



**ABJECT BODIES AND DUSTY VEILS:
MAISON LA ROCHE IN 7 ACTS**

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Abject Bodies and Dusty Veils: Maison La Roche in 7Acts

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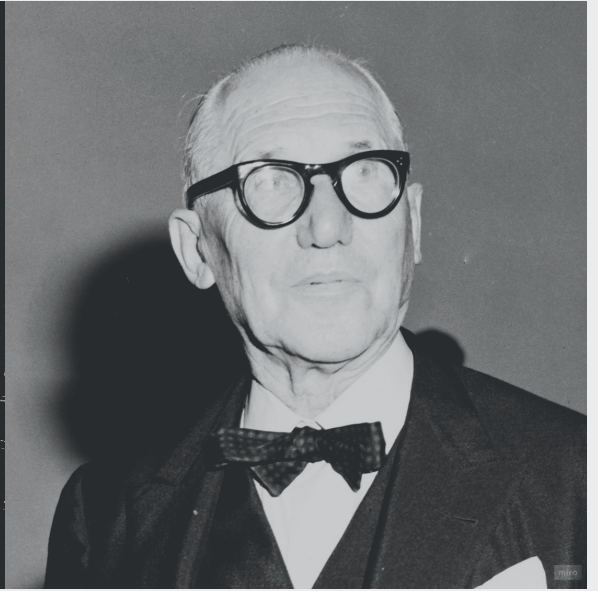
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Maison La Roche (Le Corbusier, Paris, 1923–25) through the cosmological and metaphysical lens of *Poème de l'angle droit*, Le Corbusier's symbolic text drawing-poem from the 1955.

Divided into seven chapters, the thesis follows the structure of *Poème de l'angle droit's* seven themes; each chapter corresponding to one cosmological idea. But the choice of seven isn't just structural, it's symbolic. Across myth, literature, and critical theory, the number seven signals transformation. Chapters move through architectural and metaphysical zones: Using the abject body of fragments from red dust on plastic sheeting in a renovated gallery to a dumbwaiter shaft that becomes a vertical channel of erasure; from mirrors and milk bottles that sterilize the gaze to plumbing and sculleries that repress the body; from ghostly stairs and smudges to initiatory paper-screens and fictional rites.

Maison La Roche (1923–25), designed by Le Corbusier for the art collector Raoul La Roche, is part house and part gallery. It merges the spatial experiments of the Modernist aesthetic with the architect's vision of the 'machine for living.' But beneath its formal clarity lies a complex network of voids, thresholds, servant routes, and optical devices -mechanisms that regulate visibility, movement, and control. The house is studied not in its original state, but during a phase of restoration, when its surfaces were exposed, and interrupted. Observing the building in this transitional condition when carrying out a fieldwork visit to it in 2025, revealed systems and traces not visible in canonical photographs or earlier scholarship. Dust, coverings, protective plastics, and uncovered scars made the house readable as a living, changing organism rather than a sealed modernist icon. Analysing the villa in this suspended, in-between state allowed forms of reading of it that seem impossible in the valorised version of it that is often produced through conventional architectural scholarship.

Le Corbusier's *Poème de l'angle droit* (1955) serves as both conceptual backbone and methodological apparatus to this thesis. The Poem functions as a cosmological system: a hybrid text-image constellation that outlines Le Corbusier's philosophy of matter, spirit, geometry, and human existence. Its seven themes trace a ritual movement from the earthly to the metaphysical, mapping how the world is purified, ordered, transformed, and offered back. The Poem distils Le Corbusier's thinking on perception, the body, light, colour, and the sacred dimension of everyday space. It is his most explicit articulation of architecture as a metaphysical act rather than a technical one.

To unpack this, the thesis introduces a method called 'Cosmogrammic Architecture', a hybrid approach combining symbolic reading, metaphysical drawing, architectural theory, and fictional narrative. Drawing on Julia Kristeva, Marcel Duchamp, John Hejduk, and Beatriz Colomina, the thesis frames Maison La Roche not as a neutral vessel but as an active agent that transforms, filters, or removes the impure. While earlier studies focus on its typological innovation, Purist geometry, or its place in the modernist canon, this thesis departs from those readings by grounding its analysis in the villa's exposed, interrupted, and partially dismantled restorative condition.

The core proposition of this thesis is that Le Corbusier has developed an architecture that deliberately challenges the normative conventions and idea of house as setting - shifting it through a series of spatial, materials, and perceptual actions towards a mythopoetic reality. It is not merely a modernist house-gallery, but a cosmogram: a ritualized metaphysical diagram that conceals labour, hides shame, sterilizes space, and filters perception all through white walls, silent voids, and geometric control. This erasure isn't just functional or aesthetic. It's symbolic. The house doesn't simply house objects or people, it transforms them, purifies them, or removes them. What's impure is removed. What can't be purified is hidden.

Declaration

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism and intellectual property.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sonika Kumar', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Digital signature of the candidate: **Sonika Kumar**

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the successful completion of this thesis.

First and foremost, I extend my deepest appreciation to my supervisors, **Dr. Jason O'Shaughnessy** and **Dr. Kieran Cremin**, for their invaluable guidance, insightful feedback, and continuous support throughout this research journey. Their expertise and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping my work.

I am also grateful to **University College Cork** and the **Cork Centre for Architectural Education** for providing me with the academic resources and facilities necessary to conduct this study.

My heartfelt thanks to the **Fondation Le Corbusier**, Paris, for granting me permission to visit Maison La Roche and the Documentation & Research Centre. I am especially thankful to **Arnaud Dercelles** and **Bénédicte Gandini** for their kind assistance and for sharing valuable insights on the restoration and documentation of Maison La Roche, which greatly enriched this research.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to all participants, professionals, and experts who contributed to my research through interviews, surveys, or case studies. Their insights have been invaluable in shaping my findings.

Lastly, I am deeply thankful to my family for their unwavering support, patience, and belief in me.

AI Acknowledgment Statement

I acknowledge the use of **ChatGPT** (<https://chat.openai.com/>) to assist with grammar, syntax, clarity, and readability in this dissertation. As English is not my first language, AI tools were used solely to enhance linguistic accuracy and ensure clear academic communication. At no stage did AI contribute to the development of ideas, arguments, interpretations, research analysis, or the structure of the dissertation.

The following specific prompts were used during the writing and editing process:

- “Improve the grammar in this sentence.”
- “Does this sentence read clearly?”
- “Does this line sound too poetic for academic writing?”
- “Is the syntax correct?”
- “Refine the clarity of this paragraph.”
- “Improve the flow of this sentence without changing the meaning.”
- “Correct punctuation errors in this paragraph.”
- “Help make this sentence more readable.”
- “Tighten this sentence but keep the same idea.”
- “Are there any grammar mistakes in this line?”
- “Does this paragraph flow logically?”
- “Is this too informal for academic writing?”
- “Does this revised sentence keep the same meaning?”
- “Make this line clearer while keeping the same content.”
- “Standardise tense in this paragraph.”
- “Is the transition between these paragraphs smooth?”
- “Does this sound natural in academic English?”
- “Clean up awkward phrasing in this paragraph.”

- “Is there any awkward phrasing here?”

The output from these prompts was used strictly to refine expression, improve readability, and correct minor language issues. All intellectual content, arguments, analyses, ideas, and conclusions are entirely my own. AI did not influence conceptual development, theoretical framing, or the creative or analytical direction of the research.

In addition to text-based refinement, I used ChatGPT’s image-generation feature, during AT6020 module, to create one conceptual diagram used in the thesis. The image appears as:

- Fig. 96 – Esophagus. AI-generated image used as an analogy for the concealed circulation system within Maison La Roche.

The prompt used is:

“Create a simplified anatomical-style illustration of an esophagus, abstracted in a minimal, monochrome aesthetic.”

This image was generated to model a biological form for conceptual comparison only. The conceptual interpretation, architectural analysis, and relevance of the image within the thesis are entirely my own.

Name: Sonika Kumar

Date: 10/06/2026

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CHANGE LOG

Examiner Comment 1:

Provide concrete, precise descriptions of the material elements and components of the building, rather than referring to them in general terms.

Response:

Additional contextual and material descriptions have been incorporated throughout the thesis to ground the theoretical argument in the physical fabric of Maison La Roche. Revisions were made in:

- Act 1 – expanded discussion connecting the poem to the environmental and architectural conditions of the house.
- Act 2 (p.73) – clarification and supporting discussion of “unwanted elements hidden behind walls”.
- Act 3 (p.98) – additional discussion of concealed drain pipes within the servant dwelling and their role in the suppression of building services.
- Act 5 – expanded discussion of whiteness, white surfaces and their architectural manifestation within the house.

Examiner Comment 2:

Revise the drawings to be more overtly analytical rather than allusive, and add precise annotation.

Response:

Analytical content and annotations have been added throughout the drawing set to strengthen the relationship between the theoretical argument and the architectural fabric of the building.

The following figures were revised with additional analytical annotation:

- Fig. 27
- Fig. 45
- Fig. 68
- Fig. 96

Additional analytical drawings and visual studies were incorporated, including:

- Fig. 40 – sectional analysis of the library/gallery relationship and concealment of the library from lower levels.
- Figs. 41–42 – cross-sectional and visual analyses supporting spatial interpretation.

- Fig. 53 – analysis of visual discipline and controlled views within the gallery.
- Fig. 71 – light matrix analysis of the gallery.
- Fig. 84 – examination of concealed drainage infrastructure and suppression of service elements within the building fabric.

These amendments aim to provide clearer architectural evidence and strengthen the connection between the written argument and the material realities of Maison La Roche.

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FOREWORD- A Note on Method and Vision

This thesis is not a study of what architecture appears to be, but as an invitation to observe what is intentionally concealed within the built environment.

The pristine forms often associated with modernism, particularly those found in structures like Le Corbusier's Maison La Roche, suggest that the quest for purity and light may be inseparable from an act of deliberate disappearance, an erasure of labour, impurity, and metaphysical friction. This work explores the possibility that this process is not an accident of aesthetics, but a ritual act encoded within the formal logic of design.

This thesis did not begin with Maison La Roche as its central object. The initial aim was to study Le Corbusier's wider architectural oeuvre, particularly the unusual breadth of his interests: metaphysics, cosmology, alchemy, colour theory, ritual, and the symbolic drawings. Because many of Le Corbusier's most significant Parisian works sit within a short radius, the research began as a field-based exploration across the

city. My intention was to visit multiple buildings and examine how his philosophical and symbolic concerns appeared, or failed to appear, in built form.

This direction shifted during on-site research in Paris. Encountering Maison La Roche while the building was undergoing restoration created an unforeseen turning point. Unlike the canonical photographs and scholarly descriptions that present the villa as a purified Purist object, the restoration exposed the house in an unfinished, interrupted state. Temporary coverings, taped edges, dust residues, stripped surfaces, and uncovered mechanical and structural elements revealed aspects of the building normally concealed beneath its whiteness. These conditions brought forward marks, voids, stains, and infrastructural traces that rarely enter architectural discourse.

The encounter suggested a new way of reading the building, one that recognised the villa not as a static modernist icon, but as an active and evolving organism. In this transitional condition, Maison La Roche sat between two identities: the idealised image preserved in architectural history



and the material, vulnerable object revealed through maintenance. This liminal state made it a far more revealing site for examining the rituals of purification, concealment, and disappearance that lie at the centre of Le Corbusier's symbolic imagination.

At the same time, another counter-narrative work of Le Corbusier returned with new clarity- *Poème de l'angle droit*. Because the Poem moves from Environment to Flesh and Instrument, it provided a grammar capable of reflecting the villa's own spatial and metaphysical behaviours. Its symbolic movement through matter, body, perception, and offering became a lens through which the house could be re-read.

The decision to focus the thesis entirely on Maison La Roche emerged from the convergence of these two conditions: the building's exposed restorative state and the Poem's expansive cosmological structure. Seen through this dual lens, the house aligned unexpectedly yet precisely with the seven symbolic cycles of the Poem. Its hidden passages, servant routes, smudges, dust, and infrastructural systems mirrored the

cosmogrammatic themes of purification, concealment, and transformation. What began as a broad study of Le Corbusier, condensed into a single building that revealed itself not through completion, but through ritualised expression and mythopoetic reality. In this sense, the villa was chosen as the central cosmological engine of the thesis.

In this reading, Maison La Roche is considered less a functional residence and more a Cosmogram, a spatial diagram that charts a ritualized expression.

To explore this dimension of the built world, this thesis advances a distinct analytical framework, which could be termed Cosmogrammic Architecture.

A Shift in Reading

The method developed here involves moving analysis beyond traditional typologies and towards symbolic storytelling. Cosmogrammic Architecture proposes that a building is not merely a container for human activity, but a diagram of belief capable of encoding metaphysical and ritual structures. The

Fig. 1

Parisian Streetscape at Night. Photograph by Author, January 2025.

proposition is that architecture may be read not just in its visible surfaces, but in what is hidden to enable that visibility.

This approach is pursued through five interwoven methodological components:

1. **Architectural Cosmology:** Reading Le Corbusier's Poem of the Right Angle as a metaphysical grammar that may be seen to guide the spatial and ritual logic of the design.

2. **Symbolic Reading of Space:** Reinterpreting materials and voids, such as dust, plumbing systems, and specific colors, as symbolic agents that participate in acts of concealment or revelation.

3. **Narrative Walkthrough:** Engaging with the building through the lens of spatial fiction, where the organization of rooms and walls may be understood as forming a sequential narrative.

4. **Critical Counterpoints:** Placing this reading in dialogue with theoretical frameworks, including concepts of abjection (Kristeva), erasure (Colomina), and ritual theatre (Hejduk), to define the

terrain of architectural ritual.

5. **Drawing as Translation:** Utilizing diagrams and symbolic drawings that function not as simple representations, but as forms of metaphysical cartography intended to translate hidden systems into a legible visual language.

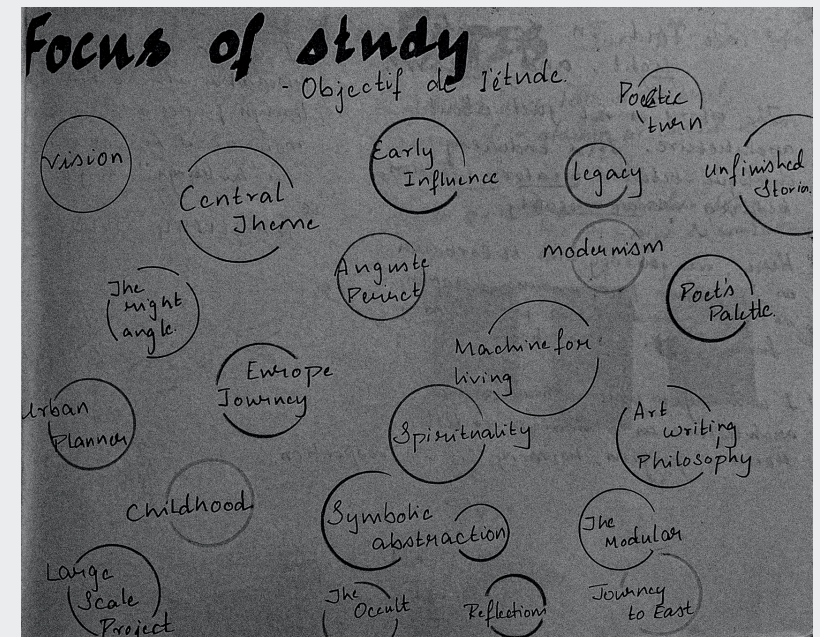
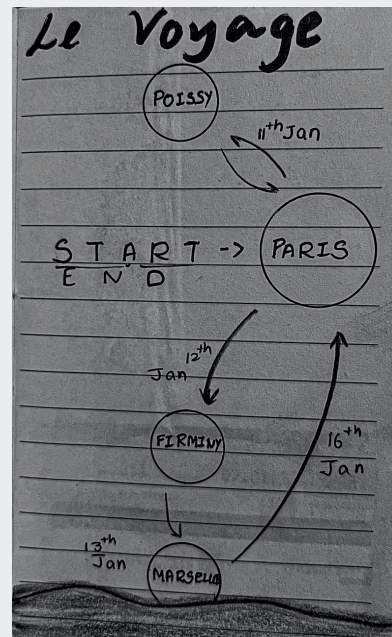
By synthesizing archival research, visual ethnography of material fragments, theoretical analysis, and speculative drawing, this thesis aims to open a conversation about the foundational systems and silent acts that architecture performs. The focus remains on inviting the reader to look beyond the pristine façade and into the densely articulated space of the concealed.

Fig. 2

Le Voyage (Initial Site Visit Plan). Authors sketchbook, Jan 2025.

Fig. 3

Initial Conceptual Mapping. Authors sketchbook, Jan 2025.





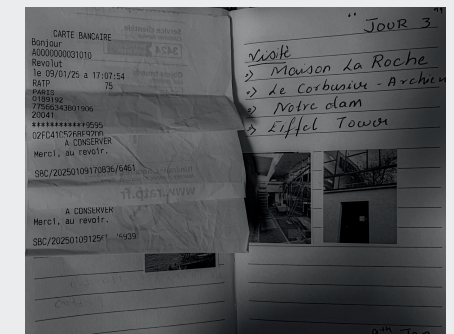
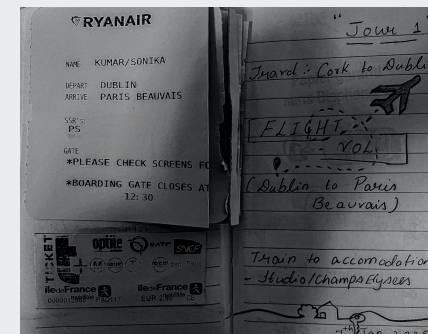
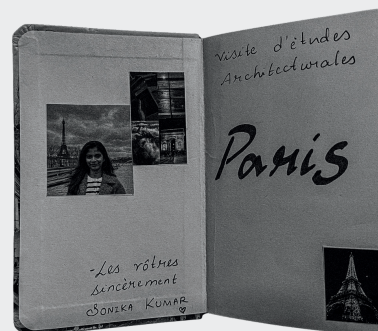
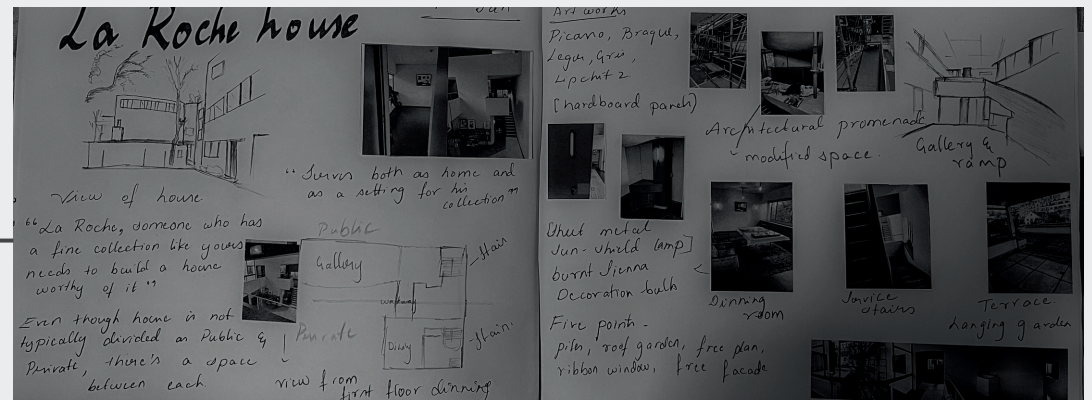
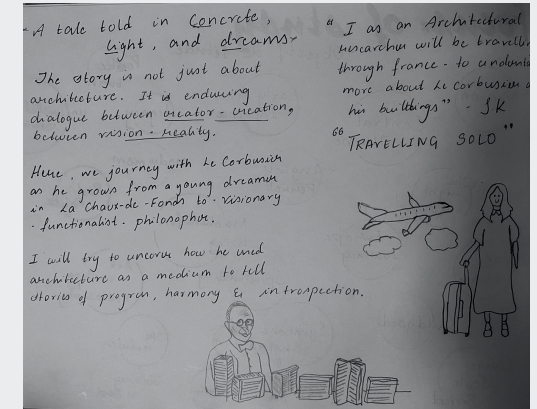
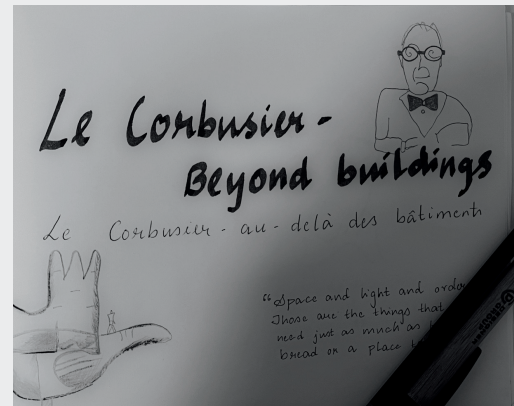
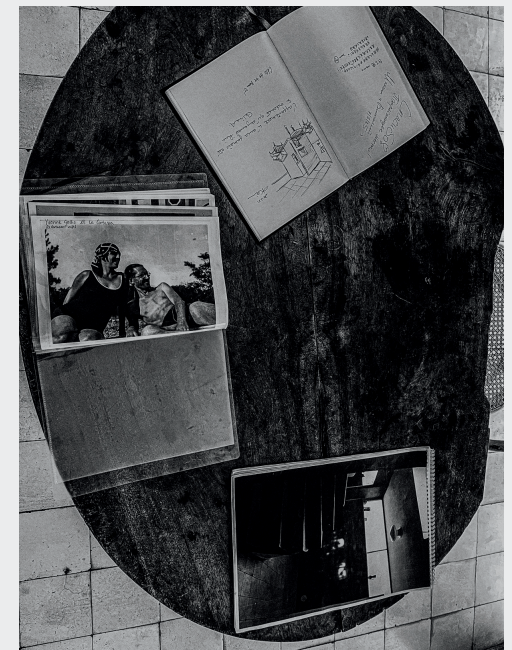
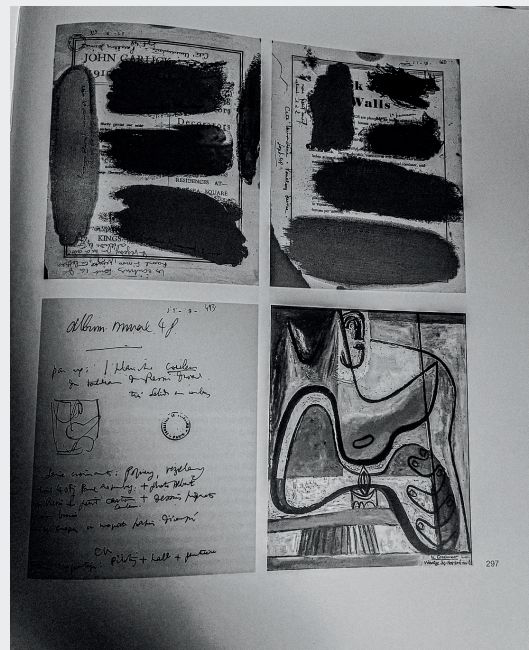
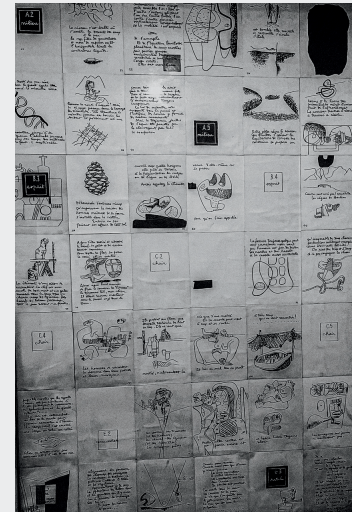
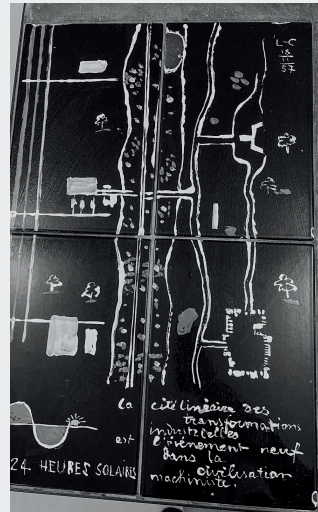


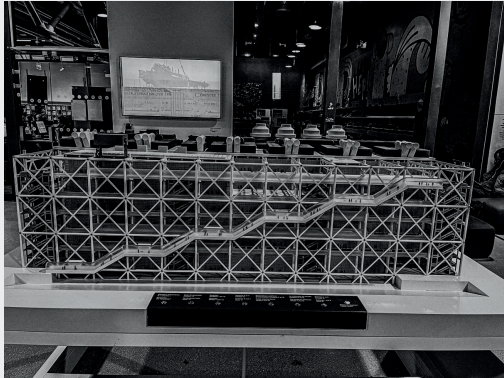
Fig. 4(Spread)
Journey to Maison La Roche, 2025. Mixed digital media.

Fig. 5(Spread)

Site Documentation Spread: Field Research and Initial Exploration in Paris and Beyond. Jan 2025.

A composite of photographs taken by author during the initial research phase, documenting the architectural context and material conditions of multiple Corbusian sites. This spread visually charts the expansive scope of the project before the research pivot, capturing the real-world state of the built environment that informed the thesis's focus on concealment, traces, and the exposed architecture of Maison La Roche.

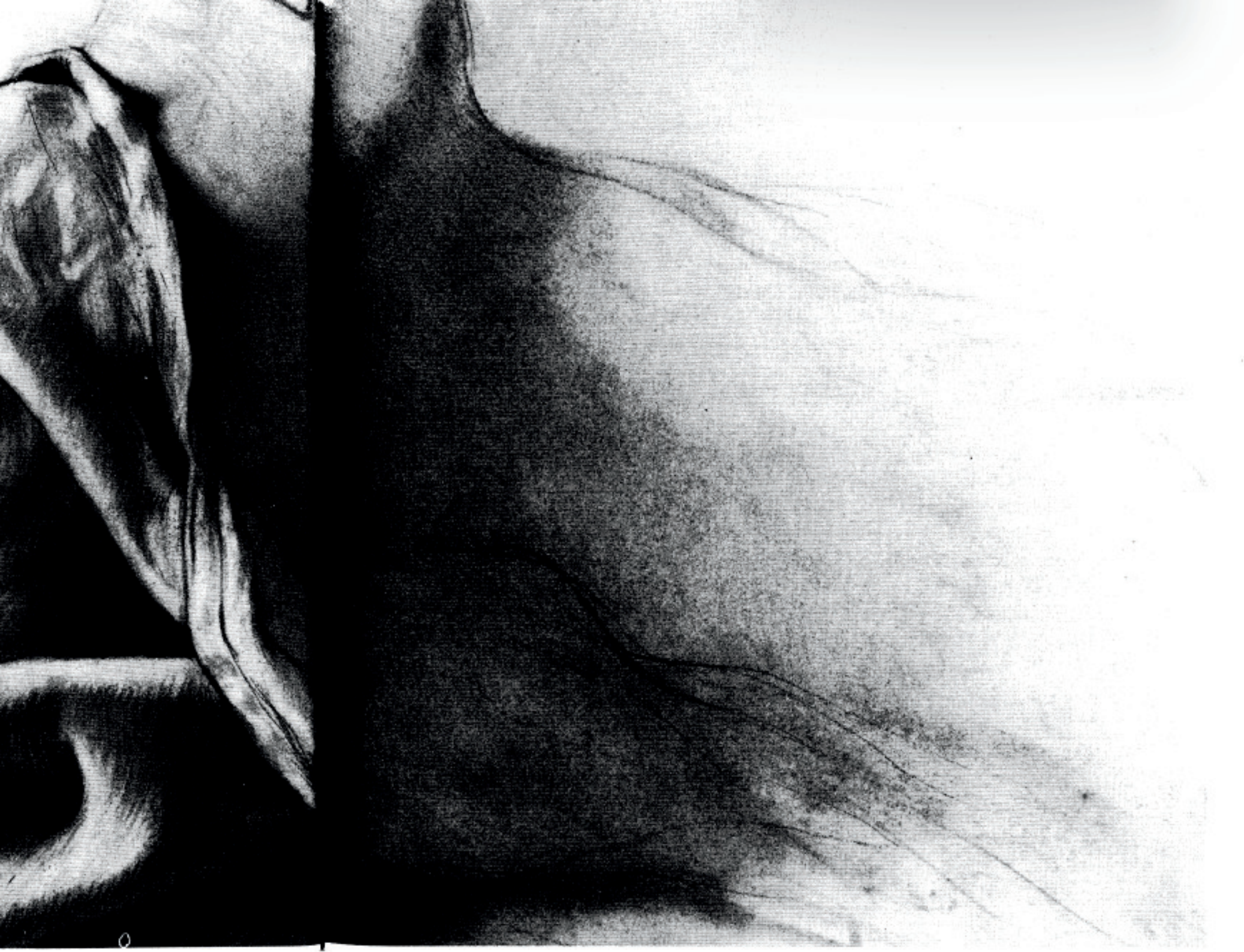




PROLOGUE

From Dust, We Begin.,





During my visit to Le Corbusier's Maison La Roche in January 2025, the house's modernist clarity was disrupted by its ongoing restoration. The gallery's long white wall was covered in translucent plastic, creating a semi-permeable membrane. The curved ramp, designed to guide movement upward, appeared softened and obscured by accumulated dust. The servant stairwell, normally discrete, revealed traces of architectural infrastructure through protective sheeting, highlighting the building's hidden systems. Light, previously choreographed through ribbon windows and skylights, now diffused unevenly, reducing spatial legibility and flattening depth. These conditions reveal a tension between the house's intended formal precision and its present state, emphasizing the interplay between architectural form, material condition, and perception. The house functions not only as a domestic and gallery space but also as a complex instrument mediating visibility, movement, and the experience of the body within its restored environment.

The presence of dust and the translucent sheeting created a visual and tactile dissonance that forced an awareness of material aging and temporal erosion. Julia Kristeva, a Bulgarian-French philosopher and literary critic, in her seminal work *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), describes abjection as the radical breakdown of boundaries, particularly those separating the subject from the ob-ject, the pure from the defiled, and life from the corpse (or death).¹ This concept resonates strongly with the conditions at Maison La Roche. Here, dust doesn't simply mark neglect; it unsettles architecture's illusion of permanence, inserting filth where there should be form. The plastic veil, meant to protect, instead blurs distinctions between structure and atmosphere, purity and contamination, making visible what architecture often works to repress.

One of the most compelling parallels emerged in relation to historical rituals of death and mourning. The scene evoked the atmosphere of Irish wakes, specifically in reference to John Minihan, an Irish photographer renowned for his evocative black-and-white images that capture the essence of Irish life, particularly in his hometown of Athy, County Kildare. Among his most acclaimed works is *The Wake of Katy Tyrrell*, (Fig 9) a series of photographs taken over three days and nights in 1977. This



Fig. 6 Veils (Spread)

Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, and Geoffrey Bennington, *Veils* (Spread). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 26–27.

Fig. 7

Author's own photograph showing the restoration debris on the gallery counter, highlighting the 'construction mess' and traces of human labor in Maison La Roche. Photograph. Paris, France, January 9, 2025.

Fig. 8

Author's own photograph detailing the scaffolding structure against the exterior façade of Maison La Roche during the renovation, emphasizing the architectural infrastructure. Photograph. Paris, France, January 9, 2025.

intimate documentation of a traditional Irish wake includes images of the deceased, dressed in the Legion of Mary burial shroud, with mirrors covered by white sheets, clocks stopped, and fires extinguished, rituals intended to prevent the soul of the deceased from becoming trapped or the living from glimpsing death's reflection.^{2, 3}

The gallery at Maison La Roche was covered in translucent plastic, shielding the architecture from fully seeing itself during a moment of transition. This spatial veiling carried symbolic weight, creating a temporal in-between where memory is paused, bodies are absent, and the architecture itself seems to mourn its own transformation into complex spatio-mythological setting. The careful suspension of visibility and time mirrors Minihan's wake, where covered mirrors enforce a liminal pause. "She is dressed in the Legion of Mary burial shroud. The mirror is covered with a white sheet. Fires are put out. Clocks are stopped. The wake room is prepared for family and friends to pay their last respects to the deceased. The vigil goes on through the night with only a candle flickering."⁴ Here, Maison La Roche becomes a space of suspended recognition. Just as the wake mediates between the living and the dead, the villa mediates between presence and absence, visibility and concealment, producing a ritualized condition in which the house appears to observe its own transformation.

We might also consider the work of John Hejduk, an American architect and artist, and the way his architecture often exhibits a veiled quality, both literal and metaphorical, staging spaces as sites of concealed meaning, emotional weight, and ritual passage. His houses were not simply shelters but "characters" draped in symbolic membranes, where walls functioned less as dividers and more as filters between psychic states. In projects such as House for a Musician and House of the Suicide, veiling was not mere concealment but a narrative device, an architecture of sorrow, echo, and disappearance.⁵

The temporary construction mess - tools, paint swatches, an energy drink bottle left on the table, functioned as intrusions into the otherwise curated aesthetic of modernist purity. These traces of labor disrupted the myth of the autonomous, finished object and reinserted the human scale and

1. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1-5.

2. "Beckett and the Wake," The Glucksman, University College Cork, exhibition, April 13–June 30, 2019, accessed May 24, 2025,

3. John Minihan, "The Broader Picture: First Love, Last Rites," *The Independent*, May 8, 1993.

4. Minihan, "Broader Picture," May 8, 1993.

5. John Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa: Works 1947–1983*, ed. Kim Sbrkovich (New York: Rizzoli, 1985).

temporality of maintenance. This aligns with the contemporary shift in architectural conservation, which now places greater emphasis on lived use, process, and repair rather than strict material restoration.

The experience of passing through a corridor shrouded in plastic resembled an initiation passage, invoking associations with ritual crossings, such as the Masonic veil described in the illustrations of Léo Taxil, a French journalist notorious for his late nineteenth-century hoax literature against Freemasonry.⁶ Taxil's fabricated *exposés* staged lurid visions of Masonic initiations, in which the blindfolded initiate tears through fabric to enter a new state of being.⁷ At La Roche, this veiling delineated not only physical zones but temporal thresholds: between completed and incomplete, between idealized vision and the real, aging object.

Just like Francisco Goya, the Spanish painter whose late *Black Paintings* confronted themes of darkness and mortality- an expression chillingly embodied by *Saturn Devouring His Son*- the comparison rests not in its literal repulsiveness, but in its thematic expression of time consuming its own legacy.⁸ The process of restoration at La Roche revealed how architecture is subject to a form of cannibalism: constantly updated, retouched, and repainted in an effort to survive, but in doing so, slowly erasing the authenticity of its own past. In that sense, the act of preservation becomes paradoxical - both saving and destroying the original.

The building, like Saturn, turns inward, consuming its own history to sustain a distorted present. This challenge of managing historical decay and deciding on authenticity is central to the field of architectural conservation.⁹ The practical efforts- such as paint swatches held up to the light- are thus revealed as not just aesthetic decisions, but profound negotiations with time, asking: Did it always look like this? Or has time drained its colour?

Maison La Roche, in this moment, was not merely a restored building-in-progress but a spatial

Fig. 9

John Minihan, *The Wake of Katy Tyrrell* (1977).

From the exhibition "Beckett and the Wake," The Glucksman, University College Cork, April 13–June 30, 2019.

Fig. 10

John Hejduk, *The Suicide's House* (from *The Lancaster/Hanover Masque*). Pen and black ink on paper, 1980–1982.

Source: Canadian Centre for Architecture, John Hejduk Fonds. Reproduced in *afasiaarchzine*, 2016.

Fig. 11

Candidate thrown into paper, illustrating the Masonic ritual of tearing the veil (Illustration). Source: Léo Taxil, *Les mystères de la Franc-Maçonnerie* (Paris, 1886).

Fig. 12

Saturn Devouring One of His Sons (c. 1819-1823) by Francisco de Goya, from the artist's *Black Paintings* series; Francisco de Goya, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

6.J. K. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009),154.

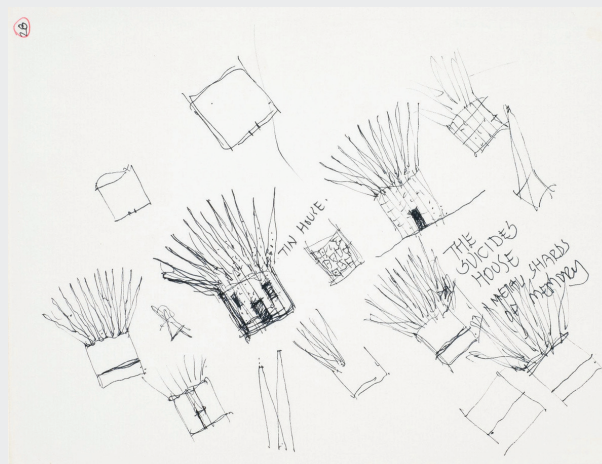
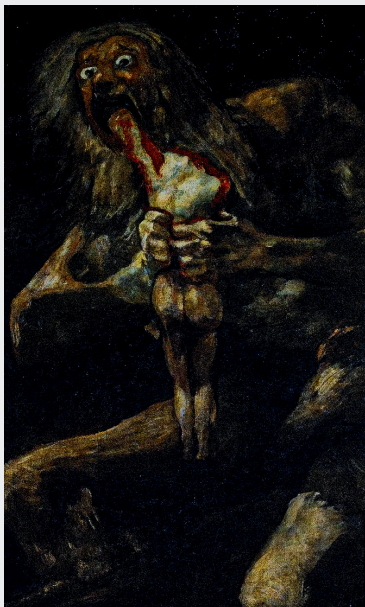
7.Léo Taxil, *Les mystères de la Franc-Maçonnerie* (Paris: Delhomme et Briguet, 1886).

8.Francisco Goya, *Saturn Devouring His Son*, c. 1819-1823, oil mural transferred to canvas, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

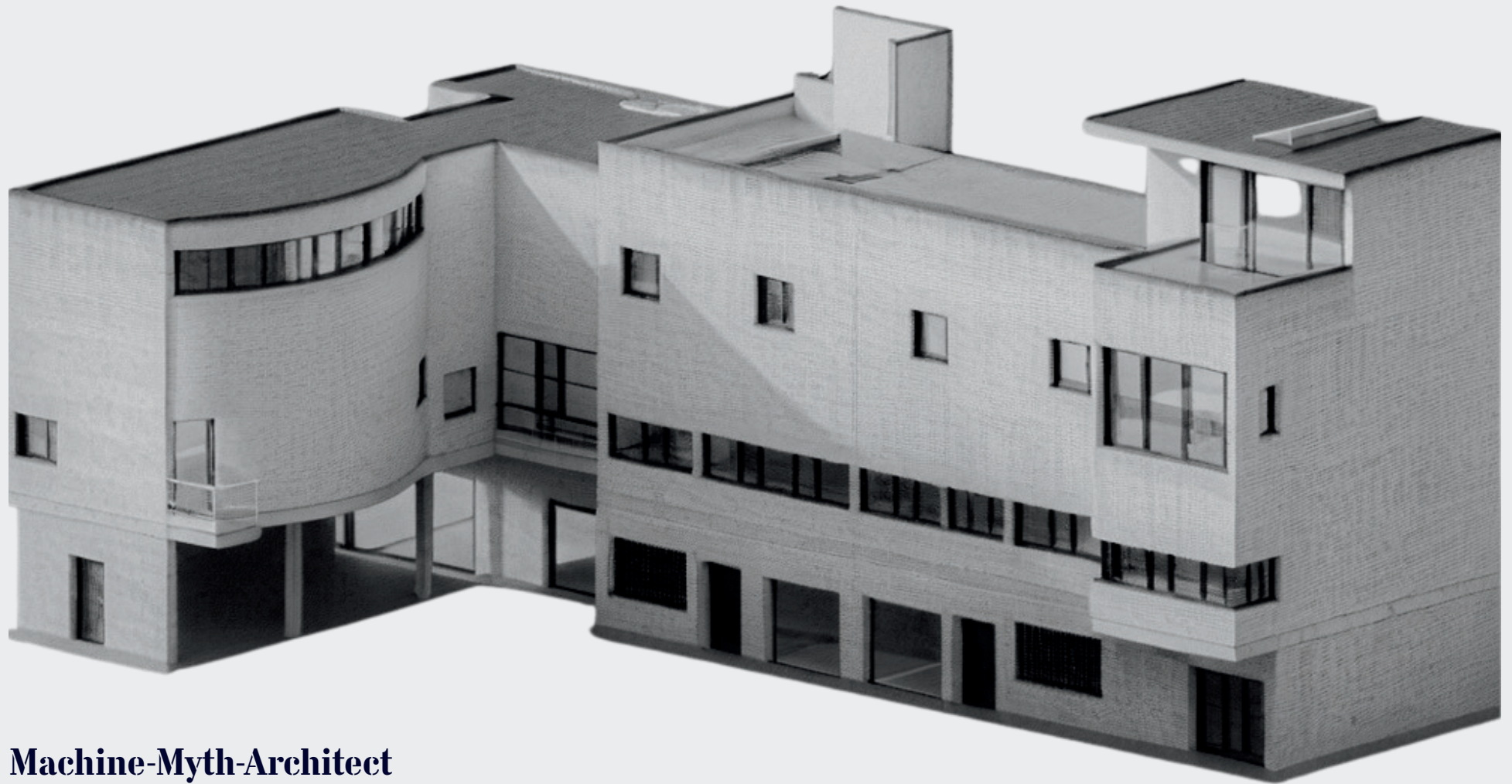
9.Jukka Jokilehto, *A History of Architectural Conservation* (London: Routledge, 1999).



text undergoing reinterpretation. The layers of dust, plastic, and exposed surfaces did not obscure the architecture; they revealed its underlying fragility, and more importantly, the complex, cyclical relationship between memory, materiality, and transformation. Restoration here was not a return to origin but a critical confrontation with time, value, and decay.



INTRODUCTION



Machine-Myth-Architect

Fig. 13

Digital model (External View) of Maison La Roche. Authors own, Cork, Ireland, April 2025.

Architecture is rarely neutral. It remembers, it erases and performs, and in this thesis Le Corbusier's Maison la Roche is not simply treated as static modernist object (house-gallery), but as a ritual machine - a mythopoetic object and metaphysical script. Reading its authorship as two-fold, as both Architect and Mystic, the narrative develops here is shaped by three intersecting thematic readings and around **the Machine, the Myth, and the Architect**.

The machine represents the visible structure of the house: its clean, geometric lines, concealed systems, ducts, dumbwaiters, staircases, and filters. It is a house designed for regulated flow, efficiency, and functional clarity. Every architectural element, from the open-plan gallery spaces to the circulation pathways, functions as a component of a larger mechanism that choreographs movement, light, and spatial experience.¹⁰ The machine is not merely utilitarian; it is performative, guiding the inhabitant through the architecture as if through a carefully tuned instrument.¹¹

Overlaid upon this architectural structure is the myth. Myth transforms architecture into a symbolic order, rendering the physical form

sacred. In Maison La Roche, this is found in the white walls that feign emptiness yet hold latent meaning, in mirrors that reflect only purified images, and in veils that conceal as much as they reveal.¹² The mythic dimension of the house mediates between the material and the metaphysical, turning everyday movement into ritual, and the domestic into a stage for transcendence.

Anthony Vidler, a architectural historian and theorist's analysis of the architectural uncanny, which emphasizes the instability and fragility of architectural experience, provides a critical starting point. He argues that the modern house deliberately subverts security, creating a sense of alienation and the unhomely.¹³ Le Corbusier orchestrates both machine and myth, scripting an experience of ritual disappearance through form, ideology, and sequence. His work here might therefore be described as 'cosmological'—insofar as the house becomes a medium through which the inhabitant navigates a narrative of purification, disappearance, and revelation. In this sense, Maison La Roche performs as a metaphysical instrument, a site where architecture enacts, remembers, and shapes ritualized human experience

10. Fondation Le Corbusier, *Maisons La Roche et Jeanneret*, accessed December 15, 2025.

11. Kenneth Frampton, "Le Corbusier and the Esprit Nouveau 1907-31," in *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, 4th ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2020), 149.

12. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

13. Anthony Vidler, "The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime," *Assemblage*, no. 3 (July 1987), 11.

Maison La Roche- The Ritual Box

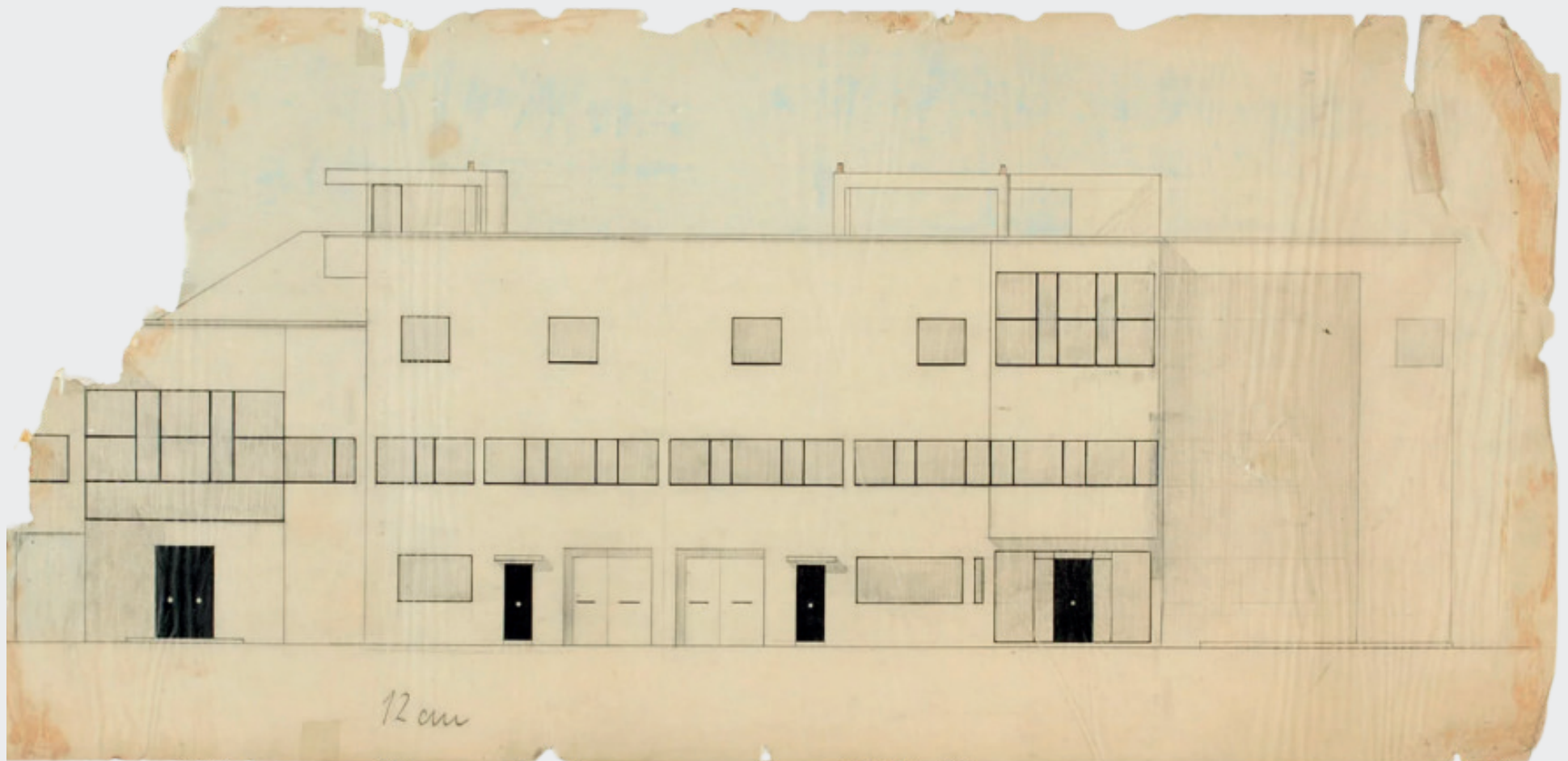


Fig. 14

Le Corbusier. Sketch of Maison La Roche, 1923. Pen and ink on paper. Held at Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. Accessed March 25, 2025.

Maison La Roche (Paris, 1923–25) was designed by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret for Raoul La Roche, an art collector and friend of the architect. The house was meant to serve both as a residence and a gallery. Located in the *bourgeois 16th arrondissement* of Paris, the project was commissioned by Raoul Albert La Roche, a Swiss banker and committed patron of the Purist movement. He sought a home and gallery that would embody the formal clarity, abstraction, and symbolic economy at the heart of modernist aesthetics.¹⁴

The site- a narrow, tree-lined *cul-de-sac* in *Square du Docteur Blanche*, imposed constraints that only heightened the architectural drama.¹⁵ From its inception, the villa was conceived as a narrative space: one house for living, one house for art, bound together through a shared architectural promenade.

Formally, the villa showcases many of Le Corbusier's early principles: *the promenade architecturale*, ribbon windows, free plan, and interplay of curves and grids. Yet beneath its apparent clarity, Maison La Roche reveals something else: an architecture of disappearance

and uncanny ritual. This sense of erasure recalls John Hejduk's vision of architecture as a theatre of violence and ritual.

This unsettling dimension was confronted by architect John Hejduk during his 1974 visit to exhibit his *Wall House* project. Hejduk's experience there led him to view the villa not merely as a rational container but as a vessel scarred by memory. He became convinced the house had previously been used by English spiritualists for ceremonies in the 1920s, arguing that the main sitting room was configured like a church. This unnerving sense of latent ritual was evidenced, in part, by the hearse lamps on the walls, which acted as a "tell-tale sign" of the house's double, concealed life.¹⁶

This sense of repression was made visceral when Hejduk attempted to hang his own work. A pivotal moment occurred when he worked on the wall and red dust seemed to seep from the interior construction of the house, as though the structure was wounded. The encounter of dust bleeding through surfaces reframes the architecture as both wound and witness, echoing Hejduk's overall vision of buildings as mute

14. Jacques Sbriglio, *Le Corbusier – Les Villas La Roche-Jeanneret / the Villas La Roche-Jeanneret* (Birkhäuser, 2015), 7.

15. Sbriglio, *Le Corbusier*, 10.

16. John Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa: Works 1947–1983*, ed. Kim Shkapich (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 126.

Fig. 15

Ground Floor Plan: Maison La Roche and Maison Jeanneret (1923-25).

Fig. 16

Le Corbusier, La Roche-Jeanneret houses, front façade, Paris, built 1923-5. (Source: DOCOMOMO Journal)

characters haunted by absence.

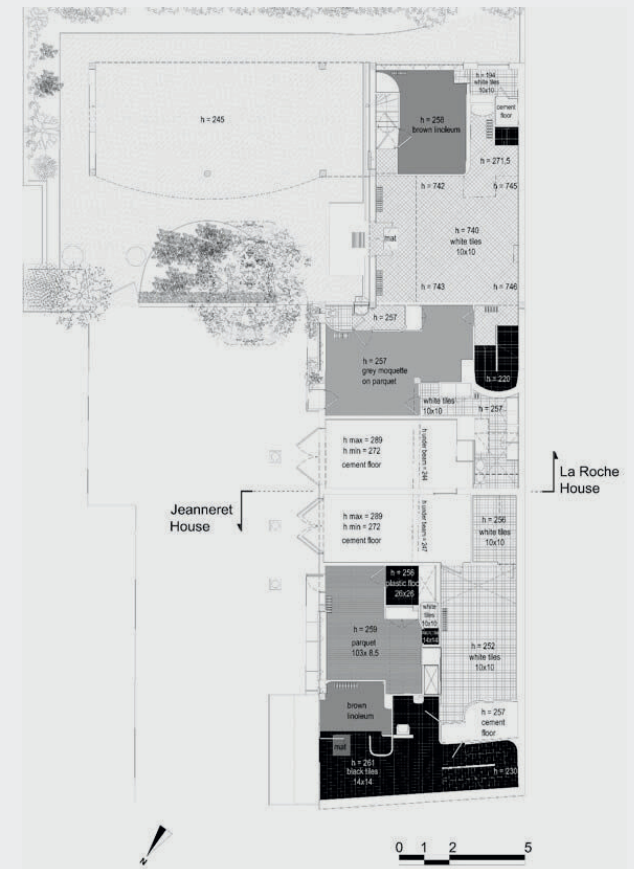
Writing about this experience in *Mask of Medusa*, Hejduk recounts sensing the terrifying and uncanny aspects of the house-what he terms its “program of other undertones.” He observes that beneath the house’s supposed calmness, “monsters are down there.”¹⁷

The depth of this unnerving ritual is amplified by the anecdotal account Hejduk recalls from Charles Correa, who visited the exhibition:

“There are two people on a ship looking over a calm ocean. Just at twilight, the still ocean parts and the fin of a shark comes up. Maybe only for two seconds. Then the fin drops down. Both men are terrorized.”¹⁸

Reading the La Roche house in a similar way, what becomes apparent, in my mind at least, is that we are not so much dealing with an essay of absolute modernist clarity but we are, instead, witnessing something like a slow ritualised violence played out in space: a compounding of bodies, traces, and functions oscillating towards a terrifying silence that marks its turn away from

what we thought was the absolute clarity of the modernist ideal.



17. John Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa: Works 1947-1983*, ed. Kim Shkapich (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 126.

18. Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa*, 126.



Poeme de l'angle droit - Le Corbusier's Cosmogram





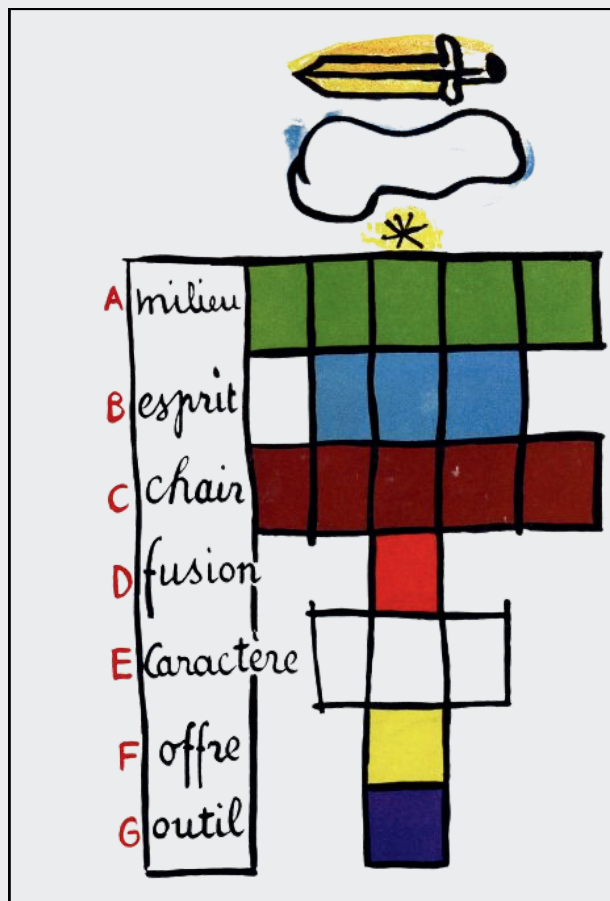


Fig. 17(Spread)

Poem of right angle spread.

Source: Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit*, translated by Kenneth Hylton (London: Thames and Hudson, June 1989).

Fig. 18

Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret). *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Diagram of the Seven Panels/Color Grid). Published by Tériade, Paris, 1955.

Fig. 19

Installation view of *Le Poème de l'angle droit* exhibition, curated by Olga Treivas. Moscow, Russia, 2013.

Source: <https://treivas.team/project/le-corbusier/>.

Published in 1955, *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (The Poem of the Right Angle) stands as one of Le Corbusier's most enigmatic and spiritually charged works, a hybrid artefact fusing poetry, drawing, geometry, and metaphysics.¹⁹ Composed between 1947 and 1953 and published by *Tériade* editions, the work is not a theoretical treatise in the conventional sense but a *livre d'artiste*, consisting of 121 lithographs accompanied by hand-written verse.²⁰ Rooted in the mid-century French tradition of artist books, alongside those of Matisse, Picasso, and Giacometti, *Poème* functions as a ritual diagram or cosmogram, in which architecture is recast as a spiritual and symbolic practice. The right angle, a recurring motif throughout the suite, becomes a sacred form: a point of intersection between man and cosmos, matter and spirit, visibility and disappearance.

The poem is structured across seven panels, labeled A through G: Environment, Mind, Flesh, Fusion, Character, Offering, and Instrument.²¹ These thematic categories not only organize the poetic and visual content of the book but also trace a metaphysical ascent from earthbound reality to cosmic abstraction- from

the impure to the pure, from materiality to spiritual clarity. Each panel is associated with a symbolic color (green for environment, blue for mind, etc.) and features diagrams that treat geometry, especially the right angle, as a metaphysical interface. The structure of the suite was influenced by Le Corbusier's deep engagement with alchemical thought: each chapter contains meditations on elemental tensions, spiritual evolution, color theory, and the gendered dynamics of cosmic harmony. The poem's visual layout, when exhibited, takes the form of a top-heavy cruciform grid, seven rows that mirror the cosmological ladder it proposes, reinforcing the work's ritual and diagrammatic logic.²²

This thesis adopts the seven-part structure of *Poème de l'angle droit*²³ as its own architectural and as its methodological scaffold. Each chapter aligns with one of the seven themes, treating Maison La Roche as a materialised counterpart to the poem, whether through direct influence or unconscious parallel. In this reading, the house is not merely a functional dwelling or gallery but a cosmogram in built form. Just as the poem ascends through zones of

19. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955).

20. Fondation Le Corbusier, "Le Poème de l'angle droit," Digital archive, Paris, France, accessed March 25, 2025, <https://www.fondationlecorbusier.fr/oeuvre-livre/le-poeme-de-langle-droit-le-corbusier-1955/>.

21. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*.

22. Fondation Le Corbusier, "Le Poème de l'angle droit."

23. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*.

Fig. 20

Le Poème de l'angle droit(1955) Plates and Manuscript Display. Photograph taken by the author in the foyer of Le Corbusier's Studio apartment, Paris, Jan 2025. Capturing the montage of symbolic drawings and textual components that outline the seven cosmological themes. This work serves as the conceptual structure for the thesis.

transformation, so too does the spatial experience of the house unfold as a metaphysical journey- where mirrors, voids, ducts, and ramps become instruments of symbolic calibration. By situating *Poème de l'angle droit*²⁴ as both an interpretive lens and structural framework, the thesis proposes that Le Corbusier's architecture is not only formal or technical, but alchemical: a grammar of matter in service of metaphysical disappearance.

24. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955).



Le Corbusier- Architect as Myth-Maker



Fig. 21

Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret) in his early years. Photograph. Reproduced in J.K. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 5.

Le Corbusier, born Charles-Édouard Jeanneret in 1887, was profoundly influenced by his early education in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland. At the age of 15, he enrolled in the local art school, where he studied under Charles L'Eplattenier, a painter and master of decorative arts. L'Eplattenier introduced him to the symbolic language of form and nature, emphasizing the spiritual dimensions of art and architecture.²⁵ This mentorship played a pivotal role in shaping Le Corbusier's design philosophy, steering him toward architecture despite his initial reluctance. Art historian J.K. Birksted, in his seminal study *Le Corbusier and the Occult*, notes that Le Corbusier “would later describe these as 'my guide, my choice' and as his 'time-honored ideas, ingrained and deep-rooted in the intellect, like entries from a catechism’”²⁶. This statement illustrates how deeply L'Eplattenier's teachings were internalized, forming the symbolic and ritualistic foundations that would permeate Le Corbusier's later architectural works, particularly in his conception of space as a medium for metaphysical and cosmic expression.

Before delving further into Le Corbusier's

architectural evolution, it is worth examining the intellectual milieu of La Chaux-de-Fonds during his formative years. The town's rich cultural environment exposed him to various spiritual and philosophical ideas. Notably, Le Corbusier was introduced to Édouard Schuré's *Les Grands Initiés*, a work that explores the mystical lives of figures such as Krishna, Plato, and Jesus.²⁷ This exposure to esoteric thought significantly influenced his conception of the architect as a prophet or seeker of truth. Schuré's synthesis of German idealism and Romanticism provided a framework through which Le Corbusier began to view architecture not merely as a functional endeavor but as a means to express universal truths and spiritual ideals.

A significant turning point in Le Corbusier's intellectual journey occurred in 1909, when he encountered a villa designed by J.L.M. Lauweriks, a Dutch Theosophical architect known for integrating mystical proportions into his designs. This experience left a lasting impression on Le Corbusier, particularly regarding the symbolic grid proportional system, which he later adapted into his own Modulor

25. J. K. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 7-11.

26. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult*, 262.

27. Édouard Schuré, *Les Grands Initiés* (Paris: Éditions Dervy, 2003), 45-48.



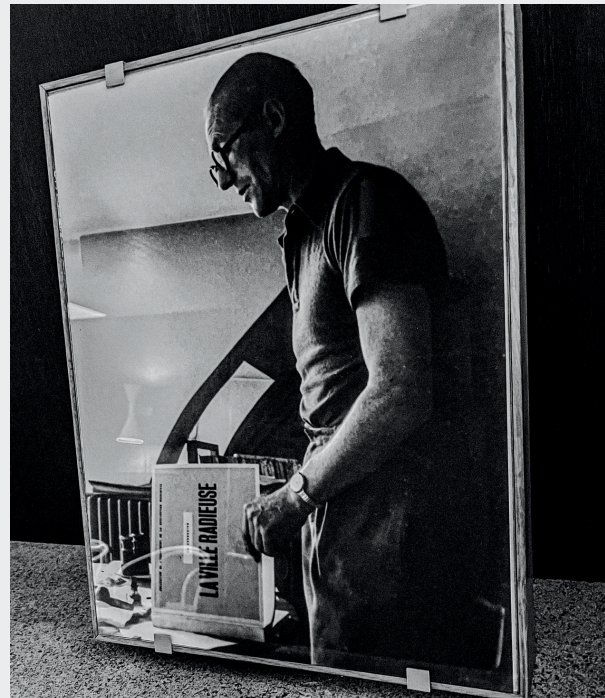
Fig. 22

A young Le Corbusier sketching or drafting in his studio at La Chaux-de-Fonds. Photograph. Reproduced in J.K. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).

Fig. 23

Portrait of Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret). Framed photograph, reflecting the formal image of the architect during his later career, displayed at the Le Corbusier's studio apartment, Paris. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

system. His exposure to the works of fellow theosophical thinkers such as Johann Thorn Prikker further deepened his belief that meaningful architecture must encompass geometry, symbolism, and spiritual purpose. These influences underscore the metaphysical dimensions of Le Corbusier's architectural philosophy, positioning him as a myth-maker who sought to transcend the mundane through design.²⁸



28. J. K. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 270.

Seven



Fig. 24

Illustration of Inanna's (Istar's) Descent into the Underworld, showing the goddess partially disrobed. Lewis Spence, *Inanna's Descent into the Underworld*. From *Myths and Legends of Babylonia and Assyria* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1917), 135.

Le Poème de l'angle droit, a work that is equal parts metaphysical diagram, architectural treatise, and spiritual autobiography, is divided into seven thematic panels: Environment, Mind, Flesh, Fusion, Character, Offering, and Instrument.²⁹ The *Poème* does not merely describe architecture; it performs it. Each stage moves from the material to the metaphysical, mapping an ascent through geometry, perception, sacrifice, and transformation. The number seven here is not decorative; it functions as a cosmological scaffold that forms the structure of Le Corbusier's worldview, a ritual framework for making and reading space.

Applying this sevenfold structure, the thesis treats each chapter as an act, each theme as a lens through which disappearance can be read. The house is not analyzed through chronology or typology, but through a ritual dramaturgy. The choice of seven extends beyond Le Corbusier, carrying symbolic weight across myth, mysticism, and metaphysical literature, where it often marks transitional thresholds, states of concealment and revelation, or the journey from the visible to the invisible.

Theodore Ziolkowski, a prominent scholar in

comparative literature and mythology, traces symbolic structures and motifs in Western and Near Eastern literature. In his work *The Veil as Metaphor and as Myth*, Ziolkowski explores the motif of the seven veils, linking it to Inanna's descent into the underworld. He writes saying, in the Sumerian-Akkadian descent, the goddess Ishtar/Inanna is compelled to remove her seven rich garments, from her crown to her breechcloth, according to the "ancient rules" of the netherworld; the disrobing serves primarily to effect the exposure of the goddess's nakedness, which carries purely sexual implications, evidenced by the resulting sterility where "the man impregnates not the maiden,"³⁰ emphasizing how the number becomes a structure of disrobing, a metaphor for gradual revelation, loss, and transformation. This mirrors the way each chapter of the thesis pulls back another architectural veil, from white dust to mirrored surfaces, and from plumbing shafts to paper-thin partitions.

The French cultural theorist Paul Virilio mediates on the mechanisms of perception and loss. In his writing *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, he situates architectural experience within both

29. Fondation Le Corbusier, "Le Poème de l'angle droit," Digital archive, Paris, France.

30. Theodore Ziolkowski, "The Veil as Metaphor and as Myth," *Religion & Literature* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 69.

temporal and perceptual frameworks, emphasizing the instability and fragility of architectural experience. He argues that speed compresses time, accelerates disappearance, and destabilizes the visual experience of architecture,³¹ highlighting how perception itself is subject to erosion. Virilio's work critically addresses the interplay of technology, memory, and architecture, proposing that the very act of observing space is temporally bound and conditioned by acceleration. In this sense, Maison La Roche's seemingly permanent and pristine surfaces are caught in a tension between material endurance and perceptual ephemerality.

By integrating Virilio, the thesis frames each act as a temporal modulation: spaces are revealed, concealed, and ultimately vanish, suggesting that disappearance is embedded in the phenomenology of architectural experience. Additional analyses in Virilio's later essays extend the argument, "If the plane is kept aloft by the speed of ejection of its jetpipes, it is not because of its fixed wing surfaces,"³² nothing that architectural form is perpetually under threat from environmental, social, and technological forces, rendering the notion of a

fixed, eternal building an illusion.

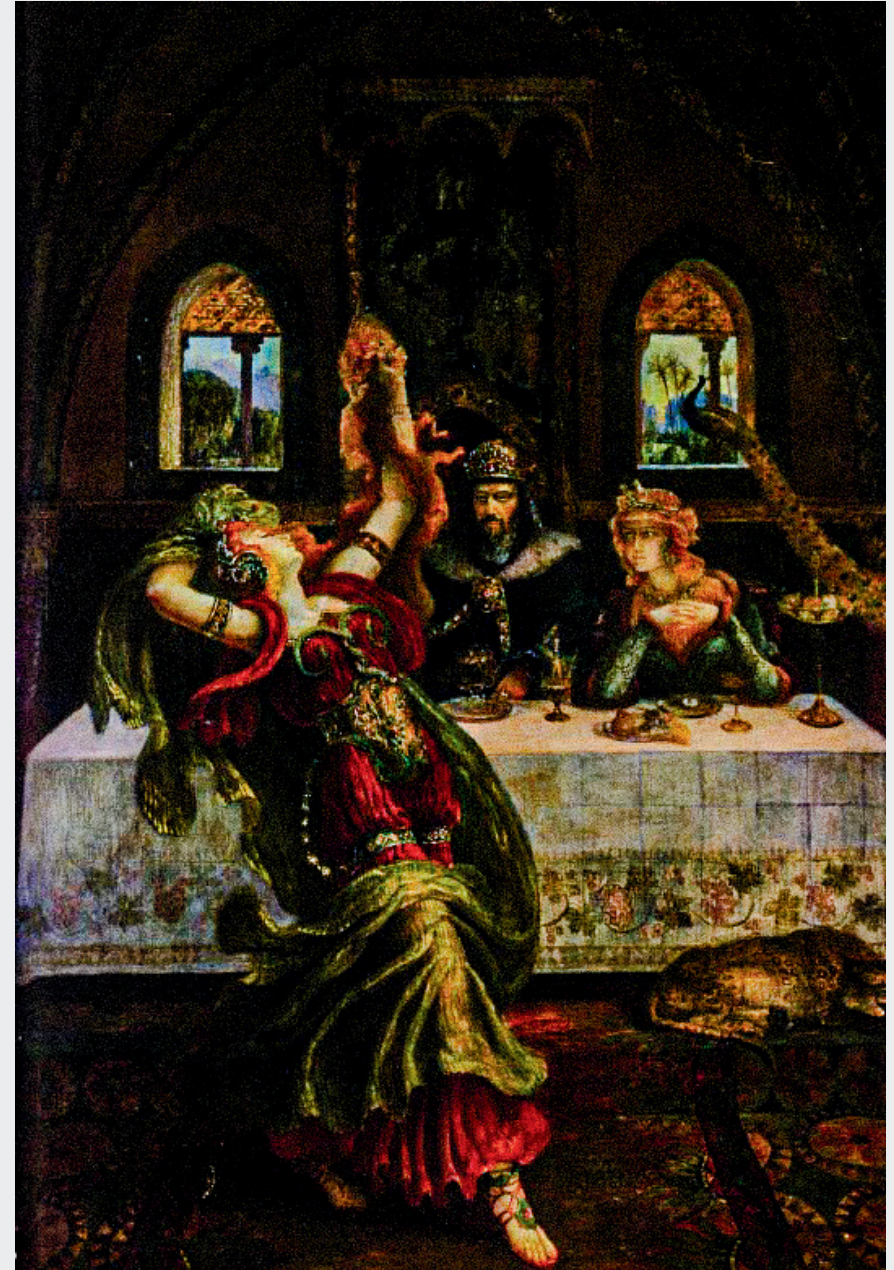
This seven-part structure, then, isn't simply borrowed from the *Poème de l'angle droit*. It is reactivated. It becomes a performative device; organizing the thesis not as a linear argument, but as a layered cosmogram: a metaphysical machine where veils, dust, and fragment's structure meaning. Each act marks a spatial, symbolic, and narrative threshold. And at the end of the seventh, what remains is not a conclusion but an opening- a final disappearance into silence.

Fig. 25

Dance of the Seven Or Dance of Salome (1898). Oil on canvas.

Source:

http://markalburger2009.blogspot.com/2009_08_01_archive.html



31. Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, trans. Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 98–103.

32. Paul Virilio, *Lost Dimension*, trans. Daniel Moshenberg (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 107.

Spatial Journey- Architect as Storyteller

The central framework of the thesis approaches Maison La Roche not simply as a modernist house, but as a narrative and mythopoetic space, and therefore as a paradigmatic example of the architect as storyteller. It is read here as a spatial text that reveals itself through thresholds, silences, veils, and disappearances. The house does not merely contain stories; it tells them. It is understood as a journey in seven acts, with each act aligned to a cosmological theme from Le Corbusier's *Poème de l'angle droit*. The reader moves through the thesis much like one move through the house: beginning with the environment, encountering the gaze, descending into the body, crossing symbolic thresholds, and eventually dissolving into instrument, trace, and dust.

Rather than offering a conventional argument, the thesis unfolds as an immersive narrative. Architect becomes the storyteller, and each chapter functions as a scene composed of spaces, fragments, voices, and rituals. These chapters take the form of spatial fictions, where architectural readings blend with symbolic

drawings, critical theory, and speculative writing. The lens shifts constantly, moving from dust that collects on plastic during restoration, to the hidden labour of servants behind the gallery, from mirrors that sterilize the gaze, to forgotten infrastructures like plumbing and waste that operate in silence.

The story is constructed not only through text but through a constellation of visual and spatial elements. Fictional monologues are placed beside annotated plans. Ritual diagrams open into theoretical passages. Photographic fragments are paired with symbolic reconstructions. Together, these layers form an experiential reading of the house, one that welcomes uncertainty and intensifies ambiguity rather than resolving it.

This narrative method draws from Julia Kristeva's concept of the **abject**, where meaning breaks down at the boundary between clean and unclean, presence and absence. It echoes Marcel Duchamp's **strategies of concealment**, where desire and meaning are folded beneath the polished surface. It also recalls John Hejduk's **theatrical architecture**, where space is never

static but inhabited by masks, gestures and disappearing figures. In this context, Maison La Roche is not only the subject of the thesis but the narrator. Its story is told not through clarity but through what remains hidden, fragmented, or veiled. The house speaks, not directly, but from behind the curtain.

The structure of this thesis follows a spatial journey divided into Acts, each of which unfolds in a consistent sequence. Every Act begins with its number and title, followed by a critical essay titled as interlude drawn from established voices in architectural theory to set the intellectual stage. This framing situates the tone within a wider discourse before turning to the specific theme.

Each Act then introduces a selected passage from *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (1947–1953), titled “Theme”, Le Corbusier’s illustrated manuscript of paintings and writings that he described as a “synthesis of the major themes of his life’s work” and which critics have interpreted as an alchemical and symbolic cosmogram rather than a simple collection of drawings (Moore 1980; *Fondation LeCorbusier*). The “right angle” is treated as more than a geometric device: it

functions as a thematic and symbolic anchor, representing uprightness, duality, and the reconciliation of opposites. This explains why the work is recognised as a coherent thematic cycle, a poem in images and words that binds Corbusian thought into a structured order. Following this introduction, each Act proceeds to narrate how the chosen theme of the Poem resonates with the spaces and concepts of Maison La Roche. The narration traces architectural elements: thresholds, stairs, corners, voids, surfaces, through the interpretive lens of the Poem, highlighting the symbolic dimension of their right-angled construction.

The Act concludes with an interpretation that synthesizes poem and building, showing how La Roche can be read as a spatial embodiment of the Poem’s metaphysical concerns. In this way, the thesis moves through a series of parallel readings, where poetic & architectural mirror one another. The result is a layered structure: criticism frames the stage, the Poem provides the theme, narration unfolds spatial experience, interpretation draws together house & manuscript into a unified act of disappearance and revelation.

BACKGROUND

Paris, 1920s• Cultural and Architectural Milieu



[illegible]

This is a detailed historical map of the Vincennes district in Paris. The map shows the Bois de Vincennes in green, with various parks and lakes like 'LAC DES MINIMES' and 'LAC DAUBERT'. It includes numerous streets, fortifications, and landmarks. Key locations labeled include Nogent, Joinville, Vincennes, St. Mandé, Charenton-le-Pont, and Paris. Specific features like 'Fort de Vincennes', 'Polygone de l'Artillerie', and 'Lac Daubert' are clearly marked. The map also shows the 'Restaurant de la Fernandine' and the 'Fort de Vincennes'.

Fig. 26(Overleaf)

Map of France. Garnier Antoine, Plan de Paris. Map. Paris, 34 Avenue de l'Opéra, ca. 1900. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Cartes et Plans.

Fig. 27

Map of Square du Docteur-Blanche. Google Earth.

Fig. 28

Sketch of Maison La Roche. Author's own.

In the early 1920s, Paris was a city reeling from the devastation of World War I but rapidly repositioning itself as the epicentre of avant-garde experimentation. The 16th arrondissement, where Maison La Roche would rise, was an enclave of affluent intellectuals, artists, and liberal patrons. Purism, Cubism, De Stijl, and early Constructivist tendencies shaped the visual arts and design fields, with figures like Ozenfant, Léger, and Le Corbusier forging links between visual clarity, social reform, and industrial aesthetics.³³

Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* had just been published in 1923, arguing for a radical new grammar of form based on the machine, the engineer, and classical proportion reinterpreted through concrete. The Maison La Roche project emerges from this intellectual moment - where the house becomes both tool and symbol, an interface between the rational and the metaphysical.

Site

Maison La Roche is located at 10 *Square du Docteur Blanche*, a quiet *cul-de-sac* in the 16th arrondissement of Paris. The site forms part of

an L-shaped plot, shared with the adjacent Jeanneret House.³⁴ This unusual parcel, bound by narrow urban edges, required Le Corbusier to experiment with layered volumes, sectional transitions, and spatial reversals. The house does not confront the street but withdraws into a protected zone of veiled encounters. This sense of inwardness of architecture as hidden threshold would become one of the themes of the house's symbolic language.

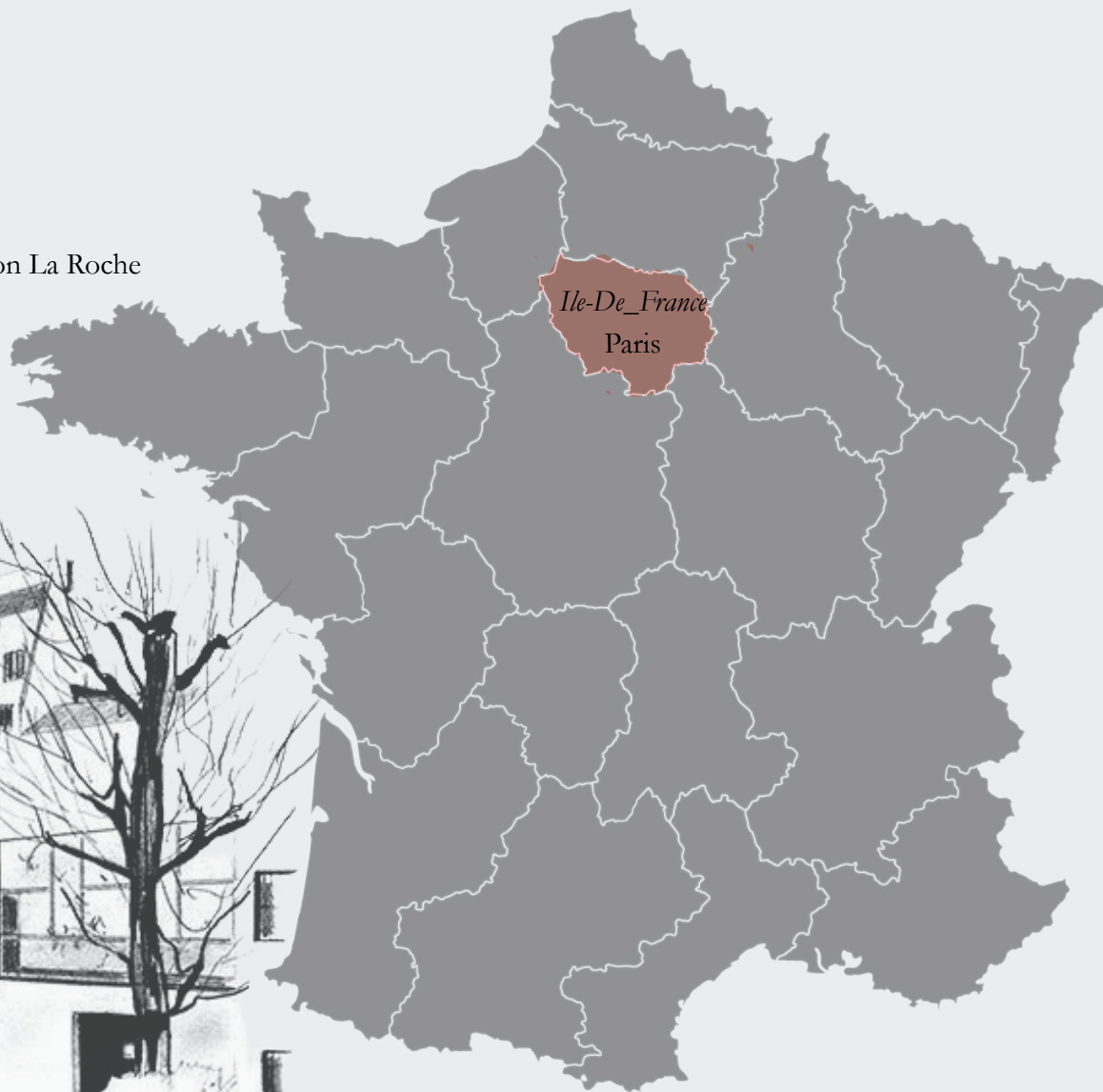
The building's orientation was tightly choreographed to frame natural light. The long ramp, which curves upward through the double-height gallery, aligns with high clerestory glazing and horizontal ribbon windows. Together, they orchestrate the promenade architecturale, leading the visitor through a ritual passage of compression and release, void and exposure. The garden, discreetly located at the rear, offers not a grand entrance but an intimate spatial breathing room, the domestic counterpart to the gallery's spectacle.

33. Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), *Après le cubisme* (Paris: Éditions Figuière, 1918).

34. Jacques Sbriglio, *Le Corbusier – Les Villas La Roche-Jeanneret / the Villas La Roche-Jeanneret* (Birkhäuser, 2015), 10.



Maison La Roche



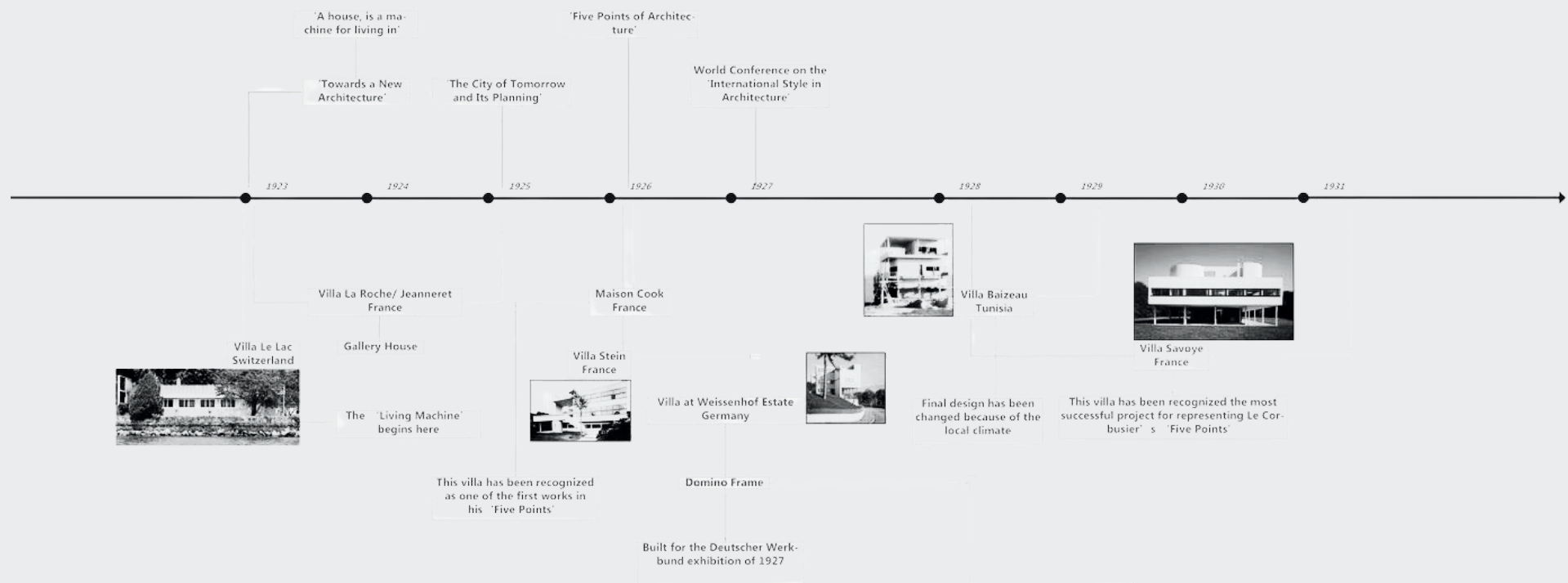


Fig. 29

.LeCorbusier works, 1923- 1931.

Timeline

Maison La Roche belongs to a short but decisive period in Le Corbusier's early career, where Purism transitioned into spatial practice. Designed in 1923 and completed in 1925, the house represents one of the first real-world tests of Le Corbusier's Five Points: pilotis, free plan, free façade, horizontal ribbon windows, and roof garden. The house's dual function - dwelling and art gallery, made it a fertile test site for his spatial theories. The use of reinforced concrete, modular proportions, and controlled light gave the house an almost liturgical precision.

Unlike the villa Savoye, which followed a few years later, Maison La Roche is more enclosed, more secretive, and more experimental in its formal decisions. Its use of colour, sequencing, and internal thresholds makes it a bridge between Purist aesthetics and symbolic architecture.

Fig. 30 & 31

Digital 3D Model. Maison La Roche. Author's own.

Fig. 32

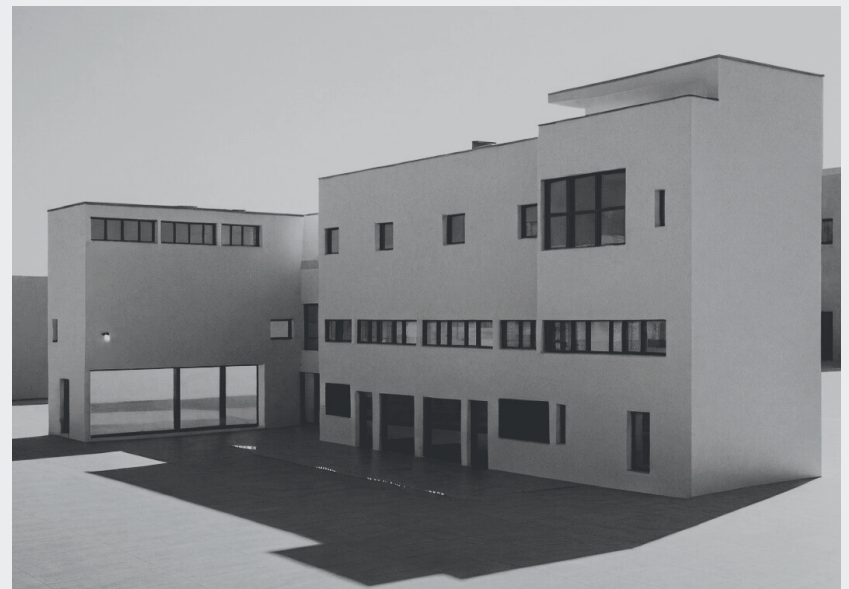
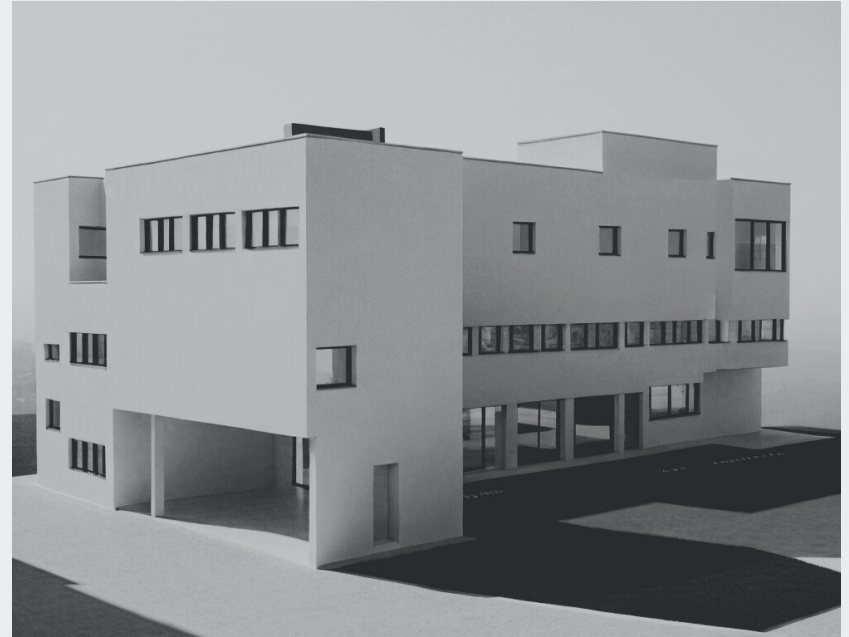
Exterior of Maison LaRoche during restoration. Authors own.

Fig. 33

Digital Floor Plans. Maison La Roche. Authors own, Cork, Ireland, April 2025.

Fig. 34

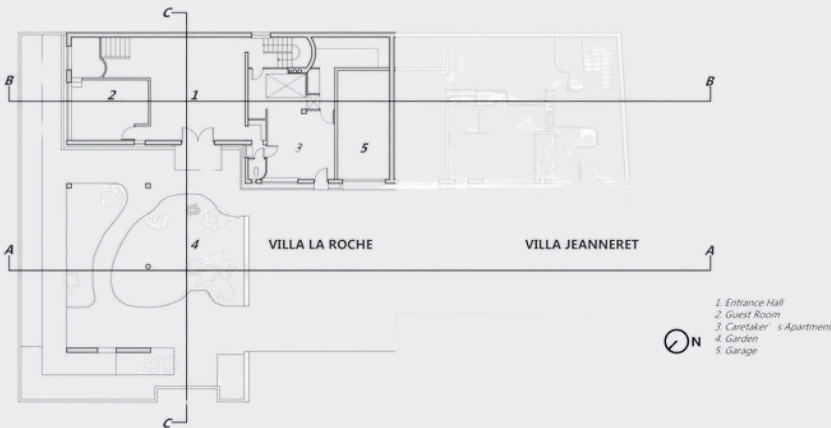
Sectional Views. Maison La Roche. Authors own, Cork, Ireland, April 2025.



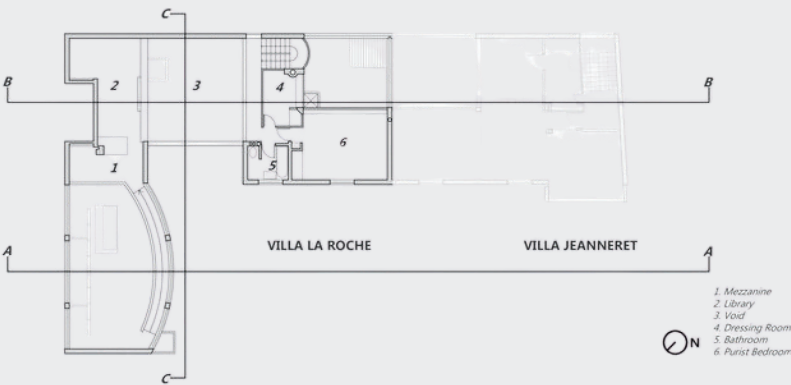


ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

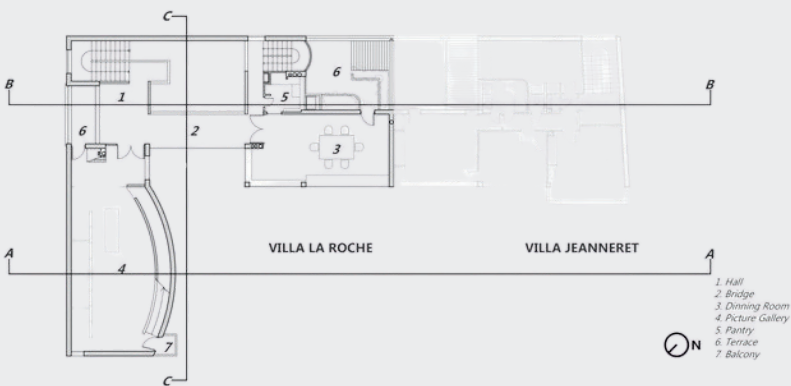
GROUND FLOOR PLAN



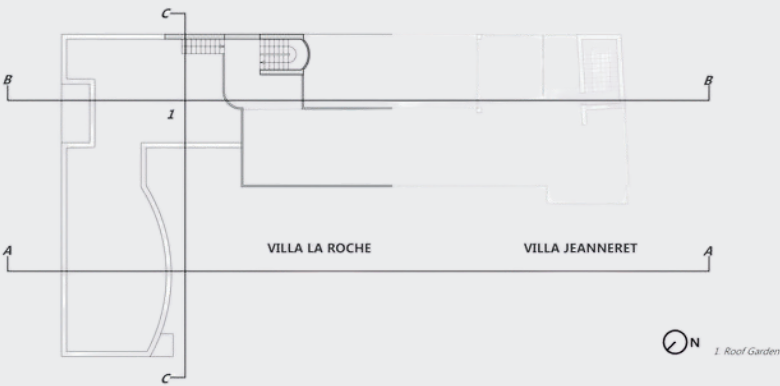
SECOND FLOOR PLAN



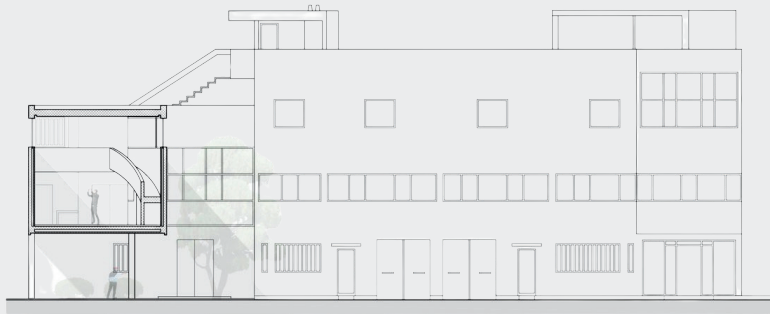
FIRST FLOOR PLAN



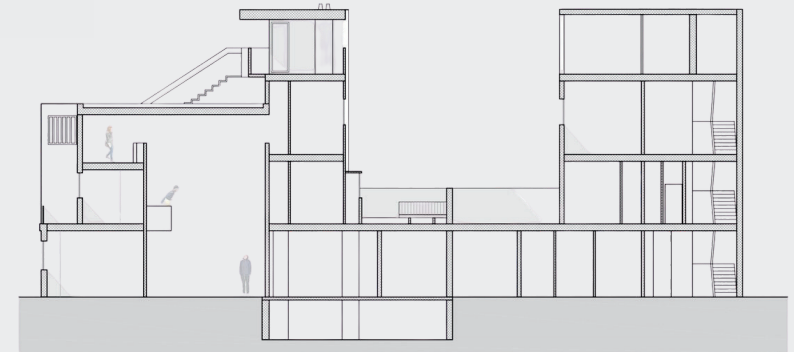
ROOF PLAN



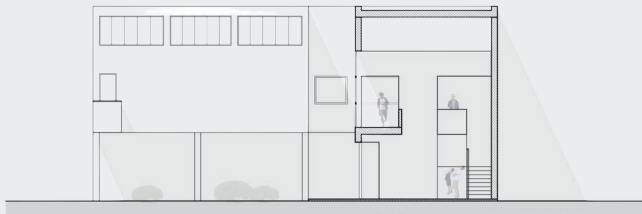
SECTION A-A



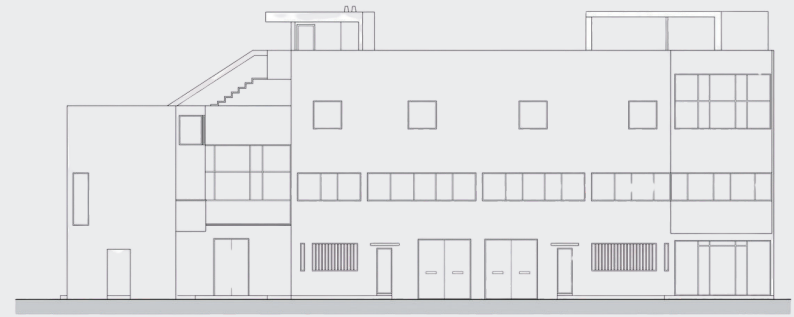
SECTION B-B



SECTION C-C



North-East Elevation



Note: The comprehensive sightline projection mapping and mechanical structural analysis demonstrating the absolute concealment of the library volume is detailed in Figure 40.

Interlude I

Architecture, as Mies van der Rohe maintained, is not exhausted by its visible surfaces. It extends into the hidden spaces, the recesses, and the devices that regulate what can or cannot be seen. Before considering the banality of concealed trashcans, it is important to situate Mies within modernist discourse. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969), a pioneering figure of 20th-century architecture, championed an ideology of purity, minimalism, and reduction. His architecture sought an absolute clarity, where form followed the rigorous logic of function, and every detail, no matter how small, served a precise role in the visual and spatial hierarchy.³⁵

Among the many details Mertins catalogues, one stands out for its disarming banality: the trashcan. “Even trashcans were subject to Mies’s purist ideology; in the Farnsworth House and the Seagram Building, he designed hidden compartments to conceal waste.”³⁶ The gesture is small, almost invisible, yet it speaks to the radical extremity of Mies’s minimalism. To hide a trashcan is to deny waste a place in the visual field. It is to treat disorder, decay, and bodily remainder as incompatible with the architectural image of purity.

The concealment of waste belongs not to the realm of ornament or luxury, but to the environment. In Le Corbusier’s *Poème de l’angle droit* (1955), the opening panel, “Environment,” establishes the stage upon which the subsequent metaphysical ascent is built.³⁷

Environment, for Le Corbusier, is not neutral ground. It is the material and atmospheric condition that must be purified, filtered, and stabilized if higher orders of mind, flesh, and character are to unfold. Within this logic, concealment becomes environmental maintenance: the removal of abject matter from the horizon of perception so that the environment itself can register as ordered and whole. Mies’s hidden trashcan compartments perform exactly this work. They do not simply manage waste; they cosmologically reorder the field of appearance.

Mertins’ Concealment and The Modernist Environment

The ideological weight of such concealment becomes clearer when viewed through Julia Kristeva’s

theory of abjection. In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Kristeva writes that the abject is that which “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.”³⁸ Trash is precisely such a material. It is not wholly outside, it remains within the domestic or professional space, but it cannot be allowed to exist visibly without destabilizing the fantasy of order. For Mies, then, the trashcan could not remain in plain sight. Its presence would rupture the visual regime of reduction and subtraction that defined his architecture. Concealment thus becomes a ritual expulsion, a way of maintaining purity by repressing the abject into hidden recesses.

Mertins underscores this logic of subtraction in another passage, noting that “Mies’s spaces operate through subtraction, where every detail is governed by a hierarchy of visibility.”³⁹ This is not simply functionalist efficiency; it is metaphysical. The hierarchy of visibility ensures that only those elements contributing to the appearance of absolute clarity remain, while all that threatens dissonance or decay disappears from view. The trashcan’s invisibility is not incidental; it is the environmental precondition for the architectural image. By refusing to admit waste into vision, Mies produces what might be called a metaphysical environment: a stage cleared of remainder, calibrated for the performance of form.

This conceptualisation of a visual field resonates with the symbolic structure of *Poème de l’angle droit*. Panel A, “Environment,” is not a neutral backdrop but a field already charged with the work of separation. Environment must be ordered so that mind, flesh, and offering can follow. The number seven, as Theodore Ziolkowski reminds us in his study of myth, often functions as a scaffold of progressive revelation, each stage a removal or concealment that brings transformation.⁴⁰ In this sense, the hidden trashcan becomes one of modernism’s veils. Its concealment is not merely practical but ritual, a threshold act that makes the environment suitable for further symbolic ascent.

35. Detlef Mertins, *Mies* (London: Phaidon, 2014), 15–20.

36. Mertins, *Mies*, 321.

37. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l’angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Plate A, “Environment.”

38. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

39. Mertins, *Mies*.

40. Theodore Ziolkowski, “The Veil as Metaphor and as Myth,” *Religion & Literature* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 61–81..

ACT 1

Concealed Encounters

Theme A - Environment

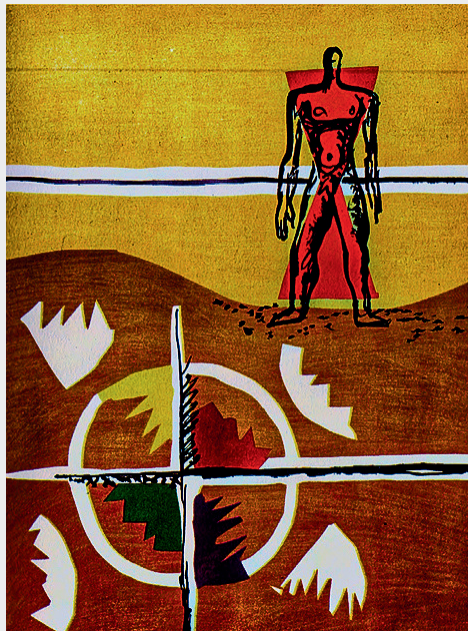
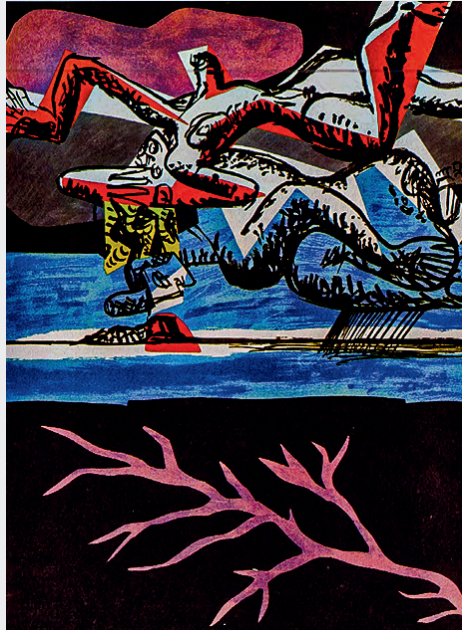


Fig. 35

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate A.1, "Environment: The Sun as Overlord and Visitor." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Fig. 36

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate A.2, "Environment: Water and the Horizon." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Fig. 37

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate A.3, "Environment: The Pact of the Right Angle." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Fig. 38

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate A.4, "Environment: Struggle and Detour." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Fig. 39

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate A.5, "Environment: Reconciliation and Survival." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

It is significant that Le Corbusier begins the *Poème* not with form, function, but with environment. For him, architecture cannot emerge in isolation; it arises from a preconditioned field of cosmic and terrestrial forces.

In the opening verses, Le Corbusier affirms that men, animals, and plants alike are subject to this primal condition: "Men may affirm this beasts also / and the plants perhaps / And on this earth alone which is ours" (*Environment A.1*) environment is thus not neutral background but the first veil, a given order that frames all human action, including architecture.⁴¹

Russell Walden, a New Zealand architect and historian whose research often connected architecture to broader cultural, philosophical, and symbolic frameworks, notes in *The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier* that Le Corbusier's choice to begin with "Environment" emphasizes architecture's "the reform of the physical environment would be a major, if not the major contribution to the creation of an ideal society that would provide all the prerequisites of

complete happiness and fulfillment."⁴²

The Environment theme unfolds across five sub-poems (A.1–A.5), each articulating a different cosmological force.

The first positions the sun as overlord (day/night rhythm). The second concerns water and the horizon (flow and condensation). The third exalts the right angle as a pact between man and nature. The fourth contrasts meander with the straight line, describing life as a struggle resolved into order. The fifth proclaims reconciliation as survival, insisting that tension between opposites must be balanced. Together, these five movements form an environmental cosmology that architecture must inhabit.⁴³

The colour green for this theme, reinforces its association with origin, growth, and cosmic fertility. In *Polychromie architecturale* (1931), green was linked with equilibrium and natural balance, a chromatic symbol of grounding.⁴⁴

Here, green signifies the environment as matrix, the enveloping field in which human and

41. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section A.1.

42. Russell Walden, ed., *The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), 218.

43. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section A.

44. Le Corbusier, *Architectural Polychromy: Le Corbusier's Color Keyboards from 1931 and 1959*, edited by Arthur Rüegg (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1997).

architectural life unfold. As Tim Benton, a british architectural historian, in his book *Villas of Le Corbusier, 1920–1930* (1987) observes, “This treatment can be thought of as analogous to the first approach, filling the interior with the colour and impact of green foliage,” colour in Le Corbusier’s thought was a spatial instrument, coding experience and intensifying perception.⁴⁵

Green thus marks environment as the instrument of architecture, the precondition upon which all later acts: mind, flesh, fusion, character, offering, and instrument, depend.

45. Tim Benton, *The Villas of Le Corbusier, 1920–1930* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1987), 60.

Blank but Loaded Stage - Maison La Roche and the Staging of Environment

Maison La Roche exemplifies architecture as a “blank but loaded” stage, where environment, structures perception, ritual, and symbolic experience. Le Corbusier positions environment as the first veil, a matrix that regulates light, air, weather, and the surrounding neighbourhood before architecture’s form is realized.⁴⁶ The house’s design reflects a deliberate orchestration of natural and contextual forces, producing a controlled field in which human and symbolic activity can unfold.

The site itself mediates environmental encounter. Located on a quiet *cul-de-sac*, the house is removed from the chaotic urban flow, isolating it from noise, visual clutter, and unpredictable activity.⁴⁷ This separation frames a threshold between the city and the house, producing a neutral stage upon which light, air, and sound can interact with the architecture in a controlled manner. The courtyard and setback act as environmental buffers, filtering wind and channelling light into specific orientations. The site context is not merely urban planning; it is the foundational layer of environmental regulation, ensuring that external forces are staged before architecture manifests.

Weather plays a central role in the orchestration of the environment. Sunlight and shadow traverse the exterior façades and roof terraces, establishing temporal rhythms that structure experience. These natural phenomena are not left to chance; they are actively choreographed, producing a perceptual environment in which the house appears to respond to elemental forces.

The deliberate modulation of light, air, and moisture transforms weather into an instrument of architectural meaning, a metaphysical medium connecting the human and the natural.

Connection to the neighborhood further contributes to Maison La Roche’s staged environment. By positioning the house within the urban fabric yet shielding it from intrusion, Le Corbusier mediates a

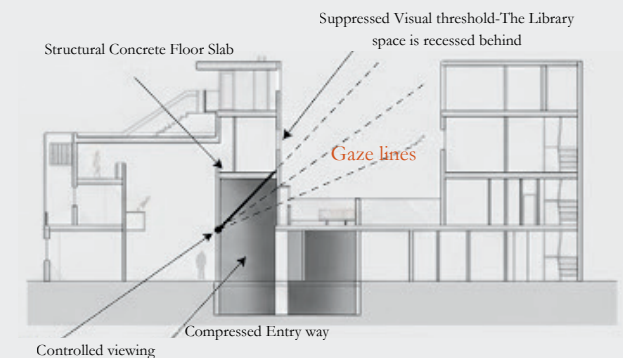


Fig. 40

Sectional analysis of the entry-to-library threshold at Maison LaRoche. Digital Section. Authors own, June 2026.

Fig. 41

Window, Maison La Roche. Photograph with digital annotation. Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Fig. 42

Curated Vision: Horizontal Ribbon window, Gallery. Maison La Roche. Multi media. Digital Sketch with Photograph. June 2026.

relationship between private and collective space. Neighbouring structures are acknowledged but rendered peripheral; the house negotiates its context through sightlines, setbacks, and elevation, creating a controlled interface between community and ritualized domesticity. The windows of Maison La Roche do not open the house to the world. Rather, they filter, curate, and sanitize the external environment. The high entrance hall window suppresses the direct visual engagement with the neighbouring suburban context and emphasizes light, sky, and spatial volume. Conversely, in the long, curved gallery axis, the fenestration transitions into a continuous horizontal ribbon window. The steel framing profiles are kept remarkably thin to minimize structural interruption, transforming the exterior landscape into a compressed, panoramic horizontal strip. Visibility itself becomes a mechanism of purification, allowing undesirable aspects of everyday life to disappear from view. In this sense, the environment is a social and metaphysical stage: it organizes not only natural forces but also human presence, aligning exterior perception with symbolic intention.

These strategies collectively produce a metaphysical environment, where concealment, regulation, and orchestration prepare the house for symbolic and ritual engagement. The cul-de-sac, exposure to sun, rain, and wind,⁴⁸ and mediated neighborhood connection act as environmental veils, filtering, ordering, and controlling forces that might otherwise disrupt perception or ritual. The house thus exemplifies modernist ideas of purity and pre-form: the environment is curated and disciplined before any aesthetic or formal architecture emerges.



46. Fondation Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Digital archive, Paris, France, accessed March 25, 2025.

47. Jacques Sbriglio, *Le Corbusier – Les Villas La Roche-Jeanneret / the Villas La Roche-Jeanneret* (Birkhäuser, 2015), 10.

48. Sbriglio, *Le Corbusier*, 10.

Fig. 43

Original site plan for Maisons La Roche et Jeanneret. White ink on paper, 1923. Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris.

Theme A, Environment, occupies a foundational position, presenting environment as the first “angle” or veil that architecture must emerge from. This theme situates environment not as a passive backdrop, but as an active, living matrix, a metaphysical veil, that precedes and conditions all architectural form and meaning.

Conceptualizing Environment as a Metaphysical Veil

In Theme A, environment is conceived as the primordial cosmos: the sky above, the earth beneath, and the invisible atmospheric forces in between. It represents the **first veil** that envelops the architectural act before it becomes visible or tangible. This veil is unseen yet essential, functioning both as a concealer and a container. It is through this environmental veil that architecture is born and with which it remains in constant dialogue. The environment acts as a ritual threshold, a boundary where raw cosmic forces meet human intervention, setting the stage for the transformation from elemental chaos into ordered built form.

Introducing Maison La Roche as

Enactment of Theme A

Le Corbusier describes the sun as “master of our lives ... a punctual machine turning since time immemorial” (Environment A.1).⁴⁹ It generates continuity yet breaks it violently at morning and evening. For him, architecture must acknowledge this double rhythm: continuity of duration, rupture of cycle.

Russell Walden in his *The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier* says, “His second house will be rather like an “architectural promenade.” You enter: the architectural spectacle at once is evident, you follow an itinerary and the perspectives develop with great variety. You play with the rush of light which falls on the walls or creates shadows. The bays provide perspectives of the exterior where you find again the architectural unity.”⁵⁰ That light is the primal in Le Corbusier’s architecture, structuring both perception and transformation. “The key is light/and light illuminates shapes/and shapes have an emotional power.”⁵¹ It guides the inhabitant’s experience, marking moments, while transforming spaces into instruments of perception where daily life and cosmic rhythm

49. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l’angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section A.1.

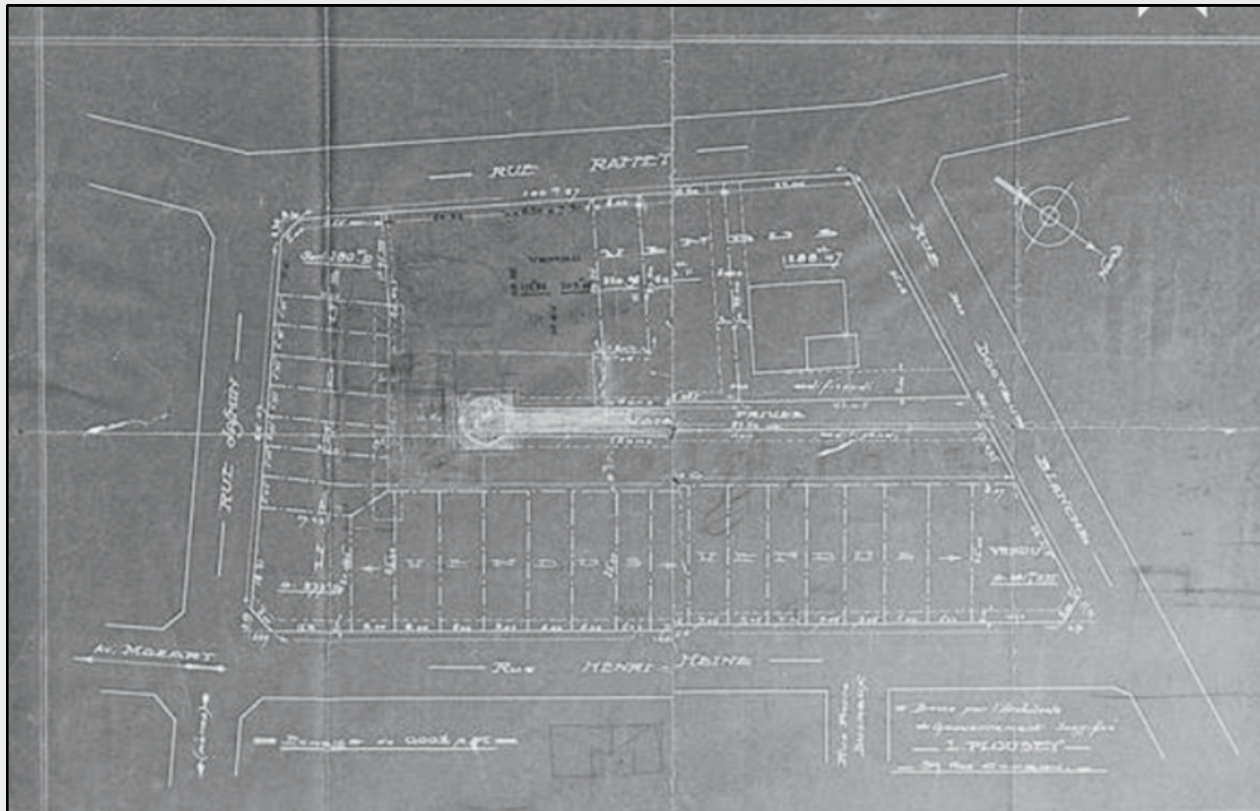
50. Russell Walden, ed., *The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977), 148.

51. Walden, *The Open Hand*, 149.

intersect.

Tucked away at the end of a quiet Parisian *cul-de-sac* within the private enclave of the *Square du Docteur-Blanche*, Maison La Roche reveals itself not with a grand gesture, but as a carefully guarded secret. This sense of enclosure, of being a world unto itself, makes the home a vivid architectural expression of a protective, environmental veil. Le Corbusier utilizes the irregular, dead-end geometry of the site to choreograph a gradual process of discovery.

The projecting gallery volume, elevated on pilotis, helps define and frame the entrance sequence, compressing movement before releasing the visitor into the interior. This spatial arrangement transforms arrival into an act of transition, filtering the noise, visibility, and distractions of the city. The urban setback functions as a protective veil, establishing a threshold between the public realm and the private world of the house. Through this controlled withdrawal from its surroundings, Maison La Roche constructs an atmosphere of introspection in which architecture begins with concealment rather than display.



When Le Corbusier designed Maison La Roche between 1923 and 1925, he was not merely arranging rooms; he was choreographing a relationship between architecture, its inhabitants, and the cosmos. By comparing the building's site plan with the "planetary orbit lines," the predictable paths of the sun, and contextualizing it with the weather of 1926 Paris,⁵² we can see the house as a functional instrument precisely calibrated to its environment.

The Setting: Two Realities of 1926 Paris

- The Isometric Site Plan: Maison La Roche sits at the end of a quiet, private *cul-de-sac*, forming an L-shaped plan with the adjoining Maison Jeanneret. The program was twofold: a public-facing gallery for Raoul La Roche's Cubist art collection and private living quarters for him as a bachelor. The gallery forms a distinct, curved volume raised on pilotis, while the private block is more rectilinear.⁵³
- The 1926 Weather: Historical data shows a significant temperature range, with a frigid low of -7.6°C recorded on January 15th and a warm high of 32.0°C on July 18th.⁵⁴ This

translates to cold, often overcast winters where maximizing sunlight for both light and warmth was crucial, and warm summers where mitigating direct, harsh sun was a key comfort consideration.

The Sun's Path: Sun path diagrams provide a map of the sun's apparent orbit relative to the building's location. Le Corbusier exploited three critical patterns:

Low Winter Sun: During the cold months, the sun travels in a low arc across the southern sky, penetrating deep into the building for passive heating and illumination.

High Summer Sun: The high summer arc reduces direct radiation on southern facades, with horizontal elements like overhangs providing shade.

Northern Light: The northern sky offers diffuse, indirect light, free from harsh shadows and glare.

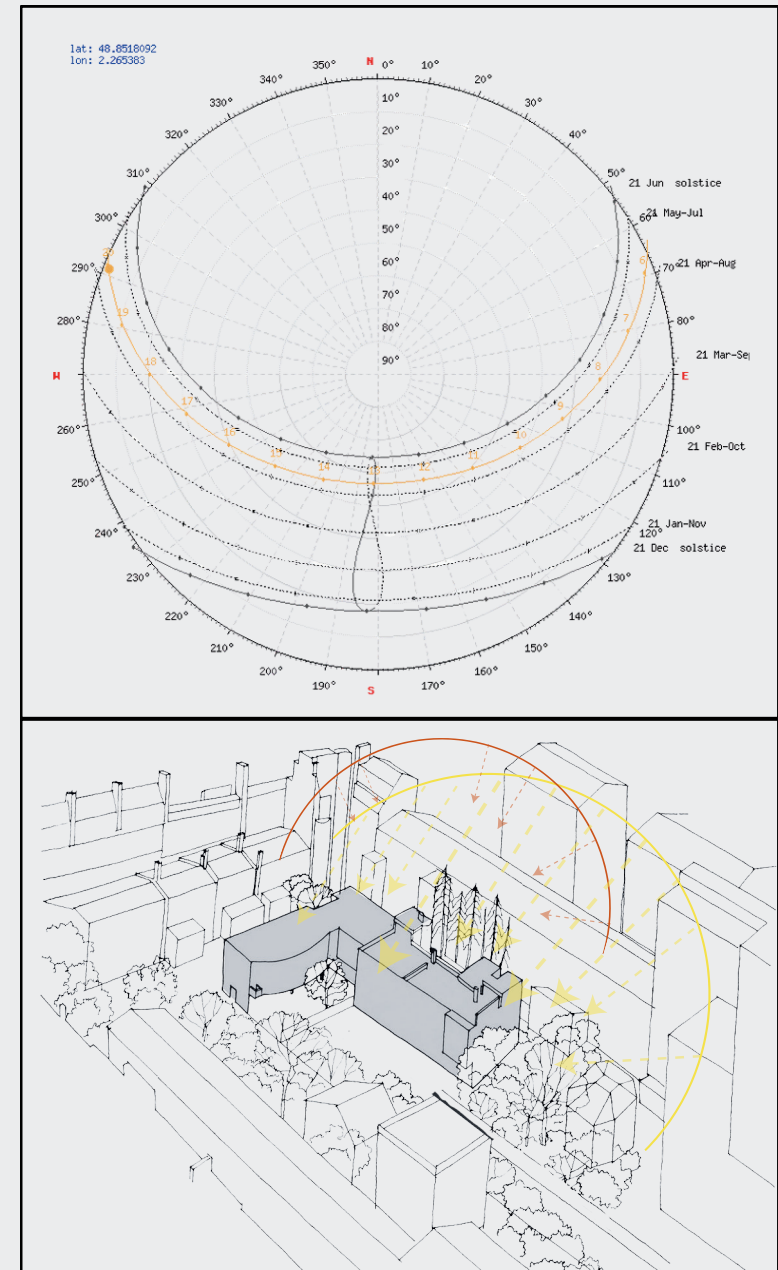
Maison La Roche stages this solar dramaturgy

Fig. 44

Sun polar chart for Paris (Latitude 48.86°N). Source: sunearth.com, 2024.

Fig. 45

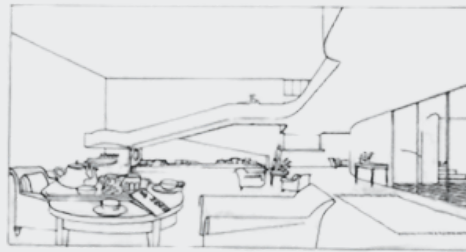
Isometric site view & Solar Analysis of Maison La Roche. Author's pencil sketch with graphical annotation, February 2025.



52. Solar House History, "October 28, 2013," accessed April 20, 2025. <http://solarhousehistory.com/blog/2013/10/28/le-corbusier-and-the-sun>.

53. Jacques Sbriglio, *Le Corbusier – Les Villas La Roche-Jeanneret / the Villas La Roche-Jeanneret* (Birkhäuser, 2015), 10.

54. French Meteorological Archives, "Historical Paris Weather Data, 1926," accessed April 20, 2025. <https://meteofrance.com/>



through its *promenade architecturale*. Visitors pass from a shaded entry into the double-height gallery, where clerestory glazing admits a diffused radiance. The curved ramp gradually exposes the eye to changing gradients of daylight, culminating in the roof garden. Benton notes- “And the ramp, deprived of its function as main access route, turns up in a quite different context in the gallery, as a route of ascent to the library, where views down into the hall mark the end of the promenade architectural.”⁵⁵ The house embodies the Poem’s dictum: the sun is not only visitor but designer, inscribing rhythm and rupture into the house’s circulation.

Water and Horizon

In Environment A.2, Le Corbusier invokes “the level ... where the waters stop flowing to the sea ... the sea daughter of droplets and mother of vapours.” Water becomes the figure of flux, condensation, and regulation.⁵⁶ For him, the horizontal line is nature’s instrument of order. La Roche materializes this cosmology through horizontality and hydrological cycles. Ribbon windows act as literal horizons, slicing the façade to regulate vision, light, and air. The roof

garden functions as an artificial hydrological system, designed to absorb and drain water, recalling Benton words “One device to make room for the enlarged dining room in the finished plans was to move one of the waterclosets to the landing off the stairs leading up to the roof garden. The box of the water-closet projects down into the space of the kitchen, making a half-length space to the left of the kitchen door.”⁵⁷ Corbusier’s engineered nature, a roof as both symbol and experiment. Even the dual-wall system, two skins separated by a thin air cavity, intents as environmental insulation, a technological veil echoing the Poem’s imagery of vapor and condensation.

Right Angle: Pact with Nature

Le Corbusier in Environment A.3, proclaims: “Erect on the terrestrial plain of things knowable you sign a pact of solidarity with nature: this is the right angle.” To stand upright is to enact geometry, to align body with horizon and sky.⁵⁸

In Maison La Roche, the right angle governs both structure and ritual. The free plan and free façade are liberated, yet disciplined by

Fig. 46

Neighborhood context view of Maisons La Roche et Jeanneret. 3D sketch drawing, 1924. Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris.

Fig. 47

Gallery of Maison La Roche showing the architectural ramp. Sketch, 1925. Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris.

Fig. 48

Elevational sketch of Maison La Roche showing the verticality of ribbon windows. Author's sketch, January 2025.

Fig. 49

Double-height gallery hall, Maison La Roche, Paris (1923–1925). Author's photograph, January 2025.

Fig. 50

Entry gate at *Square du Docteur-Blanche* leading to Maisons La Roche-Jeanneret. Author's photograph, January 2025.



orthogonal order. The *cul-de-sac* entrance stages a confrontation of vertical wall and horizontal street, a pact of form and ground. Beatriz Colomina's analysis of Maison La Roche, particularly her assertion that Le Corbusier's walls function as "instruments of vision," can be found in her essay "*Unclear Vision*," published in *Architecture and the Media: Practices of Knowledge and Representation*. In this work, Colomina explores how architectural elements, such as walls, mediate perception and influence the experience of space.⁵⁹ She discusses how Le Corbusier's design choices in Maison La Roche, including the strategic placement of walls, windows, and ramps, orchestrate the visitor's movement and visual engagement with the space, effectively guiding their perception and interaction with the environment.

Meander versus Straight Line

Le Corbusier's Environment A.4 compares life to meander- rivers, worms, currents groping their way, until the straight line bursts through as resolution. "Life must force a passage ... the current is straight once again."⁶⁰

Maison La Roche dramatizes this dialectic

55. Tim Benton, *The Villas of Le Corbusier, 1920–1930* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1987), 57.

56. Fondation Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Digital archive, Paris, France, accessed March 25, 2025.

57. Benton, *The Villas of Le Corbusier*, 66.

58. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section A.3.

59. Beatriz Colomina, "Unclear Vision," in *Architecture and the Media: Practices of Knowledge and Representation*, ed. Tom Avermaete, Janina Gosseye, and Dirk van den Heuvel (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2012).

60. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section A.4.

Fig. 51

Perspective sketch of the curved ramp in the double-height gallery of Maison La Roche, Paris. Author's digital sketch, February 17, 2025.

Fig. 52

Exterior elevation view of the ribbon windows at Maison La Roche, Paris (1923–1925). Author's pencil sketch on paper, May 8, 2025.

Fig. 53

Visual Discipline. Gallery, Maison La Roche. Photograph with annotation. Source: Fondation LeCorbusier

through circulation. Visitors trace meandering paths: oblique entry, narrow corridors, sudden expansions, while the service logic remains rigid. As Benton notes, the house is fundamentally double-scripted. This is evidenced by the "migration" of the program, where the "garage and manservant moved sideways"⁶¹ to make way for the ceremonial route, while the inhabitant enjoys a grand itinerary, the secondary spaces were defined by a "dense re-packing of the small service spaces."⁶² This duality mirrors the Poem's meander and directness: the wandering "route of ascent" (Benton) for the collector against the hidden, compact economy of functional labor. Architecture here becomes a negotiation between detour and cut, labyrinth and axis.

Union of Opposites: Reconciliation as Survival

The final sub-poem declares: "Between poles reigns the tension of fluids ... reconciliation ripens the fruit of confrontation ... sole possibility of survival."⁶³ Architecture, like life, must reconcile irreconcilables: light and dark, solid and void, purity and abjection. The Promenade stages this reconciles house and

gallery, intimacy and spectacle. Its façade balances blank planes with piercing horizontal incision. Its structure unites pilots (lightness) with heavy enclosing walls (gravity). Paul Virilio suggests that modern architecture survives by making its contradictions invisible, "suppressing all uncertainty".⁶⁴ La Roche enacts this invisibility through reconciliation of architectural elements.

Theme A of the *Poème de l'angle droit* demonstrates that environment is never passive context but an active cosmology. Through the cycles of sun, flows of water, pact of right angle, dialectic of meander and straight line, and reconciliation of opposites, architecture emerges as survival through veils. Natural forces and urban context are choreographed to produce perception, ritual, and symbolic resonance. Light, air, weather, and neighboring presence are not incidental but actively staged, creating a metaphysical veil through which architecture emerges. The house demonstrates that the regulation and concealment of environmental factors is foundational to architectural experience, producing a controlled and ordered stage upon which form, ritual, and symbolic

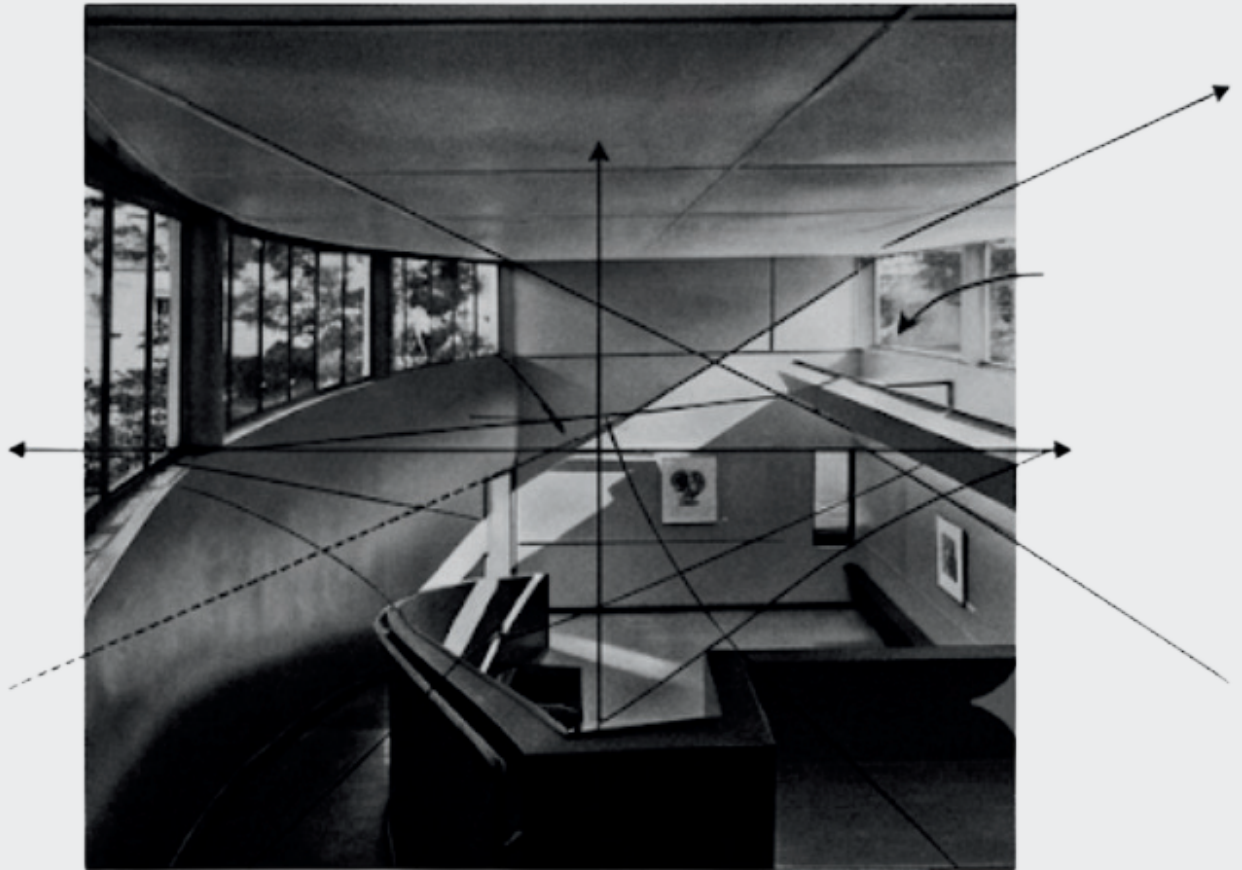
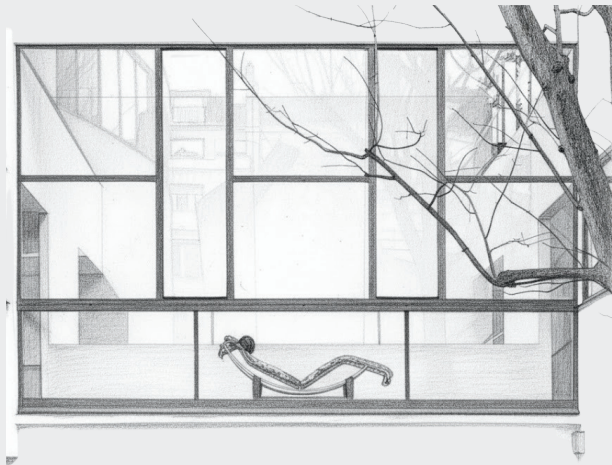
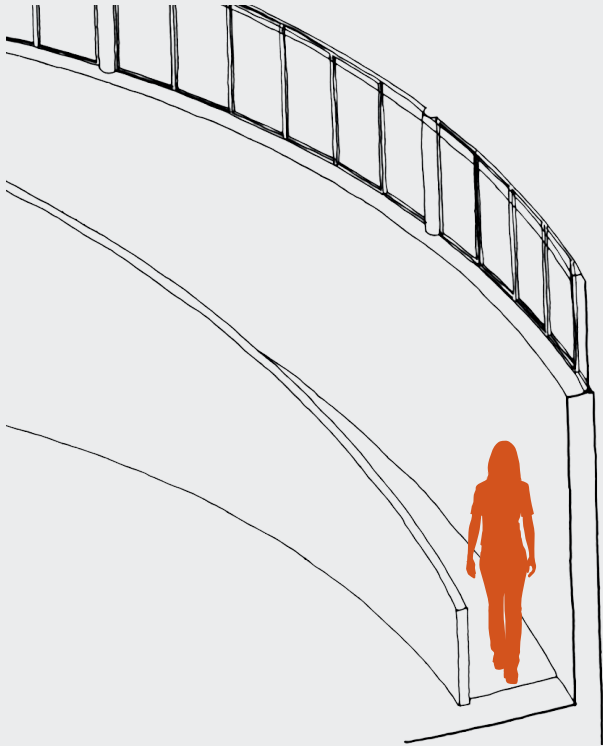
61. Tim Benton, *The Villas of Le Corbusier, 1920–1930* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1987), 57.

62. Benton, *The Villas of Le Corbusier*, 63.

63. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section A.5.

64. Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, trans. Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 26.

meaning can appear. Environment, then, is not backdrop but first ritual act. Before bodies, before labour, before shame, the house environment as its metaphysical veil.



Interlude II

Architecture as a Politics of Perception



Fig. 54

Adolf Loos, Interior view of the Villa Müller, Prague (1929–1930). Photograph, 1929–1930. Accessed from Villa Müller website.

The question of perception, space, and power has long occupied architectural discourse, but it becomes especially charged when considered through the entanglement of vision, gender, and embodiment. To think about architecture as more than material form is to ask how it frames the conditions of experience, how it determines who sees and who is seen, and how these structures of vision participate in broader cultural systems of power. In this regard, three critical frameworks converge with particular force: Gernot Böhme's *aesthetics of felt space*, Beatriz Colomina's accounts of publicity, privacy, and the gendered gaze, and Utsav Banerji's psychoanalytic reading of the gaze as object petit. Together, these perspectives open up a theoretical ground on which to consider architecture as a dispositif of perception, an apparatus that regulates desire, shame, and consciousness itself.

Gernot Böhme, a German philosopher whose work spans aesthetics, philosophy of nature, philosophical anthropology, his intervention is perhaps the most elemental: he asks us to rethink space not as abstract geometry or inert container, but as atmosphere, as something that resonates with the human body through moods and feelings. For him, architecture is inseparable from the “aesthetics of atmospheres,” where space is not simply measurable extension but a “felt space” that envelops and conditions subjects.⁶⁵ This notion departs radically from Cartesian objectivity, “one that defines them as *res extensa*, still suggest that the spatiality in things is the limited interior space they enclose, as if space as a whole did not concern them,” situating perception at the intersection of physical presence and affective atonement. Space radiates qualities, Böhme argues, much like light or sound, and these radiations generate atmospheres that act on bodies prior to conscious cognition.⁶⁶ By foregrounding the atmospheric, Böhme directs attention to the pre-conscious level of architectural experience, to the ways design structures interiority itself.

This is where Colomina's analyses become crucial, for she insists that “the model of vision” in modern architecture was never fixed.⁶⁷ In *Privacy and Publicity* she shows how modernist buildings, particularly those of Le Corbusier and Mies, engaged as “the mass media”: machines that mediated

65. Gernot Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, ed. Jean-Paul Thibaud, (London: Routledge, 2017).

66. Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, 52.

67. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 6.

the subject's relation to visibility, exposure, and concealment.⁶⁸ Architecture, for Colomina, does not simply provide shelter but organizes the subject's position in regimes of seeing and being seen. The modern house was imagined "a space that is neither inside nor outside, public nor private",⁶⁹ one that is "made up of images" while privileging the architect's eye as controlling gaze. Modern architecture, she writes, "to enter is to see. But not to see a static object, a building, a fixed place. Rather, architecture taking place in history, the events of architecture, architecture as an event."⁷⁰ And in so doing they make these eyes "modern".

This intersects directly with Utsav Banerji's reading of the gaze through Lacan's notion of *objet petit a*, where the gaze is not simply the act of looking but a structural lack, an unattainable point that animates desire. For Banerji, "The voice and the gaze are the excess remainders of the filtering out process, and as such belong 'originally'."⁷¹ The window, the mirror, the framed view are not passive openings but instruments of regulation, staging the subject as both seer and seen. This creates what Banerji calls a "desire," where vision is bound up with anxiety and repression.⁷²

The convergence of these perspectives allows us to see how perception itself is structured as a form of power. Böhme's atmospheres describe the diffuse field in which perception occurs; Colomina identifies the ways this field is gendered and politicized; Banerji underscores its psychoanalytic stakes, where the gaze reveals the constitutive lack of subjectivity. Each push against the idea of architecture as neutral backdrop and insists instead that it acts upon consciousness, shaping the very conditions of selfhood.

To bring this into sharper focus, it is worth recalling Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. For Kristeva, the abject is what disturbs identity and system, what crosses boundaries and resists incorporation.⁷³ Dust, excrement, bodily fluids, these mark the breakdown of clean distinctions between inside and outside, subject and object. In the context of vision, abjection is what the gaze must repress in order to stabilize itself. Architecture, when conceived as machine of purification, works by excluding

abjection from its field of perception. White walls erase stains; hidden ducts carry away waste; servants' routes conceal bodily labour. But the abject always returns, whether as dust on surfaces or as unconscious anxiety. Kristeva thus deepens the critique of architectural vision: the immaculate transparency of modernism is achieved only by repressing its own conditions of impurity.

A French cubist painter and writer Amedee Ozenfant, his Purist objects add yet another layer. The famous *milk bottle*, endlessly reproduced in Purist still lifes, was presented as a symbol of clarity, proportion, and hygienic purity.⁷⁴ But this very purity is ideological: the milk bottle, as Colomina would note, is not just an object but a media image, a visual code that stands in for rational order and masculine control. Its whiteness, smoothness, and transparency perform the erasure of contamination. In this sense, the Purist project was not far from the repression Kristeva identifies, it achieved clarity by expelling ambiguity.

These theoretical positions can be braided together into a single argument: architecture is a field of vision that operates not only through geometry and proportion but through atmospheres, gazes, and exclusions. One striking thread across these thinkers is the theme of *staged vision*. Böhme's atmospheres are felt but unseen; Colomina traces how modernist transparency concealed new forms of publicity; Banerji shows how the gaze reveals by concealing, staging desire around what cannot be attained. Kristeva's abject is precisely what must be hidden; Ozenfant's bottle hides the messy conditions of its production. Concealment, then, is not incidental but central to the operation of architectural vision.

Gender intensifies this picture. Colomina's work shows how the modern house, particularly through photography and publication, instrumentalized the interior as both occupant and object of vision. Windows, terraces, and open plans created conditions of display that mapped directly onto the patriarchal gaze. Banerji's psychoanalytic lens helps explain why: the female body was positioned as the unattainable object petit a, the site where desire and lack converge. Modern architecture becomes

68. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 14.

69. Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 6.

70. Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 5.

71. Utsav Banerjee, "The Voice and the Gaze as 'objet petit a'," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 13, no. 4 (2021): 2.

72. Banerjee, "The Voice and the Gaze," 1-15.

73. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

74. Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), *Après le cubisme* (Paris: Éditions Figuière, 1918).

complicit in the economy of the gaze, staging transparency while enforcing control. The implication is that architecture is deeply entangled with consciousness. This is why the metaphors of gaze and atmosphere are so powerful: they describe not only how we perceive buildings but how buildings perceive us, how they anticipate and frame our consciousness. Architecture is thus both container and agent, both background and active participant in the drama of perception.

ACT 2

Milk-Machine-Mirror

Theme B - Mind

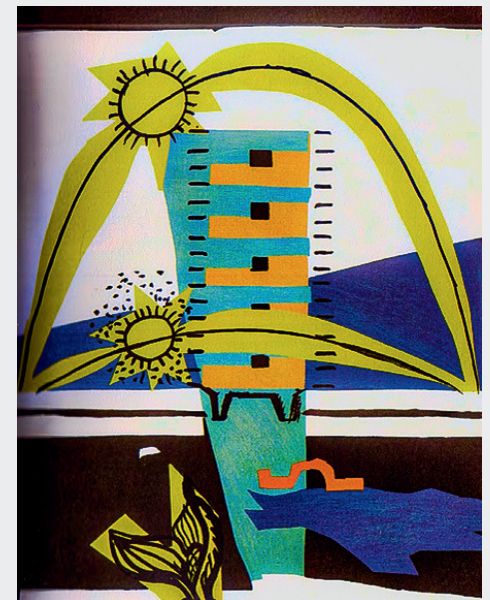
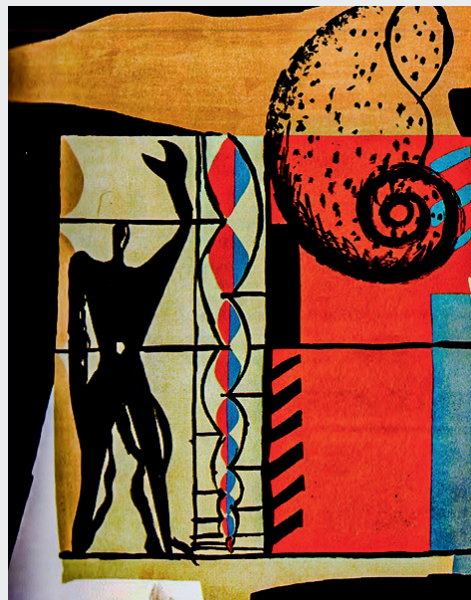


Fig. 55

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate B.2, "Mind: The Modulor and the Shell". Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Fig. 56

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate B.3, "Mind: House of Men, Mistress of its Form." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Fig. 57

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate B.4, "Mind: The Architectural Frame/Brise Soleil." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

In the sequence of thematic exploration, Theme B, titled Mind, occupies a solid position following the examination of Environment (Theme A). Where Environment engages with the physical, sensory, and atmospheric qualities of the dwelling: its light, air, and material surroundings, Mind shifts the focus inward, toward cognition, consciousness, perception, and the intellectual discipline that structures human interaction with space.

The thematic progression from Environment to Mind reflects Le Corbusier's belief that architecture operates on dual planes: the tangible and the cerebral. The blue of Theme B, symbolically associated with clarity, depth, and introspection, reinforces this introspective dimension. As Le Corbusier often suggested, the house is not merely a shelter but a medium for intellectual and spiritual engagement with the world.

Theme B of Le Corbusier's *Poème de l'angle droit* comprises three sub-poems: B.2, B.3, and B.4. Notably, there is no B.1, which may be attributed to Le Corbusier's unique structural choices in this work.⁷⁵ The sequence begins by presenting the mind as an agile instrument capable of

amplifying creativity and organizing thought: it mediates between body, perception, and invention, structuring the world through proportion and mathematical order.⁷⁶ In this first movement, abstract reasoning and clarity dominate, reflecting Purist ideals where the intellect frames and orders spatial relations, while consciousness actively engages with the environment to produce freedom within structure.⁷⁷

The subsequent poem extends this concept into intuitive and embodied perception, using the figure of the owl to represent the inhabitant's intellectual and observational agency.⁷⁸ While spatial order is established through sightlines, mirrors, and aligned axes, the mind retains autonomy, navigating the house freely and harmonizing rational structuring with perceptual experience. This process reflects the "mind's tendency to conceal its workings in the guise of spatial imaginary, with a strongly delineated pattern," as the architectural promenade transforms abstract logic into a lived, visual sequence.⁷⁹

Finally, the third poem situates the mind within

75. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Têriade, 1955), Section B.

76. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section B.

77. Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, *Après le cubisme* (Paris: Éditions Figuière, 1918).

78. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section B.

79. Beatriz Colomina, *Sexuality and Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 61.

temporal and cosmic rhythms, linking architectural design to celestial cycles and seasonal patterns.⁸⁰ Here, cognition manifests in practical interventions, such as sun-breakers and proportional alignments, demonstrating that intellect in architecture is both analytical and attuned to broader environmental and cosmic systems.

Together, the three movements articulate a layered cognitive framework in which the mind orders perception, interprets the environment, and translates abstract understanding into spatial and temporal coherence.

The blue of Theme B reinforces these ideas, symbolizing clarity, depth, and rational reflection, marking the cerebral spaces of Maison La Roche where intellect and perception converge.⁸¹ Mind represents the intellectual dimension of architecture: a system through which order, proportion, intuition, and temporal awareness integrate, guiding the inhabitant's engagement with space while mediating the visible and the symbolic, the abstract and the experiential.

80. Fondation Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section B.

81. Le Corbusier, *Architectural Polychromy: Le Corbusier's Color Keyboards from 1931 and 1959*, edited by Arthur Rüegg (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1997).

Ozenfant's Milk Bottle

Amédée Ozenfant's *Art Pur* (1918) provides a critical lens for understanding the intersection of mind, object, and perception in Le Corbusier's Theme B. In Purist painting, objects like the milk bottle are depicted as distilled geometric forms, stripped of extraneous detail to reveal their essential structure. The milk bottle's cylindrical clarity and functional simplicity act as a paradigm for mental order: just as the mind abstracts and organizes sensory experience, the bottle isolates and clarifies form, presenting it in its purest, most intelligible state.⁸² This correspondence between object and cognition aligns with Le Corbusier's treatment of the mind as a tool capable of ordering, measuring, and interpreting the environment, as expressed in *Poème de l'angle droit*.⁸³

The still life format of the milk bottle also functions as a mirror for perception, reflecting the discipline of the mind onto the composition itself.⁸⁴ Mirrors in architecture, as used in Maison La Roche, perform a comparable function: they multiply sightlines, extend spatial perception, and allow the intellect to apprehend both material and symbolic dimensions simultaneously. By juxtaposing the milk bottle with reflective surfaces, Purism creates a dialogue between object, perception, and consciousness. The bottle becomes a conceptual anchor, while the mirror mediates the relationship between observer and object, reinforcing the principles of clarity, proportion, and formal order that define Purist aesthetics.

In Maison La Roche, these ideas are materialized architecturally. Ribbon windows, galleries, and mirrored corners function like a Purist composition, framing and structuring the inhabitant's visual and intellectual experience. The house itself becomes a still life: each element: walls, furniture, light, and mirror, is treated as a discrete, geometrically ordered object, analogous to Ozenfant's milk bottle. Just as the Purist still life emphasizes the essential qualities of form over narrative or ornament, the architecture prioritizes perception and intellect over superfluous decoration. The mirror acts as a tool for the mind, reflecting the spatial composition and enabling a cognitive mapping of the interior,

Fig. 58

Amédée Ozenfant, *Nature morte* (Still Life). Oil on canvas, 1920s. National Gallery of Victoria. Source: National Gallery of Victoria, Digital Archive.

82. Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, *Après le cubisme* (Paris: Éditions Figuière, 1918).

83. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section B.

84. Ozenfant and Jeanneret, *Après le cubisme*.

85. Ozenfant and Jeanneret, *Après le cubisme*.

reinforcing the Purist notion that clarity and proportion are central to both art and architecture.

The milk bottle, mind, and mirror operate together as a conceptual triad. The milk bottle embodies formal purity and rational abstraction; the mirror extends perception and allows the intellect to navigate and comprehend space; and the mind integrates these elements into an ordered, harmonious whole. Here, Ozenfant's still life becomes more than representation, it enacts a cognitive principle, demonstrating how material objects, reflective surfaces, and mental discipline converge to produce the spatial clarity and conceptual rigor that define Purist form.⁸⁵

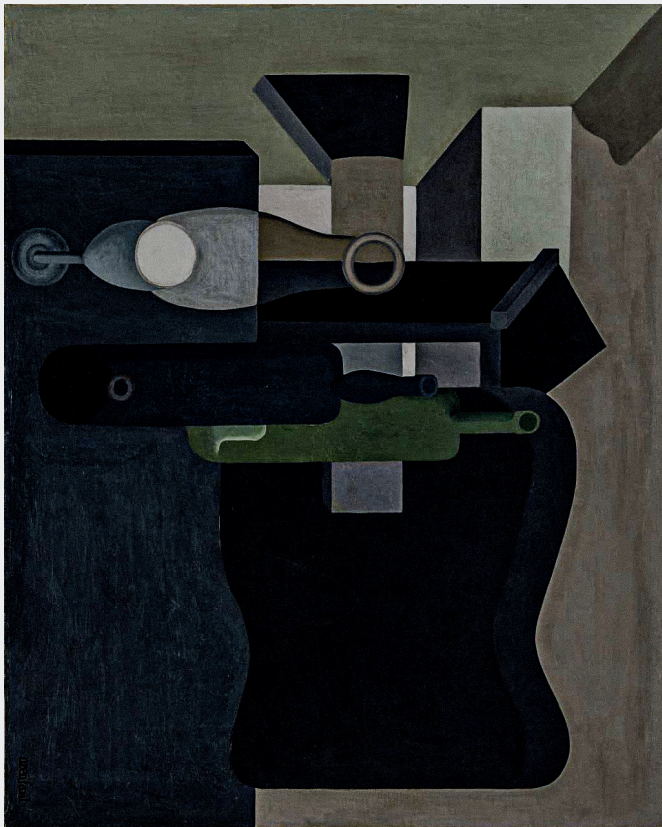


Fig. 59

Amédée Ozenfant, Still Life with Bottles, 1922. Oil on canvas. Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Gift of Ilene and James A. Nathan and purchased with funds provided by Merle Oberon (M.86.142).

Fig. 60

Amédée Ozenfant, Still Life with Carafe, Bottle, and Guitar, 1919. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 61

Amédée Ozenfant, Nature morte (Still Life). Oil on canvas, 1920s. National Gallery of Victoria. Source: National Gallery of Victoria, Digital Archive.

86. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section B.

87. Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), *Après le Cubisme* (Paris: Éditions Figuière, 1918).

88. Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

89. Ozenfant and Le Corbusier, *Après le Cubisme*.

90. Ozenfant and Le Corbusier, *Après le Cubisme*.



Poème de l'angle droit Theme B: Mind as the inner world, clarity, reflection, reason

The second act revolves around the Mind, the domain of inner clarity and rationality. In *Poème de l'angle droit*, Le Corbusier and Ozenfant articulate a vision of the modern self, one that values precision, order, and intellectual rigor.^{86, 87} This theme echoes through Maison La Roche's design, where architecture does not merely enclose space but reflects an internal mental landscape: calm, purified, and reflective. The house becomes a medium to explore consciousness as a constructed and controlled experience.

Maison La Roche is an active machine designed to orchestrate perception. It controls what the viewer sees and how they see it, much like a camera or optical apparatus. The spatial arrangement, framed views, and lighting all work together to discipline the gaze, directing attention and imposing a visual logic aligned with modernist ideals.⁸⁸

Ozenfant's Purist Milk Bottle as Symbolic of Sterile Modernist Vision

Purism emerged as a response to what Amédée Ozenfant and Le Corbusier perceived as the chaotic and fragmented nature of Cubism. In their 1918 manifesto *Après le Cubisme*, they advocated for an art that emphasized clarity, order, and precision, drawing inspiration from classical forms and industrial aesthetics.⁸⁹ The milk bottle, with its clean lines and geometric simplicity, became an ideal subject embodying these Purist ideals.

In Ozenfant's paintings, the milk bottle transcends its mundane function to become a symbol of modernity and purity. Its cylindrical form and smooth surface reflect the influence of industrial design, aligning with Purism's celebration of machine aesthetics. The bottle's whiteness and simplicity also evoke a sense of sterility, mirroring the movement's desire to cleanse art of unnecessary ornamentation and emotional excess.⁹⁰

Drawing parallels between Ozenfant's milk bottle and Le Corbusier's architectural philosophy, one can view the house as a camera, a device that filters and frames perception. Just as the milk bottle's form is distilled to its



Fig. 62

Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Dining room, Maison La Roche, Paris, 1923–1925. Photograph. Fondation Le Corbusier.

Fig. 63

Le Corbusier, Dining room, Maison La Roche, Paris. Digital artwork (Glitch/Duplication study) by author, based on photograph from Fondation Le Corbusier. This image visualizes intrusion of 'chaotic elements' into the supposedly 'purified' architectural gaze."

Fig. 64

Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Purist bedroom, Maison La Roche, Paris, 1923–1925. Photograph. Fondation Le Corbusier.

Fig. 65

Le Corbusier, Bedroom with paintings and furniture, Maison La Roche, Paris. Digital artwork (Glitch/Duplication study) by author, based on photograph from Fondation Le Corbusier. This image visualizes the intrusion of 'chaotic elements' into the supposedly 'purified' architectural gaze, challenging the modernist ideal of order.

Fig. 66

Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Double-height hall, Maison La Roche, Paris, 1923–1925. Photograph. Fondation Le Corbusier.

Fig. 67

Le Corbusier, Double-height space, Maison La Roche, Paris. Digital artwork (Hidden elements study) by author, based on photograph from Fondation Le Corbusier. This image visualizes the hidden 'mess,' 'impure,' or unrevealed elements, serving as a counter-narrative to the house's purportedly 'purified' architectural gaze.

essence, Le Corbusier's architecture sought to purify space, eliminating superfluous elements to reveal a clear, rational structure. Both the bottle and the building serve as instruments of vision, shaping how we perceive the world around us.

The milk bottle also carries connotations of purification and control. Milk, often associated with nourishment and cleanliness, becomes a metaphor for the cleansing of art and society. In this context, the bottle represents a controlled environment, where only the purest forms are allowed to exist, reflecting the Purist movement's emphasis on discipline and order.⁹¹

Ozenfant's depiction of the milk bottle is characterized by precise composition and technique. The use of sharp lines and carefully arranged planes creates a sense of harmony and balance, reinforcing the Purist ideals of clarity and order. The painting's muted color palette further emphasizes the focus on form and structure, allowing the viewer to engage with the object on a purely visual level, devoid of emotional distraction.

Maison La Roche acts as a spiritual camera; it captures and reveals only what is 'clean' or purified. The architecture filters reality, excluding the messy or 'impure' to reflect modernism's desire for clarity. Not only does the house control where one looks, it controls what one is allowed to see; unwanted elements are hidden behind walls or shadow to maintain a sanitized worldview. This concealment extends between the public architectural promenade and the concealed systems that sustain domestic life. Within the house, the infrastructure of everyday labour, including the dumbwaiter shaft, service circulation, and kitchen, is displaced from the primary spatial experience and concealed behind smooth partition walls. The visitor encounters a carefully curated sequence of light, colour, proportion, and movement, while the mechanisms that sustain the house remain largely invisible. This aligns with Gernot Böhme's assertion that "atmosphere is therefore a fundamental fact of human perception, that is, of the way in which people sense at once where they are, through their disposition."⁹² By interpreting this atmosphere through white surfaces and precise light, the house ensures that "the perceiving soul is given a passive role:

91. Ozenfant and Le Corbusier, *Après le Cubisme*.

92. Gernot Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, ed. Jean-Paul Thibaud (London: Routledge, 2017), 70.

Conceptual Core: The House as Camera

Fig. 68

Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Composite of Interior Views (Window, Circulation, and Gallery), Maison La Roche, Paris. Digital artwork (Controlled Vision Study) by author, based on archival photographs. This single spread visually analyzes how the house's fixed perspectives and viewing apparatuses, as seen through the Modernist frame, are imposed upon the collective human gaze, illustrating the architecture's function in choreographing and controlling vision.

perception is affective and merging participation."⁹³ The house does not simply reflect reality; it actively modulates the inhabitant's state of being, filtering experience to create an environment that purifies the mind while suppressing the abject.

The experience of the house is always mediated. The viewer's subjectivity is shaped by architectural framing, the orientation of spaces, and the ritualized act of looking. There is no innocent or passive viewing here; the gaze is constructed and controlled, part of the architecture's symbolic apparatus. This controlled vision connects to Beatriz Colomina's analysis of modern architecture as a producer of a specific kind of gaze that is gendered and disciplined. As Colomina notes, the "feminine surface 'orchestrates' the very gaze apparently directed at it to produce the effect of interior, the space of masculinity," suggesting that this "illusory' psychic space cannot be separated from the physical space of the so-called viewer."⁹⁴ Architecture thus organizes the gaze and disciplines the body through visual regimes, ensuring the viewer's perception is never neutral but shaped by their position. Ultimately, the

house must be understood "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."⁹⁵ This dynamic mirrors Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, where the mirror acts not just as a reflecting surface but as a site of self-surveillance that disciplines the subject by excluding what is "unclean" or abject.⁹⁶ Kristeva emphasizes that the mirror stage reveals the subject as a unified whole only by repressing the abject that threatens this unity, suggesting that the house's use of mirrors is a means of constructing a sanitized, purified self-image. This defensive boundary is fragile, however, as Kristeva describes the abject as "a passion" that emerges when "the object of desire... bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other." Consequently, "there is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject," meaning the house's architecture must constantly work to filter out these non-objective threats to maintain the inhabitant's psychic stability.⁹⁷

Le Corbusier's obsession with geometric optics further reinforces this architectural control of

93. Bohme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, 19.

94. Beatriz Colomina, *Sexuality and Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 386.

95. Colomina, *Sexuality and Space*, 114.

96. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 59.

97. Kristeva, Approaching Abjection in *Powers of Horror*, 9.



Apparatus and view as a visual Condenser,

Controlled Vanishing Point: Architectural occlusion Datum

Artificial Vanishing Point

Curated Exterior Gaze







Fig. 69

Interior view of the double-height space (the ramp and gallery) in Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret's Maison La Roche (1923–1925), Paris. The composition highlights the use of the architectural promenade and the Purist language of curved and planar surfaces. (Photo: Olivier Martin-Gambier, 2016; originally color).

Fig. 70

The curved ribbon window and ramp in the gallery of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret's Maison La Roche, Paris (1923–1925). This detail is a key feature of the promenade architecturale, offering visitors a gradual, panoramic view of the exterior garden as they ascend. (Photo: WINDOW RESEARCH INSTITUTE via madoken.jp).

Fig. 71

Light Matrix. Gallery, Maison Laroche. Digital Drawing. June, 2026.

Fig. 72

Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Interior Color Study, Maison La Roche, Paris, 1923–1925. Composite digital spread by author, utilizing: Archival photographs, Fondation Le Corbusier. This composite highlights the strategic use of blue.

vision. His idea of the house as a “machine for living” is also a “machine for seeing,” where pure geometry orders sensory chaos into clarity.⁹⁸ Windows and apertures are framed precisely to guide the gaze, creating artificial vanishing points that choreograph the viewer's experience, ensuring that the visual field remains controlled and coherent.

The gallery space in Maison La Roche is designed like a painting frame, carefully choreographing how the viewer experiences art and architecture. The walls, windows, and display elements are arranged to control the path and focus of vision, reinforcing the house's role as a visual apparatus.

Windows serve as frames, limiting and focusing sightlines, while architectural features create artificial vanishing points that guide perception towards specific views or objects. This precision controls the visual narrative, transforming the house into an optical instrument.

Maison La Roche as Viewing Apparatus

In Maison La Roche, the interplay of colour,

light, and air is not decorative but structural to experience. The most striking example is the use of blue in the gallery's double-height space, a carefully calibrated hue that Le Corbusier developed during his Purist period, when colour was conceived as a spatial instrument rather than surface embellishment.⁹⁹ The blue wall does not simply recede; it orchestrates a perceptual shift, it's cool tonality modulating depth and directing the visitor's gaze upward toward the clerestory, where daylight enters as a controlled cascade.

Le Corbusier's manipulation of natural light is precise and almost liturgical. Ribbon windows on the upper floors deliver horizontal bands of illumination, while the tall glazing in the gallery produces a chiaroscuro effect that animates the interior as the sun moves across the Paris sky. Light becomes a temporal element, marking the passage of hours and subtly transforming the chromatic register of surfaces.

Ventilation, too, is embedded in the architectural grammar. Operable panels within the ribbon windows and cross-ventilation, ensuring the environment remains "healthy (and morally so too)." By treating the residence as a “House-

98. Le Corbusier. *Towards a New Architecture*. Translated by Frederick Etchells. London: John Rodker, 1931.

99. Le Corbusier, *Architectural Polychromy: Le Corbusier's Color Keyboards from 1931 and 1959*, edited by Arthur Rüegg (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1997).

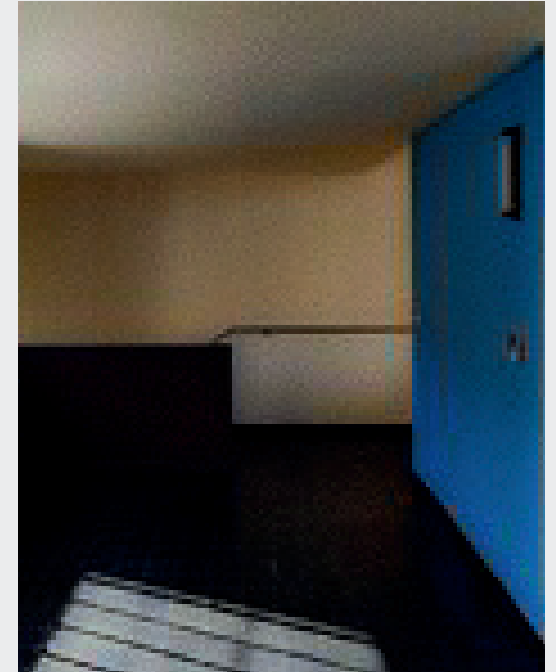
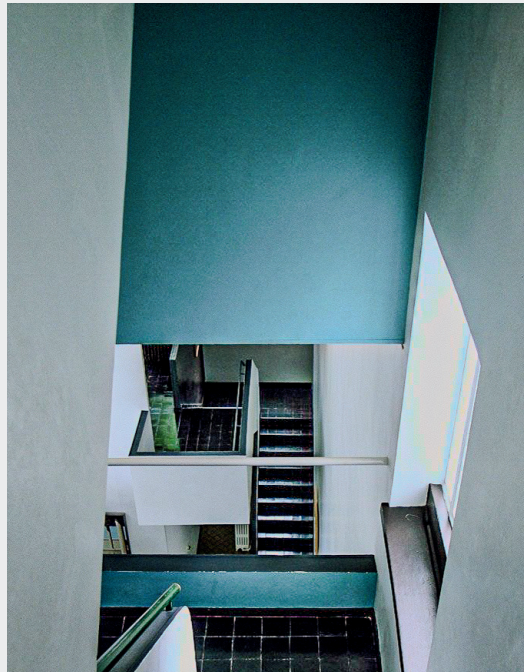
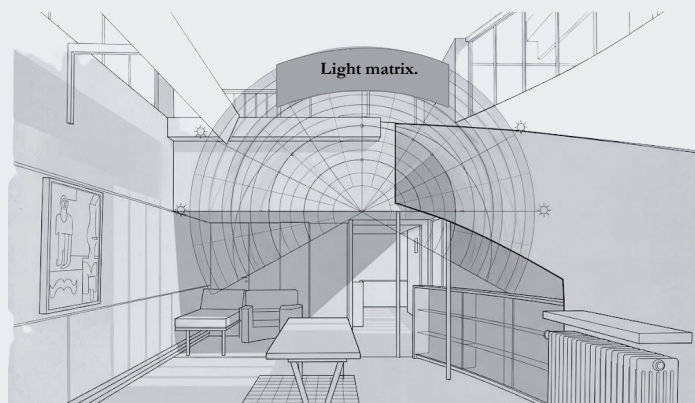


Fig. 73

The Uncanny Gaze and Fragmented Vision at Maison La Roche. Digital artwork by author. This illustration uses architectural elements (like the Fireplace and Ramp) and textual fragments to visualize the intersection of the architectural uncanny (Vidler) and the abject (Kristeva), arguing that the Purist pursuit of clarity fractures the built experience into a state of 'tragic vision' (Wigley).

Machine,” Le Corbusier argues that spatial order is "beautiful in the same way that the working tools and instruments which accompany our existence are beautiful."¹⁰⁰ This reflects an "objective point of view" where design maintains a sanitized, idealized worldview by filtering reality through functional precision.

However, the gaze within the house is never neutral; it is both eroticized and sterilized. This paradox recalls Rosalind Krauss's reading of Duchamp, where looking becomes a ritualized act charged with desire yet bound by discipline.¹⁰¹ Similarly, milk and mirror as ritual objects in Maison La Roche serve to visually and morally cleanse both space and subject, echoing Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection as the process by which the impure is expelled to preserve the self's imagined purity.

Despite the viewer's arrival and movement through the house, their subjectivity is never free or spontaneous. Instead, it is shaped and regulated by the atmosphere and spatial choreography of the house, as Böhme's notion of felt spaces suggests, where atmosphere invisibly governs how the self experiences and

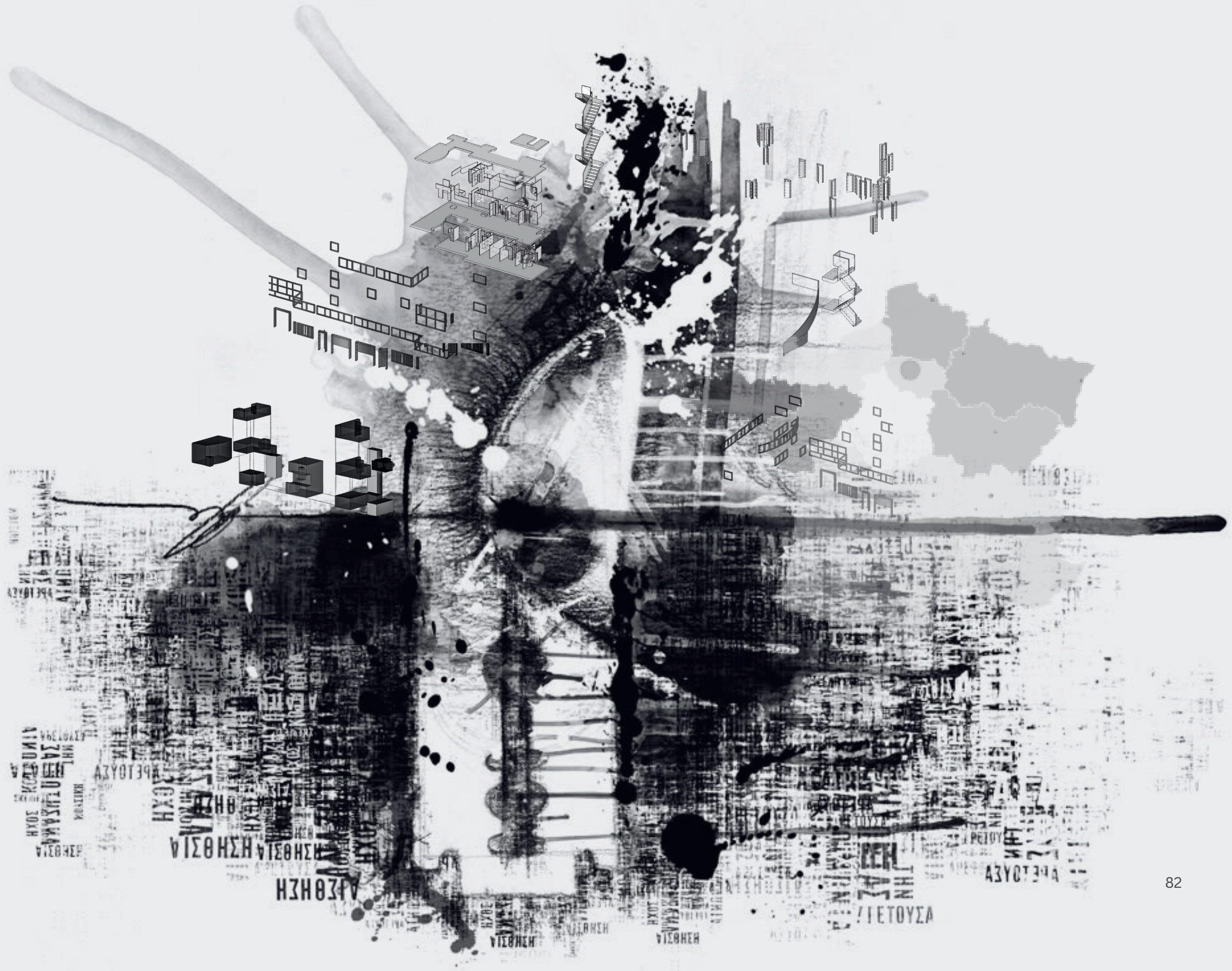
perceives. Maison La Roche acts as a mirror not of the viewer's whole consciousness but of a sanitized, sterilized version, echoing Kristeva's idea that the self is constructed through exclusion of the abject, maintaining coherence by repressing what threatens identity.

From Seeing to Erasure

This act of purification through vision prepares the ground for the next chapter, where the hidden and repressed body, what the eye excludes, will emerge, confronting the limits of architectural clarity and the failure of sterilization. The visual regime of Maison La Roche cleanses, but the corporeal body inevitably stains; the transition from seeing to erasure signals the closing of the eye and the beginning of a more corporeal encounter.

100. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*. Translated by Frederick Etchells. (London: John Rodker), 1931, 29.

101. Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).



Interlude III

The modern house rises by suppressing what it does not want to acknowledge. It ascends by sending its waste downward. It climbs cleanly only because something else descends in silence. If Act 3 turns toward Flesh, then the first gesture is to name the movement that shapes this body. This movement is **vertical abjection**. It sorts the pure from the impure through direction and divides the visible from the invisible by sending residue to a lower realm. This movement is architectural, mechanical, and metaphysical at once.

Julia Kristeva's writing on abjection offers the clearest entry. For her, abjection marks the moment when the subject confronts what must be expelled in order to exist. It is the unstable border where purity and contamination meet, where the body strains against what it cannot integrate. She writes, "The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-jest, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire."¹⁰² Modern architecture responds to this threat by arranging its interiors through lines of vertical control. The clean surfaces that Le Corbusier prized are not self-evident. They are produced by devices that redirect the unclean downward and out of sight. Abjection becomes a vertical system.

Beatriz Colomina extends this logic into the domestic interior. Her work shows that architectural modernity is built on a regime of visibility. It determines what must be exposed and what must be hidden.¹⁰³ In Maison La Roche, this regime is not horizontal. It works vertically. The gallery receives light and art. The basement receives labour and residue. The dumbwaiter, plumbing shafts, and service corridors carry the work of abjection along enclosed paths. They move downward, into a zone where the house no longer needs to appear rational or pure. This is the direction where the building becomes flesh. It swallows dust, stains, and maintenance. It internalises them so the visible world above can remain serene.

Vertical Abjection

Vertical abjection is structural; it is the silent order behind the house's apparent calm. Anthony Vidler's writing on the architectural uncanny explains why this movement feels charged, noting that

"modernism proposed to consign the cluttered interiors and insalubrious living conditions of centuries to oblivion." This creates a "willed innocence through a childlike perception of the world of objects," achieved through a "masking" that endows sight with the power of dissimulation.¹⁰⁴

The uncanny arises when this hidden residue returns; a clogged pipe or a stuck dumbwaiter reveals the "flesh" of the house. These moments prove that purity depends on a vertical choreography of expulsion. Vidler's uncanny serves as a warning: the house can repress its repress systems only until they fail.

Yet vertical abjection is not only a system of suppression. It is also a way of shaping experience. John Hejduk understood that architecture carries its own internal organs. He treated them as characters. His drawings show vents, ducts, and cavities that behave like narrative figures.¹⁰⁵ If we apply this to Maison La Roche, the vertical shafts become more than mechanical voids. They become the hidden anatomy of the house. They are the throat, the intestine, the lung. They take in and release. They swallow and return. They form a vertical body that stands behind the walls.

The living areas occupy the elevated zones of clarity. Light travels across their surfaces with ease. The ramp lifts the visitor into a controlled field of vision. The house choreographs the body upward, toward abstraction. But below this ascent is another movement. It is the descent of matter, odour, dust, and labour. It is the work of servants whose presence becomes architectural rather than personal. Their gestures are absorbed into devices. Their movements sink through floors and cavities. Their labour becomes the downward flow that sustains the upward image.

Kristeva's abject is always tied to the body. It emerges when the body recognises its own instability. In Maison La Roche, this instability becomes architectural. The house maintains its form by constantly negotiating with what threatens to exceed it. The walls are white, but only because someone cleans them. The floors shine, but only because someone scrubs them. The plumbing runs smoothly, but only because someone clears it. These acts of maintenance and care exert a downward pressure on the architecture whereby the abject substances of domesticity

102. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1.

103. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

104. Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 13.

105. John Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa*, ed. Kim Sbrkapič (New York: Rizzoli, 1985).

become hidden and screened from view. Vertical abjection is therefore a principle of organisation. It arranges matter and meaning, turns the building into a bodily envelope that encloses and suppresses these kinds of processes. The dumbwaiter is an architectural exemplar of this condition. It travels between levels without ever occupying the domestic abode as an inhabitant – it is the vertical incorporation of a service body into the architectural fabric of the house. It absorbs the impurities of life and delivers them into the house's hidden stomach, reconfiguring the abject into a screened movement. The building maintains its purity by allowing its impurities to travel through this narrow, enclosed shaft, where disappearance is not merely metaphorical but instrumental to the operation of the house.

Le Corbusier's drawings often show clean lines, exact dimensions, and precise geometries. But beneath these images is a second drawing. It is not drawn on paper. It is drawn through pipes, ducts, and shafts. This drawing is vertical. It is the cosmogram of abjection, the diagram of how the house processes residue. It marks the descent of flesh against the ascent of form. It marks the internal struggle between clarity and contamination. It marks the unstable centre of modernism.

This thesis thus positions 'vertical abjection' as central in our understanding of why *Flesh* is not just symbolic, but rather becomes something like the material base of the house's architectural ordering of domesticity. It is the downward trajectory that makes the upper world possible. If Act 1 established the house's environment and Act 2 turned to the mind, Act 3 enters the hidden body. It opens the shaft, the pipe, the cavity. It reveals the movements that keep the house alive. It shows how modernity builds itself through the repeated descent of what it cannot bear to acknowledge.

ACT 3

Labour-Dirt-Desire

Theme C - Flesh

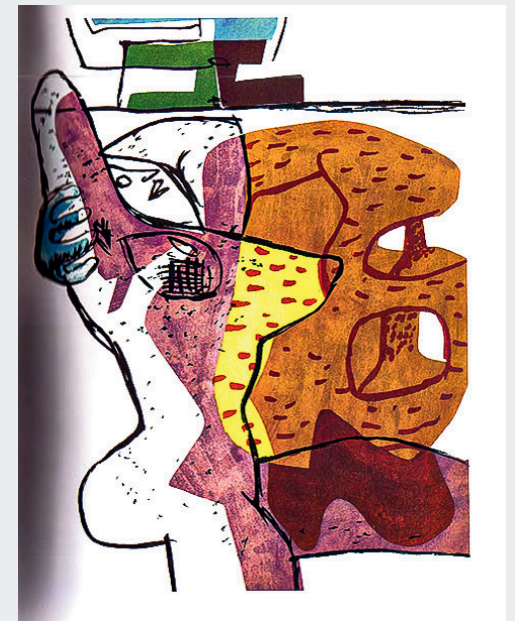
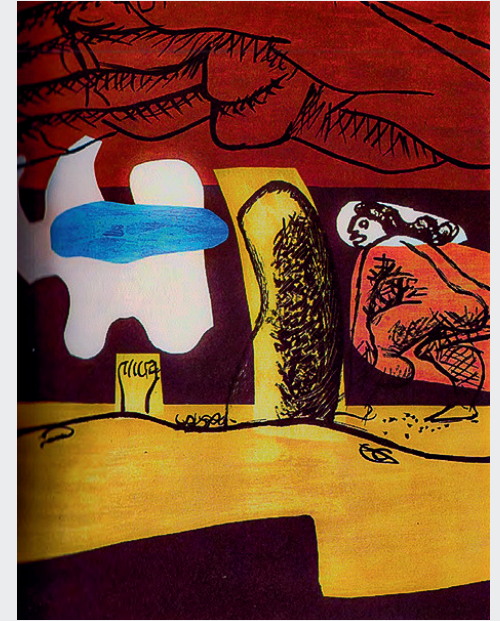


Fig. 74

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate C.1, "Flesh: The Body in Vigilance and Confrontation." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Fig. 75

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate C.2, "Flesh: Relational and Ethical Dimensions of Desire." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Fig. 76

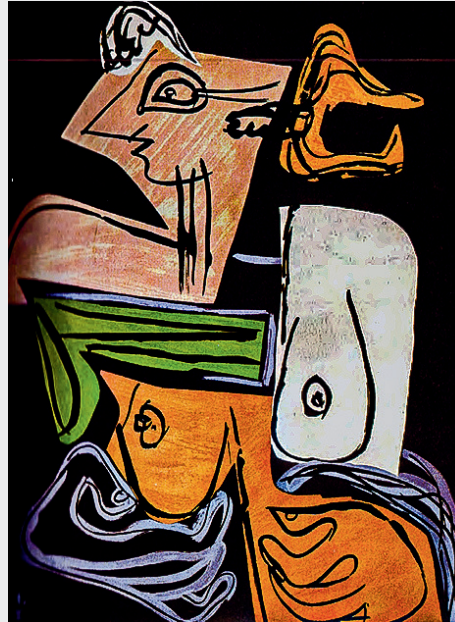
Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate C.3, "Flesh: Tenderness, Harmony, and Aesthetic Capacities." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Fig. 77

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate C.4, "Flesh: Fragmentation, Incompleteness, and Ethical Complexity." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Fig. 78

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate C.5, "Flesh: Transformative and Ecstatic Potential." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.



Theme C, Flesh, marks the shift from Mind to the corporeal, emphasizing the material, affective, and ethical dimensions of human experience.¹⁰⁶ While Theme B, Mind, explored abstraction, intellect, and sensory aspects of experience, Flesh situates human life within the body, its desires, labour, and vulnerabilities. The sequence from Mind to Flesh could be deliberate, emphasizing that intellectual apprehension alone is insufficient to understand the totality of human experience; knowledge must encounter the body, its appetites, and its abjections. The brown palette of this theme reinforces this grounding, evoking earth, decay, sweat, and organic materiality, and aligning corporeality with labour, nourishment, and corporeal reality. This prioritization of tone over hue reflects what John Gage identifies as a historical and biological precedence where "values - light and dark - take precedence over hues," reinforcing the "immanent character" of the material world.¹⁰⁷

Theme C is structured around five sub-poems (C1–C5), each examining facets of corporeality, desire, and embodiment through distinct, yet interconnected perspectives.¹⁰⁸ In C1, the body

is placed in a heightened state of vigilance and confrontation, exemplifying Kristeva's concept of vertical abjection, wherein the body must negotiate impurity, discipline, and ethical responsibility.^{109,110} C2 transitions into relational and ethical dimensions of corporeal desire, framing encounters and chance meetings as moments where the body mediates fate, intimacy, and agency.¹¹¹ The motif of crossroads and nocturnal reflection highlights the interplay between conscious and subconscious experience.¹¹²

C3 emphasizes tenderness, harmony, and the aesthetic capacities of Flesh, presenting corporeality as a medium for intimate interaction and ethical reflection. Here, embodiment becomes a site where affect, perception, and metaphysical aspiration converge, negotiating between daily corporeal realities and higher sensibilities.¹¹³

C4 addresses fragmentation, relational incompleteness, and ethical complexity, illustrating that the body is both subject and instrument of desire, always intersubjective and socially mediated.¹¹⁴ Finally, C5 portrays the

transformative and ecstatic potential of Flesh, where corporeality mediates between materiality, affect, and transcendence, achieving an equilibrium between the ordinary and the extraordinary.¹¹⁵

Overall, Theme C flows from alertness and corporeal discipline to relational encounters, affective harmony, ethical complexity, and ecstatic transformation. This sequence mirrors Le Corbusier's reflections on the body as a site of memory, labour, and desire, where Flesh is inseparable from experience, ethics, and the imagination.

106. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section C.

107. John Gage, *Color and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism* (University of California Press, 1999).

108. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section C.

109. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

110. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section C1.

111. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section C2.

112. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section C2.

113. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section C3.

114. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section C4.

115. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section C5.

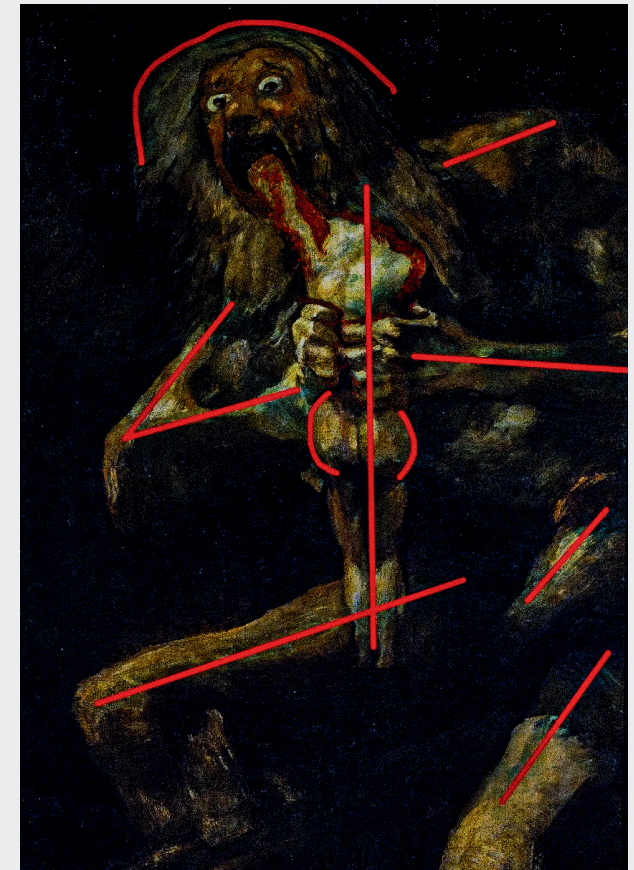
Flesh as Repressed Architecture

In the urban fabric of 17th- and 18th-century Paris, the scullery, derived from the French culinary tradition and architectural vernacular, served as a spatial threshold where the essential yet unglamorous activities of food preparation, cleaning, and domestic labor were sequestered from the household's public realms.¹¹⁶ These small, often windowless rooms were typically situated adjacent to the kitchen and connected vertically to upper floors by shafts that facilitated the movement of goods and waste.¹¹⁷ These vertical conduits, the precursors to the mechanized dumbwaiters of the modern era, reflect an early architectural strategy to separate and conceal the physical processes and bodily exertions inherent in domestic life.¹¹⁸

At this historical juncture, plumbing systems remained rudimentary, composed of lead pipes, communal drainage into courtyards, and the widespread use of chamber pots.¹¹⁹ Such infrastructural arrangements embodied the socio-technical realities of early modern domesticity, where hygiene and cleanliness were aspirational yet persistently challenged by material conditions.¹²⁰

Within this context, the dumbwaiter emerged not merely as a practical device but as a spatial and social mediator. By the mid-18th century, it evolved into an apparatus of infrastructural intimacy and social discretion: portable serving stands that enabled food and utensils to be moved discreetly between floors, eliminating the overt presence of servants during meals.¹²¹ Notably, Louis XV, King of France (1715 to 1774) famously employed a form of dumbwaiter to preserve privacy during dining, reflecting a conscious orchestration of domestic space to separate labor from leisure, visibility from invisibility.¹²²

Far from a mere servant's convenience, the dumbwaiter operates as a ritual portal, a threshold separating cleanliness from contamination, presence from erasure, and labor from leisure. It enacts



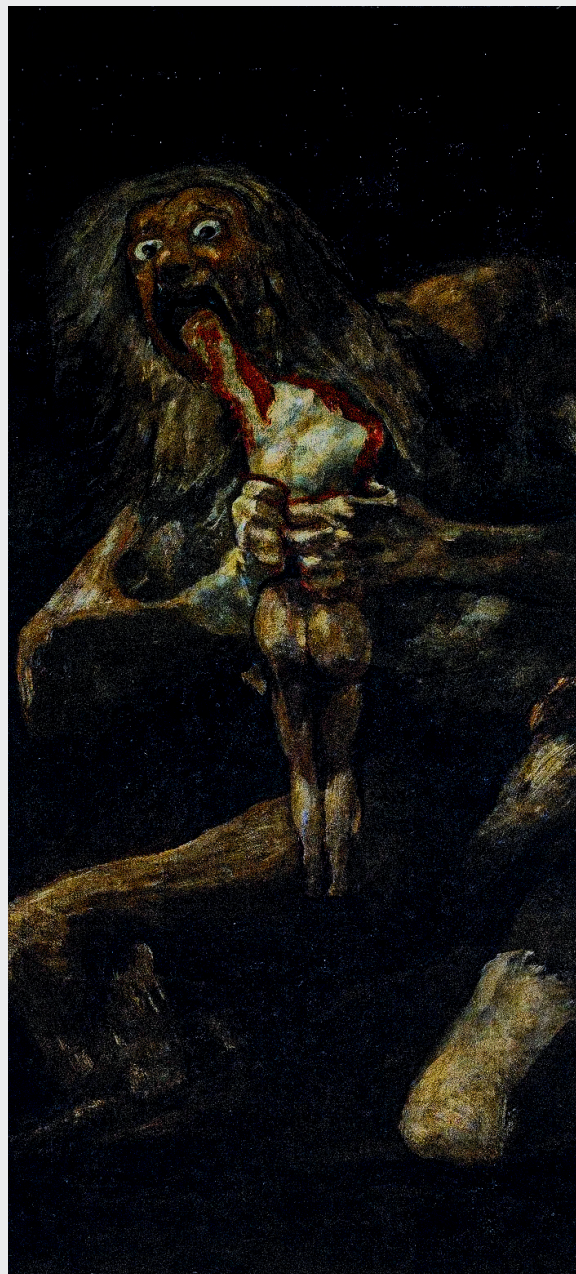
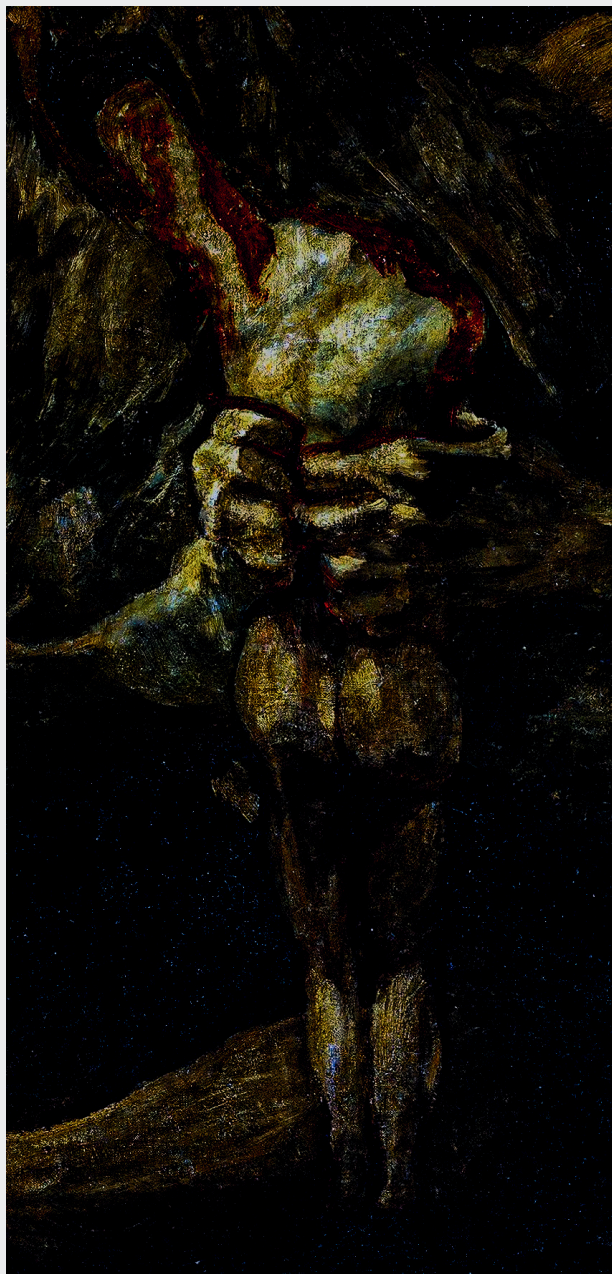


Fig. 79

Line in Saturn Devouring One of His Sons (c. 1819-1823) by Francisco de Goya, from the artist's Black Paintings series; Francisco de Goya, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Fig. 80

Detail of Saturn Devouring One of His Sons (c. 1819-1823) by Francisco de Goya, from the artist's Black Paintings series; Francisco de Goya, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 81

Saturn Devouring One of His Sons (c. 1819-1823) by Francisco de Goya, from the artist's Black Paintings series; Francisco de Goya, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

116. Annik Pardailhé-Galabrun, *The Birth of Intimacy: Privacy and Domestic Life in Early Modern Paris*, trans. Jocelyn Phelps (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 37-40.

117. Pardailhé-Galabrun, *The Birth of Intimacy*, 58-67.

118. Joan DeJean, *The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual—and the Modern Home Began* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009), 104.

119. Pardailhé-Galabrun, *The Birth of Intimacy*, 42-51.

120. Pardailhé-Galabrun, *The Birth of Intimacy*, 94-105.

121. DeJean, *The Age of Comfort*, 104.

122. DeJean, *The Age of Comfort*, 142-145.

what may be described as the symbolic disappearance of labor within modernist domestic architecture, staging a performance of comfort and purity that requires the simultaneous concealment and management of abject bodily realities.

This logic of concealment and repression finds a darkly resonant parallel in Francisco Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Son* (c. 1819–1823).¹²³ Painted on the walls of Goya's home as part of his *Black Paintings*, it depicts Saturn, eyes wide with frenzy: consuming the body of his child, an image of horror that is at once corporeal and metaphysical. The flesh in Goya's work is rendered with grotesque intimacy: torn, ingested, and simultaneously concealed within the figure's shadowed frame. As *Art in Context* notes, the painting embodies madness, fear, and the self-destructive hunger of power, its textures of darkness revealing the consuming anxiety of mortality and the repression of human instinct.¹²⁴ The act of devouring becomes an allegory of control, the desperate desire to preserve authority by erasing what threatens it.

Maison La Roche performs an eerily similar operation. Its architecture, like Saturn, devours its own flesh, the flesh of labor, dirt, and domestic exertion, in order to sustain the illusion of order and purity. The dumbwaiter becomes the mouth through which this ritual consumption occurs: food rises, waste descends, yet both movements are hidden within the wall's throat. What is digested within the architectural body is not only material but symbolic, the repression of the human, the servant, the body, the abject. In this sense, the house enacts a continual act of ingestion and erasure, converting the raw physicality of domestic work into invisible energy that sustains the modernist image of immaculate living.

Goya's Saturn, painted directly onto the plaster of his home, collapses the boundaries between wall, flesh, and psyche, the architecture itself becomes a medium of horror. Similarly, Maison La Roche internalizes its violence through its infrastructural systems. Behind the whitened walls and clean planes of modernism lies a metabolic structure of pipes, shafts, and ducts, an architectural digestive

system that consumes the traces of human presence. The building, like Goya's mythic figure, maintains its sanctity only by devouring what sustains it.

Thus, *Flesh as Repressed Architecture* finds its most potent articulation in the dumbwaiter's silent movement: the cyclical ingestion and expulsion of matter that mirrors Saturn's eternal act of devouring. Both Goya's painting and Le Corbusier's architecture stage a confrontation between purity and decay, control and chaos, visibility and concealment. In the ritual space of Maison La Roche, the flesh is not absent, it is internalized, metabolized, and entombed within the architecture's very body.

123. Francisco Goya, *Saturn Devouring His Son*, c. 1819–1823, mixed method on mural transferred to canvas, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

124. Goya, *Saturn Devouring His Son*.

In *Poème de l'angle droit*, the thematic triad of Light, Mind, and Flesh marks a progression from abstraction to materiality, from the idealized to the corporeal. Theme C, Flesh, confronts the material life of architecture: the labor, the dirt, and the raw reality that disrupts purified modernist visions. Maison La Roche, designed by Le Corbusier and commissioned in 1923 by Raoul La Roche, embodies this tension.

¹²⁵ La Roche's desire for an immaculate space belied the inherent messiness of domestic life.

Though the house's upper galleries display gleaming white walls and carefully curated artworks, these purified surfaces conceal a complex system of plumbing, waste removal, servant circulation, and labour spaces that are fundamentally repressed organs of the building.

The house's body, its flesh, is hidden behind its skin of clarity. Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection describes this repression: the "abject," what is rejected by the symbolic order, exists in a liminal space that threatens the self's coherence.¹²⁶ The house too rejects these abject elements, dirt, bodily waste, labour, as impurities that must be hidden to sustain the modernist image of perfection.

Concealed Anatomies

The visible part of Maison La Roche is carefully choreographed for aesthetic experience: ramps, galleries, framed vistas. Yet the service infrastructure, scullery, servant stairs, dumbwaiter shaft, is spatially segregated, ensuring that dirt and labour remain out of sight and mind.

Historically, in 1920s Paris, domestic service was gendered and classed. Scullery maids and servants performed strenuous, often demeaning work in cramped quarters away from the family's gaze.¹²⁷ These back-of-house spaces were deliberately small, windowless, and utilitarian, reflecting the social invisibility of the labourers themselves; as Beatriz Colomina argues, such spaces operate as architectural enclosures of control and discipline.¹²⁸

The dumbwaiter in Maison La Roche, a vertical shaft carrying food, laundry, and waste, is a physical and symbolic conduit of this repression. It is an internal pipeline that moves abject matter away from the clean galleries and main circulation routes; the device works as a domestic prosthesis mediating between purified

Fig. 82

Manual Dumbwaiter Sketch. Pencil on paper by author, September 2025.

Fig. 83

Arina Voskanyan, Disappearing Hands.

Fig. 84 (Spread)

Drain Pipes suppressed in servants' dwelling.

spaces and the labour processes that sustain them. As Jonathan Foote's notion of the smudge suggests, such concealed mechanisms register traces of human labour even while they are conceptually repressed.¹²⁹

The dumbwaiter also exemplifies Corbusier's broader commitment to mechanization and efficiency, yet its operative effect is social: maintaining a strict division between the house's public and private, clean and dirty, visible and invisible.

This can be read through the lens of The Prestige, not merely the film, but the three-part structure of a magic illusion. The first part is The Pledge: something ordinary is presented: a house, a dining area, a kitchen. The second part is The Turn: the house does something extraordinary, the dumbwaiter moves food and filth, seemingly erasing the process. The utensils vanish. The third part is The Prestige: the ordinary returns, but transformed. The dishes are clean. The meal is over. The stage is cleared. The magician ie., Le Corbusier, or the architect- is nowhere in sight. But the illusion lingers.

Another manifestation of this architectural disappearance unfolds through the house's water infrastructure. Unlike conventional construction,

where drainage systems are buried within columns or concealed deep within the wall fabric, Maison La Roche leaves its vertical downpipes visibly exposed. Yet concealment here does not occur through physical hiding, but through spatial displacement. The pipes are routed through servant quarters and secondary domestic territories, removed from the principal architectural promenade and its carefully composed visual field. What remains visible is therefore not necessarily what is seen.

In this arrangement, the abject realities of weather, maintenance, and disposal are quietly transferred to the margins of the house. The mechanisms that sustain the building's daily life are excised from the purified spaces of representation and relocated to domains associated with service and labour. The pipe thus becomes more than a functional element. It operates as a device of architectural filtration, separating the visible from the necessary, the ceremonial from the operational. Exposed yet unseen, present yet excluded, it reveals how modernism often achieves purity not through elimination, but through the careful management of where certain bodies, objects, and functions are permitted to appear.

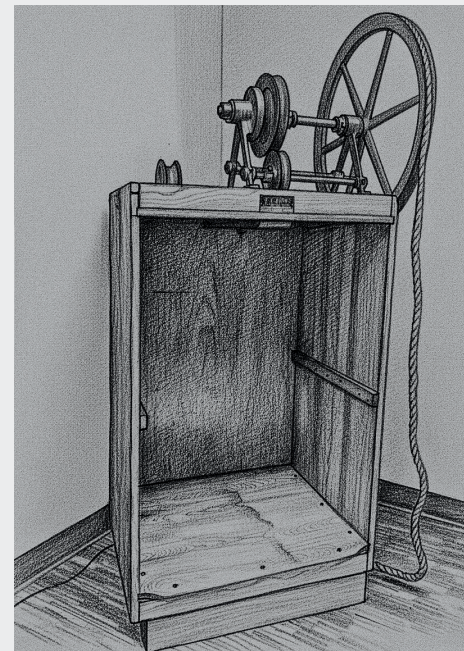
125. Jacques Sbriglio, *Le Corbusier—Les Villas La Roche-Jeanneret / The Villas La Roche-Jeanneret* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2015), 7.

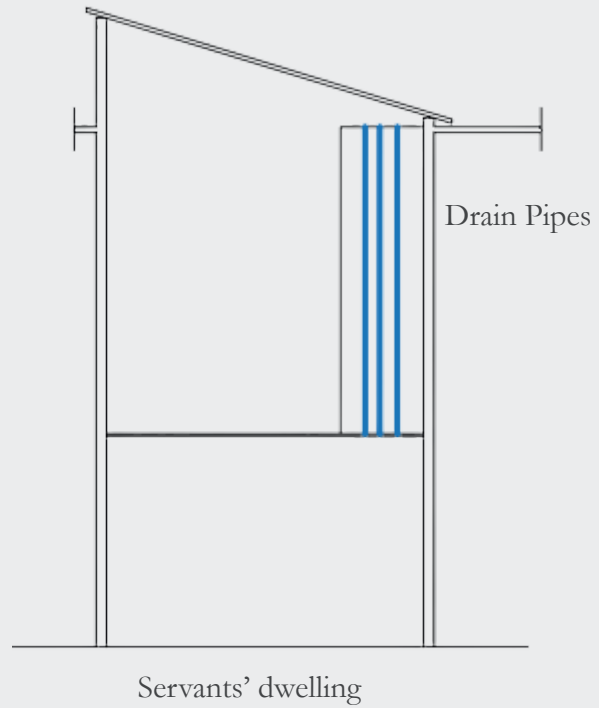
126. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1.

127. Annik Pardailhé-Galabrun, *The Birth of Intimacy: Privacy and Domestic Life in Early Modern Paris*, trans. Jocelyn Phelps (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 37-40.

128. Beatriz Colomina, *Domesticity at War* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

129. Jonathan Foote, "Borromini's Smudge," *Drawing Matter*, (November 15, 2022).





Labour, Shame, and Ritual Theatre

In the immaculate machine of modernism, Maison La Roche stands as a vessel of purity, white, clean, rational. Yet within this “machine for living,” Le Corbusier introduced something quietly distorted: a vertical shaft, a dumbwaiter, that silently shuttles food and its remnants between floors. It is a functional element, yes, but also something more, a symbolic gullet, a mechanized throat, a spatial expression of how the house digests. We explore how the dumbwaiter and the adjacent sink on the first floor of Maison La Roche operate not just as devices of service, but as metaphors of bodily inversion, abjection, and spiritual verticality. By engaging with Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection, Tom McCarthy’s reflections on post-Joycean modernism, and Le Corbusier’s poetic vision in *Poème de l’angle droit*, we expose the vertical machine’s symbolic guts.

John Hejduk’s notion of ritual theatre in architecture helps decode the dual narrative of the house.¹³⁰ The public spaces are a staged set, designed to be seen and admired, but the hidden service areas perform the necessary, often shameful, rituals of cleaning, waste disposal, and

labour. The servant is simultaneously present and absent, their movements choreographed to remain invisible, a social dramaturgy that enact(s) early twentieth-century hierarchies.

The experience of labour, carrying dishes, managing waste, cleaning, is intensely tactile and sensory, involving smells, stains, and bodily exertion. Such “fleshly” realities stand in stark contrast to the house’s purified galleries; the dumbwaiter’s mechanical, vertical operation transforms this bodily labour into an abstract, unseen process, sanitizing the physicality of domestic work.

Fig. 85

Anne Claude Philippe de Tubières, comte de Caylus, Scullery Maid (from the series *Études Prises dans le Bas Peuple où les Cris de Paris: Première Suite*), after a design by Edme Bouchardon, 1737, etching with some engraving, sheet: 9 1/4 × 7 1/16 in. (23.5 × 18 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1953.



130. John Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa: Works 1947–1983*, ed. Kim Shkapich (New York: Rizzoli, 1985).

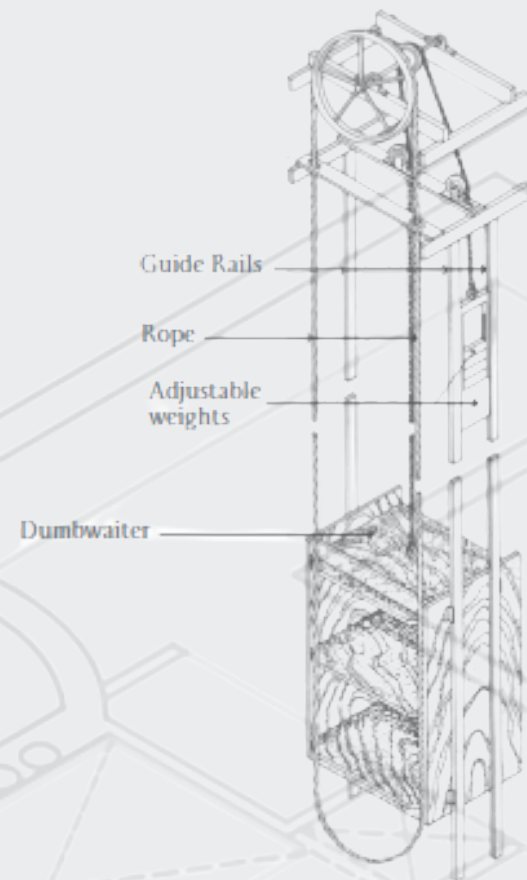


Fig. 86

Isometric drawing of dumbwaiter on ground floor plan with labeling. Digital model by author. This analytical drawing illustrates the function and placement of the concealed dumbwaiter within the domestic plan, emphasizing the infrastructure dedicated to food and waste, circulation and management.

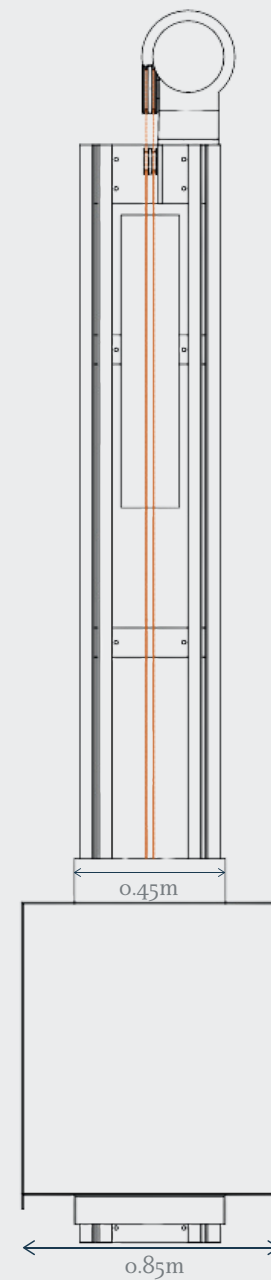
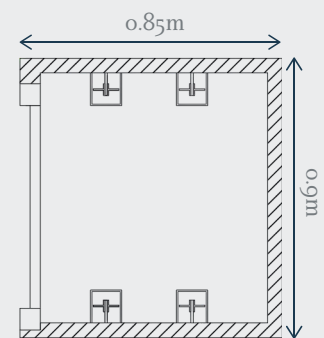
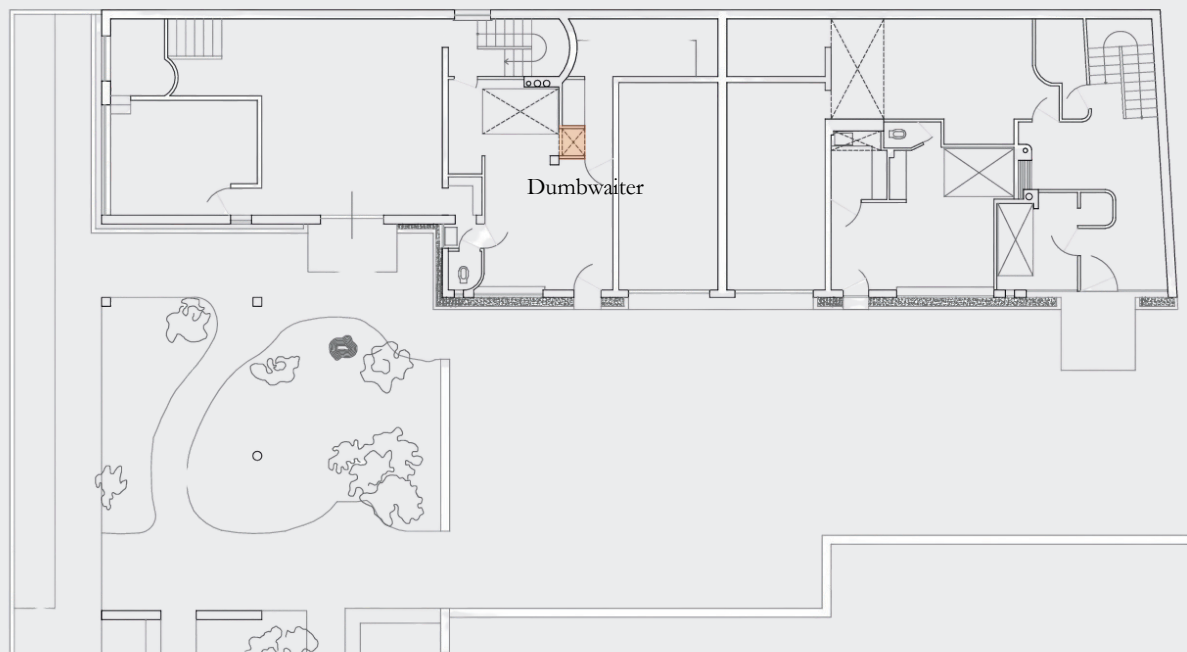


Fig. 87

Ground floor plan of Maison La Roche, Highlighting the dumbwaiter. Digital plan by author. This analytical drawing focuses on the original ground floor layout and spatial relationship, emphasizing the precise location of the dumbwaiter as a key element of the house's hidden circulation and service infrastructure.

Fig. 88

Plan view of dumbwaiter. Digital drawing by author. This plan drawing isolates the dumbwaiter mechanism, revealing its compact footprint and how it is seamlessly integrated into the wall structure, demonstrating its role as a "repressed organ" within the Purist aesthetic.

Fig. 89

Section view of dumbwaiter. Digital drawing by author. This drawing cuts through the domestic space to show the vertical circulation of the dumbwaiter between multiple levels.

Maison La Roche, like many of Le Corbusier's works, is often read through its horizontality: *the promenade architecturale*, the linear flow of spaces.¹³¹ But it is in its vertical insertions that something uncanny begins to emerge. The dumbwaiter subverts bodily logic. The dumbwaiter defies natural order. In the human body, food enters through the mouth and descends through the digestive tract, ultimately excreted as waste.

In nature, gravity facilitates nourishment's downward journey and the expulsion of waste. Yet in Maison La Roche, fresh food ascends from the ground-floor kitchen to the first-floor dining area; dirty utensils descend. This is a reversal not just of plumbing, but of corporeal logic. This reversal is uncanny. This mechanical aperture, the dumbwaiter, is a ritual portal that separates and controls bodily processes without requiring bodily presence. It is not merely a servant's convenience; rather it is an architectural disruption of anatomical and ecological rhythm.

131. Fondation Le Corbusier, *Maisons La Roche et Jeanneret* (Fondation Le Corbusier).

Fig. 90

Utility area of Kitchen, showing the placement of dumbwaiter and sink on the ground floor, Maison La Roche. Photograph by author, January 2025. This image provides primary visual documentation of the house's service infrastructure, capturing the physical reality of the sink and the small door concealing the dumbwaiter, which collectively serve as the "repressed organs" for domestic labor.

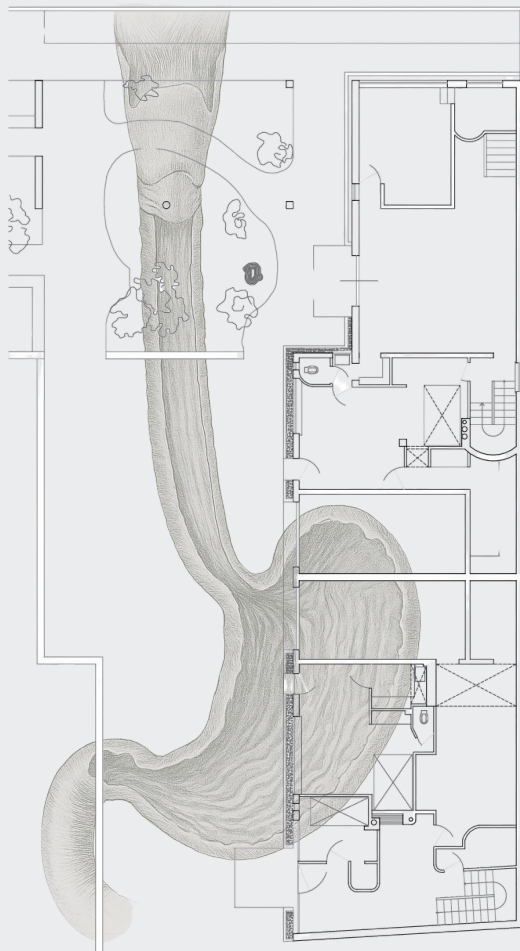
Fig. 91

Esophagus overlayed on plan of Maison La Roche. Digital drawing annotated on plan by author. This analytical drawing uses the Esophagus as a metaphor to highlight the house's internal material passage, emphasizing how the central circulation routes and the dumbwaiter system function as the bodily mechanism for the intake and removal of domestic "messes" and waste.

132. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 9.

133. John Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa: Works 1947–1983*, ed. Kim Shkapich (New York: Rizzoli, 1985).





The Pledge

We might imagine this vertical shaft as a surrogate esophagus, a gullet without a body, or with a fragmented one. It feeds the dining space but also carries away its refuse, its abject excess. Kristeva's theory, in *Powers of Horror*, is instructive here. Abjection, for Kristeva, is that which the body expels in order to maintain the illusion of integrity: the excrement, the blood, the filth. Abjection is not pure filth; it is what was once part of the self and is now cast out in horror. "Abjection is above all ambiguity," she writes. "Because while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it; on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger."¹³²

The dumbwaiter in Maison La Roche manages abjection by displacing; it becomes an instrument of abjection, not because it contains waste, but because it allows the body of the house to disavow its own mess. It is not seen, nor smelled, nor heard. It mimics the body's digestive system, but cleansed of its messiness, an architecture of antiseptic consumption.

The symbolic language of cleanliness and

concealment that surrounds the dumbwaiter resonates not only with Kristeva's theory but also with John Hejduk's exploration of architectural metaphysics. Hejduk's *Wall House and his Masques* were not designed to resolve programmatic needs so much as to act as metaphor-machines, structures that enact memory, death, ritual, and estrangement.¹³³ His houses are spaces of ambiguity and half-hidden narratives, where the vertical often appears as a shaft of mourning or transcendence. Similarly, Maison La Roche's dumbwaiter is not simply a service element: it is a mute vertical metaphor for expulsion, retreat, and mechanical purity. It is the house's vertical mask, a slot through which bodily excess is banished.

Architecture, for Hejduk, was inseparable from the body. His spatial propositions engage the user in fragmented rituals, often framed by narrow apertures, disappearing walls, and vertical alignments that provoke a somatic awareness. This physical unease is echoed in Maison La Roche, where the dumbwaiter's silent movements are unregistered by sight or sound but sensed in absence. Its very invisibility heightens its affective force; the spatial abjection

Fig. 92

Kitchen, showcasing dumbwaiter, Maison La Roche, Paris. Photograph by author, January 2025. This primary visual documentation captures the utilitarian reality of the service area, specifically highlighting the small door of the concealed dumbwaiter, which functions as a hidden conduit for the material and biological "mess" of domestic life, thus preserving the purity of the main living spaces.

Fig. 93

Dining area, Maison La Roche, Paris. Photograph by author, January 2025. This image documents the immaculate, curated aesthetic of the primary residential space, contrasting the ideal surface of the Purist vision with the necessary, but hidden, mechanisms of the dumbwaiter shown in previous image

Kristeva speaks of is no longer merely metaphorical but becomes architectural.

In this way, the dumbwaiter operates as a phantom limb of the house. It is an absent organ that nonetheless functions, like the haunted domestic mechanisms in Hejduk's *Masques* and cryptic sketches of vertical inhabitation. These fragments, like the dumbwaiter, hint at bodies without organs, mouths without speech, rituals without visible priests. It is architecture as uncanny machine.

To this logic we may add a phenomenological layer: how do spectators of Maison La Roche experience this vertical mechanism? Is it comfort or estrangement that the dumbwaiter provides? Surely, the answer is both. The comfort of not having to see waste. The estrangement of never quite knowing how the house works. Modernism often celebrates transparency, but here, we find a radical opacity. The house hides its own workings. It is a closed circuit of abjection.

The dumbwaiter becomes a modernist fetish object, hiding the work of decay while elevating the performance of cleanliness.

It does not simply move up and down; it absorbs and expels, again and again, a looped gesture that negates finality. Every elevation is followed by descent. The meal returns as waste. The house resets. It performs ritual as loop, not climax.

Kristeva warns that abjection is not clean, but "improper and unclean."¹³⁴ The dumbwaiter is dangerous not because it breaks the house's integrity, but because it maintains it, secretly, silently, disturbingly. In this, the dumbwaiter stands as an architectural analogy for repression: the abject is not expelled to be forgotten; it is rerouted.

Maison La Roche's hidden organs resonate with broader architectural precedents. Mies van der Rohe's projects¹³⁵ and the work of Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier in Chandigarh demonstrate similar concealments of plumbing and service spaces. In these sites, backstage areas represent spatial trauma-zones of labor and bodily waste that disrupt the smooth formal narrative of modernist architecture. As noted in *The Open Hand*, these infrastructural backstages ensure that a visitor "can easily be deluded into believing that they have actually been eliminated, while they have only been hidden."¹³⁶ Such strategies reflect a conscious orchestration of invisibility, where

134. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 104.

135. Detlef Mertins, *Mies* (London: Phaidon, 2013).

136. Russell Walden, ed., *The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977; repr., New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), 397.



Fig. 94

Sink, showing right angle proximity, Maison La Roche, Paris. Archival photograph, Documentation Centre, Fondation Le Corbusier. This historical image documents the original installation of the kitchen sink, highlighting its right-angle placement and stark, functional design.

Fig. 95

Sink, showing right angle proximity, Maison La Roche, Paris. Archival photograph, Documentation Centre, Fondation Le Corbusier. This historical image documents the original installation of the kitchen sink, highlighting its right-angle placement and stark, functional design.

Fig. 96

Right angle: The proximity between sink and dumbwaiter. Photograph by author, Maison La Roche, Paris, January 2025. This visual evidence captures the close physical relationship between the two main organs of domestic labor (the sink for washing and the dumbwaiter for vertical transport).

Fig. 97

Right angle annotated showing the proximity between sink and dumbwaiter. Photograph by author, Maison La Roche, Paris, January 2025. This annotated photograph uses digital markings (authorship implied by "photography, by authors") to visually emphasize the critical right-angle proximity, arguing that this architectural precision is used to structurally and psychologically repel the domestic "mess" from the house's immaculate self-image.

the "spatial music" of the public realm relies entirely upon the sequestering of its mechanical functions.

This trauma is spatialized as a form of architectural silence or repression. Trash chutes, pipes, and dumbwaiters become "invisible infrastructures" that absorb social anxieties about class, cleanliness, and bodily functions. Their invisibility is not mere neglect but a deliberate design strategy to maintain the aesthetic and symbolic order.

Moreover, consider the placement of the sink on the first floor in Maison La Roche, immediately "adjacent" to the dumbwaiter.¹³⁷ This detail is not accidental; instead, it is geometrically precise, placed at a right angle to the shaft. The sink, a vessel of purification, exists in proximity to the vertical corridor of "abjection."¹³⁸ The positioning is architectural poetry: the "vertical and horizontal meet" not in chaos, but in rational choreography.¹³⁹

Le Corbusier's *Poème de l'angle droit* evokes this meeting of axes as a kind of sacred geometry. "The verticals of the spirit," he writes, standing firm against gravity, aligned to the heavens.¹⁴⁰ The horizontal is of the earth, of repose. In this meeting, Le Corbusier does not see contradiction, but order. And yet here, the

vertical dumbwaiter, instead of elevating spirit, elevates food, only to return its detritus downward. The sacred is displaced by the practical.

Le Corbusier's right angle becomes a kind of secular cross. In place of resurrection, we have ritual. In place of the body of Christ, we have plates and cutlery. It is not difficult to read this configuration as symbolic of the modern domestic rite. The dumbwaiter is the hidden servant, the mute priest, the throat of the house that ingests and expels without display. The sink, its partner, is the purification basin. Together, they form a communion machine, one that processes, cleanses, and resets the table for the next meal, the next prayer, the next performance.

137. Fondation Le Corbusier, *Maisons La Roche et Jeanneret*.

138. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

139. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section C.

140. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section C.

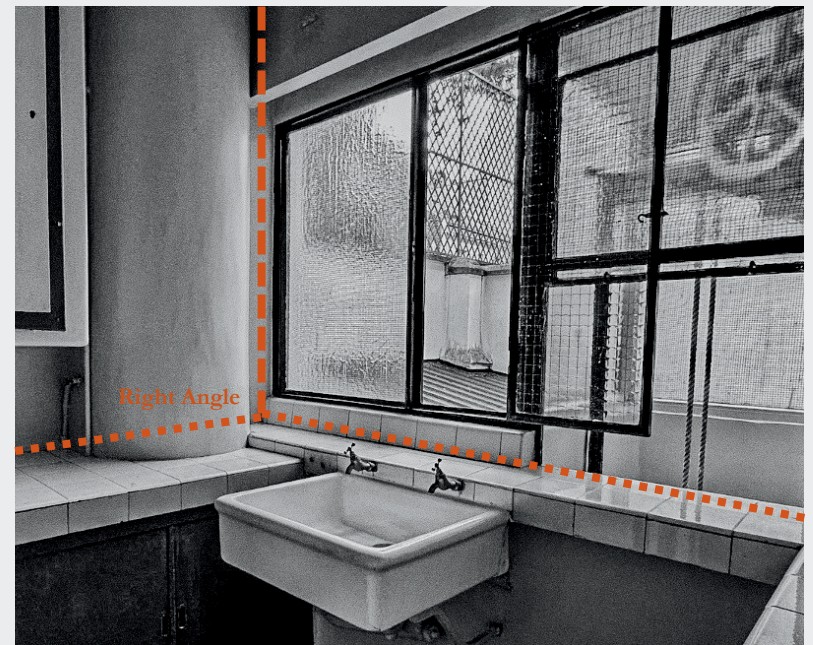
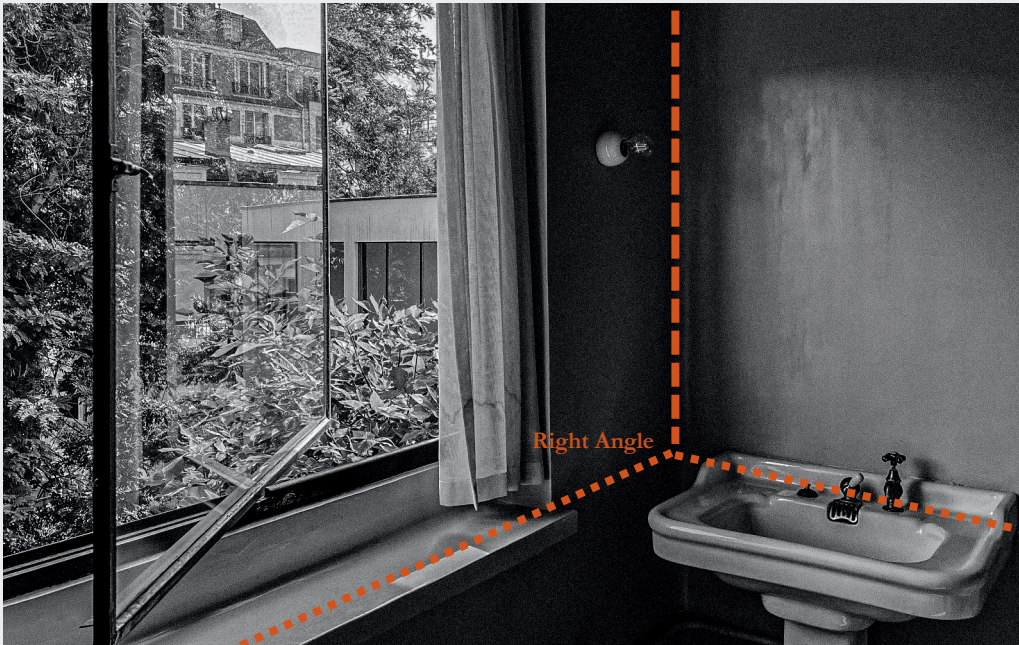


Fig. 98

Messy dining table. Digital sketch by author. This conceptual drawing visualizes the confrontation of the abject, presenting the antithesis of the immaculate modernist interior by depicting the accumulated disorder of everyday domestic life, the food scraps, dirty dishes, and general mess that Le Corbusier's architecture seeks to repress.

Fig. 99

Esophagus. AI-generated image. This visual analogy, generated to model the biological organ, is used to represent the concealed circulation system within the house.

Fig. 100

Stacked Dishes, Cork, Ireland. Photograph by author, March 17. This photographic detail captures the material reality of unassimilated domestic waste, highlighting the dirty, stacked dishes as a physical manifestation of the abject that must be removed via the service mechanisms to maintain the purity and ideological coherence of the main living spaces.



141. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* trans, Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

142. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

143. Tom McCarthy, *C* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2010).

The Turn

Le Corbusier's famous term, machine for living, finds uncanny realization in the dumbwaiter: a mechanical extension of domestic functionality. It orchestrates rhythm, separates purity from defilement, and enforces symbolic hygiene.

But it also evokes anxiety, the mechanization of intimacy. The dumbwaiter dehumanizes the ritual of eating and discarding. It becomes a technological abject, as Kristeva might describe: a site that horrifies because it "disturbs identity, system, order" and "does not respect borders."¹⁴¹

The dumbwaiter, in this structure, is both the trapdoor and the assistant. It performs the tricks of hand that make the household seem effortless. But like all magic, it relies on what is unseen. The abject, per Kristeva, is "what does not respect borders, positions, rules," that must be excluded to preserve the subject's boundaries.¹⁴² The dumbwaiter serves as an architecture of concealment; its silence is a screen for a reality that is "opposed".

In this, we return to Tom McCarthy's reading of Joyce as an author who cannibalizes literature itself. In *Ulysses* everything is described; nothing is omitted,

Leopold Bloom's digestive processes are narrated, his meals and eliminations given literary presence. McCarthy's account helps us see how modernist (and post-modern) textual strategies mirror architectural strategies that both reveal and regiment bodily flow.¹⁴³

Maison La Roche, by contrast, is literature that omits, design that removes. It can be understood as a form of architectural narrative that communicates through omission rather than elaboration. Unlike conventional buildings that rely on ornamentation or symbolic expression to convey meaning, Maison La Roche engages in a reductive design strategy, where meaning is constructed through absence, restraint, and spatial clarity.

The house functions as a kind of architectural literature in which elements are deliberately excluded to focus attention on movement, volume, and light.¹⁰ This approach aligns with Le Corbusier's modernist ethos, where architecture is purified to its essentials; in *Vers une architecture* and in *Poème de l'angle droit* he repeatedly advocates reduction to form and the primacy of spatial order. In this context, features such as the dumbwaiter or the split-level gallery become central narrative devices, not merely functional, but expressive of a broader conceptual order.

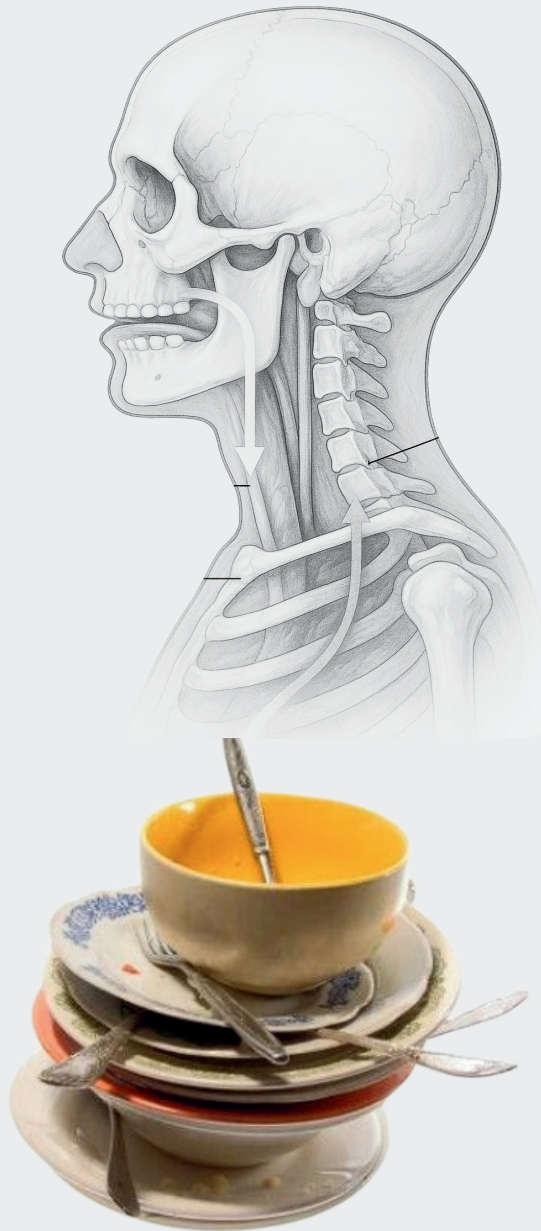


Fig. 101

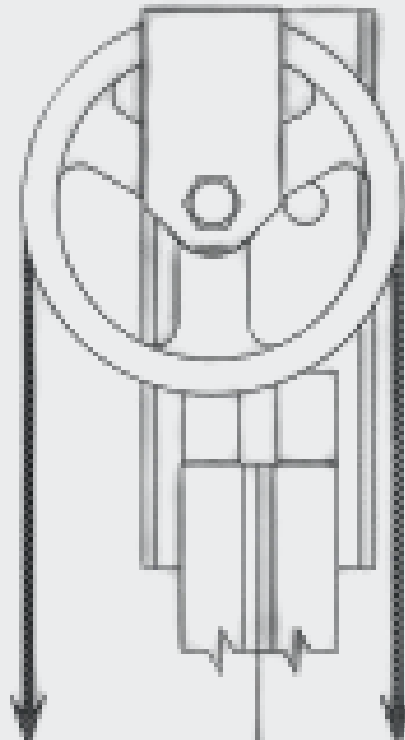
Pulley of the Dumbwaiter. Digital model by author. This analytical drawing focuses on the mechanical component responsible for the dumbwaiter's vertical movement.

Fig. 102

Manual dumbwaiter shaft. Wikipedia Commons. This diagram illustrates the generic, historical mechanism of the manual dumbwaiter shaft, providing technical context for the vertical conduit used to transport materials and emphasizing the infrastructure's primary role in physically segregating the service elements from the purified spaces of the main residence.

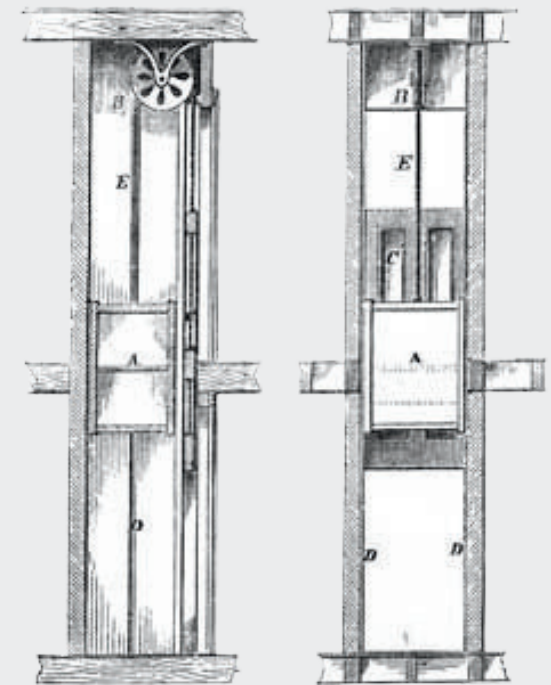
Fig. 103

John Hejduk, Sketches for characters from the Lancaster/Hanover Masque, 1980–1982. DR1988:0291:015, John Hejduk fonds, CCA Collection. These sketches introduce the corporeal and metaphorical presence of architectural characters, providing a critical lens through which to analyze the human body's role in the domestic machine and relating the themes of labor and concealment to the symbolic architecture of the Masques.

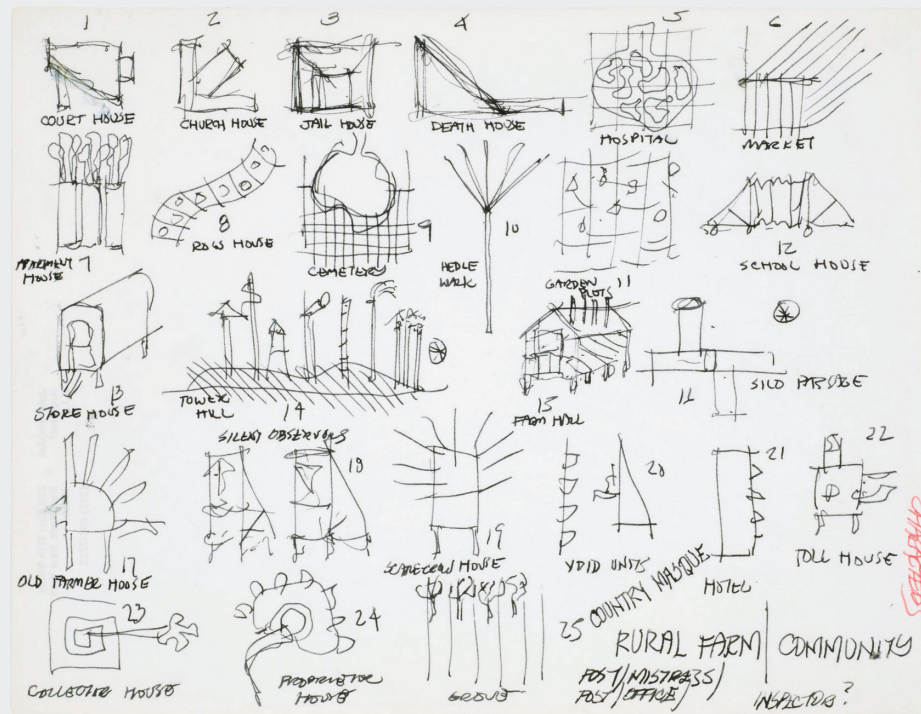


144. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

145. Le Corbusier. *Towards a New Architecture*. Translated by Frederick Etchells. London: John Rodker, 1931, n23-51.



This tension between the body and its deletion, the abject and its management, mirrors the modern subject's own condition. The dumbwaiter becomes an index of this condition: a pointer to what must be hidden for civilization to function. As Julia Kristeva makes clear, abjection is not simply dirt but a "jettisoned object" that must be cast out to preserve the subject's coherence. The abject is that which "draws me toward the place where meaning collapses," and the household's service organs perform precisely this work of displacement-sequestering the visceral "noise" of the body to maintain the fiction of a pure, modernist space.¹⁴⁴



Verticality, for Le Corbusier, was symbolic of moral ascent. The pilotis, the vertical window, and the skyscraper gesture all suggest upward movement and clarity, reflecting his belief that architecture is "the masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light." By elevating the structure on pilotis, he creates a "liberation from the ground," transmuting the messy, organic horizontal plane into a vertical gesture of order and "plastic emotion."¹⁴⁵



Fig. 104

Act of disappearing overlayed on Disappearing Hands. This analytical overlay graphically interprets the concept of disappearance by superimposing the functional removal of domestic labor (the mess and the servant's physical presence) onto the representation of vanishing hands, emphasizing how architecture actively enforces a state of domestic invisibility.

Fig. 105

Arina Voskanyan, Disappearing Hands. This image serves as a metaphorical reference for the architectural critique, illustrating the act of corporeal fading and directly relating the aesthetic of vanishing hands to the spatial and ideological repression of service workers and their labor within the purified modernist home.

The Prestige

The closed circuit opens new space for interpretation. If the dumbwaiter is a mechanical throat, it must be accompanied by a digestive system. Where, then, is the stomach of the house? Perhaps the kitchen, tucked below. But unlike the theatricality of upstairs, the kitchen remains grounded, out of sight. It is the shadow body of the house. The dumbwaiter does not bring light to it, it merely moves through it, swiftly and without attention.

This subtle architecture of shadows, the upstairs/downstairs, clean/dirty, visible/hidden, is the logic of abjection mapped onto space. The dumbwaiter becomes a central organ in this anatomy of purity. It dissects the house, vertical layer by vertical layer, and assigns moral weight to each level. What rises is offered. What descends is expelled.

Maison La Roche, in this reading, becomes a house with a hidden body. Its organs are embedded in walls. Its throat is steel. Its purifying basins glisten in tile. It is a modernist cathedral with plumbing. The sacred and the

sanitary intertwine. The result is uncanny: a house that eats, drinks, and purifies without ever seeming to move.

And yet this movement, the mechanical grace of food going up, waste going down, is the house's true performance. It is not the promenade architecturale that reveals the machine; it is the hidden shaft. The dumbwaiter is the climax of the right angle. It is where vertical and horizontal, sacred and profane, body and machine, all meet.¹⁴⁶ It is the prestige.

146. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section C.

Fig. 106

Tablecloth, Quarlina. Photograph. This image of a tablecloth functions as a visual contrast to the immaculate, bare surfaces of modernist design, representing the soft, disposable material traditionally used to manage and conceal the mess of dining and emphasizing the domestic effort required to maintain a purified, unstained architectural aesthetic.

Fig. 107

Dining area, Maison La Roche, Paris. Photograph by author, January 2025.



147. Beatriz Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), 66.

148. Colomina, *Sexuality and Space*, 74.



Flesh as Foundation and Foreshadowing

In Maison La Roche, flesh, labor, and dirt are not merely marginal or incidental aspects of the architectural narrative; its possible, they constitute the hidden, often suppressed foundation upon which the pristine clarity of modernism is constructed. The gleaming white galleries, immaculate walls, and carefully choreographed spaces rely fundamentally on the systematic erasure and concealment of the house's abject realities, the bodily labor of servants, the dirt, waste that accrue in everyday life, and the raw, visceral desires that the modernist ideal attempts to sanitize or repress.

Labour, as embodied in the hidden servant staircases, scullery, and dumbwaiter, represents the invisible human effort that sustains the visible architectural spectacle. This labor is feminized and spatially exiled, serving as the "mysterious, the secret, something hidden "that maintains the household's formal order.¹⁴⁷ In Colomina's view, the domestic interior functions as a "detective novel," where the presence of the servant is a rupture in the machinery that must be masked.¹⁴⁸ Dirt and waste, managed through

concealed plumbing, symbolize the material residues of this labor—the bodily byproducts that the architecture seeks to "jettison" to preserve its status as a site of leisure rather than toil.¹⁴⁹

Desire, in this context, is perhaps the most complex and elusive of the three. It is not simply sexual or corporeal longing, but the embodied reality of flesh that refuses to be wholly disciplined or sterilized.¹⁵⁰ Desire manifests as the tension between the idealized purity of the architectural skin and the messy, corporeal life beneath it. It is the force that threatens to rupture the rigid boundaries of control, reminding us that the house is not a lifeless machine but a living body with visceral needs and vulnerabilities.¹⁵¹

Together, labour, dirt, and desire reveal the architecture of repression at work within Maison La Roche, a repression that maintains the illusion of modernist purity by spatially and symbolically exiling its own bodily foundation. This interplay prepares us for a crucial transformation in Act 4. Here, the repression that sustains architectural clarity will no longer

hold; the hidden flesh, with all its abjection and desire, will rupture into the visible realm, disrupting the house's control over vision and space. The eye, which dominated Act 2, now closes in Act 3, making way for the body to assert itself fully. What was once hidden beneath layers of plaster and white paint will emerge, challenging the viewer's understanding and revealing the house as a site of both material and metaphysical tension.

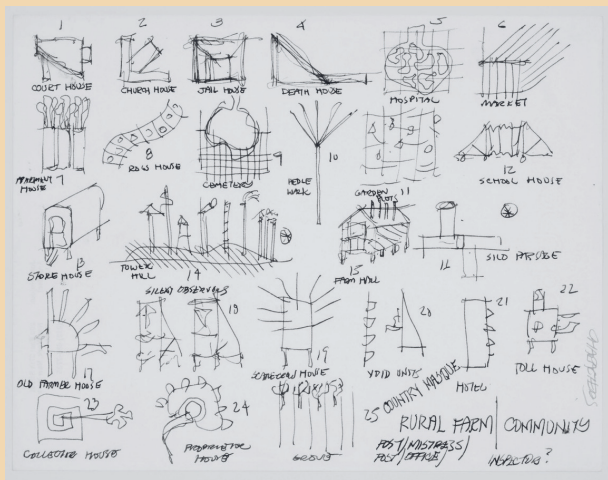
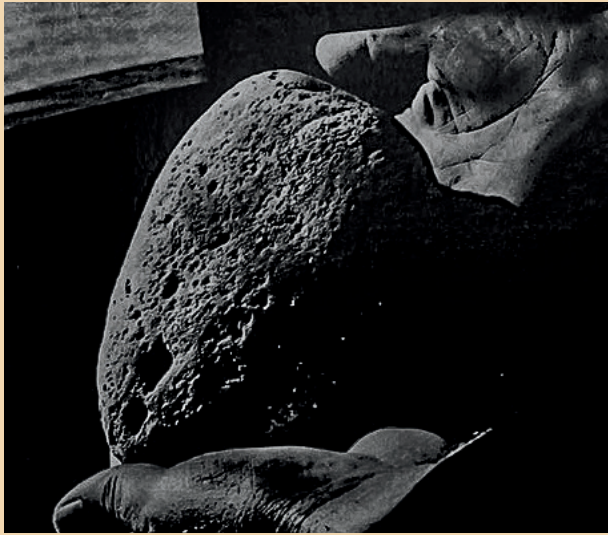
In this way, Act 3 serves as a pivotal threshold, both a foundation and a foreshadowing. It exposes the corporeal realities that underpin modernist architecture while gesturing toward their inevitable return. The pure, sterilized vision of Maison La Roche is not an endpoint but a moment suspended above the raw materiality of flesh, labor, and desire, a moment soon to be undone.

149. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

150. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2-6.

151. John Hejduk, *Victims* (London: Architectural Association, 1984).

Interlude IV



House as Ritual Theatre

John Hejduk's conceptual work, particularly the *Wall House* series, insists that architecture carries an irreducible dual nature. Functional elements are never singular in meaning; they operate simultaneously as use, figure, and narrative device. Hejduk develops an architectural language in which walls, openings, and circulation acquire double readings, transforming everyday components into instruments of temporal, bodily, and psychological experience.¹⁵² Like the raw stone in Masonic allegory, the house begins as something unrefined, a place where dust, desire, and the traces of labour persist.¹⁵³ In the hands of the architect, this base material undergoes a process of refinement, shifting toward a purified form.

For Le Corbusier, this was both a mere design method and a metaphysical act. Deeply attuned to the symbolic resonances of Freemasonry, with its dual commitment to rational order and mystical ascent, he conceived architecture as a vessel for inner awakening.¹⁵⁴ His *promenade architecturale* mirrors the Masonic ideal of progression from imperfection toward mastery and enlightenment. As Hulin observed of Masonry, its higher purpose is to give the individual the means of ensuring his spiritual development by collective work.¹⁵⁵ In *Maison La Roche*, this collective work is not of hands but of eyes, a disciplined choreography of vision that cleanses even as it frames.

Here Hejduk's own insistence on the house as ritual becomes crucial. For him, architecture was an enacted drama, a theatre of operations, where space functions as a stage for symbolic acts.¹⁵⁶ In *Masques of Medusa*, Hejduk suggests that walls, windows, thresholds, and voids are inert elements that perform, conceal, and reveal.¹⁵⁷ *Maison La Roche*, viewed through this lens, emerges as a ritual chamber: its white walls operate as both scrim and screen, disciplining the eye into a purified, moralised act of seeing. The ritual is not only spatial but spiritual, for the visitor moves through a sequence that recalls what Hejduk described as "architectural masques", choreographed journeys where form and perception are transformed.¹⁵⁸

The raw stone, in this metaphor, is the visitor's unfiltered perception: scattered, impure, tangled in the

noise of the body. The polished stone is the gaze that emerges at the end of the house's ritual, sharpened, clarified, stripped of the dirt of subjectivity. This transformation finds a parallel in Amédée Ozenfant's Purist *milk bottle*: an object stripped of superfluous detail, reduced to essential geometry, and purified of the messiness of its origin. Just as raw milk is sterilized and bottled into a hygienic form, the house distils vision into something exact and morally upright.¹⁵⁹ In alchemical terms, lead aspires to gold; here, sight aspires to purity. Vision is not passive but an active process of moralisation: what is seen is made clean, and what is unclean is concealed.

Hejduk's works often embodies shift: *The Lancaster/Hanover Masque* and *Berlin Masque* both treat the architectural setting as ritual theatre, where the subject is not simply housed but transformed by the choreography of movement and gaze.¹⁶⁰ Maison La Roche operates in a similar manner. The visitor enters with vision clouded, unrefined; the *promenade* filters, frames, and ultimately disciplines perception into a clarified state. The ritual of seeing becomes a rite of purification.

Viewed together, the raw stone and the milk bottle become metaphorical counterparts: both begin as matter rooted in natural imperfection, and both, through processes of purification, alchemical transmutation or modernist reduction, emerge as refined, disciplined forms. Le Corbusier's architecture, like Hejduk's masques, operates as a crucible for this transmutation. The *promenade architecturale* acts as a passage, guiding visitors from sensory noise to disciplined gaze.

This alchemy parallels the medieval pursuit of turning lead into gold: vision itself is transformed, cleansed of subjectivity, moralised, and controlled. What is "seen" within Maison La Roche is carefully curated; the house functions as a camera obscura, filtering out the impure and presenting only what is clean. The sterility embodied by the milk bottle echoes this, reinforcing the modernist aspiration that vision, and by extension architecture, should be lucid, functional, and uncontaminated. The raw stone encapsulate the double readings of Maison La Roche's design. As physical space, it is material and solid; as symbolic space, it is a site of metaphysical purification where architecture becomes ritual.

Fig. 108

The rough versus polished stone, from J. K. Birksted's study of Masonic allegory in Le Corbusier's work. Source: J. K. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

Fig. 109

Sketches for characters from the Lancaster/Hanover Masque (1980–1982), illustrating John Hejduk's concept of the house as a theatrical stage for symbolic acts. John Hejduk, DR1988:0291:015, John Hejduk fonds, CCA Collection.

152. Van den Bergh, Wim, ed. *John Hejduk: Wall House 2*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1995.

153. J. K. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 304.

154. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult*, 303–305.

155. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult*, 151.

156. John Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa: Works 1947–1983*, ed. Kim Shkapich (New York: Rizzoli, 1985).

157. Kimberly Shkapich, "John Hejduk's Masques," *Architectural Design* 59, no. 3–4 (1989).

158. John Hejduk, *Victims* (London: Architectural Association, 1986).

159. Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, *Après le cubisme* (Paris: Éditions Figuière, 1918).

160. John Hejduk, *The Lancaster/Hanover Masque* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1974).

ACT 4

Paper-Frame-Vision

Fig. 110

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate D.1, "Fusion: Encounter, Risk, and the Alchemical Transformation." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Theme D - Fusion



161. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section D.

162. J. K. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 147.

163. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section D.

164. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section D.

165. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section D.

Theme D of *The Poem of the Right Angle* is titled Fusion and follows the theme of Flesh.¹⁶¹ The sequence could be deliberate: after the immediacy of the body and its desires in Flesh, Fusion introduces the question of encounter and transformation. Flesh isolates, while Fusion tests that isolation through contact, risk, and the possibility of union. The color red underscores this transition. It signifies blood, vitality, and sacrifice, but also the stage of rubedo in alchemical thought, where matter is transfigured after previous stages of dissolution and whitening.¹⁶² Red is initiatory, as it marks a threshold where the individual is altered through risk and communion.

The single poem of this theme begins with an emphasis on error: “mistaking too many mediate causesmistaking our lives.”¹⁶³ Le Corbusier highlights the danger of a life lived through secondary causes and distractions, a life detached from immediacy.¹⁶⁴ Against this backdrop, fusion emerges as an act of defiance and risk, where the subject chooses transformation over passivity. The alchemical metaphor of fusion of metals situates union as both material and symbolic, yet provisional,

an event that transforms without binding. Vision plays a key role: the gaze becomes the threshold where separation is suspended, producing a fleeting flash of communion. The imagery then shifts to cycles of ebb and return, where silence and rhythm mark the temporality of fusion. The closing lines affirm that this risk inaugurates “a new time,” a phase of transition in which life is no longer mistaken but redeemed through encounter and renewal.¹⁶⁵

Theme D therefore functions as a critical hinge in the structure of the *Poem of the Right Angle*. Following Flesh, it moves from the closed intensity of desire to the openness of encounter. Its color red marks the process of rupture and transformation. Its single poem articulates fusion as risk, alchemy, vision, and cyclical renewal. The theme insists that only through such risk can one avoid the mistake of a life mediated by prohibitions. Fusion is not resolution but passage, a limit that opens toward further transformation.

The Moment of Passage

The act of tearing a veil, a motif resonant across esoteric traditions and occult rites, signifies a passage from concealment to revelation, a violent yet necessary rupture that ushers in initiation and transformation. In his *exposés* of Freemasonry, Léo Taxil described the ritual tearing of paper screens as the moment when, the initiate finds himself suddenly projected into dazzling light, as if a false world had collapsed in an instant.¹⁶⁶ Taxil frames this gesture not as incidental but as central to initiation, a violent dismantling of illusion that thrusts the novice into a liminal realm beyond ordinary sight. The veil here is both material and symbolic: its destruction enacts a revelation in which the hidden becomes manifest, binding secrecy to blood, sacrifice, and visionary knowledge. The paper screen becomes an especially potent symbol in this respect: fragile yet resistant, delicate yet decisive. Its tearing represents not merely physical destruction but a metaphysical passage, a moment when architecture ceases to regulate perception and begins instead to destabilize it. When the surface ruptures, the hidden order seeps through like blood through fabric, destabilizing the binary of concealment and revelation. Architecture, in this reading, is no longer a static enclosure but a site of ritualized transformation.

This conceptual bleeding finds haunting expression in John Hejduk's description of Maison La Roche during his exhibition there in 1986. In his letter, Hejduk remarked on the "red dust" which pervades the house, permeating its walls, a residue of sacrifice which stains even the air.¹⁶⁷ Hejduk's imagery transforms the house into a living palimpsest, not a container of objects but a body that bleeds, ruptures, and remembers. The "red dust" is less a literal presence than a metaphor for visionary rupture, a reminder that architecture itself can absorb and emit the symbolic energies of sacrifice and transformation. Hejduk's writing anticipates the collapse of binary categories: clean and dirty, visible and invisible, interior and exterior. In his account, Maison La Roche is no longer a pristine white modernist object but a haunted space of initiation, marked by blood, memory, and visionary disturbance.

Fig. 111

Candidate thrown into paper, illustrating the Masonic ritual of tearing the veil (Illustration). Source: Léo Taxil, *Les mystères de la Franc-Maçonnerie* (Paris, 1886).



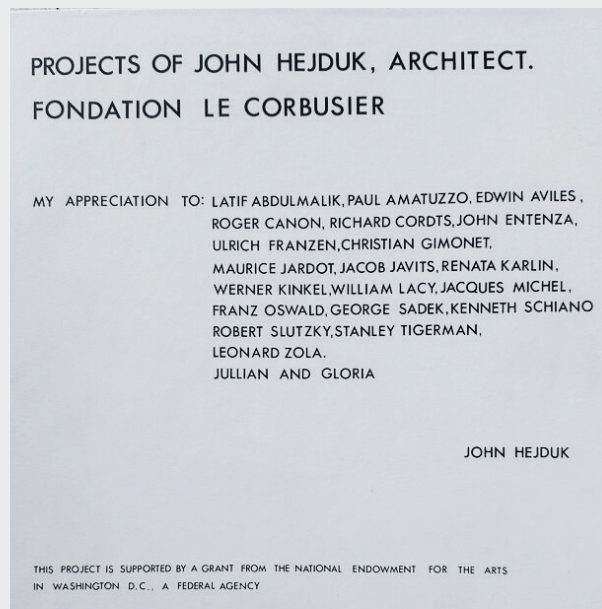
166. J. K. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 154.

167. John Hejduk, "Letter to the Fondation Le Corbusier regarding the Maison La Roche Exhibition," October 1987, Box 4, Archive of the Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris.

Seen together, Taxil's description of tearing the veil and Hejduk's imagery of red dust converge on a shared logic: that architecture and ritual both depend on acts of rupture. The paper screen, like the modernist wall, conceals until it is torn, and its destruction opens a passage to a new field of vision. The "tearing" is thus not destructive but generative; it creates the conditions for communion with what lies beyond, the necessary fusion of body, space, and symbol. In this sense, the veil becomes a fragile threshold; to tear it is to enter the space of visionary passage, where architecture is reimagined as an alchemical and initiatory act.

Fig. 112

John Hejduk, "Letter to the Fondation Le Corbusier regarding the Maison La Roche Exhibition," October 1987, Box 4, Archive of the Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris.



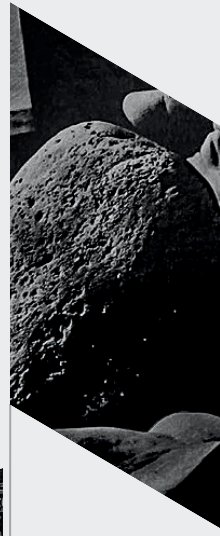




Belief in the existence of universal symbols from archaic civilizations, ancient traditions, and classical myths, including alchemy, the kabala, and Vedism, and in their revelatory possibilities and initiatory potential.



Le Corbusier's copy of Serge Hulin, I.e., Franes Marons
The architect's lifelong interest in the subject of Freemasonry Le Corbusier's annotations follow page 29, where Hulin forcefully describes Freemasonry in terms of its rational, ethical, and humanitarian aspects, and of its mystical and spiritual aspects. Hulin cites in order to demonstrate that Freemasonry's higher purpose is "to give the individual the means of ensuring his spiritual development by collective work."



The rough versus polished stone
Represents an unrefined, imperfect state, while the polished stone signifies mastery, enlightenment, or personal and spiritual refinement.



William Ritter & Peladan
William can converse with a real writer who treats him as a colleague. They talk a great deal about the kabala, the main reason for the student's journey, while Péladan

10 To Be an Architect Is Nothing, You Have to Be a Poet



Le Corbusier saw geometric and symbolic elements like the right angle, compass, cross pattée, Modulor, and regulating lines as deeply ingrained in human intellect, much like religious catechism. He believed these **"time-honored ideas"** naturally guide architectural thought, triggering structured and meaningful design responses. This reflects his philosophy that architecture should follow universal principles rooted in mathematics, mysticism, and symbolic traditions, including Masonic influences.

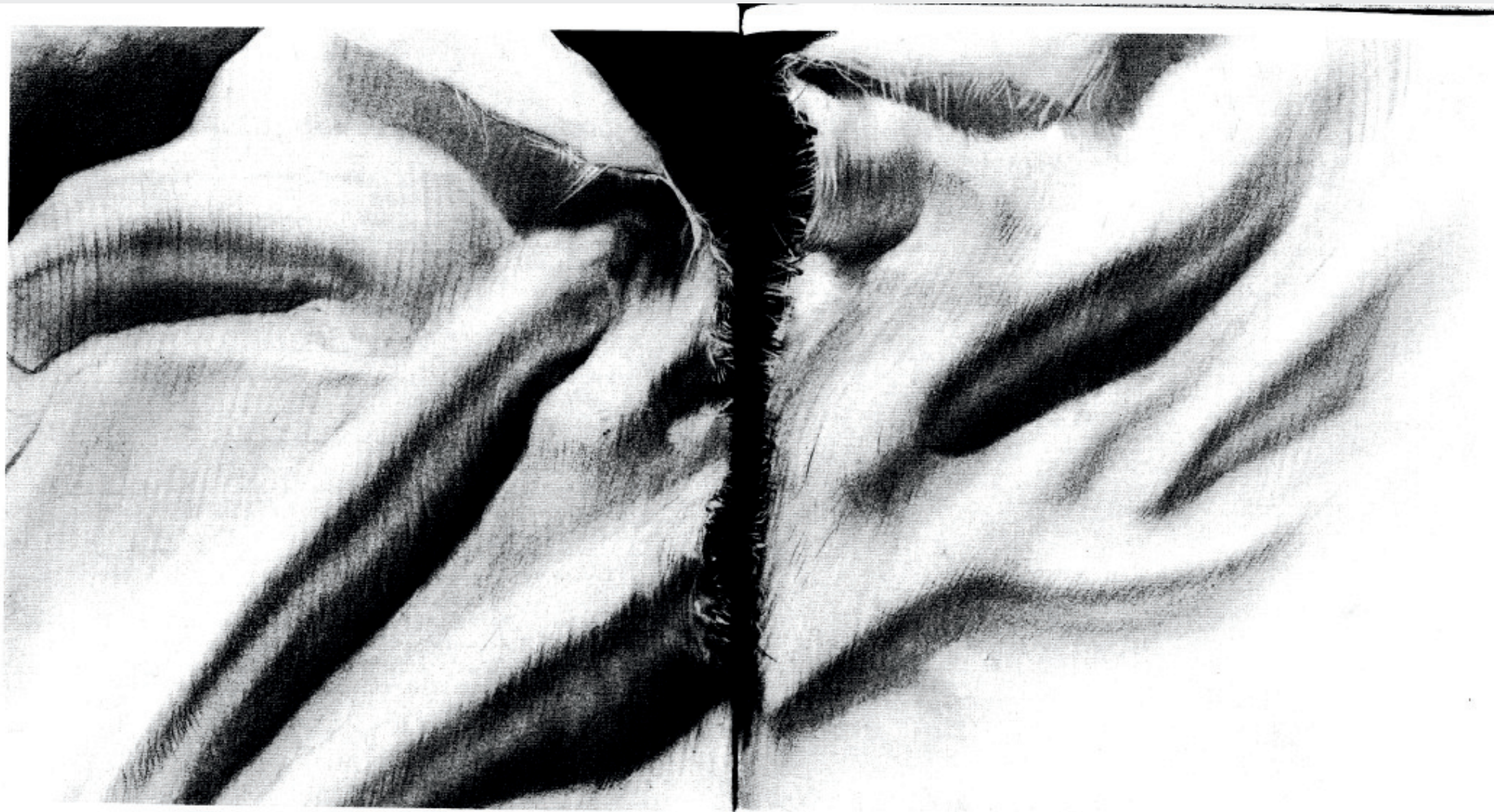


Fig. 113(Spread)

Visual Synthesis of Le Corbusier's Occult Code. Spread derived from Birksted's *Le Corbusier and the Occult: The Code* (2009). This composite image integrates text and imagery, such as the "rough versus polished stone" and Masonic diagrams, to illustrate Le Corbusier's deep engagement with Freemasonry, the Kabbalah, and esoteric symbolism. The spread serves to establish the spiritual and mystical underpinnings of his design philosophy, providing the conceptual framework for analyzing the hidden infrastructural "organs" of Maison La Roche.

Fig. 114

Veils, Savoir, by Hélène Cixous. Image from *Veils* by Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida. This figure introduces the concept of the veil as a critical metaphor for concealment, mediation, and repression in both text and space, drawing on the philosophical discourse of Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida to analyze the architectural suppression of domestic mess and labor.

(Source: Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, and Geoffrey Bennington, *Veils* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).)

Theme D in *Poème de l'angle droit* marks Fusion, a critical moment of merging, rupture, and transformation, symbolized by the color red¹⁶⁸ Red here is a ritual color, representing blood, sacrifice, initiation, and profound change. In Maison La Roche, this color signals the house's symbolic bleeding, the moment when its previously rigid boundaries begin to fracture.

A key metaphor for this transformation is the paper screen, a delicate yet powerful architectural element that represents the threshold between control and release. This screen evokes the Freemason ritual where a candidate is literally thrown through a paper veil or screen, a dramatic act signifying initiation, passage from ignorance to knowledge, from repression to revelation.¹⁶⁹ This tearing is not mere destruction but a sacred rupture that breaks illusions and opens access to a new realm of consciousness.

Derrida and Cixous elaborate on the veil as both a literal and figurative device: a boundary that both conceals and reveals. Cixous describes her myopia as an "imperceptible native veil" and the "genius of separation" that marks the limit

between presence and absence. The veil's removal is a moment of "violent gentleness", a "brusque apparition" where the world is finally given to the subject. This tearing is not a simple revelation but a removal of the "staples" that held the eye, a break in the order that Derrida likens to the tearing of the veil, allowing for a vision that is no longer "separated sight".¹⁷⁰

Paul Virilio's *Aesthetics of Disappearance* offers a parallel by describing how "technical prostheses of mediatization" create a "world-without-memory" where the gaps in physical reality are elided.¹⁷¹ The veil here is not just torn; it dissolves into an immersive surface where identity and perception blur. Maison La Roche's paper screen acts similarly, a fragile membrane that both frames and fractures the architectural gaze.

Thus, the architectural "screen" that once filtered and purified vision in Maison La Roche is violently ruptured, marking a veiled transition where the house bleeds metaphorically and the repression of Acts 2 and 3 begins to yield to a transformative re-visioning.

168. Le Corbusier(Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section D.

169. J. K. Birksted, *Le Corbusier and the Occult* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004). 154-155.

170. Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, *Veils*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001) 3-9.

171. Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, trans. Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989).



Fig. 115

Exterior of Maison La Roche, scaffolding against the façade, Paris. Photograph by author, January 2025. The scaffolding encasing the façade violently dismantles the illusion of the house as a static, immaculate object.

Fig. 116

View of façade, from interior of Maison La Roche, focusing on scaffolding, Paris. Photograph by author, January 2025. Framing the external scaffolding from within, this image illustrates how the destruction of the veil creates a "new field of vision".

Fig. 117

Passage way, with polythene sheeting during restoration process, Maison La Roche, Paris. Photograph by author, January 2025. The polythene sheeting functions as an ephemeral veil, its partial opacity enacting the "tearing" of the modernist surface that Léo Taxil described, transforming the promenade into a liminal passage where the house's pristine illusion has collapsed, projecting the observer into a realm of constructional reality.

The Moment of Passage- Ethnography

The air inside Maison La Roche, during its renovation, carried a density that was both physical and symbolic. Dust floated in suspension, catching the light as if time itself had been unsettled. It was not the decorative patina of age, but a fine particulate memory, an archive of human presence and absence. Jacques Derrida's notion of the veil as both concealment and revelation comes to mind here: the dust tried to disclosed a history too delicate to be grasped directly, requiring a membrane between the perceiver and the truth.

The plastic sheeting that swaddled the walls became those membranes, trembling lightly in response to movement, catching whispers of air. They were more than mere protection against paint splatter; they were ritual veils, temporary yet charged, much like the paper screens in Freemasonic initiation rites that Hejduk's *Masques* recall, a surface to be breached, an act of passage.¹⁷² In this suspended state, the house no longer presented itself as a static object of modernist display. It became a liminal chamber, a holding place between its former life and what it was to become, echoing Virilio's idea of the

interval, the charged pause where disappearance and appearance are equally possible.¹⁷³

The soundscape reinforced this altered state. Footsteps had lost their exhibition cadence; they now carried the weight of labour and care, deliberate and cautious. Conversations between workers and conservators dissipated quickly, their echoes clinging to the stairwell before dissolving into the muted air. In certain rooms, the only voice was that of a slow, erratic drip, plumbing fatigue revealing the body of the house, stripped of its modernist façade of utility. This unmasking was a critical exposure, much like Cixous's writing of "Temple veil was torn on the death," which is also a gesture toward the unseen beyond.¹⁷⁴

Even in its temporary shrouding, the building was a stage. The translucent plastic operated as scenography, refracting light, blurring edges, and introducing a strange temporality, each room both itself and not itself, a double image. As Utsav Banerji notes in his meditation on the gaze, the veil is not simply an obstruction but a shifting frame, producing a tension between visibility and withdrawal.¹⁷⁵ Standing inside La Roche during this period was to inhabit that

172. John Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa: Works 1947–1983*, ed. Kim Shkapich (New York: Rizzoli, 1985).

173. Paul Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, trans. Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989).

174. Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, *Veils*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 28.

175. Utsav Banerjee, "The Voice and the Gaze as 'objet petit a,'" *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 13, no. 4 (2021).

Fig. 118

The gallery, covered with polythene sheeting on the ribbon window region, and scaffolding against the ramp, Maison La Roche, Paris. Photograph by author, January 2025. Here, the plastic sheeting disrupts the purity of the ribbon window, materializing the rupture that binds concealment to revelation. The visible scaffolding and veiled window destabilize the regulation of perception, turning the gallery into an architectural veil that has been rent to expose the structure's vulnerability and hidden processes.

Fig. 119

Sketchbook spread, showing site visit learnings, including print photos on sheet with drawings and writings, Maison La Roche, Paris. Digital composite by author, January 2025. This figure documents the integration of observation and analysis, synthesizing fieldwork (photographic documentation) with abstract conceptualization (drawings and critical notes).



tension, to witness the architecture in a moment of becoming, when every surface held the possibility of transformation.

The renovation revealed that architecture's essence is not fixed in form, but in the intervals of its maintenance, its breath, and its vulnerability. To see La Roche under these conditions was to understand it not as a static manifesto of Le Corbusier's vision, but as a living manuscript, its pages momentarily loosened, its margins open to revision.

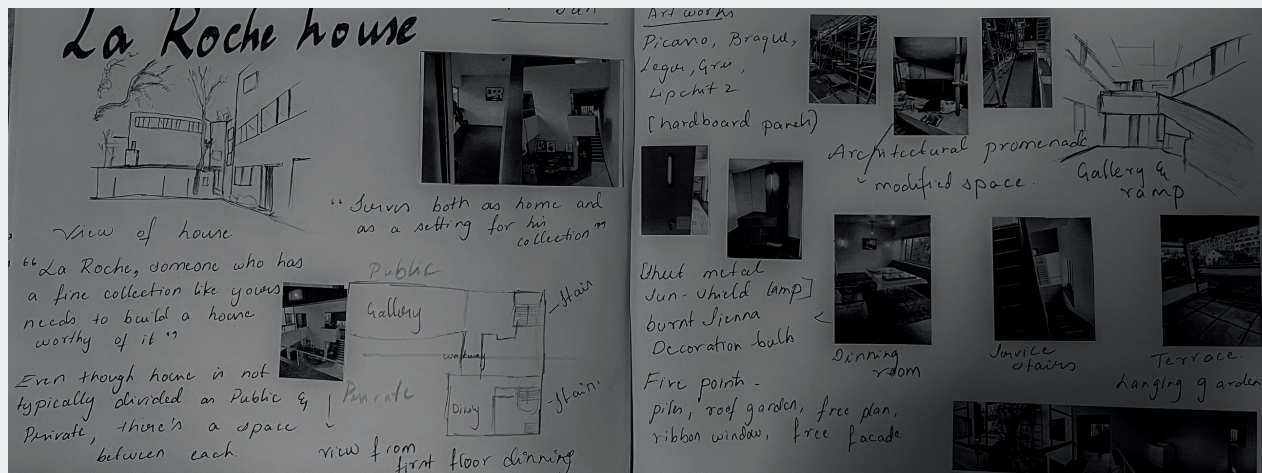


Fig. 120

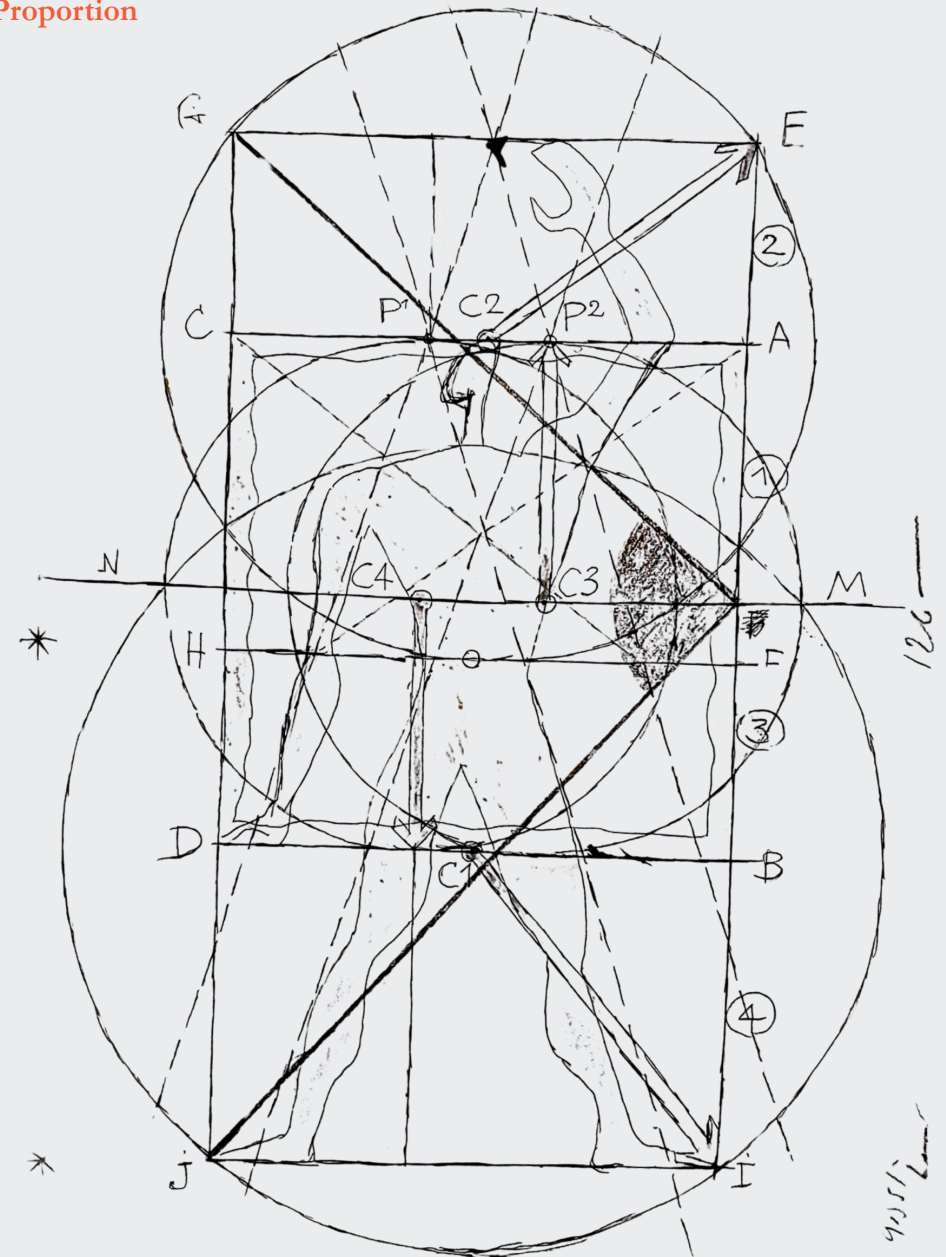
Le Corbusier's Modulor Man, a universal measuring system developed to establish a mathematical order for architecture. The Modulor integrates the proportions of the human body with the golden ratio to create a system of architectural proportion scaled to man, improving both appearance and function.

Cetin Ceren, "The Necessity for Order • Regulating Lines," WordPress, October 31, 2018.

Fig. 121

Regulating Lines and the Golden Ratio in Maison La Roche. This analytical drawing shows how the primary façade and internal sections of Le Corbusier's Maison La Roche are governed by diagonal regulating lines derived from the right angle and the Golden Ratio. Author's own drawing.

The Golden Ratio and Proportion



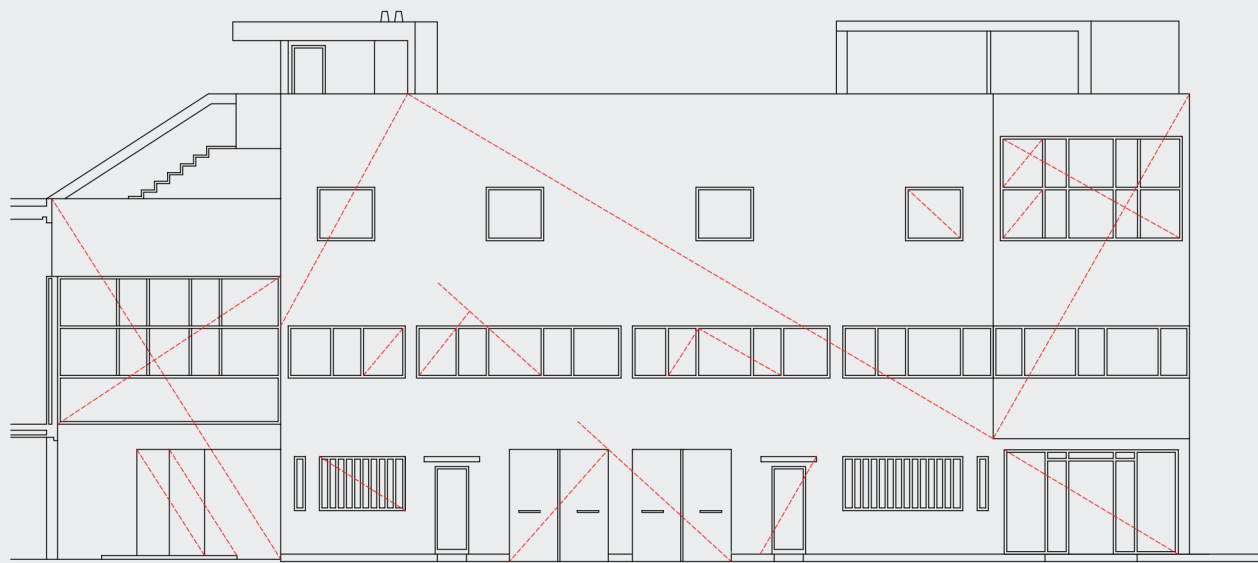
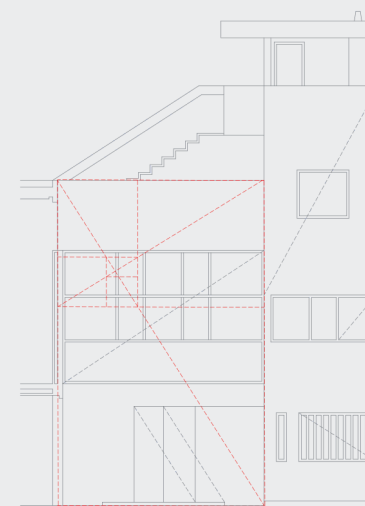
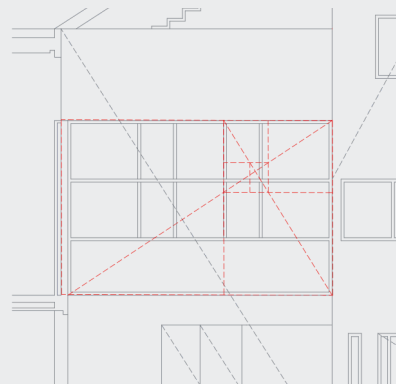
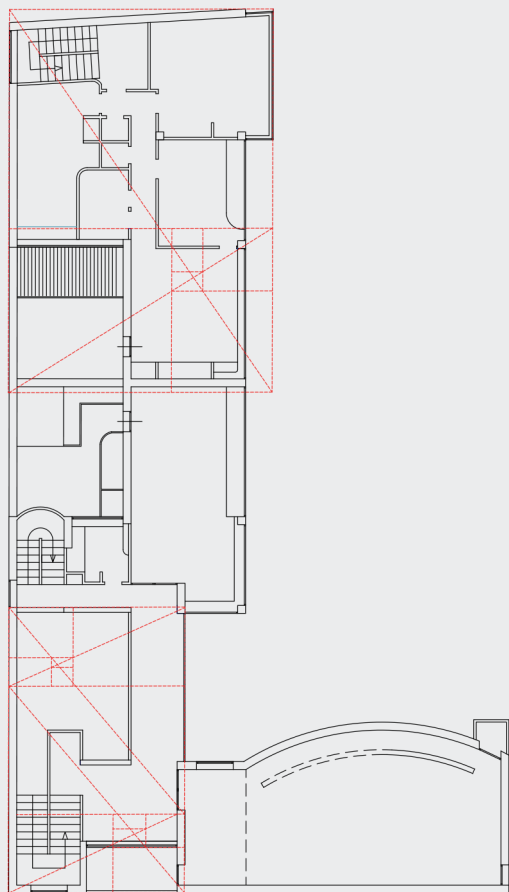
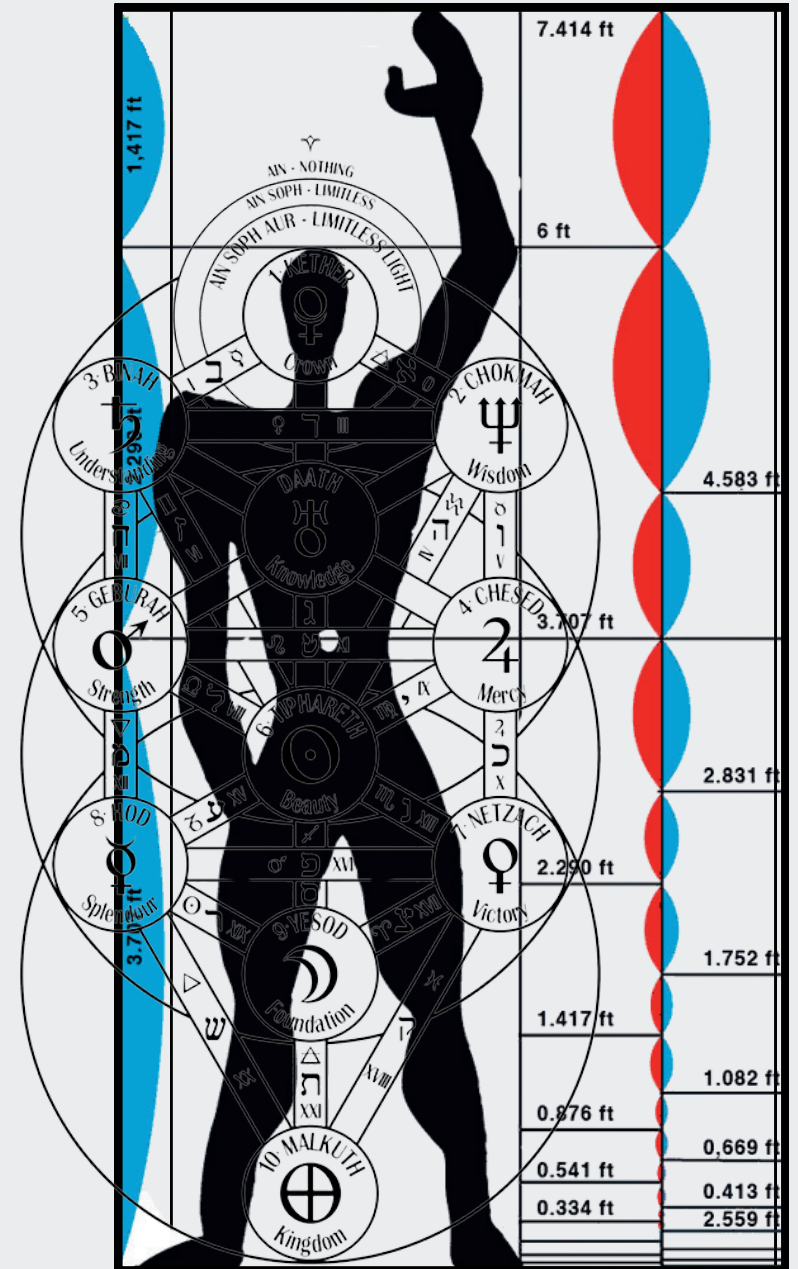


Fig. 122

The Modulor Overlaid with the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. This composite drawing juxtaposes the proportional system of Le Corbusier's Modulor Man (justified by the Golden Section) with the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. The overlay highlights a deliberate, conceptual alignment between Le Corbusier's anthropometric scale and the esoteric structure of the Tree's ten Sephirot (emanations). This alignment serves as visual evidence of Le Corbusier's deep, scholarly interest in the occult tradition, framing his architectural language as a mystical code that sought universal harmony through geometry and secret knowledge.



- 176. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tèriade, 1955), Section D.
- 177. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section D.
- 178. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section D.
- 179. Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine Transaction Co., 1969), 166.

Architecture as Initiation Chamber and Visionary Transformation

In Theme D, Fusion of *Poème de l'angle droit*, Le Corbusier turns from the mechanistic clarity of earlier panels toward a language of alchemy, communion, and transformation. The poem's verses evoke a moment of metaphysical ignition, where separation gives way to synthesis: "Let the metals fuse, tolerate, alchemies which moreover leave you out of the question."¹⁷⁶ Here, fusion is not merely chemical or material, it is existential. The self, once divided between body and mind, becomes molten within a crucible of spiritual transformation. Le Corbusier's imagery of open pupils and crossed glances gestures toward an initiation rite of vision, where architecture becomes a chamber for awakening consciousness.¹⁷⁷ The poem's final lines, "It is through the door of open pupils that the crossed glances were able to lead to the thunderous act of communion", suggest that sight itself becomes the portal through which the individual enters a higher form of being.¹⁷⁸

In this metaphysical framework, Maison La Roche can be reimagined as a space of initiation,

an architectural vessel that mediates between the visible and invisible, the material and the transcendent. The house is no longer a machine for exhibition or dwelling, but a chamber of passage, what anthropologist Victor Turner would call a "liminal zone," where transformation is enacted through spatial ritual.¹⁷⁹ The curved ramp functions like a ritual path, guiding the visitor's movement through compression, release, and revelation. Gallery becomes a metaphysical threshold: a place where modernist purity begins to crack, revealing the psychic and symbolic undercurrents beneath its surface.

The red hue of Theme D, the color of blood, sacrifice, and initiation, finds its architectural echo in the symbolic bleeding of the house. In this act, Maison La Roche ceases to be a mere gallery or exhibition space and becomes a script, a mystical manuscript where interior and exterior realities fuse. The previously rigid binaries of utility and purity, repression and visibility, dissolve into a new synthesis, a visionary seeing that transcends modernist clarity and enters the realm of myth and ritual. The red, like the alchemist's rubedo, marks the final phase of transmutation: from matter to

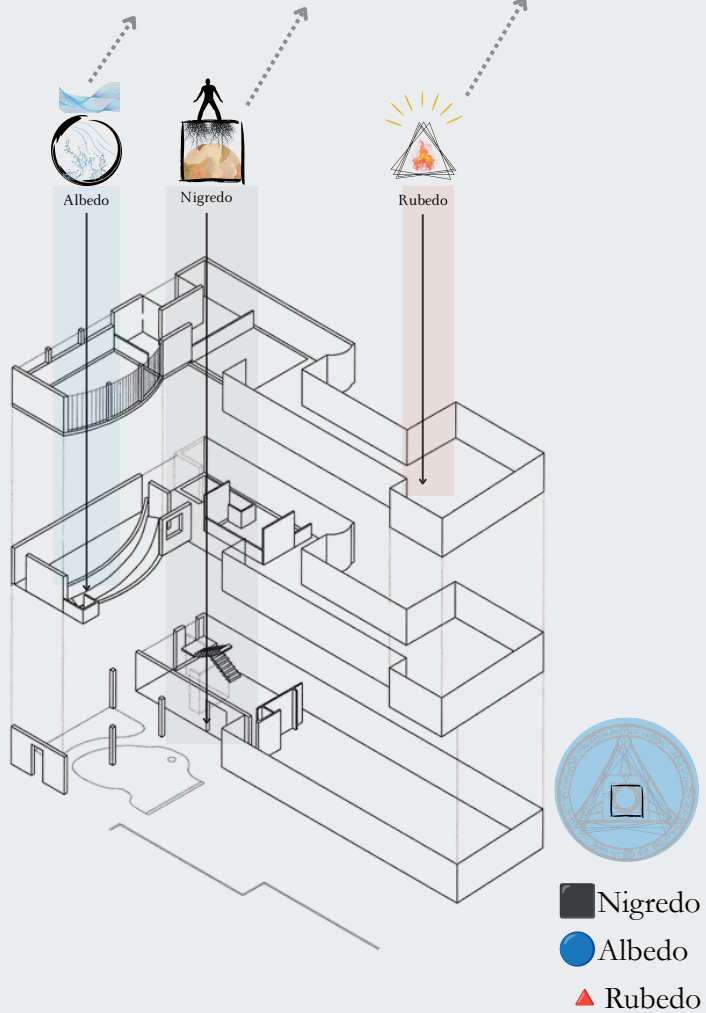


Fig. 123

Axonometric drawing of Maison La Roche, emphasizing the Alchemical Transition (Nigredo, Albedo, Rubedo). Digital drawing by author. This analytical drawing interprets the house's experiential sequence, from the compressed, shadowed entry to the roof terrace, as a metaphor for the three stages of alchemical transformation. The progression moves from Nigredo (dark, compact entry/service areas) through Albedo (reflective passage along the ramp and gallery) to Rubedo (enlightenment and expansive view upon reaching the purified, open-air terrace), thereby reframing Le Corbusier's architectural promenade as a ritualistic passage toward spiritual and formal perfection.

180. John Hejduk, *Mask of Medusa: Works 1947–1983*, ed. Kim Shkapich (New York: Rizzoli, 1985).

181. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section D.

182. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section D.

183. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

spirit, from structure to revelation.

The building becomes what John Hejduk might call a “ritual theatre,” where architecture stages the drama of consciousness itself. Hejduk’s houses of the dead and his *Masques* explore how architecture can act as a psychic chamber, spaces where life, memory, and form converge into ritual performance.¹⁸⁰

Similarly, Maison La Roche enacts a metaphysical theatre of fusion. The house bleeds through its ruptured geometry, its red undercoats exposed during renovation, and its layered surfaces that alternate between concealment and revelation.

The poem’s alchemical language, “metals fuse,” “the sea has gone back down to the bottom of the tide to be able to go back up on time”, echoes the cyclical rhythm of Maison La Roche’s spatial narrative.¹⁸¹ The ramp ascends like a tide, guiding the visitor through phases of purification and fusion, echoing the alchemical process of nigredo, albedo, and rubedo. The transition from the darker, compressed lower levels to the luminous gallery above parallels the

ascension from matter to light, from repression to revelation. The “new time” the poem speaks of, “a stage, a delay, a relay”, is architecturalized in the house’s sectional rhythm, where each threshold marks a pause, a suspension, a preparation for the next transformation.¹⁸²

This reading also connects with Julia Kristeva’s notion of the abject as a precondition for purification. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva describes the abject as that which is “excluded” in order to maintain the illusion of order and purity.¹⁸³ In Maison La Roche, the repression of the domestic, the servant’s body, and the mechanical organs of plumbing becomes the foundation upon which the purified gallery rises. But in Act 4 , Fusion, these repressions return, not as dirt or shame, but as visionary material. The hidden systems, the silent voids, and the repressed energies begin to merge with the visible, allowing the house to bleed its own secrets. Fusion, then, becomes the act of reconciliation between purity and impurity, between architecture’s front and its underbelly.

Le Corbusier’s call to not overwhelm the one who wants to take his share of the risks of life



suggests an ethics of tolerance, a willingness to let contradictions coexist.¹⁸⁴ This aligns with the house's duality as both ascetic and sensuous, both machine and myth. The "open pupils" of the poem become the building's apertures: the horizontal windows, the clerestory cuts, the framed voids that choreograph vision and light.¹⁸⁵ Through these openings, the visitor experiences what Gernot Böhme calls the atmospheric presence of space, "a fusion of horizons is no longer a choice since none are left."¹⁸⁶ Böhme's aesthetics of atmosphere, centered on the experience of presence rather than form, helps articulate how Maison La Roche transforms from a machine of seeing into a chamber of feeling.

The tearing of the paper screen, a motif of this act, represents the climactic moment of initiation. This act corresponds to the alchemical revelation, when the veil between visible and invisible worlds is pierced. The veil here functions as both barrier and invitation, its rupture marking the passage from repression to visionary encounter. What had been concealed beneath white surfaces: dust, cracks, layers of labor, now reappears as revelation. This is the

"thunderous act of communion" Le Corbusier describes: a fusion of opposites, where the architect and the inhabitant, the seen and unseen, finally converge.¹⁸⁷

The house stops performing modernism's sanitized functions and instead enacts an alchemical transformation, inviting the viewer into a liminal space of fusion and revelation. In this space, architecture becomes both text and ritual. The ramp's curvature, the red undercoat beneath white plaster, and the windows framing of light all operate as instruments of initiation, guiding the viewer's consciousness through a visionary passage.

The final moment of Act 4, the tearing of the paper screen, is both architectural and metaphysical. The veil's rupture opens a passage to the void beyond; the viewer becomes an initiate, prepared to confront what lies beyond the visible: the unknown, the unconscious, the "invisible" that will dominate Act 5.

In this way, Maison La Roche performs the red act of Fusion: a reconciliation of tensions, a bleeding of boundaries. The environment and

Fig. 124

Conceptual Analysis of the Threshold: Symbolic Death of the Old Self. This conceptual figure maps the architectural qualities of a structure's entry sequence to the theme of ritual initiation, specifically identifying the transition from the outside world into a compressed dark space where one encounters earthen materials and textures. This initial, dense zone is interpreted as the phase of Nigredo or "blackening," symbolizing the symbolic death of the old self, a necessary preparatory stage of concealment and dissolution before the subsequent rites of purification and revelation.

Fig. 125

Conceptual Analysis of Ascending Passage: Purification and Enlightenment. This conceptual figure interprets the architectural ramp or staircase as a medium of ritual purification (Albedo), where the physical movement upward is a deliberate architectural mechanism for psychological and spiritual enlightenment (Rubedo). The upward journey culminates in the exposure to light and the view of art, reframing the house as a site where the observer's movement is transformed into an aesthetic and initiatory experience, aligning the body's ascent with the transcendence of the old, bound self.

Fig. 126

Conceptual Analysis of the Final Ascent: Rebirth into Enlightenment. This conceptual figure interprets the architectural destination (the rooftop terrace or final viewing platform) as the Rubedo stage, where the ritualistic final ascent results in a complete rebirth into enlightenment. This stage explicitly mirrors the mystical ascension in Hermeticism, where the successful integration of opposing forces leads to a higher, perfected state of being and knowledge, concluding the initiation cycle established by the house's vertical path.

the psyche, matter and spirit, repression and expression, all merge into a single architectural breath. The red phase of the poem and the house's narrative both signal the moment when architecture transcends its own material logic to become an initiatory instrument, a cosmogram of awakening.

184. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section D.

185. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section D.

186. Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphere: Essays on the Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, trans. Christiane Engels (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 6.

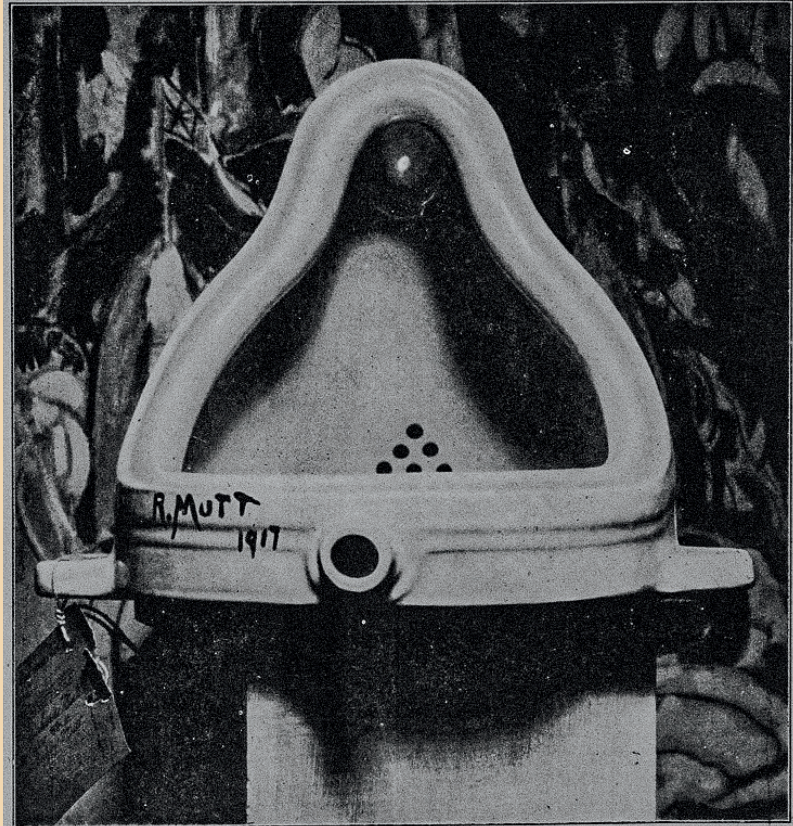
187. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section D.

Interlude V

**The Art of
Context- From Duchamp's
Fountain to Maison La Roche**

Fountain by R. Mutt

Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz



THE EXHIBIT REFUSED BY THE INDEPENDENTS

In the early 20th century, two revolutionary figures in their respective fields- Marcel Duchamp in art and Le Corbusier in architecture, radically challenged the conventions of aesthetic value and functional design. Both exemplify radical shifts in the perception of everyday objects through the lens of context, function, and meaning. Drawing parallels between conceptual art and architectural modernism, we might consider Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, an ordinary urinal presented as art, and Le Corbusier's use of a dumbwaiter in Maison La Roche, an architectural element typically relegated to back-of-house functionality, as disruptions to the conventional boundaries of both domesticity and their respective disciplines.

While at first glance Duchamp's infamous *Fountain* (1917), a porcelain urinal turned art object, may seem worlds apart from the mechanical dumbwaiter nestled within Le Corbusier's Maison La Roche (1923–25), a closer look reveals a powerful shared agenda: the transformation of the ordinary through context.

When Duchamp submitted *Fountain* to the Society of Independent Artists in 1917, a standard porcelain urinal turned on its back and signed "R. Mutt," he offered not just a provocation but a profound conceptual shift.¹⁸⁸ In doing so, could Duchamp ignited a profound debate: What makes an object art? Is it the hand of the artist, the craftsmanship, or simply the declaration that it is so?

His act introduced the idea of the ready-made-an ordinary object elevated to art status purely through the artist's selection and its placement in an institutional context.¹⁸⁹ Duchamp's gesture severed the link between the artist's hand and the artwork's value, asserting that the conceptual act of framing was enough to confer artistic status. In doing so, he destabilised traditional aesthetic hierarchies and reframed the notion of authorship, authenticity, and value.

The house, Maison La Roche, was envisioned as a machine *à habiter*-a machine for living, where form followed function and industrial elements became aesthetic features. Within the guardian's apartment

Fig. 127

Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917 (replica 1964). Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz, 1917. Via Wikimedia Commons. Source: Artsy.

188. Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 180–187.

189. Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography*, 183.

of the house, a dumbwaiter was installed, an object typically associated with service, invisibility, and labor. Rather than hide this mechanical element, Le Corbusier celebrated it as part of the architecture. The dumbwaiter reflects the logic, order, and functional beauty of industrial design, aligning with Corbusier's admiration for ocean liners, airplanes, and automobiles. It transcends its status as mere equipment to participate in the building's narrative about modern living, time-saving labor, and precision.

What unites Duchamp and Le Corbusier is their use of context to elevate the banal into the conceptual. In both cases, it is not the object that changes, but its surrounding system of meaning.

Duchamp's Fountain and Le Corbusier's dumbwaiter were both banal objects in their original domains. However, through deliberate repositioning into an art gallery and a high-design domestic space, they acquired new symbolic weight. The urinal, removed from the restroom and placed on a pedestal, became a critique of aesthetic judgment. The dumbwaiter, pulled from the servant corridors and integrated into a modernist apartment, symbolized a democratization of space and labor.

Duchamp rendered a functional object useless by reclassifying it as art. Le Corbusier, on the contrary, preserved the dumbwaiter's function but made it visible, deliberately embedding it into the spatial and social fabric of the home. In both cases, the objects resist invisibility: Fountain demands to be seen in an art context; the dumbwaiter disrupts the separation between service and served.

Duchamp's Fountain rejected beauty as a prerequisite for artistic legitimacy. Similarly, the inclusion of mechanical devices in Maison La Roche disrupted traditional aesthetic ideals of domestic purity and ornamentation. In both cases, beauty was redefined not as surface decoration, but as functional honesty and conceptual clarity. Another crucial link lies in how both works position their audience. Duchamp's Fountain relies on the viewer's willingness to accept or reject the recontextualization of the object. Similarly, Le Corbusier's dumbwaiter assumes an engaged inhabitant, one who experiences

the rhythms of domestic service and perceives the architectural choreography it enables. These objects are not simply presented; they intervene. They provoke awareness of how designed systems, whether art exhibitions or buildings, mediate our relationships with objects, labor, and meaning.

When an object crosses from one domain to another, industrial to domestic, utilitarian to artistic, its meaning is transformed. By doing so, they ask us to reconsider not just what we call “art” or “architecture,” but how the frame of context endows everyday objects with new life. Le Corbusier’s architecture, like Duchamp’s art, invites us to reconsider the boundaries between function and form, labor and leisure, visibility and invisibility.

ACT 5

White-Void-Dust

Fig. 128

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate E.2, "Characters: The Fish, Horse, and Amazons." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

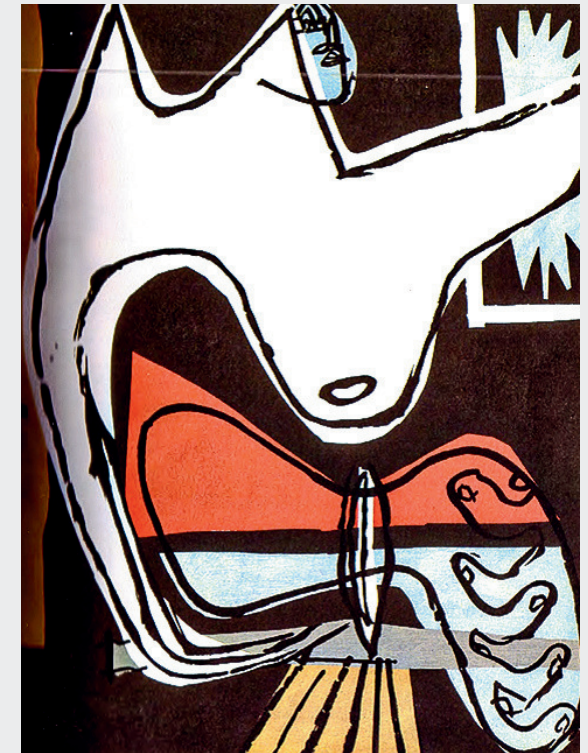
Fig. 129

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate E.3, "Characters: Introspection and Ethical Self-Determination." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Fig. 130

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate E.4, "Characters: Creation, Vigilance, and Architectural Grandeur." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Theme E - Characters

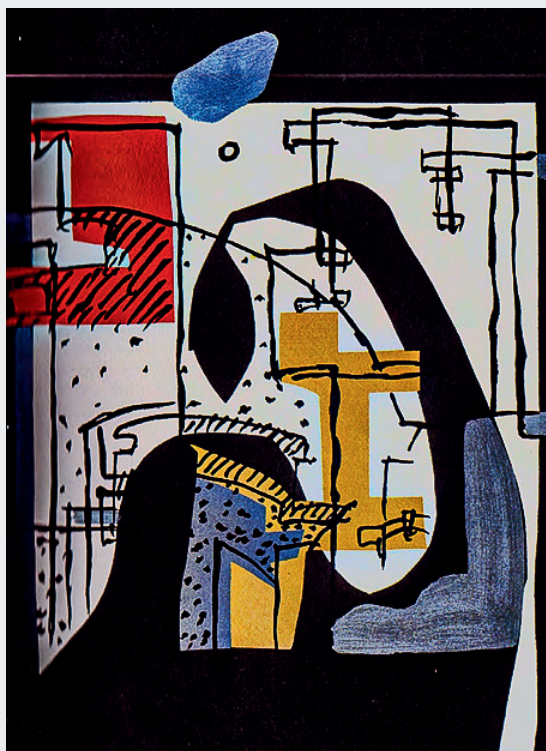


190. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

191. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section E.

192. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section E2.

193. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section E3.



Theme E, as Characters, marks the continuation of the narrative arc in the broader exploration of Maison La Roche. Following the Theme Fusion sequence, which synthesizes preceding thematic concerns of materiality, spatial transgression, and the abject, Theme E turns inward, shifting from external phenomena to the internalisation of identity, ethics, and agency within architectural space. Here, the motif of white emerges as both literal and metaphorical, a color of purification, blankness, and suspension. In the context of this poetic meditation, white functions as a reflective void: it is the space in which character is inscribed, erased, or “disciplined,” resonating with Kristeva’s notion of abjection as the encounter with that which must be “excluded” to constitute selfhood.¹⁹⁰

The sub-poems E.2, E.3, and E.4 trace the evolution of character through allegory, reflection, and creative labor.¹⁹¹ E.2 introduces the fish, horse, and Amazons as dynamic figures navigating struggle and endurance, their purity and constancy echoing Duchamp’s notion of displaced abjection and Colomina’s critique of whiteness as a disciplinary force in domestic space¹⁹² E.3 shifts to introspection,

portraying character as a mirror for ethical and aesthetic self-determination, with horizontal vision and daily humility emphasizing alignment, projection, and habitual virtue in shaping both personal and social trajectories. E.4 situates character within the act of creation itself, linking imaginative and technical mastery with ethical vigilance, patience, and constancy, culminating in the anticipation of architectural and poetic grandeur, “the splendour of raw concrete and the greatness that was essential to imagine the marriage of lines”, thereby intertwining moral, formal, and creative dimensions in the formation of character.¹⁹³

Here, white signifies purity, potentiality, and the erasure of contingencies that might distract from character formation. Void operates as silence, a space for reflection, while dust, renovation sheets, and erased traces gesture to the residue of labor, both material and symbolic, that constitutes identity. In short, Theme E interrogates how character is constructed, disciplined, and expressed, through allegory, reflection, and creation, prefiguring the architectural and symbolic readings of Maison La Roche.

Domestic Politics in Colomina's Architectural Writings.

Beatriz Colomina's critical analyses of modern architecture, particularly in works like *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* and her essays on domestic spaces, establish a powerful and often unsettling relationship between the seemingly neutral aesthetics of Modernism, the concept of surveillance, and the implicit politics of class, gender, and whiteness in the early 20th-century home. Her work shifts the focus from architecture as an object to architecture as a medium, where the domestic interior becomes a stage for control and performance.

Colomina argues that Modernist houses, far from being pristine, open, and liberating spaces, were fundamentally structured by the demands of the media age and the anxieties of bourgeois domesticity, often translating into mechanisms of surveillance and voyeurism.¹⁹⁴ This is famously explored in her analysis of Adolf Loos's Villa Müller, a central case study in understanding this tension.¹⁹⁵ The Ladies' Room (*Zimmer der Dame*), with its elevated position and internal window overlooking the main salon, is described as a "theater box" inside the house.¹⁹⁶ This architectural device, while ostensibly providing a private, intimate space for the woman, also positions her as a spectator of, and a subject for, the domestic scene below. As Colomina notes in her writings on *Sexuality and Space*, the design creates a "the inward gaze" where the occupant is protected yet perpetually observing and observed.¹⁹⁷ This spatial arrangement reinforces traditional domestic politics, where the woman is assigned the role of the fixed, domicile subject, the controller of the private realm, yet is simultaneously contained and viewed within it.¹⁹⁸

The concept of whiteness in Colomina's work is less about race (though related to the exclusionary nature of the oikos) and more about the aesthetic and hygienic obsession of the Modernist project, as documented in *Privacy and Publicity*.¹⁹⁹ The move to white, planar walls, large windows, and an insistence on cleanliness, the very elements that defined the new spirit of architecture, were deeply intertwined with the desire for transparency, efficiency, and ultimately, control.

Fig 131

Adolf Loos, The Villa Müller in Prague (1929–1930). Source: “Adolf Loos in Prague,” Villa Müller Official Website.

194. Beatriz Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," in *Sexuality and Space*, ed. Beatriz Colomina (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992).

195. Beatriz Colomina, *Sexuality and Space*, 74–88

196. Beatriz Colomina, *Sexuality and Space*, 76.

197. Beatriz Colomina, "Perverse Space," in *Sexuality and Space*, 112.

198. Beatriz Colomina, "Untitled: The Housing of Gender," *Sexuality and Space*, 348.

199. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).



The white, unadorned surfaces of houses like Le Corbusier's (explored in essays like *The Endless Museum: Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe*)²⁰⁰ were not merely aesthetic choices; they were an ethical mandate meant to eliminate dirt and ornament (which Loos famously equated with crime).²⁰¹ This push for absolute transparency, however, created a new form of invisibility: The walls of the Modern Movement house, Colomina writes, "ceased to be the opaque enclosure of privacy and became instead the transparent membrane of publicity."²⁰² The white interior, while appearing free, demanded constant, visible maintenance, making dirt, disorder, and non-conformity immediately legible and subject to censure, thus reinforcing a domestic discipline of order.

Furthermore, Colomina's work on *unclear vision* and Le Corbusier (specifically the La Roche/Jeanneret Houses, often analyzed in her sectional studies) highlights how the Modernist interior uses strategic obscuration and transparency to manipulate the inhabitant's relationship with the exterior. Windows often function as fixed frames for specific, curated views, or are obscured/positioned to prioritize the internal viewing and movement, the *promenade architecturale*, over a direct engagement with the city.²⁰³ This reinforces the idea that the house is a self-contained world designed for the continuous observation and control of its inhabitants and contents. In this theatrical arrangement of the domestic space, the subjects (the inhabitants) become the objects of the architectural vision, subject to the gaze folded within the walls themselves. Therefore, the clean, white, and seemingly open Modernist interior becomes the ultimate engine of domestic politics: a meticulously crafted apparatus that institutionalizes a subtle but pervasive system of self-surveillance and social control under the guise of hygienic efficiency and aesthetic freedom.

200. Beatriz Colomina, *The Endless Museum: Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe* (Madrid: Fundacion Caja de Arquitectos, 1997).

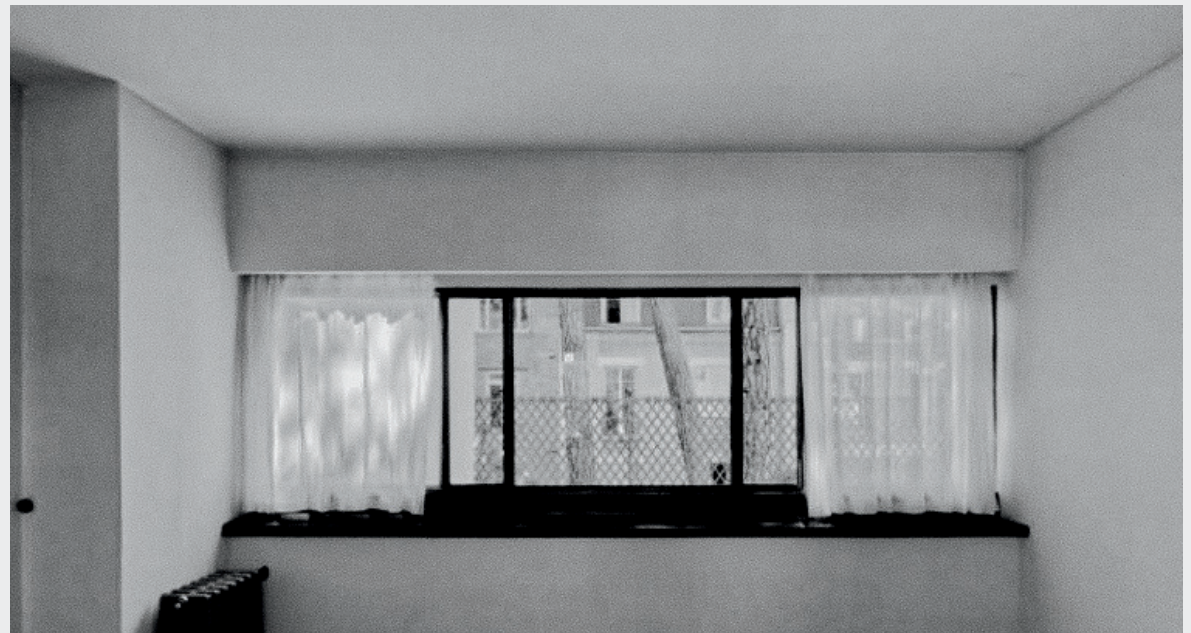
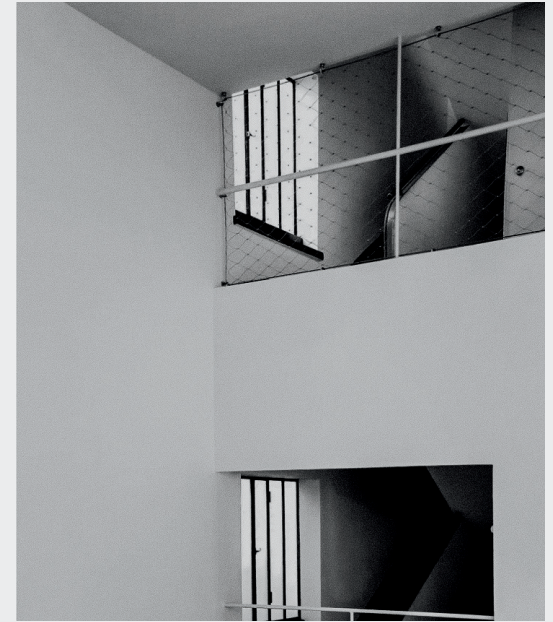
201. Adolf Loos, "Ornament and Crime" (1908), trans. Wilfried Wang, in *The Architecture of Adolf Loos*, ed. Yehuda Safran and Wilfried Wang (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1985), 103.

202. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

203. Colomina, *The Endless Museum*, 61.

Fig. 132

The White Wall as Apparatus: Purity, Surveillance, and Abjection at Maison La Roche. Composite spread featuring photographs of Maison La Roche interiors, including author's original photography and archival documentation from the Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. The spread collectively analyzes the white, purified surfaces of the house, particularly the geometric voids, ramps, and gallery spaces, as instruments of the modernist gaze and visual control. The pristine whiteness is interpreted as the physical manifestation of "Theme E: Character" from *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, staging the illusion of moral and architectural order while silently erasing the "abject", the messy residues of domestic labor, maintenance, and the history of earlier buried colors. The images underscore how the house is "reconstructed as a visual apparatus" that depends on the violence of purity and concealment.



204. Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, Section E.

205. Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, Section E3.

206. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

207. Le Corbusier. *Towards a New Architecture*. Translated by Frederick Etchells. London: John Rodker, 1931, n117.



In the *Poème de l'angle droit*, Theme E: Character marks the moment of purification, where architecture, having passed through the fires of fusion, attains its immaculate, crystalline form. After the turmoil of Act D's alchemical initiation, this stage represents the calm aftermath of transformation, the ascension from red to white, from matter to essence. Le Corbusier's verses evoke figures of discipline and constancy: fish, horses, Amazons-symbols of endurance, vigilance, and order.²⁰⁴ In E3, he writes, "Categorical right angle of the character / of the mind of the heart / I reflected myself in this character and found myself, found at home."²⁰⁵ The "right angle" is not merely a geometric measure here but a moral compass: uprightness, rectitude, the human alignment with divine proportion. Whiteness thus becomes the material embodiment of this moral and architectural character, clarity made visible. It is achieved through smooth, non-porous plaster to initially repel atmospheric soot and coal dust, materially translating the philosophical concept of immaculate spiritual endurance into a self-purifying physical surface.

Maison La Roche is the physical manifestation

of this purified ideal. Completed in 1925, its white, polished interiors stage the modernist aspiration toward universality and order. Yet this whiteness, like the purified "character" of the *Poème*, is not neutral. It is achieved through exclusion, repression, and erasure. What is visible has been purified at the expense of what has been hidden.

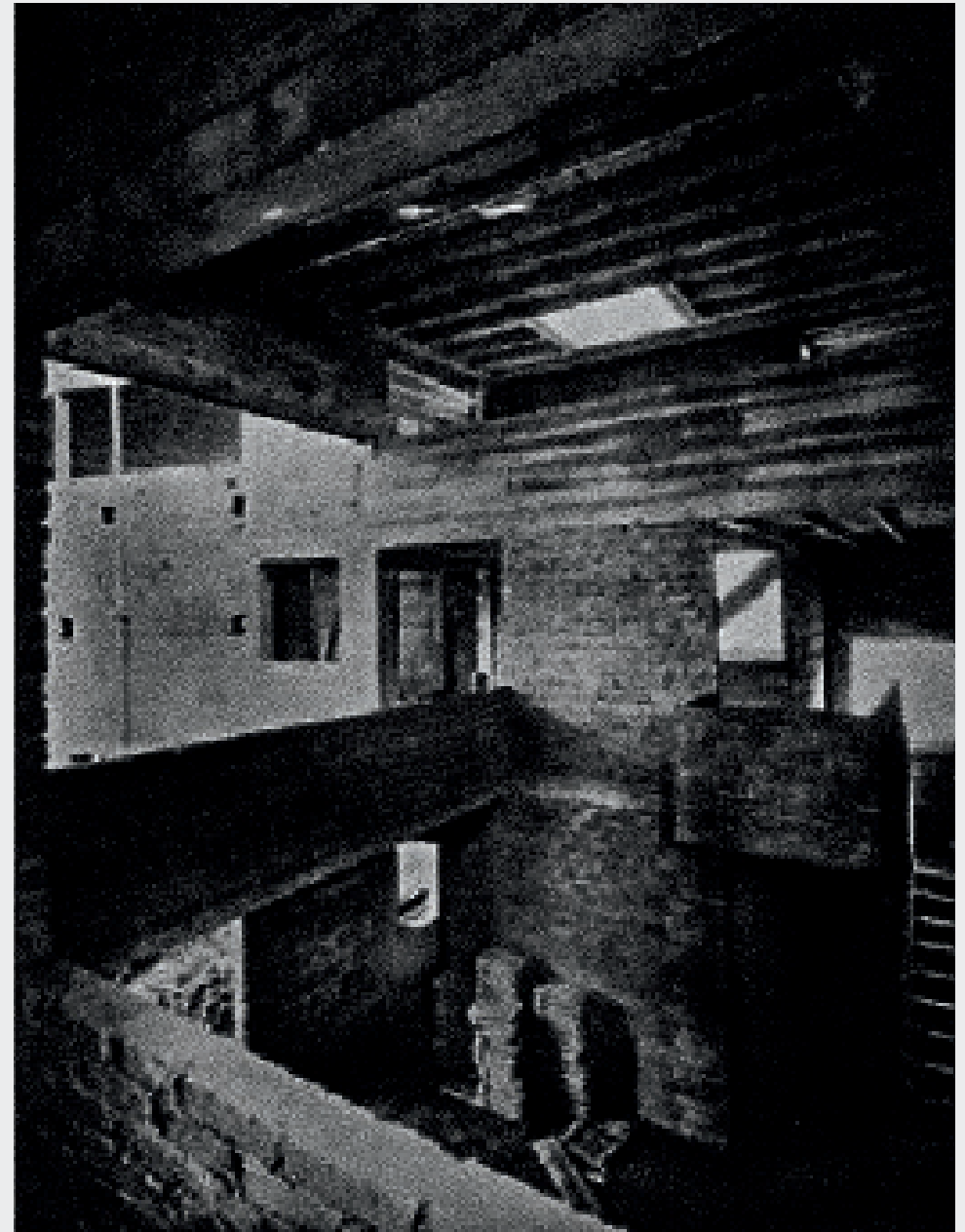
Beatriz Colomina, in *Privacy and Publicity*, writes that modern architecture did not simply open up domestic space to vision; it reconstructed it as a visual apparatus, one that disciplined the act of seeing.²⁰⁶ The white wall, she argues, becomes the screen upon which the modern subject learns to see and be seen, an instrument of visual control that disguises its own surveillance. Within Maison La Roche, whiteness performs this dual role: it creates the serene blankness of a gallery while silently erasing the messy residues of domestic life: labour, maintenance, dust.

Le Corbusier's obsession with cleanliness and hygiene is well documented. "Baths, sun, hot-water, cold-water, warmth at will, conservation of food, hygiene, beauty in the sense of good proportion."²⁰⁷ The white wall, like a sheet of

Fig. 133, 134, 135

Composite figure illustrating the chronological and ideological transformation of the Double-Height Hall at Maison La Roche. This series juxtaposes an image of the hall during the 2008–09 restoration phase (showing buried pigments under whitewash and the necessity of maintenance), a 2020 archival photograph, and a photograph by the author from January 2025. Collectively, the images reveal the white wall as a "screen" that performs a continual act of erasure. The visible shift from the exposed, dirtied restoration state to the immaculate, pristine white of the operational museum documents the house's pathological need to "purge dust, dirt, and disorder", making the space a "theatre of such purification rituals" that mask the inherent violence of modernism's pursuit of an impossible permanence.

(Sources: Jacques Sbriglio, *Le Corbusier: The Villas La Roche-Jeanneret* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1997); Fondation Le Corbusier; Photograph by author, January 2025.)



208. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

209. Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, Section E.

210. Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*, trans. James Dunnett (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987 [1925]).

211. Jacques Sbriglio, *Le Corbusier: The Villas La Roche-Jeanneret* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1997), 212.



paper, promised a new beginning, a surface onto which civilization could inscribe a purified order. But in this pursuit of purity lies what Julia Kristeva calls the abject: “that which disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules.”²⁰⁸

The abject is what must be expelled to maintain the illusion of cleanliness. At Maison La Roche, abjection is displaced behind the immaculate façade: within ducts, servant corridors, plumbing shafts, and dumbwaiters. The white walls do not cleanse space, they conceal its impurities.

The poems of Theme E oscillate between revelation and concealment. The “fish,” “horse,” and “Amazons” of E2 are not ornamental figures but archetypes of disciplined energy, forces that move, struggle, and yet remain eternally young.²⁰⁹ They embody what Le Corbusier elsewhere calls the “moral beauty” of architecture, a beauty grounded in constancy and restraint.²¹⁰ In this sense, Maison La Roche’s white surfaces act as the architectural skin of such discipline. The building presents itself as composed, detached, and perfectly ordered, yet beneath that composure lies the tension of

repression, the struggle to maintain the illusion of purity.

During the 2008–09 restoration, conservators found layers of pigment under the whitewash: pale ochres, greens, and pinks that had been successively buried under coats of white paint.²¹¹ This discovery literalized the process of erasure.

The house’s history of renovation re-enacted the same modernist drama of purification: to renew meant to overwrite, to conceal traces of time and use. Each restoration was an act of architectural amnesia. It was structurally maintained by the physical properties of the materials chosen. The 1925 original surfaces relied on a specific formulation of oil-based smooth plaster (*enduit*) and zinc-oxide white paint (*Blanc de Zinc*), selected by Le Corbusier because its non-porous finish initially repelled coal-soot and chimney dust. When this material inevitably yellowed and cracked under environmental exposure, subsequent maintenance regimes simply applied thick coats of high-opacity titanium-dioxide whitewash over the original polychrome palette (including the hidden pale ochres and sienna tones), physically

burying the building's temporal history behind a dense, monolithic chemical skin. In this sense, Maison La Roche performs what Duchamp's Fountain dramatizes conceptually, the transformation of the abject into art through displacement. The plumbing fixture becomes sculpture only when removed from its function, turned upright, and rendered white. Similarly, the house attains its modernist character only by sanitizing the traces of occupation and labour.

Colomina's reading of modern interiors as machines for looking is crucial here.²¹² In La Roche, vision is both privileged and policed. The long ramp, the ribbon windows, and the high gallery create an orchestrated promenade that directs the viewer's gaze while concealing the mechanics that sustain that view. The purity of the white wall depends on the invisibility of the bodies who clean and maintain it. Domestic labour becomes the unseen scaffolding of aesthetic purity. This visual economy parallels Kristeva's psychic economy: abjection is expelled so that the subject may appear whole.²¹³

Le Corbusier's own words in E4, "To make architecture is to make a creature. To be filled to

fill oneself to have filled to burst to exult" suggest that creation involves both containment and release.²¹⁴ The architect, like the alchemist, channels the raw material of life into ordered form, yet the tension between vitality and structure always threatens to erupt.

The creature of architecture, once animated, may resist its own confinement. In Maison La Roche, this latent resistance appears as dust, the inevitable return of matter to visibility. Dust is the enemy of purity, the silent reminder of time and decay. But it is also, paradoxically, what gives the white wall its life. The play of light across slightly uneven plaster, the faint shadows of brushstrokes, the micro-textures of wear, all these imperfections animate the surface, preventing it from becoming sterile.

In this way, dust functions as a metaphysical counterpoint to the white wall's moral absolutism. If whiteness is the mask of purity, dust is its confession. The renovation plastic that covers La Roche's galleries during repair becomes a shroud, a contemporary veil that both protects and suffocates. The image of red plaster dust staining that plastic transforms the

Fig. 136

Drawing of ramp, emphasizing the play of light. Pencil on paper. Digital drawing by author, January 2025. This analytical drawing abstracts the ramp's geometry to demonstrate its function as an instrument of visual and moral control, where the movement upward represents the ascension from red to white, from matter to essence.



212. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

213. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 31.

214. Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, E4.

site into a ritual wound, echoing the “bleeding” of Act 4. The purification of Act 5 is therefore never complete; it requires continual maintenance, continual erasure. This is the violence of modernist cleanliness, the demand for an impossible permanence.

Tom McCarthy, in his writing *Remainder*, describes a protagonist obsessed with reconstructing scenes of perfect order, endlessly rehearsing them until every gesture is precise.²¹⁵ The repetition becomes pathological, an attempt to master the real through simulation. *Maison La Roche*’s whiteness enacts a similar pathology: it seeks to freeze experience into a timeless tableau. Yet every attempt at control reveals the fragility of that control. The cracks in the plaster, the smudge on the stair, the echo of footsteps in the empty gallery, all betray the human presence that the architecture tries to erase.

In E3, Le Corbusier writes of the “upright child with the clear heart present on earth near me,” a figure of innocence and moral clarity.²¹⁶ This “child” may be read as the purified architectural subject, reborn through the rites of fusion and

initiation. But innocence here is “clear heart” is achieved through cleansing, through the repression of ambiguity. The whiteness of *La Roche* constructs such innocence, offering the viewer a vision of order unmarred by contradiction. Yet as Colomina notes, this vision is inherently gendered: the white interior, often coded as feminine, becomes the object of masculine control, the space of projection for the architect’s desire for purity and mastery.²¹⁷

Utsav Banerjee’s essay *The Voice and the Gaze* as “objet petit a” extends this argument by linking the modernist gaze to psychoanalytic structures “graph of desire.”²¹⁸ The gaze is not the act of looking but the site where visibility and power intersect.

In *La Roche*, the gaze is institutionalized in architecture itself. The ramp and the gallery function as devices of surveillance; they organize sight lines that privilege the viewer while rendering the viewed passive. The white wall becomes the “objet petit a”, the unattainable object of desire that promises wholeness but delivers only reflection. The subject’s identity is mirrored back, purified but



Fig. 137

The Gallery, emphasizing the play of light from the windows on the ramp, Maison La Roche, Paris. Archival photograph, Documentation Centre, Fondation Le Corbusier.

215. Tom McCarthy, *Remainder* (Paris: Metronome Press, 2005).

216. Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, Section E3.

217. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

218. Utsav Banerjee, "The Voice and the Gaze as 'objet petit a'," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 13, no. 4 (2021), 3.

hollow.

Le Corbusier's verse, "I reflected myself in this character and found myself, found at home,"²¹⁹ echoes this structure of self-recognition. The architect finds himself within the purified order he has created, but this recognition is narcissistic, it depends on the suppression of all that does not conform to his reflection. The "home" he finds is a mirror chamber, a pristine enclosure that denies the outside world. The whiteness of Maison La Roche thus becomes both the setting and the symptom of modernism's self-enclosure.

The promise of purity, however, always carries within it the seed of contamination. Kristeva reminds us that "the clean and proper body" exists only through its continual expulsion of waste.²²⁰ Likewise, the white modernist interior must constantly purge dust, dirt, and disorder. Each act of cleaning reinscribes the abject, keeping it at bay but never annihilating it. The gallery at La Roche, with its carefully polished surfaces and controlled light, is a theatre of such purification rituals. The daily maintenance of whiteness becomes a liturgy of denial.

At a broader cultural level, Le Corbusier's pursuit of whiteness aligns with the modernist faith in rationality and moral hygiene that characterized interwar Europe. As Stanislaus von Moos observes, Le Corbusier's white wall was not just a formal choice but- "expressing architecture 'in the nude', in conjunction with all other colours it is a way of 'dressing up' buildings in the sense of Gottfried Semper's concept of 'Bekleidung'".²²¹ The white villa stood as a medical metaphor, promising cure through clarity. Yet, as later critics have noted, this hygienic ideal often masked deeper anxieties about contamination, class, and control. The white wall was both a boundary and a filter, separating the rational subject from the chaotic outside.

Maison La Roche materializes this boundary through its spatial hierarchy. The public gallery, bathed in light, contrasts with the servant zones buried in shadow. The vertical separation of spaces mirrors the moral stratification of purity and impurity. The public promenade of the double-height hall is decoupled from the service network: the vertical shaft of the dumbwaiter, the kitchen scullery, and the drainage pipework

are tightly encased within hollow brick walls finished in thick plaster. By physically recessing these utility zones and keeping their small access doors completely flush and painted identical to the surrounding wall planes, the architecture forces the physical infrastructure of domestic labor to disappear entirely behind a continuous, deceptive architectural envelope. In this way, Le Corbusier's "modern cathedrals," as he calls them in E4,²²² are erected on the foundations of repression. The white surfaces that dazzle the eye are sustained by invisible systems: pipes, ducts, and corridors, that carry away the unclean.

Ultimately, the Character theme reveals that purity is not an endpoint but a performance. The white wall's serenity is a mask for struggle, its silence a cover for the constant hum of hidden labour.

Maison La Roche's whiteness, far from representing moral clarity, exposes the contradictions at the heart of modernism: the desire for perfection coexisting with the inevitability of decay. The "modern cathedrals" are both monuments and mausoleums, spaces where life is purified into stillness.

As the act closes, the purified house awaits its haunting. The white wall becomes the screen on which the ghosts of the repressed will soon appear, the spectral traces explored in Act 6.

Whiteness, having erased all noise, creates the silence necessary for memory's return. Dust will resettle, smudges will re-emerge, and the house, in its immaculate stillness, will begin to speak again.

219. Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, Section E.

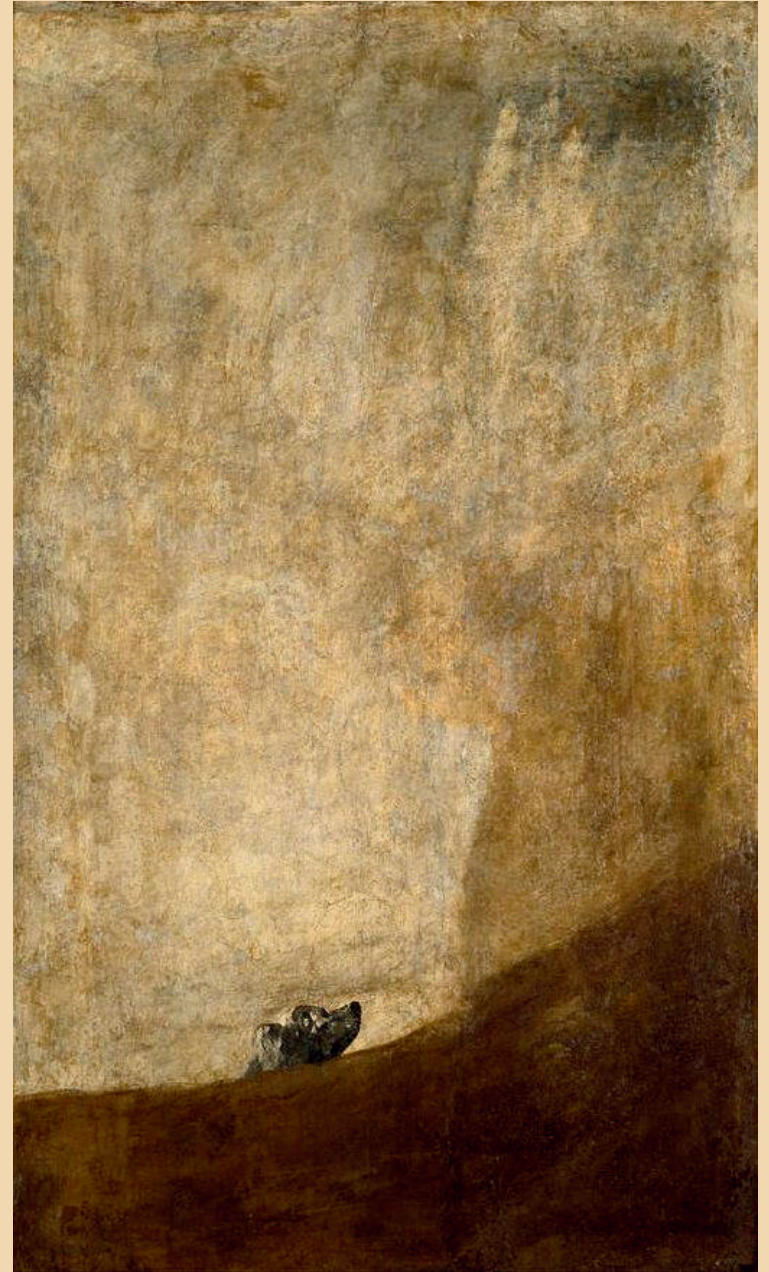
220. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.

221. Stanislaus von Moos, *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2009), 352.

222. Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, Section E4.

Interlude VI

Tracing Imperfection as a
Spiritual Remnant in Jonathan
Foote's Architectural Writing



Jonathan Foote's architectural writing, particularly in his interpretation of Borromini's methodology and techniques, elevates the concept of imperfection- the smudge- from a simple error or defect to a profound atmospheric and material mark as part of the design process.

The core of Foote's argument lies in his interpretation of smudges in Borromini's sfumato drawings, where he unfolds their blurred qualities as metatextual marks of designed indeterminacy in the architect's process. This smudge functions as an architectural grounding the atmospheric ambition of a building in the atmospheric qualities of the messy, graphite field of Borromini's drawings. As he writes: "Air as a subtle material is activated by Borromini's cupola lantern, from which the heavenly light of the Holy Spirit, represented in the centre of a camera di luce, gently descends."²²³ It is the antithesis of Modernist pristine whiteness and absolute perfection, which, as Colomina might argue, are forms of denial and control.²²⁴ Instead, Foote embraces the imperfection as a trace. The scratch, the off-center joint, or the visibly repaired break is not just tolerated; it is welcomed as the honest signature of the craftsman's hand, representing the unique, unrepeatable moment of creation.²²⁵

We might think therefore of the smudge-remnant as being somewhat aligned with Kristeva's theorisation of the abject and the limits of the self. For Kristeva, the smudge- could be interpreted as the abject element, that which disturbs identity, system, and order.²²⁶ In architecture, the smudge confronts the designer with the reality of an imperfect structure rather than a perfect, sterile envelope. It forces a reckoning with the object's reality, preventing the illusion of timeless, manufactured perfection.

This metaphysical weight of the smudge finds a powerful parallel in Francisco Goya's *The Dog* Goya's painting, painted onto the walls of his house Quinta de Sordo and marked by the horrors of the Spanish court and his own deafness, depicts a dog submerged in an ochre void, looking up toward something unseen, a mere remnant of an image clinging to the top of the canvas. This painting is a disturbing study in disappearance and the remnant. The dog is not fully present; it is a suggestion, a

Fig. 138(Opposite)

Francisco Goya, *The Dog* (Spanish: *El Perro*), c. 1820–1823. Oil mural transferred to canvas. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

223. Jonathan Foote, "Borromini's Smudge," *Drawing Matter Journal* 2 (November 15, 2022).

224. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

225. Foote, "Borromini's Smudge."

226. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

mark of something that is fading or about to be consumed.

By leaving a smudge, the designer inadvertently creates an honesty that serves as a profound reminder of the fragility of the building's envelope and the abject that lurks beneath.

Foote's use of the smudge is therefore a critical response to the cult of immaculate architectural finish. It is a defense of memory and trace in the face of erasure and a statement that the truth of a sacred or domestic space lies not in its ideal state but in its enduring blemishes. By finding spiritual resonance in the architectural defect, Foote positions the architect as a philosopher who, in order to produce transcendent architecture of this sort, must first acknowledge the ground of human, and structural, fragility.²²⁷

227. Jonathan Foote, "Borromini's Smudge," *Drawing Matter Journal* 2 (November 15, 2022).

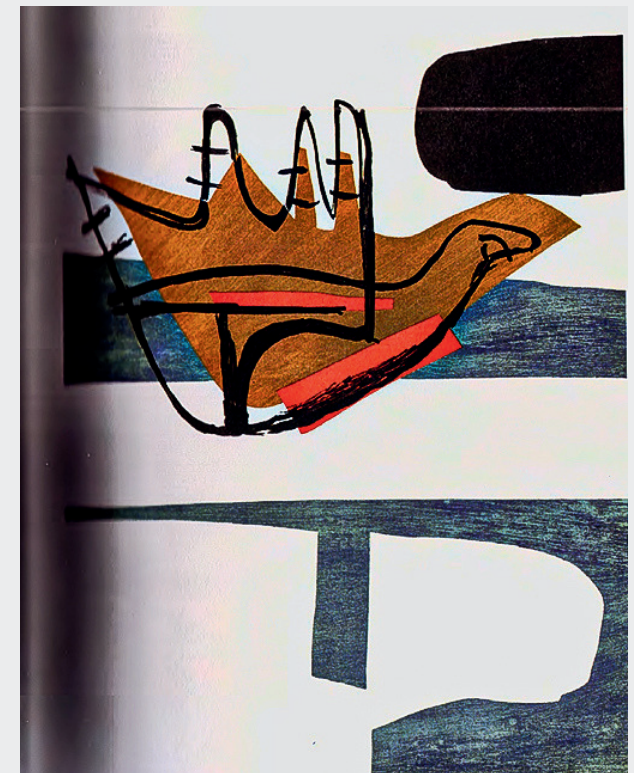
ACT 6

ACT 6

Fig. 139

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate F.3, "Offering: The Open Hand and the Logic of Reciprocity." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Theme F Offering



228. Jonathan Foote, "Borromini's Smudge," *Drawing Matter Journal* 2 (November 15, 2022).

229. Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, Section F3.

230. Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, Section F3.

231. Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, Section F3.

232. Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, Section F3.

233. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (Glencoe, IL: Cohen & West, 1954).

Theme F, Offering, follows Characters by shifting from ethical alignment to the logic of release and generosity. Once identity has been clarified, it must be given outward, shared as residue, memory, or trace. The color yellow embodies this stage: afterimage: dust, smudge, stain. As Jonathan Foote notes, the smudge functions as a reminder of the fragility of the building's envelope and the abject that lurks beneath.²²⁷ Offering, then, is the recognition that architecture communicates through what it leaves behind.

The poem F.3 Offering (The Open Hand) stages this act of release through the motif of the hand, a recurring Le Corbusier symbol.²²⁹ It begins expansively: "It is open because all is present available knowable ... Open to receive ... Open also that others might come and take."²³⁰ Openness is both receptive and generous, an exchange rather than unilateral gift. Water and light extend this imagery: "The waters flow the sun provides light ... Complexities have woven their fabric ... the fluids are everywhere", a reminder that offering is embedded in natural cycles of giving and circulation, echoing Bachelard's poetics of the

elements.²³¹

The hand here mediates between labor and intimacy: "Tools in the hand. ... Caresses from the hand ... Life is tasted through the kneading of hands." Technical mastery and sensual engagement merge, aligning with Le Corbusier's vision of architecture as both craft and concept. When the poem claims "eyesight resides in palpitation," it privileges haptic vision, phenomenology of perception where seeing arises from embodied touch.²³²

The final line, "Full hand I received full hand I now give," situates offering within a cycle of reciprocity, echoing Marcel Mauss's anthropology of the gift.²³³ Architecture is not possession but transmission, a gesture that continues beyond its maker. In this sense, Offering is the culmination of the ritual arc: fusion, purification, then sacrifice. Yellow marks this phase as the color of remnants-ghostly, smudged, spectral. In Le Corbusier's poetic system, the open hand embodies this ethic: open because it is full, full because it is open.

Fig. 140

Stucco detail, San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, Rome, showing an element of the "smudge" philosophy. Photograph by Jonathan Foote.
Source: Drawing Matter Journal 2 (November 15, 2022).



Modernism in Verticality

Verticality in modern architecture is often spoken about as structure, proportion, or circulation. But in Maison La Roche, verticality becomes something else. It becomes a narrative of revelation and concealment. It draws a line through the house that differentiates worlds. What rises into view and what sinks into shadow. What is shown and what is erased. What is remembered and what is allowed to disappear.

Le Corbusier places this line at the centre of his architectural thinking. His writings on stairs and ramps transform vertical movement from a functional necessity into a method of seeing. “Stairs separate one floor from another; a ramp ties them together,” he writes, revealing a philosophy where vertical elements are forms of thought.²³⁴ The ramp is a gesture of continuity, a slow unfolding of space. The stair is a cut, a segmentation, a discipline. Together, they structure the body’s experience of ascent in Maison La Roche.

This choreography also operates as a system of visibility. Beatriz Colomina’s analysis of modern architecture as a visual apparatus reveals how the house constructs and regulates perception.²³⁵ The modern interior becomes an optical device. Light, whiteness, and perspectival framing create the conditions for a controlled vision. In Maison La Roche, this control is vertical. The ascent through the ramp lifts the visitor toward clarity. The descent into the narrower, hidden stair compresses and obscures. Colomina’s argument about modernism’s obsession with visual hygiene resonates here: the vertical axis becomes a tool of selection, determining which worlds belong to the realm of pure image and which are relegated to maintenance, labour, and the quiet residue of use.

This vertical separation echoes tectonic logic that Frampton identifies as fundamental to modern architecture. He writes, “The worst enemy of modern architecture is the idea of space considered solely in terms of its economic and technical exigencies indifferent to the ideas of the site.”²³⁶

For Frampton, the tectonic is not only about materials or structural honesty; it is about how architectural elements articulate the forces that shape them. Vertical members carry weight. Horizontal members distribute it. Together, they form a language of gravity and resistance. In Maison La Roche, the ramp's sweeping plane is a tectonic statement of suspension, even lightness. The servant stair and the dumbwaiter shaft, by contrast, reveal the house's skeletal labour. They express the load-bearing and infrastructural spine of the building. Verticality thus reveals a hierarchy: what is celebrated is lifted; what is functional is buried. The poetic and the technical share a line but inhabit different zones of visibility.

Anthony Vidler's concept of the uncanny exposes the emotional undercurrents hidden beneath modernism's clean surfaces.²³⁷ For Vidler, the uncanny appears when architecture reveals traces of what it tries to suppress. In Maison La Roche, this uncanny is vertical. It lurks in shafts where mechanical systems descend into darkness. It clings to service stairs where faint stains, smudges, and scuffs accumulate. These small marks break through the illusion of pristine whiteness and expose the building's fragility. They reveal that verticality is a site where modernism confronts what it attempts to erase: labour, dirt, memory, and entropy.

This tension becomes clear when the visitor moves through the house. The ramp produces an almost cinematic ascent. Light glides across its surface, creating a slow, luminous reveal. The stair, meanwhile, grips the body differently. It is narrow, shadowed, utilitarian. These contrasting vertical experiences are not accidental. They reflect a deeper ideological tension embedded in modernist architecture. The ramp stands for revelation. The stair stands for work. Verticality becomes a tool that separates the ideal from the real.

Le Corbusier's own language reinforces this. His description of vertical circulation as a sequence of "*architectural promenades*" frames movement as a spiritual ascent. Yet this *promenade* is selective. It hides the routes taken by workers, cleaners, and the mechanisms that support the house's image. Colomina's

234. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Œuvre complète de 1910-1929*, ed. Willy Boesiger, 14th ed. (Zurich: Les Éditions d'Architecture, 1995), 60.

235. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

236. Kenneth Frampton, *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 8.

237. Anthony Vidler, "The Architecture of the Uncanny: The Unhomely Houses of the Romantic Sublime," *Assemblage*, no. 3 (July 1987).

analysis of the modern house as a site of controlled domesticity mirrors this duality.²³⁸ The house produces an aesthetic of transparency while concealing the labour that makes transparency possible. Frampton's tectonic reading clarifies this division, the ramp becomes a surface of display, smooth and continuous. The stair becomes a working element, marked by the pressures of repeated use. The servant shaft is pure tectonics: a straight, functional conduit. Each vertical element carries a different expressive charge. Their relationship reveals how modern architecture divides its internal economy of attention. What is upward-facing becomes part of the architectural language. What is downward-facing becomes infrastructure.

When dust collects along the ramp's edge, when smudges gather at the turn of a stair, when the dumbwaiter emits a faint mechanical hum, the buried infrastructure reasserts itself. The vertical axis becomes a channel through which the hidden life of the building rises toward visibility. The purity of modernism is interrupted by the return of its residue. The ghost and the smudge share a vertical route.

In Maison La Roche, verticality therefore produces a double effect. It elevates the visitor into a world of clarity while simultaneously sinking the building's labour into other, darker channels. But it also allows these zones to bleed into one another. The spectral marks on the servant stair. The dust suspended in the gallery air. The faint unevenness of restored plaster. These subtle vertical traces record time, use, memory, and the friction between ideality and life.

In the context of Act 6, verticality becomes the connective tissue that binds Ghost, Stair, and Smudge. It explains why the house's whiteness cannot remain untouched. It shows how circulation produces residue. It reveals how the house's spiritual atmosphere is not created despite imperfection but through it. Verticality exposes the house's vulnerability. It reveals architecture as an offering: rising, falling, marked, repaired, and repeatedly opened to time.

238. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

In *Poème de l'angle droit*, Theme F, “Offering,” marks a pivotal return, a yielding gesture after purification.²³⁹ It is the hand extended: both receptive and giving, an image of reciprocity and release. After the whiteness and silence of the previous act, the architecture begins to breathe again. The purity of the white gallery gives way to traces, smudges, scars, remnants of the building’s use and memory. The yellow theme, the color of residue, recalls light diffused through dust, the faint aura that remains after the act of erasure. This is not the brilliant illumination of revelation, but the dim, reflective glow of remembrance.

Maison La Roche’s architecture, when read through Theme F, transforms into a ritual of ascent and disappearance. The house offers itself through its own circulatory system: ramps, stairs, and service shafts, each performing the dual gesture of elevation and descent, revelation and concealment. As the poem speaks of the hand, the house too acts through its limbs: its verticals and horizontals, its circulation paths, its muscular movements.

Le Corbusier’s remark, “We climb a ramp little by

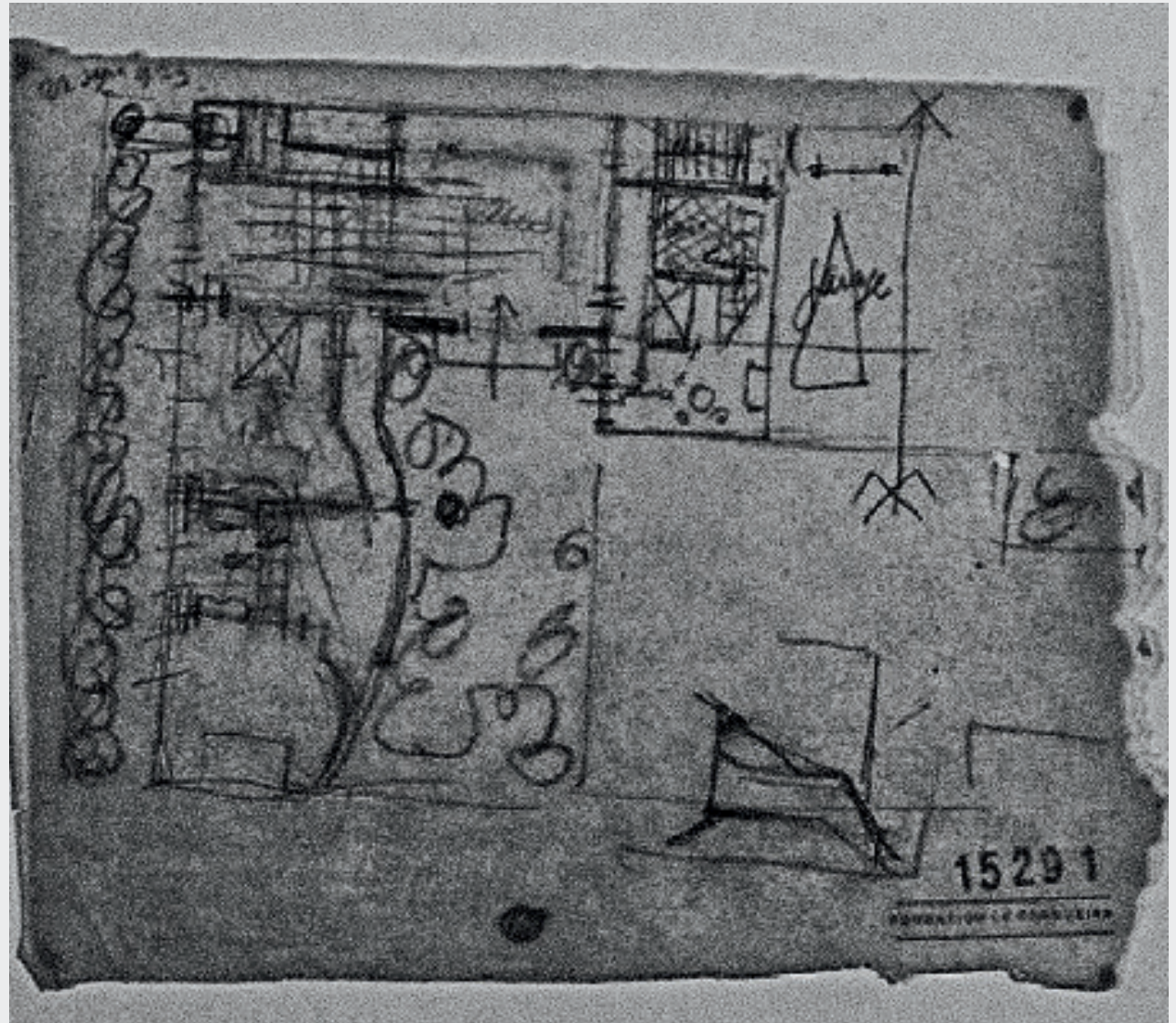
little ... Stairs separate one floor from another; a ramp ties them together,”²⁴⁰ reveals the architectural equivalent of the poem’s “open hand.” The ramp and stair, unlike static thresholds, embody motion, the building’s way of giving and receiving, of guiding and disorienting. Through this dynamic, architecture ceases to be an object and becomes an act: an offering of movement, a sequence of gestures that reveal its inner order.

If the ramp is the house’s spine, the servant stair and dumbwaiter shaft are its nervous system, the silent conduits through which the building breathes. These vertical elements embody the theme of offering in its most literal form: they carry, deliver, and exchange. Yet they are also hidden, narrow, and shadowed, spaces of absence rather than display.

In the restored house, the servant stair’s white plaster shows faint unevenness, almost spectral in its restraint. Its walls carry the faint stains of human passage: smudges, handprints, wear. These are the “caresses of the hand” the poem speaks of: physical traces transformed into memory.²⁴¹

Fig. 141

Original Ground Floor Sketch, Maison La Roche, Le Corbusier. Archival drawing, Documentation Centre, Fondation Le Corbusier.



239. Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, Section F.

240. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Œuvre complète de 1910-1929*, ed. Willy Boesiger, 14th ed. (Zurich: Les Éditions d'Architecture, 1995), 60.

241. Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, Section F.

The spatial logic echoes Le Corbusier's belief that architecture should reconcile opposites, visibility and invisibility, utility and contemplation. In Maison La Roche, the servant stair and dumbwaiter embody precisely this reconciliation. They are the "tools in the hand" of the poem, but also the tools that vanish as they give.²⁴²

Smudge and Trace: The Return of the Hidden

The restoration photographs of Maison La Roche reveal subtle evidence of use, dust on the ramp, scuffs on the wall, traces of aging beneath the new layers of paint. These residual marks, often erased in modernist maintenance, are here reinterpreted as offerings of time. Foote's notion of the smudge-remnant, describes this condition: the smudge becomes a mark of humility, a confession of imperfection.

Kristeva's theory of the abject also hovers here, what is expelled, repressed, or hidden always returns as residue.²⁴³ The dust that settles on the white wall, the faint discoloration in corners, the

warmth of worn surfaces, all testify to the persistence of the body in a space that strives for transcendence. The house's supposed purity is thus haunted by the memory of its impurities.

These traces act as offerings of memory: the building's quiet gift to time. The offering is temporal, the slow, continuous exchange between maintenance and decay. Architecture, in this act, becomes mortal. It ages, it remembers, it offers itself back to entropy.

Fig. 142

Paint brush, Plastic residual. The Gallery, Masion LaRoche. Photograph by author. Paris. Jan 2025.

Fig. 143

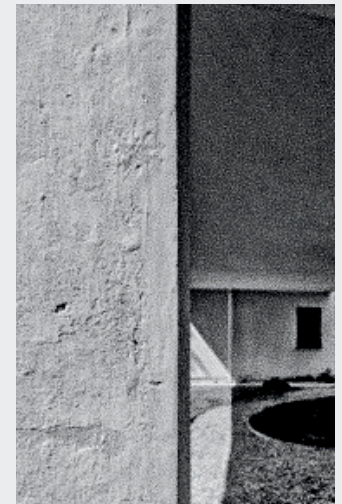
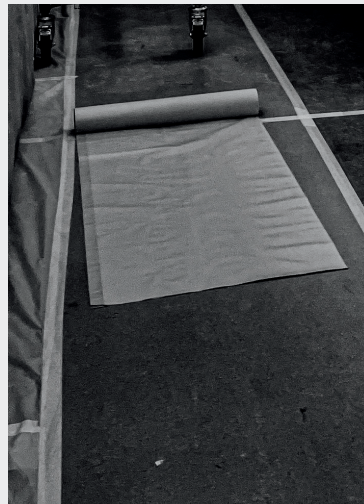
Polythene sheet on floor. The Gallery, Masion LaRoche. Photograph by author. Paris. Jan 2025.

Fig. 144

Dust residue on door. The Gallery, Masion LaRoche. Photograph by author. Paris. Jan 2025.

Fig. 145

Smudge on Pilotis. Masion LaRoche. Photograph by author. Paris. Jan 2025.



242. Le Corbusier, *Poème de l'angle droit*, Section F.

243. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

Fig. 146

Art Promenade. Authors Own. Photograph. Masion La Roche, Paris. Jan, 2025.

Fig. 147

Residential Promenade. Authors Own. Photograph. Masion La Roche, Paris. Jan, 2025.

Fig. 148

Domain Promendae. Authors own. Photograph. Masion La Roche, Paris. Jan, 2025.





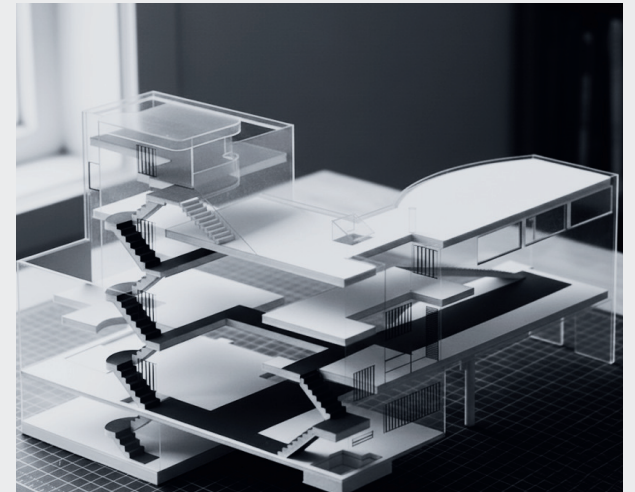
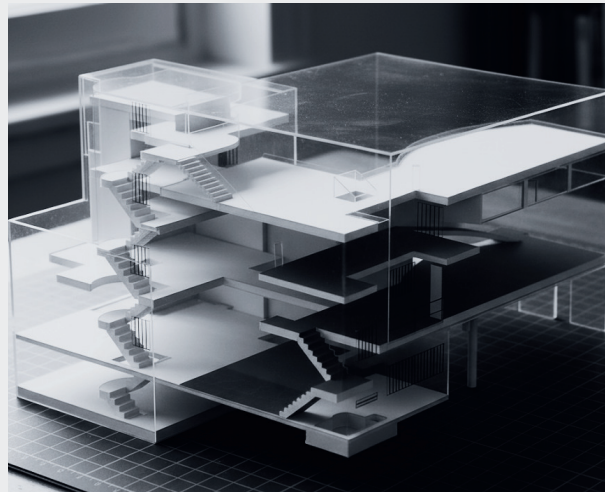
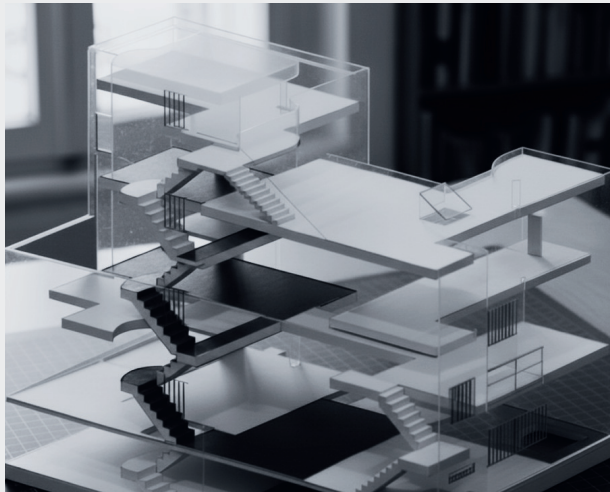


Fig. 149

Domain Promenade. Authors own. Sep 2025

Fig. 150

Art Promenade. Authors Own. Sep 2025

Fig. 151

Residential Promenade. Authors Own. Sep 2025

The “offering” is both purity and release. Where Act 5 ended with whiteness as repression, Act 6 reintroduces the human, traces of touch, breath, dust, movement. The architectural silence breaks into soft murmurs. The house, previously a mausoleum of modernism, begins to live again.

In this sense, Maison La Roche enacts a resurrection: not of form, but of memory. The ghosts of its hidden systems: the servants, the dumbwaiter, the dust, return as stains and as gifts. The building gives back what it had taken away: its history, its labor, its warmth. The offering is the house’s final act of humility, the admission that perfection must contain imperfection, that purity is always shadowed by dust.

Through the lens of *Poème de l’angle droit* Theme F, Maison La Roche becomes a continuous exchange between giving and receiving, seeing and touching, memory and oblivion. The stair, the ramp, the smudge, and the dumbwaiter together form the architecture’s gesture of open-handedness.

In the end, the house offers itself to us as a

fragile, temporal being. Its whiteness bears the stains of touch; its precision harbors traces of imperfection. In giving back these traces, Maison La Roche performs its most sacred ritual: the offering of memory.

Interlude VII

The Cosmogram of the
Fragment, Memory and
Disappearance in Rowe
and Koetter's Collage City



Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter's *Collage City*,²⁴⁴ published in 1978, stands as one of the most significant critical responses to the utopian dogma of mid-century Modernism. Their polemic advocates for an urbanism built not on planning but, on the recognition, and tactical reassembly of fragments as urban memory. This collage methodology shifts the city from a finished, holistic object, the product of an autonomous planning authority-to a perpetual, imperfect mosaic, where architectural and spatial remnants become the essential components of both historical continuity and new synthesis.

The central critique of *Collage City* is directed at the totalizing idealism of the Modernist plan, which Rowe and Koetter argue is inherently tyrannical, prioritizing abstract, a-historical diagrams over the rich, contradictory narrative of the existing city. In response, they propose a methodology rooted in the belief that the past cannot be merely reproduced or erased; it must be reconfigured through the fragment. These fragments, architectural elements, street grids, building typologies, and spatial relationships, act as living repositories of urban memory.

By juxtaposing these remnants, the *Collage City* acknowledges the complexity and necessary incoherence of historical experience. It is within the gaps and seams of the collage that memory is not passively received, but actively re-presented and made operational in the present.

Crucially, the fragment's role in memory is dual: it simultaneously acts as a trace of what existed and a reminder of new disappearance, the inevitable erosion and loss inherent in the passage of time . Rowe and Koetter's fragmentation, unlike the romantic ruin, is a proactive technique. By isolating, quoting, and rearranging historical pieces, they force a critical distance, preventing the fragments from dissolving into sentimental nostalgia. The fragment thus commemorates the act of erasure (disappearance) while utilizing the remaining physical data (the memory) to form new meanings.

This critical distance allows the resulting city to resist both the finality of the monolithic plan and the paralysis of perfect preservation, creating an urban fabric that is dynamic and historically self-aware.

Fig. 152

Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1978).

244. Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1978)

Extending this logic to the individual dwelling, the essay implicitly addresses the concept of the house as a cosmogram-instrument. If the city is a collage of memory fragments, the house is a microcosm where these fragments are internalized and deployed for a ritualistic purpose. In this perspective, the house is not just shelter; it is a sensitive instrument for collecting and arranging the "dust, pigment, [and] chips", the material fragments of experience and history, which are reassembled as ritual memory . The architect's role becomes less about designing a static container and more about constructing a framework where this ritual assembly can occur. The house, therefore, becomes a form of domestic archaeology, perpetually organizing the remnants of the user's life into a meaningful narrative.

Ultimately, *Collage City* asserts that architecture becomes a tool of remembrance, not a finished object. By privileging the interstitial relationship between fragments over the perfection of the whole, Rowe and Koetter offer a post-utopian vision. They acknowledge the impossibility of a singular, perfect urban world, opting instead for a dialectical relationship between the "Utopia" of the visionary plan and the "Tradition" of the realized city.²⁴⁵ The critique inherent in the collage method is that genuine urban freedom lies not in invention ex nihilo, but in the intelligent and ironic manipulation of available historical and spatial resources. *The Collage City*, therefore, proposes an ethical and aesthetic approach to urbanism where the imperfection of the fragment is the source of its vitality and its truest commitment to memory.

245. Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1978)

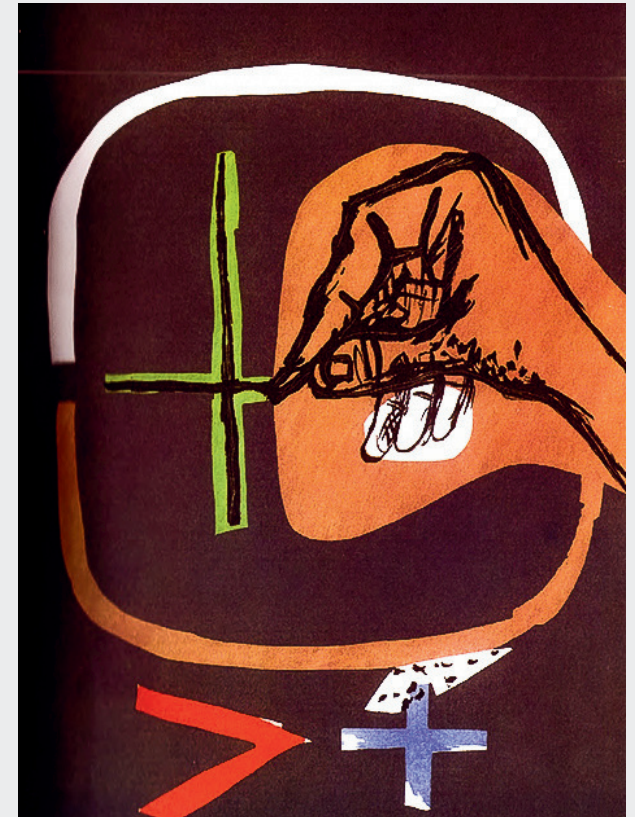
ACT 7

Fragments-Collage-City

Fig. 153

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate G.3, "Instrument: The Right Angle as Cosmic Guide and Personal Choice." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Theme G Instrument



246. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section G.

247. Michel Pastoureau, *Purple: A History of the Color* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023).

248. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section G.

249. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Section G.

Theme G, Instrument, represents the final act in the sequence of Le Corbusier's Poem of the Right Angle.²⁴⁶ Where Offering (Theme F) articulated the logic of generosity and release, Instrument moves toward the idea of architecture as a cosmic tool, a device that synthesizes fragments, signs, and memories into a larger order. The color, purple, signals this culmination: a hue historically associated with synthesis, power, and the fusion of opposites.²⁴⁷ If yellow in Theme F marked residue and traces, purple here marks integration, the reassembly of fragments into an instrument of orientation.

The poem G.3 Instrument declares this synthesis in direct terms: "With carbon we have ... traced the right angle the sign It is the answer and the guide the fact."²⁴⁸ The use of carbon suggests both the primordial element of life and the medium of inscription, reminding us that architecture begins with the act of tracing, of marking the void. The right-angle functions as a cosmogram, a structural sign that offers both answer and guide. For Le Corbusier, geometry is not abstraction but orientation, a way to anchor human existence in cosmic order.

65

Yet this sign is not purely scientific. The poem contrasts the savants who speak of relativity and rigour with the deeper claim that conscience makes it a sign. Here Le Corbusier privileges ethical intuition over detached rationalism, aligning with his conviction that architecture is at once technical and moral. The final line, "my answer my choice" returns the universal sign to the level of subjective affirmation, an existential declaration that architecture is an instrument only when consciously chosen, embraced, and enacted.²⁴⁹

Thus, Theme G closes the poetic sequence by reframing architecture as an instrument of remembrance and orientation, a tool that binds fragments into order, offering not closure but direction.

Fragments Of Maison La Roche

To study Maison La Roche through its fragments is to approach it as a field of evidence rather than a completed object. Each hinge, pipe, bulb, or door handle registers a negotiation between concept and construction, between the modernist pursuit of purity and the material realities of habitation. Examining these details makes visible the micro-operations, fixing, sealing, aligning, that sustain Le Corbusier's architectural order while revealing its fragility.

Le Corbusier conceived Maison La Roche as a synthesis of geometry and experience, a “machine for living” defined by clarity and restraint. Yet the fragments: scratches, worn surfaces, exposed joints, contradict the rhetoric of perfection. They reveal what Beatriz Colomina identifies as modernism's mechanisms of concealment, where architecture manages what may be seen and what must remain hidden to sustain its image of cleanliness and control.²⁵¹ The polished white wall, when inspected closely, becomes a screen masking system of labour and maintenance.

Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter's notion of the *Collage City* offers a productive counterpoint.²⁵² Maison La Roche operates as a collage of discrete spatial, mechanical, and aesthetic systems rather than a unified totality. The fragment, as analytical tool, captures this discontinuity, how the building performs coherence through the assembly of incompatible parts. Each detail, when isolated, reflects a specific logic of making, distinct from the architect's idealized geometry.

Photographic documentation of these fragments transforms the act of seeing into a form of critique. By focusing on the junctions, fastenings, and overlooked residues of use, the camera reconstructs the house's hidden history. These details record the processes of repair, adaptation, and decay that sustain architectural life over time. Far from diminishing the building, they expose its vitality as a living system shaped by entropy and renewal.

Fig. 154

Smudge, Pilotis. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 155

Door Lock. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 156

Door knobs. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 157

Bulb. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 158

Pulley, Dumbwaiter. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 159

Functional wardrobe, door. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 160

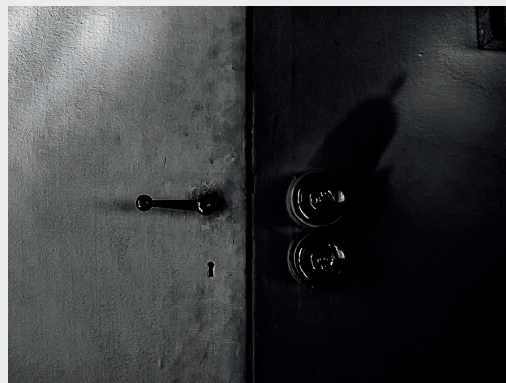
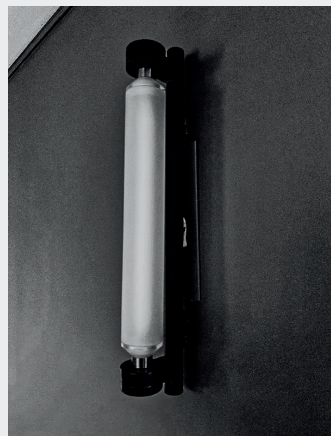
Window handle. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 161

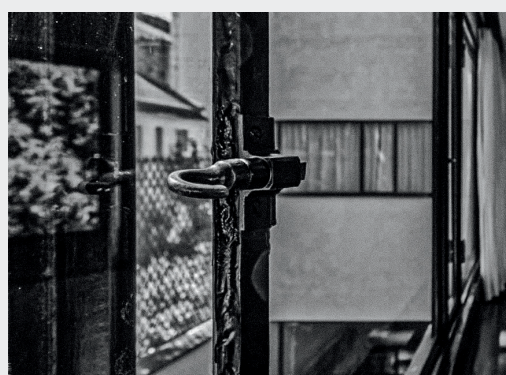
Horizontal bulb. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

250. Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

251. Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978).



Ultimately, the fragment redefines Maison La Roche as a site of negotiation rather than resolution. What appears as modernist wholeness is, in fact, a field of fragments continuously re-assembled by time, maintenance, and perception. To study these remnants is to confront the paradox of modern architecture itself, its pursuit of purity sustained by what it seeks to erase.



In the final panel of *Poème de l'angle droit*, Le Corbusier turns from ritual to revelation. The poem's language of craft and geometry becomes liturgical- We have drawn the right angle with a charcoal sign. It is the answer and the guide... my choice. After six acts of movement, purification, and offering, the Instrument theme reaffirms architecture's cosmic purpose, to draw order from chaos, to reconcile matter and thought through a single decisive gesture. The right angle, traced in dust and ash, is no longer a construction diagram. It is an emblem of conscience, a sign born from the hand's labor and the mind's faith.

In Maison La Roche, this closing act manifests as an architectural reassembly, a gathering of fragments, memories, and traces into a coherent symbolic totality. The house becomes an instrument of remembrance: its ramps, voids, and smudged walls no longer signify purity or function but continuity. The fragments of its own making, pigments on plaster, the red dust of restoration, the marks of servants' hands, become parts of a cosmic collage, much like the urban fragments described by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter in *Collage City* (1978).²⁵³

From Fragment to Cosmogram

For Rowe and Koetter, the fragment is a structure of meaning- The city is not a single vision but a collage of remembered intentions.²⁵⁴ Maison La Roche, when viewed through this lens, ceases to be a completed modernist object. It becomes a collaged instrument, its purity fractured by time, its surfaces layered with reinterpretation. Each restoration, each alteration, adds a new temporal stratum, a new rhythm in the cosmogram.

In the poem's logic, the right angle, drawn with charcoal, stands as a primitive yet transcendent mark, a human inscription on cosmic disorder. Le Corbusier's hand repeats the primordial act of measure, binding earth and sky. In the house, this gesture is architectural: the precise junctions of walls and ceiling, the orthogonal play of the ramp, the intersection of light and shadow.

Yet, in this final act, the angle is no longer pure. The straight lines of the gallery and stair bear the weight of dust, repair, and recollection. Their perfection has been touched by history. This is the charcoal sign, imperfect, smudged,

Fig. 162

Right Angle. Time Oriented instruments." (Source: Le Corbusier and the Occult : The Code. Cambridge, Mass. ; London, MIT, 2009.)



252. Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978).

253. Rowe and Koetter, *Collage City*.

but enduring. Maison La Roche's erosion becomes its music, the residue that allows it to play again as an instrument.

Purple, the color of this theme, is itself a synthesis, formed by mixing the passion of red (initiation, blood, act 4) with the serenity of blue (mind, act 2). It is the color of transition from material to metaphysical, the hue of dusk where day and night converge. Le Corbusier's choice of purple in *Instrument* thus marks the reconciliation of all prior polarities: dust and light, purity and abjection, seeing and blindness.

In the last act, the house stands as both relic and instrument. The right angle, the charcoal mark of conscience, links sky and ground, past and present. The fragments of the building's life do not resolve into closure; they resonate. The poem's final declaration, "It is the answer and the guide... my choice," reads now as a statement of responsibility.²⁵⁶ To build, to draw, to remember, these are moral acts.

Maison La Roche thus concludes its own cosmogram by vibrating between presence and memory. The architecture becomes an

instrument through which the invisible is measured, the forgotten recalled, the dust made luminous.

The house gives its final offering: it teaches that to construct is to remember, to fragment is to reveal, and to draw the right angle is to affirm solidarity with the cosmos.

254. Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret), *Le Poème de l'angle droit* (Paris: Tériade, 1955), Section G.

The Final Concealment

In the end, this thesis positions Maison La Roche not merely as an object of study, but as a powerful, revelatory machine. Through the lens of *Poème de l'angle droit*, the house transforms from a physical dwelling into a cosmogram, a site where architecture, ritual, and memory converge. The study began with a simple premise: that architecture is not only what is built, but also what is erased, concealed, and forgotten. Through the seven acts of this thesis, Environment, Mind, Flesh, Fusion, Character, Offering, and Instrument, Maison La Roche has been unfolded as a narrative of transformation, each layer revealing how space mediates between the material and the invisible.

Le Corbusier's *Poème* offers us a cosmological framework through which architectural meaning could be reimagined. By juxtaposing its alchemical stages with the spatial and sensory operations of Maison La Roche, the thesis traced how the house performs purification: the sun's rhythm in the Environment, the reflective gaze in the Mind, the repression of flesh and labour, the initiation through the veil, the

sterilisation of whiteness, the haunting return of the ghost, and finally the reassembly of fragments into a new cosmic order. Each act reveals architecture's capacity to conceal the abject while constructing the pure, to convert matter into myth.

The method of Cosmogrammic Architecture developed through this work proves that symbolic reading, when paired with critical theory and drawing, can unlock unseen narratives of space. It reframes Le Corbusier not merely as a modernist rationalist but as a storyteller of complex metaphysical fictions. Maison La Roche becomes an initiation chamber, a white ritual box where the house itself performs the act of disappearance, dissolving the real into the visionary.

In its final gesture, the building stands as a instrument for understanding a continuous cycle of concealment and revelation that defines all architecture. The house no longer belongs solely to the 1920s or the modernist age; it belongs to a timeless cosmology where dust, shadow, and

silence are as essential to design as concrete and glass. What endures is not the image of the house, but the ritual it performs, the concealment that makes architecture visible anew.

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Adolf Loos, The Villa Müller in Prague (1929–1930). Source: "Adolf Loos in Prague," Villa Müller Official Website.

Fig. 132

The White Wall as Apparatus: Purity, Surveillance, and Abjection at Maison La Roche. Composite spread featuring photographs of Maison La Roche interiors, including author's original photography and archival documentation from the Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. The spread collectively analyzes the white, purified surfaces of the house, particularly the geometric voids, ramps, and gallery spaces, as instruments of the modernist gaze and visual control. The pristine whiteness is interpreted as the physical manifestation of "Theme E: Character" from Le Poème de l'angle droit, staging the illusion of moral and architectural order while silently erasing the "abject", the messy residues of domestic labor, maintenance, and the history of earlier buried colors. The images underscore how the house is "reconstructed as a visual apparatus" that depends on the violence of purity and concealment.

Fig. 133, 134, 135

Composite figure illustrating the chronological and ideological transformation of the Double-Height Hall at Maison La Roche. This series juxtaposes an image of the hall during the 2008–09 restoration phase (showing buried pigments under whitewash and the necessity of maintenance), a 2020 archival photograph, and a photograph by the author from January 2025. Collectively, the images reveal the white wall as a "screen" that performs a continual act of erasure. The visible shift from the exposed, dirtied restoration

state to the immaculate, pristine white of the operational museum documents the house's pathological need to "purge dust, dirt, and disorder", making the space a "theatre of such purification rituals" that mask the inherent violence of modernism's pursuit of an impossible permanence.

(Sources: Jacques Sbriglio, Le Corbusier: The Villas La Roche-Jeanneret (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1997); Fondation Le Corbusier; Photograph by author, January 2025.)

Fig. 136

Drawing of ramp, emphasizing the play of light. Pencil on paper. Digital drawing by author, January 2025. This analytical drawing abstracts the ramp's geometry to demonstrate its function as an instrument of visual and moral control, where the movement upward represents the ascension from red to white, from matter to essence.

Fig. 137

The Gallery, emphasizing the play of light from the windows on the ramp, Maison La Roche, Paris. Archival photograph, Documentation Centre, Fondation Le Corbusier.

Fig. 138(Opposite)

Francisco Goya, The Dog (Spanish: El Perro), c. 1820–1823. Oil mural transferred to canvas. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

Fig. 139

Le Corbusier, Le Poème de l'angle droit, Plate F.3, "Offering: The Open Hand and the Logic of Reciprocity." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Fig. 140

Stucco detail, San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, Rome, showing an element of the "smudge" philosophy. Photograph by Jonathan Foote. Source: Drawing Matter Journal 2 (November 15, 2022).

Fig. 141

Original Ground Floor Sketch, Maison La Roche, Le Corbusier. Archival drawing, Documentation Centre, Fondation Le Corbusier.

Fig. 142

Paint brush, Plastic residual. The Gallery, Masion LaRoche. Photograph by author. Paris. Jan 2025.

Fig. 143

Polythene sheet on floor. The Gallery, Masion LaRoche. Photograph by author. Paris. Jan 2025.

Fig. 144

Dust residue on door. The Gallery, Masion LaRoche. Photograph by author. Paris. Jan

2025.

Fig. 145

Smudge on Pilotis. Masion LaRoche. Photograph by author. Paris. Jan 2025.

Fig. 146

Art Promenade. Authors Own. Photograph. Masion La Roche, Paris. Jan, 2025.

Fig. 147

Residential Promenade. Authors Own. Photograph. Masion La Roche, Paris. Jan, 2025.

Fig. 148

Domain Promendae. Authors own. Photograph. Masion La Roche, Paris. Jan, 2025.

Fig. 149

Domain Promendae. Authors own. Sep 2025

Fig. 150

Art Promenade. Authors Own. Sep 2025

Fig. 151

Residential Promenade. Authors Own. Sep 2025

Fig. 152

Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, Collage City (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1978).

Fig. 153

Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'angle droit*, Plate G.3, "Instrument: The Right Angle as Cosmic Guide and Personal Choice." Source: Fondation Le Corbusier, Digital Archive.

Fig. 154

Smudge, Pilotis. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 155

Door Lock. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 156

Door knobs. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 157

Bulb. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 158

Pulley, Dumbwaiter. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 159

Functional wardrobe, door. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 160

Window handle. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 161

Horizontal bulb. Maison LaRoche. Photograph by author. Jan 2025.

Fig. 162

Right Angle. Time Oriented instruments." (Source: Le Corbusier and the Occult : The Code. Cambridge, Mass. ; London, MIT, 2009.)

