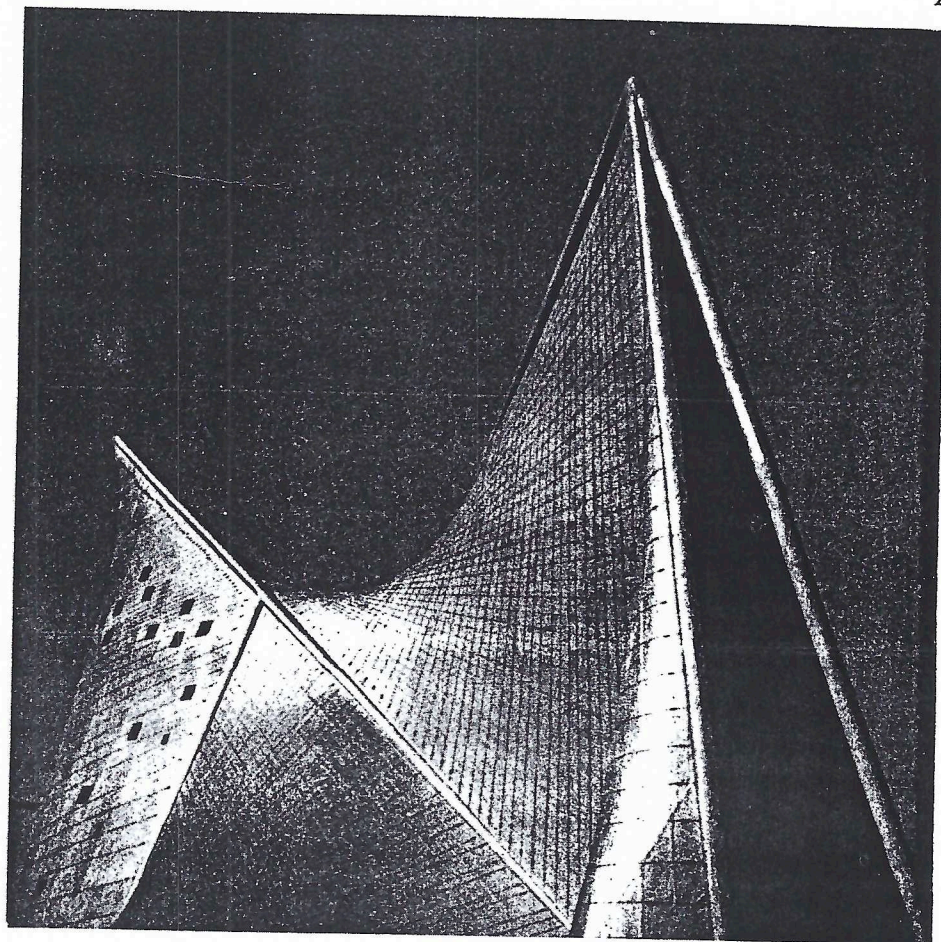


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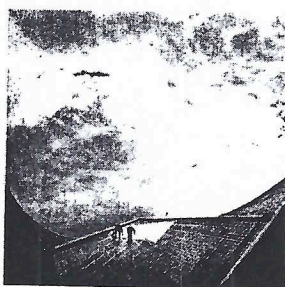
"The Philips Pavilion and
The Electronic Poem",
Arts and Architecture 75,
n° 11, 1958, p. 24



The "Electronic Poem" performed, in the Philips Pavilion, as also the building itself, is the creation of Le Corbusier, the celebrated French-Swiss architect. It is a synthesis of art and the latest scientific and technical achievements. This strange and extravagant light-and-sound show given inside the pavilion, lasts only eight minutes.

It is necessarily a somewhat sketchy account, but the over-all effect of this selection of pictures is to make it clear how, since its creation, humanity has struggled for harmony and happiness and defended itself against sorrow and catastrophe, how it has been torn between love and hate, between the elevated and unattainable ideal and the inevitable irritations of everyday life.

Le Corbusier's scenario comprises seven pictorial sequences, namely "The Formation of the Earth", "Matter and Mind", "Out of the Depths into the Dawn", "Man made unto himself Gods", "Men build their World", "Harmony" and "The Heritage of Posterity". The apotheosis of the "Electronic Poem" concerns the mission of humanity: the task of preserving what has been acquired and of handing it on to posterity is symbolized by the gesture of a hand that receives and bestows. In the mystical atmosphere of the pavilion gigantic pictures appear on the asymmetric-curved walls that converge above the head. There are birds, fishes, reptiles, masks, skeletons, idols, girls looking anxiously upward, buildings and steel structures that are askew, mushroom explosions and ruins, crippled children, but also film-stars, inventors, tools and many symbols or abstract compositions symbolizing whole epochs. These are intended to represent the dramatic story of mankind's development right up to the present day.



THE PHILIPS PAVILION AND THE ELECTRONIC POEM

BY LE CORBUSIER

AT THE BRUSSELS EXHIBITION

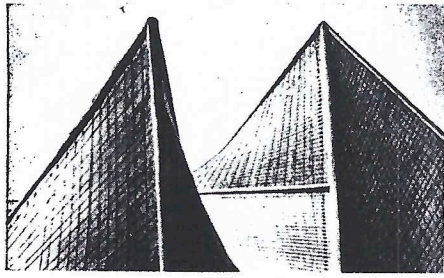
It is rarely that a great industrial concern can carry out a mainly idealistic plan to feature at an exhibition. The scheme of the 1958 Exhibition, which primarily aimed at drawing attention to the opportunities of the future, obviously gave a good opportunity to consider such a manifestation.

So thoughts turned in the direction, not only of the technical, but also of an artistic achievement, thereby making full use of the opportunity to find new means of expression with the aid of the technical products; means of expression which might also be of significance in the future. During the first talks it was thought that it should be possible to create the Philips Pavilion by a combination of assignments to an architect, an author, a composer, perhaps also to painters and even sculptors.

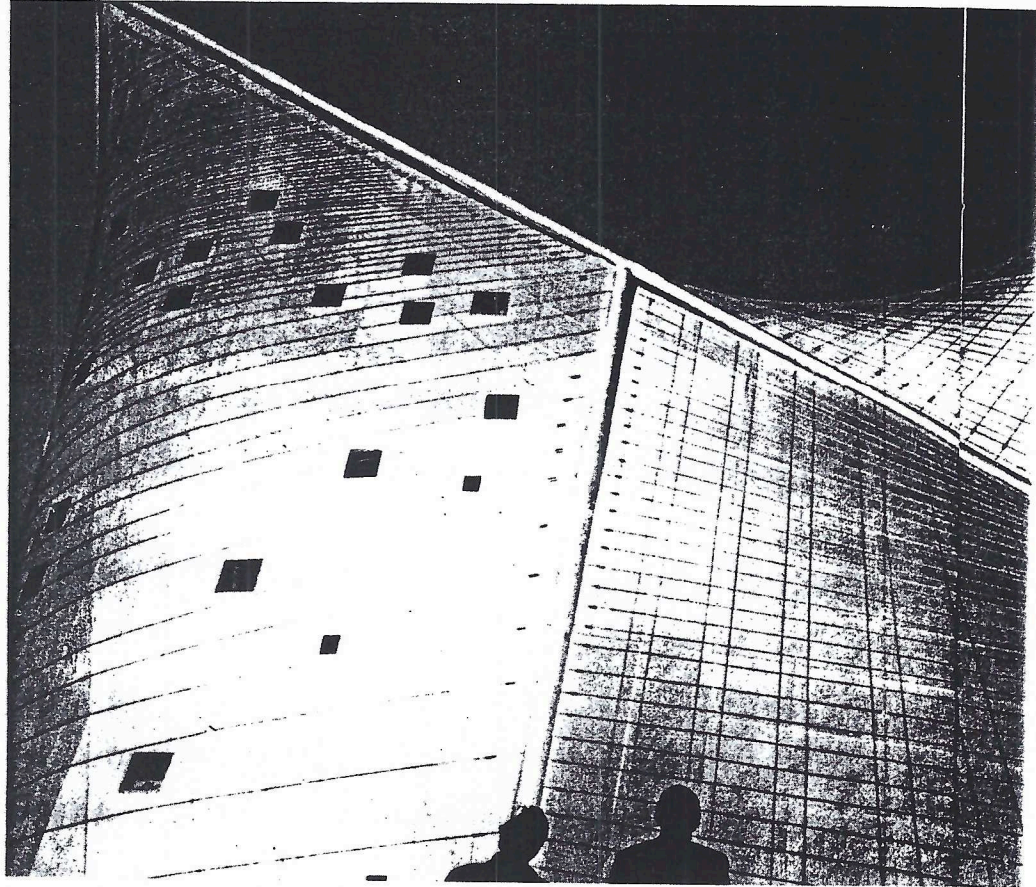
This team would be selected from artists of international reputation.

We began by discussing the project with Le Corbusier, who however, rejected our proposal to build for Philips the pavilion only. On the other hand, the opportunity of employing all the means of expression of colour and light, form and image together with sound in one great spectacle, fascinated him to such an extent that he proposed to design the pavilion as an empty shell inside which a performance would be staged for which he would provide the scenario and utilize all these technical installations in order to arrive at a new form of art. He right away mentioned his friend Edgar Varèse, an artist of his own age whom he should like to have as an associate for the section sound effects. For the rest his most important collaborators would be the Philips technicians, because they would have to demonstrate the possibilities to the script writer and the composer, so as to enable them to utilize to the full these opportunities. This meant a long-term collaboration, in which only gradually it would become clear how the whole project would develop. Trials had to be made, and in the Philips organisation there grew a small core of initiators devoting their energies to the various problems and tasks. Now that Le Corbusier's scenario has already been shown many times to the public, we have become convinced that our objectives have been largely attained. The originality of the form and construction of the Pavilion, the new means of expression employed with the aid of the Philips engineers by Le Corbusier and Varèse and also by Xenakis, have led to a remarkable and impressive manifestation of a new modern art.

L. C. KALFF



LE CORBUSIER



The curved planes used in the Pavilion introduce a new element in modern architecture, by their form which complete the plane and straight line, but also by their characteristics of resistance, which are the translation of their geometry.

"What is the geometrical form which the covering should have if we wish to keep to a minimum the quantity of material that goes into this covering?"

This is the question which has directly influenced the orientation of abstract and material research by technicians and mathematicians for more than a generation.

Reinforced concrete, which at the outset had copied the wood and stone skeleton, was the building material which by its very nature should lead the way in this new trend. Its essential property is continuity. Concrete may be shaped and moulded into any shape. It can be used for the construction of columns and beams and of massive slabs and blocks, but it can also be used to build shells as extended, as straight or as curved, as one should wish.

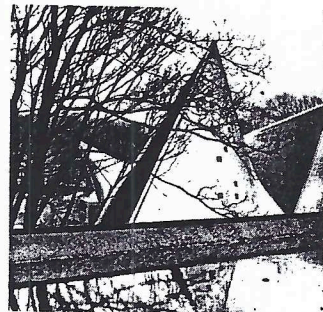
On the other hand at the dawn of contemporary architecture, its promoters found in the living or fossilized biological forms an echo of their own conceptions of plastic shapes. The industrialization of stamped metal forms and their application in such divergent domains as aviation and automobile engineering familiarized technicians and architects with the properties of resistance resulting from the geometry of these forms. Thus mathematics, plastics, industries and materials (concrete, metal) have created a favourable trend for the introduction of curved planes in concrete. For the architect, these forms also signify a transition from a translative conception of volume (elevation rising from the plane by vertical translation) to a new conception with three distinct dimensions.

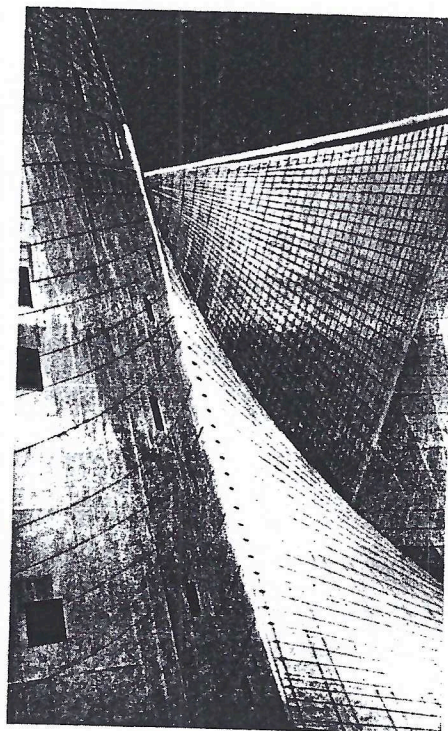
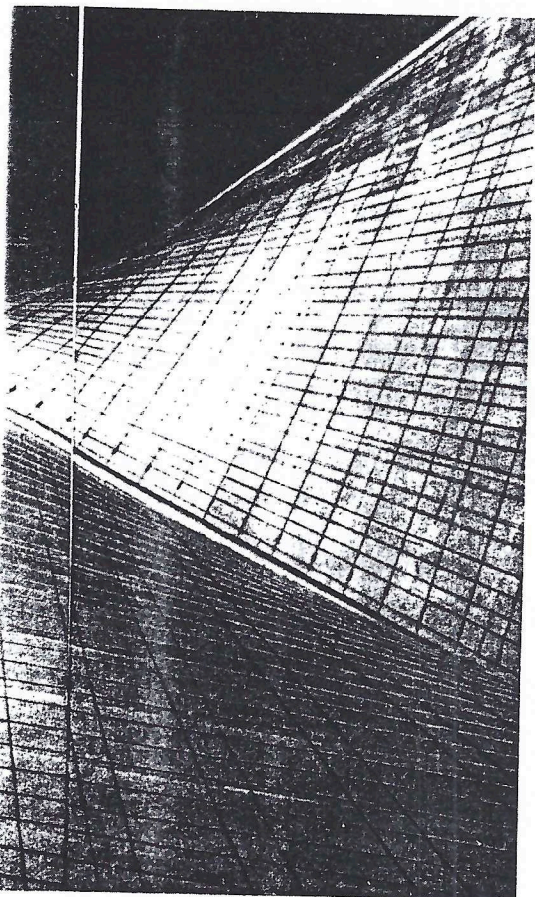
It is within this present-day framework of modern acquisitions of engineering and architecture, that the architecture of the Philips Pavilion is to be seen.

When on the request of Mr. Kalf, Le Corbusier accepted the idea of constructing the pavilion destined to house his electronic poem, he conceived a hollow structure of free design constructed in concrete projected on metal trellis-work and suspended from a frame-work comprising a sheltering roof.

The Pavilion not only introduced a bold advance in plastic design, but has also led to the discovery of an original and widely useful method of utilizing these difficult surfaces without the use of casing.

JEAN XENAKIS





A synthetic event has occurred. Everywhere new tools have opened the doors to the imagination: Electric light has lengthened the day, creating new hours of activity.. The gramophone has recorded sound (words and music). The phonograph has penetrated into the homes: Labrador Atlas, steppe, savannah, the great cities of the East and the West, farmhouses lost in the isolation of the countryside. The disc brought into the home the inspired voice or the musical instrument, learned or popular, the entire orchestra: individual form of the library: record library. The cinema ruled the world: the best as well as the worst. The radio taps at every minute of the day an infinite network of true or contradictory news, reaching everyone in his bed, in his bathroom, filling the houses with words, noise and ideas. The television invaded the homes,—blessing or bane of the household. (Up to that point everything had remained within the human scale, being the product of man or woman directly or indirectly.) Elsewhere, in the opera houses, in the music halls, in the theatres, in the concert halls, the opportunity remained of coming into "direct contact" with singers, actors, virtuosos. But the attendance dropped steadily; there were more and more empty seats.

The construction of a modern society promoted the gathering of crowds; the voice—emission, transmission was ineffective. Electronics intervened; the microphone, the loud-speaker. In airports, in railway stations, in the harbours, words are addressed to strangers over the noise of the crowd, orders are given, messages are communicated.

A medium of action has appeared: electronics, outside the human scale, drawing from physics extraordinary resources of power, volume, delicacy or violence, slowness or speed,—a physical and mechanical event that places in the hands of man almost unlimited forces, and amazing sources of psycho-physiological action through the medium of light. Colour, rhythm, sound, image, putting them in synthesis, recording them on a gelatine-coated tape and enabling their broadcasting at will at any place, obviating the hazards of human presence, projecting (like the cannons of a dreadnought during a naval battle) light, colour, rhythm, sound and image, henceforth available at every minute in the totality of symphonic recordings.

Offering to the modern world (in all latitudes, all longitudes, all climates) the electronic plays capable of stirring the emotions of men and women, capable of reaching the heart of the individual as well as 1000 or 10,000 or 100,000 spectators and listeners.

Calling on the creative faculties of: authors, actors, instructors, technicians, the new teams of the new games of a mechanized civilisation. The present electronic poem, born out of a conjuncture, has been composed by a disciplined team in the course of two years. It makes its appearance abruptly, by the finger pressing an electric button, at the precise moment when the equipment is put into action in the Philips Pavilion at the World Exhibition.

LE CORBUSIER

