History in a Glass House

Philip Johnson's "Stroke of Genius" Between Absolute Contemporaneity and Historical Reference

Markus Dauss

Philip Johnson's Glass House (Fig. 56) is a cuboid measuring 17 by 10 meters. It consists of a steel frame with H-beams and moldings, topped by a ceiling panel of layered plasterboard suspended in a steel frame and mounted on wooden slats. The building sits on a terracotta brick floor, which forms a plinth about 30 centimeters high, raising it slightly above the surrounding lawn. The interior and exterior are separated by thin glass panes, which run in front of load-bearing steel piers. At parapet height, the window surfaces are joined and divided by horizontal steel members. Glass sliding doors are placed in the center of all four sides. A few fixtures act as room dividers: a wooden wall unit of human height (not floor-to-ceiling) delineates the sleeping area (Fig. 57), while a kitchen unit includes appliances, a fold-out countertop, and a bar counter. In the northeast corner, a brick cylinder punctuates the otherwise undifferentiated space, housing a fireplace on one side and a bathroom on the other—water and fire. The elemental form pierces the roof slab (Fig. 58). The cylinder's comparative visual weight anchors the interior and makes the surrounding steel-and-glass structure appear to float. It represents the sole interruption in an otherwise perfect glass box whose exterior surface appears as perfectly smooth as its structural system and interior fixtures appear minimal.

"A house more in name"—this is how Johnson's biographer Franz Schulze describes the concept of maximum reduction that prevails here.[1] Arthur

1 Franz Schulze, Philip Johnson: Life and Work (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 188.

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Drexler, Johnson's successor as director of MoMA, echoes this assessment: "In fact, it's less like a house than like a diagram drawn in the air, indicating a certain amount of space."[2] Minimalism and conceptual abstraction thus define the Glass House. The building is characterized by a dematerialization that reduces it to a graphic cipher. The enclosed space is defined seemingly without effort and, above all, almost without barriers.

These characteristics mark not only a purist understanding of space, but also a modernist contemporaneity that completely rejects traditional architectural principles. Traditional architecture had always designed buildings as massive enclosures with extended walls, pursuing monumental weight and lavish ornamentation. According to Johnson, the only permissible decoration now consisted in the serial use of structural elements, such as beams.[3] But in the Glass House, he grants these elements only minimal sculptural expression—at most, they achieve visual presence. The box, whose structure and content resist further reduction, appears as a zero point in the history of architecture conceived as the art of building. It presents itself at first glance as a smooth and therefore reference-free design, a model-less innovation. Cross-connections within the horizon of absolute contemporaneity seem more important than diachronic links in the historical horizon of unbroken continuity.

This radical presentness constitutes the core of the most fundamental reading of Johnson's work that he himself favored. He presented a cutting-edge product that, after its completion in 1949, became—as planned—a topic of conversation and popular destination for the avant-garde circles of the East Coast elite.[4] Johnson designed the Glass House as his own retreat in the affluent small town of New Canaan, Connecticut, about a two-hour drive from New York City. It was quickly recognized as a statement of achievement by a recent convert to architecture who had also been called a dandy, impresario, curator, and former aspiring politician.[5] Taking "cutting-edge"

2 Arthur Drexler, "The Architecture Opaque and Transparent," in Philip Johnson: The Glass House, ed. Jeffrey Kipnis and David Whitney (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 2–7, here 6.

3 Philip Johnson, "House in New Canaan, Connecticut," in Architectural Review 108 (September 1950), 152–59.

4 Schulze, Philip Johnson, 198.

5 The media hype that Johnson orchestrated is vividly described by Frank D. Welch, Philip Johnson & Texas (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 30–32.

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literally, the glass box sits on the edge of an abrupt drop in terrain on Johnson's sprawling property, overlooking a park-like landscape. The location on one side sports a commanding view. But socially, too, "cutting-edge" assured Johnson a central position and fame within the system of cultural elites. He exploited strategies of "attention economy" to emphasize the absolutely contemporary status of the house he had created for himself.[6] Furthermore, he set in motion—on a second level—a precisely targeted game of historical references that also included the history of their previous appropriations and modernizations. These dual approaches—the emphasis on radical contemporaneity and the deployment of historical allusions—constituted a sophisticated form of reception control. The strategy was cunning because it deliberately remained in the mode of allusion, leaving the empty, non-explicit spaces to be filled by projection—and it even included false trails. Johnson himself unabashedly described the degree to which his references had influenced him as being as speculative as the interpretations of a Rorschach test.[7] This strategy was effective. A multitude of readings has wrapped itself like a wreath around Johnson's minimalist glass box. Interpreters have fallen for the narcissist[8]—not excluding the author of these lines (a late and barely mentionable link in this chain). Nevertheless, their interpretive work has produced new, cultural meanings, which somewhat redeems their having been manipulated by Johnson's strategy. Let us reconstruct that dual strategy and its effects in more detail.

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6 On this concept of a very special, contemporary form of economy, see Georg Franck, Ökonomie der Aufmerksamkeit. Ein Entwurf (Munich: Hanser, 2007). Franck's concept of the "attention economy" suggests that, in modern society, attention has become a limited and valuable resource. As traditional economic resources become more abundant, focus has shifted to controlling and capturing human attention. This makes attention a key asset for businesses, media, and even individuals, as it drives consumer behavior and influences public opinion. In this framework, attention is not only scarce but must be strategically acquired, managed, and retained, as it has become crucial for success in a media-driven world. As we will see, Johnson mastered the business of capturing and managing attention with great expertise.

7 Schulze, Philip Johnson, 197. The metaphor of the Rohrschach test comes from an interview on August 26, 1990.

8 On the topic of narcissism see Nerma Cridge, "Excess Water: On Floods, Architectural 'Selfies' and Being Inside the Rain," Images (IV): Images of the Other: Istanbul, Vienna and Venice, ed. Veronika Bernhard (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2015), 39–48, here 43.

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Johnson's essential strategy for creating contemporaneity centers on an omnipresent appeal to Mies van der Rohe.[9] This approach, however, operates not only through conspicuous reference to his great contemporary, but also includes partial rejection. Most strikingly, Mies is invoked both materially and discursively as a great inspiration: approaching the Glass House from the side, we immediately notice the "hollow corner" (Fig. 59) that mediates the meeting of the glass panels on the long and short sides via a double-T beam (= H-beam), which serves as a framing hinge. This can be understood as a reprise of the "negative" corner cultivated by Mies,[10] who had just implemented it on the IIT campus in Chicago. This corner solution was initially developed in 1939 and pursued further in the 1940s. The invocation of Mies becomes even more intense through the strong typological proximity to Mies's iconic glass and steel skeleton house in Plano (Illinois), designed for Edith Farnsworth and built between 1945 and 1951 (Fig. 60).[11] This, too, is an "intimate" weekend pavilion in the countryside (if a transparent building can be described as such). In it, all interior fixtures were contained in a functional core recessed from the (glass) walls and, partly, from the ceiling. This design provided crucial inspiration for Johnson's own solitary showpiece, which he began planning in late 1945. He had probably seen it in drawings during his research for the Mies exhibition he organized for MoMA in 1946–47.[12] However, Johnson completed his retreat considerably earlier than Mies himself. By overtaking him in realizing the idea, Johnson was first to reap the rewards.[13] This chronological coup naturally lent the project a particularly acute presen-

9 On Johnson's admiration for Mies, which had a pronounced impact beyond the Glass House, see Mirka Beneš, "A Modern Classic: The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden," in Philip Johnson and the Museum of Modern Art, ed. John Elderfield (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1996), 104–51, here 133.

10 Johnson, House at New Canaan, 155. On Mies's negative corner solution, which can be understood as a kind of "architectural still life" that presents a recess but also stages an angled profile, see Carsten Krohn, Mies van der Rohe. Das gebaute Werk (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2014), 115.

11 Jean-Louis Cohen, Mies Van Der Rohe (London: E. & F. N. Spon, 1996), 88–95; Franz Schulze, Mies van der Rohe. Leben und Werk (Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1986), 262–268.

12 Schulze, Philip Johnson, 191. A model of the Farnsworth House was also shown at the Mies exhibition.

13 On the question of authorship in relation to chronology and originality, see Amanda Reeser Lawrence, The Architecture of Influence: The Myth of Originality in the Twentieth Century (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2023), 42–43.

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ce. At the same time, the constellation, marked by both inspiration and competition, could be interpreted as a patricide scene—highly valuable in terms of attention economy. Johnson actually held Mies, who was thirty years his senior and had moved to the United States in 1938, in the highest esteem. He considered him a better designer than Gropius,[14] even though Johnson chose to study architecture at Harvard's Graduate School of Design with Gropius and Breuer beginning in 1940. Johnson even thought Mies to be superior to Le Corbusier and J.J.P. Oud. But correspondingly grand was his ambition to match or surpass Mies with a stroke of genius—a plot that the malicious nickname "Mies van der Johnson" aptly summarizes (although Johnson knew how to integrate it into his self-image for years).[15]

Johnson's modifications of the Mies model in his own project are accordingly striking: Both works have twelve steel supports (counting the four stubs of the terrace platform at Farnsworth House), but Johnson painted them black rather than white. The Johnson pavilion sits on a bare brick podium—an "earthen" material—rather than being raised off the ground like the Farnsworth House, which was elevated owing to flooding threats from the nearby river.[16] Most importantly, the Glass House's support system is not located outside the glazed space, as in the Miesian pavilion, but is instead retracted behind the window surfaces. The glass skin thus emerges as an independent shell, becoming a membrane-like two-sided form whose flatness encloses the interior while enabling unbroken communication with the outside. The glass-smooth, shadow-free surfaces act either like stage curtains through which we view the picturesque surrounding scenery or, when exposed to direct sunlight, like screens that capture reflections. With Mies, we feel inspired to push the glass surfaces aside, despite their transparency, like shōji in a Japanese house, as opposed to those where the suppor-

14 Schulze, Philip Johnson, 148.

15 Christian Bjone, Philip Johnson and His Mischief: Appropriation in Art and Architecture (Victoria: Images Publishing, 2014), 19.

16 For a formally precise, albeit judgmental, comparison of the two houses, see Felix Schwarz, "Betrachtungen zu den Apartments von Ludwig Mies van der Rohe und Philip Johnson," in Bauen und Wohnen 6 (1952), 1–6. A more analytic approach is Michael Hesse, "Philip Johnsons Glashaus in New Canaan. Moderne als Postmoderne,“ in Wie eindeutig ist ein Kunstwerk?, ed. Max Imdahl (Cologne: DuMont, 1987), 36-45, here 38–39.

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ting framework would stay in place.[17] Johnson's House, by contrast, operates not tectonically but scenographically, as Kenneth Frampton put its.[18]

Furthermore, Johnson's design, unlike that of Mies, has neither a loggia spatially recessed from the box nor a terrace in front of it. Unity dominates over differentiation. Yet even in this homogenized design, subtly opposing tendencies lurk in the background. Kenneth Frampton has explored their role in the design process based of ninety-five drawings that Johnson donated to the MoMA in 1976, probably not without ulterior motives.[19] These drawings reveal that, during the entire, slowly advancing design process, the architect nevertheless grappled intensely with the problem of spatial differentiation. In essence, he sought to mediate between opening the enclosed volume to the surrounding space through a loggia, and concentrating the space inward in the form of an atrium or courtyard house. Significantly, Johnson explored this through various solutions that Mies had already developed.

Johnson's models for this exploration included Mies's realized buildings, such as the Barcelona Pavilion, Villa Tugendhat, and Haus Lange, as well as unbuilt projects like the Kröller-Müller and Hubbe Houses. Johnson distilled from his appropriation an integrated, compact solution. This dispensed with both loggia and courtyard, favoring a glassy volume instead of an interlocking arrangement of building masses. At the same time, however, Johnson turned the lawn surrounding the pavilion into a platform that can be understood as an extension of the architecture—and thus as a terrace.[20] Its boundary "wall" consists of the edge before the cliff drop. Thus, if the lawn-defined space surrounding the Glass House is understood as architecture, the trans-

17 On Mies's references to Japan, see Inge Andritz, Mies van der Rohe und Japan (Salzburg: Müry Salzmann, 2018).

18 Kenneth Frampton, "The Glass House Revisited," in Philip Johnson: The Glass House, ed. Kipnis and Whitney, 92–114, here 94. Hesse sees things differently: He understands Mies's emphasis on the structural framework as ensuring that the elevated house will float, while Johnson accepts the logic of loads and supports (as the interplay of floor and ceiling slabs reveals). This thesis, however, fails to recognize that Mies's impression of floating primarily confirms the tectonic structure through negation, without abandoning the structural system, whereas Johnson's glass box—this "celestial elevator" around a cylindrical anchor—creates an almost weightless enclosure that seems to contain nothing but air. See Hesse, "Philip Johnsons Glashaus", 39.

19 Ibid.

20 Frampton, "The Glass House Revisited," 92.

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parent pavilion itself can be interpreted as the "poured out" volume of a courtyard space recessed from a virtual building. Such inversions of inside and outside are commonplace in the Glass House. The carpet in the living area on the brick floor can also be understood as marking an architectural island or "raft."[21] It supports numerous pieces of Mies furniture, including ones from the Barcelona Pavilion and the Tugendhat House. These furnishings present themselves as if raised on a pedestal, yet are simultaneously incorporated into Johnson's patricidal project. Mies is honored but, more importantly, swallowed up by Johnson's own work. The Glass House can be read as a large museum showcase or a protective cover (like those over Victorian clocks),[22] but above all it displays itself as Johnson's own central showpiece.

This game of both embracing and rejecting his great contemporary Mies—the father figure who is both invoked and "murdered"—secured Johnson public attention. Above all, it dramaturgically ensured modernist contemporaneity. The references to the gradual evolution of Mies's modernist spatial concepts are thus transformed into a pattern of oscillation between "inside" and "outside." This creates a heightened sense of contemporary relevance, even if it includes museumizing tendencies and genealogical references (the father Mies displayed like an exhibit).

The contemporaneity thus generated was anchored in Johnson himself. After all, he had helped Mies rise to prominence in the United States following their first contact in Europe in 1930, paving the way for Mies's career there. Johnson had arranged Mies's decisive first US commission—the design of his own New York apartment—which was a cornerstone of the German's successful emigration in 1938.[23] Further support came through exhibitions and publications, most notably the 1932 MoMA exhibition *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*, which publicized European modernism in America.[24] Mies received special attention in this exhibition, and Johnson also devoted an essay to him in the exhibition catalog, which established the

21 Drexler, "Opaque and Transparent," 2.

22 Ibid., 4.

23 See Margret Kentgens-Craig, The Bauhaus and America: First Contacts, 1919-1936 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 188–89.

24 On Johnson's work at MoMA and his congenial pairing with the institution's guiding spirit, Alfred Barr, see David A. Hanks and Friedrich Meschede (eds.), Partners in Design. Alfred H. Barr jr. und Philip Johnson: Bauhaus-Pioniere in Amerika (Stuttgart: Arnoldsche, 2017).

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term "International Style" for the new architecture.[25] In 1947 Johnson published the first American biography of Mies, accompanying the exhibition of the same name at the MoMA.[26]

But Johnson also breaks from his primary reference in the Mies-laden Glass House, employing equally significant references to genealogical lines reaching further back in history. These too are cleverly, almost deviously, deployed as attention-grabbing strategies. They operate in the register of the historically educated and appeal to the culturally literate. We will return to them in a moment.

In the *Architectural Review* of September 1950, Johnson published a text revealing his sources of inspiration—whether genuine or alleged remains unclear.[27] Here, too, Mies is named as a reference, and Johnson exhaustively acknowledges his debt in an almost excessive manner. Johnson had placed a brick-built service building in a slightly offset position at the side of his Glass House containing its infrastructure and guest facilities. As a model for this arrangement, he cites the massing of Mies's above-mentioned IIT buildings. The Farnsworth House is also dutifully listed as a typological inspiration for the Glass Pavilion itself, and the architect mentions the exemplary nature of Mies's corner solutions and bifurcated support structure. The room arrangement in the slightly offset Guest House opposite is also attributed to Miesian precedent—but in such generic terms that verification is nearly impossible. At one point, however, Johnson distances himself from his great inspiration: The arrangement of built-in cabinets in relation to the brick cylinder in the main house is, according to the architect, more painterly than Mies would ever have tolerated.[28] Nonetheless, Franz Schulze has demonstrated that Mies indeed had similar ideas for precisely such an arrangement in preliminary sketches for the Farnsworth House.[29]

25 Philip Johnson, "Mies van der Rohe," in Modern Architecture: International Exhibition. New York, Feb. 10 to March 23, 1932, ed. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Jr., Philip Johnson, and Lewis Mumford (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1932), 111–116.

26 Philip C. Johnson, Mies Van Der Rohe. Sep 16, 1947–Jan 25, 1948, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1947).

27 See Philip Johnson, "House at New Canaan, Connecticut," in Architectural Review 108 (September 1950), 152–158.

28 Ibid., 155.

29 Schulze, Philip Johnson, 197.

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Over-emphasis on alliance and false emphasis on distance thus stand side by side. More importantly, the register of contemporary references expands even further. The network of paths to and between the two buildings on Johnson's property derives, according to Johnson, from one of Le Corbusier's designs (*Schema du Village*, 1933). Similarly, the relationship between the two blocks—including the sculpture placed between the two buildings (a Lifschitz)—was designed according to theories of the French architectural historian Auguste Choisy (Fig. 61). Choisy had investigated the visual relationships on the Athenian Acropolis,[30] an ensemble that is not purely axially symmetrical but has a more complex structure, and he paid particular attention to the mobility of the viewer, including oblique perspectives and overlapping views.[31] These performative considerations had, in turn, inspired Le Corbusier in developing the choreographic sequences with which he intended to shape the movements and emotions of building users—the so-called *promenade architecturale*.[32] Le Corbusier had systematized his own intense Acropolis viewing experiences (dating from 1911) through this concept.[33]

This represents a strategic double move on Johnson's part. It strengthens the classical references inherent in his Glass House, such as its placement on a podium, the suggested exterior stairs in front of the door entrances, and the axially symmetrical arrangement of the entrances.[34] His design is enno-

30 The Lifschitz sculpture evokes the Athena Promachos, a bronze statue by Phidias that stood between the Propylaea (the entrance gate to the Athenian Acropolis) and the Erechtheion temple. It was hence positioned to the left of the processional route to the Parthenon during the Panathenaic festivals.

31 Auguste Choisy, Histoire de l'architecture, vol. 1 (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1899), 409–422.

32 In Vers une Architecture (Paris: Editions G. Crès et Cie., 1923), Le Corbusier reproduces Auguste Choisy's diagrammatic representations of Acropolis views without crediting him, using these diagrams to illustrate his own concept of non-axial building arrangements.

33 Turit Fröbe, "Weg und Bewegung in der Architektur Le Corbusiers," in Wolkenkuckucksheim 9, no. 1 (November 2004), https://www.cloud-cuckoo.net/openarchive/wolke/deu/Themen/041/Froebe/froebe.htm; Turit Fröbe, Die Inszenierung eines Mythos. Le Corbusier und die Akropolis (Gütersloh: Bauverlag, 2017). See also Elisabeth Blum, Le Corbusiers Wege: Wie das Zauberwerk in Gang gesetzt wird (Braunschweig: Friedr. Vieweg & Sohn, 1988).

34 Hesse sees this axial position as anchoring a cluster of classic formal relationships in a symmetrical and hierarchical system. See Hesse, "Philip Johnsons Glashaus", 39f.

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bled as a result.[35] At the same time, oblique perspectives accentuate the character of the Glass House as a pure box and thus as a modernist spatial invention.[36] In this way, gestures toward the ancient world are channeled into the broad current of modernist receptions of antiquity, which are no longer purely symmetry-based but rethink the idea of classical wholeness—a powerful contemporary discourse. The Choisy-Corbusier reference distances antiquity in favor of its modern interpretation. Affective impact is also emphasized through Johnson's placement of his surprisingly minimal pavilion against a green backdrop, an environment with which it visually merges, especially when viewed obliquely. It is probably in this sense that Johnson also refers to the "romanticist" or "romantic classicist" Schinkel, especially regarding the exposed positioning of his building volumes:[37] He cites as an example the casino that Schinkel built in 1824 on the sloping bank of the Jungfernsee at Glienicke.[38] There, Schinkel demonstrated a dramaturgy of surprise—that is, he developed an effective strategy for engaging the viewer. Mies's own enthusiastic reception of Schinkel remains unmentioned as a mediating link—is it assumed to be included or deliberately suppressed?

Johnson followed a different path to his encounter with another central reference: so-called revolutionary architecture, above all the buildings of Claude Nicolas Ledoux. The Austrian émigré Emil Kaufmann, a representative of the Vienna School of Art History, had coined the term in several writings, most notably *From Ledoux to Le Corbusier: Origins and Evolution of Autonomous Architecture* (1933).[39] He also presented these ideas in a 1942 lecture delivered at a house that Johnson had built on Ash Street on the Harvard campus that same year (Fig. 62).[40] Kaufmann argued that revolutionary upheaval and modernism shared design continuity. The architects of the late eighteenth century had achieved the autonomy of individual building parts, thus breaking down baroque unity in favor of elementary components. Johnson saw the separation between his Glass House and its guest house as

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35 Drexler, "Opaque and Transparent," 5.

36 Hesse, "Philip Johnsons Glashaus," 39.

37 Johnson, House in New Canaan, 154.

38 The architect in charge was Ludwig Persius.

39 Emil Kaufmann, Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier. Ursprung und Entwicklung der Autonomen Architektur (Vienna: Passer, 1933).

40 Reeser Lawrence, The Architecture of Influence, 61.

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a continuation of this practice. He also considered the geometric purity of his cubic glass pavilion and its interior arrangement—which inscribes a circle within a rectangle—as indebted to these "revolutionary" achievements.[41] After all, the "intellectual revolutionaries" of the period around 1800 had preferred "absolute" basic geometric forms. What is at stake here, as Johnson makes clear, is a narrative of inheritance. The architect places himself in the lineage of a continuing revolutionary movement of upheaval—a common modernist trope. Here, too, the legacy of the past is brought into the present through two determining concepts: teleology and temporal rupture.

Johnson's textual self-interpretation moves to yet another level with a genuine shift in register. He had already examined his buildings from an aerial perspective to discuss their arrangement and ensemble effects. Yet he further abstracts these diagrammatic views, even aestheticizing them in pursuit of elevation to the level of "art." The architect draws parallels to the European visual avant-garde of the 1910s and 1920s, seeing similarities with compositions by Theo van Doesburg and Kazimir Malevich—works of concrete art and suprematism (Fig. 63).[42] A Poussin placed in the Glass House's living area imbues these references with additional historical depth.[43] Johnson programmatically chooses a painting by an artist who created classically "timeless" order and established strict harmony between nature and culture: Poussin had organized his paintings according to elaborate grids, condensed his figures into silhouette-like clarity, and framed pictorial objects with *repoussoirs*.[44] The view from the house's interior onto the surrounding nature, as well as onto reflections on the exterior window surfaces, now appears an actual continuation of this historical vision.

These references to painterly order elevate the building into the sphere of high art. They transform the architectural order into an aesthetic "second nature." Moreover, they underscore its autonomy by invoking the abstraction underlying these analogies. Why was Johnson so interested in elevating and autonomizing his work? What did "art," as pure and detached form, promise, as symbolized by the early modernist visual avant-garde in its "floa-

41 Johnson, House in New Canaan, 154.

42 Ibid., 133, 138.

43 Neil Jackson, The Modern Steel House (London: Wiley, 1996), 70.

44 Pierre Rosenberg and Keith Christiansen, Poussin and Nature: Arcadian Visions (New Haven: Yale UP, 2007), vii.

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ting" arrangements? Specific motives can be assumed, beyond a general desire for elevated status. Johnson had resigned from his post as curator of architecture at MoMA in 1934 to pursue a journalistic-political career, courting the emerging American fascist ultra-right.[45] He first operated in the circle of authoritarian populists like Huey Long. Then he joined the followers of a national fascism with an anti-elitist economic platform, such as Lawrence Dennis. Finally, Johnson disseminated and promoted ideas from the camp of Charles Coughlin, a demagogue who argued in egalitarian terms but agitated with antisemitic slogans. Johnson had observed the rise of the Nazi regime in Germany with undisguised fascination and approval, partly, it has been speculated, owing to the movement's homoerotic undertones. He even established contacts during his trips to Germany. This proximity culminated in a press tour financed by the Nazi Propaganda Ministry in September 1939, during which Johnson reported sympathetically on the German invasion of Poland. From 1940, and certainly after 1941, against the backdrop of America's entry into the war, this alliance with the political right increasingly damaged Johnson's reputation—right-wing groups were monitored by the intelligence services and became the subject of public and legal scrutiny. Johnson the careerist saw his social standing and professional networks threatened, effectively ending this phase of his career. His enrollment at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1941 marked a liberating change of direction. He completed his studies with a built diploma thesis, the aforementioned house at 9 Ash Street, which was uncompromisingly Mies-oriented and a commitment to pure International Style.[46]

We might read more into Johnson's decision to become a practicing architect—a shift whose meaning is embodied by the solitary glass house on his property in New Canaan, media coverage of which he actively promoted. The house could be understood as a gesture toward transparency through which Johnson attempted to cleanse or whitewash his biography. However, the glass structure he had created through sheer force of will and which he refined into pure form could also be interpreted as continuing his previous

45 The following sections are based on Mark Lamster, The Man in the Glass House: Philip Johnson, Architect of the Modern Century (New York: Little, Brown, 2018).

46 For more on the obvious Mies model here—his unbuilt Hubbe House (1934/35, Magdeburg)—see Alex Beam, Broken Glass: Mies van der Rohe, Edith Farnsworth, and the Fight over a Modernist Masterpiece (New York: Random House, 2020), 107-108.

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commitments: Voluntaristic, Nietzschean ideas had also influenced Johnson's engagement with right-wing ideologies. In these ideologies, populism and elitist contempt for the masses, political activism, and quasi-religious devotion to art coexisted. Art was conceived as both an act of will and an act of purification.

Particularly in this latter sense, architecture could serve as biographical exoneration. Johnson demonstrated strategic acumen here as well: he was careful not to make the purification strategy too transparent. The brick cylinder—opaque and deliberately severed from the Miesian aesthetic—plays a crucial role. Johnson writes:

> The cylinder, made of the same brick as the platform from which it springs, forming the main motif of the house, was not derived from Mies, but rather from a burnt wooden village I saw once where nothing was left but foundations and chimneys of brick. Over the chimney I slipped a steel cage with a glass skin. The chimney forms the anchor.[47]

Interpreters consider this enigmatic passage a veiled reference to Johnson's journalistic coverage of the German invasion of Poland (Fig. 64).[48] This biographical episode compromised Johnson's reputation, yet he strategically appropriated this very blemish in a move that could be perceived as transparent and "honest." At the same time, he transposed the memory of his compromising flirtation with the Nazi regime into the realm of ruin aesthetics, with all its nostalgic and reflective connotations,[49] and placed it—under the glass skin as a showcase—in a kind of museum. By transferring a biographi-

47 Johnson, "House in New Canaan," 157.

48 Peter Eisenman, "Behind the Mirror: On the Writings of Philip Johnson," in Oppositions 10 (Fall 1977), 1–13, here 12; reprinted in Peter Eisenman, Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings, 1963-1988 (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), 88–105, here 103; also Schulze, Philip Johnson, 197.

49 On ruins as media of temporal reflection and allegorical meaning, see Hartmut Böhme, "Die Ästhetik der Ruinen," in Der Schein des Schönen, ed. Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf (Göttingen: Steidl, 1989), 287–304; and Gérard Raulet, "Die Ruinen im ästhetischen Diskurs der Moderne," in Ruinen des Denkens, Denken in Ruinen, ed. Norbert Bolz and Willem van Reijen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), 179–214. On the ruin cults of the modern era, see Eva Kocziszky, Ruinen in der Moderne. Archäologie und die Künste (Berlin: Reimer, 2011).

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cal transgression into the register of modern ruin discourse, Johnson established significant interpretive ambiguity. The building's meaning oscillates between explicit reference and nebulous semantic polyvalence. Johnson later confessed to have been morally misguided at the time, characterizing his alliance with the right as "stupidity."[50] However, his Nazi confession yielded no substantive consequences. He never proactively made public statements or similar gestures. Johnson's handling of this biographical phase remained fundamentally reactive—or purely aesthetic.

Placing his departure from Nazism in the debris field of ruins served not only as exculpation through obfuscation, but as an essential strategic move within the attention economy. Allegorical enigmas from the field of ruin aesthetics ensure visibility and invite interpretation.[51] However, as already indicated, the significance of the Glass House extends beyond deciphering these strategically positioned interpretive cues. The multiple historical and ruinous references also open the structure to future connections that arise once morphologic and paradigmatic boundaries have been crossed.[52] Johnson himself articulated many such connections in the following decades through "follies" placed on his property, experimental buildings, and representative summaries of his evolving creative phases.[53] Despite its self-refe-

50 "I have no excuse [for] such utter, unbelievable stupidity," as cited in Kurt Andersen, "Philip the Great," in Vanity Fair 56, no. 6 (June 1993), 154.

51 This applies to a certain extent to historical examples of cylindrical buildings inspired by ruins—for example, the monumental and curiously habitable column in the Désert de Retz landscape garden near Marly (1781) and the distinctively crowned cylinders featured in Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's utopian-revolutionary house designs from the 1770s and 1780s.

52 Hesse recognizes the Glass House as marking a pivotal moment. He bases this assessment on Johnson's many subtle reversals of Mies's design principles, the house's emphatically classical appearance filtered through modernity, and its associative evocation of modernist formal innovations. Hesse also perceives a temporal displacement or synchronicity that signals a transition into postmodern architectural discourse—a thesis we have developed above. See Hesse, "Philip Johnsons Glashaus."

53 On these constructions in the context of a history of the "folly," see Celia Fisher, The Story of Follies: Architectures of Eccentricity (London: Reaktion, 2022), 365f. Adele Tutter has presented an impressive psychoanalytical reading of the entire ensemble built around the Glass House. Starting with Johnson's own vision of the house as his "diary," she interprets it not only as documentation of a constantly evolving self and an explicitly autobiographical statement, but also as the manifestation of a dream rooted in latent desires, memories, and conflicts. The house's duality of opacity and

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rential nature, this demonstrated the Glass House's constructive openness, transposing it into *post-histoire* and its temporal simultaneity.

At least one different story could be told, however, that operates less on psychological or biographical levels. This approach also examines what the Glass House includes or excludes, reveals or conceals—but from a social perspective.[54] Conceptual artist and theorist Jeff Wall has proposed such a socially critical reading. He interprets the glass cube as a manifestation of repressed social fears and fantasies of domination that are simultaneously exhibited and contained. Here, the gaze of domination is cast back from the outside, transforming the subject of domination into the focal point of an abstract surveillance apparatus.[55] The structure's stylish contemporaneity

transparency corresponds to the psychoanalytic distinction between latent and manifest content, with the dream serving as mediating hinge. The guiding metaphor here is the house as a symbol of personal integrity, which Freud considered to be one of the most stable symbols in psychoanalytical interpretation. This is supplemented by a more process-oriented metaphor comparing dream work with architectural (re) construction. Like the skeletal, "ruinous" Glass House, the dream recombines found fragments. The analogies observed by Tutter are reinforced by the passion shared by both Johnson and Freud for the relics of classical antiquity, which function as an archaic reservoir waiting to be excavated and recombined. She names specific sources of inspiration from Mycenae that were familiar to Johnson, an expert on antiquity, and which blended with his childhood memories to create overdetermined elements. The question remains, however, whether this reading remains too fixated on motifs and overemphasizes the supposed "legibility" of symbols, rather than recognizing that, as Johnson himself put it, form follows form. See Adele Tutter, "Design as Dream and Self-Representation: Philip Johnson and the Glass House of Atreus," in Journal of American Psychoanalytic Association 59 (2011): 509–548. Francesco Dal Co, whose deconstructivist work Tutter is familiar with, has characterized the entire New Canaan ensemble as a kind of autobiographical labyrinth. According to Dal Co, it contains false traces and traps, constituting a space that ultimately lacks a key. The "collectibles" stored in this erratic environment do not coalesce into a coherent representation of the self, and no external vantage point exists from which a meta-reading could operate. See Francesco Dal Co, "House of Dreams and Memories," in Lotus International 35, (1982), 122–28.

54 Jeff Wall, "Dan Grahams Kammerspiel," in Szenarien im Bildraum der Wirklichkeit. Essays und Interviews, ed. Gregor Stemmrich (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1997), 89–187, here especially 150–187.

55 Wall interprets the chimney cylinder not primarily as a ruin, but as evidence of Johnson's manipulation of the stereotypical embodiment of domesticity. He also examines the curved plate at the chimney's opening, which protects against flying

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then derives not from erudite and *aesthetically* "revolutionary" references, but itself constitute the crystallization point of socio-political forces and their historical antagonisms.

Contemporary global developments raise an urgent question that has long remained hidden beneath aesthetic and psychological interpretive layers, and which compels us to reexamine such greenhouses of aesthetic and social modernity through a different lens—that of rising temperatures. This merits separate discussion beyond our current scope. However, one point deserves attention: a tradition notably absent from both Johnson's own promotion of the Glass House and its critical reception—glass palaces as atmospherically controlled, materially refined, structurally determined spaces.[56] These structures oscillate between the prosaic fulfillment of infrastructural or commercial functions and the spectacular exposition of utopian visions[57]—concepts whose apparent contrast, viewed from today's perspective, reveals common ground: their anchorage in the fossil fuel era.[58] Invoking these constructed bubbles, which can only be air-conditioned with great effort,[59] as precursors to Johnson's Glass House would have suggested too direct a lineage and resulted in an unflattering diminishment of his status.[60]

sparks while reflecting viewers in a distorted manner. For Wall, this anamorphic distortion indicates that the forces at work in the Glass House function not only as products of a narcissistic apparatus, but also as vectors of alienating distortion that generate an uncanny double of the self. See Wall, "Dan Grahams Kammerspiel", 183.

56 On this tradition, see John Hix, The Glass House (Cambridge/Mass.: MIT Press, 1974); John McKean, Lost Masterpieces: Joseph Paxton, Crystal Palace; Ferdinand Dutert, Palais Des Machines; McKim, Mead and White, Pennsylvania Station (London: Phaidon, 1999).

57 Peter Sloterdijk, Im Weltinnenraum des Kapitals. Für eine philosophische Theorie der Globalisierung (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), 265–276.

58 On further reflections on Mies and Johnson's glass pavilions as architectural paradigms of the carbon age, see Ute Poerschke et al., "Making the Glass House Habitable: The Debate on Transparency and A. William Hajjar's Contribution in the Mid-Twentieth Century," in In Face Time: The Emergence of the Façade as the Integrative Factor in Holistic Building Design, ed. Douglas Noble, (Los Angeles, 2016), 1–10.

59 On the example of the London Crystal Palace, see Henrik Schoenefeldt, "The Crystal Palace, environmentally considered," in Architectural Research 12, no. 3/4 (2008), 283–294.

60 This may appear paradoxical given the Crystal Palace's comparatively vast scale, but becomes evident when considering the Glass House's status as a globally recognized architectural icon.

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This tradition was therefore excluded from the strategic discourses orchestrated by Johnson and his followers.

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Fig. 56.
Philip Johnson, Glass House (exterior), New Canaan, CT, 1948–49.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Glasshouse-philip-johnson.jpg.

Fig. 57.
Philip Johnson, Glass House (interior), New Canaan, CT,
1948–49. Photo: Simon Garcia. https://archeyes.com/
philip-johnsons-glass-house-an-icon-of-international-style-architecture.

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Fig. 58.
Philip Johnson, Glass House (interior), New Canaan, CT, 1948–49, Photo: Simon Garcia. https://archeyes.com/philip-johnsons-glass-house-an-icon-of-international-style-architecture.

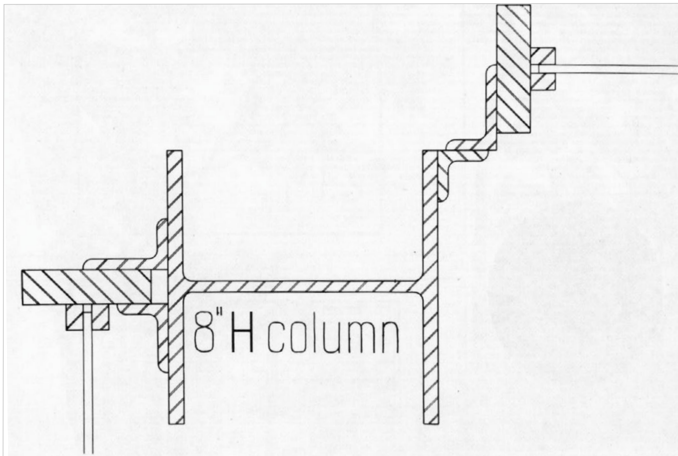

Fig. 59.
Philip Johnson, Glass House (cut through the corner), New Canaan, CT, 1948–49. From Philip Johnson, "House in New Canaan, Connecticut," Texte zur Architektur (Stuttgart 1982), 130–143, here: 139.

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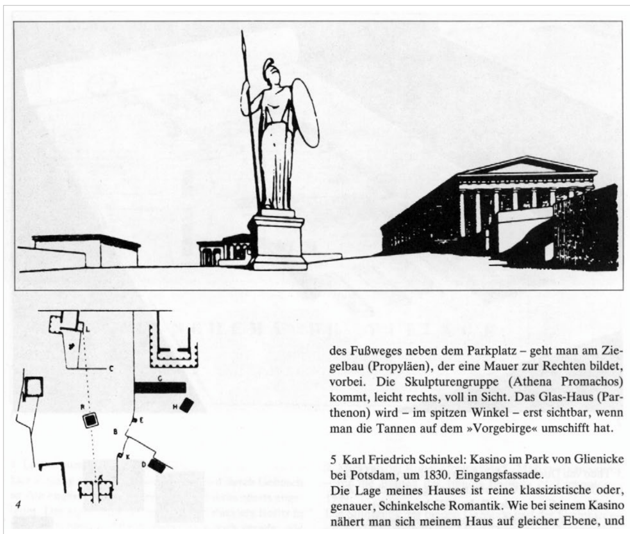
Fig. 60.
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Farnsworth House, Plano, IL, 1945–51. Photo: Victor Grigas. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Farnsworth_House_by_Mies_Van_Der_Rohe_-_exterior-8.jpg.



des Fußweges neben dem Parkplatz – geht man am Ziegelbau (Propyläen), der eine Mauer zur Rechten bildet, vorbei. Die Skulpturengruppe (Athena Promachos) kommt, leicht rechts, voll in Sicht. Das Glas-Haus (Parthenon) wird – im spitzen Winkel – erst sichtbar, wenn man die Tannen auf dem »Vorgebirge« umschifft hat.

5 Karl Friedrich Schinkel: Kasino im Park von Glienicke bei Potsdam, um 1830. Eingangsfassade.
Die Lage meines Hauses ist reine klassizistische oder, genauer, Schinkelsche Romantik. Wie bei seinem Kasino nähert man sich meinem Haus auf gleicher Ebene, und

Fig. 61.
Plan and Perspective of the Acropolis at Athens from Choisys "L'Histoire de l'Art Grecque" from Philip Johnson, "House in New Canaan, Connecticut," Texte zur Architektur (Stuttgart 1982), 130–143, here: 134.

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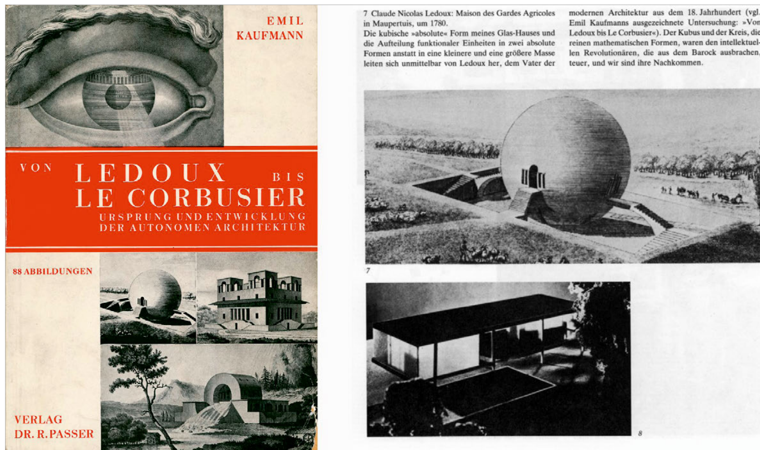

7 Claude Nicolas Ledoux: Maison des Gardes Agricoles in Maupertuis, um 1780.
Die kubische »absolute« Form meines Glas-Hauses und die Aufteilung funktionaler Einheiten in zwei absolute Formen anstatt in eine kleinere und eine größere Masse leiten sich unmittelbar von Ledoux her, dem Vater der modernen Architektur aus dem 18. Jahrhundert (vgl. Emil Kaufmanns ausgezeichnete Untersuchung: »Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier«). Der Kubus und der Kreis, die reinen mathematischen Formen, waren den intellektuellen Revolutionären, die aus dem Barock ausbrachen, teuer, und wir sind ihre Nachkommen.

8

Fig. 62.
Emil Kaufmann, Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier. Ursprung und Entwickung der autonomen Architektur (Vienna: Passer, 1933), cover, and “Claude Nicolas Ledoux: Maison des Gardes Agricoles in Maupertuis, um 1780,” from Philip Johnson, “House in New Canaan, Connecticut,” Texte zur Architektur (Stuttgart 1982), 130–143, here: 136.

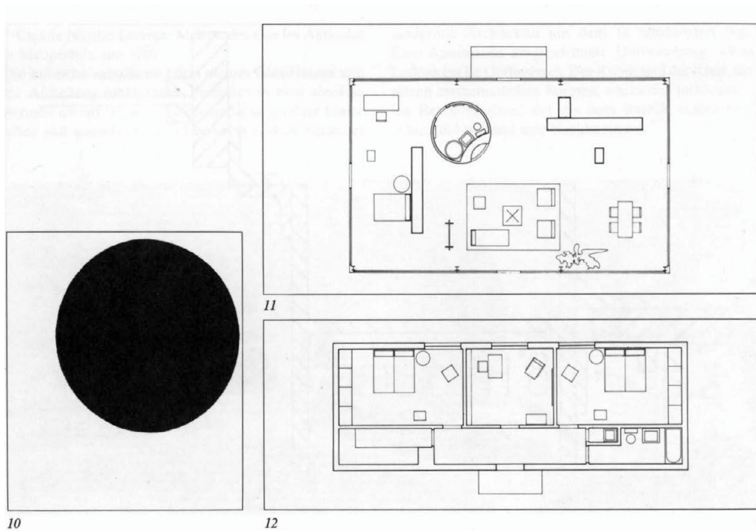

Fig. 63.
“Kasimir Malewitsch: Suprematist Element: Circle–1913,“Haus Johnson: Grundriß des Glas-Hauses,” and “Haus Johnson: Grundriß des Ziegelbaus,” from Philip Johnson, “House in New Canaan, Connecticut,”Texte zur Architektur (Stuttgart 1982), 130–143, here: 138.

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Fig. 64.
September 1939: An advance detachment of the Wehrmacht in front of a burning farm in Poland (Image: AP), and Philip Johnson, Glass House (exterior), New Canaan, CT, 1948–49. Photo: Richard Barnes (http://www.richardbarnes.net/the-glass-house).

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