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Student number: 508112

**History of Western Art**  
Part Five – Modernism to Post-Modernism

**Assignment Four**

500-word analysis of up to four works, not painting or sculpture, from post 1945

Unite d’Habitation, Marseille (1947-1952) – Le Corbusier



Unite d’Habitation, Marseille - exterior

The end of World War II saw a significant period of social, political and historical upheaval; large parts of cities and urban centres had been destroyed by bombing, displacing large populations and destroying infrastructure; government coffers were depleted by the cost of waging war; economies around the world were also reeling from the war’s after-effects. A post-war baby boom had also significantly increased the number of young families. (University of Leicester). There was therefore a pressing need for new buildings, particularly new housing. With funds at a premium, governments sought housing options that would be cheap to build, capable of accommodating large numbers of people (families and individuals) (ArchDaily).

Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (‘Le Corbusier’), artist, designer, writer and urban planner, was commissioned by Raoul Dutry to resolve this problem. Le Corbusier was not a formally qualified architect but had completed many successful, smaller design projects. However, at the time of the commission he had not worked on a major project for some 10 years. However, his vision for ‘streets in the sky’ incorporating not only housing but also social living, shopping, entertainment, all at a low price - based on an earlier design proposal (Cite Radieuse) - was clearly compelling. (Bony, 2012, p143)

Unite d’Habitation (‘Unite’) was constructed on a modular format. Reinforced beton-brut (rough-cast) concrete was used for the exterior. It was cheap and readily available and differed from Le Corbusier’s usual stark white facades. (ArchDaily). The building stands on the characteristic pilotis (pylons) however, due to shortages of steel after the war, larger than normal concrete pillars support the building. (Bony)

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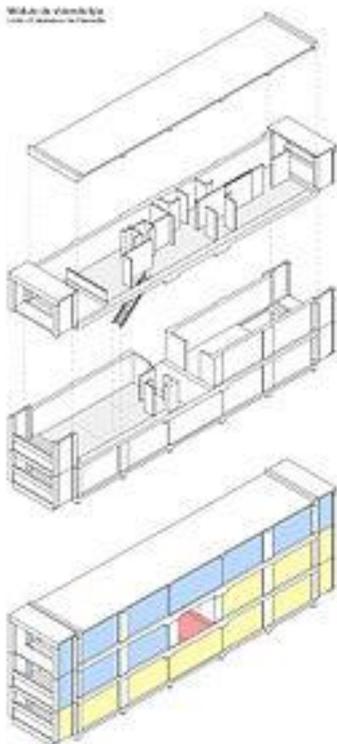
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Pilotis are one of Le Corbusier's 'Five points of Architecture', allowing free circulation of air avoiding damp. The other points being:

- Roof terrace – flat roof for garden terrace, social space
- Free plan – load-bearing walls replaced by steel framework allowing more open plan interiors
- Ribbon window – as walls are not load-bearing, long strips of windows are possible, maximising light
- Free facade – supported by interior columns, exterior can be more open, even entirely glass.

Unite exploits the modular construction style which allows two rows of two-storey apartments, each with balconies, a central corridor, uniform-sized rooms. A communal walkway runs through the interior of the building. The flat roof provides for a pool, running track, garden space.



Unite d'Habitation, Marseille – interior plan

In designing Unite, Le Corbusier stated that he was inspired by a visit to a monastery, Charterhouse of Ema, Galluzzo, in 1907 (Fondation Le Corbusier). He wrote that he learned from the monastery,

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"standardization led to perfection," (Wikipedia). This was to influence the construction of Unite around a modular format wherein the living spaces were compact, uniform in shape and furnishings, the occupants choosing only the colour of the decor (Wikipedia).

Unusual stylistic features are the apparent representations of ocean liners, seen elsewhere in his work. The vent towers are reminiscent of smokestacks; the roof like an upper deck cruise liner with pool, a row of ventilation fins akin to the wheelhouse; the flanks of the building with its strip windows are reminiscent of rows of cabin windows. (ArchDaily)



Unite d'Habitation – roof, Marseille

Le Corbusier's work inspired a number of similar projects, some infamous rather than famous (Roehampton West, London, for example) (Uni of Leicester). The notorious Hulme crescents, although inspired by Georgian Bath, also share many of the design features of his work (sadly not the quality of construction). (Manchester History).

The architecture of Le Corbusier (along with many post-war architects) is both loved and hated in equal measure. Attempts to list such properties (in the UK) are frequently met with hostility although the public are, it seems, gradually accepting that brutalist architecture is part of our history, whether we find it attractive or not (Guardian) (Dezeen).

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