

# From Sur-reality to Sur-architecture

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2015/2016  
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*To Professor Eric Lapierre, without whose prominent inspirations, this book could never have existed;*  
*To Professor Roberto Gargiani, without whose tremendous courses of architecture history, whose sapiential guidance, whose great enthusiasm, whose warm encouragement, and the considerable freedom that he granted me, I could never be able to amuse myself through this subject;*  
*To Professor Inès Lamunière, for whose enlightenment and intriguing questions throughout our discussions;*  
*To my maître EPFL Antoine Vialle, for whose wise suggestions of references for my subject, with whose assistance this research went on an interesting direction;*  
*To Professor Luca Ortelli, and Dr. Beatrice Lampariello, for their generous help across so long time;*  
*To Chao Wu, Antoine Ampoux, and Titouan Chapouly – my dear friends, for the delightful conversations that we had;*  
*And after all, to my parents, for everything that they did to support me...*



*Ennui! Carrying eyes filled with an involuntary tear,  
Dreams of scaffolds while puffing at his hookah.  
You know him, reader, this exquisite monster,  
– Hypocrite reader, – my double, – my brother!*

– Charles Baudelaire, *Flowers of Evil*



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# Overture

*Surrealism does not allow those who devote themselves to it to forsake it whenever they like.*<sup>1</sup>  
– André Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme*

## MANIFESTO-S

Sur-realism never lacks manifestos and theories, neither does architecture. However the encounter of sur-realism and architecture appears to be quite bitter.<sup>2</sup> Not only there is no manifesto of the encounter of the two fields, but even the documents concerning the relationship between them are so rare. If sur-realism can, as Breton said, “transform the world” and “change life”,<sup>3</sup> as it actually did in literature, visual arts and media arts, then architecture somehow seems like a cursed earth in this “world”. While luckily, it just *seems to be* the case, yet *not is* the case. Architecture viewed or transformed through the ideology of sur-realism can generate true *merveilles*, and this is a fact with not-yet-exuberant but brilliant evidences, whereas without a clearly stated manifesto.

This book consist to understand and to speculate, retroactively, the opportune intersections of these two fields, avoiding falling into the immediate trap of an encyclopaedia of “bizarre architecture”, colorful, if not too much, or tinged with irony, sometimes even with black humour.<sup>4</sup> This is a manifesto for the to-be-fertile resolution of architecture and sur-realism, for a transformed architecture, for a *sur-architecture*. This is a lighthouse showing the traced course, certainly partial, from sur-reality to sur-architecture, and pointing at a possible perspective of this to-be-continued journey.

## RESOLUTION

Reality has always been there, yet once encountered with human conscious, is tinged,



reflected, transformed into inner-reality. The resolution of reality and its transformed double, inner-reality, often seemingly contradictory, generate the absolute reality, the sur-reality. In the same way, the resolution of architecture and its transformed double, should generate an absolute architecture, a sur-architecture.

Actually, the resolution phenomena of architecture and its double has never ceased. The resulted *merveilles* bring us stunning moments in our spatial experience. Nevertheless, till now, the resolution has always been partial, architecture has never been transformed from end to end at one time.

If the encounter between architecture and sur-realism is in search of a theory, then this theory, once confirmed, should generate a formula, capable of transforming an architectural work completely through all levels, driving it till its maniac-convulsive<sup>5</sup> climax, inspiring in its beholders ecstasy about architecture.

## **MERVEILLES**

From the retinal approach with architecture as “objet trouvé” and materialised dream-scapes at the dawn of the movement (the visions of the surrealists and the art brut artists), via the first sur-architecture in a real sense with transformed perceptions and spaces (apartment of Beistegui, Casa Malaparte), via the works emerged at the transition period of the 1970s and 1980s, with sur-realised concepts and experiences of space-time (the theories and projects constructed or not of Tschumi and Koolhaas), via the works of analogue architecture with operated or transplanted atmosphere, via the works of Toyo Ito with his speculations on Le Corbusier’s Domino system of orthogonal grid structure, to the almost illusionist approach of the Belgium architects De Vylder & Taillieu, sur-architecture has always been extending its conquest in the territory of architecture in a guerrilla way. By reaching this substantiality, it’s time to unroll the world map to have a retroactive overview of the once conquered lands, in order to formulate an overall strategy.

## **SUBSTANTIALITY**

Interesting architecture never lacks substantiality. A brief glance at the field of architecture, even in an extremely simplified way, can prove this fact.

If there was no Roman Forum, the “Campo Marzio” of Piranesi could never existed.

If there were no “voyage d’orient” and the speculations of his contemporary avant-gardes through all fields, the giant Le Corbusier could never existed.

If there were no reflections on the role of monuments through the time, the analog architecture could never existed.

If there was no the “retroactive interpretation”<sup>6</sup> of Manhattan, the Koolhaas’s “*Merveilles*

of architecture”<sup>7</sup> could never existed.

...

To form the double of architecture, the method of sur-architecture requires questionings and reflections on every layer of the field. A sur-architecture cannot be otherwise than a “substantial architecture”.

## **LENSES AND KALEIDOSCOPE**

In terms of structure, this small book is a simulacrum of a to-be-assembled magic kaleidoscope: a collection of magic lenses adapted for different layers of architecture. Once transformed by this kaleidoscope, architecture could be alchemized to the core into sur-architecture.

The arche lens, the original one, invented by the surrealists, reveals the mechanism of alchemization of reality, by analysing the literal and photographic works of the surrealists. The lens 1.0, is the arche lens slightly adjusted by the surrealists themselves, to look at the field of architecture.

The next ones, show the reproductions of the original lens adapted for different layers of architecture, such as perception, space, concept, experience of space-time, atmosphere, structure and material.

Of course this is a non-exhaustive catalogue. The lenses and the to-be-reproduced ones are waiting an assemblage to form the magic kaleidoscope.

## **OPTICIST**

The magic kaleidoscope’s non-exhaustible variations of the magic lens and assemblage, need an optician to understand and explore their possibilities.

In this way, I was the optician in laboratory of the sur-architecture’s kaleidoscope.

Scientific researches often need experiments to advance, so works this research of sur-architecture likewise. Projects would be the laboratory. That is why the fictional ending of this small book as a project, would not be the end of this research in progress, but just an interlude among others.

## NOTES

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3. « Marx said, "Transform the world"; Rimbaud said, "Change life"; these two mottos are for us one and the same. », André Breton, *Position politique du surréalisme* (Paris, 1935), p.97.
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5. André Breton, *Nadja*, Éd. entièrement revue par l'auteur, Folio 73 (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), p.161.
6. Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York : A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan*, [Ed. 1994] (New York, New York: Monacelli Press, 1994), p.9–10.
7. Roberto Gargiani and Office for Metropolitan Architecture, *Rem Koolhaas / OMA : The Construction of Merveilles*, [Second printing 2011], *Essays in Architecture* (Lausanne: EPFL Press, 2011), p.12.

# Arche Lens

# (Re-)Genesis

## WOUND

Claude Lantier cried “This will kill that!”<sup>1</sup>

Zarathustra echoed: “Could it be possible! This old saint has not heard in his forest that *God is dead*.”<sup>2</sup>

By passing in *Le Ventre de Paris*, not very far from Beaubourg, at the point where Claude Lantier passes in front of Baltard’s recently constructed pavilions for Les Halles – he has just noticed the rose window of Saint-Eustache framed by the arcades of a passage-way. The death knell of the cathedral is ringing; he foresees a gloomy future of materialist satiety: at the same time that iron replaces stone, Les Halles supplants the church and consumption displaces redemption; its earthly nourishment will sweep away the opiate of the people.<sup>3</sup> This opiate, which is God, is anyway *dead*.

Arrived then, the war, stabbed in the vulnerable world, just like a razor blade severs the eye of an unguarded woman.<sup>4</sup> Gravely injured, falling into hell, the trembling world with its terrified inhabitants search anxiously a way to cure this wound.

Alas, no opiate! Alas, no morphine!

“Where is my lost paradise?”

Without the opiate as *God*, without the morphine as *Imagination*,<sup>5</sup> this mission seems almost impossible to be fulfilled. The surrealists as avant-garde have their try among others. The *defeatism* of the wartime<sup>6</sup> triggers the birth of the surrealist movement.

Facing this “impossible mission” of his time, Breton – the “official spokesman” of the movement, shows an enthusiastic optimism toward the solution of Surrealism. “Not every paradise is lost,”<sup>7</sup> declared Breton. The surrealists propose to reconstruct – the “*monde perdu*”, forgotten and buried behind the positivist world of quantities, by offering a substitution of the ancient opiate – a *new myth*.

## OBSERVATIONS

By observing the literature field, Breton criticizes two heavyweight writers, because of their realistic style. The first is Paul Veléry, who annoyed Breton by writing things like “The marquise went out at five”; the second is Dostoevsky, who spends paragraphs to describe the “yellow rooms”. For Breton, these are purely informative, and school-boy descriptions. They are nothing but vacuities, clichés and lack originality. For an author writing things as such, he is wasting his time. For a reader, it is unworthy. Breton pro-

claim harshly, "I shall, with your permission, *ignore the description of that room, and many more like it.*"<sup>8</sup>

By contrast, the realistic attitude, inspired by positivism, from Saint Thomas Aquinas to Anatole France, clearly seems to me to be hostile to any intellectual or moral advancement. I loathe it, for it is made up of mediocrity, hate, and dull conceit. It is this attitude which today gives birth to these ridiculous books, these insulting plays. It constantly feeds on and derives strength from the newspapers and stultifies both science and art by assiduously flattering the lowest of tastes; clarity bordering on stupidity, a dog's life. The activity of the best minds feels the effects of it; the law of the lowest common denominator finally prevails upon them as it does upon the others.<sup>9</sup>

By observing the philosophy field, Breton finds there is no true success. It seems to Breton that "every act is its own justification". Idle repartee, the flashes of wit and other niceties vie are concealing from people the true thought in search of itself. The abstract and ill-defined vocabulary cannot reveal the whole truth. Breton jokes, "If in a cluster of grapes there are no two alike, why do you want me to describe this grape by the other, by all the others, why do you want me to make a palatable grape?"

Our brains are dulled by the incurable mania of wanting to make the unknown known, classifiable. The desire for analysis wins out over the sentiments. The result is statements of undue length whose persuasive power is attributable solely to their strangeness and which impress the reader only by the abstract quality of their vocabulary, which moreover is ill-defined. If the general ideas that philosophy has thus far come up with as topics of discussion revealed by their very nature their definitive incursion into a broader or more general area. I would be the first to greet the news with joy.<sup>10</sup>

Inevitably, the observations pass on a greater level, which is the living condition of his time.

We are still living under the reign of logic: this, of course, is what I have been driving at. But in this day and age logical methods are applicable only to solving problems of secondary interest. The absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only facts relating directly to our experience. Logical ends, on the contrary, escape us. It is pointless to add that experience itself has found itself increasingly circumscribed. It paces back and forth in a cage from which it is more and more difficult to make it emerge. It too leans for support on what is most immediately expedient, and it is protected by the sentinels of common sense. Under the pretense of civilization and progress, we have managed to banish from the mind everything that may rightly or wrongly be termed superstition, or fancy; forbidden is any kind of search for truth which is not in conformance with accepted practices.<sup>11</sup>

"Human, all too human", said Nietzsche.

“Logic, all too logic”, answered Breton.

Apollo has reigned the world as a tyrant for too long time, by solving problems of *secondary interest*. Dionysus has been internalized in prison for too long time, waiting impatiently for his acquit. In this battle, Apollo and Dionysus would end in a draw. Their tensions will be released. The eternal war between the two, will end up ideally by their initial peace in the Greek era.

## CONSULTATION

“I’m getting into the area of psychology, a subject about which I shall be careful not to joke.”<sup>12</sup> As the absolute rationalist approach is no longer capable of solving the complex problems of his time, as Breton judges, then an irrational one could balance it. At this point, Breton requires help from Freud and his colleagues. As he states: “Are there any given places particularly suitable for this kind of sensibility? Yes there must be observatories of the inner sky. I mean, naturally, observatories already existing in the outer world.”<sup>13</sup>

He needs a consultation with psychologists, who knows the mysteries of the irrational *inner sky*, and who deal with the problem of *existence and perishment*.

## IMAGINATION AND MADNESS

It was, apparently, by pure chance that a part of our mental world which we pretended not to be concerned with any longer – and, in my opinion by far the most important part – has been brought back to light. For this we must give thanks to the discoveries of Sigmund Freud. On the basis of these discoveries a current of opinion is finally forming by means of which the human explorer will be able to carry his investigation much further, authorized as he will henceforth be not to confine himself solely to the most summary realities. The imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights. If the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, there is every reason to seize them – first to seize them, then, if need be, to submit them to the control of our reason. The analysts themselves have everything to gain by it. But it is worth noting that no means has been designated a priori for carrying out this undertaking, that until further notice it can be construed to be the province of poets as well as scholars, and that its success is not dependent upon the more or less capricious paths that will be followed.<sup>14</sup>

Breton detects a pure imaginative force of the insane. Imagination, on one hand as somehow the insane is victims of, on the other hand is the ultimate source of his comfort and consolation, out of which, he feels threatened. Because of or thanks to imagination, the insane enjoy his madness sufficiently, continues to be true to himself, and shows a profound indifference to the outer judgments and the law of an arbitrary utility. Breton's defense reads firmly: "I could spend my whole life prying loose the secrets of the insane. These people are honest to a fault, and their naiveté has no peer but my own."<sup>15</sup>

Be imaginative, be mad, stay honest, stay naive...

## DREAM

Rational thought can never be continual, since it is interrupted in cycles by dreams of sleep. The considerable portion of psychic activity has been till now neglected. When an ordinary observer is awake, he attaches much more importance to waking events than to those occurring in dreams. Yet an awaking man, "is above all the plaything of his memory."<sup>16</sup> Memory not only do the montage operations on the dreams, by depicting "for us rather a series of dreams the *dream itself*", but also it do the same operations of realities. The only coordination criteria is "a question of *will*". What intrigue most Breton about a dream "is everything that sinks back below the surface in a waking state... In 'reality,' likewise, I prefer to *fall*." At the waking state, "when the mind is functioning normally, it really responds to anything but the suggestions which come to it from the depths of that dark night". In a dream, a man's mind is totally satisfied by what happens to him, by its smoothness, by the priceless ease of everything. The dream space is as real as the waking space. Breton writes: "I can believe my eyes, my ears; this great day has arrived, this beast has spoken." Since the dreams are so real – "Can't the dream also be used in solving the fundamental questions of life?"<sup>17</sup>

## NON-FRONTIER LIMITS<sup>18</sup>

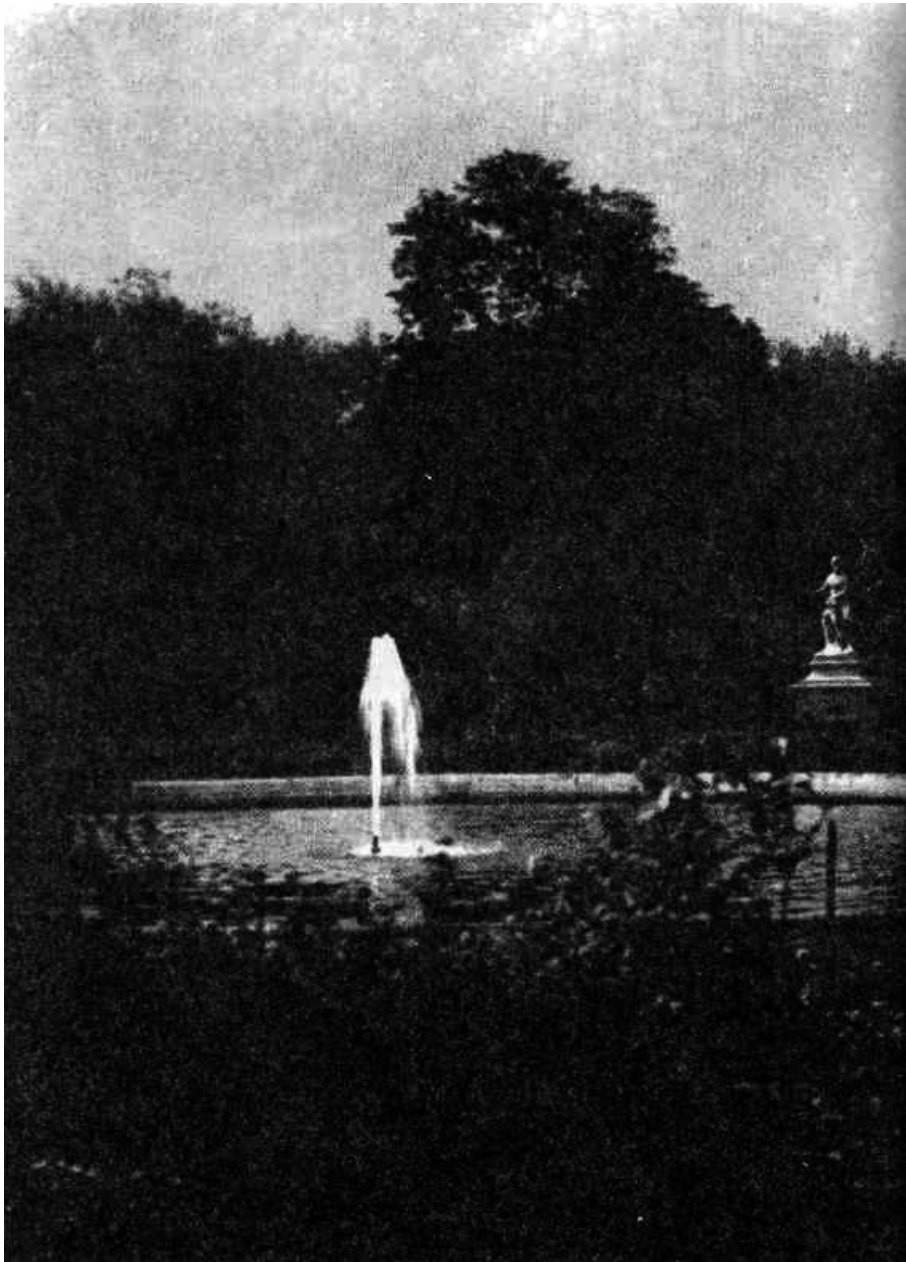
Is there really a frontier, a solid, rigid one? Or this frontier can be blurred, eroded and transgressed? Then, where would this almost soluble boundary bring one to?

So impressed by the imaginative force of the insane, Breton writes:

The well-known lack of frontiers between non-madness and madness does not induce me to accord a different value to the perceptions and ideas which are the result of one or the other.<sup>19</sup>

Actually, by announcing the limitless phenomenon in term of madness and non-madness, Breton is talking about a much more profound subject, which is the core of the movement's preoccupations, and which is to make the sealed boundary permeable and





*In Front of us was a water shoot, which it seemed to follow the curve...*

to communicate the fluid unformed *inner sky* with the solid objective matter world. Do not forget the supreme goal of the surrealists is to reach the absolute reconciliation of imagination and matter.

What is inside this boundary and what is outside are the same thing, since they share the same code, one is the complementarity of the other, and one defines the other, as two black and white carpets of the same motif, yet with the two opposite colors reversed. The 6 October,<sup>20</sup> Breton and Nadja were passing by the Seine sparkled by the sunset, this oneiric woman whispered:

That hand, that hand on the Seine, why is that hand flaming over the water? It's true that fire and water are the same thing. But what does that hand mean? How do you interpret it? Let me look at that hand! Why do you want to go away now? What are you afraid of? You think I'm very sick, don't you? I'm not sick. But what do you think that means: fire and water, a hand of fire over water? (Joking): Of course it's not good luck: fire and water are the same thing, fire and gold are quite different.<sup>21</sup>

Their promenade went on. Towards midnight, they saw a water-shoot by reaching Tuileries. Breton recited a phrase of Berkeley's *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, "Urget aquas vis sursum eadem flectit que deorsum,"<sup>22</sup> which means "The same force launches waters into the sky and makes them fall as well". Obviously, this movement of water is a metaphorized movement of thought.

All that I love, all that I think and feel inclines me towards a particular philosophy of immanence according to which sur-reality will reside in reality itself and will be neither superior nor exterior to it. And conversely, because the container shall be also the contained. One might almost say that it will be a *communicating vessel* placed *between the container and the contained*. That is to say, I resist with all my strength temptations which, in painting and literature, might have the immediate tendency to withdraw thought from life as well as place life under the aegis of thought.<sup>23</sup>

The matter world has been always existed, yet it exist less exactly as reality than as fact. For one, the outside world does not exist unless it is reflected by the *inner sky*, these two worlds are in a constant exchange. The formless boundary like a membrane, receiving permanently forces from both sides, is changing its shape ceaselessly, and finds itself in a dynamic equilibrium at every instant. This unformed limit can lead one directly to the region of unconscious, then alchemize it with the matter world. The destination of the back and forth journey will be the mysterious land of *Merveilleux*.

## MERVEILLEUX

"Let us not mince words: the marvelous is always beautiful, anything marvelous is

beautiful, in fact only the marvelous is beautiful. (...) The marvelous is not the same in every period of history: it partakes in some obscure way of a sort of general revelation only the fragments of which come down to us: they are the romantic ruins, the modern mannequin, or any other symbol capable of affecting the human sensibility for a period of time. In these areas which make us smile, there is still portrayed the incurable human restlessness, and this is why I take them into consideration and why I judge them inseparable from certain productions of genius which are, more than the others, painfully afflicted by them.”<sup>24</sup>

Only the marvelous is beautiful, and only genius can produce it. One should ask what that is exactly. Here is an answer of one of the genius, Louis Aragon:

Reality is the apparent absence of contradiction.

The marvelous is eruption of contradiction within the real.

Love is a state of confusion between the real and the marvelous. In this state, the contradictions of being seem really essential to being.

Wherever the marvelous is dispossessed, the abstract moves in.

The fantastic, the beyond, dream, survival, paradise, hell, poetry, so many words signifying the concrete.<sup>25</sup>

In this light, Breton writes: “What is admirable about the fantastic is that there is no longer a fantastic; there is only the real,”<sup>26</sup> an absolute reality, a sur-reality.

## POETIC ANALOGY

The image is a pure creation of the mind. It cannot be born from a comparison but from a juxtaposition of two more or less distant realities. The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be – the greater its emotional power and poetic reality...<sup>27</sup>

Breton quotes Pierre Reverdy in his manifesto, and he continues to comment on it, by explaining the principle of poetic analogy of images and its great power, in his poetic words:

It is, as it were, from the fortuitous juxtaposition of the two terms that a particular light has sprung, *the light of the image*, to which we are infinitely sensitive. The value of the image depends upon the beauty of the spark obtained; it is, consequently, a function of the difference of potential between the two conductors. When the difference exists only slightly, as in a comparison, the spark is lacking. Now, it is not within man’s power, so far as I can tell, to effect the juxtaposition of two realities so far apart. The principle of the association of ideas, such as we conceive of it, militates against it. Or else we would have to revert to an elliptical art, which Reverdy deplores as much as I. We are there-

fore obliged to admit that the two terms of the image are not deduced one from the other by the mind for the specific purpose of producing the spark that they are the simultaneous products of the activity I call Surrealist, reason's role being limited to taking note of, and appreciating, the luminous phenomenon.

And just as the length of the spark increases to the extent that it occurs in rarefied gases, the Surrealist atmosphere created by automatic writing, which I have wanted to put within the reach of everyone, is especially conducive to the production of the most beautiful images. One can even go so far as to say that in this dizzying race the images appear like the only guideposts of the mind. By slow degrees the mind becomes convinced of the supreme reality of these images. At first limiting itself to submitting to them, it soon realizes that they flatter its reason, and increase its knowledge accordingly. The mind becomes aware of the limitless expanses wherein its desires are made manifest, where the pros and cons are constantly consumed, where its obscurity does not betray it. It goes forward, borne by these images which enrapture it, which scarcely leave it any time to blow upon the fire in its fingers. This is the most beautiful night of all, the *lightning-filled night*: day, compared to it, is night.<sup>28</sup>

Later in *Nadja*, Breton, always been obsessed by the lighting-filled phenomenon of the marvelous poetic analogy, he made his praise:

By what latitude could we, abandoned thus to the fury of symbols, be occasionally a prey to the *demon of analogy*, seeing ourselves the object of extreme overtures, of singular, special attentions? How does it happen that thrown together, once and for all, so far from the earth, in those brief intervals which our *marvelous stupor* grants us, we have been able to exchange a few incredibly concordant views above the smoking debris of old ideas and sempiternal life?<sup>29</sup>

## ALCHEMATION

I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *sur-reality*, if one may so speak. It is in quest of this sur-reality that I am going, certain not to find it but too unmindful of my death not to calculate to some slight degree the joys of its possession.<sup>30</sup>

Here Breton formulate officially the primary goal of the movement, which is to reach the absolute point of reconciliation of dream and reality, the supreme point of all contradictions and to create a completely new reality – sur-reality, close to the aspirations of the alchemists and their *Grand Oeuvre*.<sup>31</sup> Breton declares:

Everything leads us to believe that there exists a certain point of the mind from which life and death, the real and the imaginary, past and future, the communicable and incommunicable, high and low cease to be perceived as contradictory. This is not only a view inherited from oculists; it translates an aspiration so profound that it doubtless is essentially from it that Surrealism will be considered as having taken its substance. For Surrealism – and I think this will be its glory someday – anything will have been considered good that could reduce these oppositions which have been presented as insurmountable.<sup>32</sup>

By this resolution, so to speak this alchemation, can one rise his hat in Salute, by saying “Good evening Madame the moon”, and post on his chamber door a notice, reading “THE POET IS WORKING”<sup>33</sup> before going to bed, or even during the day?

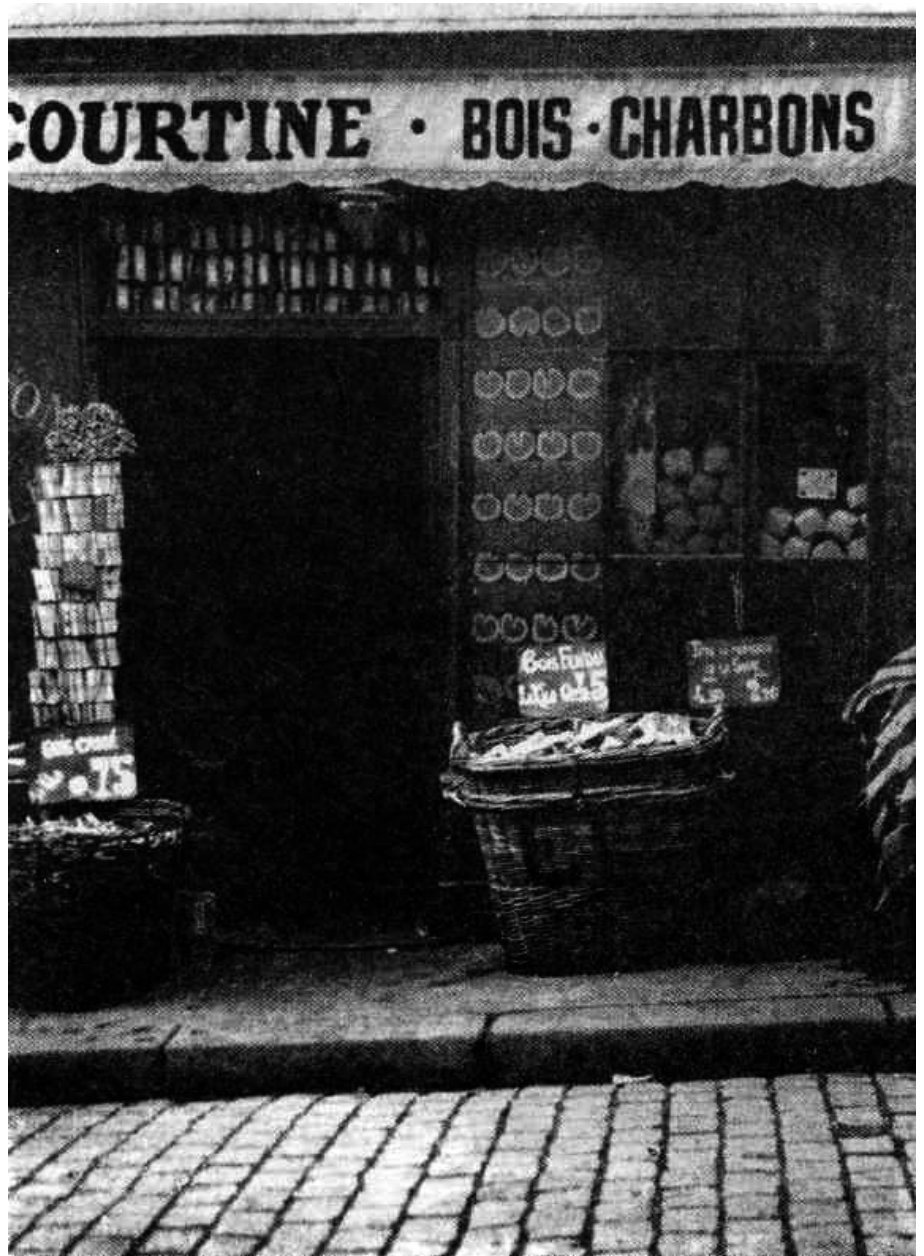
## **AUTOMATISM**

In a direct continuity to the resolution of dream and reality, the invention of automatic writing at the dawn of the movement cannot be astonishing. Known as the most popular common technique of the surrealists, it consists to exploit the richness of the boundary state between oceanic dream and solid waking, and which has been “discovered” thanks to a psychoanalytical method of free associations, thus became known as “pure psychic automatism”. Motivated by the new invention, Breton says:

In the unfathomable depth of the unconscious there prevails, according to Freud, a total absence of contradictions, a release from the emotional fetters caused by repression, a lack of temporality and substitution of external reality by psychic reality, obedient to pleasure principles and no other. Automatism leads us straight to these regions.<sup>34</sup>

These regions that Breton has in mind is doubtlessly the *unconscious*, and this “spoken thought”, thanks to its directness, is not contaminated by the logic, but is utterly transparent to the mind, immediate to experience.

Yet, having been optimistic for the early years, the surrealists start to realize that the quality of the works generated this way do not depend so much on the technique, as it did on the power of imagination and gift of expression of the author. “If one writes, following the automatic method, the sad imbecilities remain sad imbecilities.”<sup>35</sup> Breton as one the main inventor, in a retroactive review of the movement, he said: “It is possible for automatism to enter into the composition of a painting or a poem with a certain



*The words BOIS-CHARBONS...*  
J. A. Boiffard



degree of premeditation.”<sup>36</sup> The further step as the enhanced method, would be the objective chance.

## OBJECTIVE CHANCE

The street I believed was capable of causing surprising turning-points in my life; the street, with its restlessness and its glances, was my true element: there, as in no other place, I received the winds of eventuality.<sup>37</sup>

The first surrealist events, or the last Dada ones, took place in the streets of Paris. Gathering in a bar in the Passage de l'Opéra, the surrealists planned a series of visits throughout places that “really had no reason for existing”, and the adventure would “put in union the unconscious of the city with the unconscious of men”. They believed that imagination could be triggered off in poetic places through *la Magic du lieux*. The first visit to the deserted St Julien-le-Pauvre, was advertised though out the city, by posters reading “cleanliness is the luxury of the poor, be dirty”, and by slogans saying this excursion led by around ten surrealists would challenge “the incompetence of suspect guides and cicerones”. The intention was good, but on the day of this excursion, the 14th April 1921, it rained and no tourists came. As a result of this first event, it was an abysmal fail, a “collective nervous depression”.<sup>38</sup>

Only pure chance and external causalities are not enough “to destroy the old antinomy of between dream and action, between imaginary space and real space.”<sup>39</sup> What they lack is the *obsessional internal finality*, or perhaps the surrealists themselves have it, but surely not the tourists. A pure chance is just simple passive external causalities, to live the sur-reality, one would need a more effective internal finality to filter them, and to restructure them. Thus the matter world is no longer a smooth space, but alchemized into a special space with precise anchor points. For instance, the promenade of a Sunday that Breton had with Saupault under the theme of BOIS-CHARBONS was a much more successful example.<sup>40</sup> They had their day walking in the streets of Paris, to identify all shops which those two words designated. Breton, enlightened by both the Paris's *Magic du lieux*, and his internal finality as BOIS-CHARBONS, had the perspicacity to predict where is next shop might be with mysterious precision.

Not every encounter is a surrealist event, only the ones triggered by the objective chance, as a manifestation of both the external causality and the internal finality are the real ones. These experiences “attempted to call to certain disturbing facts, to certain overwhelming coincidences”, “the problem of objective chance, or in other words that sort of chance that shows man, in a way that is still very mysterious, a necessity that escapes him, even though he experiences it as a vital necessity”.<sup>41</sup>

Dali's paranoiac critic method shares a strong similarity with the objective chance. He has been recited by Breton in the conference of *What is Surrealism* at 1934:

Dali has endowed surrealism with an instrument of primary importance, in particular the paranoiac-critical method... He first announced his convictions to us in *La Femme Visible* (1930):

I believe the moment is at hand when, by a paranoiac and active advance of the mind, it will be possible (simultaneously with automatism and other passive states) to systematize confusion and thus to help to discredit completely the world of reality.

In order to cut short all possible misunderstandings, it should perhaps be said: “immediate” reality.

Paranoia uses the external world in order to assert its dominating idea and has the disturbing characteristic of making others accept this idea’s reality. The reality of the external world is used for illustration and proof, and so comes to serve the reality of one’s mind.

In the special ‘Surrealist Intervention’ number of *Documents 34*, under the title ‘Philosophic Provocations’, Dali undertakes today to give his thought a didactic turn. All uncertainty as to his real intentions seems to me to be swept away by these definitions:

*Paranoia*: Delirium of interpretation bearing a systematic structure.

*Paranoiac-critical activity*: Spontaneous method of “*irrational knowledge*” based on the critical and systematic objectification of delirious associations and interpretations.<sup>42</sup>

The inner sky of desire, passes beyond the boundary, once effectively projected into the matter world, transforms it into a “*forest of indices*”<sup>43</sup>, of marks and signs – a *merveilleux* world.

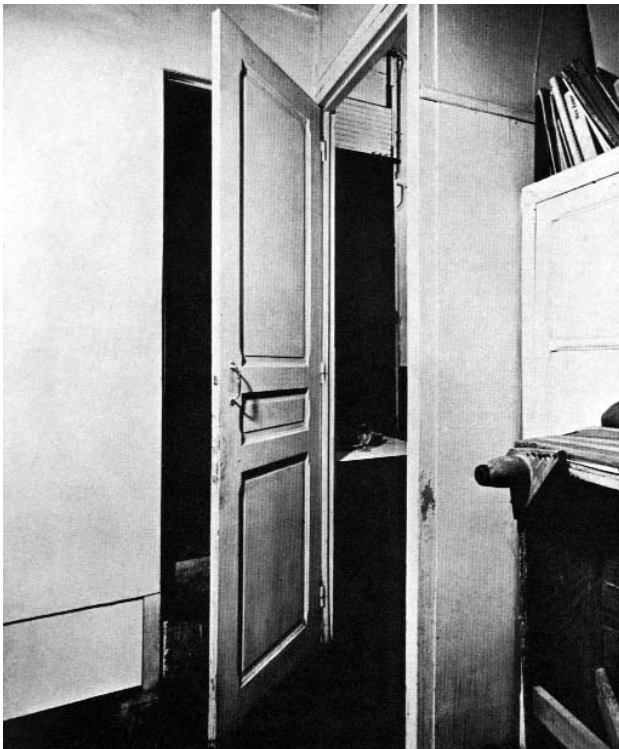
## INDICES

Whether proceeding by automatism or by objective chance, the surrealists show their interest in resolving old antinomies, and in term of aesthetic, there is the one of perception and representation. In automatism, once a word or a verse is written, it is no longer a reality but a transformed one, not yet contaminated by reason, nonetheless already transformed by the “spoken thought”, the inner sky, into a sign, a representation. So as the process of objective chance, the matter world as external causality is cut, fragmented and reassembled according obsessions as internal finalities, is no longer simply the matter world but concatenated with its signs and representations. As the primary goal of surrealism is to reconcile all contradictions to the higher synthesis of sur-reality, that will here, “resolve the dualism of perception and representation, for not sticking to the bark but go up to the sap.”<sup>44</sup>





*In Paris the staggering tour Saint-Jacques*  
*Alike a tournesol*  
*La Tour Saint-Jacques, circa 1940*  
Brassaï



*Door, 11 Rue Larry, 1927*  
Marcel Duchamp

Within western culture, this is an old couple of enemy. They are not only considered as two contrasting forms of experience, but one is placed higher than the other. Perception, which is immediate to experience, is better and truer, while representation always remains suspicious, since it is never anything but a copy, a re-production of the original form, a series of signs for experience. Because of its distance from the real, representation can thus be suspected of fraud.<sup>45</sup> The way that the surrealists propose to resolve this dualism is to concatenate the real with its representations, thus one's perception goes back and forth through the non-frontier limits, is placed in a ceaseless pendulum situation, swing between a fact and its representation. Therefore "sur-reality will reside in reality itself", representation so nearly placed to and dissolved into the real is no longer a cheat.

In many occasions we find Breton declaring his welcome accorded to representation, to signs, "It makes no difference whether there remains a perceptible difference between beings which are evoked and beings which are present, since I dismiss such differences out of hand at every moment of my life."<sup>46</sup> For instance, the experience that Breton described in the IV chapter named "Tournesol" of *L'Amour fou*, can be very typical to illustrate this point. At the night of 29 May 1934, Breton follows a scandalously beautiful unknown woman to effect a rendezvous. This rendezvous unfolds as a night-walk throughout Paris, beginning at Les Halles with Breton in an anxious state of fear. The tone of the story turned, when they are passing by the tour Saint-Jacques, which is not only the midpoint of this journey but stands above all as the turning point in the narrative in the sense that is simultaneously psychological, spatial, and temporal. As a psychological centre, it marks Breton's emotional change from fear to love; as a spatial centre, it stands at the middle of their trip as well of the city of Paris; as a temporal centre, it reminds Breton a set of things related to a poem he wrote ten years ago in 1923. By passing this tour ghostly veiled by scaffolding for years then rendered as the "greatest monument to the unrevealed", Breton recite a line of his recent verse, "In Paris the staggering tour Saint-Jacques, alike a *tournesol*".<sup>47</sup> *Tournesol*, the word for sunflower that Breton used to describe the greatness of the building, means also litmus paper which refers to the tradition that had associated it with alchemy. Triggered by the line of poetry which becomes a thread, a *revolving door*,<sup>48</sup> Breton enters in his smoky labyrinth of memory. He begins to recite fragments of a poem that he wrote in 1923, the name of which is only reminded several days after – *Tournesol*. Then he realizes what he is doing, by analyzing image by image the poem. This poem written ten years ago mapped exactly the path taken by the couple in 1934, across the Pont-au-change, along the Rue Gille-Coeur till the flower market. Moreover, this poem foretold his emotions awakened by this event, even various physical features of the woman are predicted. Each image emerges as a prophecy, a sign pointing to the future, acquiring its signification only by that future. For this type of sign, Breton does not use *signe* neither *symbole*, he has his

own specific term – *indice*. This is actually a very special type of signs, it means mark, trace, symptom, as well as index.

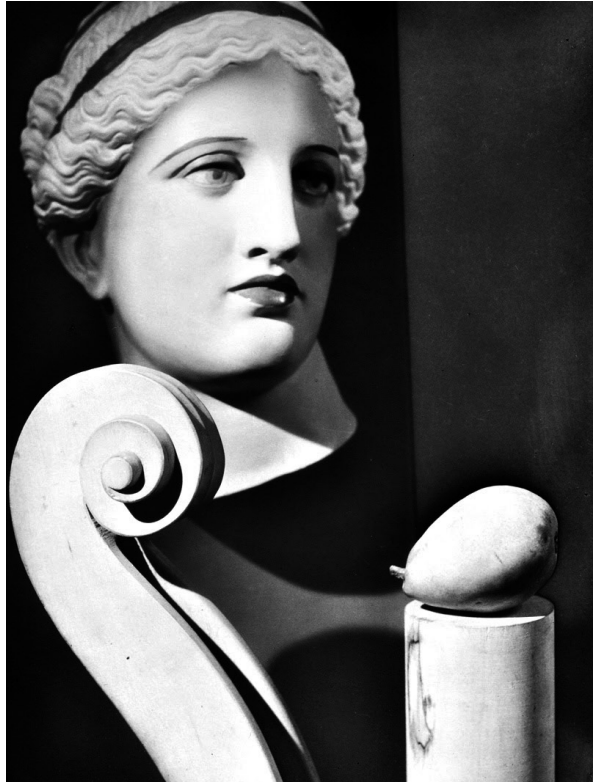
According to the classification of C.S. Peirce, there are three types of signs. The first, named “symbol”, covers conventional signs with arbitrarily fixed links between signifier and referent, such as words. The second, named “icon”, includes signs working as representation of the referent based on the resemblance or visual likeness, such as pictures, maps, charts, etc. The third, named “index”, involves signs obtaining their referent through an act of an imprint or a trace of the signifier, a footprint, fingerprint or medical symptom can serve for instance. Breton’s *indice* is a kind of index, a subgroup of the third category. It can be a deictic sign, like arrows, whose referent is either the object or the pointed direction; or an empty sign waiting for specific moments of spatial or temporal occasion in order to acquire a particular referent, yet only provisional; or a symptom, making an unrevealed internal cause evident by externalizing it.<sup>49</sup> *Indice* is less the representation of an object than the effect of an event. *Objective chance* is the operation to register the unrevealed internal finality, by evidences as certain immediate, confounding irrational events.

The description that Breton assigned to the woman’s gait can demonstrate this point quite well. In the poem, Breton describes the woman’s gait by the term of swimming. That line has always annoyed Breton since it makes an odd echo to a line of Baudelaire depicting a woman’s gait as dancing. Ten years later, as the night walk occurs, the woman herself is related to a particular dance named after its swimming like gestures. Thus the phrase of the poem is visualized by the physical female walking; the poet himself is associated with his idol fellow poet; a specific image of the feminine beauty is built by the juxtaposition of walking, dancing, and swimming. In this case the most important level of the index’s condition – the syncategoremic level – is attained. The sign is empty until it is filled with a referent, yet a provisional one, which “is itself a constellation of fragmentary, chance interconnections, ones that split and slide in relation to each other, in a series of potentially endless substitution”,<sup>50</sup> as a succession of images suggested by poetic analogy. The reality is therefore convulsed into a continually fluctuating process of reference, a constantly changing constellation of signs, just following *the merveilleux precipitated by desire*.<sup>51</sup> One’s thought is hence entered in the ceaseless pendulum movement, swinging from one image to another, oscillating between internal and external world, weaving them seamlessly into a continuum, in Sontag’s words, “a reality in the second degree, narrower but more dramatic than the one perceived by natural vision”<sup>52</sup>.

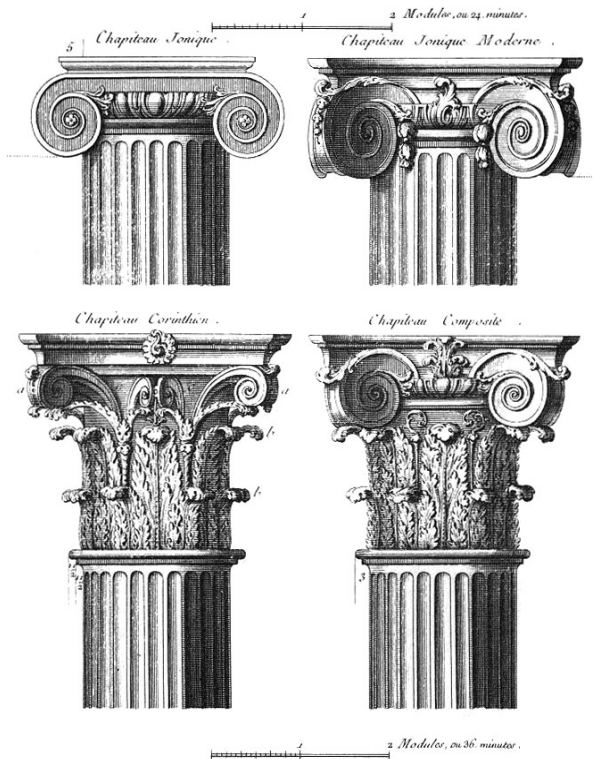
## CONVULSIVE BEAUTY

The beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will be not at all.<sup>53</sup>

*Venus in full "occultation", 1930*  
Man Ray



Ionic, Modern ionic, Corinthian,  
and Composite classic orders



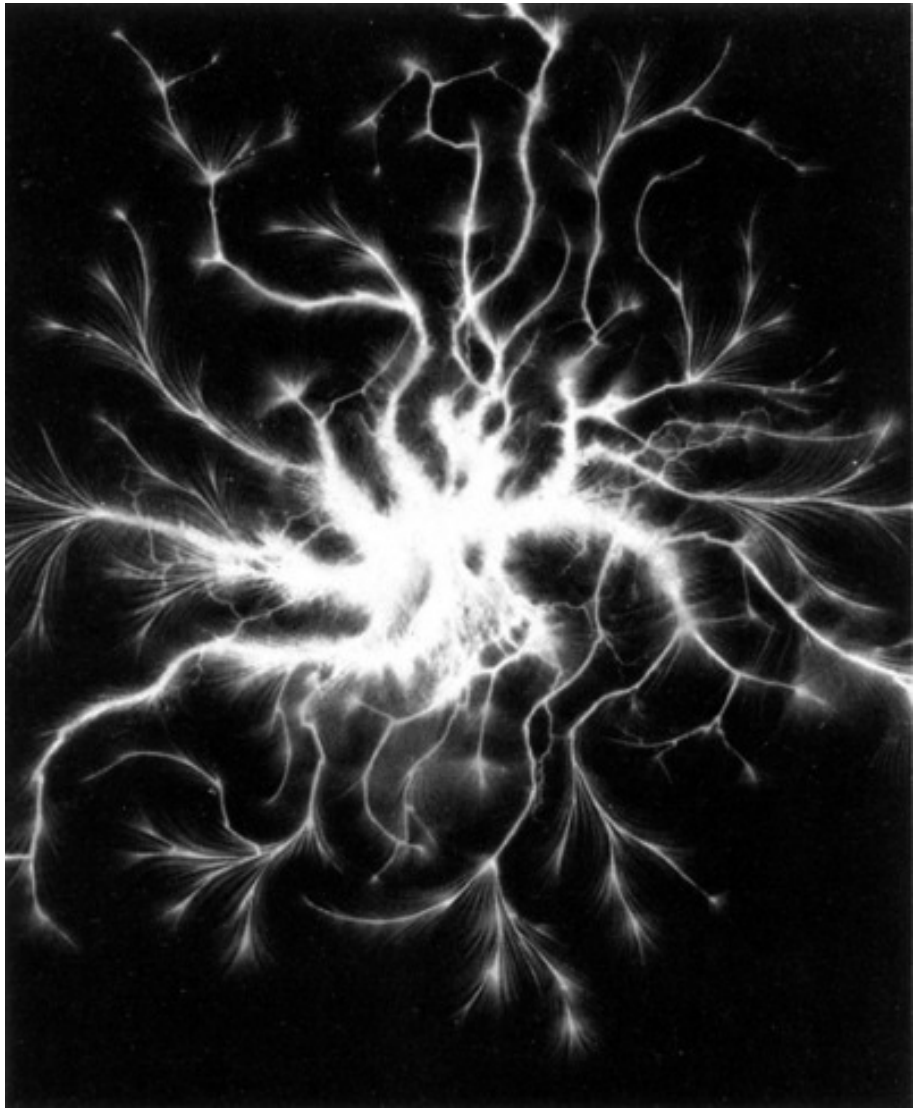


*Explosante-fixe*  
Man Ray



*a very handsome locomotive after  
it had been abandoned for many  
years to the delirium of a virgin  
forest*





*Image, as it is produced in automatic Writing*

Convulsive Beauty is another term for the *Merveilleux*, which is the great talismanic concept at the heart of surrealism itself. In the prologue of *L'Amour fou*, Breton explained himself the concept of this convulsion. There are three types.

The first, the “ *erotique voilée*”, a mimicry phenomenon occurred in nature, originally is a natural process of signs production, by one thing imitating another, distorting itself into a sign of another. For example an insect changes its color according to its circumstance, or the base of a Venus statue imitating the form the female’s hair, so as the Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite classic orders.

The second, the “ *explosante-fixe*”, describes the reciprocal relation relating the state of an object in motion and the one when it is stopped or delayed, an expiration of movement, a failure of time. Breton complete in 1928 the history of *Nadja* with the phrase quoted above. Not far before that, Breton writes, “Because you exists, as if sole you know exist.”<sup>54</sup> This present enunciation, when the writing time coincide with the time of the recounted event, translate the achievement of his quest. This quest is for him to find the “gold of *time*”, the instant when the *Merveilles* emerges. What is important is to *fix this ultimate instant*. The “wolf trap of the speed”<sup>55</sup> is a tool to reach the Convulsive Beauty.

This key notion would be animated with the myth of Mélusine, the “woman-child”, the incarnation of Beauty. “This so particular variety has always captivated poets, because *time* has no control on her.”<sup>56</sup>

Always on this subject, Breton continues to narrate, “I am sorry not to be able to reproduce, among the illustrations to this text, a photograph of a very handsome locomotive after it had been abandoned for many years to the delirium of a virgin forest.”<sup>57</sup> This locomotive no matter how handsome it is, kidnapped from its natural existence, is deprived of some part of its aliveness and physical self, thus turned into a sign, a specimen of the reality it once possessed, as a leopard caged in a zoo for the rest of its life. Breton realizing this series of meanings in front of it, is hence convulsed.

The third, the “ *magique-circonstancielle*”, depicts experiences related to objective chance, where internal desires are received and manifested by external symptoms which are signs of inner obsessions. For instance the found objects or writing fragments are quite typical of this category.

This is a process of reality, by contacting one’s conscious, convulsed into its seemingly antinomy, namely, a sign. The present reality, in this process, is deprived temporarily its presence, turned into a sign for what is absent, therefore the world is intensified, dramatized, is read as a *forest of signs*.

## **PRESCRIPTION**

By preparing so much, one may ask, what the definition of surrealism is, and what the prescription that the surrealists give to the bleeding world is. Here is the official one given by Breton in his first manifesto, once and for all:

“SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by the thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.

ENCYCLOPEDIA. Philosophy. Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought. It tends to ruin once and for all other psychic mechanisms and to substitute itself for them in solving all the principal problems of life.”<sup>58</sup>

In Breton’s perspective, surrealism would resolve hence all the principal conflictive problems of life, including curing the rankling wound of the war.



## NOTES

1. “Ceci tuera cela, le fer tuera la pierre, et les temps sont proches...” Emile Zola, *Le Ventre de Paris* (Edition Rencontre Lausanne, n.d.), p.426, <http://beq.ebooksgratuits.com/vents/zola-03.pdf>.
2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (Penguin Classics Edition 1969 reprint), p. 41.
3. Denis Hollier and Rosalind Krauss, “Surrealist Precipitates: Shadows Don’t Cast Shadows,” *October* 69 (1994): p.110, doi: 10.2307/778991.
4. Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, “Un Chien Andalou [Enregistrement Vidéo] / [réal.: Luis Buñuel ; [scénario:] Luis Buñuel, Salvador Dalí” (EdMontparnasse, 2005).
5. “Chère imagination, ce que j’aime surtout en toi, c’est que tu ne pardonnes pas.” André Breton, *Manifestes Du Surréalisme*, Folio. Essais 5 (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), p.14.
6. André Breton, “What Is Surrealism?” 1934, <http://home.wlv.ac.uk/~fa1871/whatsurr.html>.
7. André Breton, *Le Revolver à Cheveux Blancs*, Paris, Editions des Cahiers Libres, 1932, n.d, p.65.
8. André Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme / André Breton*, Folio. Gallimard. Essais 5 (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), p.17.
9. Ibid., p.16.
10. Ibid., p.19.
11. Ibid., p.19-20.
12. Ibid., p.18.
13. André Breton, *L’Amour fou*, Oeuvres complètes 2, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p.668.
14. Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme / André Breton*, p.20.
15. Ibid., p.15.
16. Ibid., p.21.
17. Ibid., p.22.
18. André Breton, *L’Amour fou*, p.659.
19. André Breton, *Nadja*, Folio plus no.37 (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p.146.
20. Ibid., p.76.
21. Ibid., p.87.
22. Ibid., p.88.
23. From *Surrealism and Painting*, 1928, quoted in his speech, André Breton, “*What Is Surrealism?*,” 1934, <http://home.wlv.ac.uk/~fa1871/whatsurr.html>.
24. Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme / André Breton*, p.24–26.
25. Louis Aragon, *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no.3, 1925, p.30.
26. André Breton, “What Is Surrealism?” 1934.
27. Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme / André Breton*, p.31.
28. Ibid., p.50.
29. André Breton, *Nadja*, p.111.
30. Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme / André Breton*, p.24.
31. Dalibor Veseley, “Surrealism and Architecture Introduced by Dalibor Veseley: Surrealism, Myth and Modernity,” in *Architectural Design*, vol. 48, 1978, p.87, p.95.
32. André Breton, *L’Amour fou*, p.723.
33. Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme / André Breton*, p.24.
34. André Breton, *What Is Surrealism?* (Haskell House Publishers, 1974), p.124.
35. Louis Aragon, *Traité du style / Aragon*, 2e éd. (Paris: Gallimard, 1928).
36. André Breton, *What Is Surrealism?*, 1974, p.224.
37. André Breton, *Les pas perdus / André Breton*, Nouv. éd. revue et corrigée., L’imaginaire. Gallimard 243 (Paris: Gallimard, 2004).
38. Bernard Tschumi, “Architecture and Its Double,” in *Architectural Design*, vol. 48, 1978, p.112.
39. Ibid.
40. André Breton, *Nadja*, p.27.
41. In *Surrealist situation of the object*, André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (University of Michigan Press, 1969), p.268.
42. André Breton, “What Is Surrealism?” 1934.
43. André Breton, *L’Amour fou*, p.685.
44. André Breton, *La clé des champs*, 1896-1966. Oeuvres complètes 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p.837.
45. Rosalind Krauss, “Photography in the service of surrealism,” in *Art of the Twentieth Century – A Reader* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2003), p.119.
46. André Breton, *Surrealism and Painting* (Harper & Row, 1972), p.2.
47. André Breton, *L’Amour fou*, p.717.
48. Walter Benjamin writes on the photographs in

both *L'Amour fou* and *Nadja*, quoted in, Rosalind Krauss, "Nightwalkers," *Art Journal* 41, no. 1 (1981): p.34, doi:10.1080/00043249.1981.10792443.

49. *Ibid.*, p.35.

50. *Ibid.*, p.36.

51. André Breton, *L'Amour fou*, p.682.

52. Susan Sontag, "Melancoly Objects," in *On Photography* (New York: RosettaBooks, LLC, 2005), p.40, <http://art.buffalo.edu/coursenotes/art314/sontag.pdf>.

53. André Breton, *Nadja*, p.161.

54. André Breton, *Nadja*, p.159.

55. *Ibid.*, p.189.

56. Breton, *Arcane 17* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 2001), p.62.

57. André Breton, *L'Amour fou*, p.680.

58. Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme / André Breton*, p.36–37.

# Sheets from the experts

## INFORME

Six years ago, after a rainy heavy research day in the construction archive of Ticino at the outskirts of Bellinzona, a small group of friends and I were walking in the drizzle on the narrow lanes in the mountainous villages, heading to downtown for dinner. Being relaxed, I started to look around, and discovered a series of twinkling stars in the thick darkness. The intrigued I started to wonder where the other stars were, which constellation these stars belonged to, and how powerful these distant stars should be to penetrate the thickness of the night. By pointing them to one of my friends, I realized my stars were merely streetlights in the mountains. Four years later, beside the incredible engineering interventions such as bridges or tunnels, I learned that almost half of the Alps in Switzerland were hollowed for the WW II as “reduit”, with bunkers disguised into country houses or landscape elements, in order to refuge the whole country’s civilians, in case that the federation would be invaded.

These shining lights are in fact the only visible points of an immense “psycho-atmospheric-anamorphic object”, which instantly caused these banal points of lights to “recover all its irrational glamour, and its most incontestable and dizzying powers of seduction.” These objects, having the psycho, atmospheric, anamorphic nature, are actually complex reconstructions, made in the dark, of an original object, chosen in the dark among many others. These are reproduced shadows of an unseen shadow that Dali referred to as *informe*, formless. Actually, in 1933, Dali has already imagined a quite similar scene to my story:

A man is staring indistinctly at a luminous point, thinking it a star, only suddenly to awaken when he realized it is only the tip of a burning cigarette. This complex story continues by Dali persuading his now-rapt listener, that among other elements buried in the object are “two authentic skulls – those of Richard Wagner and of Ludwig II of Barvaria. And it will be demonstrated that it is these two skulls, softened up by special process, that the cigarette is smoking.”

Thus in my story, the Swiss engineering interventions or my imaginary galaxy have only the symptom as the artificial stars at the night in Belinzona, among other things buried in the immense “psycho-atmospheric-anamorphic object”, softened up by drizzle and fog.

“The smoker puts the last touch to his work, he seeks unity between himself and the landscape.”<sup>1</sup> Dali ends his story with the statement, “The tip of this cigarette cannot but burn with a brilliance more lyrical in human eyes than the airy twinkle of the clear-

est and distant star.”<sup>2</sup>

The term *informe* has been clearly pronounced by Dali. Yet the painter owes the word with the particular, anamorphic spin to Bataille. In 1929 and 1930, in the form of a “Critical Dictionary” in the journal *Documents*, Bataille made an entry named *Informe*:

A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks. Thus *Informe* is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only *Informe* amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.<sup>3</sup>

Allergic to the notion of definition that he considers as “mathematical frock coat”, then, instead of giving *informe* a meaning, Bataille rather assigned it a job: to undo formal categories, to deny that each thing has its proper form. Noxious as crachat or spittle with their physical formlessness, *informe* is meant to allow one to conceive the removal of all those boundaries by which concepts organize reality, dividing it up into little packages of sense, limiting and freezing it by a philosophical frock coat. By pointing out both the abstractness of concepts and to the prissiness with which they meant to constrain, Bataille use *informe* as a tool of sabotage against the academic ivory tower and the spirit of system, to imagine meaning as gone shapeless, as though it were a spider or an earthworm crushed underfoot.<sup>4</sup> The *informe* is an operation, it’s not so much a stable motif to which we can refer, a symbolizable theme, a given quality, since it is a term allowing one to operate a declassification, in the double sense of lowering and of taxonomic disorder.<sup>5</sup> The operation of *informe* can function through four sub-operations, each conceived as a debasement of one of modernism’s tenet: *horizontality* against the primacy of the visual (and the verticality of its field); *base materialism* against the tyranny of form and idea (high) over matter (low); *pulse* against the exclusion of temporality as permeated by desire; *entropy* against structure and totality.<sup>6</sup> Through this operation, distinctions between the real and the imaginary, between waking and sleeping, between ignorance and knowledge, etc. – all of them, in short, distinctions in which valid considerations must demonstrate a keen awareness and the demand for resolution.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, form had turned into formlessness, the finite into infinity, the individual into totality.

## BEAUTY AND BEAST

It was Bataille who developed the concept of *bassesse*, by performing two sub-operations

of *informe* as horizontality and base materialism, through an axial rotation from vertical to horizontal, a mechanism of fall for its achievement. In Freud, the order essential to civilization is opposed to anal eroticism, and in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930) he presents the famous origin myth meant to show us why. The story turns on the erection of man from all fours to two feet, for with this change in posture, according to Freud, came a revolution in sense: smell was degraded and sight privileged, the anal was repressed and the genital pronounced.<sup>8</sup> Hence the ultimate verticality of civilization is replaced by bestial horizontality, the distinction between human and animal is broken down.

“To turn an object upside-down is to deprive it of its meaning,” as Merleau Ponty notes in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. And the example he gives is particularly convincing:

If someone is lying on a bed, and I look at him from the head of the bed, the face is for a moment normal. It is true that the features are in a way disarranged, and I have some difficulty in realizing that the smile is a smile, but I feel that I could, if I wanted, walk around the bed, and I seem to see through the eyes of a spectator standing at the foot of the bed. If the spectacle is protracted, it suddenly changes its appearance: the face takes on an utterly unnatural aspect, its expressions become terrifying, and the eyelashes and eyebrows assume an air of materiality such as I have never seen in them. For the first time I really see the inverted face as if this were its “natural” position: in front of me I have a pointed, hairless head with a red, teeth-filled orifice in the forehead and, where the mouth ought to be, two moving orbs edged with glistening hairs and underlined with stiff brushes.<sup>9</sup>

What Merleau Ponty retains from Gestalt psychology is that the perception of human is orientated according to our upright posture. This example has almost a tragic tone, since here it is about the human face, the source of the problem is the fact that the imago of the perceiver has been attacked. By the same way the mechanism of fall sabotage not only the human imago but also his ego. The mouth/eye axis defines the mouth in terms of man’s expressive powers, is linked to his possession to speech, and the erected position of a man opposing to the horizontal one of an animal. The mouth/anus axis, a function of the animal’s horizontality, has the mouth as the first hoop of the chain of catching, killing, and ingesting prey, for which the anus is the last hoop. Bataille contrasts the former of the human with the latter of the four legged beast. Further, beyond this simple polarity, that at its greatest moments of pleasure or pain, the human mouth’s expression is not spiritual, but bestial, is to reorganize the orientation of the human structure and conceptually to rotate the axis of loftiness onto the axis of base material existence. With this act of Bataille, mouth and anus are conflated.<sup>10</sup>

Bataille, defining himself as “an old enemy from within”, had a great impact on surrealist thinking, by introducing effective ideologies to the movement, on the production of images that do not decorate, but rather structure the basic mechanisms of thought.

The magazine which started at 1933, played the role of the surrealist vehicle – *Mino-taure*, owes its name to Bataille. This is a title as well as a concept, for as we shall see this man/beast blindly wandering the labyrinth into which he has fallen, dizzy, disoriented, having lost his seat of reason – his head – this creature is another avatar of the *informe*.<sup>11</sup>

## MIMESIS

In 1935, Caillois published an article on the subject of mimicry – “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia”,<sup>12</sup> in which he compares certain forms of animal mimesis with what Caillois calls – in terms of Pierre Janet – Legendary Psychasthenia. In the French psychiatric language of the time, psychasthenia meant as its etymology suggests – a catastrophic drop in the level of psychic energy, a kind of subjective detumescence, a loss of ego substance, a depressive exhaustion close to what a monk would call *acedia*. Yet Caillois’s description of mimetic behaviors begins with an argument for distinction: “From whatever side one approaches things, the ultimate problem turns out in the final analysis to be that of distinction... Among distinctions, there is assuredly none more clear-cut than that between the organism and its surroundings.”<sup>13</sup> The life of any organism depends on the possibility of its maintaining its own distinctness, a boundary within which it is contained, the terms of what we could call its self-possession. Mimicry, Caillois argues, is the loss of this possession, because the animal that merges with its setting becomes dispossessed, derealized, as though yielding to a temptation exercised on it by the vast outsideness of space itself, a temptation to fusion. What makes mimesis strange is precisely the fact that an organism gives up that distinction, abdicates that fundamentally vital difference between life and matter, between the organism and the inorganic. As Bichat defines it, life is all that resists death. Here, it would seem that life has stopped resisting. By renouncing the vital boundary, the mimetic insect, he says, plays dead. So be it. But Caillois does not find it worthwhile to remind us that it can only play dead because it is alive. His entire analysis proceeds as if playing dead and being dead were one and the same. But in this very case, the difference between resemblance and identity is essential. Here, death is only a mask of life, a mask behind which life maintains its difference while pretending to renounce it.

“We are dealing here with *combinations like any other*,” says Caillois, “since all these details can be brought together without being joined, without their contributing to some resemblance: it is not the presence of the elements that is perplexing and decisive, it is their *mutual organization*, their *reciprocal topography*.”<sup>14</sup> The connection between this article and the Bataille’s *informe* is obvious. Since this condition of *informe* does not propose a higher, more transcendent meaning, through a dialectical movement of thought. The boundaries of terms are not imagined by Bataille as transcended, but merely as transgressed or broken, producing formlessness through deliquescence, putrefaction, decay.<sup>15</sup> Likening the process of “*depersonalization by assimilation to space*” to the phenomenon of

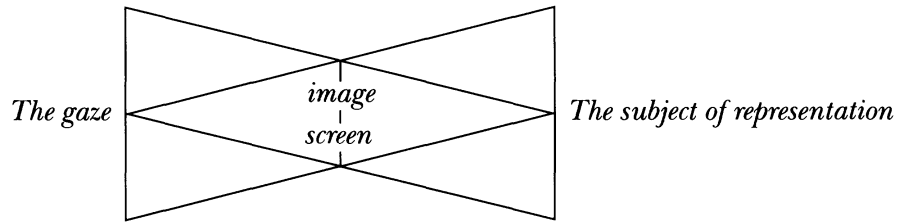
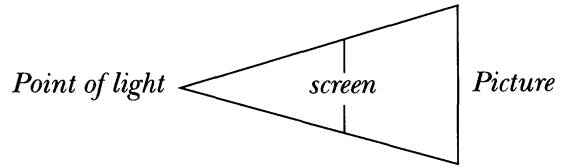
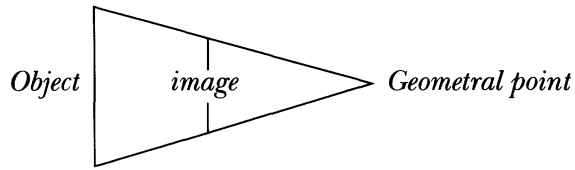
schizophrenia, Caillois writes, “To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them in a gigantic phagocytosis (consumption of bacteria). It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his senses. He tries to look at himself from any point whatever in space. He feels himself becoming space, dark space where things cannot be put. He is similar, not similar to something, but just similar. And he invents spaces of which he is ‘the convulsive possession’.”<sup>16</sup> Caillois closes his essay by the assertion: “this *attraction by space*, as elementary and mechanical as are tropisms, and by the effect of which life seems to lose ground, blurring in its retreat the frontier between the organism and the milieu and *expanding to the same degree the limits within which*, according to Pythagoras, *we are allowed to know, as we should, that nature is everywhere the same.*”<sup>17</sup>

## DOUBLE DIHEDRON

The moment that the body is inscribed by space, the seeing subject is defined as a projection, a being-seen, is the very moment when Caillois examines the subjectivity of vision. He writes: “there can be no doubt that the perception of space is a complex phenomenon: space is indissolubly perceived and represented”, which he understands as a structural problem in the field of representation.

From this standpoint, it is a double dihedral changing at every moment in size and position: *a dihedral of action* whose horizontal plane is formed by the ground and the vertical plane by the man himself who walks and who, by this fact, carries the dihedral along with him; and *a dihedral of representation* determined by the same horizontal plane as the previous one (but represented and not perceived) intersected vertically at the distance where the object appears. It is with represented space that the drama becomes specific, since the living creature, the organism, is no longer the origin of the coordinates, but one point among others; it is dispossessed of its privilege and literally no longer knows where to place itself... The feeling of personality, considered as the organism’s feeling of distinction from its surroundings, of the connection between consciousness and a particular point in space, cannot fail under these conditions to be seriously under-mined; one then enters into the psychology of psychasthenia, and more specifically of legendary psychasthenia, if we agree to use this name for the disturbance in the above relations between personality and space.<sup>18</sup>

Later on, Lacan illustrates this double dihedral effect with a diagram of two opposing triangles. The first represents the perceptual half of the double dihedron, within which the viewer stands at the apex and the object he sees deployed along the field that makes up the triangle’s base. The second represents Caillois’s dihedron of representation, the apex



Lacan's diagram of the double Dihedron



of which is no longer the viewer but a point of light, irradiant, emanating from space at large; and the base plane of the triangle is now called “picture”. The perceiving organism occurs, although no longer as the privileged point from which reality is constructed, but as Caillois said “one point among others”, a figure in a picture for which it is not a viewer but viewed. Significantly, this relationship in which the subject occurs only as alienated from himself – for he is defined or inscribed as a being-seen without, however, being able to see either his viewer or his own figure in the viewer’s picture – is the one that Lacan constructs as the domain of the essentially visual. For here, where the field of the “picture” separates off from the geometric, ultimately tactile conception of perspectival space, Lacan finds the terms of an irresolvable and perpetual tension, and it is here that he is able to diagram the “scopic drive,” to elaborate, that is, the dynamics of a specifically visual dimension, within which the subject is dispossessed. The visuality Lacan and Caillois were describing was a mastery from without, imposed on the subject who is trapped in a cat’s cradle of representation, caught in a hall of mirrors, lost in a labyrinth.<sup>19</sup>

## PRAYING MANTIS

In 1934, Caillois tells us the story of *Praying mantis*.<sup>20</sup> The ultimate mimetic animal, in order to defend itself against its predators, disguises itself as branch among branches, a leaf among leaves, no doubt renounces processing itself, by “playing dead”. The phenomenon of cannibalism can be observed in certain species during their sexual practices – the female mantis decapitate its male by consuming it after or even during the act of copulation, in order to enhance the physical strength of herself to have stronger babies, and its voracity, made it the perfect symbol of the phallic mother, fascinating, petrifying, castrating. What is more odd or unbelievable, is that so deep is the imitative reflex ingrained in this creature that it can, when decapitated and thus truly dead, continue to mime the functions of life, such as hunting for food, building a nest, even laying eggs, all the way up to the ultimate form of its preservation of life: that of “playing dead”. It is this intellectual vista into the abyss of the undecidable-into-infinity that fixates Caillois on the praying mantis: this most spectacular model of the simulacrum performed as death imitating life imitating death. In this regard, Rosalind Krauss made a brilliant analysis:

If subjectivity is born through reflexiveness, through the possibility of consciousness folding back on itself to take cognizance of itself in the “I think,” it is the merely repetitive possibility of the reflex that undoes the subject, depriving the statement’s “thinking” of its ego. This is the case of the praying mantis, for which the automatism of “playing dead,” which can occur from the vantage of either death or life, makes it possible to imagine the impossible statement “I am dead” to be projected within this situation. This utterance,

which no first person can truly pronounce from the horizon of its occurrence, but which the mantis exemplifies, demonstrates the way the simulacral condition is coupled with a radical desubjectivization. For in the case in point, the “am dead” is true; but either way, alive or dead, the “I” is not possible. “I am seeing” is the analogous statement at the level of visual form. Reflexive modernism wants to cancel the naturalism in the field of the object in order to bring about a newly heightened sense of the subject, a form that creates the illusion that it is nothing except the fact that “I am seeing” (it). The entropic, simulacral move, however, is to float the field of seeing in the absence of the subject; it wants to show that in the automatism of repetition to infinity, the disappearance of the first person is the mechanism that triggers formlessness.<sup>21</sup>

On the subject of cannibalism, this phenomenon can be understood as well as an obsessive idea of a return to the narcissistic state of childhood. In accordance with the psychoanalysis the childhood narcissism is a stage where the object of love is judged only from the point of view of oral satisfaction. The desire of absorbing the outer world in oneself, to eat the object of one’s love, can be frequently found in modern poetry and literature (Dickens, Dostoevsky).<sup>22</sup> Thus the phenomenon of cannibalism can be also read as an act of *l’amour fou*, returning to the primitive innocent state, in order to satisfy the urge of the mad love, the loving subject cannibalize the beloved object.

## UNCANNY

In one’s daily life the repetitions of names, numbers, signs, or concatenations of objects can be quite intriguing. The uncanniness seemingly surrounds these repetitions, “forces upon us”, Freud acknowledges, “the idea of something fateful and inescapable where otherwise we should have spoken of ‘chance’ only”. By observing his patients, the ascription of meaning to the powers of clairvoyance, meaning their “‘presentiments’ which ‘usually’ come true”, can be understood as the reassertion within adult life of more psychologically primitive states, namely those related to the “omnipotence of thoughts” and to belief in animism. This is a phenomenon occurred in the childhood or tribal man state, that for the purpose of gaining mastery over an all-too-threatening and unfamiliar outer world, one establish a alive relationship between himself and everything or so to speak every being around. The self-projection in the external world as one’s shadow or one’s reflexion is the first visual form of the animistic bonds. And then, through mechanisms of projection, these doubles – invented to master and sustain the individual – become the possessors of supernatural power and turn against him.

Our analysis of instances of the uncanny has led us back to the old, animistic

conception of the universe, which was characterized by the idea that the world was peopled with the spirits of human beings, and by the narcissistic overestimation of subjective mental processes (such as the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts, the magical practices based upon this belief, the carefully proportioned distribution of magical powers or “manna” among various outside persons and things), as well as by all those other figments of the imagination with which man, in the unrestricted narcissism of that stage of development, strove to withstand the inexorable laws of reality. It would seem as though each one of us has been through a phase of individual development corresponding to that animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has traversed it without preserving certain traces of it which can be re-activated, and that everything which now strikes us as “uncanny” fulfills the condition of stirring those vestiges of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression.

The transgression of the boundary between imagination and reality, an utterly searched effect of the surrealists, is analyzed by Freud as the primitive belief in magic – animism, narcissistic omnipotence, serving as triggers of the metaphysical convulsiveness which is the uncanny. The subject is stabbed, wounded by the experience of death, since these experiences represents the reverse penetrations to consciousness of earlier states of existence, being themselves the evidence of a compulsion to repeat.<sup>23</sup>

The uncanniness can be also related to a sense of fear regarding to the experience of double, especially at the moment where Freud ties the uncanniness triggered by the idea of the doppelgänger to the primitive fear of mirrors. Referring to Otto Rank’s study of this phenomenon, Freud writes:

He has gone into the connections the “double” has with reflections in mirrors, with shadows, guardian spirits, with the belief in the soul and the fear of death; but he also lets in a flood of light on the astonishing evolution of this idea. For the “double” was originally an insurance against destruction to the ego, an “energetic denial of the power of death,” as Rank says; and probably the “immortal” soul was the first “double” of the body. This invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction has its counterpart in the language of dreams, which is fond of representing castration by a doubling or multiplication of the genital symbol. . . . Such ideas, however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which holds sway in the mind of the child as in that of primitive man; and when this stage has been left behind the double takes on a different aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, he becomes the ghastly harbinger of death.<sup>24</sup>

In order to protect oneself against the extreme anxious fear of castration, one perform the operation of doubling or even multiplication of the very image of what one fears.

This is what Freud would later identify as the Medusa effect where the decap-

itated, castrated head is surrounded by snakes, which “however frightening they may be in themselves, they nevertheless serve actually as a mitigation of the horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of the horror. This is a confirmation of the technical rule according to which a multiplication of penis symbols signifies castration.”

To produce the image of what one fears, in order to protect oneself from what one fears – this is the strategic achievement of anxiety, which arms the subject, in advance, against the onslaught of trauma, the blow that takes one by surprise. This analysis through which *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* recasts the propositions of “The Uncanny” in terms of the *life and death* of the organism, speaks of the trauma as a blow that penetrates the protective armor of consciousness, piercing its outer shield, wounding it by this effect of stabbing.<sup>25</sup>

## NOTES

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8. Hal Foster, “Obscene, Abject, Traumatic,” *October 78* (1996): p.118, doi:10.2307/778908.
9. Maurice Merleau Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 252
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12. Roger Caillois, “Mimétisme et psychasthénie légendaire”, *Minotaure*, n° 7 (1935)
13. Roger Caillois and John Shepley, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” *October 31* (1984): p.16, doi:10.2307/778354.
14. *Ibid.*, p.23.
15. Krauss, “Corpus Delicti,” p.48–50; Hollier and Rodarmor, “Mimesis and Castration 1937,” p.11–13.
16. Caillois and Shepley, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia,” p.30.
17. *Ibid.*, p.32.
18. *Ibid.*, p.28.
19. Krauss, “Corpus Delicti,” p.50–53.
20. Roger Caillois, “La mante religieuse”, *Minotaure*, n° 5 (1934)
21. Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, “A User’s Guide to Entropy,” *October 78* (1996): p.42, doi:10.2307/778906.
22. Salvador Dalí and Dalibor Veseley, “Salvador Dalí on Architecture, Annotated by Dalibor Veseley,” in *Architectural Design*, vol. 48, 1978, p.138.
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25. *Ibid.*, p.64.

# Trial reports from the field of photography

## APORIA

In quest of the absolute reconciliation of dream and reality, the surrealists proceed with the method that Breton formulated in the first *Manifesto* – the psychic automatism within the experience of hypnogogic images, of half-waking, half-dreaming visual experience. Then it is not difficult to understand the bitter encounters of the surrealists in fields of realistic earthy matters. It is quite different to achieve the ultimate resolution in fields of writing, painting, sculpture and those of architecture and photography. In this regard, the movement shows somehow certain intrinsic limits. Architecture, being so deeply embedded in everyday life, as an adopted child of the family, has till now never found an equal status as painting, sculpture, even without mentioning writing. Photography, having a special connection to reality, as an imprint or transfer of the real, can be easily ignored as an artistic support of the movement. At first glance, surrealism *and* photography seems much less probable than surrealism *or* photography. The special straight connection bonding photography with reality, traps it in an unfavorable aporia. In the dislike of the hypocrite literary realism of the nineteenth century novel, precisely, as photographic, the abomination of Breton to “the real form of real objects” expresses itself. Breton complains:

And the descriptions! There is nothing to which their vacuity can be compared; they are nothing but so many superimposed images taken from some stock catalogue, which the author utilizes more and more whenever he chooses; he seizes the opportunity to slip me his postcards, he tries to make me agree with him about the clichés.<sup>1</sup>

The photographs in *L'Amour fou* and *Nadja* have been merely employed to replace the photographic realistic descriptions, they are barely illustrative descriptions by mean of photograph. These descriptive illustrations disappointed the author, since the photographs seemed to him to leave the magical places he had passed through stripped of their aura, turn “dead and disillusioning”.<sup>2</sup> Walter Benjamin shows his own interest in them when he writes about these descriptive photographs:

In such passages in Breton, photography intervenes in a very strange way. It makes the streets, gates, squares of the city into illustrations of a trashy novel, draws off the banal obviousness of this ancient architecture to inject it with the most pristine intensity toward the events described, to which, as in old chambermaids' books, word-for-word quotations with page numbers refer. And all the parts of Paris that appear here are places where what is between

these people turns like a revolving door.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, during 1920s, through the journals published by the movement, photography had always accompanied and intervened the progress of the movement, which was still continually keeping to exemplify, to define, and to manifest, what it was that was surreal. Man Ray, Jacques André Boiffard, Raoul Ubac, Brassai, etc., these familiar photographers produced abundant photographs for these journals. Besides, certain writers and painters of the movement experiment the technique of photo-montage. But the issue is not just that these books and journals contained photographs – or tolerated them. The more important fact is that in a part of these photographs, surrealism achieved some of its supreme images – images of far greater than most of what was done in the relentlessly elaborated paintings and drawings that came increasingly to establish the identity of Breton's concept of "surrealism and painting".<sup>4</sup>

What is admirable about the fantastic is that there is no longer a fantastic; there is only the real.<sup>5</sup>

The most convulsive *merveille* reside in the real, thus the almost realistic straight connection to reality of photography turns from shortcoming to advantage, therefore the field of photography become a fertile land to cultivate, to experiment, and to manifest what is surreal. In pursuit of exploring a possible marriage between surrealism *and* architecture, which seems unlikely possible at first glance, sharing a similar position with photography, I choose to examine the surrealist operations developed in this field, hoping to find certain helpful indications to exploit a similar breakthrough in the field of architecture.

## SIGN FORMATION

Previously, in the section of "indices", I have already demonstrated Breton's great enthusiasm for signs. If we look at certain of these transcendent photographs, we recognize startlingly the simultaneous effect of displacement and condensation, the specific operations of sign formation, generating photography as writing.

If we start to examine the use of photo-montage in the movement, a technique quite widespread among various avant-garde movements in the 1920s, rarely employed by surrealist photographers, yet it was very attractive to certain surrealist writers and painters. One important example is the 1938 self portrait of Breton, entitled *Automatic Writing*.

Breton's self-portrait, fabricated from various photographic elements, is not only an example of photo-montage – a process insofar as the term refers, for the most part, to the cutting up and reassembling of already printed material –but it is also an instance of construction *en abyme*. It is the microscope as representative of a lensed instrument that places within the field of the representation another representation that reduplicates an



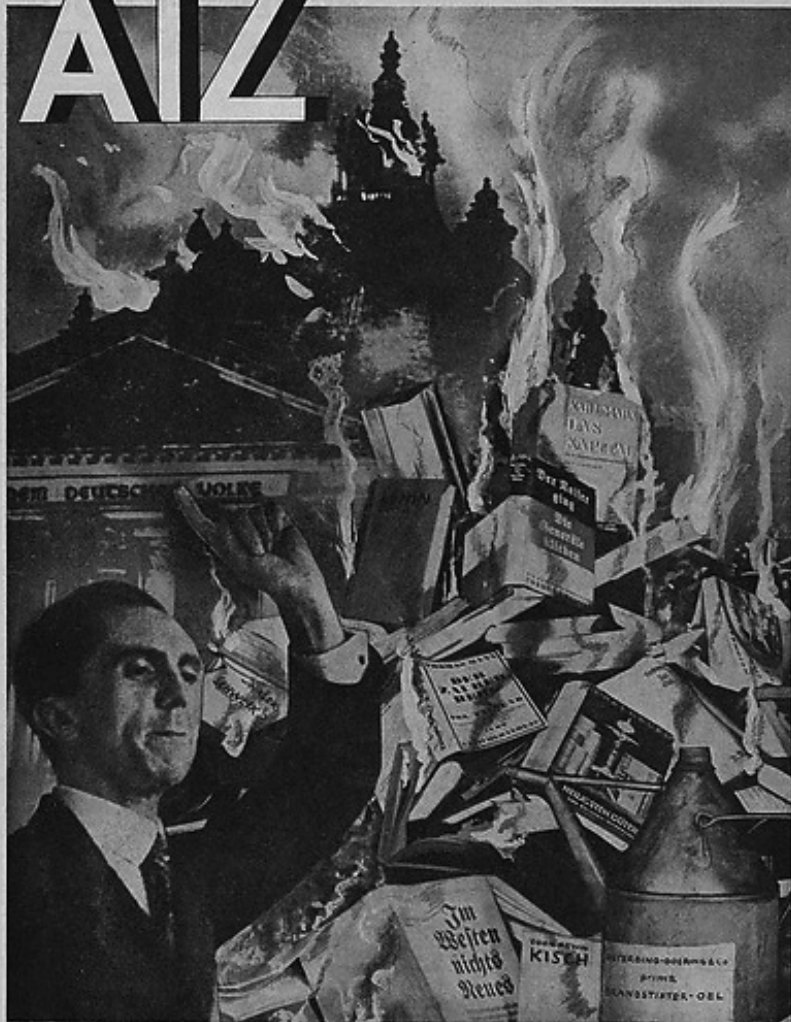
*L'écriture  
automatique*

*L'Écriture automatique, 1938*  
André Breton



# AIZ

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In Nordamerika und Kanada 10 Cents - V. b. b. - Jahrgang XII - Nummer 18 - 10. Mai 1933



AM 10. MAI WERDEN IN DEUTSCHLAND ALLE MISSLIEBENEN BÜCHER VERBRANNT

## DURCH LICHT ZUR NACHT

Also sprach Dr. Goebbels: Lasst uns aufs neue Brände entfachen, auf dass die Verblendeten nicht erwachen!

*Durch Licht zur Nacht, May 10, 1933*

John Heartfield

aspect of the first, namely the photographic process by which the parts were originally made. And if Breton does this, it is to set up the intellectual rhyme between psychic automatism as a process of mechanical recording and the automatism associated with the camera – “that blind instrument,” as Breton says. His own association of these two mechanical means of registration occurs as early as 1920, when he declared that “automatic writing, which appeared at the end of the 19th century, is a true photography of thought.” For here in a single work is enshrined the very split for which these stylistic terms are the surrogates: vision/writing. Breton portrays himself with a microscope, an optical instrument invented to expand normal eyesight, to extend its powers in ways not unlike those associated with the camera itself. He is shown, that is to say, as the surrealist seer, armed with vision. But this condition of vision produces images, and these images are understood as a textual product, hence the title *Automatic Writing*.<sup>6</sup>

Here, the apparent irreconcilable contradictions appeared in the relationship between photography and writing can be questioned. Normally we consider there is no place for writing in the photographic field. For the very nature of the photography – the “message without a code”,<sup>7</sup> writing is inhibited from this field, exiled to an external location where language functions as the necessary interpreter of the muteness of the photographic sign. This remote location is caption. Being irritated by the lack of signification as a political act, on a revision of photography floating on the surface of the real, Bertolt Brecht objects the camera image by showing his hostility to the “straight” photography: “A photograph of the Krupp works or GEC yields almost nothing about these institutions... Therefore something has actively to be constructed, something artificial, something set-up.”<sup>8</sup> “If the photograph, under the influence of the text (or caption), expresses not simply the fact which it shows, but also the social tendency expressed by the fact, then this is already a photo-montage.” Aragon seconded this insistence on a sense of reality bearing its own interpretation when he described John Heartfield’s work. “As he was playing with the fire of appearance, reality took fire around him... The scraps of photographs that he formerly maneuvered for the pleasure of stupefaction, under his fingers began to signify.”<sup>9</sup> The possibility of signification that Aragon saw in Heartfield seems to have been understood as function of the agglomerative, constructed medium of photo collage. Aragon when writes about the effect of the separate elements in Ernst’s montages, he compared them to “words”. What he refers to is not only the transparency of each signifying element, contrary to the opacity of the components of cubist collages, but also to the experience of each element as a separate unit, like a word, obeying the disposal of the condition of syntax, finding its precise placement within the syntagmatic chain of the sentence.<sup>10</sup>

Objects metamorphosed before my very eyes; they did not assume an allegorical stance or the personality of symbols; they seemed less the outgrowths of an idea than the idea itself.<sup>11</sup>

Since the technique of montage/collage has been so thought by the writers, one might



*The Phenomenon of Ecstasy, 1933*  
Salvador Dalí



ask could it be considered as textural. Probably this is a key that can resolve what is contradictory in automatic writing. If these work were able to “signify”, to articulate reality through a kind of language, this was a function of the structure that these images exploits, with gaps, or with a linguistic term – spacing. On this subject, Rosalind Krauss makes a prominent explanation:

Whether we think of syntax as temporal – as the pure succession of one word after another within the unreeling of the spoken sentence; or whether we think of it as spatial – as the serial progression of separate units on the printed page; syntax in either dimension reduces to the basic exteriority of one unit to another. Traditional linguistics contemplates this pure exteriority as that fissure or gap or blank that exists between signs, separating them one from the other, just as it also thinks of the units of the sign itself as riven into two parts – one irremediably outside or exterior to the other. The two parts are signified and signifier – the first the meaning of the sign, a meaning transparent to thought held within consciousness; the second, the mark or sound that is the sign’s material vehicle. “The order of the signified,” Derrida writes, stating the position of traditional linguistics, “is never contemporary, is at best the subtly discrepant inverse or parallel – discrepant by the time of a breath – from the order of the signifier.” For Derrida, of course, spacing is not an exteriority that signals the outside boundaries of meaning: one signified’s end before another’s onset. Rather, spacing is radicalized as the precondition for meaning as such, and the outsideness of spacing is revealed as already constituting the condition of the “inside”. This movement, in which spacing “invaginates” presence, will be shown to illuminate the distinction between surrealist photography and its dada predecessor.

In dada montage the experience of blanks or spacing is very strong, for between the silhouettes of the photographed forms the white page announces itself as the medium that both combines and separates them. The white page is not the opaque surface of cubist collage, asserting the formal and material unity of the visual support; the white page is rather the fluid matrix within which each representation of reality is secured in isolation, held within a condition of exteriority, of syntax, of spacing.<sup>12</sup>

The instant one triggers the shutter of a camera, a moment in the time is captured, a presence in the real is seized and frozen through the lens on the negative. The very nature of this act is the simultaneous presence, within a given space at a given time, of the captured content and everything else. It is an act that declares the seamless integrity of the real. The real reaches the negative in the same way as it reaches the retina, only that when the eye is substituted by the camera, all that vision captures in one glance is carried on a continuous surface as photograph, as an imprint or trace of the reality. One photograph, in a common sense, is the witness of the unity of the reality as that

which was present at one time. The operation of spacing destroys the very simultaneous presence, confuses the “given space and given time”: for it shows things sequentially, either one after another or external to one another, as cells, organized according a cellular structure. Hence the photographic image, once spaced, is robbed of one of the most powerful of photography’s many illusions – the sense of presence. Its privileged connection to the world – the straightness, is scarified. This cell construction does not mimic the look of words but the formal preconditions of signs: the fact that they require a fundamental exteriority between one another. Once one is looking at a spaced photographic image, one is not looking at reality, but a world tinged by interpretation or signification, the reality distended by gaps, with introduced exteriority – thus transformed into representation or sign.

With the language effect, Dali created his extraordinary collage *The Phenomena of Ecstasy*, depicting the half-waking, half-dreaming visual experience, the overturning of reality by those psychic states so courted by the movement: reverie, ecstasy, dream. Among images of women, there is a series of different ears, taken from the catalogue of anatomical parts assembled master police chief Alphonse Bertillon to build the “*portrait parlant*”, which can be considered as a criminological attempt in the nineteenth century, witness to the expectation of that era that, like other “mediums”, photography could wrest a message from the muteness of material reality.<sup>13</sup>

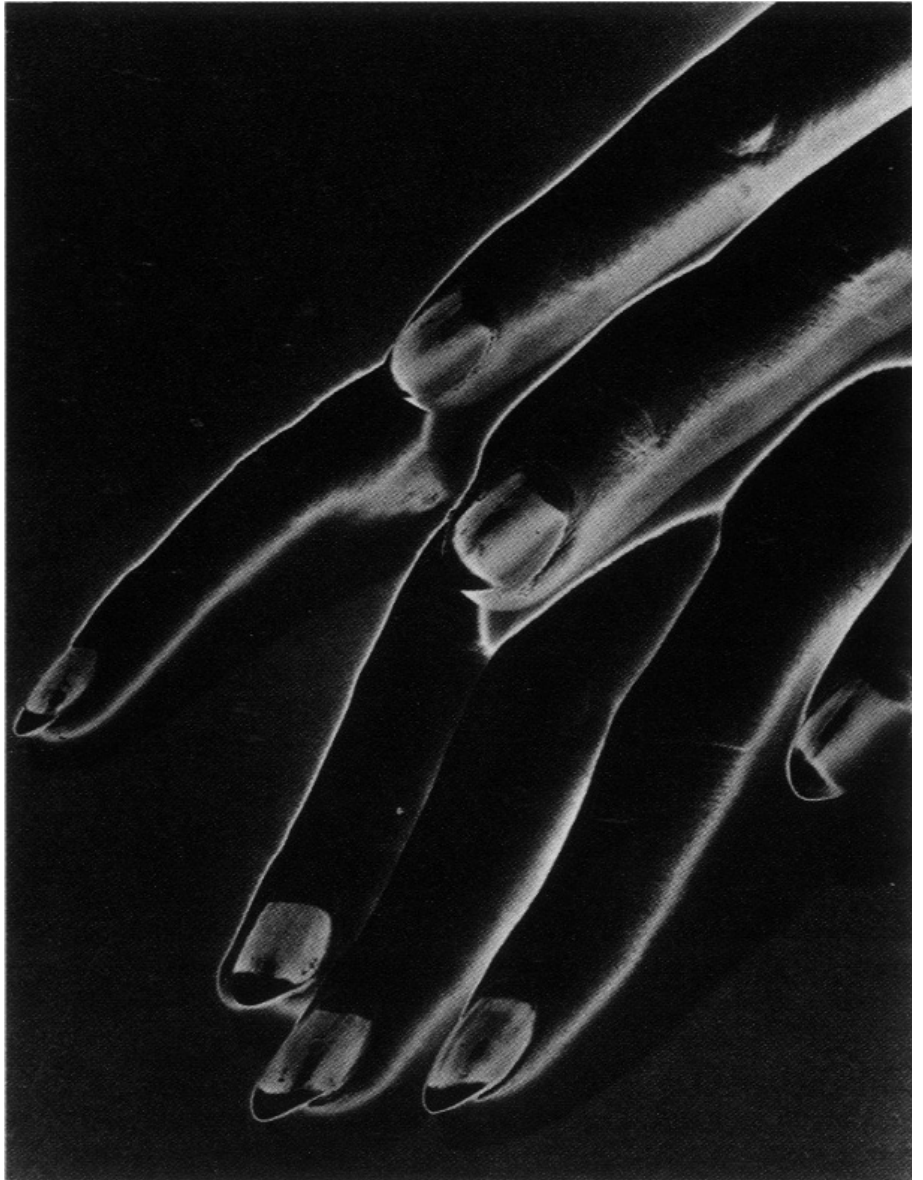
## SEAMLESSNESS

As I mentioned formerly, the surrealist photographers rarely use photo-montage. They have a more difficult pursuit, a more elaborated one, firmly related to the purpose of the movement, which is to tinge the imprint of the reality by signification, in the seamless unity of the print, without any intrusions of the continuous surface. Without exception, the surrealist photographers infiltrate the continuous surface, the body of print, with spacing – implying that it is reality that has composed itself, or so to speak, has convulsed itself, as a sign. Yet by preserving the body of the print intact, they could make it read photographically, that is to say, in direct contact with reality. The true *merveille* resides in the real, “there is no longer” an evident mannerist “fantastic”; “there is only the real”.

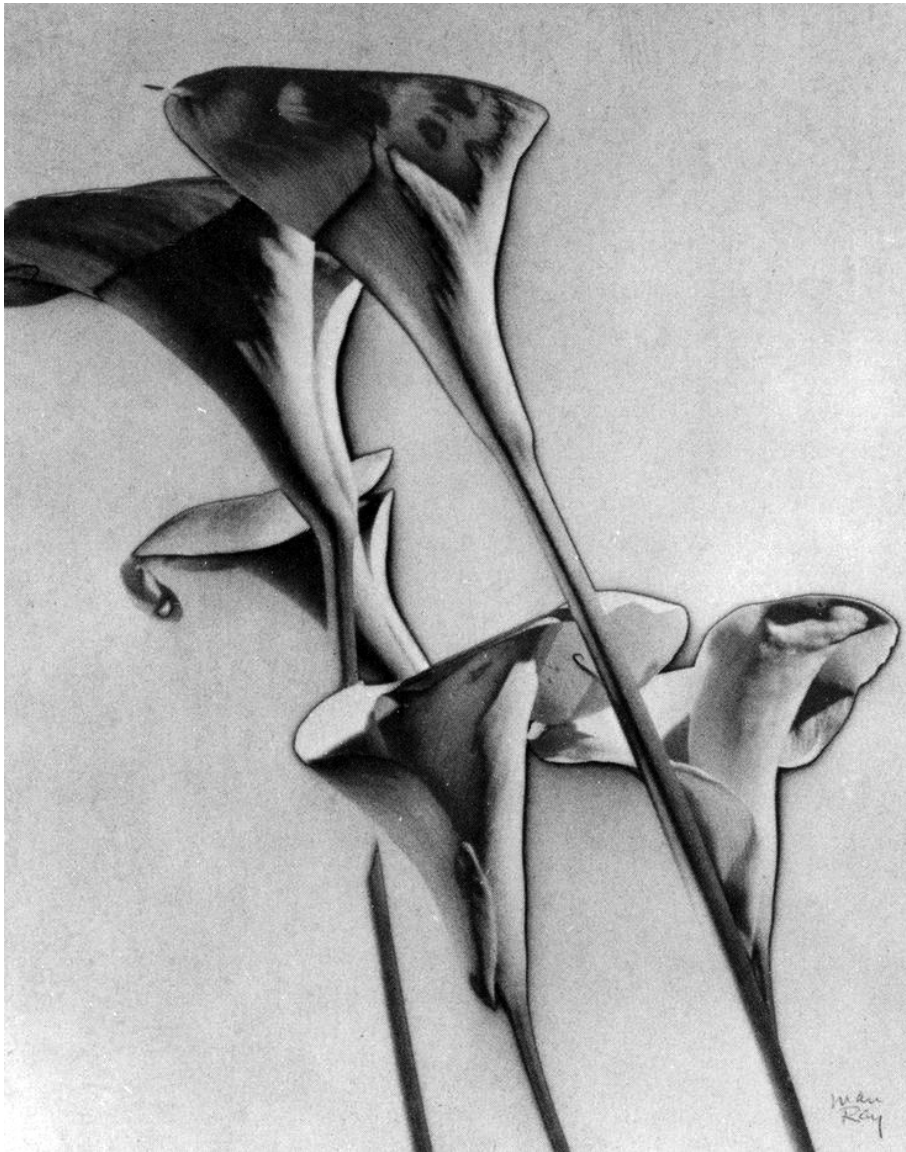
Scissors and glue are put aside, darkroom processes enter the scene. Then let us have a brief look though the range of these processes.

## SINKING INTO DARKNESS

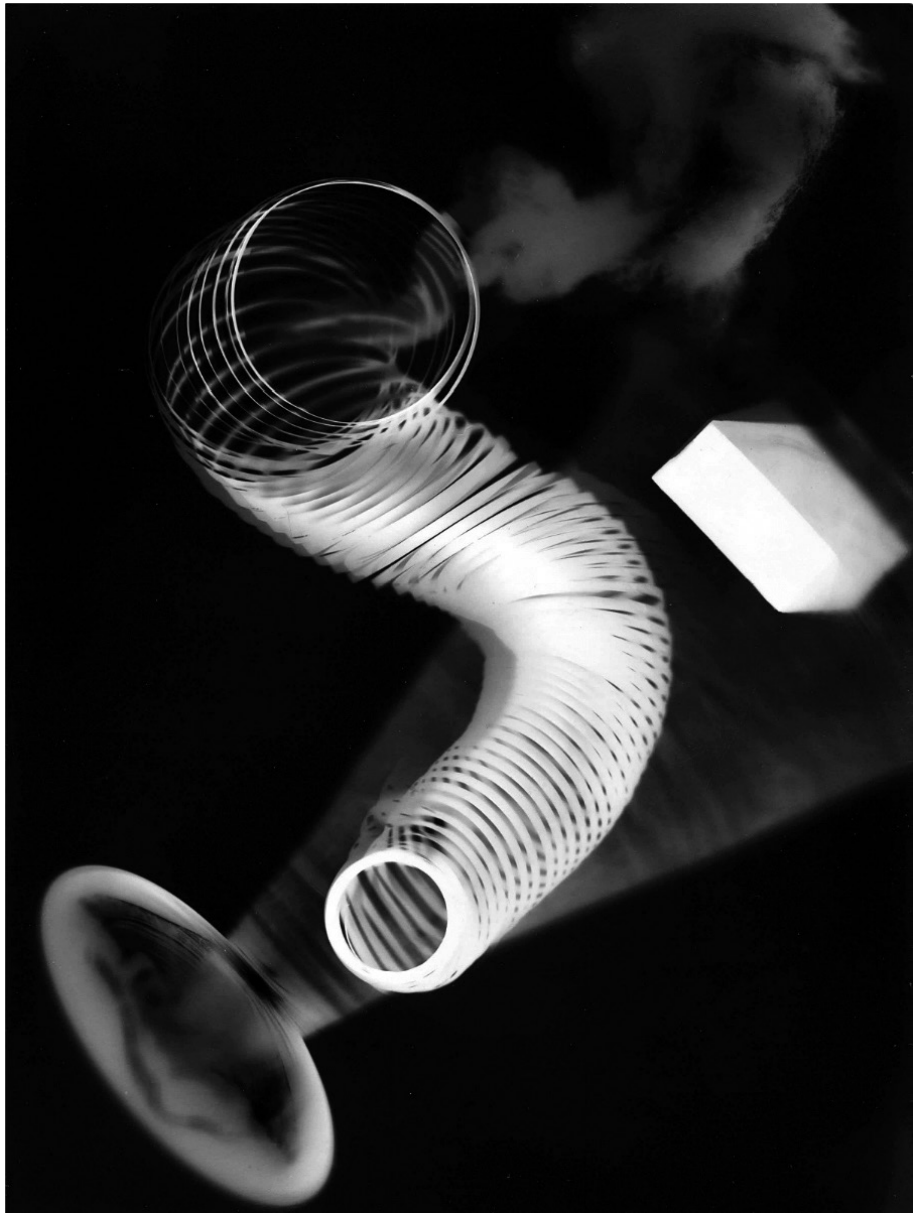
With the effect of sinking into darkness, three techniques emerge – solarization, cameraless rayograph, both baptized and made famous by Man Ray, and the frequently used



*Untitled, 1930*  
(Solarization)  
Man Ray



*Lilies, 1930*  
(Rayography)  
Man Ray



*Untitled, 1922*  
(Rayography)  
Man Ray



negative printing – in which the relationship of dark and light is altered, the conventional relationship of positive and negative is subverted. Solarization, for instance, in which photographic paper is briefly exposed to light during the printing process, thereby altering in varying degrees the relationship of dark and light tones, introducing elements of the photographic negative into the positive print – creates a strange effect of *cloisonné*, which visually walls off parts of a single space or a whole body from one another, establishing in this way a kind of testimony to a cloven reality. Rayograph, proceeds by placing objects directly to the surface of photosensitive material and then exposing it to light, with the photographed objects momentarily detached from their context; negative printing, which produces an entirely negative print, with the momentarily unintelligible gaps that it creates within objects, promote the same effect. Besides, rayograph, with its cursive, graphic quality of the images against their flattened, abstracted ground and the psychological status these ghosts of objects seem to have attained, has an obvious appeal to surrealist sensibilities. “These objects of dreams”, have been located by Man Ray himself within the domain of memory by their effect of “recalling the event more or less clearly, like the undisturbed ashes of an object consumed by flames”.<sup>14</sup>

## **MONTAGE OF MEMORY**

By researching a seamless montage, a montage of memory, the processes of multiple exposure and sandwich printing have been invented. Among the photographic images realized with these techniques, a series of works by Maurice Tabard reaches the pinnacle. In a brief period from 1929 to 1930, with the concerns to the movement, producing the effect of montage of memory, Tabard explored the essential double-sidedness of the photographic support. For what is unique to photography, is the transparency of the photographic negative, the information on which, though reversed left and right, is fully intelligible from both front and back. In this fundamental condition of reversal Tabard located the fusion of the image with its flipped, physically mirrored double. The range of vocabulary as elements employed in this series of Tabard’s works is very restraint. These figures as ladders, cane-backed chairs, or tennis rackets, are themselves double-sided and grid-like, entered the image to function as representations of the negative itself. Under the attention of the photographer, they became the very figures of the infrastructure of the photographic screen in its ideal condition of reversibility. The human figure are equally introduced, for the body’s own symmetrical mirror-reversibility, the two-sidedness of left and right. Yet contrary to the previous group of elements, it does not possess a total reversibility, the one of the front and back is not possible here.

In these works, both expressions of the reversibility of the first group’s elements and the symmetrical mirror reversibility of human figure can be detected, constantly intervene one with the other, to reflect the naive notion of the “mirror with a memory”



*Untitled, 1929*  
Maurice Tabard



*Untitled, 1929*  
Maurice Tabard



*Untitled, 1929*  
Maurice Tabard



of Lacan. For Tabard's mirror is double dihedral; there one discovers a picture of the subject seeing and being-seen at the same time.

For all that Tabard's images are layered and visually complex, the structural manipulation as flipping of the negative, closely tied to the procedure of photography, is simple yet fundamentally efficient. The premeditation is evident in Tabard's choice of elements, the linking of the double series to form a combinatory mechanism, the use of a single operator to produce his transformations: all of this is reminiscent of the operations we have been reading through the grid of those linked concepts, which at this moment combine to redefine the visual – Bataille's *informe*, Caillois's mimicry, Lacan's "picture".<sup>15</sup>

## MELTING

The technique developed by Raoul Ubac – brûlage, proceeds by burning the emulsion on the negative image, arising from an attempt to photography fully into the domain of automatic practice, yet the procedure whose trace suggest the workings of fire is a device for producing the *informe*.

The famous *La Nébuleuse* of Ubac, by using this technique, depicts a standing woman invaded by her surrounding space, attacked by the heat of a small burner. This intriguing nebulous image can make one contemplating it think about the crisis of depersonalization, about the phenomenon of schizophrenia, and about what Caillois once revealed in regard of mimesis – the dispossessed soul perished and devoured by space, becoming herself space, thus reinventing space of which she is "the convulsive possession". Therefore, this feminine body cannot only be analogized as one twinkling star among others in a nebula, it can be understood simultaneously as well as the nebula itself, as implied by the deliberately chosen title of this image.

Another breath-taking work of the same photographer – *Ophelia*, shows a beautiful feminine body floating and being melted by galaxy-projected black water. Ophelia, originally a character of the *Hamlet*, one of the most famous tragedies of Shakespeare, has been mythicized by inspired works of later generations, such as the poem of Rimbaud entitled after her, or the analysis of *the complex of Ophelia* by Bachelard. By using the metaphorical values of drowning, shipwreck and the mortified side of the foul water, the half-ghost-half-being nature of the character has been revealed. Being touched by the mystique melancholy of Ophelia, Rimbaud chants with a heart-breaking tenderness:

On waters still and black where the stars are sleeping  
White Ophelia is floating like a great lily,  
Floating most slowly in her long veils laying...  
– In distant woods one hears the call of the hallali.<sup>16</sup>

Melting is an entropic process par excellence, and perhaps this is one of the reasons that Bataille was so interested in the Icarus myth, in which the feathers-and-wax-made



*La Nébuleuse, 1938*  
Raoul Ubac



*Opheia, 1938*  
Raoul Ubac



*Distortion No.200, 1933*  
André Kertész





*Portrait in a mirror, 1938*  
Raoul Ubac

wings was melted by the heat of the sun, thereby Icarus died by falling into the sea; it means falling into indifference. Liquid is what is always everywhere the same. And it's toward just such a uniformity, as Michel Leiris reports it, that Miro once expressed: "this liquefaction, this implacable evaporation of structures... this flaccid leaking away of substance".<sup>17</sup> In addition to images generated by brûlage, the *Distortion* series of André Kertész can be relevant here – in which by using various kinds of manipulations with mirrors, the women bodies are distorted, softened, liquefied, as in a desiring dream. Facing the same psychological crisis, being inspired by the story of the ultimate mimetic animal, there are two other series of photographic image, dealing with the fierce invasion of space, the condition of "convulsive possession".

### **ROTTEN BEAUTY**

The first, images as *Portrait in a Mirror* by Ubac, which is a stunning demonstration of the dis-articulation of the self by means of its mirrored double. In dazzle sunlight a woman's face is seen in a mirror whose state of decay returns her image to her strangely altered, transformed. Her eyes, her forehead, part of her hair, obscured as though by shadow, are in fact corroded and dispersed through the very agency of reflection. So that this subject who sees is a subject who, in being simultaneously "seen," is entered as "picture" onto the mirror's surface. And in this very moment of inscription, as in a doubling reminiscent of Caillois's theory of mimicry, one discovers an image of the *informe*, the crumbling of boundaries, the invasion of space. In this image, one could read the obliterating condition of the mirror as an effect of shadow, bringing the full thrust of the "uncanny" into this image – although it must be added that superstitious belief projects the polished surfaces of mirrors, also, as the medium for the return of the dead. The extraordinary woman who stares at us from the depths of Ubac's mirror, the lower half of her face youthful and lovely, the upper portion distorted and sightless, as if she is murmuring "Who am I?", "Whom do I haunt?"<sup>18</sup>

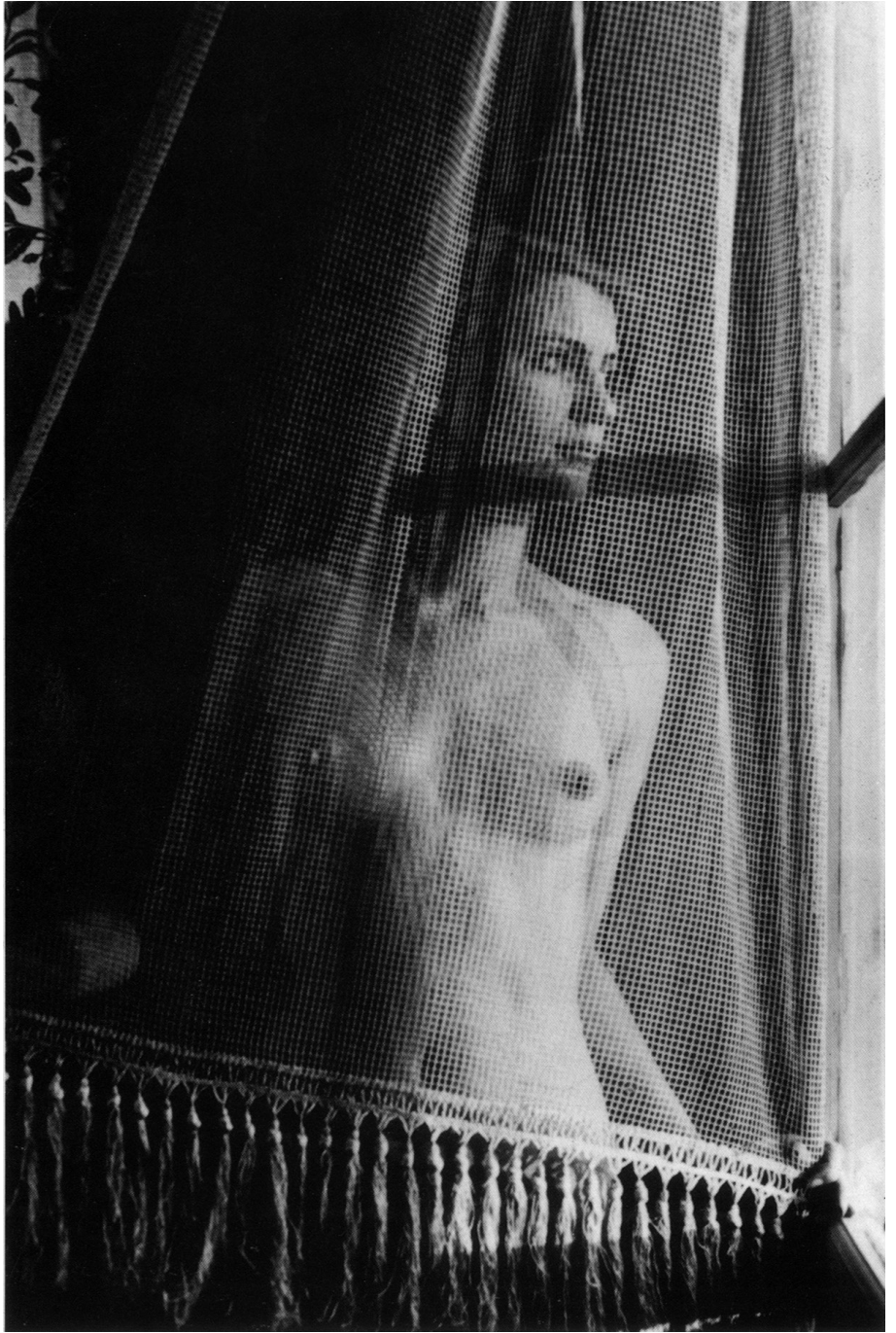
### **TEXTURED CORPUS**

The second series is explored by Man Ray among the very first photographs ever to be published by the movement, of which the most lyrical example is the triptych of the superb Lee Miller in front of a window. Here the nude torso is shown as if submitting to the possession by space, is textured subtly by the almost immaterial lines, as the mesh of the almost transparent curtain in gauze or as its projection, emitted by the surrounding space. In these images, the female torso turns from the centre of the perspective space to "one point among others", the independence of the subject is wiped out, hence in its place, the *interdependence* becomes the major melody of this photographic



*Untitled, 1931*  
Man Ray



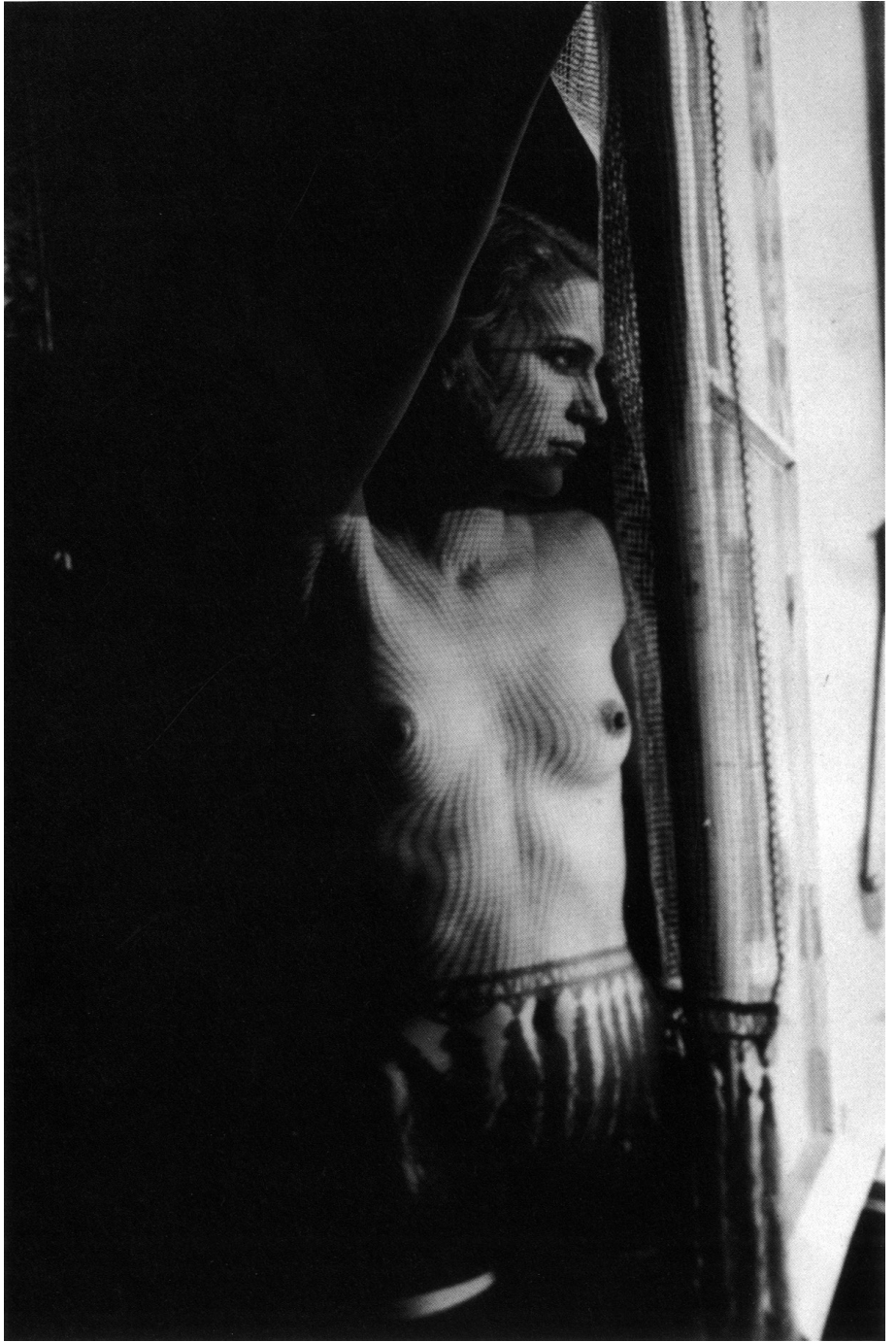


*Untitled, 1929*  
Man Ray



*Untitled, 1929*  
Man Ray





*Untitled, 1929*  
Man Ray



*Mannequin, 1937*  
Raoul Ubac

triptych.

*Mannequin*, one image produced at 1938, by Ubac as photographer and Masson as constructor of the mannequin, depicts the caged head of the female, her prey in her mouth, implies the praying mantis. This mantis, which possesses, is simultaneously possessed by the mesh of space, textured in a precise position by the projected shadow of the cage.<sup>19</sup>

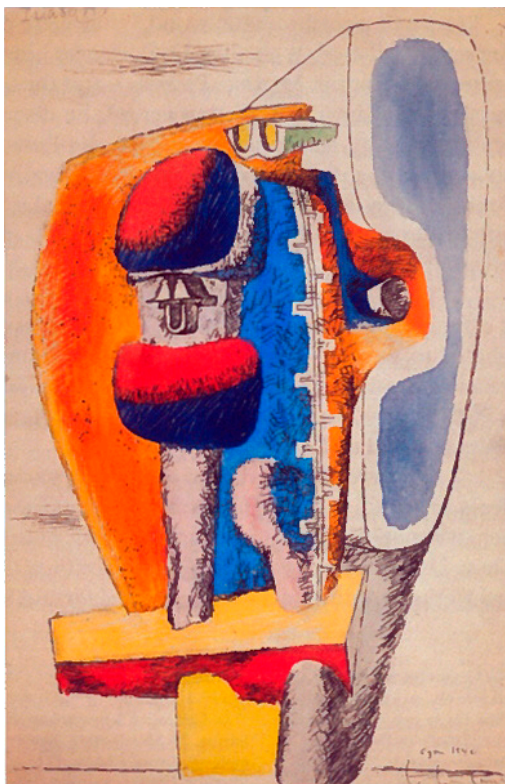
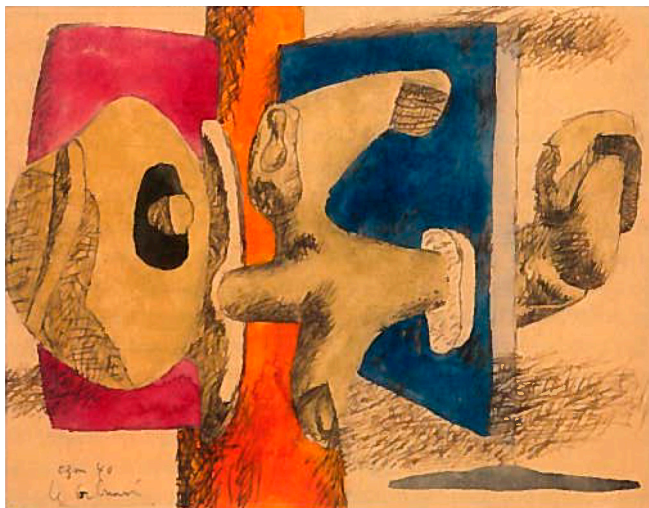
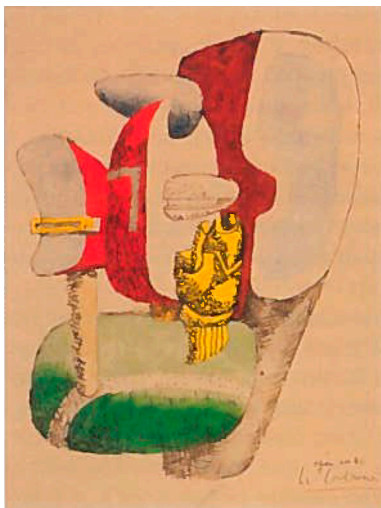
By contemplating this series, the concepts of *plastic acoustic* and *texturique space* (*espace texturique*), developed and formulated by Le Corbusier, linger in my mind ceaselessly.

## PLASTIC ACOUSTIC

The former concept as *plastic acoustic*, was developed by Le Corbusier in the quest of *ineffable space* during the 1940s. Having a mother as piano teacher and a brother as musician, music has always been important and dear to the great architect. In the very occasion of *ineffable space*, he bonds tightly the acoustic to the optical vision, calling *visual acoustics* (*acoustique visuelle*). “There are mathematical places of consonance” – he writes – “that I should call places of visual acoustics, places where things are decisive. You move, and they are no longer there. The scale is no longer there. . . . if everything is in harmony, a consonance would be created, a visual acoustic similar to that of the sounds.”

Taking possession of space – Le Corbusier writes – is the first gesture of living things, of men and of animals, of plants and of clouds. . . . The occupation of space is the first proof of existence. . . . We pause, struck by such interrelation in nature, and we gaze, moved by this harmonious orchestration of space, and we realize that we are looking at the reflection of light. Architecture, sculpture and painting are specifically dependent on space, bound to the necessity of controlling space, each by its own appropriate means. The essential thing that will be said here is that the release aesthetic emotion is a special function of space. *Action of the work* (architecture, statue or painting) on its surroundings: vibrations, cries or shouts (such as originate from the Parthenon on the Acropolis of Athens), arrows darting away like rays, as if springing from an explosion; the near or distant site is shaken by them, touched, wounded, dominated or caressed. *Reaction of the setting*: the walls of the room, its dimensions, the public square with the various weights of its facades, the expanses or the slopes of the landscape even to the bare horizons of the plain of the sharp outlines of the mountains – the whole environment brings its weight to bear on the place where there is a work of art, the sign of man’s will, and imposes on it its deep spaces or projections, its hard or soft densities, its violences or its softnesses. A phenomenon of concordance takes place, as exact as mathemat-





Drawing, *Ozon*, 1940  
(FLC, D.3034R)

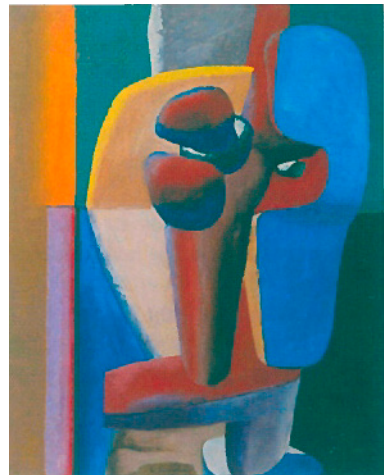
Drawing, *Ozon*, 1940  
(FLC, D.3051R)

Drawing for sculpture, *Ozon*, 1940  
(FLC, D.3440V)



*Ubu Roi*, 1923  
Max Ernst

Drawing for the sculpture *Ubu IV*, 1944  
(FLC. 126)





Photography of *the first sculpture* in the atelier on Rue Nungesser-et-Coli with the modification and polychromy added by Le Corbusier, 1947  
(FLC, without classification)

Le Corbusier with the first sculpture, *circa* 1947  
(FLC, L4.9.114)



ics, a true manifestation of plastic acoustics; this one may speak of one of the most subtle of all orders of phenomena, sound, as a conveyor of joy (music) or of oppression (racket).<sup>20</sup>

It was precisely in 1944, by writing a synthesis of the plastic arts, Le Corbusier started to make sculptures. As he was elaborating the work of the *Ozon* series, he wrote, “I was drawing, without wanting to, under the pretext of pebbles and pieces of wood, beings that became sorts of monsters: gods.... Painting them without knowing it, for four years now, one day I recognized them” as *Ubu*, a humoristic character in the theatre play – *Ubu Roi*, pushed till the limit of absurd, created by Alfred Jarry and admired by the surrealists. Following his subconscious and inner finality as desire, “without knowing it”, he entered the creative *psychic automatism*, the very method of Breton thus surrealism, and the Art Brut of Dubuffet dear to the surrealists. Then the formlessness of the *Ozon* series – with a sort of primitive acoustic horn – contradicting the functionalist Le Corbusier of the 1920s, subverts the somehow academic, almost strict, structured if not too much sometimes, purist vision developed during that period, corresponds to another surrealist criteria – *informe* – formulated by Bataille. The immersion of the relationship between these *objets à réaction poétique* and surrealism, is rendered more significant, if one looks at the similar objects sculptured by Giacometti and Arp, being themselves surrealists. This secret relationship can be revealed thoroughly, if one is aware of the architect’s article – “*Louis Soutter, l’inconnu de la soixantaine*” – published in issue no.9 of *Minotaure* in 1936, by which the regard that Le Corbusier carries on Surrealism is made evident.

By collaborating his sculptural works with Joseph Savina through correspondence, photographic prints became a primordial tool of communication. In order to assess the formal effect of the sculptures, Le Corbusier demands the works to be captured against “a backdrop of a wall, even an old wall with cracks and stains,” or a “sky with clouds”. Only with such a background with a certain vigorousness, one work can have a resonance, within a space rendered by the sculptural object’s proper presence *ineffable*, of which this object is “the convulsive possession”, thereby, in return it is versified into *objets à réaction poétique*.

He will even follow the projection of the sun to get the best photographic or filmed results of the sculptures in the atelier and on the terrace of his apartment on Rue Nungesser-et-Coli. ‘Very beautiful but *dark* – he writes, regarding the light between 8:00 and 8:45 AM. No light on the wall yet, light on the sculpture.’ In pursuit of the ideal light, it is significant that he has the shadows in his apartment photographed, like Moholy-Nagy.<sup>21</sup>

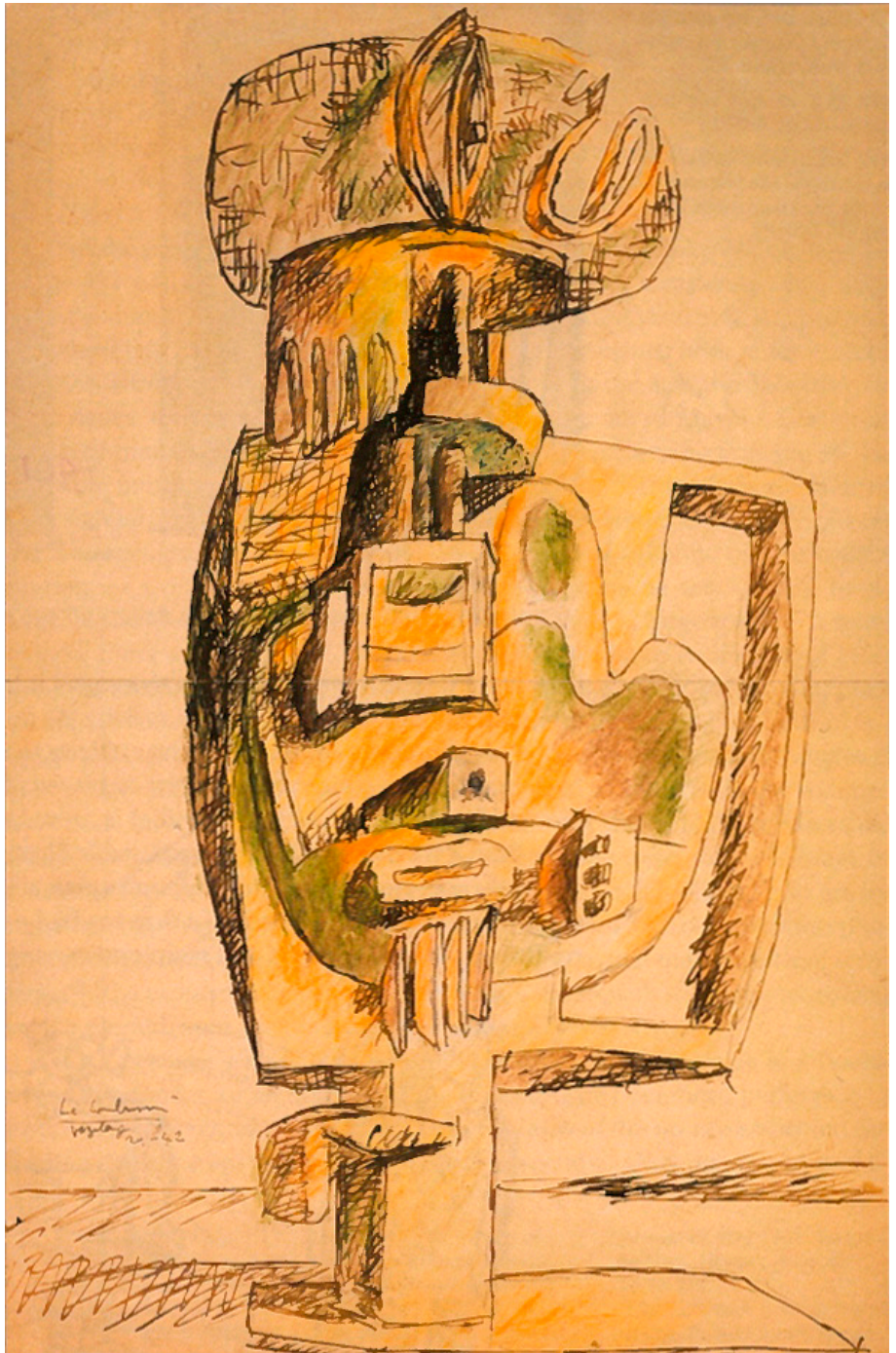
If one looks at the photographs of shadows in the apartment of Le Corbusier by Lucien Hervé, the analogy with the surrealist photographs of textured corpus cannot be ignored.

In the very *ineffable space*, of “infinitely precise harmony”, “sonant and consonant”,<sup>22</sup>



*The second sculpture* photographed with a pine cone in the atelier of Le Corbusier on Rue Nungesser-et Coli (FLC, without classification)

*The third sculpture* photographed with a pine cone in the atelier of Le Corbusier on Rue Nungesser-et Coli (FLC, without classification)



Drawing of the *Totem*, Vézelay 29-42, published in “L’architecture d’aujourd’hui”, 1948, with the caption “Etude pour une sculpture”

(FLC, D.28361R)

To notice that, as in many other drawings of Le Corbusier, the backdrop as space or landscape is omnipresent, implicit or explicit, here is represented as a horizon continued by a koppie, showing the reactionary relationship between one object and its surrounding, in this case, the *Totem* as *objet à réaction poétique* interacting in a *visual acoustic* way with the landscape as *ineffable space*.



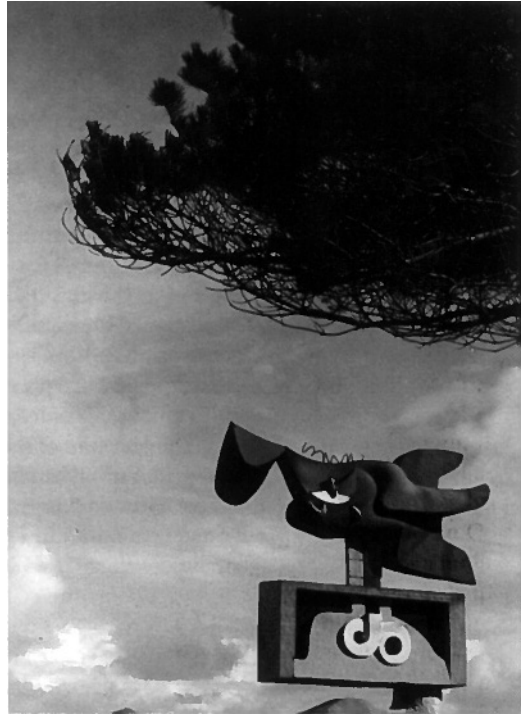


Photograph of the *Totem*,  
taken against the background  
of the church of Tréguier,  
*December 1950*  
Joseph Savina  
(FLC without classification)



Le Corbusier making modi-  
fications to the *Totem* in the  
atelier on Rue Nungesser-et  
Coli, with Savina's tool, *circa*  
*July 1951*  
(FLC, L4,9.91)

The *Totem* photographed on  
the roof of the apartment  
of Le Corbusier on the Rue  
Nungesser-et-Coli  
(FLC, without classification)



Photograph of the *Femme* taken at Tréguier, 1952  
Joseph Savina  
(FLC, without classification)

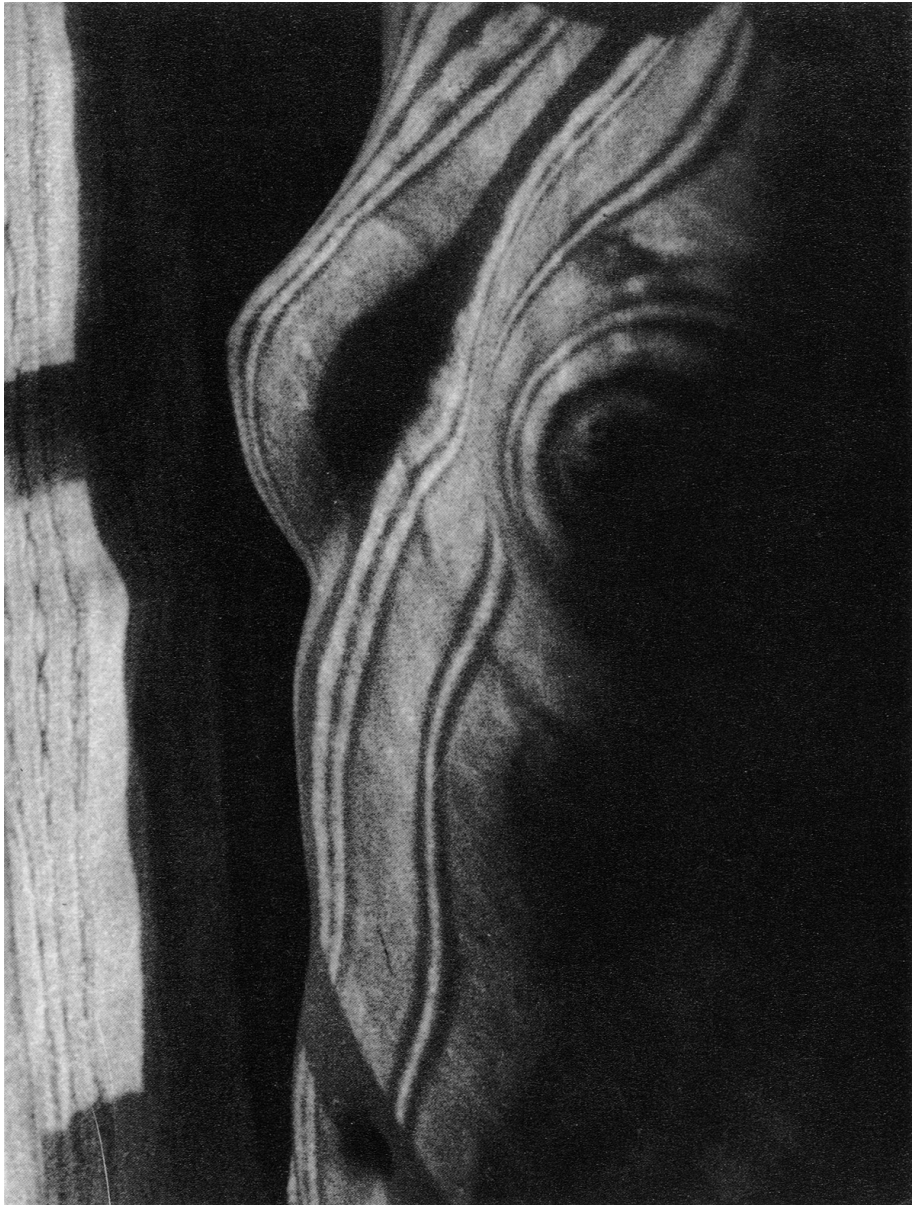
*La mer*, photograph taken at Tréguier, 1963  
Joseph Savina  
(FLC, without classification)

Photographs of the *Athlète* taken at Tréguier, 1951  
Joseph Savina  
(FLC, without classification)





*3 photographs of shadows in the apartment of  
Le Corbusier, Rue Nungesser-et-Coli  
Lucien Hervé  
(FLC, L2.11.39, 102 and 112)*



*Retour à la maison, 1923*  
Man Ray

these *objets à réaction poétique*, simultaneously seeing and been-seen, possessing and been-possessed, chanting and enchanting, perform a sublime *merveilleux spatial symphony* of a *convulsive beauty*, render the spectator infatuated, deprived of his expressive powers, as if he was an animal, or in other words, the very totemic creature, beloved to great depth by the surrealists – Minotaure.

## TEXTURIQUE SPACE

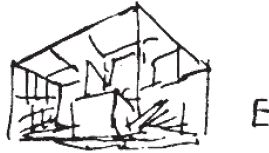
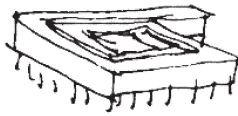
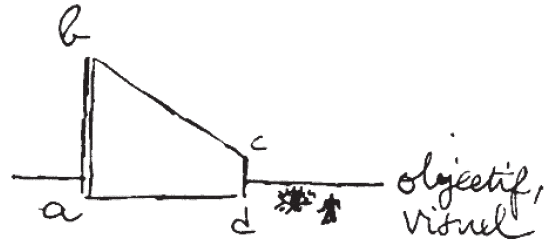
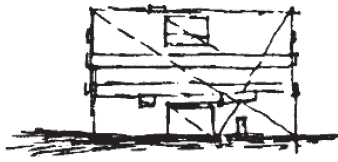
The latter concept as *texturique space*, which could be considered as a further development of *plastic acoustic* being exploited in the 1940s – a more regulated and accurate version – was published in a sequence of four sets of figures by Le Corbusier in *The Modulor* at 1950, as the last set, entitled as “*texturique*”.

The first set represents a schema of the façade of villa Stein in Garches, valorizing his famous *regulating traces* system. A schema of a vertical plan is put aside, which assigns the frontal view to a spectator: “The play performed here is perfectly, strictly objective.” The second set is “an urbanistic and architectural composition gathering grand edifices in a landscape”. The buildings are not perceived frontally, and by “arranging the ones behind the others”, they create a picturesque landscape, where the perception depends on the position of the observer.

The third set is that of the Museum of Unlimited Growth, a project of 1931, the approach of which is neither frontal nor picturesque, since the entry is located at the core of the building, and the sensation is that of an “organic unity”. The plan is represented geometrically since it corresponds to an “idea”, “the idea of an outfit preceded by the idea of a part”, said Le Corbusier during the presentation of this project.

The fourth set, intriguingly being alone without a duo as the three preceding sets, is the most interesting one, because it is, according to Jacques Lucan, the very reason of this classification, the three previous sets are there somehow merely only serve to introduce, that is to say introduce another way to put on the play of architecture: the “*texturique*” play. We are no longer in a picturesque and objective, nor in that of landscape and subjective, nor in an organic one. What is in question, in the fourth set, is “an internal event of the *Unité d’habitation of Marseille*”, for which “the systematic application of the harmonic measures of ‘*Modulor*’ creates a state of unitary aggregation that one can qualify as ‘*texturique*’”. The use of *Modulor* generates a harmony among the explicitly defined measures, yet still between the ones and the implicitly resulted ones. In other words, the *Modulor* is “apt to unify the texture of the architecture work, giving it the internal firmness which is the very health”, is apt to generate an *merveilleux ineffable space* with accuracy:

*Merveilleux* is in accuracy. Sustainable is in perfection. Life is an exact calculation. The dream relies only on essential realities. Poetry only act by accurate



texturijne

4 ways to conceive an architectural dispositif  
Le Corbusier, *Le Modulor* (1950), 1963

facts. Lyricism only has wings on the truth. The authentic is the only thing touches us. Life, life! From which we measure the brightness by a deep descent into the essence of things.<sup>23</sup>

Le Corbusier indicates well that the texture is not only planar but spatial, this confirms the tridimensionality of the fourth and last set, and the absence of a planar duo confirms the precisions made by the *Modulor 2*: “the *texturique* is a direct product of *Modulor* which harmoniously dimensions on surface and on depth, thus on *volume*. It does that automatically by applying the series of the *Modulor*’s chart.”<sup>24</sup>

One object inscribed by the *texturique space*, is depersonalized, thus rendered schizophrenic, as a double dihedron. This object or one spectator “taking possession of space” – as Le Corbusier writes – is simultaneously possessed by the meticulously established spatial, *visual acoustic* harmony, based on the proportional system of *Modulor*, is textured in a precise position by the invisible *regulating traces*, submitting oneself to the *convulsive possession* by space, yet by losing oneself, one enters paradoxically into the state of ecstasy. The independence of one is wiped out, hence in its place, the *interdependence* turns out to be the very nature of a *texturique space*.

Space, the very architectural concept of modern architecture, observed and formulated by Sigfried Giedion throughout his tremendous book *Space, Time and Architecture*, in the case of *texturique space*, is endowed with a tyrannical power.

What is most beautiful is necessarily tyrannical...<sup>25</sup>

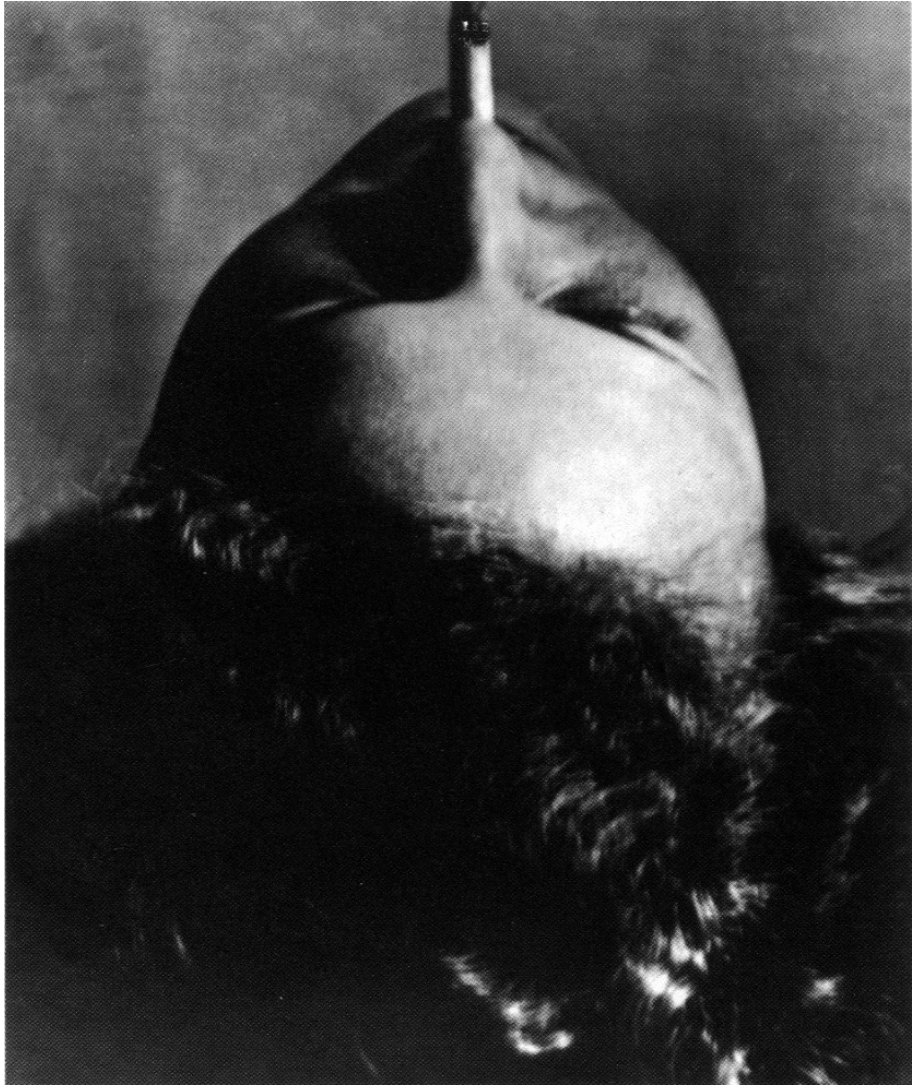
Here the hierarchical relationship between space and spectator as *master and slave*, a notion developed by Caillois,<sup>26</sup> is quite obvious. One being touched by this particular spatial effect, under the control of the tyrannical spatial power, enjoying the meticulous harmony, on the climax of ecstasy, loses oneself in pleasure, suffering simultaneously oneself to enjoy it, turns to be a slave of this spatial experience – a slave of the *texturique space*, so as the objects inscribed within.

## ROTATION

As I have explained in the section of “beauty and beast”, following the concept of *bassesse*, with the *horizontality* and *base materialism* as two sub-operations of *informe* as a general-operation of declassification, the surrealist photographers explore with their own instrument, the possibility to transgress the limit or distinction between human and beast. Within the works carried out under this purpose, the use of rotation as the instrument of de-familiarization and seeing as if, are quite frequent.

In the work of Man Ray as *Head, New York*, 1923, the female head simply being inverted, upside-down, is de-familiarized from one’s orientated Gestalt perception, redrafting the map of what we would have thought the most familiar of terrains. In this regard, one could remind the disturbing experience described by Merleau Ponty, with the at-





*Head, New York, 1923*  
Man Ray



*Untitled, circa 1930*  
Jaques André Boiffard

tacked imago and even ego of the perceiver.

Being one of the masters of the *informe*, Boiffard reveals the nude body as beast, the breasts seen as if horns, the arm as if ear – I might seem merely to be saying that the photographers operating within the circuit of surrealism adopted just that predilection for metaphor of an extravagant and unexpectedly irrational kind that was so dear to the surrealist poets and so tirelessly described in the various tracts issued by the movement. And further, since the enthusiastic discovery of the poetic bestiary of Lautreamont's Maldoror, the exploration of the thought of man-as-animal had become a commonplace of surrealism. But that would be to ignore the precise conduct of this as if – its achievement through the syntax of the camera's hold on its object, its inversion of the body, its angling from below, its radical foreshortening and cropping, so that this particular experience of the human-as-if-beast occurs through a specifically spatial device: one that suggests the dizziness to which Dali refers; one that propels the image into the realm of the vertiginous; one that is a demonstration of falling. The body cannot be seen as human, because it has fallen into the condition of the animal.

There is a device, then, that produces this image, a device that the camera makes simple: turn the body, or the lens; rotate the human figure into the figure of fall. The camera automates this process, makes it mechanical; a button is pressed and the fall is the rest.<sup>27</sup>

## FRAME

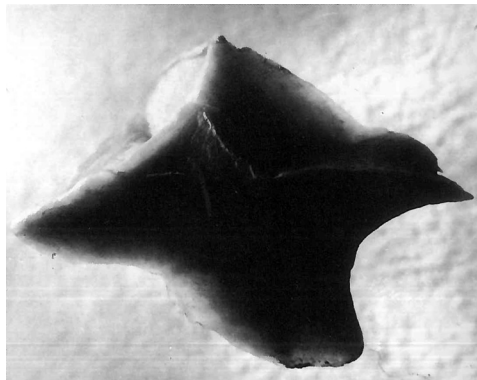
Always in the perspective of seamless image, pursuit by surrealist photographers, the deliberate use of frames convulses the reality into signs. The experience of nature as sign or representation comes naturally, then, to photography. This experience extends as well to the domain that is most inherently photographic: the framing edge of the image experienced as cut or cropped. This is possible even when the image does not seem folded from within by means of the reduplicative strategy of doubling, when the image does not seem folded from within by mean of the reduplicative strategy of doubling. When the image is entirely un-manipulated, like the Boiffard's big toes, or the *Involuntary Sculptures* by Brassäi, or the image of a hatted figure by Man Ray published in *Minotaure*. For, at the very boundary of the image, the camera frame, which essentially crops or cutes the represented element out of reality at large can be seem as another example of spacing. The Man Ray's photograph published in *Minotaure* 1934, in the same way, de-familiarizes the torso of a masculine body by cropping it by the deliberately chosen photographic frame. Hence, the human torso rendered *informe*, can be seeing as if it was the head of Minotaure, this man/beast blindly wandering the labyrinth into which he has fallen, dizzy, disoriented, having lost his seat of reason – his head.

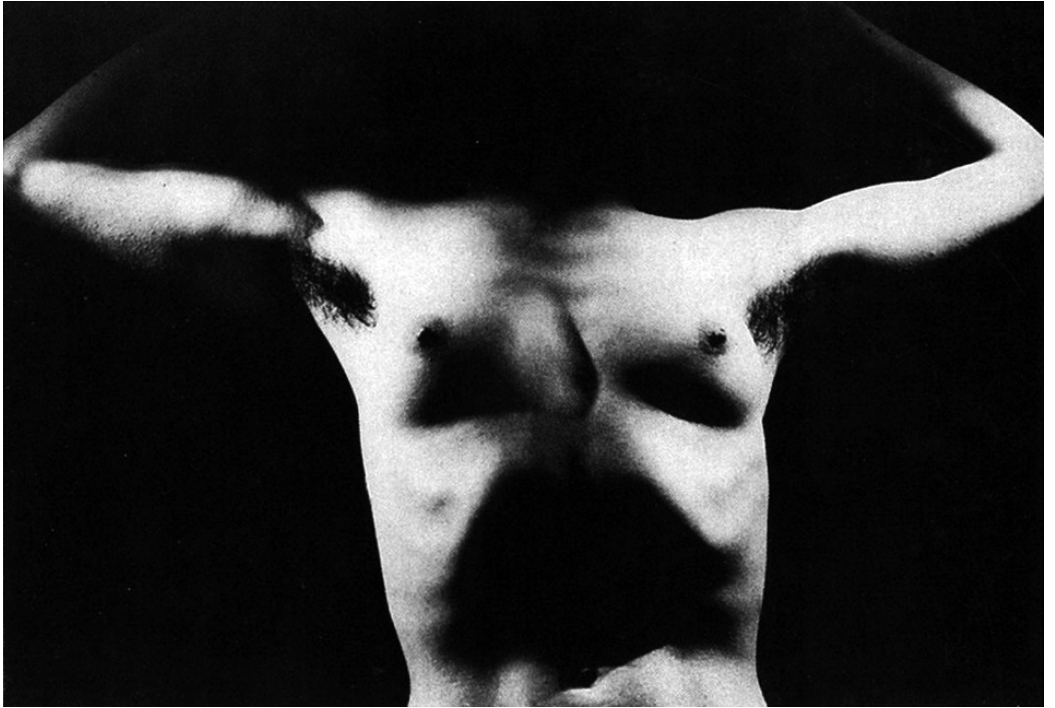
Spacing, like the doubled phonemes of papa, is the signifier of signification, the indication of a break in the simultaneous experience of the real, a rupture that issues into



*Involuntary Sculptures, 1933*

Brassai



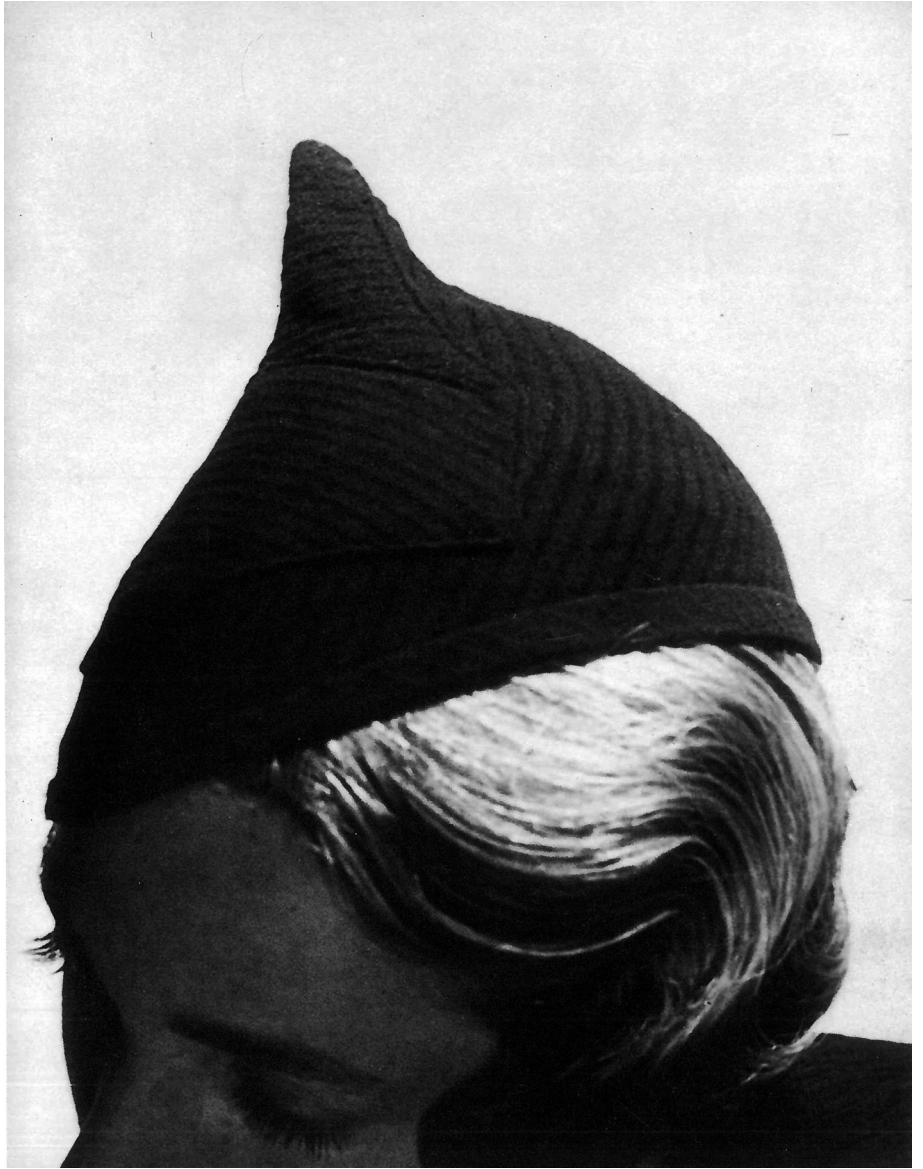


*Untitled, 1933*  
Man Ray



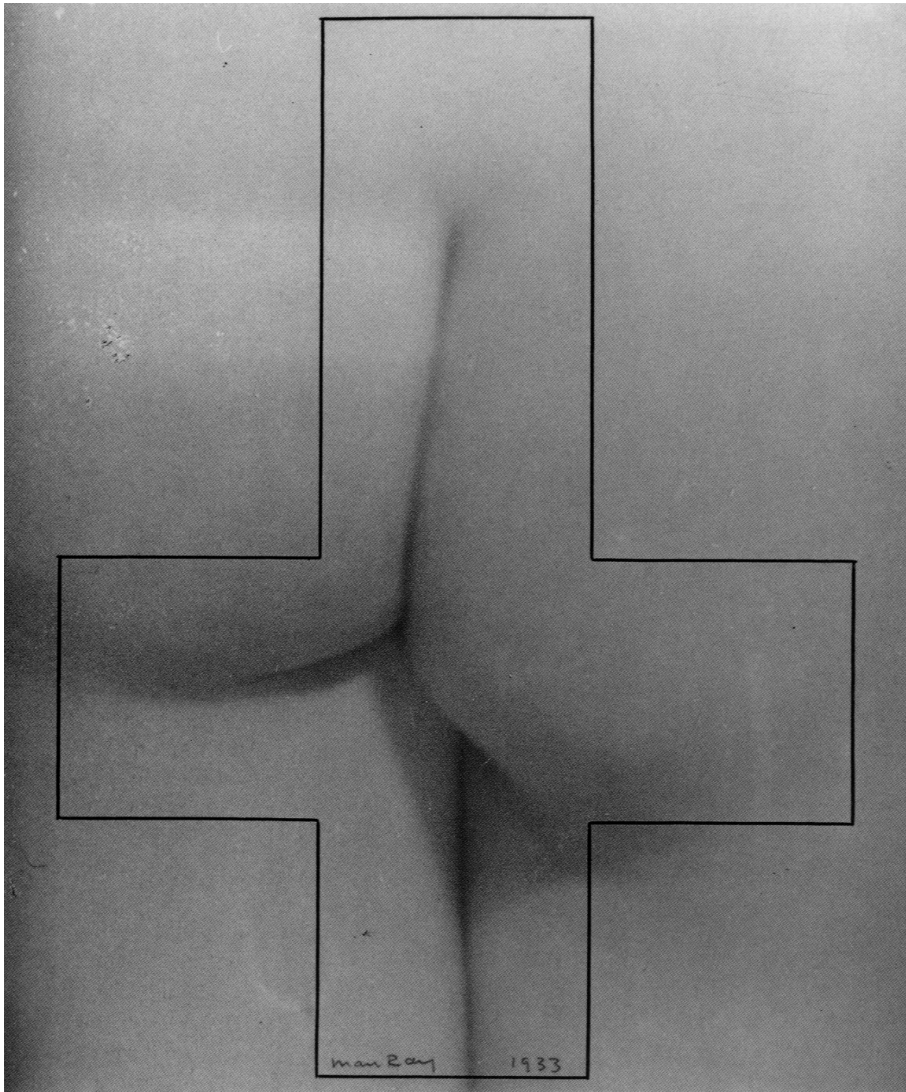


*Untitled, 1933*  
Man Ray



*Untitled, 1933*  
Man Ray





*Monument to D.A.F. de Sade, 1933*  
Man Ray

sequence. Photographic cropping is always experienced as a rupture in the continuous fabric of reality. But surrealist photography puts enormous pressure on that frame to make it itself read as a sign – an empty sign, it is true, but an integer in the calculus of meaning nonetheless, a signifier of signification. The frame announces that, between the part of reality cut away and this part, there is a difference. And that this segment, which the frame frames, is an example of nature-as-representation or nature-as-sign. Even as it announces this experience of reality, the camera frame, of course, controls it, configures it. This it does by point of view, as in the Man Ray example, or focal length, as in the extreme close-ups of Brassäi. But in both these instances what the camera frames. And thereby makes visible, is the automatic writing of the world: the constant, uninterrupted production of signs. Brassäi's images are of those nasty pieces of paper, like bus tickets and theater-ticket stubs that we roll into little columns in our pockets or those pieces of eraser that we unconsciously knead – these are what his camera produces through the enlargements that he published as involuntary sculptures. Man Ray's photograph is one of several made to accompany an essay by Tristan Tzara, about the constant unconscious production of sexual imagery throughout culture – here, in the design of hats.

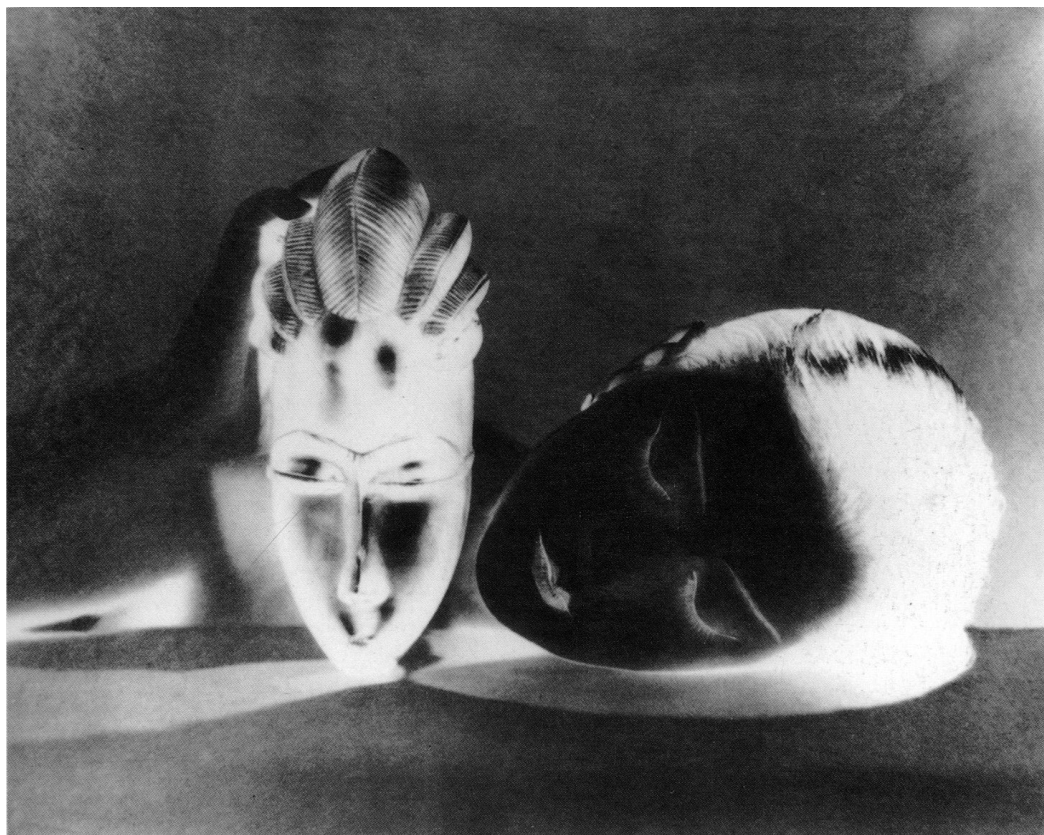
The frame announces the camera's ability to find and isolate what we could call the world's constant production of erotic symbols, its ceaseless automatic writing. In this capacity the frame can itself be glorified, noticed, presented, as in the Man Ray's *Monument to D.A.F. de Sade*. Being turned from the photograph's contents, one's attention is relocated on the container – on what could be called the character of the frame as sign or emblem. Here, Man Ray recourses to the definition of a photographic subject through the act of framing it, even as they share the same enframing shape. In this case one is treated to the capture of the photographic subject by the frame, this capture has a sexual import. The act of rotation, which transmutes the sign of the cross into the figure of the phallus, juxtaposes an emblem of the Sadean act of sacrilege with an image of the object of its sexual pleasure. And two further aspects of this image bespeak the structural reciprocity between frame and image, container and contained. The lighting of the buttocks and thighs of the subject is such that physical density drains off the body as it moves from the center of the image, so that by the time one's gaze approaches the margins, flesh has become so generalized and flattened as to be assimilated to printed page. Given this threat of dissipation of physical substance, the frame is experienced as shoring up the collapsing structure of corporeality and guaranteeing its density by the rather conceptual gesture of drawing limits. This sense of the structural intervention of frame inside contents is further deepened by the morphological consonance-what we could call the visual rhyming-between shape of frame and shape of figure: for the linear intersections set up by the clefts and folds in the photographed anatomy mimic the master shape of the frame. Never could the object of violation have been depicted as more willing.

*Black and White (Noire et blanche), 1926*  
Man Ray





*Black and White (Noire et blanche), 1926*  
Man Ray



If we are to generalize the aesthetic of surrealism, the concept of Convulsive Beauty is at the core of that aesthetic: reducing to an experience of reality transformed into representation. Surreality is, we could say, nature convulsed into a kind of writing. The special access that photography has to this experience is its privileged connection to the real. The manipulations then available to photography – what we have been calling doubling and spacing – appear to document these convulsions. The photographs are not interpretations of reality, decoding it. They are presentations of that very reality as configured, or coded, or written. The experience of nature as sign, or nature as representation, comes “naturally” then to photography. It extends, as well, to that domain most inherently photographic, which is that of the framing edge of the image experienced as cut or cropped. What unites all surrealist production is precisely this experience of nature as representation, physical matter as writing. This is of course not a morphological coherence, but a semiological one.

In cutting into the body of the world, stopping it, framing it, spacing it, photography reveals that world as written. Surrealist vision and photographic vision cohere around these principles. For in the *explosante-fixe* we discover the stop-motion of the still photograph; in the *érotique-voilé* we see its framing; and in the *magique-circonstancielle* we find the message of its spacing. Breton has thus provided us all the aesthetic theory we will ever need to understand that, for surrealist photography, too, “beauty will be convulsive ore it will not be.”<sup>28</sup>

## FROM DOUBLE TO MULTIPLICATION

To convulse reality from within, to demonstrate it as fractured by spacing, became the collective result of all that vast range of techniques to which surrealist photographers resorted and which they understood as producing the characteristics of the sign. In the vast range, no other technique creates this sense of the linguistic hold on the real more than the photographic strategy of doubling. For it is doubling that produces the formal rhythm of spacing – the two step that banishes simultaneity. And it is doubling that elicits the notion that to an original has been its copy. The double is the simulacrum, the second, the representative of the original. It comes after the first, and in this following it can only exist as figure, or image. But in being seen in conjunction with the original, the double destroys the pure singularity of the first. Through duplication, it opens the original to the effect of difference, of deferral, of one thing after another.<sup>29</sup> Thus the original, even lifeless before the doubling is rendered alive. Hence, one’s perception goes back and forth through the non-frontier limits, is placed in a ceaseless pendulum situation, swing between the original and its double.

This sense of deferral, of opening reality to the ‘interval of a breath,’ we have been calling (following Derrida) spacing. But doubling does something else

besides the transmutation of presence into succession. It marks the first in the chain as a signifying element: it transmutes raw matter into the conventionalized form of the signifier. Lévi Strauss describes the importance of pure phonemic doubling in the onset of linguistic experience in infancy – the child’s dawning knowledge of signs.

Even at the babbling stage the phoneme group /pa/ can be heard. But the difference between /pa/ and /papa/ does not reside simply in reduplication: /pa/ is a noise, /papa/ is a word. The reduplication indicates intent on the part of the speaker; it endows the second syllable with a function different from that which would have been performed by the first separately, or in the form of a potentially limitless series of identical sounds /papapapa/ produced by mere babbling. Therefore the second /pa/ is not a repetition of the first, nor has it the same signification. It is a sign that, like itself, the first/ pa/ too was a sign, and that as a pair they fall into the category of signifiers, not of things signified.

Repetition is thus the indicator that the ‘wild sounds’ of babbling have been made deliberate, intentional; and that what they intend is meaning. Doubling is in this sense the ‘signifier of signification.’

From the perspective of formed language, the phonemes /pa/ or /ma/ seem less like wild sounds and more like verbal elements in *potentia*. But if we think of the infant’s production of gutturals and glottal stops, and other sounds that do not form apart of spoken English, we have a stronger sense of this babbling as the raw material of sonic reality. Thus /pa/ moving to /papa/ seems less disconnected from the case of photographic doubling, where the material of the image is the world in front of the camera.<sup>30</sup>

Besides the linguistic examination on this subject, the psychological one remains crucial for a total understanding in this regard. As I have developed in the previous section of “uncanny”, with an animistic approach to the world, having the boundary between imagination and reality transgressed, the shadow and self-projection in the water as first doubles of primitive man become the subjects of fear. Being hunted after the fear of castration, in order to calm down the psychic anxiety, one performs the operation of doubling or even multiplication, in the inner world of imagination, of the very image of what one fears.

The use of mirror as a device in this occasion is quite frequent, such as in the *Distortion* series of André Kertész discussed in the section of “melting”, or in the *Portrait in a Mirror* by Ubac examined in the section of “rotten beauty”, etc.

In the regard of the effect of deferral, we can examine the work of Man Ray in 1935 of a double of hands, painted in black and white of the quasi same motif, yet with the two opposite colors reversed. Still with Man Ray, the effect of deferral reaches the pinnacle in the duo images entitled *black and white*, 1926. The face of Kiki de Montparnasse,



*Group in a Dance Hall, 1932*  
Brassaï

with its double as an African sculpture in the first image, which is entirely doubled and reversed in every instance in the second image, thus one original after the reduplication becomes four. The perception of one, being placed in the pendulum situation, swing ceaselessly among the original and its duplications, the longer one contemplate this duo, the faster the pendulum swings, thereby the perception falling dizzily into the abyss, enters in an almost entropic status.

### MISE EN ABYME

The use of reduplication with mirror as device has been push to its peak in the works of Brassai. In these works there is nothing very surreal-looking, nothing disintegrating or melting, nothing juxtaposed oddly or outrageously, nothing depicting the space of dream. However, these portrayed spaces full of mirrors with richly reduplicated subjects, are indeed spaces of the abyss themselves, in a constantly bifurcating field of representation – that Brassai holds in common with men like Breton and Aragon, reminding “Tournesol” of *L’Amour fou* of the former, and *Le Paysan de Paris* of the latter. Brassai’s portrait of a group of young Parisians – *Group in a Dance Hall*, in which occur a complex web of internal reduplications. Two groups of two couples each are the ostensible subjects of the photograph. Yet curiously, the longer one contemplate this image, the more confuse one would be, the more the barrier between the field of real and that of the reduplication, that of the representation, that of the sign, is eroded. The first occupy what reads as the “real” space of the image and are doubled by their own mirror images, while the second, except for the fragmentary detail of a bare arm cropped below the elbow, are present only in reflection. Doubled and yet, paradoxically, represented but once, the latter appear to have been dispossessed of their corporeal beings. Their reflections, severed from any physical connection with an object, attach themselves to the first group, so that each of the figures seated on the banquette finds a second, virtual double in the mirror reflection of the other. Details of costume, pose, and gesture reinforce this impression: the young man flanked by two women drapes one arm over the shoulder of the woman to his left, a gesture that is reiterated by his mirror counterpart, who wears an identical hat. The blank expression of the woman to his left is repeated by her counterpart; further, both seem to use the same coiffeur. On the right, two other women demonstrate the same oblique gaze, one in apparent flirtation, the other to observe the making of the photograph. This gaze also reiterates the angle of Brassai’s shot, thus implicating the photographer within the scene, as both witness and flirt. The sequence of duplications is brought to closure on the right by two men who wear identical tweed caps and echo each other’s distraction. Because of the absolute symmetry of the two groups, the couples seated on the banquette appear as if poised between parallel mirrors mounted in series, so that the distance – both physical and psychological – that separates them in reality is collapsed.





*Lover's quarrel, 1932*  
Brassai



Space thus drained from the image, the effects of doubling may no longer be located within the space of the world, but only within the flatness of the photograph. The double image appears to have been generated by an act of internal duplication, a literal folding back of the photograph upon itself – the mirror suggests not only reflection, but also a literal crease in the surface of the print. To double by folding, however, also implies the leaving of a deposit or trace on the surface, thus manipulated. Placing the subject of the photograph *en abyme*, the mirror image also, quite obviously, places the photographic representation itself *en abyme*, as an interiorized representation of its own process: depicting the fact that photographs themselves are virtual images that only reflect the world of the real. We are forced to acknowledge that the virtuality of the figures seen in reflection is no greater or less than the virtuality of the “real” figures seen in the direct representational field of the photograph. Through this deliberate conflation of levels of “reality” Brassai establishes the surface of the photograph as a representational field capable of representing its own process of representation.

*Mise en abyme*, has a literal origin. “*En abyme*” describing any fragment of a text that reproduces in miniature the structure of the text in its entirety, was introduced by Gide in a passage of his *Journal* from 1892, the phrase originally described the reduplicative strategy of his own work, it tells us in a text what a text is:

It pleases me to find, in a work of art, the very subject of the work transposed to the scale of its characters. Nothing illuminates the work better, or establishes its proportions more clearly. Thus, in some paintings by Memling or Quentin Metsys a small, somber convex mirror reflects the interior of the room in which the depicted scene is set. Also, Velasquez’ *Las Meninas*.

Not only are Gide’s initial examples of this textual device drawn from painting; all of them implicate the optical properties of mirror reflection. In painting, however, mirrors rarely function as analogues for the painting itself and Gide, sens this – “none of these examples is absolutely accurate” The perfect emblem for the procedure was itself already an emblem:

What would be more accurate, what would state better what I wanted in my Notebooks, my *Narcissus* and in *La Tentative*, is a comparison with that procedure in heraldry which consists of placing a second shield within the first – “*en abyme*”.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps because it suggests the familiar case of mirrors mounted in series to produce an infinite suite of specular effects, it has become synonymous with the internal mirror. So that it is defined, at least in its literary manifestations, as any internal mirror reflecting the totality of the work that contains it, either by simple reduplication – a fragment of a work demonstrating a relationship of similitude with the work that includes it; by reduplication to infinity – a fragment demonstrating a relationship of similitude with the work that includes it and which itself includes a fragment demonstrating; or aphoristic reduplication – a fragment supposedly including the work which includes it.<sup>312</sup>



*Lovers, Place d'Italie, 1932*  
Brassai

The abyss resonates throughout Brassai's oeuvre, demonstrates in a photograph what a photograph is, in the same way as Gide did to tell us in a text what a text is. In the work of *Lover's Quarrel, 1932*, captured in the same place than *Group in a Dance Hall*, depicts the aftermath of a quarrel, reiterating the three species of doubling – by the photograph, the mirror, and the other – which structure that photograph. Here, a man is doubled by his own reflection in the mirror, while his female companion is doubled by another woman's reflection which floats nebulously in the mirror above her. A small square glass cleat that marks the intersection of mirror panels obliterates one of the reflected woman's eyes, suggesting a possible psychological reading (mutilation, male fantasy, etc.). However, it is the internal structure of the image – the network of relationships that constitutes it as double – that makes any such interpretation possible. Meaning, therefore, does not reside in details of expression or gesture that are simply registered by the photograph. Rather, it is a property of the photograph itself.<sup>33</sup>

*Lovers, Place d'Italie, 1932*, captured a couple embracing, is itself embraced by the mirrored corner of the room. The specular action of the mirrors is such that the embrace is replayed on the walls of the café in a representation that seems to signify the opposite of union. Male and female profiles are wrenched apart, each to reappear in near isolation, the image of each figure within its own separate frame. In splitting apart the unity and fusion of the kiss, the action of the mirrors fills the reflected representations of those same actors with another set of signs – whose meanings can be read as narcissism, self-absorption, predatory seduction. The mirrors, which function in this image – as in much of Brassai – like reduced, miniature photographs contained within the space of the master photograph, imply that any unit of reality can be optically decomposed and then recomposed, or rewritten.<sup>34</sup>

In a different photograph the mirror placed in the corner of a space – in this case the room of a brothel – functions once again to collect the occupants of that room onto the single visual plane of the photograph, even while it collects them onto a second, unified plane, set within the outer frame of the image. That second plane is the rectilinear, enframing structure of the armoire in front of which a man, dressing, stands looking into the mirror on one of its doors, while his partner's naked body is captured in a virtual image that is enframed by the mirror on the other door. Present only in reflection, the woman is displaced from her position in "real" space and transported to a relation of direct spatial contiguity with her client. In the meeting that is enacted on the picture plane only, the couple produces a transient, fleeting sign of the meaning of their encounter: its anonymous sex represented by their faceless juxtaposition in the mirrors, by the closure of two bodies back to back in real space.<sup>35</sup>

*Paris, capital of the nineteenth century*,<sup>36</sup> the labyrinthine city in which the surrealist night-walkers find their inspirations, is the very city which provides the experiences *en abyme*, being the fertile grounds of possibility for the kind of confluences in which one thing



*Brothel, circa 1932*  
Brassai

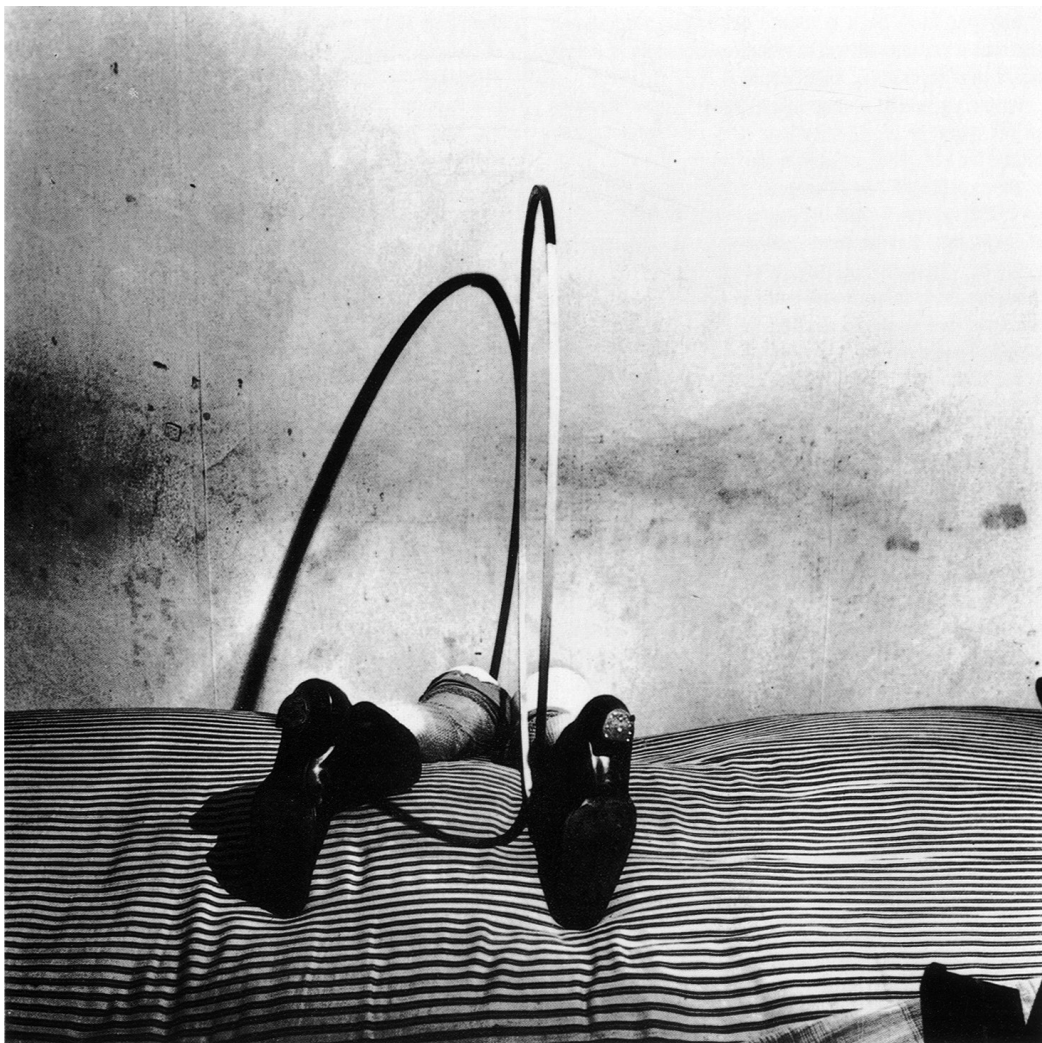
can suddenly be read as a sign for another. As I have mentioned in the section of “indices”, the labyrinth of the city of Paris can be mapped onto the labyrinth of Breton’s unconscious and a deictic relation that takes the form of a double arrow can show how each one supplies the meaning of the other, each one engulfing the other in its own representational field. Thus this city is framed, spaced, convulsed, fractured into a chain of representations, signs, each subsuming the other, the city as a continual process of reference, is what characterizes the surrealists’ conception of it as modern. This modern world providing the experience of the abyss intrigues Aragon, who ends his depiction of the Passage de l’Opéra in *Le Paysan de Paris* with a meditation in this regard:

Caught in the maze the mind is dragged toward the denouement of its destiny, the labyrinth without a Minotaur where, transfigured like the Virgin, radium-fingered Error reappears, my singing mistress, my pathetic shadow... In this whirlpool where the conscious mind feels like a mere level of the abyss, what has become of the wretched certitude which once seemed so important? I am but a moment in some eternal fall. One’s footing lost, it can never be regained. The modern world is the only one which answers my mode of being.<sup>37</sup>

Being the very scene of Aragon’s *Le paysan de Paris*, the arcades of Paris were the paradoxical combination of the interior and the street. With the illusion of privacy as seclusion and protection, they are actually fully public places, open to the anonymous, aggressive flow of pedestrian traffic. Being equally attracted to this special social and spatial phenomena in those places in Paris where the barrier between public and private had eroded, where intimacy bloomed in public, where the mirrors of cafes and dance halls could function like the glass of the arcades – could turn the most secret language of the body’s gesture into the flattened, public declaration of the billboard, the poster, the sign. These bodies of Parisian nightwalkers, living in the semi-public, semi-private space of the nocturnal city, are captured by our photographer, our master of *mise en abyme*, as intriguingly fragmented, or split – as a concatenation of both themselves and their sign.<sup>38</sup>

## LE JEU DE POUPEE

Hans Bellmer’s famous series of dolls, as an endless acting out of the process of construction as dismemberment, in its linking of the obsessional reproduction expressing a sense of menace, of anxiety, seems to open on the terrain of Freud’s “uncanny”. In this frightening yet fascinating series, we can observe the uncanny expressed in three ways. In the first, the confusion between the animate and the inanimate, is an instance of that class of the uncanny that we have already followed, involving a regression to animistic thinking and its confusion of boundaries. To the effect produced by dolls, one could add, Freud acknowledges, the uncanny effect of epileptic seizures and the manifes-



*Doll (La Poupée), 1935*  
Hans Bellmer





*Doll (La Poupée), 1935*  
Hans Bellmer



*Doll (La Poupée), 1935*  
Hans Bellmer



*Doll (La Poupée), 1935*  
Hans Bellmer





*Doll (La Poupée), 1936/1949*  
Hans Bellmer

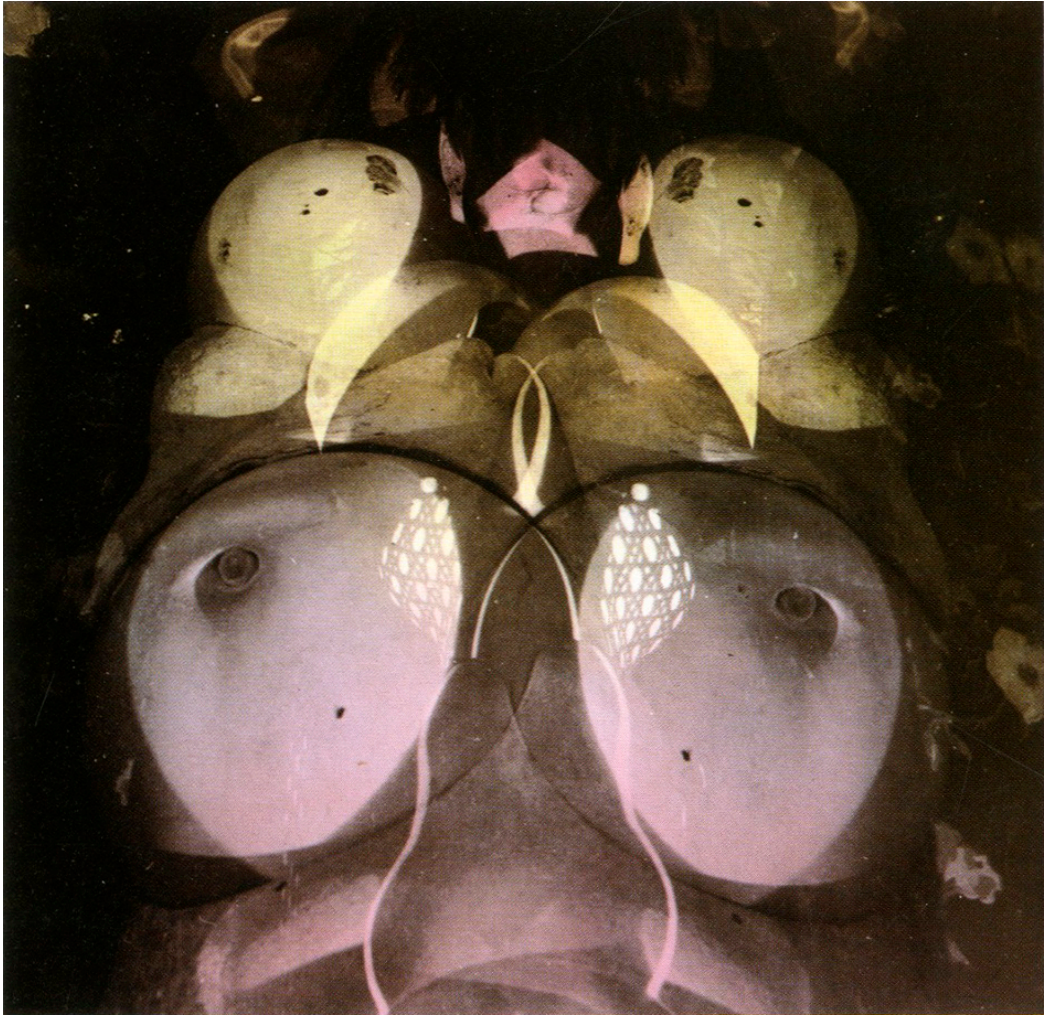


*Doll (La Poupée), 1938*  
Hans Bellmer





*Doll (La Poupée), 1938*  
Hans Bellmer



*Doll (La Poupée), 1938*  
Hans Bellmer





*Doll (La Poupée), 1936/1949*  
Hans Bellmer

tations of insanity, “because these excite in the spectator the feeling that automatic, mechanical processes are at work, concealed beneath the ordinary appearance of animation.”

The second which arises from the surfacing of another order of infantile experience: that of the complexes, specifically here, the fear of castration. The process to overcome this fear is an endless reproduction of *tableaux vivants* of the figure of castration.

The third, as I have developed in the section of “uncanny”, against the extreme anxious fear of castration, in order to protect oneself psychologically, one performs in one’s imagination the operation of doubling or multiplication of the very image of what one fears. For the invention of the protective strategy of doubling, Freud writes, finds its way into the language of dreams to operate there on the subject of castration by representing it through the multiplication or doubling of “the genital symbol.”

Within this dream-space the doll herself is phallic. Sometimes, deprived of arms, but endowed with a kind of limitless pneumatic potential to swell and bulge with smaller protuberances, she seems the very figure of tumescence. At other times, she is composed of fragmented members of the doll’s body, often doubled pairs of legs stuck end-to-end, to produce the image of rigidity: the erectile doll. But in this very pairing that is also a multiplication, a pairing of the pair, one meets the dreamer’s strategy of doubling. As he tries to protect the threatened phallus from danger by elaborating more and more instances of its symbolic proxy, the dreamer produces – although transformed – the very image of what he fears.<sup>39</sup>

## CONTRIVANCE

As Spectator I wanted to explore photography not as a question but as a wound.

– Roland Barthes

Four decays after Ballmer’s frustrating chain of castrated dolls, the obsessive expression of construction as dismemberment, screaming the anxiety, the fear, the ceaseless piercing pain of wound, the disturbing status of uncanny, Barthes echoes by his *Camera Lucida*, explaining the same phenomenon. This work thereby, can be considered as an elaboration of the uncanny in the field of photographic theory. It begins as thus:

One day, quite some time ago, I happened on a photograph of Napoleon’s youngest brother, Jerome, taken in 1852. And I realized then, with an amazement I have not been able to lessen since: “I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor.”<sup>40</sup>

Within the moment of shock, Barthes, without an easy sensation, tells us his story, which is few sharable, for its nature which is extremely personal, difficult to understand by others the power it has on Barthes himself. “My interest in Photography took a more

cultural turn”, declares Barthes, means he is thinking photography in an analogical way. The kind of detail they may or may not contain, which punctures the general human interest in photography considering it as “*studium*”, rupturing or lacerating it, and thus pricking or bruising the spectator: the “*punctum*”.

Using a half of his book to articulate the nature of the *punctum*, his scholarly narrative turns to construct this notion in a quite different way, connecting it to the kind of sudden fright that punctures the organism’s defences or to the shudder of fatefulness that is the uncanny. He uses now *punctum* to describe his experience of looking at a photograph of his dead mother as a child, an experience of seeing a ghost. The same kind of shock triggered by Bonaparte occurs here as well, only the *being* he is confronting, much more personal as his *being-past* mother, record here as a being-who-was-going-to-die, is more radical and wounding. The intrinsic nature with the certainty of the “that-has-been” attaching itself to the image makes Barthes realize the very scandalous effect of photography.

The real punctum of the photograph is Time. By giving me that absolute past of the pose, the photograph tells me death in the future. I shudder, like Winnicott’s psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.<sup>41</sup>

“The appeal to our emotions... is largely due to the quality of authenticity in the photograph. The spectator accepts its authority and, in viewing it, perforce believes he would have seen that scene or object exactly so if he had been there.”<sup>42</sup> “It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture... at most it would interest your *studium*: period, clothes, photogene; but in it, for you, no wound”, says Barthes, for which this very photograph as the center of his revelation is not reproduced in the book. Thus “the impossible science of the unique being”, the paradox of “the truth – for me”, is revealed. The grip of photography’s vaunted objectivity is loosened here, and photography’s “authenticity” is redefined.

Yet “*studium*”, assuring the authority of the photograph in its truth-value, in the objectivity of its *objectif* (or lens), in the “straightness” with which it views the world, remains at the center of the twentieth century’s photographic aesthetics; the nature of the photographic image is such, as Edward Weston admonishes, “that it cannot survive corrective handwork.” The code of Straight Photography discourages to the greatest degree any tampering with the image. Barthes’ subjectivism, in which the photograph exists as a construct – fabricated “for me” – is a scandal for the aesthetics of Straight Photography, as is all photographic activity that resorts to construction: to darkroom manipulation, to the manipulation of scissors and paste, to any contrivance which would seem to construct “the real.” For how can it be real, if it is fabricated?

Surrealist photography has long-since delivered, and continues to deliver, the same scandal, to the ensemble of Straight Photography. For surrealist photography does not



admit of the natural, as opposed to the cultural or made. And so all of what it looks at is seen as if already, and always, constructed, through a strange transposition of this thing into a different register. Contrivance is very nature of surrealist photography, which is contrived to the highest degree, with or without darkroom manipulations, or whatever one can imagine. We see the object by means of an act of displacement, defined through a gesture of substitution. The object, “straight” or manipulated, is always manipulated, and thus always appears as a fetish.<sup>43</sup>

The nature of the authority that Weston and Straight Photography claim is grounded in the sharply focused image, its resolution a figure of the unity of what the spectator sees, a wholeness which in turn founds the spectator himself as a unified subject. That subject, armed with a vision that plunges deep into reality and, through the agency of the photograph, given the illusion of mastery over it, seems to find unbearable a photography that effaces categories and in their place erects the fetish, the *informe*, the uncanny.

There are, of course, other projects to rethink photography. And thus to return to Camera Lucida, we should note the ending that Barthes gives to this mythic tale of the science of photography. The night that he found the photograph of his mother, Barthes tells us, he saw a movie in which there was an automaton, whose dancing with the hero stirred in Barthes pangs of love that he linked to the madness he associated with his newly organized feelings about photography: “a new form of hallucination. . . . a mad image, chafed by reality.” The automaton, the double of life who is death, is a figure for the wound that every photograph has the power to deliver, for each one is also a double and a death: “All those young photographers who are at work in the world, determined upon the capture of actuality, do not know that they are agents of Death. . . . Contemporary with the withdrawal of rites, photography may correspond to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic Death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into literal Death. Life/Death: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print.”

That simple click is what Breton had called the *explosante-fixe* and that combination of madness and love, released by the doll and by the essence of photography, which Barthes describes as a “gone mad” and an instance of “*la vérité folle*” is, in its uncanniness, its convulsiveness, a kind of *amour fou*.<sup>44</sup>

## NOTES

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4. Rosalind Krauss, "Photography in the service of surrealism," in *Art of the Twentieth Century – A Reader* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2003), p.116.
5. André Breton, "What Is Surrealism?," 1934, <http://home.wlv.ac.uk/~fa1871/whatsurr.html>.
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19. Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," p.50.
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# Lens 1.0 | Retinal approach

## CASTLE PROBLEM

In *Manifesto of Surrealism*, Breton once thinks of purchasing an almost half ruined archaic castle where he could receive in an anarchic way his surrealist friends:

For today I think of a castle, half of which is not necessarily in ruins; this castle belongs to me, I picture it in a rustic setting, not far from Paris. The outbuildings are too numerous to mention, and, as for the interior, it has been frightfully restored, in such manner as to leave nothing to be desired from the viewpoint of comfort. Automobiles are parked before the door, concealed by the shade of trees. A few of my friends are living here as permanent guests: there is Louis Aragon leaving; he only has time enough to say hello; Philippe Soupault gets up with the stars, and Paul Eluard, our great Eluard, has not yet come home. There are Robert Desnos and Roger Vitrac out on the grounds poring over an ancient edict on duelling; Georges Auric, Jean Paulhan; Max Morise, who rows so well, and Benjamin Péret, busy with his equations with birds; and Joseph Delteil; and Jean Carrive; and Georges Limbour, and Georges Limbours (there is a whole hedge of Georges Limbours); and Marcel Noll; there is T. Fraenkel waving to us from his captive balloon, Georges Malkine, Antonin Artaud, Francis Gérard, Pierre Naville, J.-A. Boiffard, and after them Jacques Baron and his brother, handsome and cordial, and so many others besides, and gorgeous women, I might add. Nothing is too good for these young men, their wishes are, as to wealth, so many commands. Francis Picabia comes to pay us a call, and last week, in the hall of mirrors, we received a certain Marcel Duchamp whom we had not hitherto known. Picasso goes hunting in the neighborhood. The spirit of demoralization has elected domicile in the

Breton, Benjamin Péret, Yves Elléouët  
and Charles Estienne in the villa at  
Saint-Cirq-Lapopie



*Breton's villa at Saint-Cirq-Lapopie, 2014*  
Olivier Favier





# *Le Corset Mystère*

**Mes belles lectrices,**

à force d'en voir **de toutes les couleurs**  
Cartes splendides, à effets de lumière, Venise

Autrefois les meubles de ma chambre étaient fixés  
solidement aux murs et je me faisais attacher pour écrire :

**J'ai le pied marin**

nous adhérons à une sorte de **Touring Club**  
sentimental

**UN CHATEAU A LA PLACE DE LA TÊTE**

*c'est aussi le* **Bazar de la Charité**

Jeux très amusants pour tous âges :

Jeux poétiques, etc.

Je tiens Paris comme — pour vous dévoiler l'avenir —  
votre main ouverte

**la taille bien prise.**

castle, and it is with it we have to deal every time it is a question of contact with our fellowmen, but the doors are always open, and one does not begin by “thanking” everyone, you know. Moreover, the solitude is vast, we don’t often run into one another. And anyway, isn’t what matters that we be the masters of ourselves, the masters of women, and of love too?<sup>1</sup>

His dream did come true later.

Everything is near at hand, the worst material conditions are excellent. The woods are white or black, one will never sleep.<sup>2</sup>

By selling a painting of Giorgio de Chirico to Stockholm museum, he purchased the oldest villa in the village of Saint-Cirq Lapopie, not really near Paris in the south of France, where he spent all summers from 1951 till his death.<sup>3</sup>

Actually the castle, usually in ruins, being a typical architectural subject of surrealist writings and paintings, has a more profound ideological reason to explain its recurrence in the works of the movement. This reason has emerged in a capitalized phrase “A CASTLE IN PLACE OF A HEAD” of an early poem of Breton, written in 1919, entitled “The Corset Mystery”.<sup>4</sup> Surrealism, pursuing the unexpected discoveries of dreams and of psychic automatism, being more in keeping with Marxist teaching than socialist realism, searches an answer of their current social crisis. Here we find Breton declares:

We expressly oppose the view that it is possible to create a work of art or even, properly considered, any useful work by expressing only the *manifest content* of an age. On the contrary, surrealism proposes to express its *latent content*.<sup>5</sup>

Socialist realism, by that criterion, is neither art nor useful; Surrealism is both. Having declared that Surrealism proposes to express, in its works and *as* its work, the latent content of an age, Breton goes on to an extremely interesting analysis of the English Gothic novel, which he claims accomplished a similar work in the late eighteenth century, another time of general European crisis. Besides pointing out this historical parallel, Breton identifies the Gothic novel as a precursor of the Surrealist preoccupation with dreams and with a kind of automatic writing. He quotes a letter by Horace Walpole – “the initiator of the genre”, in which Walpole explains that the origin of *The Castle of Otranto* was a curious dream, which impelled him to sit down and start to, write “without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate”.<sup>6</sup> What is more interesting is the attention Breton pays to the preferred site of the Gothic novel – the castle:

Are there any given places particularly suitable for this kind of sensibility? Yes there must be observatories of the inner sky. I mean, naturally, observatories already existing in the outer world. This we may describe, from the surrealist point of view, as the *castle problem*. “A considerable part of his youth”.<sup>7</sup>

The “*castle problem*”, for Breton, does not concern the specific trappings of the Gothic castle, but rather its extraordinary power as a collective myth. This power to engage the imagination is, he explains, at the source of the continuing appeal of the Gothic genre – but the Surrealist challenge is not to rewrite the Gothic; it is to find *another* place, as



*Cloister Cemetery in the Snow, 1817-1819*

Caspar David Friedrich

*Everything is near at hand, the worst material conditions are excellent. The woods are white or black, one will never sleep...*

The German romanticism painter depicts a Gothic ruin, *giving us back the freshness of childhood emotions.*

powerful in its mythical effect and psychic affect as the castle.<sup>8</sup>

My own research in endeavoring to discover the most favorable place for the reception of the great waves of annunciation have, in turn, held me spell-bound, in theory, at least, in a kind of castle whose wings have been clipped.... The human psyche, in its most universal form, found in the gothic castle and its accessories a point of fixation so precise that it would be essential to discover what would be the equivalent of such a place for our own period. (Everything leads us to believe that it is definitely not a factory.) But surrealism is still in the process of registering the transfer, occurring between the period of the gothic novel and our time, of the highest emotional charges from miraculous apparitions to wondrous coincidences: it only asks that we allow ourselves to be guided toward the unknown by the glimmer of those coincidences, which is at present brighter than any other one, isolating it whenever possible from the minor events in life.<sup>9</sup>

Poetic analogy, the very dear method of the surrealists, can be extended to any reality, not only to poetry, painting, sculpture and diverse objects, but also to architecture. As any other surrealist object, architecture must be an object of desire – the ultimate surrealist desire is above all – the fantastic. “A work of art worthy of the name is one that gives us back the freshness of childhood emotions.”<sup>10</sup> The childhood of surrealism is one of romanticism, where the castle in ruin is a primary symbol; with this reference, following poetic analogy, the surrealists convulse the castle into the sign of the observatory of inner sky and of innocence. Nothing else could have been nearer to the criteria of the surrealist work of art – which is always a result of imaginative integration following disintegration. Thus it is not difficult for one to understand the frequent presence of the archaic castle in the movement – the prototype if not archetype of the surrealist vision of architecture.<sup>11</sup>

## MAGIC OF CRYSTAL

However Breton, having the dream of a rustic castle, tells us another seemingly opposite aspiration in *Nadja*:

I myself shall continue living in my glass house, where you can always see who comes to call; where everything hanging from the ceiling and on the walls stays where it is as if by magic, where I sleep nights in a glass bed, under glass sheets, where *nbo I am*, will sooner or later appear etched by a diamond.<sup>12</sup>

Where the reconciliation between these two so contrasting images could be possible – only in the inner sky, the realm of imagination, of sign. As I have mentioned in the sector of “indices”, Breton accords a great enthusiasm to signs, this obsession of *crystal* cannot be understood outside the European mytho-poetic universe, in which the *crystal*



*The house where I live in, my life, my writings, 1933*  
Brassaï



is one of the most powerful symbols where all the richness and mysteries of world and life are embodied. Thus the *crystal* is for the surrealists a supreme-point where creation, spontaneity, and imagination originates, an origin where all contradictions are reconciled. It is a principle of order entirely distinct from the order of reason. In the aim to create a new myth, following the Hermetic and Esoteric inspirations, the surrealists assign to the *crystal* a supreme signification of the very reconciliation of their intention's lucidity with the unconscious, spontaneous and unpredictable individual creativity. In this regard, we find Breton stating:

Surrealism is not interested in anything not aimed at annihilation of the being into a *diamond* all blind and interior which is no more the soul of ice than of fire.<sup>13</sup>

Then, one could find one of the most enigmatic passages in all his writings for this instance in *L'Amour fou*:

But it is completely apart from these accidental configurations that I am led to compose a eulogy to crystal. There could be no higher artistic teaching than that of the crystal. The work of art, just like any fragment of human life considered in its deepest meaning, seems to me devoid of value if it does not offer the hardness, the rigidity, the regularity, the luster on every interior and exterior facet, of the crystal. Please understand that this affirmation is constantly and categorically opposed, for me, to everything that attempts, aesthetically or morally, to found formal beauty on a willed work of voluntary perfection that humans must desire to do. On the contrary, I have never stopped advocating creation, spontaneous action, insofar as the crystal, nonperfectible by definition, is the perfect example of it. The house where I live, my life, what I write: I dream that all that might appear from far off like these cubes of rock salt look close up.<sup>14</sup>

In *Surrealism and painting*, Breton recites a passage of an essay by Jacques Hérold, in which the painter confirms the necessity of the processes of crystallization in art:

The crystallization, being an outcome of the future of the form and the matter, the painting should reach the crystallization of the object.<sup>15</sup>

Later on, in the same book, Breton borrows a passage from E. Grosse to support his point of view:

After most of the text, said Grosse, the definitive idea of an art work does not seem to result from an effort of composition, which resembles laboriously and tries out methodically... The final idea precipitates more instantaneously in the soul of the artist, prepared and fertilized by the ambiance and the vision, just like the crystals precipitate around a stick immersed in a dissolution saturated with sel.<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, according to the surrealists' way of thinking, the symbolic chain of crystal, diamond and philosopher's stone (*Grand Oeuvre*) is revealed. Dalibor Veselý has made

a further explanation on this subject:

For instance the woodcut which accompanies the text of Basil Valentine (a 15th century alchemist well known to the Surrealists), where there is a man in the middle (the alchemical disc) whose face is drawn into a triangle representing sulphur, mercury and salt. Salt, which is the base of the alchemical process, is identified with Saturn whose black ray points at a cube in the wood cut (the symbol of the body), which is also the philosopher's stone.<sup>17</sup>

*Crystal* represents the elementary "spontaneity in creation"; *diamond* represents the "annihilation of the being" in the work of art; and the *philosopher's stone* represents the ultimate reconciliation where there is no more the soul of ice than of fire. Yet the common link between the three is more than simple analogy or affinity.

First, as I developed in the sector of "automatism", the devotion of the surrealists to *psychic automatism*, which is based on a state of anonymity, driving one to hallucinations, and to a production of "inorganic" text, is deeply motivated by the belief that it is the key to the unfathomable depth of the unconscious. This spontaneous act could drive one to the realm of the reconciliation of ice and fire.

Second, in regard of *objective chance* and *objet-trouvé*, Breton announces:

In any case, what is delightful here is the dissimilarity itself which exists between the object wished for and the object found. This *trouvaille*, whether it be artistic, scientific, philosophic, or as useless as anything, is enough to undo the beauty of everything beside it. In it alone can we recognize the *merveilleux* precipitate of desire. It alone can enlarge the universe, causing it to relinquish some of its opacity, letting us discover its extraordinary capacities for reserve, proportionate to the innumerable needs of the spirit.<sup>18</sup>

"To relinquish some of its opacity" means, to gradually achieve a more and more lucid world. It is in the essence of *objective chance*, that the ultimate or ideal *objet-trouvé* will be a *crystal* – the most lucid object on earth.

In quest of the ultimate reconciliation of dream and reality, emotional inner sky and matter world – the mystery of life, the surrealists reveal the essence of the movement, through automatism as *spontaneity of desire*, and the mystery of world, revealed through objective chance as *the spontaneity of nature in crystal*.

The great secret of the environment of things and of our own freedom in relation to these things can be discovered in this way: the crystal possesses *the key to every liberty*.<sup>19</sup>

The journey of crystal starts with the interpretation of dreams, hallucination through the psychic automatism in a private room, then continues through the city, practicing *objective chance* and discovering poetic encounters; leads finally to the unconscious ocean of uncanny, to discover there the ultimate mystery of creation in the crystal. The surrealist journey can be understood as an itinerary from individual consciousness, through

collective, to cosmic consciousness. Succeeded or not? I don't find myself a position to judge, but at least they tried.

*Crystal*, most of the surrealists saw it as a vision of a creative spontaneity in nature which is, identical with the creative spontaneity of our own desires and imagination. In that sense the crystal became an essence and substitute of everything that can be seen in nature, and also a justification to go beyond imitation and perception to pure creation and imagination. The creation in surrealism became in the end a tantalizing drama of desire and representation. Imagination, liberated without any restriction, became the sole power creating reality – sur-reality.<sup>20</sup>

## ARCHITECTURE-TROUVÉE

There are few architectural works done by the surrealists themselves, and most of which strikes to the point of embarrassment. Architecture, being so deeply embedded in the reality, finds itself barely a way to reconcile with dreams as a compromise through the surrealists – as *architecture-trouvée* – a variation of *objet-trouvé*. Their admiration of postman Cheval's Palais Idéal, their welcome to the architecture of Gaudi, their enthusiasm to the occasional discoveries of old castles... show well their sense of architecture. Architecture, inside the movement's family, finds itself as a poor adopted child, who can never share the dinner table with others.

The fascinations that the surrealists found in these objects, reside not only in their spontaneity and potential sur-reality, but also in their scandalous and subversive appearance. Breton, fascinated by the oneiric character for the postman Cheval's imagery of madness, begins to popularize the Palais Idéal as the first among his surrealist friends:

What has always passionately summoned me in such works as theirs, is their explosive disdain, their self-generation entirely outside the cultural line assigned to our epoch.<sup>21</sup>

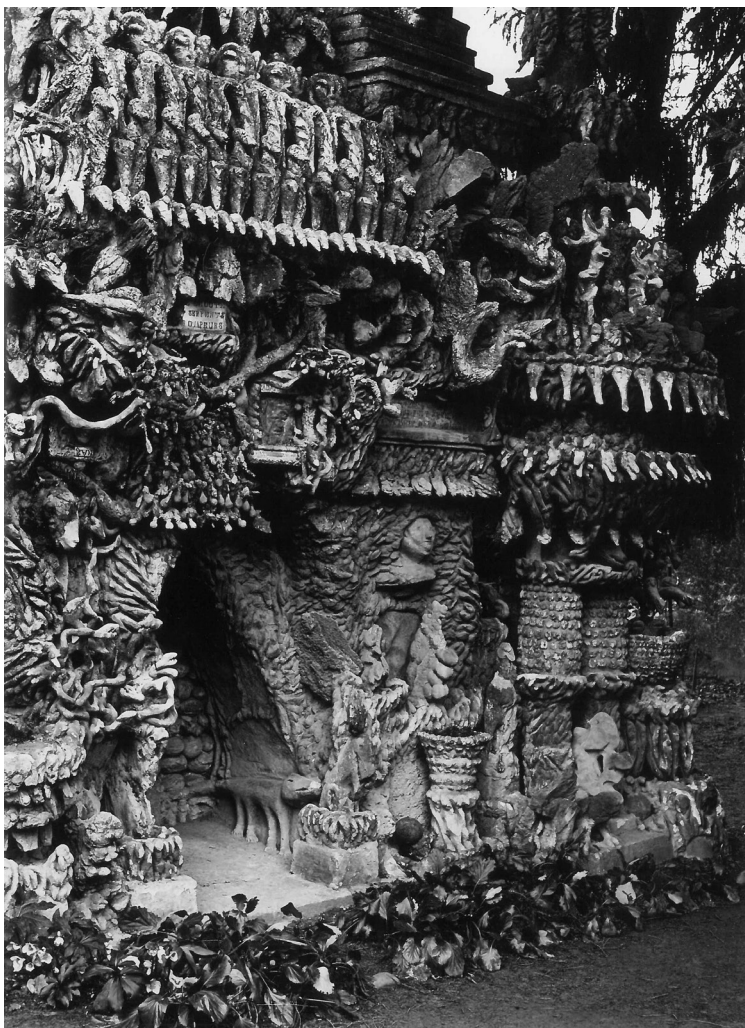
In the somber grottoes and galleries, the fossilized and buried metamorphosis of plants, animals and human figures into the flesh of this mysterious intervention, with its labyrinthine structure, make the Palais Idéal a very surrealist object and best possible substitute for the non-existent surrealist architecture.

Another interesting issue in this regard is the inquiry on "some possibilities for the irrational embellishment of a city." This inquiry was one of a series of experimental investigations into irrational knowledge conducted during February and March. It is evident the surrealists considered these experimental investigations significant, since they not only kept detailed records of individual sessions, but published by Breton these transcripts, with lengthy commentary, in the May 1933 issue of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*.<sup>22</sup>

The format of these investigations was quite straightforward. The participants would first choose an object or theme, then collectively draw up a list of questions; next, the



*Palais Idéal, 1962*  
Gilles Ehrmann



*Palais Idéal, 1962*  
Gilles Ehrmann

participants would answer each question in turn, writing their response without pre-meditation or forethought. After each question the responses were read to the group, with a quick summation, before passing to the next question. The recalled the *psychic automatism* in its pure state, and its goal was to circumvent the interference of reason in the answers, thus allowing the unconscious free play in the formulation of answers.

If one remembers the first surrealist event, as I mentioned in the sector of “objective chance”, taking place in the streets of Paris, was an urban one; then it would not be difficult for one to understand one preoccupation of the surrealists was a poetics of place, particularly among the writers associated with the movement, and it is through this awareness of place that the Paris of the surrealists intersects with the monumental face of Paris. In this context the inquiry on “some possibilities for the irrational embellishment of a city” presents an opportunity to consider the role of public monuments in the iconography of surrealism – as *architecture-trouvée*. Thirty-one monuments was involved, seven surrealists participated – André Breton, Paul Eluard, Arthur Harfaux, Maurice Henry, Benjamin Peret, Tristan Tzara and Georges Wenstein.

This inquiry of “irrational embellishment” was triggered, as M. Stone-Richards has noted, the impetus behind the codification of the surrealist object was the crisis engendered in the group by the Aragon affair – Aragon’s recent defection from surrealism to the Parti communiste francais; thus, for Stone-Richards, the rationale was “to formulate a plan of action which would involve the whole group in common activity” that “would have for consequence the emphasis on the affective dimensions of collective experience.” Charged with a tone somehow of “disgust or hate” – as noted by Eluard, this inquiry intended to vulgarize these thirty-one involved Parisian monuments, certainly erotic-Sadean-ironic-cynic-orientated, generated quite some playful yet embarrassing and dumbfounding responses.

For the Arc de Triomphe, Eluard wanted to “lay it on its side and transform it into the most beautiful public urinal in France.” For the Fremiet’s gilded-bronze equestrian statue of the armor-clad patriot, Henry proposed to replace the horse with a pig, Dali agreed with Eluard on this issue that “to place a gilded-bronze turd on her head and a crudely sculpted phallus in her mouth” – reminds one of *The 120 Days of Sodom*. The statue of the recently deceased Clemenceau, in order to show the surrealists’ aversion to the defeatism of the war, was to be replaced by a gold public urinals according to Peret, or to be surrounded by “thousands of bronze sheep, and one made of camembert” pursuant to Tzara. The phallic symbolic monuments such as the ancient Egyptian obelisk from Luxor in the Place de la Concorde or the Vendome Column, are suggested by Breton, the obelisk to be moved to the entrance of the La Villette abattoir when the “immense gloved hand of a woman would hold it,” and transforming the Vendome Column into a “factory chimney being climbed by a nude woman.”

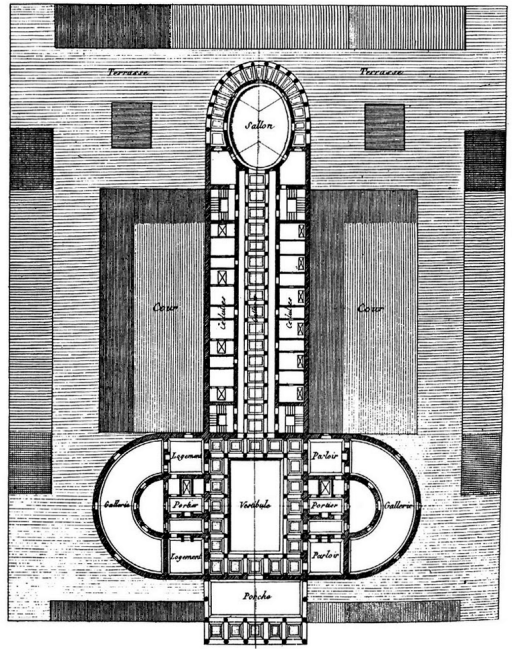
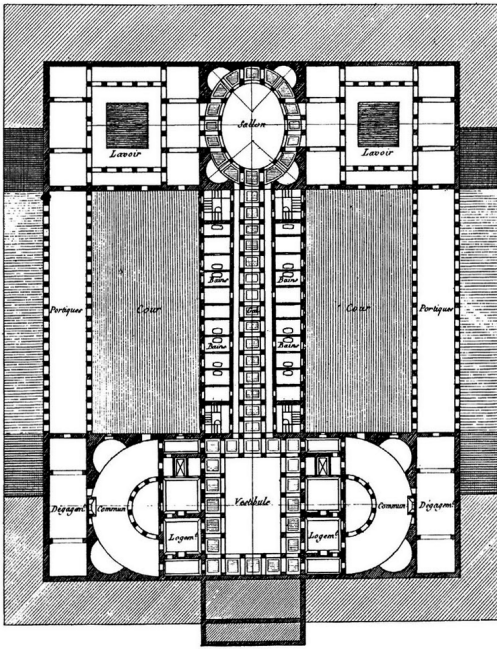
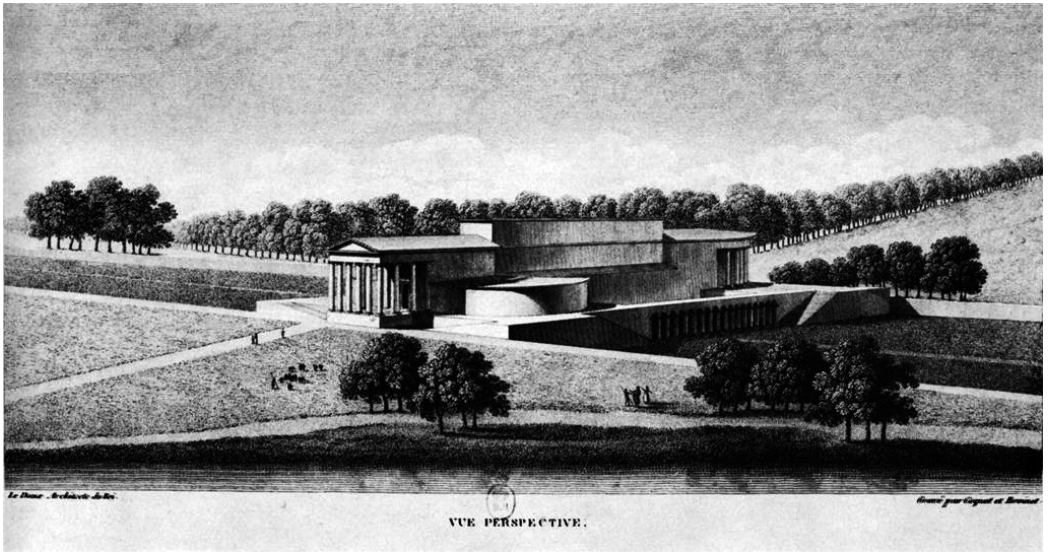
The towers of Notre-Dame are recommended to be replaced with an “immense oil and vinegar cruet, one bottle filled with blood, the other with sperm,” while the actual



cathedral would become a “school for the sexual education of virgins”, conferring to Breton.<sup>23</sup> For this instance, the recall of the “Oikema” project by Claude Nicola Ledoux of Epoque de la lumière cannot be avoided. Oikema – house of pleasure, following the ideas of the social reform of his time, is endowed the mission to “give back to the body what belongs to the body”, and prepare the journey to a new sexual ethical code without restriction. This project, with an extremely explicit phallic plan, without any windows, guaranties and reveals the intimacy of the inner program. A new form of conjugal union, more free, finds its concretization in Oikema, placed deliberately by the architect in the most beautiful landscape. In Fiedrich Gundolf’s words: “it is the first fundamental statement of the autonomy of the pleasure of the senses”, a determinant element in “the series of declaration of philosophic independence of the forces and the instincts of the human nature, a series started with the Kantian affirmation of the autonomy of the morals”, which echoes quite well with the surrealist ideology.<sup>24</sup>

In the same survey, Tzara proposed “to cut the Pantheon in half vertically, with the two halves to be fifty centimeters apart”.<sup>25</sup> Tzara’s proposition remained unfulfilled until Gordon Matta-Clark, having his father as Roberto Matta – an influential surrealist painter who worked for Le Corbusier, Matta-Clark being an artist and former student of architecture at Cornell, “followed” exactly Tzara’s proposition through his *Splitting* in 1974 of an elegant simplicity, on a suburb house,<sup>26</sup> by which act the daylight stabs into the inner-space as a sword, reminding the process of splitting till eternity. Beside the unnerving beauty of the space generated by the split, one should not forget the critical dimension of his project. For Matta-Clark, who performs “Anarchitecture”, architecture is a clownish and pretentious enterprise, and he would have been particularly enraged at having become a model, enraged to see his provisional disruptions of buildings stylized under the label of “deconstructionism” in the architectural projects of certain of his former professors at Cornell.<sup>27</sup> In this regard, one can probably be interested in Bataille’s “Architecture” as the first article in the “Critical Dictionary”, reminding his attitude – “against architecture”<sup>28</sup> as a underdog of authoritative power. Tzara, by proposing such a suggestion, is possibly agreed with both, consciously or without knowing. Bataille, positioned himself as “an old enemy from within” of the surrealists, then Matta-Clark could be considered as “a brilliant enemy from within” of architecture, and Tzara – therefore the entire seven participating surrealists of this inquiry could be recognized as “the subversive enemies from within” of the capital of the nineteenth century – Paris.

These are typical *architectures-trouvées*, constituting images exactly comparable to the poetic images used in their poems – solid, opaque, well defined, for instance the obelisk held by an “immense gloved hand of a woman”. The city is considered in the same way of the surrealist writing. Architecture is clashed together as words. Real space is less important than the symbolic meanings they contains. The real architectural spaces are in general neglected, instead of which, *architectures-trouvées* are favored for their poetic



*Le Dessin - Architecture de Ledoux*

Echelle de 1/1000

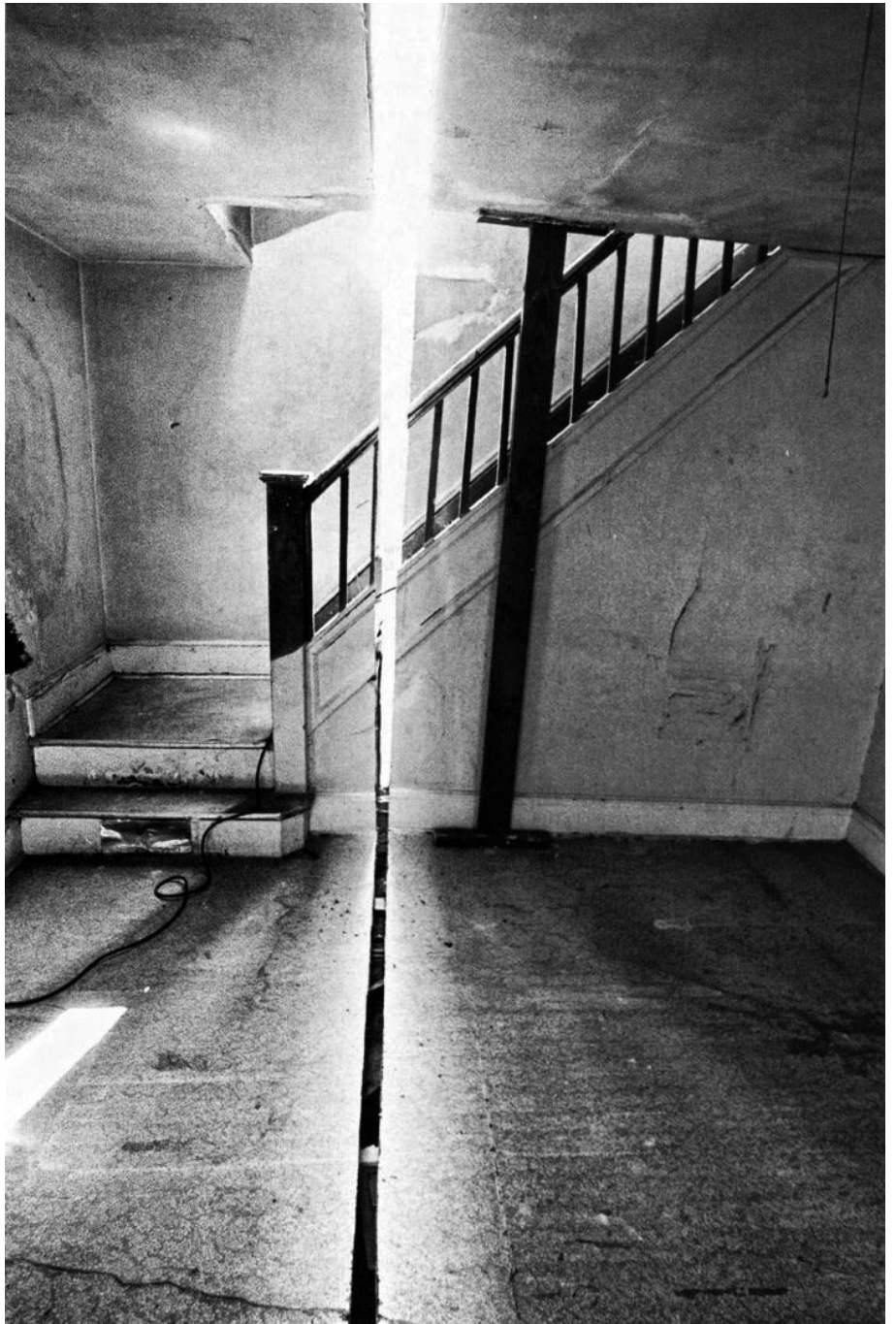
*Gravé par Vignard*

Oikema, perspective and plans  
Claude Nicola Ledoux



*Splitting, 1974*  
Gordon Matta-Clark





*Splitting, 1974*  
Gordon Matta-Clark

inspiration.<sup>29</sup>

## EDIBLE BEAUTY

The surrealists were not particularly interested in architecture, even if when they showed their interests in this domain occasionally, it is often tinged with an indirect and quite personal tone. In the vehicle periodical of the movement – *Minotaure: revue artistique et littéraire*, in my knowledge, there are only three articles talking more or less explicitly about architecture: Matta’s “Sensible Mathematic – Architecture of time”, Tzara’s “About a certain automatism of taste”, and the famous, perhaps the first and the most consistent surrealist commentary on architecture – Dali’s “Art Nouveau Architecture’s Terrifying and Edible Beauty”.<sup>30</sup>

For Dali, this inspiration of Art Nouveau architecture contributes a great deal to the formulation of his well-known *paranoiac-critical method*, and remains for him a permanent source of allusions and references. Dali, with his enigmatic personality lying in the unreconciled ambiguity of his talent and charlatanism, of his deep poetic sensibility and sheer mystification, of his prolific activity and subversion for purely narcissistic ends, he protests against the poverty of imagination and against the mediocrity of our hyper-logical world throughout his highly provocative and stimulating works of painting and writing.<sup>31</sup>

I think I was the first, in 1929 and at the beginning of *the Visible Woman*, to consider, in all seriousness, the delirious architecture of the Art Nouveau style as the most original and the most extraordinary phenomenon in the history of art.<sup>32</sup>

Through the illustrations accompanying his article in *Minotaure*, one could probably understand that by saying Art Nouveau architecture of 1900s, Dali refers principally to the French Art Nouveau and the Catalan architecture of Gaudi. The encounter between Dali and Gaudi’s architecture is quite obvious if one is aware of that both share the same origin as Catalan, yet the first encounter between Dali and the French Art Nouveau is somehow undatable. Knowing that the publication of Dali’s commentary on Art Nouveau architecture dated no early than the December of 1933, one could surmise that this encounter probably took place during his second visit to Paris in 1928. By considering the Art Nouveau art of the 1900 period as a “psycho-pathological end product of the Greco-Roman decadence”, Dali protests against the fashion of primitivism and functionalism on the Parisian scene with “the ‘poverty of plasticism’ – an anti-decorative decorativism”, in describing his interest in the works of the 1900 period carrying “essentially *extra-plastic* character” in his autobiography:

How in the tiniest ornamental detail of an object of 1900 there is more mystery, more poetry, more eroticism, more madness, perversity, torment, pathos, grandeur and biological depth than in their innumerable stock of truc-



ulently ugly fetishes possessing bodies and souls of a stupidity that is simply and uniquely savage!<sup>33</sup>

His interest in Art Nouveau is – as all the interpretations of the surrealists – doubtlessly very personal, firmly related with the liquefied and softened formless world in his pictorial works as well as his interest in the space-time continuum – in this regard, one cannot pass by without reminding his well-known *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931.

In Art Nouveau buildings, Gothic becomes metamorphosed into Greek, into Far Eastern and even, for the little involuntary fantasy it would take to realize it, into Renaissance – which, in its turn, could become a pure modern style, dynamic – asymmetric. All this could be achieved in the “feeble” time and space of *a single window* – that is to say, in that time and space which is so little understood, and probably vertiginous, and which, as we have just insinuated, is none other than the time and space of dreams.

All that has been the most naturally functionalist and utilitarian in the known architectural styles of the past suddenly become redundant in Art nouveau. Or, to put it in another way, Art Nouveau only serves the “functioning of desires” (and the most troubled, disqualified and inadmissible ones at that). Through Art Nouveau grandiose Columns, as well as ordinary ones, which lean – incapable of supporting themselves – like tired necks bearing heavy hydrocephalous heads, will emerge into the world for the first time like the hard undulations of *sculpted water* executed with hitherto unknown photographic instantaneity. They will grow out of the polychrome reliefs in waves whose immaterial ornamentation freezes the convulsive transitions of even the weakest and *most fugitive metamorphoses of smoke*. They will solidify aquatic vegetations and the hair of these new women (who are more appetizing than the slight thirst caused by the imaginative temperature of the life of the floral ecstasies in which they meet with their destruction). These columns of feverish flesh are destined to support nothing more than the celebrated soft-bellied dragon whose belly is as heavy as the block of bulky lead into which it has been sculptured in a subtle ethereal way; a block of natural lead, which (thanks to its ridiculous excess of weight which, however, leads us to the necessary idea of gravity), accentuates, aggravates and perversely complicates, the sublime sense of infinite, ice-like sterility – all of which makes column’s irrational dynamism more comprehensible and lamentable.<sup>34</sup>

*Informe*, the notion developed by Bataille and announced by Dali (referring to the previous sector of “informe”), here remains crucial to understand the metaphorical commentary of Dali. These architectures, liquefied, melting, as “*sculpted water*”, softened as “*most fugitive metamorphoses of smoke*”, yielding “eat me”, are typical visible symptoms of the immense “psycho-atmospheric-anamorphic object” with a great irrational glamour.

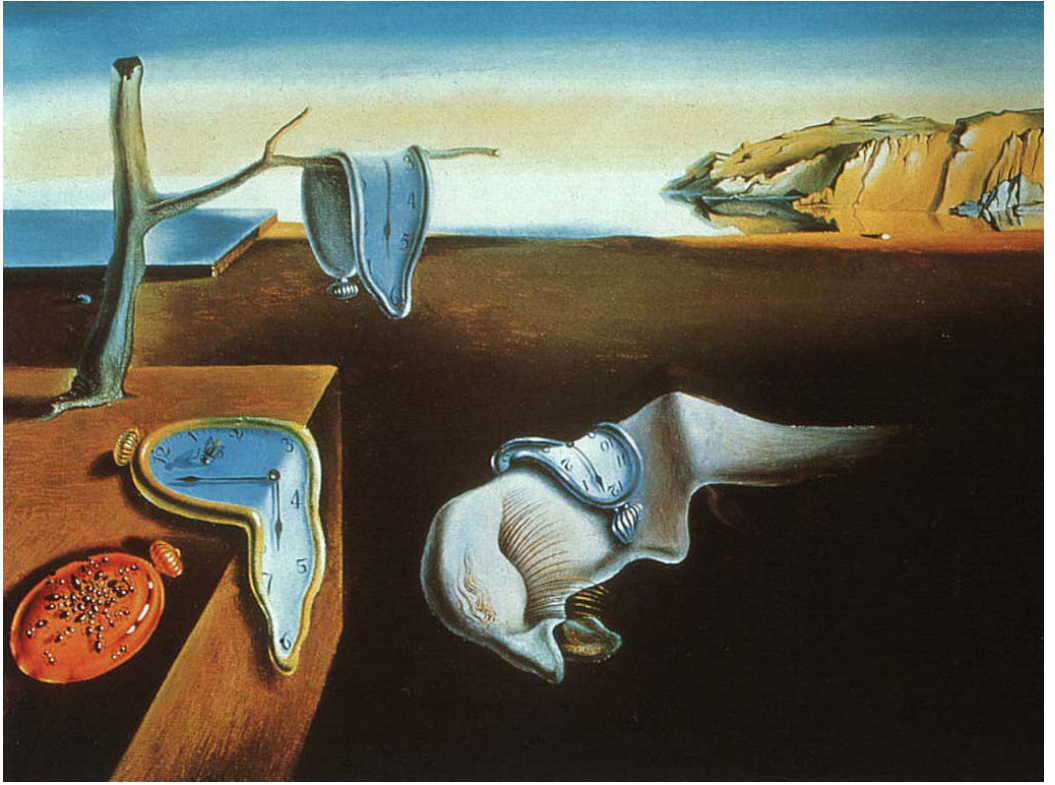
*Fossil sea waves...*

Man Ray

*Wrought iron scum...*

Man Ray





Being revealers of images and associations, they function as the critical interventions of Dali's *paranoiac-critical method*, proceeding by a spontaneous multiplication of obsessive feelings and images, which in spite of their sudden and instantaneous appearance do have a relatively coherent structure and can be brought to the plane of reality through these critical interventions. As "*indices*", these *architectures-trovées* are the exteriorized symptoms of Dali's attitude towards architecture as an inner obsession of a return to the narcissistic state of childhood, a state in which architecture could be experienced again as an object of love – a poetic object, as true surrealist and symbolic object of reference.

As a result, the column, thanks to all these finely ambivalent circumstances, cannot fail to appear to us as the true "masochistic column" whose sole destiny is to "let itself be consumed by desire" like the true original soft column built and cut from that real desired meat towards which Napoleon, as the head of all the real and genuine imperialisms – which as we are accustomed to reiterating, are non-other than history's immense *cannibalisms* which are often represented by that concrete cutlet which wonderful didactical materialism has places, in its grilled and savory glory, just like an authentic William Tell, upon the very head of politics.

Therefore, to my way of thinking (and I cannot stress this enough), it is precisely the completely ideal architecture of Art Nouveau that incarnates the most tangible and delirious aspiration of *hyper-materialism*. An illustration of this apparent paradox is to be found in the comparison made between an Art Nouveau house assimilated into a cake and a pastry-cook's ornamental tart – even though this comparison is tasteless it is however, one which is lucid and clear. I repeat that the above is a lucid, intelligent comparison, not only because it states the violent materialist-prosaicism of immediate needs, but also because, by the same token, and in real terms, a non-euphemistic allusion is achieved to the nutritious, *edible* character of these houses which are nothing less than the first *edible* houses and the first and only *erotogenic* buildings whose existence verifies that most urgent and necessary "function" which is so important to the amorous imagination: namely, the ability, in as real a way as possible, *to eat the object of one's desire*.<sup>35</sup>

The phrase containing William Tell for instance is a typical paranoiac-critical one with several duplicated meanings. In Dali's painting *The enigma of William Tell*, William Tell is identified as father, and the cutlet on the head is interpreted by Dali as cannibalistic sacrifice – "I painted a picture of myself with a raw cutlet on my head. I was trying thus symbolically to tempt my father to come and eat this cutlet instead of me". With the fear of castration, Dali depicts in the picture the cutlet of his head as "the symbol of passionate cannibalistic ambivalence" and "paternal vengeance". Here in this phrase, Dali duplicate William Tell with "history's immense cannibalisms", while "the very head



of politics” is a duplication of the head of Tell’s son – in this occasion – the head of Dali himself.<sup>36</sup> By contemplating this painting one can hardly ignore the resemblance between it with the Villa Floirac of Rem Koolhaas, no matter on the level of the villa’s appearance or on the level of the structural schema.

Here we come again to the subject of *cannibalism* that I developed in the sector of “praying mantis”. According to the psychoanalytic explanation of Freud, all our love-objects are patterned ultimately on two archaic objects – our own body as a house, cave and tomb, and our mother’s as an earth, cave and protection. The mantis absorbs its surrounding world by imitating it; and for Dali, in order to fulfil one’s desire of absorbing the outer world in oneself, one eats the object of one’s desire. The fascinating, petrifying, castrating female mantis as the perfect symbol of phallic mother, decapitalizes her loving copulating voluntary male mantis by devouring its head; Dali, by returning to the primitive narcissistic state of childhood, where one can only appreciate one’s beloved object through oral satisfaction, cannibalizes the melting desirable Art Nouveau architecture, yielding voluntarily “eat me!”

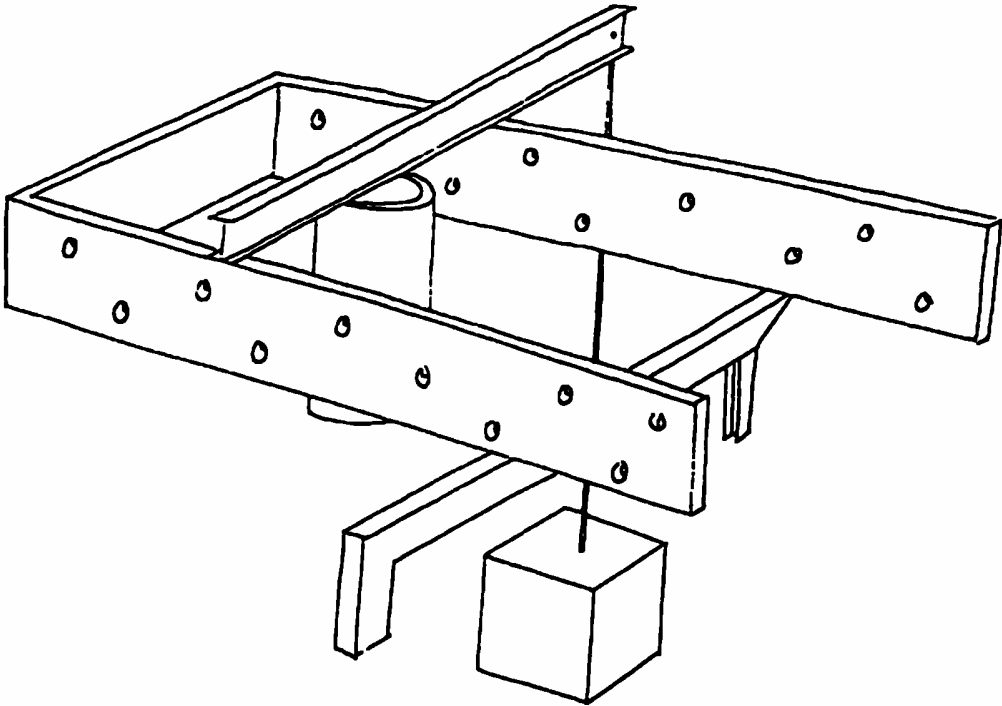
By describing the “General characteristics of the phenomenon”, Dali comments:

Profound disparagement of intellectual systems – A very marked decrease in the reasoning process which pushes to the point of *mental feebleness* – Positive lyrical imbecility – Total aesthetic unconsciousness – Absence of any lyrical-religious Compulsion; on the other hand: escape, liberty, the development of unconscious mechanisms – Ornamental automatism – Stereo type Neologisms great childhood neurosis, refuge in an ideal world, hatred of reality, etc. – Delusions of grandeur, perverse megalomania, “objective megalomania” – A need and feeling for the marvelous and for hyper-aesthetic originality – Absolute shameless pride, frenzied exhibitionism of “capriciousness” and of imperialistic “fantasy imaginings” – No notion of restraint at all – The realization of solidified desires – majestic blossoming forth of unconscious erotic, irrational tendencies.<sup>37</sup>

On the level of psycho-pathology, *hysteria*, the mental disorder discovered in the Salpêtrière School by Charot in 1875, is considered by the surrealists the greatest poetic discovery of the late 19th century.<sup>38</sup> Here, we find Dali commenting on the invention of “hysterical sculpture” as “non-stop erotic ecstasy”:

The invention of “hysterical sculpture” – Non-stop erotic ecstasy – Unprecedented contractions and attitudes in the history of statuary (reference is to the woman discovered and known since Charcot and Salpêtrière school) – Confusion and ornamental exacerbation in tune with pathological communications; precious dementedness – Close affinities with dreaming; reveries, dark imaginings – presence of characteristic dream-like elements; condensation, displacement, etc – Blossoming of the sado-anal complex – Flagrant ornamental coprophilia – Very slow, exhausting onanism, accompanied an enormous sense







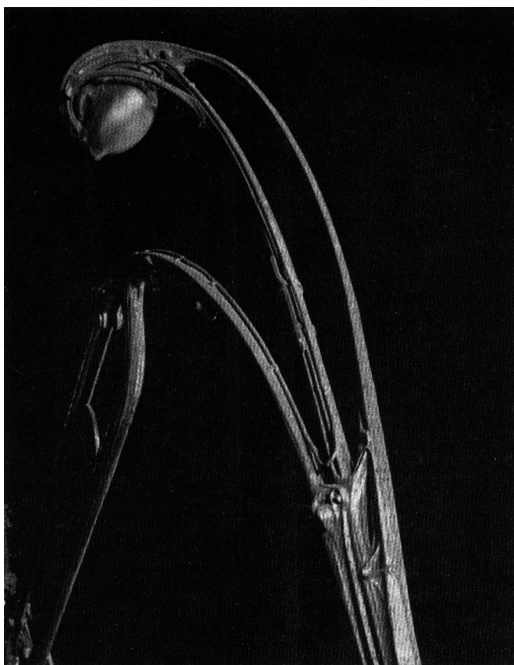
Exterior view of *Villa Floirac*,  
Hans Werlemann

*The enigma of William Tell*, 1933  
Salvador Dalí

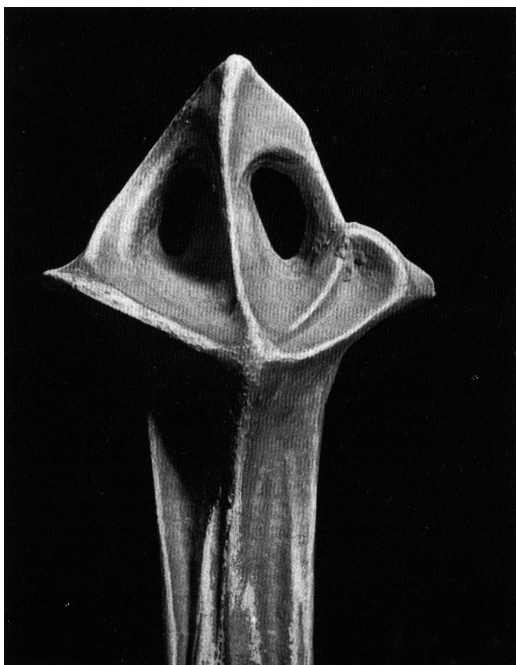
The structural schema of *Villa Floirac*  
OMA



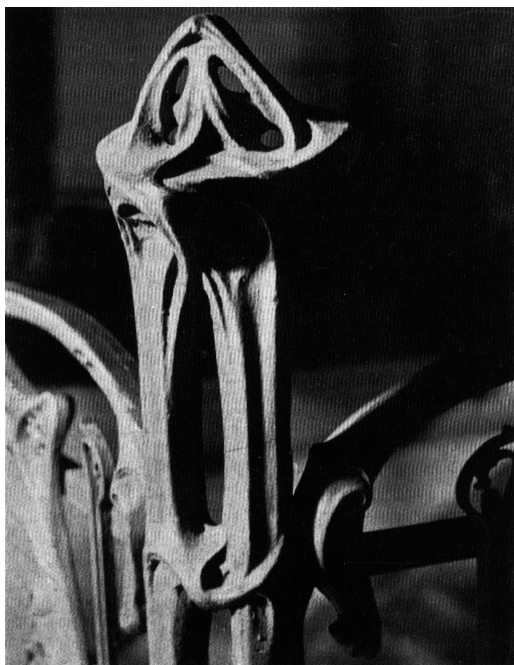
*Against the idealistic functionalism, the symbolic-psychic-materialist.*



*Again, it is about a metallic atavism of Angélu de Millet.*



*Eat-me!*



*Me too.*

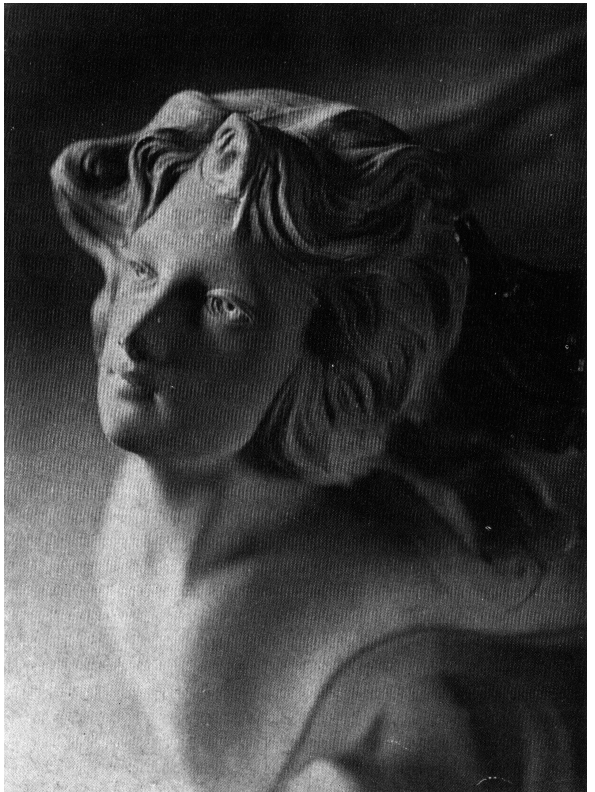
*Have you already seen the entrance of Paris's metro?*  
Brassai  
(Published in *Minotaure*, the original captions are in French.)

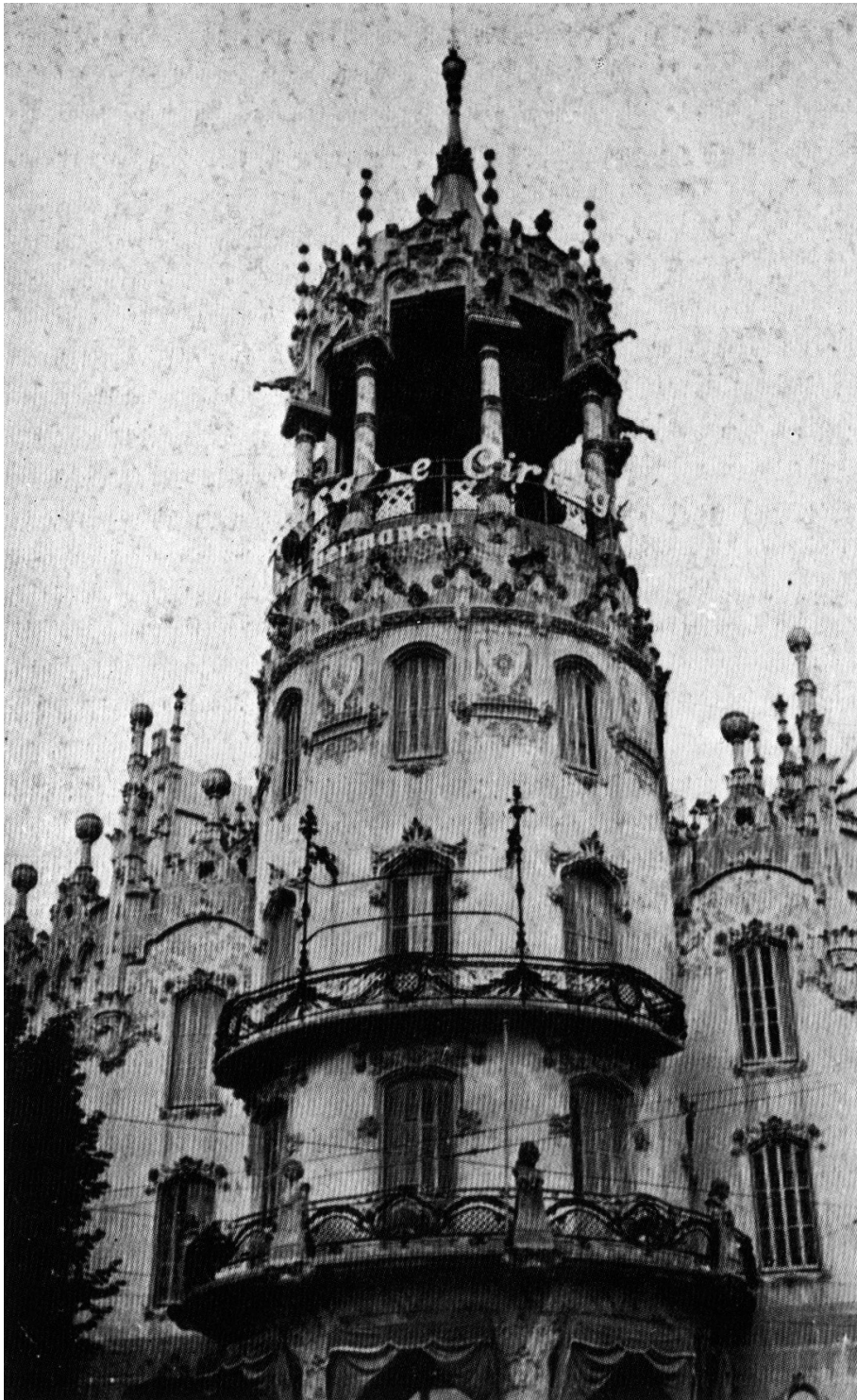


*Ecstasy of the cultture*  
Brassai



*The invention of the hysterical sculpture*  
Brassai





*The beauty will be EDIBLE or will be not at all.*



of guilt.<sup>39</sup>

Gaudi's "extra-plastic" concretizations of desire, these "true *sculptures of twilight clouds reflected on the water*" with "*shapes of wide waters, spreading water, waters ruffled by the wind*", raise a question of erecting a habitable building, therefore for Dali also "edible", which trigger his cry for "gigantic improvement based on a simple Rimbaudian submersion of the living-room to the bottom of the lake". These architectures with hideous monstrous hybrid are for Dali "house for 'living maniacs', house for 'sex maniacs'". To close his commentary, Dali defines the Art Nouveau architecture as "A return to beauty":

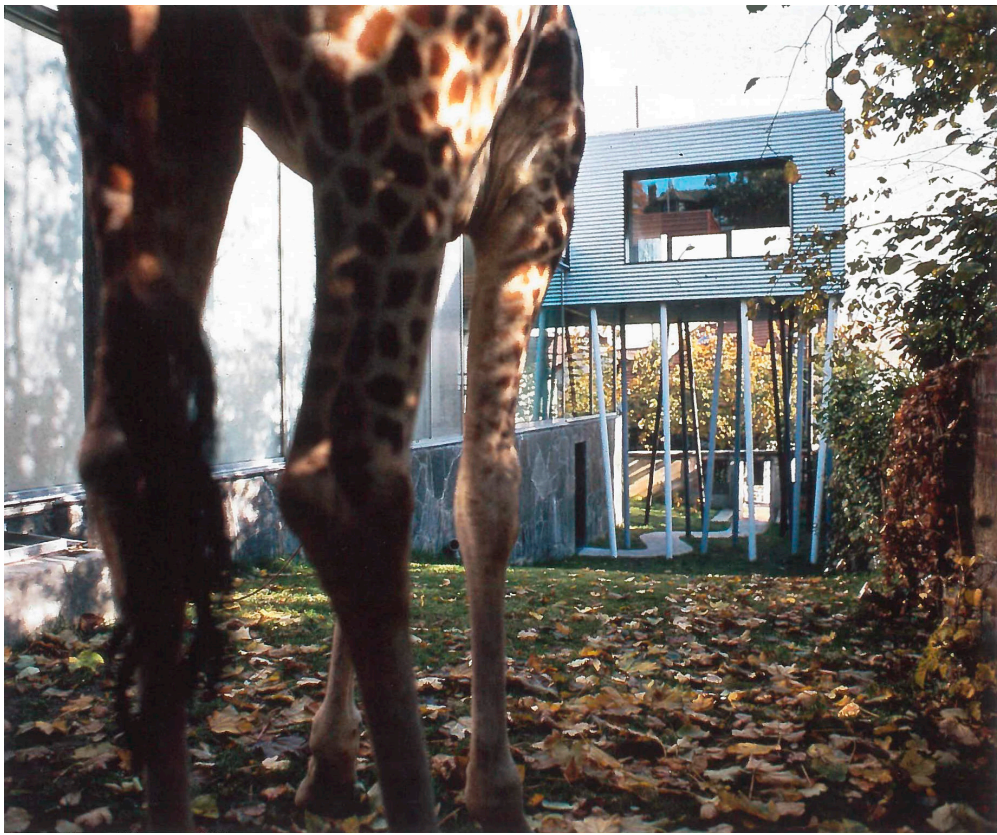
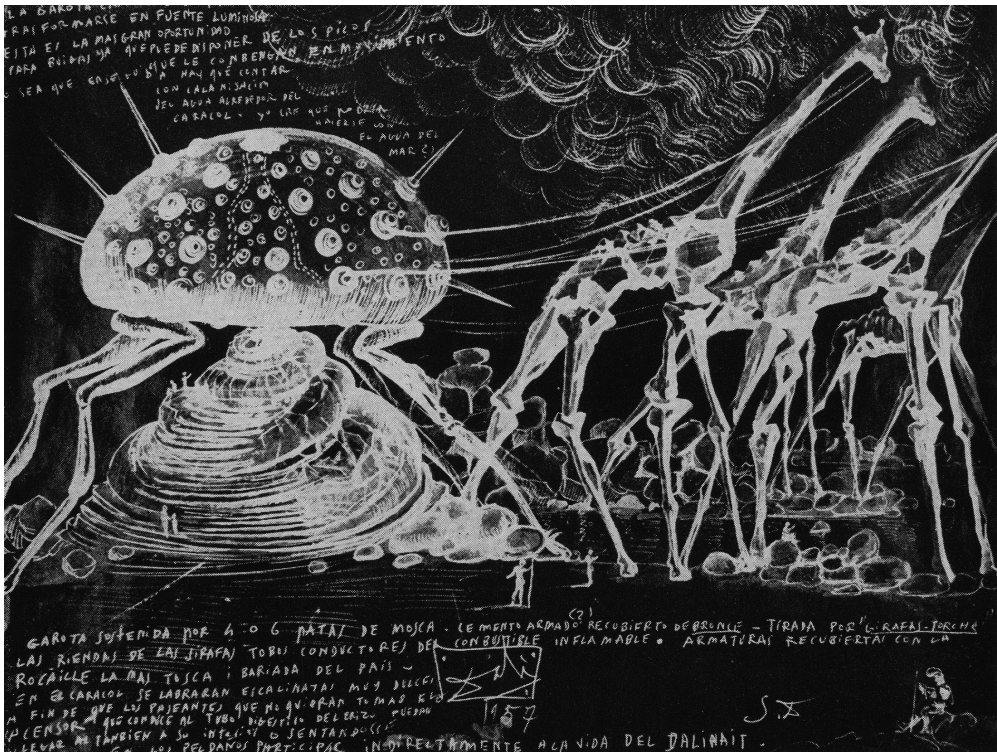
Erotic desire is the downfall of intellectual aesthetics. At the point where Venus of Logic disappears, the Venus of "Bad Taste", the "Venus in furs" makes her entrance under the banner of the one and only Beauty, that beauty which springs from real, vital, materialist disturbances – Beauty is nothing more than the sum of the total of our awareness of our perversions.<sup>40</sup>

By borrowing stylistically Breton's well known definition of convulsive beauty – "The beauty will by CONVULSIVE or will be not at all", Dali establishes his definition of edible beauty – "The beauty will be EDIBLE or will be not at all."

## CRITICS

Marcel Duchamp, who participated the movement with certain collaborations with the core figures, for instance the cooperative work of him and Breton as the entrance of Breton's art gallery "Gradiva" on the left bank of Paris which is quite conceptual in nature,<sup>41</sup> reacted violently against the surrealists' hyper-visual approach. He intended throughout his works to have a radical and long-lasting effect: "What I don't like is the completely non-conceptual, which is purely *retinal* – that irritates me".<sup>42</sup> The surrealists' visions on architecture described above, correspond unluckily very well to Duchamp's critic.

Koolhaas, who eulogized the paranoiac-critical method of Dali as "one of the genuine inventions of the (20th) century",<sup>43</sup> while looking at Dali's works of concretizations of dreamscapes like the *Dream of Venus*, critics "Dali risks going from the sublime to the ridiculous".<sup>44</sup> Yet this critic remains somehow ambivalent. Within the periodical Architectural Forum in the number of November 1957, there was an article dedicated to a Dali-designed night club which will "move and breathe" in the jungles at Acapulco.<sup>45</sup> The exterior perspective depicts a sea urchin supported on four or six fly's legs carried by a series of "torch giraffes". Beside Dali's well-known consistent extra-plastic delirious design, the dragging giraffes remind me sharply the photographs that Koolhaas fabricated for Villa Dall'Ava, 1985-91, in which the giraffe drags the villa standing on its slender-inclined-fly's-legs-like-*pilotis*, as if it can "move and breathe". By somehow forgetting his critic towards Dali, Koolhaas borrowed, knowing or without knowing, one giraffe and multiple fly's legs from Dali's night club in the jungles at Acapulco, as







View of Villa Dall'Ava with the giraffe  
OMA

*The night club at Acapulco, 1957*  
Salvador Dalí

View of Villa Dall'Ava with the giraffe  
OMA

accessories, to construct his enigmatic delirious images of the villa in the woods at Saint-Cloud, heading in the direction of the capital – Paris.

## NOTES

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4. “Le Corset Mystère”, André Breton, *Mont de Piété*, Oeuvres complètes 1, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p.16.
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6. Ibid., p.667–668.
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16. Ibid., p.764.
17. Dalibor Veseley, “Surrealism and Architecture Introduced by Dalibor Veseley: Surrealism, Myth and Modernity,” p.94.
18. André Breton, *L'Amour fou*, p.682.
19. Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture*, p.596.
20. Dalibor Veseley, “Surrealism and Architecture Introduced by Dalibor Veseley: Surrealism, Myth and Modernity,” p.94–95.
21. In André Breton, *Arcane 17*, quoted in Dalibor Veseley, “Surrealism and Architecture Introduced by Dalibor Veseley: Surrealism, Myth and Modernity,” p.92.
22. *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, no. 6 (15 May 1933), pp. 10–24.
23. Raymond Spiteri, “Surrealism and the Irrational Embellishment of Paris,” in *Surrealism and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2005), p.192–202.
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29. Bernard Tschumi, “Architecture and Its Double,” p.112.
30. Roberto Matta, “Mathématiques sensibles – Architecture du temps,” in *Minotaure : revue artistique et littéraire*, no. 11 (Paris, 1938); Tristan Tzara, “D’un certain automatisme du goût,” in *Minotaure : revue artistique et littéraire*, no. 3-4 (Paris, 1933); Salvador Dali, “De la beauté terrifiante et comestible de l’architecture modern style,” in *Minotaure : revue artistique et littéraire*, no. 3-4 (Paris, 1933).
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32. Ibid., p.139.
33. Ibid., p.138.
34. Ibid., p.139–140.
35. Ibid., p.140.
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37. Ibid., p.140.
38. Ibid., p.142.
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40. Ibid.
41. Further reading on this intervention, see Denis Hollier and Rosalind Krauss, "Surrealist Precipitates: Shadows Don't Cast Shadows," *October* 69 (1994): p.122–123, doi:10.2307/778991.
42. Bernard Tschumi, "Architecture and Its Double," p.112.
43. Rem Koolhaas, quoted in Roberto Gargiani and Office for Metropolitan Architecture, *Rem Koolhaas/OMA: The Construction of Merveilles*, [Second printing 2011], *Essays in Architecture* (Lausanne: EPFL Press, 2011), p.13; and in Jane Alison, Mary Ann Caws, and Barbican Art Gallery, *The Surreal House* (London: Barbican Art Gallery in association with Yale University Press, 2010), p.31.
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45. "GOOD NIGHT DALI," in *Architectural Forum*, November, 1957; *Dalí arquitectura: La Pedrera, Paseo de Gràcia 92, Barcelona, del 19 de junio al 25 de agosto 1996* (Barcelona: Fundació Caixa de Catalunya, 1996), p.205.



# Lens 2.0 | Icarian Odyssey

## DEPARTURE

Messieurs Le Corbusier et Jeanneret  
35, rue de Sèvres  
Contrexéville 1er juillet 1929

Monsieur,

Faisant suite à ma conversation d'hier, je vous confirme mon intention de vous confier probablement cet automne ou peut-être cet hiver les travaux que je pourrais faire faire dans mon appartement, travaux qui dépendront beaucoup de vos dessins et de vos devis, car ainsi que je vous le disais je ne suis pas encore décidé sur l'importance de ces travaux. Je tiens à vous répéter ici mon désir de voir un autre dessin de vous inspiré de notre conversation d'hier et du petit croquis que je vous ai fait. Je serai à Paris très exactement le 14 juillet au soir. Je vous téléphonerai donc le 15 matin pour prendre un rendez-vous ce même jour car je dois partir le 16 matin pour l'Italie ne devant rentrer à Paris qu'au mois d'octobre. Veuillez me répondre si je puis compter sur ce dessin et sur ce rendez-vous? Dans l'attente de vous lire, croyez, Monsieur, à l'assurance de ma parfaite considération.

Charles de Beistegui<sup>1</sup>

That was the beginning of the enigmatic penthouse at Champs-Élysées, a “liner” above the sublime urban ocean of Paris, devoted to the cosmopolitan millionaire Charles de Beistegui, coming from a world of richness, endless balls, with social elites as princesses, marquises, countesses, dons, madams, artists, etc, a world loaded with desires, innumerable complicated love affairs, a world within which there is no place left for worries to get what one requires, a world of *l'âge d'or*.<sup>2</sup> De Beistegui, having a taste of *Art Décoratif*,

a career as entertainer, being a bon-vivant, an art maniac, an amateur of Surrealism, asks one of the protagonists of modern architecture – Le Corbusier to design him an apartment – not for long term living but majorly for the parties during his short sojourns in Paris; “of which the aim, obviously, is only amusement”<sup>3</sup> – sais the architect. By showing his precise schedule of one of his brief stays in Paris, he proves his exigent personality. Here is Le Corbusier’s reply of 5 July 1929:

Your brief interests us because it is *a shop-window programme* (Champs-Élysées), because it proposes *a solution for the rooftops of Paris* which I’ve been talking about for fifteen years ... As for me, my campaign has been running for twenty years. Now, the victory has been won. I am famous; what I do is known. Every day I am trying to bring it to perfection. I have one idea only, to make of each of my problems a pure, unbeatable, correct work.<sup>4</sup>

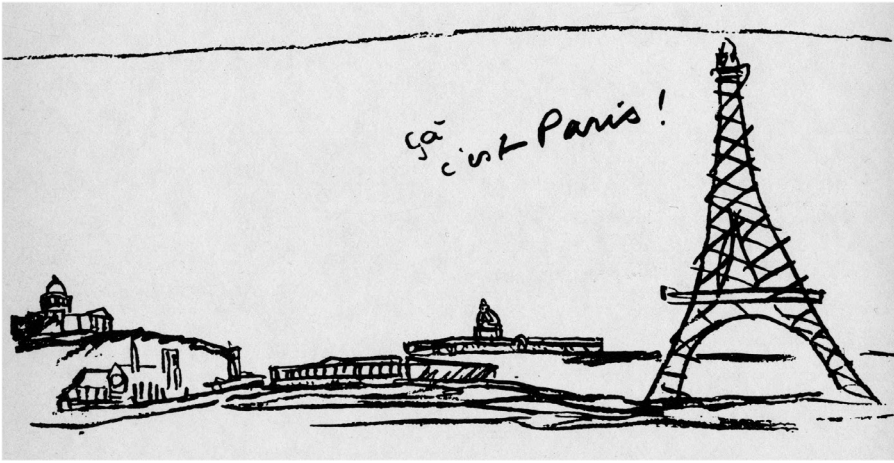
Le Corbusier once regarded it as paradigmatic examples of solutions for his urbanistic principles, by juxtaposing the penthouse of Beistegui aside the Pavillon Suisse in a letter that he addressed to the Italian modernist P.M. Bardi in 1933. Been situated at the hinge of two decades, between June 1929 and the summer of 1930, as the last villa of the 1920s and a new start of the villas conceptions in the 1930s, to merely consider it as a simple roof garden, a prototype of Corbusian dogma as *Plan Voisin* or *Ville Radiense* would be extremely unilateral and reductive. According to the examination of Tim Benton, it “reveals that, rather as in the case of the Villa Savoye, this undertaking forms a coda and critique of the 1920s villas.”<sup>5</sup> It is a critique of his own urbanistic dogma, a new departure for a “*revolution in architecture*”<sup>6</sup> to re-appropriate “*L’esprit de Paris*”<sup>7</sup> with a devoted research in “*vue*”<sup>8</sup> yet without any melancholic nostalgia, an origin for his trilling, affective, conscious or unconscious lifelong Icarian Odyssey struggling and oscillating in between the *poiesis* and *techné*<sup>9</sup>. With this premise, the relationship between this penthouse, further on Le Corbusier with Surrealism is far beyond retinal.

## L’ESPRIT DE PARIS

Occupons-nous de la beauté fière de Paris. M’adressant aux académiciens, je pose la question: “Qu’est-ce que Paris? Où est la beauté de Paris? Qu’est-ce que *l’esprit de Paris*?”

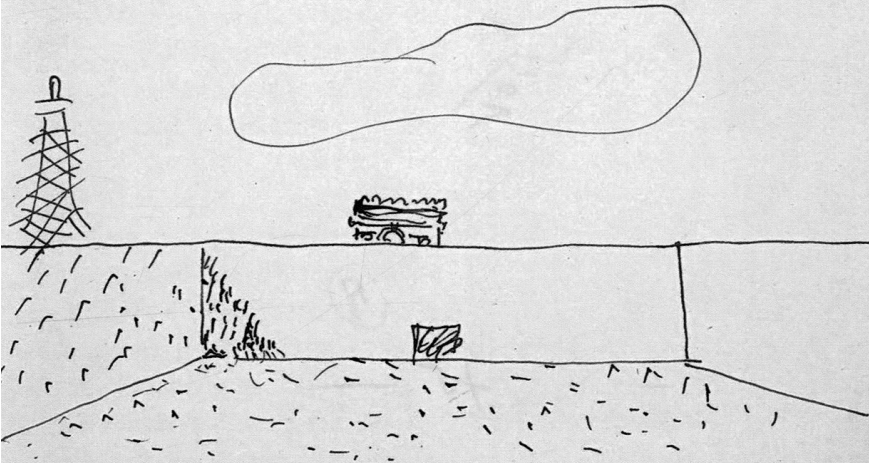
Je dessine la ville médiévale, Notre-Dame dans la Cité entourée d’eau, et ces ponts chargés de maisons, ces grandes routes qui sortent des portes et conduisent dans les provinces; et ces abbayes marquant la première étape: Saint-Germain-des-Prés, Saint-Antoine, etc. Premier dessin.

J’exprime maintenant un événement hautain: la construction de la Colonnade du Louvre par le Roy-Soleil. Quelle superbe, quel mépris de ce qui est, quelle rupture de l’harmonie, quel sacrilège insolent! En face des dents de scie des



33406

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5  
53



Two above  
Conference sketches, 1929

Left below  
Conceptual sketch

maisons à pignons, en face du maquis des ruelles, au tourment de la ville médiévale écrasée sur elle-même, le magnifique artifice intellectuel du Grand Siècle! Deuxième dessin.

Le Roy continue! Voici les Invalides et une coupole au pays des flèches gothiques: indifférence aux traditions nationales, violation du site, coup d'État! Troisième dessin.

Le visage de Paris s'est rempli de traits précis, véritable chanson de pierres. Soufflot a campé le Panthéon au sommet de Sainte-Geneviève, autre coupole! Les poètes acclament l'harmonie radieuse et décente des pierres de France. Boum!... Voici Eiffel. Patatras! Voici la Tour! C'est Paris! C'est encore Paris! La Tour est chère aux Parisiens; elle est, au-delà des plus lointaines frontières, piquée au cœur de ceux qui rêvent de Paris. Quatrième dessin.

L'autre colline est tiarée: le Sacré-Cœur. On voit l'Arc de l'Etoile, Notre-Dame. La Tour Eiffel est devenue dans le monde le signe de Paris. J'inscris: "C'est encore Paris!" Cinquième dessin.

Alors je dessine cet événement contemporain: la Cité d'Affaires de Paris. Immense et magnifique: étincelante et en ordre! Fort de l'histoire de la Ville, fort de sa puissance vitale, de son sens de la convenance, de son esprit vif et éternellement créateur – voire de son rapide et traditionnel esprit révolutionnaire – fort de la chronologie, fort de la foi que j'ai dans la présente époque, fort des réalités ardentes de l'imminent demain, je dis froidement, avec conviction et décision: "*Ça, c'est Paris!*" Je sens que le monde entier a les yeux sur Paris, espère de Paris le geste qui ordonne, crée et élève dans l'ordre, l'événement architectural qui éclairera toutes les autres villes. Je crois en Paris. J'espère en Paris. Je supplie Paris de faire aujourd'hui, de nouveau, ce geste de son histoire: continuer!

L'académisme crie: Non!<sup>10</sup>

With his *amour fou* toward Paris, Le Corbusier exhibits in his "*Ça, c'est Paris!*" five drawings revealing *l'esprit de Paris* with "les lieux sacrés de Paris", and continues to draw a contemporary one – la Cité d'Affaires de Paris – as a prolongation of Paris spirit, surely blended with an *esprit nouveau*. The Paris which contains the "Esprit de Paris" is not so much the real, material and social city, but rather a *mental construction*, an intelligible *representation loaded with meanings*. Le Corbusier, in the large urban landscape of Paris, locates, selects, and privileges the generating nuclei, the knots, the emergencies of each period, the places of collective memory, and, in accordance with his formal and ideological *a priori*, his obsession, his subjectivity, following the flow of desire and his love toward Paris, the major trans-historical constant, sharing the same nature with the *forest of indice* of Breton. "Select", "privilege", within the constellation of Parisian landscape, these are pure processes of the objective chance or the paranoiac critique method, the resulted urban treasures are the anchor points of his inner finalities, there-



fore this urban constellation is no longer isotropic, thus been convulsed into a “reality in the second degree, narrower but more dramatic than the one perceived by a natural version”. Through this process, the urban landscape of Paris is transformed into its representation with its “les lieux sacrés” as signs, thus a concatenation of reality and its representation, its sign. With this hint, one may remind the surrealists’ enthusiasm for signs, and the aesthetic of the movement as an experience of reality transformed into representation.

Yet Le Corbusier’s contemplation of this landscape comes from a more distant point of observation – that of a “liner”, since he has proudly flown over the city at high altitudes he now possesses “tous les secrets qu’elle cachait”. But the airplane is just an instrument of observation; it confirms, at the right moment, that truth, together with the beauty of things, does not give itself away immediately; neither is it evidence of something, but both are the product of a mental process of *esprit nouveau* which wipes things clean from the appearances which traditions, false beliefs, tricks and mystifying ideologies have accumulated around them.

As much as Le Corbusier tries to give the “*esprit de Paris*” a degree of “thingness” this stays a *mental construction*, revealed by a work of un-masking and interpretation. What is symptomatic, and also emblematic, is the way Le Corbusier relates to the historical legacy, urban and architectural. It is in his own words a *revolution of architecture*, which permit to re-appropriate the historical heritage without a too strong attachment to the past. Since history – according to Le Corbusier – moves by way of superimpositions and cataclysms, as Zarathustra revealed – history has a spiral evolution with memory of eternal returns. Le Corbusier ends his recital of cataclysms with “Voici Paris! C’est encore Paris”, because he refers to the super-historical, speculative and precarious term “*Esprit de Paris*”. History is no longer immediately recognizable and Paris is lost, without hope, to experience. After all the cataclysms, only the *mental construction* remains.<sup>11</sup> The historical legacy is surely inadequate to serve the Machine society; to conserve the historical legacy one needs to operate certain clarifications, to select and make intelligible the extraneousness from contemporary civilization and from its mental conceptuality. Le Corbusier’s different plans for Paris represent a sharp, recklessly sharp, application of this conceptuality. In regard of the *Plan Voisin*, Le Corbusier says: “Mais s’il faut convenir qu’ainsi leur cadre original se trouverait transformé, il faut admettre aussi que leur cadre actuel est faux et par surplus triste et laid.”<sup>12</sup> This opinion may remind one of the sector of “frames” widely employed by the surrealist photographers that I developed in the Arche lens chapter. In the large parks of the *Plan Voisin*, monuments appear for the first time open to overall views, relating to one another and forming the “analogous city” of historical Paris, like transcendent soloists, standing out of the chorus, performing a *merveilleux* urban cappella. In this sense, the penthouse that Le Corbusier conceived for de Beistegui could be considered symptomatic.

## EVOLUTION

Till the beginning of the construction there were six clearly defined and differentiated projects.<sup>13</sup> Within this evolution, Le Corbusier strove ceaselessly to search the diverse possibilities of framing, of *vue*, and to endow each element and each *organ* of this minor architectural landscape with its own singularity, integrity and independence.<sup>14</sup>

1. 3-4 June 1929, referring to FLC 17431, 17434, 17435, the first scheme, prepared in plan, section, elevations and axonometric has a classic simplicity, and largely followed the plan of the existing apartment. The design is based on a high-ceilinged salon with full-height four-bay picture window overlooking the Champs-Élysées in the south-west, and other views offered from the upper terrace and solarium. Two symmetrically disposed spiral staircases provide main and service access to the top floor, which provides a simple solarium, as well as two maids' rooms. The rear wall of the library is treated like an attic wall, curving upwards to provide clerestory lighting from the terrace. This is a statement of faith in the essential joys of sun and air, with no apparent trace of the *jeux d'esprit* to follow. In this version, the roof terrace has only two levels.

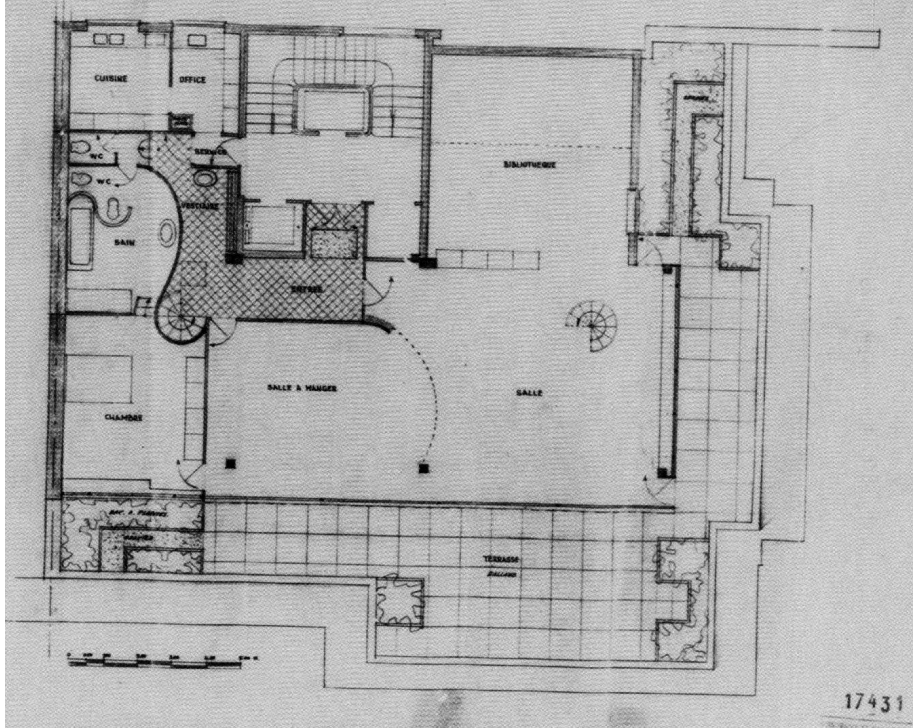
2. 14 November 1929, referring to FLC 17646, 17647, 17436, a set of plans was produced in which a characteristic explosion of the arrangement took place. Instead of a simple iron staircase rising through the salon, there were now two staircases, one internal, rising up through two sides of the library, and one external, riding on the back of the other round two sides of the exterior wall. This elaborate *promenade architecturale* continued on the roof terrace, on four levels: a lower level over the dining room and bedroom, continued with a few steps on the second level on the roof of the salon, and a third level above the projection housing the lift mechanism of the apartment block. This top level was now laid out with a croquet lawn offering the only unobstructed panoramic view, while another set of steps rose to a place of command the fourth level above the staircase housing, as a conning tower. The guardrail to this tower clearly indicates its nautical origin, and one imagines Le Corbusier leaning over it with pipe in mouth, as he is portrayed in Pierre Chenal's 1930 film *Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, which featured the villa in Garches.<sup>15</sup> The view was now open only from the roof of the salon, but – anticipating Le Corbusier's next moves – obscured by vegetation along the remainder of the south side, while the solarium pavilion had been pushed back to the northwest, away from the Champs Élysées.

3. 30 November 1929, referring to FLC 17437-17439, some of this baroque complexity of circulation was renounced, with the reintroduction of the spiral staircase in the salon, displaced into the library and rising to an apse-shaped staircase housing similar to the first scheme. The external staircase remained as in the scheme of a few days earlier. The high clipped hedges on the second level terrace blocked the view to the northwest

4. After December 1929, referring to FLC 17440, 17565, 17567, a firm agreement to proceed on the basis of a figure was obtained, the first result was a reintroduction of

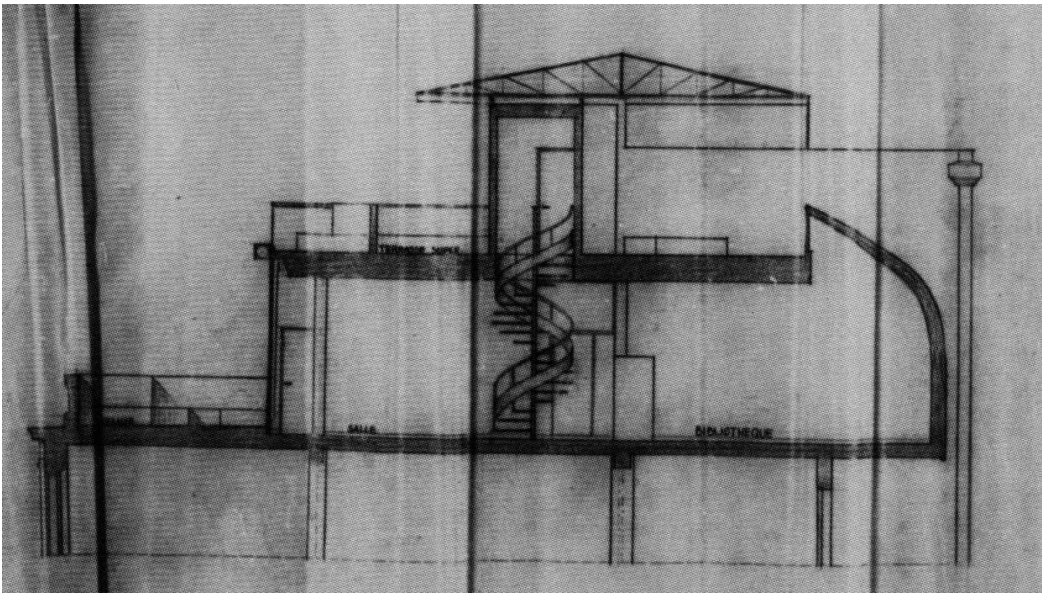
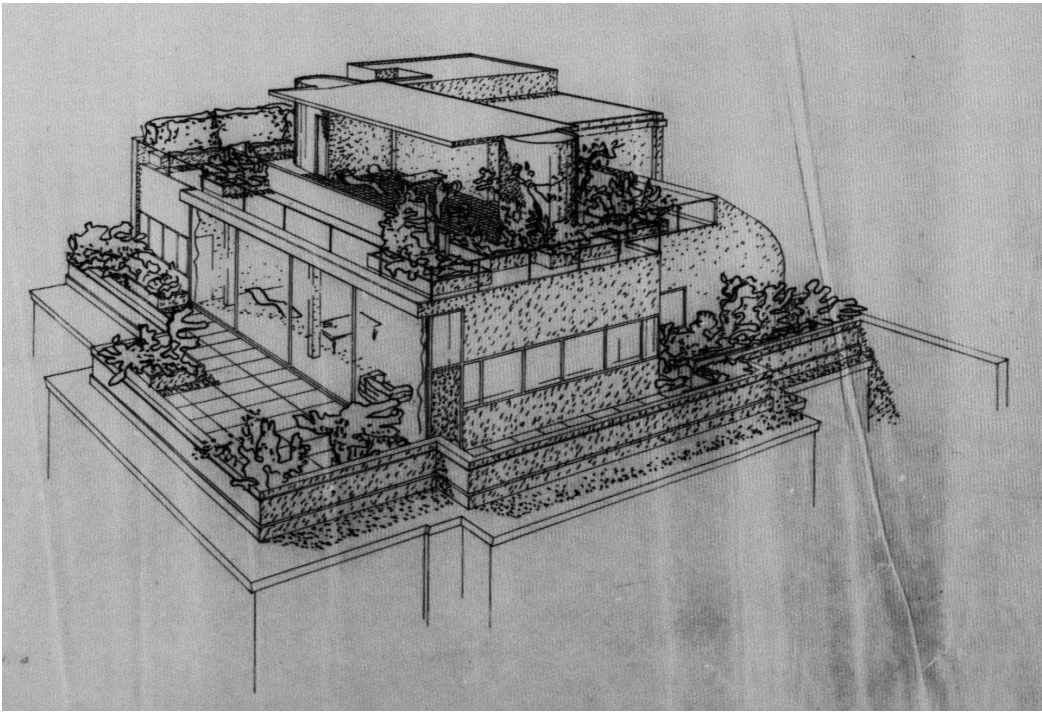
DE BEISTEGUI  
PLAN ÉTAGE 1 50

2153  
3 JUN 1929

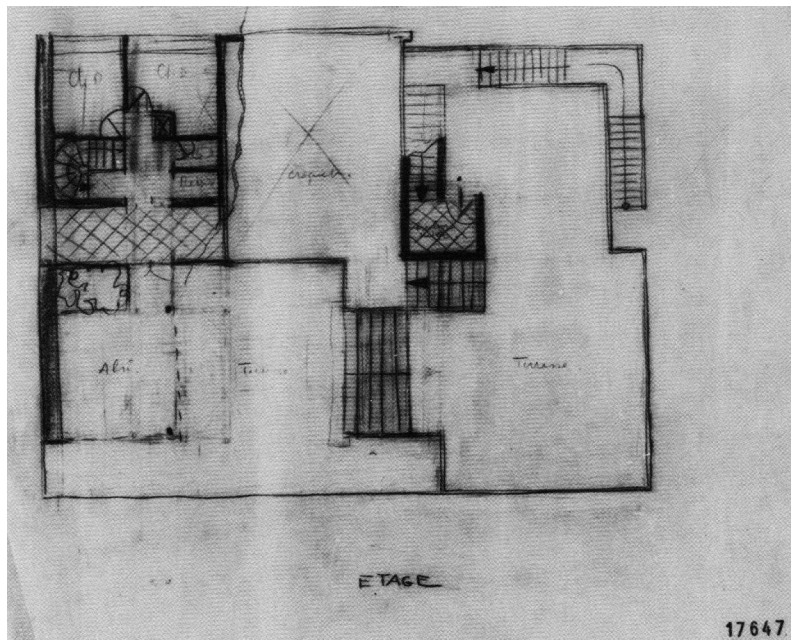
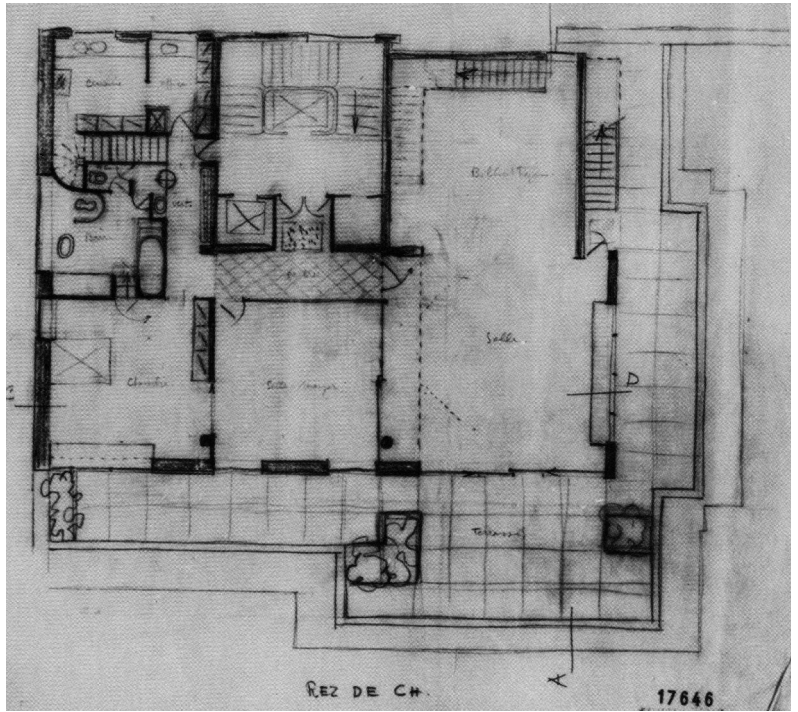


FLC 17431





FLC 17434, 17435



FLC 17646, 17647

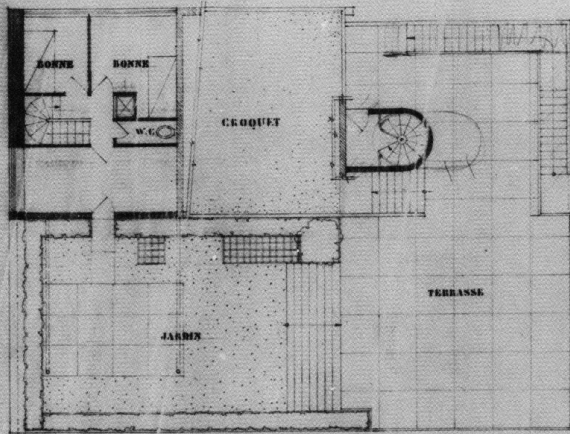


# DE BEISTEGUI

ETAGE

## 2247

30 NOVEMBRE 1929



ECHELLE 1:50

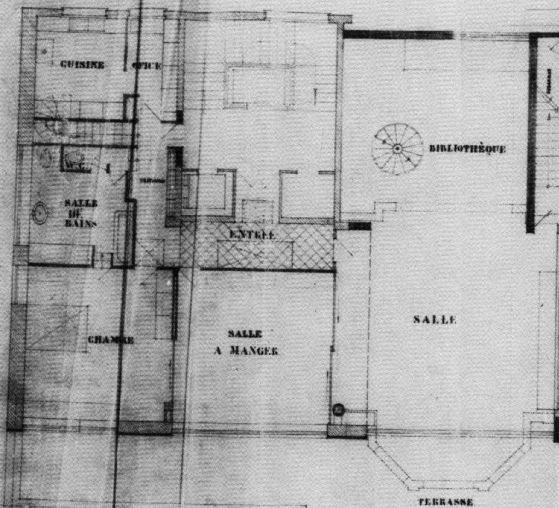
17438

# DE BEISTEGUI

REZ DE CHAUSSEE

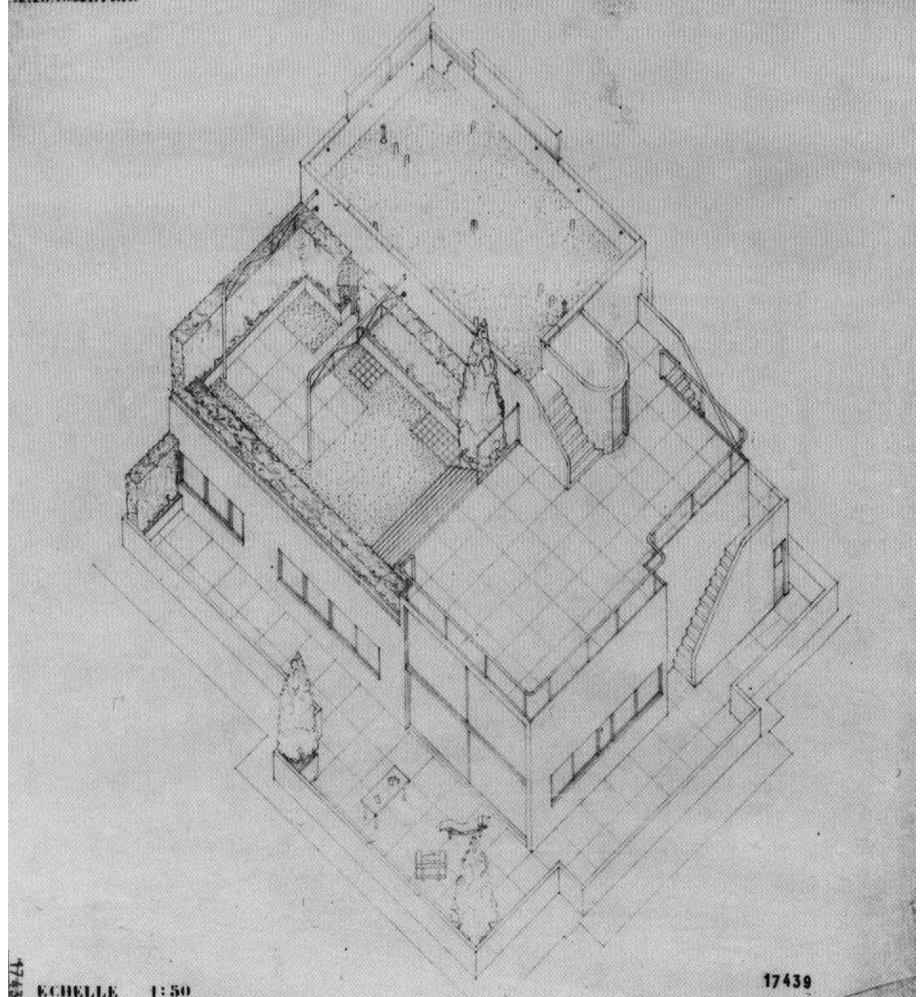
## 2246

30 NOVEMBRE 1929



ECHELLE 1:50

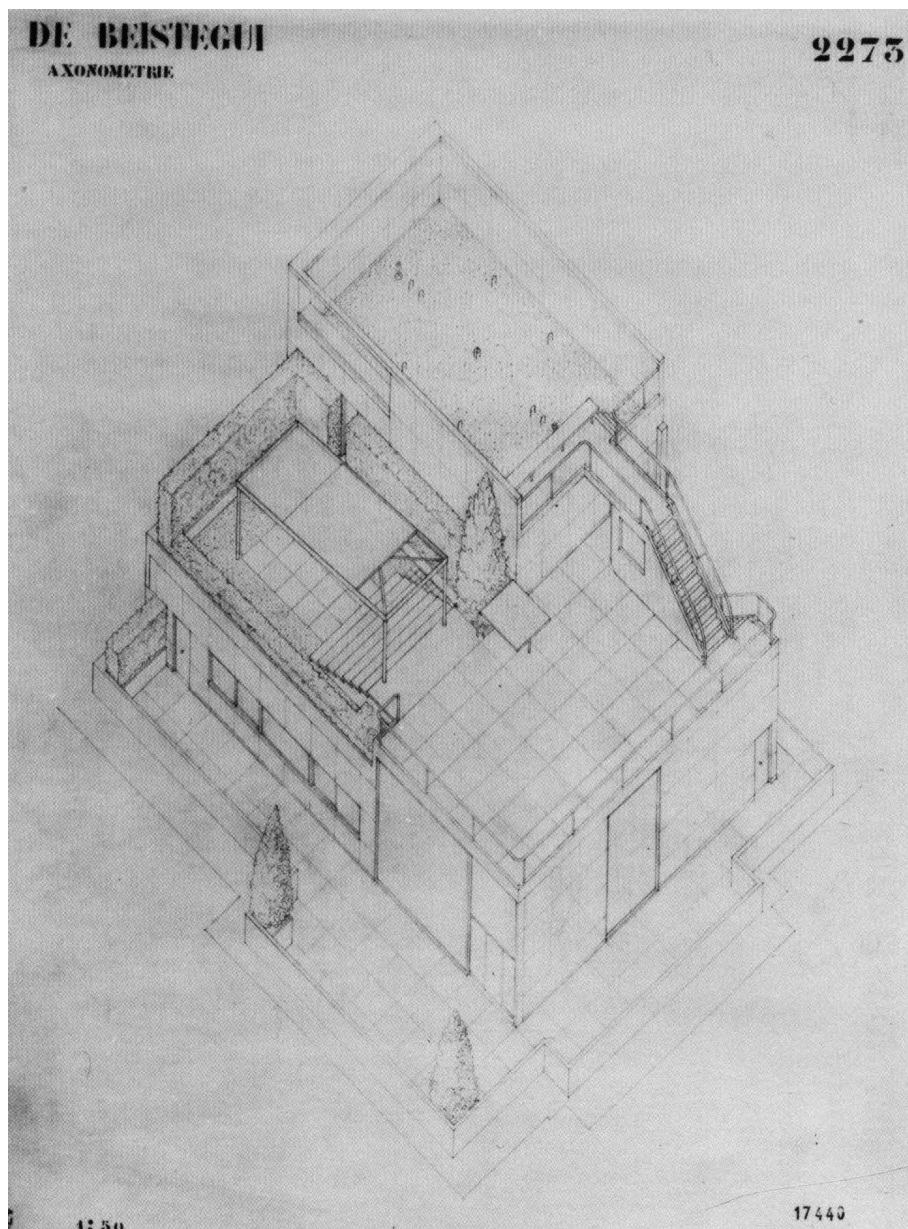
17437



Left  
FLC 17438, 17437

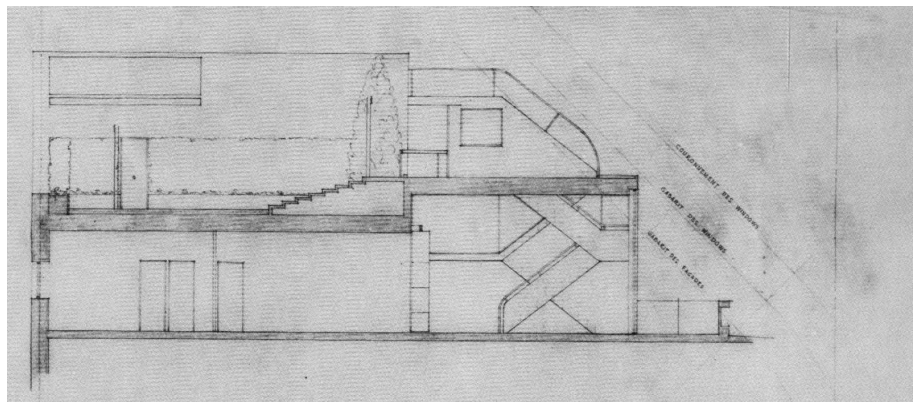
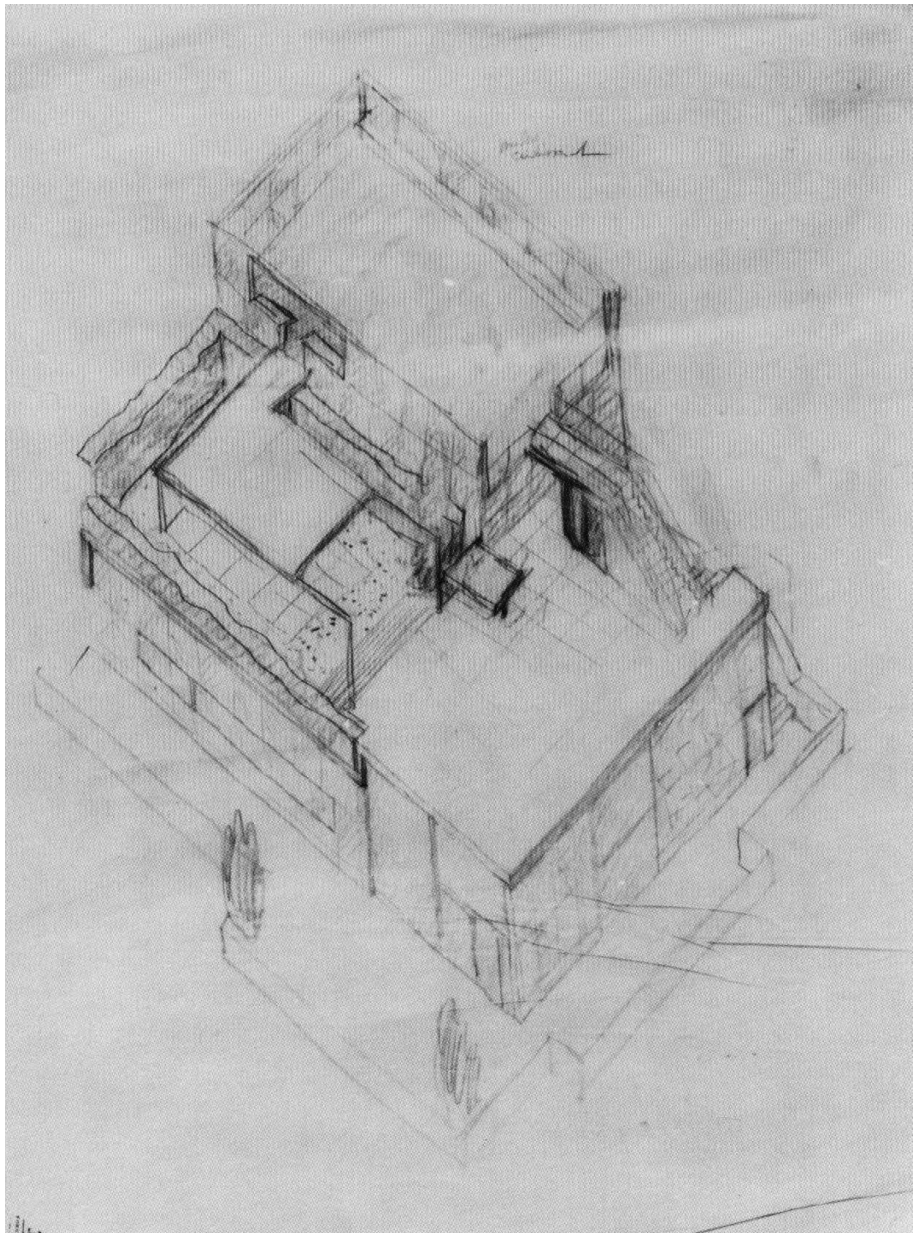
Right  
FLC 17439





Left  
FLC 17440

Right  
FLC 17565, 17567





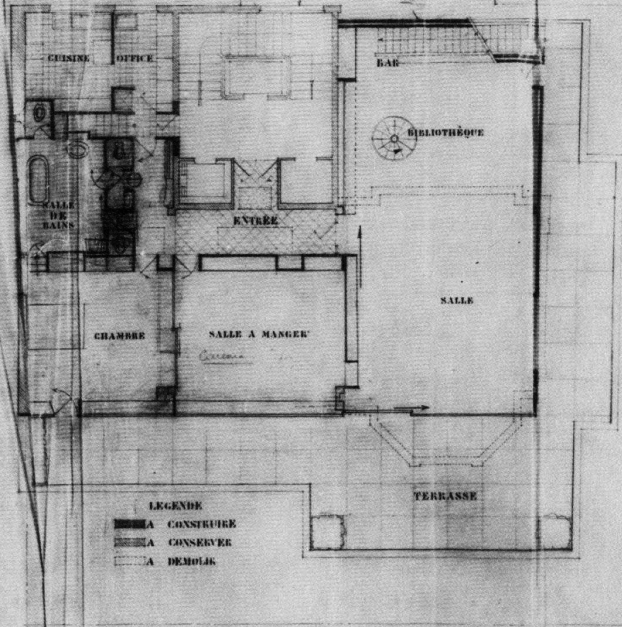
# DE BEISTEGUI

REZ DE CHAUSSEE

## 2276

10 JANVIER 1930

FLC 17441,  
17442



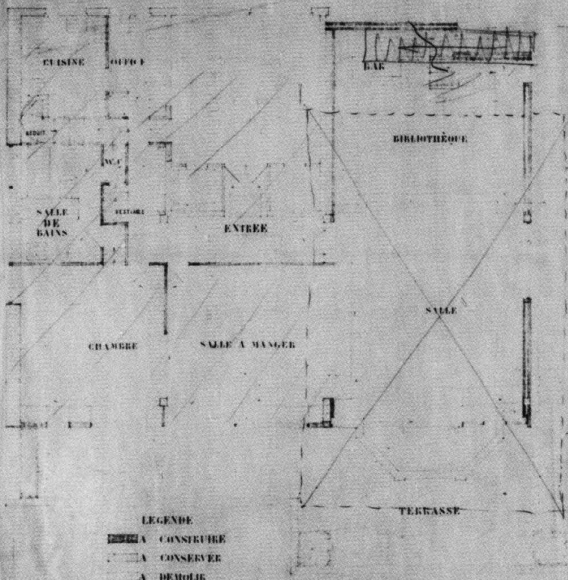
17441

# DE BEISTEGUI

REZ DE CHAUSSEE

## 2276

10 JANVIER 1930



ECHELLE 1:50

17442

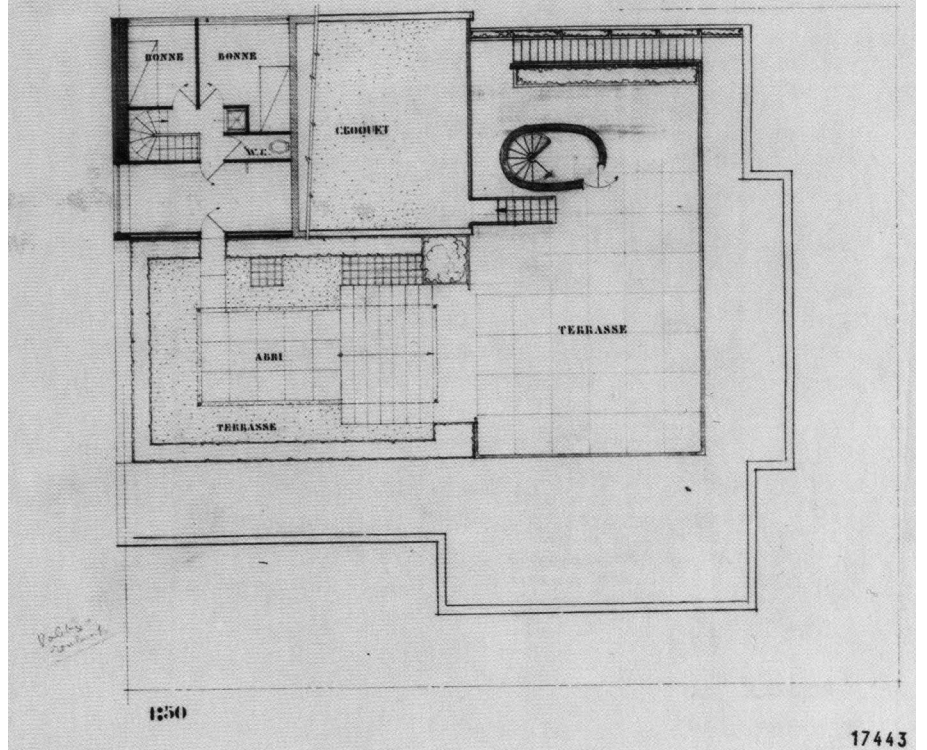


DE BEISTEGUI

2277

ETAGE

10 JANVIER 1930



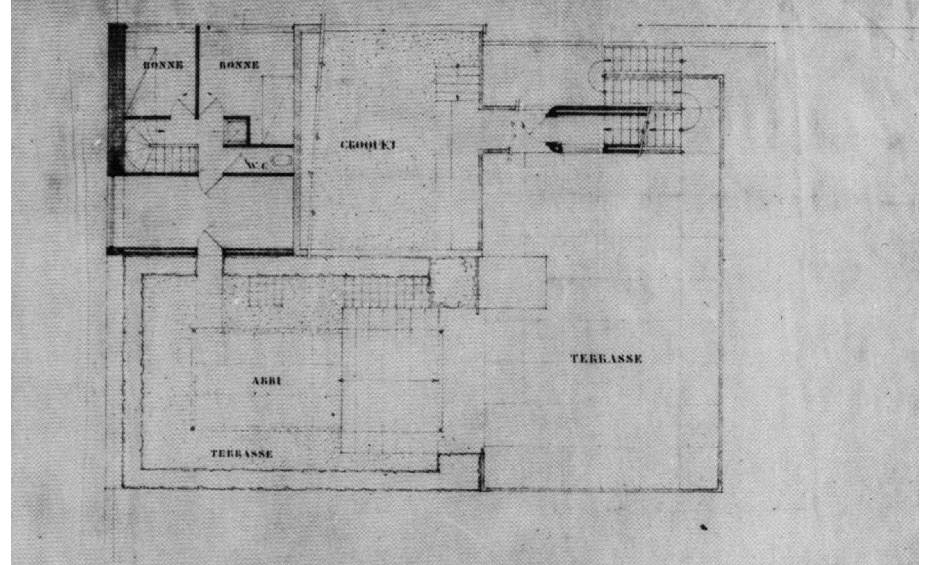
17443  
FLC 17443

DE BEISTEGUI

227

ETAGE

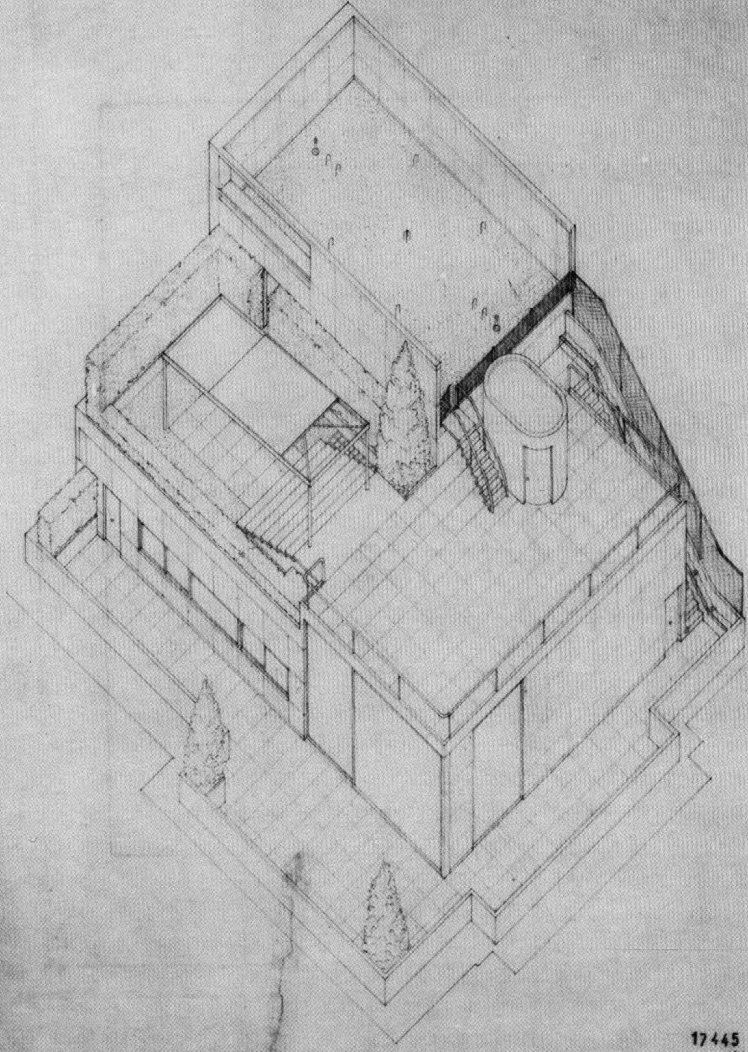
10 JANVIER 1930



FLC 17444

**DE BEISTEGUI**  
AXONOMETRIE

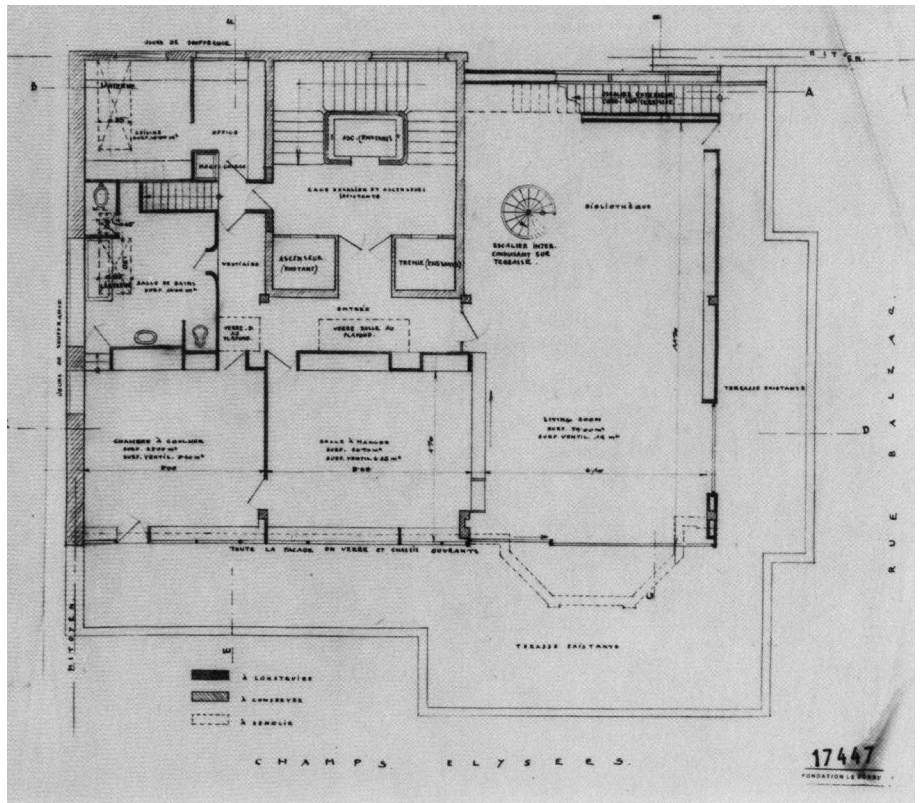
**2285**  
24 JANUER, 1901



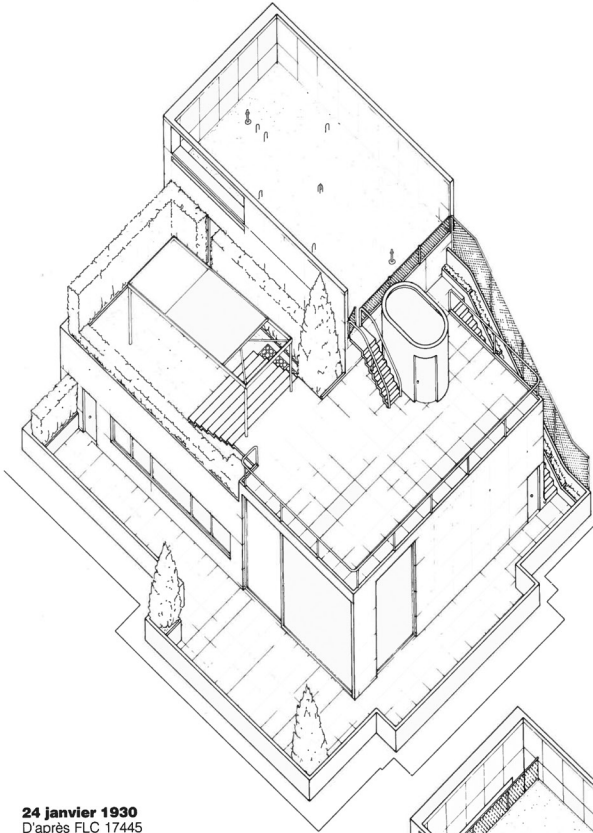
17445

FLC 17445

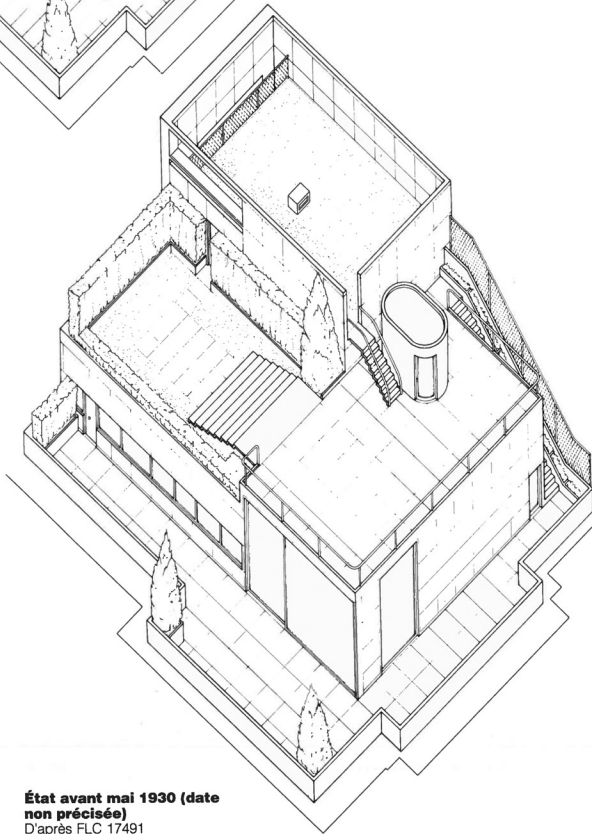




FLC 17447

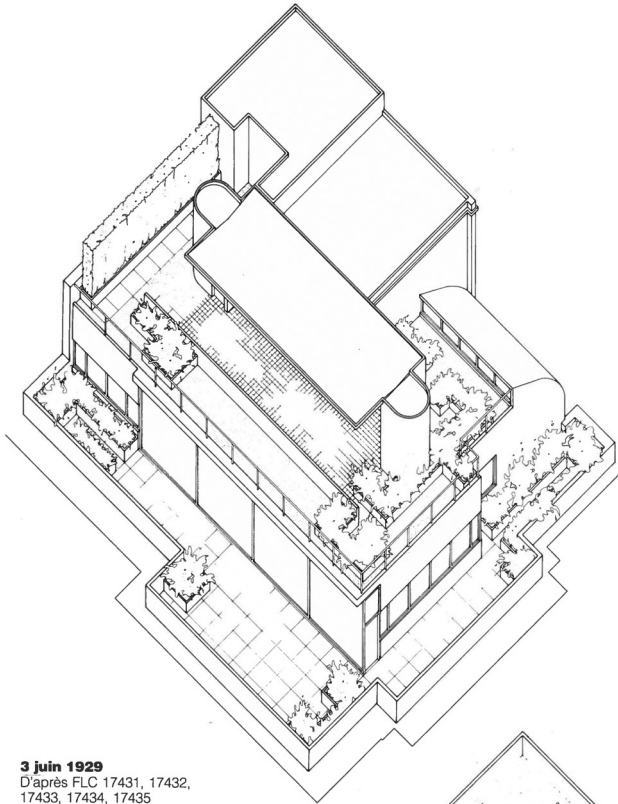


**24 janvier 1930**  
D'après FLC 17445

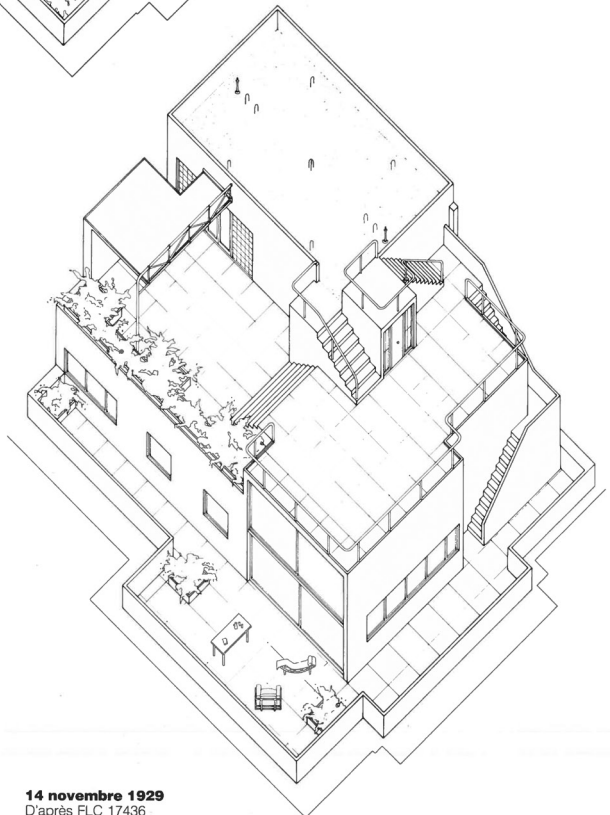


**État avant mai 1930 (date  
non précisée)**  
D'après FLC 17491



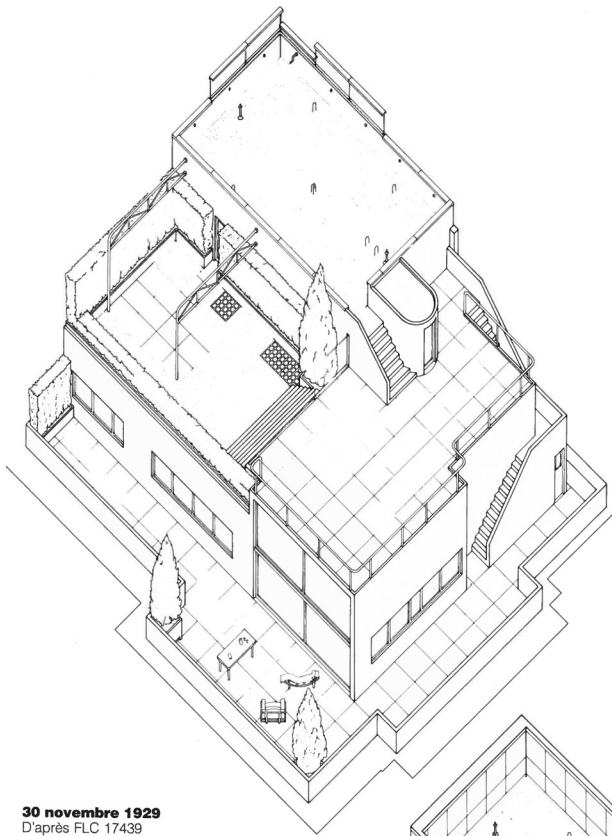


**3 juin 1929**  
D'après FLC 17431, 17432,  
17433, 17434, 17435

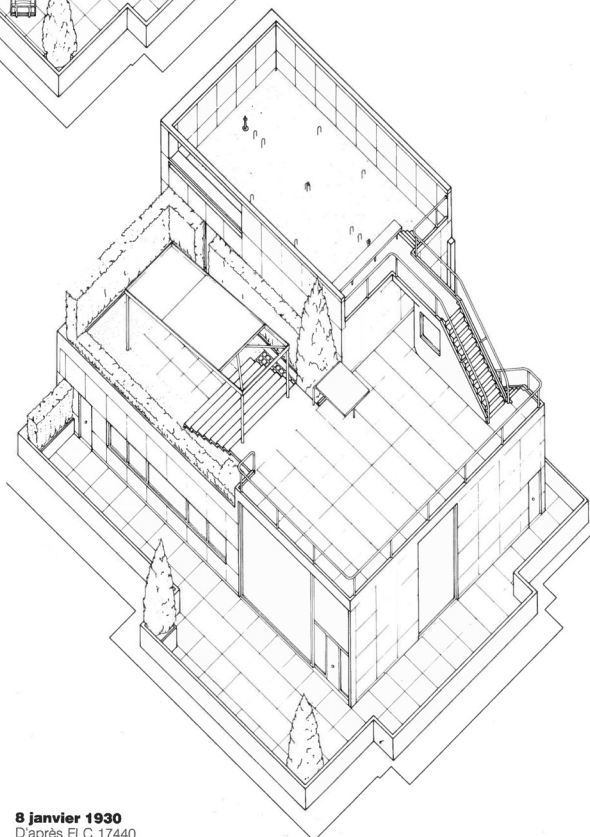


**14 novembre 1929**  
D'après FLC 17436

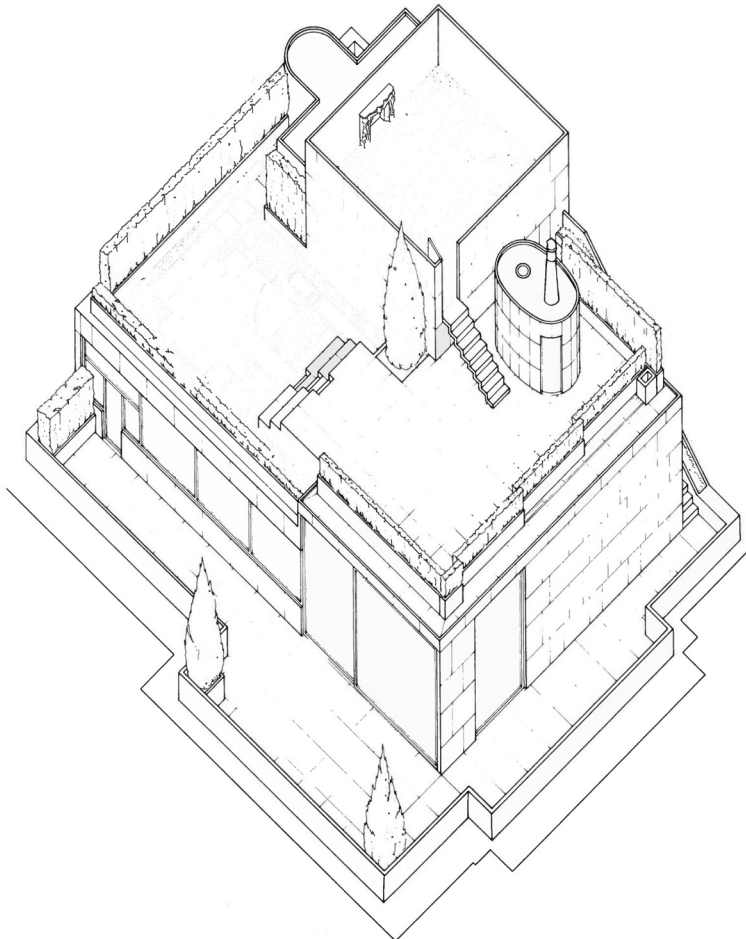




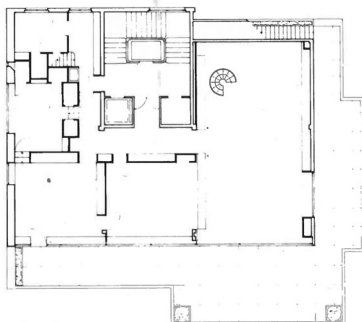
**30 novembre 1929**  
D'après FLC 17439



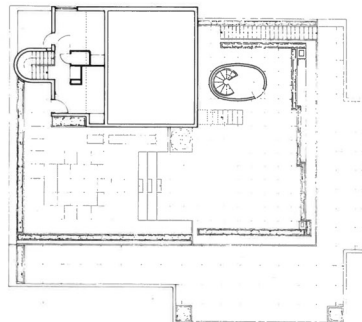
**8 janvier 1930**  
D'après FLC 17440



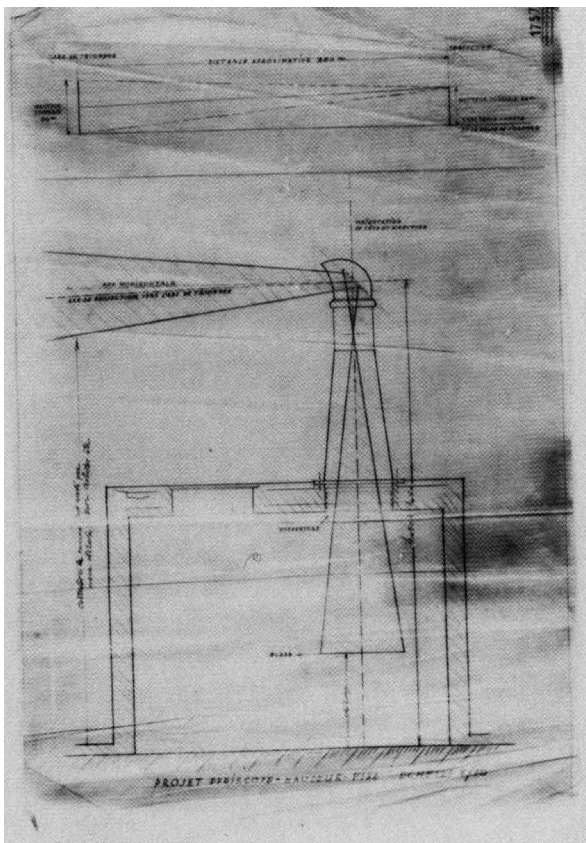
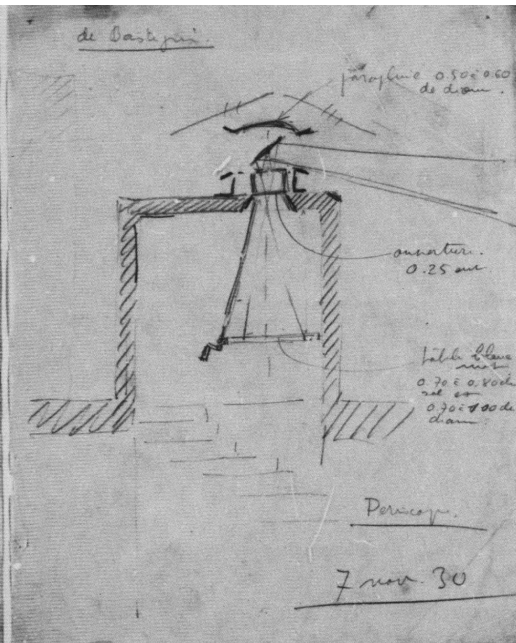
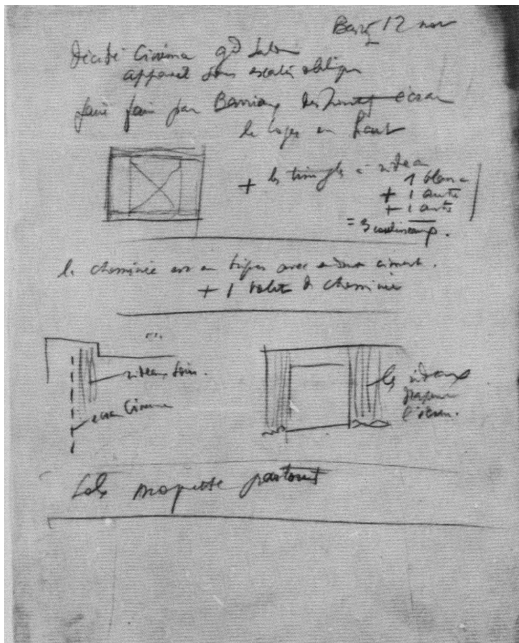
**Projet définitif, postérieur à 1930**  
D'après FLC 17502, 17539, 17490, 17598, 29863



**Plan du niveau inférieur**



**Plan du niveau supérieur**



FLC 17573, 17704





the double stairs, this time turned through 90°, parallel to the Champs Elysées, the tower deck had been eradicated. The section shows the interior staircase rising in two flights within the library, while the exterior staircase creates a corresponding diagonal in the back wall. The walls surrounding the top terrace have been raised above eye level, with a single horizontal opening, looking to the south.

5. 10-24 January 1930, referring to the FLC 17441-17445, and with yet another return to the spiral staircase, this time housed in a free-standing oval projection on the roof terrace, now without means of access to its roof. Two plans develop this scheme to the basic arrangement of the finished scheme on 14 February 1930.

6. 14 February 1930, referring to FLC 17447, to improve lighting to the bathroom and kitchen, the top terrace is now restricted to two thirds of its original extent, losing its function as croquet field, in order to allow skylights abutting the round-ended service staircase. Nevada glass tiles (later replaced with sheet glass) provide natural lighting over the entrance hall.

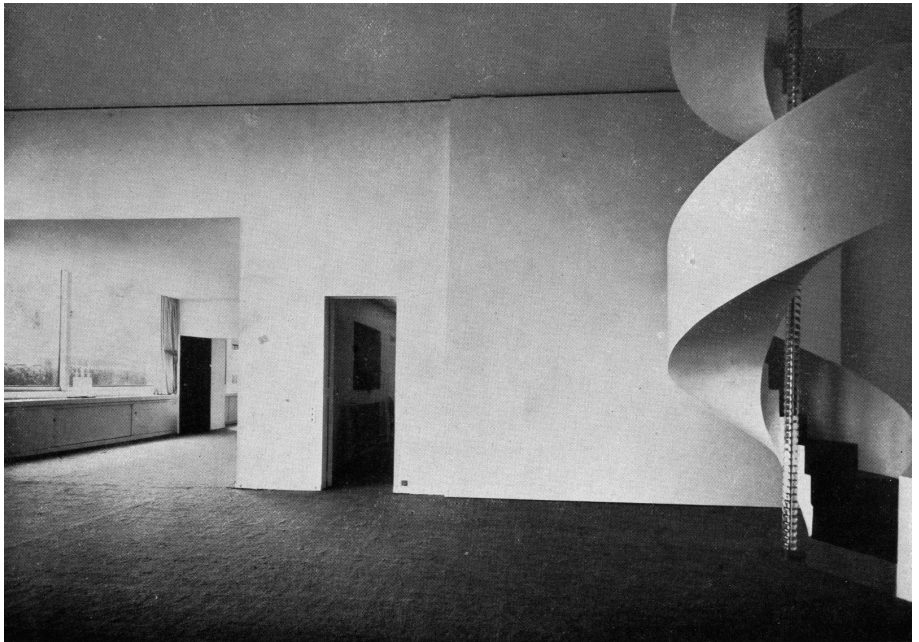
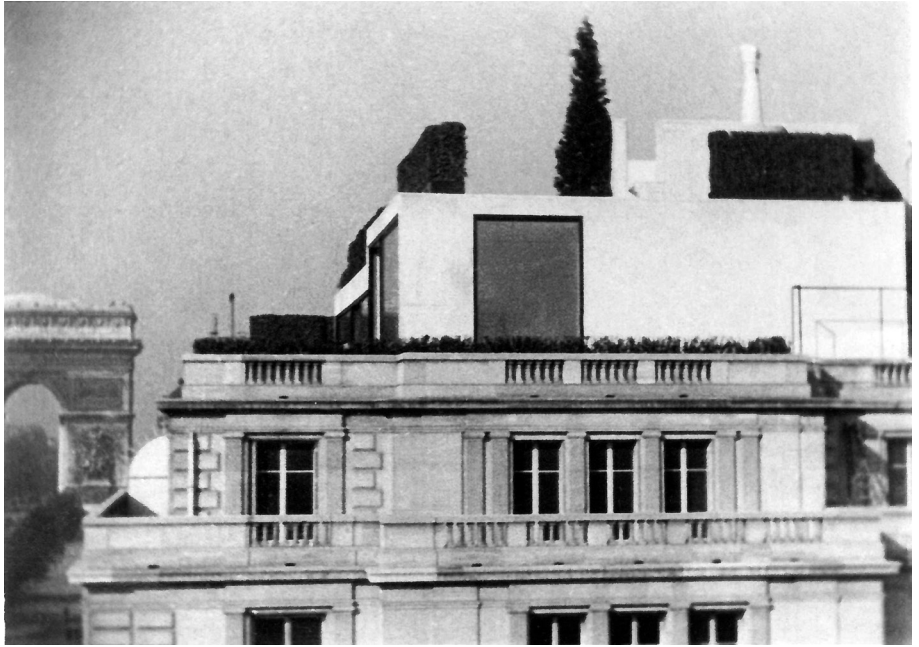
Innumerable changes of detail have been made, but the plans were agreed on in June 1930, with construction beginning on 5 June. The definitive project, close to be completed sometime in late 1930, again opens up the southwest wall, with its picture windows on the main level; the roof to the second level terrace was removed, the high clipped hedge to the west was extended along the entire roof, and the upper level solarium had now been cut off from all surrounding views.

In a final gesture to the mechanics of vision, according to the final drawing of the April 21, 1931, Le Corbusier added a last touch: a periscope set into the oval roof of the spiral stairway. As sketched in Le Corbusier's notebook, this instrument was first envisaged as a metal cone piercing the roof, with a reflecting mirror capped by an "umbrella" to protect it from the rain. A more sophisticated version was then commissioned from the optical firm of Radiguet and Massiot, makers of projectors and submarine telescopes, who provided a plan demonstrating the angles of vision and monuments that would be displayed on the circular table below.

The construction was extremely costly, and accompanied with numerous complications, for instance the piercing of the concrete slabs in order to fit the revolving periscope with its tall chimney-like protuberance (April-July 1932). Furthermore, part of the spiral staircase had to be demolished and rebuilt, due to failure in the construction. Numerous leaks were diagnosed and repaired at the same time.<sup>16</sup>

## **BOÎTE À MIRACLE**

"The glittering domestic equipment"? Those Le Corbusier addressed to penthouse Beistegui: sheet metal cladding of the sink, bathtub, radiators; "electric sliding" of windows, partitions, luster on its rail, curtains shrubs (of wood) on the terrace; mechanism



Exterior view

View of the salon

of “periscope” with counterpoise in “the central core of the spiral staircase”...<sup>17</sup> The feast of technology made to measure for the numerous devices conceived for spatial effects or pleasures is well known in this intervention. In this regard, one can find a precise description on the technical aspect in an article of the periodical *L'Architecte* in 1932:

The entire interior is painted, with an extreme care, with mat white painting, sanded with the stone. The dining room opens entirely to the salon, by a wide electrically driven wood panel. The salon has two large bay windows, one on the Tour Eiffel in the south, the other has Notre Dame in the axis, in the east. Half of the south bay window can move with electricity as well, and release on the large outdoor terrace where the Arc de Triomphe appears in the middle of the pruned box tree. A library occupies the entire east wall. First, a series of sliding wooden panels and, behind, a set of the transparent glasses, equally sliding.

Completely concealed, and cantilevered on the court, situates the installation of the sonorous cinema. The bay windows of the salon are, in fact, arranged to let the night turn into the daytime. The large bay window in the south becomes a wide screen, and the films of the biggest cinema rooms can be rolled out and extended by a simple electric command. Electricity still allows to equip in simultaneous position the roof garden, in the salon and in the bedroom, le radio, the théâtrophone and the pickup. And finally, on top of the spiral staircase leading from the salon to the roof garden, a complete device of submarine periscope allows, after the darkness made by the special devices, to see on the reading table, appears and turns slowly, the nearest sties of Paris, as the most distant ones.

...

The building was made of reinforced concrete, covered with stone veneer for the walls. The considerable mechanical and electrical equipment has absorbed 2 km of steel tubes and 8 km cables.

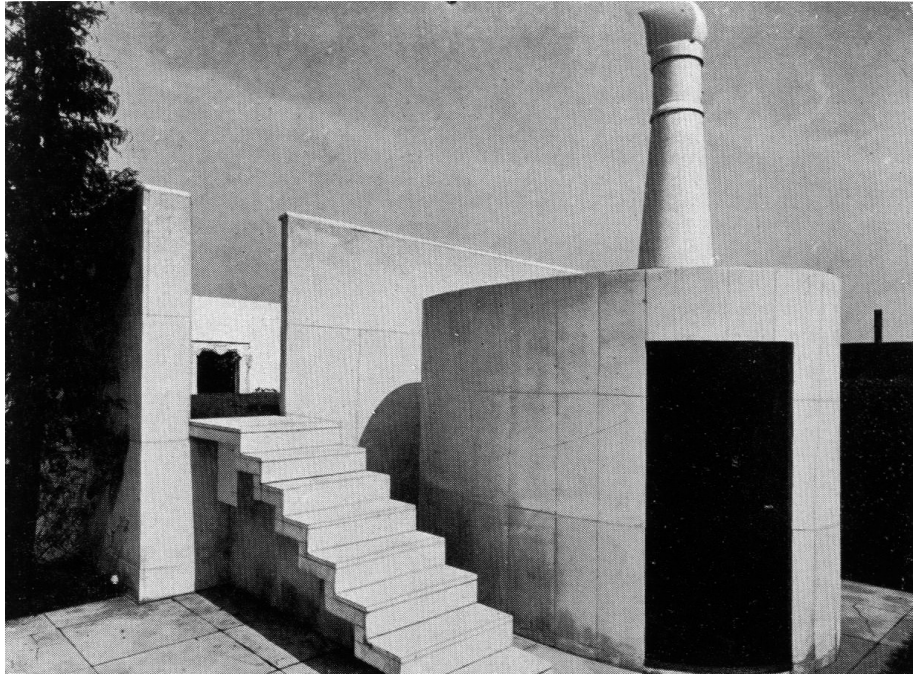
The whole construction has been soundproofed, that is to say, rendered entirely independent: 1. from the lower floors and the elevators; 2. from the noise of the Champs Elysée.

All parts were made independent from one another acoustically. The face of a door has been isolated from the against-face, and so on. This led the careful soundproofing studies and a meticulous realization, complicated by static issues and extremely complex system of heating, water and electricity.

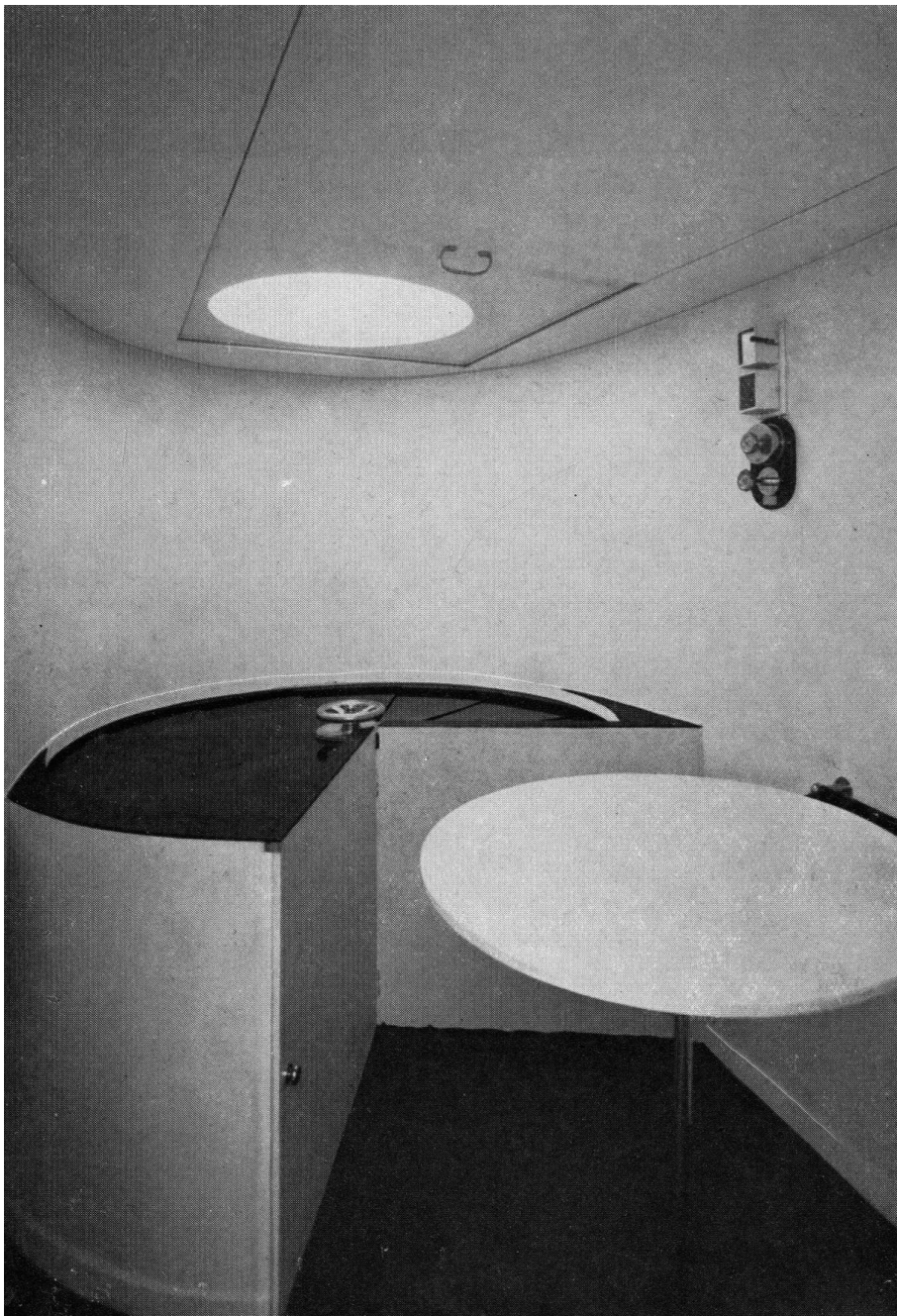
This project gathered somehow a few exceptional modern tasks of architects. It was a first class laboratory.

The windows are double-glass; the task was not easy to climb to seventh floor of such greatness ice. The multiplicity of technical work that has characterized



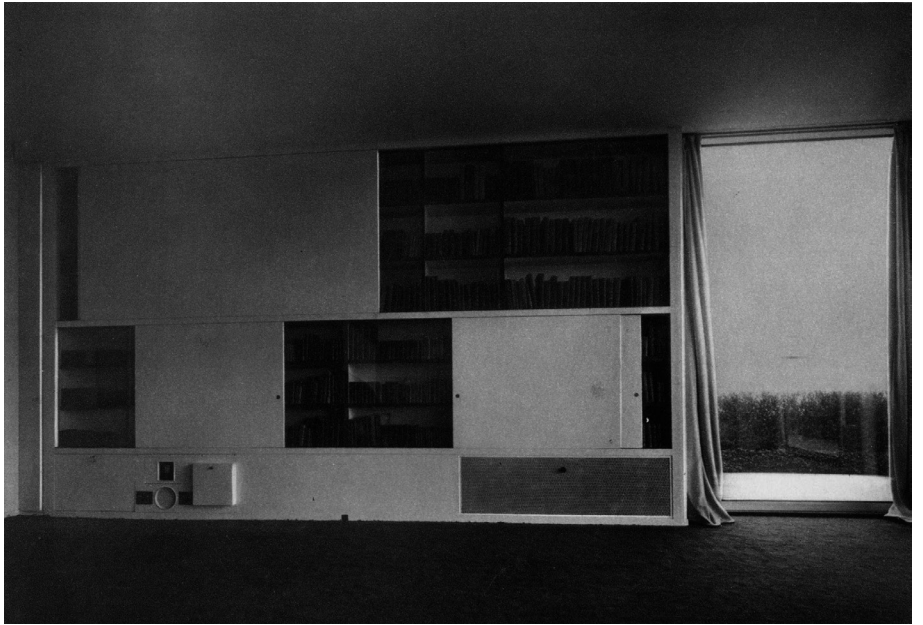


Exterior view of the periscope and the entrance stairs of the chambre à ciel ouvert



Interior view of the periscope and the table of projection





View of the library

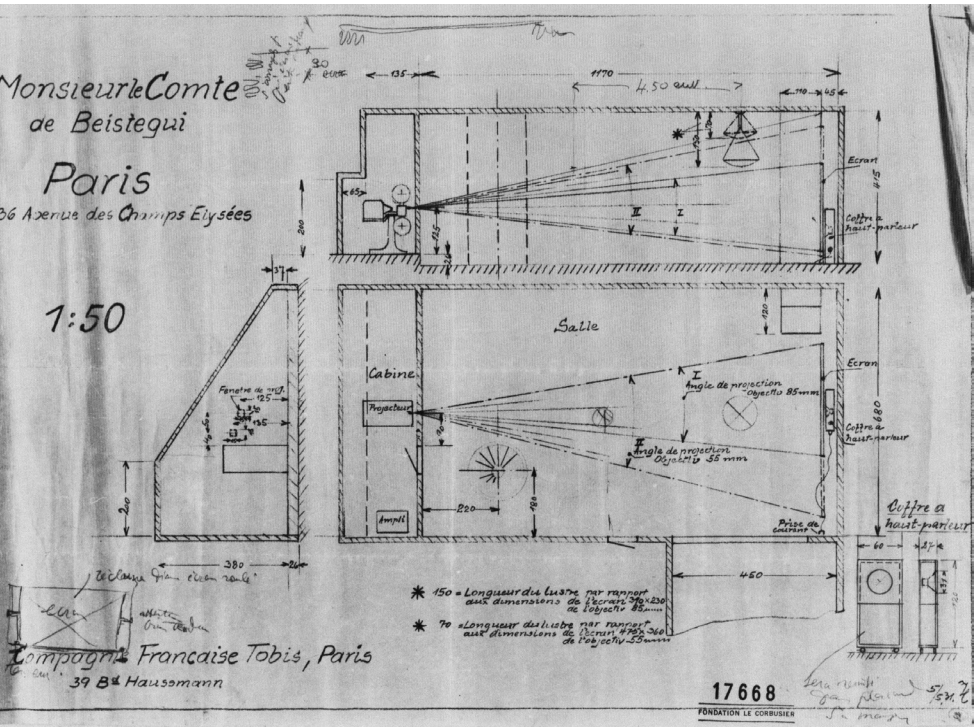
View of the terrace in front of the salon

Monsieur le Comte  
de Beistegui

Paris  
136 Avenue des Champs Elysées

1:50

Compagnie Française Tobis, Paris  
39 Bd Hausmann



17668

FONDATION LE CORBUSIER

FLC 17668

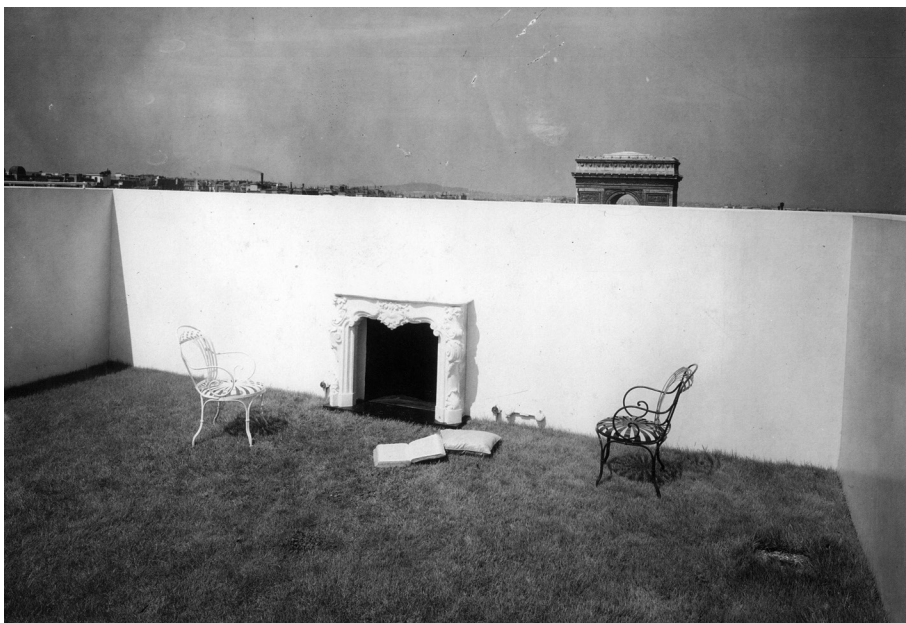


the company was made in the wind, over manned and operated floors and the only access was a tiny outdoor pine tree, commissioned by the same width of the sidewalk of rue Balzac.

“Electricity, modern power, is invisible, it does not illuminate the dwelling, but activates the doors and moves the walls,” and allows the cinematographic projection booth in the space under the external staircase on the metal screen, which unfolds automatically as the chandelier rises up on pulleys (FLC 17668, 5 May 1931), that is inside. And outside, on the roof terrace, to slide the banks of hedges to frame the view of Paris: “En pressant un bouton électrique, la palissade de verdure s’écarter et Paris apparaît.” There was no electric lighting in the penthouse. In this regard, de Beistegui wrote: “the candle has recovered all its rights because it is the only one which gives a *living* light.”<sup>18</sup>

### SPATIAL MAESTRO

In the penthouse for de Beistegui, throughout the evolution of the project, one must observe his dedication to find the final *mes*. In regard of the visual organization in this penthouse, one can discover a melodious spatial orchestration of the horizon following one’s own *promenade architecturale*. From the first level, only the Arc de Triomphe was visible; on the next, the garden was surrounded by hedges of ivy and yew in such a way that “one sees only a few of the sacred places of Paris: the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower, the perspective of the Tuileries, Notre Dame, and the church of the Sacré-Coeur.”<sup>19</sup> On the upper level, the solarium was surrounded by high walls, so that, in Le Corbusier’s words, “if one remained planted on one’s feet, one saw absolutely nothing more than the grass, the four walls and the sky, with all the play of the clouds.”<sup>20</sup> The view of Paris – the Champs-Élysées and the Eiffel Tower was entirely blocked. Finally, between this rooftop fantasy and the city above which it was planted, Le Corbusier provided a tenuous but significant link: the suspended spiral stair that rose from the entrance floor to a small oval cabin on the main, eighth-floor terrace. Enclosed in this windowless hut, an observer could look down to a circular table onto which the periscope reflected the entire panorama of Paris. The periscope’s submarine-like lens, raised above the level of the walls of the solarium, thus joined the exterior “sacred mountain” – reminiscent perhaps of the Acropolis – to the hermetic *boîte à miracles* of the apartment’s interior, and completed the illusion of the apartment as, in Le Corbusier’s words, “sur un *liner* d’océan”.<sup>21</sup> The periscope and the spiral staircase with their spatial and visual situation in this apartment function as a “short circuit”, revealing the essence of this master piece of special composition, which is the interposed distance between this dwelling and the too noisy Paris. It brings us directly to the entrance of the *chambre à ciel ouvert*, where only the silent *grand ouvert* and the celestial Being remain.



The *chambre à ciel ouvert* and the monuments of Paris

## OPERATED HORIZON

The lifelong relentless research for *vue* of Le Corbusier is well known. In 1933 he wrote: “I exist in life only on condition that I see.” He declared in 1963: “This is the key: to look... to look/observe/see/imagine/invent, create.” And in the last week of his life in 1965 he said: “I am and I remain an impenitent visual.”<sup>22</sup>

“Loos told me one day” – wrote Le Corbusier in *Urbanism* – “A cultivated man does not look out of the window...” Yet he continued his reasoning as thus “Such sentiment can have an explanation in the congested, disordered city where disorder appears in distressing images; one could even admit the paradox before a sublime natural spectacle, too sublime.”<sup>23</sup> “Too sublime” to look is the assessment that Le Corbusier addressed to the metropolis, too crowded, too noisy, too much imbecilities.

In this penthouse, electricity thus technology is not used to illuminate, to make *visible*, but as a technology of framing, and in this sense the apartment itself is a giant frame. Doors, walls, hedges, that is, traditional architectural framing devices, are activated with electric power, as are the built-in cinema camera and its projection screen, and when these modern frames are *lit*, the “living” light of the chandelier gives way to another living light, the flickering light of the movie, the “flicks”.

This new “lighting” displaces traditional forms of enclosure, as electricity had done before it. This house is a commentary on the new condition. The distinctions between *inside* and *outside* are here made problematic. In this penthouse, once the upper level of the terrace is reached, the high walls of the *chambre ouverte* allow only fragments of the urban skyline to emerge, reminding one of the collage he depicted in *Vers une architecture*,<sup>24</sup> the Aquitania bearing the numerous monuments of Paris:

These gardens have allowed us to establish places of a ravishing intimacy beneath the sky, and, by means of the order of the plan and its vertical profiles, to furnish selected views of the beauties of the city of Paris: here, the Arc de Triomphe is incorporated into the composition; there the hill of Sacré-Coeur rises up above a wall of greenery; then the Eiffel Tower appears, alone in the open sky; finally, on the last terrace – the solarium – a greensward that laps against the four walls of the enclosure is the sole motif, marked by the changing and radiant effects of a sky stripped of any vestige of habitation: a sensation of vastness, as on an ocean “liner.”<sup>25</sup>

In the regard of *inside* and *outside* as counterparts here, one may recall the metaphor that I made to clarify the complementarity-equality between counterparts in the “non-frontier limits” sector, which reads “What is inside this boundary and what is outside are the same thing, since they share the same code, one is the complementarity of the other, and one defines the other, as two black and white carpets of the same motif, yet with the two opposite colors reversed.”

## ARCHITECTURAL CAMERA

It is only by remaining inside and making use of the periscope camera obscura that it becomes possible to enjoy the metropolitan spectacle. Tafuri has written: “The distance interposed between the penthouse and the Parisian panorama is secured by a technological device, the periscope. An ‘innocent’ reunification between the fragment and the whole is no longer possible; the intervention of artifice is a necessity.” Thus the “too sublime” “natural (urban) spectacle, is constructed though a strange transposition as this “artifice” as the periscope into a different register – that of *contrivance*. The walls elevated to the level of eyes of the *chambre a ciel ouvert* shares the same operational code, not to interpose a distance but to join the human to the *grand ouvert*, the infinity. In this regard, one may remind the last sector that I developed as the end of the “arche lens” chapter.

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

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

Here we need to come back to the well-known episode of Le Corbusier killing his father Perret with a debate on his *fenêtre en longueur* is better than the Perretian vertical *porte fenêtre*. Perret’s *porte fenêtre* corresponds to the space of perspective. Le Corbusier’s *fenêtre en longueur* to the space of photography. It is not by chance that Le Carbusier continues his polemic with Perret in a passage in *Precisions*, where he “demonstrates” scientifically that the horizontal window illuminates better. He does so by relying on a photographer’s chart giving times of exposure – He writes:

I have stated that the horizontal window illuminates better than the vertical window. Those are my observations of the reality. Nevertheless, I have passionate opponents. For example, the following sentence has been thrown at me: “A window is a man, it stands upright!” This is fine if what you want are “words.” But I have discovered recently in a photographer’s chart these explicit



graphics; I am no longer swimming in the approximations of personal observations. I am facing sensitive photographic film that reacts to light. The table says this: ... The photographic plate in a room illuminated with a horizontal window needs to be exposed four times less than in a room illuminated with two vertical windows.... Ladies and gentlemen... We have left the Vignolized shores of the Institutes. We are at sea; let us not separate this evening without having taken our bearings. First, architecture: the pilotis carry the weight of the house above the ground, up in the air. The view of the house is a categorical view, without connection with the ground.<sup>26</sup>

The erected man behind Perret's *porte fenêtre* has been replaced by a photographic camera. The view is free-floating, "without connection with the ground," or with the man behind the camera – a photographer's analytical chart has replaced "personal observations". "The view from the house is a *categorical* view." In framing the landscape the house places the landscape into a system of categories. The house is a mechanism for classification. It collects views and, in doing so, classifies them. The house is a system for taking pictures. What determines the nature of the picture is the window. In another passage from the same book the window itself is seen as a camera lens:

When you buy a camera, you are determined to take photographs in the crepuscular winter of Paris, or in the brilliant sands of an oasis; how do you do it? *You use a diaphragm*. Your glass panes, your horizontal windows are all ready to be diaphragmed at will. You will let light in wherever you like.<sup>27</sup>

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

The house is a box in the air, pierced all around, without interruption, by a *fenêtre en longueur*.... The box is in the middle of meadows, dominating the orchard.... The simple posts of the ground floor, through a precise disposition, cut up the landscape with a regularity that has the effect of suppressing any notion of "front" or "back" of the house, of "side" of the house.... The plan is pure, made for the most exact of needs. It is in its right place in the rural landscape of Poissy. But in Biarritz, it would be magnificent.... I am going to implant this very house in the beautiful Argentinian countryside: we will have twenty houses rising from the high grass of an orchard where cows continue to graze.<sup>28</sup>

The house is being described in terms of the way it frames the landscape and the effect this framing has on the perception of the house itself by the moving visitor. The house is in the air. There is no front, no back, no side to this house. The house can be in any place. The house is *immaterial*. That is, the house is not simply constructed as a material object from which, then, certain views become possible. The house is no more than a

series of views choreographed by the visitor, the way a filmmaker effects the montage of a film. In the case of the penthouse de Beistegui, the views are orchestrated by the architect and choreographed by the visitor in a similar way.

In regard of surrealist photography, Krauss said: “The frame announces that between the part of reality that was cut away and this part there is a *difference*, and that this segment which the frame frames is an example of nature-as-representation, nature-as-sign. As it signals that experience of reality the camera frame also *controls* it, *configures* it. This it does by point-of-view”.<sup>29</sup> And in the architectural case of this penthouse, the “point-of-view” comes from Le Corbusier, with his deliberately constructed *vues*.

This is also evident in Le Corbusier’s description of the process followed in the construction of the *petite maison* on the shores of Lake Lemman:

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

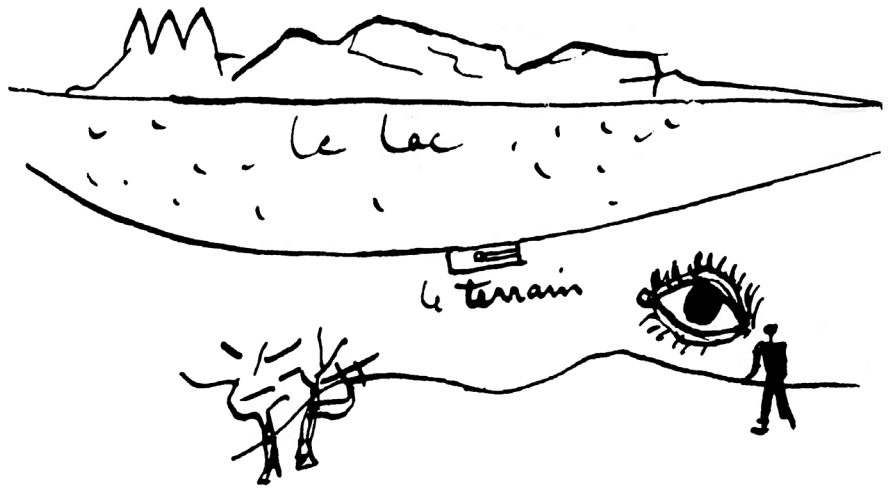
Should one first have searched for the site and made the plan in accordance with it? That is the usual practice.

I thought it was better to make an exact plan, corresponding ideally to the use one hoped from it and determined by the three factors above. This done, to go out with the plan in hand to look for a suitable site.<sup>30</sup>

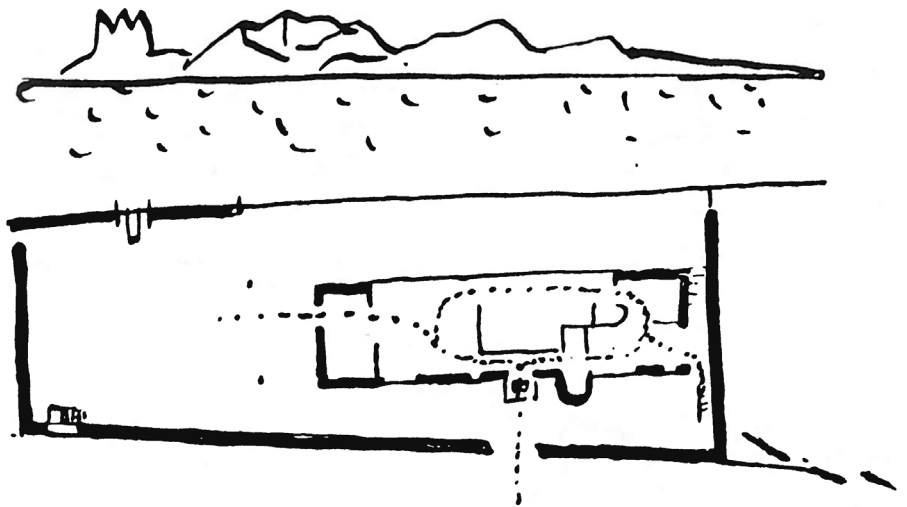
“The key to the problem of modern habitation” is, according to Le Corbusier, “to inhabit first,” “placing oneself afterwards.” But what is meant here by “inhabiting” and “placement”? The “three factors” that “determine the plan” of the house – “the lake, the magnificent frontal view, the south, equally frontal” – are precisely the factors that determine a photograph. “To inhabit” here means to inhabit that picture. “Architecture is made in the head,” then drawn. Only then does one look for the site. But the site is only where the landscape is “taken,” framed by a mobile lens. This photoopportunity is at the intersection of the system of communication that establishes that mobility, the railway, and the landscape. But even the landscape is here understood as a 10 to 15 kilometer strip, rather than a *place* in the traditional sense. The camera can be set up anywhere along that strip.

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

The object of the wall seen here is to block off the view to the north and east, partly to the south, and to the west; for the ever-present and overpowering scenery on all sides has a tiring effect in the long run. Have you noticed that *under such conditions one no longer “sees”*? To lend significance to the scenery one has to restrict and give it proportion; the view must be blocked by walls which are only pierced at certain strategic points and there permit an unhindered view.<sup>31</sup>



On a découvert le terrain,  
*Une petite maison, 1954*



Le Plan est installé  
*Une petite maison, 1954*

It is this domestication of the view that makes the house a house, rather than the provision of a domestic space, a *place* in the traditional sense. Two drawings published in *Une Petite maison* speak about what Le Corbusier means by “placing oneself” In one of them, *On a découverte le terrain*, a small human figure appears standing and next to it a big eye, autonomous from the figure, oriented towards the lake. The plan of the house is between them. The house is represented as that between the eye and the lake, between the eye and the view – as a camera – the emphasized prosthesis of the eye. The small figure is almost an accessory. The other drawing, *Le Plan est installé*, does not show, as the title would indicate, the encounter of the plan with the site, as we traditionally understand it. The site is not in the drawing. Even the curve of the shore of the lake in the other drawing has been erased. The drawing shows the plan of the house, a strip of lake, and a strip of mountains. That is, it shows the plan and above it, the view. The “site” is a vertical plane, that of vision.

Throughout his writings, Le Corbusier insists on the relative autonomy of architecture and site. Once he wrote in *La Maison des hommes* : “Aujourd’hui, la conformité du sol avec la maison n’est plus une question d’assiette ou de contexte immédiat.”<sup>32</sup> This may remind one of Breton’s metaphor of *la vase communicante* to explain the mutable relationship between the container and the contained. Here the traditional hierarchical relationship between the site as a container and the architectural intervention as contained is equally disrupted, the contained is as important as the container, or even more important than it. And in the face of the traditional site he constructs an “artificial site.” This does not mean that this architecture is independent from place. It is the concept “place” that has changed. We are not talking here about a *site* but about a *sight*. A *sight* can be accommodated in several sites. Thus one can imagine to transplant the penthouse of Beistegui as a camera, as a device framing sights, onto different sites – onto the roofs on top of the cruciform horizontal skyscrapers – lingering the landscape of the Corbusian new Paris, or in a larger sense the “radiant city”.

“Property” has moved from the horizontal to the vertical plane. Even Beistegui’s primary location from a traditional point of view, the address-Champs-Élysées-is completely subordinated by the *view*. In this regard, one finds him writing in *Précisions*: “La rue est indépendante de la maison. La rue est indépendante de la maison. Y réfléchir.”<sup>33</sup> But it must be noted that it is the street that is independent from the house and not the other way around. What he intends to tell is the detachment interposed between the Beistegui’s penthouse and the street.

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

This rock at Rio de Janeiro is celebrated.

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





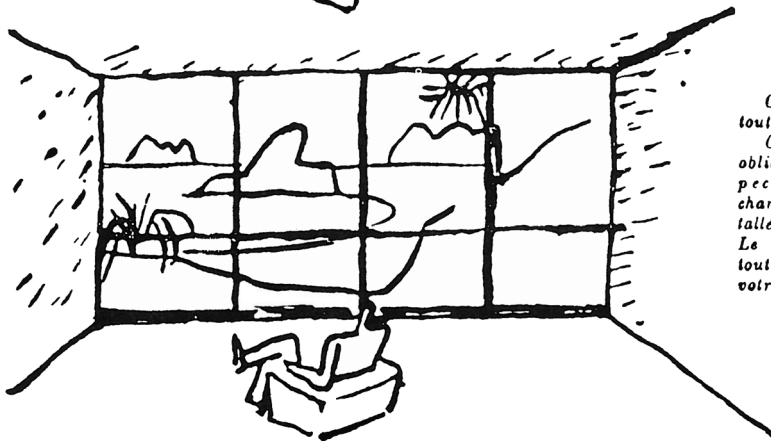
*Ce roc à Rio-de-Janeiro est célèbre.*



*Autour de lui se dressent des montagnes échevelées; la mer les baigne.*



*Des palmiers, des bananiers; la splendeur tropicale anime le site. On s'arrête, on y installe son fauteuil.*



*Cracl un cadre tout autour.*

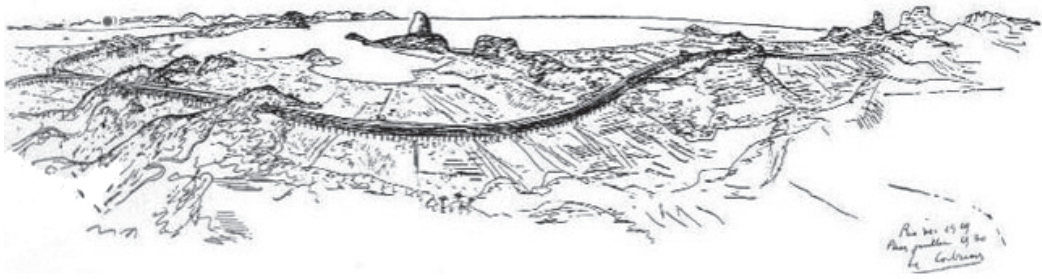
*Cracl les quatre obliques d'une perspective! Votre chambre est installée face au site. Le paysage entre tout entier dans votre chambre.*

*Le pacte avec la nature a été scellé! Par des dispositifs d'urbanisme, il est possible d'inscrire la nature dans le bail.*

*Rio-de-Janeiro est un site célèbre. Mais Alger, mais Marseille, mais Oran, Nice et toute la Côte d'Azur, Barcelone et tant de villes maritimes ou continentales disposent de paysages admirables!*

68

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



Rio de Janeiro

The highway, elevated 100 meter, and "launched" from hill to hill above the city, *La Ville Radiense*, 1933

Palms, banana trees; tropical splendor animates the site.

One stops, one installs one's armchair.

Crack! a frame all around.

Crack! the four obliques of a perspective. Your room is installed before the site. The whole sea-landscape enters your room.<sup>34</sup>

First a famous sight, a postcard, a picture. And it is not by chance that Le Corbusier has not only drawn this landscape from a postcard but has published it alongside the drawings in *La Ville radiuse*. Then, one inhabits the space in front of that picture, installs an armchair. But this view, this picture, is only constructed at the same time as the house. "Crack! a frame all around it. Crack! the four obliques of a perspective." The house is installed *before* the site, not *in* the site. The house is a frame for a view. The window is a gigantic screen. But then the view *enters* the house, it is literally "inscribed" in the lease:

The pact with nature has been sealed! By means available to town planning it is possible to enter nature in the lease. Rio de Janeiro is a celebrated site. But Algiers, Marseilles, Oran, Nice and all the Cote d'Azur, Barcelona and many maritime and inland towns can boast of admirable landscapes.<sup>35</sup>

So as the magnificent Paris, the precise views enter the penthouse, "inscribed" in the lease. This sense of the movie strip is felt both in the inside and the outside: "Architecture? Nature? Liners enter and see the new and *horizontal city*: it makes the site still more sublime. Just think of this broad *ribbon of light*, at night..." The strip of housing is a movie strip, on both sides. Beistegui is one of the few fulfilled twinkling lights of his imaginary of "ribbon of light", at night, at night of Paris, illuminated by the light of candles, throughout the overnight parties of the cosmopolitan millionaire de Beistegui. For Le Corbusier, "to inhabit" means to inhabit the camera. But the camera is not a traditional place, it is a system of classification, a kind of filing cabinet. "To inhabit" means to employ that system. Only after this do we have "placing," which is to place the view in the house, to take a picture, to place the view in the filing cabinet, to classify the landscape. In the case of Beistegui, by placing the high walls in the *chambre à ciel ouvert*, he classified the landscape by obtaining the silent *grand ouvert*, the infinitive horizon, in this space the rest is supposed to be erased; by installing the periscope, he classified the landscape as well, the classified landscape as the projection on the reading table is no longer *innocent*.

This critical transformation of traditional architectural thinking about place can also be seen in *La Ville radiuse* where a sketch represents the house as a cell with a view. Here an apartment, high up in the air, is presented as a terminal of telephone, gas, electricity, and water. The apartment 1s also provided with "exact air" (heating and ventilation). "A window is to give light, not to ventilate! To ventilate we use machines; it is mechanics, it is physics." Inside the apartment there is a small human figure and at the window, a huge eye looking outside. They do not coincide. The apartment itself is here the artifice between the occupant and the exterior world, a camera (and a breathing machine). The

exterior world also becomes artifice; like the air, it has been conditioned, landscaped – it *becomes* landscape. The apartment defines modern subjectivity with its own eye. The traditional subject can only be the *visitor*, and as such, a temporary part of the viewing mechanism. The humanist subject has been displaced.

The visitor is merely a temporary being passing by, the permanent modern subjectivity as the architect's intention resides in the core of his urbanistic dogma. As I developed in the “texturique space” the Corbusian modern space is endowed a tyrannical power, this space is a “master” and the spectator thus the *visitor* is merely a “slave”. Here, only the space, the frames, the sights, the views, and the architect's intention are important, high-lightened, and placed in the foreground in regard to the displaced traditional humanist subject – being here merely a *visitor*.

The etymology of the word *window* reveals that it combines *wind* and *eye* (ventilation and light in Le Corbusier's terms). As Georges Teyssot has noted, the word combines “an element of the outside and an aspect of innerness. The separation on which dwelling is based is the possibility for a being to install himself” But in Le Corbusier this installation splits the subject itself, rather than simply the outside from the inside. Installation involves a convoluted geometry which entangles the division between interior and exterior, between the subject and itself.

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

The visitors, till now, turn round and round in the interior, asking themselves what is happening, understanding with difficulties the reasons for what they see and feel; they do not find anything of what is called a “house.” They feel themselves in something entirely new. And ... I do not think they are bored!<sup>36</sup>

The occupant of Le Corbusier's house is displaced, first because he is disoriented. As the Minotaure, one lost oneself in the exquisite Corbusian modern box, the innovative modern device – the deliberately settled frame – the camera – the preciser, appropriating prosthesis of the visitor's eye. He does not know how to place himself in relation to this house. It does not look like a “house.” Then because the occupant is a “visitor.” Unlike the occupant of Loos' houses, both actor and spectator, both involved and detached from the stage, Le Corbusier's subject is detached from the house with the distance of a visitor, a viewer, a photographer, a tourist.

The split between the traditional humanist subject – the occupant or the architect, and the *eye* is the split between *looking* and *seeing*, between *outside* and *inside*, between *landscape* and *site*. In the drawings, the inhabitant or the person in search of a site are represented as diminutive figures. Suddenly that figure *sees*. A picture is taken, a large eye, autonomous from the figure, represents that moment. This is precisely the moment of *inhabitation*. This inhabitation is independent from *place* – understood in a traditional sense; it turns the outside into an inside:

I perceive that the work we raise is not unique, nor isolated; that the air around



it constitutes other surfaces, other grounds, other ceilings, that the harmony that has suddenly stopped me before the rock of Brittany, exists, can exist, everywhere else, always. The work is not made only of itself: the outside exists. The outside shuts me in its whole which is like a room.<sup>37</sup>

In the *chambre à ciel ouvert* at Beistegui, the *lieux sacrés* of Paris are very much a part of the composition. By turning the outside into an inside, by integrating these elements that are outside of the composition, the penthouse illustrates an extension of the *plan libre*.<sup>38</sup> “Le dehors est toujours un dedans” (the outside is always an inside) means that the “outside” is a picture. And that “to inhabit” means *to see*. In *La Maison des hommes* there is a drawing of a figure standing and (again), side by side, an independent eye: “Let us not forget that our eye is 5 feet 6 inches above the ground; our eye, this entry door of our architectural perceptions.” The eye is a “door” to architecture, and the “door” is, of course, an architectural element, the first form of a “window.” Later in the book, “the door” is replaced by media equipment, “the eye is the tool of recording.” The eyelid is the diaphragm, the eye is the lens, the occupant, hence rendered a visitor – a viewer – a photographer, passing by, registering the episodes throughout his *promenade architecturale*, fabricating the spectacular montage of his experience, his memory.

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

Walking creates diversity in the spectacle before our eyes. But we have left the ground in an airplane and acquired the eyes of a bird. We see, in actuality, that which hitherto was only seen by the spirit.<sup>39</sup>

The window is, for Le Corbusier, first of all communication. He repeatedly superimposes the idea of the “modern” window, a lookout window, a horizontal window, with the reality of the new media: “telephone, cable, radios ... machines for abolishing time and space.” Control is now in these media. Power has become “invisible.” The look that from Le Corbusier’s skyscrapers will “dominate a world in order” is a look that “registers” the new reality, a “recording” eye. It cannot be read in the same way than the introverted defensive view of Loos’ interiors, nor the look from behind the periscope of Beistegui. At Beistegui, with the supplementary device as the periscope, which immobile, one could just perceive, observe, but not yet register, as considerable part of one’s mobility and spatial initiative is restrained by the immobility of the periscope. It is the periscope registering, not the visitor’s eye. In this case one cannot move this fixed camera.

Krauss, in regard of “The experience of the camera as prosthesis and the image of it figuring in the field of the photograph is everywhere to be found in the New Vision”:

And now, with this experience of the frame, we arrive at the supplement.

Throughout Europe in the *twenties and thirties*, camera-seeing was exalted as a special form of vision: the New Vision, Moholy-Nagy called it. From the Inkhuk to the Bauhaus to the ateliers of Montparnasse, the New Vision was understood in the same way. As Moholy explained it, *human eyesight* was, simply,

*defective, weak, impotent.* “Helmholtz,” Moholy explained, “used to tell his pupils that if an optician were to succeed in making a human eye and brought it to him for his approval, he would be bound to say: ‘This is a clumsy piece of work.’” But the invention of the *camera* has made up for this deficiency so that now “we may say that we *see* the world *with different eyes*.

These, of course, are camera-eyes. They see *faster, sharper*, at stranger angles, closer-to, microscopically, with a transposition of tonalities, with the penetration of X ray, and with access to the multiplication of images that makes possible the writing of association and memory. Camera-seeing is thus *an extraordinary extension* of normal vision, one that *supplements* the deficiencies of the naked eye. The camera *covers* and *arms* this nakedness, it acts as a kind of *prosthesis, enlarging the capacity* of the human body.

But in increasing the ways in which the world can be present to vision, the camera mediates that presence, gets between the viewer and the world, *shapes* reality according to *its* terms. Thus what *supplements* and enlarges human vision also *supplants* the viewer himself; the camera is the aid who comes to usurp.<sup>40</sup>

Le Corbusier, and the penthouse being contemporary with the New Vision share with it a quite similar position. If we supplant the camera by the Corbusian architecture as camera, it remains a quite accurate reading in this regard. The natural looking of the visitor is *defective, weak, and impotent*. With the house as a framing camera, which is a *prosthesis, enlarging the capacity* of the look without any emphasized attention, is *sharper, stronger, and preciser*. With this prosthesis, one no longer looks, one *sees*. Yet in increasing the ways in which the landscape can be present to vision, the architecture as camera mediates that presence, gets between the viewer and the landscape, *shapes* reality according to *its* terms. Thus what *supplements* and enlarges human vision also *supplants* the viewer himself; the architecture as camera is the aid who comes to usurp. By supplanting the viewer, it turns a traditional humanist occupant into merely a *visitor*.

“The dominant sign ... is in the *gaze*.”<sup>41</sup> The Corbusian interior does not need to be defined as a system of defense from the exterior, the *gaze* can be extended through his carefully settled frames. To say that “the exterior is always an interior” means, among other things, that the interior is not simply the bounded territory defined by its opposition to the exterior. The exterior is “inscribed” in the dwelling. The window in the age of mass communication provides us with one more flat image. The window is a screen. From there issues the insistence on eliminating every protruding element, “devignolizing” the window, suppressing the sill: “M. Vignole ne s’occupe pas des fenestres, mais bien des (entre-fenestres) (pilasters ou colonnes). Je devignolise par: *l’architecture, c’est des planchers éclairés*.”

The organizing geometry of architecture slips from the perspectival cone of vision, from the humanist eye, to the camera angle. The operation that we are talking here is the transgression of the wall, of the idea of a wall. Thus the wall becomes a non-fron-

tier limit, the traditional inside/outside boundary collapses, as did the surrealists. Here their very objective as transgressing traditional rigid limit in between the inner world and the outer world, is fulfilled in architecture in a metaphorical way.

## TECHNÉ AND POIESIS

Manfredo Tafuri began his brilliant paper – “Machine et mémoire” with a discussion on the penthouse of de Beistegui, and throughout his paper, with a Heideggerian interpretation on the Corbusian urban proposals produced between the 1914 and 1916, he told us a trilling, affective, conscious or unconscious lifelong Icarian Odyssey of Le Corbusier with this very intervention as the origin. It is a story in which there will be a shattering and surpassing of Le Corbusier’s urbanism, and, in fact, of all urbanism, a surpassing of the Icarus myth, the bipolarity of the “Old mole” and the “eagle” revealed by Bataille<sup>42</sup> as a response to the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* by Breton. And with his direct quotations of Bataille, of Aragon, and his assessment on bipolarities related directly to Surrealism, seems there is a possibility to treat the relationship between Le Corbusier and Surrealism in an interesting way. In this part, I will follow his pace to discover this passionate itinerary, and to have a glance of the ideological reading on the relationship between Le Corbusier and Surrealism.

When Le Corbusier published photographs of the penthouse of de Beistegui in 1932 in *L’Architecte*, he referred to an “architectural landscape created from scratch”, and he described the paradox of this architectural landscape being cut off from the exceptional panorama surrounding it: “The point was to eliminate this panoramic view of Paris and to create an architectural center of stones, gardens and skies, completely isolated from the turbulence of the panoramic locality.”<sup>43</sup>

Amputating virtually all other conceptions and discussions of urbanism from the essential Le Corbusier, Tafuri concentrates on the trajectory that leads from the Beistegui Penthouse to the Plan Obus A for Algiers and ends at the Capitol of Chandigarh (though not encompassing the plan for the city around it). The voyage begins at the Penthouse in 1929. Tafuri sees Beistegui as displaying on a small scale a key insight of the architect’s and as being emblematic of what Le Corbusier will later do on a much larger scale: “its message will have to pass through the dance of forms on the Algerian hills in order to shape the ‘listening spaces’ of the capitol of Chandigarh.” The myth revealed by what Tafuri calls Beistegui’s “detachment,” “silence,” and “waiting” meets the machine in Algiers. There, the eroticism of Le Corbusier’s artistic research will prepare him for the final step of “seeking in Chandigarh the essence of technology itself.”<sup>44</sup> Encompassing, as it does, painting, sculpture, architecture, and city design, Le Corbusier’s oeuvre allows Tafuri to make the first step in the argument, namely, that his work tests architecture’s boundaries. Second, he observes that the developing plasticity and eroticism of his painting and sculpture released Le Corbusier more and more from the

domination of reason, although, of course, never completely. Finally, Tafuri notes that “it was cities of developing countries” that were of critical philosophical, as well as autobiographical, importance for this evolution. Tracing the appearance of organic elements in Le Corbusier’s painting after purism, Tafuri asserts that “the Eros discovered in Algiers” “makes its mark” on the Ubu and Ozon series of paintings, emerging, in the sculptures made with Joseph Savina in the 1940s, as “laceration, rupture, tendency toward an otherness.”<sup>45</sup>

Located high above the Champs-Élysées and consisting of a suite of reception rooms and two terraces, the penthouse, designed for the parties of Charles de Beistegui, was hardly a city plan. Moreover, it had many eccentricities – moving walls and chandeliers, for example. Two of its features, however, created a special relationship to the city below and to technology. A periscope on the penultimate terrace, by which a visitor could see over the high walls to the city beyond, permitted the traditional panoramic view, but this view was possible only by means of this technical device. On the upper terrace, the visitor found an outdoor living room ringed by high walls and carpeted with grass, from which only the fragmentary tops of Paris’s highest monuments could be seen. Thus Paris is framed by the penthouse, concatenated with its representation. In Tafuri’s argument, this odd structure provides “many hints,” more, in fact, than Le Corbusier’s writings, about “his positions on urban themes.” Indeed, it proves an “excellent litmus test” of the “hidden motives” that “guide – not always consciously – Le Corbusier’s approach to the urban phenomenon.” And it is not the penthouse’s lower terrace with its technological toy, but the topmost, view-frustrating *chambre à ciel ouvert* that conveys the “message” whose odyssey to the very “limits of space and time” is Tafuri’s theme, as well as the surrealists’ theme.<sup>46</sup>

Beistegui, Tafuri says, “has as its precondition a metaphysical separation, the rupture of all usual connections,” which implies an “attitude of mind” of one who “waits.” Because this poetics of listening is attainable only after traversing the spaces where architectonics and technology dominate, and because the view is obstructed, one has arrived at the space of separation, of “suspenses, absences, and expectations.” This mythic language inhabits that empty space as *chambre à ciel ouvert* in Beistegui, expresses the very meaning of the phrase *objets à réaction poétique*. “But how can one reconcile this *poiesis* with the necessities imposed by the fashionable myth of rationalization?” asks Tafuri, ask also the surrealists.<sup>47</sup> The philosophical presupposition that Tafuri seems to attribute to Le Corbusier in tracing the development of Beistegui’s message is that no system can encompass all reality, that there are elements of life, differences, that escape any attempt at planning. It appears that throughout his career, and particularly in this instance, Le Corbusier grappled with the question of control, that is, the extent to which the various facets of reality, especially of urban reality, can be brought under rational control. Later, in Obus A, Le Corbusier takes technology about as far as it can go, in what Tafuri describes as a virtual paroxysm of desire for control: the “desires that were frustrated



in the Beistegui Penthouse ... irrupt ... (here), twisting before the sea, swiftly flowing in a stream of fluxes, clenching in their coils both nature and history, joyously and victoriously dancing upon the hills of Fort l'Empereur." This is no rigid application of technology, however. Plan Obus A for Algiers consisted of curvilinear a redent housing on the heights of Fort l'Empereur, a curvaceous highway, under which villas could be inserted, unit by unit, in accordance with their owners' taste, and a business quarter in the port area, with a large skyscraper as its centerpiece. Linking lower and upper parts was a viaduct that bridged the casbah, assuring its preservation. By providing for the insertion of villas designed to personal specification, Le Corbusier allows for mobility and even for a kind of "festivity" of personal "bad taste" – the "old mole" is no longer rejected here. Thus it seems that, in this case at least, it might be possible to have a technology so cleverly constructed that it can cope to some degree with "the unexpected, chance, mutability," elements usually considered to exceed the reach of city plans, elements residing in the central interest of the surrealism as well. For Tafuri, a crucial element of this achievement lies in the organic forms of this "immense biomorphic machine." The inhabitable road and the viaduct over the casbah on the hills of Fort-l'Empereur become the sites of a battle between nature and technology.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, another conflict is encompassed by Le Corbusier's overall conception. Tafuri emphasizes that in this conception the casbah should be seen as the necessary counterpart to the dominating, aggressive tendencies manifest in the European sectors of the plan. As in the Beistegui Penthouse, Le Corbusier seeks to oblige the observer to share his intuition that a major aspect of reality exceeds the grasp of the rational, but here this is shown on a grand scale, in the opposition between the casbah and the bridge above it: "A very carefully preserved Casbah is inserted into that image of the machine as perfect process, the Plan Obus: the Casbah is the antithesis of this perfect process. . . . The bridge in its way takes on unsettling meanings. Thrown over an anthropological relic that the activity of colonialization could not destroy, it accentuates the fundamental 'difference' that secretly undermines the unity of the overall 'machine'".<sup>49</sup> The observer's disquiet derives from the knowledge of the radical difference between the moment-to-moment existence of the "new Algiers" and the "primeval mode of existence" of the inhabitants of the casbah, in which Le Corbusier saw "the difference between a cosmic disposition and a trust in the great ocean of being, now lost," the difference, that is, between the momentary and the eternal present. Thus in Algiers we encounter a kind of stalemate of indeterminable duration. Tafuri calls this a "synthesis," but as he makes clear, it is one of counterposition, of confrontation rather than resolution leading to a higher stage. In any case, from what Tafuri tells us, it seems that in 1932 Le Corbusier is still squarely on the side of the completion of the technological age and so does not yet grasp the overall situation that Heidegger himself has not yet fully thought out.

If we now turn to the Capitol at Chandigarh, we find that the Secretariat, High Court,

and Assembly that appear in Tafuri's analysis do not resemble those transcendent public buildings so beloved by architectural historians, those that synthesize East and West, ancient and modern, architecture and nature. Tafuri believes that Le Corbusier chose to devote most of his attention to the Capitol and its monumental buildings and that while he had titular control over updating the existing plan, he voluntarily left the decisions for the design and construction of the city proper to his on-site team. This enables Tafuri to cleave the Capitol from the surrounding city, the site of the Plan, and thus to separate Le Corbusier from it.

Here we encounter the essence of all of the late Le Corbusier's plastic language. For example, in the truncated allegory of the Assembly's curving pronaos roof line as a partially cut-off Open Hand there are "interruptions, slippings, and distortions." Tafuri observes the reappearance of the differences that he first observed in the Beistegui Penthouse. "Difference [rather than] dialectics holds the three volumes together"; with "neither roads, perspectival allusions, nor formal triangulations" to connect them, Chandigarh's buildings desire to overcome place, to reach eternity. So decisively separated are these three monuments, which Tafuri terms "desiring objects," that they fail in their attempts to join up. Symbols without codes, they speak another, sacred language. They "disarticulate the Capitol," "the objective (being) rather to fuse the memory of the origin with the tendency toward surpassing the present." Assessing the new Capitol, Tafuri sees Le Corbusier as a "modern 'builder of symbols,' seeking to converse with time, nature and being."<sup>50</sup>

The desire of the three buildings to overcome place, to reach eternity, is not unrelated to their placement near the Himalayas. In other words, the space between them – their separation by vast distances, by the Fosse de la Consideration, and by the depressed roadways – originates in a certain poetics in which Tafuri discerns the "limits of time and space." With the Open Hand, to be constructed in the Fosse, the "limits of time and space" are reached. Thinking back to the "modern tragic symbol" conjured up by Louis Aragon, of a steering wheel that turns unguided by any hand, Tafuri states that "the Ville Radieuse wanted to guide such a mythological steering wheel" – that is to say, a steering wheel "of technology assumed as destiny, as the 'infernal' foundation of 'what is most modern,' the limitless calculability and organizability of all that lives." And Tafuri concludes his article with the assertion that "its ceaseless motion is what the Open Hand opposed with its oscillating metaphors, which are endowed, to use Walter Benjamin's phrase, 'with a feeble messianic strength.'"<sup>51</sup>

How is it possible for Le Corbusier to have begun this odyssey when Heidegger was only just taking up the subject of technology for the first time in the 1930s? True, Heidegger's "theory of technology" allows for poets to anticipate in their own domain what he alone among Western philosophers had thematized. We will need to examine his "The Question Concerning Technology," written in the 1950s, to fathom what it means for Le Corbusier truly to have known what Heidegger believed he, anticipated

by a few poets, had understood: that the age of technology must be traversed in its entirety. Even before technology has completely run its course, though, a few geniuses may catch a glimmer of the emergence of a new dispensation by giving up the struggle to achieve the fulfillment of technology in its current form and by contemplating its essence instead. Now, in the present epoch, this essence is the revelation of entities as “standing reserve” available for human manipulation and exploitation. In the coming epoch, if it becomes possible to return to a condition like that found at the origins of Western civilization, that is, in pre-Socratic Greek thought, then the essence of technology will again be seen to be the disclosure of entities as they are in themselves, independent of their utility to human beings.

Let us briefly outline what this implies about Le Corbusier’s attitude toward technology as we have seen Tafuri recount it in the trajectory of Beistegui-Algiers-Chandigarh. His encounter, in this view, goes from unthinking acceptance to aggressive application to initial doubts and the sadder-but-wiser knowledge of the need to push technology’s universal application to the maximum, to, finally, the glimpse of a new age in the perhaps distant future. Le Corbusier is seen as traversing, in his understanding of the place of technology, the stages through which one must pass to arrive at something akin to Heidegger’s state of *Gelassenheit*, “letting be.”

Tafuri implies that in Algiers Le Corbusier was beginning to realize that the total dominance of technology has led to the total forgetfulness of happiness, indeed, that the very possibility of recalling happiness has passed out of reach for the West, because it has gone so far astray from the happiness that comes from rootedness in nature and tradition. One cannot help but be reminded here of Heidegger’s strictures against modern thought, which has strayed so far from a concern with Being that it is no longer even capable of raising the question of Being. According to Tafuri, Le Corbusier seems, at this time, to know what true making or producing is, namely, that it participates in a common realm with poiesis, with the work of art, and that examples of it could be found in the casbah. But it also appears that Le Corbusier does not think that in the modern age in the West such poietic production is still possible – in the Heideggerian sense of allowing objects to reveal themselves as things in their own right. The best one can do now is to point to differences between the products of a society still vitally connected to its origins (the casbah) and those of present Western society, something that Le Corbusier accomplishes in a dramatic fashion with his placement of the bridge. It would appear to us, given what Tafuri has said, that a more positive step is apparently ruled out because, at this moment in any case, Le Corbusier finds it impossible to go backward in his own work (a utopia of nostalgia is not what is wanted) and impossible to go forward, since he does not yet see a way beyond the complete dominance of technology, at least at the urban scale. In other words, he has not yet glimpsed the post-technological age of *Gelassenheit*. He has not yet seen the *coupure* that Heidegger thinks may possibly rescue humanity from its forgetfulness of authentic Being.

In the Capitol at Chandigarh, Tafuri believes, Le Corbusier has finally understood the need to look toward a post-technological age and, what is more important, has attempted to create buildings for this age, or at least ones that point toward it. Here, in his own making, he is attempting to work in accord with the Heideggerian notion that true production, or *techné*, is *poiesis*, in the sense of an authentic revelation of entities without regard to their instrumental values, thus the Icarian dilemma revealed by Bataille is also resolved. This, basically, is the insight Tafuri attributes to Le Corbusier, who seems, however, not to have abandoned any of his other views, those underlying and expressed by his writings on urbanism and all the other myriad city plans he projected. That urbanism is “dominated by a conceptual poverty” and a search for “the absolute of the planned unit.”

There is found in “Machine et memento,” inserted between the accounts of Beistegui and Algiers, what might be called an article within the article, directed against the notion that Le Corbusier’s urbanism is a synthesis of his “entire process of research.”<sup>52</sup> Tafuri concedes here that “the portrait of technology painted by Le Corbusier is indeed an ambiguous one.” He admits that “there is a bipolar relationship between that urbanism that is understood to be a ‘home of technology,’ in which the accursed multiplicity of languages is ‘forced’ to find a hearth common to all, and the centerless *multiversum* of the contemporary metropolis, it is one among a number of bipolarities, including those between the individual and collective, nature and artifice, Apollo and Dionysus, the archaic and ‘futable,’ that reflect a Manichean representation of reality that hopes to build bridges toward the ‘subversive intentions of Surrealism.’” Further, he recognizes that Le Corbusier’s intellectual biography and desire for synthesis led him to “place his hopes in the prophecies of decisionmaking authorities whose power would be unequivocal and centralized.”<sup>53</sup> Yet this is the same Le Corbusier who was simultaneously voyaging toward Chandigarh’s insight, and doing so even as he was flirting with the Vichy regime. It is the same Le Corbusier who “lets his ideologies oscillate between the Saine-Simonian tradition, an obscure syndicalism, and a corporacivism containing within itself a theory of elites; they are very much part of the current of ideas circulating among technocratic groups, such as the *Redressement français*, in the 1920s.” How is this possible? Time and again, Tafuri concedes that the appearance of a problem exists. In this regard, Bataille observed already this oscillation between the bipolarity of the materialist “old mole” and the imperialist “eagle” occurring within the surrealists, now it occurs also in the case of Le Corbusier. The Corbusian floating hand above the model of the Ville Radieuse is a “liner” – in the term of Le Corbusier, a “liner” representing the technology representing the “eagle” of the power.

Tafuri assures us, however, that the obvious potential for conflict implicit in the existence of these two components of Le Corbusier’s work – rationalization and the plan, on the one hand, and his plastic language, difference, and eventually *poiesis*, on the other – “does not mean that Le Corbusier was of two different minds.” Why not? We



ask. The answer turns out to be simple, although its explanation will be long. Briefly and obscurely it is that “rationalization must be carried out in order to be surpassed, in order to recuperate other universes of ends.”<sup>54</sup>

Drawing on the fact of Le Corbusier’s reading of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and knowing of its influence on artists and intellectuals in the early decades of the century, Tafuri points to the inversion of codes contained in the “Five Points” and concludes that “the will behind the new act of creation is founded upon nihilism.”<sup>55</sup> Given that Le Corbusier, emboldened by this nihilism, is obviously intent on far more than just individual gestures (such as the Beistegui Penthouse), some new kind of overall scheme or principle will be needed to operate on a large scale. But where, Tafuri asks, “is the synthesis of Le Corbusier?” His response is one that seeks to avoid the appearance that the architect is of two minds, after all. Although both the designs of which Tafuri approves (such as the Villa Savoye) and the plans for cities other than Algiers may be termed “matters of synthesis,” one instance turns out to be much the better one. In fact, in discussing Le Corbusier’s work after 1922, Tafuri continually points to the failure of the urbanism and the success of the individual buildings and the painting. Tafuri places all the “good” elements on the side of what may be called the plastic research, research that alone could rescue, at least partially, the urbanism. It is worth quoting him at some length on this point: “The materials brought together... ever more problematically ... over the course of Le Corbusier’s study in painting come into conflict with the assertive demands of his urbanistic theory. The villas of the 1930s, as well as the Cite de Refuge and the project for the Palace of the Soviets, constitute the theaters of this conflict.... It is this side of Le Corbusier that acted as director and strategist of these dramas of conflicts that should be seen as a lasting interpreter of the ‘age of poverty’ and not that other side, which prefigured and made apologies for inevitably anachronistic forms of dominion over this age.”<sup>56</sup>

It appears, then, that Le Corbusier is not of two different minds about rationalization, but rather, displays two different sides of one mind in his work as a whole, with the relative emphasis varying with the kind of work involved. While this assessment may save him from the charge of artistic schizophrenia, it clearly calls for further explanation, which Tafuri provides in his analyses of the Obus Plan and the Capitol of Chandigarh, and we have examined these in some detail. The Bataillan-Heideggerian interpretation allows him to reconcile these two sides in a way that can offer a coherent and satisfying view of Le Corbusier’s overall career. Looking more closely at the statement we quoted earlier – “rationalization must be carried out in order to be surpassed, in order to recuperate other universes of ends” – we see that despite its mysterious formulation, it proposes that one side, rationalization, can be considered a means to an end.

The manner in which Tafuri attributes to Le Corbusier’s work the reconciliation of these two sides in something like a means/end schema does not require the architect to be conscious of the operation, at least not fully or always so. Moreover, to the extent

that this reconciliation is actually effected, it occurs only over the course of about three decades, from the early 1920s to the mid 1950s, and it is achieved in large measure through experimentation in art. In a transition section linking some of the admittedly worst aspects of Le Corbusier's urbanism to some of the best elements of his work, Tafuri makes the following comment, which partially harmonizes with Heidegger's diagnosis of the reign of technology as a manifestation of a ceaseless will to power that is itself the last stage in the history of traditional Western metaphysics: "The post-liberal city prefigured by the *Ville Radiense* points to a surpassing of the *civilisation machiniste* itself through the acceleration of the processes ensured by the machine plan. But such a machine must continually strive for more; the 'illness' of modern times will be vanquished when technology shapes the entire universe as a whole. . . . Only by their total immersion in the flow of this process, according to Le Corbusier, can conflicts be eliminated."<sup>57</sup> This "total immersion" in the flow of technology is very similar to the Paranoiac-critique method interpreted by Koolhaas, whether it is wrong or right, by immersing into it, it can cure.

It is thus a Bataillan-Heideggerian diagnosis that allows Tafuri to consider the *Ville Radiense*, conceived on the heels of Obus A and dedicated in May 1933 to "authority," as an insufficient interim stage in Le Corbusier's development. What enables him to surpass it, to arrive at the other "universe of ends"? According to Tafuri, Le Corbusier, in the wake of his sculptural research, loses faith in "totalizing hypotheses" and becomes more receptive to "the overwhelming plurality of the forces that penetrate the subject as well as the intersubjective relations." The result is that his late architecture becomes a battle between giants, between "fragments of certitude" who "heroically battle figures born out of the 'listening' to 'unutterable' languages": those pregnant in the differences of Beistegui and Algiers. Tafuri views the ensuing stalemate in a positive light, stating that it is this that keeps the late work "from falling into 'sickness'", just as Breton, oscillating, struggling yet not falling into "madness", while contrasting to the mental status of Tafuri at the writing time of this paper.<sup>58</sup>

Assessing the postwar city planning from this standpoint, he notes that already in the Unite of Marseilles, "this extreme homage to the collectivist dream," Le Corbusier seems implicitly to acknowledge the impossibility of actually remaking the city in the way, and especially on the scale, foreseen in most of his previous urbanism, both written and drawn. This is why Tafuri can say that this building, now an "enclosed whole," speaks in a "second language" that "expresses the conditions that . . . force it to pretend to be a 'type,' and chain it to its condition as a fragment of a totality destined to remain merely thinkable."<sup>59</sup> The concession that it must remain merely thinkable shows how far Le Corbusier has traveled along the Bataillan-Heideggerian oscillating path; the insistence on continuing a tradition that finds it desirable that the expansion of such a building type to a totality should even be thinkable indicates, however, that Le Corbusier had not yet reached the end of this path, which will occur when he once again returns to

city planning in a developing country, India. As thus assesses Tafuri:

Nothing in fact joins together the gigantic volume of the Secretariat, the Parliament, and the High Court of Justice: nothing – neither roads, perspective allusions, nor formal triangulations – helps the eye to situate itself with respect to these three “characters,” which weave among themselves a discussion from which the human ear is able to gather only weak and distorted echoes. Indeed, the modeling of the terrain, the dislocation of level, the mirrors of water, especially the Pool of Reflection, are all there to accentuate discontinuities and ruptures....

Interruptions, slippings, and distortions indeed pervade the language of the later Le Corbusier: at Chandigarh they are essential to the dramatization of the forms. The three great “desiring objects” seek to shatter their own solitude: the Secretariat through its inclined ramp and the broken meshes of its facade gradations; the Parliament through the distortion of the geometric solids that dominate it like hermetic totems; the high Court of Justice through the bending of the brise-soleil and the giant entrance stairway. But the interchange takes place only at a distance: tension informs this dialogue among symbols that have lost the codes that once gave them the value of names.<sup>60</sup>

Chandigarh is opposed to his dogmatic works exalting rational reasons. The space in Chandigarh is loaded with the soul of Eros, distorting it under the rein of desire. These three great “desiring objects” remind me inevitably the Meditation on the harp, 1932 of Dali. And with this premise, Koolhaas, inheriting the bloody sword of Le Corbusier as a serial “father” killer, in return murders and cannibalizes with *l’amour fou* his “father”, thus Koolhaas together with his loving skyscrapers, find somehow their predecessors here, reminding his words on “architectural cannibalism”, “by swallowing Its predecessors, the final building accumulates all the strengths and spirits of the previous occupants of the site and, in its own way, preserves their memory.”<sup>61</sup>

Tafuri’s reading is based on the lifelong struggle of Le Corbusier between bipolarities, in Heideggerian terms it is techné and poiesis, machine et mémoire; in Bretonian surrealist terms it is conscious and unconscious, logical and poetical; in Bataillian terms it is the “old mole” and the “eagle”, the “Icarus complex”. With this premise, one could understand these three problems are actually one – the one of antinomies, of bipolarities., of paradoxes and contradictions.

Le Corbusier, with his dogmatism urbanistic propositions, he made a pure expression of planisme, with his *éloge de l’angle droit*, his devotion to discipline, tried continuously to reach the techné, the power, the sun. Thus it becomes increasingly dangerous for him that the heat of the sun will melt his Icarian wings, which means that he is in the danger of privation of happiness. Yet through his Beistegui-Algers-Chandigarh Odyssey, with the detachment he interposed to the technology, the authority, the sun – Eros, chance, *multiversum* entered his world, hence the happiness is regained through this act, keeping

his distance to the sun, the heat, protecting himself from the Icarian danger of falling into the sea.

During his journey to Chandigarh, Le Corbusier read and annotated *La Part Mudite* – a gift from the author – Bataille. Le Corbusier was particularly interested by the notion of gift – or more specifically potlatch,<sup>62</sup> in regard to which Bataille wrote:

Combat is glorious in that it is always beyond calculation at some moment.

But the meaning of warfare and glory is poorly grasped if it is not related in part to the *acquisition of rank through a reckless expenditure of vital resources, of which potlatch is the most legible form.* (Le Corbusier's emphasis)<sup>63</sup>

The idea of gift, or further – potlatch, is to give without an expectation of utilitarian return, yet the non-utilitarian values such as honour, rank, or power are acquired. As one can discover in the post-war writings of Le Corbusier his statements of self-deprecation, self-portrayal as a tragic hero, thus in this sense, the *main ouverte* in Chandigarh is a potlatch that Le Corbusier addressed to India, to the world, after his relentless yet non-recognized lifetime efforts, *through a reckless expenditure of vital resources* – as Bataille revealed in his book – like the sun. Therefore Le Corbusier wrote thus in a flyleaf joined to the book:

In offering the five volumes of Complete Works, Corbu has put forward and has asserted enthusiastic ideas to which Corbu himself is an adherent. From one side, Corbu is taken for granted, and from the other side he is a king. The unselfish practice of painting is an untiring sacrifice; it is a gift of time, patience, and love, expecting no material reward (save the modern merchants). All these spendings have remained unrecognized. One day, before or after my death, they will say “thank you.” This will come late, after many setbacks that I have lived through in my life. But what does it matter; what matters is the secret to happiness.<sup>64</sup>

Bataille gave a gift to Le Corbusier, being somehow rewarded by Le Corbusier's autobiographical reading; Le Corbusier continued the donative relay, by giving the *main ouverte* as a potlatch to the world. This main ouverte with his “reckless expenditure of vital resources” as the sun render him a sun. “Prend garde: à jour au fantôme, on le devient”, said Caillois; Le Corbusier, by pretending the sun – with his submersion into the technology, he became a sun – by somehow seeking out the essence of the technology. The worry of his Icarian winds' melting could be thus laid down, since he is now a sun. Even if his death happened in the sea, it was completely different from that of Icarus.



## NOTES

1. Wim van den Berg, *Beistegui avant Le Corbusier : genèse du penthouse des Champs-Élysées*, Patrimoine (Paris: B2 Editions, 2015), p.5.
2. *Ibid.*, p.1–66.
3. Willy Boesiger, Architecte Le Corbusier, and Architect Pierre Jeanneret, *1929-1934 : Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret*, [Treizième éd.], vol. 2, éd.13, *Oeuvre complète / Le Corbusier* (Zurich: Les Editions d'Architecture, 1995), p.53.
4. Tim Benton, *The Villas of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret : 1920-1930*, Revised and expanded ed. (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2007), p.203.
5. *Ibid.*, p.203–204.
6. Boesiger, Le Corbusier, and Pierre Jeanneret, *1929-1934*, 2, éd.13:p.11; Jacques Lucan, *Composition, Non-Composition : Architecture and Theory in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Essays in Architecture (Lausanne: Presses Polytechniques et Universitaires Romandes, 2012), p.421.
7. Le Corbusier, *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme*, [Réimpression], Collection de "L'esprit nouveau" (Paris: Editions Vincent, Fréal, 1960), p.172–174; quoted in Bruno Reichlin, "L'Esprit de Paris," *Casabella* 51, no. 531–32 (1987): 52–63, 109–10, 118.
8. See Beatriz Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," in *Sexuality & Space*, vol. 1, Princeton Papers on Architecture (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), p.98–128.
9. Manfredo Tafuri, "Machine et Mémoire: The City in the Work of Le Corbusier," in *Le Corbusier*, ed. H. Allen Brooks (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), p.203–218.
10. Le Corbusier, *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme*, p.172–174; quoted in Reichlin, "L'Esprit de Paris."
11. Reichlin, "L'Esprit de Paris," p.118.
12. Le Corbusier, *La ville radiieuse : éléments d'une doctrine d'urbanisme pour l'équipement de la civilisation machiniste*, Réimpression en 1964 (Paris: Vincent, Fréal, 1964), p.98–99; quoted in Reichlin, "L'Esprit de Paris," p.109.
13. Tim Benton, *The Villas of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret*, p.203–204.
14. Jacques Lucan, *Composition, Non-Composition*, p.420.
15. Pierre Chenal, *Architecture D'aujourd'hui, Long Version | Planum Magazine. Movies Column no.2*, 1930, <https://vimeo.com/67793221>.
16. Tim Benton, *The Villas of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret*, p.204–208; Anthony Vidler, "Paris: Beistegui Apartment, or Horizons Defferred," in *Le Corbusier : An Atlas of Modern Landscapes* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2013), p.276–277; *Appartement de Beistegui, Cité Universitaire - Pavillon Suisse, Ville Radiieuse, and other buildings and projects, 1930*, vol. 7, The Le Corbusier Archive, 1984, p.xv–xxi, 5–147; Jacques Lucan et al., *Le Corbusier, une encyclopédie*, Réimpression, Collection Monographie (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1990), p.68–71.
17. Jacques Lucan et al., *Le Corbusier, une encyclopédie*, p.314.
18. Colomina, "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," p.109.
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