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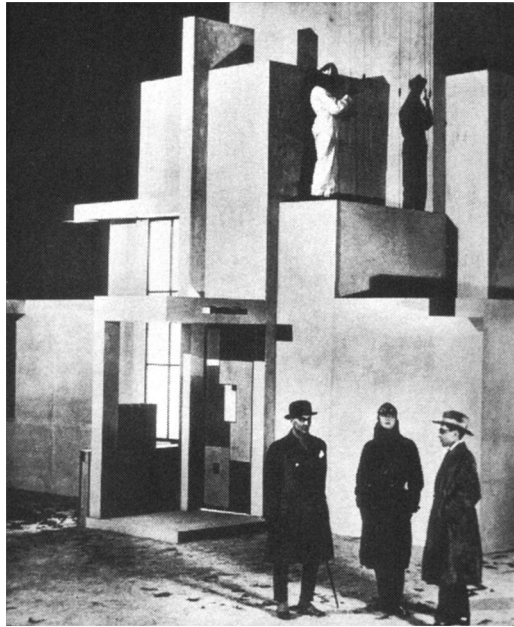
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Richard Becherer

Past Remembering: Robert Mallet-Stevens's Architecture of Duration

Richard Becherer, currently an independent scholar residing in Pittsburgh, has taught at Auburn, Virginia, Carnegie Mellon, and Cornell Universities. He is at work on a monograph on Mallet-Stevens, of which this article comprises a chapter.

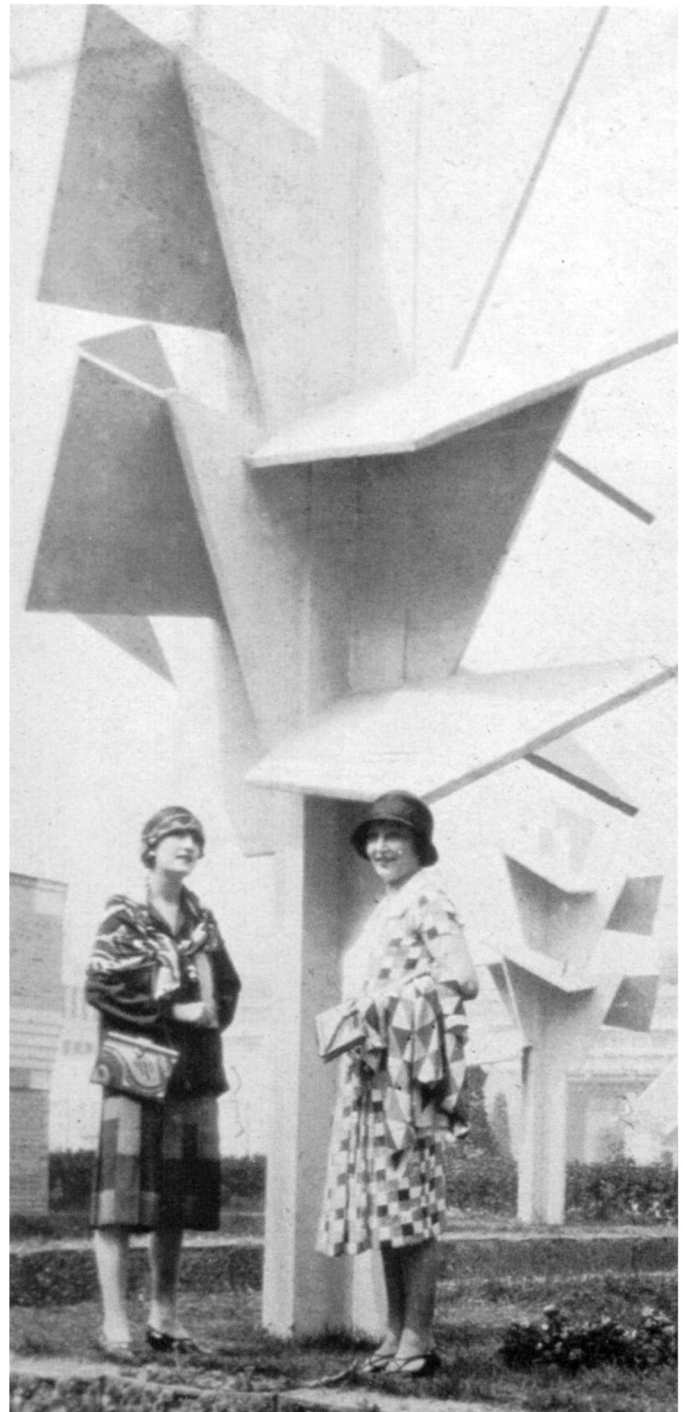
In a remarkable article of 1925, “Le Cinéma et les arts: Architecture,” Robert Mallet-Stevens spoke less of the functional than of the psychic agenda that modern architecture was designed to fill. Architecture in film, he suggested, should not simply enframe, but participate in the narrative action — it must become an actor. “Architecture plays,” he wrote.¹ This “play,” according to the architect, is directed to performing as the shadowy double of characterization and emplotment and to mirroring the dramatic staging. Mallet-Stevens spoke of this mirroring operation in terms of what the period called *photogénie*, the rhythmical repetition of motifs in various guises at points throughout the film.² *Photogénie* could reach across cinematic time, establishing visual connections between the most disparate parts of the *mise-en-scène* and thus also enacted a space/time function. Without doubt, the phenomenology informing Mallet-Stevens’s set designs operated within his architecture of the 1920s.³ Through a kind of photogenic association, his architecture could not only conjure up the memory of events just past but also call on the memory of things yet to come. In its appeal to memory, it was involved in a two-way address. It spoke to the task of manifesting cinematic illusion and narrative action, but also, so the architect would assert in “Le Décor” of 1929, of enframing the perceiving consciousness of the viewer without.⁴



1. Photograph taken during the filming of *L'Inhumaine*, featuring the set for the engineer's laboratory, and, in the foreground, from left to right, Robert Mallet-Stevens, Jacques Catelain, the film's leading man, and Marcel L'Herbier, the director

In foregrounding notions of the viewer's subjectivity and of memory, Mallet-Stevens's cinematic décor and architecture called into question the two theoretical bases of formalist interpretation; namely, the nonrepresentational nature of modernism and its psychologistic determinism. As a consequence of this challenge, he would never be regarded by the formalists as satisfactorily modern and would ultimately be dismissed from their consideration.⁵ The modern, for Mallet-Stevens, was inextricably linked to the past in a single great temporal sweep that had been theorized as "duration," and he held that an enduring and meaningful modernity would occur only by the exercise of our memory. The form that Mallet-Stevens gave to man's time consciousness and to the psychic operations that shape it is the focus of this essay.

Mallet-Stevens explored the thematics of time, and the formal implications of an architecture temporally conceived, in three constructions for the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes: the *Trees* erected in a garden in the Cour des Métiers located on the Left Bank, the Pavillon du Tourisme situated on the Right Bank, and the Hall de l'Ambassade Française mounted in the Cour des Métiers. At the time Mallet-Stevens was as well known by the general public for his film work as for his architecture and he was amply represented at the exposition as a *cinéaste*. Not only had he designed the set of Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Inhumaine*, one of the exhibition's major featured films,⁶ but moreover, had received the commission for a pair of model studios to be erected in the Grand Palais: one for the mammoth consortium Studios Gaumont/Pathé, the other for the independent French filmmakers, or *auteurs de films*. Unlike his previous work outside of film, which had been designed for an artistic and intellectual élite, his architecture for the exposition had an overtly public and outspokenly didactic agenda.⁷ The Exposition des Arts Décoratifs provided the staging point for

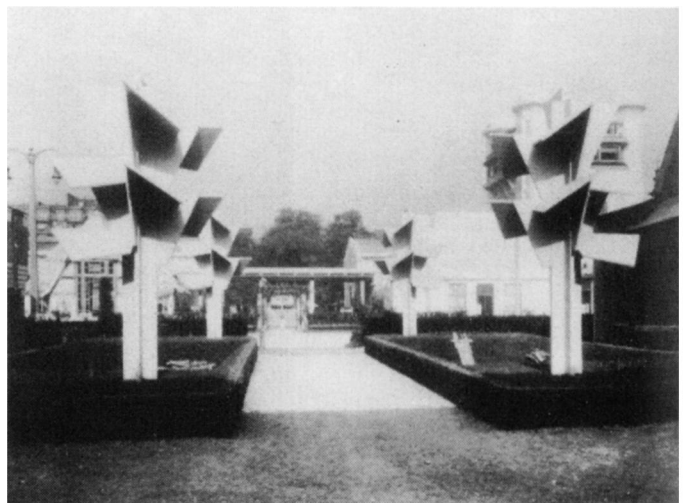
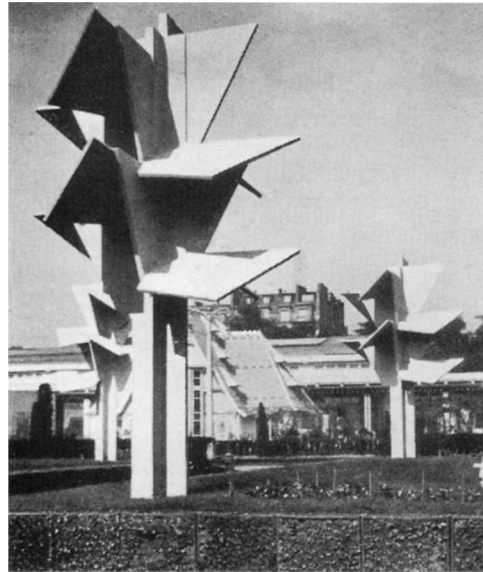


2. Mallet-Stevens, with Jan and Joël Martel, *Trees*, Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 1925, view with models attired by Sonia Delaunay

Mallet-Stevens to transfer cinematic theories from the screen to the architectural domain.⁸

Let us begin with a photograph of the *Trees*: a fashion shot that juxtaposes Mallet-Stevens's concrete constructions with two models attired in clothing designed by Sonia Delaunay.⁹ The models appear amusing in a slightly *demodé* way. But, as Henri Bergson might have argued, beneath any laugh there is the unconscious acknowledgment of a deeper truth.¹⁰ The truth here has to do with the circulation of meaning exchanged between clothing and setting. Delaunay's dresses differ dramatically from other prevailing styles of the day: they are neither the languid, sensual dresses such as Paul Poiret designed for the Ballets Russes, dresses that dramatized the movements of the body, nor the avant-garde little black dresses of Coco Chanel, created with the *femme type* in mind. Instead, these designs are works of art, autonomous objects that dissemble, through their patchwork of pattern and color and through their neutral profile, the architecture of the models themselves. In addition, although these dresses may cloak the exteriority of the models per se, the agitation of their patterning betokens another understanding, that of movement. Like some diaphanous X-ray plate, they seem to reveal Bergson's hidden truth — the activity of the models' inner life. Delaunay has attached a kind of fashion *simultanéisme* (to use the term that she and her husband Robert gave to the art movement they founded) to the motionless human figures as a way of revealing the vital inner existence of her objects, alluding, at the same time, to the active perception of the beholder that is required to unmask this deeper existence.

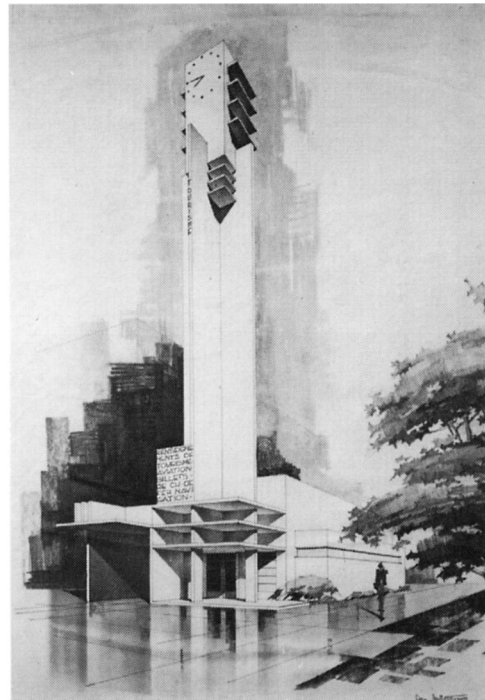
The "trees" in the background are of a comparable order. Mallet-Stevens set the *Trees* four-square into a simple garden courtyard that serves as enframement. In this architecture garden and trees collaborate to a point. Where the trees diverge, however, is in the explosion of triangular planes that Mallet-Stevens and his collaborators, the sculp-



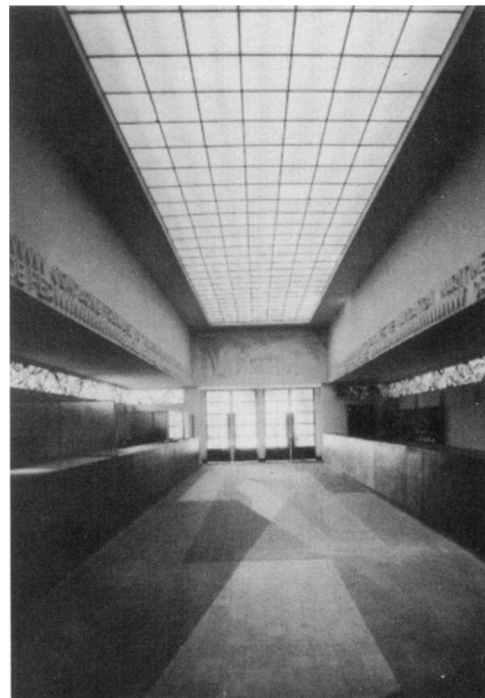
3, 4. *Trees* in their courtyard setting in the Cours des Métiers

tors Jan and Joël Martel, used to intimate the foliage in movement. Although these precast concrete “wings” suggest the trees’ implicit volume (and in this virtual reading, they perform as the shadowy doubles of more substantive “monumental” form), any reading of actual volume is repeatedly disrupted by the architecture’s aggregation of identical forms multiplied, seemingly, ad infinitum. Like the planes of foliage, the trees themselves are nothing short of mass-produced versions of each other; a multiplication that further shatters the autonomous monumentality of the artwork.¹¹ This multiplication of compositional elements frustrates our ability to situate the architecture of the *Trees* in space, as front and side engage in a combat to define specific spatial location.

A complex interlocution of light and shadow contributes to the unsettling of form. The impossibility of strictly situating illumination and of producing convincing shadows was, for Mallet-Stevens, a vice in cinematic staging, and to make the film set appear authentically architectural he recommended that various shades of gray paint be applied to selected surfaces.¹² With the *Trees*, however, by deliberately obscuring the source of illumination, he made the architectural seem cinematic.¹³ In fact, the white surfaces of the sculpture complicate our reading. For in creating shadow, the concrete “wings” also displace light. This light — reflected light — produces a multitude of possible sources of illumination, each of which reveals the form differently. Fugitive, dare I say phantom, glimmerings result from the *Trees*’ ambiguous lighting; they, in turn, bring forth the unexpected perception — that of the uncanny. As the sculpture trembles with its many lights, these false trees palpitate in the garden. As light becomes displaced, the primary fixed source of illumination, the sun (which customarily “fixes” the monumental object in space), is no longer a benchmark in our perceptual experience. Consequently, we experience a kind of unseating of the object.



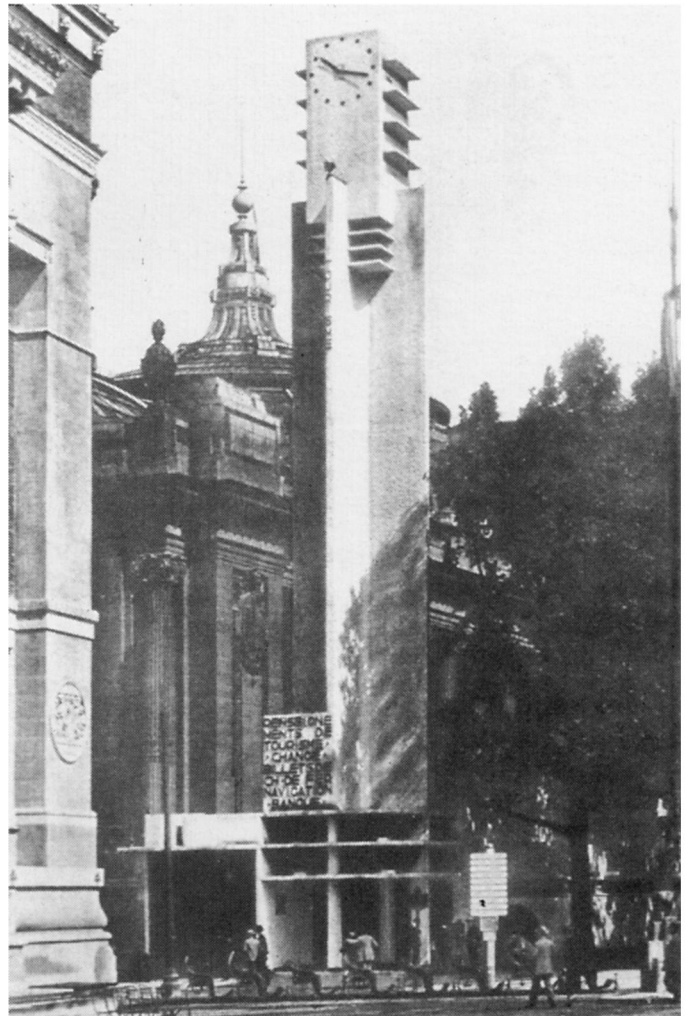
5. Mallet-Stevens, drawing of the Pavillon du Tourisme, Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, 1925



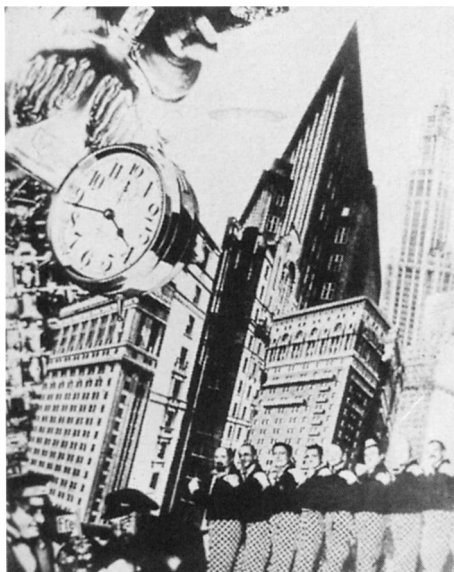
6. Interior view of the Pavillon du Tourisme

Or is it we who are unseated? Does the object of Mallet-Stevens's architectural disquisition fluctuate or is it the subject, the observer, who moves? It is perhaps an irrelevant query to ask which, or who, moves. For as we know whenever cubism is involved, particularly the *simultanéisme* we observe here, the object is to represent the fluctuant inner nature of phenomena as well as the fluctuant character of the viewer's sensory perceptions, movements he or she harnesses in the conscious identification of visual phenomena.¹⁴ Returning again to the fashion photograph of the *Trees*, we can recognize Sonia Delaunay's clothing as a kind of sign (a designer label perhaps) of the formal and psychic activities engendered by the iridescent forms of Mallet-Stevens's composition.

At the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, Mallet-Stevens appeared to counter his *Trees* on the Left Bank with a far more monumental construction on the Right, the Pavillon du Tourisme. This building was conceived as a focal point of the exhibition and, standing adjacent to one of the gateways, was a major site of the fair's *va-et-vient*. Although more cubistic in the architectonic sense (clarity of surface, structure, volume), it nonetheless presents a genre of cubism at odds with that of the *Trees* in the garden of the Cour des Métiers.¹⁵ The pavilion's tall clock tower acts as the architectural mirror image of the long, streamlined information hall, a great room accessed through the front porch. Further, the visual instability that results from the contrast of vertical and horizontal alternates with the stable, pure red cube that serves as a bus shelter alongside the tower. Although there is a certain consistency in formal vocabulary (though this may be arguable), the Pavillon du Tourisme involves a protracted play and counterplay of differentiated parts. Unlike the imagistic superimposition suggested by Mallet-Stevens's *simultanéiste* exercise, the pavilion operates on the basis of formal juxtaposition and difference. From the compositional — or countercompositional — technique emerges a



7. Photograph of the Pavillon du Tourisme from the exhibition catalogue



8. Walter Ruttmann, publicity still for *Berlin: Die Sinfonie einer Großstadt*, 1927



9. Giorgio de Chirico, *Melancholy of Departure (Gare Montparnasse)*, 1914

semiotic of disjunction that is reinforced by the standard exhibition photograph of the building. Particularly noteworthy here is the disharmony between the gleaming white tower and its setting, specifically the Beaux Arts Grand Palais in the background. This shot powerfully contrasts distinct stylistic periods and, in so doing, points up a tendentious architectural history of the recent past, a history-still-in-progress. In the distancing proposed by the photograph — the time elapsed between old and new — a history of modernism has taken root and flowered in Mallet-Stevens's new building.¹⁶

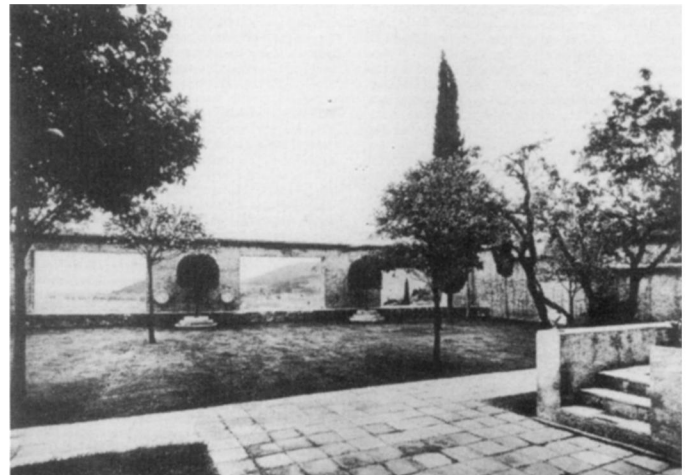
In choosing this picture as the preferred depiction of his major building at the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, Mallet-Stevens differed markedly from his compatriot Le Corbusier, designer of the nearby Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau. Le Corbusier, in the large-format photograph published in the same exhibition catalogue, presented his building in a pristine state removed from the immediate context, the neighboring Grand Palais, which he eradicated from view by close cropping. As a result, Le Corbusier's building stands pure, detached, and monumental — paradigmatic and positive. Mallet-Stevens's more critical brand of cubism seems to work in a way more closely resembling montage, disjunctive not only internally but externally as well. In this, it approaches such experimental photography as the publicity stills for Paul Citroën's *Metropolis* of 1923 or Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin* of 1927, which conjecture a contemporary city built, as it were, from the fragments of an architectural past both recent and distant.¹⁷ Mallet-Stevens's built montage also considers the past in its pursuit of an authentic modernity, yet the architect seems less to engage with than to distance himself spatially and psychically from an immediate architectural history. Despite its playful negativity, however, Mallet-Stevens's photograph, like the photo-montages, exploits the past differentially, making clear that modernity is not just a function of time, but of the passage of time.

The clock in the Pavillon du Tourisme (as in Ruttmann's assemblage) performs a semiotic function, related to the agenda of stylistic differentiation that Mallet-Stevens's disjunctive architecture aims to explore. We might recall, as a point of comparison, Giorgio de Chirico's *The Melancholy of Departure*, which quietly centers a metaphysical cityscape on a clock, so positioned as to suggest the activity of time internal to the painting. Time in De Chirico's painting is far different from that expressed by the futurists, or their compatriots the *simultanéistes*, where multiple instants are alarmingly superimposed as one.¹⁸ Here both De Chirico and Mallet-Stevens manifest the relentless passage of time and the impending anomie that results from the ensuing distance in psychological space. This separation is intensified as the present rapidly collapses into the past and the momentary perception is instantly relegated to the mysterious domain of memory. The clock is Mallet-Stevens's sign of the times. Persistent symbol of vanity, it is, moreover, the measure of the process (and progress) of time; it is the mechanism accounting for the interval that passes between distinct events. Most important, beyond this registration, the timepiece serves constantly, repeatedly, and intimately to remind the viewer of a fleeting world, fleeting perception, and fleeting life.¹⁹

Though we might be tempted, as many commentators have been, to discuss the architect's fixation as mere puristic mechanolatry, the clock was, rather, the hallmark of an internal obsession. In Mallet-Stevens's villa for the Vicomte de Noailles, for instance, an electric clock (designed by Francis Jourdain) was prominently displayed in its every room. Similarly, the famous terrace overlooking the Baie d'Hyères — immortalized in Man Ray's film *Les Mystères du Château du Dé* — was notably furnished with instruments of atmospheric measurement. In using these devices metonymically, Mallet-Stevens came to specify the garden mechanistically as a kind of open-air *passage du thermomètre et baromètre*. In this light, the garden conjures up associations with Louis



10. Mallet-Stevens, Villa of the Vicomte de Noailles, Hyères, France, 1923–25, view of the salon in 1987 showing the trace of a clock



11. View of the walled garden of the Villa de Noailles, 1923

Aragon's "Passages" in *Le Paysan de Paris*, written between 1924 and 1927, where he described the *passage* as a sun-filled space lined with shop windows that display "an inevitable succession of tastes and styles."²⁰ For Aragon, it is the seasonal, weekly, daily, hourly transformation of style, mechanically registered by positivistic architecture (and political economy) that allows us to witness the nature of time and its extent, its duration, as an active principle.²¹

Something similar occurs in Mallet-Stevens's villa. The barometer and thermometer in the garden register space's differences, just as the clocks inside calibrate time's spaces. As time and space are both mechanically described (and potentially controlled) at the Villa de Noailles, they are also implicitly equated. Mallet-Stevens advanced an architectural exegesis of what happens to natural phenomena when viewed through the veil of duration. For the wall of the garden is regularly interrupted by a series of openings not unlike the matching shop fronts that line Aragon's *passages*. Through this suite of identical *coulisses*, or windows, nature is presented and interpreted as a sequence of distinct sense impressions. These scenes recall the frame-by-frame descriptions of life, "filmic migrations of images," that orchestrate Aragon's accounting of time's duration.²² The images framed by the garden wall are captured via subjective displacement, or, in layman's terms, a walk in the garden. From this subjective displacement, we recognize Mallet-Stevens's view of nature as something resembling a film strip, whose content is revealed only as it unwinds in time. Furthermore, Mallet-Stevens seemingly posits that knowledge of nature can occur only in light of the successive build-up of immediate perceptions, interpreted in accordance with still other images perceived in the subconscious picture books of memory.

The persistent themes of Mallet-Stevens's work — time and duration, perception and memory — emerged from a philosophy of relativity that conjoined much of the period's visual experimentation, especially two great competing ar-

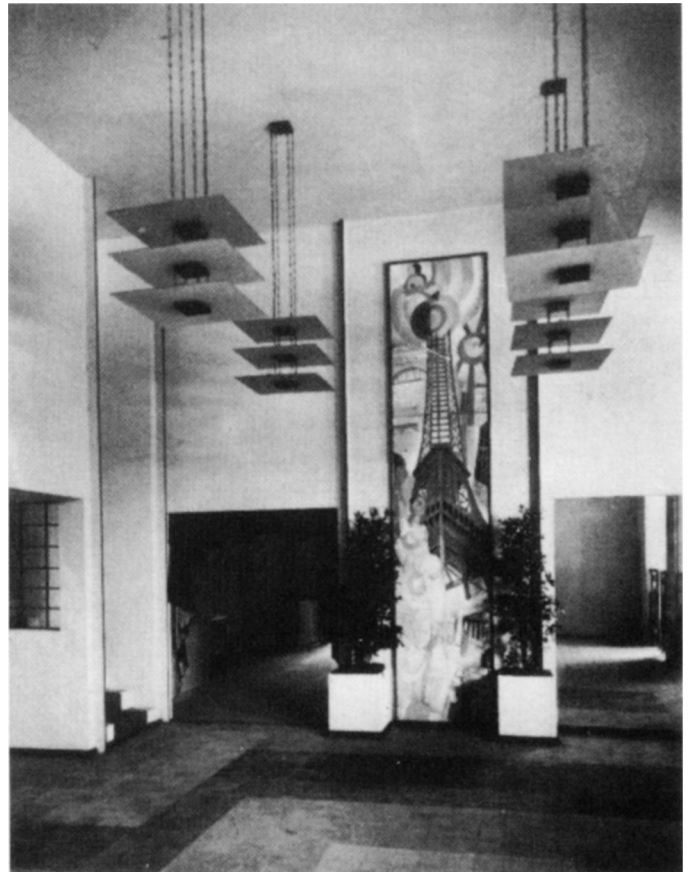
tistic schools of thought, cubism and surrealism.²³ And the philosopher of relativity, par excellence, especially for aesthetes, was Henri Bergson.²⁴ Unlike Enlightenment philosophers, Kant in particular, who assumed a critical distinction between space and time, Bergson posited, before Einstein, an equivalence between the two. Bergson held that space could be of two orders. One projected space as measurable, confined in accordance with the devices man had created to differentially describe movements in space. The other projected space as limitless and fluid. Space, for Bergson, was either mathematically divided and comprehensible or infinitely extensible and sublime. He correlated these notions of space with a conception of *durée*, or duration, in time. Duration was time's hallmark, time's passage, time's being. Like the two types of space, Bergson proposed two types of time. One he termed "inorganic," a static and "real" duration, the other "organic," active and "pure."

Duration is revealed to man, so Bergson argued, continuously, in both voluntary and involuntary ways.²⁵ And it is the memory experience from whence our appreciation of time and duration extends. Memory is called on either consciously or unconsciously. Conscious memory is what a subject enlists to interpret images and identify objects. That is to say, a subject receives an image and then spontaneously draws on a range of memory-images by which to identify the object. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty has noted, the distinction between past and present is almost invisible in this process of cognition, for as soon as the momentary "present" image is received by the eye, it is immediately awash in a sea of memory-images that the intellect employs for situating the object.²⁶ For Bergson, this conscious employment of memory in perception, which he also termed "habitual" memory, is the kind of psychic activity that gives shape and impetus to a conception of duration that is "real," or additive in its continual assembly and juxtaposition of images perceived and remembered, present and past. By contrast, it is the unconscious application of

memory that provides the opportunity to appreciate the nature of “pure” duration and time’s organic being. This process is unleashed when least expected or called for — whether in the unconscious activity of the dream or in the instinctive pure expression of intuition. Through either means, dream or intuition, the organic nature of time is to be grasped, and presented to the mind’s eye, as an ultimately single, complex memory-image suitable for representation. Through expression, the *élan vital* of time moves outward from mind to matter, transforming the nature of the objective world and hence stimulating new perceptions by which we again come to modify our understandings of memory, duration, and being.

Before World War I, the cubists appropriated a number of Bergson’s theories, specifically the possibility that man’s creations can suggest the displacement of object and subject in space over time.²⁷ Early surrealists, particularly Aragon, turned to notions of temporality as characterized by Bergson’s most avid student, Marcel Proust, who cast the problem of duration in specifically anamorphic terms.²⁸ Mallet-Stevens, so we shall see, participated in both modes of thinking; that is, he both explored the formal implications of objective and subjective displacements and addressed the phenomenological problems posed by duration in essentially analogical terms.

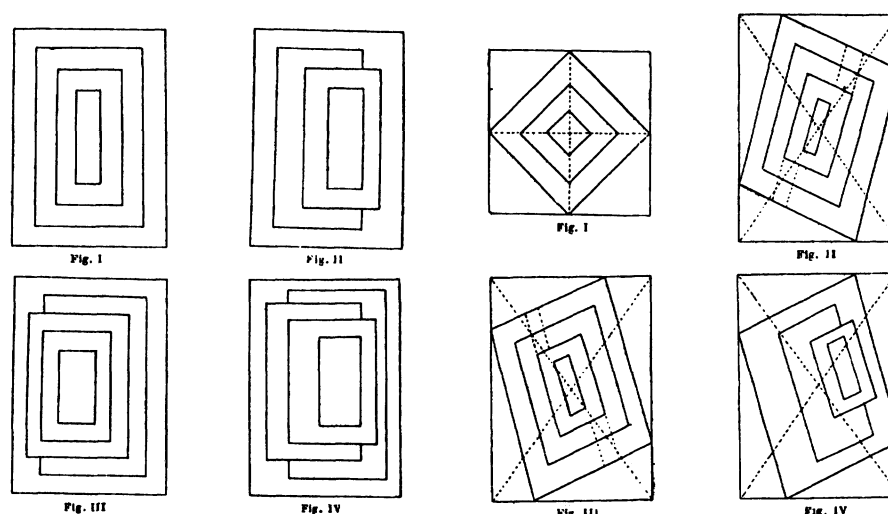
The third project that Mallet-Stevens designed for the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs further illuminates the temporal fixations of the cinematic, artistic, and architectural avant-garde. The Hall de l’Ambassade was the architect’s personal contribution to a large-scale collaborative effort sponsored by the Société des Artistes Décorateurs. The program of the collaboration was a model residence, a kind of “designer’s showcase” orchestrated by Pierre Chareau and devoted to the functional program of an *ambassade française*.²⁹ Like the exposition itself, the ensemble sought to articulate a spirit of modernism compatible with the hegemony of post-World



12. Mallet-Stevens, Hall de l’Ambassade, Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, 1925

War I France’s politics and culture. In Mallet-Stevens’s hall, we discover an interior devoid of furnishing, its sole decorations a bas-relief by Henri Laurens and two paintings on opposite walls, *Eiffel Tower* by Robert Delaunay and an untitled mural painting by Fernand Léger. As already noted with regard to Sonia Delaunay’s fashions beside the *Trees*, the painterly attachments to this architecture must be read metonymically, as clues to the architecture’s formal interests. It will come as no surprise that these concerns entail displacement in space and an inquiry into the shape of time.

13–15. Albert Gleizes, diagrams from *La Peinture et ses lois*, 1924



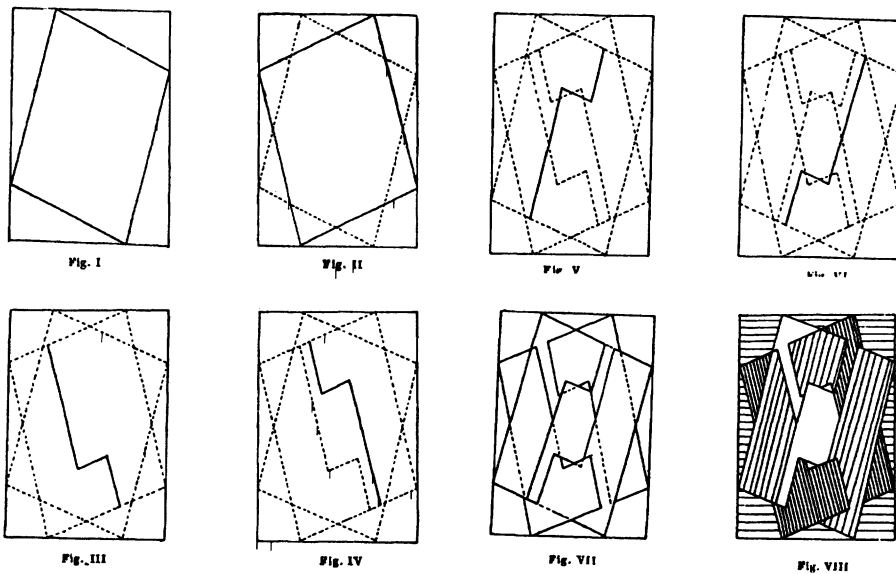
It is essential to note, however, that these two paintings imply very different understandings of duration.³⁰ As in his early *simultanéiste* canvases, Delaunay still appears preoccupied, to a considerable degree, with the notion of superimposed retinal images. The process here eventuates in a pictorial strategy that disfigures the identifiable object. Concomitantly, it postulates the possibility of the simultaneous inhabiting of object and space in the painting. The potential merger thus proposed is highlighted in the canvas in the intersecting circles Delaunay so prominently placed at the painting's summit, suggesting the intersection and interaction of endotopic and exotopic forms.³¹

Léger's rhythmic mural painting, by contrast, is constructed along the lines of duration as described in Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger's *Du "Cubisme"* of 1912.³² Although duration in painting was first suggested in this seminal work, over the next twelve years Gleizes developed a fuller exegesis in various essays on cubist painting, which were assembled in 1924 in *La Peinture et ses lois: Ce qui devait sortir du cubisme*.³³ In the essay of 1923 that gave the book its name, Gleizes rather pedantically sought to recenter cubism in a middle ground between emerging postwar neoclassicism and the foreign dada movement that was making itself felt in avant-garde circles. He did so by alluding to a notion he termed "translation," akin to the displacement in space of object or subject.³⁴ These movements (inspired

by chronophotography in reverse) would enable the artist to construct the abstract cubist canvas systematically by degrees. Most immediately, Gleize's understanding of translation allowed him to envision an order to the canvas's rhythmic construction, entailing a spatial cadence (and harmonic proportion) that not only accords with that of Bergsonian duration, but also provides key visual evidence, for the period, of a subliminal and totalizing *élan vital*.³⁵

Gleizes is especially important here in that his discussion of translation describes succinctly the formal language attributable to the very concept of displacement. His analysis of postcubist painting gives shape to a metalanguage of representation whereby the notion of Bergsonian duration is unabashedly configured. In Gleizes, we discover a discernible semiotic "architecture" for duration. What is more, as Gleizes suggests numerous objects (many of which are varied images of the same object) within the canvas, so does he implicate multiple viewpoints. As subjectivity is consistently decentered as the result of the painting's semiotic multiplicity and ambiguous architecture, Gleizes comes to foreground the relativism of man's subjectivity.

Gleizes's exposition in *Le Peinture et ses lois* centers on a series of ten analytical drawings. These diagrams describe the effects produced by various kinds of possible movements within the cubist canvas. They imply the translation in space of either subject (the observer) or object (the ob-

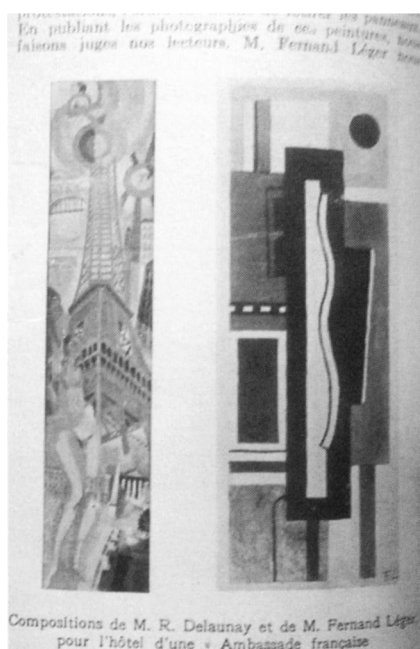


served “content”). A typical drawing analyzes the movement of the subject toward, or away from, the painting’s abstracted content, and the various expansions or contractions of planar components that together constitute the object. Gleizes goes on to describe the selective attention of the subject relative to the object as the artist’s eye, in the course of its retinal perambulation, seizes on certain planes, forcing them in one direction or another. For Gleizes, the canvas may involve more than one lateral translation, thus permitting planes to gravitate outward, along all coordinated axes, to the picture plane’s periphery. In addition, the object may rotate relative to the picture plane, torquing to the right, to the left, upward, or downward, as illustrated in another set of diagrams. Such rotation gives the impression that the insistently frontal picture plane has been violated. This slightly perverse displacement introduces into the canvas a network of diagonal lines and a rotated geometry that seeks to authenticate a space apart from that implicated by the picture plane and the station point of the subject.³⁶ Still another set of diagrams reveals what might happen as the internal planes rotate in two different directions simultaneously within the confines of the picture plane. What seems most important for Gleizes here is the point of collision that necessarily occurs when differing locales intersect — the seam that connects the painting’s juxtaposed, internal spatial frames. In this third drawing, Gleizes postulates just such a point as centroid of the pictorial composition, a

nonperspectival datum from which to analyze the image’s spatial complexities.³⁷

Léger’s contribution to Mallet-Stevens’s hall conforms to Gleizes’s more conservative notions of lateral displacement and thus demonstrates a determined frontality. For this reason Léger’s work seems particularly attuned to the architecture into which it is set.³⁸ His mural painting ripples with controlled movements — upward, downward, and sideways. In its rhythmic play, Léger “spaces” the various abstract forms of his composition and, in so doing, differentiates the pictorial domain. This composition of difference (if you will permit the oxymoron) would correlate with the Bergsonian notion of real duration.³⁹

Whereas Delaunay’s canvas tends to superimpose different moments in public and personal time (he seems to replay various phases of his near and distant career — *simultanéisme*, Orphism, neoclassicism), Léger’s performs compositionally on the basis of successive planar images that imply a juxtaposition of distinct locations in space and moments in time. Delaunay’s *Eiffel Tower* presents an exegesis of objects transformed and interconnected through the lens of simultaneity in a quest for pure duration. Léger’s route, like Gleizes’s, seeks time along the interrupted path of the real. Although Léger absents subject matter from the canvas itself, we recognize that his painting is less an exploration of pictorial abstraction, though it surely is this to a degree;

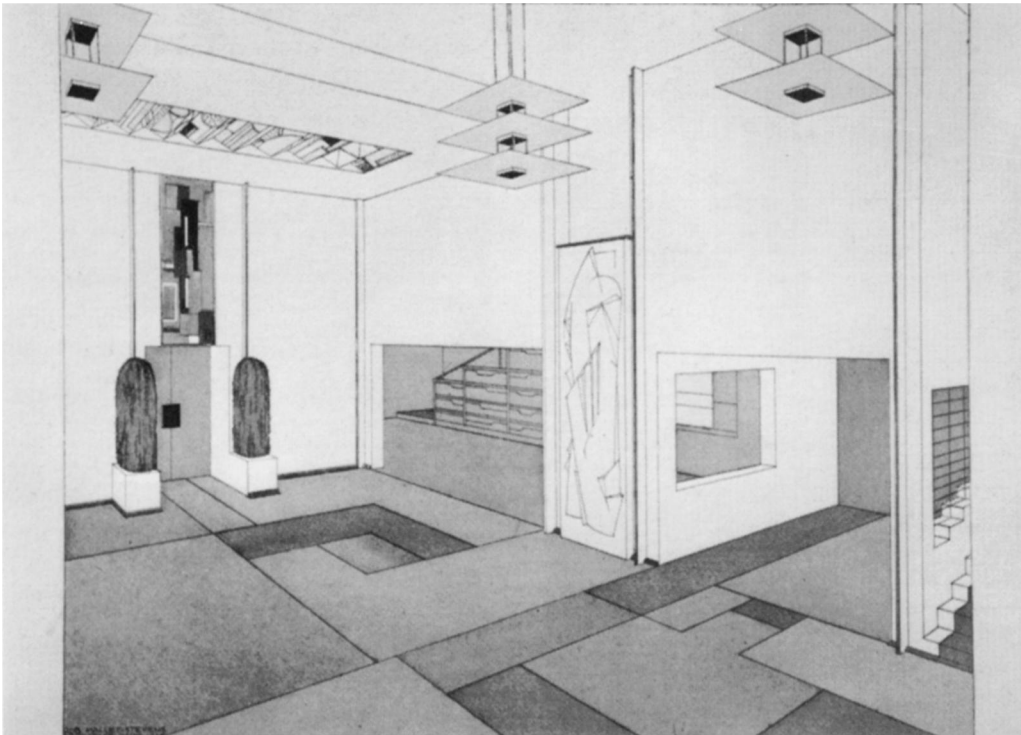


16. Robert Delaunay's *Eiffel Tower*, ca. 1925, and Fernand Léger's mural painting, 1924, in material publicizing the Hall de l'Ambassade

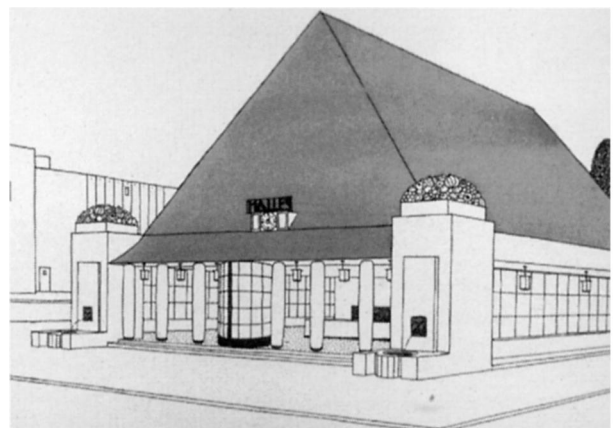
rather, it quietly conveys a narrative content by giving shape to the metalanguage of modern painting's immanent narrative structure. This painting presents the armature, the very architecture of differential time. It should be noted, however, that Léger's canvas stands in wait of the pictorial object to instantiate the painter's idea of narrative as the involvement of image and duration, as we shall soon see. Léger's mural painting thus constitutes a first remove from the representational problem of duration in time. It is a rumination on the question, not of whether time can be illustrated, but of what means are most appropriate to represent real duration.

Mallet-Stevens's drawing of the executed version of the Hall de l'Ambassade provides a sense of the mediate position between Delaunay and Léger occupied by the architect. On the one hand, the drawing purports to be a perspective rendition of space, that is, an illusionistic, three-dimensional volume regarded by the subject across the transparent membrane of the picture plane. On the other hand, this rendering states its nature to be definitively that of a *drawing*, and as such, addresses the genre and media that determine its form. The means it exploits to express its inherent two-dimensionality are similar to ones we observe in Mallet-Stevens's early drawings, particularly those included in the suite of colored engravings that comprise *Une cité moderne* of 1922.⁴⁰ These drawings are marked by a decided lack of atmosphere, specifically shading and shadow, as well as by a distinctly fauvist color sense. Moreover, in their fauvism, these drawings exploit linear patterns and color fields to abstract and systematize the pictorial space in accordance with the picture plane. Everything reduces to pure line and color.

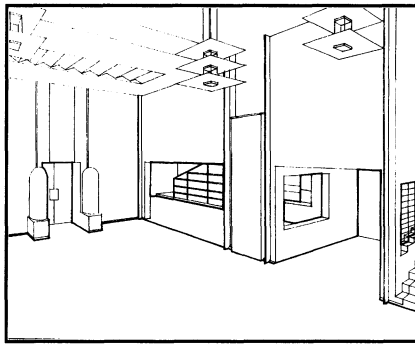
Likewise, in Mallet-Stevens's rendition of the hall, a continuous orange tonal zone flows like a watercolor wash along the lower reaches of the drawing. This golden *touche de couleur* (as Cézanne would have called it) spreads out independent of the spatial zones the color seems originally to have been intended to define. It travels across the rather De Stijl-like



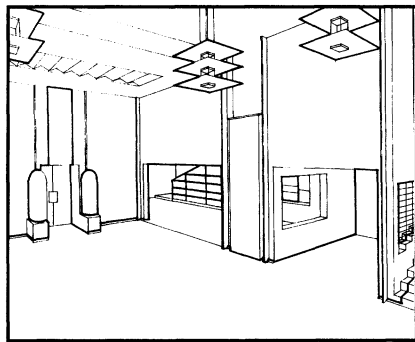
17. Mallet-Stevens, drawing of the Hall de l'Ambassade



18. Mallet-Stevens, drawing of a market from *Une cite moderne*, 1922



19. Color 1: orange zone



20. Color 2: white zone

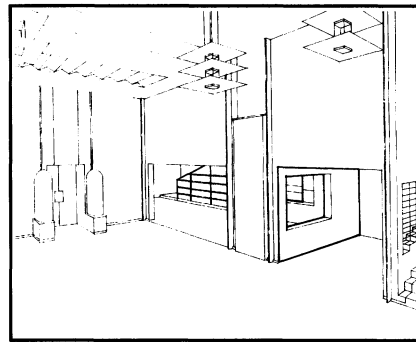
pattern on the floor, back into the drawing's deeper recesses, up the stairs, and even onto the walls. The color flattens out as it intercepts each surface — horizontal, vertical, and diagonal — and it levels all as though they were one. Mallet-Stevens repeats this process in the white upper reaches of the drawing. Again, the white zone does not designate solely the vertical architecture of the drawing, as we might suspect at first glance. Indeed, it translates into the horizontal plane of the ceiling and into the space's decorative features, the mural painting excepted. The two zones, orange and white, flatten out across the drawing and implicitly constrain its spatial extension. Moreover, the essentially decorative quality of these two serrated color zones is firmly marked in their comparison with the saw-toothed Barillet lighting fixture — which would seem to have been conceived as playful commentary on the room's insistently planar surfaces. Expanding on this comparison, the architectonic manipulation of surface is paralleled by the draftsmanly handling of surface in the drawing occasioned by the two constricted zones of color.

The nature of this representation as two-dimensional is interposed with the conception of the drawing as a faithful depiction of three-dimensional space. As our eyes seize on the central white wall that both shapes and confines the room's major space, we also come to acknowledge a conflict between spatial containment and spatial extension, expressed by the orange horizontal zone in the drawing. This struggle is played out in the drawing's central zone, where a *coulisse* in the white surface seems designed to define an orange space beyond, only to have its politics thwarted as the white becomes engulfed in a sea of orange further along. Does the wall define space or the space wall? Is Mallet-Stevens's Hall de l'Ambassade to be interpreted as a continuous, organic space interrupted here and there by the discreet architectural "image," or is the space instead broken down and defined as a sequence of isolated rooms? Mallet-Stevens, it seems, begs the question on both counts. More-

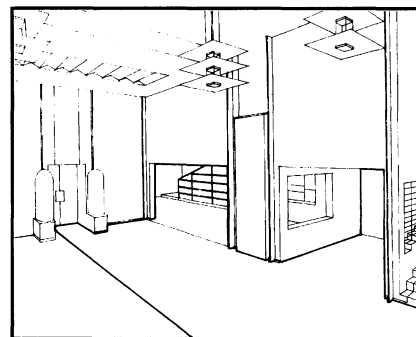
over, in his avoidance of the query and in his careful navigation through each way of describing space, he firmly positions himself between the two. By extension, he also negotiates the two notions of time described by Bergson — as so differently outlined by his two painter-compatriots whose works are prominently displayed on the walls of his room.

In playing with the reciprocal relationship between space and monumental form, Mallet-Stevens undercuts any easy reading of this architectural drawing. The ramifications that such play may entail for his architecture are complicated. For although Mallet-Stevens seems at one moment to postulate a kind of fluid architectural space (so fluid, in fact, that it washes over the very walls that contain it), at another he places his architecture on the offensive, commandeering its forms not just to displace but to encapsulate it as well. Together space and solid seem to perform in a kind of tectonic ying-yang, enmeshed in a mutually productive process like cogs in a machine. Through the interlocution of solid and void, deep and layered pictorial construction, architecture and absence, Mallet-Stevens suggests a meeting of organic and inorganic spatial systems, thus creating a setting appropriate for the negotiation of time's two faces.

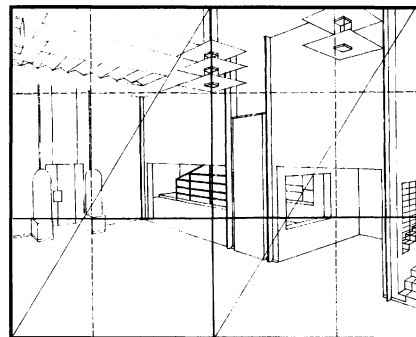
Mallet-Stevens further toys with allusions to perspective construction at the site of the chandelier suspended in the drawing's center. In his writings on film, the architect cited the importance of such features to his décor, for on screen they would assist the viewer's reading of spatial depth.⁴¹ But in his rendering he inverts the effect. For the chandelier falls on the geometric centerline of the drawing, dividing it into a pair of golden sections. In short, the chandelier serves to demarcate a kind of *tracé régulateur* that underscores the drawing's geometrical two-dimensionality rather the three-dimensionality that Mallet-Stevens would have privileged in the cinematic realm. Indeed, if anything, this motif seems to recall the *y* axis Gleizes described in the third set



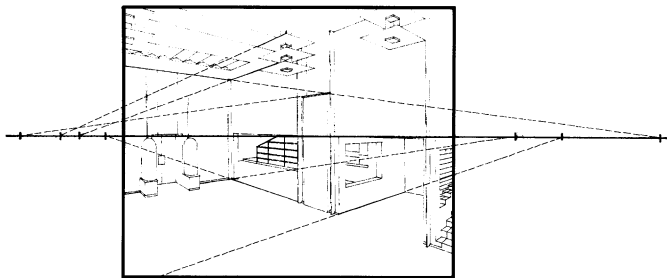
21. Figure/ground 1: *coulisse*



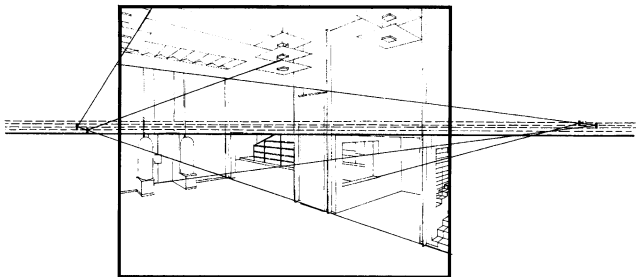
22. Figure/ground 2: engulfment



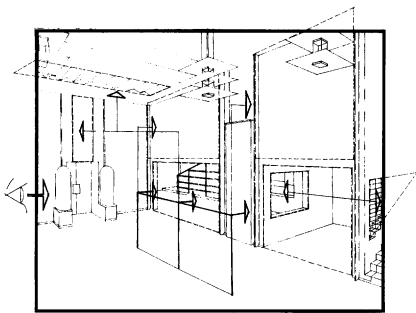
23. Composition



24. Vanishing points



25. Horizons



26. Points of view

of diagrams from *La Peinture et ses lois*. For in both Mallet-Stevens's and Gleizes's drawings, the centroidal line serves as a momentary respite from the image's spatial complexities, as a potential narrative focus, and, perhaps more important for the architect, as a reinforcement of the picture plane. Mallet-Stevens's drawing of the Hall de l'Ambassade appears to undermine the primacy of true spatial representation and to reprivilege, to a considerable degree, the graphic two-dimensionality of the drawing surface.

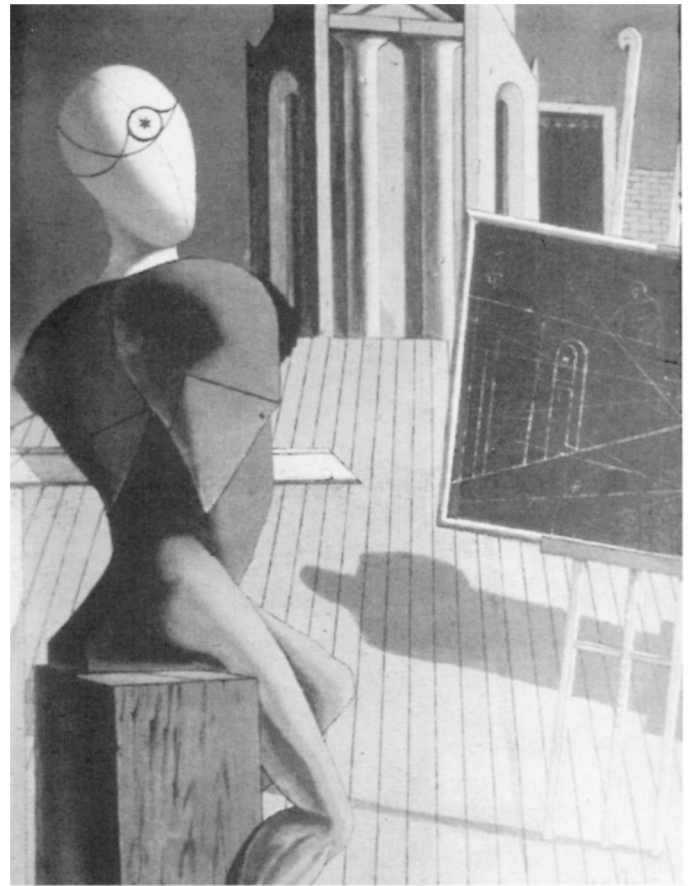
Although, initially, we might assume Mallet-Stevens's drawing to be an illusionistic representation of a specific architectural space, it is important to understand that it is less an illusion than the illusion of an illusion. For the perspective construction here is faulty: the vanishing points of various of the drawing's elements do not, in fact, recede to a single horizon line. Furthermore, when vanishing points do coincide, they imply not one but a number of different horizons simultaneously. As both vanishing points and horizons modulate, three consequences emerge. First, Mallet-Stevens's drawing deprivileges the conventions of rationalistic, classical perspective and thus implies, as Duchamp might say, "the operation of a funny physics."⁴² Second, multiple vanishing points indicate multiple station points and therefore an unseating of the viewer. This desituating of the subject makes the drawing appear to be the result of numerous superimposed retinal locations operating at once. Third, the drawing succeeds in overlapping a number of distinct spatial locations, each of which is implied by the visual cones retreating to their respective vanishing point.

As Mallet-Stevens undercuts old pictorial codes and allows his drawing to proliferate with new ones, he can be found exploring space from myriad distinct points of view. He thus implicates the importance of subjective displacement to the understanding of his architecture and uses movement as a means of accessing a kind of fourth-dimensional vantage from which to survey prevailing modes of representation.

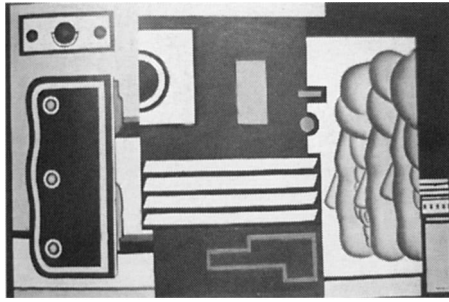
As Mallet-Stevens maps so many distinct points in space within what is otherwise a spatial continuum, we might be inclined to think once again of Giorgio de Chirico, who during his own early career became involved with similarly discordant topographies.⁴³

De Chirico is also relevant for Mallet-Stevens as an informed delineator of architectural meaning in painting. In this regard, we might recall *The Seer* of 1915: in this painting, we are confronted with a sightless mannequin — the Seer — contained within an interior that is also an exterior.⁴⁴ The Seer ignores his pictorial space; he looks instead at a black canvas on which is inscribed a web of regulating lines. An obvious connection is established between the room per se and the canvas. Could not this internal painting be the blueprint of the room itself? The room is the domain of the Seer and likely his artistic product, the work of art. The internal painting as preliminary stage is also a rendition of the *camera obscura* (clearly, a blind man's camera must be obscure), the darkened recess of the shadowy, but nonetheless clairvoyant mind. Whether the drawing is to be seen as a priori or a posteriori formal determinant is irrelevant. For what is represented in the painting is the path traced by the understanding of the Seer across a series of internal thresholds set up by the painting, and the recognition of the *modèle intérieur*, the generative capacity of the mind for art.⁴⁵

Mallet-Stevens's room, too, is rife with thresholds; they appear to be virtual picture planes devoid of content. But are they? If we compare Mallet-Stevens's interior with the domain of the Seer, we could claim that, in the hall, a "seer" is absent. Or we could claim that the "seer" — the paradigmatic subject — stands outside the drawing much as he does in De Chirico's painting. Following this comparison to a natural conclusion, might not Mallet-Stevens's room then be seen as a "metaphysical interior" and the various openings as so many psychic thresholds for the subject — the audience — to explore?⁴⁶ Furthermore, if this interior



27. De Chirico, *The Seer*, 1915



28. Léger, *Three Faces*, 1926

is metaphysical, might not the room then be seen as populated by phantom content — phantom objects — comparable to the drawing's phantom subjects?⁴⁷

Other artists of the period made similar allusions to the phantom subject in their art. For instance, in his *Three Faces* of 1926, Léger enframes no less than three identical heads within a *coulisse* created by the architecture of his painting. On the one hand, Léger may be talking about object-type and about the dehumanized man created in (and by) the age of mechanical reproduction.⁴⁸ On the other hand, he may be speaking of the spectator, whose head is turned toward the canvas and whose successive movements (hence the multiplication of this image) enact a reading of the painting. Léger speak here of the painted world of “real” time, but he alludes as well to the almost cinematic buildup of sequential images required of the subject to comprehend his painting's heightened content.

De Chirico further developed his notion of the phantom subject in other paintings. Most of us know canvases like *The Enigma of Fatality*, a painting whose pictorial spaces are dominated by the detached phenomena spied and created by man during an alienating first machine age. Such artifacts as smokestack and detached hand point up the dif-

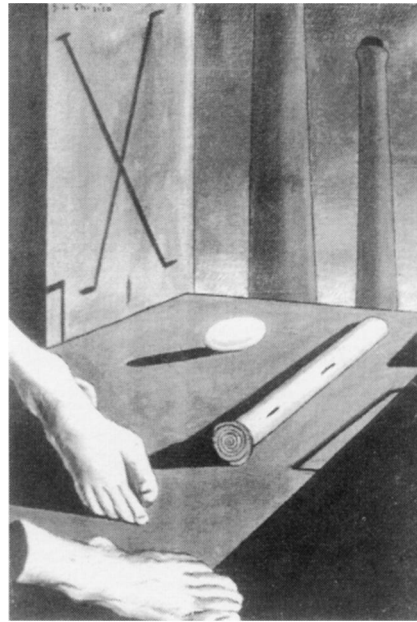
ferences between man and automata, subject and object, here and there; moreover, the picture plane itself seems to serve as a metaphor of psychic detachment and anomie. De Chirico, however, seems to play with conventions in works such as his *Self-portrait* of 1913, where an irony is suggested by his duplication of pictorial subject matter. In this painting, we witness a juxtaposition of two feet. One foot is entirely dismembered, the other cut off solely by the picture plane. We must assume, as the title suggests, that the “intact” member is the artist's. Furthermore, by comparing this foot with the dismembered one, De Chirico speaks of the legitimacy of nature cut apart by modern vision — the picture plane of the photographic image.⁴⁹ He makes us aware that all is metonymy and therefore connected to something more.⁵⁰ These contacts may be unseen — phantom — but they are nonetheless real and substantial. Here critical connections must be established with the world of the artist and the subject before the picture plane.

De Chirico, it would seem, proffers a more fulsome understanding of the *objet fantôme*. For him, this figuration would speak of the subject, and of subjectivity, made into an object as it is represented by the dismembered foot. As Léger transforms *autre* into *je*, so De Chirico personifies the subjective consciousness internal to his painting. Yet in the interplay between the images of the two feet and in the potential transformation of body part into representational object, de Chirico reverses Léger's equation. For De Chirico, as for Rimbaud, “je est un autre.”⁵¹ Clearly, everything returns, as Aragon argued, to Hegel's assertion that Self and Other are but continuities of one another.⁵² As in De Chirico's and Léger's painted production, the *coulisses* depicted in Mallet-Stevens's hall look forward and beckon to an objective reality. But they also look backward, thus addressing the world of the subject as well.

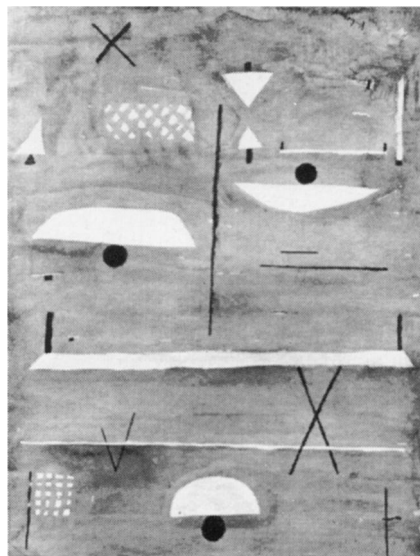
Like Léger, Mallet-Stevens also suggests the possibility of architecturally enframing not just a positive consciousness,

but a consciousness in movement, having differing points of view — potentially, a critical consciousness. To understand the formal encoding that such an architecture of criticism might entail, let us take a final detour to Paul Klee, a soul mate of both Gleizes and De Chirico who not only explored the forms that translation might take in painting, but also the critical consciousness required to grasp the spatial ramifications. Klee's work displays marked similarities to the art of Mallet-Stevens, particularly in his *graphisme*, his investigation of multiple retinal locations and resulting images, and his playful displacement of architectural imagery. In one drawing of 1921, a monotype entitled *Perspective of a Room with Occupants*, Klee actually depicted the locations of the eye as it moves about the drawing, first assessing, then interpreting the imagery. For Klee, the eye is more than a perceptual mechanism, more than a simple apparatus of sensation. Rather, it is the instrument of judgment, as the 1935 drawing *Signs on the Field* suggests. Klee felt that art is involved in a conscious activity that captures and orchestrates the free play of polyvalent nature. Art entails a dialogue between conscious and unconscious mentality, between creativity and judgment. René Crevel, in an essay on Klee from 1931, recognized this aspect of the artist's process when he described Klee's drawings as "an entire museum of the dream," the mnemotechnics of memory.⁵³ For Klee, judgment is not a measured consideration of formal alternatives. Nor does it entail the ethical metaphysics of De Chirico, whose drawings he clearly admired. Rather, judgment is a question of "balance," a measured opinion based on the operation of taste in the artist. Taste, for Klee as for Kant, is based on past experience and the habitual. More important, taste involves the conscious exercise of voluntary memory.

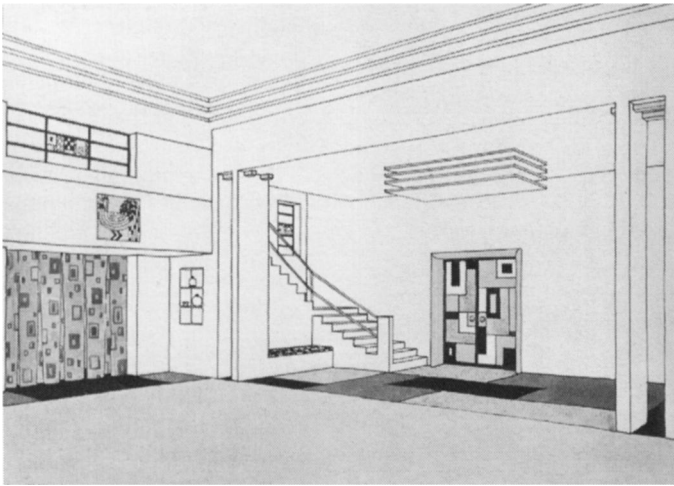
Mallet-Stevens's hall is likewise invested with spaces for judgment. But if Klee's architecture emerges from the certainty of habitual memory, Mallet-Stevens's is nowhere so



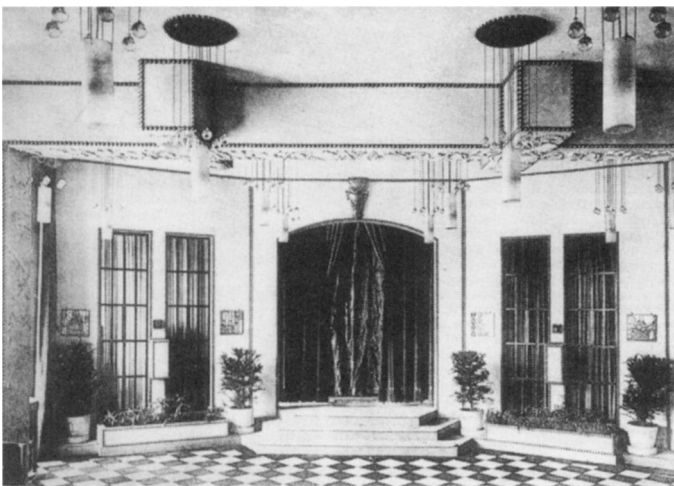
29. De Chirico, *Self-portrait*, 1913



30. Paul Klee, *Signs on the Field*, 1935



31. Mallet-Stevens, preliminary scheme for the Hall de l'Ambassade, 1924



32. Mallet-Stevens, *salon de présentation* for the couturier Melnotte-Simonin, 1924

finely tuned. Whereas Klee's offerings are measured from a certain intellectual distance, Mallet-Stevens's spaces are themselves suffused with the potential for the processes of judgment. Like the Seer's black tableau, Mallet-Stevens's room is fraught with the possibility of self-investment. It is not insignificant, after all, to recall that the Hall de l'Ambassade was, first and foremost, a *salle de présentation*.

It is worth noting that Mallet-Stevens's professional practice commenced with the *salles de présentation* he designed for his couturier friends. If we survey the early design schemes for the Hall de l'Ambassade, we quickly realize that they tend to be variations on the spatial type he developed for the fashion industry. For example, in the salon of Melnotte-Simonin, we observe that the architect has developed his room as a kind of stage, a proscenium taking the place of the picture plane, against which the season's latest infusion of *mode* could be spotlighted. This is a room designed not just to highlight the year's latest styles, but to monumentalize the dynamics of the industry itself: the creation of the new via the obsolescence of the old. Mallet-Stevens's interior at this *salon de couture* is both an investigation of the new and a careful consideration of the modern as a function of duration.

The Hall de l'Ambassade is also conceived as the staging place of the future, an action accomplished by the Saturnine ingestion of the present. The spaces in the hall, in their locational fluidity, seem compatible with the notion of temporal synchrony. The openings in the walls and the multiple thresholds, however, bespeak a different sense of space and a temporal diachrony. If we assume the applicability of space/time to the architecture of Mallet-Stevens, we might say that the Hall de l'Ambassade seems concerned with expressing organic time, at least at moments, and implicates an understanding of memory wherein all time collapses into the instant. On the other hand, through its subtler manipulations

of space, the room proposes a quality of time that emerges as inorganic, juxtaposed, discontinuous, and consciously mnemonic. This occurs especially as we are made aware of the momentary status of the modern and the agonizing dependence of the modern on the past.

We might, indeed, consider the Hall de l'Ambassade as a metonymy of Mallet-Stevens's career during the 1920s. Its spatial operations are both superimposed and juxtaposed, unified and discontinuous, simultaneous and differential. And thus the room implies simultaneously "pure" and "real" duration. Yet specific features of the work make it clear that the architecture is meant to be something more than a passing meditation on the nature of time. Rather, in its specific architectural features, it concocts a third variety of space that is also an appropriate setting for the act of contemplating, thinking, and interposing our own consciousness into the spatial fray. As this occurs, the room opens its doors as the theater of memory, in which both involuntary and voluntary associations enter into the mental *mise-en-scène*.

As the hall seeks to juxtapose two kinds of duration, so, too, does it juxtapose the psychic operation of two distinct kinds of memory activity, one freely associative, the other, the restrained, habitual memory we call on to make sense of things. As we consciously enlist the aid of memory, we are forced to recognize the room as both chronotope and psychotope for our mental processes. Moreover, as we come to understand the inseparability of spatial and mental images in our conscious activity, so do we become aware, in the forms of Mallet-Stevens's temporary installations, of the impossibility of attaining an enduring modernity. Here the modern is continuously relegated to the past in the artist's agenda of creating the new. Indeed, in Mallet-Stevens's Hall de l'Ambassade, we are forced to regard modernity as but one of the many aspects of the passage of time.

Notes

I wish to express my appreciation to Anna Balakian and Barbara Lekatsas for their substantive criticisms of a much earlier draft of this paper, prepared for the 1988 NEH Summer Seminar "Surrealism Revisited" that they directed. I also wish to thank colleagues Silva Tokatlian and Christopher Phillips for their contributions to this work. As ever, my wife, Charlene Castellano, provided insightful direction, helpful commentary, and encouragement here.

1. Robert Mallet-Stevens, "Le Cinéma et les arts: L'Architecture," *Les Cahiers du Mois-Cinéma* 16–17 (1925): 95. See, too, "Le Décor," in *L'Art cinématographique* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1929), 1–23. These essays betray a profound debt to the period's major theorists and critics of film, not the least of whom include Guillaume Apollinaire, Ricciotto Canudo, Louis Delluc, and Jean Epstein.

2. Mallet-Stevens employed photogenic similitude in, for example, perhaps his best known film effort, Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Inhumaine* of 1924, particularly in the exterior settings he designed to represent the abodes of the film's two protagonists: the heroine's villa frankly resembles a face (her face?) and the hero's laboratory is phallic in contour. Mallet-Stevens likely learned of *photogénie* from Epstein, who, in turn, borrowed the term from Delluc and Blaise Cendrars. See Jean Epstein, "The Essence of Cinema" and "For a New Avant-Garde," in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*, ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 24–30. For a more thorough discussion of the concept, see Richard Becherer, "Making Modern Architecture *Photogenic*, or, How Robert

Mallet-Stevens Finds It at the Movies," in *Proceedings of the 81st Annual Meeting of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture* (Charleston, 1993), 162–68.

3. Mallet-Stevens's work as set designer and art director in the fledgling French film industry grew out of his interest in what Apollinaire, Canudo, and Victor Bourgeois called the "Seven Arts." In "L'Esprit nouveau et les poètes," Apollinaire arranged the arts in order of ascending complexity and universality, the highest of which was film. On Apollinaire's initiative, Canudo formed the Club des Amis du Septième Art, the first of Paris's underground film clubs. Mallet-Stevens was an active member, frequently contributing to the organization's journal, the *Gazette des Sept Arts*. Of the films to which he contributed sets, besides *L'Inhumaine*, the best known are *Le Secret de Rosette Lambert*, *Le Miracle des Loups*, and *Le Vertige*. From his interest in film and, more specifically, from his need to see architecture "in movement" evolved his work at the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs and his masterwork, the houses of the Rue Mallet-Stevens.

4. Mallet-Stevens, "Le Décor," 9–10.

5. Mallet-Stevens's work is notably absent from what is arguably the most important contemporary description of the "high modern" period in architecture, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style: Architecture Since 1922* (New York: Norton, 1966).

6. Robert Wiene's *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* of 1920 also figured prominently.

7. A fair share of Robert Mallet-Stevens's early commissions can be traced to the elite social milieu within which he was raised. Born in

1886, he spent his childhood in the wealthy Paris suburb of Maisons-Lafitte. His parents, like his grandparents, were dealers of art. Mallet-Stevens undertook his secondary studies at the prestigious Collège Sainte-Barbes in Paris and pursued architecture at the École Spéciale d'Architecture, then the capital's most adventurous architectural curriculum. Upon matriculation, he apprenticed under Josef Hoffmann on the construction of the Palais Stoclet, the house of his mother's brother. Thereafter, his architectural practice involved the patronage of the Parisian fashion industry, including Madame Marie Paquin, Jacques Doucet, Paul Poiret, and Melnotte-Simonin. His first great architectural commission was a resort home for two of the period's great collectors, Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles, which will be discussed further.

8. Mallet-Stevens, "Le Cinéma," 90.

9. This photograph remains in Mallet-Stevens's personal collection at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

10. Laughter was significant for Bergson less because of the satire it wielded or criticism it implied than because it functioned as a fully spontaneous mode of expression, based wholly on intuition rather than reflection. Bergson also deeply valued laughter because, in its repeated action, it rendered the human being mechanical, hence itself laughable. See Henri Bergson, *Le Rire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1900).

11. Walter Benjamin, of course, described art conceived in the age of mechanical reproduction as freed of the dependence on ritual and claims to authenticity in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. and intro. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry

Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, 1968), esp. 222–24.

12. Mallet-Stevens, "Le Décor," 9.

13. It is not insignificant that Mallet-Stevens retouched one publicity photograph of his Pavillon du Tourisme to give a sense of the applied painting he would have liked to have done on the building itself to make this architecture seem more like the *Trees*, that is, less architectural, more painterly, as well as unsettled and unsettling vis-à-vis rationalistic readings of light and shadow.

14. The *Trees* can usefully be compared to Raymond Duchamp-Villon's portal for a Maison Cubiste, displayed at the 1913 Salon d'Automne, with its rhythmic manipulation of surface and form and its multiplication and concomitant interpenetration of primary formal geometries. Like the *simultanéistes*, the Duchamps — Raymond and his more famous brothers, Marcel Duchamp and Jacques Villon — attempted the multiplication of sensory readings extending from the viewing of a single phenomenon over time. Theirs was a representational procedure outspokenly modeled on the chronophotography of Eadward Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey. And, like Mallet-Stevens in the interplay of stable structure and cubistic formal play, they strove to "demultiply," as Marcel called it, iridescent perceptions by structuring them compositionally, whether pictorially or architecturally. Duchamp employed this term in his 1915 essay "The Green Box," in *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 35, esp. the section entitled "Shots." See also Gloria Moure, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988), 14. Mark

Antliff outlines the significance of the coexistence of ordered and disordered forms, "classic" composition and "romantic" motifs in the façade of the Maison Cubiste. He argues that they are indicative of Duchamp-Villon's fundamental commitment to Bergsonism "holism" wherein such heterogeneous forms now collaborate to produce "organic" artistic form. See Mark Antliff, "Cubism, Organicism, and the Decorative Arts," unpublished ms., 20–23, read at the symposium "Cubism and Architecture: Lectures in Honor of Daniel Robbins," held at the Canadian Center of Architecture in May 1993.

15. It also directly called to mind to the engineer's laboratory that Mallet-Stevens designed for *L'Inhumaine*.

16. I have discussed a comparable phenomenon that occurs in the framing of Thérèse Bonney's and Paul Vaux's photographs of the Rue Mallet-Stevens in "Monumentality and the Rue Mallet-Stevens," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 40, no. 1 (March 1981): 53.

17. See Dawn Ades, *Photomontage* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 56–58.

18. William Rubin argues that De Chirico was commenting in this canvas on the recent work of his Italian contemporaries, most notably the futurist artist Umberto Boccioni in his triptych *States of Mind: The Farewells* of 1911. In the three paintings that compose the suite, Boccioni concocts a vision of time, time's passage and man's gradual awakening to the passage of time — melancholy made manifest in memory. See William Rubin, ed., *De Chirico* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982), 56.

19. Juan Gris suggests as much in his early 1912 canvas *The Watch*. Mark Rosenthal has noted how this

painting essentially recasts an early Cézanne still life, *Black Clock* of 1869–70. Indeed, there is little doubt that in his subject matter, Gris maintains a continuity with the *vanitas* tradition that also informs Paul Cézanne. He expands on Cézanne, however, in the intensity he gives such images of vanity by cross-cutting them with intimate signifiers of mechanical progress — a mechanicism that he implicates not only in terms of its subject matter, the watch, but also in the highly mathematized composition of the canvas, conceived as a telescopic series of golden sections. See Mark Rosenthal, *Juan Gris* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1983), 34–35.

20. Louis Aragon, *Nightwalker (Le Paysan de Paris)* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 32. Aragon noted that "only now that the bulldozer threatens them have [the passages] become temples of a cult of the ephemeral, the ghostly landscapes of forbidden pleasures and professions, incomprehensible today and tomorrow" (*ibid.*, 10).

21. *Ibid.*, 108.

22. *Ibid.*, 25.

23. Again, Aragon established the contact when he stated that cubist and surrealist collage differ only in degree; what connects these formal approaches is their *relativisme*. See Louis Aragon, *Écrits sur l'art moderne* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), 14. Furthermore, he not only suggested the inadequacy of stylistic categories, but also postulated an aesthetic of relativity that might serve to bridge the stylistic gap. In speaking of *relativisme*, Aragon was making an oblique reference to Einstein, whose position on relativity (coined in 1906) he preferred, as well as to Henri Bergson, whose philosophy he better understood. See

idem, *Traité du style*, 6th ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 150–53, 158.

24. My comments here, particularly with respect to the “organic” nature of duration, are indebted primarily to Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt, 1911), 3–27. In what has quickly become the definitive text on Bergson and his relationship to early modern aesthetics in France, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), Mark Antliff not only chronicles the impact of Bergsonism on the cubist painterly establishment, but also plots the course Bergsonism tracks within the domain of leftist politics during the prewar period. The story of Bergson’s impact after the Great War is one that remains to be written. His impact is particularly deeply, however, within the realm of avant-garde film theory; as early as 1917, Emile Vuillermoz noted that all film must be translated across Bergson’s notion of “mechanical duration” as set out in *Matter and Memory*. See Marcel L’Herbier, *La Tête qui tourne* (Paris: Belfond, 1979), 76–77. The effect of Bergson’s famous analogy of mechanical time consciousness and film reverberates throughout the entirety of the period’s film theory — and continues to this day in the influential writings of Gilles Deleuze. On the “organic” nature of art forms conceived with an eye to duration, see Antliff, “Cubism, Organicism, and the Decorative Arts.”

25. Walter Benjamin mapped Bergson’s twin notions of time and duration onto Marcel Proust’s conceptions of voluntary and involuntary memory in his penetrating essay “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Illuminations*.

26. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “By

Maurice Merleau-Ponty,” in *The Bergsonian Heritage*, ed. Thomas Hannah (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 136. As Bergson himself stated in his philosophical “smash” of 1907: “Let us take the most stable of internal states, the visual perception of a motionless object. The object may remain the same, I may look at it from the same side, at the same angle, in the same light; nevertheless the vision I have of it differs from that which I have just had, even if only because the one is an instant older than the other. My memory is there, which conveys something of the past into the present. My mental state, as it advances on the road of time, is continually swelling with the duration it accumulates it goes on increasing — rolling upon itself as a snowball on the snow” (Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 4).

27. The degree to which the period was indebted to the theories of Bergson is suggested in Linda Henderson’s seminal book *The Fourth Dimension* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). Henderson argues that early evidence of Bergsonian thought in the world of modern aesthetics can be found in Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger’s *Du “Cubisme”* (Paris: Figuière, 1912), published shortly after Bergson’s magnum opus. She notes that for the two artists, Bergson’s contribution lay in the concept of duration: for instance, they stated that “today, oil painting permits the expression of profundity, density, and *duration*, all of which have been thought of as inexpressible, and it invites the presentation, according to a complex rhythm and in a restricted space, of a veritable fusion of objects” (Gleizes and Metzinger, *Du “Cubisme,”* 12, my emphasis; quoted in *ibid.*, 90). Such a “fusion

of objects” would, it seems, draw the artists’ compositional preferences into line with Bergsonian organic, or pure, duration. Guillaume Apollinaire then took up the theme of space/time in *Méditations esthétiques: Les Peintres cubistes* (1913; reprint, Paris: Hermann, 1965), 51–52. He championed space/time as the new theme of contemporary painting and, furthermore, like Gleizes, believed that the sign of time’s duration, the inevitable subject of the new painting, would be revealed in the combined action of proportion and rhythm. After the war, Apollinaire continued to exert his influence, albeit a more limited one, particularly in his essay “L’Esprit nouveau et les poètes.” Here he proposed ways by which late cubism might expand on the precepts of its originators (Picasso and Braque), and he opened avenues by which other art movements might pursue pictorially the *sur-réel*, the *mésalliance* of nature and the here-and-now.

28. Marcel Proust proved an inspiration to significant film theorists of the period as well, particularly Jean Epstein and “surrealist” Jean Goudal. Goudal, for example, wrote that “Proust and unconscious activity of mind . . . [have] . . . become the keystone of mental life” (Jean Goudal, “Surrealism and Cinema” [1925]; reprinted in Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988], 1: 354). Marcel L’Herbier also fondly recounted his sole meeting with the author and later compared his own artistic project to Proust’s in *La Tête qui tourne*, 132.

29. See *Une ambassade française organisée par des artistes décorateurs* (Paris: Éditions Charles Moreau, 1925).

30. For Bergson, there was only a

single ontological basis for his philosophy — duration. Nonetheless, it was he who set up a dualistic relationship between mechanistic or “real” models of time consciousness and his own idealized model of “pure” duration. See Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 73–91. Although Bergson conceived only of “duration,” Bergsonism effectively delineated parallel strains of duration, “real” and “pure,” “intensive” and “extensive,” “inorganic” and “organic.” This feat is perhaps most convincingly accomplished within the period’s avant-garde film theory. Film would have been exiled from the world of duration were it not for Bergson’s description a mechanical (and erroneous) kind of time consciousness applicable to the technical nature of the medium. On the relationship between Bergson and “mechanical” time, see L’Herbier, *La Tête qui tourne*, 77–78 and *passim*.

31. It was Paul Klee who usefully described the operation and significance of these devices in *The Thinking Eye: The Notebooks of Paul Klee*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New York: Wittenborn, 1961), 129–31.

32. See note 27 above.

33. See Albert Gleizes, *La Peinture et ses lois: Ce qui devait sortir du cubisme* (Paris: Croutset et Dépost, 1924). Gleizes’s work figured prominently in the show of cubist canvases that Mallet-Stevens attached to his famous exhibition entitled “Architecture et les Arts Qui S’y Rattache” at the Ecole Spéciale d’Architecture in March 1924. See M. Taburat, “L’Exposition à l’Ecole Spéciale,” *L’Oeuvre* (20 March 1924), n.p. His familiarity with this group probably extended from 1912, the period when he came

into contact with the Puteaux group through the likes of Frantz and Francis Jourdain and André Mare along with other so-called colorist decorators loosely allied with the group. On Gleizes and the new, conservative cast he sought to give to cubism, see Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 312–13.

34. It is not insignificant that in calling this concept “translation,” Gleizes tapped into the pervasive Bergsonism of Proust, for whom translation must be equated with the Baudelairean notion of “correspondence,” that is, the analogical understanding and representation of nature as interpreted by man’s interactive cognitive, imaginative, and memory faculties. See Beryl Schlossman, *The Orient of Style* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 15–16.

35. Gleizes, *La Peinture et ses lois*, 44–45.

36. Juan Gris, Gleizes’s compatriot in the Duchamps’ cubist retrospective “Section d’Or” exhibition (and who figures prominently in *Du “Cubisme”*), seems in his *Open Window* of 1917 to demonstrate the implications of such diagonal displacement and the promise it holds for spatial extensions beyond the limits of the picture plane per se.

37. Gris would seem to take this station point one step further in his *Harlequin at the Table* of 1919, which locates narrative focus in this location as well. As virtual spaces and subjective foci are repeatedly intimated and multiplied, this late cubist canvas gives the impression of being less self-complete than a slice of a far grander pictorial life, what Pierre Reverdy called a “paysage sans cadre,” replete with spatial and figural potential far beyond an image’s

putative visual limits. See Pierre Reverdy, *Les Epaves du ciel*, 51; cited in Anna Balakian, *Literary Origins of Surrealism* (New York: New York University Press, 1947), 103.

38. Léger wrote on the topic of an “architectural” painting in “L’Architecture polychrome,” *L’Architecture Vivante* (Fall–Winter 1924). And it is due to this interest, so Christopher Green contends, that Mallet-Stevens asked Léger to contribute his mural painting to the Hall de l’Ambassade. See Christopher Green, *Cubism and Its Enemies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 94; see also idem, *Léger and the Avant-Garde* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 261, on the relationship between wall and mural painting in the hall.

39. Gilles Deleuze contends that the idea of “continuous heterogeneity” is fundamental to the shape of duration. See Gilles Deleuze, “Duration and Immediate Datum,” chap. 2 of *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone Books, 1988), esp. 37–38.

40. See Robert Mallet-Stevens, *Une cité moderne* (Paris: Charles Massin, 1922).

41. Mallet-Stevens, “Le Décor,” 10.

42. Quoted in Rubin, *De Chirico*, 59.

43. William Rubin sets out the pictorial problems that De Chirico addresses in such early works as *Melancholy of Departure*, citing layering, acknowledgment and violation of the picture plane, attention to line and color, and “funny” perspective as part and parcel of the artist’s simultaneous critiques of both cubism and futurism. See *ibid.*, 58–60. These features, and critical spirit, seem to suggest De Chirico as Mallet-Stevens’s spiritual forebear. To elaborate on the possible relationship between the two, it is useful

to note that between 1922 and 1924 De Chirico lived in Paris, where he not only exhibited in a number of significant gallery shows, but also worked for both Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes and Rolf de Maré’s Ballet Suédois as a set and costume designer. See Raymond Cogniat, *Décors de Théâtre* (Paris: Chronique du Jour, 1930), pls. 45–49. De Chirico was a friend of playwright and film theorist Ricciotto Canudo (see L’Herbier, *La Tête qui tourne*, 66 n. 1), and Mallet-Stevens would have socialized with him during the regular Friday night meetings/screenings at Canudo’s Club des Amis du Septième Art. De Chirico’s work was illustrated by art journals of both liberal and conservative stripes: his paintings were prominently (and almost simultaneously) reproduced in André Breton’s *La Révolution Surréaliste*, Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant’s *L’Esprit Nouveau*, and Léonce Rosenberg’s *Bulletin de l’Effort Moderne*.

44. This painting was, incidentally, in the collection of Guillaume Apollinaire.

45. André Breton coined the term *modèle intérieur* in “Le Surréalisme et la peinture,” *La Révolution Surréaliste* 1, no. 4 (15 July 1925): 28.

46. On De Chirico’s metaphysics, see his essay “On Metaphysical Art,” first published in the Italian periodical *Valori plastici* 1, nos. 4–5 (April–May 1919), and reprinted in *Metaphysical Art* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 87–91.

47. In an episode recounted in “Le Surréalisme et la peinture,” *La Révolution Surréaliste* 2, no. 7 (15 June 1926): 5, André Breton noted that the term *fantôme* was commonly used by his circle, including himself, Aragon, and De Chirico, who applied it to both subject and

object. Michel Leiris, incidentally, included the term in his “Glossaire,” *La Révolution Surréaliste* 1, no. 3 (15 April 1925): 6.

48. Green, *Léger and the Avant-Garde*, 285, 314.

49. Walter Benjamin discussed the capacity of the camera to perform “optical tests” on reality, through close-ups, special angles, etc., all of which allows the photographer/subject to analyze/dissect his object. Such film work, he argued, permits analytical possibilities, spatial and phenomenological, extending far beyond the screen (or picture plane). See Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” esp. 230–39.

50. Roman Jakobson notes the importance of metonymy to such modern artistic experiments as cubism. But surrealist art, so he claims, tends toward metaphor. This distinction, I contend, fails to hold true in the cases of “surrealists” Giorgio de Chirico and Max Ernst, whose early, cubistically informed art operates metonymically. See Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*. 2d ed. (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 92.

51. This sentence is excerpted from Rimbaud’s “Lettre du voyant,” which was only rediscovered and published in 1912, that is, shortly before De Chirico’s painting *The Seer (Le Voyant)*. See Arthur Rimbaud, “Lettre à Paul Demeny, 15 Mai 1871,” in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 268; see also idem, *A Season in Hell/ Illuminations*, trans. Enid Rhodes Peschel (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 8–9.

52. “The living individual posits itself in the first stage of its evolution as subject and notion, and in the

second stage, it assimilates the object, thus giving itself a real specificity and is *in itself* the *species*, the substantive universality" (Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Mind*; quoted in Aragon, *Nightwalker*, 26).

53. René Crevel, *Paul Klee* (Paris: Gallimard, 1930), 9.

28. Katherine Kuh, *Fernand Léger* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1953).

30. Paul Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, ed. Jurg Spiller and trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Wittenborn, 1964).

Figure Credits

1. Robert Mallet-Stevens, *Le Décor moderne au cinéma* (Paris: Charles Massin, 1929). Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

2. Jean François Pinchon, ed., *Robert Mallet-Stevens: Architecture, Mobilier, Decoration* (Paris: Sers, 1986).

3. *Art et Décoration* 47 (January–June 1925).

4–6, 11, 12, 17, 31, 32. Dominique Deshoulières and Hubert Jeanneau, *Robert Mallet-Stevens* (Brussels: Éditions des Archives d'Architecture, 1980).

7. *Encyclopédie des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes au xx^e siècle*, vol. 2, *Architecture, décoration, peinture et sculptée* (1925; reprint, New York: Garland, 1977).

8. Dawn Ades, *Photomontage* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).

9, 27, 29. James Thrall Soby, *The Early Chirico* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1941).

10. Photograph by Richard Becherer.

13–15. Albert Gleizes, *La Peinture et ses lois* (Paris: Croutset et Dépost, 1924).

16. G. Allies.

18. Robert Mallet-Stevens, *Une cité moderne* (Paris: Massin, 1922).

19–26. Diagrams by Richard Becherer.