Lecture summary:

The lecture provides an introduction to the achievements of Le Corbusier, who was the most compelling architect of the twentieth century. His theories of modern cities and houses are considered in terms of two basic themes.

The first involves a critique of Le Corbusier’s urban schemes on the grounds of their utopian character. He was concerned with simplistic divisions in modern life. These were related to a notion stated in the CIAM Athens Charter of 1933, in which ‘the keys to modern town planning are to be found in the four functions: housing, work, recreation (during leisure), and traffic’. In addition, Le Corbusier set his designs for cities against urban forms that had evolved over several centuries. Values embedded in a culture were deemed irrelevant to citizens in the present.

The second theme pertains to an impressive aspect of Le Corbusier’s individual houses, which stems from welcoming the innovative achievements of his day, while also endorsing principles developed in pre-Enlightenment architecture. Thus, modern reinforced concrete was employed to create novel spatial qualities in buildings which were also designed in accordance with ancient and Renaissance notions of the human body, proportion and geometric order. This achievement is analysed with reference to Le Corbusier’s Villa Stein and Villa Savoye.

The lecture concludes by considering the architect’s fascination with spiritual ideas, which assumed a prominent role in late works, most significantly the Chapel Notre Dame du Haut. This sacred building for pilgrims is analysed with reference to Le Corbusier’s use of organic forms; as well as his desire to animate space with light that is not mundane but divine.
A typical London suburb, photograph, from Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow*

Le Corbusier, Drawing of a ‘corridor street’, from Le Corbusier, *La Maisons des Hommes*, 1941

Le Corbusier, the *piloti* explanatory drawings of the five points of a new architecture, from *Oeuvre Complete*

*Le Corbusier, Maison Domino drawing, 1914

Image of monolithic reinforced concrete joint, patented 1892 by Francois Hennebique

Le Corbusier, Drawing from *The Radiant City*, p. 124; same scale: Paris, New York, Buenos Aires

Le Corbusier, Voison Plan for Paris, 1922-25

Le Corbusier, Villa Apartment, 1922

Le Corbusier, Freehold Maisonettes, view of dining room, from *Towards a New Architecture*, p. 248

Le Corbusier, Contemporary City, Transportation Centre, with a runway on the roof, 1922

Le Corbusier, Perspective from *The Radiant City*, ‘The Green City- trees’, p. 221.

Le Corbusier, Photo of Liner, from *Towards a New Architecture*

L. Mumford, Photo of a modern steamship, from Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*

Le Corbusier, Photo of Grain Elevators, from *Towards a New Architecture*, p. 27

Le Corbusier, series of photos and drawings from *Towards a New Architecture*

Le Corbusier, Drawing of Modular Man, 1948

*Le Corbusier, Villa Stein, Garches, 1927

*Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, 1929-31

*Le Corbusier, Chapel Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp, 1951-54

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**Reference:**


Images:

Le Corbusier, Maison Domino drawing, 1914

Le Corbusier, Villa Stein, Garches, 1927
Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy, 1929-31

Le Corbusier, Chapel Notre Dame du Haut, Ronchamp, 1951-54