

Big Flower, Small Root: Germany, War
and Revolution According to Le
Corbusier

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1. Alfred Barr, 'Art in the Third Reich-Preview 1933', *Magazine of Art*, vol. 38, no. 6, October 1945, pp. 212–222.

Three years ago, when searching for a new house of Corbusier near Paris the writer asked for the way, giving a description of white walls, flat roof, and much glass. The Frenchman was puzzled for a moment and then exclaimed: 'Ah, vous voulez dire la maison dans le style allemand?'

– Alfred Barr, 'Art in the Third Reich-Preview 1933'¹

Throughout his entire life, Le Corbusier was consistently fascinated with power – be it that of a man, a regime, or a nation. His rejection of bourgeois or proletarian forms of political revolution was equally consistent. Thus, when he embarked on his first journey to Germany in 1910, Le Corbusier held that the triumph of architecture and the decorative arts that he witnessed there was undeniably linked to Germany's victory over France in 1870. Conversely, France's defeat and what he perceived as that nation's long-standing architectural decadence were both caused, he thought, by the 1789 Revolution. Yet such a universalist approach, whereby Le Corbusier admired displays of power irrespective of geographical considerations, ultimately conflicted with his particularist leanings, that is, with his taste for the 'Latin nations'. The young architect was thereby caught in a double bind between his agnostic fascination with power and his national preference. This tension was resolved in 1918, the year when the 'universal' – power – finally coincided with the 'particular': France. Le Corbusier's social Darwinism could thus freely develop itself in all its guises – national, economic, artistic, and temporal. Ceasing to contradict himself, Le Corbusier could now fit together all the pieces of the puzzle that comprised his mind and which composed a central figure, namely, the architect himself. It bears mentioning that Le Corbusier's was not a simple and univocal nationalist interpretation of Germany and its art; rather, it was a reading of their far more complex political instrumentalisation. The main idea which the present essay seeks to contribute to the rich historiography on the relation between Le Corbusier and Germany is that the latter functioned for the architect as a screen that both hid and mediated his own political convictions and projects. In the final analysis, the scope of these projects exceeded the nationalist antagonism the architect maintained vis-à-vis Germany. Le Corbusier's idea of revolution; his distrust of parliamentary regimes; his taste for 'solid' and 'whole' regimes, articulated by means of the central figure of the 'chief'; all these convictions were ultimately expressed thanks to and through Germany. The antagonistic relation to the latter functioned as an impetus, able to dramatise the architect's political convictions and the urgency of his own tasks.

More precisely, Le Corbusier imputed a revolutionary function to war and considered revolutions per se—i.e. revolutions characterised by political, economic, and social dimensions—to effect devastating kinds of action. This was his vision when he was still a young architect enrolled in the Swiss school

that had sent him to Germany with the mandate to study architecture and the industrial arts, or when, in later years, he attempted to convince the industrial elite of France to assign him the task to which he aspired: organising the nation's architectural production in the wake of the First World War. Even if Le Corbusier did not at all share the Futurists' radically redemptive vision of the war, he thought, as they did, that warfare on a national scale had taken over the best that political revolution had to offer: war had absorbed the latter's dynamic potential, that is, revolution's vocation to accelerate time while neutralising revolution's socio-economic effects.² The anti-materialist basis of his political thinking convinced him that war was a kind of *Aufhebung* of the political action; it was above all a technological and moral revolution, capable of intensifying technological progress, imposing the authority of the victor, forging hardened individualities, and extracting the nation from its bourgeois torpor. Moreover, war ultimately conferred unity to the people by undermining class divisions. Conversely, it was Le Corbusier's most intimate conviction that political revolution in France or Russia had shown its dispersing effects in all spheres of human activity. In sum, if war compressed and hastened time, revolution diluted and finally blocked it. It was a matter of nationalism on the one hand and the absorption of revolution by means of war on the other: these were the two main ideological axes that underpinned Le Corbusier's antagonistic interpretation of architecture in France and Germany as of 1910.

Double Bind: time, style, and *paragone*

When Charles Eduard Jeanneret arrived in Germany in 1910, he filled his notebooks with reflections that speak of his admiration for his discoveries: industrial or institutional architecture, *garden cities*, and schools whose imposing style, spirit of functional rationalism, and subordination to a systematic and global logic filled him with enthusiasm.³ In a letter written to his French mentor Auguste Perret in August 1910, Jeanneret states:

The Germany of architecture is worth knowing. For the movement is general and the men who lead it generous. They are a bit like philosophers, insofar as they study the complex problems of modern life and, by means of their largely utilitarian art, bring a bit more comfort [*bien être*] and some *joie de vivre* to life in general and not [only] to a single gentleman millionaire.⁴

Two years later, in a seventy-four-page report published under the title *Étude sur le mouvement d'art décoratif en Allemagne* (*A Study on the Decorative Art Movement in Germany*), Le Corbusier contended that the war of 1870 had given the German 'organism' its 'concentration' and its 'unification' which underpinned the country's architectural blossoming (Fig. 1).⁵ The colossal character of the architecture produced in the Wilhelmine period in Berlin seemed to him to be the quasi-physiognomic expression of German national pride:

[Germany] was stupefied, and then enchanted, then proud, conceited. She organized herself, spread out, blossomed, inflated, thereby objectively affirming herself as a new, considerable power; she proved this by means of fantastic constructions of warships, caserns, formidable arsenals, and gigantic palaces, disproportioned, without measure. In the realm of art, such a building hydroypsis produced architects who were briskly uprooted from their peaceful bourgeoisism.⁶

Never contesting the legitimacy of Germany's architectural conceit, Le Corbusier even went as far as claiming that Germany had successfully been able to convert itself into a 'beauty with a force of character' [*beauté à force de caractère*].

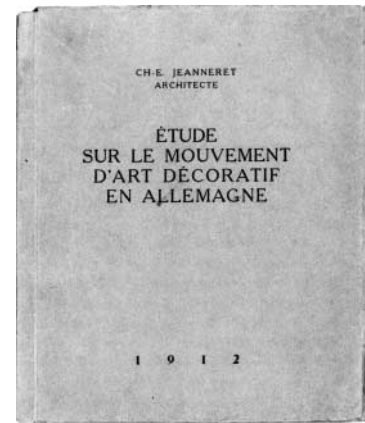


Fig. 1. Charles-Eduard Jeanneret, *Étude sur le mouvement d'art décoratif en Allemagne* [*A Study on the Decorative Art Movement in Germany*] (Cover), La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1912.

2. Unlike the Futurists, Le Corbusier did not exalt war for war's sake, but was very interested in its positive effects. For a study of the relations between war and revolution during that period, see Zeev Sternhell, with Mario Sznajder, and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1994).

3. Le Corbusier (Ch.-E. Jeanneret), *Les voyages d'Allemagne. Carnets*, ed. Giuliano Gresleri (Electa/Fondation Le Corbusier: Milan/Paris, 1987).

4. Le Corbusier, *Lettres à ses Maîtres I. Lettres à Auguste Perret*, ed. Marie-Jeanne Dumont (Ed. du Linteau: Paris, 2002), p. 51.

5. Charles-Eduard Jeanneret, *Étude sur le mouvement d'art décoratif en Allemagne* (La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1912), p. 12.

6. Jeanneret, *Étude*, p. 13.

7. Jeanneret, *Etude*, p. 11–12. In 1911, while Le Corbusier was in Germany, the Carl Vinnen Controversy arose. Carl Vinnen was the instigator of the racist, and more precisely antisemitic, protest, launched by some German artists against what they described as the omnipresence of French art in the public and private collections of their country. Although Le Corbusier never mentioned this affair, one may legitimately suppose he was aware of it. It might even have strengthened his conviction about the natural superiority of French Art. See Carl Vinnen, *Ein Protest Deutscher Künstler* (Eugen Diederichs Verlag: Jena, 1911). See also Peter Paret, *German Encounters with Modernism, 1840–1945* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001); Maria Stavrinaki, 'Le prédicat selon Marc. De l'ensauvagement à l'ascèse,' in Franz Marc, *Ecrits et correspondances*, ed. M. Stavrinaki, French trans. Thomas de Kayser (Ensb-a: Paris, 2007), pp. 34–43.

8. Jeanneret, *Etude*, pp. 11–12.

9. On the nationalisation of the Gothic by German Historians of Art, and in particular Wilhelm Worringer, see Magdalena Bushart, 'Changing Times, Changing Styles: Wilhelm Worringer and the Art of his Epoch', in Neil H. Donahue (ed.), *Invisible Cathedrals. The Expressionist Art History of Wilhelm Worringer* (The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press: Philadelphia, 1995), pp. 69–85.

10. Francesco Passanti, 'Architecture: Proportion, Classicism and Other Issues', in Stanislaus von Moos and Arthur Rüegg (eds.), *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier. Applied Arts, Architecture, Painting, Photography, 1907–1922* (Yale University Press: New Haven/London, 2002), pp. 69–97; Winfried Nerdinger, 'Standard et type: Le Corbusier et l'Allemagne 1920–27', in S. von Moos (ed.), *L'Esprit Nouveau. Le Corbusier et l'industrie* (Les Musées de la ville de Strasbourg: Strasbourg, 1987), pp. 44–53.

11. Le Corbusier, letter to Auguste Perret, 29 August 1910, Le Corbusier, *Lettres à ses Maîtres I*, p. 50.

However, two intimately bound up factors undermined – sometimes tacitly, sometimes openly – the young architect's enthusiasm, namely, the limitation of the German triumph solely to domains linked to the sphere of production (i.e. the applied arts, architecture, and urbanism), and that triumph's historically unprecedented nature. As a result, the 'revolutionary' character of German production did not only stem from the galloping rhythm of its progress, but from its 'ex nihilo' provenance as well. According to Le Corbusier, it was not only historically determined material conditions that had impeded Germany from blossoming culturally before 1870. In fact, a much deeper reason was given: a natural, and thus timeless, disposition deprived that country of its own form of creativity. Thus, he declared without ambiguity that in truth Germany had a 'small artistic genius'.⁷ In a nutshell, Germany had a coherence by default, a negative coherence which is characterised by the fact that Germany had always absorbed the style of other nations, most notably those of France and Italy. Jeanneret wrote in this respect:

During this time, Germany, which was not formed, vegetated [*vivotait*] and did not express anything; she had been copying France for centuries... until the War. She was designated more than any other to accept bourgeoisism: she cultivated it to its most definitive expressions, for she had no tradition and her lack of organization paralyzed her own inventive genius... In fact, after having led the French gothic [style] to atrophy, Germany only expressed, after the Renaissance... the Baroque [style] stemming from Italy, and then the Louis XIV, XV, XVI [styles] from France, and then the Empire [style] from Paris and at last the Restoration [style] stemming again from France.⁸

If, for Wilhelm Worringer, the gothic style had burgeoned in France but had only attained its genuine climax in Germany, which was more disposed to explore the metaphysical potential attributed to this style, Le Corbusier maintained, conversely, that the Nordic absorption of the gothic style corresponded to the former's decline.⁹ At the same moment in which German art historians, critics, and artists attributed the originality of both the Gothic and Baroque styles to Germany – a nationalist attribution based on what they perceived as their differences with respect to 'Latin' Classicism – Le Corbusier presented these two styles as the respective fruits of France and Italy. In the final analysis, the totality of the styles in history had blossomed, according to the architect, elsewhere than in Germany. However, Francesco Passanti and Winfried Nerdinger have shown that Le Corbusier's 'Latin' Classicism was consolidated on the other side of the Rhine, by means of the confrontation of his Ruskinian education with the architecture of such figures as Peter Behrens and Heinrich Tessenow.¹⁰ The architect's ideological mechanism did not simply allow him to efface his debts, but it permitted him above all to reverse their meaning: did he not believe that Germany, without its proper style, was compelled to seek one from the Other? In keeping with this idea he wrote to Perret: 'When I admire Germany I always feel more Latin. But when I open my eyes I am compelled to see that this country's architects are our masters today.'¹¹ In other words, the exploit of Germany consisted in the fact that it was able to explore the essence of the Latin better than France itself. This is how what was acquired by experience could triumph over what was innate, and how the contingency of history could inflect the course prescribed by nature. Since Germany was both powerful and united, it could thrive in the domains of art and culture; conversely, Le Corbusier sought to demonstrate that despite its congenital gifts, France was incapable of overcoming the confusion that resulted from the country's original sin, namely the Revolution of 1789.

In sum, the young Le Corbusier seemed to have witnessed a contradictory process in Germany. There, he not only experienced firsthand the undeniable rise of architecture and the decorative arts, but also the irreversible dependence of that nation on French art. Le Corbusier visualised this contradiction by means of a metaphor, which speaks eloquently of disproportion: German art is like an immense flower sprouting from a very small root.¹² Significantly, the tension between respect and condescendence was subtle, almost imperceptible, in the notebooks he kept during his German trip, but it became explicit in his 1912 *Study*. By virtue of their submission to two distinct temporalities, these hastily jotted notes and the above-mentioned report, written later and over a longer period of time, address the heterogeneity of their author's thought differently. For the notes were imbued with the impressions of admiration the German 'domination' forcefully made on their author, while the *Study* allowed him to assimilate and smooth out the contradiction between objectivity and subjectivity, the agnosticism of power and a national predilection, ephemeral history and eternal nature.

But one should also add that there are clear repercussions of Le Corbusier's double bind in the geographical division he established between the arts, a division that can be implicitly derived from his writings: Le Corbusier opposed the decorative arts and architecture on the one hand, which are more appropriate to German reality, to art and its autonomous forms on the other, by which he meant the art developed in France. He no doubt thought that when the arts are related to production, they were easily made to obey a historically determined political power that was exerted from the outside, in a 'dictatorial' manner, as he claimed.¹³ In regard to the autonomy of French art, it was extremely ambivalent. French art's nonchalance with respect to all external powers was due to its unconditional authenticity, to the fatal spontaneity of its creativity. Emerging from the artist's genius, French art thereby succumbed, *nolens volens*, to the determination of the national genius, a fact which partly explains such art's sustained quality throughout the nineteenth century. Yet at the same time, the autonomy of French art was the pure, negative product of the political liberalism originating in the Revolution of 1789. The aporetic status of its autonomy thus resided in the fortunate fact that French art was in essence refractory to any dictatorial will without being able, nonetheless, to produce the collective form for which it was naturally destined, given the absence of a favourable political regime. Stanislaus von Moos has studied this national paragon that underpins the young Le Corbusier's division of the arts.¹⁴ To explain Le Corbusier's increasingly affirmed preference for France, Von Moos has argued that the architect profoundly identified with the figure of the artist, while taking his leave, progressively, from the Arts & Crafts model which he adopted in Switzerland through his mentor L'Eplattenier and which he would later encounter in Germany. The fact is undeniable (and Von Moos has demonstrated it better than anyone else writing on the architect), for Le Corbusier, as well as for Adolf Loos before him, no human activity could attain the spiritual elevation achieved by art.¹⁵ Nevertheless, it bears mentioning that Le Corbusier did not solely intend to reign over the sphere of transcendence or to remain in margins of society. Even before the end of the First World War, his project was to effect an ideal synthesis between production and freedom, between functional architecture and art. In this light, the tension between a Germany that was productive materially and a spiritually autonomous France was but the first moment of the synthesis in

12. 'It is an accidental fact that leads today in Germany to the disproportion between the tiny roots and the enormous flower,' in Jeanneret, *Etude*, p. 13.

13. Jeanneret, *Etude*, p. 13.

14. Von Moos, 'Voyages en zigzag', *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier*, pp. 23–43.

15. Von Moos, 'Le Corbusier et Loos', *L'Esprit nouveau. Le Corbusier et l'industrie*, pp. 123–133.

16. In this sense, *Esprit nouveau* and Purism would be later the expressions of the German and French heritage of Le Corbusier.

17. Jeanneret, *Etude*, p. 9.

18. The sole example in Le Corbusier's analysis of a supposed French artistic decadence seems to be the Empire Style – an exception due, one is tempted to assume, to the Great Man hidden behind it.

question – the scission before 'reconciliation'. After 1918, France would be called upon to produce the synthesis between productive efficiency and the proud independence of art. But what France was called upon to produce at a collective level, Le Corbusier sought to carry out at a personal level, for he wished to become both an architect and a painter – 'somewhat of a philosopher' who would study, like Behrens, Fischer, or Tessenow, 'the problems of modern life', but somewhat of an artist as well, who would aspire to break free from the prosaic life by means of artistic contemplation.¹⁶

Class Propriety and Impropriety, Temporal Regimes of Art

The differences between German and French political regimes and innate dispositions also manifested themselves in terms of differing temporalities. Since French art possessed a great artistic genius, it developed throughout the centuries according to a calm, confident, and imperturbable evolutionary rhythm until the brutal outburst of the 1789 Revolution. Le Corbusier wrote in this respect:

Until the Revolution, the Arts, which are a faithful expression of economic and political life, as well as of the psychological state of the people [*peuple*], rose gradually and without waning from the obscure middle-ages to the extremes of refinement and delicacy, according to an evolutionary process. Born from the people and for the people, they progressively became at that time the monopoly of the cultivated and rich classes. Revolution brings about complete upheaval. There are men in power—or who at least have the possibility of gaining it—who have received an incomplete education, who stem from the ignorant plebs. They occupy functions previously reserved to the overlords [*seigneurs*]. In the domain of Art, for example, such an inheritance became impossible for them to receive. But given that they were compelled to accept it, they fatally committed [an act of] impropriety. This impropriety was to be disastrous for Art.¹⁷

Thus, for Le Corbusier, artistic impropriety was above all related to class impropriety.¹⁸ By breaking the biological chain of aristocratic power, the bourgeoisie disrupted the regular flow of the process of inheritance and altered the natural course of evolution. In 1789, the process whereby political and artistic legacies were bequeathed by birthright was brutally halted. The bourgeoisie had no culture to pass down, for it had received no culture through a bloodline. Much like a missing link or a fragment, this class was cut off from the past and bereft of a future. Thus, French art went from a context of peaceful evolution to one of permanent revolution, from an organic model of inheritance to a mechanical model of disruption that involves gaps and shifts, from a cyclical conception of history to the obstinate discontinuity of time. One of the implications of this mutation in the temporal regime of history was that from then on the resemblance of French artworks to the art of France's forebears could only be latent and hidden. That such was the case is due to the fact that artists now had to address two contradictory requirements: to affirm their originality with respect to older forms while sustaining the ideal of national transcendence. However, an artist's originality was not supposed to affirm itself solely in diachronical terms, but also in terms of a synchronous model. It could be measured by means of a given individual's capacity to defy the common sense of his or her contemporaries. This was yet another aspect of the French context (and not the least) which the young Le Corbusier regretted when he was in Germany. By way of contrast, the antagonistic, dissent- and revolt-laden attitude adopted by France's most interesting artists seemed to him to be destructive in a country in which artists, politicians, industrialists, and merchants governed together.

One of the leading ideas that accompany the long history of opposition to the French Revolution has it that the 1789 Revolution gave rise to a form of

individualism without limits that favoured social dissolution and national decadence.¹⁹ Le Corbusier belonged to this tradition. More precisely, his thought belonged to the new, antirepublican right, a movement instigated by Louis de Bonald and Joseph de Maistre, but which really crystallised after 1870. Its main intellectual representatives were figures such as Ernest Renan, Hippolyte Taine, or the historian Fustel de Coulanges. In his masterly study of intellectual history, *La Crise allemande de la pensée française (1870–1914)* [The German Crisis in French Thought], Claude Dijéon has demonstrated that the French defeat – the result of the country’s internal dissolution which was to culminate in the *Commune* – favoured the development of a deeply conservative thought based on pessimism and intellectual rigidity.²⁰ There is no doubt that Le Corbusier took part in this tradition, except that to the logic of national concentration he opposed the more active logic of antagonism and productive imitation. He was particularly envious of the ‘public’ turn taken by German art, which contrasted severely with the ‘ivory tower’ of French art. The political content of this paragon between the arts was located precisely within this difference: architecture and the decorative arts belonged to the public domain (by virtue of their function and symbolic charge), while the free and mobile arts were linked to private passions. As a community-based art *par excellence*, architecture integrated both the crowds and the arts, whereas paintings functioned much like abstract citizens and autonomous individuals, limited by their frames and reduced to domestic or museum spaces. Having transposed a model of political revolution into the domain of art, French artists sought indefinitely to transgress established norms. At the same time, German artists defined such norms by means of the architectural projects and the objects of mass-consumption which they invented. German artists governed. This is the reason why Le Corbusier rejected the idealist revolution led by the French artists and preferred, as he said, the ‘economic and thus *practical* revolution’ of the Germans.²¹ Thus, one of the architect’s most important conclusions, which he arrived at while still in Germany, was the urgency for France to bring the destructive opposition between artists and society to an end, and to have the former take part in the management of power. Thus, Le Corbusier confirmed one of the main theses of Claude Dijéon, namely, that between 1895 and 1905 French intellectuals and artists ceased to regard Germany as the cradle of the Idea and of Science.²² Torn between admiration and concern, they would focus, from then onwards, on the acceleration of Germany’s economical development as it prevailed in industry and trade. This ‘material turn’ was favoured by the nation’s unification and its imperial regime; it was confirmed by the victory over France; and it was carefully conducted by a flawless political, economical, and artistic planning process.

Art as Social Alchemist

The rise of architecture and the decorative arts in Germany were the result of an ambitious national project whose climax was the creation of the Werkbund. Le Corbusier’s later ‘appeals’ to industrialists Michelin, Voisin, or Citroën were inspired by the German model, founded in 1907, in which industrialists, merchants, and artists formed an alliance. The young architect meticulously studied this alliance during his stay in Germany as well as in later years.²³ In essence, the Werkbund’s objectives were twofold: it sought social reconciliation on a national scale, and, at an international level, it strove to secure commercial domination for Germany. For the bourgeoisie, it aspired

19. Sternhell, *Les Anti-Lumières. Du XVIII siècle à la Guerre froide* (Fayard: Paris, 2006).

20. Claude Dijéon, *La crise allemande de la pensée française (1870–1914)* (Presses Universitaires de France: Paris, 1959).

21. Jeanneret, *Etude*, p. 13.

22. Dijéon, *La crise allemande de la pensée française*, p. 451sq.

23. Jeanneret, *Etude*, p. 13.

24. The bibliography dedicated to the Werkbund is very rich and interesting. For its political stakes, see for instance: Francesco Dal Co, 'On the Cultural Tradition of the Werkbund,' *Figures of Architecture and Thought. German architectural Culture, 1880–1920* (Rizzoli: New York, 1990), pp. 171–261; Mark Jarzombek, 'The Kunstgewerbe, the Werkbund, and the Aesthetics of Culture in the Wilhelmine Period', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 53, no. 7, March 1994, pp. 7–19; and more recently, Frederic J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture Before the First World War* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1996).

25. Jeanneret, *Etude*, pp. 43–44.

26. Jeanneret, *Etude*, pp. 43–44.

27. On the notion of 'surplus' in German architectural Expressionism (the equivalence between the surplus of labour, the cult and the ornament), see Stavriniaki, 'Dieu, l'art et le travail dans l'Allemagne des années vingt (De l'Alpine Architektur aux Tiller Girls)', *Les Cahiers du MNAM*, no 86, Winter 2003, pp. 60–81.

to achieve the reconciliation of the middle classes with industrial modernity by means of the progressive forming of a style whose coherence and ennobled form would be compatible with the irreversible conditions of machines.²⁴ For workers, the Werkbund conceived the famous theme of the 'spiritualisation' of labour: the spirit residing in forms that were conceived by artists and executed by workers was believed to make the latter forget their class interests in favour of a 'national' project. Ultimately, it was hoped that all these objectives—the formation of a style, social pacification, the psychological compromise with industrial culture – would allow Germany to make its presence felt in the global market.

Le Corbusier was fascinated by the systematic character of such a project, of which the AEG company seemed to him to be the perfect embodiment, for it admirably joined together art and power. He believed that the company itself was condensed in the figure of its artistic consultant, the architect Peter Behrens, in whose agency Le Corbusier would later work:

One can admire electrical plants, which are an integral architectural creation of our time—the site of an admirable sobriety and cleanliness in the middle of which superb machines contribute a grave and impressive note. Since then, moreover, arc lamps, pear-shaped switches, contacts... [and] the multiple heating and lighting appliances required by modern comfort have taken on a modest, sober, almost impersonal appearance... For Peter Behrens has designed all their forms, and not a single, visible piece of the building or the industry leaves AEG without first being reviewed by him.²⁵

The young architect reduced the coherence of AEG's style to the coherence of single person; more precisely, the style's coherence was the expression of a complete, total, and imperative power of decision. The artistic leader had enough freedom and authority to dictate the company's visible form in its entirety (Figs 2 and 3). For Le Corbusier, this meant that an authoritarian intervention, effected from above, could compensate for the absence of objective conditions for spontaneously creating style from below: 'The happy outcome of such an authoritarian intervention of art could have produced lamentable results had it not, precisely, found the right man. But that does not entirely account for Peter Behrens's role: he has a hand in all new factories being constructed by AEG... His most recent factory, the Turbinen-Halle, has even been described by some as a 'Kathedrale der Arbeit' (Fig. 4).²⁶ After all, the cathedrals of the modern era, which are dedicated to the cult of work, were not the spontaneous products of a collective effort, as is the case in legends surrounding Christian cathedrals. Much to the contrary, they were the results of an economic and political will seeking to impose, from above, that which the 'bottom' could not achieve alone: 'happiness by means of work'. Political and economic power thus turned to artists in order to consolidate the propaganda of this new religion. Artists like Peter Behrens became the indispensable mediators between the top and the bottom. For their forms – the factories which they drew as well as the meaningful products which were manufactured there – were devised to effect the alchemic transfiguration of labour into happiness, of 'surplus' performance into a cult, of the materialist conflict into reconciliation of the spirit.²⁷ These were the terms which summarised the waste represented by French art: by refusing to cooperate, artists and political and economic power instances were simply foreclosing the possibility of effecting such an alchemic process for France. Thus, while Le Corbusier was in Germany, the image of his French mentor Auguste Perret came to mind by way of contrast. As Jean-Louis Cohen has aptly noted, for the young Le Corbusier Perret – whose modernist

ELEKTRISCHE TEE- UND WASSERKESSEL
NACH ENTWÜRFEN VON PROF. PETER BEHRENS



Messing vernickelt, glatt
runde Form

PL. Nr.	Inhalt ca. l.	Gewicht ca. kg.	Preis Mk.
3580	0,75	0,75	18.—
3590	1,25	1,0	21.—
3600	1,75	1,1	23.—

Die Kessel werden auch ohne elektrische Heizung und Rohre geliefert und erhalten dann zum Unterschied von Obigen als Zusatz den Buchstaben „n“, also z. B. 3580n. Die Preise betragen ohne Heizung Mark 8.— weniger.



Messing glatt, matt
runde Form

PL. Nr.	Inhalt ca. l.	Gewicht ca. kg.	Preis Mk.
3583	0,75	0,75	18.—
3593	1,25	1,0	22.—
3603	1,75	1,1	23.—

ALLGEMEINE ELEKTRICITÄTS-GESELLSCHAFT
ABT. HEIZAPPARATE

Fig. 2. Peter Behrens, Advertising for electric kettles, AEG, 1909.

struggle was never heeded by the decision-makers in France — finally represented the perfect anti-Behrens. Le Corbusier wrote to Perret:

Believe me when I say that I have thought of you many times over the course of these past few weeks as I visited some fifteen cities, for as I realized that in this Germanic country anything can be produced—including the wildest of dreams—I recalled those beautiful projects which you sometimes entertained and which today's France will not allow you to produce. And I then regretted that you are linked to a Paris that ignores its most living forces and which only offers sacrifices to the God of formulas and routines, if only because too many false priests perpetuate errors in the schools in which the youth is formed. When I admire Germany I always feel more Latin.²⁸

To conclude, when the young Le Corbusier left Germany, he carried a wealth of ideas along with him. First among these was the idea of an architecture working jointly with power and for power: technological and economic progress, social peace, and the moral order were to be the objectives achieved by means of sensible forms. He also brought back the image of an 'architect' whom he called 'transcendent' due to this figure's total mastery over industrial production and to his 'authority', which was to function in 'dictatorial' terms instead of diluting itself in the labyrinth of modern bureaucracy. Having taken very precise notes on the manner in which architecture's spatial configurations were to facilitate an increase in productivity, Le Corbusier also carried with him the idea of the rationalisation of production.²⁹ As well, his German experience and, more notably, his visit of the AEG convinced him of the irreversible role of machines in modern production. He foresaw that machines would ultimately completely reduce workers' initiatives in the process of labour. This conclusion was shocking to his then humanistic views, and such was still the case in 1917 when he read Frederick Winslow Taylor's book on the *Principles of the Scientific Management*, which was translated into French in 1913.³⁰ But in 1918, France's victory in industrial warfare would change his mind, for Taylorism was clearly a method well adapted to survival. All historians who have written on the young Le Corbusier's trip to Germany have noted that the ideas that determined the entire course of the architect's

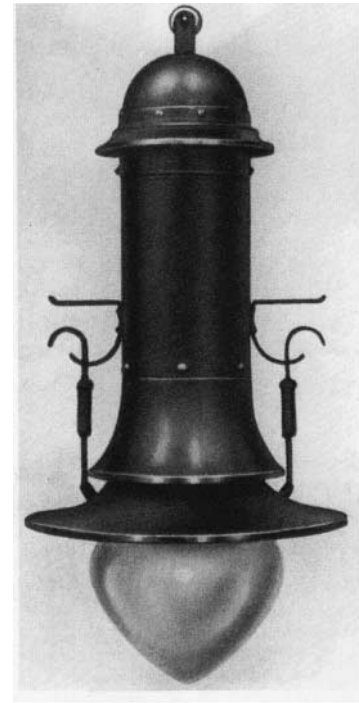


Fig. 3. Peter Behrens, Lamp, AEG, 1907.

28. Le Corbusier, Letter to Perret, 29 August 1910, *Lettres à ses Maîtres I*, p. 50. In his recent study *France ou Allemagne?*, Jean-Louis Cohen stresses the symmetry between two paternal figures in Le Corbusier's thought, namely Peter Behrens and Auguste Perret. See Jean-Louis Cohen, *France ou Allemagne? Un livre inédit de Le Corbusier* (Ed. de la MSH/Passerelles: Paris, 2009). The first historian who has explored the symmetrical relation of Perret and Behrens for Le Corbusier has been Francesco Passanti, 'Le Corbusier et le gratte-ciel', *Américanisme et modernité. L'idéal américain dans l'architecture* (EHESS/Flammarion: Paris, 1993), pp. 171–189.

29. See his *Carnets des Voyages d'Allemagne*.

30. On the importance of Taylorism in Le Corbusier's thought, see the classical article of Mary McLeod, 'Architecture or Revolution: Taylorism, Technocracy and Social Change', *Art Journal*, vol. XLIII, no. 2, 1983, pp. 132–147.



Fig. 4. Peter Behrens, Turbinenfabrik-AEG, Berlin, 1909.

career originated or at least were consolidated in that journey.³¹ But when ‘power’ changed hands, thereby resolving the tensions that tormented the young architect, Le Corbusier sought to conceal his debt to Germany not by means of silence, but rather by resorting to another defensive method: attack.

31. The bibliography dedicated to Le Corbusier’s stay in Germany is rich and interesting: Winfried Nerdinger, ‘Standard et type: Le Corbusier et l’Allemagne 1920–27’, *L’Esprit Nouveau. Le Corbusier et l’industrie*; Jean-Louis Cohen, *France ou Allemagne?*; Werner Oechslin, ‘Influences, Confluences et reniements’, in J. Lucan (ed.), *Le Corbusier. Une encyclopédie* (Centre Georges Pompidou: Paris, 1987), pp. 33–39; ‘Le Corbusier und Deutschland: 1910/1911’, *Moderne entwerfen. Architektur und Kunstgeschichte* (DuMont: Köln, 1999), pp. 173–191; S. von Moos, ‘Dar Fall Le Corbusier. Kreuzbestäubungen, Allergien, Infektionen’, in V. Magnano Lampugnani and R. Schneider (eds), *Expressionismus und Neue Sachlichkeit. Moderne Architektur in Deutschland 1900–1950* (Verlag Gerd Hatje: Stuttgart, 1994), pp. 161–183.

The Trophies of France

The 1918 French victory allowed Le Corbusier to reverse the themes and roles that he had previously ascribed to France and Germany. In *Après le Cubisme* (*After Cubism*), the purist manifesto which the architect co-authored with painter Amédée Ozenfant in November 1918, such a reversal is explicitly addressed. Germany does not haunt this text merely as the ghost of a vanquished country. In fact, France’s characteristics – that is, those characteristics which France already demonstrated during the war and those which were to manifest themselves in the future – are almost the same as the ones Le Corbusier imputed to Germany’s success in the 1912 report. Thus, France’s new attributes are to be regarded rather as trophies. Jean-Louis Cohen has recently found the missing link in the genealogy that underpins Le Corbusier’s Franco-German rivalry: between the 1912 report and *Après le Cubisme*, that is, during the First World War, Le Corbusier set out to write a book entitled *France ou Allemagne?* (*France or Germany?*) with the backing of official French propaganda (Fig. 5). The disjunctive and exclusive ‘or’ in the title reproduces in book scale the war that was being waged on the scale of

history. Because the arts were fighting much like the nations from which they stemmed, there could only be one victor, and only one loser. Such a combat was not being fought by means of grandiloquent words, but by means of images:

Eight days ago, an idea came to mind which consists in creating the book-album which I've already told you about and which you encouraged me to produce: the Frenchman, the better one, the Kraut [*Boche*], the better one, page against page, with little text, and lots of illustrations. Some dates. I will probably go back twenty five years. . . . I will not only be of service to modern style by providing it with foundations; and [sic] I will quarrel with the Institut. And [I will] destroy the weapon of Krauthood [*Bochie*].³²

While face-to-face combat was disappearing due to the total effects of industrial war, Le Corbusier chose to expose the architectural performances of both countries 'page against page' in an unequivocal and heroic manner. Moreover, as per the logic of Darwinism, which was increasingly part of Le Corbusier's thought (no doubt in light of the war) the combat between the two nations was to be fought by the 'best' architectural specimens. Furthermore, as a nationalist modernist, Le Corbusier's war was not only waged against the Germans but also against those who held conservative views in France. Their near-sighted nationalism made them identify modernism with the German invasion. But for Le Corbusier, the vision of critics such as Camille Mauclair was not penetrating enough to recognize the familiar when it was hidden or deformed.³³ In fact, if the outcome of the war waged in the trenches remained uncertain for a long period of time, the fate of the architect's image war was preordained. He thus wrote to Perret: 'What I felt this year in Paris, that is, the consciousness of what France accomplished in the arts of the twentieth century, that is everything, or almost everything. As always, the others were the administrators, those who pillage. And worse, having raped, they unmarked and re-expedited your own products back to you, unrecognizable. So much so that they have disgusted many people and caused a dangerous reaction.'³⁴ The war made Le Corbusier wary of German art, which not only appropriated foreign styles, as it had always done, but shipped them back to their own creators after having disfigured them. As a result, the process of German expansionism, which is both political and artistic, was guilty of the crime of denaturing the 'French style' (modernism) given the absence of any genetic link, and of having impeded, by means of that very deformation, the unanimous recognition and adoption of such a style by the people who created it. This amounted to stating that the blame for France's chauvinistic reaction to the new art was to be laid, ultimately, on Germany. Le Corbusier was insinuating that pan-Germanism, which functions by means of a process of absorption and expansion, had not allowed France to achieve a national consensus around a native style. From then on, the tone was given: as Kenneth Silver has argued, the post-war aesthetic objective would be to foster a sacred Union between the 'left' and the 'right' wings of art based on a unanimously accepted style, a style of the *juste milieu* that recalls Jean Cocteau's contemporaneous efforts when conceiving *Parade*.³⁵

France's modernist identity would be one of Le Corbusier's recurrent themes after the war, alongside the other grand theme of the purist manifesto and of *Esprit Nouveau*: labour.³⁶ Le Corbusier exclaimed to Ozenfant:

The war being over, everything organizes itself, everything becomes clear and purifies itself; factories are being built, nothing remains what it was before the war: the great competition has tried everything, and it has brought an end to senile methods and imposed in their stead those which the fight had shown to be the better ones.³⁷



Fig. 5. Le Corbusier, manuscript *France ou Allemagne?* (1915–1916), Le Corbusier Archives, Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris.

32. Le Corbusier, Letter to A. Perret, 30 June 1915, *Lettres à ses Maîtres I*, pp. 150–151.

33. On the nationalist antimodernist reactions in France during the Great War, see for instance Christopher Green, *Cubism and its Enemies. Modern Movements and Reaction in French Art, 1916–1928* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1987); Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914–1925* (Princeton University Press/Thames and Hudson: Princeton, 1989).

34. Le Corbusier, Letter to August Perret, 30 June 1915, *Lettres à ses Maîtres I*, pp. 150–151.

35. Kenneth Silver analyses extensively this point in the third chapter of his *Esprit de Corps*.

36. Jean-Louis Cohen has rightly observed that many important ideas associated to Purism, such as the return to order after disorder, and the importance of work and of social consensus after experimentations and revolt are already expressed in his book project *France ou Allemagne?* It is possible to extend this genealogy back to the 1912 Report on Decorative Arts in Germany. In regard to Purism, see the various texts of Françoise Ducros and especially *Esprit Nouveau: le Purisme à Paris, 1918–1925*, ed. Carol S. Eliel and Françoise Ducros (Musée de Grenoble, 2001).

37. Amédée Ozenfant et Ch.-E. Jeanneret, *Après le Cubisme* (Altamira: Paris, 1999), p. 21.

38. On the temporalisation of History, see Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2002).

39. Ozenfant et Jeanneret, *Après le Cubisme*, p. 22.

Factories rose above France much like the ‘Cathedrals of work’ had done so in Germany. The 1918 victory proved that French society was capable, finally, of taking on a great deal of work and to function once more as a collective entity, as a whole. This stress on what was ‘collective’ drove the two purists to turn against Cubism, which in their eyes now only represented another *ism*. As such, Cubism expressed not only what Reinhart Koselleck has called ‘the temporalization of history’ and, by the same token, its own ephemeral character, but also the agitated quest for transgression and originality.³⁸ Or, to put it otherwise, it represented that brand of individualism which France had long endured. Cubism was made obsolete by the war by the sheer fact that the latter heralded the end of the time of ‘protest’ and inaugurated a time of ‘sacred union’ which was to be prolonged once the war was over:

Today’s art, which was once an avant-garde art, is now the art of the rearguard, of before the war, an art of a hedonistic [*jouisseuse*] society. The art of before the great trial did not possess enough life to fortify those without an occupation, or to strike the interest of those who are active. That society was bored because the direction [*directive*] of life was too uncertain, because no great collective movement compelled those who could work to go to the workplace and tempted those who could afford not to work to get to work. [It was] a time of strikes, of demands and protests in which art itself was but an art of protest.³⁹

Engendered by the war, the ‘great collective current’ was to be prolonged during peacetime. The war had channeled the masses – i.e. those at the forefront and at the rearguard of society – and consolidated a precious knowledge-based capital related to planning and production. After having won the materials war, France had to win the war of construction: the war over France’s internal reconstruction and domination of the world market. To achieve such ends, it was necessary that the individualism prevalent in the pre-war period be permanently eradicated, in all its guises. This newly acquired capacity for success in matters pertaining to ‘consensus’ was the most precious of trophies which France took away from Germany during the Great War. In 1918, the era of individualism and revolutionary dissolution, which was inaugurated in 1789, was about to end.

Purist Eternity: Classicism, Taylorism, and Social Darwinism

Purist painting depicted future reality, which was to be produced by means of the consensual labour of French workers, in terms of a classical, timeless ideal that contained none of the contradictions that prevailed in reality. In purist still-lives, the division of functions to be shared by humans was sublimated and rendered as ‘order’. Suspended in a weightless space deprived of air – the space of eternity – purist objects absorbed and softened the fractions of engineer Taylor’s chronometer (Figs 6 and 7). The imbrication of Le Corbusier’s post-war ideological mechanism was complex, but the coherence and exactness of its operation is impressive. It was comprised of interconnections between elements stemming from Classicism, Taylorism, and Darwinism, which made it possible to articulate such a heterogeneous theory around the concept of ‘selection’, the true pivot of Le Corbusier’s theory. By selecting what was best among the particular forms history – both natural and human – had to offer, the method of combination was ultimately a mix of Classicism and Taylorism. If the former selected what was most universal or ‘beautiful’ in nature or history (or at least had been), the latter’s scientific methodology allowed one to study labour in terms of the minute observation of the gestures of workers, which were selected

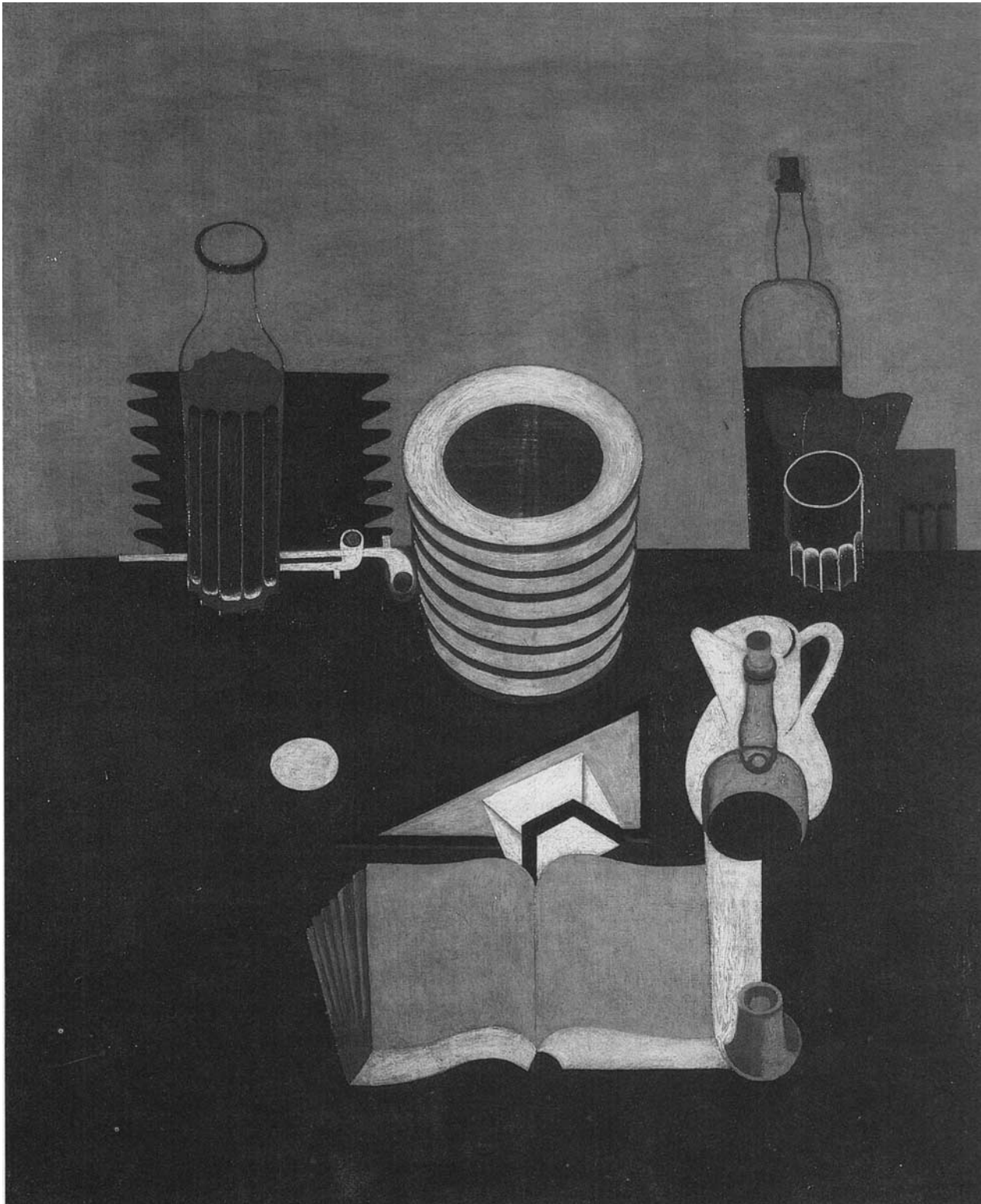


Fig. 6. Jeanneret/Le Corbusier, *Nature morte à l'oeuf*, 1919, oil on canvas, 100 × 81 cm. Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris.

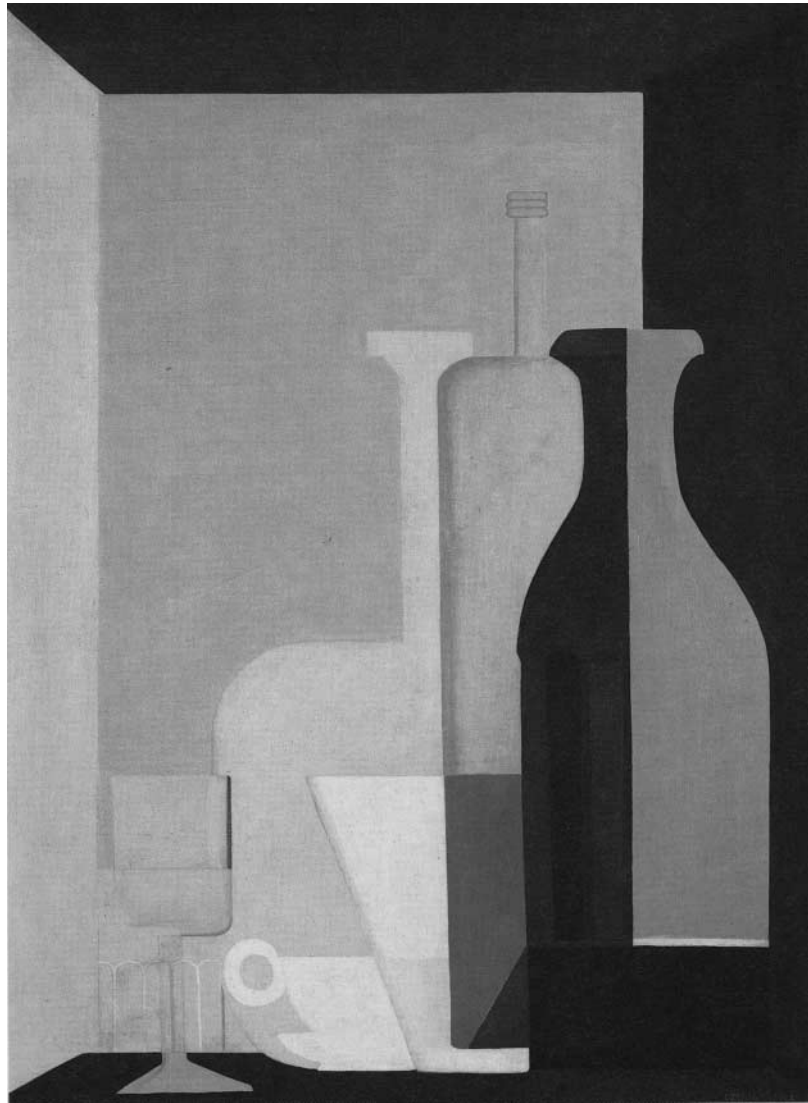


Fig. 7. Amédée Ozenfant, *Flacon, guitare, verres et bouteilles à la table verte*, 1920, oil on canvas, 81 × 100 cm. Basel, Kunstmuseum.

40. On the rationalisation of labour, see Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor. Energy, Fatigue and The Origins of Modernity* (The University of California Press: Berkeley, 1992).

41. On the aesthetical and ideological uses of the 'classic', see Salvatore Settis, *Futuro del 'classico'*, (Giulio Einaudi: Torino, 2004).

42. On the notion of 'standard' and the Darwinism of Le Corbusier's thought, see S. von Moos, 'Standard und Elite – Le Corbusier, die Industrie und der *Esprit Nouveau*', in T. Buddensieg and H. Rogge (eds), *Die nützliche Künste* (Berlin, 1981), pp. 306–323.

by experts for being the most productive.⁴⁰ Ultimately, the final diagram of the process of labour was as little a function of human organic nature or empirical reality as the abstract projections of the classical ideal had been. But what was classical was also regarded as the style most suited for survival. In this regard, Classicism could be translated as a kind of aesthetic Darwinism.⁴¹ Le Corbusier's famous juxtaposition of the image of the Parthenon and the automobile in 'Des yeux qui ne voient pas' ('Eyes that Do not See') is no doubt partly motivated by this 'aptitude': what was classical imposed itself in terms of time's verticality, whereas what was standardised dominated time's horizontality (Fig. 8). Better yet, there is a chiasmus between the classical and the standardised which had not escaped Le Corbusier's attention: the classical was a standard of time, whereas the standardised, purified and universally imposing, became what was classical on the marketplace.⁴² The relations between Taylorism and Darwinism were numerous. Taylorism proved its Darwinism by its constituent principles, one of which was the qualitative distribution of functions according to each individual's

aptitudes.⁴³ Le Corbusier explains: ‘Industry has led to the piece manufactured in series; machines work in intimate collaboration with man [*l’homme*]; the selection of intelligences is done with an imperturbable assurance [*sécurité*]: manoeuvres, workers, quartermasters, engineers, directors, administrators, each is in his proper place; and he who wears the clothes of an administrator will not be manoeuvring for long, for all functions are accessible.’ Generally speaking, much like Classicism, Taylorism had taken over after a merciless struggle. The ‘Great Trial’ that was the war did not simply aid in the selection process of nations, but it had also selected methods, thereby eliminating those which were ‘senile’ and allowing for the survival of more intelligent and useful ones. Taylorism was obviously part of this process: ‘The current evolution of work leads, by means of the useful, to the synthesis of order. One has defined it as Taylorism, but this was done in a pejorative sense. In truth, what was at stake was nothing more than the intelligent exploitation of scientific discoveries. Instinct, uncertainty, or empirical [methods] have been replaced by the scientific principles of analysis, by organization and classification.’⁴⁴

The Two Faces of Verticality: Power and Mysticism/Being and Appearing

Taylorism thus implied a *high-level* organisation of empirical knowledge that stemmed from the *bottom*: engineers chose, stylised, and reassembled workers’ scattered gestures. They dispossessed them of their own experience, only to expedite it back to them in an unrecognisable, alienated form.⁴⁵ This kind of verticality was not a problem for Le Corbusier, who regarded it as the elementary principle of the organisation of nature and society: ‘Natural phenomena arise in terms of a pyramid, as a hierarchy: the axes are at the top; below them the lesser, inferior qualities come in waves that gradually spread out. . . . The pyramid is the expression of hierarchy. Hierarchy is the law of the organized world, in nature as well as in humans.’⁴⁶ The first text which Le Corbusier penned concerning German architecture after 1918 reproached such architecture precisely for its verticality. It was entitled *Curiosité? Non: Anomalie! (Curiosity? No: Anomaly!)* and was published in 1921 in the ninth issue of *Esprit Nouveau*. Here, Le Corbusier questions ‘the systematic use of the vertical in Germany’. He adds: ‘All German architecture (which the youth of France finds impressive) is based on an error: appearance. In architecture such an error is fatal. The systematic use of the vertical in Germany is a kind of mysticism, a mysticism for the things of physics, the poison of German architecture. The Germans wanted their architecture to be one of the most active weapons of pan-Germanism.’⁴⁷ ‘Appearance’ consists above all in the use of the vertical as a symbol of power in a Germany in which misery was pervasive. Once again, Germany receded to disproportion, but this time the large flower supported by a very small root was the manifestation of a political appearance; it was thus entirely illegitimate. The German disproportion even demonstrated Germany’s boundless political ambitions, or the threat that it posed and continued to pose for other nations. The physiognomy of German architecture had completely changed: what seemed to be legitimately colossal – pride – now became a grotesque pose, a pathetic seeming. The only thing that rightfully belonged to Germany, its authentic ‘being’, was its mysticism, its quest for transcendence and religion. This is why the only verticality Le Corbusier attributed to Germany was a negative one.

The German defeat had radically changed the architect’s appreciation of the ‘cathedrals of work’. The man who had previously admired the

43. On Taylorism, see Charles S. Maier, ‘Between Taylorism and Technocracy: European Ideologies and the Vision of Industrial Productivity in the 1920s’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1970, pp. 27–61; Judith A. Merkle, *Management and Ideology. The Legacy of the International Scientific Management* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1980); Special Issue of *Recherches: Le Soldat du travail. Guerre, fascisme et taylorisme*, Murard et Zylberman (eds), no. 32/33, September 1978, pp. 95–134. And for a study examining the impact of Taylorism and Fordism on Architecture, see *Américanisme et Modernité*, ed. Jean-Louis Cohen, Hubert Damisch (EHESS/Flammarion: Paris, 1993).

44. Ozenfant et Jeanneret, *Après le Cubisme*, pp. 43–44.

45. In regard to this appropriation, see Eric Michaud, *Théâtre au Bauhaus (Âge d’homme: Lausanne, 1978)*.

46. Le Corbusier, *L’art décoratif d’aujourd’hui*, p. 16.

47. Le Corbusier-Saugnier, ‘Curiosité? Non, anomalie!’, *Esprit Nouveau*, no. 9, June 1921, pp. 1016–1017.

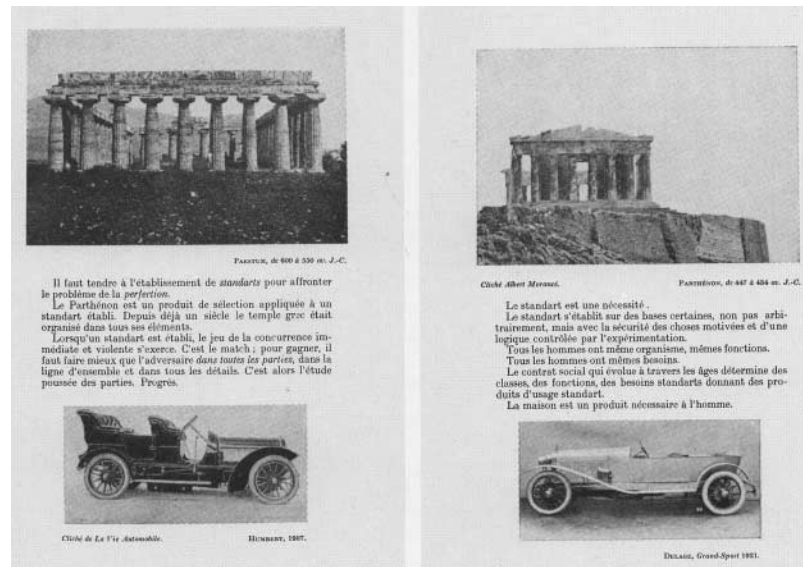


Fig. 8. Le Corbusier, Des yeux qui ne voient pas... III: Les Autos.

48. Robert Delaunay, Letter to Franz Marc, April 1913, see F. Marc, *Ecrits et correspondances*, p. 482.

Turbinen-Halle's capacity to organise production by means of the spatial configuration of its interior and the sobriety and classical authority of its façade now held that that plant succumbed to a very German brand of 'mysticism'. Much like Robert Delaunay, who wrote to Franz Marc before the First World War: 'The most interesting young Germans are [characterized by] that liveliness [*enjouement*] or rather mystical lethargy [*engourdissement*] that paralyses and hinders life,' Le Corbusier held that the mysticism of the architectural forms of Germany 'poisoned' 'physical things' or their function.⁴⁸ The verticality of Behrens's factories – appearance – hindered the horizontal productivity of their output – their essence. According to Le Corbusier, the war was no doubt the most irrefutable proof of this state of affairs, and it was perhaps the direct result of the sin that was German 'appearance'. Was the defeat of Germany not played out in the back, in the famous 'battle of materials', as much as at the front?

To summarise, Le Corbusier regarded Germany as possessing a perverted kind of verticalism which was rooted in the country's specific nature and opposed to the healthy verticalism of France, which itself was anchored in the historicity of the capitalist mode of organising production and in the pyramid-like organisational structure of nature itself. The same arguments are mobilised in Le Corbusier's 1923 critique of the Bauhaus. In an anonymous text published in *Esprit Nouveau* and entitled 'Pédagogie', Le Corbusier reflected on the great international exhibition organised by the Bauhaus around the theme of the unity of art and technology. Le Corbusier distinguished between the pedagogical 'intention' of the Bauhaus, which was praiseworthy in itself, and its 'results', which were anything but positive. He held that Gropius was wrong in thinking that it was possible to give objects their forms from *above*:

The art of doing things well [*l'art du bien faire*]... develops itself in the worker during the process of industrial labor in successive echelons, by amassing attainments, by moving on to a higher level, in full awareness of one's trade and by means of a continuous practice of its procedures, and by means of that phenomenon of fecund experience that is born from labor itself, and by means of that kind of revelation that is born in the heart of the good worker. Doing things well stems from that deep mass that

pushes its elements of quality to the surface. It is an illusion to presuppose that such a deep mass can receive and absorb [its] sense of quality, [its] sense of doing things well, from above. Doing things well is the standard. What is standard is what is perfectly accomplished. Again, the standard emerges from the deep mass (economic, social, financial, technological causes). The standard is a resultant.⁴⁹

To put it otherwise, Gropius blindly pursued Behrens's vertical ascent as he attempted to impose from above that which could only be effected from below. No individual could escape the fatal circle of national destiny, the curse of 'appearing' that was carried by each German architect much like tragic heroes bore their destinies. And if before the First World War Le Corbusier deplored that fate of his mentor Perret when he compared him to Behrens, a total reversal was now effected when he compared himself to Gropius.

In the same issue of *Esprit Nouveau*, just a few pages before the critical text on the Bauhaus, Amédée Ozenfant reviewed *Vers une architecture (Towards an Architecture)*, a book which his friend and colleague Le Corbusier had just published. Ozenfant writes:

Le Corbusier correctly observes that the machine is a servant with normal forms but that Architecture, whose goal more often than not is to give us machines to be inhabited, is also an art. The goal of machines is to serve us; the goal of art is to move us and, by taking that path, to elevate us. This is why, after having shown the evolution of mechanical productions and that magnificent health the latter possess and which springs from the fact that their creation is not presided solely by fantasy, Le Corbusier speaks to us of pure art.⁵⁰

In other words, Le Corbusier kept apart what the Bauhaus combined. If the former distinguished between the forms stemming from machines and the sphere of pure art, the latter, it was claimed, would provide industry with 'nothing', that is, as Le Corbusier would write a few pages later, with 'decorators who are an undesirable and superfluous quantity'. In the Darwinist world, or more precisely, in the Taylorist world of after 1918, superfluous properties eliminated themselves, inasmuch as the factory and the market knew how to reject what could not be assimilated for their functioning. Things had clearly changed since the inception of the war. Before 1914, the same Le Corbusier had considered that Germany – even if it was deprived of its own artistic genius – was able to profit from its political and economic boom to provide the bottom what it lacked by taking from the top. Thus, an enormous flower was supported by a tiny root. But Le Corbusier was not ready to concede to a beaten Germany that which he had previously conceded to a powerful one. The beaten Germany tried in vain to impose the standards which it was incapable of producing in a spontaneous manner. Paradoxically, despite the fact that it belonged to the mechanical realm, the standard sprang much like 'organic' beings. It is as if the standard grew like a plant, not from the earth of course, but from each country's material conditions and from the capacities of their workers. Moreover, Le Corbusier held that the standard developed autonomously since its ultimate tribunal, the market, was free and self-regulating, like nature itself. Much like the war, the market would effect a selection process. According to Le Corbusier, it was the role of the 'market' – including production and consumption – to make revolutions. Here again, he was on the same wavelength as Adolf Loos, who had contested the power of isolated artists to impose artistic revolution, which could only be effected in an anonymous way, from below.⁵¹ Nonetheless, Le Corbusier did not take into account the fact that the standard was not engendered in a spontaneous manner by the workers, who did not have the least bit of control over the

49. Le Corbusier, 'Pédagogie', *Esprit Nouveau*, no. 19, December 1923, no page.

50. Ozenfant, 'Vers une architecture', *Esprit nouveau*, no. 19, no page.

51. Adolf Loos, 'Schulausstellung der Kunstgewerbeschule', (1897) quoted by S. von Moos in 'Le Corbusier et Loos,' *l'Esprit nouveau. Le Corbusier et l'industrie*, p. 125.

52. Le Corbusier, *Esprit nouveau*, no. 25, July 1924, no page.

53. On the Expressionist utopias, see *Die Briefe der Gläsernen Kette*, ed. by I. B. Whyte and R. Schneider (Ernst u. Sohn Verlag: Berlin, 1986); *Expressionist Utopias. Paradise, Metropolis, Architectural Fantasies*, ed. by Timothy Benson (California University Press: Los Angeles, 1993); M. Stavrinaki, *La Chaîne de verre. Une correspondance expressionniste* (Ed. de la Villette: Paris, 2009).

54. Von Moos, 'Dar Fall Le Corbusier. Kreuzbestäubungen, Allergien, Infektionen', *Expressionismus und Neue Sachlichkeit. Moderne Architektur in Deutschland 1900–1950*, pp. 161–183.

continuous process of their labour, but it was imposed in a perfectly deliberate manner by that vertical entity which, from the summit of the factory's pyramid, oversaw the selection process of gestures, initiatives, and forms.

Pathologies: Eternal Expressionism

Le Corbusier's last two critiques of German architecture relied once more on the theme of national mysticism. But now, such a theme was given an overtly and radically pathological character. The two texts he devoted to German architecture written in 1924 betray a bitter taste for racism if only because of the violence of their rhetoric and, notably, their use of biological metaphors. In issue 25 of *Esprit Nouveau*, Le Corbusier conceived a montage of newspaper cut-outs related to urbanism in which he integrated, at the very end, a commentary on Expressionist architecture. Once again, his demonstration was predicated on an opposition: i.e. the 'small beast' (*la petite bête*) that worked at the very core of the Germanic countries versus the Latin spirit who knew how to draw 'plans' in clear light. If Germany was hindered by regression, France was led by progress. And if France represented the Enlightenment, the Germany of Hermann Finsterlin and Bruno Taut was heading towards the abyss of hypnotism, or even folly:

The attachment one has to the small beast that is profoundly rooted in man, even though the spirit knows it, if it is led, to hover—this hypnotic attachment, here one finds it in Germanic countries that attempt to untangle the problem of the soul in the blackest of confusions. From the very bottom of one's being, the larvae, toads, and beasts that haunt the memory of the ages of the world's gestation awaken once more. One could already see them emerge in that malady of the spirit that preceded the war, in the work the sculptor Metzner and the architect Bruno Schmitz did for the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* (*Monument to the Battle of the People*) in Leipzig, that abominable vision stemming from forgotten nightmares. The larvae, toads, and beasts, there they are again in this new crisis of the spirit that follows the war: the astonishing dreams of Hermann Finsterlin (from Bavaria), whose viscous ejaculations recall submarine horrors or those of viscera or those of beasts' impure acts, and claim to make way for architectural gestures, and an attitude that is dear to our heart: and also the Plan itself, which is by essence the crystallization of the geometric order, order, that injunction of the spirit. . . . Bruno Taut, who made many more (and which it will be worthwhile to show) publishes houses in his magazine in which one finds the same twisted, distressing neurasthenia.⁵²

Obviously, Taut's and Finsterlin's monstrous Expressionism was the paroxysmal expression of Behrens's attitude: if the latter was regarded as perhaps having poisoned physical matter by means of his forms, the Expressionist fantasies of the former two architects were so poisoned in themselves that it was not even possible to build them.⁵³ With the intention to nuance this debate and to address the inherent nationalism in Le Corbusier's practice, Von Moos has argued that Le Corbusier's work is less concerned with voicing a strident kind of anti-Germanism than effecting a critique of a stylistic particularity which was Germanic, if only in an accessory manner: Expressionism. In support of his view, Von Moos cites the fact that *Esprit Nouveau* published the work of several Germans who shared a disposition to critique the Expressionist movement. Nevertheless, according to Le Corbusier, Expressionism was not an historical, and thus reversible, phenomenon; it was rather an important genetic element in the artistic inheritance of the German nation.⁵⁴

Such is the conviction that allows the architect to establish an ultimate genealogy of the German pathology in the last critique he penned for *Esprit*

Nouveau. This text was written under the pen-name Paul Boulard after Wasmuth Verlag had refused to publish the German translation of his work *Vers une architecture*. In virtue of its diachronic approach, this text comes back full circle to the 1912 report. Beginning with Holbein and German mediaeval cities, Le Corbusier's analysis spanned the work of George Grosz and Otto Dix, and included that of Hans Joseph Olbrich, Hans Poelzig, and Erich Mendelsohn. The essay's thirteen pages were preceded by a text by Walter Gropius, entitled 'Développement de l'esprit architectural moderne en Allemagne' ('Development of the Modern Architectural Spirit in Germany') and, importantly, by a statement of *Esprit Nouveau's* support of the Weimar Bauhaus, which the very conservative Thuringian government had decided to close. In his essay 'Allemagne...' Paul Boulard wished to demonstrate that the German nation's curse was its 'soul in waiting': it is as if the ellipsis in the title signified such a state of 'waiting', which was dangerous in itself and for others. As it aspired to something it neither was nor possessed, Germany fatally succumbed to mysticism in its forms and politics: pan-Germanism. Germany was fatally, irrevocably, or even resolutely stuck to the 'surface', to appearances, to the grotesque. The 'barbaric' origins of the Germans allow Boulard to make new use of the imaginary of the War. He thus established a parallel between passionate or terrifying artistic forms and old, recent, or future Germanic 'invasions'. But above all, the author practices the art of decontextualisation and montage to make his images convey what he conveyed with words. A drawing from *Die Auflösung der Städte* (The Dissolution of Cities) appeared alongside a drawing by George Grosz. Le Corbusier noted: Neurasthenia! Expressionism! Bruno Taut conceives temples in which humanity is to undress, plunge into purifying ponds and penetrate into a sacred space of another Grail! Taut's agitated quest for purification was contrasted by the filth that emanated from Grosz's drawing, which represented a naked woman next to an old man (Fig. 9).⁵⁵ Le Corbusier made use of the same process of decontextualisation when addressing the work of Dix. When Paul Boulard attempted to show the state of German morbidity, he inserted a drawing stemming from the anti-military cycle *Der Krieg* (The War) in which the artist had drawn a soldier's cadaver. But the architect-critic did not forget the Werkbund, for he knew of no flower that was more artificial. The war had demonstrated the fallacious character of the Alliance's formerly admired expansionist claims: 'One had, in truth, awakened folklore, which was dead. It was made-up, and that mannequin of rubicund colours was sent to war. . . . In general, mannequins [are things that] receive bullets in firing exercises!'⁵⁶ Conclusion: German soldiers were as fake – read: mannequins – as their art.

One question remains though: why did Le Corbusier agree to publish a text pertaining to his magazine's support of the Bauhaus a few pages later? We are interested here in the structural factors that profoundly determined such an approach to history: Le Corbusier was ensnared in a double bind that also determined the outlook of the European avant-gardes in general. Articulated as much on a spatial axis as on a temporal one, and obeying the determination of the nation as much as that of the *Zeitgeist*, the avant-gardes were often nationalistic when it came to showing the independent character or superiority of such and such national productions, but inter-nationalistic when it came to demonstrating their historical necessity.⁵⁷ The new art's transgression of national borders was proof of the legitimacy of those who dared confront the dominant ideas of their time. Thus, when the enemies were such reactionaries as Carl Vinnen, Camille Mauclair, or the ultra-right-wing Thuringian government, the Expressionists and Le Corbusier

55. As Von Moos has argued, one of Le Corbusier's sources for his *Ville des trois millions* is, ironically, Taut's *Die Stadtkrone*.

56. Le Corbusier (Paul Boulard), 'Allemagne...' *Esprit nouveau*, no. 27, November 1924, no page.

57. On the tension between time and space, internationalism and nationalism, in Expressionist Theory, see M. Stavrinaki, 'Le prédicat selon Marc. De l'ensauvagement à l'ascèse,' in F. Marc (ed.), *Ecrits et correspondances* (Ensb-a: Paris, 2006), pp. 9–57.

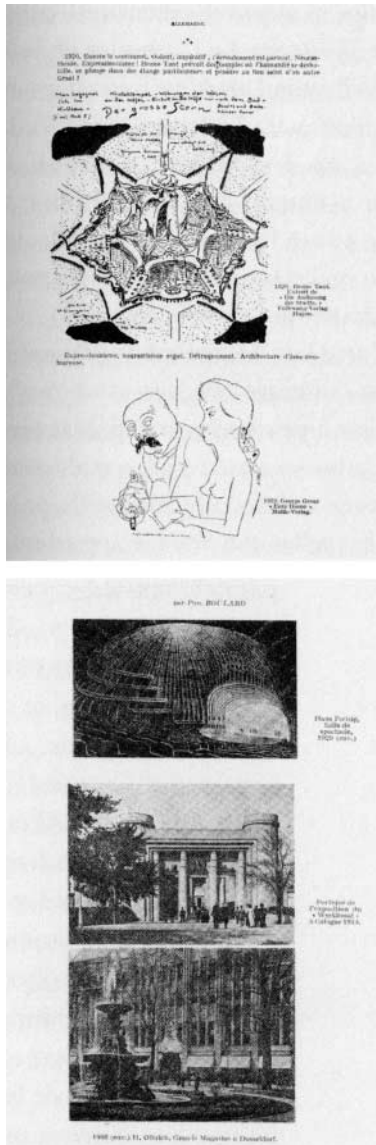


Fig. 9. Le Corbusier (Paul Boulard), 'Allemagne ...,' *Esprit nouveau*, no 27, November 1924, with a drawing from Bruno Taut's *Die Auflösung der Städte* (1920) and George Grosz's *Ecce Homo* (1922).

were ready to support their foreign colleagues. But matters stood otherwise when it came to awarding the trophies of the new art. When those atavisms were awakened, Le Corbusier could put aside his progressive and luminous conception of history in favour of a cyclical, more chthonic one, which made history out to be the agony of Sisyphus.

In all cases, after the 1918 war, Le Corbusier could claim that time and space, power and nation, finally coincided. He could thus overlook the extent of his debt to Germany. He made use of the repertoire of nationalist clichés, old and new, in order to explain that country's morbid mysticism and its illegitimate will to power. In Le Corbusier's Darwinist world, only those who proved themselves to be powerful had the right to seek to remain powerful. France's victory in 1918 erased its 1870 defeat. It remained to be seen if France was capable of bringing the sad period inaugurated in 1789 to a definitive close. To achieve such a goal, the sacred Union inaugurated in 1914 had to be pursued as much in society as in art. In the aftermath of the Great War, the same dream which, one century before, had motivated Saint-Simon to consider converting the Napoleonic Wars into a constructive war – into a war of production – resurfaced.⁵⁸ Comprised of industrialists, scientists, and artists, that avant-garde would not be subversive, but perfectly consensual. Nothing could be closer to Le Corbusier's view of things. The alternative he would propose to those governing – be they politicians or financiers – in the aftermath of the Great War would clearly attest to it: 'Architecture or Revolution!' to which he added, 'One can avoid the revolution.'⁵⁹ That was *Vers une architecture's* last sentence. On the one hand, this meant that after France was clear of its revolutionary turbulence the time for architecture would come. On the other hand, Le Corbusier was also proclaiming that it was by means of such art, which knew how to seize life as no other, that France would no longer risk succumbing to its old sin.

Translated from the French by Eduardo Ralickas

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58. Célestin Bouglé, *Socialismes français. Du 'Socialisme utopique' à la 'Démocratie industrielle'* (Armand Colin: Paris, 1933); and on the religious content of Saint-Simonism, see Henri Desroche, *Les Dieux rêvés. Théisme et Athéisme en Utopie* (Ed. Desclée: Paris, 1972).

59. The saint-simonism of Le Corbusier's thought has been explored by McLeod and von Moos in their respective writings.