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INTIMACY AND SPECTACLE THE INTERIORS OF ADOLF LOOS

Beatriz Colomina

To live is to leave traces', writes Walter Benjamin, in discussing the recent birth of the interior. 'The interior emphasizes them. An abundance of covers and protectors, liners and cases is devised, on which the traces of objects and everyday use are imprinted. The traces of the occupants also leave their impression on the interior. The detective story that follows these traces comes into being. . . . The criminals of the first detective novels are neither gentlemen nor apaches, but private members of the bourgeoisie.'¹

There is an interior in the detective novel. But can there be a detective story of the interior itself, of the hidden mechanisms by which space is constructed as interior? Where would the traces be imprinted? What clues do we have to go on?

A little-known fragment of Le Corbusier's *Urbanisme* (1925) reads as follows: 'Loos told me one day: "A cultivated man does not look out of the window; his window is made of ground glass; it is there only to let the light in, not to let the gaze pass through."² It points to a conspicuous, yet conspicuously ignored feature of Loos's houses: not only are all the windows either opaque or covered with sheer curtains, but the organization of the spaces and the disposition of the built-in furniture (*immeuble*) seems to hinder access to them. A sofa is often placed at the foot of a window so that the occupants sit with their back to it, facing the room (Fig. 1). This even happens with the windows that look into other interior spaces — as in the sitting area of the ladies' lounge in the Müller house (Prague, 1930) (Fig. 2). Moreover, upon entering a Loos interior one is continually turning around to face the space one has just moved through, rather than the space ahead or the space outside. With each turn, each look back, our progress is halted. Looking at the photographs, it is easy to imagine oneself in these precise, static positions, usually indicated by the unoccupied furniture, and to imagine that it is intended that these spaces be comprehended by occupation, by using the furniture, by 'entering' the photograph, by inhabiting it.³

In the Moller house (Vienna, 1928) there is a raised sitting area off the living room, with a sofa set against the window. Although one cannot see out the window, its presence is strongly felt. The bookshelves surrounding the sofa and the light coming from behind it suggest a comfortable nook for reading (Fig. 3). But comfort in this space is more than just sensual, for there is also a psychological dimension. The position of the sofa, and of its occupant against the light, produces a sense of security. Any intruder ascending the stairs from the entrance (itself a rather dark passage) and entering the living room would take a few moments to recognize anyone

sitting on the sofa. Conversely, any intrusion would soon be detected by a person occupying this area, just as an actor entering the stage is immediately seen by a spectator in a theatre box (Fig. 4).

Loos observed that 'the smallness of a theatre box would be unbearable if one could not look out into the large space beyond'.⁴ Both Kulka and Münz interpret this as a reference to the economy of space provided by the *Raumplan*, but they overlook its psychological dimension. For Loos, the theatre box exists at the intersection of claustrophobia and agoraphobia.⁵ This spatial-psychological device could also be read in terms of power, or regimes of control inside the house. The raised sitting area of the Moller house provides the occupant with a vantage point overlooking the interior. Comfort in this space is related to both intimacy and control.

This area is the most intimate of the sequence of living spaces, yet, paradoxically, it occupies a volume that projects from the street façade, just above the front entrance and, moreover, it corresponds with the largest window on this elevation (Fig. 5). A person inside the space can easily see anyone crossing the threshold of the house (while screened by the curtain) and monitor any movement in the interior (while 'screened' by the back-lighting).

In this space, the eye is turned towards the interior. The window does not frame a view but is merely a source of light. The only possible exterior view from this position requires that the gaze travel the whole depth of the house, from the alcove to the living room to the music room, which opens on to the back garden (Fig. 5). Thus, the exterior view depends upon a view of the interior.

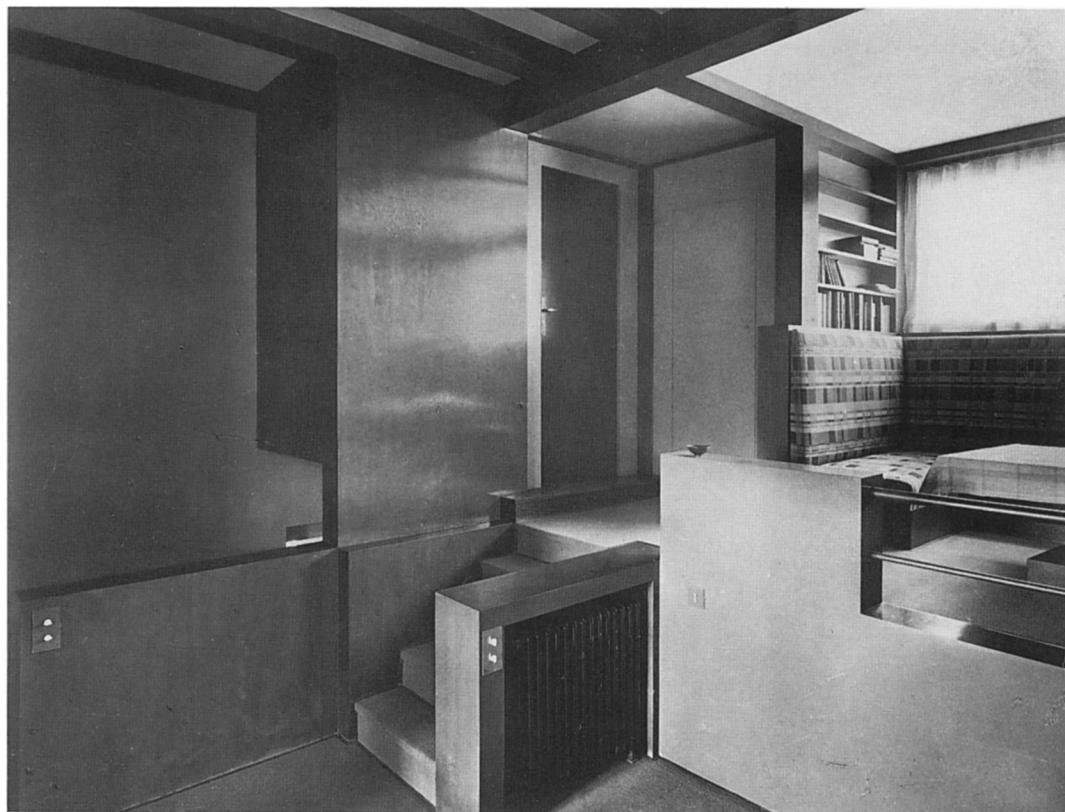
The look folded inward upon itself can be traced in other Loos interiors. In the Müller house, for instance, there is an increasing sense of privacy in the sequence of spaces articulated around the staircase, from the drawing room, to the dining room and study, to the 'ladies' room' (*Zimmer der Dame*) with its raised sitting area, which occupies the centre, or 'heart', of the house (Fig. 6). But this space has a window which looks on to the living space. Here, too, the most intimate room resembles a theatre box, and overlooks the entrance to the communal area of the house, so that an intruder can easily be seen. Likewise, the view of the exterior, towards the city, from this 'theatre box', is contained within a view of the interior. There is also a more direct and more private route to the sitting area, a staircase rising from the entrance of the drawing room. Suspended thus in the middle of the house, this space assumes a dual character: it has a 'sacred' quality, but is also a point of control. Paradoxically, a sense of comfort is produced by two seemingly opposing conditions, intimacy and control.



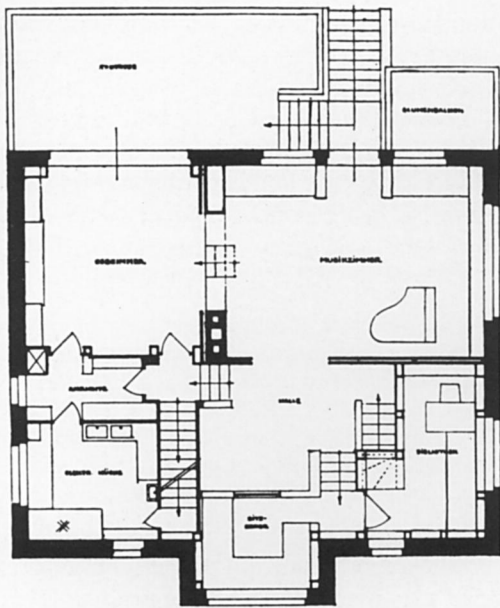
1. Flat for Hans Brummel, Pilsen, 1929. Bedroom with a sofa set against the window.



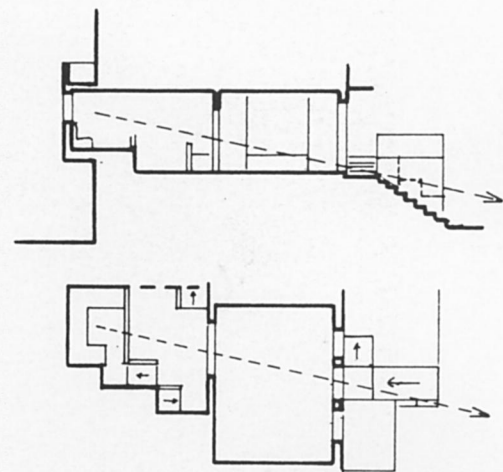
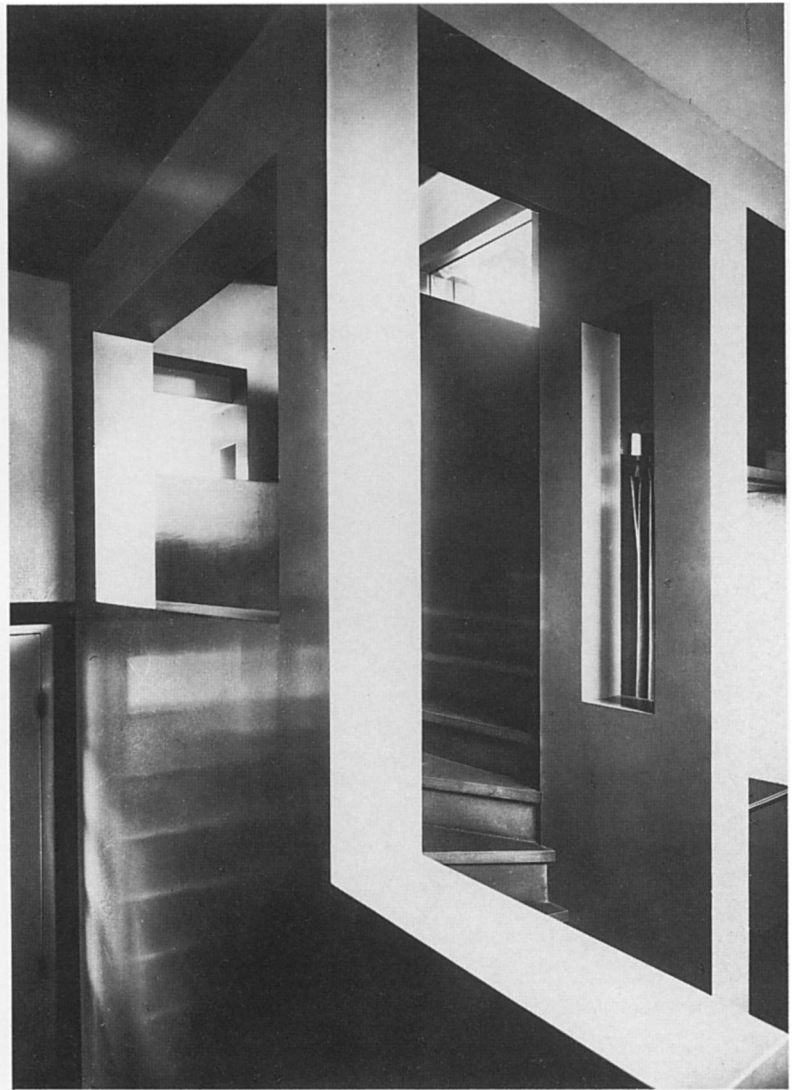
2. Müller house, Prague, 1930. The raised sitting area in the Zimmer der Dame, with the window looking on to the living room.



3. Moller house, Vienna, 1928. The raised sitting area off the living room.



4. Moller house. Plan of elevated ground floor, with the alcove drawn narrower than it was built, and view of the staircase leading from the entrance hall into the living room.



5. Moller house. View from the street, and section and plan tracing the path of the gaze from the raised sitting area to the back garden.

This is hardly the idea of comfort which is associated with the nineteenth-century interior as described by Walter Benjamin in his essay 'Louis-Philippe, or the Interior'.⁶ In Loos's interiors the sense of security is not achieved by simply turning one's back on the exterior and becoming immersed in a private world — 'a box in the world theatre', to use Benjamin's metaphor. It is no longer the house that is a theatre box; there is a theatre box inside the house, overlooking the internal social spaces, so that the inhabitants become both actors in and spectators of family life — involved in, yet detached from their own space.⁷ The classical distinctions between inside and outside, private and public, object and subject, are no longer valid.

Traditionally, the theatre box provided for the privileged a private space within the dangerous public realm, by re-establishing the boundaries between inside and outside. When Loos designed a theatre in 1898 (an unrealized project), he omitted the boxes, arguing that they 'didn't suit a modern auditorium'.⁸ Thus he removed the box from the public theatre, only to insert it into the 'private theatre' of the house. The public realm had entered the private house by way of the social spaces,⁹ and the domestic theatre box represented a last stand of resistance to this intrusion.

The theatre boxes in the Moller and Müller houses are spaces marked as female, the domestic character of the furniture contrasting with that of the adjacent 'male' space, the library (Fig. 6). In these, the leather sofas, the desks, the chimney, the mirrors represent a 'public space' within the house — the office and the club invading the interior. But it is an invasion which is confined to an enclosed room — a space which belongs to the sequence of social spaces within the house, yet does not engage with them. As Münz notes, the library is a 'reservoir of quietness', 'set apart from the household traffic', whereas the raised alcove of the Moller house and the *Zimmer der Dame* of the Müller house not only overlook the social spaces but are positioned at the end of the sequence, on the threshold of the private, the secret, the upper rooms, where sexuality is sequestered. At the intersection of the visible and the invisible, women act as the guardians of the unspeakable.¹⁰

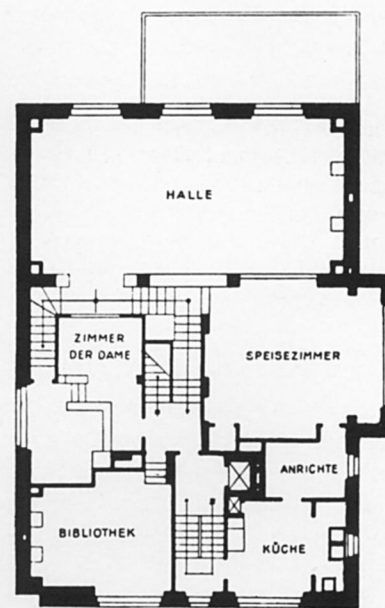
But the theatre box is a device which both protects its occupants

and draws attention to them. Münz describes entry into the Moller house thus: 'Within, entering from one side, one's gaze travels in the opposite direction till it rests on the light, pleasant alcove, raised above the living room floor. Now we are really inside the house.'¹¹ That is, the intruder has penetrated the house only when his/her gaze strikes this most intimate space, turning the occupant into a silhouette against the light.¹² The 'voyeur' in the 'theatre box' has become the object of another's gaze; she is caught in the act of seeing, entrapped in the very moment of control.¹³ In framing a view, the theatre box also frames the viewer. It is impossible to abandon the space, let alone leave the house, without being seen by those over whom control is being exerted. Object and subject exchange places. Whether there is actually a person behind either gaze is irrelevant:

I can feel myself under the gaze of someone whose eyes I do not even see, not even discern. All that is necessary is for something to signify to me that there may be others there. This window, if it gets a bit dark, and if I have reasons for thinking that there is someone behind it, is straightaway a gaze. From the moment this gaze exists, I am already something other, in that I feel myself becoming an object for the gaze of others. But in this position, which is a reciprocal one, others also know that I am an object who knows himself to be seen.¹⁴

Architecture is not simply a platform that accommodates the viewing subject. It is a viewing mechanism that produces the subject. It precedes and frames its occupant.

The theatricality that we sense in interiors by Loos does not depend on the buildings alone. Many of the photographs, for instance, tend to give the impression that someone is just about to enter the room, that a piece of domestic drama is about to be enacted. The characters absent from the stage, from the scenery and the props — the conspicuously placed pieces of furniture (Fig. 7) — are conjured up.¹⁵ The only published photograph of a Loos interior which includes a human figure is a view of the entrance to the drawing room of the Rufer house (Vienna, 1922) (Fig. 8). A male figure, barely visible, about to cross the threshold through a peculiar opening in the wall and play his part.¹⁶ But it is precisely at this threshold, slightly off stage, that the actor/intruder is most vulner-



6. Müller house. View of the library, and plan of the main floor.



able, for the window of a reading space looks down on to the back of his neck. This house, traditionally considered to be the prototype of the *Raumplan*, also contains the prototype of the theatre box.

In his writings on the question of the house, Loos describes a number of domestic melodramas. In *Das Andere*, for example, he wrote:

Try to describe how birth and death, the screams of pain for an aborted son, the death rattle of a dying mother, the last thoughts of a young woman who wishes to die . . . unfold and unravel in a room by Olbrich! Just an image: the young woman who has put herself to death. She is lying on the wooden floor. One of her hands still holds the smoking revolver. On the table a letter, the farewell letter. Is the room in which this is happening of good taste? Who will ask that? It is just a room!¹⁷

One could as well ask why it is only the women who die and cry and commit suicide. But, leaving aside the question for the moment, Loos is saying that the house must not be conceived of as a work of art, that there is a difference between a house and a 'series of decorated rooms'. The house should be a stage for the theatre of the family, a place where people are born and live and die. It is an environment, or stage, whereas a work of art presents itself as an object to a detached viewer.

In order to break down the condition of the house as an object, Loos radically convolutes the relation between inside and outside. One of the strategies he uses is mirrors which, as Kenneth Frampton has pointed out, appear to be openings, and openings which can be

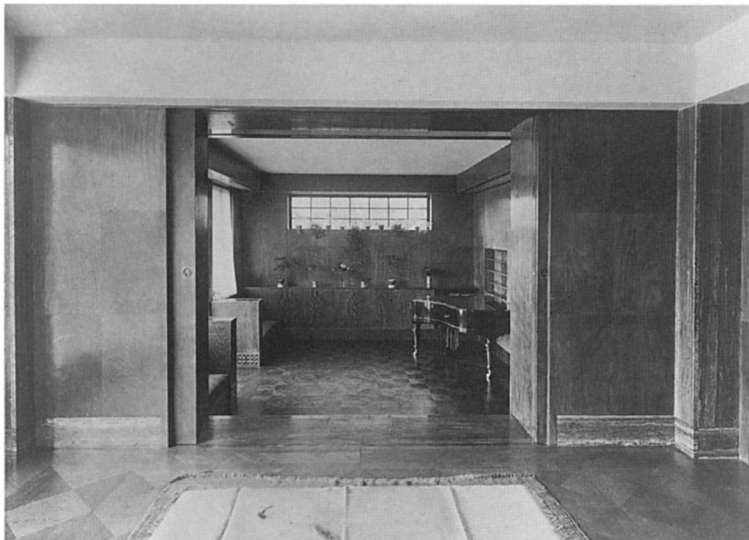


7. Adolf Loos flat, Vienna, 1903. View from the living room into the fireplace nook.

8. (top) Rufer house, Vienna, 1922. Entrance to the living room.



9. Steiner house, Vienna, 1910. View of the dining room, showing the mirror beneath the window.



10. Moller house. View from the dining room into the music room and vice versa. In the centre of the threshold are steps that can be let down.

mistaken for mirrors.¹⁸ Even more enigmatic is the placement, in the dining room of the Steiner house (Vienna, 1910) (Fig. 9), of a mirror just beneath an opaque window.¹⁹ Here, again, the window is only a source of light. Placed at eye level, it returns the gaze to the interior, to the lamp above the dining table and the objects on the sideboard, recalling Freud's studio in Berggasse 19, where a small framed mirror hanging against the window reflects the lamp on his work-table. In Freudian theory the mirror represents the psyche, thus the reflection in the mirror is also a self-portrait projected on to the outside world. The placement of Freud's mirror on the boundary between interior and exterior undermines the status of the boundary as a fixed limit. Similarly, Loos's mirrors promote the interplay between reality and illusion, between the actual and virtual, undermining the status of the boundary between inside and outside.

This ambiguity between inside and outside is intensified by the separation of sight from the other senses. Physical and visual connections between the spaces in Loos's houses are often separated. In the Rufer house a wide opening establishes between the raised dining room and the music room a visual connection which does not correspond to the physical connection. At the rear of the dining room is a mirror that returns the eye to the interior. Similarly, in the Moller house there appears to be no way of entering the dining room from the music room, which is seventy centimetres below; the only means of access is by unfolding steps which are hidden in the timber base of the dining room (Fig. 10).²⁰ This strategy of 'framing' is repeated in many other Loos interiors. Openings are often screened by curtains, enhancing the stage-like effect. It should also be noted that it is usually the dining room which acts as the stage, and the music room as the space for spectators. What is being framed is the traditional scene of everyday domestic life.

But the breakdown of the distinction between inside and outside, and the split between sight and touch, is not located exclusively in the domestic scene. It also occurs in Loos's project of 1928 for a house in Paris for Josephine Baker (Fig. 11) — a house which excludes family life. However, in this instance the 'split' acquires a different meaning. The house contains a large top-lit, double-height swimming pool entered at the second-floor level. Kurt Ungers, who collaborated with Loos on this project, wrote:

The reception rooms on the first floor arranged round the pool — a large salon with an extensive top-lit vestibule, a small lounge and the circular café — indicate that this was intended not solely for private use but as a *miniature entertainment centre*. On the first floor, low passages surround the pool. They are lit by the wide windows visible on the outside, and from them, thick, transparent windows are let into the side of the pool, so that it was possible to watch swimming and diving in its crystal-clear water, flooded with light from above: an *underwater revue*, so to speak.²¹ [author's emphasis]

As in Loos's earlier houses, the eye is directed towards the interior, which turns its back on the outside world; but the subject and object of the gaze have been reversed. The inhabitant, Josephine Baker, is now the primary object, and the visitor, the guest, is the looking subject. The most intimate space — the swimming pool, paradigm of a sensual space — occupies the centre of the house, and is also the focus of the visitor's gaze. As Ungers writes, entertainment in this house consists in looking. But between this gaze and its object — the body — is a screen of glass and water, which renders the body inaccessible. The swimming pool is lit from above, by a skylight, so that inside it the windows would appear as reflective surfaces, impeding the swimmer's view of the visitors standing in the passages. This view is the opposite of the panoptic view of a theatre box, corresponding, instead, to that of a peep-hole, where subject and object cannot simply exchange places.²²

The *mise-en-scène* in the Josephine Baker house recalls Christian

Metz's description of the mechanism of voyeurism in cinema:

It is even essential . . . that the actor should behave as though he were not seen (and therefore as though he did not see his voyeur), that he should go about his ordinary business and pursue his existence as foreseen by the fiction of the film, that he should carry on with his antics in a closed room, taking the utmost care not to notice that a glass rectangle has been set into one of the walls, and that he lives in a kind of aquarium.²³

But the architecture of this house is more complicated. The swimmer might also see the reflection, framed by the window, of her own slippery body superimposed on the eyes of the shadowy figure of the spectator, whose lower body is obscured by the frame. Thus she sees herself being looked at by another: a narcissistic gaze superimposed on a voyeuristic gaze. This erotic complex of looks in which she is suspended is inscribed in each of the four windows opening on to the swimming pool. Each, even if there is no one looking through it, constitutes, from both sides, a gaze.

The split between sight and the other physical senses which is found in Loos interiors is explicit in his definition of architecture. In 'The Principle of Cladding' he writes: 'the artist, the *architect*, first senses the *effect* [*author's emphasis*] that he intends to realize and sees the rooms he wants to create in his mind's eye. He senses the effect that he wishes to exert upon the *spectator* [*author's emphasis*]: . . . homeyness if a residence.'²⁴ Loos conceives of the interior as space before the analytical distancing which language entails. It is pre-Oedipal space, space as we feel it, and we feel it as we might a fabric, with eyes averted, as if the sight of it would be an obstacle to the sensation.

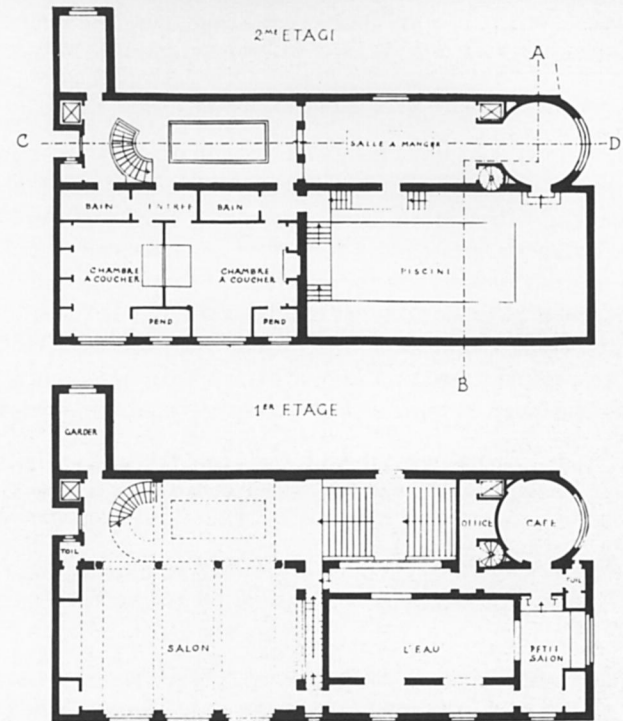
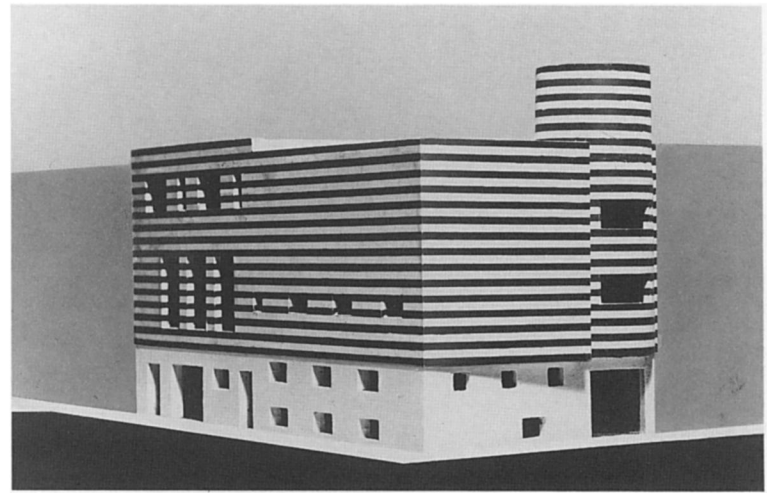
Loos seems to have reversed the Cartesian schism between the perceptual and the conceptual. Where Descartes deprived the body of its status as the seat of valid and transmissible knowledge ('In sensation, in the experience that derives from it, harbours error'),²⁵ Loos privileges the bodily experience of space over its mental construction: the architect first senses the space, then he visualizes it.

For Loos, architecture is a form of covering, but it is not the walls that are covered. Structure plays a secondary role, and its primary function is to hold the covering in place:

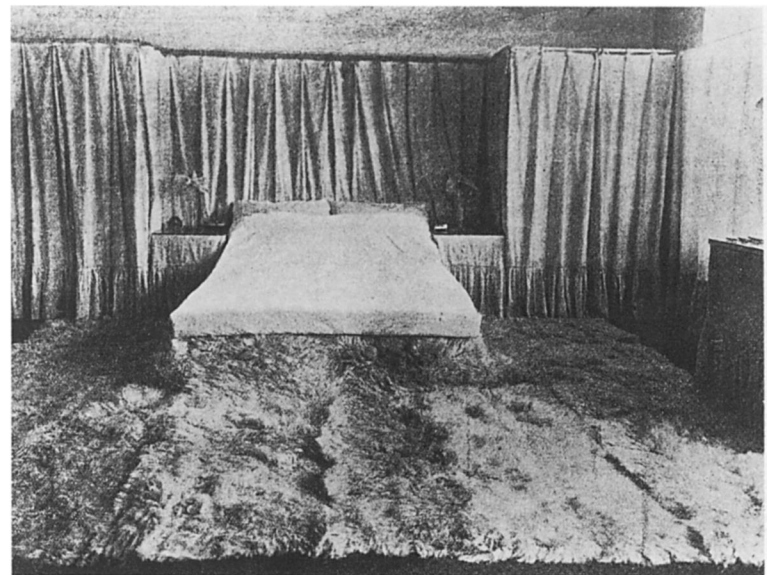
The architect's general task is to provide a warm and livable space. Carpets are warm and livable. He decides for this reason to spread out one carpet on the floor and to hang up four to form the four walls. But you cannot build a house out of carpets. Both the carpet on the floor and the tapestry on the wall require a structural frame to hold them in the correct place. To invent this frame is the architect's second task.²⁶

The spaces in Loos's interiors cover the occupants as clothes cover the body (each occasion has its appropriate 'fit') (Fig. 12). José Quetglas has written: 'Would the same pressure on the body be acceptable in a raincoat as in a gown, in jodhpurs or in pyjama pants? . . . All the architecture of Loos can be explained as the envelope of a body.' From Lina Loos's bedroom (this 'bag of fur and cloth') to Josephine Baker's swimming pool ('this transparent bowl of water') the interiors always contain a 'warm bag in which to wrap oneself'. It is an 'architecture of pleasure', an 'architecture of the womb'.²⁷

But space in Loos's architecture is not just felt. It is significant, in the quotation above, that Loos refers to the inhabitant as a spectator, for his definition of architecture is really a definition of theatrical architecture. The 'clothes' have become so detached from the body that they require structural support independent of it. They become a 'stage set'. The inhabitant is both 'covered' by the space and 'detached' from it. The tension between the sensation of comfort and comfort as control disrupts the role of the house as a traditional form of representation. More precisely, the traditional system of representation, within which the building is but one of many overlapping mechanisms, is dislocated.



11. Project for a house for Josephine Baker in Paris, 1928. Model and plans of first and second floors.



12. Adolf Loos flat. Lina Loos's bedroom.

The status of the architectural drawing, for example, is radically transformed. In architecture Loos writes that 'the mark of a building which is truly established is that it remains ineffective in two dimensions.'²⁸ By 'ineffective' he means that the drawing cannot convey the 'sensation' of space, as this involves not only sight but also the other physical senses.²⁹ Loos invented the *Raumplan* as a means of conceptualizing space as it is felt, but, revealingly, he left no theoretical definition of it. As Kulka noted, he 'will make many changes during construction. He will walk through the space and say: "I do not like the height of this ceiling, change it!"' The idea of the *Raumplan* made it difficult to finish a scheme before construction allowed the visualization of the space as it was.' But Loos was not simply setting sensual experience against abstraction; he was dealing with the untranslatability of languages. In 'Architecture' he writes:

Every work of art possesses such strong internal laws that it can only appear in its own form. . . . If I could erase the most powerful architectural phenomenon, the Palazzo Pitti, from the memory of my contemporaries and then have it drawn by the best draughtsman to enter in a competition scheme, the jury will throw me into a mad house.³⁰

Because a drawing cannot convey the tension between sight and the other senses, it cannot adequately 'translate' a building. For Loos the architect's drawing was a regrettable consequence of the division of labour, and it could never be more than a mere technical statement, 'the attempt [by the architect] to make himself understood by the craftsman carrying out the work'.³¹

Loos's critique of the photography of architecture and its dissemination through architectural journals was based on the same principle, that it is impossible to represent a spatial effect or a sensation:

It is my greatest pride that the interiors which I have created are totally *ineffective* in photographs. I am proud of the fact that the inhabitants of my spaces do not recognise their own apartments in the photographs, just as the owner of a Monet painting would not recognise it at Kastan's. I have to forego the honour of being published in the various architectural magazines. I have been denied the satisfaction of my vanity.³² [*author's emphasis*]

The inhabitants of a house perceive it as an environment, not as an object, whereas a photograph of a house published in an architectural journal requires a different kind of attention, which presupposes a certain distance and is therefore closer to the contemplation of a work of art in a museum. Loos interiors are experienced as a frame for action rather than as an object in a frame.



13. Khuner villa, near Payerbach, Austria, 1930. The 'view' through the window is a photomontage.

There is, nevertheless, a certain consistency in photographs of Loos interiors, which seems to suggest that he had some involvement in their production. The presence of certain objects, such as the Egyptian stool, in nearly every interior view has been noted by Frampton. Loos also seems to have adjusted the photographs so as to represent better his own idea of the house. The archives containing the photographs used to illustrate Kulka's book reveal a few of these tricks: the view through the 'horizontal window' in a photograph of the Khuner villa (near Payerbach, 1930) is a photomontage (Fig. 13),³³ as is the violin in the cupboard of the music room of the Moller house. A storey was added to the photograph of the street façade of the Tristan Tzara house (Paris, 1926–7), so as to make it more like the original project, and numerous 'distracting' domestic objects (lamps, rugs, plants) were erased throughout. These interventions suggest that the images were carefully controlled, that the photographs of Loos's buildings cannot simply be considered as a form of representation subordinate to the building itself.

For example, Loos often frames a spatial volume, as in the bedroom of the Khuner villa or the fireplace nook of his own apartment. This has the effect of flattening the space seen through the frame, making it seem more like a photograph. As with the device of obscuring the difference between openings and mirrors, this optical effect is enhanced, if not produced, by the photographs themselves, which are taken only from the precise point where the effect occurs.³⁴ Loos's critique of the photographic representation of architecture should not be mistaken for a nostalgia for the 'complete' object. What he achieves in this play with reflective surfaces and framing devices is a critique of classical representation. Such framing devices undermine the referential status of the photographic image and its claim of transparently representing reality. The photographs draw the viewer's attention to the artifice involved in the photographic process. Like drawings, they are not representations in the traditional sense; they literally construct their object.

Loos's critique of traditional notions of architectural representation is bound up with the phenomenon of an emergent metropolitan culture. He recognized social institutions as systems of representation, and his attacks on the family, Viennese society, professional organizations and the state, launched in *Das Andere*, were implicit in his buildings, for he also recognized that architecture in all its possible manifestations — drawing, photograph, text or building — is, after all, a practice of representation.

The subject of Loos's architecture is the citizen of the metropolis, immersed in its abstract relationships and striving to assert his independence and individuality in the face of the levelling power of society. This battle, according to Georg Simmel, is the modern equivalent of primitive man's struggle with nature, clothing is one of the battlefields, and fashion is one of its strategies.³⁵ He writes: 'The commonplace is good form in society. . . . It is bad taste to make one's self conspicuous through some individual, singular expression. . . . Obedience to the standards of the general public in all externals [is] the conscious and desired means of reserving their personal feelings and their taste.'³⁶ In other words, fashion is a mask which protects the intimacy of the metropolitan being.

Loos writes about fashion in precisely such terms: 'We have become more refined, more subtle. Primitive men had to differentiate themselves by various colours, modern man needs his clothes as a mask. His individuality is so strong that it can no longer be expressed in terms of items of clothing. . . . His own inventions are concentrated on other things.'³⁷ Fashion and etiquette, in Western culture, constitute the language of behaviour, a language that does not convey feelings but acts as a form of protection — a mask. As Loos writes, 'How should one dress? Modern. One is modernly dressed when one stands out the least.'

Significantly, Loos writes about the exterior of the house in the same terms that he writes about fashion:

When I was finally given the task of building a house, I said to myself: in its external appearance, a house can only have changed as much as a dinner jacket. Not a lot therefore. . . . I had to become significantly simpler. I had to substitute the golden buttons with black ones. The house has to look inconspicuous.³⁸

The house does not have to tell anything to the exterior; instead, all its richness must be manifest in the interior.³⁹

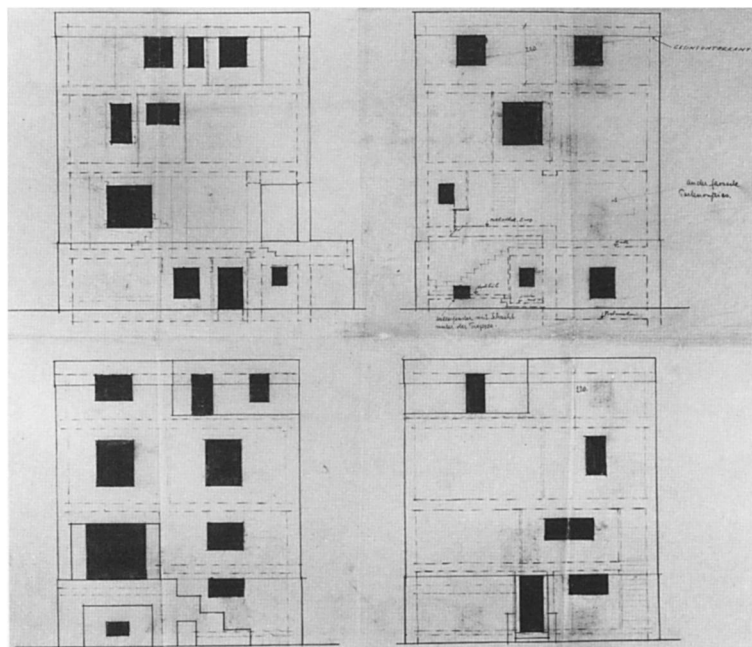
Loos seems to establish a radical difference between interior and exterior, which reflects the split between the private life and the social life of the metropolitan being: outside, the realm of exchange, money and masks; inside, the realm of the inalienable, the non-exchangeable, and the unspeakable. Moreover, this split between inside and outside, between senses and sight, is gender-loaded. The exterior of the house, Loos writes, should resemble a dinner jacket, a male mask, as the unified self, protected by a seamless façade, is masculine. The interior is the scene of sexuality and of reproduction, all the things that would divide the subject in the outside world. However, this dogmatic division in Loos's writings between inside and outside is undermined by his architecture.

The suggestion that the exterior is merely a mask which clads some pre-existing interior is misleading, for the interior and exterior are constructed simultaneously. When he was designing the Rufer house, for example, Loos used a dismountable model that would allow the internal and external distributions to be worked out simultaneously. The interior is not simply the space which is enclosed by the façades. A multiplicity of boundaries is established, and the tension between inside and outside resides in the walls that divide them, its status disturbed by Loos's displacement of traditional forms of representation. To address the interior is to address the splitting of the wall.

Take, for instance, the displacement of drawing conventions in Loos's four pencil drawings of the elevation of the Rufer house (Fig. 14). Each one shows not only the outlines of the façade but also, in dotted lines, the horizontal and vertical divisions of the interior, the position of the rooms, the thickness of the floors and the walls, while the windows are represented as black squares, with no frame. These are drawings which depict neither the inside nor the outside, but the membrane between them: between the representation of habitation and the mask is the wall. Loos's subject inhabits this wall, creating a sense of tension at the limit.

This is not simply a metaphor. In every Loos house there is a point of maximum tension, and it always coincides with a threshold or boundary. In the Moller house it is the raised alcove protruding from the street façade, where the occupant is ensconced in the security of the interior yet detached from it. The subject of Loos's houses is a stranger, an intruder in his own space. In Josephine Baker's house, the wall of the swimming pool is punctured by windows. It has been pulled apart, leaving a narrow passage surrounding the pool, and splitting each of the windows into an internal window and an external window. The visitor literally inhabits this wall, which enables him to look both inside, at the pool, and outside, at the city, but he is neither inside nor outside the house. In the dining room of the Steiner house, the gaze directed towards the window is folded back by the mirror beneath it, transforming the interior into an exterior view, or scene. The subject has been dislocated: unable to occupy the inside of the house securely, it can only occupy the insecure margin between window and mirror.

This tampering with limits is intensified in Loos's Goldman & Salatsch menswear store in Vienna of 1898. Occupying the intersection between body and language, between the space of domest-



14. Rufer house. Elevations.

icity and that of social exchange, of economy, the interior of the shop exists half-way between the private universe of the interior and the outside world. Goldman & Salatsch provided its clients with underwear and external accessories such as ties, hats and walking sticks — that is, with the most intimate garments, as well as the objects that support (literally and symbolically) the body as a figure (the body's props, its prostheses). In this store the most intimate garments are being exhibited and sold; they have abandoned the sphere of domesticity for the sphere of exchange. Conversely, the objects that most obviously represent the site of exchange, the mask that safeguards the coherence of the human figure in the public realm, have entered the interior.

A photograph published in *Das Interieur* in 1901 (Fig. 15) shows a space clad with tall rectangular mirrors set in dark frames. Some of the mirrors are fixed, others are cupboard-doors, yet others coincide with openings into other spaces. There are two male figures, one a client emerging from the intimate atmosphere of the fitting-room, the other an accountant who has entered from the exterior world of finance. They occupy the same wall, but the nature of that occupation is unclear. One of them seems to be standing at the threshold of an opening, his image reflected on the mirror-door, perhaps again in the cupboard door to the right. Even more enigmatic is the other figure, for only the upper part of the body is visible, behind bars, as if confined within a cage. The plan of the shop (which no longer exists) has been reconstructed, but it is still impossible to establish the actual positions of these figures within the space. One of them seems to be standing beside the image of his back — or is it the other way around? The depth of his body, its material presence, has been erased. Other reflections appear throughout the space, without any body to ground them. This dissolution of the figures into the wall surfaces questions not only their position but also that of the person viewing the photograph.

Furthermore, the illusion of Loos as a man in control of his own work, an undivided subject (an illusion I myself have fostered in this article) is also rendered suspect. In fact, he is constructed, controlled, and fractured by his own work. The idea of the *Raumplan*, for example: Loos constructs a space (without having completed the working drawings), then allows himself to be manipulated by this construction. Like the occupants of his houses, he is both inside and outside the object. He is not simply an author; the



15. Showroom, Goldman & Salatsch menswear shop, Vienna, 1898.

object has as much authority over him as he has over the object.⁴⁰

The critic is no exception to this phenomenon. Incapable of detachment from the object, the critic simultaneously produces a new object and is produced by it. Criticism that presents itself as a new interpretation of an existing object is in fact constructing a completely new object. The Loos of the 1960s, the austere pioneer of the modern movement, was replaced in the 1970s by another Loos, all sensuality, and in the 1980s by Loos the classicist. Each era creates a new Loos. On the other hand, there are the readings that claim to be purely objective inventories, the standard monographs on Loos — Münz and Künstler in the 1960s and Gravagnuolo in the 1980s, but they are thrown off balance by the very object of their control. Nowhere is this alienation more evident than in their interpretations of the house for Josephine Baker.

Münz, otherwise a wholly circumspect writer, begins his appraisal of this house with the exclamation 'Africa: that is the image conjured up more or less firmly by a contemplation of the model', but he then confesses not to know why he invoked this image.⁴¹ In his attempt to analyse the formal characteristics of the project, all he can manage is the opinion that 'they look strange and exotic'. What is most striking in this passage is the uncertainty as to whether Münz is referring to the model of the house or to Josephine Baker herself. He seems unable either to detach himself from this project or to enter into it.

Like Münz, Gravagnuolo finds himself writing things without knowing why, reprimands himself, then tries to regain control:

First there is the charm of this gay architecture. It is not just the dichromatism of the façades but — as we shall see — the spectacular nature of the internal articulation that determines its refined and seductive character. Rather than abandon oneself to the pleasure of suggestions, it is necessary to take this 'toy' to pieces with *analytical detachment* if one wishes to understand the mechanism of composition.⁴² [*author's emphasis*]

He then institutes a regime of analytical categories ('the architectural introversion', 'the revival of dichromatism', 'the plastic arrangement') which he uses nowhere else in the book. And he concludes:

The water flooded with light, the refreshing swim, the voyeuristic pleasure of underwater exploration — these are the carefully balanced ingredients of this gay architecture. But what matters more is that the invitation to the spectacular suggested by the theme of the house for a cabaret star is handled by Loos with discretion and *intellectual detachment*, more as a poetic game, involving the mnemonic pursuit of quotations and allusions to the Roman spirit, than as a vulgar surrender to the taste of Hollywood. [*author's emphasis*]

The insistence on detachment, on re-establishing the distance between critic and object of criticism, architect and building, subject and object, is of course indicative of the obvious fact that Münz and Gravagnuolo have failed to separate themselves from the object. The image of Josephine Baker offers pleasure, but it also represents the threat of castration posed by the 'other': the image of woman in water — liquid, elusive, unable to be controlled or pinned down. One way of dealing with this threat is fetishization.

The Josephine Baker house represents a shift in the status of the female body. The theatre box of the domestic interiors places the woman's body against the light. She appears as a silhouette, mysterious and desirable, but the backlighting also draws attention to her as a physical volume, a bodily presence within the house, with its own interior. She controls the interior, yet she is trapped within it. In the Baker house, the female body is produced as spectacle, the object of an erotic gaze, an erotic system of looks. The exterior of the house cannot be read as a mask designed to conceal its interior; it is a tattooed surface which neither conceals nor reveals. This fetishization of the surface is repeated in the 'interior'. In the passages, the visitors consume Baker's body as a surface adhering to the windows. Like the body, the house is all surface; it does not simply have an interior.

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Notes

1. Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century', *Reflections*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1986), pp. 155–6.
2. 'Loos m'affirmait un jour: "Un homme cultivé ne regarde pas par la fenêtre; sa fenêtre est en verre dépoli; elle n'est là que pour donner de la lumière, non pour laisser passer le regard."' Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme* (Paris, 1925), p. 174. In Frederick Etchells's translation of 1929, published under the title *The City of To-morrow and its Planning*, the sentence reads thus: 'A friend once said to me: "No intelligent man ever looks out of his window; his window is made of ground glass; its only function is to let in light, not to look out of."' (pp. 185–6). Was Loos a nobody for Etchells, or is this just another example of the kind of misunderstanding that led to the mistranslation of the title of the book? Perhaps it was Le Corbusier himself who decided to erase Loos's name. Of a different order, but no less symptomatic, is the mistranslation of 'laisser passer le regard' (to let the gaze pass through) as 'to look out of', as if to resist the idea that the gaze might take on a life of its own.
3. The perception of space is produced by its representations; in this sense, built space has no more authority than do drawings, photographs or descriptions.
4. Ludwig Münz and Gustav Künstler, *Der Architekt Adolf Loos* (Vienna and Munich, 1964), pp. 130–31. English translation: *Adolf Loos: Pioneer of Modern Architecture* (London, 1966), p. 148: 'We may call to mind an observation by Adolf Loos, handed down to us by Heinrich Kulka, that the smallness of a theatre box would be unbearable if one could not look out into the large space beyond; hence it was possible to save space, even in the design of small houses, by linking a high main room with a low annexe.'
5. Georges Teyssot has noted that 'the Bergsonian ideas of the room as a refuge from the world are meant to be conceived as the "juxtaposition" between claustrophobia and agoraphobia', a dialectic which is already found in Rilke. G. Teyssot, 'The Disease of the Domicile', *Assemblage* 6, 1988, p. 95.

6. 'Under Louis-Philippe the private citizen enters the stage of history. . . . For the private person, living space becomes, for the first time, antithetical to the place of work. The former is constituted by the interior; the office is its complement. The private person who squares his account with reality in his office demands that the interior be maintained in his illusions. This need is all the more pressing since he has no intention of extending his commercial considerations into social ones. In shaping his private environment he represses both. From this spring the phantasmagorias of the interior. For the private individual the private environment represents the universe. In it he gathers remote places and the past. His drawing room is a box in the World theater.' Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century', *Reflections*, op. cit. pp. 154–6.
7. This calls to mind Freud's paper 'A Child is Being Beaten' (1919), where, as Victor Burgin has written, 'the subject is positioned in the audience and on stage — where it is both aggressor and aggressed.' Victor Burgin, 'Geometry and Abjection', *AA Files* 15, 1987, p. 38. The *mise-en-scène* of Loos's interiors appears to coincide with that of Freud's unconscious. Freud, 'A Child is Being Beaten', *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII, pp. 175–204. In relation to Freud's paper, see also: Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London, 1986), pp. 209–10.
8. Münz and Künstler, *Adolf Loos*, op. cit. p. 36.
9. See my note 6. There are no social spaces in the Benjamin interior. He writes: 'In shaping his private environment he [the private person] represses both [commercial and social considerations].' Benjamin's interior is established in opposition to the office. But, as Laura Mulvey has noted, 'the workplace is no threat to the home. The two maintain each other in a safe, mutually dependent polarisation. The threat comes from elsewhere, . . . the city.' Mulvey, 'Melodrama Inside and Outside the Home' (1986), *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London, 1989), p. 70.
10. In a criticism of Benjamin's account of the bourgeois interior, Mulvey writes: 'Benjamin does not mention the fact that the private sphere, the domestic, is an essential adjunct to the bourgeois marriage and is thus associated with woman, not simply as female, but as wife and mother. It is the mother who guarantees the privacy of the home by maintaining its respectability, as essential a defence against incursion or curiosity as the encompassing walls of the home itself.' Mulvey, 'Melodrama Inside and Outside the Home', op. cit.
11. Münz and Künstler, *Adolf Loos*, op. cit. p. 149.
12. Upon reading an earlier version of this manuscript, Jane Weinstock pointed out that this silhouette can be understood as a screened woman, a veiled woman, and therefore as the traditional object of desire.
13. In response to an earlier version of this paper, Silvia Kolbowski pointed out that the woman in the raised sitting-area of the Moller house could also be seen from behind, through the window to the street, and therefore she is also vulnerable in her moment of control.
14. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I, Freud's Papers on Technique 1953–1954*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by John Forrester (Cambridge, 1988), p. 215. In this passage Lacan is referring to Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*.
15. There is an instance of such personification of furniture in one of Loos's most autobiographical texts, 'Interiors in the Rotonda' (1898), where he writes: 'Every piece of furniture, every thing, every object had a story to tell, a family history.' *Spoken Into the Void: Collected Essays 1897–1900*, translated by Jane O. Newman and John H. Smith (Cambridge and London, 1982), p. 24.
16. This photograph was published only recently. Kulka's monograph (a work in which Loos was involved) presents exactly the same view, the same photograph, but without a human figure. The strange opening in the wall pulls the viewer towards the void, towards the missing actor (a tension which the photographer no doubt felt the need to conceal). This tension constructs a subject, as it does in the built-in sofa of the raised area of the Moller house, or the window of the *Zimmer der Dame* overlooking the drawing room of the Müller house.
17. Loos, *Das Andere*, no. 1, 1903, p. 9.
18. Kenneth Frampton, unpublished lecture, Columbia University, autumn 1986.
19. It should also be noted that this window is an exterior window, as opposed to the other window, which opens on to a threshold space.
20. The reflective surface in the rear of the dining room of the Moller house (half-way between an opaque window and a mirror) and the window in the rear of the music room 'mirror' each other, not only in their locations and their proportions, but even in the way the plants are disposed in two tiers. All of this produces the illusion, in the photograph, that the threshold between these two spaces is virtual — impassable, impenetrable.
21. Letter from Kurt Ungers to Ludwig Münz, quoted in Münz and Künstler, *Adolf Loos*, op. cit. p. 195.
22. In relation to the model of the peepshow and the structure of voyeurism, see Victor Burgin's project *Zoo*. Lisa Tickner, 'Sexuality and/in Representation: Five British Artists', in *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*, edited by Kate Linker (New York, 1984).
23. Christian Metz, 'A Note on Two Kinds of Voyeurism', in *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington, 1977), p. 96.
24. Loos, 'The Principle of Cladding' (1898), in *Spoken into the Void*, op. cit. p. 66.
25. Franco Rella, *Miti e figure del moderno* (Parma, 1981), p. 13 and note 1. René Descartes, *Correspondance avec Arnould et Morus*, edited by G. Lewis (Paris, 1933): letter to Hyperaspistes, August 1641.
26. Loos, 'The Principle of Cladding', op. cit. p. 66.
27. José Quetglas, 'Lo Placentero', *Carrer de la Ciutat* no. 9–10, special issue on Loos, January 1980, p. 2.
28. Loos, 'Architecture' (1910), translated by Wilfried Wang, in *The Architecture of Adolf Loos* (London, 1985), p. 106.
29. See, in this connection, Loos's use of the word 'effect' in other passages, for example in the fragment of 'The Principle of Cladding' quoted earlier in this article (see my note 24).
30. Loos, 'Architecture' (1910), op. cit. pp. 105, 106.
31. Loos, 'Ornament und Erziehung' (1924), *Trotzdem* (Innsbruck, 1931).
32. Loos, 'Architecture' (1910), op. cit.
33. This window, the only 'picture' window to appear in a Loos building, points to the difference in his work between architecture in the context of the city and that of the countryside (the Khuner villa is a country house). This difference is significant, not only in terms of architectural language, as it is often discussed (Gravagnuolo, for example, talks of the differences between the 'whitewashed masterpieces' — the Moller and Müller houses — and the Khuner villa, 'so vernacular, so anachronistically alpine, so rustic' — see Benedetto Gravagnuolo, *Adolf Loos* (New York, 1982)), but in terms of the way the house relates to the exterior world, the construction of its inside and outside.
34. Looking again at the photograph of the dining room of Moller house, Fig. 10, the illusion that the scene is virtual, that the actual view of the dining room is a mirror image of the space from which the view is taken — the music room (thus collapsing both spaces into each other) — is produced not only by the way the space is framed by the opening, but also by the frame of the photograph itself, where the threshold is made to coincide exactly with the sides of the back wall, making the dining room into a picture inside a picture.
35. 'The deepest conflict of modern man is not any longer in the ancient battle with nature, but in the one that the individual must fight to affirm the independence and peculiarity of his existence against the immense power of society, in his resistance to being levelled, swallowed up in the social-technological mechanism.' Georg Simmel, 'Die Grosstadt und das Geistleben' (1903). English translation: 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in *George Simmel: On Individuality and Social Forms*, edited by Donald Levine (Chicago, 1971), pp. 324–39.
36. Georg Simmel, 'Fashion' (1904), *ibid.*
37. Loos, 'Ornament and Crime' (1908), translated by Wilfried Wang, in *The Architecture of Adolf Loos*, op. cit. p. 103.
38. Loos, 'Architecture', op. cit. p. 107.
39. Loos, 'Heimat Kunst' (1914), in *Trotzdem* (essays 1900–1930) (Innsbruck, 1931).
40. One of the ways in which the myth of Loos as an author has been sustained is the privileging of his writings over other forms of representation. These are used to legitimize observations made about his buildings. In demonstrating the way in which these systems of representations have been displaced, I have also treated Loos's words as a stable authority. This practice is problematic at many levels. Critics use words. By privileging words, they privilege themselves. They maintain themselves as authors (authorities). As this convention is dependent on the classical system of representation, this paper remains in complicity with the system that it claims to criticize. It is therefore necessary to reinterpret all of this material.
41. Münz and Künstler, *Adolf Loos*, op. cit. p. 195.
42. Gravagnuolo, *Adolf Loos*, op. cit. p. 191.

Acknowledgements

Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4 (right), 5 (left), 6 (left), 8, 9, 10, 11 (top), 14: *Graphische Sammlung Albertina*, Vienna; figs. 4 (left), 6 (right), 11 (below): from L. Münz and G. Künstler, *Adolf Loos* (1966); fig. 5 (right): from M. Risselada, *Raumplan versus Plan Libre* (1988); figs. 7, 12: from B. Rukschcio and R. Schachel, *Adolf Loos* (1982); fig. 13: from H. Kulka, *Adolf Loos* (1979); fig. 14: *Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst*, Vienna.