

analogy suggests that literal transparency is a property of the architectural artefact that can be dissected and classified along with other observable properties. Phenomenal transparency, on the other hand, is not a property of the objects constituted by these surfaces; the presence of a viewing subject is required for the effects of equivocal depth to be perceived.

The visible deeply objects to our habitual objectification.

David Michael Levin, The Opening of Vision

In 1968 the Swiss architect Bernhard Hoesli, who had been on the faculty at the University of Texas at Austin with Colin Rowe in the 1950s, republished the Rowe and Slutzky essay in German. In sincere appreciation of their concept of transparency “as a tool for study [which] makes understanding and evaluation possible,” Hoesli wrote his own accompanying essay, copiously illustrated, in which he suggested that [phenomenal transparency] was an “employable, operative means enabling the intellectual ordering of form during the design process, as well as its graphic representation” (Hoesli 1997, p. 60). However, his diagrammatic restatement of their ideas seems to have missed their point. He illustrated the layering of planes in one of Le Corbusier’s Purist paintings from a lateral, or flanking, as opposed to a frontal point of view (Figures 1.3a and b).

A clearly ordered Cartesian spatial matrix regulates the distance from one plane to the next, but all allusion to perceptual depth has been eliminated from this disembodied view of the painting. Hoesli then applied the same diagrammatic formula to Le Corbusier’s Villa Stein, erecting the receding planes with distances between determined, no doubt, by the numeric fact of the plan (Figures 1.4a and b).

While devising a visualization of overlapping planes, Hoesli succumbed to what Merleau-Ponty called the “traditional view” – the habit of objectification – “in which experience of depth . . . consists in interpreting certain given

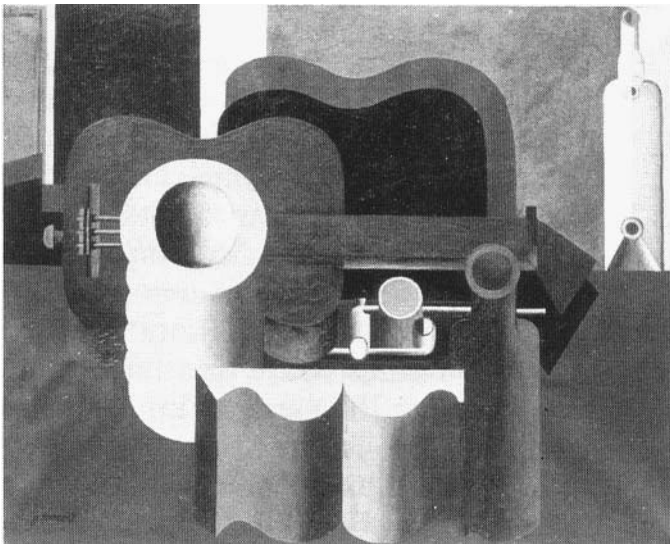


Figure 1.3a Le Corbusier, *Nature morte à la pile d'assiette et au livre*, 1920. Peinture FLC 305 © 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS)/ADAAGP, Paris/FLC.

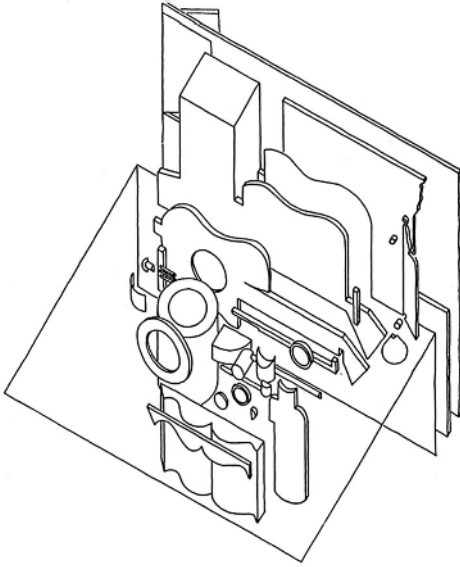


Figure 1.3b Diagram by Bernhard Hoesli of Le Corbusier's *Nature morte à la pile d'assiette et au livre*. Dessins de B. Hoesli. Courtesy FLC. © 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS)/ADAAGP, Paris/FLC.



Figure 1.4a Le Corbusier. Paris: Villa Stein 1927. © 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS)/ADAAGP, Paris/FLC. Photograph by F.R. Yerbury. © F.R. Yerbury/Architectural Association.

facts – the convergence of the eyes, the apparent size of the image, for example – by placing them in the context of objective relations which explain them” (1996, p. 257). Elsewhere, Merleau-Ponty said: “In order to treat depth as breadth viewed in profile, in order to arrive at a uniform space, the subject must leave his place, abandon his point of view on the world, and think himself into a sort of ubiquity” (ibid., p. 255). We know, of course, that “readings” of depth are facilitated by the fact that some planes (and some objects)