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Daniel Sherer

Le Corbusier's Discovery of Palladio in 1922 and the Modernist Transformation of the Classical Code

For Kenneth Frampton

In his famous essay of 1947, "The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa," Colin Rowe first proposed a striking formal comparison between Le Corbusier and Palladio which, despite the passage of over half a century, still shapes perceptions of both.[1] Indeed, this parallel has played such a pivotal role in defining formalist criticism in architecture that it can be said to exemplify the essential aims of this approach. Prompting methodological reflection on formalism's guiding assumptions and characteristic preferences, this analogy tends to emphasize what is privileged, and what is omitted, when specific boundaries are drawn, boundaries that direct the reading to problems of proportion, visuality, and aesthetic perception. And since the relationship between architecture's formal and non-formal attributes typically involves the mediation of some specific corpus of rules, Rowe's formalist strategy, which does not address this important theme except incidentally, clearly limits itself in this sense. On the other hand, this limitation just as clearly works in its favor, as Rowe's method, having focused on the internal logic of form, can now act as a spur to re-examine all that it excludes. One way to investigate what has been left out by Rowe as a result of the inherent logic of his method is to try to give an account of the norms and constitutive codes of classicism and modernism, both on their own terms and as they change over time. Taking this shift from *form* to *norm* as its starting point, the new reading of Le Corbusier's reception of Palladio outlined in the following pages attempts to provide a complement to Rowe's by extending it in ways that were barred by its strictly formal criteria.

First, some preliminary questions concerning the logic of the norm and its corollary, the inevitability of the exception, must be explored. For centuries architecture

1 Colin Rowe, "The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa," in *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995 [1947]), 1–28. The comparison was taken up again in "Mannerism and Modern Architecture I," published in the same volume, 29–58. For assessments of Rowe's method, see Paolo Berdini, "Introduzione," to the Italian translation which appeared under the title *La matematica della villa ideale e altri scritti* (Bologna, 1984), 2–25; Joan Ockman, "Form without Utopia: Contextualizing Colin Rowe," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 57:4 (1998), 448–56; George Baird, "Oppositions in the Thought of Colin Rowe," *Assemblage*, 33 (1997), 22–35; the monographic issue of *Any*, 7/8 (1994) dedicated to Rowe; Daniel Sherer, "Architecture in the Labyrinth: Theory and Criticism in the United States: *Oppositions*, *Assemblage*, *Any* (1973–1999)," *Zodiac*, 20 (1999), 46–7.

2 It is of course true that even in the Renaissance the classical language was never fully recuperated, if only because from the outset it was never fully recuperable. In this connection Manfredo Tafuri has observed that "imitation of antique models oscillated between two extremes. On the one hand, aware of the irretrievability of a longed-for ideal, the mimetic canon was forced to rely on artifice and fiction. On the other, it did not renounce the attempt to transcend the model." See Manfredo Tafuri, "A Search for Paradigms: Project, Truth, Artifice," *Assemblage*, 28 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 56.

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has oscillated between a need for rule and theories and practices of license. In architecture as in other fields, norms are caught up in dialectical relationships with ideas that resist them. In fact, prior to any normative claim, the exception cannot be recognized as such: in the absence of a rule to break, the exception is not exceptional. And yet, even before the enunciation of the theoretical *a priori*, the exception indicates the presence of a problem which, once resolved, leads to a solution that can be generalized, and which thus attains the prescriptive status of what one should do in such cases. Norms, then, are rules which arise out of problems that previously went unnoticed—predicaments that await, and in a certain sense induce, the very normative procedures, stipulations and discourses which aim to set them aright. From this it is clear that *what makes an architectural norm possible is that which violates it in advance, even before it can be codified.* Thus, the classical code (like the modernist one which came after it) can be understood as a system of representation which elicited exceptions that proved to be as decisive as the norms they defied.

In the late seventeenth century, however, when Perrault's critique of Vitruvius revealed the full extent of the crisis that affected the classical code, not only architectural norms, but also every theory or practice that resisted them, lost a fixed point of reference that was never completely recovered.[2] The real proving ground of this process was not the era of philosophical "rationalism," however, but that of technological rationalization. This phase coincided with the so-called First Industrial Revolution that was already underway by 1800: a point when standardization, the new modality assumed by the norm, displaced the metaphysical presuppositions of the classical language. Modern architecture was one result of this process. Even as classicism managed to develop new ways of dealing with the anomalies it ceaselessly generated, the ultimate exception to its logic—industrial standardization—eventually gave rise to modernism itself: a force able to challenge, assimilate, and recast the norms of the classical tradition after having dispensed with its external conventions. It is therefore reductive, although at first sight quite tempting, to assert that classicism lost any claim to universality once industrial standardization became universal. In reality the problem is more complex: exceptions elicited by the classical language undermined it from within, effectively facilitating the emergence of modernism. Thus, even when the classical legacy was condemned by the exponents of the "tradition of the new" as sterile or superseded, it could still operate as a *variable* and *internal* norm for the modern.

This hypothesis is not all that surprising given the important revision in our understanding of the origins of modernism which has occurred since Rowe. Among other things, this revision has thrown into question traditional accounts of radical discontinuity in the polemical discourse of modern architects. For although the advent of modernism is typically thought of as a clean break with the classical tradition, a norm-based reading sensitive to the role performed by the exception in elaborating a "middle way" between continuity and rupture indicates, yet again, the mythical status of this view. In so doing, this approach underscores modernism's implicit ties not only to the normative attempt to establish a new code, but also to the classical norms it presumably overcame. That these ties are bonds of inversion—dialectical continuities—only serves to bring

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out the inherent logic of modernism's underlying normative procedures. This reading is thoroughly historical, even if it takes its essential orientation from epistemological considerations: as such, it focuses on those points in the genesis of codes linking antithetical universes of discourse.

Le Corbusier's reception of Palladio is just such a turning point. To understand its significance we are obliged to consider a *carnet de voyage* whose existence was unknown to Rowe when the "Mathematics of the Ideal Villa" was written. Published for the first time by Stanislaus von Moos in 1996, this sketchbook, the so-called *Album La Roche*, documents a trip that the young architect took to Venice and Vicenza with his friend and patron Raoul La Roche in 1922, before returning to Paris the following year to work on the Maisons La Roche-Jeanneret, partly for the same client.[3] This *carnet* contains the only evidence uncovered to date which proves that Le Corbusier had detailed, first-hand knowledge of Palladio's architecture. Close analysis of its contents can help redefine the crucial, yet still largely unexplored role Palladio played in Le Corbusier's production in the early 1920s, at a point in his development when he could be said to have accomplished the transition from premodern to modern.[4] From these initial considerations one can argue that Le Corbusier elaborated a fundamental aspect of his modernist strategy—the systematic inversion of classical norms—partly as the result of a dialogue with Palladio that was more extensive than Rowe's formalist criticism has led us to believe.

Before analyzing Le Corbusier's reception of Palladio it is necessary to clarify his relationship with the classical legacy. The first decisive encounter between Le Corbusier and the antique took place in 1911, when the young architect visited the ruins of Pompeii and then travelled to Greece to study the Acropolis. The Hellenic finale of this journey (by any account a major turning point in his formation) is documented by a photograph of the eighteen-year old Charles-Edouard Jeanneret standing in front of the Parthenon. It is revealing to compare this image with another which appeared in *Vers une architecture* in 1923 juxtaposing the latest Delages and Humber motorcars with the Periclean monument (Fig. 1).[5] This visual analogy of ancient and modern underscores an important dimension of Le Corbusier's theoretical project in the 1920s: its consistent appeal to rational norms and standards.[6] This strategy of transhistorical comparison aligned the normative principles animating

3 Le Corbusier, *Album La Roche*, ed. Stanislaus von Moos, 2 vols. (Milan and Paris: Fondation Le Corbusier, 1996); cf. von Moos, "La Leçon de Venise," in Benedetto Gravagnuolo (ed.), *Le Corbusier e l'Antico: Viaggi nel Mediterraneo* (Naples: Electa Napoli, 1997), 87ff. The album was a new year's gift for La Roche, intended to underscore the close bond the architect felt with his client and friend. For an acknowledgement of the intellectual and aesthetic importance of the trip for La Roche, linking it explicitly to the gift, see La Roche's letter of 4 January 1925 addressed to the architect cited in von Moos, *Album La Roche*, I. 8. On Le Corbusier and La Roche, see Ulrike Jehle-Schulte Strathaus (ed.), *Le Corbusier und Raoul La Roche: Architekt und Maler, Bauherr und Sammler*. Exhibition catalogue, Architekturmuseum Basel, July–August 1987; Jacques Sbriglio, *Les Villas La Roche-Jeanneret* (Basel, Boston, and Berlin, 1970), 59ff.

4 It is striking to note that in another context, without expressly referring to Le Corbusier, Rowe dated the point of emergence of modern architecture to 1922–23, a decision that may indicate that he had the Maisons La Roche-Jeanneret in mind, especially since this project took shape in these years and is generally regarded as the first truly modern work of Le Corbusier's architecture: "By my own standards, the words 'modern architecture' refer to a strategy of building which erupted circa 1922–23, and its characteristic physical gestures are exceptionally easy to summarize." Colin Rowe, *The Architecture of Good Intentions: Towards a Possible Retrospect* (London: Academy Editions, 1994), 16.

5 Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (London: J. Rodker, 1931), chapter 2, esp. 124ff.

6 See, on the theme of standardization in Le Corbusier's theory and practice in the 1920s, Winfried Nerdinger, "Standard et type: Le Corbusier et Allemagne, 1920–1927," in Stanislaus von Moos (ed.), *L'Esprit Nouveau: Le Corbusier et l'industrie 1920–1925* (Strasbourg: Les Musées de la Ville de Strasbourg, 1987); von Moos, "Standard und Elite: Le Corbusier, die Industrie, und die Esprit Nouveau," in Tillman Buddensieg and Henning Rogge (eds.), *Die nützlichen Künste* (Berlin: Quadriga Verlag, 1981), 306–23; Kenneth Frampton, *Le Corbusier: Architect and Visionary* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), chapter 2.

7 Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 123.

8 Michel Foucault, Introduction to Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 16.

9 Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 7–8. On this passage, the observations in R. Gabetti and C. Olmo, *Le Corbusier and L'Esprit Nouveau* (Turin, 1972), 186, still retain all of their cogency. On the relation of classic and modern in Le Corbusier the bibliography is vast: only a few basic indications can be given here. See Giuliano Gresleri, "Il silenzio delle pietre, le parole dei 'numeri', il solitudine, il 'deflagrante ricordo,'" and Mogens Krustrup, "Il luogo di tutte le misure," both in Gravagnuolo, *Le Corbusier e l'Antico*, 71–84 and 35–43; Alan Colquhoun, "The Significance of Le Corbusier" in *Modernity and the Classical Tradition: Architectural Essays, 1980–1987* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), 163–70 and "Displacement of Concepts in Le Corbusier," *Essays in Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 51–66; F. Passanti, "Architecture: Proportion, Classicism, and Other Issues," in Stanislaus von Moos and Arthur Ruegg (eds.), *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier: Applied Arts, Architecture, Painting, and Photography, 1907–1922* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 69–98; Manfredo Tafuri, "'Machine et memoire': The City in the Work of Le Corbusier," in H. Allen Brooks (ed.), *Le Corbusier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 208; Kenneth Frampton, *Le Corbusier: Architect and Visionary*, 15, 77–9. On Le Corbusier's reading of the Parthenon, see now *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier*, 182–5, esp. 184; Krustrup, "Il luogo di tutte le misure," 35–43; Giorgio Ciucci, "Le Corbusier e il Partenone," in *Le Corbusier: Il linguaggio delle pietre* (Venice: Cataloghi Marsilio, 1988), 59ff; Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War 1914–25* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 376–7 (I owe this reference to the kindness of Mary McLeod); Paul Venable Turner, *La Formation de Le Corbusier: Idealisme et Mouvement Moderne* (Paris: Macula, 1987), 104–10.

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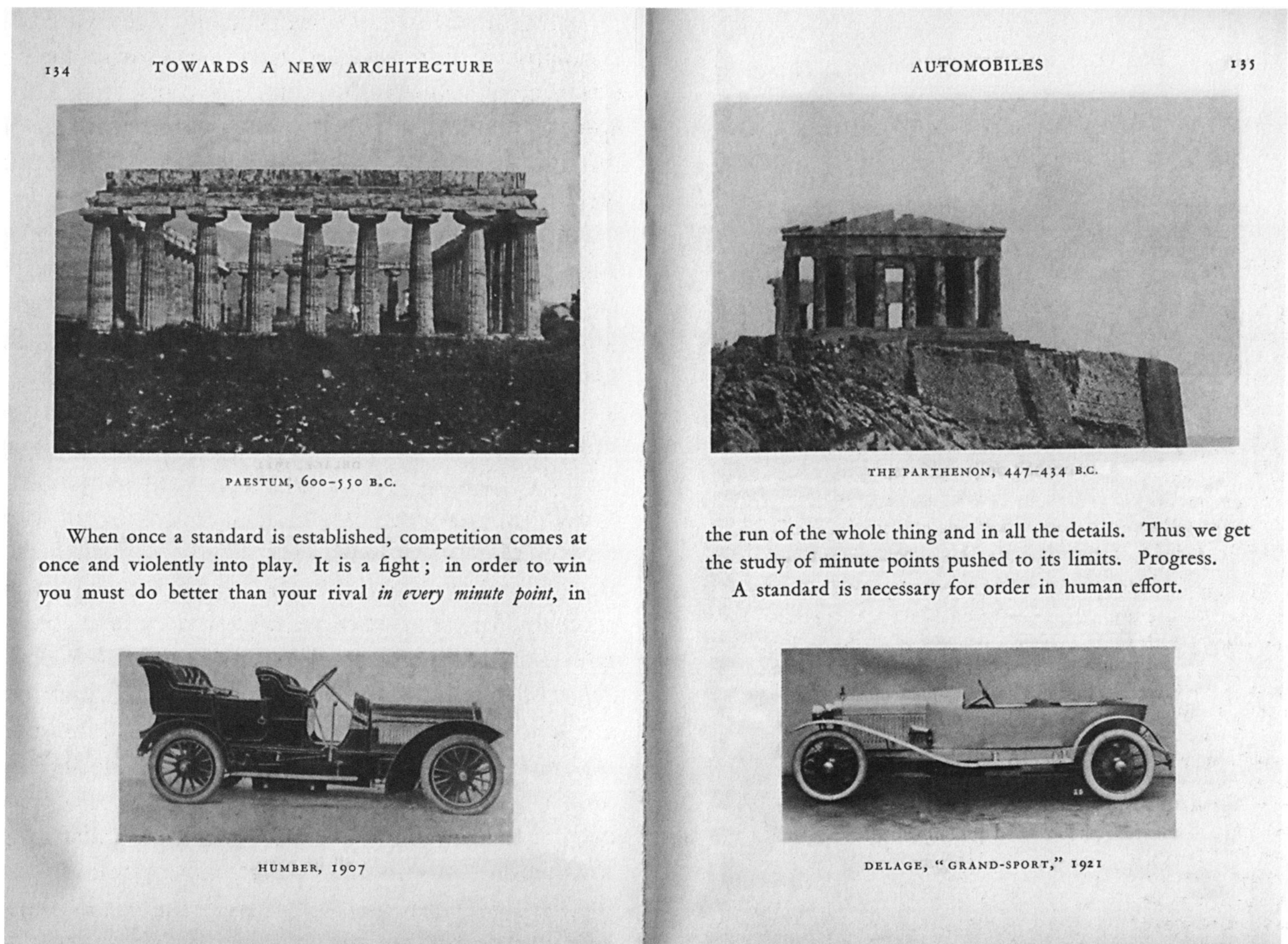

134 TOWARDS A NEW ARCHITECTURE

PAESTUM, 600–550 B.C.

When once a standard is established, competition comes at once and violently into play. It is a fight; in order to win you must do better than your rival *in every minute point*, in

HUMBER, 1907

AUTOMOBILES 135

THE PARTHENON, 447–434 B.C.

the run of the whole thing and in all the details. Thus we get the study of minute points pushed to its limits. Progress.

A standard is necessary for order in human effort.

DELAGE, "GRAND-SPORT," 1921

Fig. 1 Spread of *Towards a New Architecture* [Vers une architecture] (1923), showing modern automobiles compared with the Parthenon

classical buildings with the new standards guiding the modern universe of precision. For this reason he could observe: "The Parthenon is a product of selection applied to an established standard. Already for a century the Greek temple had been standardized in all its parts."[7]

This analogy suggests that the elective affinity which Le Corbusier perceived between classical principles and modern technology presupposes, to adapt a phrase of Michel Foucault, an essential *norm-process* traversing the entire history of architecture.[8] This process, cutting obliquely across a divergent series of codes, designates a unitary phenomenon whose significance eludes the conventional categories of Classic, Modern, Baroque, Mannerist, and so on. For Le Corbusier, then, it was not simply a matter of arguing that the advent of modernity had put an end to the "styles." Instead, his aim was to show that the "styles" do not really count, but the norms which implicitly govern them do. This idea was strengthened by his insight that normative principles have a different historical periodicity, a more profound relation to the regularities of architectural discourse, than any stylistic codification. Le Corbusier thus used the normative thematic disclosed by ancient architecture to denounce the Ecole des Beaux Arts, which saw itself as the classical tradition's only legitimate heir. When Le Corbusier announces, for instance, in the introduction to *Vers une architecture*, that "les styles sont une mensonge," the polemic is persuasive not only because it mobilizes a pre-existing critique of academic ideology, but also because it is used to further an argument uniting the ideals of a nascent modernism with the normative principles of ancient architecture.[9] By adopting this complex stance, which might be called an anti-historicist historicism, Le Corbusier cannily outflanked the claims of Beaux-Arts classicism, neutralizing them at their root.

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Consequently, what I have chosen to call the *lost classicism of the era of modernity* is not lost in any absolute sense, but rather acts as a vehicle for a kind of cultural anamnesis for which the modern architect is asked to be the agent, if not the demiurge. This observation brings to mind Tafuri's assertion that throughout his career Le Corbusier's essential theoretical position was situated between an infinite past and a will to the future, so that its stance toward the norm involves a sort of *memoire involontaire* inherent in architecture.[10] This hypothesis is reinforced by a fact of which even Le Corbusier himself does not seem to have aware (in spite of his profound grasp of its consequences): that ancient Greek architects, when working on their temples, relied upon the *paradeigma*, an ancient standardization technique consisting of a specimen or model which, placed on that area of the building under construction, regulated the relation of parts to the whole in accordance with a predetermined proportional system.[11] In this sense the technological advances of modernity which Le Corbusier so deeply admired are prefigured in the realized standards of ancient classicism. Le Corbusier seems to acknowledge this when he observes, when commenting on the precision of the entablature of the Parthenon: "All this plastic machinery is realized with all the rigour we have learned to apply to the machine. The impression is of naked polished steel."[12] Nevertheless, his emphasis on the rigor of technical standards should not be taken to mean that the exception has no role to play in the constitution of ancient and modern normative systems. In this regard his celebrated paean to the Parthenon offers eloquent evidence: "There has been nothing like it anywhere at any period... the mouldings of the Parthenon are infallible and implacable. In severity they go far beyond our practice, or man's normal capabilities."[13] Similarly, when Le Corbusier sees the Periclean monument as the apotheosis of the classical code he elevates the norm to a level of perfection usually reserved for the exception:

> In this period of science, of strife and drama in which the individual is violently tossed about at every moment, the Parthenon appears to us as a living work, full of grand harmonies. The sum of its inevitable elements gives the measure of the degree of perfection to which man can attain when he is absorbed in a problem definitely stated.[14]

Thus conceived, the Parthenon not only registers the historicity of Le Corbusier's anti-historicism, but also presupposes a new conception of architecture elaborated on a transhistorical plane.[15] In this respect, the apex of classical Greek architecture (like that of Renaissance

10 Tafuri, "'Machine et memoire,'" 214.
11 J. J. Coulton, *Ancient Greek Architects at Work: Problems of Structure and Design* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 55–8, 72–3; on standardization in ancient Greek temples, with particular reference to the orders, John Onians, *Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 9–12.
12 Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 201.
13 Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 203–4.
14 Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 134.
15 Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), chapter 1.
16 Renato De Fusco, *Segni, storia e progetto dell'architettura* (Bari: Laterza, 1973), 5.
17 Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 167–8; H. Allen Brooks, "Le Corbusier's Formative Years at La Chaux-de-Fonds," in H. Allen Brooks (ed.), *Le Corbusier*, 27ff.
18 Rowe, "'Character' vs. 'Composition': or Some Vicissitudes of Architectural Vocabulary in the Nineteenth Century," *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa*, 59–88.
19 H. Allen Brooks, *Le Corbusier's Formative Years: Charles-Edouard Jeanneret at La Chaux-de-Fonds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 327ff; Passanti, "Architecture: Proportion, Classicism, and Other Issues," 70.

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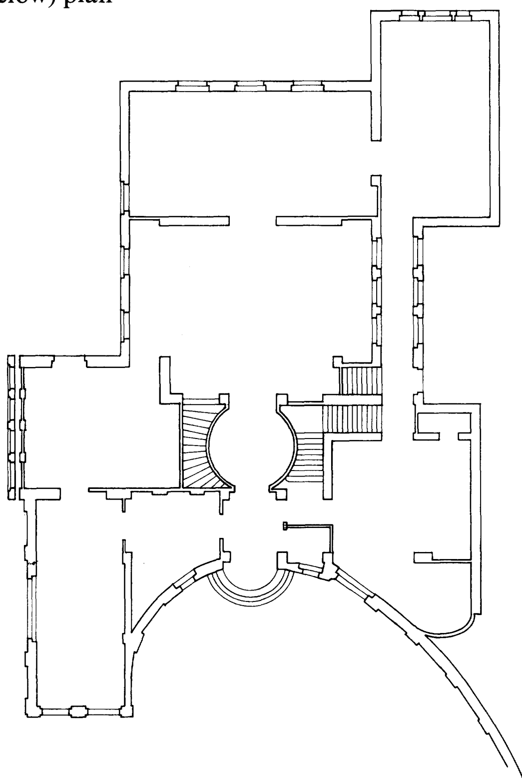
Fig. 2 Le Corbusier, Villa Fallet, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, 1906: façade

architecture, marked by Palladio) gave Le Corbusier's vision of modern architecture a powerful strategy of legitimation based upon the interdependence of standardized norms and exceptional achievements. It follows that the normative theses specific to architecture, which mobilize regulative principles, theoretical premises, and systematic concepts which Renato de Fusco has identified as so many ways of securing a dynamic orientation toward reality for the discipline, disclose an indispensable, yet often poorly understood, dimension of our history: the implicit relation that links, even as it distinguishes between, the conscious affirmation of modernity achieved by modern architecture and the spontaneous return of the classical in the era of modernism.[16]

Le Corbusier, Villa Favre Jacot, La Locle, Switzerland, 1912:
Fig. 3 (above) façade
Fig. 4 (below) plan



Le Corbusier's first realized work, the Villa Fallet of 1906 (Fig. 2), was constructed in his native city of La Chaux-de-Fonds, a hub of Swiss watchmaking which combined venerable craft traditions with exceptional technical precision.[17] Bearer of the artisanal values of the so-called "style sapin" in harmony with the Jura regionalism championed by L'Eplattenier, Le Corbusier's earliest mentor, this house epitomizes a tendency which Rowe himself associated with nineteenth-century codes that emphasized "character" over the Beaux-Arts doctrine of "composition."[18] Insofar as this project is tied to particularist impulses originating in the local architectural culture, it may also be regarded as the earliest instance of an interest in exceptions to academic doctrine, a crucial aspect of Le Corbusier's approach throughout his career.

After working briefly in the atelier of Peter Behrens in 1911, Jeanneret returned to the Suisse Romande, where he executed his first classicizing project, the Villa Favre-Jacot of 1912–13 (Figs. 3, 4). This work, which might initially appear to be the most Palladian of his entire *œuvre*, is in fact quite distant from Palladio, at least in its chief sources of inspiration. And though its idiosyncratic classicism has clear Renaissance precedents—in addition to obvious affiliations with Perret and Behrens—it can be traced back not to the mid-to-late sixteenth-century Veneto, but to early sixteenth-century Rome: instead of a Palladian antecedent for the plan, the clearest model for this feature of this villa is unquestionably Raphael's (and Giulio's) Villa Madama of 1517–21 (Fig. 5).[19] This reading is recommended by Jeanneret's unusual sensitivity to Raphael's characteristic play between symmetry and asymmetry. As such, the Villa Favre Jacot simultaneously registers an impressive control of the classical vocabulary and demonstrates that he took as his point of

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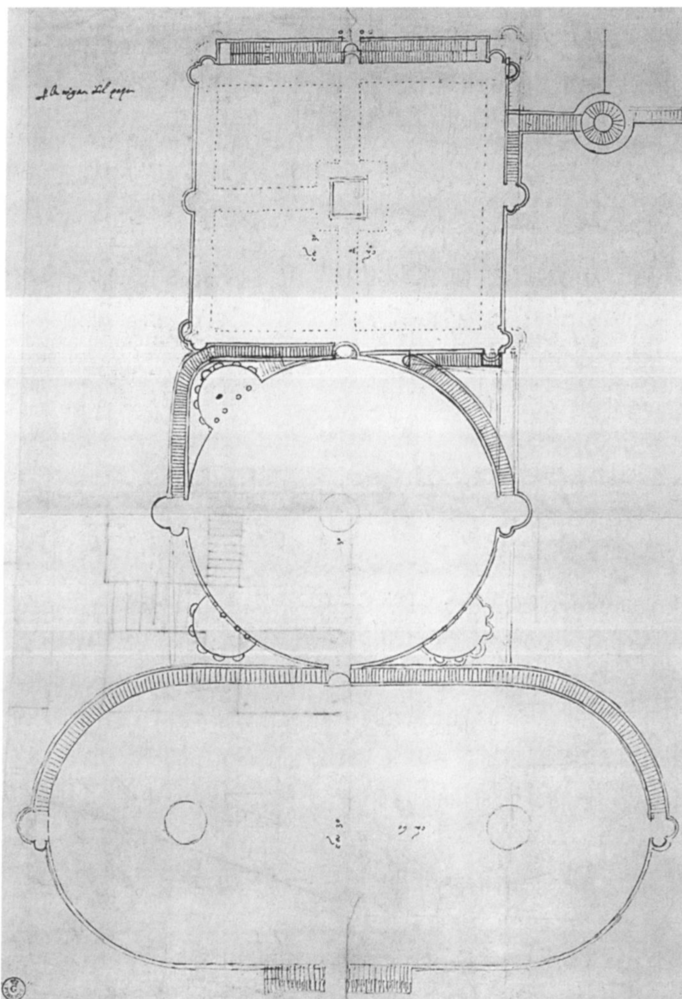
departure specific contingencies and haphazard elements connected with the unfinished project for Clement VII. When one more carefully considers the implicit network of references informing the new invention, however, one inevitably comes up against a single ancient precedent which is evoked by both Raphael and Le Corbusier: the hemicycle of the Forum of Trajan (Fig. 6).

An equally eloquent example of the use of a classical source linking Le Corbusier's work to Renaissance strategies of invention is provided by the façade of the Villa Schwob of 1916 (Fig. 7). With this project, a specific Palladian model seems to enter Le Corbusier's field of vision for the first time, the Casa Cogollo (Fig. 8). At this juncture the logic of the exception asserts itself most powerfully in the "modern classicism" of *Le Corbusier avant Le Corbusier.* As Rowe has observed, the

20 Rowe, "Mannerism and Modern Architecture," 32.
21 Rowe, "Mannerism and Modern Architecture," 33.
22 For this analysis, I have relied on the insights of my friend Scott Cohen.



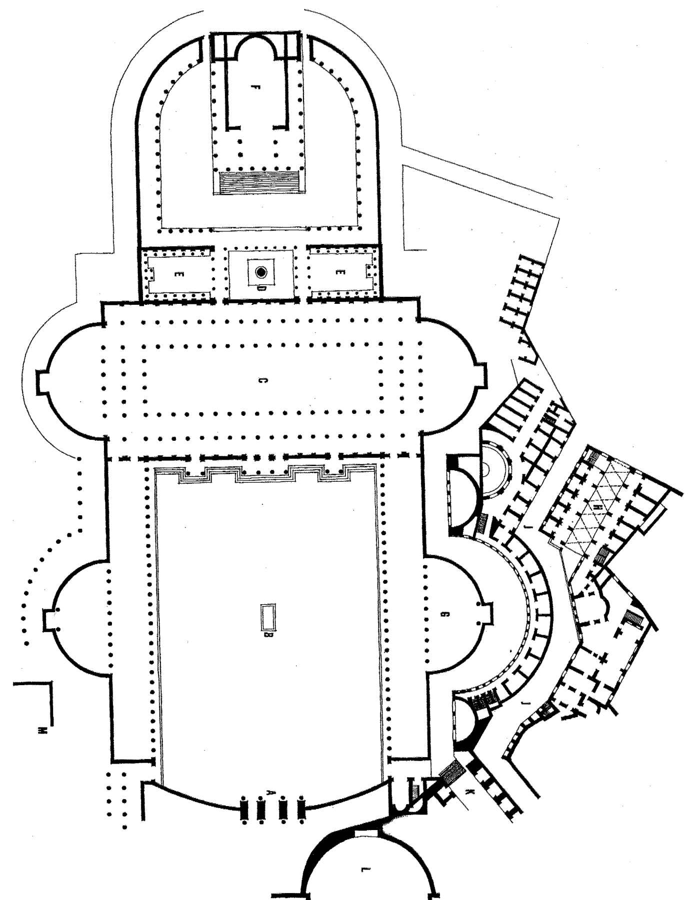


Fig. 5 (left) Raphael and Giulio Romano, Villa Madama, Rome, 1515–19: plan
Fig. 6 (right) Forum of Trajan, Hemicycle, Rome, c. 100 AD: plan

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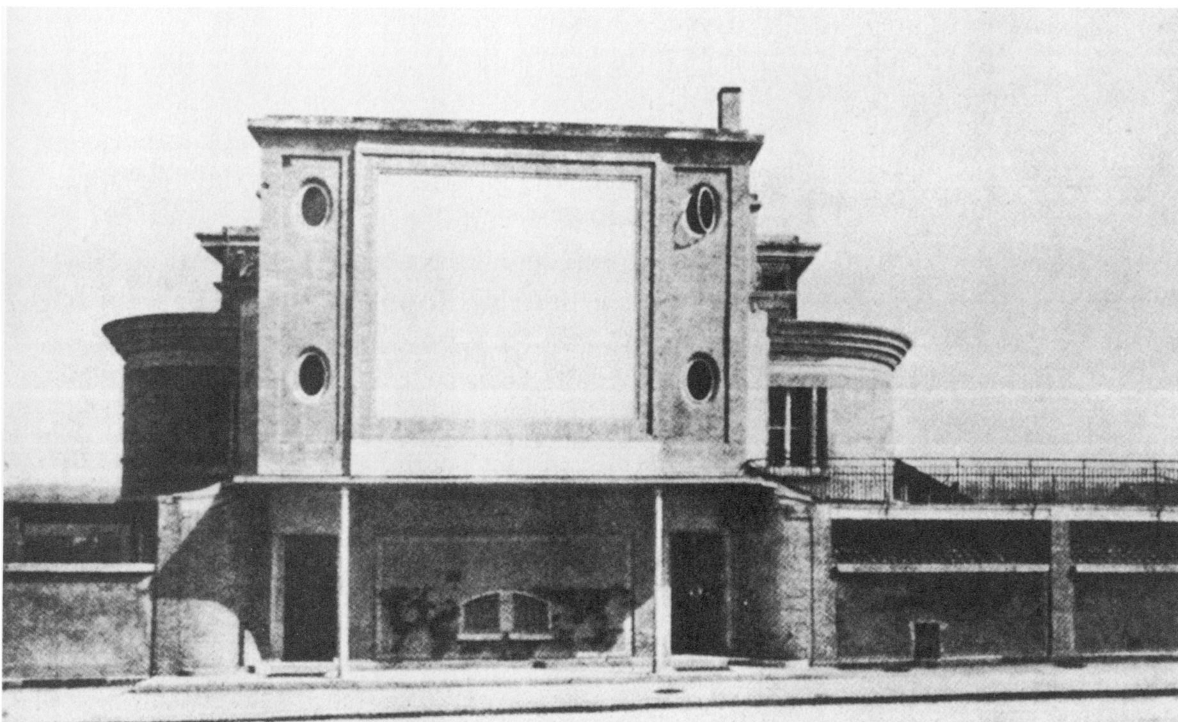
blank second-story panel appears to be a clear response to the voided panel on the Palladian façade, which for its part is generated by the unorthodox combination of a domestic façade and an arcaded loggia.[20] This combination, in concert with the breaking forward of the Ionic entablature of the arch with its anomalous Corinthian superstructure framing the empty space, reads, according to Rowe, as "an inversion of the normal... effected within the framework of the classical system"[21]—the norm in this case being the traditional type of the arch of triumph (Fig. 9).

Since the blank modernist panel of the Villa Schwob reads as the expansion of the upper-level tablet which contains the inscription, just as the base of the façade can be seen as the lateral expansion of the lower divisions of the arch beneath the string course, one can suggest that no Palladian model is necessary, and that both Le Corbusier and Palladio achieved their respective transformations of the classical type independently. In this reading, Le Corbusier's modification reflects a horizontal *and* vertical expansion of the ancient type, while Palladio's registers an exclusively vertical one.[22] (This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that the first documented encounter between Le Corbusier and actual examples of Palladio's architecture occurred six years after the design of the Villa Schwob.) However, it is also possible that the Casa Cogollo did provide a basis for Le Corbusier's complex response to the classical prototype: one that breaks with, even as it cites, the Palladian model. Even if we do not decide in favor of either reading, one thing is certain: when designing the Villa Schwob's façade Le Corbusier played a deft game



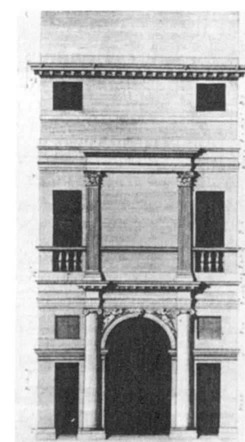


Fig. 7 (above left) Le Corbusier, Villa Schwob, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, 1916: façade
Fig. 8 (above right) Palladio, Casa Cogollo, Vicenza: façade
Fig. 9 (left) Arch of Trajan, Ancona, c. 100 AD

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with the classical language to solve a problem raised by Perret and Behrens—that of finding a classical discourse appropriate to the modern era. In so doing he underscores his own ability to speak the classical language in its highest and most sophisticated form, by inventing a new grammar of the exception, as valid in its own era as the analogous syntax of inversion formulated by Palladio in the sixteenth century.

In light of the foregoing, one might reconsider the normative implications of the emerging modernist code exemplified by Le Corbusier's white villas of the 1920s from the critical perspective formulated by Rowe himself, a perspective whose presuppositions have been elucidated by Paolo Berdini.[23] Emphasizing what is characteristic in Rowe's formalist procedure by underlining the "internal," ahistorical, and more specifically, visual and proportional dimensions of its mode of reading, Berdini maintains that Rowe's formalism does not try to isolate the typological invariants of the villa in its Renaissance and modern incarnations. Instead, it articulates an entire field of differences centering on binary oppositions. These, according to Berdini, and especially the Le Corbusier/Palladio parallel, were formulated to capture the specificity of the modernist achievement by setting it against the Palladian precedent. And yet despite Berdini's assertion that Rowe's analysis, caught up in its comparative task, ends up shedding very little light on Palladio's architecture itself, the attention which the English critic devotes to the inversion of codified languages effected by Casa Cogollo actually does tell us something new and important about Palladio's formal strategy.[24] In this respect Rowe's formalist discourse does not specify what constitutes Le Corbusier's reception of Palladio, but rather helps explain Palladio's and Le Corbusier's architectural languages by means of systematic contrasts emphasizing the "classical" side of the Swiss-French architect and the "modern" aspect of the Palladian legacy.

The images and texts which comprise the *Album La Roche* provide considerable insight into the extent of Le Corbusier's knowledge and study of Palladio (Figs. 10–14). This is not surprising, as the express purpose of the trip that it documents was probably the first-hand study of Palladio's buildings.[25] The album contains seven watercolors of Palladio's Venetian churches (three of S. Giorgio Maggiore, four of the Redentore); five sketches of a Vicentine palace (two of Palazzo Valmarana), a villa (the Rotonda), and a public building (two of the Basilica), all on the same folio, and two sketches of

23 Paolo Berdini, "Confronti inaspettati: Osservazioni sulla retorica comparata di Colin Rowe," in Luca Monica (ed.), *La critica operativa e l'architettura* (Milan: Unicopli, 2002), 130ff.
24 Berdini, "Confronti inaspettati," 135.
25 Von Moos, *Album La Roche*, II. 8, 24.
26 Le Corbusier, *Album La Roche*, I. folios 29r, 30r, 31r, 33r, 34v, 36r, 37v (the Venetian images); folio 38r (the Vicentine images).
27 Von Moos, "La Leçon de Venise," 86ff; cf. Kurt Forster, "Le Corbusier, Album La Roche, 1921–22," in Guido Beltramini et al., *Palladio nel Nord Europa: Libri, viaggatori, architetti* (Milan: Skira, 1999), 226. Originally this photograph of the Villa Rotonda was intended for an *Esprit Nouveau* article dedicated to Palladio which never appeared: see von Moos, *Album La Roche*, II. 26.
28 *Carnet 1916–1922*, Fondation Le Corbusier, 5597–8.

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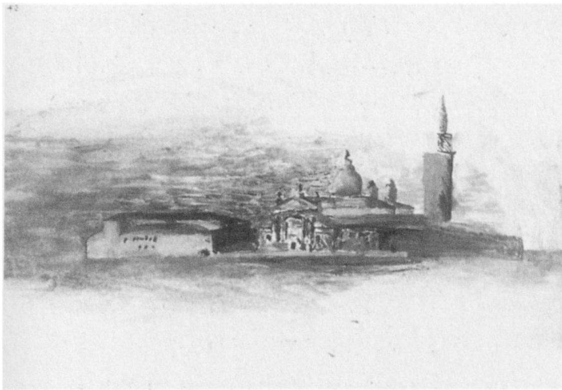
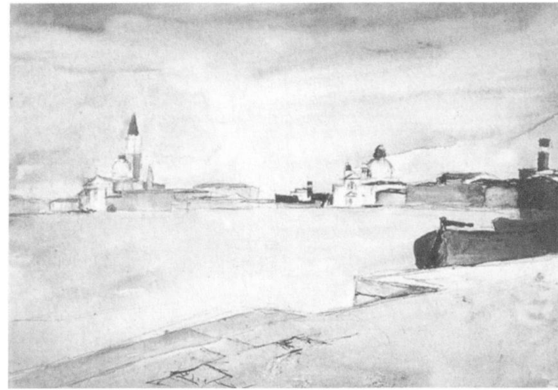
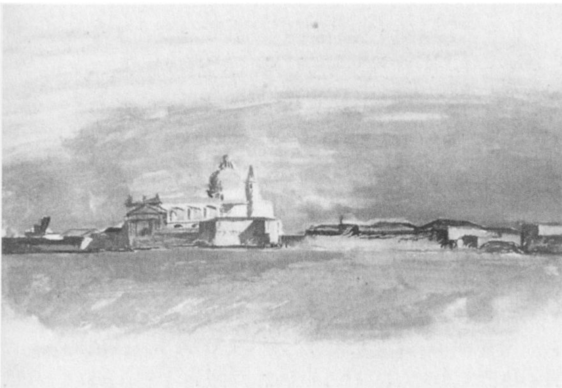
another Vicentine palace (Palazzo Porto Barbarano, mistakenly identified as Palazzo Thiene), both on a second folio.[26] To this list one should add two images not found in the *Album La Roche*: a photograph of the Villa Rotonda, obtained from the director of the Museo Civico of Vicenza, Ongaro—included in two publications by Le Corbusier, the first an article appearing in *Esprit Nouveau* 20 (1924), the second a republication of the earlier essay in *Urbanisme* (1925)[27]—and a line drawing of a portion of the façade of S. Giorgio Maggiore.[28]

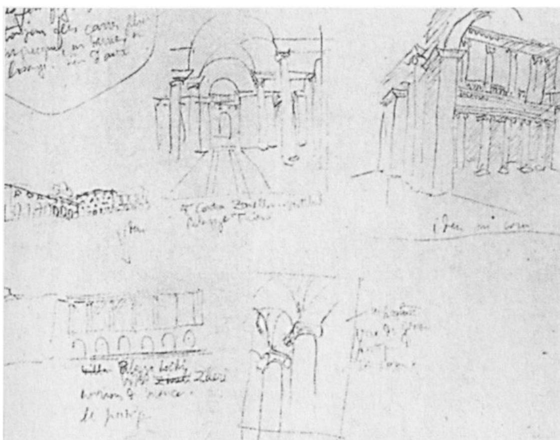
Let us start with the Venetian images. These watercolors represent the buildings from an oblique angle and at a considerable distance; as such, they accentuate overall contours, rather than specific details. At the same time, they vividly evoke the buildings' volumetric organization (Figs. 10–12). Turning our attention to the drawings of Palladio's buildings in or near Vicenza (Figs. 13, 14), we see that the one of the Palazzo Barbarano clearly shows the building's tetrastyle vestibule and cortile alla romana, while the sketch of the Villa Rotonda emphasizes the arch inserted in the portico corner (an unorthodox motif derived from the Porticus of Octavia in Rome) (Figs. 15, 16). This last drawing, moreover, appears alongside a rendering of the superimposed arches of the Basilica. Regarding the vestibule of Palazzo Barbarano, the solution which Le Corbusier docu-







Le Corbusier's watercolors and sketches in the *Album La Roche*:
Figs. 10 & 11 (top) S. Giorgio Maggiore by Palladio, Venice
Fig. 12 (middle) Redentore by Palladio, Venice
Fig. 13 (bottom left) Palazzo Porto Barbarano Vicenza
Fig. 14 (bottom right) Villa Rotunda by Palladio near Vicenza



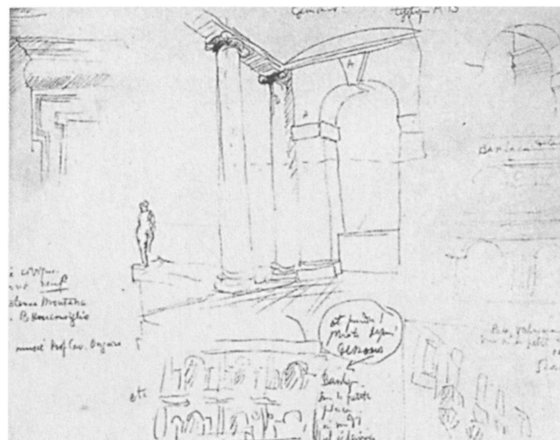


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Fig. 15 (above) Palladio, Villa Rotonda
Fig. 16 (below) Porticus of Octavia, Rome, c. 30 BC

mented in his drawing corresponds only partially to the actual Palladian project: as von Moos has observed, the problem is complicated by the asymmetrical form of the complex, which can be explained by the fact that an irregular and narrow part of the site was added to the original plot only at a later date.[29] If this modification made it possible to complete the *cortile* on a grand scale, it nonetheless also constrained it to assume an asymmetrical shape. In the *Quattro Libri*, II, iii, Palladio illustrates nothing else besides the original project (Fig. 17), or, alternatively, may have offered a more normative image to the reader, following his usual practice. Moreover, von Moos is right to point out that it was probably the unforeseen spatial sequence, and particularly the unexpected turn to the left, that caught Le Corbusier's eye: Le Corbusier describes comparable sequences when studying examples of the Pompeiian *domus*, a significant typological precedent for Palladio's Palazzo Barbarano: "Si vous dessinez les maisons de Pompeii que vou imaginiez symmetriques selons le traditions de l'Ecole, votre crayon decouvrira des assymetries etonnantes et des symmetries imprevues."[30] Bearing in mind this taste for the asymmetrical, the oblique, and the unexpected, one should also reconsider the unusual emphasis Le Corbusier placed on the motif of the Porticus of Octavia: a detail which, having captured his attention, changed the way he depicted what is arguably Palladio's most classical work, the Villa Rotonda, by bringing its least classical element to the fore. From these examples one can infer that Le Corbusier's reception of Palladio stressed deviations, aberrations, and in fact anything that is inimical to rigid interpretations of the classical code, even in architectural situations which contravene such patently anti-normative readings.

Le Corbusier's emphasis on the Palladian interplay of rule and invention registers his own predilection for a dialectical understanding of classical principles, and of architectural norms more generally. Palladio, as is well-known (and as Le Corbusier certainly knew) presented himself as the self-conscious proponent of a normative architecture. Indeed, his theoretical project was founded on expressly normative premises: according to Anton Francesco Doni (1555), the original title of the *Quattro Libri* was *Norma di Vera Architettura*.[31] Other similarities between the architects may begin to explain, or at least to contextualize, the formal congruences in their work. Giangiorgio Trissino, Palladio's humanist mentor, conferred a new name, and along with this a new social and cultural status, on the stonecutter Andrea di Pietro della Gondola at the beginning of his career. From that

29 Von Moos, "La Leçon de Venise," 86.
30 Le Corbusier, *Esprit Nouveau* (1920), in von Moos, "La Leçon," 86.
31 *La Nuova Libreria* (Venice, 1555), 155, cited in Licisco Magagnato, "Introduzione" to Andrea Palladio, *Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* (Venice, 1570), in the edition edited by Licisco Magagnato and Paolo Marini (Milan: Edizioni il Polifilo, 1980), xi; cf. Rudolf Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 64, n. 27.
32 Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, 60ff; James S. Ackerman, *Palladio* (London, 1991), 20–1; Mario Carpo, *Architecture in the Age of Printing: Orality, Writing, Typography and Printed Images in the History of Architectural Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), 23, 204, n. 16.
33 Jeanneret and Ozenfant, *Apres le Cubisme* (Paris: Altamira, 1999 [Paris, 1918]), 90ff. On the variant/invariant relationship in Le Corbusier's early aesthetic theory see Gabetti and Olmo, *Le Corbusier e l'Esprit Nouveau*, chapter 6, and the brief yet perceptive observations in Frampton, *Le Corbusier*, 27. On the Ozenfant–Jeanneret exchange and its pivotal role in the genesis of Purism, the best general discussion is still Susan Ball, *Ozenfant and Purism: The Evolution of a Style, 1915–30* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981), a reference I owe to the kindness of Mary McLeod; see also Françoise Ducros, "From Art Nouveau to Purism: Le Corbusier and Painting," in *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier*, 135ff; Beatriz Colomina, "L'Esprit Nouveau: Architecture and Publicité," in K. Michael Hays (ed.), *Architecture Theory since 1968* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 628.
34 Jeanneret and Ozenfant, *Apres le Cubisme*, 93.
35 Ozenfant and Julien Caron, "Une villa de Le Corbusier, 1916," *L'Esprit Nouveau*, 21 (1921), 692.

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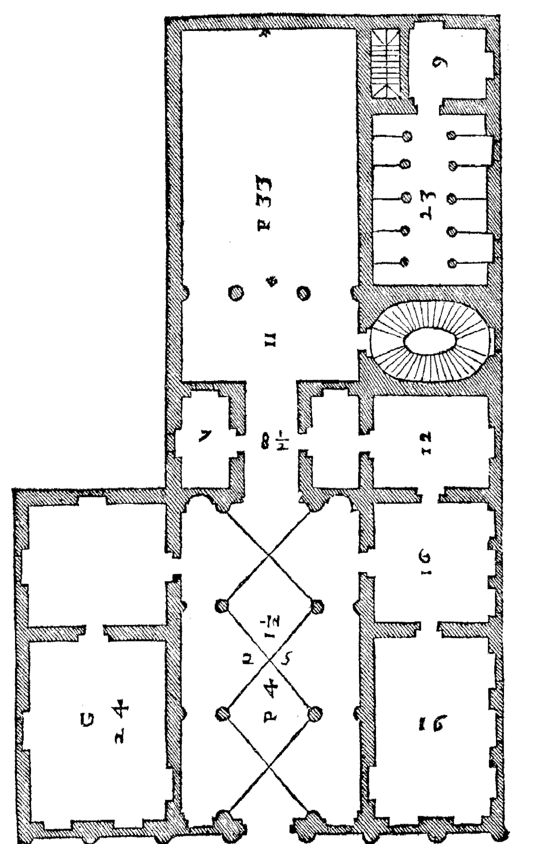
point forward, Palladio had all he needed to accomplish his transformation from a semi-literate mason into the first architect-theorist of the Renaissance to codify the norms of architectural representation in lucid orthographic images, at least as far as the culture of the printed book is concerned.[32] Like Le Corbusier, Palladio showed a profound awareness of his own intellectual and artistic vocation by assuming a new name; like Le Corbusier, he fashioned a public persona closely associated with a normative idea of architecture based on formal and geometric reduction; and finally, like Le Corbusier, he spread his message by launching a theoretical project and a promotional initiative utilizing the printed word alongside eloquent images of architectural standardization. Because of these specific parallels, Le Corbusier had ample reason to view Palladio not as the exponent of a rigid conception of the classical code (as a superficial but rather widespread view would have it) but as an architect able to exploit the tension inherent in the code itself between typological variation and pure geometry effectively. It becomes plausible to imagine that the modern architect interpreted Palladio's works in terms of his own Purist ideas, a hypothesis that derives further cogency from the central role assumed by the dialectic between variant and invariant motives in the Purist manifesto, *Après le Cubisme*, of 1918.[33] On the one hand, this manifesto argued that modern art and architecture require as their basis geometrical concepts that are primary and rigorous, understood as invariant structures of aesthetic perception; on the other, it maintained that they must be able to accommodate a specific class of deviations which Purist theory "admet... si elle est justifiée par le recherche de l'invariant."[34] However else it may be characterized, this search strives to reveal the intrinsic affinity connecting the fundamental geometric and proportional principles underlying Modern, Roman, and Greek architecture.



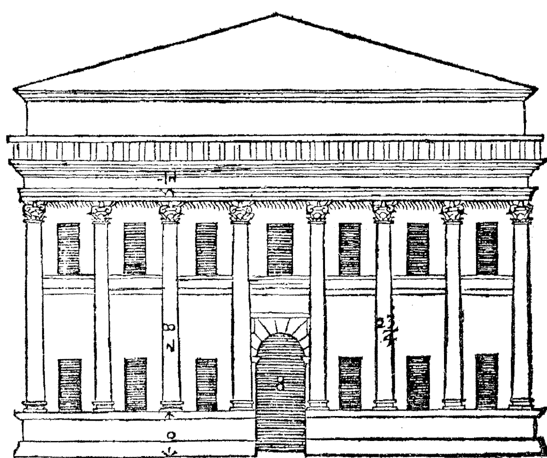


Fig. 17 Palladio, Palazzo Porto Barbarano, 1570: plan and elevation

In light of what has been said so far, we must ask ourselves if the presentation of the Villa Schwob, which Ozenfant, under the pseudonym Julien Caron, published in *L'Esprit Nouveau* 6 (1921) constitutes indirect evidence for this Purist reading of Palladio.[35] In his essay Caron/Ozenfant presents the interaction between geometrical invariants and perceptual variants as a key to understanding Le Corbusier's design. If the photograph conveys the contingent aspect of perception, the volumetric accent also manifest in this image, when taken together with the critical description furnished by the text, privileges the purity of the overall geometrical configuration:

En plus de ces applications constructives [referring

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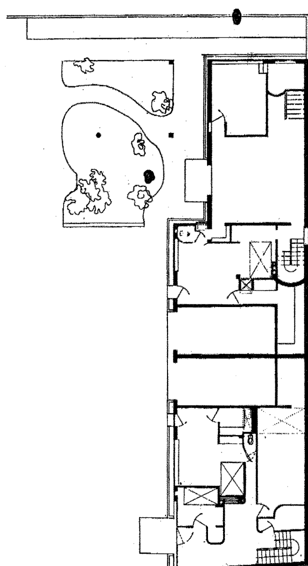

Fig. 18 Le Corbusier, Maisons La Roche-Jeanneret, 1923: plan

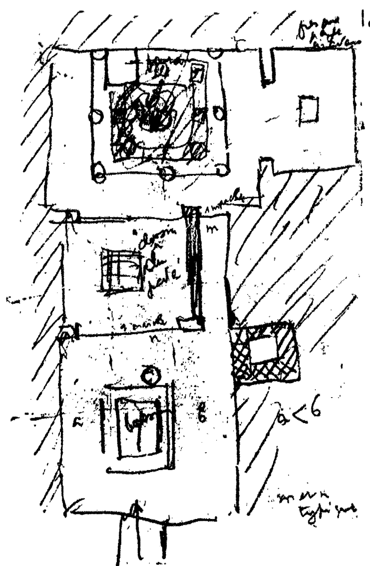

Fig. 19 Le Corbusier, sketch of the plan of the House of the Tragic Poet, Pompeii

> to the *beton armé* of the internal structure] Le Corbusier a tente de resoudre un probleme delicat; s'etant donne pur tache de faire une oeuvre de pure architecture, il s'imposa un plan dont les masses ont ete de geometrie primaire; le carre et le cercle. One a rarement tente cette gageure dans les constructions des maisons d'habitation, sauf à la Renaissance.[36]

This passage implies that a specific use of the classical code, stressing its geometrical elementalism, provided an effective normative context for the emergence of Le Corbusier's vision of a modern residential architecture. More precisely, in its reductive focus on the essential, Ozenfant's reference to "a work of pure architecture" identified one of the main problems that Le Corbusier confronted when designing the Maisons La Roche-Jeanneret from 1922 onward: to achieve a synthesis of ancient and modern without reverting to obvious classical allusions. His solution relies on two inherently related typologies: the Roman *domus* and the Palladian atrium house, so that the modern project is endowed with definite, if unobtrusive, classical reminiscences. To be more precise, in Le Corbusier's view the Roman *domus*, in addition to exhibiting a rational distribution of interior spaces, also displays a remarkable volumetric clarity.[37] Both features can be seen in Le Corbusier's plan as he absorbs the lesson of antiquity while rejecting any direct evocation of classical forms.

The most striking thing about this subtle use of the ancient type is that the plan forms a kind of L, recalling —as Kurt Forster argued in a famous essay—the plan of the House of the Tragic Poet which Le Corbusier drew during his visit to Pompeii in 1911 (Figs. 18, 19).[38] Yet, given the fact that Le Corbusier drew a strikingly similar residential plan by Palladio—that of the Palazzo Porto Barbarano (Fig. 17)—on his trip with La Roche, it is more likely that this Palladian model inspired both patron and architect when the two were discussing the Maisons La Roche-Jeanneret. At the very least, the L-shaped plan of Palladio's Vicentine palazzo may have revived memories of the Pompeiian type. In any case, the unusual circulation pattern implicit in both Palladian and Pompeiian precedents must have impressed Le Corbusier when he realized the *promenade architecturale* in the Maisons La Roche-Jeanneret—the first time that this characteristic feature of his architecture appears in his work. After arriving in the garage, the spectator emerges from an enclosed area; following a diagonal axis which leads directly to the threshold of the house, he or she experiences the entire sequence in terms of a barely perceptible contrast between covered and uncovered

36 Ozenfant and Caron, "Une villa de Le Corbusier," 692.
37 Kurt Forster, "Antiquity and Modernity in the La Roche-Jeanneret Houses of 1923," *Oppositions Reader* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 20–1.
38 Forster, "Antiquity and Modernity," 20–1.
39 On the *promenade architecturale* in the Maison La Roche, see now Sbriglio, *Les Villas Roche-Jeanneret*, 39ff; Tim Benton, *Les Villas de Le Corbusier*, 1920–34 (Paris, 1975), 64–5. For a more comprehensive reading of the significance of the *promenade architecturale* in Le Corbusier's work as a whole, see now von Moos, "Voyages en Zigzag," in *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier*, 41–3.
40 On Le Corbusier's and La Roche's shared ideas regarding the gallery's functional parameters and the differentiation of its audience—it was in fact open to the public two afternoons a week, even when La Roche was absent —see Le Corbusier, *Quand les cathédrales étaient blanches: Voyage au pays des timides* (Paris: Plon, 1937), 157.
41 Raoul La Roche, letter of 13 March 1925 cited in Russell Walden, "New Light on Le Corbusier's Early Years in Paris: The La Roche-Jeanneret Houses," in Russell Walden (ed.), *The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977), 153. My translation.

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Le Corbusier, Maisons La Roche, Paris, 1923:
Fig. 20 (top) entrance
Figs. 21 & 22 (middle & bottom) gallery

spaces (Fig. 20). As with the virtual impluvium of the picture gallery (Fig. 21, 22), this highly nuanced game recapitulates a crucial feature of the ancient house: the dialectic between interior and exterior. Charged with antique and Palladian memories while moving decisively beyond them, the *promenade architecturale* prompts an unprecedented articulation of the movement of the body through space. It does this by effecting an oscillation between subject and object, interiority and exteriority, the orthogonality of the volume and the sinuous itinerary joining the different floors.[39]

This mediation between the conventions of ancient typology and the requirements of modern circulation was aimed at accommodating the refined sensibility of a client who fully endorsed the Purist commitments of Le Corbusier and Ozenfant. In the house, La Roche's avant-garde paintings synthesized normative geometries and exceptional episodes so as to express the underlying presuppositions of a Purist concept, translated into a highly articulate architectural language.[40] It is certain that La Roche grasped the implications of this strategy in relation to the aforementioned affinity between antiquity and modernity. This much is clear from a letter he wrote to Le Corbusier after the completion of the project on March 13, 1925, in which he declares:

> The house gives me great joy and I convey to you my gratitude. You have brought to completion an admirable work which, I am convinced, will mark an epoch in the history of architecture. First, the house contains, from different points of view, innovations which have allowed technical progress but which up until now architects have not thought to use… But what especially moves me are certain constant elements found in all the great works of architecture, but which one sees so rarely in modern constructions. Your ability to link our epoch to the preceding ones in this way is particularly remarkable. You have "overrun the problem" and made a work of plastic art.[41]

Inserting itself between architectural codes associated with the residential type and plastic values peculiar to the work of art, the functional dimension of the Maisons La Roche-Jeanneret simultaneously prompts a return to the classical past and a dialectical leap into the future. To be sure, this process precludes obvious Palladian quotations and, for that matter, literal uses of the Pompeiian legacy. Yet in this house one cannot avoid discerning a profound continuity with Palladian and Pompeiian models: a surreptitious classicism whose evocative power derives from the fact that the decisive citations are never explicitly stated.

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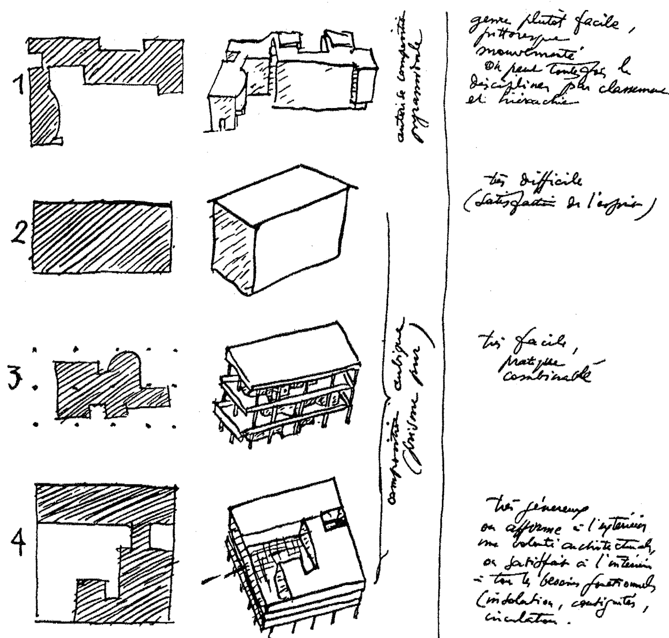

Fig. 23 Le Corbusier, *Les Quatres compositions*, 1929

In the *Quatre compositions* of 1929 (Fig. 23), Le Corbusier's inversion of classical principles finds its most succinct theoretical expression. Presented systematically through a series of new domestic typologies, this inversion acquires the status of a modernist norm. In this context the use of *pilotis* designates the reversal of a classical podium, the *fenêtre en longueur* effects a contradiction of the classical aedicule, and so on.[42] This becomes most apparent in the fourth type, exemplified by the Villa Savoie, whose interior resists the limits set by the absolute geometric integrity of the second type, even as this very same quality seems to be preserved, if only at first glance, on the exterior envelope.

This aspect of the Villa Savoie leads us back to Rowe, and more specifically to the famous analogy he proposed between Villa Savoie and the Rotonda.[43] Yet it is also the case that this specific juxtaposition hinges, as Paolo Berdini has shown, on a more general contrast between a structural system based on a *plan paralysé* and hence on bearing walls and a *plan libre* presupposing a series of *piani nobili* supported on *pilotis*.[44] For Rowe, this structural difference confirms, and yet at the same time contradicts, the effect of formal and geometric similarity that the two houses inevitably share. Yet if we reconsider their relationship in terms of a norm/exception interdependence, something new emerges from the comparison. Turning to the plan, the regularity of the Palladian perimeter remains intact in its Corbusian counterpart. In the modern interior, however, an entire series of spatial singularities and the *promenade* which connects them are clearly privileged. Moreover, when we compare the elevations of Villa Savoie to its planimetric organization (Figs. 24, 25), it is evident that we are not confronted by an abstract exemplification of the norm/exception dialectic, but rather by a concrete manifestation of this interaction, one that strongly marks the plasticity of the surrounding volume. In other words, in Le Corbusier's hands, the typological norm becomes a grid for the eruption of voids and, at the same time, a pretext for the manifestation of exceptions to classical rule.

When followed to its conclusion, the diagonal of the ramp, the primary vehicle of the *promenade architecturale*, shows that the geometrical coherence of the façade, of a pronounced Platonic and Palladian character, is merely a fiction.[45] A paratactic sequence of *objets a reactions poétiques*, exceptions *par excellence*, is secured by the *promenade*, which bears the moving subject along in its spiral journey towards the roof garden (Fig. 26, 27).[46] This itinerary refers the circulatory logic of the Maisons La Roche-Jeanneret to a new spatial model, even as it pits the dynamic lyricism of the singular

42 Colquhoun, "Displacement of Concepts in Le Corbusier," 51.
43 Working from a different perspective—and reaching different conclusions from my own—von Moos offers a perceptive analysis of Rowe's comparison of the Villa Stein at Garches and the Villa Foscari at Malcontenta: von Moos, *Album La Roche*, II. 32ff.
44 Berdini, "Introduzione," xvii–xviii.
45 Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Modern Architecture* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1976), 122.
46 Tafuri and Dal Co, *Modern Architecture*, 122.

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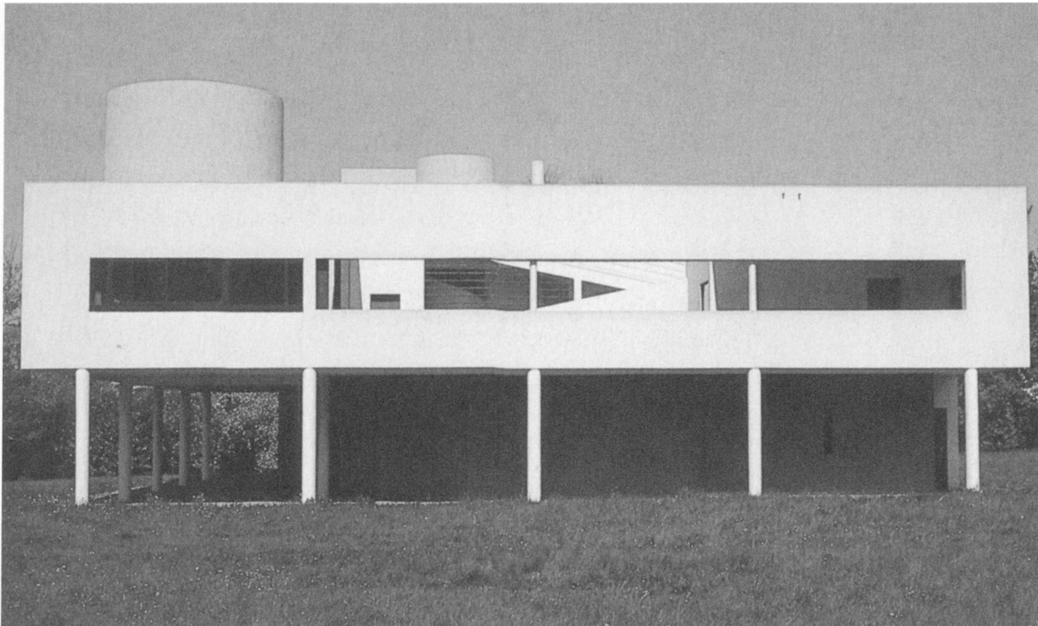
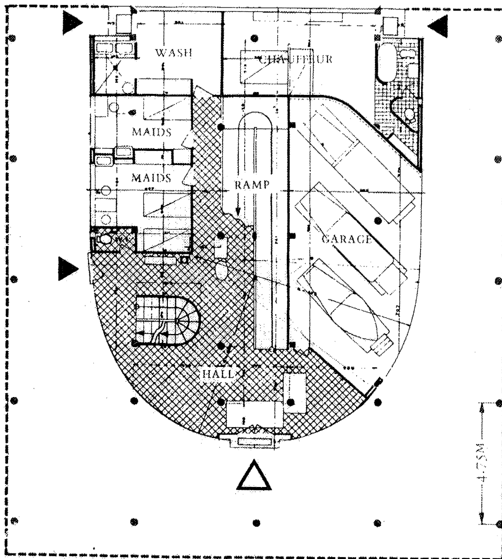
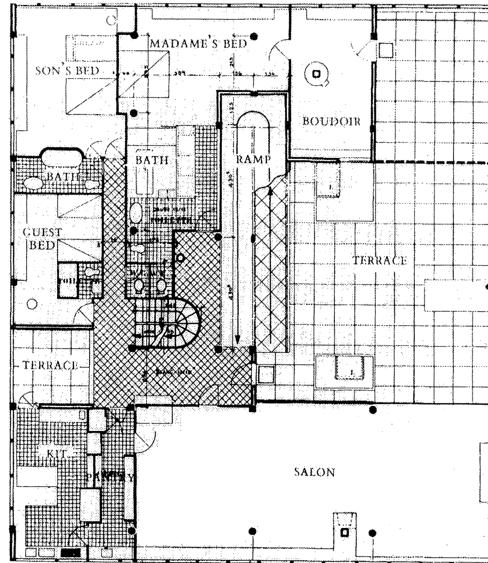
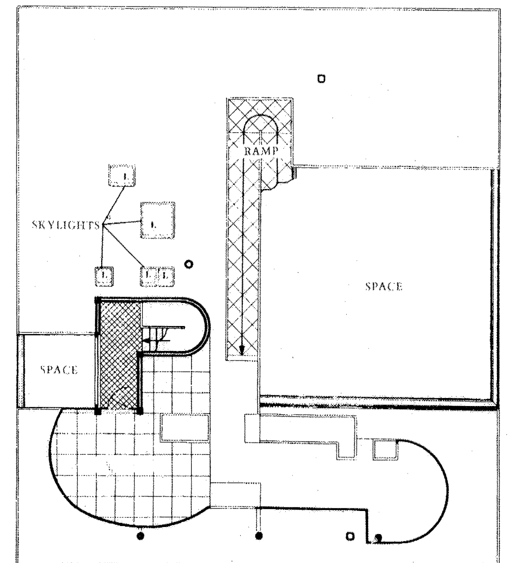
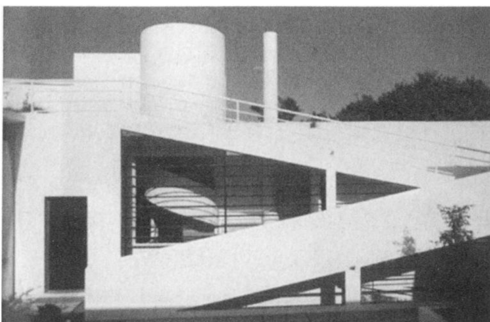
Le Corbusier, Villa Savoie, Poissy, 1929:
Fig. 24 (top) façade
Fig. 25 (middle) plans
Figs. 26 & 27 (bottom) ramp to roof garden











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episodes against the normative context of the second type of the *Quatre compositions*. In this way, to paraphrase La Roche himself, the architect "outruns the problem," exploiting the tacit equivalence between the *machine à habiter* and the ancient type to stress the distance, as well as the proximity, between classic and modern in a highly sophisticated spatio-temporal game.

It is striking to note that when Le Corbusier stresses the role of the *promenade architecturale* the façade is underplayed: in fact, the Villa Savoie has no privileged façade in the strict sense of the term. But when one turns to the Maison Plainex (1927), an emphasis on façade articulation recurs which has more than one Palladian precedent (Fig. 28). When designing this façade, Le Corbusier confronted problems raised by Palladio's interpretation of the Roman tetrastyle *domus* and reverted to the Casa Cogollo to resolve them. This much is evident from a comparative analysis of the plans of the classical type and the Parisian residence—a comparison authorized by the fact that, during his Vicentine trip, it was precisely the *all'antica* vestibule with four columns of the Palazzo Barbarano that first drew Le Corbusier's attention to the formal possibilities of the type, at least as far as its post-Pompeiian exemplifications are concerned.[47] Here the essential task for the modern architect is to translate a tetrastyle entrance hall characteristic of the ancient (and Palladian) atrium house into formal and visual terms appropriate to the façade of a twentieth-century urban residence. To frame an adequate response to this problem, Le Corbusier generated the most unequivocally Palladian solution in his entire oeuvre: the façade of the Villa Schwob, whose blank panel on the second story cites, as already indicated, a similar anomaly on the *piano nobile* façade of the Casa Cogollo (Fig. 8). In the Maison Plainex, the interior system of columns typical of the ancient tetrastyle vestibule is projected, at least partially, onto the exterior while the void on the second floor is replaced by a solid, blank projecting mass. The latter is reminiscent of the empty, second-story panel of Villa Schwob (Fig. 7)—the chief difference being that, in the Parisian residence, the blank element protrudes, and the *pilotis* recede, while in the villa at La Chaux-de-Fonds, the opposite occurs. Despite this important difference, the façade of the Maison Plainex clearly recalls the Villa Schwob and therefore transforms the model of the Casa Cogollo as well, if only at a second remove. The Maison Plainex, in other words, renews the classical type while addressing the exigencies of the modern urban residence and its implicit Palladian models. In this way, Le Corbusier registers a debt to the Palladian legacy, perhaps

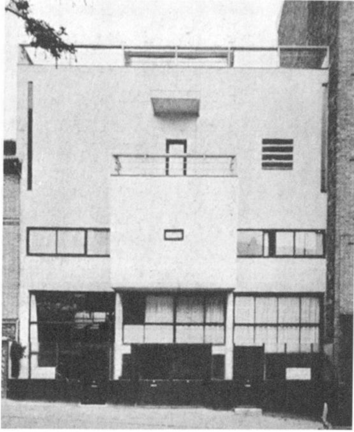

Fig. 28 Le Corbusier, Maison Plainex, Paris, 1927: façade

47 The tetrastyle atrium or vestibule was of special importance to Palladio, who may be said to be chiefly responsible for its subsequent diffusion. Wittkower explains its significance: "The tetrastyle as the leit-motif of the ground-plan is one of the recurrent characteristics of Palladio's palaces.... The ancient atrium had an open roof; since an open atrium could hardly be built by a modern architect, Palladio used the tetrastyle hall for his atrium. But he made the exchange on good authority, for among the five types of atria mentioned by Vitruvius there is one supported by four columns, i.e., a tetrastyle. Palladio's preference for this atrium was based not only upon its structural solidity, but above all upon its square shape which he regarded as a perfect form." Wittkower, *Architectural Principles*, 76.

48 Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Payson and Clarke, 1929 [1925]), 52–3.

49 On Le Corbusier's reading of Nietzsche, with reference to the idea of the eternal return formulated in *Also sprach Zarathustra*, see Tafuri, "Machine et memoire," 214; Frampton, *Le Corbusier*, 201.

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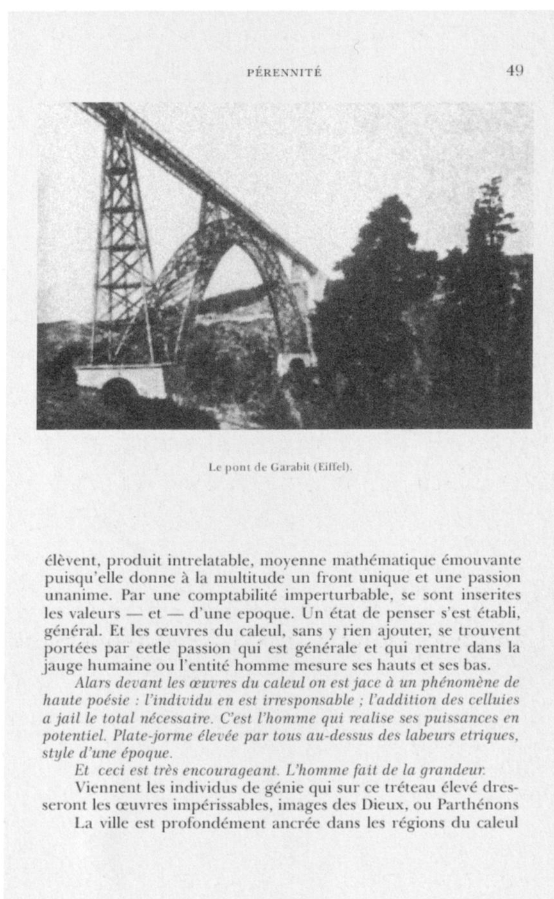
the most profound of his entire career, while taking a distinctively modern distance from it at the same time.

A less subtle but equally decisive assimilation of Palladio can be verified in Le Corbusier's theoretical work of the same period. Two years before, in one of the most emblematic pages of *Urbanisme* of 1925, Le Corbusier contrasted Gustave Eiffel's Pont de Garabit and the Villa Rotonda (Figs 29, 30).[48] In addition to offering a striking prefiguration of Rowe's formalist approach by pairing a modern and a classical work, this tension-filled analogy recalls the juxtaposition between the *civilisation machiniste* and the Parthenon advanced in *Vers une architecture* of 1923 (Fig. 1). In the 1925 text, Le Corbusier makes no reference to the Palladian villa, but speaks of the Pont de Garabit, which he regards as the concrete result of a collective will illustrating the "mind of the epoch." Presented as a characteristic product of modern standardization, Eiffel's bridge imposes a limit and establishes a norm: the norm of the engineer, which only Palladio's architecture is able to surpass. On the basis of this contrast Le Corbusier maintains that it is only from rational calculation that one can derive the fundamental value of *pérennité*—a term that denotes something like Nietzsche's "eternal return."[49] Inadequately translated by Frederick Etchells, Le Corbusier's English translator in the 1930s, as "permanence," *pérennité* designates the dynamic recurrence of norms that are infallible and implacable (rather than the static codification of values implied by Etchell's misleading choice of words). Against this notion, Le Corbusier selected a formal achievement that was rationalized and classicizing, yet also imbued with a sense of invention capable of transcending the "culture of calculation." In this sense, the Palladian villa, as an exemplary instance of the art of architecture, is more advanced, at least on the purely aesthetic level, than the most up-to-date productions of the "engineer's aesthetic" such as Eiffel's bridge.


PÉRENNITÉ 49

Le pont de Garabit (Eiffel).

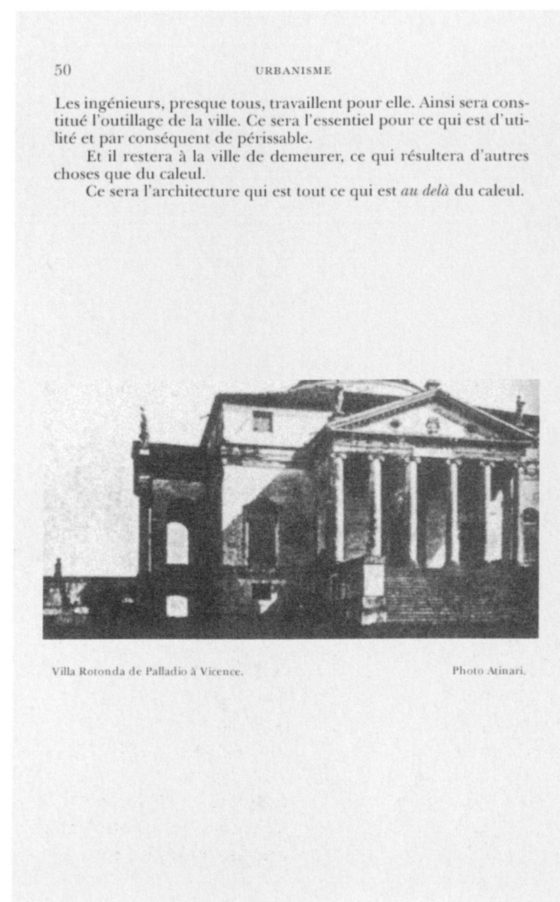
élèvent, produit intrelatable, moyenne mathématique émouvante puisqu'elle donne à la multitude un front unique et une passion unanime. Par une comptabilité imperturbable, se sont inserites les valeurs — et — d'une epoque. Un état de penser s'est établi, général. Et les œuvres du caleul, sans y rien ajouter, se trouvent portées par eetle passion qui est générale et qui rentre dans la jauge humaine ou l'entité homme mesure ses hauts et ses bas.

Alars devant les œuvres du caleul on est jace à un phénomène de haute poésie : l'individu en est irresponsable ; l'addition des celluies a jail le total nécessaire. C'est l'homme qui realise ses puissances en potentiel. Plate-jorme élevée par tous au-dessus des labeurs etriques, style d'une époque.

Et ceci est très encourageant. L'homme fait de la grandeur.

Viennent les individus de génie qui sur ce tréteau élevé dresseront les œuvres impérissables, images des Dieux, ou Parthénons

La ville est profondément ancrée dans les régions du caleul


50 URBANISME

Les ingénieurs, presque tous, travaillent pour elle. Ainsi sera constitué l'outillage de la ville. Ce sera l'essentiel pour ce qui est d'utilité et par conséquent de périssable.

Et il restera à la ville de demeurer, ce qui résultera d'autres choses que du caleul.

Ce sera l'architecture qui est tout ce qui est *au delà* du caleul.

Villa Rotonda de Palladio à Vicence. Photo Atinari.

Figs. 29 & 30 Pages from Le Corbusier's *Urbanisme* (1925) showing the photographs of Gustave Eiffel's Pont de Garabit and Palladio's Villa Rotonda

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The comparison has a double significance. In the first place, according to accepted conventions of reading, the antithesis which Le Corbusier puts forward here should be read from left to right, from the Pont de Garabit to the Rotonda. However, this procedure seems to be contradicted by the fact that the comparison presupposes a reading which reverses not only the logic of chronology, but even the temporal logic of history itself. According to the terms of the comparison, the Modern is placed before the Classical, so that the Modern corre-

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sponds to the *norm* and the Classical corresponds to the *exception*. Due to this paradoxical inversion, it seems as if the Classical derives from the Modern, not the other way around. In the second place, this comparison gives us a crucial theoretical indication which teaches us how to read the history of architecture according to Le Corbusier. It tells us that in this history, *après* and *avant* are not in their usual places, a curious situation which underscores the modernist need to move in a counterdirection opposed to the temporality of all previous histories. Which is to say: the architect is always between buildings, spaces, times and epochs of history, in such a way as to engage a continuous inversion of time and space. In the midst of this, in the promenade between the different epochs, one finds history itself, which discloses its essential contours not by engaging architectural objects, but rather by producing architectural projects, or, to be more precise, by sending the architect on a journey, endless, yet constantly renewed, *Vers une architecture*.

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