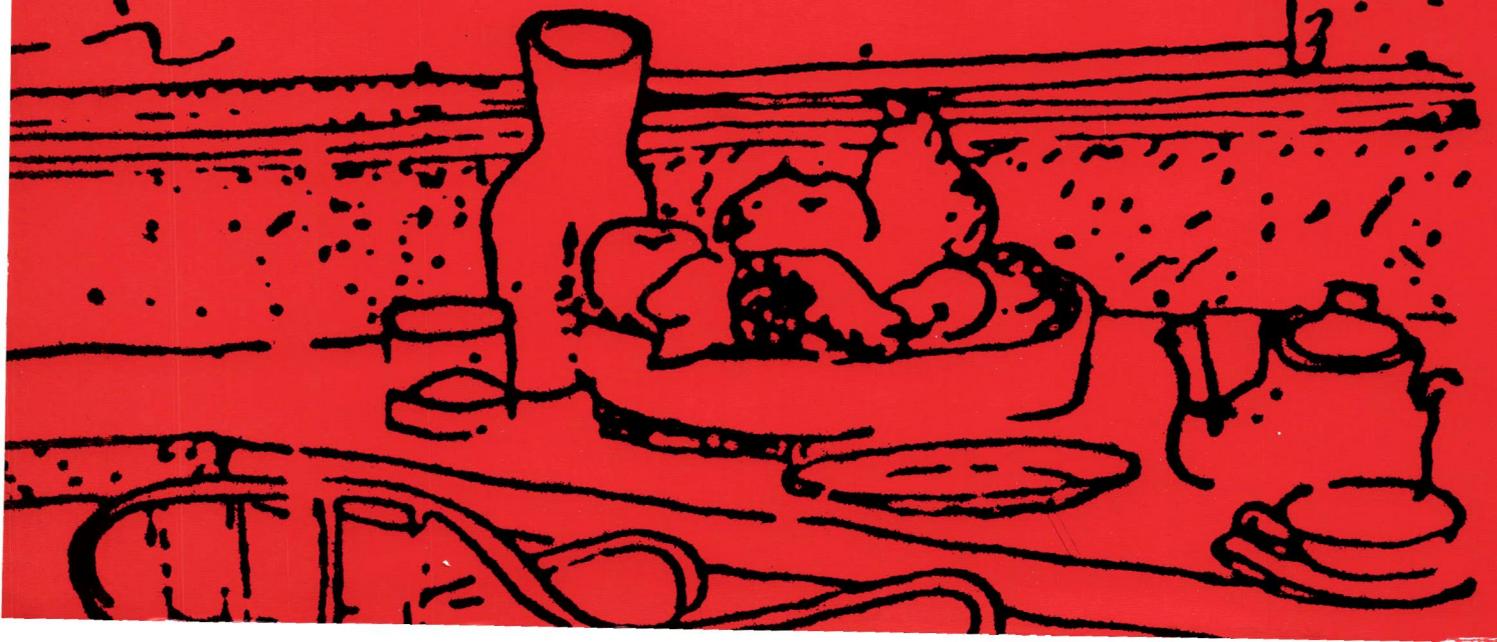


A Journal for Ideas and  
Criticism in Architecture

Le Corbusier 1905-1933  
Editor: Kenneth Frampton

# OPPOSITIONS



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Criticism in Architecture

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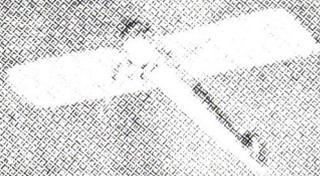
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Le Corbusier 1905-1933



## Editor's Introduction

- 2 For the protagonists of Post-Modernism or for the ever present bureaucrats of our social welfare, Le Corbusier has evolved into the pathologically sinister figure. He is to be seen as the founding father of the white architecture; as the demiurge of the International Style, as the reductive functionalist incarnate; as the creator of a hermetic and cryptically inaccessible architecture, at times Calvinist, at times traumatically Mannerist; the provider of sepulchral disquiet, as opposed to the present historicism which merely plays at the disjunctive. And yet despite the megalomania of his large scale urbanism, Le Corbusier remains the architectural touchstone of our age, the prime mentor of modern method, and for many the only architect of our century to merit recognition as a genius in his own time. Since his death in 1965, his work has either been admired as a triumph or dismissed as a farce. The result has been that our judgment has remained ineffectively suspended between the extremes of eulogy and ridicule, while the broader and deeper significance of his achievement has escaped our attention. Forged as much by his epoch as by the idiosyncrasies of his nature, Le Corbusier occupies a singular and classic place in the on-going evolution of our discipline, a body of work which despite its recession into a lost history will undoubtedly be re-evaluated by each successive generation.

It is our intent with this double issue of *Oppositions* to initiate a re-examination of this figure and to pinpoint certain aspects of his ideological development within the framework of the twentieth century. Le Corbusier, at first heir and then *saltimbanque* to the Enlightenment, strove to synthesize, in what was almost certainly the first and the last global architectural project of our century, not only the future form of the bourgeois city but also the cultural status of the industrial objects it would necessarily contain. The transformation of the early nineteenth century city into the sprawling metropolis of the second half of the century was the rupture in which modernism first saw the light of day. As Anthony Vidler has remarked in *Oppositions* 8, this urban culture was already divided by the time of Baudelaire into a curious dichotomy between *positive* projection on the one hand and *formal* subversion on the other. The culture of the *Grosstadt* was largely the creation of two antagonistic but reciprocally related classes: the technocrats who projected the city as a progressive program of development, welfare, and reform and the intellectuals whose overwrought and alienated sensibility reacted in an ambiguous way to the phenomenon of the industrial metropolis.

The technocratic ideal of the bourgeois city suffered a major setback with the First World War when the relentless expansion and triumph of its form—driven by speculative growth and accelerated locomotion—were

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