

22. Letter to Armand Séguin, Jan. 15, 1897. Cited in Danielsson, *Gauguin in the South Seas*, p. 191.
23. Huyghe, "La Clef de Noa Noa," p. 4.
24. Cited in Josette Féral, "The Powers of Difference," in *The Future of Difference*, eds. Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (Boston, 1980), p. 89.
25. Octave Mirbeau, "Paul Gauguin," *L'Echo de Paris*, Feb. 16, 1891. Reprinted in Mirbeau, *Des Artistes* (Paris, 1922), pp. 119-29.
26. *Camille Pissarro*, p. 172.
27. Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," *Mythologies*, ed. and trans. Annette Lavers (New York, 1978), p. 139.
28. *Camille Pissarro*, p. 221.

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PURISM  
Straightening Up  
After the Great War

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KENNETH E. SILVER

In 1920, with the entire northeast of France in ruins after the Great War, Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) and Amédée Ozenfant wrote, in their famous essay "Purism,"

We affirm that the mind claims imperative rights in what is called a work of art . . . we have sought to push aside all factors of futility or disaggregation; we have sought to bring together the constructive means; we have kept to physical questions and have tried that way to throw out bridges toward mathematical order.<sup>1</sup>

Although they meant to talk about paintings, not buildings, about art after Cubism, not France after the Armistice, the defensive tone of the Purists' language bespeaks the painfully obvious "impurities" of postwar French life. Their words are those of the French nation itself during Reconstruction, like those of two political analysts, Henri Bornecque and Germain Drouilly, in 1921: "Combat for moral unity of the country was carried on against the divisive and revolutionary elements that the demobilization unleashed."<sup>2</sup> Like all declarations of well-being in France after November 11, 1918, Purist language is the language of Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, ruined and victorious.

This antithesis of a visual image of chaotic reality and a well-ordered text can be turned around. Alongside the image of reason and stability

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exemplified by Le Corbusier's Purist *Still Life with Stack of Plates* of 1920, let us put the futility and disaggregation that is the true story of the war and its aftermath. Working back from Purism toward the tragic disorder from which it emerged, let us go even further and plunge into the heart of the dialectic: in its origins Purism—the immaculate, hermetic art of Jeanneret and Ozenfant—is anything but pure. Its look, its iconography, its theory, its *raison d'être*, and its significance can be understood only within the physical and psychological frontiers of a brutalized and defiled France during the First World War. Like most human endeavors that invoke "purity" and attempt to turn the murky admixture of reality into a "crystalline," "radiant" lucidity (two of Ozenfant's and Jeanneret's favorite adjectives), Purism was a reaction against a reality almost too terrible to bear. We have to return to 1915, to the early days of the Great War, to trace its beginnings.

Amédée Ozenfant was the founder, editor, and guiding spirit of *L'Elan*, the avant-garde journal, founded in 1915, and devoted exclusively to the art of wartime France. By its very title, Ozenfant's magazine left no doubt as to its orientation: *élan* was among the most patriotic and optimistic words that could be spoken in France during the war. This short, accented vocable, expressive of jumping, flying, ardor, and enthusiasm, was popularized through Bergson's "élan vital," but it became narrower and more belligerent in the vernacular of the French army. If Bergson had functioned as a kind of Gallic response to nineteenth-century German philosophy, *élan* was the Ecole Supérieure de la Guerre's answer to the defeat at the hands of the Prussians in 1870. In tactical terms, *élan* meant that France would take the offensive in matters military, just as the Germans believed in the aggressive gospel of war (according to Count von Schlieffen). It goes without saying that with her smaller army and population France had far less reason than Germany to believe that she could succeed in an *offensive à outrance*. But this was precisely the essence of *élan*, an essentially mystical term meant to express France's "will-to-succeed," her military *je ne sais quoi*, an ancient Gallic spirit that would spell the difference between the humiliation at Sedan and victory in the war to come. All these resonances belonged to Ozenfant's title.

Among *L'Elan's* contributors were Derain, La Fresnaye, Laboureur, Lhote, Matisse, Picasso, Dunoyer de Segonzac, and Ozenfant himself—who drew the cover of the first issue of April 15, 1915. In superimposing a bejeweled Dame Victory on a map of the Allied lines in France and Belgium, the artist creates an elegant and witty image of the Brow and Necklace of Victory by punning on the word "front," which in French means both brow, or forehead, and, as in English, a military front. Indeed, the cleverness, optimism, and "chic" of this first cover of *L'Elan* betray its early date in the war. After 1916, after Verdun and the Somme, after the year-long bloodletting when the "front" hardly budged, when despite

France's much vaunted *élan* or Germany's Schlieffen Plan, the war of attrition became an undeniable reality, the same image would have seemed a bad, rather flat, joke.

The statement of purpose that appears on the first page of that same first issue nonetheless expressed a timeless patriotism. In Ozenfant's editorial words,

The foreigner may think that art in France belongs only to peacetime. [But] those who are fighting, our friends, tell us how much the war has been to the advantage of their art, and they would like some place to show it . . . This French journal is also the journal of our allies and our friends. . . . It will fight against the enemy wherever it finds it, even in France . . . our only goal being the propaganda of French art, of French independence, in sum, of the true French spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Despite such unequivocal devotion to the cause, *L'Elan* was no flat-footed, chauvinistic tract. Filled with irony (though never unpatriotic or too sarcastic toward its friends), printed on excellent stock, with original screen prints and tipped-in plates in brilliant colors—in sum, rendering "defuxe" geniality, truth, light, and modernity—*L'Elan* was a demonstration of the possibility of transcending war while looking it in the face. Or almost in the face: while all the jokes and articles, and most of the illustrations, refer or allude to the fact of war, the editors do have a distinct sense of propriety. They reprimand much of the French press:

Why the bloody images, these cadavers, these sufferings on every page of the most timid newspapers. . . . Poor, heroic soldiers, hard task of fighting! but, when you fall, lamented ones, wouldn't it be decent to turn our back? Faced with agony, the civilized pull the curtain . . . one must love life; oh yes, let us admire our poor, brother soldiers who sacrifice their lives, but let us cover their cadavers and even those of our enemy.<sup>4</sup>

*L'Elan* was, then, the *civilized* magazine of war. Its resolutely optimistic, forward-looking tone could not be better expressed than in Guillaume Apollinaire's poem "Guerre," which Ozenfant published in issue no. 8. It concludes:

après, après  
nous prendrons toutes les joies  
des vainqueurs qui se délassent:  
femmes, jeux, usines, commerce,  
industrie, agriculture, métal,  
feu, cristal, vitesse, voix, regard,  
. . . et plus encore au delà de cette terre<sup>5</sup>

Between the traditional spoils of war ("women" and "fun") and more abstract properties such as "voice" and "gaze," Apollinaire inventories true twentieth-century spoils: factories, commerce, industry, agriculture, metal,

fire, crystal, speed. As if in hope that the Great War would finally bring France to the threshold of modernity, the poet comes extremely close to the Italian Futurists' earlier dream of a releasing, purifying European conflagration. Apollinaire's traditional, heroic optimistic view of war is in marked contrast to a conventional "good-bye to all that" notion of disillusionment like that expressed by Rémy de Gourmont during the first winter of World War I:

There is a great sense of melancholy in thumbing through the publications and reviews of all kinds which appeared at the same time as the outbreak of the war, some even after the beginning of combat. . . . How happy seem the times when we seriously discussed the future of Cubism, or the respective merits of free and regular verse! There was a moment, in the month of August, when I firmly believed that all that was finished, for ever, that it would never again be a question of art, or poetry, or literature, or science.<sup>6</sup>

Whether one was nostalgic for such a Paradise Lost or, like Apollinaire, projected the Golden Age forward ("après, après") in time, it is clear, as Paul Fussell demonstrates in his recent book on the first World War and English literature,<sup>7</sup> that the war begat a new measure of time. It was the twentieth-century's first major contribution to periodization. And Amédée Ozenfant, a man very much "in the wind" but out of the public eye since the demise of *L'Élan* in 1916, was among the first to take advantage of the "before and after" motif as soon as peace was declared in November 1918.

In fact, within four days of the Armistice, Ozenfant, in partnership with the architect-cum-painter Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) published a statement of first principles for the new postwar aesthetics. Not surprisingly, they called it *Après le Cubisme*, paying homage to the most important of prewar avant-garde movements, but also firmly relegating Cubism to the past. The authors' attitude toward the Great War and its effect on art had its precedent in *L'Élan*, although in comparison with that earlier publication's wartime joie de vivre, Jeanneret and Ozenfant's tone, in this first week after the Armistice, was extremely sober.

Art before the Great Test [*la Grande Épreuve*] was not "living" enough to invigorate the idle, nor to interest the vigorous; society then was restless, because the directive of life was too uncertain, because there was no great collective current to force to work those who had to work, nor to tempt to work those who did not have to. . . . Gone are those times, at once too heavy and too light.<sup>8</sup>

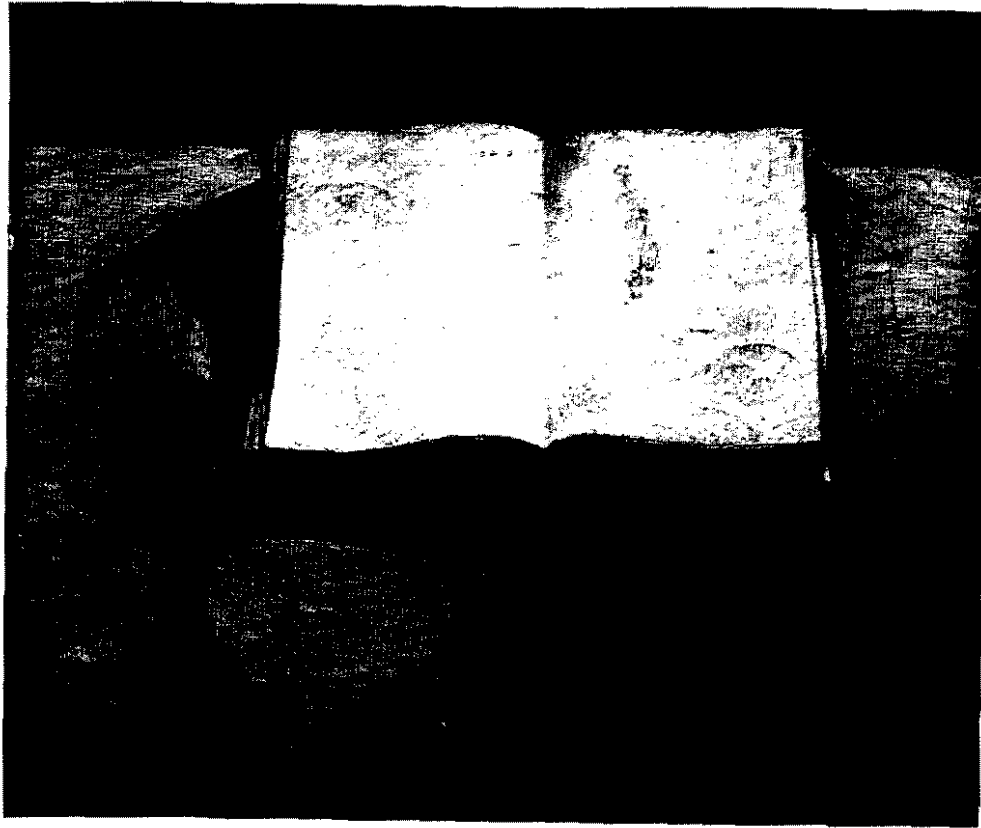
More than a little is disturbing in this interpretation of the First World War and French society, not least the authors' nickname for the Great War, "the Great Test." In contrast with Rémy de Gourmont's nostalgia for those little reviews that debated the future of Cubism and avant-garde poetry,

Ozenfant and Jeanneret say good-bye to all that. If Ozenfant had suggested in the first issue of *L'Élan* that for some of his "friends" the war had been "to the advantage of their art," now all art is seen to benefit from the positive effects of "the Great Test," as indeed all of French society seems better for the war. In the minds of the soon-to-be Purists, *la Grande Guerre* provided a cause; it was the "great collective current," which purged France of her restlessness and uncertainty, and sent Frenchmen to work. Cubism, then, was consigned to that restless, almost sinful France before the *Grande Épreuve*.

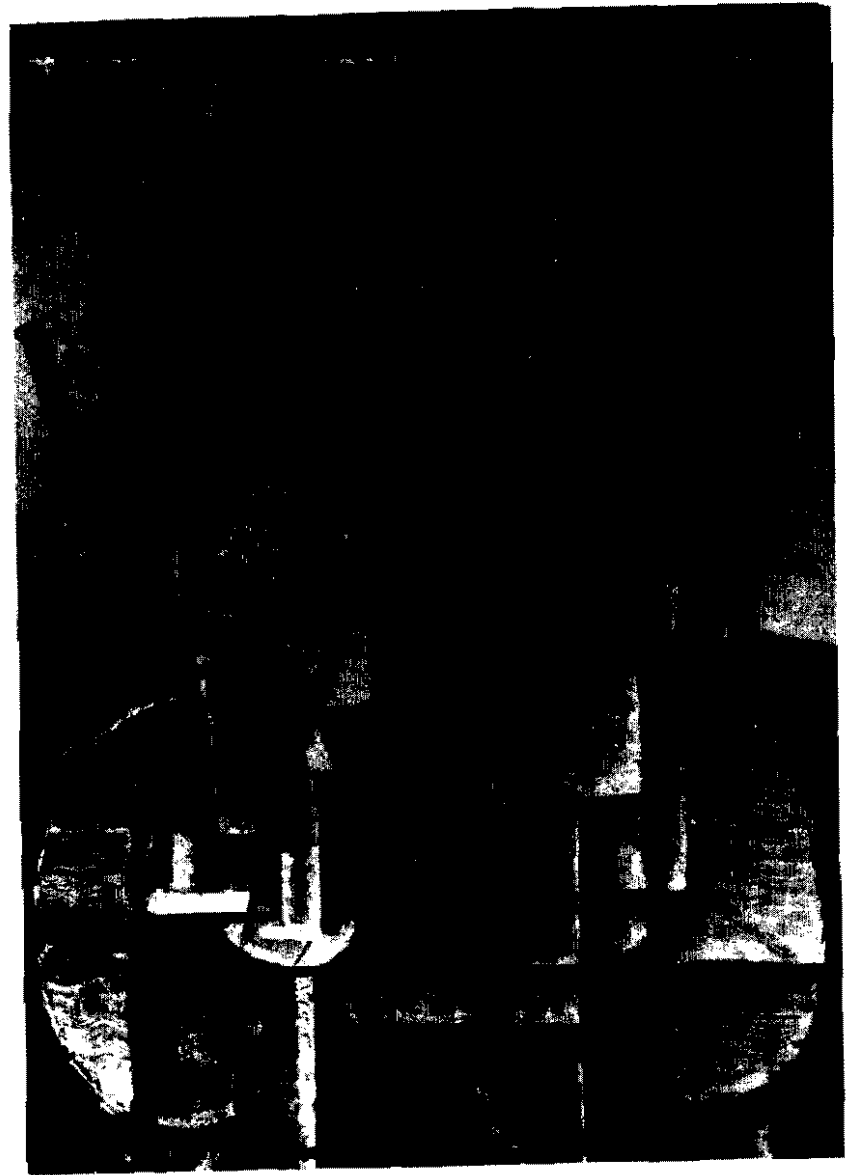
We have only to look at Jeanneret's *Still Life with Book, Glass, and Pipe* of 1918 [1], contemporary with the writing of *Après le Cubisme*, to see what this interpretation of history and art meant in visual terms. With only four elements arranged on an immaculate tabletop, Jeanneret announces the Purist entry into Paris and establishes himself in opposition to a work like Picasso's *The Architect's Table* [2] of six years earlier. In place of the profusion of signs and symbols, printed matter, indications of inebriation, and an overall surcharge of information that characterizes the Cubist picture, Jeanneret's stark image of an open book with clean, white page is a tabula rasa of the late teens. As if in defiance of the prewar Parisian avant-garde, Corbu "turns the page" and begins a new historical chapter. The ways and means of Cubism are meant to look out of date: instead of indeterminacy, simultaneity, the mutability of time and space, the Purists will substitute something stable and durable. In place of Cubist complexity Jeanneret and Ozenfant will provide images with a freshly starched spiritual and moral rectitude, showing the certainty and direction of "the great collective current."

Although the Purists would soon appropriate many of Cubism's formal inventions, they would also subvert its intentions and pictorial structure, producing an antithetical art substantiated by an antithetical theory. Whereas Gleizes and Metzinger had spoken of the Cubist picture as "a sensitive passage between two subjective spaces"<sup>9</sup> and had said that "the picture, which only surrenders itself slowly, seems always to wait until we interrogate it, as though it reserved an infinity of replies to an infinity of questions,"<sup>10</sup> Le Corbusier would proclaim that "the primordial physical laws are simple and few in number. The moral laws are simple and few in number."<sup>11</sup> If the work of art for the Cubists had been suspended between two rather unstable, subjective poles, it was now to be stretched taut and pinioned by morality and "primordial" physical laws; if before, the surrender had been preceded by the foreplay of infinite equivocation, the possible interpretations and positions vis-à-vis the work of art were now to be "simple and few in number."

Since it was Ozenfant, with his thoroughgoing involvement with the war, who produced *L'Élan*, we might conclude that Jeanneret had merely



1  
**LE CORBUSIER**, *Still life with Book, Glass, and Pipe*  
1918 Oil on canvas. Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris.



2  
**PABLO PICASSO**, *The Architect's Table*  
1912 Oil on canvas. The Museum of Modern Art. Paley Collection.

acceded to these opinions for the sake of "the new art." But this is not at all the case, because, when (as Le Corbusier) Jeanneret published his famous book *Vers une Architecture*, in 1923, he left no doubt as to his own "appreciation" of the war, and no doubt as to the positive force—both symbolic and practical—that he felt the war had exerted on French life. In fact, this concordance on a "healthy" interpretation of *la Grande Guerre* and its implications for art after 1918 was probably central to the artistic partnership of Ozenfant and Jeanneret. We hear echoes, in *Vers une Architecture*, of "the Great Test" analysis:

Now, the plan is the generator, "the plan is the determination of everything; it is an austere abstraction, an algebrization, and cold of aspect." It is a plan of battle. The battle is composed of the impact of masses in space and the morale of the army is the cluster of pre-determined ideas and the driving purpose. Without a good plan nothing exists, all is frail and cannot endure, all is poor even under the cluster of the richest decoration.<sup>12</sup>

While such imagery might well describe Le Corbusier's Purist paintings, his invocation of battle is still generalized and nonhistorical; it would hardly be the first time that an artist saw his aesthetic struggle in aggressive, military terms. Yet he is quite specific elsewhere. In the chapter "Eyes Which Do Not See, II, Airplanes," Le Corbusier writes:

The War was an insatiable client, never satisfied, always demanding better. The orders were to succeed at all costs and death followed a mistake remorselessly. We may then affirm that the airplane mobilized invention, intelligence, and daring: imagination and cold reason. It is the same spirit that built the Parthenon.<sup>13</sup>

Here the war is not the "test," but the client; not the "collective current," but a great, ferocious incarnation of the modern industrialist who galvanizes the forces of invention.<sup>14</sup> Having moved, in a rhetorical blitz, from the war and fatality to reason and Classicism, Corbu carries through his analogy to a present moment in the postwar period, touching the pressure point for France during Reconstruction. The Romans, he says,

did not have before them the problem of devastated regions, but that of equipping conquered regions: it is all one and the same. So they invented methods of construction and with these they did impressive things—"Roman." The word has a meaning. Unity of operation, a clear aim in view, classification of the various parts.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the problems of devastated and conquered regions were one and the same, for France had not only to rebuild her own devastated departments but also to equip and rebuild her beloved and newly reconquered Alsace-Lorraine. The task was immense. Apart from the loss of life (approximately 1,357,000 dead) and the physical devastation of the survi-

vors (about four and a quarter million wounded), the French also saw 1,000 factories, 1,500 schools, and 1,200 churches destroyed, and 352,000 homes either left completely in ruins or so badly damaged as to be uninhabitable. She also had to remake 62,000 kilometers of roads, 5,000 of railways, and 2,000 of canals. Three million acres of French land had been rendered unfit for cultivation.<sup>16</sup> When Le Corbusier speaks, therefore, of "unity of operation, a clear aim in view, classification of various parts," his prescription is for an ailing France having emerged from a high fever yet still dangerously weak. One observer remembered in 1922, "There is no 'period of reconstruction' separate and distinct from the period of war, but war and reconstruction went on together."<sup>17</sup> That is, if France had to begin rebuilding even at the start of war, her battle was far from over in November 1918. The Great War really represents a thirteen-year period in the life of France, from mobilization in the summer of 1914 to the official declaration of the completion of Reconstruction on Armistice Day, 1927. Likewise, the regime of exigencies, requisites, and ideologies that came into being at the start of war continued to nourish and preoccupy France at least until the late twenties.

A little more than a year after the Armistice and the appearance of *Après le Cubisme*, Jeanneret and Ozenfant, with "a clear aim in view," were ready to put their program of reconstruction for the avant-garde into effect. More than a statement of principles or a tentative effort at making clean, fairly representational paintings, there was now a "movement" called Purism, with a magazine called *L'Esprit nouveau*. Not surprisingly, the title for the magazine, which was also a kind of subtitle for the movement itself, had been picked from the rich harvest of patriotic epithets. As *L'Élan* had been meant to express the new French sense of militancy and energy, so Charles Saroléa, in his nationalistic tract of 1916, *Le Réveil de la France* (The Awakening of France), writes of "a new spirit, a dramatic transformation in the French character,"<sup>18</sup> that came into being with mobilization. Apollinaire, generally thought to have originated the phrase in his article "L'Esprit nouveau et les poètes," published in the *Mercur de France* less than a month after the Armistice, was in fact only dealing in quotidian patriotic currency. And although Apollinaire used "esprit nouveau" as an artistic description, he meant it to be understood in the nationalist sense. He wrote in his article (December 1, 1918):

Even *l'esprit nouveau*, which has the ambition to note the universal spirit and does not know how to limit its activities to this or that, is nonetheless a personal and lyrical expression of the French nation, and claims to respect it.<sup>19</sup>

We should keep this in mind, as the most accurate and astute observation of "l'esprit nouveau" of Purist theory and practice that we have. In a sentence Apollinaire gives us the key to more than a decade of French art.

Yet, as we approach the Purist theory of painting, we are stopped short. Because—although the title of Jeanneret and Ozenfant's new magazine expressed French patriotism and even though they had made direct reference to the war and its significance in *Après le Cubisme*, and despite the fact that Le Corbusier was to be warmly appreciative of the Great War in *Towards a New Architecture*—there is still not a single reference to the war in their definitive essay "Purism," which appeared in the fourth issue of *L'Esprit nouveau*. On the contrary, we could hardly find a more formalistic, seemingly hermetic and non-referential theory. Like the Purist book that cannot be read and the Purist guitar that cannot be strummed, Purist theory—concerned only with the construction of the well-tempered picture—appears to militate against its own significance. "Purism" does speak clearly and insistently of *la Grande Guerre*, and in fact there is a method to this seeming madness of an art without content. There is even a meaning in these "purist" pictures determined to be meaningless.

The very first line of Jeanneret and Ozenfant's "Purism" declares,

Logic, born of human constants, and without which nothing is human, is an instrument of control, and, for him who is inventive, a guide toward discovery; it controls and corrects the sometimes capricious march of intuition and permits one to go ahead with certainty.<sup>20</sup>

If *Après le Cubisme* had been the Purist Armistice-week manifesto, "Purism" was Jeanneret and Ozenfant's "Versailles Treaty" (which went into effect the same month as the inauguration of *L'Esprit nouveau*). We can hear much of France's own recent history in the words of the Purists: as the French had controlled the "capricious march" of the invaders from beyond the Rhine and could, with the help of her Versailles "instrument of control," now "go ahead with certainty," so the French avant-garde after Cubism would also have a new sense of certainty and purpose [3]. Militaristic language, alternately aggressive and defensive, proliferates throughout the essay, functioning as a kind of bass line to Purism's formalist melody. Such terms as "formidable fatality," "perilous agent," "futility and disaggregation," "confusion and trouble" are most immediate indications that the aesthetic revisionism promulgated in "Purism" owes more than a little to much darker, nonart forces.

Still, such a reading of Purist verbal imagery does not explain the vehemence with which the authors denigrated not only intuition but even "pleasure" itself. They say,

With regard to man, esthetic sensations are not all of the same degree of intensity or quality; we might say that there is a hierarchy.

The highest level of this hierarchy seems to us to be that special state of a mathematical sort to which we are raised, for example, by the clear percep-



3  
Congress of the Versailles Treaty  
28 June 1919, delegation of the French war-mutilated.

tion of a great general law (the state of mathematical lyricism, one might say); it is superior to the brute pleasure of the senses; the senses are involved, however, because every being in this state is as if in a state of beatitude.

The goal of art is not simple pleasure, rather it partakes of *the nature of happiness*.<sup>21</sup>

And, in the same vein:

There are obviously those arts whose only ambition is to please the senses; we call them "arts of pleasure." Purism offers an art that is perhaps severe, but one that addresses itself to the elevated faculties of the mind.<sup>22</sup>

There was a very specific meaning in the denigration of pleasure for the post-mobilization French. It was already intimated in *Après le Cubisme* that up to the war France had been accused of being decadent, sensual, and in moral decline despite—or because of—her international cultural hegemony. That is, if France was the flower of Western culture, her critics said, she was a little wilted. Maurice Barrès, France's greatest artist/patriot (later hanged in effigy by the Dadaists), wrote, in 1917, in *The Undying Spirit of France*:

We had come to be regarded as jaded triflers, far too affluent and light-hearted, with pleasure as our only concern; the French people were supposed to allow impulse and passion to determine the course of their lives, pleasure being the supreme good sought.<sup>23</sup>

This view of the French as frivolous, as a people dedicated to pleasure, was dangerous after the start of war, because "France of the prewar period was close to thinking of herself as the world saw her."<sup>24</sup> The extent to which the French were conscious of trying to counteract such a self-image is attested to by Edith Wharton's description of Paris during mobilization, in her *Fighting France* (1915):

After the first rush of conscripts hurrying to their military bases it might have been imagined that the reign of peace had set in. While smaller cities were swarming with soldiers, no glittering of arms reflected in the empty avenues of the capital, no military music sounded in them. Paris scorned all show of war, and fed the patriotism of her children on the mere sight of her beauty. . . . It seemed as though it had been unanimously, instinctively decided that the Paris of 1914 should in no respect resemble the Paris of 1870, and as though this resolution had passed at birth into the blood of millions born since that fatal date, ignorant of its bitter lesson. The unanimity of self-restraint was the notable characteristic of this people suddenly plunged into an unsought and unexpected war.<sup>25</sup>

If Wharton seems to have shared more than a little of the headiness that French propagandists were encouraging, her observations may be all the more valuable for their very intoxication. Whether or not French children were nursed on memories of the Prussian occupation, dreaming of the day when they could vindicate the seizure of Alsace (and there is a good deal of evidence that they were), Wharton's *Fighting France* is an accurate reflection of French attitudes as the nation went to war. A "unanimity of self-restraint," real or imagined, prevailed. René Viviani, president of the Council of Ministers, berated the Germans with the same theme in a speech of April 12, 1915: "Germany was completely ignorant of the French soul, and she is receiving at this moment punishment for her errors. Germany thought she had before her a dissociated, a frivolous nation."<sup>26</sup> In 1919 the French High Commission in Washington, celebrating the Allied victory, recounted how

As the war progressed . . . there developed the need of virtues not commonly regarded as French: patience, perseverance, work, unity. What was the opinion of France commonly held in 1914? That the race was wearied; the industries behind the times; the nation helplessly divided by political dissension.<sup>27</sup>

The French not only had to remake their prewar image of frivolity and decadence, but they also had to reconcile their traditional love of indepen-

dence with the new group effort. The French philosopher Emile Boutroux said in 1915,

It is fashionable beyond the Rhine to claim that the French are dedicated to an ungovernable individualism. The individual in France, according to this opinion, considers himself as literally sovereign, and it is thought that he would place the unique law of his conduct in the satisfaction of his own desires, his own caprices.<sup>28</sup>

Even Enlightenment individualism became unusable after August 1914: "French thought does not ratify the exaggerated assertion of Rousseau attributing an absolute and independent existence to the individual."<sup>29</sup>

If the present war has particularly reminded the French of the duty of submitting the individual will to the superior law, it has, by this call, simply stimulated to growth all their natural predilections. . . . It is to conform the Frenchman's most intimate nature to reconcile individual value with the submission to the law of duty.<sup>30</sup>

The Purists have already told us that logic can control the caprices of intuition, that "the clear perception of the great general law . . . is superior to the brute pleasure of the senses," and that "Purism offers an art that is perhaps severe." So, in accordance with France's national regime, they now say,

The highest delectation of the human mind is the perception of order, and the greatest human satisfaction is the feeling of collaboration or participation in this order.<sup>31</sup>

Like the politicians, they assert *ex cathedra*:

It does not seem necessary to expatiate at length on this elementary truth that anything of universal value is worth more than anything of merely individual value. It is the condemnation of "individualistic" art to the benefit of "universal" art.<sup>32</sup>

All this was an about-face for French avant-garde aesthetics. We sense in their refusal to "expatiate at length" that the Purists were well aware of this. They could hardly fail to recall that in 1913 Gleizes and Metzinger, in *their* joint essay "Cubism," had spoken of "that negative truth, the mother of morals and everything insipid which, true for the many, is false for the individual,"<sup>33</sup> and, as it pertained to the maker of paintings, they had said:

Let the forms which he discerns and the symbols in which he incorporates their qualities be sufficiently remote from the imagination of the crowd to prevent the truth which they convey from assuming a general character.<sup>34</sup>

But of course that was before *la Grande Guerre*, before France felt so acutely the need for unity, before truths that assumed a general character

became not only desirable, but the means by which the war effort and Reconstruction came into being. After August 1914, a position such as Gleizes's and Metzinger's would have seemed an almost treasonous proposition in the face of France's "call to order," which is precisely how it was taken by many. In his article "French Art After the War" (1917), André Michel, a curator at the Louvre, enunciated the official, patriotic stance on Cubism:

One could go further and by mixing the excesses of individualism and the abuse of reason, sketch out a theory of Cubism. True, there is nothing completely absurd, as the indulgent Renan said; but we have come to a moment where it is well to realize that all sophisms are not equally inoffensive. And it is here, that for the health, for the future, for the flowering of our French art, that I permit myself to appeal to good sense, to the reason and to the conscience of all those responsible for our Art, before the eyes of France and the world. . . . The need, one might say the fervent need, for a return to style, to composition which makes itself heard even at the very base of contemporary anarchy, is not, I have good reason to believe, a new mystification; it is one of our firmest reasons to count on tomorrow. It is here in this need, that artists, even the most individualistic, in the dangerous sense of the word, will understand the necessity of laws, the benefit of subordination; it is here where the truly strong individualists will steel themselves and will triumph.<sup>35</sup>

Michel's prescription for a new French art bears more than a slight resemblance to the Purism-to-be of Jeanneret and Ozenfant, and this nearly a year and a half before the appearance of *Après le Cubisme*. How congenial it would have sounded to the Purists who themselves later wrote, "Nothing is worthwhile which is not general, nothing is worthwhile which is not transmittable."<sup>36</sup> There is no reason to believe that the Purists were necessarily reading Michel. The French wartime and postwar atmosphere was so thick with these selected, essential "general truths" that one breathed the "new spirit" and exhaled "a return to style."

When Jeanneret and Ozenfant discuss the formal properties of their new art in "Purism," the translation of wartime and postwar ideology into visual terms is rather literal. Their formal principles are sanctions of severity, unity, order, and reserve. With Cubism as progenitor and antagonist, as avant-garde forebear and opponent, the Purists' "fervent need for a return to style, to composition" expresses itself as both an acceptance of Cubism's importance and as a rejection of many of its means—and this in a quasi-political vernacular.

As regards the depiction of objects, the Purists write:

Of all recent schools of painting, only Cubism foresaw the advantages of choosing selected objects, and of their inevitable associations. But, by a paradoxical error, instead of sifting out the general laws of these objects, Cubism

only showed their accidental aspects, to such an extent that on the basis of this erroneous idea it even re-created arbitrary and fantastic forms. Cubism made square pipes to associate with matchboxes, and triangular bottles to associate with conical glasses.

From this critique and all the foregoing analyses, one comes logically to the necessity of a reform, the necessity of a logical choice of themes, and the necessity of their association not by deformation, but *by formation*.<sup>37</sup>

Henceforth, there shall be no more strangely shaped objects, no more monstrosities of form, no further "abuse of reason." The authors allude to the Cubists in their essay in asserting that

A painting is an association of purified, related, and architected elements. A painting should not be a fragment, a painting is a whole. A viable organ is a whole; a viable organ is not a fragment.<sup>38</sup>

So much for the fractured planes of Cubism, so much for the confounding and enigmatic masterpieces of the individualistic, prewar, directionless France! So much too for the rococo pleasantries of the tondo, for Cubism's *jeu d'esprit* with the ambiguities of framing devices, levels of reality, and collage:

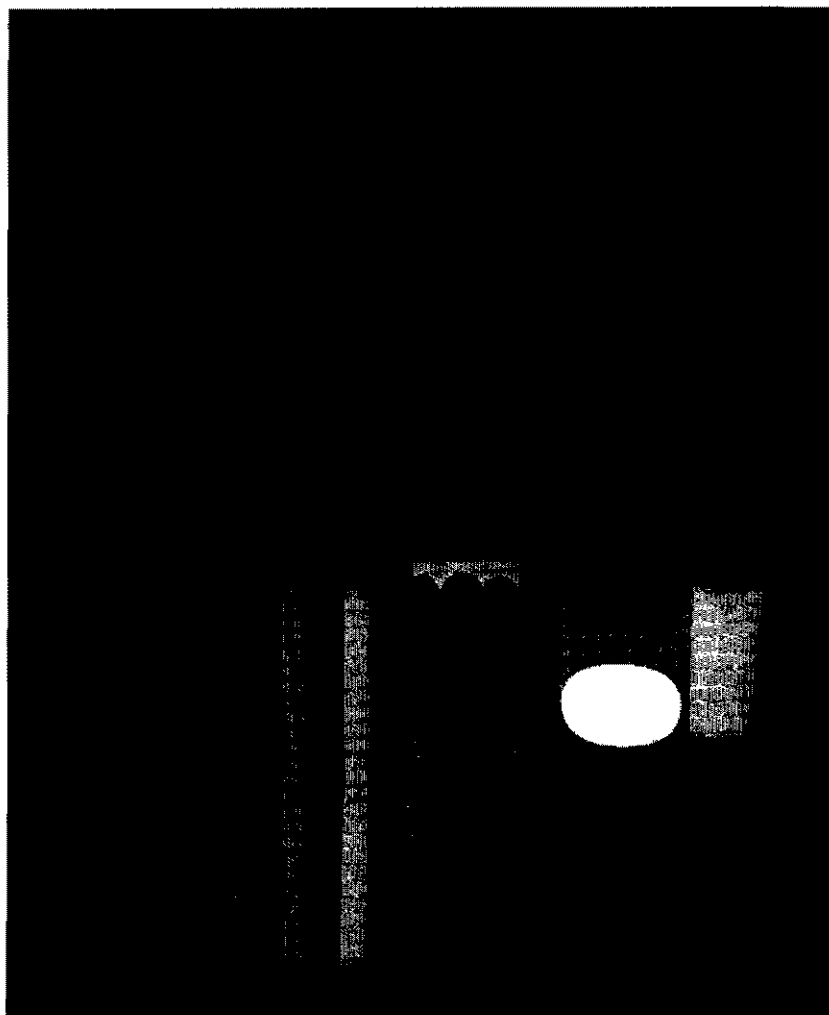
If Ingres paper and Whatman paper have a fixed format, and if canvases of 40 × 32, for example, have a format unchanged for so many years, it is because their proportions satisfy physiological needs. . . . Moreover, the painter should not concentrate on particular surfaces which necessarily determine sensations of an accidental order. A painting surface should make one forget its limits, it should be *indifferent*.<sup>39</sup>

When it comes to color—where it would have been hard to deride the grisaille severity of Analytic Cubism—we may surmise that the attack is here on the "arbitrary and fantastic" experiments of the Orphists or even the earlier Fauvists:

When one says painting, inevitably he says color. But color has properties of shock (sensory order) which strike the eye before form (which is a creation already cerebral in part). . . . In the expression of volume, color is a perilous agent; often it destroys and disorganizes volume.<sup>40</sup>

But there is a historical irony in the Purists' effort to forge a new postwar art after Cubism. For all of Jeanneret and Ozenfant's efforts to associate Cubism with the time before "the Great Test," the Cubists themselves were marching to the tune of the "new spirit." Picasso was more in harmony with the revived sense of order and tradition—and the great French collective and classical vision—than anyone would have thought possible in 1913; in fact, he embraced the "return to style" with a passion that must have seemed excessive to the prudish Purists. In comparison with the downright atavism of pictures like *Three Women at the Spring* of 1921, the otherwise tame





4  
**AMÉDÉE OZENFANT**, *Glasses and Bottles*  
 1926. Oil on canvas. The Tate Gallery, London.

modernity of Amédée Ozenfant's *Glasses and Bottles* of 1926 [4] looks "perilous." Yet both works come out of similar prevailing conditions. Despite the obvious discrepancy in dramatis personae between revived classical ladies and assorted still-life objects, we find that their limited and very similar palettes of almost identical earth tones, their strong, even patterns of light and dark, and their fluted, columnar, classical forms show both to be of the same "world."

It was indeed the same world, that of France reshaped by the Great War and the "United Front," the "Sacred Union." The same for the artistic avant-garde: it was time to call back into service those myths of French classicism and antiquity best and most recently exemplified by the state-commissioned projects of Puvis de Chavannes. Although Ozenfant does not bring back mythic classicism with the audacity of Picasso, he does create an airless, timeless image of mythic proportions that is also contrary to the Cubist "café realism" of *The Architect's Table*. As Jeanneret and Ozenfant say in "Purism," "A painting is a whole (unity); a painting is an artificial formation which, by appropriate means, should lead to the objectification of an entire 'world.'"<sup>41</sup> This is precisely the lesson relearned by France after August 1914; it was how France, a "whole," a "unity," an "artificial formation," realized her war effort and reconstruction, how France made real an "entire 'world'" of collective *élan*.

We arrive, then, at what must be considered the iconography of Purism. It would seem that no less literary or moralizing subject matter could be imagined than these glasses, bottles, plates, books, guitars, and pipes. There is not even a wine label, a newspaper headline, or a song title, not the slightest scrap of situational testimony, not even a free-floating Cubistic letter or word fragment.

This selectivity is interesting. In "Purism," the authors construe Darwin thusly: "Man and organized beings are products of a *natural selection*. In every evolution on earth, the organs of beings are more and more adapted and purified, and the entire march forward of evolution is a function of purification."<sup>42</sup> They apply this theory to mass-produced objects:

Mechanical selection began with the earliest times and from these times provided objects whose general laws have endured; only the means of making them changed, the laws endured. . . . In all ages, for example, man has created containers: vases, glasses, bottles, plates, which were built to suit the needs of maximum strength, maximum economy of materials, maximum economy of effort.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, they make the identification between man and his artifacts complete:

From all this comes a fundamental conclusion: that the respect for the laws of physics and of economy in every age created highly selected objects; that

these objects contain analogous mathematical curves with deep resonances; that these artificial objects obey the same laws as the products of natural selection and that, consequently, there reigns a total harmony, bringing together the only two things that interest the human being: himself and what he makes.<sup>44</sup>

While these theories appear reasonable and devoid of any shocking social implication (beyond the desire for efficient, industrial production), in *Vers une Architecture* we find an important qualification. Just as the sub-rosa significance of the war is clearly enunciated in Corbu's architectural manifesto of 1923, so what Corbu refrains from saying as a painter he proclaims unabashedly as architect. The theories of natural and mechanical selection are conflated, producing what we can only call a theory of "social selection":

All men have the same organism, the same functions.  
All men have the same needs.  
The social contract which has evolved through the ages fixes standardized classes, functions, needs, producing standardized products.<sup>45</sup>

We have hardly moved at all from the kind of chilling social analysis that characterized *Après le Cubisme*, where the First World War was seen to be more "living" than the era of peace which preceded it. Now society is created in the image of industrial production, rather than the other way around. But what could we expect? These are the same artists that would produce paintings according to the standard sizes of Ingres and Whatman paper that have "a format unchanged for so many years . . . because their proportions satisfy physiological needs." And again, the Purists were only reiterating the most fundamental truths of post-1914 France. As Bourroux said,

This war, perhaps more than any other in history, is, for the French, a national war . . . everyone gives himself up to the common task, each according to his place, which he occupies or is assigned. . . . It is essential that the French persuade themselves profoundly of the role of organization in the accomplishments of human tasks . . . to take one's place in the world is to practice, on the greatest scale possible, the perfected methods of organization.<sup>46</sup>

Or, as Bornecque and Drouilly summed up the "call to order" as war came to a close,

One preached of necessary sacrifices to the rich and to the managerial class, of the most intense production and economy to everyone, of the reconciliation of the classes on the altar of work, of the return to the nourishing land of all the uprooted, of elementary hygiene indispensable to the betterment of health, and of the love of family, the only socially powerful force, the creator of a new generation.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, in the artistic distance traversed from Picasso's *Studies of Goblets and Decanter*, executed in Avignon in 1914, to Ozenfant's line drawing

*Fugue*, of 1925, we see more than an isolated artistic debate about the rendering of still life and more than a merely formal revision of Cubism. Ozenfant's image is an almost ruthless rejection of the "drunken vessels" of Picasso, and a rejection, demanded by honor, patriotism, and "common sense" of the sensual, subjective, irrational, disorganized, individualistic, and undisciplined world that they represent. In the clean contours of *Fugue*, with its almost classical profile of bottle and vase, its equilibrated relationship of larger vessel and smaller, its hierarchies and boundaries, we find Michel's "return to style, to composition which makes itself heard even at the very base of contemporary anarchy." We find, in fact, the ideal image, a blueprint for the "social contract" of a perfectly functioning, postwar French society. Here Frenchmen are to see themselves in the things of their own manufacture, identifying themselves with natural and mechanical selection. The post-mobilization Frenchman could recognize himself without effort in these bottles and glasses, feeling himself the modern and purified descendant of the venerable, enduring, French tradition of Baccarat, Limoges, and Sevres, in a "total harmony" between "himself and what he makes." So absolute, so complete was the identification between Frenchman and French thing that the critic Maurice des Ombiaux, writing in his "Aesthetic of the Table" column in *L'Art vivant*, in 1925, could observe the relationship between French aesthetics and French patriotism in his very place setting:

There is a lovely filigree Venetian goblet on my table . . . but what can I drink from it? An Asti Spumante, perhaps, but certainly no French wine.<sup>48</sup>

Or, as Jeanneret and Ozenfant wrote in "Purism,"

Instead of following the caprices of an effervescent imagination, we will have generous directives in the subdividing of the painting which will determine its concordances, amplify its resonances, discipline the grouping of its masses, and locate its capital points.<sup>49</sup>

What the French at all costs were not to give in to was the image of France as in fact she was after 1918: burnt-out, ravaged, mutilated. "La Belle France" might regain her poise and dignity, showing herself again in time in her perfect, classical profile. But not if she saw herself in her northeastern landscape, so ravaged that many thought it could never be cultivated again; or in the destroyed towns to which, after centuries of family history and tradition, many would never again return; or in her mutilated soldiers and civilians. Nothing less than an extraordinary, renewed sense of *élan*, the "new spirit," would suffice to see France through her recovery. In other words, a kind of headlong rush into a national, all-embracing "formalism."

This is the meaning of Purism's "purity." From the very start of war the meaning and the method were apparent: "Why the bloody images, these cadavers. . . . Faced with agony, the civilized pull the curtain . . . one must

love life." And this was not just decorum or "good taste": this was how the "civilized" preserved some notion of civilization in the face of a war so monstrous in its duration and devastation, so modern in its destructive efficiency, that too constant an engagement with "content" might be overwhelming. Purism covered the cadavers and the evidence of "futility or disaggregation," with a purified inventory of forms. This new art, like the postwar French man and woman, could be neither too sensitive nor too vulnerable. As the Purists say, "A painting surface should make one forget its limits, it should be indifferent." This is the meaning of Purism's "non-meaning."

Edith Wharton's vision of a nocturnal, mobilized Paris in the late summer of 1914 might serve as a description of the French nation, aglow with her myths, then in the ascendant:

Then the moon rose and took possession of the city [N.B.], purifying it of all accidents, calming and enlarging it and giving it back its ideal lines of strength and repose. There was something strangely moving in this new Paris of the August evenings, so exposed yet so serene, as though her very beauty shielded her.<sup>50</sup>

## NOTES

This essay is an expanded version of a lecture of the same title delivered at the Frick Collection in New York as part of the Institute of Fine Arts Symposium held on April 10, 1976. I would like to thank my dissertation adviser, Robert L. Herbert, professor of art at Yale University, in whose seminar my ideas first took form, for his advice and guidance in the formulation of my lecture. I would also like to thank Vincent J. Scully, Jr., professor of art at Yale, who was kind enough to see this essay through several drafts.

1. "Le Purisme," co-authored by Charles-Edouard Jeanneret and Amédée Ozenfant, appeared for the first time in the fourth issue of *L'Esprit nouveau*, 1920 (not dated by month), pp. 369–86. The translation used throughout this essay is that of Robert L. Herbert, from his anthology *Modern Artists on Art* (Englewood Cliffs, 1964), pp. 59–73. This citation appears on pp. 72–73. The article will henceforth be referred to as "Purism," with page indication from Herbert.
2. Henri Bornecque and Germain Drouilly, *La France et la guerre: Formation de l'opinion publique pendant la guerre* (Paris, 1921), p. 24. This translation and all others in this essay are, unless otherwise noted, my own.
3. *L'Elan* (Paris), April 15, 1915, n.p. (p. 2).
4. *L'Elan*, December 15, 1915, n.p. (p. 1).
5. Guillaume Apollinaire, "Guerre," in *L'Elan*, January 15, 1916, n.p. (p. 8).
6. Rémy de Gourmont, *Pendant l'orage* (Paris, 1915), pp. 92–93.
7. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York and London, 1975).
8. Charles-Edouard Jeanneret and Amédée Ozenfant, *Après le Cubisme* (Paris, November 15), 1918.
9. Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, "Cubism" (originally Paris, 1912). Reprinted in translation in Herbert, pp. 2–18. This citation appears p. 8. The article will henceforth be referred to as "Cubism," with page indication from Herbert.
10. "Cubism," p. 14.
11. Le Corbusier, *Vers une Architecture* (Paris, 1923). The translation used throughout this essay is Frederick Etchell's famous rendering *Towards a New Architecture* (London, 1927). This citation appears p. 70.
12. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, p. 166.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
14. Le Corbusier's monetary debts to big business are well known—as, for example, the financing of his Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau at the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, in 1925, by the Voisin Company. In fact, he admired the modern businessman with a fervor he showed for few others. He says, in *Towards a New Architecture*, p. 264, "The morality of industry has been transformed; big business is today a healthy and moral organism."
15. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, p. 146.
16. Figures from J. P. T. Bury, *France: The Insecure Peace* (London, 1972), p. 25.
17. William MacDonald, *Reconstruction in France* (New York, 1922), p. 40.
18. Charles Saroléa, *Le Réveil de la France* (Paris, 1916), p. 71.
19. Guillaume Apollinaire, "L'esprit nouveau et les poètes," *Mercur de France* (Paris) 130 (December 1, 1918): 390; cited and trans. in Christopher Gray, *Cubist Aesthetic Theories* (Baltimore, 1953), p. 110.
20. "Purism," pp. 59–60.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 60. Italics are Jeanneret and Ozenfant's.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
23. Maurice Barrès, *The Undying Spirit of France* (New Haven, 1917) (appeared simultaneously in French as *Les Traits éternelles de la France*).
24. Bornecque and Drouilly, p. 13.
25. Edith Wharton, *Fighting France* (New York, 1915), pp. 25–26. Interesting to note here is Wharton's discussion of *élan*, which appears on pp. 220–21 of her book: "The tone of France after the declaration of war was the white glow of dedication: a great nation's collective impulse (since there is no English equivalent for that winged word, *élan*) to resist destruction. . . . It is fairly easy to soar to the empyrean when one is carried on the wings of such an impulse" (emphasis Wharton's).
26. René Viviani, in a speech delivered on April 12, 1915; cited in Augustin Rey, *Les Grandes Pensées de la France à travers ses Grands Hommes, 1914–1916* (Paris, 1916), n.p. (p. 5).
27. Information Bureau of the French High Commission, *What France Has Done in the War* (1919), n.p.
28. Emile Boutroux, "L'idée de liberté en France et en Allemagne," a speech delivered at the Hall of Agriculture in Paris, 1915; reproduced in pamphlet form (undated), pp. 13–14.
29. Boutroux, p. 11.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.
31. "Purism," p. 73.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
33. "Cubism," p. 14.

34. Ibid., p. 6.
35. André Michel, "L'Art français après la guerre," *La Revue hebdomadaire* (Paris) 26, no. 11 (March 17, 1917): 328-29.
36. "Purism," p. 65.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., p. 67.
39. Ibid., pp. 67-68.
40. Ibid., p. 70.
41. Ibid., p. 73.
42. Ibid., p. 63.
43. Ibid., pp. 63-64.
44. Ibid., p. 64.
45. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, p. 126.
46. Boutroux, pp. 13-14.
47. Bornecque and Drouilly, p. 34.
48. Maurice des Ombiaux, "L'Esthétique de la table," *L'Art vivant* (Paris) 1, no. 1 (January 1925): 30.
49. "Purism," p. 68.
50. Wharton, p. 21.

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ANDROGYNY AND  
SPECTATORSHIP

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MAUD LAVIN

In 1930, the same year that Marlene Dietrich's film *The Blue Angel* was released, Hannah Höch made the photomontage *Marlene* [1]. In the montage, two men gaze upward at a pair of gigantic legs adorned with stockings and high heels, mounted upside down on a pedestal. A bright red mouth is positioned in the upper right corner, outside the line of the male gaze. The mouth is instead offered directly as an object of desire to the male or female viewer of the montage. The name "Marlene" is scrawled across the sky in large letters, as if by a fan. With its challenging array of sexual signs and its deliberate allusion to Dietrich, an actress well known for her androgynous image and her ambiguous sexual identity, the photomontage provokes a wealth of questions about gender identity and sexuality, strategies of representation, and the reading of imagery by a Weimar audience. Viewed in its historical context, Höch's image takes its place amid a proliferation of images of androgyny during the Weimar years, produced both by avant-garde artists and by mass-culture institutions.

Today, many critical or theoretical treatments of gender promote the androgynous ideal as a liberation from constricting masculine and feminine roles. But if we examine this strain of imagery in the historical context of Weimar culture, we see that representations of androgyny and of ambiguous sexual identity functioned in two fundamentally opposed fashions at

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From Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photographs of Hannah Höch* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 185-243. Copyright © 1993 by Maud Lavin. Reprinted with permission of the author and Yale University Press.