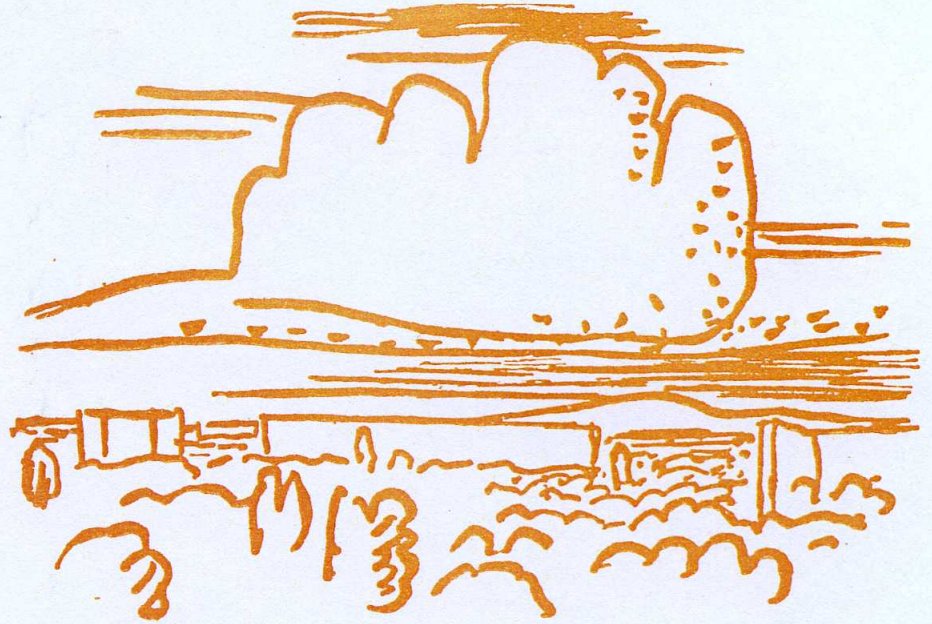


Le Corbusier's ideas about the nature of the dwelling and its relationship to the city sprang from his belief that mankind's highest activity was intellectual creativity, 'meditation'. Using sources rarely tapped by Corbusier scholars, James Dunnett explains this little-known key to Corbusier's thinking and shows how it relates both to his theory of machine production and to the revolutionary innovations of Cubism.



THE ARCHITECTURE OF SILENCE

'We are now ready to introduce into the (architectural) 'silence' of our home the work of art that inspires thought or meditation.'
Le Corbusier: *Précisions*¹

The Radiant City was conceived by Le Corbusier not simply, as is sometimes supposed, to provide roadspace for the motor car, to ensure optimal insolation, or to facilitate mass-production in the construction industry. It was to be a setting for a particular ideal of intellectual life, the model for which was, above all, that of Cubism—which for Le Corbusier was essentially a meditative art. In this sense the Radiant City was designed for

'meditation'. Le Corbusier underlined the centrality of this consideration to his theory of urban form, as follows: 'Many years ago . . . I threw into the confused discussion of styles, fashions, snobberies, this argument which was a "knock-out": "the house is a machine for living in"'. A thousand staves have been produced to beat me with for having dared that utterance. But when I say "living" I am not talking of mere material requirements only. I admit certain important extensions which must crown the edifice of man's daily needs. To be able to *think*, or meditate, after the day's work is essential. But in order to become a centre of creative thought, the home must take on an entirely new character. And that necessitates for its realisation a change in the entire layout of the city, a new arrangement of transport, a new and daring concept of space relationships, a new method of construction for human habitation. . . .'²

For Le Corbusier, the ideal of meditation not only extended the meaning of the mechanical analogy, but was intrinsic to his understanding of it, and hence to his understanding of modern architecture as a whole. This 'humanistic' interpretation of the analogy differentiated his ideal from the purely mechanistic enthusiasms of such groups as the Futurists or, later, the Metabolists. The city and home as place of meditation was only the most comprehensive expression of an ideal that permeated his approach to design at every level.

In describing the house as a 'machine for living in' Le Corbusier was classifying it according to a

1, 'To dwellings high above the ground is offered a spectacle of the sky and all its movements and its colours, its forms throughout the seasons. A distant hill appears. From below push the green domes of the tangle of trees. The town is "green".' Drawing and caption by Le Corbusier from 'The Home of Man', London: Architectural Press, 1948.
2, 'Sun, space, verdure: essential joys. Through the four seasons stand the trees, friends of man. Great blocks of dwellings run through the town. What does it matter? They are behind the screen of trees.' From 'The Home of Man'.



