Anarchism and the Advent of Paris Dada sheds new light on Paris Dada’s role in developing the anarchist and individualist philosophies that helped shape the cultural dialogue in France following the First World War. Drawing on such surviving documentation as correspondence, criticism, periodicals, pamphlets, and manifestoes, this book argues that, contrary to received wisdom, Dada was driven by a vision of social change through radical cultural upheaval.

The first book-length study to interrogate the Paris Dadaists’ complex and often contested position in the postwar groundswell of anarcho-individualism, Anarchism and the Advent of Paris Dada offers an unprecedented analysis of Paris Dada literature and art in relation to anarchism, and also revives a variety of little known anarcho-individualist texts and periodicals. In doing so, it reveals the general ideological diversity of the postwar French avant-garde and identifies its anarchist concerns; in addition, it challenges the accepted paradigm that postwar cultural politics were monolithically nationalist. By positioning Paris Dada in its anarchist context, this volume addresses a long-ignored lacuna in Dada scholarship and, more broadly, takes its place alongside the numerous studies that over the past two decades have problematized the politics of modern art, literature, and culture.

Theresa Papanikolas is Curator of European and American Art at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, USA.
Anarchism and the Advent of Paris Dada
Art and Criticism, 1914–1924

Theresa Papanikolas
Contents

List of illustrations vii
Acknowledgments ix

Introduction 1

1 Anarchism and anarcho-individualism in postwar France 27

2 Constructing a postwar humanity: Creative individualism and social responsibility 57

3 Deconstructing culture: Revolutionary anarchism in Zurich and Paris Dada 83

4 Paris Dada and culture: Critical responses 123

5 Towards a new construction: Breton’s break with Dada, and the formation of Surrealism 143

Conclusion 165

Bibliography 169
Index 191
List of illustrations


Acknowledgments

It is hard to believe that this book originated over a long-ago, caffeine-driven lunch with Patricia Leighten. At the time, I was a doctoral candidate at the University of Delaware, and Pat was my favorite professor. As usual, we were engaged in heated discussion over how something so painfully obvious to us—that Paris Dada was anarchist—had received so little scholarly attention. Several refills later, I had a dissertation topic, Pat had a new charge, and the gap in Dada studies had the (distant) promise of a resolution. So, it is to my former adviser and now dear friend Pat that I extend my first and most heartfelt mahalo (as we say in Hawaii). Not only did she encourage me to undertake this study, but she patiently guided my research and motivated my writing. Today, Pat continues to be my cherished mentor, my most steadfast supporter—and a real inspiration. For that and for all of the other wonderful things she does, I cannot thank her enough.

Special thanks also go to my colleagues. Jodi Hauptman, Linda Dalrymple Henderson, and William Innes Homer offered valuable feedback as my dissertation committee, Timothy Benson and William Camfield shared their vast knowledge of Dada as I wrote the book, and Mark Antliff stepped in with much-needed direction at a critical moment once the project neared completion. At the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Kevin Salatino generously gave me the time and space to finish writing, Claudia Einecke and Edith Wachtel heroically undertook a particularly difficult German translation, and Stephanie Barron, Sara Cochran, and Leslie Jones collegially re-energized my zeal for all things Dada. At the Honolulu Academy of Arts Stephen Little accommodated me with genuine enthusiasm as the book went into production.

I am very grateful to Mme. Aube Ellèouët, Mme. Cécile Eluard Boaretto, Mme. Olga Picabia, and M. Christophe Tzara, who granted me permission to consult restricted archives at the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet in Paris; M. François Chapon and his staff aided my study there. My research abroad was partially funded by two consecutive European Travel Fellowships
from the University of Delaware Department of Art History, as well as a
Summer Research Travel Fellowship from the Department of Art and Art
History at Rice University.

At Ashgate Publishing, I would like to thank publisher Erika Gaffney,
editor Meredith Norwich, desk editor Emily Ruskell, copy-editor Huw Jones,
Nicole Norman in the marketing department, Tom Norton for compiling
the Index and the anonymous reader. Cécile Brunner at Kunstmuseum
Basel, Marta Fodor at Art Resource Ltd., Virginia Mokslaveskas of the Getty
Research Institute, Graham Sheriff of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript
Library at Yale University, and Pauline Sugino of the Honolulu Academy of
Arts were a big help in tracking down images, while Maggie Fleming of the
Artists Rights Society and Erik de Bourbon of the Hans Richter Estate aided
me in clearing copyrights.

My parents Michael and Barbara Papanikolas, my late grandparents Arthur
and Arlene Burt, my sister Amelia Hannon, my brother Matt Papanikolas,
my sister-in-law Katherine Veneman, my beloved Sasha, and my faithful
companions Oscar, Nacho, Tam, Maggie, and Jake were always there—
particularly when I needed them the most. And, finally, Mark Sincell has
patiently weathered this project at each of its protracted phases, remaining,
in the true spirit of Dada, refreshingly subversive, appreciative of the absurd,
and uncannily able to keep me laughing.
Introduction

On March 27, 1920, as the Dada Manifestation at Maison de l’Œuvre in Paris neared its riotous conclusion, Francis Picabia unveiled Still Lifes: Portrait of Cézanne, Portrait of Rembrandt, Portrait of Renoir (see Figure 0.1), a lewdly contorted toy monkey attached to a piece of cardboard and surrounded by crude inscriptions proclaiming it a “portrait” of not one but three guiding lights of artistic tradition (the work’s unconventional media, iconoclastic subject, and willful anti-estheticism notwithstanding). That same month, in the March 1920 issue of the Dada review 391, Picabia published La Sainte-Vierge (see Figure 0.2), a drawing composed of a vigorously splashed ink blot, whose uncanny resemblance to a drop of blood implied that the “Blessed Virgin” was anything but, and in doing so called into question the ideological basis of Christian theology. Although historians of Paris Dada have always readily commented on the “anarchic” nature of such anti-art interventions, they have remained, with very few exceptions, silent about the real anarchist underpinnings of these direct assaults on institutional authority—whether artistic (Still Lifes), religious (La Sainte-Vierge), or otherwise—and until very recently have routinely dismissed Paris Dada as an apolitical moment in the prehistory of Surrealism. This paradoxical assumption that Paris Dada’s “anarchy” was apolitical originates in the notion that anarchism diminished during the First World War when Marxism gained increasing hegemony on the left, and it has become axiomatic in formalist interpretations that analyze Dada “style” in opposition to Cubism, place it in a continuum with Surrealism and ignore all three movements’ historical contexts and political goals. It has also dominated contextual approaches, which similarly fail to identify Paris Dada’s anarchist basis.

In the pages that follow, I re-examine the question of Paris Dada and anarchism. Tracing the survival and transformation of anarchism in France following the First World War, I reveal that Paris Dada responded to new directions in anarchism by developing a politicized vision of societal transformation through radical cultural—rather than insurrectionary—
upheaval, and by becoming a catalyst for debates over its own revolutionary interpretation of anarcho-individualism. To introduce my argument, I will provide a brief overview of Dada in Zurich and in Paris, and summarize the distinct philosophical and political manifestations of anarchism; in addition, I will outline how Paris Dada came to be considered apolitical by reviewing the shifting meanings of the word “anarchism” in Dada scholarship.
Dada originated in February 1916 when a group of artists and writers—among them the Rumanians Tristan Tzara and Marcel Janco, the Germans Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Richard Huelsenbeck, and Hans Richter, the Alsatian Jean (Hans) Arp, and the Swiss Sophie Tauber-Arp—exiled in Zurich to escape the First World War and protest mandatory conscription, joined forces to launch the nightclub/gallery, the Cabaret Voltaire. The Cabaret was an open stage for all performers seeking a forum for their art, and each evening, spectators from all over Europe attended to listen to recitations of Tzara’s multilingual simultaneous poetry and Ball’s Africansque verse, to witness Ball’s and Hennings’s performances of German Expressionist plays, to hear Hennings sing, to experience the transformative power of Janco’s masks, and, finally, to listen to Huelsenbeck accompany the entire cacophony on his bass drum. The Dadaists purposefully cultivated a chaotic atmosphere at the Cabaret Voltaire, inviting irony and rejecting all logic in order to attack the power structures responsible for the war and abolish their “rational” cultural codes.

Ball described Dada’s internationalism when he wrote that the Cabaret Voltaire had “as its sole purpose to draw attention, across the barriers of war and nationalities, to the few independent spirits who live for other ideals.” Arp suggested that these “independent spirits” had constructive political goals, for they undertook to replace the cultural systems they destroyed with a new “order” that would cure society’s ills:

We searched for an elementary art that would … save mankind from the furious folly of these times. We aspired to a new order that might restore the balance between heaven and hell. This art rapidly became an object of general reprobation. It is not surprising that the “bandits” were unable to understand us. Their puerile mania for authoritarianism leads them to use art itself as a means to stultify mankind.

In his “Dada Manifesto 1918,” Tzara even more stridently articulated the Dadaist condemnation of nationalist power structures, expressing despair at the absorption of individuality into a corrupt and warmongering status quo, and angrily calling for revolution:

Let each man proclaim: there is a great, negative work of destruction to be accomplished. We must sweep and clean. Affirm the cleanliness of the individual after the state of madness, aggressive complete madness of a world abandoned to the heads of bandits, who rend one another and destroy the centuries.

Early in 1919, only a month after its publication in the Zurich Dada review Dada 3, the manifesto made its way to Paris and into the hands of André Breton, Louis Aragon, and Philippe Soupault, young poets and editors of the review Littérature (1919–23) who were as appalled as Tzara was at society’s “madness” and inspired by his revolutionary polemic. These writers, involuntarily mobilized during the war and faced with strict censorship since
the armistice, were only dimly aware of Zurich Dada’s artistic and social critique, but they had none the less been attempting since their discharge to absorb, assimilate, and ultimately transcend the poetic legacy of their Symbolist and Neosymbolist forerunners: Stéphane Mallarmé, Arthur Rimbaud, and Guillaume Apollinaire. Tzara’s manifesto exemplified, for them, the use of literature to attack the fabric of society; later that year, when Tzara himself arrived in Paris, these poets aligned themselves with Dadaism, and Paris Dada officially began.

Breton, Aragon, Soupault, and Tzara, together with Picabia and the writers Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes and Paul Éluard, formed the core of the Dada movement in Paris. Through their poetry and prose, art, and notorious rebellious gestures, these writers and artists sought to deconstruct the conformist mentality that celebrated war and upheld bellicose nationalism, and they espoused complete individualism—artistic and otherwise. “Free-thinking in religion has no resemblance to a church. DADA is artistic free-thinking,” wrote Breton, and he and his fellow Dadaists cultivated “free-thinking” in raucous performances that invariably erupted into violence, simulating the revolutionary spontaneity and pursuit of complete individual freedom theorized by such anarchists as Michael Bakunin.

In order to understand the link between Dadaist “artistic freedom” and anarchist anti-statism, an understanding of anarchism’s many facets is necessary. In contrast to socialism and communism—both of which preserved the state even as they granted the labor base varying degrees of governmental control—anarchism was the only left-wing philosophy to call for the elimination of all statist structures in favor of the complete sovereignty of the individual. Contained in this broad definition, however, are several diverse—and often conflicting—ideological categories. These include federalism, anarcho-syndicalism, and anarcho-communism, as well as terrorism, illegalism, and anarcho-individualism.

Federalism was theorized in the mid-nineteenth century by the ardent populist and unconditional supporter of revolutions Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Like his socialist contemporary Karl Marx, and like his democratic forerunner Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Proudhon developed a political philosophy based on abolishing the inequities associated with monarchies and guaranteeing equality for all citizens. In contrast to his socialist and democratic counterparts, however, Proudhon believed that total individual autonomy could only result from the wholesale elimination of the state; in its place, he proposed “a form of government” based on “anarchy” in which statist structures would give way to small, autonomous federations, and voluntary, mutual agreements would replace legislative systems.

Although Proudhon assumed that such a mutualist society would be the direct result of a revolutionary “force against which no power, divine or human, can prevail,” the formation of a real revolutionary theory of anarchism was
left to his younger contemporary, Michael Bakunin. Bakunin believed that “the passion to destroy [was] a creative passion,” and he was convinced that each individual possessed the instinct and the desire for freedom; thus, he modified Proudhon’s federalism and views on the inevitability of revolution to develop an anarchist theory that emphasized the destructive anger of revolutionary minds. He envisioned an insurgent collective whose force would liberate individuals by shattering social constraints, and, in brief collaboration with the felonious Sergei Nechaev, he extended this revolutionary ideal of wholesale societal assault into the terrorist concept of “propaganda by the deed.” Indeed, for Bakunin and Nechaev, isolated acts of violence could inspire revolutionary events, and their message gave impetus to numerous fin-de-siècle assassins who aimed their bombs and bullets at such prominent political and economic leaders as the Russian Czar Alexander II and the American industrialist Henry Clay Frick.

While not all anarchists employed such violent tactics, most advocated extreme forms of propaganda, whether by “deed” or by “creed”; thus, implicit in all anarchism was the idea that political, creative, and moral assaults on dominant value systems could foster individual liberation and catalyze revolution. The nature of these anarchist assaults, however, was as varied as the movement itself. Thus, in 1895, when the French syndicalist Fernand Pelloutier called for general strikes as a way of generating economic upheaval and bringing about labor reform, he adapted anarchist revolutionary theory to the aims of the Confédération Générale de Travail (CGT). And in 1902, when Peter Kropotkin called on “poets, painters, sculptors, musicians … to … show the people how hideous is their actual life,” he marshaled intellectuals as a revolutionary force.

Kropotkin was a scion of Russian nobility, and a geographer in his youth, but he is best known for his theory of anarcho-communism, or, as he termed it, “Mutual Aid.” That theory originated in Kropotkin’s simultaneous observation of the inequities that existed between the Russian nobility and lower classes, and his reinterpretation of Darwin’s theories to emphasize the “natural law of cooperation” within animal groups. Convinced that human beings, like animals, could coexist equitably, Kropotkin studied Proudhon’s mutualist theories, but he found them limited in their conditional promise of social benefits as a function of labor contracts and completed tasks. As an alternative, Kropotkin proposed a communist theory of anarchism in which labor would follow ability and benefits would cater to need, and he envisioned a collective that would guarantee each individual the right and the opportunity to subsist. Kropotkin’s theory of mutual aid exerted a particularly profound influence on the anarchist movement in France, and it was perpetuated there by such leading anarchist theorists as Elie Réclus, Élisée Reclus, and Sébastien Faure.

Although these anarchists—along with Proudhon and Bakunin—based their anarchism on individualism, they ultimately defined human interactions
in terms of voluntary collective alliances, and here anarcho-communism diverged radically from anarcho-individualism. Anarcho-individualism was based on the theories of the German philosopher Max Stirner, whose main treatise *The Ego and His Own* (1848) offered the anti-communist view that all forms of collectivity served only to submit the wishes of the individual to the requirements of the common good; indeed, he maintained, the individual was threatened by even the most equitable of milieus. Instead, Stirner viewed society purely in terms of the egoist self, and he proposed a “union of Egoists” loosely associated out of mutual respect for each others’ “ownness” as an alternative to the collectivist model of individuals freely associating in common pursuit of liberty.

In prewar France, Stirner’s radical egoism inspired an anarcho-individualist movement, which was later transformed under the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche’s critique of ideological institutions and homogenous “herds” in the name of individual “will to power.” Among the main French anarcho-individualist theorists were the Stirnerites Emile Armand (a frequent contributor to the reviews *L’Anarchie* [1905–14] and *L’En dehors* [1922–39] who rejected the notion of a revolutionary utopia in favor of a philosophy based on the revolutionization of the here and now) and Pierre Chardon (an extreme anti-militarist who, with Armand, published the anti-war periodical *Par delà de la mêlée* (1916–18) and its post-First World War incarnation, *La Mêlée* (1918–20) and the Nietzscheans Florent Fels (an art critic whose anarcho-individualist philosophy was solidified following his devastating experience in combat and deployed in his review *Action: Cahiers individualistes de philosophie et d’art* [1919–22]) and Marcel Sauvage (editor of *La Mêlée* [1918–20]). Although their theories vary in subtle ways, each of them sought to shatter not only Statist authority, but all systems and dogmas that compromised the uniqueness of the individual. Like Stirner, these anarcho-individualists denounced even anarcho-communism as a dangerous authoritarian system, and they instead advocated the individual’s right to possess property and engage in free economic exchange. Their opposition to communitarian politics, moreover, extended beyond collectivity to include the principle of mass insurrection, for they maintained that such uprisings would inevitably be orchestrated by a handful of leaders, and therefore were every bit as authoritarian as any military dictatorship. In place of organized revolution, they envisioned a radical transformation of human conscience at the level of the individual intellect, and thus they theorized a specific way for creative autonomy to operate effectively and independently as an agent for social change. Their anarchist intellectual politics formed part of broader postwar debates on the social responsibility of the individualist artist; they were echoed, moreover, in the artistic anti-authoritarianism of Zurich and Paris Dada.

Picabia’s art and writings brilliantly exemplify Dadaist anarcho-individualism. An enthusiast of Stirner and Nietzsche, Picabia became drawn
to anarchism, as Allan Antliff has demonstrated, during encounters with Marcel Duchamp in New York in 1913. Duchamp had just arrived from Munich, where he had spent months studying Stirner’s writings, and his enthusiasm for *The Ego and His Own* and its promise of a world liberated from guiding principles (to which he himself gave visual form in works such as *Three Standard Stoppages* [1913–14]) fatefuly motivated his friend Picabia to challenge contemporary political and sexual codes, and to abandon his Cubist style for the free personal expressiveness of pure abstraction. As a Dadaist, Picabia continued to articulate his anarcho-individualist views in frequent contributions to the anarchist periodical *Les Humbles* and in his column “Carnet d’un sédentaire” for the anarcho-individualist review *La Forge*. There, he merged the artistic anti-authoritarianism encoded in works such as *Still Lifes* and *La Sainte-Vierge* with an anarcho-individualist assault on all moral structures. In “Carnet,” Picabia routinely condemned parliamentary socialism for its suspect “revolutionary zeal” and “continuation of the war for the love of Wilson.” In his writings for the Dadaist periodicals *Cannibale* (1920–21), *391* (1917–24), and *Littérature* (1919–22), he aligned this anti-parliamentarianism even more directly with anarcho-individualism. In the manifesto *Jésus-Christ Rastaquoère*, for example, Picabia exclaimed that “ALL BELIEFS ARE CHAUVINISTIC IDEAS,” and in his article “L’Art,” he condemned Art and Beauty as ideological systems that were as oppressive as organized religion:

The principle of the word BEAUTY is only an automatic and visual convention. Life has nothing to do with what these grammarians call Beauty. Virtue like patriotism only exists for average intellects [who dedicate] their whole lives to sarcophagi. It is necessary to dry up this source of men and women who look at art as a dogma whose God is accepted convention. We do not believe in God, no more than we believe in Art, nor in its priests, bishops and cardinals.

In the “Manifeste Cannibale Dada,” moreover, Picabia defined Dada directly in anarcho-individualist terms by identifying it as the denial of all ideological systems:

Dada feels nothing for it is nothing, nothing, nothing.

It is like your hopes: nothing
like your paradise: nothing
like your idols: nothing
like your political men: nothing
like your heroes: nothing
like your artists: nothing
like your religions: nothing.

Yet despite Picabia’s clear ties to anarcho-individualism, by 1965, when Michel Sanouillet published his history of Paris Dada, *Dada à Paris*, the movement’s outrageous “iconoclasm”—not its anarchism—had come to
dominate its reputation; Dada had acquired the stigma of political indifference. As Sanouillet put it:

In any case, nothing transpired in the dadaist documents of the epoch other than a coldly flaunted disdain for all political games and players. This indifference, surprising enough considering the vehement revolutionary and pacifist proclamations of the young dadaists, distinguishes very neatly the Parisian movement from its Germanic counterparts ... all of whose activities were determined by the political events that marked the end of the war of 1914-1918 in Germany. It equally differentiates Dada from Surrealism, one of whose constants would be precisely this need for intervention in public affairs.33

Over forty years have passed since Sanouillet first published his monograph, and since then numerous scholarly explorations of the many points of contact between modernism and cultural politics have transformed our view of prewar, wartime, and postwar French art and culture.34 Yet despite these breakthroughs in modernist studies, Paris Dada languishes historiographically right where Sanouillet placed it: as either the apolitical stepchild of the more revolutionary Berlin Dada or the propagator of destructive nihilism made constructive by the “publicly-minded” (meaning communist) Surrealists.35

The critical “depoliticization” of Paris Dada originated in the Berlin branch of the international Dada Movement when Richard Huelsenbeck, a psychologist with literary aspirations and a founding member of both Zurich and Berlin Dada, published the manifesto En Avant Dada (1920). This lengthy chronicle of the international Dada movement was designed specifically to promote the Berlin Dadaists’ revolutionary goals:

To make literature with a gun in hand, had, for a time, been my dream. To be something like a robber-baron of the pen, a modern Ulrich von Hutten—that was my picture of a Dadaist. The Dadaist should have nothing but contempt for those who have made a Tusculum of the “spirit,” a refuge for their own weaknesses ... These men of the spirit sat in the cities, painted their little pictures, ground out their verses, and in their whole human structure they were hopelessly deformed, with weak muscles, without interest in the things of the day, enemies of the advertisement, enemies of the street, of bluff, of the big transactions which every day menaced the lives of thousands.36

Huelsenbeck laments the failure of the “men of the spirit” to respond to contemporary events, and he includes among his adversaries Tzara and the Paris Dadaists, who, in his view, “made abstract art the cornerstone of their new wisdom, no new idea deserving of very strenuous propaganda.”37 For him, the Paris Dadaists were concerned merely with creating pure form, and he contrasted their “abstraction” with the Dadaism developed by himself and his comrades in Berlin. Indeed, he argued, Berlin Dada was violently opposed to such aestheticism, for it had progressed beyond that “abstract road” to incorporate the mundane objects of daily life, and had thus
“taken an enormous step from the horizon across the foreground [to participate] in life itself.”

Huelsenbeck’s rejection of aestheticism in favor of addressing broader political issues was, he claimed, embedded in his response to the desperate social and political circumstances of postwar Germany. In Berlin, he wrote, “a city of tightened stomachers, of mounting, thundering hunger, where … men’s minds were concentrating more and more on questions of naked existence,” artists had no choice but to emerge from their high-minded elitism and take action. Therefore, Berlin Dada, “in direct contrast to abstract art, went out and found an adversary …. [It] consciously adopted a political position.”

Calling for a revolutionary alliance of intellectuals to work to eliminate the capitalist institution of property, Huelsenbeck envisioned what he termed a “radical Communist” society modeled after the “super-individualist movement of Dadaism,” which had replaced expressionism with collectivity and simultaneity.

Just as Berlin Dada’s revolutionary agenda was designed to transform a postwar Germany badly in need of transformation, the Paris Dadaists’ failure to transcend “abstraction” was, according to Huelsenbeck, shaped by the political climate in postwar Paris. Far from being on the brink of revolution, Huelsenbeck argues, Paris was in a “moment of nationalist fervor,” and the Paris Dadaists, though attacked in the conservative French press for their “intellectual decadence,” none the less existed in relative luxury, free to wallow in their purely artistic pursuits. In Huelsenbeck’s opinion, these “very nice looking Gentlemen with pince-nez, horn-rimmed glasses and monocles, with flowing ties, faithful eyes and significant gestures, who can be seen from a distance to belong to literature,” demonstrated none of the revolutionary commitment of their counterparts in Berlin, and they were thus woefully unequipped to bring about social change. Indeed, Huelsenbeck suggests, Paris Dada was a by-product of capitalism, and its anarcho-individualism was little more than politically impotent ivory-tower elitism.

In reducing Paris Dada to a mere intellectual retreat, as well as in likening the movement’s cultivation of individualism to the capitalist possession of property, Huelsenbeck reflects the broader contrasts between anarcho-individualism, anarcho-communism, and even Marxism, and he anticipates subsequent accounts of Paris Dada informed by Marxist thought. J.C. Middleton, for example, in his article “‘Bolshevism in Art’: Dada and Politics” (1962/63) concludes that “none of the [Paris Dada] literary magazines show political interest,” even though he quotes extensively from Aragon’s manifesto—published in Littérature in 1921—dismissing all artistic and political institutions.

No more painters, no more writers, no more composers, no more sculptors, no more religions … no more republicans, no more royalists, no more imperialists,
no more anarchists, no more socialists, no more bolshevists, no more politics, no more proletarians, no more democrats … enough of all these imbecilities, no more anything, no more anything, nothing, NOTHING, NOTHING, NOTHING, NOTHING.44

Indeed, Middleton argues, this anarcho-individualist negation of all political systems reflects nothing more than a “cult of negative values,” and, echoing Huelsenbeck, he attributes Aragon’s apparent “disinterest” to the relative political stability in postwar Paris.45 French artists, he explains, had never felt the need for political protest; the Dadaists in particular “could safely leave politics to the political … and thrive on the tradition of scandal and buffoonery which had flourished in the arts before the war.”46 Thus, Middleton reduces the anarchist activities of the entire early twentieth-century French avant-garde to examples of apolitical unconventional behavior, and he argues that the politics of Dadaism lay exclusively in the points of contact between Berlin Dada and Bolshevism.47

To be sure, Middleton’s narrow equation of left-wing politics with Bolshevism formed the basis for his refusal to award political legitimacy to anarchism. Yet even those scholars more rigorous in their attention to the sheer diversity of Dada politics persisted in denying that the Paris group possessed any substantive political views. Richard Sheppard, for example, in his essay “Dada and Politics” (1979), was one of the first historians to acknowledge that “while Dada does not make a major contribution to political theory, advise how to vote, beget left-wing martyrs or encourage practical projects of social reform,” it did address the quintessentially political issue of the individual’s role in society.48 Indeed, “the politics of Dada,” in Sheppard’s analysis, are “jubilantly and ironically Anarchist,” and he concludes that Dada’s unique political contribution was its liberation of the individual to create a “truly revolutionary work of art [that] invites men to alter their consciousness of reality … to change their need for dependency, shrug off their sense of oppression, become autonomous.”49 Although Sheppard’s description of the “Anarchist Dadaist” would seem to apply brilliantly to Picabia or Tzara, for him, this definition included only the Berlin Dadaists Raoul Haussmann and Hans Richter.50 Paris Dada, Sheppard maintained, was “resolutely apolitical”:

Although the Paris Dadaists cultivated revolt, spontaneous action and provocation as ends in themselves, they were unconcerned to base these upon a metaphysic, unwilling to define the aims of their revolt and disdainful of practical politics and political thinking.51

Although Sheppard is reluctant to identify Paris Dada politics, such politics did flourish precisely in what he described as the movement’s “dismay for practical politics and political thinking.” Indeed, Paris Dada’s apparent resistance to a specific political “metaphysic” manifested itself consistently as
an attack on the cultural fabric of the current social order and as an attempt to replace that order with a new one that embraced alternative conscious states. Indeed, this principled anti-authoritarianism epitomizes and encapsulates Paris Dada anarcho-individualism.

The refusal of Sheppard and Middleton to acknowledge the political significance of Paris Dada's anarcho-individualism is a by-product of anarchism's fortunes following the First World War. With the declaration of war in August 1914, such anarchist leaders as Peter Kropotkin and Jean Grave, believing that military strategy would inevitably give way to revolution, formed a grudging alliance with those in favor of the war effort and temporarily diverted the thriving anarchist movement. 52 By 1920, with the formation of the Partie Communiste Française (PCF), anarchism had become overshadowed by Marxism as the dominant radical force in France, reflecting the worldwide rise of Marxist-Leninism on the left in the Bolshevik aftermath of the 1917 Russian Revolution. 53 Although French anarchism did survive the war—notably in the anarcho-individualism cultivated by the Dadaists and other intellectuals—its limited application as an official “leftist” philosophy diminished its influence and distorted its image in the popular imagination.54 Indeed, by the 1930s, when Dada began to receive serious scholarly attention, anarchism had come to be associated only with its most violent and destructive manifestations, and the term “anarchy” was twisted to evoke images of uncontrollable mob riots and bomb-hurling terrorists. As a result, the adjectives “anarchic” and “anarchizing” entered the popular lexicon as descriptive terms for anything seemingly disparate, disorganized, destructive—or “nihilist”—and Paris Dada's “anarchy” came to be discussed purely in formalist terms.

Thus, at mid-century, such scholars as Alfred Barr nearly succeeded in reducing Dada to the stylistic binary opposite of prewar modernism. In 1936, as the director of the Museum of Modern Art, Barr organized the exhibition “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.” This exhibition—“diametrically opposed in both spirit and esthetic principles” to the “Cubism and Abstract Art” exhibition he organized earlier that year—was designed to perpetuate Barr's theory that twentieth-century art developed within two parallel yet contradictory stylistic categories.55 “Cubism and Abstract Art” focused on the “intellectual, structural, architectonic, geometrical, rectilinear and classical” trend, which, originating in the works of Cézanne and Seurat, developed through Cubism and culminated in wartime geometric abstraction.56 “Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism,” on the other hand, was devoted to the “intuitional and emotional”57 alternative to this logic and rationalism, and it traced the persistence of the “deep-seated … interest … in the fantastic, the irrational, the spontaneous, the marvelous, the enigmatic, and the dreamlike” in Western art from the Renaissance through Dadaism and Surrealism.58 The Dadaists' cultivation of the irrational, according to Barr, though seemingly a
“[declaration of] war on the conventions and standards of respectable society,” was in fact a reflection of that society’s “madness” through the purposeful “mocking” of its art:

With robust iconoclastic humor the Dadaists mocked what they considered the sorry shams of European Culture. They even attacked art—especially modern art.

In so doing the Dadaists, while attempting to free themselves from the conventional ideas of art, developed certain conventions of their own—for example, automatism of absolute spontaneity of form, extreme fantasy of subject matter, employment of accident or the laws of chance, fantastic use of mechanical and biological forms.

Thus Barr suggests that the true significance of the international Dada movement lay not in its response to the political outcome of the First World War, but in its purely artistic cultivation of the irrational. Indeed, he homogenizes the diverse viewpoints and artistic pursuits of the movement’s ideologically varied international manifestations, and in doing so he leaves no room for discussion of Dada’s anarcho-individualism. This formalist approach and emphasis on Dada’s “iconoclastic humor” served Barr’s own agenda. Dedicating “Cubism and Abstract Art” “to those painters of squares and circles … who have suffered at the hands of philistines with political power,” Barr expressed his fear that all “radical” modernist movements were in danger of being censured by totalitarian dictators. Indeed, his emphasis on the “style [and] abstract quality” both of Dadaism and of Cubism was designed to downplay their “content or avowed program,” and in doing so prove that they were not politically subversive.

By constructing a continuum of “fantastic moments” in the history of art, Barr sought to demonstrate that Dadaism, far from being concerned with politics or even influenced by history, was little more than the “irrational” antithesis of Cubist “logic” and the “chaotic” forerunner of Surrealist automatism. This formalist model of Dadaism dominated scholarship well into the 1960s, and reached its high point in 1969 with the publication of William Rubin’s *Dada and Surrealist Art.* Although Rubin maintains from the outset that “Dada never had a consistent set of principles and was never coherently organized,” he none the less undertook to mold the movement’s diverse formal experiments and intellectual pursuits into a sound and homogenous stylistic whole. He achieved this by playing down politics and historical events and by glossing over the Dada manifestoes and other literary documents; and in this way he was able to streamline his interpretation to an almost exclusive concentration on Dadaist art.

To be sure, Rubin’s emphasis on Dada’s artistic output echoes Barr’s argument that the movement was ultimately—and unthreateningly—apolitical; yet his formalism contains none of Barr’s anxiety over the seeming vulnerability of modernism. Indeed, so convincing was Barr’s original claim
that abstract art was exclusively formalist that Rubin adapted Barr’s analysis of Dada to his own Greenbergian interpretation of modernism. Rubin’s reliance on the criticism of Clement Greenberg becomes immediately apparent in his claim that the entire history of modern art was a stylistic evolution originating in the disappearance, in 1860, of “intellectual” subject matter and emerging gradually in purely sensory configurations of line, color, and form. This stylistic progression, Rubin implies, was a homogenizing template over the diverse philosophies and concerns of the actual participating artists, and it culminated in the “triumph” of “peinture pure”:

Since subject matter has always been that part of painting which appealed directly to the intellect, its demise left the field open to an art based more and more on sensations.

The main tendency of European painting was poised, by 1910, for the triumph of “pure painting”: the creation of non-figurative art. This latter appeared … in the work of Kandinsky and the Orphists, and to all outward appearances in the 1911–12 works of the Cubists.65

Although Rubin admits that “the plastic arts played only an ancillary role in Dada,” he none the less tries to locate Dadaist art as a reactionary force in the “peinture pure” progression.66 Dadaism, he claims, distinguished itself by paying “new attention” to subject matter, and it reacted against abstraction’s “non-figurative triumph” by rejecting “the hermetic estheticism and escapism of pre-1914 painting.” Dada’s “peinture poésie,” in this view, offered a “humanistic” alternative to abstract painting by capturing the “psychological inwardness” of the human mind.67 Rubin supports his argument by comparing the “logic” of Picasso’s analytical Cubism to the “ambiguity” of Hans Arp’s “biomorphology”:

The very terms “organic” and “biomorphic” testify to the new humanism. Compare … Picasso and Arp … The former is balanced and stabilized and unfolds with a pictorial logic, though not predictability, which makes its stasis seem classically definitive; the latter might be turned any way—its contours unwind in a free and meandering manner implying growth and change. In the Arp we no longer have the sober, classical scaffolding of the collective external world of architecture but a unique and ambiguous shape which, while describing noting specifically, [contains] multiple associations to the physiological processes, to sexuality, and, through its very ambiguity, to humor. It is a shape that turns man's speculation in on himself and away from the transcended and impersonal order of Cubism.68

Biomorphism, Rubin maintains, was the unifying factor in the “apparent anarchy of Dada styles,” and he locates this “counter-Cubist morphology” in the work not only of Arp, but also of Max Ernst, as well as of the Surrealists André Masson and Joan Miró.69 By tracing biomorphism in both Dadaist and Surrealist visual expression, Rubin not only suggests that the significance of these two movements lay solely in their invention of formal equivalents
for the intuitive spontaneity of the human psyche, but he also succeeds in reducing the entire international Dada movement to little more than a stylistic segue into Surrealism. The more literary Paris Dada, in this analysis, virtually drops out of the scholarly picture: confined to only two of Rubin’s 525 pages, it emerges as merely the “nihilist” and “anarchic” epilogue to Dadaism, important only for sowing the “seeds of Surrealism.” Indeed, although Rubin applies the term “anarchic” to Dada, he does so only to describe the movement’s cultivation of artistic chaos, and leaves out any analysis of its real anarchist underpinnings. Although his formalism eventually gave way to more critical interpretations of Dada on the part of scholars such as Rudolf Kuenzli, Stephen C. Foster, Harriet Ann Watts, Richard Sheppard, and Marc Dachy, his apolitical interpretive model has held its own in the discourse.

To define Dada art purely in terms of biomorphism overlooks the sheer diversity of Dadaist visual culture. Not only were Arp’s wood reliefs definitively Dadaist, but so were John Heartfield’s photomontages, Marcel Janco’s masks, Picabia’s machinist paintings and illustrations, and Tzara’s ruptured typography. Sarah Ganz Blythe and Edward D. Powers addressed the heterogeneity of Dadaist art in their 2006 handbook *Looking at Dada*, a follow-up to Barr and Rubin published by the Museum of Modern Art in conjunction with “Dada,” the major retrospective of the international Dada movement, hosted by MOMA during the summer of 2006. Announcing that “Dada was not a style but rather the practice—with a variety of strategies—of undermining expectations and shocking the viewer into questioning blindly accepted, fundamentally repressive conventions and structures of all kinds,” Blythe and Powers offer concise accounts of most of Dada’s international centers, and they examine such Dadaist tactics as chance, humor, scandal, photomontage, machinism, and the readymade through thoughtful analysis of key Dada objects for a general audience. While they contextualize Dada by acknowledging its “assault on humanity … [and] all-out war against the social, political, economic, and cultural structures that permitted and supported such violence: nationalist politics, bourgeois values, communicative functions of language, pious social mores,” and while they describe Paris Dada in particular as an “iteration … aimed to level the noble ideals of advanced societies … that threatened to take hold in the postwar ‘return to order,’” they remain vague about the connection to anarchism implicit in such anti-authoritarianism. Instead, like Barr and Rubin before them, Blythe and Powers place Paris Dada in dialogue with prewar modernism, arguing that “despite [its] nihilism, [the movement] was surprisingly self-conscious of its place in modern art, in constructing and writing its history; self conscious, as well, about the notion of what is a picture.” Yet it is precisely in the interrogation of aesthetic criteria through the creation of the very objects Blythe and Powers so lucidly discuss that Paris Dada enacted its anarchism, for in consistently overturning mediated artistic processes to make room for
spontaneous compositional evolution, the movement resisted artistic systems and, by extension, all forms of systematization.

The Dada Seminars (2005), a second volume associated with the “Dada” exhibition, delved more deeply into the history, context, and critical issues associated with Dada. A set of 12 essays edited by curator Leah Dickerman and written by scholars who participated in seminars held at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts between 2001 and 2003, this anthology stands as a collaborative effort to add texture to the persistently monographic and Surrealism-biased state of Dada scholarship by addressing vital questions, including those pertaining to politics. Despite its promise, however, The Dada Seminars falls short of interrogating the many ways in which Dadaists worldwide engaged in political discourse; instead, Dada’s international centers are treated as airtight entities of internecine politics, as, in Dickerman’s words, “distinct identities ... [which] emerged as political conditions that framed specific political possibilities for production.” Thus, Arnauld Pierre, in “The Confrontation of Modern Values: A Moral History of Dada in Paris” (the book’s only chapter on Paris Dada), offers a useful close reading of the fluid exchange between the Paris Dadaists and the artists and poets of L’Esprit nouveau as they attempted to form a united modernist front against bellicose nationalism in France in the early 1920s. Complicating their efforts, Pierre argues, was the widespread use of the terms “anarchism, bolshevism, and antipatriotism” in the mainstream press to describe the “evil” of the “Dada spirit,” as well as the appropriation of the word “Dada” as a catchword for anything remotely radical, whether artistic or political. On the question of Dada’s actual engagement with radical politics—its reputation for so engaging notwithstanding—Pierre remains silent, limiting his discussion of “politics” to the politics of cultural negotiations, and leaving out any mention of the anarchism that framed the Dadaists’ efforts to collaborate with their modernist rivals. As I demonstrate in Chapters 4 and 5 of this study, the Dadaists and the postwar modernists were deeply involved in radical politics, and their debates over the nature of the “modern spirit” were driven by the will to reconcile the destructive aspect of anarchism with its ideals of construction and unmediated creation.

George Baker, in his recent study The Artwork Caught by the Tail: Francis Picabia and Dada in Paris (2007), similarly separates Dada from its political context, obliquely referring to the “lessons [the Dadaists] learned” in their inevitable “divorce—what they liked to call their ‘revolt’—[from] the traditional language of politics,” while overlooking the anarcho-individualist basis for this assault on communitarian dogma. Baker argues that the increasingly provocative and wildly controversial interventions that comprised the 1920 “Great Dada Season” in Paris were little more than a landslide of “‘great’ moment[s] of Dadaist negation,” and he dismisses Paris Dada as “a void, a resounding noise, a hideous,
incomprehensible buzz” that operated “at the crossroads of politics and art,” but belonged to neither. For Baker, Paris Dada was a failed experiment, a residual trace of its more heroic New York incarnation, aimlessly charting a bumbling course through the “shattered avant-garde” era known as “l’époque flou.” Within this chaos, Baker isolates Picabia, placing him in dialogue with Duchamp, Man Ray, and Cubism, and testing his drawings, paintings, abstractions, and film (not his writings) against Jean Joseph Goux’s theory of the general equivalent—the exchange value assigned to all elements in a symbolic system—to show how Picabia interrogated and ultimately undermined these terms. The “exchange” to which Baker refers, however, occurred not in the world of market structures and human interactions, but in the realm of “dialogue between forms … medium ‘conversation,’ the sharing or interaction of forms,” within which, he argues, Picabia’s work operated as a set of visual strategies designed to overturn Cubist pictorial devices and elaborate their antithesis: the readymade. Baker never really gets beyond the over-wrought formal analyses and para-psychoanalytical riffs that make up the bulk of his book, and his a-historical approach ultimately does little more than distill Picabia’s work both from its milieu and from the artist himself, liquidating Picabia’s Dadaist anti-art of its anarcho-individualism.

Dada’s revolutionary anti-art is the focus of Peter Bürger’s Theory of the Avant-garde, which locates a politics in Dada’s refusal to submit the independent components of works and texts to the dictates of superordinate rules. Dada’s resistance to clear syntax, Bürger argues, critiqued institutionalized art-making and art-market structures, and it exposed the impotent isolationism of aestheticism by requiring art to operate directly in life:

Dadaism … no longer criticizes schools that preceded it, but criticizes art as an institution, and the course its development took in bourgeois society …. The avant-garde turns against … the distribution apparatus on which the work of art depends, and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy …. But the other side of autonomy, art’s lack of social impact, also becomes recognizable. The avant-gardiste protest, whose aim it is to reintegrate art into the praxis of life, reveals the nexus between autonomy and the absence of any consequences.

Bürger argues that Dada’s visual inorganicism was a transformative and political tactic designed “to revolutionize life,” for, he elaborates, its refusal “to provide meaning is experienced as shock by the recipient”:

And this is the intention of the avant-gardiste artist, who hopes that such withdrawal of meaning will direct the reader’s attention to the fact that the conduct of one’s life is questionable and that it is necessary to change it. Shock is aimed for as a stimulus to change one’s conduct of life; it is the man’s to break through aesthetic immanence and to usher in … a change in the recipient’s life praxis.
Yet even though Bürger theorizes Dadaist revolution, his claim that creative autonomy operated exclusively and ineffectually in aestheticism fails to recognize the anarchist and therefore individualist nature of Dadaist engagement, and it overlooks the variety of postwar “avant-gardes” that, like Dada, sought to revolutionize society by revolutionizing art.

My work has historicized and elaborated on Bürger’s theory both by identifying the anarchist foundation for Dada’s challenge to art institutions and by exploring the politicized cultural context within which Dada operated. By carefully considering Dada, anarcho-individualist theory and postwar anarchist periodicals, I have discovered that anarchism survived the war as a legitimate and still-influential political philosophy; that its revolutionary goals were transformed—not quashed—by the example of the Russian Revolution; and that it informed debates along a variety of intellectual and political fronts that, like Dada, were critiquing art as a cultural subsystem in an effort to preserve its transformative role in life.

Indeed, in the postwar period, anarcho-individualist and anarcho-communist theorists—along with writers both Dadaist and non-Dadaist—debated the effectiveness of mass revolution for preserving individualism; the result of these debates was a resurgence of anarcho-individualism in postwar France. In Chapter 1, I concentrate on anarcho-individualism, tracing its philosophical origins to the illégaliste fringe of the broader fin-de-siècle anarchist movement, and I show how such Stirnerite theorists as Armand and Chardon narrowed anarchism’s individualist focus to develop a radically egoist alternative to anarcho-communism. In the postwar period, Stirnerian anarcho-individualism was transformed by the Nietzschean critics Fels, Sauvage, and others, who, like Armand and Chardon, favored intellectual development over violent insurrection, but who located “revolution” specifically in formal innovation and sought to mobilize artistic and poetic “supermen” into a harmonious coalition of unique, heroic beings.

Chapter 2 reveals how this version of anarcho-individualism resonated with the writings of other postwar intellectuals, who were similarly pursuing social change by marshaling creative individualism as a form of “propaganda by the deed.” That these ideologically diverse debates unfolded largely in the left-wing press substantially modifies the scholarly paradigm presented by Kenneth Silver. In Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-garde and the First World War, Silver locates an avant-garde “new spirit” in postwar Cubism, which, he claims, offered a rational alternative to the emotional excess of fin-de-siècle painting and paralleled official efforts to rebuild France after the destructive chaos of the war. Although Silver recognizes an affinity between this aesthetic “construction” and postwar “reconstruction,” he interprets this connection as the necessary capitulation of the largely internationalist avant-garde to the strident propaganda of the bellicose French right wing, which lay ancestral claim to Latin classicism in order to justify forming an
anti-German nationalist front.® I have found, however, that the constructive rhetoric and classical aesthetic that Silver identifies as “nationalist” also entered anti-nationalist debates, where postwar artists and intellectuals—likewise deeply concerned with “constructing” a new society—responded to numerous anarchist and individualist theories in order to demonstrate social responsibility while still preserving creative individualism.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on Dada’s place in this politicized universe. In Chapter 3, I reveal that not only did Dada emerge within the postwar anarcho-individualist groundswell, but that Dada poetry readings and performances both in Zurich and in Paris systematically attempted to topple the oppressive institution of art and shamelessly promoted Stirnerian—not Nietzschean—anarcho-individualism. Indeed, I argue, the Dadaists offered a consistent, principled, and decidedly grim reminder that society would inevitably be dismantled by its builders, and in doing so they issued a direct challenge to the constructive models for social change being developed simultaneously in contemporary cultural milieus. Chapter 4 examines how this challenge unfolded in the variety of postwar critical responses—both supportive and adversarial—to Paris Dada’s destructive and Tzara-driven revolutionary tactics, and thus it sets the stage for the notorious internal conflict that catalyzed the decline of Dada and paved the way for its Surrealist transformation.

This transformation is the subject of Chapter 5, which explores how Breton’s tense collaboration with Tzara forced him to redefine his Dadaism, his individualism, and his anarchism. Here I address broader scholarly debates between such historians as Marguerite Bonnet (who argues that the existence of the early and “automatiste” Les Champs Magnétiques indicates that Surrealism would have developed independently of Tzara’s presence in Paris) and Sanouillet (who argues that Surrealism was “French Dada”).® I have found that Dada and Surrealism were neither insular nor continuous, but operated in a dialogue that responded both to contemporary criticism of Dada and to anarcho-individualist debates. In this analysis, Breton’s clash with Tzara, along with the Littérature poets’ interest in “psychological automatism,” transformed Dada destruction into a new anarcho-individualist model for constructive social change.

Thus, this study will counter both formalist art history and the ideological suppression of anarchism to reveal that not only did the Paris Dadaists and early Surrealists study and develop anarchist viewpoints, but also that their artistic insurrection unfolded in an actively anarchist intellectual culture.

Notes

2. Allan Antliff’s scholarship on New York Dada and anarchism is a notable exception, particularly where Picabia is concerned; see especially Antliff’s *Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007), particularly the chapter entitled “Obscenity: The Advent of Dada in New York,” 49–68.


8. Tristan Tzara, “Dada Manifesto 1918,” trans. Ralph Manheim, in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, 81. Although this passage pre-dates his arrival in Paris in 1919, Tzara reiterated this anarchist rhetoric in the “Manifesto of Mr. a a the Antiphilosopher,” claiming that “Every act is a cerebral revolver shot—the insignificant gesture of the decisive movement are attacks … and with words set down on paper I enter, solemnly, unto myself” (ibid., 85).


10. For the interest that Tzara held for these writers, as well as their early contact with Zurich Dada, see Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris* (Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert 1969; reprint, Paris: Flammarion, 1993), 142ff.


16. Cited in Sonn, Anarchism, 28. Unfortunately, Sonn does not provide the source.

17. Michael Bakunin, Appeal to the Slavs (1848), cited in Woodcock, Anarchism, 156.

18. For this terrorist wave—particularly in France—see Woodcock, Anarchism, 297–314.


20. See Sonn, Anarchism, 9–12.


22. For the evolution of this line of thinking, see Peter Kropotkin, Mutual Aid: A Factor in Revolution (London: Heinemann, 1902). For Kropotkin’s interpretation of Darwin, see Leighten, Re-ordering the Universe, 39.


24. For Stirner's theories, see Max Stirner, Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum (1845), trans. Stephen T. Byington as The Ego and His Own (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1918) (all citations are from this translation unless otherwise noted); Woodcock, Anarchism, 94–105, and Victor Basch, L’Individualist anarchiste: Max Stirner (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1904).


26. I discuss the anarcho-individualist aspects of Zurich and Paris Dada in Chapter 3.

27. I discuss this dialogue in Chapters 2 and 4.

28. See Antliff, “Obscenity: The Advent of Dada in New York,” in Anarchy and Art, 49ff. See also Marc Rosenthal’s introduction to Francis Picabia, I Am a Beautiful Monster: Poetry, Prose, and Provocation, trans. Marc Rosenthal (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2007), 1–24, in which he credits Duchamp with interpreting Stirner (as well as Nietzsche) for Picabia (even though Picabia was reading Stirner long before this time), though he does not acknowledge the anarchist connection.


Whereas the first wave of scholarship laid the groundwork by raising the question of the connection between modernism and radical politics, more recent scholarship has been more rigorous in locating direct links between art and politics. See especially Richard Sonn, Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin-de-siècle France (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); Leighten, Re-ordering the Universe; Kenneth Silver, Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-garde and the First World War, 1914–1925 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989);


35. Christopher Green included a chapter on Paris Dada in his exploration of the cultural context of wartime and postwar modernism, Cubism and its Enemies: Movements and Reaction in French Art, 1916–1928 (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1987), but he concentrates only on its proto-Surrealist aspects and does not delve deeply into the political milieu.


37. Ibid., 37.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid., 39.

40. Ibid., 41.

41. Huelsenbeck’s use of the contradictory terms “radical,” “Communist,” and “individualist” points directly to the difficult and contradictory character of his own political allegiance. He called Dada “German Bolshevism” and, according to J.C. Middleton, the Berlin Dadaists aligned themselves with Bolshevism; see Middleton, “Bolshevism in Art.” Yet Huelsenbeck’s brand of Dadaism—particularly in its collectivity—seems more anarcho-communist than Marxist, and being anarchist, would thus privilege the individual over the State (hence, “individualism”). Sheppard describes Berlin Dada as a movement bifurcated between those who considered Dada a political weapon and thus joined the KPD (Georges Grosz and the brothers Wieland and Johann Herzel, a.k.a. John Heartfield) and those for whom “Communism was a Dadaistical weapon”: (Huelsenbeck, Raoul Haussmann, and Johannes Baader). In particular, he argues that Huelsenbeck’s writings reveal a belief in revolution for its own sake and betray a lack of concern for rebuilding society afterwards. This, of course, begs the question of his true political alignment, but his importance for this discussion is his expectation that art serve revolutionary goals. See Sheppard, “Dada and Politics,” 5ff.

42. Ibid., 37.


46. Ibid., 425.
47. Although Middleton generalizes the political diversity of Paris Dada, he is very careful to distinguish between the anarchist and communist members of Berlin Dada, and he writes that “only for the few months between January and April, 1919, did Dada’s political horizon so contract that Bolshevism thrust across into the foreground”; ibid., 430. He cites Herzfelde’s *Gesellschaft, Künstler und Kommunismus* (1921) as “serious and positive in its commitment to the Communist cause”; Middleton, “Bolshevism in Art,” 421. All other Dada activity is “nihilist” and “anarchic,” and therefore, in his view, ultimately apolitical; thus Huelsenbeck, “for all his politically shaded aggressivity,” emerges in Middleton’s analysis as “an ironic man, viewable as a café anarchist rather than a genuine agitator”; ibid., 410.

This stands in direct contrast to the memoirs of the Paris Dadaists themselves. André Breton, for example, discusses the climate of censorship, intellectual bankruptcy, and brainwashing during the war and afterwards, compared to the prewar period when artists enjoyed more freedom of expression. See André Breton and André Parinaud, *Entretiens 1911–1951* (1952), trans. Mark Polizzotti as *Conversations: The Autobiography of Surrealism* (New York: Paragon House, 1993). Tristan Tzara, in “Le Surréalisme et l’après-guerre,” links Dada to pacifism and discusses the revolutionary spirit that the Bolshevik Revolution inspired in him and his fellow Dadaists in Zurich; see Tristan Tzara, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Béhar (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), vol. 5, 362–9.


50. Ibid., 74, 114, 115.

51. Ibid., 61.

52. For anarchism in France after the First World War, see Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement*, and Woodcock, *Anarchism*, 324–5. Jean Maitron offers statistical evidence for the “decline” in anarchist activity in wartime and postwar France by comparing the vast number of anarchist periodicals in existence before the war to the paltry few that remained when the war ended; see Jean Maitron, *De 1915 à nos jours*, vol. 2 of *Le Mouvement anarchiste en France*, 125–8. I contradict Maitron’s evidence in Chapters 1 and 2, where I discuss numerous postwar anarchist-individualist periodicals.


54. For the history of anarchism between the two World Wars, see Berry, *A History of the French Anarchist Movement*. In subsequent chapters, I examine postwar anarcho-individualism and how it operated in French culture.


57. Ibid.


59. Ibid., 10.

60. Ibid., 11.


62. Ibid., 16.

63. Rubin, *Dada and Surrealist Art*.

64. Ibid., 10.

65. Ibid., 15.

66. Ibid., 14.

67. Ibid., 18–19.
68. Ibid., 21.

69. Ibid., 14–15.

70. Ibid., 113.


73. Ibid., 3.

74. Ibid., 4.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., 8. The exhibition’s catalogue, however, is a major contribution to Dada studies, and required reading for anyone interested in Dada. While key essays do take a contextual approach, however, they fall short of analyzing Dada in political terms. In her carefully researched introduction, the book’s editor, Leah Dickerman, for example, discusses Dada in the context of popular contemporary popular culture, advertising, and commercial structures; see Dickerman, “Introduction,” in Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris, 1–16. In their essay on “Paris,” Janine Mileaf and Matthew S. Witkovsky describe Dada there as “adolescent destructiveness” deployed in the spectacle of a European capital recovering from war; see Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris, 346–73.


80. Ibid., 57.

81. Ibid., 56.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid., 14.

84. Ibid., 12.


86. Ibid., 22.
87. Ibid., 72.

88. Ibid., 80.


Anarchism and anarcho-individualism in postwar France

Until very recently, the received wisdom on post-First World War French anarchism followed what James Joll termed the “historians’ cult of success.” Indeed, scholars such as George Woodcock and Jean Maitron—whose histories of prewar anarchism are indispensable reading for anyone interested in radical politics—maintain that the French anarchist movement sacrificed both its focus and its momentum at the outset of the war when anarchist leaders, as Woodcock put it, turned their backs on their “loudly proclaimed anti-militarism” and obediently marched into battle. The few die-hard anti-militarist anarchists who did remain after the war, he argues, were too busy squabbling about their revolutionary goals to actually carry out revolution. And, he continues, their inability to form a consensus effectively compromised their anti-statism, for their revolutionary philosophy came to be absorbed by the more centralized syndicalist (or trade union) movement as a radical model for the general strike. French anarchism, irreparably weakened, never regained its prewar influence.

In giving preference to anarcho-syndicalism, Woodcock and Maitron overlook the numerous and diverse anarchists who remained active in France during and after the war. As David Berry has shown, anarcho-communists such as Sébastien Faure not only kept alive the revolutionary spirit in wartime, but in the postwar period worked to position “traditional” anarchism within the radical French left’s broader revision of its revolutionary strategy in light of the Russian Revolution. Berry’s focus is on those anarchists who responded to attempts on the left to find common ground with Marxism, and he devotes little attention to the many other anarchists whose “self-isolation from ‘the social question’” (as he puts it) caused them to reject both anarcho-syndicalism and anarcho-communism, and instead draw inspiration from anarcho-individualism as a model for social change. This chapter focuses on these postwar French anarcho-individualists, analyzing their preference for the rebellious egoism of Max Stirner over Peter Kropotkin’s philosophy of mutual aid; their belief that the key to overcoming communitarian dogma lay in the
References


Aragon, Louis. *Manifeste du Mouvement Dada.* Littérature (March 1921): 1


Breton , André. Acte d'accusation. Littérature 20 (1921).
Breton , André. La Dernière grève. La Révolution surréaliste 2 (1925): 181.
Brunet , Gabriel. La Conception stendhalienne du héros: Julien Sorel. Action (February 1920): 196-209.
Canudo , Ricciotto. Esthétique et inspiration des poètes nouveaux. La Vie des lettres 7 (January 1921): 303-309.


Manthy, Paul. Lieux communs. a Irri! 11 and 12 (1921): 219-221, 249-255.


Marx, Jacques. La Paix. La Vie ouvrière (July 2, 1919): 1.


Stirner, Max. Der Einzige un sein Eigentum. 1845. Translated by Stephen T. Byington as The Ego and His Own. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1918.


Tokine, B. Introduction à l'esthétique artistocrate. La Mélè (April 15, 1919): 2.


