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Collapse and Reconstitution: Autonomy and the Avant-Garde

Dirk van den Heuvel

'In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal space that virtually opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives me my own visibility, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent.'

'[F]rom the depth of this virtual space that is on the other side of the looking glass, I come back towards myself and I begin again to direct my eyes towards myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am.' – Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces'

The Parental Bed

In the critical architecture discourse, the French philosopher Michel Foucault is celebrated for his essay 'Of Other Spaces'. It holds a special status for its introduction of the idea of heterotopia. Originally a radio lecture organised by and for architects in 1966, the text is much more explorative and speculative than the larger part of Foucault's body of work, in which he unambiguously set out the boundaries of institutional power and knowledge by elaborating the concepts of epistemology and biopolitics as an all-encompassing disciplinary system, a *dispositif* from which there is no escape, other than through a relentless practice of critique and deconstruction.

The notion of heterotopia on the other hand seems to offer an alternative here for the architects, a proposition of 'other' spaces outside and parallel of the systems of control, capable of nurturing the imagination and instilling the possibility of change. Foucault referred to the space of the mirror here, the mirror image as a virtual space that would enable a reconstitution of the self.

Sociologist and AIDS activist Daniel Defert has highlighted how Foucault (who was also his life partner) originally introduced the concept of heterotopia by using the metaphor of children playing in the parental bed.[1] In the published version, which came out as late as 1984, this reference was left out. Only in 2004 was this particular version published, which included the reference to 'These counter-spaces, these localised utopias', that children know so well. They can be 'the attic, or even better the Indian tent set up in the middle of the attic, or else, it is ... the large bed of the parents.'[2] Defert suggested that this implied not only a game of generational reproduction through 'the reverie of origins', but also a game of transgression by appropriating a taboo space.

Can we understand contemporary avant-garde practices as similar acts of transgressional play in the parental bed of the historical avant-garde, and if so, what sort of transgressions are we looking at?

Forensics

The proposition to consider the studio house of Nelly and Theo van Doesburg in Meudon as a crime scene as suggested by Antonis Pittas, prompts us to rethink the practices that surround art spaces and exhibitions,

and how we usually understand them. Pittas' work involves a performance amongst others, how the restored house is visited by men in white suits. Following the explanation of Pittas himself, they are busy investigating the interior for traces of evidence of the murder of modernism.

What is happening here? Even when forensics and science move in, we are denied a straightforward answer. Critique and artistic research make way for the apparatus of technology, or so it seems. The exact outcome remains in the balance.

Sophie Calle and her 'detective work' spring to mind, but also the writings of Witold Gombrowicz, especially his novel *Cosmos* of 1965. It tells the story of two travelling companions who, in their search for meaning and identity are haunted by a nervous sense of paranoia, which makes them prone to recognise signs of a bigger, yet unknown scheme in each and every little, mundane detail they come across during their trip. In search of a bigger truth, an ominous fear starts to take hold of them, and of the reader, that the revealing of this bigger truth will inevitably lead to the collapse of the existing order.

In a second gesture, Pittas connects the violated safe space of the studio, the crime scene, with the populist protests in the streets. Together with the counter-movement of *les gilets jaunes* (the yellow vests) the men in white suits are placed in the same hypothetical space. It is a double gesture that points to possible suspects, while it is also a nagging reminder that the historical avant-garde itself was also born from street revolution and proposed such revolution – from the Russian Constructivists to German Expressionism and *Sachlichkeit*. But today – in contrast with the early twentieth century – we witness a reversal of values. Whereas the social-democrat left puts its trust in institutions, *les gilets jaunes* and their fellow populist movements seem well-versed in the old techniques of Agit-Prop, a mix of propaganda and disinformation, media spectacle and street intervention. From the Capital Hill riot in Washington, DC to the Dutch Virus Waanzin and Farmers Defence Force, the populists seemed to have taken their lessons from the radical left, and know exactly the disruptive power of street happenings and Situationist *détournement*, as well as the popular festival, which was celebrated by, amongst others, the French sociologist and utopian thinker Henri Lefebvre for its revolutionary potential.

But is populism the only suspect here? Wouldn't that be all too easy and obvious? Are there other traces to follow?

To go back to Foucault's text 'Of Other Spaces': he suggested that the moment forensics moves in – in the form of espionage, police, surveillance – we are looking at the depletion of the reserve of imagination. Is the project of modernity defeated and killed by its own forces of rationalism and science? Or does it actually remain unfinished, as suggested by Jürgen Habermas? Throughout his writings, the German figurehead of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory has persisted in defending the achievements of the Enlightenment and social emancipation through institutional democracy, critical rational thinking and the rule of law.

Let's take a closer look at some of the

historiographical 'evidence', and the sort of traces we encounter; how were these produced and what can be deducted or hypothesised? We need to visit some other 'sites', those of historiography and museology, architectural design and theory.

Appropriations

A first stop away from the crime scene in Meudon has to be another major site for the history of the avant-garde and modern architecture: New York, and more specifically the Museum of Modern Art. From its inception in 1929, the museum had included architecture and design as integral parts of its curatorial policies. Notoriously, in the historiography of modern architecture, the ideological position of the architectural avant-garde was undermined by its first architecture exhibition of 1932. It's a familiar story by now, and inevitably surrounded by urban myth with one of its most scandalising ingredients being the fact that one of the curators was a gay Nazi enthusiast.

The exhibition and catalogue, which was simply titled *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition,* featured a second publication by the curators, *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922,* which would become much more influential, and – for better or worse – is still considered a turning point in the development of the architectural avant-garde. The two curators, Henry Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, travelled to Europe to bring continental invention to North America. They identified four 'masters': Le Corbusier, J. J. P. Oud, Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who were given a central place in the exhibition next to the American Frank Lloyd Wright. To reintroduce the notion of 'style', and to present the architectural innovations of the new movement to an American audience under such a notion, was, and remains, a provocation, since the modern avant-gardes wanted to move beyond the nineteenth century concept of style. Yet, the curators insisted that architecture was more than sheer 'functionalism', that it was an aesthetic practice still, and as such existed outside, and uncoupled from social ideas.

It must be said though, that there were other acts of appropriating and 'domesticating' the virulent revolutionary origins of modernism. It was not only through the transfer of avant-garde ideas to America that modernism was transformed. Also, when Jewish refugees, emigree-architects and historians, came to England fleeing from Nazi Germany, they would adjust the radical ideas of the avant-garde.

The great German-British historian Nikolaus Pevsner is a case in point. Having settled in the United Kingdom after the Nazi race laws forced him to resign from his university post in Göttingen, he would become an advocate of modernism. Especially after the Second World War, Pevsner would promote modern architecture by redressing it as the 'New Humanism', together with the leading British journal *The Architectural Review,* and its editors J. M. Richards and Hubert de Cronin Hastings. This New Humanism, also called New Empiricism to once again emphasise British values, was largely based on the Swedish, social democratic example, rather than German or Russian socialist models.

Modern architecture was 'softened' and its revolutionary potential smothered to appeal to British sensibilities. British sources of modern utopian ideals, such as the Arts and Crafts and the Garden City movement were foregrounded to suggest that a modern 'tradition' had in fact also British roots.

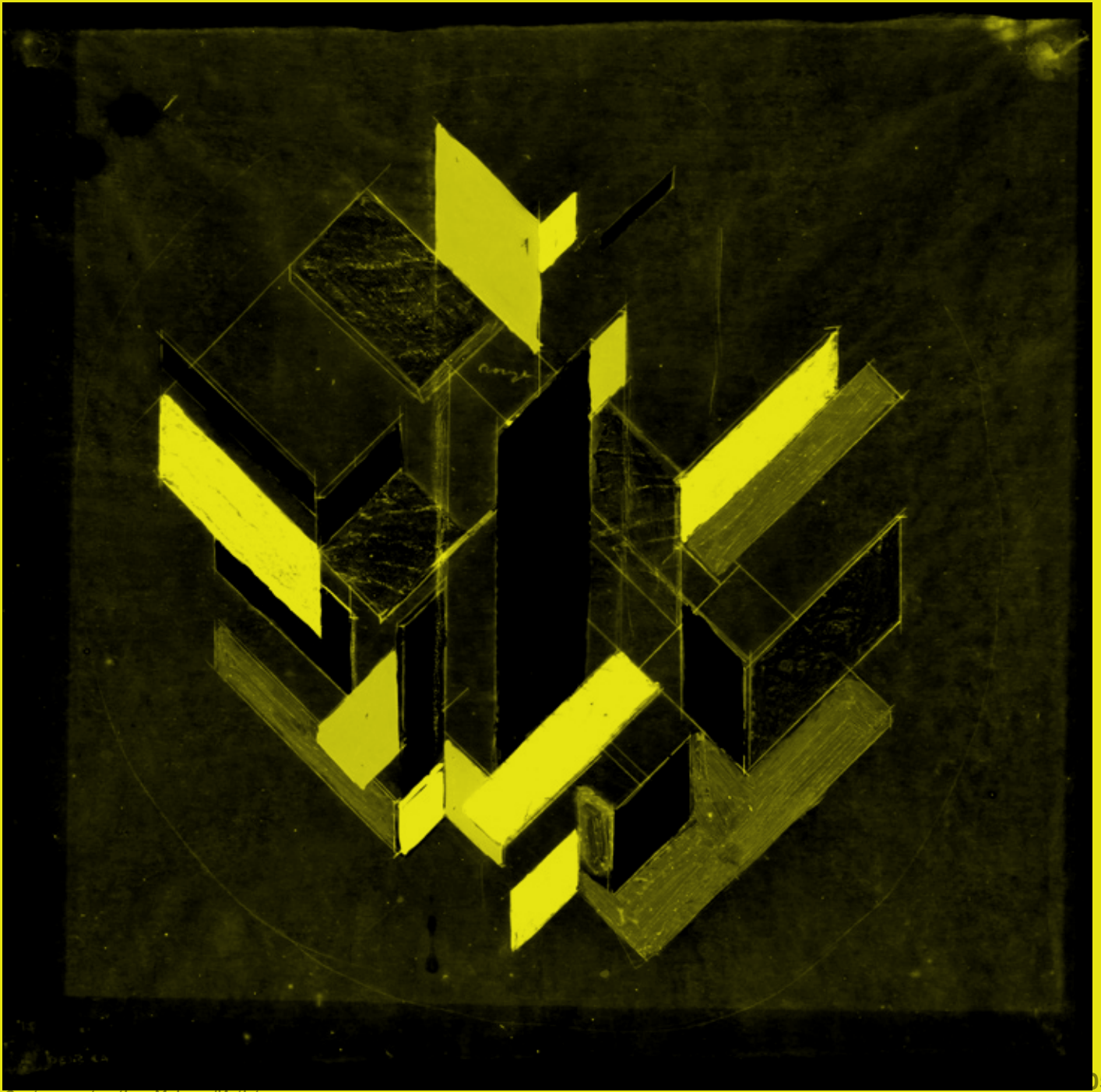
Reyner Banham, apologist of the New Brutalism in the 1950s and 60s and Pevsner's antipode in this debate, tried to rekindle the revolutionary potential though, and suggested that the Second World War was fought to make the world safe for modern architecture, including its radical, social cause to remove a class-based society. To no avail it must be said, and eventually, Banham would succumb to an early, more neo-liberal understanding of architecture, governance and planning when he embraced the idea of 'non-plan' and non-intervention by government bodies (together with the famed town planner Peter Hall and anarchist architect-thinker Cedric Price in 1969). Their ideas prefigured the Thatcher years and the dismantling of London planning departments, as well as the private development of the Docklands into the global business hub it became during the 1990s. Another multiple crime scene for sure.

Regarding the representation of De Stijl in that first architecture exhibition *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition* at MoMA in 1932: except for the central position of Oud and his work, De Stijl as a movement was hardly present. Although the curators acknowledged De Stijl, more specifically Neoplasticism, as a major influence, the work of Van Doesburg was not selected. Was Oud the more acceptable architect in terms of 'style'? And Theo van Doesburg too much of a radical thinker? The Rietveld Schröder House was included in *Modern Architecture,* but not in *The International Style* for instance. However, De Stijl would prominently figure in another ground-breaking exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, the 1936 *Cubism and Abstract Art* show curated by Alfred H. Barr Jr. Here, architectural avant-gardism seemed effectively neutralised by presenting it in the context of recent developments in the visual arts. The curator put it succinctly in the preface: 'The exhibition is intended as an historical survey of an important movement in modern art. It is conceived in a retrospective – not in a controversial spirit.'[3]

Historical and not controversial – modern art and some bits of architecture as 'exhibits', pieces of evidence from events in Europe on display in New York.

Asymmetries

It took until 1952, before the MoMA staged an exhibition wholly devoted to De Stijl. It was the third installation after its initial opening in 1951 at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, under the directorship of Willem Sandberg, and the subsequent presentation at the Venice Biennale in the summer of 1952. Both Van Doesburg and Mondrian had died by then. The architects Van Eesteren, J. J. P. Oud and Rietveld had developed their work in different directions and were now considered senior authoritative voices in the Netherlands. De Stijl had become a historical movement also



Contra-construction, Maison d'Artiste,
Theo van Doesburg and Cornelis van Eesteren, 1923

in its home country, and it was now revived to be canonised by the new post-war powerhouses of institutionalised modernism; by the Stedelijk – still experimental and progressive, one might say because of Sandberg's generous curatorial policy – and by MoMA, which by then was already a renowned corporate brand under the leadership of the Rockefeller family.

The MoMA dedicated its *Art Bulletin* to the show, with a substantial text by Alfred H. Barr Jr, which was actually an adaptation from his catalogue for the earlier seminal *Cubism and Abstract Art* exhibition of 1936. A one-page foreword was produced by Philip Johnson for the occasion, which served to concisely explain the formative influence of De Stijl on modern architecture, the Bauhaus, and the International Style. Johnson pointed towards the proposition of a universal theory of art which also included architecture, and towards the 'esthetic [sic] system' of De Stijl which 'fitted perfectly the architectural background of the time.'[4]

The most important contribution, though, was the aspect of 'asymmetrical balance' in the compositional technique of De Stijl. According to Johnson, De Stijl offered a compositional method based on first separation and then reassembling of elements 'into a loose yet careful asymmetric balance'.[5]

Despite references to the *Zeitgeist*, societal and spiritual revolution on the one hand, and the 'aesthetic system' on the other, they were firmly kept apart. Under the new Pax Americana, modern art and architecture were weaponised in the larger American project of global dominance in fierce competition with socialism and state communism as aesthetic practices that produced emblems of freedom, even democracy as the new universal values. In the case of De Stijl, Barr Jr highlighted 'open planning and free asymmetries', 'weightless freedom of the composition' and 'freely abutting and interpenetrating planes'.[6]

Rietveld designed the installation for MoMA, and the proposition of a 'careful asymmetric balance' could be experienced by the exhibition visitors in this way. The installation was thus a manifestation of De Stijl principles by one of its early progenitors. Looking at surviving photographs, one gets an overall impression of radical modern domesticity – due to the scale of the exhibition room, the relatively modest size of the artworks, and the inclusion of the original colourful furniture pieces designed by Rietveld himself, all in combination with the abstract display elements (in white, grey and black) of a similar scale.

Overall, the house as a site of avant-garde experimentation was prominently present in the exhibition. There were house designs by Oud, and Robert van 't Hoff, as well as a range of domestic interior designs, such as Van Doesburg's exquisite flower room for the Villa Noailles by Robert Mallet-Stevens. The list of works mentions a model and a drawing of the Meudon house in the exhibition (the side elevation), but it is not in the catalogue, nor can it be recognised in the photos.

The two obvious architectural icons of the show were the Rietveld Schröder House in Utrecht, designed and built in 1924, and the unbuilt Maison Particulière by Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren, amongst others included

by way of a series of six abstract drawings called 'contra constructions', of 1923 (but then erroneously dated 1922). MoMA holds one of these axonometric drawings in its collection, and copied on the wall in a blown-up version, it figured as the opening image of the exhibition. It also served as the cover image of the MoMA *Art Bulletin*. The abstract image of floating, dematerialised planes of colour will become one of the key images in the historiography of Western avant-garde architecture, probably only comparable to the diagram image of Le Corbusier's Dom-Ino House, a skeletal, concrete house design of 1914–15.

Paradigm

With the De Stijl exhibition of 1951–52 we are once again back at the site of the house, and not by accident. In the historiography of modern architecture and its canonisation, the site of the house holds a privileged position. The house – as a type and design assignment – has been considered the ultimate paradigm of universal, architectural principles of ordering, how to develop a design, its exterior and interiors, how to distribute the spaces and how to balance the structure and its materialisation. By identifying the house as a paradigm, it also became possible to put an order to the historical production itself, and the historical knowledge of the discipline, to confirm and highlight positions and trends, while obscuring others. In modern architecture, the house is therefore the site of canonical confirmation as it is the site of its contestations.

The English-Canadian historian Peter Collins was most explicit about this, in his major work *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture 1750–1950* of 1965. The emergence of modern architecture, already long before the avant-gardes of the interbellum, came along with the advent of a new secular era, driven by industrialisation and capitalism. According to Collins, similar to the temple in ancient Greek times, the church in the Middle Ages and the palace in the era of monarchs, now in the modern era the private house and villa had become the dominant building type, representative of the new socio-economic pattern and cultural hegemony. The house therefore also inevitably embodied and represented a certain society type. Peter Collins stressed that 'throughout the whole period from 1750 to 1950, architectural theory was dominated by factors more strictly appropriate only to domestic architecture'. For him it was 'by no means coincidental that the most influential architectural pioneers ..., such as Wright, Gropius, Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, originally gave expression to their theories by building either villas for wealthy connoisseurs or, after the 1918 war, modest dwellings for artisans or impecunious artists'.[7]

The individual house presented a special opportunity for modern architects: 'Villas, because of their multiplicity, their relatively modest dimensions and their unrestricted sites, allowed the current propensity for romanticism to be most fully exploited and expressed, and the importance of their subsequent influence cannot be exaggerated.'[8]

In short, Collins concluded with the sweeping statement: 'The suburban villa was not so much a minor building-type characteristic of

the early nineteenth century, as a paradigm for the architecture of the whole age.'[9]

In contrast with the received history of modern architecture, Collins' choice of illustrated examples was remarkably idiosyncratic. Absent were Mies van der Rohe, Gropius and Oud, and only two seminal cases of the great modern 'masters' are included, Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation (but none of his famous villas) and Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water at Bear Run. The third example of the avant-garde came from Van Doesburg: the unbuilt design of the Maison Particulière, with co-designer Van Eesteren left unmentioned. It once again reconfirmed the central position of De Stijl and Van Doesburg's contribution to the corpus of modern architecture.

That Collins connected romanticism with avant-garde revolution is characteristic for the British discourse on modernism, as we have also seen in the contribution of Pevsner. Class struggle and emancipation are underplayed for a focus on the rise of the middle classes. Whereas socialism and constructivism were ignored by Collins, the French Revolution and its architectural equivalent for a new rationalism were taken as a starting point though, especially the radical examples of amongst others Étienne-Louis Boullée and Claude-Nicolas Ledoux. This choice also makes clear that Collins builds the argument for the house as a paradigm for modern architecture on the work of Emil Kaufmann, who laid the theoretical foundations for a project of disciplinary autonomy for architecture.[10] Such a project of autonomy was to become the central dispute over the legacy of the avant-gardes.

Autonomy

It was the brilliant and erudite British-American historian and professor at Cornell University, Colin Rowe, who succeeded in firmly establishing the concept of autonomy in architecture. Building on Kaufmann, and on the work of Rudolf Wittkower, who was Rowe's supervisor, he eloquently demonstrated how classicist principles of ordering were still at work in the seminal works of some of the modern masters. In a series of ground-breaking essays, the house projects of Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier in particular, served as evidence material. For De Stijl, Van Doesburg and Rietveld, this was not the case however, and consequently they occupy a very different position in Rowe's analysis of the avant-garde, if they were not dismissed altogether.

Next to the question of autonomy, another *motif* in Rowe's writings concerned the transatlantic exchanges between America and Europe, and how the United States appropriated European modernism to become the new leading culture, not just with *The International Style* exhibition, but especially so with the *Cubism and Abstract Art* show. In the 1970s, Colin Rowe once again re-confirmed in no uncertain terms how he viewed this development, noting how the avant-garde was completely absorbed by the logic of late capitalism and how this had inevitably resulted in a transformation of the avant-garde project.

Rowe analysed how: '[F]or better or for worse, the message of modern architecture was transformed. It was made safe for capitalism.' According to Rowe, this 'disinfection

from political interference, its divorce from possibly doubtful ideas, in other words, its ultimate American qualification, should be recognised as being important – both inside and outside the United States – and as having direct bearing upon developments at the present day'. Modernism was no more 'an evident manifestation of socialism in some form or other'; it had now become the perfect material for east coast suburbia, the '*decor de la vie* for Greenwich, Connecticut', just as it was 'a suitable veneer for the corporate activities of "enlightened" capitalism'.[11]

'The products of a movement which became crystalised in the stress and trauma of the central European Nineteen-Twenties', were now made 'agreeably available to be catalogued – on either side of the Atlantic – among cultural trophies of the affluent society.'[12]

Rowe made these remarks in the context of various public events at MoMA, which promoted the work of the so-called New York Five, a group of emerging American architects, which included John Hejduk, Charles Gwathmey, Richard Meier, Michael Graves, and most notably perhaps, Peter Eisenman. The architects had embarked on a wholly new approach to modernism, neo-De Stijl and neo-Corbusian. They embraced the legacy as a handed down language of formalist invention, which each of them would further elaborate for exquisite and most unconventional house designs, sometimes as a free exercise in mannerism, often for a new and rich class of East Coast clients. Peter Eisenman was perhaps the most radical exponent, in that he sought to deconstruct the humanist tradition of modernism exactly by exploring house design.

Collapse

Peter Eisenman's explorations of the architecture of the house and the possibility of disciplinary autonomy were developed through a series of abstract and conceptual house designs, most of them left unbuilt. But to Eisenman architecture as a discipline is not limited to the built project; rather, its essence is the intellectual construction (or *concetto*) communicated through drawings and models. At this point, the building and its diagrammatic representation coincide, in the sense that both embody the intellectual model, the concept, as a manifestation of the principles of ordering at stake. To Eisenman, architecture cannot only achieve supreme autonomy here but paradoxically, this, to him, is also the only position where architecture can also maintain a critical position, not by engaging with the social and the ideological, but by *Entsagung* or uncompromising abstinence.

How to understand such rigorous insistence on autonomy in light of the earlier revolutionary intent of modern architecture and the avant-garde? In the 1990s, Belgian architectural theorist and philosopher Hilde Heynen suggested to look again at Theodor Adorno's notion of the dual character of art, as being both autonomous and social. She did so in her *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique*, an investigation into the relations between philosophy and the avant-garde, in an attempt to recharge the social potential of modern

architecture. She strategically connected this attempt with the positions of Rem Koolhaas and Daniel Libeskind, who were both included in the *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition, just like Eisenman, and which was crucially curated by an 82-year-old Philip Johnson for MoMA, together with the then-young and emerging architectural theorist Mark Wigley. This particular exhibition, as late as 1988, once again sought legitimisation for contemporary practice by mining avant-garde experiment, most notably early Russian Constructivism, while focusing on formalist innovation.

Yet, for Eisenman, such reconnecting as proposed by Heynen is not an option. His position comes closer to Manfredo Tafuri, the Italian neo-Marxist historian who explored the limits of the architectural avant-garde and refuted the social agenda of modern architecture and the avant-garde by pointing out its internal contradictions. Tafuri pessimistically concluded that the only valid position for architecture was 'sublime uselessness', to produce 'form without utopia', if architecture were to resist complicity in the late-capitalist economy. In the late twentieth century, architecture's place was in the boudoir, its destiny a sophisticated parlour game which at best demonstrated it had internalised the critique and made it a subject of its own formalist workings, so to speak.[13]

Exactly such disciplinary contestation is internalised in the conceptual house series of Peter Eisenman. The avant-garde promise is now about absence *(ou-topos)*, and can only be operative as such, if such a notion of operativity can ever be 'real' or actualised. The whole house series is therefore about such absence: absence of inhabitation and absence of the inhabitant, and even the hypothesised absence of the author. In those years, Eisenman was clearly influenced by the artist Sol LeWitt, the grand master of conceptual art and minimalism, and he even wrote a piece on 'conceptual' architecture and started to understand architecture design too as part of a 'process' in which the author disappeared. Also, when a house was built, it was but the momentous crystallisation of one option in an unlimited range of formal procedures and transformations.

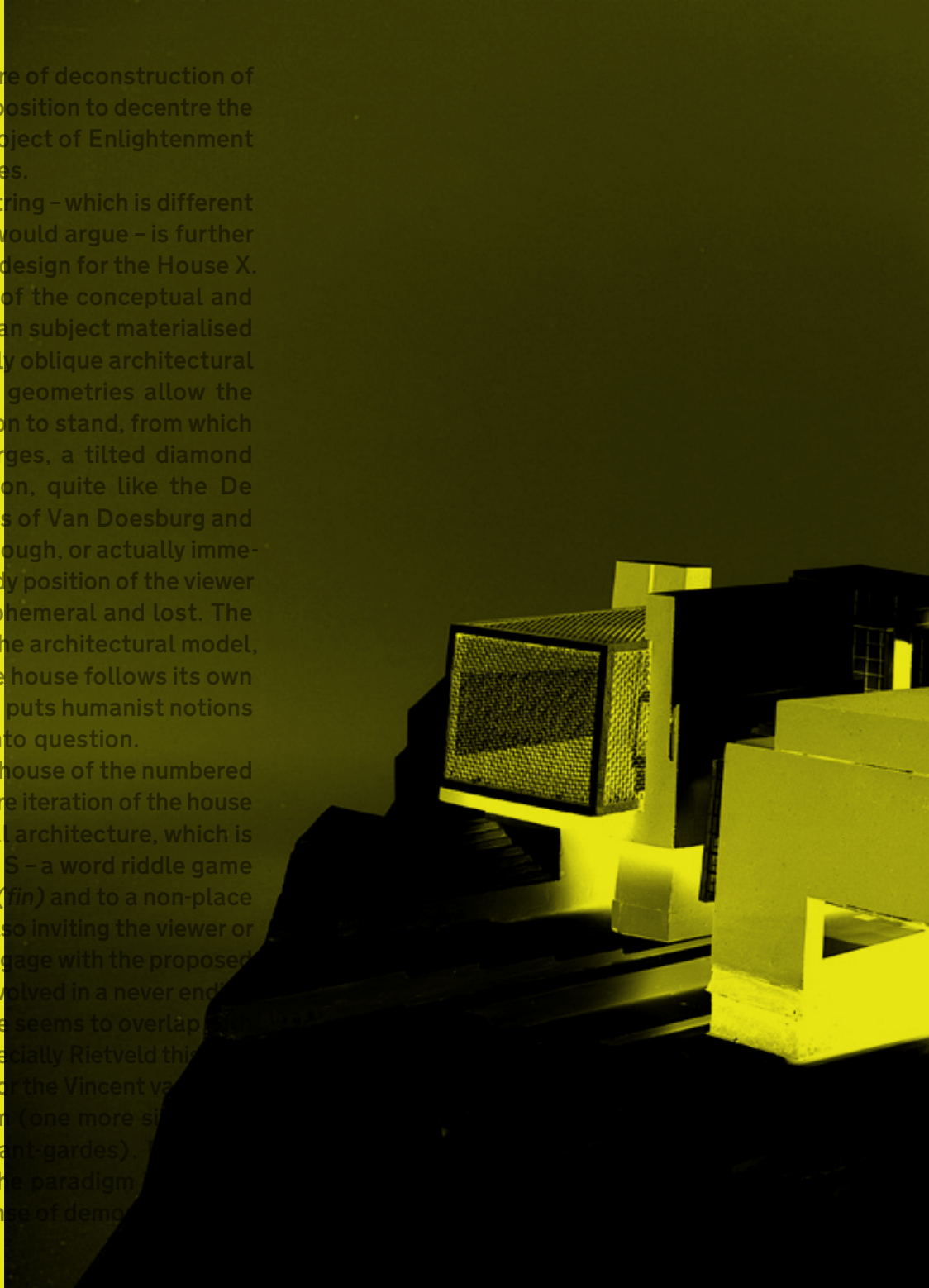
The House VI, in Cornwall, Connecticut, indeed as signalled by Colin Rowe already, is one of the more extreme cases, perhaps only because it was built, for real clients Suzanne and Dick Frank: she an architectural historian, he a photographer, and close friends of Eisenman. All sorts of humanist notions in which architecture is considered an extension of man, as well as a measure of man, are under attack here: stairs are positioned upside down, going nowhere, a kitchen table sits around an impossible corner while pierced by a column, and the marital bed too, which is literally dissected by a void creating a cleavage between the occupants of the bed. They are all gestures that aim to deny the house as a 'habitus', an aspect of a social pattern.

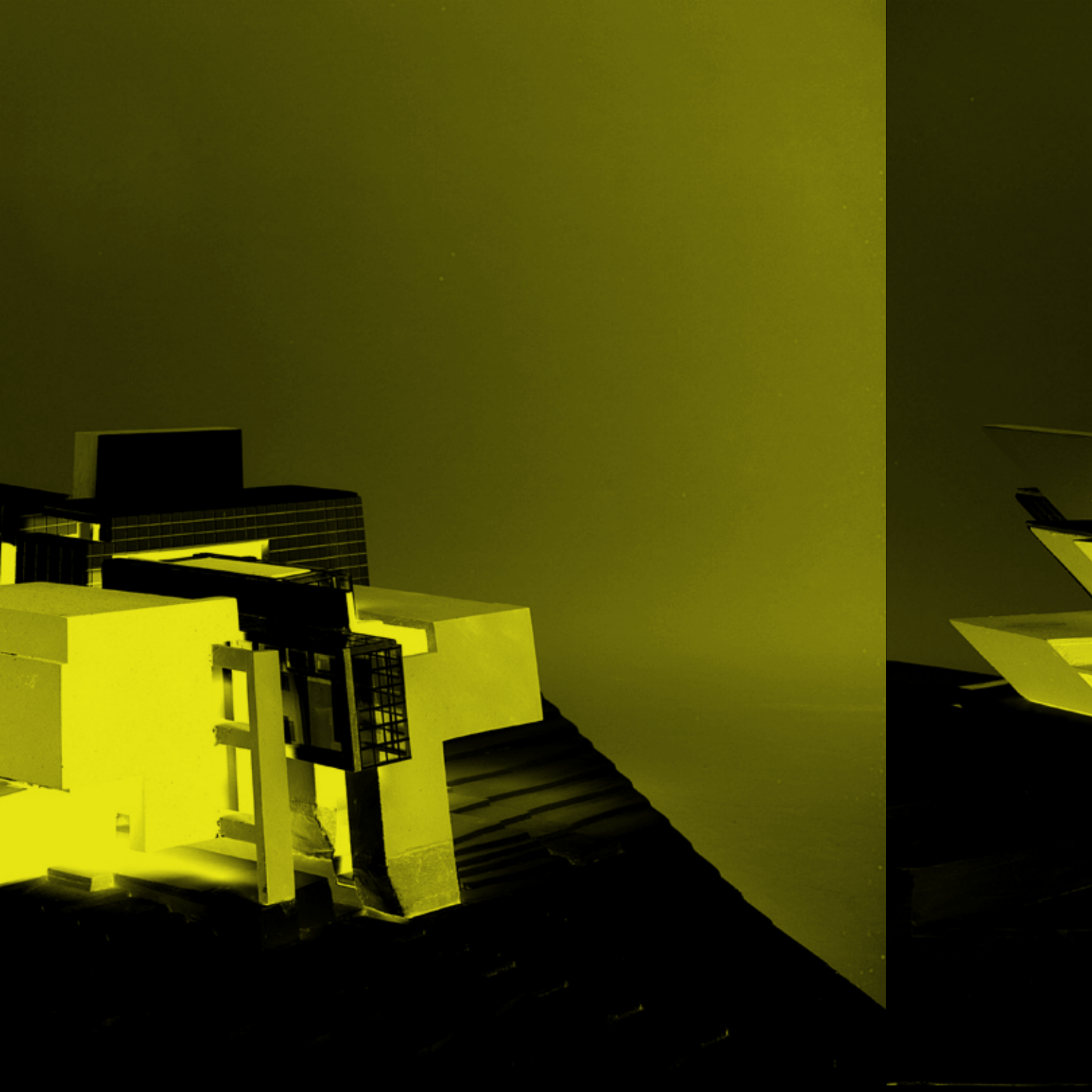
Perusing Tafuri's history and analysis of the avant-gardes, we see House VI strategically positioned on the same page next to the 'contra-construction' of the Maison Particulière.[14] At this point in our search of evidence, how can one be surprised? Van Doesburg is framed here as preparing the

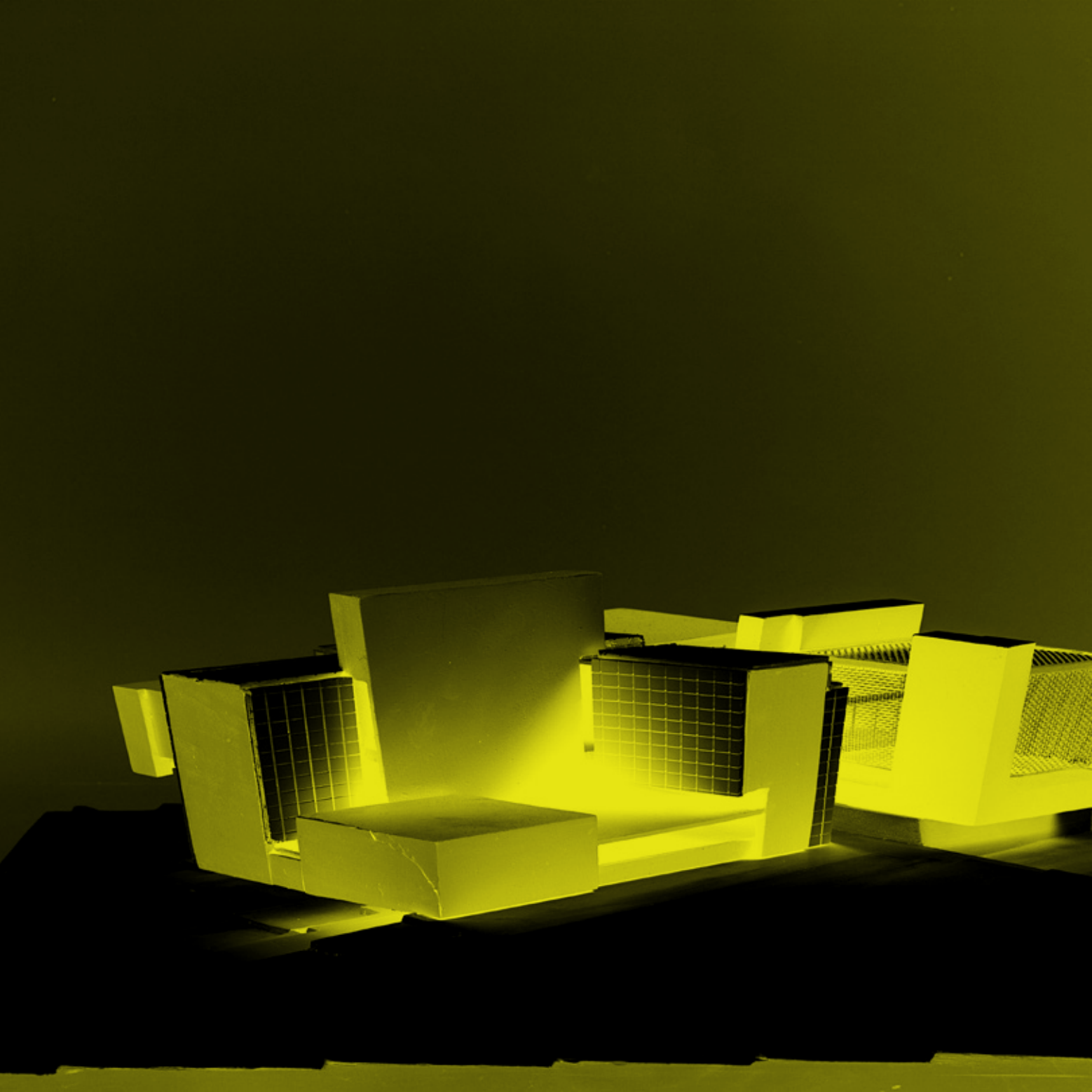
way for the architecture of deconstruction of Eisenman, and his proposition to decentre the human subject, the project of Enlightenment and its humanist values.

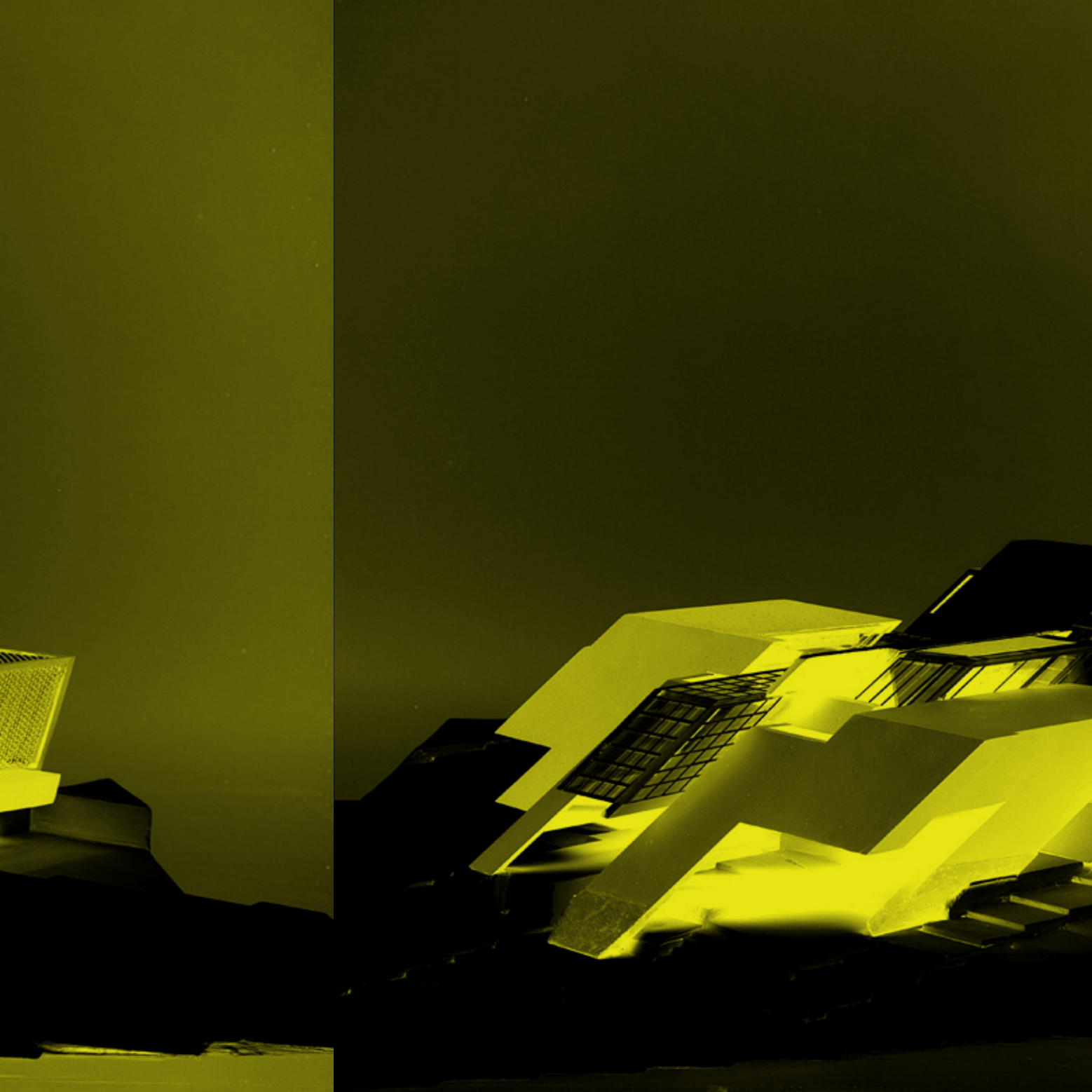
Such radical decentring – which is different from dehumanising I would argue – is further conceptualised in the design for the House X. In this case, the idea of the conceptual and decentring of the human subject materialised in a distorted, perfectly oblique architectural model. The flattened geometries allow the viewer only one position to stand, from which a perfect image emerges, a tilted diamond axonometric projection, quite like the De Stijl diamond paintings of Van Doesburg and Mondrian, but soon enough, or actually immediately, the shifting body position of the viewer renders that image ephemeral and lost. The human decentred by the architectural model, the architecture of the house follows its own logic (or agency?) and puts humanist notions of a universal order into question.

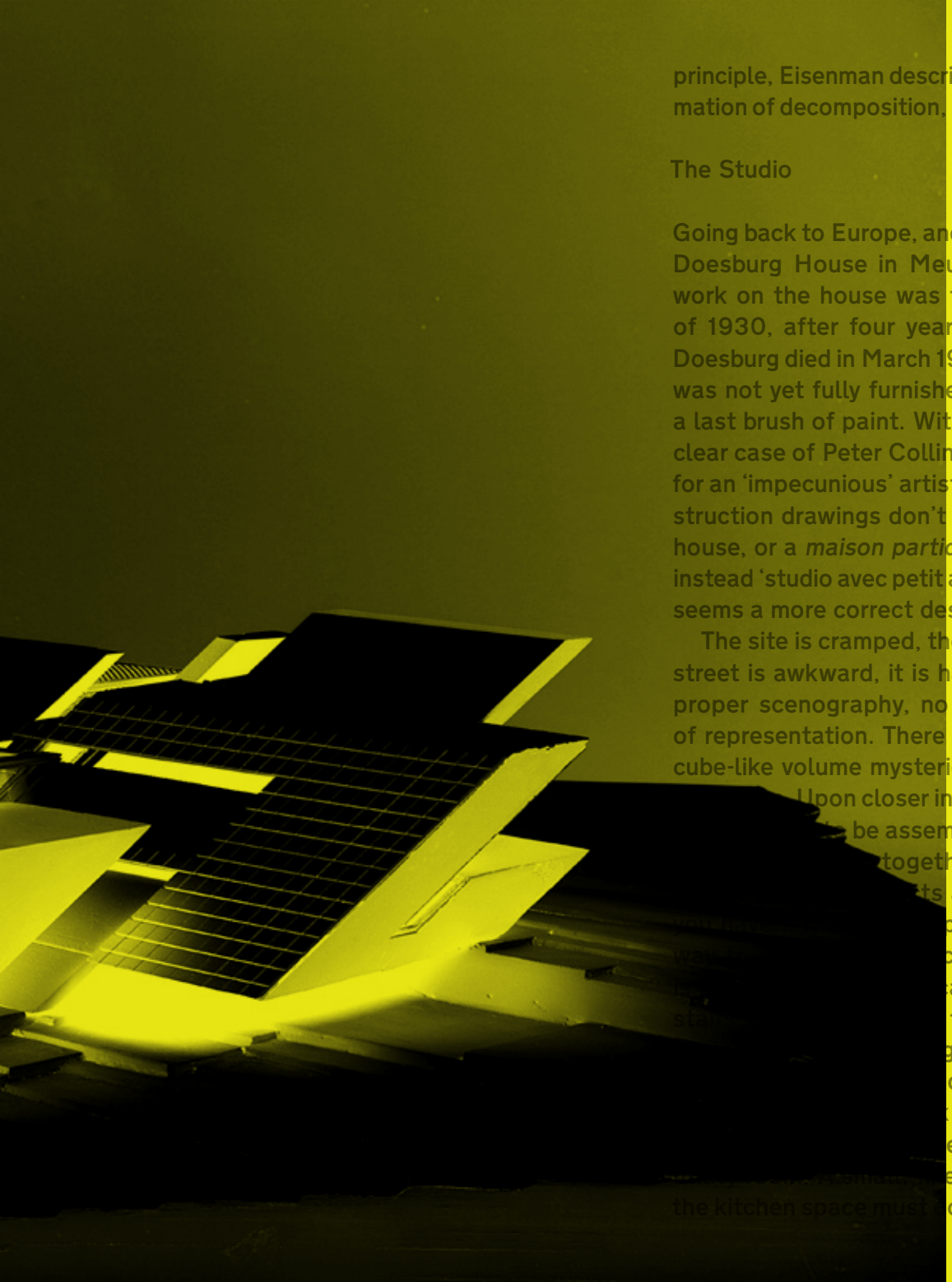
House X is the last house of the numbered series. There is one more iteration of the house as pure self-referential architecture, which is called Fin d'Ou T Hou S – a word riddle game that points to a finale *(fin)* and to a non-place *(fin d'ou)*, but that is also inviting the viewer or visitor to once again engage with the proposed design (find out) as involved in a never end[ing] story. Again, this house seems to overlap [with] De Stijl aesthetics, especially Rietveld thi[nking] and his very last work for the Vincent va[n Gogh] museum in Amsterdam (one more si[gn] historicising of the avant-gardes). [It] the epistemology of the paradigm [of] architecture, in the sense of demo[nstration]











principle, Eisenman described it as ‘an approximation of decomposition, not an example of it’.

The Studio

Going back to Europe, and the site of the Van Doesburg House in Meudon. Construction work on the house was finished by the end of 1930, after four years of planning. Van Doesburg died in March 1931, when the house was not yet fully furnished, and still needed a last brush of paint. Without a doubt, it is a clear case of Peter Collin’s ‘modest dwelling’ for an ‘impecunious’ artist. The historical construction drawings don’t actually speak of a house, or a *maison particulière*. But we read instead ‘studio avec petit appartement’, which seems a more correct description.

The site is cramped, the entrance from the street is awkward, it is hard to distinguish a proper scenography, no bourgeois gesture of representation. There is a white, abstract cube-like volume mysteriously sitting on the Upon closer inspection, the whole be assembled from cube-like together, like the yellow ts as a clear sign that proper address. The ce on the first floor ause of the outside the front door, but gesture. The kitchen d floor and is to be through a covered ellar and a separate ed concrete table in the kitchen space must do for a place to have

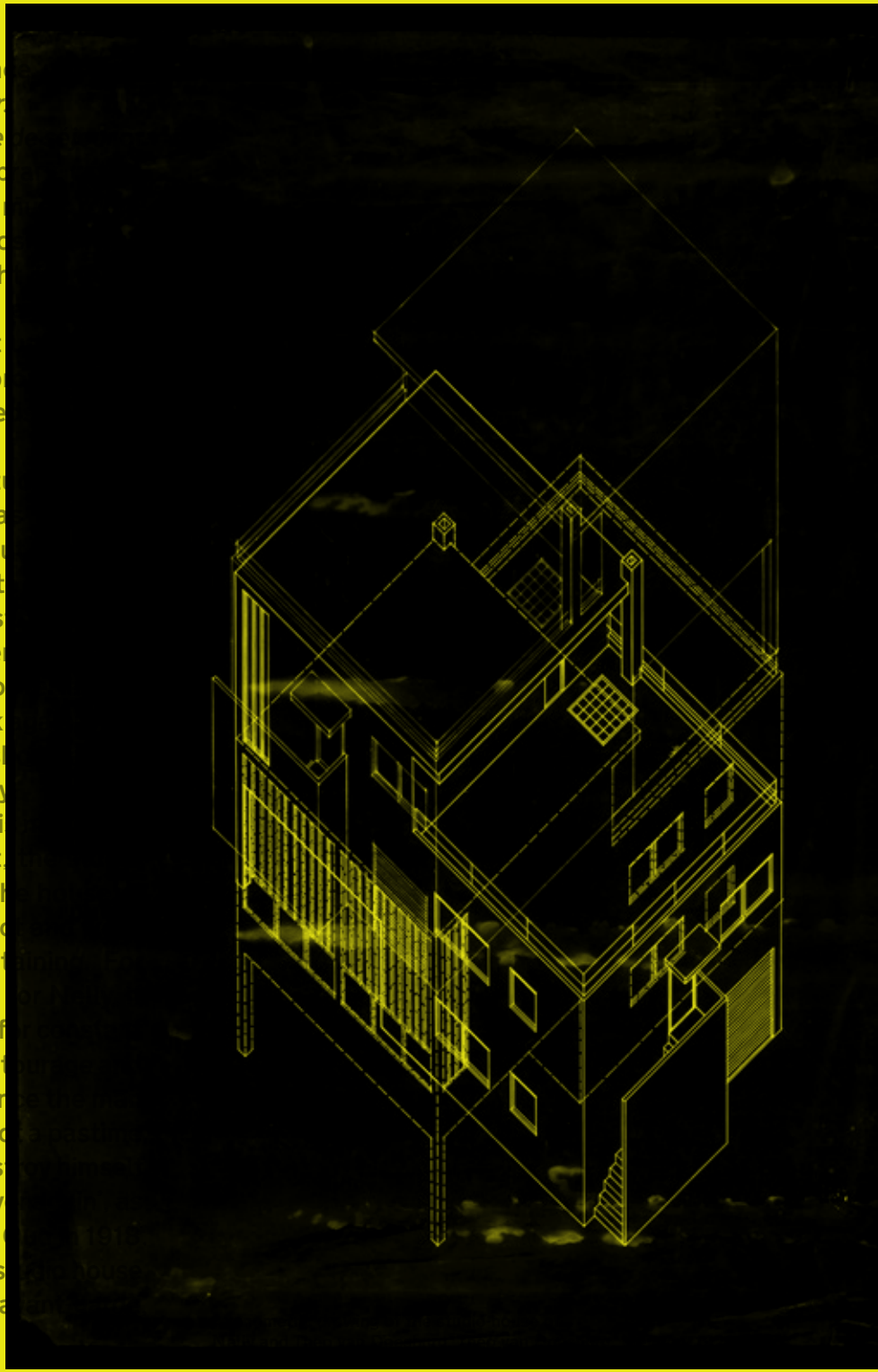
breakfast, lunch and dinner, sin
there is no proper *salle à manger*

Upstairs, there is neither a *salle*
a *salon*. Though there is a little lib
beautiful top light, and a modest
There is only one bedroom, oppo
bathroom, tucked away just righ
main entrance, where you would
wardrobe or a closet space. But
haven't found any description or p
of it, just a design sketch for a be
'pour fabrication en serie'.

The raised, double-height st
at the back of the house acts a
space. It is almost a pure cube, bu
It features an immovable concret
generous windows facing northeas
photos with friends and guests we
taken here, sometimes on the roo
be reached from a staircase stuck
studio wall. Other studio photos s
selections of paintings on display

Raised above the earth (there i
really), drenched in natural light
is not just the central space of th
is its *raison d'être*, to study, reflec
also when socialising and entert
Van Doesburg, and I assume also
must have been the natural place f
reconstitution, of the self, their ent
eventually of the world. To referen
himself, such reconstitution was no
project. 'Man must constantly des
in order to construct himself all ov
Van Doesburg wrote in a letter to

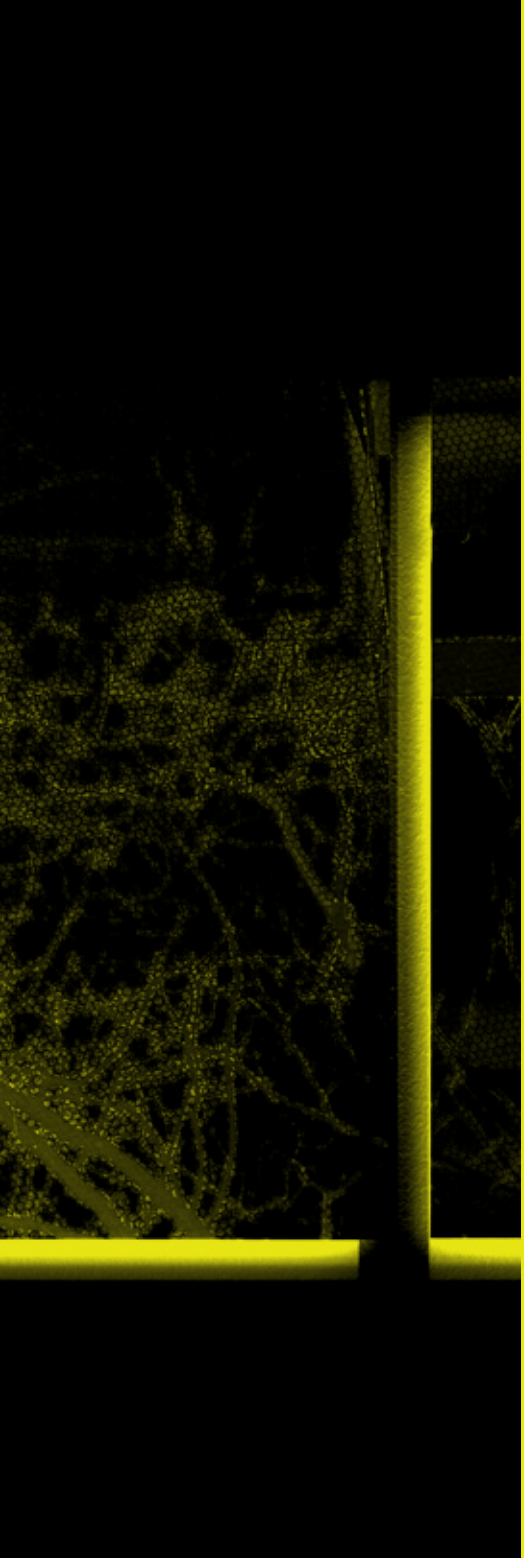
If we then think of the Meudon s
as a parental bed of the historical a



anyone who enters the scene in anticipation of an agreeable avant-gardist game might want to think twice. One could become the suspect of yet another crime.

Notes

[1] Daniel Defert, 'Foucault, Space and the Architects', in Jean-Francois Chevrier, ed., *Politics, Poetics: Documenta X, The Book* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 1997), pp. 274–83.
[2] Michel Foucault, *Die Heterotopien: Der utopische Körper / Les heterotopies: Le corps utopique* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2013), p. 40.
[3] Alfred H. Barr Jr, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, exh. cat. The Museum of Modern Art (New York, 1936), p. 9.
[4] Philip C. Johnson, 'Foreword', in *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin*, vol. XX, no. 2, 'De Stijl' (Winter 1952–53), p. 5.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Alfred H. Barr Jr, in *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin*, vol. XX, no. 2, 'De Stijl' (Winter 1952–53), p. 9.
[7] Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture 1750–1950* (Montreal: McGill-Queens' University Press, 1998 [1965]), p. 42.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Emil Kaufmann, *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier: Ursprung und Entwicklung der Autonomen Architektur* (Vienna: Passer, 1933), and *Architecture in the Age of Reason: Baroque and Postbaroque in England, Italy, and France* (New York: Dover Publications, 1968 [1955]).
[11] Colin Rowe, 'Introduction', in *Five Architects: Eisenman, Graves, Gwathmey, Hejduk, Meier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975 [1972]), p. 4.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Manfredo Tafuri, 'L'Architecture dans le Boudoir: The language of criticism and the criticism of language', in *Oppositions*, no.3 (1974), pp. 37–62.
[14] Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995 [first Italian edition 1980]), ills., pp. 324–25.



Biographies

Antonis Pittas is a visual artist who lives and works in Amsterdam. He is an Honorary Fellow of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Amsterdam, where he conducts research and produces work under the heading *Recycling history (contemporising history/historicising the contemporary)*. His artistic practice focuses on contemporary social and political issues, exploring topics such as safety and control, economic crises and acts of resistance, as well as violence and vandalism.

Lisa Bakker is a project coordinator, editor and fundraiser dedicated to contemporary artists and museums. She holds a BA in Fine Art and a MA in Museology. She is the studio manager for Antonis Pittas and project coordinator at Centraal Museum in Utrecht. Prior to this she has worked with various other artists and art institutes, including the Van Gogh Museum and the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

Maria Barnas is a poet and visual artist based in the Netherlands. Her language-based work finds its way into magazines, books, sound pieces, films and installations. She is head of the temporary master programme Approaching Language at the Sandberg Instituut, Amsterdam, and writes about poetry for newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*. She is editor of literary magazine *De Gids*.

I.K. Bonset is a pseudonym of visual artist and De Stijl founder Theo van Doesburg. In order to include Dadaism in his practice, he used for his literary work, the heteronym I.K. Bonset (which would be an anagram of 'I am silly'). According to I.K. Bonset, poetry is not meant to be understood but meant to move.

Laurie Cluitmans is a curator and art critic. Since January 2018, she works as curator of contemporary art at the Centraal Museum in Utrecht. Prior to this, she was gallery director at Galerie Fons Welters in Amsterdam. She has curated exhibitions for De Appel, Amsterdam; Sculpture International, Rotterdam; and De Hallen Haarlem, amongst others.

Alex Farrar is an artist based in Amsterdam and London. He studied at Leeds College of Art, Leeds Metropolitan University, Gerrit Rietveld Academie, and was a resident at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten. His work is all over the place, especially at the moment.

Johan F. Hartle is Dean of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. He has also taught philosophy and art studies at the University of Amsterdam, the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design; and the China Academy of Arts.

Dirk van den Heuvel teaches architecture at Delft University of Technology, and heads the Jaap Bakema Study Centre at Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam. He was a visiting scholar at the Faculty of Monash Art, Design & Architecture (MADA), at Melbourne's Monash University, and received a Richard Rogers Fellowship from Harvard University Graduate School of Design. In 2014, he was curator of the Dutch national pavilion for the Venice Architecture Biennale.

Bram Ieven is a cultural theorist. He teaches cultural studies and modern Dutch culture at the Leiden University Centre for Arts in Society and periodically publishes essays on art, politics and activism.

Eleonoor Jap Sam studied art and architecture history, design and communication. She works as an independent researcher, critic, editor and publisher. From 1998 to 2002, she was director of Docomomo International, an international non-profit organisation for the documentation and conservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement. She was one of the co-founders of episode publishers.

Bruno Latour is a French philosopher, anthropologist and sociologist. He is especially known for his work in the field of science and technology studies (STS). After teaching at the École des Mines de Paris (Centre de Sociologie de l'Innovation) from 1982 to 2006, he became a professor at Sciences Po Paris in 2006–17, where he was the scientific director of the Sciences Po Medialab. He retired from university activities in 2017.

Thalia Ostendorf is co-founder of Chaos Press (Uitgeverij Chaos). She writes short stories, which have appeared in *Cotton Xenomorph*, *DIG* and *The Satirist*. She is currently a PhD candidate in social anthropology and modern languages at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, and an Oxford Europaeum Scholar. Her research focuses on the influence of war literature on commemoration practices and peace activism in the US and UK.

Bart Rutten has been the artistic director of Centraal Museum in Utrecht since May 2017. He is responsible for the exhibition programme and acquisitions made by the museum. During this time the Centraal Museum has intensified its contemporary art programme as somewhere local and internationally renowned artists meet. Previously, he was head of collections at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam where he curated exhibitions on Matisse, and Malevich and the Russian avant-garde.

Doris Wintgens has served as modern art curator at Leiden's Museum De Lakenhal from 1979 to 2018. From 1999 on, she focussed on exhibitions, acquisitions and publications, dealing primarily with the art of the first half of the twentieth century. In 2017, her book *Peggy Guggenheim & Nelly van Doesburg: Advocates of De Stijl* was published.

Credits

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