

# Through the Lens of Sigfried Giedion.

Exploring Modernism and the Greek Vernacular *in situ*<sup>1</sup>

**Matina Kousidi**

Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Architektur gta - Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich

## Abstract

Focusing on Sigfried Giedion's initial visit to Greece, in the scope of CIAM IV, this study explores his approach to the myth of the Mediterranean as a germ of Western modernist architecture. Through a closer look at Giedion's photographic and literary lenses, it mainly considers his appreciation of early manifestations of modernity in the extended area of Athens, namely the Villa Fakidis (1932-1933) and Kalisperi Primary School (1931). Their apposition to the ancient and vernacular Greek architecture generates a dynamic discourse between areas and eras, while serving as a pivotal catalyst for the discussion of contextualization, immutability and identity – areas that are also comprised by the Modern Movement. This article thus discusses Giedion's reflection on a reciprocal relationship between Greece and the Western world, at a time when the former was striving to define its architectural identity.

## Contents

Introduction

Anticipating a new era: Indirect introductions to Greece

The past in the present: Exploring Greece in the early 1930s

Towards a reciprocal relationship: The Greek vernacular and modernity

## Introduction

[1] The arrival of the steamboat *Patris II* in Athens on 1 August 1933, carrying aboard the delegates of the fourth meeting of the *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM IV),<sup>2</sup> survives as an alluring point on the map of

---

<sup>1</sup> This article is a revised and extended version of the paper "Through the lens of Sigfried Giedion: CIAM IV and the stay in Greece" presented at the international conference *Southern Modernisms: Critical Stances Through Regional Appropriations*, ESAP, Oporto, 19-21 February 2015.

<sup>2</sup> CIAM was founded in June 1928 at the *Château de La Sarraz*, Switzerland by preeminent architects of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Le Corbusier, Karl Moser (first director) and

modern architectural history. Not only did CIAM IV serve as a foundation for the formulation of *La Charte d'Athènes*, but it also brought a selected group of architects, men of letters, artists and poets together on board, pursuing the definition of the "organic city". Part of the allure surrounding the steamboat's entry to the port of Piraeus, however, which symbolized the inauguration of the main phase of the meeting in Athens, could also be attributed to the persistent absence of a comprehensive description and explanation of the convention's content – an absence that pertains to the fact that aboard *Patris II* was Sigfried Giedion, about to encounter Greece for the first time.

[2] As the writer of the influential *Bauen in Frankreich, Bauen in Eisen, Bauen in Eisenbeton* (1928) and *Befreites Wohnen* (1929), Giedion was a crucial figure for the establishment and articulation of CIAM. On the one hand, he had served as a principal organizer of the Congress' initial meeting in Zürich in 1928, following the invitation of Madame Héléne de Mandrot.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, he was CIAM's general secretary from 1928 to 1956, and from this position his involvement in the organization of the fourth meeting of the Congress, prior to his visit to Greece, was decisive. The abrupt cancellation of the original plans to hold the meeting in Moscow had called for an immediate response after all, and the meeting was about to be held, at short notice, on board the steamship *Patris II* en route from Marseilles to Athens and return. "Through the help of friends", Giedion would recall nearly a decade later, "this Greek steamer was placed at our disposal, and we hoped that the quiet Mediterranean would afford us three weeks of concentrated work. Indeed it turned out to be the most inspired of all congresses".<sup>4</sup>

---

Sigfried Giedion (first secretary), and was committed to exploring, defining and disseminating the principles of modernist architecture. CIAM IV took place in the period between 29 July and 14 August 1933 on board the steamboat *Patris II* and the core of its events was held in the city of Athens, Greece. Of the vast bibliography on the CIAM, I cite here a few particularly relevant publications. On the various CIAM approaches to urbanism: Josep Lluís Sert, *Can Our Cities Survive?*, Cambridge, Mass. 1942; on the evolution of CIAM's meetings and their proposals regarding urban environment: Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960*, Cambridge, Mass. 2000; idem, *Defining Urban Design*, New Haven 2009; on the cartographic urban analysis of CIAM IV: Evelien van Es, *Atlas of the Functional City*, Zürich 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Madame Héléne de Mandrot was an avid promoter of the Modern Movement, co-founder of the *Société du Musée romand au Château de La Sarraz* in 1911, but also an artist, mainly active in Paris, and an art collector. She convoked the first meeting of CIAM at the *Château* in 1928. See: Antoine Baudin, "Héléne de Mandrot," in: *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz* [25 August 2008], <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/f/F27743.php> (accessed 25 June 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Sigfried Giedion, "Introduction," in: *Can Our Cities Survive? An ABC of Urban Problems, their Analysis, their Solutions*, ed. Josep Lluís Sert, Cambridge, Mass. 1942, ix-xi, here x.

[3] In the present article, I explore the reasons for CIAM IV's supremacy in terms of inspiration, expanding my field of inquiry beyond the contextual territory of the Congress' meeting and across the "quiet Mediterranean" region of Greece. If CIAM IV was able to lay down the principles of the modern urban development and to greatly influence the authorities,<sup>5</sup> I will attempt to elucidate the influence the trip to Greece had on the Swiss art historian, who was then standing on the threshold between the *Befreites Wohnen* (1929) and his magnum opus *Space, Time and Architecture. The Growth of a New Tradition* (1941). Restricting my inquiry to Giedion's appreciations of Greek architecture in the time of the alluring CIAM IV, drawing upon both his mediated and unmediated experiences, I will thus argue that his engagement with the Greek world had served as a multifaceted source of inspiration. In doing so, I will delve into his encounter with and subsequent evaluation of the Mediterranean *other* regarding the relation of architecture to sociocultural, temporal or regional surroundings, and I will discuss his reflection on the Mediterranean myth as a germ of the modern époque.

[4] The research focus of this study is hence twofold. First, it draws on rare photographs from Sigfried Giedion's initial visit to Greece, kept in his private archives, deploying visual material as enhancements of his literary critique of Greek architecture. Beyond their function as memorabilia, as touristic frames from a territorial *other*, the photographs are considered here a privileged critical tool – a tool that enhances, influences and, at times, substitutes his scholarly critique. Second, it interweaves visual analysis with a reading of Giedion's selected written material, including his correspondence from the time around the fourth meeting of the Congress, his articles deriving from his visit to Greece, mainly the 1934 *Pallas Athéné ou le Visage de la Grèce* and the 1949 *CIAM at Sea*, as well as the lectures he held in Greece at the time of CIAM IV and the years after. The selected *corpus* of Giedion's written work incorporates views on Greek architecture by modernist Greek or international architects, so as to diversify the article's analytical scope. In citing Moholy-Nagy, for instance, Giedion emphasized "how directly the Greek world speaks to us – though in a very different sense to what the 19<sup>th</sup> century understood by this";<sup>6</sup> what is at stake in what follows is tracing different manifestations of this voice through Giedion's gaze and pen.

### Anticipating a new era: Indirect introductions to Greece

[5] On occasion of the selection of Athens as the host city of CIAM IV, Giedion would acquire, for the first time, unmediated impressions of Greek architecture. In continuation with the renewed interest of modernist architects in the country, as their trips in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century reveal, the disembarkation of the CIAM

---

<sup>5</sup> Sigfried Giedion, "CIAM – Ein Jahrzehnt Moderner Architektur," in: *Architektur und Wohnform* 63 (4) (1955), 25-33, here 28.

<sup>6</sup> Sigfried Giedion, "CIAM at Sea," in: *Architect's Year Book* 3 (1949), 36-39, here 37.

delegates at the main port of Athens would be part of a wider context of exploration into this Southern Mediterranean region. Approximately one year prior to the fourth meeting of the Congress, in November 1932, the article *Notizen von einer Reise in Griechenland* by Heinrich Lauterbach was released, following Erich Mendelsohn's memoirs from his 1931 trip to the country,<sup>7</sup> published in the same year in the *Berliner Tageblatt*. 1932 was also the year when Bernard Rudofsky defended his thesis *Eine primitive Betonbauweise auf den südlichen Kykladen, nebst dem Versuch einer Datierung derselben* at the Technische Hochschule of Vienna, following his extensive stay on the island of Santorini in 1929.

[6] For the aforementioned architects, as well as for several CIAM members, such as Le Corbusier and Fred Forbát, Greece was a familiar destination because of their trips to the country preceding the Congress. For Giedion, however, Greece remained an undiscovered territory. "Modern Greece is still unknown ground for us", he claimed in his lecture *L'État Actuel de l'Architecture Contemporaine* during the official opening of CIAM IV on 2 August 1933.<sup>8</sup> "We note the existence of many good intentions, many problems to be solved and we do not doubt that it is possible for a solution to be found on these magnificent grounds", Giedion pointed out, referring to a place "where a timeless tradition demands to be restored in the modern sense".<sup>9</sup>

Prior to his physical arrival to the country, and his introductory speech at Hotel Cecil, however, sundry personages had introduced Greece to Giedion. In their majority, these personages also served a crucial role in the organization process of the fourth meeting of the Congress, following Giedion's attentive orchestration. For instance, Christian Zervos<sup>10</sup> - founder and director of the

---

<sup>7</sup> See more on Erich Mendelsohn and his initial visit to Greece in: Ita Heinze-Greenberg, "Erich Mendelsohn's Mediterranean Longings," in: *Modern Architecture and the Mediterranean*, eds. Jean Francois Lejeune and Michelangelo Sabatino, London 2010, 175-192.

<sup>8</sup> Sigfried Giedion, "L'état actuel de l'architecture contemporaine," in: *Annales Techniques: Organe Officiel de la Technique de Grèce* 44-45-46 (1933), 1137-1140, here 1140.

<sup>9</sup> Giedion, "L'état actuel de l'architecture contemporaine," 1140.

<sup>10</sup> Christian Zervos was the Greek-born director of the *Cahiers d'Art* journal between 1926 and 1960 and had participated in the CIAM IV aboard *Patris II*. He included three articles on Greek architecture in the 1934 annual volume of the journal that followed CIAM IV, namely: "Les maisons de l'Archipel Grec" (P. Djelepy), "Pallas Athéné ou le visage de la Grèce" (S. Giedion), and "Architectures grecques d'aujourd'hui" (P. Karantinós). Yet, the volume did not include a direct mention of the meeting of the Congress. Except for the elaborate description of the fourth meeting of the Congress in the November 1933 issue of the *Annales Techniques* journal, key publications such as Sert's 1941 edited volume *Can Our Cities Survive?* and Le Corbusier's 1942 treatise *La Charte d'Athènes* appeared nearly a decade after the meeting.

*Cahiers d'Art* journal – had been keen on showing the houses of Santorini island to Giedion since February 1931.<sup>11</sup> Giedion's relationship with Zervos – ongoing at the time of CIAM IV<sup>12</sup> – could have triggered the former's interest in this Southern Mediterranean territory. Zervos' links<sup>13</sup> to the Parisian branch of the navigation company Neptos, owner of steamboat *Patris II*, had facilitated Marcel Breuer's suggestion, in response to the Moscow plans' cancellation, that the Congress "should be held on board a ship instead of on land",<sup>14</sup> so as to enable the development of an intimate interaction among the delegates.

[7] In addition, Giedion's emissary, Fred Forbát, had arrived in Greece five months before the beginning of CIAM IV, at the end of February 1933, and reported to Giedion on a monthly basis. Writing mainly from the residence of architect Gustav Eglau on 11 Dimokritou street, in the heart of the city of Athens, Forbát communicated to Giedion his impressions of Greek architecture and its representatives, of the progress of the Greek CIAM group formation,<sup>15</sup> as well as of the preparatory arrangements of the Congress. Forbát's outlook on the Greek roots of modernist architecture was obviously the introduction to what Giedion would encounter a few months later himself, during his own *vis-à-vis* with Greece. "There are still some very good architects, who work more or less in our sense", Forbát had mentioned in his correspondence, referring to Dimitris Pikionis, Emannouel Kriezis and the young Ioannis Despotopoulos<sup>16</sup> – who was a

---

<sup>11</sup> In January 1928, Christian Zervos was searching for a contributor to cover the field of modern architecture and Giedion appeared able to "operate the synthesis between the bold promises of Le Corbusier in Paris, the realisations of Gropius at Dessau and of Mies van der Rohe at *Weißenhof Siedlung*". The bond between the two men was terminated at the end of 1934. See: Christian Derouet, "Sigfried Giedion: La 'Page d'Architecture' des *Cahiers d'Art*, 1928-34," in: *Les Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne* 82 (2002-2003), 42-65, here 44.

<sup>12</sup> The first traceable correspondence between Giedion and Zervos dates back to January 1928. In that period Zervos was seeking to expand his journal across more artistic disciplines and was planning a German language edition, as well. See: Daniel Weiss, "'Mit der Redaktion ist beauftragt: S. Giedion, Zürich.' Die Architekturseiten der *Cahiers d'Art* und die CIAM-Beilagen der *Bauwelt*," in: *Sigfried Giedion und die Fotografie: Bildinszenierungen der Moderne*, eds. Werner Oechslin and Gregor Harbusch, Zürich 2010, 38-57, here 38.

<sup>13</sup> It was Christian Zervos's brother, Stamos, one of the friends through whom the Greek steamboat was placed at the disposal of the delegates. See: Helen Fessas-Emmanouil, "Greece: The History Behind the Myth," in: *Atlas of the Functional City: CIAM 4 and Comparative Urban Analysis*, eds. Evelien van Es et al., Bussum 2014, 208-222, here 209.

<sup>14</sup> Giedion, "CIAM at Sea," 36.

<sup>15</sup> Fred Forbát, Letter to Sigfried Giedion, 05 April 1933, gta Archives/ETH Zürich, CIAM.

<sup>16</sup> In chapter VII of Fred Forbát's memoirs, entitled *Eine Griechenlandreise/Athene*, the Hungarian-born architect expands on his acquaintances during his stay in Greece. Alfréd (Fred) Forbát, memoirs, Swedish Museum of Architecture, Stockholm.

former employee of Erich Mendelsohn, had links to the Bauhaus School and would soon construct "a very beautiful public sanatorium".<sup>17</sup>

[8] The quest for universality – an inherent objective of the Modern Movement – emanates from Forbát's memoirs and his correspondence from Greece, as he discusses Greek architects that appeared already to have absorbed West European modernist principles in their work. It is ergo no coincidence that through the pages of Forbát's memoirs the residential buildings of Alexandros Dragoumis, the houses influenced by the cubic Greek island architecture of Dimitris Pikionis and the great university section of Emmanuel Kriezis come to light. Through his emissary, Giedion would acquire valuable insights into Greek architecture and especially into the contemporary modernist architectural highlights of Athens.

[9] In contrast to the CIAM IV discourse, the urban structure of Athens in those days did not meet the requirements of a functional city. As in no other field than urban planning "could the lack of a creativity capable of knowledge, feeling and will to fight the forces of evil be more evident",<sup>18</sup> the city of Athens was the recipient of fierce criticism from both Greek and international architects. Besides Dimitris Pikionis, who identified the "forces of evil" with the violation of all principles as regards urban development, Stamo Papadaki – the head of the Greek CIAM group – had similarly admitted an apparent lack of planning, which surpassed the field of urbanism. "(In Athens) all kinds of constructions are performed without architecture",<sup>19</sup> Papadaki had stressed, raising awareness to the crucial need for an active, coordinated response from both architects and urban planners. In turn, Erich Mendelsohn had noted that the rapid growth of the city of Athens was neglecting the fact that planning was a crucial factor for efficiency and seemed to "run into a vacuum on all sides", in aiming to adapt to modern social needs and "replace the neo-classicism of its tired mid-19<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Forbát is probably referring to the Sotiria Sanatorium (1932-1935), and not to the sanatorium built in Tripolis, Greece, which chronologically followed CIAM IV (1936-1940). Fred Forbát, Letter to Sigfried Giedion, 05 April 1933, gta Archives/ETH Zürich, CIAM.

<sup>18</sup> Dimitris Pikionis, "À propos d'un congrès," in: *Annales Techniques: Organe Officiel de la Technique de Grèce* 39 (1933), 795-796, here 795.

<sup>19</sup> Approximately two years before the CIAM IV congress, Papadaki wrote to Giedion and requested "a service to our section", due to the obscurity that accompanied the Congress's agenda in Greece. In particular, he asked for Giedion's written memorandum, which he could later translate and publish in key technical journals of the time. Papadaki, letter to Giedion, 04 May 1932, gta Archives/ETH Zürich, CIAM.

century".<sup>20</sup> At the time of the Congress, Athens was indeed fervently striving to define its architectural identity.

[10] In his speech during the official opening of CIAM IV, Giedion would situate Greece in the wider network of Mediterranean countries, including Spain, Italy and Algeria, which had been "asleep" during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and only "followed the results verified with the North".<sup>21</sup> Contrary to the unfavorable observations about the city of Athens, he would express his confidence in the resolution of the spatial and urban issues in Greece, stressing that "without doubt a new life begins".<sup>22</sup> Does Giedion base his belief on his mediated impressions of the Greek modernist architecture? And does he perhaps acknowledge here the long tradition of Greece – the myth of the Mediterranean – and its contribution to the establishment of the new epoch? Embracing the hypothesis that modernity alludes to the "experience of the new and the hope for emancipation",<sup>23</sup> the buildings of the architects of "The Thirties Generation" in Greece may be regarded as a germ of modern understanding and, in anticipation of a new era, they conveyed a similar vision.

### The past in the present: Exploring Greece in the early 1930s

[11] In the black and white photographs from the first visit of Sigfried Giedion to Greece, his points of interest during the trip have been meticulously documented while the contrast between ancient and modern, vernacular and occidental, light and shadow is being brought to surface.<sup>24</sup> During the delegates' tour of the Acropolis, Giedion would capture the rear façade of the Erechtheion Temple, focusing on the two Caryatids in the background that emerge through the shadow (Fig. 1).

---

<sup>20</sup> Erich Mendelsohn records his impressions of the Athenian urban structure, acquired during his visit to Greece in 1930, and notably deploys the term "organic" when he describes the urban development that ran into "an unplanned space, the filling up of which can at best lead to partial solutions but never to the organic growth of a great city". See: Oskar Beyer, ed., *Eric Mendelsohn: Letters of an Architect*, London 1967, 114.

<sup>21</sup> Giedion, "L'état actuel de l'architecture contemporaine," 1140.

<sup>22</sup> Giedion, "L'état actuel de l'architecture contemporaine," 1140.

<sup>23</sup> Hilde Heynen reflects on the understanding of modernity in a broader sense by posing the questions: "What if we understand it to be – as Marshall Berman would have it – about the experience of the new and the hope for emancipation? What if we were not to see modernity as something that emanates from the West and slowly radiates to the other parts of the world, but rather as a set of hopes and dreams that can be appropriated in many ways and that give rise to multiple variants?" See: Hilde Heynen, "The Most Modern Material of Them All ...," in: *Forty Ways to Think about Architecture*, eds. Iain Borden et al., London 2014, 95-99, here 95.

<sup>24</sup> The pictures located at the Sigfried Giedion private archives at gta Archives/ETH Zürich are attributed to their collector, though taking into account the possibility that they had not been, in their entirety, shot by him.



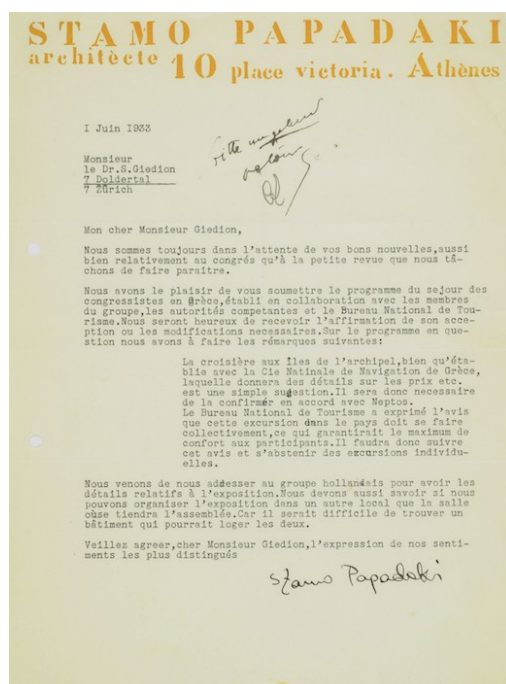
1 Sigfried Giedion, *Erechtheion Temple, Acropolis*, August 1933, photograph. (gta Archives/ETH Zürich, CIAM)

[12] During the Aegean sea cruise<sup>25</sup> (Fig. 2), he would take photographs of the manifestations of anonymous architecture and its relation to the landscape, the locals and his co-travellers among them. In the body of the aforementioned visual record, however, pictures from the early modernist architectural output of the city of Athens are also found. They are, however, limited to three frames that correspond to the Villa Fakidis in Glyfada (Stamo Papadaki, 1932-1933) and to the Kalisperi and Charokopou (Fig. 3) Primary Schools in the proximity of the Acropolis (Patroklos Karantinos, 1931) and in Kallithea (Karantinos, 1930), respectively.

---

<sup>25</sup> The exact route of the former English coal ship, rented with Papadaki's help for the Aegean cruise, remains obscure. Eric Mumford, based on information provided by Isaac Saporta, notes that the schedule prepared by the Greek group listed the places to be visited as Hydra, Milos, Santorini, Naxos, Paros, Delos, Sounion, Monemvasia and Mykonos. Giedion would yet refer to Aegina, Poros, Santorini and Cape Sounion as the selected stops of the trip, but in his archive photographs from Seriphos and Ios islands also feature. See: Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism*, 84. As the letter of Stamo Papadakis to Sigfried Giedion indicates, the cruise to the islands of the Greek archipelago had been envisaged to "guarantee the maximum of comfort to its participants". Stamo Papadakis, Letter to Sigfried Giedion, 01 June 1933, gta Archives/ETH Zürich, CIAM (my translation).





2 Stamo Papadaki, *Letter to Sigfried Giedion*, June 1933, (gta Archives/ETH Zürich, CIAM)



3 Sigfried Giedion, *Patroklos Karantinos - Charokopou School, Kallithea*, August 1933, photograph. (gta Archives/ETH Zürich, Sigfried Giedion)

[13] More precisely, construction works at the Villa Fakidis in the Southern suburb of Athens, Glyfada, designed and recently concluded by Stamo Papadaki, featured a combination of morphological expressions that testified to the highly innovative structural possibilities of reinforced concrete. It was these forms that Fred Forbát had described as "radical" in his memoirs, after expressing his consent to the building's aesthetic qualities. The unadorned volume of the building was coated in white plaster representing an "exquisite formalist

exercise"<sup>26</sup> that expressed the "vigor with which Athens adopted the housing and architectural model of Modernism".<sup>27</sup> Here, the terrace "has become the main element of the house"<sup>28</sup> from which one could take pleasure in the ample view of the Saronic Gulf and the proximal islands, due to its seaside location.

[14] In contrast to the pictures shot by other CIAM delegates, such as Carl Hubacher,<sup>29</sup> which framed close-ups of the visit to the building (Fig. 4) – the human wanderings on the rooftop, the painters applying the last brush of color and the juxtaposition of the flat roof to the longitudinal line of the horizon (Fig. 5) –, Giedion captures the house in its entirety (Fig. 6). He situates the white single-detached volume of the house in the middle of the visual composition against the backdrop of the sea, between a neighboring building, on the left, and the crumbly surface of a mud road that leads to the water, on the right. Notably, he captures the Poseidon Temple at Cape Sounion in the same way (Fig. 7). Overlooking the hill and the sea, the temple has been centered in the visual frame and can be appreciated by the beholder as a whole. Yet could this visual analogy be regarded as a foundation of a deeper association?



---

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Tzonis and Alcestis P. Rodi, *Greece*, London 2013, 104.

<sup>27</sup> Nikos Vatopoulos, *Facing Athens*, Athens 2008, 169.

<sup>28</sup> Patroklos Karantinos, "Architectures grecques d'aujourd'hui," in: *Cahiers d'Art* 1-4 (1934), 115-121, here 121.

<sup>29</sup> Carlo Theodor (Carl) Hubacher was a Swiss architect, engineer and amateur photographer – in professional partnership with Rudolf Steiger at that time – who was aboard the steamboat *Patris II* with his wife and professional photographer Grete. He contributed significantly to the photographic documentation of CIAM IV. Daniel Weiss, "Hubacher, Carlo Theodor," in: *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon Online*, [http://www.degruyter.com/view/AKL/\\_42179811?](http://www.degruyter.com/view/AKL/_42179811?rskey=L3tdQU&result=1&dbq_0=hubacher+carlo+theodor&dbf_0=akl-fulltext&dbt_0=fulltext&o_0=AND)

[rskey=L3tdQU&result=1&dbq\\_0=hubacher+carlo+theodor&dbf\\_0=akl-fulltext&dbt\\_0=fulltext&o\\_0=AND](http://www.degruyter.com/view/AKL/_42179811?rskey=L3tdQU&result=1&dbq_0=hubacher+carlo+theodor&dbf_0=akl-fulltext&dbt_0=fulltext&o_0=AND) (accessed 20 January 2015).

4 Carl Hubacher, *Stamo Papadaki – Villa Fakidis, Glyfada*, August 1933, photograph. (gta Archives/ETH Zürich, Carl Hubacher)



5 Carl Hubacher, *Stamo Papadaki – Villa Fakidis, Glyfada*, August 1933, photograph. (gta Archives/ETH Zürich, Carl Hubacher)



6 Sigfried Giedion, *Stamo Papadaki – Villa Fakidis, Glyfada*, August 1933, photograph. (gta Archives/ETH Zürich, CIAM)



7 Sigfried Giedion, *Temple of Poseidon, Cape Sounion*, August 1933, photograph. (gta Archives/ETH Zürich, Sigfried Giedion)

[15] Juxtaposing the two pictures, a dynamic relation between the depicted buildings is being uncovered, exceeding any similarities in the photographic technique. The modernist building appears to emerge from the ground like the Poseidon Temple. At the same time, the elements of the natural landscape arise like crucial parts not only of the photographic composition, but of the spatial synthesis as well. Having claimed that he would only take photographs for objective reasons, ignoring even their aesthetic value, so as to serve as catalysts for argumentation in his essays,<sup>30</sup> the earlier mentioned affinities between the pictorial representations of the Villa Fakidis and the Poseidon Temple, respectively, can be regarded as visual testaments to an underlying critique of modernist architecture.

[16] The suggested analogy between the two pictures serves as an opportunity to discuss Giedion's appreciation of the value of contextualization.<sup>31</sup> Revisiting his impressions of Greek architecture in the scope of CIAM IV, Giedion would often accentuate the importance of the relation between building and context, rather than focus on the architectural qualities alone. For example, in his 1934 essay *Pallas Athéné ou le visage de la Grèce*, he refers to Le Corbusier's interest in the perception of ancient Greek architecture and its environment as an inextricable entity, alluding to the significance of the whole. "In front of the temple of Aphaia

<sup>30</sup> Weiss, "'Mit der Redaktion ist beauftragt'," 38-57, here 45-46.

<sup>31</sup> "When the 4th CIAM was held in Greece in 1933, the guardians of the Modern Movement were astounded by the indefectible connection between architecture and its site (...)." The context, as revealed by the Balkan lesson, was not limited to the site, as Giedion had put it: "it was a 'mental landscape' more than a 'natural landscape'." See: Carmen Popescu, "Being Specific: Limits of Contextualising (Architectural) History," in: *The Journal of Architecture* 16 (2011), 821-853, here 836.

at Aegina, I accidentally threw a glance over the shoulder of Le Corbusier opening his big sketchbook", Giedion writes, mentioning that "he does not draw the details of forms, he notes the ensembles".<sup>32</sup> In the case of the Villa Fakidis, Giedion similarly perceives architecture and the encompassing landscape as an entangled entity. In his subsequent 1943 discussion of monumentality, the natural elements, namely the sea and the soil, complete the picture, meanwhile grouped in a holistic spatial synthesis.<sup>33</sup>

[17] Yet the analogy between the respective buildings goes beyond the discussion of integration and touches upon the dialogue between the ancient period and modern times, natural and man-made settings, sacred and profane qualities. "In Greece, every sanctuary is closely related to the character of the deity to whom it is dedicated", Giedion writes in the year following CIAM IV, extending his observations across the sea, the wind and the mountain lines, which are "condensed into essential deities".<sup>34</sup> The elements of the landscape thus acquire divine qualities, while forming an inextricable union with the built artifact. And as man-made architecture "continues to be established by the scenery, the photograph of the lonely house in the landscape comprises, perhaps, a peculiar architectural icon",<sup>35</sup> activating a series of dipoles between material and spiritual, regional and catholic, tangible and metaphysical characteristics.

[18] Due to its seeming "loneliness", however, the residence also acquires metaphysical and transcendental dimensions, while it allows one to grasp the totality of the scenery from its elevated rooftop, as in the case of the Greek temples. "Whoever visits the theater at Delphi in Greece", Giedion would subsequently write in his 1941 publication *Space, Time and Architecture*, "high above the sanctuaries, must first experience a long slow climb up the winding sacred way. In the theater itself he first experiences the full majesty of the landscape."<sup>36</sup> The importance of the landscape in the architectural composition is

---

<sup>32</sup> Sigfried Giedion, "Pallas Athéné ou le visage de la Grèce," in: *Cahiers d'Art* 1-4 (1934), 77-80, here 80.

<sup>33</sup> "Elements of nature, such as trees, plants and water, would complete the picture. We could group all these elements in architectural ensembles: the stones which have always been used, the new materials which belong to our times, and color in all its intensity which has long been forgotten." See: Josep Lluís Sert, Fernand Léger and Sigfried Giedion, "Nine Points on Monumentality" [1943], in: *Architecture Culture 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology*, eds. John Ockman and Edward Eigen, New York 1993, 29-30, here 30.

<sup>34</sup> Giedion, "Pallas Athéné ou le visage de la Grèce," 77.

<sup>35</sup> Aristeidis Antonas, "Τοπιογραφήματα [Landscape Writings]," in: *Architektonika Themata* 35 (2001), 57-61, here 61 (my translation).

<sup>36</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition*, 5. ed., rev. and enlarged, Cambridge, Mass. 1967, 688.

being conveyed through both Giedion's literary and pictorial notes: it is the attentive integration of an abstract type of architecture into its indigenous surroundings that strikes Giedion in his initial encounter with Greece. "What architecture searches today, and that many minds do not yet understand", he claims later, "is precisely that it tends to take into account the terrain and, at the same time, proudly bears the abstract building, as it is done here".<sup>37</sup>

[19] In the case of Patroklos Karantinos' 1931 Primary School on the junction of Kalisperi and Caryatidon streets near the Acropolis, the surviving picture in Giedion's archives conveys a different understanding of the relation between the built artifact and its surroundings.<sup>38</sup> In line with the principles of the new program for educational buildings, the Kalisperi School features a flexible spatial morphology that consists of white, austere and orthogonal volumes that echo the principles of modernist architecture. As the building expands across two levels, its indoor spaces are being lit by wide, longitudinal window panels that often blur the boundaries introduced by the architectural shell. In turn, its outdoor spaces demonstrate a characteristic "rhythmic stepping up of terraces",<sup>39</sup> which unifies its distinct volumes. A former employee of Auguste Perret – like Stamo Papadaki –, Karantinos concretizes against the backdrop of the Acropolis "a touch of lightness and transparency"<sup>40</sup> intensified by its juxtaposition to the ancient monument. Notably, the building's close proximity to the Parthenon Temple is underlined in Giedion's picture, as the Swiss art historian captures the former partially, and not as a whole.

[20] In contrast to the static volume of the Acropolis Hill, as featured in the picture's background, a dynamic is created by a group of children running on the School's linear rooftop (Fig. 8), which, again, sets apart the neighboring residential mass of tiled-roof buildings. At one level, Giedion's outlook on the synthesis between the school and its surrounding environment can be perceived as a comment on the interrelation between the constructed and the natural settings – deeply embedded in the culture of Greek vernacular architecture and later reflected in its modernist appropriations. Reminiscent of László Moholy-

---

<sup>37</sup> Giedion, "Pallas Athéné ou le visage de la Grèce," 78.

<sup>38</sup> In 1933, following the CIAM conference, Patroklos Karantinos would follow up on his acquaintance with Giedion and send him a portfolio of his works, accompanied by the note "*Quelques de mes travaux. À M. Giedion, avec amitié et reconnaissance*". The selected works included the public schools at Charokopou, Kalamaki, Nauplion, Psychikon and Kavala, as well as the Villa at Chalandri. Patroklos Karantinos, Folder addressed to Giedion, gta Archives/ETH Zürich, Sigfried Giedion.

<sup>39</sup> Tzonis and Rodi, *Greece*, 96.

<sup>40</sup> Andreas Giakoumakatos, "European Rationalism and Greek Architecture during the Period between the Wars. A Critical Review of the Autochthonous Architectural Production," in: *Architecture in Greece* 16 (1982), 75-92, here 80, 84, 85; Sigfried Giedion, "Pallas Athéné ou le visage de la Grèce," 80.

Nagy's observation that on the island of Santorini the houses "merged so plastically into one another that the children were playing on their neighbors' flat roofs", which Giedion cites in his 1949 article *CIAM at Sea*, the picture focuses on the relation of the school to its spatial context rather than solely on its architectural characteristics. At another level, it could be hypothesized that the connection of Karantinos' building to the Acropolis Hill hints at the glyptic integration of the vernacular residences of the islands into their spatial environment. The picture of the Kalisperi Primary School could be seen in continuation with a selection of Giedion's photographic records of the Aegean cruise at the time of CIAM IV.



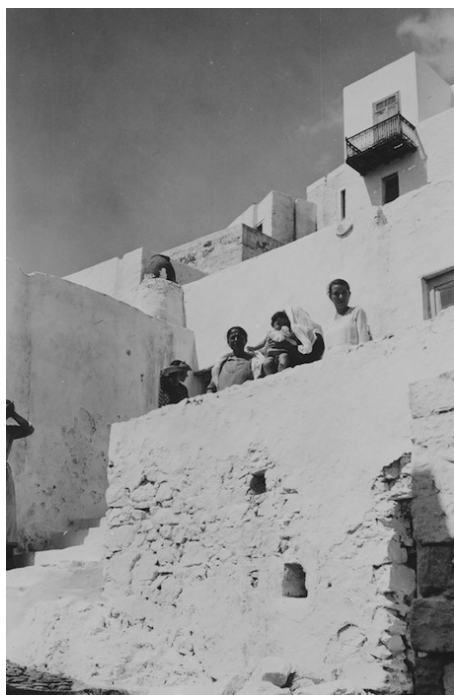
8 Sigfried Giedion, *Patroklos Karantinos - Kalisperi School, Acropolis*, August 1933, photograph. (gta Archives/ETH Zürich, Sigfried Giedion)

[21] A number of Giedion's pictures from this cruise focus on locals that stand on transitional spaces, which intervene between ground and roof level, arranged in such a way that the boundaries between the houses and their natural settings are being dissolved. Succeeding organically one another on a horizontal or vertical level (Fig. 9), the houses bear flat roofs, which appear as "graduated steps" and, owing to the natural steep inclination of the terrain they were built on, allow each building ample view over the sea (Fig. 10).<sup>41</sup> These pictures testify to Giedion's interest in contextualization, the efficient integration of a building into its surroundings, reinforced by the presence of locals captured at the various points. Beyond the negotiation of the boundaries between natural and

---

<sup>41</sup> "Dawn revealed the summit of Santorin - its whitewashed houses trailing like a drift of last year's snow along the edge of its precipitous cliff - and later in the morning we lay to before that island. When we climbed up to those houses, Moholy pointed out they merged so plastically into one another that the children were playing on their neighbours' flat roofs and how, being built up a steep slope in graduated steps, every house enjoyed a free and uninterrupted view over the sea." Giedion, "CIAM at Sea," 39.

constructed, private and public, grounded and elevated realms, the recurrent pictures of the Aegean settlements also evoke concepts of "architecture without architects" deeply founded in the Mediterranean terrain. Given that for Giedion the idea of anonymity was rooted in modern architecture,<sup>42</sup> the analogies between the Kalisperi School and the anonymous structures of the Cycladic islands become stronger.



9 Sigfried Giedion, *Residential Settlement, Santorini*, August 1933, photograph. (gta Archives/ETH Zürich, Sigfried Giedion)



10 Sigfried Giedion, *Residential Settlement, Santorini*, August 1933, photograph. (gta Archives/ETH Zürich, Sigfried Giedion)

<sup>42</sup> Sokratis Georgiadis, *Sigfried Giedion: An Intellectual Biography*, Edinburgh 1993, 103.



[22] For Giedion, the architectural forms he experienced in Greece could not be equally appreciated, if they were placed in a different cultural and topological context, since they had been "originally born out of this light and of this land".<sup>43</sup> "As the detached figures of the Parthenon become dull in the North and as the marble needs the Greek atmosphere to maintain its shine", he would argue, "the Greek form is not transportable".<sup>44</sup> The rough terrain and the natural light had an impact on the texture and color of the vernacular buildings, which have been captured in Giedion's photos as if they were retaining "their roots in the landscape".<sup>45</sup> Coinciding with the renewed discussions on the "relationship between landscape (*topio*) and place (*topos*) and the popular/vernacular buildings"<sup>46</sup> as articulated by the high modernist Greek architects of the early 1930s, Giedion's visit to the Aegean islands made him conscious of the significance of incorporation.

[23] In line with his literary lens, Giedion's photographs from the island of Santorini would accentuate his appreciation of the unity between the built artifact and its natural surroundings – an appreciation which had been the subject of critique also for modernist Greek architects. Aris Konstantinidis, for example, pointed out that the moment, when one faces an architectural product and is not able to distinguish between the natural and the man-made entities, is miraculous.<sup>47</sup> "Environment and architecture should be interlocked as intensively as possible", Giedion claimed many years later.<sup>48</sup> The harmonious association of a man-made habitation and its natural surroundings was a source of allure for Giedion, and is apparent in both case studies discussed.

## Towards a reciprocal relationship: The Greek vernacular and modernity

[24] Whether Giedion's recorded interest in the intersection of the modern architectural spirit with the ancient was supported by the ongoing debate

---

<sup>43</sup> Giedion, "Pallas Athéné ou le visage de la Grèce," 80.

<sup>44</sup> Giedion, "Pallas Athéné ou le visage de la Grèce," 80.

<sup>45</sup> "In Santorini, Rudofsky discovers that the origins have their roots in the landscape, they are generated by the landscape." See: Ugo Rossi, "The Discovery of the Site: Bernard Rudofsky. Mediterranean Architectures," in: *House and Site: Rudofsky, Lewerentz, Zanuso, Sert, Rainer*, ed. Eleonora Mantese, Florence 2014, 52-113, here 64.

<sup>46</sup> Ioanna Theocharopoulou, "Nature and the People: The Vernacular and the Search for a True Greek Architecture," in: *Modern Architecture and the Mediterranean: Vernacular Dialogues and Contested Identities*, eds. Jean-François Lejeune and Michelangelo Sabatino, London 2010, 110-129, here 115.

<sup>47</sup> Aris Konstantinidis, "Το Πρόβλημα για μια Αληθινή Αρχιτεκτονική [The Problem of a Genuine Architecture]," in: idem, *Για την αρχιτεκτονική [On Architecture]*, Athens 1987, 245.

<sup>48</sup> See: Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 688.

between Mediterranean architecture and occidental modernist appropriations, remains to be explored, but during his architectural pilgrimage to Athens and the Greek islands, at the beginning of the 1930s, he became aware of this interest.<sup>49</sup> From 1905 onwards, the Mediterranean vernacular appeared "deeply embedded in the whole Modern Movement",<sup>50</sup> just as the advances of technology,<sup>51</sup> as the key juxtaposition of the Athena Nike Temple to the *Delage Grand-Sport* in Le Corbusier's 1923 *Vers une Architecture* reveals. Moreover, Mediterranean vernacular architecture, particularly the Cycladic anonymous buildings, had served as a foundation for various critiques of modernist building typologies. In particular, Paul Schultze-Naumburg in his 1929 historiography of the German house traced the origins of the *Weissenhof* and *Schönblick* urban settlements in Stuttgart back to the indigenous houses on the Greek island of Santorini.<sup>52</sup> In a similar prism, Bernard Rudofsky, during his stay on the island that same year, expressed enthusiasm about the resemblance between the prehistoric vernacular constructions and the contemporary houses.<sup>53</sup> Besides "the

---

<sup>49</sup> Andreas Giakoumakatos supports that the CIAM IV confirmed both the creativity of the young rationalist movement and, conversely, the Mediterranean-Greek quality of the European design ethos, a view supported primarily by Le Corbusier and Giedion. According to him, this was made conscious during the visit to the Aegean islands. See: Giakoumakatos, "European Rationalism and Greek Architecture during the Period between the Wars," 80, 81 (my translation).

<sup>50</sup> Alain Colquhoun, "The Concept of Regionalism," in: *Architectural Regionalism: Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity and Tradition*, ed. Vincent B. Canizaro, New York 2007, 147-155, here 148.

<sup>51</sup> "Mediterranean vernacular characteristics have also been extremely influential in forming the mature ideology of Le Corbusier, whose references to the Mediterranean vernacular, such as cubic forms and white walls, was just as prominent as the idea of industrial standardisation." See: Colquhoun, "The Concept of Regionalism," 148. Note that also Luigi Figini had emphasized that the significance of Mediterranean modernism for modern architecture was equal to the contribution of technology, Cubism and Purism. See: Michelangelo Sabatino, "Toward a Regionalist Modernism. Italian Architecture and the Vernacular," in: *Regionalism and Modernity: Architecture in Western Europe, 1914-1940*, eds. Leen Meganck et al., Leuven 2013, 197-217, here 203.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Schultze-Naumburg, *Das Gesicht des Deutschen Hauses*, Stuttgart 1929, cited in: Kai K. Gutschow, "The Anti-Mediterranean in the Literature of Modern Architecture: Paul Schultze-Naumburg's *Kulturarbeiten*," in: *Modern Architecture and the Mediterranean: Vernacular Dialogues and Contested Identities*, eds. Jean-François Lejeune and Michelangelo Sabatino, London 2010, 148-173, here 149.

<sup>53</sup> "The walls of these prehistoric constructions were built by the same irregular blocks, that are in use still today. Although the roofs collapsed under the weight of the pumice-stone, it is still recognizable that each house had its own vault [...]. It is so very marvelous the resemblance between prehistoric ruins and the houses of today, that archeologists did not believe to their eyes." Bernard Rudofsky, "Origine dell'abitazione," in: *Domus* 123 (1938), 16-19, cited in: Rossi, "The Discovery of the Site," 64.

expression of a natural process of growth resembling that of nature", regarding the Greek vernacular architecture on the Cycladic islands, it was also their "liveliness and spontaneity", their intrinsic "gaiety and human quality"<sup>54</sup> that would catch the attention of Western architects and later of Giedion, as well.

[25] On Greek grounds, the abstractness of the Greek vernacular was echoed in the architectural buds of the Modern movement. Meanwhile, the characteristics of Western modernity were also adopted for several constructions in Greece that surfaced in the early 1930s, namely the 1932 public school of Dimitris Pikionis (Peukakia), the 1932 sanatorium of Ioannis Despotopoulos (Sotiria) and the 1931 factory of Perikles Paraskevopoulos (Papastratos). The recording of Modernist structures was, on one hand, accompanied by their analogies to the white surfaces and cubic volumes of the Greek vernacular. Heinrich Lauterbach, for instance, had observed in 1932 that "Greek architects are in happy union with their architectural tradition on the Aegean islands" - assessing this union as "a genesis, not a convention".<sup>55</sup> In addition, Panos Djelepy, in his 1934 article dedicated to the houses of the Greek archipelago, stated that the principles of contemporary architecture are found on these "unspoilt grounds".<sup>56</sup> Djelepy added that the vernacular houses of Skyros island featured a common room that occupied most of the built surface without obstruction, in close resemblance to the spatial layout of modernist dwellings.<sup>57</sup> A few years later, in 1936, it was Stamo Papadaki who compared a residential settlement on the island of Ios, as photographed by László Moholy-Nagy, to the architecture of one of his own buildings, the Villa Fakidis.<sup>58</sup>

[26] On the other hand, the recording of Modernist structures in Greece also referred to their allusion to the architectural tendencies of the North, and this exchange was often met with suspicion. "It is necessary to thoughtfully address

---

<sup>54</sup> "They compared them to the dreariness of the functional, overdesigned products of the big architectural offices, which looked dead. [...] The anonymous architecture of the people confirms this statement. But it is true today that it is very difficult to do things simply, naturally, well - and be good. Which are the obstacles to the easy? Or the apparently easy [...]?" Sert, in: *The Writings of Josep Lluís Sert*, ed. Eric Mumford, New Haven 2015, 128.

<sup>55</sup> Heinrich Lauterbach, "Notizen von einer Reise in Griechenland," in: *Die Form: Zeitschrift für gestaltende Arbeit* 11 (1932), 336-348, here 346.

<sup>56</sup> Panos Djelepy, "Les maisons de l'Archipel Grec observées du point de vue de l'architecture moderne," in: *Cahiers d'Art* 1-4 (1934), 93-98, here 93.

<sup>57</sup> Djelepy, "Les Maisons de l'Archipel Grec observées du point de vue de l'architecture moderne," 97.

<sup>58</sup> See: Stamo Papadaki, "Renouveau du vrai classicisme. La Grèce et l'architecture fonctionnelle," in: *Bâtir* 47 (1936), 869-872, as mentioned in: Stavros Martinos, *Απόπλους. Οικία Φακίδη στη Γλυφάδα [At Sea: Fakides Residence in Glyfada]*, Lecture at the University of Patras, 08 April 2014.

the solutions provided to us from the West", Dimitris Pikionis noted shortly before the initiation of CIAM IV, characterizing the use of artificial concrete on the buildings' façades as intrinsically incompatible with the textures and colors of the natural Greek light.<sup>59</sup> Together with several Greek architects he had begun to "distance himself from the forms and ideology of the modern movement" and focused on alternative ways of articulating the vernacular tradition.<sup>60</sup> What the recording of Modernist structures also revealed was a reciprocal relationship between the past, as expressed through the immutable Mediterranean vernacular, and the present, as articulated through the aspiring modernist structures. Yet "the past" in this case – and its echoing on Western modernist appropriations – appeared "like a mirror, which always reflects the features of the observer".<sup>61</sup>

[27] Throughout modern architectural historiography, Sigfried Giedion has often been blamed for having placed "far too much importance to the machine-age and abstraction as the primary source of modern architecture" at the expense of the Mediterranean vernacular's influence on modernism.<sup>62</sup> Long after the return of the steamboat *Patris II* to Marseilles, however, he would recall his first trip to Greece as an experience from which he had acquired "decisive impressions".<sup>63</sup> In his 1934 letter to Professor Dr. Otto Waser (Fig. 11) – founding member of *Hellas, Schweizerische Vereinigung der Freunde Griechenlands* –, for instance, he stresses the need to "return once again to Greece, as there lies the intersection of modern architecture's spirit with the ancient, [which is] for us of particular interest today".<sup>64</sup> As if revealing *a posteriori* his focal point during the trip,

---

<sup>59</sup> Pikionis, "À propos d'un congrès," 756.

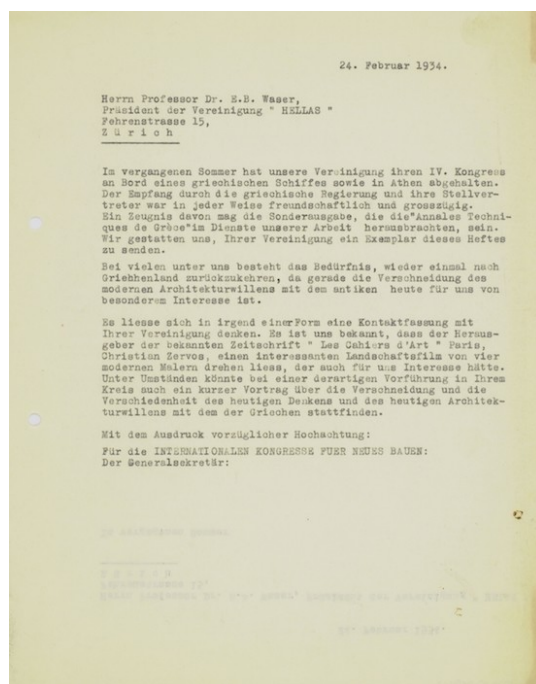
<sup>60</sup> Pikionis, "À propos d'un congrès," 756.

<sup>61</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Spätbarocker und romantischer Klassizismus*, Munich 1922, cited in: Georgiadis, *Sigfried Giedion*, 100.

<sup>62</sup> Giedion has been blamed for interrupting and potentially inverting "the pluri-secular exchange between North and South that flourished from the Renaissance until the beginning of the twentieth century". In addition, Luigi Figini had supported that Giedion had overlooked the contribution of the Mediterranean vernacular to the establishment of Modern Movement architecture. See: Jean Francois Lejeune and Michelangelo Sabatino, "North versus South: Introduction," in: *Modern Architecture and the Mediterranean*, eds. Jean Francois Lejeune and Michelangelo Sabatino, London 2010, 1-12, here 3 and 7.

<sup>63</sup> In his correspondence with Alexandros Dragoumis, dating between 1934 and 1936, Sigfried Giedion mentions having received "decisive impressions" from Greece. Apart from issues regarding the fourth meeting of the CIAM and the *Comité international pour la résolution des problèmes de l'architecture contemporaine (CIRPAC)*, they also discussed the inclusion of didactic elements from the Greek Classical period in the exhibition *Das Bad von Heute und Gestern* (Kunstgewerbemuseum, Zürich, 12 April – 26 May 1935). Giedion – Dragoumis Correspondence, gta Archives/ETH Zürich, Sigfried Giedion.

Giedion's literary and photographic lenses have been perceived, above all, as vehicles for articulating the intersection mentioned above.



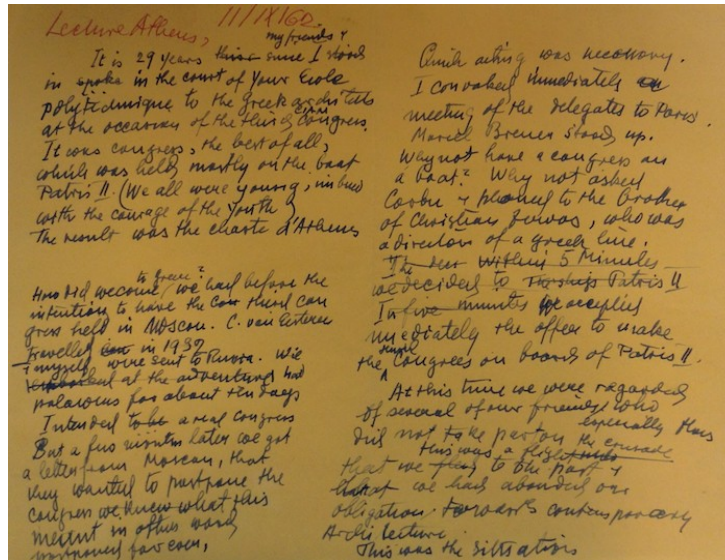
11 Sigfried Giedion, *Letter to Otto Waser*, February 1934. (gta Archives/ETH Zürich, Sigfried Giedion)

[28] If for Le Corbusier the trip to Greece was a *voyage utile*<sup>65</sup> allowing him to later apply his discoveries to his design- and theory-led practices, then Giedion's visit to the country served as an occasion to re-evaluate his approach to the myth of the Mediterranean as a foundation of modernist architecture. The discussion of the Villa Fakidis and the Poseidon Temple on the one hand, and the Kalisperi Primary School and the vernacular houses on Santorini island on the other, has illuminated this approach through a closer look at Giedion's critical media. It has uncovered that his first encounter with Greece, through the juxtaposition of the past with the present, represented a complex source of inspiration, capable of influencing Giedion's later critique of modern architecture. Indeed, an inspiration that stimulated architectural discussions, widening their scope to the broader influences between Greece and the Western world on

<sup>64</sup> Letter to Otto Waser, 24 February 1934, gta Archives/ETH Zürich, Sigfried Giedion (my translation).

<sup>65</sup> "Instead Le Corbusier set out - with empty pockets - on a long voyage, le *voyage utile*, as he called it. (...) From the white houses indigenous to Mediterranean culture, from the Acropolis of Athens, from the city of Istanbul, and from St. Peter's in Rome, he derived just the assistance he needed for his later development. It was in effect a voyage of discovery - a grand tour - through the source countries of Western civilization." See: Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, 520.

cultural and socio-political levels, as in his 1965 discussions of the immutable human values, apparent in the Greek polis,<sup>66</sup> or in his 1962 reflection on the modern city,<sup>67</sup> in light of the accessibility of the ancient Greek theater (Fig. 12).



12 Sigfried Giedion, *Notes for a Lecture at the Polytechnic School of Athens*, September 1962. (gta Archives/ETH Zürich, Sigfried Giedion)

[29] Summing up, an attentive look at Giedion's photographic work has not only provided a better understanding of his literary critique, but also offered an insight into his views of the position of the vernacular in modern times, expressed through the relation of architecture to the landscape, the dialogue between regional and occidental realms, and the architectural allusion to timelessness (Fig. 13).

<sup>66</sup> Sigfried Giedion, "The Planner and Human Values," in: *Ekistics* 20, n. 119, (1965), 247-248, here 248.

<sup>67</sup> Sigfried Giedion, *Lecture in the Polytechnic School of Athens, Greece* (currently named National Technical School of Athens), 11 September 1962, gta Archives/ETH Zürich, Sigfried Giedion.



13 Sigfried Giedion, *Residential Settlement, Santorini*, August 1933, photograph. (*Sigfried Giedion und die Fotografie: Bildinszenierungen der Moderne*, eds. Werner Oechslin and Gregor Harbusch, Zürich 2010, 16)

[30] In particular, the homogeneity of Greek vernacular dwellings as well as their harmonious relation to their surroundings reveal a vision of the Modern Movement for uniformity on an international level. Whether this vision was socially inclusive, referring to white houses for all men, or exclusive, alluding to white houses only for specific white men<sup>68</sup> is an issue that deserves further research. It is apparent, however, that through the apposition of the Athenian modernist buildings of the early 1930s to the Greek sacred and vernacular architectures, respectively, a series of reciprocal relations has surfaced.

[31] Whilst Le Corbusier experienced the trip to the Balkans as "an immersion in cultures grown over centuries, received and accepted rather than created and chosen",<sup>69</sup> Giedion reflected on the trip to Greece as an immersion in time; in the traces of times gone by, and in expectation of times to come that had already begun to emerge. By anchoring the modernist buildings of Papadaki and Karantinos to their enduring natural surroundings - the sea, the soil and the Acropolis - the manifestations of modernity were also associated with an unchanging temporality. In the "eternal present" echoing in Greek religious or popular architecture, which is as alive today as when it was born,<sup>70</sup> Giedion

<sup>68</sup> Johannes Itten, *Haus des Weißen Mannes* [House of the White Man], 1920, in: *Neue europäische Graphik*, 1. Mappe: Meister des Staatlichen Bauhauses in Weimar, Potsdam 1921, see <http://www.moma.org/collection/works/72509> (accessed 02 July 2015).

<sup>69</sup> Francesco Passanti, "The Vernacular, Modernism, and Le Corbusier," in: *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 56 (1997), 438-451, here 445.

<sup>70</sup> Josep Lluís Sert writes: "There are two histories of architecture. One dealing with the more ambitious buildings (...). Another, still partly unwritten, that should deal with the styleless anonymous structures, the architecture that people themselves built for the people. These kind of buildings, simple, honest, unpretentious, that when grouped have

potentially identified the search for immutability that permeated the Modern Movement.<sup>71</sup> Beyond the realm of time, a closer look at Giedion's encounter with the elements inherent in Greek architecture reveals his deep interest in areas such as the organic union between architecture and its surroundings, the abstract qualities of ancient and vernacular structures, and the ongoing influence of the former through time. In addition, it uncovers that the areas specified had served as catalysts for him to reflect upon notions of contextualization, transportability and permanence – in brief, to re-evaluate the principles of the modern epoch.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the article's reviewers for their insightful comments, as well as the editorial team of this Special Issue. In addition, the development of this paper has been greatly assisted by several other individuals whom I would like to thank: Sokratis Georgiadis (ABK Stuttgart), Filine Wagner and Daniel Weiss (gta archiv/ETH Zürich), Marcela Hanáčková, Andreas Kalpakci and Kim Förster (gta/ETH Zürich), Ilse New (ETH Zürich) and Stavros Martinos (NTU Athens). For their valuable support throughout the years, I express gratitude to Antonella Romano (Sapienza, Rome), Laurent Stalder (gta/ETH Zürich) and Panayotis Tournikiotis (NTU Athens).

### **Local Editor**

Maria Helena Maia, CEAA, Escola Superior Artística do Porto

### **Reviewers**

Nelson Mota, Delft University of Technology

Margarida Brito Alves, Instituto de História da Arte, FCSH-Universidade Nova de Lisboa

---

given us the towns of the Greek islands, the hill towns of Italy, the old New England communities. This architecture and the plans are timeless – visually, they are as alive today as when they were born." *The Writings of Josep Lluís Sert*, 127.

<sup>71</sup> In Giedion's recollections of CIAM IV, the aspect of time is being accentuated. He writes: "In those days we were still fired, a time when the colors of painters were more luminous and optimistic than they had ever been before or ever have been since. We were confident that our generation was destined to bridge at last the gulf between inward and outward reality. We saw clearly enough what had to be done in planning, in architecture, and in art, to achieve our aim. The road to our goal lay straight before us, and we would not admit we were already a prey to dread, and that we stood on the brink of the world-wide catastrophe which was to reduce us, like our age itself, to silence." See: Giedion, "CIAM at Sea," 39.



## License

The text of this article is provided under the terms of the [Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

