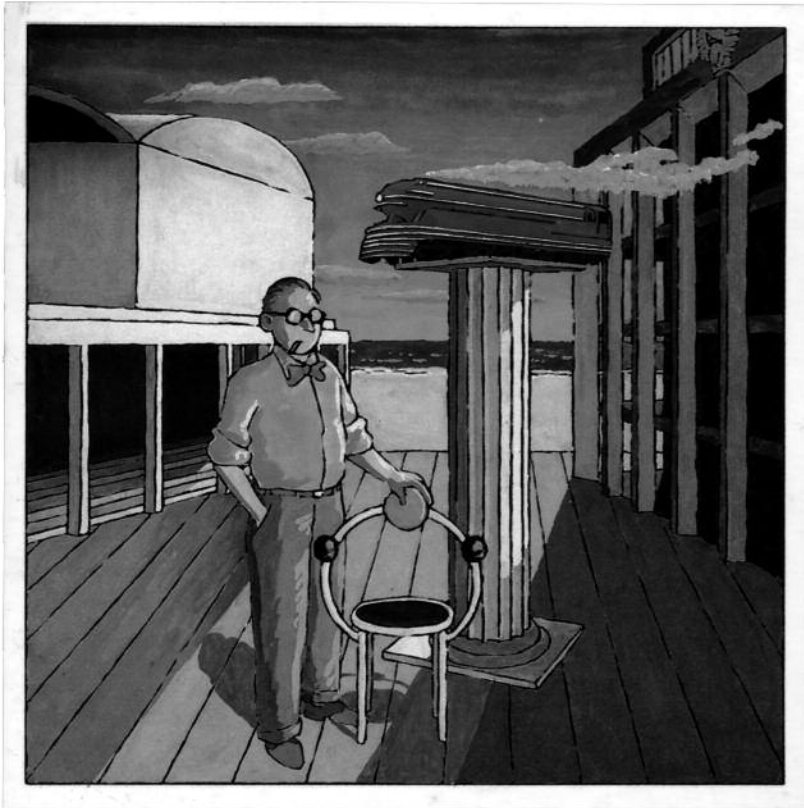


Ted Benoit. Untitled, ca. 1985.
Courtesy the artist.



Discipline and Ridicule: Giorgio de Chirico, Le Corbusier, and the Objects of Architecture in Interwar Paris

ARA H. MERJIAN

To encompass both Breton and Le Corbusier—that would mean drawing the spirit of contemporary France like a bow, with which knowledge shoots the moment in the heart.

—Walter Benjamin¹

Like a bespectacled Tintin gumming a cigarette, Le Corbusier leans—in a sketch by the cartoonist Ted Benoît—on a “First Chair” (1983) by Memphis designer Michele De Lucchi. Unperturbed by the furniture’s decorative flourishes, the architect puffs away with all the insouciance of the diminutive train at his side, which goes nowhere atop its lone Doric column. Trabeated versions of Giorgio de Chirico’s trademark arcades indicate—along with the scene’s spare décor and strange confluence of objects—that we are inside a pastiche of the Italian painter’s Metaphysical cityscapes (1910–1919). The conflation of modernity and antiquity staged in de Chirico’s images reaches, in the improbable congress of Benoît’s parody, a higher mathematics of art-historical overdetermination. To the left sits Adalberto Libera’s Palazzo dei Congressi (1937–1957) from Rome’s EUR district—a (fascist) architectonics that owes a debt to de Chirico and to Le Corbusier in equal measure. The severity of twentieth-century rationalism has thus slipped into a seaside reverie; the props of postmodernity have been shuffled onto the reified stage of modernism. The scene confuses high and low, deadpan and travesty, Corbu and cartoon. In its own way, Benoît’s lampoon undertakes the impossible task set by Walter Benjamin: to encompass surrealism and rationalism in a single image.

For Benjamin, such simultaneity was impossible because of the two isms’ contrary, even inimical, approaches to modernity. These rival tendencies, prevalent in the Paris of the late 1920s and early 1930s from which Benjamin was writing, reached their apogee in the two most prominent journals of the day: Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant’s *L’esprit nouveau* (1920–1926),

which championed “Purism” in painting and architecture; and André Breton’s *La révolution surréaliste* (1924–1929), which wrested images, objects, and spaces from bourgeois propriety and placed them in the service of a radical, waking unconscious. Nowhere did the divergence between these phenomena appear more exacerbated than in their metropolitan applications. Le Corbusier’s proposed eviscerations of the urban fabric, his peremptory applications of “invariable” order to city life, stood in direct contrast to surrealist notions of memory, illogic, and “objective chance.” To be sure, Le Corbusier and Ozenfant’s fetishization of objects as sources for utopian change rivaled that of the surrealists in the wake of the Great War.² But while the former insisted upon method and need, prosthesis and precision, Breton and his cohorts turned to objects and spaces—even the most banal—as the source of unruly desire. If chance formed the new god of surrealism’s secular modernity, the Purists sought to banish its very existence—whether from the city itself or from the aesthetic imagination in which it was rehearsed, anticipated, dreamed.

Somewhere between these extremes stood de Chirico. A Greek-born Italian schooled in Athens and Munich before moving to Paris, he was both a student of classical antiquity and a self-appointed disciple of Nietzsche’s “perversion” of that same tradition.³ The son of a prominent railway engineer, de Chirico came to shuttle in his painting between the freighted archaeology of his native Thessaly and the inchoate spaces of (sub)urban modernity—particularly that of Paris, where he settled and painted from 1911 until 1915. His return to Paris after World War One (in 1924 and again definitively in 1925), placed him at once back in the fray of avant-garde currents and on its margins—a fellow traveler of divergent trends but a wholehearted subscriber to none. De Chirico was prominently listed in the pages of *L’esprit nouveau* as an associate during the early 1920s. During this same period, the dadaist and proto-surrealist journal *Littérature* (1921–1924) paid repeated homage to his work, which was also reproduced in every issue of *La révolution surréaliste*. More than any other modernist painter from before the war, de Chirico seemed to have anticipated the so-called return to order, with its revisitation of classical themes and embrace of figurative solidity. Yet so, too, did these same canvases galvanize avant-garde assaults upon these trends during the same years, as dada and surrealist artists from Berlin to Paris adapted de Chirico’s spaces for the projection of disaffected ideologies.

Without de Chirico’s Metaphysical images, Dalí’s paranoiac dreamscapes would have been unthinkable; but so, too, would have Italian fascist architects’ merging of modernism and *Romanità* (as in Libera’s Palazzo, or

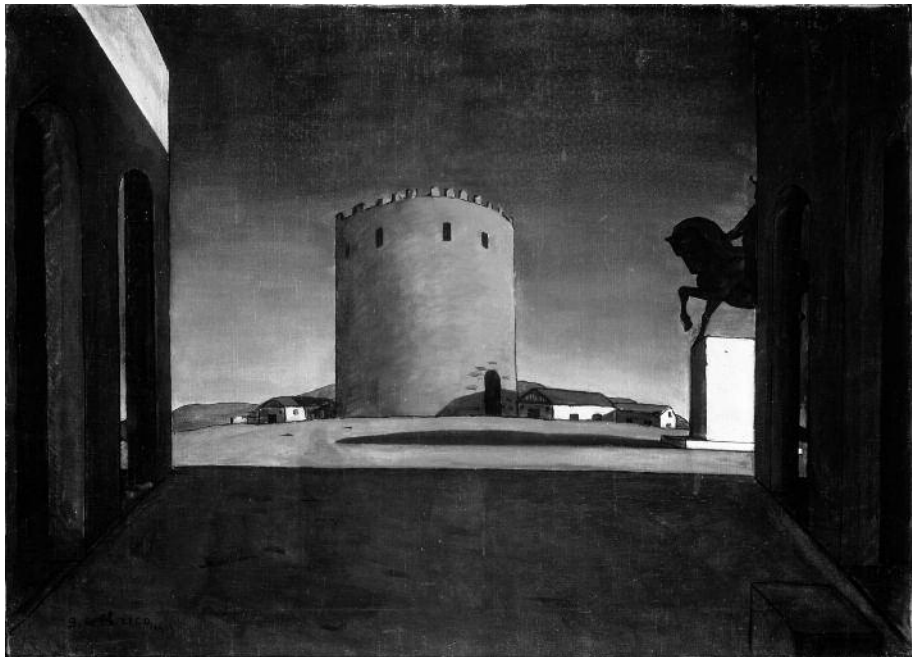


Left: Adalberto Libera. Palazzo dei Congressi, EUR district, Rome, 1937–1957. Photo: Massimo Giannetta.

Opposite: Giorgio de Chirico. *The Red Tower (La tour rouge)*, 1913. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome.

the EUR at large). Even these uses of de Chirico's work are not mutually exclusive, however. Certain fascist-era appropriations of Metaphysical painting—whether in the form of structures, cityscapes, or advertisements—reveal an acute surrealist sensibility. At the same time, even a surrealist like Dalí was not without his own fascist (and Purist) sympathies. The 1920s and 1930s thus witnessed an astonishing range of reception for de Chirico's early work. For his own part, while he begrudgingly played surrealist mascot for a time, de Chirico increasingly dissented from Breton's dogma and remained aloof from any ideology but his own. He pursued a posture of solipsistic genius, willfully ignorant of local politics, whether on the left or right. That ambivalence derived foremost from de Chirico's unwavering allegiance to Nietzschean philosophy—an affinity that continued to fuel the core of his oeuvre even after his more conservative turn post-1919.⁴ The pedantry of de Chirico's later painting still coexisted with the lyrical—and modernist—poetics of his writings throughout the 1920s. In a sense, this coexistence reflected the same conciliatory idiom of the Metaphysical images themselves, their ability to reconcile conflicting registers, epochs, rhetorics.

Benoît has thus invited Le Corbusier into his picture with the blasé conciliation of Metaphysical painting. The architect appears as an object of still life in his own right: a prop moved around like some postmodern bibelot. Even in its highbrow hyperbole, the image stirs up important questions. What *was* the relationship between Metaphysical painting and Purism, their respective negotiations of modernity and antiquity, avant-garde and reaction? May we speak, in particular, of any rapport between de Chirico and Le Corbusier? Born just one year apart, the two men overlapped for several years in Paris during the 1920s—sharing colleagues, a gallery dealer, and roles in the foremost journals of the period. However, their personal rapport seems to have been minimal.⁵ In his own copious writings, de Chirico never mentions Corbusier; the latter invokes de Chirico only once, rather glancingly.⁶ But do their respective silences belie the narcissism of small



differences? Or are their projects in fact only superficially related: frequently apposite in appearance but opposite in import? Such questions do not bear solely—or even primarily—on the respective work of de Chirico or Le Corbusier. They cut across the core of French modernism between the World Wars, revealing a cross-section of various, often contradictory, threads that are too often resolved into neat, art-historical categories.

De Chirico's paintings significantly influenced urban and architectural practices between the World Wars and after. Conversely, Le Corbusier professed that he approached architecture through “the channel of my painting.”⁷ This chiasmus reveals much about Metaphysical and Purist sensibilities, which—particularly in light of their shared resistance to avant-garde practices—merit further consideration. Both figures have been included in anthologies on Nietzsche's architectural influences, and their work sits side by side in exhibitions on twentieth-century urban utopias and studies of European modernism.⁸ Yet the rapports between them—however transverse—have never received sustained attention. Without sacrificing what is particular to each, I aim to set the early projects of de Chirico and Le Corbusier into dialogue, and to address the complex (and often irreconcilable) strains that such juxtaposition lays bare. Arguably, no two modernist figures have been as consistently assailed and feted by voices from both the left *and* the right. Their respective oeuvres attracted the most polarized epithets and followers of the interwar period—from humanist to fascist, radical to reactionary. Finally, perhaps no two individuals more decisively influenced conceptions of space and the city in Europe between the two world wars—if not the entire twentieth century—than de Chirico and Le Corbusier. But rather than proffer superlatives, I hope to tease out some of their unspoken affinities and antagonisms, as well as to suggest how these, in turn, illuminate larger historical and art-historical problems of interwar French culture.

“Modern Optics” and Painted Architecture: Affinities and Divergences

In his cogent survey of Le Corbusier's career, Stanislaus Von Moos writes of Corbu's earliest extant paintings that they

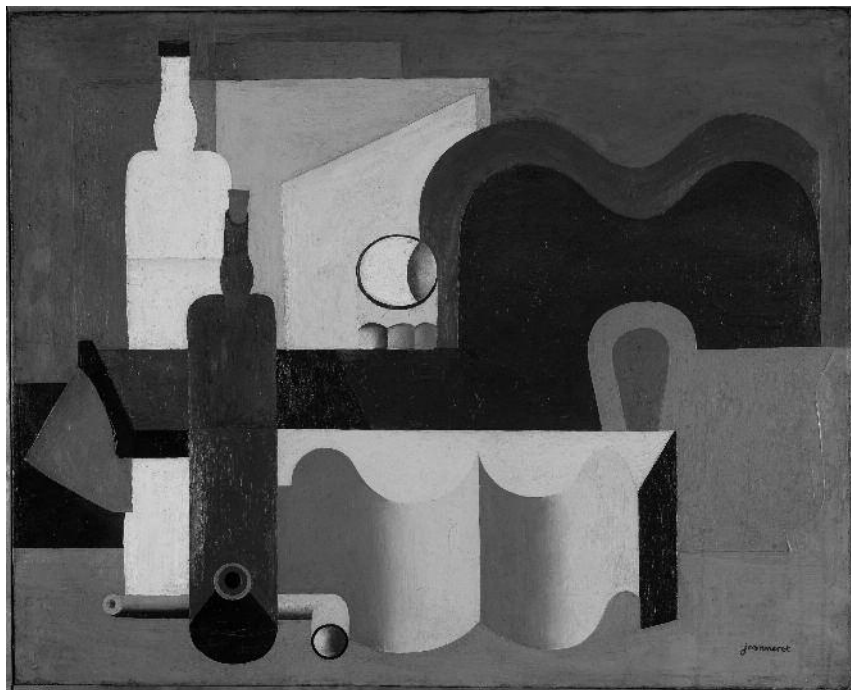
show no evidence whatsoever of the Cubist revolution. The white die reflected on the marble ledge and the books that appear in what Le Corbusier later called his first painting, *La cheminée* (1918), are at the same time an echo from Greece and an anticipation of later architectonic concepts. There is scarcely anything comparable to be found in the Parisian art scene of the time, although some works by Jeanneret do recall the decors of Adolpe [*sic*] Appia, the Swiss pioneer of modern stage design.⁹

A comparable aesthetic did exist in Paris at the time, however—a hushed, painted architectonics that had drawn upon Appia’s designs and notably combined Greek antiquity with modern sensibilities.¹⁰ Though de Chirico had immigrated to Ferrara at the start of World War One, his Metaphysical pictures remained in circulation in Paris during the late 1910s and early 1920s, arbitrated by his young, dynamic dealer, Paul Guillaume. Representing artists such as André Derain, Francis Picabia, and Amedeo Modigliani, and dealing in African sculpture, Guillaume first encountered de Chirico’s work through the poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire. As the lightning rod for an entire spectrum of avant-garde activity, Apollinaire managed to champion cubism and abstraction, on the one hand, and to defend de Chirico’s early efforts from a frequently hostile press, on the other. On the occasion of de Chirico’s first solo exhibition in Paris in October 1913, Apollinaire declared him “perhaps the only living European artist who has not been influenced by the young French school”—an account that resonates, not coincidentally, with Von Moos’s description of Le Corbusier’s burgeoning aesthetic.¹¹

Several other French critics in the ensuing decade underscored (however tendentiously) de Chirico’s exceptional resistance to cubism’s revolution. Even the future champion of the Purist cause, Maurice Raynal, asserted in 1913 that de Chirico edited out of his pictures any pictorial trace of chance and that color served in his works only to emphasize volume rather than playing any autonomous role. Frenchifying the orthography of de Chirico’s name, Raynal describes “Georgio” as a “[self-]consciously ‘French artist,’” whose compositions articulated at once antiquity and modernity, fantasy and “dogma.”¹² De Chirico’s anticipatory affinities with Purism are further evinced in the similar terms by which critics discussed the work of de Chirico and Roger de la Fresnaye—a painter whose interpretation of cubism exerted a considerable influence on Purism.¹³ Salon critics André Salmon and Louis Vauxcelles singled out both artists—however tendentiously—as offering alternatives to the more fleeting turbulence of cubism.¹⁴ The Purists’ purging of the avant-garde’s “muddled sensibilities” is most often discussed in the context of contemporary French tendencies inflected with Latin, classical solidity, whether the canvases of André Lhote and de la Fresnaye or the synthetic cubism of the *L’effort moderne* painters such as Juan Gris, Louis Marcussis, and Gino Severini.¹⁵ Yet even more than these examples, de Chirico’s Metaphysical paintings obviated the need for a purge in the first place. Furthermore, they aggressively married French modernism to principles of classical architectonics. While Le Corbusier likely did not read early salon reviews, he would have been aware of the precedent of Metaphysical art, particularly as the pyrrhic extremes of avant-garde painting receded in the wake of the Great War.

In de Chirico's work, Le Corbusier's "return to the great Latin tradition" would have found a precedent as full of Mediterranean gravitas as the synthetic solidity of Gris's and Pablo Picasso's latest works. To the extent that de Chirico had absorbed lessons from the Parisian avant-garde (to wit, the Cubist-like masses of *The Purity of a Dream*), these appeared inextricable from the trappings of classicism (hence critics' insistence upon the images' attendant "dogma" [Raynal], "reaction" [Roger Marx], and "severity" [Apollinaire]). The Metaphysical paintings' spartan geometries, furthermore, appeared already integrated into an exclusively architectural vocabulary: porticoes, *piazze*, façades, parapets, towers, and—after the artist's move to Ferrara in 1915—fragments of colored wood. These elements arbitrate sophisticated, if elliptical, narratives. But they also stand as a series of semiautonomous forms in their own right—forms that de Chirico himself likened to the fundamentals of a linguistic idiom: "[W]e who know the signs of the metaphysical alphabet are aware of the joy and the solitude enclosed by a portico, the corner of a street, or even in a room, on the surface of a table, between the sides of a box."¹⁶ In other words, Metaphysical marvels are to be found not in a transcendental realm (such as music) but in the circumscribed banality of everyday, spatial "language." Even in his earliest writings from Paris (1911–1913), de Chirico insists that modern myth lies solely in extant, circumscribed surfaces: in "[p]recise, geometric shadows," in "rectangles, squares, and trapezoids."¹⁷ Paintings such as *The Anxious Journey* (1913), *Gare Montparnasse* (1914), and *The Evil Genius of a King* (1914) render interchangeable (sub)urban space and still life, the inhabitable prospect and a conventionalized disposition of forms.

In shoring up the seemingly gratuitous caprices of modernist imagery at the end of this same decade, the Purists insisted that "modern optics" be articulated in and through city space: "the streets, the houses, almost uniformly squared up by the windows, the neat strips of the pavements, the lines of trees with their almost identical circular fences, the regular punc-



Left: Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier). *La Bouteille de Vin Orange*, 1922. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/F.L.C.

Opposite: Giorgio de Chirico. *Gare Montparnasse*, 1914. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome.

tuation of street-lighting . . . confine us still and always in geometry.”¹⁸ This immanence of Purist optics to architecture—both actual and pictorial/metaphorical—has a significant precursor in de Chirico’s painting, in which the integuments of abstraction appear through the extant geometries of the built environment. In a series of still lifes that they called “*peinture architecturée*,” Le Corbusier and Ozenfant set forth a reduced vocabulary of forms—bottles and instruments, tabletops and open doors—that served as metonyms for their aesthetic agenda.¹⁹ Like the askesis of its imagery, Purist theory rested more on proscription than on prescription. Jeanneret and Ozenfant rejected what they identified as the “ornamental,” “romantic,” and “accidental” contingencies of cubism and other modernist ventures.²⁰ Morphological deformations and ornamental caprice were as anathema to Purist doctrine as to Metaphysical theory. Both de Chirico and the Purists located aesthetic legitimacy not in formal innovation *ex nihilo* but in the opposite: a look again at what already exists, a teasing out of the profundity implicit in the most ordinary geometries and objects.²¹ The unsettling effects of *The Red Tower* (1913), *The Melancholy of an Afternoon* (1913), or *Gare Montparnasse* (1914) are evinced not through any outlandish forms but by strategies of isolation and framing—procedures entirely confluent with Purist painting and its fastidious curating of space.

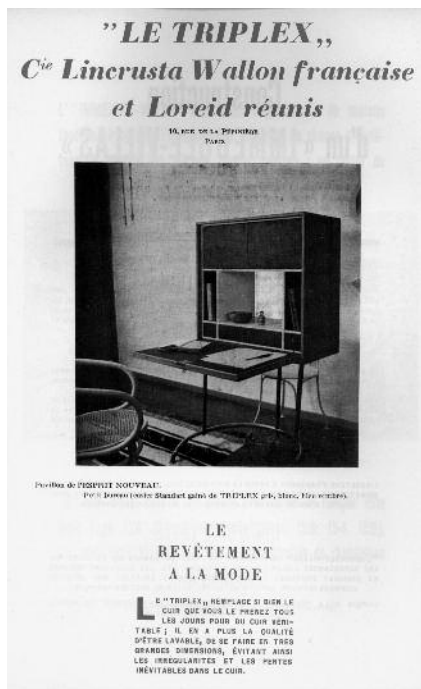
However, that unsettling effect is where the two projects diverged. The significance imputed to the object in Purism and Metaphysical painting stand at absolute odds. The ambiguity conferred upon the crisply rendered bananas in the foreground of *Gare Montparnasse* would have ruffled Purist sensibilities. For as much as Le Corbusier and Ozenfant insisted—like de Chirico—upon subject matter (as opposed to outright abstraction) as the domain of painting, they recoiled from “the sign” and its uncertainties.²² In their 1919 essay “Purism,” Jeanneret and Ozenfant disparage “an art of the initiated, an art requiring knowledge of a key, an art of symbols.”²³ This describes the very pith of Metaphysical painting: its literary penchant, its



use of what de Chirico deemed “the solitude of the sign,” and its semantic exclusivity except for an initiated few. De Chirico’s scenes subscribe, like Purist painting, to sharp lines, clear light, and silent fixity, but their objects vacillate between plain materiality and literary allusion, between (visual) transparency and (semantic) convolution. This reflects the different philosophical projects underpinning de Chirico’s work and Purism. Le Corbusier oriented his work according to the “Greek ideal” and Neoplatonism; de Chirico’s “Greece” lay, in contrast, in the world of the pre-Socratics rather than that of Pericles or Phidias. For de Chirico—as for Nietzsche and Heraclitus, from whom de Chirico derived much of his aesthetic impetus—lucidity and concision were not at odds with the nonsensical or the lyrical but were their very source.²⁴ Though numerous writers (Ozenfant among them) would misread de Chirico’s aesthetic as “humanist,” he undertook precisely to subvert the wholesome commonplaces of an all-too-human logos.²⁵

A passage from *Beyond Good and Evil* suggests the kind of order and routine that de Chirico’s painting assails, particularly in light of the Nietzschean philosophy to which he subscribed in earnest. Describing the clockwork of morality in notably spatial terms, Nietzsche denounces the habitual tendency to “assimilate the new to the old, to simplify the manifold, and to overlook or repulse whatever is totally contradictory. . . . Its intent in all this is to incorporate new ‘experiences,’ to file new things in old files.”²⁶ The Purists famously allied themselves, both metaphorically and literally, with the logic of “filing” that Nietzsche derides. Whether in the *Ronéo* file or the *Innovation* trunk, Purist painting called upon modern conveniences to order and to sort without equivocation. Illustrating this imperative to do away with *objets-sentiment*, Le Corbusier summed up his and Ozenfant’s efforts in 1925: “We have wanted to build and no longer to doubt.”²⁷ Despite their similarly discriminating spatial economy, de Chirico’s images endeavor not so much to place objects as to displace or misplace them—whether bananas next to a plaster bust or an inexplicably itinerant

painting and easel in the midst of a spectral cityscape. Doubt saturates the Metaphysical image, despite its seemingly transparent surety. Though de Chirico equated objects of modernity with antique counterparts—resonating with, say, Le Corbusier’s juxtaposition of the Parthenon and a 1921 Delage automobile—this analogy was never put in the service of any rational, transcendent standard. De Chirico’s images estrange old and new—as with an ancient galley appearing next to a modern factory or bananas from the colonies next to an ancient bust—rather than unite them in some ideal form.²⁸



Le Corbusier. Ronéo file,
Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau,
1925. © 2011 Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York/
ADAGP, Paris/F.L.C.

Nevertheless, in the context of postwar French and Italian culture, de Chirico's images—cleansed of their notably German genealogy—could be, and were, seen as appeals to order *avant la lettre*. Their stripped, superficially classicizing elements offered a screen for the projection of reactionary sentiments, above all a cultural nostalgia for humanism and logic, recently buried by the war's horrors. Despite his otherwise brilliant account, von Moos errs in asserting that “the purist manifesto was in fact the first articulate manifestation of a major shift in taste toward an updated form of classicism.”²⁹ This classicism had already been revised in the guise of de Chirico's prewar painting—an aesthetic whose refusal to “manifest” with avant-garde stridency underscored, precisely, its appeal as a postwar cultural palliative.³⁰ In the event that the Purists themselves had missed this anticipation of their own efforts, de Chirico took it upon himself to inform them. An unpublished manuscript, which still sits in the archives of the Fondation Le Corbusier, attests to his furtive effort to do so.

“Plastic Values” between Metaphysical Painting and Purism

Oh, what a blow to their nationalism my French friends receive from the bugbear of metaphysical art!

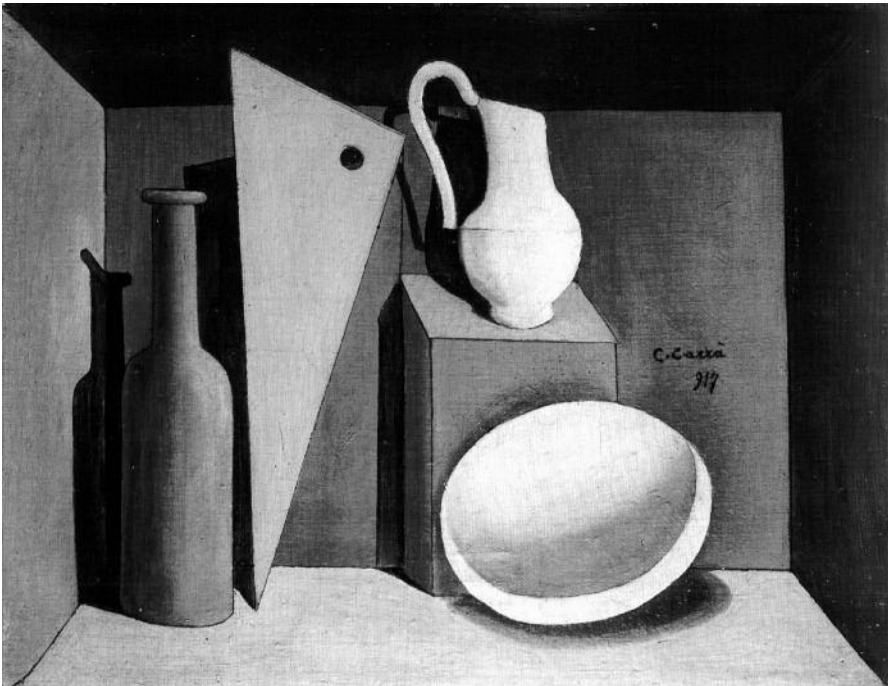
—Alberto Savinio³¹

Signed “Giovanni Loreto” and hand-typed on three sheets of thin paper, an essay titled “Giorgio de Chirico” arrived at the editorial offices of *L'esprit nouveau* on December 29, 1921 (see the translation included in this issue). In its insistence that the “*sentiment de l'architecture*” in de Chirico's imagery formed its “most intimate sense,” the essay aims to resonate with the journal's cultural agenda, specifically with the sympathies of its editors. Even as he insists upon de Chirico's modernity, the author marvels at “how, in the middle of Paris, this young painter—indifferent to the solicitations of various artistic schools and fashions, of different schools and innumerable tendencies—pursued his ideals with the chastity of an ancient painter.” Rather than recoil from de Chirico's prewar philosophical orientation, the essay calls attention to the “troubling” aspects of his Metaphysical imagery, as well as its roots in the “divine chance” articulated by Nietzsche. Loreto, however, seems not to have existed. While I cannot address this question at length here, I have elsewhere demonstrated that de Chirico—an artist prone to writing under a range of heteronyms—is the author of this essay.³² His effort as “Loreto” was in vain, however: the essay never appeared in *L'esprit nouveau* or anywhere else.³³

While Le Corbusier and Ozenfant may well have been unfamiliar with

de Chirico's painting earlier in the 1910s, they were unlikely to have missed its resurgent prominence—in both France and Italy—after the Great War. Unlike his avant-garde peers, de Chirico never published any manifestos of his theories. Beginning in 1918, however, he and his brother Alberto Savinio (né Andrea de Chirico) began to issue a series of retrospective précis of Metaphysical aesthetics. These publications shuttled with increasing frequency between Italy and Paris. Most prominently, they featured in *Valori plastici*—a journal launched in 1918 that anticipated the role of *L'esprit nouveau* in nearly every sense: it was an international clearinghouse of current practices, from Wassily Kandinsky to Breton, Jean Cocteau to Theo van Doesburg, as well as a forum for national(ist) rhetoric about the role of architecture and classicism in reorienting the course of modernity. The two journals eventually participated in reciprocal advertisement and shared many of the same authors, from Carlo Carrà and Giuseppe Ungaretti to Maurice Raynal and Waldemar George. In December of 1918, the Parisian journal *SIC* announced the debut of *Valori plastici*, noting that it “proposed . . . to study all the problems of plastic art. One finds in it essays by Carrà and . . . de Chirico, as well as lovely reproductions [of these painters' work].”³⁴ Already in May of the same year, *SIC*'s editor Pierre Albert-Birot had declared that certain artists involved with the journal *Raccolta* (published in Bologna), “in particular . . . G[iorgio] de Chirico and A[lberto] Savinio[,] are destined, to orient the Italian artistic movement toward a more simple, human, grand period of art, approaching the classical French tradition[!].”³⁵

To claim that Italy's “plastic values” might take their cues from French classicism risks a decidedly casuistic—or sophistic—reasoning. That is, at least, how the Italians saw it. They quickly wrote to the editor in clamorous protest. Even a quick glance at Giorgio Morandi's still lifes from 1918 and 1919, for example—with their sober palettes and vocabulary of pipes, bottles, and squat boxes—suggests how any exclusively French claim to Purism (by whatever moniker) would have rankled Italian sensibilities. In

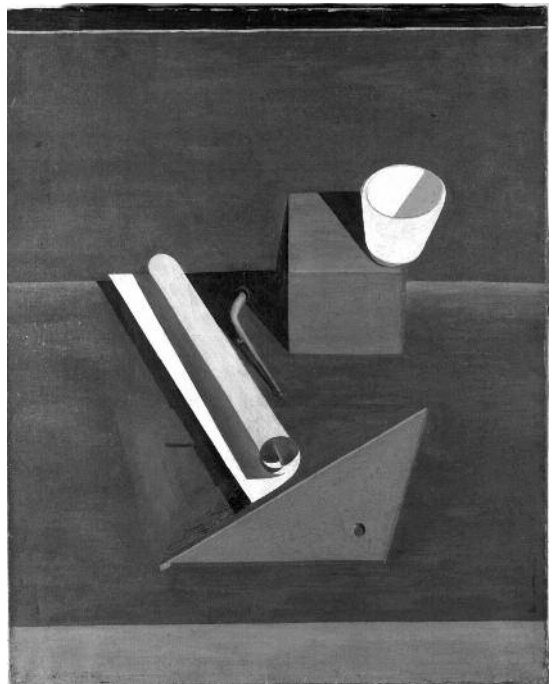


the same vein, Carrà's *Still Life with Set Square* (1917) strikingly anticipated by a couple of years Le Corbusier's nearly identical repertoire of forms. Carrà responded with due bitterness to Maurice Raynal's description of Purism as a French phenomenon. On the pages of *Valori Plastici* he sneered,

[Raynal's essay] addresses many theoretical points familiar to us [Italians] since [the early 1910s]. . . with all due respect to my dear colleagues Ozenfant and Jeanneret, the constructive concept to which "Purism" lays claim exists in the history of Italian art since the time of Giotto . . . it is absurd to speak of such things as a recent discovery by the French.³⁶

In the early 1910s, Carrà had been busy *deconstructing* painting. As a prominent futurist, he had reduced painting to shards of centrifugal faceting, riotous collage, *words-in-freedom*. While some of his work after 1914 betrayed an increasing concern for plastic solidity, the "constructive" dimensions to which Carrà refers appeared first, and most forcefully, in de Chirico's Metaphysical paintings. The remarks of "Giovanni Loreto" to Le Corbusier and Ozenfant—that de Chirico "was the first Italian painter to have truly *understood* the profundity" of Italian architectonics—are a refrain of which de Chirico would make frequent use during these years. He insisted (often in vain) that Carrà and others recognize the prescience of his aesthetic atavism, as well as their debt to its more retiring precedent.³⁷

We must not disavow the differences and quibbles—some subtle, some sharp—that marked Italian figuration after the Great War, whether between the respective Metaphysical ventures of de Chirico and Carrà, the still life strategies of Carrà and Morandi, or the ideological orientations of journals such as *Valori plastici* and *La ronda*.³⁸ After 1917, de Chirico's early work anchored a renewed concern for "plastic values" on behalf of numerous Italian artists and critics, Carrà foremost among them. Though de Chirico's Metaphysical images evince more of a Nietzschean "untimeliness" than a timeless classicism, they appeared—in the postwar context, along with the artist's increasingly conservative rhetoric about craft and tradition—as touchstones of a renewed humanism, rationalism, and order. At the expense of de Chirico's more equivocal imagery, too, Carrà emphasized the logical foundations that he drew out of *pittura metafisica*, insisting upon "the synthesis that constitutes the definitive order within the painting."³⁹ Carrà intoned about the need to "to succeed in making the



Opposite: Carlo Carrà. *Still Life with Set Square* (*Natura morta con squadra*), 1917. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome.

Right: Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier). *The White Bowl*, 1919. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/FLC.

drawing precede the reconstruction of the picture, which happens architectonically and not by chance, like the sum of raw facts put in order.”⁴⁰ The frequent appearance of compasses, T squares, and drafting instruments in both de Chirico’s and Carrà’s images, redoubled—on an iconographic level—the architectural sensibility that subtends them. As Italian modernist painters searched for a new classicism relevant to the age, de Chirico’s Metaphysical pictures stood out for having resisted a priori the avant-garde dissolution of form.⁴¹ Furthermore, that resistance seemed (however speciously) to have been made in the name of an unequivocally Italian aesthetic.⁴²

Like so many of his compatriots after the Great War, de Chirico inveighed about the role of *italianità* in shoring up the effete superficiality of French culture—whether pictorial, architectural, or verbal. Writing to Giovanni Papini on the latter’s new journal, *La vraie Italie* (founded in 1919, a year before *L’esprit nouveau*), de Chirico declares it “excellent, from every point of view; I also like that sense of solidity that is conferred upon French [language] by an Italian who knows it well.”⁴³ Yet the fact that Italy’s foremost cultural proponents felt obliged to publish in French undermines the very notion of Italian primacy. To wit, the title of *La vraie Italie* implies that the “truth” of Italy is accessible only via Frenchness (much as the Italian futurist manifesto had been first launched in Paris a decade earlier on the pages of *Le Figaro*). Even *Valori plastici* published monographs in French, in France, and on French artists: from Le Nain to Camille Corot to *Le néoclassicisme dans l’art contemporain*.⁴⁴ Despite all the posturing of cultural ascendancy during this period, French and Italian identities remained imbricated, mutually contingent. If the French “new classicism” needed Giotto and Piero, the Italians needed Nicolas Poussin and Claude, Jean Ingres and Georges Seurat, even André Derain and the Douanier Rousseau. In their writings, Le Corbusier and Ozenfant invoke the wisdom of Italian Renaissance painters on the primacy of line. Conversely, Carrà appeals to Charles Baudelaire on linear composition and laments that the sensorial excess of French naturalism and impressionism had betrayed “proud [Gustave] Courbet of the barricades.”⁴⁵ While de Chirico, Carrà, and their compatriots could rightly claim a prominent role in the reorientation of postwar painting, even those efforts cannot be seen independently of, say, Fresnaye’s *Still Life with Set Square* (1914). The anticipatory solidity of Fresnaye’s example, which separates shapes and planes into clear boundaries (including the telltale, architectural bellwether of the set square), complicates this genealogy. The potential influence of Metaphysical painting on Purism (and Italian modernism on its French *confrère* more broadly) is thus more difficult to tease out than it would seem.

Such give-and-take between (often ineffably) “Italian” and “French” sen-

sibilities raises the question: What did Maurice Raynal mean when he described de Chirico as a “consciously ‘French artist’”? Do Raynal’s scare quotes not render the very term self-conscious in its own right? The peculiar, Franco-Italian alchemy of de Chirico’s Metaphysical painting stirred up such questions well before interwar critical controversies—and before the Purists launched their own contemporaneous venture.⁴⁶ While I do not argue for any direct influence of the former upon the latter, the terms of their contemporaneity must be reconsidered in light of de Chirico’s notable—and notably ambivalent—oeuvre. His work most poignantly mediated the often-polarized histories and historiographies of French and Italian aesthetics between the wars. Tellingly, de Chirico’s preparatory drawing for *Gare Montparnasse* bears the title “Italian Square with Bananas.”⁴⁷ Even the final painting itself—in its composition as well as its title—articulates anything but an exclusively Italian idiom. The image’s exaggerated perspective is indistinguishable from the rearing picture planes of Paul Cézanne and Henri Matisse. The architectonic solidity of its piazza recalls the trabeations of a Greek agora and a cast-iron Parisian porch in equal measure. The national values of its plasticity are anything but pure.

The Limits of Signs

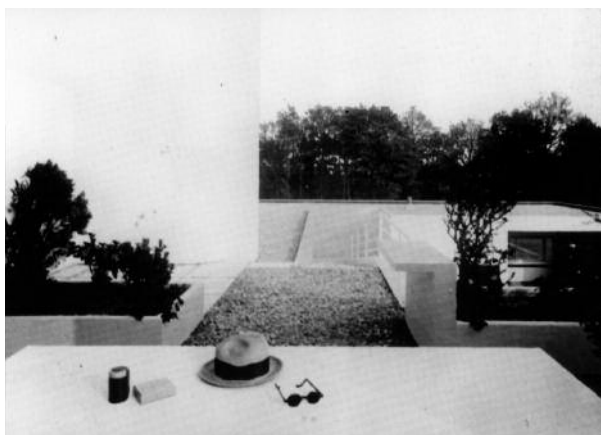
“We think of the painting,” Jeanneret and Ozenfant write, “not as a surface, but *as a space*.”⁴⁸ As much as the Purists’ *peinture architecturée* proffered a stylized vocabulary of flat forms, it also assumed a projection of the viewer into the picture plane—a process that rehearsed the transition from fictional space to inhabitable reality. Indeed, Le Corbusier’s refinement of the so-called *promenade architecturale* in his buildings during the 1920s (particularly the Villa Savoye) derived from the pictorial experiments of Purist painting. In contrast, most Cubist paintings—by turns fragmented and ruthlessly compressed—had denied the projection of the individual into space, except as a fragmented subject. Still, in his landmark book, *Space, Time, and Architecture* (1941), Sigfried Giedion argued for the historical confluence between the Cubist picture plane and the free plan pioneered by Le Corbusier. As an example, Giedion juxtaposed Picasso’s *L’arlésienne* (1911) with the Dessau Bauhaus by Walter Gropius (1926), arguing for a shared sense of transparency and simultaneity of (nonperspectival) spaces.⁴⁹

Defying this received wisdom in turn, von Moos writes, “Whatever the impact of cubism upon architecture may have been, it was only after modern painting had returned to classical discipline that it could enter into dialogue with progressive architecture, as it did later on in the works of Le Corbusier.”⁵⁰ Not until 1922 or 1923, von Moos argues, could cubism

enter into the bloodstream of architectural rationalism, having by then been cleansed of its recalcitrance. Yet de Chirico's architectural representations after 1912 anticipated that disciplining a decade earlier, particularly in their representations of a (fictionally) habitable space. While many of his images simply skirt cubist fragmentation and faceting (as in *The Red Tower*), several others (e.g., *The Purity of a Dream*, *The Anxious Journey*, *Gare Montparnasse*) assimilate it with a sophistication that far exceeds the clumsy, decorative applications of actual models, such as Raymond Duchamp-Villon's *Maison Cubiste* of 1911. Writing decades after a stay in New York, de Chirico marvels that the city's "elongated, white, cubist, neatly ordered" architecture expresses not simply imperial cities like Rome or Babylon but "that which I felt and expressed in certain aspects of my painted works: a harmonious homogeneity and monumentality formed of disparate and heterogeneous elements."⁵¹ New York's architectural heterogeneity and monumentality are a far cry from that of Rome or Turin. The white "cubism" of rationalist structures could not differ more dramatically from the Forum. Still, de Chirico's account of his own paintings—as evincing both urban antiquity and International Style modernism—captures something of how the Metaphysical paintings reconcile disparities.

Picasso's legendary naming of de Chirico as "*le peintre des gares*"—"the painter of (railway) stations"—in the 1910s underscores the particular modernity of the Metaphysical cities, their whiff of an antiseptic, modern engineering—a dimension that is frequently downplayed in the effort to

cast de Chirico as a *passéiste* foil to futurism.⁵² In fact, de Chirico's spaces increasingly resembled the urban scenes that nostalgists of old Paris decried about the city's modern incarnation, its growing resemblance to "improvised Californias."⁵³ The imperious sweep of Metaphysical perspective, for example, effaces memory as much as it recuperates it. De Chirico's pictorial strategies appeal more to the reductive logic of Haussmannization than to the recuperative archaeology of Rome. The unadorned severity of de Chirico's façades after 1912—their seriality and linearity—reveals something of "the new aesthetic of the hotel" that he praises in his early French manuscripts.⁵⁴ No less a critic than Giedion remarked upon "the sure



Top: Le Corbusier. *Villa Savoye*, Poissy, France, 1928–1929. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/F.L.C.

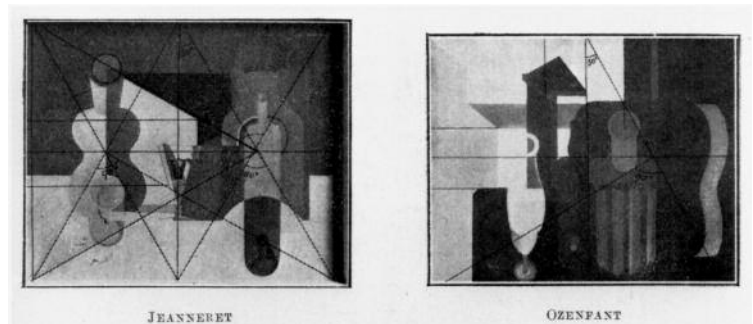
Bottom: Le Corbusier. "Composition" on the terrace of the *Villa Savoye*, 1928–1929. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/F.L.C.

and inoffensive quality of [de Chirico's] uniform Paris façades"—a description at odds with habitual accounts of de Chirico's cityscapes as topographic reminiscences.⁵⁵ Yet these paintings contain more of Adolf Loos's sterile, anti-historicist architecture than they do any concern for ruins or fantastic vistas.

A comparison of the roof of the Villa Savoye with *Gare Montparnasse* is perhaps too neat, too perfect, in its visual rhymes but does underscore the frequent formal and spatial convergences of these projects, despite the ideological divergences that separate their intentions. De Chirico has made the void under the station's side porch the unlikely axis of his scene, underscoring many of his images' resonance with—or anticipation of—aspects of Le Corbusier's "countermonumentality."⁵⁶ De Chirico uses walls and planes to frame his objects, elevating them to a mythical hieraticism—something eventually pursued by Corbusier not only in painting but in actual structures. If the Villa Savoye's spaces effect a striking spatial and visual simultaneity (pierced stairwells, walls of glass, etc.), that simultaneity coexists with a decided investment in architectural perspective. Whether in the solarium, the rooftop cutouts, or the ground-floor windows and pilotis, the structure is continually pierced and spaced by emphatically framed views. A photographic composition by Le Corbusier from the late 1920s—featuring a crypto-Purist still life of spectacles, a small box, and a hat on the Villa Savoye's roof—reveals a sensibility quite in line with de Chirico's. Photographed through the prominent empty frame cut out of the building's west façade, the still life sits on a shelf seemingly made for the isolated display of objects. The "Philosopher's Promenade" evoked by de Chirico's painting of the same name (1914)—featuring a drawn statue and isolated glasses framed by crisp, geometric architectonics—seems almost expressly cited by Le Corbusier's strange punctuation of his own "*promenade architecturale*." The bananas on the foreground ledge of *Gare Montparnasse* no longer seem so estranged from Le Corbusier's own strategies.

"The limits of these signs," de Chirico writes in "On Metaphysical Painting," which he published in *Valori plastici* in April 1919, "constitute for us a sort of moral and aesthetic code of representation, and more than this, with clairvoyance we construct in painting a new metaphysical psychology of objects."⁵⁷ Consider Le Corbusier's observations in his text *Une petite maison* (1923), "To make the landscape interesting, one must take the radical decision to limit it, to give it certain dimensions: to occlude the horizon by raising the walls, and to reveal it through gaps at strategic points."⁵⁸ Von Moos likens this framing and its "spatial manipulation" to a delimited stage set, writing, "here, the inspiration from surrealism, or perhaps more immediately from the *pittura metafisica* of Giorgio de Chirico is not to be discarded."⁵⁹ But aside from von Moos's brief, astute observation, it has indeed been largely discarded.

Illustrations with "traces réguliers," from *L'esprit nouveau*, 1921. Left: Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier). *La Bouteille de Vin Orange*, 1922. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/F.L.C. Right: Amédée Ozenfant. *Flask, Guitar, Glass, and Bottle on a Green Table*, 1920. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.



De Chirico, Le Corbusier, and the Avant-Garde “Situation of the Object”

Marcel Duchamp put a mustache on the Mona Lisa; Jeanneret and Ozenfant, those superlative coiffeurs du cubisme, set about shaving it off, but it will grow back.

—Francis Picabia⁶⁰

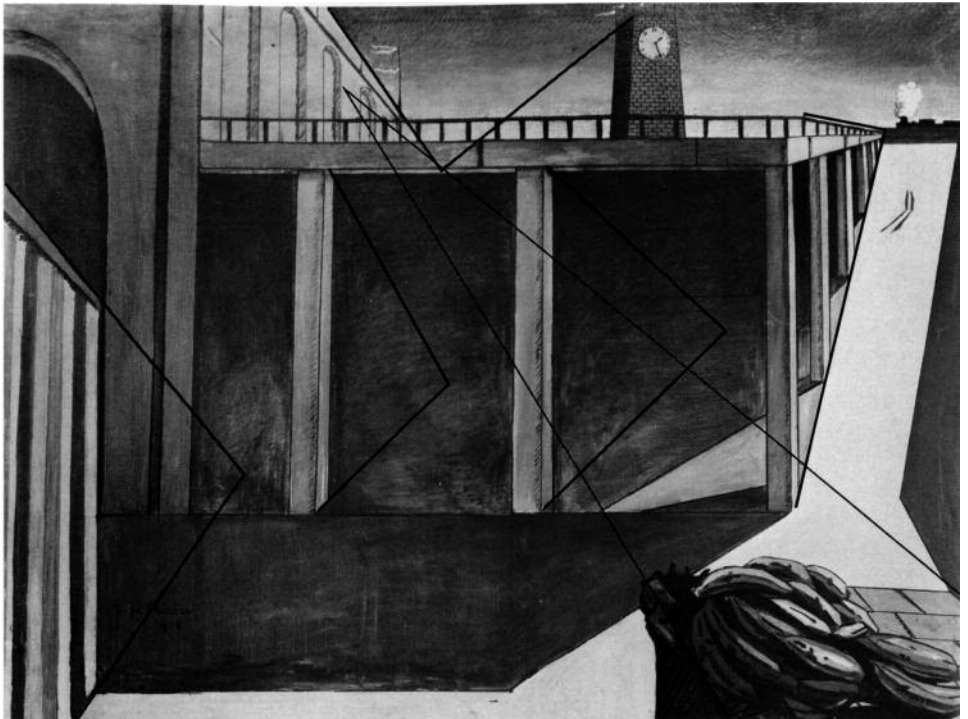
De Chirico did not hesitate to paint industrial chimneys and silos—forms that he eulogized for evincing the “romanticism of modern life,” “the geometry of factories and workshops,” “estates immobile like cubic arches of stone and cement.”⁶¹ Yet, whereas he fetishized the painterly craft of re-presenting such industrial structures, Le Corbusier championed the leveling uniformity of industrial process *itself* as the touchstone for a new aesthetic. The only use implied in de Chirico’s structures and objects is an imaginative one, at odds with the proximity and clarity of their presentation—as different, ultimately, from the literal physicality of Marcel Duchamp’s bottle rack (1914) as from the utilitarian resonance of Purism’s painted bottles. Even in its seemingly oracular anonymity and freedom from “style,” Metaphysical painting remained invested in the singularity of each canvas, as well as the genius of its maker.⁶² The esotericism of de Chirico’s Nietzschean revelations bridled against Purism’s universalist ethos, its application to commercial design.

With regard to that design and its implied principle of aesthetic *selection* (as opposed to mere mechanical production), Nancy Troy has written, “Le Corbusier and Ozenfant drew attention to the sense in which their notion of the design process involved an anonymous, aesthetically ‘blind’ choice, and was not a matter of making art.”⁶³ In this sense, Le Corbusier’s project was as divested from the myth of craft—and the attendant subscription to a subjective aesthetic genius—as Duchamp’s readymades. Many art historians have likened the latter to de Chirico’s still lifes, to the extent that both displace objects into new, disorienting spaces and semantic values.⁶⁴ Yet if, like Duchamp, de Chirico may be said to draw attention to the “extraplastic” condition of things, this deflection serves quite a different purpose in the painter’s hands. Duchamp used chance to deal the notion of original authorship a blow. De Chirico exploited the fruits of chance—or rather, the *look* of chance in his staged paintings of incongruous combinations—to further cement his irreducible, ordained singularity. “Loreto’s” offhand apposition of “architectural genius” and “mere chance” underscores this. De Chirico aimed for his painting to conflate these same registers. In their crisp transparency, the Metaphysical paintings at once efface de Chirico’s authorship, and foreground it absolutely as a product of painterly genius.

Conflicting orthogonals of
Giorgio de Chirico’s *Gare
Montparnasse*, 1914. As illus-
trated in *Giorgio de Chirico*
(Museum of Modern Art, 1982).
© 2011 Artists Rights Society
(ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome.

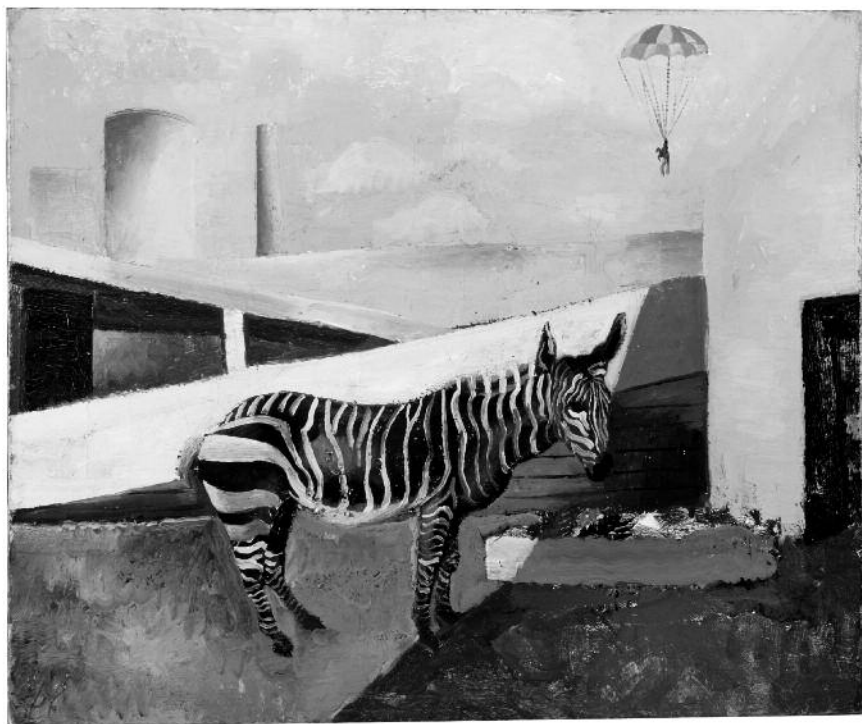
In the end, Duchamp's "anesthetic" short-circuiting of subjectivity stands as close to the Purist venture—and its proposed elimination of "art"—as to de Chirico's. Duchamp's objects are, however, stripped of the use value implied in the Purist project. The ideological purposes (as well as the philosophical origins) of their respective "selections," furthermore, are wildly divergent.⁶⁵ Still, as evidenced by Duchamp's declaration in 1912, "Painting is over" (as he looked at a plane propeller at the Salon de la Locomotion Aérienne), he anticipated Le Corbusier's oeuvre far more than is often recognized.⁶⁶ Even Duchamp's 1911 schematic painting of a coffee mill in motion anticipates Purist concerns both formally and thematically and frustrates—along with the mechanomorphs of Picabia that are its counterparts—the neat corral of art-historical categories. As much as this image betrays hints of the ironically "Purist" facets of Duchamp's "antiretinal" work, it obliquely underscores what is (often literally) eccentric in Le Corbusier's own painting.

In essays published in *L'esprit nouveau* (and subsequently in *Vers une architecture*) Jeanneret and Ozenfant developed what they called "regulating lines" (*traces regulateurs*). Complete with mathematical notations, these X-ray like vectors, superimposed over paintings and architectural structures alike, aimed to demonstrate the positivist logic subtending Purism. A close look at Purist paintings reveals, however, that this putatively mathematical rationalism often protests too much and that the paintings frequently equivocate in their spatial disposition. While Ozenfant's are often the more adventurous in this regard, Jeanneret's reveal their own ambiguities. In the latter's *Purist Still Life, Effort Moderne* (1922), the forms alternate between corpulence and utter flatness: now *sfumati*, now planar. The contour of a pitcher appears simultaneously flush with the very ground on which it sits. The bottle in the foreground is inexplicably divided into solid sections of opaque color, while its base reveals a transparent cross-section



of its structure. Incongruities lurk, too, in the relative simplicity of *The White Bowl* (1919). The lines on either side of the squat brown cube, demarcating the far edge of the table, cannot possibly converge evenly. Despite its solidity, furthermore, the eponymous bowl appears precarious in its perch.⁶⁷ The left quadrant of *Composition with Guitar and Lantern* (1920) takes these spatial hedges to queasy effect; they are almost dizzying in their confusion of recession and protrusion.⁶⁸ The “invariables” professed by Purist geometries vary significantly, if subtly.

The same may be said for de Chirico’s deployment of linear perspective, a deployment consistently upheld as proof of his archaism—notwithstanding Clement Greenberg’s exceptional, incisive argument that de Chirico’s hyperbolic uses of perspectives stood not as his recoil from modernist painting but as his greatest contribution to its radical flatness. It was Piet Mondrian, Greenberg claimed, who “drew the correct conclusion from the Italian painter’s early work, not Dalí.”⁶⁹ In an important essay that dissented from received wisdom and built upon Greenberg’s argument, William Rubin demonstrated how de Chirico’s orthogonals converge upon numerous, conflicting vanishing points.⁷⁰ The vectors of *The Enigma of a Day* (1914) and *Gare Montparnasse*, for example, recede in at least five different directions. As with Purist painting, these discrepancies reveal themselves only gradually, to the deliberate looker. Yet de Chirico himself never promised the unswerving journey plotted by “regulating lines.” If he could espouse a title such as *The Purity of a Dream* (1915), he also could lay claim to *The Uncertainty of the Poet* (1913). And in spite of his musings on the future translation of his images into public works, de Chirico could not have cared less if his trains ran on time.⁷¹ The functionality of his scenes is already sabotaged by a sense that time loops in an endless circle; the communal aspect of their public spaces is simultaneously disavowed by their semantic exclusivity. If de Chirico’s objects always appear *in piazza*,



Left: Christopher Wood.
Zebra and Parachute, 1930.
Tate Gallery, London.

Opposite: Charles-Édouard
Jeanneret (Le Corbusier).
Nature morte: L'effort moderne,
1922. © 2011 Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York/
ADAGP, Paris/FLC.

their meaning offers itself only to a few, privileged initiates.

These paradoxical effects—of publicity and secrecy, transparency and obfuscation—go a long way in explaining the simultaneous appropriations of his images: whether surrealist claims for their utopian lyricism or a fascist urbanism that derived strategies of *sventramento* (disemboweling) and *isolamento* (isolating) from the same pictures. De Chirico remained committed to neither, yet undeniably productive of each. Later avant-gardes such as CoBrA and the situationists would rail against the “right angles” and “cadaverous rigidity” of Le Corbusier’s rationalism, claiming that this architecture had sacrificed the “only truly human part of life . . . poetry and dream.”⁷² With Metaphysical painting, however, one could have right angles *and* poetry, a classical rigidity and a nonsensical dreamscape in which to project oneself. Indeed, in offering a radical reformation of modernism’s oppressive approach to space, more than one situationist author (including Guy Debord) described de Chirico’s images as “blueprints” for a different urban future.⁷³ Even when its politicians wear the frock coats of de Chirico’s statues, the “bad dream of modernism” did not always look entirely like a nightmare.

Modernism at a Standstill

It will be perceived at some future date, that from 1914 on, all artistic activity falls into two living collective trends, Dadaism and Purism. These two movements, though apparently in opposition to each other, were equally sickened by the glib and stale productions of art, and sought to restore it to health: the former by ridiculing time-worn formulas, the latter by emphasizing the need for discipline.

—Amedée Ozenfant⁷⁴



The appearance of the Porte Saint-Denis in Breton's 1928 experimental novel *Nadja* leaves little doubt as to the target of the author's disdain. The same structure had appeared just a few years earlier as a paragon of order in Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture* (1923). Cleansed of officious "regulating lines," the arch stands in Breton's book as a triumph not of geometric propriety but of a different (if no less peremptory) project. A wry caption declares the structure beautiful solely in its "useless[ness]." René Magritte seconded this defiant gesture in one of surrealism's most famous images from the same year—an image that might be seen as an oblique send-up of Le Corbusier's briar pipe, also famously reproduced in *Vers une architecture* and *L'art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (1925) and a staple of Purist painting. For Corbusier, the pipe stood as a paragon of simple functionalism, an analogue of the architectural revolution that he hoped would obviate social insurgency. In Magritte's *Treachery of Images* (1928–1929) the object no longer serves as a votive of fidelity and simplicity. Even in its silent propriety, Magritte's pipe falls victim to the mutiny of language from the straightjacket of sense. The revolution that Le Corbusier had hoped to quell with this humble architectonics of the everyday erupted—quite in spite of himself—precisely in and among ordinary objects during the 1920s.

The linguistic treason that Magritte's painting spells out occurs more tacitly—if no less forcefully—in de Chirico's paintings. Just as the hard surfaces of de Chirico's façades belie their emptiness as vessels of actual use or sure meaning, the decorum of Metaphysical objects masks their semiotic promiscuity. The reception of one particular painting strikingly illustrates these paradoxes and the wide-ranging resonances of de Chirico's work between the wars. *The Evil Genius of a King* (1914), which he painted in Paris on the eve of World War One, reveals a constellation of unrecognizable objects pinned to a vertiginously tipped plane, in a shallow space. Alluding to navigational tools and to the practices of ancient haruspices—and thus to both mathematical logic and oracular divination—the image invokes the viewer simultaneously as a scrupulous engineer, a patron before a modern shop window, and an augur in front of an ancient altar.⁷⁵ Perhaps not surprisingly, the painting underwent strikingly different appropriations in the larger field of modernism. In the second issue of *Dada* (December 1917), Tristan Tzara placed *The Evil Genius of a King* alongside his own "Poèmes nègres." As the only figurative image reproduced in the journal, de Chirico's canvas appears in ostensible sympathy with dadaist nonsense. A few years later, the same painting came to inform a series of still lifes by Patrick Henry Bruce—an American artist in Paris who contributed to the early development of Purist painting but then betrayed its patent influence during the early 1920s. Several of Bruce's paintings of 1923–1924 adapt *The*

Evil Genius's pitched plank and compressed space but depict their objects as unadorned solids, an assembly of abstracted geometric types stripped of any individual quiddity.⁷⁶ More than a decade later, Man Ray borrowed *The Evil Genius's* gravity-defying incline for his painting, *La fortune* (1938), which teases out from the original painting a similar mixture of play and menace, this time on the eve of a different world war.

These paradoxes are not aberrant but typical of the period.⁷⁷ The third original editor of *L'esprit nouveau*, Paul Dermée, was a committed dadaist who would eventually leave the journal to pursue his own interests. The “classic[al] age” that Dermée called for after World War One was not, as evidenced by his own proclivities, inimical to avant-garde experimentation.⁷⁸ Even the terms *esprit nouveau* and *surrealism* shared a common origin in the parlance of Guillaume Apollinaire.⁷⁹ As Luigi Baldacci writes, Apollinaire had already “justified the marriage between avant-garde and classicism” in the eyes of numerous “repentant” artists following World War One.⁸⁰ Like Apollinaire’s legacy after his death in 1918, de Chirico’s oeuvre allowed for different, even antagonistic, projections onto the same surfaces. The occasional overlap between them was not a haphazard fluke. During the 1920s de Chirico and the Purists shared the same dealer, Léonce Rosenberg and his Galerie de l’Effort Moderne. Many writers, from J.-E. Blanche to Waldemar George, wrote sympathetically about both Corbusier and de Chirico. While George exalted the populist resonances of Le Corbusier’s architecture, in defiance of a “reactionary” and “rich” clientele, he simultaneously eulogized the aristocratic and “divine” exclusivity of de Chirico’s Metaphysical painting.⁸¹ Though this reflects George’s own mercenary (and increasingly fascist) sympathies, it also suggests how the respective oeuvres of both de Chirico and Le Corbusier appealed to sensibilities that intersected as much as they diverged. These circumstances reached an ironic apogee in January 1920. At the first soirée for the protosurrealist journal *Littérature*, organized by Breton, de Chirico’s paintings were exhibited alongside works by Gris, Fernand Léger, and Jacques Lipschitz—the only three artists whose works (aside from his own and Ozenfant’s) Le Corbusier saw fit to grace his landmark 1925 Pavillon de l’Esprit Nouveau.⁸²

Van Doesburg, the De Stijl pioneer and a fellow traveler of both *Valori plastici* and *L'esprit nouveau*, seized upon these paradoxes early on, comparing de Chirico’s canvases to Gerrit Rietveld’s tricolor chair in a poem from 1920.⁸³ If de Chirico’s geometries are more fraught than pure, less useful than lyrical, his paintings nevertheless set these valences into an unprecedented propinquity. The appropriately mixed reception of his work between the world wars might help us to take Ozenfant at his word when he writes—in *Foundations of Modern Art* (1928), published precisely at the

height of the period—that “all artistic activity falls into two living *collective* trends, Dadaism and Purism.” Metaphysical painting and its afterlives defy the notion of dada and surrealism as the absolute foils to Purism. How else may we explain Dalí’s Purist still lifes from the early 1920s or Serge Charchoune’s oscillations among cubism, Purism, and dada during the same years? Conversely, how do we square (so to speak) what is surreal about Purist painting, despite itself? How do we reckon the proximity between Léger’s earnest, tumescent mechanisms from the late 1910s and Picabia’s mordant versions of the same contraptions? What of the fact that the trope of the “glass house” served the fascist imaginary (in Giuseppe Terragni’s Casa del Fascio, as much as in Mussolini’s famous analogy) at the same time that Breton claimed it as a metaphor for surrealism? Finally, what do we make of the simple irony that Loos designed Tzara’s residence in Montmartre in 1926? Even in their rarefied airlessness, de Chirico’s images—and the void at their ideological core—give some breathing room to these convergences.

With his tongue firmly in cheek in 1930, the painter Christopher Wood gives them some room as well, staging—in his painting *Zebra and Parachute*—the oppositions that were rending French cultural politics at the time. A diminutive parachutist and a lone zebra puncture the taut sobriety of Le Corbusier’s Villa Savoie. In its own invocation of Le Corbusier, Ted Benoit’s 1983 postmodern parody appears as much in the vein of Wood’s imagery as of de Chirico’s. Benoit’s cartoon—and the Metaphysical painting from which it derives—tenders a fabled truce between these same oppositions, a truce at once retrospective and prospective. The “two living collective trends” that Ozenfant identified as twin sides of the same coin of postwar Paris occupy the same space here. Like an arc pulled back on itself, the scene reconciles the extremes of reason and dream. Contemporary France is drawn like a bow; its antagonisms appear lulled into an eerie calm. Benjamin’s dialectics have reached a standstill.

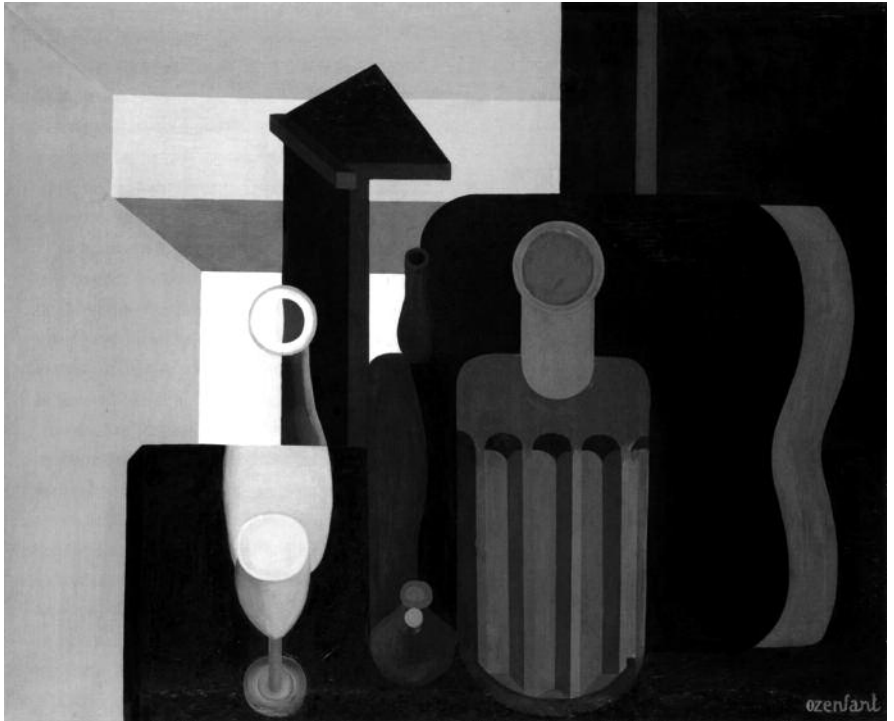
Just weeks before the essay by “Giovanni Loreto” arrived at the offices of *L’esprit nouveau*, de Chirico penned a letter to another Parisian address. Following up on a request for the completion of some paintings, he responded with obsequious zeal to his newly professed admirer, Breton.

Thank you for your encouraging letter. Now, I count only on you. . . .
I am reading your book and your texts in *Littérature*, and I hold you in high regard and feel great love for you; I expect great things from you for art and for this renaissance (I must use this word) which we are working toward and for which we sacrifice ourselves.⁸⁴

Thus commenced quite a different courtship. Breton and his cohorts oblig-

Amédée Ozenfant. *Flask, Guitar, Glass, and Bottle on a Green Table*, 1920. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

ingly championed the very master they would, just years later, come to scorn (when they issued a *damnatio memoriae* against de Chirico's wretched "renaissance" in 1926). The Purists, by contrast, seemed to have passed over the solicitations of "Loreto" from the start. His text, in any case, languished at the bottom of Corbu's desk. For a while, though, de Chirico seemed to have it both ways: as Giovanni and Giorgio, reactionary and radical, a purveyor of blueprints and of ruins. His Metaphysical cities could stand, like the space framed in Benoît's caricature, as sites as much of discipline as of ridicule.



Notes

An earlier and shorter version of this paper was given in the form of an invited lecture at the University of Toronto, Ohio State University, and Stanford University. For their comments, criticisms, and encouragement, I thank Rodolphe El Khoury, Lisa Florman, Jennifer Marshall, and Alexander Nagel. My work on de Chirico, as well as my approach to this period in French modernism, remains deeply indebted to T.J. Clark's teaching and advising. Unless otherwise noted, all translations—and any errors that remain—are mine. I am grateful to dear friends Massimo Giannetta and Benoît-Philippe Duval for their photographic assistance and their company in looking at Libera and Corbu buildings. Finally, thanks to Nicola Lucchi and Valerie McGuire for their invaluable assistance with images.

1. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), Konvolut N, 459.

2. In his *Foundations of Modern Art*—first published in 1928—Ozenfant acknowledges this shared concern, writing, “It was from the union of the two attitudes dada and Purism that the passion for modern objects issued, exaggerated though it became in certain cases.” Amédée Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art* (1928), trans. John Rodker (New York: Dover, 1952), 117.

3. “The best German cultural figures learned best to come to terms with the Greeks . . . by skeptically abandoning the Hellenic ideal and completely perverting the true purpose of antiquarian studies.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (1967; New York: The Modern Library, 2000), sec. 20, 122. On de Chirico's scrupulous assimilation of Nietzschean philosophy, see Paolo Baldacci, *Giorgio De Chirico: The Metaphysical Period, 1888–1919*, trans. Jeffrey Jennings (New York: Bullfinch, 1997); and Ara H. Merjian, *Giorgio de Chirico and the Metaphysical City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming).

4. In 1919 de Chirico infamously declared a newfound dedication to “craft,” baptized himself “Pictor classicus,” and embraced an increasingly pedantic mode of painting. See Giorgio de Chirico, “The Return to the Craft” (1920), trans. Massimo Carrà, in *Metaphysical Art*, ed. Massimo Carrà (New York: Praeger, 1971), 90.

5. In his fictional reconstruction of de Chirico's early career (based on a range of documents), the art historian Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco imagines de Chirico encountering Le Corbusier at a café in the neighborhood of Saint-Germain. Paraphrasing de Chirico on his Parisian exploits, Fagiolo writes, “At the table in the corner there is someone who greets him [de Chirico]: yes, it is indeed he, Le Corbusier, a frequent habituée of the Petit Saint-Benoît, since he lives just blocks away on the rue Jacob.” Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Come diventare pistor optimus (La vita di Giorgio de Chirico)* (Turin: Allemandi, 1988), 161. The extent to which this reflects an actual encounter is unclear.

6. Le Corbusier's only significant mention of de Chirico appears in his 1925 text *The Decorative Art of Today*. He cites an essay, published in the first number of *La révolution surréaliste* (December 1924), in which de Chirico describes some fantastic objects: “They are like levers, as irresistible as those all-powerful machines, those gigantic cranes which raise high over the teeming building-sites sections of floating fortresses with heavy towers like the breasts of antediluvian mammals.” Le Corbusier glosses, “However far you want to carry the exaltation of emotions—even if to undermine a rationalism which was and is indis-

pensable, and thereby create a new Byronic romanticism—these emotive relations will continue to be based on *objects*, and the only possible objects are *objects with a function*.” Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*, trans. James Dunnnett (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 187–189.

7. Stephen Gardiner, *Le Corbusier* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 49.

8. The extensive, 1972 exhibition *Immagini della Città*, for example, situated both Le Corbusier and de Chirico’s work under the rubric of “Utopia.” See also Paolo Baldacci, “The Function of Nietzsche’s Thought in de Chirico’s Art,” in *Nietzsche and “An Architecture of Our Minds,”* ed. Alexandre Kostka and Irving Wohlfarth (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999), 91–114; and Jean-Louis Cohen, “Le Corbusier’s Nietzschean Metaphors,” in *Nietzsche and “An Architecture of Our Minds,”* ed. Kostka and Wohlfarth, 311–332.

9. Stanislaus von Moos, *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis* (1968; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), 41. Born Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, Le Corbusier changed his name only after his early Purist period. Thus, scholars generally refer to the author of his Purist paintings as Jeanneret and reserve “Le Corbusier” to refer to his architectural work.

10. Von Moos’s allusion to Greece presumably paraphrases Le Corbusier’s own description of the image as “an emanation of the landscapes of Greece.” Carol S. Eliel, “Purism in Paris, 1918–25,” in *L’Esprit Nouveau: Purism in Paris, 1918–1925* (New York: Abrams, 2001), 16. On Adolphe Appia’s and E. Gordon Craig’s influence on de Chirico, see Marianne Martin, “Reflections on De Chirico and *Arte Metafisica*,” *Art Bulletin* 2 (1978) 342–353; and Francesco Poli, *La Metafisica* (1989; Bari, Italy: Laterza, 2004), 86–96.

11. Guillaume Apollinaire, *L’intransigeant*, 30 October 1913. Consider as well Roger Marx’s remark that de Chirico was “impervious to the frenzied dance of modernism.” Unidentified review, cited and reprinted in *Valori plastici* (1919). Even years later, after de Chirico had decidedly absorbed aspects of avant-garde painting, Apollinaire reiterated this notion: “Aujourd’hui, les jeunes futuristes italiens subissent une nouvelle influence: celle de leur compatriote Giorgio de Chirico qui, avant la guerre, peignait à Paris. Du reste, ce peintre d’accent si particulier est peut-être le seul peintre européen vivant qui n’ait pas subi l’influence de la jeune école française.” (Today, the young Italian futurists have found a new master in the person of their compatriot Giorgio de Chirico, who worked in Paris before the war. De Chirico, incidentally, has a highly personal style; he may be the only living European painter who has not been influenced by the new French school.) Guillaume Apollinaire, “Échos et on-dit des lettres et des arts” (13 April 1918), trans. and reprinted in *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews, 1902–1918*, ed. LeRoy C. Breunig (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 461.

12. “M. de Chirico se révèle donc comme ‘artiste français’ conscient si l’on peut dire . . . ses paysages sont tous fantaisistes, mais comme une sorte de dogme. . . . La couleur ne semble pas avoir pour lui d’existence personnelle, elle ne sert qu’à souligner les formes et les définir.” (Mr. de Chirico shows himself, we might say, to be a *consciously* “French artist” . . . his landscapes are all fictitious, but in a dogmatic manner. . . . Color seems to have no personal autonomy for him, but serves only to underscore and define forms.) Maurice Raynal, “Exposition G. de Chirico,” *Gil Blas*, 16 October 1913. De Chirico was subsequently included in interwar anthologies of French modernist painting (by Dorette Berthoud and André Salmon, for instance).

13. Ozenfant painted alongside de la Fresnaye at the Académie de la Palette.

14. “Les signes d’une libération. Son personnage et ses deux natures-mortes ne sont que

des essais. Toutefois, ils nous plaisent plus que tant de prétendues oeuvres, par leur logique, par le respect des vérités essentielles, par leur honnêteté au plus beau sens du mot. De semblables ouvrages sont en réaction, bien qu'imparfaitement réalisés, contre le petit symbolisme pour cours du soir, contre l'esthétisme démocratique, contre l'Art Esperanto, contre le cosmopolitisme, contre l'Art muffle [*sic*]." André Salmon, "Le retour en méditation: M. de la Fresnaye," *Montjoie!* 2, no. 3 (1913): 27–28. "Il faut excepter ceux des réels artistes que le cubisme n'a point gangrenés, qui ont pris sincèrement cette mécanique scolaire pour une discipline. . . . Lhote, La Fresnaye, et Segonzac." Louis Vauxcelles, review of *Salon des Indépendants*, *Gil Blas* 18 (March 1913): 2.

15. See, for example, von Moos, 39; Silver, 234–247; and Christopher Green, *Art in France: 1900–1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 152–158. Green rightly notes (elsewhere) the influence of de Chirico's painting on Fernand Léger's work of the mid-1920s. See Christopher Green, *Léger and the Avant-Garde* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 258–261.

16. Giorgio de Chirico, "On Metaphysical Art" (1919), trans. Massimo Carrà, in *Metaphysical Art*, ed. Massimo Carrà, 90.

17. See Giorgio de Chirico, "Paulhan MSS" (1911–1913), in *Hebdomeros and Other Writings*, trans. John Ashbery, Mark Polizzotti et al. (Cambridge, MA: Exact Change, 1992), 208–209.

18. Amédée Ozenfant and Le Corbusier, "Formation de l'optique moderne," *L'esprit nouveau* 21 (March 1924), quoted in Christopher Green, *Art in France, 1900–1940* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 156.

19. Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, "Le Purisme," *L'esprit nouveau* 4 (January 1921): 386.

20. Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, "After Cubism" (1918), trans. John Goodman, in *Purism in Paris*, pp. 135, 145, 165.

21. "Purism begins with elements chosen from existing objects, extracting their most specific forms. It draws them for preference from among those that serve the most direct of human uses; those which are like extensions of man's limbs, and thus of an extreme intimacy, a banality that makes them barely exist as subjects of interest in themselves, and hardly lend themselves to anecdote." Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant, *La peinture moderne* (1925), quoted in Rayner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980), 211. See also Maurice Raynal's essay from *Valori Plastici*: "it is no longer a question of creating [forms] *ex nihilo*, but of constructing new arrangements with the aid of familiar elements." Maurice Raynal, "Purismo e la logica," *Valori Plastici* 3, no. 3 (1921): 56. Alexander Tzonis writes that among Corbusier's main ambitions was to "instruct his contemporaries how to 'see' artifacts rather than to make artifacts just to be seen." Alexander Tzonis, *Le Corbusier: The Poetics of Machine and Metaphor* (New York: Universe, 2001), 12.

22. "[L]a beauté sans signe permettrait peut être d'éliminer certaines incertitudes dans l'étude de l'art qui est trop souvent celle des goûts personnels." (Beauty without signs will perhaps allow for the elimination of some uncertainties in the study of art, which is too often bound up with personal tastes.) Amédée Ozenfant, "Sur les écoles cubistes et post-cubistes," in *Journal de psychologie: Normale et pathologique* 6 (1926): 301–302.

23. Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant, "Purism," trans. Robert Herbert, in *Modern*

Artists on Art, ed. Robert Herbert (New York: Dover, 2000), 63. The article was originally published in *L'esprit nouveau* 4 (1921).

24. See Ara H. Merjian, “*Il faut Méditerraniser la peinture*: Giorgio de Chirico, Nietzsche, and “The Obscurity of Light,”” *California Italian Studies* 1, no. 1 (January 2010): n.p., <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/12d9s5vb>.

25. This misapprehension of Metaphysical painting as humanist characterized a range of early interpretations, from René Gaffé to Eugenio d’Ors to Ozenfant himself, who describes de Chirico in the following terms: “While Cubists were seeking a new form totally different from anything that had gone before . . . Chirico began by drawing the elements of his formula from the Italian Renaissance. A humanist[!], his first works made a singular impression, because of an extraordinary dramatic quality in them, due to a curious approximation of antique backgrounds and certain aspects of modernity.” Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art*, 124.

26. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann, 350.

27. Le Corbusier, *L’art décoratif d’aujourd’hui* (1925; Paris: Éditions Arthaud, 1980), 218.

28. Compare, for instance, Léger’s *The Baluster* (1925), which doubles as both a modern baluster and a fluted column; or Ozenfant’s *Flask, Guitar, and Bottles on a Green Table* (1920), in which the eponymous bottle serves triple duty as a container, a fluted column, and an allusion to naval smokestacks. For an astute description of the latter, see Eliel, “Purism in Paris, 1918–25,” 28.

29. Von Moos, 39–49.

30. On Purism’s relationship to the politics of wartime and postwar France, see Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914–1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); and Kenneth E. Silver, “Purism: Straightening Up after the Great War,” *Artforum* 15, no. 7 (March 1977): 56–63.

31. Alberto Savinio, “Anyodomenon: Principles in the Evaluation of Contemporary Art,” trans. Massimo Carrà, in *Metaphysical Art*, ed. Massimo Carrà, 162. The article was originally published in *Valori plastici* 4–5 (May 1919).

32. See Ara H. Merjian, “A Lost Manuscript on (and by?) de Chirico: Origins, Authorship, Implications,” *Metafisica: Journal of the Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico* 5–6 (2006): 386–403.

33. Merjian, “A Lost Manuscript.” The essay has been inventoried among other articles in the archives of the Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris, that were similarly never published in *L’esprit nouveau*.

34. *SIC* 3, no. 36 (December 1918).

35. Pierre Albert-Birot, “ETC . . .,” *SIC* 3, no. 29 (May 1918).

36. Carlo Carrà, “Il Purismo: Risposta a Raynal,” in *Valori plastici* 3, no. 3 (1921): 59. (Carrà’s essay immediately followed Maurice Raynal’s “Il purismo e la logica,” *Valori plastici* 3, no. 3 [1921]: 56.) Carrà had indeed expressed such sentiments years earlier, even before his fateful encounter and collaboration with de Chirico. Carrà had said shortly after retreating from Futurism, “the idea of Italian art is at the apex of every constructive aspiration.” Carlo Carrà, “Our Antiquity” (1916–1918), trans. Massimo Carrà, in *Metaphysical Art*, ed. Massimo Carrà, 44. The essay was originally published in *Pittura metafisica* (Florence, 1919).

37. To wit, Giovanni Loreto’s insistence that “This entire body of painting, which the

artist himself deemed *metaphysical*, influenced numerous artists, even as de Chirico—that indefatigable seeker—pursued entirely new kinds of work.” See p. 88 of this issue.

38. As Giuliano Briganti writes about *Valori plastici*, “[f]rom the very first issue its contributors were artists and critics often at odds with one another—indeed, it is probable that it was a hotbed more of controversy than of fraternity.” Giuliano Briganti, “The *Valori Plastici* Years,” in *Italian Art, 1900–1945*, ed. Pontus Hulton and Germano Celant (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 77.

39. Carrà, “Our Antiquity,” 37.

40. Carlo Carrà, “Theories as Instrument of Knowledge” (1918), trans. Massimo Carrà, in *Metaphysical Art*, ed. Massimo Carrà, 72. The essay was originally published in *Pittura metafisica*.

41. Serge Fauchereau writes, “De Chirico would prove very important in attracting certain painters, such as Ardengo Soffici, Ottone Rosai, Mario Sironi, and Primo Conti, who had erred towards Futurism, back towards Realism. Italian magazines such as *La Raccolta*, but above all, *Valori Plastici*, both established in 1918, and *La Ronda* which appeared a year later, were the first to hail this change of direction. . . . Looking at these magazines gives us the chance to trace the development of the misunderstanding between the Surrealists and de Chirico, originally revealed by Apollinaire. . . . Throughout the 1920s, a number of art magazines sympathetic to de Chirico sprang up . . . [including] *L’Esprit Nouveau* (1920–25) [*sic*], published by Le Corbusier and Ozenfant in Paris.” Serge Fauchereau, “Italian Artists and Western Magazines and Periodicals,” in *Italian Art, 1900–1945*, ed. Hulton and Celant, 117.

42. This same year (1919) de Chirico disingenuously asserted in his essay “On Metaphysical Art” that “[f]rom the geographical point of view it was inevitable that the initial conscious manifestation of the metaphysical movement should have been born in Italy. In France this could not have happened.” De Chirico, “On Metaphysical Art,” 88.

43. “La rivista [è] ottima, a ogni punto di vista; mi piace anche quel senso di solidità che le conferisce il francese scritto da un italiano che lo sa.” Giorgio de Chirico to Giovanni Papini, 4 February 1919, in *La metafisica schiarita: Da de Chirico a Carrà, da Morandi a Savinio*, ed. Maurizio Calvesi (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982), 148.

44. See Serge Fauchereau, “Italian Artists and Western Magazines and Periodicals,” in *Valori plastici*, ed. Paolo Fossati, Patrizia Rosazza Ferraris, and Livia Velani (Milan: Skira, 1998), 117; and Serge Fauchereau, “Dove va l’arte moderna? Mostra documentaria su Mario Broglio e ‘Valori Plastici,’” in *Valori plastici*, ed. Fossati, Ferraris, and Velani, 275–302.

45. Carlo Carrà, “Metaphysical Painting” (1918), trans. Massimo Carrà, in *Metaphysical Art*, ed. Massimo Carrà, 51, 69. The essay was originally published in *Pittura metafisica*.

46. De Chirico wrote years later that he while he was painting in Paris in the early 1910s his “thoughts returned to the cities of Italy.” Giorgio de Chirico, “[Autobiografia]” (1919), reprinted in *Il meccanismo del pensiero: Critica, polemica autobiografia (1911–1943)* (Rome: Einaudi, 1985), 150. So, too, during these same years did Apollinaire declare, “C’est à toi que je songe ITALIE mère de mes pensées.” (It is of you that I dream, ITALY, mother of my thoughts.) Guillaume Apollinaire, “À l’Italie,” *La voce* 7, no. 17 (15 November 1915); and Guillaume Apollinaire, “O frères d’Italie . . .” *La voce* 7, no. 17 (15 November 1915).

47. See *Giorgio de Chirico: Disegno*, ed. Jole de Sanna (Milan: Mondadori/Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, 2004); and Baldacci, *Giorgio de Chirico*, 194. The drawing is now in the collection of the Musée Picasso, Paris.

48. Le Corbusier and Ozenfant, "Purism," 60; emphasis mine.
49. Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time, and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941). See also Eve Blau and Nancy Troy, eds., *Architecture and Cubism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002).
50. Von Moos, 294.
51. Giorgio de Chirico, "J'ai été à New York," in *Meccanismo del pensiero*, 346; and Giorgio de Chirico, "Metafisica dell'America," in *Meccanismo del pensiero*, 351–352.
52. De Chirico first mentions Picasso's remark in Angelo Bardi [Giorgio de Chirico], "La vie de Giorgio de Chirico," in *Sélection: Chronique de la vie artistique*, vol. 8 (Antwerp: Éditions Sélection, 1929), 23.
53. Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 266 n. 10.
54. "The new aesthetic of the hotel wins us over / the station moves us," reads one of de Chirico's poems from 1911–1913. See Chirico, "Eluard MSS," in *Hebdomeros and Other Writings*, 100.
55. Giedion, 773. This is the only attribution to de Chirico's cities of specifically Parisian architecture in all of the art-historical scholarship.
56. Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 207.
57. De Chirico, "On Metaphysical Art," 90.
58. Von Moos, 293.
59. Von Moos, 294. Von Moos's attention to Le Corbusier's "framed views" merits further consideration vis-à-vis de Chirico's extensive meditations on (and pictorial pursuit of) framing as a key aesthetic trope. Von Moos's invocation of the work of Claude Lorraine (an important influence on de Chirico) in this context underscores some of the points of convergence.
60. "Marcel Duchamp a mis des moustaches à la Joconde; Jeanneret et Ozenfant, parfaits coiffeurs du cubisme, se sont empressés de les couper, mais elles repousseront." Francis Picabia, "Picabia dit dans *Littérature*," *Littérature* 4 (1924). In this response to articles in *L'esprit nouveau*, Picabia continues, "Maurice Raynal, mon cher Raynal, n'oubliez pas les pernods que nous prenions autrefois en compagnie de Guillaume Apollinaire, place Ravignan; si je vous dis cela c'est que moi j'aime toujours mieux les pernods que les devoirs de vacances imposés par l'Église Jeanneret et la cathédrale Ozenfant."
61. Giorgio de Chirico, "Max Klinger" (1921), trans. Massimo Carrà, in *Metaphysical Art*, ed. Massimo Carrà, 100. The essay was originally published in *Il convegno* 1 (10 November 1920): 32–34. These sentiments resonated with and extended his earliest meditations in Paris on "geometricized zones of cities," the "tender symmetries" and "perfect reliefs" of buildings," and so on.
62. Consider the final section of the essay by "Giovanni Loreto": "His entire effort tends to express itself with a scrupulous sincerity, approaching, by means of slow and painstaking labor, the level of master painting." See p. 88 of this issue. De Chirico also published a *Short Treatise on Pictorial Technique* in 1928—a pompous and pedantic riposte to his embattlements with the surrealists.
63. Nancy Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Deco to Le Corbusier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 218.
64. See Maurizio Calvesi, *Le due avanguardie: Dal futurismo alla Pop Art*. (Milan: Lerici,

1966); and Achille Bonito Oliva, *Warhol verso de Chirico* (Milan: Electa, 1982). See also William Rubin, “De Chirico and Modernism,” in *Giorgio de Chirico*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), 55–79. “De Chirico’s search for a ‘second identity’ in objects finds a still closer counterpart in Duchamp” (57).

65. Duchamp serves, for example, as the foil to Purism in Marc Antliff and Patricia Leighton’s *Cubism and Culture*: “Ozenfant and Le Corbusier would have likewise despised the affront to collective order and logic signified by Marcel Duchamp’s *Three Standard Stoppages*, as well as Duchamp’s embrace of the anarchist Max Stirner.” Marc Antliff and Patricia Leighton, *Cubism and Culture* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 213.

66. Duchamp further quipped in 1917 that “[t]he only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges”—a phrase that just as easily could have issued from the lips of Le Corbusier, whose *Vers une architecture* and *L’art décoratif d’aujourd’hui* proposed essentially the same sentiment, insisting that the valid aesthetic of the age lay not in art *per se* but in architecture and engineering.

67. The other version of this painting (also from 1919) reads even more incomprehensibly because the table’s plane reads not as a recessive space but as plumb with the picture plane.

68. Le Corbusier’s paintings from the mid- and late-1920s—with their proliferation of overlapping shapes, abstract patterning, and nearly biomorphic contours—seem both to betray certain Purist dictates and to announce the surrealist aspects that would increasingly inform his painting. See Naïma Jornod and Jean-Pierre Jornod, eds., *Le Corbusier (Charles Edouard Jeanneret): Catalogue raisonné de l’oeuvre peint*, 2 vols. (Milan: Skira, 2005).

69. Clement Greenberg, “Review of an Exhibition of Giorgio de Chirico” (1947), in *Arrogant Purpose, 1945–1949*, vol. 2 of *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 134.

70. Rubin, “De Chirico and Modernism,” 58.

71. Attacking the overwrought architecture of Rome, which reached its nadir in the Palazzaccio, Corbusier strove to recuperate a more dignified and unfussy “Lesson of Rome.” He champions the supposedly Latin and Mediterranean origins of modernism in terms similar to de Chirico’s own writings from 1918–1919. The latter writes: “I have meditated at length upon this problem of the metaphysics of Italian architecture, and all my painting of the years 1910–1914 is concerned with this problem. Perhaps the day will come when such an aesthetic, which up to now has been left to the whims of chance, will become a law and necessity for the upper classes and the directors of public concerns. Then perhaps we will be able to avoid the horror of finding ourselves placed in front of certain monstrous apotheoses of bad taste and pervading imbecility, like the gleaming white monument to the Great King [Vittorio Emanuele II] in Rome.” De Chirico, “On Metaphysical Art,” 90.

72. Michel Colle, “Vers une architecture symbolique,” *Cobra* (Brussels) 1 (1948): 21.

73. “It is easy to imagine the fantastic future possibilities of such architecture and its influences on the masses. Today we can have nothing but contempt for a century that relegates such *blueprints* to its so-called museums.” Gilles Ivain (Ivan Chtcheglov), “Formulary for a New Urbanism” (1953), in *Theory of the Dérive and Other Situationist Writings on the City*, ed. Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa (Barcelona: MACBA, 1996), 14–17. (The essay was also printed in the June 1958 *Internationale situationniste*.) “Certain of De Chirico’s paintings, which are clearly provoked by architecturally originated sensations, exert in turn

an effect on their objective base to the point of transforming it: they tend themselves to become blueprints or models.” Guy Debord, “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography” (1955), in *Theory of the Dérive*, ed. Libero Andreotti and Xavier Costa, 20.

74. Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art*, 116; emphasis in original.

75. See Ara H. Merjian, “Untimely Objects: Giorgio de Chirico’s *The Evil Genius of a King* (1914) between the Antediluvian and the Post-human,” in *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 57/58 (Spring–Autumn, 2010): 187–208.

76. See Barbara Rose, “The Price of Originality,” in *Patrick Henry Bruce: American Modernist*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1979), 61.

77. The dadaist and *Neue Sachlichkeit* reception of de Chirico and Carrà’s painting after 1919, for example, used the paintings’ precedent to insist upon perspective as “the rein and rudder of painting.” See George Grosz, Raul Hausmann, John Heartfield, and Rudolf Schlichter, *Die Gesetze der Malerei* (The Laws of Painting), published posthumously in Cornelia Thater-Schulz, ed., *Hannah Höch: Eine Lebenscollage*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Berlin: Argon, 1989), 696–98.

78. Paul Dermée, “Quand le symbolisme fut mort,” *Nord-Sud* 1, no. 1 (15 March 1917): 3.

79. In a penetrating and cogent essay, David Bachelor sets Purism and its putative opposites into dialogue, particularly to the extent that they intersect in the oeuvres of Apollinaire and Picasso. To these, I seek to add de Chirico’s work, which similarly offered various, conflicting aspects for expropriation. See David Bachelor, “‘This Liberty and This Order’: Art in France after the First World War,” in *Realism, Rationalism, Surrealism: Art between the Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), esp. 61–76.

80. Luigi Baldacci, “Ordine e letteratura,” in *Valori plastici* (Milan: Skira, 1998), 152.

81. Waldemar George, “L’exposition des arts décoratifs et industriels de 1925: Les tendances générales,” *L’amour de l’art* 6 (August 1925): 283–291, quoted in Troy, 191; and Waldemar George, *Giorgio De Chirico, avec des fragments littéraires de l’artiste* (Paris: Jeanne Bucher, 1934), xxiii.

82. Recall, too, that if Purism seems, in retrospect, the opposite number to dada and surrealist radicalism, Jeanneret and Ozenfant were themselves attacked in the conservative French press. On the group “Art et Liberté,” and its defense against “false traditionalists,” see Troy, 155. De Chirico’s influence seems to have been elsewhere on display at the 1925 Exposition of Decorative Arts. Dorette Berthoud writes, “Le retour de Chirico à Paris, vers 1924, ouvrit sa troisième période [*sic*], celle des mannequins. . . . A ces créatures mystérieuses, les étalagistes de l’Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, de 1925, empruntèrent le modèle de leurs mannequins en bois doré. (Duo ou les mannequins dans las tour ‘rose’ [*sic*]).” Dorette Berthoud, *La peinture française d’aujourd’hui* (Paris, 1937), 61.

83. Theo Van Doesburg, “La peinture artistique de De Chirico et une chaise de Rietveld,” *De Stijl* 5 (March 1920).

84. Ungaretti might have delivered the letter on de Chirico’s behalf. Giorgio de Chirico to André Breton, 12 January 1922, *Metafisica: Journal of the Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico* 1–2 (2002): 146–147.