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The Photo book as Symphony – Ronchamp as Sculpture: Re-composing Architectural Photography

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Abstract: This paper suggests that Le Corbusier's editorial composition of the book *Ronchamp: Les Carnets de la recherche patiente 2* can be regarded as an artistic manner of re-composing architectural photography that partly contrasts Le Corbusier's otherwise conservative concept of the synthesis of the arts, which so far had excluded the medium of photography. The paper proposes that the book, which was published at a time when *The Chapel of Ronchamp* (1950-1955) had become controversial among architectural critics, aspired to communicate the architectural project as a work of art by creating links to other art forms, particularly by: 1) emphasizing Hervé's artistic, partly non-representational, approach to architectural photography; 2) employing principles of musical composition; and 3) approximating photographic practise of documenting sculpture.

Keywords: architectural photography, photo book, Lucien Hervé, Le Corbusier, Ronchamp.

1. Introduction

Two years after the inauguration of *The Chapel of Ronchamp* (1950-55) the German art book publisher Verlag Gerd Hatje published the book *Ronchamp: Les Carnets de la recherche patiente 2* (1957).¹ It was designed and edited solely by Le Corbusier. In terms of genre, it should be regarded as a hybrid between a photo book and a building monograph. It succeeded a broad range of media presentations of the chapel in the professional and popular press, and the architect himself had authorized presentations of the project in various genres of publications. However, the use of photography and the visual presentation mode of the book clearly deviate from previous publications. The book is primarily devoted to photographs by Lucien Hervé of which several go beyond a representation of the architectural subject. The photographer's semi-abstract compositional approach is accentuated through the layout, which creates a visual dialogue between the photographs as images. Based on studies of the mock-up of the book, this paper suggests that the design of the book can be regarded as an artistic manner of re-composing architectural photography, and that it partly contrasts Le Corbusier's otherwise conservative concept of the synthesis of the arts, which excluded the medium of photography. Furthermore, the paper proposes that the main photographic sequence of the book aspired to communicate the building as a work of art by creating links to other art forms, particularly by: 1) emphasizing Hervé's artistic, partly non-representational, approach to architectural photography; 2) employing principles of musical composition; and 3) approximating photographic practises of documenting sculpture.

The Chapel of Ronchamp epitomizes qualities of Le Corbusier's architectural works in the post-war period, such as sculptural shapes in concrete and sensitivity to materials. In the post-war period, Le Corbusier became increasingly concerned to promote the interrelatedness of his works within the field of painting, sculpture and

¹ Le Corbusier, *Ronchamp: Les Carnets de la recherche patiente 2*, Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1957.

architecture through his publications.² It is conspicuous that Le Corbusier in the same period established collaboration with a photographer who had not previously specialised in architectural photography.³ Interestingly, Hervé was in this period engaged in promoting photography as an art form.⁴

Many of the Hervé photographs Le Corbusier chose to publish in *Ronchamp* are in a non-representational mode. The distorted views, bold cropping and/or vigorous tonal contrasts of the photographs are typical of Hervé's *oeuvre*, and may recall the New Photography movement of the late 1920s and 1930s (Ill.1).⁵ Notably, the book is the anti-thesis of the didactic, and more "rational", presentation form of *Oeuvre Complete*, in which *The Chapel of Ronchamp* was presented in both volume 5 and 6. The completed building was presented in *Oeuvre Complete, 1952-1957, vol. 6*, which was published the same year as the photo book. Most of the photographs in this presentation were shot by Bernhard Moosbrugger, and are total shots from the exterior and interior of the building.⁶ Their compositions are in line with classical architectural photography, i.e. the use of parallel verticals, even lighting, and wide angle, in order to contain as much of the building as possible within the picture frame.⁷ Whereas the monographic series primarily targeted practising architects, the photo book was aimed at a largely lay audience, readers with a special interest in art and architecture. A comparison of these two publications of *The Chapel of Ronchamp* indicates a distinction between parallel communication strategies targeting different audiences, which also entailed selecting photographs by different photographers.

Moreover, the photo book has the quality of an artistic object in its own right. The mock-up for the book indicates that the double-page spreads were designed as entities, in which the white space surrounding the photographs had an important role in the composition.⁸ The graphic design played an essential role in the architect-editor's endeavour to create pairs of photographs. Before examining this issue more thoroughly, the organization of the main photographic sequence of the book should be addressed.

² Pearson, Christopher, "Integrations of art and architecture in the work of Le Corbusier. Theory and practice from ornamentation to the "Synthesis of the Major Arts", Dissertation, Stanford University, 1995, p.17.

³ For accounts on how Hervé and Le Corbusier's collaboration started, see: Bergdoll, Barry, "Les deux modernismes architecturaux de Lucien Hervé", in *Lucien Hervé : L'œil de l'architecte*, Brussels : CIVA, 2005, 11; Béatrice Andrieux, "The encounter between two visionaries of modernity", in Sbriglio, Jacques (ed.), *Le Corbusier & Lucien Hervé: The architect & the photographer. A dialogue*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2011, pp. 20-21.

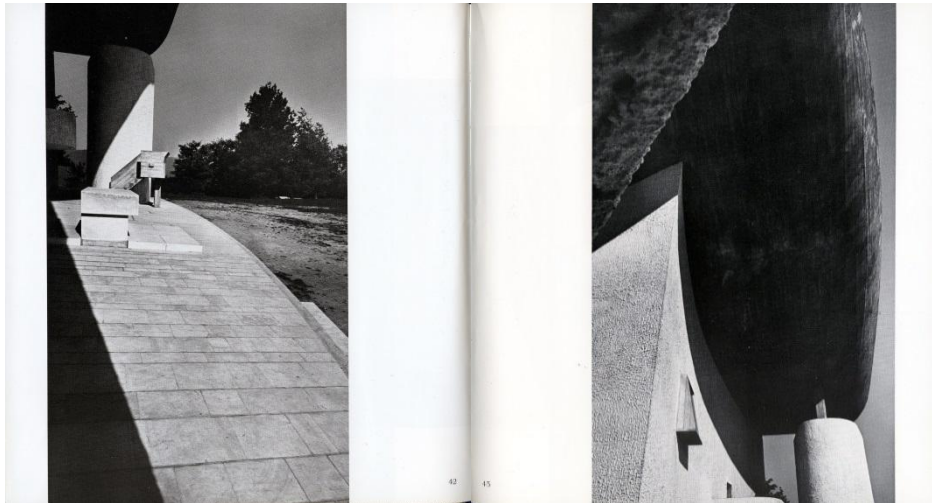
⁴ Hervé, Lucien, "A propos de la photographie d'architecture", *Aujourd'hui : Art et Architecture*, September 1956, n° 9, pp. 29-31.

⁵ Elwall, Robert, "New eyes for old: Architectural photography", *Twentieth Century Architecture*, British modern: Architecture and design in the 1930s, 2007, n° 8, pp. 54-55.

⁶ Le Corbusier, "La chapelle de Ronchamp", *Oeuvre Complete, 1952-1957, volume 6*, Zürich: Girsberger, 1957, pp. 16-43.

⁷ Herschman, Joel and Robinson, Cervin, *Architecture Transformed: A History of Buildings from 1839 to the Present*, New York: The architectural league of New York, 1988, p.10.

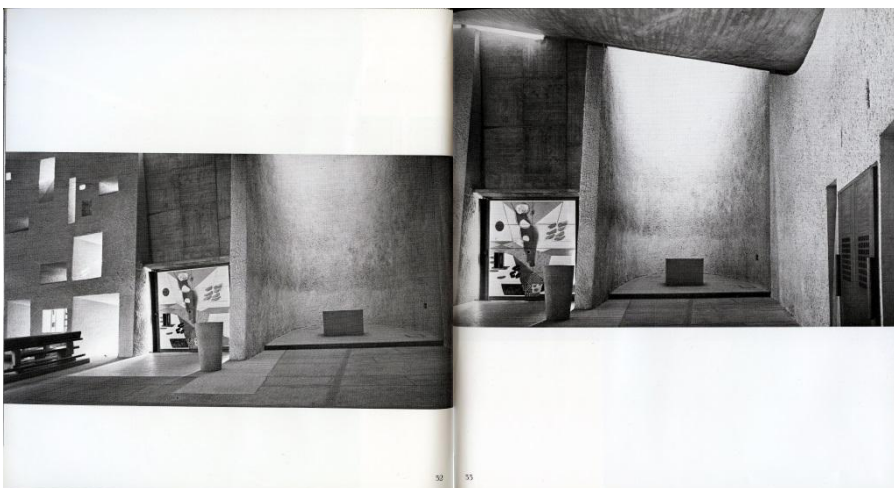
⁸ FLC B 1-2-243.



1. Double page-spread from the second chapter of the book *Ronchamp*. Photo: Lucien Hervé. (Le Corbusier, *Ronchamp*, Stuttgart, Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1957, pp 42-43) (© FLC- ADAGP)

2. Slow-motion and cross-cutting: Interweaving promenades

The concept of the architectural promenade was a key term in many presentations of *The Chapel of Ronchamp* in the professional press, and was used as a narrative device in written accounts or in the organisation of illustrations.⁹ In the *Ronchamp* book, however, the photographic sequences of the first and third chapter deny any chronological progression completely. Contextual jumps create a clearly incoherent representation of time, and the reader's ability to presume what comes next is obstructed. The dramaturgy of the photographic sequence of the second chapter, which is the main part of the book, is more complex. It includes sections with motifs that roughly imitate a visitor's route through and around the building. The chronological progression is, however, interrupted by double-page spreads in which views of elements that are far apart from each other in the building are juxtaposed.



2. Double page-spread from the second chapter of the book *Ronchamp*. Photo: Lucien Hervé. (Le Corbusier, *Ronchamp*, Stuttgart, Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1957, pp 32-33) (© FLC- ADAGP)

⁹ See for instance Guéguen, Pierre, "Le testament poétique de Le Corbusier", *Aujourd'hui: Art et Architecture*, 1955, n° 4, pp.54-60.

If these pages deliberately fracture the linear narrative, other double spreads are characterised by their emphasis on continuity. The book has several examples of double-page spreads in which photographs of similar motifs are visually linked without any vertical division in the form of a white space between them (III.2). They invite associations of a film camera panning horizontally from right to left, or zooming in from a wide view to a close-up. Furthermore, they may recall Le Corbusier's description of the promenade, particularly how he highlighted the cinematic quality of the architectural experience:

*"We enter, we walk around, we look at things while walking around and the forms take on meaning, they expand, they combine with each other. Outside: We approach. We see, our interest is aroused, we stop, we appreciate, we turn around, we discover. We receive a series of sensory shocks, one after the other, varying in emotion: the jeu comes into play. We walk, we turn, we never stop moving or turning towards things. Note the tools we use to perceive architecture...the architectural sensation we experience stems from hundreds of different perceptions. It is the 'promenade', the movement we make that act as the motor for architectural events".*¹⁰

As Claire Zimmerman has pointed out, what film does in a continuous layered montage, photography approximates through seriality and repetition.¹¹ The double page-spreads in question may give the impression that selected "scenes" have been extended in slow motion, through the juxtaposition of similar motifs and the visual linking of the photographs. The quasi-cinematic effect would maybe more accurately be compared to a "long take", an uninterrupted shot without cuts. It is as if the depicted architectural forms "expand" and "combine with each other", as Le Corbusier formulated it in his description of the promenade (III.3). What he essentially highlighted was a perception in movement, something the double-page spreads with visually linked photographs may also evoke.



3. Double page-spread from the second chapter of the book *Ronchamp*. Photo: Lucien Hervé. (Le Corbusier, *Ronchamp*, Stuttgart, Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1957, pp 36-37) (© FLC- ADAGP)

The most extensive part of the second chapter comprises the sequence of exterior photographs. It includes various views of each of the façades that are presented successively, starting and ending at the East side of the building. A characteristic of this section is its alternation between details of fragments of the building from various perspectives, and more inclusive views that show larger part of the facades. It is as if the sequence combines views from various promenades. If the section of exterior photographs, seen as an entity, can be

¹⁰ Le Corbusier, Speech at conference at the Reale Accademia d'Italia, Rome, 1936. FLC Archives, published in *Architecture Vivante*, Paris 1936, p. 7.

¹¹ Zimmerman, Claire, "The monster magnified: Architectural photography as visual hyperbole", *Perspecta*, Monster, 2008, vol.40, p. 138.

interpreted as one coherent walk around the building, it involves a continuous shifting of positions; from observing the building from a distance, to moving towards it to scrutinize a particular element more closely, only to back away again to attain the larger perspective of the building in its surroundings.

However, the book may also appear as an attempt to overwhelm the readers with an excessive flow of images. By the time Le Corbusier made the photo book, *The Chapel of Ronchamp* was controversial among architectural critics. Early reviews of the building repeatedly stressed with obvious disdain that Le Corbusier had left behind the rationalism of his earlier functionalist work.¹² Considered as an architectural publication, the book at once reads as an advocacy of the building and as a persistent aestheticization of the architectural subject through an abundance of photographs and graphic design. If the photographic sequence partly was an attempt to overstimulate readers' visual apparatus, helping to silence any sceptical commentators, one can assume the book was made with a rather friendly audience in mind. In one sense the book presents itself to the readers as an assertion that criticism of the building would no longer affect the architect. In the preface of the book, Le Corbusier stated:

*"Never in my life have I 'explained' a painting. The painting will go out and will be loved or hated, understood or not. Do you think that that bothers me! (How could that bother me)."*¹³

3. Exposing the medium: The expanse of blank space

The expanse of blank spaces surrounding or separating the photographs characterizes the double spreads of the book. Le Corbusier's dedication to balance the proportions of white areas around or between the photographs is underlined by the mock-up. Particularly, his annotations "blanc vide" (white space) between photographs testifies to the importance of the unprinted areas in his conception of the composition of the different pages. In the second chapter of the book, some of the pages approximate the rule of thirds, in which the unprinted areas are essential elements in the composition. The white parts of the pages help emphasize the alternations between vertical and horizontal orientation of the images. Moreover, the demarcations of the unprinted areas introduce vertical and horizontal lines that influence the perception of the images. Either they highlight the curving lines of the building or they create a contrast to the diagonal lines that often dominate the compositions of Hervé.

White spaces also accentuate the cropping of the photographs, of which some deviate radically from standard photographic formats of the period. By highlighting the unconventional format and edited quality, the blank parts of the pages intensify what Rosalind Krauss has succinctly pointed out about the perceptual effect of cropping: "Photographic cropping is always experienced as a rupture in the continuous fabric of reality."¹⁴ Attention is drawn to the quality of photographs as images. The layout ardently accentuates the photographer's semi-abstract compositional approach, praising the photographs as creative expressions relatively independent of the architectural subject they present. The architect-editor's re-composition of the photographs demonstrates the fact that there is no pure perception, by stressing the necessity of recognizing the frame as a structure by which perception is organized.¹⁵

¹² Stirling, James, "Ronchamp: Le Corbusier's chapel and the crisis of rationalism", *Architectural Review*, 1956, n° 3, p.161; Pevsner, Nicolas, *An outline of European architecture*, 6th ed., Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1960, p. 508.

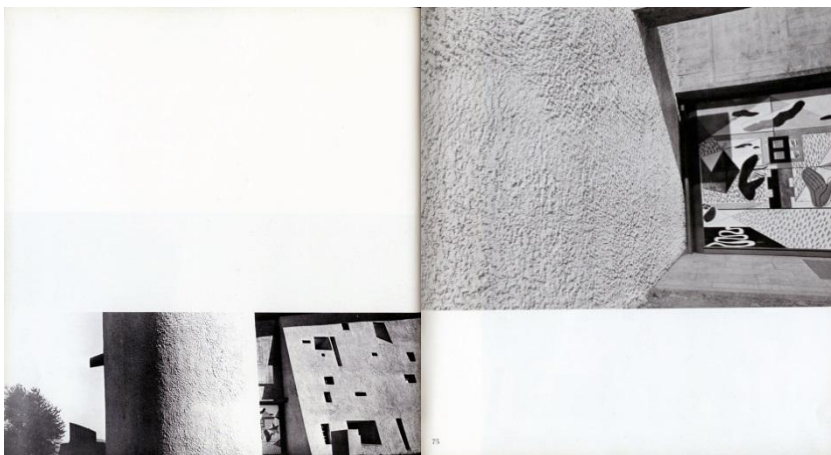
¹³ Le Corbusier, *Ronchamp*, p. 7.

¹⁴ Krauss, Rosalind, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996, p. 115.

¹⁵ Emerling, Jae, *Photography: History and Theory*, London: Routledge, 2012, p. 48.

4. The editor as curator

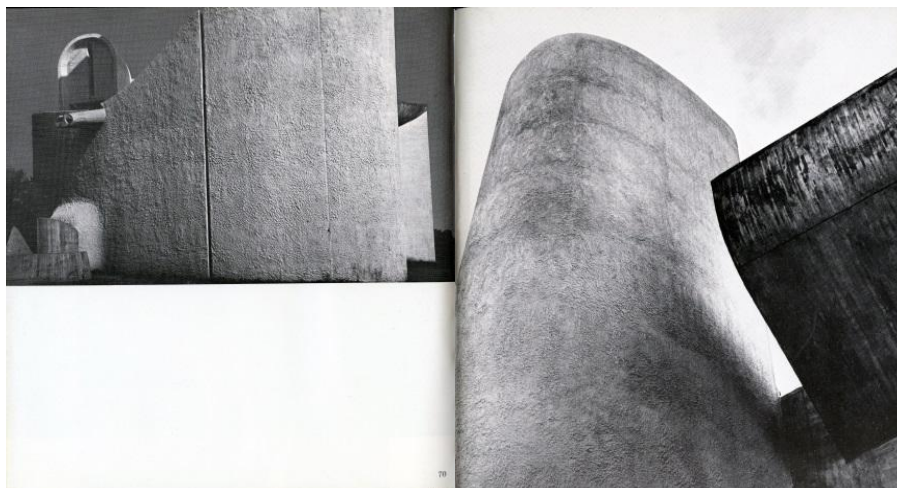
A desire to let the lines in one photograph be continued by the shapes depicted in the photograph on the facing page apparently guided the selection of photographs, and the decision to juxtapose or place them in a diagonal relation to each other. The architect-editor acted as a curator, creating a dialogue between the images. The manner in which pairs of images are separated, linked and/or rather framed by the blank spaces, underlines the impression of the composition of the page spreads as a curation of images. Yet another function of the white areas is to show readers that it is not the individual photographs to which they should respond, but the visual play between two images. They call attention to the logic of the space of the double spread (Ill. 4).



4. Double page-spread from the second chapter of the book *Ronchamp*. Photo: Lucien Hervé. (Le Corbusier, *Ronchamp*, Stuttgart, Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1957, pp 74-75) (© FLC- ADAGP)

Some of Hervé's close-ups of concrete surfaces may evoke a tactile imagination and an embodied spectatorship. They enhance intimacy and nearness by referring to bodily encounters, whereas the architect-editor's layout creates a distance. The graphic design is clearly motivated by a wish to create an aesthetically pleasing reader experience. This contrast between the respective impacts of individual motifs and layout plan recalls the alternation in the sequence between sections that roughly imitate a visitor's route around the building and double spreads introducing contextual jumps between contrasting motifs. Notably, there is a tension in the book – it may even appear as a conflict – between evocations of experiential aspects and the overt exhibition of the mediation of the experience of architecture. The presence of the photographer and the editor is always felt by the readers (Ill.5). Le Corbusier never intended to make the media transparent, but rather to display their intervening agency. The editorial composition of the book exposes an artistic manner of re-composing architectural photography. Christopher Pearson has argued that Le Corbusier's conception of the synthesis of the arts was oddly conservative in its choice of media, ignoring film and photography in favour of more traditional means of expression.¹⁶ The hybrid nature of *Ronchamp*, part architectural representation and part photographic art book, to some extent challenges this conception of the synthesis.

¹⁶ Pearson, "Integrations of art and architecture in the work of Le Corbusier", p. 389.



5. Double page-spread from the second chapter of the book *Ronchamp*. Photo: Lucien Hervé. (Le Corbusier, *Ronchamp*, Stuttgart, Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1957, pp 70-71) (© FLC- ADAGP)

5. “Bravo pour le collage !!”: Hervé’s contact sheets as editorial impulse

Hervé’s contact sheets bear witness to a careful process of selection and composition, as has been noted by Quentin Bajac.¹⁷ They may be seen in relation to the interest in the series as form, an avant-garde predilection since the 1930s. Furthermore, both Hervé and Le Corbusier were inspired by the medium of film.¹⁸ More particularly, they shared an interest in the work of the Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein.¹⁹ The manner in which Hervé catalogued his photographs is characterised by a cinematic sensitivity. Working on his contact sheets, he would often juxtapose motifs that indicate only a slight movement by the photographer/camera (III.6).²⁰ It is noteworthy that the sequentality of Hervé’s contact sheets seems to have influenced Le Corbusier’s editing of *Ronchamp*, particularly the composition of the double spreads that may be compared to “slow motion” scenes or “long takes”.

¹⁷ Bajac, Quentin, “Expressing architecture”, in Sbriglio (ed.), *Le Corbusier & Lucien Hervé: The architect & the photographer*, p. 13.

¹⁸ Obrist, Hans Ulrich, *Lucien Hervé – Une Conversation*, Paris : Manuella Éditions, pp.14-15.

¹⁹ Le Corbusier met Eisenstein in Moscow in the 1920s. Cohen, Jean-Louis, *Le Corbusier and the mystique of the USSR : Theories and projects for Moscow 1928–1936*, translated by Kenneth Hylton, Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1992.

²⁰ The cinematic effect is undoubtedly the result of the composition of the contact sheets. Photographs that are juxtaposed on the contact sheets were in most cases evidently not successive shots during a photo shoot, as is confirmed by Hervé’s catalogue codes that refer to the numbers of the original contact prints from which the photographs are cut.



6. Contact sheet with photographs by Lucien Hervé, compiled by the photographer. FLC L-3-3-70 © FLC - ADAGP

Hervé would also sometimes rotate images before pasting them on the planches. A contact sheet with photographs of *The Chapel of Ronchamp* contains the following note by Le Corbusier under a photograph from the East façade, placed sideways on the sheet: “Bravo pour le collage !! Ca a créé un nouveau lieu saint...”²¹ This is another aspect of Hervé’s work on the contact sheets that may have inspired the architect-editor at an early stage of the design process of the book, inasmuch as the mock-up shows that some of the images were initially rotated on the page. In an interview, Hervé stated that he always photographed in such a way that the pictures could be viewed inverted.²² Indeed, it was something he had “discussed at length” with Le Corbusier with respect to painting: “For us it is not the theme that is important, it is not the subject, but essentially the plastic expression.”²³ Notably, Le Corbusier, like Fernard Léger, would flip over his paintings to see them afresh.²⁴

Hervé’s 1965 article “Concerning architectural photography” undertakes several comparisons of that medium to painting.²⁵ What complicated such an exercise in comparison was the photographer’s dual role, as an artist, but also as an interpreter of the work of another artist. According to Hervé, it would be better to compare the ethical and aesthetic endeavour entailed in this act of interpretation to the work of a conductor or a musician:

*“Like a conductor of an orchestra or a pianist, he selects the sounds and tones of the instruments to remake to his own taste the purest of harmonies, while at the same time scrupulously respecting the intensions of the composer, in this case, the architect.”*²⁶

²¹ FLC L3-3-110.

²² Naegele, Daniel, “An Interview with Lucien Hervé”, *Parametro*, January–February 1995, vol. 1–2, n° 206, p. 7.

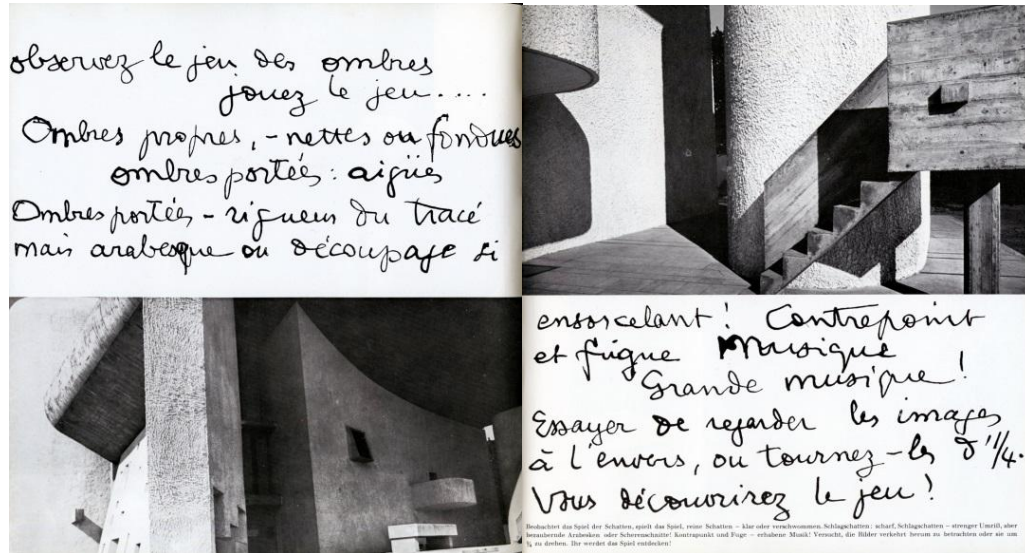
²³ Lucien Hervé quoted in Naegele, “An Interview with Lucien Hervé”, p. 76.

²⁴ Quetglas, Josep, “Ronchamp: A landscape of visual acoustics”, in Cohen, Jean-Louis (ed.), *An Atlas of Modern Landscapes*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2013, p. 212.

²⁵ Hervé, “À propos de la photographie d’architecture”, pp. 29–31.

²⁶ Hervé, “À propos de la photographie d’architecture”, 31

The article expresses Hervé's determination to promote photography as an art form. The manner of seeking to elevate the position of photography by reference to music is a long-standing strategy among artists, especially since the late nineteenth century, as they sought to musicalize their own media.²⁷ Indeed, the technique was frequently used by Le Corbusier himself.²⁸



7. Double page-spread from the second chapter of the book *Ronchamp*. Photo: Lucien Hervé. (Le Corbusier, *Ronchamp*, Stuttgart, Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1957, pp 46-47) (© FLC- ADAGP)

6. Musicalization

In his *Precisions* from 1930, Le Corbusier described architecture and music as “intimate sisters”.²⁹ Nevertheless, *The Chapel of Ronchamp* was the first architectural project in which music was stated as playing a part in the design conception.³⁰ Le Corbusier initially wanted strident electronic music by the composer Edgar Varèse to play automatically at regular intervals from the chapels towers. In his book on the chapel, Jean Petit quoted the architect on his ideas for the readers (Ill. 7):

“I have one more idea to bring *Ronchamp* to perfection, and that is that there should be music (even if there were no one to hear it) –automatic music coming from the chapel at regular hours, addressing, inside and outside, the unknown occasional listener.”³¹

The musical programme was rejected, after clerical opposition.³² In the book *Ronchamp*, however, there is a trace of the idea of letting the aural component be essential in the experience of the visitor. The book apparently

²⁷ Carpenter, Patricia, “Musical form regained”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, January 21, 1965, vol.62, n° 2, p. 42.

²⁸ Peter Bienz's doctoral dissertation is the most thorough account of Le Corbusier's involvement with music. Bienz, Peter, “Le Corbusier und die music“, *Bauwelt Fundamente* 120, Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1998.

²⁹ Le Corbusier, *Precisions on the present state of architecture and city planning*, originally published in 1930, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991, p. 11.

³⁰ Pearson, “Integrations of art and architecture in the work of Le Corbusier”, p. 386.

³¹ Le Corbusier cited in Petit, Jean, *La Chapelle Notre-Dame-du-Haut, Ronchamp : Les Cahiers Forces vives*, Paris : Forces Vives, 1956, pp. 20-21.

³² Pauly, Danièle, *The Chapel at Ronchamp*, Basel: Birkhäuser; Paris: Fondation Le Corbusier, 2008, p. 96.

aspires to musicalize the reader's experience. The most explicit musical reference appears in a reproduction of a handwritten note by Le Corbusier, at a double spread with two photographs from the outdoor chapel:

*“Observe the play of shadows, play the game.... Precise shadows, clear cut or dissolving. Projected shadows, sharp. Projected shadows, precisely delineated, but what enchanting arabesques and frets. Counterpoint and fugue. Great music! Try to look at the pictures up-side down or sideways. You will discover the game.”*³³

The text strengthens the non-representational aspect of the photographs. The encouragement to turn the book sideways increases the distance from the referent, the architectural subject, and calls the readers' attention to the graphic operations of the photographs. In music, a fugue is a composition technique in which one or two themes are imitated by successively entering voices. It is contrapuntally developed in a continuous interweaving of the voice parts. In *Ronchamp*, much of the photographic sequence unfolds as a play of straight and curved lines forming abstract shapes. Shadows echo the architectural shapes and create mirroring surfaces in the images. This visual counterpoint rhythm is observed by leafing through the pages of the book.

Paraphrasing Roland Barthes, one might say that the handwritten text serves as an *anchorage* for the readers' interpretation of the photographic sequence.³⁴ It invites readers to see the book as an adaption of musical form. However, the musical reference quoted above goes beyond the visual compositions of the photographs. Repetition is a key principle of the editorial construction that links it to the structure of a musical composition. Notably, the repetition of similar motifs enforces their effect in the sequence. A reiterated page design, with identical placement of pictures and blank areas, serves to link double-page spreads containing contrasting photographic motifs. It creates a unity. At the same time, a shifting rhythm is established through the sequence, by the contrast between the repeated interruptions of white space separating photographs and the continuation implied by visual linking of photographs. The white space could be regarded in this sense as analogous to the function of silence in a musical piece, understood as the complement to music rather than the opposite. Like a moment of silence, the white space at once underlines the preceding section of the photographic sequence and calls attention to the succeeding part of its composition.

In Le Corbusier's *Le Modulor* from 1950, music serves as a symbol of measure and proportions.³⁵ This publication was his fullest theoretical statement of the relationship between architecture and music, and reflects his faith in the Renaissance project of establishing humanistic measure.³⁶ Whereas *Le Modulor* partly expresses a rational approach to music as a system of flexible and adaptable principles, the effect of adapting *Ronchamp* to musical principles is to call attention to music as an art form progressing in time. In music, time becomes aestheticized.³⁷ Readers are reminded of this in their reading of the book, an activity that itself is a temporal experience. Only implicitly does the book suggest a musicalization of architectural perceptions. The manner in which the photographic sequence combines views from various promenades, by letting them overlap and be intertwined, might be compared to the relationships of repeated melodic intervals in a musical piece. It appears

³³ Le Corbusier, *Ronchamp*, pp. 46-47.

³⁴ Barthes, Roland, “Rhetoric of the Image”, in Barthes, Roland, *Image – music –text*, London: Fontana Press, 1977, pp. 32-51.

³⁵ Le Corbusier, *Le Modulor*, Boulogne: Éditions de l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, 1950.

³⁶ Graham, James, “Musique en fer forgé: Erik Satie, Le Corbusier and the problem of aural architecture”, *AA Files*, 2014, n° 68, pp. 9–10.

³⁷ Stambaugh, Joan, “Music as a temporal form”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, April 23, 1964, vol.61, n° 9, p. 274.

as the carrying over of one theme to another. One of Le Corbusier's declarations may come to mind: "Music, like architecture, is time and space".³⁸

While Le Corbusier was making the mock-up for the book, in the summer of 1956, he had started working on the *Poème électronique*.³⁹ This was the multimedia show he curated for the Philips pavilion, which he designed together with Iannis Xenakis for the Brussels Fair of 1958.⁴⁰ When he asked Varèse to compose the music for the show, Le Corbusier described what he had in mind: "a scenario to be created wholly from relationships; light, plasticity, design, and music."⁴¹ The show was Le Corbusier's most explicitly formulated idea about the synaesthetic experience, and was related to an abstract idea of a synthesis of the arts.⁴² It is interesting that it coincided with his work on the book *Ronchamp*, which to some extent evokes aural and tactile perceptions. It is, however, primarily through references to principles of musical composition that the book manifests its own ambition of going beyond the mere documentary report on the building. Whereas musical analogies are widespread in Le Corbusier's architectural writings, the book can be regarded as a visual, and more subtle, manner of highlighting the relationship between architecture and music, through the mediation of photography inspired by musical composition. One might say that the book offers a more abstract aestheticization of the architectural experience.

7. Une pot-pourri : Photographic sequentiality

In the 1950s, Le Corbusier worked to strengthen the artistic character of his *Oeuvre Complete* series, as the correspondence concerning the production of volumes five and six illustrates. In his letters to the publisher and editor he insisted on the inclusion of polychrome illustrations as one of the means to achieve this goal.⁴³ More important in the present context, is that while working on the sixth volume Le Corbusier developed another concept of communicating his architectural works through photography, in which sequentiality purposefully would arouse musical associations.

The same year as *Ronchamp* appeared in print, he told the editor Willy Boesiger that he wanted volume six to include a separate section of photographs of some of his buildings. He called it a "pot-pourri", and attached several sketches as a mock-up for a particular section of the volume.⁴⁴ The photographs would be by Hervé alone, and *The Chapel of Ronchamp* would have a central position. Apparently, this photographic sequence was intended to illustrate his concept of the synthesis of the arts, and it is interesting to note that his formulations further suggest a musical analogy. Le Corbusier referred to it as a "Séquence Symphonique des Arts Majeurs", and listed some of the projects to be included:

³⁸ Le Corbusier cited in Wogensky, André, *Le Corbusier's hands*, translated by Martina Millà Bernad, London: The MIT Press, 2006, p. 74.

³⁹ Le Corbusier started making the mock-up at Cap-Martin from August 1956. FLC U 3-1-7, letter from Le Corbusier's secretary to Gerd Hatje, 30 July 1956.

⁴⁰ Treib, Marc, *Space calculated in seconds: The Philips pavilion*, Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1996.

⁴¹ FLC J2-19-86, letter from Le Corbusier to Edgar Varèse, 25 June 1956.

⁴² Pearson, "Integrations of art and architecture in the work of Le Corbusier", p. 389.

⁴³ FLC F3- 20-12, letter from Le Corbusier to Girsberger, 4 November 1948; U 3-14-52, Note from Le Corbusier to Boesiger, 21 December 1956; FLC U3-14-68, letter from Le Corbusier to Boesiger, 15 June 1957; FLC U3-14-65, letter from Le Corbusier to Girsberger, 23 April 1957.

⁴⁴ The attachments to the letter are not in the archive. FLC U3-14-65, letter from Le Corbusier to Boesiger, 23 April 1957.

“*Pot-pourri* = *Ronchamp/ Chandigarh/ Ahmedabad/ Nantes-Rezé/ Marseille-Michelet/ Jaoul. etc.../ showing the comprehensive and inventive symphonic concept of the architect.*”⁴⁵

Analogous to montage, the word *potpourri* refers to a mixture of elements, and often implies a collection of unrelated or disparate items. As a description of a principle of combining photographs of various buildings on the double page-spreads of a book, it suggests a condensed form of presentation for which comparability would be essential. Although Le Corbusier did not expand on how this *potpourri* should be organized, the term he used implies that he wanted to create a diversified and complex series of images. One can imagine it appearing as a fragmented, but congruous, photographic sequence that generated a new context for the perception of the projects presented. It was presumably conceived as a means of pursuing the goal of raising the artistic quality of the volumes of *Oeuvre Complete*. By adopting an experimental approach to a purely photographic sequence, it would traverse the artistic ambitions for volume five, which had primarily centred on inclusion of polychrome illustrations.⁴⁶ The principle would have introduced a new model on which to organise the photographic sequences in the monographic series. The fact that it was suggested only a few months after Le Corbusier had finished the mock-up for *Ronchamp*, suggests that the experience of creating the sequence of Hervé photographs for the book was crucial for his development of the *pot-pourri* concept.⁴⁷

Catherine de Smet has identified demonstrative juxtapositions as a characteristic principle of the graphic design of *New World of Space*.⁴⁸ Reproductions of his paintings and buildings were combined in double page-spreads of the book, rhetorically underlining the unity of his creations within different artistic disciplines.⁴⁹ What De Smet has referred to as “synthetic” layout,⁵⁰ entailed the superimposition of sketches of natural objects onto photographs of his built works, with a view to implying sources of influence. The proposed *pot-pourri* concept would assumedly, in condensed form, also privilege demonstrative confrontations. It was supposedly intended to work as a method of isolating selected elements of each project, inviting the readers to draw parallels and extract formal aspects shared by the different projects presented. In this sense, it seems to have been informed by his earlier graphic strategies, which had depended on the juxtaposition of different media. However, it primarily illustrates another aspect of the role photography, in particular, played in the everlasting process of Le Corbusier’s conceptual engagement with his projects.⁵¹

If it was intended to promote his aim of the synthesis of the arts, the concept also shed light on his use of intermedial references to music to communicate his architecture through photography. Considered as a strategy to emphasize the aesthetic quality of architectural expressions, it applies to *Ronchamp*. According to Irina O. Rajewsky, an intermedial reference should be understood as a meaning-constitutional strategy that contributes to a media product’s overall signification.⁵² The given media product constitutes itself partly or wholly in relation to the work or system to which it refers. In *Ronchamp*, the adoption of musical forms helps shape and constitute

⁴⁵ FLC U3-14-65, letter from Le Corbusier to Boesiger, 23 April 1957.

⁴⁶ FLC F3- 20-12, letter from Le Corbusier to Girsberger, 4 November 1948.

⁴⁷ The final mock-up was sent to Hervé in January 1957, for him to prepare the photographs to be published. FLC E2-4-374, letter from Le Corbusier’s secretary to Lucien Hervé, 7 January 1957.

⁴⁸ De Smet, Catherine, *Vers une Architecture du Livre: Le Corbusier. Edition et mise en pages 1912-1965*. Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2007, pp. 86-88.

⁴⁹ De Smet, *Vers une Architecture du Livre*, pp. 83-90.

⁵⁰ De Smet, Catherine, *Le Corbusier: Architect of Books*, Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2007, p. 91.

⁵¹ Colomina, Beatriz, “Le Corbusier and photography”, *Assemblage*, October 1987, n° 4, pp. 6-23.

⁵² Rajewsky, Irina O., “Intermediality, intertextuality, and remediation: A literary perspective on intermediality”, *Revue Intermédialités*, no.6, Autumn (2005), p. 53.

the book as an artistic object. However, as a hybrid of a photo book and an architectural monograph, it is never perceived in isolation from the architectural subject it presents. Through the intermedial reference it thematises and reinvestigates architectural expressions in relation to musical form.

8. A voluntary sculpture

Another intermedial reference that can be identified in the book serves to illustrate other aspects of Le Corbusier's use of photography (in publications and his own photographic practice), as well as contemporary conventions for photographing sculpture and architecture. The structure of the main photographic sequence of the book, combining views from multiple promenades around the building, together with the many tilted views and close-ups recalls an established practice in the photographic documentation of sculpture, which included movements encircling the work of art to create series of different views.⁵³ In a 1949 handbook on photographing architecture and sculpture, Helmut Gernsheim wrote: "Success depends ... on the photographer's ability to acquire the sculptor's faculty of seeing and thinking all round his model."⁵⁴

The manner in which Le Corbusier organised the *Ronchamp* photographs may encourage a perception of the architectural work as a sculpture. As part of his self-conscious campaign to shape his persona as the universal *plasticien*, Le Corbusier may have consciously sought to evoke the documentation technique of another artistic discipline to heighten the status of the building as an art work, implicitly downplaying its utilitarian role. Seen in the context of the hostility many architectural critics had expressed, the book may be regarded as an invitation to consider the project as a work of art, one to be judged as a work of formal innovation in the service of aesthetic renewal.

However, the photographic sequence also points to Le Corbusier's own photographic procedures of working in series⁵⁵ Tim Benton's research on the photographic practice of Le Corbusier has revealed how the architect became preoccupied at an early stage with working in series, taking several photographs of the same or of similar objects.⁵⁶ In the book *Le Corbusier: Secret Photographer* Benton pointed out that it became an obsession for Le Corbusier to work in series, particularly in the 1930s when he primarily photographed with his movie camera. For him, the series enabled a methodical analysis of form.

It is worth noting that Le Corbusier's photographs of natural objects, of his "objets à réaction poétique", has a parallel in the work of surrealist artists of the 1930s. Their photographic practice expressed an interest in ways of manipulating photographic conventions to create sculptures from objects and fragments that were not originally conceived of as works of art.⁵⁷ The resulting pictures were called "involuntary sculptures". Under this heading Gyula Brassai and Salvador Dalí published photographs of a fragment of soap and a crumpled up bus ticket in *Minotaure* in 1933.⁵⁸ Briony Fer has interestingly discussed this as a moment in the history of Modernism when

⁵³ Di Bello, Patrizia, "Photography and Sculpture: A light touch", in Di Bello, Patrizia and Koureas, Gabriel (eds), *Art, History and the Senses: 1830 to the Present*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2010, p. 29.

⁵⁴ Helmut Gernsheim, *Focus on architecture and sculpture: An original approach to the photography of architecture and sculpture*, London: The Fountain Press, 1949, p. 38.

⁵⁵ Benton, Tim, *LC Foto. Le Corbusier: Secret Photographer*, Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, p. 405.

⁵⁶ Benton, *Le Corbusier: Secret Photographer*, pp. 405-406.

⁵⁷ Johnson, Geraldine A., "Introduction: Sculpture and photography: Envisioning the third dimension", in Johnson, Geraldine A. (ed.), *Sculpture and photography: Envisioning the third dimension*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 13.

⁵⁸ The photographs were by Gyula Brassai. Gyula Brassai and Salvador Dalí, "Sculptures involontaires", *Minotaure*, 1933, n°3-4, p. 68.

the distinctions between sculpture and photography became blurred.⁵⁹ The connection to the Hervé photographs that Le Corbusier published in the book *Ronchamp*, is the photographer's dedication to explore and expose plastic shapes through the medium of photography. In the book, links to photographs of sculpture can be identified as operating at two levels: in the photographic sequence and in the individual photographs. Hervé's compositions emphasise the sculptural qualities of the building, particularly through framing and lighting.

Whereas the idea of modern sculpture as a significant historical development gathered momentum relatively late, in the 1930s, it peaked in the 1950s with a spate of publications dedicated to the subject.⁶⁰ Moreover, sculptural photo books from the post-war period represent a particular type of photographic object.⁶¹ In his handbook, Gernsheim urged the architectural photographer to take a "rational" approach: "The picture must be taken in such a way as clearly to show the structure of the building."⁶² Through the pictures, the photographer should "intelligently relate the general plan of a building to its parts and give a correct interpretation."⁶³ In contrast, the imperative for the photographer of sculpture read as follows: "The photographer must try to infuse his work with life, and in lighting the photographer has a powerful means at his disposal for his interpretation photographing ... photographing sculpture is modelling with light."⁶⁴ The many oblique angles in Hervé's photographs in *Ronchamp* obstruct the readers' ability to relate the views to the plan of the building. If readers follow the architect-editor's instruction to turn the book sideways or upside down, the "irrationality" of the photographs, in terms of conventions of architectural representation, reaches a climax. This aspect of the reader experience would obviously have been emphasized if the initial idea to rotate some of the photographs, as indicated by the mock-up, had been realized.

9. Representing architecture as drama

Hervé's compositions depend on the use of shadows to mould the architectural shapes in dramatic fashion. This aspect, in particular, relates his photographs in *Ronchamp* to those he shot of the Cistercian abbey of Le Thoronet, and that were published in the book *La Plus Grande aventure du monde: L'architecture mystique de Cîteaux*.⁶⁵ Le Corbusier wrote the preface for this book. After receiving a copy of the completed book, Le Corbusier sent a letter to Hervé to express his enthusiasm for the published photographs:

*"Received your magnificent book, you have done truly creative work here. It is very beautiful...It is not photogenic, it is photography to the highest degree."*⁶⁶

This compliment may recall Le Corbusier's characterisation of the photographer Frédéric Boissonnas as a plastic artist when publishing his pictures of Parthenon in *Vers une Architecture* (III.8).⁶⁷ Nevertheless, he included

⁵⁹ Fer, Briony, "The space of anxiety: Sculpture and photography in the work of Jeff Wall", in Johnson (ed.), *Sculpture and photography*, p. 239.

⁶⁰ Potts, Alex, *The sculptural imagination: Figurative, modernist, minimalist*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 103.

⁶¹ Di Bello, Patrizia, "Sculpture, photograph, book: *The sculptures of Picasso* (1949)", in Di Bello, Patrizia; Wilson, Colette and Zamir, Shamon (eds), *The photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and beyond*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2012, pp.91-109.

⁶² Gernsheim, *Focus on architecture and sculpture*, p. 33.

⁶³ Gernsheim, *Focus on architecture and sculpture*, p. 31.

⁶⁴ Gernsheim, *Focus on architecture and sculpture*, p. 38.

⁶⁵ Hervé, Lucien, *La plus grande aventure du monde: L'architecture mystique de Cîteaux*, with texts by François Cali Paris: Arthaud, 1956.

⁶⁶ Letter from Le Corbusier to Lucien Hervé, quoted in Naegele, "An Interview with Lucien Hervé", p. 75.

⁶⁷ Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, Paris: Crès & Cie., 1923, p. 181.

Boissonnas' pictures in the publication primarily to praise the work of the Greek architect Pheidias as a sculptor. "The Parthenon is a drama", Le Corbusier noted in the preface to *Ronchamp*.⁶⁸ Determined to highlight his own capacity as a sculptor, the abundance of Hervé photographs in the book would hopefully serve a parallel purpose to the Boissonnas photographs of Acropolis he had earlier published:

"With contour modulation one acknowledges the plastic artist; the engineer steps aside and the sculptor works.... It is Pheidias who made the Parthenon, Pheidias the great sculptor."⁶⁹

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⁶⁸ Le Corbusier, *Ronchamp*, p. 6.

⁶⁹ Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, p. 178; 180.

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