Architecture as a Monument or Instrument? : The Mundaneum Project and the Polemic between Karel Teige and Le Corbusier

by Jana Beránková

Abstract: Focusing on the *Mundaneum* project, which took place at the end of the 1920s, this paper contests Le Corbusier's polemical classing of Czechoslovak architect and theorist Karel Teige as a representative of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) and retraces the genealogy of the polemic, arguing that the origins of the discord lay in their distinct aesthetic doctrines. Whereas Le Corbusier promoted mathematically-grounded eternal values of beauty, Teige believed beauty was a socially and historically determined product. The latter was strictly opposed to any idea of monumentality and saw architecture as an *instrument* rather than as a *monument*. The polemic between Teige and Le Corbusier merits the attention of contemporary scholarship because it elucidates the asymmetries in avant-garde architects' approaches to politics. Le Corbusier saw architecture as specialized knowledge independent of political doctrines; his famous statement "architecture or revolution" can be read as an expression of the motive to use architecture in order to prevent revolution. On the contrary, Teige's stance was far more radical; for him, a truly modern architecture should be preceded by a successful socialist revolution. In reviving the *monument-instrument* debate between Teige and Le Corbusier, my paper raises questions about the brittle relationship between politics and architectural practice.

Keywords: Le Corbusier, Karel Teige, Architecture, Mundaneum, Monumentality

　　The polemic on the Mundaneum project is a remarkable point in the history of Le Corbusier's and Karel Teige's architectural thinking.

According to a general interpretation of the dialogue of these two thinkers, Teige advocated *Sachlichkeit* and took Le Corbusier's thinking too literally. However, this interpretation is saturated by Le Corbusier's rhetoric and overlooks nuances present in the thinking of the Czechoslovak critic and crucial issues of this debate. Therefore, the polemic should be analyzed from the perspective of the aesthetic theories of both characters. Only this perspective can help to elucidate the crucial paradigms of the debate: the tension between the notion of *monument* and *instrument*, architecture and social tissue. The goal of this article is to highlight contrasting paradigms of this debate. How and why was Le Corbusier related to his young opposing colleague?

Shifts and meetings

In 1922, Karel Teige met Le Corbusier on a trip to Paris. Teige was a young critic whose career was embedded in ideas of proletarian poetry promoted by Karel Seifert and Jiří Wolker. He considered modern technology to be the cause of human alienation and criticized the spread of American culture, and the related cult of the engineer, in Europe. The first volume of the *Devětsil* anthology,[1] to which he significantly contributed, was still marked by these tendencies. It included criticism of the industrial civilization and the appraisal of a simple, *naïve* and tendentious art.

The meeting with Le Corbusier had a fundamental effect on Teige. At that time, Le Corbusier promoted his "esprit nouveau": the new beauty of modern, industrially produced objects. It was after this meeting that Teige began to consider science as the only rational apparatus able to fight the irrationality of capitalism. In Teige's newly shaped view, science was a discipline using hypothesis verified by mathematic calculation, and its exact methods lead the whole humanity towards social progress. This notion of science defied common positivist ideas; science was a weapon in the struggle towards a new socialist society, and technological innovations were tools for defending an equitable social order.

In 1923, Teige presented the oeuvre of his French colleague in the *Stavba* review[2] and advertised him largely among the young Czechoslovak avant-garde. Le Corbusier visited Prague where he delivered a number of conferences under the name of the series *Purism and architecture*, which also sponsored visits by other famous archi-

tects like Gropius, Loos and Oud. In this manner, Le Corbusier established a close relationship with the Czechoslovak intellectual milieu.

Although Le Corbusier stimulated Teige's interest in architecture, the French architect was not his definitive master. At the end of 1920s, the relationship between both personalities culminated in a significant clash preceding their separation. This dispute was already insinuated in Teige's interview of Le Corbusier for *Rozpravy Aventina*[3] and it found its climax in disagreement over the Mundaneum project. Although Teige was inspired by the French architect, he relegated him to the position of an old and antiquated master.

Mundaneum

The Mundaneum project became the pretext of discord. The commission for the Mundaneum project was sent to Le Corbusier in 1928 by Paul Otlet. Otlet, a champion of universalism, conceived the Mundaneum as a global museum materializing the unity of knowledge. He envisioned it as a visual three-dimensional encyclopedia, the goal of which was to emphasize the unity of all people around the globe. According to Wouter van Acker, the Mundaneum was "an atlas of knowledge that did not symbolize the Euclidian space of knowledge, but a semantic space."[4] Otlet was involved in research focused on giving a visual form to the knowledge. He shared with the avant-garde the conviction that the image was the most rapid and functional form of knowledge and he saw the predominance of the image as a direct expression of modern times. Yet, his thinking was also deeply embedded in occultism and platonic metaphors of seeing and illumination. Rather than a mere museum, the Mundaneum was supposed to be a sanctuary of knowledge; it was monumental and functional at the same time.[5]

The Mundaneum had four main functions: documentation (as a world library and bibliographical institute), a museum describing the progress of ideas of the whole of humanity, a university, and various world institutions. Otlet envisioned that the institution would have an extra-territorial status and would work to preserve world peace. It would be an instrument of communication between different cultures. Thus, the project inscribed itself into an ideology of humanitarian internationalism serving for the prevention of military conflicts.

Le Corbusier proposed a project for the Mundaneum's design which contained a museum with a surprising pyramidal form. This step pyramid had no staircase; visitors had to enter it either by using elevators or exterior ramps. To reach the entrance at the top of the pyramid, visitors would have to traverse a two-thousand-and-five-hundred-meter walk. Visitors descended through an exhibition starting in pre-historic times and advancing towards the present era. Along the way, the halls of the museum contained apertures offering a panoramic view of natural settings. Finally, at the end of the walk, visitors were to enter the *Sacrarium*, a temple of ethics, philosophy, and religion containing a huge globe, which alluded to the international character of the project.

The architectural walk that Le Corbusier proposed may reflect Otlet's own vision of knowledge. In his cosmological treatise *The World, Essay of Universalism*, Otlet describes three stages of knowledge that constitute the world: The first is analysis, a positive system, "a mere recording of facts and their classification according to a strictly experimental order, and observation."[6] The second stage is synthesis including logics as well as intuition, in which the spirit establishes preliminary answers. Finally, the third stage is religious thought in which "a natural order that the reason can access is doubled by a supernatural order, accessible only via belief, and via revealed truths."[7]

The architectural walk through the pyramid proposed by Le Corbusier may materialize Otlet's understanding of knowledge. A walk through Mundaneum's museum can be interpreted as a cognitive procedure divided into three main stages: ascending (analysis), reaching the top and descending (synthesis), and finally entering the Sacrarium without any natural daylight (religious revelation). The walk through the pyramid would evoke a pilgrimage, a sacred ceremony in which a human being moves from the external (positive) truths to inner truths of the soul. It would have a circular character, as one can imagine a visitor that would repeat this walk many times. The Mundaneum's museum would thus materialize the eternal spiral of knowledge and vital cosmic energy described by Otlet.[8]

The museum was to be completed by a library in a form of a massive prism on *pilotis*. Its first floor was to be divided by two entrances: one for employees, the other for visitors. It was supposed to contain lecture halls, offices and a restaurant situated in superior floors. On the southern side of the whole complex, a huge hall shaped

according to rules of acoustics evoked a similar facility proposed in Le Corbusier's *Tsentrosoyuz* project. Finally, in the middle of the area, a university connected all the institutions and was completed by a large garden and temporary exhibition pavilions. The whole complex was equipped with a telegraph station, a parking lot, a hotel, university dormitories and botanical and mineralogical gardens. The urban scheme of the project was shaped in order to preserve a natural panorama of Lake Geneva.

Teige, Stavba, 1929

In 1929, Teige published a critique of Mundaneum in *Stavba* review[9]. While Teige respected Le Corbusier as a founder of modern architecture and appreciated the project's solution of the university component, he remarked that the whole project created an archaic impression. In his view, it was impossible to give any functional justification for the pyramidal form of the museum, mainly due to the complicated access to the top of the building and due to the artificial lighting which was the only source of light inside the *Sacrarium*. He claimed the whole plan resembled an aerial photograph of an old archeological site.

According to Teige, "the first root of this misconception of the program lies in the program, the idea and theory of the Mundaneum. This idea is not alive, it does not originate from a vibrant, felt need; it is the fruit of the abstract and rarified speculation of intellectual coteries within the League of Nations."[10] What Teige criticized was not merely the architectural plan, but also the idealistic and religious vision of Paul Otlet. To him, Le Corbusier's project was a mere academic utopia aligned to Otlet's abstract vision. If a program was vaguely and incorrectly defined, a resulting architectural form could be only a sad compromise. The building could never be fully functional if its main "function" was an abstract symbolic one. The inner truths that one was to discover inside the symbolic space of the Sacrarium clearly contradicted the requirement for natural daylight to enter the exhibition space. In other words, Teige disapproved the symbolic dimension of the Mundaneum because it was antithetical to functional demands of the space.

The main error of the Mundaneum was the error of monumentality and of the Golden Section: the project's compliance to composition and astronomical symbolism. It was the "error of a palace."[11] In-

stead of proposing a viable urban solution, the project promoted an abstract composition; *tracé régulateur* subjugated everything to an aesthetic *a priori* speculation. Teige believed this conception was false, because the goal of architecture was to create *instruments*, not *monuments*. In Teige's conception, the instrument equaled the functionality of constructivist architecture. The architecture as an *instrument*, or a tool, was liberated from any aesthetic ambitions; it conveyed the definition of architecture as a science that Teige embraced in the late 1920s. On the contrary, the *monument* conveyed the artistic conception of architecture which Teige heavily criticized. Thus, the debate on monument-instrument also embodied the questioning of the role of architecture in the interwar period.

Le Corbusier's *In Defense of Architecture*

Le Corbusier replied to Teige by a text written during his travels to Moscow and published for the first time in the Czech review *Musaion* in 1931. The French version was published only in 1933 in the *l'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* review. In this response, Le Corbusier recycled Teige's quotations (for instance from Hannes Meyer's *Bauen* manifesto) and tried to turn them against him. Corbusier tried to persuade Teige that he could not be serious in pretending to be something what he was not: a scientist, and not a poet. In this manner, Le Corbusier misconstrued Teige's conceptions, as the latter never renounced his role of writer and poet but only proclaimed a different conception of art and poetry. In fact, Teige, who was founder of the Poetist movement, believed that poetry was a quality inherent in the life of tomorrow and that life itself would become poetry. Teige believed it was necessary to construct buildings rationally in order to create a dialectical opposition to the current poetic disorder.

Le Corbusier labeled Teige's approach as *sachlich*; he claimed that the *Neue Sachlichkeit* was "a recent banner under which avant-gardes from Germany, the Netherlands and partly from Czechoslovakia assembled."[12] This claim is particularly simplified since Teige never espoused positions of the "new objectivity." If the new objectivity had a considerable impact on German art and architecture, its influence in Czechoslovakia was rather restricted. The origins of Teige's critique of Le Corbusier's design were broadly political and aesthetic; they were not related to the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Le Corbusier's rebuttal was ineffectual; he used the word *sachlich* as his principal weapon, but he did not manage to locate the crux of Teige's critique.

Le Corbusier also asked Teige why he thought that the notion of composition was contradictory to architecture. Although it is not clear to what extent Le Corbusier was familiar with polemics inside the Soviet constructivist movement, his question insinuates either a lack of knowledge of the theoretical distinction between *construction* and *composition* or a defense of *composition*. According to the productivist group of Russian Constructivists, *composition* seeks eternal laws of beauty and for aesthetical *a priori*, while *construction* demonstrates *faktura* of the oeuvre, its fabrication process and the dialectical tensions it contains. While *composition* regards itself as a timeless practice, *construction* is deeply embedded in history. Varvara Stepanova, whose position is close to the productivist stance, defines the distinction thus:

> Composition is the contemplative approach of the artist in his work. Technique and industry have confronted art with the problem of construction as an active process, and not contemplative reflection. The 'sanctity' of a work as a single entity is destroyed. The museum which was a treasury of this entity is now transformed into an archive.[13]

Teige's own reception of Constructivism was close to these productivist positions. His thinking can be generally associated with ideas of Varvara Stepanova, Alexander Rodchenko or with groups like ASNO-VA ("Association of New Architects") or OSA ("Organization of Contemporary Architects"). Some of his propositions concerning the liquidation of art seem to have been partly inspired by Aleksei Gan's declaration of the *end of art* and a refusal to separate the form from its ideology. His interpretation of Constructivism could be linked with the productivist criticism of metaphysics and ideal artistic structures. Thus, it is clear that he must have had a little sympathy for Le Corbusier's idealistic approach investigating eternal and *pure* aesthetic values. If *composition* and *construction* were isolated from the variety of issues inside the Russian constructivism, then Le Corbusier may be labeled a defender of *composition* while Teige would be rather a defender of *construction*.

According to Le Corbusier, *composition* was essential to architecture; it was the manifestation of human genius. He accused Teige from romanticizing machines and claimed that aesthetics was a fundamental human function. A human being was a dual being; it was a brain and a heart, reason and passion. For that reason, the rejection

of architecture as artistic practice was a mere repressive measure of the *Sachlichkeit*. Construction appeared as nothing more than a preliminary condition of architecture; then human genius was needed to compose. In order to support his claim, Le Corbusier mentioned an anecdote from his studio in which Alfred Roth gave a wastepaper basket a kick. The wastepaper basket buckled and its volume expanded. However, its form was hideous. This story illustrated the fact that "the function of beauty is independent on the function of utility; these are two things."[14]

Le Corbusier defended Paul Otlet's conception and demonstrated the Mundaneum's functionality: Its form was deduced from its function and the spiral was a useful attribute. Since it clarified the composition, he said *tracé régulateur* should be understood as "purification of a drawing"[15] and he stated that a pyramid was not less academic than a cube. Le Corbusier mentioned the mixture of intimacy and of geometry inherent to the project, which he described as an infiltration of nature into a heroic gesture of a human being. Finally, he employed the example of the Eiffel tower as a structure which seemed to be completely useless work of pure beauty when constructed, but which later gained a particular utility.

Reply to Le Corbusier – Karel Teige

In his article in response to Le Corbusier's rebuttal (which was published in the same issue of *Musaion* in 1931), Teige stiffened his rhetoric. He refuted the accusation of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and strictly criticized the Society of Nations. This time, he laid his cards directly on the table by assuming a political stance; he claimed that the Society of Nations was a reactionary institute following the interests of the powerful and pursuing strictly imperialist objectives. Projects like Mundaneum tried to clothe financial interests in a coat of metaphysics. Teige's critique therefore addressed the important question of the political responsibility of an architect: To what extent should an architect follow or contest demands of his client?

In his article, Teige stated, "Useful equals beautiful. Or more exactly, accomplished functionality is beautiful. Beauty does not exist in itself; an accomplished construction, a poem, a scientific work or other expression of vigor, is beautiful."[16] He criticized the bourgeois idea of *Une maison – un palais* and insinuated his theories of *minimum dwelling*. He denounced the idea of *tracé régulateur* because

urban life was neither symmetrical nor calculated according to a Golden Section. *Tracés régulateurs*, which cannot accommodate the orientation of the sun, are mere academism of modern architecture, Teige argued. He criticized Le Corbusier for modifying the terrain in order to make his buildings perfectly symmetrical and for adding useless abutments (as with villa Besnus and villa Stein). Teige riposted that even the Eiffel Tower had a particular utility since the beginning; not only was it was a meteorological and radiotelegraphic station, but it was also a gigantesque advertising of French metallurgy. To call advertising a *temple* was to mistake financial concern for humanitarian service. Architecture had to consider social issues.

The timeless: nature, sun, air, simplicity

One of the main issues of this polemic is a clash between two different aesthetic conceptions. At the time of their disagreement, Le Corbusier may have been influenced by Victor Basch and by the establishment of aesthetics as an academic field that aimed to analyze absolute aesthetic values and invariants of beauty. In his *In Defense of Architecture*, Le Corbusier insisted on these presumed eternal values: a cube, a circle, a *tracé régulateur*. He described himself more as an artist or a poet, not far from the human geniuses whose monument was to be the Mundaneum. Le Corbusier's aesthetic theories were concerned with invariants and eternal laws. If he defied the traditional French academy, it was not to suppress the Golden Section, but because he believed that its aesthetics had become too complicated and too distant from these invariants (i.e. neo-historical buildings were far from being simple). Le Corbusier did not want to abolish academies; he tried to rival them. He constituted *l'Esprit Nouveau* as a new academy.

This position was completely opposed to Karel Teige's stance. Teige did not believe in any eternal laws of beauty. His conception was close to Viktor Shklovsky's idea of *ostranenie* (*defamiliarisation*),[17] demonstrating that beauty was not a quality inherent in objects but rather dependent on a spectator's view. If Le Corbusier claimed that Roth's wastepaper basket was hideous, Teige might have replied that even this object could be considered as beautiful if it were regarded in a certain manner. According to Teige, aesthetics *a priori* did not exist; what existed was only a permanent historical evolution of aesthetic perspectives.

This idea was interconnected with the Czechoslovak intellectual life of the time, mainly with the structuralism established by the Prague's Linguistic Circle, which included Victor Shklovsky amongst its members. In his essay *Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts*, Jan Mukařovský, another key figure in the Circle, talked about the variability of beauty in time. Mukařovský defined the aesthetic function and stated that the "boundary lines of an aesthetic domain are very variable and they are determined by reality itself."[18] Although there is a relatively constant presence of the aesthetic function in our society, there are also people who consider everything to be beautiful and people who have almost no aesthetic experience; everything depends on the sensibility of the individual. For this reason, there is no clear frontier between a domain of the aesthetic and a domain of the non-aesthetic; these two zones are in a relationship of permanent fluctuation and of "dialectical antinomy."[19] An aesthetic object is an object with a predominating aesthetic function. But aesthetic appreciation is always volatile and dependent on the relationship between a collectivity and the world; it is never in the thing itself.

Although Teige belonged to a slightly different milieu than that of the Linguistic Circle, he became Mukařovský's friend. While a detailed genealogy of the exchange of ideas between the Czechoslovak avant-garde and structuralism is still to be traced, it is certain that they share many connections. Early structuralism was opposed to academism and its universal aesthetic laws. In Mukařovský and Jakobson's studies of the functions of art, aesthetic function was merely a way of seeing, which encompassed other *utilitarian* functions. While in structuralism, the form and the function were inseparably linked as two sides of the same coin, Le Corbusier leaned towards subjugating the function to the form. It may be for that reason that Teige reproached Le Corbusier for adding ornament to his architecture. Peter Zusi underscores the tension between Teige and Le Corbusier when he argues that, for Teige, "a new beauty would emerge only from a radical elimination of the independent beauty function,"[20] whereas Le Corbusier conceived the "beauty function" as something added and thus could not avoid the pitfall or ornamentation. This discord is also the source of Teige's condemnation of Le Corbusier's Villa Stein. Teige criticized Le Corbusier for increasing the terrain in order to locate Villa Stein's staircase parallel to a diagonal of a façade. According to Teige, the construction of modern temples was unjustifiable. He believed the aesthetic principles of the Golden Section were superannuated and

that "the dictatorship of composition schemes and formalist, sculptural intentions deforms the construction."[21]

Beautiful – useful – poetic

Teige was convinced that every object in which form and function were in a relation of mutual balance was beautiful. If a poem was considered beautiful, it was for its coherency between the *signified* and the *signifier*. While Le Corbusier affirmed that "the function of beauty is independent on the function of utility; these are two different things,"[22] Teige considered every perfectly functional machine as beautiful. For the latter, it was unnecessary to construct first and to add supplemental ornament later. Le Corbusier, however, accused Teige of *Sachlichkeit* and of reducing architecture to a machine. In order to evaluate this critique, it is useful to turn to Teige's actual conception of a machine.

In his *Poetism Manifesto*, Teige declared that it "is in the interest of life, that engineers' computations would be rational. But every computation rationalizes the irrationality only up to a certain number of decimals. The computation of every machine has its π."[23] Even in a perfectly rationalized construction of a house, there will always be an unconceivable zone of the irrational. The aesthetic function recalls this π (pi) of the machine. Even so, creating deliberately irrational objects in order to aggrandize the zone of the π would be nothing more than a mere mystification. Objects would become imperfect, not beautiful. Teige disapproved of Le Corbusier's belief in the distinction between two phases of *construction* and of *composition*. For Teige, this was a mystification of aesthetics; as the capitalist system exploited the surplus value of a worker's activity, Le Corbusier focused on surplus value of aesthetics.

Teige's construction had to be rational in order to make space for the irrationality inherent in life. He proclaimed a dialectical opposition between poetism and constructivism. If constructivism was to be seen as a rational scientific practice, poetism was the joy of life, a life transmuted into poetry. Poetism was a delightful quality of life; it was an activity that happened among the walls of a building, an activity exceeding architecture. While in Le Corbusier's considerations of machinism, the rationality of architecture directed human life (i.e. his reflections on the number of working hours, hobby culture and transportation), Teige defended a clear segregation between life and archi-

tecture. He was persuaded that life was not an object. The individual did not need more than a simple *minimum dwelling* in a *koldům*, because her lifestyle was not governed by private property but rather by the social relations she established with other inhabitants of the building.

Art of tomorrow

In his *Defense*, Le Corbusier accused Teige of the intention of depriving a human being of her spirituality and of reducing her personality to material goods. In his description of the ascension of a visitor to the top of the Mundaneum pyramid, he said: "Listen, Teige, let's talk seriously: I think this guy will be 'ready', processed; during his ascension, he will be isolated from the small concerns of his existence; he will forget to worry about his digestion or a crease of his trousers."[24] In this manner, Le Corbusier set beauty and spirituality in opposition to the material and corporeal aspect of life.

As they had different definitions of art, it was impossible for the two thinkers to concur. Teige criticized *l'art pour l'art;* he denounced the idea of *pure art* as a product of bourgeois society. *Pure art* was a sad liberty of an artist who limited his activity to formal play, while society subjugated all creative potential to money value. *Pure art* was pure nihilism. As a future promise, Teige sketched a free society in which all social classes would be abolished and everyone would be an artist; geniuses would not exist. Every human being could deploy freely his or her creative potential. He considered bourgeois liberty to be a pure illusion; it was an illusion that an artist could escape into an autonomous world to create freely, and were it not an illusion, the result would be that the work would have no real social impact. In reality, however, the artist created what was required by the market. *Pure art* was then nothing more than a product of capitalist society. Contrariwise, Teige proposed that the "art of tomorrow" should be useful and should not comply with the division of functions established by the market economy. Teige did not necessarily intend artists to become proletarians or proletarians to become artists; what was important was that artists engage in social issues through art and its internal development.

Teige anticipated an equitable post-revolutionary society and clearly adhered to a leftist political stance. Le Corbusier, on the contrary, lacked such political hope; his political orientation at the time of

the polemic was more ambivalent. Although he presented many technological reforms of human life, these reforms cannot be considered as overtly political. They represent rather a certain presumed expert technology of power, which has been elucidated in Mary McLeod's article on Le Corbusier and technocracy,[25] which demonstrates the connection between the French architect and Taylorism. Le Corbusier considered architecture as an expert knowledge exempted from politics. While Teige claimed that capitalist society created *pure art*, Le Corbusier created *pure architecture*. The latter believed that only the actions of singular characters, not groups of people, could lead society towards progress. In his *In Defense of Architecture*, he highlighted that the Mundaneum project should glorify these human geniuses. In his vision, art was exclusive; it was not accessible to the masses, but only to the inspired.

When Le Corbusier accused Teige of *Sachlichkeit*, he used the word *art* to signify a spiritual activity as opposed to the material aspects of life. Yet, Teige wanted to suppress bourgeois art, not spirituality; he believed art and spirituality should flourish freely. Le Corbusier's misunderstanding or misrepresentation of Teige's philosophy transformed their entire debate into a series of false steps. Le Corbusier believed his main arguments to be contradictory to Teige (i.e. "aesthetics is a fundamental human function"[26]), but in fact, these were also Teige's convictions.

The relationship between politics and architecture is a key issue underlying the debate between Teige and Le Corbusier. Teige believed that architecture should clarify its ideological position and that the pretended neutrality of Le Corbusier in the Mundaneum project was only a mark of his conformism. Le Corbusier, on the contrary, considered architecture to be an apolitical and universal field. Teige stated that the Mundaneum project could not be successful if its ideological basis was unclear; it was necessary to resolve politics before architecture. Contrariwise, in Le Corbusier's oeuvre, architecture symbolized a new form of *apolitical politics*. All social tensions were to be resolved by the machine age. If Le Corbusier proclaimed "*architecture or revolution*,"[27] Teige's slogan could have been *revolution and architecture*.

Monument or instrument?

The last significant issue of their debate was over the scale of Le Corbusier's project. Teige claimed that "the error of Le Corbusier's proposal is the error of monumentality."[28] Architecture should not become monument, because its goal is not to subjugate the citizen but to serve him or her. The error of the *house-palace* is that it makes the citizen forget her real physical and material needs in favor of the fictional ones. Monumentality, related to the Golden Section, is a prop of financial ideology promoting architecture as art.

Le Corbusier quoted a version of his famous definition of architecture in the *Defense*: "architecture is the masterly, correct and magnificent play of forms brought together in light."[29] By replacing the word *volume* used in *Towards an Architecture* by *form*, he created an impression of denying the material aspects of architecture. If the subject of the phrase were suppressed, his definition could be applied to painting or other aesthetic form. Le Corbusier assumed the position of an artist: a sculptor or a painter for whom engineering work was a mere preliminary task. On the 4th of August 1929, Le Corbusier wrote Teige in his letter: "Do not grieve about *tracés régulateurs*; it is a great tool for a sculptor."[30] It is clear that Le Corbusier regarded himself as creator of monuments, palaces, and temples. Such ideas simply did not accord with Teige's understanding of architecture as a science based on the dialectical materialism.

Teige contradicted the position of the French architect by stating that "a house can be neither museum nor exhibition gallery."[31] A temple cannot be inhabited, he argued; it only tries to subjugate human beings by hiding its power under metaphysical pretensions. "I do like neither a millionaire's villa and its sophisticated comfort, nor capitalist cities for several millions of inhabitants. It is more about a human simplicity of a house, about an imperative of minimum comfort, because we do not live just to inhabit."[32] Teige clearly preferred modest housing that conformed to his conception of *minimum dwelling* (a conception refuting the CIAM's idea of *existenzminimum*). Even Le Corbusier's collective housing projects seemed to him only an expression of the will to satisfy the bourgeoisie's desire for luxury.

Is architecture monument or instrument? Is there an ethics of monumentality? The polemic between Le Corbusier and Teige reveals two fundamental visions which differ only by a minimal distinction. On

the one hand "architecture is life," and on the other, "life is between the walls of architecture." *A monument versus an instrument*. The ideal articulation of these two poles may not have been arrived at until today. Nowadays, a certain architectural expression conforming to the market still creates an effect of *monumental instrumentality* (i.e. skyscrapers). For this reason, a revision of crucial architectural debates of the twenties and thirties may be very timely. While postmodern architectural production is clearly indebted to Le Corbusian ideas of the technology of power and of architecture as an apolitical expert domain, it is useful to reconsider Teige's lesser known ideas as we redefine the relationship between architecture and ideology in the present, and as we encounter a new articulation of a *monument-instrument* in contemporary architectural practice.

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Endnotes

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[3] Karel Teige, "Le Corbusier v Praze." *Rozpravy Aventina 4* (1928-29): 31-32.

[4] Wouter van Acker, "Die Utopie visueller Bildung, Zur grafischen und szenografischen Transformation der universellen Enzyklopädie bei Paul Otlet, Patrick Geddes und Otto Neurath" In *Vom Buch zur Datenbank. Paul Otlets Utopie der Wissensvisualisierung,* ed. Hartmann, Frank (Berlin: Avinus, 2012), 84.

5 This conflict between the functionality and the monumentality appeared also in the later Maurice Heyman's design of the Mundaneum. See Wouter van Acker, "Architectural Metaphors of Knowledge: The Mundaneum Designs of Maurice Heymans, Paul Otlet, and Le Corbusier." *Library trends* 61 (2012): 379.

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19 Ibid., 56.

20 Peter Zusi, "The Style of the Present: Karel Teige on Constructivism and Poetism," *Representations* 88 (2004): 115.

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22 Le Corbusier, "Obrana architektury," 34.

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29 Le Corbusier, "Obrana Architektury," 32.

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31 Karel Teige, "Odpověď Le Corbusierovi," 52.

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