

writings, which reveal him to be one of the great humanist architects of the 20th century, have inspired legions of architects throughout the world. His legacy of drawings is remarkable for depicting the realm of human activity within the spaces and places he designed. Yet the numerous perspective views of his projects are typically composed without a corporeal viewer in mind (Figures 1.5 and 1.6). The viewer's station point for the perspective view is almost always located indeterminately. Kahn was trained as an architect in the United States, but he was most influenced by professors and practitioners who were trained in Paris at l'Ecole des Beaux Arts, where emphasis was placed on the development of the plan. Throughout his career his own plans were informed by axial strategies for connecting geometric volumes; he was undoubtedly aware of the resulting visual effect of enfilade. At Salk the technique explodes into an architecture of numerous local symmetries and a multiplicity of spaces in enfilade (Figures 1.12 and 1.13), treating the viewer to one opportunity after another to find a "registration" with the architecture. Here is a place where interaction with the architecture inspires subjective self-awareness. However, there is little positive evidence that Kahn himself thought consciously about achieving these visual effects.

Man looks at the creation of architecture with his eyes, which are 5 feet 6 inches from the ground. One can only consider aims which the eye can appreciate and intentions which take into account architectural elements.

*Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture*

There is every reason to believe that Le Corbusier did think explicitly about the visual effects of his architecture and the engagement of the subject. In addition to statements such as the one quoted above, his photographs employ several techniques in which one can discern the presence of the viewer. It should be clarified here that the photographs discussed in the following paragraphs (Figures 1.14 and 1.15) were created by Le Corbusier to promote his design work. They were composed with deliberation and frequently cropped



**Figure 1.12** Louis Kahn, The Salk Institute, La Jolla, California. Photograph by Penny Yates.



**Figure 1.13** Louis Kahn, The Salk Institute, La Jolla, California. Photograph by Penny Yates.

for publication. The observed effects are almost certainly intentional. He frequently composed his photographs using one-point perspective from the point of view of an average height person occupying the represented ground plane. However, he freed this compositional technique from its association with bilateral symmetry by identifying the *perceptual* condition that establishes depth – the visual axis<sup>13</sup> – *the abstract line that connects the subject's eye to a focal point*. If this connection is of sufficient perceptual strength, it no longer requires *two* opposing but symmetrical edges to establish its presence. This perceptual axis replaces the abstract and objective mathematical axis of symmetry; the architecture no longer needs to be equivalent on both sides. Nor does this axis necessarily double as a circulation axis. In Le Corbusier's photographs one frequently finds objects located along or near the visual axis to deny the traditional equation between the path of the eye and the path of the feet. These departures from tradition were appropriate to Le Corbusier's quest for a new architecture for the modern world. They were also in keeping with his explorations of spatial ambiguity in his post-Cubist *purisme* paintings of the 1920s and 1930s.

The visual axis connects a viewer and a focal point. Since the viewer's location is not necessarily dependent on the particular geometry of the unified architectural object, as in the view of spaces in enfilade, the possible station points will instead be determined by the viewer's discovery of, or registration with, a focal point. The focal point is unlike Alberti's abstract centric point, the purpose of which was to construct a mathematically correct representation. Rather, the focal point is like the "visual magnet" in Colin Rowe's description of La Tourette quoted at the beginning of the chapter, or Merleau-Ponty's fixed point of "any looked-at object in which I anchor myself." The focal point and the vanishing point are virtually synonymous in these photographs, but they are not equal. The focal point is primary, contrived to locate the subject's focus in the image; its mathematically precise location is irrelevant and it may be adjusted for purely compositional purposes. The