

---

# *“Tout ça est foutaise, foutaise et demi!”: Le Corbusier and UNESCO*

---

BARBARA E. SHAPIRO\*

*Guest Curator*

*Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture*

*For James S. Ackerman on his Seventieth Birthday*

---

## RÉSUMÉ

---

Avec la découverte et l'acquisition par le Centre Canadien d'Architecture d'une étude de Le Corbusier pour le siège de l'UNESCO à Paris, on peut maintenant mieux connaître le rôle exact joué par l'architecte dans la conception de cette oeuvre. En se fondant sur des documents inédits de première main, dont des dossiers, des lettres et des dessins, l'auteur révèle que de 1951 à 1958, l'engagement et l'ingérence de Le Corbusier dans ce projet ont largement débordé le simple exercice de ses

fonctions à titre d'un des cinq consultants de la firme d'ingénieurs-architectes Breuer, Nervi et Zehrffuss. Son attitude querelleuse révélait sa double allégeance: il entendait suivre les principes des Congrès Internationaux de l'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) ainsi que sa propre évolution de pionnier du modernisme tout en se faisant le défenseur de la plasticité expressive en architecture.

---

In the spring of 1988 the Canadian Centre for Architecture acquired a small pen and pencil sketch by Le Corbusier.<sup>1</sup> Until the emergence of this unpublished study (Fig. 210) for the proposed United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization Headquarters in Paris, few precise facts had been disclosed about the exact role Corbusier had played in its development beyond the intentionally veiled and tempered remarks in contemporary accounts by Siegfried Giedion, Walter Gropius, and Le Corbusier himself. What had been acknowledged openly pertained only to his appointment and limited role as one of five advisors on an international panel who acted as professional consultants to the official team of architect-engineers: Bernard Zehrffuss,

Marcel Breuer, and Pier Luigi Nervi. However, the CCA drawing asserts something new: that Corbusier exercised a specific architectural involvement within the prolonged design process. Its discovery provokes a more penetrating enquiry, to disclose not only the effect of his restricted, official position as advisor, but also the results of his more insidious, elaborate, even scheming machinations behind the scenes, suppressed intentionally by those concerned with maintaining the equilibrium and diplomacy of the prestigious commission, and with containing his vituperative, controversial outbursts. Together with unpublished dossiers and associated drawings, it is now possible to unravel the full history of the evolution of UNESCO and, in particular, Corbusier's complex, tendentious, and disputatious dealings, an experience he was to characterize as “les plus tristes aventures de ma vie.”<sup>2</sup>

At a plenary session of the UNESCO planning committee set up in 1951 to study the establish-

\* I would like to thank Dr. Myra Nan Rosenfeld for her initial sponsorship and reactions to the project; Francesco Pasanti for his comments on an earlier version of the argument; and Madames Evelyne Tréhin, Director, Martine Lasson, Chief Librarian, and Holy Raveloarisoa for allowing free access to and reproduction of all relevant material in the UNESCO archive at the Fondation Le Corbusier.

1 Sotheby's, London, 27 April 1988, lot no. 533.

2 Corbusier to Walter Gropius, 17 April 1953, Fondation Le Corbusier 13 (4) 129. Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris, to be referred to hereafter as FLC.

ment of its new headquarters in Paris, Paulo Carneiro, the Brazilian delegate (familiar with Corbusier's work in Sao Paulo), recommended the French architect for the commission.<sup>3</sup> The United States State Department Representative Jacobs, however, immediately vetoed the recommendation, a humiliating episode that the architect cryptically reports in notebooks from the period.<sup>4</sup> But as his private office records more fully reveal, despite the veto Corbusier was undeterred. Quick to respond to the possibility of this prestigious project, he shot off a series of self-promotional letters to influential friends and UNESCO members in defence of his own candidacy. Typical were those packets delivered in July 1951 to Jaime Torres Bodet, acting Director General of UNESCO, citing support of various colleagues such as José Luis Sert, Richard Neutra, Alvar Aalto, Wells Wintemute Coates, and even Bagby of New Delhi who was the son of the Secretary General of Foreign Affairs. The packet included a number of covering letters, citations from the *International Who's Who*, and "une masse de livres [in fact over 18 titles and offprints] qui sont consacrés à [s]on oeuvre."<sup>5</sup> He also lost no time establishing the exact reasons for the American resistance, which he traced primarily to a United Nations Headquarters incident in New York four years earlier—a fact confirmed and elaborated upon by Gropius, Giedion, and Sert in confidential letters.

As Corbusier discovered, the United States veto was critical to his future as architect of the UNESCO building since the United States provided the principal financing for the construction. Influenced by reports from Leland King from the Division of Foreign Building Operations at the State Department in Washington, as well as Charles Thomson (United States chairman of the UNESCO Headquarters Committee), Jacobs remained sceptical of Corbusier's ability to control the project; both Thomson and Jacobs had been warned by Wallace Harrison, principal architect of the UN Building. During 1947-48, Corbusier's confrontation with Harrison involving disputes over artistic exploitation and inaccurate execution of the architect's original designs, as well as his notoriously excessive financial demands, had been exposed in the press as examples of unbridled egotism. By the late 1960s, Giedion and Gropius had publicly

acknowledged this controversy as a major factor in the American success in discrediting Corbusier at UNESCO.<sup>6</sup> However, in earlier private correspondence, Gropius had cautioned his friend against emotional utterances, urging him to remain "cool and businesslike."<sup>7</sup> Outwardly Corbusier acquiesced; among intimates he was venomous. He pronounced Wallace Harrison "mon ennemi" and somewhat paranoically believed the Americans labelled him "un diable."<sup>8</sup> As late as 1963, he continued to rail bitterly to his friend and translator Marguerite Tjader Harris:

New York m'a jeté à la porte des Nations Unies avec une brutalité effroyable, geste qu'elle a répété pour m'arracher de l'UNESCO à Paris et me jeter à la porte par un veto. On a beau faire et beau dire, il y a certaines choses qui vous restent sur l'estomac.<sup>9</sup>

As President of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), Sert sought to intervene with Torres Bodet but to no avail. On 5 November 1951, the UNESCO committee nominated Eugène Beaudouin as provisional architect, along with Howard Robertson of England and Eero Saarinen of the United States as consultants. It was recommended, however, that Corbusier serve on an advisory panel.<sup>10</sup> Torres Bodet further requested from the International Union of Architects and from Sert that names of other architects to participate with him on the panel be put forward. Private correspondence among CIAM members (including Sert, Gropius, Lucio Costa, and Ernesto Rogers, as well as Corbusier himself) confirms that as a group they were determined to place their own supporters strategically on the advisory board to advance their "lutte commune pour l'architecture moderne" and their concept of "team work" over individual ambition.<sup>11</sup> In this

3 Jean Petit, *Le Corbusier Lui-Même* (Geneva, 1970), 101; Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 5th ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 566.

4 Françoise de Franclieu, ed., *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks* (New York and Cambridge, Mass., 1981), II and III, 27, 811; Petit, *Le Corbusier Lui-Même*, 110. I have not been able to discover the first name of the U.S. representative Jacobs.

5 FLC 13 (4) 1-3, 34-37, 39-42.

6 Gropius to Corbusier in confidential letters, 3 and 30 June 1952, FLC 13 (4) 108, 109; Corbusier to Sert, 27 October 1952, FLC 13 (4) 44-47; Giedion to Sert, 11 November 1952, FLC 13 (4) 71; Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 566; Walter Gropius, "Témoignages," *Aujourd'hui*, 1:1 (November 1965), 108.

7 Gropius to Corbusier, 27 May 1952, FLC 13 (4) 107.

8 Corbusier to Henri Laugier, 10 September 1951, FLC 13 (4) 1; Corbusier to Sert, 27 October 1952, FLC 13 (4) 6.

9 Corbusier to Tjader Harris, 2 February 1963, doc. no. 870384, Archives of the History of Art, Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities. I am grateful to Nicholas Olsberg for bringing this letter to my attention. Mrs. Harris prepared the first American translation of *Quand les cathédrales étaient blanches*, published only in part in two issues of *Direction* (1938, 1939).

10 Torres Bodet confirmed the details in a letter to Corbusier, 22 November 1951, FLC 13 (4) 43.

11 A handwritten list of candidates, jotted down by Sert and dated by Corbusier on 19 July 1952, included such names as Wells Coates of England, Bakema of Holland, Alfred Roth of Switzerland, Maekawa of Japan, and Peter Oberlander and Hazen Size (*sic*) of Canada, FLC 13 (4) 67 *recto*/

they succeeded. The Headquarters Committee chose Gropius as president of the International Panel of Advisors, together with Rogers, Costa, Sven Markelius, and Saarinen as consultants. Using his new position of authority, and loyal to his colleague, Gropius once again promoted the name of Corbusier as sole architect in a letter of 16 May to the chairman Charles Thomson. But without further outside consultation, UNESCO appointed Zehruss, Breuer, and Nervi on 10 July as the “Architecte[s] d’Opération.”<sup>12</sup> With warm encouragement from Gropius to “take the bitter pill” and to accept the defeat—“you know in what high esteem the ‘good loser’ is held in Anglo-Saxon countries”—Le Corbusier was enjoined to participate on the Advisory Committee among like-minded architects.<sup>13</sup>

Corbusier consented in February 1952, agreeing to receive the equivalent of U.S. \$1,000 in French francs for his honorary services.<sup>14</sup> Amongst the other advisors, he frankly exercised a favoured and senior position because of his international prestige (his Marseilles and Chandigarh projects both achieved great recognition in that year) and because of his position as a prominently active architect in Paris. An almost conspiratorial agreement to honour the architect’s rightful role as “leading designer” was struck in June 1952 by three of the advisors. Gropius confided to Corbusier that both Markelius and Saarinen “would not interfere for their own ambitions,” quietly restraining themselves as a mark of respect.<sup>15</sup> Corbusier took this baldly as a psychological prerogative to advance what his CIAM colleagues (and no doubt he himself) believed to be his superior opinion. Yet among the three official architects such deference was only thinly tolerated, and various UNESCO officials became wary. In November 1952 Corbusier tried without success to devise a legal formula whereby among the “Comité des Cinq Architectes de Réputation Internationale,” he would be singled out as the “Consultant Permanent” with decision-making powers to

be assured by the “Architecte[s] d’Opération,” or “les Trois.”<sup>16</sup> His proposal was ignored.

An exchange of letters clarifies the legal complexities of Corbusier’s dilemma. Having accepted the position of advisor, he could not then participate as a professional architect without conflict of interest. This opinion was argued emphatically by Howard Robertson, then president of the Royal Institute of British Architects (himself involved in the original design development) in a letter to Charles Thomson dated 22 May 1952. He deemed it a matter of “architectural ethics,” cautioning UNESCO against taking “any action which is publicly vulnerable on the general ethical plane.”<sup>17</sup> Corbusier as architect was effectively neutralized, both politically and legally.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, he managed to exert great power over the proceedings. Subtle psychological and professional ambiguities in his position on the Advisory Panel of Five persisted and were to colour the long proceedings over the next six years. They were exacerbated, moreover, by the strongly divisive theoretical and architectural tensions between the architects and their advisors, centred on their spokesman Corbusier. Differences of opinion (over the value of collaboration, over appropriate architectural form, over the use and meaning of historical context and language) cropped up throughout the design process. The debate, largely a generational one, characterized the polemical differences between the early pioneers of Modernism, embodied in CIAM, and the late Modernists of the 1950s, practitioners who exhibited a more inclusive, forgiving, and flexible pragmatism. The various design proposals submitted by the different teams between 1952 and 1954 best illustrate the rifts between the protagonists.

On 16 April 1952 Eero Saarinen, on behalf of his collaborators Beaudouin and Robertson, submitted an internal report to the Headquarters Committee which was an illustrated summation of their six preliminary architectural proposals for the UNESCO site at Place de Fontenoy.<sup>19</sup> The

*verso*. The solidarity of CIAM members towards the UNESCO project is emphasized in a joint letter signed by Gropius, Rogers, Sert, Emery, Wells Coates, and Giedion addressed to Zehruss, Breuer, and Nervi, dated 19-26 July 1953, FLC 13 (4) 172.

12 Résolution 28.2 adapted by the Conférence Général in the 6th Session, FLC 13 (4) 56. Sert complained to Corbusier that he was bypassed in the decision in his letter of 5 November 1953, FLC 13 (4) 10-13.

13 Gropius to Corbusier, 30 June and 17 July 1952, FLC 13 (4) 109, 112.

14 Corbusier to Torres Bodet, 14 February 1952, FLC 13 (4) 54; Torres Bodet to Corbusier, 21 January 1952, FLC 13 (4) 52.

15 Gropius to Corbusier, 3 June 1952, FLC 13 (4) 108.

16 Corbusier entitled the document “Projet de rédaction pour une décision à l’Assemblée-Générale de l’UNESCO en novembre 52.” Copies were circulated to Sert, Gropius, and other officials, FLC 13 (4) 7.

17 Robertson to Thomson, FLC 13 (4) 247.

18 Gropius explains the circumstances and complications thoroughly to Corbusier in a letter of 30 June 1952, FLC 13 (4) 109. Giedion verifies the legal dilemma (exposing scant detail) in *Space, Time and Architecture*, 566. A similar conflict of interest had occurred in 1937 in Algeria when Corbusier had accepted a position on the Regional Planning Board, thereby ruining the possibility of realizing any of his urban proposals for the area developed during 1931-42; see Stanilaus von Moos, *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1980), 205.

19 “Le Siège Permanent de l’UNESCO/Rapport au Directeur

wedge-shaped three-hectare plot was scooped out at its northern tip to form a quarter-circle, complementing the other quarter-circle formed by the austere convex façades of the existing Ministry of Public Health and Safety, and the Secretariat of Transport and Merchant Marine built in the 1930s. Together they formed the exedral termination point to the anterior grounds of Ange-Jacques Gabriel's Ecole Militaire. The properties fell under the jurisdiction of the City of Paris and its Commission des Monuments Historiques and, as such, were required to address the "gabarits" and "servitudes de hauteur" of the designated zone. These included not only the eighteenth-century buildings of Gabriel, but also his unexecuted design intentions for the gardens which were made available to the architects in prints and plans. The cornice lines of the newer ministries had also to be addressed.<sup>20</sup>

Beaudouin established the first scheme as "Architecte provisionaire" (Fig. 211). It is a solution not uncharacteristic of an architect-urbanist who had formulated his ideas as an *ancien pensionnaire* at the French Academy in Rome. Within a symmetrical *cour d'honneur* reminiscent of the *hôtel particulier*, he situates the UNESCO operations in the southwest peripheral wing and hexagonal node on axis with the convex entry gate, isolating governmental services in the northeasterly flank. Saarinen comments that this first idea was unanimously criticized for being too academic, and insensitive in according UNESCO a position inferior to the French government buildings. Two alternative plans by Saarinen, Robertson, and Beaudouin then emerged. The first, described as "asymétrique mais équilibré" (Fig. 212) shows three extended and low staggered blocks, in de Stijl or Bauhaus fashion, their open plaza facing on a classically-inspired colonnaded exedra forming the half-circle of Place de Fontenoy. To the rear, a domical shell auditorium echoes the implied circular ground plan of the gardens. The French ministers found this attempt to be anti-urbanistic, partly because the *rond-point* cut off circulation across Avenue de Lowendal. The second counterproposal (Fig. 213) places government func-

tions in a convex quarter-arc building, raised on pilotis, which together with the ministries opposite form a half-circular court (with obelisk) considered eighteenth-century in spirit. The UNESCO buildings, set in the rear of the site, form an L-shaped plan facing a triangular inner garden. This formalistically confused solution was disagreeable to the UNESCO authorities as, once again, it ignored the prestige of their institution.

Beaudouin then adapted this scheme to create several variations on his original courtyard plan (Figs. 214 to 216). In them he retains the basic figure of the convex slab facing on the Place de Fontenoy, reserving it for UNESCO. He offers alternative solutions to accommodate the auditorium in fan-shaped extrusions to the main block, or to the perimeter wings that protect an inner court. In his report, Saarinen himself admits that the "distribution des masses . . . n'était pas heureuse." In conclusion, he argued weakly that only a compromise was possible given the historical context and heavy zoning restrictions on the site. He then suggested lifting all servitudes or changing locations altogether.

During the ensuing weeks, the Advisory Committee prepared its unequivocal response, submitting a final version on 13 and 14 May.<sup>21</sup> Generally it concurred with Saarinen's summation. But preliminary, unpublished notes in Corbusier's files add lively critical detail to their reservations. The Five found the modern interpretation of Gabriel's intentions (which had originally called for a simple landscaped background of a line of trees to articulate the resolution of the Ecole Militaire gardens) to be out of scale and unfaithful to the spirit of the eighteenth century. Regarding the surrounding area of ministries as "dismal and of poor quality" and "significantly ugly," they observed that it "dwarf[ed] . . . the dignity" of the military works. Of the Beaudouin team's proposals they were dismissive: "a two-front approach, half Beaux Arts, half Modern," in the words of Gropius; "lack[ing] in clarity and consistency [and] spiritual significance," in the more tempered consideration of the Panel.<sup>22</sup> The advisors offered

Général," Annex IX, submitted by Eero Saarinen, Consulting Architect, 16 April 1952, FLC 13 (6) 27-36. The report is based on an earlier study, *Etat des Besoins pour le Bâtiment UNESCO*, prepared by the Service de l'UNESCO, Paris, December 1951 and 13 February 1952 (*Annexe*). The *Plan d'Ensemble* by Eugène Beaudouin, 23 April 1952, and additional reports by Eero Saarinen and Howard Robertson, 8 and 30 April 1952 followed; FLC 13 (6) 27-36; 3; 8-18.

20 The zoning requirements were discussed in a letter of Charles Lucet, Adjunct Director for the Minister of Cultural Relations (n.d.), FLC 13 (6) 21.

21 *Report Concerning the Permanent Headquarters Building of UNESCO in Paris*, presented to His Excellency the Director-General from the International Committee of Five Architects, Paris, 13 May 1952; Appendix, 14 May 1952, FLC 13 (6) 58, 59-60.

22 Several draft versions of the official report, some with handwritten emendations in Corbusier's hand, are preserved in his office files; FLC 13 (6) 38-41, 43, 44-45, 46-48, 53-54. He also kept a powerful perspective sketch of the Ecole Militaire and the adjacent 1930s Ministries as seen through the massive arch of the Tour Eiffel (directly on axis with the Place de Fontenoy site), keyed to incisive notes on cornice heights, existing and projected. It is dated 5 May

specific recommendations to the Headquarters Committee to consider three alternative sites, each unfettered and beyond the historic centre of Paris: the Jardin d'acclimatation in the Bois de Boulogne; the strip of land bordering on the Bois between Porte Dauphine and Porte Maillot; and the land along Boulevard Lannes to the southwest of Place Dauphine. They also called for a different group of architects to replace Beaudouin's team.

Written exchanges between Gropius and Corbusier make clear the question of site was more than a merely pragmatic one. It concerned the spirit of modern architecture, its necessity for freedom of expression beyond the restrictions of historicism. Their desire for a *tabula rasa* echoed the express sentiments of Corbusier in the twenties and thirties, in his designs for the City for Three Million, the Plan Voisin, and the Radiant City. In these urban visions, as in the alternative sites for UNESCO, the historic urban fabric is viewed as a hindrance to invention. In this first round of the design process, the Advisory Panel of Five scored a victory. The UNESCO board agreed to study the Porte Maillot-Porte Dauphine site and to use a fresh team of architects: Zehrfuss, Breuer, and Nervi. As Gropius bluntly characterized the decision to his accomplice Corbu: "[W]e have succeeded in eliminating their site and their architect—i.e. a strait-jacket and a bastard-mind."<sup>23</sup> The Five saw their success not as a personal vindication but as one reflecting the strength and aims of CIAM and of Modern architecture itself. But they were wrong in assuming that a change either in site or in designer would guarantee better architecture.

The Zehrfuss-Breuer-Nervi team published the results of their work in a printed document on 15 September 1952. It contained a set of preliminary presentation drawings of the site, with its assembly of buildings, in plan, section, elevation, and perspective, based on a survey of costs, programme, and transportation accessibility.<sup>24</sup> On the unmodulated rectilinear plot that stretched along the north-south axis between Portes Dauphine and Maillot, they situated two flat-roofed, single-storey rectangular blocks, pierced by interior courts, to house the auditorium and delegations. The roofs and ambient terraces formed a strong, undifferentiated base to the curtain-wall skyscraper for UNESCO, raised on pilotis, which met it

1952, FLC 13 (6) 113. Gropius's comments were offered to Howard Robertson in a confidential letter of 9 November 1952, FLC 13 (6) 265.

23 Gropius to Corbusier, 17 July 1952, FLC13 (4) 112.

24 Marcel Breuer, Bernard Zehrfuss, and Pier Luigi Nervi, *UNESCO Paris: Avant projet, preliminary project, ante-project: 15 September 1952* (Paris, 1952); FLC 13 (6) 162-80.

at right angles on the east-west axis. Its principal entry court was pronounced as a taut shell canopy of reinforced concrete. By burying the public functions, such as libraries, cinemas, and parking, beneath the concourse level, the architects stressed the mass and monumentality of the office block whose only reference to scale was given by the *brise-soleil* across its north and south façades. This isolated wafer-thin tower, covering only a fraction of the site but dominating its effect, owed much to two similar contemporary designs: notably (and ironically) Corbusier's own original design for the United Nations building in New York and his 1951 proposal for a pair of Unités d'Habitation for the Concourse at Strasbourg.

That Corbusier was directly involved, at least to a limited extent, in this first conceptual phase of the UNESCO design process is confirmed by the existence of two groups of unpublished sketches in the Fondation Le Corbusier, dated from August and September 1952. The architect must have produced the first set after receiving in July a packet of diazo prints, showing an earlier version of the scheme, which carried a return address of the UNESCO headquarters on Avenue Kléber where the official architects were installed.<sup>25</sup> His six drawings respond to these prints. They range from diagrammatic preliminary graphite doodles indicating sun angles, site access, and various positionings of building to more precisely informed thumbnail concept sketches that experiment with massing and placement of the major blocks (Fig. 217). They also include annotated coloured pencil analyses of various longitudinal site sections, façade angles, and ground plans. The latter series, precisely dated "17-18 septembre 52," reveals a more advanced understanding of the scheme, likely prepared as a visual critique of the official proposal submitted two days earlier. Annotated and animated with dashes of brightly coloured pencils, the ten sheets demonstrate Corbusier's concern for the correct ratios of built space to open, and rationalized access to the site which he studies typically in pairs of elevations and plans. He also appears to be interested in buffering the edges of the site by curving, contouring, modulating, and sloping both the ground planes and the roofs, as revealed in one sectional-elevation and plan study (Fig. 218). Here the diagonal roof (is this a theatre?) for one of the low buildings on the right is startlingly close to his solution for the UN auditorium.

Although technically competent, the Zehrfuss team submission seemed a decidedly dull, pedes-

25 The envelope was stamped and cancelled by the Paris post office, 25 July 1952, FLC 13 (6) 151-60.

trian late Modern effort, dependent on International Style motifs and urban planning formulas. When it was published, the conservative Paris press and architectural community raised “a rather formidable wave of attacks” in the words of B. Wermiel, administrative officer of the UNESCO Planning Unit, in a confidential note to Gropius.<sup>26</sup> These attacks culminated in unfavourable decisions against the project by the Commission des sites de la Ville de Paris and the Comité d'aménagement de la région parisienne, although they were challenged by the Fédération nationale du bâtiment and the Cercle d'études architecturales. Such support did not help. Even those more directly implicated in the future of the project were cool or hostile to its merits. Robertson, perhaps still rancorous over the rejection of Beaudouin, cursorily dismissed the effort in a letter to Gropius:

[I]t seems to represent externally buildings of a now familiar type of functionalist expression, plus attempts at enrichment of the surface modelling. It contains many derivative motifs and clichés of past and present projects, and some curious elements of incongruity in major form and character.<sup>27</sup>

Nor can Gropius's weary, professorial response be interpreted as enthusiastic: “After the successful revolution in architecture by the original pioneers a generation ago, consolidation and refinement . . . seems to me . . . the desirable trend . . . , a virtue [of] the new design.”<sup>28</sup> The Advisory Committee mustered only enough enthusiasm to give the necessary show of solidarity, sprinkling its official response with terms such as “rational,” “efficient,” and “intelligent,” but drawing attention to the critical need for improvements in the technical areas, especially heating, ventilation, lighting, and acoustics. It avoided all discussion of the aesthetic qualities of the proposal.<sup>29</sup>

In public the advisors, under the guidance of Gropius, considered their support essential to the survival of the project at Porte Maillot. The politically sensitive and strategically skilled president of the Five called the controversy a “test case for Modern architecture,” a decisive “battle” in which a “front of solidarity” between architects and advisors was essential, as he described it in a letter to Corbusier on 29 October 1952.<sup>30</sup> Yet for Cor-

busier, the situation threatened to taint his own integrity; he felt compromised. Two revealing letters conserved in his files give insight into his inner turmoil. André Wogenscky, then adjunct architect in Corbusier's atelier in the Rue de Sèvres, wrote to Ernesto Rogers in Milan describing the dilemma: on the one hand Corbusier was being urged to suppress his reservations, to avoid complications under the pretext of an “esprit de conciliation et d'attitude amicale”; on the other hand he risked approving a “médiocrité signée CIAM devant le monde et devant l'histoire.”<sup>31</sup> He had been patient after the 15 September submission, for he had judged that, with revisions, the proposal could be improved. However, the Supplementary Report of 24 October submitted by the Zehrfuss team for the comments and approval of the advisors, which contained modifications to the original plans, did not rectify the situation. To Corbusier, they only proved definitively “la faiblesse architecturale” of the three designers when left to their own devices. “La qualité spécifique de chaque bâtiment,” he lamented to Sert in a letter written three days later, “leur liaison me semblent anti-architectural, incohérent, sans cohésion.” He refused to put his signature to the plans and left for India.<sup>32</sup>

By a turn of fate, the controversy was quelled in December. The City of Paris and the French Government revealed that for financial reasons the site at Porte Maillot could not be made available to UNESCO. This fact obliged the General Assembly once again to reopen the study of Place de Fontenoy, and to approve the retention of both the architects and their advisors for the work. That the project was forced to return to a site burdened with zoning restrictions was interpreted by Gropius as a sign of veiled opposition to Modern architecture, “an historic blunder by the French authorities.” The Five, however, did succeed in insisting that all restrictions (except that of height) be lifted.<sup>33</sup> Yet as in the case at Porte Maillot, the freedom from servitudes did not ensure a successful new project.

The architects took more than a year to prepare their submission for Place de Fontenoy, published in a report dated 2 April 1953.<sup>34</sup> Despite innumerable surface changes and greater degree of plastic cohesiveness, the underlying strategy and *parti* of the submission owe much to the late plans of Beaudouin. In the northern sector of the site, the archi-

26 Wermiel to Gropius in a letter marked “PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL,” 14 November 1952, FLC 13 (4) 277-78.

27 Robertson to Gropius, 21 October 1952, FLC 13 (4) 263.

28 Gropius to Robertson, 9 November 1952, in a confidential letter, FLC 13 (4) 265-67.

29 *Report on UNESCO's Headquarters Building in Paris*, presented to His Excellency the Director-General from the International Panel of Five Architects, 17 September 1952, with Technical Appendix, FLC 13 (6) 66-71.

30 Gropius to Corbusier, 29 October 1952, FLC 13 (4) 117.

31 Wogenscky to Rogers, 29 October 1952, FLC 13 (6) 220.

32 Corbusier to Sert, 28 October 1952, FLC 13 (4) 8-9.

33 Gropius to Corbusier in two separate letters, 19 December 1952 and 25 February 1953, FLC 13 (4) 122, 125.

34 Marcel Breuer, Bernard Zehrfuss, and Pier Luigi Nervi, *UNESCO, Preliminary Project, Place Fontenoy, Paris, 2 April 1953* (Paris, 1953).

sects situated the glazed, eight-storey, curved, tripartite, Y-shaped Secretariat Building. Its convex entrance façade, facing on Place de Fontenoy, is raised up on tapered concrete pilotis. On its extended southeastern arm they attached a short passage containing the Salle de Pas Perdus, which links up to the exposed reinforced concrete trapezoidal General Assembly or Conference Hall, housing an auditorium with corrugated fan-shaped roof. To the west, an open-air patio and sunken garden are sheltered from Avenue de Lowendal by a landscaped screen of parking slots. Diagonally opposite to the east within an enclosed garden, they positioned the square Executive Council Building whose southwest corner was clipped by the cantilevered southeastern arm of the Secretariat.

In the months preceding the April submission, the advisors as a panel, and Corbusier alone, had participated actively in the design process, submitting a series of formal and informal written critiques. Corbusier had offered minor suggestions to enliven the roofs of the Salle des Pas Perdus and Conference Hall, to add an indoor theatre, and to reconsider the texture of the Secretariat façade which, because of the climate, light, and noise of Paris, he felt required an articulated screen.<sup>35</sup> Given the bold plasticity and expressive sculptural tendencies of the Marseilles Unité, Notre-Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamp, and Chandigarh—all contemporary with UNESCO—it is not surprising that Corbusier had noticed a flatness about the Zehr-fuss proposal. But he did not insist. His desire, so he wrote to the architects in a highly conciliatory tone on 18 February, was to establish “un rapport entièrement positif . . . sur un terrain nettement amical.”<sup>36</sup> A letter from the Zehr-fuss team two days later, acknowledging the validity of his criticisms, suggests that the architects accepted the spirit of collaboration.<sup>37</sup>

The mood was short-lived. Corbusier soon found the weaknesses of the scheme intolerable. Two weeks after agreeing with his fellow advisors to approve the April submission, he retracted his support of it, complaining in a note to Gropius that “les ‘3’ tous seuls sont insuffisants, ils doivent avec les ‘5’ totaliser les capacités.”<sup>38</sup> The disputes

escalated. In the summer of 1953 Zehr-fuss reported bitterly to Gropius that Corbusier had personally confronted several UNESCO officials with his criticisms, ignoring the proper channels for registering comments through the advisory panel.<sup>39</sup> The fracas began to hamper the design proceedings.

Le Corbusier harboured grudges. In a note to Wogensky, who had warned him that he was forcing the project to an impasse, the architect retorted with acrimony that, after all, “les ‘3’ touchent des millions, beaucoup, et moi, rien du tout.”<sup>40</sup> In the end, however, the issue for Corbusier rested on the quality of the architecture. He firmly believed that it was inadequate and, as at Porte Maillot, he could not affix his name to its approval at this stage. Always preoccupied with his international—even eternal—reputation, he discussed his responsibilities on the project with Carneiro in global terms, beginning with responsibilities to the Committee of Five, then to CIAM, then to the spirit of Paris, to France, and to the world. He realized that he had created a schism, but he felt it hinged on a matter of principle. He confided: “Tout ça est foutaise, foutaise et demi! Ça fait le jeu des faibles, la médiocrité des entreprises ‘mondialisantes.’”<sup>41</sup>

By late October, Corbusier voiced to Gropius his growing suspicions that the architects were pointedly circumventing him, either by failing to send their drawings altogether or by notifying him too late for him to review their design in adequate time before scheduled UNESCO meetings.<sup>42</sup> If the lack of design development drawings after 1953 in Corbusier’s files can be taken as a reliable indication that few visual documents actually passed through his hands, then his suspicions were valid. However, a year later, almost to the day, one significant memo with graphic attachment did reach him, soliciting his advice. It was this event that prompted Le Corbusier to execute the CCA drawing (Fig. 210).

On 14 October 1954, Eugene Callison, chief engineer at the Headquarters office, wrote to Gropius reporting on programmatic changes to the UNESCO project taken nine days earlier by the Executive Committee. They had decided to eliminate the Executive Council Building entirely and to provide instead a separate pavilion for future expansion for UNESCO and other specialized agencies such as the World’s Air Ministries. He enclosed a schematic drawing by the Zehr-fuss team

35 “Rapport de Le Corbusier établi à la demande du ‘Comité des 5’ pour être soumis à l’Assemblée Générale par les soins du Président Walter Gropius, chargé de la rédaction décisive.” 23 March 1953, FLC 13 (4) 129-30; Corbusier to Zehr-fuss, Breuer, and Nervi, 18 February 1953, FLC 13 (4) 100-101.

36 Corbusier, FLC 13 (4) 100-101.

37 Zehr-fuss and Breuer to Corbusier, 20 February 1953, FLC 13 (4) 170.

38 Corbusier to Gropius, 17 April 1953, FLC 13 (4) 129-30.

39 Giedion reports this incident to Sert in a letter of 5 August 1953 which he copied to Gropius, FLC 13 (4) 86.

40 Corbusier to Wogensky, 5 March 1953, FLC 13 (4) [101A].

41 Corbusier to Carneiro, 17 July 1953, FLC 13 (4) 73.

42 Corbusier to Gropius, 22 October 1953, FLC 13 (4) 145.

of their responding proposals to the changes, for which Callison solicited Gropius's reaction.<sup>43</sup> The architects' hard-line drawing showed a schematic plot plan and northeast perspective view of the new extension (Fig. 219), together with a view of its southwest façade, and typical floor plans. They proposed that this narrow, glazed single-storey oblong (structurally capable of upward expansion to four storeys as illustrated in the perspective) be set on pilotis in harmony with the Secretariat and run parallel to the northeast corner of the site, defining the limits of the enclosed garden. This they treated simply by scattering about a few trees and transversing it with a path leading to the southeast arm of the Secretariat where the Executive Building had once stood.

Because Gropius was allowed only 16 days in which to respond to the proposal (and this by post from Cambridge, Massachusetts to Callison in Paris), he replied directly on 19 October without first consulting the other members of his advisory panel. He did, however, on that same day, transmit to Corbusier a copy of Callison's letter, together with the architects' proposal, and his own written response. He asked that Corbusier respond directly to Callison, with copies sent to him. Cautiously, he added that he hoped that no complications would arise.<sup>44</sup> Gropius's observations were brief. He considered the Executive Building not indispensable to the architectural composition, although he noted that it had added a "favorable contrast." He approved of the independent block and its location as long as it remained subordinate to the Secretariat and reached no higher than five storeys.<sup>45</sup>

In contrast to Gropius's detached comments, Corbusier's reactions reflect a more considered and involved identification as designer with the development of the project. Not only did he offer Callison a detailed critique; he also sent along an alternative concept sketch, the CCA drawing (Fig. 218). Executed on buff transparent paper, obviously traced over the official architects' draughted proposal, the drawing is carefully labelled: "réponse à lettre/de Gropius reçue le 22 octobre 54," signed and dated "24 octobre 54/Le Corbusier." He then mailed copies of his letter with an "ozalide du croquis" to each of the advisors,

mailed on 26 October.<sup>46</sup> In the northeast corner of the site, he roughs in a small, inwardly coiled bracelet-shaped pavilion whose opening or entry point gives onto a densely tangled landscaped garden, like an inner sanctum. In the accompanying thumbnail perspective of the pavilion, which is shielded by the convex sweeping arm of the Secretariat, he distinctly renders the curvature of the end walls (his notation reads: "ce mur courbe") textured by an incised plaster, concrete, or rubble finish. Within his accompanying letter, Corbusier explains the logic and justification for his scheme. Although he agreed with the location and technical section of the proposed oblong extension, he had found its configuration to be "une tare au milieu d'un ensemble devenu harmonieux" which deflated the impact of the perspectival view of the Secretariat. He sought, by contrast, a formal solution to unify the buildings, "un événement plastique cohérent et symphonique." He admitted that his coiled form seemed "un peu plus compliquée" and required further study, but he justified its diversity by arguing that its angles and curves accorded well with its surroundings.<sup>47</sup>

Corbusier's little pavilion, hinting at a new poetic language with which to instil an organic, expressive, and emotional content in architecture, bears no relationship to the rational functionalist four-storey square box, raised on stilts, now erected in the northeast garden. What the architect sought in the CCA study was realized in form only in his own idiosyncratic and spiritual commissions of the next two decades—the Chapel at Ronchamp with its miniature ziggurat monument to the dead, the Assembly Building at Chandigarh, and the Church of Saint-Pierre at Firminy—those lyrically curved and anthropomorphically sculpted buildings prefigured in the Swiss Hostel at the Cité Universitaire.

Despite the obsessive and detailed attention that Corbusier devoted to the UNESCO project, only vapid and faint traces of his architectural influence are visible in the executed work: perhaps in the rubble stone finish at the base of the Secretariat (though Breuer's American domestic work is reflected here too), perhaps in the shallow sunscreens on the south-facing elevations, and in the tapered pilotis.<sup>48</sup> But by the late 1950s these motifs

43 Callison to Gropius, 14 October 1954, FLC 13 (4) 148-49.

44 Gropius to Corbusier, 19 October 1954, FLC 13 (4) 150.

45 Gropius to Callison, 19 October 1954, FLC 13 (4) 152.

46 The postscript of Corbusier's letter to Callison states that "l'ozalide" is attached, thereby firmly securing the provenance of the CCA drawing. This is further confirmed by the note from Corbusier (signed in his absence by his secretary) to the advisors informing them that he sends along print copies of his proposal and his sketch, the origi-

nal of which had been mailed to Callison. Corbusier himself retained carbons of all the letters and an "ozalide" of the original sketch, now preserved at the Fondation; see Corbusier to Callison, 26 October 1954, FLC 13 (4) 197-98; Corbusier to Gropius, copied to Rogers, Costa, and Markelius, 26 October 1954, FLC 13 (4) 152.

47 Corbusier to Callison, FLC 13 (4) 197.

48 For a commentary and illustrations of the UNESCO Headquarters as built, see Françoise Choay, *UNESCO Headquarters in Paris* (London, 1958); also Cranston Jones, *Marcel*

had become commonplace in the repertoire of late Modern architecture, which by then Corbusier himself had repudiated. The Zehrfuss team approached their commission in ways that Corbusier no longer found spiritually satisfying. They parted ways. By 1955 a few meagre diary entries in his notebooks confirm that the only occasions on which he was consulted related to technical matters. Luther Evans, then Director General of UNESCO, and Zehrfuss inquired about construction costs of the Secretariat at Chandigarh in relationship to those in Paris.<sup>49</sup> His design ideas were shunned. Embittered letters to Gropius in 1956, and to Evans in 1958, reveal that over the years he had not been invited to participate in a single design session. In a plangent comment to Evans, he rued the fact that he had been reduced to taking an unaccompanied tour of the headquarters on his own initiative, only weeks before the inaugural ceremonies of 3 November.<sup>50</sup> If Cor-

*Breuer: Buildings and Projects 1921-1961* (New York, 1962), 78-97; Pier Luigi Nervi, *Aesthetics and Technology in Building* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 28-39, 50-53. The Francis Loeb Library at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University, holds an incomplete set of sepia print working drawings, mostly dated 31.5.54 and signed by R. Mouton, from the Breuer/Nervi/Zehrfuss office, Vertical Files, PN 5.671.6 A1-8. These drawings do not reflect the final scheme.

49 de Franclieu, *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks*, III, 784, 786, 789.

50 Corbusier to Gropius, 7 March 1956, FLC 13 (4) 160; Corbusier to Evans, 13 October 1958, FLC 13 (4) 195.

busier identified at all with the work, it was only by negative association, with his rejection as architect of the project:

L'UN sur l'Est River et l'UNESCO dans Paris seront américains. Ainsi croit-on en USA, mais toute cette morale équivoque retombera un jour sur le nez de ceux qui l'ont imposée au monde. Et le monde s'y est refusé et s'y refuse chaque jour de plus en plus.<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps this vision of poetic retribution or nemesis tempered his disappointment in missing out on what was to be his last opportunity to design a major public building in Paris, his adopted city. In 1936, with Auguste Perret in a competition to develop the Trocadero, he had lost his first chance to establish a building on axis with the Eiffel Tower and the Ecole Militaire. He was never to rival those great French monuments. The CCA drawing records his rather sorrowful defeat. However, its real value lies not so much in establishing the loss, as in refracting the debate between a group of second-generation Modernists and their early protagonist who had progressed to another, perhaps more powerful phase in his development. The drawing is an icon of Le Corbusier's dualistic loyalties: to the principles of CIAM and to his own evolution from a pioneer of Modernism to an advocate of expressive plasticity in architecture.

51 Corbusier to Gropius, 7 March 1956, FLC 13 (4) 160.

*Centre Canadien d'Architecture/  
Canadian Centre for Architecture  
1920, rue Baile  
Montréal, Québec H3H 2S6*

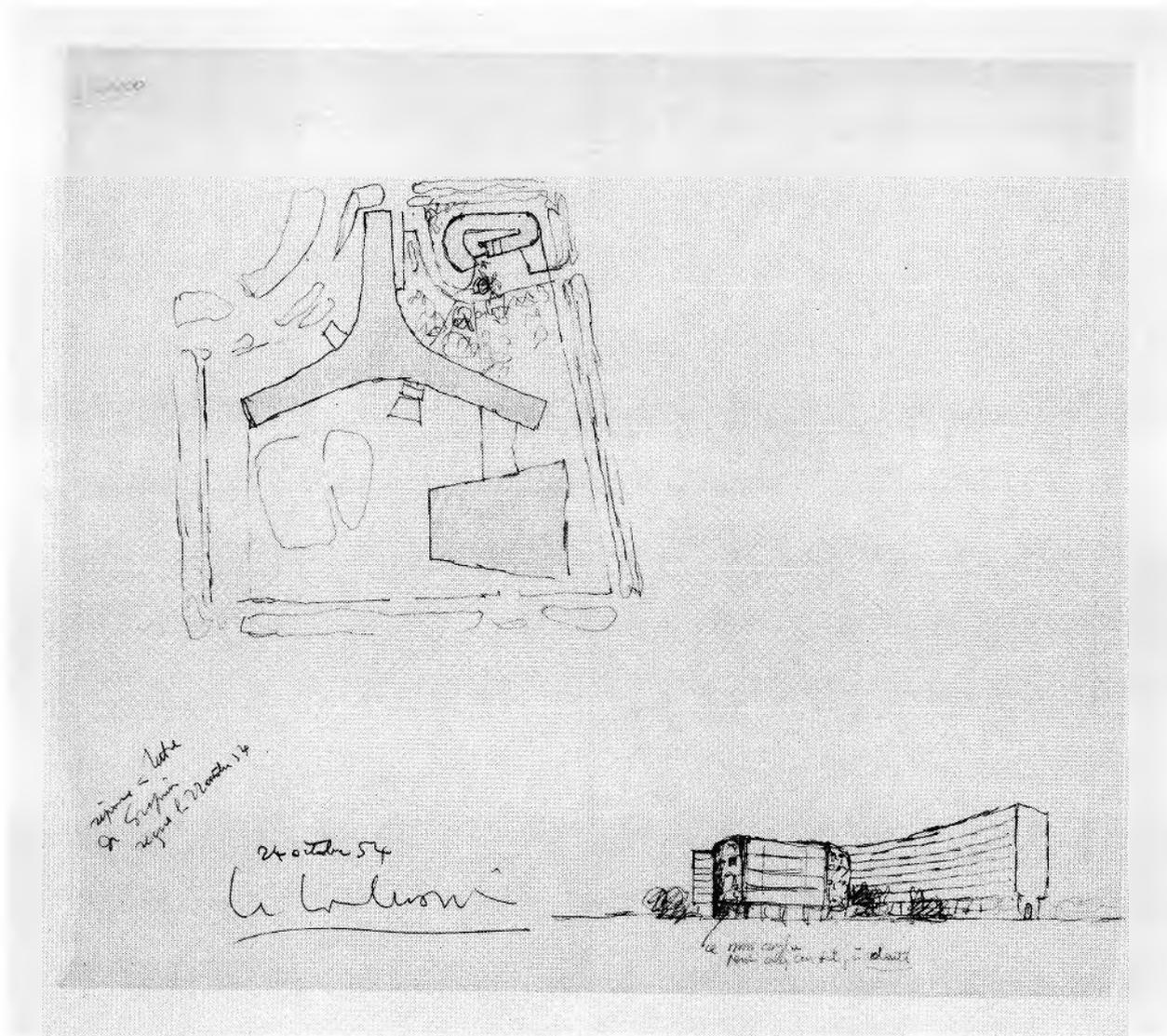


FIGURE 210. Le Corbusier, Switzerland, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Canton of Neuchâtel, 1887-Roquebrune, Cap Martin, France, 1965, *Alternative Proposal to Future Extension of UNESCO Headquarters, Place de Fontenoy*, pen and black India ink with graphite, 24 October 1954, 29 × 33 cm. DR1988:0425, Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal. © Le Corbusier 1989/Vis\*Art Droits d'auteur Inc.

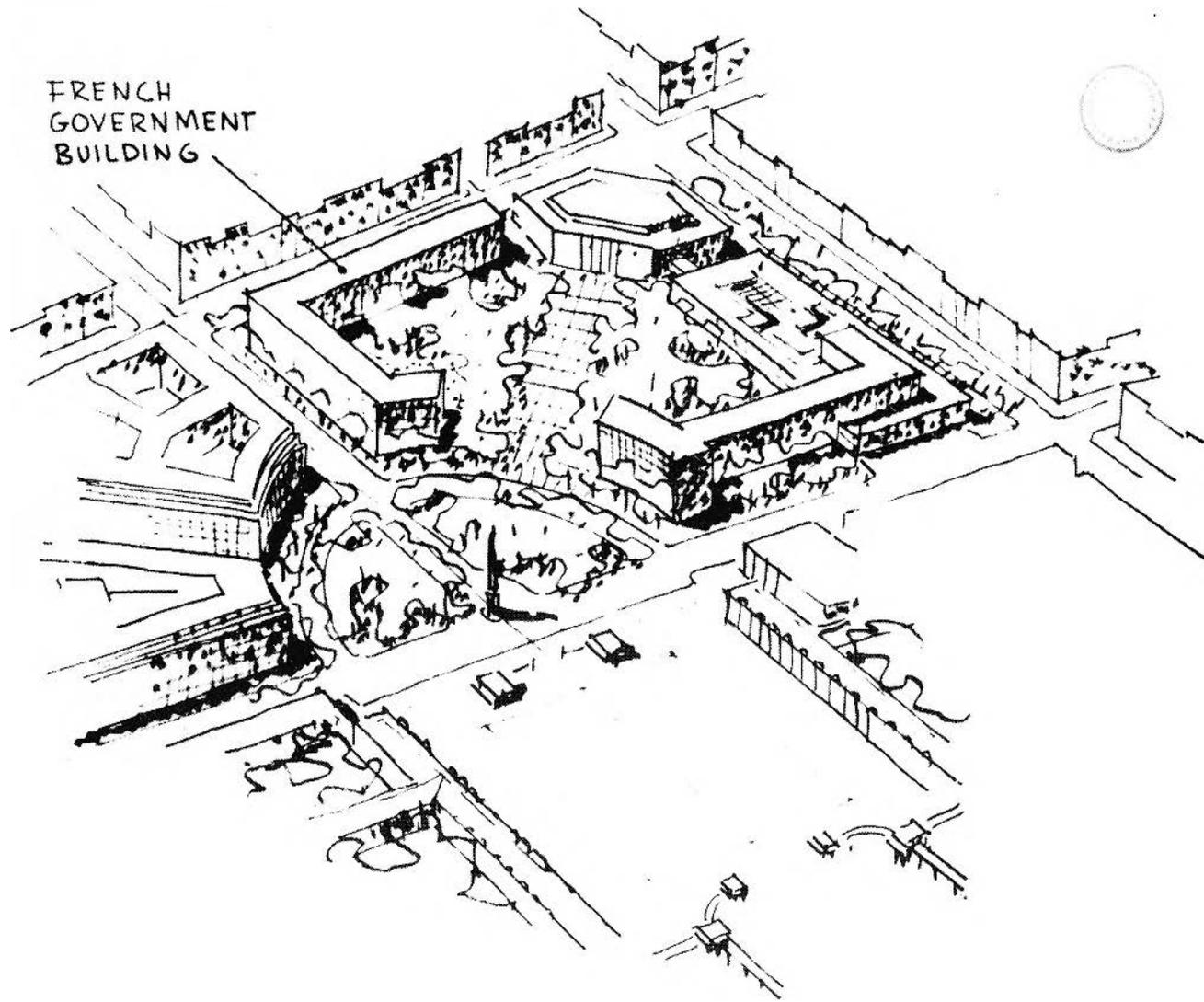


FIGURE 211. Unknown draughtsman, *Proposal 1, UNESCO Headquarters, Place de Fontenoy, Paris*, submitted by Beaudouin, Robertson, and Saarinen, black-line print, 16 April 1952, location and dimensions of original unknown. Photo: Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris: 13 (6) 29.

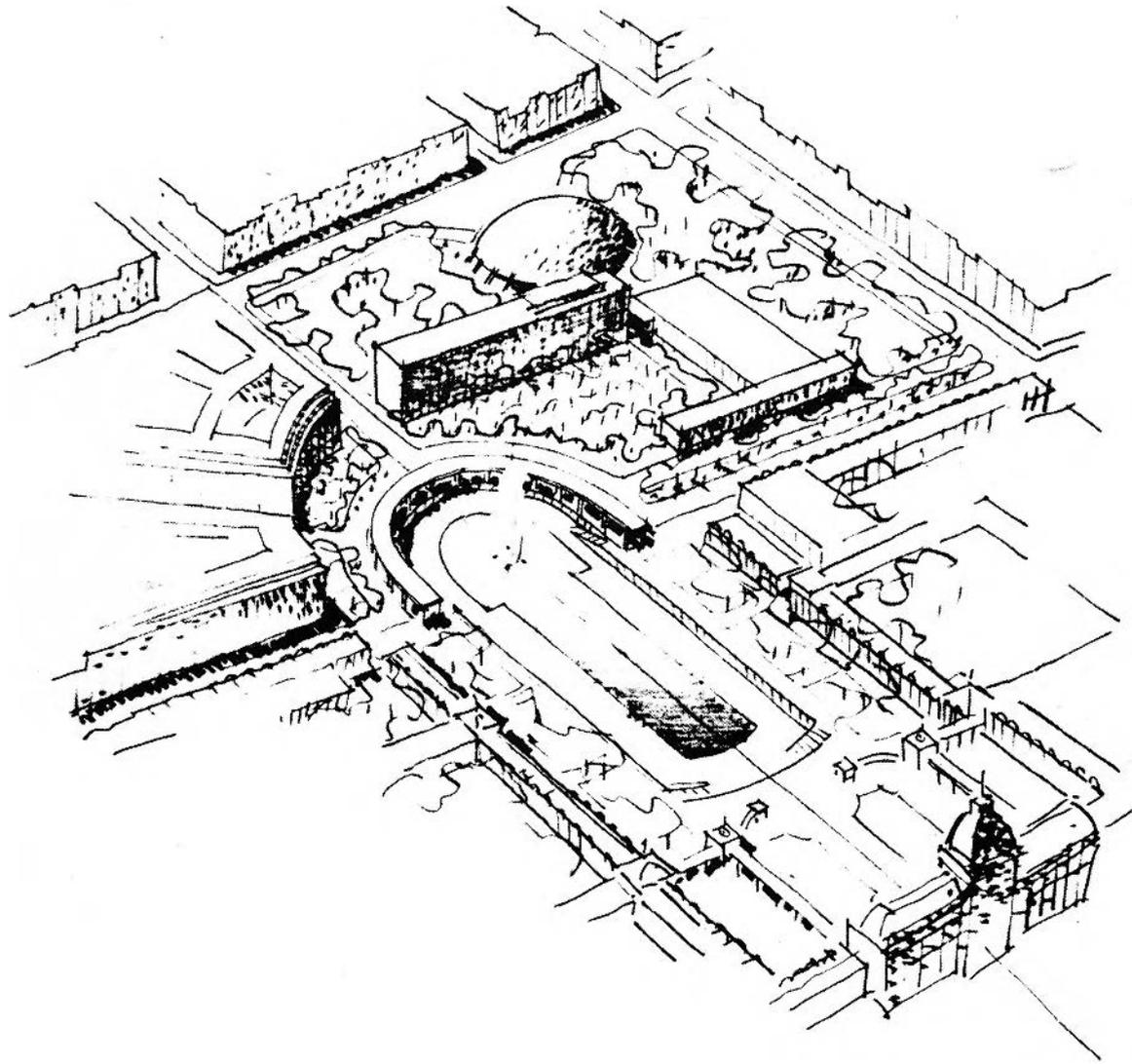


FIGURE 212. Unknown draughtsman, *Proposal II, UNESCO Headquarters, Place de Fontenoy, Paris*, submitted by Beaudouin, Robertson, and Saarinen, black-line print, 16 April 1952, location and dimensions of original unknown. Photo: Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris: 13 (6) 30.

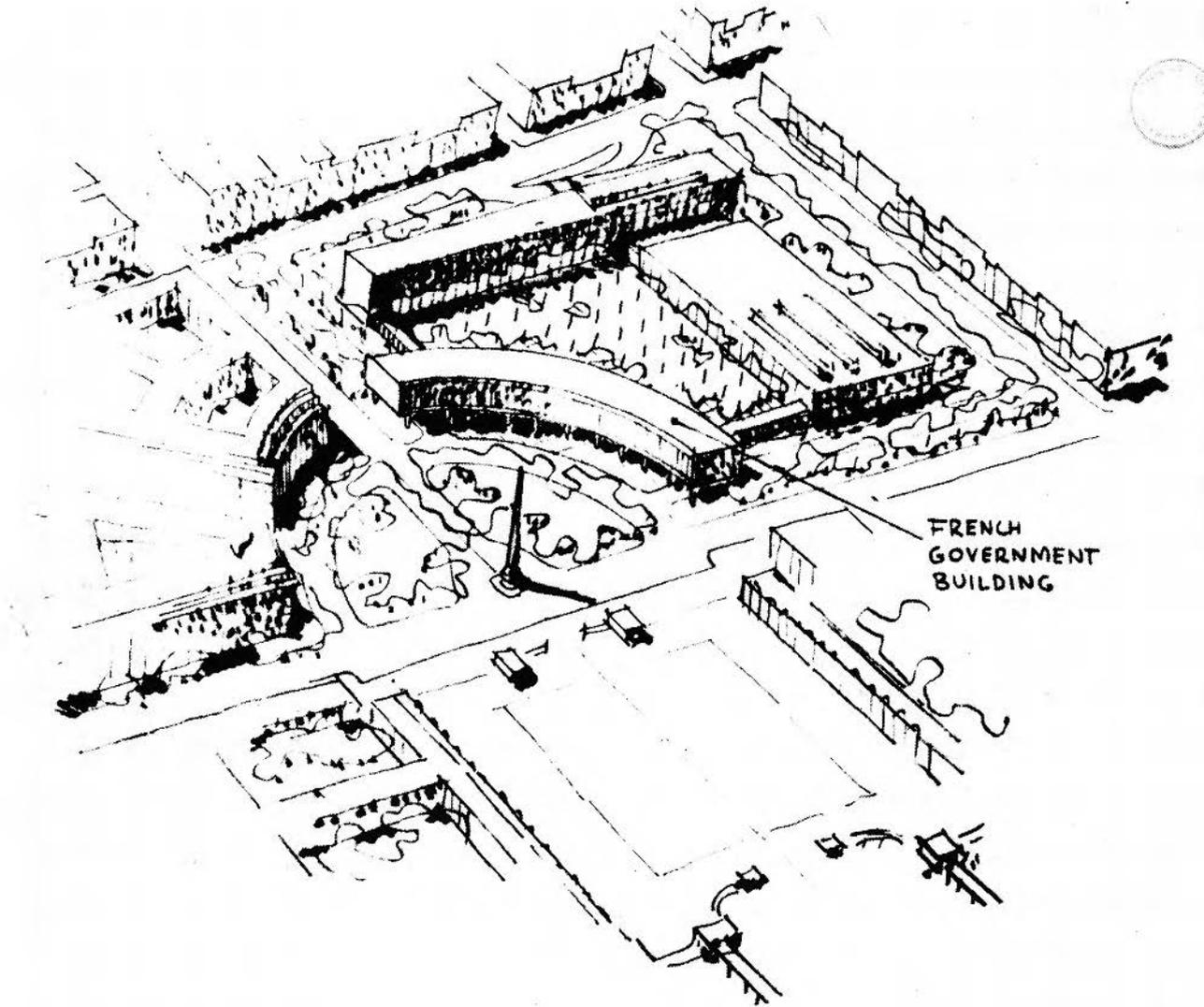


FIGURE 213. Unknown draughtsman, *Proposal III, UNESCO Headquarters, Place de Fontenoy, Paris*, submitted by Beaudouin, Robertson, and Saarinen, black-line print, 16 April 1952, location and dimensions of original unknown. Photo: Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris: 13 (6) 31.

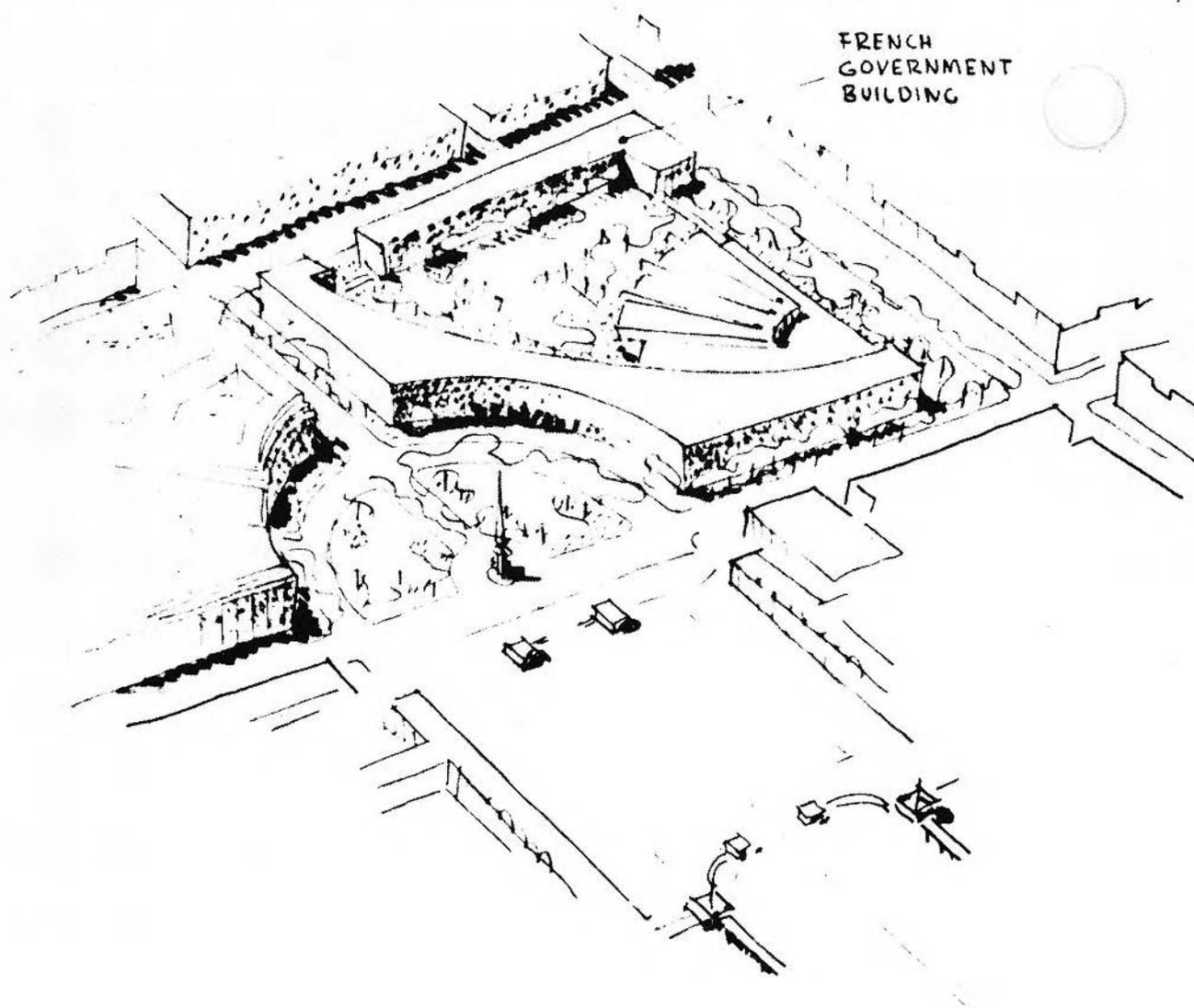


FIGURE 214. Unknown draughtsman, *Proposal IV, UNESCO Headquarters, Place de Fontenoy, Paris*, submitted by Beaudouin, Robertson, and Saarinen, black-line print, 16 April 1952, location and dimensions of original unknown. Photo: Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris: 13 (6) 32.

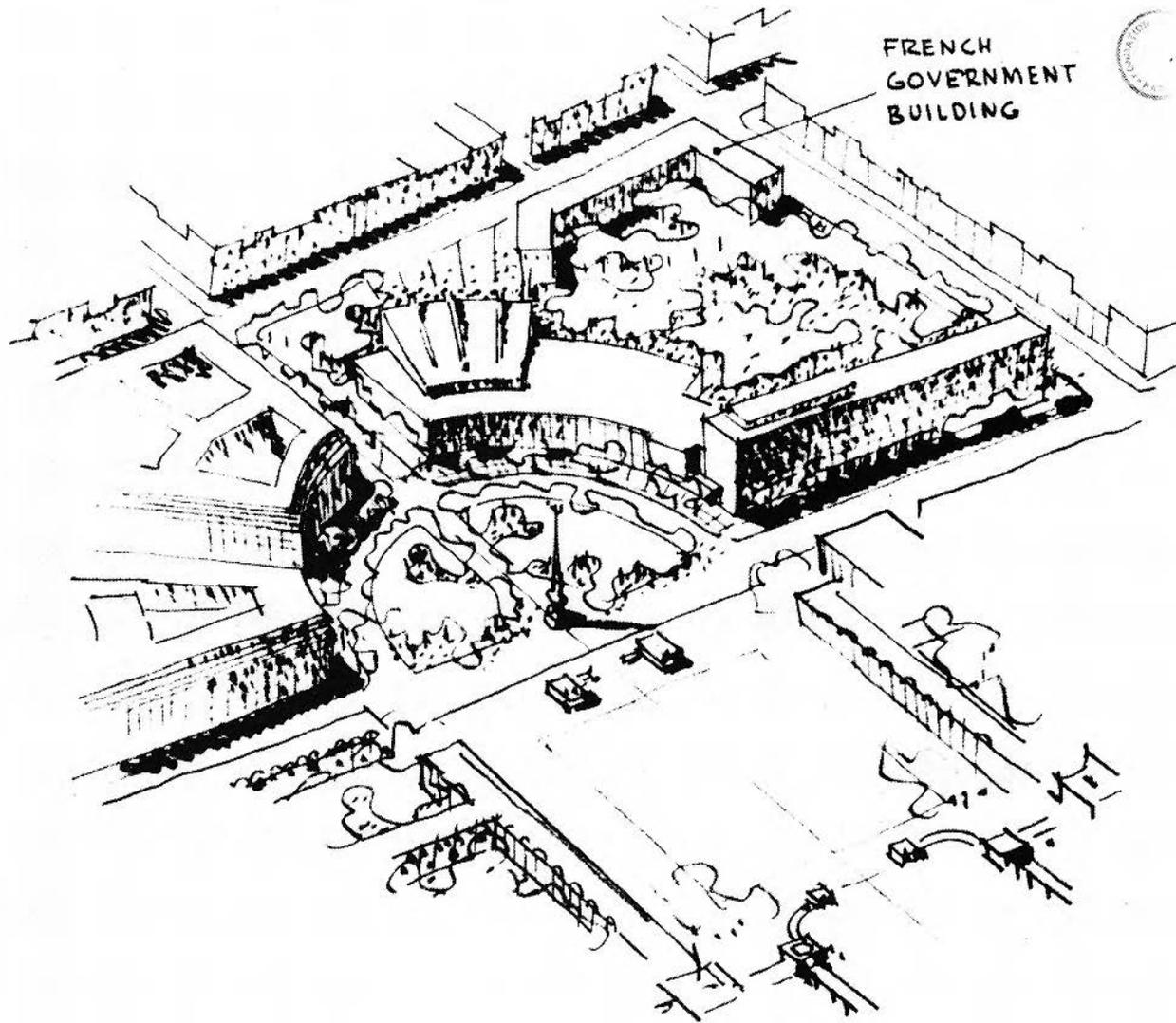


FIGURE 215. Unknown draughtsman, *Proposal v, UNESCO Headquarters, Place de Fontenoy, Paris*, submitted by Beaudouin, Robertson, and Saarinen, black-line print, 16 April 1952, location and dimensions of original unknown. Photo: Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris: 13 (6) 33.

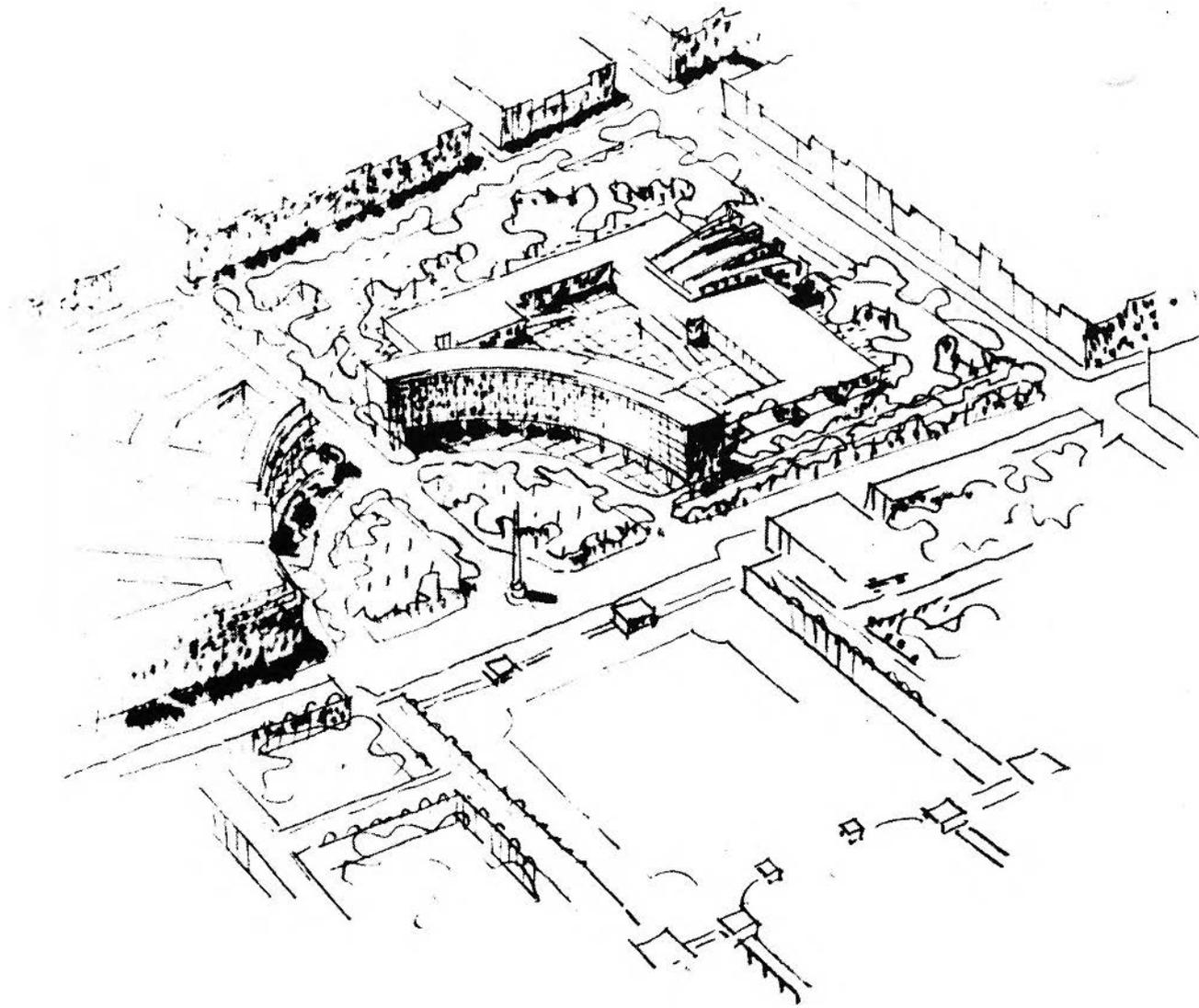


FIGURE 216. Unknown draughtsman, *Proposal VI, UNESCO Headquarters, Place de Fontenoy, Paris*, submitted by Beaudouin, Robertson, and Saarinen, black-line print, 16 April 1952, location and dimensions of original unknown. Photo: Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris: 13 (6) 34.

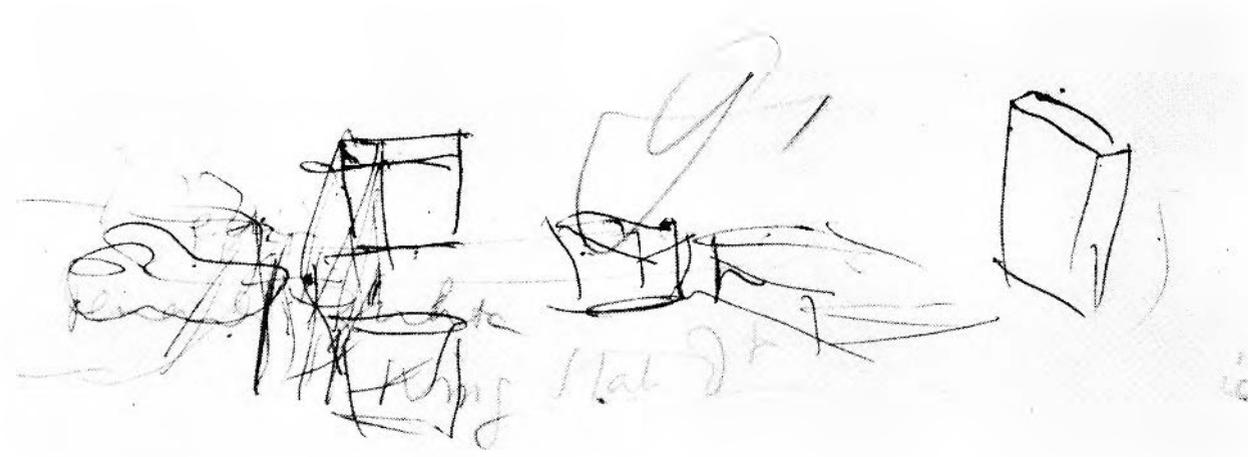


FIGURE 217. Le Corbusier, Switzerland, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Canton of Neuchâtel, 1887-Roquebrune, Cap Martin, France, 1965, *Study of Building Masses and their Placement, UNESCO Headquarters, Portes Maillot and Dauphine*, black ballpoint pen over graphite, detail, 1952. Photo: Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris: 13 (6) 105. © Le Corbusier 1989/Vis\*Art Droits d'auteur Inc.

17-18 Septembre 52

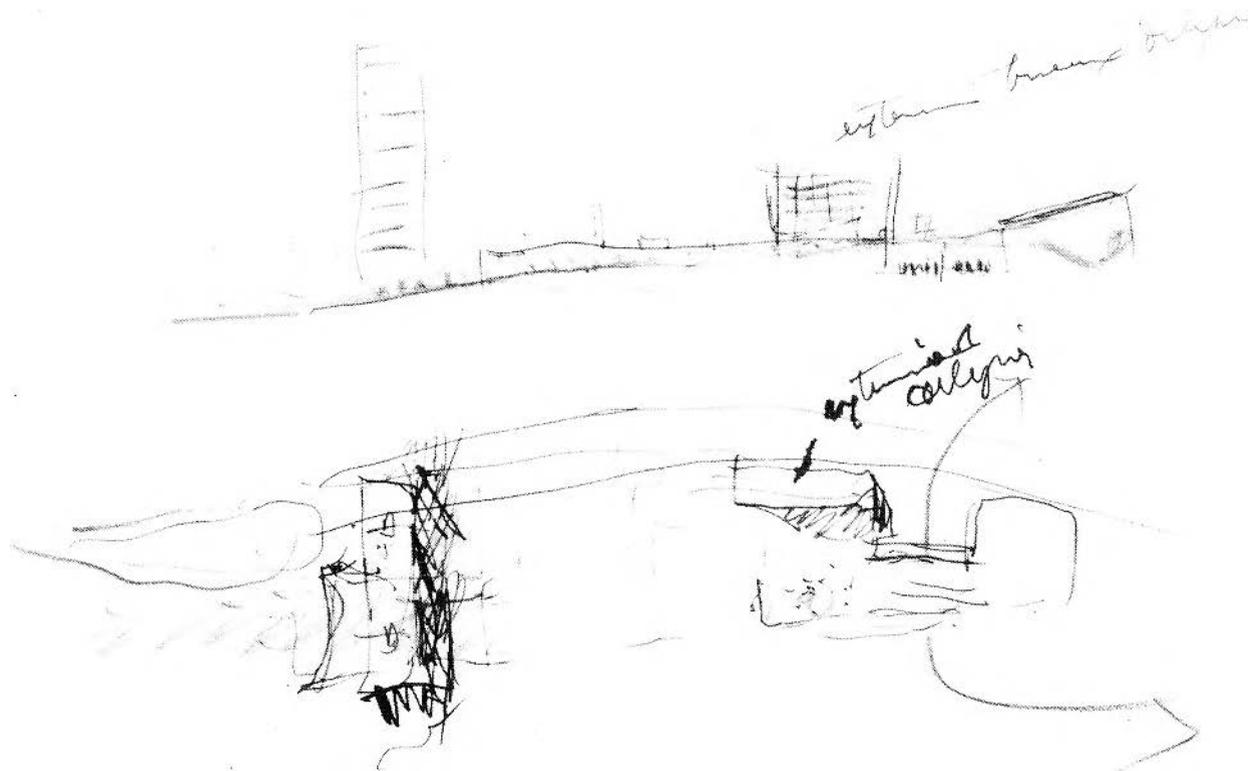


FIGURE 218. Le Corbusier, Switzerland, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Canton of Neuchâtel, 1887-Roquebrune, Cap Martin, France, 1965, *Study of Sectional-Elevation and Plan, UNESCO Headquarters, Portes Maillot and Dauphine*, coloured pencils and black India ink, 17-18 September 1952, 17 × 22,5 cm. Photo: Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris: 13 (6) 147. © Le Corbusier 1989/Vis\*Art Droits d'auteur Inc.

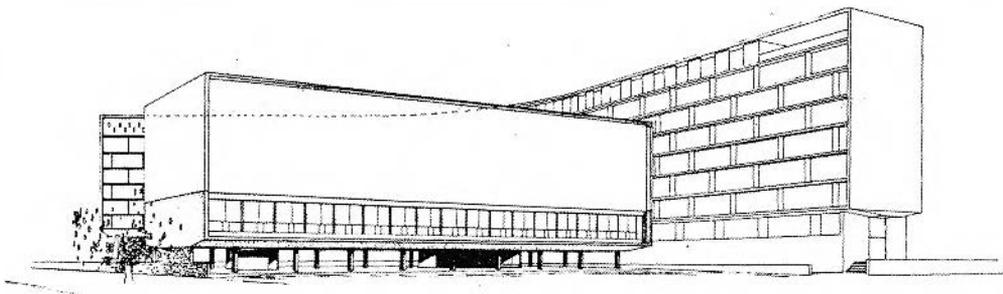
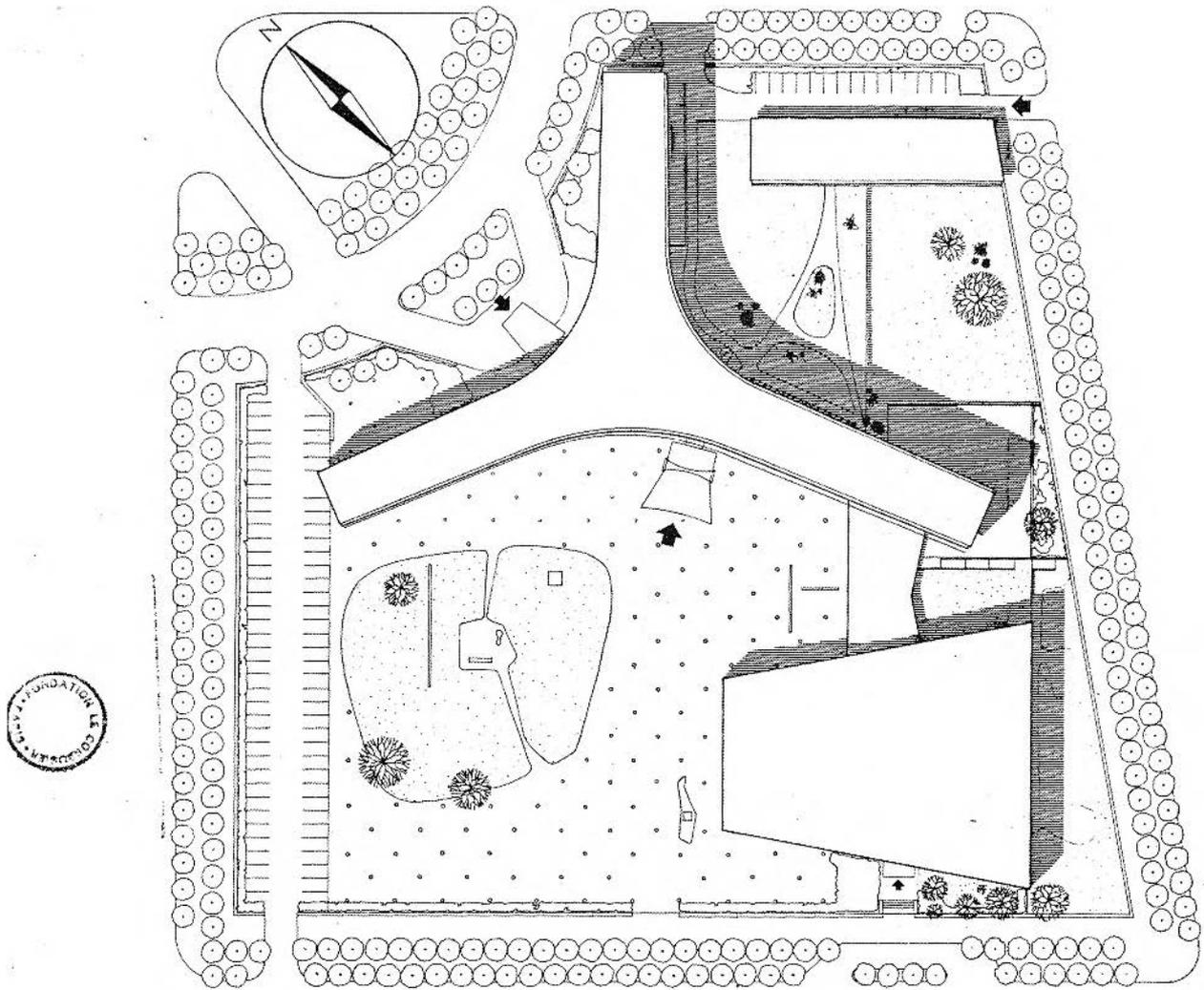


FIGURE 219. Unknown draughtsman, *Future Extension of UNESCO Headquarters, Place de Fontenoy*, detail, designed by Breuer, Nervi, and Zehruss, black-line print, detail, fall 1954, location and dimensions of original unknown. Photo: Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris: 13 (6) 149.