

2/ The confrontation with rationalism



Brandt sur Haffner, 1984
Bertrand Lavier

There is no doubt that the power of order magnifies the built space, systematising its methods of construction and optimising costs. But more importantly, to my mind, it helps to forge an unbreakable bond between the mental ideal of intellectual constructs and the construction of reality. It is this bond that seems profoundly responsible for Man's attachment to the purity of the architectural undertaking. Georges Bataille described architecture as the guardian of the temple to the systematicity of the world (cf. Denis Hollier article "La métaphore architecturale" in La prise de la concorde - 1974). In his view, it is thanks to architecture that the world makes sense since everything in it is systematic, logical and necessary. And this is also why the vocabulary of architecture is invoked every time we attempt to introduce clarity into the cosmos.

The universe is a "heavenly vault", God is the "great architect" every system of thinking in the world is maintained by "keystones" and so on. Architecture is the repository of the image of the world, or rather of the necessity for this image to make sense. But if we are to follow Bataille, this domination of the world through the symbolic work of architecture is a negation of humanity, its drives, dances, sexualities and rituals: intrinsically human practices that subvert order and measure. He writes: "The great monuments rise like dykes, upholding the logic of majesty and authority against all that would trouble it."

The Frankfurt Kitchen by Margarete Schutte-lihotzky
Source: Anatole Kopp, «Quand le moderne n'était pas un style mais une cause» - ENSBA, 1988, P 61



Aerial view of Fontenay sous bois
Source: Google earth

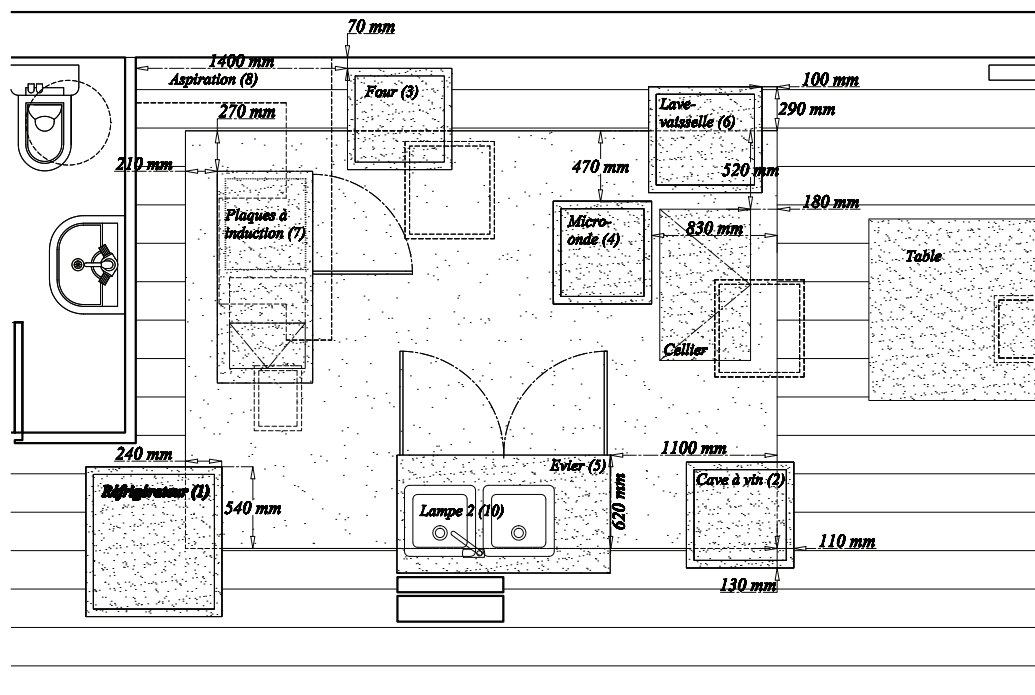
This symbolic dimension of architecture could explain why the production of non-architects is excluded from Architecture. Should we not question the relevance of a vision in which the world is considered to be a perfect whole? Should we not question this irresistible attraction we architects have for control and mastery, the obsessive attachment to the construction of spaces that are perfect in their every detail? Let us take the example of the Frankfurter Küche by the Austrian architect Margarete Schutte-Lihotzky. This kitchen, installed in most homes built by the municipality during the 1920s, aimed to simplify household chores (Anatole Kopp, p.69). Movements were optimised using diagrams. Each drawer was labelled with the name of the utensils it was supposed to hold: the typology "kitchen" was standardised to facilitate its mass production. This kitchen, of which 10,000 units were to be installed in the city of Frankfurt, is often criticised for its lack of flexibility but also for the way it isolates women in the home. The space was designed for one person only and for a single use. Despite these criticisms, this type of kitchen has remained a model for the kitchens we know today. They present us with fatally muted forms, lined up against the walls, as if the terms of existence for "functionality" were used up by bunching up uses on the wall.



Kitchen of Monsieur and Madame L.
View of the cellar in foreground
Antony, France (92)



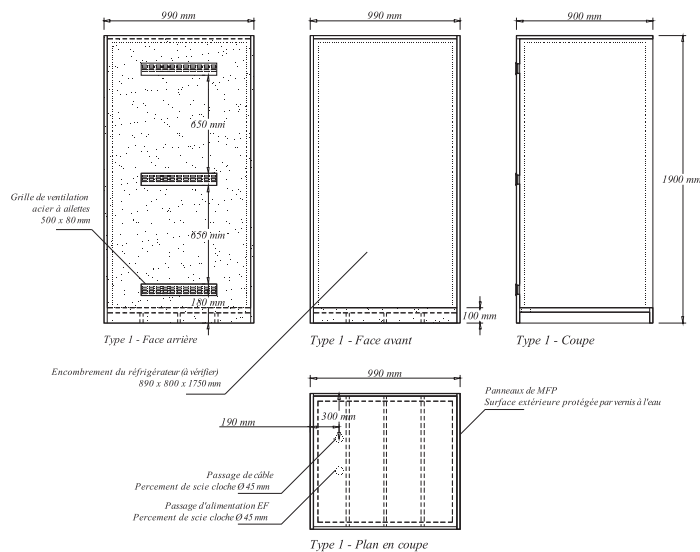
*Kitchen of Monsieur and Madame L.
View of the ensemble
Antony, France (92)*



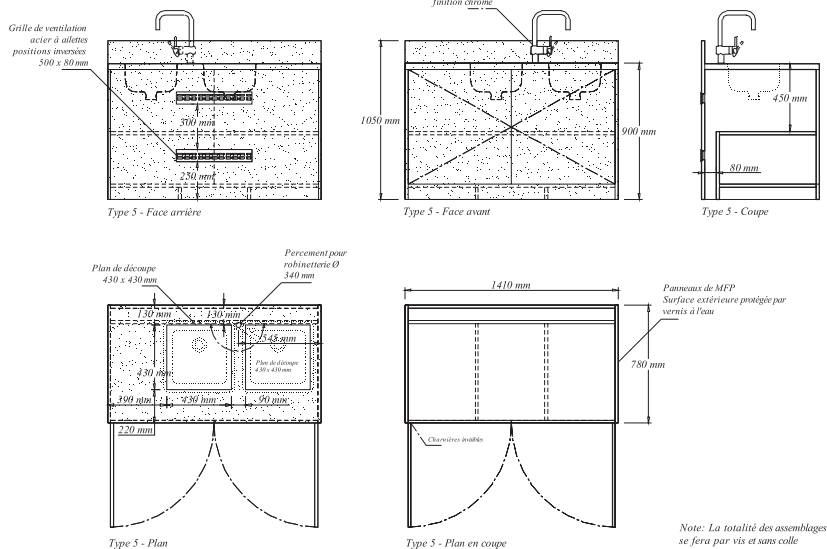
*Plan of the kitchen of Monsieur and Madame L.
Antony, France (92)*



Placement tests of the kitchen elements on site
Fabrication of the socles
Antony, France (92)



Kitchen of Monsieur and Madame L.
Construction drawing of the refrigerator socle
Antony, France (92)



Kitchen of Monsieur and Madame L.
Construction drawings of the socle for the two sinks
Antony, France (92)

Kitchen of Monsieur and Madame L.
Detail of the game of volumes
Antony, France (92)



The kitchen of Monsieur and Madame L., designed by the firm in 2008, is an attempt to move away from this ideal type. It proposes a kind of “gay functionalism”, which amounts to a pile of boxes, sized to the volume of the kitchen items that the clients already possessed. A system of simple blocks was laid out on the ground and adapted to the dimension of the inhabitants’ arms and their movements.

Designing the kitchen in this way presented many advantages in cost and execution. No adjustment was required on site to fit walls that were all irregular. The pre-cut wood panels could therefore be delivered directly from the manufacturer, saving costly labour. No space was lost or rendered inaccessible. Cleaning was very simple since each volume was set away from the walls. Above all, this kitchen created scenarios for multiple types of passage. It generated shortcuts and games of hide and seek for the couple’s young child. Its loose spatiality was inspired by those suburban spaces that are so unjustly and perpetually beaten down, as much by the conservatism of fans of old stones as by lack of resources. The use of a single material (a low-cost particle board that is also low in formaldehyde – emission class E1) imparts a sculptural dimension to these kitchen appliance objects that dream of being worthy of museums.