

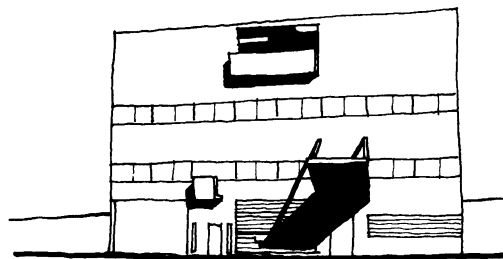


**Figure 3.45** Peter Womersley, *Roxburgh County Offices*, 1968

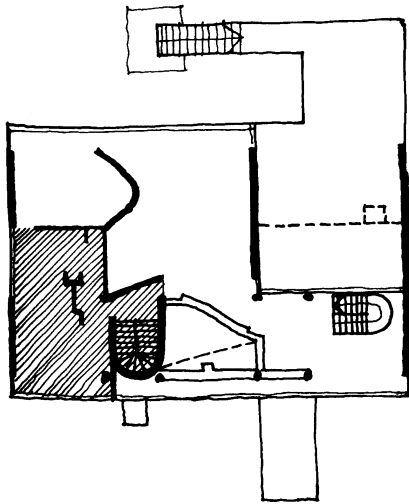
### The exemplar

By the late 1920s Le Corbusier had developed the notion of *promenade architecturale* to a very high level of sophistication. At the Villa Stein, Garches, 1927, a carefully orchestrated route not only allows us to experience a complex series of spaces but also by aggregation gives us a series of clues about the building's organisation. The house is approached from the north and presents an austere elevation with strip windows like an abstract 'purist' painting. But the elevation is relieved by devices which initiate our engagement with the building. The massively-scaled projecting canopy 'marks' the major entrance and relegates the service entrance to a secondary role.

At the same time the two entrances are differentiated by size thereby removing any hint of duality or ambiguity (**Figure 3.46**), and a pierced opening in the parapet suggests the existence of a roof terrace. On entry, an opening in the first floor provides a gallery which immediately asserts the importance of the first floor; the *piano nobile* has been established. A free-standing dog-leg stair allows us to re-engage directly with the void at first floor level, the serpentine edge of which invites a further exploration of the plan. Generous glazing to the south elevation engages with the garden beyond, but the pre-determined route then leads to an external terrace which, because of the complex sectional organisation involving further terraces overhead, reads as a transitional space between inside and outside. Finally, a straight-flight stair leads into a garden to conclude a complex promenade (**Figure 3.47**). The route reveals sequentially the building's principal spaces but at the same



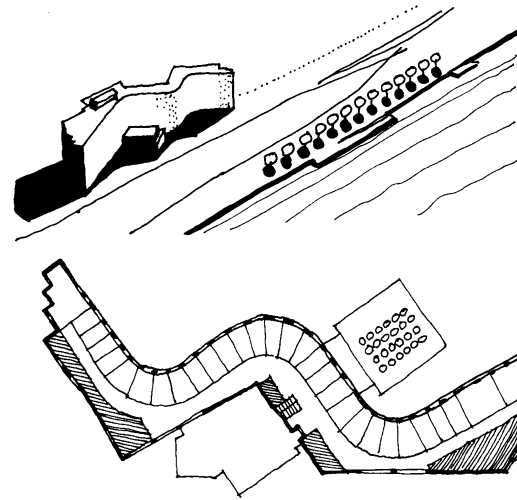
**Figure 3.46** Le Corbusier, *Villa at Garches*, 1927. North elevation.



**Figure 3.47** Le Corbusier, Villa at Garches, 1927. First floor plan. From student model, University of Nottingham.

time conceals the 'service' elements of the plan like service stair, servants' quarters at ground floor and kitchen at first floor to establish a clear functional hierarchy.

Whereas at Garches the route marks and celebrates the prominence of an elevated first floor or *piano nobile*, the reverse can be employed to equally dramatic effect; at Alvar Aalto's serpentine student dormitory block for Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Mass., 1949, visitors engage with this riverside building at high level and descend into the principal foyer and social spaces with views over the Charles River (**Figure 3.48**).



**Figure 3.48** Alvar Aalto, Baker House, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1951. From *Modern Architecture since 1900*, Curtis, W., Phaidon, p. 297.

James Stirling developed this notion of a complex route within the context of a highly disciplined plan to further levels of sophistication at two celebrated art galleries; the Neue Staatsgalerie at Stuttgart, 1984 (**Figure 3.49**), and the Clore Gallery, Tate Gallery, London, 1986 (**Figure 3.50**). Both celebrate access by preamble and transition and both buildings use the promenade as a powerful structuring device engaging with ramps and stairs which provide a dynamic element alongside a controlled sequence of gallery spaces.

At a more prosaic level, Peter Womersley employed similar devices to describe the