



Figure 1.16 Piero della Francesca, *Flagellation of Christ*, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino. SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

interpretations of Piero's artistic device, especially given the subject matter. Rather, it will suffice to say that Piero's methods were almost certainly more in the service of the narrative than in the composition. His entire *oeuvre* consists of tableaux that are temporally transcendent; spatial ambiguity rather than spatial logic reinforces this narrative intention.

In his essay Schumacher demonstrates that many of Le Corbusier's images are composed "as an overt and conscious act" (*ibid.*, p. 41) using this bilateral juxtaposition of two focal points, one in deep space and one in shallow space. He further analogizes the composition of these photographs to the post-Cubist Purist paintings of Le Corbusier and his colleague Amédée Ozenfant in which orthographically derived compositions are rendered spatially ambiguous, as planes in closer proximity overlap more distant planes, creating spaces of ambiguous dimensions, as deep space continues invisibly behind shallow space, and as figure and ground merge and fluctuate. In Le Corbusier's photographs a similar, ambiguous merging of foreground and background causes a "spatial collapse."

But there is another dynamic at work in these photographs. As a mathematical construction, one-point perspective admits only one vanishing point. This was insufficient for the spatial complexity of Le Corbusier's modernist architectural intentions, as well as his artistic interests, in which he (like the Cubists before him) pursued spatial ambiguity, dispersal of focus, and compression of depth. As in the previously discussed photographs, Le Corbusier relinquished the power of the mathematically determined vanishing point to the greater power of the subject's focal point. Piero had done virtually the same thing. As an early perspectivalist, Piero was not beholden to the orthodoxy of the centre point; it was only one among many methods then being used to achieve pictorial depth.¹⁵ In the painting there is a positive spatial and perhaps temporal tension between the two focal points. On the other hand, in the photographs that juxtapose shallow space and deep space, the camera lens will not yield its complicity in the reification of the perspectival

vanishing point. To undermine its power, to press the spatial ambiguity and tension between competing focal points, Le Corbusier used several tricks in his photographic constructions. One was to conceal the vanishing point by locating it behind the frontal plane (Figure 1.17). Another was to emphasize frontal planes and limit the presence of the converging diagonals of the lateral planes, as he had done so often in his Purist paintings (Figure 1.18). Yet another was to place the vanishing point in that very element – a tree, a column, a window mullion – that, like Piero's column, divides the image into two parts – deep space and shallow space. The eye must move away from the insidious grasp of the vanishing point to the right side or the left side of the image.

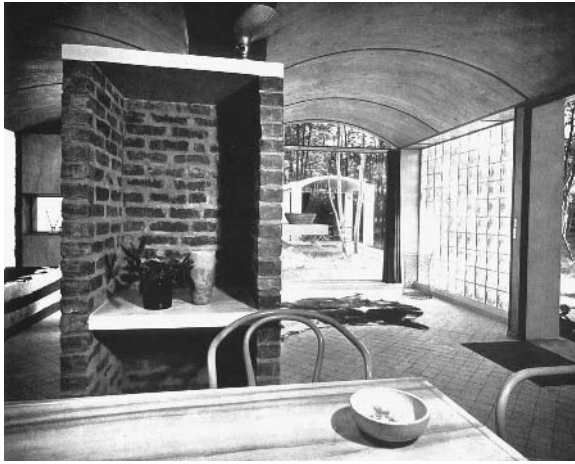


Figure 1.17 Le Corbusier. Le Celle Saint Cloud: Maison de week-end 1934 © 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS)/ADAAGP, Paris/FLC L1(6) 146.

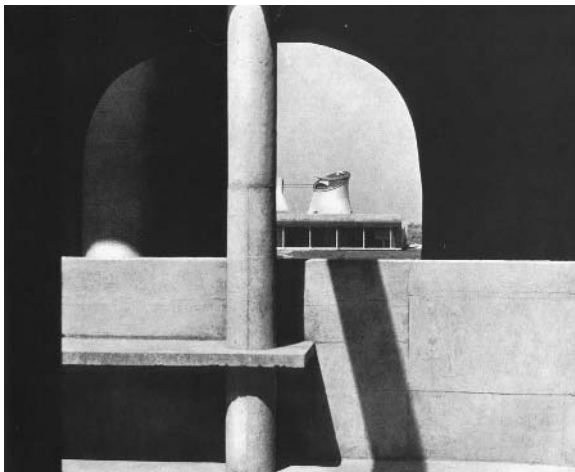


Figure 1.18 Le Corbusier. Chandigarh: View of the Palace of the Assembly from the High Court 1950–65 © 2003 Artists Rights Society (ARS)/ADAAGP, Paris/FLC L3(10) 209.