

## **II. *En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism***

By Richard Huelsenbeck. Translated complete from the German by Ralph Manheim. First published as *En Avant Dada: Eine Geschichte des Dadaismus*, Hannover, Leipzig, Wien, Zurich, Paul Steegemann Verlag, 1920. By permission of the author.

**Expressionismus. Kubismus.  
Futurismus. Bruttismus.**  
Sensationelle Enthüllungen:  
*Die Praktiken der  
EngelmacherInnen!*

Die  
abstrakte  
Kunst.

Das  
simultane  
Gedicht.

*Alfred Kerr t.*

**Der Kaiser  
Hindenburg  
& Co.**

Der Geheim-  
dadaismus.

*Die Speisung  
der Geistigen  
auf dem Pots-  
damer Platz.*

**Dadaist kann  
jeder werden.**

500000  
Silber-  
gäule  
sind auf-  
gelegt.

*Eine halbe Million Silbergäule!*

**En avant dada**

**DIE GESCHICHTE  
DES DADAISMUS**

von

**Richard  
Huelsenbeck**

Geheimrat

Verlegt bei Paul Steegemann  
Hannover / Leipzig

Ist dada eine  
Geisteskrankheit?

*Die Lues des  
Herrn Picabia.*

**Der  
Ober-dada.**

*Dada in aller Welt.*

Die Prügelstrafen  
in Dresden,  
Prag, London,  
Paris, New York.

Wie wäre es mit  
einem Schnaps?

**D Ä U B L E R.  
E D S C H M I D.  
H I L L E R.**

Lernen  
Sie  
Beten!

*Reiten Sie Ihre Haare!!!!!!*

**Das Cabaret Voltaire.  
D J E T Ä N Z E R J N.  
Hans Arp. Hugo Ball. Tristan Tzara.  
die wolkenpumpe.  
ANNA BLUME. Beste Loderung.  
DER MIXER DER MANHATTAN-BAR.  
D A D A das Holzpferdchen.  
Die Kathedrale. Sekunde durch Hirn.  
DER MARSTALL. DER MARSTALL.**

**Das witzigste Buch über ernsthafte Dinge**

Cover. For *En Avant Dada* by Richard Huelsenbeck. Hanover, 1920.

**Richard Huelsenbeck:** *En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism (1920)*

Dada was founded in Zurich in the spring of 1916 by Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp, Marcel Janco and Richard Huelsenbeck at the Cabaret Voltaire, a little bar where Hugo Ball and his friend Emmy Hennings had set up a miniature variety show, in which all of us were very active.

We had all left our countries as a result of the war. Ball and I came from Germany, Tzara and Janco from Rumania, Hans Arp from France. We were agreed that the war had been contrived by the various governments for the most autocratic, sordid and materialistic reasons; we Germans were familiar with the book "*J'accuse*," and even without it we would have had little confidence in the decency of the German Kaiser and his generals. Ball was a conscientious objector, and I had escaped by the skin of my teeth from the pursuit of the police myrmidons who, for their so-called patriotic purposes, were massing men in the trenches of Northern France and giving them shells to eat. None of us had much appreciation for the kind of courage it takes to get shot for the idea of a nation which is at best a cartel of pelt merchants and profiteers in leather, at worst a cultural association of psychopaths who, like the Germans, marched off with a volume of Goethe in their knapsacks, to skewer Frenchmen and Russians on their bayonets.

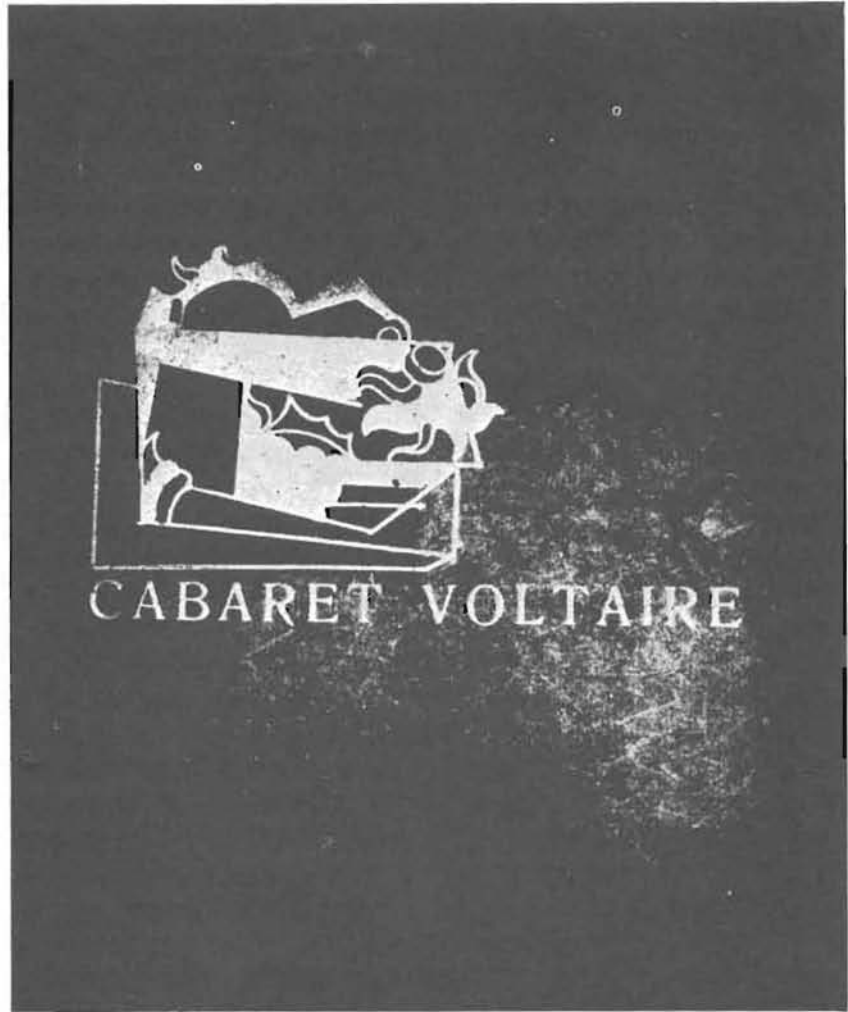
Arp was an Alsatian; he had lived through the beginning of the war and the whole nationalistic frenzy in Paris, and was pretty well disgusted with all the petty chicanery there, and in general with the sickening changes that had taken place in the city and the people on which we had all squandered our love before the war. Politicians are the same everywhere, flatheaded and vile. Soldiers behave everywhere with the same brisk brutality that is the mortal enemy of every intellectual impulse. The energies and ambitions of those who participated in the Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich were from the start purely artistic. We wanted to make the Cabaret Voltaire a focal point of the "newest art," although we did not neglect from time to time to tell the fat and utterly uncomprehending Zurich philistines that we regarded them as pigs and the German Kaiser as the initiator

of the war. Then there was always a big fuss, and the students, who in Switzerland as elsewhere are the stupidest and most reactionary rabble—if in view of the compulsory national stultification in that country any group of citizens can claim a right to the superlative in that respect—at any rate the students gave a preview of the public resistance which Dada was later to encounter on its triumphant march through the world.

The word Dada was accidentally discovered by Hugo Ball and myself in a German-French dictionary, as we were looking for a name for Madame le Roy, the chanteuse at our cabaret. Dada is French for a wooden horse. It is impressive in its brevity and suggestiveness. Soon Dada became the signboard for all the art that we launched in the Cabaret Voltaire. By “newest art,” we then meant by and large, abstract art. Later the idea behind the word Dada was to undergo a considerable change. While the Dadaists of the Allied countries, under the leadership of Tristan Tzara, still make no great distinction between Dadaism and “*l'art abstrait*,” in Germany, where the psychological background of our type of activity is entirely different from that in Switzerland, France and Italy, Dada assumed a very definite political character, which we shall discuss at length later.

The Cabaret Voltaire group were all artists in the sense that they were keenly sensitive to newly developed artistic possibilities. Ball and I had been extremely active in helping to spread expressionism in Germany; Ball was an intimate friend of Kandinsky, in collaboration with whom he had attempted to found an expressionistic theatre in Munich. Arp in Paris had been in close contact with Picasso and Braque, the leaders of the cubist movement, and was thoroughly convinced of the necessity of combatting naturalist conception in any form. Tristan Tzara, the romantic internationalist whose propagandistic zeal we have to thank for the enormous growth of Dada, brought with him from Rumania an unlimited literary facility. In that period, as we danced, sang and recited night after night in the Cabaret Voltaire, abstract art was for us tantamount to absolute honor. Naturalism was a psychological penetration of the motives of the bourgeois, in whom we saw our mortal enemy, and psychological penetration, despite all efforts at resistance, brings an identification with the various precepts of bourgeois morality. Archipenko, whom we honored as an unequalled model in the field of plastic art, maintained that art must be neither realistic nor idealistic, it must be true; and by this he meant above all that any imitation of nature, however concealed, is a lie. In this sense, Dada was to give the truth a new impetus. Dada was to be a rallying point for abstract energies and a lasting slingshot for the great international artistic movements.

Through Tzara we were also in relation with the futurist movement and carried on a correspondence with Marinetti. By that time Boccioni had been killed, but all of us knew his thick book, *Pittura e scultura futuriste*. We regarded Marinetti's position as realistic, and were opposed to it, although we were glad to take over the concept of simultaneity, of which he made so much use. Tzara for the first time had poems recited simultaneously on the stage, and these performances were a great success, although the *poème simultané* had already been introduced



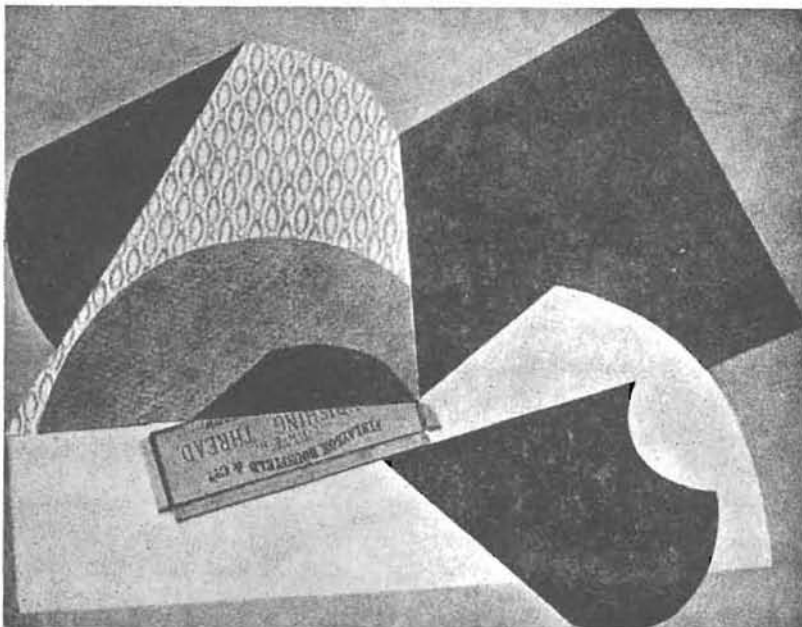
Cover. (For first number of *Cabaret Voltaire*, dada review, edited by Hugo Ball). Design by Arp. Zurich, 1916.

in France by Derème and others. From Marinetti we also borrowed "bruitism," or noise music, *le concert bruitiste*, which, of blessed memory, had created such a stir at the first appearance of the futurists in Milan, where they had regaled the audience with *le reveil de la capitale*. I spoke on the significance of bruitism at a number of open Dada gatherings.

"*Le bruit*," noise with imitative effects, was introduced into art (in this connection we can hardly speak of individual arts, music or literature) by Marinetti, who used a chorus of typewriters, kettledrums, rattles and pot-covers to suggest the "awakening of the capital"; at first it was intended as nothing more than a rather violent reminder of the colorfulness of life. In contrast to the cubists or for that matter the German expressionists, the futurists regarded themselves as pure

activists. While all "abstract artists" maintained the position that a table is not the wood and nails it is made of but the idea of all tables, and forgot that a table could be used to put things on, the futurists wanted to immerse themselves in the "angularity" of things—for them the table signified a utensil for living, and so did everything else. Along with tables there were houses, frying-pans, urinals, women, etc. Consequently Marinetti and his group love war as the highest expression of the conflict of things, as a spontaneous eruption of possibilities, as movement, as a simultaneous poem, as a symphony of cries, shots, commands, embodying an attempted solution of the problem of life in motion. The problem of the soul is volcanic in nature. Every movement naturally produces noise. While number, and consequently melody, are symbols presupposing a faculty for abstraction, noise is a direct call to action. Music of whatever nature is harmonious, artistic, an activity of reason—but bruitism is life itself, it cannot be judged like a book, but rather it is a part of our personality, which attacks us, pursues us and tears us to pieces. Bruitism is a view of life, which, strange as it may seem at first, compels men to make an ultimate decision. There are only bruitists, and others. While we are speaking of music, Wagner had shown all the hypocrisy inherent in a pathetic faculty for abstraction—the screeching of a brake, on the other hand, could at least give you a toothache. In modern Europe, the same initiative which in America made ragtime a national music, led to the convulsion of bruitism.

Bruitism is a kind of return to nature. It is the music produced by circuits of atoms; death ceases to be an escape of the soul from earthly misery and becomes a vomiting, screaming and choking. The Dadaists of the Cabaret Voltaire took over bruitism without suspecting its philosophy—basically they desired the opposite: calming of the soul, an endless lullaby, art, abstract art. The Dadaists of the Cabaret Voltaire actually had no idea what they wanted—the wisps of "modern art" that at some time or other had clung to the minds of these individuals were gathered together and called "Dada." Tristan Tzara was devoured by ambition to move in international artistic circles as an equal or even a "leader." He was all ambition and restlessness. For his restlessness he sought a pole and for his ambition a ribbon. And what an extraordinary, never-to-be-repeated opportunity now arose to found an artistic movement and play the part of a literary mime! The passion of an aesthete is absolutely inaccessible to the man of ordinary concepts, who calls a dog a dog and a spoon a spoon. What a source of satisfaction it is to be denounced as a wit in a few cafés in Paris, Berlin, Rome! The history of literature is a grotesque imitation of world events, and a Napoleon among men of letters is the most tragi-comic character conceivable. Tristan Tzara had been one of the first to grasp the suggestive power of the word Dada. From here on he worked indefatigably as the prophet of a word, which only later was to be filled with a concept. He wrapped, pasted, addressed, he bombarded the French and Italians with letters; slowly he made himself the "focal point." We do not wish to belittle the fame of the *fondateur du Dadaïsme* any more than that of *Oberdada* (Chief Dada) Baader, a Swabian pietist, who at the brink of old age, discovered Dadaism and journeyed through the countryside as a Dadaist prophet, to the delight of all



Arp. Collage. 1915. (Reproduced in *Cabaret Voltaire*). (Courtesy Cahiers d'Art, Paris).

fools. In the *Cabaret Voltaire* period, we wanted to “document”—we brought out the publication *Cabaret Voltaire*, a catch-all for the most diverse directions in art, which at that time seemed to us to constitute “Dada.” None of us suspected what Dada might really become, for none of us understood enough about the times to free ourselves from traditional views and form a conception of art as a moral and social phenomenon. Art just was—there were artists and bourgeois. You had to love one and hate the other.

Yet despite everything, the artist as Tzara conceived him was something other than the German *dichter*. Guillaume Apollinaire jokingly claimed that his father had been a doorman in the Vatican; I suspect that Apollinaire was born in a Galician ghetto and became a Frenchman because he saw that Paris was the best place to make literature. The literary jobber is not the most deplorable figure created by the International of the mind. How much liberating honesty and decent shamelessness it takes to construe literature as a business. The litterati have their thieves' honor and their high-signs—in international trade, in the corners of hotel lobbies, in the *Mitropa* dining cars, the mask of the spirit is quickly dropped, there is too little time to dress up in an ideology that might appeal to other people. Manolescu, the great hotel thief, has written memoirs which, in point of diction and *esprit*, stand higher than all the German memoirs that have been brought forth by the war. Elasticity is everything. Marinetti has a good deal of the great literary magician of the future, who plays golf as well as he chats about Mallarmé, or, when necessary, makes remarks about ancient philology, yet at the same time is perfectly well aware which lady present it is safe to make a pass at.

The German *dichter* is the typical dope, who carries around with him an academic concept of "spirit," writes poems about communism, Zionism, socialism, as the need arises, and is positively amazed at the powers the Muse has given him. The German *dichter* has taken out a mortgage on literature. He thinks everything has to be as it is. He does not understand what a gigantic humbug the world has made of the "spirit" and that this is a good thing. In his head there is a hierarchy, with the inartistic man, which amounts to more or less the same as the uneducated, at the bottom and the man of the spirit, the Schillerian Hasenclever, yearning for the ethereal, at the top. That's how it is and that's how it's got to be. Just listen to old Schopenhauer in his *Parerga* telling us how stuck-up the German is about his culture, and, if you are anything of a psychologist you will see how comic and utterly hopeless is the situation of the German *dichter*. The German *dichter* who means violet even when he says bloodhound, the philistine over all philistines, the born abstractionist, the expressionist—surely that wasn't what Tzara wanted when he made Dadaism an abstract direction in art, but he never really understood what it meant to make literature with a gun in hand.

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. The philosopher in the garret was thoroughly obsolete—but so was the professional artist, the café litterateur, the society "wit," in general the man who could be moved in any way by intellectual accomplishment, who in intellectual matters found a welcome limitation which in his opinion gave him a special value before other men—the Dadaist as far as possible was to be the opposite of these. 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. Of life itself. But the Dadaist loves life, because he can throw it away every day; for him death is a Dadaist affair. The Dadaist looks forward to the day, fully aware that a flowerpot may fall on his head, he is naive, he loves the noises of the Métro, he likes to hang around Cook's travel bureau, and knows the practices of the angelmakers who behind closely drawn curtains dry out foetuses on blotting paper, in order to grind them up and sell them as ersatz coffee.

Everyone can be a Dadaist. Dada is not limited to any art. The bartender in the Manhattan Bar, who pours out Curaçao with one hand and gathers up his gonorrhoea with the other, is a Dadaist. The gentleman in the raincoat, who is about to start his seventh trip around the world, is a Dadaist. The Dadaist should be a man who has fully understood that one is entitled to have ideas only if one can transform them into life—the completely active type, who lives only through action, because it holds the possibility of his achieving knowledge. A Dadaist is the man who rents a whole floor at the Hotel Bristol without knowing where the



money is coming from to tip the chambermaid. A Dadaist is the man of chance with the good eye and the rabbit punch. He can fling away his individuality like a lasso, he judges each case for itself, he is resigned to the realization that the world at one and the same time includes Mohammedans, Zwinglians, fifth formers, Anabaptists, pacifists, etc., etc. The motley character of the world is welcome to him but no source of surprise. In the evening the band plays by the lakeshore, and the whores tripping along on their high heels laugh into your face. It's a fucked-up foolish world. You walk aimlessly along, fixing up a philosophy for supper. But before you have it ready, the mailman brings you the first telegram, announcing that all your pigs have died of rabies, your dinner jacket has been thrown off the Eiffel Tower, your housekeeper has come down with the epizootic. You give a startled look at the moon, which seems to you like a good investment, and the same postman brings you a telegram announcing that all your chickens have died of hoof and mouth disease, your father has fallen on a pitchfork and frozen to death, your mother has burst with sorrow on the occasion of her silver wedding (maybe the frying pan stuck to her ears, how do I know?). That's life, my dear fellow. The days progress in the rhythm of your bowels and you, who have so often been in peril of choking on a fishbone, are still alive. You pull the covers up over your head and whistle the "Hohenfriedberger." And who knows, don't gloat too soon, perhaps the next day will see you at your desk, your pen ready for the thrust, bent over your new novel, *Rabble*. Who knows? That is pure Dadaism, ladies and gentlemen.

If Tristan Tzara had barely suspected the meaning of this famous existence we drag along between apes and bedbugs, he would have seen the fraud of all art and all artistic movements and he would have become a Dadaist. Where have these gentlemen who are so eager to appear in the history of literature left their irony? Where is the eye that weeps and laughs at the gigantic rump and carnival of this world? Buried in books, they have lost their independence, the ambition to be as famous as Rabelais or Flaubert has robbed them of the courage to laugh—there is so much marching, writing, living to be done. Rimbaud jumped in the ocean and started to swim to St. Helena, Rimbaud was a hell of a guy, they sit in the cafés and rack their brains over the quickest way of getting to be a hell of a guy. They have an academic conception of life—all *litterati* are Germans; and for that very reason they will never get close to life. Rimbaud very well understood that literature and art are mighty suspicious things—and how well a man can live as a pasha or a brothel-owner, as the creaking of the beds sings a song of mounting profits.

In Tzara's hands Dadaism achieved great triumphs. The Dadaists wrote books that were bought all over Europe; they put on shows to which thousands flocked. The world press adopted the Dada movement in art. A new sensation, ladies and gentlemen. In the hands of men who were no Dadaists, Dada became an immense sensation in Europe; it touched the soul of the true European who is at home between the pistons and boilers of machines, who hardly looks up from the *Daily News* when you meet him in Charing Cross Station, whom you find in fashionable tweeds on the decks of Red Star liners, with a pipeful of shag dangling noncha-

Lorsque je fondis le Cabaret Voltaire, j'étais convaincu qu'il y aurait en Suisse quelques jeunes hommes qui voudraient comme moi, non seulement pour de leur indépendance, mais aussi la prouver.

Je me rendis chez Mr Ephraïm, le propriétaire de la „Meierei“ et lui dis: „Je vous prie, Mr Ephraïm, de me donner la salle. Je voudrais fonder un Cabaret artistique.“ Nous nous entendimes et Mr Ephraïm me donna la salle. „Donnez moi, je vous prie un lab-j'aimerais associer une petite exposition à cueillanté de Zurich, je dis: „Aidez-moi, national; nous ferons de belles choses.“ publia les entrefilets. Alors nous eûmes le nings et Mme Leconte chantèrent en français lut de ses poésies roumaines. Un orchestre populaires et des

Je trouvai beaucoup d'appui et grava l'affiche du Cabaret et chez Mr Arp œuvres originales, quelques eaux-fortes de amis O. van Rees et Artur Segall. Beaucoup d'appui encore chez Mrs Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janko et Max Oppenheimer qui parurent maintes fois sur la scène. Nous organisâmes une soirée russe, puis une française (on y lut des œuvres d'Apollinaire, Max Jacob, André Salmon, Jarry, Laforgue et Rimbaud). Le 26 février arriva Richard Huelsenbeck de Berlin et le 30 mars nous jouâmes



Dada Dada Dada.

de sympathie chez Mr Slodki qui qui mit à ma disposition des Picasso, des tableaux de ses deux admirables chants nègres (toujours avec la grosse caisse: bonn bonn bonn drabatja mo gere, drabatja mo bonnoooooooooooooooooo;) Monsieur Laban y assistait et fut émerveillé. Et sur l'initiative de Mr Tristan Tzara: Mrs Huelsenbeck, Janko et Tzara interprétèrent (pour la première fois à Zurich et dans le monde entier) les vers simultanés de Mrs Henri Barzun et Fernand Divoire, et un poème simultané composé par eux-mêmes qui est imprimé sur les pages 6—7 du présent cahier. Aujourd'hui et avec l'aide de nos amis de France, d'Italie et de Russie nous publions ce petit cahier. Il doit préciser l'activité de ce Cabaret dont le but est de rappeler qu'il y a, au delà de la guerre et des patries, des hommes indépendants qui vivent d'autres idéals.

L'intention des artistes assemblés ici est de publier une revue internationale. La revue paraîtra à Zurich et portera le nom „DADA“ Dada



J'allais chez quelques connais-leau, un dessin, une gravure. mon cabaret.“ A la presse ac-Je veux faire un Cabaret inter-On me donna des tableaux, on 5 février un cabaret, Mme Hen-et en danois, Mr Tristan Tzara de balalaika joua des chansons danses russes.

de sympathie chez Mr Slodki qui qui mit à ma disposition des Picasso, des tableaux de ses

Zurich, le 15 mai 1916.

HUGO BALL

Hugo Ball. "Lorsque je fondis le Cabaret Voltaire . . ." (facsimile from Cabaret Voltaire). Zurich, 1916.

lantly from between his gold fillings.

Dada knew how to set the big rotary presses in motion, it was discussed in the Ecole de France and in the books of the psycho-analysts; in Madrid they tried to understand it, in Chile they tore each other's hair out over it, even in Chicago, with the grain exchange made famous by Frank Norris, there appeared for a moment as on a great eerie screen, the word Dada.

During the past decades in Europe, no word, no concept, no philosophy, no slogan of party or sect can be said to have burst upon the imagination of a civilized society with such catastrophic force. Do not forget the profound psychological significance of this fact. In the minds of all these people at the cafés, theatres, race tracks, brothels, who were interested in Dadaism because they regarded it as a

"ridiculous product of modern artistic madness," Dada had long since ceased to be a movement in art. You need to be a professor of philosophy with a catheter<sup>1</sup> at Berlin University not to see that ninety-nine out of a hundred people care as much about movements, individual techniques, perspectives in art, as the legendary cow about Easter Sunday. It did not interest them and was not even known to them that Dada, which did have an effect, however imponderable, upon them, had something to do with art and originated in art. A word which affects the masses so profoundly must embody an idea that touches the most vital interests of these masses, shaming, frightening or encouraging them in their innermost soul. That is why it is so incomprehensible that this Tristan Tzara, who out of childish ambition passes himself off as the inventor of Dada, should try to bind Dada to abstract art; such an attempt represents a total failure to understand things both near and far; he fails to see the possibilities of the birth, life and death of an idea, or to understand the significance that an *ens spirituale*, a *fluidum* (whether expressed in a word, concept or idea) can assume for a little circle of art-jobbers and a startled continent looking up from its work.

What Dada was in the beginning and how it developed is utterly unimportant in comparison with what it has come to mean in the mind of Europe. Dada has operated—not as mild suasion but like a thunderbolt, not like a system set down in a book, which through the channel of superior minds, after years of chewing and rechewing, becomes the universal possession of the nations, but like a watchword passed on by heralds on horseback. The immense effect of Dadaism on the great mass of the artistically indifferent lay in the senseless and comic character of the word Dada, and it would seem that this effect, in turn, must derive from some profound psychological cause, connected with the whole structure of "humanity" today and its present social organization. The average man, Smith, Schulze, Dupin, nature's famous mass-production ware, who disarms all intellectual evaluation, but with which nevertheless all psychological insight begins, heard that Dada was babies' prattle, that there were men who "made a business" of this prattle—that apparently some lunatics "wanted to start a party" based on the whimperings of the suckling babe. They held their sides laughing, they'd seen a good deal in their time, but this, well, all you can say is—(well, what can you say?) nix, nix, nix. Messrs. Schulzè, Smith and Dupin felt themselves strongly reminded by Dada of their milk bottle and honorably soiled diapers, now a generation behind them, and of the cry which was now to bring happiness into the world. Dada, Dada, Dada.

That is what I meant by the suggestivity of the word Dada, its ability to hypnotize, by guiding the vulgar mind to ideas and things which none of its originators had thought of. To be sure, the choice of the word Dada in the Cabaret Voltaire was selective-metaphysical, predetermined by all the idea-energies with which it was now acting upon the world—but no one had thought of Dada as babies' prattle. It is a rare gift of God to be present at the birth of a religion, or of any idea which later conquers the world. Even though Dada is not (I say this to reassure all Ger-

<sup>1</sup> A pun on the similarity of Katheder (professor's chair) and Katheter (catheter).

man high-school students and academic donkeys), thank God, an idea in the "progressive-cultural" sense celebrated in all historical compendia, but has a thoroughly ephemeral character, in that it has no desire to be anything more than a mirror which one quickly passes by, or a poster which in the harshest colors of the moment calls your attention to some opportunity to get rid of your money or fill your belly. Psychologically speaking! If you have had the miraculous good fortune to be present at the birth of such a "sensation," you will want to understand how it happens that an empty sound, first intended as a surname for a female singer, has developed amid grotesque adventures into a name for a rundown cabaret, then into abstract art, baby-talk and a party of babies at the breast, and finally—well, I shall not anticipate. This is exactly the history of Dadaism. Dada came over the Dadaists without their knowing it; it was an immaculate conception, and thereby its profound meaning was revealed to me.

The history of Dadaism is indeed one of the most interesting psychological events of the last twenty-five years; one need only have eyes to see and ears to hear. In the hands of the gentlemen in Zurich, Dada grew up into a creature which stood head and shoulders above all those present; and soon its existence could no longer be arranged with the precision demanded by a businesslike conduct of the Dadaist movement in art. Despite the most impassioned efforts, no one had yet found out exactly what Dada was. Tzara and Ball founded a "gallery" in which they exhibited Dadaistic art, i.e., "modern" art, which for Tzara meant non-objective, abstract art. But as I have said, abstract art was very old hat. Years before, Picasso had given up perspective as the expression of an intellectual and penetrating world conception, in favor of that archaizing, mathematical representation of space which, with Braque, he designated as cubism. There was something in the air of ageing Europe that demanded an attempt, by a last effort of the will, deriving its impulse from the knowledge of all cultures and artistic techniques, to return to the old intuitive possibilities, from which, it was realized, the various styles had emanated hundreds of years ago. It is no accident that the Latin peoples included in their program the mystic elements of Euclidean geometry, the conic sections and mathematical quantities, in so far as they were symbols of tangible bodies, while the Germans made the academic concept of intuition, in the form of expressionism, the signboard for their artistic barber shop. The Latins, with their last strength, directed their abstractionism toward something universally valid, something determined amid the indeterminate, which presupposed a personality that would treat the transcendental with inborn tact and moderation; while the Germans with their expressionism evoked the immeasurable eternalization of the subjective individual, giving free play to the *kolossal* and the grotesque, manifested in the arbitrary distortion of anatomical proportions.

The *Galerie Dada* capriciously exhibited cubist, expressionist and futurist pictures; it carried on its little art business at literary teas, lectures and recitation evenings, while the word Dada conquered the world. It was something touching to behold. Day after day the little group sat in its café, reading aloud the critical comments that poured in from every possible country, and which by their tone

of indignation showed that Dada had struck someone to the heart. Stricken dumb with amazement, we basked in our glory. Tristan Tzara could think of nothing else to do but write manifesto after manifesto, speaking of "*l'art nouveau*, which is neither futurism nor cubism," but Dada. But what was Dada? "*Dada*," came the answer, "*ne signifie rien*." With psychological astuteness, the Dadaists spoke of energy and will and assured the world that they had amazing plans. But concerning the nature of these plans, no information whatever was forthcoming.

Incommensurable values are conquering the world. If someone hurls a word into the crowd, accompanying it with a grand gesture, they make a religion of it. *Credo, quia absurdum*. Dada, as a mere word, actually conquered a large part of the world, even without association with any personality. This was an almost magical event. The true meaning of Dadaism was recognized only later in Germany by the people who were zealously propagating it, and these people, succumbing to the aggressive power and propagandistic force of the word, then became Dadaists. In Berlin they founded the Dada Club, which will be discussed below. The gentlemen of the Galérie Dada apparently noticed that their own stature was not consistent with the success of Dadaism. Things came to such a pass that they borrowed pictures from the Berlin art-dealer Herwarth Walden (who for a long time had been making money out of abstract art theories) and passed them off on the Swiss puddingheads as something extraordinary. In literature primitive tendencies were pursued. They read mediaeval prose, and Tzara ground out Negro verses which he palmed off as accidentally discovered remains of a Bantu or Winnetu culture, again to the great amazement of the Swiss. It was a dismal collection of Dadaists.

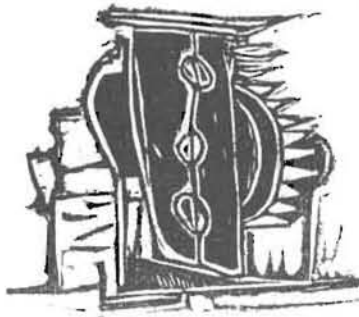
As I think back on it now, an art for art's sake mood lay over the Galérie Dada—it was a manicure salon of the fine arts, characterized by tea-drinking old ladies trying to revive their vanishing sexual powers with the help of "something mad." The Galérie Dada was an antechamber of ambition, where the beginners in the humbug of art had to accustom themselves to looking up to the leaders with the fish-eyed veneration found in Werfel's poems, when he sings of God, nature and spirit. The Galérie Dada was a small and cluttered kitchen of literary conventions, where no one experienced the slightest shame as long as he had a by-line. The gentlemen were all international, members of that League of the Spirit which at the decisive moment was such a catastrophe for Europe, two-dimensional, planimetric creatures, who had no sense of the compromise necessary to artistic activity in the restricted sense.

There might have been a way to make something of the situation. The group did nothing, and garnered success. They produced something, anything, and saw that the world was ready to pay high prices. It was a situation made to order for the racketeers of art and the spirit. But none of the gentlemen who sold abstract art in the Galérie Dada understood this, or else they did not want to understand it. Tzara did not want to give up his position as an artist within the abstract Myth, for the position of leadership he longed for had come tangibly near; and Ball, the founder of the Cabaret Voltaire (incidentally a far-sighted fellow) was too honor-

# D A D A I

RECUEIL LITTÉRAIRE ET ARTISTIQUE

JUILLET 1917



Cover. (For *Dada I*, review edited by Tristan Tzara). Zurich, July, 1917.

able, too Roman Catholic, too something. Both had insufficient insight into the possibilities of Dadaism; they lacked psychological astuteness. The Dadaist as racketeer, as Manolescu: this aspect reappeared.

The dissatisfaction ended in a battle between Tzara and Ball, a real bullfight among Dadaists, carried on, as such fights always are, with every resource of impertinence, falsification and physical brutality. Ball remembered his inward nature, withdrew definitively from Dada and from all art, and began to become a democrat in Bern, and in this, it seems to me, he has been very successful. Tzara and his supporters fell for a time into a stunned silence and then (since Dada was doing well in the world even without them) they plunged with renewed zeal into *l'art nouveau*, *l'art abstrait*. Tzara began to publish the magazine *Dada*, which found its way into every country in Europe and was widely purchased. We saw it in Germany, and it impressed us as commercial art and nothing else. The con-

tributors included, aside from the Zurich Dadaists, all the familiar names of the International of ultra-modern literature. Among many, I shall mention Francis Picabia, whom I deeply respect; at that time he was already contributing to Guillaume Apollinaire's famous *Soirées de Paris*, and is said to have stood to this periodical, which for a time played a leading role, in the relationship of the rich man to the lavatory attendant. Apollinaire, Marie Laurencin—the good Henry Rousseau who up to his death played the *Marseillaise* at home: old Paris came to life.

Now it has died for good. Today it is the stamping ground of Messrs. Foch and Millerand; Apollinaire died of influenza. Picabia is in New York—old Paris is done for. But very recently Dada turned up there in person. After exhausting all the Dadaistic possibilities in Zurich, after attempting in vain, by admitting Serener into his circle, to put new life into its ideas (after a good many more sensational performances and Dadaist parades), Tzara arrived in the city where Napoleon is supposed to have said that literature wasn't worth a pile of dung to him. Napoleon had stood at the foot of the Pyramids; Tzara managed immediately to turn the magazine *Littérature* into a Dadaist organ; he staged a great opening at which bruitist concerts and simultaneous poems made a terrific impression; he had himself enthroned, anointed and elected pope of the world Dada movement. Dada had conquered. Picasso and Marinetti must have felt rather strange when they heard of the success of their ideas under the name of "Dada." I fear that they were not Dadaist enough to understand Dada. But Picabia, who year after year, had watched the whole fraud pass him by, was not surprised. He had been a Dadaist before Tzara had let him in on the secret wisdom of Dadaism; his great wealth (his father was governor of Chile, Martinique or Cuba) permitted him to maintain a personal physician who was continually running after him with a loaded hypodermic. Francis Picabia is married to Gabriele Buffet, the daughter of a Paris deputy, and as my good friend Hans Arp (whom, in passing, I exempt from all my attacks on the Zurich Dadaists, and whose works, as an expression of his lovable personality, are most welcome to me) tells me, he loves violet waistcoats, smokes Chilean imports, and sometimes takes a glass of sarsaparilla for his imaginary or inherited lues. Tzara is in Paris; Picabia is back in New York. In the countries of the Allies, including the United States, Dada has been victorious. Before we leave it to its own resources and in particular take our leave of Tzara, and turn to Germany, I should like to say a few words about simultaneity, which those interested in Dada will encounter in all Dadaist performances and all Dadaist publications.

Simultaneity (first used by Marinetti in this literary sense) is an abstraction, a concept referring to the occurrence of different events at the same time. It presupposes a heightened sensitivity to the passage of things in time, it turns the sequence  $a=b=c=d$  into an  $a-b-c-d$ , and attempts to transform the problem of the ear into a problem of the face. Simultaneity is against what has become, and for what is becoming. While I, for example, become successively aware that I boxed an old woman on the ear yesterday and washed my hands an hour ago, the screeching of a streetcar brake and the crash of a brick falling off the roof next

door reach my ear simultaneously and my (outward or inward) eye rouses itself to seize, in the simultaneity of these events, a swift meaning of life. From the everyday events surrounding me (the big city, the Dada circus, crashing, screeching, steam whistles, house fronts, the smell of roast veal), I obtain an impulse which starts me toward direct action, becoming the big X. I become directly aware that I am alive, I feel the form-giving force behind the bustling of the clerks in the *Dresdner Bank* and the simple-minded erectness of the policeman.

Simultaneity is a direct reminder of life, and very closely bound up with bruitism. Just as physics distinguishes between tones (which can be expressed in mathematical formulae) and noises, which are completely baffling to its symbolism and abstractionism, because they are a direct objectivization of dark vital force, here the distinction is between a succession and a "simultaneity," which defies formulation because it is a direct symbol of action. And so ultimately a simultaneous poem means nothing but "Hurrah for life!" These problems are long chains. Simultaneity brings me, without feeling that I have taken a long leap, to "the new medium" in painting, which was enthusiastically touted by the Dadaists under Tzara as the *non plus ultra* of the "most modern" painting.

The introduction of the new medium has a certain metaphysical value, it is in a sense a transcendental revulsion against empty space, the result of the fear that is a part of the psychological foundation of all art and must be considered, in this special case, as a kind of *horror vacui*. The concept of reality is a highly variable value, and entirely dependent on the brain and the requirements of the brain which considers it. When Picasso gave up perspective, he felt that it was a set of rules that had been arbitrarily thrown over "nature": the parallels which cross on the horizon are a deplorable deception—behind them lies the infinity of space, which can never be measured. Consequently he restricted his painting to the foreground, he abandoned depth, freed himself from the morality of a plastic philosophy, recognized the conditionality of optical laws, which governed his eye in a particular country at a particular time; he sought a new, direct reality—he became, to use a vulgar term, non-objective. He wanted to paint no more men, women, donkeys and high-school students, since they partook of the whole system of deception, the theatre and the *blague* of existence—and at the same time he felt that painting with oil was a very definite symbol of a very definite culture and morality. He invented the new medium. He began to stick sand, hair, post-office forms and pieces of newspaper onto his pictures, to give them the value of a direct reality, removed from everything traditional. He well understood the ideal, slick, harmonious quality inherent in perspective and in oil painting; he sensed the Schillerian cadence that speaks out of every portrait, and the falsehood of the "landscape" produced by the sentimentality of oil painting.

Perspective and the color which, separated from its natural efficacy, can be squeezed out of tubes, are means of imitating nature; they run at the heels of things and have given up the actual struggle with life; they are shareholders in the cowardly and smug philosophy that belongs to the bourgeoisie. The new medium, on the other hand, points to the absolutely self-evident that is within



reach of our hands, to the natural and naive, to action. The new medium stands in a direct relation to simultaneity and bruitism. With the new medium the picture, which as such remains always the symbol of an unattainable reality, has literally taken a decisive step forward, that is, it has taken an enormous step from the horizon across the foreground; it participates in life itself. The sand, pieces of wood, hair that have been pasted on, give it the same kind of reality as a statue of the idol Moloch, in whose glowing arms child sacrifices are laid. The new medium is the road from yearning to the reality of little things, and this road is abstract. Abstraction (Tzara & Co. stubbornly refused to see this) is by its function a movement, not a goal. A pair of pants is after all more important than the solemn emotion that we situate in the upper regions of a Gothic cathedral "when it enfolds us."

The appropriation by Dada of these three principles, bruitism, simultaneity and, in painting, the new medium, is of course the "accident" leading to the psychological factors to which the real Dadaist movement owed its existence. As I have said, I find in the Dadaism of Tzara and his friends, who made abstract art the cornerstone of their new wisdom, no new idea deserving of very strenuous propaganda. They failed to advance along the abstract road, which ultimately leads from the painted surface to the reality of a post-office form. No sooner had they left the old, sentimental standpoint than they looked behind them, though still spurred on by ambition. They are neither fish nor flesh. In Germany Dadaism became political, it drew the ultimate consequences of its position and renounced art completely.

Yet it would be ungrateful to take leave of Tzara without tipping our hats. I have in my hand *Dadaphone*, a publication recently put out by the Paris Dadaists. It contains the photographs of the presidents of Entente Dadaism: André Breton, Louis Aragon, Francis Picabia, Céline Arnould, Paul Eluard, G. Ribemont-Dessaignes, Philippe Soupault, Paul Dermée, Tristan Tzara. All very nice and harmless-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. A Dadaist monster demonstration is announced, the program including a "Manifeste cannibale dans l'obscurité" (Cannibal manifesto in darkness) by Francis Picabia and a "Dadaphone" by Tristan Tzara. All this is exceedingly gay. Picabia addresses the public: "*Que faites-vous ici, parqués comme des huitres sérieuses—car vous êtes sérieux, n'est-ce pas? Le cul, le cul représente la vie comme les pommes frites et vous tous qui êtes sérieux, vous sentirez plus mauvais que la merde de vache. Dada lui ne sent rien, il n'est rien, rien, rien. Sifflez, criez, cassez-moi la gueule, et puis, et puis? Je vous dirai encore que vous êtes tous des poires.*"<sup>1</sup> This was more than the Paris bourgeoisie in this moment of nationalistic fervor would stand for. The big newspapers went into the matter at length. In

<sup>1</sup> "What are you doing here, plunked down like serious oysters—because you are serious, aren't you? The ass, the ass represents life like fried potatoes, and all you serious people will smell worse than cow-flop. Dada smells of nothing, it is nothing, nothing, nothing. Whistle, shout, bash my face in, and then what? Then what? I'll just go on telling you that you're all fools."



George Grosz: Krause!

*Dadaco* (trial sheets for unpublished anthology.) Munich, 1920. Montage by Grosz.

*Le Temps*, March 30, 1920, I find: "La décadence intellectuelle est l'un des effets de la guerre. La guerre a fortifié les forts; elle a pu pervertir les pervers et abêtir les sots. Mais les vaincus eux-mêmes se protègent contre ces souffles malsains. Il est singulier de voir qu'en France des jeunes gens ('Proche-orientaux') les respirent avec satisfaction et qu'il se rencontre des gens moins jeunes pour les encourager dans cette tentative d'empoisonnement."<sup>1</sup> *Dadaphone* announces a Dadaist exhibition, a Dadaist ball, a large number of Dadaist periodicals, most of which are probably a pious wish on the part of the editor of *Dadaphone*; in short, *une vie dadaïque extraordinaire* has blossomed out at Tzara's instigation.

In January 1917 I returned to Germany, the face of which had meanwhile undergone a fantastic change. I felt as though I had left a smug fat idyll for a street full of electric signs, shouting hawkers and auto horns. In Zurich the international profiteers sat in the restaurants with well-filled wallets and rosy cheeks, ate with their knives and smacked their lips in a merry hurrah for the countries that were bashing each other's skulls in. Berlin was the city of tightened stomachs, of mounting, thundering hunger, where hidden rage was transformed into a boundless money lust, and men's minds were concentrating more and more on questions of naked existence. Here we would have to proceed with entirely different methods, if we wanted to say something to the people. Here we would have to discard our patent leather pumps and tie our Byronic cravats to the doorpost. While in Zurich people lived as in a health resort, chasing after the ladies and longing for nightfall that would bring pleasure barges, magic lanterns and music by Verdi, in Berlin you never knew where the next meal was coming from. Fear was in everybody's bones, everybody had a feeling that the big deal launched by Hindenburg & Co. was going to turn out very badly. The people had an exalted and romantic attitude towards art and all cultural values. A phenomenon familiar in German history was again manifested: Germany always becomes the land of poets and thinkers when it begins to be washed up as the land of judges and butchers.

In 1917 the Germans were beginning to give a great deal of thought to their souls. This was only a natural defense on the part of a society that had been harassed, milked dry, and driven to the breaking point. This was the time when expressionism began to enjoy a vogue, since its whole attitude fell in with the retreat and the weariness of the German spirit. It was only natural that the Germans should have lost their enthusiasm for reality, to which before the war they had sung hymns of praise, through the mouths of innumerable academic thickheads, and which had now cost them over a million dead, while the blockade was strangling their children and grandchildren. Germany was seized with the mood that always precedes a so-called idealistic resurrection, an orgy à la Turnvater-Jahn, a Schenkendorf period.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Intellectual decadence is one of the effects of the war. The war has strengthened the strong; it has also perverted the pervers and stupefied the stupid. But even the vanquished defend themselves against these unhealthy vapors. It is strange to see that in France there are young people ('Near Easterners') who breathe them with satisfaction and that there are people less young who encourage them in this attempted poisoning."

<sup>2</sup> "Turnvater"—"gymnastic father," refers to Ludwig Jahn, the founder of the gymnastic societies which played an important part in the liberation of Germany from Napoleon.

Now came the expressionists, like those famous medical quacks who promise to "fix everything up," looking heavenward like the gentle Muse; they pointed to "the rich treasures of our literature," pulled people gently by the sleeve and led them into the half-light of the Gothic cathedrals, where the street noises die down to a distant murmur and, in accordance with the old principle that all cats are gray at night, men without exception are fine fellows. Man, they have discovered, is good. And so expressionism, which brought the Germans so many welcome truths, became a "national achievement." In art it aimed at inwardness, abstraction, renunciation of all objectivity. When expressionism is mentioned, the first three names I think of are Däubler, Edschmid, and Hiller. Däubler is the gigantesaurus of expressionist lyric poetry. Edschmid the prose writer and prototype of the expressionist man, while Kurt Hiller, with his intentional or unintentional meliorism, is the theoretician of the expressionist age.

On the basis of all these considerations and the psychological insight that a turning-away from objective reality implied the whole complex of weariness and cowardice that is so welcome to putrescent bourgeoisie, we immediately launched a sharp attack on expressionism in Germany, under the watchword of "action," acquired through our fight for the principles of bruitism, simultaneity and the new medium. The first German Dadaist manifesto, written by myself, says among other things: "Art in its execution and direction is dependent on the time in which it lives, and artists are creatures of their epoch. The highest art will be that which in its conscious content presents the thousandfold problems of the day, the art which has been visibly shattered by the explosions of the last week, which is forever trying to collect its limbs after yesterday's crash. The best and most extraordinary artists will be those who every hour snatch the tatters of their bodies out of the frenzied cataract of life, who, with bleeding hands and hearts, hold fast to the intelligence of their time. Has expressionism fulfilled our expectations of such an art, which should be the expression of our most vital concerns? *No! No! No!* Under the pretext of turning inward, the expressionists in literature and painting have banded together into a generation which is already looking forward to honorable mention in the histories of literature and art and aspiring to the most respectable civic distinctions. On pretext of carrying on propaganda for the soul, they have, in their struggle with naturalism, found their way back to the abstract, pathetic gestures which presuppose a comfortable life free from content or strife. The stages are filling up with kings, poets and Faustian characters of all sorts; the theory of a melioristic philosophy, the psychological naïvety of which is highly significant for a critical understanding of expressionism, runs ghostlike through the minds of men who never act. Hatred of the press, hatred of advertising, hatred of sensations, are typical of people who prefer their armchair to the noise of the street, and who even make it a point of pride to be swindled by every small-time profiteer. That sentimental resistance to the times, which are neither better nor worse, neither more reactionary nor more revolutionary than other times, that weak-kneed resistance, flirting with prayers and incense when it does not prefer to load its cardboard cannon with Attic iambs—is the quality of a youth

which never knew how to be young. Expressionism, discovered abroad, and in Germany, true to style, transformed into an opulent idyll and the expectation of a good pension, has nothing in common with the efforts of active men. The signers of this manifesto have, under the battle cry Dada!, gathered together to put forward a new art, from which they expect the realization of new ideals." And so on. Here the difference between our conception and that of Tzara is clear. While Tzara was still writing: "*Dada ne signifie rien*"—in Germany Dada lost its art-for-art's-sake character with its very first move. Instead of continuing to produce art, Dada, in direct contrast to abstract art, went out and found an adversary. Emphasis was laid on the movement, on struggle. But we still needed a program of action, we had to say exactly what our Dadaism was after. This program was drawn up by Raoul Hausmann and myself. In it we consciously adopted a political position:

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### **What is Dadaism and what does it want in Germany?**

#### **1. Dadaism demands:**

- 1) The international revolutionary union of all creative and intellectual men and women on the basis of radical Communism;
- 2) The introduction of progressive unemployment through comprehensive mechanization of every field of activity. Only by unemployment does it become possible for the individual to achieve certainty as to the truth of life and finally become accustomed to experience;
- 3) The immediate expropriation of property (socialization) and the communal feeding of all; further, the erection of cities of light, and gardens which will belong to society as a whole and prepare man for a state of freedom.

#### **2. The Central Council demands:**

- a) Daily meals at public expense for all creative and intellectual men and women on the Potsdamer Platz (Berlin);
- b) Compulsory adherence of all clergymen and teachers to the Dadaist articles of faith;
- c) The most brutal struggle against all directions of so-called "workers of the spirit" (Hiller, Adler), against their concealed bourgeoisism, against expressionism and post-classical education as advocated by the Sturm group;
- d) The immediate erection of a state art center, elimination of concepts of property in the new art (expressionism); the concept of property is entirely excluded from the super-individual movement of Dadaism which liberates all mankind;
- e) Introduction of the simultaneist poem as a Communist state prayer;
- f) Requisition of churches for the performance of bruitism, simultaneist and Dadaist poems;
- g) Establishment of a Dadaist advisory council for the remodelling of life in every city of over 50,000 inhabitants;

- h) Immediate organization of a large scale Dadaist propaganda campaign with 150 circuses for the enlightenment of the proletariat;
- i) Submission of all laws and decrees to the Dadaist central council for approval;
- j) Immediate regulation of all sexual relations according to the views of international Dadaism through establishment of a Dadaist sexual center.

The Dadaist revolutionary central council.

German group: Hausmann, Huelsenbeck

Business Office: Charlottenburg, Kantstrasse 118.

Applications for membership taken at business office.

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The significance of this program is that in it Dada turns decisively away from the speculative, in a sense loses its metaphysics and reveals its understanding of itself as an expression of this age which is primarily characterized by machinery and the growth of civilization. It desires to be no more than an expression of the times, it has taken into itself all their knowledge, their breathless tempo, their scepticism, but also their weariness, their despair of a meaning or a "truth." In an article on expressionism Kornfeld makes the distinction between the ethical man and the psychological man. The ethical man has the child-like piety and faith which permit him to kneel at some altar and recognize some God, who has the power to lead men from their misery to some paradise. The psychological man has journeyed vainly through the infinite, has recognized the limits of his spiritual possibilities, he knows that every "system" is a seduction with all the consequences of seduction and every God an opportunity for financiers.

The Dadaist, as the psychological man, has brought back his gaze from the distance and considers it important to have shoes that fit and a suit without holes in it. The Dadaist is an atheist by instinct. He is no longer a metaphysician in the sense of finding a rule for the conduct of life in any theoretical principles, for him there is no longer a "thou shalt"; for him the cigarette-butt and the umbrella are as exalted and as timeless as the "thing in itself." Consequently, the good is for the Dadaist no "better" than the bad—there is only a simultaneity, in values as in everything else. This simultaneity applied to the economy of facts is communism, a communism, to be sure, which has abandoned the principle of "making things better" and above all sees its goal in the destruction of everything that has gone bourgeois. Thus the Dadaist is opposed to the idea of paradise in every form, and one of the ideas farthest from his mind is that "the spirit is the sum of all means for the improvement of human existence." The word "improvement" is in every form unintelligible to the Dadaist, since behind it he sees a hammering and sawing on this life which, though useless, aimless and vile, represents as such a thoroughly spiritual phenomenon, requiring no improvement in a metaphysical sense. To mention spirit and improvement in the same breath is for the Dadaist a blasphemy. "Evil" has a profound meaning, the polarity of events finds in it a limit, and though the real political thinker (such as Lenin seems to be) creates a movement, i.e., he dissolves individualities with the help of a theory, he changes nothing. And that, as paradoxical as it may seem, is the import of the Communist movement.

The Dadaist exploits the psychological possibilities inherent in his faculty for flinging out his own personality as one flings a lasso or lets a cloak flutter in the wind. He is not the same man today as tomorrow, the day after tomorrow he will perhaps be "nothing at all," and then he may become everything. He is entirely devoted to the movement of life, he accepts its angularity—but he never loses his distance to phenomena, because at the same time he preserves his creative indifference, as Friedlaender-Mynona calls it. It seems scarcely credible that anyone could be at the same time active and at rest, that he should be devoted, yet maintain an attitude of rejection; and yet it is in this very anomaly that life itself consists, naive, obvious life, with its indifference toward happiness and death, joy and misery. The Dadaist is naive. The thing he is after is obvious, undifferentiated, unintellectual life. For him a table is not a mouse-trap and an umbrella is definitely not to pick your teeth with. In such a life art is no more and no less than a psychological problem. In relation to the masses, it is a phenomenon of public morality.

The Dadaist considers it necessary to come out against art, because he has seen through its fraud as a moral safety valve. Perhaps this militant attitude is a last gesture of inculcated honesty, perhaps it merely amuses the Dadaist, perhaps it means nothing at all. But in any case, art (including culture, spirit, athletic club), regarded from a serious point of view, is a large-scale swindle. And this, as I have hinted above, most especially in Germany, where the most absurd idolatry of all sorts of divinities is beaten into the child in order that the grown man and taxpayer should automatically fall on his knees when, in the interest of the state or some smaller gang of thieves, he receives the order to worship some "great spirit." I maintain again and again: the whole spirit business is a vulgar utilitarian swindle. In this war the Germans (especially in Saxony where the most infamous hypocrites reside) strove to justify themselves at home and abroad with Goethe and Schiller. Culture can be designated solemnly and with complete naivety as the national spirit become form, but also it can be characterized as a compensatory phenomenon, an obeisance to an invisible judge, as veronal for the conscience. The Germans are masters of dissembling, they are unquestionably the magicians (in the vaudeville sense) among nations, in every moment of their life they conjure up a culture, a spirit, a superiority which they can hold as a shield in front of their endangered bellies. It is this hypocrisy that has always seemed utterly foreign and incomprehensible to the French, a sign of diabolical malice. The German is un-naive, he is twofold and has a double base.

Here we have no intention of standing up for any nation. The French have the least right of anyone to be praised as a *grande nation*, now that they have brought the chauvinism of our times to its greatest possible height. The German has all the qualities and drawbacks of the idealist. You can look at it whichever way you like. You can construe the idealism that distorts things and makes them function as an absolute (the discipline of corpses) whether it be vegetarianism, the rights of man or the monarchy, as a pathological deformation, or you can call it ecstatically "the bridge to eternity," "the goal of life," or more such platitudes. The ex-

pressionists have done quite a bit in that direction. The Dadaist is instinctively opposed to all this. He is a man of reality who loves wine, women and advertising, his culture is above all of the body. *Instinctively he sees his mission in smashing the cultural ideology of the Germans.* I have no desire to justify the Dadaist. He acts instinctively, just as a man might say he was a thief out of "passion," or a stamp-collector by preference. The "ideal" has shifted: the abstract artist has become (if you insist, dear reader) a wicked materialist, with the abstruse characteristic of considering the care of his stomach and stock jobbing more honorable than philosophy. "But that's nothing new," those people will shout who can never tear themselves away from the "old." But it is something startlingly new, since for the first time in history the consequence has been drawn from the question: What is German culture? (Answer: Shit), and this culture is attacked with all the instruments of satire, bluff, irony and finally, violence. And in a great common action.

Dada is German Bolshevism. The bourgeois must be deprived of the opportunity to "buy up art for his justification." Art should altogether get a sound thrashing, and Dada stands for the thrashing with all the vehemence of its limited nature. The technical aspect of the Dadaist campaign against German culture was considered at great length. Our best instrument consisted of big demonstrations at which, in return for a suitable admission fee, everything connected with spirit, culture and inwardness was symbolically massacred. It is ridiculous and a sign of idiocy exceeding the legal limit to say that Dada (whose actual achievements and immense success cannot be denied) is "only of negative value." Today you can hardly fool first-graders with the old saw about positive and negative.

The gentlemen who demand the "constructive" are among the most suspicious types of a caste that has long been bankrupt. It has become sufficiently apparent in our time that law, order and the constructive, the "understanding for an organic development," are only symbols, curtains and pretexts for fat behinds and treachery. If the Dadaist movement is nihilism, then nihilism is a part of life, a truth which would be confirmed by any professor of zoology. Relativism, Dadaism, Nihilism, Action, Revolution, Gramophone. It makes one sick at heart to hear all that together, and as such (insofar as it becomes visible in the form of a theory), it all seems very stupid and antiquated. Dada does not take a dogmatic attitude. If Knatschke proves today that Dada is old stuff, Dada doesn't care. A tree is old stuff too, and people eat dinner day after day without experiencing any particular disgust. This whole physiological attitude toward the world, that goes so far as to make—as Nietzsche the great philologist did—all culture depend on dry or liquid nutriment, is of course to be taken with a grain of salt. It is just as true and just as silly as the opposite. But we are after all human and commit ourselves by the mere fact of drinking coffee today and tea tomorrow. Dada foresees its end and laughs. Death is a thoroughly Dadaist business, in that it signifies nothing at all. Dada has the right to dissolve itself and will exert this right when the time comes. With a businesslike gesture, freshly pressed pants, a shave and a haircut, it will go down into the grave, after having made suitable arrangements



with the Thanatos Funeral Home. The time is not far distant. We have very sensitive fingertips and a larynx of glazed paper. The mediocrities and the gentry in search of "something mad" are beginning to conquer Dada. At every corner of our dear German fatherland, literary cliques, with Dada as a background, are endeavoring to assume a heroic pose. A movement must have sufficient talent to make its decline interesting and pleasant. In the end it is immaterial whether the Germans keep on with their cultural humbug or not. Let them achieve immortality with it. But if Dada dies here, it will some day appear on another planet with rattles and kettledrums, pot covers and simultaneous poems, and remind the old God that there are still people who are very well aware of the complete idiocy of the world.

Dada achieved the greatest successes in Germany. We Dadaists formed a company which soon became the terror of the population—to it belonged, in addition to myself, Raoul Haussmann, Georg Grosz, John Heartfield, Wieland Herzfelde, Walter Mehring and a certain Baader. In 1919 we put on several big evening shows; at the beginning of December, through no fault of our own, we gave two Sunday afternoon performances in the institute for socialist hypocrisy, the "Tribune," which achieved the success of good box-office receipts and a word of melancholy-reluctant praise in the form of an article in the *Berliner Tageblatt* by Alfred Kerr, a critic well known and appreciated a century ago, but now quite crippled and arterio-sclerotic. With Haussman, the "Dadasoph," to whom I became greatly attached because of his selfless shrewdness, and the above-mentioned Baader, I undertook in February 1920 a Dada tour, which began in Leipzig on February 24 with a performance in the Zentraltheater attended by a tremendous ruckus ("bruit") which gave our decayed old globe quite a shaking up; this affair was attended by 2,000 people. We began in Leipzig, on the basis of the sound idea that all Germans are Saxons, a truth, it seems to me, which speaks for itself. We then went to Bohemia, and on February 26 we appeared in Teplitz-Schönau before an audience of fools and curiosity-seekers. That same night we drank ourselves into a stupor, after, with our last sober breath, we had appointed Hugo Dux, the most intelligent inhabitant of Teplitz, chief of all Dadaists in Czechoslovakia. Baader, who is almost fifty years of age and, as far as I know, is already a grandfather, then repaired to the Bawdy House of the Bumblebee, where he wallowed in wine, women and roast pork and devised a criminal plan which, he calculated, would cost Hausmann and myself our lives in Prague on March 1. On March 1 the three of us were planning to put on a show in the Prague produce exchange, which seats nearly 2,500 persons. And conditions in Prague are rather peculiar. We had been threatened with violence from all sides. The Czechs wanted to beat us up because we were unfortunately Germans; the Germans had taken it into their heads that we were Bolsheviks; and the Socialists threatened us with death and annihilation because they regarded us as reactionary voluptuaries. Weeks before our arrival the newspapers had started a monster Dada publicity campaign and expectations could not have been screwed to a higher pitch. Apparently the good people of Prague expected the living cows to fall from the heavens—in the streets



First International Dada Fair. (Catalogue, first page). Berlin, June 1920.

crowds formed behind us with rhythmic roars of “Dada,” in the newspaper offices the editors obligingly showed us the revolvers with which, under certain circumstances, they were planning to shoot us down on March 1. All this had smitten Baader’s brain with a powerful impact. The poor pietist had conceived such a very different picture of our Dada tour. He had hoped to return to his wife and children with money in his pocket, to draw a comfortable income from Dada and, after performance of his conjugal duty, retire with a pipeful of Germania ersatz tobacco to dream in all tranquillity of his heroic feats.

But now he was to take leave of his precious life, now there was a chance that he would end his poetic career in a Prague morgue. In his terror he was willing to promise anything, to bear any disgrace if his cousin, the old God of the Jews, with whom he had so often allied himself, would only preserve him this last time from the dissolution of his individuality as a pseudo-bard. *Dum vita superest, bene est.* The performance in the produce exchange was to begin at 8 o’clock. At 7:30 I ask Hausmann about Baader’s whereabouts. “He left me a note saying he had to go over to the post-office.” And so he left us up to the very last moment in the belief that he would still turn up; this he did in order to prevent us from changing the program, thus exposing us with all the more certainty to the fury of the public. The whole city was in an uproar. Thousands crowded around the entrances of the produce exchange. By dozens they were sitting on the window-ledges and pianos, raging and roaring. Hausmann and I, in great agitation, sat in the little vestibule which had been rigged up as a green room. The windowpanes were already beginning to rattle. It was 8:20. No sign of Baader. Only now did we see what was up. Hausmann remembered that he had seen a letter “to Hausmann and Huelsenbeck” stuck in his underclothes. We realized that Baader had deserted us, we would have to go through with the hocus pocus by ourselves as best we could. The situation could not have been worse—the platform (an improvised board

structure) could be reached only through the massed audience—and Baader had fled with half the manuscript. Now was the time to do or die. Hic Rhodus! My honored readers, with the help of God and our routine, a great victory was won for Dada in Prague on March 1. On March 2 Hausmann and I appeared before a smaller audience in the Mozarteum, again with great success. On March 5 we were in Karlsbad, where to our great satisfaction we were able to ascertain that Dada is eternal and destined to achieve undying fame. X

Richard Huelsenbeck (left) and Raoul Hausmann.  
Prague, 1920.



# DADA

Was ist **dada**?

Eine Kunst? Eine Philosophie? eine Politik?

Eine Feuerversicherung?

Oder: Staatsreligion?

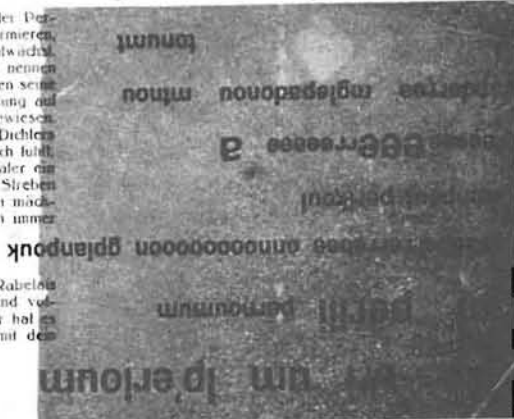
ist **dada** wirkliche ENERGIE?

oder ist es **= Garnichts**, d. h.

alles?

Die Geister einer unbedeutenden Epoche sind vor eine große und schwere Aufgabe gestellt. Wo die Wirklichkeit, zu der alles Geistige in engster Beziehung steht und von der es den stärksten Teil seiner Antriebe erhält, in höchstem Maße gerissen ist, wo ein Tag verneint, was der vorhergehende heiligte, wo die Ereignisse sich überschlagen wie

ist es schwerer als in ruhiger Zeit, das Maß der Persönlichkeit auszubalanzieren und den Kreis zu formieren, aus dem man als gesammelte Erscheinung aufwächst. Es fehlt das, was man die Schule der Geistigkeit nennen kann. Deswegen, der im Ausdruck seiner Gedanken seine Lebensarbeit sieht, bleibt am Anfang der Entwicklung auf das Wort und die Tat der Vorhergehenden angewiesen. Unwillkürlich richten sich die Augen des jungen Dichters auf die ältere Generation; je weniger sicher er sich fühlt, umso mehr ist er bestrebt, aus dem Leben der Vater ein Ziel zu suchen, aus ihm für ein gemeinsames Streben verbindlich zu sein scheint. Die Tradition ist ein mächtiges Agens, das in den bedeutendsten Kulturen immer wieder gesucht und hervorgehoben wird. Die französische Geistigkeit ist ohne die Tradition nicht denkbar und immer wieder steht jemand auf, der das Genie latin preist, wie es sich von Rabelais bis Anatole France, bestimmt von karmalistischen und volkslichen Verhältnissen geäußert hat. Immer wieder hat es dort eine Renaissance française gegeben und mit dem Eigenhümlichen des französischen Geistes wie es von Vätern und Großvätern gehandhabt worden ist, wäre die Kultur des Landes dahin. Dies Gemeinsame, dies Abstrakte hinter der Fülle der einzelnen Erscheinungen hat die Jugend von jeher gesucht, um sich eine Schule daraus zu machen. Es ist der Sinn für Vereinerung und Begeisterung, eine Eigenschaft der Zwanzigjährigen, die sie dazu befähigt, sie sucht Gemeinschaft, Freundschaftsbünde, Klubs, in denen man Alles diskutieren kann, um das Neue daraus wachsen zu lassen. Dies natürliche Bedürfnis bildete die Handwerks- und Malschulen, aus der die große Kunst des Mittelalters hervorging. Die Jugend allein hat das Recht und das Vorrecht, sich unter zu ordnen, weil sie allein aus einem Abhängigkeitsverhältnis gelöst hervorgehen kann, weil sie allein eine Bildung des Charakters findet, wo andere in Knechtschaft und Infamie herabsinken. Aber wo findet die Jugend einer Epoche wie die unsere, die Möglichkeit sich Lehrer zu suchen, von deren Lippen sie Klugheit und Weltweisheit kennen lernen kann, in deren Büchern sie den



Tretet Dada bei

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Die Kulle auf den TELEgraphten

SINN DER WELT

suchen und finden konnte?