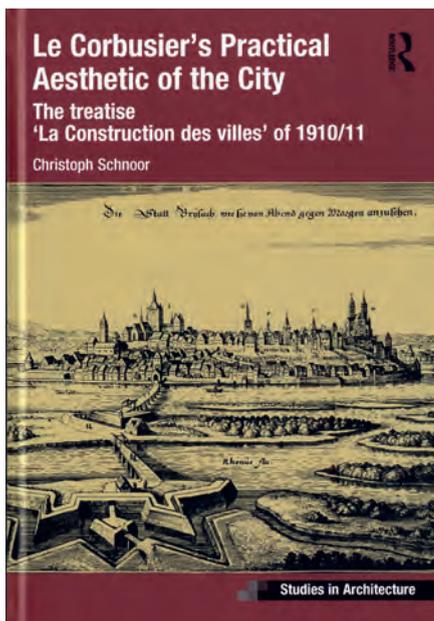


REVISIONS



Le Corbusier's urban plans and theories on urban design have been widely debated by architects and scholars. Less known is the formative process that established the basis for those plans and theories, when Le Corbusier still carried his birth name, Charles-Edouard Jeanneret. Le Corbusier (Jeanneret) was introduced to urban design in 1910 and early 1911, a period in which he read extensively about and wrote on the subject while living in Germany. In early 1911, other plans, namely a trip to the Orient, led him to abandon the draft of the book he had been working on. In 1915 he decided to take up the project once more. He travelled to Paris for that purpose, having consulted and studied more than eighty titles at the Bibliothèque Nationale. It was only in the early 1920s, however, that his interest in the field would truly bear fruit, both in practical and theoretical terms: the urban proposals of the 1922 Ville Contemporaine, its practical application in Paris (the 1925 Plan Voisin), and the theoretical support for these in the 1925 book *Urbanisme*.

The extant primary sources from the initial 1910-1911 formative phase, mainly based on the contemporary German-language debate, consist of more than six hundred handwritten pages containing notes, the unfinished manuscript of the book, titled "La Construction des villes," and some seventy illustrations and sketches. This material constitutes the subject of research of Christoph Schnoor's *Le Corbusier, "La Construction des Villes", Charles-Edouard Jeannerets erstes städtebauliches Traktat von 1910/1911* (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2008), now available to English readers in the present edition.

uncovered some three hundred additional pages of the manuscript containing notes, excerpts from literature on urban design, and further draft and chapter texts.

The complete version of the manuscript of Le Corbusier's "La Construction des villes," including the illustrations, was thus made available to the public for the first time in Schnoor's 2008 gta Verlag edition, in both the original French version and its translation into German. The finding and publication of the complete manuscript is the first major achievement of Schnoor. Unfortunately, for editorial reasons partially related to translation criteria, the English edition does not provide the original version. This means that, as the author himself warns in the introduction, scholars specifically devoted to the subject may need to consult the original French version in the 2008 edition for detailed information.

Schnoor's second major achievement comes with the first part of the book, where he offers us a comprehensive and insightful critical analysis of the manuscript. It is organized in three main chapters: the genesis of the book project, the analysis of the work, and its abandonment and the consequences for Le Corbusier's later approach to urban design. In tracing the genesis of the work, the first chapter provides a general discussion of the several parts of the manuscript, their thematic contents, and issues of dating involved in the definition of the overall structure, interpreted in light of the chronological development of Le Corbusier's studies and main biographic episodes during this period.

Having clarified the structure or thematic organisation Le Corbusier intended for his first written work on urban design, the second chapter embarks on a detailed examination of each of the sections and themes. Le Corbusier's introductory section is devoted to general considerations of the challenges facing modern urban planning, from functional zoning to the social, technical and artistic components of the discipline. The main body of the work is devoted to the basic elements a city is composed of. The categories of these elements are fairly inconsistent in their heterogeneity, an inconsistency that Schnoor sees as reflecting the picturesque

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4995/lc.2022.17277>

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Le Corbusier's Practical Aesthetic of the City. The Treatise 'La Construction des villes' of 1910/1911

London, New York: Routledge, 2020.

Format: 25,2 x 18,0, 528 pag, illustrations b&w

Language: English.

ISBN: 978-1-4724-4564-3

Schnoor's book is divided into two main parts: the transcription of the manuscript translated into English, preceded by a historical and critical analysis of it. Part of Le Corbusier's original material had come to light through American scholar H. Allen Brooks, who discovered it in the late 1970s in private ownership. In the early 1990s, Swiss architect Marc E. Albert Emery organized it and published a first edition of Le Corbusier's unfinished book under the title *La Construction des villes: genèse et devenir d'un ouvrage écrit de 1910 à 1915 et laissé inachevé* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'homme, 1992). The research carried out by Schnoor

legacy of Le Corbusier's artistic and spatial approach to urban design: blocks, streets, squares, enclosing walls, bridges, trees, gardens and parks, cemeteries, and garden-cities. Finally, there is a concluding section in which Le Corbusier rehearses a synthesis of the problems involved and the practical application of possible solutions to the case of La Chaux-de-Fonds, his home town—the reason that had led him to urban studies in the first place. Section by section, in an in-depth critical reading, Schnoor reconstructs the development of Le Corbusier's reasoning on each topic, the sources of his arguments, the range of his intellectual interests, the extensive literature he read on the subject, and the way he accommodated the several strands of the contemporary debate within the intellectual framework of his earlier artistic education in La Chaux-de-Fonds, often leaving conflicting ideas and opposing tendencies unsolved.

Acknowledging that in-depth research on Le Corbusier's 1915 Parisian studies is still to be done, the third chapter outlines the period extending from the end of Le Corbusier's work on the manuscript in early 1911 to the publication of *Urbanisme* in 1925. The chapter is broadly structured around three main themes. First, Schnoor discusses the key influence of Marc-Antoine Laugier's *Essai sur l'architecture* on Le Corbusier. Through works such as Albert Erich Brinckmann's *Platz und Monument*, Le Corbusier had started to reconcile the aesthetics of and arguments for the monumental design of French classicism with the picturesque of authors such as Camillo Sitte, Karl Henrici and Paul Schultze-Naumburg, who were more closely aligned with his romantic education. His reading of Laugier's *Essai* would trigger the beginning of a shift of emphasis from the picturesque to the *grand style* of classicism. This happened precisely at the time when Le Corbusier was abandoning the draft of the book, which means that Laugier's influence is not yet reflected in the manuscript of "La Construction des villes." It would, however, be crucial for Le Corbusier's later thinking and formulations on urban design, as Schnoor aptly illustrates with the *Ville Contemporaine*. Following this initial discussion on Laugier, Schnoor proposes several reasons for Le Corbusier's abandonment of the book project in order to

argue that the architect's failure to publish it was not the result of disinterest in the field or the rejection of the picturesque arguments he had developed in the draft. Indeed, despite the shift of emphasis, Le Corbusier never entirely eliminated the duality of picturesque and classic monumental. The reason why he could consistently maintain this duality is due to the fact that, as Schnoor cogently argues, the focus of Le Corbusier's 1910-11 studies on urban design was not style, but space, a never-to-be-forgotten focus that Le Corbusier inherited from the contemporary German literature on urban design. Finally, Schnoor provides an overview of the links between Le Corbusier's 1910-11 studies and his later positioning and arguments in *Urbanisme*, pointing to several threads of continuity within this fifteen-year period and to their presence in the design of the *Ville Contemporaine*. One thus gains a fresh perspective of Le Corbusier's urban plans, one that can only be enriched by thorough research on the 1915 studies at the Bibliothèque Nationale.

More than an original contribution to the 1910-1911 debate on urban design, Le Corbusier's "La Construction des villes" is a compilation of contemporary theories filtered by and accommodated to his own personal proclivities. It seems quite clear that the comprehensive scope of the manuscript reflects Le Corbusier's endeavour to educate himself in the field and his aim to find a path to urban design capable of solving the artistic and functional problems posed by the contemporary city. Nonetheless, as a theoretical contribution, Schnoor sees the systematization of the individual architectural and urban design elements of the city and of their articulation as constituting a singular achievement of Le Corbusier's draft, an achievement which would have earned a place in the contemporary debate on urban design had the book been published in 1911. More importantly, Schnoor shows that this systematization would be key to Le Corbusier's avant-garde urban design of the 1920s and beyond. In paralleling "La Construction des villes" and *Urbanisme*, the author unveils the extent to which Le Corbusier's later urban visions owe to his 1910-1911 studies in Germany. Despite their radical differences, the contemporary German-language debate on urban design had provided Le Corbusier

with the building blocks to think about the main components of the city, from the design of streets to that of public spaces, and from the residential block to the introduction of greenery within the city. In fact, one may go further and ask if this systematization does not foreshadow the diagrammatic quality of Le Corbusier's modern city.

The last few decades have witnessed a continuing and unrelenting interest in the formative years of Le Corbusier, including biographical investigation, partially due to the vastness and richness of his personal archival material. Some of the resulting publications are seemingly more interested in the man than in his work, sometimes falling into ungrounded speculation. Others reflect rigorous scholarship and maintain the focus on architecture, contributing to the history and theory not only of his work but of modern architecture in general. Schnoor's book belongs to the latter group. It brings truly original material to light and is based on rigorous and detailed research, succeeding in adding substantially to the literature on this period, namely Brooks's seminal book *Le Corbusier's Formative Years* (1997) and the theoretical approaches to the manuscript by Brooks and Emery.

Since the 2008 gta Verlag edition, Schnoor's research has become an indispensable piece of literature on the young Le Corbusier. This will be even more the case with the publication of the English edition, which has been long-awaited by so many non-German speaking scholars. What is more, readers will discover that the importance of Schnoor's research on this formative period of Le Corbusier is not restricted to urban design. Aspects such as the persistent coexistence of the opposing aesthetics of the picturesque and the monumental; the central focus on space and on the beholder's perception, paving the way to abstract spatial thought; and the prioritizing of aesthetics over function in the conviction that one defines the other, illustrate how his studies on urban design in 1910-1911 shaped Le Corbusier's intellectual training, and how it not only enlightens but also gives food for thought concerning both Le Corbusier's later urban design and his avant-garde architectural work.