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The little 'maison de week-end' and the Parisian suburbs

TIM BENTON. I'm going to finish up discussing the Villa Félix, or *petite maison de week-end*, in the Parisian suburb of La Celle St Cloud. To orientate ourselves: Le Corbusier began discussing the project in the autumn of 1934 and the house was built between April and June 1935. But before this, I want to discuss the attitudes of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret to the suburbs. The French word *banlieue* (the outer suburbs) literally refers to the *banus*, or league outside the legal limit of the city which, in medieval times, was subject to its own legal regime.

But first we must confront the horror of the *banlieue*.

My hypothesis about the *banlieue* is as follows. French architects in the 1920s and 1930s tended to divide into three groups, who believed one of the following:

1. It was a catastrophe; there was nothing to be done except try to abolish it.
2. It was a political question: organise the workers and deploy the planners to provide a better way of life in social housing.
3. It was a desert – a non-place (literally Utopia), a paradise of individualism and eccentricity, where you could do what you wanted, including modern architecture.

Le Corbusier favoured the first or the third. I want to show that, by 1935, Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier were approaching domestic architecture in quite different ways. The designs for this house provide a privileged insight into these differences.

The most significant response to the French housing crisis was the Loi Loucheur, in 1928. Le Corbusier was not a Lurçat, a Beaudouin and Lods, nor, obviously a Karel Teige, a Van Eesteren or a Mart Stam. In fact, by 1929, he was in more or less open conflict with each of these leaders of the Modern Movement. His commitment was first and foremost to architectural solutions rather than social ones.

For example, at the CIAM meeting in 1929 at Frankfurt, Le Cor-

busier was the only one to provide house designs, rather than flatted accommodation. Le Corbusier's Maison Loucheur houses were conceived as a product, like a mass produced automobile, to exploit the terms of the Loi Loucheur (mortgage repayments for houses built on land owned by the user)¹. 60,000 people in the *banlieue* did in fact make use of the Loi Loucheur to build houses on their plots². And there is indeed a typical development in the life of a suburban lot:

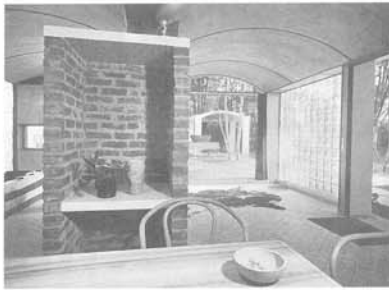
1. Purchase of a plot as allotment with garden shed and shelter for weekends.
2. Development into a hut or wooden shack where the family could stay for much of the summer.
3. Converted into a permanent home, in brick or stone, for the family to move to, or the parents to retire to.

Le Corbusier's Maisons Loucheur could have been adapted for this set of circumstances.

But Le Corbusier's flirtation with this individualistic product-solution was short-lived. By 1930, in the CIAM in Brussels, he would have nothing to do with garden cities (and hence the *banlieue*): 'The garden city leads to individualism. In reality to an enslaved individualism, a sterile isolation of the individual. It brings in its wake the destruction of social spirit, the downfall of collective forces'³. This was the standard line taken by Socialists, Communists and housing reformers⁴.

For example a French workers' delegation to an English housing exhibition in 1886 was highly critical of these 'satisfied' British workers who, once safely in their little house, would lose every thought of 'social equality' and think about nothing but cricket and horse racing, ignoring completely the plight of their fellow workers⁵. The debate about the social, psychological and political effects of the *enfouissement pavillonnaire*, le *rêve pavillonnaire* and conservative individualism continues into the contemporary French housing

—1 For the Communist deputy Beaugrand, the purpose of the Loi Loucheur was to 'vanquish the Communist workers by turning them into house-owners' (Debate in the Chambre des Députés, 6 July 1928, *Journal Officiel/Debats parlementaires*, 1928, p 2248). Only the Communists voted against the Loi Loucheur. Cf Tim Benton, 'La réponse de Le Corbusier à la Loi Loucheur' *Le Corbusier une Encyclopédie*, Centre Pompidou, Paris 1987, pp 236-9. —2 Annie Fourcaut, *La banlieue en morceaux*, Paris 2000, p 224. —3 Le Corbusier, *La Ville Radieuse*, p 38. —4 For example Auguste Keuter, in 1892, feared that the appeal of house ownership would make the workers forget 'generous feelings' and lead them to lose 'the notion of their corporate duties' (Alain Faure (ed.), *Les premiers banlieusards*, Paris 1991, p 176). —5 *Rapport d'ensemble*, Paris 1887 (report of Cardeillac, carpenter, p 337 (cited dans Alain Faure, *op.cit.*, p 176. —6 Cf the research of Raymond Haumont (*L'Habitat Pavillonnaire*, CRU, 1979), who is not convinced of the political impact of house ownership, as against H. R. Guerrand in *L'Histoire de la vie privée*, Paris 1989, t 4, p 380 ff. —7 Françoise Dubost, 'Le choix du pavillonnaire', in Alain Faure, *op.cit.*, p 185 ff. The Communists voted for the loi Sarraut, 9 mars 1928, which delivered 8.4 million francs to sanitise estates predating the law of 1924. The loi Sarraut helped to neutralize opposition in the *banlieue* by



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PROMENADE PRINTEMPIÈRE
— Si tu es bien sage... nous ferons le tour du jardin.

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1. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Villa Félix ("petite maison de weekend"), La Celle St Cloud, Paris 1935, living room, view towards garden and bedroom. (*Œuvre Complète*, vol. 3, p 124).
2. "Spring-time walk : if you're good... we'll take a turn round the garden". Cartoon published by Le Corbusier in *Une Maison un Palais*, p 25

literature⁶. The whole history of French twentieth century housing up to the second world war can be seen as an oscillation between English garden city notions and German and Russian social housing.

But the Socialists and Communists were also drawn into the struggle to improve the plight of the *mal-lotis*, the little house-owners who had been let down by speculators⁷. The *banlieue* was growing rapidly: 500,000 new people between 1921 and 1946, of whom half were deemed *mal-lotis*. In 1931, there were 571,000 commuters (five times more than in 1900)⁸. Le Corbusier was well aware of the tragic effects of this. 'Suburban life is a despicable delusion entertained by a society stricken with blindness!⁹ His secretary explained it to him: her dreadful life, spending hours on the train, living with her mother in the suburbs, bored out of her wits the weekend, never meeting anyone. *The martyrdom of suburbanites. And something else again: the terrible solitude in the crowd of that vast urban agglomeration. Oh. Liberty!*¹⁰.

For conservative critics and supporters of the French regionalist style, such as Léandre Vaillat, Camille Mauclair and Gustave Umbdenstock, the *banlieue* was proof that ordinary people wanted natural materials, craftsmanship and 'homely' qualities¹¹. Furthermore, the *banlieue* offered employment for the masons and stone cutters, the so-called *homme du tas*, who seemed to them to represent the last bastion against the encroachment of the machine, communism and worse¹².

So most modern architects condemned the *banlieue* root and branch as a breach of rational planning, an anarchy of selfish individualism and reactionary bad taste. In his book *La Ville Radieuse*, Le Corbusier would simply have eliminated the suburbs ('The garden city is a pre-machinist utopia') and with it the suburbs.

So it's a bit rum that Le Corbusier, the architect of charming Swiss chalets in his home town before the war and the designer of a

series of suburban villas in the 1920s, should have become a suburbanite himself (like Louis XIV before him), in 1934 (even if his apartment in rue Nungesser et Coli was only just outside central Paris). Needless to say, Le Corbusier's Purist villas were not to be found in the Red Band around Paris, nor in the outlying settlements of pioneer houses (often called the 'Wild West' of the *lotissements de banlieue*).

Le Corbusier's villas can be found along a Royal and Imperial axis which extends from the Louvre, along the Champs Elysees, Boulogne, Vaucleresson, Garches, Ville d'Avray and La Celle St Cloud (and beyond to Poissy and the forest of Rambouillet). This western approach is often referred to as the green, or more simply rich, suburb.

These clients had cars, their sites were serviced with water and electricity, and the roads had been metalled; they therefore shared nothing of the experience of typical suburbanites. The villas can be thought of as a series of bridge heads in Le Corbusier's campaign to take over Paris; they took nothing from the suburb and gave nothing back. You could call it a 'bugger you' approach to the social and physical context.

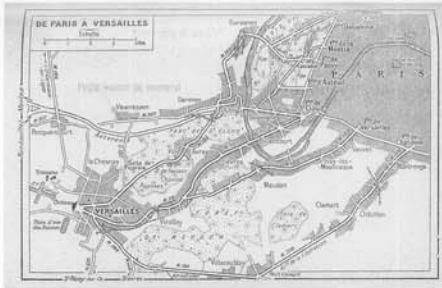
The Villa Stein-de Monzie, set right back along its private road, protected by a gatehouse and a sliding metal gate, hidden behind abundant vegetation, is a good example. These are people who don't care what the neighbours think. And that's the point. You couldn't do this in Paris. The suburbs offered the conditions for individualistic self-expression.

So, is there an avant-garde view of the suburb? I'm sure there are hundreds among writers and artists, but I'll offer you just one.

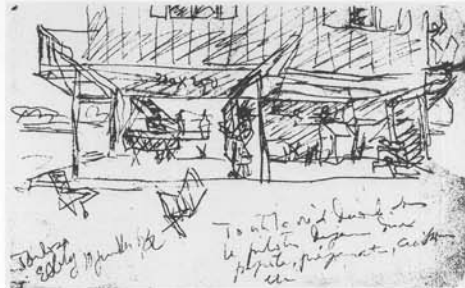
Blaise Cendrars, born in the same town and the same year as Le Corbusier, collected his thoughts about the Parisian suburbs in a book published in 1949, illustrated with photos by Robert Doisneau¹³.

Cendrars begins the book with Erik Satie. He describes his

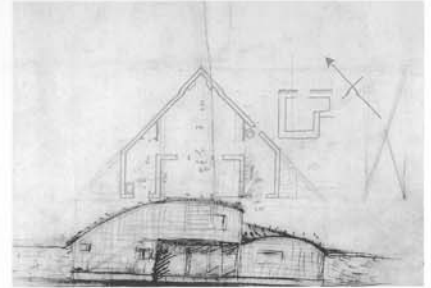
supporting some improvement while also forcing illegal settlers to become normalized by paying local taxes. (Annie Fourcaut, *La banlieue en morceaux*, Paris 2000, p 198). — 8 A. Fourcaut, *op.cit.*, p 61. — 9 Le Corbusier *La Ville Radieuse*, p 91. — 10 Le Corbusier, *La Ville Radieuse*, p 12. — 11 cf Jean-Claude Vigato, *L'architecture Régionaliste*, Paris 1994; Camille Mauclair, *La crise du panbétonisme intégrale. L'architecture va-t-elle mourir?*, Paris 1933; Gustave Umbdenstock, *Cours d'architecture de l'Ecole Polytechnique*, 1927, Paris 1930. — 12 Annie Fourcaut observes that postwar research on the *banlieue*, such as it is, has focused almost entirely on the social housing programmes in the *ceinture rouge*. '...the bourgeois suburbs remain terra incognita. No historical work on Saint Mandé or Enghien; hardly anything on rightwing suburban leaders such as Jean Goy or senator Ernest Billiet...' A. Fourcaut, *Un siècle de banlieue parisienne 1859-1964*, CNRS, Paris 1988, p 20. — 13 Blaise Cendrars, *La banlieue de Paris*, Paris 1949 (paperback edition, 1966). For a provocative and fascinating comparison between Le Corbusier and Blaise Cendrars, see Jacques Gubler, 'LC et BC : paragone difficile', *Le Corbusier à Genève 1922-1932*, Lausanne 1987, pp 143-151.



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many efforts to visit him in his home at Arcueil-Cachan. Satie, the *best of the French modernists...a communist already in 1917*; 'with not an ounce of snobbism in him, fiercely protected his independence from his friends and visitors from the city. Satie never answered the bell. And this, for Cendrars, was the typical frame of mind of the banlieusard¹⁴.

Cendrars loved to trudge across the 'maquis' of the *banlieue*, botanising the various tribes of the Parisian suburbs, just as he had explored the Brazilian jungle. He imagined a Marquis de Sade behind the shuttered windows of a suburban house, spotted the Douanier Rousseau in a bistrot, communists plotting the revolution or a fat bourgeois drawing the cork on a vintage bottle of wine and exclaiming, *Here goes another one which the revolution won't drink*! 'And all those little people, with their impossible dreams of home-sweet home, who are going to the wall¹⁵.

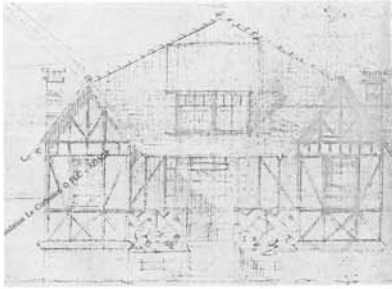
He is sensitive to the daily tragedy of suburban isolation: *A crazy world, which has had it, all washed up, in a mess, betrayed, a world of materialism, unfair, hard, wicked, a world of dog eats dog, a disgusting world; I was going to say a world without humanity, but that would be wrong*¹⁶. And he railed at the horror of the little houses, fuelled by the hysterical love of nature and the compulsion to own something, built on endless scrimping and saving and sordid economies just to reach the final goal: to have one's own villa! *Absurd, bizarre, self-righteous, uncomfortable, hideous, ridiculous, nightmarish, pretentious, clichéd. Never mind, we made it!* And Cendrars exposes the smug and 'satisfied' (that word again) nature of these little home-owners in their little 'Nests' and 'dun-roamins'¹⁷. I am sure that Le Corbusier would probably have echoed these thoughts pretty precisely.

But there is also hope in the suburbs. *Look at this man on the Juvisy train who's just been to the flower market and is going home with his rosebush complete with its root ball. Look at the secret emotion and dreams in this prosaic photograph*¹⁸.

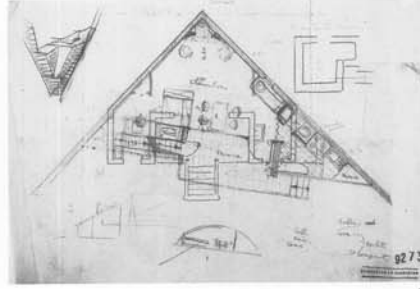
And the spirit of optimism often prevailed in the pioneers of the lotissements. Listen to 'Madame G', from Coudreaux: *My father bought this scrap of land to go fishing in the lake... The first house was this little wooden hut made of planks... Dad did it all, he was a carpenter-cabinet maker... There were no roads, no nothing, only the woods; those really were heroic times. The wooden hut was never destroyed, it's still there inside, walled in by Italian bricklayers, the Cavinis*¹⁹. Now that's a foundation myth which Le Corbusier might have warmed to. Remember his moving account in *Une Maison un Palais* of the fishermen's houses in the pine forests of the Bassin d'Arcachon. Le Corbusier noted 'the isolation, the separation from the rest of the world' of the tongue of sand-dunes, between the lagoon of Arcachon and the Atlantic. The fishermen, who worked there in the summer, *only came there with the idea of living 'from day to day'. This precariousness puts them into the paradigmatic situation of the house builder; they are making a shelter for themselves, somewhere to live, no more, in all simplicity and honesty. They are carrying out a pure programme unencumbered with claims to history, to culture, to the taste of the day. They're building a shelter, somewhere to live, with the materials that come to hand*²⁰. And suddenly, says Le Corbusier, he realized that these houses were Architecture (or as he puts it, they were 'palaces'). There are other signs of Le Corbusier's preference for the most simple and primitive conditions for relaxing and living in the summer. On 10 July 1932 he had sketched a wooden shack, raised on stilts, rented by friends of his for a vacation. He notes: *life enfolds entirely under the pilotis...* and he clearly considered this unbuttoned existence idyllic²¹.

The suburbs could have been like this for Le Corbusier, a place for seeking the simple life in the internal frontier of the urban hinterland. Instead, he saw his role as that of forcing his *poor little rich clients* (to use the phrase of Adolf Loos) into the straightjacket of his architectural vision. They were given works of architecture

— 14 Cendrars, *op. cit.*, pp 9-10. — 15 Cendrars, *op. cit.*, p 14. — 16 Cendrars, *op. cit.*, p 19. — 17 Cendrars, *op. cit.*, p 36-7. — 18 Cendrars, *op. cit.*, p 32. — 19 'Madame G' from Coudreaux, in Alain Faure, *op. cit.*, p 193. — 20 Le Corbusier, *Une Maison un Palais*, Paris 1928, p. 46. — 21 The original sketches are in *Le Corbusier Sketchbook*, I, B6, pp. 389 and 390 (redrawn later and included in *The Radiant City*, p 29. The drawings was apparently labeled 'Toulouse Esbly', but there doesn't seem to be an Esbly near Toulouse. There is an Esbly, on the shores of the Marne, in the eastern suburbs of Paris, and this is probably what Le Corbusier refers to. — 22 See Francesco Passanti, 'The vernacular, Modernism and Le Corbusier', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 56:4, December 1997, pp 438-451, Jean-



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3. Plan of western approach to Paris, from *Guide Bleu*, 1952.

4. Sketch of rented vacation home at Esbly, 10 July 1932 (Sketchbook B6, *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks*, MIT, vol. 1, p 389).

5. In black, the plan by an unknown architect for a half-timbered cottage to be constructed in the North East corner of M. Félix's property, 18 September 1934. (FLC Document H2-19 152). In grey, Pierre Jeanneret's sketch plan and elevation (FLC 9265).

6. South West Elevation by unknown architect of cottage to be built on the plot of M. Félix, approved 18 September 1934 (FLC Document H2-19 152).

7. In grey, Pierre Jeanneret, development of the first project (FLC 9273); in black, the original plan by unknown architect (FLC Document H2-19 152).

but not necessarily the homes that either they or even Le Corbusier himself would have chosen to live in

I don't have to repeat here the enduring fascination Le Corbusier had for vernacular and natural material²². The *Ville Radieuse* begins with the words: *I am attracted to a natural order of things*. And Bruno Reichlin and others have written about Le Corbusier's 'discovery' of natural materials around the time of the *Maison de Mandrot* (1929-32) and the possible links with the regionalist style²³.

Le Corbusier never lost his early love for stone, wood, brick, stucco and the effects of texture and warmth you could create with them. One of his tropes of contentment (paradise on earth) were the medieval stone houses which his friend Badovici (and Eileen Gray) had opened up and refurbished in Vezelay.

Pierre Jeanneret, Charlotte Perriand and Fernand Léger had also got very interested in the vernacular and the simple life which, mixed with left wing politics, utopian primitivism and a touch of sexual spice between Pierre and Charlotte, provided a heady mixture.

But, how could Le Corbusier rescue natural materials from his sworn enemies in the *Style Régionaliste*? The answer lies in the notion of *objets trouvés* or *objets à réaction poétique*. The avant-garde could recuperate the vernacular only if it was stripped of its nationalist and traditionalist associations and rediscovered as a fragment of 'nature'. A modest building material which can be seen everywhere in Paris, and which was quarried in the suburbs was what the French call the *moellon*. These are mid-sized rubble stone blocks, of second quality, small enough to be carried up ladders and cheap to produce. You see them wherever they are meant to be invisible, in functional retaining walls, or when a party wall has, for some reason, been left exposed. These aren't the dressed ashlar stones of the Beaux Arts architects, or the picturesque rusticated blocks of the *Style Régionaliste*. The *moellon* was a modest, simple, honest, local material, comparable to the pine trunks of the fisherman's log cabin.

Le Corbusier liked to say that he had 'discovered' the beauty of the exposed stone (*moellon*) party wall of his neighbour at rue Nungesser et Coli (actually a block of flats designed by Michel Roux-Spitz), with its characteristic red veins produced by the chimney flues, and had left it exposed, pure and noble as a feature of his atelier²⁴.

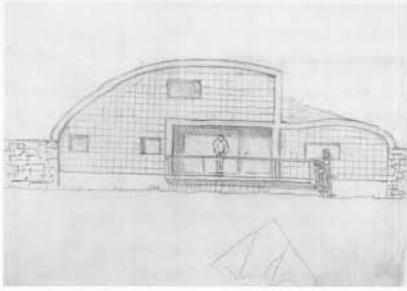
This sign of 'the natural' also worked as an icon of the 'homely' and was built into the design of the House for Albin Peyron's son at Mathes and the little weekend house for Monsieur Félix at La Celle St Cloud.

Now, in the *maisons Loucheur* and in the *Villa de Mandrot*, Le Corbusier deliberately juxtaposed the natural materials of stone and wood with the industrialised window fittings made by Barriaux²⁵. But in these new houses, he took a further step towards the vernacular.

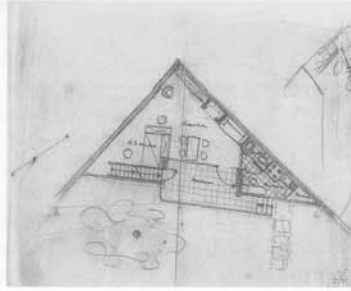
On the railway line from Saint-Cloud to Marly-le-Roi, passing Garches-Marnes-la-Coquette and Vaucresson you come to Bougival-La Celle-St Cloud, 1.5km from La Celle St Cloud (see Fig 3). *My Guide Bleu* of 1952 describes it as a pretty village surrounded by chestnut forests on a hill. It was in this *morcellement* (a fancy estate agents' term for *lotissement*) that Mister Félix bought his plot.

This Félix project has the classic elements of a suburban home and the venture begins according to type. Some architect was asked to draw up what one could only call a regionalist dacha, in brick and fake half-timbering and this was granted building approval on 18 September 1934²⁶. The plan is of a minimal interior with living space, kitchen and bathroom downstairs and a mezzanine floor above for a bedroom. It was described as a caretaker's house and seems to have been built at the expense of Félix's company, La Société Henfel. The house was pinned back to the corner of the site, turning its back to the neighbours in approved suburban fashion and shrinking from the road. It's obvious that Félix, like Satie, defended his privacy tenaciously. Maybe there was

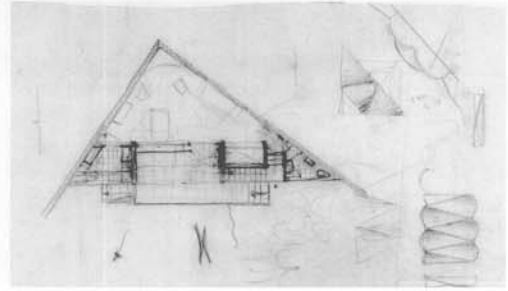
Claude Vigato, "Régionalisme", *Le Corbusier Une Encyclopédie*, Paris 1987, pp 56-7. —²³ Bruno Reichlin, "Cette belle Pierre de provence" La villa de Mandrot, *Le Corbusier et la Méditerranée*, Marseille 1987, pp 131-140. —²⁴ Le Corbusier talks about "my neighbour's wall" in a radio interview included on the CD-Rom published by the Fondation Le Corbusier. —²⁵ Tim Benton, "La villa Mandrot et l'Illoc de la imagnacio", *Quaderns*, 163, oct-dec, Barcelona 1984, and Bruno Reichlin, "La villa de Mandrot au Pradet (Var), 1929-34", *Le Corbusier La Ricerca Paziente*, Lugano 1980, pp 87-96. —²⁶ The *devis descriptif* survives (FLC H2-19 123-130). The estimate comes to 40,500 francs.



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some hanky panky here, a tax dodge or some ripping off of the share-holders, because Félix later wrote to Le Corbusier in July : *For special reasons, I must ask you not to discuss this house, especially in the Gironde (where Le Corbusier was holidaying at the time), because I have business dealings down there*²⁷. Who knows Félix's motives? It's important that we should not know, that we should not disturb the sacred secrecy of the suburb. The key thing is that all the elements of suburban existence are reunited in this brief. Search for a simple life away from the hurly burly of Paris, privacy and secrecy and a little house to match (informal, a bit quaint, unpretentious).

For simplicity, I will divide the projects into two main parts, with an intermediary phase. The first project, exclusively by the hand of Pierre Jeanneret, was drawn up, on a triangular parti, before 13 December 1934. I'm going to characterise these plans and elevations as a kind of modernist reflection on the suburb (in the context of the Front Populaire). On 13 December 1934 Le Corbusier had a meeting with Félix, after which he made a series of interventions –which, via the intermediary phase– led to the final zig-zag solution, which was significantly more monumental²⁸. The finished building incorporates the new interest in natural materials –rubble stone walls with plywood lined interior surfaces, earth and grass on the roof and a landscaping which seeks to bed the house down into the soil. But I will try to show why I think that this project reverts to Le Corbusier's characteristic disdain for the suburban context, by comparison with the first.

Of the triangular plans by Pierre Jeanneret, only FLC 9265 follows the layout of the original plan exactly, not only in the positioning on the page and the tripartite division, but also in preserving the symmetry around the angle of the corner. Superimposing the original scheme by the unknown architect in red on FLC 9265 shows its dependency, in plan but not in elevation, on the layout of the simple suburban cottage.

Pierre's is a schematic plan divided into three, with a porch in

the centre, like the original, but with the staircase on the left and the façade extended sideways to meet the garden walls. One vault covers the left and central bay (rising to cover the mezzanine bedroom), while the vault on the right is single storey.

Superimposing the original plan with Pierre's development of the triangular plan (FLC 9273) shows the *parti* quite clearly.

In FLC 9273 the façade has now been tilted sideways towards the west, perhaps to accommodate a tree which was in the way on the west corner. Note the peculiar consequence of this displacement, that the cosy fireplace in the corner comes out on the elevation a third of the way along the façade and that the central axis of the façade comes out 2.50m along the right hand wall.

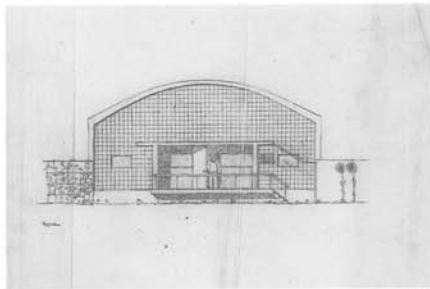
There is a little sketch on FLC 9273, which shows a rectilinear treatment of the roof. This is worked up on FLC 9268 into a 'rationalised' version of the curvilinear façade, but this idea is immediately dropped. Pierre seems to be determined to maintain a casual, organic form for the little house. The South West façade (FLC 9269) shows traces of the rectilinear façade, erased.

This asymmetrical, directional, curved façade offers a dynamic vision of modernity, with some of Pierre's dry humour in it. If, for Stanislaus von Moos, Citrohan I looked like a 10HP Citroen car, Pierre has updated the car to a more streamlined version. It's worth remembering, also, that one of the clichés of life in the *lotissements* were the caravans and converted railway carriages –poignant symbols of transience and impermanence.

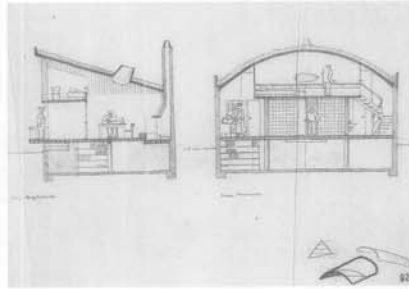
In FLC 9276, Pierre transposes the chimney to the East wall, to bring it into the central axis of the façade.

Until now, all the plans have followed the original layout of the first project on the sheet. From FLC 9266, the plan is turned round to align the façade with the bottom of the paper. The staircase is moved to the right and the porch consequently shifts to the left, towards a symmetrical alignment with the fireplace and its chimney (now again in the corner). I take this to be the first steps towards a more formal, hierarchic and symmetrical variant.

— 27 H2 19 106, letter to Le Corbusier, "chez monsieur Vidal au Piquey, Bassin d'Arcachon", 29 juillet 1935. — 28 The diaries are notoriously difficult to use, for checking dates, since they have few if any dates in them. Fortunately, the one for June 1934 to March 1935 unlocks its secrets quite easily (FLC F3-5-9, p.53). — 29 See note 20. — 30 The drawing the dividing wall in the center of the salon, in the penultimate phase of the project, just before 21 January 1935 (FLC 9295, 9254, 9245, 9257, 9242, 9243), before Pierre discovered that there was a tree in the way of the west extension of the house. The first two draw-



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8 Pierre Jeanneret, South West façade, first project (FLC 9269).

9 Pierre Jeanneret, development of the plan to place the fireplace on axis on the elevation (FLC 9276).

10 Pierre Jeanneret, revision of the first project to align the façade with the paper and transpose the staircase (FLC 9266).

11 Pierre Jeanneret, South West elevation, symmetrical variant of first project, populated with avant-garde suburban pioneers (FLC 9278).

12 Pierre Jeanneret, long and short sections of symmetrical variant of first project (FLC 9277).

Round the edge of the drawing is an interesting discourse about intersecting vaults. I take this to represent an intervention by Le Corbusier on the theme of how to light this awkward triangular space. His solution is similar to the sketch he made in 1928 labelled "ma maison", which differentiated a South facing office and accommodation block with a studio space illuminated by North facing windows contained in concrete vaults. A similar lighting solution would be found for his penthouse studio apartment in rue Nungesser et Coli. The pattern of alternating triangular vaults also leads towards a solution (sketched top right on FLC 9266) in which there is a single vault facing South West, with a North facing dormer. This in turn gets rid of Pierre's dynamic asymmetry of one large and one small vault to find a symmetrical façade. This symmetry will be confirmed in the elevations and sections FLC 9281, FLC 9277, FLC 9278, which marks the end of this series of drawings by Pierre Jeanneret.

So, here we are back where we started, with a symmetrical façade with a central *in antis* porch. Bye bye to the suburbanite's car, hello to a kind of universal shed-hut. But let's just look at the people Pierre has drawn in on his elevation and section. Who are they? Who is this bearded man in the worker's smock, and his pretty companion tending to her sweet peas? And look at these sunflowers, stereotype of the garden city ideal, signifying a life of natural growth under the sun's rays. And isn't the whole house a kind of sunflower, turning its face of Nevada glass tiles to the South West? Is it Félix's dream of suburban life we see here, or Pierre's, peopled with Bakunian intellectuals, socialist ramblers, some chums who have bicycled over for the day and a young, pretty comrade cooking up the spaghetti?

This is an image of a social avant-garde paradise, like that of Badovici's houses in Vezelay. Or the image of Norbert Bezard (the farmer from the Sarthe) and Le Corbusier debating the future of agriculture in the Ferme radiouse (1934-35) with this vigorous, pretty and fertile young woman cooking up the dinner while her

two children play in the vegetable patch²⁹. But, above all, I see this as an optimistic take on the *banlieue*.

An evocative but mysterious drawing forces to engage with these speculations (FLC 9270).

I call this emblematic image *l'homme de pierre* –man of stone but also Pierre's man. This is the well muscled and politically engaged man of the future, the man of the *front populaire* or the *homme réel* (ie politically left or right). It belongs with the penultimate phase of the design, when the space heating was provided by a proletarian stove rather than a bourgeois fireplace³⁰. He stands there, demonstrating the new order, a marriage of industry and craftsmanship, cast iron, brick and stone.

This trope of the yellow stone blocks and red bricks recurs in the drawings for Mathes and the studio penthouse at Nungesser et Coli. As built (See Fig. 1), we have a fireplace, with its associated primitivist art work in a niche: a cliché of bourgeois possession. It was Henri Frugès who had advised Le Corbusier in 1925 to put fireplaces into the houses in Pessac, rather than the more efficient stoves, because he said that he couldn't feel 'at home' without the comfort of a live fire³¹.

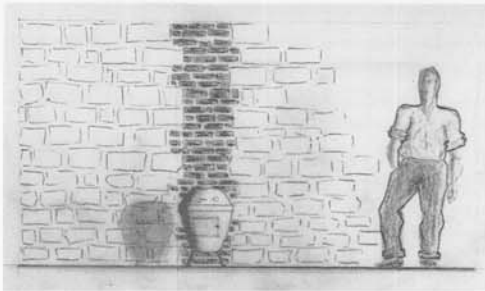
Following 13 December, everything tightens up pretty quickly. I see FLC 9286 as a dialogue between Pierre and Le Corbusier.

Pierre appears to be explaining his project, with its elevation, while they explore the potential for different forms of vaulting. Le Corbusier seems to be referring to Gaudí and the Sagrada Familia school, which he had sketched, and also possibly to the Colonia Guell chapel. And, towards the top on the right hand side, a version of the step-back solution is indicated. This is worked up in a bird's-eye view perspective FLC 9307, labelled *Casa Gaudí*, which I call the intermediate phase.

Two other versions of this same plan exist (FLC 9282, 9280), of radically different appearance and culture.

One (FLC 9282) has the appearance of a modest shack (the return to the cottage origins of the project?), while the other

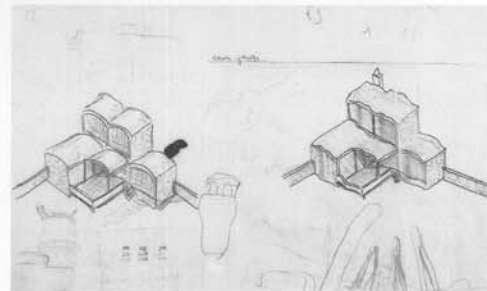
ings for the final, reduced project (FLC 9255 and 24228) retain the stove, but all the other drawings introduce a fireplace on the East side of the divider. — 31 On 13 January 1925 Henri Frugès wrote to Le Corbusier about the complaints of the first inhabitants of the sawmill cottages he had designed at Lege. *People cannot understand a house without a hearth... they would love to have at least a fireplace and take pleasure in seeing a flickering fire... I must admit myself that, personally, I could never live in a house, however well heated it was, if I couldn't take pleasure in a roaring fire* (FLC H1-17-131).



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begins to develop a language of monumental vaulted spaces illuminated with Nevada glass tiles.

The plan (FLC 9305) underlying these three very different external forms is identical. Interestingly, the plan was probably traced over the lines of the original scheme, reverting to the alignment of the unknown architect's plan.

The upper storey is now along the East wall, with access stairs on this wall, but the plan itself has become orthogonal, with an "L" shape along the East and North garden walls of the property, framing a partially covered terrace towards the South West.

Comparing this with the earlier triangular plan is instructive. The new plan, FLC 9305 makes difficulties for itself within its large terrace which cramps the internal space. The next stage (FLC 9301) is to turn the paper around again and align the East wall with the edge of the paper. In this plan, part of the terrace is occupied to make a large internal space, c. 6 m square.

The next stage involves losing the upper storey, extending the East wing to the south to make a bedroom and squeezing everything else in. You can see this in FLC 9299, which was drawn before 4 January 1935.

On January 4, Le Corbusier visited Félix again, and made a little sketch in his *agenda* (diary)³². The emphasis was on building up barriers of earth to protect from the view from the street. A similar intervention can be seen on FLC 9299. At this point the vaults rested on steel or very thin concrete pilotis set inside the stone walls. These will shortly be replaced by a system of stone (*moellons*) walls and hidden steel supports framing Nevada glass tiles.

We are left with a system of vaults, on roughly 2.5m centres. The interior demonstrates its contrasts between light and dark, wood, brick, painted stone walls and plywood panels. The drawings are handed over to an assortment of draughtsmen, Sakakura, Pollak, Streb, Miquel and others for detailing.

We are suddenly a long way away from the light-hearted adventures of Pierre Jeanneret. Unfortunately, the first variants for the final scheme didn't take account of the position of the trees, which involved some drastic compression of the cellar stairs, kitchen and bathroom in the west wing³³. The house as built classifies and orders its spaces, elevations and materials in a rigorous way. For all the *bricolage* and warmth of plywood, brick, grassed vaults and *moellon* surfaces, any trace of informality and the spirit of pioneering suburban living has vanished. The 'petite maison de weekend' carries the full burden of responsibility of the avant garde villa. My take on all this is that it's as if Pierre asked Le Corbusier whether he could build a cheerful, friendly, informal, Socialist suburban dwelling, and that Le Corbusier would have nothing of it.

But the suburb has had the last word³⁴. The building has reverted to type, behind its high hedge and fierce guard dog. It has sprouted Spanish grilles, and a hideous extension, its stone flags and masonry brightly picked out with coloured mortar.

Tim Benton, Professor of Art History, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK.

13 Pierre Jeanneret, drawing of worker, wall of *moellons*, stove and brick flue, associated with second project, January 1935 (FLC 9270).

14. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, sheet of sketches comparing the triangular first project with the step-back intermediate project, December 1934 (FLC 9286).

15. Pierre Jeanneret, 2 variants ("Casa Gaudi") of intermediate project, December 1934, (FLC 9307).

16. Pierre Jeanneret, shack variant of intermediate project, December 1934 (FLC 9282).

17. Comparison between the plan of the intermediate project (FLC 9305) and the original plan by the unknown architect (based on Document H2-19 152).

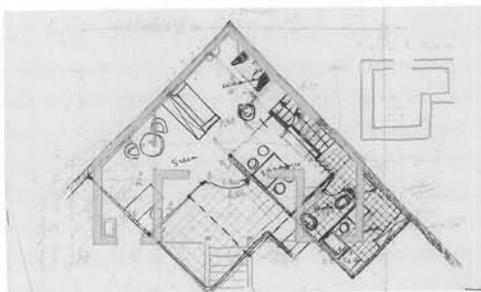
18. Comparison of plan of intermediate project (in black, FLC 9305) and the first of the variants for the final scheme (in grey, FLC 9301).

19. Pierre Jeanneret, Piloti variant of plan for final project, with intervention by Le Corbusier indicating earthworks and garden layout, January 1935 (FLC 9299).

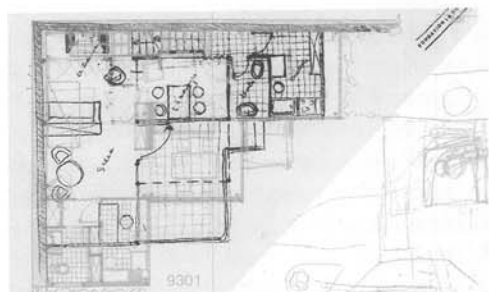
20. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Plan of Villa Félix as built (*Œuvre Complète* vol. 3, p 125).



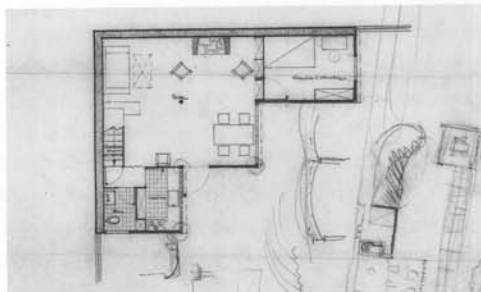
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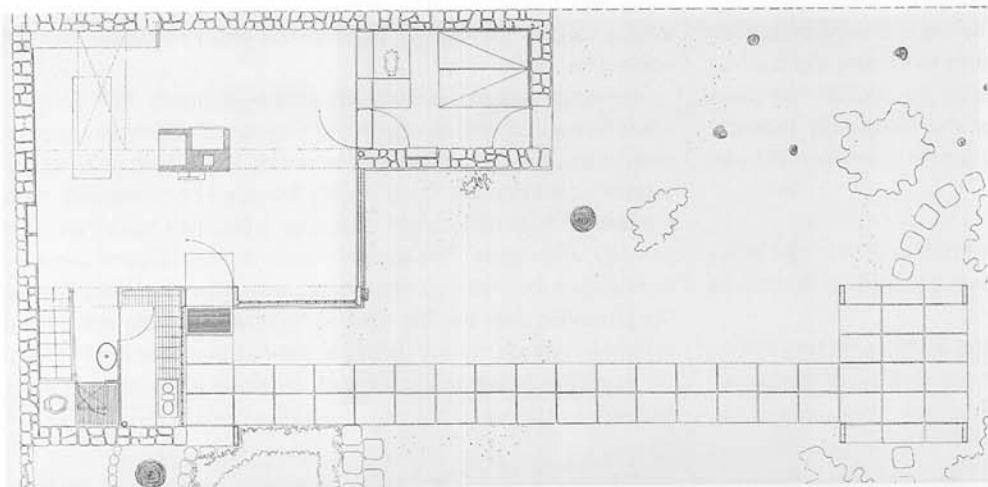
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