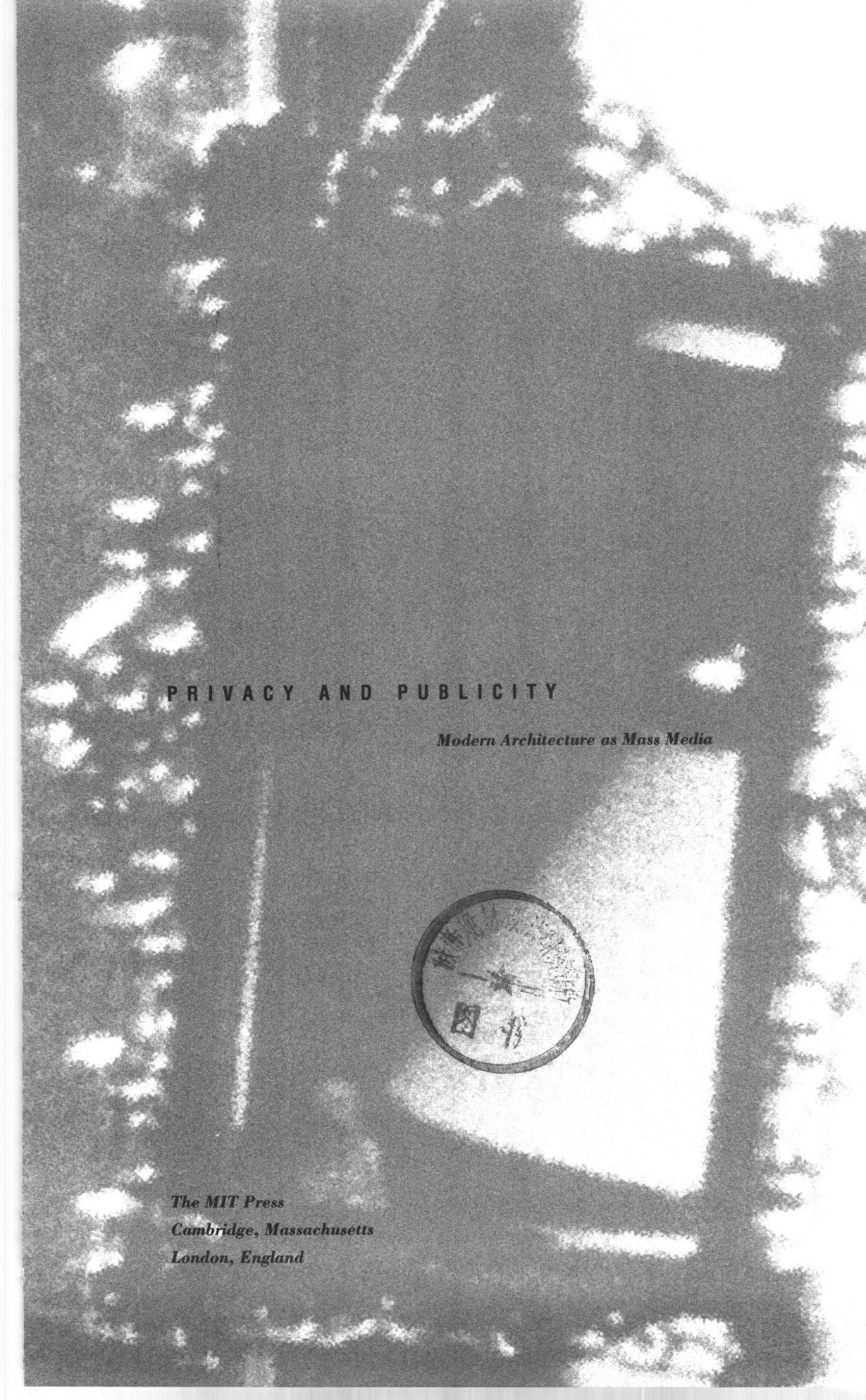
PRIVACY AND PUBLICITY

Modern Architecture as Mass Media

BEATRIZ COLOMINA



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BEATRIZ COLOMINA

for Andrea and Mark

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Preface

This book has been with me for a long time. I don't know exactly when it all started, but I do know when I first wrote something that one way or another has ended up here. It was 1981. New York. I was writing in Spanish and then translating into English. When, soon after, I tried my hand at English, I was shocked at the extent to which not only the way I was writing had changed but even what I was saying. It was as if with the language, I was also leaving behind a whole way of looking at things, of writing them. Even when we think we know what we are about to write, the moment we start writing, language takes us on an excursion of its own. And if that language is not ours, we are definitely in foreign territory. Lately, I have started to feel that way about Spanish. I have managed to become a foreigner in both languages, moving somewhat nomadically through the discourse on an unofficial itinerary. Traces of this complicated movement can be found throughout this book. The text is somehow suspended between the languages and times in which it was constructed.

Even if the original essay of 1981 on Loos is here rewritten and expanded beyond the point of recognition, the struggle between these different worlds, these different cultures and times, is still there. The changes testify to the abyss that appeared before me when I reopened the text ten years later, during a sabbatical. I could no longer read what I had written without getting a headache. And yet, when trying to reenter it, I found myself ensnared by it, trapped in its complicated mesh of literary references, pulled back into a space in which I had the time and the state of mind to read novels, nostalgic for that space and yet irritated by its testimony, that meandering piece of writing that resists being straightened up, brought into line with the rest of the book. What I anticipated as a cursory labor of editing turned into a lengthy period of writing in which I found myself back in the mood of the first text and, at a certain point, fighting to liberate myself from it but unable to efface it. In the end, the book tracks the evolution of my thinking over the twelve years I have been in the United States.

During this time, I have become indebted to many people and institutions. The research and writing were supported by grants and fellowships from the Caixa de Barcelona, Graham Foundation, Fondation Le Corbusier, SOM Foundation, and Princeton University Committee on Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. I have also benefited from being a research scholar at the New York Institute for the Humanities, a visiting scholar at Columbia University, and a resident fellow at the Chicago Institute for Architecture and Urbanism. I am grateful to Angela Giral and the staff of Avery Library at Columbia University, to Frances Chen at the School of Architecture Library at Princeton University, to the staff at the Museum of Modern Art library and the archives of the Department of Architecture and Design, and above all to Madame Evelyne Tréhin and her staff at the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris, who over the years facilitated my research in the extraordinary archives of Le Corbusier.

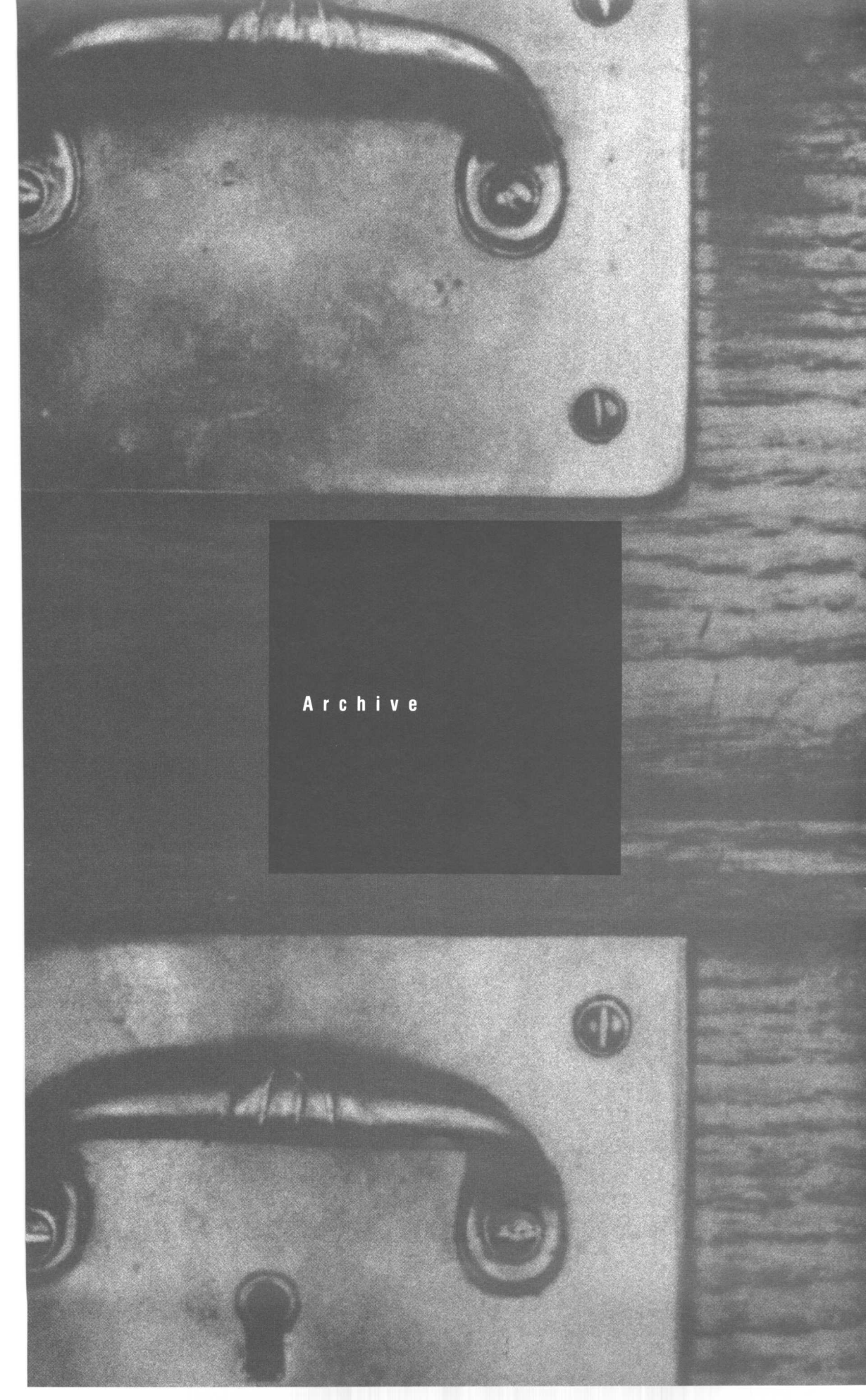
Earlier versions of parts of this book were published in *9H* no. 6, *Assemblage* no. 4, *Raumplan versus Plan Libre, L'Esprit nouveau: Le*

Corbusier und die Industrie, Le Corbusier, une encyclopédie, AA Files no. 20, *Architectureproduction*, *Ottagono*, and *Sexuality and Space*. I am grateful to the respective editors: Wilfried Wang, K. Michael Hays, Max Risselada, Stanislaus von Moos, Jacques Lucan, Bruno Reichlin, Jean-Louis Cohen, Joan Ockman, Alvin Boyarsky, Mary Wall, and Alessandra Ponte. While the book was in progress, it also benefited from a number of invitations to present it as a small series of lectures: at Harvard University in 1986, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1987, the Architectural Association in 1989, and Yale University in 1991. Finally, as the book went to press, I was invited to deliver it as the 1993 Preston H. Thomas Memorial Lectures at the School of Architecture at Cornell University, sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Thomas. The support of schools of architecture has been invaluable. The extent to which my arguments were sharpened by these exchanges cannot be overestimated.

Perhaps my first thanks should go to my own students. In seminars, first at the School of Architecture at Columbia University and then at Princeton, I ventured the preliminary thoughts. Nothing is more rewarding than the first audience; I will be eternally grateful. In many ways, this book is written for them.

Of course, I am indebted to my friends, all of whom contributed to the project in different ways: Diana Agrest, Jennifer Bloomer, Christine Boyer, Cristina Colomina, Alan Colquhoun, Elizabeth Diller, Mario Gandelsonas, Michael Hays, Jean Leonard, Ralph Lerner, Thomas Leeser, Sandro Marpillero, Margarita Navarro Baldeweg, Irene Perez Porro, Alessandra Ponte, Txatxo Sabater, Ricardo Scofidio, Ignasi de Solá-Morales, Georges Teyssot, and Tony Vidler. I owe a special debt to Roger Conover at the MIT Press, who has been supportive of this project throughout, to Matthew Abbate for his nuanced editing, and to Jeannet Leendertse for the design.

The book is dedicated to Mark Wigley and to my daughter Andrea, who were not there yet when all of this started but without whom it would never have happened.


Archive

25 Beatrixgasse, Vienna. Loos orders all the documents in his office to be destroyed as he leaves Vienna and settles in Paris in 1922. His collaborators Heinrich Kulka and Grethe Klimt-Hentschel gather the few fragments that remain and that will become the basis for the first book on Loos, *Adolf Loos: Das Werk des Architekten*, edited by Kulka and Franz Glück in 1931.[1] Over the years, more documents are found (but almost never complete). This collection of fragments will become the only evidence for generations of scholarship. As Burkhardt Rukschcio put it in 1980: "Today, on the 110th anniversary of Loos' birth, it can truly be said that we are unlikely ever to know more about his work. A sizeable part of his designs and projects has completely disappeared and we know of only some of the hundreds of interiors he did for homes."[2] All investigations of Loos have been marked by his removal of the traces. All of the writing is in, on, and around the gaps. It is even about those gaps, often being obsessed with them.

8–10 square du docteur Blanche, Paris. Le Corbusier decides very early on that every trace of his work, and of himself, should be kept. He saves everything: correspondence, telephone bills, electricity bills, laundry bills, bank statements, postcards, legal documents, court proceedings (he was often involved in lawsuits), family pictures, travel snapshots, suitcases, trunks, filing cabinets, pottery, rugs, shells, pipes, books, magazines, clippings from newspapers, mail order catalogues, samples, mechanical boards, every stage of every manuscript, drafts for lectures, doodles, scribbles, notebooks, sketchbooks, diaries . . . and, of course, his paintings, sculptures, drawings, and all the documentation of his projects. This collection, now housed in the La Roche-Jeanneret house as the Fondation Le Corbusier, has been the basis of a massive research into Le Corbusier culminating, perhaps, in the centennial celebrations of his birth in 1987. The immensity of the materials available has also generated a series of megapublications intended to make the contents of the archive public, including the *Le Corbusier Archive*, 32 volumes containing 32,000 drawings of architecture, urbanism, and furniture, which, as its editor, H. Allen Brooks, describes it, is "the largest architectural publication ever undertaken"; the four volumes of the *Le Corbusier Carnets*, which consist of the 73 notebooks filled with sketches realized between 1914 and 1964 and the transcription of the texts that accompany them; and *Le Corbusier, Viaggio in Oriente*, which chronicles the trip undertaken by Le Corbusier in 1910–1911 and which includes his report "Voyage d'Orient" and all the drawings, photographs, and correspondence of that period.[3] Even the Centre Georges Pompidou's choice of an encyclopedia as the form with which to commemorate the centennial of Le Corbusier's birth is, in this regard, symptomatic.[4] What other architect's work (or artist's) might have lent itself to such a treatment? This kind of exhaustive coverage was anticipated by Le Corbusier when, at the age of 42, he came out with the first volume of his *Oeuvre complète* (covering the years 1910–1929), to which seven further volumes were added over the years, with the last (1965–1969) covering the years after his death in 1965.[5]

Le Corbusier is probably the most written about architect of this century. The writing on Loos, on the other hand, began very slowly. While the first book on him was published in 1931, on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday,[6] the second, *Der Architekt Adolf Loos* by Ludwig Münz and Gustav Künstler (which includes all the documents recovered since 1931 but is otherwise based on the earlier one), did not appear until 1964.[7] Soon translated into English, it became the most influential source on Loos. In 1968, the Graphische Sammlung Albertina bought the documents from the estate of Münz and started the Adolf Loos Archive. And it was not until 1982 that Burkhardt Rukschcio and Roland Schachel came out with the monumental monograph *Adolf Loos, Leben und Werk*,[8] which includes a complete catalogue of the work of Loos based on the Archive in the Albertina and on documents in three private collections. The authors of this book describe their enterprise as having been "truly the work of a detective": the endless search for documents (which, they insist, is by no means finished, and how could it ever be?), a sweeping "raid" on the press of Loos's time, conversations with Loos's friends, clients, and colleagues. These last, they warn us, can not be trusted entirely: "Even in his closer collaborators and his most intimate friends, reality is often deformed by interpretations." Consequently, these "subjective" and "anecdotal" contributions have been included only "after verification."[9] In a sense their book with all its gaps *is* the Adolf Loos archive (even in the police sense of "archive").

If the research into Loos is organized by the gaps in the archive, the research into Le Corbusier is organized by archival excesses. Loos vacates a space and destroys all traces behind him. Le Corbusier fills a space ahead of him, but not just any space: a domestic space, literally a house. To think about Loos one has to occupy a public space, the space of publications, his own and others', but also the space of word of mouth, hearsay, gossip, tips; the enigmatic space of circumstantial evidence. To think about Le Corbusier is necessarily to enter a private

space. But what does private mean here? What exactly is this space? And how does one enter it?

Square du docteur Blanche, a small cul-de-sac in Paris-Auteuil, an invaginated space, a street folded upon itself, a space halfway between a street and an interior, a private road. At the end of this dead-end street, number 8–10, Maison La Roche-Jeanneret, a double house, *deux maisons accouplées,* that Le Corbusier designed for Lotti Raaf and his brother Albert Jeanneret[10] and for his patron the art collector Raoul La Roche in 1922, the same year that Loos arrived in Paris. Is 8–10 square du docteur Blanche private or public? A house or an exhibit, an archive or a library, an art gallery or a museum? The dilemma was already present in the original program, since La Roche had an art collection to display in the house; indeed the building was commissioned to "house" the paintings, and visitors used to sign in in a book by the door. Soon the issue of whether visitors were signing in for the paintings or for the house became blurred, at least for Le Corbusier, who would later recommend to Madame Savoye to leave a "golden book" by the entrance to her house too (even if she did not have an art collection displayed there): "You will see how many fine autographs you will collect. This is what La Roche does in Auteuil, and his Golden Book has become a veritable international directory."[11]

But where is this entrance?

No traditional entry presents itself. The house is L-shaped. The "pavillon La Roche," behind a mesh security fence, closes the cul-de-sac, but since it is on pilotis the space of the street flows under the house. To the right, two small identical doors almost flush with the facade have a way of saying that we have nothing to look for in them. The protruding belly of La Roche's gallery pushes the visitor away, back into the space of the street, while at the same time its curve points to the corner, to the hinge of the house where the fence has a small built-in door. Pass