

# Surrealism and Architecture

Edited by Thomas Mical



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*Surrealism and Architecture* examines a long-overlooked topic: the relationship of surrealist thought to architectural theory and practice. This is a historically informed examination of architecture's perceived absence in surrealist thought, surrealist tendencies in the theories and projects of modern architecture and the place of surrealist thought in contemporary design methods and theories.

The book contains a diversity of voices, methodologies, and insights to bring into sharp focus what is often suppressed in the histories of the modernist avant-garde. Of all the artistic modernisms affecting the design of buildings and cities, surrealism has been the least explored, yet the surrealist critiques of rationalism, formalism, and ideology are questions imbedded in the legacy of modern architecture. In these 21 essays, the role of the subconscious, the techniques of defamiliarization, and critiques of social forces affecting the objects, interiors, cities and landscapes of the twentieth century are revealed in the works of Breton, Dali, Aragon, Le Corbusier, Niemeyer, Kiefer, Hejduk, Tschumi, and others ranging across the history of modern art and architecture. This far-ranging collection examines the theoretical, visual, and spatial practices of writers, artists, architects, and urbanists with particular emphasis on the critique of the everyday world-view, offering alternative models of subjectivity, artistic processes and effects, and the imaginative production of meanings in the built world.

With the renewed interest in the surrealist movement, this timely collection of illustrated essays is the first to look at the architectural possibilities of this distinct modern artistic movement that was interdisciplinary and international. This book offers a variety of models for analysis of interdisciplinary artistic practice; it will be of interest to scholars in the histories of modernism, students and practitioners of art and architecture, cultural studies, and urban studies.

**Thomas Mical** completed his doctorate on Nietzschean thought in De Chirico's metaphysical paintings. He completed his professional architecture degree at Harvard, and he has worked as a designer in Tokyo and Chicago, and writes on surrealism, cinema, and urbanism. He has taught and lectured on surrealism in the US, Europe, and the Middle East. Currently he is Assistant Professor of Architectural History and Theory at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada.

# **Surrealism and Architecture**

**Edited by Thomas Mical**

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

*Thomas Mical*

Architecture, as materialized desires achieved through subjective imagination and thoughtful cultural production, polymorphously draws from sources outside its own discrete disciplinary boundaries. Much of the premodern history of architectural theory can be read as the search to identify exactly that which distinguishes architecture from mere construction, and the shifting answers always lie outside utilitarian making. Architecture, even modern architecture, as an incomplete discipline incapable of autonomy or completion, is open to these associations, and it is doubtful if the sacrificial tropes on classical temples, or the original impulse to make these temples, were entirely rational or discipline-specific.<sup>1</sup> The science of geometry and musical harmony, and the artistic practices of painting and sculpture, in particular, became fetishes in the design and construction of classical and neo-classical architecture, as if the desires informing architecture necessarily precede and exceed their material boundaries. These “supplements” to premodern architectural construction are in effect an expression of a necessary fundamental lack in architecture, masking the incompleteness of mere building with aesthetically instrumentalized materialization of desires. Premodern architectural theory seeks to describe and rationalize these “others” of building. It is often the case that for architecture to exist, it must paradoxically stage the re-emergence of its own excluded desires. In each work of architecture, the utilitarian needs can be satisfied, but the desire cannot: the “blind spot” of desire is the longing for a lost origin.<sup>2</sup> Hence the obsession over the history of architecture in premodern architectural theory – in this view, architectural history cannot be the history of style, but the history of lacks, desires, supplements, and new desires.



The prevalent assumption that modern architecture's dehistoricized formations were overtly political statements, positing instrumental reason over bourgeoisie desires reconfigured as ideology, appears to suppress the excesses of architectural desire in favor of austere constructions under the guise of rationalism. Modern architecture, erupting from the challenge of industrialization to the neo-classical order, is therefore often read as an instrumental language of technologically described voids. Yet even in its extreme ascetic manifestations, works of modern architecture could not overcome the tendency to draw upon the fetish of art and technology, specifically the contemporaneous movements of modern art. Expressionism, Futurism, Constructivism, and Cubism (Purism) resonate within modern architecture, and are now inseparable from the historiography of the modern.<sup>3</sup> The least-examined artistic practice informing modern architecture is surrealism: architecture as the "blind spot" in surrealist theory and practice, and surrealist thought is the "dark secret" of much modernist architecture – they are mutually understated or absent in most scholarship.<sup>4</sup> To address the status of desire in modern architecture, much can be learned from a critical examination of architecture's haunting presence in surrealist thought, surrealist tendencies in the theories and projects of modern architecture, and the theoretical and methodological concerns of surrealism informing past and future urban architecture. The essays collected in this anthology attempt to describe that which lies outside of the instrumental construction logic in modern architecture, and after.

Surrealism, as a movement, was almost always interdisciplinary; it was originally an avant-garde movement that eventually crossed cultures, contexts, and media forms, much like modern architecture's emergence. To date, the status of architecture within surrealist thought remains undecidable – of the creative arts, it is only architecture that remains as the unfulfilled promise of surrealist thought. The dialogue between material representations and the (incomplete) subjectivity of the modern world, a dialogue of forms and spaces where irrational meanings and experiences are produced, lies at the heart of any surrealist architectural project: "their paintings and poems were characterized by images of searching and finding, of veiling and revealing, of presence and absence, of thresholds and passages, in a surrealized universe in which there were no clear boundaries or fixed identities."<sup>5</sup>

Modern architecture in the interwar period overtly drew upon rationalism in the form of instrumental logic, *mono*-functionalism to order the inherited world, and objective fact over subjective effect. The radical shift in the philosophical and political grounding of the spaces of life in the interwar period of "high modernism" are rarely made more explicit than in surrealism's critique of this dominant rationalist orthodoxy. Within the diverse

spatial practices of the surrealist group, such as “objective chance,” the goal is explicit:

All the logical principles, having been routed, will bring [each person] the strength of that objective chance which makes a mockery of what would have seemed most probable. Everything humans might want to know is written upon this screen in phosphorescent letters, in letters of desire.<sup>6</sup>

All of the topics addressed in contemporary surrealist scholarship have a place in architectural thought, as the rethinking of craft, materiality, symbolism, imagery, social order, domesticity, urbanism, technologies, and divided cultures and contexts.<sup>7</sup>

There is not one surrealism, but many, and the significant variance between surrealist practices may function as an under-explored and expansive conceptual territory for architectural thought. Before functionalism, before formalism, there is thought forming in response to the possibilities of architecture to encode desires. For this reason, Breton’s claim that surrealism is simply “pure psychic automatism, by which one intends to express verbally, in writing, or by any other method, the real functioning of the mind” is an architectural premise.<sup>8</sup> When he adds “surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of association heretofore neglected, in the omnipotence of dreams, in the undirected play of thought,”<sup>9</sup> he is pointing towards techniques of representation that escape the Weberian cage of determinism. It is exactly these certain forms of association liberated in automatic processes that are excluded in modernist-rationalist architectural rhetoric, and it is the very same excluded associations that return to haunt the sites of rationalism, as a repressed “other.” Psychic automatism allows the author (or artist) to engage the “real” through the unseen movements of the imagination, a method that explicitly rejects the mechanisms of control, taste, calculation, and judgment. The automatic process erases the notion of the integrated rational subject in favor of its others – this tendency towards the multiplicity of voices expands the subject beyond the processes of reason – to the point of rendering the author as a “mere recording instrument”<sup>10</sup> for the imaginary. Breton offers the possibility of surrealism as a means of recovering architecture from the symbolic, and points towards diverse artistic practices proceeding historically from the written to the visual and into the spatial, although his understanding of the spatial is often blinded by the primacy of the (surrealist) object.

Consider Breton’s 1935 Prague lecture “Surrealist Situation of the Object,” which follows Hegel in situating architecture as the poorest of the

arts, poetry the richest.<sup>11</sup> For Hegel, architecture is the most base of the arts, made of earth, timber, and stone; the stones are outside art, and the distinction between architecture and building is slight. Breton's vision of surrealist practices drew upon the role of estrangement in art, the slippage between form and content Shlovsky described as defamiliarization: "by making the familiar strange, we recover the sensation of life . . . art exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony."<sup>12</sup> Jameson describes this defamiliarization as "a way of restoring conscious experience, of breaking through deadening and mechanical habits of conduct, and allowing us to be reborn to the world in its existential freshness and horror."<sup>13</sup> Vidler follows this logic in describing a "spatial estrangement" dominant in the sociology of modern urbanism.<sup>14</sup>

We would expect that Breton would see the phenomenal stoniness of stone as the point of sensual estrangement that could draw architecture up from building towards poetry, overcoming a lack. But Breton, in the same lecture, cites the modernism of the Art Nouveau movement as the first among all the arts to move towards surrealism by excluding the external world and turning towards the inner world of consciousness, of expressing the inner world visually, citing Dalí:

No collective effort has managed to create a world of dreams as pure and disturbing as these art nouveau buildings, which by themselves constitute, on the very fringe of architecture, true realizations of solidified desires, in which the most violent and cruel automatism painfully betrays a hatred of reality and a need for refuge in an ideal world similar to those in a childhood neurosis.<sup>15</sup>

Breton was incapable of understanding the design/making/meaning of architecture as Dalí could, and explained the "concrete irrationality" of modern architecture in the superficial exception of a wavy wall of Le Corbusier's Swiss Pavilion of the Cité Universitaire in Paris. Breton was blind to the surrealist tendencies in this phase of the controversial modernist's work: Corbu's collection of "objets a reaction poétique," and use of object-types in this pavilion and other projects, is very close to Breton's terminology and concerns.<sup>16</sup> Breton noted surrealist sculptures often incorporate the found object, because "in it alone we can recognize the marvelous precipitate of desire" where "chance is the form making manifest the exterior necessity which traces its path in the human unconscious."<sup>17</sup> We may see an example of this "awakening" in the imagery of Le Corbusier.<sup>18</sup> Many of the avatars of surrealist imagery are in his work, as if illustrating a citation by Cocteau: "in

the countryside we saw two screens and a chair. It was the opposite of a ruin . . . pieces of a future palace.”<sup>19</sup> The surrealist precursor Giorgio de Chirico once wrote: “and yet, so far as I know, no one attributes to furniture the power to awaken in us ideas of an altogether peculiar strangeness.”<sup>20</sup> The strangeness of the sentient object figures significantly in de Chirico’s metaphysical interiors and exteriors, and the defamiliarized technical object in space recurs as a fundamental formal strategy for modern architecture, one can easily imagine Hans Bellmer’s *poupee* at home in a Corbusian villa, a objectified body of fragments inhabiting a sanitized “machine for living.” Le Corbusier’s modular man and the ascetic sensuality of the modernist villa historically follow the instrumentalized fetish of the irregular body informing modernist functionalism and construction. Yet the irregular surrealist body of semiotic impulses, banished from the prismatic rationalist volumes of an industrialized world, returns as its uncanny guest.

Can the Bretonian categorization of surrealist objects apply to spaces?<sup>21</sup> Rarely, because architecture is procedurally distinct from sculpture, though for Breton the distinction is malleable. Breton came closest to imagining a surrealist architecture in his references to Dalí’s paranoiac-critical double-image, “a spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based upon the critical and systematic objectification of delirious associations and interpretations.”<sup>22</sup> Breton described the ability of the surrealist object to fuse two distinct images to produce “uninterrupted successions of latencies” from the “hidden real” of their origins, a technique common to architectural theory.<sup>23</sup>

Desire forms and informs architecture, even modern architecture, where the technology of crafted details (fragments) are submerged into construction. The details of modern architecture, objectified markers of desire, like the sculptures inhabiting classical temples, register constellations of associative meanings. Thus modern architecture’s fetish of technology, as a supplement, marks the suppression of irrational desires, of ornament and historicism, and tends towards an architecture of blank walls within a totalizing oceanic space. The medium of modern architecture is not stone, but space. Architecture must remain void to function and incomplete to produce effects, because architecture can only be completed in the spatial immersion of the subject. The construct of the body-in-space, the consistent epistemological basis for premodern architectural pleasure and meaning, is inherently lacking in most modern architecture. The semiotic impulses of the self, fluid and formless, move easily through the formless continuity of modern domestic spaces and urban contexts. This is the locus of the formless in architecture – modernism’s space without qualities, emptied of inner experience, the vaporous undecipherable spaces of the “in-between” where

the paradoxes of interiority and exteriority are to be resolved by the perceptive subject.

Any thorough description of surrealist space is absent from the primary works, though the question figures significantly in the essays of this anthology. There are as many surrealist spaces as there are surrealist works, though many of the paintings of surrealism proper sustain an apparent neo-Victorian *etherspace* – such as the painted landscapes of Magritte, Tanguy, Miro, and Dalí – where the lost content of partial objects lingers as an irrational latency, rich with associations and potential effects, the register of all that is suppressed in the spaces of modern architecture, as in the disquieting urbanism of Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical paintings. It is within the metaphysical paintings that the crisis of modernist representation investigated by the surrealists is first played out architecturally, as these haunted exilic spaces clothe modern spaces in the dream language of the classical, de Chirico painted architecture as the site of subjective (uncanny) effects produced by the fusion of decontextualized fragments, human or spatial.<sup>24</sup> This suturing of objects within derelict spaces invokes an overlap of the lost content of objects. Max Ernst's over-paintings follow from this technique, which Krauss equates with the Freudian wax tablet and "to the mental operations of memory and thus to that part of his topological model given over to the unconscious."<sup>25</sup> We can see an immediate correspondence to modernist architectural thought, where the selective process of negation of a context, argued along the lines of functionalism, efficiency, hygiene, or clarity begin in the mind of the designer. What we learn from the knowledge of the under-painting is the persistence of those excluded elements (literal objects or objectified desires) within a hidden landscape beneath or behind the optical – the operative negation inherent in much avant-garde modern architecture. The dilemmas of pictorial space in surrealist representations (the formless in-between where the paradoxes and conflicts of interiority/exteriority are suspended visually as indeterminacy) reappear in many contemporaneous works of modern architecture – for example, the early houses of Mies van der Rohe or Louis Barragan. In these projects and those works described within this anthology, it appears that surrealist representation harbors not only an optical unconscious but also a spatial unconscious.

The task of architecture is to give form to the transgressive and formless desires of the subject, often reduced in modern architecture to voids within rationalized frames or thin membranes. The voided spaces of modernity are frequently reductionist, abstracted, hygienic, homogenized, and continuous – designed to suppress the individuated, coarse, theatrical, perverse, or the traumatic.

For surrealism, and by extension surrealist architecture, reason shrivels in the representation of all that is irrational that tugs upon the desiring subject. Surrealist thought offers a repeatable process of experiencing and representing space that is other than rational, yet grounded in individual subjectivity. Surrealism does not intend to disfigure the subject, but to substantiate perception, often through

a marvelous faculty of attaining two widely separate realities without departing from the realm of our experience, of bringing them together and drawing a spark from their contact; of gathering within reach of our senses abstract figures endowed with the same intensity, the same relief as other figures; and of disorienting us in our own memory . . .<sup>26</sup>

Surrealist space has the possibility of overcoming rationalism to bring the oneiric “underworld” to the surface of perception. Michael Hays has argued correctly that individuals, “by virtue of their complex and multiple historical and cultural affiliations, always exceed the subjectivities constructed by architecture.”<sup>27</sup> David Lomas, paraphrasing Blanchot, states: “the subject of surrealism is defined by the coordinates of a space of multiplicity” troping the interiority of the self and the interiority of (architectural) space.<sup>28</sup> Events are located in spaces colored by perception; even the pristine instrumental voids of modern architecture, when occupied, are the territories of overlaps and slippages, condensations and displacements that challenge the rational-mechanical model of subjectivity. If the design of a transparently rational and optimal architecture begs the eruption of that which it has excluded, then the promise and lessons of surrealist architecture in our late modern world is an urgent concern.

This anthology is organized topically, not necessarily chronologically. The first section addresses the possibilities of architectural thought and practice in the primary sources of surrealism, beginning with Krzysztof Fijalkowski’s insightful examination of the domestic spaces in the lives of the surrealists. Gray Read turns to Aragon’s writings to contrast the role of light and darkness between theater and the city. The meanings of the autobiographical spaces of Joseph Cornell are Dickran Tashjian’s contribution. Bryan Dolin looks at the spatial paintings of Latin American surrealist (and former architect) Matta, followed by Silvano Levy’s examination of Magritte’s transformation of Albertian space in the works of British surrealist Conroy Maddox. This section concludes with Spyros Papapetros’s theories of the history and potential of the organic to challenge the fundamentals of architecture from Dalí.

Within modern architecture lies a secret history of surrealist thought, and differential efforts towards this project form the second section of this anthology. A revised version of Alexander Gorlin's seminal essay on the surrealist imagery in the works of Le Corbusier is reprinted here, as is Nadir Lahiji's sustained examination of Bataille's influence upon Corbusier. Surrealist thought in the speculative biotechnical architecture proposed by Kiesler is the topic of Stephen Phillips's chapter. Two Italian villas, the "il Girasole" and the Casa Malaparte are explored by Lewis.Tsurumaki.Lewis and Jacqueline Gargus, respectively.

Paris was the urban tableaux for the surrealist experiment, and the third group of essays establish the question of surrealist space as an urban necessity. David Pinder's chapter clarifies the dialogue of surrealism and modernity in the urban contexts of Le Corbusier's thinking, while Raymond Spiteri's text examines the role of monuments in the surrealist critique of the city's symbolic function. Urban projections in Paris of recent surrealists are examined by Jill Fenton. Fernando Magallanes provides a seminal essay in the emergent field of surrealist landscape studies, and Richard J. Williams critiques the surrealist intentions and effects in Niemeyer's built Brasília. The section concludes with a provocative intellectual history of surrealist architecture and urbanism through the contemporary by Michael Stone-Richards.

The final section addresses surrealism in contemporary architectural theory and practice. Jean La Marche documents a pedagogy informed by surrealism, Kari Jormakka situates Tschumi's early advertisements for architecture within a broad intellectual project, and James Williamson offers insights into the influential practices of the late John Hejduk.

Like the discipline of architecture itself, this anthology is incomplete. There are a great many voices that could not be included, and by necessity the work has been limited to English-language scholars. The surrealist tendency in modern and contemporary architecture can also be found in certain practices of Latin America, Japan, and Central Europe not specifically addressed in this anthology. Significant advancements in understanding the possibility of an architecture that engages the creative processes and provocative effects of surrealism are still unwritten. Within each chapter are multiple approaches for rethinking the conventions of architectural thought and practice. Each of the essays included are independently clear; in their entirety they are an "open work" containing multiple interpretations, methodologies, and topics that resonate or compete, pointing toward further inquiries. Surrealism in architecture is incomplete – even now, new strategies for architectural design and analysis, an architecture of desire, and erotics of architecture are being developed as a pursuit of meaning in architecture.

## Notes

- 1 For a description of the sacrificial tropology of classical temples, see G. Hersey, *The Lost Meaning of Classical Architecture*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988.
- 2 This psychoanalytic anaclitic model is transposed from the discussion of repetition and desire contra mere satisfaction in R. Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993, p. 140.
- 3 Modern architecture textbooks here include, but are not limited to, the influential L. Benelovo, *History of Modern Architecture* (vol. 2, trans. Bary Bergdoll), Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977; V. Lampugnani, *Encyclopedia of 20th Century Architecture*, New York: Abrams, 1986; M. Tafuri and F. Dal Co. *Modern Architecture* (vols. 1–2, trans. Robert Wolf), New York: Rizzoli, 1976; K. Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1985; and H. Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999.
- 4 Though there have been isolated essays, lectures, and footnotes in the area of architecture and surrealism, the most influential English-language text remains the out-of-print D. Veseley (ed.) *AD: Architectural Design*, vol. 48, no. 23, London 1978.
- 5 J. Mundy (ed.) *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*, New York: Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 13.
- 6 A. Breton, in C. Poling, *Surrealist Vision and Technique*, Atlanta: Emory University, 1996, p. 65.
- 7 A. Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (trans. R. Seaver and H. Lane), Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1972, pp. 274–278.
- 8 Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 26.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 See J. Chénieux-Gendron, *Surrealism* (trans. Vivian Folkenflik), New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 55.
- 11 A. Breton, “Surrealist Situation of the Object,” in Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 259.
- 12 V. Shlovsky, “Art as Technique,” in L. T. Lemon and M. J. Ries (eds) *Russian Formalist Criticism*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965, p. 12.
- 13 F. Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972, p. 52.
- 14 A. Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992, p. 11.
- 15 Dalí, writing in 1930, cited in Breton, “Surrealist Situation of the Object,” in Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 261.
- 16 This association is described in K. Frampton, *Le Corbusier*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001, p. 204.
- 17 Ibid., p. 65.
- 18 See, for example, Le Corbusier’s terrace of the De Beistegui penthouse, Paris, 1930–1, in Alexander Gorlin’s “The Ghost in the Machine,” included in this anthology, and C. Rowe and F. Koetter, *Collage City*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978, p. 141, where this space is used to illustrate Le Corbusier’s adoption of (cubist) collage in architecture, though its visual effect obviously operates closer to surrealist practices.
- 19 J. Cocteau, “Opéra,” cited in de Chirico, “Statues, Furniture, and Generals,” in G. de Chirico, *Hebdomeros*, Cambridge, Mass.: Exact Change, 1992, p. 246.
- 20 De Chirico later adds: “pieces of furniture abandoned in the wild are innocence, tenderness, sweetness amidst blind and destructive forces,” in G. de Chirico, “Statues, Furniture, and Generals,” p. 246.
- 21 Breton includes the ready-made, the weathered object, found object, interpreted found



object, surrealist object proper in his essay "The Crisis of the Object," in P. Waldberg, *Surrealism*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1965, p. 86, though he here omits the category he participated in directly: the poem-object.

- 22 Dalí, in Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, p. 274.
- 23 Breton, "Crisis of the Object," in Waldberg, *Surrealism*, p. 86.
- 24 See T. Mical, "The Origins of Architecture, after de Chirico," in *Art History*, London: vol. 26, no. 1, February 2003, pp. 78–99.
- 25 Krauss, *Optical Unconscious*, pp. 54 and 57. H. Foster in *Compulsive Beauty*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993, p. 81, sees this as a primal scene, where "its contradictory scale, anxious perspective, and mad juxtaposition" are inherited from de Chirico, where "in the construction of the scene that the trauma is created, the charge released in the subject, the *punctum* is inscribed in the viewer . . ."
- 26 A. Breton, preface to the Max Ernst Exhibit, Paris, May 1921, quoted in D. Ades, *Photomontage*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1976, p. 115.
- 27 M. Hays, *Modernism and the Posthumanist Subject: The Architecture of Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992, p. iv.
- 28 D. Lomas, *The Haunted Self: Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, Subjectivity*, New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 203. The citation neatly describes the necessity of rendering surrealist and psychoanalytic subjectivity as a mutable dialogical space.

## Chapter 2

# 'Un salon au fond d'un lac'

## The domestic spaces of surrealism

*Krzysztof Fijałkowski*

It is only to be expected that today's commentators, historians and curators of surrealism should attend above all to the movement's public face. After all, it is through its books and magazines, exhibitions, café meetings and public demonstrations that the surrealist movement has addressed its audiences, and through adopting radical and active group positions that it has presented itself as a current of social as well as cultural thought. What seems most relevant, then, about André Breton's often cited 'simplest surrealist act' – 'to go down into the street, revolvers in hand' – is precisely the call to leave the safety of one's private space and embrace the thrill of the public world.<sup>1</sup>

An inevitable result of this emphasis is that surrealism's domestic environments – the physical spaces in which surrealists have resided, worked and played – and in consequence a cornerstone of the lived experience of surrealism's day-to-day engagement with architectural space, have been overlooked or at best seen in static terms as simply a fascinating but essentially 'given' decor around individuals and events. Material culture approaches to the domestic environment, however, suggest ways in which the look and contents of a home present dynamics that are altogether more

complex and revealing; as Daniel Miller has proposed, for example, domestic space can be seen as 'both a site of agency and a site of mobility, rather than simply a kind of symbolic system that acts as the backdrop or blueprint for practice and agency'.<sup>2</sup>

More surprising, perhaps, is the way in which critical reflections on the dialogues and encounters between surrealism and architecture have also tended to overlook this lived domestic experience as a potentially fruitful starting point. When recent writings have discussed the theorization or representation of architectural space by surrealists of the inter-war years, they have generally emphasized an express opposition to dominant trends in Modernist architecture, and drawn attention both to the movement's advocacy of counter-Modernist trends (notably Art Nouveau buildings and *art brut* structures like the Facteur Cheval's Palais idéal) and to its calls during the 1930s for architectural but largely imaginary spaces embodying myth, unconscious meaning and the uncanny.<sup>3</sup> In consequence this approach has had the effect of presenting surrealism's engagement with architectural space in often simplified, homogeneous and imaginative terms, as a kind of draft project left for others to complete. In refocusing here on surrealists' actual domestic environments (in this case concentrating reluctantly on just the 1920s and 1930s), the intention is to argue that from this perspective surrealism's relationship to architecture is more complex and various than at first appears, to identify a number of key trends in these spaces, and in particular to examine the idea of the surrealist 'home' as a physical term in the dialectics of public versus private action that remain central to surrealism's social commitment.

A discussion of the fabric and appearance of surrealist domestic spaces, however, reveals a number of problems that might make the notion of the surrealist home of dubious value. First and foremost, these are considerations which would appear so far down the list of priorities of a politicized collective movement that its participants would be expected to reject its relevance vigorously; certainly, it would be entirely misleading to suggest that there has ever been a deliberate surrealist 'position' on its chosen domestic spaces (let alone on interior design), and the fact that in the 1930s and 1940s popular notions of a 'surrealist style' arrived precisely from the movement's patrons, imitators and commercial proselytizers makes this a problematic ground for the movement. But just as importantly the very notion of the 'home', with its implications of a repressive stability, a stultifying family environment and a seat for bourgeois morality and politics, would seem to make this a space synonymous with all that surrealism found contemptible. Surrealist writing and imagery repeatedly condemns the idea of the (bourgeois) home as an odious, venomous or ideologically saturated space: the place where outrages against the Papin sisters or Violette Nozières could be

committed in secret; the place that Fantômas should righteously ransack. Breton, just one of a number of the founding surrealists whose early home lives had been less than idyllic, would write in 1949: 'Personally I must pay homage to those rare works driven by that subversion which alone can measure up to individual resistance against general domestication'<sup>4</sup> – and this distrust of the domestic can be traced everywhere from the Chinese box of the apartment in *Un Chien andalou* to the frenzied theatre of the nursery in contemporary Czech surrealist Jan Švankmajer's animation of *Jabberwocky*.

The reverse of this coin, however, is that for surrealists in the 1920s and 1930s, the domestic interiors of their turn of the century childhoods could also be the fading scenery of the alluring, the exotic and the uncanny. Max Ernst's collage novel cycles like *Une Semaine de bonté* played out their fantasies in these outdated rooms, while Michel Leiris could later evoke with great fondness the childhood home as a lost place of wonder and enchantment.<sup>5</sup> Walter Benjamin repeatedly points to the implicit and explicit affinities between surrealism and the nineteenth century's 'dreamy epoch of bad taste' in interior design, 'wholly adapted to the dream', highlighting the latter's vogues for the collecting of ephemera and exotica, of bizarre decor and furniture, and of its strange reversals of private and public space. Benjamin reads surrealism specifically as a glimpse of the ruins of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, those of a vanished epoch that more than ever exalted in self-protective dwelling,<sup>6</sup> and for all of its rejection of the domestic and its longing for the exotic and the other, surrealism must also be seen as a search for a rootedness through wandering, of new places through the revolt against order, of the *heimlich* in the *unheimlich*. The privileged figure for this home, for Breton, is the castle, a 'palace of the imagination' that is repeatedly invoked, along with a longing for this utopian space to become real; a deliberately social space (as opposed to the private space of the bourgeois family unit) in which to gather all those friends of common intent and from whose bastioned heights the prospects could be scanned. Actual surrealist spaces, too, appealed to this desire for a place in which one might both dwell *and* survey: Breton was to describe his Gradiva gallery, for instance, as

a dream of a space as small as you like, but from which one could see without leaning out the greatest, the most daring constructions under way in people's heads, of a place from which one might overcome that retrospective viewpoint we are accustomed to adopt for true creation.<sup>7</sup>

Small wonder, then, that surrealism of the 1920s and 1930s could find little

to approve of in the modernizing debates within contemporary architecture and decorative arts (though we will see later that this might not be quite the blanket rejection one expects). The founding years of the Paris group were also the period of increasing popularity of the new styles in European and especially French interior design, culminating in the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs of 1925. Issue 5 of *La Révolution surréaliste* contained a sarcastic critique of the exhibition by Louis Aragon, who lamented its 'desert of walls' built to the rhythms of factories and hangars, and noted how the new spirit of Deco design – whose public was meant to be seduced by its elegance and rich finish – in fact measured everything solely by utility; here, he argued, one found the financial sense of the word 'modern': to get rid of art since it isn't useful unless it goes with the décor.<sup>8</sup> When the functional subtext of Art Deco became the explicit rationale of Modernist architecture, Surrealists would apparently have little but contempt for such notions of progressive design. Le Corbusier in particular appears as a *bête noir* for the Paris group, held as an arch-rationalist antithesis of surrealism's call for a poetic, inward creative drive by Breton who was to follow Hegel in labelling architecture as the most elementary art form and boast of the revenge of the 'irrationally wavy' walls of the Swiss Pavilion.<sup>9</sup> Painter André Masson's views were more forthright:

I will always hate the horrors of the 'industrial age' and the hideous claims of all those mechanics, from the inventor of the death ray to Mr. Le Corbusier who dreams of getting the whole human race (or what's left of it after his learned colleague) to live in a columbarium (a pigeon hole for everyone).<sup>10</sup>

One thing likely to have irked the Paris surrealists in the architecture and interior design of these trends was their emphasis on the reduction or suppression of decoration and ornament – the very elements of buildings and their furnishings that would most interest someone like Salvador Dalí. Popularizing French magazines of the mid-1920s such as *L'Art vivant*, for instance, carried, alongside articles on contemporary painting and architecture, some forthright advice on new furnishing and decoration styles, and its regular feature on 'Modern Living' exhorted its readers to make a clean sweep of the fussy trappings of the nineteenth century:

Don't hesitate to get rid of those adventitious ornaments. They're ugly, they're good for nothing, not even as decoration, and they prevent you from the means of a simple, sober décor, which goes best with modern practice.<sup>11</sup>

2.1

**André Breton's  
studio, 42 rue  
Fontaine, 1980s**

Photo Dawn Ades



Equally under suspicion, however, were the apparently elitist positions supported by the new spirit in design; the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs promoted its aesthetic through presenting models for the homes of wealthy and fashionable society figures, and in France the vast majority of finished examples of Modernist architecture were luxurious private rather than social projects. Whilst it may be debatable to what extent Parisian surrealists of the period could genuinely focus on social issues, what is relevant here is the sense in which surrealist appropriation of lived space aimed to inhabit not the private sphere as such but the dialectic between the personal and the collective, and the complex to and fro between the closed/occulted and the public/exhibited politics, spaces and actions that formed the hub of French surrealism's problem of the inter-war years.

The defining example of a surrealist home, both in its appearance and its articulation of this tension between private and public space, is the apartment at 42 rue Fontaine that was home to the movement's guiding spirit André Breton (Figure 2.1). In fact, Breton occupied not one but two addresses here, moving in to a top floor studio on 1 January 1922 not long after his wedding to Simone Kahn, and then to more spacious quarters on the floor below in 1946; but his presence in this building for over forty years clearly signals a sense of rootedness and elective location. As an archetypal surrealist interior, crammed with his collections of artworks, objects and books, Breton's home appears as an extraordinary combination of *Wunderkammer*, alchemist's lair and archive. The effect on the visitor was powerful (as the present writer can attest), and among those who grew to know it a myth developed of an

enchanted, magnetized space. Jean-Louis Bédouin, for example, explained his first visit there 'as if the adolescent I was then had crossed a threshold of initiation, beyond which the world one could actually live in began'.<sup>12</sup>

The furnishings in the apartment appear to have been simple, unmatched and probably second-hand, with textiles tending to be cosy but straightforward non-western fabrics and rugs, and walls washed a uniform dusty neutral shade; all of these practical details were, of course, all but invisible behind the myriad objects and artworks around them. Thus the background style of Breton's home, evolving gradually over nearly half a century, certainly bore little resemblance to the fashions of interior design being promoted and popularized in France over the 1920s and 1930s, whether Art Deco chic or glass and steel modern. Far more influential in its appearance and its belvedere qualities would have been the top-floor flat on the boulevard St Germain belonging to Guillaume Apollinaire, where Breton had been a regular visitor until the poet's death in 1918:

The apartment was tiny, but had a dangerous twist: one had to thread one's way between furniture laden with African and oceanic fetishes, mixed up with strange objects and the shelves on which the piles of books with their old yellow covers resembled, as he put it, 'mounds of butter'. [...] On the walls, which were fairly low, the paintings hung almost without interruption were so many vistas onto exotic or unknown worlds.<sup>13</sup>

Interiors combining crowded collections, unexpected objects and the outlook of an intellectual environment were not rare in Europe between the wars – Breton's visit to Freud's apartment for instance, where one guesses he would have seen Freud's study, was made only a couple of months before moving into rue Fontaine – but they were becoming both unfashionable and unusual. Such models for the home seem consigned rather to the vanishing interiors of the nineteenth century, those that for Benjamin represent an all-encasing carapace, one that

bears the impression of its occupant. In the most extreme instance, the dwelling becomes a shell. The nineteenth century, like no other century, was addicted to dwelling. It conceived the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it encased him with all his appurtenances . . .<sup>14</sup>

It might be pointed out that this desire for a home space for the Breton couple was not necessarily the norm among their friends and colleagues

at the time. Many of those participating in Paris Dada and early surrealism lived much less stable lives in hotel rooms (as indeed Breton had done for some time before), and several continued to live in hotels for many years to come. But certainly the rue Fontaine studio bears all the hallmarks of a lair secreted around its occupant to the point where dwelling and dweller seem inseparable, one that might shelter the poet from the outside world and nurture his projects. Julien Gracq for one emphasized this small, closed and secretive aspect in describing its rooms as dark and crammed with objects, and by 1947 a notice on the door dissuaded the casual caller with the message: 'Visitors by appointment only; no interviews'.<sup>15</sup> But this rather sombre picture misrepresents the reality of Breton's home. For one thing, the larger second studio was far from being a small space, and by Parisian standards the main room in particular felt relatively spacious; above all, though few contemporary photographs reflect this clearly, one whole wall was dominated by enormous north-facing studio windows, allowing a generous amount of light and air helped by the height above the boulevard de Clichy below. So if this is a shell, it is one that faces the street, high out of reach but open literally and metaphorically onto the world in a manner less suggestive of the transparency of glazed Modernist architecture or of Foucauldian controlling vision than as a series of revelations and positions from which to see, be seen and make visible. It is in this sense, then, that Breton might be seen to really inhabit the apparently idealized 'maison de verre' he describes in *Nadja*, a space in which opacity might be banished for clarity and where it is not the occupant's security but his identity that is at stake:

As for myself, I'll continue to inhabit my house of glass, from where I'll always be able to see who is coming to see me, and where everything is hung from the ceilings and walls as if by magic [...] where sooner or later *who I am* will be revealed.<sup>16</sup>

Breton's choice of the location visible from this window, of course, was far from random. Just off the place Blanche and the busy boulevards skirting the butte Montmartre from the place de Clichy, rue Fontaine could be both close to cafés and studios (the daily surrealist café would be held for many years at the Cyrano just a step away, and several surrealist artists had studios nearby) yet still be in a district that had not entirely succumbed to fashionable *tout-Paris* (or to the bohemian pretensions of Montparnasse): still in essence a working-class district with local atmosphere and colour (in particular the fabled hidden pleasures of its night life). Every year the boulevard right below Breton's window would host street fairs, as though an Apollinaire poem had come to life, where

from the Boulevard Clichy, the *fête foraine* throws out the smell of waffles and candyfloss, of acetylene and lions in cages mingled



with that of spent firecrackers and of undercooked sauerkraut from the ample worker's canteen.<sup>17</sup>

Rue Fontaine, then, could be read as a potentially fertile location for relationships between work and play, the social and the personal, and it is in particular as a working environment that Breton's home should also be appreciated. In Walter Benjamin's reading of the nineteenth-century interior it was the gradual alienation of the bourgeoisie from its workplace that led to the emergence of the private home.<sup>18</sup> A surrealist home like Breton's, on the other hand, could be seen to recast this process through its status as a place of unalienated work. Habitually referred to as a 'studio' or an *atelier* – Agnes de la Beaumelle calls it a 'construction site' and 'the real "factory" of surrealism' – Breton's apartment was above all a place in which to think and write, but it was also a space for both serious and more relaxed collective activity.<sup>19</sup> After the daily café meetings, group members would frequently accompany Breton home to prolong the evening with discussions, editorial and planning sessions, games and experiments, and a number of significant group events, such as the trance experiences of the *époque des sommeils* or the Dalí 'trial' of February 1934, took place here. Like a number of other surrealist homes, rue Fontaine thus functions very much as a social space; and it was also, of course, one not inhabited by Breton alone but shared with his partners, who must also all have had a hand in shaping its look and contents.<sup>20</sup>

Most spectacularly, though, the apartment was also home to the accumulation and installation of Breton's legendary collections, a living museum of objects that would have spoken eloquently to their keeper of memories and encounters, places and journeys, of friendship and love; in a sense, rue Fontaine is built of these objects just as the Facteur Cheval's Palais idéal was constructed from its accidental accretion of stones. In contrast to the look of a museum or archive, or of most nineteenth-century collectors' homes, however, these displays strike the viewer above all for the extraordinarily complex way in which categories and distinctions between types of objects are blurred and ignored. The wall facing the door to the main room, frequently reproduced in photographs and now partially recreated in the Centre Pompidou, is particularly rich in these confrontations: geological specimens gather dust under Giacometti's *Suspended Ball*; a wooden New Guinea korvar statue sits staring at a painting by Toyen; a jawbone lies by a Tibetan bronze; a photograph of Elisa hangs at the epicentre of intricate stepped shelves laden with things.<sup>21</sup> Less frequently photographed were the adjoining and opposite walls, where shelf upon shelf of books placed Breton's library in direct contact with the other collections, and it is clear that the worth of these ensembles lay not simply in their discrete systems of

order and value but in the complex and subtle relationships between images, objects and ideas as each painting, flea-market find and bound volume spoke to its neighbours and its owner. Breton seems to have appreciated the space of his collections above all as a privileged place for reflection and reverie on their account, writing for example of his oceanic objects that

personally I often feel the need to return to them, to wake up looking at them, to hold them in my hands, to talk to them, to accompany them back to the places they came from so as to reconcile myself with the places I am now.<sup>22</sup>

A significant purpose of Breton's home was thus to shelter a physical and intellectual collection of objects whose prime function was to locate the self within the wider world outside. The status of these collections as poetic rather than archival or taxonomic encounters was further enhanced by the inevitable shifts and rearrangements of their display, open to the dynamics of change and accident. Even the progression of an object into the collection could be subject to such forces, and Bédouin describes how on a typical occasion with a newly acquired New Guinea sculpture Breton 'had "walked it around" for a few days, from a shelf to a table, from one corner of the studio to the other, looking for the inevitable place that was destined for it'.<sup>23</sup> With books, objects and artworks received and donated, bought and sold, each one a messenger from another person, the incessant trade between the interior and the outside world was thus expressed through the studio's objects as well as its visitors.

While the studio at 42 rue Fontaine was clearly the exemplary surrealist interior, to be echoed in many other locations over the years, its style and aesthetic was by no means the only model for the surrealist home. In particular, the popular image of a 'surrealist interior design', one drawing on wildly disparate sources and dramatic fantasies, was probably far more intriguing to the wider public than Breton's initiates' *eyrie*. The origins of this fantasy style might be traced in particular to the legendary shared house at 54 rue du Château in Montparnasse, home to surrealist group members such as Yves Tanguy, Marcel Duhamel, Jacques Prévert and Georges Sadoul during the second half of the 1920s. André Thirion, a frequent guest and later occupant of the house, has described the premises at length, with its green-painted furniture placed incongruously out in the yard, its walls hung with unbleached canvases framed with sticks or else plastered with film posters, the mottled linoleum floor strewn in one corner with black leather mattresses, and its copious collections of records, books, strange objects and stolen shop signs (the latter also visible in a Man Ray photograph reproduced in Thirion's book showing a lavatory hung with posters and

with a crucifix for a chain-pull). As a kind of alternative headquarters for collective surrealist activity, the rue du Château household was well known for its contrasts to the rue Fontaine, in particular in its eclectic tastes in popular culture. But that its inhabitants were not insensitive to contemporary interior design issues, albeit in a highly unorthodox manner, is implied by Thirion's account, which for example describes a sumptuously comfortable bedroom hung with jazzy wallpaper by Jean Lurçat and alabaster lamps by Pierre Chareau, two leading figures in Deco applied arts.<sup>24</sup>

By the late 1930s, surrealist exhibition installations (themselves ambiguously domestic spaces where surrealist furniture lurked among incongruous evocations of natural or urban environments) offered their public a chance to see for themselves just how effective the surrealist transformation of interior space might be. The arch promoter of this spectacular and highly influential 'fantasy surrealist' style, upon which much of the discussion of the encounters between surrealism and architecture has been based, was of course Salvador Dalí. A vociferous supporter of Art Nouveau architecture and design, and famous for his extravagant lifestyle in the flamboyant theatre of his home in Port Lligat, for example, Dalí's widely promoted tastes were clearly an influence on well-known eccentric homes like those of the collector Edward James, as well as on the style of other mass-market showcases such as fashion magazines and the cinema. It might be argued, however, that this apparent trend in surrealist interior design was not at all reflective of actual surrealist homes (just as surrealists only rarely actually used the surrealist furniture they designed). Even in Dalí's case, given that most of the expansion of his Port Lligat house came in the decades after the war, and that Dalí and Gala did not move into their first Parisian flat that really echoed the baroque atmospheres and exotic fauna of his painting until late 1937, the fruition of this style can be placed during and after his divergence from the Parisian surrealist group, after which time the latter insisted that Dalí's interests could no longer be classified as authentically surrealist.<sup>25</sup> In fact, descriptions and images of the Dalí couple's home from July 1932 near the parc Montsouris, at 7 rue Gauguier (a newly built Modernist building), indicate an interior which, far from reflecting 'fantasy' tendencies, suggests a pared-down elegance consistent with progressive early 1930s design, with minimal furniture and décor. Henri Pastoureaux, a regular participant in 'factional' meetings here along with Roger Caillois, Jules Monnerot and Étienne Léry in the winter of 1932–33, remembers a drawing room that was 'enormous, furnished in a modern manner with no discernible influence from Dalí', and Brassai's photograph from this period shows Dalí and Gala posing in a bright, rather bare and open interior decorated with a few carefully chosen objects and paintings, and simple tubular steel furniture.<sup>26</sup>

More recent commentators on surrealism's contributions to architectural debate, such as Anthony Vidler, have concentrated in particular on articles contributed by Dalí and others during the 1930s to the luxurious journal *Minotaure*, with the implicit possibility that their ideas might suggest blueprints for actual building design. But given that in the early and mid-1930s, Dalí was living in a home that reflected many of the values of contemporary Modernism, his writings on architecture and design published in *Minotaure* and elsewhere take on a rather different value – one that explored the notion of unconscious or irrational readings of architectural space but without necessarily wishing to imagine these as rationalizable models for real built environments – and this same ambiguity may be discerned in a number of the key *Minotaure* articles in question. Dalí's promotion of Art Nouveau design in 'On the Terrifying and Edible Beauty of Art Nouveau Architecture', in particular the buildings of Gaudí, drew attention to elements of its 'terrifying and sublime ornamental' nature. But Dalí, wishing both to rescue a by-now outmoded style from its popular reception and at the same time refuse its appropriation by modernist design, emphasized the essentially inexplicable morphology of its appearance, and insisted that this was not a question of simply replacing 'the "right angle" and "golden section" formula with the convulsive-undulating formula [which] can ultimately only produce an aesthetic that is just as miserable as the last, even if the change might be temporarily less boring'.<sup>27</sup> The 'delirious concrete' of Art Nouveau is thus an irrational upsurge from the past, not a project for the future.

Other surrealists too contributed to this forum, notably the painter Roberto Matta who had graduated in architecture from Santiago University and gone on to become a successful interior designer, before moving to Europe where he was to work with Gropius and Le Corbusier (for whom he produced drawings for the Ville Radieuse).<sup>28</sup> The spring 1938 issue of *Minotaure* published Matta's *projet-maquette* for an apartment in which an unorthodox use of materials and space would introduce eroticism and inter-uterine motivations into a home that could 'push forcefully [its] inhabitant into the centre of the ultimate theatre where he becomes everything, its argument and actor, the stage and this silo in which he can live in silence among its rags'.<sup>29</sup> Once again, the exchange between inside and outside was a primary feature of this dwelling, for as Matta was to say of it later:

A house must function like a heart, with a systole and a diastole, outside and inside. You must recharge your batteries at home, and in the street as well. This is one of the principal ideas of *Mathématique sensible*, the politico-economic significance of this energy.<sup>30</sup>

As a former employee in Corbusier's office – and it's tempting to read the *projet-maquette* as a feminizing riposte to Modernist architecture's paternalistic values – Matta can be assumed to be fully aware of both the feasibility of his idea and the status of a 'project-model' as a conceptual step on the path to a real building. But despite the repeated references to space in general and architectural space in particular throughout his paintings and writings, there seems to be little to suggest that these are envisioned as literal construction blueprints; what we do know, however, is that by the end of the previous summer, having been thrown out after living on the drawing-room sofa in the apartment of a wealthy friend, Matta had been obliged to find a *pension* with no money and just a suitcase of possessions, an ejection from the bourgeois home that might well make one dream of an idealized and all-nurturing space.<sup>31</sup>

A third key article referring to architecture in *Minotaure* was Tristan Tzara's 'On a Certain Automatism of Taste' of 1933. As several commentators have pointed out, Tzara's discussion of the unconscious motivations of taste includes an appeal (prefiguring Matta's project) for a rounded, irregular inter-uterine architecture reminiscent of a cave or a yurt, and insists that '“modern” architecture, as hygienic and bereft of ornament as it wishes to appear, has no chance of surviving [...] since it is the total negation of the image of the dwelling'.<sup>32</sup> What seems astonishing, however, is that at the time of writing these lines Tzara should be living in a domestic space that in many ways embodied the very antithesis of this philosophy. A short walk up the hill from rue Fontaine, Tzara's house on avenue Junot had been commissioned by him from the architect Adolf Loos in 1925 and completed in 1926 (Figure 2.2). The two men knew each other well, having met in Zurich (Kenneth Frampton suggests that Tzara was instrumental in Loos's move to Paris in 1923), and it would appear that the house was designed in close collaboration.<sup>33</sup> The house is an important one in Loos's *œuvre*, but architectural historians have tended to see Tzara as a Dadaist, inviting somewhat slender connections between the building and Dada ideas. In fact, despite the well-known rupture between Tzara and the former Dadaists around Breton, the former had always maintained contacts with surrealist group members (notably René Crevel), and was reconciled with Breton in 1928; by 1929, Tzara was a key member of the surrealist group and would remain so until 1935 (longer, then, than the duration of Paris Dada), residing at avenue Junot throughout, so that his occupancy of this classic of Modernist architecture should really be read in the context of surrealism rather than that of Dada.

It is true, of course, that Loos's position in the history of Modernist architecture is ambiguous, and the Tzara house cannot be read as a straightforward contradiction of surrealism's position on Modernist building



2.2  
**Interior, Tristan  
Tzara's house,  
c.1930**

design. Often seen as a forerunner of functionalism, it is perhaps Loos's espousal of abstraction and simplification, in particular the famous 1908 essay 'Ornament and Crime' in which he argues for the removal of ornament as the crowning proof of cultural evolution, that best places him as a precursor for architects such as Le Corbusier; but critics have also stressed the ways in which his buildings could embody the irrational, using contrast, play and surprise within symmetry to exercise rationality while simultaneously breaking its rules. The apparent austerity of Loos's houses stemmed from his belief that 'use determines the forms of civilized life, the shape of objects', part of his determination to sweep away the bourgeois domestic clutter of nineteenth century and Jugendstil interiors<sup>34</sup> – qualities unlikely to endear his work to a surrealist audience. But Loos also conceived a house as a protective shell, one that should say as little as possible on the outside and hide its secrets within: for him the home was a protective shelter for the psyche that balanced the private and public and allowed dwelling in the modern age, and in 1930 Tzara was to pay homage to Loos's determination to attain 'a human possibility of clarity, within the hub of social activity'.<sup>35</sup> The Tzara house in particular, with its sternly symmetrical rectangular elevation, hides a play of rooms and unexpected spaces that Benedetto Gravagnuolo