

**UN CORPS À HABITER:
THE IMAGE OF THE BODY
IN THE ŒUVRE OF LE CORBUSIER**

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1 Photograph by Hans Silvester of the east façade of Ronchamp at night, with bonfire in foreground. (Jean Petit and Le Corbusier, *Le Livre de Ronchamp*)

La maison est une machine à habiter.
(*The house is a machine for living in.*)

—Le Corbusier, 1923

Literate man, once having accepted an analytic technology of fragmentation, is not nearly so accessible to cosmic patterns as tribal man. He prefers separateness and compartmented spaces, rather than the open cosmos. He becomes less inclined to accept his body as a model of the universe, or to see his house—or any other of the media of communication, for that matter—as a ritual extension of his body. Once men have adopted the visual dynamic of the phonetic alphabet, they begin to lose the tribal man's obsession with cosmic order and ritual as recurrent in the physical organs and their social extension.

—Marshall McLuhan, 1964

Faire une architecture c'est faire une créature.
(*To make architecture is to make a creature.*)

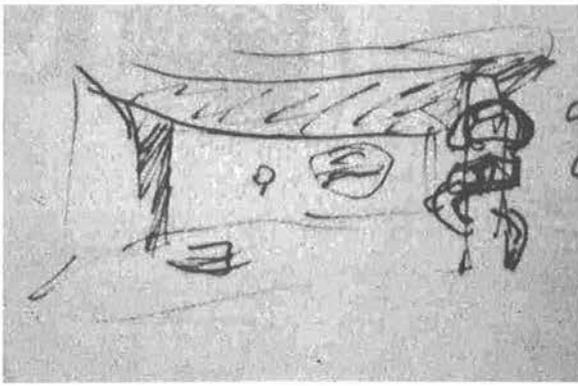
—Le Corbusier, 1955

Of Le Corbusier's architecture-metaphors, the best known is surely that which likened a house to a machine, but he made many others. His early houses at La Chaux-de-Fonds alluded directly to the fir trees that grew beside them. His Armée du Salut building, particularly its upper storey as it meets the sky, assumes the profile of an ocean liner. In studies for Rio, Monte Video, Sao Paulo, and Algiers, his buildings are like bridges to be driven over; and in both visual and verbal writings, Le Corbusier variously likened his elephantine Unité d'Habitation at Marseilles to an ocean liner, a filing cabinet and a wine rack.¹

"A dialectician, the greatest,"² Le Corbusier thought in terms of simile, and in the late forties, when the devastation of war and the threat of nuclear destruction rendered technology a suspect platform for the promotion of modern architecture, these similes began to take on an archaic and subtly surreal character. Once vehement about the virtues of precision and mathematical certainty, Le Corbusier began more and more to ally architecture with art. His own painting served as a source for inspiration and innovation in his buildings, and in the mid-thirties his painting had reached a turning point as he began to explore a theme of metamorphosis in a quite literal manner.

After the war, Le Corbusier extended this exploration in his architecture. Like certain Surrealists, he began to conceive of—or, at least, to portray—both natural and man-made environments anthropomorphically. Through carefully contrived images, he brought buildings and landscapes to life by paralleling both with the human body. In so doing, he imbued his architecture with a dimension of spirituality and otherworldliness, veiling it in an aura that had been all but extinguished in the mechanical age. Buildings metamorphosed into bodies and fused with the natural environment. These living works transcended style and internationalism to exist simultaneously in ancient, present and future time, and in the mythological space of the "open cosmos."

1. See William Jordy, "The Symbolic Essence of Modern European Architecture of the Twenties and its Continuing Influence," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 12.3 (1963) and Colin Rowe, "Iconography," in *The Architecture of Good Intentions: Towards a Possible Retrospect* (London: Academy Editions, 1994).
2. Colin Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1976), 194. This essay was first published as "Dominican Monastery of La Tourette, Evieux-Sur-Abresle, Lyon," *Architectural Review* (June, 1961): 401-410.



- 2 LE CORBUSIER. Early sketch of east façade of Ronchamp. (*Œuvre complète* 5)
- 3 LE CORBUSIER. Detail of *Femme couchée, cordage et bateau à la porte ouverte*, 1935. (*Le Corbusier: Architect of the Century*)

3. Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1986), 157.
4. "Il faut toujours dire ce que l'on voit, surtout il faut toujours, ce qui est plus difficile, voir ce que l'on voit." I am uncertain where and when this quotation first appears in the writings of Le Corbusier, but it is employed several times as an epigram introducing small "Forces Vives" monograms "realised" by Jean Petit in the 1950s and sixties.
5. Though *Le Livre de Ronchamp* (Paris: Les Cahiers Forces Vives/Editect, 1961) was "realised" by Jean Petit, Le Corbusier wrote an unpublished "addendum" dated June 27, 1957 in which he explained that he himself was responsible for both the verbal and visual contents, including the *mise en page*; and that he offered this completed book design to Petit as a kind of gift to encourage him in his publishing efforts. It was published in 1957 as *Chapelle Notre Dame du haut à Ronchamp* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1957) and carried Le Corbusier's name on the cover. The "other" book of 1957—titled *Ronchamp* in the Italian, German and French editions and *The Chapel at Ronchamp* in English (recently re-published in English as *Ronchamp*)—was entirely the work of Le Corbusier and published under his name alone. The final book, *Textes et dessins pour Ronchamp* (Paris: Éditions Forces Vives, 1965) was published under Le Corbusier's name, but again was "realised" by Jean Petit. Its verbal text is comprised of quotations from Le Corbusier. Its visual program is made up of his sketches and drawings for the chapel.

Did we not notice this? Perhaps we *sensed* it in the buildings, "*read*" it in Le Corbusier's presentation of this work, but read it without knowing it. For how, in the mid-twentieth century to cloak a building in cult without rendering it as kitsch? How to allow the curious, polysensuous, and irrational to be born of the logical, the material, the functional, the structural? If these were the questions that confronted the artist Le Corbusier as he moved to coalesce art and architecture, the answer for him lay largely in a single truth: the truth of illusion. For Le Corbusier, visual ambiguity accessed this truth. Cultivated for more than four decades in his many paintings, buildings and book illustrations, ambiguity provided the means for Le Corbusier to link the real with the ideal, the mundane with the profound. It served him as simile serves the poet; it was a discreet, covert manner of communication and yet it was the very essence of his art. Ambiguity allowed the figurative to be always present yet at the same time hidden—accessible only to a privileged few, to those who could see what others could not. The "pictorial image of dialectics,"³ it could portray the world as coded, as laden with meaning. In Le Corbusier's hands, it made present the numinous.

What follows is on the one hand an exposé, on the other an excursion. It presents a case for the cryptic and does so by taking the reader on tour to visit or re-visit various sites, sites comprised of highly ambiguous imagery—illusory representation carefully selected to reveal a truth. It asks the reader to adopt what Le Corbusier so often called for in his writings: a different way of seeing things. "It is necessary to say what one sees," he wrote in a passage that became the introductory motto to several of his later illustrated books, "but what is more essential and more beneficial, is to see what one sees."⁴

Let us begin, then, with a subtle but climactic moment found in *Le Livre de Ronchamp*, the second of Le Corbusier's three books on Notre Dame du Haut, books which serve as addenda, as coloration to this famous pilgrimage chapel.⁵ *Le Livre de Ronchamp* records a special day in the life of the chapel, the day of its dedication. In so doing, it envelops the building in a narrative not customary to modern architecture. Its records are photographs arranged in a film-like sequence. In image after image, the chapel is presented to us as we might have experienced it that day had we climbed the hill with other worshippers, ambled about the strange structure, took note of its most striking features, and ultimately penetrated its dark interior to be bathed in its special light. When, at the conclusion of this sequence, we are returned outside, at the chapel's exterior east altar we witness a ceremony underway: the formal dedication of this sacred structure. Then the day is done; darkness falls, and Le Corbusier ends his story with a curious photograph of the chapel at night (Fig. 1).



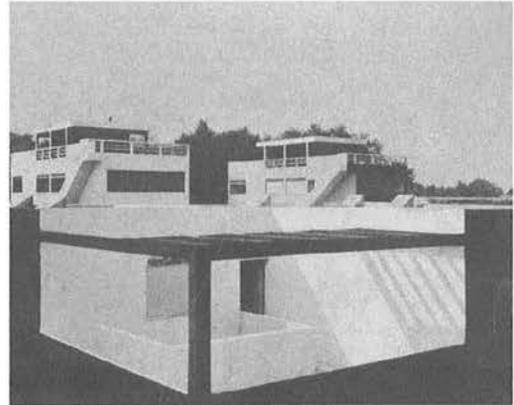
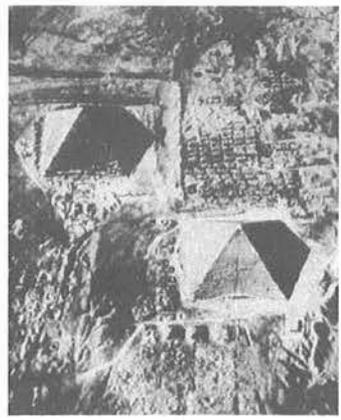
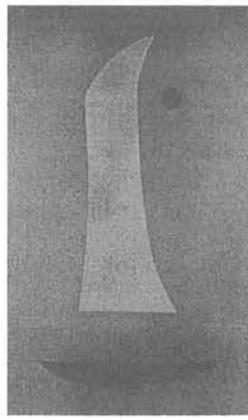
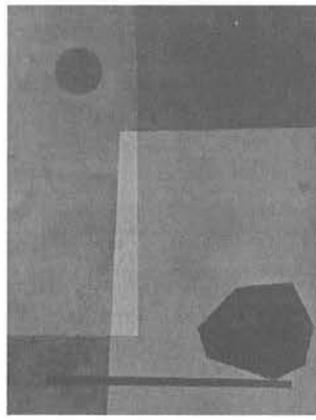
The photograph depicts a group of worshippers gathered about a blazing fire just below the chapel's east façade. The figures around the fire appear as fragments, some rendered in silhouette, others as faces and hands suspended in mid-air and aglow in the dark. The chapel is also footlighted by fire, its whiteness emerging mysteriously from the blackness that surrounds it. It, too, is fragmented; and as we gaze intently at it, a sense of the uncanny takes hold. For firelight has transformed the chapel's façade to a glowing, benevolent face, a face that floats in the darkness of the night. Curved balcony as nose, linear bench as mouth, the glass lozenge as right eye: the countenance is nearly complete, complemented by a full head of hair. Shadows cast by the fire from below reinforce this physiognomy and bring to it a distinct personality by adding a bridge over the nose, a triangular lash above the eye, and a hairline where wall meets roof. The apparition is almost comic and we might imagine it to move should the flame that animates it begin to flicker.

What to do with such an "appearance"? Fire to air, air to apparition—its "make up" is like so much myth we know: the genie of Aladdin's lamp; Christian belief, which equates the Church, Ecclesia, with Notre Dame herself; the new spirit that resides in the body the day of its christening. With its capacity for revealing the secret character of persons and things, photography might record all of this. And yet there is something comic about this spectre that belies any serious attempt to find allegory within its structure. If here we find a face at all, perhaps it should be accepted as little more than that—a finding which Le Corbusier, too, found, and in which he saw an opportunity for a visual pun, entertaining yet hardly intended to be edifying.

But even a cursory review of Le Corbusier's writings on Ronchamp offers much evidence to the contrary, evidence that suggests that Le Corbusier, master of ambiguity, may have consciously designed the chapel façade as a face. For certainly a face is present in all the maquettes and study sketches—even in the earliest conceptual sketch, which in addition to its Mona Lisa smile has a definitive head of hair complete with stylish curly lock (Fig. 2). This earliest face finds an ancestor in Le Corbusier's 1935 painting, *Femme, cordage et bateau à la porte ouverte*, where a skull-capped feminine figure with truly strange anatomy stares out at us with right eye only, covering the left with her hand in a *Last Judgement* gesture (Fig. 3).

Indeed, the one-eyedness of the east façade is both its most disturbing and most distinguishing feature, one that can only retard easy acceptance of any suggestion of a physiognomy. Yet many of Le Corbusier's paintings are populated with monocular female faces, usually hooded or "hard-haired" (Fig. 4). He sketched himself and his mother in such a manner (Figs. 5 & 6); and in sculpture from the early fifties—works done concurrently with the refining of the design of Ronchamp—he gave the monocular face three-dimensional form (Fig. 7). Even in celestial bodies Le Corbusier discovered a one-eyed woman, recording in his sketchbook a monocular moon he spied in India, in November 1955,⁶ a finding he presumably regarded as significant to

- 4 LE CORBUSIER. Detail of painting, ca. 1932. Photo: Dan Naegele
- 5 LE CORBUSIER. Drawing, self-portrait. (*Rencontre avec Le Corbusier*)
- 6 LE CORBUSIER. Drawing of the artist's mother, Marie Charlotte Amélie Jeanneret Perret, at age 91, dated 10 September, 1957. (Le Corbusier, *Une Petite Maison*)
- 7 LE CORBUSIER. Detail of sculpture *Femme*, 1953. (Heidi Weber, *Le Corbusier—The Artist*)
6. *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks 3 1954-1957* (NY: Architectural History Foundation and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, in collaboration with the Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris, 1981), Carnet J38, #385. The text accompanying the sketch of the moon's one-eyed face reads: "la lune le 26 nov 55 à 16 heures." Two years earlier, on the May 26, 1953 at Chandigarh Le Corbusier had sketched the moon as a one-eyed female (*la lune*) face and scribbled below it: "c'est la première fois que je vois un visage à la lune." See *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks 2*; Carnet G 28, no. 944.
7. Le Corbusier, *Ronchamp*. A photograph of the window appears on page 18 and a sketch of the moon dated 22 April 1956 is shown on page 24 opposite the opening page of Le Corbusier's written text, his "Dedicace." Above the sketch is written "Autour du trentième parallèle nord, en Orient, la lune a un visage," and a bird in flight seems to emanate from the face of the moon. Both the moon, *la lune*, and the chapel, "Fille de l'Esprit," are female.
8. The Surrealists' preoccupation with the single eye, epitomised by Georges Bataille's 1928 *Histoire de l'oeil*, is well known. It was stimulated by the work of Odilon Redon whose lithographs of the 1880s—*Il y eut peut-être une vision première essayée dans la fleur* (1883); *L'oeil comme un ballon bizarre se dirige vers l'infini* (1882); and *Partout des prunelles flamboient* (1888), for example—are comparable to the Ronchamp night scene. On Redon, see Piero Falchetta, "Anthology of Twentieth-Century Texts," in *The Arcimboldo Effect: Transformations of the Face from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, eds. S. Rasponi and C. Tanzi (Milan: Bompiani, 1987), 206-233.



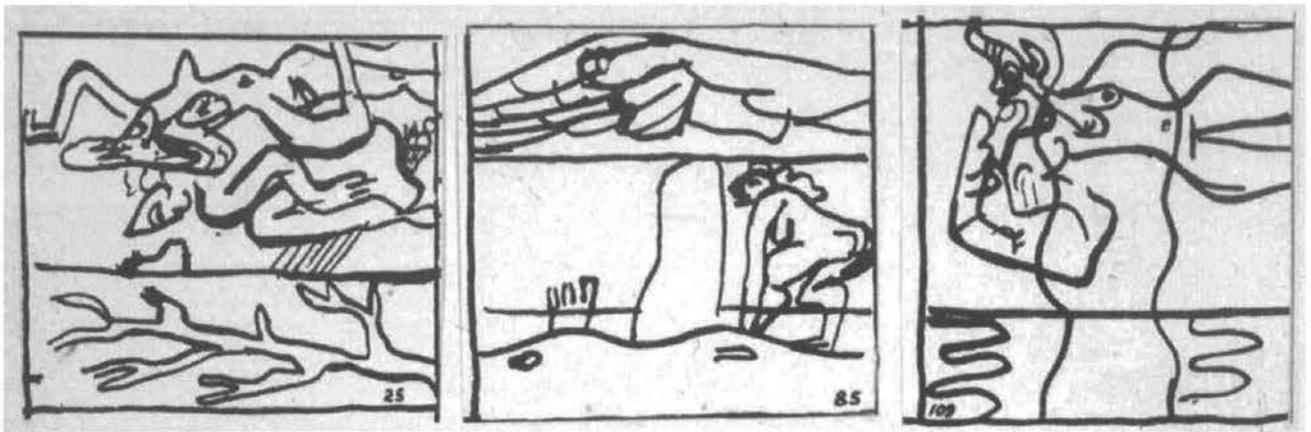
- 8 HANS ARP. *Tête* (Relief en corde). (Documents 1)
- 9 PAUL KLEE. *Daringly Poised*, 1930. (Paul Klee, *The Thinking Eye*)
- 10 WASSILY KANDINSKY. *Upright*, September, 1930. (V. E. Barnett and Armin Zweite, eds., *Kandinsky Watercolors and Drawings*)
- 11 Photograph of pyramids from A. Ozenfant's *Foundations of Modern Art*.
- 12 Photograph of Pessac unit, captioned "La terrasse." (*Oeuvre complète* 1)

9. Although his essay does not specifically address the one-eyed face, Jean Clair's "Continental Drifts" in *The Arcimboldo Effect* (244-256) features many illustrations of very subtle monocular faces by avant-garde artists from 1911 to 1918, images which convey the strong sense of mystery that such visages often evoke.
10. Numerous works by both artists feature one-eyed faces. Both Kandinsky's *Upright* (1930) and Klee's *Landscape-ly-physiognomic* (1931), for instance, might be thought immediate ancestors to the lithograph which opens Le Corbusier's *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit* (1955) an image which Le Corbusier later recycled as a red-lipped lithograph and eventually as an enamelled wall panel for the Heidi Weber Pavilion in Zürich. Klee and Kandinsky, though both Bauhaus masters, were understood by some French critics as fundamental to the Surrealist movement (see, for instance, *Cahiers D'Art* 7 [1928]: 451). Klee's work especially was widely published throughout the twenties and thirties in the Surrealist journals *Documents* and *Minotaure*.
11. If one were to protract this point, certainly the 1932 photograph, "Viaduc d'Auteuil," by Le Corbusier's longtime friend Brassai, would be included in

Ronchamp, for the sketch he drew was later transcribed to a painted glass window of the chapel and subsequently re-presented in photographs and drawings in his first book on this building.⁷

And here one must note that the one-eyed face is hardly exclusive to Le Corbusier but a staple of modern art, presumably because it allows both front and profile views to be presented simultaneously (Fig. 8). Picasso used it as such, as did Brancusi, Chagall, Arp, Apollinaire, Redon,⁸ and many others, including Le Corbusier's friend Fernand Léger, whose 1920s paintings were often populated with monocular visages. And when even a cursive check is run, not-so-distant one-eyed relatives begin to appear in compositions that directly parallel the Ronchamp night scene.⁹ Both Klee and Kandinsky did paintings of a very similar kind (Figs. 9 & 10);¹⁰ and Le Corbusier's partner in Purism, Amédée Ozenfant, whose journal *L'Elan* from the teens is replete with one-eyed women, closed his renowned *Foundations of Modern Art* with an aerial view of the pyramids, which anticipated by thirty years the Ronchamp countenance (Fig. 11).¹¹

Of particular importance is the bipartite composition of the Ronchamp night scene. It is clearly divided into two realms: the upper part where the glowing face floats, and the lower part where dark figures are gathered about the fire. Light and dark, sky and earth, heaven and hell, ideal and real—much can be assigned to such duality. In fact, many of Le Corbusier's compositions, including photographs of his architecture, assume this bipartite division, presumably because "regulating lines" order them, but also, no doubt, because presentation in pairs—the creation of distinct and adjacent spatial realms—encourages dialectical thinking about even the most prosaic of subjects (Fig. 12). This disposition is particularly evident in numerous lithographs that illustrate Le Corbusier's enigmatic *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit*, completed the same year as Ronchamp (Fig. 13).¹² In each, an enormous, bizarre phenomenon floats in the upper half of the picture. At this time, too, Le Corbusier did drawings, collages and photographic projections that



assume this same parti. In the upper half, colossal body parts appear suspended in mid-air above a horizon line while in the lower half we find an assembly of onlookers (Figs. 14 & 15).¹³

These parallel images encourage further interpretation of the Ronchamp night scene, for they present us with not simply a two-dimensional fleeting phenomenon, but with a kind of giantism. This is to say that once the idea of a chapel with a face becomes somewhat credible, another thought takes hold: if the façade is a face, it follows that the chapel itself is a head, an enormous head that sits atop the hill looking out towards the east. We can inhabit this head, dwell in its darkness, feel the light which penetrates it day after day, year after year. But from within, we cannot see out.

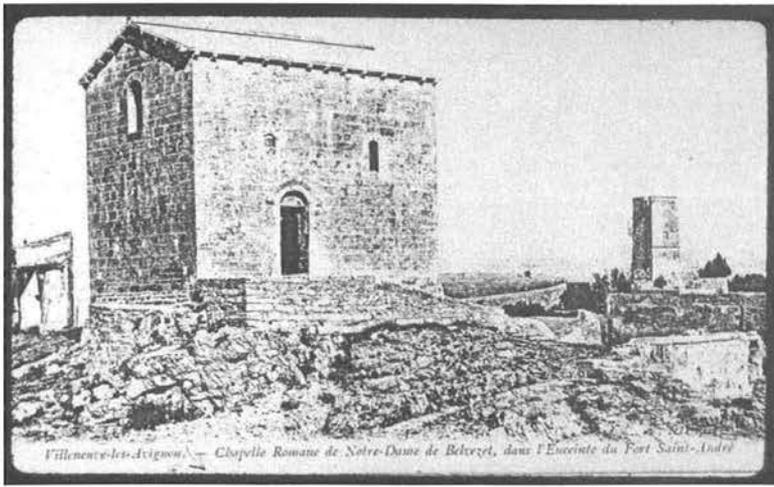
Ronchamp: a head, a cranium, a colossal skull that we the curious, we the worshippers, climb on, probe, penetrate, inhabit—the notion is fantastic and absurd, but again there is much that might encourage us to consider this strange proposition more closely (Fig. 16).

this list. Its subtlety is such that were it not clearly framed in a *Minotaure* photo essay—an essay in which all images anthropomorphise architecture—its visage might easily go unrecognised. See Brassai, "Ce n'est pas trop tard," *Minotaure* 7 (1936): 31.

12. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit* (Paris: Editions Verve, 1955).
13. The Philips Pavilion "spectacle" offered a three-dimensional manifestation of this parti. See for instance the photographic projection of the reptilian-like fon housed in the Musée de Homme, Paris as shown in Le Corbusier, *Creation Is a Patient Search*, trans. James Palmes (NY: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), 281.

- 13 LE CORBUSIER. Three lithographs (nos. 25, 85, 109) from *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit*.
- 14 LE CORBUSIER. *La Main ouverte*, watercolor, 1948. (*Le Corbusier's Secret Drawings*)
- 15 LE CORBUSIER. Left: *Crise du tabac et vie de chameau*, 1942. FLC 75. Right: drawing. FLC 3897. (Mogens Krstrup, *Porte Email*)
- 16 Photograph of the east façade of Ronchamp during ceremony. (Jean Petit, *Le Livre de Ronchamp*)





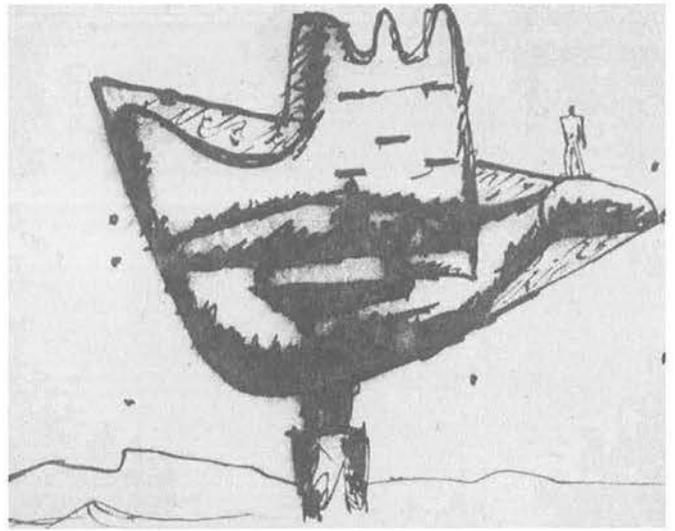
17 Postcard. "Chapelle Romane de Notre-Dame de Belvezet." (FLC Box A1-8, Doc. 274)

II

In the Paris archive that Le Corbusier took care to establish, among his large collection of picture postcards is an image of a modest stone building amidst rubble and ruin, the *Chapelle Romane de Notre-Dame de Belvezet* (Fig. 17).¹⁴ The façade is curious. It, too, exhibits facial features. A mouth and two eyes, the right one considerably smaller than the left and so perhaps winking, are the first clues. With a hairline of projected beams and an ear-like opening on its side elevation, the building is a compact, cubic head. On the back of the card Le Corbusier's inscription designates this tiny Roman chapel "*la naissance de l'architecture*," the birth of architecture.

Architecture is not built, but born. It lives. Some forty years later, Le Corbusier interpreted his own creation similarly. On the cover of the small book *Ronchamp* he wrote that his chapel, raised from the rubble of a bombed church on a hilltop in eastern France, "is born for today and for tomorrow."¹⁵ He dubbed it the "Daughter of the Spirit, of which one knows neither from where it came nor to where it goes,"¹⁶ and by doing so both emphasised its transcendent and phenomenal nature and underscored its fleeting yet persistent "appearance." Later, he gave a detailed account of the conception of Ronchamp. He told how, after having received the commission, he carried "the idea of the chapel" in his head for several months. During this time he permitted himself to make no sketches. "The human head is made in such a way as to possess a certain independence: it is a bottle into which one might place the elements of a problem, allowing them 'to float,' 'to brew,' 'to ferment.'"¹⁷ In this metaphor the head is both box and womb. Once conceived, ideas gestate and begin to take form. "Then one day, a spontaneous initiative of the inner being, [...]; one takes a crayon [...] and scratches on the paper: the idea exits,—the infant exits, it comes into the world, it is born."¹⁸

The human head as a box in which "*éléments*" float, brew and ferment: the description fits equally well a certain building type which Le Corbusier often proposed, the "*boîte à miracles*." Though this box was never built, the pavilion Le Corbusier built for the Philips corporation at the Brussels Fair in 1958 adopted aspects of its program. Le Corbusier described the building not as a box but as "an Electronic Poem contained in a 'bottle' ... a stomach assimilating 500 listener-spectators, and evacuating them automatically at the end of each performance,"¹⁹ thus evoking flotation and fermentation while encouraging the notion of building as body fragment. In the darkness of its amorphic interior, visual and sonorous images appeared miraculously. An exclusively phenomenal architecture arose, composed only of light and sound emitted in space.



18 LE CORBUSIER. Open Hand colossus with scale figures. (*Le Corbusier Selected Drawings*)

This environment was durational, the architectural analog of ten minutes of the human mind. At Brussels, Le Corbusier placed the viewer inside the human head.

Shortly before the design of this “Electronic Poem,” Le Corbusier published another poem, the aforementioned *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit*. Composed of original writings and drawings, *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit* is a curious hybrid of verbal and visual text in which the cursive, hand-written verbal takes on visual form comparable to that of the line drawings which seem to flow from the same pen. Its twenty color lithographs are designed to be assembled side by side to form a right angle “tree,” a “cross” which echoes medieval religious narrative art. The drawings often depict minotaur-like creatures: a woman-bull or a winged and horned beast metamorphosed from a human hand. Mirror-imaged figures—one white, one black, or one male, one female—are fused into unity. In both form and content the portfolio which transforms itself into a cross illustrates metamorphosis. It offers for consideration nothing less than a new world view.

In *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit*, Le Corbusier placed his own creative energies in a cosmic context which transcends specific place and time. In its most revealing anecdote, he tells how he collected from the road a piece of dead wood and a pebble and how an ox passed all day before his window. “Because I drew it and redrew it,” he explained in the poem, “the ox—pebble and root—became a bull.” Representation encouraged metamorphosis.

The mythic world that emerges from this metamorphosis is evident in the previously noted images of mirage-like visions, strange figures hovering above the horizon line as if the artist were depicting a seascape in which cloud formations were contorted into signs to be deciphered by the reader (Fig. 13). The “open hand is one of these mirage-like compositions; in the color lithograph a colossal body fragment seems to float on a blue sea. “Life is tasted through the kneading of hands,” Le Corbusier wrote in the adjacent text. “Eyesight resides in palpation.”²⁰ Le Corbusier proposed this hand as a centerpiece for his capital complex at Chandigarh, initially sketching it with several figures standing on its thumb, thus rendering it a colossal body part the size of a building (Fig. 18).

Built as a rather large sculpture many years after Le Corbusier’s death, the open hand monument easily falls within the acceptable limits of the modern architecture which, under Le Corbusier’s direction, actively sought a synthesis of the arts. And seen as sculpture it continued a long line of accents and centerpieces in modern architecture. But seen as originally proposed, that is to say, as architecture metamorphosed in the shape of a human hand skewered on a steel

14. FLC, postcard, Box A1-8, #274. The card is probably from the teens, and the caption printed on the front of it reads: “Villeneuve-les-Avignon. — Chapelle Romane de Notre-Dame de Belvezet, dans l'enceinte du Fort Saint-André.”
15. “Est bien née pour aujourd'hui et pour demain.”
16. “Fille de l'Esprit dont on ne sait ni d'où il vient ni où il va.”
17. “La tête humaine est ainsi faite qu'elle possède une certaine indépendance: c'est une boîte dans laquelle on peut verser en vrac les éléments d'un problème. On laisse alors 'flotter', 'mijoter', 'fermenter'.”
18. “Puis un jour, une initiative spontanée de l'être intérieur, le déclic, se produit; on prend un crayon[...] et on accouche sur le papier: l'idée sort, —l'enfant sort, il est venu au monde, il est né.” This and the preceding three quotes are from Le Corbusier, *Textes et dessins pour Ronchamp*, unpaginated (first page).
19. Le Corbusier, *Creation is a Patient Search*, 186.
20. “La vie que l'on goûte par le pétrissement des mains/La vue qui est dans la palpation.” Translated by Kenneth Hylton in the unpaginated 1989 facsimile copy of *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit*.

19 MAN RAY. Portrait of Jacques Rigaut, 1922.
(Patrick Waldberg, *Surrealism*)



rod and left to wave in the breeze—seen as such the open hand must be understood as yet another affront to the canons of modern architecture.

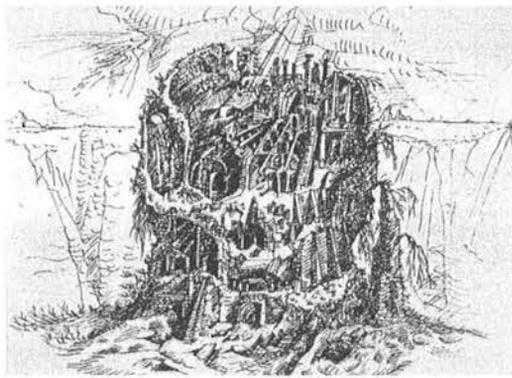
III

A colossal head; a gigantic hand; a stomach or “mind” large enough to accommodate five hundred? If such clearly representational, overtly symbolic and emotionally charged notions find no place within the context of Modern architecture, to what realm do they belong? The *corps à habiter*, the body to live in, though antithetical to the logic of modernism, falls easily within the sphere of French avant-garde art. For European Surrealists in the 1920s and thirties, figurative colossality was a common strategy for enlarging art into habitable environment. Almost always, it was a fragment of the human corpus itself that was enlarged—typically the head, but sometimes the hand, the mouth, the genitals, the intestines.²¹ Man Ray, André Masson, and even Le Corbusier’s revered Picasso paired both man-made and natural environments with the human body, a fusion that resulted in a critical metamorphosis simultaneously poetic and psychologically probing. Such a fusion would have been attractive to Le Corbusier who, after all, had been trained in a Swiss Art Nouveau architecture that relied on nature as metaphor for buildings and who, after having entered the Parisian art world in 1918 as a painter, had persistently aggrandised art into environments with pavilions such as *Esprit Nouveau*, *Nestlé’s*, and *Temps Nouveau*.²² The “absurd” idea of “buildings as body parts” outlined above grew directly from this alignment of architecture with art, albeit with an art whose values differed greatly from those normally associated with Le Corbusier’s Purism.

A brief history of Le Corbusier’s engagement with such ideas must suffice to suggest a “theory” behind such manifestations, a way of thinking about building arrived at not overnight, but cultivated over many years. We begin not at the beginning, but in the 1920s when representation itself encouraged speculation about the colossal. At that time, photographs and montages served to fragment the human body into discrete parts. Carefully conceived ambiguity presented these parts as enormous. This is most obvious in the work of Man Ray. His 1922 *Portrait of Jacques Rigaut*, for instance, shows Rigaut’s head upside down, isolated by focus and confronted with a tiny wooden *poupée*, the mere presence of which questions the scale of the head

21. Frederick Kiesler’s work offers examples of most of these: for the mouth, his preliminary 1946 set design for Sartre’s *No Exit*; for the genitals, his 1960-1 Universal Theatre, a colossal penis; for the intestines, his 1959 Endless House. See *Frederick Kiesler* (New York: Whitney Museum of Art, 1980).

22. For a protracted discussion of these three pavilions as “art enlarged to the size of architecture,” see Daniel Naegele, “Le Corbusier and the Space of Photography: Photo-murals, Pavilions, and Multi-media Spectacles,” in *History of Photography*, vol. 22 no. 2 (Summer, 1998): 127-138.



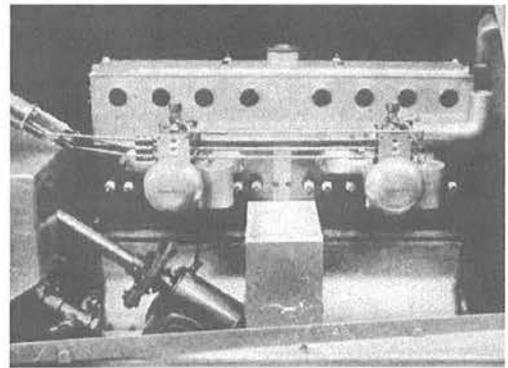
- 20 MAN RAY. *La Plage*, 1937.
(Man Ray: the rigour of the imagination)
- 21 ANDRÉ MASSON. *City of the Skull*, 1939.
(W. Rubin, *André Masson*)
- 22 ANDRÉ MASSON, *Portrait of André Breton*, drawing, 1941.
(Patrick Waldberg, *Surrealism*)

itself (Fig. 19). Imaginary projects for “body buildings” followed. In a 1936 self portrait, for example, Man Ray graphically translated his own head into architecture by sporting six-pane windows as eyeglasses, and in his *Portrait of the Marquis de Sade* he described the high priest of Surrealism as a stone colossal comparable to the Great Sphinx. In his *Les tours d’Eliane*, a fortress becomes female as towers and thighs coincide and building and body share a common entrance. In *La plage*, this animation was extended to the scale of landscape as a natural land formation becomes a colossal reclining nude (Fig. 20). Salvador Dalí provided numerous, more humorous variations on this theme, but it is the far more ominous images of André Masson that invoke the inherent power of the colossalised human corpus as architecture.²³ Evident as early as 1925 in his *Portrait of Michel Leiris* and extending through his “physiognomic landscapes” of the mid-thirties, the head as a site for human habitation was a persistent theme in Masson’s work, blossoming in the late thirties and early forties with *City of the Skull* (1939) (Fig. 21), *The Palace* (1940), and *Portrait of André Breton* (1941) (Fig. 22).

In Masson’s projects, the body is depicted as an immense carcass without consciousness. The head is a helmet, and to inhabit it is for the viewer to assume the place and presumably the role of consciousness itself. In such works, the psyche is given palpable presence and a dialectic is established between body and being. A peculiar spatial realm is manifested. Colossal heads invert conventional scale, making the human experience Lilliputian and underscoring the relativity of the human perspective. Unreal scale does not replace but rather is placed next to human scale, creating a condition in which two apparently contradictory and mutually exclusive “spatial realms” exist side by side.

Needless to say, these surreal paper projects were seldom realised and when they were, as with the work of artist-architect Frederick Kiesler, they remained within the frame of the museum or theatre, that is, as stage sets or exhibition sites in environments dedicated exclusively to fiction and fantasy. If such art projects suggest an elusive colossality, a giantism of a similar though less intentionally surreal sort was evident throughout America in the 1930s, where a new sense of the immense was present in the era’s huge new skyscrapers, bridges, dams and ocean liners. Complementing this scale were various large-scale advertisements rendered in anthropomorphic and mechanomorphic form. Children of popular culture and particularly of the international expositions, these giants were intended for commercial and amusement purposes rather

- 23. Other variations on the theme would include Georges Malkine’s *The Lady of Pique* (1928) and Roland Penrose’s *The Invisible Isle* (1936) and perhaps Raoul Ubac’s photograph *Solarization* (1937). All are featured in Patrick Waldberg, *Surrealism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), figs. 89, 90 and 139.
- 24. In a certain sense, Gutzon Borglum’s Mount Rushmore carving seems a most banal monument. That it was not is evident in Simon Schama’s account of the work in *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 385-405. The truly surreal sense of the finished monument did not go unnoticed. Alfred Hitchcock employed it to great artistic effect in his 1958 film *North by Northwest* in which Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint are confronted by the colossus and ultimately traverse its faces as a means of escape.
- 25. See FLC Box C1-15, #54. Newsclipping from *Ce Soir*, 19 May 1939.
- 26. See FLC Box F2-12, #18. Page from *L’Illustration* without date or page number.
- 27. See FLC Box F2-12, #18. This newsclipping is without source or date. It shows the Mount Rushmore monument under construction with a full frontal view of Jefferson and a profile of Washington.
- 28. For Le Corbusier’s early watercolors, see *Le Corbusier, Peintre Avant Le Purisme* (La Chaux-de-Fonds: Musée des beaux arts de La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1987), especially *Un rêve* (1917), 75.
- 29. For an extensive discussion of the ambiguous photographic images of *Vers une architecture*, see Daniel Naegele, “Photographic Illusionism and the ‘new world of space’,” *Le Corbusier-Painter and Architect* (Denmark: Arkitekturstiftelsen, 1995), 83-117.



23 Newsclipping. Photograph of "le stand Ricard" at the Paris Fair, from *Ce Soir*, May 19, 1939. (FLC, Box C1-15, Doc. 54)

24 LE CORBUSIER. *Portrait dans un paysage*, watercolor, 1908. (*Le Corbusier, Peintre Avant Le Purisme*)

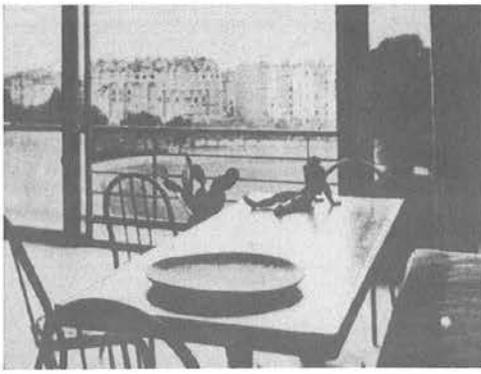
25 Photograph of "A Bugatti Engine" from Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*.

30. Le Corbusier, *Aircraft* (London: The Studio Publications, 1935), fig. 18.
31. For a brief history of this project, see Jean Petit, *Le Corbusier, lui-même* (Geneva: Editions Rousseau, 1970).
32. In this 13 year period, Le Corbusier executed only two small houses—the Maison aux Mathes and the Petite Maison de Weekend at La Celle-St-Cloud, both of 1935—and a temporary "tented" exhibition pavilion, the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux of 1937. In addition, in 1936 he served as consultant for the Ministry of Health and Education buildings in Rio de Janeiro.
33. "[...]une enquête illimitée dans le monde apparent et une appréciation constante des réactions de l'objectif sur le sujetif: transposition, transfert des événements extérieurs dans l'intérieur de la conscience." FLC, Box U3-06, #498-500, from a typed draft titled "OEUVRE PLASTIQUE" (Peintures et Dessins—Architecture) Editions Albert MORANCE." A final version was published as preface in *Le Corbusier, Oeuvre plastique, peintures et dessins, architecture*, the catalogue for Le Corbusier's 1938 exhibition at the Galerie Balaÿ et Carré in Paris. It was also published under the title "Peinture" in 1938 in *Le Corbusier, Oeuvre Plastique*, the eighth and final volume in Morancé's *L'Architecture Vivante* series on the work of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret. Annotated with sketches by Le Corbusier, this volume is devoted to the paintings and graphic works of Le Corbusier and features the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux as well.
34. For more on this subject, see Daniel Naegele, "Le Corbusier and the Space of Photography," 127-138.
35. For an excellent and concise study of these drawings and the text in which they appeared, see Mogens Krustup,

than for intellectual or artistic edification. In addition to these advertisement and engineering feats, the earth itself was a site for work on an unprecedented scale. In Tennessee, the TVA built an extensive network of dams to harness the forces of nature; while in South Dakota, at the scale of giants, Gutzon Borglum massaged a mountainside into the faces of four American presidents. Both projects, each in its own way, contorted nature into a sign, imbuing it with a mythic dimension both awesome and surreal.²⁴

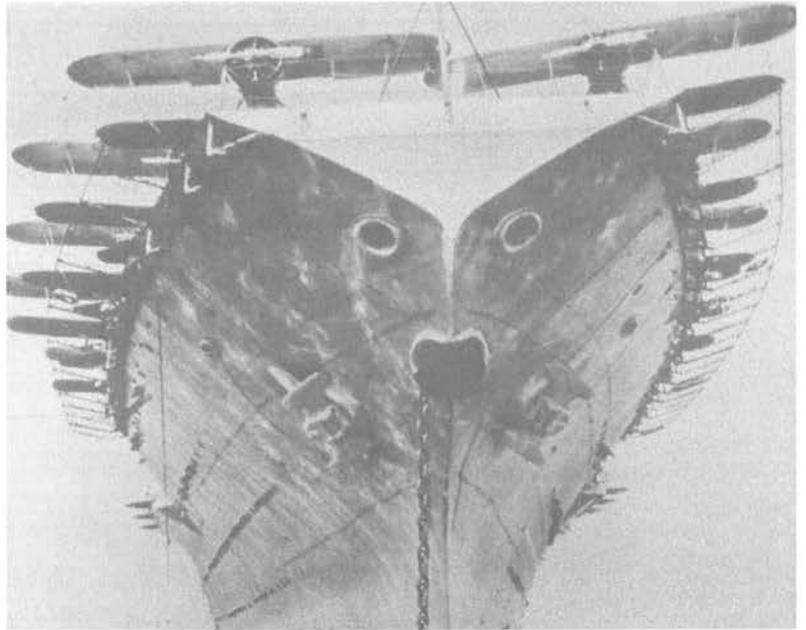
If both avant-garde and pop culture had thus conceived of a new giantism in which the body of man was enlarged to the size of buildings and landscapes, Modern architects showed little if any interest in this tendency, Le Corbusier being the exception. The movement's principal proponent, in his private files he nonetheless harbored images of overtly anthropomorphic colossals: "le stand Ricard" (Fig. 23);²⁵ volcanoes photographed from above to resemble giant breasts and captioned "Le deux 'mamelles';"²⁶ Mount Rushmore under construction with Washington looking a lot like Man Ray's *Marquis*.²⁷

This interest in the anthropomorphic and colossal was not new to Le Corbusier. As early as 1908 and again in 1917, he had depicted a kind of colossality in his watercolors (Fig. 24),²⁸ and, as mentioned, his Purist partner Ozenfant frequently featured fictive colossals in drawings published in his journal *L'Elan*. When together they co-edited *L'Esprit Nouveau*, the colossal occasionally emerged in photographic images of monuments and buildings and machines. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Vers une architecture*, a collection of essays initially published in *L'Esprit Nouveau* and featuring a highly ambiguous illustrative text that reveals Le Corbusier's pronounced tendency toward the physiognomic parti, an inclination similar to that exhibited in the teens by Picabia, Suzanne Duchamp, Paul Strand and others (Fig. 25).²⁹ More strangely, though, in certain photographs of his architecture in the late twenties Le Corbusier employed wooden *poupée* in the manner of Man Ray, presumably to suggest a fantastic environment of competing scales (Fig. 26). By the mid-thirties this tendency had grown more explicit, and in his 1935 *Aircraft* Le Corbusier complemented an obviously facial photograph of a fully-loaded aircraft carrier with the caption: "And Neptune rises from the sea, crowned with strange garlands, the weapons of Mars"(Fig. 27).³⁰ This association of ancient myth with the enormous realities of the twentieth century would stay with Le Corbusier for decades to come.



26 Photograph, probably by Pierre Jeanneret, of an apartment interior with a *poupée* on the table at the Immeuble à la Porte Molitor. (*Œuvre complète 2*)

27 From Le Corbusier's *Aircraft* (fig. 18), a photograph of an aircraft carrier captioned: "And Neptune rises from the sea, crowned with strange garlands, the weapons of Mars."



In the above examples, Le Corbusier employed the inherent illusion of two-dimensional representation to suggest both enormous scale and the aura of the human body in the new industrial landscape that he championed, and in 1938 such suggestions were synthesised into concrete form with his monument to the socialist revolutionary Paul Vaillant-Couturier.³¹ Expressly surreal, it featured a four metre high head placed directly on a shelf, mouth opened wide as if frozen in an act of speech. Hovering above it, an eight metre long hand emerged from a stone slab wall, presumably the sign of socialist solidarity. There was about it something both slightly sinister and highly emotive, something that bore little relationship to the rational and positive approach pursued by Le Corbusier in his earlier architecture.

Concurrent with this work, Le Corbusier—who had built almost nothing since 1933 and who would not complete a major work until 1946³²—re-introduced himself as a painter with a major retrospective of his “artistic production” in Zürich. For this exhibition, he issued a cursive theoretical treatise—ostensibly on painting, but applicable by extension to architecture—in which he stated clearly that he no longer understood painting as an “objectification of a ‘world’” as he had in the Purist years. Painting had become for him “an unlimited inquiry,” an extremely personal and introspective investigation “*dans le monde apparent*” which provoked “a constant appreciation of the action of the objective on the subjective ... the transfer of exterior events into the interior of consciousness.”³³

Thus, rather silently Le Corbusier moved from the absolute and material world of the rationalist to the relative and phenomenal world of the poet-artist, and to the “new world” of the twentieth century. The physics of Einstein, the subconscious mind of Freud, the dialectic signification of a Breton or a Leiris or even of Picasso—all would be accommodated in this new perspective. Ultimately it would lead to the proposal of a new “absolute good” for architecture, what Le Corbusier dubbed *l'espace indicible*, an inexplicable space that arose from the careful conjoining of the illusory space of representation—usually large scale mural painting—with the “real” space of architecture.³⁴ Colossality played a central role in that quest. It emphasised the relative nature of human perspective by providing a second perspective, the colossal, that questioned the authority of the first. It created a kind of visual contradiction that ruptured the seamless, ubiquitous space of perspective. In this sense, it evoked a palpable space while at the same

Le Corbusier L'Illade Dessins (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1986).

36. These were published in *Minotaure* 11 (1938): 57, in an exposé which directly followed and complemented Benjamin Péret's “A l'intérieur de l'armure” (54-56), an article which featured photographs by Ubac: provocative images of suits of armour.

37. In his 1929 article in *Problemi dell'arte attuale* Giorgio Nicodemi was the first to rediscover Arcimboldo, the sixteenth century master of fantastic and bizarre composite portraits of heads composed entirely of fish or fruit or birds or vegetables. The first encyclopaedia entry on Arcimboldo is in A. Venturi's *Storia dell'arte italiana* (1934). A sampling of Arcimboldo's work was published in *Minotaure* 12/13 in 1939 and later in more popular French magazines. His paintings had mass appeal. In 1952 his *Vegetable Gardener* was shown at the Orangerie in Paris. In 1954 his *Four Seasons* was exhibited at the Furstenberg Gallery in Paris and in the same year Benno Geiger's monograph on the artist was published in Florence. Arcimboldo did not go unnoticed by Le Corbusier, who held clippings of “Les Quatre Eléments, les Astres et le Destin,” an article by M. L. Sondaz which assigned symbolic significance to the various elements of a series of Arcimboldo's paintings and which featured illustrations of his *La Terre* and *L'Eau*. (FLC Box C1-15, #69 and #103. No date or journal is indicated, but it seems to be from the popular French magazine *Voilà*.) This article ends on a curious note, moving from the realm of the occult to that of “science,” noting that its outrageous claims regarding the human personality are substantiated by “a scientific explanation of the races and of human temperaments.”

38. See Piero Falchetta, “Anthology of



- 28 LE CORBUSIER. Drawing of colossal floating head over page 32 of *L'Iliade*. (Mogens Krusturp, *Le Corbusier L'Iliade Dessins*)
- 29 J. B. FISCHER VON ERLACH. Mt. Ethos colossus in Erlach, *Entwurf einer historischen Architectur* (Leipzig, 1725).
- 30 BRASSAI. *Ceill Postiche*, a photograph published in *Minotaure* 6 (Winter, 1935).

Sixteenth-Century Texts," in *The Arcimboldo Effect*, 142-198.

39. For manifestations of this trend see, for instance, Pierre Gueguen, "L'Art Brut," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, second special number (March, 1949): un-paged. The four page article features three photographic documents provided by Charlotte Perriand, all very sensuous views of natural objects—a rock ensemble and a tree trunk viewed in section—contorted to take on human characteristics. These images are coupled with others: a tree which assumes the posture of a headless man with a raised arm (collection Henry Descours) and images of ancient art which parallel these conditions. This article follows one on Paul Klee (Jean Cassou, "Klee" [48-64]) which exhibits many of his animated, line-drawing paintings of faces. In this same issue are photographs of Picasso in his villa flanked by his ceramic plates, each of which forms a face.

Le Corbusier animated nature in his so-called "photogramme" films discovered at the FLC by Jacques Barsac in 1986. Le Corbusier made these 8mm films presumably on his voyage to Rio in 1929 and later in 1936. They are composed of "stills"—film shots in which the position and focus of the camera is fixed—spliced together to form a film of short duration. An element represented in one still might appear again in the next, its position within the composition slightly altered, thus animating the object. A few photographic stills from the tree trunk sequence are reproduced in *New World of Space* (56). Atget, too, anthropomorphised trees, but with "straight" photographs, as did Max Ernst in his 1934 "Les mystères de la forêt," *Minotaure* 5.2 (1934): 6-7.

40. The sketch was published in 1954 in Le Corbusier, *Une Petite Maison* (Zurich: Artemis, 1954), 74-75.
41. Homère, *Les XXIV Chants de L'Odyssée*, trans. Victor Bérard (Paris: Le Club Français du Livre, 1948). In French the caption reads: "Les îles sont des corps de femmes à demi immergées qui reçoivent les bateaux dans leurs bras." A tapestry titled "Odyssée" from 1948

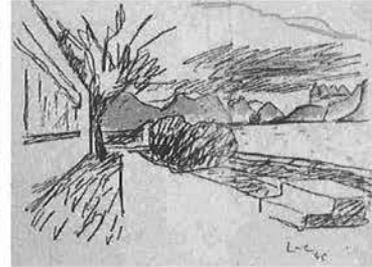
time serving as a means to imbue architecture with a sense of meaning and significance that it had lost in its quest for purity. With colossality, Le Corbusier shared common ground not only with the avant-garde artists of the day, but with the great builders of all ages. With it, he could transcend time and offer his architecture to worlds beyond his own.

IV

Colossality could itself be enlarged and gain a mythic dimension if the colossal object animated, if only by implication, the natural environment in which it resides. Landscape architecture, it might be assumed, is nature contorted into a sign and, as such, would seem a privileged medium for accessing "cosmic order." Landscape played an increasingly important role in Le Corbusier's architecture beginning in the mid-forties and continuing into the fifties with commissions for large, often sacred buildings in rural and sometimes spectacular sites: La Sainte-Baume, Roq and Rob, Chandigarh, Ronchamp and La Tourette. As we have seen, in his *Iliade* drawings³⁵ and in the illustrations for *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit*, Le Corbusier anthropomorphised landscapes by creating fantastic figures that appear like mirages above earth and sea (Figs. 28 & 13). The landscapes seem somehow responsible for these apparitions and adopt an appropriately colossal scale to accommodate them. They become signs that speak to the cosmos.

Such a strategy, applied to the production of architecture, might effect a similar transformation of the natural environment. Something like this happens at Ronchamp. For if the chapel is a colossal head, it might follow that the hill it crowns is its body. Both chapel and landscape are transformed. The chapel is no longer *on* the hill, but is itself a part of the hill. The hill itself, however, is now no longer ground, but figure. As with Le Corbusier's two-dimensional works, this inversion of ground to figure expands the space of the landscape. When the landscape is animated, all the natural elements—the sun, clouds, hills, horizon line; the color of the sky; the trees and river—take on new significance and dimension. In this way the face of the east façade serves as a catalyst, revealing the landscape as mythic, and offering it as medium between common ground and cosmic order. A sensational, wholly fictive, yet palpable space emerges, space comparable to that of the ancients (Fig. 29).

Again, there is much precedent for such notions throughout history, including the contemporary context of French avant-garde art. Picasso's oddly warped hybrid figures from the late twenties often fuse human anatomy with its landscape surroundings. Inversely, too, the landscape itself was animated by various Surrealists when its elements took on the form of the human body or of parts of the human body. In Man Ray's *A l'heure de l'observatoire—les amoureux* (1934), vibrant red lips of enormous proportion float above an otherwise serene Corot



- 31 ANDRÉ MASSON. *Construction d'un "homme"* featured in *Minotaure 11*.
 32 ANDRÉ MASSON. *Heraclite* featured in *Minotaure 11*.
 33 HANS MEYER. Anthropomorphic woodcut from the early 17th century. (*The Arcimboldo Effect*)
 34 LE CORBUSIER. Sketch of Vevey house and mountains, 1945. (Le Corbusier, *Une Petite Maison*)

sunset. In *Ciel Postiche*, Brassai imagines a fantastic landscape where montaged abstract nudes are both earth and sky, foreground and background, solid and void (Fig. 30). André Masson drew numerous animated landscapes, among them *Construction d'un 'homme'* where a colossal under construction becomes the nose for a much larger creature, and *Heraclite* in which a volcano belches out an ominous visage—a head which takes the surrounding hills for its hands and shoulders (Figs. 31 & 32).³⁶

At this time, too, the Surrealists “re-discovered” Arcimboldo,³⁷ and there was a renewed interest in the early seventeenth-century anthropomorphic landscape artists, including Hans Meyer, Josse de Momper, and Matthäus Merian (Fig. 33).³⁸ Similar “landscapes” were portrayed—often as geological, and therefore scientific, curiosities—in “straight” photographs of gigantic anthropomorphic rocks published in popular press nature journals. Dali collected such images and titled one: *Idée que la géologie dor sans sommeil*.

In the late forties, in his drawings and lithographs, Le Corbusier, too, began to anthropomorphise nature in a very literal way.³⁹ In his 1945 sketch of the *petite maison* at Vevey, he drew the surrounding mountains as a colossal open hand (Fig. 34).⁴⁰ In his 1948 lithograph frontispiece to a French edition of Homer’s *Odyssey*, he depicted an island in the shape of a colossal woman crouching with out-stretched arms and explained in the caption that “The islands are the half-emerged bodies of women who receive the boats in their arms” (Fig. 35).⁴¹ In his 1950 “landscape” sketch for the unexecuted cover of his *Poesie sur Alger*,⁴² he portrayed the clouds over Algiers in the shape of a reclining nude, a nude similar to those he had drawn in ink washes in the mid-thirties (Fig. 36).⁴³ And in 1951, Le Corbusier sketched the coastline of the French Riviera and captioned it a “reclining dog, 50 kilometres long.”⁴⁴ The following year he traveled to Giza where in a sketch he captured the pure geometric form of the pyramids beside the figurative colossal of the Sphinx (Fig. 37).⁴⁵ Viewing the picture sideways—as Le Corbusier would direct his “readers” to do with the photographs in *Ronchamp*, and as Ozenfant had encouraged his readers to do in *Art*⁴⁶—the landscape becomes a portrait of a tight-lipped, pointy-nosed person with spectacles: a short figure on his back, oddly dressed in a suit coat and bow tie and donning a tall, ceremonial hat with ear flaps as he looks toward the sky.

In 1952, metamorphosis was still a prominent theme in Le Corbusier’s paintings and graphic work⁴⁷ and in his sketchbook he drew a series of hybrid creatures along side which he scribbled: “intuitively over the past 20 years I have evolved my figures in the direction of animal forms, vehicles of character, force of the sign, algebraic capacity for entering into a relationship between themselves and thereby producing 1 poetic phenomenon.”⁴⁸ In another sketch he showed the horned head of a woman, captioned it “a bestiary,” and reminded himself to “make a grouping of these forms and ideas and notions by isolating them from their context and assembling

is apparently an enlargement of this image. (See Pl. 2 in the exhibition catalogue *Les Tapisseries de Le Corbusier* [Musée d’Art et d’Histoire, Genève/Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris: 1975].) A variation on this image is found as a color lithograph in *Le Poème de l’Angle Droit* (25), where the anthropomorphised island is shown in blue hovering in the sky above the water, as a red male figure crashes atop her from above. Here Le Corbusier animated the weather. His verse reads: “[...] gaseous cloud/variable masses rising and/falling sliding over/each other thrust/vertically horizontally.”

Besides this and the *Iliade* drawings, Le Corbusier produced several other works on the subject of Homer and the legends of Greek antiquity including the 1944 painting *Le jugement de Paris* and a 1953 lithograph depicting the Trojan horse.

42. FLC Box A3-7, #386.

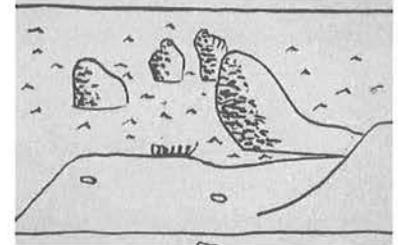
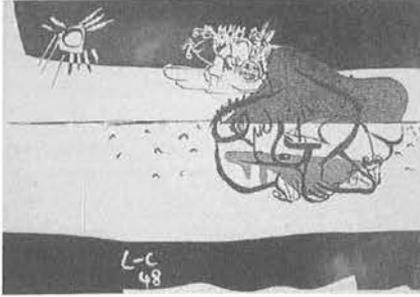
43. See, for instance, the inkwash of a reclining nude from 1933 featured in *New World of Space* (NY: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1948), 69.

44. *Carnet 2*, no. 530 (from Sketchbook E 21, July, 1951). In French the note reads: “le chien couché a 50 kilomètres de long,” followed by a note that emphasizes: “la tête du chien /et non pas la tête de chien.”

45. *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks 2* (NY: Architectural History Foundation and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, in collaboration with the Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris, 1981), *Carnet F 25*, #772 (April, 1952).

46. In *Art*, later translated as *Foundations of Modern Art*, Ozenfant set what he termed an “innocent trap” for his readers. After claiming a direct relationship between form and sensation and illustrating his point with sketches of curved and rectilinear lines, he directed the sceptical reader’s attention to a photograph of a Renoir nude, a painting he assumed the reader would champion as the product of anti-analytical genius and thus as refutation to his own bold claim. Beside it he placed a horizontal photograph of the mountains of Rio, orienting this photograph vertically. The outline of the

- 35 LE CORBUSIER. Frontispiece to French edition of Homer's *Odyssey*, 1948. (Bibliothèque de la ville, La Chaux-de-Fonds)
- 36 LE CORBUSIER. Sketch for unexecuted cover of *Poesie sur Alger*. (FLC Box A3-7, Doc. #386)
- 37 LE CORBUSIER. Sketch, Giza pyramids, 1952. (William J. Curtis, *Le Corbusier Ideas and Forms*)
- 38 LE CORBUSIER. Untitled lithograph from *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit*.



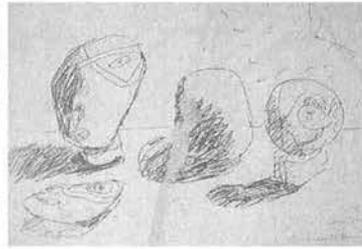
mountains coincides with that of the woman by Renoir. He then once again directed the reader's attention to the previously viewed sketches, sketches we now notice also possess the silhouette of the nude figure. "The pleasures of apprehension augment those of feeling," Ozenfant concluded. "Echoes on echoes. Can you hear the echoes?" See *Foundations of Modern Art*, 274-75.

47. Overt metamorphosis is evident in the 1948 Pavillon Suisse mural in which Le Corbusier painted a strange hybrid figure: the body of a woman with a single wing and a horned, sheep-like head. The figure floats horizontally and seems to take its life from an enormous hand that cups the wing and echoes its shape. In the 1950 painting *A l'Etoile de mer règne l'amitié*, a fish the size of a man is clearly metamorphosed into a colossal head, the fish's stripes appropriately shaped to contribute a nose and mouth. Not unlike *Deux musiciennes*, this composition as a whole, when studied carefully, transforms itself into a face. In 1952 Le Corbusier painted *Métamorphose* and *Métamorphose violon* and began the Taureau series, a study in multiple transformations that would dominate his painting until the end of his life.
48. *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks* vol. 2, Carnet F 24 (March, 1952), nos. 700-707. The note is from sketch no. 700.
49. *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks* vol. 2, Carnet F 24 (March, 1952), no. 702.
50. *Je rêvais I* of 1953, for instance.

them. Do the same with Hands and also with feet."⁴⁹ The results of this approach are evident in various paintings,⁵⁰ in several lithographs in the *Entre-Deux* portfolio, and in the "self-portrait" in the introduction to *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit* in which two feet, two thighs and a chest are shown emerging from water, thus suggesting islands in a seascape (Fig. 38).⁵¹

Working from objects, or from bodies, Le Corbusier created landscapes. The inverse was also true. Le Corbusier could condense entire landscapes, both spatial and temporal, into a single object—and then re-introduce this symbolically charged object into the "natural" world, as if to question or attempt to convert that world, to transcend its objectivity, or to remind us (as he stated in "L'espace indicible") that what we are looking at is only "the reflection of light." His fascination with anthropomorphic rocks serves to exemplify this. His interest is first evident in the numerous picture postcards that he collected of natural rock outcroppings, some in the shape of human heads, most from the seaside at Ploumanach (Fig. 39).⁵² In the fifties, Le Corbusier found a small stone, an *objet à réaction poétique*, that encapsulated the power of signification embodied in these rocks. The stone resembled a head, its white lines suggesting facial features. It also bore remarkable resemblance to a renowned aboriginal artifact, the colored clay skull from the Solomon Islands displayed at the Musée de l'Homme, Paris (Fig. 40). Sketching the rock in 1952, Le Corbusier transcribed it into a self-portrait (Fig. 41).⁵³ He placed this self-portrait at the very beginning of *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit*, in a passage that animates the natural environment as it describes the eternal rhythms of the world:

The sun master of our lives
far off indifferent
He is the visitor—an overlord
he enters our house.



- 39 Postcard. Anthropomorphic rock. (FLC postcard 4 FRA 434)
- 40 Photograph of "Crâne surmodelé des îles Salomon. Océanie." (Chefs D'Oeuvre du Musée de L'Homme)
- 41 Photograph by Lucien Hervé of Le Corbusier sketching a "tête de pierre." (Mogens Krusturp, *Le Corbusier L'Iliade Dessins*)
- 42 LE CORBUSIER. Sketch of four anthropomorphic rocks. (Mogens Krusturp, *Iliade*)
- 43 LE CORBUSIER. "Tête de pierre" drawing over page 147 of *L'Iliade*. (Mogens Krusturp, *Le Corbusier L'Iliade Dessins*)

In setting good evening he says
to this mossy earth (oh trees)
to these puddles everywhere
(oh seas) and to our lofty wrinkles (Andes, Alps and
Himalayas). And the lamps
are lit up.⁵⁴

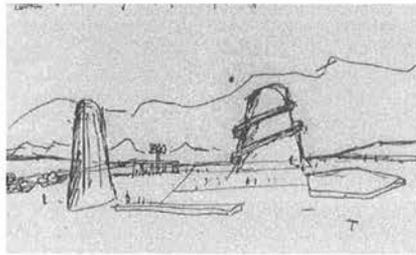
In a 1955 drawing, Le Corbusier described a whole family of one-eyed rock heads (Fig. 42),⁵⁵ and in his drawings for the *Iliade* he re-introduced the "tête de pierre" self-portrait into the natural environment, placing it together with the sun and a distant horizon to suggest a vast and existential landscape, and over the three line figures of the Flaxman engraving as if they inhabited this head (Fig. 43).

If in this way Le Corbusier could create an imaginary world in which the earth and its landscapes were animated in a daily drama, how might this animation be brought to the real world? How might architecture capture it or catalyse it? A postcard from Le Corbusier's collection of a prehistoric menhir at Trégastel, when set beside his 1953 sketch for the Parliament Building at Chandigarh, suggests one way (Figs. 44 & 45). Another way is implicit in the drawing of Chandigarh that Le Corbusier sent in a letter to his wife, a sketch in which the city itself, seen from above as if by circling birds, takes on the appearance of a smiling face (Fig. 46). A third way is suggested by Le Corbusier's postcards of anthropomorphic stone buildings, among them the old chateau at Bressieux,⁵⁶ the apse of the medieval church at Vetheuil,⁵⁷ and most important, the tenth century Château Fort⁵⁸ that crowns the hill at Roquebrune above Cap-Martin where Le Corbusier built his *cabanon* in 1950 at the time that he first began work on Ronchamp (Fig. 47). These screaming, yawning, half asleep, man-made stone heads, when set

- 51. This lithograph was done after a sketch inscribed: "London March 53, Hotel Berkeley. In my bathtub—the formation of an archipelago." See Mogens Krusturp, "Persona," in *Le Corbusier—Painter and Architect* (Denmark: Arkitekturdsskrift B, 1995), 134 and 137.
- 52. In the FLC postcard collection see: 4 FRA 428-29 and 4 FRA 432-34, as well as 4 FRA 301 (captioned "Représentations humaines en terre cuite"), 5 FRA 234, and 5 FRA 231. Postcard 4 FRA 428 approximates a dinosaur head and is captioned on the back "31-Perros Guirec (C.-du-N.) Rocher de Ploumanach, la guérite." Postmarked December 7, 1952, it was sent to Le Corbusier at his home by "Germaine." Postcard 5 FRA 231 was also sent to Le Corbusier and is post-marked July 20, 1950. The other cards are without dates or inscriptions and were probably collected by Le Corbusier himself. With their faded green backs, they appear to be much older than those sent to Le Corbusier. The skull-like rock in Postcard 4 FRA 34 is captioned: "209. —Ploumanach. — Rochers étranges. —La Tête de Mort. —A. B." Postcard 4 FRA 431 is marked for cropping on the front. An edited version appears in *Le Corbusier, Ville Radieuse* ([Paris: Vincent, Fréal & Cie, 1935], 137 bottom left) showing an abstract colossal head supporting a lighthouse. Grouped together with other postcards of peasant life and vernacular architecture, the ensemble is



- 44 Postcard. Prehistoric menhir at Trégastel. (FLC postcard # 5 FRA 234)
- 45 LE CORBUSIER. 1953 sketch, Chandigarh Parliament. (William J. Curtis, *Le Corbusier Ideas and Forms*)
- 46 LE CORBUSIER. Perspective sketch of Chandigarh in letter to his wife. (Mogens Krustup, *Porte Email*)
- 47 Postcard. The tenth century Château Fort. (FLC postcard 5 FRA 106)



captioned:

Forms taken by culture in scattered communities: "folk art." Perfect harmony achieved on a scale with *man*. Serenity of the pastoral life. Tools and equipment sufficient though precarious ... But the locomotive is either on its way or already there ... Death of "folk art," dawn of a new culture and accompanying distress.

In a sense, Le Corbusier's animated landscapes can be seen as an attempt to remedy this distress and to recapture the lost dimension and harmony evident in pastoral life.

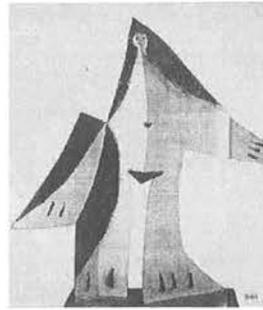
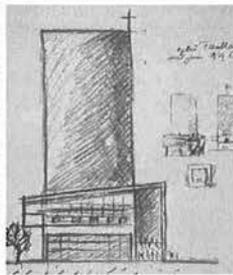
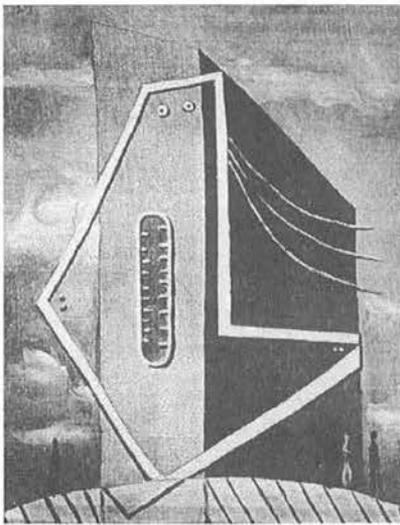
53. See Mogens Krustup, "Notes," *Le Corbusier L'Iliade Dessins*, note 18. In these notes Krustup gives a detailed history of the "tête de pierre" but does not mention Le Corbusier's postcards or the Solomon Island skull. He establishes the first "tête de pierre" sketch as the FLC drawing #2317, dated August 24, 1952, a sketch that can be seen in the Lucien Hervé photograph shown here as Figure 41.
54. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit* (Paris: Editions Verve, 1955), 13-14.
55. Le Corbusier, *Le Poème de l'Angle Droit*, note 14. The drawing is dated "Cap M février, mars 55" and annotated "anthropocentrisme."
56. FLC Box A1-8, #271. This card is post-marked July 21, 1924 and was sent to Le Corbusier at 20 rue Jacob by G. Jacquery [?].
57. FLC Postcard 5 FRA 307.
58. FLC Postcard 5 FRA 106.
59. This drawing is reproduced in Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Œuvre complète* 5, ed. Willi Boesiger (Zurich: Les Éditions d'Architecture Artemis, 1991), 59. Three points give the façade its facial features. In describing these studies on page 54 of this volume, Le Corbusier mentioned that they "are contemporary with those of the Sainte-Baume" and that they "strive for a synthesis of architecture and site

beside his images of anthropomorphic rocks, seem but a rung above their more natural Ploumanach ancestors on the evolutionary ladder. Such a building might be introduced into the landscape—as the "tête de pierre" was in Le Corbusier's *Iliade* drawing—to anthropomorphise it, to give it a second, colossal scale, and momentarily dematerialise it. Certainly, the Château Fort would have alerted Le Corbusier to this poetic possibility, for one cannot visit this stone ruin without being struck by its uncanny face and ceaseless gaze out to sea—features Le Corbusier faithfully recorded when he drew the chateau into his second study for "Roq," the hotel complex he planned to build into the Roquebrune hill.⁵⁹ And it was here, in the realm of this giant, on the hill that forms its body, that Le Corbusier chose to bury his wife, and where he himself was later laid to rest.

V

One might understand Ronchamp as a manifestation of this third approach to anthropomorphic landscapes. The ancient Greeks, various seventeenth-century landscape painters, and the Surrealists of the 1930s would have seen it as such. So, too, would have Picasso, the artist Le Corbusier most admired. In 1929 Picasso painted *Monument, Woman's Head* (Fig. 48), its geometry remarkably similar to Le Corbusier's first church design, the 1929 *église Tremblay*⁶⁰ (Fig. 49); and in the late fifties and sixties, Picasso created actual colossals, totemic heads, such as the 20 feet high concrete Ronchamp-twin *Femme aux bras écartés* (Fig. 50) and the 84 feet high *Head of a Woman* that effortlessly animates its ocean-front site (Fig. 51).⁶¹

Still, it is not at all certain that Le Corbusier intended the east façade of Ronchamp as a face, or that he imagined his masterpiece a colossal and habitable head, or the hill on which it sits a gigantic body. What *is* certain is that Le Corbusier was preoccupied with metamorphosis at this time and that transformation was at the very heart of his creative production. What is also certain is that he understood the power of the natural environment to evoke supernatural sensations. He knew the numinous in nature, and sought to render its presence palpable. In the ambiguity of representation, he found a means of transforming landscape—if only momentarily and only in the mind of the "reader"—into a mythic land in which all of nature is animated, a means capable of contorting nature into a sign and, as such, capable of accessing cosmic order.



- 48 PICASSO. *Monument, Woman's Head*, 1929, private collection. (*Picasso in Chicago*)
- 49 LE CORBUSIER. Drawings for chapel at Tremblay, 1929. (Jean Petit, *Le Corbusier, lui-même*)
- 50 PICASSO. *Femme aux bras écartés*, Musée Picasso. This metal sculpture was later enlarged in concrete. (Jean Louis Ferrier, *Picasso Déconstruction creatrice*)

Note

In memory of Colin Rowe, Corbuologist *par excellence*, whose "Provocative Façade" made evident to me what otherwise would have remained unseen.

Parts of this essay appeared in my dissertation, "Le Corbusier's Seeing Things: Ambiguity and Illusion in the Representation of Modern Architecture," completed at the University of Pennsylvania in 1996 under the always wise supervision of Joseph Rykwert and with the keen, critical and always generous advice of Mary McLeod. John Klein read the finished essay and I am grateful to him for his thorough and insightful review.

References to FLC (Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris) documents are to the boxes and numbers as categorised by that archive in 1993. Recently, the Fondation has digitised much of its material and in so doing it has changed nearly all the reference numbers, thus tragically invalidating three decades of research by scholars from around the world. No means for cross-referencing was established.

which is so eloquent of the Côte d'Azur." He noted that a "wise plan must provide for reserves of nature; architectural features of great sculptural value must be created. Examination of the ancient little towns which stand on the higher parts of the coast, reveals excellent precedents. The houses are crowded together but all have eyes (windows) towards the infinite horizon."

60. In his *Picasso: His Life and Work* (NY: Schocken Books, 1962), 240-241) Roland Penrose groups the *Monument, Woman's Head* painting together with Picasso's monument for Apollinaire and his later monumental sculpture for La Croisette, the sea-front at Cannes. "I have to paint them," Picasso told Kahnweiler in reference to such colossals, "because nobody's ready to commission one from me." This changed in the late fifties.

Le Corbusier's project for a chapel for Madame de Monzie at Tremblay—a kind of vertical *Maison Citrohan* done in the same year as the *Mundaneum* and the *Villa Savoye*—in its severity clearly anticipates the chapel at La Tourette and was the starting point, the cubic ancestor, of Le Corbusier's more sculptural church of *Saint-Pierre*, designed for Firminy-Vert in the sixties. See Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, *Œuvre complète 7*, ed. Willi Boesiger (Zurich: Les Éditions d'Architecture Artemis, 1991), 136-139.

61. For a listing of these outdoor sculptures see Werner Spies, *Picasso Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), especially nos. 594-597—four versions of the *Woman with Outstretched Arms* from 1961—and no. 654, the 82 foot high 1966 sculpture at Barcarès. For a detailed description and history of the concrete sculpture, see Sally Fairweather, *Picasso's Concrete Sculptures* (NY: Hudson Hills Press, 1982), especially page 48 on the *Femme Debout*, the 20 foot high concrete version of *Femme aux bras écartés* built in 1962 by Carl Nesjar at Le Priure de Saint-Hilaire, Chalo-Saint-Mars, France. For a visual account of "architecture-sized" Picasso sculpture, see the catalogue *Picasso in Chicago* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1968).

- 51 PICASSO. *Head of a Woman*, a montage of a proposed 84 foot high sculpture. (*Picasso's Concrete Sculptures*)

