

Modernist Abstraction, Anarchist Antimilitarism, and War

Patricia Leighton^{*}

Abstract

Analyzing how and why anarchism and antimilitarism proved central to the development of abstraction in the early twentieth century reveals that modernism needs to be reconceived from a new historical and theoretical perspective. Major artists — Pablo Picasso and others — created abstract art at the turn of the century as an activist aesthetic practice, based on a radical subjectivity that was integral to their anarchism.

Oh yes, I found that in the newspaper, and it was my way of showing I was against the war.

PABLO PICASSO to Pierre Daix
apropos *Bottle of Suze*, 1912.¹

The subject of the *avant-garde* and World War I not only summons the historical environment in which modernism originated, but leads to the critique of a dominant model of modernism centered on the notion of “autonomy,” the term theorized in Marxist art criticism of the late 1930s. This term conjures a neo-Kantian self-reflexive meditation on materials as a function of the artist’s retreat

¹ Cited in *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, Lynn Zelevansky, ed. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992, 75–76.

^{*} Patricia Leighton is Professor of Art History & Visual Studies at Duke University and author of *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897–1914* (1989) and, with Mark Antliff, *Cubism and Culture* (2001) and *A Cubism Reader: Documents and Criticism, 1906–1914* (2008). This essay is from her book, *The Liberation of Painting: Modernism and Anarchism in Avant-Guerre Paris* (forthcoming University of Chicago Press); a version was given as the keynote address to the Modernism Studies Association meeting in Victoria, BC on November 11, 2010.



Figure 1 Pablo Picasso, *Bottle of Suze*, Nov 1912. Washington University Art Gallery, St. Louis. © 2011 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

from the contradictions of capitalism. The term is still invoked by many, though with ivory-tower results, as it is usually denuded of its Marxist genealogy following Clement Greenberg's shift during the McCarthy period. This article counters that discourse by focusing on the anarchism of four major modernists who were central figures

in the development of Parisian modernism: Maurice de Vlaminck, André Derain, Pablo Picasso and Juan Gris. In formalist and semiotic discourse, the two movements associated with them, fauvism and cubism, are understood as entirely distinct – if not opposed – idioms, but when framed in terms of these artists' anarchist antimilitarism, such stylistic innovations in both movements are better understood as manifestations of the formative impact of anarchist discourse.

The importance of anarchism to the development of modernism is profound, and a substantial literature has addressed its centrality, starting in the 1960s but with a growing impact in the last twenty years.² Anarchist-communism and anarchist-individualism constituted two poles within a broad range of positions among anarchists in this period, and the fact that 452 separate anarchist publications appeared in France in 1905 suggests the diversity of opinion that animated the movement.³ Believing that a viable social future was only conceivable without authoritarian rule and critiquing social inequity, anarchist artists of the symbolist and neoimpressionist generation had seen a place for liberating creativity in a self-governed society. For example, Robyn Roslak has demonstrated that neoimpressionists, including Paul Signac and Camille Pissarro, drew analogies between

² See Robert Herbert and Eugenia Herbert, "Artists and Anarchism: Unpublished Letters of Pissarro, Signac, and Others," *Burlington Magazine* (November 1960): 473–82 and (December 1960): 517–22; Eugenia Herbert, *The Artist and Social Reform: France and Belgium, 1885–1898* (Yale University Press, 1961); Richard Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de Siècle France* (University of Nebraska Press, 1989); Patricia Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897–1914* (Princeton University Press, 1989), and "Réveil anarchiste: Salon Painting, Political Satire, Modernist Art," *Modernism/modernity*, II (April 1995): 17–47; Rose-Carol Washton Long, "Occultism, Anarchism, and Abstraction: Kandinsky's Art of the Future," *Art Journal* (Spring 1987): 38–45; Robyn Roslak, "The Politics of Aesthetic Harmony: Neo-Impressionism, Science, and Anarchism," *The Art Bulletin* 73 (Sept. 1991), 381–90 and *Neo-Impressionism and Anarchism in Fin-de-Siècle France: Painting, Politics and Landscape* (Ashgate, 2007); Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton University Press, 1993); "Cubism, Futurism, Anarchism: The 'Aestheticism' of the Action d'Art Group, 1906–1920," *Oxford Art Journal* 21 (1998): 99–120, and "Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's *Guerre sociale*: Art, Anarchism and Anti-Militarism in Paris and London, 1910–1915," *Modernism/modernity* 17/1 (2010), 135–69; Hubert van den Berg, *Avantgarde und Anarchismus: Dada in Zürich und Berlin* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1999); Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (University of Chicago Press, 2001) and *Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007); Theresa Papanikolas, *Anarchism and the Advent of Paris Dada* (Ashgate, 2010).

³ Dardel, "Les Temps nouveaux," 1895–1914: *un hebdomadaire anarchiste et la propagande par l'image* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des Musées nationaux, 1987), 10.

their pointillist technique and the positivist assumptions informing anarchist-communist theory.⁴ But for a later generation of anarchist artists who rejected the rationalist underpinnings of anarchist-communism, forms of individualism proved more compelling. Basing their ideas on the antirationalism of Friedrich Nietzsche, Henri Bergson and the godfather of Egoism, Max Stirner, these artists set out to politicize aesthetics and aestheticize politics in a new way. In contrast to Signac or the anarchist-communist theorist Peter Kropotkin, these radicals seem to hold out less hope for a harmonious society, celebrating the unfettered expression of their subjectivity as a sign of ongoing revolt against self-perpetuating social institutions and norms. This generation — who created abstract art in the shadow of the impending First World War — added an activist aesthetic practice conceived as radical individualism keyed to the subjectivist philosophies of Bergson and William James and demanding a new form of visual abstraction.⁵ The threat of war and rise of a mass antimilitarist movement during the prewar period fully engaged these four artists, and their response is integral to their art.

Anarchist antimilitarism

If the anarchist theorist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon was right when he wrote that “the end of militarism is the mission of the nineteenth century,” that mission failed.⁶ Good evidence of this failure is the Dreyfus Affair, which inaugurated the new century.⁷ To review the issues briefly, *L’Affaire* was a political crisis lasting from 1894 to 1906 and revolving around the guilt or innocence of treason on the part of Jewish army captain Alfred Dreyfus. When evidence came to light in 1896 pointing to another French officer, public opinion split between supporters of the army — whose leaders covered up the new evidence — and those willing to believe in the innocence

⁴ They based this on a reading of contemporary color theory and the works of Petr Kropotkin, reinforced by Élisée Reclus and Jean Grave; see Roslak, “The Politics of Aesthetic Harmony.”

⁵ See Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson* and Antliff and Leighton, *Cubism and Culture* (Thames & Hudson, 2001), chapter 3.

⁶ Woodcock, *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: A Biography* (Black Rose Books, 1987), 233.

⁷ The literature on this period and on the Dreyfus Affair is enormous and well known; here I will simply point the reader to Jean-Marie Mayeur and Madeleine Rébérioux, *The Third Republic from its Origins to the Great War, 1871–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

of a French Jew, calling for reopening the case. This controversy dramatically split French society in the 1890s and threatened the stability of the Republic: for or against the army; for or against the Catholic Church, which supported the army; for or against Jews; for or against the government. These issues were far-reaching, with important implications for the success of the Third Republic and the very notion of republicanism. Many Dreyfusards subsequently mistrusted the army, if they were not already antimilitarists, and for the next decade the army worked hard to re-establish its prestige and position in the public sphere. The impetus to antimilitarism and anticlericalism given by the Dreyfus Affair is well known, as well as the involvement of artists and writers of the period in its visual and verbal polemic.⁸ The collusion of army and church led to an anticlerical reaction on the part of subsequent governments and to the formal separation of church and State in 1905.

In the decade following the Dreyfus Affair, an even larger antimilitarist movement grew in response to the threat of pan-European conflict. A loose alliance of pacifists, socialists and anarchists, the antimilitarist movement gained traction in Western Europe during the First and Second Balkan Wars of 1912–13, which led directly to the outbreak of World War I a year later. In 1904 a congress convened in Amsterdam to found the International Antimilitarist Association, advocating international brotherhood and insurrection as the right response to mobilization. The French anarchist-sindicalist union, the *Confédération Générale du Travail*, published a *Soldier's Manual* to spread revolutionary propaganda in the barracks, advocating desertion; at their congress in 1908, the delegates agreed to proclaim a general strike at any declaration of war. Desertion from the French army grew at an extraordinary rate in this period, partly in response to this widely disseminated critique of the military: 6000 in 1902; 14,000 in 1907; and 13,000 in 1912.⁹ Socialists, who garnered 10 million votes in the 1910 election, also met to consider pacifist tactics.

⁸ See *The Dreyfus Affair: Art, Truth, and Justice*, editor Norman Kleeblatt, The Jewish Museum, New York and University of California Press, 1987; and Philip Nord, *Impressionism and Politics: Art and Democracy in the Nineteenth Century* (Routledge, 2000), 100–7.

⁹ “When they send you to the border to defend the coffers of the capitalists against other workers, abused as you are yourselves, you will not march. All war is criminal. At the mobilization order, you will answer with an immediate strike and with insurrection”; Jean Maitron, *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France (1880–1914)*, vol. I (*Société Universitaire d'éditions et de librairie, Paris, 1951*), 349–50; Harvey Goldberg, *The Life of Jean Jaurès* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 351.

After 1907 Jean Jaurès, a key leader of the parliamentary socialists and editor of *L'Humanité*, became famous for his speeches throughout France against the coming war. His following became so great that one antiwar speech he gave in a working-class district of Paris – Pré-Saint-Gervais in May 1913 – was organized in only two days and drew over 100,000 people.¹⁰

Anarchist writers and artists, including modernists Vlaminck, Gris, Kees Van Dongen and František Kupka among scores of others, contributed articles and satire to anarchist journals including *Le Libéraire*, *Les Hommes du jour*, *Les Temps nouveaux* and *L'Assiette au beurre*, while their socialist counterparts published in antimilitarist journals ranging from the revolutionary *La Guerre sociale* to Jaurès' pacifist *L'Humanité*. Such mass antimilitarism charged the atmosphere for a generation of artists and writers who lived through the prewar period and were forced to make a choice in August 1914 to fight or declare their pacifism.¹¹ One witness is Picasso's dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, who wrote in his memoirs:

As for my political ideas, I was a leftist. [In 1902] I took part in a demonstration on the grave of [Émile] Zola, who had just died. I was still a very young man, so the only way I could show my interest was to participate in demonstrations and meetings, which I did. I heard Jaurès, [Francis] Pressensé, all the great socialists of the day. The Dreyfus case was fairly recent, and the political atmosphere was unsettled. The right wing was very restless, and the left wing was full of enthusiasm.¹²

In this environment of increasing political crises and militarization, the structure of alliances and treaties across Europe made clear the pattern of opposing allies that would act on the declaration of war. The results were accurately foreseen in the broad range of the press, though few conceived of the scale of its actual destruction and virtually none that it would last four long years. The war itself not only devastated the economies of Europe, but also the hopes and

¹⁰ Harvey Goldberg, *The Life of Jean Jaurès*, 382–3 and 442.

¹¹ See Verdiana Grossi, *Le pacifisme européen, 1889–1914* (Bruylant, Brussels, 1994); and Paul B. Miller, *From Revolutionaries to Citizens: Antimilitarism in France, 1870–1914* (Duke University Press, 2002).

¹² Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *My Galleries and Painters*, trans. Helen Weaver (Viking Press, 1971), 23. Zola was central to the Dreyfusard cause as the author of "J'Accuse," an open letter addressed to the French president, Félix Faure, published on the front page of *L'Aurore* on January 13, 1898.

enthusiasms of the prewar modernists, leading ironically to a form of self-censorship in the war's aftermath and eventual cultural amnesia about the themes and aims of the Parisian avant-garde that have allowed the notion of autonomy to substitute for historical memory. Analyzing why antimilitarism and the threat of war proved central to the development of abstraction in the early twentieth century has led me to conclude that our concept of modernism needs to be further developed, from an historical and theoretical perspective. Centering this question on art and politics, we may see how these key figures of the Parisian avant-garde created art as a sign of resistance to militarization. This resistance informed their choice of a variety of media, styles and venues, articulating a Bakhtinian counter-discourse to the political and aesthetic status quo still represented by the *École des beaux-arts*: from satire in political penny weeklies, to public exhibition of abstract works intended to outrage the status quo, to the creation of alternative exhibition sites to reach new audiences directly.

The aesthetic status quo

Official salon art of this period remains unfamiliar, largely because of an unfounded assumption that such art was trivial. All categories of salon art continued up to the First World War, including historical, religious, allegorical, portrait, still-life, landscape and genre painting, and idealist sculpture. Such work, and the larger culture it served, maintained undeniable vitality up to 1914, as is evident in Luc-Olivier Merson's *Truth*, 1901 (Fig. 2). State-sponsored art remained powerfully dominant in the art world, both in terms of the market and in terms of the large volume of published art criticism addressing it.¹³ As in the previous century, the majority of artists

¹³ There is not a large bibliography on the art of the post-1900 mainstream Salons. A number of works that survey Salon painters of the nineteenth century extend into the twentieth, and there is now a growing interest in this field; see Natalie Adamson and Toby Norris, *Academics, Pompieri, Official Artists and the Arrière-garde: Defining Modern and Traditional in France, 1900–1960* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009); Marie-Claude Genet-Delacroix, *Art et État sous la IIIe République: le système des beaux-arts, 1870–1940* (Publications de la Sorbonne, 1992); Christopher Green, *Art in France, 1900–1940* (Yale University Press, 2000); Cécile Ritzenthaler, *L'école des beaux-arts du XIXe siècle: Les pompieri* (Paris: Éditions Mayer, 1987) and *Peinture et société, 1870–1914: à travers les collections des musées de Franche Comté* (Pontarlier: L'association des conservateurs de Franche Comté, 1982); and Pierre Vaisse, *La Troisième République et les peintres* (Flammarion, 1995).

exhibited their works in a variety of styles in the mainstream salons under the auspices of the French State, seeking direct sales, portrait commissions, and the establishment of their own teaching studios. Bourgeois culture, with its well-established notions of beauty, harmony and order, saw itself affirmed in the naturalist and idealist art exhibited annually in the several salons and purchased by the State for distribution to provincial museums. In fact, it was the very centrality of academic art and theory and its alliance with State institutions that inspired anarchist artists to develop their subversive and counter-cultural work. Some radical socialist and even anarchist artists, like Jules Adler, addressed their socially critical works to the bourgeoisie at the salon, in recognizably naturalist styles, as in his *Strike at Le Creusot*, shown in the Salon of French Artists in 1900 (Fig. 3). Others went further, developing avant-garde styles invested with political purpose, outrages against academic values and, by extension, the complacent society the State's cultural apparatus served, as contemporaneous critics were quick to assume. In politicized modernist hands, stylistic vanguardism signified a rejection of bourgeois commodification, a stand against the government and the striking economic inequities of the age, and constituted a Bakhtinian counter-discourse through the language of style and choice of audience and venue for the work.

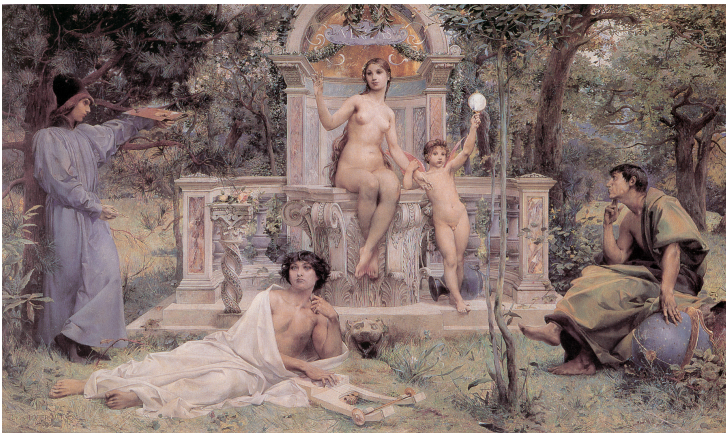


Figure 2 Luc-Olivier Merson, *Truth*, 1901. Wall decoration for l'hôtel Watel-Dehaynin, canvas stretched over plaster, (222×375). Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Figure 3 Jules Adler, *Strike at Le Creusot*, 1899 (Le Creusot, Ecomusée de la Communauté Le Creusot/Montceau), Salon des Artistes français, 1900. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris



Figure 4 Jules-Alexandre Grün, *A Friday at the Salon des Artistes français*, 1911

In the process, the State arts administration's hegemony was also resisted and subverted. The Society of French Artists was the commercial vehicle affiliated with the National School of Fine Arts (*École des beaux-arts*) and the *École's* teaching studios; juries for painting and sculpture at its annual exhibition were dominated by artists from this elite circle; we can see them celebrating in Jules-Alexandre Grün's *Opening of the Salon of French Artists in 1911* (Fig. 4). In 1884, a group spearheaded by the anarchist Signac had countered the hegemony of this organization by founding an unjuried Independents' Salon (*Salon des Indépendants*), a venue that threatened the State-sponsored salon by denying any right to judge artists; this anti-Statist organization, in turn, inspired the founding of an even more restrictive State-sponsored salon by the self-proclaimed National Society of Fine Arts (*Société Nationale des Beaux Arts*) in 1890.¹⁴ In 1903, a venue for avant-gardists — the Autumn Salon (*Salon d'automne*) — was founded by Derain, Henri Matisse, Albert Marquet and Georges Rouault, which ensured a rotating jury of modernists. The Independents' and the Autumn Salon became the main venues for exhibiting modernist works, as is evident in a photograph of the scandalous Autumn Salon of 1912 (Fig. 5). Because the Society of French Artists and the National Society of Fine Arts were both officially sanctioned by the State, they held their exhibitions in the State-owned Grand Palais; eventually, the Autumn Salon also won this right, but the Independents' remained outside any governmental frame until 1918, annually appearing in different, temporary quarters.¹⁵

Despite these new public venues for modernists, some artists — including Picasso — exhibited only in newly emerging private galleries, while others — from Signac to Gris — exhibited in the alternative

¹⁴ For concise analyses of these institutional issues, see Fay Brauer, "L'Art révolutionnaire — the Artist as Alien: The Discourses of Cubism, Modern Painting, and Academicism in the Radical Republic" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London (Courtauld Institute of Art, 1997), chapter 2, and Green, *Art in France*, 39–42; see also Antliff and Leighton, *A Cubism Reader: Documents and Criticism, 1906–1914* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 244–48.

¹⁵ For the literature on these shifts in markets in relation to the development of modernism, see Malcolm Gee, *Dealers, Critics and Collectors of Modern Painting: Aspects of the Parisian Art Market Between 1910 and 1930*. Garland, New York, 1981; David Cottington, *Cubism in the Shadow of War: The Avant-Garde and Politics in Paris, 1905–1914* (Yale University Press, 1998); Michael FitzGerald, *Making Modernism: Picasso and the Creation of the Market for Twentieth-Century Art* (University of California Press, 1996); Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1994); and Martha Ward, *Pissarro, Neo-Impressionism, and the Spaces of the Avant-Garde* (University of Chicago Press, 1996).



Figure 5 Photograph of the Autumn Salon, 1912

salons, as well as donating drawings and caricatures to anarchist journals like *L'Assiette au beurre*, as in the case of Gris (Fig. 13 & 14). Some went further and published cheap and widely distributed propaganda postcards, such as those by anarchists Félix Vallotton and Théophile Steinlen depicting war as mass murder; Vallotton quotes Erasmus: “A single murder makes a criminal, thousands of murders make a hero,” while Steinlen quotes Louis Blanc: “It is with the poor that the rich make war.” A Kupka postcard — crying “Down with military justice!,” n.d. (Fig. 6) — employs reverse primitivism, casting members of a military tribunal as savages and offering a striking comparison with popular illustrations of Dreyfus’ trials.¹⁶

Such political choices went hand in hand with aesthetic ones: the development of formal innovations unacceptable within the parameters of the Beaux-Arts tradition and constituting an affront to critics; the artists’ and their supporters’ word for this was “abstraction,” not “autonomy.” One of the best instances of this strategy is

¹⁶ Steinlen published a postcard for the Comité d’Entente Internationale pour le Désarmement Universel (Committee of International Entente for Universal Disarmament) with the Golden Calf, representing the rule of capital, rising above a sea of dead, and a quote from Louis Blanc: “C’est avec les pauvre que les riches font la guerre” (“It is with the poor that the rich make war”). Vallotton’s postcard, another image of an infinity of corpses for the same organization, quoted Erasmus: “Un seul meurtre fait un scélérat, des milliers de meurtres font un héros” (“A single murder makes a criminal, thousands of murders make a hero”).

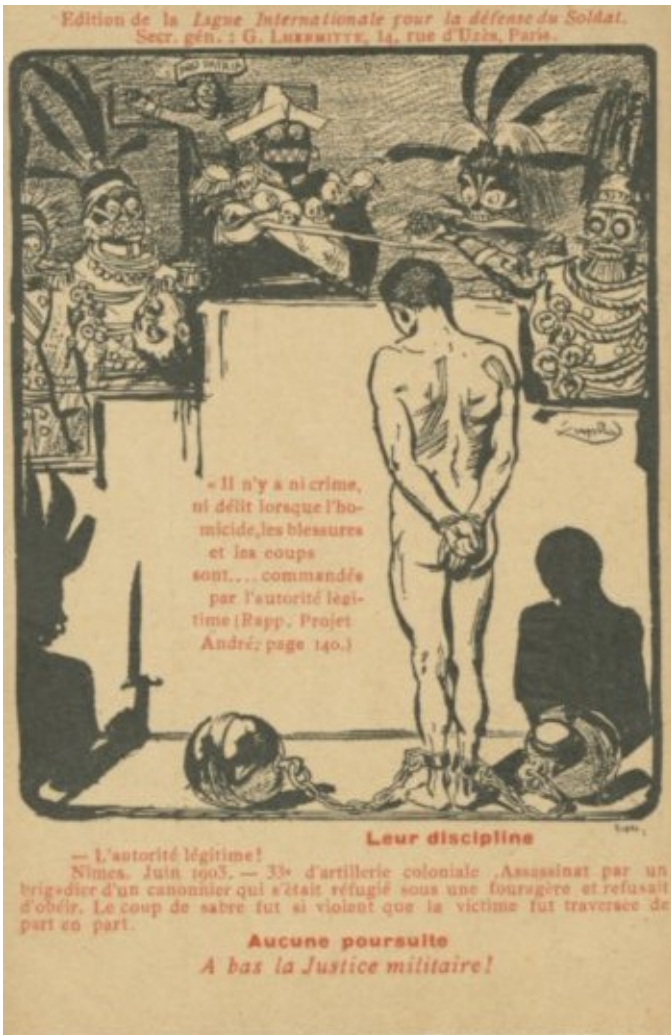


Figure 6 František Kupka, “A bas la justice militaire!” (“Down with Military Justice!”), postcard, n.d. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

Vlaminck, an openly anarchist artist who employed a ferocious form of painting as “propaganda of the deed.” One of a group who first exhibited together at the Independents in 1905, Vlaminck, Derain, Van Dongen, Matisse and others came to be called “les fauves” — “the



Figure 7 Maurice de Vlaminck, *Portrait of Derain*, 1905. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Jacques and Natasha Gelman Collection. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

wild beasts” – for the rough and open brushwork, antinaturalistic color, and lack of formal structure. For Vlaminck, anarchism was constitutive of his painting style – as in his *Portrait of Derain*, 1905 (Fig. 7) – which he showed in the alternative salons as a provocative rejection of tradition and good taste. Though Vlaminck’s anarchism is frequently acknowledged in scholarly discussions, his art has usually been discussed independently from his stated politics, as moving

a step toward abstraction in the name of “feeling.” Subjectivity was central to fauvist discourse, but the political importance of theorizing extreme individualism needs to be recognized. When Vlaminck developed his fauve style, he articulated it as a programmatic violation of inherited forms implicated in an unjust society, created with an anti-establishment audience in mind. How many times were theater seats reportedly torn up by crowds outraged at the violation of an Alexandrine meter, the introduction of a rhymeless expletive, or the dancing of an antinarrative ballet? This was the audience for Vlaminck’s transgressive paintings, whose theory and practice developed with his anarchism in the post-Dreyfus period. In our century, audiences can no longer share this crowd’s anger at the transgression of interiorized rules, but we must accept the historical conditions in which and against which an artist made such choices.

While doing his compulsory military service from 1897 to 1900, Vlaminck became a convinced antimilitarist.¹⁷ Through a fellow soldier he was introduced to leading anarchists Sébastien Faure, Charles Malato, Libertad, Zo d’Axa, and Laurent Tailhade, the last also a prominent Dreyfusard polemicist.¹⁸ While in the military — now a self-described “dreyfusard enragé” himself — Vlaminck familiarized himself with the writings of Zola, Karl Marx and Kropotkin and attended the retrial of Captain Dreyfus in 1899, which found him guilty for a second time.¹⁹ During this period and continuing into his later life, Vlaminck contributed “papiers révolutionnaires” to anarchist journals; in 1900 and 1901 he contributed to *Le Libéraire*, edited by Faure, and from this period to 1939 he also donated paintings to its annual fund-raiser.²⁰

During the prewar period the government increasingly deployed the army against strikers. Workers doing their compulsory army service looked past their bayonets at workers on the factory line. Vlaminck was alert to this class irony. While in the army, he heard speeches such as the following, delivered to men being sent to a strike: “The strikers! These are filthy people. If they make trouble, shoot them!”²¹ Vlaminck decided to take action against the captain

¹⁷ Discussed at length in Vlaminck’s memoir, *Tournant dangereux: souvenirs de ma vie*. (Paris: Stock, Delamain et Boutelleau, 1929).

¹⁸ Vlaminck, *Tournant dangereux*, 74ff.

¹⁹ Vlaminck, *Tournant dangereux*, 63–65.

²⁰ Oppler, *Fauvism Re-examined* (Garland Publishers, 1976), 194–95.

²¹ Vlaminck, *Tournant dangereux*, 62: “— Les grévistes! Ce sont de sales gens. S’ils font des histoires, faut tirer dessus!”

who gave this directive. He wrote down the exact words and mailed them, with incriminating details, to a leading Dreyfusard at *L'Aurore*, whose article on the subject resulted in this captain's transfer to a distant frontier.²² As Vlaminck noted in his memoirs, "I was neither a good nor bad soldier: I was not a soldier."²³ When the First World War was declared on August 3, 1914, he refused to rejoin his unit when it was called up and was granted conscientious objector status. But even as a conscientious objector he was required to serve as a noncombatant, and the State punitively assigned him to the assembly line of a bomb factory.

Among his writings of the earlier period, Vlaminck's military experience dominates his thinking. In an article of 1900 in *Le Libertaire*, he wrote:

the truth is flagrant: it is the worker always anxious not to starve, though dying of work, it is the homeless tramp, the destitute, who find themselves obliged to undergo three years of military service in order to defend the property of others: the Rich! who believe that their money honestly belongs to them, the rich who have honor, integrity, fatherland, religion, the rich who give charity, oh irony! . . .

Why doesn't an alliance exist [between the workers]? . . . The fault is in the enormous number of the disinherited who do not wish to admit the state in which they vegetate and perish indifferent; they do not wish to comprehend the absurd and wretched nonsense of their alcoholic chauvinism which they howl in cries of "Long Live the Army!," not realizing that they likewise prop up capital, and that the enemy for them is neither the German, nor the Jew, but on the contrary the possessors of whatever nationality and whatever religion they are.²⁴

In another article in *Le Libertaire* the following year, Vlaminck defined anarchism in terms of his own army experience:

Anarchy is the aspiration of every being toward an absolute of justice which condemns the submissiveness, the cowardice,

²² Vlaminck, *Tournant dangereux*, 62–63.

²³ Vlaminck, *Tournant dangereux*, 57–58: "Je n'étais ni bon ni mauvais soldat: je n'étais pas soldat. Je ne prenais pas du tout mon rôle au sérieux."

²⁴ M. de Vlaminck [sic], "L'Entente," *Le Libertaire*, III sér., VI/55, 16–23 Dec. 1900, 2–3.

the ignominy, of the spirit of command forming those hunting dogs called “soldiers.”²⁵

After leaving the army he continued to frequent the *Libertaire* circle, and when he began to paint it was with a virulent antiacademicism. He translated his anarchism into an art theory based on spontaneity, primitivism, and extreme individualism. As he put it:

With my cobalts and vermilions, I wished to burn down the École des Beaux Arts. I wanted to revolutionize habits and contemporary life, to liberate [the depiction of] nature, to free it from the authority of old theories and classicism, which I hated as much as I had hated the General or the Colonel of my regiment. . . . I felt a tremendous urge to recreate a new world seen through my own eyes, a world which was entirely mine. . . . I was a tender barbarian, filled with violence.²⁶

In his fauve paintings of 1905 these anarchist ideas rooted in antimilitarism are translated into abstract form. The color in *Portrait of Derain* is not merely heightened, but arbitrarily violates perceived color. Just as the applied paint refuses to describe the ordinary tones and texture of skin, so the absence of light and shadow and the thick, indelicate slabs outlining the head refuse to articulate three-dimensionality of form. This “portrait” thus reduces itself to a caricature by virtue of a cartoon-like simplicity and childlike directness, bespeaking the spontaneity and honesty of the “primitive” Vlaminck aspired to become. His style presents a purposely naive antinaturalism that rejects all conventions of academic painting except that of relative scale: we can see that it is a portrait, but one transformed into a visionary otherness justified by the artist’s anarchism and radical subjectivity.

Derain met Vlaminck in 1900 and so was exposed to Vlaminck’s anarchist and antimilitarist thought before he was required to begin his own army service in 1901 (Fig. 8).²⁷ When he arrived at his unit, he found that many of his comrades were already antimilitarist. Derain was himself sent against striking workers, and he wrote to Vlaminck: “I was at the strikes. Behold a Derain, strap on chin, keeping the strikers in order. Supreme irony!”²⁸ More bitterly two

²⁵ Vlaminck [sic], “Le Chemin,” *Le Libertaire*, III sér., VII/73, 13–20 July 1901, 2–3.

²⁶ Vlaminck, *Dangerous Corner*, 11–12.

²⁷ Oppler, *Fauvism Re-examined*, 45.



Figure 8 Photograph of André Derain in uniform, 1901–4

years later, he wrote: “Regiments come every day and the officers excite the men against the strikers. . . . The miners are starving and they perceive that this is life or death. All this becomes very, very villainous, although no-one is talking about it in the newspapers.”²⁹

²⁸ André Derain, *Lettres à Vlaminck* (Flammarion, 1955 and 1994), 121.

²⁹ Derain, *Lettres à Vlaminck*, 132–33. Oppler, *Fauvism Re-examined*, 188, dates this letter to autumn 1903.



Figure 9 Jules-Félix Grandjourn, cover for 'The Strike', *L'assiette au beurre*, May 1905. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

The awareness among engagé modernists of such increasingly routine events was acute, as is further evidenced by numerous cartoons published in the anarchist press. A special issue of *L'assiette au beurre* of 1905 devoted to "The Strike" repeatedly attacks this policy. Jules-Félix Grandjourn, a committed anarchist cartoonist, depicts on the cover a soldier fully equipped and beating the drum, followed

by the shadowy mass of a regiment, bayonets at the ready, led by an epauletted officer (Fig. 9). The young drummer is the only soldier fully depicted and is thereby individualized in facing down the mass of angry workers beyond. Two other cartoons within this special "Strike" issue suggest the soldiers' identification with their counterparts. In one, again by Grandjouan, a soldier mistakes himself briefly for a worker, crying "What an exploited face! . . . Oh my God, it's mine!"³⁰ In another, the anarchist painter and cartoonist Bernard Naudin depicts two soldiers — just starting their compulsory service — who stand in a line of bayonets facing a barricade manned by striking workers; one says "To think that in two years, one could perhaps be in their place."

The antimilitarism expressed in such cartoons is visible in a work by Derain, *Soldier's Ball in Suresnes* (Fig. 10), painted in 1903 while still in the military. Artists customarily submitted such large-scale works to the salons, indicating the ambition of this painting, which treats soldiers in a comic manner and focuses on the central joke of the small soldier dancing with a much larger woman. The perspective exaggerates this effect since our viewpoint is from above. We look down at the floor and at the dancing soldier, although we look up into the woman's grimly stoic face. The soldier's white gloves, which should suggest the rigor of army dress, evoke rather the gesturing clown, with an unmodulated starkly white silhouette reminiscent of works of the previous decade. For example, Toulouse-Lautrec's *Cirque Fernando* (Art Institute of Chicago; 1887–8) employs a similarly silhouetted white-gloved hand on the red-haired clown. The iconography of the clowns' and acrobats' invariably henna-red wigs is subtly echoed in the buffoonish soldier's red hair and mustache, in turn reinforcing his coloristic incarnation in tricolor, the blue-white-red of the French Republican flag. His grave and anxious concentration on the task of grasping and moving this woman is equally comic, partly for being so closely watched from behind by his taller fellow soldier, looking on with some combination of envy and amusement. The two Hussards with their sabers and boots ceremonially frame the dancing pair. Their boredom and embarrassment at his lustful embrace adds a salacious note to the awkwardness of the social interaction. The caricatural treatment of their bodies and uniforms, all in the prosaic setting of a cheap ballroom, is anything but a glorification of the military.³¹ The Dreyfusard Derain, through

³⁰ Special issue of *L'Assiette au beurre*, "La Grève," May 1905.



Figure 10 André Derain, *Soldier's Ball at Suresnes*, 1903, St. Louis Art Museum. © 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

his simplification of form and rough brushwork, stylistically invokes modernism, folk art, and the cartoon – evocative of satire and propaganda – which would be read as a calculated insult to the army at a time when the Dreyfus Affair was still grinding through the inquiries

³¹ The painting was based on a photograph of Derain & friends, see André Derain, *Le peintre du "trouble moderne"* (Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1994), 436ff.

that finally rehabilitated Dreyfus in 1906. Additionally, his work purposely echoes a painting by Derain's friend Henri Evenepoël, *Festival at Invalides* of 1898, which was exhibited at the salon at the height of the Dreyfus Affair in 1899 and created a storm in the nationalist press, particularly *Le Progrès militaire*.³² Evenepoël was passionately Dreyfusard, and his work not only treats figural form with modernist simplification — an insult in itself — but confronts the military figures with an angry working man in the center. The anti-Dreyfusards understood this work, correctly, to be an attack on the army. The language of style had become finely-tuned in this discourse. Indeed Derain intensified his antimilitarism in a work only recorded in a little-known photograph of 1904–5. Derain is in his Chatou studio, armed with palette and brushes, in front of a crude painting of a crucifixion (Fig. 11). The figure on the cross, though, is not Christ but a soldier, dressed identically to the figure in his *Soldier's Ball*, with his cap, jacket, epaulettes, belt, striped trousers, spats and, above all, white gloves. The cartoon-like exclamatory marks around the figure emphasize the source of this treatment in political cartoons, while its subject is close to Kupka's postcard decrying military justice (Fig. 6), with the soldier both in chains before the bench and on the crucifix behind. It is telling that this work is lost.³³

Though his anarchist antimilitarist period was short-lived, ending in 1905, Derain, like Vlaminck, formed his aesthetic theory in response to it, calling his colors in these early years “sticks of dynamite,” linking art metaphorically to acts of anarchist violence.³⁴ Such radicalism encouraged these artists to push their painting towards outrages on traditional treatment of form and color that were received by hostile art critics as “primitive,” “anti-aesthetic,” “anarchist,” and “anti-French”: “a defiance to good sense and to reason.”³⁵ In such well-known works as *Portrait of Matisse*, 1905 (Fig. 12), Derain's metaphor of explosion works less within the frame of the painting than in its relation to its academic or even Impressionist

³² *The Dreyfus Affair*, 257.

³³ Patrice Bachelard, *Derain, Un fauve pas ordinaire* (Gallimard/Paris-Musées, 1994), 18.

³⁴ Duthuit, *The Fauvist Painters* (Wittenborn, Schultz, 1950), 27 and 29.

³⁵ Étienne Charles, “Le Dauphiné au Salon d'Automne,” *Le Petit Dauphinois*, 25 oct 1905, repr. in *Un certain Derain* (Réunion des musées nationaux, 1991), 42; see also Benjamin, “Fauves in the Landscape of Criticism: Metaphor and Scandal at the Salon,” in *The Fauve Landscape*, Judi Freeman, ed. (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1990), 241–66.



Figure 11 Photograph of André Derain in his studio, c. 1905, private collection

precursors. As with Vlaminck, the color and brushwork signify spontaneity of execution, connoting direct emotion and a uniquely subjective vision. The way the marks of paint refuse description speaks of the artist's negation of the tools of bourgeois illusionism. Such works by Vlaminck and Derain were as outrageous an act against tradition as was yet conceived within the medium of painting.

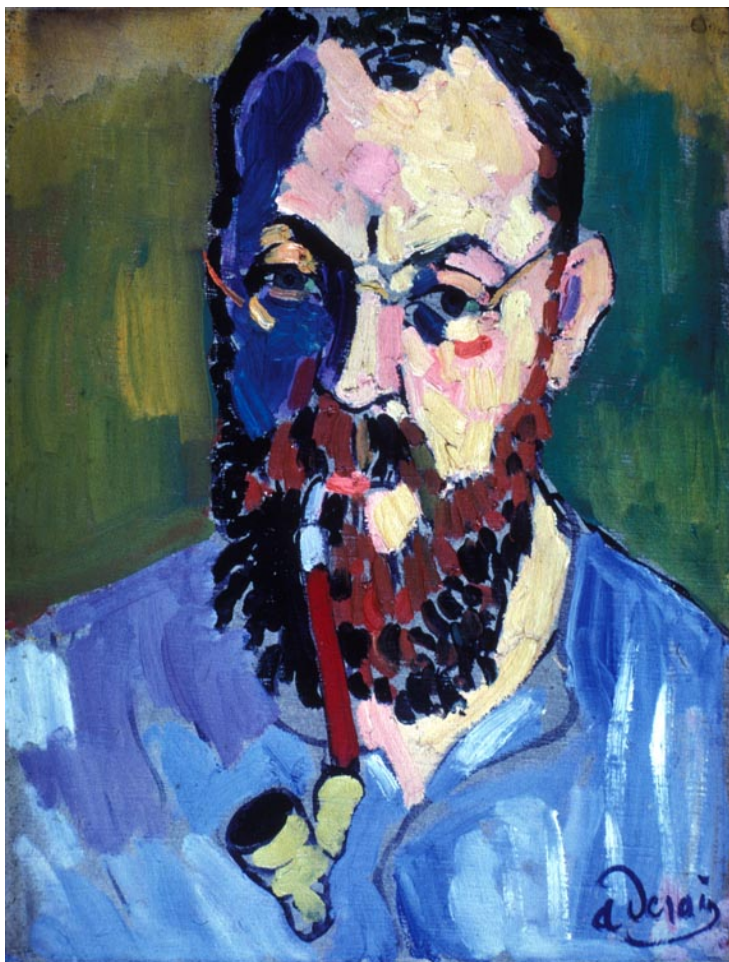


Figure 12 Derain, *Portrait of Matisse*, 1905. Tate Modern, London.
© 2011 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris

To turn to the cubist movement, the Spanish expatriate Juan Gris has always been treated as an apolitical artist. Yet he was allied to anarchism and socialism by virtue of his expressed antiauthoritarianism, antimilitarism and anticlericalism, and he collaborated with anarchist writers such as Charles Malato for *L'Assiette au beurre*, in which he published expressly anarchist cartoons. The memoirs of Gris's friends' witness that an early "revolutionary" Gris was very concerned with social injustice. According to the cubist Alice Halicka,

like his comrades [here she refers to Van Dongen, Kupka, and her partner, cubist Louis Marcoussis], hate for society pushed this young rebel to substitute for vitriol and dynamite the acid of his drawings and the violence of his captions.

Linking Gris's cartoons with his cubist works, she asserts, "he quickly took a place in the highest rank serving in this way art and revolution at the same time."³⁶ His friend the art critic and anarchist/communist Waldemar George called Gris "this atheist, this revolutionary, this defaulter from the Spanish army."³⁷ Gris avoided military service and did not pay the Spanish exemption fee; hence, like Picasso, was officially a "fugitive" and could not return to Spain.³⁸ When World War I broke out, Gris wrote to his dealer Kahnweiler that the war "does not concern me either by virtue of my nationality, character, or ideas."³⁹

Some of Gris's cartoons in *L'Assiette au beurre* could support the common notion of Gris as disengaged from politics (Fig. 13); an old man speaks to a younger man in a café:

³⁶ Alice Halicka, "Quand Juan Gris travaillait à *L'assiette au beurre*," *Arts* (September 3, 1948), 1 and 3.

³⁷ Waldemar George, *Juan Gris* (Gallimard, 1931), 6.

³⁸ Gaya Nuño, *Juan Gris*, translated by Kenneth Lyons (Secker & Warburg, 1975), 58; Gris wrote to Kahnweiler at the outbreak of war (Gris, *Letters of Juan Gris*, 7): "But where shall I go? And How? The trains have been requisitioned for mobilization. Paris? It's risky. Spain? You know it might be unpleasant for me"; on Picasso, see Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe*, 22, 70, and 110–1.

³⁹ Gris to Kahnweiler, August 16, 1914, in *Letters of Juan Gris (1913–1927)*, editor Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, translated by Douglas Cooper (Humphries and Co., 1956), 8.



Figure 13 Juan Gris, “Formerly, young man...”, *L'assiette au beurre*, Oct 3, 1908

“Formerly, young man, I was a pacifist. But age has come, and now I have understood that it is necessary to defend the honor of the country.” “With my skin?” . . . asks the younger man. “Well, of course! Not with mine!”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ See Rosenthal, *Juan Gris*, 12.



Figure 14 Gris, cover, “Noises of War and Noises of Peace,” *L’assiette au beurre*, Oct 3, 1908

Such an innocuous drawing is easily politicized by a caption and has led scholars to several false assumptions: that it was not part of Gris’s commission to write the caption, that he was unconcerned with – or even unaware of – the final use to which his drawing would be put, and that he did not sympathize with the politics expressed by the work as published. But to understand such a work, we need to look at the entire issue of the journal in which it appeared and to grasp why the theme of pacifism mattered at that time.

The cartoon in question was originally published in a special issue of *L'Assiette au beurre* of October 3, 1908 entitled "Noises of War and Noises of Peace," whose cover was also drawn and signed by Gris (Fig. 14). In a period when the Germans and the French were frequently rattling their sabers over Morocco and other contested issues, threatening the war that finally came in 1914, the Chancellor of the German Empire is shown gesticulating at a podium, the olive branches of peace held aggressively aloft. Exposing the deeper truth, toy cannons litter the podium and one long cannon shaft vulgarly emerges through the podium to threaten the audience. A quote from the Chancellor, Prince von Bülow, completes the association of images: "Instead of shells, we will, henceforth, only use olive branches, which we will throw upon the world. That is why we have need of many cannons." This image then, revealing the deep desire for war and its inverted presentation as peace while acknowledging the military build-up, forms the context for the more well-known cartoon within. Both constitute antiwar statements, emphasizing the hypocrisy of Europe's leaders and of ordinary warmongers exempt from the actual fighting. To represent Gris as unwittingly playing into the hands of a leftist editor requires that we be ignorant of his work for the same issue's cover, which no reader of the time would have been. In fact, the antiwar sentiments expressed in the cartoons are consonant with each other and continuous with Gris's own refusal to fight in the war when it came six years later, as well as with pacifist statements he made at that time.

During this period, Gris was developing as a cubist painter. One of the early works he exhibited in the Independents Salons was entitled *Homage to Picasso* (Art Institute of Chicago; 1912). Later he would be among the first to emulate Picasso's and Georges Braque's radical new technique of *collage*. Gris's own style of cubism looks to works like Picasso's *Portrait of Kahnweiler* of 1910 (Fig. 15), which systematically subverts representational codes of the nineteenth-century academic art on which Picasso was raised. As the son of a teacher at Barcelona's School of Fine Arts — who taught him to produce fully competent academic drawings by the time he was a teenager — Picasso nicely engages in a double rebellion. This portrait's lack of tactile form, arbitrary distribution of light and shadow, suppression of color, abstract linear rhythms, and bewildering lack of recognizable detail openly satirize the bourgeois taste he had mastered so well. The critic Henri Guilbeaux makes precisely this point in an article reviewing the Independents in the anarchist *Les Hommes du jour*



Figure 15 Picasso, *Portrait of Kahnweiler*, 1910. Art Institute of Chicago. © 2011 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

in April 1911, where he writes that Picasso and the cubists “have produced grotesque results, made it seems in order to shock the middle-class (*épater les bourgeois*).”⁴¹

⁴¹ Henri Guilbeaux, “Paul Signac et les Indépendants,” *Les Hommes du jour*, 22 April 1911, 2–4.

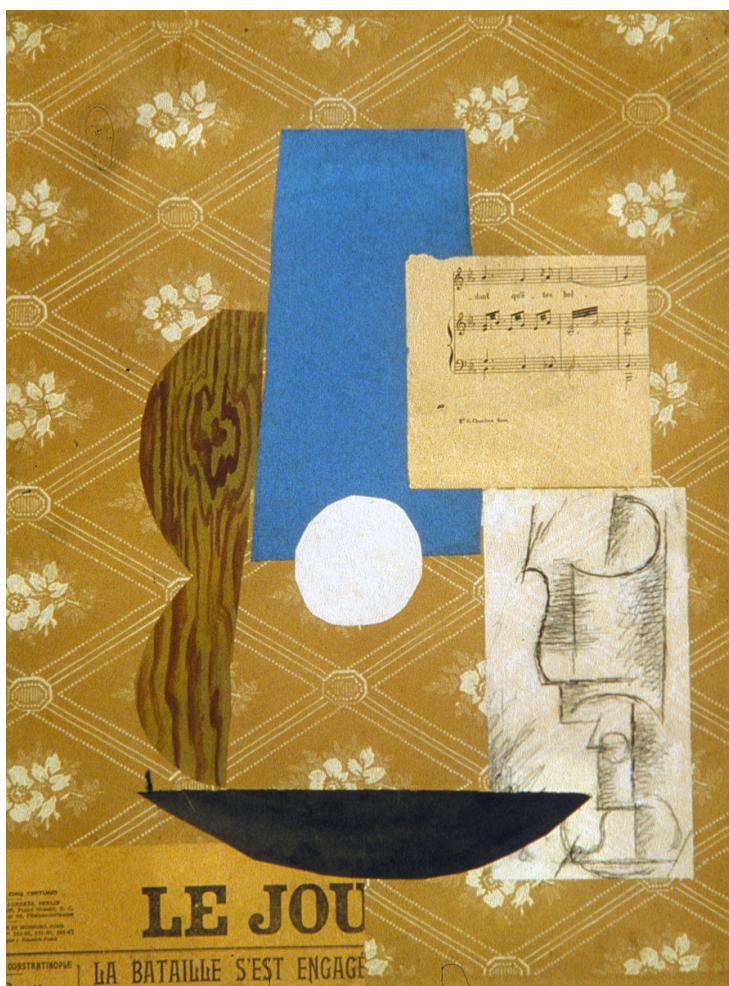


Figure 16 Picasso, *Guitar, Sheet-Music and Wineglass*, 1912. Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum, San Antonio. © 2011 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Picasso's engagement with the burning issues of the day became acutely visible when he introduced newsprint into his collages in fall 1912. The first instance was *Guitar, Sheet-Music and Wineglass* (Fig. 16), for which he clipped a headline about the First Balkan War from a leading daily, *Le Journal*.⁴² "The Battle Begins" intrudes

abruptly into a world of guitars, popular love songs and wine in a working-class café. He used texts from this same page of *Le Journal* for a second collage, *Bottle of Suze* (Fig. 1), to incorporate details of the Balkan War, with a sensationalizing degree of description, from “A Procession of Choleric”; of a Pré-Saint-Gervais demonstration, complete with antiwar speeches by prominent members of the international Socialist party; and, from the back page, of part of a serial novel by Abel Hermant satirizing upper-class libertines.⁴³ Pierre Daix, a later acquaintance from the French Communist Party deeply convinced that Picasso’s art held aloof from politics, skeptically asked him whether he had incorporated the column reporting the mass demonstration in this work on purpose. The artist surprised him by replying: “Of course I did it on purpose, because it was an important event involving a hundred thousand people . . . Oh yes, I found that in the newspaper, and it was my way of showing I was against the war.”⁴⁴

Bottle of Suze incorporates these articles from *Le Journal* into an image of a bottle, glass, and newspaper on a café table within a systematic disorganization of the elements of conventional illusionism. In the collage, however, Picasso has recreated the potential for a narrative through juxtaposition; he has done it, moreover, in a cubist style, whose assumed “anti-aesthetic,” “anti-French” disorder-

⁴² I studied this extensively in *Re-Ordering the Universe*, chapter 5.

⁴³ Jean Sutherland Boggs, *Picasso & Things* (Cleveland Museum of Art, 1992), 113; even while denying its interpretive relevance, Boggs has retrieved the author of this novel, *La Véritable Madame Bradier*.

⁴⁴ See *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium*, 75–76; ironically, Daix interpreted this as proof that “Picasso did not intend to create a manifesto proclaiming his political ideas. Rather, it was something that played a private role at one moment or another in his art.” He concludes that “On the issue of the Great War, he was isolated.” That is, Daix suggests that there were no other pacifist avant-gardists, hence Picasso’s pacifism is unimportant for his art. He completely misses Picasso’s relation to the larger antiwar community with whom Picasso states he identified; see Grossi, *Le pacifisme européen, 1889–1914* and Miller, *From Revolutionaries to Citizens: Antimilitarism in France, 1870–1914*. In addition, a number of Picasso’s friends were, in fact, pacifists, including Juan Gris and the poet André Salmon, who nonetheless fought in the war and later wrote *Le Drapeau noir* (la Cité des livres, 1927) detailing his generation’s intense conflict over the issue.

liness was aligned to anarchism in the critical press.⁴⁵ By retrieving columns from different parts of the newspaper, he reunites reports that now echo meaningfully, critiquing — from an anarchist perspective — the discourse that would disjoin them in a pretense of political neutrality.⁴⁶ This reorganization constitutes a counter-discourse, subverting the original ideological formation of the newsprint, and does so furthermore in the setting of a café, that locus of friendship, argument, sedition, and police surveillance that, as historian Scott Haine demonstrated, “sustained the political, cultural and social ferment of *fin-de-siècle* and *belle époque* Paris.”⁴⁷ At the same time, Picasso breaks down visual conventions of pictorial representation that embody for the vast French public “order” and “unity,” celebrating the seemingly random and disorderly, what critics called the “ugly,” the “primitive,” the “anti-aesthetic.” Thus what is for the bourgeoisie a disorderly work is, for the leftist avant-gardist, a work whose coherence resides in the very subversion of the conventions of bourgeois illusionism, and the illusions paraded in newsprint.

Other newsprint collages suggest Picasso’s exploration of the anarchist culture surrounding him. The self-declared anarchist writer Félix Fénéon was editor of the *anarchisant* journal *La Revue Blanche*. He was admired by Picasso’s friend and critical ally Guillaume Apollinaire for his short reports written for *Le Matin* in 1906, constituting the extraordinary series of “*nouvelles en trois lignes*.” The word *nouvelles* connotes both “news” and “novellas” in three lines: fragments of stories that suggest, but never complete, humble yet sensational

⁴⁵ My research has shown that “anarchist,” “ugly,” and “primitive” were terms of disapprobation used frequently by contemporary French critics against all forms of modernism. The terms “anti-aesthetic, even anti-French” for cubism emerged in the debate in the Chamber of Deputies in December 1912 on whether to ban foreign artists from exhibitions in the national palaces; see Leighton, *Re-Ordering the Universe*, 98–101 and Antliff and Leighton, *A Cubism Reader*, 395–409.

⁴⁶ In several other collages from this period, for example, *Bottle on a Table* of December 1912 (Musée Picasso), Picasso incorporates and structures the work to emphasize stock reports and dire economic predictions in light of the failure of current peace talks and, in so doing, compositionally highlighting a headline: “Ce qu’il faut lire,” “what one must read.”

⁴⁷ See Scott Haine, “‘Café Friend’: Friendship and Fraternity in Parisian Working-Class Cafés, 1850–1914,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 27 (1992): 607–26. In other works, Picasso conjures with the ideological space of another Parisian commercial institution, the department store, in relation to the commodified female; see Francis Frascina’s discussion of *Still-Life “Au Bon Marché”* (1913) in “Realism and Ideology: An Introduction to Semiotics and Cubism,” in Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina and Gill Perry, *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century* (Yale University Press, 1994), 87–183.

narratives of a tragic society. Beginning his career championing the anarchist art of the neoimpressionist Signac, Fénéon utilized the three-line format to register his disdain for a society ruled by capital in *nouvelles* documenting and ironizing a society riven by poverty and lacking moral compass. Here is one:

Mme Fournier, M. Vouin, M. Septeuil, of Sucy, Tripleval, Septeuil, hanged themselves: neurasthenia, cancer, unemployment.

And another:

Eugène Périchot, of Pailles, near Saint-Maixent, entertained at his home Mme Lemartrier. Eugène Dupuis came to fetch her. They killed him. Love.⁴⁸

Some of Picasso's collages incorporate newsprint stories likewise suggestive of the private realm, revealing a strain of black humor rife among his circle of writers and evident in his early work, as in a comic self-portrait of 1903 as an artist-imp. Apollinaire — alias "Guillaume Macabre" in his youth — shared this interest, and was well equipped to see a parallel between Fénéon's *Three Lines* and a headline like "Un Chauffeur tue [sa] Femme," conveying that "A Chauffeur [or more likely slang for a break-and-enter specialist] Kills His Wife," in *Newspaper and Violin* of December 1912 (Fig. 17). In *Bottle and Glass*, we can read that a vagabond in Fontainebleau "accuses himself of murder." Stories of assassinations, murders, suicides, strikers, and vandals repeat themselves in both Picasso's collages and Fénéon's wittily crafted "nouvelles," both projecting portraits of a society under intolerable stress.

Coextensively, Picasso's collages reject the commodification of art in important ways. The ephemeral materials of which they are made not only disdain the condition of salability, but flamboyantly mock the concept of "fine" art and craftsmanship.⁴⁹ Challenging the

⁴⁸ Félix Fénéon, *Novels in Three Lines [Nouvelles en trois lignes]*, translated by Luc Santé (New York Review Books, 2007), xxiv and 40.

⁴⁹ Crow, in "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts," 246, in *Modernism and Modernity, The Vancouver Conference Papers*, Benjamin Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut, and David Solkin, eds. (Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, 1983), 215–64, points to the political relevance of such antibourgeois subversions as the introduction of mass-produced materials and artisanal techniques into "high" art: "As such surfaces soon degrade, peel, flake, and fade, as newsprint and handbills turn brown and brittle, so collage disrupts the false harmonies of oil painting by reproducing the disposability of



Figure 17 Picasso, *Newspaper and Violin*, 1912. Private collection, New York. © 2011 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

notion of bourgeois collectability, Picasso made subversive choices in incorporating ephemeral newsprint, advertisements, the cheapest wallpaper, sticky bottle labels, and tattered bits of popular song-sheets, the detritus of an industrial and commercial culture increasingly dominant in Paris. Newsprint in strong light turns brown in

the late-capitalist commodity. The principle of collage construction itself collapses the distinction between high and low by transforming the totalizing creative practice of traditional painting into a fragmented consumption of already existing manufactured images.”

a single afternoon, thus Picasso necessarily envisaged its decay, its temporality, as part of the meaning of these works.



Figure 18 Gris, *Breakfast*, 1914. Museum of Modern Art, New York

Gris, creating his collages during the war two years later, inherited this politicized practice, yet attempted to depoliticize it, going so far as to create a fake headline with his own name in *Breakfast*, 1914

(Fig. 18), in a domestic rather than café setting (packet of coffee). He never entirely abandoned his socially critical position, though he no longer contributed radical cartoons to the anarchist press. He stood against the war, for example, describing the war's beginning to Kahnweiler as "the nightmare through which we are passing," and wrote to his friend Maurice Raynal in 1916, "I can't understand as you do this urge to massacre, to exterminate."⁵⁰ But he just as surely developed a carefully privatistic art that left his anarchism behind. When he occasionally included pasted newspaper references to political controversies — such as the debate over the three-year draft which appeared in three works of 1914, including *Bottle of Rum and Newspaper* (Guggenheim Museum, New York) — the allusion is barely legible, muffled rather than amplified, private rather than public.⁵¹ When Picasso had introduced this same issue in a collage, it was legible and included the headline stating that "M. Millerand, Minister of War, Blasts Antimilitarism."⁵² That Gris knew perfectly well the potential of such newsprint allusions is subtly visible in numerous works made during the war, when for example he carefully painted the headline, "Official Communiqués," on a fictional newspaper in *Still Life with Checked Tablecloth* of 1915.

Nearly alone of the avant-garde, Picasso and Gris stood by their refusal to serve in any military. Lucky to be from neutral Spain, they nonetheless had to stand against the forces that led Apollinaire, Marcoussis and many others also from neutral countries to enlist. Gris kept a very low profile during the war, when cubism was popularly viewed as *bôche*, the wartime slur for "German." His works reveal dark, shuttered interiors, when public spaces were taken over by combatants hostile to able-bodied civilians. When Gris used a masthead like *The Socialist*, as in *The Sun-blind* (Fig. 19), he evokes his working allegiance to the pacifist position of pre-war socialism. Yet it is a quiet sort of comment, in tune with the private inward-turned world of his cubist art, not playing to the politically-charged events evoked by Picasso before the war. Gris represents an interesting case

⁵⁰ Juan Gris to D.-H. Kahnweiler, August 16, 1914, and Juan Gris to Maurice Raynal, October 17, 1916, *Letters of Juan Gris*, 8–9 and 42.

⁵¹ See Lewis Kachur, "Gris, Cubismo y Collage," in *Juan Gris (1887–1927)*, edited by Gary Tinterow, Madrid: Salas Pablo Ruiz Picasso, 1985, 33–44.

⁵² The work is *Bottle and Wineglass on a Table* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1912); see Leighten, *Re-Ordering the Universe*, 127; the newsprint records Millerand, once a leading socialist, now Minister of War, berating the antimilitarists in the Chamber of Deputies for resisting passage of the law increasing the draft to three years of service.

of an artist whose leftist politics inspired the expressive power of his cartoons and nourished his subsequent painting, but who shed those politics when the consequences grew too intense.



Figure 19 Gris, *The Sunblind*, 1914, Tate Modern, London

This account of particular artists and writers in Paris reveals that they operated in a culture where the embrace or violation of tradition was freighted for cultural arbiters with political promise or social threat. In the State-sponsored salons, there were also narrative paintings depicting subjects fiercely critical of the government, such as Jules Adler's *Strike at Le Creusot* (Fig. 3), but they were routinely reviewed in terms respectful of their naturalist treatment of form, composition, and color. Hostile critics of avant-garde works, alternatively, often deployed the language of political outrage to describe seemingly mundane subjects such as landscapes, still-lives, and portraits, like Picasso's depiction of Kahnweiler (Fig. 15). To understand the reception of modernist art in this culture, then, we

need to recognize the terms of political debate and the importance of visual culture to that debate.

Supporters of avant-garde art began to shift their critical language during the war itself. To take cubism as an example, Gris's friend the poet and critic Pierre Reverdy wrote in purely formalist terms about his work, ignoring both his antimilitarist cartoons and the cultural references in his collages, and aligning his rectilinear cubism to the nationalist "return to order" aesthetics that signified a wartime retreat from any association of cubism with social subversion and antistatism. And Kahnweiler in his influential book, *The Way of Cubism*, written in 1915 while he was residing in neutral Switzerland, championed Picasso's and Braque's cubism in light of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. He explicitly rejected the philosophical premises of prewar cubism, whose practitioners had embraced the anti-Kantian precepts of Bergson, James and Henri Poincaré, as he would have known well. Kahnweiler's tract harmonizes with the promotion of Kant's call for a "United States of Europe" as a solution to European conflict on the part of his fellow pacifists and exiled German socialists. As such, he rebuts xenophobic attacks on Kantian thought as "German" in wartime France by purposely recontextualizing cubism as part of an internationalist European culture. In subsequent years, his Neo-Kantian terminology — with its reference to so-called "analytical" and "synthetic" phases of cubism's development — was adopted by dealers, critics and art historians as signifiers devoid of political or historical meaning. In this period of intense nationalism, even Picasso came to talk about cubism in purely formalist terms, stating in 1923 that cubism had been an art concerned with line, color and form.⁵³

The dynamic of modernist art and its reception in a resistant bourgeois culture should disturb perceptions of modernism as always or inherently conservative or reactionary, however understandable that association may be when considering key Anglo-American figures like Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis and T. E. Hulme. Because the history I have charted here features some of the most important artists of the Parisian avant-garde, it also needs to be taken into account if we wish to understand modernism as a European-wide movement in all media, where political ideas inform artistic

⁵³ "Picasso Speaks," *The Arts* (New York), May 1923, a statement in Spanish given to his friend Marius de Zayas, reprinted in Alfred Barr, *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946), 270–1.

agency and are manifest across the whole spectrum from anarchism to fascism. The First World War cast a defining shadow on culture both well before August 3, 1914 and well after the November 11, 1918. Tragically, the war killed and damaged not only a generation of artists and writers, but also eclipsed the political hopes and enthusiasms of many key modernists in France, leading ironically to a willful cultural amnesia — often perpetuated by the artists themselves — about the antiwar themes and anarchist aims of the avant-garde that has made an ahistorical ‘autonomy’ reading of modernism in the visual arts possible. Recognizing how anarchist theory and praxis worked together historically within modernist movements in the visual and propaganda arts, and how modernity was engaged and critiqued in the context of social change and political events, profoundly changes our understanding of modernism and its relevance to the crisis in which we find ourselves today.

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