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# Transgression and Ekphrasis in Le Corbusier's Journey to the East

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## ***Abstract***

Transgression and ekphrasis in Le Corbusier's Journey to the East explores some lesser known aspects of Charles Edouard Jeanneret's early trip to the East focusing on the role of traditional arts and architecture that he encountered in the South-East of Europe. The experience, observation and thinking about these arts that subsequently influenced and determined his approach to art and architecture are being explored as a form of transgression and ekphrasis.

## **Transgression and *Ekphrasis* in Le Corbusier's *Journey to the East***

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...Architecture was revealed to me. Architecture is in the great buildings, the difficult and the high-flown works bequeathed by time, but *it is also in the smallest hovel*, in an enclosure-wall, in everything, sublime or modest, which contains sufficient geometry to establish a mathematical relationship. (Le Corbusier, *Voyage to the East*, 206–207)

The invisible lines of this revelation have been woven in the text, sketches and photographs of Charles-Édouard Jeanneret's 1911 voyage to the east. They have outlined this architect's future career that played itself out in the five decades that followed. This was not an ordinary career; it was a unique professional path with effects that have touched many across the globe. In relation to this path, the world has observed the emergence, flourishing and subsequent erosion of Modernist architecture. From its outset, this career has resonated with peripatetic and nomadic cords of transgression; the tunes of its register were still reverberating in the summer of 1965 when Le Corbusier edited his travel diary for publication, shortly before his death.

In this paper I argue how the experience of this trip worked itself out as a transgression and how this transgression was the necessary condition for a particular quality that epitomised Le Corbusier's work that followed. My emphasis will not be on widely theorised topics such as the fascination with the Parthenon or the importance of certain churches. Rather, I shall focus on the prior and less acknowledged aspects of this trip, such as the effects of the indigenous arts and architecture in the countries along the river Danube. I shall support my argument by making reference to the subsequent scholarship on prehistoric civilisations such as Vinča culture, in order to shed more light on Jeanneret, who by the time of his arrival in Constantinople had already changed his approach to arts and design.

### **The notion of transgression in the context of the twentieth century**

The notion of transgression enters European cultural discourse in the early twentieth century. The term had already existed in Medieval Latin and in the legal lexicon for two millennia, denoting the phenomenon primarily in relation to law, understood in its negative sense as the

violation of legislation. However, during the twentieth century, the signification of this term acquired more complex undertones, linked predominantly to avant-garde figures such as Marcel Duchamp, Georges Bataille, Antonin Artaud and Raymond Roussel. Their (in part surrealist) writings, art and lives subsequently gained the attention of Michel Foucault (1963, 1977), Jacques Derrida (1978), Denis Hollier (1989) and others who further explored the phenomenon of transgression.

Experiencing life fully, with its contradictions, ambiguities and intricacies, was central for the proponents of the early avant-garde such as Artaud, Bataille or Roussel. These and other twentieth-century adventurers drew novel aesthetic qualities from the experiences of the new metropolitan life as we observe it in Duchamp's work such as the iconic 'Nude Descending a Staircase' (1912) where the painter explored the experience and the movement, beyond creating a simple 'retinal pleasure'. Duchamp, who could also be considered the first conceptual artist, was a friend of Roussel and considered the French poet as an inspiration 'pointing the way' to the radical artists at the time. Foucault's only book-length work of literary criticism is on Roussel, while Derrida and Hollier wrote enthusiastically on Artaud and Bataille, respectively. Personal curiosities and dispositions guided Bataille, Artaud and others through the new circumstances, while extreme experiences were accelerated with the advances in mechanisation, the breakout of the Great War and the first socialist revolution.

For these and other twentieth-century young radicals of any vocation such as Shackleton, Wright brothers, Einstein or Coco Chanel, finding oneself in unfamiliar and uncomfortable territory facing difficult predicaments became part of life's challenges. Travels to distant corners of the world such as the North and the South poles, 'sailing of the air' across the ocean, revolutionary changes in female clothing and the struggle for equal rights were all different forms of breaking the existing boundaries and thus transgression in a wider sense.

### **Le Corbusier and the tour as the point of transgression and genesis**

In contrast to the 'Grand Tour' travellers of the eighteenth century, who searched for legacy of the classical antiquity, and distinct from the self-conscious romantic 'adventurers' of the nineteenth century, early twentieth-century itinerants such as Charles-Édouard Jeanneret plunged into a different kind of adventure. Although Jeanneret (later known as Le Corbusier) made his first trip to Italy in 1907, it was the six-month May-November 1911

journey to the east that profoundly affected him. The trip that aimed to reach Constantinople was less grand and obsessive, but, I shall argue, more absorbing, life-changing and transgressive.

The formative role of *Voyage d'Orient* for Le Corbusier's theoretical work and practice thereafter has been broadly recognized.<sup>1</sup> References to art and architecture experienced on this trip appear in his writings as early as 1915 and span numerous publications, among them *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (1925), *La Ville radieuse* (1933), *Quand les cathédrales étaient blanches* (1937) and *Le Modulor* (1949). It has been acknowledged that a number of his early villas, such as Villa Jeanneret-Perret (1912), Villa Favre-Jacot (1912) and Villa Schwob (1916), were inspired by the houses seen on the trip in terms of their internal organization around a central hall, ample spaces, massing and blank street facades (Çelik: 1992: 59).

While Zeynep Çelik provides an important argument in relation to Le Corbusier's orientalism and colonialism by additionally examining the context of Algiers, Çelik often equalises his orientalism with Islamic architecture. This might be appropriate for Algiers, but would be reductive for Le Corbusier's orientalism as it appears in his *Journey to the East*, which includes exploration of both Islamic and Christian arts and architecture. More to the point, Jeanneret is interested in an understanding of the arts *before* they were Christian or Islamic as neither was of essential significance for his investigation. It is therefore important to draw the attention to the cultural *mélange* of the region he visited but even more so to the role of the underlying indigenous arts of this part of the world, as they became important discoveries for Jeanneret.

Departing from Dresden via Prague and Vienna, twenty-four-year-old Jeanneret and his friend August Klipstein travelled east through the countries of Hungary, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece. The trip took the two men down the river Danube, a major natural and cultural infrastructure linking Northern Europe with the Mediterranean world.<sup>2</sup> Travelling along its waters made a huge impression on the two friends, who felt the excitement of being part of the system that connected Europe with Asia and Africa.

Until this point in his life, Jeanneret was a draftsman at the office of Peter Behrens in Berlin and had not yet found his own focus in architecture. Were it not for this journey that imprinted deeply felt experiences upon Le Corbusier as a young man, his career would not have taken the

radically innovative direction for which we know it. In other words, it was on this journey to Constantinople that Le Corbusier experienced his ‘road to Damascus’ moment.

This claim is bold and not demonstrable with mathematical precision; it is not entirely new either. According to Ivan Žaknić, the editor and English translator of the *Voyage*, the more we know about Le Corbusier and his later accomplishments, ‘the more significant this “grand tour” becomes as a substantive locus and point of genesis for ideas in all domains of his creativity’ (2007: vi). Le Corbusier himself had singled out the year of the trip as the most decisive year of his professional growth (2007: xvi).

According to Jeanneret’s travel diary and numerous letters to family, friends and mentors such as Charles L’Eplattenier and William Ritter, Charles-Édouard lived through events that were overwhelming and fundamentally altered his previous understanding about architecture and decorative arts<sup>3</sup> (Gresleri: 1987). Jeanneret admitted that he was not able to cope with the intensity of the experiences he lived through on this journey: he writes, ‘these notes are lifeless; the beauties I have seen always break down under my pen...’ (2007: xiii). The depth of these experiences determined his personal development and gave Jeanneret the necessary confidence for future projects.

### **Transgression and *ekphrasis***

My hypothesis is that Jeanneret’s experience of the indigenous arts and culture encountered on this trip was a transgression, and that his related observations, contemplation, sketching and writing could be understood and qualified as *ekphrasis*, whose breath and depth facilitated and determined the genesis of Le Corbusier’s work.

Let us therefore clarify what is meant by *ekphrasis*. *Ekphrasis* is a detailed description of a work of art that is practised to enhance the contemplation and experience of the arts. This practice cultivates a person’s perception, sensitivity and reflectivity through observation. It could inspire another work of art in a manner of *ut pictura ut poesis*. *Ekphrasis*, an essentially rhetorical device, was commonly used by the scholars of late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, as it was instrumental for grasping the arts in words and letters. In Byzantium, it was studied as part of the *trivium*.<sup>4</sup> There is no explicit evidence that Jeanneret was familiar with this concept; however, the impact of his co-traveller August Klipstein, an art

history graduate with a keen interest in Byzantine art, should not be underestimated. According to Tim Benton, Jeanneret had learned a great deal from Klipstein (Benton: 2013:12). Moreover, having previously visited Spain and Italy, it was Klipstein's idea to travel to Constantinople and Athens, at a time when Jeanneret dreamed of an 'idler's tour to Rome' only (2013:100). In the end, Jeanneret agreed to go to Rome via Constantinople and Athens because he needed a travel companion and the two men seemed to get along well. (2013:100).

Both Klipstein and Jeanneret wrote detailed journals during the trip. We do not know whose idea was this or whether it was simply a common practice at the time. As a Byzantine scholar, Klipstein would have been familiar with the practice of *ekphrasis* and could have encouraged it, as Jeanneret's narratives became more vivid and read as 'drafted and painted' with words.<sup>5</sup> Charles-Édouard's writing is personal and authentic, based on his perception of the arts and life as encountered. It noticeably improves with time and we observe a gradual change and broadening of Jeanneret's perception. This enhanced and fine-tuned perception, in part due to *ekphrasis*, underpins most of Jeanneret's travel journal.

In a self-reflective manner, Jeanneret describes the training of the eye and the depth of observation by comparing sketching and photography:

When one travels and works with visual things – architecture, painting or sculpture – one uses one's eyes and draws, so as *to fix deep down in one's experience* what is seen. Once the impression has been recorded by the pencil, it stays for good, entered, registered, inscribed. The camera is the tool for idlers, who use a machine to do their seeing for them. (2007: xiv)

For Jeanneret drawing was part of a profound registering of lived experiences into his personal memory system. He strove to record everything in an organised way by using writing, drawing and photography, and by collecting objects of arts and crafts that were shipped back to Switzerland as the journey progressed. He planned this methodically, while letting his susceptibility lead the way. In this undertaking, various arts were studied in their own right and in relation to each other, allowing for *ekphrasis* to work and cross-fertilise them. Indeed, this dynamic persisted beyond the trip and throughout most of his career, as Le Corbusier continued to draw from these experiences. On the importance of being drawn to action and on the primacy of sketching, Charles-Édouard wrote emphatically:

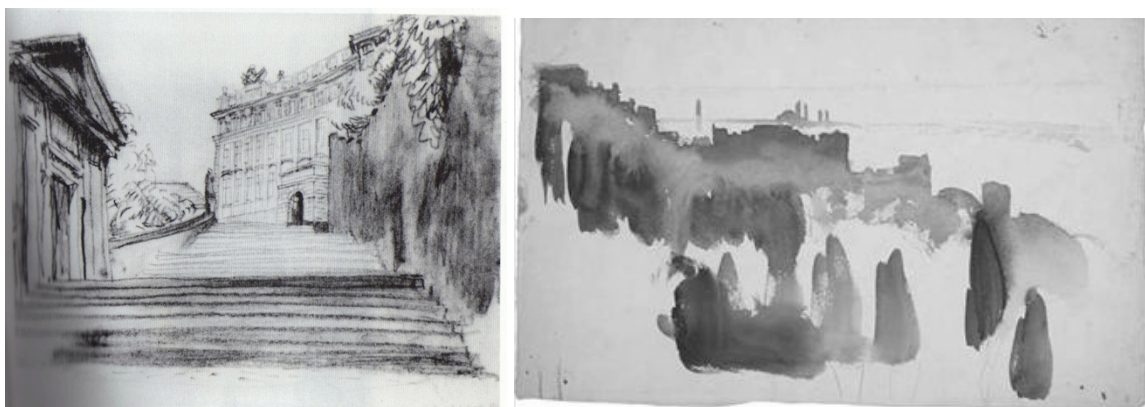
To draw oneself, to trace the lines, handle the volumes, organise the surface... all this means first to look and then to observe and finally perhaps to discover ... and it is then that the inspiration may come. Inventing, creating, one's whole being is drawn into

action, and it is this action which counts. Others stood indifferent – but you saw! (2007: xiv)

Jeanneret took many photographs, yet he overtly gave little importance to them, preferring his sketches and writing instead. But despite his apparently dim view of the camera, Jeanneret clutched one throughout the trip and took shots that have become paradigmatic. Tim Benton's *Le Corbusier: Secret Photographer* (Benton: 2013) makes a seminal contribution to the understanding of Le Corbusier's photography. Benton points out that during the 1906–11 period, Jeanneret made a serious effort to master the technique and the art of photography by purchasing three cameras, a tripod and many filters. He also learned how to print and develop negatives (Benton: 2013: 9). According to Benton, in the year of the voyage alone, Jeanneret went through three different styles of taking photographs. From the initial phase in which he was trying to make professional architectural photographs in Germany and Prague (April to May 1911), via photographs in a more personal style (May to September), Jeanneret ended up producing photography in the style of visual notes (October 1911) (2013: 9). Implied in Benton's statement is the assertion that Jeanneret's changing attitude towards photography hinges upon the transformative experiences of this trip. This understanding runs in parallel with and directly supports my main argument.

### **An art that is sensuous, authoritative and that 'gives to the body its fair share'**

As mentioned, the change is evident not only in Jeanneret's style of writing and photography but also in his drawings as they became less academically studious (Prague drawings) and more abstract (Constantinople sketches) (Fig. 1 & 2). How are we to explain this conversion?



**Figure 1. Black and white drawing of Prague cityscape; Figure 2. A watercolour sketch of Constantinople**

The two friends' journey was dominated by their fascination for the unconsidered lands and the



people they encountered. Their journey was filled with unexpected moments of exaltation and joy, as Jeanneret and Klipstein stumbled upon the simplicity of everyday life in the landscapes of Hungary, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria. Impressed by the prolific nature of traditional arts amongst non-academically educated people, Jeanneret wrote ecstatically:

In our travels we passed through countries where the artist peasant matches with authority the colour to the line and the line to the form, and we were green with envy! But this continued without end! (2007:15)

At this point it might be instructive to briefly consider the role of Worringer's influential 1907 book *Abstraction and Empathy*, as Klipstein was a protégé of Wilhelm Worringer (1881–1965). According to Rabaça and Brooks, and quoted by Benton, Klipstein had his master's book with himself, had written and quoted from it during the travel and had apparently encouraged his companion to read it (Rabaça: 2012) (Brooks: 1997:235). In *Abstraction and Empathy*, Worringer makes an important distinction between the two kinds of art: a) the art that takes pleasure in making recognisable simulacra; and b) the art that suppresses that illusion in favour of something more constricted and abstract. Both can produce beauty; however, according to Worringer, the former accepts and idealises the world, while the latter is concerned and anxious about it and thus compelled to devise artistic strategies designed to minimise the sovereignty of representation. This compulsion for non-representational artistic strategies is Worringer's 'urge for abstraction' (Worringer: 1997: vii–xv).<sup>6</sup> As evident in his sketches, writings and photographs, Jeanneret was taken by this urge (Fig 3).

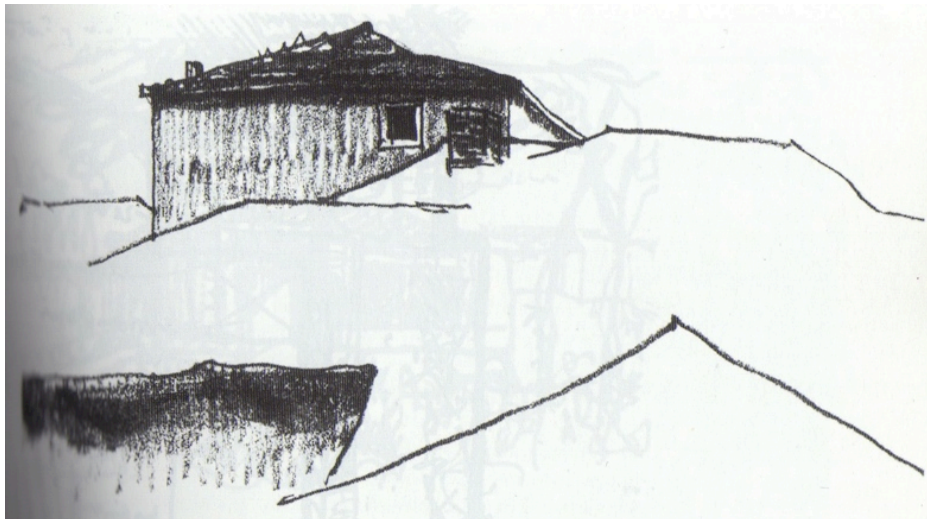


Figure 3. House in the Balkans sketch by C-E Jeanneret, 1911 – note a tendency for abstraction;



**Figure 4. Vernacular house in Serbia – photograph 1911;**

Excited by abstract objects of traditional ceramics, woodcarvings, stone-cuttings and freshly painted peasant houses, he writes that in the pursuit of these simple abstract forms they had to ‘flee from the invading Europeanisation’ of big cities, into the refuge of the countryside where the great popular traditions survive (Fig. 4.).

In this ‘flee’ we can read the urge to transgress all that was left behind in the cities, including the work with established architects such as Behrens. Jeanneret searches for something more ‘sensual’, which he finds in the traditionally designed objects. He writes:

The art of the peasant is a striking creation of aesthetic sensuality. If art elevates itself above the sciences, it is precisely because, in opposition to them, *it stimulates sensuality and awakens profound echoes in the physical being. It gives to the body – to the animal – its fair share*, and then upon this healthy base, conducive to the expansion of joy, it knows how to erect the most noble of pillars. (2007: 15)

Jeanneret makes an uncanny libidinal connection between art objects and physical pleasure.

What makes this statement extraordinary and transgressive is the fact that the aesthetic

judgement is not disinterested (as in the tradition of Kant). Instead, Jeanneret calls for an unapologetic aesthetic pleasure that is instinctive, physical and intoxicating. He continues:

The forms are voluminous and swollen with vitality, the line continually unites and mingles native scenes, or offers, right alongside and on the same object the magic of geometry: an astonishing union of fundamental instincts and of those susceptible to more abstract speculations.

The colour, it too is not descriptive but evocative – always symbolic. It is the end and not the means. It exists for the caress and for the intoxication of the eye and as such, paradoxically, with a hearty laugh it jostles the great inhibited giants, even the Giotto's, even the Grecos, the Cézannes and the Van Goghs! (2007: 16)

Jeanneret thus boldly brings together the cool reason of geometry and the libidinal passions for forms and colours. The blaze of this passion prevailed as Jeanneret aimed for the works that were able to induce physical and authoritative pleasure. The two photographs below show Jeanneret's appreciation of the haptic qualities in art and design (Figs 5 & 6).



**Figure 5.** In the workshop at 29 rue d'Astorg, Paris, 1922. Le Corbusier holds a ceramic pot acquired from Serbia in 1911. In the background is a kilim, probably from the same trip;



Figure 6. Le Corbusier relaxes surrounded by works of art.

### **Transgression by lines and the pre-historical ancestry of the vernacular art in the Danube region**

Several visual notions relate to Jeanneret's transgressive experience, including the observation of lines such as the flat line of the horizon. Describing the experience of Danube from the river-boat Jeanneret writes:

It is like being on the Amazon, so remote are the river banks and so impenetrable are their forests... There is now nothing to see but a horizontal line... (2007: 36) (Fig. 7)



**Figure 7. Horizontality: The river Danube near the medieval fortress of Smederevo, a photograph by Jeanneret 1911.**

Reading Jeanneret's notes evokes the fluvial land crowned with the immense sky that must have projected a sense of luxury, which rendered everything possible. Calm, lush scenery must have brought reassurance about life linked to the ground. In absorbing the richness of this vast landscape, its plain topographical qualities, its vegetation and its people, Jeanneret recorded:

Why should one copy some shrivelled bud? That is so monstrous! ... Joy – it is a tree spread out like a magnificent palm, with flowers and with all its fruits. Beauty is this splendid flourish of youth, its liveliness and its variety... (2007:18)

In a similar appreciation of the instinctive, natural and organic lines recognisable on the pots and other traditional art objects, we read:

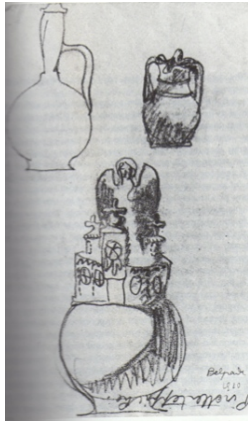
First and foremost among these men who do not reason is the instinctive appreciation for the *organic* line, born from the correlation between the most utilitarian line and that which encloses the most expansive volume – thus the most beautiful. (2007:16)

Jeanneret gradually articulates a definition of beauty that acknowledges the 'organic line'. He observed this line in the way in which earthenware developed organically from the ground into everyday life and in the manner it continued to live on the fingertips of the locals (Fig. 2). In comparison to the flatness and striation of modern industrial design, Jeanneret considered the lines of this traditional design more purposeful, less arbitrary, and in that sense superior:

In effect these pots too are young, beaming ... with their curves expanding to the bursting point, and what a contrast they make, created as they are on the wheel of the village potter, ... whose fingers unconsciously obey the rules of an age-old tradition, in contrast to those forms of disturbing fantasy, or a stupefying imbecility, conceived by



who knows whom in the unknown corners of large modern factories; those are nothing but the foolish whims of some low-ranking draftsman who draws such form for the sole purpose of differentiating it from the one he drew yesterday. (2007:18)



**Figure 8. Jeanneret's sketches of the pottery from the Balkans 1911;**



**Figure 9. Anthropomorphic pot of Neolithic Vinča culture.**



**Figure 10. Pots by Le Corbusier acquired in Serbia, 1911.**

Jeanneret saw curved lines of pots as analogous to the arcs and bends of the natural surroundings and to the voluptuous bodies of women in traditional costumes that he watched with interest when they unintentionally had to stay in Baja. These kinds of accidental encounters, at times combined with the soul-searching music of the Gypsies (as in the occasion of a wedding that Jeanneret and Klipstein inadvertently attended), are experiences that proved to be long-lasting and relevant. The two men found the local women intriguingly different, more relaxed and strangely tuned to life.

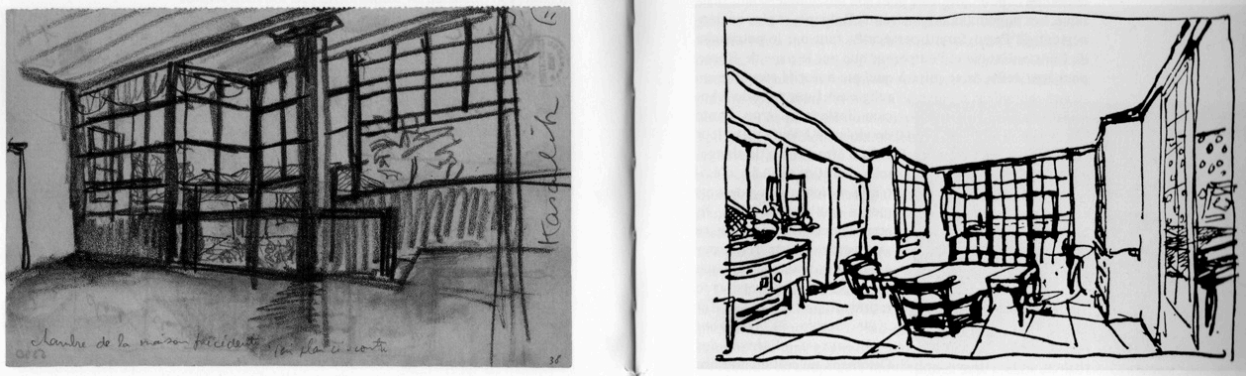
It would not be an exaggeration to say that Jeanneret's photographs of the curvaceous women of Hungarian *pusztas* potentially bring to mind female figurines coincidentally excavated in the not-too-distant Willendorf in 1908 by the archaeologists Josef Szombathy, Hugo Obermaier and Josef Bayer.<sup>7</sup> While this is a truly large time gap to cover, in my view the traditional vernacular arts that Jeanneret observed cannot be dissociated from the legacy of the previous prehistoric cultures of the Danube region (Figs 8 & 9). Contemporary Corbusian scholarship habitually does not study this aspect because of the presumed red line separating so-called pre-history and history. However, the virtue of the traditional art of pottery is in the fact that it spans this tentative line.

The advances in archaeology in central Europe during the period when Jeanneret and Klipstein travelled were significant and ought to be highlighted. Apart from the well-known Austrian figurine, archaeologists were working on many Neolithic sites that were part of the Danubian branch of cultures. For example, in 1908, archaeologist Miloje Vasić made the important discovery of a prehistoric settlement of Belo Brdo close to the village of Vinča, downstream of Belgrade on the right bank of the Danube, paving a way for future discoveries of what came to be known as Vinča culture. This civilisation from about 7800 years ago, which spread from Hungary to Greece, incorporating most of contemporary Serbia and parts of Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Bosnia, was once a highly sophisticated European culture that lasted for about 1000 years before it diminished. In addition to the organised settlements and copper metallurgy, these people had an early form of writing and a highly developed pottery that included anthropomorphic pots and small sculptures.<sup>8</sup> There was at the time a considerable general and scientific interest in the archaeological excavations conducted; Jeanneret and Klipstein were most probably aware of them. Although Jeanneret did not warm to Belgrade, he paid a visit to its newly established Ethnographic Museum, which he liked, and where he was exposed to the latest findings and related scholarship.<sup>9</sup> He writes how they decided to make a detour to Knjaževac in order to explore the pottery:

In a quiet corner of the city there is an exquisite ethnographic museum, with carpets, clothing, and pots – beautiful Serbian pots of the kind we will go looking for in the highlands of the Balkans around Knjaževac. (2007:43)

In his overall quest for the primary and universal quality in the arts, Jeanneret did not follow a strictly rational or academic approach. The stimulating sensuality of the shapes and colours of

pots and other objects constantly affected him as he often extracted, recorded and abstracted forms that he enjoyed (Benton: 2013:13). The use and application of these forms recorded in the sketches is subsequently evident in Le Corbusier's paintings, design and architectural projects, including the Dom-ino house (Figs 10 & 11).



**Figure 10. Interior of the house in Kasaniak, sketched 1911; Figure 11. The proposal for the interior of the Dom-ino house, 1915.**

We can therefore construe that Jeanneret's knowledge of vernacular art was based on some scholarly knowledge passed to him by friends and mentors, but mostly it was acquired on the trip by observation and direct experience. In this way Jeanneret's 'urge for abstraction' worked through the ekphrastic contemplation of the freshly discovered 'art of the peasant'. This attitude gradually became Le Corbusier's own strategy for approaching art and design, where the processes of abstraction and *ekphrasis* stimulated sensuality and awakened the body by giving it pleasures.

But abstraction also worked at another level: on the macro *Weltanschauung* (world-view) level, where it was the way in which one coped with the complexities and anxieties of the world. Jeanneret indeed displayed his personal pleasure and joy in the process related to the arts, but he also showed a certain oblivion of the socio-political context, as he remained silent about the tensions that existed in this region prior to the breakout of the 1912 and 1913 Balkan Wars and the 1914 Great War.

### **The 'savage' and the unlocking of the universal quality of art**

Jeanneret's language, which includes terms such as 'sensuality', 'physicality', 'expansion of joy' and 'erection' of the 'most noble of pillars' reveals Jeanneret as an open, experimental explorer who embraced life with passion. From his excitement over colourful crafts, via the study of the pots and sketches of the vernacular whitewashed houses, he came to Bosphorus to



appreciate the spaces of the imperial Stamboul. The perspectival study drawings are gone, while sensuous, inspirational often abstracted sketches take over. The new drawings make observations on a deeper level, beyond the framed and academically taught perspectival copying. Jeanneret observes the inner and outer structure of the overall urban phenomenon and its topographical relation to the sea, the sun and the sky. He cherished the life-changing hold that the trip provided, enabling him to see things differently, to transgress and to speak a new language of empathy and universality of the arts. He evoked the tactile qualities of the traditional art that led him this realisation:

Thus this traditional art, like a lingering warm caress, embraces the entire land, covering it with same flowers that *unite or mingle races*, climates and places. It has spread out without constraint, with the spiritedness of a beautiful animal. (2007:16)

These exaltations clearly echo beyond the Heimatschutz movement to which Jeanneret was initially responsive<sup>10</sup> (Benton: 2013:15). He penetrated deeper than the urban followers of this movement by uncovering the traits of arts and culture *in situ* in the ancient crafts of Pannonia and the Balkans. This awareness enabled him to reach fundamental strata of the arts where written language, history and categories such as style appeared irrelevant. He writes:

Considered from a certain point of view, folk art outlives the highest of civilizations. It remains a norm, a sort of measure whose standard is man's ancestor – the savage, if you will. (2007:16)

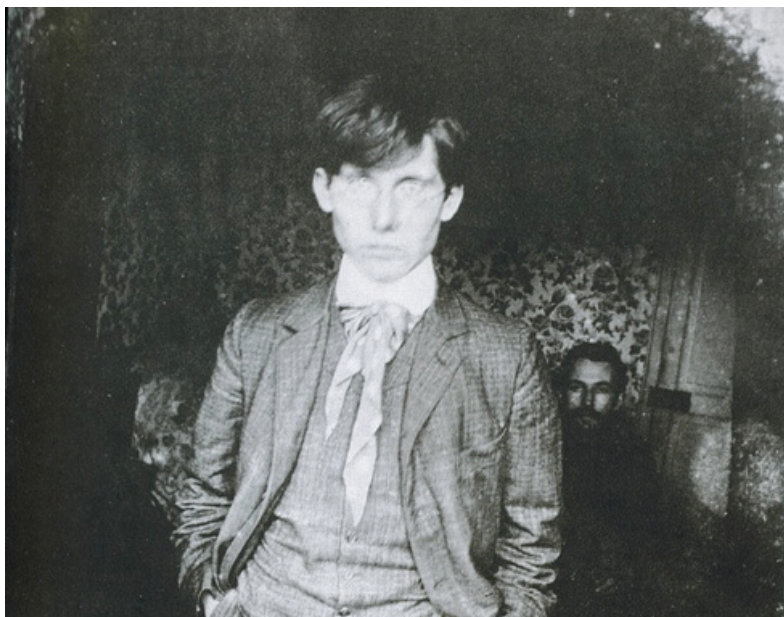
The discovery that universal pleasure in art is linked to the qualities of the art of the savage was transgressive. Understanding these principles led Jeanneret to search for and find the same underlying universal traits elsewhere in the Balkans, in Stamboul and beyond this trip in places such as Brazil and India.

Jeanneret's contribution to the formulation of modern abstract art was in the fact that he gradually ceased to use the term 'primitive', previously widely used. He replaced it with the term 'peasant'. This meant that the term 'abstract' became dissociated from the term 'primitive', which was still the case in Worringer. In this way, the terms 'abstract' and 'abstraction' were emancipated. Consequently, the concept of abstract art emerged in its own right. It was soon to be linked not to the past, but almost exclusively to the future, progress and modernist experimentation. This is the important legacy of Jeanneret and of his trip to the East.

History has often been patronising towards and reluctant to consider the indigenous art of this part of Europe. Indeed, since the Romans this area was considered marginal – a *limes*. By

identifying the importance of these previous cultures for Le Corbusier's work and therefore for Modernism generally, I also suggest the relevance of the prehistoric cultural heritage of this part of the world which twentieth- and twenty-first-century archaeological scholarship has confirmed. This aspect deserves further elaboration, which goes beyond the scope of this paper.

In relation to transgression, it is important to state the following: Jeanneret was able to capture previously non-theorised conditions of arts due to his acquired openness, empathy and the sense of abstraction that he and Klipstein developed on the way. This experience amounts to a cultural transgression or something very close to it.



**Figure 12. Charles -Edouard Jeanneret, Istanbul 1911**

Jeanneret generated radically different language in art and architecture, containing elements of his own invention such as the new relation to the horizon and horizontality, the juxtaposition of straight and organic lines, the pockets of beaming colours in their dialogue with the light source, the physical pleasure of emphatically abstracted forms and the new awareness of the complex geometry and topography of urban spaces. These are the elements of the new grammar invented through an ekphrastic reflection on the transgressive experiences of this trip. They are evident in Le Corbusier's projects such as Villa Savoye and the chapel in Ronchamp, where this approach produced powerful infringements and innovative solutions.

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<sup>1</sup> The latest significant contemporary book on this subject is *L'invention d'un architecte: Le voyage en Orient de Le Corbusier* (2013). It was not out at the time of writing the proposal for this paper. Le Corbusier prepared the book *Voyage En Orient* in July 1965; it was published posthumously in 1966 by Jean Petit. Although in 1965 Le Corbusier was a recognizable citizen of the world and a household name, curiously he still insisted that the experiences of young Charles-Édouard should be recorded. This suggests the importance he gave to this early travelogue. The book has subsequently been translated into Italian as *Le Corbusier Viaggio in Oriente* (1984). It appeared in English as *Journey to the East* (1987/2007).

<sup>2</sup> See among other general literature the book by Magris, C. (1999).

<sup>3</sup> Note that when Le Corbusier speaks about 'the decorative arts', he does not refer to the arts that include ornaments and decoration but to the 'design' of objects.

<sup>4</sup> For more on *ekphrasis* see Curtius, E.R. (1990), 302–47.

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<sup>5</sup> People who practiced *ekphrasis* often saw themselves as ‘painters with words’. Historical examples include Philostratus and Callistratus, who aimed to reproduce paintings and statues and to instruct the reader both in art appreciation and in the entire story, of which the artefact was only a part. Curtius, *ibid.*.

<sup>6</sup> Worringer’s ‘urge to abstraction’ is related to Riegl’s ‘will for art’, *Kunstwollen*, as Worringer was a student of Alois Riegl (1858–1905). Otto Rank (1884–1939), a Viennese psychoanalyst and a student of Freud, cites Worringer as ‘taking Riegl up to the verge of psychological insight where art forms can be interpreted parallel to forms of belief in the soul’. See Rank, O. (1989). Worringer is also credited for coining the term ‘expressionism’.

<sup>7</sup> Paleolithic Venus of Willendorf was excavated by a worker, Josef Veram, in 1908 at the excavations carried out by archaeologists Josef Szombathy, Hugo Obermaier and Josef Bayer. It is kept at the Natural History museum in Vienna.

<sup>8</sup> The Vinča sign system is a proto-writing that existed before the others appeared in Mesopotamia or Egypt. This sign system is believed to be the basis for both the Linear A and Linear B that later emerged in Greece. For more on this, see the reports on the 1961 archaeological works in Tărtăria, Romania. See also Vasić M. (1936); Chapman J. (1981); and Winn, S. MM (1973, 1981). On later Vinča culture scholarship that includes the excavations in Lepenski Vir, see Srejović, D. (1969, 1971, 1972, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> The Ethnographic Museum of Serbia in Belgrade was opened in 1904 after the proposal and the theoretical base conceived by Stojan Novaković, a leading Serbian historian of the nineteenth century and a member of the Serbian, Yugoslav and Russian Academy of Arts and Sciences. The museum contained traditional pottery, textile, jewelry, metal and glass objects. Most of the content was subsequently destroyed in the First World War, but the museum was restored.

<sup>10</sup> Like the Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain, this movement was eager to restore the charm of old towns and villages and related arts and crafts in Germany and Switzerland.