

Fatal Symbiosis: Modernism and World War I

In 1909, Ezra Pound, standing on a chair in a London café and assuming the persona of the Troubadour poet and warrior Betrans de Born, declaimed the following lines from his new poem, “Sestina: Altaforte”:

Damn it all! all this our South stinks peace. . .
There’s no sound like to swords swords opposing,
No cry like the battle’s rejoicing
When our elbows and swords drip the crimson. . .
Hell grant soon we hear again the swords clash!
Hell blot black for alway the thought “Peace”!

That same year, in Paris, Filippo Marinetti published the “Foundation Manifesto” of Futurism on the front page of *Le Figaro*, part of which declares: “We will glorify war—the world’s only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers . . . Except in struggle, there is no more beauty. No work without an aggressive character can be a masterpiece. Poetry must be conceived as a violent attack on unknown forces . . .” (*Selected Writings* 41-42).

In the following two years, 1910-11, the Berlin avant-garde journals *Die Aktion* and *Der Sturm* introduced new and highly disturbing images of cataclysmic war and apocalypse in the poems of Jakob Von Hoddis and Gottfried Benn, Georg Heym and Georg Trakl. Heym’s “The War” (1911) images the disaster as an awakening monster:

He that slept long has arisen,
Arisen from deep vaults below.
He stands in the dusk, huge and unknown,
And crushes the moon to pulp in his black hand.

By 1912-13, motifs of cannons and marching soldiers, exploding shells and burning cities proliferated in modernist painting,

regardless of whether the canvas was painted in London or Berlin, Paris or Milan. And in the same month as the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the British composer Gustav Holst completed the first of his pieces for *The Planets*: “Mars, the Bringer of War.”

As anticipations of World War I, these images of war have been typically treated either as instances of artistic naiveté (in glorifying a horror that artists could scarcely imagine) or as artistic prescience in sensing the blood that was already “in the air.” Yet such clichés scarcely reveal the complexity of modernism’s relation to World War I. For beyond merely anticipating or even welcoming a new war, *avant-garde* artists across Europe drew upon war in its multiple meanings—war as metaphor and as actuality, war as language, as imagery, as models of both organizing and destructive power, and most of all as focused energy. One could almost say the prewar modernists *embodied* war and might therefore have seemed the group most prepared to deal with the real thing in August 1914. In fact, however, they were probably the most vulnerable. For their relationship with war was essentially symbolic and symbiotic: as they drew energy from the *idea* of war, their own energies, in turn, were quickly sucked into the real war’s immeasurably larger vortex. And as this juggernaut rolled through and over their lives, it mutilated the entire face of modernism, leaving a postwar artistic climate that would have been scarcely recognizable in 1914.



The Modernists’ War

“I have had this war inside me for a long time. That is why inwardly, the real war means nothing to me.”

—Paul Klee, *Diaries*, 952; *qtd. in* *Voices* 80

Like Paul Klee, modernist artists had been at war long before they were mobilized in August 1914. Their primary enemies were the forces of artistic reaction: the hostile press, the conservative academies, the reactionary critics, the smug, self-satisfied bourgeoisie, and even bourgeois culture itself. Of course, this battle was hardly new in the 1910s, evolving through a series of

skirmishes and scandals throughout the nineteenth century. But by the early 1910s, as modernist innovation in all of the arts accelerated, so did its struggle against reaction. Increasingly, modernists turned to war for the vocabulary to depict this opposition. Franz Marc, for example, writes in *The Blue Rider Almanac* of 1912:

In this time of great struggle for a new art we fight like disorganized “savages” against the old established power. The battle seems to be unequal, but spiritual matters are never decided by numbers, only by the power of ideas. The dreaded weapons of the “savages” are their new ideas. New ideas kill better than steel and destroy what was thought to be indestructible. (“The Savages of Germany” 61)

Marc’s contemporary, the Expressionist poet Ernst Wilhelm Lotz, echoes this militancy: “We smash through the power and topple the thrones of the old reign . . . on our heads the crowns of young messiahs we wear” (qtd. in *Lost Voices* 5).

German Expressionists, in fact, were especially prone to aggressive and messianic language because they saw themselves as both scourge and rejuvenator of Wilhelminian stagnation. Ernst Blass, for example, recalls his involvement with the young Berlin poets: “What I was engaged in . . . was a literary movement, a war on the gigantic philistine of those days [1910-14] . . . a spirited battle against the soullessness, the deadness, laziness, and meanness of the philistine world. . . . *We were definitely the opposition*” (qtd. in *Era* 29-32; Blass’s emphasis). The radical editors of Expressionist newspapers and little magazines fueled this *Kulturkampf*. Alfred Kerr wanted to make *Pan* “a journal which will give a sound flogging to the contemporary middle class because of its baseness.” And Franz Pfemfert, editor of Berlin’s highly influential *Die Aktion*, spoke of fighting a “merciless battle” against “the great [bourgeois] public” (qtd. in Allen 30, 183, 137). Even where this cultural perspective did not prevail, modernists across Europe still resorted to war language to portray their situation and intent. Albert Gleizes describes the impact of the Cubist School painters on the Paris Autumn Salon of 1911: “[The] ensemble had a fine

provocative air about it. In those painters one sensed an air of battle" (qtd. in Coen xlv). And in a letter, Arnold Schoenberg quipped aphoristically: "peacetime . . . means wartime for me" (qtd. in Moldenhauer 215).

War imagery not only defined the modernist identity as fighter, the modernist fate as combat; it provided a metaphorical vocabulary artists drew on to express their particular aims and tactics. At times, indeed, prewar modernists sound like imperialist politicians or generals deploying their troops. Guillaume Apollinaire wrote that his aim in composing his *Calligrammes* was to "annex new domains for poetry" (Gibson 191). Elsewhere, he declared that "young people, art critics, painters, and poets have formed an alliance in order to defend their artistic ideas." In grouping both Cubist and non-Cubist painters together in *The Cubist Painters*, he wanted (in Gustav Vriesen's paraphrase) "to create a solid front against the continuing attacks from the press and from the general public. All artists who strove for the new were to be united under the flag of Cubism" (53). Marinetti, in visiting the Russian Futurists in 1914, appeared (to two hostile members) to "affect the pose of a general who had come to inspect one of his remote garrisons" (qtd. in Markov 150). Boccioni appealed for "an all-out campaign" against Italian provincialism and "cowardice" (qtd. in Coen xxxix). And just as Apollinaire portrayed himself among the vanguard "forever fighting at the frontiers of the limitless future," so Wassily Kandinsky described the first Blue Rider exhibition in Munich (December 1911) as having a "'front' comprised of a 'left' wing (the newly created 'abstract' side) and a 'right' wing (purely 'realistic')."²

Perhaps the most striking example of this linguistic appropriation was Alfred Capus's sardonic editorial on the front page of *Le Figaro* (2 June 1913), which describes the riot at the premiere of the Ballets Russe's *Le Sacre du Printemps* in the all-too-familiar political rhetoric of European brinkmanship. Although the Second Balkan War has just yielded a peace treaty,

there remains nevertheless a number of international issues that still have to be settled. Among these I have no hesitation in placing in the front rank the question of the relationship of Paris with the Russian dancers,

which has reached a point of tension where anything can happen. Already the other night there was a border incident whose gravity the government should not underestimate. (qtd. in Eksteins 87)

If, for the conservative press, these metaphors betray the foreboding and war fears of 1913, for the fire-eaters of the avant-garde, war metaphors were energizing, and the more inflammatory the better. Thus, Ezra Pound declares in January 1914:

The artist has at last been aroused to the fact that the war between him and the world is a war without truce. That his only remedy is slaughter. . . . He must live by craft and violence. His gods are violent gods. . . . Those artists, so called, whose work does not show this strife . . . are simply insensible. And being insensible they are not artists. . . . [The new] sculpture with its general combat, its emotional condemnation, gives us our strongest satisfaction. . . . The artist has been at peace with his oppressors for long enough. . . . We turn back, we artists, to the powers of the air, to the djinn who were our allies aforesaid, to the spirits of our ancestors. It is by them that we have ruled and shall rule And the public will do well to resent these "new" kinds of art.³

The very extremity of this language shows how thoroughly it belonged to a realm where "slaughter" was entirely metaphorical. In his memoir of the period, Wyndham Lewis (who, with Pound, led the Vorticist group) recalls the safety of these mock-battles:

the months immediately preceding the declarations of war were full of sound and fury, and . . . all the artists and men of letters had gone into action before the bank-clerks were clapped into Khaki Life was one big bloodless brawl, prior to the Great Bloodletting. . . . "Kill John Bull with Art!" I shouted. And John and Mrs. Bull leapt for joy, in a cynical convulsion. For they

felt as safe as houses. So did I. (*Blasting and Bombardiering* 35-36)



Militant Groups: “the bloodless brawl”

The military—and militant—rhetoric of modernism is scarcely surprising given the dynamics of modernist struggle in these years. For the radical groups into which young artists and intellectuals organized themselves—the *Futurists*, the *Imagists*, the *Vorticists*, the *Blue Rider*, *Die Pathetiker*, *Die Brücke*, the *Cubo-Futurists*, the *Rayists*, and many others—were aggressive by their very nature. Like-minded artists banded together not merely to defend themselves collectively against a hostile public, but to carry their battle to the enemy. Ernst Blass describes how a group, meeting at its chosen cafe, could affect the solitary artist: “It was a place of refuge and an unparliamentary parliament. Even the timid and the silent learned how to talk and express themselves, learned to recognize what it was they really felt deeply about. It was an education in emotional sincerity” (qtd. in *Era* 29). As Blass implies, the group not only helped clarify its members’ aesthetic principles, it *intensified* the boldness and combativeness of these principles partly through the give-and-take of free discussion but still more as these groups decided to publicize their positions through collective exhibitions, concerts, and publications, and especially through manifestos and multi-media “evenings.”

The manifesto was the preferred weapon of these groups. Virtually every group had its own, ranging from the Rayists’ lengthy declamations to single-sheet broadsides. The Italian Futurists alone published over fifty between 1909 and 1914, often as paeans to war and violence for their own sake: “We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia . . . the punch and the slap” (Foundation Manifesto, 1909). Far more common were manifestos attacking the reactionary public: the Cubo-Futurists of Moscow entitled their anthology of December 1912: “A Slap in the Face of Public Taste.” Even when a group simply wished to present its aesthetic position, its need for public visibility dictated a manifesto style that Marinetti (its inventor)

described as “violence and precision.” As Marjorie Perloff and other critics have noted, the manifesto was itself a kind of provocative art-form, declaring its principles (typically couched as demands) in exclamatory, hyperbolic prose and presenting them in aggressive boldface, caps, and underlining. The Vorticists’ journal, *BLAST*, for example, enacts its title with huge, black boldface lists of those it wished to “Blast” or “Bless”—thus one-upping the manifesto it plagiarized for this idea: Apollinaire’s “L’Anti-Tradition Futuriste.”

When avant-garde groups staged “evenings,” combat often left the realms of the metaphorical and typographical to become actual—a planned and realized brawl. The infamous evenings of the Italian Futurists were a chaotic swirl of manifesto declarations and poetry readings against a cacophonous background of Futurist art, noise-music, shouted insults from the audience and insult-rebuttals from the artists (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Umberto Boccioni, *A Futurist Evening in Milan*, 1911, ink on paper, Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

The rare evening that did not produce a fist-fight, or at least a shouting match, was deemed a failure. Modernist groups in Moscow vied to see who could be most provocative. In their

much-advertised “recital” of 13 October 1913, the Cubo-Futurists shouted insults, presented nonsense lectures, and even spilled hot tea on the front row of the audience (Markov 133-34). Six days later, a rival group staged its own event, in which Larionov (his face painted) called the audience “jack-asses,” Balmont referred to them as “idiots,” Mayakovsky read them an insulting poem, and, as the *pièce de résistance*, Natalia Goncharova struck an army officer. As one newspaper reported: “the audience wanted to thrash them. . . . if the police had not intervened, everything would have ended in a bloody battle” (qtd. in Parton 71). Even the famous riot that greeted the Parisian première of *Le Sacre du Printemps* in May 1913 has recently been shown not to have been just a spontaneous uprising of a hostile audience, but a *two-sided* battle largely anticipated and joined by young Stravinsky partisans.⁴

In their struggle for recognition, modernist groups fought each other as much as the hostile public. Avant-gardists like Pound, Kandinsky, and Larionov, often battled and then split off from their own groups, which now seemed too conservative, to form newer, more radical groups. Thus, Marc writes of himself and Kandinsky as the two pull out of the NKV-Munich to create the Blue Rider: “Now it is the two of us who must continue the fight!” (qtd. in Lankheit 14).

Modernist groups maneuvered against each other, as when Pound declared he was “‘busily engaged in a big campaign against the Georgian [poets], . . . gathering together all the [I]magists he could find, for the purposes of bringing out an anthology that would serve as a counterblast to Harold Monro’s *Georgian Poetry*’” (qtd. in Fletcher 72, 77). Fledgling groups also fought to maintain their identity and keep from being swallowed by more imperialistic groups like the Italian Futurists. In the spring of 1914, for example, the newly-formed Vorticists directed their most publicly disruptive gestures at Marinetti, who sought to bring them under the Futurist banner. Lewis recalls: “*Putsches* took place every month or so. Marinetti for instance . . . brought off a Futurist *Putsch* about this time. . . . I counter-putsched.” (*Blasting* 35-36). Lewis also observed that these modernist mini-wars, reported at length in the press, provided the public much entertainment and became a kind of performance art:

I might have been at the head of a social revolution, instead of merely being the prophet of a new fashion in art. Really all this organized disturbance was Art behaving as if it were Politics. . . . The Press in 1914 had no Cinema, no Radio, . . . so the painter could really become a "star". . . . (*Blasting and Bombadiering* 35-36)

Modernism and Prewar International Politics

The "bloodless brawl" of modernist group conflict did not, of course, occur in a vacuum; the bellicose language and indeed the very energy of these fights mirrored in miniature the polarizing political situation in Europe beginning with the Agadir Crisis of 1910-11.⁵ That crisis, culminating five years of dispute between Germany and France over French control of Morocco, marked a turning point in European relations. Though war was averted, the gunboat diplomacy of Agadir resulted in a treaty in which both sides felt cheated. Its legacy of mutual bitterness, recriminations and distrust sharply contrasted the relatively tranquil first years of the century. By 1912, Paris witnessed its first torchlight military parades in twenty years, and France soon extended the period of military service. The following year, Germany vastly increased the size of its peacetime army and, to pay for it, introduced a war tax. Italy, seeking to match French and Spanish gains in Morocco, invaded Tripoli. As France strengthened its ties with Russia and England, Germany reaffirmed its Triple Alliance with Austria and Italy.

The Balkan wars marked the second major crisis before Sarajevo. The first Balkan war lasted scarcely the month of October 1912, as Serbia and several other small states successfully separated from Turkey. In June 1913, the war renewed when Serbia fought other Balkan provinces over boundaries. Although technically outside the conflict, the European powers positioned themselves around it according to

their current alliances and old grudges. Following the first Balkan War, Germany threatened to fight Russia, should Austria become involved (Gordon, *Expressionism* 152). Meanwhile, as Austria, with Germany's support, opposed Balkan independence and annexed Bosnia, Russia encouraged that rebellion, quietly supporting Serbia's provocative call for all ethnic minorities throughout the Hapsburg Empire to revolt.

Modernist groups both reflected and resisted this polarizing nationalism. The Italian Futurists proved a virtual microcosm of European nationalism, imperialism, and war-fever. Their claims to being the vanguard of modernism were as much an assertion of *Italian* artistic renewal as they were group boasting. And their efforts to absorb other groups, such as the London Vorticists, aped Europe's imperialist powers. In fact, Marinetti physically linked the two realms by shuttling back and forth between Italy's imperialist campaign in Libya and the Balkan wars, which he covered as a journalist, and the Futurist campaigns in England and later in Russia, which he planned and led. The Italian Futurists' modernist opponents were sometimes also driven by nationalist pride as well as the need to preserve their own group identity. Though obviously indebted to Futurist aesthetics and publicity techniques, the Rayist Larionov wanted his work to be seen as "a distinctively Russian manifestation" of Futurism (Douglas 233). Other avant-garde Russian writers and artists wanted the loose term "Russian Futurism" to signify a national identity as well as a modernist orientation. Accordingly, these artists greeted Marinetti's 1914 visit with open hostility.

In Paris, Apollinaire also tangled with the Italian Futurists. As art promoter and reviewer of several Parisian avant-garde groups, particularly the Cubists and Orphists (which he named), he was a kind of modernist minister without portfolio. But his loyalties were intensely French, and he went out of his way to belittle Futurist innovation and to claim primacy for Parisian avant-garde groups even in the invention of the word "simultaneism."

More than counterbalancing these instances of artistic nationalism, however, were significant examples of modernist cosmopolitanism before August 1914. Indeed, the artistic climate of Europe itself was international as artists criss-crossed the

continent to visit each other's studios, read poems, give lectures, stage performances and premieres, hold one-artist shows and participate in major exhibitions. The mutual benefits of such interchanges were immediate. When Franz Marc and August Macke visited Robert Delaunay's Paris studio in October 1912, the abstractions they saw there (along with examples from the traveling Futurist exhibition that they saw in Cologne) influenced Marc to take the final steps towards his own abstract style. In turn, Robert Delaunay's visit to Berlin in 1913 was a major artistic event, with Apollinaire and Cendrars accompanying him to read essays and poems.

Encouraged by leaders who thought in terms of Europe or the world rather than of nations, modernist groups often had an international membership and philosophy. Thus, Kandinsky explains part of his plan for the first *Blue Rider Almanac*: the new almanac must be

a link to the past as well as a ray to the future. . . . We will put an Egyptian work besides a small Zeh, a Chinese work beside a Rousseau, a folk print beside a Picasso. . . . We must show [by including works from other countries] that something is happening *everywhere*.⁶

Like Kandinsky and Marc, the organizers of major modernist exhibitions in these years—August Macke (The Cologne Sonderbund of 1912), Herwarth Walden (The First German Autumn Salon of 1913), and Walter Pach, Walt Kuhn and Arthur Davies (the Armory Show of 1913)—all demonstrated this internationalism in their diverse selections. For the numerous artists attending these shows, in turn, the catholicity of offerings affirmed modernism's international character. As Karl Otten noted, "we [living in the Rhineland] looked upon Cologne and Bonn as suburbs of Paris, Vienna and Rome" (qtd. in *Era* 139).

Transcending their own occupations, some artists even worked to improve international understanding. Romain Rolland and Paul Claudel, the latter a diplomat as well as a playwright, fostered increased cultural exchanges between French and German artists. The Alsatian-German poet and translator Ernst Stadler worked with the French poet René Schickele for better relations between their

countries. But despite his international sympathies and the prospect of an appointment in Toronto, Stadler enlisted when war was declared and was killed in October 1914. His enlistment and death sadly foreshadowed the larger fate of modernism's international character, which also became an early casualty of the war. Perhaps its last and bravest gesture in a belligerent country was Franz Pfemfert's publication of an issue of *Die Aktion* in Berlin amid the intense nationalism and war fever of 1915, featuring poems by Baudelaire and Mallarmé, essays by Bergson, Claudel, and Gide, art by Braque and Picasso and a dedication, in black edging, "TO THE POET CHARLES PÉGUY VICTIM OF THE WAR" (Mehring, in *Era* 110-11).



Prophetic Visions

Despite their internationalism, modernists were nonetheless susceptible to the political climate. Directly or peripherally, the European war scares and preparations of 1911-14 insinuate themselves into prewar art all across Europe in images of violence and war.⁷ In 1913 Jacques Villon paints *Marching Soldiers* (Fig. 2) in Paris, while, in Bavaria, Franz Marc places the

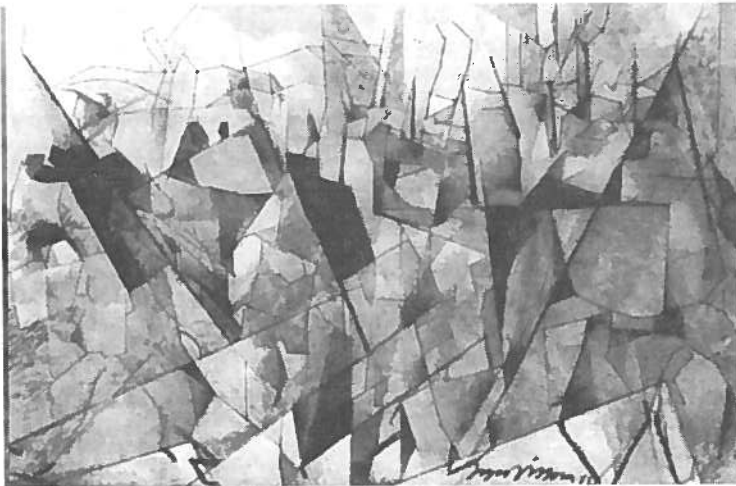


Figure 2. Jacques Villon, *Marching Soldiers*, 1913, oil on canvas, 25½ x 36¼ in., Musée National d'Art Moderne (Paris), Inventory No. AM1976. 1057.

blue tunic and spiked headgear of a German officer on a horseman in *St. Julian the Hospitaler* (Fig. 3) and entitles another painting, *Wolves: Balkan War*.



Figure 3. Franz Marc, *St. Julian the Hospitaler*, 1913, watercolor, gouache, and bronze powder on paper, 46 x 40.2 cm. (18 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 15 $\frac{7}{8}$ in.), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Photograph by Robert E. Mates[®] The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, FN47.1099.

At the same time, Wassily Kandinsky shows firing cannons obliterating hints of buildings and hills in his semi-abstract *Improvisation No. 30: Cannons* (Fig. 4) and subtitles *Improvisation 31: "Naval battle."* About the cannons, Kandinsky was somewhat evasive:

The presence of the cannons in the picture could probably be explained by the constant war talk that had been going on throughout the year. But I did not intend to give a representation of war; to do so would have required different pictorial means; besides such tasks do not interest me. . . .



Figure 4. Wassily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 30 (Cannons)*, 1913, oil on canvas, 109.2 x 109.0cm., Art Institute of Chicago, Arthur Jerome Eddy Memorial Collection, 1931.511. Photograph© 1994, The Art Institute of Chicago. All Rights Reserved.

The subtitle “Cannons,” he continued, was not intended to convey the contents of the picture (Selz 267)—a disclaimer that is hardly surprising since Kandinsky at the time was struggling to free his paintings from the tyranny of the figurative image. Yet the cannons are central to this work; their diagonal blasts dominate the center and orient the other forms around themselves both spatially and thematically.

In Prague that same year, 1913, Bohumil Kubista painted *Heavy Artillery in Action*, while in Berlin, at least three of Ludwig Meidner's apocalyptic works of 1911-13—*Shelling of a City* (1913, Fig. 5), *Horrors of War* (1911), and *Apocalyptic Landscape* (1913, Eliel no. 1)—trace their destructions specifically to war.



Figure 5. Ludwig Meidner, *Shelling of a City*, 1913, india ink, pencil, and tempura on paper, 45 x 65 cm. (17 1/16 x 22 1/16 in.), Berlinische Galerie, Berlin.

Finally, Ernst Barlach's *Holy War* (Fig. 6), begun just before the war, depicts a menacing figure lunging forward, about to hack the viewer with his upraised sword.



Figure 6. Ernst Barlach, *Holy War*, ink on paper, Museum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte der Hansestadt Lübeck, no. 1924/665.

By September 1914, Barlach considered this image (which he later converted to the better-known sculpture, *Avenger*) “the very crystallization of war.”⁸

Across the Channel, several of Wyndham Lewis's prewar abstractions have martial motifs and titles: *Timon of Athens: Alcibiades* (1912-13, Fig 7), *Plan of War* (1914), and *Slow Attack* (1914).



Figure 7. Wyndham Lewis, *Timon of Athens: Alcibiades*, 1912, process engraving whole sheet, 39.5 x 28 cm. Private collection.

As Richard Cork avers, the “combative character of . . . *Slow Attack*, *March*, and *Enemy of the Stars* foreshadowed the course of political events with uncanny accuracy” (268); but Lewis himself was rather saddened by his unwitting clairvoyance:

it is somewhat depressing to consider how as an artist one is always holding the mirror up to politics without knowing it. . . . *Plan of War*, painted six months before the Great War “broke out” . . . still depresses me . . . With me war and art have been mixed up from the start. It [sic] is still. (*Blasting* 5)

Beyond drawing on war for images, the Italian Futurists made it central to their philosophy of an energized and masculinized future—"the World's Only Hygiene"—and to their aesthetics. Marinetti justified his "free-word" poetics of 1912-13 through his experience observing the Libyan campaign and covering the Balkan wars as a journalist. The chaos and "swift pace" of war, he asserted, demanded a corresponding freedom of poetic syntax, grammar, and analogy.⁹ The best known of his ZANG TUMB TUMB word drawings, dated "Adrianopoli Ottobre 1912" (Fig. 8), uses both pure onomatopoeia (nonsense words that emulate artillery fire) and visual spacing to suggest howitzer angles and shell trajectories.



Figure 8. F.T. Marinetti, *Zang Tumb Tumb: Adrianopoli Ottobre, 1912*, ink on paper (book cover), Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, M338Z.

Marinetti would not perfect these multi-sensory, multi-directional depictions of battle until his 1915 masterpiece “Montagne+Vallate+StradeXJoffre” (Fig. 9)—an advance obviously inspired by the war itself.

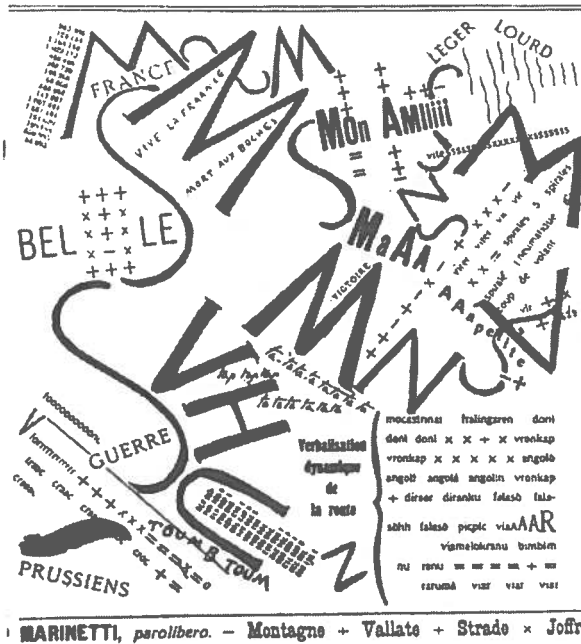


Figure 9. F.T. Marinetti, *Montagne+Vallate+StradeXJoffre*, 1915, ink on paper, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Beyond specific references to war in images and titles, we should also consider images of violence and aggression. Several of Kandinsky's abstractions, such as *The Black Arc* (1912, Fig. 10) and *Painting with Three Spots* (1914) show large shapes looming menacingly over smaller ones; often one of these shapes sends out jagged, jabbing tubes suggesting attacking arms or stingers. As Peter Selz comments on *The Black Arc*:

Kandinsky . . . creates a threatening image sheerly by means of line, plane, position, and color. Yet the painter has [also] created a mood. In his violent white world,

swept by lines and shapes, the warm and cool colors conflict, the withdrawing and aggressive forms meet in battle. To speak of a premonition of war is too hasty in this case, and at any rate superfluous. This is more than an omen of a specific event—it is an expression of the violence of an entire era. (*German Expressionist Painting* 268)



Figure 10. Wassily Kandinsky, *The Black Arc*, 1912, oil on canvas, 188 x 196 cm., Musée National d'Art Moderne (Paris), inventory no. AM1976.852.

Franz Marc expresses this violence even more directly. An abstraction he finished shortly before the war opposes two large “Fighting Forms” (Fig. 11): the red one’s crescent swathes flail out aggressively while the black shape curves protectively inward.



Figure 11. Franz Marc, *Fighting Forms*, 1914, oil on canvas, 91 x 131.5 cm. (35 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 51 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.), Staatsgalerie moderner Kunst, München.

Marc's most disturbing image of violence, *Fate of the Animals* (Fig. 12), in which jagged blood-red diagonals rip apart a forest while animals cower, bellow, and die, can be read in various ways. Donald Gordon sees in it

a destruction of the decadent and materialist world, a kind of post-Nietzschean "war of spirits". . . [a] world of "flaming suffering" [a phrase from the Hindu Vedas that Marc wrote on the back of the canvas], and simultaneously the creation of a more ideal and spiritual realm where flora and fauna have become transparent and dematerialized. (*Expressionism: Art and Idea*, 47)

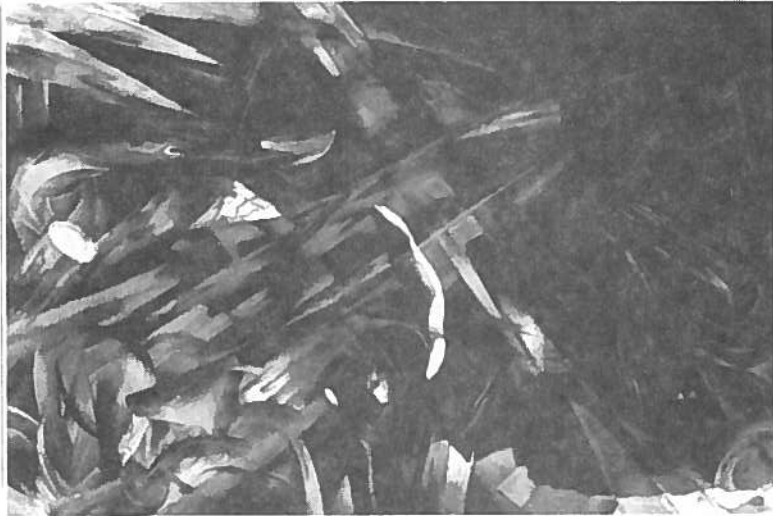


Figure 12. Franz Marc, *Fate of the Animals*, 1913, oil on canvas, 195 x 263.5 cm. Oeffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kunstmuseum, accession no. 1739.

Yet Marc himself, on seeing a postcard reproduction of the painting two years later, while he was at the front, wrote: "I was startled and astonished by its immediate effect on me. I saw it as an utterly strange work, a premonition of war that had something shocking about it. It is a curious picture, as if created in a trance" (letter to Bernhard Koehler, March 1915; qtd. in Levine 77). Writing to his wife, he adds: "It is artistically logical to paint such pictures before wars, not as dumb reminiscences afterward" (Levine 77).

For several reasons these readings are not mutually exclusive. First, Marc's apocalyptic vision, like Kandinsky's, was not nihilistic. Both painters saw a new world of the spirit emerging from the ashes of bourgeois materialism. In *The Blue Rider Almanac* Marc writes:

We are also convinced that we can already proclaim the first signs of the time. The first works of a new era are tremendously difficult to define. . . . But just the fact that they *do exist* and appear in many places today, sometimes independently of each other, and that they possess inner truth, makes us certain that they are the first signs of the coming new epoch—that they are the signal fires for the pathfinders. (“Two Pictures,” *Blue Rider Almanac* 69, Marc’s emphasis)

Kandinsky echoes this view in his 1913 *Reminiscences*:

Each art work arises technically just as the cosmos arose—through catastrophes, like the chaotic instrumental roar at the end of a symphony that is called the music of the spheres. . . . A great destruction with an objective effect is also a song of praise, complete and separate in its sound, just like a hymn to new creation which follows the destruction. (qtd. in Eliel 50)

This twining of apocalyptic forebodings and anticipations of cultural renewal was central to the Expressionists’ sensibility and helps explain how even their most chilling images came from hopeful artists, inspired by “the liberating lust of battle,” as Ludwig Meidner put it.¹⁰ Claire Jung, for example, recalls that at poetry readings of the Berlin avant-garde in those years

we felt . . . a new life force was being expressed pointing to the future and mobilizing the whole man’s intellectual forces In all of [these creative works] the disintegration of the old social ties, the collapse of an all-embracing and till then generally accepted faith is already visible, but also the quest for a new one . . . a reorientation of culture (qtd. in *Era* 38-39)

In the same milieu, Oskar Kokoschka could create a cataclysmic vision of himself and Alma Mahler, *The Bride of the Wind* (Fig. 13), while facing his own future optimistically. As Nell Walden recalls him in 1913: “‘Koko’ laughed and joked and discussed thousands of plans for exhibitions and for the future

with [Herwarth] Walden. . . . It was a wonderful, bright world” (qtd. in *Era* 124, 128).



Figure 13. Oskar Kokoschka, *The Bride of the Wind*, 1914, oil on canvas, 181 x 221 cm. Oeffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kunstmuseum, accession no. 1745.

The prewar images of war, violence, and apocalypse ambivalently signaled foreboding and hope, menace and promise, destruction and rebirth. Like the tiger in the limerick, war seemed a beast that could be ridden.



“Eye-deep in Hell”

I think the war is eating up all of everybody’s subconscious energy. One does nothing but buy newspapers.

—*Exra Pound to Harriet Monroe, 29 August 1914*

When the war did come, modernists responded with the same naive enthusiasm as the general public.¹¹ The surge of patriotism, the euphoria of being swept up in a great event (and now as part of the crowds they had formerly opposed), the release from a dull and complacent peacetime, and—for some—the hope that a

corrupt, materialistic culture would finally crumble—all these emotions led them to welcome this new collective enterprise. Thomas Mann eloquently recalls:

How the hearts of the poets burst at once into flame when war was declared! . . . in one way or another [we] had called it down upon us; for at the bottom of our hearts we had felt that the world, our world, could not go on as it was. We knew that world of peace well enough. . . . Was it not swarming with the vermin of the mind as if with maggots? Was it not surfeited with the rot of civilization? . . . How could the artist, the soldier in the artist, help thanking God for the collapse of a peace-time world of which he was sick, thoroughly sick. War! We felt its coming as a purification, a liberation, and an immense hope. This is what the poets spoke of, only of this. (qtd. in Dube 85)

The mock-wars artists had been fighting now seemed childish beside the real thing. As art critic Julius Meier-Graefe wrote that August:

The war bestows on us a gift. Since yesterday we are different. The fight over words and programs is over. We were tilting at windmills. . . . What we were missing was meaning—and that, brothers, the times now gives us. . . . The war has given us unity. All parties are agreed on the goal. May art follow! (qtd. in Gordon 153)

Swollen with patriotism, writers like Thomas Hardy and H. G. Wells, who only months before had published anti-war poems and novels, now urged young men to “Stand up and take the war /The Hun is at the gate” (“Men Who March Away”). Modernist cosmopolitanism shriveled as the war closed borders and released a tidal wave of nationalism. From Switzerland the writer Emil Szittyá complained:

[After the declaration] it is really astonishing how all the intellectuals in the countries at war, even the finest and most individualistic, became at one with the mass mentality [supporting the war]. There was something

in the air that clouded the mind, robbed one of the will to breathe. People in the countries at war became absolutely horrible. (qtd. in *Era* 153)

The war disrupted virtually everyone's life: artists put aside brushes and pens to volunteer or follow their mobilization orders; emigrés like Kandinsky suddenly found themselves living in an "enemy" country and hurriedly returned "home" or sought safe haven in a neutral country, as did more than a few nationals avoiding the war (see Appendix). Groups that had been the lifeblood of prewar modernism disbanded, never to reform, their members in uniform, exiled, dead. Modernist journals folded: *Les Soirées de Paris*, *The Blue Rider Almanac*, eventually *BLAST*, *Lacerba*, *Pan*, and many others.¹² Francis Steegmuller's poignant eulogy applies to all these casualties:

That July-August [1914] issue was the end of the *Soirées*. Nowhere does one relive the fine fresh flourishing of twentieth-century art more intensely than in the pages of the new *Soirées de Paris*; nowhere does one have a keener sense of what "might have been" or feel more sickeningly the brutal stifling of it all when it had barely begun, the fatal descent of the curtain on 1 August 1914. (*Apollinaire: Poet among the Painters*, 230)

As Meier-Graefe had predicted, the artistic controversies that had seemed so vital before the war quickly faded; modernist exhibitions were seldom held in the belligerent countries and failed to arouse controversy when they were. Albert Gleizes observed in 1915: "The present conflict throws into anarchy all the intellectual paths of the pre-war period, and the reasons are simple: the leaders are in the army and the generation of thirty-year-olds is sparse. . . . The past is finished."¹³ On the other side of the lines, the situation was the same:

With the nation's energies fully devoted to the defence of the fatherland, artistic aspirations seemed to lose their significance. Each member of the Vienna circle was affected. From Altenberg, Kokoschka, and Loos to

Schoenberg and his disciples, the only matter of importance now was the individual's rôle within the war effort. (Moldenhauer 211)

That this rôle might also serve their art was not lost on some artists. Raymond Duchamp-Villon wrote in 1916: "Maybe this rest imposed on our artistic faculties will be a boon. . . . I have acquired a clearer and surer vision of the path already traced and the path yet to be traced" (qtd. in Shapiro 143). Fernand Léger, recalling the experience, was even surer of its benefits:

I was dazzled by the open breech of a 75-millimeter gun in the sunlight, by the magic of the light on the white metal. . . . Once I had bitten into that reality its objects did not leave me. [It] . . . taught me more for my plastic development than all the museums in the world. (qtd. in Shapiro 141)

Apollinaire, too, saw something poetic in artillery: "[It is] as beautiful, as strong, as tender as one of my poems." In fact, his poems flourished during a service that he enjoyed—for a time.¹⁴ Like Léger and Marinetti, the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska also saw the mechanistic chaos and cacophony of combat as a modernist simulacrum: "We have the finest futurist music Marinetti can dream of, big guns, small guns, bomb-throwers' reports . . ." (qtd. in Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska* 69). War's promises, however, proved treacherous: Duchamp-Villon, Apollinaire, and Gaudier would not live to see the peace.

The war's physical toll on modernist artists was immense: it killed or severely maimed scores of them, including some of the very best; it drove numerous others to nervous breakdowns and weakened still others to make them vulnerable to the 1918-19 influenza epidemic or to pneumonia (see Appendix). Ezra Pound, now ruing his own poetic war-mongering,¹⁵ turned his modernist rage against a corrupt culture that sent promising young artists to their death:

Died some, pro patria,
non "dulce" non "et decor"
walked eye-deep in hell
believing in old men's lies, then unbelieving

came home, home to a lie

 There died a myriad,
 And of the best, among them
 For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
 For a botched civilization . . .

—from *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, IV

As they boarded their troop trains, even some modernists eager for the war foresaw that things would never be the same. When Kandinsky, seeing Marc off for the front, hoped that “our separation would not be for long,” Marc replied: “No, we will never see each other again.” His prophetic words were echoed by Picasso, who saw Braque to his train. Although they were to meet again, their former intimacy was gone: “We never saw each other again” (qtd. in Rubin 51).

Inevitably, the modernists’ prewar mood of buoyant optimism and artistic aggression vanished amid the horrors of the real thing. The contrast between Max Beckmann’s early enthusiasm and later disillusionment is typical:

Outside there was the wonderfully grand noise of battle. I went out among crowds of wounded and exhausted soldiers coming from the battlefield, and heard this strangely awful, grand music. It is as though the gates to eternity are being torn asunder when such a great salvo rings above. Everything suggests space, distance, timelessness. I would like to, I could paint this noise. *Ach*, these broad and uncannily beautiful depths! Crowds of people and “soldiers” moved all the while toward the center of this melody, toward the decisive moment of their lives. (October 1914, qtd. in Shapiro 149-50)

What would we poor men do if we didn’t always create for ourselves ideas of fatherland, love, art, and religion, with which we can again and again cover up the black, dark hole a little. . . . I must digest it all inwardly, then I’ll be free to work it up with almost

timeless detachment. These black faces blossoming out of the grave and the silent dead coming towards me are mournful greetings of eternity and as such I will paint them later. (May 1915, quoted in Shapiro, 150; Dube, 106-07)

Franz Marc's hope that the war would provide the "purifying fire" to clean out European decay and leave a "refined and hardened" culture, gradually crumbled under the relentless grind of the killing.¹⁶ On Christmas Eve, 1914, he wrote his wife: "You would perhaps find me a little more silent, a little more melancholic [today] . . . The cleverness and the bright thoughts are not the same as they were before." (qtd. in Levine 162). The following year, he wrote to August Macke's widow, Elizabeth, that the war was "the cruelest catch of men to which we have abandoned ourselves." And in a letter to his wife—one of the last before he too was "caught"—he reflected:

It is terrible to think of; and all for *nothing*, for a misunderstanding. . . . We must unlearn, rethink absolutely everything in order to come to terms with the monstrous psychology of this deed and not only to hate, revile, deride and bewail it, but to understand its origins and to form *counterthoughts*. (qtd. in Partsch 91, Marc's emphasis)

Oskar Kokoschka had once written to Franz Marc: "Let the apostles of the new German art take a leaf from your book [in your volunteering for service], and then they may gain some conception of a world which, by a natural outbreak of violence, we are trying to create" (qtd. in Dube 86). A year later, he painted the trauma of his multiple woundings and loss of idealism into a 1915 self-portrait, *Knight Errant* (Fig. 14). Amidst an apocalyptic setting of darkness, flood, devastation, and the angel of death, the artist lies in rigor mortis-like stiffness, one arm awkwardly extended. Though his tunic is contemporary, his leg irons make him appear a knight, overweighted with armor, who has fallen from his charger and cannot right himself. The grotesque inadequacy of a chivalric conception of war in a modern inferno could not be clearer.



Figure 14. Oskar Kokoschka, *Knight Errant*, 1915, oil on canvas, 89.5 x 180.1 cm. (35 ¼ x 70 ½ in.), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Photograph by Robert E. Mates© The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, FN48.1172 x 380.

Even artists whose art thrived in a war setting, like Apollinaire, Léger, and Dix, often paid a huge price for this new inspiration. Apollinaire grew despondent after transferring into the infantry as a lieutenant:

Nine days without washing, sleeping on the ground without straw, ground infested with vermin, not a drop of water except that used to vaporize the gas masks. . . . It is fantastic what one can stand . . . One of the parapets of my trench is partly made of corpses. . . . There are no head lice but swarms of body lice, pubic lice No writer will ever be able to tell the simple horror of the trenches, the mysterious life that is led there. (qtd. in Steegmuller 249)

After he took a shell splinter in the head and underwent trepanning, Apollinaire's despondency and fatigue intensified; he was never to regain his former vitality, optimism and exuberance before he succumbed to pneumonia on the day before the Armistice.

Non-combatant artists found it difficult to work in the feverish wartime environment. Some, like Matisse and Picasso, felt guilty being safe and doing something irrelevant to the war effort while their friends and sons (in Matisse's case) were fighting. Matisse writes in 1916: "I cannot say that [my recent painting] has not been a struggle—but it is not the real one, I know so well, and it's with a special respect that I think of the *poilu* . . ." Two years later, the guilt had not lessened: "Every day I have to have worked all day long to accept the irresponsibility which puts the conscience to rest" (qtd. in Silver 30, 34). Picasso, according to William Rubin, "had changed a great deal during 1915-16. His loneliness and unhappiness in wartime Paris . . . were compounded by the death of his companion, Marcelle Humbert . . . and led to a profound morosity" (51). Juan Gris, who, like Picasso, suffered the isolation of being a foreign national in Paris, could not abide the xenophobic war fever:

I can't understand . . . this urge to massacre, to exterminate, unless there's an absolute guarantee that it will end satisfactorily. . . . Ever since the war broke out, all the civilians I come in contact with have their minds warped by events. There's not one of them intact; all have broken down under the pressure of war. I am amazed by my own stupidity and inability to swim with the tide. My feet are anchored to pre-war times. (letter of 17 Oct. 1916, qtd. in Shapiro 143)

More devastating still was the sense of meaninglessness that the Great War now gave to the ambitions of artist-veterans. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner was doubly a victim. The war he served in, which gave him such harrowing fears of mutilation and castration, as seen in his *Self-Portrait as a Soldier* (Fig. 15) and which ultimately caused him a complete mental breakdown, now threatened to rob him of creative purpose as a civilian. As he wrote a friend: "The pressure of the war and the increasingly prevailing superficiality weigh more heavily than everything else. One feels that crisis is in the air Turgidly one vacillates, whether to work, where any work is surely to no purpose" (qtd. in Shapiro 152).



Figure 15. Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Self-Portrait as a Soldier*, 1915, oil on canvas, 69.2 x 61 cm. (27¼ x 24 in.) Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College Ohio; Charles F. Olney Fund, 1950, accession number 50.29.



“And When We Came Back . . . It Was All Different”

Not merely individual modernists but modernism itself became a war casualty: it survived, but profoundly changed. As Kenneth Silver has documented in *Esprit de Corps*, the war provided the perfect opportunity for conservative opponents of modernism to counter-attack. In a wartime climate of extreme nationalism and xenophobia, modernism’s international character, elitism, and abstract experimentation proved easy targets.

French rightists deplored the nation's prewar state as "cosmopolitan, decadent, and demented"; one popular cartoon sequence depicted Marianne, the national symbol, enjoying "crazy paintings" and "barbarian ballets" (obviously an allusion to *Le Sacre du Printemps*), while "Germania" strengthened itself (Silver 13-22). Cubism (now spelled with a Germanic "K" in the hostile French press) and other modernist styles acquired the taint of a foreign conspiracy, foisted on a guileless public by foreign art dealers (e.g., Kahnweiler, Udhe, and Weil): "[the Judeo-German Cartel] came to falsify French taste . . . [with] works stamped with German culture—Pointillist, Cubist, Futurist, etc." (Tony Tollet, 1915 lecture; qtd. in Silver 8).

Across the Rhine, the same political-aesthetic reaction occurred. The Expressionist poet Christian Schad complained from Zurich:

All the poetry and philosophy the Germans are so proud of had been transformed by Prussian discipline into the one watchword: "God, Emperor and Fatherland"[;] the Officer was the ideal man and the War the supreme test: all that Man could look for in life was now restricted to subservience, the best qualities were crippled . . . (qtd. in *Era* 161)

In England, too, modernism became equated with the enemy. The London *Times* called the Second Exhibition of the London Group "Junkerism in Art" and "Prussian in spirit" (Cork 269). And, as if to respond to Rémy de Gourmont's nostalgic recollection of the prewar years in 1915 ("How happy seem the times when we seriously discussed the future of Cubism, or the respective merits of free and regular verse!"), Francis Carco wrote that same year:

Do you remember—before the war—the diversity of views, opinions, tendencies, directions, theories in French pictorial art? The grossest extravagances became a daily spectacle—and amid this chaos we had to fight in order to declare that Cubism was no more than an error—and that experiment for

experiment's sake was an idle preoccupation. (qtd. in Silver 146)¹⁷

The new conservatism aimed not merely at particular styles but at the very spirit of prewar modernism: its expansive daring, its internationalism, its will to uproot the very bases of the arts: mimesis, tonality, regular rhyme and meter. Thus, Paul Dermée: "After a period of exuberance and force must follow a period of organization, of arrangement, of science—that is to say, a classic age" (*Nord-Sud* 15 Mar. 1917, qtd. in Silver 89).

German and Austrian Expressionists, who had viewed their art as a cultural and not merely stylistic renaissance, generally resisted this new conservatism, but their own patriotism complicated the issue. Schoenberg, for example, withdrew his *Chamber Symphony* from a 1916 performance in Prague because "he did not want to excite aesthetic controversy now that the national emergency took priority over everything else:] 'In peacetime—which means wartime for me—I am quite prepared to go back to being everyone's whipping boy'" (Moldenhauer 215).

French modernists were more susceptible to neoclassicism because its values were depicted as typically French. "Restraint," "balance," "order," and "moderation" were on the tongues of major artists who had, only a few years earlier, recognized no barriers as valid in art. Before the war, for example, Braque felt that emotion is "translated and transmuted" into art. By 1917, he could assert: "In art, progress consists not in extension but in the knowledge of its limits. . . . I love the rule which corrects emotion" (qtd. in Silver 105-06). Apollinaire expressed similar views the same year when he claimed that the "new spirit" of poetry "tends toward austere expression, or rather toward containment, of feelings."¹⁸ Delaunay went even further, declaring in 1916 that the newest art was "in reaction or rather in opposition to all the painting or artistic tendencies called Cubist-Futurist. . . ." A year later he referred to the prewar period of the Parisian avant-garde as an "epoch of poor painting, hysterical, convulsive, destructive. . . . [T]hese Futurist [and] Cubist hoaxes. . . [were] neither painting nor art" (qtd. in Silver 147-48). And Jean Cocteau, one of the collaborators of *Parade*, applied the new emphasis on limits

even to modernism's penchant for shocking the bourgeoisie: "Between TASTE and VULGARITY, both unpleasant, there remains an *élan* and a sense of proportion: THE TACT OF UNDERSTANDING JUST HOW FAR YOU CAN GO TOO FAR" (qtd. in Silver 57, Cocteau's emphasis).

As Picasso had returned to figurative portraiture during the war, Apollinaire saw his poetry similarly incorporate aspects of tradition following his brashly pictorial *Calligrammes*. Two months before his death he wrote Picasso: "What I am doing now will accord better with your present preoccupations. I am trying to renovate the poetic tone, but in the classic rhyme" (4 Sept. 1918, qtd. in Silver 139). In England, at about the same time, the two premier modernist poets, Pound and Eliot, were doing likewise; Pound recalled:

at a particular date [1917] in a particular room, two authors . . . decided that the dilutation of *vers libre*, Amygism, Lee Masterism, general floppiness had gone too far and that some counter-current must be set going . . . Remedy prescribed . . . Rhyme and regular strophes. ("Harold Monro"; rpt. in *Ezra Pound: Polite Essays* 14)

In Stravinsky's post-war neoclassicism, in Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, in the *Neue Sachlichkeit* of Germany, and even in Schoenberg's codification of "The Twelve Tone Method," one can see comparable movements of aesthetic contraction, of gravitation towards rules, boundedness and older styles as an "orderly" framework for innovation.

The strained friendship between Picasso and Braque during and after the war perfectly dramatizes how resurgent nationalism affected the prewar modernists' widespread indifference to national boundaries and origins. As William Rubin notes: "We have Braque's word that these [national differences] didn't count for anything" in his prewar friendship with Picasso[:] 'Despite our very different temperaments, we were guided by a common idea: But 'as was clear later, Picasso is Spanish, I am French; we know all the differences that implies'" (52). To be sure, modernist internationalism still flourished in neutral countries—Switzerland and America (until it

entered the war)—but these countries were at the fringes of modernism as it *had* existed.

Not coincidentally, these same two countries, Switzerland especially, witnessed the most radical avant-garde movement of the war years, Dadaism. Yet Dada's anti-art nihilism shows just how much wartime modernism differed from its prewar counterpart. While it shared the latter's baiting of the bourgeoisie, Dada's shock value was in its own self-destructive nihilism. Nothing could be further from prewar modernism's high seriousness and optimistic battles for cultural rejuvenation than Dada's brittle laughter that proclaimed nothing, least of all art, worth saving. Juan Gris was not alone among the prewar modernists in his disgust at this change: "I am alarmed about what happens next in painting. I see our serious efforts being swallowed up in waves of Dadaism and Expressionism" (letter of 12/2/19, qtd. in Silver 310).

Indeed, between Dada's nihilism and conservative neoclassicism, and in a Europe so utterly ravaged by the war that "cultural rejuvenation" itself was a Dada joke, there seemed little room and less reason for the prewar modernist program to continue. It had become a casualty of the war it had so confidently anticipated and emulated. The German poet Jacob Picard's melancholic recollection of his particular group might speak for the entire prewar modernist movement: "And when we came back [from the war], those of us who had survived, it was all different and the *Argonauten* were past history" (qtd. in *Era* 138). □

Notes

1. For a recent, albeit inconclusive, discussion of artists' prescience before World War I, see Francis Haskell, "Art & the Apocalypse," *New York Review of Books*, July 15, 1993, 25-29.
2. Apollinaire quoted in Steegmuller, "Introduction" to *Alcools*, v-vii; Kandinsky quoted in Lankheit 14.
3. "The New Sculpture," *The Egoist*, Feb. 16, 1914, 67-68; rpt. in *Exra Pound and the Visual Arts* 180-82. Pound's personal battles were no less warlike and

more obviously tinged with megalomania, as when he assures the editors of *Poetry* in 1914: "I can annihilate anyone who gets in front of us. Simply I've got the artillery . . . to take on the whole lot" (quoted in Watson 307).

4. Eksteins, *Rites of Spring* 10-42.

5. Evidence of this high energy speaks for itself in the astonishing outpouring of works and styles in the years just preceding the war. Nevertheless, a number of modernist artists recalled the eerie parallel between prewar tensions and modernist energy. Stephan Zweig, for example, writes: "Marvelous was this tonic wave of [artistic] power which beat against our hearts from all the shores of Europe. But there was danger too in the very thing that brought joy, although we did not perceive it." Citing the accelerating instances of international tension, he continues:

The surplus energy had finally to discharge itself and the vanes showed the directions from which the clouds were already approaching Europe. It was not yet panic, but there was a constantly swelling unrest; we sensed a slight discomfort whenever a rattle of shots came from the Balkans. Would war really come upon us without our knowing why and wherefore?
(*The World of Yesterday* 196-98)

6. Letters to Franz Marc, 6/19/11 and 9/01/11, quoted in Lankheit 15-17, Kandinsky's emphasis. In 1911, when one minor German artist, Karl Vinnen, published "A Protest by German Artists" that objected to German museums purchasing French paintings, Marc and Kandinsky organized a spirited rebuttal from artists, art historians, and museum directors entitled "The Battle for Art"—another instance of warlike language, here defending internationalism!

7. Frederick Levine persuasively argues that the war imagery of Expressionist painters like Meidner and Marc belongs to their broader struggle against Wilhelminian culture (*The Apocalyptic Vision* 101). But war images were equally prevalent in art from countries little affected by Expressionism, e.g., England and France.

8. Barlach was somewhat contradictory on this image however, since he originally entitled it *Berserk One!* (and the sword-wielder doesn't wear a military uniform). Its title was changed to *Holy War* when it was published in Paul Cassirer's *Kriegszeit* in December 1914 (Miesel 152).

9. "Destruction of Syntax-Imagination without Strings-Words-in-Freedom 1913"; rpt. in Apollonio 95-106.

10. Meidner, himself, recalls this period of his dark, apocalyptic landscapes with contradictory sentiments:

We were confused, high-strung and irritable. We were driven to the breaking point by the approach of world catastrophe. (1918, quoted in Voices 182)

[Summer 1912] was a strange and omen-laden time for me as none other ever was. I was very poor but not at all unhappy. I was charged with energy, full of mighty plans; I had faith in a magnificent future." (1964, quoted in Eberhard Roters, "The Painter's Nights" in *Eliel* 63, 69)

11. Kandinsky was a notable exception to this enthusiasm, but even he seemed ambivalent about the war's meaning. He had grave forebodings when war was declared, not least because he now had to leave Germany abruptly. He writes to Herwarth Walden on 2 August: "now we have it! Isn't it dreadful? It's as if I had been torn out of a dream. I have been living mentally in a time when such things are completely impossible. My delusion has been taken away from me. Mountains of corpses, horrible torments of various sorts, suppression of inner culture for an indefinite time" (quoted in Shapiro 145). Yet, he could also look forward in a postwar world "to a great release of inner powers which will also make for the brotherhood of man. And so also a great flowering of art, which now can do nothing but lie in hidden corners" (quoted in Dube 86). Paul Klee, however, went into the war under no such illusions: "There was about as much spirituality in it as dung on a heel" (quoted in Shapiro 147).

12. Of sixteen German Expressionist journals extant in August 1914, only five survived the first year of the war and all underwent rigorous censorship; the literary circles surrounding these journals likewise disbanded or suffered drastically altered memberships (Allen 33-34). The same held true for Paris: "General mobilization . . . meant suspension of almost all publications (Cornell 134).

13. (*Le Mot*, 1 May 1915; quoted in Silver 48). As Kenneth Cornell observes, French poetry debates were similarly stifled: "In August 1914 discussion of poetic and literary theory was brought to an end. . . . The imbroglia of "dramatisme," "paroxysme," "and "néoclassicisme" . . . was halted at a moment of great effervescence" (134). Of the belligerents, the single major exception to this pattern was Russia, where returning emigrés like Kandinsky, Larionov, Goncharova, Tatlin, and El Lissitzky helped modernism to thrive during the war years.

14. Quoted in Miesel, "Paul Cassirer's *Kriegszeit* . . ." 156, n. 3. S. I. Lockerbie notes that, "the vast poetic output . . . of the fifteen months between [his enlistment and his wounding] . . . testifies to the stimulating effect of events on his imagination. . . . [In his poems] the ominous associations of war are sublimated in a release of energy, prompted by a situation with an unusual appeal to the poet's imagination and stimulating him to a unique appreciation of life, given greater force by its context" (Introduction, Guillaume Apollinaire, *Calligrammes*, 14, 16).

15. After the war, Pound said of "Sestina: Altaforte": "Technically, it is one of my best, though a poem on such a theme could never be very important" (quoted in Stock 68).
16. "In War's Purifying Fire" (1915); quoted in *Voices* 161-65.
17. The stifling of modernist debates also crippled French poetry, in Kenneth Cornell's view, leaving "a discontinuity . . . and for several years a sense of void" (134).
18. "The New Spirit and the Poets," lecture (Nov. 1917); trans. Steegmuller, *Apollinaire: Poet Among the Painters* 278.



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Appendix: Modernist Casualties of World War I

"How much is lost for all of us; it is like a murder . . ."

—*Franz Marc, on learning of August Macke's death*

Killed in action

Kurd Adler, German poet (1892-1916)

Rudolf Börsch, German writer (1895-1915)

Hans Ehrenbaum-Degele, German poet (1889-1915)

Eugen Fischer, German writer (1891-1915)

Georg Hecht, German poet (1885-1915)

Hugo Hinz, German poet (1894-1914)

Robert Jentzsch, German poet (1890-1918)

Alfred Lichtenstein, German poet and novelist (1889-1914)

Ernst Wilhelm Lotz, German poet (1890-1914)

August Macke, German painter (1887-1914)

Franz Marc, German painter (1880-1916)

Albert Michel, German writer and poet (1895-1915)

Wilhelm Morgner, German painter (1891-1917)

Wilhelm Runge, German poet (1894-1918)

Gustav Sack, German poet and novelist (1885-1916)

Reinhard Johannes Sorge, German poet and playwright (1892-1916)

Ernst Stadler, German poet (1883-1914)

Hermann Stenner, German painter (1891-1914)
August Stramm, German poet and dramatist (1874-1915)
Albert Weisgerber, German painter (1878-1915)

Umberto Boccioni, Italian painter (1882-1916)
Giosuè Borsi, Italian poet (1888-1915)
Nino Oxilia, Italian film director, playwright and poet (1888-1918)
Antonio Sant'Elia, Italian architect (1888-1916)

Robert Besnard, French painter (1881-1914)
Alain-Fournier, French novelist (1886-1914)
René Dalize, French poet (1879-1917)
Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, French sculptor (1891-1915)
Léo Latil, French poet (1890-1915)
Olivier-Hourcade, French poet (1892-1914)
Charles Péguy, French poet (1873-1914)
Ernest Psichari, French writer (1883-1914)
Roger Vincent, French writer (1886-1915)

George Butterworth, English composer (1885-1916)
T. E. Hulme, English poet and theorist (1883-1917)
H. H. Munro ("Saki"), English short-story writer (1870-1916)
Wilfred Owen, English poet (1893-1918)
Isaac Rosenberg, English poet and painter (1890-1918)
Edward Thomas, English poet and writer (1878-1917)

Vladimir Burliuk, Russian painter (1886-1917)
Franz Janowitz, Bohemian poet (1892-1917)
Aladár Radó, Hungarian composer (1882-1914)

Died from war wounds or war-related causes

Guillaume Apollinaire, French poet and journalist (1880-1918; died of pneumonia, severely weakened by head wound and trepanning)
Hans Bolz, German painter (1887-1918; died of exhaustion)
Rupert Brooke, English poet (1887-1915; died of uremic poisoning while en route to Dardenelles)
Raymond Duchamp-Villon, French painter and sculptor (1876-1918; died of typhoid contracted in trenches)
Roger de la Fresnaye, French painter (1885-1925; died of pneumonia, severely weakened by lung hemorrhages in war)

- Enrique Granados, Spanish composer (1867-1916; drowned after torpedo attack on English ship)
- Franz Henseler, German painter (1883-1918; died of exhaustion and insanity)
- Alfred Heymel, German poet and publisher (1878-1914; died of illness contracted at front)
- Hans Leybold, German poet (1894-1914; suicide at the front)
- Wilhelm Lehmbruck, German sculptor (1881-1919; suicide from depression partly caused by his war work as hospital orderly and self-exile to Switzerland)
- Milos Marten, Czech writer and critic (1883-1917; died of wounds)
- Otto Mueller, (1874-1930; died of lung disease caused by two lung hemorrhages in war)
- Nadezda Petrović, female Serbian painter (1873-1915; died of typhus contracted as nurse)
- Tadeusz Nalepinski, Polish poet, novelist, and playwright (1885-1918; exhaustion and influenza)
- Georg Trakl, Austrian poet (1887-1914; drug overdose [accident or suicide unknown] while in military hospital)

Died from influenza epidemic, 1918-1919

- Georges Antoine, Belgian composer (1892-1918)
- Egon Schiele, Austrian painter (1890-1918)
- Bohumil Kubista, Czech painter (1884-1918)
- Tadeusz Nalepinski, Polish poet, novelist, and playwright (1885-1918)
- Morton Schamburg, American painter (1882-1918)

Severely wounded

- Georges Braque, French painter (head wound, trepanned)
- Blaise Cendrars, French poet (arm amputated)
- Otto Dix, German painter (wounded three times)
- Othon Friesz, French painter
- Ernest Hemingway, American novelist (badly wounded in leg)
- Oskar Kokoschka, Austrian painter (shot in head, bayoneted in lung)
- Frank Kupka, Czech painter (awarded Legion of Honor by France)
- Mikhail Larionov, Russian painter (concussion)
- Fernand Léger, French painter (gassed)
- F. T. Marinetti, Italian poet and theorist
- Otto Mueller, German painter (gassed)
- Luigi Russolo, Italian painter and composer (head wound)

Laurence Stallings, American playwright
Jacob Steinhardt, German poet
Georgy Yakulov, Russian painter

Suffered nervous or physical breakdown during or just after war

Max Beckmann, German painter
Alban Berg, Austrian composer (physical breakdown)
Erich Heckel, German painter (painting impaired for a time after war)
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, German painter
(complete physical and mental breakdown)
Oskar Kokoschka (shell shock)
Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, German painter
(painting impaired for a few years after war)
Arnold Schoenberg, Austrian composer (physical breakdown)
Georg Trakl, German poet (after treating casualties as medic)

Foreign national returning to native country

Natan Altman, Russian graphic designer (from Paris)
Zhenia Bogoslavskaya, Russian artist (from Paris)
Marc Chagall, Russian painter (from Paris)
Giorgio De Chirico, Italian painter (from Paris)
Natalia Goncharova, Russian painter (from Paris)
Wassily Kandinsky, Russian painter
(from Bavaria after stays in Switzerland and Sweden)
El Lissitzky, Russian painter (from Darmstadt)
Max Pechstein, German painter (from Palau Islands)
Elie Nadelman, American sculptor (from Paris)
Liubov Popova, Russian painter (from Paris)
Ivan Puni, Russian artist (from Paris)
Nadezhda Udaltsova, Russian painter (from Paris)

Foreign national moving to neutral country

Alexei Von Jawlensky, Russian painter (Switzerland from Munich)
Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, German art dealer (Switzerland from Paris)
Marie Laurencin, French painter married to a German (Spain from Paris)
Wilhelm Uhde, German art dealer (Switzerland? from Paris)
Marianne Werefkina, Russian painter (Switzerland from Germany)

Citizen moving to neutral country

Alexander Archipenko, Russian painter & sculptor (Switzerland)
Hugo Ball, German writer (Switzerland)
Robert and Sonia Delaunay, French painters (Spain and Portugal)
Marcel Duchamp, French painter (USA)
Albert Gleizes, French painter (USA)
Richard Huelsenbeck, German writer (Switzerland)
Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, German painter (Switzerland) after serving
Else Lasker-Schüler, German poet (Switzerland)
Wilhelm Lehmbruck, German sculptor (Switzerland)
Gabriele Münter, German painter, (Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark)
Max Oppenheimer, Austrian painter (Switzerland)
Julius Pascin, Bulgarian painter (London, USA)
Francis Picabia, French painter (USA and Spain)
Hans Richter, German painter and filmmaker (Switzerland)
Romain Rolland, French novelist (Switzerland)
Christian Schad, German painter (Switzerland)
Igor Stravinsky, Russian composer (Switzerland)
Tristan Tzara, Romanian poet (Switzerland)
Edgar Varese, French composer (USA) after serving

Imprisoned during war

e. e. cummings, American poet and painter
(briefly imprisoned by French, 1917)
Karl Hofer, German painter
(interned as enemy alien in France until 1917)
Max Pechstein, German painter (interned in New Guinea)
Jacques Rivière, French writer, p.o.w. of Germans
Heinrich Vogeler, German painter (incarcerated by Germans)
Lyonel Feininger, German-American painter
(interned by Germans, 1917-18)

Milton Cohen, Associate Professor of Literary Studies at the University of Texas at Dallas, has written on diverse modernists, including Pound and Schoenberg, the Italian Futurists, Stein, Hemingway and cummings. He is presently writing a book on modernist groups, ca. 1910-1914, from which "Fatal Symbiosis" is drawn.