

'A language for humanity?' The *Blaue Reiter*, and the failed search for universality

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At the end of 1911, Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc prepared a communiqué in French to announce the publication of their *Almanac*: ‘The Blaue Reiter,¹ organ of an art being born. A great epic begins, has begun: that of the ‘intellectual awakening’: that of the nascent tendency to regain a lost equilibrium: the inevitable necessity of spiritual creations: the flowering of the first buds. We are on the threshold of one of the greatest epochs humanity has seen to date, and which we call the epoch of the “Great Spiritual” ... In our Almanac you will find only those works which share a particular affinity, despite not having any external resemblance’. The two artists, a German and a Russian, who lived in southern Germany, and whose acquaintance is very recent, nonetheless were committed to the task of assembling ‘en rapports fraternelles’ all those who ‘were following internally the same aim’.

The choice of French was not an accident. The vision of the two men inclined towards Paris, whose artists, French or foreign, they wanted to attract to their project. The term, the ‘avant-garde’² arose in military discourse, and using it enabled them to appropriate a culture of conflict, of ‘progress’, of innovation, of a break with the conventional places of artistic tradition, of the academy. It entailed a move towards utopia, as a destructive preparation for the future. The new movement would be spiritual, theoretical, opposed to the intolerances of schools and critics, and for a creative future, mystical because it would be creative, and creative because it would be mystical. Everything had to be opened up: art and nations, religions and temporalities, the sophistication of the avant-garde, the primitive, the popular. Languages had to be compressed into one language, the language of ‘humanity’.³

¹ Kandinsky and Marc might have been hesitant about the French translator, who chose ‘chevalier’ (Ritter), over « cavalier », (Reiter). In English the distinction is between ‘knight’ and ‘rider’.

² For Felix Fénéon who created the concept in 1886, Seurat and Signac were at ‘the avant-garde of impressionism’.

³ Tapuscrit, nd. Cited in *Catalogue Kandinsky*, Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2009, p.327.

The ‘Homage to Apollinaire’ painted by the Russian artist Marc Chagall was not a direct response to the *Blaue Reiter*, but it synthesized clearly the links, real, virtual and occult, tying together the European avant-garde, as what Apollinaire termed the ‘extreme schools’.

⁴ This painting is one of the most imposing of those voluntarily addressing artistic innovations of the years 1912-13, in part because of its dimensions – it is almost two meters’ square – in part because of its technique, its sense of colors, by its wish to theorize, by its call to the spiritual, to the mystical and to the primitive. Herewith Apollinaire:⁵

Above all, artists are those human beings who want to become inhuman. They seek painfully the traces of the inhuman, traces which you cannot find in nature. They have the truth, and without them, we cannot see reality.... The new artists seek an ideal beauty which is no longer the vain figuration of space, but rather the figuration of the universe, to the extent it is rendered human in light’ .⁶

The Russian painter aimed at illustrating Apollinaire’s *Méditations*, reprinted in part in an article in the *Der Sturm*⁷ at this time: innovation and the universal were in the air, discussed, disputed. The avant-garde practiced internationalism : each artist residing in his own country, as well as in other countries. But we should avoid exaggerating the intellectual and artistic harmony of the avant-garde in the years 1911-14, encompassing French, German, Italian artists, as well as Russian, Polish, Spanish and Swiss. From Paris, Munich, Dresden, Berlin – one French and several German centers – we go to New York at the moment of the Armory Show in 1913 to find traces of these artistic exchanges, marked by competition, imitation, hints and injuries exchanged face to face, or at a distance, here and there. If the arguments among them are primarily artistic, intellectual, and religious, national tonalities never fade away fully. The Balkan wars

⁴ « Méditations esthétiques. Les peintres cubistes », « Sur la peinture », mars 1913, La Pléiade, T.2, p.10.

⁵ I paraphrase Nietzsche whose work was fundamental for both Kandinsky and Apollinaire. See Kandinsky, *Du Spirituel dans l’art*, Denoël, 1969, p.61 or Apollinaire, *Méditations*.

⁶ « Méditations esthétiques. Les peintres cubistes », *op cit.*, p. 8, 16-17.

⁷ Apollinaire gave a talk on 18 January 1913, in *Der Sturm* gallery in Berlin published in February at the same time as he completed his *Méditations esthétiques* which appeared in March 1913. « La peinture moderne » had the advantage of being shorter, for a German audience, but repeated the same ideas, such as the phrase at the end, « J’aime l’art des jeunes peintres parce que j’aime avant tout la lumière. Et comme tous les hommes aiment avant tout la lumière, ils ont inventé le feu. » « La peinture moderne » Pléiade II, p. 500-505.

give a foretaste of 'real' war, which in turn arrives in August 1914. Here we deal with the chiasmus between the impulse to create and promote universal and human art, and the persistence and progressive resurgence of national sentiments and identities.

'Truly, there are only artists'. (Franz Marc)

-« Il n'y a que les artistes, vraiment. »⁸

The central motif in Chagall's painting is the Garden of Eden, paradise lost and undoubtedly recovered. From a single hermaphroditic body, Adam and Eve announce the new man, the new social and cultural man which the avant-garde call into being. This bi-cephalic being: is it inspired by pre-Colombian art? Is it an allusion to the primitives, in art and in religion? We are close to both the redemption and the fall, to Adam's rib and the hermeticism of the serpent. The 'ouroboros', the circle formed by the serpent devouring its tail, symbolizes cyclical time and the continuity of life. Chagall develops a line of thought through a melange of esoteric references he shares with many of his contemporaries, including the founders of the *Blaue Reiter*: the omniscience and ubiquity of God gesturing to a very different future, to the occult, theosophy, renewed (and revised) Christianity. Marc wrote to Delaunay:

I myself am a dreamer, a man of instincts, with the healthy sense of a peasant and of the religious art the peasant has in his religion: he believes and does not ask for reasons to believe.... For me it is painful to live in a time which has no religion; it is not because I have a desire to relive past centuries; but not a single day goes by when I yearn for future centuries infused with a very strong religion, very spiritual and magical, occult but a

⁸ Marc à Delaunay, 2 III 1913, in Franz Marc, *Ecrits et correspondances*, Ecole Nationale supérieure des Beaux Arts, 2006, pp.480-481.

thousand times nobler than the Christian religion, so often narrowly smug and never original; a late and unhappy mélange of diverse religions.... I am a bit ashamed to be so blasphemous about the Christian religion at the very moment my wife is playing the divine Bach on the piano; he was a good Christian, and what he was able to make of his religion! Truly, there are only artists. (il n'y a que les artistes, vraiment'.)⁹

Marc's cri de sœur expressed the mood of the others. Beyond their differences, their disputes, their quarrels and their reconciliations, what mattered was art, 'pure art'. Here is Apollinaire again: 'The young painters present works more cerebral than sensual.... Theirs is the grandeur of metaphysical forms. That is why contemporary art, if it is not the direct emanation of particular religious beliefs, still bears the marks of great art, that is to say, religious art'.¹⁰

Chagall starts from the Hebrew notion of 'ihud', that is, union or unification. The two bodies are fixed on a target which is also a clock. In the Cabalistic version of creation, each stage lasts one of the 12 hours of the day. Chagall painted the hours 9, 10, and 11 as the time of original sin (hence the apple and the serpent). The expulsion happens in the 12th hour, where Chagall places his name in Latin and Hebrew script, above a third headless neck created alongside Adam and Eve.

Adam's sexual organ is the geometric centre of the painting, serving as the hand of the clock. Cyclic time indeed, a complicated space-time measure for a complicated man. Perhaps 'Apollin.r' in French? It is in this way that Chagall writes the light name of his friend, as a play on 'air' amplified by two missing vowels ('a' and 'i') in the manner of Hebrew grammar. The name Apollinaire is linked with that of the German Herwarth Walden,¹¹ of the Swiss poet Blaise Cendrars and the Italian Ricciutto Canudo.¹² Chagall

⁹ Marc to Delaunay, 2 III 1913, *Ecrits...op.cit.*, p.480-481. Original spelling given in the French text.

¹⁰ *Méditations esthétiques, op.cit.*, p.12.

¹¹ It was a coup for the Bavarian capital to house the two *Blaue Reiter* exhibitions in December 1911 and February-April 1912. Munich was the mid-point between Paris (Delaunay, Rousseau, Picasso) and Moscow (Kandinsky, Larionov...) The opening on 12 March to 19 April in the Herwarth Walden's gallery *Der Sturm* in Berlin of the *Blaue Reiter* exhibition had an unmistakable international character. There were as well in the same month an exhibition of 'Italian futurists', which came from Paris and brought with it its own polemics, and an exhibition in August of 'French expressionists'. The term 'expressionists' was first used in March 1912. Walden (the

is certainly well informed. Apollinaire and Walden, the founder of *Der Sturm* had become friends in Berlin at the time of the Delaunay exhibition of January 1913. Walden and his wife came to Paris in March 1913, where they met many avant-garde artists, including Chagall.¹³

This artistic and literary collaboration -- in 1913 Apollinaire wrote a 'letter from Paris in *Der Sturm* -- was interrupted only by the war. The last letter of Walden to Apollinaire is dated 20 June 1914: 'Seeing that you want to come to Berlin for the Picabia exhibition, I would like you to give a public reading of some of your poems.... Your evening event in January would take place Thursday 28 January'.¹⁴ That day, 28 January 1915, Apollinaire was at Nimes, ready to leave for the fight against the Germans at the front. Friendships, engagements: everything was fractured in the summer of 1914.

The art-house cinema was born in these years, and all these artists were aware of it. Let us imagine a flash back, with the elements of Chagall's painting in mind. The years 1912-14 were a time of massive international activity: exhibitions, voyages, the writing of articles and books, lectures, correspondence. From the *Blaue Reiter* to *Der Sturm*, exhibitions from Munich to Berlin, Paris, Moscow, New York, from core to periphery, real or self-appointed. The force of artistic relations can be seen in these international networks, bilateral, multilateral, crossing: reconfigurations, alliances, hatreds, polemics, temptations for affiliation or for turning away from affiliation, giving – or withholding – legitimation to works of art.¹⁵

pseudonym of Georg Lewin) who had founded the review *der Sturm* in 1910 with Karl Kraus, championed Berkin as the center of modern art, as Chagall noted at the time.

¹² In the last number of *Montjoie !* (newspaper founded by Canudo), in April 1914, Cendrars published on the same page two parallel poems, « Canudo » and « Apollinaire », written in New-York, regretting their absence.

¹³ « Chez Apollinaire on discutait beaucoup. Dans un coin un petit bonhomme est assis. (...) Savez-vous ce qu'il faut faire, M.Walden ? Il faut organiser une exposition d'œuvres de ce jeune homme. Vous ne le connaissez pas ? Monsieur Chagall. » *Ma vie*, Stock, 1993, p.158.

¹⁴ Cited by Philippe Rehage, *op.cit.* p. 96.

¹⁵ For a very interesting example, see Delphine Bière-Chauvel, *Le réseau artistique de Robert Delaunay*, Publications de l'université de Provence, 2005.

The *Bleue Reiter* and France : temptations, frictions

-Le *Blaue Reiter* et la France, tentations, frictions.

We can follow closely the relations and interactions of four men : the two creators of the *Blaue Reiter*, Marc and Kandinsky, the French painter Robert Delaunay, and the poet and art critic, Guillaume Apollinaire. What is most striking in their relations – as in all of Europe at this time – is the speed of things, as if the pace of technology which fascinated or worried them had become a metaphor for their hyperactivity. Marc and Kandinsky met on 1 January 1910, a year to the day before the closure of the first *Blaue Reiter* exhibition at the Tannhauser gallery in Munich.¹⁶ In the same period, Kandinsky published his essay on the Spiritual in art. The second *Blaue Reiter* exhibition, ‘Black and white’, spanned the months between February and April 1912, when the founders took their first trip outside Germany. In May, the *Almanac* is published. Delaunay’s work appeared in two exhibitions, the second of which had works by Derain and Picasso. In addition there were reproductions of the works of French artists in the *Almanac*, and the titular presence of Douanier Rousseau, adored by everyone. And yet the French did not respond to the invitation to write for the *Almanac*, perhaps by virtue of their supposed superiority. After all, if it were true as they believed, that everything important happened in Paris, why join those who insisted on staying elsewhere? And yet it was in writing about the Orphism¹⁷ of Delaunay that Apollinaire emphasized with rapport with Kandinsky and Marc. Here is the sole reference to German painting in all Apollinaire’s critical works:

This movement is particularly close to the sensibility of several modern German painters.... To this movement belong the most interesting German painters: Kandinsky, Marc, Meidner, Macke, Jawlensky, Münter, Otto Freundlich, etc. Orphism attracts as

¹⁶ « Erste Ausstellung des Redaktion Der BR »

¹⁷ A term he invented to emphasize the role of light and color, which paralleled form in cubism.

well the Italian futurists who, following on from fauvism and cubism, refuse to abolish all perspectival or psychological conventions.... We are drunk on enthusiasm. We are rising here towards plastic lyricism.... This creative tendency reaches towards the universal.... With these movements, orphist and cubist, we arrive into the poetry of light'.¹⁸

Apollinaire's critical writings confirm both a French superiority, and, his (and their) intellectual curiosity notwithstanding, an opposite tendency among the French to suppress their solidarity and adopt a kind of patriotic pictorial sensibility, which in 1914 easily turned into contempt towards Germans. The slavs were spared this fate. Kandinsky sent to the Salon of Independent artists in March 1912 *Improvisation 24 (Troika II)*, *Improvisation 25 (Garten der Liebe II)*, *Improvisation 26 (Rudern)*. Apollinaire could not resist showing his claws in his critical commentary: 'Kandinsky displays his *Improvisations*, which are not without interest, since they represent more or less alone the influence of Matisse. But Kandinsky pushes to the extreme the theory of Matisse on the need to follow instinct, and thereby winds up obeying chance alone. Mme Münter shows us what happens in a household of a poor vegetarian in Montparnasse, and that is not particularly cheerful'.¹⁹ Kandinsky was not amused. He wrote to Delaunay that Apollinaire, in his French morgue, completely misunderstood his work and ignored the importance of his research : 'The question of expression (construction ; design and colour ; composition) has preoccupied me for 8-10 years. What I can paint now is the practical result of these reflections, which must become little by little the vehicle of my feelings and the aim of my art.... That is why I was so surprised to read his comment on my entries in the Independent exhibition that I operate only on sentiment and take to an extreme Matisse's principles. Apollinaire's attitude is to me inexplicable.... My core is 'inner necessity' (la nécessité intérieure).... There is a high price to pay to exhibit in Paris.... This is why one shows only minor works, useless and even dangerous'.²⁰

¹⁸ « La peinture moderne », *op.cit.*, p. 505

¹⁹ *L'Intransigeant*, 25 mars 1912. *Oeuvres II*, p.430.

²⁰ K. à Delaunay, 1^{er} avril 1912. Christian Derouet « Kandinsky-Delaunay, un échange de lettres en avril 1912 », *Les Cahiers du Musée d'art moderne*, n°73, automne 2000, p. 74-83.

Kandinsky was cross enough to take the precaution to send his pamphlet on the Spiritual in art to a critic who could really master German.²¹ In that work, he spent particular effort in commenting on Matisse at length. His treatment is both enthusiastic and critical. Critical, that is for his absence of interiority,²² but this point is one Apollinaire had not yet had the time to read. It is doubtful if Apollinaire ever really understood Kandinsky, despite their affinities. Besides, before Kandinsky's letter, in which he also announced the publication of the *Almanac*,²³ Apollinaire had already written very favorably about Kandinsky in *Der Sturm*, at the invitation of Walden, unhappy with bad reviews, and persuaded that Apollinaire could be brought around to see the importance of this work in Germany. 'I frequently talked about Kandinsky's work at the time of his exhibition in Paris. I was glad to have had the chance on this occasion to express my deep admiration for an artist whose work is both serious and significant'.²⁴

In short order, Apollinaire came to Berlin at the time of the exhibition 'Delaunay, Ardengo Soffici, Julie Baum' at the Sturm gallery.²⁵ The French poet was transformed to the extent that he accepted the hospitality of August Mache in Bonn during his return voyage.²⁶

²¹ « Monsieur

Je vous remercie pour votre carte. Aujourd'hui je vous envoie un livre sur l'art/ Après la parution du Chevalier Bleu je vous ferai parvenir un exemplaire avec un plaisir spécial. Je serai très flatté d'entendre votre opinion sur ces livres. » Unique lettre de K à GA, 13 mars 1912, Campa, Read, *op.cit.*, p. 600. (Il s'agit du *spirituel dans l'art*. Dédicace : « Monsieur Guillaume Apollinaire Hommage de l'auteur Kandinsky Munich 13 III 12. »

²² « Ses dons exceptionnels, son talent de coloriste qu'il doit à sa qualité de Français l'ont conduit à donner dans ses œuvres une part prépondérante à la couleur. (...) Il n'a pas toujours su se libérer de la Beauté conventionnelle. (...) La beauté raffinée, bien française, savoureuse, purement mélodique de la peinture, atteint, ici, les hauteurs glacées, inaccessibles, les cimes glacées de l'esprit. » *Du Spirituel, op. cit.*, p. 69-70

²³ Dans l'*Almanach*, c'est le critique Roger Allard, très actif partisan du cubisme à ses débuts, qui a accepté d'écrire l'article « Les signes du renouveau en peinture. » Même s'il a aimé les Kandinsky du Salon des Indépendants, il reste persuadé de la suprématie et de l'avance française : « Le mouvement spirituel n'est plus désormais purement français depuis que se répercute à l'étranger le même appel au renouveau de l'art. » *Almanach, op.cit.*, p.146. On a choisi pour l'illustrer, deux Cézanne, un Le Fauconnier et un Matisse, mais aussi une broderie sur soie du XIV^{ème} siècle et un dessin d'enfants, diversité riche habituelle de l'*Almanach*. (Power point.)

²⁴ March 13 *Der Sturm, Oeuvres II*, p. 526. It seems that Walden asked Apollinaire to write these lines, as a response to a harsh review of Kandinsky's exhibition in Hamburg, by Kurt Kùchler, in the *Hamburger Freudenblatt*.

²⁵ In a collective post card with Walden and his wife Nell sent to Marie Laurencin on 20 January 1913 (and with an image of the rose garden in the Tiergarten, saying he was returning. (Campa, Read, *op.cit.* p.192)

²⁶ In May 1914, Apollinaire reviewed an exhibition of Rhineland expressionist artists, and said of Macke : expressionnistes rhénans dont « August Macke qui vit à Bonn et qui est peut-être le seul vraiment intéressant ». *Paris-Journal*, 20 mai 1914, *Oeuvres II*, p. 715.

There were, in this mock sword play between Apollinaire and the two founders of the *Blaue Reiter*, both artistic and intellectual matters at stake. Kandinsky and Marc wrote that they disliked what they termed ‘unhealthy’ (malsain) critiques. ‘Both the artists and the public need to see the grimacing face of today’s critic, and to this end we dedicate a special number to this sad and pernicious phenomenon’²⁷ Not only was Apollinaire a critic, but a writer too, and here we arrive at another central point : Kandinsky’s extreme scepticism on writers who pronounce on art : ‘Artists speaking of art, even hesitantly, say living things about it – writers, on the contrary, speak of already crystallized things, that is, they things not in movement, but at rest.... Since our great art – painting – is on a path of constructive development, it is inevitable that the time of the painter-writer has arrived’.

What Kandinsky addresses here, is Apollinaire the ‘official’ critic (le critique attitré). That indeed was his position with respect to Delaunay. Apollinaire wrote prefaces for catalogues and wrote his poem ‘The windows’ on Delaunay’s work of the same name, which was at the center of the *Der Sturm* exhibition of 1913 (power point)

Delaunay’s reply to Kandinsky shows that he understood the situation, and believed that the supremacy of Paris in the discovery of abstract painting – between the cubists and ‘his’ colors – was far from established. Delaunay was entranced by Kandinsky’s submissions to the Salon des Indépendants:

Your works were discussed several times by a small elite.... The heart of the matter is your search for pure painting.... I do not know painters in Paris with a similar quest ; those associated with the cubist group explore matters of line and reserve to color a secondary and non constructive role.... Apollinaire has started to believe in us, and has become particularly interested in my research, and this year he has become officially the defender of this rare art’²⁸

Delaunay tried to preserve his critical stance despite the fact that it clouded the personal relations he had with non-French artists. Why? Because the critical text ‘La peinture

²⁷ Tapuscrit, sd. *catalogue Kandinsky, op.cit.* p.327.

²⁸ Delaunay to Kandinsky, 25 IV 1912, Christian Derouet « Kandinsky-Delaunay, un échange de lettres en avril 1912 », *Les Cahiers du Musée d’art moderne*, n°73, automne 2000, pp. 74-83.

moderne' is a quasi-nationalist hymn to French painting from impressionism on, even if the European echoes of this work were noted too:

This movement is not exclusively French but European. There are English artists like Constable and Turner, a German artists like Marées, a Dutchman like Van Gogh, a Spaniard like Picasso: they all play a large part in this movement, which is not so much a manifestation of French genius as of universal culture.... Nevertheless, this movement emerged first in France.... It is possible to say that France is playing the part that Italy played in painting in earlier times. [Picasso's cubism, in which] he studies an object as a surgeon dissects a cadaver [is thus] the art of painting new compositions with formal elements developed not through the reality of vision but through the conception ... of poetic painting.²⁹

Like the artists of the *Blaue Reiter*, Apollinaire celebrates primitivism, be it French or Siennese as against the art of the Renaissance. But he continued to affirm the central role played by France, the capital of the arts, housing the greatest artists of the day, even if, like the Spaniard Picasso, they were not French. When he refers to Germany, though, Apollinaire distinguishes between Germans and Slavs. It is as if the Slav Guillaume Apollinaire wanted to show that the principle of *jus soli* operated on this level in France, in that assimilation through geography and language worked in France but not in Germany. Could Kandinsky have imagined that Apollinaire, whose roots were Polish and Slavic, could accuse him of Slavic tendencies? That would be to misunderstand the poet, who resented the failure of his application for naturalization in 1911 and who consistently refused to use his Polish name de Kostrowitsky, preferring his *nom de plume* instead.

In November 1913, Apollinaire wrote a review of the first autumn exhibition in Berlin organized by *Der Sturm*. If he had wanted to speak of these works as representing 'the new trends in the plastic arts', why then did he speak of them, not with respect to art, expression, color, forms, but solely of nationality, understood in ethno-linguistic terms? He reiterated this point in May 1914: 'This Berlin homage to French painting seems to me to be very touching.... The collection is a celebration of the young Parisian painters and in

²⁹ *Méditations esthétiques*, p.10.

particular those engaged in orphism'. Then he cites a letter he says he had received from Berlin:³⁰

Disappointment... The triumph of reactionary art. Other French painters like Gleizes, Léger, Metzinger, who share French taste, seem to be level-headed men, simple and refined compared to the German revolutionaries. We left this exhibition with the conviction that German or Italian avant-garde painters are like converted Jews, who retain all their qualities and flaws, but who become the most intolerant Catholics.... Everything that pertains to either French taste or even Slavic taste, like Kandinsky, would shock Berlin, but the shock arises from difference....³¹

In May 1914, Apollinaire continued along this line : '... There is less grace among Swiss painters like Valotton and Hodler than among German painters; it is true that those rare young painters worthy of the name of artist working today in Germany are slaves, like Kandinsky and Kokoshka'³² Then on 2 July 1914, the poet-critic wrote for the last time on German painters who had come to Paris, in an article on those who frequented the Dôme restaurant in Montparnasse. They were dubbed the 'dômiers'. Among them was a Czech and a Pole, Kisling. 'Under the name *Der Dome*, which signifies a cathedral to Teutonic ears (is it not true that the real German cathedrals are *brasseries* ?) these artists exhibit their work in the Fletcheim gallery in Dusseldorf.... The impoverished state of German art today is remarkable, even if we take into account their efforts to divine the secrets of new French painting today'.³³ One last time he celebrates French painting then on display in Germany: Gleizes, Metzinger, Duchamp-Villon, Jacques Villon. Marc Chagall and Archipenko also attracted his attention, but they were Russian and lived in France after all.³⁴

The *Blaue Reiter* and France : Elective affinities – modern art, popular art, primitive art

³⁰ Apollinaire did not indicate who was his correspondent; possibly he was playing with ideas by putting them in the mouth of an imaginary anonymous person; he was not above such practices, and latent anti-Semitism was typical of his thought in this period.

³¹ *Les Soirées de Paris*, 15 novembre 1913, Pléiade, II, p.621-624.

³² GA, *Paris-Journal*, 8 mai 1914, Pléiade, II, p.685.

³³ *Paris-Journal*, 2 juillet 1914, Pléiade, II, p.802.

³⁴ *Paris-Journal*, 2 juillet 1914, Pléiade, II, p.804_

-Le *BR* et la France, amitiés électives : art moderne, art populaire, art primitif.

Since the 19th century, a certain number of artists cultivated a profound interest in primitivism and popular art, becoming thereby anthropologists dedicated to renewing culture and the arts. Matisse confirmed this engagement, so fertile for his art: 'The revelation came to me from the East. It was only later that this art touched me and that I understood Byzantine painting, in the icons of Moscow.... Giotto is for me the height of my desires.... With what pleasure I discovered Japanese prints. What a lesson I learned in the purity of harmony'.³⁵ The Russian artists Larionov went further still. He was 'adopted' from 1906 on by the avant-garde, by Cézanne, Derain, Matisse, but he was not interested in cutting off his Russian roots. Between East and West, he chose irony, and created an enormous library and personal collection. In 1913 Larionov organized in Moscow an exhibition of 'the icons of Loubki', from which he took a kind of unusual inspiration:

During the reign of the Assyrian emperor Hammerabi, there was an exhibition of Russian loubki, alongside Chinese, Japanese, French etc. of the 19th and 20th centuries. They provoked such an upheaval of artistic sentiment that time was killed by the extra-temporal and the extra-spatial. This new sentiment reigned supreme like an autonomous eternity.... Paul Cézanne lived in the reign of Ramses II. The scribe Héavad Randai lived, worked and died in Aix-en-Provence. Precise historical information thereby informed the clarity of vision essential to a work of art, since the value and purpose of a work of art cannot be judged through the angle of time. The self-definition and analysis of art refers only to itself, and in all other cases, those around it.³⁶

Here we are, humour and all, in the sphere of 'synthetic relationships' extolled by Kandinsky. Above all the *Blaue Reiter* supported a dialogue between different styles and

³⁵ Cited by Philippe Dagen, *Le peintre, le poète, le sauvage, les voies du primitivisme dans l'art français*, Champs-arts, 2010, p.300. In an article on Matisse in Matisse en 1907, Apollinaire cites Duccio, Giotto, Piero della Francesca, and the Siennese primitives.

³⁶ *Extrait(s) de l'histoire non publiée de l'art*, Introduction by Larionov, for a 1913 exhibition, « icônes originales et Loubki » dans Larionov, *Manifestes*, Allia, 1995, p.41.

different epochs, thumbing through continents and genres over the centuries. August Macke wrote an article entitled 'Masks' in the *Almanac*. They were, he said:

powerful as the forms of thunder.... What we hang on the wall as a painting is basically similar to the carved and painted pillars in an African hut. That African considers his idol the comprehensible form for an incomprehensible idea, the personification of an abstract concept. For us the painting is the comprehensible form for the obscure, incomprehensible conception of a diseased person, of an animal, of a plant, of the whole magic of nature, of the rhythmical.³⁷

Everyone visited ethnological museums : Marc, Macke, as well as Apollinaire, Picasso and Derain, all purchased tribal art. Apollinaire liked to hunt bargains among the dealers in flea markets. He stood up for the aesthetic and spiritual qualities of this kind of art and knew how deeply the so-called 'primitive' arts had influenced modern art during this epoch of global migration.³⁸ He did not hesitate to plead for a real history of this art, requiring aesthetic, anthropological, geographic, and archeological research necessary for a true appreciation of this 'profound decorative and impassioned art'³⁹ which he rated equally to the so-called primitives of Western art. He had a real acquaintance with the philosophical debates of the period, and made reference to the ideas of Gobineau 'who attributed to the children of Shem a preponderant role in the birth of artistic sentiment within the history of human progress'.⁴⁰ To Gobineau 'the Negro is the human being most energetically endowed with artistic emotion, linked to the indispensable condition that his intelligence penetrates its meaning and range.... The Negro possesses to the highest degree that sensual faculty without which art cannot exist, but his absence of intellectual aptitude renders him completely unfit for the culture of art, even for the appreciation of how the noble application of human intelligence can produce higher thoughts.'⁴¹ Apollinaire resisted this particularist idea imbedded in race. 'Every Frenchman who ever was, resists the

³⁷ ABR in *Primitivism...* p.377.

³⁸ He paid dearly for this, as did Picasso, around the time of the theft of Spanish statues from the Louvre. The scandal surrounding the plot to steal La Joconde, of which he was entirely innocent, nonetheless resulted in his spending a few days in prison, and in the indefinite postponement of what he dearly wanted, namely French naturalization.

³⁹ "Art nègre", *Paris-Journal*, 17 juillet 1914, Pléiade, 2, p.833.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem.*, p. 2.

⁴¹ Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, 1853. See Philippe Gumplowicz, « Musique et ethnicité » *Dictionnaire du racisme* (Dir. P.A.Taguieff), P.U.F., 2011.

‘*Gobineauvereine*’ ; Gobineau would have no idea how to comport himself today in a civilized country’.⁴² Gobineau’s contempt for African intelligence, his insistence on their sensuality as their contribution to civilization, revolted Apollinaire. On the contrary, he thought that the study of these works would yield proof of their originality in global art, in which there are no real divisions in time or space linking African and Oceanic primitivism, European primitivism, the avant-garde, popular art, children’s art, the art of the mad.

Here we return to Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter who on their arrival in Bavaria started to collect glass painting of pure and luminous colors ; they loved their black surrounds, to the point that they used the same lines in their works as in their frames. Even in their domestic life they wore peasant costumes, in marked contrast with Germany’s rapid industrialization.⁴³ The expressive distortion of popular prints, children’s drawings, icons, glass painting were all, they believed, the expression of a vibrant spirituality. Collecting such art is to participate in this phenomenon, traces of which we find in the photographs and paintings of their Bavarian life.⁴⁴

In this case, primitivism can be seen as what Kandinsky terms as both a ‘life idea’ and an ‘art idea’. Kandinsky hated false distinctions, the artificial differences, the gaps, between periods and different arts; he called them «Harmful separations».⁴⁵ Kandinsky was not as influenced in his personal art by the ethnographic museum in Berlin and tribal art, as was Franz Mark, who loved what he saw in Berlin and then in Paris:

I spent some very productive time in the Ethnographic museum.... I was finally caught up, astonished and shocked, by the carvings of the Cameroons people, carvings which can perhaps be surpassed only by the sublime works of the Incas. I find it so self-evident that we should find the rebirth of our artistic feeling in this cold dawn of artistic intelligence, rather than in cultures that have already gone through a thousand-year cycle like the Japanese or the Italian Renaissance. In this short winter I have already become a

⁴² « A propos de l’art des Noirs », *Sculptures nègres*, Paris, 1917. Republished in 1973, Hacker Art Books, New York, p.2.

⁴³ At the same time, many other avant-garde painters, from Delaunay to Meidner engaged in a polemic on the modern city, for and against.

⁴⁴ Gabriele Münter painting of Kandinsky and Emma Bossi at dinner (1912). We see their entire collection on the walls: Luboks, plates, glass paintings, ceramics and Russian wood carvings. Photos of Kandinsky at home : see powerpoint.

⁴⁵ Kandinsky in *Primitivism in XXth century art*, vol 2., p.375.

completely different person.... To call ourselves artists ... we must be brave and give up almost everything which until now was dear and indispensable for us good Central Europeans. Our ideals and ideas must wear a hairshirt. We must nourish them with locusts and wild honey, and not with history, if we are to issue forth from the exhaustions of our European bad taste. The goal [will] ... to be brought about by a healthy instinct for color, like that possessed by all primitive people. That from this we wish to make 'pictures' and not only colourful columns and straw huts and clay pots, is our advantage, our Europeanness. » 46

'Douanier Rousseau', who died in 1910, provided a bridge between popular and modern art, between the art of the 'French' and that of the 'Germans'. Everyone shared a passion for Rousseau's work, which his friend Apollinaire praised to the skies. To Rousseau he attributed the recovery in modern art of popular art.⁴⁷ Derain and Dufy joined in this renaissance of wood carving in their illustrations of Apollinaire's writings. Dufy, who felt close to the art of Durer, drew inspiration too from provincial nativity sculptures and from *Images d'Epinal*, for which he had a veritable passion.⁴⁸ As for Marc, he corresponded with Delaunay about a catalogue of Rousseau's work he wanted to publish in Germany.⁴⁹ I am happy to write a short article which will present to a German audience the way Rousseau 'sees' and his importance for all of us, in particular, those with a German point of view.⁵⁰ Delaunay cited Rousseau to prove the universality of art: 'My friend Rousseau in his time and place truly sang. His melody is now universally recognized in the great

⁴⁶ Marc to Macke, 14 janvier 11, in *Primitivism in XXth century art*, vol 2., p.375-6.

⁴⁷ G. Apollinaire, « Peintures populaires », *Paris-Journal*, 24 juillet 1914 (Caizergues-Décaudin 1991, p. 842). Apollinaire put GeorGIN and Rousseau on the same plane the next day (*ibid.*, p. 844-845).

⁴⁸ The outbreak of war in 1914 gave Dufy the occasion to deepen his work in creating images as part of military propaganda, enabling him to come closer to early nineteenth-century imagery.

⁴⁹ Marc thought about buying one of Rousseau's paintings, especially since Apollinaire had one to sell. These purchases, or desires to purchase, limited by finances, shows how these groups operated. Money problems were recurrent, among French and Germans alike, who passed on to anyone else the costs of exhibiting arts. March wrote to Walden about Delaunay: It is a pity that an artist so fine covers a man so gross – simply without education.⁴⁹

⁵⁰ Marc to Delaunay, end of November 1912, *Ecrits...op.cit.*, p.461. Marc refers to a photo: « Tableau de Mexique avec des animaux et qui est très typique pour Roussau. » (13 12 12, *op.cit.*p. 463). If these jungle scenes are full of color and exoticism, it is in part because both Apollinaire and Rousseau wanted to deepen the myth of the painter-voyager, on Mexican expeditions. The real expeditions were limited to Paris and the Jardin des Plantes. It would be fitting to think of this as a kind of homage to Marc and his love of horses and the Blue Rider, in the 1891 work of Rousseau 'The horse attacked by a tiger.' (Power point.)

newspapers of New York where his defenders champion his visionary genius. The true believers speak out amidst the laughter. »⁵¹

German art, French art, universal art. In the debate and the petition initiated in 1911 in Germany by Vinnen,⁵² who violently criticized the acquisition of foreign painting, and especially French painting, Marc spoke out in favor of artistic universalism with caustic irony.⁵³

It was six months before the appearance of the *Blaue Reiter*, a period infinitely long and terribly short. Fortified by his visit to Berlin where he had seen and appreciated ‘a real passion for true painting’ Delaunay found universalism sheltering in the ‘archaism’ of Rousseau. He regretted the tendency of Marc to theorize, in contrast to his French colleagues, a position Apollinaire adopted too: ‘I love everything which is stronger than all the theories about the poor.... We love each other through our vision of each other. In Berlin I feel a stranger only through daily language.’⁵⁴ Words change, ‘but the representations in your paintings are not incomprehensible’. After a brush with the cubists, Delaunay concluded: ‘We can see a simultaneity, a complementarity, a coming together and not divide: all tend towards a universal comprehension beyond Europe, extending from man to the Universe’.⁵⁵

From the blue rider to War, the grey rider

-Du « Cavalier bleu » au « Cavalier gris », la guerre.

In 1913 and 1914, in numerous fruitful encounters and international exchanges, many avant-garde artists conjured up an imaginary war that they hoped would lead humanity to

⁵¹ Delaunay to Marc, 12 1 13, *Ecrits...op.cit.*, p.477.

⁵² La Controverse de Brême : *Une protestation des artistes allemands* with an introduction by Karl Vinnen « Quousque tandem » Marc, *Ecrits...op.cit.* p.118-137.

⁵³ « Les artistes allemands (...) prétendent avoir pondu des œufs, des beaux, des grands, des œufs allemands, pas des œufs de coucou comme ces maudits Français. (...) face à cette bêtise (...) notre aspiration signifie au rappel de la raison originelle de l’expérience, de la création artistique ; nous nous sentons en cela proches de certains de nos collègues français et nous leur tendons franchement la main. Notre amour des primitifs (...) c’est le rêve profond de rétablir les liens entre l’homme et l’art. » Marc to Vinnen, printemps/été 1911, *op.cit.* p.139, 141.

⁵⁴ Delaunay, whose French had limitations, used here a double negative which either led him to say the opposite of what he had intended, or which represents perhaps the revenge of the unconscious ?

⁵⁵ Delaunay to Marc, 12 1 13, *op.cit.*, p.478.

a purer and more modern world. Here in their work was a frightful apocalypse, terrifyingly prescient.

It is striking to see how frequently Macke, Marc, and Kandinsky use a military vocabulary, a language of violent confrontation, with a certain zest for images and metaphors in their work of violence, combat, triumph and defeat.⁵⁶ And yet at the same time they praise solitude, asceticism, contemplation, spirituality, and the expression in art of internal desire « désir intérieur ».⁵⁷

On receiving the first copies of the *Blaue Reiter*, Marc expressed his joy : ‘The impression this book offers is powerful.... I am certain of one thing: the tranquility of the countryside and the new forces who secretly admire us will be enchanted by this book and will see the world from its point of view. How much I would like this book and the future ones to become a veritable *Sachsenspiegel* [medieval code of law] for our tortured world.... The people unaware of futurists (futulistes) will have to get to know the German mind. Forgive me if I invent things : but I am trying to tease out those thoughts which are dancing behind a black curtain.’⁵⁸ Marc, ‘a German mind’, chose here to cite a primitive German customary code of 1220, and consciously or not, he spoke of the tortured world of art as a metaphor, perhaps for the tortured world at large.

It was not at all as a metaphor that a very real war came to Europe via the Balkans. In chronological order, war caught up first with the futurists, whose brutal ‘Initial manifesto’ against the corrupt art of the time appeared in Paris in 1909.

Museums, cemeteries! ... All are truly the same, in their sinister contact with bodies of which they know nothing. ... In truth visiting museums, libraries, and academies) these cemeteries of wasted effort, these calvaries of crucified dreams, these lists of broken impulses ! ... are for artists like the extended parental control of the young, blind to their talent and to their ambition.... Look what is coming : happy bonfires of carbonized fingers !... There they are !... Bring fire to the libraries ! Reroute the canals to inundate the caverns of the museums !...

⁵⁶ There are numerous examples in *Du Spirituel* and in the Almanac.

⁵⁷ Catalogue of the first exhibition of the *Blaue Reiter* at the Thannhauser Gallery in Munich.

⁵⁸ Marc to Kandinsky, 11 5 1912, *op.cit.*, p.384.

A few lines above this passage, Marinetti made this announcement: ‘We want to glorify war – the only hygiene for the world – and glorify militarism, patriotism, the destructive impulse of the anarchists...’⁵⁹

The futurists offered to other members of the avant-garde more than was asked of them, even if the more or less violent squabbles between the cubists and the futurists had been simmering for quite a while, simmering down to hybridization and mutual recognition.⁶⁰ The futurists’ response to the Balkan wars showed how militant they had become. In a radio spiral calligramme, Marinetti depicts an antenna announcing the battle of Adrianopolis, *Zang Tumb Tuum*.⁶¹ Luigi Russolo, inventor of ‘brutisme’ cites one of Marinetti’s letters in which the master had written :

... patatraack splash manes winnying iiiiii tohu-bohu ringing three Bulgar battalions on the march croak croak (slow tempo in double time) Choumi Maritza or Karvavena officers’ cries clattering copper plates pam here (fast) pac there Boum-pam-pam-pam-pam here and there and further out and above very high attention the name of God on his head chaak marvelous! flammes flammes flammes flammes flammes flammes flammes in the ramp of the forts there...⁶²

Colors and sounds jumbled together, noise, avant-garde music, some Schonberg, like ABR. Two works of Kandinsky and Marc bring together their thinking, their proximity, and perhaps their disenchantment with futurism: « Improvisation 30 » by Kandinsky in 1913, one of the last, entitled ‘Canons’⁶³ and *Fighting Forms* by Frantz Marc in 1914, both in the Munich Museum. «(2 power points)

Kandinsky’s ‘improvisations’ emerged unconsciously and suddenly, in contrast to his ‘Impressions’ in which the memory of ‘direct impressions’ remain visible and to his other compositions which emerge slowly out of earlier studies. Kandinsky himself offered a reading of one of his works in a letter to the Chicago collector Jerome Eddy : ‘ The viewer sees or is under the impression of the forms and the colors of the painting.... I paint almost

⁵⁹ « Manifeste initial du futurisme » *le Figaro*, Paris, le 20 février 1909.

⁶⁰ *Le futurisme à Paris, une avant-garde explosive*, (dir. Didier Ottinger) catalogue de l’exposition du Centre Pompidou, Cinq continents, 2008.

⁶¹ Edizioni Futuriste, 1914, in *Les mots en liberté futuristes*, Jacques Damase éditeur, 1986, p.13.

⁶² Lettre of Marinetti cited by Luigi Russolo, *L’art des bruits, manifeste futuriste 1913, op.cit.* p.21.

⁶³ Munich, Staatsgalerie.

subconsciously in a state of high internal tension'. Kandinsky refused to see figuration as 'objective' and insisted on two 'objective' elements: the cross is one and cannons are another; they are in the right corner of the work. He insisted three times on cannons, and each time denied their representative character:

'The title 'Cannons', which I chose for my own reasons, is not relevant to the content of the painting.... More or less objective traces – cannons for example – produce in the viewer a secondary impression beyond that which the objects trigger among those able to feel it. The presence of the cannons in the painting probably can be explained by the frequent conversations we had about war during that year. But it was not my intention to provide a representation of war; that would have required different pictorial strategies; besides, that kind of task does not interest me, at least at this time.'⁶⁴

If Sigmund Freud, the master of repression and denial, had known about this letter, he would have appreciated it.⁶⁵

Marc's 'Combats of form' have been interpreted frequently as a premonition of war, and there are reasons to support this view. The dominant colors, red, blue, black, yellow, take on brutal forms. They are the colors of the theosophists, forms of a cruel future to come. The blue, that of the rider, is always related to « devotion...(which) may express a strong realization of the universal brotherhood of humanity »⁶⁶ But if it is mixed with black, does not it lose its universality? Instead, it turns into the Apocalypse, that is to say, the war to come. And yet, Marc remained optimistic, prolonging their productive period, universalist, hope to the future, resting on a temporality, not cyclical but vibrantly facing the future, even when they wondered if they would be up to the task:

What better way to confront the beatitude than by renouncing everything and refusing to escape? To put everything behind us, between yesterday and today?... The world is giving birth to a new epoch; there is but one question: is now the time to separate from

⁶⁴ Kandinsky to Jerome Eddy, 1913, cited in Eddy, *Cubists and Post-Impressionism*, McClurg, Chicago, 1914, traduite dans Liliane Brion-Guerry, (dir.), *L'année 1913*, Klincksieck, 1973, p.148-9.

⁶⁵ See Freud's text on death, devant la loge Juive de Vienne. (Prefiguration of *Thoughts for the time on war and death?*...)

⁶⁶ Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, *Thought Forms*, 1901, published in German in 1908, Kandinsky and Marc had read it. Cf John F. Moffit, « Franz Marc's color theory » in *The Spiritual Image in modern Art*, (ed. K. Regier), A quest Book, 1987.

the old world? Are we ripe for a *Vita Nuova*?... It is in light of this question that we must measure the form and value of the book'.⁶⁷

But Kandinsky, after having edited a preface for the second edition of the *Blaue Reiter*, drew back in 1914 from the projected second volume Marc had planned. His reasons were partly personal; he had to devote 'all his energy' to his own work, and above all, he believed that the world was not yet ready, that 'there wasn't enough art'.⁶⁸

And yet at the same time Kandinsky thought about realizing the project he had developed with his utopian Serbian friend Dimitrije Mitrinovic to produce another almanac entitled *Towards a future humanity across Aryan Europe (Vers une humanité du futur à travers l'Europe aryenne)*, which would be composed of articles on politics, philosophy, religion, art and culture. 'He wants you to write on German painting.... It is high time to erase frontiers, to circulate living blood throughout the body of humanity. It will be one body and one pulse: the resurrection of paradise lost. Think of the art humanity is going to create!⁶⁹ This publication of Kandinsky and Mitrinovic appeared in 1915.

But in August 1914 Kandinsky travelled to Switzerland to escape internment as an enemy alien. The war had begun, and so had another time, another world. Marc wrote from Munich to Alfred Kubin, one of Kandinsky's favorite painters and someone with whom he shared many spiritual beliefs :⁷⁰ 'A last greeting from here, where everything seems so peaceful, where there is, so to speak, a deadly silence; we must keep quiet and speak of world history. I leave Thursday for the army.'⁷¹ Kokoshka thanked Marc for the honor he has done for Germany by joining the color. 'When the emissaries of our young German art will be heard, the idea that we are making the world will flourish in a spontaneous manner'.⁷²

⁶⁷ Marc in February 1914.

⁶⁸ Later, in the 1930s, after the Russian revolution and the Bauhaus, Kandinsky looked back on the abandonment of the second number because of the war, and on the decision to focus on the relation between the arts and the sciences. His correspondence with Marc does not refer to this; their rupture was complete five months after the declaration of war.

⁶⁹ Kandinsky to Marc, 10 3 1914, *Ecrits, ...op.cit.*, p.399.

⁷⁰ *Du Spirituel, op.cit.*, p.62

⁷¹ Marc to Kubin, 3 8 14, *Ecrits, ... op.cit.*, p. 425.

⁷² Oskar Kokoshka to Marc, 3 9 14, *Ecrits, ...op.cit.*, p.427.

At the very same moment and with the very same words used by Marc, Apollinaire also spoke about a 'new epoch' in his poem *La Petite auto*. It was a time when the extraordinary explodes the everyday, turning it all into the Great War ... and into anti-German hatred. The poem starts with a children's round or a popular song, changed by the passage of a single month :

31 August 1914

... We say farewell to an epoch

Of furious giants descending on Europe...

The dead trembled with fear in their somber quarters

I sensed in myself new life, full of dexterity

Ready to build and to breathe life into a new universe...

... We arrived in Paris

At the moment the mobilization order was posted

We understood my comrade and I

That our little car had brought us into a new age

And even though we were too sturdy men

We had, however, just been born."⁷³

This poem was configured as a calligramme, turning into a shape the act it describes. The broken form touches the edge, which is the front to be ; writing turns into design, the art critic turns into a volunteer soldier who turns into a plastic artist, using drawing in and through words just like the futurists or cubists he knew, who used ads and newspaper columns in their work.⁷⁴

The techniques and technologies which had fascinated artists for years crystalized at this very moment, exploding in acts of war and bringing the war into their lives. *La Petite auto* became a metaphor for the course taken by modernity, a pathway both desired and at times

⁷³ Guillaume Apollinaire, « La petite auto », *Œuvres poétiques, Calligrammes, Poèmes de la paix et de la guerre, (1913-1916)*, La Pléiade, Gallimard, pp. 207-208. (Poem probably written in Nîmes at the beginning of 1915, first appeared in 1918.)

⁷⁴ Claude Debon et Peter Read, *Les dessins de Guillaume Apollinaire*, Buchet-Chastel, 2008, and *L'un pour l'autre, les écrivains dessinent*, catalogue de l'exposition de l'IMEC, Buchet Chastel, les cahiers dessinés, 2008.

worrying. The reference to the steel horseshoes so necessary for the mobilization of horses echoes the sounds of earlier, nineteenth-century, mobilization.⁷⁵ Apollinaire expresses presciently what Walter Benjamin would evoke time and again in the 1920s and 1930s, that is, the insignificance of the human being in the radical experience of war, of that war: ‘A generation which had gone to school in a horse-drawn cart suddenly found themselves in a landscape where nothing is familiar, except the clouds, and where, in a field of force traversed by tension and destructive explosions, all that remains is the small and fragile human body’.⁷⁶

The two editors of the *Blaue Reiter* exchanged only two letters. Marc died knowing both the certitude of friendship and the defeat of friendship. He wrote from the Vosges front, sick, broken: ‘I have the impression that this war is like a great river flowing between us, separating us. Each of us has trouble seeing the other on the other bank.... In these circumstances everyone is brought back with force to his nation, whether he wants to or not. I fight within against this; the good European spirit is closer to my heart than is Germanness. I know nothing of what you are feeling now. As for me, I see in this war [je vis dans cette guerre]; I even see in it the horrible but salutary passage leading to our aim ; it will not detain humanity ; rather it will *purify* Europe, render it ‘ready’... Pity the poor, brave men who are fighting in both camps! For an aim they do not know and which nonetheless exists. Europe is enduring in its flesh what France endured during the Revolution. Let us hope a new Emperor Napoleon will save us! I often fear that Europe will once more miss its chance! If only this great blood sacrifice will not have been premature. If only the political game, that great stupid spider, would no longer weave its web: it is time to tear it up. Speak to me of this great river which flows between us; what do you make of it?’⁷⁷

Kandinsky, barred from returning to Russia, did not pay a high price at the beginning of the war. Paul Klee, a friend of both Kandinsky and Marc, hinted to Marc about the great

⁷⁵ Echoes abound too with reference to the *Cavalier bleu* and the fastastic experiments of that painter of horses par excellence, Franz Marc.

⁷⁶ Walter Benjamin, “Le conteur”, 1936, *Oeuvres, III*, Folio Galimard, 2000, p.116.

⁷⁷ Marc to Kandinsky, 24 10 1914, *op.cit.*, p. 405-6.

gap between them, the front, death: 'At this very moment, we are deeply affected by the collapse of our hopes, while you, on the contrary, you are trying to compensate for this disaster by even more audacious hopes. And like few Germans do we continue to exist despite all? We have lost August Macke.... I met Kandinsky, and he does not feel the loss of the German world'.⁷⁸

And yet Kandinsky also saw what would happen. 'Until the very last moment, I could not believe that your expectations could be realized. I thought that there would be another kind of cleansing which would permit us to construct the future. The cost of this clean sweep is terrible.... I still believe in the future, in a time for the spirit which will bring us all together again'.⁷⁹

Apollinaire chose the French patriotic camp. In his correspondence he presents a veritable honor roll of men mobilized, wounded, prisoners. Enlisting for France is the only possible value which mattered for artists, French or foreigners. He insisted on the volunteer spirit, like his own, of the 'Italian futurist Ugo Giannattasio and the Polish-Austrian Kisling in French regiments'⁸⁰ and cites the cases of the Swiss Cendrars and the Italian Canudo in the Foreign Legion.⁸¹ Both appeared in Chagall's painting. De Walden had dropped out of sight.

Robert Delaunay stayed in Spain and did not return to France to enlist. If Apollinaire's relations with Delaunay were strained since the beginning of 1914, they grew more strained still, since Apollinaire violently rejected this "'simultanist" and deserter, this sad man who left France in order to avoid becoming a soldier'.⁸² Only three months before,

⁷⁸ Paul Klee to Marc, 17 octobre 1914, *op.cit.*, p.429-30..

⁷⁹ Kandinsky to Marc, 8 11 1914, *op.cit.*, p.407-8.

⁸⁰ "L'art vivant et la guerre", *Le Petit Messager des arts et des industries d'art*, 1er mars 1915, Pléiade, Prose, 2, pp.857-8, p.858.

⁸¹ « Appel aux étrangers vivant en France » : « L'heure est grave. Tout homme digne de ce nom doit aujourd'hui agir, doit se défendre de rester inactif au milieu de la plus formidable déflagration que l'histoire ait jamais pu enregistrer. Toute hésitation serait un crime. Point de paroles donc des actes. Des étrangers amis de la France qui ont appris à l'aimer et à la chérir comme une seconde patrie, sentent le besoin impérieux de lui offrir leur bras. (...) » Cendrars, Sarius, Lipchitz, Canudo et alia, « Appel à tous les étrangers. » Publié dans *Le Figaro* et *Le Gaulois*, 2 août 1914.

⁸² « On dit... On dit... Au pays de Vélasquez » *La vie parisienne*, 13 mars 1915, Pléiade, Prose, 2, pp. 1315.

Apollinaire had written eulogies about Delaunay.⁸³ Apollinaire would continue his condemnation of Delaunay throughout the war. ‘The prismatic painting of Delaunay, which he calls “simultanéisme » is derivative impressionism, the work of a vulgar artist’.⁸⁴ Apollinaire stuck to the term “Simultanéiste« in order to stigmatise a triple desertion : of nation, morality, and talent, precisely the opposite of what he had said before the war, when he had placed Delaunay’s name below his own, and not far from that of Kandinsky, in his list « ROSE » in his *l’Antitradition futuriste*. It was in this ‘Manifesto-synthesis’ that Apollinaire slipped in the names of some women writers or artists, including Valentine de Saint-Point, futurist, feminist, but note the name of Gabriele Münter. The feminist turn was far in the future. (Power point)

Apollinaire, in a series of catalogue prefaces or articles written in the first year of the war, worked hard to reinterpret cubism, by then termed ‘Kubism’. To save modern art and cubism, it was necessary to separate them both from all German art, and to protect Latin art from the intrinsically backsliding German from of art. It was to ‘aestheticians and German painters’⁸⁵ that we owe academicism, false classicism

It is to the honor of the French school to have always reacted again this, and we salute the audacity of French painters throughout the whole of the nineteenth century in their efforts to retrieve the authentic traditions of art... It has been a long time since anyone in Germany counted in the world of art. And there, war has not been a stimulant. We cannot pass in silence before the evidence of the artistic impotence of contemporary Germany. Who cites the artistic activity of Attila’s hordes ?...⁸⁶ Some writers have succeeded in making the French public believe that the words ‘modern’ and ‘German’ are synonymous. Even with the ‘union sacré’ and even given the fact that most modern artists are of military ages and have been mobilized, still some people hurl insults on them as ‘Boches’... The Germans have not shone in modern art.... There is

⁸³ « Simultanisme-librettisme », *Les soirées de Paris*, 15 juin 1914. Pléiade, 2, pp.974-979.

⁸⁴ LAM, 16 décembre 1915, p.427.

⁸⁵ ‘We should not that today there is no artistic school in Germany ; there is only an industrial pot-pourris and all kinds of styles and archaisms, which nonetheless are worthy of study’ . *Il faut noter qu’aujourd’hui il n’existe pas en Allemagne d’école artistique, mais seulement un industriel pot-pourri de tous les styles et tous les archaïsmes dont il y aurait cependant profit à étudier le développement.*

⁸⁶ *Album-catalogue de l’exposition Derain*, 15-21 Octobre 1916 Galerie Paul Guillaume.

not a single German name worthy of mention in the cubist movement... In effect cubism and its brother futurism are essentially products of Latin civilization.⁸⁷

Herewith some ironies of the war. In 1914, the soldier Carl Einstein, friend of Picasso and Kahnweiler, author of the important book *Negerplastik*, served in Alsace in the German army,⁸⁸ and Emil Nolde wrote of 'Cossack' terrors that arise from the presence of Russian peasants who resembled the inhabitants of Germany's colonies in the South Pacific.

Apollinaire, who continued to publish on primitive and popular art, kept strictly to his anti-German line.⁸⁹ For instance, he saw in iron nail memorials a superstitious and barbarous practice of degenerate people, fetishistic practices 'in imitation of negro art',⁹⁰ devoid of 'the religious passion which is the source of the purist art'.⁹¹ He was hardly the only person to mock the German and Austrian practice⁹² of using wood sculptures on which nails were hammered in return for a contribution to the war effort.⁹³ And yet he was a collector sufficiently well-informed about primitive art to have avoided such vulgar propaganda; to compare German barbarism with African barbarism was to fall into a trap. He knew he was dealing with totemic forms. To mock the totems of the other denoted a superior sophistication on the part of the French who have themselves produced art of this type. As soon as war propaganda takes over, the aesthetic intelligence of the avant-garde falls apart, and they lose sight of life, form, color.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ *Paris-Midi*, 9 décembre 1916. Pléiade, T.2, pp.861-862.

⁸⁸ See *Primitivism in XXth century Art, Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, (ed. William Rubin), The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2 volumes, 1984.

⁸⁹ Apollinaire, « A propos de l'art des Noirs », avertissement de *Sculptures nègres*, Paris, 1917. Republié 1973, Hacker Art Books, New-York. Repris avec quelques variantes dans "Mélanophilie ou mélanomanie" *La vie anecdotique*, 1er avril 1917, La Pléiade, T.3, pp. 252-255.

⁹⁰ "Le sculpteur du fétiche Hindenburg" *Mercure de France*, 16 octobre 1917, Pléiade, T.2, p. 1345. Power point.

⁹¹ "Sculptures d'Afrique et d'Océanie", *Les Arts à Paris*, 15 juillet 1918, La Pléiade, T 2, pp.1415.

⁹² P. Saintives, "Le clou de la guerre" *Mercure de France*, 16 novembre 1916, pp. 639-647.

⁹³ Or in work for war widows and orphans. These iron nail memorials and statues were a form enabling civilians to say we are with the soldiers, we are in the war, that literally we arm the nation in iron. Its origins was in forms of popular art beloved in France and Germany before the war.

⁹⁴ Aesthetic intelligence was in part preserved in Zurich's Dada movement, in particular in the masks of Janco, who mixed playfulness, a fascination for the primitive and the home front, as he said well to Hugo Ball: 'What fascinates us in these masks, is not that they present human characters, but characters larger than nature and above the passions. The Horror of this epoch and the paralysing background of the war, thereby becomes clear'. « Ce qui nous fascinait avec tous ces masques, c'est qu'ils ne présentaient pas des caractères humains mais des caractères plus grands que nature et au-delà des passions. L'Horreur de cette époque l'arrière-fond paralysant y deviennent

France Marc, shocked by the death of his friend August Macke – ‘a stupid end after the debuts of such wonderful cavaliers’ – still saw himself in the same way, but now as ‘a grey cavalier’.⁹⁵ Here we return to the distinction Ritter/Rider, Cavalryman/ Cavalier, Modern horseman/medieval horseman. Did Marc think that the combat he began in *The Spiritual in modern art* had now donned a grey uniform? ‘There is in green a possibility of life totally lacking in grey’.... Grey is immobility without hope. It seems that despair grows as colors darken. Concealment becomes menacing. Just by lightening grey, it is possible to draw out its hidden qualities, to breathe life into it.⁹⁶

Consider the paradox of the two sides meeting, the two sides searching for the music of colors, the two sides coming together at the front : Fernand Léger in the strange horror of Verdun – where Marc was killed – wrapped in a ‘camouflaged vision and omnipresent sounds: The war was grey and camouflages. Light, color, sound were forbidden on penalty of death. A life of the blind where everything that the eye could see had to be hidden and had to go underground. No one saw the war, hidden, secretive, lurking, color of the earth, the useless eye saw nothing. Everyone ‘heard’ the war. It was an enormous symphony beyond every musician or composer. It was ‘Four years without color’.⁹⁷

Conclusion

From the *Blaue Reiter* to the grey cavalryman : Marc’s transformation captured the failure of a vision, that of international art as a means to explore the vibrant world of science and cultural forms in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century. Was its failure inevitable? Perhaps, since the social position of these artists was too fragile and too marginal to survive the upsurge of national sentiment in the war crisis of 1914. Apollinaire descended rapidly from international solidarity to nationalist clichés, and yet should we be surprised? Not quite French, only military service would bring him the naturalization he so dearly desired. He paid for it with his life, as a victim of the Spanish

visible »⁹⁴ For Janco, Tzara, Ball, the masks quiver with the war, from which, living in Switzerland, they were spared. Janco and Tzara were Romanians; Ball, a German.

⁹⁵ Marc to Paul Klee, 31 décembre 1914, *op.cit.*, p. 437.

⁹⁶ *Op.cit.*, pp.121, 130.

⁹⁷ Fernand Léger cité dans *Fernand Léger, Rétrospective*, Catalogue Fondation Maeght, 1988, p.52.

flu in 1918, alongside hundreds of thousands of other soldiers on both sides of the line. Kandinsky too was blown about by the winds of war, but he survived. Marc, Macke, and nine million others did not. Artistic solidarities were real enough, but so were national bonds, and when push came to shove, the nation came first. When the first shots were fired in 1914, they blew to pieces a dream of trans-national creativity and transformation. The world has been poorer ever since.