Since the late 1970s, various efforts have been made to describe the way gender affects architecture. The first generation of critics was historians such as Delores Hayden and Gwendolyn Wright. Their work concentrated on norms of American domesticity and on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century attempts to reform those confining conventions through architecture and companion social experiments. These social historians described the ways sexual social codes can structure architectural space, especially in the domestic sphere. Buildings then could be analysed as artifacts to uncover the order of gender.

The next generation, beginning in the middle 1980s, worked in a medium inspired by the French literary critics and their methods of textual analysis. Led by Beatriz Colomina, these analysts sought a deeper, more philosophical, correspondence between gender oppression and design. Concentrating on buildings by male heroic figures of the International Style, these critics sought in the buildings of the Modern Movement metaphors for the body, images of the voyeuristic consumption of the tectonic body, and examples of the violation of that metaphoric body in the building's forms. Towers became phallic and windows pornographic, and the building material itself became a sexual text.

Throughout this period, there has been a rising tide of profiles about women architects who had been excluded from the canon or dominated by male colleagues who did not fairly credit their contribution. It turns out that both Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier were heavily dependent upon women who worked in their offices. The careers of independent architects such as Julia Morgan and Eileen Gray have been revived for their important contributions to the architecture of the twentieth century. These profiles have been useful in disclosing the discrimination present in the way architectural work is carried out. All three types of analysis – the social relations of building users, the interpretation of the buildings as gender-related texts, and the critique of the design industry's internal discriminations – are important, and reflect legitimate forms of architectural analysis. But they have all fallen short.

Somehow, evidence of oppression can only take us so far. The analysis of women's work, of radical communal utopias, and of body metaphors severely limit the range of buildings that can be discussed. As architecture schools reach gender parity in their student bodies, it is important to look deeper and see how men and women might design differently and, from a wider perspective, how buildings could be used to express or even precipitate new gender models. Because the nuclear family is changing so dramatically, and because previously closeted domestic arrangements now see the light of day, it is crucial that architecture learns to respond to these changes. Part of the response is dependent upon these areas of study; how building users, building designers, and the elements of buildings themselves participate in a gendered reality is a crucial step. But, as yet, we do not have a sense of the totality of effect gender can have on architecture, and vice versa. Answering these questions would create a deeper awareness of the extent and effects of our culture's gender structure. It might also give us a fuller, more powerful sense of architecture's cultural significance.

Alice Friedman's *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History* is a fascinating and well-crafted study of the previously unnoticed history of female patronage upon which many of the architectural revolutions of the twentieth century relied. The work goes a long way towards offering a fully integrated view of the central role gender has had in modern architectural movements. It fully...
challenges to prevailing categories of normalcy and difference’. These challenges were made by the clients, not the architects, and more often than has been suspected, these clients were women.

This is also a story of tremendous architectural egos deeply threatened by formidable client-patrons. Much of the tension produced was a result of these architects’ desire to re-engineer social reality through design. This totalizing ambition was undercut, or at least tempered, by the realization, so clearly demonstrated in Friedman’s profiles, that society would drive social change, and that architects would follow. Ranging from the turn of the century libertine, Aline Barnsdall, to the heretically independent Dr Farnsworth in the 1940s, we read of deep challenges to domestic prototypes, an array of powerful, sometimes radical lives, who sought in these trend-setting architects an opportunity to symbolize and advance their novel and committed life choices.

The existence of these women was a tremendous opportunity for the architects of that generation of Modernists who invented the International Style. Instead of practising their revolutionary aesthetic concepts in the artificial laboratory of the treatise or exhibit, progressive women offered these architects the chance to build the experiments which had only existed on paper. Edith Farnsworth gave Mies van der Rohe his first commission in America. Truus Schröder gave Gerrit Rietveld his first commission anywhere. Le Corbusier was badly in need of work when the Steins found him. These women were actually living the new social forms about which architects only vaguely speculated. But the architects did not always see it that way.

The proclamations of the more imperious designers included in Friedman’s book – Wright, Le Corbusier, and Mies – were thoroughly going. Each of these architects had an inflated sense of the role of design in society. Each created a total social vision centred around their architecture. And in each case, it was the architect, armed with elaborate theories, who would be responsible for the transformation and reform of a badly limited and misguided culture. Frank Lloyd Wright designed the furniture, lighting, cabinets, and even place settings for his homes. He was also strict about the types of artwork that should grace his walls. At his Taliesin compounds in Wisconsin and Arizona, his vision was complete and overwhelming, including a cultural programme of music, theatre, and highly orchestrated recreation. Even the caravan that ferried Wright and his disciples to these retreats was a carefully choreographed train of red cars.

Friedman tells of Le Corbusier’s disappointment at the Steins’ choice of furniture used in the villa he designed for them outside Paris (the family chose to use traditional furniture it had collected over the years rather than the austere machine creations designed by Le Corbusier himself). She also tells us of the 80m running track planned for the villa’s roof, for which the Steins, then in their sixties, would have little use. His confidence in the superiority of his work over any condition present in reality was such that the design for the Villa Stein/de Monzie was largely complete before he had ever seen the land on which it would be built. And these are modest pretensions compared to some of Le Corbusier’s more ambitious social visions. His plan for Paris, for instance, proposed razing the city’s central core, and building there a forest of identical pristine living towers on a gargantuan scale. This would be his primary instrument for healing and purifying a culture that had gone astray, misled by the excesses and purifying a culture that had gone astray, misled by the excesses of Victorian hypocrisy, and severely disabled by the wounds of a world war.

That men of such hubris were dependent upon women for some of their most important innovations was often a difficult pill for them to swallow. Friedman’s book chronicles the complexity and intensity of the architect/client relationships that resulted. We read of highly developed relationships stretched far beyond the conventional patron/artist partnership, or the detached professional contract. Aline Barnsdall, a wealthy oil heiress, feminist, and enthusiastic patron of avant-garde theatre, was to continue a lively and contentious correspondence with Frank Lloyd Wright some 20 years after their collaboration on her Los Angeles home and theatre complex had ended in disappointing incompleteness. Wright spent a good portion of his autobiography
rewriting the encounter with Barnsdall, much to her disadvantage. Mies’ involvement with Edith Farnsworth began with genuine enthusiasm; they socialized together, and she spent many hours in his office, witnessing the design process and befriending the staff. This unusually congenial beginning ended quite differently in a highly publicized lawsuit initiated by Farnsworth.

The intensity of relationships was sometimes resolved through sex. The history of these architects is filled with romantic involvements (though Friedman considers only one). Frank Lloyd Wright’s long-time companion was a client of his middle career, Mamah Borthwick Cheney. Gerrit Rietveld inaugurated a happy and respectful relationship with his first client, Truus Schröder, transforming the intensity of these forces into a collaborative passion. Rudolph Schindler was reputed to have had less lasting and more numerous dalliances with his female clients.

The happiest of these stories involved architects capable of accepting the authority of these independent, unconventional women. When the architects were able to listen to and respect the unique profile of needs and desires which these trend-setting women presented, the buildings succeeded in enhancing the lives of their owners. In these cases, the intense relationship was transformed into a constructive partnership. Rietveld’s happy and respectful working relationship with his lover extended his Modernist formal concepts into a way of life, a pedagogical experiment, and into a career of collaborative designs. Robert Venturi’s loving attention to his patient and indulging mother led to the design of an architectural icon which was also a happy home; over the years, Vanna Venturi held court, providing living-room seminars for the droves of architectural students who made their pilgrimage to the site during her lifetime. Neutra’s highly successful ability to respect the wishes of an articulate and artistically mature Constance Perkins had lasting results. She continued living in the house he designed for her until her death 39 years after they first met. She submitted drawings to Neutra, specifying the contours of the reflecting pool which she had requested; this element, along with the landscaping which Perkins also helped develop, were new for Neutra, and one of the house’s most successful and often noted features.

Friedman is at her best when she works as a comparative historian. It is in the fourth chapter – on Mies’ Farnsworth House and Philip Johnson’s Glass House – that we can see the true power of Friedman’s premise. Both buildings are iconic, and have often been understood to demonstrate the same design principles, but Friedman gives us a different view. Edith Farnsworth was a successful Chicago doctor who had been thinking for some time of building a country house when she met Mies socially in 1945. She was fully aware of, and sometimes suffered from, the uniqueness of her life. She also felt a cultural responsibility to build a house that would be an artistic statement. Meeting Mies seemed fortuitous. Mies had been struggling to find a client in the US. He had published widely but had built little, and was in danger of slipping into academic obscurity. He was as excited by his meeting with Farnsworth as she was. The two began an intense collaboration that involved frequent site visits and meetings in his office, and socializing. But the congeniality eventually proved one-sided. Farnsworth began to believe in Mies’ mystique and his almost spiritual belief in abstract space. As Friedman observes: ‘Although she was no doubt unaware of it, Farnsworth had by this point made a critical transition from client to patron in the minds of her architect and his supporters, unconsciously blurring the boundaries between her self-interest in the house and her enthusiasm for the larger intellectual and artistic implications of the project’. For his part, Mies felt fortunate that his client was single, bringing with her fewer social and practical demands to clutter the purity of the spatial perfection he wanted to create. From the row that was to ensue, one suspects that he was also grateful his client was a woman, and could more easily be reduced in his mind to an aesthetic figure that was part of his design, rather than seen as the house’s human owner and his employer.

The house he designed for her is brilliant, but had little to do with its occupant’s needs, and everything to do with Mies’. By the time the house was complete the
relationship between Farnsworth and Mies had fully deteriorated. They argued over money, went to court, and engaged in a media argument over the success of the project. She was most startled, however, over what the building required of its occupant. There was no privacy. Too many mundane functions were not accommodated by the design. The roof leaked. She could not adequately house guests. She could not undress privately. She argued that, for all Mies’ claims about free flowing space, the space was confining and rigid. And she was, simply, uncomfortable: "the truth is that in this house with its four walls of glass I feel like a prowling animal, always on the alert. I am always restless. Even in the evening. I feel like a sentinel on guard day and night. I can rarely stretch out and relax.”

Mies found her objections irrelevant. When asked why, in such a minimal house, he had taken the trouble to provide two bathrooms, Mies responded that he did not want to offend guests with the sight of Dr Farnsworth’s night-gown on the back of the bathroom door. ‘In Mies’ view, it seems, Farnsworth had very little of a "private life" to conceal: as a single woman, the only thing that could possibly be worth hiding was her night-gown, the sign for her body.’

Mies had created a space that was a repression of the female body, a denial of sexuality, and a refusal to accommodate privacy. These are some of the deeply gender-related desires that Friedman has discovered at the heart of one of the Modern Movement’s signal monuments.

It is a brilliant analysis. But Friedman continues. In the same chapter, she goes on to compare the Farnsworth House with Philip Johnson’s Glass House. The two buildings are outwardly quite similar but, as Friedman so effectively shows, they are also completely different kinds of accomplishment. Two features sum up the difference between the projects, and expose Mies’ true intent. The first is that Johnson used several free-standing forms to create a self-conscious and only partial exposure of the occupant, and to allow an ironic and seductive awareness of the voyeuristic implications of a see-through house. The second feature is that the Glass House was designed as part of a compound that included a windowless Guest House in acknowledgement of the need for privacy — a sort of antidote to the severity of exposure which the glass box enforced.

For Friedman, Johnson’s design is a more perceptive commentary on the conditions of conventional domesticity. In tandem with his pronouncements about the building, Friedman demonstrates his work to be a personal commentary on the sexual restrictions of both the conventional domestic programme, and of Mies’ total repression of domesticity and sexuality. The virtually windowless Guest House, with its bunker design and camp furnishings, is the telling statement of a gay man’s heightened awareness of the value of privacy, of the duplicity inherent in so many conventional forms, and of the theatrical doubling that are conditions of daily life. She argues further that Johnson’s flip and ironic public persona and the nature of both his criticism and his design, should be understood in light of this theatrical doubling that reveals without fully communicating, that distracts without fully resembling.

This analysis encourages the full architectural acknowledgement of the body, of the body’s needs, and of the demands placed on the body by society. The great weakness of the International Style is that the bodies for which architects designed so many chairs and running tracks and measurement systems did not really exist. Real bodies, especially of women, had not yet found their architecture.

Though the book is organized chronologically, one sometimes wishes Friedman had historicized her subject more. Each vignette is vividly contextualized, but a larger historical arc that would unify the profiles fails to emerge. The stories in the first half of the book are more colourful than in the second. The architectural criticism in the second half of the book is more meticulous and based more on observation than in the first. It is clear that the gender relationships in the post-Second World War era were more successful (with the exception of the remarkable Schröder/Rietveld partnership), but we are not told why. The clients in the book become progressively less wealthy in a pattern that is also frustratingly unexplained. And as the century passed, the patron/architect relationship transforms into a client/architect relationship that is more successful. Friedman makes the distinction between client and patron, but this phenomenon may have a historical pattern that it would have been wonderful to have had described. One suspects that a fundamental shift in gender models has occurred, too, and that deserves study.

Architecture still labours under the influence of the precedent set by the first generation of the architectural vanguard, many of whose leaders are represented in Friedman’s work. It was a conspicuous generation. Beginning in 1867 with Wright, five of the
twentieth century’s most important architects were born in a 25-year span (Le Corbusier, 1887; Mies and Rietveld, 1888; Neutra, 1892). Their cohort boasted an enormous number of influential names. An impressive list of cultural luminaries swirls around the clients in Friedman’s book: Emma Goldmann, Gertrude Stein, Upton Sinclair, Theo van Doesburg, and Henri Matisse all make appearances. Their presence makes it clear that, in the earlier years of this century at least, acquiring a famous avant-garde architect was often part of a larger cultural and political programme orchestrated by the client/patron. Modernism’s most important architects were convinced that their architecture could change culture. But Friedman’s analysis of the gender dynamics in twentieth-century design allows us to reconsider this and reflect that perhaps it is cultural change that actually drives architectural innovation.

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By Kenneth Frampton
Thames and Hudson, London, 2001
240 pp, 191 mono illus
Price £7.95 (pb)

**Le Corbusier in America: Travels in the Land of the Timid**

By Mardges Bacon
320 pp, 187 mono and 8 colour illus
ISBN 0-262-02479-9
Price £41.50 (hb)

Reviewed by David Wild

Thirty-seven years since Le Corbusier’s death in the water off Cap Martin, and despite much opprobrium in the 1970s, there remain far more books on this creative titan than any other architect. Yet, as Kenneth Frampton suggests in his new book on the master for the excellent Thames and Hudson World of Art series, ‘it will be a long time before we shall free ourselves from the fertility of his vision and the range of his influence ... Architect, urbanist, painter, graphic designer and writer, polemicist and mystic, Le Corbusier was a figure of many guises, to such a degree that it is hard to know where one role ends and the other begins’.

The definitive biography has yet to appear. In the meanwhile, Mardges Bacon’s *Le Corbusier in America* offers a unique window into the man’s first visit to the US and combines the public and private aspects of a sometimes fraught but always ambivalent relationship to the New World which he attempted to recuperate by writing *Quand les cathédrales étaient blanches* (later translated as *When the Cathedrals Were White*) on his return to Paris. Bacon’s book is the result of extensive and painstaking research and succeeds in being both scholarly and entertaining. The cover already sets the stage with Corbusier’s sketch of himself as a colossus, striding across the Atlantic from New York to Paris – not the other way round, as he returns disabused. His departure was even less of an event than his arrival: Robert Jacobs, his interpreter and guide for the tour, recalls Corbusier wanting to be photographed against the famous skyline. On offering one of the press photographers $5 and being told his film was used up, Jacobs appealed: ‘snap the empty camera, I’ve got to live with the guy for two months’. Corbusier posed ceremoniously – and scanned the morning papers in vain. However, just two hours later at the Museum of Modern Art, the press were there in force. Corbusier calmly offered copies of a French studio portrait at $5 apiece. The offer declined, flash bulbs popped, and a goggle-eyed Corbusier appeared in the *Herald Tribune* over the headline ‘Skyscrapers Not Big Enough, Says Le Corbusier’. Joseph Alsop, the reporter then went on to describe the visitor’s head as ‘egg-shaped’, inadvertently giving birth to the popular epithet ‘egghead’.

The major event was still to come – an extensive exhibition of his work, opening with a lecture by Corbusier at the civilized time of 8.45pm. For those in the know, this must have been highly intriguing: starting from 1916 and progressing via the Purism so admired by Philip Johnson, the exhibition covered everything from urbanism (the site model for Nemours, Algeria) to the recent furniture designs. Ever the opportunist, Corbusier told reporters that the now ubiquitous chaise-longue was inspired by cowboys he had seen in the movies lounging with their feet up on tables. He failed to mention...
Charlotte Perriand, whom he had recruited to design this and other pieces for the Salon d’Automne Paris exhibition of 1929. There were also models of the Villa Savoye, and the Moscow Palace of the Soviets – in all some 22 projects in rooms painted ‘Corbusier Pink’. Sketching on tracing, blue or brown paper rolls of about 6m x 1m, samples of which are reproduced in the central colour pages of this book, Corbusier concluded his lecture (given in French): ‘The problem is so complex, so synthetic and so manifold that to express it I felt obliged to write a book which is a veritable symphony’ – a plug for La Ville Radieuse, presumably. This lecture format was repeated throughout a demanding tour of 20 cities, reduced from the American proposal of 42 venues; perhaps the most dramatic was at Vassar where the ‘Amazons’ (his term) rushed onto the platform to grab the drawings, tear them into small pieces, and demand autographs. He was particularly struck by one of these, Alma Clayburgh, who is pictured here with her mother, the operatic singer (and possible model for Mrs Claypole in the Marxist Night at the Opera).

Coming at a critical period of imminent change in architectural education, these lectures brought into the open the growing rift between students and an entrenched Beaux Arts faculty. The radical ideas that appealed to a generation of students, including the necessity of a social programme for architecture in the aftermath of the Great Depression, fell on more stony ground as far as potential clients were concerned, including the young Nelson Rockefeller, whom Corbusier had courted assiduously. With hindsight, we can see that the brand new Rockefeller Center in New York, from where Corbusier broadcast for the NBC Network, already offered an alternative ‘culture of Congestion’ as Kem Koolhaas would term it (in Delirious New York, 1977) to the rather Calvinist Ville Radieuse concept. Meanwhile the home-grown hero, Frank Lloyd Wright, declined to meet him, and in no uncertain terms. Yet, as Mardges Bacon notes, many American historians, sociologists, and planners came to hold him responsible for the urban renewal and housing programmes that had developed independently, devoid of any utopian impulse. With an ego as big as the Ritz, Corbusier felt free to attack the adverse results of capitalism, yet insinuate himself into the company of the businessmen themselves in an effort to gain commissions. It would be left to the stately Mies van der Rohe to set the example of a glazed Cartesian skyscraper as Corbusier moved away from the prism to a more solid, highly articulated expression.

With his hectic schedule of lectures, he nevertheless found time for dalliance with Marguerite Tjader Harris, one time mistress of Theodore Dreiser, and visits to hear Jazz – notably Louis Armstrong – and witness the exuberance of the dance at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem. Sadly, he did not find time to see the first concrete results of Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’ – the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), where the magnificent Norris dam complex had just been completed 18 months ahead of schedule. Here in Knoxville, Tennessee, Jane West Claus, who had worked in Le Corbusier’s atelier on the Pavillon Suisse, collaborated with her husband on houses sponsored by the TVA. Their Hart house here, of 1943, is one of a group showing the influence of Corbusier’s post purist period, its random rubble walls as used in the Pavillon Suisse, Maison Mandrot et al, now almost a cliché in American domestic architecture.

Le Corbusier would return to America in 1946 as the French delegate to the United Nations Permanent Headquarters Commission. The final building complex, which he had attempted to dominate throughout the supposedly collaborative process, suffers greatly in comparison with the extraordinary Palace of the Soviets project, a model of which Corbusier is seen examining, in a posture reminiscent of the late Glenn Gould, on the cover of Kenneth Frampton’s new monograph. The image has been cropped to fit the space, but inside it is reproduced in full, with the trusty Pierre Jeanneret, partner at the time, standing by the open studio window, the complete model bathed in sunlight. It is a wonderful photograph which sets the style of this beautifully designed (Derek Birdsall) compact compendium. Corbusier had tried to get Rockefeller to buy this model for the Museum of Modern Art for $2000 back in 1937 but finally had to settle for $600 for this, together with the Villa Savoye and Nemours.
site model: an extremely hard bargain.

‘Among the peripatetic pioneers of the Modern Movement, Le Corbusier is the sole figure who would project himself at a global scale’ Frampton reminds us in a chapter 6 entitled ‘World Architect: Czechoslovakia, Russia, Brazil, North Africa, North America, France and Switzerland 1928-1936’ which covers this fertile period. His concept of the key role of Industry was severely dented by his experience in the US, coming after the success of the highly sophisticated, steel-framed and double-glazed Immeuble Clarté in Geneva built by the industrialist client and contractor, Edmond Wanner, and it was the less developed economy of Brazil that proved more hospitable to Le Corbusier and his influence.

Corbusier’s technocratic politics are examined in the following chapter, where we learn that his alignment with the Vichy regime of 1940 was the reason for the split with Pierre Jeanneret. However, with the founding of ASCORAL (Association of Constructors for the Renewal of Architecture) in 1943, Corbusier distanced himself from his former Vichy colleagues, and Frampton suggests coming to a more revisionist and existential position: ‘This was the pre-consumerist, homeostatic mediatory moment that confronted Europe at the end of the Second World War’.

Perhaps the most intriguing part of this study comes with the penultimate chapter which attempts to unravel the metaphysical aspects of Corbusier’s symbolism, culminating in a detailed analysis of La Poème de l’Angle Droit, which striking graphic work was finally published as a portfolio in 1953. You do get the feeling that this was part and parcel of Corbusier’s drive to create a quasi-mythic persona: that much of the work was realized through the labours of dedicated assistants – some of whom found themselves locked out of the studio for having the temerity to ask for recognition – was the other side of the coin. Yet, with the example of an atelier rather than office in the city, and a modest cabin by the seaside rather than a villa in Tuscany, say, the example remains something to aspire to. Indeed it is a detailed examination of the cabanon at Cap Martin that concludes this excellent study.