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## DOM, MIASTO I PARADYGMAT LE CORBUSIERA

### THE HOUSE, THE CITY AND THE LECORBUSIER'S PARADIGM

Willa archeologa Wieganda zbudowana przez Behrensa w Berlinie w 1911 r. oraz dom Curutcheta w argentyńskiej La Plata projektu Le Corbusiera z 1949 r. to, jeżeli mówimy o architektonicznej jakości, przykłady symboliczne. W obydwu przypadkach występuje silny związek z miastem a fasady stają się ważnym narzędziem tej relacji: pomiędzy przestrzenią publiczną i prywatną pojawia się nowe, osłonięte, miejskie/domowe miejsce, z dala od miasta i ulicy. Ten temat był przedmiotem przeprowadzonego na UIAV (Wenecja) projektu badawczego: pusta przestrzeń fasady przypomina, przez analogię, wenecki dziedziniec, uwzględniając również kompozycję przestrzenną wspomnianych domów.

*Słowa kluczowe: dom, miasto, przestrzeń prywatna, przestrzeń publiczna, Behrens, Le Corbusier*

The archeologist Wiegand's villa built by Behrens in Berlin in 1911, and the Curutchet's house by Le Corbusier in La Plata, Argentina, in 1949 are emblematic examples about the theme of architectural quality. In both there's a strong relation with the city, and the facade becomes an important device for this relation: the space between public and private space creates a new protected urban/domestic place, far from the street and the city. The research project made at IUAV explores this theme: the empty space of the facade reminds, by analogy, a venetian courtyard, not forgetting the spatial composition of elements of Curutchet and Wiegand houses.

*Keywords: house, city, private space, public space, Behrens, Le Corbusier*

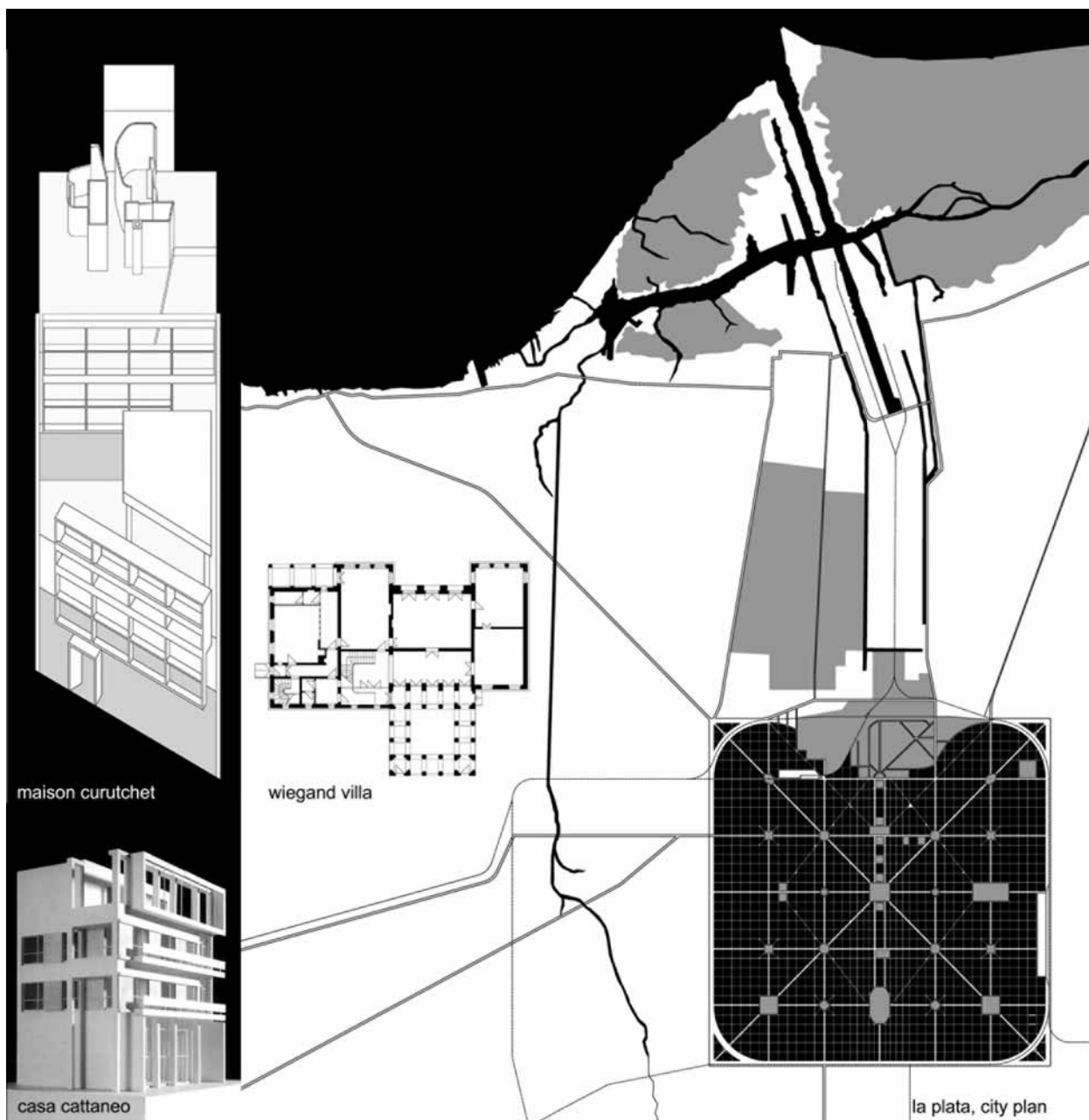
Dealing with architecture and the couple city-architecture is a way to restart a many times interrupted issue: architecture's role in city planning.

Some architects, who based their works on the indifference of the project to the city, were convinced to create instability in the Modern Movement: they criticized its uniformity of style which caused the worsening and standardization of the *International*

*Style*. They contested these principles but they didn't realize that their way of thinking was similar to them: so they created a new stylization more affected than the theory expressed by the *International Style*.

All countries show interest in this phenomenon of internationalization, supported by technological innovations which caused the loss of all foundations on which an architectural project is based. In opposition

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to the idea of innovation, this is what I consider of primary importance: the symbolic and narrative sense of architecture, the composition, the figures of construction and the space.

The development of theories, which underline the importance of a different idea of architecture and of a new cultural identity, totally ignore these points.

### City

The city is the house of man.

They involve a deep analysis of the building principles of architectonic forms, of their rules and foundations.

The house motive, a domestic space both ideal and real, suggests to us the borderline of an architectonic project in relation to deep-rooted traditions on inhabiting and to spatial and distributive building techniques.

In the same way his research on a new residential dimension, grounded on the issues of the house of man, greatly helped to solve the housing problem and the living unit as the basic element of city planning.

The architectonic opus is never solitary, it is never an end in itself, but in most cases it represents an in-depth analysis, if not overcoming, an analytical study into the *opera omnia* of an artist-architect.

The indescribable space (a legacy of Le Corbusier) or the creative act (the moment of creation and satisfaction) – in which for a second one feels “the

angel’s fluttering of wings” as the Slovenic architect Joze Plecnik said – are times of conquest the result of a creative tension that goes beyond any dogmatic and disciplinary (scientific) specifications. In some cases they can even reach pure poetry.

The city leads the way to architecture. The idea of the city as a work of art is still valid and is constantly reaffirmed by the study of urban phenomena, which are filtered and reinterpreted by a designing mould. It is a design that absorbs urban complexity in its richness and at the same time engenders a comparison with natural geographies, locations and historical architectures. The contemporary city, often considered a place deprived of memory, is opposed to the real city, a urban collective event that is imbued with living history, identity and memory.

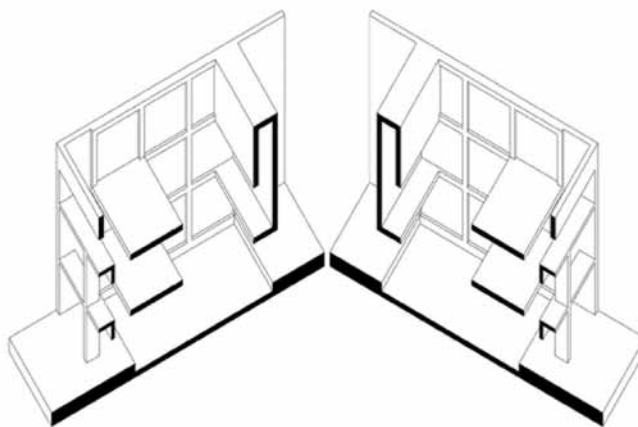
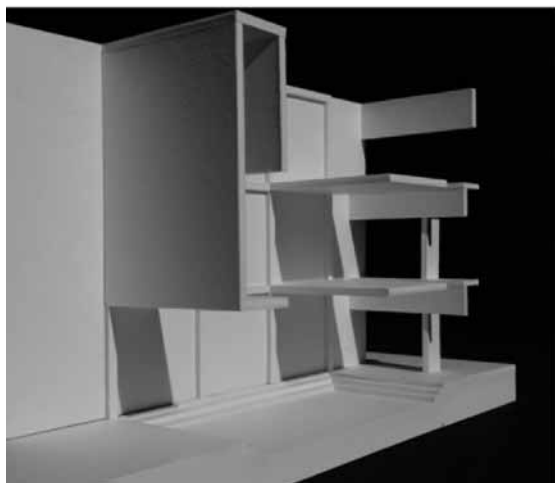
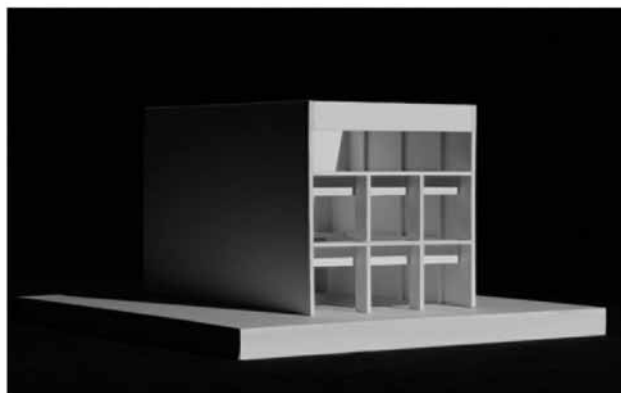
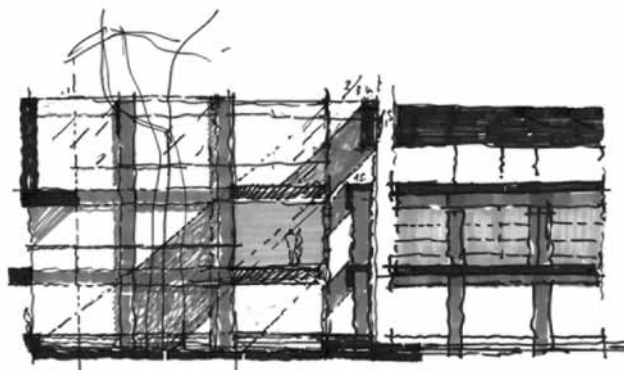
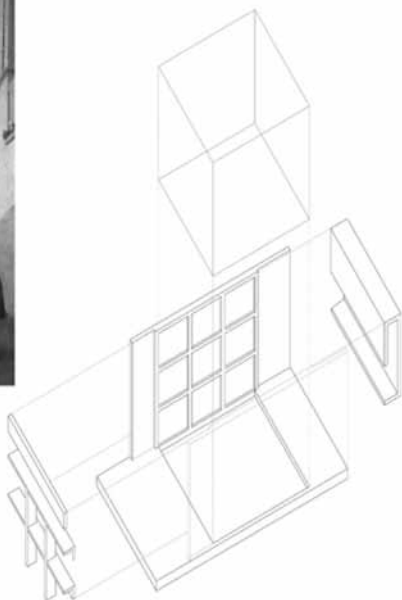
We begin with the signs of time, the great figures designed in the territory, the archaic architectonic types such as the hypostyle rooms, the halls, the enclosures, and go on with the great spatial configurations of ancient architectures such as the agoras, the Roman forums and the amphitheatres. These themes are constantly reinterpreted and recur in every age, in the Renaissance as in modern architecture, in Palladio as in Le Corbusier.

Lingering over the issues or the issue of cultural heritage in architecture should help us to find again – in an era of bygone ideologies – a *modus operandi* which could be able to lead architecture beyond the asphyxiating boundaries of urban contemporaneity and which is more and more indifferent to settling procedures. These are iconoclastic and inexpressive towards itself and which are playing above all marginal roles in the city’s destinies.

### Contexts

I would like to present you here two projects: the archeologist Wiegand’s villa, built by Peter Behrens in Berlin in 1911, and the Curutchet’s house, built by Le Corbusier in La Plata, Argentina, in 1949. These

◁ 1. Dom i miasto: analogie w układzie architektonicznym fasady. Kompozycja elementów w Maison Curutchet, Wiegand Villa, Casa Cattaneo. Kolaż z użyciem rysunków arch. Patrizio Martinello przygotowanych w ramach prac badawczych IUAV/MIUR i na potrzeby pracy doktorskiej (UIAV), 2007–2008. / House and city: analogies in the architectural devices of the facade. The composition of elements and parts in Maison Curutchet, Wiegand Villa, Casa Cattaneo. Collage with drawings by arch. Patrizio Martinelli for the IUAV/MIUR research and IUAV PhD thesis, 2007–2008



emblematic examples gave me the idea to start thinking about how to “combine” quality. I mean I would like to focus on the relationship between architectonic quality and its intrinsic potentiality and I would like to examine its fundamental elements and to focus especially on the most successful results of the project from a cultural point of view. Besides I think that the problem of quality is strictly related to the instrument of the same project.

Let's talk about the Curutchet's house that was built in 1949, for example. In my opinion nowadays this house still represents a valid example explaining the matter of living in our contemporary time, not only as a private or domestic question that aims at organizing the heart of the house – nowadays this theme has been transformed into a design, rather than architectural, issue by media bombing –, but also as an effort to represent a different relation between the interior and the exterior, the real house-

the lodging – and the external space – the street and the city. The small house in La Plata seems a big, large house and a big built area thanks to a continually moving fluidity of interiors and exteriors – opened/covered and opened/uncovered.

I would like to go on this limit considering this project as a personal and learned reinterpretation of the *Chorizo* house – a basic and innovative element in the construction of the city of La Plata and more in general of the hispano-american cities. The attention should be focused on the invention that gave rise to the urban settlement. In my opinion, if we compare this aspect with the style of the city and its foundation system, it should be considered in a particular way.

Or at the same time we could underline some constituent choices of the Curutchet's house that refer maybe to the period in which Le Corbusier was serving Behrens' apprenticeship or to some of the urban themes examined by the Berliner master. The idea in the Curutchet's house of the slightly turned big facade – completely detached from the main building and, being the urban front, closely connected to the street – conceptually reminds of the facade planned by Behrens in 1911 for Wiegand's villa in Berlin. Indeed it has as entrance a solemn peristyle that gave to the house a strong axial direction.

The example of the archeologist Wiegand's villa is famous for the interesting relationship between this villa and the peristyle in front of it. The peristyle is usually built in the middle of a house and is surrounded by it. But in this particular case, beyond symbolism and symbolic references, Behrens planned it right in front of the house so that it became an element with its own dimensions and proportions. The peristyle in front of the facade is connected to the rest of the house and to its particular internal rooms – for example the hall or the salon – in just one point.

◁ 2. Fasada jako architektura. Przestrzeń pomiędzy frontem, zewnętrzną granicą fasady a ścianą, granicą wewnętrzną, w nowej ostłoniętej przestrzeni miejskiej, scala i rozdziela miejsca przeznaczone dla życia domowego, z dala od miasta i ulicy. Pusta przestrzeń fasady przypomina, poprzez analogię, wenecki dziedziniec, jak ten namalowany przez Benedetto Rusconiego w „Cudzie relikwii Świętego Krzyża” (*Il miracolo di santa croce*) czy jak wiele w całej Wenecji; przypomina również kompozycję przestrzenną Mason Curutchet i Wiegand Willa. Autorzy: Armado dal Fabbro, Patrizio Martinelli na potrzeby prac badawczych IUAV/MIUR, 2007/2008. / The facade as architecture. The space between the urban front, external limit of the facade, and the wall, the internal limit, keeps together and separates, in a new protected urban space, the places of domestic life, far away from the street and the city. The empty space of the facade reminds, by analogy, a venetian courtyard, like the one painted by Benedetto Rusconi in „Miracolo della reliquia della santa croce”, or in many cases inside Venice; and it also reminds the spatial composition of elements we find in Maison Curutchet and in Wiegand Villa. Project by prof. Armando Dal Fabbro and arch. Patrizio Martinelli for the IUAV/MIUR research, 2007–2008.

This element – typical of the Roman Domus – is planned in a very particular place of the house and it becomes a sort of connection between the domestic place of the house and the urban place, the street. It gets a urban relevance that is not just a problem of interior-exterior relations.

I consider the peristyle to be an attempt to build a monumental element also related to the urban area. From its section, we can see that the peristyle is an independent element; different from the rest of the house: it has its own dimensions, it is not as high as the first floor, it has specific qualities and a geometric-proportional independence.

This is a hint that helps the reflection on the elements that are constituent of the house, on private places opposed to a urban places, and on the relationship between domestic spaces and the urban spaces of streets and cities. Looking at the plan of the building, we can notice that the peristyle outside the house plans, determines and builds even the internal space of the house. The well-defined geometry of the peristyle – then broken by the spatial and linguistic dimensions of the house – organizes and designs the whole building, even the garden.

I think this could be a way to talk about the elements of a house without considering the functional ones. Considering the theme we are talking about we could reflect on the elements that belong or do not to the house and that seem to be ambiguous.

The peristyle is open at the top; it has solid columns on which both the main trabeation and the secondary open roof framework rest, and big lacunars through which the daylight filters, breaking the tradition but also lightening the solemnity of this element. An interesting aspect of this process consists on getting back to the classic architectural tradition but at the same time consists on breaking it – tradition and innovation (or imitation and innovation) are complementary aspects that give us the opportunity

to reflect on the fundamentals of this subject and on its inheritance.

### Mark

Le Corbusier's project for the house of doctor Curutchet in La Plata – 50 km far from Buenos Aires- has been planned according to Curutchet's wishes. Indeed he wanted a building, a house which could represent him; curious is the fact that he lived there for a very short period. Actually in the anthology of his projects there are no pictures but only sketches of this house.

We can also notice in this project the intention to create a sort of diaphragm between the house and the street, but this house is completely different from Behrens' Wiegand villa. In his project Le Corbusier reflects on the relations between interiors and exteriors, on transparencies, on distributive verticalities and on the best way to get the green park inside the building through the single facade facing the street.

In his drawings and sketches Le Corbusier doesn't reflect on the internal organization of the house but on some significant elements and on paths, sort of internal-connection system. There are different paths: one is characterized by a ramp connected to the hall and the doctor studio, the other is characterized by a staircase that connects the living area to the sleeping area.

From a small sketch is clear that Le Corbusier was trying to separate the 2 systems and to plan them on different levels, according to a distinct *promenade architecturale*.

In this project he underlines some themes he worked on in the past such as the theme of the free plan or that of a building resting on *pilotis*. At the same time he reinterprets the typical hispano-american chorizo house in a modern way.

In this case a reflection on tradition is also an expedient to start thinking about the project.

While Behrens' facade is corrupted by the single point connected with the peristyle, at the same time Le Corbusier is always reworking and questioning himself about the most important elements of his project.

### Place

The doctor studio and the home are two different buildings detached and connected only with the terrace that seems to extend the sitting-room to the outside. Looking at the building from the street, it seems a sort of diaphragm, separating and connecting the street, the city and the park with the house.

Some images of the interior show the relation with the park; it opens onto the interior of the house through the street and the terrace, covered by a shadowy canopy.

I thought this could be a good way to analyse some elements of the house and to show them as central elements of the same project.

Let's make a simple example. I would like to show you some drawings; the first one was drawn by Amancio Williams, one of the most important Argentinian architects of the 20th century and a big fan of Le Corbusier's architecture. He was interested in the building of the house and even proposed a modification to the original plans sent by Le Corbusier. Amancio suggested to make the parallelepiped-hall, connecting the ramp to the staircase, the most transparent as possible. Le Corbusier accepted this different solution and changed the original project; he also cut the diaphragm-wall connecting the 2 ramps. Both Le Corbusier and Amancio believed very important to lighten the staircase of the entrance hall; that's the reason why they made it transparent and therefore more luminous. The simple and clear corrections of some architectural elements – even if of secondary importance – of the project reveal a deep sensibility; small changes can also be very important.

Actually the house is very small: its plot of land has a dimension of 8 × 23 m. Despite the small dimension of the house and the fact that the plot has 3 blind walls, Le Corbusier tries to solve this issue.

Some images show the glazed hall, the column system, the presence of trees, specifically kept because of doctor Currutchet's desires, and the ramp system that goes into the first floor and then into the hall of the house.

Other images show the shell of the building. Looking at its plans we can notice a different distribution of the floors: from the linear system of the ground floor, to the orthogonal-spatial system of the living area, to the curvilinear and sinuous system of the sleeping area. A continuous movement from downside to upside and from inside to outside.

### New order

The study of the project of doctor Curutchet's house helps us to think about the difficult architectural process of its construction. At the same time it suggests us to see the project in relation to the particular form of structure of the city. It is the only project built by Le Corbusier in South-America and moreover it could be seen as the synthesis of the reflections and analysis that he made during his previous Argentinian stay – it happened in 1929, exactly 20 years before.

Is possible to find the same relation between the architecture and the city in some examples produced in Italy during the years of Rationalism, which represent a real anticipation of the complex facade of Curutchet's House: for example the urban system used by Terragni in some houses in Milano as the Rustici House, the Giuliani Frigerio's House, ecc... or an appropriate example may be the Cattaneo's House in Cernobbio, planned by Cesare Cattaneo in 1939, ten years before the Curutchet's House.

Le Corbusier's machine is perfect in its organizational mechanics and it is full of figurative hints.

It also uses the *promenade architectural* as an element that organizes and exalts the internal complexity of the architectural space. This house has 3 blind walls, respects the Hispano-American square plan and completely opens out in the main facade; therefore it creates a different relation with the city if compared with traditional chorizo houses.

Our study should consider 2 different aspects: on one side the foundational plan of the city of La Plata, the Cartesian reticulum of the urban plan –typical of Hispano-American cities- and on the other side the construction of the architecture of a urban fragment of the Hispano-American reticulum.