

LE CORBUSIER AND POLITICS

"Society is filled with a violent desire for something which it may obtain or not. Everything lies in that : everything depends on the effort made the attention paid to these alarming symptoms. Architecture or Revolution. Revolution can be avoided." (*Le Corbusier's words in the chapter "Architecture ou Revolution" from "Vers une architecture", 1923*).

That was his thinking before the big economic and political crisis, that started with the Wall street crash in 1929. His political vision was after this oriented to peace, to the "construction of peace". During the 30's he favoured some form of national socialism and this position led to the dissolution with the partnership with his cousin, Pierre Jeanneret. Le Corbusier allied with the Vichy government in the belief that he can rebuild France and during this time he wrote: "the capitalist system found itself forced, by its own diabolical urge, continually to expand to impose, not upon savages but upon countries already crammed with goods, this general surfeit known as over-consumption".

"Le Corbusier and the Mystique of the USSR- Theories and Projects for Moscow-1928-1936", by Jean-Louis Cohen, Princeton University Press 1992

In November 2005 a series of riots started in France's suburbs. The base of this conflict was the build up of superstores such as Ikea and The Gap between the "93" and Charles de Gaulle Airport began the process of encroaching on these poor communities. Then came the construction of the Stade de France in time for the 1998 World Cup in Saint-Denis (just on the border of the hot region). The last step was meant to score the 2012 Summer Olympics for the same venue, which would have paved the road for the completion of the great "urban renewal" project of the problem district.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2005_civil_unrest_in_France

<http://www.spectrezone.org/europe/Reichel5.htm>

Those housing problems were one very important aspect in Le Corbusier work and vision of the new France, 60 years before this events. Part of his solutions then was L'Unité d'Habitation from Marseilles. But that solution, even if it was meant to help the people, was often referred as a "box" and an isolation from the rest, isolation that can lead strong conflicts, like the one from 2005.

Le Corbusier started his education in La-Chaux-de-Fonds, in Switzerland in 1902. After the basic education and projects in his own city, he decided to travel and enlarge his vision about the world and project himself at a global scale by his magazine "L'Esprit nouveau" but also through his incessant "globe-trotting" - giving a new vision to the whole world. And this began with his first visit to Moscow in October 1928.

In his "L'Esprit Nouveau" he wrote some articles that were sympathetic to The Soviet union, going so far that in May 1922 as to make an international appeal for economic aid for the young socialist state. For him "Bolshevism means everything at its biggest" and that was translated in his approved project for Centrosoyuz, but also in his rejected projects: the plan of Moscow and the one for the Palace of Soviets. He was very strongly influenced by "the linear city", the thesis by N.A. Miulutin and he used it for the apartments block. Before his contact with the Eastern Europe, his architectural vision wasn't so political involved. While working at this project he developed the idea of the "air-conditioning", a subject that will reappear in The Cité de Refuge, in Paris. For him "architecture is circulation" and it's something that "condemns academic methods and consecrates the principle of "pilotis".

Le Corbusier thought that in order to build the "the new city" he needed someone like Louis XIV, the symbol for a rich, strong and powerful man. And to aim his dream, he offered projects for: Stalin, Mussolini or the Marechal Petain, during the Vichy government. But his plans weren't understood even by this most powerful political figures of the 30's-40's, also because he didn't try to please them and he didn't make compromises.

One example of the architecture put completely under the power of the dictatorship is the "House of the People", in Bucharest, the second largest administrative building in the world, after the Pentagon. Here, in order to obtain this impressive size (the floor area is 350,000 m²) they had to demolish one fifth of the historic district of Bucharest (two neighborhoods with 19 Orthodox churches, 6 synagogues and Jewish temples and 3 Protestant churches were raised to make way for the behemoth are remembered to this day).

http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palatul_Parlamentului

<http://images.google.ro/images?q=casa%20poporului&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&client=firefox-a&um>

After the attempt in Moscow he made several other travels into Latin America (where his vision was again very strongly influenced by the local culture - a plan to expand Rio de Janeiro), to North Africa (the plans for Algiers - plan Obus), North America (where he admired the skyscraper and the technology to realize such megastructures, but despised in the same time the "cultural decadence")

He also had a world known fulfilment with the Chandigarh project in India (1950-65). Despite the somewhat sceptical and ambivalent attitude that Le Corbusier displayed towards the inevitable modernization of India and the fact that he sensed the impossibility of achieving a successful fusion between the First and the Third Worlds, particularly at residential scale, he confined himself to the design of the Capitol, comprising the Assembly, the High Court, the Secretariat and the Governor's Palace.

Despite some of his political convictions, some more powerful than others or some given to him by the world political climate, his work stands for Modernism and Postmodern solutions, used all over the world, and for continuous change in order to obtain harmony between the humans and their living spaces.

