The Villa Baizeau and the Casa O’Gorman: The Modern House in 1929 Through Two Case Studies

Nora L. Boyd
CUNY Hunter College

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The Villa Baizeau and the Casa O’Gorman: the Modern House in 1929 through two Case Studies

by

Nora Lucia Boyd

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History, Hunter College The City University of New York

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Thesis Sponsor:

May 8, 2019
Date
Harper Montgomery
Signature

May 8, 2019
Date
Nebahat Avcioglu
Signature of Second Reader
To Mom, Dad, and Nick
Table of Contents

Acknowledgements........................................................................................................... ii

List of Illustrations........................................................................................................... iii

Introduction............................................................................................................................. 1
Two Modern Houses in 1929
Le Corbusier and narratives of Modernism
Toward an impure architecture

Chapter 1................................................................................................................................. 20
The Villa Baizeau: A Modern House in Carthage
What Monsieur Buhagiar found at Stuttgart
Villa Baizeau in 1929
Baizeau vs Le Corbusier, 1928–31
History erased, 1930

Chapter 2................................................................................................................................. 48
The Casa O’Gorman: A Modern House in Mexico City
Juan O’Gorman’s “first” house
Translation of ideas into house
The Casa Cecil O’Gorman in 1929
Post-Revolutionary Modernism: the 1929 designs
Mexican Avant-garde, 1929–1948

Conclusion............................................................................................................................... 78
Uncovering the stories of the Villa Baizeau and the Casa O’Gorman
The fate of the Villa Baizeau, 1930–2019
Through the forest of *pilotis*: a way forward

Bibliography............................................................................................................................. 104

Illustrations............................................................................................................................. 112
Acknowledgements

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List of Illustrations

Figure 1. Lucien Baizeau and Le Corbusier, Villa Baizeau, 1928-30, Tunis, Tunisia.

Figure 2. Juan O’Gorman, Casa O’Gorman, 1929-31, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 3. Weissenhof exhibition, 1927, Stuttgart, Germany.

Figure 4. Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye, 1929, Poissy-sur-Seine, France.

Figure 5. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Stuttgart apartments, Weissenhof, 1927, Stuttgart, Germany.

Figure 6. JJP Oud, terraced houses, Weissenhof, 1927, Stuttgart, Germany.

Figure 7. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Stuttgart houses, 1927, Stuttgart, Germany.

Figures 8-10. Villa Baizeau’s surroundings, Tunis, Tunisia.


Figure 15. Villa Baizeau soon after its construction, 1930, Tunis, Tunisia.

Figure 16. Villa Baizeau from the Gulf, Tunis, Tunisia.

Figure 17. Dom-ino house, 1914.

Figure 18. Le Corbusier, “Citrohan” type, 1920s.

Figure 19. Auguste Perret, Garage Ponthieu, 1905, Paris, France.

Figure 20. Villa Baizeau, first and ground floors, February 1929.

Figure 21. Villa Baizeau, second floor, February 1929.

Figure 22. Lucien Baizeau, second sketch, 4 May 1928.

Figure 23. Lucien Baizeau, first sketch, 23 January 1928.

Figure 26. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Pavillon de l’esprit nouveau, 1925, Paris, France.

Figure 27. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Maison Cook, 1926, Paris, France.

Figure 28. Atelier Le Corbusier, FLC 1037, 1928.


Figure 34. Le Corbusier, detail from FLC 24983, 6 March 1928.


Figures 39-42. Atelier Le Corbusier, FLC 2069-2071, February 1929.

Figures 43-44. Atelier Le Corbusier, FLC 25023 & FLC 25031, August 1929.

Figure 45. Villa Baizeau under construction, 1929, Tunis, Tunisia.

Figure 46. Le Corbusier, *Four studies of the potentials of the ‘Five Points,’* 1929.

Figure 47. Mehdi Ben Cheikh, Villa Baizeau, undated, published February 2019, Tunis, Tunisia.

Figure 48. Juan O’Gorman, Casa O’Gorman, 1929-1931, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 49. José Villagrán García, Instituto de Higiene y Granja Sanitaria, 1925, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 50. Detail of “terrazzo” floors, 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 51. View of the South facade, 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 52. San Angel Inn, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figures 53-54. Front entrance, 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 57. Exterior staircase, 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 58. Studio interior, 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 59. East and North facades, 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figures 60-61. Garage and servant’s quarters, 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figures 62-64. Details of the interior color, 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figures 65-67. Details of red antioxidant paint, 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 68. Built-in shelving, 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 69. Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan, Mexico.

Figure 70. Interior of Palace of Quetzalpapalotl, Teotihuacan, Mexico.

Figures 71-72. Details of the roofline, 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 73. Le Corbusier, Ozenfant studio, 1924, Paris, France.

Figure 74. Walter Gropius, Bauhaus, 1926, Dessau, Germany.

Figure 75. Mies van der Rohe, Villa Tugendhat, 1928, Brno, Czechia.

Figure 76. Model of Casa O’Gorman, 2018, Museo Casa Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 77. Double-helicoid staircase, Rivera house-studio, 1931-1932, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 78. O’Gorman, house on Calle de Jardín, circa 1930, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 79. O’Gorman and Diego Rivera, interior of Anahuacalli, circa 1940s, Coyoacan, Mexico.

Figure 80. O’Gorman, interior of Pedregal house, 1948-56, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 81. O’Gorman, Drawing 1, 1929.

Figure 82. O’Gorman, Drawing 2, 1929.
Figure 83. O’Gorman, December plans, 1929.

Figure 84. O’Gorman, December plans, 1929.

Figure 85. O’Gorman, *Autorretrato múltiple*, 1950, oil on canvas, Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 86. Sinopia of mural (1948), 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 87. Left side of mural (1948), 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 88. Right side of mural (1948), 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 89. Detail of skeleton (1948), 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 90. Detail of nude woman (1948), 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 91. Detail of bottom center (1948), 2018, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 92. O’Gorman, Pedregal house, 1948-56, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 93. O’Gorman, Saavedra, and Martinez, UNAM library, 1949-52, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 94. Le Corbusier, Villa Shodhan, 1951-56, Ahmedabad, India.

Figure 95. Le Corbusier, Chandigarh High Court, 1950-1955, Chandigarh, India.

Figure 96. Le Corbusier, Casa Curutchet, 1955, La Plata, Argentina.

Figure 97. Rivera and O’Gorman, Anahuacalli, 1942-43, Coyoacan, Mexico City.

Figure 98. O’Gorman, school, circa 1930s, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 99. O’Gorman, Rivera-Kahlo houses, 1931-32, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figures 100-101. O’Gorman, interiors, Casa O’Gorman, Mexico City, Mexico.
In 1929 two men in different parts of the world were imagining small, functionalist houses. On the gulf of Tunis, in the wealthy suburb of Carthage, a businessman was envisioning a compact and straightforward weekend home (figure 1). In the southern Mexico City suburb of Coyoacán, a young architect was designing a small house which he meant to use as a case study for a new Mexican architecture (figure 2). The former, Lucien Baizeau, commissioned the Swiss architect Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, known as Le Corbusier, for the task, and the latter, Juan O’Gorman, built it himself. Both the architect and commissioner were aware of current trends in architecture, and admired the work of Le Corbusier. Both the Villa Baizeau and the Casa O’Gorman, as they came to be known, were built between 1929 and 1931, and made use of reinforced concrete, which was unusual for residential buildings at the time.† Perhaps more significantly, they each grasped and embraced the potential of concrete, revealing the material’s strength in different approaches to transparency; the Casa O’Gorman in extensive use of glass, and the Villa Baizeau in fully open sides. Both designs have been linked to Le Corbusier, whose shadow looms long and large in the historiography of 20th century architecture. These similarities warrant a comparative history of these buildings even though the houses figure more in the stories of Baizeau and O’Gorman than in that of the older Swiss architect.

In English-language architectural history, both houses have been relegated, for their tangential links to Le Corbusier, to footnotes in the story of Modernist architecture and of Modernism in general. The shorthand “Corbusian,” within architectural history, refers variously to the aesthetic denial of historic references through pared-down white walls, machine-age references to automobiles and ships, and the open floor plans allowed by reinforced concrete construction. The Casa O’Gorman, when related to Corbusian buildings, was called derivative—his “austere houses and schools modeled on the work of Le Corbusier” were only the forerunners to more “authentic” architecture.² The Villa Baizeau has the opposite relationship to the term “Corbusian”—because it was not deemed a true Corbusian creation by scholars, it was dismissed and ignored.³ Because Le Corbusier is one of the harbingers of Modernist architecture within the accepted narrative of architectural history, the Villa Baizeau and the Casa O’Gorman are obscured by their relation to his work. This shorthand “Corbusian” is meant to make the narrative of architectural history smoother, but like all shorthands it can obscure the realities of the built forms to which it is attached. In this history, the rubric for being Modern is defined by towering geniuses in a self-referential model, and everything else falls short. The authoritative work of scholars such as Nikolaus Pevsner and William J.R. Curtis delimit the


³ Because its built form was not included in Le Corbusier’s Oeuvre Complète (1930), most scholars only attend to the early, unbuilt designs which were more closely related to Le Corbusier; see Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Oeuvre Complète 1910–1929, ed. W. Boesiger and O. Stonorov. (Zurich: H. Girsberger, 1937).
contours of this well-tread narrative: outsize individual geniuses such as Adolf Loos, Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Walter Gropius invented a radical new style that broke from the traditional past, “reconcil(ing) an idealized vision of society with the forces of the Industrial Revolution.” Influence is linear, traceable to a handful of geniuses, and always flows from originator to outsiders, whose responses are not radical enough. This has perhaps been more true of Le Corbusier than anyone else.⁴

Yet each house responded individually and directly to its site, climate, context, and the needs of its owner. The Casa O’Gorman was a product of post-revolutionary Mexico City and its young architect, whose relationship to Le Corbusier was solely through his abstract writings. The Villa Baizeau came out of a long negotiation with Le Corbusier and his atelier by letter, resulting in a building designed more directly in response to its site than conversation with its ostensible architect, miles away. The Casa O’Gorman’s structural transparency and non-monumentality were political statements in its post-revolutionary society as well as functional elements. The Villa Baizeau’s precise situation on its site allowed it to function properly, but also allowed it a monumental aspect, perched on its hill. Interrogating their specific relationships to Corbusian

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⁴ William J.R. Curtis, Modern Architecture Since 1900 (New York: Phaidon Press, 2009). Nikolaus Pevsner’s Pioneers of the Modern Movement (1936) was one of the first major textbook sources on the subject, setting this narrative out early. Curtis’ Modern Architecture since 1900 was first published in 1982 and has gone through several editions. (I read it in its third edition at NYU in 2009.) The book won multiple awards upon its original publication, and the AIA’s architecture book prize for its third edition in 1997. Both set out the history of Modernist architecture as a history of “a number of extraordinarily imaginative individuals” (Curtis, Modern Architecture, 7).

⁵ As an example, UNESCO’s website explains why it has preserved seventeen of Le Corbusier’s buildings as a World Heritage site: the architect is “directly and materially associated with ideas of the Modern Movement,” his works are a “masterpiece of human genius,” an “unprecedented interchange of human values,” and were of “universal significance in the twentieth century.” Because he is credited with “the invention of a new architectural language that made a break with the past,” he is, by extension, responsible for all Modernism, Purism, Brutalism, and Sculptural architecture. Emphasis my own.
principles can help us better understand how the story of Le Corbusier’s influence has crystallized our judgements about Modernism around the world.

These houses have been left out of the narrative or mischaracterized for both material and historiographical reasons. The Villa Baizeau was, as the Le Corbusier scholar Tim Benton wrote, “designed at a distance.” 6 Lucien Baizeau initially contracted the architect to build him a small villa; it was only after Le Corbusier’s first few designs proved untenable that he ended up building his villa based on designs of his own that he sent to Corbusier’s office in May 1928. Scholars like Deborah Gans and Peter Serenyi mention Le Corbusier’s discarded first proposals much more frequently than they do its actual built form, or they leave it out of his oeuvre altogether, since the architect himself chose to do so. 7 After the Villa Baizeau’s inaccurate initiation into history, the creation of the Presidential Palace precinct around the house in the mid-century made it inaccessible to researchers and tourists, prolonging and perpetuating its obfuscation.

In the Casa O’Gorman, Le Corbusier played an indirect role through his 1924 book Vers une architecture. O’Gorman was deeply interested in the potential of functionalist housing for a post-revolutionary society, rather than in any particular buildings of Le Corbusier’s, which were

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6 Tim Benton, “Drawings and Clients: Le Corbusier’s Atelier Methodology in the 1920s,” AA Files, no. 3 (January 1983): 43. In 1980, the Le Corbusier scholar Tim Benton published the first and only comprehensive discussion of the Villa Baizeau (which was focused on Le Corbusier’s ideas more than the final building itself) in the Italian journal Rassegna. In this publication, three years later, Benton wrote, “neither Le Corbusier, nor any of his assistants, visited the site, although the client did visit the rue de Sevres on various occasions. Consequently, much of the dialogue between client and architect, carried out verbally and unrecorded when the clients lived in Paris, are, in this case, documented in letters and even drawings. Indeed, many important features of the house as completed were originated by the client, not the architect” (Benton, “Drawings and Clients,” 43).

not published until after he had finished his designs.\(^8\) The house was shaped by this and his own relationship to contemporaneous Mexican Nationalist movements in the arts and architecture. Though early scholars like Gibson Danes lauded the Casa O’Gorman’s particular response to its Mexico City context, later scholars like Curtis soon began to fold all his functionalist works into a derivative early career, under the influence of Le Corbusier, dismissing it as a “crude” derivation.\(^9\) Similarly to the Villa Baizeau, because of later additions and multiple later residents, it survived until 2014 in a heavily modified form that was not open to the public, contributing to this imprecise narrative.

I will not argue that Le Corbusier had no part to play in the histories of the Villa Baizeau and the Casa O’Gorman, but he is not the most important player in either of them. His involvement in their histories is relevant historical fact: his designs and his writing were vitally significant to both the Casa O’Gorman and the Villa Baizeau. But the existing historiography overstates the debt to Le Corbusier in both cases. It is important to refine the relationship of the houses to Le Corbusier’s ideas, by analyzing points of connection and differences in both cases as responsive, fluid phenomena. By clarifying this relationship, we can free these buildings from their structure as dead ends in a Corbusian narrative and allow them to act as agents in their own narratives.

\(^8\) O’Gorman built the Casa O’Gorman without any significant reference to actual plans or buildings by the older architect. By the time the \textit{Oeuvre Complète} was published, in 1930, the Casa O’Gorman was well underway and the design had been finished. When he began his studio-houses for Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, in 1931, he may have referenced the \textit{Oeuvre Complète} and its floor plans for the Amédée Ozenfant Studio; Rivera may even have pointed it out to him or asked for something similar, as they worked together closely on his commission; see more in Chapter 2.

In order to begin a history of these houses that lends insight into their historical contexts, the lives of their creators, and the experiences of their inhabitants, I first had to foreground formal analysis. I am certainly not the first person to perceive the value of these designs, particularly since the Casa O’Gorman has been restored and opened to the public and has attracted renewed scholarship.\textsuperscript{10} Because of this, I was able to do extensive formal analysis of the Casa O’Gorman in person, and gained limited access to the O’Gorman archives.\textsuperscript{11} In Mexico City, I found formal and archival evidence for the Casa’s shifting relationship to Mexican Muralism and O’Gorman’s functionalism. Finding the Villa Baizeau was harder.\textsuperscript{12} By mining its scant traces in the existing literature and drawings made available through the Fondation Le Corbusier, I was able to begin the process of a formal analysis of a house that was built through a process that unfolded over time, and responded to its site and its commissioner’s needs.\textsuperscript{13} In both cases, reevaluating the houses themselves and their design processes also allowed me to revisit their legacy within the scholarship, shedding light on the narrative of English-language architectural history.

\textsuperscript{10} Fortunately, the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, or INBA, has made great strides in making the Casa O’Gorman not only accessible to the public but more accurately represented in scholarship.

\textsuperscript{11} In January 2018, through a generous grant from the Kossak Foundation, I travelled to Mexico City to experience the restored Casa O’Gorman at length, to compare it to local buildings, and O’Gorman’s later work at UNAM. There, I was given limited access to the O’Gorman archive, though it was in the process of moving and I was only able to see certain images while on site.

\textsuperscript{12} Today, the Villa Baizeau is largely inaccessible, the Villa Baizeau and any archives on Baizeau were beyond my reach for this investigation. Further scholarship must be done on the current state of the house, to fill in the gaps in documentation of its built form, and elaborate on our picture of the man who designed it; see more in Chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{13} I was able to pinpoint Baizeau’s involvement in the form of his letters, preserved in Benton's research in several articles from 1980 through 2016, and I am grateful for his direct email communication with me in the fall of 2016. Then, through images made available through the Fondation Le Corbusier’s archives, I could refer directly to drawings made by Baizeau, as well as by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret.
To produce a more complex narrative, I will embed these houses in a model of architectural research proposed by the architect and architectural historian Jeremy Till. His model breaks down into three stages: architectural processes; architectural products; and architectural performance. Architectural historians tend to see the first as the study of the architect’s mind, and evaluate the second as it pertains to aesthetic success. Practicing architects have long contributed to the study of buildings’ performance—Frank Lloyd Wright’s or Le Corbusier’s leaking buildings, for example—but architectural history has rarely focused on the longer-term performance of the buildings of modernism, once they have been categorized in the first two instances. Most significantly, Till’s three stages are three steps leading to a conclusion, but rather form an “iterative loop in which one stage informs another:”

Research into performance in use informing the processes of design.
Research into the products of design looking backwards to knowledge about the processes of design.
Research into the performance of buildings being critically informed by knowledge of the processes of architecture.

Using this understanding of buildings as shifting sites, both imaginary and real, as organisms that respond to their contexts reciprocally, with more fluidity and flux than typically acknowledged, we can see their conception, their built forms, and their legacies as different and interrelated facets of their development. And we can begin to uncover the histories of their lives.

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14 Jeremy Till, “Three Myths and One Model,” *Building Material* 17, (2007): 4. Like Mario Carpo and Richard Scherr, Till advocates for a more interdisciplinary methodology. This article discusses three fallacies about architecture as held by the current structure of architectural scholarship, and proposed this model as a possible remedy.

15 In addition to the scholarly and industry backlash against International Modernism in the later mid-century, recent scholarship has begun to pick apart the nuances in the theories of Modernism and the physical performance of the movement’s buildings. See Lynda Schneekloth’s work on Chandigarh, India, or Carol Krinsky’s work on Empire State Plaza in Albany, New York.

over time, far longer than the moment in which they were built, over the course of which their relationship to each of these stages could be in flux.

I propose using the Casa O’Gorman and the Villa Baizeau to widen Till’s model to include the notion of performance in architectural scholarship. We must look at how the buildings performed physically, whether they successfully addressed the needs of the inhabitants, withstood normal wear and tear, and how they integrated with their site and climate. But we can also look to how they performed in the scholarly imagination, in order to illuminate the contours of architectural history. As another part of this iterative process, we can use flawed and uneven models of architectural history to reflect our own biases back to us. Doing this can help us challenge our assumptions, begin deconstructing propaganda narratives promoted by a few self-aggrandizing individuals or from an imperial hegemonic position, and give our current best to constructing new ones.

Looking at these houses together allows us to ask several questions about the processes, products, and performance of architecture in 1929 and beyond. What do these two houses, built in this ‘heroic’ moment of Modernism, to paraphrase Charles Jencks, tell us about the translation and negotiation of an architect’s or client’s own ideas and those of others into the realities of site, budget, climate, and form? How did they enter into English-language scholarship, and what has that meant for their own legacies and for the broader narrative of Modernism? How did the buildings function differently over time, not as static objects, but as sometimes symbolic, and sometimes literal, changing forms, with changing relationships to Modernism, their builders or occupants, their contexts, and their histories?

Rather than trying to fit the houses into this already well-tread narrative of modern architectural history, I would like to consider them as central characters in their own narratives, framing Modernism as an open question. Rather than asking whether a house was Modern, by comparing it against accepted Modernist notions, we should ask how, when, and in what way the house was Modern. We can study their designs as lengthy processes, in which they contended with specific contexts and contingencies. By seeing the houses as unstable, imaginative processes rather than as finished structures, we can decouple them from the self-referential lineage of architectural history. Both their built forms and later histories furnish a fuller story proposing that Modernism was impure from the start. Beyond judging their success at Modernism in their distinct moment of construction, we can use them as objects that allow us to study history.

**Le Corbusier and narratives of Modernism**

Both the Casa O’Gorman and the Villa Baizeau were designed and built during a moment in which Le Corbusier was forging his status in the narrative of architectural history, through both buildings and the dissemination of his ideas. As I will discuss in Chapter 1, the Weissenhof exhibition in Stuttgart in 1927, for which Le Corbusier and his cousin Pierre Jeanneret built two case-study houses, became instrumental in publicizing both the concept of Modern architecture and the names of the architects involved (figure 3). Two years later, Le Corbusier began building the Villa Savoye, in Poissy-sur-Seine, a suburb of Paris (figure 4). The house comprised

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18 Esra Akcan, in her work on the movement and translation of concepts of the house between Turkish and German architects, has contextualized it as the show that catalyzed international interest in the Weimar siedlung, or settlement, to the consternation of more conservative architects. Esra Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2012), 234–235. See Chapter 1.
a white box with ribbon windows raised off the lawn on slim *pilotis*, or columns, and topped by a roof deck. Le Corbusier saw the combination of simple, geometric volumes with the theatrical experience of ascending its long interior ramp or gazing out from its framed rooftop as his High Modernist triumph, in the tradition of the High Renaissance triumph of the Sistine Chapel (1508-12). Most importantly, he believed the Villa Savoye was a Platonic ideal, that was a universally applicable answer to the question of modern architecture. Scholars would follow suit, explicitly or implicitly marking 1929 as a high-water mark in the history of modernist architecture: Curtis taught a course at the Open University in 1975 that used Le Corbusier, and the Villa Savoye in particular, as a synecdoche for Modernist architecture in general. The coursebook cites the Villa Savoye as his accepted “masterpiece,” and is organized around its development, its “crystallization.”

Perhaps more momentous for architectural history, it was during these same years that Le Corbusier also circulated his definition of Modern architecture and urban planning through publications, correspondence, and by lecturing abroad. Le Corbusier, whose life work was, as Paul Turner wrote, to search for “generalization, universality, and absolute formal truths,” was gaining the stature and international recognition, he hoped, to disseminate his discoveries. In June of 1928, Le Corbusier organized CIAM, the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne,

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19 See also Benton, Gans, and Serenyi for the importance of the Villa Savoye and the year 1929.

20 Paul Turner, “The Beginnings of Le Corbusier's Education, 1902–07,” *The Art Bulletin* 53, no. 2 (June 1971): 224. Turner’s 1971 article about Le Corbusier’s earliest education and training is also an undertaking in understanding how Le Corbusier saw architecture, and more particularly, the role of the architect, as an idealist and intellectual project.
which would become a mouthpiece for his mandates.\(^*\)\(^\text{21}\) And in 1930 he published his first self-edited *Oeuvre Complète*. While his 1924 publication *Vers une Architecture* had been widely read by architects worldwide, the *Oeuvre Complète* included comprehensive documentation in the form of photos, floor plans, and the architect’s reflections on each project.\(^*\)\(^\text{22}\) He was also corresponding with several new clients around the world about commissions for villas, proposing for them his commensurable, Platonic universal house, including Baizeau in Tunis, the avant-garde Argentine writer Victoria Ocampo, and the Mexican Carlos de Beistegui in Paris, among others.\(^*\)\(^\text{23}\) In 1929 he made his first trip to South America, to give a series of ten lectures in Buenos Aires which envisioned the next advanced city in the world, populated with his villas.\(^*\)\(^\text{24}\)

By the 100th anniversary of Le Corbusier’s birth, in 1987, the architect’s self-aggrandizing propaganda and his vision of Modernism had been cemented, as shown by the numerous exhibitions dedicated to him all around the world that year. The catalogue for the show “The Le Corbusier Adventure” at the Centre Pompidou in Paris alluded to his massiveness in the world of architecture and architectural history, being published in the form of an encyclopedia, with entries ranging from theories, to publications, to specific houses. Seven years later, Beatriz Colomina, in her seminal work *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (1994), showed how well Le Corbusier documented his own work, and how deeply his self-edited and constructed documentation of it had been mined by the academic community,

\(^*\)\(^\text{21}\) CIAM was founded at the Château de la Sarraz in his native Switzerland with a group of 28 architects. The second meeting, in 1929, was focused on the *existenzminimum*, or “the minimum habituation.” See Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000).

\(^*\)\(^\text{22}\) Corbusier, *Oeuvre Complète*.


\(^*\)\(^\text{24}\) Ibid. Note that the chapter is entitled “Le Corbusier’s first encounters with South America.”
which often consequently obscured history rather than elucidating it. Jean-Louis Cohen has further bolstered this work, showing how purposefully Le Corbusier worked “as an archivist” of his own story, cropping and editing from his earliest publications.

In recent years many scholars have examined Le Corbusier less as a harbinger of modernism, and more as a man of his time and place. As Jeremy Till wrote: “And so to repeat, just to shake the inhabitants from their reverie: Le Corbusier and the others are not a cause of modernism; they are symptoms of modernity.” Till, building on the earlier work of Paul Turner, argues that Le Corbusier had a European, universalizing vision of modernism from his earliest years, influenced by the totalizing and arguably colonial narratives of European superiority. Luis E. Carranza has used the Villa Savoye to show Le Corbusier’s regrettable, but not altogether surprising, sexism. Carranza and Çelik discuss the limiting and negative aspects of his position as a white European male, re-evaluating his patriarchal relationship to Modernism and Orientalist relationship to North Africa, respectively.

But these reevaluations of Le Corbusier’s legacy only serve to reorder his history, rather than filling in the multitude other histories that have historically been ignored and miscast. His


28 Till connects Turner’s work on Le Corbusier’s mythmaking, idealism, and belief in a pure architecture through 19th-century German philosophy to eugenics.


ability to shape his own narrative, identified by Colomina, both masked and excused his free appropriation of the built environments and material cultures of Turkey, the Mediterranean, and elsewhere, which Zeynep Çelik and Max Adolf Vogt identified in his earliest years. The dissemination of the Le Corbusier story, and its pervasiveness in the broader history of Modernism concealed the fact that Modernism was “impure” from the outset.

**Toward an impure architecture**

The concept of the outsize genius encourages a history of high points strung together, to the detriment of outsiders, namely vernacular architecture, or ordinary practitioners. Curtis’ methodology is emblematic of that of Modernist architectural historians at large: “I make no apologies for concentrating on buildings of high visual and intellectual quality: a tradition is formed from a sequence of such high points which hand on their discoveries to lesser followers.” In other words, once these major players had laid claim to the pure ideas of modernism, both through buildings and publications, all other responses fell short.

I would argue that the idea of architecture is more relevant to a self-referential architectural history than it is to the study of history through buildings, or the study of how the built environment affects its inhabitants. Daniel M. Abramson has written that the stakes of the unbuilt are exactly the stakes of architectural history: what is unbuilt, or unbuildable, is pure. Because technical innovation has not been the purview of architectural historians, but rather of

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architects and, perhaps even more often, of contractors, architectural historians have reverted to biography. Rather than tracing houses, they trace specific individuals and their ideas.

To learn about history through a building, one must study not just the pure ideas of an architect or the pure ideas of a building, but its negotiation from idea into reality, its specific built forms, and its performance over time. Recent scholars of architecture such as Abramson, Jeremy Till, Richard Scherr and others have argued persuasively that architecture is never pure, and never autonomous; one of its primary features is that it is necessarily contingent. There is a gap between what architectural historians want architecture to be (hermetic, autonomous, pure, unique) and what it is (contingent, interdisciplinary, a compilation, impure). It is in that space, between functions and needs, between the demands of architectural history and the realities of built environments, that the study of architecture is now living.

The agreed-upon English-language narrative of Modernist architecture is incomplete in part because this concept of the pure idea, transmuted into linear influence, privileges European and United States architects. Glorifying the unbuilt can be part of the system, in which pure ideas center the origins of Modernism in European and United States architects, while architects in other parts of the world are then influenced by them, and thereby relegated to the status of derivative copyists. Their works are almost universally discussed in terms of their absorbed influence from Europe or the US, usually couched in terms of specific architects such as Le Corbusier or Frank Lloyd Wright. In a typical example, the entry on Latin American architecture

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35 As Till writes, “The distance between functions and needs is just one of the many rifts that contribute to the gap between architecture as it wants to be and architecture as it is” (Till, “Architecture and Contingency,” 133).
in the Encyclopedia Britannica, after discussing all the modernizing and interest in new styles and methods since the early 1900s, entitles the section in which Le Corbusier lectures in Argentina in 1929, “The Birth of Modern Architecture.” This inadequacy of methodology has been noted by architectural historians like Luis E. Carranza, Esra Akcan, and Zeynep Çelik who are attempting to fill in these gaps by adding to the literature. But buildings designed and built outside of the geographical purview of Modern Architecture must be covered in separate textbooks and qualified with said “alternative” location, and are evaluated not just within these accepted paradigms of Modernism (defined as European/American), but also as authentically “native” or “local.”

I am purposely using this limited perspective of English-language scholarship on a Mexican architect and a Tunisian builder to highlight the ways in which the dominant narrative of architectural history has drawn from European and US contexts. There is, of course, significant scholarship and archival material on the Casa O’Gorman in Spanish, and presumably a corresponding body of material on the Villa Baizeau in French and Arabic. I translated those materials which allowed me to understand the buildings themselves, given my limited access particularly to the Villa Baizeau, but I am more interested in how the English-language narrative around them developed and how it mischaracterized them.

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37 See Carranza and Luiz’s textbook on Latin American modernist architecture, Akcan’s book on exchanges between German and Turkish architects of the 1930s and 1940s, and Hernández Gálvez’s work re-evaluating this hegemonic narrative.

38 See Chapter 2; see Oles, Art and Architecture in Mexico; and Eggener, “Juan O’Gorman.”

39 See Chapter 1; material on Lucien Baizeau and the actual villa is quite scarce.
This Euro- and US-centric architectural history has defined both these houses as “outside” of strict modernism, examples of Corbusian “influence.” This narrative illuminates how differently the concepts of influence and appropriation are deployed toward Lucien Baizeau and Juan O’Gorman, as opposed to the affirmed geniuses of Modernism. Modernist architectural historians such as Benton, Eggener, and James Oles, cite the Villa Baizeau and the Casa O’Gorman occasionally, but only as supporting characters in the story of Le Corbusier’s linear progress or his towering influence. The Casa O’Gorman is an example of his widespread influence around the world, and the Villa Baizeau is a failed project because his influence was resisted.

Recent books, articles, and even textbooks have challenged the smooth arc of this narrative, particularly for researching buildings outside of Western Europe and the United States. Luis E. Carranza and Fernando Luiz Lara’s *Modern Architecture in Latin America: Art, Technology, and Utopia* (2014) offers a clear alternative course, acknowledging that history can never be whole or complete, and even positing that history itself is “ideologically suspect.” Non-canonical or minor works “highlight...the political and collective nature of architecture,” and the thematic arrangement of the buildings through art, technology, and utopia highlight the

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40 As Beatriz Colomina notes, Le Corbusier “appropriates” from the world, while “nonwestern” architects are “influenced” (Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 90).

41 Benton mines the Villa Baizeau for its relevance to Le Corbusier’s working process; see Chapter 1. Both Eggener and Oles lump the Casa O’Gorman in with other early architecture, which “cites” Le Corbusier’s work (Oles, *Art and Architecture*, 261); see Chapter 2.

42 Carranza and Luiz, *Modern Architecture in Latin America*, 2–4. See also Jorge Francisco Leirmur, “Foreword,” in Luis E. Carranza and Fernando Luiz Lara, *Modern Architecture in Latin America: Art, Technology, and Utopia*, trans. Luis E. Carranza (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014). Leirmur writes that this textbook is not a “summae scientiam” on the subject; “books like this bring us closer to the end of the narratives about ‘architecture in Latin America’” (xi). Rather, its publication means we can “imagine a near future when these kinds of approaches will no longer be fostered or necessary” (xii).
multiple concerns of architects. Chronology does not hierarchize the buildings or architects, but highlights the trans-geographical and transnational movement of these impulses back and forth across borders. Likewise, Esra Akcan’s *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House* (2012), analyzes the movement of architectural ideas back and forth across the porous border between West and East, convincingly showing that, despite Western European architects’ claims to distinct, pure, ideological strains, “architectural forms are never coupled with fixed ideologies but are almost always redefined in specific conditions.”

The Villa Baizeau and the Casa O’Gorman show us that architecture must be seen as more flexible, reciprocal, and adaptive than architectural history allows. Mario Carpo argues that architecture “is perforce permanently interdisciplinary”: Le Corbusier used machinery as inspiration, Wright incorporated traditional Japanese philosophy into his domestic spaces, Palladio engaged with the first forays into archaeology. O’Gorman’s 1929 house, then, should not be picked apart for “Mexican” and “European” or “American” parts, but seen as a house created by an architect who is of mixed heritage, educated in a post-revolutionary society, and immersed in the particulars of building a reinforced concrete house as efficiently and cheaply as

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43 Carranza and Luiz, *Modern Architecture in Latin America*, 5. The eclecticism of the approach is meant to give readers multiple points of entry, highlighting the mutable and transient nature of definitions and truth, so as to undermine the institutional voice of the colonial narrative.

44 Carranza and Luiz do not disregard chronology but note the unevenness of Modernism’s concerns: “The first phase of Latin American modernism (particularly in Brazil) was promoted by artists and writers, primarily from the elite, who were returning to their countries after living, studying, and working in Europe for some time. It was not so much the directly transplanted influence of the European that gave rise to the modernizing vein in the visual arts on the continent, but rather the questions that Latin Americans posed to themselves on how to make their international experience compatible with the tasks presented to them by their own (developing) societies” (Carranza and Luiz, *Modern Architecture in Latin America*, 35).


possible. Baizeau’s house, likewise, should not be parsed into “Corbusian” and “deviant” tendencies, but seen as a house imagined and negotiated into reality by a colonial subject who was educated abroad, active in the contemporaneous conversations about architecture, and an agent of his own interest in modernity. Considering the houses’ existence over time also paints a picture of the different meanings they had in different historic moments, and for different viewers, readers, and inhabitants.

These two houses represent the stories of several individuals in different parts of the world at the exact same moment, who were responding to many of the same global concerns—industrialization, democratization, global trade networks, migration—but who were responding to them differently precisely because they were in different places. They refute the narrative that Europe and the United States invented Modernism and then disseminated it around the world. If we are interested in studying history through the built environment, we should be looking to each building for the clues it can provide for understanding that historical moment and the actors who were involved, rather than evaluating the building against a canonized aesthetic rubric.

In order to expand upon their stories, this study will follow each house’s history through the stages of design, construction, and performance. In Chapter 1, I will closely follow the thinking of both Lucien Baizeau and Le Corbusier as they collaborated at a distance on their shared project, reexamining it from the perspective of the commissioner over the storied architect, through the same limited sources. In Chapter 2, I will situate the Casa O’Gorman and Juan O’Gorman’s relationship to functionalist architecture within the material and ideological context of post-revolutionary Mexico, shifting the conversation toward the responsiveness of
individual buildings. These case studies propose an imaginary route forward, in which the house is embedded in history, rather than architectural history. In the third chapter, I will lay out the eventual fates of each of the houses, using their shared stories to propel us toward new methodologies of architectural history and a theory of inherently impure Modernism.
Chapter 1

The Villa Baizeau: A Modern House in Carthage

What Monsieur Buhagiar found at Stuttgart

In the autumn of 1927, a Monsieur Buhagiar was strolling the grounds the Weissenhofsiedlung, or Weissenhof settlement, comprising 29 full-sized case-study houses, in Stuttgart, Germany (figure 3).47 The housing settlement was part of a sprawling exhibition organized by the director of the Deutscher Werkbund, the German architect Mies van der Rohe, and encompassed several hillsides and city streets; with it, Mies instructed the participating European architects to demonstrate the potential of reinforced concrete construction and the new modern aesthetic.48 Mr. Buhagiar was employed by La Tunisoise Industrielle, a construction company based in Tunis, and had been sent specifically by his employer and its director, Lucien Baizeau, to report on the “revolutionary new methods of construction that were being experimented with in Europe.”49 Baizeau, a French-Tunisian from the capital of the French Protectorate, was both professionally and personally interested in movements in contemporary house-building.50

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47 Akcan, Architecture in Translation, 234-237. The exhibition itself was called Die Wohnung, or “the dwelling;” the Weissenhof settlement houses remained after the exhibition ended.

48 Akcan has noted that Mies “required that participating architects use flat roofs and white walls,” which was a contentious subject amongst Stuttgart architects (Akcan, Architecture in Translation, 234). Lincoln Kirstein and Alfred Barr were amongst the early scholars to write about this show, helping to popularize its significance in the history of architecture.


What Buhagiar saw was that the Weissenhof houses announced the arrival of the machine-age aesthetic, more so than they announced the potential for mass housing for which Mies and proponents of the *Siedlungen* advocated.\(^{51}\) Despite the collective and emancipatory goals set out by Mies, most of the resulting case-study houses were built for single families and were relatively costly; Mies was the only architect who built on the scale of collective housing (figure 5). Though the participating architects, including the Dutch JJP Oud, German Walter Gropius, and Swiss Le Corbusier, took advantage of the flexibility of reinforced concrete construction and prefabricated building components, it was the flat roofs and white walls, devoid of decoration or articulation, which drew the most attention and were quickly becoming the stylistic markers of modernist architecture (figure 6). The exhibition drew half a million visitors and was praised around the world, establishing its architects as Masters of Modern architecture.\(^{52}\)

As the director of a construction company, Baizeau had a vested interest in the building potential of concrete, and appeared to have a particular interest in the two houses that Le Corbusier and his cousin Pierre Jeanneret designed in Stuttgart, in the prime lots facing the city (figure 7). Baizeau, whose business took him often to Paris, may already have been familiar with Le Corbusier’s famous book *Vers une architecture* (1924), and even with some of his Parisian

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51 Ross Wolfe, “Stuttgart-Weissenhof, 1927: Modern architecture comes into its own,” *The Charnel House*, published March 14, 2015, accessed November 14, 2017. [https://thecharnelhouse.org/2015/03/14/stuttgart-weissenhof-1927-modern-architecture-comes-into-its-own/](https://thecharnelhouse.org/2015/03/14/stuttgart-weissenhof-1927-modern-architecture-comes-into-its-own/). According to Wolfe, Western European architects of *siedlungen*, or housing settlements, during the Weimar period were very much influenced by collective housing designs coming from the USSR, and the Weissenhof was meant to house the working class. See also Akcan for a full discussion of the *siedlungen* movement in Germany at the time, which brought together architects and city planners under the Weimar government (Akcan, *Architecture in Translation*).

buildings. Either way, it appears that he received Mr. Buhagiar’s report of the Weissenhof settlement as confirmation that Le Corbusier could build him a small summer villa. In January of 1928, he requested a meeting with Le Corbusier and Jeanneret in Paris, to discuss their designing and building a villa for him and his wife on a lot he had in the wealthy suburb of Carthage.54

The villa that was eventually built there between 1929 and 1931 was largely based on Lucien Baizeau’s own designs, and represented a negotiation with Le Corbusier’s aesthetic and ideas, and Baizeau’s ideas, needs and site. The house was constructed by La Tunisoise Industrielle, as no one from Le Corbusier’s studio ever went to the site; Le Corbusier conducted the entirety of his involvement with its design process at a distance, both theoretical and physical.55 Over the course of this lengthy process, Baizeau was working directly and indirectly from Le Corbusier’s theoretically applicable designs, and from both published and unpublished ideas of Le Corbusier’s, perhaps because of his work in construction. The lengthy back and forth between Baizeau and Corbusier can serve to illuminate a more flexible and reciprocal nature of influence than is often allowed by architectural history. And the result, the Villa Baizeau, as a place where progress and innovation are not always stable concepts and are in fact contextual and contingent, can help to rebuild another, necessarily partial, history.

53 Vers Une Architecture was published in Paris in October 1923 and reissued in an edited form in December 1924; it had originally appeared as a series of essays in the journal L’esprit Nouveau, which Corbusier founded with the painter and writer Amédée Ozenfant, between October 1920 and May 1922.

54 Carthage is now a suburb of Tunis, which has been the capital of Tunisia since 1159, outlasting Ottoman rule and the French Protectorate, from which Tunisia declared independence in 1956. Carthage was a city in its own right since ancient times, having been conquered by Phoenicians, and waged war against the Greeks and Romans. In Baizeau’s time it was a wealthy and prestigious suburb.

Villa Baizeau in 1929

Nestled amongst the dark green trees and abundant foliage of the Présidence neighborhood, the Villa Baizeau stands on the edge of a bluff that, in the 1930s, ran directly down to the Gulf (figures 8-10). The rectangular footprint of the house is oriented with the shorter East side facing the water (figures 11-14). The house is situated at the end of a residential cul-de-sac, set amongst other upper-class houses whose scale and interiors are illegible from the street, guarded by high exterior walls. The Villa Baizeau, in contrast, is perched on the edge of its bluff, totally unguarded, decisively facing the water.

The skeletal, sculptural house is modest in scale, about sixteen by ten meters, and as visitors approach it from the street, at the back of the house, it appears as a single continuous object, the whole building white with silver accents of balustrade and hardware. Small windows can just barely be seen from the street, round in the nautical style, but also a playful nod to the Mediterranean vernacular of geometric white stucco houses with cool, shaded interiors. Between each of the three floor slabs, the volumes of each floor are massed toward the back of the house, the street, away from the Gulf (figure 15). The topmost slab overhangs the solid back walls, casting shadows on its seemingly solid, contained volume. But in moving around the house toward the Gulf, the solid walls of the South and West sides give way to curves: a small service channel underneath the kitchen on the ground floor is sheathed in a tightly curved geometric volume, and a pleasingly convex master bedroom wall on the top floor that balloons into the terrace (figure 16). Toward the Gulf, the curves fall away to three layers of roofed verandahs

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50 Risselada, Max, ed., “Villa Baizeau, Carthage,” Raumplan Versus Plan Libre (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2008), 142. See also later discussion of Baizeau’s images and detailed drawings of the site, and the Oeuvre Complete, 177: Le Corbusier’s sketch “perspective from the sea” includes the open beach and a boat. This slope is now neatly manicured with the entrance roads and lawns of the Presidential Palace, which was established in 1960, and for which the neighborhood is now named.
with open sides caged in by the repeating slim white columns. The deep terraces on East and
North sides of the house catch and hold dark purple shadows that rotate around the house as the
Eastern morning light fades to dusk from the West.

Baizeau’s villa played off the intrinsic potential of reinforced concrete construction: the
exterior walls, no longer structural, became totally mutable, so that the external and internal
layout could respond directly to the needs of the inhabitant and the site. The Villa’s structure is
deceptively simple, giving the impression of four trays on columns: a flat one on the ground (the
floor), another flat one on top (the roof), and the two trays in between with “turned-up edges,
carrying the enclosed volumes of the house,” as Deborah Gans has observed, making each tray
both ceiling and floor at once. In its most basic form, this arrangement means that the slabs
function as giant umbrellas, each shading the floor below it while it holds the rooms perched on
it, and provides ample space for shaded, outdoor activity around its rooms. The turned-up edges
of the second and third slabs form solid balustrades along the long North and South facades, and
metal balustrades close in the terraces at the shorter East and West facades.

The geometric simplicity of the Villa Baizeau’s skeletal superstructure and inner massing
is more eloquent of its construction-minded commissioner than its Stuttgart inspiration. Lucien
Baizeau built a house that bore a striking resemblance to Le Corbusier’s early designs for the
Dom-ino house (1914), which the architect had not yet published at the time of Baizeau’s
designs (figure 17). The Dom-ino was not intended as a viable model for a house, but to

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Savoye in Poissy,” Course guide for Unit 17 in History of Architecture and Design 1890–1939 at the Open
University (UK: The Open University Press, 1975): 16. According to Curtis, the Maison Dom-ino was first
published in the Oeuvre Complète in 1930. It appears in the 1928 English translation of Vers une architecture by
Frederick Etchells, but functions as a decorative element rather than a building, popping up in margins or as a
line-break, and is never explained or mentioned in the text. However, the section entitled “Let Us State the Problem”
demonstrate how the new technology of reinforced concrete could be used in Europe in the aftermath of the first World War. Like Baizeau, Le Corbusier was demonstrating as clearly as possible that the only structural elements of the building, given the strength of reinforced concrete, were the slim columns, or pilotis, and the flat, repeating slabs of the floors and roof. Exterior walls were no longer load-bearing elements, which allowed the architect to place them wherever they liked, to break them up entirely with windows, or even to shift rooms or entire floors. When he did publish the Dom-ino, in his Oeuvre Complète (1930), Le Corbusier treated it more as an aspirational image than as a house; Baizeau had brought the Dom-ino into being, almost before Le Corbusier himself saw it as viable.

In his villas of the 1920s, Le Corbusier was developing a type he called the Maison Citrohan, in which he used the Dom-ino frame as an internal skeleton, enclosed within non-structural flat white walls, flat roofs with articulated gardens or decks, and ribbon windows (figure 18). While architects like Auguste Perret had pioneered the use of balloon-frame construction in industrial and factory buildings for decades (figure 19), for Le Corbusier’s European audience in 1929, these houses, sheathed in white walls like a tightly-stretched skin, pierced by larger and larger expanses of windows, still seemed implausible. Baizeau’s house revealed the concrete skeleton, with only a quarter or so of the external perimeter of the house

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59 See Le Corbusier’s introduction to the Oeuvre Complète, written in September 1929

60 The Oeuvre Complète (1930) was published before the villa was completed, but not before the final designs had been extensively reworked, as I will show later in the chapter.

61 See Curtis, Modern Architecture, and Oles, Art and Architecture for the shift of concrete from industrial buildings to modernist houses in the early 1930s. (O’Gorman details this shock about using concrete in domestic buildings at the time in his autobiography, with evident pleasure. See Chapter 2.)
enclosed. The Villa Baizeau’s stark outline, melting interior and exterior space, was unlike its neighbors, all contained within unbroken perimeter walls, but also unlike the *Maisons* of the 1920s.

Unlike the *Maison Citrohan*, the Villa’s exterior edges are not walls; its perimeter is both penetrable and shadowed. The house begins at the edges of its slabs, not at walls or even windows, which are no longer essential elements, no longer fundamental to understanding where private life begins and public life ends. The architectural historian Beatriz Colomina wrote of Le Corbusier’s theoretical goal, the traditionally acknowledged goal of the Modernists:

> The walls that define the space are no longer solid walls punctuated by small windows but have been dematerialized, thinned down with new building technologies and replaced by extended windows, lines of glass whose views now define the space. The walls that are not transparent now float in the space of the house rather than produce it.\(^6\)

In the Villa Baizeau, this goal was perhaps surpassed, or even ignored, for walls that consisted of shadow and light, where private space and public space flowed into each other, sometimes imperceptibly.

The Villa Baizeau’s open plan was not an aesthetic flourish but directly responding to how the Baizeaus wanted to use their small weekend home (figures 20-21). Baizeau and his wife wanted an efficient layout, with five small bedrooms, a kitchen and dining room, a couple of living spaces, and servants’ quarters on the ground floor. The staircases are stacked to take up the least amount of space, ribbon windows on the West allow light into the bedrooms, and a sliding glass door forms a porous barrier between the interior and exterior dining spaces. While more traditional Tunisian houses allowed for outdoor eating in interior courtyards shielded from the

\(^6\) Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 6. Colomina was concerned mainly with Le Corbusier’s own evaluation of his projects along these lines.
street, sun, and wind by high exterior walls, in the Villa Baizeau the shaded verandahs provided flexible outdoor living and dining space, where they could enjoy their view and sea breezes.

Baizeau’s house responded directly to the climatic particularities of sun and wind on its site, as well as its geography, in the size and orientation of the house. The villa is situated as close to the beach as possible, at the edge of its bluff; just to the front of the house the ground falls starkly away and down toward the sandy beach. The topmost slab acts as an umbrella around the whole, extending beyond the internal volumes of the house so that no wall receives the full force of the sun.63 The sun rises at the front of the house over the water, gaining strength as it heats up the earth, and by the time it sets behind the house in the evening, the umbrella roof and the solid walls at the South and West sides maintain the interior cool. The devastating Saharan Scirocco, carrying heat and dust, blows from the direction of the desert, the South and West. Those solid volumes act as a windbreak against that dusty maelstrom, so that the interiors were sealed against dust blowing through gaps in doors or windows. Toward the Gulf, and the Mediterranean breeze, the solid volumes give way to porous, penetrable terraces, windows, and sliding glass doors, protected from the Scirocco and perched atop its bluff to amplify the view. The public rooms are all massed toward this Gulf-facing safety of the decks, so that the Baizeaus and their guests could enjoy the sea view, and take their meals in the continuous outdoor-indoor dining and living space, shielded from the midday sun, and cooled by breezes coming up the bluff from the sea, which then filtered through the house.

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63 Later scholars called this the “ombrellone roof,” or the “parasol roof.” See Benton, Gans, Sobin, Curtis.
Baizeau vs Le Corbusier, 1928–31

Le Corbusier’s hand in the Villa Baizeau was both concrete and imaginary. From the earliest traces of its conception, it is clear that Baizeau and Le Corbusier imagined different villas. Though he was contracted to design the villa and his name is still attached to it, neither Le Corbusier nor any of his assistants ever went to the site or saw the finished building.\textsuperscript{64} He had never been anywhere in North Africa; his first trip would be to Algiers in 1931.\textsuperscript{65} It was Baizeau himself who acted as the translator between the architects in France and the site in Tunis. It is through this lengthy correspondence and design process that we can see the house emerge, as much from Baizeau’s imagination as from Le Corbusier’s.

The plans that were exchanged, and the letters full of disgruntled and ego-filled quips, allow us to frame the house within Baizeau’s own shifting process of translation and negotiation. Apart from two in-person meetings in Paris, the majority of the design process occurred by correspondence between January 1928 and June 1929.\textsuperscript{66} We can trace several major moments of disagreement and agreement over the course of four discrete designs by Le Corbusier and Jeanneret’s studio, and two responsive designs by Baizeau himself, most probably with input from his wife.\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{64} See Benton, “Drawings and Clients,” 43. Interestingly, the original contract appears to have been laid out with the assumption that Le Corbusier would never visit the site.


\textsuperscript{66} Pierre Jeanneret sent a letter detailing interiors and finishes in May 1930, and in December 1930 one further letter was sent from Le Corbusier’s atelier (Benton,”La matita del cliente,” 24).

\textsuperscript{67} As I will discuss later in the chapter, she was frequently mentioned in the correspondence; unfortunately, I do not have her name.
As noted in the Introduction, this process was a back and forth that we must recreate almost exclusively from one side. I was able to reconstruct the process of conceiving, designing, and constructing this house only through Le Corbusier’s obsessive self-cataloguing and documentation. There are about sixty letters preserved in the Fondation Corbusier, the most momentous of which have also been published in Tim Benton’s articles about the Villa Baizeau. Though all the designs and drawings from the atelier for each project were preserved in the Fondation Le Corbusier, they were not necessarily in chronological order. By cross-referencing with the letters and Benton’s scholarship, I was able to reconstruct the order of Corbusier and Jeanneret’s designs for the villa over time, and also able to confirm, through careful comparison, that FLC Drawing 8509 is in fact Baizeau’s (figure 22). It appears that Le Corbusier or Pierre Jeanneret annotated the image when it was sent to them in May 1928, and then added it to their files, where it was later stamped with an official FLC number and piled into the ever-growing archive without demarcation. I will call this drawing Baizeau’s second plan.

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68 As Benton noted to me, he reconstructed the design process solely through material at the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris. It is my hope that future scholarship will uncover material on Baizeau in Tunis or elsewhere. See further discussion in conclusion.

69 For access to these letters and plans, I am extremely indebted to Tim Benton’s articles of 1980 and 1983, and for his direct correspondence in fall 2016. See also Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 24, footnote 1, where he notes that Jeanneret carried out most of the correspondence on the atelier’s side.

70 See “Buildings and Projects, 1928–1929,” The Le Corbusier Archive, vol. v, ed. H. Allen Brooks, (Paris: Fondation Le Corbusier, 1984). In 1984, the Fondation Corbusier published a massive multi-volume tome called The Corbusier Archive, which published reproductions of all the of the drawings preserved in its archives. Thanks to this, I was able to closely review all of the images preserved by Le Corbusier that pertained to this project. The published drawings are ordered by their Fondation Le Corbusier number, which are not chronological, which possibly indicates that they were numbered after the project had finished.

71 The Corbusier Archive, 133. The accompanying text captions in the book indicate that this was drawn by Le Corbusier or Pierre Jeanneret, but careful comparison with other drawings, and its citation in Benton’s article establish that it was Baizeau’s own sketch.
From Baizeau’s first meeting with the architects in Paris on January 23rd, 1928, his ideas were closely tied to his knowledge of the site. Included in the detailed contract he signed that day were precise instructions about his and his wife’s needs, sketches and photographs of the site, and his own floor plans of the villa he imagined. Le Corbusier and Jeanneret agreed to design the villa at a distance from Paris, and to begin construction in March, only six weeks later.

Baizeau’s bird’s-eye view sketch and photographs of the site showed the precipitous cliff that led down to the beach, which has now been built out into the Presidential Palace grounds (figures 8-10). At the time, the site’s chief features were, as Baizeau meticulously described to Le Corbusier, “the view of the sea which one enjoys from the cliff at the East and the inconvenience of hot winds from South-Southwest.” Baizeau’s first plan was modest and schematic: these weren’t blueprints, but his attempt to give Corbusier a sense of the rooms needed and the scale, which was about sixteen by ten meters (figure 23). His sense of the interior and massing is already clear: Baizeau arranges the living areas on the first floor facing the Gulf, and includes two covered terraces along the protected East and North sides. Because he owned the site and was familiar with it, and because he was well-versed in problems of construction, he had picked out the exact spot on the property where he wanted it, and had imagined in detail how it would be situated. Baizeau did not include a sketch of the facade, perhaps leaving that up to Le Corbusier’s discretion; this suggests that he was interested in Le

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73 Risselada, “Villa Baizeau,”142. As noted above in footnote 10.


75 As I was unable to gain access to the letters myself, the image here is from Benton’s original article, and is a schematic representation of Baizeau’s plan.
Corbusier’s signature aesthetic, while he felt it necessary to determine the siting and scale himself.

Baizeau was not, at least in practice (we know nothing of his theoretical views on this), interested in a ready-made type like a Maison Citrohan to be inserted into his site, but for Le Corbusier’s specific answer to his real site, its climate, and his needs. From his original sketch it is clear that these contingencies, not a question of budget necessarily but of scale, situation, responsiveness to climate, and his needs, ordered his imagined villa from the start. Having seen images, heard through M. Buhagiar’s words, and read about the houses at Stuttgart, Benton posits that the commissioner could have specified “wanting a variant of the (Maison) Citrohan house that Le Corbusier had built (there).” The Stuttgart house was definitely a Maison Citrohan type, with its tight-stretched white walls over a boxy frame, ribbon windows, double height living room, and ground floor pilotis (figures 24-25). Baizeau may have chosen Le Corbusier, rather than the other architects at Stuttgart, because he was familiar with his publications, or because Le Corbusier appealed specifically to his senses. But he clearly believed that Le Corbusier’s aesthetic, building methods, and materials could be used in Carthage, and that Le Corbusier would create something relevant to his life and his site.

It seems that he was not interested in the exterior form of the Maisons Citrohan so much as its small scale. Though the Citrohan type’s exterior form does not resemble Baizeau’s villa, he certainly seems to have drawn on existing Citrohan types he may have seen in Paris in these

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76 Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 20. The plans of the Stuttgart houses were published in the Deutsche Werkbund’s Monthly Newspaper, Die Form 2, no. 3 (1927), in which each of the architects wrote a short tract about their house(s). I was able to view a reproduction of this issue of the newspaper on Charnel House.

77 We can assume that Baizeau was interested in the single house, rather than the apartment building that the Jeannerets presented that autumn.
years for his earliest designs. The Pavillon de l’esprit nouveau, built for the International Exhibition of the Decorative Arts in Paris in 1925 (figure 26), and the Maison Cook (1926) (figure 27), were similar in scale and compact design, with stacked staircases and pilotis allowing for the free arrangement of volumes and large sections of terrace.\textsuperscript{78} The Stuttgart house sat on a bluff at the edge of the fairgrounds, overlooking the city, which may have recalled the position of his own site, looking down from its bluff onto the sea (figure 7). The scale of the house is very similar to that of Baizeau’s plans: just a few bedrooms, a single stacked staircase, compact, simple, with a large, protected terrace. In these likely examples of Le Corbusier’s houses he had seen, heard of, and read about, he may have liked Le Corbusier’s tendency toward modest scale and efficient layouts, and seen his own needs reflected in them.

But Le Corbusier, in the instance of the Stuttgart house or the Pavillon, was proposing what he believed was a commensurable model or type, rather than a specific house for a specific person. In \textit{Vers une architecture}, he had already insisted that the Citrohan and Monol types could be replicated at mass scale.\textsuperscript{79} In this moment, Le Corbusier was interested in universal types, platonic forms that could present both the aesthetic and ecological solutions for any client, regardless of his climate or site. On January 23, the same day that Lucien Baizeau presented him with his own sketches, Le Corbusier was superimposing his designs for the Edmond Wanner apartments in Geneva onto this villa in North Africa (figure 28).\textsuperscript{80} Based on his own limited experience in climates like that of North Africa, Le Corbusier looked to constant interior

\textsuperscript{78} See floor plans and images in the \textit{Oeuvre Complète}, 99–104 (Pavillon), 130–135 (Cook), and 150–156 (Stuttgart).

\textsuperscript{79} Le Corbusier posits his \textit{Citrohan} and \textit{Monol} types as universal schemes, that are cheap, efficient, perfectly unified, and could be replicated on a mass scale (Corbusier, \textit{Vers une architecture}, 243).

\textsuperscript{80} See \textit{Oeuvre Complète} for Edmond Wanner designs; Curtis discusses the simultaneous work on these two projects, noting how closely the first sketches for the Villa Baizeau honed to the earlier designs (Corbusier, \textit{Oeuvre Complète}, 176–178).
ventilation through a complex interior section of interlocking open living spaces, as the solution
to the heat and wind. In a letter that day, presumably to his studio, he wrote, “M. Baizeau desires
that you all study with every attention the question of ventilation, which he wants perfect in
every location.” Though in the Wanner apartments the complex interior was an aesthetic
conceit, Le Corbusier believed it could apply to another house as an environmental solution. He
proposes almost the exact same section in his first designs for Baizeau’s villa, and in his Oeuvre
Complète Corbusier relates the section to the challenges posed by the site: “from the ground
floor to the upper rooms, interior spaces flow from one room to another, establishing a constant
air current,” solving the problem of ventilation.

Le Corbusier’s first design, finished in February of 1928, shows that he was combining
his Wanner interior type with another universal type he was playing with: the ‘villa by the sea’
illustrated in the Oeuvre Complète. In his proposal for a seaside villa with attention to
ventilation, he imagined a much larger house than Baizeau did (20.5 x 10.25 meters to Baizeau’s
16 x 10 meters), with a roofed terrace on top (figures 29-30). But this design had wide expanses
of flat wall that would absorb a great deal of sunlight, with no sun coverage anywhere besides
the roof terrace. The main terrace opened on the South and East sides, which would receive the
full force of the Scirocco winds. When he saw the design in Paris soon afterward, Baizeau was
understandably unsatisfied: in addition to these orientation errors the proposed house was

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81 As quoted in Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 18. He also wrote “perhaps it will be an opportunity to contemplate a
small service staircase,” so he is responding to those requests that he had already contemplated himself in his recent
houses.

82 Corbusier, Oeuvre Complète, 176. See later discussion of his edited presentation of the Villa in the Oeuvre
Complète.

83 Corbusier, Oeuvre Complète, 245. This ‘seaside villa’ is organized long and lean, on stilts, with massive
double-height windows in the living room.
literally larger than the area of the site that could be built on.\textsuperscript{84} Corbusier quickly worked up a second project, which he sent on March 9, 1928 cutting the perimeter down to 12.75 x 10.25 meters (figures 31-33). In most other ways, it was essentially the same project on a smaller scale, including the complex cross section he was developing.

For Le Corbusier, the Villa Baizeau was not so much a physical site as an imaginary one in which he could work out the intellectual and idealistic theories for which he was so famous. As the architectural historian Paul Turner wrote in 1971, for Le Corbusier, “architecture was above all an expression of ideas and transcendent principles, rather than those aspects which have been the ostensible concern of most twentieth-century architects, such as function, structural and material integrity, economy, etc.”\textsuperscript{85} Le Corbusier’s focus on an idealistic and platonic architecture is quite clear from his own introduction for the \textit{Oeuvre Complète} in September of 1929: he wrote that he and his cousin only took on interesting projects that would help them work out \textit{their} ideas, rather than those that would pay the bills. In this way, he insisted, “we never once agreed to a compromise,” which suggests that compromise, for him, meant the influence of outside ideas.\textsuperscript{86} He was, perhaps, only willing to compromise between and amongst his own ideas.

It was through this search for commensurable, universal types that Le Corbusier homed in on what he believed could be the perfect freestanding modernist villa. A sketch in the margins of Le Corbusier’s work for the second Baizeau design on March 6, 1928, clearly anticipates the

\textsuperscript{84} Benton, “La matita del cliente.” Baizeau had carefully explained the site, its dimensions, and the directions of the sun and wind in his instructions and in previous letters.

\textsuperscript{85} Turner argues that Le Corbusier saw architecture as idealistic and intellectual (Turner, “The Beginnings of Le Corbusier’s Education,” 219). See conclusion for more on this.

\textsuperscript{86} Introduction to \textit{Oeuvre Complète}, 12–13.
earliest known designs for the Villa Savoye (figure 34).\textsuperscript{87} Working from France, and envisioning the Villa Baizeau abstractly as an opportunity to create a platonic type, his preoccupation was with the universal, not the specific. For scholars of Le Corbusier, this was the Villa Baizeau’s most valuable feature.\textsuperscript{88} This inspiration, drawn from his work on the Villa Baizeau, would eventually manifest in what was his agreed-upon masterpiece.

Understanding how Le Corbusier was working, and what he was searching for in this moment, then, it is possible to also understand how Lucien Baizeau, faced with an unworkable incommensurability, had to advocate for his own needs even to this acclaimed architect. Through the spring of 1928, Le Corbusier was reluctant to relinquish his universal answer to internal ventilation, and Baizeau insisted that the design would not only not succeed in the climate, but would literally not fit on the site. Between March and May of 1928, frustrated by Le Corbusier’s basically unchanged schemes, Baizeau began to negotiate between his original smaller footprint, the Swiss architect’s slick and curved surfaces, and the structural solutions to his ecological concerns posed by the possibilities of his medium. Baizeau wrote a dense letter on May 2, 1928 with a second set of his own designs, which I will call Baizeau’s second sketch (figure 22).\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{87} This is the linchpin of Benton’s argument in his 1980 paper, and the reason for his attention to the Villa Baizeau: identifying the first moment of conception for the Villa Savoye. “Mixed in with the second design of 6 March there are some sketches which prefigure exactly the ground floor and the exterior of the Villa Savoye; these preceded by several months the first identifiable designs for the Villa Savoye” (Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 20).

\textsuperscript{88} For example, Benton mentions the Villa Baizeau several times in his later work, but always within this context of the genesis of the Villa Savoye; he also found Savoye precedents in the first designs for Baizeau, in the exterior characterized by horizontal bands of flat wall and ribbon window.

\textsuperscript{89} Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 20. This is the sketch that was mislabeled in the Fondation Corbusier archives. Benton calls this the “second intervention,” in a nod to Baizeau’s repeated efforts to make himself understood by Le Corbusier. As Benton notes, the letter was extremely detailed; it even “specified the dimensions of the garage and the details of the wardrobes, of the French windows and etc.”
In this letter, Baizeau and his wife, who figures prominently enough in it to suggest they were working as a team, wrote confidently and succinctly, flexibly incorporating Corbusier’s and Jeanneret’s designs into a form directly responding to the site and their needs in a summer villa.\(^9\)

Though he and his wife had examined and understood Le Corbusier’s designs, he wrote that because they differed so clearly from his original instructions, they had “completely modified” them. They allowed that the interconnected living rooms might have an aesthetic function, but the scale was much too large for them and the interlocking volumes lacked the privacy and soundproofing they required when they had guests. As he explained to Le Corbusier, he had eliminated the extra salon and the extra servants’ staircase, simplifying the design into separate, concise floors.\(^9\)

He wrote that “we have extended the terrace in front of the dining room which will also serve as a living room,” as “we will as often take our meals on this terrace as inside.”\(^9\)

Most importantly, he wrote:

we have the kitchen projecting onto this terrace which will act as a wind barrier against the sirocco (South West wind) which, without this protection, would make the terrace uninhabitable on some days... It is very important to protect oneself from the sun and from the too strong impact of the sunlight. We have therefore provided for significant projections by the terrace on three sides of the house.\(^9\)

In Baizeau’s second sketch the two disparate imagined villas began to meet, and it became the basis of the Villa Baizeau’s eventual built form. Both Sobin and Benton note that Le

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\(^9\) Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 20. It is interesting to note that Baizeau frequently uses “we,” rather than “I,” in these instructions and letters. It would certainly be worth examining Mrs. Baizeau’s engagement in the project, given access to their own archives or archival material that could be located in Tunis.

\(^9\) Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 20. “To reduce as far as possible the upkeep of the house we have only provided one staircase.”

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^9\) Ibid.
Corbusier’s final scheme followed the client’s design closely.\textsuperscript{94} Baizeau parried Corbusier’s designs with his superior knowledge of the site and of his needs, reverting to his original scale and massing, and articulating Corbusier’s echoing roof slab, hovering ineffectively over an enclosed Citrohan volume, into an umbrella roof that protected the structurally freed, open plan beneath it. Baizeau had a clear understanding of what would be effective and innovative for his house (like sliding-glass doors and open-plan construction) and what was unnecessarily novel (like ribbon windows and an enclosing Citrohan envelope).\textsuperscript{95} Though he had sought out Le Corbusier’s services in particular, and clients had been known to capitulate to the architect’s formidable reputation before, Baizeau was determined to be an equal partner in this process. In his letter, he expressed hope that Le Corbusier could make the necessary changes as quickly as possible, so that he could see a new project at the end of June, when he would be in Paris. But by June of 1928, the site was still empty.\textsuperscript{96}

Moments of flexibility, when ideas were bounced back and forth and returned later in new forms, underline the nonlinear nature of the Villa Baizeau’s conception. Le Corbusier’s scheme of July 1928 reverted to his original over-large dimensions, and shifted the terraces back again, ignoring Baizeau’s other suggestions (FLC 1073-75) (figures 35-36). Baizeau was not pleased. Benton recounts Baizeau’s letter of July 9th with some humor: “I am distressed to see

\textsuperscript{94} Sobin, “Veils and Shadows,” 188. As Benton rightly says, “It’s important to note that the most notable characteristic of the villa - the terraces which run on three sides of the building - was decided by the client and not by the architect...In practice all the fundamental characteristics of Le Corbusier’s designs for Baizeau were decisively rejected by the client” (Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 21).

\textsuperscript{95} For example, Baizeau had specified sliding-glass panel windows between the inner and outer dining room in his original contract (Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 18), suggesting that Baizeau considered this a useful innovation, but not in the way Le Corbusier used them in his first plans.

\textsuperscript{96} Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 20. This was six months after the start date of March 1928 set out in the original January contract.
that you have taken very little account (he wrote ‘no account’ but changed it) of the very precise instructions which I gave you in May. I must insist therefore that you study these immediately and to conform to them as precisely as you can.”

In September of 1928, it seems that someone in the atelier, perhaps Jeanneret, returned to Baizeau’s ideas: FLC 1083 and FLC 1089 (figures 37-38), the latter of which is dated 18 September 1928, look nearly identical to Baizeau’s second sketch.

These designs indicated the first real engagement of Le Corbusier’s studio with Baizeau’s work. At the end of February 1929, over a year after their first meeting and nearly a year from the original construction start date, the studio sent plans modeled on Baizeau’s second sketch, numbered FLC 2069 & 2071; but there were still too many rooms, the dimensions were still too large (figures 39-42). In May 1929 La Tunisoise Industrielle prepared a corrected version, eliminating two rooms, and externalizing the garage, as well as shifting the wall along the street outside of the *pilotis* due to a more precipitous slope than Le Corbusier had imagined. The final schemes which involved Le Corbusier’s atelier were dated August 1929, and were further modified later that year by La Tunisoise Industrielle (figures 43-44). These last modified

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98 While the longer FLC numbers appear to have been somewhat haphazardly applied to the sketches well after the project was finished, the other numbering system seem to follow each other sequentially, which suggests that 1083 and 1089 were executed around the same time. The hand which executed FLC 1083 and 1089 is stylistically distinct from Le Corbusier’s.

99 The atelier fleshed out these plans with FLC 2024-2041 in December 1928; and FLC 2050, 2052, 2064–8 in early February 1929.

100 Benton calls FLC 2069 & 2071 the penultimate plans, only because they are the second-to-last set of designs executed by Le Corbusier’s studio (these were included in the *Oeuvre Complète*, but labeled FLC 2024 & 2041, perhaps mistakenly). He doesn’t include the plans made by La Tunisoise Industrielle in May 1929 or the final modified plans in late 1929.

101 Lucien Baizeau brought these plans in person to the studio when he visited Paris in May 1929 (Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 24).
schemes and the May 1929 plans have no record in the Fondation Corbusier.\textsuperscript{102} The final project was constructed from late 1929 and 1930 (figure 45).

It was only in the second year of its conception that the Villa Baizeau became a viable building, through Baizeau’s negotiation and translation. At the beginning of the project, both Le Corbusier and Baizeau had imagined a commensurability in European modernist architecture. Baizeau’s interest in the \textit{Weissenhofsiedlung}, reinforced concrete, and in Le Corbusier’s work in particular indicates that he thought they could apply to his own life in Tunisia. But for Baizeau, there was a point at which an imagined villa had to shift into a built reality. Over the course of the villa’s design, Baizeau’s and Corbusier’s ideas converged and diverged over the particular needs of the commissioner and his site. On that site, there developed a modestly-scaled, free-plan house with curving walls designed to withstand the heat and wind of the Gulf of Tunis, an amalgamation of Baizeau’s straightforward interiors, Corbusier’s compact massing, Baizeau’s scale, Corbusier’s expressive curved walls, Tunisian white walls and outdoor dining, Baizeau’s noise-shy guests, the Mediterranean sun, and the Saharan wind.

For Le Corbusier this second year, and its eventual product, seemed not to register, because his mind remained on the idea of a commensurable, perfect villa. Though he (or someone else in his atelier) finally began engaging with Baizeau’s designs in September 1928, I believe he was able to relinquish it only because by then the Savoye commission had gained momentum, and he could transfer these ideas to it.\textsuperscript{103} The Villa Savoye is quite unlike the Villa Baizeau, with its theatrical immense ramp spanning the roof garden, framing elements enacting

\textsuperscript{102} See conclusion for further discussion of one-sided documentation.

\textsuperscript{103} As identified by Benton, the first official sketches for the Savoye project are dated some months after Corbusier’s March 1928 sketch in the corner of the Baizeau plans.
visual control over the visitor. In late 1929, when Baizeau was finally preparing to break ground, Le Corbusier still believed that his Villa Savoye could be trans-geographical and trans-national, that it could be the universal house. In a lecture in Buenos Aires, Le Corbusier proposed the Villa Savoye, as peak commensurability: “the house could be transplanted to Biarritz or even to the Argentinian pampas.”\textsuperscript{104} Though Baizeau had confronted him with the fact that his flat-walled, flat-roofed houses would not be successful in Tunisia, but he propounded on their all-encompassing perfection.

The Villa Baizeau’s lengthy process of design tells us about the translation, negotiation, application of reinforced concrete construction and the modernist ideal of simplified and expressive geometry through a particular site, climate, and set of needs. Both the process and the product tell us about the tension between universalizing thought and contingencies of real construction, in the lived moment of Modernism. The performance of the Villa Baizeau, which we must recreate through gaps in the literature, further reveals the distance between this real, contingent, moment of Modernism, and the one that was recorded, edited, and propounded by Le Corbusier and the scholars who came after him. The afterlife of the villa reveals the changing historical state of the field, the way we have constructed our narratives over the last near-century.

**History erased, 1930**

The legacy of the Villa Baizeau, what Till would call its performance, tells us more about Le Corbusier and the structure of architectural history, than it does about the house itself.

Architectural history focuses on Le Corbusier and uses his narrative. As Le Corbusier moved on and moved toward the Villa Savoye, English-language scholarship moved with him; we lose our main source of documentation, and we lose sight of the Villa Baizeau.\(^5\) Though we have little documentation of the construction, we know that there were problems: during the winter of 1930-31, the house began to leak, and Baizeau’s calls for help were never answered.\(^6\) As soon as the atelier stopped corresponding with Baizeau, architectural history stopped tracing him.

There is almost nothing written about Lucien Baizeau; there is no information about the families who lived in the Villa Baizeau over the decades.\(^7\) Because the villa now falls within the precinct of the Presidential palace, it is inaccessible to the public.\(^8\) Documentation of the built structure is scarce, incomplete, or flawed (see figure 16).\(^9\) We have no information about its actual use as a house: images or descriptions of its interior, its use, of the art that filled it, the books that were read inside it, or the photos that were taken from its balconies (figure 47).

Because of this, the villa’s performance in existing scholarship tells us less about the building itself and more about the historiography of Le Corbusier.

But even from our limited perspective, understanding the process of its conception and the built product helps to illuminate how the Villa was erased from architectural history, and how

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\(^{5}\) As Benton notes, “Unfortunately, the documents of the methods of construction, the costs and the finishings have not been conserved” (Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 24). The last correspondence from the atelier was in December of 1930.


\(^{7}\) As noted by Benton to the author in emails in the fall of 2016, some of Baizeau’s letters were preserved in the Fondation Le Corbusier, but other documentation of him is hard to find. Compared to the surfeit of documentation on Le Corbusier, his traces number in the dozens. See more in conclusion.

\(^{8}\) Gans, writing in 1987, noted that the private residence was “in poor repair but not altered” (Gans, The Le Corbusier Guide, 144).

\(^{9}\) The few images that can be found of the actual house are in black and white, out of date, and hardly comprehensive. For example, figure 16 shows the building’s East facade, but the image has been flipped.
its traces can still be found. It is important to distinguish between two distinct forms of the Villa Baizeau that existed after 1930: the built version in Carthage, and an imaginary version, living on in paper. The former was the villa that Baizeau built, whose plans Le Corbusier never published, and which was inaccessible to the public and to scholars; the latter was modeled on Le Corbusier’s first plans for the Villa and published in his *Oeuvre Complète* (1930). During the years in which Le Corbusier’s legacy as a harbinger of Modernism was being cemented, European and US scholars, looking mainly to the architect’s own writings, ignored the villa or referred to this inaccurate, imaginary form. Even scholars in the revisionist wave of the 1990s, because their project was to revise Le Corbusier’s legacy, ignored the villa in its built form. Though we might not be able to recreate the life of the people who lived there, its skewed existence in the literature reveals the parameters of architectural history, and proposes places where those contours can be pushed.

Le Corbusier himself began the process of erasing the constructed house and foregrounding his imagined villa even before construction on the house began. Apparently, Baizeau’s resistance had stung him, as both Sobin and Benton note; Sobin reports that “the experience provoked the architect’s deep resentment.” Perhaps because of this perceived slight, in the *Oeuvre Complète*, Le Corbusier did not recognize the eventual designs but rather featured his first design, continuing to posit the complex cross-section as a viable ventilation solution: “The problem consisted of avoiding the sun and ensuring constant ventilation in the

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110 Sobin, “Veils and Shadows,” 188. Benton, as always, is more neutral: “It’s clear that this ultimate solution imposed on him from the client did not please Le Corbusier as much as his first projects.” Because of this, Benton wrote years later, the architect “showed little interest in the house as built and never published the finished plans of the house” (Benton, “Villa Baizeau, Carthage, Tunis,” 6).
house. The cross section has contributed these diverse solutions.”

He included fully worked up perspective drawings illustrating the imagined house it situ. He did note that the plan was never executed, and included the February 1929 plans (figures 39-42), calling them the “second project.” He described these second plans, erroneously, as under construction and as “less interesting” than the first. He knew by then that these were not the final plans which would be constructed, and never corrected this in any later editions of the Oeuvre Complète. He went so far as to erase Baizeau’s name from the official record, calling it the “Villa at Carthage,” rather than Villa Baizeau. He had done the same six years earlier with the artist Amédée Ozenfant, his erstwhile collaborator on Vers une architecture, after a falling out, eliminating his name from the dedication and the author’s byline, and even from image captions.

Le Corbusier further obscured the built villa by including, and dismissing, a modified version of the Baizeau house in his drawing Four studies of the potentials of the ‘Five Points’

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111 Corbusier, Oeuvre Complète, 176.

112 FLC 2069 & 2071, from late February 1929. Perhaps accidentally, in the Oeuvre Complète these are numbered FLC 2024 and 2029 (the designs from December 1928), which is incorrect.

113 Original french: “la coupe n’a plus le même intérêt” (Corbusier, Oeuvre Complète, 176)

114 Benton notes that the Oeuvre Complète was published before the house was finished (Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 24), but by the time Le Corbusier was writing his introduction to the Oeuvre Complète in September 1929, his atelier had already worked up several more designs past those of February 1929, all based on Baizeau’s later instructions.

115 Corbusier, Oeuvre Complète, 176. Several scholars then followed this lead, notably Serenyi, who only refers to the house as the “Villa at Carthage,” and never as “Baizeau.”

116 As Jean-Louis Cohen has made clear, Ozenfant and Le Corbusier often edited liberally in their original articles for L'esprit Nouveau, “cropping inconvenient elements in images of such iconic buildings as the Parthenon and St. Peter’s” (Cohen, “Introduction,” 67). In the second edition of Vers une architecture, published just over a year after the first, Le Corbusier eliminated Ozenfant from the dedication and the author’s byline, also taking out photos of works by other architects, including Perret, and putting in more of his own. See also Jean-Louis Cohen and Tim Benton, Le Corbusier, le grand (London: Phaidon, 2008), 74. He sealed the gesture by captioning the image of the studio he built for Ozenfant in 1920 “Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, A house” (Corbusier, Vers une architecture, 81). By September 1929, in his introduction to the Oeuvre Complète, Corbusier seems to have made up with Ozenfant, lauding their work together on L’esprit Nouveau (Corbusier, Oeuvre Complète, 12).
(1929), also known as the “Four Compositions” drawing (figure 46). The composition Le Corbusier included in this drawing differed significantly from the Villa Baizeau: it has three rows of five pilotis, while the Villa Baizeau has three rows of four, and the volume inside the pilotis does not correspond in size or shape to any of the villa’s actual floors. This third version of the Villa Baizeau never existed in either plan or built form, and may not even have been meant as a particular building, but rather as a general type. Either way, Le Corbusier dismissed this solution, labeling it “very easy, practical—allows for combinations,” while the other three buildings in the study are “picturesque,” “full of variety,” “difficult...(satisfying to the mind),” perhaps because he felt more ownership of them. 117 Though Le Corbusier did not identify these compositions as specific houses, scholars such as Curtis and Gans identified it among the other types as the Villa Baizeau, referring to it as if it were an illustration of the actual house. 118

Because architectural historians interested in Le Corbusier drew their understanding directly from the architect’s own writings, publications, lectures, and especially his Oeuvre Complète, scholars forwarded the two images of the villa that the architect published, the imaginary first design and the “easy,” unsatisfying approximation of the client’s own solution. Once it was enshrined in this muddled form, the Villa Baizeau as it was built did not exist in the scholarship. Early scholars writing in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, among them Gans, Loos, Curtis, and Serenyi, followed the architect’s lead, focusing their attention on those projects he deemed

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117 Recreated in Curtis, “Le corbusier,” 35. Benton believed this was also a snub: “Le Corbusier described this solution as “very easy”; perhaps because he didn’t invent any of the key characteristics” (Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 24).

118 See Curtis coursebook and textbook, where each type is labeled as a particular house (Curtis, “Le corbusier,” 35; Curtis, Modern Architecture, 283). Gans wrote, “Although Le Corbusier projected an ambivalent attitude toward the house, he also recognized its clarity and included it as the third of his Four Compositions” (Gans, The Le Corbusier Guide, 145).
most important, mainly the Villa Savoye.\textsuperscript{119} Beginning with Benton’s discovery in 1980, most scholars drew the Villa Baizeau into linear narratives of Le Corbusier’s development toward the Villa Savoye, and treated it as a conceptual stepping stone toward this high-water mark.\textsuperscript{120} J. R. Curtis’ landmark textbook, first published in 1982, can be seen as emblematic of the accepted narrative of the Villa Baizeau, built on a distorted understanding of partial evidence: he inaccurately refers to the first plans as built, conflating the skeleton frame of the final project with the exterior and plan of the first.\textsuperscript{121} Other scholars follow his lead, crystallizing this inaccurate picture.\textsuperscript{122}

This deference extended to Le Corbusier’s preferred, imaginary project, which became much more well-known than the eventual built form of the house. The internet favors this first project: even the digital models, made by students of architecture, are based on these unbuilt designs and have little to do with the actual building.\textsuperscript{123} Serenyi writes about the Villa at Carthage as “an entirely fresh interpretation of the well-known Citrohan type,” fused with

\textsuperscript{119} Early scholars either ignored the Villa Baizeau or only referenced it as being contemporaneous with the Villa Savoye. See Serenyi, “Le Corbusier’s Changing Attitude toward Form,” 16. Serenyi framed all Le Corbusier’s work in the 1920s in the lead up to “the finest, and indeed, the last house in the Purist style, the Villa Savoye.” In 1975 Curtis devoted an entire course at the Open University to tracing the run-up to the Villa Savoye (Curtis, “Le corbusier”).

\textsuperscript{120} Few of these scholars did research themselves on the house, instead referencing its relevance to the Villa Savoye through Benton: see Scherr citing the Villa Baizeau through Benton’s work (Scherr, “Architecture as Index,” 179), as well as Gans (Gans, \textit{The Le Corbusier Guide}, 145).

\textsuperscript{121} Curtis, \textit{Modern Architecture}, 176–178.

\textsuperscript{122} K. Vandenhende, “Learning how to design architecture from the Villa Savoye design process,” \textit{International Congress: Le Corbusier, 50 years later} (November 2015): 5. Vandenhende similarly muddled the first and later projects, finding traces of later designs for the Villa Baizeau in the Villa Savoye: the Villa Savoye “fused together the asymmetry, spatial drama, and promenade architecturale” of the Maison la Roche-Jeanneret with the “skeletal character” of the Villa Baizeau and the “geometrical clarity” of the Villa Stein at Garches. That skeletal character was certainly only present in the later designs based on Baizeau’s sketches.

\textsuperscript{123} A Google image search for the Villa Baizeau will return only a page or so of images—but most of them are images of the first designs. An Artstor search returns a similarly misleading crop: three pictures, two of the first project, and one of Le Corbusier’s \textit{Compositions} sketch.
inspiration from the Dutch De Stijl movement; this seems flawed until one realizes that he addresses the images of the unbuilt first project from the *Oeuvre Complète*. Bruno Reichlin, in *Le Corbusier une encyclopédie*, published on the 100th anniversary of Le Corbusier’s birth, included the first project in the “Solution” section, with the subheading, “An example of an elegant solution: the first project for the Villa Baizeau.” Like Le Corbusier, Reichlin posits it as an “elegant solution” to problems of wind and sun. Even Deborah Gans explicitly describes and privileges Le Corbusier’s first scheme, despite being the last scholar who appears to have physically visited the built house.

The Villa Baizeau’s erasure from architectural history shows how deeply it relies on the narrative of Le Corbusier’s singular genius: some scholars saw Baizeau’s imprint on the final designs of the house as a reason to exclude it from Le Corbusier’s oeuvre, and therefore altogether from architectural history. Because Baizeau’s needs dictated the design of the house, some historians cast this as a story of an unreasonable, “angry,” and “uncompromising” client, to which Le Corbusier was forced to “capitulate.” Instead of seeing Baizeau’s substantive involvement in the house as a reason to investigate how Le Corbusier’s designs fell short, scholars dismissed his solutions as inferior, because Le Corbusier had. Gans argued that Baizeau

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126 Her book, published in 1987, was formatted like a travel guide. No other source commented on the physical state of house; as noted above, she wrote that it was “in poor repair but not altered” (Gans, The *Le Corbusier Guide*, 144).
127 Sobin wrote that the solution was “forced down his throat by an angry client” (Sobin, “Veils and Shadows,” 188). Gans wrote that the second design was “eventually built according to the client’s uncompromising demands;” she stresses that Le Corbusier and Jeanneret eventually “capitulated to Baizeau’s increasingly specific demands for a house with terraces” (Gans, The *Le Corbusier Guide*, 144).
rejected the “first, preferred (by Le Corbusier)” design “in part because its glass sheathing failed in his mind (emphasis my own) to satisfy particular problems of sun and wind,” presenting Le Corbusier’s imagined villa as successful and Baizeau’s understanding as flawed. Sobin makes the same sort of assumption: Baizeau “reject(ed) all four (of Le Corbusier’s) schemes as unsuited to the overheated climate, and sent his own design” (what Sobin means by “overheated” when referring to a naturally occurring climate is unclear). Even Benton, who knew the most about the house, mainly used it to give him insight into Le Corbusier’s working process, rather than a catalyst to uncover more about the house itself or its commissioner. In fact, even with the little information we have about the house, its innovations, negotiations, and indeed rejections of certain Corbusian paradigms makes it a worthwhile investigation, rather than cause for abandonment.

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129 Sobin, “Veils and Shadows,” 188.

130 When Benton acknowledged the client's agency over the house, and rejection of Corbusian schemes, he essentially disregarded that house as a part of Corbusier’s oeuvre. After his initial, definitive article for Rassegna in 1980, he wrote about the house again in 1987 and 2016, each time confirming that it was an anomalous instance that affected Corbusier’s thinking on the Villa Savoye, but was not a part of his oeuvre per se.
Chapter 2

The Casa O’Gorman: A Modern House in Mexico City

Juan O’Gorman’s “first” house

In 1929 in the southern suburb of Mexico City Coyoacán, a place of rolling hills, tennis courts, and walled gardens, twenty-four-year-old Juan O’Gorman built his second house.131 Born to an Irish father and a Mexican mother, he was raised by his Mexican-Irish grandmother, and trained at the School of Architecture at the National Academy of Fine Arts from 1923 to 1927, in the years after the Mexican Revolution (1910–20). The house was ostensibly for his father, Cecil O’Gorman, although he constantly struggled with him and resented his strict Irish Catholic style of parenting.132 The Casa Cecil O’Gorman is a small, two-story house with boldly colorful walls and a second-floor studio for Cecil, a retired mining engineer and painter (figure 48).133

In this house, O’Gorman was both enshrining the past and breaking with it: he was taking inspiration from architectural theory but not following in footsteps that already existed; he was responding to the emotional, spatial, and political needs of post-revolutionary Mexico; and experimenting with both. Though at the time and later he referred to it as the first functionalist house in Mexico, whose form strictly followed function, it was also an experiment in form and

131 His first house was for Ernesto Martinez de Alba in Las Lomas (1927–28), which was not a functionalist house. Jiménez mentions this house in the interest of establishing the second, the Casa Cecil O’Gorman, as the first definitively functionalist house in Mexico. Víctor Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” in Casa O’Gorman 1929 (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, 2014), 60.

132 See later discussion of the house as a rental property.

133 The house is sometimes referred to as Palmas 81, after its original address. It is still number 81, but the street is now Calle Diego Rivera.
materials. By using a skeleton of reinforced concrete, as had been proposed by other architects around the world for industrial buildings, O’Gorman released the walls from weight-bearing. While still working within a strict budget, he configured the floor-to-ceiling glass panels on the second-floor studio to fold like a giant accordion, opening the studio up completely to the temperate Mexico City air (figure 2).

Amidst loud, authoritative, and contradictory voices, O’Gorman rather quietly set out to build a private house, the architect’s smallest unit of measurement, with the least expense and the most efficient building techniques. At twenty years old, O’Gorman had worked under José Villagrán García on the Instituto de Higiene y Granja Sanitaria (1925), learning to approach the problems of a building’s function within its specific site, as well as the needs of the new Mexico, in an updated Neoclassical style (figure 49). Villagrán García, like O’Gorman’s professors and many of the leading architects in Mexico at the time, advocated for a reinterpretation of the Spanish Colonial as the new national style. Navigating through his experience and other sources of inspiration, O’Gorman approached the problem at the granular level.

For English-language scholars, his particular relationship to these and other ideas were obscured because of his well-publicized reading of Le Corbusier’s Vers une architecture (1924),

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134 As I will discuss later, O’Gorman talked about the house in a 1932 interview for the magazine Tolteca; Federico Sánchez Fógarty, “Juan O’Gorman,” unsigned article in Tolteca 32 (March 1932): 328. He spoke about it again in his autobiography in 1973; Juan O’Gorman, Autobiografía, dictated to Antonio Luna Arroyo, trans. Nora Boyd (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1973), 100.

135 Carranza and Luiz, Modern Architecture in Latin America, 40–41.

136 See Oles, Art and Architecture in Mexico, 219. Many of the prominent architects of the time advocated for the eighteenth-century Mexican Baroque (“Churriguesco Mexicano”) or Neoclassical styles as an answer to the proliferation of “imported” European styles during the late years of the Porfiriato (1876–1911). See later discussion of monumentality.
through which they tied his early work inextricably to the older architect’s. In reality, the Casa O’Gorman illuminates O’Gorman’s much more complex relationship to the ideas of Le Corbusier—he had not, at that time, seen any of Corbusier’s buildings in person—which he believed were applicable to Mexico City in the aftermath of its revolution. In *Vers une architecture* he found the Swiss architect’s call for “revolutionary” architecture, to break from the traditional past.138 The opportunity came when he saw a lot with two tennis courts for sale near his ancestral home. He bought the lot with money he had saved working for other architects, designed the house over the course of 1929, and began construction in early 1930.139

But for architectural historians, the category of Modernism, and success as a Modernist, is wrapped up in questions of ethnic origin and authenticity. Modernist architecture, according to the accepted model, was born in Europe and the United States, and then disseminated to the rest of the world. Architects engaging in the ideas of Modernism outside of the US or Europe never change the rubric, they only fail to achieve the highest grade within it. In two major reference articles, O’Gorman’s early houses are characterized as “among the first in the Americas to show the functionalist ideas of Le Corbusier,” rather than some of the first in the world to negotiate the ideas of functionalism within the distinct political and social needs of post-revolutionary Mexico.


138 Corbusier, *Vers une Architecture*, 291. In it, Le Corbusier advocates for revolutionary architecture to prevent a real political revolution (see later discussion).


An underlying assumption that formal elements of architecture recognizable as Modernist precluded any authentic Mexicanness frequently underpins evaluations of O’Gorman’s work. In this model, architecture in Mexico was always somehow wrapped up in the local, the traditional. Oles’ textbook also implies that modernity could not be Mexican. The presence of hand-woven textiles, organ cactus fences like those in the countryside, and brightly-colored exterior walls mixed “avant-garde forms with references to the local.” In a 2009 article, Architectural historian Keith Eggener, wrote that Mexican architects’ buildings in the 1920s and 30s were “daring mixtures of the native and the foreign,” assuming that foreign is modern and native is not modern, and that the two are exclusive incommensurable styles.

Translation of ideas into house

The materials—the cement, tile, glass, and metal—that make up the Casa O’Gorman and their relationship to its form are speak to the post-revolutionary context in which O’Gorman was working. In 1982 Enrique del Moral, O’Gorman’s one-time school colleague, said of the house, “I do not believe that such radical expressions of that position (in architecture) could be found in any other country” at the time. Though this is frequently taken as referring to aesthetic and technical innovation, I believe Del Moral spoke about O’Gorman’s dedication to radical


141 Oles, Art and Architecture in Mexico, 261.

142 Eggener, “Juan O’Gorman versus the International Style,” 301.

economic efficiency, within their post-revolutionary context. Through the interior, concrete and linoleum were painted to look like fashionable red granite or terrazzo, significantly lowering the costs (figure 50). Traditional hollow pressed-clay flooring insulated the house cheaply, allowing inhabitants to heat the house with a single metal furnace. Pressed-clay ceilings lightened the skeleton of the house, and provided work for local artisans and demand for local materials. Construction, over the course of 1930 and 1931, only cost 6,500 pesos.

The materials and form also spoke to the reciprocal and relational nature of aesthetic influence: O’Gorman read Vers une architecture for its ideas, rather than direct aesthetic inspiration. Esra Akcan has convincingly shown that even young architects could consciously position and reposition themselves against even the great Le Corbusier’s seminal text. When scholars such as Kathryn O’Rourke wrote that O’Gorman “missed,” “lost sight of,” or didn’t understand the central arguments of Le Corbusier’s text, it reveals her assumption that he was reading it for instruction, rather than the conceptual motivation inherent in ready-made theory. For O’Gorman, the Casa O’Gorman was never purist; it was not “simply an artistic whim, nor

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144 As Jiménez writes, he was “sensitive to the new esthetic of Revolution, which championed the creativity of folk artists and indigenous craftsmen for certain solutions and made minimum costs a legitimate goal, indeed, even a sine qua non, given the new circumstances prevailing in the country” (Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 71).

145 This included the interior staircase, bathroom and kitchen floors; see Victor Jiménez, “Cedulas, Casa O’Gorman,” placards for the Casa Cecil O’Gorman from the Museo Casa Estudios Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo, trans. William Ruiz Richter.

146 See later discussion of pressed-clay coffers.


148 In the Turkish architect Sedad Eldem’s diaries of 1928-29, Akcan shows his fluctuation from strong agreement to “suspicio(n) of the ‘absurdity’ of Le Corbusier’s machine a habiter” (Akcan, Architecture in Translation, 124–125).

was it built according to abstract theory…(but was the) application of the principles of functional architecture” to a real site with real materials.\textsuperscript{150} Rather than an exercise in Corbusian aesthetics, the house was a negotiation of Corbusian ideas into a real, physical, contingent house. \textit{Vers une architecture} was largely a theoretical tract, without much discussion of and no floorplans of Le Corbusier’s houses.\textsuperscript{151} As a young architect with no major institutional support, extended chapters on city planning were irrelevant to O’Gorman. Even the chapter on houses, “The Manual for Dwelling,” did not instruct the reader on how to build houses, but rather how to live in them. Le Corbusier’s extended proscriptions included that one must “Never undress in your bedroom”; one mustn’t have bad taste; one mustn’t go to the concert hall in the evenings, as a gramophone will do fine, and “you will avoid catching cold in the concert hall, and the frenzy of the virtuoso.”\textsuperscript{152}

But while O’Gorman never mentioned any of Le Corbusier’s actual buildings in interviews at the time nor in his later autobiography, the theory underlying Le Corbusier’s pronouncements was important to his thinking. When O’Gorman does mention \textit{Vers Une Architecture}, he cites Le Corbusier’s idea of the house as a “machine for living in.”\textsuperscript{153} He began to think about houses with optimal dimensions and efficient layouts, designed for what modern inhabitants actually did with their time, and the most appropriate forms for that use. In March of

\textsuperscript{150} O’Gorman, \textit{Autobiografía}, 86. See Chapter 1 for Baizeau’s similar stance, that while architectural theory or aesthetic inclinations may call for a certain form over another, ultimately theory can only guide the outcome; see conclusion.

\textsuperscript{151} The only houses pictured in \textit{Vers une architecture} were the Ozenfant studio and a model of the Maison Citrohan.

\textsuperscript{152} Corbusier, \textit{Vers une architecture}, 122–23. He wrote also that one must teach one’s children the same; finally, one must “bear in mind economy in your actions, your household management and in your thoughts.” Ironically, in this chapter Le Corbusier instructed commissioners to “demand” these conveniences of modern life, though in reality he did not respond well to commissioner’s demands.

\textsuperscript{153} O’Gorman, \textit{Autobiografía}, 83.
1932, the year after the Casa O’Gorman was finished, he gave an interview to Federico Sánchez Fógarty, the editor of Tolteca magazine, in which he denied any interest in the external form of a building above and beyond its ability to perform its function. He saw architects as engineers, creating useful machines:

human creative forces never depart from (nor are preoccupied with) the external form of things, for resolving problems; but the external form is always a simple result (an accident)...of the resolution of such problems. Because effectively a house is a product which, ultimately, doesn’t differ from a shoe.

Because function dictated the form and materials of the machine, the architect-engineer’s main purpose was to find that perfect form and material, given the particular problem he wished to solve.

In that same interview, O’Gorman proposed the house’s low-cost cement construction as a potential solution for the grave housing shortage facing the Mexican state. This was another idea that may have come directly, though not explicitly, from Le Corbusier’s Vers une architecture, but his interest in reinforced concrete construction was not without more immediate encouragement: Sánchez’s magazine was published by the cement company Tolteca, and O’Gorman would go on to enjoy several career advancements due to that company’s involvement in contemporary art and architecture. As Sánchez elaborated, “(t)he structural part

\begin{footnotes}

154 Tolteca magazine was run by the cement company La Tolteca; Sánchez Fógarty was the company’s manager.

155 Sánchez, Tolteca, 328. Original Spanish: “las fuerzas humanas creadoras nunca parten (ni se preocupan) de la forma externa de las cosas, para resolver los problemas; sino que la forma externa siempre es un simple resultado (un accidente)...de la resolución de tales problemas...Porque efectivamente una casa es un producto que, en el fondo, no difiere de un zapato.” Translated by the author.

156 In his autobiography decades later, he also recalls Rivera’s pronouncement that the house’s efficiency and cheap construction was beautiful because “this was of enormous importance to the rapid reconstruction of our country” at the time (O’Gorman, Autobiografía, 89-90).

157 Sánchez Fógarty was well known for his active engagement with the Mexican avant-garde through his work on Cemento and Tolteca magazines. In 1931 O’Gorman won first prize for a painting he submitted to La Tolteca’s
\end{footnotes}
of the house, that is to say: the foundations, the skeleton, the mezzanines, the ceiling, the walls—is, in reality, the cheapest part of the house; but at the same time most vital, most important.”\textsuperscript{158} Cement was solving the technical problem facing the engineer-architect: to make the most houses with the least amount of resources, so that “the greatest number of people can enjoy (them).”\textsuperscript{159} As Carranza has argued, O’Gorman’s functionalist work was “a social solution to urgent housing problems…(and) an ideologically constructed aesthetic and architectural solution by Mexican cement industries.”\textsuperscript{160}

O’Gorman’s repeated readings of Vers une architecture—Eggener writes that O’Gorman claimed to have read the book four times before he turned twenty—actually appeared to give the young architect the opposite idea from Le Corbusier.\textsuperscript{161} When it came to housing, while Le Corbusier warned of “Architecture or Revolution,” O’Gorman saw architecture for revolutionary Mexico.\textsuperscript{162} Le Corbusier, writing in Europe during the turbulent years after the destruction of World War I, hoped that by building revolutionary architecture, modernizing societies could avoid political revolutions. O’Gorman, reading these ideas on the other side of a political

\footnotesize{painting competition; Rivera was on the jury who awarded him the prize, and that was probably how they connected, and would then lead to his gaining his first major house commission from the older painter. See Valeria Luiselli, “Translation Spaces: Mexico City in the International Modernist Circuit” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2015),195 & 208-09.

\textsuperscript{158} Sánchez, Tolteca, 330.

\textsuperscript{159} Sánchez, Tolteca, 328. Original Spanish: “producir el tipo más perfecto y más económico, y así...lograr el que todas las personas, o el mayor número posible de personas, puedan disfrutar de ese producto.” Translated by the author.

\textsuperscript{160} Luis E. Carranza, Architecture as Revolution: Episodes in the History of Modern Mexico (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 13.

\textsuperscript{161} Eggener could mean either of two versions which were published in close succession, in 1923 and 1924 (Eggener, “Juan O’Gorman versus the International Style,” 301); see Chapter 1, footnote 52. Guzmán Urbiola writes that O’Gorman read the original French, which he could do thanks to his father’s strict education (Guzmán Urbiola, “The First Functionalist House in Mexico,” 24).

\textsuperscript{162} Corbusier, Vers une architecture, title of section 1.7, 291. Emphasis in quote my own.}
revolution, believed that cost-effective and efficient building could be the answer to the housing problems of a rapidly modernizing post-revolutionary society. Speaking of the Casa O’Gorman in 1973, O’Gorman connected the theoretical basis for the house, “the minimum expense and effort for the maximum efficiency,” with his later work on behalf of the state, for the Department of Education in the years 1932–35.

Working to build for his post-revolutionary society, O’Gorman saw these Vers une architecture-inspired interests in the machine for living and reinforced concrete construction through a national lens that was all his own. As Guzman rightly claims, O’Gorman delved into “all the riches of popular, vernacular, and local campesino architecture, which is functional by its very nature,” the type of source Le Corbusier would not purposefully or explicitly exploit for many years to come (figure 51). While Le Corbusier was often engaged with the theoretical application of his ideas to low-cost housing or to solutions for city planning, his villas were rarely economical. Though in Vers une architecture he propounded on the efficiency of his Citrohan and Monol types, none of his extant houses had been replicated on a mass scale. O’Gorman made this a reality in the Casa O’Gorman, perhaps because materials and funding

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163 As Guzmán writes, “recent researchers have explained how the Swiss-French architect had written the book to forestall a possible social uprising, while its Mexican reader wanted to a make a revolution with his architecture” (Guzmán Uribola, “The First Functionalist House in Mexico,” 25). As Carranza writes, Le Corbusier’s ideas were “retheorized and radicalized” by Juan O’Gorman (Carranza, Architecture as Revolution, 13).

164 O’Gorman, Autobiografía, 85. O’Gorman moves quickly from speaking about his house to speaking about his work for this department (121-122). He also spends several paragraphs discussing the house’s reception by the neighborhood (with shock) and its effect on Diego Rivera (admiration), but he always connected it closely with his designs for schools. See later discussion of his school buildings.

165 Guzmán Uribola, “The First Functionalist House in Mexico,” 25. See also Adolf Vogt, and discussion in Chapter 1 about Le Corbusier’s unknowing or unrecognized appropriation of the vernacular architectures of other cultures.

166 Corbusier, Vers une architecture, 243.
were scarce, but also in response to his immediate context in the pluralistic, Nationalist-inflected moment of post-revolutionary Mexico City.\textsuperscript{167}

\textbf{Casa Cecil O’Gorman in 1929}

In 1930 as today, the Casa O’Gorman is strikingly visible from the street, announcing its presence over the rhythmic punctuation of a cactus fence, unlike the private, cloistered bourgeois residences around it. In the wealthy, low-lying neighborhood where O’Gorman was born, the streets are bound by discreet stucco walls, with bright pink, yellow, and purple bougainvillea bursting over the tops, and recessed dark wooden doors hinting at the homes behind them. The San Ángel Inn (figure 52), famous for its Spanish Colonial-style hacienda building, lies caddy-cornered to the plot, its form obscured from the street by its exterior wall.\textsuperscript{168} The Casa O’Gorman, in contrast, crouching above the tips of the cactus fence, is like a glass box perched on a brightly painted concrete frame with square stilts, announcing the house’s modernity, and is topped with the naked, undisguised equipment of that modern era: radio antennas, water tanks, and electrical wiring. O’Gorman loved to speak about the shock that passersby experienced, especially in his autobiography years later, delighting in the disgruntled looks of the bourgeoisie as they shielded their eyes against his monstrosity of socialist functionalist building, who swore that his “diploma should be taken away from him, so that he doesn’t keep doing such horrible things.”\textsuperscript{169}

\textsuperscript{167} Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 59; see later discussion of nationalism in that post-revolutionary moment.

\textsuperscript{168} At the time of construction, this was the Goicochea hacienda.

\textsuperscript{169} O’Gorman, \textit{Autobiografía}, 86-87.
O’Gorman was less interested in amazing the public, however, than he was in the possibilities afforded him by the newest materials and technology. As Sánchez quoted O’Gorman, “No, the mission of the architect never has been to to disguise modern houses as antique houses.”\(^{170}\) While it was surprising enough to use concrete in a residential building at the time, it was more striking that he was revealing the underlying structure of the house, not least through its most prominent feature: the open-plan studio, enclosed on three sides with the floor-to-ceiling glass accordion windows, gridded with bright red painted metal casements.\(^ {171}\) The entire front of the articulated glass facade could be folded open, creating the striking image from the street of a giant accordion or an opened box floating above a shadowed pedestal.\(^ {172}\) These were not just floor-to-ceiling windows but structurally independent walls of glass.

Though the transparency and unadorned nature of the house was shocking to local residents, the house itself was not grandiose but decidedly un-monumental, setting it apart from the work of many other post-revolutionary Mexican architects. There is no grand approach to the house, which is small at only eight by eleven meters. The door through the cactus fence, gesturally framed within a concrete rectangle, leads the visitor diagonally across the tamped earth and toward the small red door on the ground floor (figures 53–54).\(^ {173}\) In fact, the second floor extends over the ground floor, so that the main entrance recedes from the surrounding

\(^{170}\) Sánchez, Tolteca, 328.

\(^{171}\) Factory buildings in Mexico had used reinforced concrete since the late nineteenth century, and there were some steel-framed buildings at the end of the Porfiriato (1884-1911), but none were houses. See Introduction, footnote 1.

\(^{172}\) Compare to Juan Segura’s Ermita apartments in Tacubaya (1930), which had “thick reinforced concrete walls...pierced by small windows, (like those) that had defined the structure of early colonial churches” (Oles, Art and Architecture in Mexico, 261).

\(^{173}\) Jiménez writes that the plot used to be tamped earth, but is now gravel for easier conservation (Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 73).
landscape in a *jardín de sombra*, or “shadow garden.” Influential architects of the time, such as Jesus Acevedo and Federico Mariscal, were convinced that the new Mexican state needed a monumental architecture to symbolize its success and power, and that the Neocolonial was the appropriate style. O’Gorman was twenty-four and could not afford a larger project. Turning to the smallest unit of the built environment allowed him to approach this problem in a very personal way.

The small scale responds directly to the house’s intended function, and embodies the machine that a painter—in this case, I believe, himself—would live in. Behind the shadow garden, the smaller ground floor encompasses a combined living and dining space, an interior staircase, and a small kitchen and service area with a separate entrance. The second floor, half again as large as the first, contains three small bedrooms and two bathrooms. The railless ascension of the outdoor staircase insistently focuses the attention on the most important space, the artist’s studio, which takes up fully half of the second floor (figures 55–58). The floor-to-ceiling windows, when shut, are opaque from waist-height down, giving the impression that one is floating above the world, erasing the view of the street. When opened, the window-walls are massive ribs thrust open, burst and folded outwards, the open, unrailed edges the room completely open to the outside, unfettered by walls. I believe that this was Juan’s space, not his father’s. Cecil was a painter of small canvases, and would not have needed such a

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174 “*jardín de Sombra*” are O’Gorman’s own words in the December 1929 plans, which I will discuss later.

175 Carranza and Luiz, *Modern Architecture*, 18. There is significant scholarship on this need for monumental architecture, particularly in 1929, with the National Pavilions for the International Exhibition in Barcelona and the Ibero-American Exposition in Seville. Carranza and Luiz’s textbook discuss this at length.

176 In 2010, Carranza wrote that O’Gorman’s insistence on the visibility of the antennas, plumbing, and electricity in the Casa O’Gorman was also a nod to non-monumentality (*Carranza, Architecture as Revolution*, 7).
large, open space (he also preferred the dark wood and velvets of Porfirian interiors).177
O’Gorman, in contrast, was a painter of large canvases and murals, and an open-air studio would
have given him the ability to survey the landscape without actually painting outside, which he
never did.178 Here, he was providing a technical solution to the problem of a painter’s studio and
perhaps demonstrating his independence from his father.

If the house’s scale and the studio grew from O’Gorman’s own lifelong work as a painter,
its form also followed that function insofar as the planar surfaces are symbiotic murals more than
the blank surfaces of geometric volumes. As much as the studio windows dominate the facade, it
is the subtly modulated color that forms the general impression of the house. In 1964, art
historian Esther McCoy wrote that “glass areas were offset by planes of blue, red, yellow and
brown; window sashes were sometimes orange or vermilion.”179 The solid walls of the other
three facades are a flat brick red, reminiscent of traditional roof tile, edged in the mottled grey of
raw concrete (figure 59); the small garage and servant’s quarters behind the house is
superimposed with darker crimson at the bottom, which does not correspond to any functional
element, but gracefully echoes the form of its roof (figures 60–61). The exterior and interior
walls become a series of interdependent murals, which playfully complement or slyly contrast.

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177 Even scholars within the same recent book disagree about the original purpose and inhabitants of the house. Guzmán Urbiola says he bought the lot and he wanted to build a house for his family to live in, but that they did not move in because it was much too small (Guzmán Urbiola, “The First Functionalist House in Mexico,” 27). Jiménez says instead it was always meant to be a rental property, for applying his deeply held theories in practice, and to attract the attention of Diego Rivera as a potential client (Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 65-75). According to his 1973 autobiography, O’Gorman built it for his father.

178 Though he frequently featured the Mexican landscape in his murals, O’Gorman did not paint outdoors; instead “he usually sketched the scenes in a notebook and made notations as to color before completing the work in the studio” (Bach, “The art & anger,” 54).

179 McCoy, “Mosaics of Juan O’Gorman,” 17. Writing in 1964, when Le Corbusier was perhaps more well-known than ever before, she notes O’Gorman’s early interest in Le Corbusier, but does not see much relation to his work in the Casa O’Gorman because of this use of color and because “cantilevered projections and exterior spiral stairways relieved the planar surfaces.”
The front wall’s shadowed rosy pink is both heightened and dulled by the muted olive-pea green of the slim boxy columns that extend from the glass front down to the ground (figures 53–54).

O’Gorman’s color is not just pleasing to the eye but instructive, as all good murals should be: the colors code the elements of the building, both structurally and thematically. As it did on the exterior, the rosier pink denotes free-floating interior walls, such as the wall that curves toward the kitchen (figures 62–64). The dark maroon beam down the center of the ceiling aligns with the green beam on the exterior, clarifying the structure of the building through this visual connection (figures 63–64). A bright, matte red announces all metal and mechanical parts, outlining doors, anointing the water-pipe staircase railings, and indicating the exposed plumbing and heating throughout the house (figures 65–67). There is dark green for woodwork, in the form of built-in cabinets and shelving (figure 68), and the pine floors are stained an ochre that was called “Congo” at the time.\textsuperscript{180} The wiring throughout stands out bright white as it zigs and zags across the ceiling and along beams, pulled taut by white ceramic anchors.

O’Gorman’s early interest in Mesoamerican archaeology may have helped him find a way to speak legibly through color to a post-revolutionary public. José Vasconcelos, the Secretary of Education during O’Gorman’s training, another proponent of the Neocolonial style, preferred to reference European heritage, and was actively negative toward the cultures and architectures of the Aztec and Maya.\textsuperscript{181} O’Gorman, along with Diego Rivera and others in the

\textsuperscript{180} Jíménez, “Cedulas, Casa O’Gorman.”

\textsuperscript{181} As Carranza and Luiz relate, Vasconcelos developed the semi-religious theory of la raza cosmica, or cosmic race, which was an amalgamation of all the races (Carranza and Luiz, Modern Architecture, 23–24). Vasconcelos chose a seventeenth-century colonial building as headquarters for the Secretaría de Educación Pública in Mexico City that had an updated neoclassical facade, which dovetailed with his ideas about “architectural syncretism” and miscenegenation (24). See Jíménez on his negative attitude toward historical Mexican cultures, and his preference for the mixed nature of la raza cosmica (64).
avant-garde, “openly and polemically opposed” Vasconcelos’ “criollo-leaning anti-indigenismo.” O’Gorman said he learned more than he ever had in school from frequenting Mesoamerican sites like Teotihuacán; he even guided the French art historian Elie Faure there and to several other sites while still a student in the mid-1920s (figure 69). Many of these sites were just beginning to be systematically excavated and studied in the 1924–28 period, and were the subject of intense interest amongst the avant-garde. Though Teotihuacán would not enter its main phases of restoration until the 1960s, its Palace of Quetzalpapalotl, decorated with red paint and flat, geometric sculpture, is hard not to relate to the Casa O’Gorman’s walls (figure 70). Rather than look to colonial shapes and profiles, O’Gorman mined these archaeological sites for their legibility to the local, majority-indigenous population, finding that these solid colors were an important part of its vocabulary.

The bright red paint that announced all the metal, electrical, and plumbing features also articulated to a post-revolutionary audience that the house was a technologically advanced feature of the new Mexico. This antioxidant paint was instantly recognizable to contemporary Chilangos as it was typically used on metal in industrial facilities in Mexico, and served to

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182 Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 64. Several members of the avant-garde, and in particular Rivera, rebelled against any vision of Mexico that was framed through religion. Rivera instead foregrounded history, heroicizing the indigenous Mexicans who resisted foreign invaders, and using the symbolism of that history rather than narrative (Carranza and Luiz, Modern Architecture, 24). O’Gorman would follow this lead in his murals later on, but from the start was interested in archaeology and history of art and architecture of indigenous Mexican populations. See also later discussion of Anahuacalli (1942–43).


184 In setting the context for O’Gorman’s early school years and first few years working, Jiménez discusses the intense interest in archaeology that had been major draws for travelers since the mid-nineteenth century. Mitla, Palenque, Chichen Itza, and Uxmal and other sites around the country gained notoriety through lithographs and then photographs. In the 1920s, there was a renewed interest in these sites led by the Estridentismo movement and their short-lived but influential magazine El Irradiador (Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 64).

underscore the pipe- and metal-works’ functional purpose. As Jiménez notes of other members of the Mexican avant-garde in the 1920s, O’Gorman was preoccupied with radio antennas and other indicators of modernity.\textsuperscript{186} The spare service ladder up to the roof, and the pipes and antennas strung with wire along its perimeter, are undisguised, and almost rhythmic (figures 71–72). The red both coded and proclaimed these features, such as the water tanks, reclining in a curved concrete tray, emphatically visible from the street (figures 65–67).\textsuperscript{187} It showed how the service elements were efficiently compiled into a single channel in the middle of the house, joining the water tower on the roof with plumbing for the kitchen and bathrooms, and all drawn out into the street by a single connection along the North facade.

With similar goals in mind, O’Gorman’s treatment of the walls was not just a technical feat, but an exploration of the theoretical possibilities of the medium within the strict needs of his budget (the ostensible budget of a post-revolutionary Mexican state). Like Le Corbusier, O’Gorman was interested in the possibility of glass walls, but not in a way that spoke of luxury.\textsuperscript{188} Jiménez compares the Casa O’Gorman favorably, in terms of precedence, with Le Corbusier’s Ozenfant studio (1924) (figure 73) and Walter Gropius’ Bauhaus building (1926) (figure 74), concluding that his “may have been the first house (as opposed to factory, greenhouse, or office) built anywhere with such characteristics, all the more remarkable in that it was ‘floating’ above

\textsuperscript{186} Jiménez writes primarily of the Estridentismo movement (Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 68).

\textsuperscript{187} As Guzmán says, the house is “boasting out loud: ‘This house has drinking water!’” (Guzmán Urbiola, “The First Functionalist House in Mexico,” 26).

\textsuperscript{188} Colomina wrote that Le Corbusier’s eventual goal was for all walls to be “replaced by extended windows, lines of glass whose views now define the space;” see Chapter 1. It is interesting to note that Oles characterizes O’Gorman as falling short of the technical bravura set out by the older Swiss architect, though Le Corbusier had not yet constructed a comparable building (Oles, \textit{Art and Architecture in Mexico}, 261).
the ground on three slender *pilotis*. ¹⁸⁹ Jiménez discounts Mies van der Rohe’s Villa Tugendhat (1928) (figure 75), which had floor-to-ceiling, corner-to-corner glazing, which could be rather dashingly lowered by flipping a switch to an electric rotor, because O’Gorman could not have seen it.¹⁹⁰ Regardless of which house came first, this was the emblematic difference: the Villa Tugendhat was “extremely luxurious and expensive,” but the Casa O’Gorman’s function was the same with very little expense.¹⁹¹ O’Gorman prioritized the dignity of the inhabitant and the building’s function within a strict budget, devising hand-operated pulley systems to open and close the high windows in the bathrooms and kitchen, and forming ergonomic neck indentations in the cement bathtubs.¹⁹²

The materials—cement rather than porcelain bathtubs, painted water-pipe instead of chromed rails, cement disguised as terrazzo—did not just trim the budget, but eloquently referenced local craft which occupied its own category between the richness of handmade objects and patriotic *mexicanidad*. The tall cactus fence and the piled-stone walls referenced the countryside hacienda properties of Guanajuato, where O’Gorman spent his young childhood with his grandmother.¹⁹³ The landscaping was integral to the design of the plot and featured native

¹⁸⁹ Jiménez notes that though there were large windows in Le Corbusier’s Ozenfant studio, they didn’t “extend to floor level...(and) they did not come together at the corner” (Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 70). Similarly, though the glass did meet at corners in the Bauhaus, this was not a house.

¹⁹⁰ It was built 1929–30, exactly the years of the Casa O’Gorman, and wasn’t published until sometime later (Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 70).


¹⁹² As I will discuss later, these rooms are not accessible to the public today but Jiménez mentions these pulleys in his text (Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 68). The ergonomic neck cushions are visible in the Kahlo house-studio, where Kahlo’s bathroom is accessible.

¹⁹³ Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 64. O’Gorman’s father was employed at El Profeta mine there, until O’Gorman was eight. In his autobiography, O’Gorman emphasized the time he spent in his grandmother’s house and garden there, where she encouraged him to draw, rather de-emphasizing his father’s influence on him as an artist.
plantings: “truero, cedro, organos, ivy, bambus, organos ingertados, hortensias, arancaria, laurel, dracenae, mimosa” (figure 51). In the garage, O’Gorman worked out a grid-like ceiling of “hollow pressed-clay coffers set between concrete ribs,” only running the steel through the load-bearing areas. These pressed-clay coffers were used in traditional houses to better insulate, as well. Ribbed concrete made the floors and ceilings lighter and stiffer; it was made in formwork and could be poured by unskilled laborers. Oles saw this “greater recourse to handcraft” as a shortcoming, that including Mexican “cultural references...mitigated assertions of absolute modernity (emphasis my own),” not understanding how this could be a reference to the new, machine-age Mexico. But, as Jiménez wrote, the situation in Mexico City in the 1920s “rendered nationalism and the avant-garde complementary, rather than antagonistic.”

Machine-age Mexico, in fact, necessarily included the Nationalist strains of handwoven textiles, terracotta tile, organos cacti, and the bright colors of their Mesoamerican ancestry. O’Gorman used clay and tile with an understanding of how the Mexican labor force could be involved.

Some elements of the house were indicative of his own changing relationship to functionalism, mexicanidad, and International Modernism, and of his fluid, contextual relationship to form. Like the windows-walls, the floating, lilting exterior staircase is not just a flexing of technical prowess, nor a purely functional element, but an early attempt at a question of form that he would deviate from and return to over several decades. O’Gorman’s many trips

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194 These are labelled and laid out in the December plans of 1929; see below.
196 Jiménez, “Cedulas, Casa O’Gorman.”
197 Oles, Art and Architecture in Mexico, 261.
to Teotihuacán and other archaeological sites since his school days could only have impressed upon him the expressive power of stairways within mesoamerican precedents (figure 69), but in 1929 O’Gorman opted for lightness, rather than weightiness. Though a bird’s eye view clearly shows its exact half-turn (figure 76), from the ground at human eye-level the Casa O’Gorman’s exterior stairway gives the impression of playful grace, rather than stern rationality. For Rivera’s and Kahlo’s studio-houses (1931–32) and for other private houses in the 1930s, he would explore the aesthetic impact of spiraled, poured concrete (figures 77–78). For Rivera’s museum for Mexican art at Anahuacalli (1942–43), which was specifically designed to harken back to mesoamerican forms, he opted for massive, momentous entrance stairs (figure 79). In his Pedregal house (1948–56), he returned again to a floating staircase, though this time fully integrated into his encrusted interior (figure 80). The idea of this form was responsive in each case to its function and context, rather than representative of a linear progression from less authentic to more authentic.

Post-Revolutionary Modernism: the 1929 designs

Two drawings and a set of detailed plans O’Gorman made in 1929 illuminate his sifting of Le Corbusier’s ideas through his own context and his own interests. In them, he is already playing with the freedom afforded him by using reinforced concrete, with the house as a machine for a Mexican mural painter, and with materials, forms, and color that spoke to the

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199 In reality, as Jiménez says, the stairs were “daring even as a proposal,” and INBA struggled to recreate during the restoration in 2012-13 (Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 70). Jiménez and Ruiz Richter write that in the staircase, “where the steps’ edges do not correspond to a single point, as if they were continued by imagination,” only the two “rafters” on either side of the staircase are reinforced, containing the outward force of the steps and functioning as beams to hold the weight at the shadow garden and the 2nd-floor entrance (Jiménez, “Cédulas, Casa O’Gorman”). See also Guzmán Urbiola, “The First Functionalist House in Mexico,” 27.
post-revolutionary Mexico City. The two autographed and dated sketches preserved in the O’Gorman archive, which show the house from its Southwest and Northeast corners (I will call these drawing 1 and drawing 2, respectively) (figures 81 & 82), show how O’Gorman envisioned the exterior form of his house on the eve of its construction.\(^\text{200}\) Also preserved there are O’Gorman’s plans dated 23 December 1929, consisting of two pages of annotated floor plans and facade elevations (which I will call the December plans) (figures 83 & 84), showing his attention to materials, interior layout, and technical form. We can compare the house O’Gorman built to these plans, to see how and why O’Gorman’s imagined house changed over the course of its construction.

From both the drawings and the plan, it is clear that color was integral to his drafting process from the beginning, suggesting that he saw the relationship of color and architecture as analogous to that of color and painting. In the December plans, as when he sketched out a new mural, O’Gorman notated his forms with their colors or materials: “rose, rojo venicia, bleu, gris, red, pink.”\(^\text{201}\) Sometimes he erased initial thoughts and recast them, looking to the broader picture to imagine a unified, interrelated whole. Though the plans are a dichromatic architect’s map, looking closely reveals a legend that could bring to mind a full-color experience. In drawings 1 and 2, color is essential to understanding each distinct form of the exterior and interior, their transparency and opacity. Deep red indicates metalwork and plumbing, a very light

\(^{200}\) These are signed by O’Gorman as the architect, and cosigned by Marcial Gutierrez Camarena. The O’Gorman archive is at the Museo Nacional de Arquitectura in Mexico City. Unfortunately, the archive was in the process of being moved, so I was only able to access some of these documents. I was only able to obtain black and white versions of drawings 1 and 2 to reproduce here.

\(^{201}\) He did this for his paintings as well, since he usually only sketched outside and returned to paint indoors (Bach, “The art and anger,” 54); we can see this also in the sinopia for the 1948 mural (see below). Throughout the plans he switches between English, Spanish, and French notation, as he was fluent in all these languages.
blue indicates the opacity of select windows, and he carefully delineates the concrete edging on flat exterior walls. O’Gorman is already working out his system of interrelated and coded colors, which correspond largely to the final colors, though here too we see evidence of him reworking them, blotting out his watercolor and repainting.202 In drawing 1, the differentiated color of the bent middle beam-column on the ground floor is clearly echoed directly above on the second floor. Unpainted concrete emphasizes his technically advanced material in those places where it is most relevant: the slim levels in between the floors on the back facade and framing the walls to indicate that they are not load-bearing, but rather more like framed pictures. The expressive flourish of the darker color along the lower part of the front wall seems to emphasize its curve, again allowed by the strength of the concrete.

O’Gorman treats the December plans as a site for free exploration, in which some elements contradict others within the same overarching plan. This underscores that he is not working directly from any Corbusian plan; rather, it shows that he is, like all architects, wrestling with the contingencies of his materials, his budget, and his proposed solutions to his proposed problem. Though they are detailed, the plans do not represent a cohesive and finished architectural product. The railed staircase in the fachada al occidente (as it does in drawing 1) directly contradicts the rail-less staircase in the fachada al oriente, directly below it on the same page. The second floor implies both two bedrooms and three, with a railed upper floor hallway. He appears to be working out the possibility of a chimney on the South facade, which only appears on the planta baja and planta de conjunto. The fachada al norte shows a solid wall with

202 Drawing 2, of the North and East facades, shows hatchwork along the bottom half of the wall, which could indicate either tilework or a darker color. Once built, the North and East walls became a solid red, though the motif of a darker stroke of color did occur in the service quarters and garage building behind the house. The restoration of the house has returned it to its original colors (Casa O’Gorman 1929, 6).
high windows and a door to the kitchen, while the *planta baja* shows a curved wall leading into a covered exterior service area, as exists today. From the elevations, the studio appears to be the glass windows, but the floorplans also show a solid outer wall.

Each of these changes indicates his increasing and decreasing distance from the ideas he set out with and the teachings of his training, as he calculates the costs and viability of each different possibility within the whole. In the *fachada al oriente* O’Gorman has glazed floor-to-ceiling windows on half of the back facade, but in the *planta baja* he indicates a solid wall all along that Eastern side. A full back wall of glazing, on a real site as opposed to a drawing, has real consequences not just in form, but in costs, materials, and use: the sun rising in the East, would offer a dazzling (and expensive) breakfast, when perhaps the inhabitant would rather experience that dazzle in the West-facing studio in the evening.

The December plans also show how O’Gorman is using reinforced concrete’s main advantage: its strength meant that the walls were the most mutable element. Because the boxy columns did the essential work of holding up the floors and ceilings, the walls were structurally freed. He could play with more glazing at the back of the house, for example, because that back wall did not hold the weight of the second floor. In these plans, we can see O’Gorman freely moving the interior walls around as well: in the *planta baja* a straightforward entrance hallway directs the visitor into the larger living room and a more distinctly separate dining room; this would later curve, drawing the visitor in more gently and blurring the lines between the rooms.

In the bedrooms and studio on the second floor, O’Gorman could explore the differences between cost-effective built-in shelving or furniture and the flexibility of freestanding objects, so that the space could comfortably accommodate two to six people.
In the two facades presented in the December plans, O’Gorman confronts the question of legibility for a Mexican audience from two distinct, and mutually exclusive, positions: with symbolic imagery and with form as a signifier of its own modernity. In the planta alta and the fachada al occidente, we see a mural of a “venetian red” sun and a gray moon facing each other on a blue ground (in the planta alta, there is a clear difference between the solid line for the wall and the dotted line for windows). Perhaps part of the same scheme, on the fachada al norte is a similarly-proportioned circle etched out at the upper left, and noted “pink.” But on both the fachada al norte and the fachada al sur, as well as some indicators in the planta alta, O’Gorman is clearly also working out the possibility of his wrap-around, floor-to-ceiling studio windows. The mural facade would have used age-old imagery to connect it with a Mesoamerican past while it was so clearly modern; the glass studio walls proclaimed its modernity with its material. These two approaches were emblematic of the changing position of the avant-garde in Mexico City’s post-revolutionary reality, for whom legibility, figural imagery, and plastic integration were central questions. O’Gorman, already caught up in these questions as both a trained architect using the newest technologies and as a working muralist, would return to this question many times over the course of his career.

To understand O’Gorman’s post-revolutionary context, his relationship to Le Corbusier’s ideas, and the Casa O’Gorman’s story, we cannot take 1929 as a single moment of conception, but one in a series of moments in the house’s history. O’Gorman did not, it would transpire, choose the glass-as-modernity model and discard the figural mural facade. Comparing early photographs and the restored house of today with these plans, one might make that assumption. But this gives a flat, oversimplified idea of O’Gorman’s conception process, which as in Till’s
model is iterative and reflexive, and involves the building’s performance over time. He would in fact return to the mural facade, as well as several other minimal additions and subtractions. Over the nearly four decades in which the O’Gorman family owned the house, O’Gorman’s process overlapped with its legacy. The house did not progress linearly from a single, pure idea to its completion, but rather shifted backward and forward over those subsequent decades.

**Mexican Avant-garde, 1929–1948**

O’Gorman’s interest in functionalism as an appropriate and legible architecture for the Mexican populace was deeply entwined in the question of plastic integration, which had surrounded him since his adolescence. As Carranza and Luiz wrote in their 2010 textbook, “plastic integration became...a de facto characteristic of its (Mexico’s) architecture” in the 1920s.  

David Alfaro Siqueiros was one of many who, in the pages of the avant-garde journals *El Machete, Horizonte, and !30-30!*, supported the new architecture and figural painting all at once. They advocated for the straightforward geometrical forms, cheap construction, and unadorned style of the new architecture as both aesthetically emblematic of a violent break with the Porfirian and Colonial past, but also as the carrier of the revolution’s “social goals.” On the one hand, it could curb the malicious practices of contemporary architects exploiting the poor with exorbitant fees, rents, and poor-quality products. On the other, it could directly incorporate, or literally carry, the figural muralism the avant-garde was championing, which could instruct the public about the political and social goals of the new society. The historian and journalist

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Catherine Nixon Cooke writes that as a high schooler O’Gorman (and his friend Frida Kahlo) watched as Diego Rivera and Siqueiros painted massive mural cycles in the Secretaría de Educación Pública in downtown Mexico City.\textsuperscript{205} From his earliest training as a painter and as an architect, O’Gorman was situated squarely within the sphere of the Mexican muralists, their work within public spaces and buildings, and their commitment to plastic integration as a solution for post-revolutionary society.

Within this context, the sun and moon mural O’Gorman proposed in the December plans are a response to modern Mexico’s need for an iconography, and to the debate about plastic integration. Painting was integral to his work as an architect, and vice versa; there was never such a stark delineation between the two for him (he even signed the upper righthand corner of the South facade of the Casa, as if it were one of his paintings). When faced with the decision in late 1929 of whether to incorporate a mural or to expose the inner form of the building by making the facade glass, he did not so much discard the need for murals as submerge it into his nuanced color system. Though Rivera’s visit to the Casa O’Gorman is enmeshed in myth of both O’Gorman’s and scholars’ making, it is certain that Rivera admired its stark mural-like walls, and even declared them beautiful, especially because of its potential for rapid reproduction.\textsuperscript{206} It is here where the myth picks up, as O’Gorman sets the house’s success as the impetus for

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\textsuperscript{206} As mentioned before, O’Gorman recalls in his biography that Rivera surprised him by declaring that “architecture performed by the strict procedure of the most scientific functionalism is also a work of art. And since...this was of enormous importance to the rapid reconstruction of our country...(according to him) it lent the building beauty” (O’Gorman, \textit{Autobiografía}, 89-90).
\end{footnotesize}
Rivera’s commission of his next and perhaps most consequential work, catapulting him into the spotlight at twenty-six years old.\textsuperscript{207}

When O’Gorman returned to the other half of his original proposal for the Casa O’Gorman in late 1930s, it was a continuation, not a revision, of his ideas about plastic integration. By reconstructing the timeline, I have narrowed the window for his manifesting the mural facade to sometime between 1937 and 1942. From its completion in 1931 until 1968, the house was a rental property providing Cecil O’Gorman with an additional income.\textsuperscript{208} O’Gorman’s brother Tomas lived there briefly after his marriage, from 1942 to 1944; then new renters presumably came in.\textsuperscript{209} Sometime after the house appeared, glass facade glinting, in \textit{The New Architecture in Mexico} (1937) by Esther Born, O’Gorman covered the glass with a solid wall, and painted the twinned moon and sun.\textsuperscript{210} An undated photograph in the Juan O’Gorman archives in Mexico City shows the house with the mural facade.\textsuperscript{211} This is little-known, and to my knowledge, as yet unpublished.\textsuperscript{212} It was also during this time, from 1937 to 1942, that

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\textsuperscript{207} O’Gorman also recalled that the Rivera-Kahlo commission was “the most important work of my life, because it made me known all over Mexico” (O’Gorman, \textit{Autobiografia}, 110). Jiménez argues that the Casa O’Gorman was always meant to be a showcase for the older painter, to convince Rivera that he should commission the architect for his first “real” job (Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 70).

\textsuperscript{208} A caption on plans reproduced in \textit{Casa O’Gorman} state that he “changed the name of the owner to that of his father,” perhaps because his father was the one collecting the rental income (\textit{Casa O’Gorman} 1929. 29). O’Gorman said his parents rented it out for 100 pesos a month, which over time was meant to repay his father for his education. In a somewhat bitter tone, he wrote that “of course this helped (my father) a lot, because he was very poor” (O’Gorman, \textit{Autobiografia}, 87).

\textsuperscript{209} Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 73.

\textsuperscript{210} Born, \textit{The New Architecture in Mexico}.

\textsuperscript{211} The archive did not have the rights to this photograph, and so was unable to send me a digital version of the image. The image was archived in a folder labeled “1929” but the photograph itself was not dated. By reconstructing the house’s timeline via its publications, I concluded that the outer wall was built after 1937, when the glass exterior was shot for the Born publication.

\textsuperscript{212} In a caption on plans reproduced in \textit{Casa O’Gorman} 1929, it is noted that the glass was later replaced but unclear what replaced it. It states that O’Gorman “made various modifications to the house...including the elimination of the large studio window and the addition of chimneys” (\textit{Casa O’Gorman} 1929, 29). Grouping these modifications
O’Gorman shifted his practice mainly into painting, and this could have been the impetus for his revisiting the Casa O’Gorman. It should also be noted that even after Le Corbusier’s floorplans had become available through publications, O’Gorman chose to modify his house to be less like the older architect’s buildings, rather than more.

It seems that O’Gorman returned to his earlier ideas to satisfy his own shifting relationship to plastic integration within his sustained search for a legible Mexican modernism, and that the mural was probably finished before or just after his brother moved in, in 1942. Though he would later make some modifications for his father’s renters, it is highly unlikely that such an enormous change was requested by a renter, and even less likely that O’Gorman would undertake such a project for them. I would argue that he undertook his original idea for himself, before or while his brother was in residence—there’s no more opportune client to experiment on than a brother. While it is also tempting to date this mural closer to when O’Gorman was executing his famous 1950 self-portrait, which featured a twinned sun and moon, representing his dual nature as painter and architect (figure 85), it is more likely a continued engagement with symbols he associated with meso-american traditions.213 Gibson Danes, a professor of Latin American art and architecture at the University of Texas, suggests that there was some figural painting in the house when he wrote about it in 1942, (unfortunately, Dane’s article was not accompanied by photos).214 For Danes, the way O’Gorman intertwined painting and architecture,

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213 See also his school friend Frida Kahlo’s continued engagement with this imagery, which can be found in her 1932 Self portrait on the border between the US and Mexico, as well as on her body casts from the 1930s.

214 In 1937, Born wrote that for his 1929 house “he painted some frescoes,” though it is unclear what she means here; it could be there were others, or that this is what Danes was referring to (Born, The New Architecture in Mexico, 142).
“two usually distinct fields of expression,” within single works, distinguished his works from those of International Modernists, including Le Corbusier, who was not interested in plastic integration and whose use of color was unrelated legibility or nationalism or native materials. This was six years before O’Gorman would return even more directly to figural murals in his architecture.

In 1948, O’Gorman’s third approach to plastic integration within the Casa O’Gorman tied the house symbolically into an anachronistic Mexican landscape, and the larger story of the relationship of tradition and innovation in Mexican cultural history. From 1948 to 1968, Entre la filosofía y la ciencia hay bastante diferencia, or “Between Philosophy and Science There is a Significant Difference” (1948), a fresco mural, adorned the North wall of the dining room (figures 86-88). In 1968, the house was sold by the O’Gorman family, and its interior mural was removed, to be acquired by Mexico’s National Bank Collection.

The mural was integrated into the space of the room: it was the exact height of the windows it adjoined, the lush greens and rusty reds of the painting echoed those of the surrounding walls and woodwork, and the glimmer of sunrise in the mural and notations in the sinopia indicate it shows the East alongside the East-facing windows (figure 85). An industrial tower with the same antioxidant red steel frame, and a cubic building with the same red walls

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215 Danes, “Juan O’Gorman,” 1. Danes wrote that because of his continuous engagement with both painting and architecture, O’Gorman should be better known on an international scale; one could not “pigeonhole his work or...describe him in terms of any of the contemporary ‘isms,’” as he was not interested in Corbusian functionalism per se (Danes, “Juan O’Gorman,” 9).


217 It is fortunate that the sinopia, or underpainting, which O’Gorman traced, survived under the subsequent layer of paint. It was discovered during the restoration process and carefully restored (Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 73).
framed in the grey outline of exposed concrete echo the Casa, amidst the Aztec pyramids and Catholic churches of the past, and the humble private homes and the impressive factories of the modern Mexico (figure 87–88).

Though the express purpose of the Mexican muralist form was didactic, in this mural he does not tell a history or argue a point, but rather illustrates a changing and complex ideological landscape. A skeleton with dashing red shoes at the bottom left holds a banner denouncing religion in favor of philosophy which counteracts and tempers the science “which has brought materialism to the world” (figure 89). On the other side, a nude woman offers a counterargument for science, “the only means of knowing reality in all the orders of human life” (figure 90). At the bottom, where a saturated blue column has been decapitated and fallen over, an unclaimed legend offers a reason to equate the two: “The plastic (arts) and mysticism are unknowns, therefore one needs to have faith to practice them. Only to this extent are they subjectively acceptable” (figure 91). Maybe this is his contribution to the debate, as a painter-architect whose works are subjective and changeable; he even signs it. Inside the house where O’Gorman had experimented, and changed his mind, where he was approaching these

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218 The legend above the scene seems to echo his ambivalence. Original Spanish: “Ni estan todos los que eran. Ni eran todos los que estan.” Author’s translation: “All which is, is not as it was. Neither is all that was as it is.”

219 Original Spanish: “Hoy la filosofía es manera de contrarrestar el desarrollo de la ciencia que ha traído el materialismo al mundo. Sólo cerrando los ojos a la realidad se encuentra la esperanza de que la metafísica salve a la humanidad.” Author’s translation: “Today philosophy is the way to counteract the development of the science which has brought materialism to the world. Only by closing our eyes to reality do we find hope that metaphysics (religion) will save humanity.”

220 Original Spanish: “En la antigüedad la filosofía y la ciencia eran la misma cosa. Hoy la filosofía sólo sirve para disfrazar de verdad lo desconocido. La ciencia es el único medio de conocer la realidad en todos los de la vida humana.” Author’s translation: “In antiquity, philosophy and science were the same thing. Today, philosophy only serves to disguise the unknown truth. Science is the only means of knowing reality in all the orders of human life.”

221 Original Spanish: “La plástica como la mística son incognitas, por lo tanto se necesita tener fé para practicarlas. Solo en esta medida son subjetivamente aceptables.”
questions over and over, he represented the varied, discursive, opposing sides of his fields of painting and architecture.

In this same year, O’Gorman began work on his own house in Pedregal (1948–56) (figures 92 & 80), and on the library at UNAM (1949–52) (figure 93), which each offered distinct approaches to plastic integration. The presumably upper-middle class inhabitants of the house were living in a moment of reaction against the Socialist- and Nationalist-inflected rhetoric of the 1930s known as the Mexican Miracle, which had gained steam in 1946 with the election of a more business-friendly president in Miguel Alemán Valdés. At every meal, this mural presented years of debate within a house that was itself nearly two decades old, not a static reminder of the moment of its creation, but a living, changing house that responded to a living, changing Mexico City.

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222 The Pedregal house, sometimes called the Casa San Jerónimo for its address on Avenida San Jerónimo, was carved out of naturally-occurring lava rock in cave-like forms, and over many years he decorated it with elaborate murals and mosaics. The UNAM library, perhaps his most famous work, designed with Gustavo María Saavedra and Juan Martínez de Velasco, juxtaposed two perpendicular rectilinear forms whose surface was a riot of multicolored mosaics, illustrating the history of Mexican culture. In the former, plastic integration was almost sculptural, while in the latter, he explored the full didactic possibilities of large-scale mural in mosaic.

223 Alemán, elected in 1946, was the first civilian President of Mexico after the Revolution; he ran on the PRI, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, which was more interested in economic growth.
Conclusion

Uncovering the stories of the Villa Baizeau and the Casa O’Gorman

Within a few decades of their construction, both the Villa Baizeau and the Casa O’Gorman were physically inaccessible to interested scholars, and figuratively inaccessible to scholars who only encountered them in the inaccurate narratives in which they were submerged. Even before it was finished, the Villa Baizeau was erased from Le Corbusier’s oeuvre, for all intents and purposes. Because it entered into the scholarly imagination as a lesser or altered Corbusian villa, the only substantive clue to how it fared is in Benton’s 1980 mention that it was damaged within its first year, due to technical issues neglected by Corbusier’s atelier. The Casa O’Gorman’s dismissal began in the 1950s with O’Gorman’s turn away from functionalist aesthetics, and was solidified after its sale and subsequent alteration under new owners. If the houses’ traces in the existing scholarship only allow fleeting glimpses of their afterlives, they offer a much clearer picture of the methodologies of architectural history and the rubrics of Modernism.

The fate of the Villa Baizeau, 1930–2019

The Villa Baizeau’s traces (and to find them, we must mine this same skewed scholarship, until new primary sources come to light), reveal how self-referential architectural history is, even when scholarship begins to dismantle the Western European and US-based

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224 Benton writes that “the walls and ceilings sustained significant damage because water infiltrated from the non-insulated terraces...Baizeau wrote desperately for advice complaining of the fact that Le Corbusier and Jeanneret had neglected to specify the necessity of putting a layer of bitumen under the tiles of the terraces.” Even though Corbusier and Jeanneret had not directed these very real and important parts of the process which they had been contracted to do, Baizeau paid the agreed-upon percentage of 7% (Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 24).
construction of the narrative. As Paul Turner noted, Le Corbusier famously denied most influence on his work: “the problem [of understanding him] is compounded by Le Corbusier’s own tendency to disclaim intellectual influences and to encourage the view, like so many artists, that his ideas had sprung full-blown from his creative genius.”

Following Le Corbusier’s lead, English-language architectural history only admits the possibility of influence from named, and usually Western European or US sources. Serenyi saw the Dutch architect Gerrit Rietveld as the only plausible influence on Le Corbusier of the 1920s. Curtis echoed Le Corbusier’s assertion of self-influence, asking, “How does the Villa Savoye relate to earlier and later architecture by Le Corbusier?” For both Serenyi and Curtis, therefore, the only way the Villa Baizeau could affect Le Corbusier was in the form of his first, unbuilt scheme, or his muddled *Four compositions* form.

The Villa Baizeau was forced into conversation with the Villa Savoye because of its importance in his oeuvre. Both Curtis and Serenyi find the genesis of the Villa Savoye in a combination of his earlier types, hence their interest in the *Four compositions*.

The house’s continued absence in the revisionist wave of the 1990s stems from its continued inaccessibility, and from the continued attention to Le Corbusier. Scholars such as Luis E. Carranza, Beatriz Cololina, Zeynep Çelik, and Adolf Max Vogt, challenged Le

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225 Turner, “The Beginnings,” 30. This was one of Turner’s struggles in writing on Le Corbusier’s early education, since the architect maintained this fiction so strongly. In a footnote on that same page, Turner wrote: “Le Corbusier is reported to have boasted, for example, that the only books which ever influenced him were the Bible and the works of Cervantes and Rabelais (from conversation with Maurice Besset, December, 1969).”


228 Serenyi argued that Le Corbusier’s influences were Rietveld and other architecture of the De Stijl group, and his own earlier designs of the 1920s, amongst which he placed the first designs of the Villa Baizeau, as a Citrohan type. Curtis also wrote about earlier typologies, casting the first project for the Villa Baizeau as a Citrohan as well.

Corbusier’s legacy but not his narrative of the Villa Baizeau. Perhaps because the villa remained inaccessible, none of these scholars sought to reposition it within history based on their rereading of Le Corbusier. Though Colomina focused on the obfuscation of Le Corbusier’s self-editing, she does not revisit the Villa Baizeau, one of the victims of his writing of his own history.\textsuperscript{230} Çelik mentions the Villa Baizeau in passing and Carranza ignores it.\textsuperscript{231} Vogt made the same mistake as Curtis, confusing the early (unbuilt) and later (built) plans.\textsuperscript{232} So the villa remained submerged.

Though he does not revisit the Villa Baizeau in any substantive manner, Adolf Max Vogt’s fantastic and experimental book revises the conventional understanding of Le Corbusier’s seeming imperviousness to outside influence by suggesting the possibility of unnamed sources, which is particularly relevant to the Villa Baizeau’s history. If one were to follow Le Corbusier’s own projected narrative, in which each of his own villas in the 1920s was an advancement toward the universal transcendence of the Villa Savoye, one would also conclude that architectural progress is a logical, linear progression over time toward platonic perfection, and that his ideas all sprang from his own mind. But of course, Le Corbusier was affected by known and unknown influences, which he either did not consciously understand as major influences, or purposefully repressed. Vogt parodies this narrative of the Villa Savoye in a chapter entitled “A

\textsuperscript{230} Colomina showed that Le Corbusier’s photographs and publications weren’t just a portrayal of life as it was but an active construction of a text, like all modern advertisements, or like propaganda.

\textsuperscript{231} Çelik focuses on his projects in Algeria, so the villa registers only as a point of evidence that he had never spent time in the region before; like many others, she spends most of her time analyzing the architect’s unbuilt plans (in her case, for the city of Algiers), as a way of analyzing his Orientalist relationship to North Africa (Çelik, “Le Corbusier, Orientalism, Colonialism,” 58-77). Carranza does not draw it into his argument at all, preferring to focus on the Villa Savoye (Carranza, “Le Corbusier,” 71-80).

\textsuperscript{232} Vogt, \textit{Le Corbusier, the noble savage}, 28-29.
Steep but Consistent Climb toward the Villa Savoye and the Palace of the League of Nations.”

Vogt’s book persuasively argues that Le Corbusier’s self-described teleological progress, devoid of external influence, was in fact punctuated by chance encounters and a more nebulous push and pull of varied influences and sources, and specifically, by his early exposure to Turkish vernacular architecture. Vogt compellingly connects Le Corbusier’s earliest ideas of *pilotis* to the stilts and overhanging upper stories of the Turkish *çikma* house. He even rather mischievously compares the *kösk* type, “a garden house open on all sides,” in the form of a farmer’s house in Börecki, with the Villa Savoye.

The complex design process of the Villa Baizeau furnishes us with a non-canonized understanding of influence and inspiration that is diffuse and flexible. That process shows how Le Corbusier was influenced by others, even outside of named Western European or US-based sources, but more importantly reveals how influence is an inherent part of all creative processes. It is easier to see how Baizeau, as a relatively unknown actor in the narrative of architectural history, might have been influenced by unnamed, vernacular sources, and because we do not assume his genius was singular and self-referential, we understand that no idea of his can be traced to its genesis. It is also clear that though Baizeau was working directly from Le

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233 Vogt writes: “A possible assertion. The interconnection, the consistency of the four steps...is evident enough, but how can it be comprehended? What takes place is a logical advance in visualization and clarification of concepts; but this series of steps, including the Villa Savoye as its culmination, did not drop down from heaven” (Vogt, *Le Corbusier, the noble savage*, 27-31). This language had been used before, and often, though usually in exactly the context that Vogt was parodying: see Curtis above, after he asks how Le Corbusier influenced himself: “Did it ‘drop out of the blue’?” (Curtis, “Le Corbusier,” 9).

234 Vogt, *Le Corbusier, the noble savage*, 44-45. “What is more likely is that it [the Villa Savoye] was handed to the architect by chance by the Orient.” Here Vogt self-consciously uses the term “Orient,” mirroring what Le Corbusier did in his own writings on Turkey and Algeria.


236 Vogt, *Le Corbusier, the noble savage*, 75.
Corbusier’s ideas, the Villa Baizeau is neither a derivative copy of an existing Le Corbusier villa nor a “Corbusian” villa, but the culmination of many ideas exchanged over time among at least four actors.\textsuperscript{237}

This reciprocal and flexible understanding of influence can only help us, because a teleological and self-referential narrative of architectural history will not allow us to understand history or the experiences of living people through buildings. For example, Sobin used the Villa Baizeau as an example of “reverse influence,” asserting that influence is a monolithic, unidirectional force that naturally flows in a colonial direction, but which in some cases could flow “backwards” from “a colonial society or culture to its dominant colonializing power.”\textsuperscript{238} But the Villa was neither a received colonial imposition nor a rigid rejection of colonializing power. It was the specific response of a well-educated commissioner, whose ideas bounced back and forth over his site and across the Mediterranean, and of his architect, whose needs and interests at that time were very different. In their mutual resistance and occasional compliance, they created something unique, and though we can only see how the Villa Baizeau figured in the longer narrative of one of the characters, its influence was never linear.

Though Le Corbusier consciously or unconsciously sought to erase it from his oeuvre, formal similarities of the Villa Baizeau to later buildings, like the Villa Shodhan (1951-56) in Ahmedabad (figure 94), the High Court in Chandigarh (1950-55) (figure 95), and the Casa Curutchet (1955) in La Plata, Argentina (figure 96), belie his narrative. Just as Le Corbusier’s

\textsuperscript{237} Along with Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, as well as various unnamed assistants working in their atelier, Lucien Baizeau was clearly joined by his wife and almost certainly by others working at La Tunisoise Industrielle.

\textsuperscript{238} Sobin, “Veils and Shadows,” 187. Sobin also wrote about the influence of vernacular architecture on Le Corbusier’s brise-soleils, or sun screens, again positing this as a “reverse influence” (Harris J. Sobin, “The Role of Regional Vernacular Traditions in the Genesis of Le Corbusier’s Brise-Soleil Sun-Shading Techniques,” Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review 6, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 80).
and Lucien Baizeau’s influences on the Villa Baizeau were part of a responsive process, the Villa Baizeau’s effect on Le Corbusier, while not immediately apparent even to the architect himself, was appreciable, even in that moment. The *Oeuvre Complète* was published before the villa was completed, but not before the final designs had been worked up to the point where the Villa Baizeau’s skeletal structure was apparent. It is hard to say whether Le Corbusier was paying attention to his brainchild coming into being on a site he would never see, but it may have caused him to finally publish the *Dom-ino* type.\(^{239}\) Though Le Corbusier effectively denied its importance and flooded the scholarship with his preferred, imagined form, the Villa Baizeau as built was in his imagination, percolating for decades and infusing new buildings with elements of his past project.

The Villa Baizeau’s success was neither aesthetic nor typological. Rather it was due to its particular response to its context, its combination of siting and massing, overhanging roof, Dom-ino structure, and ample terraces. Though in his *Oeuvre Complète* Le Corbusier wrote that “the house carries a parasol which shades the interior rooms,” he knew that in the early designs, with the terraces in the wrong location, the parasol roof did not adequately shade the rooms.\(^{240}\) He probably included this statement because by that time, with Baizeau’s direction in siting the house, massing the interior volumes, and correctly placing the terraces, the roof could now act as a solution. Though at the time he was interested in a universalist approach, and this adjustment had been forced upon him by the client, he was already registering the particularity of this solution in his brain, even before he arrived in a comparable climate for the first time in 1931.

\(^{239}\) As mentioned before, the Maison Dom-ino was first published in the *Oeuvre Complète* in 1930.

\(^{240}\) Corbusier, *Oeuvre Complète*, 176.
His imagined Villa by the Sea was growing softer and dimmer as the idea of the real house worked in his mind.

Corbusier scholars tend to judge a building’s effectiveness or success through its aesthetic or typological clarity, comparing it back to his own architecture. This is the case regarding the Villa Baizeau. For example, Gans argues that it was the first design for the Villa Baizeau that “addressed the problem of a tropical architecture,” and that from it, Le Corbusier “had developed a particular vocabulary of forms...to manipulate sun and breeze,” linking it directly to his later architecture in South America, such as the Ministry of Education in Rio (1936), and his much later work in India. Gans had a Corbusian way of universalizing projects in as disparate places and climates as India, the Mediterranean, and Argentina as “tropical;” she consistently calls Tunis tropical, when in fact Tunis’ climate is Mediterranean.

Though Gans, along with Curtis, Serenyi, and Von Moos, recognized the roof and terraces as important responses to the climate, they did not understand that those forms would be ineffective if applied randomly to a site. Von Moos writes that the first project, “a free-standing roof-umbrella on top of a box,” reappeared years later at Ahmedabad. Curtis likewise relates the Villa Shodhan’s “concept of a parasol against rain and sun” to the Maison

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241 Gans, The Le Corbusier Guide, 138-39; 144. This vocabulary “included the brise-soleil and a parasol roof on stilts to manipulate sun and breeze.” For discussion of the former, see Sobin. Arguably, the parasol roof on stilts was not effectively articulated until Baizeau’s second sketch. She references the first project when she writes that “The idea of the roof as umbrella dates from his Villa Baizeau (1929)” (79).

242 Though not recognizing Baizeau’s role in it, Von Moos recognized that “the problem [of sun control] received an elegant solution: the rooms were placed so far in the interior of the corps du logis that the projecting floor and ceiling slabs assumed the function of parasols” (Stanislaus Von Moos, Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1979), 117). It is unclear here whether he writes about the first or the “second” project as it was published in the Oeuvre Complète.

243 Von Moos, Le Corbusier, 121.
Citrohan, an aesthetic concept rather than a specific answer to its site. Serényi is more interested in the aesthetic composition of the Villa Shodhan than its effectiveness in its climate, connecting it aesthetically to the “later versions” of the Villa (i.e. Baizeau’s designs), in which “the spaces and masses are gradually loosened up, culminating in the dynamic composition of the Villa Shodan.” Only Benton understands the full implications of the design process, recognizing that the building’s final form was much indebted to Baizeau’s siting and massing.

In the Villa Shodhan, the Villa Baizeau’s contribution is both the form of the terraces and parasol roof and its responsiveness to the site, in its orientation and massing: as Le Corbusier saw during the earlier building’s design process, these forms are only effective if placed correctly. In the later building, Le Corbusier emphasized the parasol roof, an extension of Baizeau's suggestions, even further in an expressive and functional gesture. Though Vogt does not reference the Villa Baizeau, it is possible to see how the Turkish Kösk type’s “umbrella-like roof on pilotis that generously covers the assembly place beneath,” could be joined years later by the ideas of Baizeau’s designs, in creating a new approach in the architect’s mind. Though Sobin recognizes Baizeau’s contribution to the Villa Baizeau, he argues that the later parasol roof at Chandigarh was a new innovation of Le Corbusier’s, perhaps because once influence moves “backwards” its effect dissipates. The Villa and its conception refute the more

244 Curtis, *Modern Architecture*, 426. He wrote that the Villa Shodhan was “descended in the long run from the Maison Citrohan,” citing “the image of the Dom-ino but incorporating as well the concept of a parasol against rain and sun.”


246 He wrote that “the clarity of the conception—a separate sun screen which envelops a free flow of space—didn’t find other exemplifications until the Indian buildings of the 1950s,” (Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 20).

247 Vogt, *Le Corbusier, the noble savage*, 75.

248 Sobin, “Veils and Shadows,” 188. Though he wrote that the Villa Baizeau “was the architect’s first building to come to architectural terms with the sun, even if the technique permitting it to do so, i.e. the use of the peripheral
conventional narrative of linear progress and innovation as something that can be traced to specific authors. In fact, these innovations were not born hermetically from the the individual genius of either Baizeau or Le Corbusier, but were rather the product of a long and involved negotiation between ideas and reality, and their dual contexts. Influence is not something that happens linearly, progressing logically from step to step, always from Europe outward, but something that moves back and forth across oceans and time, from Turkey to Paris, from Tunis to Ahmedabad, from vernacular sources to celebrated individuals, and from past to future.

This fuller, though still incomplete, portrait of the Villa Baizeau, which includes its lengthy design process, its built form, and its legacy (and lack thereof) in scholarship, should also illuminate how to move forward: to look at the building without trying to insert it into our known history. In giving equal weight to Lucien Baizeau’s contributions and Le Corbusier’s, we not only revise our conception of the villa’s importance to Le Corbusier’s history, but also to our narrative of the villa itself as an object worthy of study. Baizeau’s contributions to the Villa Baizeau, shrouded from the perspective of traditional architectural history, are apparent in the distances between his original sketches and his second design. That distance highlights the negotiated and contingent nature of innovation and progress, proposing that this moment of Modernism wasn’t the product of singular geniuses but rather a congruence of material and ideological factors, which were translated and negotiated through individual actors across time and located at specific building sites.

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Later, Sobin argues that Le Corbusier employs a new technique when he gets to Chandigarh: the projecting parasol roof, which, in fact, one can begin to see in the final designs for the Villa Baizeau (193).

The Casa O’Gorman’s sale in 1968 and its subsequent modification by its new owners hid the house from view; its inaccessibility, coupled with English-language architectural history’s reliance on architects like Le Corbusier and a linear model of influence, cast the house, inaccurately, as abandoned by its creator.249 By the early 2000s, there was a persistent narrative that O’Gorman “rejected what he...considered the soullessness of the International Style,” before finally throwing off Le Corbusier’s influence, forsaking his early architecture in favor of his later work, which was more authentic.250 Without access to this early house and without attention to its conception and the architect’s continued engagement with it, the Casa O’Gorman was dismissed and obscured.

Because the Casa O’Gorman was largely ignored by scholarship and inaccessible, O’Gorman’s English-language legacy settled into a neat, but inaccurate, formulation: from 1929–1937 he was a (derivative) Modernist architect; from 1937–1950 an authentic Mexican muralist; and from 1950–1980, a Mexican painter-architect in the vein of Frank Lloyd Wright. His early architecture was dismissed as Corbusian, and later buildings conflated with Wright’s influence. The Oxford Dictionary of Architecture entry may be the most typical, distilled version of this narrative:

He designed (1920s and ’30s) houses and schools, influenced by Le Corbusier, regarded as paradigms of Functionalism. He had a very public change of heart (1950s) concerning International Modernism, and began to incorporate [Wrightian] vernacular

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249 After the 1968 sale of the house, the spiral stairs were removed and a chimney put in; more glass was added the South facade and glass patio doors added to the East. See Jimenez for more details on the restoration (Jiménez, “Juan O’Gorman’s House of 1929,” 53–55). It seems that many of these modifications happened soon after the sale, as O’Gorman stated in his autobiography five years later that the new owners had “destroyed” its form, see below.

250 Oles, Art and Architecture in Mexico, 320. He writes that this constituted a “dismissal of his own modernist buildings of the 1930s.”
motifs into his designs...e.g. the National Library, State University of México (1952–3—covered with colourful mosaics).  

James Oles, in his 2013 textbook Art and Architecture in Mexico, frames O’Gorman’s early functionalist works in terms of Le Corbusier’s. In this formula, the Casa O’Gorman is a blip on the way to more authentic architecture.

Perhaps English-language scholars were relying too heavily on O’Gorman’s words about Le Corbusier, the more well-known architect in the English-speaking world and the focal point of so much architectural history, but they also conflated the older architect with all functionalism and modernism. O’Gorman did famously make public statements against the International-style modernist architecture of Le Corbusier and others in the 1950s, and in 1955 wrote, in English, “The Degeneration of Architecture in Mexico Today,” an unpublished submission to the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. (The fact that it was written in English probably accounts for its overemphasis within this scholarship.) The architectural historian Keith Eggener, uncovering this “strident” submission in a 2009 article, argued that O’Gorman totally refuted functionalist architecture, hated and had thrown off his “austere houses and schools modeled on the work of Le Corbusier.” Francisco Gonzalez de Canales wrote that O’Gorman repudiated the “capitalist scam” of modernist architecture, failing to make the distinction between the


252 Oles, Art and Architecture in Mexico, 261-263. Oles ignores the Casa O’Gorman, but notes, of the Rivera-Kahlo studios on the same site, that “several features cite [the Swiss architect’s] house-studios in Paris.”

253 Eggener’s title, “Juan O’Gorman versus the International Style: An Unpublished Submission to the JSAH,” pits O’Gorman against the International Style, as if they were two separate, distinct schools: Mexican versus International. (Though O’Gorman’s early functionalist work is integral to his argument, he does not mention the Casa O’Gorman.)
capitalist deployment of International Modernism in the 1940s and 50s and the underlying ideology of dignity for the common man that originally attracted him to 1920s functionalism.\textsuperscript{254} Without understanding his nuanced relationship to Le Corbusier’s ideas, it was easy to cast his functionalist architecture as derivative, and O’Gorman’s own repudiation of Le Corbusier’s work as an admission that he had been misled by him.

This narrative reveals how the aesthetic and self-referential evaluation of European and US-centric architectural history is unable to account for O’Gorman’s continuous ideological engagement with “socially relevant architecture” in Mexico, as Lynda Klich wrote in 2010.\textsuperscript{255} English-language scholars saw the mosaics and organic forms of his later work, so different from the flat planes and glass of his early work, as a break from his need to find a modern architecture for Mexico. But censuring the aesthetic forms of International Modernism did not mean refuting the need for a modern Mexican architecture, and in particular, for O’Gorman, the ideology underlying the Casa O’Gorman that he translated and negotiated from his engagement with early functionalist ideas. His relationship to the ideology he had espoused in the Casa O’Gorman still stood. Dictating his autobiography in 1973, O’Gorman bemoaned the Casa O’Gorman’s ruined state: the new owners had “destroyed its original architecture.”\textsuperscript{256} Considering the Casa O’Gorman’s conception and O’Gorman’s continued engagement with it, we can say that it was Le Corbusier’s universalizing and Western-centric approach to architecture and city planning in

\textsuperscript{254} Gonzalez de Canales, “Juan O’Gorman (1905–1982).” This is a well-established distinction, easily seen when comparing Modernist office buildings of the 1950s with the egalitarian spirit of the Weissenhof, for example.


\textsuperscript{256} O’Gorman, Autobiografia, 90.
practice that O’Gorman declared defunct, inappropriate for the people, and not relevant for
Mexico in their modern age, while he continued to espouse the ideology he set out with in the
1920s. O’Gorman’s need to change his external forms, to use local materials and build directly
into the earth, was not a repudiation of the underlying ideology of his early architecture, nor a
dismissal of it. And referencing meso-american forms is not a refutation of the modern age at
large, a retreat into historicism, but rather a different way of approaching modernity than, say, Le
Corbusier.

This scholarship also reveals the rubric of architectural history in pitting Mexican
architecture against Modernism, which it implicitly links to Europe and the United States.
Though Oles and Bach pose nationalism as anti-modern, and internationalism as Modern, as we
have seen for Mexicans in 1929 nationalism was integral to modernity. Oles associated Frida and
Diego’s “modernist” houses with factories, machines, and Internationalism, not with workers,
folk traditions, or national history, which was where the couple placed their allegiances.257
Gonzalez de Canales associates capitalism with Europe and the United States, and International
Modernism as its aesthetic representative, which are all by extension not authentically Mexican.
Bach writes that O’Gorman was “an architect of considerable vision” but he “fell under the spell
of functionalism,” and later “admitted he took many of his cues from” a Frenchman.258 But not
all foreign influence is modern, and not all Mexican influence decidedly un-modern.

257 Oles, Art and Architecture in Mexico, 261–263. This persists with O’Gorman’s late work as well: though with
Anahuacalli O’Gorman and Rivera used pre-Hispanic building practices and stone mosaics, and UNAM’s historical
and cosmological symbols are “striking,” Oles says they “seem simply pasted over the walls of his own functionalist
building, a costume as nationalist as the indigenous or peasant dresses worn by elite women in Rivera’s
contemporaneous portraits” (263).

258 Bach, “The art and anger,” 48, 50, 54. He refers to Ferdinand Cheval’s house in France, which O’Gorman cited
as another interest of his when approaching mosaic and mural in his Pedregal house.
In fact, during this time, O’Gorman was still searching for a socially relevant architecture for Mexico, while mourning the co-option of the economically efficient building techniques of functionalism by the capitalist International Modernist developers.\textsuperscript{259} Alejandro Hernández Gálvez argues persuasively that O’Gorman’s unbroken attention to his surfaces, to color and texture, refutes the idea of his so-called “abandonment” of architecture from 1936 through 1942.\textsuperscript{260} We can see all this play out in the house itself and its relationship to O’Gorman’s contemporaneous architecture and to its historic context in Mexico. Between 1937 and 1942, when he supposedly abandoned architecture, O’Gorman was painting a Mexican sun and moon on the Casa O’Gorman’s front, and co-designing Rivera’s Anahuacalli, incorporating mesoamerican motifs (figure 97). In 1948, while designing and painting his mural about aesthetics, painting, architecture, progress, and tradition into his first house, O’Gorman was meticulously constructing three-dimensional murals to his Pedregal house, and incorporating mosaic murals in the earliest designs for the library at UNAM. These were contemporary responses to the changing political and economic context in Mexico, whose modernity had always involved reclaiming its history from colonization and dictatorship.

The real performance of the house, if we value it not against the aesthetic rubric of Modernism, but against its proletarian usefulness for the Mexican state, was a great success. The house was a case study for an efficient and hyperlocal style of building, as Rivera had noted, and

\textsuperscript{259} Eggener, “Juan O’Gorman,” 302.

\textsuperscript{260} As Hernández Gálvez argues, though he stopped building for several years in 1936, and built in a very different exterior form afterward, O’Gorman did not so much change his relationship to his own works but to the International Modernist style and its proponents (Hernández Gálvez, writing before the restoration in 2010, does not discuss the Casa O’Gorman, but rather the Rivera-Kahlo houses), Hernández Gálvez, “Juan O’Gorman: Architecture and Surface,” 206–229. See Bach, “The art and anger,” 54, for an example of his perceived abandonment of architecture. This narrative contributed to the diminishing of the Casa O’Gorman’s importance.
in 1932, thanks to his commission from Rivera and Kahlo, and introductions through them, it formed the basis of O’Gorman's work for the Department of Education.\textsuperscript{261} Under Narciso Bassols, the Secretary of Public Education, between 1932 and 1935, he designed dozens of schools, using reinforced concrete construction, indoor-outdoor staircases, and integration of both single-color and figural murals (figure 98).\textsuperscript{262} According to Cooke, O’Gorman’s efficient and cost-effective schools allowed enrollment to balloon 300 percent in these years, a figure of which he was very proud.\textsuperscript{263} Starting in 1932, O’Gorman helped organize the architecture school in the new National Polytechnic Institute, where he founded a study group for workers’ housing; he continued teaching there until 1948.\textsuperscript{264} Though his aesthetics changed over the decades, his commitment to projects related to public education, such as the library at UNAM, Anahuacalli Museum, and his murals at the National History Museum in Chapultepec Castle, did not.

Much of the house’s legacy was obscured not only because the house itself was inaccessible, but also because it was overshadowed by its more famous neighbors, the Rivera-Kahlo studios (figures 98 & 77).\textsuperscript{265} He did not work from Corbusian floor plans when he was designing or building the Casa O’Gorman.\textsuperscript{266} Unlike the Casa O’Gorman, the Rivera studio

\textsuperscript{261} As mentioned above, Rivera’s pronouncement on the beauty of the house was because of its potential for addressing the urgent need for housing for the new Mexican state. This, as O’Gorman details in his autobiography, got him the Rivera commission, which was most important because it led to bigger jobs and national and international recognition.

\textsuperscript{262} The number of schools O’Gorman designed and the number actually built vary from scholar to scholar: Eggener notes fifty schools, Hernández Gálvez twenty-four, Cooke thirty.

\textsuperscript{263} Cooke, \textit{Juan O’Gorman}, 44.


\textsuperscript{265} The house-studios have been open to the public since 1986; they underwent a major restoration in 1995-97 (see Museo website), and were featured in the movie \textit{Frida} in 2002. The Casa O’Gorman is now part of the museum complex that comprises the House-studios of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo.

\textsuperscript{266} As O’Rourke writes, the 1923/24 versions of \textit{Vers une architecture} did not have plans of Ozenfant’s studio (O’Rourke, “Composition and Conflict,” 185). It was not until the 1930 publication of the \textit{Oeuvre Complète I}
(not Kahlo’s) may have been closely based on actual floor plans and images of the Atelier Ozenfant (figure 73). These houses were conceived under different circumstances and for different purposes: Rivera may have asked for a studio like that of Ozenfant, or perhaps O’Gorman suggested it. Scholars such as Oles, and Carranza and Luiz, because of the house-studios’ much closer visual relationship to an extant Corbusian building, and to the Casa’s continued inaccessibility, lump all the early functionalist architecture together as Corbusian-influenced. In his widely-read textbook, Curtis makes a striking yet typical overview of O’Gorman’s early works: in one sentence, he ignores the Casa O’Gorman, noting instead that Rivera’s studio-house was “modelled on Le Corbusier’s Atelier Ozenfant of 1923...yet possessed a crude vitality of its own.” Perhaps because these buildings were open to the public for longer and associated with the two most famous Mexican artists outside Mexico, even after the Casa O’Gorman was reopened to the public in 2014, images of the Casa

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267 See the double twist staircase and ridged factory roof in the Studio Amedee Ozenfant in Corbusier, Vers une architecture, 81. In the early version which O’Gorman claimed to have read so many times, this was labeled “Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, A house,” and was not specifically linked with that of a painter (see Chapter 1 about Le Corbusier’s editing out Ozenfant from the book). The 1928 English translation by Frederick Etchells did include the Ozenfant studio, but it would be redundant of O’Gorman to buy and reread the English translation.

268 Oles noted that “several features cite [the Swiss architect’s] house-studios in Paris,” (Oles, Art and Architecture in Mexico, 261). Carranza and Luiz’s textbook, published in the same year of the Casa’s reopening, only briefly mentions the Casa O’Gorman. They discuss the studio-houses he built for Frida and Diego, pointing to the Rivera house as an Ozenfant copy, while Frida’s house is “more original” (Carranza and Luiz, Modern Architecture, 72).

O’Gorman are frequently conflated with the more-famous studios,\textsuperscript{270} and scholars who have not been to the site interchangeable.

Though the Casa O’Gorman’s restoration and reopening to the public in 2014 has greatly increased access and accurate scholarship, the house is still not presented to the world in its complete form. Between 2010 and 2013, the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes undertook the lengthy process of restoring the house, also with the goal of restoring its reputation as “one of O’Gorman’s] most representative works.”\textsuperscript{272} The book that accompanied the reopening of the house, published in 2014, has added tremendously to the available information on it, not least because it reproduces its three essays in both English and Spanish.\textsuperscript{273} Unfortunately, it is still difficult to truly understand the spaces as they were at any moment during the house’s existence because the studio windows are blocked by temporary exhibition walls, and the bedrooms, bathrooms, and kitchen are closed to the public (figures 100–101). While displaying contemporaneous artwork in temporary exhibitions within the site of the Rivera-Kahlo houses and the Casa O’Gorman gives visitors a sense of their context within Mexican history, it obscures the true function of the house. How does one understand the painter’s studio without

\textsuperscript{270} For a typical example, see Artstor, where all the images of the Casa are labelled “House-Studio Museum of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo.” Each caption also states the following, which muddles the Rivera-Kahlo houses and the Casa Cecil O’Gorman: “This property includes three buildings: two house-studios and a photographic laboratory. It is...one of the first modernist constructions on the American continent...It was one of the first buildings, for example, to expose pipes, ducts and other utilities. On the outside, a concrete spiral staircase connects the different stories of the painter's study. (from UNESCO website).”

\textsuperscript{271} See Luiselli, “Translation Spaces,” 205, in which she captions a photo of Diego Rivera’s house “Esther Born, Casa Cecil O’Gorman (Juan O’Gorman).” One of the photos by Martin Munkacsi for Harper’s Bazaar in July 1934 she cites later, in her argument about the translation of Frida and Diego’s spaces into print, also appears to be of the interior of the Casa O’Gorman (see page 212, picture on left).

\textsuperscript{272} María Cristina García Cepeda, the Director of INBA, in her brief foreword, emphasized that it was because of the additions and changes over the years that the house was not appreciated. It was their special mission, in restoring it, to “revalue” it and his oeuvre in general (García, Casa O’Gorman 1929, 8–9).

\textsuperscript{273} I have drawn all of my information about the restoration process from this book, as the archive was in the process of being moved while I was studying the house in Mexico City.
seeing its opening walls, or the lived experiences of middle-class Mexico City renters without exploring the mechanisms and design of its kitchen, or the layout of its bedrooms? A separate site for exhibition spaces, though implausible in a neighborhood populated with privately-owned lots, would be more ideal.

The imprecise history of the Casa O’Gorman should, in our iterative model, reflect back on our methods of historicizing. O’Gorman’s design process and his product show us a house that was a site for a young Mexican architect to play out the concepts of functionalism through a nationalist lens, and calls for a more nuanced understanding of influence through ideas, filtering indirectly through human actors who were actively engaging in their realities. The Casa’s performance highlights the inadequacies of history’s methodologies, that modernity is an inherent experience of individuals living in the world in that moment, that must be interrogated for its particulars, rather than evaluated for its conformity to an external rubric.

**Through the forest of pilotis: a way forward**

More conscientious and responsive attention to the particulars of the conception, construction, and legacies of buildings, or their “lives,” can force substantial adjustments to the history of Modernist architecture and its methods. Canonizing buildings self-referentially by evaluating them aesthetically against their predecessors and descendants, as this narrative does, produces a linear narrative of ideas rather than a notion of nonlinear circulation of concepts, and can obscure the flexible relationship of form to politics. The Villa Baizeau’s physical and imaginative distance from its erstwhile maker illuminates issues of power, displacement, and landscape. The Casa O’Gorman’s history is enmeshed in the political context of post-revolutionary Mexico, when nationalism was in fact a porous and flexible term, in which
many forms and referents found themselves productively entangled with one another. Most importantly, these elisions and oversimplifications confound the richer, and ever-globalizing, study of history through buildings.

The seemingly less powerful positions of Lucien Baizeau and Juan O’Gorman in relation to Le Corbusier actually furnishes more productive additions to historical research. Though each was deeply embedded in his own context, the dismissal they shared as non-geniuses forces us to consider the historical realities of their choices, and to picture their contexts more fully. Rather than picturing them working in a vacuum of pure ideas, we see O’Gorman and Baizeau applying theory to the contingencies of costs, materials, climate and site. As O’Gorman wrote in his autobiography in 1973, the Casa O’Gorman was never purist; it was not “simply an artistic whim, nor was it built according to abstract theory…[but was the] application of the principles of functional architecture” to a real site with real materials. In Baizeau’s letter to Le Corbusier on May 2, 1928, he wrote, “although this arrangement may present architectural advantages, it would have for us the serious disadvantage of reducing the sound insulation, on which we insist absolutely,” bypassing the luxury of a purely aesthetic and “architectural” solution to his and his wife’s real needs.

Focusing on the particulars of each individual house circumvents the easy narrative of a pure, teleological narrative of Modernist architecture.

Accepting the established narrative and the way these houses are evaluated within it, we risk losing them as valuable historical objects, but more significantly, we risk losing the ability to conduct architectural history by not examining our own processes. At its best, architectural history, like art history, music history, or film history, is a multifaceted approach that

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274 O’Gorman, *Autobiografía*, 86.

acknowledges the human need to express individual ideas and to interact with each other across the boundaries of space and time. It allows us methods of relating our built environments to history, and history to the products of human creation. These methods must necessarily be reconsidered as we shift from a hegemonic narrative to a more global one. As this thesis demonstrates, individual stories will be our way forward.

The gaps in my study illuminate the immediate concerns of architectural history: shifting from a study of architects toward a study of buildings, examining our uneven and biased archives, and proposing new methodologies for productively reading between the lines where archival material does not exist. My limitations, in both language barriers and access to archives, show how these narratives can reproduce themselves in the absence of robust archival evidence. As archival documents and scholarship are translated into English and vice versa, the story becomes more complete, but we must be cognizant that cultural barriers to understanding also color our writings. My reconstruction of Baizeau’s narrative was almost entirely from the gaps in Le Corbusier’s own documentation, translated from French or Italian, as necessary. As Tim Benton has noted, some of Baizeau’s letters were preserved in the Fondation Le Corbusier, but other documentation of him is hard to find. His work on the Villa Baizeau was drawn entirely from letters, images, and floor plans in the Fondation Corbusier; if Baizeau had his own archives, presumably in French, it has not been located. Compared to the surfeit of documentation on Le Corbusier, his traces number in the dozens. If the records of La Tunisoise Industrielle could be

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276 See Leirmur, “Foreword,” xii. He notes the necessity of translating Spanish scholarship into English to widen the dissemination of more accurate histories, on the way to widening our scope.

277 Benton, “La matita del cliente”; also noted in emails to the author in Fall 2016. Benton writes for publications in French, English, and Italian, and translated letters in the Fondation from the French, so would have been able to incorporate other primary sources from Baizeau, had he found them.
located in Tunis, they might provide another interesting angle to the Villa Baizeau’s development. Future scholarship should necessarily be conducted in Tunis, and particularly by an Arabic reader.

In our reading of archives and publications, we tend to take information at its word, though documentation is itself a way of controlling a narrative which is furthered by colonial nations.278 In this modern world, the victors of history are those who leave behind their traces as early and often as possible, and Le Corbusier wrote much of his own story. Colomina wrote that “the immensity of the traces [of Le Corbusier’s work] makes the research a never-ending process, with new traces, or rather new ways of looking at these traces or even seeing them as traces for the first time, always producing new interpretations that displace the old.”279 Cohen also writes about Le Corbusier’s control over his own story.280 Akcan notes that contemporary Turkish architects were aware of the similarities between Le Corbusier’s work and vernacular Turkish architects, further emphasizing that the narrative that has been disseminated leans too fully on the writings and archives of a select few European and United States architects.281 Both Colomina and Akcan demonstrate how we can operate in the gaps of these archives, no matter how robust and authoritative they are, performing the history of the unsaid. There are no

278 This was part of a discussion at a panel on Comprador Networks in Southeast Asia at the conference of the European Architectural History Network in June 2018. Subrahmanyam’s work also implies this, arguing that scholarship must fill in the gaps and recognize that lack of information about the subaltern side of the equation does not mean it did not exist or wasn’t relevant, but only that standard archives did not recognize certain information as important.

279 Colomina, Privacy and Publicity, 11.


281 Akcan, Architecture in Translation, 132–133. She writes about Sedad Eldem’s recognition of Le Corbusier’s use of these forms in his diaries in 1929.
“victors” in this type of history, except perhaps the buildings themselves, which assume center stage.

The afterlives of these buildings are, far and away, the least studied parts of their histories, but might be the most relevant to comparing the theories of Modernism with the realities of modernity. It is well-known that many of the buildings that have garnered the most attention in Modern architecture, and set the highest standards of their movement, did not deliver on their promises of functional perfection.282 This was true even in the Villa Savoye, which Le Corbusier deemed perfect. A letter by Eugénie Savoye to Le Corbusier on October 11, 1937 read: “After several complaints, you have finally admitted that the house you built in 1929 is not habitable.”283 This history of technical problems with Modernist buildings was part of exploring new construction methods but, as Turner or Till might argue, also because success was measured in the radicalness of the idea over the appropriateness or performance of the buildings.284 Even harder to research, within our current methodologies, is the experience of the inhabitants, the history of the building’s occupation—the very substance that architectural historians frequently use to argue that architecture is “more than” the fine arts, that it affects real people every day.285 But where is our discussion of how these buildings affected people every day? Where is the evidence? How do we gather it and treat it? The most recent image of the Villa Baizeau I could

282 See also Frank Lloyd Wright’s leaking Fallingwater. When Benton writes about the technical issues with the Villa Baizeau, he starts, “Naturally there were some technical problems” (Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 24). Emphasis my own.


284 As mentioned before, Turner argues that the idea of architecture was more important to Le Corbusier than the physical built architectural product (Turner, “The Beginning,” 219).

285 See Till, “Three Myths.”
find was undated, but indicates that there is much to learn: later residents added air conditioning units, electrical wiring, and an antenna (figure 47). The shifting of the field toward the study of visual and material culture, as well as spaces, is a particularly interesting place to start.

Most architecture is entangled with any number of unnamed, but not irrelevant, people and ideas. In An Economy of Colour, their book about transatlantic art and material culture of the 18th century, Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz question the practice of art history itself when they assert that “in historical studies visual images still operate largely as unmediated ‘evidence’ of the material conditions under which colonization proceeded.” Quilley and Kriz rather advocate for reading between the lines to “visualize” spaces and experiences that were knowingly or unknowingly made invisible—from the horrific events of the slave trade and the middle passage to the routine spaces of everyday life in the colonies. The story of the built environment is irrevocably intertwined with the story of global capital; those who build it, and those who inhabit it, are, for the most part, the poor, the silenced, the nameless, and the historically insignificant. Shifting away from a history of architects and toward a history of buildings, we can widen our scope to include the people who lived in them, the nature and source of their materials, the urban or natural landscapes that encompassed them, and the shifting ideological fabrics that surrounded them.

Further research has plenty of room to expand, beyond the narrower concerns of establishing individual genius. We can shift from personal journeys of genius, in a vacuum

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286 Geoff Quilley and Kay Dian Kriz, An Economy of Colour: Visual culture and the Atlantic World, 1660-1830 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 2. Their book spans the “long eighteenth century” and part of its stated purpose is to reinject into the narrative the voices, weight, and consequence of enslaved people back into the story of that century of globalization and transatlantic colonial expansion. Because they seek to reorient their stories around those were forcibly removed from the official records of history, their methodology is an extremely helpful one to me.
where funding and access to information is not a problem. Both the Villa Baizeau and the Casa O’Gorman open the door to discussion about the political and cultural dimensions of the involvement of concrete companies in the creative endeavors of modernists in both Mexico City and Tunis.  

Both Baizeau and O’Gorman insisted on certain furniture and design elements that correspond to their own specific contexts perhaps more than to aesthetic or architectural concerns. One could understand O’Gorman’s consideration and ultimate decision against built-in furniture not as an aesthetic choice but against the long history of Mexican furniture design as a site of anti-colonial power. Sliding glass doors, a technical advance usually associated with the interest in glass-enclosed buildings, like Mies’ early imagined skyscrapers, could be explored as a transformation of late-19th century Tunisian eating practices, amidst the reforms of late-Protectorate elite life.

As historians of earlier eras are beginning to show, interiors can be spaces of anti-hegemonic identity formation and a fluid space of modernity, outside the bounds of

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287 Sánchez Fógarty’s Tolteca and Cemento magazines were owned by cement companies, and not only funded architects and artists with prizes, but actively forwarded the causes of the avant-garde in Mexico (see James Oles, “Industrial Landscapes in Modern Mexican Art” on this competition and the imagery of factories in 1930s Mexican avant-garde). Baizeau’s La Tunisoise Industrielle, besides actually constructing the Villa Baizeau, presumably constructed other concrete houses in Tunisia. Le Corbusier wrote an article in 1935 about glass for a publication about Czech glass production. The Weissenhof was a project initiated by the Deutsche werk bund, meant to stimulate interest in concrete construction during the Weimar period (which was so powerful that it was refuted by the Kochenhof exhibition under the influence of the Nazis to shift production back to wood).


European modernists’ search for a new, modern lifestyle. The home was where modernity occurred, rather than where it was described, illustrated, or framed. In her PhD dissertation on the spaces of modernity in Mexico City, Valeria Luiselli writes that, contrary to what architectural history would have us believe, “houses are not metaphors, symbols or figurations, but actual inhabited spaces.” Documentation of interiors are scarce, given our current methodologies, but this is an area that deserves more scholarly attention, as noted by architectural historians working on domestic spaces in the early modern and modern eras in Europe and Asia, such as Samuel Y. Liang, Denise Baxter, and Meredith Martin. As Samuel Y. Liang has brilliantly shown in his work on 19th and early-20th century Shanghai, domestic space creates distinct identities for its inhabitants. This in turn is entangled in the production of modernity, especially in cities and cosmopolitan zones where traditions die fast and new ones must be constantly negotiated. These interiors, un-pictured but not un-experienced, should be

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200 Most work on this pertains to colonial spaces. Henri Lefebvre’s early book on this, The Production of Space (1974), saw the colonial traza as a violent segregation and enactment of imperial order over heterogeneous people. See also Art Historian Michael J. Schreffler’s work on 18th-century Mexican biombos, or folding screens (Schreffler, “Shaping the Universal Monarchy,” 119). He argues that, contrary to the Imperial spatial order enacted by maps and cartography disseminated by Spain at the time, biombos represented a new “way of conceptualizing geopolitical space and their own place within that structure.” See, for example, Frank Lloyd Wright’s fascination with Japanese domestic architectural space, or Eileen Gray’s long engagement with Japanese lacquer, to name just one non-European country whose domestic spaces offered routes of resistance against “old-world” order.

201 Luiselli, “Translation Spaces,” 190–192: “Houses, in particular, and with them daily life, transformed radically and rapidly toward the second half of the 1920s.” Luiselli in particular cites Victoria Rosner’s book Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life, in which Rosner argues that the domestic sphere is, contrary to conventional scholarship, a relevant space in which Modernism is played out, but that “domesticity remains, for many critics, the antithesis of modernism.” Part of her book’s focus is on domestic spaces, as a way of re-including women in the equation of Modernism. Her subject spaces are mainly in Western Europe, and her framework is largely literary, rather than architectural.

202 Luiselli writes that descriptions in letters are the most common literary sources, but are incomplete or inaccurate: “Archival traces of interiors—be they painted, snapped or written—are rare, or clad in nostalgic remembrance, or blurred by the enthusiasm of novelty” (Luiselli, “Translation Spaces,” 211).

203 See Samuel Y. Liang, Mapping Modernity in Shanghai: Space, Gender, and Visual Culture in the Sojourners’ City, 1853-98 (New York: Routledge, 2010). See also Renee Chow on the lilong type and its change over time.
seen as spaces for articulating distinct national cultures, class experiences, individual notions as well as technical and aesthetic advances.

I cannot tell the whole story of each of these houses myself, and would argue, in fact, that a complete story will never be possible and should not be the goal of any historian. But deeply examining our evidence and renegotiating our focus within our evidence can be a blueprint for more productively conducting the research of history through buildings. This proposal for a new methodology will and must shift, too, as we discover new ways to mine and treat evidence, as we shift our aims, and reformulate our understandings of the contexts and afterlives of these buildings. New archives and old archives will bring to light new histories and new ways of framing histories. The Casa O’Gorman and the Villa Baizeau are a starting point, whose stories intertwined with the imaginations of multiple people at various times and places, whose idealized forms fought with their real forms, whose real forms affected later imaginations, which tells us much more about turning a shorthand into a paragraph than most stories do.

Through these two houses we can begin to conduct a historical investigation of distinct individuals and distinct locations in 1929. These houses were substantive responses to this broader global question of Modernism, precisely because Lucien Baizeau and Juan O’Gorman each approached the question through his distinct context, perspective, materials, means, and needs. Each house is an inherently valuable contribution to this historical moment, providing us with the evidence to study its creators, its cultural context, and its inhabitants, so long as we spend some time with its stories.
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Theory


**O’Gorman**

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Le Corbusier


**Villa Baizeau**


Contexts: Weissenhof, Architecture 1928, Latin American Architecture


Illustrations

Introduction

Figure 1. Villa Baizeau, 1928–30, Tunis, Tunisia. From Risselada, Raumplan, 145.
Figure 2. Casa O’Gorman, 1929–31, Mexico City. By Saúl Ruiz for *El País* online.
Figure 3. Weissenhof exhibition, 1927, Stuttgart, Germany. © Stadtarchiv Stuttgart, from open-iba.de/.
Figure 4. Villa Savoye, 1929, Poissy-sur-Seine, France. By Valueyou, from Wikimedia Commons.
Chapter 1

Figure 5. Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Stuttgart apartments, Weissenhof, Stuttgart, Germany, 1927. From Wikiarquitectura.com.

Figure 6. JJP Oud, terraced houses, Weissenhof, Stuttgart, Germany, 1927. By Pjt56, from Wikimedia Commons.
Figure 7. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, “View of Stuttgart house and apartment building from street,” 1927, Stuttgart, Germany. From Charnel House website.
Figures 8–10. Views of the Villa Baizeau’s surroundings. All images from Wikimedia Commons.
Figures 11–14. Location and orientation of the Villa Baizeau. All screenshots from Google Earth.
Figure 15. The Villa Baizeau from the back soon after its construction, 1930. By Danaursula, from Pinterest.

Figure 16. The Villa Baizeau from the Gulf; note that this image has unfortunately been flipped. From archweb.it.
Figure 17. Dom-ino house, 1914. From dezeen.com.

Figure 18. Le Corbusier’s “Citrohan” type, 1920s. From Wikiarquitectura.com.
Figure 19. Auguste Perret, Garage Ponthieu, 1905. By Camille H, from Pinterest.
Figure 20. First and ground floors, plans of February 1929 (redrawn from FLC 2029). Note that figures 20–21 are not the final plans, but give a relatively close sense of the final floor plan. From *Oeuvre Complète I*, 177–178.

Figure 21. Second floor, plans of February 1929 (redrawn from FLC 2024). From *Oeuvre Complète I*, 177–178.
Figure 22. Baizeau’s second sketch of 4 May 1928, mislabeled as FLC 8509. From *Le Corbusier Archive*, 133.

Figure 23. Baizeau’s first sketch of 23 January 1928 (as redrawn in Benton). From Benton, “La matita del cliente,” 22.

Figure 27. Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Maison Cook, 1926, Paris. From Fondation Corbusier website.
Figure 28. FLC 1037, interior drawings of the Villa Baizeau, 1928. Note that the interiors are extremely similar to those of the Wanner apartments (see *Oeuvre Complète I*). From *Le Corbusier Archive*, 132.
Figures 31–33. FLC 1041, 1045 & 1043, amended first project, 9 March 1928. From Le Corbusier Archive, 119–120.
Figure 34. Le Corbusier, detail from FLC 24983, 6 March 1928. From *Le Corbusier Archive*, 169.
Figure 45. The Villa Baizeau under construction in 1929, showing its West (back) facade. From ideomagazine.com
Figure 46. Le Corbusier, *Four studies of the potentials of the ‘Five Points,’* 1929. From Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900,* 283.
Figure 47. The only recent photo of the Villa Baizeau, undated but published in February 2019. Photo by Mehdi Ben Cheikh, from ideomagazine.com.
Figure 48. Juan O’Gorman, Casa O’Gorman, 1929–1931, Mexico City, Mexico. Photo by the author.
Figure 49. José Villagrán García, Instituto de Higiene y Granja Sanitaria, 1925, Mexico City. From academiadeartes.com

Figure 50. Detail of “terrazzo” floors. Photo by the author.
Figure 51. View of the South facade, showing the cactus fence, plantings, and piled-stone and earth walls that recall campesino architecture. Photo by the author.
Figure 52. San Angel Inn, which used to be the Goicochea hacienda. From Wikimedia Commons.

Figures 53–54. The diagonal orientation of the fence to the front entrance. Photos by the author.
Figure 57. Exterior staircase, looking South toward Diego Rivera’s studio-house. Photo by the author.

Figure 58. The interior of the studio on the second floor (this space now holds exhibitions). From cultura.gob.mx
Figure 59. East and North facades of house. Photo by the author.

Figures 60–61. The garage and servant’s quarters at back of the house, with detail. Photos by the author.
Figures 62–64. Details of the interior color-coding. Photos by the author.
Figure 68. Built-in shelving in the dining-living space. Photo by the author.

Figure 69. Staircase of the Pyramid of the Sun at Teotihuacan. Photo by the author.
Figure 70. Interior of Palace of Quetzalpapalotl, Teotihuacan (restored). Photo by the author.

Figures 71–72. Details of the roofline along the Southern facade, showing antennas, electrical wiring, and ladder up to roof. Photos by the author.
Figure 73. Le Corbusier, Ozenfant studio, 1924, Paris. From Wikiarquitectura.

Figure 74. Walter Gropius, Bauhaus, 1926, Dessau, Germany. From Thecreative.net
Figure 75. Mies van der Rohe, Villa Tugendhat, 1928, Brno, Czechia. © Alexandra Timpau, from Archdaily.com.

Figure 76. Exact half-turn of exterior staircase. This model was created to help visualize the interior spaces and proportions, as relayed to me in person by Maria de Lourdes Sánchez Corona, in the Educational Services and Pedagogical Department at the Museo Casa Estudio Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo, in January 2018, and in emails of March 2018. Photo by the author.
Figure 77. The double-helicoid staircase at Rivera’s house-studio, 1931–32. Photo by the author.
Figure 78. Spiral staircase at the Juan O’Gorman house on Calle de Jardín, circa 1930. From Casa O’Gorman 1929, 57.
Figure 79. Interior of Anahuacalli, circa 1940s. By Jacqueline Roberts from Rivera-Kahlo archive.
Figure 80. The stairs at O’Gorman’s Pedregal house on the Avenida San Jeronimo (1948–56); the house was destroyed by the next owner, who had promised O’Gorman not to change it. From unavidamoderna.tumblr.com.
Figure 81. Juan O’Gorman, Drawing 1, 1929. From the O’Gorman Archive, Mexico City.

Figure 82. Juan O’Gorman, Drawing 2, 1929. From the O’Gorman Archive, Mexico City.
Figure 83. Juan O’Gorman, December plans, 1929. From the O’Gorman Archive, Mexico City.
Figure 84. Juan O’Gorman, December plans, 1929. From the O’Gorman Archive, Mexico City.
Figure 85. Juan O’Gorman, Self portrait (Autorretrato múltiple), 1950, oil on canvas, Museo de Arte Moderno, INBA, Mexico City. From artesyartistas.wordpress.com.
Figure 86. The sinopia of the mural left on the back wall and a recreation of the mural in situ. Photo by the author.
Figure 87. Left side of mural. Photo by the author.
Figure 88. Right side of mural. Photo by the author.
Figure 89. Detail of skeleton. Photo by the author.
Figure 90. Detail of nude woman. Photo by the author.
Figure 91. Detail of bottom center with signed note. Photo by the author.

Figure 92. O’Gorman, exterior of Pedregal house, 1948–56. From hiddenarchitecture.net.
Figure 93. O’Gorman, Saavedra, and Martinez, UNAM library, 1949–52. Photo by the author.
Chapter 3

Figure 94. Le Corbusier, Villa Shodhan, 1951–56, Ahmedabad, India. From Wikiarquitectura.com.

Figure 95. Le Corbusier, Chandigarh High Court, 1950–1955, Chandigarh, India. From BBC.com.
Figure 96. Le Corbusier, Casa Curutchet, 1955, La Plata, Argentina. © Foto Vía ARQ + HIS. From Plataformaarquitectura.com
Figure 97. Rivera and O’Gorman, Anahuacalli, 1942–43, Coyoacan, Mexico City. From Mxcity.mx.

Figure 98. One of Juan O’Gorman’s schools, 1930s. From Born, *The New Architecture in Mexico*, 144.
Figure 99. O’Gorman, Rivera-Kahlo houses, 1931–32. From Wikiarquitectura.com.

Figures 100–101. The interiors of the studio and living-dining space now house exhibitions, so their original spatial proportions and experiences are hard to imagine. From arq.com.mx.