PRIVACY AND PUBLICITY

Modern Architecture as Mass Media

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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.

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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 Leonord, Ralph Lerner, Thomas Leeser, Sandra Marpillero, Margarita Navarro Baldews, Irene Perez Porro, Alessandra Ponte, Tsaxo Sabatier, Ricardo Scalfio, 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 Albate for his nuanced editing, and to Jeanne 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.
25 Beistrasse, 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 Rukachcio 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.
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, the second, Der Architekt Adolf Loos by Ludwig Münz and Gustav Küntler (which includes all the documents recovered since 1931 but is otherwise based on the earlier one), did not appear until 1964. 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 Unksche and Roland Scharrel came out with the monumental monograph Adolf Loos, Leben und Werk, 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 "unecdotal" contributions have been included only "after verification." 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 accolées, that Le Corbusier designed for Lotti Raaf and his brother Albert Jeanneret 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.”

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 through it. Now you see the driveway sweeping toward you. Perhaps the entrance was not clear because we were expected, as in the other houses of Le Corbusier, to arrive by car (in a way, leaving an “interior,” the car, for another, the modern house, in its turn inspired by the car). On the right the wall recedes, creating an entrance space. In the middle, hidden from the street view, you finally see the door.

In the Oeuvre complète, Le Corbusier goes out of his way to describe the entry into this house. It turns out to be all a matter of vision:

You enter: the architectural spectacle at once offers itself to the eye; you follow an itinerary and the views develop with great variety; you play with the flood of light illuminating the walls or creating half-lights. Large windows open up views on the exterior where you find again the architectural unity. In the interior the first attempts at polychromy... allow the “camouflage architectural,” that is, the affirmation of certain volumes or, the contrary, their effacement. Here, reborn for our modern eyes, are historic architectural events: pilotis, the horizontal window, the roof garden, the glass facade.  

To enter is to see. But not to see a static object, a building, a fixed place. Rather, architecture taking place in history, the events of architecture, architecture as an event. It is not so much that you enter architecture as that you see architecture’s entrance. The elements of modern architecture (pilotis, horizontal window, the roof garden, the glass facade) are seen being “born” in front of your eyes. And in so doing they make these eyes “modern.”

Modern eyes move. Vision in Le Corbusier’s architecture is always tied to movement: “You follow an itinerary,” a promenade architecturale. About this Le Corbusier will become more explicit in his Villa Savoye at Poissy (1929–1931):
Arab architecture gives as a precious lesson. It is appreciated by walking, on feet; it is by walking, by moving, that one sees the order of the architecture developing. It is a principle contrary to that of baroque architecture, which is conceived on paper, around a fixed theoretical point. I prefer the lesson of Arab architecture. In this house it's a question of a real architectural promenade, offering constantly changing views, unexpected, sometimes astonishing. The point of view of modern architecture is never fixed, as in baroque architecture, or as in the model of vision of the camera obscura, but always in motion, as in film or in the city. Crowds, shoppers in a department store, railroad travelers, and the inhabitants of Le Corbusier's houses have in common with movie viewers that they cannot fix (arrest) the image. Like the movie viewer that Benjamin describes ("no sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed"), they inhabit a space that is neither inside nor outside, public nor private (in the traditional understanding of these terms). It is a space that is not made of walls but of images. Images as walls. Or as Le Corbusier puts it, "walls of light." That is, the walls that define the space are no longer solid walls punctuated by small windows but have been dematerialized, thinned down with new building technologies and replaced by extended windows, lines of glass whose views now define the space. The walls that are not transparent now float in the space of the house rather than produce it. "Interrogated by Rasmussen about the entrance hall of the La Roche house, Le Corbusier answers that the most important element of the hall is the big window and that for that reason he had prolonged the upper edge of the window to match the parapet of the library." The window is no longer a hole in a wall, it has taken over the wall. And if, as Rasmussen points out, "the walls give the impression of being made out of paper," the big window is a paper wall with a picture on it, a picture wall, a (movie) screen.

Le Corbusier's basic definition of the primordial idea of the house—"The house is a shelter, an enclosed space, which affords protection against cold, heat and outside observation"—would have been commonplace if it had not included the question of the view. Seeing, for Le Corbusier, is the primordial activity in the house. The house is a device to see the world, a mechanism of viewing. Shelter, separation from the outside, is provided by the window's ability to turn the threatening world outside the house into a reassuring picture. The inhabitant is enveloped, wrapped, protected by the pictures. But how constrained these early windows were! In his letter to a friend, Le Corbusier describes the window as the "most restricted organ of the house." (Significantly, he says "organ" rather than element, because the window is thought of first and foremost as an eye.) Today the facade, no longer "constricted" by the old building technologies that made the wall responsible for bearing the load of the building, fulfills its true destiny; it is the provider of light. . . . From this emerges the true definition of the house: stages of floors . . . all around them walls of light.

Walls of light! Hencethere the idea of the window will be modified. Till now the function of the window was to provide light and air and to be looked through. Of these classified functions I should retain one only, that of being looked through. . . . To see out of doors, to lean out.

The modern transformation of the house produces a space defined by walls of (moving) images. This is the space of the media, of publicity. To be "inside" this space is only to see. To be "outside" is to be in the image, to be seen, whether in the press photograph, a magazine, a movie, on television, or at your window. It no longer has so much to do with a public space, in the traditional sense of a public forum, a square, or the crowd that gathers around a speaker in such a place, but with the audience that each medium of publication reaches, independent of
the place this audience might actually be occupying. But, of course, the fact that (for the most part) this audience is indeed at home is not without consequence. The private is, in this sense, now more public than the public.

Privacy is now what exceeds the eyes. That doesn’t include what we used to think of as the private. As Roland Barthes put it: “The age of photography corresponds precisely to the irruption of the private into the public, or rather, to the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private: the private is consumed as such, publicly (the incessant aggressions of the press against the privacy of stars and the growing difficulties of legislation to govern them testify to this movement).”

Privacy has become consumable merchandise. Maybe that explains why Baudelaire writes: “Your eyes lit up like shop windows.” Even to look into the eyes, traditionally the only way to see into the private space of the mind, is now but to look at a public display. The eyes are no longer a “mirror of the soul” but its carefully constructed advertisement. As Nietzsche saw it: “No one dares to appear as he is, but masks himself as a cultivated man, as a scholar, as a poet, as a politician. . . . Individuality has withdrawn within: from without it has become invisible.”

If modern eyes are lit up like shop windows, so too are the windows of modern architecture. The picture window works two ways: it turns the outside world into an image to be consumed by those inside the house, but it also displays the image of the interior to that outside world. This shouldn’t be confused with exposing one’s privacy. On the contrary, we have all become “experts” on our own representation. In the same way that we meticulously construct our family history with snapshots, equally skillfully we represent our domesticity through the picture window.

The traditional sense of privacy is now not only scarce but endangered, under attack. It is better protected legally than with walls. This situation may be traced back to the debates over the ownership of the image that developed with photography. The right to privacy has become the right to remain “out of the picture,” which means not only out of the press photograph, of the gossip column, but also of the credit report and, most urgently, out of the disclosed medical record. That is, out of public view (or “access”).

Modernity, then, coincides with the publicity of the private. But what kind of space results from this redrawing of boundaries? The space of the archive is very much affected by this transformation. In fact, this new reality is first and foremost a question of the archive. The archive has played an important role in the history of privacy, even in the history of history. The archive is private, history is public (the fact that today archives function mainly as clearinghouses for copyrights of the documents they hold only confirms this distinction). “Out” of the archive history is produced, but when writing history the utmost care is traditionally placed on producing a seamless account of the archive, even though all archives are fractured and partial. The messy space of the archive is thus sealed off by a history. History then is a facade. Already in 1874, Nietzsche writes in “The Uses and Abuses of History”:

The most characteristic quality of modern man [lies in] the remarkable antithesis between an interior which fails to correspond to any exterior and an exterior which fails to correspond to any interior—an antithesis unknown to the people of earlier times. . . .

We moderns [have become] walking encyclopedias. . . . With encyclopedias, however, all the value lies in what is contained within, in the content, not in what stands without, the binding and cover; so it is that the whole of modern culture is essentially interior; on the outside the bookbinder has printed some such thing as “Handbook of Interior Culture for Exterior Barbarians.”

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Significantly, the antithesis between interior and exterior is expressed by Nietzsche in terms of the home, what he calls “the disorderly, stormy and conflict-ridden household” that results from “memory” either trying to accommodate “these strange guests” which are our excessive historical knowledge, “a huge quantity of indigestible stones of knowledge,” or alternatively memory “tidily storing away in its coffers” the “things worth knowing.” History is a public representation of this household.

“Forgeting is essential to action of any kind,” Nietzsche immediately goes on to argue. Loos seem to have understood as much when he destroyed all the documents in his studio. In a lecture given in 1926, he says:

> Human works can be summed up in two actions: destruction and construction. And the bigger the destruction, the more human work is nothing other than destruction, the more it is truly human, natural, and noble. The concept of gentlemen cannot be explained otherwise. The gentleman is a man who only carries out work with the help of destruction. The gentleman comes from the peasant class. The peasant only produces destructive work. . . . Who has never desired to destroy something? 

Destruction is construction. Loos’s destruction of his traces has generated a massive work of reconstruction, an endless campaign for their recovery. A campaign into which, at first, only his closest friends and collaborators were drawn, but that would soon pass into the hands of another generation of compatriots equally devoted to the enterprise. In this sense, Kulk’s book was the first stone in the building of Loos’s archive. If with Loos we go from the book into the archive, Le Corbusier follows the opposite strategy. He stores away everything. His obsession with filing cabinets is well known and well documented (in fact, even his filing cabinets have themselves been filed away in the Fondation Le Corbusier). But is not this filing away another way of “forgetting”?

What in the end makes Le Corbusier’s archive private is its capacity to hide things. Sometimes the best way to hide something is in full sight. Commenting on the choice of an encyclopedia as the form with which to celebrate Le Corbusier’s centennial, Jacques Lucan, the director of the work, writes:

> The books, the articles, the studies devoted to Le Corbusier are almost innumerable. . . . This abundance finds a justification in the fact that perhaps no other artist has left to posterity, in a foundation created with that purpose, such an enormous number of documents concerning all his activity (public and private). One would have thought that with the mass of documents available the task of historians and biographers would have been facilitated . . . that it would be possible to retrace his life . . . the itineraries of his architectural and urban reflections. . . . Paradoxically, perhaps neither is possible.

The immensity of the traces makes the research a never-ending process, with new traces, or rather new ways of looking at these traces or even seeing them as traces for the first time, always producing new interpretations that displace the old. The encyclopedia, Lucan goes on to argue, does not enclose Le Corbusier precisely because each entry can send the reader through other entries “as in a chain without end,” in a way as if offering a “promenade through the articles.”

The space of Le Corbusier’s houses and the space of the histories of Le Corbusier would then have something in common. They are less about enclosure than about the entanglement of inside and outside, less about a traditional interior than about following an itinerary (no matter how many times redrawn, no matter how nonlinear), the enclosure resulting from the collage of fleeting images assembled as the reader moves through too much material, too many images, too many stimuli. And isn’t this precisely the experience of the modern city? The archive allows
the scholar to wander through the material as the flaneur wanders through the arcades of Paris, which are neither interior nor exterior.

Such a promenade necessarily involves a transformation of our sense of architecture. The way we think about architecture is organized by the way we think about the relationships between inside and outside, private and public. With modernity there is a shift in these relationships, a displacement of the traditional sense of an inside, an enclosed space, established in clear opposition to an outside. All boundaries are now shifting. This shifting becomes manifest everywhere: in the city, of course, but also in all the technologies that define the space of the city: the railroad, newspapers, photography, electricity, advertisements, reinforced concrete, glass, the telephone, film, radio, . . . war. Each can be understood as a mechanism that disrupts the older boundaries between inside and outside, public and private, night and day, depth and surface, here and there, street and interior, and so on.

What is “strange” about the “big city” to which, as Benjamin argues, people now have to “adapt” is the speed, the continuous movement, the sense that nothing ever stops, that there are no limits. Trains, traffic, films, and newspapers use the verb run to describe their very different activities. As in to “run” an ad in a newspaper. Even meeting somebody has become running into somebody. With this relentless effacement comes a new mode of perception that has become the trademark of modernity. Perception is now tied to transience. If photography is the culmination of centuries of efforts to arrest the image, “to fix fleeting reflections,” to use Benjamin’s words, is it not somewhat paradoxical that once the fleeting image is fixed, the mode of perception is what becomes fleeting? Now the observer (the flaneur, the train traveler, the department store shopper) is what is transient. This transience, and the new space of the city in which it is experienced, cannot be separated from the new forms of representation.

For Benjamin, film is the form where these new conditions of perception, which “are experienced on an individual scale by the man in the street in big city traffic,” find their “true form of exercise.” The city will turn out to be a good stage for the movies. The Man with the Movie Camera by Dziga Vertov (1929), for example. This movie is often understood by film theorists to be about the way in which meaning is fabricated in film. In conventional film, the point of view is represented as “neutral,” not visible, turning what you see into “reality.” But with Vertov’s movie there is seen to be a reversal of view and point of view. The subject’s point of view comes after the view, making the viewer aware that what s/he sees is but a construction. But what all of this does not yet explain is why Vertov had to demonstrate this transformation with the city.

Realism in film is sometimes defined as a “window on the world.” This is an architectural model, a traditional model of an interior with an unmediated view. But the space of the big city had already displaced the model of the room with a view, the model of the camera obscura. It is not by chance that Vertov will choose the city. His film makes clear that it is not just that the new space of the city is defined by the new technologies of representation; those technologies are also transformed by the city.

To think about modern architecture must be to pass back and forth between the question of space and the question of representation. Indeed, it will be necessary to think of architecture as a system of representation, or rather a series of overlapping systems of representation. This does not mean abandoning the traditional architectural object, the building. In the end, it means looking at it much more closely than before, but also in a different way. The building should be understood in the same terms as drawings, photographs, writing, films, and advertisements; not only because these are the media in which more often we encounter it, but because the building is a mechanism of representation.
in its own right. The building is, after all, a "construction," in all senses of the word. And when we speak about representation we speak about a subject and an object. Traditionally, architecture is considered as an object, a bounded, unified entity established in opposition to a subject that is presumed to have an existence independent of it. Within modernity the object defines a multiplicity of boundaries between inside and outside. Inasmuch as these boundaries undermine each other, the object calls into question its own objecthood and therefore the unity of the classical subject presumed to be outside of it. It is in these terms that this book questions the ideological assumptions underlying our view of modern architecture.

The conventional view portrays modern architecture as a high artistic practice established in opposition to mass culture and to everyday life. It has focused on the internal life of the supposedly autonomous, self-referential object made available to a detached viewing subject, an art object. In so doing, it has neglected the overwhelming historical evidence of modern architecture's continuous involvement with mass culture. It is actually the emerging systems of communication that came to define twentieth-century culture—the mass media—that are the true site within which modern architecture is produced and with which it directly engages. In fact, one could argue (this is the main argument of this book) that modern architecture only becomes modern with its engagement with the media. Banham noted that the modern movement was the first movement in the history of art based exclusively on "photographic evidence" rather than on personal experience, drawings, or conventional books. While he was referring to the fact that the industrial buildings that became icons for the modern movement were not known to the architects from "direct" experience (only from photographs), the work of these architects themselves has become known almost always through photography and the printed media. This presupposes a transformation of the site of architectural production—no longer exclusively located on the construction site, but more and more displaced into the rather immaterial sites of architectural publications, exhibitions, journals. Paradoxically, those are supposedly much more ephemeral media than the building and yet in many ways are much more permanent; they secure a place for an architecture in history, a historical space designed not just by the historians and critics but also by the architects themselves who deployed these media.

This book attempts to trace some of the strategic relationships between modern architecture and the media by looking at the work of the two canonic figures that articulate our view of the modern movement, one marking the threshold of this historical space but not crossing it, the other occupying and dominating the space. To rethink their work will necessarily be to rethink the architecture of that space. Perhaps no other modern architects have aroused so much speculation. If Loos destroys all traces and Le Corbusier accumulates too many, both hide. In so doing they have succeeded in generating an extraordinary amount of critical work. This book is not so much concerned with replacing the old space of modern architecture produced by this mountain of work. Rather it is a preliminary attempt to think about that old space and its limits, and to follow certain openings, tracing some leads but not to any single conclusion. Throughout its various trajectories, the book is not so much concerned with the relationship between architecture and the media as with the possibility of thinking of architecture as media.
Readymade Images

At every moment, either directly or through the medium of newspapers and reviews, we are presented with objects of an arresting novelty. All these objects of modern life create, in the long run, a modern state of mind.

Le Corbusier, Vers une architecture

The archives of L'Esprit nouveau in the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris indicate that throughout the years of the magazine's publication, from 1920 to 1925, Le Corbusier collected a great number of industrial catalogues and manufacturers' publicity brochures lavishly illustrated with photographs of their products. These include not only the automobiles Voisin, Peugeot, Citroën, and Delage, Farman airplanes and Caproni seaplanes, suitcases and trunks from Innovation, office furniture by Or'mo and file cabinets by Ronéo, hand bags, sport bags, and cigarette cases by Hermès, and Omega watches; but also, and perhaps
Front cover of L'Esprit nouveau 1 (1920).

Front cover of L'Esprit nouveau 4 (1921). Note the change in subtitle in issue 4 and that Paul Demé is no longer editor.
Proof of an advertisement for Delage prepared for L'Esprit nouveau but never published.

Page from a Cypres publicity brochure in the L'Esprit nouveau archives.
"The Time of Your Workers Is Your Money": front cover of a Slingsby catalogue in the L’Esprit nouveau archives.
more surprisingly, turbines by Brown Boveri, high-pressure centrifugal ventilators by Rateau, and industrial equipment by Clermont-Ferrand and Slinshy. Le Corbusier went, in fact, very much out of his way to obtain this material, constantly writing to companies to ask for it. Not only were the catalogues useful in securing advertising contracts for L'Esprit nouveau (the products of most of the companies ended up being advertised in the magazine), but they also had an influence on his work.

Along with the catalogues, Le Corbusier collected department store mail order brochures (Printemps, Au Bon Marché, La Samaritaine) and clippings from newspapers and magazines of the time, such as The Autocar, Sciences et la vie, Revue du béton armé, L'Illustre. In fact, he seems to have collected everything that struck him visually, from postcards to the cover of a child's school notebook illustrated with the basic geometric volumes. This material, these “everyday images,” are the source of many illustrations in L'Esprit nouveau and the five books that came out of that experience: Vers une architecture, Urbainisme, L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui, La Peinture moderne, and Almanach de l'architecture moderne. The illustrations in L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui especially come from this “diaposable” material; here images from department store catalogues, industrial publicity, and newspapers like L'Illustre alternate with ones taken from art history and natural science books. One entire page is devoted to a publicity photograph of an industrial lamp that was apparently promised by the manufacturer but never obtained; in its place one reads the story of the abortive attempt: on ne se comprend pas.

Le Corbusier's arguments in L'Esprit nouveau rely to a great extent on the juxtapositions of image and text. Unlike the "representational" use of imagery in traditional books—whereby the image is subordinate to and consistent with the written text—Le Corbusier's arguments are to be understood in terms of never-resolved collisions of these two elements. In this unconventional manner of conceiving a book, one can
Photograph of a Sautter-Harle lamp in the L'Esprit nouveau archives.
The image arrived too late!
see the influence of advertising techniques. As in advertising, the strongest effect is achieved through the impact of the visual material.

When a low-pressure centrifugal ventilator from the Rateau company is placed on the page opposite the opening of the chapter “Architecture ou Révolution” in Vers une architecture, and a turbine from the Centrale électrique de Gennevilliers placed at the head of the chapter, the message derives from the interaction between title and images: it is not social conditions in general that most preoccupy Le Corbusier, it would seem, but the condition of the architect in an industrial society. The Rateau ventilator puts on the meaning of mechanical revolution in a literal sense and industrial revolution. In the article one reads, “modern society does not recompense its intellectuals judiciously, but it still tolerates the old arrangements as to property, which are a serious barrier to transforming the town or the house.” Le Corbusier here is defending public property and the need to address the housing problem through mass production—directing his critique, precisely, to where a “revolution” in the position of the architect in an industrial society is at stake.

The imagery derived from advertising is considerably more pervasive in the pages of L’Esprit nouveau than that from strictly architectural sources—for example, Le Corbusier’s famous borrowing of photographs of American silos from the Gropius article in the Werkbund Jahrbuch of 1913. Whereas the Gropius borrowing (and the subsequent traveling of this image through avant-garde journals and publications: De Stijl, MA, Buch neuer Künstler, etc.) might also be read as a “media phenomenon” as Reyner Banham has noted, none of the architects had seen the silos in question—the presence of this heterodox publicity material in L’Esprit nouveau’s pages suggests a shift in the conventional interpretation of that journal: from an internal exchange among avant-garde movements (as if enclosed in their own “magic circle,” uncontaminated by the materials of low culture) to a dialogue with an emerging new reality, namely the culture of advertising and mass media.
Double-page spread from Vers une architecture, 1923, with photographs of a ventilator and a turbine taken from industrial catalogues.

Page from a Société Rateau publicity brochure in the L'Esprit nouveau archives, with the image of the ventilator used by Le Corbusier in Vers une architecture.
The modern media are war technology. They evolved from the technical revolution of the post–World War I years in much the same way as the vehicles of speed, automobiles and airplanes, had emerged from the prewar revolution. The media were developed as part of the technology and instrumentation of war. What made possible the involvement of so many distant countries in World War I was communications, which bridged the distance between the battlefield and the places the news was being transmitted, between the fighting and the decision making. The battle of the Marne is said to have been won by coups de téléphone. The classic accounts of World War I explain the significant role of propaganda built up among nations, especially through the medium of the newspaper. After the war, this technology was gradually domesticated. Just as regular airline services were being established throughout Europe at the beginning of the twenties, radios and telecommunications had become household items.

In contrast to the amount of attention that has been focused on Le Corbusier's architecture in relation to the culture of the "machine age," very little has been paid to its relation to the new means of communication, the relation of architecture to the culture of the consumer age. Ironically, the very idea of the "machine age," which served the period as a symbolic concept, was largely induced by the advertising industry. Architecture's relationship to the mechanisms of that industry needs to be analyzed in order to establish architecture's role in that period.

Retrospectively speaking, the concept of the "machine age" has served the critical purpose of sustaining the myth of the "modern movement" as an autonomous artistic practice in which the artist/architect is "interpreter" of the new industrial reality. Critics interested in sustaining this myth are those who under labels such as "machine age" put together such different attitudes toward the industrial reality as, for instance, the futurist, the dadaist, and Le Corbusier's. The differences, however, are more striking than the similarities.
For example, when Le Corbusier selects images from the airplane catalogues of Farman, Voisin, Bleriot, etc. for the article “Des yeux qui ne voient pas” in L’Esprit nouveau (later reprinted as a chapter in Vers une architecture), it is important to note that he is not talking here about airplanes but about mass-produced houses. His interest is in the insertion of architecture into the contemporary conditions of production. (The futurists, on the other hand, while using the same images, were indifferent to the processes of industrialization.) In fact, Le Corbusier had more than just a philosophical interest. He actually negotiated with leading industrialists like Gabriel Voisin. At the end of the war the Voisin company was trying to keep its aircraft plant occupied by entering the building industry. Voisin produced two prototypes of houses that were published in an article in L’Esprit nouveau (“Les Maisons Voisin”), where Le Corbusier and Ozenfant write:

Impossible to wait on the slow collaboration of the successive efforts of excavator, mason, carpenter, joiner, tiler, plumber... houses must go up all at once, made by machine tools in factories, assembled as Ford assembles cars, on moving conveyor belts... Aviation is achieving pedigrees of serial production... It is in aircraft factories that the soldier-architects have decided to build the houses; they decided to build this house like an aircraft, with the same structural methods, lightweight framing, metal braces, tubular supports.12

Le Corbusier’s concern with the contemporary conditions of production is necessarily a concern with the mechanisms that sustained that production: advertising, mass media, and publicity. The images of airplanes that he was deploying were very much part of the popular imagination. Illustrated newspapers, for example, moved from the fetishistic display of images of aircraft in war to images of the new passenger aircraft, such that around 1919 these images appear side by side. Le Corbusier was employing modern publicity techniques: on the one hand he grabs the readers’ visual attention through the spectacular image to direct them to

Front cover of a Radiola publicity brochure in the L’Esprit nouveau archives.
the concept he is promoting, the mass production of houses. On the other hand, subliminally inscribed within the images he chooses is the domestication of military technology.

In these terms, Le Corbusier not only had an "intuitive understanding of media and a definite feel for news," as Marie-Odile Briot writes in one of the few existing comments on Le Corbusier and the media.¹⁵ Purist culture, by which I mean Le Corbusier and Ozan's project of arriving at a theory of culture in industrialized everyday life throughout the pages of L'Esprit nouveau, can be read as a "reflection," in both the specular and intellectual sense of the word, on the culture of the new means of communication, the world of advertising and mass media.

To the first meaning of the word belong Le Corbusier's use of mass media culture, of the everyday images of the press, industrial publicity, department store mail order catalogues, and advertisements, as "readymades" to be incorporated in his editorial work. The architect's tracings and sketches on the catalogues suggest that he was not taking these images in a passive manner; these drawings testify to a formal search ultimately directed to his design practice. But there is more, and this is where the second meaning of "reflection" comes in. Le Corbusier identified in the very existence of the printed media an important conceptual shift regarding the function of culture and the perception of the exterior world by the modern individual. In L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui he writes, "The fabulous development of the book, of print, and the classification of the whole of the most recent archaeological era, has flooded our minds and overwhelmed us. We are in a completely new situation. Everything is known to us."¹⁶

This new condition in which one knows "everything about everything" represents a critical transformation of traditional culture. Paradoxically, the classical, humanist accumulation of knowledge becomes problematic.¹⁵ We can begin to read Le Corbusier's position vis-à-vis this trans-
*Sketch page indicating image of an airplane to be reproduced from a Farman catalogue.*

*Annotated page from a Farman publicity brochure. The image chosen will later head the article "Des yeux qui ne voient pas..." in *I Les avions* in *L'Esprit nouveau* 9 (1921), reprinted as a chapter in *Vers une architecture.*
DES YEUX QUI NE VOIENT PAS...

LES AVIONS

Page from Vers une architecture with image from the Farman catalogue.

Wing of Farman airplane as seen through the window by a passenger.
L'Illustration, February 1919.
LES MAISONS "VOISIN"

Le Corbusier-Sauparc, L'Esprit nouveau 2 (1920).

"Les Maisons Voisin."

"Les Maisons Voisin."
Mockup of layout of Hermès bags for L'Esprit nouveau 24 (1924).

The equipment of a French soldier during the war. L'Illustration, February 1919.
formation by addressing one aspect of it, his view of the status of the artwork in an industrial society.

The role of art in society was, in Le Corbusier’s view, radically altered by the existence of mass media. In *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui* he writes, “Now broadly disseminated through books, in the schools, newspapers, and at the cinema is the linguistic form of our emotions, which, in the centuries prior to our own, found expression in the arts.”4 And in the introduction to *La Peinture moderne*, he writes with Ozanfant, “Imitative art has been left behind by photography and cinema. The press and the book operate much more efficiently than art relative to religious, moral, or political aims. What is the destiny of the art of today?”17

**The Uneasy Status of the Object**

One question that presents itself in relation to Le Corbusier’s use of publicity images as ready-mades is to what extent this is paralleled by dadaist practices. This question contains a conceptual problem that has become important in recent critical discourse—the difference between modernism and the avant-garde in the context of the first half of this century.18

Picabia, for instance, picks up machine images from mail order catalogues and advertisements, redraws them, and endows them with legends to make a series of “objects-portraits,” among them: *Voilà Hasiland* (portrait of Paul Haviland as a portable electric lamp), *Ici, c’est ici* Stieglitz (Alfred Stieglitz as a folding camera), *Portrait d’une jeune fille américaine dans l’état de nudité* (an American girl as a spark plug), etc., all reproduced in Stieglitz’s journal 291.19 But, unlike Picabia, Le Corbusier does not remain prisoner of the representative paradigm of a tragic mise-en-scène. Le Corbusier juxtaposes images on the page mean-

ing is in the void, in the silence of the white space between the images and the written text. The mechanical element is not used in a representational manner but as a “disjunctive” element.

A comparison between Le Corbusier and Marcel Duchamp may be more productive. Take the image of a bidet by the manufacturer Maison Pirsoul that Le Corbusier publishes at the head of the article “Autres icones: les musées” in *L’Esprit nouveau*, and Duchamp’s *Fountain by R. Mutt* of 1917. (Incidentally, J. L. Mott was, at the time, a prominent manufacturer of ironworks. Aside from plumbing fixtures, Mott produced actual fountains, elaborate objects with mythological themes—very “artistic” indeed. This suggests that *Fountain by R. Mutt* was, among other things, a pun on this manufacturer’s name and products that Duchamp must have known through advertisements.)20

*Fountain by R. Mutt* and the bidet by Maison Pirsoul are, if we take representation as a transparent medium, two plumbing fixtures. And both are obviously intended (exploiting the sexual allusions so dear to the dadaists) as assaults on the institution of art. Less evident is the fact that they both exist only as reproductions. The origin of the first is its publication in the pages of *L’Esprit nouveau*; there is no other “original.” The second was supposed to have been exhibited in the Salon of the Independents in New York but never was, as it was rejected; what remains is only the photograph of it. Nevertheless, it is this moment, together with a piece of contemporary criticism by Beatrice Wood in *The Blind Man*, a New York dada journal, that has assured this piece a place in history. The original object, the actual urinal, has been lost. Thus both of these “objects” exist only as “reproductions.” Another aspect of the lack of an original has to do with the objects each reproduction represents. Duchamp’s artwork is a mass-produced object turned upside-down, signed, and sent to an art exhibition. Le Corbusier’s “raw material” is an advertising image, obviously taken from an industrial catalogue, and placed in the pages of an art journal.
Advertisement for a Wallace portable electrical lamp.

Francis Picabia, Voilà Haviland: la poésie est comme lui (1915).
AUTRES ICONES
LES MUSEES

Page from L’Esprit nouveau 20 (1924).

Les lettres

Cubistes contre Dadaïstes

La clôture du tribunal civil, relâchée par M. Léger, a permis aux peintres cubistes de se réunir pour un grand mouvement. Ce mouvement s'est traduit par des actions non-violentes, mais néanmoins provocantes.

Une action a été menée simultanément à Paris et à New York, où les artistes cubistes ont manifesté contre les Dadaïstes. Ces derniers, par leurs actions anarchistes, ont tenté de soulever l'opinion publique contre les idées cubistes.

C'est ainsi que l'on a pu observer des échanges d'idées, non seulement entre les deux camps, mais également avec la population en général. Les Cubistes ont ainsi pu montrer leur contestation contre les Dadaïstes, tout en exprimant leur désir de voir les choses répondues.

La clôture du tribunal civil a donc permis de mettre en lumière les divergences entre les deux camps, mais aussi de montrer l'importance des débats artistiques dans la société contemporaine.
These are the superficial similarities between the two documents. Their difference, however, resides in the meaning of each gesture and the context in which it is placed. The context of the *Fountain by R. Mutt* is the exhibition space. It does not matter that it was never exhibited there. It has to be thought of in that setting; it cannot be thought outside its interpretation. It doesn’t exist outside its interpretation. As Peter Bürger says in his book *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, the meaning of Duchamp’s gesture derives from the contrast between mass-produced object on the one hand and signature and art exhibit on the other. In signing a mass-produced object, Duchamp is negating the category of individual creation and unmasking the art market, where a signature means more than the quality of the work. The avant-garde gesture, in Bürger’s definition, is an attack on art as an institution. 20

To what extent can we consider Le Corbusier’s bidet an avant-garde gesture? The context of the bidet is *L’Esprit nouveau*. The image heads an article titled “Other Icons: The Museums,” which belongs to the series published between 1923 and 1924, reprinted in *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui* in 1925. The series was issued in preparation for the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. In the article Le Corbusier writes, “Museums have just been born. There were none in other times. In the tendentious incoherence of museums the model does not exist, only the elements of a point of view. The true museum is the one that contains everything.”

These observations on museums again appear close to Duchamp. The museum viewer can only perform an intellectual operation; contemplation is no longer possible. When the *Fountain by R. Mutt* was rejected by the Independents as “plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing,” Beatrice Wood wrote in *The Blind Man*, “Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.” If the museum transforms the work of art—in fact, creates it as such—and allows the viewer only an intellectual experience of it, Marcel Duchamp’s act consists in putting this condition in evidence: creating a new thought for an ordinary product.

The Maison Pissou bidet is an everyday object, an industrial product, and Le Corbusier never intended it to abandon this status. His statement that it should be in a museum does not mean he intended to present it as an art object. That the bidet should be in a museum—to be precise, in the museum of decorative arts—means for Le Corbusier that the bidet speaks of our culture, as the folklore of a certain place spoke of that place’s culture in other times. But in the places where the railway had already arrived, as Le Corbusier realized, after Loos, folklore could no longer be preserved. The industrial product had become the folklore of the age of communications. 21 Both folklore and industrial production are collective phenomena. Modern decorative art did not have the individual character of artistic creation but the anonymous one of industrial production, of folklore.

While Duchamp was questioning the institution of art and artistic individual production, Le Corbusier, more in line with Adolf Loos (who was also fascinated with sanitary material), was distinguishing between the object of use and the art object. Indeed, Le Corbusier’s arguments in *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui* are strongly indebted to Loos, who not only wrote the famous essay “The Plumbers” (1908) but in 1907 wrote another called “The Superfluous.” This text is devoted to the architects of the Werkbund. Loos writes:

> Now they have all gathered together in a congress in Munich. They want to demonstrate their importance to our craftsmen and industrialists.... Only the products of industries that have managed to keep away from the
superficially have attained the style of our times: our automobile industry, our production of glass, our optical instruments, our cases and umbrellas, our suitcases and trunks, our saddles and our silver cigarette cases, our jewelry and our dresses are modern. . . . Certainly, the cultivated products of our time do not have any relation to art. . . . The nineteenth century will pass into history as having effected a radical break between art and industry.24

Contrary to the received view of Loos, it is not only the unselfconscious craftsman, the master saddler, who is "modern." Modern, for Loos, includes everything that we do not know as such: anonymous collective production. Le Corbusier, like Loos, distinguishes between art and life, between the art object and the everyday object. He does not deny the individuality of artistic creation. In L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui he writes:

"Permanence of the decorative arts? or more precisely, of the objects that surround us? It is there that we have to pass judgment: the Sistine Chapel first, then chairs and file cabinets—to tell the truth, problems of a second order, as the cut of a man's suit is a second-order problem in his life. Hierarchy. First the Sistine Chapel, that is, works where passion is inscribed. Then, machines for sitting, for classifying, for illuminating, machine-types, problems of purification, of cleanliness. . . ."

There are three key words in this passage: permanence, passion, and purification. The first two are associated with art, the third with the everyday object. For Le Corbusier the essential thing about art is its permanence, lastiugness. As Banham has noted, Le Corbusier rejected the futurist theory of the caducità or ephemerality of the work of art. He distinguishes works of art from works of technology and insists that only the latter are perishable.26
Against the products of reason Le Corbusier sets the products of passion, the passion of a creative man, a genius. The capacity of a work of art to provoke an emotion, qualitatively different from the pleasures of a beautiful object, lies in recognizing the passionate gesture of the artist who created it, in any place or time. He thus sets the artwork apart from the everyday object, the artist from all the other "producers" in society.

Finally, L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui promotes cleanliness and purification. This notion reminds us once again of Loos, when in "The Plumbers," after commenting that "the most remarkable difference between Austria and America is the plumbing" (reminiscent of Duchamp’s claim that "the only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges"), he goes on to say:

_We don’t really need art. We don’t even have a culture of our own yet. This is where the state could come to the rescue. Instead of putting the cart before the horse, instead of spending money on art, let’s try producing a culture. Let’s put up baths next to the academies and employ bath attendants along with professors._

However, Loos’s caustic and irreverent writings should be distinguished from the shock tactics of dada. A comment made by Walter Benjamin in reference to Karl Kraus is applicable here to Loos, who predicted that in the twentieth century a single civilization would dominate the earth: "Satire is the only legitimate form of regional art." "The greatest type of satirist," continues Benjamin, "never had firmer grounds under his feet than amid a generation about to board tanks and put on gas masks, a mankind that has run out of tears but not of laughter." Le Corbusier is a postwar figure, Loos a prewar one. Le Corbusier’s architect is, precisely, a "soldier-architect"; Loos’s architect is "a mason who knows Latin" (a cultivated craftsman). While it is possible to establish relations between their work, a crucial question remains unanswered: how much does this demarcation line of the war cause them to be such different historical witnesses?

_The Architect as (Re)producer_

In his books and articles Le Corbusier borrows the rhetoric and persuasive techniques of modern advertising for his own theoretical arguments and manipulates actual advertisements to incorporate his own vision, thus blurring the limits between text and publicity. He does this consciously, arguing that in this way persuasion is most effective: "L’esprit nouveau," he announces in the publicity brochure sent to industrialists, "is read calmly. You surprise your client into calmness, far from business, and he listens to you because he doesn’t know you are going to solicit him."

In obtaining advertising contracts Le Corbusier often reversed the usual procedure. Once he had incorporated images from industrial catalogues in his articles, or even published actual advertisements in the review, he would send the company a letter with a copy of L’Esprit nouveau and request payment for the publicity the company was receiving. Of course, the request was not made so crudely but rather wrapped in Le Corbusier’s flattering rhetoric: the product had been singled out as representative of the spirit of the times, and so forth.

The strategy was not always effective: "Les bagages Moynat thank L’Esprit nouveau’s administration very much for the free publicity given to them in issues 11 and 13 . . . but we cannot commit ourselves for the moment to an advertising contract." In some cases, however, as with the company Innovation, Le Corbusier obtained not only an advertising contract for L’Esprit nouveau but a commission to redesign and publish its catalogue. This type of commission, also pursued with other com-
panies such as Ingersoll-Band and Roné, was part of a wider project conceived by Le Corbusier as Catalogues spéciaux de L'Esprit nouveau: "We have thus conceived a kind of publicity that is almost editorial, but it can only be applied—this is evident—to products whose fabrication and use are consistent with a certain esprit nouveau." (Note that it is not the product itself, its formal qualities, that count, but its fabrication and use.) L'Esprit nouveau itself comments on the product of the advertising firm, and, with respect to the clientele, this will certainly have an effectivity that is far different from ordinary publicity."

The company was to have a full page with a different text and illustration published in each issue of L'Esprit nouveau for a year. At the end of the year, the twelve pages thus constituted would be printed "in an edition of 3,000 (or more) on fine paper" and put together to form a brochure or catalogue called L'Esprit nouveau that the advertising firm "will be able to distribute usefully to a certain segment of its clientele."

Innovation's first page of "editorial publicity" appeared in L'Esprit nouveau 18. Instead of the conventional text of an Innovation catalogue—"An Innovation armoire holds three times as much as an ordinary armoire. Makes order. Avoids unnecessary folds"—one reads, "Construction in series is necessary to setting up house. . . . " This is followed in L'Esprit nouveau 19 by "To construct in series is to dedicate oneself to the pursuit of the element. . . . By analyzing the element one arrives at a standard. We must establish the standards of construction—windows, doors, plans, distribution, and all the interior mechanics that modern man requires for his comfort and hygiene." This tone seems to intensify progressively. A double page in L'Esprit nouveau 20, laid out in the shape of an hourglass, starts with: "The war has shaken us out of our torpor. Taylорism has been spoken of and achieved. . . ." Throughout these pages specific references to Innovation products are practically nonexistent."
Innovation publicity leaflet in the shape of a wardrobe trunk, from the L’Esprit nouveau archives.

While this is not the place to attempt a complete analysis of these pages of publicity produced by Le Corbusier—an analysis, I should note in passing, that would prove very fruitful not only for an understanding of Le Corbusier’s ideology but also for tracing the source of certain of his architectural concepts such as the horizontal window—I shall try to relate this strategy of Le Corbusier’s to contemporary advertising strategies.

In his book *The Making of Modern Advertising* Daniel Pope divides the history of advertising into three periods. The third one, the modern era, extends from 1920 to the present, and is defined as the “era of market segmentation.” At this point the marketplace begins to be transformed from production for mass consumption—that is, for an undifferentiated group of consumers—to a stratified marketplace characterized by consumers organized into relatively well-defined subgroups. L’Esprit nouveau’s special catalogues fall clearly into this category. The audience in this context becomes the “product” to be sold to advertisers. Thus the contract with Innovation states, “Mr. Jeanneret will himself take responsibility for the writing of the text and the choice of images to accompany it, thereby furnishing you with a catalogue that can favorably influence your clientele and especially architects.”

Another publicity strategy deployed by Le Corbusier includes the portrayal of his own work in actual advertisements, as often occurs in the *Almanach de l’Architecture moderne* (the content of the *Almanach* was originally intended to be issue 29 of *L’Esprit nouveau*, which never appeared). The image used in the text and in the advertisement is the same. Sometimes an image of a built work by the architect is placed in the advertisement of a company that has been involved in its construction (Summer, Euboolith, etc.), a strategy that clearly illustrates the previous point—publicity addressed to a targeted group, in this case architects.
Another dimension is added when the process is reversed, as happens with the Immeubles-Villas. The image in the Almanach text and in the advertisement is again the same. But since the Immeubles-Villas do not actually exist, their appearance in an advertisement confers on them a degree of legitimacy (beyond that which publishing already confers). The advertising context conflates the realm of ideas with that of facts. Something of the same order also happens when Le Corbusier associates himself with industrialists for his visionary projects. Le Corbusier, as Stanislaus von Moos has pointed out, tried to involve the Michelin tire company in the Plan Voisin for Paris. The plan was to have been called Plan Michelin et Voisin du Centre de Paris (the Michelin and Voisin Plan for the Center of Paris). In a letter to Michelin, Le Corbusier wrote: "Through association of the name 'Michelin' with our plan, the project will acquire considerable mass appeal. It will become possible to motivate public opinion in a much more fundamental way than would be possible through books, for example." As this statement reveals, Le Corbusier's interest in industrial publicity was twofold: on the one hand, the industrialists were to provide economic support for his projects, editorial or otherwise; on the other, the association with such concerns would have a multiplying effect owing precisely to the reputation of their names and products within mass culture. Of course, the blurring of the limits between publicity and content in L'Esprit nouveau was more effective not only for the advertised product but also for the dissemination of the review's theories. Every time its readers were confronted in another context with, for instance, a Rondo advertisement, they would inevitably associate it with Le Corbusier's ideas.

L'Esprit nouveau was effectively used by Le Corbusier to publicize his own work. In the archives of the review in the Fondation, there is a box containing numerous letters from potential clients. These were readers of the magazine or visitors to the L'Esprit Nouveau Pavilion in the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs. As Roberto Gabetti and Carlo del Olmo have noted, the pavilion was used by Le Corbusier not to launch the
magazine but to attract a professional clientele. Le Corbusier answered the letters he received, sending sketches and preliminary budgets and, in some cases, proposing an actual site. While this is a subject for detailed study, it is sufficient for our purposes to note that some readers of L'Esprit nouveau became actual clients.

When L'Esprit nouveau ceased publication in 1925 (“Five years is a lot for a magazine,” Le Corbusier declared, “one ought not to repeat oneself continuously. Others, younger people, will have younger ideas”), he emerged from the experience as an established architect. This maturation process was accelerated by his production of the review and the nature of the audience it was reaching. Statistics included in a letter to the Ateliers Primavera, a subsidiary of the Printemps department store, in an effort to obtain an advertising contract, state that only 24.3 percent of L'Esprit nouveau’s subscribers were artists (painters and sculptors). The rest comprised “people occupying active positions in society.” Architects, of course, were included in the latter category, together with doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, industrialists, and bankers. While these statistics are not entirely reliable—Le Corbusier also asserted that L’Esprit nouveau had a circulation of 5,000 copies when the maximum ever reached was 3,500—his statement in the same letter that “L’Esprit nouveau finds its most sympathetic response precisely in the active milieu of society” not only was a strategem to sell L’Esprit nouveau readership as a “product” to the Ateliers Primavera, but also reveals Le Corbusier’s relentless desire to integrate his work into the contemporary conditions of production. The largest group of subscribers was, as he claims, constituted by industrialists and bankers, 31 percent; architects made up 8 percent. Financing for the magazine, which it was Le Corbusier’s responsibility to produce, also came largely from industrialists and bankers, many of Swiss origin.

L'Esprit nouveau 17 shows the distribution of subscribers by country of origin. Le Corbusier and Ozenfant even attempted at one point to come out with an English-language version of the review, but “L’affaire Américaine,” as they themselves called the project, was never realized. L'Esprit nouveau was part of an exchange network with avant-garde magazines such as MA, Staatb, De Stijl, Vestische Gegenstand, Objekt, Disk, and others. Correspondence in the Fondation illuninates Le Corbusier’s relations with El Lissitzky, Ilya Ehrenburg, Walter Gropius, László Moholy-Nagy, Theo van Doesburg, Karel Teige, and others. Perhaps the most telling document in this respect, not only on a symbolic level, is a card Sigfried Giedion wrote to Le Corbusier in 1925 mentioning that he was preparing a book on modern architecture and that Moholy-Nagy had recommended that he visit Le Corbusier.

We can already see in this the network of the avant-garde engaged in its own historical legitimation, something Giedion would carry out full-scale as the first “operative critic” of the modern movement. “What is normally meant by operative criticism is,” as Tafuri puts it, “an analysis of architecture (or of the arts in general) that, instead of an abstract survey, has as its objective the planning of a precise political tendency, anticipated in its structure and derived from historical analyses programmatically distorted and finalized.” The relations between “operative criticism” and a “consumerist” culture are clear. Differences are canceled by the process of labeling, and the product in turn becomes marketable. Modern architecture does not simply address or exploit mass culture. It is itself, from the beginning, a commodity. Perhaps nowhere is this made more explicit than with the 1932 exhibition “Modern Architecture” in the Museum of Modern Art and the book that accompanied it, The International Style: Architecture since 1922.
Letter from Theo van Doesburg to the editors of L'Esprit nouveau, 10 April 1924.
Map of subscribers. L'Esprit nouveau 17 (1923).

Postcard from Sigfried Giedion to
Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret.