



FORMATION DE L'OPTIQUE MODERNE

REPÉRIAGE

III

*La vie moderne avec son machinisme a perfectionné notre œil.
L'esprit lui-même, par conséquence directe, a développé son goût
de la parfaite ordonnance.*

*Nos sens et notre esprit sont devenus plus exigeants. Ils exigent
un art intense de précision.*



‘Complications and Attacks on the Beauty of Unity’: Le Corbusier and Louis Soutter

Krzysztof Fijalkowski

1 The work and ideas of Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, 1887–1965) continue
2 to polarize opinion. Commonly considered the most influential architect of the
3 twentieth century, his legacy extends to fields such as town planning, product and
4 interior design, painting, graphics and above all theoretical writing. Yet in all of these
5 his reception has been divided between those who see in him the arch rationalist, an
6 avatar of mechanized mass culture and a figurehead for high modernism’s toughest
7 functional and constructive aesthetics, and those who read him instead as imbued
8 with a more ‘artistic’ and visionary sensibility, a poet of the applied arts, even a latent
9 surrealist – with all the appeal to the irrational and anti-cultural the latter assertion
10 might imply.¹ These apparently contradictory strains are already signposted in Le
11 Corbusier’s series of innovative and influential early writings published during the
12 1920s – it was arguably on these rather than his completed buildings that his initial
13 reputation rested – in which an ambitious polemic on art, architecture and design
14 is presented in a signature graphic format combining a distinctive use of text, image
15 and typography. Largely based on articles first presented in the journal *L’Esprit Nouveau*,
16 edited by Le Corbusier and the painter and theorist Amédée Ozenfant between 1920
17 and 1925 and the principal organ for their purist art movement, books such as *Vers une*
18 *architecture (Towards a New Architecture)* or *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui (The Decorative Arts of Today)*
19 laid out a vigorous and deliberately provocative argument for a progressive aesthetic
20 that would reconfigure the roles and relationships of art, architecture and design,
21 stripped of all artifice to reveal objects, images, homes and environments fit for life in
22 a machine age. Written and published in Paris more or less contemporaneously with
23 the Parisian dada group and the founding of the surrealist movement, the polarity of
24 European high modernism seems clearly activated by mid-decade: logic against the
25 absurd, purity against the unconscious, social cohesion against its others, whitewash
26 and concrete against poems.

27 But of all the responses to the challenge of Le Corbusier’s writings, among the
28 most surprising and least known, certainly the most moving and hardest won, are
29 kept in a modest cardboard box in the archives of the Fondation Le Corbusier in
30 Paris; they are the work of the architect’s own cousin Louis Soutter (1871–1942),
31 an ‘outsider’ artist whose entire mature career was spent in an institutionalized
32 environment against his stated will. Three of Le Corbusier’s books, bound together
33 in two volumes, have been painstakingly and completely covered in an extraordinary
34 series of ink drawings – not so much a work of illustration (after all these books are
35 already illustrated with printed photographs and drawings) as colonizations, even

**Detail from Louis Soutter,
untitled, c. 1931. Ink drawing
on page 60 of Amédée
Ozenfant and Charles-
Édouard Jeanneret, *La
Peinture moderne*, Paris:
Éditions Crès, 1925 (plate 8).**

DOI:
10.1111/1467-8365.12262
Art History | ISSN 0141-6790
XX | X | Month XXXX | pages
XX-XX

détournements of the publications as both arguments and material objects. These unique books, with their divergent intellectual systems driven in complex and ambivalent ways by their text/image tensions, bear witness to one of the more unexpected encounters of European modernism, and might be read as a key to triangulate the relative positions of the latter's apparently opposing markers, so as to test what happens when against expectation they happen to meet. At first glance, two mutually exclusive sensibilities appear to have collided, one powered by a sophisticated logic, the other by a destabilized subjectivity. But which one is which?

The books in question are *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (the major focus here) and Le Corbusier's and Ozenfant's *La Peinture moderne*, bound together in one volume under the title *1925 Expo. Arts Déco.*, and a slightly later work *Une maison – un palais* of 1928; their modification is dated by Michel Thévoz, Soutter's most important biographer and commentator, at 1931, a contention supported by the dossier of correspondence between the cousins also held in the Fondation archive.² Both the books and the relationship to which they testify have been cited and in some cases discussed at some length in the literature on Soutter, though until recently access to the books' content has been largely limited to print reproductions rather than public exhibition of the objects themselves; but the extensive studies devoted to Le Corbusier, in contrast, have scarcely commented on them, despite Le Corbusier devoting an article to the artist in 1936 and reproducing an image from the books in a special issue of *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* in 1948.³

In several ways, and given the far wider appreciation of the work and ideas of Le Corbusier (driven in part by his flair for self-promotion), it is Soutter who will always remain the hidden correspondent in this exchange. Indeed, in contrast to the broad shadow cast by Le Corbusier's reputation across a range of disciplines, the place of Louis Soutter within the canon is unstable and contested in several ways. Born in Morges near Lausanne, the young Soutter showed signs of brilliant promise, rejecting early studies in architecture in Geneva and Zurich in order to study the violin in Brussels, a discipline to which he would return professionally throughout later decades but which vied for prominence with his other considerable gift for painting and drawing, studied next in Switzerland and Paris.⁴ Married to an American from a wealthy background, Soutter emigrated to the United States and by 1898 was Head of Fine Art at Colorado College, Colorado Springs. A successful if unremarkable career built around his ability as a talented but rather conservatively academic painter seemed in prospect, but over the coming years Soutter's health began to deteriorate. According to Thévoz, this very promise of success acted as a trigger in the face of the artist's overwhelming feelings of guilt, failure and impotence. Returning to Switzerland in 1904 in a state of nervous and physical collapse, and with his father's death that same year adding to the already morbid, unpredictable and conflictual leanings to which he increasingly became prey, Soutter spent the next decade and a half continuing to work as a musician but displaying ever more eccentric behaviour, accompanied by financial problems and a tendency to withdraw from everyday social interaction, quickly alienating his family and most of his friends. By 1922, his demeanour having become intolerable to his family, Soutter was placed first in a *Maison de Santé* and then the following year in the *Asile de Jura* at Ballaigues, an isolated village some forty kilometres from Lausanne. Though the latter was not, as has sometimes been asserted, a psychiatric asylum but an old people's home, this nevertheless represented an institutionalized environment, experienced by Soutter (who was only in his early fifties) as a miserably confined, controlled regime from which he repeatedly made pleas to be liberated. Even if right from the start of his stay

1 he was allowed access to the village and rambles in the countryside, and later longer
 2 visits to friends as far away as Zurich, it was apparently clear to all concerned (and
 3 presumably at some level to Soutter himself) that he was temperamentally unable to
 4 adapt to independent life outside this home, where he spent the remaining nineteen
 5 years of his life.

6 This history might have been nothing more than one unfortunate case of decline
 7 among many, were it not for the fact that upon admission to the Asile de Jura his
 8 artistic activity suddenly and dramatically flowered into an entirely unprecedented
 9 phase lasting until his death, centred above all on ink drawings executed, to begin
 10 with at least, on any available paper support and produced in their hundreds and
 11 thousands (later extending to paintings made with his fingers rather than a brush).
 12 The academic conventions of his earlier work vanished, the artist abandoning
 13 realistic depictions of genre scenes to embrace instead a dense, teeming and
 14 nervously hatched circus of an interior life that veered from thickly populated
 15 figurative images (often with classical or biblical overtones) to imaginary cities and
 16 extravagant decorative motifs. If, unsurprisingly, the Asile's staff initially declined to
 17 treat this work seriously, over the course of the 1930s a small but growing number of
 18 supporters and collectors came to appreciate and promote Soutter's output (one of the
 19 most vigorous of whom, as we shall see, was Le Corbusier). After his death, however,
 20 it would above all be the interest of Jean Dubuffet and the rise of his notion of art
 21 brut that would guarantee Soutter's reputation, thus categorized first and foremost
 22 as belonging to a strain of unsanctioned, 'raw' artistic production characterized in
 23 particular by the mental welfare of many of its protagonists. If Soutter's work has
 24 most often been presented in the context of art brut and scrutinized for evidence of its
 25 maker's psychiatric condition, however, his place in this classification is problematic:
 26 Soutter's training and successful early career as a professional artist, albeit of an
 27 entirely different water, disqualified him from Dubuffet's eventual revision of his
 28 category of art brut during the 1960s, relegating him to a status halfway between this
 29 and 'cultural art'.⁵ The artist's legacy, then, remains in a kind of taxonomic limbo,
 30 sometimes noted for its prescient anticipation of more recent bodies of work but for
 31 all that seen as an isolated, inwardly facing obsession driven by suffering and cut off
 32 from the currents and culture of his time.⁶

33 It would seem that Le Corbusier first became aware of Soutter's work around 1927,
 34 most probably through his family in Geneva or Ponts-de-Mastel. Soutter's maternal
 35 grandfather was the brother of Le Corbusier's paternal grandfather; Soutter's uncle,
 36 furthermore, was the father of Pierre Jeanneret, Le Corbusier's long-term architectural
 37 collaborator during this period.⁷ Over the next decade an intense if episodic
 38 relationship developed between the two men, notably with Soutter both inviting Le
 39 Corbusier to Ballaigues and offering him hundreds of drawings, some of the finest of
 40 his work. Notwithstanding their family kinship, Le Corbusier could not have failed to
 41 be struck by the distance between the two men's temperaments, ideas and above all
 42 artistic production – indeed his published writing on his cousin begins on precisely
 43 this note. Yet Le Corbusier's admiration for Soutter's drawings, accompanied by a
 44 vigorous campaign to promote and sell them, was sincere and profound, even as it
 45 was also couched in terms that drew attention to their otherness. 'I was dazzled by his
 46 immense and intense work, obsessive and inspiring obsession', he would write in 1960
 47 of their first encounter; of the drawings themselves, he affirmed that he held them to
 48 be 'of capital value' and 'beyond discussion'.⁸ Le Corbusier made strenuous attempts
 49 to interest galleries and collectors in both Europe and America in Soutter – with
 50 some success in the United States, where an exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum,

1 Hartford was the first public showing of the artist's new work – to ease Soutter's pitiful
 2 financial state and encourage his practice, and in particular to write about him for
 3 the prestigious surrealist-leaning art journal *Minotaure*.⁹ Published in autumn 1936,
 4 and in the company of articles by André Breton and Salvador Dalí among others,
 5 'Louis Sutter [sic]: L'Inconnu de la soixantaine' (translatable perhaps as 'The Unknown
 6 Sexagenarian') presented Soutter's life and mature work to an international audience
 7 for the first time, but precisely in terms of the artist's withdrawal from the world at
 8 the end, not the height, of a life. 'Why look outside?', he quotes Soutter as saying;
 9 'Complications and attacks on the beauty of Unity. My drawings have no other claim
 10 than to be unique and born of an idea impregnated with pain.'¹⁰

11 From Soutter's perspective, postcards to his cousin attest not only to his deep
 12 admiration of Le Corbusier, but also to a sustained and informed conversation
 13 about the latter's work and ideas, since they repeatedly allude enthusiastically to Le
 14 Corbusier's writings (as we have seen, Soutter had after all briefly begun a career
 15 in architecture); it was presumably in encouragement of this exchange that Le
 16 Corbusier gave Soutter a number of his publications, several of which Soutter went
 17 on to embellish.¹¹ It had become Soutter's practice to draw in cheap school notebooks
 18 during the 1920s; by the early 1930s (which is when Thévoz dates the book works),
 19 and encouraged by others to take his production more seriously, he began to use
 20 better quality papers,¹² but the decision to draw directly into published books would
 21 seem to have been a survival of his interest in working in this small-scale, sequential
 22 and 'ready-made' format. More than a dozen such works exist, of which three are
 23 made from books by Le Corbusier, and of which five found their way into the Le
 24 Corbusier archive.¹³ At least one (and perhaps all) of these was offered to Le Corbusier
 25 during Soutter's lifetime, since *Une maison – un palais* bears a dedication to him on the
 26 title page, thus closing the loops of an ongoing dialogue that in each case culminated
 27 in a meticulous but destabilized reading of Le Corbusier's books, triggering a surge of
 28 imaginative drawings.

29 What must have attracted Soutter to this idea, however, was that the books
 30 in question were already a sophisticated synthesis of text and image, theory and
 31 practice. Works of the 1920s such as *The Decorative Art of Today* struck their readers as
 32 innovative and challenging publications, in which each essay was accompanied by
 33 a distinctive use of photography as well as drawings (many of them by the architect
 34 himself), engravings and facsimile reproductions to create arguments that operated
 35 on a visual as well as textual plane. Deeply committed to the idea of books as material
 36 objects, Le Corbusier had from early on insisted in executing or controlling nearly
 37 all aspects of the design, production and promotion of his publications, from cover
 38 design, page layout, typography and format specifications right through to taking
 39 on the task of sending out promotional copies and actively pursuing re-editions.¹⁴
 40 This could make him a particularly demanding – even downright autocratic – author
 41 for publishers to deal with, but it also made for results that were unusually closely
 42 supervised and meticulously designed in every way, and in which an overt modernity
 43 (appropriate to their insistence on completely revising the values of design in its
 44 widest sense) vied with a classicism and an insistence on machine production rather
 45 than bibliophile's craft that makes them look less like avant-garde artists' books than
 46 trade catalogues or technical manuals.¹⁵

47 *The Decorative Art of Today* was typical of these concerns, offering the reader an
 48 argument made through text and image interplay that could already be read in more
 49 than one way. Composed of articles first published in *L'Esprit Nouveau* in 1924, this
 50 was ostensibly a preparation for the much-heralded Exposition Internationale des

1 Arts Décoratifs of the following year.¹⁶ Far from an endorsement of the exhibition's
 2 intentions, however, Le Corbusier's text anticipated the latter's largely conservative,
 3 luxury market emphasis by denouncing the whole field of the French decorative arts
 4 as an exercise in lazy, superfluous and duplicitous objects and interiors, themselves
 5 just the material indicators of a culture and society that had become unfit for purpose.
 6 On the one hand, it claimed, the bourgeois taste for luxury and surface pattern
 7 removed the object from its functional origins, rooted in human needs; on the
 8 other, the nostalgia for craft values set it jarringly at odds with the authentic spirit of
 9 the modern age, enshrined in technical design, new technology and mechanized
 10 production. If little in all of this looks apt to enthuse Soutter, what is likely to have
 11 caught his eye is Le Corbusier's setting of the debate in terms of an irrevocable
 12 iconoclasm, and the positing of a return to fundamental human truths through a
 13 kind of visual hygiene – echoing strains of destruction and redemption through the
 14 image already visible in Soutter's life and work.

15 But perhaps even more than these features of the text, two aspects of the book's
 16 design, both capable of being read in ambivalent ways, also clearly spoke to Soutter.
 17 Firstly and most immediately, the book's argument was both made visible and
 18 rendered dynamic through a large number of photographic, drawn and engraved
 19 illustrations that sometimes simply showed the objects under discussion – whether
 20 for approbation or critique – and sometimes set up tensions and questions for the text.
 21 Chapter title pages in particular could serve the latter function: thus the first chapter,
 22 headed 'Iconologie Iconolâtres Iconoclastes', was accompanied by a photograph of an
 23 ostrich peeping balefully over a wire fence, while chapter two on museums opened
 24 provocatively with a trade catalogue image of a bidet (plate 1). Where many of the
 25 images were of products, interiors and industrial design, particularly of modern
 26 transport and office equipment, other unexpected pictures included monkeys playing
 27 musical instruments, the music hall artiste Mistinguett, a boxing match and the rings
 28 of Saturn. Clearly, if in many places these supported the book's rationale, in others
 29 (and to a contemporary audience not long before exposed to the absurd humour
 30 of Paris dada, for example) they were capable of being read in less stable terms.¹⁷
 31 Secondly, and just as crucially for Soutter's project, Le Corbusier's books of this period
 32 all feature a careful attention to the qualities of the margin, giving argument and
 33 images space, rhythm and dramatic pauses. The generous use of not so much blank as
 34 white space forms the defining and contextualizing elevations of a paper architecture
 35 that, in the case of *The Decorative Art of Today*, resonated with the book's insistence on
 36 an aesthetic of whitewash, undecorated surfaces and industrial media as elements
 37 of a new mental and material hygiene. But to an artist for whom any paper surface
 38 presented both an invitation and a compulsion to draw, these were the very spaces
 39 in which Soutter's imagination could ferment; as Thévoz notes, the apparent horror
 40 *vacui* observable in so many visionary artists might for Soutter make any white page
 41 an interrogation, 'constantly reflecting back to him that unbearable gaping lack to be
 42 stitched together at all costs'.¹⁸

43 In one sense, and in all probability in the artist's own eyes, Soutter's
 44 embellishment of this and the other books by Le Corbusier seems intended as a
 45 sensitive, playful but respectful illustration of his cousin's work.¹⁹ The drawings are
 46 expansive and imaginative, but for the most part they consist of fine pen lines that
 47 resemble engraving, with a precision that sets up a lively relationship with the books'
 48 illustrations, especially the use of found prints from trade catalogues or technical
 49 manuals and (particularly in the latter sections) the architect's own architectural
 50 sketches. With great care, and however intense their activity, the new images rarely

I Le Corbusier, page 15 of *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, Paris: G. Crès, 1925. Norwich: University of East Anglia. © FLC/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London. Photo: Archives and Special Collections, University of East Anglia Library.



Maison Pirsoul.

AUTRES ICONES LES MUSÉES

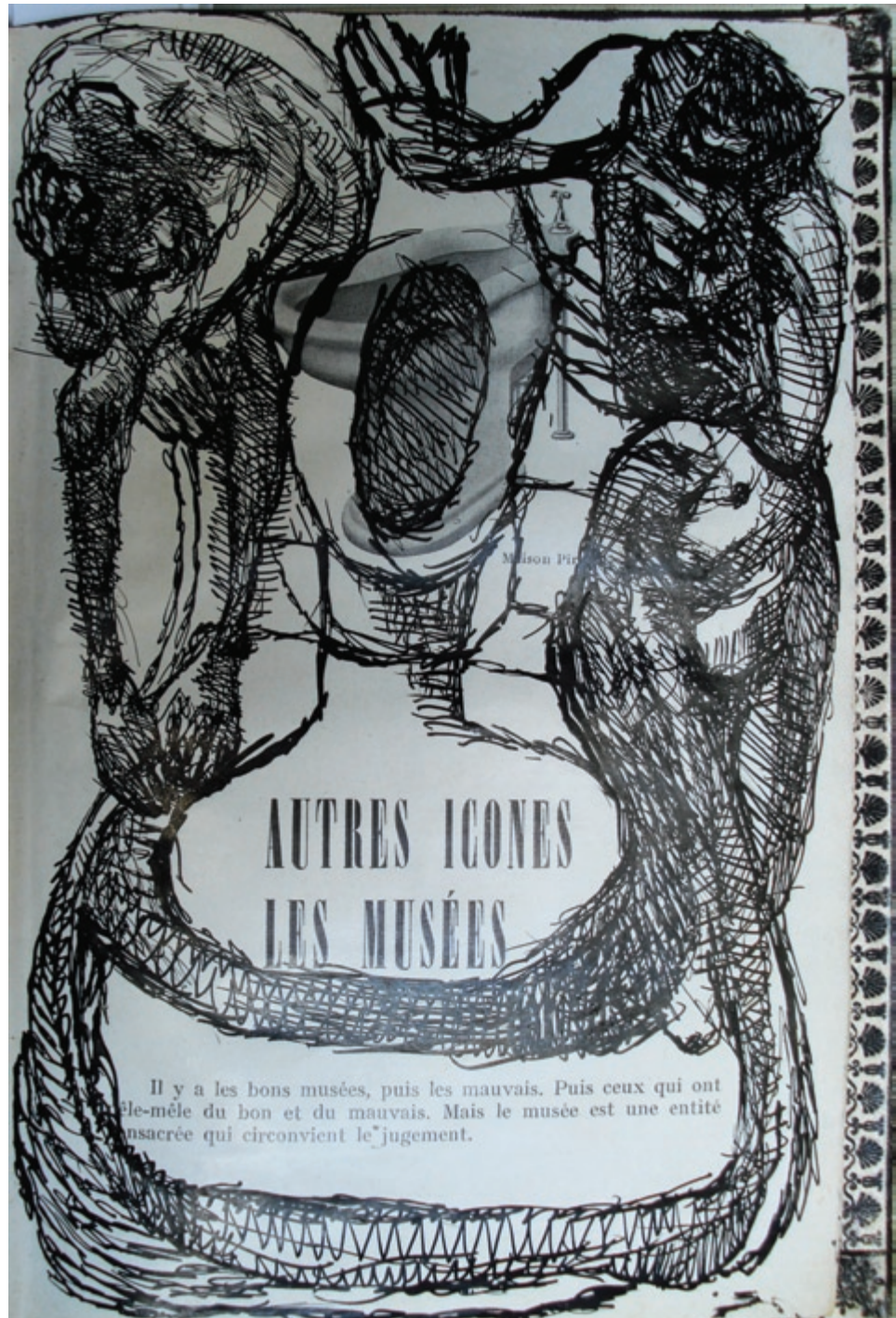
Il y a les bons musées, puis les mauvais. Puis ceux qui ont pêle-mêle du bon et du mauvais. Mais le musée est une entité consacrée qui circonvient le jugement.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8

intrude upon the existing illustrations of blocks of text, which both remain legible and are now often given a frame or frieze to honour their weight; that each page of drawings is different, that they are usually occasioned by the text or images themselves, and often feature marginal notes, makes Soutter's work a meditative reading that seems to desire a genuine engagement with each book's discourse. The fact remains, nevertheless, that at the level of its explicit argument, and whatever the sincerity of the intellectual accord between the two men, almost every claim made

1 by *The Decorative Art of Today* seems fundamentally opposed by Soutter's vision. Even as
2 the book enshrines through its very design the demand to reject the decorative for the
3 unadorned, the personal for the universal, Soutter's ink drawings not only colonize
4 the uncluttered, meditative space of the margins with a horde of dark designs; their
5 tendency is to completely undermine the book's logic by re-contextualizing and
6 sometimes reinterpreting its images, or by prising words or phrases out of the text
7 and shifting their meaning.

8 Soutter's re-imagining of the opening page of chapter two of *The Decorative Art*
9 of *Today* – marshalled under the image of a bidet – is a particularly complex and



2 Louis Soutter, untitled, c. 1931. Ink drawing on page 15 of Le Corbusier, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, Paris: G. Crès, 1925. Paris: Fondation le Corbusier archives. © FLC/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London. Photo: Author.

1 ambiguous drawing (plate 2). While the photograph of the bidet – that paragon of
 2 contemporary sanitation, striking in its functional simplicity and supporting Le
 3 Corbusier’s wider polemic about the daily hygiene epitomized by modern design –
 4 seems directly to the point, the chapter itself is titled ‘Other Icons: Museums’. The
 5 brief first paragraph distinguishes good and bad museums, and then suggests: ‘But
 6 the museum is an acknowledged entity that circumvents judgment.’ Onto this – and,
 7 for once, allowing himself to draw over the existing illustration as well as around
 8 it – Soutter has installed two (apparently nude female) figures, their faces hidden
 9 from us as they look towards the bidet, their loose limbs stretching around the space
 10 (one figure seems to have a surfeit of hands, of which one is raised dramatically
 11 above the bidet) in an entanglement of skeins of roughly cross-hatched and hair-like
 12 fabric. Drawn upon the bidet is an upright oval whose shape echoes the plan of the
 13 bidet’s seat (and now implies a lavatory too), but below this, new lines also suggest
 14 that this is the flattened mouth of a bottle whose neck and shoulders are outlined in
 15 such a way as to give the two figures a role as both supporting or protecting some
 16 sacred vessel, and hint at their ambivalent relation to whatever it might contain: the
 17 viewer is unsure whether they are about to sample it, have already done so or, on the
 18 contrary, forbid each other its pleasures. A ‘judgment’ seems indeed to have been
 19 made after all, but it is one whose decision remains unavailable to us.

20 Soutter’s responses to the photographs of *The Decorative Art of Today* in particular
 21 work in a number of parallel ways, with the artist often particularly drawn to the
 22 very images Le Corbusier had selected in order to ridicule specific design tendencies
 23 – noticeably in the images of baroque palace interiors or the visual essay ‘Témoins’
 24 (‘Witnesses’) of recent trends where ornamental excess is juxtaposed with industrial
 25 design – in order to install a new set of embellishments of his own. Elsewhere,
 26 photographs might be added to, expanded or radically re-contextualized through
 27 drawing, and in several cases entirely reinterpreted – as when an already rather
 28 unexpected photograph of the entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre at his table is rotated
 29 by Soutter through 90° to discover an entirely different figure in the shadows of the
 30 image – in ways reminiscent of avant-garde interpretative techniques such as Salvador
 31 Dalí’s paranoia-criticism.²⁰

32 At the level of the book’s writing, many of Soutter’s drawings incorporate words
 33 or phrases quoted from the adjoining printed text – indeed, it seems reasonable to
 34 suppose that these were jotted down first before the drawings were made. But the
 35 effect of borrowing these key isolated elements is both to remove specific terms from
 36 a wider argument, and in some cases to read these entirely against the grain – most
 37 startlingly where Le Corbusier’s plea for the establishment of an ‘échelle humaine’
 38 (human scale) on page thirty-nine is illustrated in a literal but now contradictory
 39 manner on the facing page by a tragic figure clinging to a ladder (*échelle*), the folds
 40 of his clothes turning to roots beneath him (plate 3). While the short text contrasts
 41 society before and after the advent of mechanization, proposing that what is essential
 42 for the latter is the eradication of the former’s ‘slum’ and ‘hierarchical décor’ alike,
 43 each of the three figures inserted by the artist seems in different ways to activate
 44 something of the pathos and humanity of both of these spaces. In their contrast to
 45 Le Corbusier’s upright, assertive and heroic *Modulor* silhouette (developed during
 46 the 1930s and 1940s) – man as the measure of all construction – these slumped but
 47 vivid characters endure without denying the tyranny of material life. Where the Le
 48 Corbusier posits ‘human scale’ as proportion, what is laid bare in Soutter’s figures is
 49 the first rungs of a scale of dignity and existence. Repeatedly, then, Soutter’s desire
 50 to remain faithful to the text in fact confronts its sense from within, both providing



1 **3 Louis Soutter, untitled, c.**
 2 **1931. Ink drawing on pages**
 3 **38–9 of Le Corbusier, *L'Art***
 4 **décoratif d'aujourd'hui,**
 5 **Paris: G. Crès, 1925. Paris:**
 6 **Fondation le Corbusier**
 7 **archives. © FLC/ADAGP,**
 8 **Paris and DACS, London.**
 9 **Photo: Author.**

10 an ambivalent anchor for his own drawings and sparking tensions that appear to
 11 emanate from the book's own logic.²¹ In a more physical sense, too, the effect of
 12 Soutter's art has been not only to undermine but to dismantle Le Corbusier's carefully
 13 planned work. In addition to its profuse new drawings, this re-titled copy of *L'Art*
 14 *décoratif d'aujourd'hui* / *La Peinture moderne* includes tipped-in reproductions of artworks
 15 from another source (paintings and woodcuts by Holbein or Dürer, for instance)
 16 that are significantly not themselves drawn over by Soutter, as though these represent
 17 a further level of intertext through collage rather than drawing. Just as puzzlingly,
 18 scrutiny of the bound volume reveals that whether by accident or design the pages
 19 of the original books are often no longer in the correct order, and others are missing
 20 altogether: presumably, so as to facilitate the process of drawing on them, it would
 seem that Soutter physically dismantled each book before constituting it anew, a
 process of destruction, interpretation and re-making that pits Le Corbusier's utopian
 rhetoric against Soutter's visionary struggle between text and image.

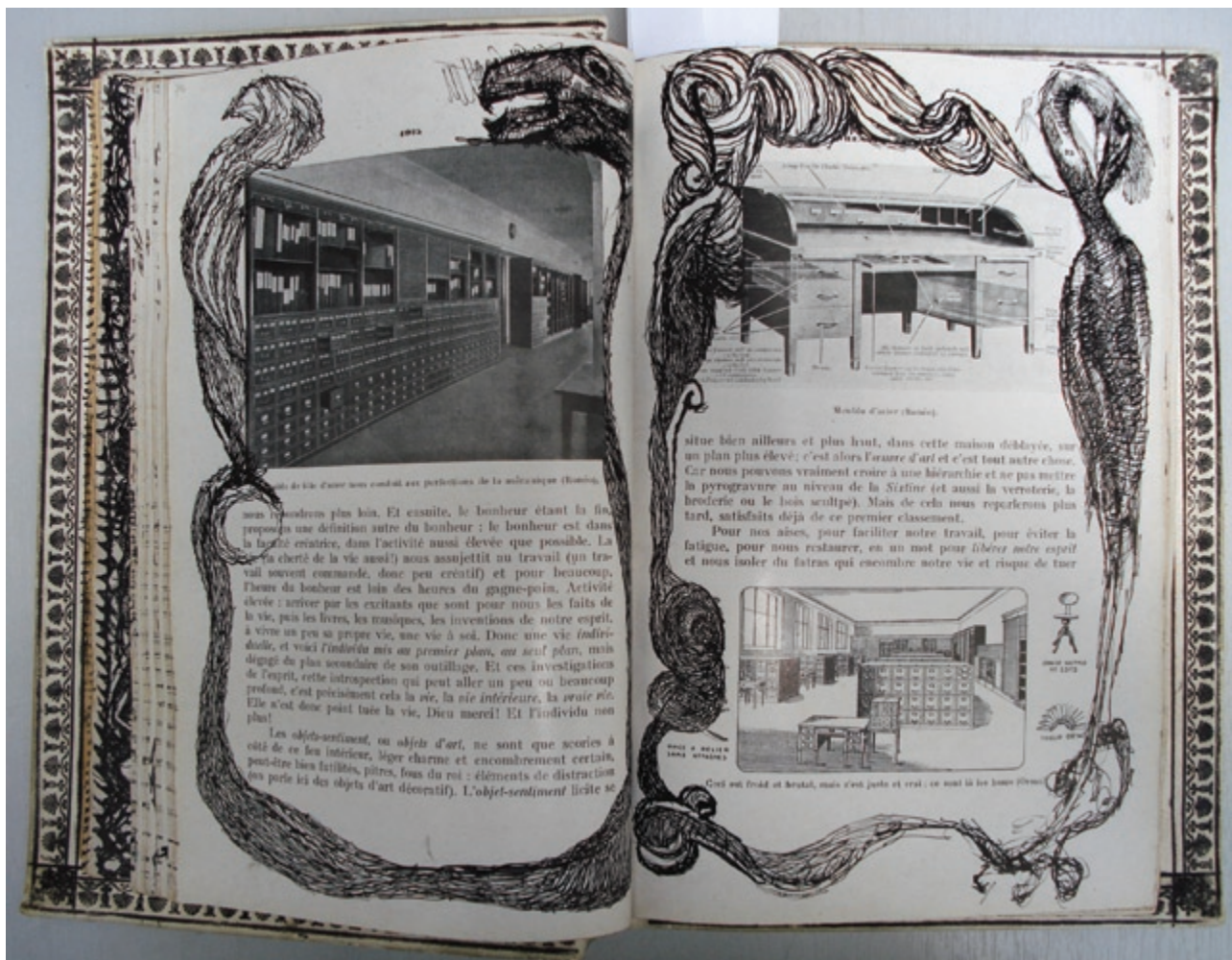
Most tellingly, of course, Soutter's challenge to the argument of *The Decorative Art of Today* – with its uncompromising rejection of ornament, nostalgia and surplus – operates above all by sending the book spinning back to the world of the 'decorative', albeit now a decoration that appears excessive, occult and self-sufficient, apparently rooted in an archaic world of form, and as foreign to the bourgeois love of the exotic surface as to Le Corbusier's rationalized 'type objects'. A substantial number of

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20

Soutter's drawings in this book consist of thickly coiled decorative marginal designs crowded closely around the text and illustrations, reminiscent sometimes of skeins of rope or hair (and on occasion suggesting a morphology of entire bodies), sometimes of organic fibres or shells, apparently – and in flagrant contradiction to the book's stipulations, mocking the geometry of its rationalized objects – bereft of any function other than to lose the viewer in their spirals (plate 4). Curlicues and nodes sometimes branch out from the illuminations, reaching into the line breaks as though to actualize the relationship between text and drawing, or invite a tentative reading based on a phrase or subtitle. Thévoz observes that decorative motifs form a recurrent theme within Soutter's oeuvre, and that on occasion he would use the pretext that they were designs for proposed embroidery or weavings, reading these spirals and labyrinths as an invocation of the interior life of the family, as well as of the broken maternal link driving part of Soutter's inner turmoil.²² Despite the conflict between Soutter's commitment to ornament and the book's blunt rejection of it, it is important to note that Le Corbusier's own earlier interests in the decorative arts were themselves far more open to the decorative or the organic.²³ In this light, Soutter's superimposed drawings might be read as a kind of reawakening of his cousin's disavowed past.

If these anxious labyrinths seem distinctly out of kilter with the harmony and order of Le Corbusier's conception of both the social and the private environment, they nevertheless point to the fact that Soutter's drawings in these books tend invariably to collapse space, notably by flattening the picture plane, ignoring

4 Louis Soutter, untitled, c. 1931. Ink drawing on pages 74–5 of *Le Corbusier, L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, Paris: G. Crès, 1925. Paris: Fondation le Corbusier archives. © FLC/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London. Photo: Author.



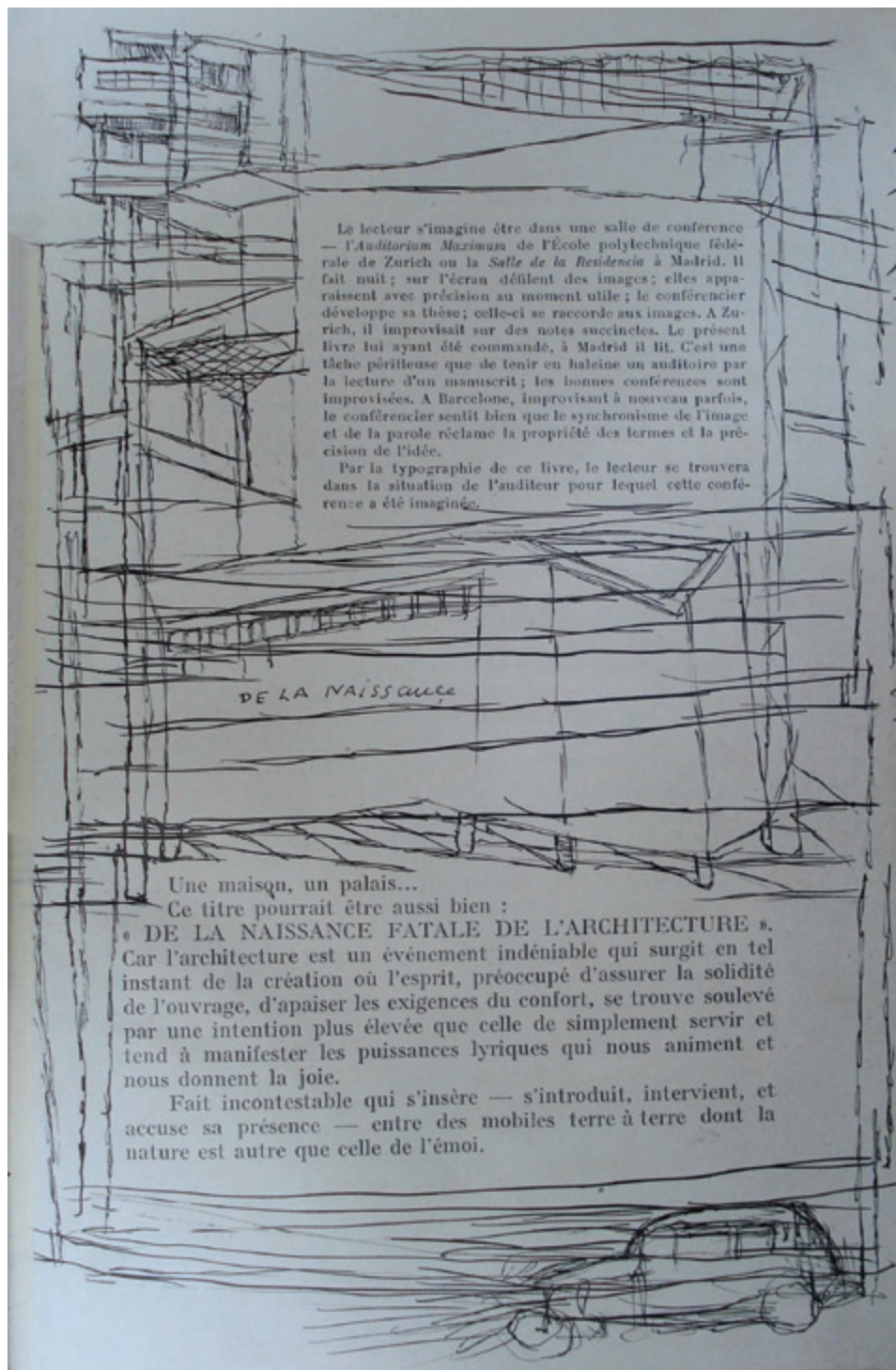


5 Louis Soutter, untitled, c. 1931. Ink drawing on pages 82–3 of *Le Corbusier, L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, Paris: G. Crès, 1925. Paris: Fondation le Corbusier archives. © FLC/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London. Photo: Author.

perspective, and above all by crowding the page with superimposed lines and figures. Space in Soutter's work, as Thévoz notes, is closed in on itself, denying the viewer a sense of distance from it: it 'imposes upon us an anxious proximity to everything' until we feel trapped in the space of the self, so that the artist 'makes us experience space itself like a form of captivity'.²⁴ Indeed, an obsessive inwardness in the specific context of the built environment was the motif under which Le Corbusier had begun his article in *Minotaure*, which opened by quoting Soutter: 'The minimum dwelling, or the "future housing unit" must be made entirely of translucent glass. No more windows, those useless eyes. Why look outside?', the architect going on to note that this idea lies 'at the very opposite of my own ideas, but it manifests the thinker's intense inner life'.²⁵

While Soutter's claustrophobic configurations may appear the mirror reverse of Le Corbusier's aesthetic of light and harmony, Soutter's language here again suggests a clear familiarity with his cousin's ideas (indeed, the polemical styles of both men bear some similarities). What is more, his drawings in *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* and other books by Le Corbusier repeatedly represent architectural space, whether that of ancient and imaginary cities (chiming with the book's reproduction of the architect's own sketches of the city of Istanbul, for example), the modern world of high-rise edifices redolent of the new American skyline, or specific designs by Le Corbusier; in all three, the city or building as fortified bastion or as utopian reverie suggest a powerful metaphor for the self whose psychological echoes can be found in both men's work, however different their respective outlooks (plate 5).²⁶

6 Louis Soutter, untitled, c. 1931. Ink drawing on page 1 of Le Corbusier, *Une maison – un palais*, Paris: Éditions Crès, 1928. Paris: Fondation le Corbusier archives. © FLC/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London. Photo: Author.



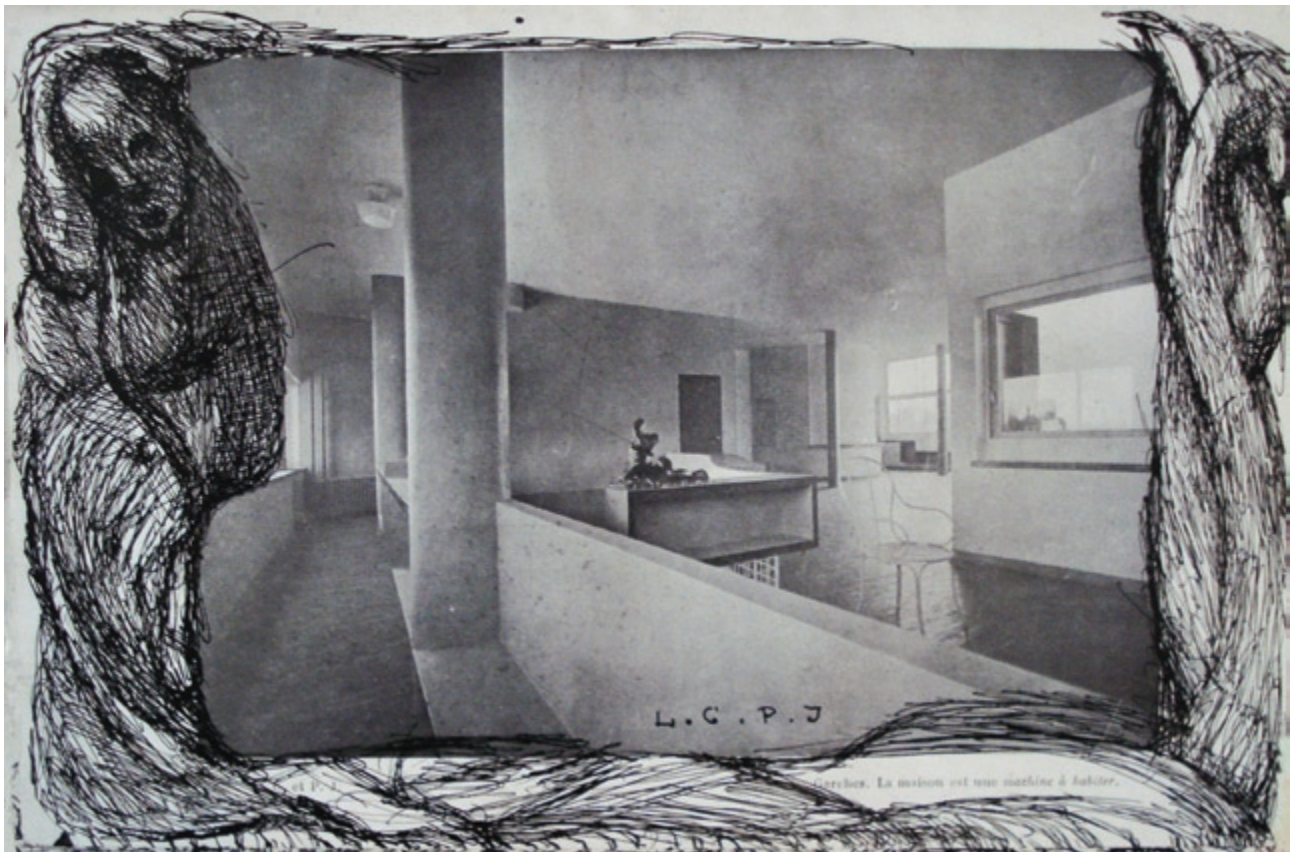
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8

In particular, the three-quarter outline of a typical Le Corbusier concrete skeleton 'Dom-Ino' housing unit (first developed by the architect in 1914) appears repeatedly in Soutter's more nervous hand as a kind of magic sign, reincorporated into Soutter's own iconography of an interior life laid bare (plate 6). Elsewhere, photographs of Le Corbusier houses are drawn over, expanded and new occupants installed, the empty interiors or exteriors in the reproductions sometimes abandoned to the jungle, sometimes haunted by wraith-like figures that seem to mock their sanitary logic (plate 7). Soutter's insistence on pursuing this architectural debate, however delirious

1 the results, Thévoz suggests, represents not simply a desire to engage his cousin but
 2 an urge to absorb the latter's identity, 'a tendency to identify unconsciously with a
 3 powerful and prestigious individual' in the person of the architect.²⁷ Yet for all that
 4 these drawings may be read as an internalization of Le Corbusier's text and theories,
 5 they nonetheless also signal a kind of triumph over the latter's own rationalizing and
 6 totalizing ambition, through the medium of the line. Architecture and drawing are
 7 fundamentally opposed, Le Corbusier claimed in *Croisade ou le Crépuscule des Académies*
 8 (one of the books Soutter was to embellish); drawing was the enemy.²⁸ Under
 9 Soutter's pen, for a moment at least, this model of conflict could be resolved at a
 10 stroke in an alternative utopia of architecture and the imagination (plate 8).

11 Sensitive from the outset to the presumption of defacing Le Corbusier's books,²⁹
 12 Soutter also seems to have been well aware of the manifest contradictions between
 13 the world views their respective systems represented, writing to his cousin in
 14 January 1936: 'I shan't make any more of these drawn-over books, it's contrary to
 15 your thought.'³⁰ It is tempting to read this respectful curbing of the desire to engage
 16 Le Corbusier through overlaying one vision upon another as an avowal of Soutter's
 17 own anxious, ill-adapted demeanour, a lucid moment in what his commentators
 18 have seen as a kind of schizo-text played out both in these extraordinary one-off
 19 books and in his work as a whole, in the face of Le Corbusier's calm, monumental
 20 thought. Yet in the meeting of these two apparently mutually exclusive worlds it
 21 might be said that both show signs of instability and difficulty, and that the two
 22 men's encounter is characterized just as much by a shared ambivalence as by an
 23 unequal relationship between a troubled individual encouraged and supported
 24 by his younger but psychologically secure confidant. One small but telling detail
 25 relates to Le Corbusier's own designations of selfhood. For all his muscular public

7 Louis Soutter, untitled, c.
 1931. Ink drawing on page 73
 of Le Corbusier, *Une maison*
 – un palais, Paris: Éditions
 Crès, 1928. Paris: Fondation
 le Corbusier archives. © FLC/
 ADAGP, Paris and DACS,
 London. Photo: Author.



8 Louis Soutter, untitled, c. 1931. Ink drawing on page 60 of Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, *La Peinture moderne*, Paris: Éditions Crès, 1925. Paris: Fondation le Corbusier archives. © FLC/ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London. Photo: Author.



1
2
3
4
5
6

persona, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret himself repeatedly indulged in games with his identity, inventing several pseudonyms, playing with versions of his chosen name and frequently adopting an ambivalent authorial voice in his writings to the extent that this identity is often under construction; yet on more than one occasion he seems to have hesitated over that of his cousin as well, in the varied spellings of Soutter's surname.³¹

1 While Soutter's work has been read as a sublimation of his own intolerable
 2 feelings of failure and insecurity, the apparently entirely self-confident Le Corbusier,
 3 too, shows signs in his writings of a nagging anxiety about failure, with letters, texts
 4 and entire books driven by the desire to redeem unsuccessful projects or defend
 5 the author against criticism.³² And although Soutter's obsessively repeated figural
 6 drawings, particularly those of women, have been interpreted by commentators as
 7 indicative of an unstable and paranoid anxiety over sexual relations, the relationship
 8 between Le Corbusier's own work or behaviour and issues of gender, power and
 9 the gaze have also been questioned, with the problematic overlaying of the female
 10 body onto the object, the building or the city a repeated motif in his visual practice,
 11 and instances of the fetishization or disavowal of objects and materials visible
 12 throughout his theoretical writings.³³ Finally, an uncomfortably close intertwining
 13 of architecture and institution haunts the two men's writings to and about each
 14 other. While Soutter dreams, in his letters and his drawings on the books, of an ideal
 15 but modest 'minimum dwelling' (perhaps one designed by his cousin) to which
 16 he can escape from the misery of institutionalization,³⁴ Le Corbusier speaks of the
 17 'hygiene' of the Maison de Jura, of its ideal situation within a natural environment,
 18 in terms that make it more than a little unclear if he sees this building as a place of
 19 incarceration or refuge.³⁵ While Soutter's experience of drawing over the work of
 20 others seems to have been an intimate and self-contained experiment, Le Corbusier
 21 would come to adopt this practice himself in public, through the use of drawing
 22 upon photographs, book jackets and texts in his own publications after Soutter's
 23 death, and perhaps as a direct result of his cousin's influence.³⁶

24 In the end, perhaps, these two modes of being, these two visions, find themselves
 25 in the Le Corbusier-Soutter books not so much overlaid by their chance encounter
 26 as organically and inevitably grown together, feeding into each other's structures
 27 until it becomes hard to read *The Decorative Art of Today*, for example, without sensing
 28 the afterimage of Soutter's ghosts between its pages, without seeing Soutter's fevered
 29 drawings as somehow completing and immunizing the unity of Le Corbusier's vision
 30 of harmony by injecting it with all the qualities of its negation. Le Corbusier would
 31 write to his cousin in 1936, the year he published his text on this 'inconnu':

32 You see, Louis, one mustn't wish for what's inaccessible. You have a drawing
 33 style that brings you a wonderful chance to bring to the world what you have
 34 in your heart. ... I often talk about you with great admiration. I show your
 35 beautiful drawings. Draw, Louis, that's happiness. And know that I'm your
 36 friend.³⁷

37 Notes

38 **My interest in the subject of this paper was sparked by Tim**
 39 **Benton's presentation 'Corbu Surréaliste! Surely Not?' at the**
 40 ***Surreal Things: Surrealism and Design* conference, Victoria and**
 41 **Albert Museum, London, 12 May 2007, whose insightful readings**
 42 **of the Le Corbusier-Soutter material have been instrumental**
 43 **here. The first version of the current paper was paired with an**
 44 **experimental text by Gavin Parkinson, whose enthusiasm has**
 45 **also been crucial.**

- 46 1 On this last claim, see for example Alexander Gorlin, 'The ghost in the
 47 machine', in Thomas Mical, ed., *Surrealism and Architecture*, London 2005,
 48 103–18.
 49 2 Michel Thévoz, *Louis Soutter: Catalogue de l'œuvre*, Lausanne, 1976,
 catalogue entries 2475 and 2476.

- 3 Discussions of Soutter's work frequently cite the relationship between
 the two men, but the books in question have been considered in
 two principal locations: Michel Thévoz, *Louis Soutter ou l'écriture du désir*,
 Lausanne, 1974, 45–56; and Armin Zweite. "Keine Fenster mehr,
 diese unnützen Augen": Louis Soutter und Le Corbusier oder Geflecht
 und Geometrie', in Zweite, ed., *Louis Soutter (1871–1942): Zeichnungen,*
Bücher, Finger-malerien, Munich, 1985, 47–72. Thévoz also discusses the
 relationship in more general terms in his other major study of the
 artist (first published in 1970), *Louis Soutter*, Lausanne, 1989, 58–9. In
 the literature on Le Corbusier, besides Tim Benton's unpublished
 paper cited above, the only location to our knowledge where the
 books are discussed is the extensive consideration of the relationship
 between the two men in Daniel Naegele, 'Drawing-over: Une vie
 décantée. Le Corbusier y Louis Soutter', *Revista de Arquitectura*, 6, June
 2004, 43–54 (<http://fast-ip.org/naegele.pdf>); and a brief mention of

- 1 them in Catherine de Smet, *Vers une architecture du livre. Le Corbusier: édition*
2 *et mise en pages 1912–1965*, Baden, 2007, 29. Since the present paper was
3 first written, however, several more recent sources have appeared
4 which have extended the visibility and discussion of the relationship
5 and collaboration of the two men. One is a full facsimile reproduction
6 of *Une maison – un palais*, Lyon, 2011, with a postscript by Julie Borgeaud;
7 there have also been two exhibitions featuring the artist's book-based
8 works *Le Corbusier, Louis Soutter, croisements*, La Maison Blanche de Le
9 Corbusier, La Chaux-de-Fonds, 2010 and *Fondation Suisse*, Paris 2012,
10 and *Louis Soutter: Le Tremblement de la modernité*, Maison Rouge/Fondation
11 Antoine de Galbert, Paris 2012 (all curated by Borgeaud, who was also
12 responsible for the latter exhibition's catalogue). Caroline Levitt, who
13 has also been working on this material, was kind enough to share the
14 text of her conference paper 'Criminal or cousinly? Louis Soutter's
15 ornamentation of Le Corbusier's treatises' (2012).
- 4 Biographical material on Soutter in this section is drawn from the first
16 part of Thévoz, *Louis Soutter* (1989).
- 5 Thévoz, *Louis Soutter* (1989), 70; see also Lucienne Peiry, *L'Art brut*, Paris,
17 1997, 143 and 215. In terms of Soutter's status as suffering from a
18 mental illness, Thévoz underlines (*Louis Soutter* (1989), 35) that the
19 Asile de Jura was a home for the elderly, largely inhabited by rural
20 paupers placed in care by their communes, and notes elsewhere
21 (140) that Soutter was never formally diagnosed or treated for
22 mental illness. As Thévoz suggests, if the biography of the artist and
23 anecdotal evidence of his behaviour show clear signs both of Freud's
24 notion of 'melancholia' and of schizophrenia, the work might on the
25 contrary be seen precisely as a strategy through which full-blown
26 mental illness was kept at bay (28–30 and 44–6); Thévoz also argues
27 not only that speculation about Soutter's mental illness is irrelevant
28 for the work, but that it has also been used as a way of avoiding its
29 truths (140–2). Naegele, on the other hand, notes the potential echoes
30 between the artist's art brut status and Le Corbusier's contribution to
31 what has been termed 'brutalist' architecture ('Drawing-over', 45).
- 6 The passing reference to Soutter in Hal Foster et al., *Art Since 1900:*
32 *Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism*, London, 2004, 478, for example,
33 typifies this quandary (on a subject for which one might expect its
34 authors to have some sympathy). Wrongly cited as an untrained
35 artist, Soutter's name is mentioned simply by way of an example
36 of Dubuffet's category, this discussion in turn occasioned only in
37 order to support a discussion of the post-war German painter Georg
38 Baselitz. Julie Borgeaud's research and publications (see note 3 above)
39 rightly correct the reception of Soutter as isolated from avant-garde
40 culture.
- 7 Thévoz, *Louis Soutter* (1989), 10 and 58; Thévoz, *Louis Soutter ou l'écriture du*
41 *désir*, 14.
- 8 Le Corbusier, letters to the Musée de Beaux Arts, Lausanne, 21
42 December 1960, John Nef, 6 March 1936, and Marguerite Tjader
43 Harris, 9 September 1937. But Le Corbusier's claims about Soutter's
44 work could shade into a claim over it: 'I am the one who discovered
45 Louis Soutter and who encouraged him for 7 or 8 years to pursue his
46 drawing', he would write on 16 October 1936 to the writer Jean Giono
47 (all letters from the archive of the Fondation Le Corbusier, hereafter
48 referred to as FLC).
- 9 Le Corbusier, correspondence with James Thrall Soby and Tériade,
49 FLC archive; the latter in particular testifies Le Corbusier's impatience
50 and frustration with delays with the *Minotaure* article. A postcard from
51 Soutter (7 December 1931, FLC archive) thanks Le Corbusier for
52 money in terms that indicate how precious it was: 'I was able to buy
53 the indispensable: Shoes. Stamps. Ink.'
- 10 Le Corbusier, 'Louis Sutter: L'Inconnu de la soixantaine', *Minotaure*,
54 9, October 1936, 62–5. This issue is, arguably, one of those least
55 dominated by surrealist ideas, with articles on Matisse, Cézanne,
56 Cranach and a technical discussion of the effect of artificial light on
57 plants; perhaps this placement, and the delays in publication, reflect
58 the well-known antipathy among surrealists towards Le Corbusier.
59 On the other hand, both the surrealist enthusiasm for what would
60 later be termed art brut, and the affinities discerned by several
61 subsequent commentators between Soutter's work and surrealist
62 practice – notably in considering his drawing as a kind of automatic
63 process, but even in the echoes between Soutter's 'why look outside?'
64 and Breton's 'inner model' for surrealist painting – makes *Minotaure* a
65 highly appropriate location for this text. After the war, Soutter's work
66 would also be published in the French surrealist journal *Troisième convoi*.
- 11 The FLC archive holds a number of postcards and letters from
67 Soutter and a few typescripts of Le Corbusier's letters to him, as
68 well as typescripts of his letters to others to promote Soutter's work.
69 Soutter's postcards of 3 November 1931, 30 January 1936 and 19 June
70 1939, for example, all mention his avid readings of Le Corbusier's
71 books, the first of these being *Une maison – un palais*. The tone of the
72 correspondence between the two men attests to a warm and frank
73 friendship, but one that also suggests a level of serious intellectual
74 exchange as well.
- 12 Thévoz, *Louis Soutter* (1989), 63.
- 13 Thévoz, *Louis Soutter: Catalogue de l'œuvre*, 300–8. Besides the Le Corbusier
75 volumes already cited, Thévoz also lists Soutter's embellishment of
76 Le Corbusier's *Croisade ou le Crépuscule des Académies* (1933) (cat. 2468). The
77 Fondation archive contains, as well as the two volumes already cited,
78 copies of Gustave Flaubert, *Salammô* (undated), François Mauriac, *Le*
79 *Baiser au lépreux* (1926), and Marcelle Vioux, *Les Amants tourmentés* (1929),
80 all richly illustrated with Soutter's drawings.
- 14 De Smet, *Vers une architecture du livre*, see for example page 9. This work
81 is a detailed study of both the design and the editorial process of Le
82 Corbusier's books.
- 15 De Smet (*Vers une architecture du livre*, 30ff.) notes, as others have done,
83 that Le Corbusier's book designs are generally conventional in
84 appearance when compared, for instance, to contemporary Bauhaus
85 publishing design (see also the same author's catalogue *Le Corbusier:*
86 *Un architecte et ses livres*, Baden, 2005, 72). On the relationship between
87 Le Corbusier's books of the 1920s and trade catalogues or publicity
88 material, see Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as*
89 *Mass Media*, Cambridge, MA, 1994, 141–53.
- 16 Le Corbusier, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (1925), Paris, 1980.
- 17 De Smet, in *Vers une architecture du livre*, 30, cites Élie Faure writing in 1935
90 about Le Corbusier's books of this period: 'Remember this unique
91 presentation, at first sight chaotic but composed with such malice.
92 Remember those original illustrations using unexpected photographs
93 – sometimes lovely, sometimes laughable ... always with the intention
94 of soliciting the rigour of a logic that nails the reader's thought like a
95 stroke of good luck. It shakes him, tickles him, knowing that he's an
96 unsympathetic dimwit. It pinches him mirthlessly, and makes him
97 first frightened then indignant.' Several commentators have noticed
98 the potential parallels (and divergences) between Le Corbusier's use
99 of text and image juxtapositions and dada strategies (see for example
100 Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 170–85; De Smet, *Le Corbusier*, 72). A
101 single, doubtless isolated but extraordinary example exists of Le
102 Corbusier's ability to manifest his interest in the material qualities of
103 the book in startling ways: his library copy of *Don Quixote*, bound in
104 the hide of his long-haired dog Pinceau (De Smet, *Vers une architecture du*
105 *livre*, 29).
- 18 Thévoz, *Louis Soutter* (1989), 44 and 76. Though Thévoz's
106 methodological grounding tends to lie in Freudian psychoanalysis,
107 here he is playing on an affinity between the notion of stitching
108 together (as with a wound): suturer, and the artist's own identity that
109 might be consistent, for example, with a wider Lacanian reading of
110 Soutter's work.
- 19 A rather different reading is acknowledged by Le Corbusier, in
111 writing to Jean Giono of an unrealized project to include Soutter's
112 drawings in one of the latter's books: 'I do not believe him
113 psychologically equipped enough to be able to complete what's
114 termed an "illustration" of a text in the usual sense of the word. On
115 the other hand ... in my opinion there are enough materials in his
116 work to be able to select those drawings that could add something like
117 a profound echo of the text in which they were inserted' (letter of 16
118 October 1936, FLC archive).
- 20 One must for the moment leave open the question of whether
119 Soutter might indeed already have been aware of such strategies
120 in contemporary practice, in the face of his usual definition as an
121 isolated art brut 'outsider'. Correspondence from Soutter to Le
122 Corbusier (for example, 8 November 1937, FLC archive) several times
123 indicates that the former was familiar with the journal *Minotaure*
124 (which of course published the latter's article on Soutter), dominated
125 in particular by surrealist ideas and containing some of Dalí's most

- 1 interesting writing; but the journal postdates Thévoz's dating of the
 2 book drawings. If nothing else, Soutter was obviously exposed to
 3 debates around the early twentieth-century Parisian avant-garde
 4 through Le Corbusier himself, and books like *La Peinture moderne*. It is on
 5 the subject of avant-garde painting and sculpture, including purism,
 6 that Soutter allows himself his most explicit criticisms in the section
 7 of this bound volume made from Le Corbusier's and Ozenfant's *La*
 8 *Peinture moderne*. Where on pages 40–1 the text claims that nature is
 9 only beautiful in the context of the perfect geometries of art, Soutter
 10 adds in pencil: 'On the contrary!! The imperfection of art only occurs
 11 when the so-called geometrical element is disturbed'; page 122's
 12 reproduction of a cubist harlequin by Picasso provokes Soutter's
 13 comment 'Useless comprehension', while a Lipchitz relief is simply
 14 captioned 'nul' ('worthless').
- 21 See Thévoz, *Louis Soutter ou l'écriture du désir*, 55–6.
 22 See Thévoz, *Louis Soutter ou l'écriture du désir*, 110ff.
 23 See, for example, Stanislaus Von Moos, *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis*,
 18 Cambridge, MA, 3–7 or Nancy J. Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Art in*
 19 *France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier*, New Haven, CT and London, 1991.
- 24 Thévoz, *Louis Soutter ou l'écriture du désir*, 94 and 100.
 25 Le Corbusier, 'Louis Sutter', 62.
 26 Thévoz, *Louis Soutter ou l'écriture du désir*, 180–1.
 27 Thévoz, *Louis Soutter ou l'écriture du désir*, 50.
 28 Thévoz, *Louis Soutter ou l'écriture du désir*, 147. On the other hand, as Beatriz
 25 Colomina points out in the context of Le Corbusier's practice, the
 26 architect could also figure drawing as crossing a threshold of privacy
 27 when he writes, 'By working with our hands, by drawing, we enter
 28 the house of a stranger, we are enriched by the experience, we learn'
 29 (cited in Colomina, 'Battle lines: E.1027', in Diana Agrest et al., eds,
 30 *The Sex of Architecture*, New York, 1996, 167–82 (175)). When we know
 31 how problematic Soutter's search for home was – the impossibility of
 32 entering other people's environments without disruption, the despair
 33 at his being housed against his will – it's tempting to imagine Soutter's
 34 drawing as an entry (a return?) into the dwelling of his own kin in
 35 just this way.
- 36 29 'Started sketches on La Maison. Un Palais. [sic] Don't scold me for this
 37 impertinence. In any case I shall read it all' (postcard from Louis
 38 Soutter to Le Corbusier, 12 October 1931, FLC archive).
 39 30 Louis Soutter, postcard to le Corbusier, 21 January 1936, cited in
 40 Thévoz, *Louis Soutter ou l'écriture du désir*, 56.
 41 31 Le Corbusier apologizes to Soutter for the surprising misspelling of
 42 his name in the *Minotaure* article and attributes it to a printing error
 43 (letter to Louis Soutter, 24 November 1936); but Le Corbusier repeats
 44 the slip in other correspondence, giving it again as Sutter throughout a
 45 letter to the Musée des Beaux Arts, Lausanne, 21 December 1960, or as
 46 Souter throughout in his letter to James Thrall Soby, 17 January 1936
 47 (all letters FLC archive).
 48 32 One such book is precisely *Une maison – un palais*, written partly as a
 49 riposte to the rejection of Le Corbusier's plan for the League of Nations
 50 headquarters in Geneva in 1927. As with several other examples of
 51 unrealized designs during this crucial period, it was precisely the
 52 architect's most ambitious and defining projects that suffered this
 53 fate.
 54 33 On Soutter's representations of women, see Thévoz, *Louis Soutter* (1989),
 55 51–2; on Le Corbusier and gender issues, see for example Colomina,
 56 'Battle lines: E.1027'. For a wider situation of Le Corbusier's ideas as an
 57 affirmation of an essentially masculine modernity see Tag Gronberg,
 58 *Designs on Modernity: Exhibiting the City in 1920s Paris*, Manchester, 1998; this
 59 apparently secure gender identity, clearly, is fatally undermined in the
 60 Le Corbusier-Soutter books by the effect of Soutter's drawings.
 61 34 'The Maison le Lac would be a favour you could grant me' (postcard to
 62 Le Corbusier, date illegible, FLC archive); 'Where is my life of effort?
 63 I think of the Lac, 14 square metres big or more, which could start my
 64 career [?] as a painter: I can't cope with this place any longer. Alone.
 65 Ville Radieuse, where are you?' (postcard to Le Corbusier, 28 May 1937,
 66 FLC archive).
 67 35 'Then it's the rest home, with the many other withdrawn individuals
 68 like [Soutter]. The silence of the pine forests all around; the tonic
 69 alpine air that keeps the body dry. The bringing together, in this
 70 large hygienic house, of the autumns of lives' (Le Corbusier, 'Louis
 Sutter', 63). One might recall that the architect had at this point already
 designed a building for similar purposes, the Cité de Refuge Salvation
 Army sheltered accommodation for the homeless, Paris 1932.
- 36 For examples and a discussion of this practice in the context of book
 design, and the contention that Soutter's work directly influenced Le
 Corbusier, see De Smet, *Vers une architecture du livre*, 29 and note 48, and
 194–7; Daniel Naegele, 'Drawing-over', 50ff. On a particular instance
 of Le Corbusier's drawing as a problematic *redrawing* of public and
 private spheres, see Colomina, 'Battle lines: E.1027'.
 37 Le Corbusier, letter to Louis Soutter, 1936, cited in Thévoz, *Louis Soutter*
 (1989), 59.

‘Complications and Attacks on the Beauty of Unity’: Le Corbusier and Louis Soutter

Krzysztof Fijalkowski

The sources of Le Corbusier’s status as the most influential architect of the twentieth-century may be traced above all to his theoretical writing, as communicated in his own carefully supervised book publications. A detailed and profound response to them comes in the form of unique artist’s books made from several of these works by the architect’s own cousin Louis Soutter, an artist often categorized as an ‘art brut’ visionary. This essay examines the ways in which Soutter’s dense figurative and decorative marginal drawings on the books emphasize the ambivalent tensions and exchanges between the two men and their apparently contradictory but equally complex world views.

Krzysztof Fijalkowski is Professor of Visual Culture at Norwich University of the Arts. Recent publications include: *Surrealism and Photography in Czechoslovakia* (Ashgate, 2013, with Michael Richardson and Ian Walker); ‘Poétique/Politique: Picasso, Surrealism and Politics after 1944’, in Jonathan Harris and Richard Koeck, eds, *Picasso and the Politics of Visual Representation* (Liverpool University Press, 2013); and the translation and introduction of Gherasim Luca’s *The Passive Vampire* (Twisted Spoon Press, 2008).