

The search for paradise: Charlotte Perriand's canoe trip around Mallorca^{1,2}

En busca del Paraíso: el viaje en canoa de Charlotte
Perriand alrededor de Mallorca

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Abstract

During the summer of 1932, Charlotte Perriand made a trip to the Balearic Islands, the relevance of which was reflected in her later memoirs. The trip began in Mallorca, following an itinerary that was unusual for the time: paddling around the island in a canoe. This article reconstructs the route Perriand followed while examining the precedents for the trip and its derivations in her later work, which centred on architecture for leisure and the enjoyment of nature. The article focuses on certain imaginaries that may have fuelled the trip, offering an analysis of the island *topos* and its subsequent interpretations in the mythological construction of the idea of paradise and emancipatory adventure. The expedition is also situated in its historical context, looking at the specific perspective of the avant-gardes in relation to popular culture, which ended up shaping the ideal of *mediterraneity* as part of the Modern Movement's investigations. At the same time, the article points to the singularity of Perriand's peripheral recognition of Mallorca, defining what is understood as a liminal approach to the territory, carried out mainly from the coastline, which syncopated the experience and the timing of the journey.

Keywords

Charlotte Perriand, liminal landscape, Mallorca, mediterraneity, travellers

Resumen

Durante el verano de 1932, Charlotte Perriand realizó un viaje a las Islas Baleares cuya relevancia quedó reflejada en sus memorias posteriores. El viaje comenzó en Mallorca y siguió un itinerario inusual para la época: bordear la isla navegando en una canoa. Este artículo reconstruye la ruta seguida por Perriand, además de examinar los precedentes y derivaciones del viaje en la consolidación de su obra posterior, focalizada en las arquitecturas del ocio y el disfrute extremo de la naturaleza. El artículo se enfoca en ciertos imaginarios que pudieron desencadenar el viaje, como el análisis del *topos* insular y sus interpretaciones posteriores en la construcción mitológica de la idea de paraíso y la aventura emancipadora. También se analiza la expedición en su momento histórico, a partir de la mirada específica de las vanguardias hacia la cultura popular, en lo que acabará perfilando el ideal de *mediterraneidad* como parte de las búsquedas del movimiento moderno. Al mismo tiempo, se ha analizado la singularidad del reconocimiento periférico de la isla llevado a cabo por Perriand, definiendo lo que entendemos como una aproximación liminar al territorio, realizada principalmente desde una línea de costa que sincoparía la experiencia y los tiempos del viaje.

Palabras clave

Charlotte Perriand, paisaje liminal, Mallorca, mediterraneidad, viajeras

INTRODUCTION

The French architect and designer Charlotte Perriand (Paris, 1903-1999) has typically been studied in relation to her collaboration as the head of furniture and interior design at the studio of the French-Swiss architect Le Corbusier between 1927 and 1937. During this period, her participation was reflected in the creation of now-celebrated furniture pieces such as the *Chaise longue basculant* and the *Fauteuil grand confort*.

Until the 1980s Perriand was scarcely known outside a small circle of French architects; she only achieving international recognition at the end of the 20th century (McLeod, 2003a). Since then, some retrospectives have been organised and monographs have been published. However, as McLeod points out, “there was still no critical study of Perriand’s work in French or English” (McLeod, 2003a, p. 7), and following McLeod’s and others’ research, many aspects of her work remain to be analysed, especially given her multidimensional practice and her remarkable biography. Her interests translated into a photographic production related to the origins of Surrealism and its subsequent developments in *art brut* (Barsac, 2011), an enthusiasm for industrial production and prefabrication tied to improving people’s living conditions (McLeod, 2003b), and an eagerness to explore unknown territories through countless trips during her long and prolific life (Perriand, 1998).

These exploratory practices are the object of the present research. Some of her explorations were motivated by ideological interests, such as her trips to the Soviet Union in the 1930s (Perriand, 1998). Others were related to professional projects or exceptional circumstances, like her wartime exile in Japan and the Indochinese Peninsula (Perriand, 1998), and some responded to an enduring need for a close connection with nature, which led her to explore the possibilities of high mountain leisure (Clarisse et al., 2003, 2005).

In Perriand’s case, the act of *exploring*—a verb historically associated with the conquering feat of the pioneer— has little to do with the intent to exploit and dominate nature driven by an interest in achieving the wisdom characteristic of enlightened culture. For Perriand, the logic of travel and exploration, despite a perspective sometimes tinged with colonial inflections, is associated with a subjective process of emancipation: a search for pleasure and freedom that were eventually the only guarantors of her later creative processes. Another important characteristic of Perriand’s exploratory experiences relates to the methods she used in recording her travels. She not only avoided the then-popular travel notebook (Pozo & Medina, 2011), but in most cases generated an intense photographic survey characterized by overlapping accounts.

Given this foundation, this article focuses on a specific episode related to the search for contact with nature: the canoe trip around Mallorca that

Perriand made during the summer of 1932. The objective of the article is primarily to reconstruct the trip based on the available fragmented sources, which include the author’s memoirs and a photographic compilation of the journey found in the Charlotte Perriand Archive (ACP), published only in part (Jaume et al., 2010). Additionally, the article evaluates how the trip influenced her architectural approach. Precisely within the framework of the itinerary’s singularities, the article analyses Perriand’s approach in skirting the island from the sea, focusing on the unique life experience of passing through what the authors refer to as a liminal landscape (the interval between land and water). First, the article contextualizes the trip historically and draws analogies with previous and subsequent exploratory practices while analysing the specific reality in Mallorca in the early 1930s. Second, it establishes the itinerary and relates it to the sequence of the narrative of the trip and Perriand’s experiences. The article also delves into the reasons that brought Perriand to Mallorca, examining how the western Mediterranean became a shared reference for modern approaches to architecture, including Perriand’s own. Finally, the article examines the connections between the specific experience of the canoe trip and Perriand’s subsequent architectural production, while analysing other proposals that navigated similar liminal landscapes.

Perriand’s trip took place at a time when visits to the Balearic Islands were frequent among Europe’s social and cultural elites. As early as the 19th century, travel among European aristocracy had resulted in “the discovery of the Balearic Islands by travellers from all over Europe saturated with the Romantic spirit” (Adrover, 2022, p. 11). These experiences of the world ultimately shaped an attitude characterized by the constant search for freedom, the transcendental or the sublime, and a penchant for the exotic or the extravagant. The turn of the century brought new visions based on more local perspectives. The chronicles of some trips made by members of the *Centre Excursionista de Catalunya* [Hiking Club of Catalonia] in 1908 and 1914, showed the evolution in the ways of understanding the island, as well as its transformation (Galbany, 1908a, 1908b; Rius Matas, 1914; Rosselló, 2021). The link between territory, culture, politics, and architecture that was promoted by certain regionalist stances led to the birth of the concept of *Mediterraneity*³ and the appearance of the Catalan *Noucentisme* movement, also known as the “Mediterraneanist movement” (Cabañas Bravo, 1996, p. 117).

³ The term *Mediterraneidad*, difficult to translate into English and which we have chosen to simply adapt as *Mediterraneity*, contains various nuances. It refers mainly to the condition of a common geographical and cultural space, populated by ideas and knowledge that have persisted across different civilizations. In the specific case of architecture, this ideal took the form of the exaltation of vernacular constructions and became an important point of reference for the artistic avant-gardes of the modernist period.

Avant-garde circles developed similar relationships with other islands, drawing inspiration from Paul Gauguin, a precursor whose experiences in French Polynesia (1891) were published in 1920, in *Noa-Noa* (1920), and led to the emergence of Fauvism, the flourishing of artistic primitivism, and the revival of the Rousseauist myth of the noble savage. Thus, the pursuit of authenticity was already capitalizing on these environments when Perriand decided to undertake her canoe trip, in line with a kind of travel that prioritized pleasure over intellectual pursuits and the culture of learning.

The origins of the trip can be traced back to April 1929, when Perriand published her first article in a widely circulated magazine. The essay titled 'Wood or Metal' (Perriand, 1929) focuses on the emergence of new materials. Despite the specialized theme, a small fragment of this text warrants our attention for its prefiguration of the ideals of the *New Man* proclaimed by modernity. Perriand writes, "A new lyric beauty, regenerated by mathematical science has produced a new kind of man who can love with fervour: Orly's 'Avion Voisin', a photograph of the Mediterranean, and "Ombres Blanches"" (Perriand, 1929, p. 279). In a single sentence, the author combines lyrical beauty, the technological ideal and the evocation of the Mediterranean as a paradigm of the modern movement. Additionally, she incorporates a reference to *Ombres Blanches*, the French translation of the American film *White Shadows in the South Seas* (Van Dyke, 1928), released in August 1928 and based on Frederick O'Brien's novel of the same name from 1919.

White Shadows in the South Seas was innovative, first, for being entirely shot in Tahiti, a rarity for the time. Later, it stood out for its critical vision of the military and the economic exploitation that was taking place in the Pacific Islands, in parallel with the representation of a romantic adventure full of clichés. These characteristics endowed the film with an instant exotism, exalting primitivism fed by colonial guilt (Geiger, 2002). However, the impact of the film resided in its ability to evoke a desire for escape, perceptible in the idealization of the primitive world, which appeared as the guarantor of a simpler and fuller existence. This liberation was depicted in idyllic images such as canoe rides around an island that could well have been the inspiration for Perriand's expedition to Mallorca (Figure 1). She could have seen in *White Shadows* some of the images that came to embody her ideal of life in contact with nature, where the Mediterranean—much more accessible than French Polynesia—harboured an iconic potential for the consolidation of the new secular and free man (Barsac, 2011). *White Shadows* also offered a clear reference to the archetype or *topos* of the paradisiacal island—understood here as a commonplace or standardized formal category for representing a theme—in a model that has remained unchanged for centuries: from Plato's *Atlantis* and Euhemerus' *Panchaia*

Figure 1

Perriand during the trip around Mallorca, 1932. ACP



(4th century BC) to Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627) and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719); and from *Treasure Island* (1883) by Robert Louis Stevenson to *Suzanne et le Pacifique* (1921) by Jean Giraudoux, where the myth of adventure and subsistence was finally inhabited by a woman. The island *topos*, depicted in its various mythical, psychological, and literary guises, has been transmitted into the collective imagination through maps, texts, paintings, and utopian visions since the insular mythology of classical Greece, starting with Homer's epic tales of Odysseus' journeys among the islands of the Mediterranean.

Suzanne et le Pacifique also reminds us that Perriand's foray coincided with a time when women had overcome their fear of pleasure travel, yet the extensive travel literature documented very little of their experiences. There were many female travellers who landed in Mallorca from the mid-19th century onward (Adrover, 2022) —women who, based on diverse interests, approached the island to experience their own adventures and discoveries—. In all cases, however, their itineraries had crossed the island via land routes, eventually forming a shared ideology. Against this backdrop, Perriand's approach, grounded in imaginaries from the Pacific, was absolutely innovative.

The same year as the premiere of *White Shadows*, Le Corbusier gave lectures in Madrid and Barcelona and began a professional relationship with the Catalan architect Josep Lluís Sert. In 1928, Perriand also began her collaboration with Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret. During those years, the modern school shared an interest in the Mediterranean, advocating a return to simplicity and a reevaluation of the built environment founded on authenticity. Thus, studies and publications began appearing that were focused on a timeless architecture, attentive to its surrounding and its function, ultimately tying in with the forms promoted by the Modern Movement. In the Spanish panorama, this included some of the texts by Fernando García Mercadal, such as *La casa popular* (1930), or the magazine *Documentos de Actividad Contemporánea* (1931-1937), known by the initials A.C.⁴, directed by Josep Lluís Sert and Josep Torres Clavé. It was precisely Sert who turned his focus towards the Balearic Islands and the debate on *Mediterraneity* through an initial project in Ibiza, *Houses in Cala Blanca* (1932). With all these references and in the context of long working days at Le Corbusier's atelier, it is not surprising that Sert might have encouraged others to visit the Balearic Islands —first Perriand, but also Le Corbusier, who travelled to Mallorca in 1932—.

⁴ Magazine published by G.A.T.E.P.A.C. (Grupo de Arquitectos y Técnicos Españoles para el Progreso de la Arquitectura Contemporánea) on a quarterly basis.

Figure 2
Approximation of the route followed

In this text, the aim is to delve into the singularities of a journey around an island that evoked the desire for escape and even fuelled the rupture between Perriand and her first husband. In this sense, the breaking of ties in Perriand's personal life holds many similarities with the strategy employed in her experience of Mallorca, given how the island *topos* harbours diverse and even contrary imaginaries and symbolisms. An island can be interpreted as an interior microcosm, a sort of closed and easily exhaustible space. Based on this premise, an island can represent a schism with the rest of the world. According to Deleuze,

It is no longer the island that is separated from the continent, it is humans who find themselves separated from the world when on an island. It is no longer the island that is created from the bowels of the earth through the liquid depths, it is humans who create the world anew from the island and on the waters (Deleuze, 2004, p. 4).

However, the island as experienced by Perriand is far from an inward-looking space focused on itself; rather, it is a space of exteriority and openness, where her canoe also represents the biblical ark, “the ark sets down on the one place on earth that remains uncovered by water, a circular and sacred place, from which the world begins anew” (Deleuze, 2004, p. 8). That moment marks the end of her journey and the beginning of a new life upon her return to Paris.

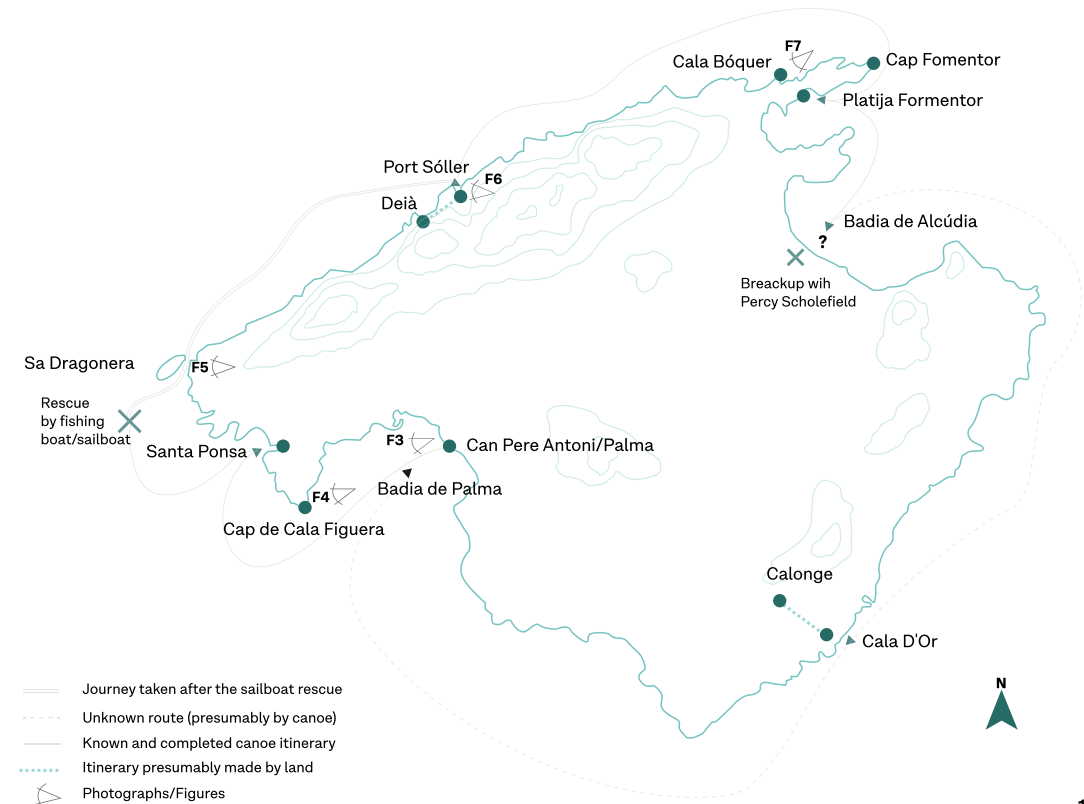




Figure 3
Perriand at Can Pere Antoni beach, 1932. ACP

Figure 4
Passage through Sa Dragonera, 1932. ACP

Among Perriand's wide range of travel experiences, this canoe trip was remarkable because it was framed within the pursuit of outdoor recreation before the official establishment of a yearly holiday as a social necessity. Additionally, it was distinctive because it diverged from Perriand's paradigmatic holiday destination in the Alps, which prioritized high mountain experiences as a source of well-being and inspiration (Clarisse et al., 2003). In this case, Perriand's deep interest in the discovery and enjoyment of the sea and the coast, where sensitivity and expectation enter into a dialogue, later led to the creation of a specific shoreline architecture in her work — which has received much less attention than her high mountain architecture— such as the *Maison de week-end au bord de l'eau* (1934-35), the *Centre de vacances à Bandol* (1935), or *Le Tritonian* (1937).

CANOEING AND SAILING AROUND MALLORCA: THE ITINERARY

Based on Charlotte Perriand's memories collected in the section "En canoë aux Baléares" from her book *Une vie de création* (Jaume et al., 2010; Perriand, 1998) and the existing images in the Perriand archive (Paris, Archives Charlotte Perriand, ACP), and looking at geographically comparable elements in present-day photos, we have made an approximation of the route she followed and the places she passed through, the location of each of her stops, and their sequence (Figure 2). It is relevant to clarify that the photographic record of her journey mostly lacks interior images of the territory, emphasizing the significance of the peripheral or liminal experience. The fact she wrote her description of the trip some 60 years after it took place, in her memoirs published in the 1990s, means that some of the experiences overlap or follow a logic that does not correspond to the successive nature of an itinerary. All the same, they provide us with information that is highly relevant to our analysis.

The "great project", as she calls it, of circumnavigating the island of Mallorca with her husband, Percy Scholefield, and a group of friends began in June 1932 in Badia de Palma —more specifically at Can Pere Antoni beach (Jaume et al., 2010) (Figure 3). The image of Perriand sitting on the sand fixing the Latin sail in what appear to be her final preparations before departure shows her engagement and the attention she poured into the liminal experience.

The group had prepared for the itinerary in the months prior by doing river descents in kayaks and canoes. From Palma, and guided by a group of knowledgeable young people, they began their route towards the west. According to Perriand, the canoes were autonomous, each carrying a navigation chart, a bottle of water, a waterproof bag for clothes, another for food, and a third for money and identification documents.



Figure 5
*Passage through Sa
 Dragonera, 1932. ACP*

The expedition included six canoes, as images from the trip demonstrate, with two crew members in each one. An image of Cala Figuera taken from the sea with the lighthouse in the background shows their leave-taking from Badia de Palma (Figure 4). They rowed without incident until Santa Ponsa, where they made a pleasant stop after sailing just over 15 miles. Shortly thereafter, they resumed their journey westward. That same day, according to Perriand, there was a storm during which they were picked up by a fishing boat that transferred them to a fairly large recreational sailboat. Some images of their passage through Sa Dragonera towards Formetor show the rigging of this vessel (Figure 5). They probably sailed on to Port de Sóller; an existing image in the archives, likely taken on board the boat, supports this assertion.

The experience on the sailboat was not very gratifying, as everyone was seasick, and Perriand explains that she ended up huddled among the rigging begging the crew to let her disembark (Perriand, 1998). Their arrival in the port caught the attention of many people and, according to her, drove up the prices of supplies. From this specific moment on the north coast, there is evidence of just one other episode: an image available at the archives of the town of Deià, a village located 6 km from Sóller. The time



Figure 6
Perriand at Sóller, 1932. ACP



Figure 7
Views towards Cala
Bóquer, 1932. ACP

spent in Port de Sóller offered a respite after two or three days of sailing with episodes of very rough seas. The image of Perriand climbing a ladder leaning against a garlanded pole shows the summery atmosphere of the town (Figure 6).

The group eventually resumed their canoe journey towards Formentor, a landmark and one of the most attractive stops, at least on the first part of the route. There are two spectacular images of their passage through this area, specifically through Cala Bóquer and Cap de Formentor. They evince an experiential power that perfectly sums up the ideal of the imagined journey. Perriand describes “grandiose cliffs that forced us to travel 30 or 40 kilometres before finding an inlet large enough to accommodate us, and which was not always hospitable” (Perriand, 1998, pp. 49-50) (Figure 7). Formentor beach was a clear point of reference for Perriand. The Formentor Hotel, a gathering place for cultural elites visiting the island, opened its doors in 1929. That is where Le Corbusier stayed in March 1932 as a guest of Adan Diehl, an entrepreneur with professional connections to the architect (Jaume et al., 2010). In her memoirs, Perriand does not offer details about her stay on Formentor beach, although there are some images of it (Jaume et al., 2010).

Most likely, it was on the beaches in the bay of Pollença or Alcúdia where her relationship with Scholefield definitively ended. Perhaps it followed an episode recounted by her biographer, Jacques Barsac, that could have ended in tragedy (Barsac, 2015), and Scholefield gave her an ultimatum, demanding that she abandon the adventure. She refused. As Perriand recalled it,

I stayed, intoxicated by freedom. I stayed for those great beaches of golden sand that awaited me, for that appearance at dawn of a man on his horse, in the white foam of the sea. I stayed to continue smelling those Mediterranean scents (Perriand, 1998, p. 51).

The phrase, which highlights her yearning for a transcendental experience, would resonate in a similar atmosphere a year later aboard the *Patris II* bound for Athens, the venue of the IV CIAM, with Le Corbusier’s exhortation to seek out the lyrical, sensual, and luminous aura they had found in those Mediterranean landscapes (Pizza, 1996).

From that point forward, the journey continued only for her and the support group, and she narrates the itinerary from the perspective of a liberated woman following her own path. To continue she had to cross the garrigue alone under a blazing sun; the rest of her companions had gone ahead. Once they were reunited, she would not be separated from them again until the journey was over (Perriand, 1998).

Thereafter, there is news only of the next stop many miles away. She says nothing about the passage from Cap Farrutx to the Capdepera lighthouse and Cap des Pinar. She writes only,

after sleepless nights, fighting against blowflies around big bonfires to keep them away, finally Cala d’Or, paradise: a very small beach of white sand at the bottom of a cove surrounded by hills, a clearing covered with oleanders where we set up our four tents (Perriand, 1998, p. 50).

The memory of Cala d’Or must have deeply affected her because, more than 60 years after the experience, its evocation is the most detailed of all those she included in her memoirs.

The significance of this memory can be attributed to various reasons related to the intention and scope of the trip. First, because, following several complicated days, that remote, peaceful and beautiful spot (Cala d’Or was far removed from places like Formentor, frequented by Perriand’s peers) represented the imagined paradise of *Mediterraneity*. On the other hand, it is where she finally connected with the local population after venturing for the first time into the interior of the island, arriving at a village—probably Calonge since it is the nearest village, located 4 km from the coast— where

she made contact with the locals and their picturesque traditions. Here, she describes the inhabitants from a somewhat paternalistic perspective, the good people of that imagined island “without restaurants” (Perriand, 1998, p. 50). There is an olive grove, the songs of cicadas, fishermen and farmers surrounded by countryside. There are the women, keepers of their homes, who share a delicious rice dish with them, and, in Perriand’s words, everything was good, and they felt like kings. She also recalls an episode after dark where she sees a group of porters passing with baskets on their heads, a clear allusion to smuggling taking place, and which she attests to concealing the following day upon being questioned by some guards, a signal of participating in that otherness and adventure she had sought. Finally, in her memoirs, Cala d’Or also represents the formalization of the literary *topos* of the island, serving as a metaphor for pleasure, sensuality, and freedom.

SKIRTING AS A PARADIGM: THE SINGULARITY OF THE APPROACH FROM A LIMINAL LANDSCAPE

Deciding to circumnavigate Mallorca by canoe in 1932 and without venturing into its interior was not only a risky venture, but also a novel feat that would radically determine a peripheral experience. The coastline and its hinterland acted as a backdrop to Perriand’s adventure, but at the same time the coast became a threshold, a border that set the pace and defined the rhythm of the events. We have evidence of just one other episode of a woman traveller who contemplated and documented the views of Mallorca from the sea, coincidentally also during 1932. The French poet and journalist Yvonne Le Bayon —better known as Claude Dervenn— was not satisfied with retracing the tourist itineraries that existed at the time. Instead, she set out to visit a series of beaches and conduct reconnaissance from the sea, as evidenced by her travel narrative. She writes,

at dawn, the rocky capes open to the horizon take on a pink colour, and it is a delight to head towards them in a canoe, from cove to cove, along steep cliffs where there is always a bit of vegetation (Dervenn, 1933, p. 44).

However, Dervenn’s canoe excursions were only occasional diversions and not the leitmotif of her trip, as in Perriand’s case.

In 1909, the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep first pointed to the value of the “liminal region” in his book *The Rites of Passage*. According to van Gennep, a liminal region is the transitional space or threshold between two physical or mental situations or realities (Van Gennep, 1960). In Perriand’s journey, the coastline was the determining factor for changes in activity during exhausting and dangerous days of sailing; contact with land occurred

only to rest or stock up on provisions (Perriand, 1998). Disembarking meant first conducting a meticulous analysis to find suitable topographic conditions for camping —something especially complicated in the northern part of the island— seeking out minimal safety and the necessary material to light at least one fire. Once on land, the expedition could relax, preparing the camp amid festive singing, which Perriand recalled, along with occasional contacts with locals. Thus, the coast became a liminal space for Perriand; in it, she not only crossed a physical threshold in a syncopated way over the course of her journey but also gradually moved towards a new personal threshold.

Looking past the traditional dichotomy between land and sea, what was innovative and exceptional about Perriand’s trip was precisely this change in the approach to the island, along with the potential to derive meaning from that manoeuvre. By 1932, Mallorca had already begun to open up to the world. It had received a significant number of foreign visitors who generally followed the recommended itineraries from travel guides, tracing the route Palma-Manacor, Alcúdia-Pollença, Lluc, Valldemossa-Deià-Sóller (Adrover, 2022). Perriand not only avoided conventional tourist circuits, she hardly ventured into the interior of Mallorca at all, something completely exceptional from the perspective of tourism as it existed on the island. The space of the sea was her realm of knowledge —both personal and external: the waves, contact with other boats, and the study of the territory were the object of most of her reflections and photographs—. The rest of her musings focused on the coast, understood as a scenic backdrop and as a cyclical end and beginning for the journey. The island was reduced to a perimeter, and Perriand traversed that edge like never before, embracing the territory and her experience from a peripheral perspective that also involved physical effort and exhaustion as the driving force. This approach later resonated in some of her architectural proposals, where she highlights the concept of the boundary as an ideal place to situate architecture.

MODERN ARCHITECTURE AND LIMINAL LANDSCAPES

Around the same time, albeit minus the physical effort and the seafaring, other authors were also turning their attention toward *Mediterraneity* and the peripheral quality of the coastline. In the same year as Perriand’s trip, *A.C.* magazine published a proposal for two types of beach houses located in Cala Blanca, Ibiza (Sert, 1932). Josep Lluís Sert thus began his experiments in exalting the kind of *Mediterraneity* that was pursued by the Catalan rationalists. The material that has been preserved from that project includes a perspective and photomontage of the “Type II” vacation house that are particularly suggestive for our purposes. In the perspective drawing, a woman on the porch is sitting on the chaise longue designed

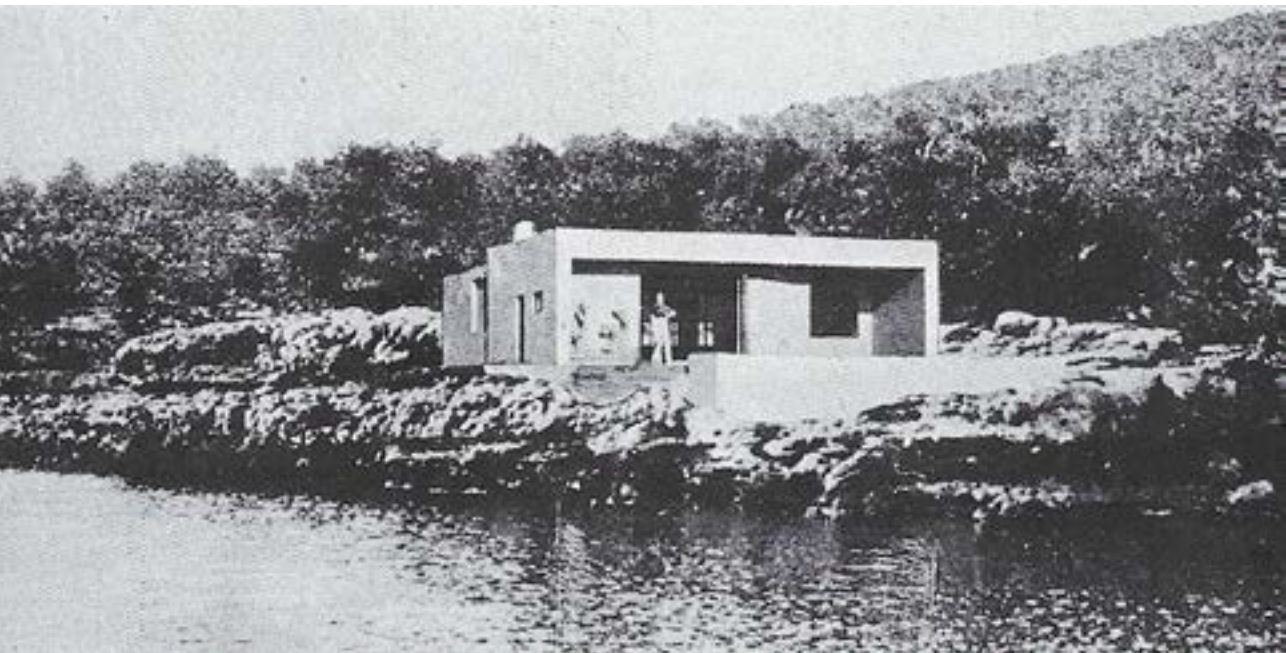


Figure 8
Josep Lluís Sert,
1932. Beach house in
Cala Blanca, Ibiza
Nota. Photomontage.
Historical Archive
of the Architects'
Association of
Catalonia.

by Le Corbusier, Perriand, and Jeanneret, in a clear nod to the relationship between Sert and the atelier on the rue de Sèvres. The photomontage, on the other hand, presents an image from a more distant perspective, showing the surrounding coastal landscape. It situates the viewer in the sea, perhaps contemplating the dwelling from a *llaüt* or some other similar traditional boat (Figure 8).

Sert was not the first, or the last, to recognize the specific value of the coast in constructing an image tied to the ideal of *Mediterraneity*. Between 1916 and 1928, Le Corbusier worked on developing a series of houses by the sea. In all of them, the designs were illustrated through perspectives in which the viewpoint was also situated over the water, although here from a bird's-eye view as opposed to a possible boat. Examples include the *Villa au bord de la mer* from 1916, the adaptation of the Citrohan type on the Côte d'Azur, which was exhibited at the Salon d'Automne in 1922, and the first proposal for the *Villa à Carthage* from 1928 (Le Corbusier, 2013).

The shores of the Mediterranean were also an object of exaltation in the ideals of Italian modernist architecture. Authors such as Gio Ponti and Bernard Rudofsky, with their experiments published in the magazine *Domus*, explored the possibilities of the coastline from the sea, creating a narrative of dreamlike timelessness and pleasure framed by a nature that was often imagined in terms of the island *topos*. Rudofsky had explored the relationship with the coast in a series of initiatory trips to Italy and Greece, which he captured in documents such as his doctoral thesis and in

Figure 9
Bernard Rudofsky,
1935
Nota. Orientation
map of the island
of Procida. Bernard
Rudofsky Estate.

a collection of drawings, including the series *Die Insel der Verrückten* (The Island of the Mad) from 1933. Similar relationships were established in the unbuilt project for a house on the Neapolitan island of Procida, designed in 1935 (Figure 9). The idea of an introspective courtyard house, reimagining the domesticity of the Classical tradition, was contrasted with the desire to inhabit the exterior—an exterior that was itself surrounded by the purest reiterated exteriority—. This awareness of the exterior is reflected in the peculiar site plan, where the house is situated in a sort of central cosmogonic space, surrounded first by an island, and then by the sea. Rudofsky's Procida is surrounded also by boats that encircle and contemplate it from the outer liminal landscape, without disembarking, on a journey that seems ongoing. In Rudofsky's words, it was "life as a voyage, travel as a lifestyle" (Rudofsky & Noever, 1986, p. 21).



LIFE EXPERIENCE AS THE DRIVER OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS

The coast that Perriand experienced and inhabited (rather than simply contemplating) led to a sort of epiphany about the value of the culture of pleasure and well-being in nature, which oriented her future interests. On the one hand, the canoe trip around Mallorca became a true turning point following her break-up with Percy Scholefield. The divorce resulted in a hostile atmosphere upon her return to Paris, forcing her to abandon the apartment on Place Saint-Sulpice, the design of which had earned her professional recognition, but it also triggered the beginning of an emancipated life (Barsac, 2005). The desire for freedom that had initially

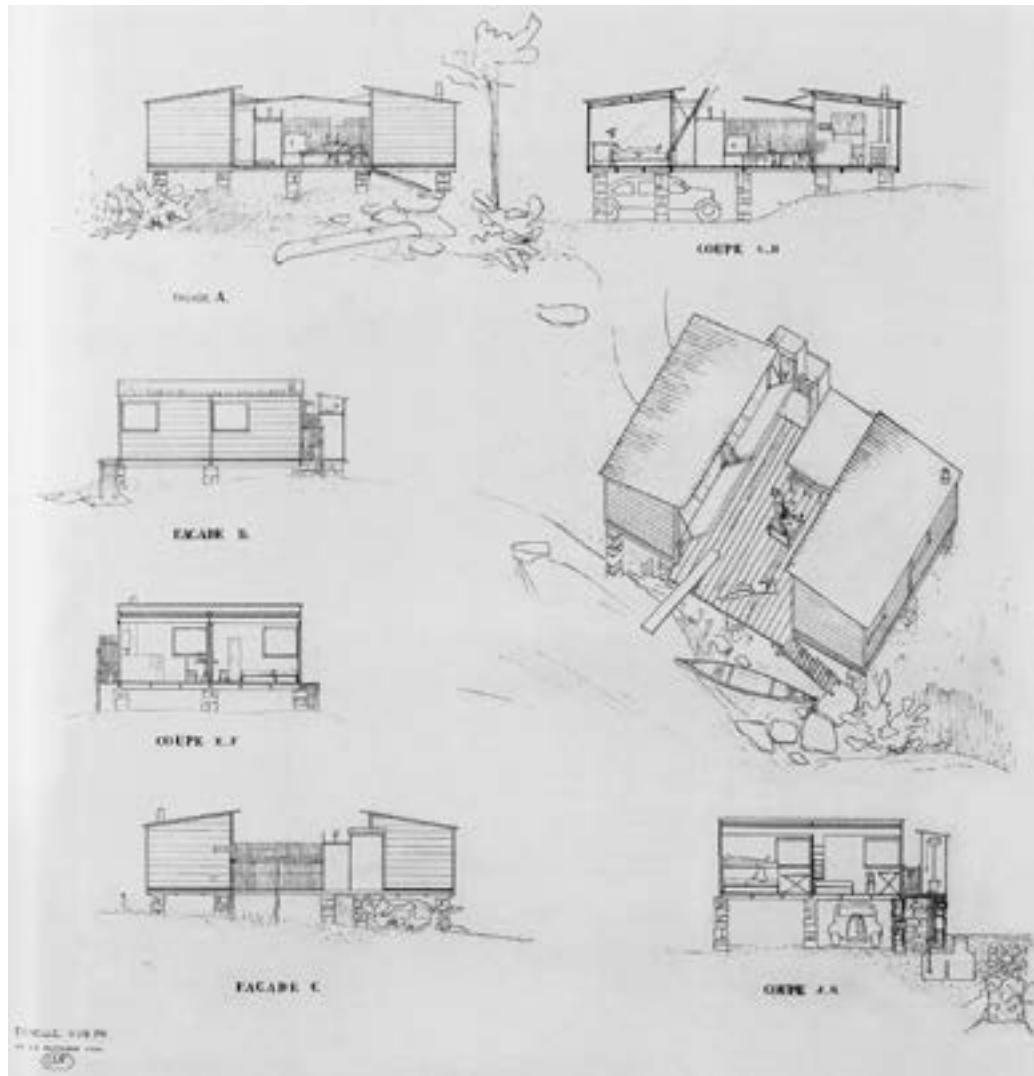


Figure 10
Charlotte Perriand,
1934-35. *Maison de
week-end au bord de
l'eau*. ACP

pushed her toward Mallorca became a reality, and after the canoeing experience Perriand continued her journey to Ibiza, albeit on a very different type of trip.

On the other hand, shortly after her Mediterranean visit, Perriand began submitting entries to various competitions independently, including some organized by the magazine *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, which eventually led to her first design for a weekend house. The *Maison de week-end au bord de l'eau* (1934-35) sat on an elevated platform on pillars in the liminal space defined by a water line. On the surface of the elevated pavement, Perriand erected two parallel rooms joined by a lightweight wall that formed a partially open enclosure facing the sea—an area protected from the surroundings that operated somewhat like a base campsite—. It was an affordable construction designed for the working class, built with a metal

structure and wooden enclosures that ingeniously pivoted on the interior façade to provide shade for the terrace, while also turning the rooms into porches. The project, inspired by fishermen's houses in the Bay of Arcachon, could be easily disassembled and was adaptable to various terrains precisely because of its elevation above the ground. In the plans from the October 1934 version, Perriand drew the house on the shore and included a canoe—two details that, in the wake of her trip to Mallorca, should be interpreted for their symbolic value as a declaration of freedom and pleasure in contact with nature— (Figure 10).

Almost in parallel, A.C. devoted its entire issue number 7 from 1932 to the phenomenon of popular holidays, thus anticipating some of the approaches defined in *La Charte d'Athènes* of 1933 and the proposal on leisure and time off (Le Corbusier & Giraudoux, 1957) and the subsequent result of the V CIAM "Logis et Loisirs" (Sert, 1937). The contact with nature to offset an increasingly congested urban existence seemed to be a central concern in Modern Movement circles (*La necesidad de la vida al aire libre*, 1932). In the case of the Catalan rationalists led by Sert, this translated into the ideas for the *Ciutat de repòs i vacances* to meet the needs of workers from Barcelona (*La ciudad de reposo que necesita Barcelona*, 1932), together with the development of a dismantlable weekend house (*La casa para el fin de semana* (Week-end), 1932).

Based on these progressive ideas—and in parallel with the political framework of the Front populaire that mandated *congés payés*, or the first paid holidays in history, in 1936— Perriand began to explore holiday architecture, an interest that continued throughout her lifetime, focused especially on issues of prefabrication and mass tourism in natural environments. In 1935, she participated in a competition for the *Centre de vacances à Bandol* on the Côte d'Azur, exhaustively photographing traditional farms in the region that helped her to articulate the proposal (Barsac, 2015). This awareness of local vernacular architecture and the homeostatic use of materials such as stone led to different groupings of the constructions defined by three types of base enclosures, where two or three of the sides formed bays to house the programme. The resulting volumes prioritized the definition of a kind of private courtyard open to the sea, optimizing the use of the slopes so as not to obstruct the views from each unit, and articulating the entire ensemble through the continuity of the perimeter walls that varied progressively in height.

After these initial coastal experiences, in 1937 the Sub-Secretariat of State for Agriculture announced a competition for the development of a wooden holiday home on the coast. Perriand, with help from Pierre Jeanneret on the construction details, reinterpreted an earlier high mountain shelter, the *Bivouac Refuge* (1936-37), to generate a mono-space supported by a

metallic exoskeleton with aluminium enclosures. Based on this precedent, the design for *Le Tritonian*, an allegory for the Petit Trianon in Versailles, was created, maintaining the metallic exoskeleton but taking the form of a wooden cottage facing the sea. The main attribute of the design was the use of independent and expandable modules based on units that could be specialized according to the user's needs. The prioritization of an affordable system, where assembly and disassembly would be efficient without the need for specialized labour, was captured in a series of principles described in the text *Note sur étude de chalet* (Barsac, 2015).

Paradoxically, the exalted culture of leisure that all these designs sought to communicate and spread ultimately ended up transforming the prized liminal landscape. Charlotte Perriand herself wrote, in reference to Cala d'Or, "I wouldn't want to go back to that blessed place, because I know it's completely different now; transformed by the leisure era" (Perriand, 1998, p. 50). This lament at the distortion of the coastal landscapes later led her to advocate for the protection of the mountains as the last paradise of freedom. She expressed these concerns in a 1966 article titled "Pour une prise de conscience de nos responsabilités" (Perriand, 1966). The text is coherent with her life experiences and with her pursuit of an integrated architecture that maximizes an intense contact with the kind of nature that can systematically evoke the values of an instinctive freedom.

In the discussion of Perriand's contribution to the production of leisure architecture, the historiographic emphasis often centres on her evident passion for high mountains, where the body of her work ranges from prefabricated shelters, chalets and small hotels to large-scale accommodations and alpine urbanism at the *Les Arcs* resorts in Savoy (1967-85) (Clarisse et al., 2003; Clarisse, 2005). In 1966, she wrote, "I love the mountains deeply. I love them because I need them. They have always been the barometer of my physical and mental equilibrium" (Perriand, 1966, p. 10). However, her canoe trip around Mallorca brings up different connotations. While encapsulating the need for close contact with nature, there is an introduction of the natural and mental framework of *Mediterraneity*, that crosses through layers of time to revisit essential, primitive icons in a world undergoing purification (Pizza, 1996).

As we have seen, this intellectual project was not exclusive to Perriand but was part of a cultural and creative context where the coastline played a central role in constructing a specific image. The liminal landscape thus became a sort of emblem of *Mediterraneity*, where the island, through the maximization of its perimeter and its inaccessible character, became firmly embedded in the narrative of a commonplace or *topos*. Consequently, the years immediately following the trip around Mallorca led to a concentrated production of coastal tourism projects for Perriand, which are less well known—but no less significant—than her later high mountain designs.

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