Guest Editor: Beatriz Colomina

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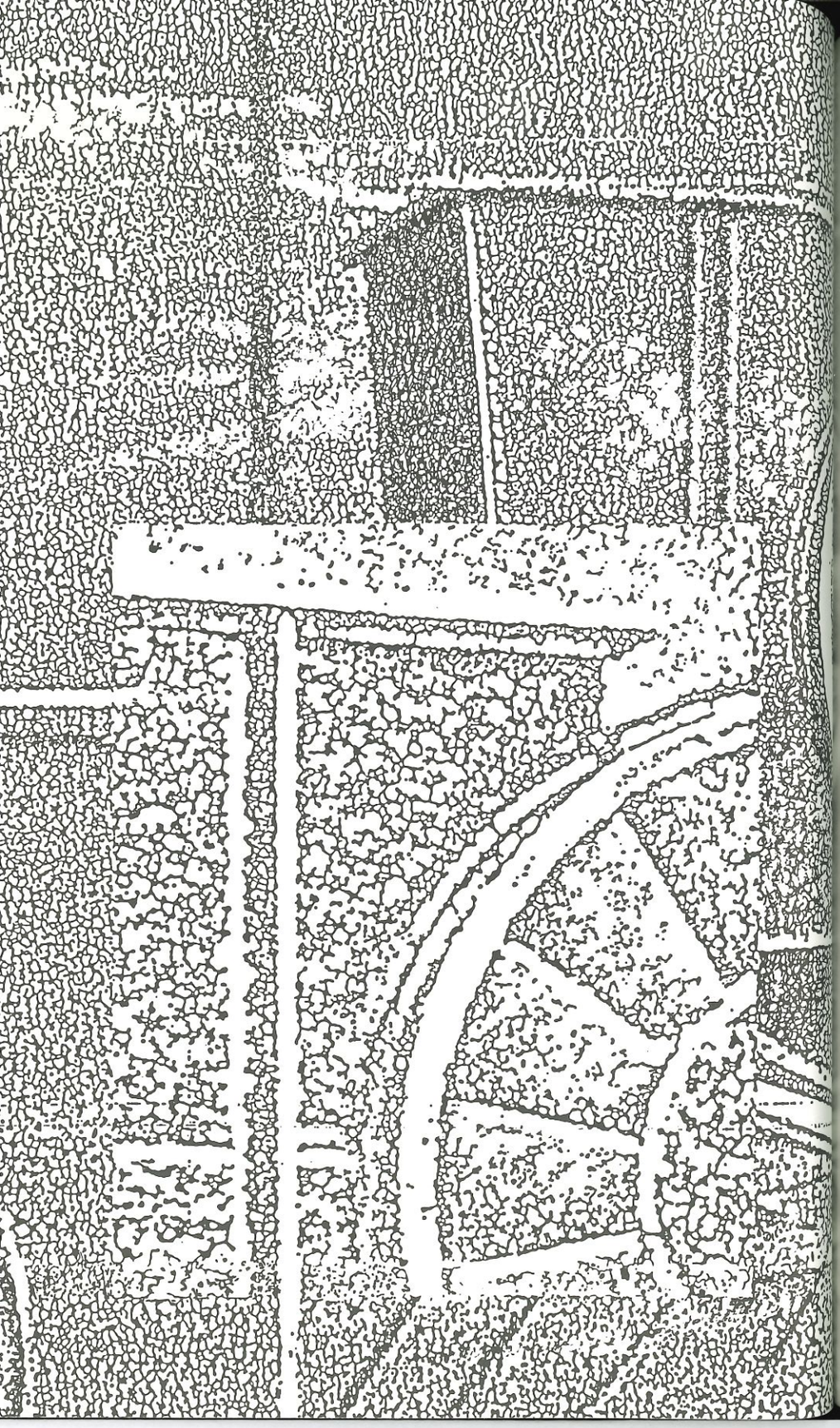


Beatriz Colomina

L'ESPRIT NOUVEAU: ARCHITECTURE AND PUBLICITÉ[1]

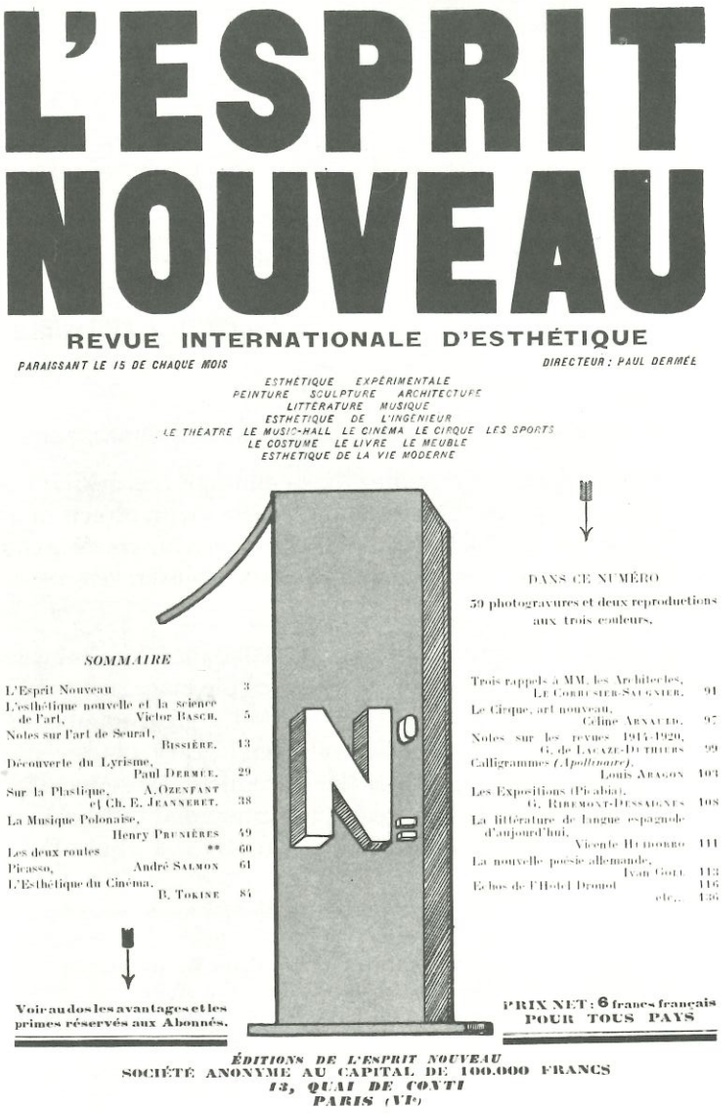
Le Corbusier and the everyday image of the industrial age

> At every moment either directly, or through the medium of newspapers and reviews, we are presented with objects of an arresting novelty. All these objects of modern life create, in the long run, a modern state of mind. —Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*

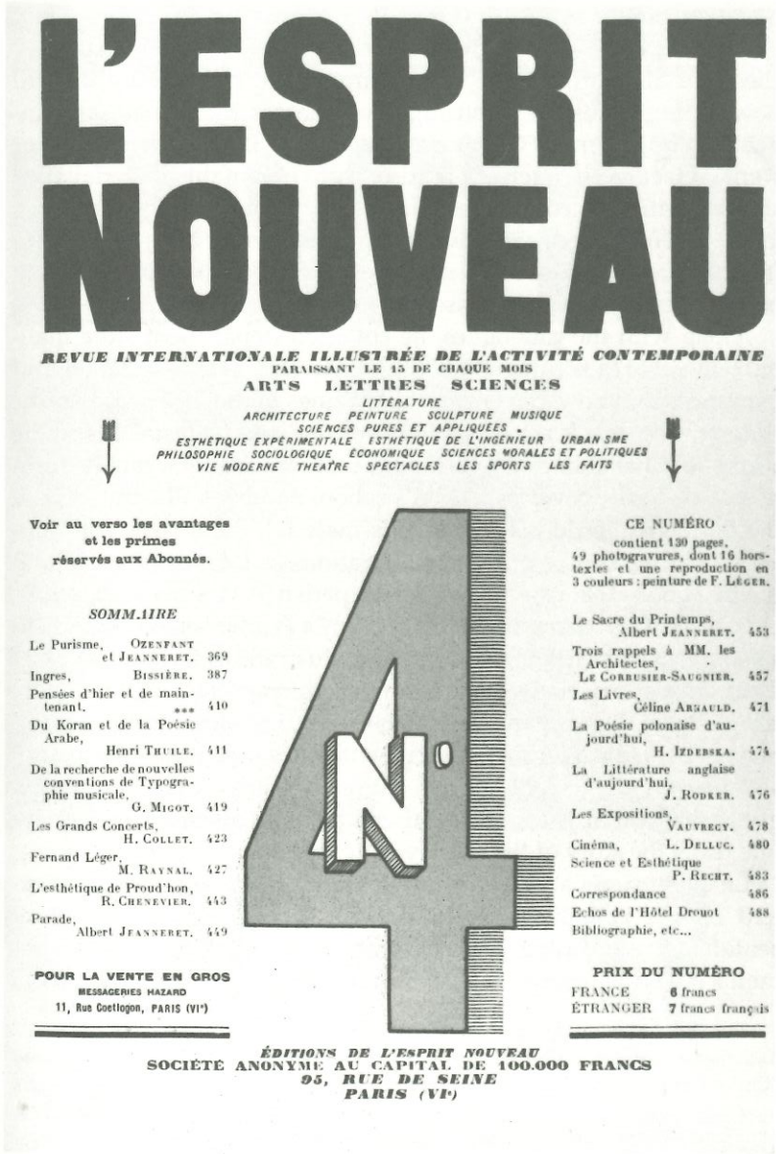
The archives of *L'Esprit Nouveau* in the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris indicate that throughout the years of the magazine's publication, 1920 to 1925,[2] Le Corbusier collected a great number of industrial catalogues and manufacturer's publicity brochures lavishly illustrated with photographs of their products. These include not only the automobiles Voisin, Peugeot, Citroën, and Delage; Farman airplanes and Caproni hydroplanes; suitcases and trunks from In-

1. I have chosen to keep the word *publicité* in French in my title to avoid the loss that occurs in its translation into the English "publicity." The word in French, as in all Romance languages, means (1) advertising (methods and techniques), (2) advertisement, (3) publicity. The notion of publicity as used in this article embraces all these meanings. It is also consistent with its root in the word "public." In relation to Le Corbusier and *publicité*, see Stanislaus von Moos, *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1979), and his later article, "Standard und Elite. Le Corbusier, die Industrie und der Esprit Nouveau," in Tilmann Buddensieg and Henning Rogge, eds., *Die nutzliche Künste* (Berlin, 1981), pp. 306–23.

2. *L'Esprit Nouveau* was published in Paris between 1920 and 1925 by Le Corbusier and the French painter Amedée Ozenfant. Initially the editor of this magazine was the Dadaist poet Paul Dermée, but he was dismissed by number 4 amid a polemic among the editorial group that ended up in a court trial. Ozenfant would later write in his memoirs, "Dermée had gotten it into his head to make a Dada journal: we eliminated him." The subtitle of the magazine changed significantly with Dermée's dismissal, from *Revue internationale d'esthétique* to *Revue internationale de l'activité contemporaine*. This change implies a shift from "aesthetics," as a specialized field separate from everyday life, to "contemporary activity," which included not only painting, music, literature, and architecture, but also "lower" forms of art: theater, music hall entertainment, sports, cinema, and book design.



Front cover of L'Esprit Nouveau: Revue Internationale d'Esthétique *1 (1920).*



Front cover of L'Esprit Nouveau: Revue Internationale Illustrée de l'Activité Contemporaine *4 (1921). Note the change in subtitle and that Paul Dermée is no longer editor.*

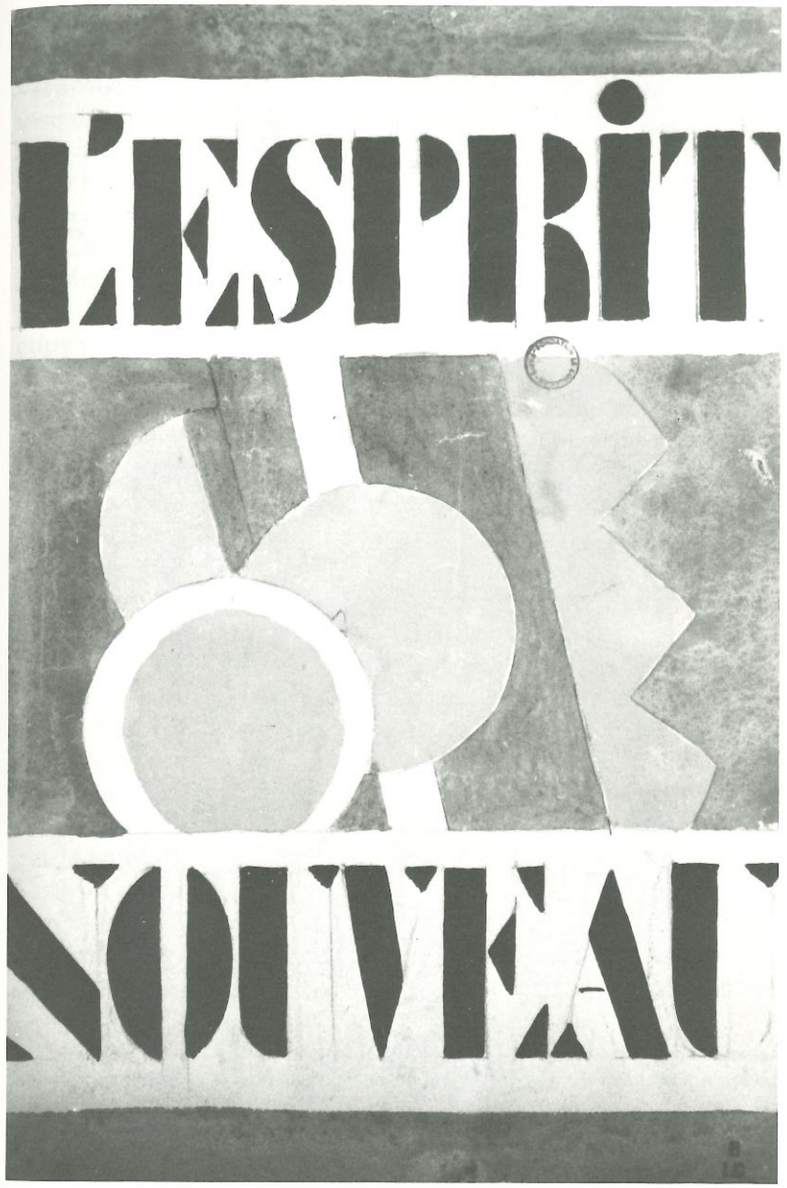
novation; office furniture by Or'mo and file cabinets by Ronéo; hand bags, sport bags, and cigarette cases by Hermes; and Omega watches, but also, among the most extravagant, turbines by Brown-Boweri, high-pressure centrifugal ventilators by Rateau, and industrial equipment by Clermont-Ferrand and Slingsby. Le Corbusier went, in fact, very much out of his way to obtain this material, constantly writing to companies to ask for it. Not only were the catalogues useful in securing advertising contracts for *L'Esprit Nouveau* (the products of most of the companies ended up being advertised in the magazine), but they also had an influence on his work.

Along with the catalogues, he collected department store mail-order brochures (Printemps, Au Bon Marché, La Samaritaine) and clippings from newspapers and magazines of the time, such as *The Autocar*, *Science et la vie*, *Revue du beton armé*, and *L'Illustré*. In fact, he seems to have collected everything that struck him visually, from postcards to the cover of a child's school notebook illustrated with the basic geometric volumes.[3] This material, these "everyday images," are the source of many illustrations in *L'Esprit Nouveau* and the five books that came out of this experience: *Vers une architecture*, *Urbanisme*, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, *La Peinture moderne*, and *Almanach de l'architecture moderne*.[4] The illustrations in *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* especially come from this "disposable" material; here images from department stores catalogues, industrial publicity, and newspapers like *L'Illustré* alternate with ones taken from art history and natural science books. One entire page is devoted to a photograph that was apparently promised but never obtained; in its place one reads the story of the abortive attempt: *on ne se comprend pas*.

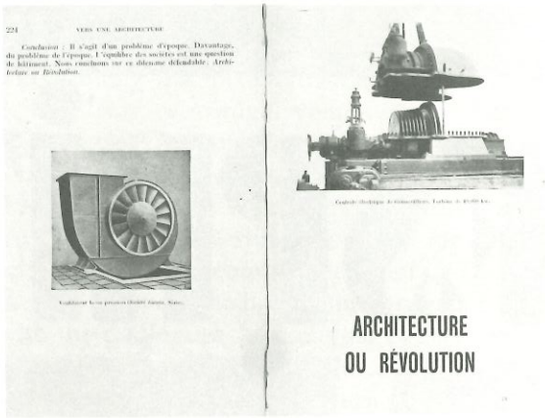
Le Corbusier's arguments in *L'Esprit Nouveau* rely to a great extent on the juxtapositions of image and text. Unlike the representational use of imagery in traditional books, Le Corbusier's arguments are to be understood in terms of never resolved collisions of

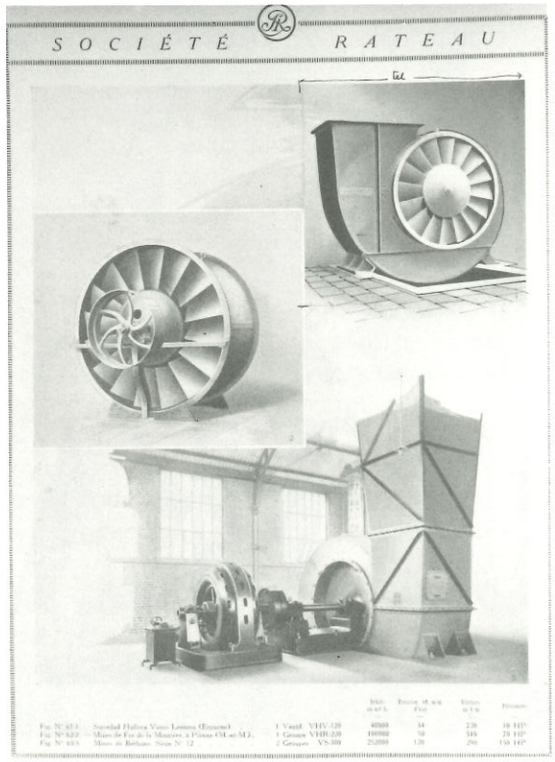
3. At the back of this "found object," the child's school notebook, Le Corbusier wrote: "Ceci est imprimé sur les cahiers des écoles de France/C'est la géométrie/La géométrie est notre langage/C'est notre moyen de mesure et d'expression/La géométrie est la base." A fragment of this image was to find its way into "Nature and Creation" (*L'Esprit Nouveau* 19), an article by Ozenfant and Le Corbusier, later reprinted in *La Peinture moderne* (1925). The complete image appears again in *Urbanisme* (1925), reproducing the above comment. The illustrations of an article in *The Autocar*, called "The Harmony of Outline," were transplanted into *L'Esprit Nouveau* in the form of a photo essay called "Evolution des formes de l'automobile" (*L'Esprit Nouveau* 13).

4. The content of these books was first published as a series of articles in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, with the exception of the chapter "Architecture ou révolution," which was added to *Vers une architecture*. The *Almanach de l'architecture moderne* was supposed to have been number 29 of *L'Esprit Nouveau*, an issue entirely devoted to architecture, but it never appeared.



Sketch for a cover of L'Esprit Nouveau *by Fernand Léger, 1922.*





Double-page spread from Vers une architecture, *1923, with photographs of a ventilator and a turbine taken from industrial catalogues.*

Page from a Société Rateau publicity brochure in the L'Esprit Nouveau *archives, with the image of the ventilator used by Le Corbusier,* above, *in* Vers une architecture.

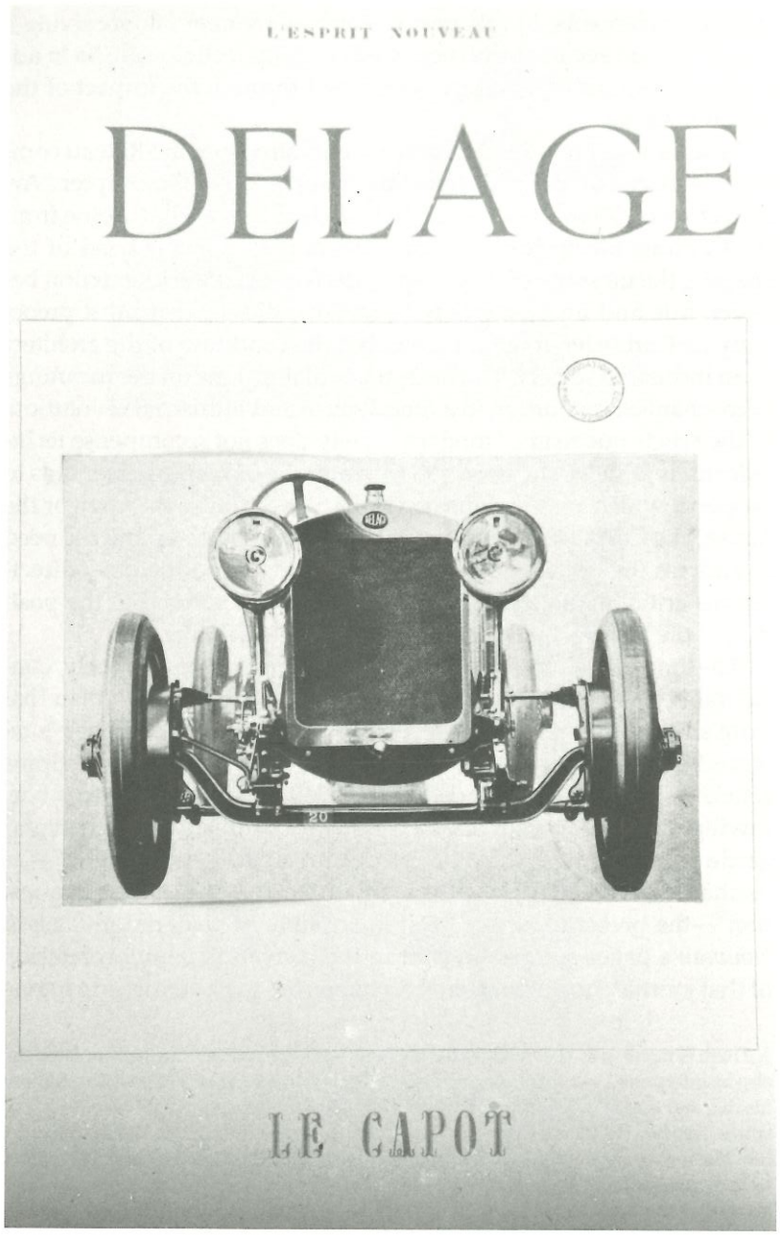
these two elements. In this unconventional manner of conceiving a book, one can see the influence of advertising techniques. As in advertising, the strongest effect is achieved through the impact of the visual material.

When a low-pressure centrifugal ventilator from the Rateau company is placed on the page opposite the opening of the chapter "Architecture ou Révolution" in *Vers une architecture*, and a turbine from the Centrale Electrique de Gennevilliers placed at the head of the chapter, the message of this chapter derives from the interaction between title and images: it is not social conditions that most preoccupy Le Corbusier, it would seem, but the condition of the architect in an industrial society. The Rateau ventilator puns on the meanings of mechanical revolution in a literal sense and industrial revolution. In the article one reads, "modern society does not recompense its intellectuals judiciously, but it still tolerates the old arrangements as to property, which are a serious barrier to transforming the town or the house." Le Corbusier here is defending public property and the need to address the housing problem through mass production—directing his critique, that is, precisely where a "revolution" in the position of the architect in an industrial society is at stake.[5]

The imagery derived from advertising is proportionately considerably more pervasive in the pages of *L'Esprit Nouveau* than that from strictly architectural sources—for example, Le Corbusier's famous borrowing of photographs of American silos from the Gropius article in the *Werkbund Jahrbuch* of 1913. Whereas the Gropius borrowing (and the subsequent traveling of this image through avant-garde journals) might also be read as a "media phenomenon"—as Banham has noted, none of the architects had seen the silos in question[6]—the presence of this heterodox publicity material in *L'Esprit Nouveau*'s pages suggests a shift in the conventional interpretation of that journal: from an internal exchange among avant-garde move-

5. There is never only one reading in Le Corbusier's work. The Rateau ventilator can also be interpreted as a spiral, one of the images that obsesses Le Corbusier throughout his life, and that in modern psychology is bound to the process of individuation. The spiral may be seen as the expression of a path that goes from life to death to reenter life. The renaissance of man (of the architect) is possible through the death of a part of his previous being. "Architecture or Revolution" could from this point of view also be read as initiating a spiritual-cultural rebirth. Without exhausting the complex significance of the spiral, one might also mention the myth of Daedalus, builder of the labyrinth: "d'après une tradition antique il aurait été capable de tendre un fil à travers un coquille de limaçon." Karl Kerenyi, *Labyrinth-Studien* (Zurich: Rhein-Verlag, 1950), p. 13.

6. Reyner Banham, *A Concrete Atlantis: U.S. Industrial Building and European Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), p. 11. In addition to the sources mentioned by Banham, it should be noted that Theo van Doesburg borrowed some im-



Proof of an advertisement for Delage intended to appear in L'Esprit Nouveau. *It was never published.*

The comfort of the Cabin of a Caproni Triplane 600-900 HP

Page from a Caproni publicity brochure in the L'Esprit Nouveau *archives.*

ments (as if enclosed in their own "magic circle," uncontaminated by the materials of low culture) to a dialogue with an emerging new reality, namely the culture of advertising and mass media.

Historically speaking, there is nothing very surprising about this impact on Le Corbusier of the visual imagery and techniques of advertising. He witnessed firsthand the passage from an industrial to a consumer society, with the corresponding development of mass media and publicity and the formation of a "culture of consumption." Le Corbusier was very sensitive to this new cultural condition. The production of consumer goods—as Theodor Adorno noted—developed according to a logic completely internal to its own cycle, to its own reproduction; its main mechanism was the "culture industry," the vehicles of which are the mass media—cinema, radio, advertising, and periodical publications.[7]

The media evolved from the technical revolution of the post-World War I years in much the same way as the vehicles of speed, automobiles and airplanes, had emerged from the prewar revolution. Radios and telecommunications had become household items by the beginning of the twenties.[8] The media were developed as part of the technology and instrumentation of war. What made possible the involvement of so many distant countries in World War I was communications, which bridged the distance between the battlefield and the places the news was being transmitted, between the fighting and the decision-making. The battle of the Marne is said to have been won by *coups de téléphone*.[9] The classic accounts of World War I explain the significant role of propaganda built up among nations, especially through the medium of the newspaper.

In contrast to the amount of attention that has been focused on Le Corbusier's architecture in relation to the culture of the machine age,

ages of silos from *L'Esprit Nouveau* for publication in *De Stijl* 4 and 6 (1921). Le Corbusier and Ozenfant wrote to Van Doesburg reprimanding him for not crediting *L'Esprit Nouveau* as the source of the material. The same photographs of the silos reappeared in Kassak and Moholy-Nagy's *Uj Müveszek Könyve* (Vienna; republished in Berlin as *Buch neuer Künstler*, 1922) and afterward in *MA* (nos. 3-6, 1923). See Gladys C. Fabre, "The Modern Spirit in Figurative Painting: From Modernist Iconography to a Modernist Conception of the Work of Art," in *Léger et l'esprit moderne* (Paris: MAM, 1982), pp. 99–100.

7. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York, 1972). See esp. the chapter "The culture industry." Also see Sergio Moravia, *Adorno e la teoria critica della società* (Florence, 1974), pp. 33–37.

8. Cf. Marie-Odile Briot, "L'Esprit Nouveau and Its View of the Sciences," in *Léger et l'esprit moderne*, p. 62.

9. Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880–1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 309.

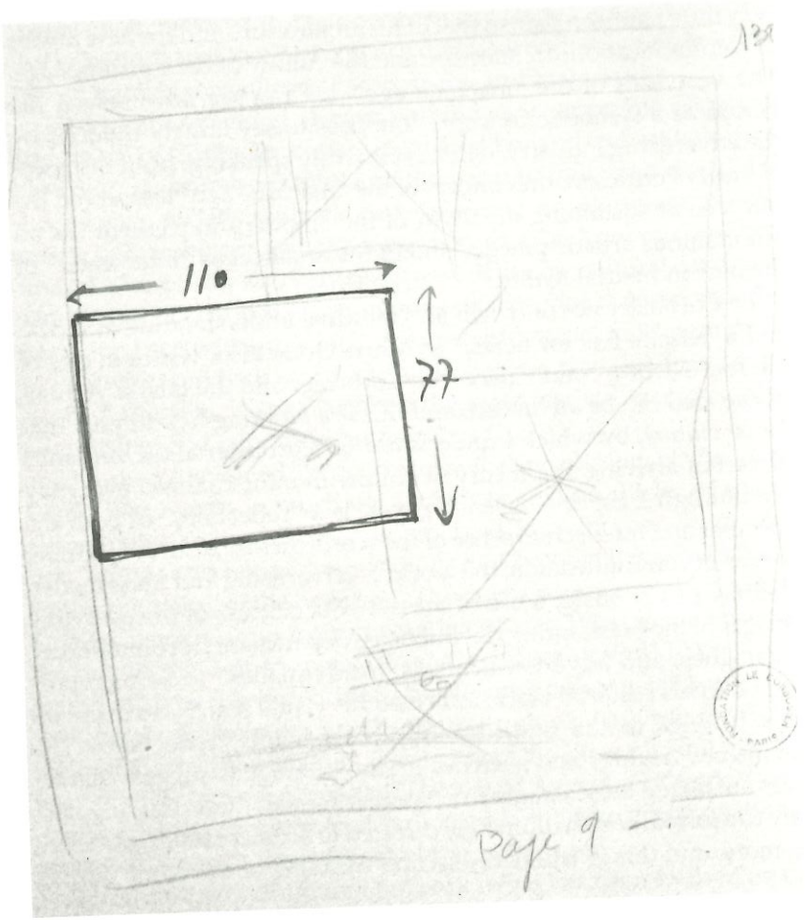
very little has been paid to that of his architecture and the new means of communication, architecture and the culture of the consumer age. The very idea of the "machine age," we can see now, served the period as a symbolic concept, doubtless to say largely induced by the advertising industry.[10] Retrospectively speaking, from the point of view of criticism, the concept of the "machine age" has served the purpose of sustaining the myth of the "modern movement" as an autonomous artistic practice and of the architect as "interpreter" of the new industrial reality.[11]

Le Corbusier not only had an "intuitive understanding of media and a definite feel for news," as Marie-Odile Briot writes in one of the few existing comments on Le Corbusier and the media. Actually, the idea can be advanced (and this is a working hypothesis) that *Purist culture*, by which I understand Le Corbusier and Ozenfant's project of arriving at a theory of culture in industrialized everyday life through *L'Esprit Nouveau*'s pages, is a "reflection," in both the specular and intellectual sense of the word, on the culture of the new means of communication, the world of advertising and mass media.

How Le Corbusier's use of mass-media culture, of the everyday images of the press, industrial publicity, department store mail-order catalogues, and advertisements as "ready-mades" to be incorporated into his editorial work, informed his visual search is a question that belongs to the first meaning of the word "reflection." The architect's tracings and sketches on the catalogues suggest that he was not taking these images in a passive manner; these drawings testify to a formal search ultimately directed to actual practice. But there is more, and this is where the second meaning of the word "reflec-

10. "At about the same time that serious artists were discovering in the industrial landscape new religious symbols, businessmen were learning about the power of advertising. To stave off the perils of overproduction, their advertising agencies turned to machine age imagery to stimulate consumption." Alan Trachtenberg, "The Art and Design of the Machine Age," *New York Times Magazine*, September 21, 1986.

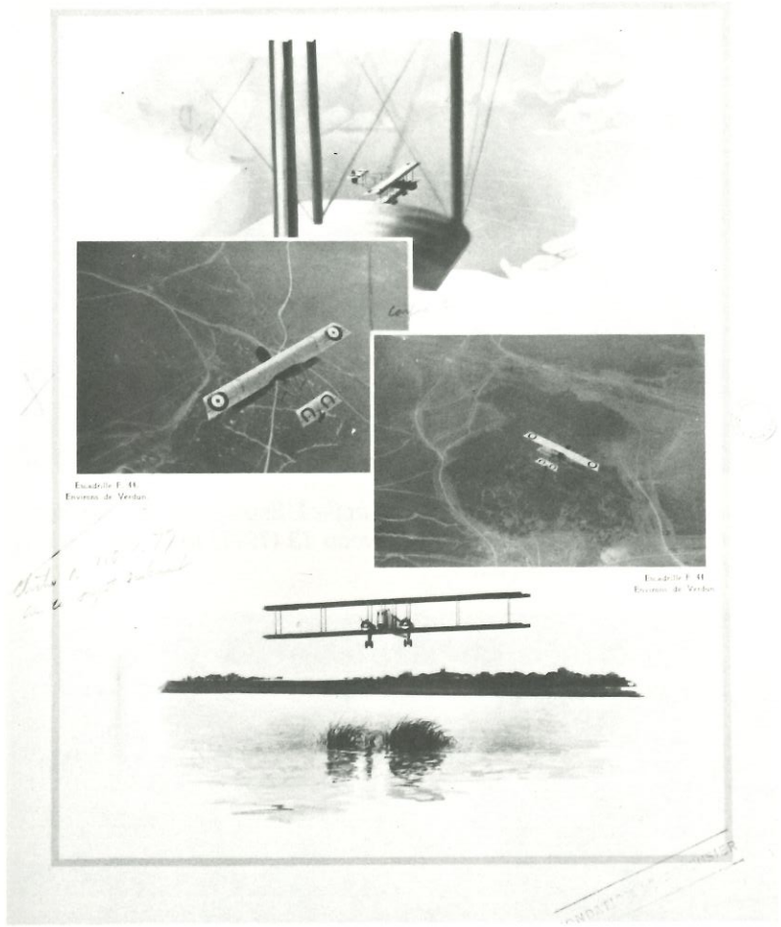
11. The term "machine age" was coined in 1927 with the exhibition organized by the *Little Review* in New York and is hardly adequate to characterize the artistic practices of the earlier part of the twentieth century in Europe. Critics interested in sustaining the myth of the "modern movement" as an autonomous artistic practice are those who under labels such as "machine age" put together such different attitudes toward the industrial reality as, for instance, the Futurist, the Dadaist, and Le Corbusier's. The differences, however, are more striking than the similarities. While Le Corbusier is showing airplanes, for instance, he is talking about mass-production houses. It is important to note how much airplanes were part of the popular imagination, occupying vast pages in the illustrated newspapers. Le Corbusier is deploying a well-known publicity technique: grabbing the attention of readers through their eyes in order to direct them, then, to the important matter. The Futurists, on the other hand, were indifferent to the processes of industrialization.

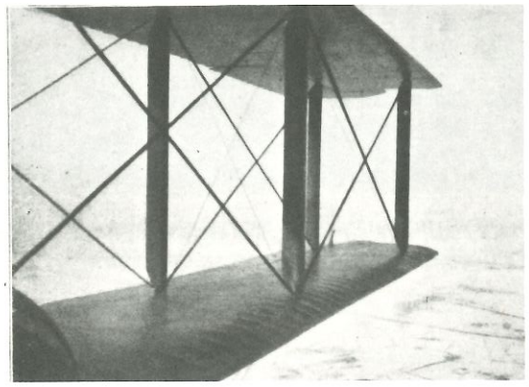


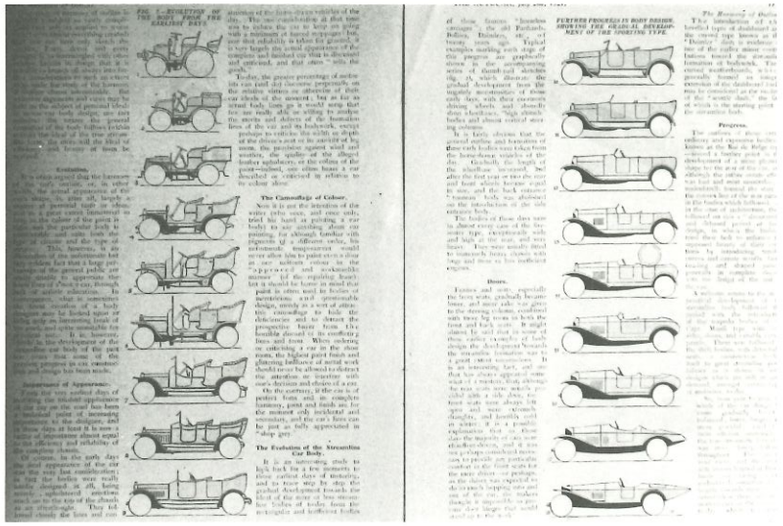
Above: *Sketch page indicating image of an airplane to be reproduced from a Farman catalogue.*

Page 69, above: *Annotated page from a Farman publicity brochure. The image chosen will later head the article "Des yeux qui ne voient pas…: II. Les avions" in* L'Esprit Nouveau *9 (1921), and be reprinted with the same chapter in* Vers une architecture.

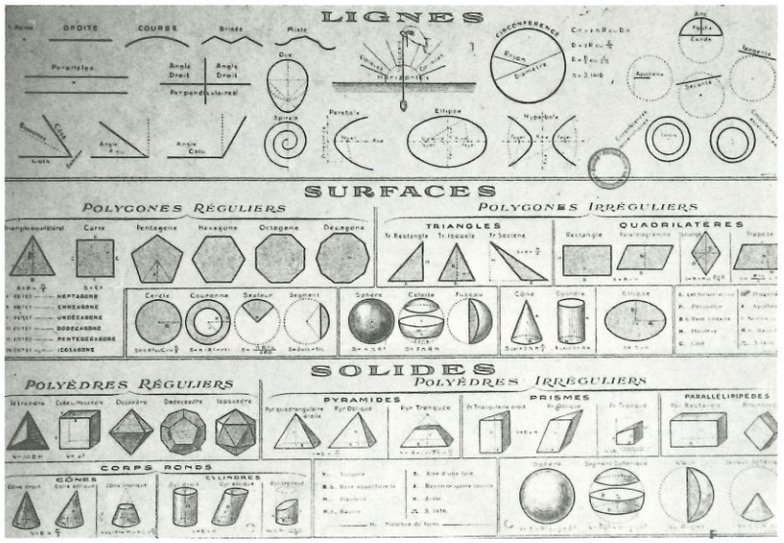
Page 69, below: *Wing of a Farman airplane as seen through the window by a passenger.* L'Illustration, *February 1919.*







Spread from The Autocar, *July 2, 1921, in the* L'Esprit Nouveau *archives. The images appeared in* L'Esprit Nouveau *13 (1921) under the heading "Evolution des formes de l'automobile."*



Back cover of a child's school notebook, in the L'Esprit Nouveau *archives. Le Corbusier used this image several times.*

Mockup of layout of Hermés bags for L'Esprit Nouveau *24 (1924).*

The equipment of a French soldier during the war. L'Illustration, *February 1919.*

tion" comes in. Le Corbusier identified in the very existence of the printed media an important conceptual shift regarding the function of culture and the perception of the exterior world by the modern individual. In *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* he writes, "The fabulous development of the book, of print, and the classification of the whole of the most recent archaeological era, has flooded our minds and overwhelmed us. We are in a completely new situation. *Everything is known to us.*"[12]

This new condition in which one knows "everything about everything" represents a transformation of traditional culture. Paradoxically, the classical, humanist accumulation of knowledge, a process that was strongly Cartesian and deductive, becomes problematic.[13] Further on I shall discuss Le Corbusier's position vis-à-vis the epistemological break represented by the media. Meanwhile, I shall address one aspect of it, his view of the status of the artwork in an industrial society.

The role of art in society was, in Le Corbusier's view, radically altered by the existence of mass media. In *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* he writes, "Here, in widespread use in books, schools, newspapers, and at the cinema, is the language of our emotions that was in use *in the arts* for thousands of years before the twentieth century." And in the introduction to *La Peinture moderne*, he writes with Ozenfant, "Imitative art has been left behind by photography and cinema. The press and the book operate much more efficiently than art relative to religious, moral, or political aims. What is the destiny of the art of today?"

12. Le Corbusier, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Editions Crès, 1925), p. 23.

13. Abraham Moles, in his *Sociodinamique de la culture* (Paris, 1960), notes: "The role of culture is to provide the individual with a screen of concepts in which he projects his perceptions of the exterior world. This conceptual screen had in traditional culture a rational reticular structure, organized in an almost geometrical fashion...we knew how to place new concepts with reference to old ones. Modern culture, mosaic culture, offers us a screen which is like a series of fibers glued together at random. This screen is established by the submersion of the individual in a flux of disparate messages, with no hierarchies of principles: he knows everything about everything; the structure of his thought is extremely reduced." Le Corbusier's constant attempts to classify his knowledge do not exempt his work from this cultural condition described by Moles, but rather make it one of its possible manifestations. The conventionality with which Le Corbusier constructs the table of contents in his books, in an almost nineteenth-century fashion, stands dramatically in opposition to their actual content, which is drawn from all kinds of sources of information and manifested according to the new "visual thinking" strongly indebted to the new condition of printed mass-information.

L'Esprit Nouveau between avant-garde and modernity: the status of the artwork and the everyday object

One question that presents itself in relation to Le Corbusier's use of publicity images as "ready-mades" is to what extent this is paralleled by Dadaist practices. This question contains a conceptual problem that has become important in recent critical discourse—the difference between modernism and the avant-garde in the context of the first half of this century.[14] A comparison between Le Corbusier's image of a bidet by the manufacturer Maison Pirsoul, published in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, and Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain by R. Mutt* of 1917 will serve as a starting point for this discussion.

These are, if we take representation as a transparent medium, two plumbing fixtures. The origin of the first is its publication in the pages of *L'Esprit Nouveau*; there is no other "original." The second was supposed to have been exhibited in the Salon of the Independents in New York, but never was, as it was rejected and subsequently lost; what remains is only the photograph of it. Nevertheless, it is this document together with a piece of contemporary criticism by Beatrice Woods in *The Blind Man*, a New York Dada journal, that has assured this piece a place in history. Thus both of these objects conceived by Duchamp and Le Corbusier exist only as "reproductions." Another aspect of the lack of an original has to do with the objects each reproduction represents. Duchamp's artwork is a mass-produced object turned upside-down, signed, and sent to an art exhibition. Le Corbusier's prime matter is an advertising image, obviously taken from an industrial catalogue, and placed in the pages of an art journal.

These are the superficial similarities between the two documents. Their difference, however, resides in the meaning of each gesture and the context in which it is placed. The context of the *Fountain by R. Mutt* is the exhibition space. It does not matter that it was never exhibited there. It has to be thought of in that setting; its interpretation

14. "The problem I address...is not what modernism 'really was,' but rather how it was perceived retrospectively, what dominant values and knowledge it carried, and how it functioned ideologically and culturally after World War II. It is a specific image of modernism that has become the bone of contention for the postmoderns, and that image has to be reconstructed if we want to understand postmodernism's problematic relationship to the modernist tradition and its claims to difference." Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," *New German Critique* 33 (1984), p. 13. The usual equation of the avant-garde with "modernism" is part of this received view. The "ism" in this sense is particularly telling—it reduces everything to a style. Against this heritage we should indeed try to understand the specificity of the different projects that fall within the modern period—or perform, in Manfredo Tafuri's words, "a thorough investigation of whether it is still legitimate to speak of a Modern Movement as a monolithic corpus of ideas, poetics and linguistic traditions." Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture* (New York, 1976; original ed. Rome and Bari, 1969), p. 2.

THE BLIND MAN

The Richard Mutt Case

They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit.

Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.

What were the grounds for refusing Mr. Mutt's fountain:

1. *Some contended it was immoral, vulgar.*
2. *Others, it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.*

Now Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bath tub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows.

Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.

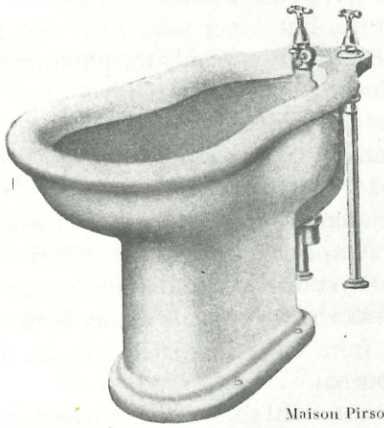
As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.

"Buddha of the Bathroom"

I suppose monkeys hated to lose their tail. Necessary, useful and an ornament, monkey imagination could not stretch to a tailless existence (and frankly, do you see the biological beauty of our lost ol them?), yet now that we are used to it, we get on pretty well without them. But evolution is not pleasing to the monkey race; "there is a death in every change" and we monkeys do not love death as we should. We are

ing thing about our human institutions that although a man marry he can never be only a husband. Besides being a money making device and the one man that every woman can sleep with in legal purity without sin he may even be as well some other woman's very personification of her ab stract idea. So, while to his employees he is nothing but their "Boss," to his children only their "Father," and to himself ce

"The Richard Mutt Case" in The Blind Man *2 (1917).*



Maison Pirsoul.

AUTRES ICONES
LES MUSÉES

Page from L'Esprit Nouveau *20 (1924).*

Plate 317-H

FOUNTAIN: LARGE ACANTHUS LEAF, DUCK BASE, TWO PANS, WITH BITTERN

THE J. L. MOTT IRON WORKS

Fifth Avenue and 17th St.

84 to 90 BEEKMAN STREET, NEW YORK

Illustrated page and company name and address from the cover of the publicity catalogue Fountains *issued by the manufacturer J. L. Mott. Besides very elaborate ("artistic") fountains, this well-known company also produced plumbing fixtures, which suggests the possibility that the title of Duchamp's work,* Fountain by R. Mutt, *is a play on this manufacturer's name.*

is inseparable from it. As Peter Bürger says in his book *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, the meaning of Duchamp's gesture derives from the contrast between mass-produced object on the one hand and signature and art exhibit on the other. In signing a mass-produced object, Duchamp is negating the category of individual creation and unmasking the art market, where a signature means more than the quality of the work. The avant-garde gesture, in Bürger's definition, is an attack on art as an institution.[15]

To what extent can we consider Le Corbusier's bidet an avant-garde gesture? The context of the Le Corbusier bidet is *L'Esprit Nouveau*. The image heads an article titled "Other Icons: The Museums," which belongs to a series published between 1923 and 1924, later reprinted in *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* in 1925. The series was issued in preparation for the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. In the article Le Corbusier writes, "Museums have just been born. There were none in other times. In the tendentious incoherence of museums the model does not exist, only the elements of a point of view. The true museum is the one that contains everything."

These observations on museums again seem close to Duchamp. The museum viewer can only perform an intellectual operation; contemplation is no longer possible. When the *Fountain by R. Mutt* was rejected by the Independents as "plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing," Beatrice Woods (presumably in agreement with Duchamp) wrote in *The Blind Man*, "Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object." If the museum transforms the work of art—in fact, creates it as such—and allows the viewer only an intellectual

15. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 52. Burger also remarks how easily Duchamp's gesture is consumed: "It is obvious that this kind of provocation cannot be repeated indefinitely: here, it is the idea that the individual is the subject of artistic creation. Once the signed bottle drier has been accepted as an object that deserves a place in a museum, the provocation no longer provokes, it turns into its opposite...it does not denounce the art market but adapts to it." Manfredo Tafuri also gives priority to the question of architecture as an institution. He writes, "one cannot 'anticipate' a class architecture; what is possible is the introduction of class criticism into architecture.... Any attempt to overthrow the institution, the discipline, with the most exasperated rejections or the most paradoxical ironies—let us learn from Dada and Surrealism—is bound to see itself turned into a positive contribution, into a 'constructive' avant-garde, into an ideology all the more positive as it is dramatically critical and self-critical." *Theories and History of Architecture*, note to the second (Italian) edition. See also, in this regard, Lionello Venturi, *History of Art Criticism* (New York, 1964).

experience of it, Marcel Duchamp's act consists in putting this condition in evidence: creating a new thought for an ordinary product.

The Maison Pirsoul bidet is an everyday object, an industrial product, and Le Corbusier never intended it to abandon this status. His statement that it should be in a museum does not mean he intended to present it as an art object. That the bidet should be in a museum—to be precise, in the museum of decorative arts—means to Le Corbusier that the bidet speaks of our culture, as the folklore of a certain place spoke of that place's culture in other times. But in the places where the railway had already arrived, as Le Corbusier realized, after Loos, folklore could no longer be preserved. The industrial product had become the folklore of the age of communications.[16] Both folklore and industrial production are collective phenomena. *L'art décoratif moderne* did not have the individual character of artistic creation but the anonymous one of industrial production, of folklore.

While Duchamp was questioning the institution of art and artistic individual production, Le Corbusier, more in line with Adolf Loos (who was also fascinated with sanitary material), was distinguishing between the object of use and the art object. Indeed, Le Corbusier's arguments in *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* are strongly indebted to Loos, who not only wrote the famous essay "The Plumbers" (1898), but in 1908 wrote another essay called "The Superfluous." This text is devoted to the architects of the Werkbund. Loos writes:

> Now they have all gathered together in a congress in Munich. They want to demonstrate their importance to our craftsmen and industrialists.... Only the products of industries that have managed to keep away from the superfluous have attained the style of our times: our automobile industry, our production of glass, our optical instruments, our canes and umbrellas, our suitcases and trunks, our saddles and our silver cigarette cases, our jewelry and our dresses are modern. Certainly, the cultivated products of our time do not have any relation to art. The nineteenth century will pass into history as having effected a radical break between art and industry.

Contrary to the received view of Loos, it is not only the unself-conscious craftsman, the master saddler, who is "modern." Modern, for Loos, includes everything we do not know as such: anonymous collective production. Le Corbusier, like Loos, distinguishes between art and life, between the art object and the everyday object. He does not deny the individuality of artistic creation. In *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* he writes:

16. Le Corbusier, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, p. 57.

> Permanence of the decorative arts? or more precisely, of the objects that surround us? It is there that we have to pass judgment: the Sistine Chapel first, then chairs and file cabinets—to tell the truth, problems of a second order, as the cut of a man's suit is a second-order problem in his life. Hierarchy. First the Sistine Chapel, that is, works where passion is inscribed. Then, machines for sitting, for classifying, for illuminating, *machines-types*, problems of purification, of cleanliness, of clarification, before problems of poetry.[17]

There are three key words in this passage: *permanence*, *passion*, and *purification*. The first two are associated with art, the third one with the everyday object. For Le Corbusier the essential thing about art is its permanence, lastingness. As Banham has noted, Le Corbusier rejected the Futurist theory of the *caducitá* or ephemerality of the work of art. He distinguishes works of art from works of technology and insists that only the latter are perishable.[18]

Against the products of reason Le Corbusier sets the products of passion, the passion of a creative man, a genius. The capacity of a work of art to provoke an emotion, qualitatively different from the pleasures of a beautiful object, for Le Corbusier lies in recognizing the passionate gesture of the artist who created it, in any time or place. He thus sets apart the artwork from the everyday object, the artist from all the other "producers" in society.

Finally, *L'art décoratif moderne* promotes cleanliness, purification. This notion reminds us once again of Loos, when in "The Plumbers," after commenting on America in a manner reminiscent of Duchamp[19] ("the most remarkable difference between Austria and America is the plumbing"), he goes on to say:

> We don't really need art. We don't even have a culture of our own yet. This is where the state could come to the rescue. Instead of putting the cart before the horse, instead of spending money on art, let's try producing a culture. Let's put up baths next to the academies and employ bath attendants along with professors.

However, Loos's caustic and irreverent writings should be distinguished from the shock tactics of Dada. A comment made by Walter Benjamin in reference to Karl Kraus is applicable here to Loos, who predicted that in the twentieth century a single civilization would

17. Ibid., p. 77.

18. Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (New York: Praeger, 1978), p. 250.

19. I am referring to the comment, "The only works of art America has created are its installations and its bridges," in *The Blind Man*, 2 (1917).

dominate the earth: "Satire is the only legitimate form of regional art." "The greatest type of satirist," continues Benjamin, "never had firmer grounds under his feet than amid a generation about to board tanks and put on gas masks, a mankind that has run out of tears but not of laughter."[20] Le Corbusier is a post-World War I figure, Loos a prewar one. While it is possible to establish relations between their work, a crucial question remains unanswered: how much does this demarcation line of the war cause them to be such different historical witnesses?

Faut-il brûler le Louvre?

The key to Le Corbusier's position on universal culture is to be found in his idea of the museum: "The true museum is the one that contains everything." Le Corbusier makes this comment in the context of his publication of the bidet. With this definition, however, the museum and the world become conflated with each other. Perhaps, then, Le Corbusier is not talking about museums after all, at least not in the literal sense, especially since, as we have seen, he is not suggesting that the bidet is an art object. In this respect, it is interesting to notice the way in which he twists his argument later, in *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, to talk about popular literature (*Je sais tout*, *Sciences et vie*, *Sciences et voyages*), cinema, newspapers, photography, and everything from the new culture industry that brings, as it were, the world into our living rooms.[21]

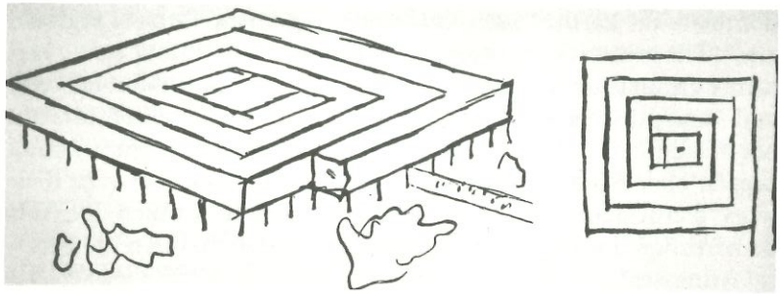
What makes the museum obsolete as a nineteenth-century accumulative institution is the mass media. Thus when Le Corbusier says the true museum should contain everything he is talking about an imaginary museum, a museum that comes into being with the new means of communication, something close to what Malraux will later call a "museum without walls."[22] "For a long time," says Le Corbusier in a document called "Lettre de Paris" conserved in the Fondation Le Corbusier, "painting had as its main objective the creation of documents. Those documents were the first books.... But a hundred years ago photography arrived, and thirty years ago, cinema. Documents are obtained today by an objective click, or by a film that rotates."[23]

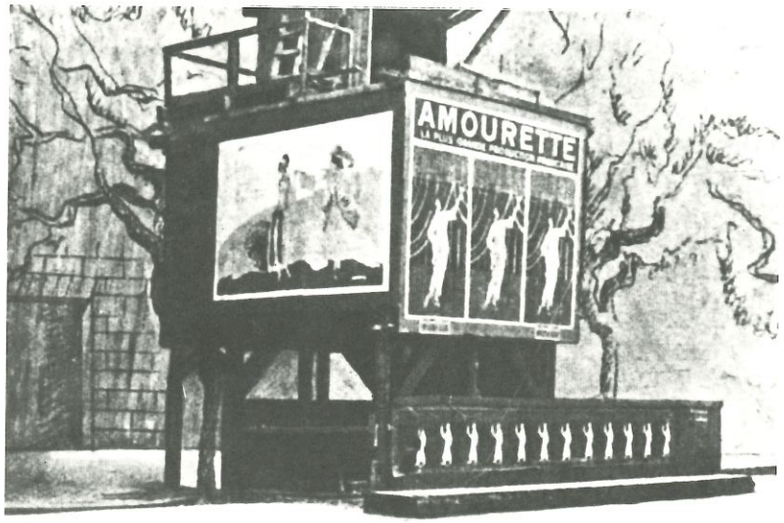
20. Walter Benjamin, "Karl Kraus," in *Reflections* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), p. 260.

21. Le Corbusier, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, p. 128.

22. André Malraux, "The Museum without Walls," in *The Voices of Silence* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1953).

23. "Lettre de Paris," undated manuscript, Fondation Le Corbusier, A1(16). The document is part of the *L'Esprit Nouveau* archives. The argument is so close to that of *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* as to suggest a 1924–25 date.





RÉPONSES A NOTRE ENQUÊTE (FIN)

FAUT-IL

BRULER LE LOUVRE?

Le Corbusier, Museum of Unlimited Growth, 1939.

"Fresque." *Illustration in* L'Esprit Nouveau *19 (1923).*

Title block of an article in L'Esprit Nouveau *6 (1921).*

Since everything is known to us through the media the problem is no longer that of mere documentation, but of the classification of information. The question of museums gives way, in Le Corbusier's argument, to that of classification. As he says of Ronéo file cabinets, "In the XXth century we have learned to classify."

Malraux begins his "Museum without Walls" by reflecting on the transformation of the "work of art" in the context of the museum:

> A Romanesque crucifix was not regarded by its contemporaries as a work of sculpture, nor Cimabue's *Madonna* as a picture.... Museums have imposed on the spectator a wholly new attitude toward the work of art. For they have tended to estrange the works they bring together from their original functions and to transform even portraits into pictures.[24]

The museum, Malraux argues, is the place where the work of art is constituted as such. Walter Benjamin takes somehow the reverse route when he writes:

> By the absolute emphasis on its cult value, it [the work of art in prehistoric times] was, first and foremost, an instrument of magic. Only later did it come to be recognized as a work of art. In the same way today, by the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value, the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental.[25]

Mechanical reproduction, suggests Benjamin, qualitatively modifies the nature of art in modifying the relation of the public with it. Something of this order was understood by Le Corbusier when he wrote (in response to Marcel Temporal, who was heading a group of painters attempting to recuperate the fresco as an artistic medium):

> The fresco wrote history upon the walls of churches and palaces, told stories of virtue or of vanity. There were no books—one read the frescoes. (In passing, a quick homage to Victor Hugo: "This will kill that.")...The poster is the modern fresco, and its place is in the street. It lasts not five centuries but two weeks, and then it is replaced.[26]

24. Malraux, "The Museum without Walls," pp. 13-14.

25. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 225.

26. "Fresque," *L'Esprit Nouveau*, 19. The posters that Le Corbusier was admiring were those of Cassandre. However, he did not know at the time, or did not acknowledge, their authorship. Instead, he wrote to the company the posters were advertising, Le Boucheron, in an effort to obtain a publicity contract for *L'Esprit Nouveau*. See letters of June 6 and 14, 1924, in Fondation Le Corbusier, A1 (17). Of course, Cassandre's posters were not "Art" for Le Corbusier, but one more instance of the beautiful objects that industrialized everyday life was producing.

L'art est partout dans la rue qui est le musée du present et du passé, writes Le Corbusier in *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*. The works in this imaginary "museum" are the poster, fashion, the industrial design object, advertising; they are the equivalent in our time of the madonnas, crucifixes, and frescoes of medieval society. That is to say, we do not perform in front of them an intellectual operation. We perceive them in a mood of relaxation that, among other things, allows advertising to become effective. They constitute the objects of a cult, the cult of consumption, as necessary to the reproduction of the social system as religion was in medieval times. They embody the values and myths of our society. As Adorno and Horkheimer have noted, they are not only the vehicles of an ideology, they are ideology itself.

Any critical reassessment of Le Corbusier's position in the light of a "critique of ideology" must take into account this structural condition of capitalist society, and the role of media and advertising. Particularly in the case of Le Corbusier, perhaps the first architect fully to understand the nature of the media (to put it bluntly, he published some fifty books), critical theories exclusively founded on the notion of traditional building production are insufficient. I shall return to this subject shortly: the architect as (re)producer. In the meantime, a pending question: if "the press and the book operate much more efficiently than Art relative to religious, moral, or political aims, what destiny is left to art in an industrial society?"

As we have seen, for Le Corbusier the everyday object, the industrial product, the engineer's construction were not works of art:

> I discard, I discard.... My life isn't meant to preserve dead things. I discard Stevenson's locomotive.... I will discard everything, for my twenty-four hours must be productive, brilliantly productive. I will discard everything of the past, everything except that which still serves. Certain things serve forever: they are Art.[27]

With such a statement, Le Corbusier distinguishes himself from the avant-garde, understood as an attack on High Art. For him, permanence still differentiates the artwork from the everyday object, architecture from engineering, painting from posters. The artist as maker is set apart from the rest of producers in industrial society. The institution of art, its autonomy from everyday life, remains intact. Nor is Le Corbusier the quintessentially modernist figure we are accustomed to see portrayed in conventional histories. Perhaps the best evaluation is still Manfredo Tafuri's when, in his *Theories and History of Architecture*, he notes in passing that Le Corbusier did not

27. Le Corbusier, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, p. 182.

accept the new industrial conditions as an external reality, did not relate to them as an "interpreter," but rather aspired to enter into them as a "producer."

Interpreters are those who perpetuate the figure of the *artist-magician*, in the Benjaminian definition, those who, faced by the "new nature of artificial things" to be used as raw material in their artistic work, remain anchored to the principle of mimesis. On the opposite side is the *artist-surgeon*, again in the Benjaminian sense, one who has understood that reproduction techniques create new conditions for the artist, the public, and the media of production. Instead of passively admiring the "equipment," they go behind it and use it.[28]

The architect as (re)producer

In his books and articles Le Corbusier borrows the rhetoric and techniques of persuasion of modern advertising for his own theoretical arguments and manipulates actual advertisements to incorporate his own vision, thus blurring the limits between text and publicity. He does this consciously, arguing that in this way persuasion is most effective: "*L'Esprit Nouveau*," he announces in the publicity brochure sent to industrialists, "is read calmly. You surprise your client into calmness, distance from business, and he listens to you because he doesn't know you are going to solicit him."

In obtaining advertising contracts Le Corbusier often reversed the usual procedure. Once he had incorporated images from industrial catalogues in his articles, or even published actual advertisements in the review, he would send the company a letter with a copy of *L'Esprit Nouveau* and request payment for the publicity the company was receiving. Of course, the request was not made so crudely, but rather wrapped up in Le Corbusier's flattering rhetoric: the product had been singled out as representative of the spirit of the times, and so forth.

28. Benjamin studies film as an example of an art in which the reproduction techniques confer a new condition on the artist, the public, and the media of production. He writes: "The magician and the surgeon behave respectively like the painter and the operator. The painter keeps, in his work, a natural distance from what he is given, while the operator penetrates deeply into the texture of the data.... [The image] of the painter is total, that of the operator is multifragmented, and its parts are rearranged according to a new law. Therefore the cinematic representation of reality is vastly more meaningful for the modern man because, precisely on the basis of its intense penetration through the equipment, it offers him that aspect, free from the equipment, that he can legitimately ask from the work of art." "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction," p. 233. Tafuri finds in this passage a principle by which to identify the distinctive features of the twentieth-century avant-gardes. It is interesting to note that he includes Marcel Duchamp among those who perpetuate the figure of the artist-magician. *Theories and History of Architecture*, p. 32.

L'ESPRIT NOUVEAU

REVUE MENSUELLE ILLUSTRÉE

se lit au calme

Vous surprendrez votre Client

au calme
loin des affaires

et il vous écoutera parce qu'il ne
sait pas que vous allez le solliciter

ÉDITIONS DE L'ESPRIT NOUVEAU, 40, RUE DE SEINE
SOCIÉTÉ ANONYME AU CAPITAL DE 100.000 FRANCS
SIÈGE SOCIAL PARIS 40, RUE DE SEINE

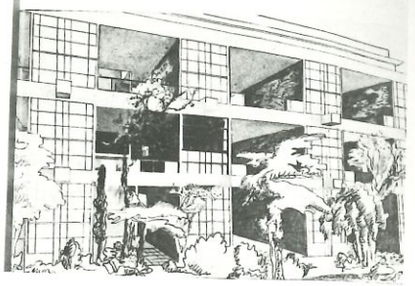
Publicity brochure for L'Esprit Nouveau *directed to potential advertisers in the magazine.*

Construction d'un « IMMEUBLE-VILLAS »

à Paris

Architecture LE CORBUSIER et PIERRE JEANNERET, 35, rue de Sèvres (Ségur. Fleurus 39-84) par les soins de la « SOCIÉTÉ TECHNIQUE et INDUSTRIELLE d'ENTREPRISES » 5, Square de l'Opéra (Opéra. Central 09-11. Aut. 07-33)

L'"IMMEUBLE-VILLAS" n'est plus l'appartement de maison locative. Il apporte l'indépendance complète de chaque propriétaire. Il apporte cet élément capital nouveau : un jardin de



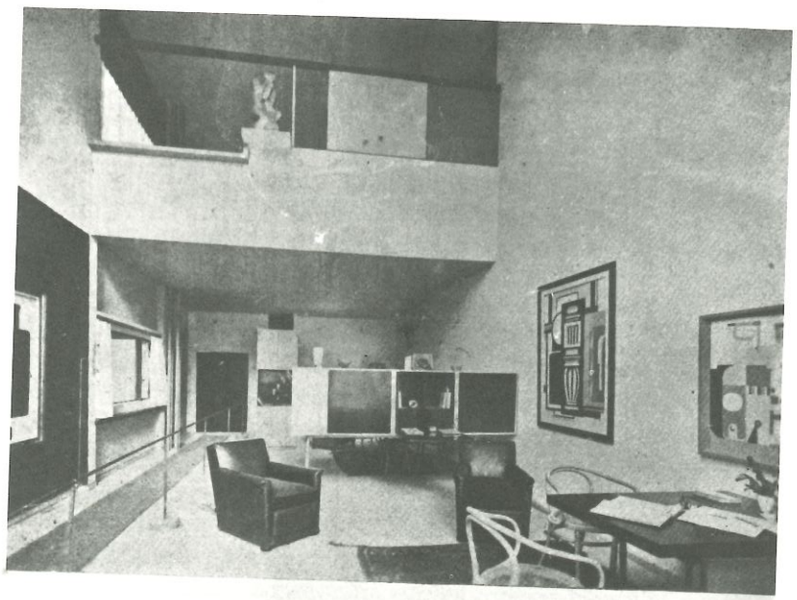
"L'IMMEUBLE-VILLAS"

QUE ÉLÉMENT DE CONSTITUE EN SOI UNE A DE 2 ETAGES SEMBLABLE A CELLE QUI FUT EDIFIEE DANS LES JARDINS DU RS-LA-REINE A L'EXPOSITION INTERNATIONALE DES ARTS DECORATIFS, SOUS ION DE PAVILLON DE L'ESPRIT NOUVEAU (VOIR PAGES 121 ET 139 DU PRESENT ALMANACH)

CHACUNE DE CES VILLAS EST A VENDRE SEPAREMENT

IONTANT ACTUEL DU DEVIS EST DE 180 000 FRANCS PAR VILLA ET COMPREND ILLA ENTIEREMENT TERMINEE AVEC SA PART D'ACCES (ESCALIER, ASCENSEUR, SOUS-SOL) ; LA PARTICIPATION AU TERRAIN N'EST PAS COMPTEE. ACHETEURS PEUVENT ADRESSER LEURS DEMANDES A M. BLONDEL, 35 RUE DE IES A PARIS (6e) (EN FACE DU SQUARE DU BON MARCHE). CELUI-CI RECEVRA LE DI ET LE JEUDI SEULEMENT, DE 14 A 16 HEURES. TELEPH. FLEURUS 39-84. SUR RENDEZ-VOUS.

Advertisement for an "Immeuble-villas." Almanach de l'architecture moderne, *1925.*



Pavillon de l'*Esprit Nouveau*
Sol en « Euboolith »

L'EUBOOLITH»

Société Anonyme française
au capital de 600.000 Fr.

Advertisement for L'Euboolith. Almanach de l'architecture moderne, *1925.*

The strategy was not always effective: "Les bagages Moynat thank *L'Esprit Nouveau*'s administration very much for the free publicity given to them in issues 11 and 13...but we cannot commit ourselves for the moment to an advertising contract." In some cases, however, as with the company Innovation, Le Corbusier not only obtained an advertising contract for *L'Esprit Nouveau* but a commission to redesign and publish its catalogue. This type of commission, also pursued with other companies such as Ingersoll-Rand and Ronéo, was part of a wider project conceived by Le Corbusier as *Catalogues spéciaux de L'Esprit Nouveau*: "We have thus conceived a kind of publicity that is almost editorial, but it can only be applied—this is evident—to products whose fabrication and use are consistent with a certain *esprit nouveau*." (Note that it is not the product itself, its formal qualities, that count, but its fabrication and use.) "*L'Esprit Nouveau* itself comments on the product of the advertising firm, and, with respect to the clientele, this will certainly have an effectiveness that is far different from ordinary publicity."[29]

The company was to have a full page with a different text and illustration published in each issue of *L'Esprit Nouveau* for a year. At the end of the year, the twelve pages thus constituted would be printed "in an edition of 3,000 (or more) on fine paper, put together to form a brochure or catalogue called "L'Esprit Nouveau" that the advertising firm "will be able to distribute usefully to a certain segment of its clientele."

Innovation's first page of "editorial publicity" appeared in *L'Esprit Nouveau* 18. Instead of the conventional text of an Innovation catalogue—"An Innovation armoire holds three times as much as an ordinary armoire. Makes order. Avoids unnecessary folds"—one reads, "Construction in series is necessary to setting up house...." This is followed in *L'Esprit Nouveau* 19 by "To construct in series is to dedicate oneself to the pursuit of the element.... By analyzing the element one arrives at a standard. We must establish the standards of construction—windows, doors, plans, distribution, and all the interior mechanics that modern man requires for its comfort and hygiene." This tone seems to intensify progressively. A double page in *L'Esprit Nouveau* 20, laid out in the shape of an hour glass, starts with, "The war has shaken us out of our torpor. Taylorism has been spoken of and achieved.... " Throughout those pages specific references to Innovation products are practically nonexistent.

While this is not the place to attempt a complete analysis of these pages of publicity produced by Le Corbusier—an analysis, I should note in passing, that would prove very fruitful not only for an understanding of Le Corbusier's ideology, but also for tracing the source of certain of his architectural concepts such as the horizontal window—I shall try to relate this strategy of Le Corbusier's to contemporary advertising strategies.

In his book *The Making of Modern Advertising* Daniel Pope divides the history of advertising into three periods. The third one, the modern era, extends from 1920 to the present, and is defined as the "era of market segmentation." At this point the marketplace begins to be transformed from production for mass consumption—that is, for an undifferentiated group of consumers—to one of production for consumption in a stratified marketplace characterized by consumers organized into relatively well-defined subgroups. *L'Esprit Nouveau*'s special catalogues fall clearly into this category. The audience becomes in this context the "product" to be sold to advertisers. Thus the contract with Innovation states, "Mr. Jeanneret will himself take responsibility for the writing of the text and the choice of images to accompany it, thereby furnishing you with a catalogue that can favorably influence your clientele and especially architects."[30]

Another publicity strategy employed by Le Corbusier includes the portrayal of his own work in actual advertisements, as often occurs in the *Almanach de l'architecture moderne* (the content of the *Almanach* was originally intended to be issue 29 of *L'Esprit Nouveau*, which never appeared). The image used in the text and in the advertisement is the same. Sometimes an image of a built work by the architect is placed in the advertisement of a company that has been involved in its construction (Summer, Euboolith, etc.), a strategy that clearly illustrates the previous point—publicity addressed to a targeted group, in this case architects.

Another dimension is added when the process is reversed, as happens with the Immeubles-Villas. The image in the *Almanach* text and in the advertisement is again the same. But since the Immeubles-Villas do not actually exist, their appearance in an advertisement confers on them a degree of legitimacy (beyond that which publishing already confers). The advertising context elides the realm of ideas with the world of facts. Something of the same order also happens when Le Corbusier associates himself with industrialists for his visionary projects. Le Corbusier, as Stanislaus von Moos has pointed out, tried to involve the Michelin tire company in the Plan Voisin for Paris. The plan was to have been called *Plan Michelin et Voisin du Centre de Paris* (the Michelin and Voisin Plan for the Center of Paris).

29. Fondation Le Corbusier, Al (7), 194.

30. Fondation Le Corbusier, A1 (17), 1.

« La guerre a secoué les torpeurs ; on a parlé de taylorisme ; on en a fait. Les entrepreneurs ont acheté des machines ingénieuses, patientes et agiles. Les chantiers seront-ils bientôt des Usines ? ... Les chantiers ne seront plus des éclosions sporadiques où tous les problèmes se compliquent en s'entassant ... La maison ne sera plus cette chose énorme et qui à coup de murs de forteresses prétend défier les siècles ; elle sera un outil rigoureux, comme l'auto précise devient un outil de travail. Bénéficiant d'un siècle de science, de calcul et d'industrie, elle se présentera, dans sa svelte et nerveuse résistance, aux infinies combinaisons qu'exigent des besoins infiniment plus raffinés, plus précis, conséquence d'une évolution foudroyante conduite, depuis un demi-siècle, par la loi d'Economie ... »

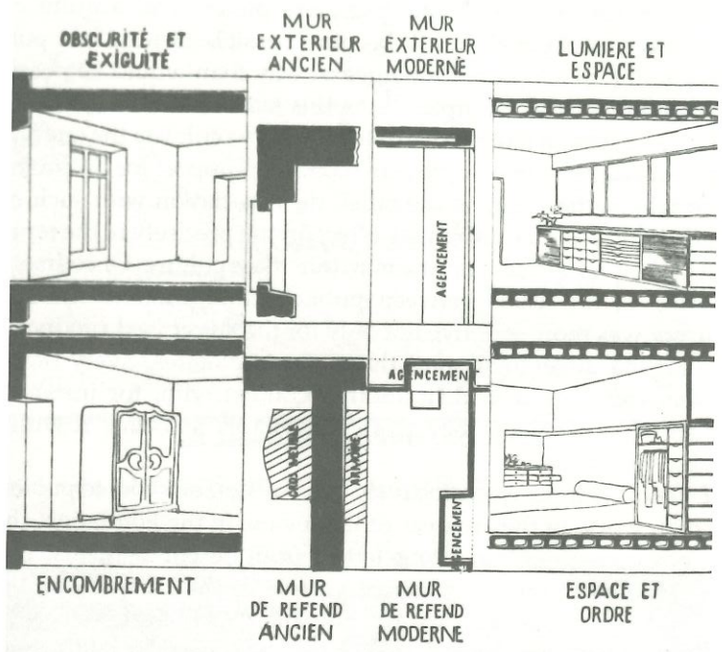
Nous avons fait le logis vaste, car nous avons trouvé à supprimer une grande partie des meubles qui l'encombrent et l'étouffent. Mais si l'on veut nous comprendre, nous réaliserons jusqu'au bout cette libération du logis. Il suffira que MM. les Architectes apportent à la construction des immeubles et des villas, la même attention qu'ils accordent aux ingénieurs lorsqu'ils construisent une usine, un frigo, un entrepôt. Là, ils ont fait leurs murs en prévoyant les supports des ponts roulants, les attaches des appareils de manutention. Leurs murs et leurs plafonds sont en vérité de nouveaux organismes rationnels. Dans la maison locative et les villas, nous pouvons transformer les murs inertes en murs vivants ; *des murs, nous pouvons faire de véritables serviteurs.*

VOIR CI-CONTRE

LA DEMONSTRATION DU MUR ANCIEN ET DU MUR MODERNE

INNOVATION

TRADEMARK



INNOVATION

TRADEMARK

Double-page spread advertisement for Innovation. L'Esprit Nouveau *20 (1924).*

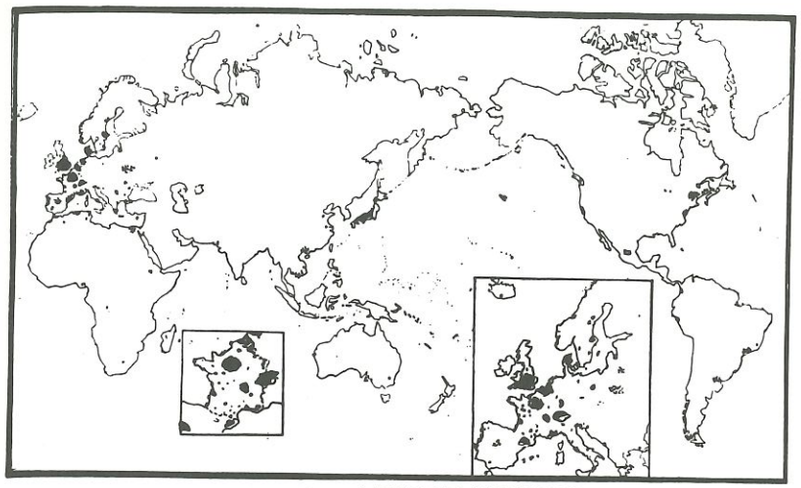
In a letter to Michelin Le Corbusier wrote, "Through association of the name Michelin with our plan, the project will acquire considerable mass appeal. It will become possible to motivate public opinion in a much more fundamental way than would be possible through books, for example."[31] As this statement reveals, Le Corbusier's interest in industrial publicity was twofold: on the one hand, the industrialists were to provide economic support for his projects, editorial or otherwise; on the other, the association with such concerns would have a multiplying effect owing precisely to the reputation of their names and products within mass culture. Of course, the blurring of the limits between publicity and content in *L'Esprit Nouveau* was more effective not only for the advertised product but also for the dissemination of the review's theories. Every time its readers were confronted in another context with, for instance, a Ronéo advertisement, they would inevitably associate it with Le Corbusier's ideas.

L'Esprit Nouveau was effectively used by Le Corbusier to publicize his own work. In the archives of the review in the Fondation, there is a box containing numerous letters from potential clients. These were readers of the magazine or visitors to the L'Esprit Nouveau pavilion in the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs*. As Roberto Gabetti and Carlo del Olmo have noted, the pavilion was used by Le Corbusier not to launch the magazine but to attract a professional clientele.[32] Le Corbusier answered the letters he received, sending sketches and preliminary budgets and, in some cases, proposing an actual site. While this is a subject for detailed study, it is sufficient for our purposes to note that some readers of *L'Esprit Nouveau* became actual clients.

When *L'Esprit Nouveau* ceased publication in 1925 ("Five years is a lot for a magazine," Le Corbusier declared, "one ought not to repeat oneself continuously. Others, younger people, will have younger ideas"), he emerged from the experience as an established architect. This maturation process was abetted by his production of the review and the nature of the audience it was reaching. Statistics included in a letter to the Ateliers Primavera, a subsidiary of the Printemps department store, in an effort to obtain an advertising contract, state that only 24.3% of *L'Esprit Nouveau*'s subscribers were artists (painters and sculptors). The rest comprised "people occupying active

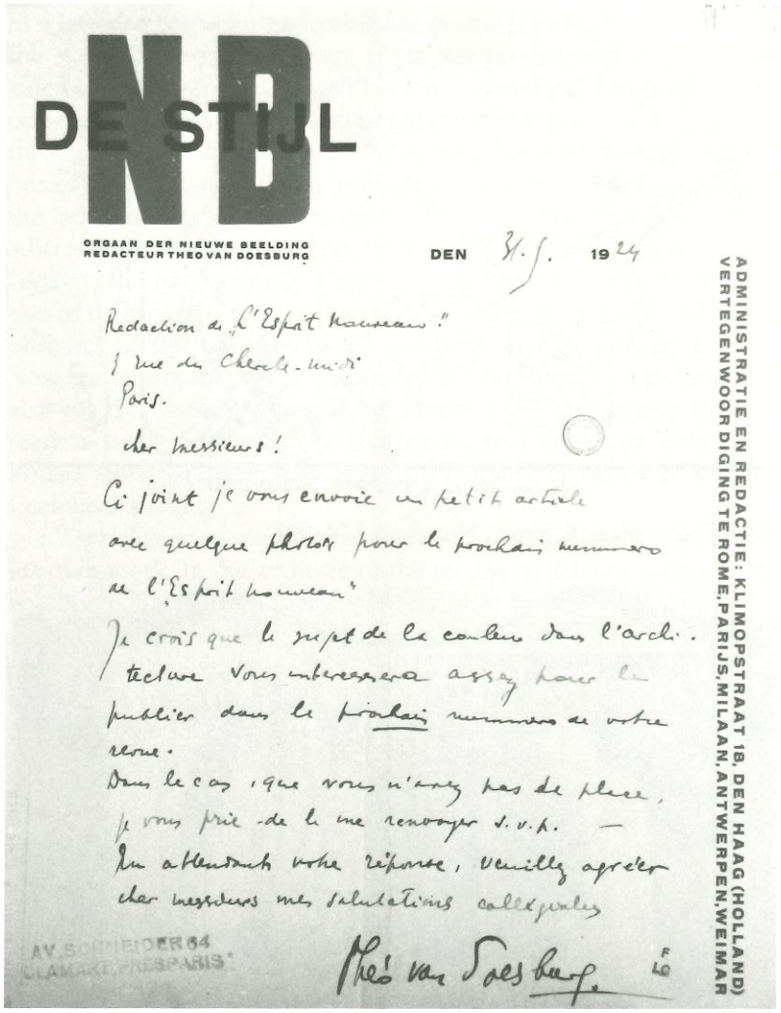
31. Stanislaus von Moos, "Urbanism and Transcultural Exchanges, 1910–1935: A Survey," in H. Allen Brooks, ed., *The Le Corbusier Archive* (New York, 1983), vol. 10, p. xiii.

32. Fondation Le Corbusier, A1 (5). See also Roberto Gabetti and Carlo del Olmo, *Le Corbusier e* L'Esprit Nouveau (Turin, 1975), pp. 215–25.



Map of subscribers. L'Esprit Nouveau *17 (1922).*

Innovation publicity leaflet in the shape of a wardrobe trunk, from the L'Esprit Nouveau *archives.*



DE STIJL

ORGAAN DER NIEUWE BEELDING
REDACTEUR THEO VAN DOESBURG

DEN 7.5. 1924

Redaction de „L'Esprit Nouveau"
7 rue de Chevreuse
Paris.

Chers messieurs!

Ci joint je vous envoie un petit article avec quelques photos pour le prochain numéro de l'Esprit Nouveau"

Je crois que le sujet de la couleur dans l'architecture vous intéressera assez pour le publier dans le prochain numéro de votre revue.

Dans le cas que vous n'avez pas de place, je vous prie de le me renvoyer s.v.p. —

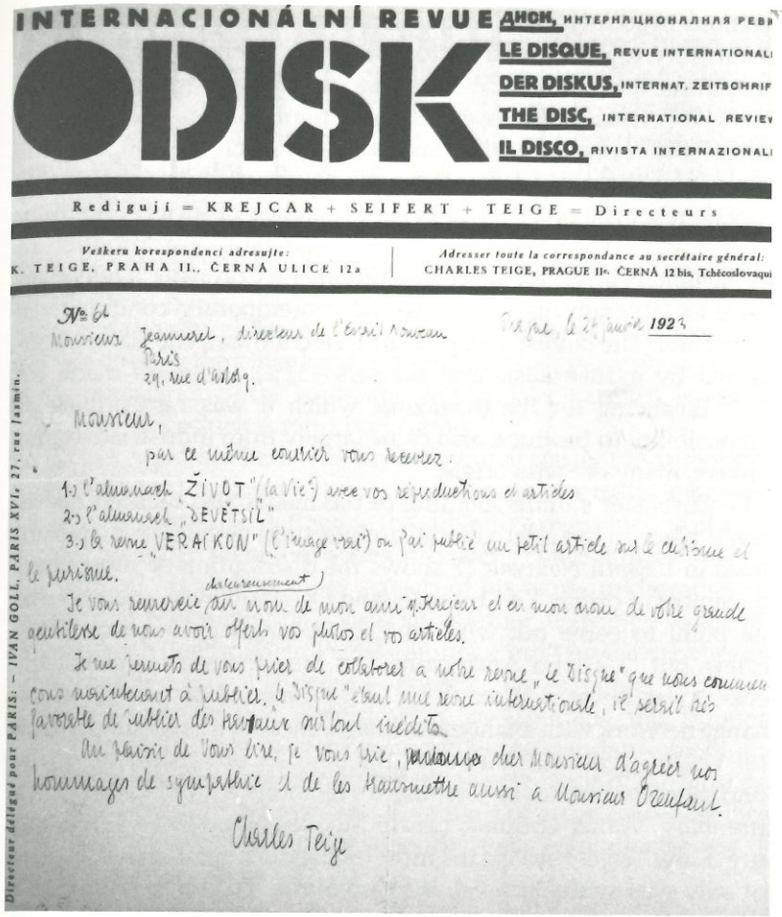
En attendant votre réponse, veuillez agréer chers messieurs mes salutations cordiales

Théo van Doesburg

AV. SCHNEIDER 84
CLAMART (SEINE) PARIS

ADMINISTRATIE EN REDACTIE: KLIMOPSTRAAT 18, DEN HAAG (HOLLAND)
VERTEGENWOORDIGING TE ROME, PARIJS, MILAAN, ANTWERPEN, WEIMAR

Letter from Theo van Doesburg to the editors of L'Esprit Nouveau, *April 10, 1924.*



INTERNACIONÁLNÍ REVUE ДИСК, ИНТЕРНАЦИОНАЛЬНАЯ РЕВЮ

ODISK

LE DISQUE, REVUE INTERNATIONALE
DER DISKUS, INTERNAT. ZEITSCHRIFT
THE DISC, INTERNATIONAL REVIEW
IL DISCO, RIVISTA INTERNAZIONALE

Rediguji = KREJCAR + SEIFERT + TEIGE = Directeurs

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Adresser toute la correspondance au secrétaire général:
CHARLES TEIGE, PRAGUE II^e, ČERNÁ 12 bis, Tchécoslovaquie

Directeur délégué pour PARIS: — IVAN GOLL, PARIS XVI^e, 27, rue Jasmin.

№ 61

Monsieur Jeanneret, directeur de l'Esprit Nouveau
Paris
29, rue d'Astorg.

Prague, le 29 janvier 1923

Monsieur,

par ce même courrier vous recevez:

1.) l'almanach „ŽIVOT" (la Vie) avec vos reproductions et articles
2.) l'almanach „DEVĚTSIL"
3.) la revue „VERAIKON" (l'image vraie) où j'ai publié un petit article sur le cubisme et le purisme.

Je vous remercie sincèrement pour votre aimable attention et en même temps de votre grande gentillesse de nous avoir offert vos photos et vos articles.

Je me permets de vous prier de collaborer à notre revue „le Disque" que nous commencerons prochainement à publier. Le Disque "devait être une revue internationale, il devrait nous favoriser de publier des travaux inédits.

Au plaisir de vous lire, je vous prie, monsieur cher Monsieur d'agréer mes hommages de sympathie et de les transmettre aussi à Monsieur Ozenfant.

Charles Teige

Letter from Karel Teige to Le Corbusier, January 29, 1923.

positions in society." Architects, of course, were included in the latter category, together with doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, industrialists, and bankers. While these statistics are not entirely reliable—Le Corbusier also asserted that *L'Esprit Nouveau* had a circulation of 5,000 copies when the maximum ever reached was 3,500—his statement in the same letter that "*L'Esprit Nouveau* finds its most sympathetic response precisely in the active milieu of society" not only was a stratagem to sell *L'Esprit Nouveau* readership as a "product" to the Ateliers Primavera, but it also reveals Le Corbusier's relentless desire to integrate his work into the contemporary conditions of production. The largest group of subscribers was, as he claims, constituted by industrialists and bankers—31%; architects made up 8%.[33] Financing for the magazine, which it was Le Corbusier's responsibility to produce, also came largely from industrialists and bankers, many of Swiss origin.[34]

Le Corbusier's understanding of the media also secured his review a place in the international architectural circuits. A map published in *L'Esprit Nouveau* 17 shows the distribution of subscribers by country of origin. Le Corbusier and Ozenfant even attempted at one point to come out with an English-language version of the review, but "L'affaire Américaine," as they themselves called the project, was never realized.[35] *L'Esprit Nouveau* was part of an exchange network with avant-garde magazines such as *MA*, *Stavba*, *De Stijl*, *Vesch/Gegenstand/Objet*, *Disk*, and others. Correspondence in the Fondation illuminates Le Corbusier's relations with El Lissitzy, Ilya Ehrenburg, Walter Gropius, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Theo van Doesburg, Karel Teige. Perhaps the most telling document in this respect, not only on a symbolic level, is a card Sigfried Giedion wrote to Le Corbusier in 1925 mentioning that he was preparing a book on modern architecture and that Moholy-Nagy had recommended that he visit Le Corbusier.

We can already see in this the network of the avant-garde engaged in its own historical legitimation, something Giedion would carry out on full scale as the first "operative critic" of the modern movement.[36]

33. Fondation Le Corbusier, A1 (10).

34. Fondation Le Corbusier, A1 (18). See also Gabetti and del Olmo, *Le Corbusier e* L'Esprit Nouveau, pp. 215–25.

35. Fondation Le Corbusier, A1 (17), 105.

36. "What is normally meant by 'operative criticism' is an analysis of architecture (or of the arts in general) that, instead of an abstract survey, has as its objective the planning of a precise poetical tendency, anticipated in its structure and derived from historical analyses programmatically distorted and finalised." Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories*

Le Corbusier between modernity and tradition

A drawing by Le Corbusier with the heading "Ronéo," found in the archives of *L'Esprit Nouveau*, provides the occasion for the last section of this essay. Le Corbusier appears to have been in the process of making a "Special Catalogue *L'Esprit Nouveau*" for the Ronéo company. What the drawing illustrates, however, is the famous Perret-Le Corbusier debate over the horizontal window, concerning which Bruno Reichlin has made an insightful analysis.[37] Perret maintained that the vertical window, the *porte fenêtre*, "reproduces an impression of complete space" because it permits a view of the street, the garden, and the sky, giving a sense of perspectival depth. The horizontal window, on the other hand, diminishes one's perception and correct appreciation of the landscape. In fact, Perret argues, it cuts out precisely that which is most interesting.[38]

Perret expresses here with an exceptional clarity the authority of the traditional notion of representation within a realistic epistemology, representation defined as the subjective reproduction of an objective reality. In these terms, Le Corbusier's concept of the horizontal window, as well as other aspects of his work, undermines this concept of representation. Classical painting attempted to identify images with their models. Purist paintings, built up with shapes and images of recognizable objects—bottles, glasses, books, pipes, and so forth—eschew this identification, as Ozenfant and Jeanneret claim. In *La Peinture moderne* they define the standard objects that they chose to represent in their paintings as "objects of the most perfect banality," which have "the advantage of a perfect readability." That is, they avoid being dispersed by their own allusiveness, by deviation of attention.

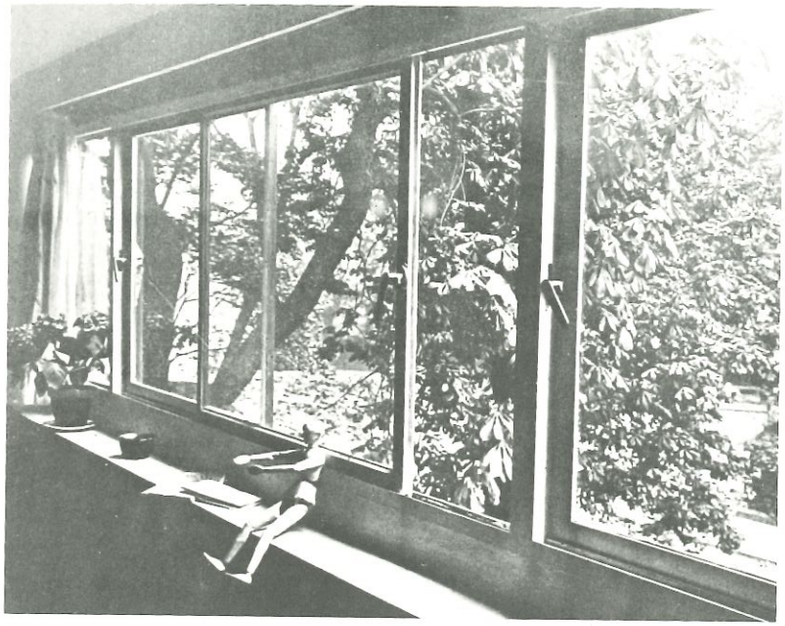
The terms of Le Corbusier's "pictorial frontality" have been read by Rosalind Krauss as threefold:

> First, the object is registered as pure extension, as flat shape which never breaks rank with the picture's frontality to suggest a turning of one of its facets into depth. Second, the constellation of objects wedge together in that insistent continuity of edges which the Purists called *mariage de contours*. Third, color and texture are handled in a manner that calls attention

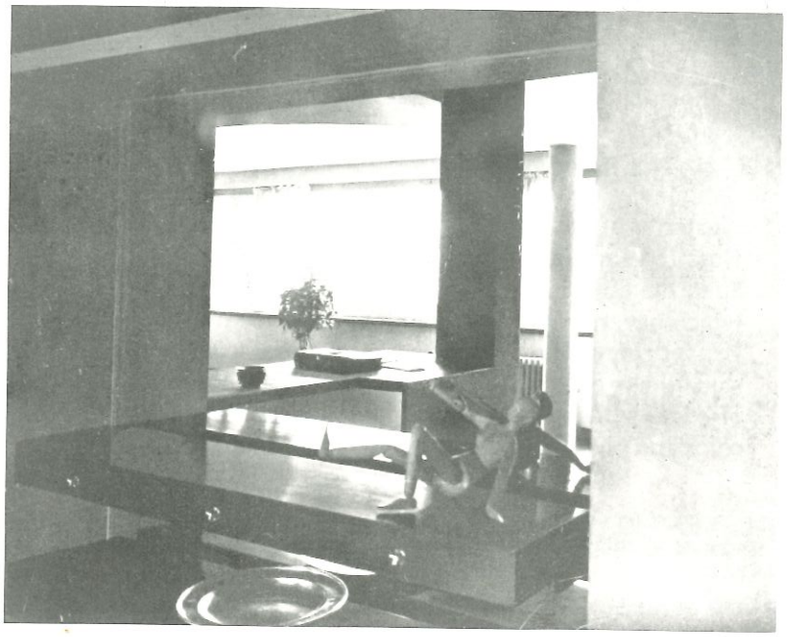
and History of Architecture, p. 141. The relations between "operative criticism" and a "consumerist" cultural situation are clear: differences are canceled by the process of labeling, and the product in turn becomes marketable.

37. Bruno Reichlin, "The Pros and Cons of the Horizontal Window," *Daidalos* 13 (1984). For the debate between Le Corbusier and Perret, see *Paris journal*, v.1.12 (1923), v.14.12 (1923), and v.28.12 (1923) in Fondation Le Corbusier.

38. Marcel Zahar, *Auguste Perret* (Paris, 1959).



Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Maison Cook, 1926.



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

> to the inherent superficiality of these "secondary qualities"—so that distance or depth in the painting becomes no longer a matter of representing the space separating one object from another in the real world. Instead distance is transformed into a representation of the caesura between the appearance of the object and the object itself.[39]

Viewing a landscape through a window implies a separation. A window, any window, breaks the connection between being in a landscape and seeing it. Landscape becomes visual, and we depend on memory to know it as a tangible experience.[40] Le Corbusier's horizontal window works to put this condition, this caesura, in evidence.

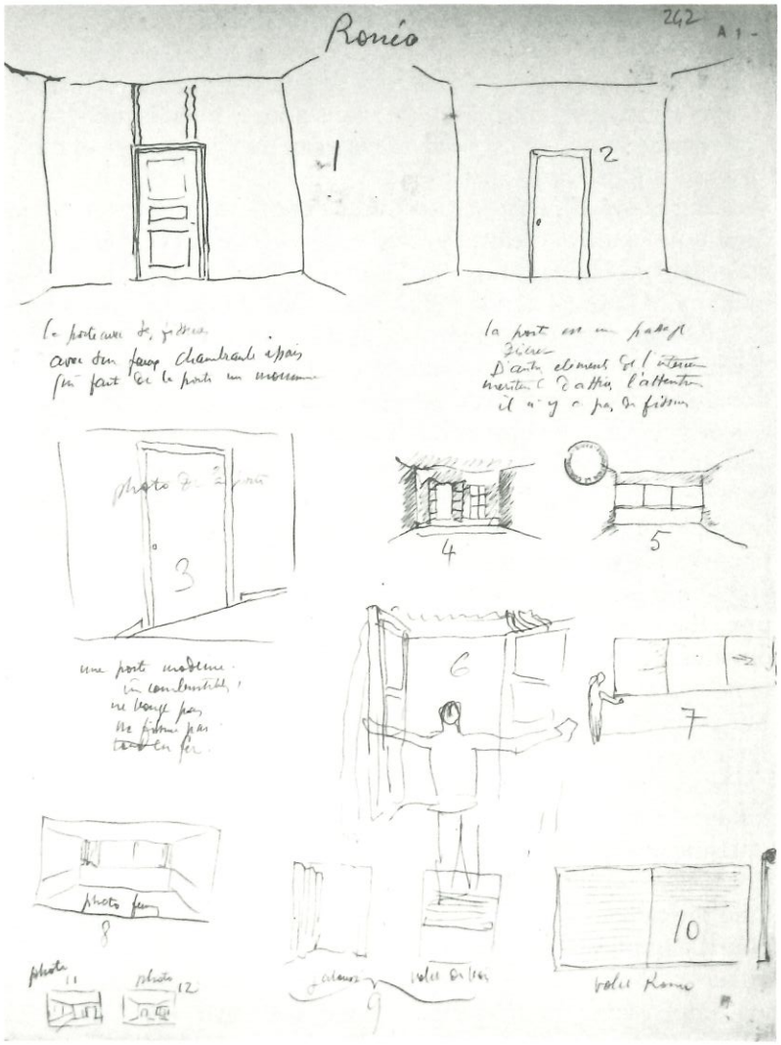
Perret's window corresponds, as Reichlin has shown, to the traditional space of perspectival representation in Western art. Le Corbusier's window corresponds, I would argue, to the space of the camera. It is not by chance that Le Corbusier continues the polemic with Perret in an argument in *Précisions*, demonstrating "scientifically" that the horizontal window illuminates better, by relying on a photographer's chart that gives times of exposure.[41] Photography and film, based on single-point perspective, are "transparent" mediums; their derivation from the classical system of representation is obvious. But between perspective and photography there is an epistemological break. The point of view of photography is that of the camera, a mechanical eye. The painterly convention of perspective centers everything on the eye of the beholder and calls this appearance "reality." The camera—and more particularly the movie camera—implies that there is no center.

Using Walter Benjamin's metaphor one could conclude that Le Corbusier's architecture is the result of his positioning himself behind the camera. But we are not referring now to these larger metaphorical implications: Le Corbusier as "producer" and not as "interpreter" of the industrial reality. Rather we intend a more literal reading, emphasizing the deliberate dispersal of the eye in Le Corbusier's villas of the twenties, effected through the promenade, together with the shrinkage of depth of the landscape outside the horizontal window—the architectural correlative of the space of the movie camera.

39. Rosalind Krauss, "Léger, Le Corbusier and Purism," in *Artforum*, April 1972, pp. 52–53.

40. For insightful comments on the nature of the "window" and "landscape," see Raoul Bunschoten, "Wor(l)ds of Daniel Libeskind," *AA Files*, 10 (autumn 1985), pp. 79–84.

41. Le Corbusier, *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme* (Paris: Editions Crès, 1930), p. 74.



Le Corbusier, "Ronéo" drawing illustrating the polemic between Auguste Perret and himself concerning the fenêtre en longueur.

On this basis, may we therefore say that Perret's architecture falls within the humanist tradition and Le Corbusier's within the modernist? The following reflection stems from an observation by Kerry Shear on the paradoxical nature of the Ronéo drawing. While Le Corbusier intends by his drawing to illustrate the superiority of the horizontal window, in fact the intensity and detail with which he draws Perret's *porte fenêtre*, in contrast to the sketchiness of the horizontal window, show it to be much more emotionally charged. Above all this may be seen in the way Le Corbusier draws the human figure in each. In the *porte fenêtre* a carefully drawn man holds open his window, recalling Perret's assertion that "a window is man himself, it accords with his outlines.... The vertical is the line of the upright human being, it is the line of life itself." In contrast, the diminutive man drawn in the horizontal window occupies a peripheral position; the window opens by sliding. Le Corbusier wrote in the *Almanach*, "fenêtre, élément type—élément mécanique type: nous avons serré de près le module anthropocentrique."

Whether Le Corbusier's work falls within the humanist or the modernist tradition cannot be answered conclusively here. Certainly he understood the crisis of values resulting from the introduction of reproduction into the processes of architecture. His work is precisely about the tension between a classical conception of the world and the shattering of this hierarchical order by the new processes of mass (re)production and the culture industry.

A preliminary version of this text was given as a lecture in the symposium "Avant-garde and Regional Form" at the Wissenschaftskolleg, Institute for Advanced Study, Berlin, in June 1986. It is also a chapter in my book in preparation, L'Esprit Nouveau: Le Corbusier and the Media. *Financial help for this study came from a grant from the Fondation Le Corbusier. I am also indebted to the Fondation, and especially to Madame Evelyne Tréhin, for their help in making available material and answering numerous questions. This text has benefited from the careful reading and criticism of Michael Hays, Kenneth Frampton, Stanislaus von Moos, and especially Sandro Marpillero. I also wish to acknowledge Mary McLeod and Joan Ockman for their response to my text in this issue and Joan Ockman for her generosity in editing it.*