



Fig. 5.120 Cover of *Des canons, des munitions? Merci! Des logis... S.V.P!* (Boulogne: Éditions de l'Architecture d'aujourd'hui, 1938). Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris <FLC #?>

By the time he designed his Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux for the 1937 Exposition Internationale in Paris, Le Corbusier was internationally recognized as a master at proclaiming, debating, and disseminating architectural matters via images. Only now did he deploy this gift for pictorial rhetoric before a vast public and on a truly large scale: two levels of ramps connecting a series of platforms took the visitor on a promenade along 17,000 square feet (1,600 square meters) of photomurals (fig. 1) <5.118>.<sup>1</sup>

Photomurals became the medium of choice for the victorious Front Populaire at the 1937 fair. With its takeover of the parliament followed by the election of Léon Blum as prime minister in June 1936, the Socialists had come to power when the exposition was already under construction, with only a few months until its scheduled opening. Under these circumstances, photomurals were a panacea.<sup>2</sup> Consisting of photographic montages glued on cardboard, they could be made quickly and on the cheap, and their grand scale guaranteed a strong and all-encompassing visual impact. As such, the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux could be said to belong to a kernel of pavilions including, just a few yards away, Charlotte Perriand's collaborative project with Fernand Léger in the small clearing assigned to the pavilion of the Ministry of Agriculture; the Pavilion de la Solidarité, with photomurals by André Papillon; and the Pavilion de la Femme et l'Enfant (Pavilion of the woman and child), with photomurals by Raymond Gid and Lucien Mazonod.

Le Corbusier had originally envisioned an ambitious project for the most prominent axis of the exposition, the Champs de Mars. When in 1935 the fair's organizers instead offered

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Naegele, "Le Corbusier and the Space of Photography: Photomurals, Pavilions, and Multimedia Spectacles," *History of Photography* 22, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 127–38.

<sup>2</sup> See my book *Muralnomad: The Paradox of Mural Painting, Europe 1927–1957* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); and my article "La Possibilité d'un photomural

socialiste," in Maria Stavrinaki and Maddalena Carli, eds., *Artistes et partis dans la première moitié du Vingtième siècle en Europe* (Paris: Presses du Réel, 2012), pp. 231–52.



Fig. 5.118 Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux at the Exposition Internationale, Paris. 1937. Main axis of the second floor with the panels on Living and Leisure. Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC L2-13-120

Fig. 5.119 Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux at the Exposition Internationale, Paris. 1937. General view from the entrance side. Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC L2-13-74



him what he considered to be a poor alternative site, he at first refused. However, wooed and reinvigorated by the victorious Left, Le Corbusier decided to turn the relative paucity of space, time, and funds to advantage. He conceived his pavilion at the Porte Maillot annex as a large, simple, tent-like structure of wood, steel, and brightly colored canvas, anchored by highly visible metal cables (fig. 5.119). (The idea of using water-resistant canvas apparently came from his cousin and frequent collaborator, Pierre Jeanneret, who had recently experimented with temporary structures for the Communist Party's Fête de l'Humanité.)<sup>3</sup>

As Le Corbusier later noted with pride, his structure was rejected by the exposition's authorities as non-architecture and was omitted from both official publications. For Le Corbusier, this was confirmation that many of his colleagues, as he contemptuously phrased it, dreamed of little more than "pavillonner"—to indulge in the puerile activity of merely decorating architecture as they had done for the Decorative Arts Exhibition of 1925.<sup>4</sup> At the closing of the fair, Le Corbusier's tent was thus promptly pulled down and its contents scrapped. His pavilion and its contents are now known to us only via a photobook published in 1938—*Des Canons, des munitions? Merci! Des logis... S.V.P!* (fig. 3) <5.120>—whose layout was intended to reproduce in miniature the visual dynamics of the pavilion itself.

Photomurals were not mere spectacle, Le Corbusier claimed; in a Europe beset in 1937 with economic depression and the concomitant rise of totalitarian regimes, they were there to remind fairgoers that nations had better ways to use the formidable retooling of the Second Machine Age than to gear up for yet another war. His pavilion, he declared, was "dedicated to the people so that they may understand, judge, and demand."<sup>5</sup> It emanated a sense of urgency, punctuated by declarations such as: "The conscience of the mechanized society has awakened: it proclaims solidarity" and "The world is not finished. Neither Europe, nor the United States, nor Asia, nor South America is fading. The world lives again!"<sup>6</sup>

In moving his project from solid pavilion to tent, Le Corbusier dropped the bourgeois-sounding name Musée d'Esthétique Contemporaine in favor of Musée d'Art Populaire and reconceived it as a nomadic structure. He asked that a railway carriage be installed on the site so that his project could later travel throughout France. Though he ended up dropping this idea, there lingered an overtone of Bolshevik agitprop: in the Soviet Union from 1918 to 1921, railway carriages gaily painted with revolutionary images and slogans had been paraded

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent and detailed account of the planning of the pavilion, see Danilo Udovicki-Selb, "Le Corbusier and the Paris Exposition of 1937: The Temps Nouveaux Pavilion," *Journal of*

*Architectural History* 56 <vol. or no.??> (March 1997): 42–63.  
<sup>4</sup> Le Corbusier, *Des Canons, des munitions? Merci! Des logis... S.V.P!* (Boulogne-Billancourt: Éditions de

*l'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, 1938), p. 37. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are by the author.  
<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.  
<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

eastward across the Russian steppes, stopping in villages and towns to spread word of the October Revolution. Similarly, Le Corbusier saw his itinerant carriage as a “Club des Jeunes” that would include a movie theater, a music room, a library, a museum, a telegraph office, a print shop, and a study room. And yet—symptomatic of the troubled 1930s as well as of Le Corbusier’s notoriously labile political allegiances—his mottos in fact originated not from the Left but from the Right. As he later made clear in *Des Canons*, they were penned by “professionals”—members of the journals *Prélude* and *Plans*, men such as Dr. Pierre Winter, François de Pierrefeu, and himself—who were “steeped in reality and thus equipped to respond at every given moment, to the contingencies of their time.”<sup>7</sup>

The 1937 pavilion’s program—whose archival documents prominently feature the name and signature of Charlotte Perriand as chief coordinator of the project during its initial stage—was a collaborative multimedia endeavor. Although the Temps Nouveaux pavilion was dominated by photomurals, it included, in a typical Corbusian gesture toward unadulterated creativity, a number of children’s paintings: *The Harvest* by a twelve-year-old named Lesaffre and four renderings of the Eiffel Tower enlarged to mural scale by one of his assistants on the site, Asger Jorn (who would become a CoBrA member and Situationist) and Raoul Simon, simply identified as a painter from the town of Vézelay.<sup>8</sup> Another work to which Le Corbusier referred repeatedly in *Des Canons* is *Grande Plastique suspendue* (Large suspended form) <date?>, which he commissioned from Cubist sculptor Henri Laurens: it was a cutout relief in cardboard and polychrome wood of a reclining female nude, more than 16 feet (5 meters) across, whose curvaceous outlines floated above a row of photomurals like a lush, mountainous landscape.

Upon entering the tent, visitors were ushered through an impossibly ambitious six-hundred-year history of urbanism (circulation, dwellings, cities, plans), “decades of fits and starts and of increasingly accentuated ruptures between cause and effect,” in Le Corbusier’s words.<sup>9</sup> These he interspaced with contributions from the various declarations he had made at the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM), visualization of which often amounted, with a good dose sarcasm, to Manichaeian juxtapositions of “good” and “bad” urbanism; in the section of the pavilion titled *Misère de Paris*, for example, he set the “slums of the rich” (i.e., “the reputedly comfortable neighborhood of Saint Augustin”) next to the “official slums” (low-income housing) and “slums of the poor” (to be destroyed). The remainder of the pavilion was used by Le Corbusier essentially to promote his most recent concept of an ideal city, the *Ville Radieuse*, developed at the end of 1930.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>8</sup> See Archives Charlotte Perriand, Paris.

<sup>9</sup> Le Corbusier, *Des Canons, des munitions?*, p. 13.



Fig. 5.121 Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux at the Exposition Internationale, Paris, 1937. View of the second floor toward the Plan of Paris <Plan Voisin for Paris?>. Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC I2-13-126



Fig. 5.122 Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux at the Exposition Internationale, Paris, 1937. View of the ground floor with the ramp leading to the section on the lot Insalubre No. 6. Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC L2-13-137

As they moved along the ramps, fairgoers were introduced first to his *Plan de Paris 37* (which he was about to present at the fifth CIAM conference), then, in spirited succession, his myriad ongoing plans: his Stadium for 100,000 Spectators, a park, a summer camp, a nursery school, a high school, a modernized farm, and a cooperative village. Le Corbusier deployed every type of imagery at his disposal to make his point, juxtaposing aerial views of the Roman Coliseum with arrays of Gothic spires jumbled with those of American skyscrapers and his own (“Cartesian”) high-rises, men and women at work in city streets, in fields, and in domestic interiors, mingling with blow-ups of Brueghel paintings, medieval prints, diagrams, newspaper cartoons, and caricatures. Rather than offering an encyclopedic overview of urbanism, he provided what he called a sampling (the French word is “échantillonnage”) of the possibilities offered by modern urbanism, and left it to the viewer to pull together the necessary threads. It was a creative take on the pedestrian “timeline”; had it caught the attention of Anthony Grafton and Daniel Rosenberg in their recent book *Cartographies of Time*, Le Corbusier’s effort might have been included among those inspired timelines that blurred the line between charts and art.<sup>10</sup>

The pavilion ramps allowed Le Corbusier to strategize spatial situations heretofore unavailable to him on the printed page. The most dramatic—the image and slogan he chose for the cover and title of *Des Canons*—is the installation shot toward the mid-point of the itinerary along the ramps of a photomural featuring a cityscape entirely made up of artillery shells (an image culled, he said, from a World War I-era magazine) pointing straight into the section of his *Plan de Paris 37* (fig. 5.121). In the context of a World’s Fair purportedly devoted to peace, or at least to military containment, and yet whose main esplanade, under the new Palais de Chaillot was dominated by the two marble Behemoths of the Soviet and Nazi pavilions, Le Corbusier was the only contributor to use his pavilion as a warning, crying out, “Cannons? Munitions? Thank you very much! Dwellings, please! Every year France spends twelve billion francs on armaments.”<sup>11</sup> In a typical touch of self-irony, one section of his Paris photomontage combined images of the Arc de Triomphe, the Louvre, Notre Dame, the Panthéon, and the Eiffel Tower—edifices that had survived another type of blitz, one that would have been perpetrated by Le Corbusier himself had he been allowed to carry out the wholesale razing of central Paris called for in his 1925 *Plan Voisin* (fig. 5.122).

The precepts “Photomontage can move you” and “Polychromy = Joy” were

<sup>10</sup> See Anthony Grafton and Daniel Rosenberg, *Cartographies of Time* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Yet the French misread the signs, with disastrous consequences; see Karen Fiss, *Grand Illusion: The Third Reich, the Paris Exposition, and the*

*Cultural Seduction of France* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009).



Fig. 5.123 Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux at the Exposition Internationale, Paris, 1937. View of Fernand Léger's photomural *Travailler* (Working<Work?>). Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC L2-13-146



Fig. 5.125 Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux at the Exposition Internationale, Paris, 1937. View of Lucien Mazenod's photomural *Recréer* (Leisure<Recreation?>). Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC L2-13-152

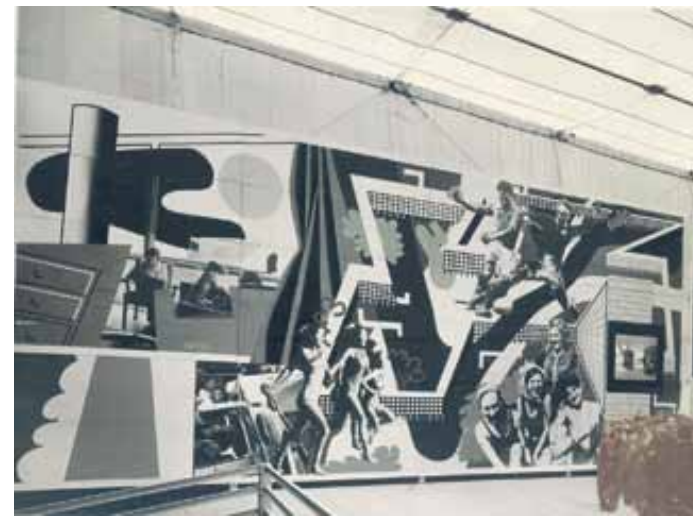


Fig. 5.126 Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux at the Exposition Internationale, Paris, 1937. View of the photomural *Habiter* (Living) by Léon Gischia or Le Corbusier. Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. FLC L2-13-105



Fig. 5.124 Cover photomontage of the magazine *Vu* (March 1933), featuring a worker about to be ground between the teeth of an engine. From the personal archives of Le Corbusier. Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris <FLC #?>

manifested in the solid red, blue, green, and yellow color scheme of the tent interior (its floor covered with yellow gravel) and in the accent of colors in the four photomurals (which Le Corbusier actually referred to as "paintings") displayed in the quadrangular space devoted to the visualization of the four functions of urbanism: *Work, Recreation, Dwelling, Transportation*. *Work*, by Fernand Léger, jarred the senses with huge close-ups of mechanical parts (fig. 6) <5.123>. In the middle of the composition, a worker is tightening the giant bolts of an electric motor larger than himself; this image, drawn from *La France travaille*, a compendium of more than ten thousand photographs taken by François Kollar in 1932, was the perfect emblem of the "socialisme personaliste," the Socialism respectful of the individual, advocated by Léon Blum. It reads like a modern evocation of Leonardo's *Vitruvian Man* (c. 1490), standing at the epicenter of a mechanical landscape but still the measure of all things. Here was a pointed response, on the part of Léger and Le Corbusier, to the downbeat images of mechanization disseminated in the press in the years after the Wall Street crash of 1929, such as the March 1933 cover of the illustrated magazine *Vu*: a montage of a worker about to be ground between the teeth of an engine, captioned "Fin d'une civilisation" (End of a civilization) (fig. 7) <5.124>.

Crisp and clear in its composition, *Recreation* by Lucien Mazenod played on the dual meaning of the verb "to recreate" as both creation and leisure, showing prancing children holding hands in solidarity next to a close-up of a grinning boy and, behind him, two children in a sailboat (fig. 8) <5.125>. <sup>12</sup> *Dwelling*, the only photomural specifically ascribed to Le Corbusier and the only photomural for which we have a small preparatory collaged drawing, displayed a lovely combination of electric and baby blue, yellow, brown, and green (fig. 9 is a plate). <sup>13</sup> Like Mazenod, Le Corbusier focused on children—at school, in boy and girl scout troops, in sports, and at the beach—celebrating the promises made by the Popular Front (in conjunction with the labor unions) to provide the populace with tourist attractions, summer camps, sport facilities, and, most important, the "congrés payés" (paid annual leave), which turned out to be the Socialists' most lasting institution (fig. 10 <5.126>). Festooned with little banderoles bearing the words "live, think, fight the good fight, breathe," his photomural was framed by two charming images of Corbusian domestic bliss. On the left, the architect plays with his dog Pinceau as his wife Yvonne reads in their living room under the

<sup>12</sup> André Léjard, "A Propos d'une conception nouvelle de la publicité murale: Lucien Mazenod," *Arts et métiers graphiques*, no. 61 (1938). Reprinted in Dominique Baqué, ed., *Les*

*Documents de la modernité: Anthologie de textes sur la photographie de 1919 à 1939* (Paris: Jacqueline Chambon, 1993), pp. 349–52.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Barsac, *Charlotte Perriand and Photography: A Wide-Angle Eye* (Paris: 5 Continents, 2010).

roof-terrace of their Paris apartment on rue Nungesser-et-Coli. And, on the right, a small photograph shows Le Corbusier sitting at his desk in his rue Molitor studio, surrounded by some of his recent paintings. And indeed, in typically provocative fashion, Le Corbusier declared that he intended this platform to function as a "salon de repos," a resting space devoted to degustation, reading, and conversation, but which for lack of time, organization, and money, remained, alas, empty.<sup>14</sup>

It is ironic that the photomural *Transportation*, executed by Georges Bauquier (Léger's assistant), which featured an ocean liner at the center of its composition, should have been the weakest of this beautiful set of four works. As he wrote in *Des Canons*, Le Corbusier intended his photobook to be read like a "livre de bord"—that is, a log recording the ship's speed, bearing, and daily progress.<sup>15</sup> One might suggest that what Le Corbusier sought to recapture in this pavilion was the heady atmosphere of the fourth gathering of CIAM, whose medial ferment he wistfully recalled in *Des Canons*:  
*This congress was held on a liner from Marseilles to Athens, in Athens, then from Athens to Marseilles. A boat filled with effervescence: city plans hung on the walls of the decks, typewriters in every room, plenary conferences with speakers, working committees. The whole thing connected by a ceaseless chain of dispatches Xeroxed from hour to hour.*<sup>16</sup>

By the time of its publication, with the fall of Blum's government in April 1938 and the international arms race in full gear, the memory of a community of architects gathered on shipboard gliding past sunny Mediterranean coasts must already have felt light-years away. With regard to the title, *Des Canons*, Le Corbusier offered his readers a caustic disclaimer: "The title dates from January 1937; in no way does it allude to the burning issue of rearmament in 1938. It is about yesterday (and we are so very sorry).<sup>17</sup> The book ends with a last, ghastly photographic glimpse of the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux: its images dismantled, the frail skeleton stands silhouetted against a barren landscape under a gray autumnal Parisian sky.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Le Corbusier, *Des Canons, des munitions?*, p. 140.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.



Plate 5.100 Pavillon Temps Nouveaux 1937 "Habiter" 1937  
 (from log)

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