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In the Shadow of the Enlightenment

Le Corbusier, Le Faisceau
and Georges Valois

Simone Brott

Queensland University of Technology

On 9 January 1927 Le Corbusier materialised on the front cover of the Faisceau journal edited by Georges Valois Le Nouveau Siècle which printed the single-point perspective of Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin and an extract from the architect's discourse in Urbanisme. In May Le Corbusier presented slides of his urban designs at a fascist rally. These facts have been known ever since the late 1980s when studies emerged in art history that situated Le Corbusier's philosophy in relation to the birth of twentieth-century fascism in France—an elision in the dominant reading of Le Corbusier's philosophy, as a project of social utopianism, whose received genealogy is Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier. Le Corbusier participated with the first group in France to call itself fascist, Valois's militant Faisceau des Combattants et Producteurs, the "Blue Shirts," inspired by the Italian "Fasci" of Mussolini. Thanks to Mark Antliff, we know the Faisceau did not misappropriate Le Corbusier's plans, in some remote quasi-symbolic sense, rather Valois's organisation was premised on the redesign of Paris based on Le Corbusier's schematic designs. Le Corbusier's Urbanisme was considered the "prodigious" model for the fascist state Valois called La Cité Française – after his mentor the anarcho-syndicalist Georges Sorel. Valois stated that Le Corbusier's architectural concepts were "an expression of our profoundest thoughts," the Faisceau, who "saw their own thought materialized" on the pages of Le Corbusier's plans.

The question I pose is, In what sense is Le Corbusier's plan a complete representation of La Cité? For Valois, the fascist city "represents the collective will of La Cité" invoking Enlightenment philosophy, operative in Sorel, namely Rousseau, for whom the notion of "collective will" is linked to the idea of political representation: to 'stand in' for someone or a group of subjects i.e. the majority vote. The figures in



Voisin are not empty abstractions but the result of “the will” of the “combatant-producers” who build the town. Yet, the paradox in anarcho-sindicalist anti-enlightenment thought – and one that became a problem for Le Corbusier – is precisely that of authority and representation. In Le Corbusier’s plan, the “morality of the producers” and “the master” (the transcendent authority that hovers above La Cité) is flattened into a single picture plane, thereby abolishing representation. I argue that La Cité pushed to the limits of formal abstraction by Le Corbusier thereby reverts to the Enlightenment myth it first opposed, what Theodor Adorno would call the dialectic of enlightenment.

In the Shadow of the Enlightenment: Le Corbusier, Le Faisceau and Georges Valois

On 9 January 1927 Le Corbusier materialised on the front cover of the *Faisceau*¹ League’s newspaper *Le Nouveau Siècle* edited by the anarcho-sindicalist journalist Georges Valois. Le Corbusier’s friend Dr. Pierre Winter, a physician and Faisceau neophyte, in that issue, named Le Corbusier one of *les animateurs*, the “organisers,” of the Party.² Le Corbusier’s early affiliations on the right have been well known since 1985: his involvement with the technocratic movement of Ernest Mercier, from 1926, the *Redressement Français* (French Resurgence); with Hubert Lagardelle’s regional syndicalist group in the 1930s; his contribution to three fascist revues: *Plans*, *Prélude* and *L’Homme Réel*; and, his post as a city planner for the Vichy regime. It is less known that Le Corbusier was engaged in an urban dialogue with the first group in France to call itself fascist in 1925: Valois’s militant Faisceau des Combattants et Producteurs, the “Blue Shirts,” inspired by the Italian “*Fasci*” of Mussolini.

On 1 May 1927, The *Nouveau Siècle* printed a full-page feature “Le Plan Voisin” on Le Corbusier’s 1922 redesign of Paris; the architect’s single-point perspective sketch appeared below an extract lifted from his original polemic *Le Centre de Paris* on the pages of *Urbanisme* published two years earlier.³ Three weeks later, Le Corbusier presented a slide show of his urban plans at a fascist rally for the inauguration of the *Faisceau*’s new headquarters, thereby crystallising the architect’s hallowed status in the league. A panegyric by Valois followed in the *New Century* 29 May:

1. Faisceau in French literally means a (structural) “beam” and translates into English as “fascies,” an ancient Roman symbol of a bundle of wooden sticks with an axe blade emerging from the centre, symbolising “strength through unity.”

2. Pierre Winter, “Les Animateurs: Le Corbusier,” *Nouveau Siècle* (January 9, 1927). Peter Winter was a doctor and hygienist, and a neighbour of Le Corbusier in Rue Nungesser-et-Coli, Paris who introduced the architect to Valois. Winter prefaced one of the volumes of Le Corbusier’s *Oeuvre Complete* (1934–38) and also contributed articles to Le Corbusier’s revue *L’Esprit Nouveau*. Le Corbusier and Winter both wrote for the fascist revues *Plans* and *Prelude*. This is the subject of another essay.

3. “Le Plan Voisin,” *Nouveau Siècle* (May 1, 1927). Extracts were taken from “*Le Centre de Paris*” and “*Chiffres & Réalisation*” in Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme* (Paris: Editions Crés, 1925). An original section was added to bridge the two. Edition cited here, Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, ed. Francois Hébert-Stevens, *Collection Architectures* (Paris: Les Editions Arthaud, 1980), 263–66, 78–79. In fact, the roughcartoon-like sketch appears to be a rendering of another perspective “Une ville contemporaine: la Cité, vue de l’autodrome de ‘grande traversée’” in Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, 234–35. Ville Contemporaine of course formed the basis for the Plan Voisin scheme which follows. The first translation of *Urbanisme* was Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning*, trans. Frederick Etchells (London: J. Rodker, 1929).

4. My translation. From hereon all translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. Georges Valois, "La Nouvelle Étape De Fascisme," *Nouveau Siècle* 1(May 29, 1927).

It is with a very precise intention that we invited Monsieur Le Corbusier to give a lecture. I am totally ignorant of M. Le Corbusier's political ideas. What I do know is that his work magnificently expresses, in forceful images, the profound tendency of the Faisceau.⁴

Valois reiterates this manifesto in four variants in his review:

We are builders, builders of new towns, and Le Corbusier's designs reflect our most profound thought. Le Corbusier is simply a man of genius who conceived, as nobody until now, the modern city.

Our comrades, who were the first to see Le Corbusier's slides, experienced a moment of astonishment. They saw their own thought materialized in The City of Tomorrow.

Le Corbusier's grandiose designs express the profound thought of fascism, of the fascist revolution.

Seeing his slide images of the City of Tomorrow, all our comrades lived this thought that fascism is not an act of rioters overturning a ministry—rather, this is a constructive revolution that will give to the world the modern city.

The Faisceau's program was premised on the redesign of Paris, by the medium of Le Corbusier's architectural imaginary. The symmetry between fascism *un ordre nouveau* and *la cité nouvelle* in Valois's voice, could not be clearer; *Le fascisme: c'est la cité nouvelle*—fascism is the new city, Valois proclaimed addressing the *Faisceau* reader in Capital letters "*LES CONSTRUCTEURS DE L'ORDRE NOUVEAU*."⁵ The question here is what exactly did Valois see in Le Corbusier's slides that warranted this reception?

5. Georges Valois, "Sur la voie glorieuse et rude de la pauvreté et de la réussite," *Nouveau Siècle* (May 29, 1927).

6. The first essay on this subject was Mark Antliff, "La Cité Française: Georges Valois, Le Corbusier, and Fascist Theories of Urbanism," in *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, ed. Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997). A longer more developed version of the essay with the same name appeared in Mark Antliff, *Avant-Garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909-1939* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

Thanks to Mark Antliff, we know that *Urbanisme*, Le Corbusier's book which culminates in the Plan Voisin, was considered the very model for the fascist state Valois called *La Cité Française*⁶—after his mentor the anarcho-syndicalist writer Georges Sorel, an engineer and philosopher, who, originally on the radical left, would one day be credited as the parent of twentieth-century fascist thought. For Sorel, *La cité* is an amorphous political space, a "spiritual unity" to foment the moral regeneration of the French masses. Sorel like many French intellectuals in the early twentieth century, including Le Corbusier, decried France's invention of a bourgeois modern democracy, the clas-



sical liberalism spawned by the French revolution—in short, he opposed the entire rationalist paradigm of the French Enlightenment.

Central to *la cité* is Sorel's founding "myth" of the "general strike"—the overturning of capitalism by *proletarian violence* that would re-instate France's division into classes, and instill in each citizen the warrior values of ancient Greece.⁷ In his first book *Vers une architecture*, Le Corbusier would oppose the "decadence" and commercialism of the French bourgeoisie; and, using the same historiography as Sorel, blamed the French Revolution, and offered the age of classical antiquity as the *solution*: the Parthenon, Paestum, and Hadrian's Villa were the formal quintessence of *l'esprit nouveau*. Le Corbusier, Sorel, and Valois each substituted the pacifist values of laissez faire capitalism with the military values of the Greek Polis, contributing to the fashionable intellectual discourse in 1927 Paris that aligned the productivity of the city industrial complex with militancy and war.⁸ The war not only stimulated productivity; but, heroism in the battlefield and creativity in *industry* are tantamount in both Le Corbusier's "warrior esprit" and Sorel's idiom "the warrior of the city."⁹ This is not to say that Le Corbusier was a "fascist"—rather he was a Frenchman of his time; but that his views should be historicised through the genealogy of French thought.

Valois's innovation was to convert *La cité* into an *urban project* for reimagining Paris, that would synthesise Sorel's "morality of the producers" with the "morality of the combatant." A year before he invited Le Corbusier to speak, Valois produced his own syndicalist plan for the centre of Paris, which was to be constituted by separately articulated corporate industrial entities.¹⁰

Yet there are important ideological differences between Valois's reading of *la cité* and Le Corbusier's *Urbanisme*. Nonetheless, for both men the city was defined as a technocratic environment, a vast factory or industrial complex where the purpose of life for each citizen was to devote one's life to building the city—thereby dissolving class conflict and recovering for the proletariat the glory of work. In Valois's version, the city would be self-governed by processes of production spread across a group of *syndicates*. 1927 was also the year the Berlin film *Metropolis* was released, an acid satire on the very technocratic fantasy of the city industrial complex.

7. Distinct from that of the French Revolution which Sorel opposed. G. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 85. Georges Sorel, *Réflexions Sur La Violence* (Paris: M. Riveère, 1912). English ed., *Reflections on Violence* trans. T. E. Hulme, (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1914).

8. After the real war, in *De l'utilité du pragmatisme* (1921) Sorel replaced this radical model of *la cité* with four separable cités: the cité savante, the cité esthétique, the cité morale, and the cité catholique. *La cité* is as if an Aristotelian substrate for subject attributes: traits of the "mass-producers." Valois had been brought together with George Sorel before the war when Sorel was planning a Nationalist-socialist journal *La Cité française* in 1910. This journal never appeared, but was advertised in the flyer: "Déclaration de la Cité française" signed by Sorel, Valois, Berth, Jean Variot, and Pierre Gilbert.

9. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*. 98-99.

10. The scheme, moreover, differed from that of Le Corbusier on certain ideological points to which I will return.

11. Mary McLeod, "Architecture or Revolution: Taylorism, Technocracy, and Social Change," *Art Journal* 43, no. 2 (1983). Followed by her full dissertation: Mary McLeod, *Urbanism and Utopia: Le Corbusier from Regional Syndicalism to Vichy*, PhD diss., Princeton University, 1985.

12. In part due to Le Corbusier's statements about *la révolution* in *Vers une architecture* and the historiographic treatment of the latter that remains divorced from French history. In particular, the architect's postwar works such as the *Unité d'Habitation*, have been paralleled with the *Phalanstère* and ideal city of Charles Fourier as industrial socialist models of the city; the conception of modernism as a utopian project of social redemption endures in no small part because of this historical reading of Le Corbusier's refrain *Architecture ou révolution* in 1923. See Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 163. Also Peter Serenyi, "Le Corbusier, Fourier, and the Monastery of Ema," *Art Bulletin* 49, no. 4 (1967): 282. Serenyi writes: "Le Corbusier was heavily indebted to the thought of the 19th-century French utopians Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier. There is a noteworthy resemblance between the concept of the *unité* and Fourier's phalanstère." See also Anthony Vidler, "Asylums of Libertinage: Sade, Fourier, Ledoux," *Lotus International* 44 (1984). Charles S Maier, "Between Taylorism and Technocracy: European Ideologies and the Vision of Industrial Productivity in the 1920s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 2 (1970).

13. Italics mine. Valois, "*La Nouvelle Étape De Fascisme*."

14. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 20.

15. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 28-29. "Unlike utopia, a myth cannot be refuted since it is identical to the convictions of a group. Utopia on the other hand can be refuted by showing that the economic system on which it has been made to rest is incompatible with the necessary conditions of modern production."

For at least ten years Le Corbusier subscribed to American models of industrial rationalization such as Taylorism—as documented by Mary Macleod in 1983—until the Wall Street crash of 1929 when he soured to American capitalism.¹¹ Le Corbusier and Valois both loved Henry Ford and believed in Taylorism: a scientific system for increasing the productive flow of factory processes; its ideology, that rationalisation had the power to dissolve class dissonance because of "the spirit of collaboration" among all classes invested in production. In the early 1920s the young Jeanneret and painter Amédée Ozenfant had published serial agit prop pieces on Taylorism and Fordist method in *Esprit Nouveau*.

The lineage of Le Corbusier's technocratic ideas about cities has until now been ascribed to the political *left* via the *social utopianism* of Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier.¹² In fact, Sorel and Valois formulated French fascism by the same intellectual genealogy we find in the early Le Corbusier—for the reason that fascism was born out of the split within revolutionary left, and Sorel's historic shift from the left to the right is emblematic of this transformation of French thought (Marxism) that so disfigured the twentieth century.

Valois openly disavowed having any intelligence of Le Corbusier's political ideology—which merely serves to sharpen the point, that it was not Le Corbusier's technocratic ideas but his construction of the problem via the apparatus of *the architectural image* that Valois was responding to. Valois laments that "from the beginning of the Faisceau, there were misunderstandings, even at the level of the image."¹³ Le Faisceau's fevered adoption of Le Corbusier's urban images is ironic given their rejection of his purist painting and the condemnation of modern art by fascist groups in the 1920s.

The role of the image in anarcho-syndicalist fascist ideation begins with Sorel's definition of the fascist "*myth*" as a "system of images that changes history."¹⁴ Le Corbusier's new city-centre which rose up from the ashes of Paris constituted for Valois an "image of battle" or "coordinated picture of the revolution to come." For Sorel, "Images or myths are not descriptions of things but expressions of a will to act. A utopia is, on the contrary, an intellectual product for future juridical institutions . . . while the myth leads men to prepare themselves for a combat which will destroy the existing state of things."¹⁵



Valois in turn conceived the Faisceau's task as a problem of the architectural image, in other words, how to *visualise la cité*. The function of image, here, is irreducible to an architect's slides, or objects of a pure visuality, but includes the writings and rhetorical apparatus of these men. Because the contested image of the new city in 1927 Paris was not a finality but, like Sorel's "myth," an ideological battle underway.

Le Corbusier was writing *Urbanisme* at the precise moment that the redesign of Paris was being debated and undertaken by planning authorities, as he urgently narrates: "A Congress of The New Paris is being developed at the moment. What will happen to Paris, what streets will it give us? Heaven save us from the grasping Balzacian delegates of the spectacle of faces in the black crack of the streets of Paris..." *Urbanisme* was an attempt by Le Corbusier to appeal to planning authorities to change the direction of Paris—even if historiography would reduce Le Corbusier's urban oeuvre to '*l'utopie*.' By the time the book came out, Le Corbusier had endured widespread objections to his schemata, bad reviews which Le Corbusier would forensically document, publish, and archive in a chapter of *Urbanisme*.¹⁶

Nonetheless, Le Corbusier's relationship with Valois is not a matter of patronage or opportunism, as per the dominant historical reduction of Le Corbusier's relationship with "politics," to a "mutual instrumentalisation" between an architect and a statesman¹⁷—a view that was crystallised in modernist historiography ever since Mary Macleod's 1985 dissertation on Le Corbusier's turn to the right.¹⁸ (It is no accident that the isolated studies on Le Corbusier's affiliation with the right since the 1990s have been carried out almost exclusively in art history, not architecture.¹⁹) The claim however is not that Le Corbusier became a "fascist" under the influence of Valois. Neither was it a case of projection onto Le Corbusier by Valois.

If Valois's discursus on Le Corbusier and the latter's urban formulations bear a striking and even "profound" resemblance, the critical task of the theorist is to distinguish causation from mere association in the primary materials adduced. Only then can the "mutual instrumentalisation" version of history be defeated. The facile equation provided by Valois is that Le Corbusier gave to Le Faisceau the apparatus of the architectural image. By extension, le Faisceau's construction of *la cité* gave to Le Corbusier the Sorelian discourse that would re-surface on the pages of *Urbanisme*. But this causality is a forced and unwarranted simplicity. If there is a

16. Le Corbusier's defense was after all one of the principal goals of Urbanisme. Le Corbusier, "Coupsures De Journaux," in *Urbanisme* (Paris: Vincent, Fréal et Cie, 1966). The chapter is devoted to newspaper clippings and excerpts of excoriating reviews, interspersed with Le Corbusier's rejoinders and defense of his vision. Includes Le Corbusier's analysis "of various widespread objections to his scheme—an analysis first published by Le Corbusier in the *Almanach d'Architecture Moderne*, 1925. (133) See the critique Le Corbusier published here of his scheme first printed in *L'Architecture*, Paris September, 1925: "Is the next generation really destined to pass its existence in these immense geometrical barracks, living in standardized mass production houses with mass production furniture; conveyed at the same hours by the same trains to the same sky-scrapers into identically similar offices? . . . This dreadful speed, this organization, this terrible uniformity? So much logic taken to its extreme limits, so much 'science' so much of the 'mechanical' . . . is enough to make one long for disorder." *L'Architecture* (September, 1925). Reprinted in Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre Complète: Le Corbusier: 1910–1929*, ed. Willy Boesiger and Oscar Stonorov, vol. 1 (Berlin: Les Editions d'Architecture, Birkhäuser. Reprinted from first edition 1929, 1995), 133. You draw straight lines, you fill the holes, you level [the ground], this is nihilism . . . (A quote from the great and wrathful edict by the chair of a committee on plans for the extension of Paris.) I replied: Excuse me, but this is, properly speaking, the precise work we should be doing. Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, 261. While Le Corbusier's plans were rejected unilaterally in a civilian context, in a military context Le Corbusier's plans received some praise. Paul Vauthier a colonel for example vigorously defended Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin. The very notion of the plan was originally a military invention in 1635 and in 1927, the notion of town planning was informed by military operations and exigencies of war. When the English translation of *Urbanisme* first appeared in English in 1929, a review in the *Nation* described *The City of Tomorrow* as "a book not for aesthetics but for statesmen." In 1927/1928 Le Corbusier had submitted his United Nations, *Projet pour le palais des Nations* a Geneva 1927/1928, his most overtly political project, at the time of his affiliation with Le Faisceau. Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre Complète: Le Corbusier: 1910–1929*.

17. This is a term of Jean Louis Cohen, "Scholarship or Politics? Architectural History and the Risks of Autonomy," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 67, no. 3 (2008): 326. "If politicians have 'their' own historians and sometimes 'their' own history, historians also have 'their' own politicians, women or men with whom they establish alliances to develop projects, from research programs to exhibitions and publications, and to create scholarly institutions." This idea that Le Corbusier was opportunistic and confused, and was without a serious or cohesive political mind extends to Mary Macleod, Robert Fishman and countless historians. But if Le Corbusier is compared to other French intellectuals in 1920s France, Le Corbusier is no different to the ambiguous "neither left nor right" position of many French avant gardists that reflected the vexed political discussion in early twentieth century France. All these contradictions contributed to the failure of fascism to win massive public support in France compared with Italy and Germany.

18. An event which the author identifies and then seeks to dismantle and unsubstantiate—by indicating Le Corbusier was confused, contradictory or else opportunistic in his political beliefs.

19. Even Mary Macleod's seminal essay appeared in the *Oxford Art Journal*.

20. Le Corbusier's views on la révolution had already been expressed in *Esprit Nouveau* and made a central theme of *Vers une architecture* as I have discussed in a previous essay: Simone Brott, "Architecture et révolution: Le Corbusier and the Fascist Revolution," *Thresholds* 41 (Spring 2013).

correspondence between the two discourses, it is because Valois and Le Corbusier were speaking the same language of modernity and transformation of the subject by the modern city that was ambient in 1927 France, at the dawning of twentieth century fascism. Le Corbusier's images are a heuristic device that stand at the centre of this debate. The encounter between Valois and Le Corbusier is not a misappropriation, but a problem of French history that appears symptomatically in their dialogue. Valois and Le Corbusier had inherited the longer genealogy of French thought from the turn of the century, specifically, the bitter opposition to the French revolution and quarrel with the humanist tradition and enlightenment, that was characteristic of many intellectual figures in the early twentieth century.²⁰

Zeev Sternhell locates the rise of fascist ideology across Europe in the "anti-materialist" transformation of Marxism that took place in France after the first world war, which opposed classical liberalism and the rationalist ideology of the French Revolution. Indeed, the first seeds for French fascism were planted by Sorel's leftist students who violently rejected the material values of bourgeois capitalism, and decried the Marxist view that socialism issued from class struggle (from the emancipation of the proletariat). In *Reflections on Violence* Sorel substituted the concept of the working class and the material "State" with that of the "nation"—a spiritual *totalité* that would stage the bourgeoisie and proletariat in a grand battle. It was precisely Sorel's idea of a dematerialised body emptied of classes, but united by *esprit*, in a word: *La Cité*, which took over the proletariat and materialist interpretation of history—in this perversion of Marxism that would become the very inspiration for Mussolini and Hitler.

The dematerialisation of the modern city was a quintessential feature of both Valois's and Le Corbusier's urban proposals. By increasing the density of Paris four times and concentrating material labour in seven new towers that would constitute the new business centre of Paris, Le Corbusier visualised an infinitely vast city of pure air, emptied of persons, who were to be concealed in the weightless, ephemeral *gratte-ciel* (skyscraper). While Valois railed against materialism, just like Le Corbusier, he proposed concentrating material (labour) in the centre: in both schemata the ambivalent status of materiality feeds on the old terms of Marxism and revolution while attempting their removal. Le Corbusier writes:



The air is clear and pure; there is almost no noise. *What, you cannot see where the buildings are ?* Look...into the sky towards those widely-spaced crystal towers, taller than any buildings in the world. These translucent prisms that seem to float in the air without anchor to the ground, sparkling at night—are huge blocks of offices.²¹

21. Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre Complète: Le Corbusier: 1910–1929*. “Un air sain, presque que pas de bruit. Vous ne voyez plus de maisons! Comment donc? a travers la resille arabesque et si charmante des ramures, VOUS apercevez dans le ciel, a de tres grandes distances les unes des autres, des masses de cristal, gigantesques, plus hautes que n'importe quel edifice du monde. Du crista! Qui miroite dans l' azur, qui luit dans les ciels gris de l'hiver, qui semble plutot flotter dans l'air qu'il ne pese sur le sol, qui est un etincellement le soir, magie electrique.”

The buildings are weightless in Le Corbusier's famous “vue de la gare centrale” perspective; the wire-frame striation reads as a thin surface wrapping rather than built fabric or fenestration. Compare this line work with the heavy treatment of skyscrapers in the ville contemporaine rendering, two pages earlier, drawn from the same location and perspective.

In the plan Voisin perspective, the buildings are inclined planes (cardboard cutouts) against the sky: “The silhouette of buildings against the sky is one of the most fundamental elements in urban aesthetics; *it is a thing that strikes the eye at the first glance and gives the final impression.*”²² The sky is the ultimate goal of Le Corbusier's new city and the eye is drawn upwards in his perspective to the zenith of the city, the uninterrupted skyline at the top of the drawing. “The profile of the traditional street, given by the chaotic outlines of volumes against the sky...would be replaced by a pure and simple line.” The tops of the skyscrapers form a single horizontal line from which hang the translucent volumes. The city for Le Corbusier is a single line through which all other lines are collapsed, all material folds are flattened and all contradictions resolved.²³ It is a quintessentially Hegelian paradigm, the perfect unity of *la raison* and *l'esprit*.

22. Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), fn 74, 71.

Hence, Le Corbusier's urban philosophy is not captured in the plan view of the centre of Paris (plans which have been the focus of historiographical interpretation) but in the horizontal perspective, where the elements of Le Corbusier's thought are isolated and laid bare. For Le Corbusier, the apparatus of the horizontal perspective drawing reproduced the apparatus of *vision* of a real skyscraper: The skyscraper gives rise to a “horizontal vision, that previously only Alpine climbers enjoyed” he rhapsodised. “A wide horizontal perspective can acutely influence us . . . As the horizon expands, as the eye takes in vast distances, it seems that thought itself can be heard.”²⁴ For Le Corbusier, the skyscraper is an “apparatus for the suspension of time and space itself—an optical look-out for dominating an ordered world.”²⁵

23. Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre Complète: Le Corbusier*. Reprinted from the first edition (Zurich 1929). Also later in the book: The profile of the town seen against the sky becomes a pure line...the purity of the city's silhouette” 232 The bottom of the building and top are depicted in opposite ways—flat and jagged views.

24. “Au fur et a mesure que l'horizon e'eleve, il semble que la pensée soit projetée en trajectoires plus entendues : si, physiquement, tout s'elargit, si le poumon se gonfle plus violemment, si l'oeil envisage des lointains vastes, l'esprit s'anime d'une vigueur agile, l'optimisme souffle. Le regard horizontal conduit loin : c'est en somme un grand résultat sans un travail pénible. Songez que jusqu'ici les horizons ne nous ont été révélés que par des yeux a peine élevés au-dessous du sol; on ne connaissant pas autrefois ces-a-pic saisissants; les alpinistes seuls avaient eu la sensation grisante. De la tour Eiffel aux plates-formes successives, de 100, 200 et 300 mètres, le regard horizontal possédé des immensités et nous en sommes commotionnés, nous en sommes influencés.” Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, 176.

25. Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, 177.

26. Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, 266. *Déformais, en lieu et place d'une ville aplatie et tassée et telle que si l'avion la révèle pour la première fois a nos yeux, nous en demeurons effarés, se dresse une ville hauteur offerte à l'air.*

27. Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre Complète: 1910–1929*, 281.

28. In a peculiar footnote: “I should like any of my readers who may find themselves able to do so to take a walk in the daytime, and another at night, in the districts of Paris covered by the “Voisin” plan. They would be surprised!” Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre Complète: 1910–1929*, 281.

29. Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning* 183. “The following considerations are not fanciful, they are merely, once again, the consequences of a continuous train of thought taken to its logical conclusions...” “pure reason does not make this a utopian scheme, on the contrary belief in pure reason leads to the most concrete and precise solution.” And “I invent no utopia in which to build my city. I assert that its proper place is here, and nothing will remove it. If I affirm this so categorically it is because I am aware of our human limitations, aware that we have not the power to begin all over again build our City as we will elsewhere. To desire such a thing is to be reactionary, and to persist in it would make the whole scheme an impossibility. Therefore it must be here.” Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre Complète: Le Corbusier: 1910–1929*.

30. Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, 182. The cité modèle is the correct blueprint upon which every modern city will one day be built.

The horizontal perspective stages Le Corbusier’s conception of the “vertical city,” a “city that rises vertical to the sky,” counter to the “bewildering flattened city the airplane reveals to us for the first time.”²⁶ This account has a Darwinian ring: through the skyscraper, “our city suddenly rises to its feet...” The perspective thus has two axes: the horizontal axis of the skyline and the vertical axis given by the rise and rise of the skyscraper, in other words a Cartesian coordinate system whose grid of perfect rationality floats in the thin, altitudinous air of Hegelian idealism – what is essentially the method of French enlightenment thought recovered in the early twentieth century.

The history of the horizontal perspective also reveals something about Le Corbusier’s ontology of drawings and models, the agency of such artifacts in Le Corbusier’s urban vision. In 1925 Le Corbusier painted a vast horizontal perspective of the redesign of Paris that would appear at the *esprit nouveau* pavilion at the international exhibition of decorative arts held in Paris: “The voisin plan was on view, I painted a panorama whose aim was to make evident to *the eye* this new conception, so unfamiliar to us as yet. The Panorama was most carefully executed and showed Paris as it is today from Notre Dame to the Etoile....Behind it rose the new city.”²⁷

Le Corbusier’s photo-realistic fifty-square-metre panorama would have been breathtaking to an architectural audience in 1925, like the first Hollywood matte painting. And its purpose was the same, to create a seamless illusion of an environment that would otherwise be too expensive or impossible to realise. Just as Sorel’s images of a battle already won lend a disturbing realism to Sorel’s myth, Le Corbusier narrated the Plan Voisin city as if it already existed: “Another ramp takes us to a second promenade two stories above the first. On one side of it is a Rue de la Paix of the smartest shops; the other commands an uninterrupted view of the city’s limits”—the city is suddenly materialised on the pages of the book.²⁸ In some sense Le Corbusier believes that his city *is* real, insofar as it is the inevitable result of “a pure logic taken to its final conclusion”²⁹—it exists in the model whose future is assured.³⁰

Further to Sorel’s philosophy of the fascist myth is the event of *palingenesis*—annihilating the existing order and starting again from degree zero—without which the myth cannot be fulfilled. A mythic palingenesis was also lionized in Le Corbusier’s *Urbanisme* in his concept of urban purification, the fatal razing to the ground



the existing city, in order to start again *ex nihilo*, that would catalyse the spiritual rebirth of France Le Corbusier had in mind.³¹ Urban purification is an historical imperative for Le Corbusier who re-enacts the historiological narrative of the purification of Paris undertaken by “all the great leaders of France,” and in doing so compares himself to Louis XIV and Haussman who succeeded in demolishing large existing fabric to rebuild the city. In his eyes, *Urbanisme* was neither utopian nor fanciful—history has vindicated these men just as history will vindicate Le Corbusier.³²

The panorama was pivotal in constructing Le Corbusier’s realist ontology of the model city. For Le Corbusier “*ce n’est pas d’un futurisme périlleux . . . C’est un spectacle organisé par l’Architecture*” (this is not a perilous futurism, it is a spectacle organised by a real architecture).³³ The panorama existed at the threshold of representation, somewhere between the artefact and its light-weight referent in the infinitely far horizon of the future. This, finally, is the conception of image in which I propose Valois’s and Le Corbusier’s dialogues coincide—in what is a dizzying conflation of the image, the modele, the drawing, and the city itself. I would like to propose, the Faisceau understood Le Corbusier’s scheme better than his professional colleagues, *because they understood it at the privileged level of the architectural image*—not as illusion or representation, but as historically concrete event.³⁴

Realism forms the lining of Sorel’s anti-enlightenment polemics which sought to replace the unreality of money—the abstraction of finance capitalism—with the *social real*—a system grounded in “morality” via the desire of the masses. In his *Esprit Nouveau* days, Le Corbusier appealed to society’s “violent desires” for modernisation, the social imperative for the city industrial complex.

The fascist city conceived as “collective will” symptomatically invokes Enlightenment philosophy, operative in Sorel, namely Rousseau, for whom the notion of “collective will” is linked to the idea of political representation: to ‘stand in’ for someone or a group of subjects i.e. the majority vote, the basis of democracy and liberalism.³⁵ The figures in Voisin are not empty abstractions but the result of “the will” of the “combatant-producers” who build the town. For Le Corbusier the subject does not exist outside the “collective will” that realises the city. “Immense industrial undertakings . . . are carried out by a torrent . . . apart from the individuals who exert themselves in it. The torrent is in *mankind*, it is not the individuals themselves.”³⁶

31. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 50. The objective of the new order for Le Corbusier and Sorel, is social palingenesis—not utopia. In *Reflections on Violence*, Sorel defines myth as a manifestation of a people’s will to act, the myth materialises the desires of the masses and it thereby changes history. Benito Mussolini, would cite Sorel when he said, “men do not move mountains; it is only necessary to create the illusion that mountains move.” What begins as myth realises history, and becomes reality.

32. Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, 255. Île Saint-Louis was named after King Louis IX of France (Saint Louis). One of France’s first examples of urban planning, it was mapped and built from end to end during the 17th-century reigns of Henri IV and Louis XIII. The Mémorial des Martyrs de la Déportation, a memorial to the 200,000 people deported from Vichy France to the Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War, is located at the upriver end of the island. The cité is real as a set of drawings or models which always have that privileged status of exclusion, severed from the real in a conventional sense, but occupying a “higher reality” in a Bazinian sense. Le Corbusier reproduces the drawings of the radical transformation of the [il de la] cité. “Haussmann followed Louis XIV, Louis XV, Louis XVI, and Napoleon I. His demolitions were undertaken remorselessly in the centre of Paris.” Valois in turn reads Le Corbusier through the same “productivist” models of urban purification as Le Corbusier, citing Haussman in “fascism is the new city”: “the great industrial revolution brought the large army of technicians and great team of builders of the modern world, ranging from baron Haussmann to the prodigious engineering of Le Corbusier.”

33. Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, 168.

34. The politico-aesthetic model is at first provisional and exists only synchronically, but eventually it will be realised in future cities, crystallised by history. Le Corbusier writes that the city does not need the conceit of strong materials and permanence but that ephemeral or provisional buildings, that will only last for an uncertain time could be a powerful tool for redesigning the city: “Temporary elements like military sheds, where users will conduct their first experiments, can be like ‘models’ of future enterprises and serve as a first test. . . The shacks of wartime can be thought of as an *inclined plane* that leads to the near future.” Le Corbusier, “L’architecture et la guerre,” *Gazette Dunlop* 19, no. 232 (May 1940), typewritten text, FLC B3(5)204-206. While the city is emptied or dematerialised, its model (blueprint) is made substantial.

35. The “common good” is replaced by the collective will. This new principle for legitimating authority through the collective will represented in the majority vote, took root in France at the time of the French Revolution of 1789. (It is through this original meaning of representation that the relation between Le Corbusier and the Faisceau can be found.)

36. Le Corbusier also places his hands in the collective will “In these cases the only right of individual sensibility is to embody the collective will. Collective will is the state of mind of an epoch which is capable of application to the mass of men as well as to the individual, by means of those great successive movements which are at once an education, a disintegration, and a renewal; it is something which cannot be adulterated...since it provides for the multitude a single outlook and a unanimous sensibility. With a cold and clear accountancy the + and—of an epoch are established. A way of thinking...arises.” Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning*, 52. “Immense industrial undertakings do not require great men. Such works are carried out in the same way as rain fills a water-butt, drop by drop; and the men who bring them to completion are small, like raindrops, and not great like torrents. Nevertheless the achievement is a masterly one, and carries all before it like the torrent; the torrent exists apart from the individuals who exert themselves in it. The torrent is in *mankind*, it is not the individuals themselves.” Le Corbusier, *The City of Tomorrow and Its Planning*, 43, 44.

37. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 238.

38. Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 9.

39. Le Corbusier’s recently published library contains the French translation *Ainsi parlait Zarathustra*.

40. “Pour le Grande Paris: la Ville Moderne,” *Nouveau Siecle*, May 16, 1926.

Sorel substituted the hierarchical structure of capitalism with the diffusion of authority down into the workers’ organizations. By flattening all class members onto a single level, syndicalism claims to bring about authentic representation, a “morality that turns the men of today into the free producers of tomorrow, working in workshops where there are no masters.”³⁷ Yet, the paradox in syndicalist anti-enlightenment thought—and one that became a problem for Le Corbusier—is precisely that of authority and representation. While Sorel affirms there are no masters, *la cité* would be constituted by the elite, the most brilliant “producers” who would regenerate the city. Sorel is alive to this paradox which he traces back to the French revolution. He argued that the Rousseauesque organisation that mobilised the French revolution believed that *it* alone possessed the secret of the general will, thereby justifying their limitless authority: “this conceit was now entertained by a class of intellectuals who had turned themselves into the people’s *masters*.”³⁸ The revolutionaries *de facto* preserved “the principle of hierarchy,” so their violence was unjustified.

This paradox is magnified in Valois and Le Corbusier who both condemned the figure of the “nomad” (versus the “master”). Le Corbusier’s soliloquy on the “pack donkey” opens the first pages of *Urbanisme* and establishes the binary order of the new city—those with reason on their side are masters and the herd-like masses are likened to animals. *Le Corbusier saw himself as the Nietzschean Surhumain or Surhomme, that he read in Zarathustra’s mastery of “la bête” in his personal copy of Also sprach Zarathustra* in French translation.³⁹ In Valois’s grotesque fantasy, nomadism represented an “infinite of steppes—endless treeless plains.” Capitalism and communism alike had produced the “ethic of the horde” severed from their communities, the hapless victims of capitalism. Pierre Winter would even adduce Le Corbusier’s theory of nomadism as ‘evidence’ of the fascistic nature of Le Corbusier’s city plans.⁴⁰

As incredulous as this might be, the one conceptual thread that binds Le Corbusier’s discourse to that of Valois’s and other fascists is the notion of the “master”: for Valois “the elite leaders of industry, the technicians, and the strongest faction of the working class” would bring about the revival. Le Corbusier was more extreme than Valois in his geographic apartheid of the new city. Even while he claims the city will be predicated on talent and the “productivist esprit,” alone, Le Corbusier writes that not all citizens could become leaders. The technocratic elite, the indus-



trialists, financiers, engineers, and artists would be located in the city centre, while the workers would be removed to the fringes of the city.⁴¹ This scheme contradicted the fundamental tenet of fascism, that corporate syndicalism encouraged the mixture of all classes to inspire the collaborative spirit of production.⁴²

To return to Le Corbusier's horizontal perspective, the "morality of the producers" (subsumed by the skyscrapers) and "the master" (the ghostly authority that hovers above *la Cité*) are flattened into a single picture plane, vanishing all subjects in the spectral city and hence abolishing all representation. *La Cité* pushed to the limits of formal abstraction by Le Corbusier thereby reverts to the Enlightenment myth it first opposed, what Theodor Adorno would one day call the "dialectic of enlightenment." The repressed contents of Le Corbusier's panorama (a work of pure mathematical genius) are revealed on the last page of *Urbanisme* in a painting Le Corbusier admires depicting Louis XIV ordering the construction of les Invalides. Le Corbusier's caption to "a great urbaniste": This despot conceived great things and realized them. The brightness of his glory covers the country, everywhere. He was able to say: I desire! or such is my pleasure.⁴³ Le Corbusier is not interested in the architecture of Mansart or Bruant, but in the order of authority.

The caption is followed by *ceci n'est pas une déclaration d'Action Française*—in other words, these ideas preceded French fascism such as the Action Française party and are to be found in architectural history.

In a perfect world 100 years before the French Revolution an angel (the transcendent authority hovering over *la cité*) looks down from the sky, sounding a trumpet meaning "the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of god, and he will reign for ever and ever"—this is the world view that French writers like Rousseau and Pascal would begin to challenge. God here, and not rationality or an enlightened democracy, is the arbiter of authority. The uncontested master designated by God, Louis XIV orders the construction of *les invalides* (1670) a home for military patients, today a military museum of the Army of France—while a mysterious dark figure in the foreground holds out a note to the sun king.⁴⁴ On this site converged critical French history. The invalides was stormed by Parisian rioters for ammunition against the Bastille, Napoleon was buried under the dome (1840), and in 1894 the fascist degradation of Alfred Dreyfus was held at the main building. This etching is a shrine to war and domination.

41. Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, 1, 39.

42. Le Corbusier's elitism caused him to separate the mass of producers and the small number elites who possessed an artistic sensibility. Since this elitism was closer to the ideology of the Redressement Française, from 1928 Le Corbusier chose to promote his urban plans in that movement's revue, at the moment the Faisceau came to its end.

43. Le Corbusier, "Louis XIV ordonnant la construction des Invalides," "Hommage à un grand urbaniste. Ce despote conçut des choses immenses et il les réalisa. Le rayonnement de sa gloire est sur tout le pays, partout. Il avait su dire: 'je veux!' ou: 'tel est mon bon plaisir.' (ceci n'est pas une déclaration d'Action Française)."

44. Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, 285.

45. This is ironic given that fascism did not gain massive popular support in France, notwithstanding the Vichy collaboration, which was not strictly “conservative” and preserved many of the progressive social programs of the Front Populaire, and further, a spectrum of fascistic groups in 1920s-1930s France Robert J. Soucy, “The Nature of Fascism in France,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 1, no. 1 (1966). “According to René Rémond, fascism was a phenomenon quite alien to French political traditions. Most of the so-called fascist leagues of the 1920s and 30s were not really fascist at all but Bona-partist and Boulangist in character and inspiration, connected with past nationalistic movements.” See René Rémond, *La Droite En France De 1815 À Nos Jours: Continuité Et Diversité D’une Tradition Politique* (Paris: Aubier, 1954), 207. Soucy contests this view exemplified in Rémond for the reason that philosophical fascism was deeply rooted in France even though France did not openly embrace “fascism.”

46. Such as the far-right monarchist *Action Française*, founded in 1898 during the Dreyfus affair; Emile Zola's publication *J'Accuse*; the nationalist response to the latter in figures such as anti-Semite Maurice Barres, and even the Jacobinism of the French Revolution (1789-1799). See Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism; Doctrines of Revolution in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1964), 12, 19. Even while fascism in France failed to captivate the masses, it formed the intellectual framework and inspiration for Mussolini, who would later acknowledge his debt to Sorel in “The Doctrine of Fascism.” Giovanni Gentile and Benito Mussolini, “La Dottrina Del Fascismo,” in *Enciclopedia Italiana* (1932). Gentile's and Mussolini's essay is the opening section of the encyclopaedia entry “Fascismo.” The official translation was printed in the Fascist government publication Giovanni Gentile and Benito Mussolini, “The Doctrine of Fascism (1932),” in *Fascism Doctrine and Institutions*, ed. Benito Mussolini (Rome: Ardita Publishers, 1935).

Le Corbusier hereby closing his book suggests modernity is inseparable from militancy, and that the aestheticisation of violence under despotic orders, to use Benjamin's term, is essential to achieving great works, *and to the avant garde itself*, a belief that Benjamin correctly predicted would be fatal for Europe. The privileged architectural image for Le Corbusier is not les invalides, but the architectural vindication of a totalitarian world.⁴⁵ This image was produced at the dawning of the French enlightenment; its contents would become the precise object of the fin de siècle reactionary movements of the 1880s that gave birth to proto-fascism in France.⁴⁶ Four decades after the second world war, fascism was still historicised as the enemy of modernism and the avant garde. Le Corbusier's appeal to Louis XIV in 1925 reveals in symptomatic fashion the genealogy of modernity in France's long history of violent constructs and despotic orders.

