

POLYTECHNIC OF TORINO  
FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE  
Degree in Architecture  
*Honors theses*

---

**André Lurçat. A Le Corbusier follower or an independent creative character?**

by Fiamma Bernardi

Tutor: Micaela Viglino

For decades André Lurçat has been considered as a Le Corbusier follower and just recently an attempt has been made to free him of the allegations of treason concerning the rationalist architecture principles. With the rehabilitation of his image, Lurçat is able once more to gain an independent position in the modern architectural panorama between the two wars, alongside the character of Le Corbusier who has been up until now the backbone of the French rationalism. For a better understanding of the actual theoretical and formal contribution provided by Lurçat to the "Modern Movement", it is necessary to clarify to what extent his architecture and his urban thought were influenced by the pioneer and master Le Corbusier, and to what extent this is the result of his personal creativity.

The research is based on the analysis of the archive material of the Lurçat Fund which is deposited at the I.F.A. in Paris and on consultations of the Le Corbusier Foundation Archives and also on readings of the theoretical operas of the two architects. An attentive bibliographic investigation has also been conducted, with particular attention to the more meaningful contemporary writings.

By analysing the operas constructed by the two architects an attempt has been made to probe the project differences of the buildings though both answered the purpose of common functional programs (the "maisons d'artiste" or the peripheral villas) without neglecting the clients influence on the final result. The architectural language of Lurçat, though very similar to Le Corbusier's opera, is almost always the result of his societal ideologies.

Lurçat's vast theoretical operas in the 20's at the time, already considered social and political themes; while Le Corbusier's operas have a strong controversial tone, Lurçat's writings are, on the other hand, principally political. Within the architectural international debate, especially the CIAM, Lurçat and Le Corbusier are confronted directly; the difference in view points is transformed in a struggle for power in the French section and Le Corbusier's main aspiration crushes Lurçat's will of pluralism.

The two architect's paths are definitely divided when the existing relationship between architecture and politics is considered. Lurçat, has become the spokesman of the communist culture with the foundation of Villejuif's scholastic left municipality group, sided publicly in favour of collectivisation and the alienation of private property; what resulted was a period of intense research concerning collective habitation at low cost. Lurçat's contacts with the USSR are the occasion to reveal his inner thoughts about Le Corbusier's work, which he considers the result of capitalistic society and lacking any innovating ardor.

In the urbanistic field Lurçat undertakes a typology study of the single elements which make up the city, elements which must be reconnected with social and functional objectives without having to research valid solutions *a priori*. While Le Corbusier believes that a town-planner is a technician who attempts to resolve on his own socio-political matters, according to Lurçat, this character is inseparable from his ideological involvement.

In conclusion, the dependent relationship between Lurçat and Le Corbusier is not as important as one has been led to believe. The parallelism between the programs and the common clientele have increased the similarities of their works, Lurçat gains though, his own precise personality through the interconnection between architecture and political engagement which becomes the conducting line for his research and operas. The interest for the creation of an architectural syntax becomes weaker with respect to a superior ideological cause and the definition of socio-functional programs. The meaning of Lurçat's architecture is therefore political and influences society, while that of Le Corbusier depends on formal research applied to the technical needs of the mechanic era.

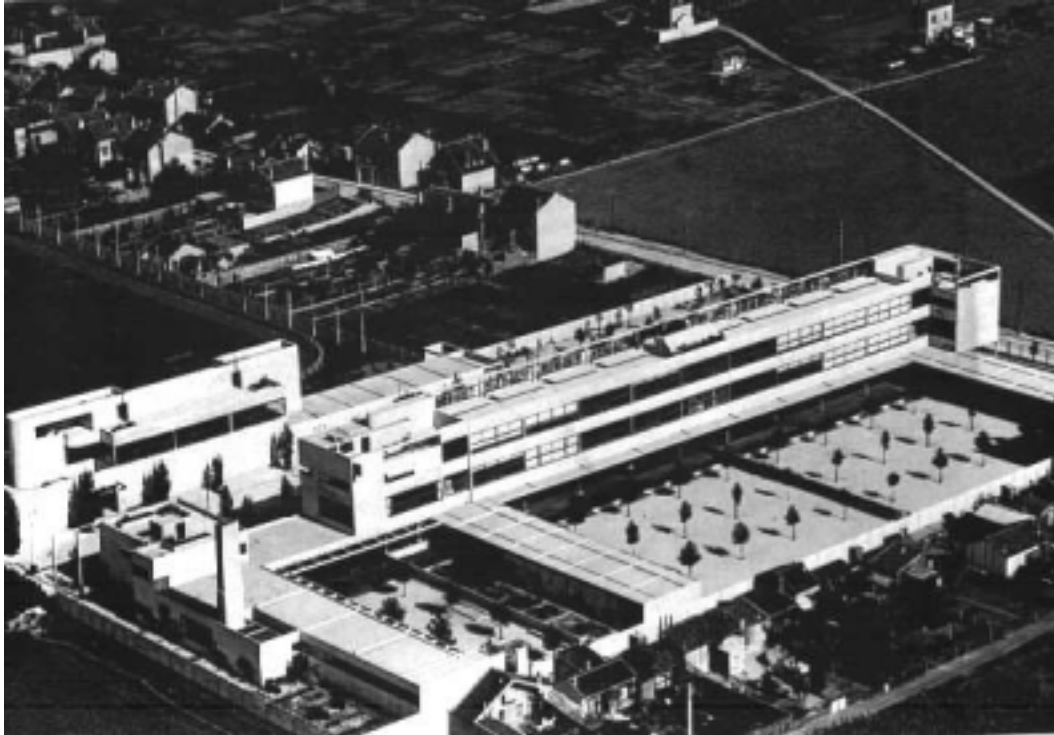
It seems then, almost useless to conceive André Lurçat's creative personality as a simple adhesion to architectural precepts belonging to others; simply considering Lurçat as a "follower of Le Corbusier" would impoverish the characteristics of an already underrepresented figure of the French rationalism, without mentioning the first order position occupied by Le Corbusier.



Pict.1 André Lurçat, villa Bomsel, Versailles, 1925.  
(PHOTO F. BERNARDI 1997)



Pict.2 André Lurçat, villa Guggenbühl, Parigi, 1926- 27.  
(PHOTO F. BERNARDI 1997)



Pict.3 André Lurçat, school Karl- Marx, Villejuif, 1930-33