He flies through the air with the greatest of ease. 'That, dear human, is the flying trapeze.'

Architect: Le Corbusier

The Assembly, Chandigarh

The third of Le Corbusier's major buildings on the capital of Chandigarh—the Assembly—has recently been completed and is discussed in this article by Charles Correa, the Indian architect who practices in Bombay. Opposite, 1, and across the entrance portico which forms the south eastern facade, looking towards the High Court. Across the road, below the bridge span on the right is the portico seen across the pool.

He flies through the air with the greatest of ease. 'That, dear human, is the flying trapeze.'

One arrives at Chandigarh. One travels through the town, past the houses spread out in the dust like endless rows of sand on the seashore, and down the surrealistic roads—V 14 and V 25—running between brick walls to infinity. Chandigarh, brave new Chandigarh, born in the harsh plains of the Punjab without umbilical cord.

Then in the distance, like an aircraft carrier floating above the fumes and jetsam of some harbour town, appears the Secretariat. From miles away one sees it, white in the sunlight, racing along with the car, riding high above the rows of gherkin houses that make up the foreground. Gradually this prosenium clears, and the other two elements of the Capitol appear: the Assembly and the High Court; and the three buildings ride together against the grey-blue foot-hills of the Himalayas.

Ride together, swinging sometimes in front of each other and sometimes behind enormous banks of earth. One approaches closer and closer to the complex, and the bleached whiteness deepens slowly into the grey-green of concrete, the simple outlines of the masses dissolve into an astonishing, voluptuous complexity of shadow and substance.

Incredible, evocative architecture. 'Stones are dead; living things sleep in the quarry, but the aspen of St. Peter are a passion!' Throughout his life, Corb has sought to create an architecture of passion. His buildings—both in concept and visual language—have always been presented at a certain decibel level. No sotto voce, no politeness, but—like Wagner—thunder in the concert hall. This is probably the single most important fact about Corb because it necessitates his disregarding any solutions which could not be projected at the decibel level he favours. (It is interesting to note that when Corb sometimes intentionally lowers the volume, so as for instance in the new extensions to the High Court, he achieves an architecture not unlike that of Louis Kahn.)

How does one project architecture at this decibel level? As an intelligent architect, Corb immediately perceived the necessity for a strong concept (the plan is the generator); but concept alone is not enough, and as an artist he has become more and more aware of the importance of developing an impassioned visual language that would project these concepts. Thus each of Corb's buildings has been a consecutively step in his search to develop the power—and further the boundaries—of his vocabulary and syntax. Other architects from Brexi to Tokyo have created buildings which can be termed 'applied Corb'; Corb himself has never applied what is safe and proven. He has always sought to demonstrate something we did not know.

In 1929, Cocteau wrote in Vanity Fair: 'Genius, in art, consists in knowing how far we may go too far. 'Don't touch it any more' cries the amateur. It is then that the true artist takes his chance.'

And Corb himself has written in Acrux: An amateur is no poet. He devotes his life to activities in which, in perpetual danger of death, he performs extraordinary movements of infinite difficulty, with disciplined exaltation and passion... to break his neck and his bones and be crushed.

Nobody asked him to do this. Nobody owed him any thanks.

He lives in an extraordinary world, the amateur.

Result: most certainly! He does things which others cannot.

Beats: why does he do them? Others ask. He is showing off.

'Statistics' it seems, we pity him; he's a bore.

Concept and language; in his work up to the Unité d'Habitation at Marseille Corb gave weight to both these aspects of architecture. (In fact, the Unité is an astonishing complex of spatial, structural, economic, and perhaps sociological, relevance.) Since then—and especially in his buildings in India—Corb has become more and more absorbed in his visual language, and however masterful this language may have become, it is still only one aspect of any great architecture. So we have the High Court's building where large areas were ill-planned and badly lit, but with a spell-binding entrance where a whole new aesthetic world came into being; and the Secretariat: a structure with a magnificent facade, almost like a stage-set. Did not the earlier Corb promise something less skin-deep, something more conceptual? The third building in the complex, the new Assembly, is—in this sense—a return to the earlier Corb, for in this Assembly he has produced an architecture that is not restricted to an entrance, nor to a facade, but to the functions of the programme and to the very spaces within the building itself.

The idea behind the Assembly is extremely simple: along three sides of the building, 900 ft. square, are located offices and conference rooms; the fourth side is an enormous portico which 'orient's the building towards the High Court. In the centre is an interior court, 200 ft. across, ranging from 85 to 45 ft. in height, where are located the hyperbolic form of the assembly chamber, the rectangle (surmounted by a skew pyramidal roof) of the council chamber and the extraordinary collection of spaces, ramps and platform levels that make up the forum. (Corb has provided the principal users of the building—the legislators, the office workers, the press and the visiting public—each with their own system of entrances, lobbies, stairs, etc., ensuring their separation.)

The drama of the building starts with its skyline. Corb has always placed the greatest emphasis on the total volume of a building and its silhouette against the sky; as, for instance, the ramp on the roof of the Secretariat which acts like an immense spine holding the marvellously long, fractured, nanoplate facade together.