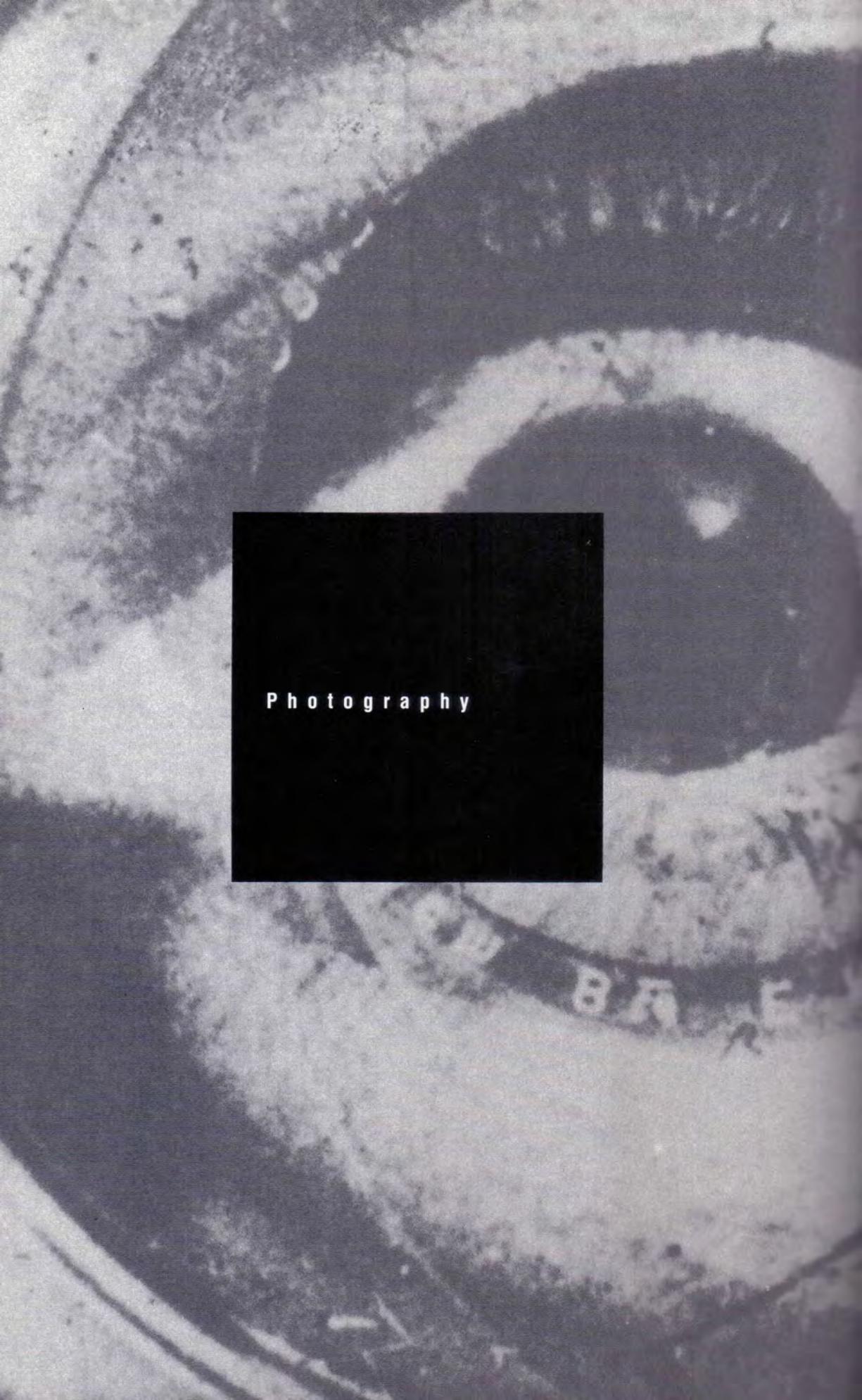


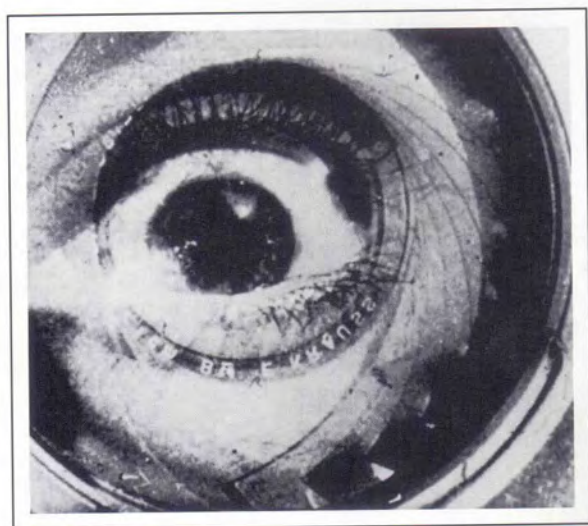


Photography

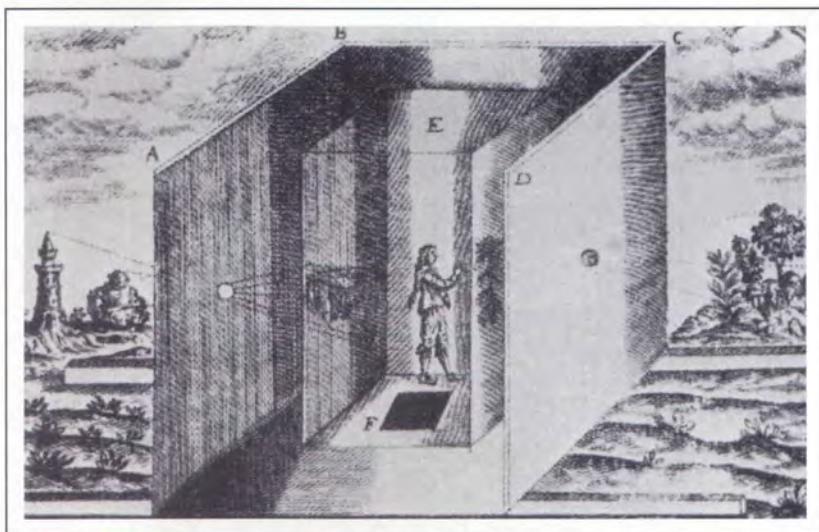
T h e M e c h a n i c a l E y e

There is a still from Dziga Vertov's movie *The Man with the Movie Camera* in which a human eye appears superimposed on the reflected image of a camera lens, indicating precisely the point at which the camera—or rather, the conception of the world that accompanies it—disassociates itself from a classical and humanist episteme.

The traditional definition of photography, “a transparent presentation of a real scene,” is implicit in the diagram instituted by the analogical model of the camera obscura—a model that would pretend to present to the subject the faithful “reproduction” of a reality outside itself. In this definition, photography is invested in the system of classical representation. But Vertov has not placed himself behind the camera lens to use it as an eye, in the way of a realistic epistemology. He has employed the lens as a mirror: approaching the camera, the first thing the eye sees is its own reflected image.



*Still from Dziga Vertov's The Man
with the Movie Camera, 1928–
1929.*



Camera obscura, 1646.

In film, light leaves its traces on the sensitive emulsion, imprinting on it permanent shadows. The manipulation of two realities—the superimposition of two stills, both traces of material realities—produces something that is already outside the logic of “realism.” Rather than *represent* reality, it *produces* a new reality.

Photography and cinema seem, on first reflection, to be “transparent” media. But that which is transparent, like the glass in our window, also reflects (as becomes evident at night) the interior and superimposes it onto our vision of the exterior. The glass functions as a mirror when the camera obscura is lit.

Freud hangs a framed mirror against the window of his studio, right next to his work table. As Marie-Odile Briot notes: “The mirror (the psyche) is in the same plane as the window. The reflection is also a self-portrait projected onto the outside world.”¹ Freud’s mirror, placed in the frontier that separates interior from exterior, undermines its status as a fixed limit. This is not without architectural consequences. The frontier is no longer a limit that separates, excludes, dissociates, a Cartesian limit; rather it is a figure, a convention, its aim is to permit a relation that has to be defined continuously. It is what Franco Rella would call a “shadow line.”²

The diffusion of photography coincides with the development of psychoanalysis. Between the two there is more than one relation. Benjamin writes that it is through photography that “one first learns of the optical unconscious, just as one learns of the drives of the unconscious through psychoanalysis.”³ And Freud himself explicitly sees the relation between unconscious and conscious in terms of photography:

Every mental process . . . exists to begin with in an unconscious stage or phase and it is only from there that the process passes over into the conscious phase, just as a photographic picture begins as a negative and



*Sigmund Freud's study, Berggasse
19, Vienna, 1938. Note the mirror
in the window near his work table.*

only becomes a picture after being formed as a positive. Not every negative, however, necessarily becomes a positive; nor is it necessary that every unconscious mental process should turn into a conscious one.⁴

The unconscious and the conscious, the invisible and the visible, like the negative enclosed within the camera and the print of the exterior developed from it, cannot be thought of independently of one another. Furthermore, both photography and the unconscious presuppose a new spatial model in which interior and exterior are no longer clear-cut divisions. In fact, photography represents a displacement of the model of the camera obscura, and with it, as Jonathan Crary notes, the figure of an "interiorized observer," a "privatized subject confined in a quasi-domestic space, cut off from a public exterior world," into a model in which the distinctions between interior and exterior, subject and object, are "irrevocably blurred."⁵ Likewise, psychoanalysis forever complicates the relationship between inner psyche and its exterior manifestations. The simultaneous and interrelated arrival of psychoanalysis and photography marks the emergence of a different sense of space, indeed of a different architecture.

T h e P h o t o g r a p h i c F e t i s h

In the rare cases when criticism has addressed the subject of Le Corbusier and photography it has done so from within the position that holds photography as a transparent medium of representation, oscillating constantly between a realistic interpretation of the medium and a formalist interpretation of the object. Significantly enough, the subject is addressed as either Le Corbusier the photographer or the photographs of Le Corbusier's work. The place of photography in Le Corbusier's process of production is conspicuously missing. Giuliano Gresleri's fascinating book *Le Corbusier, Viaggio in Oriente* shares in this critical

oversight, particularly at the delicate point where it takes on the connotations of a nostalgic album by the amateur photographer Le Corbusier.⁶ The subtitle of this book, *Gli inediti di Charles-Edouard Jeanneret fotografo e scrittore*, is indicative. First, “inediti,” unpublished, hitherto unheard of; this term maintains the commonsense notion that because the “originals” have not yet been published they have a higher value than any circulating images. Then “Charles-Edouard Jeanneret photographer and writer”: the use of these terms projects onto Le Corbusier’s work a grid that divides knowledge into watertight compartments, presenting him as some sort of multitalented individual capable of producing valuable work in different, specialized branches of knowledge. Le Corbusier as photographer, writer, painter, sculptor, editor, these divisions—often encountered in standard academic criticism—mask Le Corbusier’s fundamentally nonacademic method of working.

This nonacademic method is particularly manifest in Le Corbusier’s travels, which played an essential part in his formation (I am not referring here to what is conventionally understood as the “formative period” but to his entire lifework). A journey represents the possibility of an encounter with “the other.” During Le Corbusier’s first trip to Algiers, in the spring of 1931, he made drawings of naked Algerian women and acquired postcards of naked natives surrounded by accoutrements from the Oriental bazaar. Jean de Maisonseul, who as an eighteen-year-old boy had guided Le Corbusier through the Casbah, will later recall their tour: “Our wanderings through the side streets led us at the end of the day to the rue Kataroudji where he [Le Corbusier] was fascinated by the beauty of two young girls, one Spanish and the other Algerian. They brought us up a narrow stairway to their room; there he sketched some nudes on—to my amazement—some schoolbook graph paper with colored pencils; the sketches of the Spanish girl lying both alone on the bed and beautifully grouped together with the Algerian turned out accurate and realistic; but he said that they were very bad and refused to show them.”⁷ The guide also describes his astonishment at seeing the

architect buying such “vulgar” postcards. The Algerian sketches and postcards are a rather ordinary instance of the ingrained mode of a fetishistic appropriation of women, of the East, of “the other.”⁸ But Le Corbusier, as Samir Rafi and Stanislaus von Moos have noted, turned this material into preparatory studies for a projected monumental figure composition, “the plans for which seem to have preoccupied Le Corbusier during many years, if not his entire life.”⁹

From the months immediately following his return from Algiers up to his death, Le Corbusier seems to have produced hundreds and hundreds of sketches on yellow tracing paper by laying it over the original sketches and retracing the contours of the figures. He also studied exhaustively Delacroix’s famous painting *Femmes d’Alger*, producing a series of sketches of the outlines of the figures in this painting, divested of their “exotic clothing” and the “surrounding decor.” Soon the two projects merged; he modified the postures of Delacroix’s figures, gradually making them correspond to the figures in his own sketches. He said that he would have called the final composition “Femmes de la Casbah.” But, in fact, he never finished it. He kept redrawing it. That the drawing and redrawing of these images became a lifetime obsession would have been enough of an indication that something was at stake. This becomes even more obvious when in 1963–64, shortly before his death, Le Corbusier, unhappy with the visible aging of the yellow tracing paper, copies a selection of these sketches onto transparent paper and—symptomatically, for someone who kept everything—burns the original sketches.¹⁰

But the obsessive process of drawing and redrawing had already reached its most intense, if not hysterical, moment when Le Corbusier’s “Femmes de la Casbah” studies found their way into a mural that he completed in 1938 in E.1027, the house that Eileen Gray had designed and built for Jean Badovici in Cap-Martin in 1927–1929. Le Corbusier called the mural *Graffiti à Cap-Martin*. According to von Moos (who is quoting the new owner of the house, Frau Dr. Schelbert): “Le Corbusier explained



*Eugène Delacroix, Les Femmes
d'Alger, oil on canvas, 1833. Paris,
Louvre.*



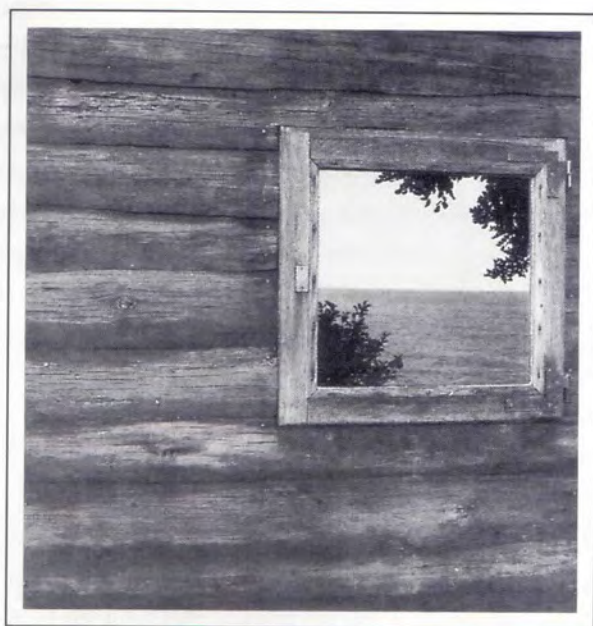
*Le Corbusier, crouching woman,
front view (after Delacroix's Les
Femmes d'Alger), watercolor on
transparent paper, 49.7 × 32.7 cm.
Unsigned (n.d.). Milan, private
collection.*



*Le Corbusier, three women (Graffiti
à Cap-Martin). Mural in Eileen
Gray's house E.1027, Roquebrune-
Cap Martin, 1938.*

to his friends that 'Badou' was depicted on the right, his friend Eileen Gray on the left; the outline of the head and the hairpiece of the sitting figure in the middle, he claimed, was 'the desired child, which was never born.'¹¹ This extraordinary scene, a defacement of Gray's architecture and perhaps even an effacement of her sexuality, is clearly a "theme for a psychiatrist,"¹¹ as Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* says (in a passage curiously omitted from the English translation) of the nightmares with which people invest their houses. Particularly if we also consider Le Corbusier's strange relationship to the couple and to this house, as manifested, for example, in his quasi-occupation of the site when he built after World War II a small wooden shack for himself at the very limits of the adjacent property, right behind Eileen Gray's house. He occupied and controlled the site by overlooking it, the cabin being little more than an observation platform. The violence of this occupation had already been established when Le Corbusier painted the murals in this house (there were eight altogether) without the permission of Eileen Gray, who had already moved out. She considered it an act of vandalism, indeed, as Peter Adam has put it, "it was a rape."¹² When Le Corbusier published the murals in *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* (1948), Eileen Gray's house is referred to as a house in Cap-Martin; her name is not even mentioned. Le Corbusier will end up, later on, getting credit for the design of the house and even for some of its furniture.¹³

Le Corbusier's fetishization of Algerian women is consistent with his abuse of Eileen Gray. One might even argue that the child in the mural reconstitutes the missing (maternal) phallus, whose absence, Freud argues, organizes fetishism. In these terms, the endless drawing and redrawing is the scene of a violent fetishistic substitution that in Le Corbusier would seem to require the house, domestic space, as prop. Violence is organized around or through the house. In both circumstances (Algiers or Cap-Martin) the scene starts by an intrusion, the carefully orchestrated occupation of a house. But the house is in the end effaced (erased from the Algiers drawings, defaced at Cap-Martin).



*Le Corbusier, cabanon, Cap-Martin,
1952.*

Significantly, Le Corbusier describes drawing itself as the occupation of a “stranger’s house.” He writes: “By working with our hands, by drawing, we enter the house of a stranger, we are enriched by the experience, we learn.”¹⁴ Drawing, as has often been noted, plays an essential part in Le Corbusier’s process of “appropriation” of the exterior world. He repeatedly opposes his technique of drawing to photography: “When one travels and works with visual things—architecture, painting or sculpture—one uses one’s eyes and draws, so as to fix deep down in one’s experience what is seen. Once the impression has been recorded by the pencil, it stays for good—entered, registered, inscribed. The camera is a tool for idlers, who use a machine to do their seeing for them.”¹⁵ Certainly statements such as this (which accompanies some of Le Corbusier’s drawings of his journey through the Orient published in his late work *Creation Is a Patient Search*) have gained him the reputation of having a phobia of the camera—a reputation so strong as to make the discovery of the stock of photographs that he took while traveling in the East a “surprise,” as Gresleri describes it. Yet it is difficult to understand how this view of Le Corbusier could ever have been established, let alone sustained, given such evident manifestations of a unique sensibility for the photographic image as his own printed works.

But before that, what is the specific relation between photography and drawing in Le Corbusier? After all, the sketches of the Algerian women were not only redrawings of live models but also redrawings of postcards. In fact, one could argue that the construction of the Algerian women in French postcards, widely diffused at the time, would have informed Le Corbusier’s live drawings, in the same way that, as Zeynep Çelik notes, Le Corbusier precisely reproduces in his physical entrance to foreign cities (Istanbul or Algiers, for example) the images of these cities constructed by postcards and tourist guides.¹⁶ In these terms, not only did “he know what he wanted to see,” as Çelik says, but he saw what he wanted to see, what he had already seen (in pictures). He “enters” those

pictures. He inhabits the photographs. The redrawings of the *Femmes d'Alger* are also more likely to have been realized, as von Moos points out, from postcards and reproductions than from the original painting in the Louvre. So what, then, will be the specific role of the photographic image as such in the fetishistic scene of the "Femmes de la Casbah" project?

The fetish is always about "presence," writes Victor Burgin: "and how many times have I been told that photographs 'lack presence', that paintings are to be valued *because of their presence!*"¹⁷ Clearly this separation between painting and photography is what organizes the dominant understanding of Le Corbusier's relation to photography. And while Le Corbusier's writings, in some passages like the one quoted above, may lead the reader to similar conclusions, what these accounts seem to ignore is what happens when the drawing, the hand-crafted artistic meditation, is done "after" the photograph: the art reproduction, the postcard, even the architect's own photographs. Photography too has been read, in more than one sense, in terms of the fetish. Victor Burgin writes:

In fetishism, an object serves in place of the penis with which the child would endow the woman (her "incompleteness" threatening the child's own self-coherence). Fetishism thus accomplishes that separation of knowledge from belief characteristic of representation; its motive is the unity of the subject. . . . The photograph stands to the subject-viewer as does the fetishized object. . . . We know we see a two-dimensional surface, we believe we look through it into three-dimensional space, we cannot do both at the same time—there is a coming and going between knowledge and belief.¹⁸

So if Le Corbusier "enters the house of a stranger" by drawing, could "the house" be standing in here for the photograph? By drawing he



French postcard of Algerian women:
Scenes and types—Reclining
Moorish women.

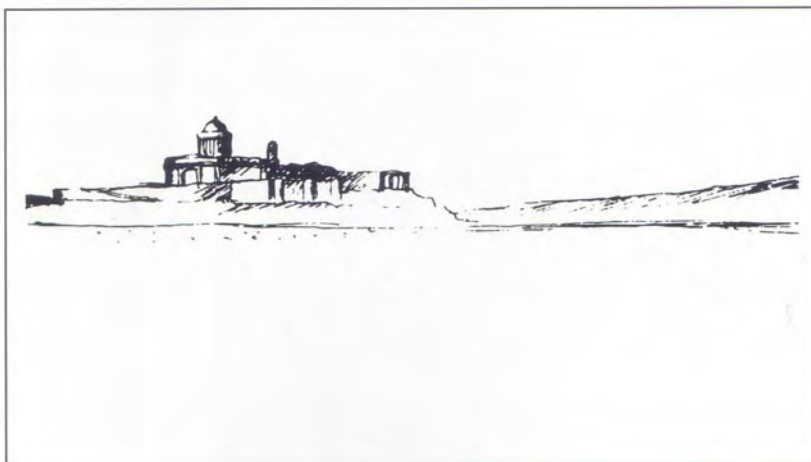
enters the photograph that is itself a stranger's house, occupying and reterritorializing the space, the city, the sexualities of the other by reworking the image. Drawing on and in photography is the instrument of colonization.

In fact, even the early material from his trip to the Orient, which Gresleri collected in *Le Corbusier, Viaggio in Oriente*, reveals the existence of drawings—such as the cathedral of Esztergom viewed from the Danube—that have obviously been realized “after” photographs.¹⁹ This practice of drawing an image after it has already been fixed by the camera appears throughout Le Corbusier's work, recalling his no less enigmatic habit of sketching his own projects again and again, even long after they have been built. He redrew not only his own photographs but also those he encountered in newspapers, catalogues, postcards. The archives of *L'Esprit nouveau* hold numerous sketches on tracing paper that are obvious reworkings of found photographs. These depict such unlikely subjects as *horreurs* (as Le Corbusier would have said) like “Khai Dinh, the present emperor of Annam” or “The opening of the English Parliament. The king and queen” (taken from *L'Illustré* and reproduced in *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*), side by side with a portrait of Gaston Doumergue, President of the French Republic.²⁰

While these drawings were ostensibly done to indicate which image was to be published on which page, they are not simply minimal outlines. Rather they resemble Le Corbusier's purist drawings in their careful reduction of everyday objects to essential forms. In this sense, they seem to indicate Le Corbusier's resistance to a passive intake of photography, to the consumption of images occurring in the world of tourism and mass media. In the face of an explosion of information in the illustrated newspapers, industrial catalogues, and advertisements—with their pretense of representing reality by extensive documentation, by the addition of “facts”—Le Corbusier operates by exclusion. In the terms conditioned by the logic of mass media, a photograph does not have



*View of the cathedral of Esztergom:
photograph by Charles-Edouard
Jeanneret, 1911.*



*Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, drawing
of the cathedral of Esztergom,
1911.*



*Photograph of President Gaston
Doumergue, from L'Illustré.*



*Le Corbusier, sketch realized after
the photograph of Gaston
Doumergue.*



*Photograph of Emperor Khai Dinh,
from L'Illustré.*



*Le Corbusier, sketch after the
photograph at left.*

specific meaning in itself but rather in its relationship to other photographs, the caption, the writing, and the layout of the page. As Roland Barthes puts it: "All images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a floating chain of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others. Polysemy poses a question of meaning. . . . Hence in every society various techniques are developed intended to *fix* the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs."²¹ While photography as constituted in the mass media is most often uncritically received as a fact, Barthes further makes clear that "the press photograph is an object that has been worked on, chosen, composed, constructed."²² Le Corbusier takes pleasure in reconstructing the images thus "constructed," isolating, for instance, some of them from their original context, an illustrated magazine or a mail order catalogue, and drawing sketches after them. Again, the sketch learns from what the photograph excludes. By drawing he is obliged to select, to reduce to a few lines the details of the image. The preformed image thus enters Le Corbusier's creative process, but interpreted. As he himself would put it:

To draw oneself, to trace the lines, handle the volumes, organize the surface . . . all this means first to look, and then to observe and finally perhaps to discover . . . and it is then that inspiration may come. Inventing, creating, one's whole being is drawn into action, and it is this action which counts. Others stood indifferent—but you saw!²³

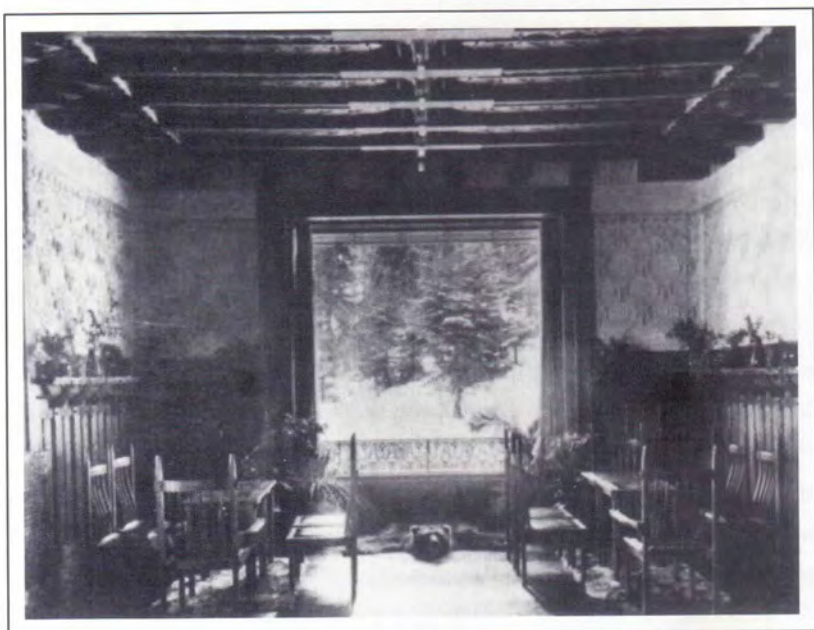
Drawing is an instrument of the *recherche patiente*. It is a technique to overcome the obsessive closure of the object, to reincorporate it into the process, a process of "no beginning and no end." For Le Corbusier the process is more important than the product. This also accounts for the form of his writings, constantly combining the bits and pieces of his thoughts in different contexts, reworking them, as if resisting a final form. As Peter Allison once put it, in spite of the "apparent repetitiveness, . . . he seldom ever repeated himself exactly."²⁴

Reflection and Perception

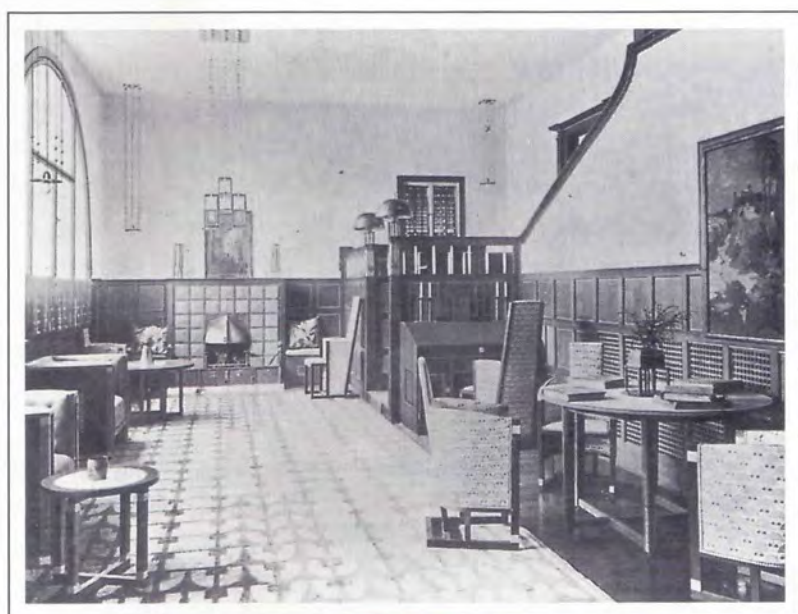
During his first trip to Italy and Vienna in 1907–1908, Le Corbusier became aware of the difference between architecture and its photographic representation. This reflection on representation became a constant subject of his letters. In Vienna, to which Charles L'Eplattenier had directed Le Corbusier and his companion Léon Perrin, the travelers could not find their way to houses they had previously seen in architectural magazines. Le Corbusier wrote to L'Eplattenier asking for the addresses of modern houses published in *Innen Architektur* and *Deutsche Kunst*: "Illogisme, se faire indiquer de La Chaux-de-Fonds des adresses pour Vienna; tant pis c'est ainsi." L'Eplattenier sent them reproductions of Hoffmann interiors and included some of the music room designed by one of his students for the Mathey-Doret house in La Chaux-de-Fonds.²⁵

The photographs of the music room disappointed Le Corbusier: "They are well done, but how pitiful is the effect! Yes, Perrin and I were really upset at what photography gives of the beautiful things we know."²⁶ They consoled themselves by considering that their photographs of Florence and Siena taken a few months earlier, in the fall of 1907, had also been a disappointment: "From our stock of photographs from Italy, we do not have a good one of the beautiful architectural things [we saw], because the effect of photography is always distorted and offensive to the eyes of those who have seen the originals."²⁷ The opposite was true for the *épatant* reproductions of Hoffmann interiors; at first they seemed impressive, but they did not withstand a close inspection:

Look at the photographic effect of these halls and dining rooms of Hoffmann: how much unity it has, how sober, simple, and beautiful it is. Let's examine it closely and analyze it: what are these chairs? This is ugly, impractical, boring, and juvenile. These walls? of taped gypsum, like in



*Music room of the Mathey-Doret
house, La Chaux-de-Fonds, interior
by pupils of Charles L'Eplattenier,
1908.*



*Josef Hoffmann, house for Dr.
Friedrich V. Spitzer, hall, 1902.*

the arcades of Padua. This fireplace, a nonsense. And this dresser and these tables and everything? How cold, surly, and stiff it is. And how the devil is it built?²⁸

The atectonic quality of "modern Vienna" shocked and disgusted Le Corbusier, who had been educated in a vernacular crafts tradition. "All the construction is masking and trickery [*masquée et truquée*]," he wrote to L'Eplattenier. "The German movement is in search of originality to the extreme, not occupying itself with construction, logic, or beauty. No point of support in nature."²⁹ He faulted L'Eplattenier for having misdirected him ("you have sent us to Italy to educate our taste, to love what is [well] built, what is logical, and you want us to renounce all this because of some impressive photographs in art magazines"),³⁰ and suggested that he spend fifteen days in Vienna instead of relying on magazine pictures. As for himself, Le Corbusier had decided to leave Vienna for Paris to learn construction: "*c'est qu'il me faut, c'est ma technique*." Not surprisingly, he did very little drawing during his stay in Vienna.

It is interesting how close these letters come to Adolf Loos's criticism of photography and its shortcomings in representing architecture. In 1910 Loos wrote in "Architektur": "It is my greatest pride that the interiors which I have created are totally ineffective in photographs. . . . I have to forego the honour of being published in the various architectural magazines."³¹ Loos was reacting to the confusion between architecture and the image of architecture so characteristic of the overfed journals of the *Jugendstil*. Le Corbusier was to go a step further than Loos. In Paris, more precisely with the experience of *L'Esprit nouveau*, he came to understand the press, the printed media, not only as a medium for the cultural diffusion of something previously existing but also as a context of production with its own autonomy. His encounter with the metropolis produced a break with L'Eplattenier's crafts forma-



*Charles-Edouard Jeanneret,
engraved watchcase, c. 1902.*



*Omega advertisement in L'Esprit
nouveau 2.*

tion where the object is identified with the world, where the material carries the traces of its maker. Such continuity between hand and object is inside a classical notion of the artifact and of the relationship between producer and product. With industry, mass production, and reproduction this continuity is broken, inverting the relationship between producer and product. Production in a "consumer society" develops, as Adorno and Horkheimer noted, according to a logic completely internal to its own cycle, to its own reproduction. The main mechanism by which this is accomplished is the "culture industry," the vehicles of which are mass media: cinema, radio, publicity, and periodical publications.³² Le Corbusier engages fully with this industry. Indeed, it is arguably only through such an engagement that architecture could itself become industrialized.

F a k e d I m a g e s

In *L'Esprit nouveau* 6, Le Corbusier published the only work he ever recognized from his La Chaux-de-Fonds period: Villa Schwob. (This house, built in 1916, did not appear in the *Oeuvre complète*.) In the accompanying article, Ozenfant, under the pseudonym Julien Caron, remarked on the difficulties of capturing architecture through the eye of the camera: "And photography, already misleading when it reproduces surfaces (paintings), is how much more so when it pretends to reproduce volumes."³³ Ironically, the published photographs of this house are *trompeuse* indeed, they have been "faked."

Le Corbusier air-brushed the photographs of Villa Schwob to adapt them to a more "purist" aesthetic. In the "façade sur la cour," for instance, he masked the pergola in the court, leaving its white trace on the ground, and cleared the garden of any organic growth or distracting object (bushes, climbing plants, and the dog house), revealing a sharply defined



Une Villa DE LE CORBUSIER 1916

Dans ses articles remarquables de l'*Esprit Nouveau*, Le Corbusier-Saunier, architecte, avec modestie, ne s'est occupé que des rapports de l'ingénieur avec la construction moderne, afin de mettre en évidence les conditions primordiales de l'architecture : le jeu des formes dans l'espace, leur conditionnement par les procédés de construction. Il a montré que le calcul peut introduire à une grande architecture, que les moyens de construire actuels (financiers et techniques) offrent des ressources plus vastes que ceux des époques passées.

Le Corbusier sut, dans ses articles, lui artiste, faire momentanément abstraction des qualités de sensibilité qui font l'artiste, pour dégager, avant tout, les moyens de l'ingénieur,

*Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, Villa
Schwob, La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1916,
as published in L'Esprit nouveau 6,
1921.*



*Villa Schwob, as published in
L'Esprit nouveau.*



*Villa Schwob, detail of the pergola.
Original photograph, c. 1920.*

outer wall. He also modified the service entrance to the garden, cutting the protruding vestibule and the angled steps with a straight plane aligned with the door (a difference observable in the original plans published in the same article). The window corresponding to the vestibule became a pure rectangular opening.³⁴

Le Corbusier discarded everything that was picturesque and contextual in this house, concentrating on the formal qualities of the object itself. But the most striking modification in the photographs of this house published in *L'Esprit nouveau* is the elimination of any reference to the actual site, which is, in fact, a steep terrain. By eliminating the site, he makes architecture into an object relatively independent of place. This relationship between an ideal object and an ideal site is a constant in Le Corbusier's architecture of the twenties. For example, he designed the small villa for his parents on the shores of Lake Geneva before he knew its specific location.³⁵ And in Buenos Aires he proposed a suburban development consisting of twenty "replicas" of Villa Savoye.³⁶

An analysis of the *Oeuvre complète* uncovers a similar reworking of the photographic image. In the published photographs of Villa Savoye, for example, Le Corbusier masked, by painting them gray, anomalous columns (wet columns perhaps) visible in other photographs of the villa. Interestingly, the published section of Villa Savoye corresponds to an earlier version of the project rather than to the one that was built.³⁷ It becomes evident that for Le Corbusier any document from the process, which better reflects the concept of the house, takes precedence over the faithful representation of the actual built work. Furthermore, the distinction he makes between real space and the space of the page is equally clear. It is precisely because the latter is necessarily reductive that certain elements—such as wet columns—while innocuous in an experiential reading of the building, are distracting when seen in a photograph.



*Villa Schwob, as published in
L'Esprit nouveau.*

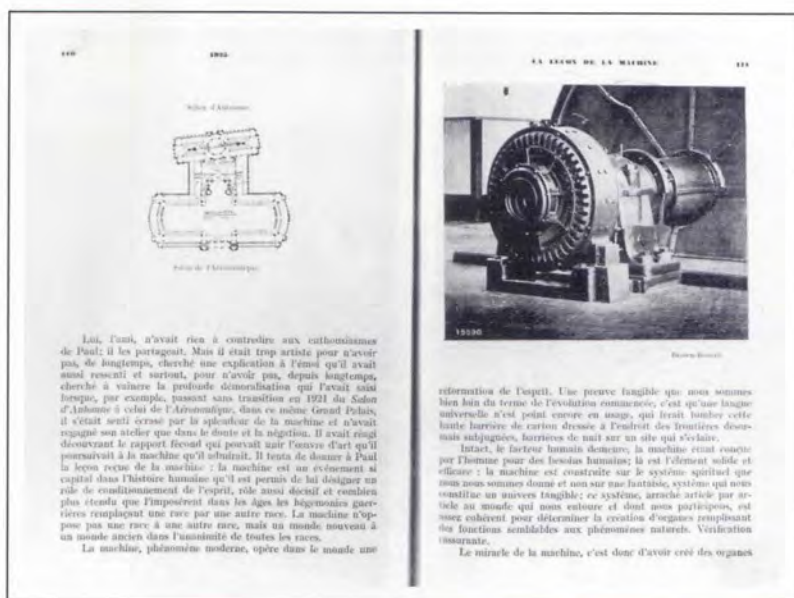


*Villa Schwob. Original photograph,
c. 1920.*

Likewise in the *Oeuvre complète*, Le Corbusier eliminated in the plan for Villa Stein at Garches the two columns that frame the apse of the dining room projection into the living room.³⁸ The resulting plan conveys the spatial, experiential reading of this house. The absence of the two columns reinforces the diagonal thrust of the villa, further disintegrating the “central axis” into fragments.³⁹

Outside his architectural work, Le Corbusier used analogous techniques to reinforce his theoretical arguments. For instance, in *L'Esprit nouveau* and later in *Vers une architecture* he published a photograph of Pisa taken from his own collection of photographs from his first trip to Italy; but prior to its reproduction Le Corbusier traced portions of the print in black ink to stress the purity and clarity of lines in the platform.⁴⁰ A page of sketches from the working material of *Vers une architecture* reveals similarly notable instructions for modifications to be applied to the photographs of the church of S. Maria in Cosmedin in Rome.⁴¹ These consist of removing tabernacles, decoration on the arches, leather pillows, columns, windows, and anything else that would distract the reader from seeing Greece in “Byzantine Rome.” He writes: “Greece by way of Byzantium, a pure creation of the spirit. Architecture is nothing but ordered arrangement, noble prisms, seen in light.”⁴²

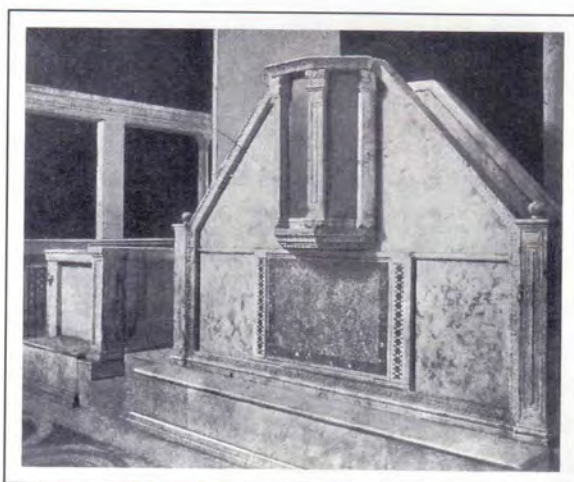
Stanislaus von Moos has written that for Le Corbusier the relationship of the architectural work to a specific site and its material realization are secondary questions; that for him architecture is a conceptual matter to be resolved in the purity of the realm of ideas, that when architecture is built it gets mixed with the world of phenomena and necessarily loses its purity.⁴³ And yet it is significant that when this same built architectural piece enters the two-dimensional space of the printed page it returns to the realm of ideas. The function of photography is not to reflect, in a mirror image, architecture as it happens to be built. Construction is a significant moment in the process, but by no means its end product. Photography and layout construct another architecture in



*Double-page spread from L'Art
décoratif d'aujourd'hui, 1925.*



Publicity brochure for Vers une architecture, 1923(?).



*S. Maria in Cosmedin as published
in Vers une architecture, 1923.*

the space of the page. Conception, execution, and reproduction are separate, consecutive moments in a traditional process of creation. But in the elliptic course of Le Corbusier's process this hierarchy is lost. Conception of the building and its reproduction cross each other again.

C O N T I N U O U S E D I T I N G

In the division of tasks among the editorial group of *L'Esprit nouveau*, Le Corbusier took as his responsibilities "administration et finances." Amédée Ozenfant and Paul Dermée, coeditors of the magazine, were in charge of the more traditional work of production and editing. But Le Corbusier opted to mix with the world outside the intellectual circles, to participate actively in the world of industry and finance, himself a "producer" rather than an "interpreter"—the classical task of the intellectual—of the new industrial reality.⁴⁴ As the magazine was largely financed by advertising, Le Corbusier came in contact with the culture of mass media.

His avid collection of industrial catalogues, department store brochures, and images clipped from newspapers and magazines thus has, in part, a productive explanation. Le Corbusier was in search of publicity contracts for *L'Esprit nouveau*. In fact, many of these catalogues came from companies whose products were ultimately advertised in the magazine. But Le Corbusier also appropriated this material as a source of images for his articles and books.⁴⁵

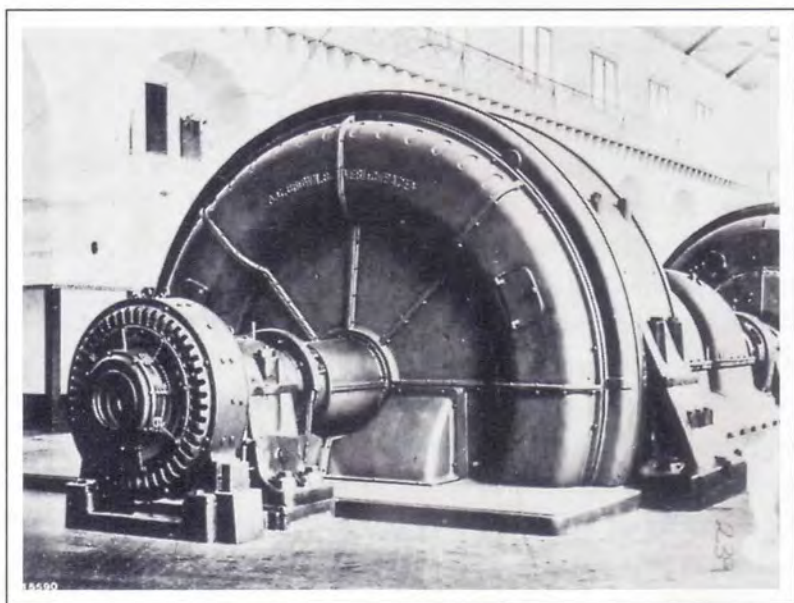
In *L'Esprit nouveau* photography is not presented as an artistic project, rather as a documentary means. But in Le Corbusier's articles, photographs taken from publicity material coexist with images extracted from art books and photographs of his own work. Within these pages the world of mass culture intrudes into the world of high art, shaking the

edifice to its foundations. No matter how often Le Corbusier claims a higher rank for the art object than for the everyday object, his work is continually “contaminated” by the materials of low culture.⁴⁶

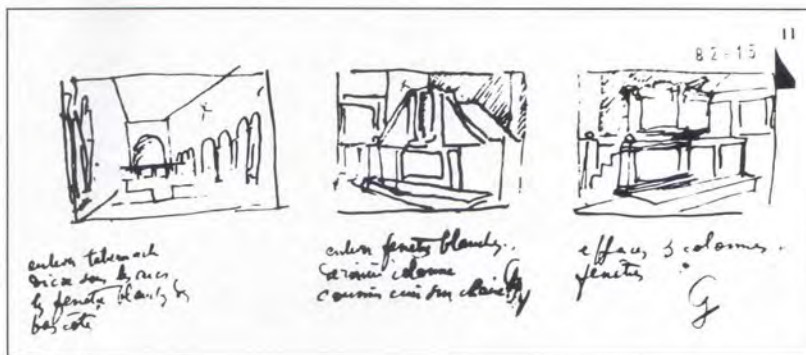
On the cover of the publicity brochure that Le Corbusier prepared for *Vers une architecture* he stated: “Vient de paraître / [interrupted by the reproduction of the book’s cover] / Ce livre est implacable / Il ne ressemble à aucun autre.” Inside he explained the novelty of his book in terms of his use of images: “This book derives its eloquence from the new means; its magnificent illustrations hold next to the text a parallel discourse, and one of great power.”⁴⁷

Photography in Le Corbusier’s book is rarely employed in a representational manner. Instead it is the agent of a never-resolved collision of images and text, its meaning derived from the tension between the two. In this technique Le Corbusier borrowed much from modern advertising: the association of ideas that can be produced through the juxtaposition of images and of images with writing. A similar sensibility is evident in Le Corbusier’s photographs of his early villas, which, as von Moos has noted, often include cars, if not his own Voisin: “Indeed, it is often unclear in these images whether it is the car or the house that supplies the context for an advertisement of the contemporary good life.”⁴⁸ In Le Corbusier’s books, images are not used to “illustrate” the written text; rather they construct the text. Again in the publicity brochure of *Vers une architecture* he wrote: “This new conception of the book . . . allows the author to avoid flowery language, ineffectual descriptions; the facts explode under the eyes of the reader by force of the images.”⁴⁹

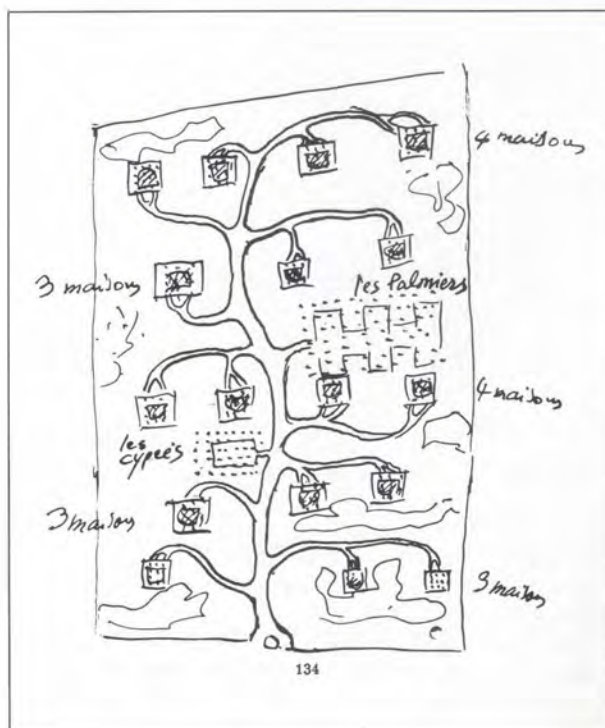
In fact, Le Corbusier’s books were conceived through a continuous editing of found images. The working material of *Vers une architecture* and *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui* reveals as much.⁵⁰ It consists of a series of sketches, grouped as vignettes, that correspond to the images to be



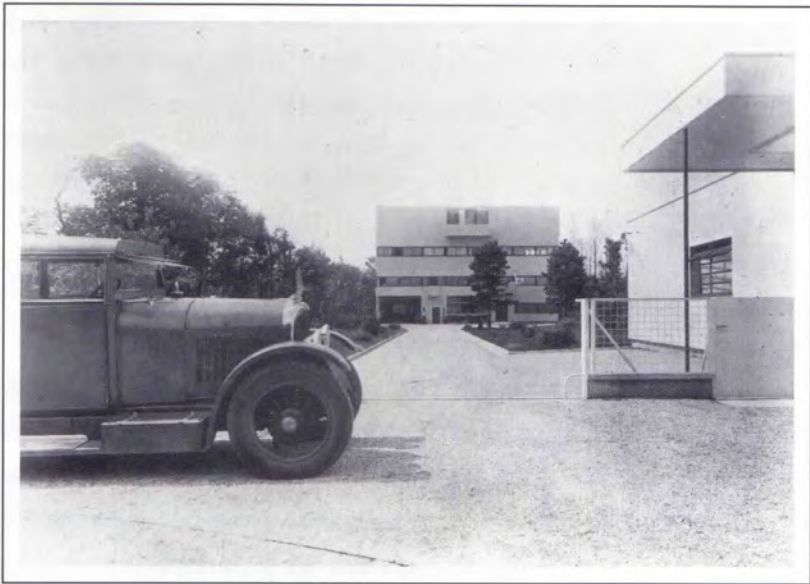
*Photograph of a turbine from a
catalogue of the Swiss company
Brown Boveri, c. 1924.*



Le Corbusier, sketches of the interior
 of S. Maria in Cosmedin, Rome,
 with instructions for modifying the
 original photographs before their
 publication in *Vers une*
architecture.



Replicas of Villa Savoye for the Argentine countryside, proposed by Le Corbusier in a lecture in Buenos Aires, October 1929, and published in Précisions.



*Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret,
Villa Stein-De-Monzie, Garches,
1927.*

displayed. Some images come from Le Corbusier's memory ("carte postale, où est la carte postale?" is the footnote to one vignette); others are extracted from machinery catalogues, from Frédéric Boissonnas's albums of Greece, and so forth. Almost invariably Le Corbusier transformed these photographs. Beyond removing them from their original context, he painted on them, erased their details, reframed them; these, then, are images that have been worked on, chosen, composed, constructed.

Though photography makes everything accessible—"distant places, famous people, springtime" (as Benjamin put it)—choice rather than accumulation is its essence. Framing is the issue of photography. The photographs of Greece by Boissonnas that Le Corbusier published in *Vers une architecture* were taken primarily from Maxime Collignon's *Le Parthénon* and *L'Acropole*.⁵¹ Some were reframed and bear a resemblance to his own sketches in "Voyage d'Orient." They are "incomplete." They create a tension that pulls toward the missing element. As Stanford Anderson, referring to the sketches, has observed:

We hold no vantage point from which we may possess the building objectively. And if we did possess such a vantage point, these drawings tell us we would be missing something else. Experience itself and the knowledge which comes only through experience. . . . At a conceptual level Le Corbusier is concerned with how we correlate experience and knowledge. . . . This insistence on experience is more forceful when made in the presence of a work [the Parthenon] for which we have previously instilled modes of appropriation. . . . Le Corbusier did not repeat or make more precise the earlier researches into the orders . . . he produced a set of sketches which evoke vividly the sequential experience of the ascent of the Acropolis.⁵²

Boissonnas's photographs exemplify the instilled mode of an aestheticized appropriation of the Parthenon. The enormous plates of this book



Photo Albert Métais.

Le Parthénon.

Petit à petit, le temple se termine, passe de la construction à l'architecture, tend vers son plein et son Parthénon vers le point culminant de l'antiquité.

du guerrier et du prêtre, pour atteindre à ce qu'on appelle justement la culture. La culture est l'aboutissement d'un effort de sélection. Sélection veut dire écarter, éliminer, sélectionner, faire remonter au et choir l'essentiel.

Depuis le primitivisme de la chapelle romane, on a passé à Notre-Dame de Paris, aux Invalides, à la Concorde. On a épuré, affiné la sensation, écarté le décor et conquis la proportion et la mesure; on a avancé; on a passé des satisfactions primitives (dites) aux satisfactions supérieures (mathématiques).

Si l'on recule des années bretonnes en Bretagne, c'est que les Bretons sont demeurés en Bretagne, bien bas, bien stables, toujours occupés à la pêche et à leur élevage. Il n'est pas étonnant que les maîtres de la haute société d'aujourd'hui, en leur hôtel de Paris, dans un lit breton; il n'est pas étonnant qu'un monsieur qui possède une limousine dorme dans un lit breton, etc. Il suffit de se rendre compte et de tirer les déductions logiques. Posséder une limousine et un lit breton, c'est, hélas, courant.



Photo Albert Métais.

Le Parthénon.

Chaque partie est dessinée, marquée le maximum de précision, d'expressivité, la perspective et la couleur.

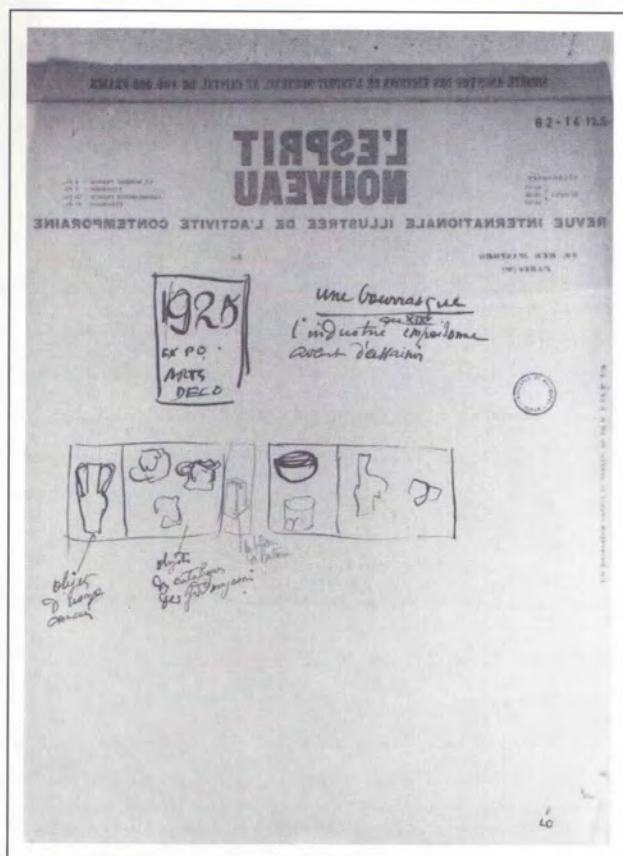
Tout le monde s'écrit avec conviction et enthousiasme : « La limousine marque le style de notre époque » et le lit breton se vend et se fabrique toujours chez les antiquaires.

Montrons donc le Parthénon et l'auto sans qu'on comprenne qu'il s'agit ici, dans des domaines différents, de deux produits de sélection, l'un ayant abouti, l'autre étant en marche de progrès. Ceci rassurait l'auto, Allez! Allez! Allez! il reste à confronter nos maisons et nos palais avec les autos. C'est ici que ça ne va plus, que rien ne va plus. C'est ici que nous n'avons pas nos Parthénon.

Le standard de la maison est d'ordre pratique, d'ordre constructif. J'ai tenté de l'élever dans le précédent chapitre sur les avions.

Le programme Loucheur qui comporte 500 000 logements à construire en dix ans écarte sans doute celui de l'habitation de luxe.

Double-page spread from Vers une architecture, 1923, with reproductions of photographs by Frédéric Boissonnas taken from Maxime Collignon's Le Parthénon and reframed.



Sketches on L'Esprit nouveau
letterhead for L'Art décoratif
d'aujourd'hui.

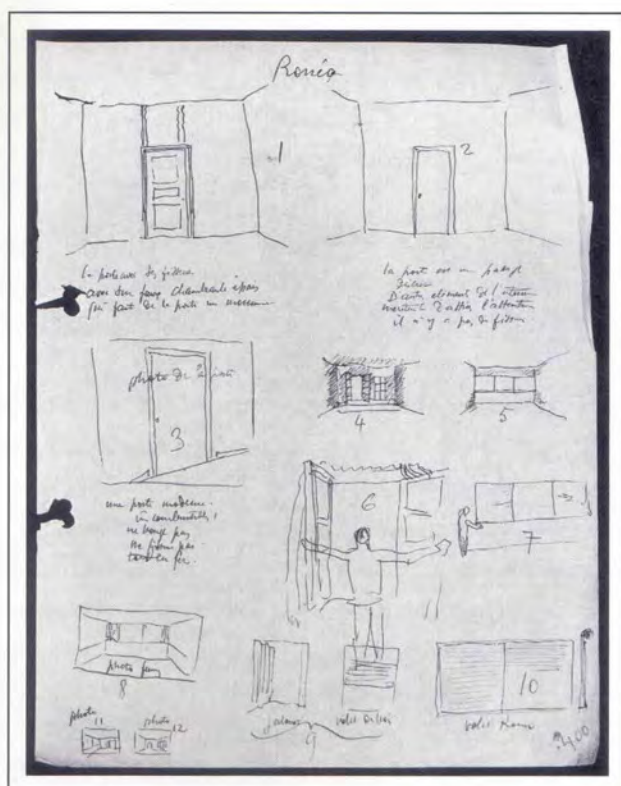
force the reader to step back every time a page is turned, presenting each image as an object for contemplative immersion, as a “work of art.” Le Corbusier breaks away from his source when he wrenches these images from the sanctuary of high art, reduces their size, and places them next to the everyday images of newspapers and industrial catalogues (which themselves have undergone equivalent transformations). Mass media make everything contiguous and equivalent. Le Corbusier does not pretend to maintain a hierarchical division of the material by genre or type. Instead, he presents the collision of fragments corresponding to the experience of culture in the media. Thus his work becomes a critical comment on the conditions of culture in our time.

This rethinking of culture through a systematic reappropriation of photography transforms the fundamental sense of space in Le Corbusier’s work. The transformation is most evident in his thinking of the window. After all, the window like the photograph is first of all a frame. The frame of Le Corbusier’s horizontal window, like his photographs of the Parthenon, upsets the classical viewer’s expectations, precisely because it cuts something out of the view.

A Window with a View

Nobody was more upset by Le Corbusier’s horizontal window than his mentor Auguste Perret. From their initial dispute in the pages of the *Paris Journal* in 1923, they engaged for years in a bitter debate over the *fenêtre en longueur*, about which Bruno Reichlin has made an insightful analysis.⁵³

A page of sketches by Le Corbusier with the heading “Ronéo,” found in the archives of *L’Esprit nouveau*, appears to have been made when he was in the process of making a publicity brochure for the company

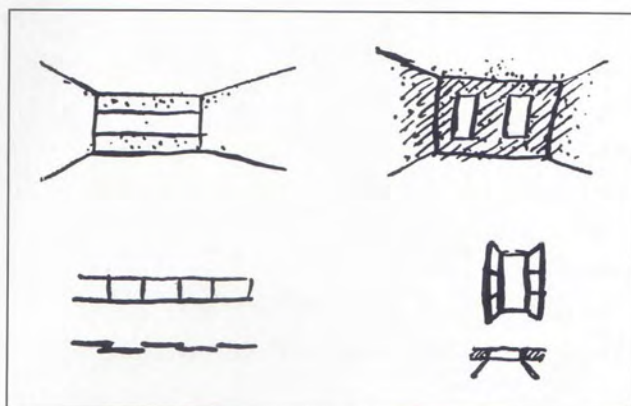


Le Corbusier, "Ronéo" page of sketches, illustrating the polemic between Le Corbusier and Auguste Perret over the fenêtre en longueur.

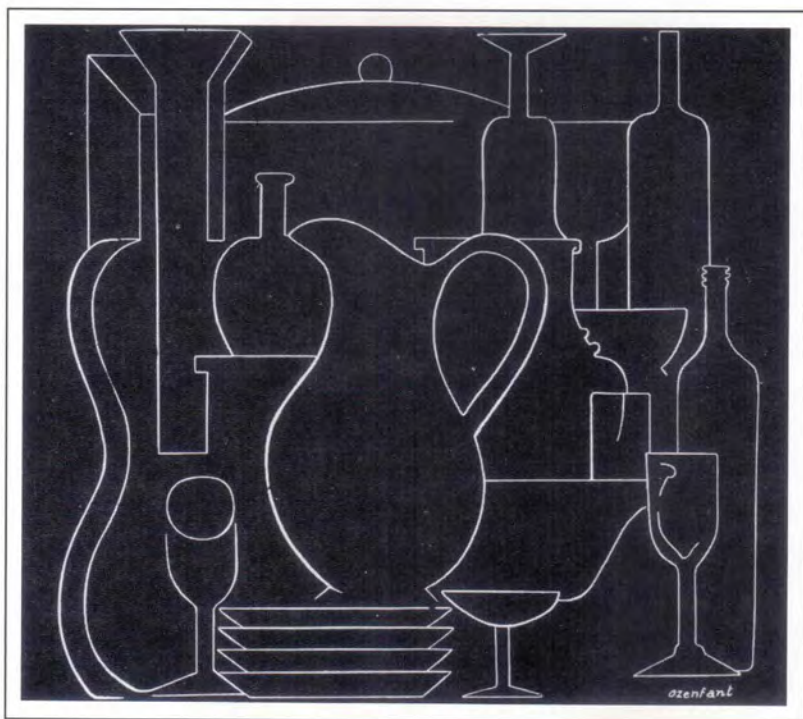
of that name.⁵⁴ What the drawings illustrate, however, is that famous controversy between Perret and Le Corbusier. Perret maintained that the vertical window, the *porte-fenêtre*, reproduces an “impression of complete space” because it permits a view of the street, the garden, and the sky, giving a sense of perspectival depth. The horizontal window, the *fenêtre en longueur*, on the other hand, diminishes “one’s perception and correct appreciation of the landscape.” In fact, Perret argued, it cuts out of view precisely that which is most interesting: the strip of the sky and the foreground that sustains the illusion of perspectival depth. The landscape remains, but (as Bruno Reichlin has put it) as though it were a planar projection “sticking to the window.”⁵⁵

In this dispute Perret expresses, with an exceptional clarity, the authority of the traditional notion of representation within a realistic epistemology, representation defined as the subjective reproduction of an objective reality. This is what he means by “complete” space. In these terms, Le Corbusier’s concept of the horizontal window, as well as other aspects of his work, undermines this concept of representation. While classical paintings attempted to identify images with their models, purist paintings, built up with shapes and images of recognizable objects—bottles, glasses, books, pipes, and so forth—eschew this identification, as Ozenfant and Jeanneret claim. In *La Peinture moderne* they define the standard objects that they chose to represent in their paintings as “objects of the most perfect banality,” which have “the advantage of a perfect readability and of being recognized without effort.”⁵⁶ Objects on the canvas are therefore like words in a sentence: they refer to recognizable things, but the objects in the world that are represented are less important than the conjunction of differential units within the painting itself, each element being qualified by its place in the ensemble, or in Saussure’s words by “differences without positive terms.”⁵⁷

The terms of Le Corbusier’s “pictorial frontality” have been read by Rosalind Krauss as threefold:



*Le Corbusier, sketch of the
confrontation between the porte-
fenêtre and the fenêtre en longueur.*



Amédée Ozenfant, drawing, 1925.

First, the object is registered as pure extension, as flat shape which never breaks rank with the picture's frontality to suggest a turning of one of its facets into depth. Second, the constellation of objects wedge together in that insistent continuity of edges which the Purist called *mariage de contours*. Third, color and texture are handled in a manner that calls attention to the inherent superficiality of these "secondary qualities"—so that distance or depth in the painting becomes no longer a matter of representing the space separating one object from another in the real world. Instead distance is transformed into a representation of the caesura between the appearance of the object and the object itself.⁵⁸

Viewing a landscape through a window implies a separation. A "window," any window, "breaks the connection between being in a landscape and seeing it. Landscape becomes [purely] visual, and we depend on memory to know it as a tangible experience."⁵⁹ Le Corbusier's horizontal window works to put this condition, this "caesura," in evidence.

Perret's window corresponds, as Reichlin has shown, to the traditional space of perspective representation in Western art. Le Corbusier's window corresponds, I would argue, to the space of photography. It is not by chance that Le Corbusier continues the polemic with Perret in an argument in *Précisions*, demonstrating "scientifically" that the horizontal window illuminates better, by relying on a photographer's chart that gives times of exposure.⁶⁰ While photography and film, based on single-point perspective, are often seen as "transparent" media, deriving from the classical system of representation, there is an epistemological break between photography and perspective. The point of view of photography is that of the camera, a mechanical eye. The painterly convention of perspective centers everything on the eye of the beholder and calls this appearance "reality." The camera—particularly the movie camera—implies that there is no center.

Using Walter Benjamin's distinction between the painter and the cameraman, one could conclude that Le Corbusier's architecture is the result of his positioning himself behind the camera.⁶¹ By this I am not referring now to the aforementioned implications, Le Corbusier as "producer" rather than "interpreter" of industrial reality, but to a more literal reading, emphasizing the deliberate dispersal of the eye in Le Corbusier's villas of the twenties, effected through the architectural promenade, together with the collapsing of space outside the horizontal window—the architectural correlative of the space of the movie camera.

On this basis, may we therefore say that Perret's architecture falls within the humanist tradition and Le Corbusier's within the modernist? There is something paradoxical about the Ronéo drawing. While Le Corbusier intends by this drawing to illustrate the superiority of the horizontal window, in fact the intensity and detail with which he draws Perret's *porte-fenêtre*, in contrast to the sketchiness of the horizontal window, show it to be much more emotionally charged.⁶² Above all this may be seen in the way Le Corbusier draws the human figure in each. In the *porte-fenêtre*, a carefully drawn man stands at the center of the window, holding it open with wide-stretched arms—recalling Perret's assertion (in an imaginary dialogue published by Le Corbusier in the *Almanach d'architecture moderne*) that "a window is man himself. . . . The *porte-fenêtre* provides man with a frame, it accords with his outlines. . . . The vertical is the line of the upright human being, it is the line of life itself." In contrast, the diminutive man drawn in the horizontal window occupies a peripheral position; the window opens by sliding. Le Corbusier wrote in the *Almanach*: "fenêtre, élément type—élément mécanique type: nous avons serré de près le module anthropocentrique."⁶³

Any concept of the window implies a notion of the relationships between inside and outside, between private and public space. In Le Corbusier's work this relationship has to do with the contrast between the infinity of

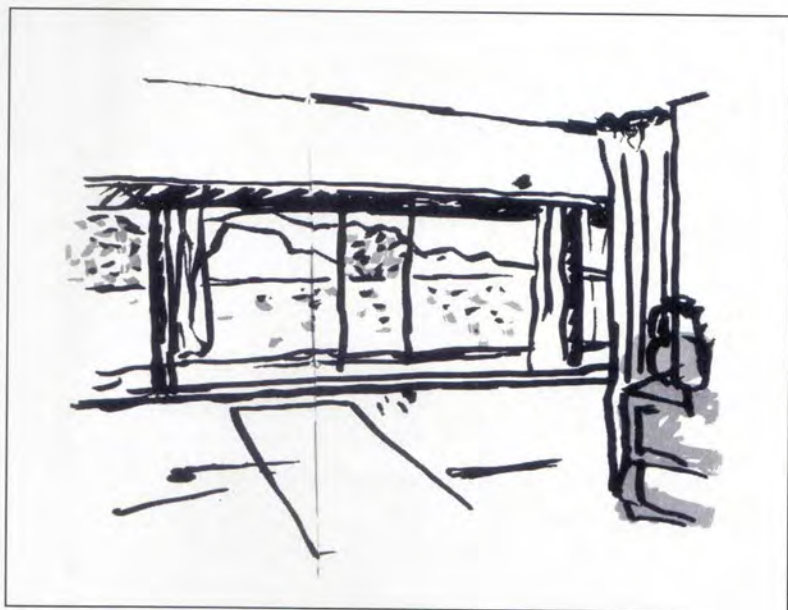


*Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret,
Maison Cook, 1926.*

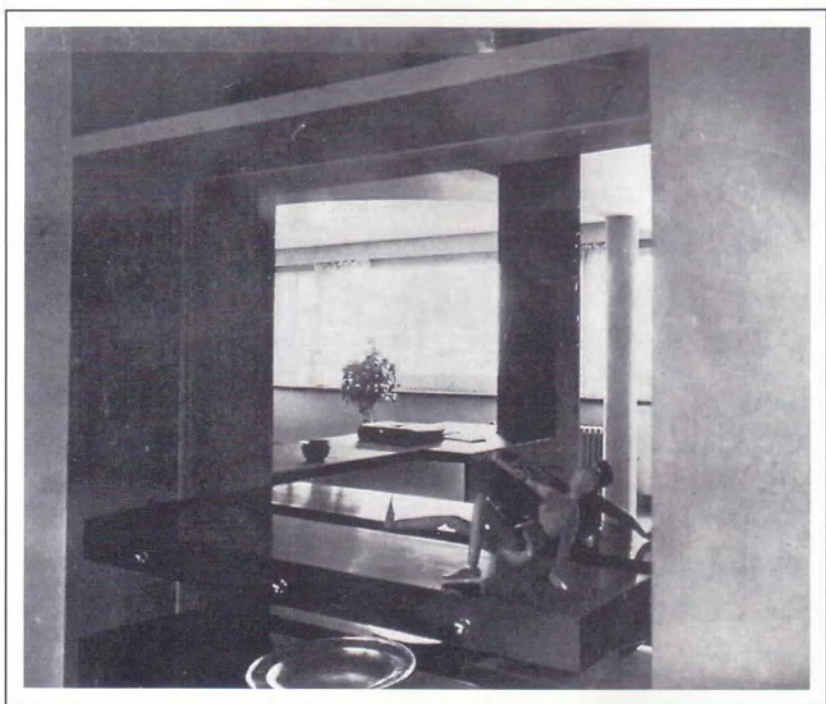
space and the experience of the body, a body that has become a surrogate machine in an industrial age. As he writes in *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*: "Decorative art is the mechanical system that surrounds us . . . , an extension of our limbs; its elements, in fact, *artificial limbs*. Decorative art becomes orthopaedic, an activity that appeals to the imagination, to invention, to skill, but a craft analogous to the tailor: the client is a man, familiar to us all and precisely defined."⁶⁴ And in a footnote to the book, Le Corbusier wrote that when the typewriter came into use, anthropocentrism became standardization: "This standardization had considerable repercussions upon furniture as a result of the establishment of a module, that of the *commercial format*. . . . An international convention was established [for paper sheets, magazines, books, newspapers, canvases, photographic prints]."⁶⁵ Le Corbusier understands the window in the same terms. Rather than framing the body, it is the body's mechanical substitute.

This can be seen in the evolution of the *fenêtre en longueur*. The one that stretches along the facade of the villa for Le Corbusier's parents in Corseaux on Lake Geneva (1923)—a house that became central to the Perret-Le Corbusier controversy—does not open by sliding. The window is divided into four elements, each of which is divided into three panels. The central panel, a rectangle, opens by pivoting; the two square panels are fixed. There, the occupant of the house still has to go to the center of the window to open it, and is thereby framed. In the Ronéo drawing, the *fenêtre en longueur* is again divided into three panels, but now the central one is square, like the others, and is fixed. This window slides open; and when opened, one glass panel is overlaid on another. The individual no longer occupies the center of the window when opening it, but must stand to one side. More than in Corseaux, the subject is displaced by the equipment.

How important the division of the window into three panels is for Le Corbusier is evident in his sketches of the house: the view outside each



*Le Corbusier, small villa for his
parents, Corseaux, drawing of the
view through the interior overlooking
Lake Geneva.*

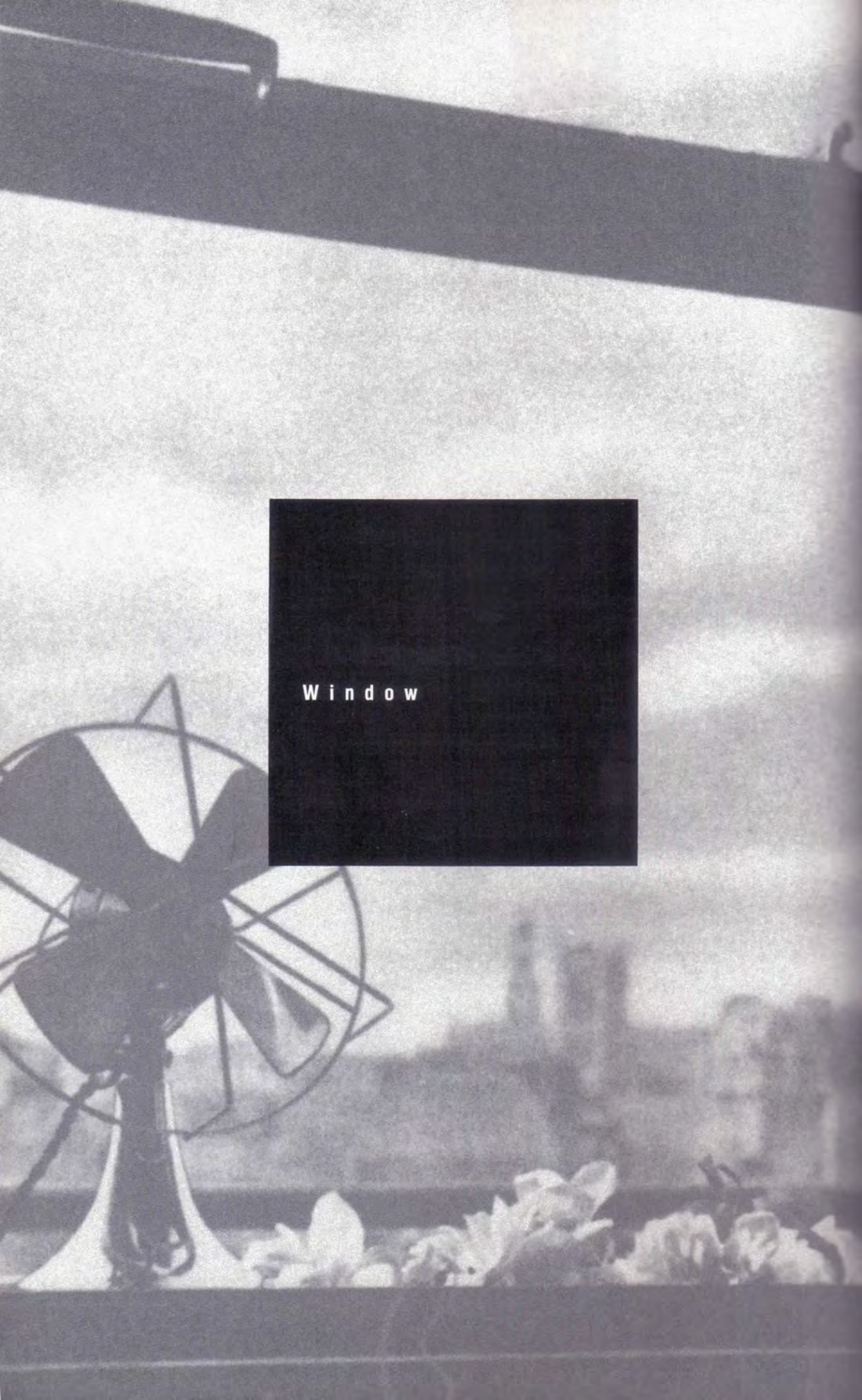


*Maison Cook, view showing the
fenêtre en longueur of the opposite
wall reflected in the mirror of the
buffet.*

panel seems relatively independent of the adjacent view. The grouping of curtains in the side post, also stressed in Le Corbusier's sketches, reinforces the division of this window into four. The panorama "sticking" to the window glass is superimposed on a rhythmic grid that suggests a series of photographs placed next to each other in a row, or perhaps a series of stills from a movie.

We imagine a boat going down the lake. Viewed from a *porte-fenêtre* there would be an ideal moment: the boat appears at the center of the opening directly in line with the gaze into the landscape—as in a classical painting. The boat would then move out of vision. From the *fenêtre en longueur* the boat is continuously shot, and each shot is independently framed.

With Le Corbusier's *fenêtre en longueur* we are returned to Dziga Vertov, to an unfixed, never-reified image, to a sequence without direction, moving backward and forward according to the mechanism or the movement of the figure.

A black and white photograph of a window view. In the foreground, a vintage-style electric fan with four blades is positioned on the left. To its right, a row of white flowers is visible. The background shows a blurred cityscape with various buildings. A solid black rectangular box is superimposed over the center of the image, containing the word "Window" in white text.

Window

In the houses of Le Corbusier the reverse condition of Loos's interiors may be observed. In photographs windows are never covered with curtains, neither is access to them prevented by means of hampering objects. On the contrary, everything in these houses seems to be disposed in a way that continuously throws the subject toward the periphery of the house. The look is directed to the exterior in such a deliberate manner as to suggest the reading of these houses as frames for a view. Even when actually in an "exterior," in a terrace or in a "roof garden," walls are constructed to frame the landscape, and a view from there to the interior, as in a canonic photograph of Villa Savoye, passes right through it to the framed landscape (so that in fact one can speak about a series of overlapping frames). These frames are given temporality through the *promenade*. Unlike in Adolf Loos's houses, perception here occurs in motion. It is hard to think of oneself in static positions. If the photographs of Loos's interiors give the impression that somebody is about to enter the room, in Le Corbusier's the impression is that somebody was just there, leaving as traces a coat and a hat lying on the table



*Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, Poissy,
1929. Jardin suspendu.*



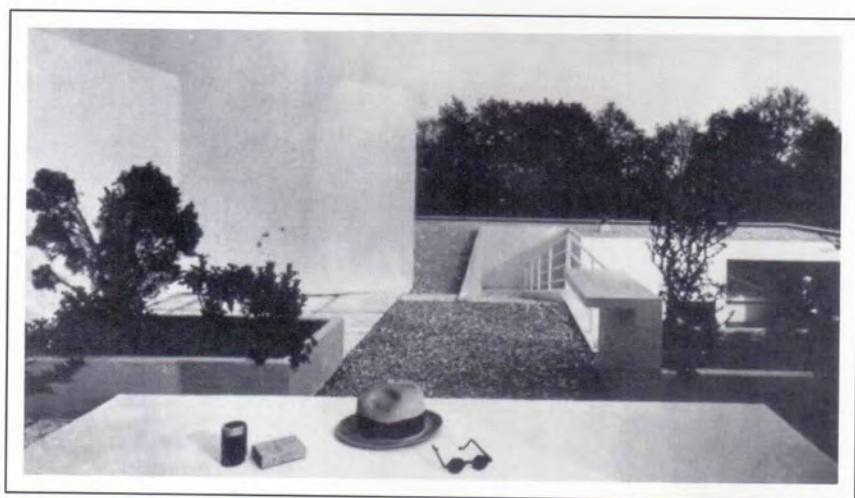
Villa Savoye. The entrance hall.



Villa Savoye. The kitchen.



*Le Corbusier, Villa à Garches,
1927. The kitchen.*



Villa Savoye. The roof garden.

by the entrance of Villa Savoye or some bread and a jug on the kitchen table (note also that the door here has been left open, further suggesting the idea that we have just missed somebody), or a raw fish in the kitchen of Garches (whatever one can make of it). And even once we have reached the highest point of the house, as in the terrace of Villa Savoye on the sill of the window that frames the landscape, the culminating point of the promenade, here also we find a hat, a pair of sunglasses, a little package (cigarettes?) and a lighter, and now, where did the *gentleman* go? Because of course, as you would have noticed already, the personal objects are all male objects (never a handbag, a lipstick, or some piece of women's clothing). But before that. We are following somebody, the traces of his existence presented to us in the form of a series of photographs of the interior. The look into these photographs is a forbidden look. The look of a detective. A voyeuristic look.¹

In the movie *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* (1929), directed by Pierre Chenal with Le Corbusier,² the latter as the main actor drives his own car to the entrance of the Villa à Garches, descends and enters the house in an energetic manner. He is wearing a dark suit with bow tie, his hair is glued with brilliantine, every hair in place, he is holding a cigarette in his mouth. The camera pans through the exterior of the house and arrives at the "roof garden," where there are women sitting down and children playing. A little boy is driving his toy car. At this point Le Corbusier appears again but on the other side of the terrace (he never comes in contact with the women and children). He is puffing his cigarette. He then very athletically climbs up the spiral staircase that leads to the highest point of this house, a lookout point. Still wearing his formal attire, the cigarette still sticking out of his mouth, he pauses to contemplate the view from that point. He looks out.

There is also a figure of a woman going through a house in this movie. The house that frames her is Villa Savoye. Here there is no car arriving. The camera shows the house from the distance, an object sitting in the



*Villa à Garches. Still from
L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui, 1929.*



*Villa à Garches. Still from
L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui.*



*Villa Savoye. Still from
L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui: "Une
maison ce n'est pas une prison:
l'aspect change à chaque pas."*

landscape, and then pans the outside and the inside of the house. And it is there, halfway through the interior, that the woman appears on the screen. She is already inside, already contained by the house, bounded. She opens the door that leads to the terrace and goes up the ramp toward the roof garden, her back to the camera. She is wearing "inside" (informal) clothes and high heels and she holds to the handrail as she goes up, her skirt and hair blowing in the wind. She appears vulnerable. Her body is fragmented, framed not only by the camera but by the house itself, behind bars. She appears to be moving from the inside of the house to the outside, to the roof garden. But this outside is again constructed as an inside, with a wall wrapping the space in which an opening with the proportions of a window frames the landscape. The woman continues walking along the wall, as if protected by it, and as the wall makes a curve to form the solarium, the woman turns too, picks up a chair, and sits down. She would be facing the "interior," the space she has just moved through. But for the camera, which now shows us a general view of the terrace, she has disappeared behind the bushes. That is, just at the moment when she has turned and could face the camera (there is nowhere else to go), she vanishes. She never catches our eye. Here we are literally following somebody, the point of view is that of a voyeur.

We could accumulate more evidence. Few photographs of Le Corbusier's buildings show people in them. But in those few, women always look away from the camera: most of the time they are shot from the back and they almost never occupy the same space as men. Take the photographs of Immeuble Clarté in the *Oeuvre complète*, for example. In one of them, the woman and the child are in the interior, they are shot from the back, facing the wall; the men are on the balcony, looking out, toward the city. In the next shot, the woman, again shot from the back, is leaning against the window to the balcony and looking at the man and the child who are on the balcony. This spatial structure is repeated very often,



*Le Corbusier, Immeuble Clarté,
Geneva, 1930–1932. View of the
interior.*

not only in the photographs but also in the drawings of Le Corbusier's projects. In a drawing of the Wanner project, for example, the woman in the upper floor is leaning against the veranda, looking down to her hero, the boxer, who is occupying the *jardin suspendu*. He looks at his punching bag. And in the drawing "Ferme radieuse," the woman in the kitchen looks over the counter toward the man sitting at the dining room table. He is reading the newspaper. Here again the woman is placed "inside," the man "outside"; the woman looks at the man, the man looks at the "world."

But perhaps no example is more telling than the photocollage of the exhibit of a living room in the Salon d'Automne 1929, including all the "equipment of a dwelling," a project that Le Corbusier realized in collaboration with Charlotte Perriand, whose credit for it has been practically erased. In fact, today we know this furniture as "Le Corbusier's" when some of the pieces, the *siège tournant*, for example, were designed, exhibited, and published by Perriand before she met Le Corbusier.³ In this image, which Le Corbusier published in the *Oeuvre complète*, Perriand herself is lying on the *chaise-longue*, her head turned away from the camera. More significant, in the original photograph employed in this photocollage (as well as in another photograph in the *Oeuvre complète* that shows the *chaise-longue* in the horizontal position), one can see that the chair has been placed right against the wall. Remarkably, she is facing the wall. She is almost an attachment to the wall. She sees nothing.

And of course for Le Corbusier, who writes things such as "I exist in life only on condition that I see" (*Précisions*, 1930) or "This is the key: to look . . . to look/observe/see/imagine/invent, create" (1963), and in the last weeks of his life, "I am and I remain an impenitent visual" (*Mise au point*), everything is in the visual.⁴ But what does *vision* mean here?

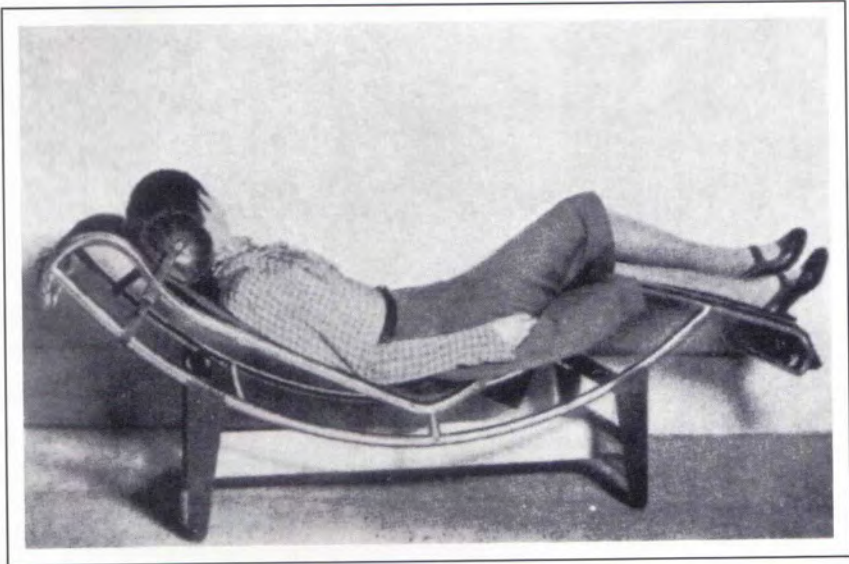
If we now return to the passage in *Urbanisme* where Le Corbusier refers to Loos's window ("Loos told me one day: 'A cultivated man does not look out of the window; his window is a ground glass; it is there only to let the light in, not to let the gaze pass through'"),⁵ we find that he has left us a clue to the enigma in that very passage, when he goes on to say: "Such sentiment [that of Loos with regard to the window] can have an explanation in the congested, disordered city where disorder appears in distressing images; one could even admit the paradox [of a Loosian window] before a sublime natural spectacle, too sublime."⁶

For Le Corbusier the metropolis itself was "too sublime." The look in Le Corbusier's architecture is not that look which would still pretend to contemplate the metropolitan spectacle with the detachment of a nineteenth-century observer before a sublime natural landscape (as in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich). It is not the look in Hugh Ferriss's drawings of *The Metropolis of Tomorrow*, for example, where a small figure perched on the top of a skyscraper looks down into the bottomless abyss of the canyons of an imaginary city, in the same way that Friedrich's small figures dressed in city clothes look into the unframable spectacle of nature.⁷

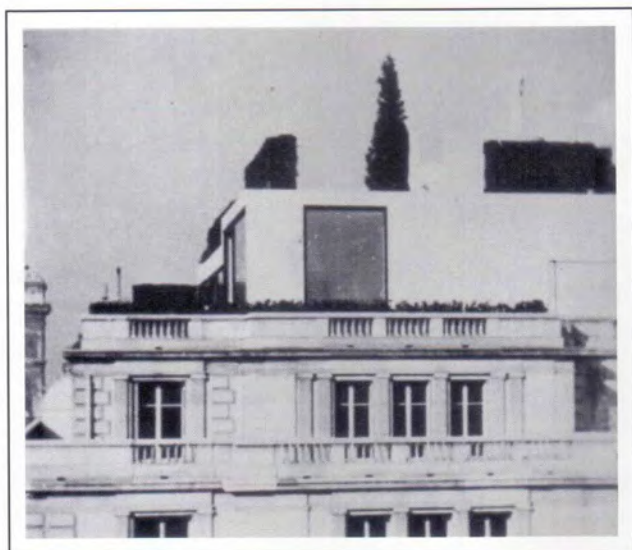
In this sense, the penthouse that Le Corbusier did for Charles de Beistegui in an existing building on the Champs-Élysées, Paris (1929–1931), becomes symptomatic. In this house, originally intended not to be inhabited but to receive visitors and to act as a frame for parties ("day parties, night parties," says Le Corbusier), there was no electric lighting. Beistegui wrote: "The candle has recovered all its rights because it is the only one which gives a *living* light."⁸ Instead, "electricity, modern power, is invisible, it does not illuminate the dwelling, but activates the doors and moves the walls."⁹ Invisible like the "docile servant" that Le Corbusier identifies in *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* with the "human limb objects" (those "extensions of our limbs" that respond



*Charlotte Perriand in the chaise-
longue against the wall. Salon
d'Automne 1929.*



Chaise-longue in the horizontal position.



*Le Corbusier, Charles de Beistegui
apartment, Paris, 1929–1931.*

to our "type-needs" [*besoins-types*]), "discreet and self-effacing, in order to leave his master free,"¹⁰ electricity is used *inside* this apartment to slide away partition walls, operate doors, and allow cinematographic projections on the metal screen (which unfolds automatically as the chandelier rises up on pulleys), and *outside*, on the roof terrace, to slide the banks of hedges to frame the view of Paris: "En pressant un bouton électrique, la palissade de verdure s'écarte et Paris apparaît."¹¹ Electricity is not used here to illuminate, to make *visible*, but as a technology of framing. Doors, walls, hedges, that is to say traditional architectural framing devices, are activated with electric power, but so also are the built-in cinema camera and its projection screen, and when these modern frames are *lit*, the "living" light of the chandelier gives way to another living light, the flickering light of the movie, the "flick."

This new "lighting" of the movies displaces traditional forms of enclosure, as electricity had done before it. Around the time that the Beistegui apartment was built, La Compagnie parisienne de distribution d'électricité put out a publicity book, *L'Electricité à la maison*, attempting to gain clients. In this book, electricity is made *visible* through architecture. A series of photographs by André Kertész present views of interiors by contemporary architects, including A. Perret, Chausat, Laprade, and M. Perret. One of them, perhaps the most extraordinary, is a closeup of a "horizontal window" in the terrace (enclosed with glass) of an apartment by Chausat, with a view of Paris outside it and a fan sitting on the sill of the window. The image marks the split between two traditional functions of the window, ventilation and light, now displaced into powered machines, and the modern function of a window, to frame a view. The Beistegui apartment, on the other hand, is a commentary on the new conditions presented by the media. Not only is electricity used here to operate the new media apparatus ("*la T.S.F., le théâtrophone et le pick-up*, which are installed on multiple settings, on the roof garden, the drawing room, the bedroom . . .")¹² but the views from the inside and



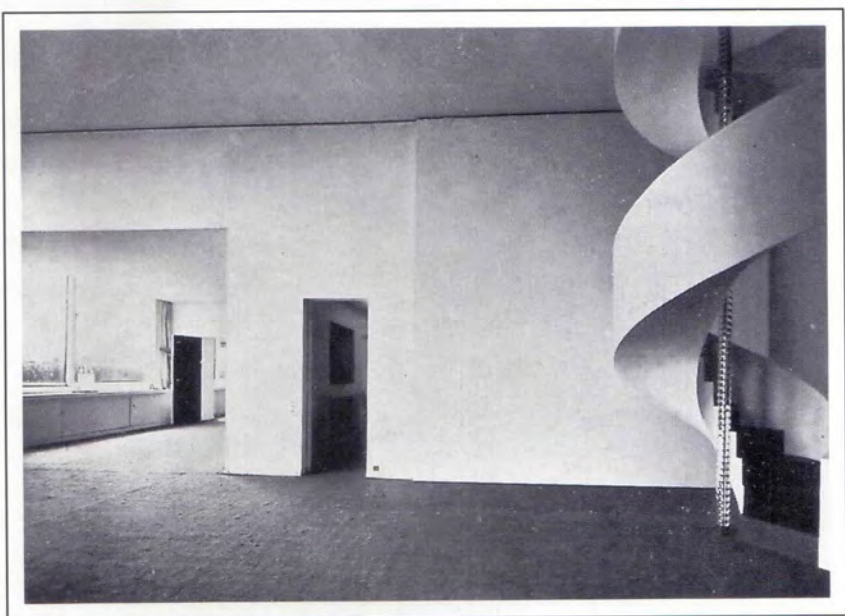
*L'Electricité à la maison. Chaussat,
architect. A. Kertész, photographer.*

outside spaces of the apartment are also technologically controlled: "From this belvedere Paris is visible in all its horizons . . . but the *parti* was to suppress this panoramic view of Paris . . . offering [instead], at precise places, moving views [*perspectives émouvantes*] of four of the things, visible from there, that establish the prestige of Paris: the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower, Sacré-Coeur, Notre-Dame." Of the outside spaces, for example, the first landing of the terraces (which are organized in four levels) is enclosed by walls of hedges. From there one discovers, above the stone steps, a view of Notre-Dame isolated from the rest of the city. And on pressing an electrical button, the fence of greenery slowly slips away, revealing Paris. Of the inside spaces, the *salon* has two picture windows (one to the south, on the Eiffel Tower, the other to the east, on Notre-Dame); half of the window to the south moves electrically, opening the view on the big terrace where the Arc de Triomphe appears among trimmed box trees. These are but two of the multiple reframing devices employed in this project. Le Corbusier claimed that the complex mechanical and electrical installations in this apartment had absorbed 4,000 meters of cable, to which Peter Blake could not help commenting that only "a Frenchman in love with modern machinery would ever describe a landscaping project in terms of the length of electric cable required to make it function."¹³

These multiple technologies conspire with traditional architectural elements to problematize the distinctions between *inside* and *outside*. In this penthouse, once the upper level of the terrace is reached, the high walls of the *chambre à ciel ouvert* allow only fragments of the urban skyline to emerge: the tops of the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower, Sacré-Coeur. And it is only by remaining inside and making use of the (submarine) periscope camera obscura that it becomes possible to enjoy the metropolitan spectacle. Tafuri has written: "The distance interposed between the penthouse and the Parisian panorama is secured by a technological device, the periscope. An 'innocent' reunification between



Beistegui apartment. Second and third levels of the terrace. The fence of greenery is slipping away, clearing the view of Notre-Dame.



Beistegui apartment. The wall that separates the salon from the dining room slips away electrically.

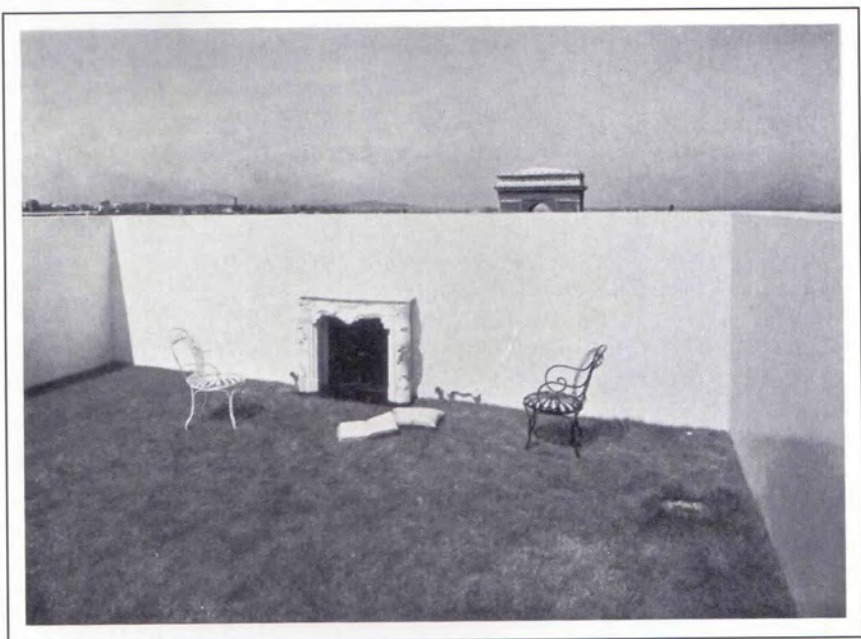
the fragment and the whole is no longer possible; the intervention of artifice is a necessity."¹⁴

But if this periscope, this primitive form of prosthesis, this "artificial limb," to return to Le Corbusier's concept in *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, is *necessary* in the Beistegui apartment (as was also the rest of the *artifice* in this house, the electrically driven framing devices, the other prostheses), it is only because the apartment is *still* located in a nineteenth-century city: it is a penthouse in the Champs-Élysées. In "ideal" urban conditions, the house itself becomes the artifice.

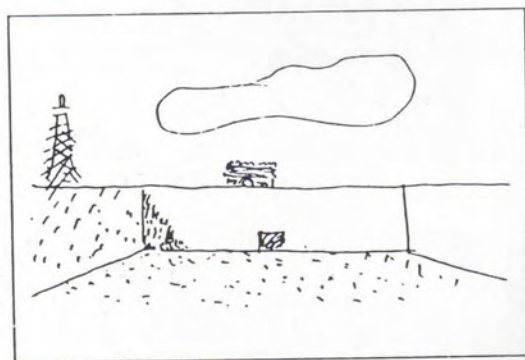
For Le Corbusier the *new* urban conditions are a consequence of the media, which institute a relationship between artifact and nature that makes the "defensiveness" of a Loosian window, of a Loosian system, unnecessary. In *Urbanisme*, in the same passage where he makes reference to Loos's window, Le Corbusier goes on to write: "The horizontal gaze leads far away. . . . From our offices we will get the feeling of being lookouts dominating a world in order. . . . The skyscrapers concentrate everything in themselves: machines for abolishing time and space, telephones, cables, radios."¹⁵ The inward gaze, the gaze turned upon itself, of Loos's interiors becomes with Le Corbusier a gaze of dominion over the exterior world. But why is this gaze horizontal?

The question returns us to the debate between Le Corbusier and Perret over the horizontal window.¹⁶ At one point, Le Corbusier attempts to demonstrate in a quasi-scientific manner that the horizontal window illuminates better. Symptomatically, he relies on a photographer's chart giving times of exposure:

I have stated that the horizontal window illuminates better than the vertical window. Those are my observations of the reality. Nevertheless, I have passionate opponents. For example, the following sentence has been



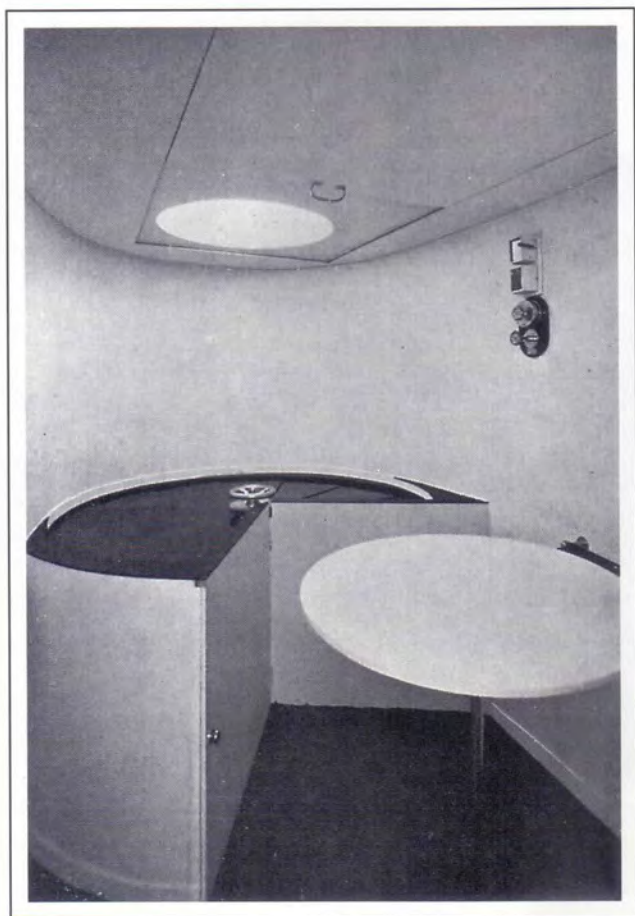
*Beistegui apartment. "La chambre à
ciel ouvert."*



*“Pélouse et murs au neuvième étage
aux Champs-Élysées.”*



*Beistegui apartment. Terrace with
the periscope. "Paris est caché: on
ne voit apparaître que quelques-uns
des lieux sacrés de Paris: L'Arc de
Triomphe, la Tour Eiffel, la
perspective des Tuileries et de
Notre-Dame, le Sacré-Coeur."*



Beistegui apartment. Periscope-camera obscura. Arrival of the stairs that lead from the salon into the third level of the garden, and glass table where the periscope projects the views of Paris. The stairs are covered to remove the light. The table can be lowered to allow the trap door to be opened.

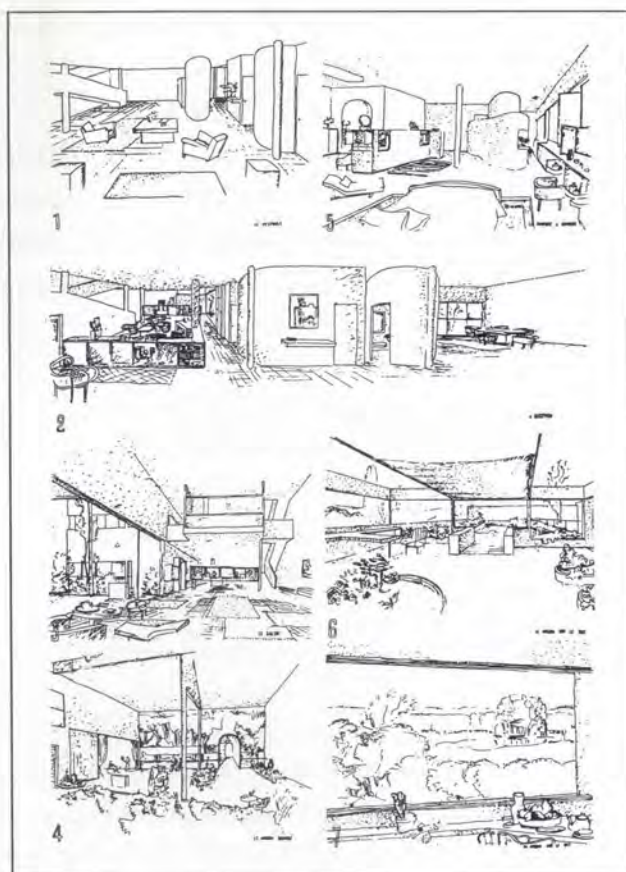
thrown at me: "*A window is a man, it stands upright!*" This is fine if what you want are "words." But I have discovered recently in a photographer's chart these explicit graphics; I am no longer swimming in the approximations of personal observations. I am facing sensitive photographic film that reacts to light. The table says this: . . . *The photographic plate in a room illuminated with a horizontal window needs to be exposed four times less than in a room illuminated with two vertical windows.* . . . Ladies and gentlemen . . . we have left the Vignolized shores of the Institutes. We are at sea; let us not separate this evening without having taken our bearings. First, architecture: the pilotis carry the weight of the house above the ground, up in the air. *The view of the house is a categorical view, without connection with the ground.*¹⁷

If for Perret "a window is a man, it stands upright," with Le Corbusier the erected man behind Perret's *porte-fenêtre* has been replaced by a photographic camera. The view is free-floating, "without connection with the ground," or with the man behind the camera (a photographer's analytical chart has replaced "personal observations"). "The view from the house is a *categorical* view." In framing the landscape the house places the landscape into a system of categories. The house is a mechanism for classification. It collects views and, in doing so, classifies them. The house is a system for taking pictures. What determines the nature of the picture is the window. In another passage from the same book the window itself is seen as a camera lens: "When you buy a camera, you are determined to take photographs in the crepuscular winter of Paris, or in the brilliant sands of an oasis; how do you do it? *You use a diaphragm.* Your glass panes, your horizontal windows are all ready to be diaphragmed at will. You will let light in wherever you like."¹⁸

If the window is a lens, the house itself is a camera pointed at nature. Detached from nature, it is mobile. Just as the camera can be taken from Paris to the desert, the house can be taken from Poissy to Biarritz to Argentina. Again in *Précisions*, Le Corbusier describes Villa Savoye as follows:

The house is a box in the air, pierced all around, without interruption, by a *fenêtre en longueur*. . . . The box is in the middle of meadows, dominating the orchard. . . . The simple posts of the ground floor, through a precise disposition, cut up the landscape with a regularity that has the effect of suppressing any notion of "front" or "back" of the house, of "side" of the house. . . . The plan is pure, made for the most exact of needs. It is in its right place in the rural landscape of Poissy. But in Biarritz, it would be magnificent. . . . I am going to implant this very house in the beautiful Argentine countryside: we will have twenty houses rising from the high grass of an orchard where cows continue to graze.¹⁹

The house is being described in terms of the way it frames the landscape and the effect this framing has on the perception of the house itself by the moving visitor. The house is in the air. It has no front, no back, no side.²⁰ The house can be in any place. It is *immaterial*. That is, the house is not simply constructed as a material object from which certain views then become possible. The house is no more than a series of views choreographed by the visitor, the way a filmmaker effects the montage of a film. Significantly, Le Corbusier has represented some of his projects, like Villa Meyer and the Guiette house, in the form of a series of sketches grouped together and representing the perception of the house by a moving eye.²¹ As has been noted, these drawings suggest film storyboards, each of the images a still.²²



*Le Corbusier, Villa Meyer, Paris,
1925 (second project).*

The description of Villa Savoye in *Précisions* recalls Le Corbusier's account, in the same book, of the process followed in the construction of the *petite maison* on the shores of Lake Geneva:

I knew that the region where we wanted to build consisted of 10 to 15 kilometers of hills along the lake. A fixed point: the lake; another, the magnificent view, frontal; another, the south, equally frontal.

Should one first have searched for the site and made the plan in accordance with it? That is the usual practice. I thought it was better to make an exact plan, corresponding ideally to the use one hoped from it and determined by the three factors above. This done, to go out with the plan in hand to look for a suitable site.²³

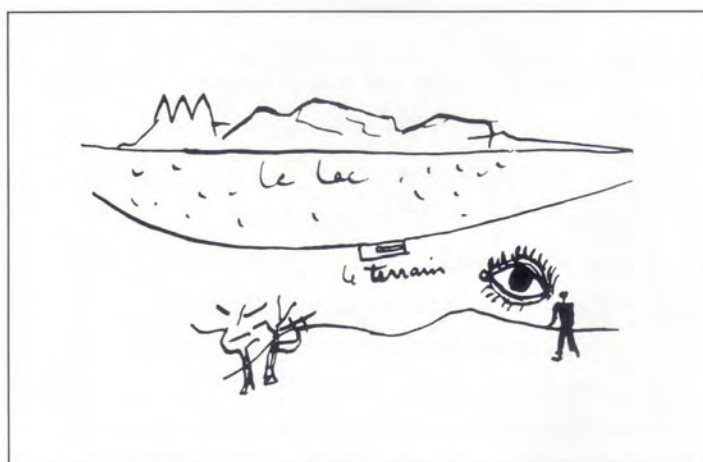
"The key to the problem of modern habitation," continues Le Corbusier, is "to inhabit first . . . placing oneself afterward [*Habiter d'abord. . . Venir se placer ensuite*]." But what is meant here by "inhabitation" and by "placement"? The "three factors" that "determine the plan" of the house—the lake, the magnificent frontal view, the south, equally frontal—are precisely the factors that determine a photograph of the site, or rather, a photograph taken from the site. "To inhabit" here means to inhabit that picture. Le Corbusier writes: "Architecture is made in the head," then drawn.²⁴ Only then does one look for the site. But the site is only where the landscape is "taken," framed by a mobile lens. This photo opportunity is at the intersection of the systems of communication that establish that mobility: the railway and the landscape. But even the landscape is here understood as a 10- to 15-kilometer strip, rather than a *place* in the traditional sense. The camera can be set up anywhere along that strip. Geography is now defined by the network of the railway: "The geographical situation confirmed our choice, for at the railway station twenty minutes away trains stop that link up Milan, Zurich,

Amsterdam, Paris, London, Geneva, and Marseilles." Place is now defined by the communication system. It is precisely within this system that the house moves: "1922, 1923 I boarded the Paris-Milan express several times, or the Orient Express (Paris-Ankara). In my pocket was the plan of a house. A plan without a site? The plan of a house in search of a plot of ground? Yes!"²⁵

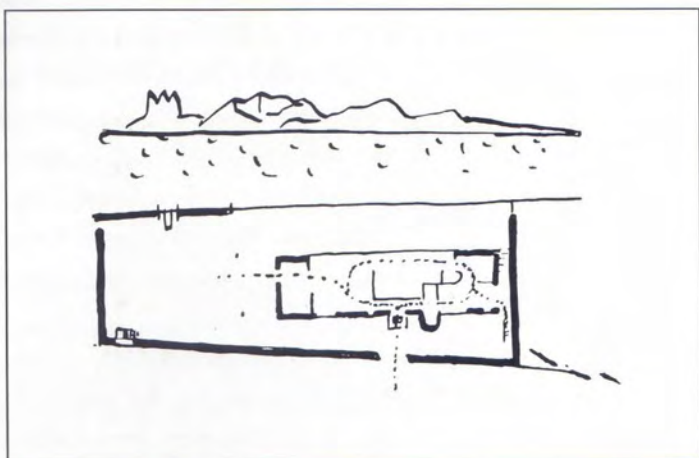
The house is drawn with a picture already in mind. The house is drawn as a frame for that picture. The frame establishes the difference between "seeing" and merely looking. It produces the picture by domesticating the "overpowering" landscape. Le Corbusier writes:

The object of the wall seen here is to block off the view to the north and east, partly to the south, and to the west; for the ever-present and overpowering scenery on all sides has a tiring effect in the long run. Have you noticed that *under such conditions one no longer "sees"?* To lend significance to the scenery one has to restrict and give it proportion; the view must be blocked by walls that are only pierced at certain strategic points and there permit an unhindered view.²⁶

It is this domestication of the view that makes the house a house, rather than the provision of a domestic space, a place in the traditional sense. Two drawings published in *Une petite maison* speak about what Le Corbusier means by "placing oneself." In one of them, "On a découvert le terrain," a small human figure appears standing and next to it a big eye, independent of the figure, oriented toward the lake. The plan of the house lies between the eye and the lake: the house is represented as that which lies between the eye and the view. The small figure is almost an accessory. The other drawing, "Le plan est installé," does not show, as the title would indicate, the encounter of the plan with the site, as we traditionally understand it. The site is not in the drawing.



"On a découvert le terrain."
Une petite maison, 1954.



"Le plan est installé. . . ."
Une petite maison, 1954.

Even the curve of the shore of the lake in the other drawing has been erased. The drawing shows the plan of the house, a strip of lake, and a strip of mountains. That is, it shows the plan and above it the view. The “site” is a vertical plane, that of vision. The site is first and foremost a sight.

Of course, there is no “original” object in the new architecture, because the design is not dependent on any specific place. Throughout his writings, Le Corbusier insists on the relative autonomy of architecture and site. Referring again to the *petite maison*, he writes: “Today, the agreement of the ground with the house is no longer a question of site or of immediate context.”²⁷ And in the face of a traditional site in Rio de Janeiro he constructs an “artificial site”: “Here you have the idea: here you have *artificial sites*, countless new homes, and as for traffic—the Gordian knot has been severed.”²⁸ All of this, however, does not mean that Le Corbusier’s architecture is independent of place. It is the concept of place that has changed. We are talking here about a site that is defined by a sight. A sight can be accommodated in several sites.

“Property” has moved from the horizontal to the vertical plane, the space of vision. Even in the Beistegui apartment, the primary location (from a traditional point of view), the famous *address*—Champs-Élysées—is completely subordinated by the *view*.²⁹ In fact, the street cannot even be seen from the apartment. The eye is lifted up but not simply to attain a panorama. If Le Corbusier declines the panoramic view of Paris that the place made possible, “represses” that view, it is only to replace it with a series of precisely constructed and technologically controlled vistas of the city. Moreover these vistas, of the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower, Notre-Dame, Sacré-Coeur, etc., coincide precisely with Paris’s most touristic sites, with the “icons” of Paris, what Le Corbusier would call the *lieux sacrés de Paris*. The vistas reproduce, in fact, the “reality” of Paris as depicted by contemporary postcards. Indeed Le

Corbusier not only collected postcards but incorporated them into his architectural projects. It is not surprising in that respect to find Le Corbusier producing a drawing of his project for an apartment building in rue Fabert (1935) by pasting a postcard of Paris onto the paper and drawing his proposal on and around it. The city for Le Corbusier is not so much a material reality as a representation, a collage of images. The urban fabric, the public space of the street, has been replaced by a limited set of images (much like a standard set of postcards), which however do not add up to any simple unified whole.

If for Le Corbusier cities are collections of postcards, the window is first and foremost a problem of urbanism. That is why it becomes a central point in every urban proposal of Le Corbusier. In Rio de Janeiro, for example, he developed a series of drawings in vignette that represent the relation between domestic space and spectacle:³⁰

This rock at Rio de Janeiro is celebrated.

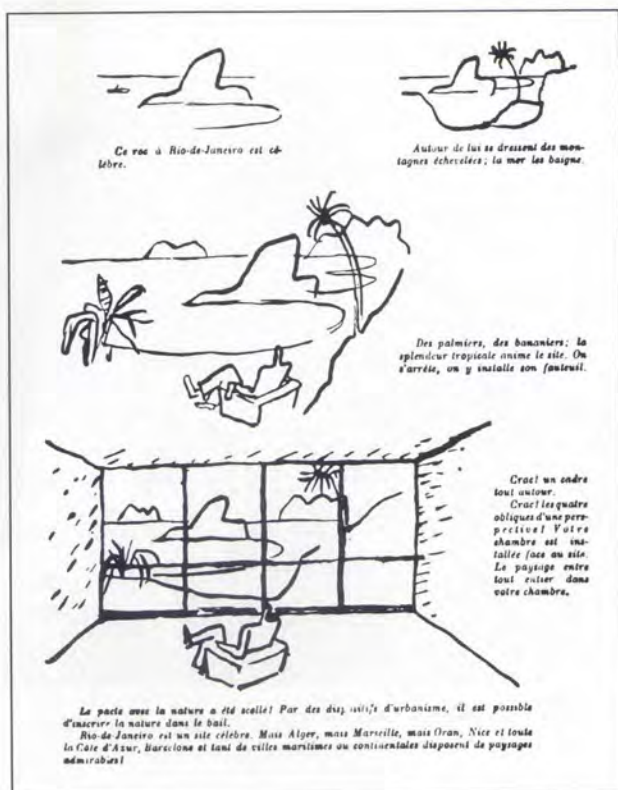
Around it range the tangled mountains, bathed by the sea.

Palms, banana trees; tropical splendor animates the site.

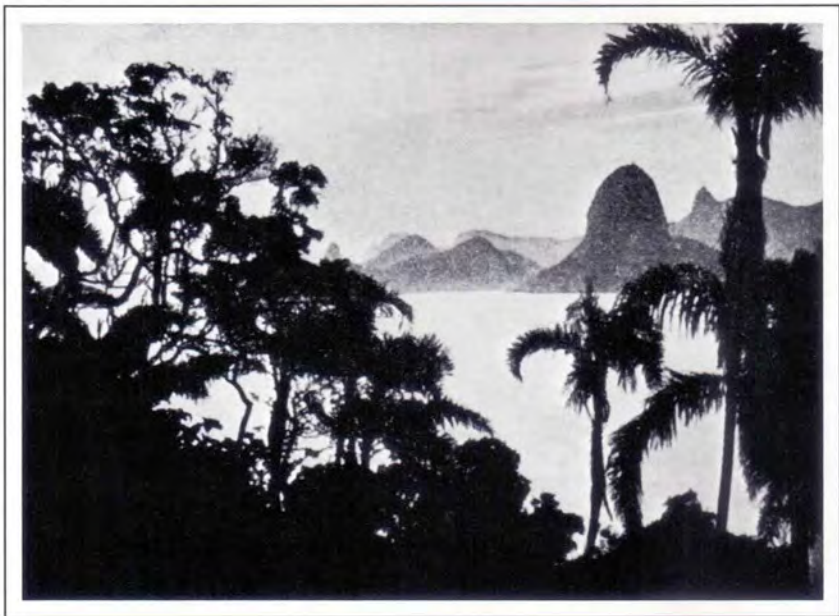
One stops, one installs one's armchair.

Crack! a frame all around. Crack! the four obliques of a perspective. Your room is installed before the site. The whole sea-landscape enters your room.³¹

First a famous sight, a postcard, a picture. (And it is not by chance that Le Corbusier has not only drawn this landscape from an actual postcard but has published the postcard alongside the drawings in *La Ville radieuse*.)³² Then, one inhabits the space in front of that picture, installs an armchair. But this view, this picture, is only constructed at the same time as the house.³³ "Crack! a frame all around. Crack! the four obliques of a perspective." The house is installed *in front of* the site, not *in the*



Rio de Janeiro. The view is constructed at the same time as the house. La Maison des hommes, 1942.



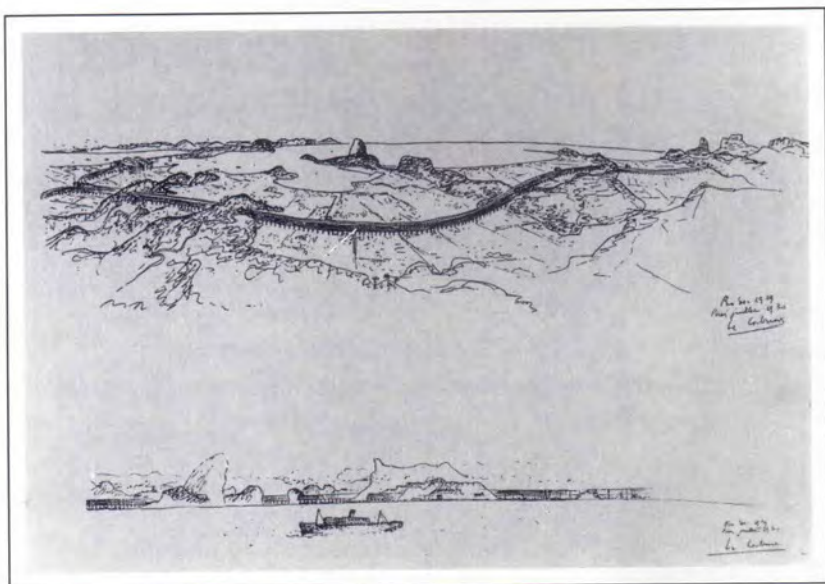
Rio de Janeiro. Postcard view of the famous rock.

site. The house is a frame for a view. The window is a gigantic screen. But then the view *enters* the house, it is literally “inscribed” in the lease: “The pact with nature has been sealed! By means available to town planning it is possible *to enter nature in the lease*. Rio de Janeiro is a celebrated site. But Algiers, Marseilles, Oran, Nice and all the Côte d’Azur, Barcelona, and many maritime and inland towns can boast of admirable landscapes.”³⁴

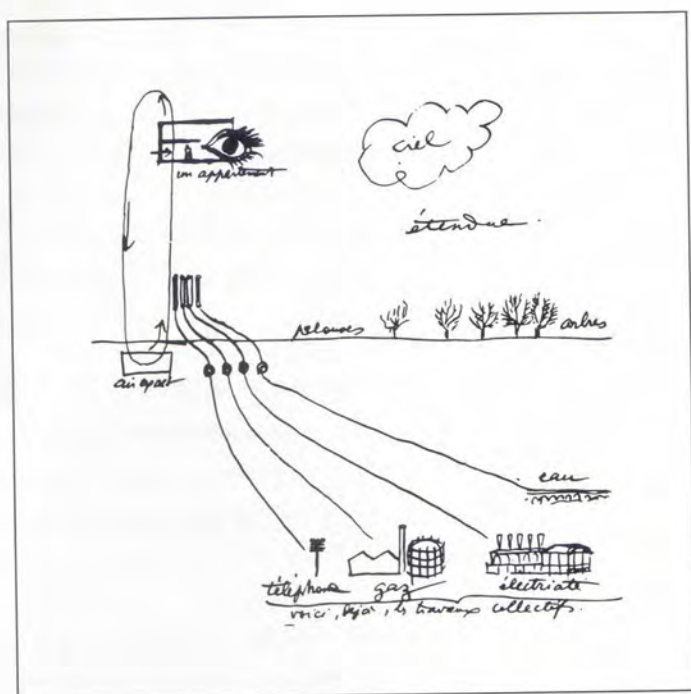
Again, several sites can accommodate this project: different locations, different pictures (like the world of tourism). But also different pictures of the same location. The repetition of units with windows at slightly different angles, different framings, as happens when this cell becomes a unit in the urban project for Rio de Janeiro, a project that consists of a six-kilometer strip of housing units under a highway on pilotis, suggests again the idea of the movie strip, each apartment’s window a still. This sense of the movie strip is felt both in the inside and the outside: “Architecture? Nature? Liners enter and see the new and *horizontal city*: it makes the site still more sublime. Just think of this broad *ribbon of light*, at night.”³⁵ The strip of housing is a movie strip, on both sides.

For Le Corbusier, “to inhabit” means to inhabit the camera. But the camera is not a traditional place, it is a system of classification, a kind of filing cabinet. “To inhabit” means to employ that system. Only after this do we have “placing,” which is to place the view in the house, to take a picture, to place the view in the filing cabinet, to classify the landscape.

This critical transformation of traditional architectural thinking about place can also be seen in *La Ville radieuse* where a sketch represents the house as a cell with a view. Here an apartment, high up in the air, is presented as a terminal for telephone, gas, electricity, and water. The apartment is also provided with “exact air” (heating and ventilation): “A



*Rio de Janeiro. The highway,
elevated 100 meters and "launched"
from hill to hill above the city. La
Ville radiense, 1933.*



Sketch in La Ville radieuse, 1933.

window is to give light, not to ventilate! To ventilate we use machines; it is mechanics, it is physics."³⁶ Whereas Loos's window had split sight from illumination, Le Corbusier's splits ventilation (in his words, *breathing*) from these two forms of "light."³⁷ Inside the apartment there is a small human figure, and at the window a huge eye looking outside. They do not coincide. The apartment itself is here the artifice between the occupant and the exterior world, a camera (and a breathing machine). The exterior world also becomes artifice; like the air, it has been conditioned, landscaped—it becomes landscape. The apartment defines modern subjectivity with its own eye. The traditional subject can only be the *visitor*, and as such a temporary part of the viewing mechanism. The humanist subject has been displaced.

It is precisely in terms of the *visitor* that Le Corbusier has written about the inhabitant of his houses. For example, about Villa Savoye he writes in *Précisions*:

The visitors, till now, turn round and round inside, asking themselves what is happening, understanding with difficulty the reasons for what they see and feel; they don't find anything of what is called a "house." They feel themselves within something entirely new. And . . . they are not bored, I believe!³⁸

The inhabitants of Le Corbusier's house are displaced, first because they are disoriented. They do not know how to place themselves in relation to this house. It does not look like a "house." Then because the inhabitant is only a "visitor." Unlike the subject of Loos's houses who is both actor and spectator, both involved and detached from the domestic stage, Le Corbusier's subject is detached from the house with the distance of a visitor, a viewer, a photographer, a tourist.

The objects left as "traces" in the photographs of Le Corbusier's houses confirm this. They tend to be, again, the objects of a visitor (hat, coat, etc.). Never do we find any trace of "domesticity," as traditionally understood.³⁹ These objects could also be understood as standing for the architect. The hat, coat, glasses are definitely those of Le Corbusier. They play the same role that Le Corbusier plays as an actor in the movie *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, where he passes through the house rather than inhabits it. Even the architect is *estranged* from his work with the distance of a visitor or a movie actor.

In a photograph of the interior of Villa Church, a casually placed hat and two open books on the table announce that somebody has just been there. A window with the traditional proportions of a painting is framed in a way that makes it read also as a screen. In the corner of the room a camera set on a tripod appears. It is the reflection on the mirror of the camera taking the photograph. As viewers of this photograph we are in the position of the photographer, that is, in the position of the camera, because the photographer, like the visitor, has already abandoned the room. (We have been advised to leave.) The subject (the visitor of the house, the photographer, the architect, and even the viewer of this photograph) has already left. The subject in Le Corbusier's house is estranged and displaced from his/her own home.

This estrangement is perhaps not dissimilar to that experienced by the movie actor before the mechanism of the cinematographic camera. In a passage cited by Benjamin, Pirandello has described it as follows:

The film actor feels as if in exile—exiled not only from the stage but also from himself. With a vague sense of discomfort he feels inexplicable emptiness: his body loses corporeality, it evaporates, it is deprived of reality, life, voice and the noises caused by its moving about, in order to



*Le Corbusier, Villa Church, Ville
d'Avray, 1928–1929.*

taken, a large eye, autonomous from the figure, represents that moment. This is precisely the moment of *inhabitation*. This inhabitation is independent from *place* (understood in a traditional sense); it turns the outside into an inside:

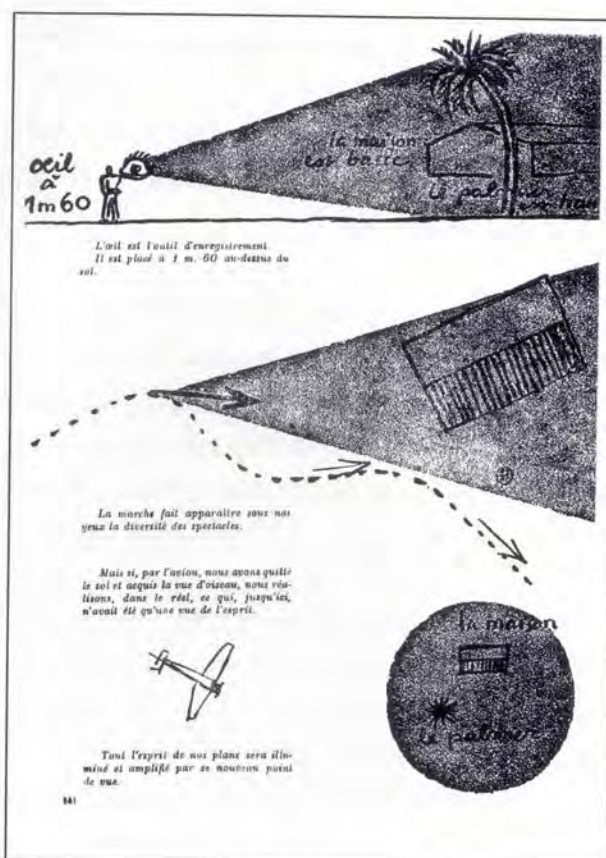
I perceive that the work we raise is not unique, nor isolated; that the air around it constitutes other surfaces, other grounds, other ceilings, that the harmony that has suddenly stopped me before the rock of Brittany exists, can exist, everywhere else, always. The work is not made only of itself: the outside exists. The outside shuts me in its whole which is like a room.⁴²

“Le dehors est toujours un dedans” (the outside is always an inside) means, among other things, that the “outside” is a picture. And that to inhabit means *to see*. In *La Maison des hommes* there is a drawing of a figure standing and (again), side by side, an independent eye: “Let us not forget that our eye is 5 feet 6 inches above the ground; our eye, this entry door of our architectural perceptions.”⁴³ The eye is a “door” to architecture, and the “door” is, of course, an architectural element, the first form of a “window.”⁴⁴ Later in the book, “the door” is replaced by media equipment, “the eye is the tool of recording”:

The eye is a tool of registration. It is placed 5 feet 6 inches above the ground.

Walking creates diversity in the spectacle before our eyes.

But we have left the ground in an airplane and acquired the eyes of a bird. We see, in actuality, that which hitherto was only seen by the spirit.⁴⁵



"L'œil est l'outil d'enregistrement."
La Maison des hommes, 1942.

If the eye is a "tool for recording," the window is, for Le Corbusier, first of all communication. He repeatedly superimposes the idea of the "modern" window, the lookout window, the horizontal window, with the reality of the new media: "telephone, cable, radios, . . . machines for abolishing time and space." Control is now in these media. The look that from Le Corbusier's skyscrapers will "dominate a world in order" is neither the look from behind the periscope of Beistegui or the defensive view (turned toward itself) of Loos's interiors. It is a look that "registers" the new reality, a "recording" eye. The whole argument of *Précisions* is set up around the opening description of modernity as mass communication:

Mechanization has overwhelmed everything.

Communications: in the past, men organized their undertakings at the scale of their legs: time had a different duration. The idea of the world was its great size, without limits. . . .

Interpenetration: one day Stephenson invented the locomotive. They laughed. And as businessmen—the first captains of industry, who will be the new conquistadors—take it seriously, ask for rights-of-way, Mr. Thiers, the statesman who was leading France, intervenes immediately in Parlement, begging the deputies to keep to serious things. "A railroad could never connect two cities. . . ."

Came the telegraph, the telephone, steamships, airplanes, the radio, and now television. A word said in Paris is with you in a fraction of a second! . . . Airplanes go everywhere; their eagle eyes have searched the deserts and penetrated the rain forest. Hastening interpenetration, the railway, the telephone unceasingly run the country into the city, the city into the country. . . .

The destruction of regional cultures: what was held most sacred has fallen: tradition, the legacy of ancestors, local thinking . . . all is destroyed, annihilated. . . .

Whiners curse the disturbing machine. Intelligent active persons think: Let us record while there is still time, in photos, films, or tapes, in books, magazines, the sublime evidence of age-old cultures.⁴⁶

Le Corbusier's architecture is produced by this kind of engagement with the mass media but, as with Loos, the key to his position is in the end to be found in his statements about fashion. Where for Loos the English suit was the mask necessary to sustain the individual in metropolitan conditions of existence, for Le Corbusier this suit is cumbersome and inefficient. And where Loos contrasts the *dignity* of male British fashion with the *masquerade* of women's, Le Corbusier praises women's fashion over men's because it has undergone *change*, the change of modern time.

Woman has preceded us. She has carried out the reform of her dress. She found herself at a dead end: to follow fashion and, then, give up the advantages of modern techniques, of modern life. To give up sport and, a more material problem, be unable to take on the jobs that have made woman a fertile part of contemporary production and enabled her to *earn her own living*. To follow fashion: she could not drive a car; she could not take the subway, or the bus, nor act quickly in her office or her shop. To carry out the daily *construction* of a "toilette": hairdo, shoes, buttoning her dress, she would not have had time to sleep. So, woman cut her hair and her skirts and her sleeves. She goes out bareheaded, barearmed, with her legs free. And she can dress in five minutes. And she is beautiful; she seduces us with the charm of her graces of which the designers have

admitted taking advantage. The courage, the liveliness, the spirit of invention with which woman has revolutionized her dress are a miracle of modern times. Thank you!

And what about us, men? A dismal state of affairs! In our dress clothes, we look like generals of the Grande Armée and we wear starched collars! We are uncomfortable.⁴⁷

While Loos spoke, you will remember, of the exterior of the house in terms of male fashion, Le Corbusier's comments on fashion are made in the context of the furnishing of the domestic interior. The furniture in style (Louis XIV) should be replaced with *equipment* (standard furniture, in great part derived from office furniture), and this change is assimilated to the change that women have undertaken in their dress. He concedes, however, that there are certain advantages to male dressing: "The English suit we wear had nevertheless succeeded in something important. It had *neutralized* us. It is useful to show a neutral appearance in the city. The dominant sign is no longer ostrich feathers in the hat, it is in the gaze. That's enough."⁴⁸

Except for this last comment, "The dominant sign . . . is in the gaze," Le Corbusier's statement is purely Loosian. But at the same time, it is precisely that *gaze* of which Le Corbusier speaks that marks their differences. For Le Corbusier the interior no longer needs to be defined as a system of defense from the exterior. To say that "the exterior is always an interior" means that the interior is not simply the bounded territory defined by its opposition to the exterior. The exterior is "inscribed" in the dwelling. The window in the age of mass communication provides us with one more flat image. The window is a screen. From there issues the insistence on eliminating every protruding element, "de-

Vignolizing" the window, suppressing the sill: "Mr. Vignola is not concerned with windows, but 'between windows' (pilasters and columns). I de-Vignolize with: 'architecture is lighted floors.'"⁴⁹

Of course, this screen undermines the wall. But here it is not, as in Loos's houses, a *physical* undermining, an *occupation* of the wall, but a *dematerialization* following from the emerging media. The organizing geometry of architecture slips from the perspectival cone of vision, from the humanist eye, to the camera angle. It is precisely in this slippage that modern architecture becomes modern by engaging with the media. Given that the media are so frequently identified with the feminine, it is not surprising to find that this slippage is not neutral in gender terms. Male fashion is uncomfortable but provides the bearer with "the gaze," "the dominant sign." Woman's fashion is practical and modern but turns her into the object of another's gaze: "Modern woman has cut her hair. Our gazes have enjoyed the shape of her legs." A picture. She sees nothing. She is an attachment to a wall that is no longer simply there. Enclosed by a space whose limits are defined by a gaze. If for Le Corbusier the woman is the very figure of modernity, the status of that figure remains troubling.