

Repetition and Difference: Lefebvre, Le Corbusier and Modernity's (Im)moral Landscape

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Introduction

As someone who has written extensively on Henri Lefebvre and is currently researching Le Corbusier, I was immediately drawn to Mick Smith's article (*Ethics, Place and Environment*, 2001, 4, 31-44). The piece makes many telling points concerning the role that various spatial practices have played in the production of a distinct modernity characterised by abstract space. The exemplar in producing and promoting the consolidation of this abstract space, which destroys both individual and social difference, is, according to Smith, the architect and town-planner Le Corbusier. Lefebvre is introduced by Smith in order to both consolidate the critique of Le Corbusier and provide the basis for the development of a 'difference ethics'. However, in building his case, Smith brings forth a characterisation of Le Corbusier which many will find tendentious and unjustified. The article also articulates a partial view of Lefebvre's attitude towards Le Corbusier. More worryingly, Smith, on occasion, questionably stretches the limits of textual interpretation in order to build his case, especially against Le Corbusier. Underlying these aspects is a disquieting lack of contextualisation and it is this that I wish to address first.

Contextual issues

Both Le Corbusier (1887-1965) and Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) lived long and productive lives each marked by prodigious published output. Yet Smith's article contains little sense of which Lefebvre and which Le Corbusier is being discussed. There is no notion of any development of each's ideas over time or of ambiguity, contradiction or self-critique. The article also presents a confusing publication and translation chronology. Smith dates Le Corbusier's *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning* as 1971 though the book was originally published in 1925 in France as *Urbanisme* and first translated into English in 1929. He references the publication date of *Towards a New Architecture* as 1974 though this was first published in 1923 as *Vers une architecture* and first translated into English in 1927. These dry details are significant as Smith not only misplaces the publication dates but also reverses the order of their original appearance. *Urbanisme* is in many respects a reply to debates that

arose from the publication of *Vers une architecture*.¹ Moreover, although he references Kofman & Lebas' introduction, 'Lost in Transposition', to Lefebvre's *Writings on Cities* (Kofman & Lebas, 1996) he has not taken notice of their warnings concerning the problems of reading authors in translation. It was Frederick Etchells, in the first English translation, who changed the title from *Vers une architecture* to *Towards a New Architecture*, 'perhaps assuming that the English reader would not understand the cultural implications in the original title with its connotation of *restoring a lost unity*' (Benton, 1990, p. 46, emphasis added). Etchells also translated *Urbanisme* as *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning* again adding a clear future orientation absent from Le Corbusier's originals. These points are noteworthy given that Smith imbues Le Corbusier's writings with an Utopian forward-looking sensibility rather than following Le Corbusier's own insistence that his plans were practical possibilities rooted in the current conditions of the time and not at all Utopian.

These works of Le Corbusier which Smith references were written in the aftermath of the First World War in which there was already the perceived threat of a new war. Furthermore, the devastation that war had brought to France was uppermost in Le Corbusier's considerations; overcrowding, pollution, tuberculosis, poverty and a chronic housing situation were unfolding in a highly conservative and nationalist atmosphere. By the end of the 1920s Le Corbusier had also largely left behind his interest in the grand and heroic modernist projects that Smith attacks. However, apart from one reference to Le Corbusier's 'Voisin Plan' for Paris from 1925, Smith does not name one single building or project of Le Corbusier's, whether conceptual or realised. If Smith's article had just made passing reference to Le Corbusier such absence of detail may be justified. However, Smith refers to Le Corbusier in the title of his piece, bases his view on a reading of the primary material and names no other twentieth century architect or town planner. By this series of reductions, Smith makes Le Corbusier synonymous with advocating the

¹According to Docker the whole of *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning* can be viewed as a response to Le Corbusier's critics: 'he evidently felt that he was unfairly being accused of ignoring emotion, the poetic, and nature' (Docker, 1994, p. 10). The critique of American cities is also strongly articulated in the latter book as are Le Corbusier's changing views on skyscrapers. In '*Towards...*' he considered them as dwellings but, in '*The City of Tomorrow...*' Le Corbusier explicitly rejected the skyscraper as a place to live. Smith, though, sees only 'sky-scraping colonies' (Smith, 2001, p. 33) with all the connotations that the word 'colonies' carries.

particular view of modernity he critiques.

Similarly, Smith references Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* as being published in 1994 though it was first published in France in 1974 and translated into English in 1991. The twenty year gap between 1974 and 1994 is significant, not least, because Smith does not place Lefebvre's work in any kind of historical or social context. According to McLeod, 'Lefebvre was acutely conscious of the relationship between his philosophy and the historical moment from which it emerged. He insistently historicized his claims, frequently reminding the reader of the conflicts and contradictions in France that generated his investigations' (McLeod, 1997, p. 11). So, Lefebvre's lifelong intellectual project was concerned to understand the dialectic of modernity and everyday life and his specific interrogation of space and the city was intimately tied to this greater preoccupation. *La production de l'espace* (1974), thus, appeared as the key text of a relatively short period of explicit spatial theorizing (Kofman & Lebas, 1996)² within a publishing history of over 65 years beginning in 1924. As such it is shorn of much of the explicit Marxism which characterizes most of Lefebvre's other work and also of many of Lefebvre's specific views concerning modernity (Lefebvre, 1995).³ In 1974 Lefebvre was also a respected figure in debates concerning the direction of French urban planning having influence on both town planners and architects (see Lefebvre *et al.*, 1967, Kofman & Lebas, *ibid.*, p. 35-42, Shields, 1999). During the 1920s, however, the decade that Smith focuses on in terms of his critique of Le Corbusier, Lefebvre was involved in a number of thoroughly modernist projects of his own; Dada, Surrealism and eventually Marxism. During this period he was also gathering the materials

²Unwin's (2000) observation that *The Production of Space* was written by a philosopher for other philosophers should also be borne in mind. Le Corbusier was writing fifty years before as an architect and anticipating a very different audience. The transposition of ideas from one domain to another can be fraught with difficulties of translation, intention and meaning (see also Elden, 2001).

³Frampton (1969) makes a very similar point about Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* that Merryfield (1995) makes in relation to Lefebvre's *La production de l'espace*. Both are characterized by indicative structure followed by circumlocutory content. Frampton's observation concerning Le Corbusier's book that, 'Its structure which is clearly tabulated in the first few pages bears only an elliptical relation to its actual content which, through recapitulation and transposition, reveals itself as resting on a number of separate but related dialectical themes' (Frampton, *ibid.*, p. 139), is also a perfect description of Lefebvre's *La production de l'espace*. Unwin (2000) presents some of the problematic consequences arising from Lefebvre's text's form and structure.

which would later form the basis for expounding the figure of the ‘Total Man’ (surely an example of that ‘paradigmatically masculine subject’ which Smith makes pejoratively synonymous with modernity, Smith, 2001, p. 33).

Textual constraints

Whilst the limits of permissible interpretation of particular texts are generally seen to be wider now than in the past they still remain a consideration. It would be absurd to ignore the authority of Smith as the author of his own text and to proceed to read the article as a trenchant defence of Le Corbusier and critique of Lefebvre, for example. Yet Smith rarely allows Le Corbusier in particular to clearly express his intentions through the use of full quotations in context. Rather, a series of snippets of a few words, often even single words, are presented as evidence of views that Smith argues Le Corbusier is articulating. One reason for this may be that Le Corbusier is invariably talking about the specifics of architecture as a profession and building as an industry while Smith tends to see his comments foremost as general social prescriptions which can be stripped of their specific technical content without altering their meaning.

The tone of any text also sets an interpretive consideration and Smith’s is clearly hostile rather than open towards Le Corbusier. He forces a number of disparaging affinities between Le Corbusier’s views and the elimination of difference, the panoptic function of the prison and Orwell’s dystopian *1984* dictum, ‘slavery is freedom’, with little textual justification or sensitivity to context or genre. These associations carry strong negative and hyperbolic intentions but, then, the society which Smith constructs is a curious one in which hyperbole becomes reality. It is a world in which figures including Le Corbusier produce ‘an abstract space that is *quite literally*, and quite intentionally, a “*no-where*” and, in which ‘modern city-dwellers live hermetically sealed existences. . . made *quite literally* senseless by the constant, confusing and meaningless white noise of television’ (Smith, 2001, p. 32-33, emphases added). Perhaps Smith’s intention is not to be taken seriously after all?

Another consideration is the extent to which texts are seen as plastic entities to be stretched, re-ordered and chopped up like dough in order to support particular interpretations. There are very many questionable examples but space permits only a handful to be discussed. For example, Smith offers the following,

According to Le Corbusier, the modern spirit demands the erasure of the specificity of both past and place. It strives to break free from both the ‘slime’ of social history and the unwelcome intrusions of nature’s ‘disorderly’ conduct, ‘the nature all around us [that] thwarts us’ (Smith, 2001, p. 31).

This quotation suggests strongly a certain belief of Le Corbusier’s but, there are only nine of Le Corbusier’s words here. Within the pages from which Smith draws this material, Le Corbusier actually argues for humanity’s rootedness in nature and, contrary to the claim that he associated nature only with ‘disorderly’ conduct, emphasises that, ‘the spirit which animates Nature is a spirit of order’ (Le Corbusier, 1987, p. 19).⁴ Le Corbusier here simply makes no mention of erasing past or place, the modern spirit or anything that could justify Smith’s, ‘According to Le Corbusier’ approach. Smith continues, ‘In the regulated space of the city of tomorrow there is no room for a “misplaced sentimentalism” that would cling to the past, and progress will ensure that the “vagaries of weather and the seasons can be ignored”’ (Smith, *ibid*, p. 32). The words ‘vagaries of the weather’ appear here as part of the same sentence but are from nearly two hundred pages further on in Le Corbusier’s text. Whilst Smith references this clearly it does make one cautious about accepting a line of argument that rests on such small snippets of such widely separated material,

The builders’ yard must become a workshop with a proper staff and machinery and specialized gangs. The vagaries of the weather and seasons can then be ignored. ‘Building’ must cut out its ‘off seasons’ (Le Corbusier, *ibid*, p. 220).

Here Le Corbusier is plainly speaking only of making the building industry more productive and the idea that he wanted his architecture and town-planning to be hostile to weather and the seasons is entirely fallacious. On numerous occasions from within the pages of the books Smith quotes the exact opposite is expressed. For example, after complaining that the pollution which results from the congested traffic in the centre of Paris is killing the trees, Le Corbusier exclaims, ‘Only May! What has happened to the

⁴The disparity in page numbers arises from that fact that I am using different English editions to Smith, they though are the same translations.

seasons?’ (Le Corbusier, *ibid*, p. 199). Further on after detailing his plans for a ‘Contemporary City’ which included 85-95% of all the ground space being given over to parks, trees, gardens, orchards and allotments, Le Corbusier imagines a profusion of hanging gardens sprouting from every dwelling and argues, ‘we are still children of Nature; and we have seen that an urban manifestation which completely ignored Nature would soon find itself at odds with our deepest primeval impulses’ (Le Corbusier, *ibid*, p. 237). Not only in his writings but also in his architectural practice, Le Corbusier demonstrates his filial view of nature. It is also manifested in his drawings, paintings, tapestries and sculptures. All evidence, for one commentator, to charge Le Corbusier with an increasing ‘obsession with the harmony of nature’ (Curtis, 2001, p. 225).

A further interpretive consideration is the extent to which justifiable meaning can be attributed to the shortest snippets of an author’s writing. It would surely be possible to extract three word quotations from any text and read many different meanings into them? I will consider one such example here though, again, there are many in Smith’s account,

Modernity’s principle is repetition. It seeks salvation in the *de novo* creation of ‘types’ and through the eradication of ‘difference’ and of everything unique. ‘Repetition dominates everything’ (Smith, 2001, p. 32).

Leaving aside the veracity of this claim, Le Corbusier’s three words ‘repetition dominates everything’ are used to support Smith’s contention. Yet it is simply not clear whether Le Corbusier is using these words approvingly, disapprovingly or as straightforward description. Context is also lacking; was Le Corbusier, when he wrote these three words, arguing for the social elimination of everything different or unique from modernity? No, the words come from the section identified earlier where Le Corbusier is considering the inefficient state of the French building industry against the backdrop of a chronic housing shortage. He titles this section ‘On Repetition or Mass Production’ and repetition is used here as a synonym for mass production. Le Corbusier remarks that, ‘Repetition dominates everything. We are unable to produce industrially at normal prices without it; it is impossible to solve the housing problem without it’ (Le Corbusier, 1987, p. 220). Of course, Smith may interpret the French building industry in 1929 as synonymous

with ‘modernitys grand scheme’ as a whole or he may be insinuating that every brick, window frame, tile and door should be produced in a different way and with a unique form in order to avoid the tyranny of repetition. This, though, is not made clear.

Finally, there are competing interpretations of the same material which may throw new light onto familiar territory. Crow (1989), for example, offers a very different reading to Smith of *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning*. For Crow, Le Corbusier’s technical and rational approach to city planning is ‘constantly at odds with his other signifying strategies’ used throughout the book (Crow, 1989, p. 241). This text ‘challenges the distinction between modernism and postmodernism’ and ‘questions any attempt to place it in either modern or postmodern periods of philosophical history’ (Crow, *ibid*, p. 241). The use of cartoons, drawings, photographs, architectural renderings, photo-montages, reproductions of postcards, graphs, charts, paintings and collages are all integral to Le Corbusier’s texts and it is these that for Crow undermine Le Corbusier’s textual strategies. According to Crow ‘Through all the strategies he uses to construct and privilege geometry, science and technique against poetry, art and politics, these seemingly “marginalized” elements not only slip through his grid of arguments but also overpower it’ (Crow, *ibid*, p. 243). Crow, then, suggests the possibility of other readings, yet Smith, privileging the interpretation of text above all other signifying practices, is blind to such possibilities (though there are 215 of them spread over the book’s 300 pages and they can be found on all but one of the pages from which Smith quotes).

Lefebvre and Le Corbusier

Lefebvre’s few, scattered comments on Le Corbusier are also open to differing interpretations. Lefebvre’s position on Le Corbusier remained pretty much unexamined and unchanged from the early 1960s to the mid 1980s (McLeod, 1997) and it seems to be predicated on a very narrow reading of Le Corbusier from the 1920s, possibly only through secondary sources (there are no primary references in *The Production of Space*). Smith summarizes as follows,

Thus according to Lefebvre, ‘Le Corbusier ideologizes as he rationalizes’. His architecture ‘turned out to be in the service of

the state...despite the fact its advent was hailed as a revolution...Le Corbusier, expressed (formulated and met) the architectural requirements of state capitalism'. Far from being 'natural', modernism's abstract and Cartesian conception of space was an '*ideology in action*' (Smith, 2001, p. 36, emphasis in original).

This quotation is assembled from material covering five pages of *The Production of Space* and while it is a reasonable reflection of Lefebvre's view of Le Corbusier, a fuller version may be of interest,

Le Corbusier ideologizes as he rationalizes - unless perhaps it is the other way around. An ideological discourse upon nature, sunshine and greenery successfully concealed from everyone at this time - and in particular from Le Corbusier - the true meaning and content of such architectural projects (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 303-4).

Contrary to Smith's claim that Le Corbusier was antagonistic towards nature, Lefebvre is arguing the exact opposite. Moreover, Lefebvre seems to be somewhat excusing Le Corbusier's plans caught up as he saw them in an all pervasive ideology of nature abroad at the time. However, Lefebvre is far from consistent in this regard. On another occasion he approvingly prefaces a critique of Le Corbusier's supposed functionalism with the following, 'As for Le Corbusier, as philosopher of the city he describes the relationship between the urban dweller and dwelling with nature, air, sun, and trees with cyclical time and the rhythms of the cosmos' (Lefebvre in Kofman & Lebas, 1996, p. 98). In terms of his architecture meeting the 'requirements of state capitalism' Lefebvre does indeed charge Le Corbusier with this. However, he also includes the Bauhaus and the Soviet Constructivists here, and as Gregory (1994) observes Lefebvre's ire was directed far more towards the Bauhaus. There are several references to the Bauhaus omitted from Smith's quotation above and nowhere does Lefebvre provide the kind of lengthy disquisition on Le Corbusier that he does on the Bauhaus (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 123-26.) It is to the Bauhaus that Lefebvre repeatedly ascribes an 'historic role' in the production of abstract space.⁵

⁵From the pages of *The Production of Space*, Smith could have built a far more cogent and coherent case by linking the Bauhaus to Lefebvre and the abstract space of modernity. Why he has chosen to focus on Le Corbusier is unclear.

Lefebvre also clearly demarcated Le Corbusier's architectural theory from his architectural practice being much more generous to the latter: 'Le Corbusier's architectural practice is seen to be more hesitant, more flexible and more vital than his architectural theory' (Lefebvre, 1972, p. i-ii). And, even though he described Le Corbusier as a 'good architect' but a 'catastrophic urbanist' (Lefebvre in Kofman & Lebas, 1997, p. 207), he regarded Le Corbusier's 1942 *Charte d'Athnes* as a 'milestone of prime importance', and an attempt to 'make the notion of harmony concrete' (Lefebvre, 1995, p. 393). Smith, however, sees no difference between Le Corbusier's architecture or his town-planning or, indeed, between the conceptual and practical dimensions of each. It is all reduced to the level of the 'Same' to borrow Smith's terminology.

Past, place and difference

Returning to Smith's assertion that 'According to Le Corbusier, the modern spirit demands the erasure of the specificity of both past and place' (Smith, 2001, p. 31), Le Corbusier does not agree,

The past has been my one master and continues to be my constant guide. Any reflective man thrust into the unknown of architectural invention cannot base his creative spark on anything but the lessons taught by past ages, and the signposts time has left standing are of permanent human value (Le Corbusier, 1999, p. 56-57).

After hubristically detailing the part he played in saving the old Algerian Casbah, the Old Port of Marseilles and the heritage of Barcelona, Le Corbusier complains that, 'All this hasn't prevented my critics from accusing me of wanting to systematically destroy the past' (ibid, p. 58). He fills the pages of *Towards a New Architecture* and *The City of Tomorrow and its Planning* with references to, and sketches of, historic cities which he admires including medieval Sienna, Venice, Bruges and Rome and argues 'I do not feel that I am breaking with tradition: I believe myself to be absolutely traditional in my theories' (Le Corbusier, 1987, p. 300). He even regarded the overly-rational 'Voisin Plan' for Paris as respecting and rescuing both past and place and he included the preservation of many buildings, monuments,

arcades and doorways within the redeveloped area (Le Corbusier, 1987, p. 287).

Smith's tendency to make both Le Corbusier specifically, and architecture and town-planning generally, synonymous with modernity is overblown. According to Gregory, while critical of the 'strange sort of liberty' that Le Corbusier defended, 'For all his importance, it would be wrong to cast Le Corbusier as paradigmatic of modernism; the movement was never monolithic' (Gregory, 1994, p. 340). Similarly, Best and Kellner argue that, 'The most striking exceptions to the International Style were the inventive modernist constructions of Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright', and, 'Moreover, Le Corbusier explored tensions, ambiguities, and paradoxes that subvert oppositions such as those between machine and biology, between mathematical measure and lyricism, between engineering and aesthetics' (Best and Kellner, 1997, p. 144-45). Reducing social formations to the specifics of their 'spatial' culture, whether represented or lived, is an anti-social exercise which Le Corbusier himself recognized,

Town-planning, 'has become a sort of dumping ground for every difficult and unresolved problem such as the birth-rate, the social equilibrium, alcoholism, crime, the morale of the great city, civic affairs and so forth (Le Corbusier, 1987, p. 130).

Moreover, Le Corbusier's views cannot be simply reduced to the 'moral discourse on straight lines, on right angles' with which Smith, quoting Lefebvre, charges him (Smith, *ibid*, p. 36). Le Corbusier's admiration of the straight line was not so much theoretical as practical; he regarded it as the best way to solve the problem of contemporary motor traffic. He included curved streets within his plans as more appropriate for strolling within the green spaces of his garden cities and, during the 1920s and beyond curved and circular shapes were increasingly part of Le Corbusier's architectural practice. Smith, though, seems to link all benevolence to the curved line with his language that contrasts meanders, loops and eddies favourably with vectors, straight lines and right angles whilst concurrently and disingenuously expelling the curve both from Le Corbusier's work and from modernity.

Smith also ties Le Corbusier's discussions of productive techniques too closely to some implied moral prescription for society as a whole. When

Le Corbusier is talking about standardization, mass production and prefabrication he is doing so almost exclusively in relation to the production of housing units. Take, for example, Smith's inevitable swipe at Le Corbusier's notion of dwellings as 'machine-houses' (Smith, 2001, p. 33).⁶ Reflecting in 1943 on his architectural emphasis on the home and his choice of the phrase 'machine for living', Le Corbusier comments that, 'I was never forgiven for that expression, neither in Paris nor in the U.S.A.- in the U.S.A. where the machine is king' (Le Corbusier, 1999, p. 26). Moreover, 'A house has to fulfil two purposes. First it is a machine for living in, that is, a machine to provide us with efficient help for speed and accuracy in our work, a diligent and helpful machine which should satisfy all our physical needs: comfort. But it should also be a place conducive to meditation, and, lastly, a beautiful place, bringing much-needed tranquillity to the mind' (Le Corbusier in Weston, 1996, p. 100). Le Corbusier is clearly not here preaching the elimination of social difference and Harvey (who Smith repeatedly uses against Le Corbusier), while highly critical of many aspects of Le Corbusier's work and character, argues that, 'his project was internationalist, and emphasized the kind of unity in which a socially conscious notion of individual difference could be fully explored' (Harvey, 1989, p. 271). Furthermore, Le Corbusier is not even arguing for the elimination of architectural difference. Standardized units can be configured in many different forms and Le Corbusier constantly emphasizes his belief that the result will be architectural variety and diversity rather than uniformity and, of course, standardized and repetitive building techniques and forms are centuries old phenomena. As Lefebvre observes whilst commenting in 1962 on the medieval village of Navarrenx, twice rebuilt in the Middle Ages according to geometric ground plans, 'It is amazing the diversity which can be obtained spontaneously from the same unchanging (or "structural") regional elements. . . .' (Lefebvre, 1995, p. 116-117).⁷

There is also a more direct commentary of interest from Lefebvre on Le Corbusier which touches upon these themes: Boudon (1972) published a study of Le Corbusier's 1920s workers' housing project at Pessac in South West France. In particular, Boudon documented the manner in which the in-

⁶Lefebvre also uses the term to attack Le Corbusier commenting that a, 'machine for living in, [is] the appropriate habitat for a man-machine (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 303).

⁷Lefebvre is clear that there has always been town-planning but that it is capitalism that produces the distinctive type of town-planning that he opposes. Lefebvre is certainly not anti-planning (see Kofman & Lebas, 2000).

habitants had altered Le Corbusier's original design. Lefebvre contributed a short preface to the book referring to Le Corbusier as a 'genius' whose houses at Pessac were adapted by their inhabitants by introducing 'personal qualities' which produced a 'differentiated social cluster'. According to Lefebvre, Le Corbusier intended to build a predetermined, homogeneous and functional system whose standardization was overcome by the adaptations of the inhabitants as they put their needs into action. However, Boudon's study provides a different interpretation which suggests that Lefebvre was misinformed concerning Le Corbusier's architectural intentions at Pessac. For Boudon, 'the modifications carried out by the occupants constitute a positive and not a negative consequence of Le Corbusier's *original conception*' (Boudon, 1972, p. 161, emphasis added). Boudon argues that the geometric differentiation that resulted from the use of standardized components in different configurations provided both architect and occupants with the scope to realize their differentiated intentions through adaptation and modification. For Boudon, one of the essential features of Le Corbusier's spatial conception at Pessac was that it, '*facilitated* and, to a certain extent, even *encouraged* such alterations' (Boudon, *ibid*, p. 114, emphasis in original). Boudon's extensive interviews with the occupants support these findings: the original occupants did not object to the standardization that Le Corbusier employed and, the imaginative and varied alterations made by the inhabitants were not motivated by the desire to 'personalise the standardized appearance of the houses, but in order to bring out or enhance the personal qualities that they already possessed' (Boudon, 1972, p. 152).

Conclusion

This paper has not had the scope to deal with Smith's provocative thesis concerning the ethically normalizing force of the abstract space of modernity. It has also not been possible to discuss the questionable use made of Lefebvre's equally questionable spatial categories. It has sought, rather, to advance a different Le Corbusier from the portrayal found in Smith's paper. Whilst he was certainly the designer of detested schemes such as the Voisin Plan for Paris and other emblems of heroic modernism, Le Corbusier was also the most vernacular of the pioneer modernists. Whilst he carried favour with the bourgeoisie he was also acutely aware of the need to improve the basic living conditions of the proletariat. While he naively relied on the social

reform of technocrats he was not himself a technocrat. A more complex and ambiguous Le Corbusier, and a fuller account of Lefebvre's attitude towards Le Corbusier, has been suggested. Concerns regarding the contextualisation of ideas and the malleability of texts have also been advanced. However, to insist on the importance of context is perhaps one of the difference destroying strategies of the modernity which Smith seeks to oppose. After all, he does clearly affirm his intentions, 'anything and everything is liable at any moment to be ripped from its particular context' (Smith, 2001, p. 36).

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