In light of the last 50 years of debate and research it is interesting to reconsider some basic ideas about how buildings and streets interact. Pre-modern conceptions of the boundaries between the street and the interiors of buildings were predicated on the clear definition of interior and exterior. Windows and doorways marked the end of interior space; interior space was discrete and legible, with the space of the street being a separate space with distinct characteristics. The interior and exterior were linked through the careful modulation of threshold conditions, particularly as cities expanded and developed through the 19th century.

Modernist design principles pursued the eradication of discrete boundaries, proposing a more continuous vision of space; one where the interior moved out into the exterior and the exterior was drawn into the interior space. However this fundamental conception of space was disrupted in relation to the street. When it came to streets modernism saw them as contributors to the dirty, dark, overcrowded, chaotic and violent 19th century industrial city. In agreement with contemporary progressive thinking, modernism identified traditional streets as a major cause of urban problems, proposing an alternative urban environment without streets. Instead of streets which coupled movement, commerce and social interaction, modernism proposed that buildings be located in a landscape, with a direct contact to a natural environment and that movement be through a dedicated network of roads.1 The moral pursuit of improving living conditions and eliminating perceived ills, coupled with the modernist aesthetic agenda, prevented the examination of a modernist conception of the relationship between urban exterior and interior.

It is possible to extend contemporary notions of continuous space to the street, developing an understanding of the relationship between interior space and the exterior space of the city that is urban. Architects and urban designers should challenge the practices and conceptions which lead to the separation of ground floor interiors from the room of the street. Those responsible for the configuration, construction and management of urban space, must see the ground floor spaces along a street as contributing to the urban environment, pursuing a public space of the street that is both exterior and interior. Architects must design the ground floor of urban buildings to address the public space of the street, extending the activity of the interior out into the street. Most importantly, owners must understand the public nature of the ground floor and their responsibility to the public space of the city. If streets are to perform their critical role in the life of cities, there must be a joint effort to pursue the active engagement of ground floor spaces with the streets they form.

The design of ground floor spaces should utilise the sophisticated tools of architectural practice to generate high quality and meaningful solutions. The careful modulation of thresholds, boundary conditions and spatial compositions can generate strong physical and visual connections between interior and exterior spaces. Architectural design which pursues urban relationships and considers the impacts of design choices on the street can lead to interesting and desirable streets, which attract use and support a vital urban environment. If architects conceive of the street as a room which the interior space they are designing is connected to, rather that moment where their design stops, a completely different approach to the design issue opens up. Most of the architectural solutions are self-evident and based on fundamental architectural principles, such as scale, threshold, composition, tectonics, materiality and spatial definition. The important alteration is the removal of the simplistic distinction between the interior space and the street. Once they are seen as two parts of one whole, the design problem is transformed and the possibility of meaningful, interrelated interiors and exteriors is greatly improved. Streets where the interior and exterior are designed to complement and enhance each other can only result in more vital streets, which will improve urban space.

The most important contributor to a vibrant urban environment is the active street and the integrated design of the street and the ground floor is the best means of achieving this. The street is a civic room; the activity of the ground floor should necessarily overlap with the activity of the street. The blurring of interior and exterior space extends the architectural conception of a spatial continuum in an instrumental manner to urban thinking. The design of the relationship between the interior and the street is the most important task for an architect in an urban context and methodologies for understanding and designing active streets are essential tools for urban designers, architects and those who assess their designs.

1. Le Corbusier, (1967). *The* *Radiant City*. translated by Pamela Knight, Eleanor Levieux and Derek Coltman. London: Faber and Faber. p.119-126.