





The Dada Seminars



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TATLINS

The Dada Seminars

**Edited by Leah Dickerman
with Matthew S. Witkovsky**

**CASVA Seminar Papers I
Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Art**

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BACK COVER: Opening of Max Ernst
exhibition at Au Sans Pareil, Paris; from
left: René Hilsun, Benjamin Péret, Serge
Charchoune, Philippe Soupault (with
bicycle), Jacques Rigault (upside down),
and André Breton, 1921, Bibliothèque
Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris

TITLE PAGE: From left, George Grosz
and John Heartfield, illustration in
Richard Huelsenbeck, ed., *Dada Almanach*
(Berlin, 1920)

ENDSHEETS, HARDCOVER: From left,
Hans Arp, Tristan Tzara, and Hans
Richter in Zurich, 1918, Fondation Arp,
Clamart-Meudon

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Preface

This volume inaugurates a new series of publications by the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA) at the National Gallery of Art: the Seminar Papers. Over the first twenty-five years of the Center's existence an active publication program has focused primarily on gathering papers from scholarly symposia in the series *Studies in the History of Art*. Our smaller meetings, by contrast, have generally relied on the freedom that comes from informal discussions not recorded in any permanent way. To mark a new beginning at CASVA as we enter the new century, we are fortunate to be in a position to explore opportunities for different kinds of meetings and publications. The concept of inviting a group of scholars to Washington, D.C., to discuss a topic in several seminars over the course of a year or so with drafts of papers exchanged along the way, leading to a publication that incorporates the results of debate, seems a highly appropriate and promising means to develop our contribution to international scholarship. This program has the added benefit of giving some of the critical discussions that take place at the Center a wider dissemination and a longer life.

The Dada Seminars represents the exchange of papers and discussion that took place at the Center in three seminars between November 2001 and May 2003. The seminars were led by Leah Dickerman, associate curator of modern and contemporary art at the National Gallery, and a former David E. Finley Fellow at CASVA. In this first instance we responded to Dickerman's proposal for a major Dada exhibition to be held at the National Gallery of Art, in collaboration with the Centre Pompidou, Paris, and The Museum of Modern Art, New York. We are indebted to Leah Dickerman for her commitment to the project, which involved the selection of contributors, the organization of the topics for discussion, and her eventual editing of the volume, for which she recruited the invaluable support of Matthew S. Witkovsky, assistant curator of photographs at the National Gallery. Dickerman's introduction to *The Dada Seminars* provides a full account of the genesis of this volume and of the thinking behind it. We are delighted to have participated in a unique opportunity to examine the issues before an exhibition takes place, and to present a volume of essays that will complement the exhibition catalogue while remaining quite independent of it.

Future volumes in the CASVA Seminar Papers may come about in a similar way, but they may be unrelated to exhibitions and instead take up questions in the history of

art around which significant debate is developing. The Center looks forward to collaborating with scholars both inside and outside the National Gallery of Art in the creation of such seminars.

The Dada Seminars were supported by the Center's International Exhibitions Foundation Endowment Fund, and the publication of the volume by the Paul Mellon Fund.

ELIZABETH CROPPER

Dean, Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts

Though there is much consensus about the formative impact Dada has had on postwar artistic practice, in many ways it remains little known. In contrast to the two other major movements of the historical avant-garde, Russian constructivism and surrealism, there have been relatively few sustained efforts to examine the premises of Dada practice in broad view, to understand either its structural workings or the significance of its activities within a historical field.

In many ways, art history's general hesitancy around Dada is a consequence of Dada's historiographic legacy. By and large, and especially in an Anglo-American context, Dada works of art and the careers of Dada artists have been examined from a monographic perspective, focusing on a small range of dominant figures. Or Dada has been tied to surrealism, as in the case of three exhibitions, each seminal in its own right, that together have defined an alternate modern tradition to that of a cubism-focused narrative of geometric abstraction: at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, Alfred Barr's 1936 *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism* and his successor William Rubin's 1968 reprise of the subject, *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage*, and at the Hayward Gallery, London, the team-curated 1978 show *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*.¹

The first of these tendencies, the monograph, tends to tie work more to biography and less to history, and the narrative of Dada that has been written so far is largely an anecdotal one, full of tales of drinking, sex, scandal, and games. Its individual focus inherently fails to provide insight into how and why so many key figures in twentieth-century art began their careers and defined the terms of their mature practice within the context of Dada. It offers little ground for reckoning with how certain precepts were shattered in such a short period of time. That is, something crucial is missing in suggesting—as most scholarship has in its fragmented form—that there is nothing more macro, more overarching about Dada. Moreover, this approach has occluded the way in which its participants radically conceived Dada as a network of contacts, publications, and correspondences—a self-conscious borrowing of the structures of modern communication and exchange.

The second of these tendencies, the linking of Dada to surrealism, has shaped a view that is both Francocentric and unitary in its teleology. Its very structure suggests that Dada is a juvenile and generally inchoate form of the later Paris-based movement. Nonetheless, the impact of MoMA's two Dada-surrealism shows, in which works from both movements were intermixed into a general category, remains determining. Set in juxtaposition to its pendant show of the same year, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, and introduced by a

genealogy of the fantastic, Barr's *Dada, Surrealism and Fantastic Art* presented Dada as a manifestation of a recurrent transhistorical fascination with the irrational, although in 1936, with Europe of the brink of political disaster, the dialectic he defined between rationality and irrationality in his two-show display clearly carried an embedded historical charge.

For the American reception of Dada, however, the defining moment occurred after the war, when Dada was recuperated first by artists and then by the museum. Robert Motherwell's 1951 anthology of documents, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, served as a major conduit of information, despite the title's insistence on a medium whose traditional premises were almost wholly annihilated by the dadaists. In 1953, Marcel Duchamp curated and installed an exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York, called *Dada: 1916–23*, which assembled an important group of international Dada work for view. Rubin's show at MoMA, the culmination of this postwar interest, offered the proposition that one might understand the work of artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns as heirs to Dada and surrealism in the way that abstract expressionism was understood to be the American successor to cubism, thereby defining postwar analogues for the modernist tendencies delineated by Barr in his 1936 shows. But this was also inherently a profoundly retrospective view, which obscured the historical context of the objects' making. At the same time, and almost paradoxically, given that the exhibition suggested the way Dada had been read by a later generation of artists, Rubin's catalogue text resists definitions of Dada as fundamentally concerned about making art. The catalogue's first sentence reads: "The plastic arts played only an ancillary role in Dada and Surrealism; they were held useful as means of communicating ideas, but not worthy of delectation in themselves."² While the dadaists certainly intended the debasement of delectation, the sheer quantity of objects produced, strategies deployed, and knowing references to artistic tradition suggest their commitment to the production of works of art. However, the terms that accrue to Dada in Rubin's account, ones that have stuck tenaciously, suggest the filter of a fashionable postwar existentialism. Alongside trenchant formal observations, Rubin speaks of Dada as a "life attitude," variously described as "nihilism," "antibourgeois," and "antiart." While these concepts are clearly relevant, the persistent and generalized characterization of Dada as an "attitude" rather than a coherent, if novel, approach to art making has worked to deflect further definition of the logic of the movement's formal procedures and the particular social semiotics of its objects.

The essays in this volume are part of a collaborative effort to address issues in scholarship around Dada now. They have developed out of a novel seminar format established in conjunction with the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art. Though run independently, the seminars were intended to serve as a complement to the planning of a major Dada exhibition to be presented in 2005–2006 at the Centre

Pompidou, Paris; the National Gallery of Art, Washington; and The Museum of Modern Art, New York, a way of broadening the dialogue beyond museum walls. Participants were invited to address the questions: What can we understand to be Dada? How can it be understood to be meaningful? How can we understand its relation and distinction to surrealism and other movements? What is the relationship of work emerging from various Dada centers? Over the course of three closed working sessions participants discussed problems in the historiography of the Dada movement and presented first short proposals for new approaches.³ In the final session, drafts of longer, more developed essays were presented for further discussion, and the authors turned these papers into manuscripts of the texts published here. We commissioned an additional paper from Arnauld Pierre, who was unable to attend the seminars themselves, to address Paris Dada, a gap among the paper topics received.

While the seminar discussions produced a variety of perspectives and, at times, intense disagreement, a consensus emerged around certain questions of value for current scholarship—one might say a series of imperatives—which are ultimately reflected in the papers gathered in this volume.

1 A first imperative lies in the idea that overcoming the legacy of Dada's reception requires at the most basic level recognition of the centrality of art making to the movement's concerns, and a need to come to terms with the works themselves intellectually and historically. For fundamentally, dadaism is about producing art in changed historical circumstances. Given Dada's commitment to the production of works, and its knowing engagement with cultural tradition, its iconoclastic diatribes are better read as a critique of both modernism and more traditional art rather than as a wholesale jettisoning. How do we understand Dada's radical rethinking of the nature of the art object? How might we approach it in a way that is more attentive to its formal procedures? How can we understand the models of practice proposed in a structural way? I think it fair to say that each essay in this volume offers some insight into this question.

2 Moreover, an understanding of Dada as (simply) iconoclastic overshadows the movement's practitioners' own deep interest in their historical position and relation to the past. How then is a connection to the past reimagined in the wake of World War I, which served to shatter so many traditional categories and assumptions? Various approaches to these questions are suggested within the volume: George Baker reads the dadaist work of Francis Picabia and Man Ray as a razor-sharp travesty of the traditional artistic categories of painting, drawing, and photography. My essay on Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau* explores the structure's pervasive mnemonic concerns.

3 A fundamental imperative to emerge from the seminar discussions requires that Dada be unharnessed from surrealism. How can we understand the distinction between the models proposed by these two movements? Furthermore, how can Dada be reimagined as a set of propositions with various possible outcomes and consequences including forms of abstraction and constructivism,

as well as endgames and dead-ends? Within this framework, the devolution of Dada is as fertile a topic for analysis as is its legacy. These questions all lead to a mandate for a more complex international perspective, as well as a reinterrogation of the boundaries between movements more generally held at a distance, such as Dada and constructivism. Within this volume, Hal Foster's essay on the shell-shocked ego of dadaism provides an implicit point of contrast with the Freudian model of desire that grounds so much surrealist thinking. Uwe Fleckner examines the links between Dada and *Neue Sachlichkeit* through the lens of Carl Einstein's criticism. Marcella Lista's essay on Raoul Hausmann's experiments with mechanized multisensory production draws new points of relation with futurism. Arnauld Pierre's text traces both the formation of a dadaist alliance with other modernist forces in postwar Paris in a common front against nationalist restoration, and its dissolution.

4 Moving away from the monographic focus on certain dominant artists requires a reconsideration of both figures long marginalized and group dynamics within the movement. How have the lines defining Dada practice been drawn, and what has been excluded? How do we understand the specific way in which Dada functioned as crucible in which certain ideas crystallized and were communicated between participants? And how did these ideas travel? Amelia Jones suggests that art history's focus on Marcel Duchamp's readymades has overshadowed an alternate model of Dada practice in New York, which can be discerned in the activities of the Baroness Elsa von Freitag-Loringhoven. Jeffrey T. Schnapp looks outside the geographic boundaries in which Dada is usually considered, to the transmission and adaptation of Dada ideas in the work of the Italian Julius Evola. Matthew S. Witkovsky not only addresses the importance of correspondence between participants in the transmission of ideas, but also suggests the ways in which these communication conduits become the terrain of dadaist practice.

5 Within this network of connections, the distinct identities of various manifestations emerged as political conditions that framed specific political possibilities for production. How do we understand both the distinction and the relation between production in various Dada centers? What are the linking principles and how might these break down? And how is the political enacted within various forms of Dada work? Essays in this volume allow the reader to draw contrasts between Zurich's expatriate community of politically dislocated individuals (T. J. Demos); Hannover-based Kurt Schwitters' elegy for and explosion of nineteenth-century bourgeois culture (Leah Dickerman); the impact of New York's booming consumer culture (Helen Molesworth); and the intense negotiation for dominance between representatives of various modernist groups within the context of a larger *retour à l'ordre*, governing Parisian cultural life in the wake of World War I (Arnauld Pierre).

6 A final imperative recognizes the dadaists' role as prescient readers of modernity. How might we understand their work as anticipatory or diagnostic of its symptoms? And how can we understand this in relation to its formal strategies? To what degree do dadaists assimilate (only to transgress) the structures of modernity itself? Many of the essays in this volume offer insight here, including T. J. Demos' discussion of the way in which Dada strategies in Zurich reflected the deterritorialization

produced by war. Hal Foster sees mimicry of a shattered modern consciousness as a fundamental dadaist tactic in both Zurich and Cologne. In Helen Molesworth's essay, the quintessentially modern culture of shopping frames Marcel Duchamp's readymade strategies. David Joselit argues that the spatialized idiom of the diagram served as a key language for dadaism, reflecting a larger epistemological crisis.

As a group, these essays do not coalesce into a unified view. Instead, they offer a series of openings for a new understanding of Dada and a starting point for further work.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to many for their efforts in bringing this project to fruition. The Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts offered support—at the conceptual, financial, and administrative level—in hosting the seminars and publishing this volume; dean Elizabeth Cropper, associate dean Therese O'Malley, associate dean Peter Lukehart, and administrative assistants Kim Rodeffer, Nicole Anselona, and Colleen Howard all played key roles. Matthew Witkovsky, who worked with me in editing the manuscripts, shared his keen insights and elegant sense of prose. The publishing office at the National Gallery of Art, under editor in chief Judy Metro, has expertly shepherded this volume into print. Margaret Bauer oversaw the book design, and she, Wendy Schleicher Smith, and Patricia Inglis of Inglis Design all made important contributions to its present form. Ulrike Mills edited the texts on a tight schedule with a rigorous eye for detail. In the department of modern and contemporary art, Amanda Hockensmith, Anna Lakovitch, and Marcie Hocking provided invaluable assistance in innumerable ways. The deans of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, Matthew Witkovsky, and I would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who participated in the seminar series: George Baker, Timothy Benson, Matthew Biro, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, T. J. Demos, Leah Dickerman, Brigid Doherty, Wolf-Dieter Dube, John Elderfield, Uwe Fleckner, Hal Foster, Michael Jennings, Amelia Jones, David Joselit, Isabel Kauenhoven, Laurent Le Bon, Marcella Lista, Helen Molesworth, Therese O'Malley, Jeffrey T. Schnapp, Jessica Stewart, Michael Taylor, and Aurélie Verdier.

NOTES

This text draws in part on an earlier essay, "Dada Gambits," which appeared in *October* 105 (Summer 2003), 4–12.

1. See Alfred Barr, ed., *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism* (exh. cat., The Museum of Modern Art) (New York, 1936); William S. Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage* (exh. cat., The Museum of Modern Art) (New York, 1968); and Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (exh. cat., Arts Council of Great Britain) (London, 1978).

2. Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage*, 11.

3. Some of these early ideas and proposals were later published in a special issue of *October* magazine. *October* 105 (Summer 2003).



Zurich Dada: The Aesthetics of Exile | T.J. Demos

In a famous 1916 photograph we see Hugo Ball on stage, fumbling, constricted in his bizarre costume before his audience at the Cabaret Voltaire. With his “blue-and-white-striped witch doctor’s hat” he looks like a flamboyant ecclesiast, or a giant crustacean standing upright, tubular limbs made out of shiny blue cardboard, hands shaped like peculiar claws. “Officiating” in front of two music stands that hold his prepared text, he readies himself to deliver a sermonlike speech to the unsuspecting crowd. Silence. Then he intones: “gadji beri bimba, glandridi lauli lonni cadori. . . .” The sounds flow with gradually heavier stresses and sharpening consonants, spilling out like the incomprehensible jabber of a foreign language. It is what Ball called *Verse ohne Worte*: verse without words (fig. 1).¹

Assembled from syllabic fragments that repudiate semantic content, the poem moves toward pure sound. Instead of engaging the communicative potential of language, it foregrounds the materiality of the voice, thus sharing in the avant-garde dream of abstraction expressed across painting, sculpture, music, and poetry during the first quarter of the twentieth century. The dream was to liberate language from its representational burden, verse from poetic conventions—“a dream that loves night, senselessness, and solitude,” as Ball explained in the words of Novalis on 6 August 1916 in his “diary from exile,” *Flight Out of Time*. The voice would refer only to itself, becoming autonomous, improvisatory, spontaneous. Its self-reflexivity is evident throughout Ball’s sound poem “gadji beri bimba,” where sounds are repeated but in vaguely transmuted forms, as in the third line, which nearly imitates the first: “gidji beri bin blassa glassala laula lonni cadorsu. . . .” The result is a constellation of shimmering particles that mirror each other, although imperfectly, becoming other, as “gadji” metamorphoses into “gidji,” “bimba” into “blassa.” Through its “negation of illusion” Ball’s poetry would arrive at “a daring purification of language.”² Freed, it rejected the outside world, which, in 1916, was propelled into the catastrophe of World War I.

But the sign of catastrophe was not completely eliminated from dadaist poetry. Its dark shadow is still perceptible in its shattered forms. For Ball, the noise of dadaist performances would “represent the background—the inarticulate, the disastrous, the decisive,” and express “the conflict of the *vox humana* with a world that threatens, ensnares, and destroys it” (30 March 1916). The cause of the desire for a better world, in other words, remained embedded in the abstraction itself. Not quite purified, Ball’s speech emerged as damaged. In the wake of its abandonment of semantic value and syntactic structure follows a telling stutter, a nervous echolalia—like the halting, haunting “ü ü ü” at the

center of “Karawane,” another of Ball’s sound poems of 1916. The delivery, not surprisingly, came with nervous exhaustion. As such, it was symptomatic of what Sigmund Freud diagnosed as the speech of the traumatized subject of brutal combat, plagued by a compulsion for repetition in which comprehension and experience were mutually exclusive.³ Declared medically unfit for duty, Ball had not fought in the war, although he did visit the front in 1914, which brought about a crisis that catalyzed his expatriatism and nearly ended in suicide.⁴ The sound poems not only glimpsed an idealized world; they also carried with them the wreckage from this one.

While Ball’s poetry implies trauma, expressed through speech, it is also marked by a “senselessness” that reflects an expressive incapacity. The inability to communicate suggests that warfare had left us poorer—not richer—in communicable experience, as Walter Benjamin observed. Rather than producing stories to tell, warfare had crippled language. For Benjamin, whom Ball had met in Basel in 1918 while both were in exile, the phenomenon was pervasive, the result of multiple but related historical developments, including modernized warfare, developing capitalism, and advancing technology: “For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.”⁵

Ball’s sound poetry is complex: it evoked a utopian dream of an ideal realm, purified and abstract, as well as a critical reflection back on a degraded world, even an involuntary expression of its brutalized condition. It launched a “flight out of time” as well as immersion back into it. This begins to express the complex terms of Zurich Dada’s exile, which figures as an escape from intolerable conditions as well as a critical look back at them. For, “how could we be at home in this today?” as Friedrich Nietzsche, Ball’s guide and the subject of his earlier dissertation, had asked decades earlier, reflecting on the dubious ideology of blood and fatherland that would return to dominate Europe decades later. “We ourselves who are homeless constitute a force that breaks open ice and other all too thin ‘realities,’” Nietzsche proclaimed.⁶ Ball followed suit: “The Cabaret Voltaire . . . has as its sole purpose to draw attention, across the barriers of war and nationalism, to the few independent spirits who live for other ideals,” he declared in the inaugural issue of the eponymous journal in 1916.⁷ In addition to Ball, the Cabaret would group together the Germans Emmy Hennings and Richard Huelsenbeck, along with the Romanians Tristan Tzara and Marcel Janco, and the Alsatian Hans (Jean) Arp coming from France, among others, who had all set out for Zurich to escape war and nationalism—Switzerland being a desired destination because of its geopolitical neutrality and polylingual diversity. The case was similar with other dadaists. It mobilized what Marcel Duchamp called “the

spirit of expatriation,” which motivated him, Francis Picabia, and others to elude military service, escaping the claustrophobic pressures of the war by emigrating to other neutral countries.⁸ The experience of geopolitical displacement was central to Dada’s identity, a fact that is by now well known. But how did exile inform Dada’s artistic models? How did “expatriation” figure in its poetics, performances, and artistic objects, becoming “a force that would break open the ice” of traditional languages, identities, and communities? What would be its “other ideals,” realized on the other side of war and nationalism?

If Ball claimed that the Cabaret would be a place where dadaists would “not only enjoy their independence, but also give proof of it,”⁹ then it seems that he proved his own independence with his *Verse ohne Worte*. The negation contained in the sound poems, signaled in the conjunction *ohne* (without), first tips us off: sounds without sense sever the dependence on the preestablished meanings and conventional uses of language, on the rule of signifier and signified, as the poems evacuate “words” from verse through a systematic autocancellation. Syllabic elements were assembled in order to create new complex terms (as in “Karawane’s” “blago bung”), common enough sounds for a German speaker but without meaning. As Ball noted, “The negation of illusion occurs here again by the juxtaposing of illusionistic elements, taken from conventional language, which cancel each other out.”¹⁰ Consequently, the sound poem escaped from the logic of dominant languages that, for Ball, had been put crassly to instrumental purpose: “The word has become commodity . . . [and] has lost all dignity,” he wrote on 16 July 1915. In response, Ball abolished the word: “In these phonetic poems we totally renounce the language that journalism has abused and corrupted” (24 June 1916).

By freeing sound from meaning Ball would release being from national and cultural identity. “Eager to give up” his “Germanity,” his renunciation was enacted through sound poetry (20 September 1915). In “Karawane,” phonetic elements like “wussa olobo” splinter words and force verbal elements to behave as pure vocal sensation and aural phenomena, cut off from any clear purpose or communicative task. As a result, comprehension of the poem no longer required competence in a conventional language, like German. If a homogenized language—one purified of regional differences, foreign influences, disparate etymologies—has served historically as a primary medium of nationalism’s self-imagination, as a vehicle of its community’s constitution, as Benedict Anderson and others have argued, then the liberation of language from the national tongue would resist the myth of its organic essentialism, freeing it from the instrumentalized task of nationalist community formation.¹¹ The abolition of traditional semantic functions from poetic compositions would promote a radically new form of audience address, existing outside the linguistic communion of nationalist structures of belonging. Exiled to Zurich, the dadaists expatriated language in turn, uprooting it from semantic value, estranging it from everyday meaning, freeing it from official discourse.

With this expatriation came a profound relativization of language and identity,

read by the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson as Dada's most radical act. In an early essay on Dada, he argued that the avant-garde group was part of a wider epistemic revolution in Western organizations of knowledge that moved toward a new paradigm of "relativity," stretching from post-Kantian philosophy to Albert Einstein's physics, to Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin's post-Marxist concept of value.¹² This was first signaled by Dada's antinationalism and corresponding geographical deracination. By severing ties to the home—suggesting a matrix of tradition, habit, familiarity, and comfort—dadaists proposed a new openness to the world, like sailors on an open sea of endless possibilities. "Is this not the reason for the fact that sailors are revolutionary, that they lack that very 'stove,' that hearth, that little house of their own, and are everywhere equally *chez soi*?" (34). Moreover, Dada's relativity, Jakobson suggested, arced between its geopolitical homelessness and its linguistic dislocations. Where its poetry "laid bare the device" of poetry, it denaturalized language and revealed its contingent structure. If linguistic codes were merely conventional, their signs arbitrary, their meaning relative to cultural and historical conditions—as argued in Saussurean linguistics and discussed in Jakobson's Russian formalist circles—then there was no reason not to freely experiment with language, as the dadaists did. The result was that a laundry list could be poetry: "letters in arbitrary order, randomly struck on a typewriter . . . verses; dabs on a canvas made by a donkey's tail dipped in paint . . . a painting" (38).

In Ball's sound poems, such as "gadji beri bimba" of 1916, we discover exile's "device." The verse sets loose a wandering language, with roaming, mutative syllables flowing through an unstructured rhyme. In its tortuous course, the poem's meandering lines throw the "bimba" of its title into a seemingly infinite metamorphosis: from "bimbala" to "binban" to "bin beri ban" to "bimbalo," and so on. While these terms imply a single source from which all variables emerge, the phonemes nevertheless reject the consistency of any single and stable identity by subjecting it to an ever-expanding plasticity. As if sensitive to the determining contingency of each syntactic site within the poem, the "word" perpetually adapts itself to each new occupation before moving on to the next, while still resembling its previous instantiation. Any given term can consequently never be fully located and is always becoming different. Centrifugal, the poem's elements flee the old center of meaningful substance in traditional language, now exposed as merely contingent, and extend aural sensations away from any consistent signification. This suggests an emptying out of subjective presence within the poem, for it annuls expressive intention with the obliteration of meaning; instead, we encounter a dispersal of language and subject alike. The poem offers a free-floating verbal sonority both itinerant and purposeless: in other words, the poem's verse is homeless, or alternately, everywhere equally *chez soi*.

But if the verse mimics an incomprehensible foreign speech, as if spoken by the very figure of alterity, it belongs nowhere, for there is no origin to return to, no community

to represent, no home to inhabit, other than Ball himself. The verse would only exist where he happened to be. Accessible to anyone, due to the release of speech from the exclusivity of a national language, it would be understood by no one. Its freedom, consequently, brought isolation. Looking again at Ball in the photograph, he is not quite the picture of Jakobson's revolutionary sailor. In fact, he appears the very image of social disjunction. We look at him, but he does not look back, his plaintive gaze drifting off slightly to the left. There is a breakdown in visual connection, perhaps due to a momentary lapse in attention, which expresses psychic alienation. Isolated against the flat background of the Cabaret, Ball retreats into an introverted posture, with cardboard gear protecting his body from scrutiny, as if assuming a defensive position behind the music stands. If a demonstration of "independence," the performance appears radically noncommunal, repositioning exile not as wholly triumphant or revolutionary but as lonely, following, perhaps in part, from the incommunicative "senselessness" of its exiled language.

Ball's isolation on stage, withdrawn into a private shell, announced that solitude also haunted subjectivity in a period of social and political catastrophe. This was clear for Walter Benjamin, too, who complicates our notion of exile by observing that the loss of communicative ability meant the deterioration of social relations, such that a profound "isolation" would now characterize post-World War I modernity. With it, we encounter the ascension of a new aesthetic condition, less revolutionary than existential, which Benjamin termed "the form of transcendental homelessness."¹³ If Dada embraced a radical relativity, put to task toward a revolutionary undoing of traditional identity and community, its experience of dislocation also cast a dark shadow of anomie, a melancholy residue of social fragmentation. "It is the loss of community, rather than simply its non-existence, that lies at the core of dadaism," Leah Dickerman has observed.¹⁴ Ball's "public performance of privatism," for her, suggests alienation and ritual at once—a paradoxical combination that identifies its aporetic crisis—in which the "loss of community" could only be mournfully commemorated in the public performance of solitude.

Still, Dada evinced a commitment to publicness—to cabaret culture, to an insistently international collective, to live performance—that implies a desire for social relations beyond the finality of their destruction. If Dada rejected conventional modes of community, it also imagined experimental ways of collectivization. Ball's performances were not just private, abstract, and anticomunal, they also established a proximity, a form of being-in-common achieved through the very release of language from national delimitation. Ball stressed the performance of his poems over their graphic representation. This implies that he placed a premium on the immediacy and presence of live recital, even as a site where immediacy and presence could be complicated. His hope, however, appears idealistic: such a modeling of abstract speech, on the one hand, might suggestively expand the capacity of language to form inclusive communities across the barriers of war and nationalism; but on the other, its rarified terms would simultaneously and

paradoxically limit its community of participants due to the specialized and exclusive conventions of its artistic discourse. Perhaps this is less a paradox and more the deeply ambivalent but nevertheless desired condition of Dada's experimental community: to yearn for new forms of social relations unconstrained by traditional barriers and to deeply suspect the utopian claims of social fusion, even if transnational.

One evening in 1916 at the Cabaret Voltaire, Tzara performed his simultaneous poem, "L'amiral cherche une maison à louer" (The Admiral Is Looking for a House to Rent), with Huelsenbeck and Janco. Two began at the same time, with Huelsenbeck's "Ahoi ahoi Des Admirals gwirktes Beinkleid schnell zerfällt..." paralleling Tzara's "Boum boum boum Il déshabilla sa chair quand les grenouilles humides commencèrent à brûler..." The voices mingled in aural space, creating an initial counterpoint built on a flexible combinatory interaction. Then, interrupting both in the middle of their "sentences"—which were undefined, for all punctuation was omitted from the score—Janco began to sing: "Where the honny suckle wine twines itself arround the door a sweetheart mine is waiting patiently for me..."¹⁵ They continued for roughly two minutes, with a brief "rhythmic interlude" in the middle that involved the use of a drum, clicker, and whistle, and some abstract vocal sounds ("hihi Yabomm hihi Yabomm hihi hihi hihiiii"). Ball, in the audience on 30 March, found the performance "elegiac, humorous, and bizarre" and was amazed at "an rrrrr drawn out for minutes."

The poem's title first announces its thematics of homelessness, even while the rest of the poem delegitimizes thematicization by undermining semantic value. It strategically conscripts a military officer, an ironic counterpart to Jakobson's revolutionary sailor, to play the protagonist, one who represented the perfect exemplar of military authority—and thus the perfect dadaist target. Evicted, the admiral is forced to look for a house to rent but is unsuccessful. In fact, the voices agree only on this point, uniting in the last line in French: "L'amiral n'a rien trouvé" (the admiral has found nothing). He appears destined to wander the seas, and his attempt to dominate these international waters will be condemned to failure. While homelessness was broached thematically, it was performed linguistically. No single language could achieve dominance in order to orient the poem, no official voice could operate as a grounding frame of reference. Instead, the poem became a cosmopolitan stage for multilingual interactions, nonhierarchically intermingling the plural speech of displaced subjects—words inevitably mixed with others from different languages, each continually invaded by an otherness not only foreign but also an integral part of the poem. One striking conclusion is that belonging and foreignness become identical, as the poem dismantles the exclusionary basis of national identity.

What is surprising about Tzara's score, published in the journal *Cabaret Voltaire* in 1916, is that its symmetrical layout, unified typography, and evenly columnar distribution of text contradict the cacophonous effects of its simultaneous recital.¹⁶ For unlike

the disorganized collective speech of its performance, the score obeys order, each voice running neatly from left to right and across the two pages, much like sheet music. The typeface is consistent, the composition rational, the counterpoint of voices clear. Moreover, its appearance resists the models of simultaneity claimed as precedents by Tzara in the “Note pour le bourgeois” sardonically included on the bottom of the pages. The poem, notes Tzara, first of all builds upon Stéphane Mallarmé’s typographical experiments with poetry, specifically “Un coup de dès jamais n’abolira le hasard,” which materializes verse as expressive visual sensation, allowing its words, in different typefaces and sizes, to flow evocatively across the white folds of its pages. Also mentioned is cubist collage, wherein the banal conventions of appropriated newspaper are playfully overturned by suggestive cuts and graphic inscriptions. The so-called popularization of Mallarmé’s “typographical reform” in Filippo T. Marinetti’s “Paroles en liberté” is also cited, as well as Henri Barzun’s theoretical text *Voix, rythmes, et chants simultanés*, which attempted to relate the polyrhythmic structure of symphonic music to poetry. Also, Guillaume Apollinaire’s development of the “visual poem,” specifically his “Calligrammes” of 1913–1916, caught Tzara’s attention, as did the work of Blaise Cendrars, likely his “La prose du transsibérien et de La petite Jehanne de France” (1913), which intertwines the theme of transnational travel with the migration of its poetic text into spaces of colorful illumination, supplied by Sophie Delaunay. These models are radical for their blurring of mediums that allegorize a complex hybridity of text and image, thereby critiquing the limitations of any essential identity or purified form. In contrast, Tzara’s poem looks commonplace. But perhaps what explains its restrained appearance is the fact that the poem would achieve its impact not through its contemplation as a visual object by an individual viewer—one who could never realize its simultaneous effects; rather, its dutifully conventional form awaited explosion in its collective performance (figs. 2, 3, 4).

Once there, the poem would achieve the cooperative destruction of the meaning and instrumental communicative value of language. The story of each voice—mostly nonsensical, but still semantically meaningful at the level of the word—would be perpetually interrupted by others and would negate individually produced meanings. In its place, the audience would experience a constellation of uprooted sounds, in which hybrid “words” would emerge intermittently and spontaneously through simultaneous expressions—an aleatory process contingent upon arbitrary interactions, changing with each performance (similar to Tzara’s other experiments with chance, such as his method for constructing a poem by blindly pulling cut-up newspaper words from a bag). A diversity of aural sensations would result, drawn from a multiplicity of vocal qualities and phonetic idiosyncrasies, depending on individual intonations, variations of amplification, breathing techniques, inflections, and so on. The simultaneous poem performed a new modeling of speech marked by division, simultaneous production, and collective reception, offering an endless generation of semantic associations and fractured phonetic experience.

2. Tristan Tzara, Score for "L'amiral cherche une maison à louer," 1916, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

3. Stéphane Mallarmé, "Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard," 1897 (published 1914), General Research Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

4. Blaise Cendrars, "La prose du transsibérien et de La petite Jehanne de France" (Paris, 1913), Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

L'amiral cherche

une maison à louer

Poème simultané par R. Huelsenbeck, M. Jenko, Tr. Tzara

HUUSENBECK: Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer. Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer.

JENKO: Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer. Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer.

TZARA: Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer. Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer.

HUUSENBECK: Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer. Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer.

JENKO: Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer. Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer.

TZARA: Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer. Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer.

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JENKO: Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer. Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer.

TZARA: Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer. Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer.

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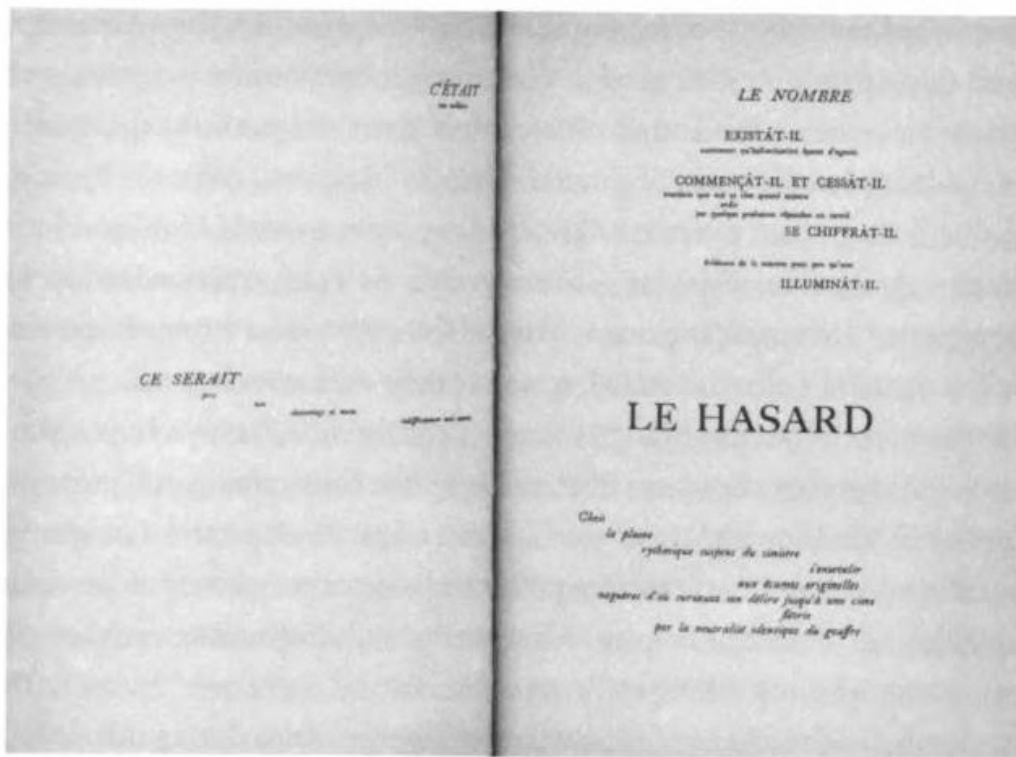
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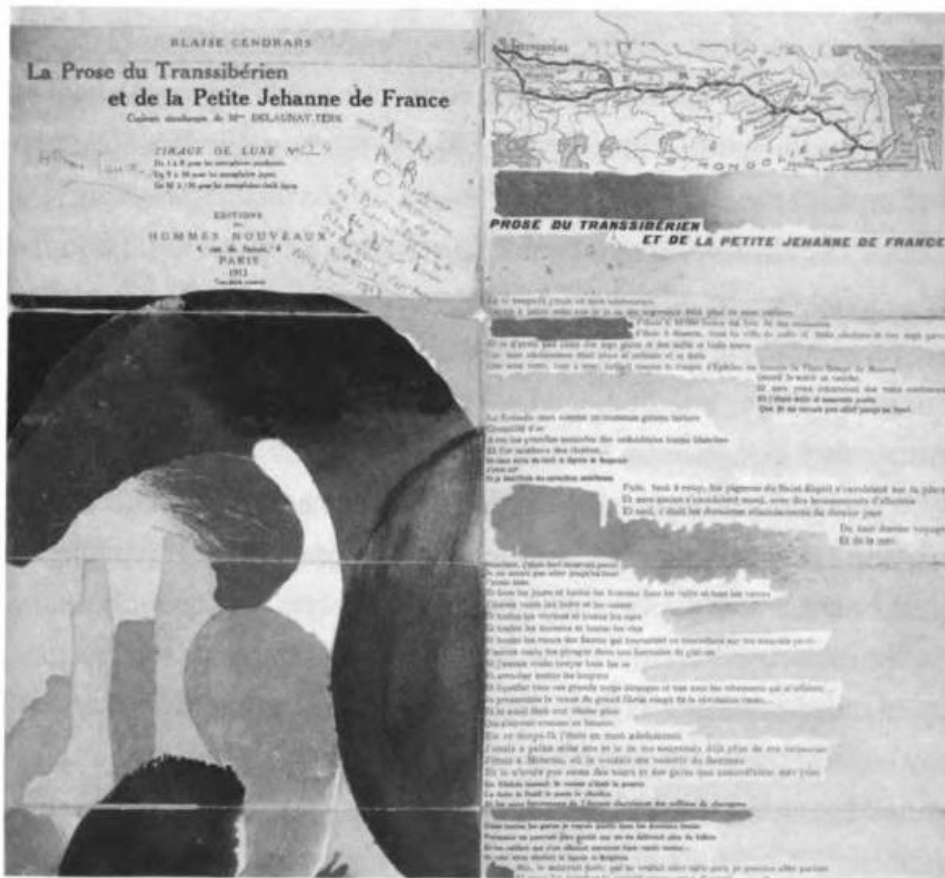
TZARA: Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer. Je suis un homme qui cherche une maison à louer.

2.

Tzara's language elicited the fundamental "heteroglossia" of language, as Mikhail Bakhtin has described it. Writing in exile in Kazakhstan during the mid-1930s—another period of rabid nationalist consolidation and corresponding geopolitical dislocation—Bakhtin theorized the internal diversity of language, its intrinsic "multi-linguagedness" that casts meaning into a dispersive whirlwind. This is typically suppressed by the forces of ideological unification (as in Stalinism), "forces that unite and centralize verbal-ideological thought, creating... the firm, stable linguistic nucleus of an officially recognized... language."¹⁷ "Heteroglossia" opposed such centralization by highlighting the plurality of language, its socio-ideological contradictions and spatio-temporal diversity. Fissiparous and irreducible, its energy splintered signification at the level of discourse—rather than Ferdinand de Saussure's focus on *langue*, or the abstract rules of language that transcend its historical and cultural enactment—whose very meaning, from the beginning, was "dialogical," or constituted through the cooperative construction by multiple agents. Tzara's "L'amiral" staged this plural discourse, most obviously in the clash and blurring between its disparate languages, each loosened from the traditionally unifying structure of the poem and released in the semioclastic conditions of simultaneous recital. If



3.



4.

Bakhtin explained that “the word in language is half someone else’s” — due to the dispersal of its meaning across the dialogical moments of production and reception — then in Tzara’s poem it was only a third one’s own, or even less.¹⁸ For the three speakers’ words would be (re)defined in the space of simultaneous multinational collective speech. Its multilingualism — composed of several different languages — would highlight the multilingualness — the internal divisions — of each voice. As Tzara explained in his “Note pour le bourgeois,” the simultaneity would force listeners to reassemble fragments of verse, broken up in the collective recital, to create their own associations.

What were the politics of such a language? *Relativized*, Tzara’s language represented a revolutionary homelessness liberated from the constraining categories of traditional identity, as Jakobson had claimed of Dada at large. Its dispersive dialogism would resist the nationalist consolidation of language and experience, as well as the sociopolitical homogenization of the community. Moreover, its multilingualism would attack its patriotic opposition by unleashing an “extraterritorial and aggressive” force, as Theodor Adorno remembered the effects of his own use of foreign words during this time. The careful deployment of “foreign words [in everyday speech] constituted little cells of resistance to the nationalism of WWI,” which delivered a rending violence, such that “with our esoteric foreign words we were shooting arrows at our indispensable patriots.”¹⁹ These “words from abroad” contested purist conceptions of language by injecting difference into it, repeatedly materializing signs of the nonexchangeability of language. They disrupted the myth of the natural or organic origin of a native language and expressed its ultimate insufficiency by invoking other foreign means of expression. “L’amiral” would do the same, abolishing the myth that the home of language was tied to national identity.

For Tzara, Dada was “born out of a need for independence, out of mistrust for the community.”²⁰ The simultaneous poem obviously “mistrusts” the community as well, if “community” designates a unification of individuals forming the being of a commonality, which would realize an etymological return to “com-unus,” implying “being together as one,” as in the nation’s “People.”²¹ Writing on the “group psychology” of nationalism at the time, Freud explained its psychic mechanism and identified its subjective cost: nationalist communities, like those found in the military, are formed through the suppression of individual egos in their regressive group binding, which leads to social homogeneity but also produces malleable, conscienceless members.²² Unlike such “pathological” forms of community, “L’amiral” opened up Dada’s social space to diversification and heterogeneity. This points to a rather astonishing aspect of Dada’s collective organization: it refused the formation of an alternative community of consensus, one unified in opposition. Even in a time of the disaster of war, in the existential vulnerability brought about by displacement, Dada internalized *difference* as the formative principle of its social collectivization. By rejecting the form of consensus, it challenged the perpetuation of any communal structure of social and political absorption.

Dadaist practice also exposed the striking emptiness behind conventional community formations, specifically the fact that they are imagined linguistically rather than formed metaphysically. Dadaists realized that social fusion is constituted through a particular force of language, what Slavoj Žižek calls its “political performative,” in which official speech gains its interpellative power to forge collective binding not through any organic or spiritual substance but through the rhetorical power of language: “In itself it is nothing but a ‘pure difference’: its role is purely structural, its nature is purely performative—its signification coincides with its own act of enunciation; in short, it is a ‘signifier without the signified’ . . . behind the dazzling splendour of the element which holds it together (‘God,’ ‘Country,’ ‘Party,’ ‘Class’ . . .) [is a] self-referential, tautological, performative operation.”²³ Similarly for Tzara, “Honour, Country, Morality, Family, Art, Religion, Liberty, Fraternity once answered to human needs. Now nothing [remains] but the skeleton of convention.”²⁴ Dadaist performances exposed this skeleton of convention in the official speech they parodied. When the admiral spoke, what emerged was a cancellation of words, a voiding of semantic substance through the deployment of simultaneous voices that resulted in empty stories and verbal blather: “a signifier without a signified.” However, this speech was drained of performative force, as the signifier was unsettled through its collision with foreign words that disfigured it. Political speech was denigrated as logorrhea, just as Tzara degraded its symbols: “DADA remains within the framework of European weakness, it’s all shit, but from now on we want to shit in different colors so as to adorn the zoo of art with all the flags of all the consulates.”²⁵

If not a community of consensus, was Zurich Dada a grouping of individuals founded in the commonality of their differences? Was it a collection of people who agreed to disagree? This also appears unlikely, especially if this definition of community presumes a preexistent “individual,” which Dada revoked. In Tzara’s simultaneous poem, not only is *l’amiral* without a home—that is, the admiral as military subject—but *l’amiral* as a word is too. By floating through the poem in the lines of different speakers, the homeless “admiral” exemplifies the poem’s deracinated language in general. The meaning of words cannot be tied to the intentions of their speaker because they drift off into the opacity of simultaneous speech. Nor are words firmly housed in their speaker’s body, as they live in the multiplicative medium of dialogical space. Consequently, language becomes self-reflexive and opaque to the point that it excludes its own speakers. As a result, the individual is unlocatable as originary point of the emission of language, for any meaning, which is tentative and plural, assembles at the dispersive locus of reception. In fact, there is no “single” language to begin with that could guarantee the unified organization of a centered individual. What we have is a poetics of exile that announces the conclusion of traditional subjectivity. “Man himself is not any longer,” Ball realized on 4 March 1916.

“There is no language any more,” Ball claimed on 9 July 1915, “it has to be invented all over again.” The answer, he urged, was a retraining of subjectivity, rendered obsolete with the loss of language: “People will not see that a revolution cannot be ‘made’ except by an *accelerated relearning*” (18 September 1916). This appeal sheds further light on the conspicuous and surprising didacticism and the pedagogical components of dadaist practice, which unexpectedly gives it a new dimension beyond the merely nihilistic or traumatophilic to which it has been related. For instance, “relearning” is evident in Ball’s performances, in which he emphasized the props of his practice. While reciting experimental sounds, he read from scripts on music stands placed before him. Hard cardboard cylinders encased his body, functioning like so many braces to retrain his posture and condition his physical movements. In doing so, he mimed and mocked the reification of the subject within capitalist orders and the mechanization of military identity—even while he simultaneously prepared the body for new conditions of modernity. Such regimentation is also evident in the paradoxically logical score for Tzara’s “L’amiral.” Perhaps it, too, responded to the call for “an *accelerated relearning*”—that is, of reinvented languages, posttraditional identities, and de-essentialized social relations. While no doubt a perverse and critical parody of the very order of traditional representational paradigms under attack (the pedagogy of rote learning implied by sheet music), Tzara’s score appears to have mimicked them in order to discipline a posttraditional subject, as well as to test ways of enacting experimental social relations in the act of performance.²⁶

In contrast to Tzara’s simultaneous poems, which were sometimes performed with up to twenty people at a time (as in “Male Fever” of 1919), Ball’s “Karawane” was radical in modeling a new identity through multilingual discourse in the speech of the single speaker. Despite its ostensible appeal to a solipsistic abstraction, and despite its seemingly primitivizing urge toward an imagined degree zero of language, the poem touches on several languages at once.²⁷ Its first word, “jolifanto,” phonetically suggests a French hybrid of *joli* (pretty) and *éléphant* (baby elephant). Several words refer explicitly to language itself, like the Spanish *habla* (to talk) in the second line, the Portuguese *falli* (close to “speech”), and *anlogo* (near *logos* in Latin). Other terms reach across different languages, for example *bosso* (“boss” in Italian, or “bump” in Portuguese). The title, “Karawane,” of course, designating “caravan” in German, identifies the diverse linguistic train that is the poem. “Karawane” is thus to some degree mimetic, motivated by its resemblance to different conventional languages (paralleled by the typographical diversity in Ball’s written version of the poem, which uses several conventional styles at once). As such it represents a progression beyond Tzara’s semioclasms toward a reinvention of forms of relationality, expressed in the vocal and visual registers of Ball’s performance. While words resembled foreign words, the materiality of Ball’s voice imitated sounds of the exterior world, such as animals, as in the staccato attack and slow release of “blago bung blago bung,” evoking the weighty march of elephants (the poem is also referred to

as “Elefantenkarawane,” elephant caravan). As one commentator describes it, “Ball’s *Lautgedichte* convey the physical substance of sound, sound as guttural rumblings, sound as voice, generated by lungs, larynx, vocal chords, tongue, and lips, producing sudden trills and sibilations. When we execute such sounds, the poet seems to be saying, we join the chorus of animals described in the poem.”²⁸ Forms of resemblance also extended to the visual domain of the performance: in costume, Ball became “like” other objects, animals, and people, as reported in his own account of 23 June 1916: his torso was “like an obelisk”; he wore a “cubist mask”; his arms gave “the impression of winglike movement”; he sang in “the ancient cadence of priestly lamentation”; the recital was “church style, like a recitative”; and he looked “like a magic bishop.”

Ball’s mimesis proposes a sympathetic correspondence between languages, and between languages and things, offering a gentle way of relating to otherness through the sharing of sensation. This represented a reparative and resonant vocalic mediation between words and the world that was beyond war and nationalism, rather than a language that merely internalized the conflict around it. Indeed, a relation of harmony is vaguely perceptible in the poem’s mimetic faculty, expressing Ball’s own convictions regarding “the unity of all things” (12 June 1916). This comes close to Walter Benjamin’s own theory of language, which pictured “the world in a state of resemblances,”²⁹ where “language represents the medium in which objects meet and enter into relationship with each other.”³⁰ For Benjamin, “it is no longer conceivable . . . that the word has an accidental relation to its object, that it is a sign for things (or knowledge of them) agreed by some convention. Language never gives mere sign.”³¹ Such arbitrariness only indicated the fall of language from an *imagined* prelapsarian state, when words and things existed in mimetic agreement. One could still discern the residue of that archaic language, Benjamin believed, in the existence of “nonsensuous” resemblances, such as the relation between words from different languages arrayed around the thing they all mean. While dissimilar, they nevertheless share a “nonsensuous” resemblance by pointing to the same center.³² Ball’s poem presents both a configuration of sensuous similarity between words and things, primarily through onomatopoeia, and a virtual system of endless signification formed by nonsensuous resemblance, where words “touch lightly on a hundred ideas at the same time without naming them,” as he suggested on 18 June 1916.

Yet the tenuousness of such language gave witness to the still-unredeemed life in this world, even in anticipation of a better one to come. While the poem glimpses at a social order without conflict, a world in fleeting harmonic accord, it still admits through its own dissonances to the impossibility of overcoming the real world in crisis. While the poem bridges differences through mimetic assimilation, it also maintains their distinctions. Its array of *near* resemblances avoids a pure imitation that would dominate, coerce, or subsume the other, or promote a simplistic dualism of original and copy. In this respect, Ball’s mimesis differs from that of the futurist Marinetti’s *parole in libertà*, which also as-

pired to a “psychic onomatopoeic harmony” between image and reality, but one that would “live the war pictorially,” producing a “direct collaboration in the splendor of this conflagration.”³³ While Ball was initially enthusiastic about Marinetti’s poetry, he “abhorred” its jingoistic content, and his more sympathetic relation to difference is clear in “Karawane.”³⁴

With Ball’s mimesis came a “retraining” of subjectivity, positioning the self as a reparative bridge to the outside world, already torn asunder by the violence of warfare. What Ball reconstructs is the self as relation, one that becomes a “being-with-others,” which, as Jean-Luc Nancy has argued, is “originarily present in ‘being-self.’”³⁵ As such, it proposes that being is not something created after the self-engenderment of an individuality built upon the myths of autonomy. Rather, identity can only be considered from the beginning as a relation, which is the lesson of Ball’s poetry, specifically its seemingly paradoxical unification of the elements of abstraction and mimesis: whereas the former indicates the renewal of language as pure and autonomous, its accompaniment by mimesis founds identity within the space of relationality. But if relational, then it is surely not the “being together as one” of the national “com-unus,” or some ontologically merged “being of community” (against which Nancy also cautions). Rather, dadaist practice emphasized dissonance, not fusion, and represented a complex negotiation of relationality in a period when it was in crisis, tugged in both directions toward a nostalgic collective absorption and modernity’s fetishization of individuality.

Still, there is something intensely private and opaque about Ball’s speech—what Leah Dickerman has termed its “solipsistic core”—that is unavailable to communication, just as his costume shields his body from the audience. In such moments, Ball expresses the limits of relationality, just as his machinelike prosthetic hands prohibit the intimacy of touch, or as the high collar of his cape and his long obelisklike coat hide his neck and torso. Recoiled into this shell, Ball figures forth the limit of being and community. This kernel of being—whether materialized in Ball’s body, in his vocalic singularity, or in the alterity of his appearance—provided the traction to stop the self from sliding into social unity. But if it delimits a self, Ball’s form of resemblance also represents a way of becoming other, even while it expresses the insufficiency of being in its very need for imitation. The more the self becomes like, the more it is unlike itself, which evidences a “mutual becoming” of self and other. Ball’s sound poetry was neither “an ‘Adamic language’ of innocence, resurrecting a speech that is utterly beyond all war and catastrophe,” nor a “synthesis of all languages.”³⁶ Positioned between those extremes, Ball’s mimesis avoided each. On the one hand, by stressing an internal multiplicity, its multilingual imitations contested the nationalist purification of language, which had driven xenophobic communities to catastrophic conflict. His language offered a way to become other, even while maintaining the self, and to relate to differences by differentiating the self. On the other hand, it constituted a rejection of the absolute arbitrariness of language completely subordinated to pure exchange, to its status as “commodity,” as Ball complained. His

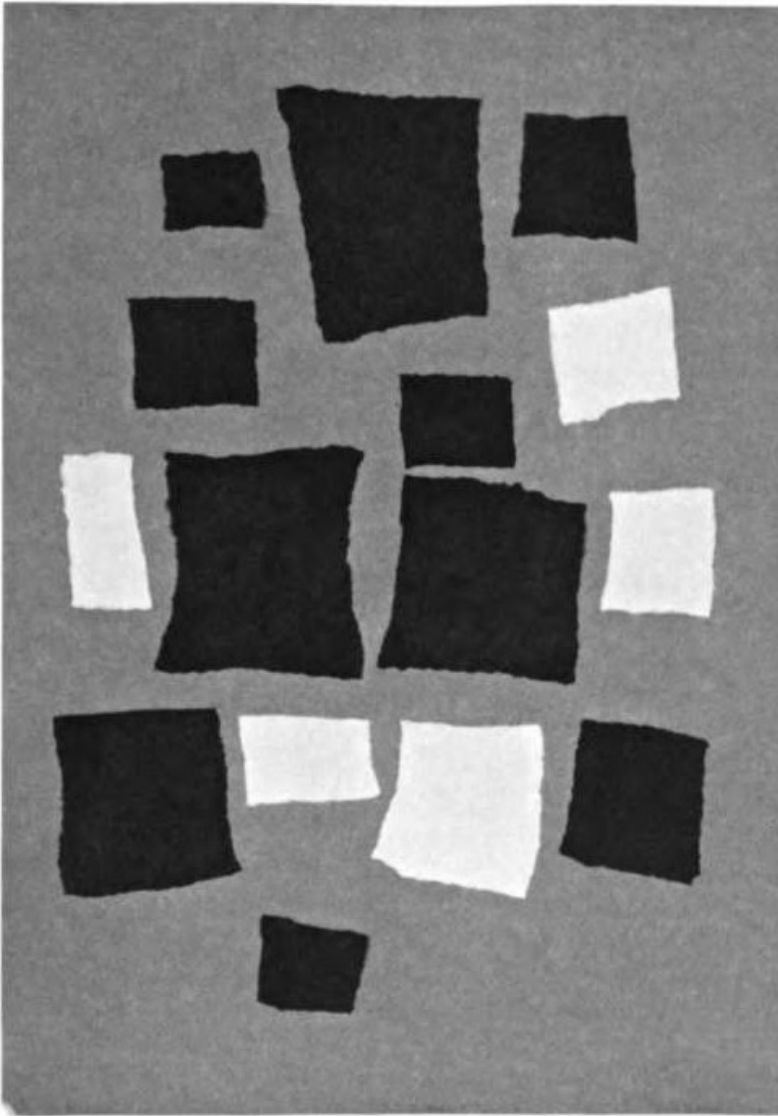
language of exile thus proposed a medium not only of dislocation, but also of relocation through harmonic accord with the environment.

Dada's experimentation with new social forms and radical languages was also elaborated in the collages of Arp and Sophie Taeuber, who was Swiss by origin. Arp, "disgusted by the butchery of World War I" and the megalomaniacal "logic" behind it, also urgently wanted to invent "a new order to restore the balance between heaven and hell."³⁷ As with the work of other dadaists—Ball in particular—Arp's collages, and those he made with Taeuber, evince a tension between the attempt to uncover a primordial, universal language, which would exceed the deadly divisiveness of the group psychology of nationalism, and a profound skepticism regarding the continuation of traditional models of identity, whether as unitary subjects or unified communities. As with other dadaists, there is also a connection in the case of Arp between geopolitical displacement and the structural dislocation found in his art objects. As an Alsatian, Arp was bicultural (he spoke both German and French), but by law a German citizen and subject to its draft. After fleeing Germany in 1914 for France, he only faced further bureaucratic troubles in Paris and consequently escaped to Zurich. Once there, and coming into contact with Ball, Tzara, and Taeuber, who would be his partner from that point on, Arp negotiated the crises of language, identity, and social relations in his work. He wished to void from his collages all traces of the corrupted systems of rationality he felt were responsible for the war. The collages, he explained, would represent "a denial of human egotism" through which "our brothers' hands, rather than serving as our own, had become enemy hands." This began with a profound doubt toward his own self as a creative subject: "cerebral intention" would be abolished from his work. Consequently, he would pursue "an anonymous and collective art" with Taeuber and with Dada at large, in which he could examine the remaining possibilities for a viable community.

In 1916 Arp commenced the famous series of collages "arranged according to the laws of chance." In one, squarish pieces of paper sit above a rectangular flat surface, as if, not quite moored to their ground, they float above the light blue background. Several dark blue shapes cluster around the middle, while five white forms sweep around the bottom half of the composition. All are more or less oriented along the same vertical and horizontal axes of the collage's borders. While the collage exists as a singular work of art, one that appears drawn into itself through the correspondences of its internal elements, it is a multiplicity of shapes that we face, or that blankly face us, detached from their ground, all different yet placed in relation. How can we read this tension between heterogeneity and unity, a split redoubled in the simultaneous invocation of both chance-based procedures and the grid's compositional format (fig. 5)?

Even if the claim of using chance was made retrospectively, aleatory elements still declare themselves in the collage. The rough edges of the paper, obviously torn, show signs of randomness, and the apparently haphazard use of commercial paper betrays the arbitrary choices of color, tone, and texture. Combining chance with the grid appears contradictory because while the grid indicates the logic of scientific rationality, the use of chance implies its total rejection. Arp likely invoked the former only to attack it with the latter, for it was exactly “science and technology” that he believed had turned “man into a megalomaniac,” as he later explained.³⁸ But if oppositional, both, for Arp, shared the same function: each would displace agency from artistic production, whether by letting aleatory systems or the grid determine the composition, releasing the author from such responsibility. Both would desubjectify the collage and would eliminate even the potentially unconscious repetition of a suspect “egotism.” Authorship would consequently be fractured and decentered. It would be open to intersecting foreign influences, implying a necessary hybridity at the origin of artistic creativity, a heterogeneous mix at the center of identity. The collage evinces no significant trace of traditional artistic craftsmanship: no painterly touch, no signature elements, no autographic index of emotional expression or psychological revelation. What results is a work of art that is nonintentional, or at least complexly intentional, where the artist exiles himself from the work he produces.

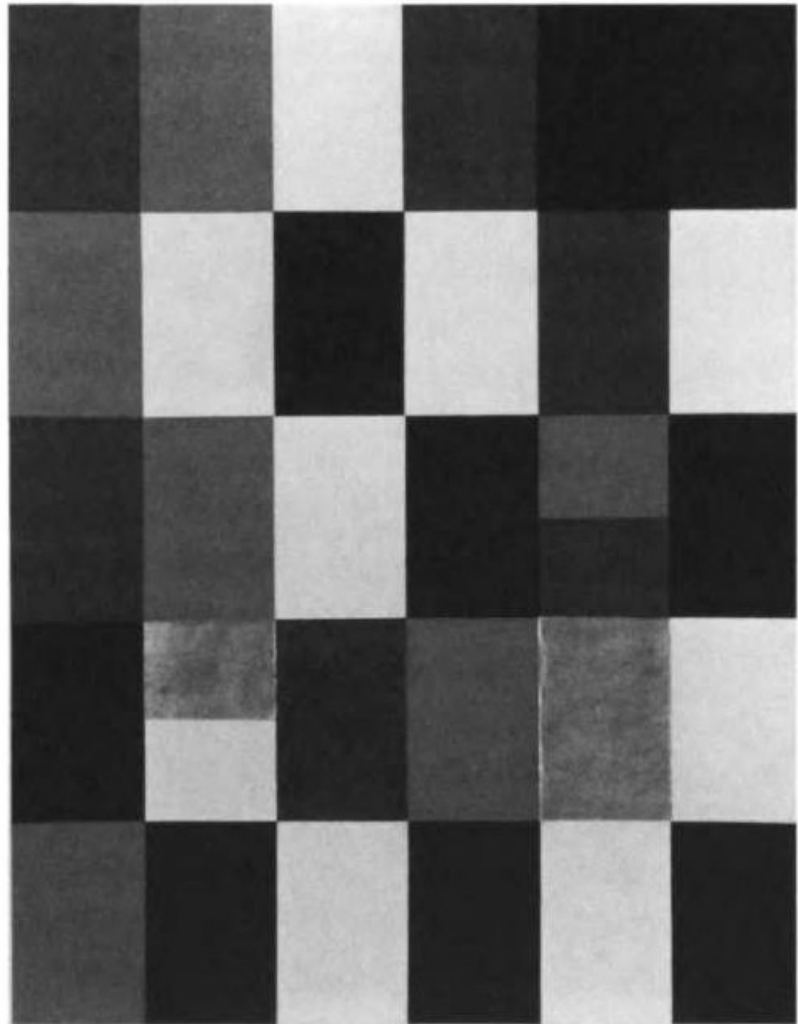
Arp's use of abstraction paralleled his removal of the hand: both were directed against a suspect anthropocentrism. “The image of the human form is gradually disappearing from the paintings of these times and all objects appear only in fragments,” Ball observed on 5 March 1916. “This is one more proof of how ugly and worn the human countenance has become, and of how all the objects of our environment have become repulsive to us. The next step is for poetry to decide to do away with language for similar reasons.” Arp's nonrepresentational grid was not just abstract, but aggressively anti-anthropomorphic, implying a further negation of “the ugly human countenance” and the very impossibility of representing it. The human form was replaced with abstract geometries, chance combinations, and in his sculptural work, biomorphic shapes that suggest a mutating natural order. Correlatively, subjectivity would be abolished through the denial of the singularity of artistic identity carried out in the collaboration with Taeuber.³⁹ Coming from a background in the decorative arts in Switzerland, Taeuber had already developed in her work a rigorous compositional system organized by abstract grids. Like Arp's production, hers was quiet and impersonal, tending toward materials



5.

other than oil paint, which was seen as “pretentious” against the background of a “suffering” world.⁴⁰ Together, Taeuber and Arp pursued the goal of an “anonymous art”: “Even personality we regarded as burdensome and useless, since it had developed in a petrified and lifeless world.”⁴¹

One result of their collaboration is the series of *Duo-Collages* of 1918, which proclaim their hybrid identities in their titles. In one, the surface is subdivided by a series of rectangular pieces of paper, uniform in size and cleanly cut. Compared to earlier collages, this grid now has a more rigid, exacting geometrical consistency, facilitated by the use of a paper cutter, a further way to eliminate the artist’s touch.⁴² The arrangement of light and dark shapes appears random, allowing for an aleatory distribution of forms on the surface. Similarly, the papers reveal different textures, whose arbitrary organization suggests further signs of chance. An insistent frontality addresses the viewer, allowing neither entrance into a deep optical space nor inference regarding artistic intention or signs of personality; attention is kept fully at the surface, which is in fact composed of divergent elements. The identity of the collage is itself fragmented, existing beyond the conscious



control of any one author. Instead, it becomes a space of connection between participants, where each is only further subdivided and never fully immanent to him- or herself (fig. 6).

Not only is the collage defined by the paradoxical logics of the grid and chance; the *Duo-Collage* also reveals a further tension indicated by the intrusion of readymade elements into its terrain of abstraction—primarily through the use of commercial papers, but also in the employment of the preestablished compositional structure of the grid.⁴³ This abstraction / readymade combinatory is contradictory not only because it arrives at a complex articulation of avant-garde artistic legacies, recalling the grid of cubist collage and postcubist aleatory procedures, as in Duchamp's *Three Standard Stoppages*, 1913. It is also contradictory because while abstraction typically calls up the principles of purification and singularity, embracing originality and immanence, the readymade elements signal their very denial, instead eliciting the forces of heterogeneity, repetition, and mass production. Further, while abstraction defines a space of ostensible autonomy, the readymade invokes commercial predetermined frameworks. As Ball perceptively noted, Arp “assumes here that the images of the imagination are *already composites*. The artist who works from his freewheeling imagination is deluding himself about originality. He is

6. Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber,
Duo-Collage, 1918, paper on paste-
board, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin,
Nationalgalerie

using a material that is already formed and so is undertaking only to elaborate on it” (1 March 1916).

Looking closer, we find that the multiplicative forms of the *Duo-Collage*, far from simply nonrepresentational, assemble into so many letters—Ts, Ls, and Es—as abstraction gives way to an amorphous written language. Within the grid’s seemingly purified surface, we discover a signifying relationality, not only in terms of the internal reflections of forms within the collage, but also in bridging these forms and the initial signs of an elemental alphabet. This move from abstraction to language is further clarified in Arp’s other works, such as his collage of 1920, *Untitled (“i” picture)*, in which the letter *i* emerges from collaged elements, suggesting a nascent identity, even a hesitant self (as in *Ich: ego or I*, in German, although here notably diminutive). If an identity is proposed, it is one that assembles itself in the space of autodifferentiation and relationality: the shapes that may read as “letters” continually mirror other similar shapes. They can only be established as identifiable forms through their separation from contiguous areas. In other words, the collage’s signs—amorphous and shifting—are radically context-dependent, forming bridges between their own materiality and the exterior linguistic symbols they sometimes ambiguously mimic. If these collages assimilate themselves to language, then they complement Ball’s linguistic imitation of things. Ruled by the rending structure of identity-as-difference, the collages imply a further elaboration of expatriate identity: one that longs for a redemptive order outside of war and nationalism (glimpsed by abstraction’s autonomy and purity), even while it denies its possibility. Returning to contemporary reality, it crushes traditional notions of the unified subject and replaces them with collaborative articulations, initiating a tentative relation between plural selves and the outside world.

If Dada’s homelessness indicated a “transcendental” form—as Benjamin argued of modern identity—then it does so by proposing an experimental modeling of the self as a complex negotiation between identity and difference, without collapsing into one or the other. Exceeding its historical and cultural horizons, Dada’s aesthetics of exile—of displaced subjects, uprooted languages, and fractured social relations—proposes an “exilic ethics” not far from what some have recently called for in our own present moment.⁴⁴ Indeed, Dada represents a critical and urgent resource for today’s world in

which we witness yet again the nagging tenacity of nationalism's grip, with renewed attempts to secure the homeland, enforce its imagined community, exploit its patriotic energies to militaristic conquest, and police the boundaries of its official language. Returning to Dada may not alter our current condition, but it will certainly contest its normalcy, corrode its triumphalist history, even indicate how similar problems might be addressed in the future. With hope, Dada's ethics of exile will continue to enable a more empathetic relation to difference, for it reveals the fundamental strangeness of ourselves.

NOTES

- 1 Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*, ed. John Elderfield, trans. Ann Raimés (Berkeley, Calif., 1996), esp. 70–71. Subsequent references to Ball's journal appear in the text by date.
- 2 This was explained in relation to Kandinsky's work in a talk Ball gave in 1917, but the significance extends to his own practice. "Kandinsky" (1917), repr. in Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 234.
- 3 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York, 1961).
- 4 Ball describes himself in "Downfall of the Phony Dance," performed at the Cabaret on 26 March 1916: "a life undermined by terrors and panic; a poet, suffering from immense and inexplicable depressions, collapses into neurotic convulsions and paralysis. A passionately lucid oversensitivity is the insidious starting point. He can neither escape from impressions nor control them. He succumbs to subterranean forces." Ball nearly attempted suicide in 1915 by throwing himself into Zurich's lake. Instead, on 20 October 1915, he dumped German war paraphernalia in the water.
- 5 Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968), 84.
- 6 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (1882), trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1974), 338.
- 7 Hugo Ball, *Cabaret Voltaire* (June 1916), 5; trans. in Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (New York, 1978), 14. For more on Ball's biography, see John Elderfield, "Introduction," in Ball, *Flight Out of Time*.
- 8 On Duchamp's relation to expatriation, see my "Duchamp's Labyrinth: First Papers of Surrealism, 1942," October 97 (Summer 2001): 91–119, and "Duchamp's Boîte-en-valise: Between Institutional Acculturation and Geopolitical Displacement," *Grey Room* 8 (Summer 2002): 6–37.
- 9 Ball, *Cabaret Voltaire*, 5.
- 10 Hugo Ball, "Kandinsky," in Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 234. Ball's verse moved toward abstraction, though it never became fully asymbolic, which I discuss below. On Ball's relation to Kandinsky and to the Russian futurist poetry of Khlebnikov and Kruchonykh, which Ball may have known through Kandinsky, see Martin Gaughan, "Dada Poetics: Flight out of Sign?" in *Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada*, ed. Stephen C. Foster (New York, 1996), 29–58.
- 11 For Benedict Anderson, among the principal forces behind the "imagination" of national communities is the homogenization of language achieved through "print capitalism," at least in the nineteenth century that represents his focus. See *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), 6–7.
- 12 Roman Jakobson, having recently arrived in Prague from Moscow, wrote "Dada" in 1921. It is reprinted in *Language in Literature*, eds. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, Mass., 1987). Subsequent citations appear in the text by page number.
- 13 Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 99. Benjamin borrowed the phrase from Georg Lukács, who used it in reference to the modern novel. For Benjamin it named a broader cultural condition.
- 14 Leah Dickerman, "Dada's Solipsism," *Documents* 19 (Fall 2000): 18.
- 15 I follow the irregular spelling of Tzara's script for "L'amiral," reproduced in *Cabaret Voltaire*.
- 16 The simultaneous poem's collective enactment would not prevent Tzara from claiming sole authorship, however, especially after Sébastien Voirol attempted to credit himself with its invention. In "A propos de la poésie simultanée," Tzara explains that "We make known that the first staged realization of the simultaneous poem was made under the initiative and direction of Tristan Tzara at a performance at the Cabaret Voltaire, March 31, 1916. This fact was marked in the publication *Cabaret Voltaire*, appearing May 15, 1916. The poem 'l'amiral cherche une maison à louer' was arranged by Tzara." *Dada* 1 (July 1917).
- 17 Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogical Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981), 270–271. Ferdinand de Saussure also recognized an opposition between a language that is "destined to infinitesimal subdivision," and an "official language" that reduces differences—but he never discussed the full ideological ramifications for each system. See the section on "Geographical Linguistics" in his *Course in General Linguistics*, eds. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye (London, 1983), 194.
- 18 Bakhtin, *Discourse*, 293.
- 19 Theodor Adorno, "Words from Abroad," in *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York, 1991), 1:186.
- 20 Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto 1918," *Seven Dada Manifestos*, trans. Barbara Wright (New York, 1981), 4–5.

21 Georges Van Den Abbeele describes this etymology, which he relates to the organic unification implicit in Hobbes' "body politic." He also retrieves another root: "com-munis," which suggests "being bound, obligated, or indebted together," more along legal lines, and connected to notions of community such as Locke's "social contract." While nationalism may contain elements of both, its rabid form tends toward the former. "Introduction," *Community at Loose Ends*, ed. Miami Theory Collective (Minneapolis, 1991), xi.

22 Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York, 1959).

23 Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York, 1989), 99.

24 Tristan Tzara, "An Introduction to Dada" (1951), unpublished pamphlet; cited in William Rubin, *Dada and Surrealist Art* [exh. cat., The Museum of Modern Art] (New York, 1968), 10.

25 Tristan Tzara, "Monsieur Antipyrine's Manifesto" (1926), *Seven Dada Manifestos*, 1.

26 This is especially relevant given Dada's strategic appropriation of other dominant cultural forms. For Tzara, "Dada also made use of the advertisement, but not as an alibi, an allusion, but as a utilizable material with aesthetic and suggestive ends. . . . It used the very reality of advertising in the service of its own publicity needs." Cited in Johanna Drucker, *The Visible World: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909–1923* (Chicago, 1994), 213.

27 The verse of "Karawane" reads: "jolifanto bambla ð falli bambla / grossiga m'pfa habla horem / égiga goramen / higo bloiko russuia huju / hollaka hollala / anlogo bung / blago bung / blago bung / bosso fataka / ð üü ð / schampa wulla wussa ólobo / hej tatta górem / eschige zunbada / wulubu ssubudu uluw ssubudu / tumba ba-umf / kusagauma / ba-umf."

28 Erdmute Wenzel White, *The Magic Bishop: Hugo Ball, Dada Poet* (Columbia, S.C., 1998), 106–107.

29 Walter Benjamin, "The Image of Proust"; cited in Shiery Weber Nicholzen, "Aesthetic Theory's Mimesis of Walter Benjamin," in *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, eds. Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), 77. In fact, Benjamin and Ball met in 1918 in Bern. Gershom Scholem was there as well and reports in his *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 2001), that Benjamin's thinking about language during this time would eventually turn into the essay "On the Mimetic Faculty." Also see Anson Rabinbach, "Introduction to Walter Benjamin's 'Doctrine of the Similar,'" *New German Critique* 17 (Spring 1979). Benjamin's notion of mimesis, needless to say, was antithetical to the logic of simple imitation. On Benjamin's concept of mimesis, see Nicholzen; see also Martin Jay, "Mimesis and Mimetology: Adorno and Lacoue-Labarthe," in *The Semblance of Subjectivity*; and Irving Wohlfarth, "On Some Jewish Motifs in Benjamin," in *The Problems of Modernity: Adorno and Benjamin*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (New York, 1989).

30 Walter Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," *New German Critique* 17 (Spring 1979): 68. My thanks to the participants in the Dada Seminars who encouraged this line of thought.

31 Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1978), 324.

32 See Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1978).

33 Cited in Christine Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting: Cubism, Futurism, and the Invention of Collage* (New Haven, 1992), esp. 209, 229.

34 Hugo Ball, "Die Reise nach Dresden," *Die Revolution* 3; cited in John Elderfield, "Introduction," in Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, xviii.

35 Jean-Luc Nancy, "Interview with Chantal Pontbriand," *Parachute* 100 (October/December 2000): 15. Also see Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor et al. (Minneapolis, 1991).

36 Respectively, Anson Rabinbach, "The Inverted Nationalism of Hugo Ball's Critique of the German Intelligentsia," in Hugo Ball, *Critique of the German Intelligentsia (1919)*, (New York, 1993), xiii; and White, *The Magic Bishop*, 112.

37 All following quotes, unless otherwise noted, are from Hans Arp, "Dadaland," in *Arp on Arp: Poems, Essays, Memories*, ed. Marcel Jean, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York, 1972), 232. Also see the useful catalogue by Jane Hancock et al., *Arp, 1886–1966* [exh. cat., Minneapolis Institute of Arts and Württembergischer Kunstverein] (Minneapolis and Stuttgart, 1987).

38 Hans Arp, "Concrete Art" (1944), in *Arp on Arp*, 139.

39 See Renée Riese Hubert, "Sophie Taeuber and Hans Arp: a Community of Two," *Art Journal* 52, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 25–32. Hubert's stress on the possibility of mystic union and utopian community, however, significantly diverges from my own view presented here.

40 On her vertical/horizontal compositions, see Christian Besson, "Les Composition Verticales-Horizontales de Sophie Taeuber," in *Sophie Taeuber* (exh. cat., Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris) (Paris, 1990), 35. Besson argues that Taeuber's vertical-horizontal abstraction prefigured Arp's. On Taeuber's "nonautographic" work and its resistance to traditional conventions of artistic bravura, see Yve-Alain Bois, "Sophie Taeuber-Arp against Greatness," in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine*, ed. M. Catherine de Zegher (exh. cat., Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston) (Cambridge, Mass., 1996).

41 "And So the Circle Closed," in *Arp on Arp*, 232.

42 Hans Arp: "Even the scissors, which we had used initially to cut our first paper images, were discarded because they too readily betrayed the presence of the hand. From then on we used a paper-cutting machine," *Arp on Arp*.

43 The grid is never invented, if we follow Rosalind Krauss' argument: it can only be repeated, and as preexistent it comes readymade. Krauss, "Grids," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985).

44 Homi Bhabha, "Arrivals and Departures," in *Home, Exile, Homeland*, ed. Hamid Naficy (New York, 1999), xii.



If Dada stands for anything, it is for and against. For and against unity; for and against affirmation and negation; for equations as long as they do not equate, against them when they do. The stance extends to the label Dada itself, which means nothing and everything. Dada is any word—cow, cube, bar of soap, nurse, yes, hobby horse—yet Dada is also the heart of words, a modernist mantra, a machine-age tetragrammaton. This simultaneous stance of for and against is never reducible to clowning about. Rather, it is integral to a global strategy of contradiction: the positive Dada response to a cluster of negatives—bourgeois morality, ends-means rationality, the nation-state, war—that puts itself forward as a *contra-dictio* in the juridical sense of counter-argument.

In this essay on one Italian strain of the Dada virus, I explore the productivity of this practice of contradiction, which represents one of Dada's enduring legacies in contemporary culture. Contradiction in the juridical sense had been central to the avant-gardes from the start. The 1909 "Founding Manifesto of Futurism," for instance, contested static conceptions of beauty in the name of dynamism and speed, institutions of memory such as libraries in the name of a future-centered counter-mnemonics. Likewise, the 1912 "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" had called for a disruption of syntax and the destruction of the literary "I." But futurism's prose tended to remain that of conventional counter-argumentation. It was anchored in the intentionality of a first-person subject who pounds the podium with a jackhammer. The speaker abjures logic while embracing humor and self-contradiction. But he does so as a function of instinct and a monumental will that, for all its volatility, is able to make and fulfill promises—to sing, smash, exalt, make war, make art; able to transform every machine into a prosthetic extension of self. The paradox is made flesh in futurist visualizations of multiplied man, such as Umberto Boccioni's "Unique Forms of Continuity in Space" and Anton Giulio Bragaglia's photodynamic experiments. Rapid movement disrupts the unity of the Cartesian subject, explodes the body's contours, relocates identity in a hypothetical future, but only to reanchor the exploded fragments of the self in a techno-promethean corporeality. Futurist self-discontinuity equals expanded selfhood.

Dada modifies the equation (without quite sundering it). It further unmoors the futurist self and further fissures the future ego. It sections bodies into assemblies of nonintersecting parts, no longer tagged with countries of manufacture, indifferently vegetable, animal, mineral; typographical and mechanical. It casts words and sentences adrift from real-world chores; it cuts objects and machines free from the burden of functionality, even as producers of accidents. But to what end? The history of Dada supplies

many responses, but one stands out as a *trait d'union* between good, bad, and so-so Dada; left and right Dada; north, south, east, and west Dada—that provided in the opening line of Tristan Tzara's "Mr. Antipyrine's Manifesto": "Dada is our intensity."¹

Intensity. The word may not seem immediately promising with respect to the cerebral chess games of Duchamp or the play rebuses of Francis Picabia. Yet it characterizes them all the same. For the specific intensity to which Tzara refers involves the collision of cool indifference and hot sensation, the planned and the unplanned, the idiosyncratic and the universal, according to a logic codified by Dada's forefathers, from the dandies of the nineteenth century to their visionary descendants, Arthur Rimbaud and the Count of Lautréamont: "The Dictatorship of the Mind,' presented without bothering about improvements or circumspection, is an affirmation of intensity, and steers every thought towards that noble, precise, sumptuous force, the only one worthy of interest—destruction."² Tzara is eloquent about the impersonal yet hyper-individualistic art that will result: "Beauty and Truth in art don't exist; what interests me is the intensity of a personality, transposed directly and clearly into its work, man and his vitality, the angle under which he looks at the elements and the way he is able to pick these ornamental words, feelings and emotions, out of the basket of death."³

The paradox is fundamental: destruction equals the highest form of construction. Amid the wreckage of exploded old forms of individuality blossoms forth an unconstrained personality open to the new: oblique angles of vision, odd methods, the arbitrary selection of "ornaments" that are more than ornaments.⁴ The personality in question is the expression of a new humanity emerging simultaneously in Zurich, Paris, Rome, Berlin, and New York. It asserts itself against the strictures of psychology in the realm of blood:

People these days no longer write with their race, but with their blood (what a platitude!)... It's only natural that the elderly don't notice that a new type of man is being created here, there and everywhere. With some insignificant variations in race the intensity is, I believe, the same everywhere, and if there is a common characteristic to be found in people who are creating today's literature, it will be that of anti-psychology.⁵

Anti-psychology dictates a creative method that consists in granting "each element its identity, its autonomy, the necessary condition for the creation of new constellations, since each has its own place in the group. The drive of the Word: upright, an image, a unique event, passionate, of dense color, of intensity, in communion with life."⁶ Art equals life. But not just any life: only life plucked from out of the basket of death, life on the edge. And not just any art. Art is dead. It is a mere relic of and potential catalyst for lived intensities, an experiential stepping stone.

To call attention to the centrality Dada assigns to intensity as a criterion of aes-

thetic success is to underscore certain fundamental continuities between it and futurism, beyond the two movements' differences with regard to ideas about selfhood and corporeality. It is also to situate Dada at the heart of that revolution in modern culture that saw the displacement of traditional norms of aesthetic judgment, based upon fidelity to ideals of beauty or truth, upon service to didactic or moral imperatives, or upon pleasure, in favor of a scale of valuation based instead upon registering the sheer intensity of sensation, affect or effect, with pain and pleasure, beauty and ugliness experienced as one. From the Gothic to industrial Gothic, from Thomas de Quincey to decadentism to trance music, a modernity founded upon rationalization and technics has found its dark mirror image in a succession of subcultures that have explored forms of sublimity stripped of ethical imperatives and of any nesting within idealist or rationalist schemes of cognition. Most of all, it is to draw attention to an inevitable opening within Dada, due to the radical nature of its work of contradiction, to mystical, totalizing, even totalitarian trends in thought. For it is precisely Dada's pursuit of higher intensities that informs such apparently anomalous, though only trivially so, flights out of time such as those carried out by the likes of Julius Evola.

Evola is little known in the English-speaking world, except to students of the radical right, though he was included in the bibliography to Robert Motherwell's 1951 *The Dada Painters and Poets*.⁷ Thanks to a series of exhibitions beginning with a 1963 one-man show at the La Medusa gallery in Rome and culminating with the 1998 show *Julius Evola and the Art of the Avant-gardes, between Futurism, Dada, and Alchemy* held in Milan, he has recently been consecrated as the leading Italian exponent of dadaism,⁸ and properly so, because Evola is a more significant Dada theorist, poet, and artist than is either generally known or acknowledged, even by Dada specialists. Evola's Dada sojourn was swift but intense. It included one-man shows at the Casa d'Arte Bragaglia in Rome in 1920 and Herwarth Walden's *Der Sturm* gallery in 1922, participation in the 1921 Paris Salon Dada, plans with Christian Schad to form a Dada jazz band, and an impassioned (but only partly reciprocated) correspondence with Tzara.⁹ It left in its wake a corpus of a dozen poems in Italian and French, some forty surviving paintings and drawings, a handful of essays and lectures, a manifesto, and the first extended treatise in Italian on abstract art.¹⁰

The lack of recognition has to do only in part with the secondary role conventionally assigned to Italian Dada within the Dada archipelago. It is true that futurism remained the dominant arbiter of avant-garde cultural politics in Italy during the 1920s, frequently managing to blur the boundary line between futurist and nonfuturist currents. A case in point is Enrico Prampolini's review *Noi—Raccolta Internazionale d'Arte d'Avanguardia*, published in Rome between 1917–1920 and 1923–1925: a forum, as its subtitle suggests, open to all currents of contemporary culture but whose prolonged courtship with Dada was eventually torpedoed by Filippo T. Marinetti's battles with Picabia over the paternity of tactilism. Similarly Bragaglia, another independently minded futurist

NOI

3 - gennaio 1921

1 LIRA

casella postale 23 - MANTOVA

NOTE PER GLI AMICI

Per noi, l'arte è un'altra cosa.

Non si tratta di fare il gioco dell'umanità che i diversi mezzi espressivi travestono in illusione di nuovo e d'individuale; non si tratta di fare gli istrioni o gli eroi, non si tratta di abbandonare e di ebbrezza colpevole, motivi eterni di ogni individualizzazione del sentimento e del pensiero. **Siamo fuori.**

Tod una Verklärungs! Noi tutti siamo dei morti, dei carbonizzati, dei decomposti; abbiamo esaurito, nella sete insaziabile di un Faust, tutte le esperienze, spremute sino all'ultima velle sanguinaria tutte le passioni. Con Wagner ci siamo esauriti nell'eroismo dell'elemento universalizzato, con Fichte abbiamo risolto egotisticamente il mondo, con Nietzsche e, più con Richard ci siamo decastati di umanità; palpitanamo, indieribilmente sparsi sulla natura, con Debussy, e con Berkeley e Kant riviviamo in arte vitale il problema della conoscenza. Soffriamo tutte le morti, viviamo le illusioni di tutte le luci, nell'esperienza di questa epoca travagliata e torren-

ta. Ora tutto ciò non esiste più. Fine delle asive delle corazzate che si scontrano fucili non fummo che sibili fuori di neri disastri — fuori — un deserto gelidamente ardente il passato, verso la rarefazione solara. Ora sappiamo che **d'ora qualcosa d'altro** che la nostra ubriachezza massimale, ora sentiamo che sentimento, fede, amore ed umanità non deboli infinite sistemi; tutto qui

che è vita e realtà, per gli altri è caduto giù, per sempre, come una veste sporca, sudata e straccia da un corpo di luce. E gli uomini che si chiamano vivi, li vediamo morti fantocci, bruti e mercanti.

Non è pessimismo: si tratta di aver veduto. Nella conoscenza squallida abbiamo ritrovata la nostra realtà: l'Ag che è al di fuori della vita di tutti gli... e l'Alone e la mutabilità in tutto il resto: e l'estraneità, la brutalità e la non-proprietà di tutte le cose che si chiamano spirituali: pensiero, sentimento, fede.

E si sveglia in noi: « quel che abbiamo di divino: l'azione autonoma » (?). L'uomo che non è più agito, ma agisce — unica realtà — si risolve nella vita di ogni ora nel motivo della negazione. Da qui l'arte, **la nostra arte**, come terapeutica dell'individuo.

Noi siamo destrutturati, immovabili, disorganizzatori; vogliamo morte e follia: « *Noni deliriosa, rest furiosa, le lingue des ongles et des poires, et préparons le grand spectacle du désastre,*

l'insensé, la décomposition... l'état de folie, de folie agressive, complète, d'un monde laisé entre les mains des bandits qui se déchirent et détruisent les cicéris: sans nul ni dessein, sans organisation » (?). Ed in questo è la nostra saggezza, la nostra pena di vivere; distruggere logica e coerenza, disseccare la volontà di vivere, portare l'astuzia nell'ordine, dischiudere il concreto nell'oscurità, la fede



IVO PANNAGGI

Nudo di donna

1.

fellow traveler, hosted Dada shows at the Casa d'Arte Bragaglia and covered Dada doings in his *Cronache d'Attualità*, the March 1921 issue of which contained an insert paid for by and devised by Tzara, who had been mischievously instructed by Evola to "ridicule both trends and illustrious Italian and foreign personalities (starting with Marinetti and extending to Bragaglia himself)."¹¹ But Bragaglia's ties to the Italian scene, especially to the circle of Massimo Bontempelli and Luigi Pirandello, would in the end prevail over Dada connections, as would his longtime friendship with the founder of futurism.

Futurism's absorptive tendencies in no way imply either that Zurich Dada's impact on Italy was insignificant or the converse. Filippo de Pisis and Alberto Savinio were in close contact with Tzara during the Cabaret Voltaire phase of Dada. Tzara had begun contributing to the Neapolitan review *Le Pagine* in 1917 and, with Marcel Janco, was featured in the inaugural issue of *Noi*, where Dada coverage would remain a constant.¹² When *Noi* suspended publication in 1920, the Mantuan circle of Gino Cantarelli, Aldo Fiozzi, and Ambrogio Cantarelli took up the Dada cause, founding a short-lived review

1. Cover of *Bleu* (January 1921), with lead essay by Julius Evola ("Note per gli amici") and cover illustration by Ivo Panaggi

entitled *Bleu*, in which Noi's dadaphile contributors, among them Evola, published (fig. 1).¹³ Italian authors and artists were ubiquitous in early Dada publications on the other side of the Alps as well, to such a degree that one critic has argued that "it would be legitimate to characterize Dada as a Swiss-Italian avant-garde between 1916 and 1917."¹⁴ The lead issue of *Dada* (July 1917) contained art by Prampolini and writings by Savinio, Nicola Moscardelli, and Francesco Meriano, not to mention coverage of performances of futurist words-in-freedom. Italian contributors to subsequent issues included Maria d'Arezzo, Cantarelli, Giorgio de Chirico, and Prampolini. D'Arezzo was featured in Richard Huelsenbeck's *Dada Almanach*, along with a telegram in support of Gabriele D'Annunzio's occupation of Fiume. In short, Hugo Ball may well have erased *Dada Marinetti* from the genealogy of Dadas—"Dada Tzara, Dada Huelsenbeck . . . Dada Mr. Rubiner, Dada Mr. Korrodi. Dada Mr. Anasthasius Lilienstein"—that figured in the first draft of his 1916 Dada manifesto in order to distance Zurich Dada from its futurist neighbor, and Marinetti may well have fulminated every time a rival movement contested futurism's primacy on Italian soil, yet the Dada presence in Italy and the Italian presence in Dada remain considerable.

The relative lack of recognition of Italian Dada on the part of historians is ultimately attributable less to forgetfulness than to another problem alluded to above: the fact that the figure who, in 1919–1922, emerged from the futurist fold to become its leader, also went on to become a prominent fascist/neofascist thinker, a mystic and political philosopher who continues to inspire a cultlike following among members of the postwar right, from Mauro Tarchi to Alain de Benoist. Celebrated as "our Marcuse, only better" by the neofascist opposition to the student uprisings of May 1968, Julius Evola remains both a taboo figure and a cause célèbre thirty years after his death. A tacit pact remains in place among scholars (defied only by a courageous few, such as Enrico Crispolti and Claudia Salaris), with those on the left either ignoring him or judging his work solely from the standpoint of its noxious political consequences; and those on the right, where Evola scholarship is thriving, striving to buttress Evola's myth of himself as an intellectual titan who stands above, outside, against his own era.

On the one side, as recently as 2002, one finds Umberto Eco reminding contemporary readers that Evola's preface to the 1937 Italian edition of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* assigned to Jews such as Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, and Tzara the role of destroying "every surviving trace of true order and superior civilization," without mention either of Evola's own Dada phase or of the constructive role Evola attributed to Dada's work of demolition even in later philo-Nazi writings.¹⁵ On the other side, one finds schol-

ars close to the Edizioni di Ar (as in Ar-yan) group churning out editions of his works with a robust critical apparatus, which skirt around Evola's ties to Nazi and fascist circles of power, not to mention the immediate political use-value of works such as *Tre aspetti del problema ebraico* (Three Aspects of the Jewish Problem) (1936), *Il mito del sangue* (The Myth of Blood) (1937), and *Sintesi della dottrina della razza* (Synthesis of the Doctrine of Race) (1941). A recent, meticulously documented Ar anthology of his contributions to the racist review *La Difesa della Razza* (The Defense of the Race), for instance, characteristically refuses to judge "their correctness according to the thought and political currents of our time," insisting that "Evola's thought is devilishly difficult and . . . especially so the problem of race in Evola's thought and doctrine."¹⁶

Missing is the critical middle ground that the present essay seeks to open up through an examination of Evola's Dada writings and works of art. What the essay sets out to demonstrate is that Evola's mystical understanding of Dada is at once cohesive, plausible, and in line with the movement's core values, and that Dada represented a decisive stepping-stone in his abandonment of art in favor of philosophy. Dadology, or Evola's work of absolute (self-)contradiction begun within the Dada fold, bears within it the seeds of that subsequent wholesale revolt against modernity, founded upon the advocacy of elitism, spiritual racism, and pagan imperialism that propelled Evola—alone among fascist theorists—beyond the catastrophe of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler into postwar prominence. The tale is significant not because its protagonist remains something of a scandal, but rather because Evola's flight out of time is just one of many such Dada flights. It is no less a Dada symptom than are the trajectories followed by Hugo Ball, from the Cabaret Voltaire to the seraphic bliss of Byzantine Christendom, or by Johannes Baader, from *The Great Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama* to becoming the self-designated living avatar of Jesus Christ.

Contemporary sensibilities may sometimes wish it otherwise, but for all their emancipatory potential and productivity as secular engines of intensity and thrill, the avant-garde's radical rhetorics of demolition have a built-in tendency to find themselves entwined within the familiar patterns of apophatic mysticism. They flow, that is, just as naturally into radical rhetorics of construction as do rhetorics of the dismantling of selfhood into rhetorics of transcendental selfhood. Selves that have been fissured with wounds, exploded and evacuated, and reduced to empty shells, have a knack for reappearing brimming over with power, magic, even God.

Born into a Sicilian family belonging to the minor nobility, Giulio Cesare Andrea Evola became Julius Evola—the Latinate name being an homage to Caesar—in his youth. His metamorphosis into a Dada took place at age twenty-one. Less than four years later, in

1923, the year of Duchamp's renunciation of art, Evola also abandoned Dada. He shed the mantle of painter-poet in favor of that of a "traditionalist" philosopher and dedicated himself to analyzing, among other topics, the hermetic tradition, Tantric yoga, the Holy Grail, the metaphysics of sex, and the role of the worker in the thought of Ernst Jünger. At once an insider and an outsider, Evola would count among his many transalpine admirers Gottfried Benn, René Guenon, Mircea Eliade, and Marguerite Yourcenar.

At the heart of Evola's thought lies the doctrine unfolded in his most influential work, *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* (Revolt against the Modern World), published in 1934 and reissued with updates through the time of his death in 1974.¹⁷ It posits the existence of two fundamentally opposed types of civilization: "traditional" organic societies structured according to a strict sense of hierarchy, at the top of which one finds a caste of warrior-priests, entrusted with the transmission of a zealously guarded corpus of metaphysical mysteries; and modern rationalistic (or "mechanicist") societies structured according to the principles of freedom, secularism, and popular sovereignty, and animated by an abiding faith in science and progress. The former is a breeding ground for absolute forms of individualism that transcend the merely human, reserved for an elite of initiates; the latter favors instead the shallow materialistic individualism summed up in the slogans of 1776 and 1789: "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," *liberté, fraternité, égalité*.

Much as in Oswald Spengler, traditional societies evolve into modern ones thanks to the pattern of long-term decay that shapes the whole of Western history, from the time of the emergence of Athenian rationalism to the mid-twentieth century, when an absolute nadir is reached with the defeat of Europe and the triumph of the twin evils of Americanism and bolshevism in World War II. Naturally, there are islands of light within the ever darkening sea of world history: Imperial Rome, the Holy Roman Empire as interpreted by the likes of Frederick II, forces of potential rebirth such as the Knights Templar, and, at least in the prewar editions of *Rivolta*, Nazism and fascism.¹⁸ But there can be no turning back history's tide: non-Western forms of spirituality, the counter-culture radicalisms of the right and left, are no alternative at all. The proper traditionalist response consists not of political engagement, but of disengagement on the contradictor's part: in raising oneself above the hubbub of the marketplace to the lofty heights from which the chosen few can peer into the depths of perennial Tradition. The title of Evola's most important postwar work sums up the stoic ethos that results: *cavalcare la tigre* (ride the tiger). The tiger is modernity. Traditionalists have no choice but to straddle the beast; the ride will be long and hard but its end will come.

Evola's sources are eclectic and blend Hindu texts like the Bhagavad Gita, the Rîg-Veda, and the Upanishads with Greco-Roman classical sources and with modern scholarship from the fields of anthropology, archaeology, and the history of religions by authors such as Johann Jakob Bachofen, Franz Cumont, Fustel de Coulanges, Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, and Lucien Lévi-Bruhl. Some overlap occurs with the eclecticism

found in Evola's Dada writings where references to Lao-Tse, Plotinus, Tertullian, the gnostic Valentine, Meister Eckehart, and Saint Theresa are interwoven with quotes from Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Emanuel Swedenborg, as well as considerations of the work of Stéphane Mallarmé, Arthur Rimbaud, Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Verlaine, Maurice Maeterlinck, Arnold Schoenberg, and Igor Stravinsky. But the deeper continuity between the Dada and the post-Dada Evola is found on the level of a unifying theme: the need for autarchic, absolute, ahuman or even antihuman forms of selfhood—dictatorship of the mind achieved by means of relentless (self-) contradiction.

Such was the very essence of Dada as Evola understood it: *Dada, suprema terapeutica dell'individuo* (Dada, supreme therapy of the individual), and the therapeutic method is called *abstraction*.¹⁹ Evola arrived at Dada via Roman futurism and the studio of Giacomo Balla, which he began frequenting in 1915 at age seventeen. Already in this earliest phase, interrupted by a year of military service (during which he apparently dabbled in ether and cocaine), he set about attempting to carve out a niche for an abstract art that would abandon "feeling as value and sensation" in the name of "will in the form of abstract sentiment and egoism."²⁰ This amounted to a critique of the tendency within futurism to fetter art to the world of sensations (such as speed) and external engagements (such as political action), as well as of what, a decade later, Evola would describe as futurism's "convulsive and frenzied mysticism of matter and the sensuality of movement."²¹

Evola's tastes were aristocratic. He sought a cooler, more introverted art, an art in harmony with the Stirnerian ideal of self-mastery referred to as *Eigenheit* (or "ownness") in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (The Ego and Its Own).²² Thanks to his close ties to Noi, he crossed paths with Tzara's 1918 Dada manifesto, where he found statements such as "order = disorder; ego = non-ego; affirmation = negation: the supreme radiations of an absolute art"; and "There is one kind of literature, which never reaches the voracious masses. The work of creative writers, written out of the author's real necessity, and for his own benefit. The awareness of a supreme egoism, wherein laws become insignificant"; and "Dada is the mark of abstraction."²³ The words could have been his own, and so he made them his. In March 1920 he wrote to Tzara: "I join your movement with great enthusiasm, a movement with which all my work has long been converging, even when I was unaware of you; I declare Dada to be the most important and profoundly original art movement that has appeared to date."²⁴ Later he would add:

Nothing speaks to me besides you. Above and beyond all that I have lived through, I find only you in whom to mirror myself and through whom to breathe again. I understand you infinitely. Everything that you do seems to me as if was done by myself. Knowing you, I discovered myself somewhere else: I anticipated myself.²⁵

Through Dada, Evola cast his past aside and found himself always already embodied in a Paris-based Romanian Jew.

Dada's importance for Evola can be summed up in two base concepts that are fully, if darkly, articulated in his 1920 volume *Arte astratta: Posizione teorica, 10 poemi, 4 composizioni* (Abstract Art: Theoretical Stance, 10 Poems, 4 Compositions): autarchic individualism and abstraction as intensified consciousness. The first is broached by means of a public practice of self-contradiction:

All that exists in us is necessarily contradictory. This is the very nature of practice when leading an abstract existence. Dada is contradictory and, for this reason, it's not contradictory at all. And I want to contradict myself to such a degree that I'm not contradicting myself at all. I know what I'm up to. I'm acting in bad faith. I'm absolute.²⁶

Contradiction, particularly self-contradiction, serves as a tool for dismantling the stranglehold of logic over everyday existence, for freeing the self from logic's gravitational pull, for demolishing the destructive core of a fallen world. It tenders the promise of a *via negativa* toward absolute self-knowledge:

We know what we are doing because we own destruction and destruction doesn't own us. We know this coldly, with the insight of a surgeon, while, on the other hand, everything that we are doing is absolutely incomprehensible to ourselves. We want nothing, we understand nothing. Dada is radical idiocy. I practice bad faith: my poems and philosophy matter to me as little as does nail polish. I paint my paintings for my own vanity and for purposes of self-promotion, the very reasons that I am giving today's lecture. I wish to persuade no one. I stake out my case on lifeless forms; I stake out my case on nothingness.²⁷

The closing quotation is from Max Stirner ("ich habe meine Sache auf nichts gestellt") and seals the climactic account in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* of how the self unfetters itself from all that is not self.²⁸ It cements the link between the dream of conquering sovereign forms of individuality, unconditioned by the outside world, free from the laws of logic and ordinary morality, and Dada's work of demolition of self, work, and world. In this particular lecture, delivered at the Casa d'Arte Bragaglia on the occasion of the inauguration of an April 1921 group show, the tone is glib in keeping with at least one aspect of Evola's Dada adventure: a concern with snobbery, which is to say, elitism in the conventional sense. A contemporaneous "jazz-band Dada ball" and an array of other activities are designed, or so Evola's letters to Tzara suggest, to ensure that Dada becomes all the rage among the Roman elites.²⁹

Beneath the snobbery and self-advertisements there are clear signals that "othering" the self—Rimbaud's *je est un autre* is cited approvingly—is associated with the

achievement of intensified states of consciousness. Abstract art, Evola argues in a subsequent lecture, is more than the pictorial mode assumed by the most advanced modern art. It is the product of an altered mode of being, “a state of intensity in which neither sentiment nor thought survive, but only a rarefied and strange atmosphere in which sounds and forms, as if emanating from another world or another reality, surface as if in a shifting landscape that is colored alternately like a dream or like a delirium.”³⁰ The state in question is in no way inherent to the work of art; it exists only in the work’s creator or spectator. It is a limit, a zero degree beyond which lie silence or suicide.³¹ One arrives at this limit via an ascetic practice of self-abstraction from the world that views with indifference the distinction between the work of art and the everyday object, between the animate and inanimate matter. The great mystics provide a precedent:

If one were to seek a point of comparison, certain mystics would come to mind: in particular, the atonal, icy fire that characterizes the interiority of a Ruysbroeck or an Eckehart. Unlike these two cases, however, in abstract art such a value doesn’t assume the form of a uniform and solitary light. Rather it is breathed forth only within an incoherent complex of vital, obscure, intimate, anxious states that, as if lost in diaphanous atmosphere in which the feeling of dreaming or delirium gradually transforms and clarifies itself into a rarefied sunlight; states whose sounds and motions are inexplicable. . . . It could be said that in such a sphere reality itself dissolves, emptied of life by the extreme degree of rarefaction, and returns to an elementary state of chaos “dry and burning, burning and monotonous.” But to those who have been fully penetrated by abstract art, it becomes clear that this incoherence and folly is little more than a surface behind which lives the metallic shimmer of the self’s absolute freedom. It is but the final delicate shroud that veils, and by veiling reveals, the conquest within the fold of aesthetics of that formless and unconditional purity that is raw power and the origin of all form and order. Here art at its core becomes self-revelation.³²

Unlike Ball, who eventually sought refuge in the angelic hierarchies of a higher D.A.D.A., Dionysius the Areopagite, Evola remains committed to modernity as the potential scene of self-disclosure of the sacred (the purity and power of the unfettered self) through radical negation. Dada’s *via negativa* cannot literally repeat that of a Ruysbroeck or an Eckehart—Evola remained ferociously anticlerical throughout his life. There is no turning back history’s clock. The tiger must be ridden, but it can be ridden out of time and space. Art provides the means and not the end—the path of abstraction leads beyond art.

Evola’s talk of rarefaction reducing the world to a dry, explosive chaos behind



2.

which looms the shimmering gold of absolute selfhood, raw power, and pristine form betrays a growing devotion to alchemical literature in his Dada works and poems. Alchemy equips Evola with a treasure house of secret signs as well as a source of doctrinal inspiration for what he would later refer to as “magic idealism.” Most of all, like Rimbaud’s *alchimie du verbe* (alchemy of the word), it stands for a compositional method that concentrates upon the evocative—that is, the irrational, nonobjective—value of words, sounds, and forms at the expense of their conventional semantic or mimetic properties.³³ Dada paintings such as *Abstraction*, 1920, *Interior Landscape—Diaphragm Aperture*, *The Fiber Catches Fire and the Pyramids*, and *Dada Interior Landscape* thus weave together abstract pictorial elements reminiscent of Balla, Hans Arp, Fernand Léger, and the Kandinsky of the 1920s with a private language of zigzags, sinusoids, rhombi, letters, and hermetic symbols into densely packed but cool planar tableaux that play off diagonals against verticals, veils of vapor and smoke against hard-edged forms, and the organic against the inorganic (fig. 2).

Works result whose ambition, in keeping with Evola’s understanding of Dada as a “supreme therapy of the individual” and in line with the spirit of Kandinsky’s early “improvisations,” is to explore the artist’s inner state of “abstraction” at a particular moment in time. (The paintings and drawings often bear titles with time references, such as *Interior Landscape 3:30 pm.*) Each moment is animated by traces of a yet-to-be-completed

3. Julius Evola, *The Fiber Catches Fire and the Pyramids*, 1920–1921, oil on canvas, Private collection



3-

4. Poetic version of Julius Evola, *The Fiber Catches Fire and the Pyramids*, in *Dadaphone* 7 (March 1920): 6



4-

passage from impure into pure forms. Fractured emblems dodge in and out as if the ruins of old systems and the promise of a new synthesis: the word Dada; the name Ea; planetary seals; the swastika; the cross; a meditative eye; the symbol for sulphur; the A of Aleph, Alpha, and Athanor, the furnace that supplies the heat for alchemical transformations; the Hg that refers to mercury on the periodic table. Their suggestive power is redoubled by color choices freighted with symbolism: greens, blacks, cinnabars, whites, and yellows that evoke the alchemical cycles of *nigredo*, *albedo*, *citrinitas*, and *rubedo* (blackness, whiteness, yellowness, and redness) and agents associated with them (azote, salt, sulphur, and mercury). It is important to note that the works resist any simple decoding, seeking instead to evoke a suspended interior condition, an estranged and estranging atmosphere gesturing obliquely toward a state of resolution that necessarily lies beyond the confines of art.

That no real distinction can be made between Evola's visual and verbal works is confirmed by many convergent titles. *The Fiber Catches Fire and the Pyramids* is both a painting and a poem (figs. 3, 4). Works on paper and canvas tagged with precise time

5. Julius Evola, cover of *La Parole obscure du paysage intérieur* (1921), Collection Dada, Rome, Maglione and Strini, 1921



5.

6. Julius Evola, *Composition (Dada Landscape) #3*, 1920–1921, oil on canvas, Private collection



6.

references correspond to Dada poems such as “10 am Composition” and “6 pm Composition.” *La Parole obscure du paysage intérieur* (The Dark Word of the Inner Landscape), Evola’s most sustained poetic exercise, bears an illustration as its cover, is paired with a painting of the same title, and is cited in various other pictorial works (such as *Composition [Dada Landscape] #3* with its *évidemment* [obviously]) (figs. 5, 6). As indicated by an impassioned letter to Tzara in which Evola interprets this poem as a prelude to Dada understood as absolute (self-)abstraction, the work documents a moment of crisis, possibly dating back to May 1921 when he had ended another letter by announcing his imminent suicide. The act in question is now glossed as a “metaphysical suicide, which is to say, killing oneself... through an act of the will.”³⁴ Whether in its pictorial avatars or literary incarnation, the crisis is overcome by means of the proclamation of a “dark word”: an oracle, a parable, an enigma, a constellation of jumbled signs that will yield its treasure trove of meaning only to a select few.

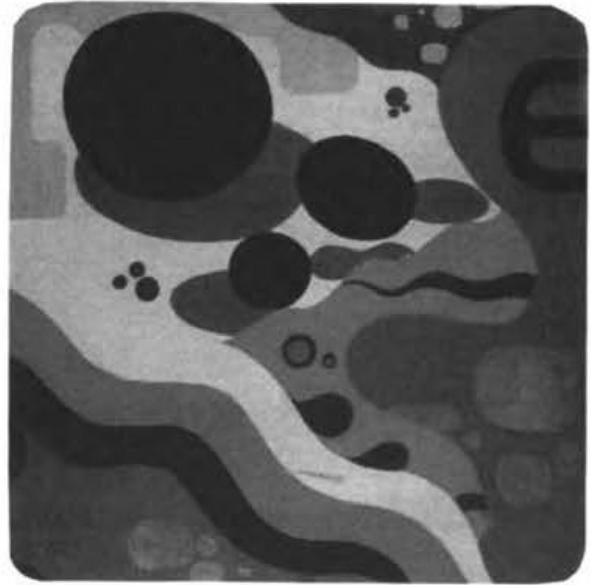
In harmony with its title, the painted version of *La Parole obscure* is anchored com-



7.



8.



9.

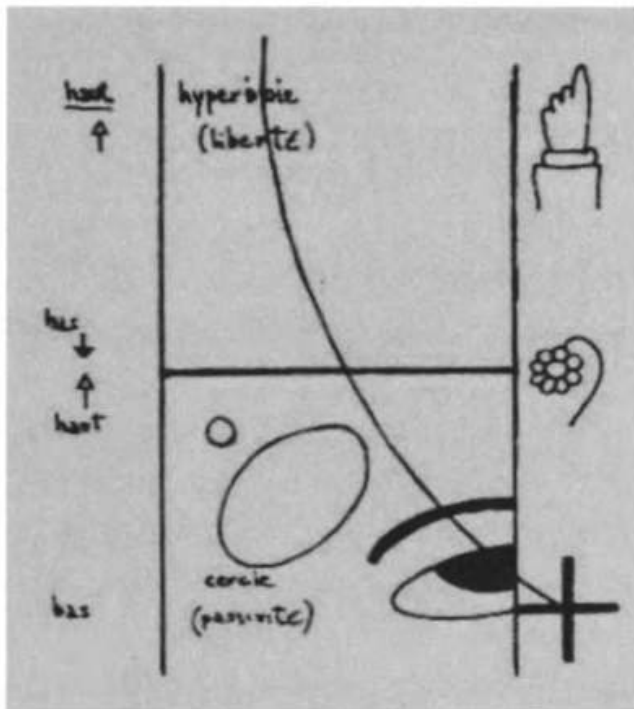
7. Julius Evola, *La Parole obscure* (The Dark Word), 1921, oil on cardboard, Franco Canonico Collection, Rome

8. Julius Evola, *Abstraction*, 1920–1921, oil on wood, Private collection

9. Julius Evola, *Small Painted Tableau*, early 1920s, oil on wood, Fondazione Julius Evola, Rome

positionally in a dark cloud (fig. 7). Around the cloud hover wedges, semicircles, ovoids, and sinusoids, flanked by floating typographic elements: a backward Z (as in Zarathustra or the serpent Ea), six to the second power, the riddle NHA. As in all of Evola's paintings, the picture plane hosts neither the sort of swirling symphonic dreams that one associates with Kandinsky, nor Arp-like decorative blots and blobs or Balla's spiraling cutout forms, but is instead built up along a grid of syncopated verticals and horizontals, bisected by other elements at 45 degree angles and interrupted by vaporous emanations and rounded shapes. These elements intersect and interpenetrate one another as if jostling for position within the setting of an overall upward drift with cosmic overtones. In Evola's Dada paintings levitation always triumphs over gravitation, even in works like *Abstraction*, 1920, or *Small Painted Tableau*, early 1920s, that read from the bottom up, as if landscapes in the conventional sense, with the darker masses and matter concentrated along the base (figs. 8, 9).³⁵ Such is not the case in *La Parole obscure*, for the entire composition floats atop luminous windows (on the left) and banks of clouds (on the right). The riddle that the painting visually enunciates appears to hinge upon the intrusion of light into the central black cloud. A white/gold wedge has cleft the cloud's upper edge as if breaking the dark spell and preparing the way for an invasion of the foreground by a backdrop whose radiant red seems to identify it with an alchemical reawakening.

Evola's poem supports such a reading, though it substitutes visual tensions with a full-blown psychomachia that unfolds within "the great desert(ed) theater" of the phenomenal world.³⁶ Four characters—Mr. Ngara, Miss Lilan, Mr. Râaga, and Mr. Hhah—speak, respectively, for the will, feelings, contemplative description, and disinterested abstraction, in a language that combines nonsense words (*garagàdara*, *krounkrounganam*, *glan glan blaga*) with absurdist word play (*danse abracadabrante • plus moins • oui non âme • locomotive 2754*) with metaphysical bombast (*le mystère du métal le mystère du Mouvement Absolu et du Nombre de la grande Incompréhensibilité de la vie qui est la mort de la Parole Obscure*). The dramatic structure is fundamental to the poem's structure and represents but one of many borrowings from Tzara's "double quadralogy," *La Première aventure céleste de M. Antipyrine* (The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine).³⁷ Like its Parisian counterpart (staged in March 1920 at the *Maison de l'Oeuvre*), *La Parole obscure* was performed at the Bragaglia/Prampolini *Cenacolo d'Arte* in Rome a year and a half later, in a futurist cabaret known as the *Grotte dell'Augusteo*. The star performer was Maria de Naglowska, Evola's translator-collaborator, according to the *Collection Dada* edition of the text. A sexual priestess and theosophist, the future founder of the satanic cult of the Third Term



10.

of the Trinity, perhaps the twentieth century's leading esoteric feminist, Naglowska may well have had an enduring impact on Evola's later beliefs regarding matriarchy, sexuality, and magic. In *La Parole obscure* she appeared on the grotto's stage cast in the role of Lilan, in the company of three male actors and surrounded by Evola's own wall paintings. The four actors drank champagne and smoked

their way through a recitation accompanied by music by Satie and others, before an audience of invitees each of whom had received a Dada talisman at the grotto's entrance.³⁸

The text recited by Naglowska and company, for all its density and verbal playfulness, traces a trajectory no less intelligible than does Mr. Antipyrine's celestial adventure. If in the latter "a painful birth is viewed both internally, from the standpoint of the mother, and externally," the former narrates a painful rebirth: a descent into the chaos of human life—marked by actions, sufferings, sensations, objects, materials, bodies, and disease—that sets the stage for the ascent into a new life. Dada drives the reversal (fig. 10).

The plot of *La Parole obscure* may be described as follows. In the opening, a door closes behind the reader only to reopen in the closing refrain of *hyperbole, hyperbole*. Between these two moments, he endures a season in Hell, encountering mountains that liquefy, apocalyptic cityscapes and seascapes, forests of asbestos plumcake, whirling turbines, palaces of ice and fire, microbes and men running in circles, existential algebras, railways to nowhere, blood arrayed in the form of a cross. Lurking within these jumbled landscapes is the specter of the serpent Ea, the snake on the caduceus borne by Hermes and the seducer of the Garden of Eden: an emblem of gravity's downward/deathward pull and of the principle of circularity that transforms all living into dying (even as, through healing, it has the potential to transform death into life). There are counterforces within the chaos, islands of levity and expressions of freedom like the dance of Alpha, which marks a first detachment from Ea's ironclad laws; forces of cosmic compression that give rise to points of resistance and power. But what prevails is a futile whirling about that hollows out the world into an infinite sequence of voids nested one within another. "This retreat [from void to void] is reality," the reader is told:

10. Diagram inserted by Julius Evola into a letter to Tristan Tzara dated November 1921, from *Lettre di Julius Evola a Tristan Tzara (1919-1923)* (Rome, 1991). The diagram explains

the fundamental structure of the poem *La Parole obscure du paysage intérieur*, with its opposition of ascent versus descent figured in terms

of the contrast between cross and circle (passivity) and the hyperbole (freedom)

until the white descends from on high
(engineers and instruments all jump •
the microbes parade in tetragrammatical formation and turn into sounds)
and for this luminous suffering for this red thirst
for the infinite blue the eternal rain and our disgust
for all our passion and our disease
let the curtain fall with the Dark Word over immobile machines
hallucinated
in the great deserted theater³⁹

Throughout the poem, hopes for the white's descent from "on high" rest on the shoulders of its hero, Mr. Hhah. The spokesman for disinterested abstraction, Hhah is closely affiliated with Evola himself just as Mr. Aa (alias Antipyrine) is closely affiliated with Tzara, so much so that a direct blood bond exists: "I believe [Hhah] to be the brother of Mr. Aa the antiphilosopher," Evola declares in an already cited letter.⁴⁰ Hhah's name conflates notions of laughter (hahaha) and satisfaction (aaaahhhh) with the literal casting out of one's breath in prophecy (hyperbole). His role is to proclaim right from the start that "thanks to the sounding of a word, the world will explode in ether and laughter."⁴¹

And so it does when, at the center of the poem, Ngara, speaking for the will, sounds the magic word:

Form no longer exists and Dada is the dark glow the cry of metal compacted by the incandescent atmosphere that collapses upon itself. Dada is disinterested force not an illness not an energy not a truth. Dada is a virgin microbe.⁴²

The closing quote from the 1920 Dada "Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love" is but one of a legion of direct borrowings from Tzara, who had embedded a Dada manifesto into the middle of *La Première aventure céleste*.⁴³ Ngara's mini-Dada manifesto turns the tide in "La Parole obscure." The virgin microbe, the microbe arrayed in tetragrammatical formation (not YHWH but D-A-D-A), gradually spreads throughout the great world theater, killing off one character after another, until only Hhah is left. The poem ends:

Ngara blood in hyperbolic formation
Hhah hyperbole
 Hyperbole⁴⁴

The will (Ngara) dies off at the moment of emancipation from the logic of effort, sacrifice, and striving figured in the poem by recurring crosses and circles. As cruciform blood gives way to hyperbolic blood, the drama ends. Abstraction triumphs. The circle is broken and reshaped into an ascending arc: a mathematical hyperbola that enacts a literal *hyperballéin*, an overthrowing of ordinary life in the name of something extraordinary.

Like several other key features of *La Parole obscure*, the poem's conclusion is patterned after *La Première aventure céleste*, with the double repetition of hyperbole imitating Tzara's ninefold reprise of the phrase *des réverbères* (reverberations).⁴⁵ But there are also debts to Tzara's manifestos and 1918 collection *Vint-cinq poèmes* (Twenty-Five Poems) of a lexical, stylistic, and rhetorical sort.⁴⁶ Dozens of words are shared, many unusual or exotic: nouns such as *étain*, *éponge*, *flamme*, *baobab*, *caolin*, *algue*, *steppe*, *cascade*, *corail*, *tourbillon*, *caoutchouc*, *palmier*, *pyramide*, *formation*, *organe*, *désert*, *arc-en-ciel*, *volcan*, and *tuyau*; adjectives like *aniline* and *arborescent*, and verbs like *liquifier*, to mention but a few. Alliterative phrases such as *cathédrale drale drale* in *La Première aventure* recur in *La Parole obscure* as *cathédrale sidérale*.⁴⁷ Then there are borrowings of a more direct sort. *La Première aventure*'s director states, "we are most intelligent" (*nous sommes très intelligents*); Ngara substitutes, "I am most intelligent" (*je suis très intelligent*).⁴⁸ Hhah's constant refrains are, "I am most refined" (*je suis très distingué*), "even I don't take myself seriously" (*je ne me prends pas même moi-même au sérieux*), "I'm terribly bored" (*je suis très ennuyé*), and "I'm still terribly bored" (*je suis toujours très ennuyé*), as is befitting of the sibling of a model whose Dada mantra consists in variations on the sentence, "I consider myself very likable."⁴⁹

Beneath the verbal textures deeper convergences between Dadas Tzara and Evola are worthy of note: a shared embrace of spiritualized geometry, a common thematic of embodiment experienced with special reference to blood, and a shared appetite for oracular language. Evola's fascination with the symbolic and expressive potential of lines is a legacy of his years in the futurist fold, as demonstrated by such early pictorial works as *Forge, Study of Noises* (fig. 11) and *Bouquet of Flowers*. Esoteric dabblings and contact with Kandinsky's metaphysical musings on art's turn toward the "spiritual," conceived as freedom from the burdens of naturalism, also contributed their part to his understanding of Dada abstractionism. But Tzara's poetry may have played a decisive role as well. The mysterious triangles, polygons, hyperbolas, spirals, circles, straight lines, and zigzags that pervade Evola's pictorial and poetic works also pervade the *Vint-cinq poèmes*. The opening poem, for example, "Le Géant lépreux du paysage" (The Giant Leper of the Landscape), identifies triangles with origins (*à l'origine le triangle*), the hyperbola with



11.

thought (*mes cerveaux s'en vont vers l'hyperbole*), and the soul with zigzags (*il y a des zigzags sur son âme et beaucoup de rrrrrrr*). Another of Evola's favorites from the same collection, "La Grande complainte de mon obscurité un" (The Great Complaint on My Obscurity One), features spiraling memories (*les souvenirs en spirales rouges*) and zigzagging blood (*froid tourbillon zigzag de sang*). These and other passages could only have reinforced Evola's conviction that private geometries provided an ideal vehicle for the construction of interior landscapes, whether visual or verbal, all the more so given that the world animated by these geometrical conceits appears in tune with Evolian irrationalism and antimaterialism. It is an acutely self-reflexive world in which the human body is experienced, in the words of Tzara's editor Henri Béhar, as a "theater of suffering (giving birth, sickness, darkness, liquidity as rot) of erotic activity, a microcosm reflecting the great cosmic conflicts," despite much foreground mirth and the background flicker of hinted-at celestial adventures.⁵⁰ Blood prevails, and the "intelligence" that blood offers up has to do with death, decay, excretion, tumors, microbes, hunger, scars, and desire, thwarted or not. In keeping with this negative thematics of embodiment, the poetic utterance assumes the shape not of song, but instead of a cry that issues forth from a body in pain. Its form is fractured on every level: on the level of the individual word, the individual verse, and the poem as a whole. In carrying out his revolution in poetic language, Tzara sought inspiration for such breakage and formal/semantic dislocation in noncanonical literary sources. In *Vint-cinq poèmes*, he turned to a well-known prophetic text, the *Centuries of Nostradamus*,

cutting, reshuffling, and pasting them into “La Grande complainte de mon obscurité un,” “Retraite” (Retreat), and “Droguerie-Conscience” (Druggist-Conscience), among other texts, and giving the collection an overall oracular cast.⁵¹ Dada Tzara’s disruption of conventional sense-making thus relied upon and borrowed from a prior history of sense-disruption in the service, veiling and unveiling divine truths. A dark word itself, Dada transformed itself into a factory for dark words, some nonsensical, some prophetic, some nonsensical and prophetic.⁵²

Laborious though it may be to survey the visual, verbal, and epistolary trail leading back and forth between *La Parole obscure* and Tzara’s writings, such a survey has the virtue of demonstrating just how tightly the Evolian strain of Dada is affiliated with its Zurich-Paris counterpart and just how implausible it would be to claim, as has sometimes been done with respect not just to Evola but also to other deviant Dada strains, that they ought to be placed outside the Dada fold.⁵³ There are differences, to be sure, between the Romanian Dada leader and the future author of *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*: notably, Evola’s metaphysical tendencies and overt hermeticism (shared with numerous futurist peers), or the relative humorlessness of Mr. Hhah with respect to Mr. Aa. But there are also core commonalities that emerge the deeper one excavates the verbal surface of Tzara’s contemporary poetry and an emblematic work like *La Parole obscure*; commonalities that, to differing degrees, may encompass as well other portions of the kingdom of Dada and the avant-gardes.

The commonality of greatest significance for the historiography of modernism, and of greatest value for understanding Evola’s place within and beyond Dada, involves the question of how the word “abstraction” was understood during the 1910s and 1920s. The short answer to the question that I would like to sketch out in these concluding thoughts is that “abstraction” rarely meant abstract in any pure, rigorously formal, non-referential, and nonrepresentational visual sense, accommodating instead a wide array of hybrid formulations. Evolian abstractionism is one such hybrid. At once pictorial, poetic, and philosophical, it is embedded within a genre whose history can be traced back to romanticism, but whose moment of triumph comes at the end of the nineteenth century in the context of symbolism, decadentism, and the avant-gardes: the interior landscape. The importance assumed by interior landscapes and their “observer-producers” within modern culture rises in direct proportion to the crisis experienced by exterior landscapes and by the cognitive subjects associated with their observation and production. Whether in the work of Charles Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautréamont, Georges Rodenbach, Maeterlinck, or D’Annunzio, or in counterparts in the visual arts such as Kandinsky or Paul Klee or their surrealist successors, a landscape is “interior” to the degree that it has been cut free from interference on the part of conscious rationality and the bodily eye. But, as the analogous case of psychoanalysis confirms, such cutting loose can be in the service of “truer” modes of vision and worlds of reference. (Little does it matter whether for “truer”

one substitutes such adjectives as “higher,” “lower,” “deeper,” “flatter,” or “intensified.”) In other words, in its revolt against conventional naturalism and realism, art often asserts its freedom from the retina precisely as it embraces other meta-, infra-, or hyper-mimetic ambitions as well as constraints.

The above informs the early history of abstraction in ways that can sometimes puzzle postwar observers better acquainted with the constructivist and minimalist branches of the abstractionist family tree. As initially employed in early twentieth-century cultural debates, “abstraction” signifies less a distinctive pictorial practice that disrupts naturalism in the name of the autonomy of art than a mode of unfettered exploration of the world—hence the referential trace embedded in the word “landscape”—closely allied with visionary states: meditation, dreaming, delirium, hallucination. Evola declares as much in the March 1963 preface to a reprint of *La Parole obscure*, in which he distinguishes his generation of abstractionists from their 1960s descendants:

the value of the movements that interested me [in my youth] was not artistic; rather they were signs and expressions of a state of being that was meta-artistic and even anti-artistic. This, in striking contrast to the abstract art that has become fashionable in recent years, singularly lacking in the existential crisis that animated its predecessor, which represents a new set of conventions and an artistic school (often contaminated by commercialism). In my era, abstract art, as championed by Dada, represented a limit beyond which, if the experience was lived intensely, lay only silence, the abandonment of art itself and/or, in extreme cases, the path followed by Rimbaud or by those who ended their own lives because they failed to find an adequate means of release or found themselves unable to turn back.⁵⁴

The “existential” turn that purportedly separates the prewar from the postwar—one can only presume that Evola has his critical sights set not on Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko but instead on decoratively minded redactions of minimalism—alludes to a broader conviction, shared with the likes of Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian, that abstraction is a tool for piercing the material veil of the world and for resacralizing what modernity has successfully desacralized.⁵⁵ So understood, “abstraction” opens up the prospect of an art that, following in the footsteps of pure philosophical inquiry, symphonic music, and certain expressions of spirituality, finds in geometry not only the new vernacular of the era of industry but also the secret language of the psyche or of the world, or of the psyche as world; an art that is “abstract” inasmuch as it has withdrawn from the realm of appearances in the pursuit of something anticipating the noumenal. Whether such anticipation stands in line with or at cross-purposes with cultural modernity or, indeed, whether it matters at all, has been a recurring source of debate in the historiography of abstractionism. Whatever the answer, one thing is certain: that it will remain a recurring consideration in the eternal struggle to sift out the good from the bad, the “worth preserving” from the “worth burying” in the archives of modernism.

NOTES

- 1 Tristan Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries*, trans. Barbara Wright (2nd ed., London and New York, 1992), 1.
- 2 "Note on the Comte de Lautréamont, or the Cry" (1922), in Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos*, 97; my italics. The metaphors of dictatorship already occur in Tzara's 1920 "Manifeste sur l'amour faible et l'amour amer" (Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love): "dada is the dictatorship of the spirit, or dada is the dictatorship of language . . ." in Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos*, 110.
- 3 "Lecture on Dada" (1922), in Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos*, 41; my italics.
- 4 See Richard Sheppard's parallel considerations in *Modernism-Dada-Postmodernism* (Evanston, Ill., 2000).
- 5 "Open Letter to Jacques Rivière" (1919), in Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos*, 87.
- 6 "Note on Poetry" (1919), in Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos*, 76; my italics.
- 7 Evola is nowhere mentioned in the texts included in *The Dada Painters and Poets* (2nd ed., Cambridge, Mass., 1981), but surfaces in Bernard Karpel's bibliography on pages 333 and 345, and on pages 79–85 of Willard Bohm's anthology *The Dada Market, An Anthology of Poetry* (Carbondale, Ill., 1993). The recent critical bibliography on Evola qua political philosopher includes Richard Drake, *The Revolutionary Mystique and Terrorism in Contemporary Italy* (Bloomington, Ind., 1989), 116–134; and Walter Laqueur, *Fascism: Past, Present, Future* (New York, 1996), 97–98.
- 8 The *La Medusa* show was held in 1963 with a brief catalogue by Enrico Crispolti, "Giulio Evola," *La Medusa—Studio d'arte contemporanea* 40 (November 1963): 1–6. The Milanese exhibition (Palazzo Bagatti-Valsecchi, 15 October–29 November 1998) was accompanied by a full-scale catalogue edited by Gianfranco de Turris, *Julius Evola e l'arte delle avanguardie, tra futurismo, dada e alchimia* [exh. cat., Fondazione Julius Evola] (Rome, 1998).
- 9 See Elisabetta Valento, ed., *Lettere di Julius Evola a Tristan Tzara (1919–1923)*, *Quaderni di Testi Evoliani* 25 (Rome, 1991).
- 10 Evola's Dada-period writings are collected in De Turris, *Julius Evola e l'arte delle avanguardie*, 61–110, and Elisabetta Valento, ed., *Scritti sull'arte d'avanguardia* (Rome, 1994). The treatise *Arte astratta—posizione teorica / 10 poemi / 4 composizioni* was originally published in Tzara's *Collection Dada* (Rome, 1920); an electronic edition is available through the University of Iowa International Dada Archive site at http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/Arte_astratta/index.htm. Likewise, his most important poem, "La Parole obscure du paysage intérieur," originally printed in the *Collection Dada* in Rome in 1921, has been reprinted twice: first, by Vanni Scheiwiller (Milan, 1963), and, more recently, by the Fondazione Julius Evola (*Quaderni di Testi Evoliani* 27 [Rome, 1992]).
- 11 Valento, *Lettere di Julius Evola*, 34. On Tzara's contacts with the Italian scene, see François Buot, *Tristan Tzara, l'homme qui inventa la révolution Dada* (Paris, 2002), 113–115, and Giovanni Lista, "Tristan Tzara et le dadaïsme italien," *Europe* 555–556 (July–August 1975): 173–192. All translations into English are my own.

12 According to Marilena Pasquini, five texts by Tzara appeared in this often overlooked review: "La Grande complainte de mon obscurité" (*Le Pagine* 6 [February 1917]), "Mouvement" (*Le Pagine* 6 [February 1917]), "Le Géant lépreux du paysage" (*Le Pagine* 7 [March 1917]), "Mouvement Dada" (*Le Pagine* 11 [July 1917]), and "Marcel Janco" (*Le Pagine* 11 [July 1917]). Pasquini's "Maria d'Arezzo: una poetessa d'avanguardia," *Il Ponte* 57, nos. 10–11 (October–November 2001), 34–43, tells the story of *Le Pagine* and Maria d'Arezzo's career as a dadaist.

13 On Evola and *Bleu*, see Enrico Crispolti, "Evola e la collaborazione a *Bleu*," *Palatino* 3 (June 1969): 294–299.

14 Giovanni Lista, "Dada in Italia," in *Dada, l'arte della negazione* (Rome, 1994), 11; italics mine. Other documents regarding dadaism in Italy may be found in Filippo de Pisis, *Futurismo Dadaismo Metafisica*, eds. Bona de Pisis and Sandro Zanotto (Milan, 1981).

15 "The Poisonous Protocols," *The Guardian* (17 August 2002).

16 The first quote is from the concluding paragraph of Piero di Vona's introduction to Julius Evola, *I testi de "La difesa della razza"* (Salerno, 2001), 39. In the fourth paragraph, the words *difficile* (difficult) and *complesso* (complex) recur a half dozen times, the complexity in question having to do with Evola's insistence upon the ultimately "spiritual" character of his doctrine of race. Yet the close entanglement between "spiritual" racism and its various eugenic counterparts remains an indisputable fact. On this subject, the best study is Francesco Germano, *Razza di sangue, razza dello spirito* (Turin, 2001).

17 *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* (Milan, 1934; Rome, 1969).

18 In postwar editions, fascism and Nazism are judged as too deeply implicated in rationalism, the cult of progress, and mass society, to provide a true alternative.

19 "Dada!" (1921), in De Turrís, *Julius Evola e l'arte delle avanguardie*, 74.

20 "Ouverture alla pittura della forma nuova," in Valento, *Scritti sull'arte*, 21.

21 "Simboli della degenerescenza moderna: il futurismo," in Valento, *Scritti sull'arte*, 84.

22 See in particular chap. 3, section 2 of *The Ego and Its Own*, available online at www.nonserviam.com/stirner/the_ego/.

23 Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos*, 7–8.

24 Valento, *Lettere di Julius Evola*, 18.

25 Valento, *Lettere di Julius Evola*, 43. The closing phrase echoes several passages from Nietzsche.

26 "Note di filosofia dada," in De Turrís, *Julius Evola e l'arte delle avanguardie*, 66.

27 Numerous borrowings from Tzara's 1918 manifesto are found here: "I don't want to convince" (Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos*, 5); "Art is a private thing, the artist makes it for himself" (10).

28 The following is the original context of Stirner's line, the final sentence of the treatise, cited from the online edition at www.nonserviam.com/stirner/the_ego/: "I am owner of my might, and I am so when I know myself as unique. In the unique one the owner himself returns into his creative nothing, of which he is born. Every higher essence above me, be it God, be it man, weakens the feeling of my uniqueness, and pales only before the sun of this consciousness. If I concern myself for myself, the

unique one, then my concern rests on its transitory, mortal creator, who consumes himself, and I may say: All things are nothing to me."

29 The announcement was explicit in its appeal to snobbery: "J. Evola and Christian Schad, Dadaists, are in the process of organizing a 'jazz-band Dada ball' in Rome with the involvement of the highest aristocracy and with music by Stravinsky, Casella, Auric, Defosse, etc. Among the attractions will be a *Hesitation* with a simultaneous declamation of Dante, a fox-trot for percussion instruments and revolvers, etc." *Bleu* 2 (August–September 1920): 2.

30 From a 30 April 1921 lecture reproduced in De Turrís, *Julius Evola e l'arte delle avanguardie*, 79.

31 See Evola, *La Parole obscure*, 8, for the source of this claim.

32 "Sul significato dell'arte modernissima," in Valento, *Scritti sull'arte*, 68.

33 In a roughly contemporary "Note per gli amici," Evola had equated "alchemy and the hallucination of abstract forms" (*Bleu* 3 [January 1921]: 2).

34 Valento, *Lettere di Julius Evola*, 47. Suicide is a frequent transgressive thread in Dada texts, as in Tzara's "How I Became Charming Likeable and Delightful": "I sleep very late. I commit suicide at 65%. My life is very cheap." Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos*, 49.

35 The point is made explicitly in a passage from the lecture on Dada that Evola presented on 15 April 1921 at the Casa d'Arte Bragaglia: "Now there exist various individuals who have allowed themselves to set off on this strange adventure that promises neither election to parliament as a deputy nor becoming a fashionable writer. Freeing themselves from gravity, they have begun an odd ascent through the layers of the atmosphere." De Turrís, *Julius Evola e l'arte delle avanguardie*, 72. The passage closes with a reference to the atonal smile that, like that of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, accompanies the completion of this "cosmic adventure" (*avventura astrale*): a clear allusion to the celestial adventures of Mr. Antipyrine.

36 *La Parole obscure*, 22. On the work's significance, see Matteo d'Ambrosio, "Alchimia, Astrazione, Dada—*La Parole obscure du paysage intérieur* di Julius Evola," *Bénédict* 5, no. 14 (July 1997): 151–156.

37 The label *double quatologue* was employed by Tzara to account for the eight speakers present in his text according to *Dadaphone 7* (March 1920): 5. This was the same issue in which Evola's "La Fibre s'enflamme et les pyramides" appeared.

38 In a 1971 television interview, Evola described the event as follows: "there was a concert hall in Rome known as the *Augusteo*, under which Ciacelli had established a French-style cabaret called *Le Grotte dell'Augusteo*. I painted two rooms there myself. It consisted in a small theater within which a dada performance was held in the course of which my poem with four characters was recited by four actors: three men and one woman. During

the performance, they drank champagne and smoked. The background music was by Helbert, Satie, and others belonging to the same current. The evening was limited to invited guests, each of whom received a Dada talisman upon their arrival." Interview originally published in *L'Italia Settimanale* 25 (1994), cited from http://members.tripod.com/Exclamonde/konservative_revolution/evola/tzara.html.

39 *La Parole obscure*, 21–22.

40 In his November 1921 letter, Evola mentions in passing that "I believe (Mr. Hhah) to be the brother of Mr. Aa the antiphilosopher" (Valento, *Lettere di Julius Evola*, 46). Tzara variously refers to his doppelgänger as Mr. Antipyrine and Mr. Aa.

41 *La Parole obscure*, 16. It is also worth noting that in the manifesto "Tristan Tzara," the Dada poet had inserted a line that seems to anticipate the name Hhah: "One of those poets who satisfy their legitimate need of cold onania in warm furs: H a h u . . ." Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos*, 23.

42 *La Parole obscure*, 18.

43 The phrase "Dada is a virgin microbe" is found in Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos*, 45, among other places.

44 "Ngara sang en formation d'hyperbole / Hhah hyperbole / hyperbole," *La Parole obscure*, 22.

45 *La Première aventure céleste de M. Antipyrine*, vol. 1, *Oeuvres Complètes*, ed. Henri Béhar (Paris, 1975), 84. The echo is strong given that the sequence of repetitions is launched by a phrase proclaimed by Mr. Antipyrine himself (Hhah's "brother"): *nous sommes devenus des réverbères* (we have become reverberations). In Evola's version the utterance is more opaque, but the context suggests the aptness of the paraphrase: "we have become a hyperbola."

46 In his treatise on abstract art, Evola had concluded by stating that "the 1918 Dada Manifesto, Tzara's *Vint-cinq poèmes*, and the woodcuts of Hans Arp represent the expression of the highest state of purity, of awareness, and of the properties of the intimate and deep self that has ever been achieved since the beginning of time." *Arte astratta—posizione teorica / 10 poemi / 4 composizioni*, 13–14.

47 Béhar, *La Première aventure céleste*, 79; *La Parole obscure*, 16.

48 *La Parole obscure*, 18; Béhar, *La Première aventure céleste*, 80.

49 Compare "The Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love" and "How I Became Charming Likeable and Delightful" in Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos*, 31–50.

50 *Oeuvres Complètes*, 1:646.

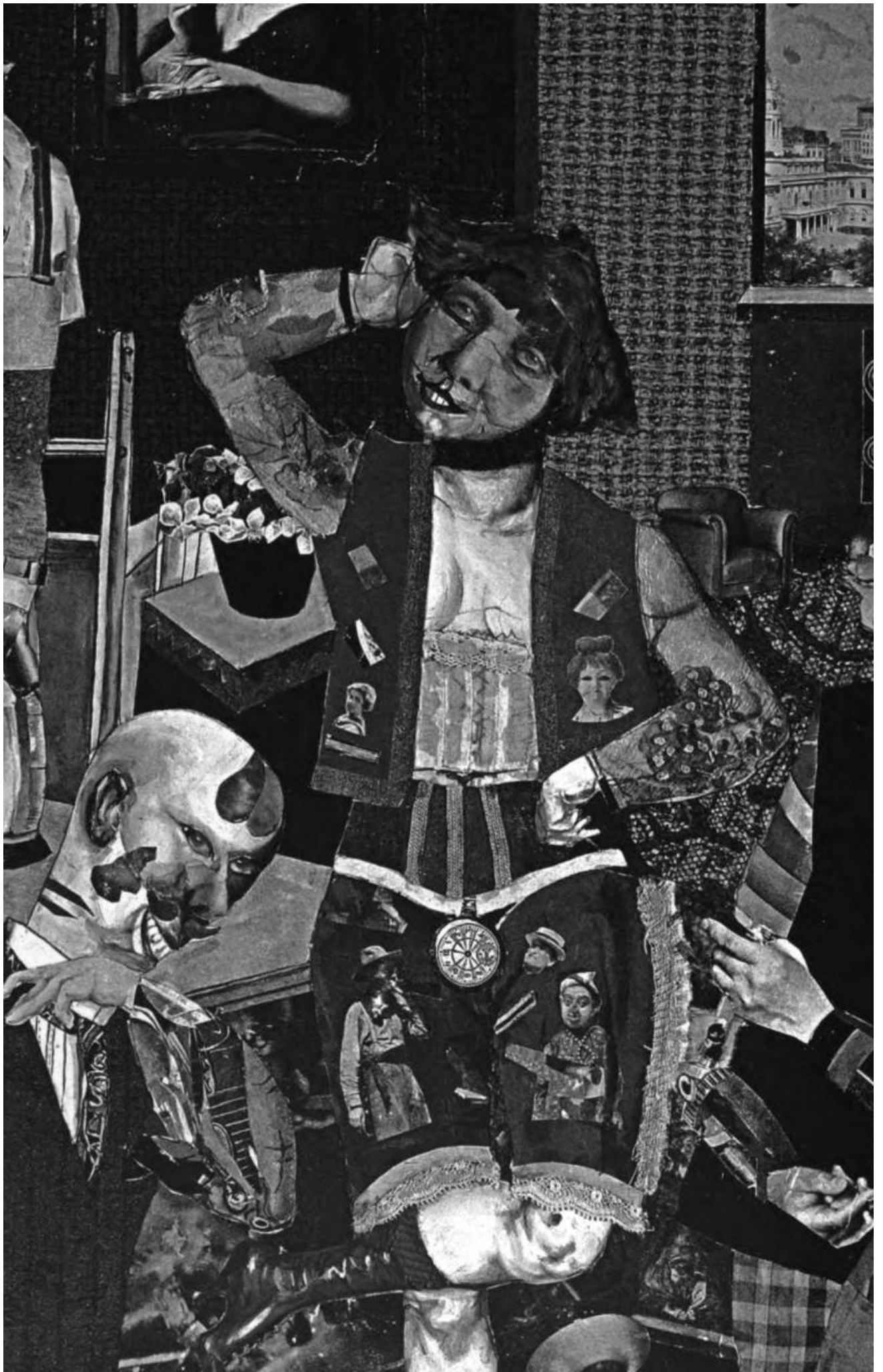
51 For the precise uses to which Nostradamus is put see Béhar's notes in *Oeuvres Complètes*, 1:644–658. A public reading of Nostradamus' poetry by Tzara was held in Zurich on 12 May 1917.

52 Other examples of an interest in other noncanonical or oracular early modern forms are André Breton's pattern poem "Pièce Fausse"; Paul Dermée's acrostic poem "Zut," whose left margin spells out "ZIZI DE DADA"; and Paul Éluard's "Mot dure—Numero 58" (which, of course, anticipates Evola's *Parole obscure*). All three are included in *Dadaphone 7* (March 1920).

53 As cases in point with respect to Evola see Paolo Fossati, "Un dadaismo italiano?" in *La pittura a programma—De Chirico, metafisico* (Venice, 1973), 71–88, and "Julius Evola," *Pianeta* 44 (January–February 1972): 126–134; as well as Richard Sheppard, "Julius Evola, Futurism and Dada: A Case of Double Misunderstanding," 85–94, in *New Studies on Dada*, ed. R. Sheppard (Driffield, England, 1981).

54 *La Parole obscure*, 8.

55 On this subject one may consult the catalogue for *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985*, ed. Maurice Tuchman with the assistance of Judi Freeman (exh. cat., Los Angeles County Museum of Art) (New York, 1986).



The Real Demolished by Trenchant Objectivity: Carl Einstein and the Critical World View of Dada and “Verism” | Uwe Fleckner

The Politicization of Art Criticism

Carl Einstein became a dadaist because of World War I, because of the revolts and revolutions so inextricably bound to its end, and because of his sense of the inevitability of profound social collapse. He was politicized by his gory experiences in the trenches and in military hospitals, yet the brutal action during battle, the *Stahlgewitter* (storms of steel), did not lead him—as was true for many other artists and intellectuals—to a restorative return to figurative traditions. Instead, his aesthetic convictions were radicalized. After his return from Belgium at the end of 1918, where he had played a leading role in the revolutionary Brussels Soldiers' Council, Einstein found a new arena of activity among the Berlin dadaists and became journalistically involved with this group, if only for a few months.

The author developed a theoretical approach to dadaism a short time later, when he resumed his work as an art critic and fundamentally revised the principles he had adopted before the war. A number of his writings help us gain a better understanding of German dadaism and its complex relationship to a form of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, the “verism” of the 1920s, particularly the essays Einstein began to compose in 1920 for his dadaist comrades-in-arms Rudolf Schlichter, Otto Dix, and George Grosz, as well as the critical overview he presented in his 1926 book *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Art of the 20th Century). The present study will first sketch out a brief survey of Einstein's dadaist activities; then, with the help of a dadaist “portrait” of the author by Grosz and John Heartfield, I will examine his deeply conflicted self-image as a critic in the years immediately following World War I. Finally, an interpretation of Einstein's critical and theoretical reflections will, I hope, contribute to the contemporary study of dadaist artists.

As early as 1919 Einstein, who had joined the Spartacus League and the Communist party and had fought on the barricades, became part of the Berlin circle of dadaists. He contributed political appeals and manifestos to the quickly banned magazine *Die Pleite* (Bankruptcy), and he and Grosz also edited the satirical weekly *Der blutige Ernst* (Deadly Earnestness), Einstein's participation beginning with the third issue (figs. 1, 2). The publisher's advertisement of 1919 states in the best dadaist style: “‘Der blutige Ernst’ is written by Carl Einstein and illustrated by George Grosz; the names of the editors guarantee deadly effects.”¹ Yet it was not just as a revolutionary and a politico-didactic publicist that Einstein stood in direct opposition to the young Weimar Republic. His 1921 play *Die schlimme Botschaft* (Bad Tidings) “questions all that is sacred to citizen and noncitizen alike.”² It was confiscated, and both author and publisher were fined for blasphemy.



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1. George Grosz, *Der blutige Ernst*, 1919, ink and collage on paper, Private collection, Freie Universität, Berlin, Kunsthistorisches Institut

2. Cover of *Der blutige Ernst* 6 (1919), Freie Universität, Berlin, Universitätsbibliothek

Einstein's dadaist texts, all without exception dating from the immediate postwar period, deliver uncompromising polemics in a caustic vocabulary. Their objective was political attack, in an environment of profound social upheaval. The ruling Social Democrats, in power since the proclamation of the Republic, were the major target ("You have betrayed the Revolution!")³ Disappointed by the course of the revolution, and despairing of the political compromises that were forcing the postwar political system into more and more backpedaling, Einstein focused his efforts on nationalism, on war profiteers and exploiters, and on philistines and capitalists: "Relinquish personal property," he demanded in *Die Pleite* in 1919, proposing not just a social utopia but also a new self-concept for artists and intellectuals, "so that thinking, painting, writing are no longer prostitution."⁴ Einstein was clearly calling for a dictatorship of the proletariat; he suggested a classless society where even intellectuals would be given a new role in the "communist community."⁵ Yet authors and painters were subjected to particularly severe rebukes in his writings. He felt that during the war many artists had complied with the shameful aims of national propaganda and the glorification of combat: "For the poet, bitter misery is an excuse for claptrap."⁶ Now he accused them of collaborating, with aesthetic means, in the collapse of the revolution and the suppression of the proletariat.

Secondary literature has devoted numerous detailed studies to Einstein's political engagement, but the politicization of his art-critical contribution has been mentioned only in passing.⁷ In the midst of the political controversies of the postwar years, however, he articulated his views very clearly in his short essay *Zur primitiven Kunst* (On Primitive Art). Einstein does not address his studies of African sculpture, the topic suggested to the reader by the title; instead, he conveys his thoughts on "primitive," unalienated, non-European art, the supposedly anonymous works that constitute an ideal counterpart to a European art "entangled in the process of differentiated capitalization."⁸ In his pioneering book *Negerplastik* (Negro Sculpture) of 1915, Einstein had already pointed out the fundamental differences between Western and African art, and from these artifacts of foreign culture evolved a new concept of reality for the artistic production of the present and the future.⁹ In his view the objects of *l'art nègre* are not, as in European art, the product of philosophical-metaphysical thought, but instead are rooted in "unmediated nature" and are thus characterized as works of a "formal and religious reality," as works of a "mythical realism" that does not consist of subjective artistic creation but that adopts its pictorial form as though necessarily and objectively.¹⁰

After the war Einstein dismissed the bourgeois "fiction of aestheticizing revolt"

3. **George Grosz and John Heartfield**, *La vie heureuse (The Fortunate Life)* (Dedicated to Dr. Karl Einstein), 1920, collage, location unknown

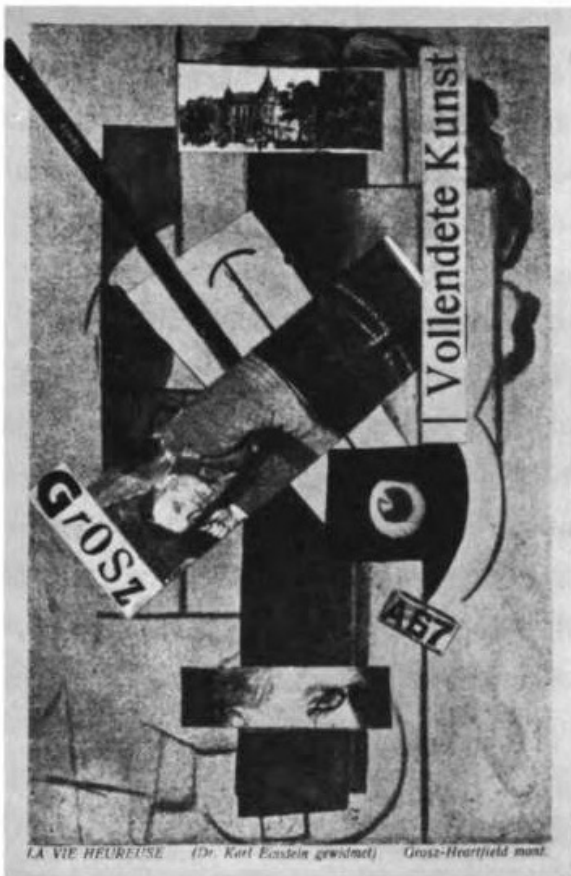
4. **Pablo Picasso**, *Tête de jeune fille (Head of a Young Girl)*, 1913, oil on canvas, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

and consequently also broke away from his own unpolitical attitude of the years before 1914. He now condemned art that had turned revolt into aesthetic forms of expression, thereby supporting the economic and social structure of the German empire. Einstein demanded a new social responsibility from both artist and work of art, a “primitive” and “collective” art in which not the individual but the masses would be the subject of artistic action: “Every work of art is a piece of reactionary snobbery, prehistoric, if it does not adapt itself to the social reconstruction that provides its only purpose.”¹¹

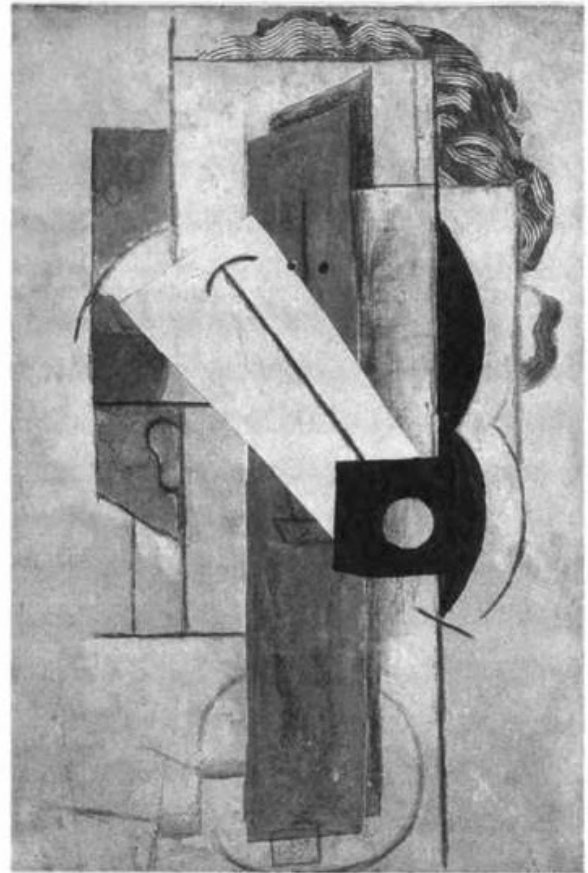
In his subsequent explorations of the visual arts, Einstein must have felt it his duty to bring the demands for radical social change into accord with the aesthetic insights of his early work. His further contributions as an art critic and art historian can only be understood from the perspective of this conflict. Einstein's increasing focus on art history in the 1920s is less an escape from the present than a resigned retreat in the face of the failed communist revolution in Berlin and the bloody suppression of the Soviet Republic in Munich. He attempted to establish new creative principles for the “rebuilding” of human beings and the world through art, a goal he invoked repeatedly. These principles should not rest only on artistic-stylistic change but should lead to a new conception of the world and of history. Consequently, the historical blueprint Einstein would present a few years later in his major work, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, is based in equal measure on aesthetic and social, anthropological and ethnological insights.

The Corrected Masterpiece

In the early 1920s Einstein's self-conception was thoroughly conflicted, revealing the tensions of a writer whose hopes for a revolutionary upheaval had been dashed. We can see this most readily with the help of a dadaist “portrait” that Grosz and Heartfield dedicated to him, although less to Einstein the man than to his aesthetic-political stance. In the summer of 1920 these two artists, along with Raoul Hausmann, organized the *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe* (First International Dada Fair) in the shop of the Berlin art dealer Otto Burchard. Most of the artists in Germany, France, and Switzerland who identified with the goals of the dadaist movement contributed to this dadaist *Gesamtkunstwerk* of an exhibition. One of the works on display was a collage entitled *La vie heureuse (The Fortunate Life)* and dedicated to “Dr. Karl Einstein,” who had, of course, never earned a doctoral degree (fig. 3). Somewhere amid the clutter of paintings, photomontages,



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posters, and objects of every kind, a visitor would come across this small “corrected masterpiece,” as the collage was identified in the accompanying brochure.¹²

The piece, now lost, presents us with several questions. Grosz and Heartfield created it by applying fragments of texts and images to a reproduction of Pablo Picasso’s 1913 painting *Tête de jeune fille* (*Head of a Young Girl*) (fig. 4), thereby significantly altering the content and aesthetic message of the original work and turning it literally into the basis for their act of alienation.¹³ The two artists proceeded cautiously and with an absolute minimum of artistic intervention, adding just eight elements to the composition—primarily allusions to the political-military situation—and carefully fitting the additional bits of paper into the existing framework of lines and shapes. Their purpose was not an iconoclastic destruction of the original, in spite of the disapproval of Picasso that Grosz frequently expressed. Rather, the composition’s calm balance was considered with respect; form and content were expanded, not polemically dismantled. At the lower edge, a cut-out detail of a man’s head showed his eyes, his glasses identifying him as a viewer, perhaps an art critic, perhaps Einstein himself. Although the planar construction of the original cubist painting places it stylistically close to the collages of early synthetic cubism, the addition of severe, geometric pictorial elements turned it into a work that, as in Russian revolutionary art, includes some formal characteristics of constructivist or suprematist painting. With its allusions to Prussian militarism the piece also sounds a

critical note, and this politicized content stands in a thoroughly discordant relationship with the abstract composition.

Formulated by his dadaist friends, the small collage offers a kind of critical reception of the critic. Yet what does it tell us about Einstein's art-critical writings, about his artistic opinions, or about the relationship between aesthetic and political revolt inherent in those opinions? As we have seen, Picasso's cubist composition was largely respected by Grosz and Heartfield, who merely expanded it with political motifs. By dedicating their composition to Einstein, aware of his high regard for cubism, they were drawing attention to what they saw as the essential characteristics of Einstein's aesthetic convictions, namely the unresolved contradiction between his artistic estimation and his criticism of contemporary affairs, between art and rebellion. Hence the work almost becomes an intellectual portrait. The artists' intention may have been to alert their friend to these implied contradictions, to challenge him to a less ambiguous position, and to induce him to side unequivocally with their communist position in the art-political debates of the time.

Einstein's essays from these years can give us an idea of the great complexity of his assessment of art during the political conflicts of the postwar period. On the one hand, as early as 1919 an advertisement in *Der blutige Ernst* claims that, in view of the desperate political situation, there can no longer be any justification for "shallow beauty and the idolization of form."¹⁴ Authorship of this statement is uncertain, yet we can assume that Einstein at least approved of the opinion. Elsewhere, for instance in the essay "De l'Allemagne" (About Germany), which Einstein wrote for the Parisian periodical *Action* in 1921, we find pointed assertions categorically decrying the political and aesthetic breakdown of contemporary German literature and art. On the other hand, Einstein adheres to aesthetic insights gained before the war by holding up cubism as a model for German art: "Cubism did away with a few old studio tricks of the trade, while German expressionism enjoys squeezing tubes of paint without managing to emit any spiritual light."¹⁵

In 1922 Einstein wrote a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between political and aesthetic revolution, which he intended for *Veshch'-Gegenstand-Objet*, a journal published in Russian, German, and French by El Lissitzky and Il'ia Ehrenburg.¹⁶ This essay, unpublished during his lifetime, argues that the objective goal of any revolution is to break through history and tradition—an objective coincident with the goals of major aesthetic innovations intent upon destroying outmoded artistic conventions. The object, which Einstein uses as a metaphor for the "ego" of bourgeois ideologies, is seen as an accumulation of memory and tradition. He describes in full the social, philosophical, and cultural consequences of revolutionary "de-materialization."¹⁷ Once again the author finds in cubism the possibility of transforming art's most noble goal, from the representation of what one sees into the artistic act of seeing itself. The aim of revolutionary art is defined not as the "remembering of objects" but as active, creative seeing:

Ever since the cubists, artists have dared to destroy pictorial convention in favor of creating space. It became clear that it was not the representation but the act of seeing that was important, something that had been devitalized by an interest in the objective and by the techniques of painting into just another conventional trick of the trade. An artist was no longer limited to analyzing form as a means of objective clarification, but instead dared to understand seeing as a creative activity in itself.¹⁸

With the concept of creative seeing, and also with the notion of seeing as a “total act” that grants “totality” to a picture, Einstein returns to his earlier writings on art. He now combines the idealistic foundations of his aesthetics with the radical as well as socially motivated goals of art; he believes that passive seeing, which protects the continued existence of memory and tradition, must be replaced by an “independent, subjective act of seeing.”¹⁹ The goal of aesthetic reform is thus not the replacement of one style by another, but the fundamental alteration of artistic perception; the maxim Einstein derives from his reflections is not revolution or art, it is revolution through art. This emphatic concept of art is the reason Einstein abruptly cut himself off from Berlin dadaism, turning away both from the politically partisan goals of Dada’s most important artists and from the scandal-ridden undertakings of a “dadaïsme de brasserie” (brewery dadaism).²⁰ As a critic and historian, however, he continued to follow the art of the dadaists assiduously well into the 1920s as it developed toward verism. The formal revolution of cubism, with its abstract strategies of realization and perception, clearly predominates in Einstein’s texts from the middle of the decade, diminishing the revolution of the dadaists, which is accomplished by realistic means.

The Veristic Grasp for Reality

During the early 1920s Einstein’s contributions to German art criticism were aimed exclusively at those contemporaries who, like Einstein himself, were connected to the circle of Berlin dadaists.²¹ Schlichter, Dix, and Grosz shared the author’s disappointed hopes for a new political beginning, particularly his radical view of the social woes of the young Weimar Republic. Einstein published his first postwar critique in *Das Kunstblatt* (Art Journal) in April 1920. The text focuses on the work of Schlichter, who had come to Berlin from Karlsruhe only the previous year. Apparently Paul Westheim, the editor of the journal, had asked that the artist be introduced around the capital in order to create advance publicity for Schlichter’s first one-man show.²² We know almost nothing about the personal encounters between artist and critic, although Schlichter planned to write about his acquaintance with Einstein in his memoirs, which, unfortunately, were not completed.²³ Yet we can assume that Schlichter, who became significantly involved in the *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe* that same year, was among the artists and intellectuals in Einstein’s sizable circle of acquaintances in the early 1920s.

As in many of his writings, Einstein begins this essay with general reflections about the artistic situation of the time. Expressionist art comes under special attack, accused of being a “lowly variety of French handicraft” with the decorative tendencies of an outmoded academicism. Einstein aims a passing shot at the dramatist and critic Hermann Bahr, whose 1916 essay “Expressionismus” had presented a very unconventional literary-philosophical approach to this movement. Deliberately presuming that Bahr was dead, which he by no means was, Einstein indulged in a polemic against the themes and forms of German expressionism:

In France there was not so much expressionism as there was a painter, Matisse. The French made paintings; we, lacking painting, chose a direction; the German soul exhausted itself in exoticism, to the dull satisfaction of the deceased Hermann Bahr. If Matisse often painted good decorations, among other things, then the long-antiquated academy of the expressionists produced plaster nudes in the style of the Palau Islands. Naked women as interior decoration was over and done with in the eighteenth century.²⁴

We can see that the experiences of war and revolution also radicalized Einstein's language. His critical writing is increasingly and uncompromisingly dominated by bold semantics, grammatical inversions, and a hard-edged style informed by his own poetry of the war years. For instance, in characterizing the German artists who borrowed from Oskar Kokoschka or from the cubists, his inimitable style reinforces his critical judgments while adding an acerbic sharpness: “The ecstasies slogged away, each one more or less borrowing from the Viennese Rembrandt; then the tardy cubists who cube more for the sake of the grotesque than for any spatial decision.”²⁵

According to Einstein, the objective of contemporary art should be nothing but uninhibited protest against the aesthetic benchmarks of the past. Here his text strikes a thoroughly iconoclastic note: “Today art is valuable only if form is destroyed.” A few lines further we read that in contemporary art, painting only makes sense “when it is aimed at destroying art.”²⁶ It is hardly surprising that he identifies a successful break with aesthetic tradition in the works of the French cubists, who ventured a creative new beginning with their concept of pictorial space, while he rebukes the German commitment to imitate nature. Einstein politicizes his aesthetic discourse by the vocabulary he uses to condemn pre- and postwar expressionism: “Whereas it was actually possible for Picasso, Braque, and Derain to develop formulae for a new relationship to space, in our case you were more likely to find sentimental paraphrases, with form camouflaging the reactionary character of the imitations.”²⁷

How is Schlichter's art judged under these conditions? Despite his brief dabbling in cubism and futurism, he certainly cannot be counted among the great pioneers of twentieth-century art. Einstein makes it clear in his essay that he had seen works of

widely varied style and form in the artist's studio. Indeed, the young Schlichter's artistic idiom had changed constantly ever since his student days in Karlsruhe; influences from every conceivable avant-garde trend alternated in his work, each expressed in few completed pieces. Einstein observes this fact in passing and points out that the diversity of ideas in contemporary European art had left its mark on Schlichter, but he also recognizes a "strong talent with a rich repertory" that has not yet become rigid in its style and thus contains "abstraction and objectivity, calligraphy and narrative."²⁸

Einstein first turns his attention to the narrative or illustrative drawings, a small selection of which accompanies his text.²⁹ He wants to determine the relationship between the distinctive lines of these images—sometimes stylized, sometimes objectively descriptive—and their often hackneyed subject matter. He finds that in Schlichter's work the line is invested with an intrinsic value of beauty, even if it is always used to depict an objective scene, something Einstein not incorrectly relates to the popular pictorial realm of cinema: "Schlichter made use of pure calligraphy; yet many of his works are so objectified that they are reminiscent of movies."³⁰ Touching briefly on the artist's abstract color experiments of the war years, Einstein comments on their restrained palette ("abstract pictures are executed in cool, delicate tones"); he also discusses Schlichter's representational works, where the use of color is not indebted to any systematic color theory but instead serves to dramatize the action that is depicted ("narratives are colored with excitement, brutality"). He summarizes the evolution of the artist's oeuvre and then segues into the actual subject of his short essay, discussed not from a monographic perspective but by relying on the key words "imitation," "realism," "representationalism," and "verism." We read that the intention of the artist's current works was to thoroughly explore the objectivity of the things represented: "Schlichter, who earlier followed abstraction with untroubled consistency, now pursues the representational with meticulous verism."³¹

In this context Einstein concentrates his attention on one of Schlichter's major works from his dadaist years, a collage he had seen in the artist's studio. Although he does not actually describe the sheet or the scene depicted, he manages to convey an impressive image of a work of art that obviously fascinated him:

In his studio there is a picture of a prostitute: hair is represented by hair, fabric by fabric. The background glued; houses from magazines, etc. The ideational connections, the distinguishing features of the depiction, are stuck on. The painter makes use of things shaped by mechanical life.³²

From this characterization of technique and subject we can clearly identify the work. It is the large-scale collage *Phänomen-Werke* (*Phenomenon Factory*), which Schlichter exhibited for the first time only a few weeks later in Otto Burchard's gallery; it was subsequently shown at the *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe* (fig. 5).³³ The quoted sentences represent



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the one and only time Einstein places his critical skills in the service of a concrete assessment of a specific dadaist work of art. His high opinion of the collage is shown by the art-historical context he provides. He compares the piece to cubist works and traces Schlichter's and Picasso's use of collaged as well as painted inserts to the same aesthetic principles. Immediately following the passage quoted above we read that in a few paintings of the prewar period, Picasso had similarly taken extraneous, independent objects and "painted them like color photographs cut up into flat surfaces," thus developing a comparable approach to the fragments of found reality. Although Schlichter's collages were not, in fact, inspired by cubist works, Einstein's assessment of the aesthetic role that the spoils of everyday reality can play in a work of art is nonetheless extremely instructive. They draw the viewer's attention to art's grasp on reality, encouraging so much skepticism about established pictorial conventions that these are completely rejected: "The end of painting and its methods is acknowledged."³⁴

In hindsight, this first short essay from 1920 was probably just a casual piece of journalism written as a favor, yet we should not underestimate its historical contribution. Along with Paul Westheim and Wilhelm Hausenstein, Einstein was one of the first authors to apply the term "verism" to one of the artistic directions of the 1920s. In the wake

6. **Georg Scholz**, *Industriebauern* (*Industrial Peasants*), 1920, oil and collage on wood, Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal

7. **Rudolf Schlichter**, *Dada-Dachatelier* (*Dada Rooftop Studio*), c. 1920, watercolor and pen on paper, Karsch/Nierendorf Collection



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ity. As a transitional work between dadaism and verism it compares to few contemporary pieces, for instance *Industriebauern* (*Industrial Peasants*), composed by Georg Scholz in 1920. This image shows a family that has attained a certain level of prosperity by profiteering with foodstuffs during and after the war (fig. 6).³⁷ Grotesquely distorted figures of a father, mother, and son sit around a table, their faces maliciously caricatured. The artist formulated his sarcastic commentary with the help of a few pasted-on motifs, employing the dadaist medium of collage. We see the picture of a military officer on the wall, perhaps a son who died in the war, and beneath it—still—a bust of the kaiser. A sack of grain, a

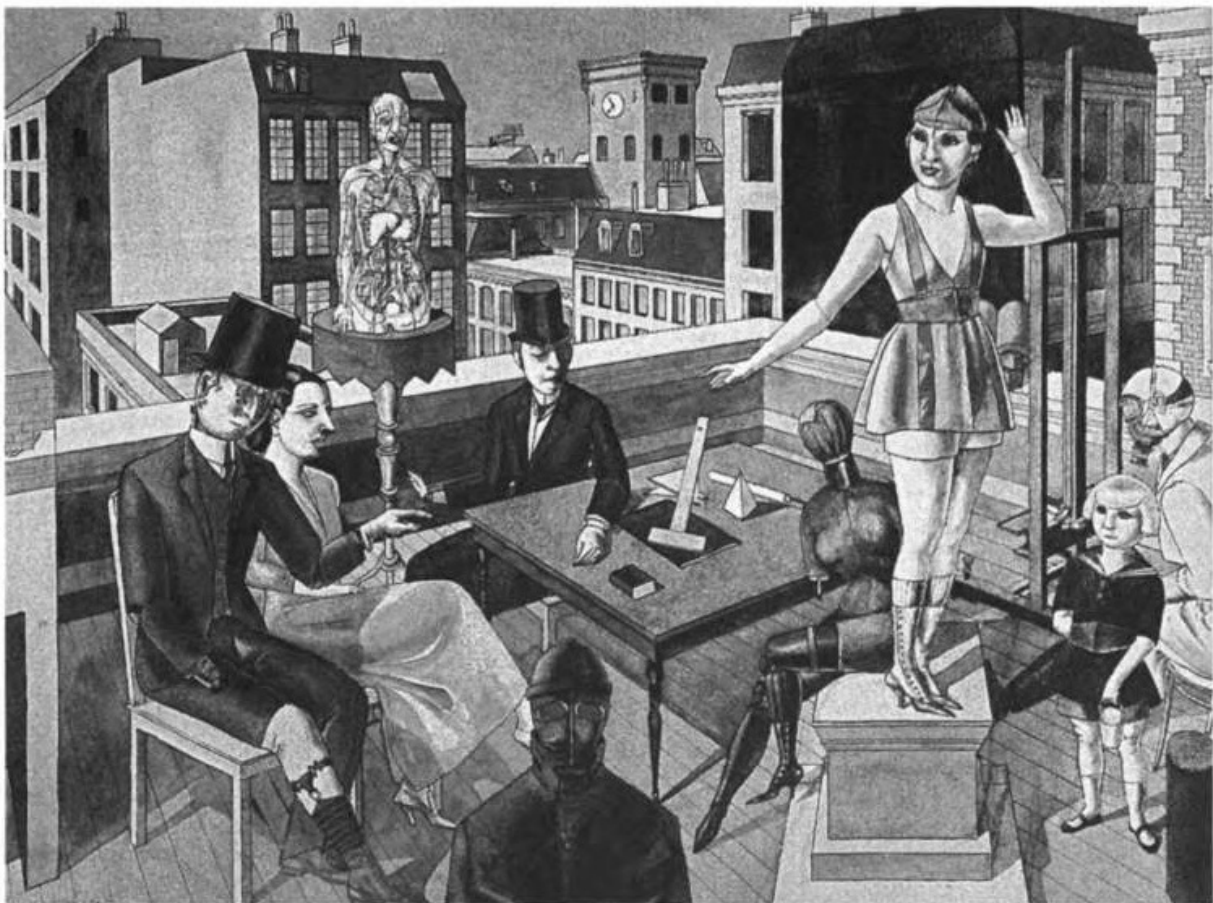
piglet in the woman's lap, and a picture of the newest farming equipment unambiguously proclaim the sources of the wealth that has been amassed on the backs of the starving population. Veristic painting and dadaist collage are combined here in a trenchant piece of social criticism, with the war profiteer at the center, holding a Catholic book of hymns.

Einstein's insights into Schlichter's hybrid grasp of reality help us understand other works as well, such as the disturbing watercolors *Dada-Dachatelier* (*Dada Rooftop Studio*) (fig. 7) and *Tote Welt* (*Dead World*) (Staatsgalerie Stuttgart), both c. 1920.³⁸ The scene of an artist's studio set up under the open sky shows us a veristically conceived cityscape. The cool, single-vantage-point perspective and the blank windows are clearly influenced by the Italian *pittura metafisica*, known for its representations of foregrounds animated by objects and figures that seem to have no logical relationship to each other. A model poses, two gentlemen wear top hats, and we see a lady in a red dress, a masked man, a child in a sailor suit, a mannequin, and an anatomical model. The autistic lack of communication among these figures can only have been derived from the principle of dadaist collage, a principle that permits the collision of contradictory motifs without reconciling the resulting confrontation in a simple pictorial narrative, even though here

the pictorial fragments are painted and not actually pasted on. Schlichter did not supply the means to decode this image so that the semantics of the individual, isolated elements might be joined in a narrative syntax. Instead, a nonsensical drama of diverse figurines is staged; people acting like dolls and dolls acting like people merge into a phantasmagorical group, which appears—intensifying the absurdity—before a realistic stage set. In spite of the objective mode of representation, the artist’s painted “collage” depicts a nightmarish scene that can only be understood by superimposing dadaist and veristic pictorial strategies.

Attack against the Times

In April 1923 Einstein wrote an article about Dix, once again directing his critical attention to an artist from the group Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub would characterize in 1925 as the “left wing” of *Neue Sachlichkeit*.³⁹ Again, an event prompted Einstein to focus on the work of a young, little-known painter. A month earlier Dix had exhibited a selection of his newer works in the Berlin gallery of Israel Ber Neumann, and the show was accompanied by a small monograph.⁴⁰ Nothing in Einstein’s text suggests he was contributing some publicity as a favor to an art dealer; the integrity of the piece and especially its severe language prevent any such notions. Quite the contrary, the author’s unsparing criticism



8. Otto Dix, *Zuhälter mit Nutten*
(*Pimp with Whores*), 1922, oil on canvas,
Private collection

9. Otto Dix, *Der Schützengraben*
(*The Trench*), 1923, oil on canvas,
location unknown

deems the painter's earlier works to be "dangerously literature-like" and claims that their artistic approach often fails to overcome their anecdotal or sensational subject matter. In reference to subjects drawn from the circus or the bordello, milieus Dix depicted in his watercolors from around 1920, Einstein formulated a pointed critique: "Shooting galleries and sex murders are the initial drumbeats in Dix's works. Very talented but rather beset by the miscellaneous. Romanticism of the local news; rather childish journalism."⁴¹

What Einstein valued most in the artist's current work was his uncompromising image of humanity. He writes of the *comédie humaine* of racketeers and war profiteers, demimonde and vogueish society that were the subjects of Dix's portraits and genre scenes, all equally critical of contemporary issues and social mores. Einstein illustrates his article with some of these works, approaching them in a particular way (fig. 8). Rather than describing the pieces that he discusses and in some cases reproduces, he tries to create a linguistic equivalent of his experience of seeing them. Although a few weeks later he expressed his skeptical thoughts on language to his friend Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler—reflections that have since become famous—he drew the inescapable conclusion already in this essay.⁴² Even so, concrete visual experiences seem to flash between the lines again and again as Einstein's breathless language captures and caricatures the human types and their social dispositions, thus translating the pictorial strategies of verism into his own expressive style:

Dix, resolute and technically well-equipped, kicks his foot into the swollen belly of this era, this mere persiflage of an era, forces it to confess its wicked villainy, and depicts its inhabitants candidly, their crafty faces smirking in scabbled-together grimaces. . . . He has discovered the arrogant nastiness that weighs down every chair, that deceives in stupidly conventional phrases, and defends a crumbling position with a butt end of empty rhetoric; he gives kitsch-as-kitsch-can. He puts the gang in the space it deserves; negative and passé. Airless and with a constricting background of bricks and nothingness. Dix rightly understood that the accidental murderer is not especially dangerous; the gentlemen and ladies of correct, legitimate malice glide by tripping and breaking bones.⁴³

Yet Einstein was interested in more than just the social criticism expressed in this artist's paintings and watercolors. In his 1923 article he is still fully convinced by the formal quality of Dix's painting, in which he finds "craft and objectivity" summoned up to counter "sham and unctuousness." He considers the artist's sober pictures an



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“attack” against the times and its art, as painting of “critical pronouncement.”⁴⁴ In fact, a few years later, and having studied cubist art more deeply, Einstein would fundamentally revise his opinion of Dix’s work. In his *Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, the painter is granted just one brief section and four full-page illustrations, and Einstein characterizes a highly controversial work like *Der Schützengraben* (*The Trench*) as an “unwieldy allegory” with a fussy painting technique that produced a “perverse and sentimental garden idyll” (fig. 9).⁴⁵ Finally, if hesitantly, Einstein reaches a thoroughly devastating judgment: “Perhaps at heart he is a reactionary painting left-wing subjects.”⁴⁶

Einstein would not be an outstanding critic had he not also fashioned his essay on Dix into a kind of inventory of the art of the early 1920s. He sees European painting of this period as determined by two fundamentally conflicting tendencies: the abstract art of constructivism and the art of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Einstein reproaches the conservative represen-



tatives of the latter, termed “classicists” by Hartlaub in 1925, for their affirmative relationship to reality: “When a German imagines reality, he should think of things other than spring, a flowerpot, and a vulgar, chat-filled living room.”⁴⁷

As critic, Einstein unambiguously joins those proponents of *Neue Sachlichkeit* who, continuing the pursuit of dadaist pictorial methods, assume a critical attitude to the world and to artistic tradition. He leaves no doubt about the aesthetic and social significance of verism and constructivism: “These painters are waging a civil war; they are against regurgitated subjects; they reject and destroy these whether they are observers or abstractionists.”⁴⁸ The mirrorlike aspect of the argumentation is interesting here. According to this assessment, verism is just as eager to shatter external reality as is the nonobjective art of the constructivists. At

first this sounds contradictory, but Einstein wants to show that veristic painting itself functions critically and analytically, and in the end also questions reality. The verists' goal is not to imitate objective motifs but to criticize the individual and the society that provide these artists with their themes and subject matter. Einstein offers a paradoxical account that sees this part of the aesthetic assumptions of *Neue Sachlichkeit* not at all as descriptive but rather as destructive of reality, thus seemingly turning them into their opposites. In his view this art is as seriously committed to revolt against the existing world as is otherwise true only for the iconoclasm of dadaism: "Constructors, abstractionists established the dictatorship of form; others like Grosz, Dix, and Schlichter demolish the real by trenchant objectivity, exposing this period and forcing its self-irony. Painting, the way to a chilly death sentence; observation as an instrument of extreme aggression."⁴⁹

The Pessimism of Drawing

Throughout the 1920s Einstein enjoyed a close personal relationship with one of these demolishers, Grosz, about whom he wrote two short catalogue essays in 1926. Contemporary sources occasionally refer to their collaboration on dadaist journals and to evenings spent together in the often turbulent artistic circles of Berlin during those years. The gradual withdrawal into the private milieu of studios and coffeehouses, the scenes of Bohemian life where Einstein and his friends appear time after time can, of course, be interpreted as evidence of disappointed political hopes. Yet as dadaist agitator as well as painter and draftsman, Grosz never tired of condemning Germany's social and political reality, of unmasking the *Stützen der Gesellschaft* (*Pillars of Society*) in his works (fig. 10).

Einstein approaches the artist from that very perspective in a short introduction for the catalogue of an exhibition at the Galerie Alfred Flechtheim in the spring of 1926. First he calls Grosz a "man of combative enlightenment" and a "firm moralist," emphasizing that he had nothing in common with the strain of *Neue Sachlichkeit* that followed in the wake of the French painter Henri Rousseau.⁵⁰ Einstein characterizes Grosz's work in harsh, strongly rhythmical language that does not shy away from neologisms and ellipses and is occasionally aphoristically brief. He repeatedly shows the *dramatis personae* in the artist's work to the reader: the "rabble" and the "alienated society," the "humanoids" and the "capitalized flab."⁵¹ The text reveals Einstein's sympathy with Grosz's political convictions. A good number of passages read more like text from a pamphlet on contemporary issues, as we might expect from one of Einstein's dadaist polemics, than like a critical appreciation of the works on exhibit, yet the formal aspects of Grosz's watercolors and drawings also receive serious attention. Einstein encapsulates the caricatured nature of these pieces as "sneering contour," which he ascribes to English influence, and he observes that the artist expresses his social criticism primarily in the faces of his figures. The ethical content of Grosz's works becomes more than a motif—it is a cate-

gory of artistic creation. Einstein specifically mentions a “graphic criticism,” attributing semantic qualities to the linear expression of the artist in which the caricatured stylization of the line transmits explanatory content that is closely interwoven with the truthfulness of his motifs. In short: “If morality, then that of handicraft.”⁵²

In the catalogue text Einstein implies that Grosz’s involvement with psychoanalysis may have had some influence on his work, an assumption that becomes the pivotal point of the argument in a second essay, also published in 1926. On the occasion of an exhibition at the Berlin *Kunstammer Martin Wasservogel* in December of that year, Einstein attempted to explore nothing less than the entire artistic development of his friend’s oeuvre in just a few pages.⁵³ References to the artist’s recurring motifs, comments on pictorial structure and use of color, on the concepts of figure and line are so closely interwoven that the resulting text is a hermetic, nearly incomprehensible fabric. Today’s reader is therefore well advised to consult the section about Grosz in Einstein’s book, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, written only slightly earlier.⁵⁴

Here as well as in the catalogue essay Einstein begins with the paintings from the years leading up to the end of World War I. He identifies a “simultané” in both form and content of Grosz’s pictures, claiming they demonstrate a heightened ability to absorb, a skill that “condensed painful diversity in one quick motion.”⁵⁵ Themes of the big city and local sensations predominate in his early paintings, which are particularly influenced by the inventions of Italian futurism and introduce a teeming profusion of settings, figures, and objects in a dynamic language of forms: “At that time Grosz was asking which part of the content and tempo of the era could be chronicled by painting.”⁵⁶ It is obvious that once again Einstein is trying to find a linguistic equivalent for his visual experiences, thereby helping the reader comprehend the work of art. This curious stylistic tactic, developed by Einstein in the 1920s, can best be appreciated in those passages in *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* that summon up themes and motifs from Grosz’s works without resorting to an actual description of a painting or drawing. For example, a painting such as *Der Abenteurer* (*The Adventurer*), 1917, uses a crystalline pictorial structure derived from cubism and futurism to depict an imaginary America, its dominant figure engulfed by a profusion of images from urban life (fig. 11). Einstein imitates this richly detailed mode of composition in the rapid staccato of his account, stringing together motif after motif:



11.

New superlative rises: fairy-tale America; skyscraper, cowboy, Chaplin, jazz, Smith & Wesson, Colgate, grotesque dancer, boxer. Impossible to live in Germany; so Grosz composed his America with movies, bazaar, and detective story, the big adventure; a botched, overcrowded picture—hours and hours to paraphrase—attests to this: the adventurer (saintly cowboy) in the middle of utopian New York.⁵⁷

In his catalogue essay Einstein follows, albeit disjointedly, the development of the artist's work from the dadaist politicization of the postwar period, through the mechanical-constructive phase with its "engineer drawings" (George Grosz) influenced by *pittura metafisica*, all the way to the veristic portraits of the mid-1920s.⁵⁸ The author is particularly interested in the artists's drawings. With specific reference to Sigmund Freud, the reader learns that in Grosz's graphic works an associative process has been realized that links a variety of impressions and concepts. By layering motifs that were originally far apart both spatially and temporally, Grosz's drawings achieve an expressiveness that reminds Einstein of dream experiences: "Motifs dash through the early Grosz drawings like a dream in an express train."⁵⁹

One of the artist's watercolor drawings is particularly relevant in this context. Dated 1919, it shows a "dance of death" of various human types who, having survived the



12.

war, are engaged in different activities (fig. 12). In the upper left corner two hefty figures help themselves from a steaming bowl while passersby and a policeman cut across the scene. At the top edge, a skeleton is dressed like a waiter, ushering in a beggar to join the proceedings; underneath, two men close a deal with a handshake; to the left, a couple embraces. On the right side, behind an elegantly dressed gentleman who is also accompanied by a skeleton, a vista opens into a gloomy landscape. At the lower edge of the sheet a woman is sitting on a man's lap, her breasts and pubic hair visible through her dress; above this pair a gramophone plays the hit tune that gives this drawing its name ("Fern im Süd das schöne Spanien" — Way down south, in lovely Spain). Two large female nudes draw our gaze back to the center of the composition, and in the lower right corner of the sheet none other than Einstein himself appears, dressed in a tie, vest, and stiff collar, the inevitable pipe between his pinched lips.⁶⁰ His head, its features recorded for us in many contemporary portraits, intersects the thigh of the female figure who is turned to the viewer, drawn in such a way that the contours of thigh and head overlap, with the smoke from his pipe rising in a curling line toward the woman. Grosz may have smuggled, so to speak, his friend's portrait into this picture, thereby establishing the art critic as representative and eye witness of the criticized Weimar society, but it is just as

12. **George Grosz**, *Fern im Süd das schöne Spanien* (*Way Down South in Lovely Spain*), 1919, ink and watercolor on paper, Private collection, Hamburg

surprising to find a short passage in Einstein's essay connecting the memory of this work with other, similar drawings:

A pessimism of drawing, here and there glazed with transparent paint. Figures intersect as if illuminated by x-rays, things flow through one another. A piece of contour bearing a defect that has become transparent. *Simultané*, a moral agency, one that rivets the scene; brain anatomy. One figure crosses another as its content or imagining. Transparency of the figures, a means of coupling opposites in one breath: gugelhupf between social-club-brain, gramophone, and female thigh.⁶¹

Along with this characterization of Grosz's graphic art, Einstein gives his readers a key to its interpretation. Figures and motifs that intersect wholly or in outline suggest an ideational connection between human being and object, an associative relationship between the people represented. Taking the concrete example of the writer's portrait literally means, according to Grosz's witty critique, that Einstein—whose amorous adventures are recorded in great number—had nothing but “women on the brain.” Yet Einstein wants to go further in his interpretation of this kind of graphic superimposition, seeing it also as psychoanalytic. In his opinion the intermingling of contours alludes to images of dreams and memories, so that graphic simultaneity becomes a metaphor for the play of associations, as Freud described it as early as 1900 in his fundamental study *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In Einstein's words:

Drawing is a kind of psychoanalytical process in which complicated things are deciphered using simple methods. Perhaps what fascinates us in these compositions is not so much their representational quality but rather the frightening abundance of the connections. Grosz was simplifying, shattering objectivity in favor of simultaneous binding.—He forced various temporal moments into the picture, and one figure often seems to be a dreamlike manifestation of the neighboring one.⁶²

Einstein does not confine himself to the political evaluation of Grosz's subject matter; just like the corresponding section in *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, his essays about the artist strive to characterize the formal qualities of the drawings, to uncover the aesthetic principles that make this work so distinctive. Admittedly Einstein repeatedly emphasizes the grotesquery and caricature, the scathing criticism of society that assails the viewer not only in both the dadaist paintings and the drawings by Grosz. At the same time, however, he leaves no room for doubt that this artist's verism is a verism of form

and must not be confused with the “affirmative” imitation for which he indicts other representatives of *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Therefore Einstein’s analysis of how dadaist idioms are absorbed into the veristic works of Schlichter and Dix from the 1920s applies to Grosz as well; this borrowing can explain both the special pictorial language of these artists as well as their radical criticism of social reality. In addition, with reference to the psychoanalytic process of Grosz’s idiosyncratic graphic language, Einstein wants to show that his friend’s art does not remain on the surface of objects but penetrates deep into the personalities of the figures he depicts.

Painting as Civil War

The art of the 1920s in Germany was shaped by a whole series of artistic movements that, in style and meaning, were fiercely opposed to one another. Expressionism and constructivism, dadaism and *Neue Sachlichkeit* were searching for ever new modes of discourse in order to respond to the social challenges that were themselves at the mercy of a precipitous shift from revolution to restoration, from economic consolidation to depression. The shift that the painters and sculptors of the Weimar Republic confronted in their artistic careers was no less precipitous, and there was scarcely an artist whose life and work would remain untouched by the painful turmoil of these years.

Yet it was not just the work of visual artists that became radically politicized in the period following the World War I. Many writers and intellectuals also responded to the bitter social circumstances of that time. For Einstein this meant first a turn to revolutionary action and a short but fervent involvement in the political-aesthetic revolt of dadaism. Soon realizing that a communist political system could not be achieved, he retreated behind his other goals, at least until he became caught up in the Spanish Civil War. As an art theorist he hoped throughout the 1920s for a far-reaching anthropological evolution, as conventional patterns of perception and representation were reevaluated. From here on Einstein’s art-critical and theoretical intentions were to promulgate artistic and intellectual movements like cubism and surrealism, since he hoped these would, through aesthetic means, bring about a transformation of the individual and society.⁶³

It may initially seem astonishing to find Einstein so willing to put his critical expertise at the service of his dadaist companions during the first half of the 1920s, instead of concentrating on what was for him so crucial, the French avant-garde. Granted, all his writings on Schlichter, Dix, and Grosz were prompted by personal relationships and commercial incentives. Yet Einstein’s attention to a number of German works of the 1920s was motivated by an interest in the epistemology of aesthetics. During this period Einstein devoted his occasional pieces of art criticism to those uncompromising in their efforts to confront social themes, who wanted to expose human weakness and political abuses. Schlichter, Dix, and Grosz had, like Einstein himself, suffered through the war

and the political conflicts of the postwar era and tried to use their art to respond to the urgent questions of the time. Both Berlin dadaism and, in its wake, German verism—which consistently furthered the artistic idiom of Dada—seemed well-suited in motif and form to develop a way of exploring reality that could allow a fundamental critique of society and humanity of that time.

In his writings Einstein carefully worked his way through Schlichter, Dix, and Grosz's critical relationship to reality. In his view, they shared specific goals: the artistic subversion of bourgeois society, and painting waged as civil war. Furthermore, this attitude was not only apparent in their subject matter but also determined the formal strategies of their paintings, collages, watercolors, and drawings.⁶⁴ As Einstein stated in his 1923 essay on Dix, these artists “demolish the real by trenchant objectivity,” something that made their works interesting for a critic whose major concern in that decade was to understand the roots of the avant-garde's new forms of expression. He was convinced that the potential for social criticism in dadaism, and even more so in its successor, verism, destined these movements to complement cubism's aesthetic transformation of the world view. Einstein did not really explain this mirror-imaging of dadaist-veristic and cubist art until *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Here, at the end of the chapter on Grosz, Einstein explicitly categorized this critical approach to the world as the “other side” of cubism: “Cubism wanted to embrace the fullness of moving through space, to grasp more completely the visual experience of space. The German verists transformed this into a propagandistic and understandable demonstration of actual reality.”⁶⁵

NOTES

This essay was translated by Linda Parshall.

1 See *Der blutige Ernst* 3 (1919), last page of the cover; see also Hanne Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas. Die Berliner Dadaisten und ihre Aktionen* (Gießen, 1989), 218; on Einstein see 214; see also Walter Mehring, “Berlin Dada” (1959), in his *Verrufene Malerei. Berlin Dada. Erinnerungen eines Zeitgenossen und 14 Essays zur Kunst* (Düsseldorf, 1983), 139–212, 174.

2 Carl Einstein, *Die schlimme Botschaft. Zwanzig Szenen* (Berlin, 1921). The quotation is taken from the publisher's banderole on the first edition (collection the author).

3 Carl Einstein, “Pleite glotzt euch an. Restlos,” *Die Pleite* 1 (1919): 2; repr. in Carl Einstein, *Werke, 1919–1928*, eds. Hermann Haarmann and Klaus Siebenhaar (Berlin, 1996), 15.

4 Carl Einstein, “Man schaffe den Besitz ab,” *Die Pleite* 3 (1919): 2; repr. in Einstein, *Werke*, 19–20.

5 Carl Einstein, “An die Geistigen!” *Die Pleite* 1 (1919): 2; repr. in Einstein, *Werke*, 18.

6 Carl Einstein, “Capelle und Genossen,” *Der blutige Ernst* 3 (1919): 2; repr. in Einstein, *Werke*, 28–30, 29; see also Carl Einstein, “Schulze,” *Der blutige Ernst* 6 (1919): 4; repr. in Einstein, *Werke*, 48–52.

7 On Einstein's political engagement, see Klaus H. Kiefer, “Carl Einstein and the Revolutionary Soldiers' Councils in Brussels,” in Rainer Rumold and Otto Karl Werckmeister, eds., *The Ideological Crisis of Expressionism. The Literary and Artistic German War Colony in Belgium 1914–1918* (Columbia, S.C., 1990), 97–113; Dirk HeiBerer, “Einsteins

Verhaftung. Materialien zum Scheitern eines revolutionären Programms in Berlin und Bayern 1919," *Archiv für die Geschichte des Widerstands und der Arbeit* 12 (1992): 41–77; Christoph Braun, "Carl Einstein und die Novemberrevolution," in *Carl-Einstein-Kolloquium 1994*, ed. Klaus H. Kiefer (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), *Bayreuther Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft* 16, 55–61; Hubert Roland, *Die deutsche literarische "Kriegskolonie" in Belgien, 1914–1918. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der deutsch-belgischen Literaturbeziehungen 1900–1920* (Bern, 1999), *Contacts. Série 11—Gallo-germanica* 26, 71.

8 Carl Einstein, "Zur primitiven Kunst," in *Die Gemeinschaft. Dokumente der geistigen Weltwende. Jahrbuch des Verlags Gustav Kiepenheuer*, ed. Ludwig Rubiner (Potsdam, 1919), 175–176; repr. in *Einstein, Werke*, 27.

9 See Carl Einstein, *Negerplastik* (Leipzig, 1915; 2nd ed. Munich, 1920); repr. in *Einstein, Werke 1907–1918*, eds. Hermann Haarmann and Klaus Siebenhaar (Berlin, 1994), 234–252.

10 Einstein, *Negerplastik*, XII, XV.

11 Einstein, "Zur primitiven Kunst," 27.

12 See *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe* [exh. broch., Kunsthandlung Dr. Otto Burchard] (Berlin, 1920), cat. 74: "Grosz-Heartfield mont.: Pablo Picasso, *La Vie Heureuse*. Dr. Karl Einstein gewidmet" (dedicated to Dr. Karl Einstein); the brochure expressly identifies this collage along with cat. 73: "Grosz-Heartfield mont.: Henri Rousseau, *Selbstbild-*

nis" as "korrigierte Meisterbilder" (corrected masterpieces); on this exhibition see Helen Adkins, "Erste Internationale Dada-Messe," in *Stationen der Moderne. Die bedeutenden Kunstausstellungen des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland* [exh. cat., Berlinische Galerie—Museum für Moderne Kunst, Photographie und Architektur] (Berlin, 1988), 156–183; Hanne Bergius, *Montage und Metamechanik. Dada Berlin—Artistik von Polaritäten* (Berlin, 2000), 233, 349.

13 See Marc Dachy, *The Dada Movement 1915–1923* (Geneva and New York, 1990), 103; Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas*, 214; Bergius, *Montage und Metamechanik*, 104, 248, 284, 387.

14 Quoted from Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas*, 218.

15 "Le cubisme brisa quelques vieux trucs d'ateliers; l'expressionnisme allemand par contre, se plaît à broyer des tubes de couleurs sans dégager aucune clarté spirituelle." Carl Einstein, "De l'Allemagne," *Action. Cahiers de philosophie et d'art* 9 (1921), 31–32, 32; repr. in *Einstein, Werke*, 200–203.

16 See Carl Einstein (no title) (*Revolution Breaks through History and Tradition*), in *Einstein, Werke. Texte aus dem Nachlaß I*, eds. Hermann Haarmann and Klaus Siebenhaar (Berlin, 1992), 146–152.

17 Einstein, *Werke*, 146.

18 Einstein, *Werke*, 149.

19 Einstein, *Werke*, 149.

20 Einstein, "De l'Allemagne," 31.

21 In this context the only "exception" was the 1926 essay Einstein dedicated to the German-Russian painter Kandinsky on his sixtieth birthday; see Uwe Fleckner, "Le solipsiste et son critique. L'œuvre de Kandinsky jugé par Carl Einstein," in *Kandinsky. Retour en Russie. 1914–1921* [exh. cat., Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain] (Strasbourg, 2001), 38–46.

22 See Carl Einstein, Rudolf Schlichter [exh. cat., Galerie Otto Burchard—Alte und neue Kunst] (Berlin, 1920).

23 See Götz Adriani, ed., Rudolf Schlichter. *Gemälde—Aquarelle—Zeichnungen* [exh. cat., Kunsthalle, Tübingen] (Munich, 1997–1998), 11.

24 Einstein, Rudolf Schlichter, 105; see Hermann Bahr, *Expressionismus* (Munich, 1916, 2nd ed., 1920).

25 Einstein, Rudolf Schlichter, 105. The "Viennese Rembrandt" is a reference to Oskar Kokoschka.

26 Einstein, Rudolf Schlichter, 105.

27 Einstein, Rudolf Schlichter, 105.

28 Einstein, Rudolf Schlichter, 106.

29 These are the drawings *Mädchen aus dem Westen* (*Girl from the West*) (Einstein, Rudolf Schlichter, 106), *Lyncher* (*The Executioner*) (107), and *Das Ende* (*The End*) (109). Their locations are unknown.

30 Einstein, Rudolf Schlichter, 106.

31 Einstein, Rudolf Schlichter, 106.

32 Einstein, Rudolf Schlichter, 106.

33 On this work see Hanne Bergius, "Lederstrumpf" zwischen Provinz und Metropole, in Rudolf Schlichter. 1890–1955 [exh. cat., Staatliche Kunsthalle] (Berlin, 1984), 33–46, 38; Rudolf Schlichter. *Gemälde—Aquarelle—Zeichnungen*, 92 (cat. 26).

34 Einstein, Rudolf Schlichter, 106, 108.

35 On the art of *Neue Sachlichkeit* see Hans-Jürgen Buderer, *Neue Sachlichkeit. Bilder auf der Suche nach der Wirklichkeit. Figurative Malerei der zwanziger Jahre*, ed. Manfred Fath [exh. cat., Städtische Kunsthalle] (Mannheim, 1994–1995); Dennis Crockett, *German Post-Expressionism:*

- The Art of the Great Disorder 1918–1924 (University Park, Pa., 1999); Uwe Fleckner, "Les réalités glacées de la Nouvelle Objectivité. Histoire, théorie et langage formel d'un art entre critique sociale et idéal esthétique," in *Allemagne années 20. La Nouvelle Objectivité* [exh. cat., Musée de Grenoble] (2003), 8–23.
- 36 Carl Einstein, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1926), 49.
- 37 See Mariene Angermeyer-Deubner, *Neue Sachlichkeit und Verismus in Karlsruhe 1920–1933* (Karlsruhe, 1988), 38; on the artist's work, see Georg Scholz, *Ein Beitrag zur Diskussion realistischer Kunst* [exh. cat., Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe] (Karlsruhe, 1975); Georg Scholz 1890–1945. *Malerei, Zeichnung, Druckgraphik*, ed. Hans-Dieter Mück (Stuttgart, 1991); Fleckner, "Les réalités glacées," 17.
- 38 See Rudolf Schlichter, *Gemälde*, 96 (cat. 29), 100 (cat. 30).
- 39 Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub, "Zum Geleit," in *Neue Sachlichkeit* [exh. cat., Städtische Kunsthalle] (Mannheim, 1925), n.p.; see Paul F. Schmidt, "Die deutschen Veristen," *Das Kunstblatt* 8 (1924), 367–372.
- 40 See Paul Ferdinand Schmidt, *Otto Dix* (Cologne, n.d. [1923]).
- 41 Carl Einstein, "Otto Dix," *Das Kunstblatt* 7 (1923), 97–102, and illustrations preceding 97, 100; repr. in Einstein, *Werke*, 1919–1928, 342–344; see Matthew Biro, "Allegorical Modernism: Carl Einstein on Otto Dix," *Art Criticism* 15 (2000), 46–70; on the critical reception of the artist, see Andreas Strobl, *Otto Dix. Eine Malerkarriere der zwanziger Jahre* (Berlin, 1996).
- 42 Letter from Carl Einstein to Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, undated (June 1923), in Carl Einstein and Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *Correspondence 1921–1939*, ed. Liliane Meffre (Marseille, 1993), 138–148.
- 43 Einstein, "Otto Dix," 98, 101.
- 44 Einstein, "Otto Dix," 100.
- 45 See Wolfgang Schröck-Schmidt, "Der Schicksalsweg des 'Schützengraben,'" in Dix, ed. Wulf Herzogenrath and Johann-Karl Schmidt [exh. cat., Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart and Neue Nationalgalerie] (Stuttgart and Berlin, 1991), 161–164.
- 46 Einstein, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 156; illustrated are *Portrait meiner Eltern I* (Portrait of My Parents I), 1921 (Kunstmuseum, Basel); *Zuhälter und Nutzen* (Pimp with Whores), 1922 (Private collection); *Bildnis Max Rösberg* (Portrait of Max Rösberg), 1922 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York); and *Kinderbildnis* (Nelly in Blumen) (Portrait of a Child [Nelly Surrounded by Flowers]), 1924 (Otto-Dix-Stiftung, Vaduz); in the 1928 edition the latter was replaced by *Bildnis des Philosophen Max Scheler* (Portrait of the Philosopher Max Scheler), 1926 (Universität Cologne, Philosophische Fakultät), which was dropped in 1931.
- 47 Einstein, "Otto Dix," 98.
- 48 Einstein, "Otto Dix," 99.
- 49 Einstein, "Otto Dix," 97.
- 50 Carl Einstein, "George Grosz," in *George Grosz* [exh. cat., Galerie Alfred Flechtheim, Berlin] (Berlin, 1926), *Veröffentlichungen des Kunstarchives*, vol. 1, 3–7, 4; repr. in Einstein, *Werke*, 1919–1928, 468–470.
- 51 Einstein, *George Grosz*, 4, 5.
- 52 Einstein, *George Grosz*, 5, 6.
- 53 Carl Einstein, "George Grosz," in *George Grosz* [exh. cat., Kunstammer Martin Wasservogel, Berlin] (Berlin, 1926), 1–9; repr. in Einstein, *Werke*, 1919–1928, 463–467.
- 54 See Einstein, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 149.
- 55 Einstein, *George Grosz*, 2.
- 56 Einstein, *George Grosz*, 3.
- 57 Einstein, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 149.
- 58 See Roland März, "Republikanische Automaten. George Grosz und die Pittura metafisica," in *George Grosz*. Berlin—New York, ed., Peter-Klaus Schuster [exh. cat., Neue Nationalgalerie and Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen] (Berlin and Düsseldorf, 1994–1995), 147–156.
- 59 Einstein, *George Grosz*, 4; on the drawings, see also Alexander Dückers, "Der Zeichner George Grosz," in *George Grosz 1994–1995*, 157–165.
- 60 Rolf-Peter Baacke was the first to mention the identity of this figure; see Baacke, ed., *Carl Einstein. Zwischen Bebuquin und Negerplastik* (Berlin, 1990), *Materialien*, vol. 1, 50. Grosz included his friend's head again in his *Trauermagazin* of 1918–1919 (Private collection, Frankfurt am Main); see Baacke, *Carl Einstein*, 59; on the drawings, see also *George Grosz 1994–1995*, 409 (cat. x. 60), and 413 (cat. x. 69); here the head, in both cases, is mistakenly identified as Paul Westheim.
- 61 Einstein, *George Grosz*, 6.
- 62 Einstein, *George Grosz*, 4.
- 63 See Uwe Fleckner and Thomas W. Gaetgens, "Schauend ändert man Menschen und Welt. Carl Einstein und die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts," in Carl Einstein, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Uwe Fleckner and Thomas W. Gaetgens (Berlin, 1996), 7–32.
- 64 See Einstein, "Otto Dix," 99.
- 65 Einstein, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, 153.

Raoul Hausmann's Optophone: "Universal Language" and the Intermedia | Marcella Lista

Any instrument designed for transferring optical into acoustic effects, or light into sound, and thus to some extent substituting the ear for the eye, may be appropriately termed an "Optophone."

— E. E. FOURNIER D'ALBE, "THE TYPE-READING OPTOPHONE," 1914

The task of the future is that of achieving a new primeval condition. A form that links the frequencies of light and sound can be found.

— RAOUL HAUSMANN, "OPTOPHONETICS," 1922

The Optophone, a mysterious machine for converting sounds into images and vice versa that appeared in Raoul Hausmann's writing around 1921–1922, has until now attracted little attention from historians of Dada. It came about as a result of the artist's private research in the field of physiological optics and vibration theory, and it seems from the outset to have followed a different course of development, far from the excitement of Berlin's Dada Club. The Optophone sprang directly from the baroque tradition of instruments expressly created to produce "color music." László Moholy-Nagy, in the second edition of his complete theory *Malerei, Fotografie, Film* (Painting, Photography, Film), published in 1925, included Hausmann's Optophone at the end of his long list of chromatic machines that had stimulated the synesthetic imagination ever since Father Castel's *Ocular Harpsichord*. Moholy-Nagy illuminates, if only in passing, the radically new nature of the experiment within this tradition. In envisaging the evolution of intermedia studies, the reverse of the external association of sound and image, the Hungarian artist was also doing a little special pleading on his own behalf:

far too little work has so far been done in the field of moving light display. It must at once be tackled from any angles and carried forward as a pure discipline. While I value what their experiments have achieved, I consider it a mistake to try, as Hirschfeld-Mack and A. László do, to combine optical-kinetic with acoustical experiments. A more perfect, because scientifically grounded, performance is promised by Optophonetik. The bold imagination of the dadaist Raoul Hausmann has been responsible for the first steps toward a future theory.¹

The *Reflektorische Lichtspiele* (Reflected Light Compositions) created by Ludwig Hirschfeld-Mack at the Bauhaus and the projections of the color keyboard demonstrated in the 1920s in Germany by the Hungarian composer Alexander László were both based on the production of musical accompaniment in conjunction with moving color effects.²

Conversely, the Optophone dreamed up by Hausmann was intended to overturn the postsymbolist theory of correspondences. This instrument, which would not get past the theoretical stage, was to make use of the techniques of electrical conversion that were beginning to appear in the same decade; these were driven by the expectation of talking films produced by the first photoelectric cells. "With the appropriate technical equipment the Optophone can give every optical phenomenon its sound equivalent, in other words it can transform the difference in the frequencies of light and sound," was Hausmann's claim in 1922 when describing the capacities of his invention.³ An approach like this, while capable of stimulating the creation of that "elementary art" advocated by Theo van Doesburg, El Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, and Hans Richter,⁴ seemed to contradict the subversive strategies of Dada theory. It distanced itself from the artists' preferred techniques (photomontage, sound poetry) to focus on the technological future of art and the "scientific" translatability of light and sound. Hausmann himself admitted this divide, which earned him the cold shoulder from his colleagues in Berlin, in his autobiography *Courrier Dada*.⁵

Thereafter his biographers took the same attitude, happy to dismiss the Optophone as a utopian vision, a venture by the *Dadasoph* (Dada sage) outside the trodden paths of dadaism.⁶ Nevertheless, three major texts he published between 1921 and 1923—the manifesto "PREsentism" and the essays "Optophonetics" and "From Talking Films to Optophonetics"—presented an ambitious theoretical framework for this research. The first proposes a sensory revolution based on a haptic or touch-based perception of the world; the second establishes the premises of a new language; and the third sets forth the technical argument for a new art of light and sound, destined to become an actual physiological extension of the human body. When considering this momentous period in art, the years that saw the rise of "international constructivism," historiographers tend to create a distinction between theories of language as a traditional analytical tool of the phonetic poem on the one hand and the history of electric media, in which Moholy-Nagy was an undoubted pioneer, on the other.

Yet a number of considerations lead us to reconsider this distinction. First, the close connection in Hausmann's theory between the Optophone and the development of a touch-based or haptic sensibility, one of dadaism's most fruitful areas of research, differentiates this instrument a priori from the tradition of chromatic organs. From this point of view, the Optophone forms part of an aesthetic debate that, in response to futurist "tactilism," produced a number of interpretations within the Dada movement, especially in the work of Francis Picabia. Furthermore, the complex links between the Optophone and a general theory of "optophonetics" sparked a radical rethinking of verbal language and of the notion of a "universal language" predicated by Richter. The latter thought this could be realized through the purely visual language of "signs" and undertook to create it, together with Viking Eggeling, by means of an electric medium: film. The Optophone,

a recurring concern throughout Hausmann's life and one he used successfully in the early 1960s as a challenge to the early proponents of electronic art, suggests a different linkage for intermedia experiments than that associated with the figure of Moholy-Nagy.⁷ With Hausmann's machine, the completely abstract approach to the artistic material sets in play a primitivist model that aims at a redefinition of sensibility.

Haptics versus Tactilism: The Premises of a New Total Art

The decisive influence of the philosophical theses of Salomon Friedlander/Mynona and Ernst Marcus on the evolution of the "presentist" theory, by which the Dadasoph Hausmann began in 1921 to differentiate himself from the Dada Club of Berlin, has been thoroughly studied.⁸ The loss of the "differentiated ego" that Friedlander took as the condition of modern man, together with the theory of "eccentric sensoriality" developed by Marcus, constitutes the mainspring of the antirationalist and antibourgeois attitude apparent in Hausmann's work after 1910. Marcus' book, *Das Problem der exzentrischen Empfindung und seine Lösung* (The Problem of Eccentric Feeling and Its Solution), in particular develops the radical physiological thesis according to which the sense of touch is an extension, an adjunct of all the other senses. On discovering this text in 1916,⁹ Hausmann took from it psycho-physiological inferences: "the limits of the body are not those of the sensory perceptions but . . . by virtue of the eccentric rays, perceptions may take place in the remotest areas," he noted to Hannah Höch at the time.¹⁰ When he wrote his manifesto "PREsentism" in 1921, he postulated the dynamic of the feeling captured at a distance as the foundation of artistic creation:

We must convince ourselves that the sense of touch is mingled with all our senses, or rather that it is the definitive basis of all the senses: the haptic sense, whose eccentric emanations are projected into the atmosphere through the six hundred kilometers of the Earth's atmosphere as far as Sirius and the Pleiades. We see no reason why this most important of our apperceptions should not be made into a new art.¹¹

A less familiar aspect of Hausmann's "presentist" theory is his dialogue with the futurist Filippo T. Marinetti on the question of "tactilism" in art. The futurist manifesto "Tactilism," which began as a lecture that had shaken dadaist circles in Paris, was published in French by Marinetti in January 1921.¹² It included a typological classification of the various tactile sensations, similar to the one adopted by Luigi Russolo in 1913 to describe nonmusical sounds, in his manifesto "L'Arte dei rumori" (The Art of Noises). In both cases the totalizing method of futurism was based on a taxonomic approach that designated the as yet unnamed components of the new art. A playful illustration of this way of thinking can be seen in Marinetti's notion of a "tactile theater" that would put into

the hands of spectators “long tactile ribbons that will roll, producing harmonies of tactile sensations with varying rhythms,” which “could also be arranged on small turning wheels, with accompaniments of music and light.”¹³ But the inventor of futurism also dreamed that tactilism’s dynamic would bring about the dissolution of individualism, since the new blossoming of the senses would “[serve to] perfect communications between human beings through the skin.”¹⁴

Hausmann seems to have penned his own “PREsentism” in February. The manifesto was first sent in the form of a tract to the founder of futurism in the spring of 1921 and to De Stijl in September of the same year.¹⁵ By flinging his own credo of a “haptic” art into this text, the dadaist vehemently rejected the futurist conception of “tactilism,” which he considered too easily left to chance, and condemned Marinetti’s manifesto on the grounds of its failure as a theory: “From Italy we hear the news of Marinetti’s tactilism! He has conceived the problem of haptic sensation in a confused manner and thus destroyed it. We do not like Marinetti, Europe’s most modern man, because his starting point is chance, not a higher form of consciousness. . . . We demand haptism, and also odorism! Let us expand the haptic sense and give it a scientific basis beyond random chance.”¹⁶ With tactilism on one side and haptics on the other, Marinetti and Hausmann both challenged the predominant opticality of Western culture, which they countered with senses considered less refined (touch and smell). The explicit target of their attack was the anthropocentric structure of visual culture and the illusion of dominance over the world that it conveyed. The movement from the individual to collectivity, and the absorption of the subject into a social body unified by the electric media, themes that were later to form the basis of Marshall McLuhan’s theories, were here closely associated with the evolution of the sense of touch and the relational metaphor of contact.

On the one hand, Marinetti and Hausmann’s theoretical constructs based on the primacy of the tactile involved a modernist reappraisal of synesthesia. They countered the notion of a “resonance” between the arts, expressed by symbolism and later by expressionism, with a principle of direct contact that implied an active process of translation rather than an aesthetic hypothesis of a comparison between the arts. This new conception of synesthesia can be seen as early as 1910 in France, in the work of the music critic Jean d’Udine, which anticipated the scientific developments of the notions of kinesthesia and proprioception, making touch an “intermediate sense” that allowed the other senses to interact.¹⁷ On the other hand, Marinetti and Hausmann offered very different responses to this modernist statement, both of which led to a reconsideration of artistic media and forms of language.

In 1912 Marinetti had prepared the ground for an alternative to expressionist synesthesia by envisaging a kind of electric pyrotechnics, an aerial conquest of painting by means of spectacular new methods:

The day will come when painted pictures will no longer suffice. . . . Colors, as they multiply, will have no need of shapes in order to be perceived and understood. We shall do without canvases and brushes; instead of easel art, we shall offer the world gigantic ephemeral paintings made up of gleaming lanterns, electric reflectors, and multicolored gases which, in a harmonious blending of showers, spirals, and interlacing patterns across the arc of the horizon, will thrill the complex soul of future multitudes.¹⁸

This prophecy was restated in more precise terms at the end of the decade, when Fedele Azari published a manifesto specifically devoted to the idea of a total aerial art. His "Théâtre aérien" (Aerial Theater) was to be composed of choreographies of airplanes with their engines singing, like the engineered sound effects of Russolo, and even of a multicolored light show in the air: "above the innumerable spectators lying on their backs the rainbow-colored, dazzle-painted airplanes will dance by day in the colored areas formed by the dust they scatter, while at night they will compose mobile constellations and dance in the lights sprayed out by projectors."¹⁹

It may at first seem odd to find an idea like this in the text Hausmann devoted to his theory of a new haptic art. It was in fact in this "presentist" manifesto that the principle of the Optophone (as yet unnamed) was evoked through the dream of an aerial spectacle of sound and light: "We demand electric, scientific painting!!! Sound waves, light waves, and electrical waves differ only in their length and breadth. Following Thomas Wilfred's experiments in America with colored phenomena floating freely in the air, and the experiments with sound carried out by the American and German wireless telegraphy, it will be easy to direct sound waves through giant transformers that will transmit them in aerial spectacles of color and music. . . . At night a theatre of light will fill the sky, and in the daytime the transformers will make the atmosphere ring."²⁰

It should be noted that the experiments by Wilfred to which Hausmann referred did not actually free colored light from the support of a screen. In his first Clavilux, presented in 1920, the light was diffracted behind a large, curved opalescent screen, which gave a more floating, insubstantial impression than did projected lights (fig. 1).²¹ Although lacking precision, the references cited by Hausmann do express his desire to separate himself from the example of the futurists. Where the Italian group used a taxonomic approach to postulate a fragmented polysensoriality, the German dadaist was looking for a single theoretical mainspring to define the sensorial mutation he expected of modern man, which he associated with Marcus' formula: "eccentric sensoriality." Hausmann therefore set himself apart once and for all from Marinetti's position by shifting the focus from effect to process.

Hausmann's suggested perception of haptics was unrelated to any anecdotal method. It was to establish by means of electrical conversion the model for a new apprehension of the world. The conversions explored at a time by technique, proceeding by the



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physical contact implied by the analogical reproduction, transformation, and restitution of sound data, could be brought in a general way into the process of imprint. The engraving of the microgroove on the record—sound graphics—as well as the photograph of sound on the sound track of a film—optical sound—brings such a contact into play, in both the transfer and the reading phase. Hausmann refers to the generalization of this principle when he speaks of haptic perception, not only in the transfer from one medium to another but also from the media themselves to the human sensorial system:

Thanks to electricity we can transform our haptic emanations into mobile colors and sounds, into new music. The tactilism advocated by Marinetti, which would make people squeal from the effects of ribbons unfurling from various surfaces, is just an ersatz of Roman gladiatorial fights, it was born of the same impulse and does not represent anything new.²²

For Hausmann in 1921, therefore, the laboratory for a new art was to be upon the processes of electrical conversion developed at the time. This approach is hinted at in his next two texts, “Optophonetics” and “From the Talking Film to Optophonetics,” which list a highly specialized set of tools. In addition to the radiotelegraphy already mentioned in “PREsentism,” Hausmann reviews other procedures such as the “singing

1. Thomas Wilfred composing with Lumia, his first Claviflux machine, c. 1940, Thomas Wilfred Papers, Yale University Library

arc lamp,” the very earliest techniques for optical recording of sound in film, and finally, a now-forgotten instrument designed to enable the blind to read: the Optophone of Dr. Fournier d’Albe.

Sound Film and Optophonics

Hausmann’s research for his Optophone project between 1922 and 1923 is recorded in three notebooks found in the archives of the Berlinische Galerie, Berlin.²³ These notes reveal a specific bibliographical source, the *Zeitschrift für Feinmechanik* (Magazine for Precision Tools), a publication that featured the latest scientific and technical discoveries, especially in the field of electrical energy. The text “Optophonetics,” published in Russian in May 1922 in the first issue of Lissitzky and Il’ia Ehrenburg’s magazine *Veshch’-Gegenstand-Objet* before appearing in *MA* that October, sums up the results of his research:

If a telephone is introduced into the arc-lamp’s circuit, the sound waves make the electric arc correspond precisely with the sound frequencies. If a variable-resistance selenium cell is introduced into an electric arc that is in acoustic movement, the beam of light induces changing currents and the photographed sounds appear on the film behind the selenium cell in the form of narrower or broader, lighter or darker strips.

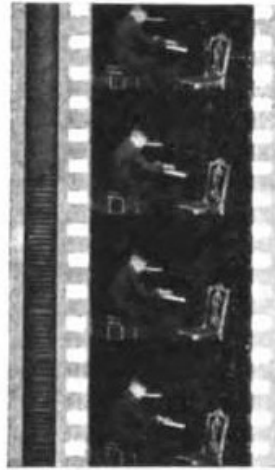
Using a selenium cell, the optophone transforms induced light phenomena into sounds with the aid of a telephone switched into the current. With the appropriate technical equipment the optophone can give every optical phenomenon its sound equivalent. . . .²⁴

According to Hausmann, in about 1920 he visited the Berlin Postal Museum for a demonstration of the “singing arc lamp” invented by the English physician William Du Bois Duddell in 1899.²⁵ The incandescent-arc lamp was connected to a keyboard by which the level of power of the electric induction could be controlled. The luminescent arc could thus produce musical sounds. (Eliminating the continuous irritating crackle it normally emitted had been the initial goal of Duddell’s research.) In the early 1920s this principle was applied to one of the first photoelectric cells, the selenium cell, to make it possible for sound to be photographed on film stock. Hausmann also mentions the pioneering work done in this field by the German physician Ernst Ruhmer.²⁶ Ruhmer had already perfected the mechanism of his optical instrument, the Photographophone; he had succeeded in photographing the sounds made by a “singing arc” on film, and in

Vom sprechenden

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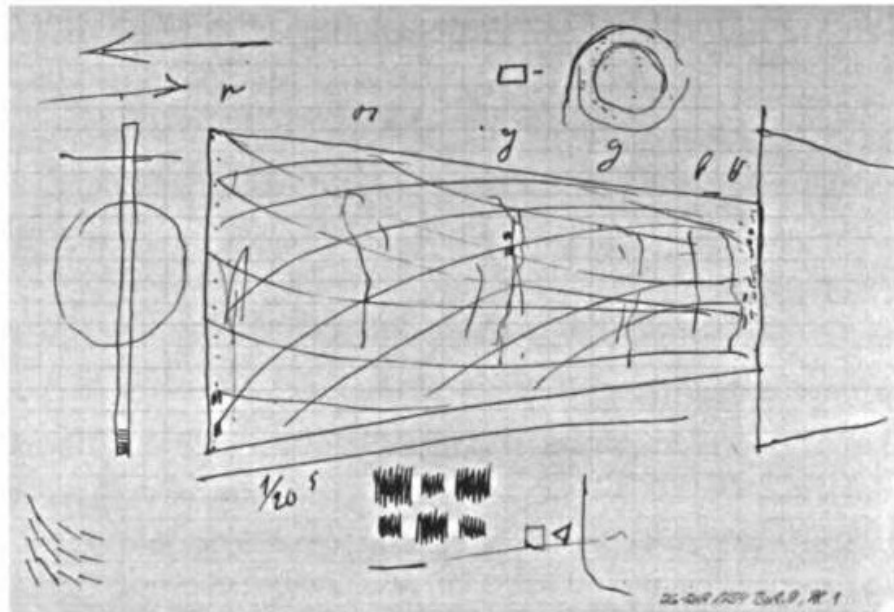


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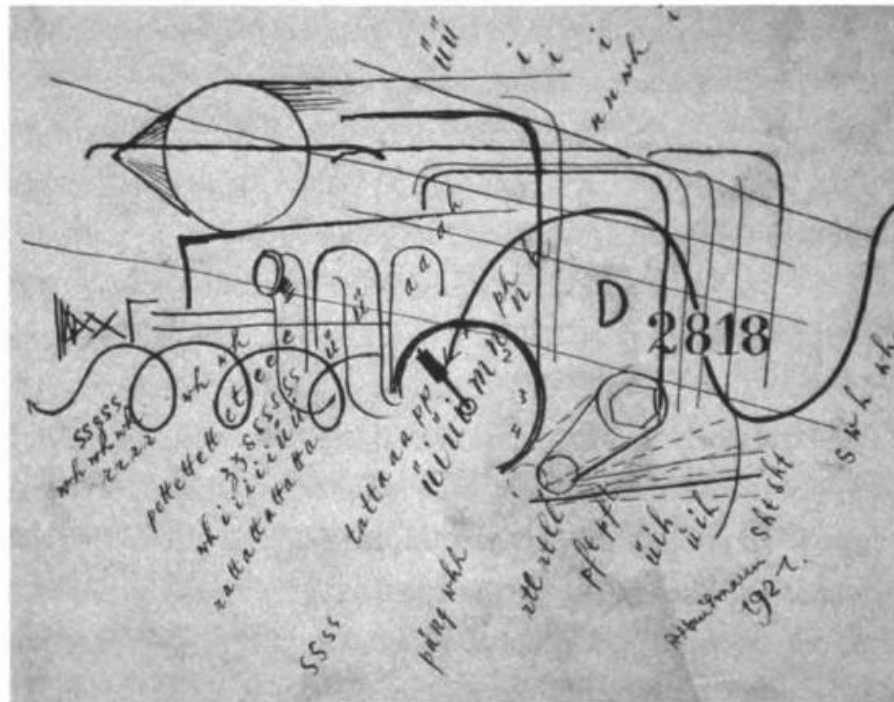
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2. Sound stripes by Vogt, Masolle, and Engl (Tri-Ergon Soundfilm system), ill. from Raoul Hausmann, "From Talking Film to Optophonetics," *G: Zeitschrift für Gestaltung* (1923)

3. Raoul Hausmann, Technical sketch after Tri-Ergon Soundfilm system, from *Notizbuch 7, Beilage 9*, Bl. 1 (BG-RHA 1754), Berlinische Galerie, Berlin

4. Raoul Hausmann, D2818 Phonem — Phonetisches Gedicht mit mechanischer Unterermalung (D2818 Phonem — Phonetic Poem with Mechanical Background), 1921, ink on paper, Private collection

restoring them by passing the film in front of a selenium cell. However, since the sound could not yet be amplified, it could only be heard through a telephone receiver.²⁷ Ruhmer's device only became viable in the early 1920s. The Tri-Ergon company, consisting of the engineers Hans Vogt, Jo Engl, and Joseph Masolle, added a microphone (Kathodophon) and an electrostatic loudspeaker (Statophon) to it, with the result that in September 1922 viewers at the Alhambra cinema, Berlin, were shown the first film produced by this technique in Germany. This major technological breakthrough placed the German film industry in the vanguard of the history of talking film. A detailed account given in the *Zeitschrift für Feinmechanik* in 1921²⁸ seems to have been the direct inspiration for Hausmann's descriptions in his text of 1923, "From Talking Film to Optophonetics." It includes an epigraph of several photograms of a sound film produced by Tri-Ergon, in which the sound track can be seen outside the perforations of the film negatives (fig. 2).²⁹

Furthermore, Hausmann had genuinely absorbed all the components and stages of this technological process into his graphic thinking. In his working notebooks he copied simplified diagrams of conversion and amplification devices (fig. 3).³⁰ His programmatic collage of 1920, *PRE* (Berlinische Galerie, Berlin), already included an ink drawing, a simplified image of a reel of film pulled by a projector. But it was the more specialized imagery of the transduction mechanisms used in early talking pictures that influenced a unique poem-drawing, his *D2818 Phonem — Phonetisches Gedicht mit mechanischer Unterermalung* (*D2818 Phonem — Phonetic Poem with Mechanical Background*), 1921 (fig. 4). The "diagrammatic" quality of this drawing, in the sense it is understood by David Joselit,³¹ demonstrates a shift away from the functional logic associated with machines. A structural interplay exists between the mechanical components through which vectors of energy pass and the components of a language splintered into single letters. This polyvalent, indeterminate interplay echoes the dynamic proliferation of a two-way conversion, or a multidirectional process in actuality. The splintering of language here is the final result of a graphic philosophy that associates the expression of movement with the vibrating continuum of electrical energy.

The *Dadasoph's* appropriation of the raw materials of light and sound places the question of language at the core of physiological experience, understood as a "translation" process carried out by the senses. The idea, which had already appeared in Marcus' work, that the senses function in a mutually compensatory way and are closely interdependent, embodied a possible semantic revolution. This is precisely the significance of Hausmann's optophonetics: "the brain, the central organ, completes, as it were, one

5. **Francis Picabia**, *Optophone II*, c. 1921/1922–c. 1924/1926, oil and Ripolin on canvas, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris

6. **August Sander**, *Raoul Hausmann als Tänzer (Raoul Hausmann as Dancer)*, 1929, photograph, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin

sense through another.”³² Although Hausmann’s conception of the Optophone was based on methods explored by the film industry to develop a properly synchronized speaking film, it had an even more specific antecedent among the devices for electrical conversion invented in the early twentieth century. The term itself was used in 1912 by the physician Fournier d’Albe for the instrument he developed for the blind at the University of Birmingham, using a selenium cell. First designed as a device to capture light in order to help blind people move around, it was redesigned in 1914 as an aid to reading. The instrument consisted of a row of five very narrow light rays that in a sense “scanned” the printed page, sending back to the selenium cell a variety of reflections of light then produced in the form of sound.³³ These sounds had been deliberately harmonized: each of the five light rays produced a given musical note. After a difficult learning process, the blind person recognized through this “optical music” the printed characters from the alternation of black and white shapes exposed to the photoelectric cell. The machine, mass-produced by the early 1920s, received wide publicity in both Europe and the United States and, of course, in Hausmann’s technical bible, the *Zeitschrift für Feinmechanik*.³⁴

Demonstrations of this apparatus in Paris between 1921 and 1922 undoubtedly helped inspire Picabia’s two canvases of the same name, *Optophone I*, c. 1922 (Private collection), and *Optophone II*, c. 1921/1922–c. 1924/1926 (fig. 5).³⁵ In both compositions



the motif of the target, overlaid with female nudes, establishes a shift from the optical to the tactile. The nudes, together with the allusions to sexual organs particularly evident in the second version, which was reworked shortly before being sold in 1926, constitute a fanciful phantasmagoria. This was inspired by the public demonstrations of the Optophone performed by a young pupil of Fournier d’Albe, the blind Mary Jameson. For Picabia, the mechanism seems to be the basis for a joke directed at himself: this machine, designed to replace the Braille alphabet, or rather to make use of the tactile vision of blind persons through a “disembodied” electrical pro-



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decade. As he indicates in “Optophonetics,” Hausmann intended to provide the (existing) Optophone with “appropriate technical equipment.” We do not know whether he was acquainted with the first version of the apparatus, the one that captured movement, but it is clear that the *Dadasoph* meant to make use of the machine’s functional principles to create a total art, aimed at expanding the horizons of proprioceptive space and eliminating distance. This futurist theme is omnipresent in the theories of optophonetics. Pushing the language of words to its limits, it refers to the kinetic, fusil possession of space that Hausmann found in dance, the supremely proprioceptive art: “The dancer is he who sets space in movement, in the sense that he lives in himself all the relationships of spatial tensions and gives them the appearance of shape by means of his body” (fig. 6).³⁶ In the artist’s theory, the Optophone is both a real subject for technical research and a metaphor for a universal convertibility of the senses, an extended sensoriality in direct contact with the continuous movement of vibratory space.

It was not until the early 1930s that Hausmann described the technical functioning of a real mechanism that was intended to synthesize the methods of electrical conversion. In the first issue of the periodical *Gegner* (Opponent), founded in Berlin in 1930 by Franz Jung, he published a long summary, “Die überzüchteten Künste: Die neuen Elemente der Malerei und der Musik” (The Overdeveloped Arts: The New Elements of Painting and Music), in which he laid out his ideas about “electronic sound” and the “light keyboard.” We shall confine ourselves to an outline of the complex construction

cess, led him to hold up to ridicule the highly sexed synesthesia he had initially expressed through the subject of jazz in 1913 with his two watercolors *Chanson nègre I* and *Chanson nègre II* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). From the proprioceptive, fusil space of his New York watercolors from 1913, Picabia was moving toward a voyeuristic approach, based on the distance, not the proximity, of the object of desire.

There is no explicit mention of Fournier d’Albe’s Optophone in Hausmann’s texts; as with Picabia, the machine is alluded to but not defined. Yet in the early 1920s the Optophone apparently was widely known, while the very first experiments with sound film were only becoming marketable in the second half of the

7. Raoul Hausmann, *Schéma de l'Optophone (simplifié) (Diagram of Optophone [Simplified])*, after 1960, ink on paper, location unknown,

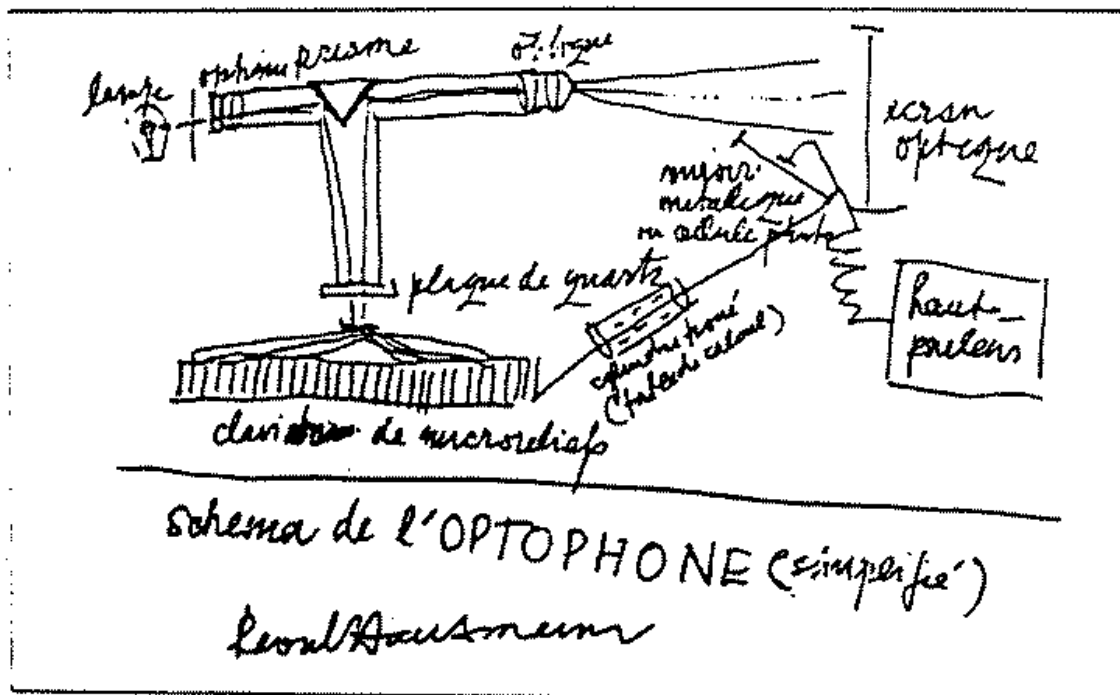
from Jean-François Bory, *Prologomènes à une monographie de Raoul Hausmann* (Paris, 1976)

described by Hausmann. An artist must first incorporate color into the existing mechanisms. To do so he imagines a keyboard with scores of keys corresponding to the same number of surfaces of bichromatized gelatin, each with a pattern that absorbs light to a greater or lesser degree. This was an “adaptation” of the patterns of lighter or darker stripes at varied intervals that appear on the earliest soundtracks laid on film stock. Hausmann chose for this purpose a photosensitive substance, chromatic acid, which reacts to light by marking a surface with a shallow relief; it had the added advantage of being more resistant to repeated projection than the bromide paper used in filmmaking. The bichromatized gelatin surfaces acted as filters that, when selected one by one on the keyboard, cut the light into a variety of shapes and intensities. This action, combined with that of a prism, diffracted the light into various zones of color. The parts of the spectrum that appear on the screen therefore result from the filtering action of the gelatin plates. Last, a photoelectric cell intercepts the light values projected on the screen and translates them, in real time, into sound values via a loudspeaker. The machine described here appeared in a drawing of the early 1950s that is now lost, Hausmann’s *Schéma de l'Optophone (simplifié) (Diagram of the Optophone [simplified])* (fig. 7).³⁷ Hausmann concludes his description of the “invention,” which condemned the old forms of music and painting to obsolescence, with an unexpected appeal:

It is possible for this keyboard to exploit structurally the tension checks between the optical and acoustic values in such a way that, given the choice of keys for the gelatin plates, one can play on it optical-phonetic compositions of an absolutely new kind, regarding which the Patent Office declared “no sort of pleasant effect, in the usual sense, could come out of that.”

Dear musicians, dear painters: you will see with your ears and you will hear with your eyes and you will run mad! The electric Spektrophone obliterates your notions of sound, color, and shape; of all of your arts there remains nothing, alas, nothing at all!³⁸

In 1927 Hausmann seems to have tried to obtain a patent for his instrument. As he explained early in the 1930s: “Color keyboards, the basic principles of which I had worked out by 1921 and of which I had for the first time in 1927 presented five different versions to the German Patent Office, were technically so unusual that the Office doubted they could be marketed, and went so far as to write as the reason for refusing, ‘that nothing humanly pleasant could come of it.’”³⁹ Thereafter he radicalized the reason for refusal in an antifunctionalist way. The project may well have been rejected because it was



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“technically quite possible, but it is hard to see what it could be used for.”⁴⁰ Unfortunately, this information cannot be verified in the artist’s archives, and the archival records from that time in the Berlin patent office were destroyed during the war. The earliest correspondence with the patent office extends only to the end of 1930, shortly before the artist decided to publish the technical details of his Optophone in *Gegner*. These do not relate to an opto-acoustic mechanism in the theatrical sense but to a “calculating machine on a photo-electric basis” designed in collaboration with the engineer Daniel Broïdo—a sort of analog computer that was to represent the sole concrete—and useful—result of this long technical meditation.⁴¹ Hausmann’s comments after the event nevertheless point to a significant paradox: he meant to obtain a patent—a license to market a functional product—for an apparatus that rendered existing machines useless, one of which was already patented under the name Optophone.

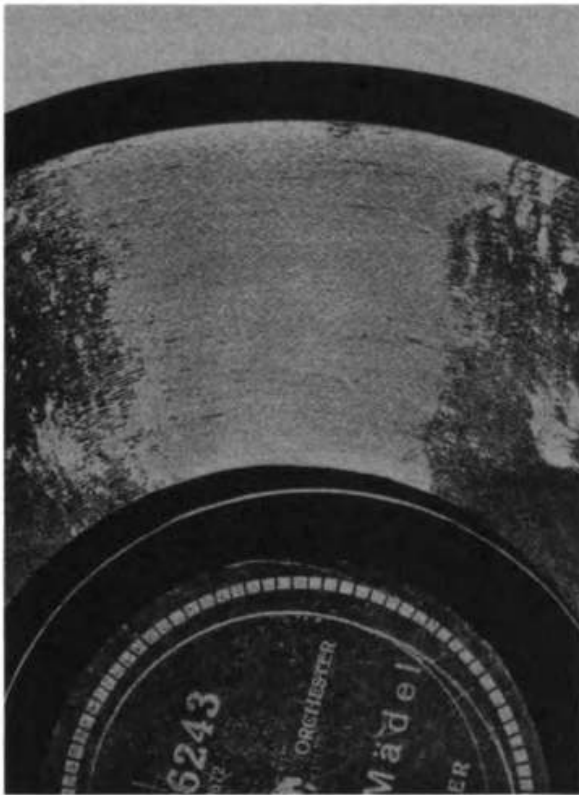
Flow and Reversibility

Although we cannot yet be entirely sure about the circumstances in which the Optophone was developed in 1922 and the “electric Spektrophone” in 1931, or about the parallel transformation into a calculating machine, the fact remains that Hausmann’s project does not quite fit the artist-engineer’s fascination with technology. Beyond the synthesizing that sets his theory opposite to Marinetti’s, we find a strong tendency to hybridization in the total electric art hypothesized by the Dadasoph, not only between the sensorial effects he hoped to achieve but also in the assembling of different mechanisms for converting elec-

trical power that control the interplay of these effects. A significant aspect of optophonetics theory in this sense is the principle of reversibility to which it refers. Hausmann's fondness for the shift from image to sound and back to image is not unrelated to the first experiments with television at the turn of the century, using the selenium cell: the photoelectric transformation of the image into sound defined an "intermediate stage," before the new transformation into an image on a distant reading screen.⁴² The electrical methods developed in optophonetics certainly imply the notion of "touching at a distance," which Hausmann wished to generalize. In his notes of 1922 announcing an optophonic weltanschauung, he reverts to the idea of a "central organ" of the senses, inspired by Marcus, in order to call for the development of innovative mechanisms: the "teleoptor," "telephor," "telehaptor," "teleodor," and "telegustor" (tele-seer, tele-hearer, tele-toucher, tele-smeller, tele-taster).⁴³ Perceiving electric media as real organic extensions, as the instruments of "eccentric sensoriality," remarkably foreshadows the vision developed by McLuhan some forty years later of the media as "translators":

Our very word "grasp" or "apprehension" points to the process of getting at one thing through another, of handling and sensing many facets at a time through more than one sense at a time. It begins to be evident that "touch" is not skin but the interplay of the senses, and "keeping in touch" or "getting in touch" is a matter of fruitful meaning of the senses, of sight translated into movement, and taste and smell.⁴⁴

In the context of the Berlin avant-garde in the early 1920s, such an idea inevitably clashed with Moholy-Nagy's well-known theoretical position with regard to the "productive" process that can be obtained from the translating media. In July 1922 the Hungarian artist published in *De Stijl* magazine his famous essay "Production-Reproduction," in which he sought to draw a general theory of the processes of creation through direct imprint on the reproductive supports of photographic paper and record. He established a parallel between the use of the photogram by both dadaists and constructivists and that of a sound-producing object yet to be invented: a record printed by hand, by the imprint directly drawn by the artist on the wax matrix. Photography and recording thus would be used to produce images and sounds never experienced before, rather than reproducing the existing ones. This idea was very close to the haptics theory as Hausmann had developed it a few months earlier, in his "presentist" manifesto and then in his "Optophonetics." Moholy-Nagy's approach, like Hausmann's, based its legitimacy on the idea of man's sensorial "perfectibility," but his point of view takes an opposite position: "this perfecting process is the fact and the duty of art, since the overall effect depends on the perfection of the receiving organ, to the extent that art does its utmost to bring out new, more promising relationships between as yet unknown optical and acoustical phenomena and other functional phenomena, and to the extent that it obliges the functional or-



8. László Moholy-Nagy, *Grammophonplatte (Gramophone Record)*, illustrated in his *Malerei, Photographie, Film* (Berlin, 1925)

8.

writing (fig. 8).⁴⁶ Hausmann described very clearly in 1921 his idea of basing art on light waves alone, and the possibility of translating light energy into sound energy. Yet, it was not until 1923 that he directly focused on the principle of electronic music as such, consciously created from a visual vocabulary.⁴⁷ Above and beyond the obvious sense of rivalry, the attitudes of the two artists show shifting interests. These shifts can be measured by the opposition noted by Friedrich Kittler, in his history of the media, between *translation*, an ancient practice of language, and *transposition*, as made possible by the technology of electrical conversion. “While translation loses all special features in the need to achieve an overall equivalent,” he notes, “transposition by media proceeds in a punctual, serial manner.”⁴⁸ While the former is involved qualitatively in the process, the latter operates functionally in a stage-by-stage result. An overview of the methods of electrical conversion and the complexity of their combinations in optophonetics shows Hausmann’s aesthetic approach to be closer to the dynamics of the translation process than to the fruitful end product of transposition as proposed by Moholy-Nagy in the same period.

The genesis of the Optophone project certainly coincides, in Hausmann’s career, with his distancing himself from the Berlin Dada Club by the series of demonstrations he organized with Kurt Schwitters. On 6 September 1921 in Prague Hausmann gave, along with Schwitters, his first presentation of “Merz & Präsentismus: Neue Lyrik” (Merz and Presentism: New Poetry), a lecture rallying support for Merz. That same year he wrote an article, still unpublished, “Immer an der Wand lang, immer an der Wand lang. Manifest von Dadas Tod in Berlin” (Another brick in the wall, another brick in the wall. Manifesto of Dada’s Death in Berlin), claiming he had dug the grave of dadaism.⁴⁹ The fact remains

gans to assimilate these relationships.”⁴⁵ Moholy-Nagy was closer to constructivism than to dadaism in this respect, giving the artist the task of modeling human sensorial functioning and reflexes rather than having art illustrate or exteriorize a physiological blueprint supposedly already present in every human being. Inspired by the creation of new methods of making music, he envisaged a systematic examination of the grooves of the record to establish a kind of “alphabet” of sound

that his approach to new technology was inspired by something other than the goal of Moholy-Nagy's research at the same time, which was to create and master a new alphabet of sounds. We should instead look for an equivalent to the experiments with abstract film carried out by Eggeling and Richter in the same years. The "Zweite Präsentistische Deklaration" (Second Presentist Declaration), published jointly by Hausmann and Eggeling in MA in 1923, implies a violent rejection of the productivist aspects of international constructivism with the following argument: "Our attachment to physiology and to the physical approach to formal function sets us in opposition to the techniques and arts that have existed until now; for we observe that no field of human work or behavior is there of itself: it is, in fact, linked in each of us to an analytical process at the subconscious level, beyond the inadequacies and functional inhibitions of human psychology."⁵⁰

As Malcolm Turvey pointed out recently in his analysis of Richter's concept of "universal language," the search for a new language in the abstract image in motion is partly linked to the exploration of the deep-seated mechanisms of perception: "when referring, albeit briefly, to his search for a universal language through his abstract work, Richter tends to talk about uncovering the species-wide laws of perception 'hardwired' in the brain."⁵¹ This new language resembles constructivist elementarism in its methods, but is quite different in its motivation and in the way it operates vis-à-vis the viewer. Where the constructivist artist, by an act of *Gestaltung* (construction), modeled the new man, the elementarist branch of Dada strove to get close to the most primitive conditions of perception. The abstract image, set in motion, invites the viewer to a hypnotic involvement. For Richter as well as Hausmann, electrical technology represents a turning away from the primitivist approach, an attempt to inscribe the work in the immediacy of the liberated unconscious. It was to activate new systems of perception, to free the viewer into the flow itself. The flow is reversible, both in the principle of Optophonetics and in Richter's masterpiece of cinematography, *Rythmus 21*, in which the rhythmic dynamic, based on many instants where the image is inverted (background/shape, positive/negative), rejects the idea of progression in favor of that of process.

A closer inspection shows that this is exactly the program described in the "Appel pour un art élémentaire" of October 1921:

caught up in the march of our times, with elementary art we proclaim the renewal of our conception, of our awareness of the energy sources that endlessly intersect, modeling the spirit and structure of time, giving birth to art, a pure thing that, freed from utility and beauty, springs forth, elemental, from the individual.⁵²

"Elementary art," which historians of Dada usually consider the sign of the constructivist turning point, also turned out to be one of the main characteristics of the culmination of dadaism. The final sentences of this manifesto briefly reunited Hausmann

and Moholy-Nagy before their respective aesthetic trajectories diverged. Constructivist elementarism was to take up the project for transforming man through the *Gestaltung* of his environment, while Dada elementarism focused on the most primitive structures of awareness, not forming them but liberating them, from the subconscious to the surface. The resulting eradication of language, the dissolution of music itself in the vibratory continuum of sound and pure rhythmic pulsation, derived from Dada's vertiginous regressive energy. Moreover, they bequeathed to the experimental field of action that was Dada the beginnings of a "tribal" history of the media. This history is resistant to the idea of production, in which, from John Cage to Nam June Paik, by way of McLuhan's theories, the technologies engendered by electricity are interpreted in terms of interaction with and equivalence to the electric energy inherent in the nervous system of a human being.

NOTES

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1 László Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography, Film*, with note by Hans M. Wingler and postscript by Otto Stelzer, trans. Janet Seligman (London, 1969), 22.

2 Alexander László, *Farblichtmusik* (Leipzig, 1925).

3 Raoul Hausmann, "Optophonetika," *Veshch'-Gegenstand-Objet* 3 (May 1922). Trans. from Russian, in repr. with vol. of comments (Baden, 1994), 121. This text was later reprinted in Hungarian in *MA* 1 (October 1922).

4 The relevant notion of an "elementary art" in the work of the artists mentioned is not to deny the importance of the declaration signed by Raoul Hausmann, Hans Arp, Iwan Puni, and László Moholy-Nagy, "Anruf zur elementaren Kunst," *De Stijl* 4, no. 10 (October 1921): 156. This is generally considered one of the clues to the transition between Dada and "international constructivism," to which we will return later.

5 Raoul Hausmann, *Courrier Dada* (Paris, 1958), 89.

6 Michael Erlhoff, in his excellent monograph Raoul Hausmann, *Dada-soph: Versuch einer Politisierung der Ästhetik* (Hannover, 1982), 131–145, devotes a long "digression" to the theory of the Optophone, which is analyzed as a "sensory utopia"

descended from the chromatic keyboards. Timothy O. Benson in Raoul Hausmann and Berlin Dada (Ann Arbor, 1987), mentions the Optophone in the last chapter of his book, significantly titled "After Dada." See also Eva Züchner, ed., *Scharfrichter der bürgerlichen Seele: Raoul Hausmann in Berlin, 1900–1933, Unveröffentlichte Briefe, Texte, Dokumente, aus den Künstler-Archiven der Berlinischen Galerie* (Berlin, 1998).

7 Raoul Hausmann, "Ausblick auf Elektronen-Kunst," *Manuskripte* 2 (1967): 17–19.

8 Eva Züchner, "Aux sources de la révolte," in Raoul Hausmann [exh. cat., Musée d'Art Moderne de Saint-Étienne] (Saint-Étienne, 1994), 9–21.

9 This book was published by Der Sturm, Berlin, in 1918. Hausmann learned of it earlier through Friedlander.

10 Letter of 23 November 1916, Ralf Burmeister, Eckard Füllus, Karin Hoerstel, eds., *Hannah Höch: Eine Lebenscollage* [exh. cat., Berlinische Galerie] (Berlin, 1989), 1:235.

11 Raoul Hausmann, "PRÉsentismus: Gegen den Puffkeismus der deutschen Seele," dated February 1921, *De Stijl* 4, no. 7 (September 1921): 141.

12 The text of this manifesto had been read out loud in the Théâtre de l'Œuvre on 14 January 1921. The Paris dadaists in the audience, especially Picabia, expressed lively hostility.

13 Filippo T. Marinetti, "Le Tactilisme," tract dated 19 January 1921.

14 Marinetti, "Le Tactilisme."

15 Marinetti acknowledged receiving it in an undated letter to Hausmann, probably sent in the spring of 1921; Hannah Höch Archiv, Berlinische Galerie, 1989, 2:45.

16 Hausmann, "PRÉsentismus," 141.

17 Jean d'Udine (pseudonym of Albert Cozanet), *L'Art et le geste* (Paris, 1910), 121, "two senses can never be interdependent nor even communicate in sympathy without touch being used as an intermediary." On this subject, see the first theories of proprioception analyzed by Arnauld Pierre, "La Musique des gestes: sens du mouvement et images motrices dans les débuts de l'abstraction," *Aux Origines de l'abstraction 1800-1914* [exh. cat., Musée d'Orsay] (Paris, 2003), 85-101.

18 Filippo T. Marinetti, "La peinture futuriste," *Excelsior* (15 February 1912). It should be noted that this text is a reprint of a lecture given in Italian by the futurist painter Umberto Boccioni to the Circolo Internazionale of Rome on 29 May 1911: Boccioni, *Gli Scritti editi e inediti*, ed. Zeno Birolli (Milan, 1972), 2:11.

19 Fedele Azari, "Théâtre aérien," April 1919.

20 Hausmann, "PRÉsentismus," 140-141.

21 Hausmann is referring to the first article devoted to the experiments of Thomas Wilfred, a Danish artist who emigrated to the United States to join the Prometheans, a group founded in Long Island by Claude Bragdon. See Virginia Farmer, "Mobile Colour: A New Art," *Vanity Fair* (December 1920): 53. This review of a studio performance was a lasting source of confusion in Hausmann's remarks. The journalist described not only the colored shapes floating in space (the photograph that is included, showing the pure epiphany of light against a black ground, confirms this impression), but also a continuous electronic sound, "a drone" (probably interference), which must have led Hausmann to believe that the Clavilux set in joint motion both light frequencies and sound frequencies, while the mechanism was actually silent. The first public demonstration of the Clavilux, accompanied by instrumental music, was given at the Neighborhood Playhouse, New York, on 10 January 1922.

22 Hausmann, "PRÉsentismus," 141.

23 RHA-BG 1754, RHA-BG 1757, and RHA-BG 1760. I am most grateful to Gunda Luyken, director, Künstler-Archiv, Berlinische Galerie, for helping me access these archival holdings and for informative conversations on the subject of optophonetics.

24 Hausmann, "Optophonetika."

25 Letter to Henri Chopin dated 23 June 1963, quoted in Jacques Donguy, "L'Optophone de Raoul Hausmann," *Art Press* 255 (March 2000): 56.

26 Letter to Henri Chopin, 23 June 1963.

27 Ernst Ruhmer, "The Photographophone," *Scientific American* (20 July 1901). See also the extensive chapter on this machine in Ernst Ruhmer, *Drahtlose Telefonie* (Berlin, 1907), 7-30. Louis AnceI's article, "Le Sélénium et ses applications actuelles," *Chimie et Industrie* 2, no. 3 (1 March 1919): 245-259, published in German with the title "Die Vielseitige Verwendung des Selens," *Zeitschrift für Feinmechanik* (20 January 1920), covers in detail the functional relationship between Duddell's lamp and optical sound on film stock.

28 "Ein neues Verfahren zur Herstellung sprechender Filme," *Zeitschrift für Feinmechanik* (20 September 1921): 1.

29 Raoul Hausmann, "Vom sprechenden Film zur Optophonetik," *G: Material für elementare Gestaltung* 1 (July 1923).

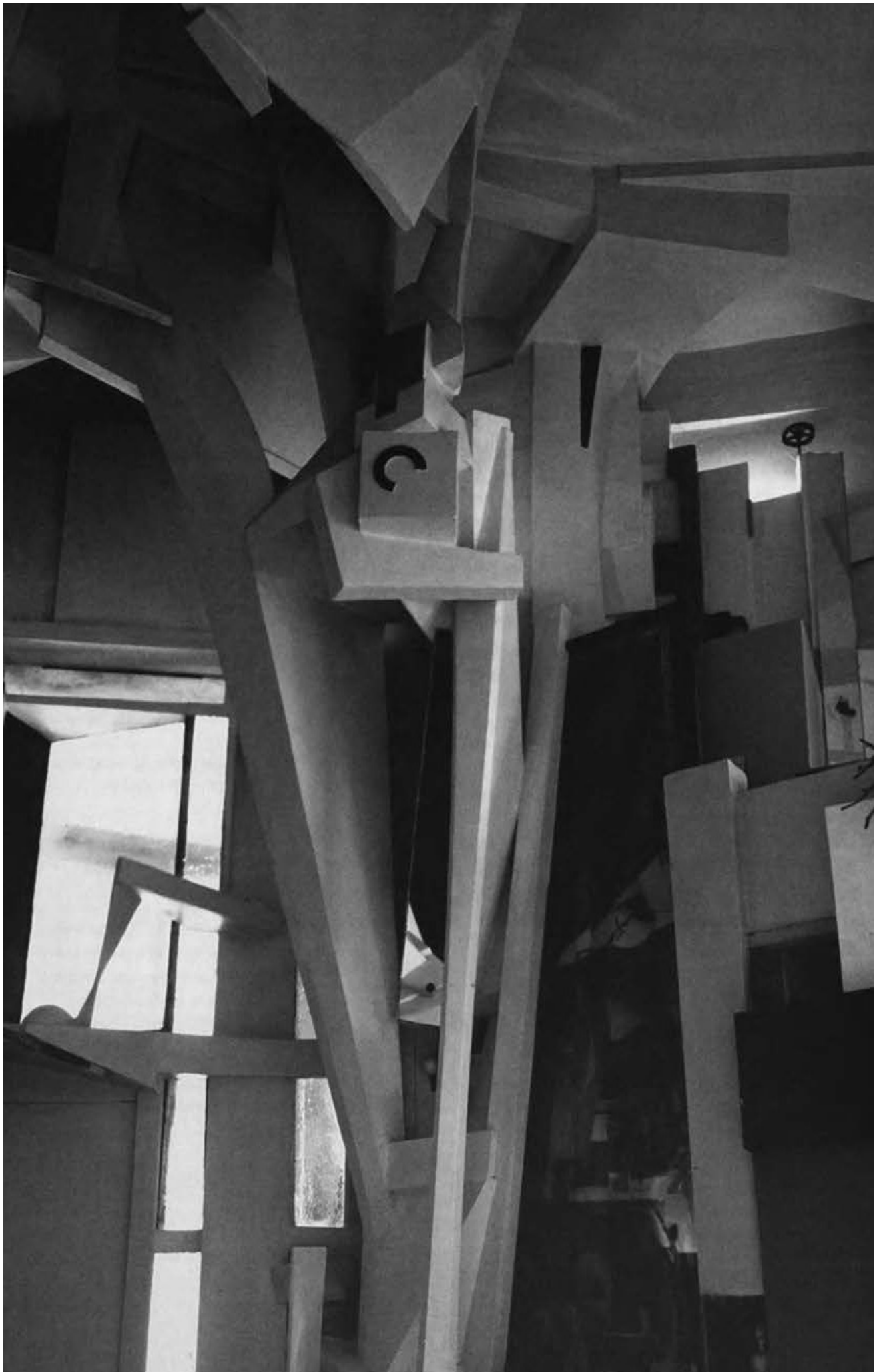
30 See especially the "Tri-Ergon" device, reproduced in *Notizbuch* 7 (1922-1923), "Texte zur Physik, Optik und Optophonetik" (BG-RHA 1754, Beilage 9, Bl. 3), and its graphic reinterpretation (Beilage 9, Bl. 1), Berlinische Galerie.

31 I refer to his essay on the form of the diagram in Duchamp and Picabia, published in this volume.

32 Raoul Hausmann and Viking Eggeling, "Zweite Präsentistische Deklaration," *MA* 8, nos. 5-6 (1923), n.p.

33 E. E. Fournier d'Albe, "The Type-reading Optophone," *Nature* (3 September 1914): 4.

- 34 Léon de Clérault, "Le Sélénium est appelé à révolutionner la physique," *La Science et la vie* 7, no. 49 (February–March 1920): 295–305; "The Type-reading Optophone," *Scientific American* 123, no. 19 (6 November 1920). The presentation of a new model of the Optophone produced by the English firm Ban & Stroud, published in the London periodical *The Electrician* 85 (1920): 183, was translated in *Zeitschrift für Feinmechanik* in 1921.
- 35 The periodical *La Science et la vie*, in which the important study on selenium of Léon de Clérault had appeared and which devoted a detailed chapter on the Optophone of Fournier d'Albe (see note 34), is known as one of the most important iconographic sources of Pica-bia during the second decade of the 1900s.
- 36 Raoul Hausmann, "Die Absichten des Theaters PRÉ," *Der Sturm* 13, no. 9 (September 1922): 138.
- 37 First published in Jean-François Bory, *Prolegomènes à une monographie de Raoul Hausmann* (Paris, 1972), n. p.
- 38 Raoul Hausmann, "Die überzüchteten Künste: Die neuen Elemente der Malerei und der Musik," *Gegner* 1 (15 June 1931): 17.
- 39 Raoul Hausmann, "Über Farbenklaviere," *A bis Z* 3 (February 1932): 88.
- 40 Letter to Henri Chopin, 23 June 1963. The same explanation appears in a letter dated 6 December, sent to Paul de Vree, *Factotum Art* 1, no. 1 (1977), quoted by Michael Erhoff, ed., in Raoul Hausmann, *Texte bis 1933* (Munich, 1982), 2:214.
- 41 Several versions of a patent, "Verfahren zur fotoelektrischen Schaltung von Rechen-Zähl-Registrier- und Sortiermaschine," can be found in the correspondence of Raoul Hausmann with Daniel Broïdo and the Reichspatentamt Berlin. The first (RHA-BG 1118) accompanies a letter dated 5 July 1930. It was not until 1934 that Hausmann succeeded in getting the London patent office to accept a patent entitled "Improvements in and relating to a calculating apparatus," Patent Specification no. 446.338, co-signed with Broïdo. It is reproduced in Erhoff, *Texte bis 1933*, 2:215.
- 42 Clérault, "Le Sélénium . . .," 1920; Ancel, "Le Sélénium . . .," 1919 and 1920. In "Vom sprechenden Film zur Optophonetik," 1923, Hausmann mentions a procedure of this kind with an obscure reference: "Die Zukunft des elektrischen Fernsehers," by a certain Plenner.
- 43 "Versuch einer kosmischen Ontographie. Optophonische Weltanschauung." Text dated "Ende Juli, Anfang Dezember 1922," *Notizbuch* 8, BG-RHA 1757. In another unpublished text, "Optophonetische Erklärung," typescript dated 1937, preamble to a work on optophonetics that never materialized, Hausmann hints broadly at the cosmic resonance of the haptic revolution: "Let us create our lives in an optophonetic manner. Time is a rhythm in which space rings and gleams . . . Build optophones and listen to the light of the world," Fonds Raoul Hausmann, Musée Départemental de Rochechouart. These archives also contain a summary of the book Hausmann intended to write, under the title *Die abstrakte Formwelt und das Optophon* (The Abstract World of Form and the Optophone). I am grateful to Arielle Pélenq, director, Musée Départemental Rochechouart, for access to these archives, and to Barbara Lindlar for help with my research.
- 44 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964; repr. Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1995), 334.
- 45 László Moholy-Nagy, "Produktion-Reproduktion," *De Stijl* 7 (July 1922).
- 46 The idea, already announced in "Produktion-Reproduktion," was developed in László Moholy-Nagy, "Neue Gestaltung in der Musik: Möglichkeiten des Grammons," *Der Sturm* 14 (July 1923). On this subject, see Thomas Y. Levin's comments in "Tones Out of Nowhere: Rudolf Pfenninger and the Archaeology of Synthetic Sound," *Grey Room* 12 (Summer 2003): 32–79.
- 47 In "Vom sprechenden Film zur Optophonetik," which appeared the same month as Moholy-Nagy's second text on sound writing in *Der Sturm* (14 July 1923).
- 48 Friedrich Kittler, *Aufschreibesysteme 1800–1900* (Munich, 1987), 271.
- 49 Probably Berlin, 1921, BG-RHA 1249, Züchner, Scharfrichter, 117–125.
- 50 Hausmann and Eggeling, "Zweite Präsentistische Deklaration."
- 51 Malcom Turvey, "Dada between Heaven and Hell: Abstraction and Universal Language in the Rhythm Films of Hans Richter," *October: Dada, A Special Issue* 105 (Summer 2003): 33, Leah Dickerman, ed.
- 52 Hausmann, Arp, Puni, Moholy-Nagy, "Anruf zur elementaren Kunst."



Merz and Memory: On Kurt Schwitters | Leah Dickerman

Art-historical focus on Dada's nihilism and iconoclasm has made it difficult to see how preoccupied its players were with the question of the past. Yet several recent essays have signaled a dadaist interest in the operations of memory. Rosalind Krauss has suggested that Max Ernst's overpaintings might offer a structural analogy to Sigmund Freud's model of screen memory.¹ In both Hal Foster's and Brigid Doherty's writing, dadaist interest in traumatic shock—in which repetitive behavior masks a disturbed recollection—plays a key role.² Other Dada activity suggests a broad fixation with mnemonic concerns. The Zurich dadaists' attention to dance and the rhythmic cadence of sound poetry can be understood in part as an effort to tap into a primeval collective unconscious—a submerged common memory trace. Hans Arp's chance procedures, by contrast, seem assertively anti-mnemonic, taking production out of the realm of practice and experience. In New York in 1915, Francis Picabia made a group of machine images with components invoking rotation, labeled, "Cette chose est faite pour perpétuer mon souvenir" (This Thing Is Made to Perpetuate My Memory), "Révérence. Objet qui ne fait pas l'éloge du temps passé" (Reverence: Object That Does Not Eulogize the Past), and "Souvenir de rien" (Souvenir of Nothing). In each of these cases, memory is figured in ways that point to the difficulty or inaccessibility of recollection. Dada's concerns seem to be as much forgetting as remembering. All this is to say, there is a lot to suggest that Dada artists were deeply anxious about the status of memory under the conditions of modernity, and that they recognized what might be called a memory crisis.

The term is Richard Terdiman's, coined to define the urgency of concern about memory in the modern period, which is evident in the work of a broad range of intellectuals, including Ferdinand Tönnies, Charles Baudelaire, Marcel Proust, Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, and Freud.³ He describes the emergence, spurred by broad cultural transformations, of a certain insecurity about the relation with the past that served to define "memory as a problem, as a site and source of cultural disquiet."⁴ Central to the transformation of the experience of memory in the nineteenth century was the shift from the central role of organic, individual memory toward the compensatory growth of peripheral or artificial mechanisms for recollection: the archive, the monument, the souvenir, and a new-media cultural industry. The sense of disturbance resulting from this and other cultural changes was perceived, paradoxically, as two simultaneous phenomena of mnemonic dysfunction: both the inadequacy and surfeit of available memory—memory in either "monstrous hypertrophy or in pitiful underdevelopment."⁵



1.

In this regard, Kurt Schwitters' work, and in particular his *Merzbau*, serves as an elucidating case study. Often cited as a precedent for postwar installation art, the *Merzbau* was an ever-expanding construction begun about 1919 that took over increasing portions of Schwitters' home. In this work, memory is tied to architecture—in particular, to the forms of the monument and the domestic interior, the public and private facets of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century bourgeois memory culture. Across much of nineteenth-century Europe, a virtual “monumentomania” emerged, in which thousands of monuments were built in public spaces as part of a complex system of ideological pageantry; in Germany, unified in January 1871, such monuments were often dedicated to themes of national identity (fig. 1).⁶ Simultaneously, the domestic interior was reconfigured as a sanctuary from the outside world, reflecting a newly modern division of public and private. Conceived as an expression of inner life and experience, the home was filled with personal mementos and collections. In the *Merzbau*, these forms, which normally inhabit divided spheres, were forced into relation with each other and were radically transfigured.

Schwitters established a Dada variant in Hannover—the city of the German bourgeoisie. In doing so, he performed the act of renaming Dada in 1919 with a neologism of his own: *Merz*. Of this, Schwitters wrote:

I called my new manner of working from the principle of using any material MERZ. That is the second syllable of *Kommerz* [commerce]. It originated from the *Merzbild* [Merzpicture], a picture in which the word *Merz*, cut-out and glued-on from an advertisement for the *KOMMERZ- UND PRIVATBANK* [Commercial and Private Bank], could be read between abstract forms. . . . When

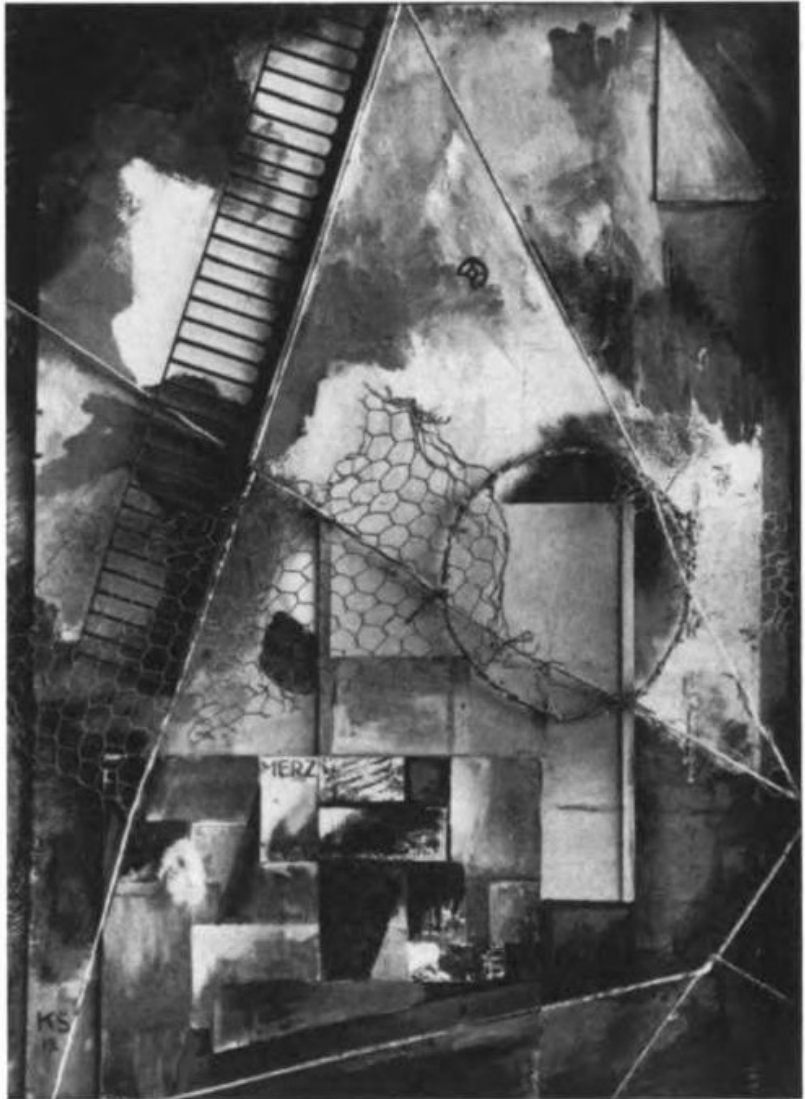
1. Denkmäler Deutschlands, in ihrem Grössenverhältnissen (Monuments of Germany, according to scale), German postcard, after 1914, Private collection

I first exhibited these pasted and nailed pictures at the Sturm [gallery] in Berlin, I searched for a generic term for this new kind of picture, because I could not define them with older concepts like Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism, or whatever. So I named all my pictures as a species *Merz*-bilder after the most characteristic one. Later I expanded the title *Merz*, first to include all my poetry, which I had written since 1917, and finally to all my relevant activities. Now I call myself *MERZ*.⁷

Schwitters often employed a rhetoric of purity to discuss his *Merz* collages, claiming that he used materials purely for formal ends, and that in doing so he effaced what he called their *eigengift*—their own special essence.⁸ Art historians have echoed this in their tendency to describe his work in terms of transcendence⁹—celebrating the artist’s magical act of transforming garbage into art. One Dada scholar writes: “Similar to children innocently and spontaneously pasting together the most incongruous things and establishing relationships between them, Schwitters attempted through his art to convey this creative, humorous, free and playful innocence.”¹⁰

Indeed, Schwitters has often been seen as a conservative within the Dada camp, a tendency fueled by Richard Huelsenbeck’s assessment of Schwitters, in denying his bid for membership in the Berlin Club Dada as someone insufficiently political and overly bourgeois. “He disliked my fighting ways,” wrote Huelsenbeck, “and I liked his static, smug middle-class world even less.”¹¹ Huelsenbeck’s characterization, launched as part of a polemic aimed at establishing a definition of Dada and intended as grounds for Schwitters’ exclusion, has permeated scholarship too in both subtle and overt ways.¹² But such positioning ignores the radicalism of Schwitters’ formal procedures—its wholesale openness to stuff of the modern world, its assault on traditional concepts of medium, and its reconfiguration of the terms of distribution. Moreover, it pushes aside what may be exactly the point: for it is not that the issue of bourgeois identity is irrelevant to Schwitters’ work, but rather that Huelsenbeck’s label, meant as a form of dismissal, might instead help us see how Schwitters is not simply bourgeois, but often excessively bourgeois, taking certain preoccupations in his work to a hyperbolic, even grotesque, extreme.

Schwitters’ *Merz* procedures are more complex than this, less innocent and certainly less clean. The first intimations exist in the word itself. *Merz*’s origins in commerce, a fragment torn from a banking advertisement, write money into the frame of the work of art (fig. 2). Resonance with other words takes it into the realm of the body: with *Schmerz* (pain), which evokes the violent mutilations of war, and with *merde* (shit),



2.

the French word of international currency, which introduces scatology. Money and *merde* then: Merz signals the return in fragmented form of what is normally repressed in art's sanctified sphere.

The scatological resonance of the word *Merz* also emphasizes the condition of Schwitters' material as waste. Famously slippery in his narration, the artist asserted at one point that *Merz* came not from commerce but instead from the German verb *ausmerzen*¹³—to reject, or perhaps the word's resonance is even stronger—to obliterate. Schwitters in fact worked with refuse of all kinds, annoying people “by writing down what they said as well as picking up what they dropped.”¹⁴ The term *Merz* thus sets up what we shall see is an important analogy operative in Schwitters' practice: between bodily waste and the detritus of a new exchange economy and media culture.

Offering a radical model of modernism, *Merz* resists purity at the level of procedure as well, announcing an expansive heterogeneity—“the principle of using any material.” Indeed, Schwitters' *Merzbilder* contain bits of packaging and advertising, and also twine, broken china, and fabric (fig. 3). The barrage of fragments, the superfluity of stuff verging on overload seems very different in kind than either cubist collage or surrealist

2. Kurt Schwitters, *Das Merzbild (The Merzpicture)*, 1919, location unknown

3. Kurt Schwitters, *Merzbild 10 A Konstruktion für edle Frauen (Merzpicture 10 A [Construction for Noble Ladies])*, 1919, Los Angeles County Museum of Art



3.

most as important, with the concept of Merz Schwitters initiates a radical shift from the optical to the tactile, jettisoning any notion of the picture plane as establishing the illusion of penetrable space. Papers, especially in the early works, were often torn rather than cut, their soft edges a marker of the manipulation of hands (fig. 4). Schwitters shows a predilection for worn surfaces, an effect the artist sometimes heightened by washing his materials before using them for collage-making.¹⁵ The surface itself was often permeated with glue. Schwitters' friend, Charlotte Wiedler, recalls: "He spread flour and water over the paper, then moved and shuffled and manipulated his scraps of paper around in the paste while the paper was wet. With his fingertips he worked little pieces of crumpled paper into the wet surface. . . ."¹⁶ Materiality in these works is not transcended but thickened. With tactility come intimations of the body.

In its assertion of the "principle of using any material," Merz obliterates one modernist dream: that of medium-specificity. It seems closer to that of another: the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a notion born of Wagnerian romanticism that imagines the fusion of word, image, and sound in a total work of art. Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* aimed at countering the pervasive compartmentalization inherent in bourgeois culture, seen

objects. Merz proposes an utterly new degree of permeability to the conceptualization of the work of art—a heightened openness to the mass-produced image, to the commodity, and, most importantly, to language itself. The frame is transgressed in a way that is literalized in Schwitters' *Merzbau*. Rather than constructing a space for contemplation, the work of art is overrun. There is no purity here because language enters—not in the sense of the word play of Pablo Picasso's *jou/jour/journal*, but in ruins of advertising, propaganda, and journalism.

Second, and this is al-



4



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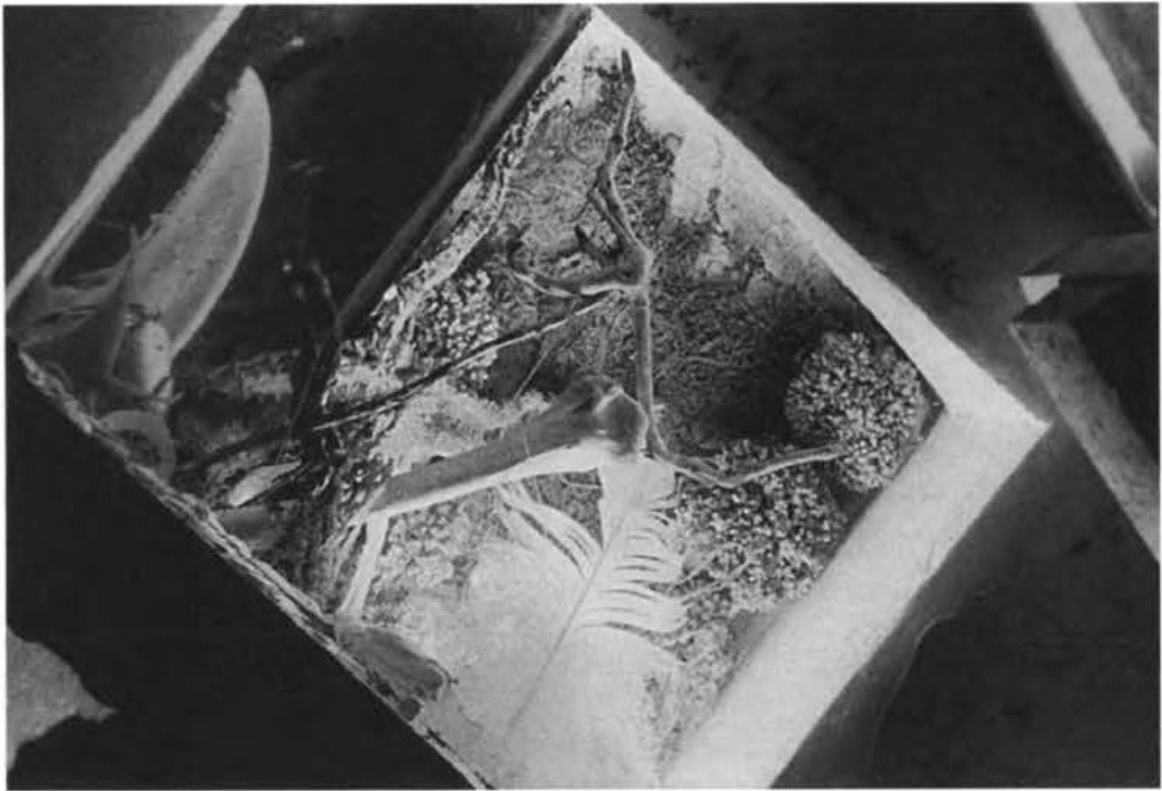
in genre art and the division of labor, and reunifying the cultural and mythic aspirations of an entire people.¹⁷ The idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* had great impact on a generation of expressionist artists, including Vasily Kandinsky, who was perhaps its most influential advocate at the beginning of the twentieth century. Kandinsky's conception privileged the possibility of synesthetic effects—the crossing and reverberation of sensory responses in a way that would circumvent forms of signification corrupted by instrumentalization, and allow expression of an inner voice, which had been rendered mute by the inhospitality of the contemporary external world. Merz not only seems to foreground the fragmentation that Wagnerian musical drama sought to overcome, but it also crucially lacks the purity inherent in Kandinsky's model. Rather, the things that serve as figures for Kandinsky's anxiety about contemporary materialism—technology, the commodity, the corporeal body, and language¹⁸—percolate throughout Merz works. Can we imagine a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, then, without purity, without even the semblance of wholeness?

Schwitters did. Establishing his own identification with the model of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Schwitters announced a project for a *Merz-gesamtwerk* already under way, the culmination of his ambitions to “efface the boundaries between the arts.”¹⁹ The transgression of boundaries of all kinds became a central impulse within the work. While for Wagner the territory for the total work of art was theater, for Schwitters it was architecture. The *Merzbau* was begun around 1919 in the interior of Schwitters' house and continued as an ongoing reconstruction of his home until 1937, when he fled to Norway to escape persecution as a degenerate artist. The work thus spanned the period between the two World Wars. Allied bombing later destroyed the building and construction inside.

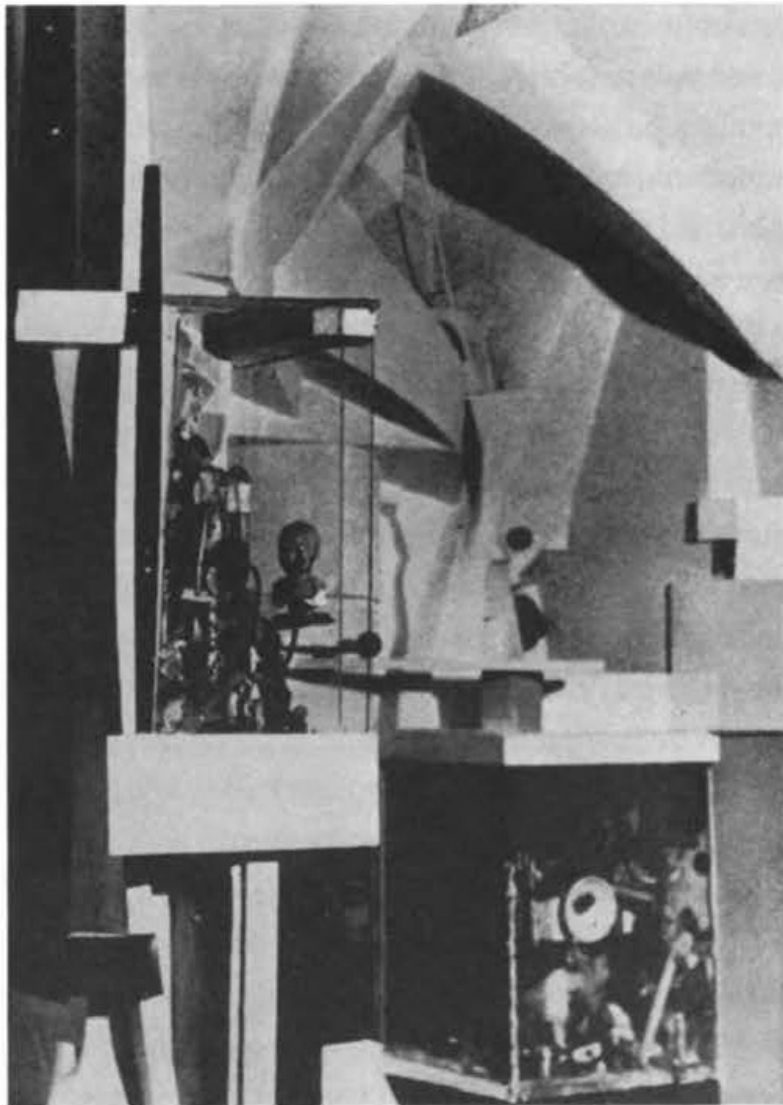
The origins of the project lie with a few sculptural assemblages made beginning in 1919 that Schwitters placed first in one of the studio rooms in his house and then in a second. The first of these constructions, called *Leiden*, was adapted around 1923 and renamed *Der Erste Tag Merzsäule* (fig. 5).²⁰ Schwitters' designation of the work as a *Säule* (column) links it, as Dorothea Dietrich has suggested, with the idea of the memorial column,²¹ and Schwitters later sometimes used the term "column" to refer to the *Merzbau* as a whole.²² But the work's vertical thrust was marked and interrupted by "apertures, concavities, hollows in which Schwitters kept souvenirs, photos, birthdates, and other respectable and less respectable data," as Huelsenbeck, an early observer of the activities within Schwitters' home, put it.²³ In its origins, then, the *Merzbau* foregrounds themes of memory, deploying accumulations of mnemonically significant forms and artifacts—those very things that reflect the artificial or extra-individual memory culture of modernity. This construction—a column replete with souvenirs—combined elements drawn from both public and private spheres. The first *Merzsäule* was soon followed by a second, which Schwitters called the *Kathedrale des Erotischen Elends* (*Cathedral of Erotic Misery*), or *KdE*. This second column, too, seems to have set the program for what followed: Schwitters sometimes also used its title to refer to the larger *Merzbau* construction. He continued to build columns, noting in 1930 that there were about ten.²⁴ Schwitters himself understood the origins of the *Merzbau* in relation to Dada, writing that "The literary content is Dadaist: that goes without saying for it dates from the year 1923, and I was a Dadaist then...."²⁵

Around 1923, the artist's son recalled, Schwitters started running strings from the columns to the wall, which were then replaced with wires; he began thickening these connections, building around the columns, and merging his sculptural assemblages with the architecture of the rooms, transforming his home into a structure that resembled a "huge, abstract grotto."²⁶ These materialized interstices produced odd niches that Schwitters named "grottoes," "holes," and "caves," and that he filled with various collected materials (figs. 6, 7). By 1925 the construction took over his studio. In 1928 the room was completely filled, and the structure still growing.²⁷

Eventually, the *Merzbau* construction broke through the outer shell of the house. It thrust through a skylight in one of the rooms it had taken over, climbing to a small platform for sunbathing poised on the peak of the roof. In another section, it moved through a hole broken in an exterior wall out onto the balcony, then through another pierced in the balcony's floor, down a spiral staircase to ground level. After a large sub-



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6. Kurt Schwitters, *Grotto in Memory of Moldé (detail of Merzbau)*, 1935, Sprengel Museum Hannover

7. Kurt Schwitters, *Golden Grotto and Grotto with Doll's Head (detail of Merzbau)*, c. 1932, Sprengel Museum Hannover

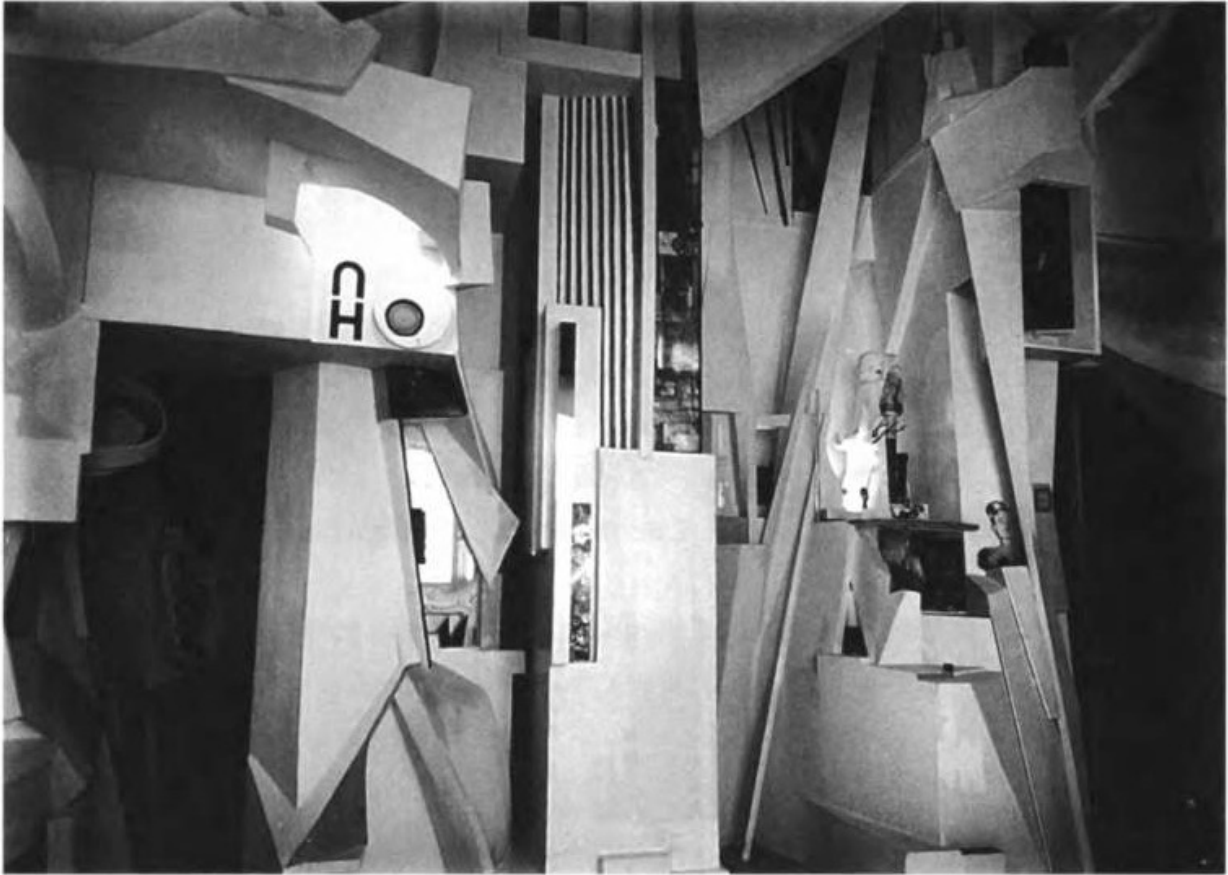
terranean cistern was discovered in the area below the floor of the balcony, the spiral staircase was extended two meters below ground to the water's surface.²⁸

As has often been noted, the *Merzbau's* construction pattern invokes organic growth.²⁹ But in its invasiveness, the *Merzbau's* growth seems to go beyond normative patterns to something more pathological—a kind of metastasis, perhaps, a runaway biological productivity that might analogize the runaway productivity of other contemporary social spheres. It moves without respect for boundaries, transgressing limits between rooms, between inside and outside, between the terrain above and below ground, from solid to liquid. Liquid—the introduction of fluid into the realm of things—seems key, standing as a marker of the processes of desublimation at work here. As the defining distinction between our dry outsides and our wet insides, it aligns the *Merzbau* with the body's inner core.

Indeed, in using architecture Schwitters develops, to a greater degree than ever before, a concept of interior for the work of art. Hans Richter visited Schwitters in 1925 and wrote of the *Merzbau*: “But this was more than a sculpture; it was a living, daily changing document on Schwitters and his friends. He explained it to me, and I saw that the whole thing was an aggregate of hollow space, a structure of concave and convex forms which hollowed and inflated the whole sculpture.”³⁰ The structure of Richter's telling—“he explained it to me and I saw . . .”—suggests that Schwitters himself saw the idea of a sculptural interior as central to his conception. Schwitters underlines this point further in a letter, writing, “by no means do I construct an interior for people to live in, for that could be done far better by the new architects. I am building an abstract (cubist) sculpture into which people can go.”³¹ The idea of the interior is above all a somatic structure.

Of course, there is a long tradition of bodily reference in architecture. In classical texts, including Leone Battista Alberti, Filarete, and Francesco di Giorgio, the body serves as a source for proportional and figurative authority, seen in canons of bodily mathematics and the anthropomorphic forms of columns, plans, and façades. Yet the body invoked within the *Merzbau* is clearly very different from the one at the center of the humanist tradition, which is whole, inviolable, and guided by the rational mind. Rather, the sense of interior suggested here, the series of holes, concavities, and protuberances within the structure, the introduction of liquid, the dissolution of boundaries all work to align the *Merzbau* with the grotesque body.

As described by Mikhail Bakhtin in his discussions of François Rabelais, the



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grotesque offers a counter model to the conception of the body as a separate, cleanly delimited entity. Instead, through emphasis on the body's orifices and protrusions, and on acts performed at the body's boundaries—eating, sneezing, defecation, and copulation—the limits between the body and the world are effaced.³² The grotesque body is less a bounded figure than parts and processes. It holds critical power in its inversion and debasement of images of authority and its resistance to sublimation. Significantly in this context, the grotesque finds an architectural correlate in its etymological origins: the grotto, the formal and conceptual antipode to the column. It derives from the Italian word *grotta*—and from the ornamental forms found during the fifteenth-century excavation of Titus' baths, called *grotteschi*. Bakhtin writes that in these rediscovered Roman ornaments, plant, animal, and human forms “seemed to be interwoven as if giving birth to each other. The borderlines that divide the kingdoms of nature in the usual picture of the world were boldly infringed.”³³ In its later development as a fashionable architectural form, the grotto—often sporting rusticated entrances, faux stalactites, and decorative seashells, interior fountains, and pools—was aligned with nature, rather than with the

rational and intellectual. In the *Merzbau*, “grottoes” grow from column forms, offering an organic model of the cultural.

Now consider this as well: perhaps as early as 1924,³⁴ Schwitters gradually concealed the odd niches and columns with which he had begun, so that they disappeared from view. Photographs provide testimony to the state achieved in the 1930s (frontispiece and fig. 8). Most of the caves and grottoes have slipped behind wood and plaster. A few stand behind glass planes for viewing. Traces of earlier constructions could later be read on the surface as bulges and indentations. Richter visited the *Merzbau* for a second time in 1928 and noted in his diary the changes that had taken place. “All the little holes and concavities that we had formerly ‘occupied’ were no longer seen. ‘They are all deep down inside,’ Schwitters explained.”³⁵ The artist’s reported comment stresses that he operated according to a principle of conservation—not destroying work, but building it in—or perhaps more fittingly, a principle of absorption verging on the digestive.

Yet in the *Merzbau*, the interior is aligned with both the body and the mind; boundaries between the home, corpus, and psyche collapse. Accumulations of fragments, souvenirs, and keepsakes related to the artist’s public and private history fill the niches and grottoes, then slip from the surface and are absorbed in a materialized model of memory.

In a long passage in one issue of his journal *Merz* (his first published discussion of the *Merzbau*), Schwitters produced a partial inventory of the *Merzbau*’s contents:

Each grotto . . . takes its character from some principal components. There is [the] hoard of the Nibelungs with the sparkling treasure; the Kyffhäuser with the stone table; the Goethe grotto with one of Goethe’s legs as a relic and a lot of pencils worn down to stubs through writing; the lost duchy of Braunschweig-Lüneberg with houses from Weimar by Feininger; . . . the Sex-Crime Cavern with the extremely mutilated corpse of a poor young girl, painted tomato red, and splendid votive offerings; the Ruhr district with real brown coal and real gas coke; an art exhibition with paintings and sculptures by Michelangelo and myself being viewed by a dog on a leash; the dog kennel with outhouse and a red dog; . . . the 10% disabled war veteran with daughter, who doesn’t have a head anymore, but still holds up quite well; the Mona Hausmann consisting of a reproduction of Mona Lisa with the glued-on face of Raoul Hausmann (she totally lost her stereotypical smile in the process); the whorehouse with a three-legged lady constructed by Hannah Höch; and the Great Grotto of Love.³⁶

Schwitters goes on to discuss the *Great Grotto of Love* in detail:

The Grotto of Love itself takes up about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the base of the column; a broad staircase leads up to it, beneath it is the toilet cleaning woman of life in a long, narrow walkway in which there is also camel dung. Two children greet us and enter life; due to some damage, only part of a mother with child remains. Glittering and fractured objects characterize the mood. In the middle there is a couple embracing; he has lost his head and she her arms; in between his legs he is holding a giant

blank cartridge. The big twisted head of the child with syphilitic eyes above the pair of lovers is an urgent warning not to hurry anything. There is reassurance in the little bottle of my own urine in which immortelles [artificial flowers] have been suspended. I have described here only a small part of the literary contents of the column. Some of the grottoes have already disappeared from the current surface, such as the Luther corner.³⁷

Schwitters' description underlines the structure's mnemonic concerns, allowing us to see the way in which it holds the fragment—the emblem of the ruin—in relation to the column. The cavities and additions rupture the closed solidity and formal completion we expect of the column form, while the accretion of fragments presents the column already as a ruin: it suggests the impossibility of reviving the classical tradition in a wholesale way, a failure of continuum.

The continuum that has failed is history—the collective memory of a culture. Many of the references point to a preoccupation with German cultural patrimony.³⁸ Among the rooms, grottoes, and caves were *Der Nibelungenhort*, which refers to the *Nibelungenlied*, a founding tale in German mythology, subject of Wagner's opera and Fritz Lang's 1924 film, and paean to the horror and beauty of war; and the *Göthegrotte* (Goethe Grotto), the *Luthersecke* (Luther's Corner) and *Biedermeierzimmer* (Biedermeier Room), and others with reference to Michelangelo and *Mona Lisa*. Some were dedicated to sites both real and mythical, of great resonance within a symbolic and political topography of the German nation: *Der Kyffhäuser* (The Kyffhäuser), a cave governed by a mythological king who, according to legend, would be resurrected one day and vanquish all enemies, and to which one of the grandest nineteenth-century national monuments was dedicated; the duchy of Braunschweig-Lüneberg, lost in the reconfiguration of borders after the war; and the Ruhr Valley, Germany's principal industrial region, occupied by France after Germany failed to pay reparations. Others point directly to the pathologies of modern German culture; there was *Die Lustmördhöhle* (Sex-Crime Cavern) but also *Die Mörderhöhle* (Cave of the Murderers), *Die Missbilligenderheldhöhle* (Cave of the Deprecated Heros), and the *Hitler-Altar*, which, given the extent of Schwitters' own resistance activities,³⁹ can be safely placed in this category.

With this ironic panoply of national monuments of his own, Schwitters' home has become the territory of the "homeland."⁴⁰ The language of commemoration had renewed relevance: a surge of monument and memorial building followed in the wake of World War I—a latter-day "monumentomania" that presented a conspicuous display of mourning and at the same time sought to contain the trauma of the conflict under the principles of sacrifice and glory. In the *Merzbau*, this terrain—that of German history and national identity—is shot through with images of sexuality and violence. It is rife with damaged bodies (Goethe's severed leg, the mutilated corpse of the young girl, the disabled veteran without a head, the male lover displaying a prosthetic phallus, the child's head)

and bodily products: the bloodlike red paint, the camel dung, and the small bottle of the artist's own urine. The cultural fragment is doubled by bodily parts and bodily traces.

Schwitters helps make the connection between these markers of German identity and damaged bodies and relates the experience of war, calling Merz "a prayer about the victorious end of war, victorious as once again peace had won in the end; everything had broken down in any case and new things had to be made out of fragments; and this is Merz."⁴¹ But despite his words, Schwitters' collection of fragments suggests less the harmony of peace than traumatic disturbance, for the new things come from shattered pieces.

The collapse of the monument form and, by implication, a stable sense of history is suggested in other ways as well. We think of the monument as speaking a public language, making a statement about what is important to preserve in our collective memory. It is visible in public space, often erected on a high pedestal and carefully placed in relation to the sightlines of surrounding architecture. This orchestrated visibility creates a zone around the monument—a barrier to transgression and marker of distance in the Benjaminian sense. In the *Merzbau*, the monument is brought inside, swallowed by the domestic interior. If the monument is the nineteenth-century's preferred architectural signifier of history, the domestic interior is its pendant: the über-signifier of private life. Here, the domestic interior has itself been configured to evoke that most private of spaces: the interior of the body. Instead of inserting itself in the public sphere, the column form is hidden from view. The *Merzbau* was not a secret, for it was shown to visitors, but only close friends were given access to certain parts.⁴² The artist Rudolf Jahns recounted that Schwitters asked him to enter into the interior alone.⁴³ Schwitters went so far as to paint the windows of his house white, blocking visual access from the street, and then spoke of the melancholy that this act of withdrawing provoked, stating that it made him "utterly depressed at the lack of contact. I can't show my studio to anyone of course. . . . it saddens me so."⁴⁴ Within the *Merzbau* the public/private division, which grounds so much of nineteenth-century social life, collapses. Indeed, as I think Schwitters recognized, the terms of the concept of the public (of monumentality and distance, of durable history and universal values) cannot withstand commingling with the private. There is no better emblem of this than the fact that the *Cathedral of Erotic Misery*, so littered with the ruins of German cultural identity, is topped with a marker of personal loss: the death mask of Schwitters' elder son (see fig. 5).⁴⁵

The private emerges in other accumulations within the *Merzbau*. Along with those that invoke mutilation and degradation were others of a seemingly more benign and sentimental order. Schwitters also dedicated grottoes to friends and to those he admired—often constructed around a pilfered keepsake. Hans Richter wrote:

He cut off a lock of my hair, and put it in my hole. A thick pencil, filched from Mies van der Rohe's drawing board, lay in his cavity. In others, there was a piece of shoelace, a half-smoked cigarette,

a nail paring, a piece of tie (Doesburg), a broken pen. There were also some odd (and more than odd) things such as a dental bridge with several teeth on it, and even a little bottle of urine bearing the donor's name. All these were placed in the separate holes reserved for the individual entries.⁴⁶

Käte Steinitz, too, searched for a missing key only to realize where it had gone, and Sophie Taeuber-Arp woke one morning to find that Schwitters had stolen away her bra to a grotto that bore her name.⁴⁷ Schwitters also solicited contributions, appealing at times to the vanity of his target: "Well-known artists have already participated in the construction of essential parts, artists such as Walden, Hannah Höch, Vordemberge-Gildewart, and others. I would greatly appreciate it, if you, too, could contribute to the construction of a small grotto."⁴⁸

The link between the objects in the caves and caverns with themes of national identity and those within niches dedicated to individuals seems to be that of mnemonic significance: ruins and keepsakes—what one might like to remember and what one might like to forget. The two categories seem to gravitate toward the poles inscribed in the title *Cathedral of Erotic Misery*.⁴⁹ Eros and Elend, love and trauma, and perhaps, if this is not taking it too far, the sex and death drives. But like the accumulations of the *Cathedral of Erotic Misery*, the individual grottoes also suggest a certain mnemonic anxiety. Their sentimental aspect is disturbed by the peculiar aspect of that contained within. Why obsessively memorialize present relationships, invoking friends alive and nearby as if dead or far away?

What seems key for Schwitters is a certain kind of physical investment in things, a preoccupation with traces. There are the things that the body itself expelled into the world: hair and fingernails and urine. But even with the other objects, it is the index of touch that Schwitters holds dear. Objects handled, clothes worn. In placing such treasures in the cavities of the *Merzbau*, the artist establishes a chain of contact—the bra taken from Taeuber-Arp that touched her skin, now housed in the *Merzbau*, creates a tactile link between him and her.

The categories of objects within these niches—bodily products and bodily parts, things touched—and the transference of aura implied, recall the relic form and the hierarchy of relics established in the Middle Ages. (In fact, Schwitters speaks of a Goethe relic in the Cathedral column.) There were primary relics (a saint's body or its parts); secondary ones (material that had touched a saint); tertiary ones (material that had touched something that had touched a saint). What the relic seems to offer is a corporealized model of memory, the body and its traces as mnemonic signifiers.

This lends insight into the linkage between the domestic interior and the grotesque body within the *Merzbau*: for if the monument form is predicated on an orchestrated visibility and the imposition of distance, both the interior and the body are ciphers for the tactile and the near-at-hand. While the body leaves traces, the nineteenth-century

interior was designed to capture them. Walter Benjamin suggests that to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the city and the elimination of the trace of the practiced hand in the mass-produced object, it is privileged within the domestic interior—hence “the preference for plush and velour which preserve the imprint of all contact.”⁵⁰ To dwell in the interior is to leave traces. In the *Merzbau*, this is pushed to yet another degree: the emphasis on trace is so strong that it has materialized corporeally, transformed into bodily products and bodily, spatial metaphors.

Given the accumulative drive within the *Merzbau*, it seems significant that for Benjamin, the collector is the true resident of the domestic interior. Benjamin understands the collector’s activities in relation to a crisis in the structure of memory: to the demise of the *mémoire involontaire*, the failure of cultural memory under modernity.⁵¹ No longer was the individual able to experience the past as a continuum in which he himself moved, accessible in forms of intuitive and collective memory. Collecting for Benjamin becomes a compensatory effort to re-stitch the fabric of experience, to bring together the far-away and long-ago: a type of prosthetic memory. Benjamin often speaks of *mémoire involontaire* in corporeal terms, pointing to the significance of sensory stimuli, like the savor of Proust’s madeleine, in triggering remembrance. Collectors, he asserts, “are beings with tactile instincts.”⁵² But if the collection is a type of artificial and materialized memory, it is also (and as that might suggest) a form of reification. In the *souvenir*, Benjamin writes, “is deposited the increasing self-alienation of the person who inventories his past as dead possessions.”⁵³

Thus the production of a space laden with traces, residues, relics, and *souvenirs* can be viewed historically. In constructing the friendship grottoes, touch seems to hold out hope for Schwitters of asserting himself against the terms of the abstract exchange economy. The commodity according to Karl Marx is, of course, more generally aligned with the suppression of the memory of labor in the process of production. For Schwitters, the physical investment in an object allows it to function mnemonically. The trace of use, of touch and wear, re-singularizes the commodity, tying it to a specific individual so that it no longer stands as one of many all the same. It seems significant in this regard that no money was exchanged in the acquisition of the objects placed within the memory caves—rather they were thefts or gifts requiring (surreptitiously or not) contact between people.

Yet clearly there is something more here. Schwitters’ accumulations within the *Merzbau* go far beyond (in numbers, limits of propriety) those of the nineteenth-century collector described by Benjamin—an excessiveness that resonates with the hyperbolic manifestations of trace. Many of the things that accrued within the *Merzbau* figure what is repressed in ordinary social life: debased sexuality and obscene violence. Walter Benjamin, the critic whose thinking opens several avenues for understanding Schwitters’ work, saw architecture as standing in relation to the collective in the way that “sensoria

of organs” did to the individual.⁵⁴ The *Merzbau* seems to collapse the two, proposing a kind of visceral unconscious—of things being digested and circulating within the depths. Its absorptive structure doubles the act of psychic repression, or of forgetting, with the physical submergence of stuff. Yet it seems to be the incompleteness of the process of sublimation within the *Merzbau*, the failed discipline of a superego that garnered the scorn of no less a figure than Alexander Dorner. Dorner, who was director of the Niedersächsische Landesgalerie in Hannover, admired Schwitters’ collages as pioneering abstract work. But he read the *Merzbau* in terms of an overarching regressiveness—as a “kind of fecal smearing—a sick and frightening relapse into the social irresponsibility of the infant who plays with trash and filth.”⁵⁵

The problem of the interior, articulated by Benjamin and invoked by Schwitters’ transformation of his home into “a sculpture into which people can go,” is taken up within contemporary architectural theory, perhaps most explicitly in the work and writing of the Viennese architect Adolf Loos. In terms that resonate with Benjamin’s discussion of the domestic interior as a sanctuary for private experience, Loos proposed a hardening or emphatic rearticulation of the divide between public and private. For him, modern life was characterized by a split between our individual experience and our existence in society, a kind of schizophrenia between our private and public selves.⁵⁶ The modern house, he asserted, should articulate this estrangement. In his famous text “Architecture” (1910), Loos wrote: “The house does not have to tell anything to the exterior; instead, all its richness must be manifest in the interior.”⁵⁷ As the domain of the private, the house should close itself to the external world, offering little social information and nothing about life inside; its façade a silent mask (fig. 9). In contrast, the interior was to be conceived in experiential terms, designed to nurture an inner life under threat in the external urban world (fig. 10). Loos advocated and produced interior spaces of physical invitation and extraordinary tactility. “What I want in my rooms,” he wrote, “is for people . . . to know the enclosed space, to feel the fabric, the wood, above all, to perceive it sensually, with sight and touch, for them to sit comfortably and feel the chair over a large area of their external bodily senses. . . .”⁵⁸ He was proud that the sensual and psychological dimensions of his interiors could not be communicated effectively in the public language of photography (fig. 11).⁵⁹ At the same time, there is anxiety implicit in Loos’ conception of home, a demand for protection. The mute exterior functions as armor. Loos’ house fortifies Benjamin’s nineteenth-century interior into a bunker for private experience, buffered against the outside world.



9.

The sense of vulnerability revealed by Loos, the desire for a protective shield, finds a structural analogy in Freud's description of the exterior of consciousness, in his 1920 essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," written in the immediate aftermath of the war. Famous for its introduction of the concept of the death drive, derived from Freud's analysis of war neuroses and traumatic repetition, the essay also offers a new model of the mind. Freud speaks of the way that the exterior of consciousness hardens, "becomes to some degree inorganic," and functions as a shield, protecting the sensitive "living" core from being "killed by stimulation." The exterior shell parries the barrage of stimuli from the external world, sampling it in small doses so that it can be effectively assimilated rather than overrun. Beneath the shield are the sense organs, which offer other filters, protecting the core from excessive and unsuitable stimulation. Indeed, Freud stresses that *protection from stimuli* is one of the mind's primary functions.⁶⁰ Yet at the same time he suggests that this shield is brittle, for it can be shattered in the face of trauma, when the shock is too strong. Then, the mind is overrun by stimuli—Freud uses the words "flooded" and "invaded"—and is unable to parry, sort, and bind.⁶¹ Traumatic neurosis is the consequence.⁶²

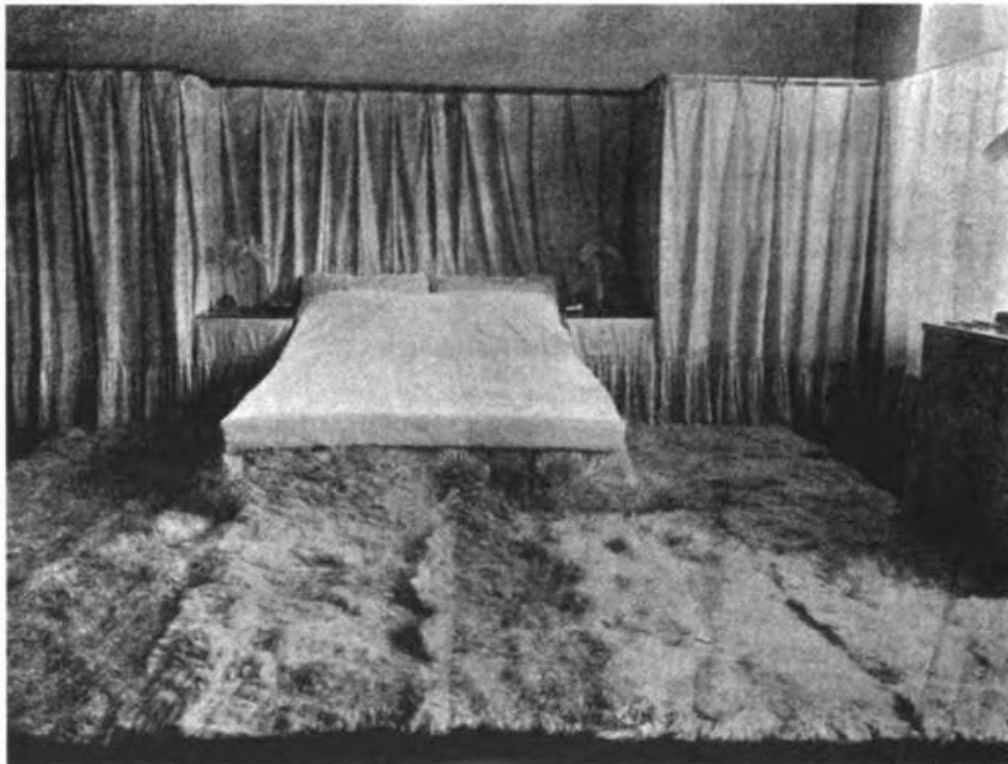
If both Loos and Freud reveal a sense of the interior under threat, conjuring a protective shield against the external world, in Schwitters' *Merzbau* this fragile shell is breached in traumatic form. The exterior wall, which holds the external world at bay within Loos' architecture, is no longer capable of holding things in place within the

10. Adolf Loos, Living Room in the Scheu House, 1912/1913, photographed c. 1930, Adolf Loos-Archiv der Graphischen Sammlung Albertina, Vienna



10.

11. Adolf Loos, Wife's Bedroom, 1903, Private collection



11.

Merzbau. The monument, emblem of the collective and of history, is swallowed by the interior. The architectural interior elides with the human body. The cultural artifact resides alongside the body part. Both collecting and the capture of traces—activities associated with the nineteenth-century bourgeois interior—exist in exploded form. Traces are materialized corporeally in the form of the grotesque body, while the accumulation of things runs amok, proceeding excessively, compulsively, disregarding propriety. It stands as much a drive to bury as to remember, a reminder of the endless productivity of the pathological. In its anomic character, accumulation within the *Merzbau* serves a lawless counterpoint to the archival impulse so pervasive in this decade. But it is exactly this—the sense of being overrun, the failure to parry, sort, and bind—that recalls Freud's description of the shattering of mind's external shell in the face of a traumatic shock.

The structure of the *Merzbau* foregrounds the precariousness of memory. The obsessive quality of collecting within the *Merzbau* suggests in its compensatory excess a wholesale disturbance in the sense of continuum with the past—a moment when the capacity of memory and experience to make sense of the world is definitively overwhelmed. If the nineteenth-century interior functions as a kind of protective shell, protecting private life from the shocks associated with modern public space, within the *Merzbau* this protective shell has been definitively shattered. It presents, in materialized form, the fracturing of history and memory by catastrophe.

NOTES

This essay is indebted to the work of previous writers on Schwitters' *Merzbau*, in particular John Elderfield's suggestive chapter "Phantasmagoria and Dream Grotto" in his *Kurt Schwitters* (London, 1985), 144–171. The reader will soon find that his extensive research serves as a foundation for this essay. Also important were Dietmar Elgar's "Kurt Schwitters: *Merzbau* in Hannover," in *Dada: Cologne/Hanover*, eds. Charlotte Stokes and Stephen C. Foster (New York, 1997), 193–205, and Dorothea Dietrich's sensitive iconographic reading in her book *The Collages of Kurt Schwitters: Tradition and Innovation* (Cambridge, England, 1993), 164–209. Benjamin Buchloh's thinking about

Kurt Schwitters and Dada, conveyed over the years in teaching, writing, and conversation, has introduced important issues and focused my own thoughts, and in many ways he has served as an interlocutor for this essay. For insightful, critical responses to this essay in draft and lecture form, I would like to thank Amanda Hockensmith, Hal Foster, Pamela M. Lee, and Matthew S. Witkovsky. Amanda Hockensmith also provided important research assistance.

1 Rosalind Krauss, *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 33–93.

2 See Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 57–100; "Blinded Insights: On the Modernist Reception of the Art of the Mentally Ill," *October* 97 (Summer 2001): 3–30; "Armor Fou," *October* 56 (Spring 1991): 64–97; and "Dada Mime," *October* 105 (Summer 2003): 166–176. Also see Brigid Doherty, "'See: we are all neurasethenics,' or the Trauma of Dada Montage," *Critical Inquiry* 24 (Fall 1997): 82–132.

3 See Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1993).

4 Terdiman, *Present Past*, vii.

5 Terdiman, *Present Past*, 25.

6 On the nineteenth-century cult of monuments, see Sergiusz Michalski, *Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage* (London, 1998), 13–76. Michalski describes the German interest in the creation of *Nationaldenkmäler*.

7 Kurt Schwitters, *Merz 20. Katalog* (Hannover, 1927), 99–100; cited in Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 13.

8 Originally published in *Merz 1* (January 1923), 9. His use of the term in context is already more complex, less about purity than relationality: “And so I began to construct pictures out of materials I happened to have at hand, such as streetcar tickets, cloakroom checks, bits of wood, wire, twine, bent wheels, tissue paper, chips of glass, etc. These things are inserted into the picture either as they are or else modified in accordance with what the picture requires. They lose their individual character, their own *eigengift*, by being evaluated against one another, by being *entmaterialisiert* [dematerialized] they become material for the picture.” Kurt Schwitters, “Die Bedeutung des Merzgedankens in der Welt,” in *Kurt Schwitters: Das literarische Werk* (Cologne, 1981), 5:134; trans. from the English edition of Werner Schmalenbach, *Kurt Schwitters* (New York, 1967), 94.

9 The idea of transcendence over the material and social origins of elements in Schwitters' work is a commonplace, seen across a wide range of scholarship. For example, Harriet Janis and Rudi Blesh write: “Merz, born of Kommerz, was so purged of commerce, so freed from its venal origins, so transmuted in very fact, that for it eventually to become a prize commodity in a boom art market could only have struck its creator as one of dada's highest reaches of irony.” Janis and Blesh, *Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques* (New York, 1962), 64. Carolia Giedion-Welcker writes that “[Schwitters] was primarily concerned with attaining pure art even through the use of rubbish. This was not an elementary demystification of art, but an artistic act of sublimation.” Introduction to *Kurt Schwitters* (exh. cat., Marlborough Fine Art) (London, 1972), 5. This idea of transcendence is often extended to suggest that, in overcoming the debased origins of his material, Schwitters' work offers a form of psychic or social redemption. Elderfield comments: “To make art, as [Schwitters] understood it, from such components required that they somehow be dissociated from the literal world, liberated from all contextual considerations. The search for this kind of liberation was the true driving force of Schwitters' early work.” Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 64. Gamard describes “an artistic ethos that implicitly maintains and affirms the future.” Elizabeth Burns Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau: The Cathedral of Erotic Misery* (New York, 2000), 27. However, the interest in debased materials and the incompleteness of sublimation in Schwitters' work is also striking.

10 Rudolf Kuenzli, “Hanover,” in *Dada Artifacts* (exh. cat., The University of Iowa Museum of Art) (Iowa City, 1978), 61.

11 Richard Huelsenbeck, “Dada and Existentialism,” in Willy Verkauf, ed., *Dada: Monograph of a Movement* (Teufen, 1951), 68; cited in Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 40. There are many such expressions of his hostility to Schwitters; for example, in his *Dada Almanac* of 1920 Huelsenbeck writes: “Dada fundamentally and emphatically rejects such works as the famous ‘Anna Bloom’ by Mr. Kurt Schwitters.” Richard Huelsenbeck, ed., *The Dada Almanac*, introduction by Malcolm Greene (London, 1998), 14. Huelsenbeck makes an effort to explain his rift with Schwitters in a 1957 article, in which he recounts, “To me, at that time a very unruly and intolerant fellow, he was a genius in a frock coat. We called him the abstract Spitzweg, the Kaspar [sic] David Friedrich of the dadaist Revolution.” Richard Huelsenbeck, “Dada and Existentialism,” in *Dada Monograph of a Movement*, ed. Willy Verkauf (London, 1957), 56; cited in Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau*, 29. (Carl Spitzweg was a popular nineteenth-century painter who appealed to petit-bourgeois taste.) But while Huelsenbeck's use of the pronoun “we” projects his position onto the larger Berlin Dada group, it should be noted that Schwitters maintained close relationships with Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch, and dadaists from outside Berlin, such as Hans Arp.

12 The common assertion that Schwitters' work stands apart from the transgressive and critical tactics of dadaism both extends from and validates Huelsenbeck's initial characterization. (The characterization of Schwitters' work as transcendent, discussed in note 9, is a related tendency.) For example, in an influential essay on collage and montage, Benjamin Buchloh sets up an opposition between "the collage work of Kurt Schwitters and the montage work of John Heartfield," seeing the pair as occupying polar positions "in a range from meditative contemplation of reification to a powerful propaganda tool for mass agitation." Benjamin Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum* 21 (September 1982): 43.

13 Kurt Schwitters, "Tran 35. Dada ist eine Hypothese," *Der Sturm* 15, no. 1 (March 1924): 30; *Das literarische Werk*, 5:172; cited in Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 90.

14 John Elderfield, "On a Merz-Gesamtwerk," *Art International* 21, no. 6 (December 1977): 24. Elderfield's statement is based on anecdotes collected in Friedhelm Lach, ed., *Kurt Schwitters: Das literarische Werk*, vol. 2 (Cologne, 1974). See Elderfield's discussion of the important correlations between Schwitters' collage practice and his poetry on this point in his monograph *Kurt Schwitters*.

15 Elderfield notes that Schwitters often washed papers before using them and thickened the surface with glue. Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 85.

16 Quoted in Janis and Blesh, *Collage*, 76.

17 Theodor Adorno discusses Wagner's hostility to the fragmentation inherent in bourgeois culture, though he asserts that the *Gesamtkunstwerk* provided only the illusion of unity. See Adorno, in *Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London, 1981), 97–113.

18 See Vasily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (New York, 1977).

19 Kurt Schwitters: "My aim is the total work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), which combines all branches of art into an artistic work. . . . First I combined individual categories of art. I have pasted poems from words and sentences so as to produce a rhythmic design. I have on the other hand pasted up pictures and drawings so that sentences could be read in them. I have driven nails into pictures so as to produce a plastic relief apart from the pictorial quality of the paintings. I did so as to efface the boundaries between the arts." Schwitters, "Merz (für den 'Ararat' geschrieben)" (1920), in *Das literarische Werk*, 74; cited in Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 44.

20 Gwendolyn Webster, *Kurt Merz Schwitters: A Biographical Study* (Cardiff, 1997), 210, and Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau*, 87–88.

21 Dorothea Dietrich, *The Collages of Kurt Schwitters*, 176–184.

22 Käthe Steinitz recalled, "Kurt called it a 'column.'" Steinitz, *Kurt Schwitters: A Portrait from Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968), 90.

23 Huelsenbeck described seeing such a piece in December 1919. Richard Huelsenbeck, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, ed. Hans J. Klein-schmidt (New York, 1974), 66.

24 Kurt Schwitters, "Ich und meine Ziele," in *Das literarische Werk*, 5:344–345; cited in Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 147.

25 Schwitters, "Ich und meine Ziele," 161.

26 Ernst Schwitters wrote: "He started by tying strings to emphasize this interaction. Eventually they became wires, then they were replaced with wooden structures, which in turn were joined with plaster of Paris." Kurt Schwitters (exh. cat., Seibu Museum of Art and Seibu Takanawa Museum of Modern Art) (Tokyo, 1983); cited in Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 148. See descriptions of the development and growth of the *Merzbau* in Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 147–148, 152–157; Elgar, "Kurt Schwitters: Merzbau in Hannover," 195–197; Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau*, 87–109.

27 There has been some debate about the final scope of construction. Elderfield claims that the final extent of its growth has been exaggerated. Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 56.

28 Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 157. See also Webster, *Kurt Merz Schwitters*, 270.

29 In his memoirs, Richter described it as "vegetation, never ending. . . a proliferation that never ceased." Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (New York and Toronto, 1965), 153. Also see Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 43, 45, 235, 237.

30 Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, 152.

31 Letter to Alfred Barr, 23 November 1936, Archives of The Museum of Modern Art; cited in Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 156.

32 See the discussion of the grotesque in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, Ind., 1984). At times, Schwitters himself seems to acknowledge this alignment of his work with the grotesque. Richard Huelsenbeck's passage on *Der Erste Tag Merzsaule*, cited earlier, reads more fully: "This tower or tree or house had apertures, concavities, and hollows in which Schwitters kept souvenirs, photos, birthdates, and other respectable and less respectable data. . . . We asked him for details, but Schwitters shrugged: 'It's all crap.'" Huelsenbeck, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, 66. While this might seem a simple figure of crude speech, the scatological reappears in his work in a way that is not easy to ignore. For example, a print made from leather nailed to a block, *Untitled (Lithograph with Rivet Holes)*, 1919 (*Musée d'Art et Histoire*, Geneva), is signed KURt SchwITTeRs.

33 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 32.

34 Gamard, *Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau*, 102.

35 Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, 152–153.

36 Kurt Schwitters, "Ich und meine Ziele (1930)," in *Das literarische Werk*, 344–345. Citation here from Elgar, "Kurt Schwitters: Merzbau in Hannover," in slightly modified translation.

37 Kurt Schwitters, "Ich und meine Ziele (1930)," *Das literarische Werk*, 344–345; see Elgar, "Kurt Schwitters."

38 See Elgar, "Kurt Schwitters: Merzbau in Hannover," 201–202. Elgar suggests a structured taxonomy for the caves and grottoes within the Merzbau: a first group related to immediate contemporary political events (the Ruhrgebiet, the Hider-Altar); a second group that exposed the historical and mythological models for contemporary nationalism (the Kyffhäuser cave where, according to legend, the Emperor Barbarossa was put to rest, to wake one day and destroy all foes); a third group that offered a more positive sense of German identity (the Luther corner and Goethe grotto); a fourth that commemorated themes of sexual violence (the Cathedral of Erotic Misery); and a fifth and final group of grottoes dedicated to friends. Elgar, "Kurt Schwitters," 201–202. For another discussion of cultural references, see also Dietrich, *The Collages of Kurt Schwitters*, 192–198. Dietrich places the caverns and grottoes in three groups: those dedicated to sexual deviance, those dedicated to the formation of national ideologies, and those that offer a vision of community.

39 Webster, *Kurt Merz Schwitters*, 255–277.

40 In 1915, Sigmund Freud employed a similar metaphor, writing in his "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" about how the entire homeland of Europe, that apparently secure house of Western civilization, was in the process of regression to a primitive psychic state: "Well may the citizen of the civilized world of whom I have spoken stand helpless in a world that has grown strange to him—his great fatherland (*Heimat*) disintegrated, its common estates laid to waste, his fellow-citizens divided and debased!" Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 14 (London, 1957), 280.

41 Schwitters, "Kurt Schwitters" (1930), in *Das literarische Werk*, 335; cited in Dietrich, *Collages of Kurt Schwitters*, 7. Originally published in "Gefesselter Blick," 25 *kurze Monografien und Beiträge über neue Werbegestaltung* (Stuttgart, 1930).

42 Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 148. Käthe Steinitz reported, "The very secret caves were probably never seen by anybody except Walden, Giedion and Arp." Steinitz, *Kurt Schwitters*, 90.

43 Quoted in Elgar, "Zur Entstehung des Merzbaus," in *Almanach* (1982), 34–35; see Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 153.

44 Webster, *Kurt Merz Schwitters*, 270.

45 Elderfield establishes the identity of the death mask. Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 169.

46 Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, 152.

47 Steinitz, *Kurt Schwitters: A Portrait from Life*, 90–91.

48 Schwitters, "Das Grosse E," in *Das literarische Werk*, 5:338; cited in Elgar, "Merzbau in Hannover," 195.

49 Peter Nisbet suggested the alignment with the idea of "erotic misery" in a recent conversation about these categories.

50 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 19, 221, 227.

51 See Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968), 155–200.

52 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 206.

53 Walter Benjamin, "Zentral-park," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, eds. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, with the collaboration of Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem (Frankfurt am Main, 1972), 1:68; trans. in Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 189.

54 Dietrich finds an analogy in Benjamin's interest in the cultural fragment, *The Collages of Kurt Schwitters, 191–192*, and Elderfield's chapter, "Phantasmagoria and Dream Grotto," in his *Kurt Schwitters*, invokes Benjamin's use of the term.

55 Quoted by Samuel Cauman, *The Living Museum. Experiences of an Art Historian and Museum Director, Alexander Dornier* (New York, 1958), 36; cited in Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters*, 162.

56 See Beatriz Colomina's discussion of Adolf Loos in her *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), esp. chap. 2, "City," 20–73, and chap. 6, "Interior," 233–281.

57 Adolf Loos, "Architecture" (1910), trans. in *The Architecture of Adolf Loos* (London, 1985), 106. There is good reason to think that Schwitters was familiar with these architectural discussions. Schwitters had studied architecture for a brief period in 1918–1919 at the Technische Hochschule in Hannover and maintained a lifelong interest in the discipline. Adolf Loos published five essays in Herwarth Walden's journal *Der Sturm* in 1912, which guaranteed him an international avant-garde audience. Siegfried Giedion, an architectural critic and champion of Loos, was one of only three individuals who Schwitters believed had comprehended his intentions, according to Käthe Steinitz. She wrote: "Kurt says that only three of his friends were capable of understanding the con-

cept fully: Herwarth Walden, Dr. S. Giedion, and Hans Arp." Steinitz, *Kurt Schwitters: A Portrait from Life*, 89. Loos later moved to Paris, where his writings were republished and where he was much appreciated by the dadaists; he designed a home for Tristan Tzara in 1925–1926.

58 Adolf Loos, "Regarding Economy," in Max Risselada, ed., *Raumplan versus Plan Libre* (Delft, 1988), 139–140; cited in Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 64.

59 Adolf Loos, "Architecture," 106. See Colomina's discussion in *Privacy and Publicity*, 42–57.

60 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York, 1961), 30–31. The trope of a protective shield has great currency for Simmel, too, who speaks of a psychic hardening that functions to protect the inner mind from the many shocks of urban experience. Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life (1903)," in *Georg Simmel: On Individuality and Social Forms. Selected Writings*, ed. David Levine (Chicago, 1971), 324–339. Hal Foster discusses a proto-fascist model of psychic hardening in the work of Ernst Jünger. See Foster, "Armor Fou," 83–86. His discussion in the same essay of the way Ernst's Dada-period work reflects on the damaged construction of military industrial subjects offers a starting point for understanding the way in which these concerns might be broader dadaist preoccupations.

61 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 33–34.

62 Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 35.



A Bashed Ego: Max Ernst in Cologne | Hal Foster

Max Ernst was drafted into an artillery regiment of the German army in 1914. He was wounded twice in the Great War—once by a gun recoil and once by a mule kick—and earned the nickname “Iron Head” for these troubles. “We young people came back from the war in a state of stupefaction,” Ernst later wrote. In his autobiographical sketch, “Some Data on the Youth of M. E. as Told by Himself” (1942), he presents the entire war as a loss of consciousness, indeed of life: “Max Ernst died the 1st of August 1914. He resuscitated the 11th of November 1918.”¹ This emphasis on shock is suggestive, as is the alienation of the first-person voice by that of the third person, for his Dada work often deploys such tell-tale signs of narcissistic disturbance.

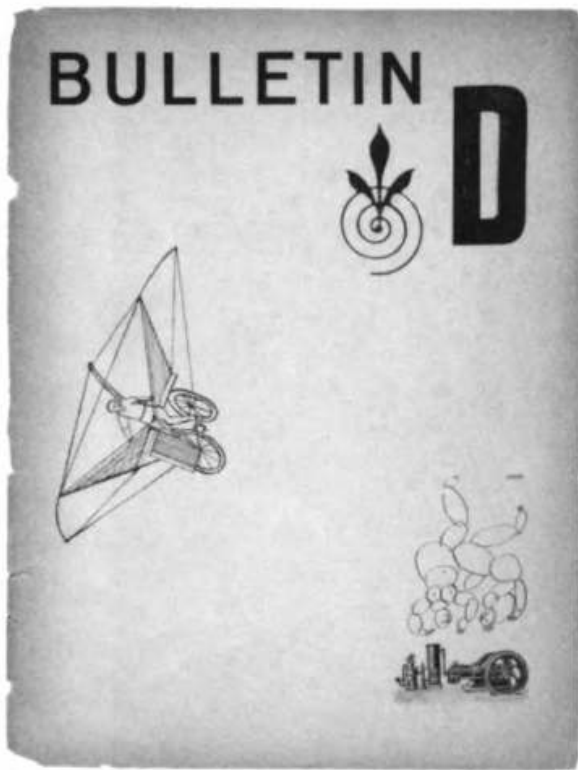
This is to suggest not that Ernst was so disturbed, but that he adapted signs of this disturbance to critical ends. When he “resuscitates” from the war, he does so in quasi-autistic guise as “Dadamax,” machinic maker of machinic figures. In this way Ernst not only figures the body in mechanistic terms in his early collages, but he also assumes the machine as a persona throughout his Dada years. Meanwhile, his coconspirator in Cologne Dada, Alfred Grünwald, the radical son of a rich banker, takes “Baargeld” as his alias, which translates as “ready money” or “cash,” and Ernst is no less interested in the commodity as an object of critical mimicry. As we will see, this mimetic parody of the corrosive effects of machine and commodity—that is, of capitalist modernity—is fundamental to Dada at large, especially in Cologne and Zurich. Suffice it to say here that Ernst evokes the trauma of the military-industrial disciplining of the self in order to reflect on its psychophysical effects, and further, to turn these effects back on the social order that produced them.

Before the war Ernst studied such subjects as the psychology of disturbed children and “Origins and Implications of Mental Illness” at the University of Bonn. He also began to read Emil Kraepelin, the renowned German psychiatrist who provided an early typology of mental disorders in *Textbook of Psychiatry* (1896), as well as Sigmund Freud, at least such early texts as *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905).² At some point Ernst also discovered some of the case studies like *Leonardo da Vinci and A Memory of His Childhood* (1910) and *Psychoanalytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia* (1911), for he later echoes the Leonardo case in *Beyond Painting* (1948), his surrealist art-treatise cum auto-analysis, and his interest in paranoia must have led him to the famous account of the paranoid Judge Schreber, too. Certainly Ernst encountered the art of the mentally ill early on, even before the influential publication of *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (1922) by Hans Prinzhorn. In his “Biographical

Notes,” for example, Ernst reports that he visited an asylum near Bonn to see such work as a student, and that he once planned a book on the subject.³ His early collages do resemble schizophrenic representations in several respects: they share an obsession with repetition, a mixing of drawing and script, an imaging of bodies as both mechanistic and disjunctive, and a contradictory treatment of boundaries, sometimes ignored and sometimes reiterated.⁴ Ernst adapts these signs in a way that exceeds considerations of style. Perhaps, aided by his reading in schizophrenia, he intuits that this disturbed image-making might articulate a disturbed ego construction, and that, if reworked in his (proto)fascist milieu, such image-making might in turn be politically incisive precisely because it is psychologically incisive—again, both as an evocation of narcissistic disturbance incurred during the war and as a caution against (proto)fascist armoring of the ego thereafter.

These connections will remain tenuous unless they are grounded in his artistic context. On his return from the war Ernst is still an expressionist with a style that shows fantastic elements (akin to Marc Chagall) as well as social-critical aspects (akin to George Grosz).⁵ Back in Cologne he becomes affiliated with the Expressionistische Künstlergesellschaft (Expressionist Society for Artists) directed by Karl Nierendorf, who also publishes the expressionist journal *Der Strom* (The Stream). However, like many of his generation, Ernst soon strays from expressionism, especially in the face of the radical events of the winter of 1918–1919 (on 9 November the kaiser flees, on 15 January the Spartacist leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg are murdered by mercenaries, and on 21 February Kurt Eisner, socialist prime minister of Bavaria, is assassinated). At this time Ernst begins to collaborate with Baargeld—first on a magazine, *Der Ventilator*, which is suspended by the British army of occupation in Cologne after six issues for its anarchistic rhetoric—and together they gravitate toward Dada.⁶ Ernst had met Hans Arp before the war, and no doubt Arp reported on the exploits of Hugo Ball and Tristan Tzara thereafter; by mid-1918 Ernst also encounters Zurich Dada through publications. A particular epiphany occurs a year later: together with Arp in Munich in late summer 1919 he sees reproductions of the “metaphysical” paintings of Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carrà in a special issue of *Valori Plastici*—a discovery that Ernst later describes as uncanny (“as when an event already seen opens up an entire region of our personal world of dreams”).⁷ By this time he had also discovered the “mechanomorphic” work of Francis Picabia (his celebrated drawing made of inked parts of a smashed alarm clock stamped on paper is reproduced in *Anthologie Dada* 4–5, May 1919); by the fall of 1919 Ernst shows this influence as well.⁸

Like his early combination of Chagall and Grosz, his new joining of De Chirico and Picabia is odd, even singular, yet it is also crucial to his cast of inhuman figures set in deranged spaces—work that is seminal in turn to the visual vocabulary of surrealist art. At the time, however, these influences are not resolved, as is clear from the signal productions of Cologne Dada: two shows accompanied by two publications titled *Bulletin D*



1. Cover of *Bulletin D*, 1919, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

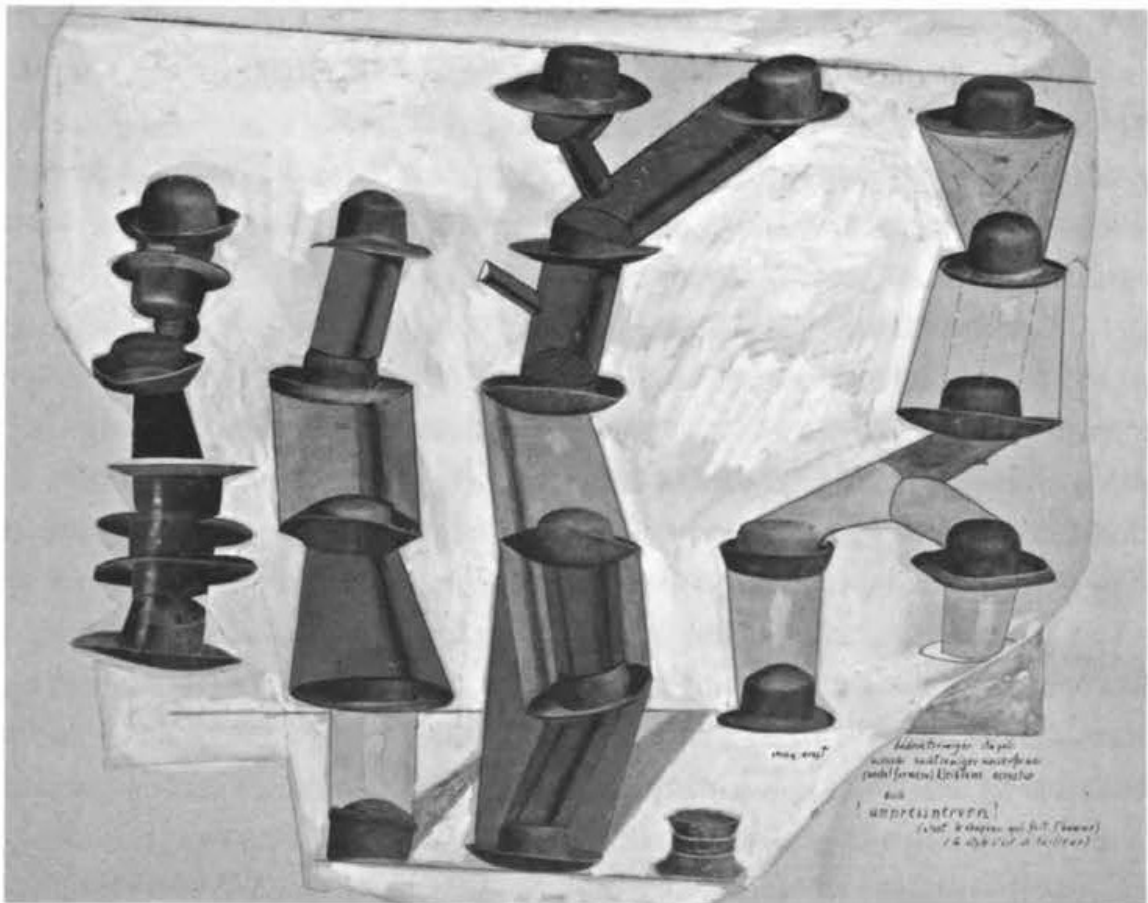
and *Die Schammade*. Both manifestations arise when Ernst and Baargeld run afoul of other exhibitions. In the first instance they are expelled, due to their new dadaist sympathies, from a room devoted to the Society for Artists at a Kunstverein exhibition in November 1919; the Kunstverein director, Walter Klug, offers them a separate room (Room D, thus “Bulletin D,” the D of which also signals Dada). In good dadaist fashion Ernst and Baargeld exploit the controversy with a show that assem-

bles, among other art, a miscellany of African sculpture, drawings by children, art of the mentally ill, pictures by Sunday painters, and found objects of Ernst’s own work. Here he exhibits Chiricoesque paintings (*Aquis Submersus*, 1919, which depicts a strange homunculus before a cenotaphic pool, is the best-known) and derivative assemblages that partake stylistically of Pablo Picasso, Arp, and Kurt Schwitters, but no collages as yet (at least none is listed in the catalogue). Perhaps his first collage of the sort is produced for the cover of *Bulletin D* at the time of this first exhibition (fig. 1). It shows, at lower right, two pneumatic line-figures dancing (coupling?) upside down above an illustration of an engine cut from a magazine, and, at middle left, a drawing of a man in a flying machine. Here aspects of his dadaist idiom are already scattered across the page.

Not long afterward, in February 1920, Arp is again in Cologne, where he assists Ernst and Baargeld on *Die Schammade*, which is published for their next Dada show in April. (The Nazi Party is founded in Munich in February 1920, and the Kapp Putsch occurs in Dresden in March.) Again prompted by an exclusion, in this case from an exhibition at the Kunstgewerbemuseum (Museum of Decorative Arts), the *Dada—Early Spring* show is the one Cologne event that has entered all Dada lore, in part because it was staged at a beer hall, in a courtyard accessed only through a public toilet. On the first day a girl in a white communion dress greets visitors with obscene poems, and Ernst displays an object with an ax attached, along with an invitation for visitors to destroy it (which they do several times over). He shows some twenty of his own works here: more Chiricoesque paintings and dadaist assemblages, but also new bric-a-brac constructions that one reviewer calls “flowerpot sculptures,” as well as such diagrammatic collages as *Hypertrophic Trophy*



2.



2. Max Ernst, *Old Lecher with Rifle Protects the Museum's Spring Apparel...*, 1920, showing Luise Strauss-Ernst, Max with Jimmy Ernst, and Gala and

Paul Éluard in Max Ernst's Cologne studio, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Saint-Denis

3. Max Ernst, *C'est le chapeau qui fait l'homme* (*The Hat Makes the Man*), 1920, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

(see fig. 5), *erectio sine qua non*, and *Don't Smile*. The show is shut down for a day on charges of fraud and indecency: the setting provokes talk of homosexual activity, but the principal target turns out to be a “flowerpot sculpture” whose full title is *Old Lecher with Rifle Protects the Museum's Spring Apparel from Dadaist Interventions (l'état c'est moi)* (*Monumental Sculpture*) (fig. 2). Related to the well-known collage *C'est le chapeau qui fait l'homme* (*The Hat Makes the Man*), 1920 (fig. 3), this long-lost figure is stuck together with wood rods and other odds and ends, given a stick-gun, and topped with a helmet-hat. At its crotch Ernst hangs a tray splashed with red paint on which he also sets a medallion with the Albrecht Dürer engraving *Adam and Eve*. Ironically, it is this use of a canonical image that brings in the police; no doubt, however, the crazy juxtaposition of things overall provokes the good citizens of Cologne—including his father, Phillip Ernst, a teacher of the deaf and the mute (a devout Catholic who paints religious pictures, he once depicts young Max as Christ). “I curse you,” Phillip writes of the show in a letter that Max later cites, with oedipal relish, on several occasions, “You have dishonored our name.”⁹

Self-Constructed Small Machines

This is the immediate context of the diagrammatic collages that concern me here. Begun in the fall of 1919, they are not as materially heterogeneous as most collages by Schwitters: they are plate prints or pencil rubbings, or a combination of the two, with additional lines and inscriptions, all produced as if anonymously, almost automatically, from stereotypes, letter blocks, and other stock elements of the printing trade. Occasionally these collages include line etchings taken from technical publications (usually renderings of engines or engine parts), and often they are tinted with watercolor or gouache. The collages make up an extended sequence (I will discuss only five or six); most of the extant ones involve schematic figures constructed from the aforementioned elements, which Ernst finds at a Cologne printer where *Der Ventilator*, *Bulletin D*, and *Die Schammade* are printed. My reading of these bizarre images is guided by the inscribed texts, which are garbled just enough to derange any conventional relation between work and title—just enough, that is, to render these images all the more bizarre. To find any meaning in these works is, of course, tendentious, and usually they are read as mere Dada nonsense. Yet this nonsense is purposeful not only in its disruption of conventional signification, but also in its imaging of both mechanistic bodies and quasi-schizophrenic subjectivities. For through this imaging the collages seem to pose a modern subject that is, on the one hand, diagrammatic,

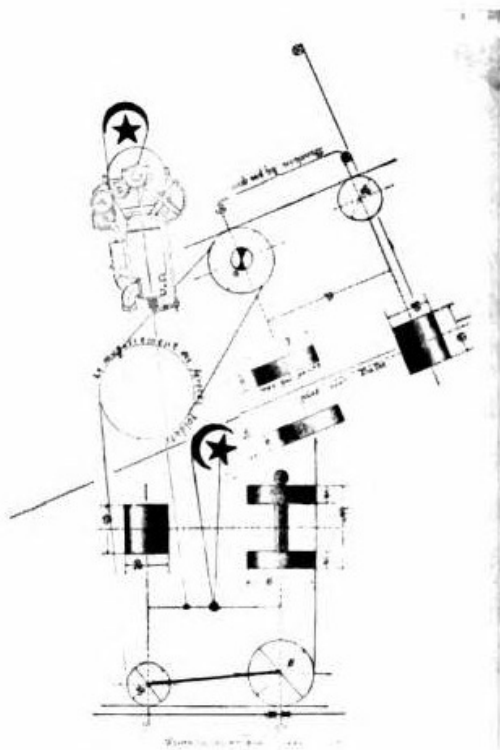
4. Max Ernst, *Le Mugissement des féroces soldats* (*The Roaring of Ferocious Soldiers*), 1919, Arturo Schwarz Collection, Milan

5. Max Ernst, *Trophée hypertrophique* (*Hypertrophic Trophy*), 1919–1920, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

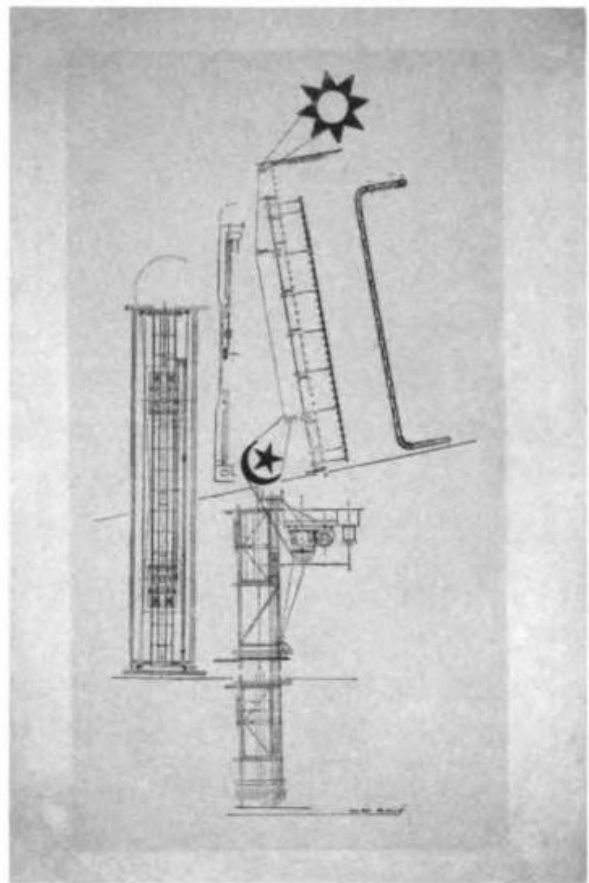
with so many given elements to be designed and redesigned, and on the other hand, dysfunctional, a bachelor machine that, as defined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “interferes with the reproductive function of technical machines” and works “to short-circuit social production.”¹⁰

The titles of two collages, *Le Mugissement des féroces soldats* (*The Roaring of Ferocious Soldiers*) (fig. 4) and *Trophée hypertrophique* (*Hypertrophic Trophy*) (fig. 5), point to a military-industrial subject, perhaps to an ego armoring of a (proto)fascist sort. “The roaring of the ferocious solidiers” (the phrase derives from the national anthem of France) suggests a loss of speech or reason, a becoming animal or other—a trope that the surrealists would soon develop for a becoming unconscious. Yet immediately after the war such “roaring” indicates a becoming machine or weapon (a caption—“Druck in kg. pro gm.” [pressure in kilogram per gram]—also suggests an engine of some sort). However, there is nothing “ferocious” about the fragile contraption diagrammed here: its three parts are connected only by ink lines that evoke wispy belts, and the title is written around the thinnest of pulleys. One element, made up of two solid cylinders attached to two spindly wheels, appears twice—once in the lower half of the image, and once rotated 140 degrees in the upper right. The “soldiers” are then completed by a third form, a small schematic of an internal combustion engine set in the upper left (this found illustration appears in other collages as well). Meshed as they are, the three soldiers suggest a Rube Goldberg contraption that has lost even the slight functionality of such devices. Stranded like stalled railway cars or suspended like a broken assembly line, these ferocious soldiers mock the military-industrial fantasies of a Filippo T. Marinetti or an Ernst Jünger.

Made up of calibrational devices as well as mechanical designs, *Hypertrophic Trophy* appears even more fragile than *Ferocious Soldiers*. Here the becoming machine or weapon is keyed by the title, which, written at the bottom left like a legend in French, German, and English, seems to commemorate three of the national combatants of the Great War. From a reluctant soldier like Ernst this commemoration can only be ironic—war dead as trophies?—yet such is the first definition of “trophy”: “Arms etc. of vanquished enemy set up on field of battle or elsewhere to commemorate victory” (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In this definition arms first vanquish the body, then represent it, and finally displace it; in effect the trophy is the body transformed into armor. This play on the figure “trophy” is deepened by the term “hypertrophic.” Of a different Greek root than “trophy” (*trophia* rather than *tropaion*), “hypertrophy” concerns the “enlargement (of organ etc.) due to excessive nutrition.” “Hypertrophic trophy,” then, suggests not



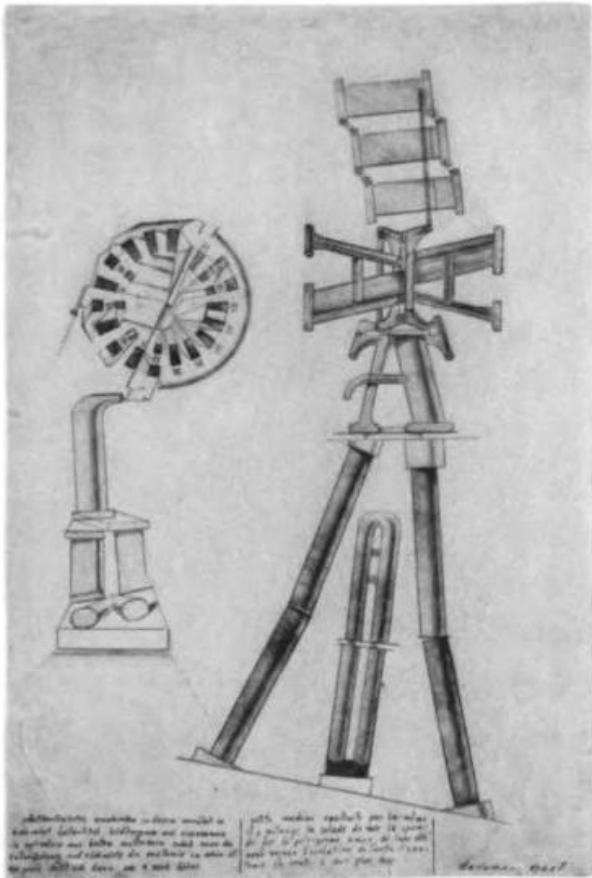
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only that the war has swelled the number of soldier-trophies and thus nourished death excessively, but also that it has armored the male body and thus turned it into a hypertrophic trophy. In play here both formally and thematically is the dadaist strategy of mimetic adaptation, according to which one assumes a given condition, here the (proto) fascist armoring of the body, and inflates it through hyperbole (or “hypertrophy”), in order to explode it bombastically or at least to deflate it parodically. “What we call dada is a farce of nothingness . . .” Hugo Ball writes in *Flight Out of Time*, his extraordinary diary of Zurich Dada, “a gladiator’s gesture, a play with shabby leftovers.”¹¹ Yet, more than a form of adaptation, a technique of survival through camouflage in a hostile environment, this mimetic strategy is a kind of exacerbation, whereby an excessive identification renders the given condition absurd or at least insecure. In effect, Ernst offers us not the hypostasis of the hardened ego as presented by a Marinetti or a Jünger, but the buffoonery of “the bashed ego.”¹²

This parodic presentation of the military-industrial subject is not only a riposte to (proto)fascist visions of war and masculinity, but more generally, in keeping with Germanic Dada at large, it is also an insult to the humanist ideals of art and individuality cherished by the classes that forced the war in the first place. “Our rage had to find some expression somehow or other,” Ernst commented in retrospect. “This we did quite naturally through attacks on the foundations of the civilization responsible for the war.” The



6. Max Ernst, *Petite machine construite par lui-même* (Self-Constructed Small Machine), 1919–1920, graphite with pen and black ink on tan wove paper, The Art Institute of Chicago, Lindy and Edwin Bergman Collection

6.

intent is not quite to shock this civilization. “Contrary to general belief, Dada did not want to shock the bourgeoisie,” Ernst continues. “The bourgeoisie was already shocked enough.”¹³ Rather, the intent is to work over this trauma—to work it over caustically rather than to work it through therapeutically. This difference is intimated in *The Roaring of Ferocious Soldiers*, where Ernst inscribes “vous qui passez priez pour DaDa” along one belt. This note casts “the roaring” in infernal terms (“you who pass pray for Dada”), yet it also suggests that Dada hopes to treat

this trauma, to survive this hell—however futile, even farcical, this hope might be. In this guise Dada both exploits the shock of the military-industrial for purposes of critical negation and seeks to work over this shock—perhaps to “prepare” (as Freud wrote grimly of the symptomatic nightmares of World War I shock victims in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) for a trauma that has already come.¹⁴ “The artist as the organ of the outlandish threatens and soothes at the same time,” Ball states in *Flight Out of Time*. “The threat produces a defense.”¹⁵

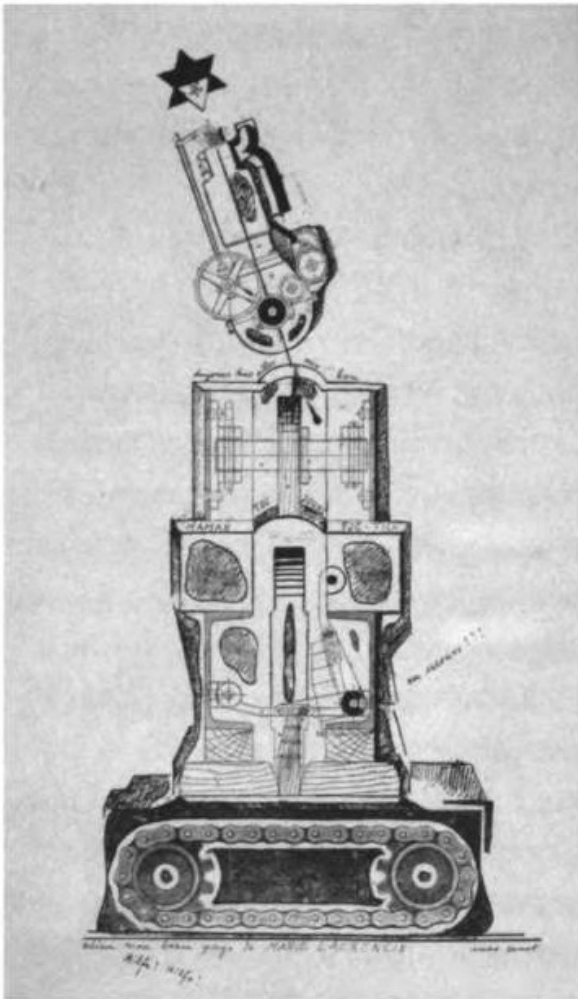
In *The Roaring of Ferocious Soldiers* and *Hypertrophic Trophy*, then, a mechanizing of the male body is pushed to the point of parodic excess. In *Petite machine construite par lui-même* (Self-Constructed Small Machine) (fig. 6) this mechanizing is seen to penetrate the very beginnings of the body. Here the “self” is literally schizo, split into two small “machines,” “constructed” from print plates and pencil rubbings over blocks (letter and other), again all found at the Cologne printer.¹⁶ On the left is a figure with a roulette wheel for a head (only the red numbers appear); on the right is a tripod whose head resembles the bellows of a camera or the mount of a gun. Below runs a nonsensical text, in German and in French. The French reads: “Petite machine construite par lui-même/il y mélange la salade de mer la sperme/de fer le périsperme amer de l’une côté/nous voyons l’évolution de l’autre l’ana-/tomie ça coute 2 sous plus cher.” This might be translated literally as “Self-constructed small machine: it mixes sea salad, iron sperm, a bitter perisperm on the one side; on the other we see the evolution of the anatomy, that costs 2 sous more.”

One is reminded of the dysfunctional machines and semi-anagrammatic puns of Picabia and Marcel Duchamp as well as of Raymond Roussel, the idiosyncratic French writer whom Ernst also admired; yet there might be another association here more particular to Dadamax. In his account of “dementia praecox,” Kraepelin (whose work Ernst had read before the war) disparaged schizophrenic representation as “word or picture salad,” and manifestly this work is both: “il y mélange la salade,” verbal and visual.¹⁷ Allusively schizophrenic in this way, the collage struggles to describe a “self-constructed small machine,” perhaps to evoke what it feels like to be such a schizo machine. “On the one side” (perhaps the left) is an “anatomy” that mixes “sperm” and “salad” in a “perisperm” (a perisperm is a tegument that covers seeds like a protective shell or shield). In this light the work reads as an imaging of a particular kind of conception, an autogenesis, in which the self is constructed like a machine, even as a machine, through a technological conjunction that substitutes for a biological origin. Such fantasies of machinic creation outside the maternal body are a staple of modernists across the political spectrum, but they are pronounced among figures like Marinetti.¹⁸ Here, as in other dadaist machines, these fantasies are mocked: the “self-construction” is an abortion; the figure is divided and dysfunctional, even its gender is ambiguous (a similar figure is announced as feminine in *Femme Belle et Femme Debout* [Beautiful Woman and Upright Woman]). In this regard the phrase *la salade de mer* also evokes, through *mère*, a “mother salad” and, through *merde*, a “shitty mess,” and, as in childhood theories of conception, this “self-construction” conflates the sexual and the scatological as well. This play with regression is as characteristic of Dada as the strategy of mimetic adaptation; here the two are bound up with each other.

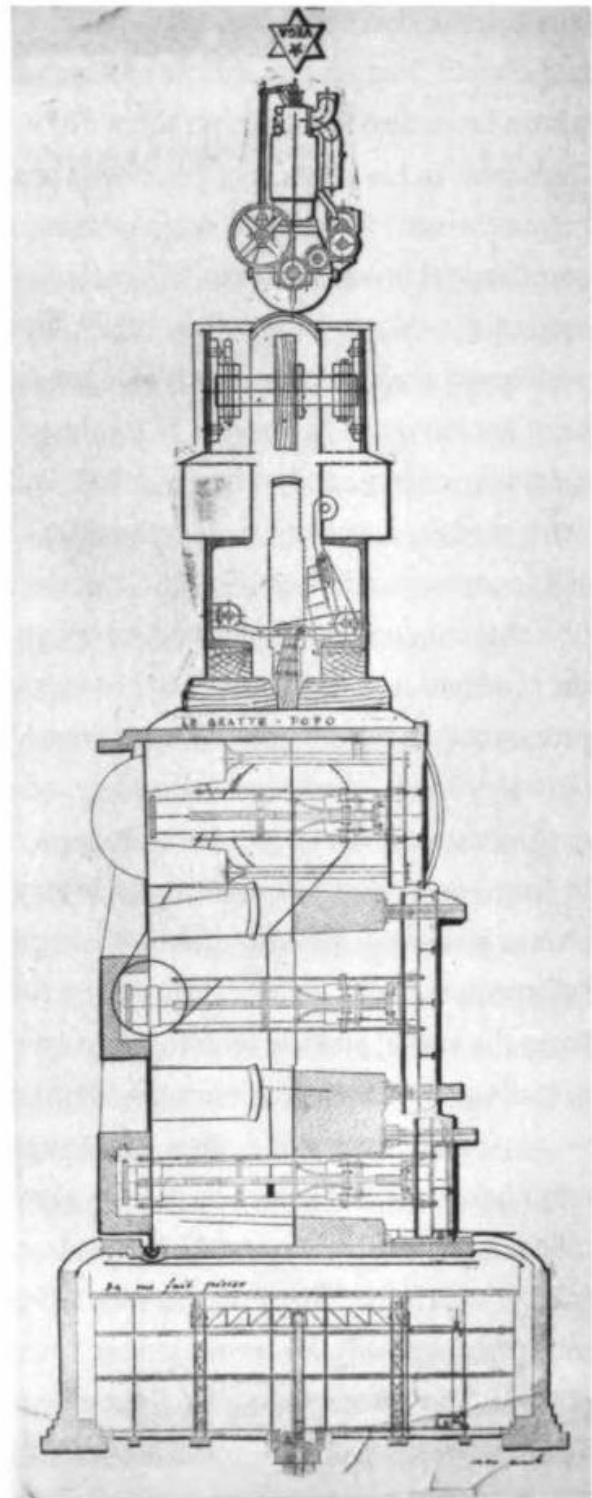
On the one hand, then, the sexual-scatological mocks the mechanical; on the other hand, the mechanical is seen to penetrate the sexual-scatological, not only in the mechanical construction of the figure, but also in its very species-substance as a machine whose “sperm” is “iron.” In this way, *Self-Constructed Small Machine* points to a historical armoring of the body, an “evolution” of “anatomy” that has become almost genetic. The hypothesis of a “protective shield,” the exterior layer that an organism extrudes as protection against excessive stimuli, was a modernist fiction that operates in thinkers as diverse as Freud, Walter Benjamin, Marinetti, and Wyndham Lewis.¹⁹ It can be glimpsed in Ernst too, but again, in dadaist fashion, he presents it excessively, parodically, as a “bitter perisperm” or a “hypertrophic trophy.” *Self-Constructed Small Machine* suggests that, under the shocks of industrial war and capitalist exchange (as at a freak show we are invited to take in this anatomy “on the other side,” perhaps the right, for “2 sous more”), the male body has become an instrumental camera or gun. Paradoxically, however, this very instrumentality renders it dysfunctional as a body image, and this dysfunctionality points to the psychic resonance here. For the collage intimates an autistic system: this “self-constructed small machine” evokes a protective shield or an armored body of a schizophrenic sort—a machinic substitute for a damaged ego that only debilitates this ego all the more.²⁰

7. **Max Ernst, *Ça me fait pisser* (That Makes Me Piss), 1919, Arturo Schwarz Collection, Milan**

8. **Max Ernst, *Adieu mon beau pays de Marie Laurencin* (Farewell My Beautiful Land of Marie Laurencin), 1919, The Museum of Modern Art, New York**



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Two further collages also nuance the historical armoring of the male body in psychic terms. *Ça me fait pisser* (*That Makes Me Piss*) (fig. 7) diagrams another fantastic engine or pump (it is topped by the same schematic of a combustion engine that appears in *The Roaring of Ferocious Soldiers*), and together title and image posit the male body as little more than a mechanical or hydraulic penis. At the same time the diagram also resembles an elevation of a tower with four levels crowned by a star, a skyscraper or *gratte-ciel*, with the words *LE GRATTE-POPO* inscribed atop its second stage. Like other neologisms in Ernst, this one appears both nonsensical and multivalent. On the one hand, it grounds

the meanings of the image in its production (*gratter papier*, to scratch paper), which Ernst liked to sexualize. (In *Beyond Painting* he relates his signature techniques—collage; “frottage,” an image produced through rubbing; and “grattage,” an image produced through scratching—to a hallucinatory erotics of image-making.)²¹ On the other hand, “le grattepopo” twists the phallic aspect of this skyscraper toward both “skin” scratcher (*peau* is “skin” in French) and “ass” scratcher (“popo” is German slang for “ass”). An ass-scratcher that makes me piss: this is yet another dadaist figure of a derangement of bodily functions or a regression in psychosexual stages. *Gratter* also means “to cross out,” and *popo* recalls “papa,” too: in this light the phallic tower is not only mocked in scatological terms, but also challenged in preoedipal terms. In short, this “father-scraper” might infer a crossing out of the paternal image, a defiling of the symbolic order.

The pendant to *That Makes Me Piss* is *Adieu mon beau pays de Marie Laurencin* (*Farewell My Beautiful Land of Marie Laurencin*) (fig. 8). Another tower in elevation, it is topped by the same schematic of the combustion engine, here tilted like an artillery gun in a way that makes the whole resemble less a mock skyscraper than a schematic weapon, a missile-tank. Moreover, its inscriptions—the allusion to the French artist Marie Laurencin as well as the phrase *MAMAN TOUJOURS FJC-TICK* atop its second stage—seem to gender it female.²² Private associations are certainly possible, but the psychology of the work is not only personal, for just as *That Makes Me Piss* suggests a parodic version of the paternal image, *Farewell My Beautiful Land* suggests an ambivalent representation of the maternal body—the maternal body as a fantasmatic object of infantile aggression. It evokes a nightmarish fantasy of the sort detected in disturbed children by the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein—the maternal body as a destructive weapon made up of stone organs and machine parts exposed to view, a fantasy that, as in Klein, seems to threaten the little subject who projects it (“Help!” is scribbled in German and French around the image). Despite the “beautiful land” of the title, the work seems to express fear, even hostility (the inscription “Mama Always Fjk-Fick” sounds obscene as well).

However obliquely, Ernst refers the historical armoring of the body evoked in *The Roaring of the Ferocious Soldiers* and *Hypertrophic Trophy* to a psychic deforming of the subject in *Self-Constructed Small Machine*, *That Makes Me Piss*, and *Farewell My Beautiful Land*. In each collage he associates a dysfunctional machine with a narcissistic disturbance, as if the machine were an attempt to image the disturbance or to rectify it—an attempt that, again, only debilitates the damaged subject further. In effect Ernst juxtaposes historical reification, in the military-industrial development of the subject, with psychic regression, in a preoedipal disordering of the drives; moreover, he associates the two processes and puts them into play together, allusively but critically. Of course these two notions are in great tension—reification (as thought by Georg Lukács) involving broad historical agencies, regression (as thought by Freud) concerning particular psychic states—but it is of this kind of tense connection between the social and the subjective that Ernst invites

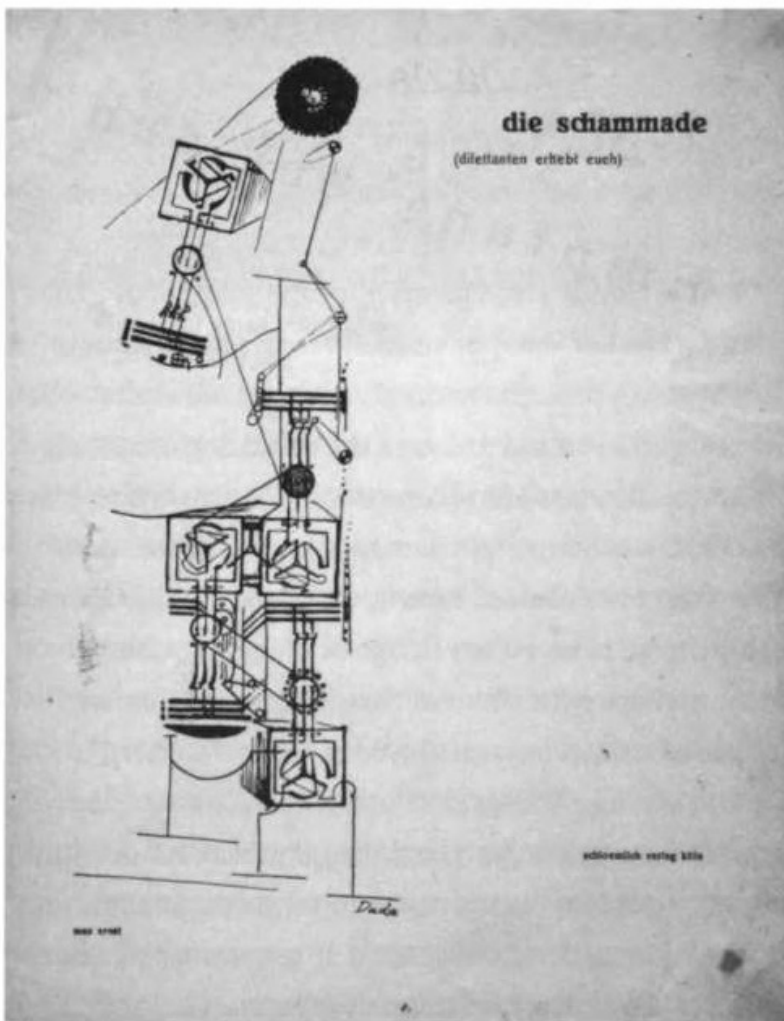
us to think. In doing so, he offers a bitter riposte to reactionary modernists like Marinetti, Lewis, and Jünger, who worked to transvalue reification and regression alike, to turn them into the ecstatic condition of a “new ego” or a “cold consciousness.” At the same time these collages mock a more general faith in the “evolution” of a modern “anatomy,” in the “construction” of a new “self.”

The Hat Makes the Man

Four of the five collages discussed thus far include stock symbols found at the Cologne printer—a small star and, in one instance, a small sun. Usually set atop the vertical figures, they suggest symbols of a military, a party, or a state—abstract placeholders for different regimes of the time. But they might also stand in for different subjects of the time, subjects interpellated as soldiers, party members, or bureaucrats, as so many cogs in the machine of a given regime (the trope of the nation as machine is soon common enough). The sheer abstraction of the symbols suggests the violent arbitrariness of this interpellation as well: in these collages figures are literally imprinted or constructed out of letter blocks (out of language no less), but again in a dysfunctional way—bachelor machines that do not mesh with either the meanings or the mechanisms of the state.

Ernst once cited this account of his work with apparent approval: “His art is neither realistic nor abstract but emblematic.”²³ This emblematic quality pertains not only to the stock symbols but also to the diagrammatic elements of the early collages. The operation of a diagram is to abstract a reality in order to reconceive it; often, then, a utopian projection is implicit in this kind of representation. At the same time a diagram works to control this reconceived reality, so it could be said to carry a dystopian potential as well. Perhaps this doubleness is irreducible in diagrams; certainly both principles seem immanent to some radical diagrams within modernist art (that is, some of the late “Architekton” models of the suprematist Kazimir Malevich, or some of the “New Babylon” drawings of the Situationist Constant). In this light the Ernst collages might not only mock the (proto)fascist visions of a Marinetti or a Jünger, but also question the utopian proposals of a Vladimir Tatlin or an El Lissitzky: in this light *That Makes Me Piss* and *Self-Constructed Small Machine* read as parodies of such near contemporaries as *Monument to the Third International* of Tatlin and *The New* of Lissitzky. All these modernists are prompted by the new forces of the Second Industrial Revolution, especially means of transportation and modes of reproduction, and most view these new techniques as triumphant prostheses, as the making of modern types of machinic movement and vision. In his dadaist collages, however, Ernst seems to present this machine vision as a regressive reification, regardless of the political inflection—capitalist or socialist, communist or fascist. “On the one hand a tottering world in flight, betrothed to the chimes of hell,” Tzara writes in his “Dada Manifesto” of 1918; “on the other hand: new men.”²⁴

The Ernst figures totter toward failure more than flight; indeed, his roaring soldiers, hypertrophic trophies, and self-constructed small machines point to phallic regimes in distress. Such figures recur in all his work of the time; *Die Schammade*, the publication that accompanies the Dada — Early Spring show, is especially telling in this regard. On its title page, above the simple legend “Dada,” appears another self-constructed disaster, a fragile tower made up of stereotype prints, and below the title *die schammade* runs the phrase *dilettanten erhebt euch* (dilettantes rise up) (fig. 9). This pathetic call seems to mock dilettante artists who pretend to revolutionary insurrection, ambivalent avant-gardists who remain dandyish. But then Dada is not free of dandyism either; Ball once defined Dada as “a synthesis of the romantic, dandyistic and daemonistic theories of the nineteenth century,” with Charles-Pierre Baudelaire and Friedrich Nietzsche (the subject of his dissertation) in mind.²⁵ In this light Ernst might be implicated in his own mockery of the dilettante. Perhaps, after the failed revolts of November 1918 there seemed to be



little alternative, at least in Cologne, to a dandyish kind of ambivalent critique. In any case, his tower figures suggest a political impotence that implies a sexual impotence as well, as if these dilettantes fail to “rise up” in that sense, too. The title of the tower-pump, *That Makes Me Piss*, evokes penile dysfunction, and the title of another collage with two meshed figures is more explicit: *erectio sine qua non*, 1920, literally “erection without which nothing” (a play on the Latin formula *conditio sine qua non* or “indispensable

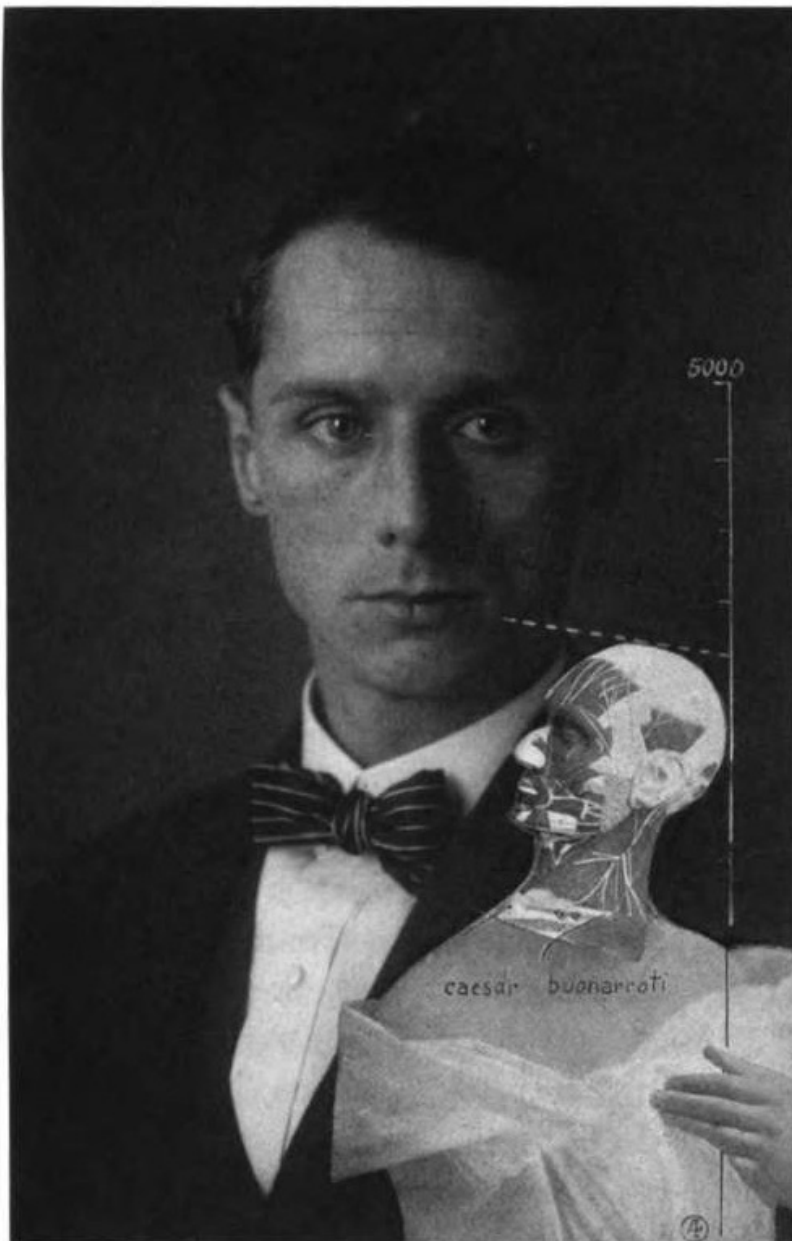
condition"). One of these figures has a little spigot for a penis with a blood-red drip, a detail that is repeated in the collage *minimax dadamax selbst konstruiertes maschinchen* (Self-constructed Small Machine by Minimax Dadamax) in a way that associates this condition, in which penile dysfunction bleeds into outright castration, with his alter ego Dadamax.²⁶ As we have seen, this bloody mark is also present in the assemblage *Old Lecher with Rifle* (where it is associated with Adam and Eve, that is, with the Fall), and this condition casts other figures like *The Roaring of Ferocious Soldiers* and *Hypertrophic Trophy* in a new light as well: they all present different scenarios of "phallic divestiture."

In her formulation of the male masochist, Kaja Silverman defines phallic divestiture in these terms:

He acts out in an insistent and exaggerated way the basic conditions of social subjectivity, conditions that are normally disavowed; he loudly proclaims that his meaning comes to him from the Other; prostrates himself before the Gaze even as he solicits it, exhibits his castration for all to see, and revels in the sacrificial basis of the social contract. The male masochist magnifies the losses and divisions upon which cultural identity is based, refusing to be sutured or recompensed. In short, he radiates a negativity inimical to the social order.²⁷

Such divestiture is fundamental to much Dada; in a sense it is the sexual component of its strategy of mimetic adaptation to military-industrial reification and psycho-social regression. The term *die Schammade* seems to name this divestiture and to clinch this strategy for Ernst in particular. The word is one of the slipperiest of his neologisms. Hans Richter, a veteran of Zurich Dada, heard both *Schamane* (shaman) and *Scharade* (charade) in the term, a reading perhaps closer to the world of Ball than to that of Ernst (though here they are close enough); again, Ball performs Dada precisely as the shaman of a charade, of "a play with shabby leftovers," a kind of sham or scam.²⁸ Werner Spies reports that Ernst intended the term to be "purposely defeatist in tone": a *Schammade* is a bucolic melody, and "the phrase *Schammade schlagen* . . . means to sound the drum or trumpet signal for retreat."²⁹ This melancholic surrender suits our picture of phallic divestiture, but a further combination is possible as well—of *Scham*, which means both "shame" and "genitals" (a telltale association that must have pleased Freud), with *Made*, which means "maggot." This reading of the neologism gives us a nasty image of maggoty pubes, of wormy penises and rotten vaginas, perhaps with a hint of "maggoty shame" as well (along the lines of the "agenbite of inwit" coined by James Joyce in *Ulysses* [1922]).³⁰

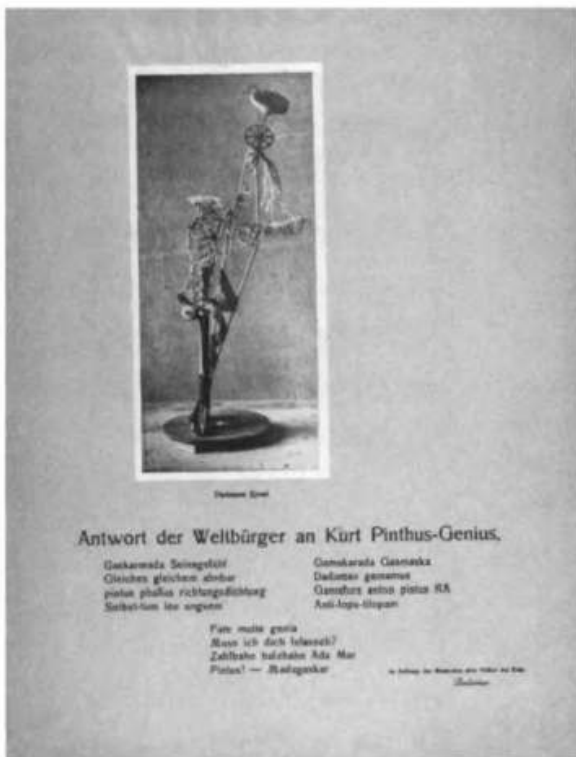
There is other support for this reading. Baargeld included a junk assemblage with the apposite title of *Anthrophiliac Tapeworm* in *Die Schammade*, on the cover of which Ernst listed his collaborators along a "Dadameter" made up of the term "die Schammade"—as if to associate dadaists with a maggoty mess directly or to measure phallic failure, mock-scientifically, with a meter. A similar "Dadameter" appears in his self-



10. Max Ernst, *The Punching Ball ou l'immortalité de buonarroti (The Punching Ball or The Immortality of Buonarroti)*, 1920, Arnold H. Crane Collection, Chicago

10.

portrait *dadamax maximus* of 1920, the photo collage also known as *The Punching Ball or The Immortality of Buonarroti* (fig. 10). Here a handsome young Ernst (his photograph is inscribed “dadamax”) gazes out at us from behind the head of a repellent old man flayed for anatomical study (this smaller photo is inscribed “caesar buonarroti,” as in Michelangelo Buonarroti), set in turn on the bust of woman in a strapless white gown (an alien hand attached to her body holds the Dadameter). Often juxtaposed with a photomontage self-portrait of Baargeld with his head atop the *Venus de Milo*, *The Punching Ball* has as much in common with *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919, the goateed *Mona Lisa* of Duchamp. Rather than a mocked Leonardo (“L.H.O.O.Q.” sounds like “she has a hot ass” in French), Ernst here gives us a Michelangelo stripped bare; but as with the goateed *Mona Lisa* there is gender trouble: “buonarroti” appears in drag. This trouble might extend to the paternal function as well, for “buonarroti” is also identified as “Caesar,” an ultra-patriarch. As with *LHOQQ*, then, a revered icon of Western art is turned into a pilloried image, even a circus freak: art



11.

history as *cadavre exquis*, the classical tradition as “punching ball.”³¹

Ernst also foregrounds phallic divestiture in his “flowerpot sculptures” of the period, perhaps inspired by “the bread-crumbs sculptures” of the mentally ill that he apparently saw in Bonn before the war. Ernst makes several figures of various sizes along the lines of *Old Lecher with Rifle*, figures that we know today mostly through grainy photographs in Dada publications. Stuck together out of wood rods and metal curlicues, *Objet Dad'art*, 1920 (fig. 11), which appears in *Die Schammade*, is another hapless personage. So, too, is *The Little Virile Tree*, and the title of *Bone Windmill of Powerless Hairdressers*

(which is all that remains) suggests that it is one as well. Like others in this loose group, these rickety figures mock any pretense of phallic autonomy, let alone any fantasy of auto-genetic creation.³² This is also true of another lost construction; exhibited along with *Bone Windmill of Powerless Hairdressers* in the *Dada—Early Spring* show, *Phallustrade* was made up primarily of doll parts, apparently along the lines of the four unsteady stacks of semi-animate hats and hat-blocks tinted in different colors in *The Hat Makes the Man* (see fig. 3).³³ Another provocative neologism, “phallustrade” is a contraction of “phallus” and “balustrade”; indeed, in *Beyond Painting* Ernst uses the word to model his conception of collage as “the unexpected meeting of two or more heterogeneous elements.”³⁴ Might this be how he remembers his early sequence of collages and assemblages—as a parade of penile stick-figures, of phallic imposters?

Like *die Schammade*, “phallustrade” conjures up a pathetic charade, a play with shabby leftovers. Once more the term points to phallic divestiture, perhaps effected here through a parodic excess of penile forms, a “hypertrophy” that only exposes deficiency and dysfunction. As we have seen, Ernst often evokes castration in these works: thematically, in the blood-red drips of his penis-spigots; formally, in the failed postures of his pathetic figures; and procedurally, in the castrative cuts and fetishistic accumulations of the making of the collages and assemblages. Paradoxically, the excess of penile forms in *The Hat Makes the Man* and *Phallustrade* is another way to evoke castration. In “*Medusa's Head*” (1922) Freud argues that any fetishistic “multiplication of penis symbols” might only declare what it seeks to deny, namely, the lack of the penis, castration. Such is the double import, he continues, of the snaky hair of the gorgon Medusa: castration is

11. Max Ernst, *Objet Dad'art*, 1920, title page of *Die Schammade* (with Dadamax Ernst), Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

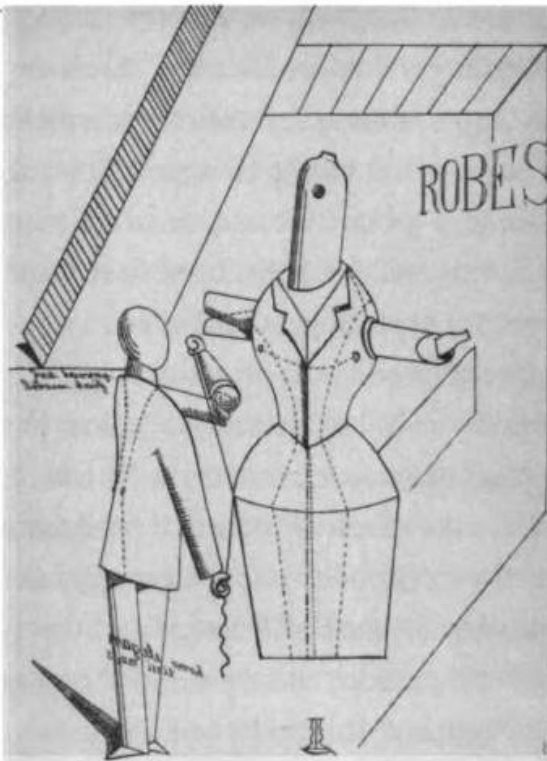
12. Max Ernst, *Fiat Modes—pereat ars* (Let There Be Fashion—Art Is Fleeting) (I), 1919, The Art Institute of Chicago, Margeret Fisher and Major Acquisitions Centennial Endowments

13. Max Ernst, *Fiat Modes—pereat ars* (Let There Be Fashion—Art Is Fleeting) (VI), 1919, The Art Institute of Chicago, Margeret Fisher and Major Acquisitions Centennial Endowments

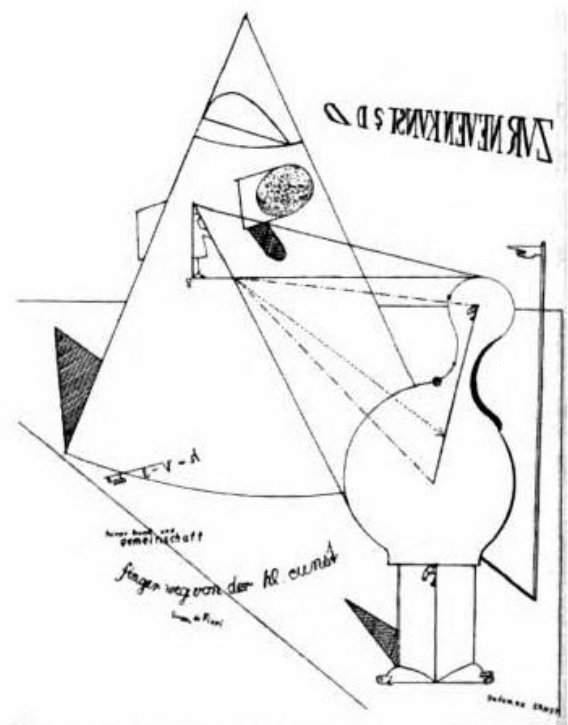
revealed in the very fetishistic attempt to conceal it.³⁵ So it is too, perhaps, with the phalustrade figures of Ernst. If the hat makes the man, then it follows that without the hat the man is little; that is, without his phallic embellishments, his hypotrophic trophies, the man is deficient. (As the Lacanian psychoanalyst Eugène Lemoine-Luccioni writes, “if the penis were the phallus, it would have no need of feathers or ties or medals.”³⁶) Such virile display is most pronounced in (proto)fascist subjects, and here the phallic politics of Marinetti and others is also mocked by the pathetic phalustrades of Ernst.

If Picabia gives us “daughters born without a mother,” then Ernst offers us sons born without a father, or, more precisely, sons born against the father. More than once Ernst titles his figures “ambiguous,” as if to indicate an uncertainty of form that also bespeaks a confusion in identity. But often in this confusion his figures are more than “ambiguous”; they are perverse—perverse in the sense of *père-verse*, turned against the father. Again, like the bachelor machine defined by Deleuze and Guattari, they work against normative reproduction. “Childhood knows Dada,” Ernst remarks in *Beyond Painting*, but by the same token Dada knows daddy, and kidnaps him to the nursery.

Ernst also intimates “male trouble” in *Fiat Modes, pereat ars*, 1919 (figs. 12, 13). This sequence of eight lithographs traces the strange metamorphoses of two featureless



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figures, a male tailor and a female model that are the most direct progeny of his joining of the mannequins of De Chirico and the mechanomorphs of Picabia in fall 1919. Announced by another diagrammatic tower on its cover, the sequence is not a coherent narrative, but the title (“FIAT MODES” in capital letters, “pereat ars” in tiny script) keys our reading. Another dadaist inversion of a familiar saying, it transforms “let there be art, life is fleeting” (*fiat ars, pereat vita*) into “let there be fashion, art is fleeting.” Here, then, fashion has replaced art as the human approximation of immortality: in a way that parallels German critics of his extended generation (Lukács, Benjamin, Theodor Adorno), Ernst implies that fashion has become eternal in its very transience (the ever-new as the ever-same), a “second nature” to whose laws the (bourgeois) individual is subject.³⁷ *Fiat Modes* is thus more than a general attack on humanist ideals of art; it is a particular tale about the “fashioning” of the self, or, as the inscription has it, “the hat makes the man, style is the tailor.” As with *The Hat Makes the Man*, the male tailor is also caught up in this fashioning, manipulated no less than the female model as so many parts. This set of transformations looks ahead to the perverse variations that Hans Bellmer wrought on his dolls; at the same time the deranged space in *Fiat Modes* looks back to De Chirico.³⁸ By the end of the sequence the two figures seem to be combined in one bulbous creature with a little penis. This large ridiculous figure in the foreground is diagrammed by an irrational perspective that seems controlled by a small sinister figure housed in a perspectival pyramid in the background. This image is another Chiricoesque derangement of Renaissance space with a smutty dadaist jibe at high art thrown in, for inscribed by the large figure is the phrase *finger weg von der hl. Cunst*, or “hands off holy art” (perhaps with an undertone of “hands off holy cunt”), an ironic plea to halt the degradation of art by the likes of Ernst. Another inscription inflects the image further: “ZUR NEUEN KUNST” (Toward a New Art) follows, in reverse script, the space of the image as it plunges into the distance. This is an ambiguous gesture: it might suggest an additional target, not only Renaissance perspective but its modernist transcendence in abstract space as proposed, say, by Lissitzky (“Toward the New Art” was the motto, UNOVIS the acronym, of a group of Russian artists formed around Malevich at the very moment that *Fiat Modes* was made).³⁹ Here the reification of the subject appears to be total, without redress even (or especially) in radical art.

In *Fiat Modes* reification appears as a reciprocal process of subject and object, as indeed Lukács would argue two years later in *History and Class Consciousness* (1922). In his account of reification, which essentially fuses Karl Marx on commodity fetishism with Max Weber on rationalization, Lukács considers the effects of industrial production as transformed by Taylorist regimes of work, which were introduced into Germany just before World War I.⁴⁰ On the assembly line, Lukács argues, the bodily integrity of the worker is broken up as much as the organic unity of the product, and the worker becomes “a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system.”⁴¹ In *Fiat Modes* Ernst (who once worked briefly in a hat factory owned by his father-in-law Jacob Straus) implies that

this kind of reified fragmentation occurs in consumption as well as in production. Again *The Hat Makes the Man* is the complementary work here, for its “men” are also both mechanical (they resemble four pistons) and commodified (they are nothing but hats). In fact, Ernst gives *The Hat Makes the Man* an inscription that reads like a crazy litany of many of his concerns at this time. It appears first in German and translates roughly as “seed-covered stacked-up man seedless water-former well-fitting nervous system also tightly fitted nerves”; and then in parenthetical French, “the hat makes the man, style is the tailor.”⁴² Once more, in the schizophrenic language of a subject damaged by the process, the inscription points to the evolution of a new kind of man, with a new sort of nervous system—armored, mechanical, mass, sterile, constructed out of standard parts and commodity images, a “mass ornament” of one.⁴³

This irrational rationalization is a recurrent theme in the early collages. It is also a formal operation, for Ernst puts his own kind of mad mechanization to work here: as noted above, his images are often made up of standard parts (stereotype prints and letter blocks) repeated from figure to figure or from work to work. In a sense the collages perform a mechanization not only of bodily form but of artistic procedure, with different marks that are semiautomatic—printed and stenciled, rubbed and stamped. Almost always his pen and pencil additions also conceal his hand (Ernst often photographed his collages to this same end), and, however absurd, his texts sound semiautomatic, too, in the manner of the anagrammatic readymades of Roussel and Duchamp. As Benjamin would argue famously, the modern work of art is not only subject to mechanical reproduction; it also adjusts to this modality, becomes predesigned, as it were, for it. Ernst suggests this process with images that are (de)constructed almost serially, as if on an assembly line; and again this mimetic adaptation to industrial production or mechanical reproduction is pushed to a parodic point: both procedure and appearance become Frankensteinian, and the subject that they project is schizo.⁴⁴

Perhaps the apparent oppositions here between the rational and the irrational are mediated by chance. Several collages, for example, contain images of roulette wheels. Yet if these wheels are images of chance, they are not opposed, for example, to machines as images of order, for sometimes the two are combined, as in *Self-Constructed Small Machine*, *vademecum mobile be all warned*, and *Canalization of Refrigerated Gas*, c. 1919–1920, where roulette wheels merge with bicycle wheels (an early allusion to Duchamp?). Sometimes, too, images of bodily organs are included, as if to imply that chance and order cannot be opposed at the level of the body either, or that the body is equally implicated in both. Despite common opinion, chance and order are not opposed in Dada (not to mention in surrealism); rather they are revealed to be bound up with each other, to determine one another. This imbrication of the two is demonstrated in numerous works from Duchamp to André Breton and beyond, and the demonstration is not only philosophical, for it reflects on an important aspect of this capitalist epoch. “Where would one find a more evi-

dent contrast than the one between work and gambling?" Benjamin asks in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939), written at a time when Dada was much on his mind. Yet, as Benjamin suggests, this contrast between regimes of order and chance is only apparent: the automatic dimension of capitalist production and consumption "reconciles" them in a way that Baudelaire already glimpsed in his tableaux of modern Parisians. "The jolt in the movement of a machine is like the so-called coup in a game of chance," Benjamin continues. Both the worker and the gambler "live their lives as automatons"—that is, they confront repetitions that, though expected, surprise them nonetheless—and "the work of both is equally devoid of substance."⁴⁵

Some of the early collages of Ernst point to a similar condition. Look once more at the figures in *Self-Constructed Small Machine*: they resemble strangely animate cameras or guns—or perhaps both, as if the body were retooled as a photographic rifle. In the late 1870s the French physiologist Etienne-Jules Marey devised the *fusil photographique* to capture the mechanical dynamics of the body in motion, and like other modernists (especially Duchamp and the futurists), Ernst was interested in the "chronophotography" that resulted (in his later collage-novels he uses related illustrations drawn from the scientific magazine *La Nature*, where Marey published his images). Such time-motion studies of the body in the last decades of the nineteenth century prepared "the scientific management of labor" in the first decades of the twentieth. Perhaps Ernst alludes to this development of the body as examined by devices like the camera-gun and reconfigured according to its specifications. He implies that the body might also be transformed into such a device, that its vision might become a "machine vision." In this light the ultimate target of his dysfunctional figures may be not the futurist fantasies of a "new ego," much less the constructivist diagrams of a "new man," but the Taylorist-Fordist (dis)assembly of the worker that, adopted by many regimes of this time, subtends all these modernisms.

NOTES

1 Max Ernst in an interview with Patrick Waldberg, "La Partie de Boules: Die Boules-Partie," in *Max Ernst in Selbstzeugnissen und Bild-dokumenten* (Hamburg, 1969), 35; and Ernst, *Beyond Painting* (New York, 1948), 14. The latter includes several texts, most published in surrealist journals, the earliest of which dates from 1927.

2 Some historians date his first encounter with Freud texts to 1911, others to 1913. For his possible use of Kraepelin see Elizabeth M. Legge, *Max Ernst: The Psychoanalytic Sources* (Ann Arbor, 1989), 11–16; she also lists other recent texts on his connections to psychoanalysis. Jokes might have inflected his dadaist play with neologisms in titles and inscriptions, and *Dreams* his notion of the surrealist image as a picture puzzle of broken meanings. As Sander L. Gilman has noted, the "mythopoesis of mental illness . . .

dominated the German intellectual scene in the opening decades of the twentieth century." See his *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), 217–238.

3 In a reprise of a passage in *Beyond Painting*, Ernst writes in "Notes pour une biographie": "Near Bonn there was a group of gloomy-looking buildings that in many respects recalled the Sainte-Anne Hospital in Paris. In this

'home for the mentally ill' students could take courses and practical seminars. One of these buildings contained an astonishing collection of sculptures and paintings by the involuntary inhabitants of this frightful place—particularly figures made of breadcrumbs. They profoundly moved the young man, who was tempted to see strokes of genius in them and who decided to explore the vague and dangerous regions on the margins of insanity. Only later, however, was he to discover certain 'procedures' that helped him penetrate into this 'no-man's land' " (*Écritures* [Paris, 1970], 20). In *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane* (Princeton, N.J., 1989), John M. MacGregor questions the veracity of this statement (278).

4 The first two characteristics are noted by Hans Prinzhorn in his *Artistry of the Mentally Ill*, trans. Eric von Brockdorff (Vienna, 1972), 48, 60.

5 I am indebted for much information here to Werner Spies, *Max Ernst Collages: The Invention of the Surrealist Universe*, trans. Johan William Gabriel (New York, 1991); Wulf Herzogenrath, ed., *Max Ernst in Köln* (Cologne, 1980); William A. Camfield, *Max Ernst: Dada and the Dawn of Surrealism* (London, 1991); and Charlotte Stokes, "Rage and Liberation: Cologne Dada," in Charlotte Stokes and Stephen Foster, eds., *Dada Cologne Hanover* (New York, 1997).

6 "German intellectuals can neither pee nor shit without ideologies," Ernst writes to Tristan Tzara on 17 February 1920 (quoted in Spies, *Max Ernst Collages*, 270). It is often said that Ernst is not political, not even in his Dada days in Cologne, yet like the Berlin dadaists he has exhibitions closed and publications seized by the police.

7 Max Ernst, "Biographical Notes," in *Beyond Painting*, 31; Spies, *Max Ernst Collages*, 48. He also meets Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings in Munich at this time and begins to correspond with Tzara by December 1919.

8 Ernst includes Picabia's work in his new dadaist publication *Bulletin D*. For the now-familiar associations of his early collages with Duchamp and Picabia, see Spies and Camfield—though Ernst claimed that his interest in mechanical elements stemmed from wartime experiences more than from those dadaists (Spies, *Max Ernst Collages*, 33).

9 Max Ernst, "Biographical Notes," 294. Phillip also paints Max in uniform, replete with the Iron Cross that he won in the war. Apparently, Max would paint out the Cross on visits home, and Phillip would paint it back in.

10 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972), trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (New York, 1977), 31.

11 Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time* (1927), trans. Ann Raimis (New York, 1974), 65. Incidentally, "hypertrophic" is a term used sarcastically by Picabia and Tzara in relation to poetry and painting, respectively.

12 I associate this strategy of mimetic adaptation or exacerbation with the great challenge of Marx: "petrified social conditions must be made to dance by singing them their own song" (Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Introduction," in *Early Writings*, ed. and trans. T. B. Bottomore [New York, 1964], 47; translation modified). It is also akin to "kynical irony" as discussed by Peter Sloterdijk in *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis, 1987); I borrow the term "bashed ego" from him (see 391–409).

Fragments of a theory of mimetic exacerbation are found in Benjamin and Adorno. See, for example, Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, 1997): "Art is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated." For more on this strategy see my "Dada Mime," October 105 (Summer 2003).

13 Ernst quoted in Spies, *Max Ernst: A Retrospective*, 21.

14 See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), trans. James Strachey (New York, 1961), 6–7, 23–27.

15 Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 54. "But since it turns out to be harmless," Ball adds, "the spectator begins to laugh at himself about his fear." This points to the limitations of mimetic adaptation, more on which below.

16 Spies sees in the figure on the right the letters "MAX"; see *Max Ernst Collages*, 72.

17 Perhaps the French-German salad also speaks to the "schizo" position of Ernst at this time, suspended between various avant-gardes, oriented to Paris but stranded in Cologne.

18 In an announcement in *Die Schamade for Fiat Modes*, a work discussed below, Ernst is described as *die Gebärmutter methodischen Irrsinns*, literally "the uterus of methodical madness."

19 There is a sociological use of this trope as well. For example, Nobert Elias uses it to think the development of a military-industrial body in *The Civilizing Process* (1939), trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York, 1978). Concerned with armoring as a psychic phenomenon, Klaus Theweleit is ambivalent about this sociological account: on the one hand, he speaks of “the technization of the body”; on the other hand, he argues that “it has nothing to do with the development of machine technology” (*Male Fantasies*, Cambridge, England, 1987, 2:202, 162).

20 Above I intimated that his post-war “resuscitation” as Dadamax mimed an autistic defense, and that his “self-constructed small machines” recalled autistic systems. Such machinic systems are sometimes found in the art of the mentally ill gathered by Prinzhorn, but he did not theorize them as such. Long afterward the psychotherapist Bruno Bettelheim began to do so in a controversial case-study of a boy named Joey, whose autism was marked by an apprehension of his body as “run by machines.” These machines, which Joey represented in a way sometimes reminiscent of the Ernst collages, served both to drive him and to protect him, as a “defensive armoring” against dangers from within and without. This armoring, however, placed Joey in a double bind, for he also needed periodic release from it, a release that came in the form of catastrophic “explosions.” The explosions left him, in the depths of his autism, with the fear that he had no body left at all, that its waste was everywhere, that he lived in a “world of mire” (Theweleit detects a related double bind, and a similar fear of “mire,” in his [proto]fascist subjects).

The machines were thus attempts to abject this world, to reestablish his boundaries. Needless to say, they were hardly satisfactory, and “his defensive armoring ended in total paralysis.” See Bruno Bettelheim, *The Empty Fortress: Infantile Autism and the Birth of the Self* (New York, 1967), 233–339.

21 Here is one passage concerning his overpainted collages (Ernst repeats it with variations for his other techniques): “One rainy day in 1919, finding myself in a village on the Rhine, I was struck by the obsession which held under my gaze the pages of an illustrated catalogue showing objects designed for anthropologic, microscopic, psychologic, mineralogic, and paleontologic demonstration. There I found brought together elements of figuration so remote that the sheer absurdity of that collection provoked a sudden intensification of the visionary faculties in me and brought forth an illusive succession of contradictory images, double, triple and multiple images, piling up on each other with the persistence and rapidity which are peculiar to love memories and visions of half-sleep” (Ernst, *Beyond Painting*, 14). On this “primal scene” of aesthetic creation see chap. 3 of my *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993).

22 Renowned for her romantic adventures, Marie Laurencin attempted to get Ernst a visa at this time—without success. See Uwe M. Schneede, *The Essential Max Ernst*, trans. R. W. Last (London, 1972), 21.

23 The formulation is that of the critic Patrick Waldberg; see Ernst, “Biographical Notes,” in Camfield, *Max Ernst*, 285.

24 Tristan Tzara, “Dada Manifesto,” in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 78. In this respect the dadaist (anti-capitalist)

vision of “the engineer” is very different from the (pro-communist) constructivist vision: the former is a figure of reification that works down from society to the subject; the latter is a figure of idealization that runs from the subject to society at large. Ernst does not share the interest in constructivism shown by some dadaists. Indeed, his *Self-Constructed Small Machine* is other to “the man with a movie camera” imagined by Dziga Vertov in his 1929 film of this title, and his *Punching Ball or The Immortality of Buonarroti* is other to *The Constructor* of El Lissitzky.

25 Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 117 (23 May 1917). The “cubist” novella by Carl Einstein titled *Bebuquin, the Dilettantes of the Wondrous* (1912), is perhaps influential here as well; see Ball, “Carl Einstein’s *Dilettanten des Wunders Shows the Way*” (*Flight Out of Time*, 10).

26 In this collage an inscription alludes to *furchtlose verrichtungen* or “fearless performances,” which suggests *fruchtlose verrichtungen* or “fruitless performances” (in all these titles even the letters fail to “rise up” as capitals). A related figure is titled *Chilisaipetzlein*; salt-peter was an old treatment for syphilis.

27 Kaja Silverman, “Masochism and Male Subjectivity,” *Camera Obscura* 17 (May 1988), 51. Silverman elaborates the strategy of phallic divestiture in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York, 1992). George Baker discusses it in relation to Francis Picabia in *Lost Objects* (Ph.D. diss., Columbia Univ., 2000).

28 Ball: "What we call Dada is a farce of nothingness in which all higher questions are involved; a gladiator's gesture, a play with shabby leftovers, the death warrant of posturing morality and abundance" (*Flight Flight Out of Time*, 65 [12 June 1916]).

29 Spies, *Max Ernst Collages*, 79.

30 Ursula Dustmann suggests "maggoty shame" in Wulf Herzogenrath, ed., *Max Ernst in Köln: Die rheinische Kunstszene* (Cologne, 1980), 118.

31 There are many images of transvestism in Dada beyond the Baargeld self-portrait, and phallic concerns run through other Ernst collages and photocollages of the time. In one (fig. 155 in Spies, *Max Ernst Collages*) a man gazes at an amorous couple with a massive corn cob between his legs and a bear by his side; in another (fig. 156) a man in drag gazes up at two hunks of meat that hang above a seductive woman on a chaise lounge.

32 This fantasy of creation ex nihilo is a strong current in modernist sculpture from Constantin Brancusi through David Smith; in a sense Ernst anticipates it and mocks it here.

33 Or so Ernst told Spies (in *Max Ernst Collages*, 58).

34 See Ernst, *Beyond Painting*, 16. Like the unconscious, the surrealist image, visual as well as verbal, is often neologistic in this way.

35 Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head," in Phillip Rieff, ed., *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love* (New York, 1963), 212. It is again at work in his first collage-novel, *La Femme 100 têtes* (1929), in which "100," cent, also reads as sans, without. One might also argue that this multiplication disperses the penile form and drains away whatever phallic force it may possess.

36 See Eugène Lemoine-Luccioni, *La Robe: Essai psychanalytique sur le vêtement* (Paris, 1983), 34.

37 Georg Lukács discusses "second nature" in the nearly contemporaneous *The Theory of the Novel*, written in 1914–1915 but published in 1920: "This second nature is not dumb, sensuous and yet senseless like the first: it is a complex of senses—meanings—which has become rigid and strange, and which no longer awaken interiority; it is a charnel-house of long-dead interiorities" (*The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock [Cambridge, Mass., 1971], 64).

38 Perhaps in a work like *Phallustrade* Ernst anticipates the dolls of Bellmer. (Ernst and Bellmer did not meet until later; for a short time during World War II they were interned together as German aliens in France.)

39 Similarly the overpaintings, as Rosalind Krauss has argued, suggest "a visual model that is at one and the same time the complete reversal of traditional perspective and the total refusal of its modernist alternative" ("The Master's Bedroom," *Representations*, 66).

40 See Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (New York, 1990): "the psychotechnical movement in Germany experienced its greatest influence in the early 1920s" (278).

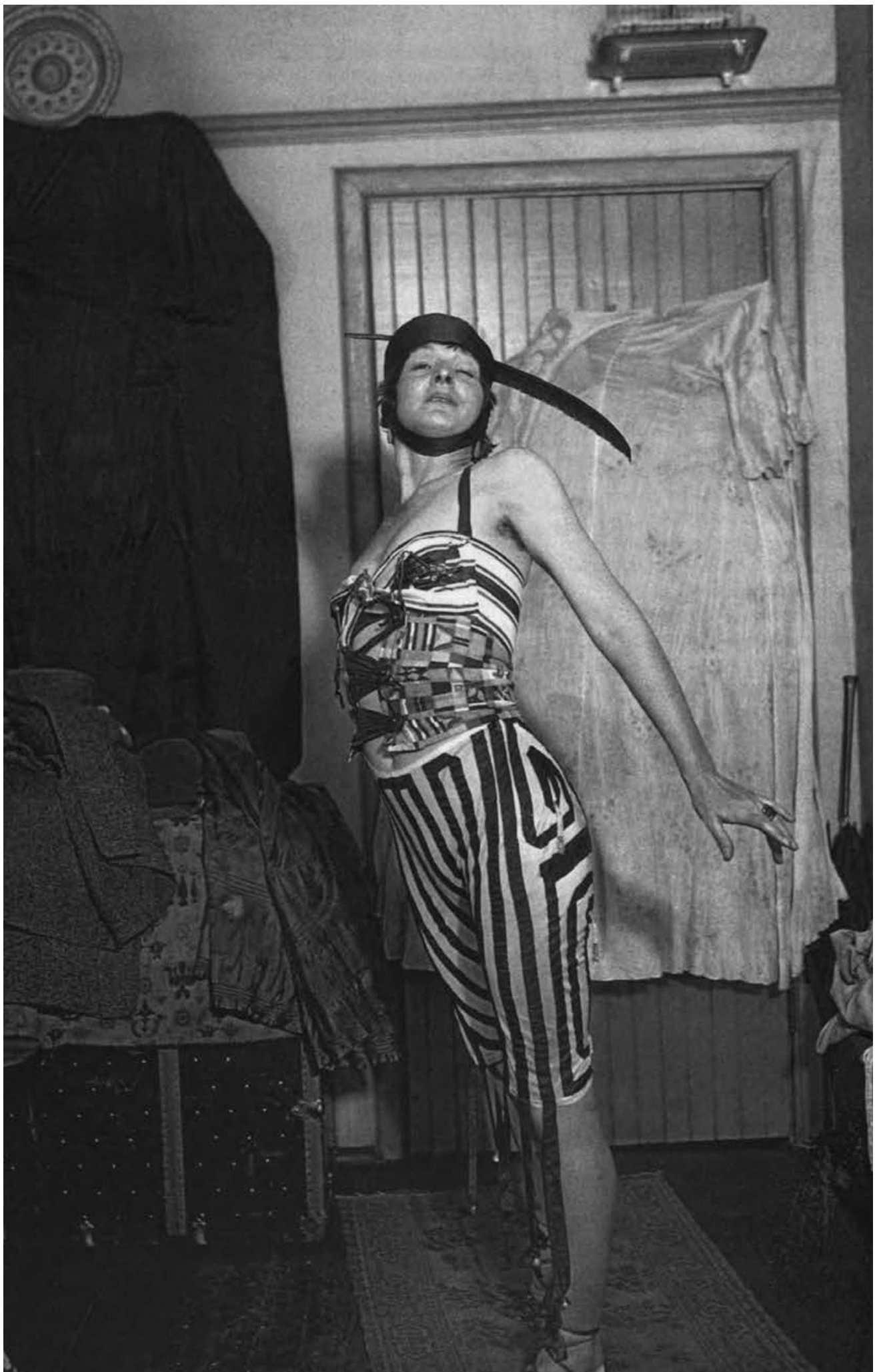
41 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), 89. "With the modern 'psychological' analysis of the work process this rational mechanization extends right into the worker's 'soul'" (88).

42 The German inscription reads, "bedecksamiger stapelmensch nacktsamiger wasserformer ('edelformer') kleidsame nervatur auch lumpressner-vent!" *The Hat Makes the Man* is an overpainting of found and collaged images, with some hats inverted. *The Sandworm Who Reties Her Sandal*, 1920, is its female complement: here Ernst inverts an illustration of two rows of bonnets and paints it over in such way as to create a world in which human hats in a magazine have become sandworms on a dune. The implication is that fashion now penetrates nature with its fetishistic form of (in)animation, that its "sex appeal of the inorganic" (to use the Benjaminian formula of the commodity fetish) reproduces on its own.

43 See Siegfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament*, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, Mass., 1995).

44 A Frankensteinian twist on the modern worker-subject is almost explicit in the photocollage *Anatomy as Bride* (1921; Spies, *Max Ernst Collages*, 174), a kind of mechanical *cadavre exquis*. (In *Max Ernst Collages*, 45, Spies claims that "these plate-prints are the first compositions in twentieth-century art to be based on the serial principle.") In a sense they may also comprise an early instance of the horizontal reorientation of the image as a sort of quasirandom operation that, according to Leo Steinberg, was fully achieved only in "the flat-bed picture-plane" of Robert Rauschenberg over thirty years later (again, the kind of "schizophrenic" mind that Steinberg sees projected there is also intimated here). See Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York, 1972), 55–91.

45 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1969), 176–178. Benjamin met Ball and Emmy Hennings in 1918 in Bern.



New York Dada: Beyond the Readymade | Amelia Jones

For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably. (The good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth.)

Opening this essay with a quotation from Walter Benjamin's 1940 "Theses on the Philosophy of History" is strategic. In the same text, Benjamin discusses the tension between historical materialism, of which he is an advocate, and historicism, noting critically that the followers of the latter historical attitude and method empathize "with the victor," benefiting "the ruler" at the expense of "the anonymous toil of their contemporaries." He concludes, "[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."¹ For Benjamin, historicism is a politically dubious method in that it fails to understand the "barbaric" labors and cultural effusions that are coextensive with the culture of the "victors," on which historicists focus exclusively.

In art history this tendency to privilege the cultural "victors"—those artists whose reputation has already been solidified or whose work in one way or another serves the purposes of the discourses that comprise the discipline and its institutional support structures (including the university, the museum, and the art market)—is even more striking, perhaps because of the strong ties between the discipline and the art market's penchant for, and commodification of, "unique" objects that seem inexorably to point to "unique" subjects as their makers and origins. In a mutually sustaining circuit of value, the art market and its institutional corollaries, the art gallery and museum, draw on the insights of art-historical scholarship and art-critical writing to legitimate the value (economic and otherwise) of the objects they display, which in turn are the "object" of art history's narratives of progress and critique.

The "victor" has a particular salience for the study of New York Dada, a group of artists including the French Marcel Duchamp (called, in fact, "Victor" by his friend Henri-Pierre Roché²), the American Man Ray, the Cuban-French Francis Picabia, and other disaffected American and European expatriate writers and artists (Arthur Craven, Jean Crotti, and others) who came to New York City during the World War I period and were shortly after the war retroactively designated with this moniker.³ In particular, while studies specifically of New York Dada (including the work of Francis Naumann, Rudolf Kuenzli, Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, and others) have acknowledged myriad figures relating to the "dadaist" impulse in New York during that era (and, in fact, have been criticized for applying the New York Dada rubric too widely),⁴ broader studies of the contribu-

1. Two views of Elsa Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven from *New York Dada* (1921), Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Carl Zigrosser, 2003



Elsa
Baroness
von
Freytag
Loring-
hoven

DON'T MISS
Kurt Schwitters and other
ANONYMPHS at the
SOCIÉTÉ ANONYME, INC.
19 East 47th Street, New York

YOURS WITH DEVOTION
trumpets and drums.

1.

tion of the early twentieth-century avant-gardes to histories of modernism and post-modernism have tended to focus on Duchamp's readymades—mass-produced objects chosen (with “indifference,” according to Duchamp⁵) and signed as works of art. The Duchampian readymade gesture has thus consistently been defined as epitomizing the radical critical impulse of New York Dada.

This tendency to reduce the complex fabric of cultural activities of the New York Dada group was crystallized by Peter Bürger in his important 1974 book *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (published in English in 1984), which deeply informed subsequent theorizations in the United States not only of the early twentieth-century “historical” avant-gardes (as Bürger calls them) and Dada in particular, but of the later postmodern tendencies, such as 1980s appropriation art. Bürger argues the crucial impetus of the historical avant-gardes to be that of the critique of the institutions of art.⁶ Given this emphasis, it is not surprising that he singles out Duchamp's readymades as paradigmatic examples of the

impulse toward institutional critique he identifies as essential to the historical avant-gardes. This gesture was not new. As Benjamin had phrased it half a century earlier, clearly referring at least in part to the readymades, Dada represented the “relentless destruction of the aura of their creations, which they branded as reproductions with the very means of production.”⁷

The point here will not be to discard Bürger’s model—which clearly has had an enormously useful role in theorizing postmodernism—and replace it with another “correct” one; nor is my goal to reject the preeminence of Duchamp’s readymades and substitute another set of objects or practices within the same logic of avant-gardism. The importance of Duchamp’s readymades for subsequent conceptions of radical practice (and in particular for conceptions of postmodern critique that developed in American-based art discourse in the 1980s),⁸ at any rate, can hardly be denied. I want to take a different position entirely from which to view the cultural productions of New York Dada. These will be understood here largely in institutional terms, as indicating the work of artists who at one time or another exchanged ideas in the context of the Arensberg salon and, to some extent, Alfred Stieglitz’s 291 gallery and the related, eponymous publication (spearheaded by Paul Haviland, Agnes de Meyer, and Marius de Zayas), as well as other related journals and institutions (such as the journals *The Blind Man* and *New York Dada*, and the organizations of the 1917 Society of Independent Artists and the *Société Anonyme*, cofounded by Duchamp, Man Ray, and Katherine Dreier in 1920) (fig. 1).⁹

From this different vantage point, informed by the insights of feminism and postcolonial theory, a different *idea* about Dada, in particular New York Dada and its avant-gardism, will emerge—an idea of Dada as a continuum of creative acts. In this way, I hope to provide not only a new way to think about New York Dada but also a different way of *doing* art history—one that acknowledges and examines the work of not only the “victors” (though Duchamp, as always, will play a role in it) but also of other figures that have heretofore been perceived as peripheral to considerations of the historical significance of the movement.

“Barbarians”

Victors, of course, are always defined as such in relation to those figures Benjamin termed “barbarians.” While Giorgio Vasari could, in the sixteenth century, oppose Italian artistic culture to the debased cultures of the “savage and barbarian invaders from the north,” by the period of modernism at issue in studying Dada, such views of “barbarianism”—encapsulated in the common modernist term, primitivism—came in certain cases to be celebrated as a means of jazzing up (as it were) the sterility of bourgeois Western culture.¹⁰ The primitive, then, gained in value in the modern age but retained its oppositional status (as “other” to the European traditions).

Slightly twisting Benjamin's meaning in his argument cited above (in the context of his essay, he is clearly writing about the barbaric underside of capitalist production, including artistic ventures), I deploy his notion of the primitive as existing within the parameters of European culture itself, as its own repressed underside. In this way I willfully pervert the standard opposition posing the primitive as other to European culture, proposing from within the culture of Dada itself a barbarian or primitive alternative to the common notion of New York Dada as being epitomized by Duchamp's readymades, objects quintessentially of the modern with their critique of the commodifying processes of the art market. While the readymade critique came to be central to later, postmodern art practices, I am interested here in an aspect of New York Dada that until very recently has been repressed in broad debates about the significance of the movement.

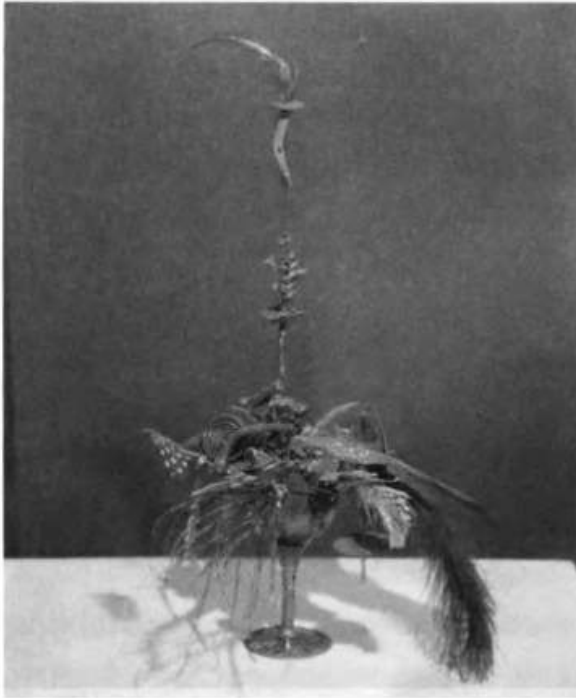
The so-called barbarian I have in mind as activating this underside is the violently sexualized, peripatetic poet-artist, the nominally German-Polish but, in the eyes of her artistic and poetic colleagues, primitive expatriate called the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (née Else Plötz). A European who nonetheless pointed to the limits of European bourgeois—but also, I am arguing, *avant-garde*—culture, the Baroness threatened to pollute both arenas through her messy, irrational, oversexualized self-performances, as well as her experimental visual objects (constructed from conglomerations of found and stolen urban detritus) and literary works.

Crucially for my argument here—my attempt to rethink the potential significance of New York Dada in terms of its activation of a continuum of creative acts—it was recognized at the time that the Baroness had a fully embodied, lived relationship to Dada. Her dramatic persona so impressed members of the American literary and visual arts *avant-gardes*, for example, that she was deemed by Jane Heap, one of the editors at the *Little Review* (which published her poetry), to be “the first American dada. . . [and the] only one living anywhere who dresses dada, loves dada, lives dada.”¹¹ Georges Hugnet described her equally provocatively in an early 1930s account: “decked out with impossible objects suspended from chains, swishing long trains, like an empress from another planet, her head ornamented with sardine tins, indifferent to the legitimate curiosity of passers-by, the baroness [sic] promenaded down the avenues like a wild apparition, liberated from all constraint.”¹² Through her production of objects and her explosive self-performative forays into the *avant-garde* salons and crowded streets of World War I-era New York—“liberated from all constraint”—the Baroness primitivized the European body even as she instantiated it, making its dislocating, lived performance central to her cultural contribution to the New York *avant-garde*.

We know the Baroness as a performative subject through her objects, cobbled together from found urban detritus and stolen commodities, her poems (many written in English and published in the United States), her autobiography (which, sadly, leaves off just as she departed Europe for America in 1910),¹³ a series of photographs (mostly

2. Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven,
Portrait of Marcel Duchamp, c. 1920,
assemblage, miscellaneous objects
in a wine glass, location unknown,

photograph by Charles Sheeler, as
reproduced in *The Little Review* 9 (Winter
1922), Francis M. Naumann Fine Art,
New York



2.

hung a very small bird-cage and within it a crestfallen canary. One arm was covered from wrist to shoulder with celluloid curtain rings, which she later admitted to have pilfered from a furniture display in Wanamaker's. She removed her hat, which had been . . . trimmed with gilded carrots, beets and other vegetables. Her hair was close cropped and dyed vermilion.

[On another occasion she arrived having made] a clean sweep of Schwarz's Toy Store that morning; and had sewed to her dress some sixty or eighty lead, tin or castiron toys: dolls, soldiers, automobiles, locomotives and music boxes. She wore a scrapbasket in lieu of a hat, with a simple but effective garnishing of parsley; and she led, tied on one string and fastened at different intervals, seven small, starved and terrified curs.¹⁴

The Baroness, as we can understand her through these means, was an intrusive yet marginalized urban wanderer who traveled through the streets, commercial byways, and avant-garde salons of New York. Obstructing the circuits of capitalist flow that sustained life in New York, she absconded with commodities from department stores to fashion fantastical bodily ornaments (such as those noted by Biddle); she also mined the streets for urban detritus from which she would construct her fanciful costumes or objects, such as the 1920 *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* (fig. 2). The Baroness' objects, conglomerations of broken and fragmented organic and machine-made things, strongly contrast

by Man Ray) that were published in contemporaneous journals, and textual descriptions, such as the following extended reminiscence by the painter George Biddle:

I met her in my Philadelphia studio . . . in the spring of 1917, a few weeks before I enlisted in the Officers' Training Camp. Having asked me, in her harsh, high-pitched German stridency, whether I required a model, I told her I should like to see her in the nude. With a royal gesture she swept apart the folds of a scarlet raincoat. She stood before me quite naked—or nearly so. Over the nipples of her breast were two tin tomato cans, fastened with a green string around her back. Between the tomato cans



3. Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven working as a model, 7 December 1915, Bettmann/Corbis

with Duchamp's far more obviously rationalized readymades—most often (in their “unassisted” form) everyday objects originally produced in factories and (as far as we know) legitimately purchased by Duchamp.

The Baroness' “art” did not distinguish among bodily style, urban immersion, and the making of objects; all dimensions of lived experience were fodder for her irrational and ultimately non-

commodifiable enactment of Dada. In addition, she made her bodily presence—deliberately flamboyant as it was contrived to be—even more threatening by accosting or attempting to seduce artists (including hetero- as well as homosexual men and women) and policemen alike. The stories of her aggressive attempts to woo figures from the New York avant-gardes such as Duchamp, William Carlos Williams, and Biddle (usually by disrobing or physically attacking them, often to their horror and dismay) are legendary, as are those tales of her being arrested for shoplifting or even, during the war, as a potential German spy.¹⁵ As Hugnet's quote suggests, there was something unnerving, otherworldly, irrational about the Baroness, even in the context of the supposedly radical Bohemian and avant-garde circles of the day (fig. 3).

The Baroness was a figure well known to the now-canonical core members of New York Dada—Man Ray, Picabia, and Duchamp—as well as central to the avant-garde literary scene (including the *Little Review* editors Margaret Anderson and Heap, and the writers Ezra Pound, Djuna Barnes, and Williams). Her peripatetic urban wanderings, public appearances, and professional network of contacts thus pulled together a somewhat disparate group of avant-gardists. Until the rise of feminism, with its pressuring effect in the humanities, however, the Baroness was largely ignored in histories of New York Dada. “Rediscovered” only in 1985 by the scholar Robert Reiss, who wrote an article about her in relation to the visual arts, the Baroness has recently experienced a renaissance. This has resulted in her growing prominence in the writings and exhibitions of Francis Naumann; the biography by Irene Gammel, who situates her in relation to the literary and artistic history of her native Germany and New York; and my work (she is a featured character in my book *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada*).¹⁶

The Baroness' recent renewed visibility, extended here specifically within the context of the history of Dada, points to the fact that her lived Dada potentially speaks more relevantly to current modes of confronting global late capitalism than do the avant-garde critiques posed by the readymades and other Dada objects. The particular kind of irrationality posed by the Baroness has a special significance in relation to the irrationality of current models of constructing and disrupting the flows of capital and information within all levels of culture.¹⁷ One useful tool in understanding the revisionist structure of the Baroness' participation in New York Dada is fetishism. The Baroness' lived Dada, which proposed a revised kind of fetishistic relation (in economic and sexual, as well as aesthetic terms¹⁸), can thus give us a different way of looking at New York Dada—from its messy and irrational margins.

Fetishism

Fetishism has everything to do with the art-historical construction of New York Dada, as well as with the particular significance and effects of Duchamp's readymades. While art history, it could be said, matured relatively slowly and in parallel with the development of modernism,¹⁹ Dada exploded precisely at the moment at which fetishism was most violently emerging in its modern forms. Dada has an intimate historical relationship to modernist fetishism. The readymades surface this relationship by explicitly functioning as fetishes precisely in order to expose the dual fetishistic logic of the art market: 1) the capitalist structures through which works of art are assigned social and economic value and thus become objects of desire, commodities that will (we imagine) raise our social status and thus veil our sense of class inadequacy; and 2) the psychic structures through which these objects gain personal value as palliatives to enable us to disavow our inherent lack as subjects.

In his important 1988 study *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, James Clifford views art history and museology from the point of view of postcolonial theory in order to explore the way in which “non-Western” subjects and cultural artifacts have or have not been incorporated into Western modernism's narratives of Euro-American cultural preeminence. Of course, the historical avant-gardes also often drew on non-European cultures (deemed by comparison to be “primitive,” “exotic,” or “barbarian”)—thus deploying a colonizing anthropological fetishism in order to invigorate their critique of bourgeois belief systems and lifestyles; as many have argued in art history and beyond, the avant-gardes thus participated in the “ethnographic modernity” Clifford critiques.²⁰ The dadaists themselves, particularly in Zurich, appropriated “primitive” masks and other signifiers in performances and other works.²¹ Here, however, I want to draw on a more nuanced model of anthropological fetishism as an alternative system of value and exchange in order to activate the Baroness against the narra-

tives of New York Dada that define it solely, or primarily, in relation to the Duchampian readymade.

In his joint essays on fetishism published in 1985, William Pietz traces the historical development of the term “fetish” and the deep logic that has underlain its development and usage in European cultures. The fetish, he notes, developed in the cross-cultural spaces of the coast of western Africa during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when trade with Portugal and other European nations was expanding. He states that “the fetish could originate only in conjunction with the emergent articulation of the ideology of the commodity form that defined itself within and against the social values and religious ideologies of two radically different types of noncapitalist society.” The pre- or early-modern fetish, then, is deeply linked to the “problematic of the social value of material objects,” a kind of value that is defined through circuits of barter rather than capitalist exchange. Fetishes were valued by the Africans, while European paper money was not—therefore, the fetish-object came to be the object of intercultural exchange, a circuit of exchange in which paper money had no value and only material objects could be bartered across the two cultural systems.²²

In this historical context, then, the fetish took its value from a system deeply at odds with the developing bourgeois capitalist value systems of Western capitalism, which was increasingly based on intangible and abstracted forms of labor and exchange. Within the African context at this time, the fetish was valued as the “thing itself,” not as something whose value was sustained in relation to abstractions of a money-driven economic system.²³ Clearly, Pietz’s definition of premodernist fetishism places it in sharp contrast to the modernist fetishism of the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, when first Karl Marx, then Alfred Binet, and later, Sigmund Freud developed their theories of economic and psychic fetishism.²⁴

New York Dada activities took place roughly between the years 1915 and 1921. This is precisely the period in which Freud was developing his theory of fetishism, which built upon Marx’s idea of commodity fetishism while also drawing from the anthropological conception of the fetish as a desired object (Freud’s “Fetishism” essay was first published in 1927). As I have suggested, Duchamp’s readymade can usefully be understood explicitly within this context of the modernist discourse of the fetish as a sexualized object of desire and as a desired object of economic exchange; the Duchampian readymade functioned, and continues to function, within strictly modern and modernist conceptions of fetishism. It is this engagement with modernist regimes of fetishism that made the readymades so central to discourses and practices seeking to challenge modernism developed later in the twentieth century.

In contrast, I want to suggest that the Baroness’ practice can be understood as opening up a different relation to the commodity, the body, and the work of art, functioning within the premodern structure of fetishism outlined by Pietz in relation to the bi-

cultural trade situation in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Africa.²⁵ The Baroness' works did not "fit" within previous conceptions of modernism, postmodernism, and the avant-garde, which pivoted around stylistic models based on connoisseurship and formal analysis or, as in Bürger's model of avant-gardism, around Marxian ideas of radical social critique that do not apply easily to the Baroness' "lived Dada."

What interests me in terms of this historicized view of fetishism is the threatening view of the "primitive" fetish (from a Euro-American point of view) as an object whose devotional use was not understood, an object thus deemed to be "too close" to the body in that it was believed by its wearer to be divine, rather than to be (as European religious images were understood) a representation of the divine. It is the threat of the "too close," of the collapse of the distance predicated in Western notions of signification, of the feminization / primitivization / corruption of European coherence and rationality by the irrationality of the primitive fetish (with its thwarting of commodity capitalism's then nascent circuits of exchange) that links up to the Baroness' practice as I understand it here. As Clifford notes, rather than grasping objects only as cultural signs and artistic icons, we can "return to them . . . their lost status as fetishes— not specimens of a deviant or exotic 'fetishism' but our own fetishes."²⁶ It is precisely this aspect of the fetish— as something that resists the colonizing gaze of art history but also as something that we produce through art-historical acts (Duchamp's readymades, insistently invoked in discourses of postmodernism, indeed point precisely in this direction)— on which I want to expand here, interpreting her practice from the rich point of view offered by the model of fetishism explored by Pietz and Clifford.

As an oxymoronic European barbarian herself, the Baroness fetishized objects in the "primitive" sense—collecting things viewed as detritus by "civilized" people and refashioning them into something of immense personal value. At the same time, through aggressive and publicly enacted sexual behavior and excessive, flamboyant self-display, she refused the modern fetishizing effects of the capitalist, patriarchal "gaze" (which, as many feminist theorists have pointed out, creates distance between viewer and viewed, reducing those apprehended as "other" in terms of gender, race, or ethnicity, to "fetishes" or objects of the desire of the dominant subject).²⁷ The success of the Baroness' refusal is clear, as we will see, from the responses to her embodied presence on the part of her male avant-garde colleagues.

The Baroness and "Primitive" Fetishism

In *Predicament of Culture*, Clifford draws on the example of William Carlos Williams, whose c. 1920 poem "Spring & All" evokes the exoticism of a working class girl named "Elsie" with (as Williams puts it) a "dash of Indian blood." Clifford argues that the appearance of such "an ambiguous person of questionable origin" in Williams' text anticipates the

development in the immediate post–World War I period of attitudes we now align with the logic of colonial (soon to be “postcolonial”) Europe. Bringing us back to modernist primitivism, Williams’ comprehension of the modern, Clifford argues, is framed by his ethnographic characterization of the “other” as exotic—a characterization central to the ethnographic modernity he argues is at the root of the West’s “modern” conception of itself.²⁸

While “Elsie” serves the purpose of invigorating Williams’ mundane bourgeois existence (and his poetic ruminations), she also functions as a radical disruption of both in that, Clifford notes, her “very existence raises historical uncertainties undermining the modernist doctor-poet’s secure position.”²⁹ Amazingly enough, given this salient conjunction of terms, we have seen that the Baroness—whose first name, we recall, was Elsa—knew Williams well during this exact same time. In fact, she terrified him and undermined his sense of bourgeois security through her brazen, public attempts to seduce him in the byways of New York City or at his home in suburban New Jersey, where he lived with his wife and children and practiced medicine. At one point, Williams wrote with heightened belligerence that he took up boxing so that he could “flatten . . . her with a stiff punch to the mouth” the next time she approached him on the streets; he also noted that his friend, the writer Wallace Stevens, “was afraid to come below 14th Street when he was in the city because of her.”³⁰ Williams’ violent—yet ambivalent—reactions to her suggest that he viewed her as a terrifyingly disruptive, “primitive” force—and one far more potentially dangerous, threatening, and destructive than the ultimately harmless maid enunciated in his text as “Elsie.”³¹

Williams is not, of course, generally considered a dadaist. However, the violence of Williams’ response to the Baroness’ artistic and sexual aggression indicates the unease that she evoked in most of the men of New York’s World War I–era avant-gardes, men whose aesthetic radicality was often mitigated by their conservatism in the face of actual gender or sexual excess. While typically enough, given his tendency to maintain an attitude of indifference toward the world, Duchamp’s response to the Baroness’ performative presence on the art scene was far more generous than was Williams’, he was not beyond discussing her with his male friends behind her back, an understandable response indicating that he felt unease and thus the need to create some “critical” distance from her sexual/aesthetic advances.³² Meanwhile Man Ray, who, as noted, took photographs of the Baroness and used her image (a fragment of a film strip in which she is shown flaunting her naked body) to illustrate New York Dada in a now famous 1921 letter to Tristan Tzara, conveniently omits her name when describing the making of this film in his autobiography (see Baker essay, fig. 4).³³

Man Ray’s erasure points to the simultaneous centrality and invisibility of the Baroness Elsa to New York Dada—an equivocal position I want to argue was determined in part by the male artists’ confusion and unease in the face of her aggressive perfor-

mance of her excessively sexualized persona and her almost violent merging of life and art.³⁴ The Baroness, who functioned for the men around her as a site of projections, sometimes (as with Williams and, supposedly, Stevens) violent in nature, was a figure who pointed to the limits of what the avant-gardes during this period could tolerate in the behavior of an actual woman, and one who insistently performed herself as an active figure of lived Dada.

Drawing on Clifford's terms, we can attempt to think outside the box (so to speak) by understanding the Baroness' self-display and elaborate Dada assemblages (from the *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* to her self-made costumes) as, precisely, confusing the neatness of such oppositional terms—terms that Clifford himself, of course, is analyzing if not fully contesting. The Baroness' mode of lived Dada goes beyond the ready-made model of New York Dada. In this way, the Baroness' acts—such as her excessive attempts to seduce Williams and Duchamp—potentially circumvented at least part of the logic of capitalism built into most Western art practices and histories of art, a logic whose rigidity Clifford criticizes via his use of the Greimasian square.

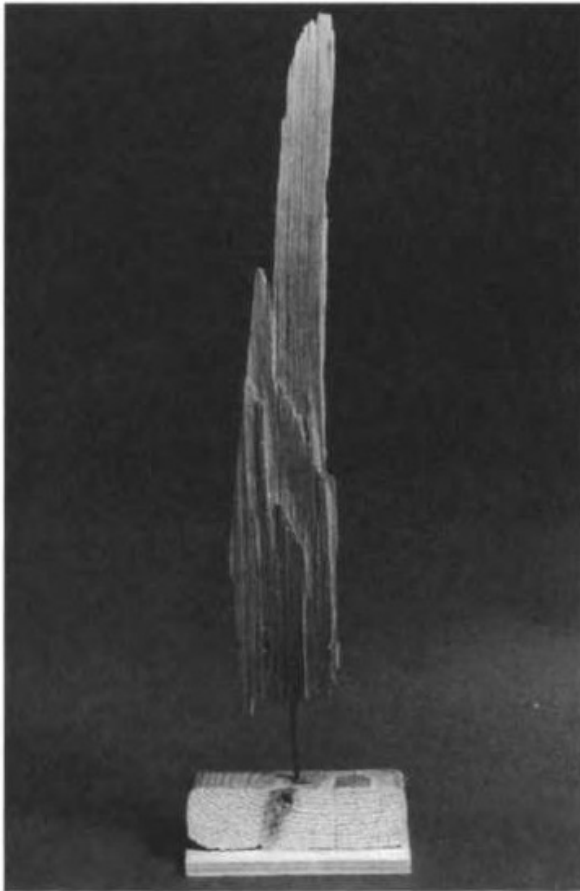
Ultimately, the Baroness' lived Dada opens up different circuits of meaning and desire that, in their irrationality and disorder, have closer ties to non-Euro-American modes of making cultural artifacts (as viewed, of course, from the point of view of someone immersed in European or American culture). The Baroness' mode of Dada as a continuum of acts, in this way, taps into an antimodern (or, more accurately, anticapitalist), resolutely “primitive” structure of production and dissemination that contrasts with the readymade model, with its critique of modernism's inexorable mapping of objects as fetishes into the logic of capital. Her practice can be viewed in Benjamin's terms as the barbarian underside of the European-American practice of the “victors” of the Dada movement.

Irrational Objects³⁵

Of particularly recalcitrant objects that refuse the fetishizing logic of the European museological gaze, Clifford notes, “[s]een in their resistance to classification they could remind us of our lack of self-possession, of the artifices we employ to gather a world around us.”³⁶ This description precisely points to the “resistance to classification” that kept the Baroness' visual productions out of the canonical histories of Euro-American avant-gardism until very recently.³⁷

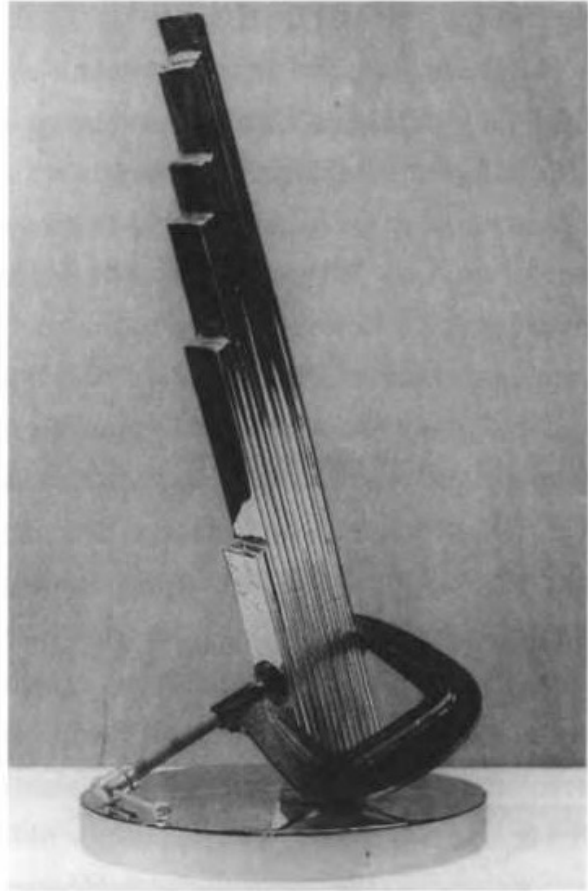
Compare, for example, the Baroness' *Cathedral*, c. 1918 (fig. 4), and Man Ray's *New York*, 1917 (fig. 5). The Baroness' piece is composed of a shard of found wood, mounted vertically to mimic the phallic thrust of the skyscrapers defining the New York skyline (these were called “cathedrals of commerce” in the popular media of the time³⁸). While *Cathedral* is composed of a “found” piece of wood, it is not a “readymade” in the

4. Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Cathedral*, c. 1918, wood fragment, Mark Kelman, New York



4-

5. Man Ray, *New York*, 1917, wood slats and C-clamp assemblage, location unknown, Man Ray Trust



5-

Duchampian sense.³⁹ *Cathedral* is resolutely organic (the seemingly random splits and cracks give the wood a rough, unfinished texture), yet, especially in the context of New York City, refers to an architectural form that epitomizes the rationalism of industrial capitalism—the skyscraper.

Man Ray's piece, in contrast, subordinates the organic (the wood slats) to the kind of sleek formalism linked to modernism's version of industrial rationalization. The wood slats are smooth, even metallic in appearance (and by the time he refabricated the piece in an aestheticizing edition in 1966, he resorted to bronze, completing its rationalizing appearance and function).⁴⁰ The different lengths of the slats emerge only at the top, suggesting the variegated rooflines common to skyscrapers from the late teens into the 1920s.⁴¹ Man Ray's rectified readymade, which explicitly becomes a "sculpture" through its aestheticizing rectification, is a clever visual and material pun on the rationalized structures of urban modernity. Rather than countering the formalistic rigidity of these structures, the piece repeats them, rendering found materials into a sculptural

6. Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Earring-Object*, c. 1917–1919, mixed media, Mark Kelman, New York

7. Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Limbswish*, c. 1917–1919, mixed media including metal spring, curtain tassel, Mark Kelman, New York

representation (albeit seemingly tongue-in-cheek) of the modern city. While Man Ray's work thus abstracts and aestheticizes (makes pleasing art out of) the means as well as the symbols of urban rationalization, the Baroness' *Cathedral* seems to mock the steel-armored thrust of modernism's continuing phallogentrism, presenting a shattered, organic shard as a visual metaphor for the skyscraper.

The Baroness even more tellingly fabricated assemblages out of found urban materials that served as bodily adornments—actively enacting the lived Dada that set her apart from the more restricted formal and conceptual experiments of her male colleagues, and performing them in a relation of bodily proximity that recalls Pietz's definition of the anthropological fetish.⁴² *Earring-Object* (fig. 6) is a fabulous conglomeration of what seem to be machine parts; on closer inspection, the object appears to be constructed from a watch spring and dangling prefabricated earring parts, including a hanging triangular pendant. One imagines—even feels—the swing of the large earring passing back and forth across the Baroness' bony and elegant shoulder as she strides purposefully down Fourteenth Street in lower Manhattan.

Limbswish (fig. 7) is equally evocative of bodily movement. Here, another spiral (a metal spring) loosely encases a dangling gold curtain tassel, the whole thing a good



6.



7.



8.



9.

18 inches long. One imagines the Baroness would have worn this off her hip: as Berenice Abbott described her friend, “[s]he invented and introduced trousers with pictures and ornaments painted on them. This was an absolute outrage. . . . Elsa possessed a wonderful figure, statuesque and boyishly lean. I remember her wonderful stride, as she walk[ed] up the street toward my house.”⁴³ Swishing back and forth indeed, the Baroness would have signaled the animal—one is tempted to say even *virile*—sexual power that could easily be unleashed by the slightest provocation.

As her biographer, Irene Gammel, has stated, the Baroness’ urban promenades with such evocative assemblages, combined with her tendency to appear at various balls, art openings, and avant-garde venues with a passel of dogs on leash, “accentuated the image of her body as gyrating life force. Confronting her viewers with her ready-made formula—*motion, emotion*—her proudly strutting body critically engaged the modern machine age and critically countered the male dadaists’ fetishizing of modern technology.”⁴⁴ Gammel, I think, hits the nail (of rationalism, of “fetishizing . . . modern technology”) on the head with a finely tuned hammer (the imagined Baroness herself), exemplifying the way in which extended attention to this marvelous figure can shift one’s understanding of the New York Dada group and historical avant-gardism in general. The Baroness intervenes in the modernist kind of fetishism evoked or interrogated by Man Ray and Duchamp with a “primitive” fetishism that produces hybrid organic/machinic objects *on a continuum with* (too close to) her body. In this way, the Baroness collapses desire into the objects and reciprocally back into her peripatetic body itself (as experienced then by her colleagues; as we imagine it today).

8. Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917,
photograph Alfred Stieglitz

9. Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven
with possible collaboration from
Morton Schamberg, *God*, 1917, wood
miter box and cast iron plumbing

trap, Philadelphia Museum of Art,
The Louise and Walter Arensberg
Collection, 1950

Embodying New York Dada

The Baroness' power was, precisely, drawn from her mobilization of assembled objects and her enactment of her overtly sexualized body in costumed, performative promenades; these summoned up a relation of primitive fetishism, with what Pietz called its "primary and carnal rhetoric of identification and disavowal."⁴⁵ While the body has not often been evoked in discussions of the work of New York Dada (the readymade, so central to these, tends to lure our gaze in a more rational, abstract direction), I want to insist here, via the Baroness, that the body is the means through which we can rethink what New York Dada may mean for us today. If Duchamp's 1917 readymade *Fountain* (fig. 8) became the Dada object par excellence in previous histories of New York Dada and narratives about the historical avant-gardes, in closing I would like to suggest the Baroness' *God* (made around the same time) (fig. 9), which functioned as an entirely different kind of fetish, might become the "non-object" of this new view of New York Dada avant-gardism I am proposing.⁴⁶

Fountain, it could be said, is a comment on the rationalizing forces of urban industrial modernity—on the means by which, in high modernism, bodily irrationality tended to be channeled into contained flows and siphoned away from modern subjects and their domestic spaces. As a readymade, it also provides an institutional critique (it was, infamously, submitted probably by Duchamp to the supposedly open, nonjuried 1917 American Society of Independent Artists exhibition in New York, and summarily rejected—pointing to the strictures and value systems still at work in supposedly "advanced" circles of avant-garde expression). In fact, Bürger illustrates it in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, implicitly proposing it as the quintessential readymade (and thus the quintessential "aesthetic" tool of institutional critique).⁴⁷

The Baroness, in one of her brilliant, poetic stream-of-consciousness rants (this one included in a grant request to Peggy Guggenheim), explicitly commented on the rationalizing mindset of industrial modernism as follows:

All know—[God] is tinkerer—limitless of resources.

But why so much tinkering?

He better fordize—learn from America—start expert machinshop—

Ford can supply experience—funds—is rumored—for as yet he is

clumsily subtle—densely—intelligent—inefficiently—immense—

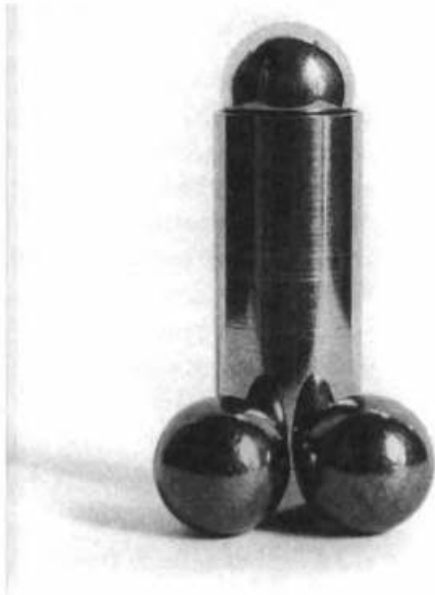
(Lord not Ford—of course).

[God] better hotfoot it towards progress—modernize—use his own omnipotence intelligently—smart or we'll all expire in tangle.

Well Lord knows—(Does he?)⁴⁸

Given her prescient spoof of Fordism (the assembly-line methods Henry Ford developed to rationalize human labor) and of phallocentrism, Christianity, and patriarchy in general (“Lord knows—[Does he?]”), we might argue that the Baroness’ God is at this point in time (a moment upheaved by the effects of global capitalism with its corollary imperialisms) a more telling sign of the complexity of New York Dada’s engagement of machine culture than even the *Fountain*. If *Fountain* is *pissoir as womb*, then God is *disposal pipe as twisted phallus*—a “modernized” yet obviously tongue-in-cheek objectification of male power in machine-age America. The plumbing pipe reworked into “art” by the Baroness was apparently in use, although dysfunctional (a clogged pipe in Morton Schamberg’s studio in Philadelphia when the Baroness ripped it out and attached—or had it attached—to a miter box); when torn from its full extension, the metal rippled, leaving a curiously trembling upper lip at the top of the piece. The regulating slits of the miter box (lined up to guide a saw) are countered by the contorted tube of pipe, which would fail to channel flow properly. God, a contorted phallus, is the perfectly succinct indictment of masculinity and phallocentrism (not to mention Fordism), as these inevitably conspire with industrial rationalism (and art history) to attempt to control the irrational flows that escape modernism and its institutions.

Compare, too, the twisted phallus of God to Man Ray’s 1920 sculpture *Priapus Paperweight* (fig. 10)—with its perfect, gleaming balls and shaft, a piece ludicrously and obviously literalizing the conflation of penis and phallus that substantiates male power in patriarchal modern culture. *Priapus Paperweight* enacts the fetish on the most literal level—it conflates the anatomical fetish (the missing “phallus” in Freud’s account) with the aesthetic fetish (the gleaming modernist object). God, conversely, parodies fetishism (God being, from one point of view, the ultimate fetish object—which would fill in our fundamental lack) while also sustaining its most dangerous (primitive) structures. While God, too, has been incorporated into the museum (the Philadelphia Museum of Art, from the Arensberg Collection), it insistently recalls the grossness and irrationality of bodily functions through its refusal of formalist perfection (that trembling upper lip; the rough, utilitarian surface of the pipe). It is “too close” to the body, still, in its material reference to the trapping of bodily fluids. Viewed through the model I have articulated here, the piece seems explicitly to signal the failure of the attempt to channel the flux of modernity through rationalization, a corollary of which, it should be clear by now, is modernist fetishization (with its art-historical variants). Contorted and with its metal lip (like flesh) testament to the violent bodily action of ripping the pipe from the wall, God acts as a sub-



10.

versive, desublimated, and, one is tempted to argue (given the Baroness' radical poetic rants), even feminist counterpart to the gleaming and assertive phallicism of *Priapus Paperweight* or the ambiguously gendered and sexed cavity of *Fountain*.

Using works such as *God* as my guide, I hope to have at least momentarily thrown into question the rationalizing force of art history itself, which makes use of the readymades as anchors (origins) for a certain kind of now reified mode of avant-garde "critique." It is precisely the way in which I feel the Baroness' practice speaks to today's seemingly thoroughly globalized world of consumerism and fetishism-beyond-fetishism—where

subjects are derationalized by the lure of consumerism only to be more rationalized, and sutured into late commodity capitalism than before⁴⁹—which motivates me to reread the New York Dada moment through this practice.

Michael Taussig has argued that Walter Benjamin's project was to address "the fetish character of objecthood under capitalism, demystifying and reenchanting, out-fetishing the fetish."⁵⁰ In parallel terms, by purposefully "out-fetishing the fetish" the Baroness demystified the functions of the capitalist art world, including its art-historical variants, in ways that we can only now begin to understand. By clinging to—even overidentifying with—the Baroness' mode of "out-fetishing the fetish," a mode of hyperfetishization linked to primitive rather than modernist structures of fetishism, I hope I have been at least somewhat successful in sketching a new way to think about New York Dada as well as art-historical practices themselves. I hope I have opened a way to rethink our understanding of how avant-gardes functioned and might continue to function (and sustain a power to disturb) through interpretations informed by bodily investments that can never be fully rationalized.

NOTES

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- 1 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968), 255, 256.
- 2 See Henri-Pierre Roché's fictionalized Victor (*Marcel Duchamp*), ed. Danielle Régnier-Bohler (exh. cat., Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou) (Paris, 1977).
- 3 In a 1921 letter from Man Ray to Tristan Tzara, who had obviously prompted him to define "New York Dada" (as far as I know, one of the earliest references to this term), Man Ray parodically undermined the idea of defining what had gone on in New York since 1915 as "Dada," writing "dada cannot live in New York," because "All New York is dada, and will not tolerate a rival...." I discuss this exchange and reproduce the letter at the very beginning of my book *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004).
- 4 See Francis M. Naumann, *New York Dada, 1915–23* (New York, 1994); Francis M. Naumann with Beth Venn, eds., *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York* (exh. cat., Whitney Museum of American Art) (New York, 1996), 177–205; and Rudolf Kuenzli, "Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and New York Dada," in *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity*, ed. Naomi Sawelson-Gorse (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 467–468. Reviews of the *Making Mischief* show often noted the breadth of inclusion.
- 5 Duchamp stated, famously, "[y]ou have to approach something with indifference, as if you had no aesthetic emotion. The choice of the readymades is always based on indifference." Cited in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (New York, 1987), 89.
- 6 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, 1984), 51–54.
- 7 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), in *Illuminations*, 237–238.
- 8 I elaborately trace the uses of Duchamp by American artists, art critics, and historians in the 1980s in my book *Postmodernism and the En-Gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge, England, 1994).
- 9 The most extensive sources describing the network of venues at issue with New York Dada are Naumann, *New York Dada*, and Steven Watson, *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde* (New York, 1991).
- 10 Giorgio Vasari, from his 1568 *The Lives of the Artists*; see Eric Fernie, ed., *Art History and Its Methods* (London, 1995), 31.
- 11 Jane Heap, "Dada," *The Little Review* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1922): 46.
- 12 Georges Hugnet, "The Dada Spirit in Painting" (1932 and 1934), repr. in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 186.
- 13 Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Baroness Elsa, eds. Paul I. Hjartarson and Douglas O. Spettigue (Ottawa, 1992).
- 14 George Biddle, *An American Artist's Story* (Boston, 1939), 137, 139.
- 15 The Baroness wrote to Djuna Barnes of her wartime arrest in a c. 1925 letter, beginning "I am again astonished"; Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven letter to Barnes, Special Collections, University of Maryland at College Park Libraries, Series 2, Box 2.
- 16 Reiss, "'My Baroness': Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven," in *New York Dada*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli (New York, 1986), 82; Naumann, *New York Dada, 1915–1923*, 168–175; Naumann and Venn, eds., *Making Mischief*; Irene Gammel, *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity, A Cultural Biography* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002); Naumann and Gammel, *The Art of Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven* (exh. cat., Francis M. Naumann Fine Art, LLC) (New York, 2002); and Jones, *Irrational Modernism*.
- 17 I discuss these issues at greater length in *Irrational Modernism*. The ideas of Critical Art Ensemble (see *Flesh Machine: Cyborgs, Designer Babies, and New Eugenic Consciousness* [Brooklyn, 1998]) have been important to my understanding of these issues in relation to global capitalism.
- 18 As this parenthetical comment suggests, in my discussion of fetishism I will more or less conflate Marx and Freud; my analyses are informed by Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), and the groundbreaking artistic and critical project of Marysia Lewandowska and Neil Cummings—see their *The Value of Things* (Basel, Boston, and Berlin, 2000), which traces the interconnected history of museums, department stores, and other modes of exhibition and cultural consumption.

19 The recent work of Donald Preziosi explores at great length the interconnections among modernism, modernity, art history, and capitalism. See his *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity* (Minneapolis, 2003).

20 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988); on "ethnographic modernity," see 3.

21 Marcel Janco, for example, was famous for his masks, which drew on "primitive" forms from Japanese and African cultures. See Annabelle Meizer, *Dada and Surrealist Performance* (Baltimore and London, 1976/1994), 32–33.

22 William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, 1," *Res* 9 (Spring 1985): 5, 7. See also William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, 11/The Origin of the Fetish," *Res* 13 (Spring 1987): 24–46.

23 See "The Problem of the Fetish, 1," 8, 9.

24 On the history of the concept, including Binet's role, see William Pietz, "Fetish," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago, 1996), 201.

25 The pre- or early capitalist mode of exchange in this situation is in interesting ways echoed in contemporary global capitalism. To this end Don Ihde, in his *Bodies in Technology* (Minneapolis, 2002), makes a compelling argument for postmodern modes of experiencing the self as returning to less instrumentalized, pre- or early-modern formulations of subjectivity.

26 Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 229.

27 The key essay here, of course, is Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), reprinted in *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (New York and London, 2002), 44–53.

28 Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 3–5. Williams' poem was published as the book *Spring & All* (Paris, 1923).

29 Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 4.

30 Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York, 1951), 164, 165, 168–169.

31 Williams published an extended and violently misogynistic account of his encounter with the Baroness; see "Sample Prose Piece: The Three Letters," *Contact* 4 (Summer 1921): 11. Elsewhere, in another text on the Baroness (with whom he seemed to be obsessed, in spite of himself), the married poet historically noted that she "tried to destroy me. That made no difference to me because she couldn't, but the form it took was familiar. 'Come with me and I will make a man of you.' Yea, yea. . . . She was like Cortez coming to Montezuma and she wanted to do the same stupid thing he did. Destroy." Williams, "The Baroness Elsa Freytag von Loringhoven," *Twentieth Century Literature* 35, no. 3 (September 1989): 280–281, 283.

32 The Baroness' heated pursuit of Duchamp is summed up by the painter Louis Bouché, who recalled an incident in which she took a clipping of Duchamp's *Nude Descending the Staircase* and "gave herself a rubdown with it, missing no part of her anatomy. The climax was a poem she had composed for Duchamp. It went, 'Marcel, Marcel, I love you like Hell, Marcel.'" From tape-recorded "Interview with Louis Bouché" by W. E. Wollfenden, 13 March 1963; transcript, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, roll 688, frame

701. Duchamp kept his distance from the Baroness, who heatedly pursued him (they probably crossed paths quite often at the Arensbergs' salon, and especially around 1915–1916 when they both lived in the Lincoln Arcade Building in Manhattan at 1947 Broadway); at the same time, he was apparently not beyond being obsessed with her in a minor way, at least on a theoretical level. On their relationship, see Gammel, *Baroness Elsa*, 158–180 (Gammel notes on 170, citing her 1991 interview with Beatrice Wood, that Wood remembered Duchamp, Walter Arensberg, and Henri Roché discussing the Baroness frequently); see also the Baroness' own mention of her "American unresponded love emotions" to Marcel and Williams in her autobiography, *Baroness Elsa*, 85. Margaret Anderson, coeditor (with Heap) of *The Little Review*, notes that Duchamp, unlike Williams, treated the Baroness well: "Williams didn't want her in love with him and became thoroughly frightened at the avalanche. He might have stopped it by treating her like a human being (as Marcel Duchamp did) and convincing her that it was no use. But instead he acted like a small boy and wrote her insulting letters in which his panic was all too visible." Anderson, *My Thirty Years' War* (London, 1930), 180, 210.

33 Aggrandizing his own role in constructing these images at the expense of this dramatic figure of lived Dada, Man Ray writes, "I had shot a sequence of myself as a barber shaving the pubic hairs of a nude model, a sequence which was also ruined in the process of developing and never saw the light." Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (1963; Boston, 1988), 213; on this letter see also note 3, above.

34 While the Baroness may well have been equally threatening to some of the women active in these avant-gardes (one imagines that Katherine Dreier, a key patron of the New York Dada group, would have been frightened of her), it is notable that she was strongly supported by queer women—Margaret Anderson, Jane Heap, Djuna Barnes, and Berenice Abbott.

35 Portions of the analysis of the Baroness' works in this section are revised from my *Irrational Modernism*.

36 Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 229.

37 The pieces recently found their way into Mark Kelman's collection (on their trajectory, see Gammel, *Baroness Elsa*, 323), at which point they entered into the discourse about her work, though they have not, to my knowledge, been integrated into discussions of New York Dada except in my *Irrational Modernism*.

38 See Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915–1935* (Berkeley, 1999), 156. See also Gammel, *Baroness Elsa*, 235, on the Baroness' title.

39 See Molly Nesbit, "The Language of Industry," *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry de Duve (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1991), 351–384. Duchamp's concern was to intervene specifically in the logic of industrial production—his readymades were machine-made objects, supposedly innocently "found" and signed as works of art.

40 The original piece was lost or destroyed, although Man Ray's photograph of it remains. The bronze version is reproduced in Arturo Schwarz, *New York Dada: Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia* [exh. cat., Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus] (Munich, 1973), 68, fig. 106.

41 In 1916 a new building code restricted the circumference of skyscraper towers to 25 percent of the footprint of the building for fear that large, bulky towers would block out all the light in the city; this code led to the building of hundreds of stepped-back buildings, producing exactly the kind of ragged skyline Man Ray's piece imitates. See Jeff Hirsh, *Between the Rivers: Manhattan, 1880–1920* (Charleston, S.C., 1998), 91.

42 In addition to the bodily objects described here, there are many others that are now lost but that are known through descriptions in the anecdotal stories about the Baroness; for descriptions of these, see Irene Gammel's "Lashing with Beauty: Baroness Elsa and the Emergence of Assemblage Art in America," in *The Art of Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*, 14.

43 Berenice Abbott, from an interview with Gisela von Freytag-Loringhoven, cited in her "Afterword" to Gammel, *Baroness Elsa*, 396. See also Gammel's rich analysis of the many levels of meaning evoked by *Limbswish*, in *Baroness Elsa*, 188–189.

44 Gammel, *Baroness Elsa*, 189.

45 Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, I," 14.

46 Gammel actually argues, with some good evidence, that the Baroness may have "chosen" the *Fountain* as well as making *God*; see Gammel, *Baroness Elsa*, 223–238. The attribution of *God* is also contested. The piece was long attributed to Morton Schamberg,

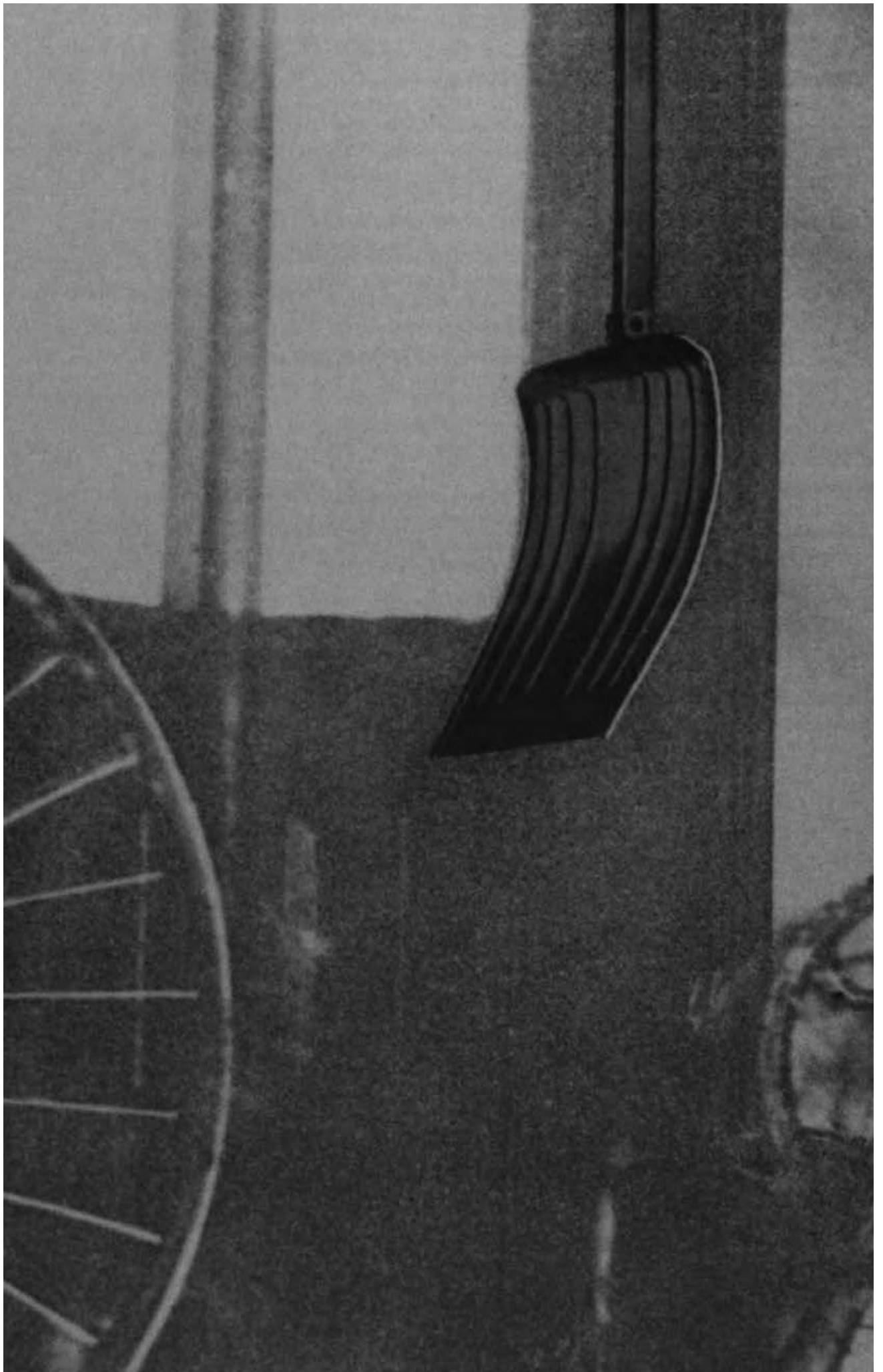
who probably was with the Baroness when she assembled it and who photographed it for her; in 1917 she lived for a brief period in Philadelphia, where she became friends with Schamberg and posed for Biddle, possibly becoming his lover, just before he enlisted in Officers' Training Camp. See Gammel, *Baroness Elsa*, 200–201. As Francis Naumann has noted, the original attribution of the piece to Schamberg was probably simply due to the fact that he had photographed it in his studio, after the Baroness had pulled it out and staged it as art; the photograph of the plumbing pipe without the miter box, in front of Schamberg's 1916 painting *Machine*, is illustrated in Naumann's *New York Dada*, 129. The Philadelphia Museum of Art, which acquired the piece in the late 1950s along with the rest of the collection of Walter and Louise Arensberg, has in its archives Walter Arensberg's collection list, which includes *God* under Morton Schamberg's category but then notes: "This construction was made by both Schamberg and Von Loringhoven." Aside from this notation, *God* has been definitively attributed only to the Baroness by R. Schamberg, a descendant of the Schamberg family, who wrote a letter to the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (18 April 1990), noting "the Morton Livingston Schamberg sculpture *God*, which is in [the Museum's] . . . Arensberg Collection, is nothing more than an upside down plumbing trap that the Baroness Elsa von Freytag [sic] Loringhoven took out of a vacant house on Chestnut Street in the early 1900s"; unpaginated editorial page from the Philadelphia Museum of Art archives. I am indebted to Michael Taylor for sharing the Arensberg list and *Inquirer* letter with me.

47 Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 52; it should be noted that the Fountain is illustrated on the very page on which Bürger also notes the ultimate failure of the readymade critique: "Once the signed bottle drier has been accepted as an object that deserves a place in a museum, the provocation no longer provokes; it turns into its opposite." The most exhaustive source on the Fountain is William A. Camfield's *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain* (Houston, 1989).

48 Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, letter to Peggy Vail [Guggenheim], c. August 1927, 9; cited by Gammel, *Baroness Elsa*, 229.

49 These are, of course, the circuits and patterns identified so presciently by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their magisterial studies *The Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972), trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, 1983), and *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1987).

50 Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York, 1993), cited by Pietz, "Fetish," 203, n.p.



Rrose Sélavy Goes Shopping | Helen Molesworth

There are (at least) two versions of the readymades. The readymades of 1917, the objects of New York, were installed in Marcel Duchamp's studio and were lying in wait for an encounter with a visitor. These readymades are the ones that were ultimately lost, or misplaced, or forgotten, but not before they were photographed, playfully, lovingly, by Man Ray or Duchamp, or Alfred Stieglitz, even. These were the readymades purchased by Duchamp, an artist who went into a hardware store, a plumbing manufacturer's shop, or another place of business, and proceeded to look, choose, and finally, buy one commodity object among many. This artist, the Duchamp of the teens, plucked the readymades (however innocently is up for debate) out of the stream of commodity exchange (where all values are equivalent), and put them down in another place—a studio, an apartment, a gallery, an art show—where, through their migration, their use value was altered and their exchange value temporarily halted.

This Duchamp was different from the Duchamp who emerged, nascently triumphant, after World War II. This Duchamp went to art openings in New York, after surrealism had been forced from Europe's shores. This Duchamp was friends with Peggy Guggenheim and quietly watched the rise of abstract expressionism. This was the Duchamp who sat on a panel at the Museum of Modern Art in 1961 and read "Apropos of Readymades," in which he stated: "The point I very much want to establish is that the choice of these Readymades was *never* dictated by an aesthetic delectation. The choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste."¹ Yet, ironically, this Duchamp no longer visited hardware stores to buy readymades. Quite the contrary, this Duchamp authorized others to do so. Thus Sidney Janis and Ulf Linde both purchased urinals in Duchamp's name. Certainly, these readymades were acquired with Duchamp's "visual indifference." But after seeing his works brought together in his American retrospective exhibition organized by Walter Hopps in 1963, Duchamp revised his position on letting others do the shopping for him and instead allowed Arturo Schwarz to refabricate, by hand, a set of readymades. Their specifications were taken not from the present condition of the objects, but rather were drawn from those loving photographs of the readymades taken by Man Ray and Alfred Stieglitz so many decades earlier. In other words, the Duchamp who spoke of visual indifference had long since relinquished the dilemma of choosing one object over another; he had long since abandoned the problem of the Duchamp of the teens.

Art-historical accounts of Duchamp and the readymades usually neglect to make the distinction between the readymades of the teens and the readymades of the postwar

period. Instead, Duchamp's postwar version of the readymades stands as their explanation and justification tout court. As such, we have grown accustomed to thinking of the readymades as mass-produced objects chosen with visual indifference. The problem with such accounts is that they leave out the wrinkles of internal contradiction. Ignored is the possibility of Duchamp's self-revision, and forgotten is the Duchamp of 1913 who wrote of his experience in front of a shop window, the Duchamp who confronted the dilemma posed by the "glass pane with one or many objects of the shop window," in the face of which he felt, "the demands of the shop windows, from the inevitable response to shop windows, my choice is determined."² Plotting a course, a pattern all too familiar to any shopper, Duchamp maps the progression from dilemma, to demand, to penalty, which "consists in cutting the pane and in feeling regret as soon as possession is consummated."³

Despite the early Duchamp's displays of consumerist angst, most discussions of the readymade avoid the problem of mass consumption, preferring to focus on the industrially produced quality of the readymades. One reason for this lacuna may be that we lack an account of consumption as sophisticated as our accounts of production. Perhaps it is because shopping, in large part, was and remains a daily activity whose burdens and pleasures fall primarily upon women. Or it may be that art history has tended to focus on the means of production, separating them, untenably and undialectically, from the experience of consumption. Yet it is precisely this quintessentially twentieth-century experience of shopping that Duchamp introduced into the realm of art, and he did so at a time when its conventions and discourses were relatively nascent. Ever canny, he was quick to describe the experience as one distinguished by a dilemma: the problem of how to choose one thing over another. While commodity acquisition remains the goal of shopping, the consumer first must navigate the perilous waters of taste—both hers and others. Shoppers must decide what commodity is best for them; unlike mass production, the experience of mass consumption is largely dependent upon the activity of choice.

The Duchamp of the teens was emphatic about the problem of choice. Writing in *The Blindman*, a Dada manifesto designed to justify the artistic legitimacy of the recently suppressed *Fountain*, "Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He **CHOSE** it." The typographical emphasis on choosing is set up in opposition to the more traditional artistic labor of making. Choice was a new form of artistic labor, and as such needed to be foregrounded, enlarged, emphasized, and ultimately, legitimated. The role of choice in the artistic process found in *The Blindman* had a corollary in Duchamp's counsel to his friend Beatrice Wood, a precocious young artist also submitting an entry to the 1917 Independents exhibition (organized by the Society of Independent Artists in New York). She recalls the following piece of advice: "I sent in a painting of a nude woman taking a bath, with only her torso showing and a piece of real soap covering a certain part of her anatomy, like a fig leaf. The piece of real soap was Marcel's idea: 'Be sure to choose the right shape and color,' he advised."⁴

It appears that two readymades were submitted to this exhibition: both mass-produced, both purchased, and both, it seems, chosen with deliberation and care. Perhaps, both were chosen with a sense that shopping was an activity bound up with desire and regret, and that choosing an object out of a shop window, particularly the right object, was no easy task. But what makes choosing and shopping so arduous? The complexity of these activities is that deciding what one likes, establishing one's preferences, cobbling them together over a period of trial and error into one's taste, is in many ways synonymous with the creation and presentation of the self.

In his epic study *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu states his case plainly: "Taste is the basis of all that one has—people and things—and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others."⁵ Bourdieu suggests that taste, hardly a fixed system with strict class correlations, is formed through an elaborate mixture of public and private forces, a combination of educational and cultural capital. For Bourdieu, educational capital is the public domain of taste, taught in schools, in the media, and in a variety of public institutions, whereas cultural capital is the taste of the home. The bedrock of one's personal taste begins and ends with one's family, inasmuch as the taste one grows up with is always the taste against which all other forms of taste are measured. Hence taste is a mechanism through which individuals distinguish or align themselves from and with others. Additionally, taste is a calibrating axis along which individuals negotiate or manage the spheres of public and private.

If taste is thus defined, then how does it function? The combination of public and private taste—educational and cultural capital—form a matrix of what Bourdieu calls "perceived needs." This is not the basic need for human shelter and sustenance but the need that evolves in front of shop windows, the "need" for things we want. Nowhere is the problem of taste more evident than with perceived needs. Here our tastes are translated into our preferences, which we subsequently experience as constitutive of the self. Yet our "preferences" are always subject to our conditions, becoming what Bourdieu calls the "taste for the necessary." We do not recognize our conditions as constrictions and forms of classification as such; rather we continually read these systems of distinction to be our own, as manifestations of our preference. A taste for the necessary implies that no matter how much effort goes into our choices, no matter how much we experience our choices as public manifestations of our selves, our choices are determined as much from the outside as from within.⁶ It is this ineluctable mixture of forces, of educational and cultural capital, combined with access to actual capital, that creates a nexus of taste, which, Bourdieu writes,

continuously transforms necessities into strategies, constraints into performances, and, without any mechanical determination, it generates the set of "choices" constituting life-styles, which de-

rive their meaning, i.e. their value, from their position in a system of operations and correlations. It is a virtue made of necessity which continuously transforms necessity into virtue by inducing "choices" which correspond to the condition of which it is the product.⁷

Perhaps this is what Duchamp felt when he wrote in 1913: "From the demands of the shop windows, from the inevitable response to shop windows, my choice is determined."⁸

What kinds of demands were in play when Duchamp stood in front of shop windows, and how might they have determined his choices? When Duchamp set out shopping in New York, two distinct forces were at work shaping the taste of the American consumer: a lively sense of competition between the museums and the new department stores and the invention of the trademark. During the first three decades of the century, American taste was a topic of active debate between the museums and the big department stores. American museums, founded primarily as educational institutions, dedicated themselves to raising the standards of production and consumption of both commodity goods and art objects. Early twentieth-century museums in particular championed themselves as educators (and specifically elevators) in matters of the tastes of the people, and most museums had technical and craft schools that were designed to aide and abet in this endeavor. Yet the rise of department stores dramatically shook the museum's sense of its societal role. Historian Neil Harris maintains that "changes in the architecture and display methods of . . . retailers lessened the effectiveness of museum displays, raised public expectations, and so rendered the museum less powerful as a force shaping that abstraction called public taste."⁹ By the early decades of the twentieth century, department stores had effectively "stolen" the discourse of taste from the museum, establishing themselves as the preeminent teachers and edifiers of the American public.

One of the ways the department stores were so effective in establishing their role as public educators of taste was their use of "high" (and sometimes explicitly "modern") art. In fact, some of the most radical paintings of Duchamp's day were displayed in department stores. After the success of the 1913 Armory Show, where Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* was first shown in New York, Gimbels department store mounted the first exhibition of cubist paintings in the country. The big department stores also offered their customers an ideology not so far removed from the avant-garde rhetoric of the merging of art and life, although with very different political implications. Consider the chapter titled "Art" in the *Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores*, in which John Wanamaker, a department store magnate, espouses the following philosophy:

The truth is that the quality of art comes out in everything we do. Whatever is well done, with sincerity and the love of work and a feeling for beauty, is art. Whatever is badly done, with pretense

or half-heartedness and clumsiness, is far from being art. It is not only the person whose soul sings through his lips, or who puts his thoughts on canvas with a brush, who is an artist. The vehicle of expression does not matter. It is the spirit that counts. The woman who arranges a room charmingly, who dresses to express her personality, or serves a dinner with grace; the man who binds a book in good taste, or turns out a chair that is a pleasure, or lays out a garden to give delight—all are artists in their way. So, too, is the store that lives up to its highest ideal.¹⁰

Many museums responded to the department stores' success in merchandising and their monopoly of the discourse of taste with a form of mimicry. Curators Stewart Culin of the Brooklyn Museum and John Cotton Dana of the Newark Museum were notable among those who emulated the department stores by changing both their display strategies and the types of exhibitions they mounted. In 1917 Culin, then curator at The American Museum of Natural History, New York, and editor at *Women's Wear*, filled the museum with the textiles of native peoples, collected on expeditions sponsored by John Wanamaker. Culin's self-stated goal was to create a "laboratory of taste" for "our most successful [clothing] designers."¹¹ Far from perceiving any contradiction between Wanamaker and himself, he championed department stores as "the greatest influences for culture and taste that exist today."¹²

While Culin was in direct collusion with Wanamaker, his counterpart, John Cotton Dana, was a more independent spirit. Founder and curator of the Newark Museum, Dana was as progressive a museum thinker as Duchamp was an artist. In 1917 he wrote a short volume entitled *The Gloom of the Museum*, which bemoaned the far remove the average art museum held between its contents and its patrons. Going so far as to challenge the "undue reverence for oil paint," Dana felt passionately that department stores were "filled with objects closely associated with the life of the people."¹³ The task of the museum was to learn from department stores the value of contemporary, machine-made objects. In what must have seemed as heretical as Duchamp's submission of a urinal to the Independents exhibition, Dana suggested:

This fact in time will be recognized and acted upon, that the oil painting has no such close relation to the development of good taste and refinement as have countless objects of daily use. The genius and skill which have gone into adornment and perfecting of familiar household objects will then receive the same recognition as do now the genius and skill of the painter in oils.¹⁴

This maverick sensibility, combined with progressivist politics, allowed Dana to open the Newark Museum to what he believed were the democratic principles of the department stores.¹⁵ He sought to disabuse people of the notion that the handcrafted object was superior to the mass-produced one. As early as 1912 he was mounting exhibits of industrial design, and one of his favorite tricks was to install machine-made goods

with wall labels indicating they were made by hand. By the late 1920s he was to mount an exhibition of plumbing fixtures. While there is no evidence that points to Dana and Duchamp knowing of one another's institutional and ideological challenges, the high degree of porosity between department stores and museums, and subsequently art and commodities, indicates, if nothing else, that Duchamp's readymade practice occurred within a historical field marked by a debate over who would have the "rights" to high art, who would govern taste, and ultimately, who would negotiate the relationship between art and the readymade goods.

It's not as if readymade goods were easily negotiated in and of themselves. In the emerging period of American mass-consumerism (roughly 1890 to 1920) the activity of shopping changed dramatically. The consumption of daily goods so thoroughly replaced the production of goods in the majority of American homes that "the home economics profession reclassified housework from a production to a consumption activity."¹⁶ Shopping took place in the new venue of the department store, and women now needed to be able to negotiate an extraordinary array of new products. Advice on how to shop proliferated in books and magazines, primarily encouraging women to buy frugally, to buy products that reflected their identities or personalities, and to choose things in good taste. Shopping was staged as a site of desire through the increase of advertising, women's magazines, and the sensory stimulation of the department stores. It simultaneously offered the paradoxical promise that mass consumption would be able to create a highly individuated subject.¹⁷ A question emerged: if an individuated subject had to be created through the purchase of mass-produced goods, how might the goods be personalized or individuated?

One answer was the development of the trademark. The trademark, established in 1905, differs from a copyright or patent. The copyright is the exclusive right to reproduce a specific product, usually one with some form of "artistic" merit. A patent is the legal acknowledgment of an invention (which is sometimes protected by a trademark). A trademark, however, is the slogan and/or logo identified with a commodity. The typeface and script of "Coca-Cola" establish it as a trademark, and the accompanying slogan, "It's the real thing," is also a trademark. This slogan is particularly apt because it defines the very purpose of the trademark: to guarantee that the commodity in question is authentic. In effect, the trademark is like a signature on a work of art or a check; it signifies the maker's authority to guarantee the authenticity of the product. The dictionary definition of trademark is "a distinguishing characteristic or feature firmly associated with a person or thing,"¹⁸ and the elision of "person" and "thing" is crucial as the trademark was designed to give the commodity an identity, a personality.¹⁹

While the trademark was a device designed to win market shares for the producer, it was presented to the consumer as a helpful facilitator of choice. Given the new variety of readymade goods, producers were relatively quick to bestow identities upon

their commodities. These identities or trademarks were designed to ease the transition from a more intimate form of consumption, when consumers knew the shopkeeper (and perhaps even those who made the product they were buying), to an era of burgeoning national markets and increasingly anonymous service and products. As Susan Strasser argues, "A population accustomed to homemade products and unbranded merchandise had to be converted into a national market for standardized, advertised, brand name goods in general."²⁰ The trademark was an integral part of advertising strategies that linked products with slogans and with fictional characters (such as Quaker Oats). Trademarks, with their guarantees of authenticity, created the impression of providing a consumer choice that emanated from the inside of the individual shopping subject while, in fact, helping to determine choice from the outside.

Duchamp's first artistic foray into the arena of the trademark came with *Apolinère Enameled*, 1916–1917, in which he consciously manipulated an advertisement for a national brand of paints. Duchamp placed the role of the trademark and advertising front and center—the image of a young girl painting her bedposts seems to imply a correlation between the activity of artists and shoppers that ran deeper than previously understood. (Importantly, on the recto of the work an original label for the Sapolin display remains. It contains a gnomelike figure that suggests the easel will aid sales of Sapolin Decorative Specialties, complete with the slogan, "It pays to advertise Sapolin.")

In the bedroom-redecorating scene of *Apolinère Enameled* the great critic of art and the purveyor of home improvement stand side by side, suggesting that Duchamp understood trademarks might be part of the continuity between museums and department stores, inasmuch as all three institutions were motivated by the desire to influence the choices and tastes of the American consumer. When Marcel Duchamp wrote in *The Blindman*, "Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He **CHOSE** it," he insisted upon choice and choice alone as the sufficient criterion to qualify something as an art object. The typographical emphasis on choosing, which established the justification for the readymades, certainly implies that Duchamp bought these objects. Yet to buy a urinal in 1917 would not necessarily have been an easy task. The urinal in question was selected from the J. L. Mott Iron Works showroom in New York City. The company's promotional catalogue offered myriad types of urinals.²¹ By buying from a nationally known maker, Duchamp once again inserted himself into the discourse of trademarks and choice.

Furthermore, he manipulated the idea of the trademark by signing the urinal with a new "trademark," R. Mutt. Yet R. Mutt is not your average trademark; it is an abandonment of or affront to everything the trademark stands for. J. L. Mott, because of name recognition, may have guaranteed the authenticity of the urinal, but in its rotational transformation into an art object, R. Mutt's signature does not guarantee much. Instead it is a joke, a visual pun on the similarity between the signature of the artist and the trade-



1.



1. Marcel Duchamp as Rose Sélavy, 1920, photograph by Man Ray, Man Ray Trust

2. Marcel Duchamp, *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette*, 1921, Collection Yves Saint Laurent-Pierre Bergé

3. Marcel Duchamp, *Wanted / \$2,000 Reward*, 1923, from *Boîte-en-Valise*, 1961, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine



3-

mark of consumer culture. By fraying the logic of the trademark, Duchamp rendered his readymades authentically nonauthentic.

Further exploring the logic of the trademark, Duchamp invented an alter ego who is also a trademark, Rose Sélavy, created in 1920, the year women gained the vote. She was an easily identifiable image and brand name; an identity for a given set of products, an identity shielding the identity of her “parent company.” The placement of her name or image on works “authenticated” them. The version of authenticity being offered, however, is a puzzling one, for our surest belief in Rose Sélavy comes not from Duchamp, but from Man Ray’s famous portrait of her (fig. 1). In a sense Man Ray’s collaboration on the project made him the “ad man,” creator of the Sélavy image, which Duchamp then affixed, trademark-style, onto products. We need only think of the ready-made *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette*, 1921 (fig. 2). Here Duchamp took a perfume bottle and manufactured a label replete with his own brand name, which he verified with his trademark, Rose Sélavy. Later, this bottle was photographed and used as the cover of *New York Dada*, running this time as a sort of print ad.

The Rose Sélavy trademark makes a telling appearance in Duchamp’s best advertisement for himself, *Wanted / \$2,000 Reward*, 1923 (fig. 3). In this readymade Duchamp

pasted two grainy mug shot–style photographs of himself into a joke “Wanted” poster. While the caption promises a reward for information leading to the arrest of George Welch, Duchamp offers proof of his “real” identity by exposing Welch’s alias as none other than Rose Sélavy. Why this guise of Duchamp is wanted remains unclear, but the detail that “Welch” was operating a “bucket shop” under the names “HOOKE, LYON and CINQUER” intimates that shady business dealings and false advertising were the crimes. The confusing narrative turns amusing vis-à-vis issues of forensic identification, as the figure of Welch/Sélavy/Duchamp is described as having “complexion medium, eyes same.” The consumer’s difficulty in distinguishing among things mutates into an inability to make distinctions between persons.

Duchamp used the logic of the trademark to disarticulate his own identity, to fracture its seamless surface with a variety of aliases: R. Mutt, Rose Sélavy, and George W. Welch, and products or “readymades,” as he called them: *The Fountain* (signed by R. Mutt), as well as *Belle Haleine*, 1920, and *La Bagarre d’Austerlitz*, 1921 (both signed by Rose Sélavy). This scenario, however, is slightly more complicated than an easy one-to-one association of a trademark with a product, for Rose Sélavy’s best-known product is Rose Sélavy; she is both an identity without a product and she is the product. Duchamp shows how the trademark ultimately stands for itself, and its logic works regardless of whether a product actually exists.

Authorship, legitimation, and product are all set into flux by Duchamp’s seemingly simple gesture of producing aliases. When Duchamp looked back upon his artistic career he seemed to understand the terms he had unmoored. For example, in the poster for the 1963 retrospective of Duchamp’s work at the Pasadena Museum, Duchamp, underneath a reproduction of *Wanted/\$2,000 Reward*, wrote the slogan, “By or of Marcel Duchamp or Rose Sélavy” in his own hand.²² The play between “by” and “of” is pointed in its ambiguity regarding the relationship of agency, or, even more simply, *manufacture*, of the maker/artist to the artistic oeuvre in question. Who stands for what? Who or what is the product of the exhibition, the maker or the objects? Who is the agent of artistic production, Duchamp or Rose Sélavy (or Man Ray)? This confusion between the role of the maker and the product found in Duchamp’s practice resembles the confusion in commodity culture of the boundaries between the persons and things, a confusion maintained by the logic of the trademark.

One consequence of the blurred distinction between persons and things is that in consumer culture, what we buy and what we choose comes to stand for who we are. That is, what we choose is governed by our taste, and taste is one of the strongest mechanisms through which the consumer subject differentiates herself from others (and her objects from those of others). The trademark shores up these distinctions, couching nearly imperceptible differences in terms of *preference*. Duchamp was one of the first artists to address the thorny issue of preference and taste through his engagement with

shopping and the trademark. He also did so through his many identities or alter egos.

If, as Bourdieu suggests, the choice of objects is bound up with the production of the self (however illusory such a practice might be), then what or who is the Duchamp who emerges from his various shopping forays? When he wrote in 1913 that in front of shop windows his “choice is determined,” which version of himself was being so spoken for? Ironically, it appears not to be Duchamp at all. Bourdieu and Duchamp both propose that choice, the manifestation of taste, does not flow exclusively from the individual to the object, but that objects choose the individual as well (a further blurring of the boundaries between persons and things). Objects can choose because taste is public. (Taste is formed and choice occurs, after all, on the street, in front of the shop window, or in the crowded bustle of the department store.) Objects manufactured with identities (objects complete with trademarks) take on an uncanny ability to interpolate subjects whose perceived needs fit the bill. Duchamp exploits the fact that objects can choose an individual: the urinal did not choose Duchamp, it chose R. Mutt, and the window of *Fresh Widow*, 1920, chose Rose Sélavy. While Duchamp appears to have been aware of the constraints that are always already placed upon his choice, he also tried to mitigate such a determination; not in the name of a kind of radical individuality, but rather as a way to counteract the logic of an identity that comes replete with an authority bestowed upon it through the proper choice of objects. Like Bourdieu, he suggests that taste is more likely to be a manifestation of social conditions than a display of our interiority or individuation. One fallacy of commodity culture is that we believe our taste is a marker of our personality, character, or identity. There is a way in which our taste bespeaks us—it is simultaneously ours and not ours. As Bourdieu says, “Taste is the basis of all that one has—people and things—and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others.”²³ How Duchamp was to be classified by others lay at the heart of the scandal surrounding the 1917 Independents exhibition.

The Independents Scandal Reconsidered

In light of the complex relationship between museums, department stores, and the discourse of taste, let us reconsider the slogan of the 1917 Independents exhibition: “No Jury, No Prizes.” Could this slogan embody the desire of the organizers to coordinate an exhibition that functioned without taste, preference, or distinction? Did they wish to democratize the art exhibition, to make it as accessible as the department store? (After all, the exhibition was compared to both the circus and a popular Sunday revival meeting by the contemporary press.²⁴) What the organizers of the exhibition did not seem to understand was that they were about to set a crisis in motion by their desire to eliminate taste—a crisis that had at its heart the tension between the dependence of taste on a legitimator and the inherently arbitrary nature of legitimation as such.

The story is well known: Duchamp, under the alias R. Mutt, submitted an inverted urinal; the hanging committee refused to show it; the object was “hidden” behind a partition; and Duchamp and Walter Arensberg resigned in protest. The decision not to exhibit the urinal came from two camps, personified in this argument by George Bellows and Katherine Dreier. Both, oddly enough in the face of the “No Jury, No Prizes” slogan, employ the rhetoric of taste to justify their refusal to legitimate the *Fountain* as art. The arguments for showing the urinal also relied on the rhetoric of taste, albeit somewhat unwittingly.

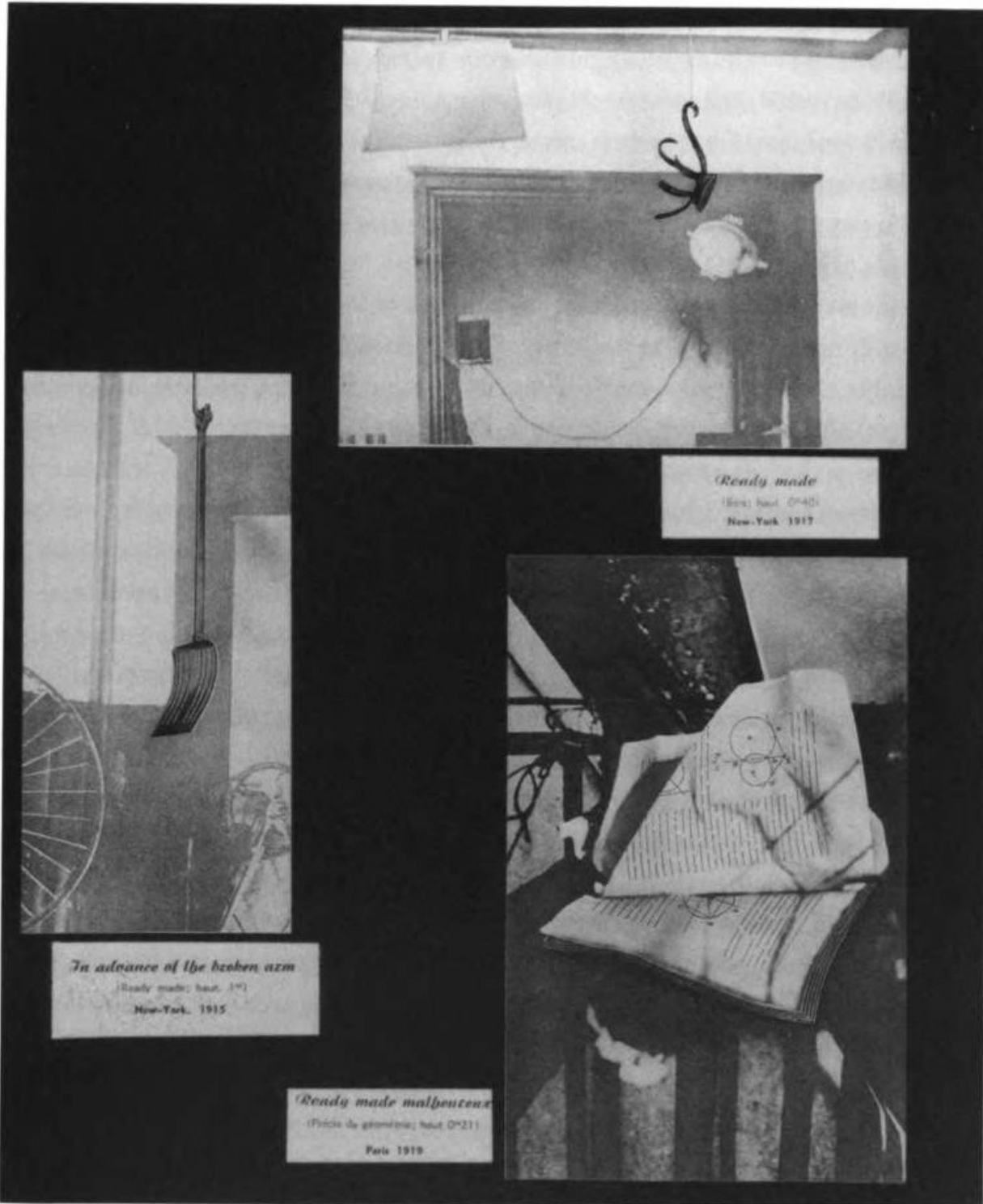
Ash Can school painter Bellows’ reaction was, perhaps, the more predictable of the two objections to the exhibition of *Fountain*. For Bellows, the urinal was a tasteless object, an affront to bourgeois propriety and sensibility.²⁵ “It is indecent!” he roared upon seeing it for the first time.²⁶ Arensberg, however, responded, “A lovely form has been revealed,” employing the language of aesthetics to back his argument. Their responses seem fairly typical, reflecting Victorian prudery on the one hand and the timeless association of beauty and art on the other.

Dreier’s response was more complicated. In a letter to Duchamp regarding the course of events that led to his resignation, she wrote the following:

When I voted “No,” I voted on the question of originality—I did not see anything pertaining to originality in it; that does not mean that if my attention had been drawn to what was original by those who could see it, that I could not also have seen it. To me no other question came up: it was simply a question of whether a person has the right to buy a readymade object and show it with their name attached at an exhibition? Arensberg tells me that it was in accord with you [*sic*] “Readymades,” and I told him that was a new thought to me as the only “readymades” I saw groups which were extremely original in their handling. I did not know that you had conceived of single objects.²⁷

On the surface it appears as if Dreier’s objection was based on the criterion of originality, but as her letter progresses, this position becomes increasingly untenable. Dreier had already been exposed to Duchamp’s readymades; she was therefore familiar with their existence and perhaps some of the ideas behind them. But where she experienced them obviously inflected her understanding of them. She saw them in Duchamp’s studio—coat rack nailed to the floor, shovel suspended from the ceiling—manifesting their “original handling” (fig. 4). More importantly, though, situated in the middle of Duchamp’s domestic space, they manifested Duchamp’s “sensibility.” His placement of objects is analogous to the housewife’s artfully arranged living room. In his domestic space, Duchamp “offers” to Dreier an “alternative” version of the domestic interior, one that she reads as being imbued with his taste and his choices. In effect, she reads the readymades as an expression of his lifestyle. Beatrice Wood had a similar reaction to

4. Photographs of the readymades in Marcel Duchamp's New York studio, from *Boîte-en-Valise*, 1961, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine



the readymades when she encountered them in Duchamp's studio. In her tribute to him written after his death, she says:

Duchamp's studio was a typical bachelor's niche, with a wall bed, usually unmade, projecting out into the middle of the room, with a chair and table nearby. There were always chocolate bars on the window sill. To my astonishment, ordinary objects were scattered about: a coffee grinder, a bicycle wheel mounted on a box, an advertisement for Sapolin Enamel on the wall.

When I asked why he was keeping such things around, he smiled. They had their purpose, he said, but I should not give them another thought. Once I remember pointing to a square box that had sugar in it. "What is that?" I asked, wanting to be sympathetic with his ideas. "Cela n'a pas d'importance," he would say. And I knew nothing was as important as just being there.²⁸

In the same essay Wood states that with the exception of *Nude Descending a Staircase*, she did not really understand Duchamp's work. Here again we have a reaction to the oddness of the readymades, their unexpected quality within domestic space, let alone in a gallery or museum. The predominant framework for Dreier and Wood's experience of the readymades is to see them as a manifestation of Duchamp's "artistic sensibility," or taste. The women are hardly to blame. The predominant experience of the readymades was in Duchamp's domicile and studio; they were not exhibited, except for the controversial nonexhibition of the *Fountain* and an exhibition where they were shown but never commented upon.²⁹

Bellows, Arensberg, and Dreier all seem blind to the crisis of legitimation they are experiencing, for the motto of the show disallowed them (or anyone) from acting as the legitimators of the work, either in terms of decency or aesthetics. Ironically, "No Jury, No Prizes" is tantamount to saying No Choice. When the organizers of the Independents show abandoned the institutional role of guaranteeing the authenticity of the art, when they abdicated the right to choose one work over another, the right to express their taste, they unwittingly exposed a much larger problem: the guarantee of the authenticity or legitimacy of art was arbitrary from the very start, because the problem with taste is that it constantly needs a legitimator. Such legitimation, as we have seen, can come in many forms: through the trademark, the instruction of the museum, or the call and response of the department store. Yet Duchamp's sly intervention into the normal workings of taste and legitimation in an art exhibition exposes a much larger problem: if the taste of the museum acts as the legitimator of art, then who legitimates the museum? At the heart of every system of taste lies a moment of arbitrariness, an arbitrariness perpetually covered up by acts of legitimation. In this light, when Dreier and Wood see the readymades within Duchamp's domestic space, they attribute the legitimacy of that space through the function of Duchamp's persona. As lifestyle, they are odd but acceptable; as art, they are confounding and disruptive.

This argument about legitimacy needs to be held in relation to criticism that defines the readymades as a nominalist practice.³⁰ In such accounts the artist typically is the sole legitimator of the art object, and Duchamp's emphasis on choice in *The Blindman* is offered as the ultimate act of artistic legitimation.³¹ Yet in actuality, Duchamp did something slightly different. By submitting *Fountain* under an alias he tried to avoid the use of his personal identity as the legitimator of his practice. Such a position careens dangerously close to Wanamaker's "I shop therefore I am," or rather, "I choose (with taste) therefore I am." Herein lays the context of Dreier's confusion. When the readymades are in the context of an artistic lifestyle, they are art because Duchamp is an artist. R. Mutt, however, was not an artist because he had not been legitimated as one. In a sense, Duchamp articulated (for the first time?) the problem of what it meant to say that one is an artist. His subsequent "abandonment" of art-making is particularly compelling in this light.

In 1921 Marcel Duchamp made *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?*, a deeply peculiar assemblage of marble cubes that resemble sugar, piled atop one another in a small white cage and accompanied by a thermometer and a piece of cuttlefish. The trademark was making one of her last appearances. Apparently, Katherine Dreier's sister Dorothea had grown "a trifle awed by Katherine Dreier's collection"³² and wanted some art for herself. Katherine acted as the intermediary on her sister's behalf and offered Duchamp \$300 for a commissioned work to be made for her sister. As luck would have it, Dorothea Dreier was horrified by the object and returned it to Katherine, who in turn also did not like the work and returned it to Duchamp. For a while in the ownership of Duchamp's good friend Henri Pierre Roché, it was eventually sold to the Arensbergs for the original price of \$300. It is well known that Duchamp "abandoned" art-making after deciding to leave *The Large Glass* permanently unfinished in 1923. Yet by 1921 the ownership of *The Large Glass* had already passed to Dreier, as the Arensbergs had moved to California that fall. The year 1922 saw no significant artistic activity on the part of Duchamp. It is a moment of pure conjecture, perhaps possible coincidence, but is it possible to think that the Duchamp of the teens was tired of his work not being chosen? The Duchamp of the teens wrote a note to himself asking if it was possible to make works that were not works of art. R. Mutt's submission of *Fountain* seemed to prove that indeed anything could be art; hence it was impossible to make a thing that could not be art. But perhaps the abandonment of art and the subsequent refusal to abide by the logic of choice and taste—the rules of the game set out by the Duchamp of the postwar period—belie a slight variation on the question. Duchamp's radical play with the definition of art finds another corollary in Bourdieu's understanding of taste and legitimation. For Bourdieu,

The games of artists and aesthetes and their struggles for the monopoly of artistic legitimacy are less innocent than they seem. At stake in every struggle over art there is also the imposition

of an art of living, that is, the transmutation of an arbitrary way of living into the legitimate way of life casts every other way of living into arbitrariness.³³

If Duchamp had tired of his and his aliases' objects not being chosen, or of not being able to make something that is not art (for the rejection of the Fountain was in fact what established it as art—even a rejection is a choice), then maybe the true test was to see if one could be an artist without seeking legitimation. Could one be an artist who refused to participate in the game of taste—both one's own and that of others? Could one be an artist underground, like the Duchamp of the postwar period, the Duchamp who worked in complete silence for nearly two decades on a work of art—seeking the choice or taste or legitimation of no one?

NOTES

- 1 James Reggio and Helen M. Franc, "The Art of Assemblage: Transcript of the Symposium," in *Essays on Assemblage*, ed. John Elderfield (New York, 1992), 135.
- 2 Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, ed., *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York, 1973), 74.
- 3 Sanouillet and Peterson, *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 74.
- 4 Beatrice Wood, "Marcel," in *Marcel Duchamp: Artist of the Century*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 14.
- 5 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), 56.
- 6 Hence, I imagine myself as someone who prefers Volkswagens to Audis, in part because I am someone who can afford a Volkswagen and not an Audi. Rather than feel badly about my inability to buy an Audi, I develop a fondness for Volkswagens as such, aided, without a doubt, by their hipster ad campaign that "speaks" to my generation.
- 7 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 175.
- 8 Sanouillet and Peterson, *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 74.
- 9 Neil Harris, "Museums, Merchandising and Popular Taste: The Struggle for Influence," in *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*, ed. Ian M. G. Quinby (New York, 1978), 154. Harris argues that the three elements of public taste are "knowledgability, experience, and preference patterns."
- 10 John Wanamaker, *Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores* (Philadelphia, 1911), 245–246.
- 11 William Leach, *Land of Desire* (New York, 1993), 170.
- 12 Leach, *Land of Desire*, 167.
- 13 Leach, *Land of Desire*, 168.
- 14 John Cotton Dana, *The Gloom of the Museum* (Woodstock, Vt., 1917).
- 15 See Carol Duncan, "John Cotton Dana's Progressive Museum," in *Self and History: A Tribute to Linda Nochlin*, ed. Aruna d'Souza (London, 2001).
- 16 Bettina Berch, "Scientific Management in the Home: The Empress's New Clothes," *Journal of American Culture* 3, no. 3 (Fall 1980): 443.
- 17 On the shift from the production of daily goods such as soap and clothing and women's new role in sorting through the vagaries of readymade goods, see Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed* (New York, 1989); on the effect of department stores on women's shopping behavior, see Gail Reekie, *Temptations: Sex, Selling, and the Department Store* (Sydney, 1993), and Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving* (Oxford, 1989); on the rise and proliferation of the genre of "advice to women" on everything from shopping to mothering, see Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York, 1978).

18 Webster's *New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1977, s.v. "trademark."

19 This is the primary difference between my argument and Molly Nesbit's in "Ready-Made Originals: The Duchamp Model." Nesbit argues that Duchamp uses the "language of the industry," as typified by mechanical drawing taught in French schools, as a way to think about the "modern model of repetition's relationship to mass-production." In Nesbit's account, Duchamp tried to negotiate the "interrogation of shop windows" by reintroducing the "culture of the patent," meaning the values of the artisan and the original, to fight the "culture of the copyright," meaning the logic of repetition, mass production, and the commodity. While sympathetic to this persuasive argument, I have one fundamental reservation: the logic of the trademark more accurately describes the part of Duchamp's work that is invested in consumption as an activity, particularly with regard to his later discourse about taste and his early disclosure of choice. The logic of the copyright, as described by Nesbit, accurately describes his relation to the "exclusively" art-related issues of originality and the copy but does not account for his meditation on mass consumption as opposed to mass production.

20 Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, 6-7.

21 See William A. Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain* (Houston, 1989).

22 This transcription is part of Duchamp's larger play with complicating the notion of temporality in art history, for this "signature" was first used on the *Box in a Valise*, 1941, the work in which Duchamp staged his own retrospective in miniature.

23 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 56.

24 See "The Independents" in Francis M. Naumann, *New York Dada, 1915-23* (New York, 1994).

25 On the other hand, a urinal is literally taste-less, without taste or class markings; "Now Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bath tub is immoral."

26 Wood, "Marcel," 14.

27 Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, 30-31.

28 Wood, "Marcel," 12-13.

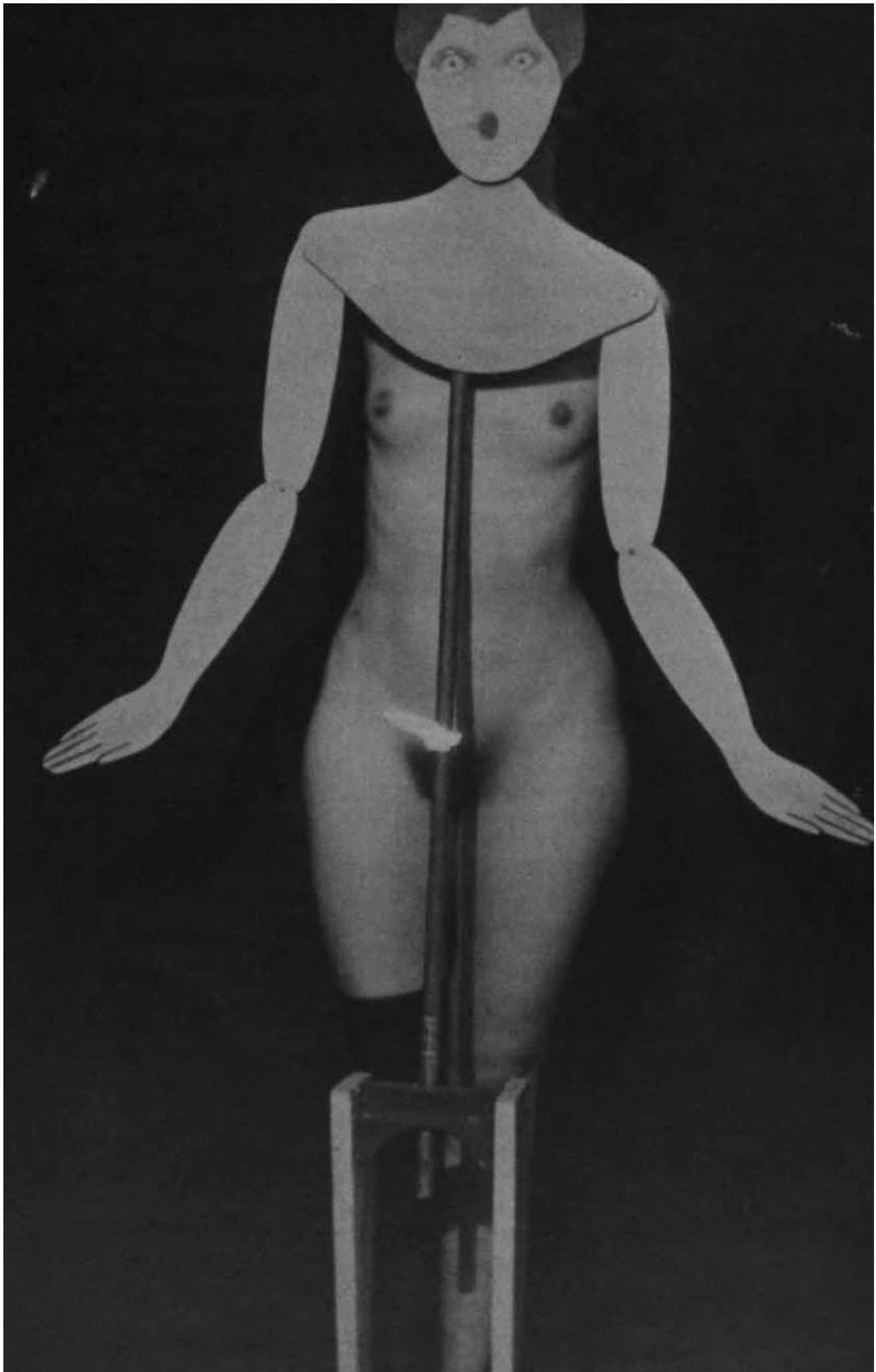
29 The two best histories of the exhibition of the readymades are Camfield's *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain* and Thierry de Duve's *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), esp. chap. 2. Our knowledge of the readymades from this period comes almost exclusively from the famous photographs of Duchamp's studio, personal accounts of visits to the studio, letters, and the Stieglitz photograph of *Fountain*.

30 See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Readymade, Objet Trouvé, Idée Reçue," in *Dissent: The Issue of Modern Art in Boston* (Boston, 1985), 111; and Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985).

31 This argument is seen most clearly (and most reductively) in Robert Rauschenberg's understanding of the performative utterance. When asked by art patron Iris Clert for a portrait, Rauschenberg replied by sending a telegram that read: "This is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say so."

32 Mary Sisler Collection (1964), n.p., Philadelphia Museum of Art, object file.

33 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 57.



Keep Smiling | George Baker

*Man Ray, n. masc., synonym. de joie jouer jouir.*¹

— MARCEL DUCHAMP

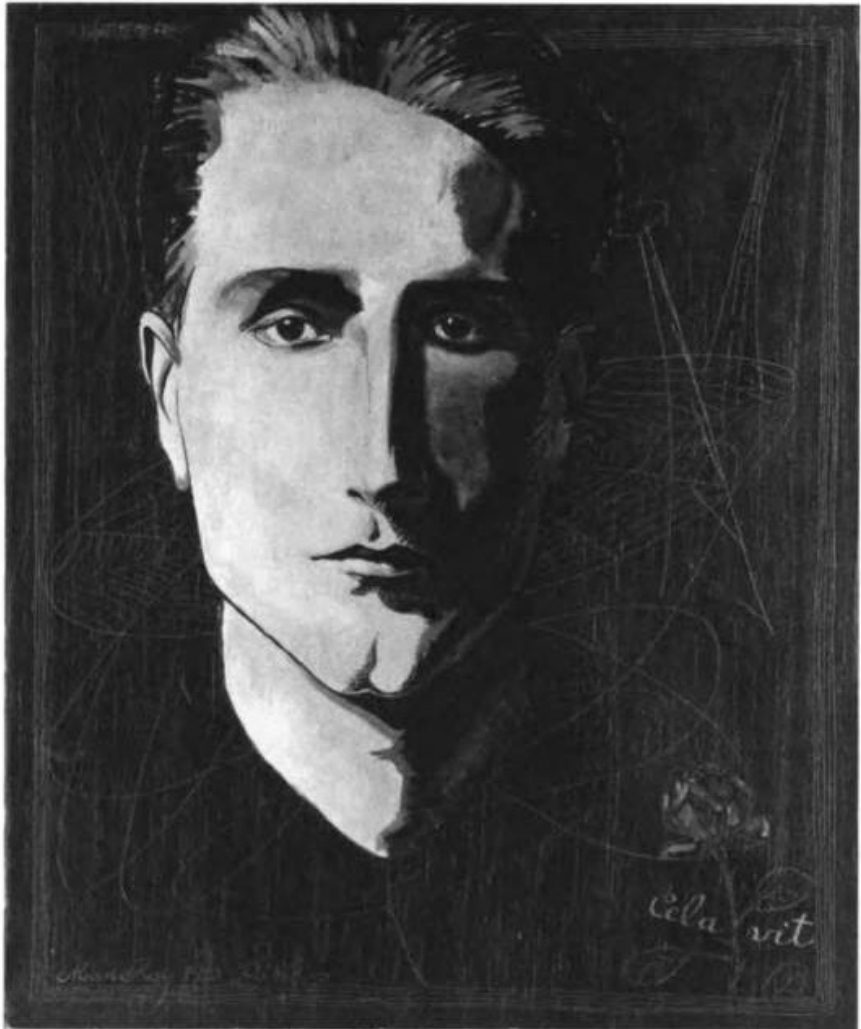
*Cela vit.*²

— MAN RAY

This essay will take seriously the transformation enacted by Man Ray upon the well-known pun embedded in Marcel Duchamp's Dada pseudonym, *Rose Sélavy*, usually decoded as *Eros, c'est la vie*: *Eros, that's life*. Between *c'est la vie* and *cela vit*, between the passive surrender of "that's life" and the joyous affirmation of "that lives," there is, indeed, a world of difference. Inscribing the words *Cela vit* upon the bottom right corner of his 1923 painted portrait of Duchamp (fig. 1), Man Ray entangled these words with a line drawing of a rose, creating from Duchamp's pun a "synonym," a crossing of word and image that this essay will also explore. In the optimism of the phrase, in its affirmation—from "that is (just) life" to "that (there) is living (alive)"—we sense the opening up of signifying conditions that exist in opposition to everything we have been taught to expect from Dada.

I want to explore these signifying conditions by turning to a photograph by Man Ray that has remained marginal in all the accounts of Dada and surrealist photography within which the artist nevertheless serves as the central figure. For I am not thinking of Man Ray's photograph of the egg beater and its shadow, nor of the ashtray overturned, nor of the ghostly rayographs, nor of the gleaming nudes. I am thinking of an image from 1920 usually identified simply with the title *Portemanteau* or *Coat Stand* (frontispiece). The marginality of the photograph in the critical literature should, however, strike us as strange. Indeed, it was this image that Man Ray chose to reproduce in 1921 in the one existing issue of *New York Dada*, a publication that might be said to define—if anything could—the practice of what paraded beneath the label "Dada Photography."

For Man Ray filled *New York Dada* with photographs. Along with his *Portemanteau*, there was a contribution from Alfred Stieglitz, namely his crucial and uncharacteristic *Portrait of Dorothy True* (fig. 2). From the hands of Man Ray himself, there would be the journal's cover image of Duchamp dressed up as *Rose Sélavy*, refashioned by Duchamp into the packaging of a faux-perfume bottle, an "assisted" readymade that Duchamp named *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette*. There were also other "collaborative" images, such as the several nude portraits by Man Ray of the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven



1.

at the issue's end. In this plethora of rather disparate photographic reproductions, *New York Dada* seems at first to have only one common denominator, and it surely makes one thing clear: the practice of Dada photography cannot be separated from a reflection upon the image of woman. And with this thought, other connections slowly suggest themselves.

Most of the images in *New York Dada* seem to be about “veiling,” about an intimation that something is hidden, perhaps enigmatically, within the image: Man Ray's *Portemanteau* depicts this literally, with a woman's body hiding behind a coat stand, and Duchamp's *Belle Haleine* states it verbally, subtitled as it is *Eau de Voilette* or “veil water.” Stieglitz's *Portrait of Dorothy True* could surely be said to foreground an optical veiling as well. Technically, the work is a double-exposed image in which two photographs interact: a tightly cropped picture of a striding woman's calf and foot, wrapped in a black stocking and stuffed into a too-small high-heeled shoe; and, along with this, an image of a woman's face, just visible in the black fog of the monumental stocking. The only images that seem to set themselves against this general formal preoccupation with veiling are the “exposed” images of the Baroness, who appears nude in her portraits. But then, of course, the images of the Baroness perhaps reveal the more general logic of the other photographs' traffic with both images of women and techniques of veiling: the engage-

ment of all the images in *New York Dada* with a logic of what we can call the fetish.

For a variety of discourses, a fetish object involves at its base a process of displacement. In the anthropological and economic discourses from which the term originated, a fetish emerges from a confusion of the animate and the inanimate, an attribution of life and power to a dead thing that borrows this power from somewhere else (the primitive fetish, the commodity fetish). Within psychoanalytic discourse, a fetish is also a displaced substitute, an object that allows for the disavowal of sexual difference through its continued attribution of the phallus to the mother. All these understandings of fetishism seem to be in place in the images from *New York Dada*.³ Collapsing female part-object and shoe, Stieglitz's photograph represents a classic sexual fetish; Duchamp's perfume an engagement with the commodity fetish; and Man Ray's *Portemanteau* an opening onto fetishism and fashion, which of course subsumes both commodity and sexual fetishism, just as Duchamp's fashion plate and Stieglitz's modern shoe also emerge from the world of fashion. And if Man Ray's photograph somehow subsumes the logic of the others that surround it, the artist seemed at pains to foreground this centrality with the captions, even an alternate title, by which he surrounded it.

The first of these captions would be writ large, like a sign: "KEEP SMILING." While humorous and friendly enough, this sign will need to be explained; for the moment, it appears enigmatically paired with the image that we see. "EYE-COVER ART-COVER CORSET-COVER AUTHORIZATION": this seems to serve as title to the letter by Tristan Tzara authorizing the free use of the name Dada ("Dada belongs to everybody"), a text printed beneath Man Ray's image. Yet the title's repetition of the word "COVER" seems to rhyme with what a *manteau* is in French—a cloak or a coat, but also figuratively a mask, a veil, or a pretence—and that this specific *Portemanteau* would carry or explore as its basic structure. Man Ray's image "carries" one more caption, the most important for our purposes here: he calls the work a "dadaphoto"—itself subtitled "Trademark Reg."—as if this were the image that defined the very practice of Dada photography.

To copyright if not commodify the form of the Dada photograph, to register if not regulate its appearance through the device of the brand name, seems entirely in character with the "authorization" that the New York dadaists sought from Tzara to borrow the European movement's name, or with schemes hatched in New York such as the "Société Anonyme" or Duchamp's one-time desire to market internationally the word Dada itself as a piece of jewelry.⁴ Man Ray would later speak in similar terms of the publication of *New York Dada* as a form of "legalization" of the movement:

In 1919 [sic], with the permission and with the approval of the other Dadaists I legalized Dada in New York. Just once. That was enough. The times did not deserve more. That was a Dadadate. The one issue of *New York Dada* did not even bear the names of its authors. How unusual for Dada!

3. Francis Picabia, *Tableau Dada* (*Natures mortes*) (Dada Painting [Still Life]), 1920, mixed media on cardboard, location unknown, from *Cannibale* 1 (1920), National Gallery of Art Library, Washington

Of course, there were a certain number of collaborators. Both willing and unwilling. Both trusting and suspicious. What did it matter? Only one issue. Forgotten — not even seen by most Dadaists or antidadaists. Now, we are trying to revive Dada.⁵

According to this account by Man Ray, the publication of *New York Dada* (however poorly remembered) represented a “Dadadate,” and it contained a “Dadaphoto.” To create such a category of image in 1921 reaches beyond the bureaucratic trappings of New York Dada strategies, however, in order to connect to activities recently central to Dada in Paris, where a series of similar anticategorical Dada categories had been initiated. It would seem that Man Ray’s *Dadaphoto* poses a specific response to Francis Picabia’s quest, throughout the year of 1920, to “invent” new categories of artistic objects that he paraded through the pages of his Dada reviews *391* and *Cannibale* under the names “Dada Painting” and “Dada Drawing,” the *Tableau Dada* (fig. 3) and the *Dessin Dada*. Part of a particularly intense moment in the French artist’s longer dialogue with Duchamp, Picabia’s label of “Dada Painting” was attached in the Parisian journals only to his own *Natures mortes* and Duchamp’s

L.H.O.O.Q., while the “Dada Drawings” encompassed Picabia’s photographic reproduction of a Pari-Mutuel horserace ticket and Duchamp’s *Tzanck Check*.

It has been my contention that in these paradoxical categories, and in the works that elaborated them, one of Dada’s central strategies can be discerned.⁶ This activity could be described as a war upon, but also a play with, what Karl Marx named the *general equivalent*, a theorization extended more recently by Jean-Joseph Goux from a critique of political economy to the symbolic and libidinal economies of semiotics, psychoanalysis, and philosophy.⁷ A general equivalent, simply put, serves as a standard measure, allowing disparate objects to be (abstractly) compared, rendered commensurable, and ulti-

TABLEAU DADA



Francis PICABIA.

mately evaluated vis-à-vis one another. The question of the general equivalent is thus tied to the question of value, and to the genesis of what, in the world of capitalism, we would call the “money-form” of value. We are all familiar with the general equivalent of the world of the commodity economy, even if we no longer encounter it often. For the object elevated to the role of the general equivalent of commodities is gold: useless, excessive, an object of pure surplus. Goux observes that gold, in order eventually to serve in this role of absolute evaluation, needs to be sequestered from the common world of commodities; placed on reserve, radically excluded, gold is hoarded in banks, never to be seen again. “Expelled” in this way “into transcendence,” the general equivalent of commodities begins to function in a way that Goux has observed is structurally homologous with a number of other symbolic general equivalents: as Gold is the general equivalent of commodities, the Father will become the general equivalent of subjects, the Phallus the general equivalent of objects, and Language the general equivalent of signs. These general equivalents too only accede to the privileged site of measure through a procedure of radical exclusion, that is, the “primal murder” through which Freudian psychoanalysis understands the imperative to introject the Dead Father as Law, or the “castration” that separates from the actual object that is the male penis, the principle of structural division that is the Phallus.

In Picabia’s category of the *Tableau Dada*, in his own *Natures mortes* and in Duchamp’s *L.H.O.O.Q.*, almost all the avatars of the general equivalent are put into play rather than excluded: Phallus (the displaced tail of *Natures mortes*, the displaced beard and mustache of *L.H.O.O.Q.*), Father (the shared project of old master parody, of Paul Cézanne, Rembrandt van Rijn, Auguste Renoir, Leonardo da Vinci), and Language (the punning inscriptions in each work, and the play with the signature in *Natures mortes*). In the *Dessin Dada*, money too would be directly engaged. Yet if the Dada strategy elaborated here consisted in contesting the structural exclusion of the general equivalent, in potentially laying waste to the foundation of a given symbolic economy, Man Ray’s category of the *Dadaphoto* evinces no such engagement with the general equivalent at all. For here no trace of Phallus, or Father, or Language, or Money can be discerned; the *Dadaphoto* hardly seizes upon the general equivalent, and surely does not subject its forms to direct manipulation. Which is perhaps not entirely surprising. For to locate such a strategy within what Picabia nominated as “Dada Painting” and “Dada Drawing” is to witness the general equivalent contested upon the site of tradition, upon the mediums delimited and legitimated by history, which the avant-garde had set out to contest. Photography, by contrast, was a new form for the avant-garde. Not legitimated by tradition, it did, however, pose the question of exchange at the very heart of its operation as a form of mechanical reproduction, opening up perhaps—and it will be my thesis that such was the case for the *Dadaphoto*—entirely new forms of exchange, new modalities of visual equivalency, an entirely other symbolic economy.

Indeed, exchange of some sort seems to be at the heart of the image that the *Dadaphoto* offers. Describing what we might see in this photograph has not proven easy for those few commentaries that exist on the image. A female body, nude except for a single black, knee-high stocking (à la Stieglitz), stands behind a coat stand of a sort, one itself transformed into something like a caricature of the female form, a cartoon affair of moveable arms and a wide-eyed face, mouth agape, an object suspended illegibly between evoking a sex toy, a fashion mannequin, and a carnivalesque theatrical prop. At its best, for some, the interest of the *Dadaphoto* lies in the manner it provides literal form to the repeated “anthropomorphism” of the Dada readymade or mechanomorph, illustrating directly the bodily evocations that ring out from beneath snow shovel, or camera bellows, or egg beater.⁸ At its worst, for others, the image confirms the clear misogyny of the Dada project, its need to contain actual female bodies and feminine sexuality within the ironclad, man-made forms of industrial modernity.⁹ Both these explanations seem entirely too “quick” to me. For we do not yet understand what the “anthropomorphism” of the readymade might in fact entail. And despite the explicit caricature—despite, too, the fetishism of all the images in *New York Dada*—misogyny might be the inversion of the project that the *Dadaphoto* could be said to sustain.

To restate what the *Dadaphoto* gives us to see, and to do this more slowly: a nude female body stands behind a readymade object, a modified coat stand. This readymade “masks” the full extent of her bodily form; at times, for example around the visual incident of the otherwise ludicrous single black stocking, the female form seems to fuse—in an amateur theatrical sort of way—with the object that stands before it. Two entities, a body and an object, stand in relation to one another. They seem “drawn” to one another, “rhyming” their visual forms. While the coat stand caricatures or imitates quite openly the female form, the nude body too reciprocates this imitation, rigidifying its vertical stance, conforming to the object’s lines, receiving its shadows. A doubling of sorts takes place, a form of “correspondence” seems on offer. It will be my contention that the *Dadaphoto* presents not the engagement with the general equivalent of the *Tableau Dada* or the *Dessin Dada*, but what might be imagined as a dynamic existing on the other side of the latter’s operations. If, previously, I have explored the Dada strategies that set out to rupture a dominant symbolic economy, here I want to detail a linked Dada strategy that involves exploring the alternate symbolic economies let loose by this rupture, the repressed or utopian systems, and the new possibilities of meaning and value that they would allow.

As a photograph, the *Dadaphoto* prioritizes a new form of exchange. It will concern itself with equivalency, with objects both doubled and corresponding. But the equivalency of such a photograph will now be that which is let loose by an exchange beyond the Law of the general equivalent. This is an equivalency, an exchange, that will force us to find in the Dada practice of photography a new definition in fact of what the

photograph could be thought to be. It is an exchange whose stakes are inordinately high, opening up not the hatred of a certain vision of Dada misogyny, but a joyous affirmation more intense than any imagined in the currently existing explorations of Dada “humor.” In the *Dadaphoto*, we witness an intimation of an exchange that would not be a figuration of what Marx called either “relative” or “equivalent” forms of value, but rather what film theorist and philosopher Kaja Silverman has recently called a form of “absolute” value.¹⁰

In a recent book and a series of subsequent essays, Silverman has attempted to theorize a redemptive relationship to vision that she calls, using a term borrowed from Hannah Arendt, “world spectatorship.” Embracing “a kind of looking which takes place in the world, and for the world,” Silverman’s world spectator departs radically from the “denigration of the visual”¹¹ prevalent in most forms of poststructuralism and contemporary film and photographic theory, seeking instead “a kind of looking which not only stubbornly adheres to phenomenal forms, but also augments and enriches them” (2–3). Her model for this utopia of visual enrichment is decidedly psychoanalytic; this is an account that attempts in the most accurate of ways to theorize how we as subjects can be said to love the world.

Crucial to Silverman’s account is the phenomenon that she names “perceptual identity”: we “see” something, from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, only when an external stimulus or perception can be bound to a chain of visual memories in the subject, only when the outside world can be “touched” by the previous affective ties of the psyche. We care for the outside world—we “see” it—only when we can displace onto its objects the love we once held for a past object of desire. The ability thus freely to displace affect onto the world will become the focus of Silverman’s form of visual ethics; the more that displacement can move from the subject’s past into the world, the more we can “see” and ultimately love. “Every act of visual affirmation,” Silverman writes, occurs “via the visual reincarnation of previous incarnations [of the object of desire],” defining the world spectator as “consequently not just someone to whom the past returns, but someone who holds himself open to the new form it will take—who anticipates and affirms the transformative manifestation of what was in what is” (24–25).

The contiguity of world and psyche at the heart of perceptual identity depends upon a mode of symbolization that can transfer affect; in a later essay, Silverman describes such forms of the “conveyance of affect,” the symbolization characteristic of a “libidinal conveyance system” that would found a “symbolic order . . . without either unity or closure.”¹² Here too we face a mode of symbolization that depends upon a psychoanalytic model: rather than “directly evoking a signified, as it does in Ferdinand de Saussure’s account of the sign,” the signifier that Silverman seeks to describe “refers back to

a previous one, which itself does the same" (GL, 12), a chain of signifiers corresponding to the endless displacements of the movement of desire. In fact, such a signifier would be a "redemptive form," set against the Saussurean model of the sign and ultimately "capable of raising the world from the grave to which the linguistic signifier has consigned it" (GL, 10).

Language, in Silverman's account, is "inimical to affect" (GL, 20), an impoverished form for its conveyance. The linguistic signifier exists in fact in opposition to all that would support the project of what Silverman also calls libidinal communication: "The linguistic signifier is prototypically closed: closed to affective transfers, closed to other linguistic signifiers, and closed to the world" (101). Saussurean linguistics, at least, insists upon the delimitation of the "linguistic entity," its separation "from everything that surrounds it on the phonic chain."¹³ As Silverman explains:

This notion of delimitation also appears at every other point in Saussure's account of the linguistic sign. The abstract *langue* or language system is detached from the real; every element within it means not through reference to what resides outside that order, but only through the ways in which it differs from other elements within it. A signifier is also properly closed in relation to the signified, and vice-versa; although poetic usage can motivate the relation between the two in all sorts of ways, those signs in which there is no communication between them better exemplify the workings of language than those in which there is. Finally, although our concrete utterances have the power to work transformatively upon our abstract language system, *parole* is every bit as respectful of the discrete nature of individual words as is *langue*. When we speak "well," we *articulate*: we clearly separate each of our words from those which precede them, and from those which come later (104).

This description will hopefully not sound strange to those readers familiar with the basic outlines of Saussurean linguistics. And yet further, this system of "separation" should also strike the reader as evocative of all that I have had to say previously about the system of the general equivalent; indeed, we are listening in Silverman's summation to the reasons that led Goux to nominate Language as the general equivalent of signs.

For Silverman, language when functioning in this mode—according to the logic of the general equivalent—will be attached to what Sigmund Freud calls the "secondary process":

When words are most conventionally "wordlike" . . . they bring displacement to a halt. They do so by insisting upon difference, over and against similarity and contiguity. Indeed, in a certain sense, the linguistic sign is nothing but difference. "Mother" signifies "not father," "not brother," "not sister," and so forth. When we write or speak, we also articulate our words, that is, we "cut" them off from each other graphically or acoustically. Even the "arbitrariness" of the linguistic sign represents part of this process of differentiation. The lack of affinities between it and the referent, as

well as between the two terms out of which it is itself comprised, puts further obstacles in the way of libidinal transfer. The linguistic sign is consequently a poor conveyer of affect. . . . Freud associates the linguistic signifier with the "secondary process," which predominates at the level of the preconscious (GL, 20).

This description obviously begs the characteristics that would pertain to the mode of symbolization psychoanalysis calls the "primary process," a mode of symbolization belonging to the unconscious and lying—in this account at least—outside the linguistic model, lying—for my account as well—outside the system of the general equivalent. It is to the primary process that Silverman turns for her model of "affective transfer" or "affective symbolization"—a symbolization inherent not in linguistic communication but in what she calls the "perceptual signifier"—a process she describes as the drive "to make repressed visual memories once again perceptually available" (GL, 20). Dependent upon visual affinities, similarities, and contiguities, the affective transfer of the primary process corresponds to the activity that psychoanalysis calls "displacement"—an activity that comes with an all-important twin and corollary, namely "condensation." We need to begin to recognize the ways in which the modality of this affective transfer finally explains and gives concrete form to the long-acknowledged Dada project of inserting desire into the practice of art, of achieving an explicit and unavoidable libidinalization of the entire aesthetic domain.

I was perhaps disingenuous of me to observe earlier that nothing in Man Ray's *Dadaphoto* relates to the forms of the general equivalent explored in Picabia's categories of the *Tableau Dada* and the *Dessin Dada*. For we do face, at least in the version of the image published in *New York Dada*, a thematics of castration, and thus in some way of the Phallus, every bit as strong as that witnessed in Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* Visible in the current form of the print only as an actual tear on the photograph itself, when published in *New York Dada* the female body in *Portemanteau* carried a white stamp placed over her genitals, a literal postage stamp that voided the space of her sex. In a historical moment that would see the editors of the avant-garde journal *The Little Review* brought to court on obscenity charges for the publication of sections of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, it has usually been supposed that this (eventually removed) stamp served the purpose of protecting *New York Dada* from similar charges of pornography. And yet this was a visual "obstruction" or deletion that both looked back to Man Ray's previous journal publications (the play with deletion and censorship in the 1915 *Ridgefield Gazook*), and that would remain characteristic of his subsequent artistic procedures. Given the parameters of the photograph, it is also a deletion that becomes extremely evocative of the elision of castration itself.

In the moments leading up to the production of *New York Dada*, Man Ray had assisted Duchamp on an infamous film project that itself engaged a thematics of castration, perhaps more directly than any other dadaist work I know. This was Duchamp's attempt to film the shaving of the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's pubic hair, a project of elision in which Man Ray was to serve as both cameraman and "barber." "While helping Duchamp with his research," Man Ray remembered, "I had shot a sequence of myself as a barber shaving the pubic hair of a nude model, a sequence which was also ruined in the process of developing and never saw the light."¹⁴ At first only understandable, if at all, as an avant-garde strategy of mimicry that seizes upon the subcultural frisson of pornography, Duchamp's lost project perhaps makes more sense when seen in light of his own attempts to libidinalize the aesthetic—the work of his *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*—and this libidinalization's outmoding or transformation of the activity of painting itself. For Duchamp's film would have produced another understanding of the "stripping bare" of a female body, a denuding here that curiously would invert, with almost 180-degree precision, the activity of the traditional painter. Rather than continue to employ the bodily prosthesis of the paintbrush—the "stick with hairs"—to add material to a canvas, Man Ray as Duchamp's "barber" would employ an everyday item to subtract hairs directly from the female body. This inversion of painterly activity would now link painting to castration, the abandonment of the brush with the activity of elision, perhaps asserting that the transformation of painting would involve the stark confrontation with sexual difference and also the exploration of a new symbolic economy of the painterly (and libidinal) object.

Potentially linking this lost film project to the *New York Dada* photograph, it has recently been asserted that the female model in Man Ray's *Dadaphoto* is in fact the Baroness herself.¹⁵ Perhaps this is an attribution aided by the stamp Man Ray placed upon the image in *New York Dada*, for the Baroness was known not only for her nude modeling but for her performative masquerades, one aspect of which often included the placing of postage stamps upon her own body. Man Ray did once cryptically describe the *Dadaphoto* as "conceived for a friend [a male friend, un ami],"¹⁶ an explanation that may link the photograph to Duchamp and his film. Whatever the case—and whether the *Dadaphoto* depicts the Baroness or not—Man Ray did link the *Dadaphoto* to the Baroness film. When published in April 1921, the *Dadaphoto* in *New York Dada* would be placed on the same page as a letter from Tzara authorizing the spread of Dada to New York (fig. 4). Just two months later, in June of 1921, when Man Ray wrote a response to Tzara's letter, that letter would now place the sole surviving film stills from the abortive Baroness project on the page with his text. In fact, it is in the relation of these film stills to the letter's text that we discover something like a key to a crucial structure paralleled by the visual form of the *Dadaphoto*.

Offering up the lack of the Phallus in a form of extraordinary display, and with

4a-b. Man Ray, Letter to Tristan Tzara, June 1921, with image of Baroness Elsa from the film project by Duchamp and Man Ray, Francis M. Naumann Fine Art, New York



4a.

seeming gleeful abandon, the Baroness' shaved body in the Duchamp/Man Ray image is made to function in Man Ray's letter in relation to written language. However, in contradistinction to all that we have been saying about the symbolic economy of the linguistic signifier, Man Ray's initial language in this letter is not very well "articulated" in the Saussurean meaning of the word. It seems to operate in a quite different way. Stretching from end to end of the white page, the letter begins with a stuttering line, avoiding through repetition the clear pathways of sense:

MERDELAMERDELAMERDELAMERDELAMERDELAMER

de l'a [] merique!

Usually understood too quickly as an expression of boredom and disgust ("merde") with America, Man Ray's opening salvo has been read as a prelude to his imminent expatriation from the United States and his July 1921 arrival in Paris, there to join the Paris Dada group ("Dada cannot live in New York," Man Ray's letter continues). However, the opening line is of course properly unreadable, as it throws up an almost infinite number of possible "articulations," playing on a set of several recognizable French words or homophones,

The appearance of New York dada was made possible through the generosity of a few poor friends, but it cannot go on so. Perhaps in the future we may do something again. I have not come across any coupures, but will watch for them.

What has happened between you and Picabia? I saw a little article from some French paper. It is unfortunate.


Thanks very much for the photos of yourself and friends.

I shall send you some more New York dadas.

Duchamp is returning this week to France, you will meet him, no doubt, and have a talk with him.

Merci pour Mlle Bernice's sentiments! I am doing nothing of interest now to anyone or to myself!

Most cordially
 man Ray
 directeur de mauvaise movies



4b.

MER = Sea
 MÈR[E] = Mother
 MERDE = Shit
 AMER = Bitter

Descending to the level of the excremental (“de la merde”), or announcing something coming “from the sea” or “from the mother” (“de la mèr[e]”), language here seems freed from its existence as a mode of the general equivalent. For it is constructed on the one hand by the work of condensation, producing from an entire phrase or sentence what we might call a massive “portemanteau” word, a word made up of other words. In this, Man Ray’s line seems given over to that of which language should not be allowed to partake, namely displacement and the primary process. Inhabited by the workings of affective transfer, other readings of the statement thus arise, in a spiral not of nonsense but of expanding meanings, ranging from the scatological to the melancholic, from violence to love: “MER DE LA MERDE [Sea of Shit... Mother of Shit],” the passage yelps. “MERDE DE LA MER [The Sea’s Shit... The Mother’s Shit],” it whines in mirror reversal. The possible readings don’t end here: MERDE L’AMER DE LA MER [Shit, the bitter(ness)]

of the sea . . . Shit, the bitter(ness) of the mother] . . . MER DE L'AMER [Sea of Bitter . . . Mother of Bitter] . . . MER DE LA MER [The Mother's Sea . . . the Mother of the Sea . . . the Mother of the Mother . . . The Mother's Mother (an Ur-Mother?)]. The spiral of readings could continue.

Attached to this stuttering line of displacements and condensation, it is as if the transgressive image of the nude, shaven Baroness has given its libidinal charge to the words themselves, causing perhaps this explosion of articulation and of sense. Indeed, the condensation represented by this collision of words and letters is only redoubled by another, more momentous condensation, that of the body of the Baroness to the experimental phrase presented by Man Ray. We see a form of fusion, a verbal-visual crossing where the Baroness' body and its placement allow the body to begin to act like a letter, forming in its pose the shape of the first letter from the word "Amerique," namely the letter A. But this crossing extends in both directions, allowing the body to become a letter—to become an entity that we recognize as a signifier—but also forcing language now to devolve from the word into pure sound (the purring, alliterative stutter of the phrase), or into pure visual image. For we could reverse our description of the Baroness film still, seeing now how the letter or the linguistic signifier becomes a body as it emphasizes its visual—as opposed to merely linguistic—nature. The product of such transformation is that the letter will now carry that body's erotic charge. We are witnessing the operation of affective transfer. As in the *Dadaphoto*, with its ricochet of body and readymade, here the Baroness' body corresponds to another object through similarity and contiguity, but this time it is aligned not with a readymade but with a letter (the letter A). Stated in a different way, "language" in this document seems not to operate in the Saussurean manner, where a signifier refers to a signified, but opens up an abyssal chain, with the female body—perhaps even figuratively the "mother" that whispers through this line's aggressive stutter—now standing behind the letter or the word, a support for its libidinal charge.¹⁷ Which we could restate: in Man Ray's letter to Tzara, language exceeds its existence as a system of the general equivalent through intensifying a form of exchange, just as the original film project of Man Ray and Duchamp might be described as exceeding the parameters of the symbolic regime of castration by intensely inserting the literal "fact" of castration into the visual realm.

How can we more fully describe the psychoanalytic—as opposed to Saussurean—model of symbolization characteristic of displacement? Considering its Dada deployment, what are the possible connections of this symbolic mode to the female body, or, indeed, to a figure that we would have to call maternal? Not relating a signifier immediately to a signified, displacement presents a sign of affect that relates a signifier to a chain of other,

preceding signifiers, a chain of objects of desire. The story of displacement that Silverman tells focuses intently on Freud's claim—in texts like *The Interpretation of Dreams* or "The Unconscious"—that "every signifying act in a given subject's life refers back, in some ultimate sense, to a primally repressed term, which is most frequently the mother" (GL, 12). We are forced—by the kinship structure, by the Oedipus complex—to displace away from the mother throughout our lives onto other substitute objects. The result, for Silverman at least, is not an "abandonment" of the original lost object of desire, nor a diminution of a primary affect. Rather, affect can be transferred, and displacement opens up a "qualitative complexification" (119), a means of elevating what served as the "first" term, connecting it to "a host of related memories and thereby expand[ing] its field of meaning" (119). Affect, through this process, can in fact grow and thus evolve.

Rejecting the Saussurean or linguistic model of signification, Silverman's description of affective symbolization might seem unfortunately regressive, an anchoring and thus fixation of the mobility of meaning in the figure (and the meaning) of the mother. Ultimately, however, this is not the case; the opposite would be more true. The mother is a "first signifier" for an even greater loss, one that cannot and will never be symbolized, but that sets the drive toward symbolization itself in motion.

Within the Freudian model [of symbolization], this regressive journey finally leads to a term capable of functioning as a signified. This is of course the mother. In my view, however, the mother does not constitute the full stop of meaning. She classically provides the first signifier for a more primordial loss: the loss of what Lacan variously calls "presence," "being," or the "here and now." Unlike the other signifiers of the *hic et nunc*, though, she has nothing to which she can refer back. What she stands in for psychically cannot provide this function, since it is precisely what escapes signification. Although serving as the support for libidinal symbolization, the mother is consequently devoid of semantic value. It is not she who gives all of the other signifiers of desire their meaning; it is, rather, they who determine what she can mean. To go "backward," libidinally speaking, also is not finally to touch "ground"; it is, instead, to apprehend the groundlessness of all signification (GL, 13).

For Silverman, this groundlessness is "liberating" (GL, 13).¹⁸ Operating in the absence of an anchor in this way, operating in a close bond with absence itself, libidinal transfer can work freely, with no bounds upon its form, with no constraints upon which directions it may ultimately take. It would be all important to keep open the groundless ground of the signifying chain, the groundless ground that the mother—or what Silverman elsewhere calls the "maternal signifier"—represents. However, in the normative account given by psychoanalysis, all sorts of obstacles arise to threaten this openness. Although again this is not the term that Silverman (or Freud) uses, one of these obstacles will be the installation of the general equivalent at the heart of this symbolic economy. It is an obstacle that thus also signals the regression of the earlier economy itself.

With the onset of the Oedipus complex and the castration crisis, with the ascension of the Father and Phallus to the position of general equivalent of subject and object alike, a massive challenge to the position of the mother in the economy just described takes place. What psychoanalysis strangely calls the “negative” Oedipal mother will be replaced by the “positive” Oedipal mother of castration, the mother of insufficiency and lack from whom we will displace ever more according to the dictates of the paternal Law.¹⁹ Ultimately, this positive Oedipal mother is not the one to which Silverman has devoted her account of libidinal transfer. In fact, the discovery of “anatomical difference,” Silverman affirms, leads to a “mortification of language,” one even more severe than the blow dealt by the linguistic signifier, and which Silverman sees potentially as “the atrophy of signification itself” (GL, 23).

Silverman's description of this atrophy follows closely the installation of the general equivalent at the heart of the subject's symbolic economy. This installation is also a usurpation, a rigidification of the operations of desire. “A language dies,” Silverman mourns, “when one of its signifiers succeeds in passing itself off as the signified to which every other signifier ultimately refers.” While this is the mother's psychic function, as we have seen the maternal signifier stands in this privileged place only in a “groundless” way, and in such a way that later symbolizations retroactively determine her meaning. The usurping signifier commands a very different relationship to displacement. Silverman continues:

This imposture requires two steps. First, a signifier must present itself as autonomous and self-defining by erasing the prior signifier or series of signifiers upon which it relies for its meanings. Then it must install itself in the place of origin. As we have seen, although the maternal signifier actually occupies the latter position, it is incapable of masquerading as a signified, since there is no earlier term to which it can ever refer. It marks the site where meaning finally and fully fails. It is classically the paternal signifier which claims to constitute the bedrock of meaning, and it does so by writing over the maternal signifier (GL, 24).

This is a close description of the process that Goux would call the “ascension” of the general equivalent of the Dead Father and his Law, or what Lacan called variously the Name of the Father or the “paternal metaphor.” It is obvious that Silverman sees the “maternal metaphor” as more crucial for psychic life than the installation of the paternal metaphor as described by Lacan. For without the mother “there can be neither signifier nor passion of the signifier” (122–123). It is she who gives rise to the free form of displacement, which then reciprocally determines what she can mean. Consequently, Silverman concludes, “in spite of all of the social and ideological encroachments that work to impose retroactive restrictions upon her, our originary love-object may be the closest any of us ever comes to pure limitlessness” (123). We must understand the challenge of the follow-

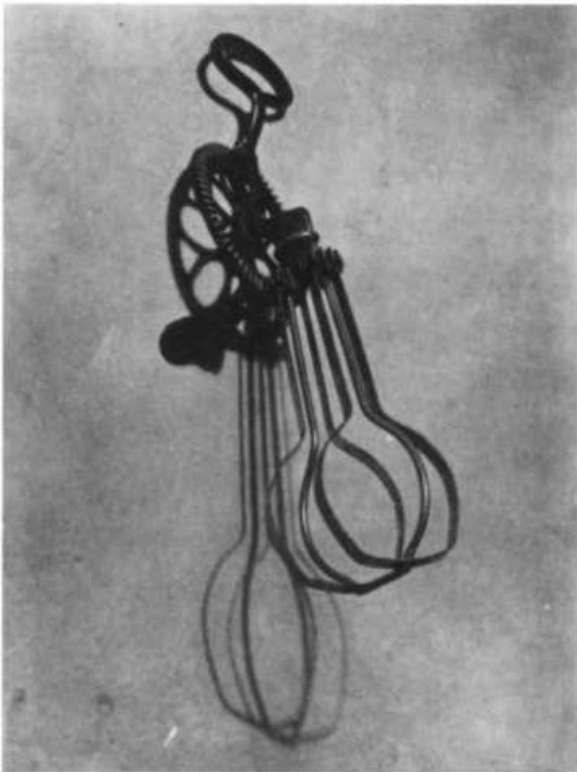
ing imperative: "It is through loving the mother that we are able to love the world" (123).

Loving the mother in the manner that Silverman desires is no simple affair; it seems almost impossible to think what this might mean. It would involve accessing the mother at a level beyond or before that installed in the Oedipus complex, accessing the maternal signifier in a mode not sanctioned by castration, by the Father, by the Law. In my account, it would mean imagining libidinal transfer from the mother in a series of exchanges not under the sway of the general equivalent. To describe the form this would take, Silverman reaches back in the psychoanalytic account to what we can define as "forgotten form[s] of symbolization," one of which is inherent in the working of female subjectivity prior to the castration complex, a mode of relation to the mother that Silverman calls "Girl Love." This is a "love" beyond or before the Law, a love that gives affective transfer its true form. "By uncovering the maternal signifier" usurped by the Law of the paternal metaphor, such love would show "the father to have only borrowed 'clothes.'" The chain of libidinal transfers and the visual possibilities for perceptual identity would be set free:

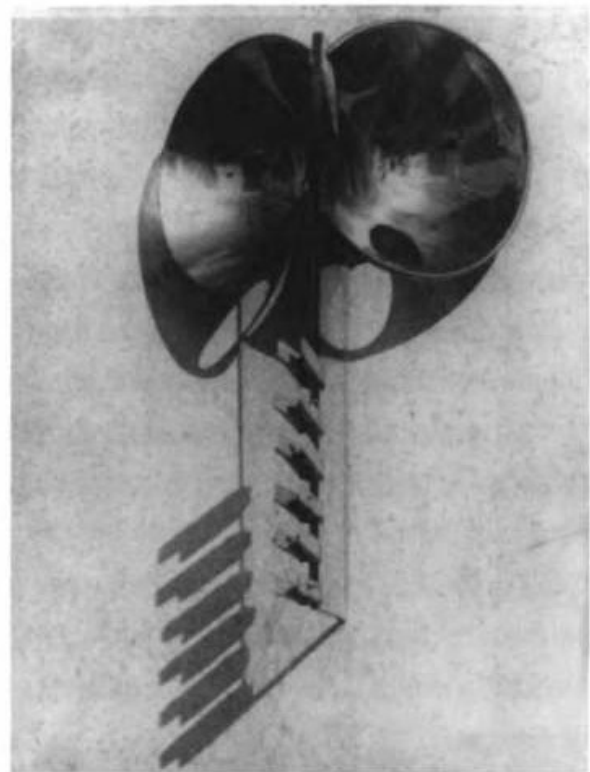
[Uncovering the maternal signifier] breaks the spell, and gives us access to an entirely new kind of symbolization—one without either authentication or limits. The subject who opens herself to its possibilities burns not only the bridges behind her, but the land as well. But she now faces what Nietzsche calls "the horizon of the infinite"; she is free to displace in whichever direction desire takes her (GL, 24).

The picture of Man Ray's photography that we have inherited from the recent literature sets itself against many of the terms that this essay has been exploring. In fact, the most advanced approach to Dada photography reads Man Ray's practice as offering up a series of objects "able to hold out against exchange."²⁰ Depicting—as Man Ray so often did—the readymade object and its shadow, according to this reading, would show an object of exchange now tied to the specific time and place of its capture within the photographic image. This is a reading that would in fact see Man Ray's photographs holding out, in a specifically photographic manner, against the regime of general equivalency.

Linked and older accounts of Dada and surrealist photography saw the doubles created in crucial early photographic images by Man Ray such as *L'Homme (Man)* and *La Femme (Woman)* (figs. 5, 6), the object doubled by its shadow, as not only an homage to Duchamp's own concern with shadows and the indexical sign, but with a specifically photographic concern with doubling.²¹ This doubling could be given over to a reading that saw it in analogy to the form of double articulation that within linguistics creates the base condition of meaning, the signifier of signification—in primal words like "mama" and



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“papa”—thus seeing in the avant-garde deployment of photography a true concern with the photograph as a form of the “graphic,” as an invasive form of “writing” inserted into the domain of modernist visuality.

Inasmuch as I have been investigating how Man Ray’s project might at times be given over not to holding out against exchange but to repressed forms of exchange—to an exchange almost without limit—and also to how his practice of photography might challenge the limitations of the linguistic signifier, this reading departs from those earlier accounts. What I am seeking is not the insertion of “writing” into modernist visuality, but a new or redeemed form of visuality counter to modernism’s concerns. This search also necessitates a new model of the photographic, one implicitly introduced within Silverman’s recent work as well.

“I never worked as Duchamp did,” Man Ray once asserted. “I never said that objects were *readymade*. Duchamp found it revolutionary simply to place a phrase or his name on an object found at the hardware store. No: I needed not one thing but two things. Two things which, in themselves, had no relation and which . . . I placed together to create by contrast a sort of plastic poetry.”²² Man Ray called his creation of objects—almost invariably made to be photographed—not a practice of the “*readymade*,” but instead “Objects of My Affection.” Accentuating the “ludic” or the “popular,” as Rosalind Krauss has observed,²³ Man Ray’s moniker also prioritizes *affect*, prioritizes—perhaps—love. It is in this light that I want to see the “plastic poetry” Man Ray derived from the collision of at least two objects as a figuration of the chain of signification at the heart of affective transfer, of its operations of displacement and condensation.

The *Dadaphoto* gives us the new perspective on Man Ray's objects and photographs that we need to begin to open up this reading. Here, in this image, the *portemanteau* or depicted "coat stand" has a strange relationship to its normative function, as it is not serving immediately as an armature for other objects to be placed upon, ultimately to cover it up, but itself serves to mask another object, to stand before and in front of the female body (of the Baroness? of the "mother"?).²⁴ In fact, the *portemanteau* depicted here performs an inversion of its traditional function, a precise reversal too, we might say, of modernist concerns with structural transparency, as an internal armature—a coat stand—comes to be placed as an external skin upon other objects, operating more like a surfacing of the repressed. This is, then, a *portemanteau* that has its own armature standing behind and beneath it, which "carries" its form and perhaps even depicts in this a model for what we might say was Man Ray's or Dada's general model of the photograph (Stieglitz's *Portrait of Dorothy True* could be opened up by all that I am in the process of saying, for example). We seemingly face an intimation of a chain of signification, a set of visual displacements propped upon one another, and this chain forms the basis of what the *Dadaphoto* entails.²⁵ This chain also reconnects us to the female form, which I am reading as a figuration of the maternal signifier, beneath the appearance to us of the world's objects and its forms, operating not according to a regime of differentiation and separation, but instead of contiguity and similarity. Everywhere we look in Man Ray's photography, we can see now intimations of this same chain of signifiers, the tools of "perceptual identity" opening up the possibility of "affective transfer." We also often find the photograph conceived as not only the form of the conveyance of affect, but as thus a form propped upon—if not defined by—the female form or body. Reconceived in this way, the photograph becomes the sign of a more general Dada project.

Such is the case for Man Ray's *Woman*. Here, as in *Man* (which would later be retitled *Woman*), an object is doubled by its shadow, which now in the wake of viewing the *Dadaphoto* we can begin to see in a new way. As in the *Dadaphoto*, we see "two" objects, a chain of signifiers, or we see, conversely, an object displacing its form onto and into the world, producing the contact and the contiguity at the basis of libidinal transfer as much as it is at the basis of the photographic sign itself. We also see the "condensation" of these two objects, the invention from this libidinal transfer of what we must call a "new," expanded form. What separates *Woman* from *Man*, however, is the intensity of the former's introspection, the mode in which this image also reflects upon what a photograph might be thought to be. For of course the objects that make up Man Ray's *Woman*



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are everyday objects, objects from the domestic sphere formerly of woman and mother alike—clothespins for example—but they are also tools of the photographer's trade, and bind or fuse the objects that go into the production and development of the photographic image with, once more, the form of the woman or mother.

To see the doubles and shadows in Man Ray's photographs as not only—or merely—indexical signs that betray a self-reflexive photographic logic, to see these signs instead as a self-expansive intimation of a chain of displacements that the photograph can also carry, is to link such images to the manner in which Man Ray often expanded the “life” and affect of a given work. I am thinking in this regard of a photograph that Man Ray entitled *Moving Sculpture* (fig. 7), a still image of laundry on a clothesline billowing in the wind. Another typical Dada engagement with the everyday—a space and “economy” once associated almost exclusively with the feminine—*Moving Sculpture* also exists as another sign of Man Ray's dialogue with Marcel Duchamp, as the image's billowing laundry recalls Duchamp's photographic experiments on what he called the “Draft Pistons” section of his *Large Glass*. And yet, as an everyday image of hanging clothes set out to dry, *Moving Sculpture* must be connected directly to the “sculpture” of a clothes “hanger” that Man

7. Man Ray, *Moving Sculpture*, 1920, photograph, Man Ray Trust

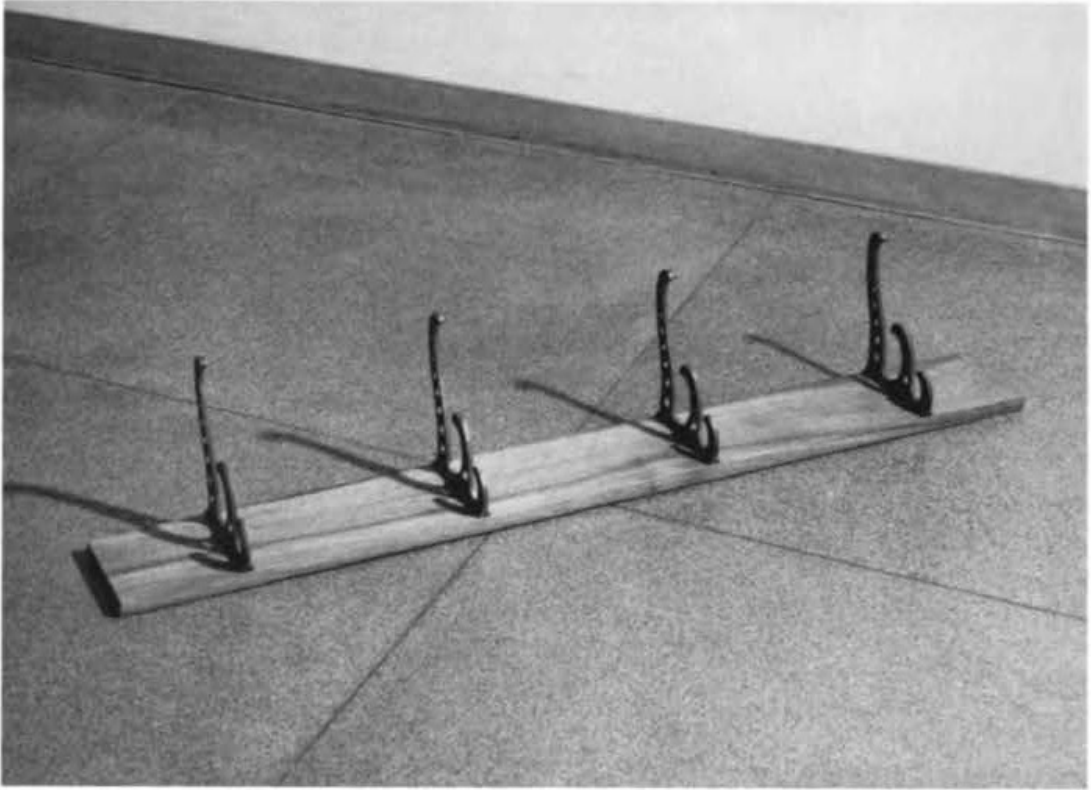
8. Man Ray, *Object to Be Destroyed*, 1923 (1962 replica), metronome with moving photograph attached, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris



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time. Man Ray's title also prioritizes the fact that such displacement might be seen as "moving" in the emotional sense. In fact, Man Ray would construct as one of his most important pieces a literal "moving sculpture," the ticking metronome used as the basis for the artist's *Object to Be Destroyed* (fig. 8). This is a piece whose own understanding of that which is "moving" would itself be double, as it was this object that would open up the dynamic of what Man Ray referred to as the "destructible" or "indestructible" object around a logic of photographing and remaking the object, the object's disappearance and its subsequent reproduction in a new form. *Object to Be Destroyed* was a sculpture that reversed the dialectics of *Moving Sculpture*; instead of a fixed photographic image of moving objects, the piece now put the photograph into literal motion, attaching a photographic image of a woman's eye to the metronome's ticking hand. For Man Ray, setting the photograph into motion in this way was not simply an opening of the piece onto an incipiently cinematic dimension; it linked the photograph once more to the object of desire, and specifically to the implicitly maternal *Lost Object* as Man Ray would in fact name a later reconstruction of the piece. From the "lost object" to the "indestructible object," from destruction to rebirth, we follow once more the effects and the characteristics of the signifying chain.²⁶

Ray's *Portemanteau* would also depict. We are in the presence of another object related to what we might now call Man Ray's principle of the *portemanteau*, and of the *Dadaphoto*, a principle operating along the line of a chain of displacements. In this regard, Man Ray's title *Moving Sculpture* resonates in two significant directions: toward a sheer engagement with mobility and the mobile, which would be linked to my exploration of signifying chains, of the photograph no longer thought of as "retentive" and fixed, but as open and connected to a chain moving both backward and forward in space and



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9. Marcel Duchamp, *Trebuchet (Trap)*, 1917 (1964 edition), assisted ready-made, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

10. Marcel Duchamp, *Hat Rack*, 1917 (1964 edition), assisted readymade, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

As Man Ray's *Moving Sculpture* attests, it should by now be clear that a strange node of connections existed in Man Ray and Duchamp's Dada practice around what I have been calling *portemanteau* objects. For of course, if the *Dadaphoto* was "conceived for a friend" and that friend was Duchamp, we must register the photograph's response to those two of Duchamp's previous readymades that were themselves *portemanteaux* of a sort. I am thinking of Duchamp's *Trebuchet* and the hanging hat or coat rack, one readymade infamously nailed to the floor in Duchamp's studio, the other suspended from the ceiling (figs. 9, 10).

Duchamp's name for his practice of choosing store-bought (not always industrial) items—the "readymade"—was in fact a term that came from the garment or fashion industry, and so these objects expand upon that sartorial and commercial, supplemental and bodily origin. And yet what has always seemed to me crucial about both of Duchamp's *portemanteau* readymades is not just their domestic or everyday status, nor their existence as somewhat creaky "industrial" objects, nor their own concerted anthropomorphism, their phallic limbs or spidery appendages, their closeness—as the kind of supplemental armature that any coat stand is—to the human body. What seems crucial about both readymades is their internal repetition, their repetition of the same series of four hangers in *Trebuchet* or the identical "arms" in the *Hat Rack*. This registers something like an industrial logic of seriality to be sure. But perhaps one can also press its reading into the domain of what we might call the libidinal chain of signification that this essay has been exploring. The displacement at the heart of the alternate symbolic economy reclaimed by Dada might also be seen, that is, as internal to the mode of artistic production that the readymade or the Dada photograph represented.

For these *portemanteaux* would find themselves repeated, remade or resignified, in vastly different circumstances, much like the future life of Man Ray's *Object to Be Destroyed*. Most famously, this would occur at the 1938 Surrealist Exhibition in Paris, presided over by Man Ray and Duchamp, who would take the opportunity here and in later surrealist exhibition designs to revive a host of Dada strategies, if not actual Dada objects (the relation of the *First Papers of Surrealism* installation of *16 Miles of String* to Duchamp's *Sculpture for Traveling* or Picabia's *Danse de St-Guy*; the suspended sacks of coal in 1938 to an earlier Dada obsession with "Bois et Charbons," and so forth). With the mannequins installed in the "Surrealist City" at the 1938 exhibition (fig. 11) we have a direct evocation of the mannequin-object of the *Dadaphoto*, an evocation made ironclad by Man Ray's placement of a *portemanteau* next to his own mannequin at the exhibition. This object would later be

separated from the female body to become Man Ray's *Portemanteau esthetique*, 1938. Like *Trebuchet*, it has a series of hangers to present, in Man Ray's installation now actually hung with a series of coats. And in his autobiography, *Self-Portrait*, Man Ray would claim that Duchamp proposed simply to use his mannequin as "a coat rack."²⁷ In actuality this meant that Duchamp dressed his mannequin as a man, attiring it in a reversal of his own masquerade as *Rose Sélavy* with suit jacket and men's clothes.

But Man Ray had already resignified the *Dadaphoto*, attached it to another chain, at the very moment of its production. Produced initially in 1919–1920 (and thus perhaps explaining Man Ray's misremembering of the 1921 date of *New York Dada*), the *Dadaphoto* prefigured Man Ray's object *Obstruction* (fig. 12) made in 1920. This is an "object" constructed from a series of identical clothes hangers, carrying forward once more the logic of the *portemanteau*. As Man Ray once described the mode of assembly of this item:

You begin with one hanger attached to the ceiling. In the two holes at the extremity of the hanger introduce the hooks of two more hangers. Into these hooks eight hangers and so on until the sixth row has thirty-two hangers. Of course, if enough hangers are available, this mathematical progression may be carried onto infinity. The increasing confusion is apparent only to the eye and is to be desired.

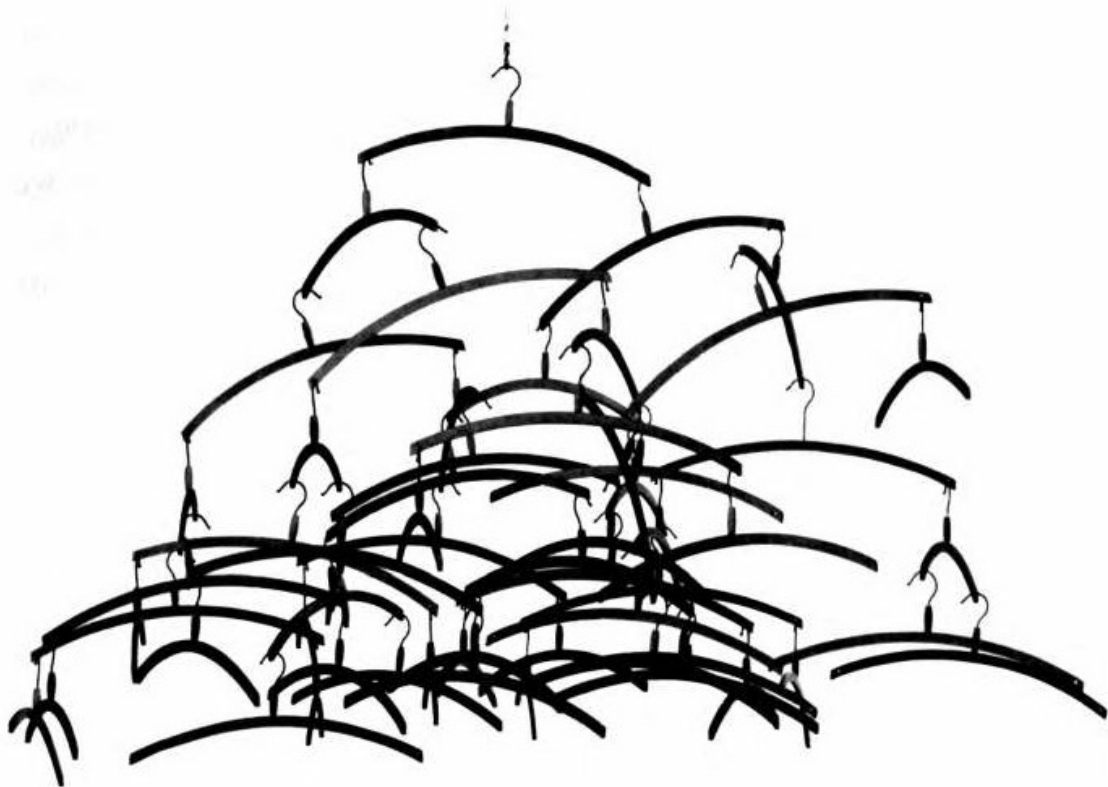
As perhaps was the case with the *Dadaphoto*, Man Ray evidently thought of this object as his answer to the structurally transparent forms of modernist abstraction (in other descriptions, he would play on the homophony between "abstraction" and "obstruction" as words).²⁸ Indeed, what needs to be explained in approaching the connection of *Dadaphoto* and *Obstruction* lies, first, in the ways in which each are involved in masking, in the creation of sedimented layers, in visual "obstruction." This is a concern that would run throughout Man Ray's project, especially in the Dada moment, from the model standing behind the coat stand in the *Dadaphoto*, to the white stamp occluding her genitals, to the visual barrier of *Obstruction*, or the underlying "mystery" of the wrapped objects of *Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* (fig. 13). But what also needs now to be registered is how this visual layering characteristic of the logic of the *portemanteau* would be refigured in *Obstruction* as a literal chain of objects, emanating in a proliferation whose extent would be, for Man Ray, "infinite."



11a.



11b.



12.



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14.

It would seem that the *Dadaphoto* has been marginalized in accounts of Man Ray and the Dada movement because it presents, initially, the least “photographic” or self-reflexive of the artist’s productions. In other words, the modernist bias of our approach to Dada and other anti-modernist avant-gardes still shows. Yet Man Ray obviously considered the *Dadaphoto* to be in some way central to his project. The “doubling” of the *Dadaphoto* is not immediately, or procedurally, related to the photographic apparatus (like the shadows or the ashes in other Man Ray photographs). It presents a doubling, rather, that takes the photograph *outside of itself*, which is another way of understanding what the activity of displacement might in fact entail. In so doing, the *Dadaphoto* does in the end present a reflection upon what the photograph might be thought to be. This new conception of photography in turn helps us understand in new ways the centrality of photography to the Dada movement. It helps as well to argue for the renewed centrality of dadaist uses and

conceptions of the photographic to the problems and artistic practice that we face today.

For to model photography upon what Silverman calls the “maternal signifier” is not an unknown proposition within photographic history and theory.²⁹ Silverman reminds us of the fact that our greatest elegy to the medium, Roland Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*, presents nothing but this reconception, the search in photography for a lost object, indeed, for the mother. However, Barthes’ mournful search also represents the acme of a certain understanding of photography’s “indexicality” and “pastness,” a theorization emerging like the Owl of Minerva only at the moment of the radical technical transformation of photography that we have since observed. At the present moment, we need perhaps to begin to reclaim other models of the photograph than the one that reaches its climax in Barthes’ account. “In *Camera Lucida*,” Silverman writes, “Barthes makes painfully evident the temporal limits of the conventional analogue image. The photograph in which he is able to see his mother does not return her to him; it merely says, over and

over, 'this was' (GL, 25). The reconception that is proposed by Silverman then recodes Barthes account. The model of affective transfer, or what Silverman also names "girl love," is not based "upon representational access to an irretrievably lost mother, but rather upon her recovery in a new form," and so, "it can neither be depicted nor enabled by a photograph whose value is primarily indexical. It requires one capable of assuming its place within a chain of signification" (GL, 25).

This is the chain that the *Dadaphoto* and its "two-layered palimpsest" might be imagined as presenting—self-reflexively, but also self-expansively (fig. 14). This would be a statement and thus a model of the photograph where we would be shown visually that "everything we see is propped upon something we have previously seen—that perception is a semiotic event." Every photograph is this kind of double, then, a double of that which has already been seen, a visual object fully dependent on a structure of "seeing again." The transfer of affect thus enabled simultaneously "releases photography from the univocality of the 'this-has-been,' and into the open-ended temporality of 'becoming'" (GL, 25). Like "the signifiers leading back to the mother," the nested objects of Man Ray's images and of the *Dadaphoto* also figure the "path of displacement away from her, and the infinity of directions in which it can move." To enter into such an understanding of Dada photography is to enter a new conception of the signifying conditions of Dada in general, proposing perhaps new modes of entry into the displacements of the dadaist mechanomorph and "object portraits," the collages of Max Ernst (*One Man Can Hide Another*, for example), or someone like Picabia's recurring engagement with "correspondences." It is to find in the Dada photograph a modality of visual exchange based upon contiguity and similitude, one that is groundless in its operation, infinite in its capacity for affirmation. It is to enter a symbolic order deprived, joyously, of the Law of the General Equivalent.³⁰ The symbolic order of girl love or affective transfer, the world loved according to the metaphor of the mother, would be an order that "has ceased to be the domain of the law, and become instead the domain of love" (GL, 27). It is in this way, finally, that I understand the additional label *KEEP SMILING* attached to the *Dadaphoto* in *New York Dada*.³¹ Much more radical than the "style with a smile" that some have tried to see in proposing humor as the unifying trait of an otherwise pluralist, styleless New York Dada movement,³² we sense here that the chain of signifiers of Dada signification itself is opened onto love and thus to joy. For what is joyful in Dada, in fact, is the displacement of signifiers, and their endless expansion. What is joyful is the transfer of affect, and thus of love.

NOTES

- 1 Marcel Duchamp, inscribed in the 1959 London exhibition catalogue for Man Ray, reprinted in Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, eds., *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York, 1973), 165.
- 2 Man Ray, inscribed on the artist's *Portrait of Rose Selavy*, 1923.
- 3 The linkage of avant-garde photography and fetishism has long been a part of the literature on surrealist photography. Rosalind Krauss, for example, sees fetishism as part of the critical project of such images in "Corpus Delicti," *L'Amour fou: Photography and Surrealism* (New York, 1985), 15–114. I have also explored the potentially critical ramifications of an avant-garde project of fetishism in my essay "Long Live Daddy," *October* 105 (Summer 2003), see 54–58. For a more general linkage of photograph and fetish, see Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetish," in Carol Squiers, ed., *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography* (Seattle, 1990), 155–164.
- 4 See Duchamp's letter to Tristan Tzara (19227), *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 180.
- 5 Man Ray, *Objets de mon affection* (Paris, 1983), 20.
- 6 George Baker, "The Artwork Caught by the Tail," *October* 97 (Summer 2001): 51–90.
- 7 See Jean-Joseph Goux, "Numismatics," *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990).
- 8 Rosalind Krauss speaks of the *Dadaphoto* as articulating the "anthropomorphism" of the ready-made in "The Object Caught by the Heel," in Francis Naumann, ed., *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York* (exh. cat., Whitney Museum of American Art) (New York, 1996), 251.
- 9 In her recent biography of the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Irene Gammel connects the *Dadaphoto* to "male attempts to contain her [the Baroness's] body within male parameters." See Irene Gammel, *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002), 293–294. Gammel's reading builds upon the approach to Dada representation offered by Amelia Jones in "Women" in *Dada: Elsa, Rose, and Charlie*, in Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, ed., *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender, and Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).
- 10 See Kaja Silverman, *World Spectators* (Stanford, 2000), 159 n. 40. *World Spectators* will hereafter be cited by page number in the text.
- 11 Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of the Visual in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993).
- 12 Kaja Silverman, "Girl Love," James Coleman (Ostfildern-Ruit, 2002), reprinted in *October* 104 (Spring 2003): 6, 10. Hereafter cited in the text as GL.
- 13 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York, 1966), 103, cited in Silverman, *World Spectators*, 104.
- 14 Man Ray, *Self-Portrait* (Boston, 1963), 263.
- 15 Gammel, *Baroness Elsa*, 294.
- 16 Man Ray, *Objets de mon affection*, 141.
- 17 In what follows, I will present a rather utopian reading of the place of the mother in the alternate symbolic economies envisioned by Dada. I actually find it problematic that the Baroness was often referred to within the Dada context as the "Mother of Dada." Although it may seem to support my reading, this appellation was also extended to Beatrice Wood and Gertrude Stein. It is a potentially sexist appellation, and to see it as the literal, iconographic key to the phrase and image presented here by Man Ray would go against the more utopian reading that I think these projects support.
- 18 In its liberation, this "groundlessness" of signification could also serve as an interesting way to reconceive and in fact transvalue the Dada project of the "destruction" of meaning and sense. My reading of that "destruction" would thus be in fact also an opening of sense, if not a redemption of it, an exploration of long-repressed symbolic economies.
- 19 Actually, the terms are Silverman's; Freud refers to the negative and the positive Oedipus complexes. Silverman's account of the negative Oedipal mother is heart-wrenching, its loss to the female subject in the wake of the castration crisis leading to a "narcissistic" wounding that produces a "subject no one can love." I point the interested reader to Silverman's texts, as well as to the origins of such reflection on the author's part in *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1988).

20 Krauss, "The Object Caught by the Heel," 248–251.

21 Rosalind Krauss, "The Photographic Conditions of Surrealism," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 87–118.

22 Pierre Bourgeade, *Bonsoir, Man Ray* (Paris, 1990), 80–81.

23 Krauss, "Objets de réflexion critique," in *Objets de mon affection*, 10.

24 In this fusion of object and body, Man Ray's *Portemanteau* operates instead in relation not to the function of the portemanteau as object, but to the portemanteau as a linguistic concept, a concept, however, that attempts to describe the invention of new forms through an otherwise nonsensical combination of legitimate words, and thus through the subversion of distinct linguistic "articulation" and differentiation. A portemanteau word is a new word formed through the fusion of two established words (for example, "motel").

25 The account closest to the semiotic conditions that I am tracing can be found in David Joselit's work on Duchamp, see *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp 1910–1941* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

26 One could object that the violence directed against the object of desire in *Object to Be Destroyed* works to undermine the "maternal" economy that this essay has been exploring, just as the engagement on Man Ray's part with caricature and fetishism—with, then, potential misogyny—in the *Dadaphoto* would militate against any recuperation of the image as incipiently feminist. But if contemporary theory and philosophies such as post-structuralism have taught us

anything, it is that one must engage with the dynamics of the objects that one wishes to critique; to stand apart from them, without ambivalence, is impossible. Indeed, the ambivalence of *Object to Be Destroyed* is so great as to call out for a reading of it in terms of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein's categories of the Good and Bad Mother, and of the Kleinian dynamics of destruction and reparation.

27 Man Ray, *Self-Portrait*, 240.

28 Bourgeade, *Bonsoir, Man Ray*, 109–110.

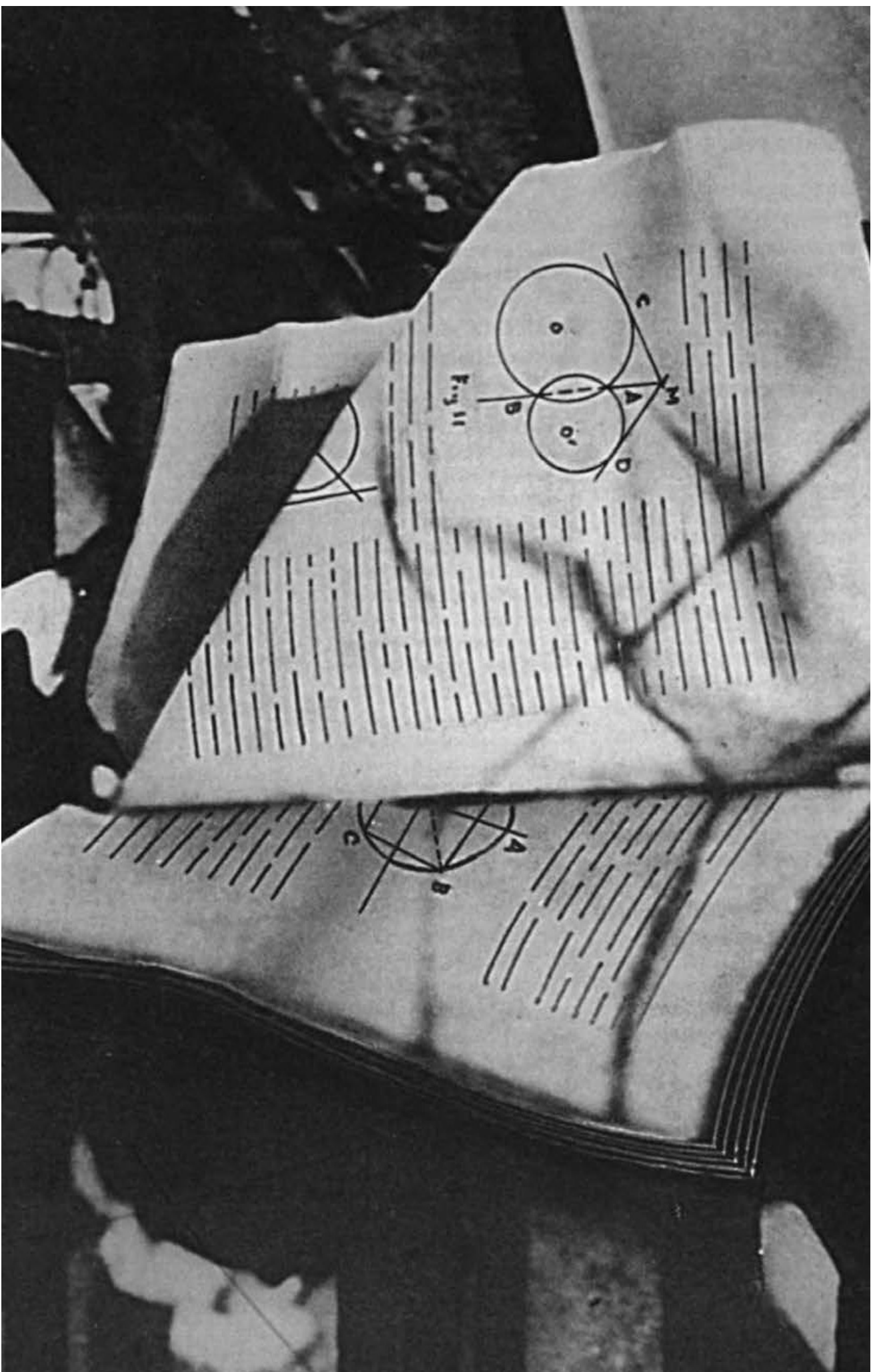
29 This could perhaps serve as a description of Carol Armstrong's recent series of essays on woman photographers and their reconfiguration of the medium. This is a reflection on photography itself tied closely to a rethinking of Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*. See, for example: "Biology, Destiny, Photography: Difference According to Diane Arbus," *October* 66 (Fall 1993): 28–54; "Cupid's Pencil of Light: Julia Margaret Cameron and the Maternalization of Photography," *October* 76 (Spring 1996): 114–141; "From Clementina to Kasebier: The Photographic Attainment of the 'Lady Amateur,'" *October* 91 (Winter 2000): 101–139; and "This Photography Which Is Not One: In the Grey Zone with Tina Modotti," *October* 101 (Summer 2002): 19–52.

30 Rosalind Krauss sees in Man Ray's work a contestation of the Law of Language and (implicitly) the Father in her essay "Objets de réflexion critique," 10–11.

31 John Elderfield has suggested to me that the first word of Man Ray's caption can significantly be reversed to form the word "PEEK," a connection that might slip the image in question into a direct engagement with voyeurism. "Keep Smiling," indeed, might be read in quite aggressive ways, hardly "friendly" or "humorous" at all,

as I suggested at the essay's outset: it could be seen as a command one gives to what the French call a "mannequin" and the English a "model" during a photographic shoot, just as, more ominously, it is the kind of exhortation that women experience from men still to this day as they walk the streets of any given urban milieu. But, perhaps paradoxically, I would argue that this engagement with voyeurism or with misogyny is part of what is ultimately subversive about the practice of this and other Dada images. Just as "voyeurism" is a pale shadow to the massive visual affirmation of what Silverman calls "world spectatorship," the misogyny and caricature that ride upon the surface of Man Ray's photograph might be understood as the weak bait to an invitation rather to model the world upon the mother's form. This flirtation with the misogynistic, that is, can be taken as the sign of a project dedicated to its undoing: the location of a maternal economy of desire operating beneath the appearance of the world's forms, an economy with the power to recode, if not redeem, the violence and deformation thrust upon the female body and the female subject within what is in fact now visible as a quite fragile paternal/patriarchal economy.

32 Francis Naumann, "Style with a Smile," *Making Mischief*, 10–26.



Dada's Diagrams | David Joselit

In 1919 Marcel Duchamp offered an eccentric wedding present to his sister Suzanne and her husband, Jean Crotti. He called it *Unhappy Readymade*, and in 1967 he described it to Pierre Cabanne as follows:

It was a geometry book, which he had to hang by strings on the balcony of his apartment in the rue Condamine; the wind had to go through the book, choose its own problems, turn and tear out the pages. Suzanne did a small painting of it, "Marcel's *Unhappy Readymade*." That's all that's left, since the wind tore it up.¹

Like many of Duchamp's readymades, this one perished. Or rather, it was intentionally designed as a catalyst whose physical form would disappear into the various visual and textual reverberations it provoked. Unlike other readymades such as *Fountain*, whose discursive aftermath was extensive and complex, the surviving issue of *Unhappy Readymade* is limited. It includes a 1920 painting by Suzanne Duchamp, a spatially compressed photograph of the same year showing the book suspended on its balcony, and an enhanced version of this picture prepared for publication in the *Boîte-en-Valise* (Box in a Valise). All three documents give evidence that *Unhappy Readymade* thoroughly negated the book's conventional architecture. Pages are cross-hatched by shadows and riven by furrows, the smooth and undifferentiated surfaces of paper are made to resemble the fractal topographies of a fingerprint. In assaulting the individual page, *Unhappy Readymade* also disrupted the book's orderly progress. If, as Duchamp fancifully states, it is up to the wind "to go through the book, choose its own problems, turn and tear out the pages," the photograph documenting this action reveals an ingrown object collapsed into an ungainly mass.

In this picture, as in Suzanne Duchamp's painting, no geometric exercises are visible on individual pages (fig. 1). Yet if geometry is not represented, it has nevertheless been enacted through processes of puckering, folding, and furrowing caused by exposure to weather. The diagrams visible in these documents are inscribed not by the printing press but by the elements. In a gesture of desublimation typical of Duchamp's art, his *Unhappy Readymade* thus twins mathematics with chance. He makes this reverberative association explicit in comments to Harriet and Sidney Janis published in 1945. The Janises write:

1. Suzanne Duchamp and Jean Crotti, *Unhappy Readymade*, 1919, gelatin silver print, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Virginia and William Camfield

2. Marcel Duchamp, *Unhappy Readymade*, from *Boîte-en-Valise*, 1934–1941 (box), 1938 (collotype), Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection

This object was constructed from a text book—a treatise on geometry—opened face up, hanging in midair and rigged diagonally to the corners of a porch. It was left suspended there for a period of time, during which the wind could blow and tear its pages of geometric formulae, the rain drench them, and the sun bleach and fade them. Thus exposed to the weather, “the treatise seriously got the facts of life.” (“What is the solution?” Duchamp proceeds to ask. “There is no solution because there is no problem. Problem is the invention of man—it is nonsensical.”)²

Duchamp presses the science of description up against the aleatory nature of events: “the treatise seriously got the facts of life.” Yet in his conceptual universe, there can be no desublimation without a countervailing moment of abstraction designed to throw it into relief (the “nonsensical” nature of the problem is only visible if the problem itself emerges). Consequently, in the sole representation of *Unhappy Readymade* over which Duchamp exerted control—the photograph included in his *Boîte*—he introduced both diagrams and blocks of explanatory text into the picture indicated by grids of broken lines (fig. 2). He added these details to make the weather’s disorderly diagram collide more forcefully with geometry’s universal abstraction.

In *Unhappy Readymade* Duchamp’s habitual practice of infinite regress (whereby one object, text, or image simultaneously mirrors and undoes another)³ is lodged within another rhetorical opposition between the book and the diagram. While *Unhappy Readymade* is itself a rather obscure work, the encounter it orchestrates between textual and visual languages is central both to Duchamp’s oeuvre and to the historical avant-gardes at large. In his well-known lecture “The New Spirit and the Poets” (1917), Guillaume Apollinaire suggests why:

It would have been strange if in an epoch when the popular art par excellence, the cinema, is a book of pictures [un livre d’images], the poets had not tried to compose pictures for meditative and refined minds which are not content with the crude imaginings of the makers of films. These last will become more perceptive, and one can predict the day when, the photograph and the cinema having become the only form of publication in use, the poet will have a freedom heretofore unknown.⁴

It is oddly contradictory to describe the cinematic projection of reels of photographic stills, whose images optically fuse in the illusion of continuous movement, as a book. But the false ring of Apollinaire’s metaphor only serves to emphasize the magnitude of the historical rupture it attempts to reconcile between a mode of knowledge grounded



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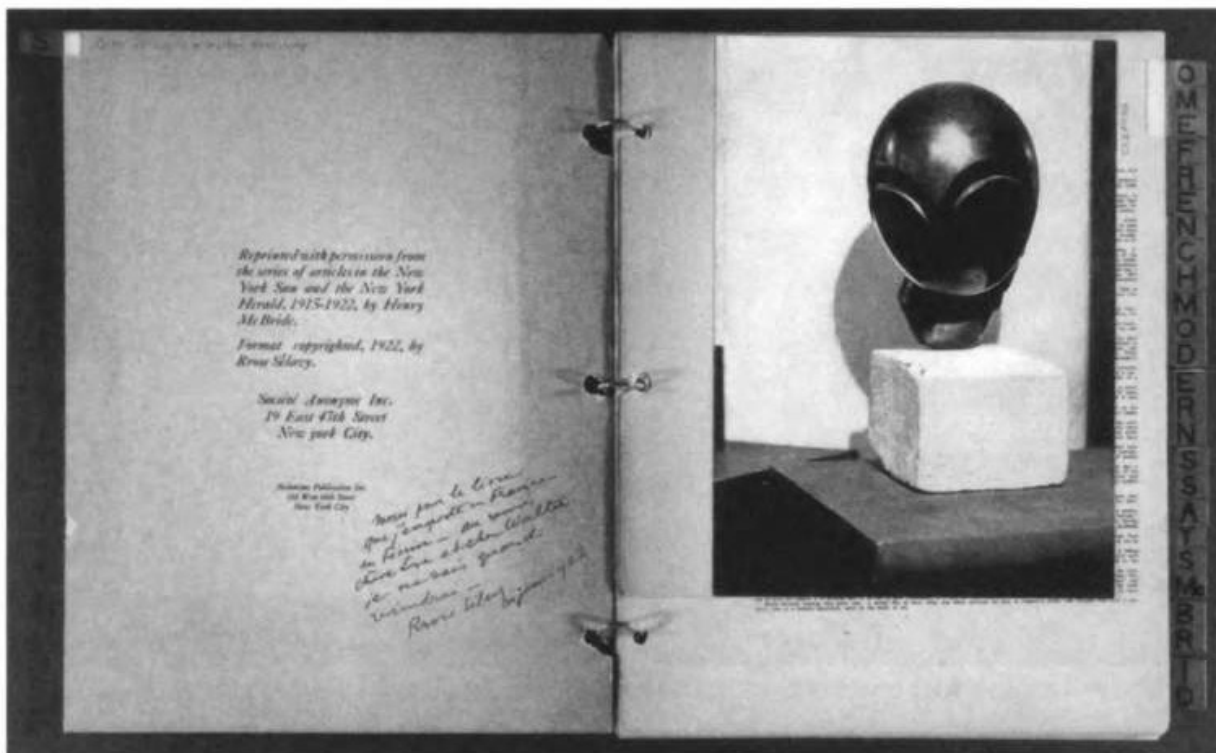
2.

in text and one founded in images. Christine Poggi and Rosalind Krauss have demonstrated how an opposition between the book and the newspaper, elaborated by Stéphane Mallarmé and reframed by Apollinaire, haunts Pablo Picasso's collages of 1912.⁵ I intend to track Dada's parallel but significantly different production of *livres d'images*.

As Apollinaire's diagnosis of the *esprit nouveau* indicates, a historical rupture between the textual codes of the book and the visual codes exemplified by cinema constitutes the ground against which Dada's spectacular heteroglossia emerges. In the course of this essay I will argue that, in Dada, the diagrammatic served as one of three visual tactics—montage and the readymade being the other two—for embracing and representing this epistemological crisis. Duchamp's elaboration of the diagrammatic may therefore be exemplary, but it was not unique. Under the misleading label of machine drawings, artists like Francis Picabia, Max Ernst, Man Ray, and Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes pursued related projects. Duchamp's work is nonetheless heuristically useful in that it systematically charts the field produced by the encounter of the book and the diagram. For, whereas *Unhappy Readymade* may seem a peripheral work, Duchamp pursued its themes in different ways from the mid-1910s right up until the time of his death. Most of these projects may be sorted into two categories: "books-in-the-round," and, in a nod to Filippo T. Marinetti's futurist word poems, "Paroles en liberté" (pages in liberty). *Unhappy Readymade* was Duchamp's first true book-in-the-round but by no means

3. Marcel Duchamp, *Some French Moderns Says McBride*, 1922, photo-mechanical reproductions and printed and stamped text on card stock sheets with index tabs, bound with steel

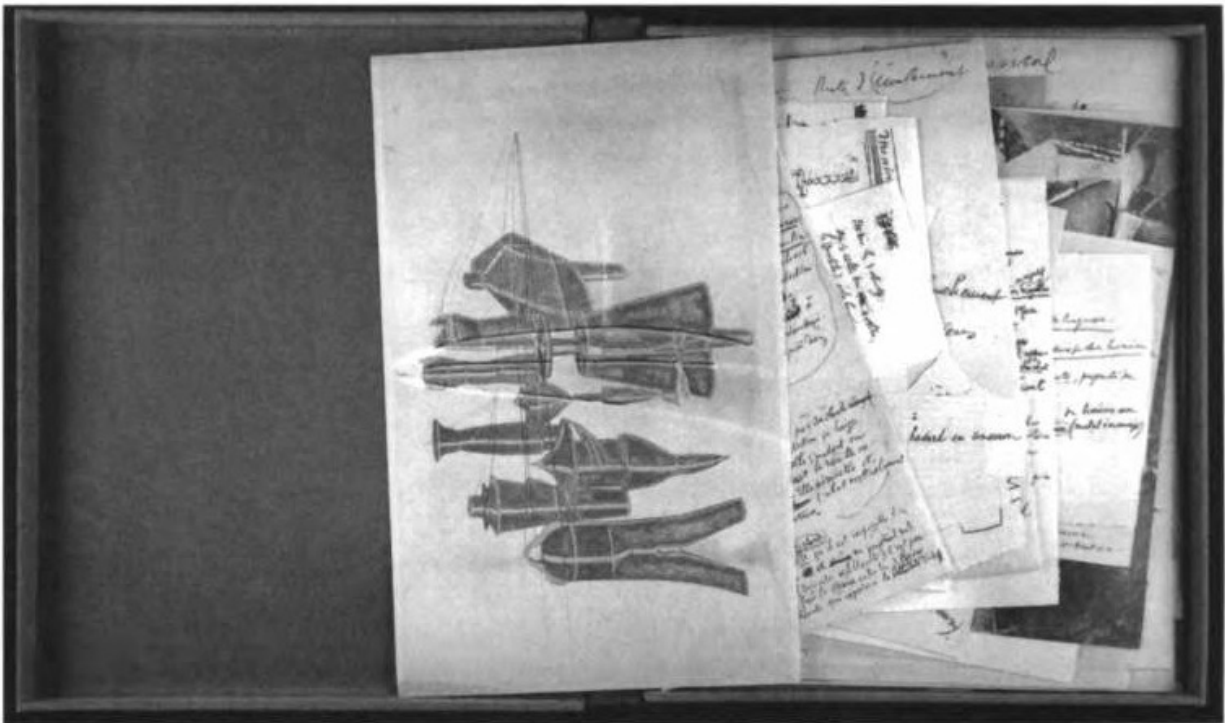
rings, Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection



3.

his last. In 1922 he put together a small collection of the art criticism of his friend Henry McBride, in which various articles by the New York critic were reprinted and collated in a ring binder organized with dividers onto which index tabs were pasted (fig. 3). On its recto, each tab carried one to three letters of the legend, “Some French Moderns Says McBride,” whereas on their verso they spell out “Société Anonyme Incorporated.” The asymmetry of the tabs—their suggestion of two different principles of classification—introduces a kind of reversibility in the book, as though it could be read either from front to back or from back to front. This effect is intensified by Duchamp’s choice of progressively increasing the type size from article to article to the point where, as Arturo Schwarz comments, “the characters in the last [article] are so big that the complete text will not fit on the three pages allotted for it, so the ending is printed on the last page in the same very small type that was used for the first article.”⁶ In other words, the reversibility of the circular movement of the lettered tabs is mirrored by a process of enlargement and sudden reduction that brings the reader back to the scale of the first page. Rather than ending, the book circles back to its own beginning—an effect only emphasized by using rings as a form of binding.

In a footnote in my book *Infinite Regress*, I noted a similar dynamic in Duchamp’s



5.

called his “pages in liberty” —pursues an analogous effect by doing away with bookbinding altogether in favor of the proliferation of independent scraps or sheets of paper. The *Green Box* (1934), his collection of notes pertaining to *The Large Glass*, is the most prominent example of this practice, but its roots predate the period of Dada (fig. 5). In 1914 Duchamp produced a series of five works in which various notes and one drawing, *To Have the Apprentice in the Sun*, were reproduced as photographs and collected in photographic-supply boxes. Text is here transposed into photography in a manifestation of what, three years later, Apollinaire would call *livres d’images*. Duchamp’s liberation of the page from any fixed order seems to have been disciplined in *Rendez-vous du Dimanche 6 Février 1916 . . .* (Rendezvous on Sunday, 6 February 1916 . . .), 1916, in which a four-square grid is built from postcards covered with a typewritten nonsense text, and yet this particular grid is haunted conceptually by infinite geographical mobility—the pages are postcards that may, in theory, have traveled from anywhere.

Duchamp’s two tactics for deterritorializing published writing—books-in-the-round and pages in liberty—together constitute only one dimension of the artist’s response to the contest between textual and visual knowledge that since the late nineteenth century has been one of the fundamental conditions of modernism. Here, the book asymptotically approaches the diagram and vice versa. Duchamp’s second type of response to this epistemological crisis is rooted not in the convergence of two unlike terms, but rather in the establishment of a causal or symbiotic relation between them. Jean Suquet has brilliantly remarked that in Duchamp’s *Large Glass* “the machine runs only on words.”⁸ Indeed, it is impossible to imagine an interpretation of the diagrammatic array of mechanisms that structure *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*

5. Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (The Green Box), 1934, ninety-four facsimiles of manuscript notes, drawings, and

photographs, and one original manuscript item, *Broyeuse de Chocolat* (Chocolate Grinder), contained in a green flocked cardboard box, Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection

without Duchamp's notes, upon which he lavished enormous attention. But if text is, as it were, consumed as the fuel for a diagram in the Glass, the readymades function conversely as producers of words (and images). At the outset of this essay I described *Unhappy Readymade* as a catalyst for its various attenuations in photographs and paint—a point that William Camfield demonstrates with regard to the successive reproductions of *Fountain* after its very brief public life in 1917.⁹ The “afterlife” of *Fountain* indicates that Duchamp was acutely aware that the only way of maintaining meaning in a readymade after its initial moment of shock was to keep it mobile as a signifier, and this entailed multiple reiterations and reframings. *Fountain*'s successive generations of reproductions, dating from 1917 to 1964, included a photograph by Alfred Stieglitz, articles by friends and strangers, a tiny model, many ceramic casts from it, a new urinal from Paris installed in two different ways in New York, a cleaned-up urinal from a men's room in Stockholm, and finally eight brand-new *Fountains* fabricated according to blueprints derived from a forty-seven-year-old photograph. An interpretive framework for this profusion is suggested in an unsigned editorial, “The Richard Mutt Case,” published on the occasion of *Fountain*'s rejection from the 1917 New York Independents exhibition:

Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.¹⁰

According to this editorialist, readymades create new thoughts for objects. But indeed this formulation, like Duchamp's books in the round, is reversible: the new thought that is the readymade strategy generated an endless chain of objects to which it might correspond—in other words, new objects to a given idea—namely, the idea of the readymade. The key to these activities is Duchamp's concept of *delay*. In his note titled “Specifications for ‘Readymades,’” published in the *Green Box*, he declares:

by planning for a moment to come (on such a day, such a date such a minute), “to inscribe a readymade”—The readymade can later be looked for—(with all kinds of delays). The important thing then is just this matter of timing, this snapshot effect, like a speech delivered on no matter what occasion but at such and such an hour. It is a kind of rendezvous. . . .¹¹

6. **Georges Braque**, *Untitled*, cover illustration for 291 g (November 1915), Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

7. **Pablo Picasso**, *Untitled*, back cover illustration for 291 g (November 1915), Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

8. **Marius de Zayas**, "Femmet" and **Francis Picabia**, *Voilà Elle*, centerfold, 291 g (November 1915), Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

From its initial moment, therefore, the readymade thing is an effect of its discursive frame, not the other way around: it is the delayed manifestation of a declaration or inscription.

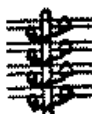
The relationship between image and text in Duchamp's art is thus structured by two axes. Along one, a convergence between word and image (or book and diagram) is approached asymptotically, and along the other, words and images mutually produce and consume one another. In both instances the text and picture (or object, in the case of the readymades) maintain a division of labor whose opposing terms oscillate but never collapse into one another. Given this complex relationship, one might ask why Duchamp does not directly introduce text into the *Large Glass*. The question may seem sacrilegious, but such combinations of word and picture are precisely what characterize more "canonical" Dada diagrams by artists like Picabia. In such works, image and text circulate within a single plane of signification—their translatability is assumed in order to emphasize other forms of productivity. If Duchamp represents a moment of rupture that never heals, Picabia takes that rupture as his point of departure. He produces another kind of *livre d'images*.

The ninth number of 291, the avant-garde publication that both Marius de Zayas and Picabia hoped would extend the modernist program of Stieglitz's New York gallery of the same name, offers an evocative point of access to Picabia's model of the Dada diagram. Published in November 1915, this issue of 291, like most of the others during its short existence, was a simple though finely produced folio. Its front and back covers reproduce two cubist drawings of a violin, one by Georges Braque in front and another particularly spare and lovely work by Picasso in back. Framed between these cubist book-ends is a double spread of a different sort. On the inner left page is one of De Zayas' visual poems, "FEMMET," in which a highly schematic "body" is delineated through lines of text, and on the right, in another diagrammatic representation of a woman, is *Voilà Elle* by Picabia (figs. 6, 7, 8). This latter piece is an example of the artist's so-called machine drawings. As in the preponderance of these works, no coherent mechanism is reproduced, but rather an array of mismatched parts joined incoherently with lines that ostensibly describe pulleys or ducts. It is striking that each of these four representations—the two violins, "FEMMET," and the machinic *Elle*—accomplish a dispersion of representational cohesion across the bodies of women—either metaphorically with

VOYAGE

A Mlle Paula Palmyre

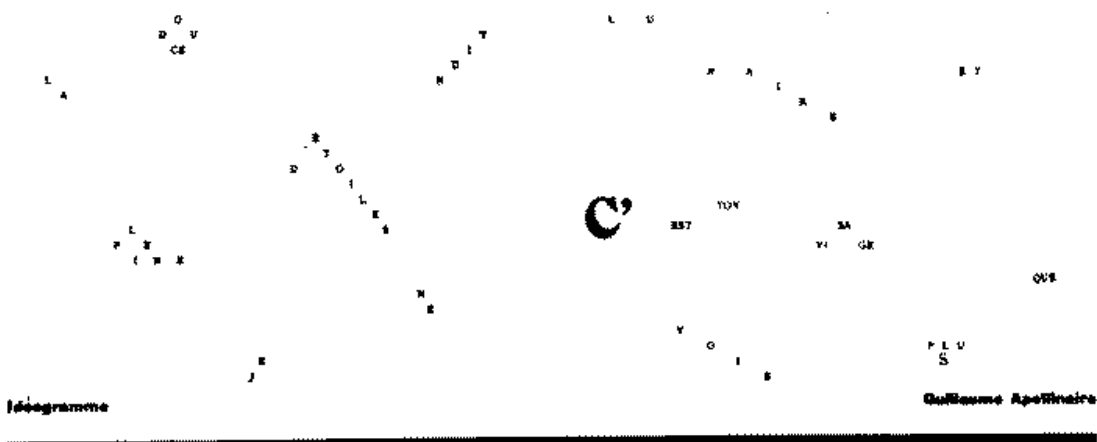
AUQUANT AMOUR MURURE QUI
 PUIS ENVAIS LE PUYAN DE BANTE
 ET N'A PAS QUI PLUS POUON



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a musical instrument, or nominally through the application of title or caption. As in much of the art associated with the historical avant-gardes, a breakdown in vision necessarily induces a spasm of impossible desire or hatred in masculine creators (De Zayas' poem, for instance, contains vicious moments of misogyny).

In publishing two cubist drawings as bookends for their new diagrammatic works, De Zayas and Picabia simultaneously offered a tribute to and marked their distance from that movement. Apollinaire is the absent term, or the mediating figure presiding over this ambivalence. In his calligrams he developed a semiotic model that was likewise both indebted to cubism and in opposition to it. That De Zayas and Picabia saw these qualities in Apollinaire is indicated by the publication of the calligram, "Voyage," in the very first number of 291 in March 1915 (fig. 9). "Voyage" is a modern landscape composed of words. By varying the typography of its different sections and by arranging clusters of text into suggestively mimetic configurations, Apollinaire pictures as much as he describes. "Voyage," for instance, contains five figures in addition to its title: a cloud, a bird, a train, a chain of hills defining a valley, and a little pictogram of the top of a telegraph pole. In this poem the sequentiality of text has been spatialized as a landscape (in other calligrams, the still-life genre is adopted). Indeed, as Roger Shattuck has beautifully

described in his analysis of the calligram "Lettre-Océan," these poems may be entered from many directions:

Our global vision first grasps the Gestalt, the shape of the whole. But this immediate perception has to be completed and corrected by scanning. To read "Lettre-Océan," one must scan it in search of vectors and relations leading to a possible order of events. Apollinaire liked to use the term "*poème-événement*," or event-poem.¹²

Shattuck's term "scanning," and Apollinaire's own phrase, the "event-poem," illuminate these works. For if on the one hand, Apollinaire draws pictures with his text, he also introduces varying directions and velocities between these pictures, linking them together as in a diagram. The speed with which one reads the bold horizontal lines composed of capital letters that delineate the "train"—"OU VA DONC CE TRAIN QUI MEURT AU LOIN DANS LES VALS ET LES BEAUX BOIS FRAIS DU TENDRE ÉTÉ SI PALE?" (Where is it going, then, this train that rushes far into the valleys and the beautiful fresh woods of the tender summer, so pale?) (which turn up at the end, evoking the vertical smokestack of the locomotive)—is balanced both by the meandering distribution of words and letters describing the "valley" below and the virtual orthographic and grammatical incoherence of this section of the poem. Moreover, the "things" Apollinaire depicts dissolve into the poignancy of the emotional register evoked by the words that compose them, so that a thundering train is paradoxically conjured from a lyrical mood of tender melancholy.

Apollinaire's calligrams are thus closely aligned to cubist painting in their engagement with landscape and still life, and in their dissolution of things into the rhetoric of representation. But these poems also introduce a new kind of relationship among the elements of a pictorial field. In the violin drawings by Braque and Picasso published in 291, visual dynamism is immanent to the moment of perception: scattered intensities of line and chiaroscuro signal a vertiginous disarticulation of representation from its traditional burden of mimesis. Cubism's effect is implosive: objects collapse under their own mounting semiotic obscurity. Apollinaire's poem, on the other hand, is expansive—diagrammatic—in its impulse to establish what Shattuck aptly calls the "vectors and relations leading to a possible order of events." In other words, Apollinaire's calligrams turn cubism inside out, and this—precisely—is what Picabia's machine drawings do. Indeed, Picabia extends and radicalizes Apollinaire's insight in two ways. By adopting an abstract

mechanomorphic vocabulary as in *Voilà Elle*, Picabia dispenses with much of the lyrical residue of Apollinaire's poetry (or of the cubist violin for that matter) in favor of a mode of subjectivity founded in mechanization. This fascination with the metaphorical potential of the machine should not, however, be confused with the literal representation of functional mechanisms. After all, Picabia's rendering of technology is no more mimetic than Picasso's representation of violins. It would be absurd to say that cubism is "about" violins or guitars in the way that commentators on Dada presume that Picabia's or Duchamp's work is "about" machines. Far more important than Picabia's adoption of a vocabulary drawn from industry in his "machine drawings" is the model of polymorphous connectivity between discrete elements that these works deploy in order to capture the uneven economic and psychological transformations and the jarring disequilibrium characteristic of modernity. In other words, the diagram reconnects the disconnected fragments of representation invented by cubism. This act of reconnection does not function as a return to coherence, but rather as a free play of polymorphous linkages, which, to this day, remains a central motif of modern (and postmodern) art.

Picabia's investigations of machine forms may be approximately divided into three types. There are those paintings that represent erotic encounters as a meshing of mechanical parts, such as *Machine tournez vite (Machine Turn Quickly)*, 1916/1918, where a small gear labeled "Femme" and a much larger one labeled "Homme" interlock in a comic (or perhaps tragic) interpersonal event whose enigmatic character is both psychological and physical. Such works belong to the same metaphoric universe as Duchamp's *Large Glass*, in which personal eroticism is presented as a virtually operatic performance of modernity's demand that subjectivity accommodate new modes of production and consumption. A second category consists of iconic paintings and drawings composed of monumental mechanical elements, usually arranged symmetrically. These include a series of covers for Picabia's Dada publication 391 (the successor to 291), in which a single thing such as a lightbulb or a propeller is floated in isolation in the field of a page. Such works are related to Duchamp's readymade practice in that they isolate and recode a particular mass-produced object through inscription. By labeling a lightbulb *Américaine*, for instance, as Picabia does on the cover of 391 6 (July 1917), he associates an illuminating device with the spirit of American femininity, just as Duchamp reframed ordinary things like a urinal or a snow shovel by recaptioning and recontextualizing them. A third category of Picabia's machine drawings constitutes what, in my view, is one of his most significant contributions to Dada. These works include *Construction moléculaire (Molecular Construction)*, *Tamis du vent (Sieve of the Wind)*, and *Donner des puces à son chien (To Give Fleas to One's Dog)*, all reproduced in 391 8 (February 1919). Here, the metaphors of the machine have become fully diagrammatic.

Unlike Apollinaire's calligrams, where text delineates the contours of simplified objects such as a train, a cloud, or a hill, in many of Picabia's drawings for 391 configu-

diachronous. The lack of fit between these two visual figures is differently reconciled in *Tamis du vent* and *Donner des puces à son chien*. In the former work, lines of text amplify drawn lines as when a nearly circular segment is further encircled by the phrase, “Soleil Electrique” (Electric Sun). In *Donner des puces* phrases and sentences no longer merely amplify drawn lines but begin to function compositionally in exactly the same ways: two lines of words cross one another at an oblique angle, and in another syntagm the first word of a phrase, “L’Art,” is turned upside down with respect to its complement “N’est pas beau,” in a literal enactment of “text-in-the-round” (fig. 11). If Duchamp retained the figure of the book in order to set off the deterritorialization of text within the diagrammatic, in Picabia’s “machine drawings” word and image are articulated on the same visual and semiotic plane.

Dada’s diagrams should be placed alongside photomontage and the readymade as the movement’s third major formal invention.¹³ Through jarring juxtapositions of heterogeneous pictures, works of photomontage enact the trauma of modernity’s assault on the senses by multiplying and transgressing boundaries between diverse types of mass-cultural imagery. Like improperly healed scars, the jagged seams that simultaneously join and divide one picture from another denaturalize the mass media’s ostensibly neutral distribution of information into tidy columns and editorial categories.¹⁴ The readymade slices up signification differently—it decapitates things by simultaneously dividing them from their use-value and from their own representation. Readymades induce conceptual vertigo by demonstrating that matter may no longer be seized upon as the guarantor of meaning. Both photomontage and readymades therefore dramatize the modern commodity’s semiotic mobility and, consequently, undermine its stability as a fetish. Montage does so by rupturing the proprieties of commercial speech, and the readymade by demonstrating the void underlying consumerism’s proliferation of things. The diagrammatic takes a complementary tack: it emphasizes pure relationality between things rather than directly assaulting their objectivity. Diagrammatic visibility produces an interstitial space—a space of the cut like the joins between pictures in a montage, or the *infrathin*¹⁵ boundary between a readymade and its recodings. It seeks to stabilize and visualize Dada’s physical and conceptual principle of commodity fission.

Calling for a proper acknowledgment of Dada’s diagrams necessarily entails a thorough rethinking of the movement’s relationship to machines. I have argued for a metaphorical interpretation of Dada mechanisms and to this end, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari offer a productive model. In their discussion of different semiotic regimes, they use the term “machine” to indicate a heterogeneous principle of assemblage among bodies and signs that differs sharply from the closed-circuit mechanisms of an actual

technological ensemble, such as an automobile or an airplane, where each mechanical component works in concert with its fellows. Deleuze and Guattari's machines are more open-ended, more like a set of discursive possibilities, or the rules of a game whose specific outcome is unforeseeable. While each of the regimes of signification—or machines—they theorize, corresponds to a different social or political paradigm extracted from world history—including, in their terms, the tribal, the despotic, the nomadic, and the modern—no one model ever corresponds directly to a particular historical reality. On the contrary, not only is each regime itself an assemblage of bodies and signs, but various paradigms are mixed together at differing proportions in different times and places. Deleuze and Guattari call this first principle “the generative component, which shows how a form of expression located on the language stratum always appeals to several combined regimes, in other words, how every regime of signs or semiotic is concretely mixed.” A second principle articulates the temporal relationships between different regimes. This is the “transformational component, [which] shows how one abstract regime can be translated, transformed, into another, and especially how it can be created from other regimes.”¹⁶ I contend that Dada develops a formal model corresponding to Deleuze and Guattari's third principle of combination, the thoroughly abstract diagrammatic that they articulate as follows:

Defined diagrammatically in this way, an abstract machine is neither an infrastructure that is determining in the last instance nor a transcendental Idea that is determining in the supreme instance. Rather, it plays a piloting role. The diagrammatic or abstract machine does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality.¹⁷

The diagrammatic or abstract machine embodies a principle of perpetual change. It produces a distinctive representational space that is nonobjective, and yet, despite Deleuze and Guattari's use of the term, not quite abstract in the manner of, say, a cubist painting. As in Picabia's “machine drawings,” mimetic units may be deployed within a diagram, but their function is to undermine objectivity rather than to represent it. Diagrammatic visuality thus encompasses objects without itself signifying any particular object in the world. Stated simply, a diagram has no referent. Deleuze and Guattari offer two critical characterizations of such a condition worth remarking upon: first they claim that the diagrammatic machine “plays a piloting role.” Second, they propose that it “constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality.” Despite the terminological distortion that arises from applying Deleuze and Guattari's political and economic theory of the diagrammatic to an analysis of the diagram's formal nature in Dada, these two insights are pertinent and productive. They link the diagram to a dynamic form of agency on the one hand and to a nonplace or utopia on the other. Each of these attributes constitutes a limit to the condition of the commodity as fetish.

Those characteristics of the diagrammatic that are identified speculatively by Deleuze and Guattari are confirmed in the more specialized analyses of science studies. In his work on the semiotics of mathematics, Brian Rotman has called attention to a fundamental disequilibrium between literary semiotics founded in the analysis of alphabetic signs and semiotic studies of science that must concern themselves with an entirely other realm of writing: what he calls the numeric, encompassing both ideograms (such as “+” or “=”) and diagrams. Despite their classification as numeric, Rotman notes that diagrams are regarded with suspicion on both sides of the semiotic divide he elaborates: for the scientist they are insufficiently formalized and dangerously susceptible to subjective interpretation and, conversely (if paradoxically), for the humanist they are tainted by their association with science and its faith in universal truth. Underlying these dual aversions, Rotman finds the very same two qualities identified by Deleuze and Guattari as fundamental to the diagrammatic. First, he calls attention to the semiotic mobility or agency inherent in diagrams. For him, their “piloting role” is activated by the perceiving subject. The diagram has no meaning in the absence of an act of interpretation: “diagrams are inseparable from perception: only on the basis of our encounters with actual figures can we have any cognitive or mathematical relation to their individual forms.”¹⁸ Second, Rotman asserts that mathematics, and the whole apparatus of technoscience it enables, proceeds according to a subject’s imaginary circulation within an idealized semiotic world: “if mathematical signs are to be likened to maps, then they are maps of a purely imaginary territory.”¹⁹ Rotman’s semiotic analysis of mathematics is founded on the premise that, despite our powerful ideological conviction that science describes the “real” world, mathematicians (and to varying degrees other scientists) project themselves into a realm whose topography is purely semiotic.²⁰ Deeply indebted to Jacques Derrida’s analogous and foundational operation in the realm of the alphabetic, Rotman’s project is devoted to demonstrating the materiality of the numeric sign. He ends up concluding that the distinctive quality of the diagrammatic is to move as far as possible into the realm of the signifier where any conviction in the existence of a referent is completely lost. It is worth quoting him at length on the subject:

The alphabetic dogma rides on and promotes an essential secondarity. In its original form, this meant the priority of speech to writing, that is, the insistence that writing is the transcription of an always preceding speech (and, taking the dogma further back, that speech is the expression of a prior thought, which in turn is the mirror of a prior realm...). Current Platonistic interpretations of mathematical signs replay this secondarity by insisting that signs are always signs of or about some preexisting domain of objects. Thus the time-honored distinctions between numerals and numbers rest on just such an insistence that numerals are mere notations—names—subsequent and posterior to numbers which exist prior to and independent of them...

Similar considerations are at work within Husserl’s phenomenological project and its

problematic of geometric origins. Only there, the presemiotic—that which is supposed to precede all mathematical language—is not a domain of external Platonic objects subsequently described by mathematical signs, but a field of intuition. . . .

Why, from divergent perspectives and aims, should both Platonism and Husserlian phenomenology avoid all figures, pictures, and visual inscriptions in this way? One answer is that diagrams—whether actual figures drawn on the page or their imagined versions—are the work of the body; they are created and maintained as entities and attain significance only in relation to human visual-kinetic presence, only in relation to our experience of the culturally inflected world. As such, they not only introduce the historical contingency inherent to all cultural activity, but, more to the present point, they call attention to the materiality of all signs and of the corporeality of those who manipulate them in a way that ideograms—which appear to denote purely “mental” entities—do not.²¹

Like Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of the diagrammatic machine, Rotman’s analysis leads to a paradoxical formulation: in its combination of phenomenological corporeality (a “piloting role”) and pure semiosis (a “real that is yet to come”) the diagram constitutes an embodied utopianism. Moreover, unlike the Platonism Rotman identifies in both alphabetic and numeric semiotics, the diagrammatic is characterized by a set of tactical evasions that are among Dada’s great contributions to modernism—the composition of works of art from vectors of force whose lines of flight escape objectivity altogether. In other words, diagrams assault commodity fetishes not by eroding their contours, but by demonstrating their semiotic and physical mobility, which, if intensified sufficiently, may cause the fetish to collapse altogether.

Embodied utopianism also describes the relays of sublimation and desublimation that organize a work like *Unhappy Readymade*, in which an aleatory array of diagrams produced by the weather is superimposed onto geometry’s orthodox descriptions of space. The “piloting role” of the diagrammatic inheres in Duchamp’s instruction that the work’s recipients, Suzanne Duchamp and Jean Crotti, suspend a geometry textbook by strings on their balcony. The resulting illegibility of the text is where *Unhappy Readymade*’s perverse utopianism emerges, its prognostication of a “real that is yet to come.” I began this essay by asserting that one of the central crises of modernism—the waning of literary knowledge and a corresponding rise of image worlds—could be encapsulated by Apollinaire’s uneasy phrase, *un livre d’images*. The diagram is indeed such a hybrid, appearing alternately as pictorialized text and textualized pictures. It offers a dialectical response to cubism’s practice of submitting things, like a violin or a café table, to semiotic implosion, for while cubism dramatizes the collapse of signification into “noise,” Dada diagrams develop new and unanticipated representational pathways.²² Later, more explicitly utopian modernisms ranging from constructivism to De Stijl would devote themselves to reinventing the commodity fetish in the service of anticapitalism, but

Dada's diagrams promise a politics that might circumvent the object altogether—by running circles around it. The diagrammatic is therefore definitively modernist, and yet, to put it crudely, time has been on its side to a much greater degree than other features of modernism. What has been called the postwar “dematerialization” of art, for instance, is founded in a diagrammatic visuality that, in Rotman's terms, is purely semiotic. But as tempting as it would be to allow the powerful—even disproportionate—legacy of Dada to tug it away from its historical moorings, this would be a great loss. Allowing the explosive (dadaist) and the implosive (cubist)—or as Rotman would have it, the numeric and alphabetic—semiotic assaults on the commodity fetish to rub shoulders, as they did, for instance, in the pages of 291, is to give ourselves a richer account of modernism wherein Dada is not doubly marginalized as clownish provocateur or postmodernism *in vitro*.

NOTES

1 Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (New York, 1971; orig. publication in French, 1967), 61.

2 Harriet and Sidney Janis, “Marcel Duchamp: Anti-Artist” (1945), repr. in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 313.

3 See my *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp, 1910–1941* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

4 Guillaume Apollinaire, “The New Spirit and the Poets,” in Roger Shattuck, trans., *Selected Writings of Guillaume Apollinaire* (New York, 1971), 228.

5 See Christine Poggi, “Mallarmé, Picasso, and the Newspaper as Commodity,” *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 1, no. 1 (1987–1988): 133–151, and Rosalind Krauss, “The Motiva-

tion of the Sign,” in William Rubin and Lynn Zelevansky, eds., *Picasso and Braque: A Symposium* (New York, 1992), 261–286. Poggi does not discuss Apollinaire but articulates Mallarmé's opposition between the book and the newspaper in light of Picasso's collage. Krauss discusses Picasso's adoption of newsprint in collage as a dialogical accommodation of Mallarmé's condemnation of the newspaper in favor of the book on the one hand, and Apollinaire's futurist embrace of it on the other. She writes, “in late 1912 newsprint had initially to be recuperated by Picasso from a world of Futurist abandon to which he himself was extremely hostile. Yet recuperation means here not simply siding with Mallarmé's condemnation of the newspaper, but showing that the newspaper can, to the contrary, be made to yield—for the new art—the very qualities Mallarmé condemned it for lacking. Thus without jettisoning its flatness and its columnar monotony, Picasso deploys newsprint to create, at the level of the sign, those precious aesthetic possibilities that Mallarmé had insisted were the exclusive prerogative of the book . . .” 281.

6 Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, Volume 2, 3rd rev. and expanded ed. (New York, 1997), 697.

7 Joselit, *Infinite Regress*, 234–235 n. 37.

8 Jean Suquet, “Possible,” trans. Tamara Blanken and Thierry de Duve, rev. Dennis Young, in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry de Duve (Halifax and Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 86.

9 See William A. Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain* (Houston, 1989).

10 Quoted in Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, 38.

11 Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, eds., *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (New York, 1973), 32.

12 Roger Shattuck, "Apollinaire's Great Wheel," in *The Innocent Eye: On Modern Literature and the Arts* (New York, 1984), 260.

13 I have somewhat arbitrarily focused solely on static visual forms, and I therefore omit discussion of an extremely important fourth model of Dada visuality: performance. For a treatment of this subject, see Amelia Jones' essay in this volume.

14 For an important treatment of the visceral, even surgical, nature of montage, see Brigid Doherty, "Figures of Pseudorevolution," *October* 84 (Spring 1998): 64–89, and for a highly influential account of montage as a model of modernity's sensory assaults, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art," *Artforum* 21, no. 1 (September 1982): 43–56.

15 This is Duchamp's famous term for indicating a kind of difference or differentiation that almost escapes the threshold of perception.

16 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1987), both quotes, 145.

17 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 142.

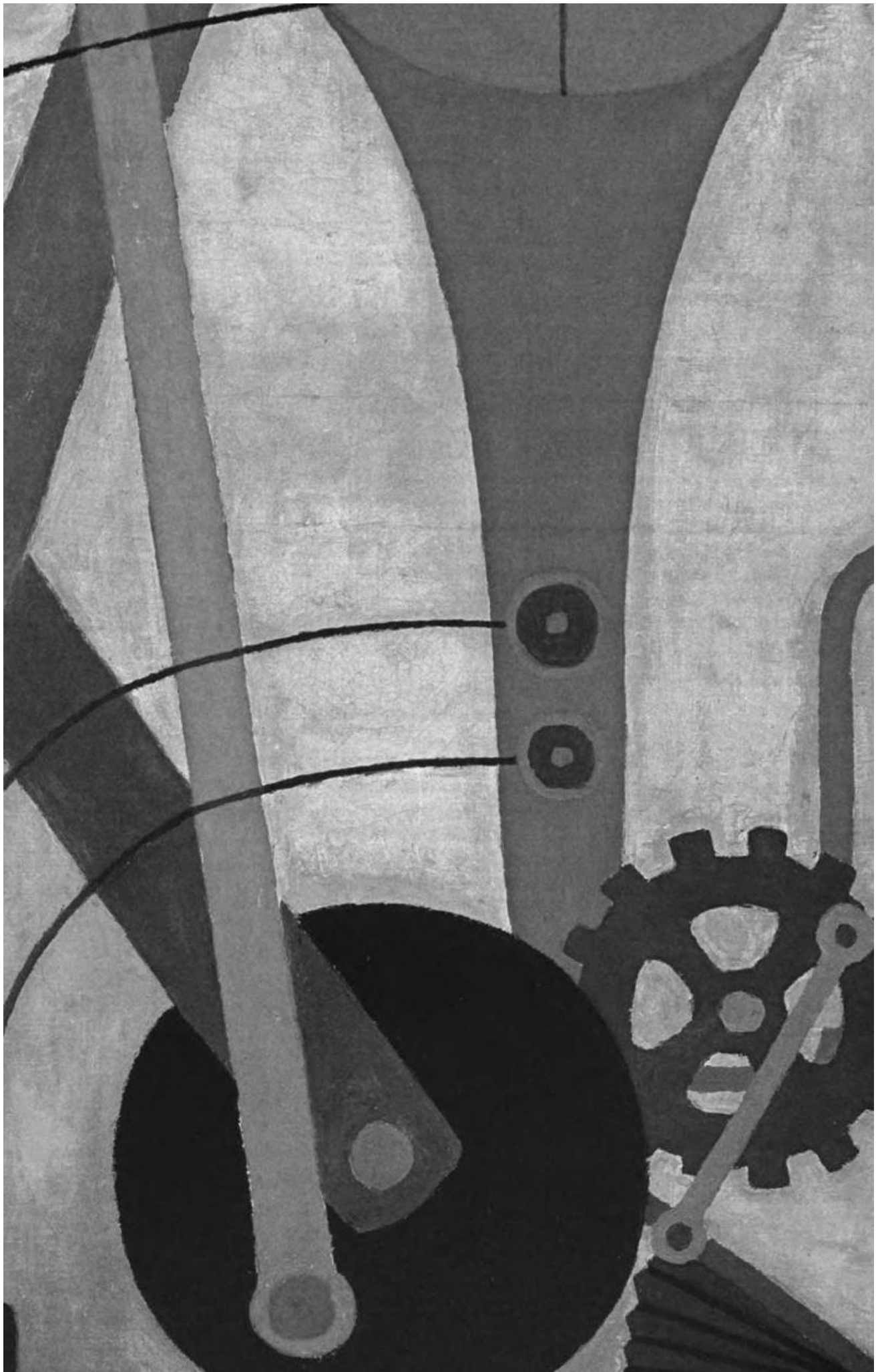
18 Brian Rotman, "Thinking Diagrams: Mathematics and Writing," in Mario Biagioli, ed., in consultation with Peter Galison, *The Science Studies Reader* (New York, 1999), 437. I am grateful to Helen Molesworth and Jeffrey Schnapp for suggesting that I think about the diagram in terms of science studies, and especially to Jeffrey Schnapp for bibliographic suggestions.

19 Brian Rotman, "Toward a Semiotics of Mathematics," in *Mathematics as Sign: Writing, Imagining, Counting* (Stanford, 2000), 14.

20 In "Toward a Semiotics of Mathematics," Rotman elaborates a tripartite model of the mathematician as subject encompassing the Person, the actual scientist in the world who is associated with what Rotman calls the Metacode, or natural language surrounding mathematical discourse; the Subject of mathematics who practices its abstract Code; and the Agent of mathematics who is engaged in sets of imaginary operations (Virtual Code) through which mathematical proofs are made and tested. In our context it is unimportant to introduce this degree of detail—what is critical is Rotman's notion, quite close to theorizations of cyberspace, of a distributed subjectivity across "real" and "virtual" territories, and his assertion that, in part, mathematics is conducted in a purely semiotic territory.

21 Rotman, "Toward a Semiotics of Mathematics," 436–437.

22 One could argue that the intersecting visual rhetorics of Picasso's so-called analytic cubism, and even more, the linear skeins of his "surrealist" styles, also mine the potential of the diagrammatic, but in a rather different manner than the Dada diagrams I have been discussing.



The “Confrontation of Modern Values”: A Moral History of Dada in Paris | Arnauld Pierre

Common Front

In his November 1922 lecture entitled “Caractères de l'évolution moderne et ce qui en participe” (Characteristics of the Modern Evolution and What It Entails), André Breton opined “that cubism, futurism and Dada are not, on the whole, three distinct movements; . . . all three participate in a more general movement, the meaning and breadth of which we still do not precisely know.” He added that to consider these three movements in turn amounted to “following the ascent of an idea that has reached a plateau, and merely awaits a new impulse to continue upon its assigned trajectory.”¹ Today, when the paradigm of rupture dictates a history of the avant-gardes that is fractured into hyper-specialized cliques, such declarations sound a disconcerting note: they are reminders that integrating factors existed as well among the factions of what contemporaries called “modernism,” the “modern spirit,” or, as Guillaume Apollinaire famously formulated it, *l'esprit nouveau* (the “new spirit”).² These integrative forces were perhaps particularly active in the Parisian context, which for at least two decades had been the crucible for “modern values” (as Breton refers to them in the same text) in general. Instead of perceiving in Breton's historical determinism the prefiguration of surrealism—it is too early for that in 1922—one might take his words as an impetus to overcome the break between the young guard of 1920 and their prewar predecessors of 1910, who were sacrificed to World War I and to its cultural aftermath.

Overcoming that generational divide was precisely Breton's goal in organizing the “Congrès international pour la détermination des directives et la définition de l'esprit moderne” (International Congress for the Determination of the Governing Principles and Definition of the Modern Spirit). Breton proposed the Congrès de Paris, as it is more commonly known, in early 1922, together with a committee consisting of the painters Robert Delaunay, Fernand Léger, and Amédée Ozenfant, the composer George Auric, and several of Breton's collaborators on the periodical *Littérature*; this mixed group of pre- and postwar figures later invited Pierre Reverdy, a representative of literary cubism from the 1910s, to join. “One should not be mistaken,” Breton cautions in an announcement for this venture. “The signatories of this article have no intention—withstanding the individual and group or school characteristics, of which we have the example in art of impressionism, symbolism, unanimism, fauvism, simultaneism, cubism, orphism, futurism, expressionism, purism, Dada, etc.—to work to create a new intellectual family and to tighten the bonds that many will judge illusory. . . . [We need only ensure that] we

render for the first time an exact accounting of forces present [today], and that we can . . . make clear what it is they yield.”³ Thus the objective of the Congrès was not to seek a compromise, to reduce ideas to their lowest common denominator, but rather to reactivate avant-garde solidarity against what the promoters of the Congrès designated as “the guardians of order” and their “so-called return to tradition.”⁴ Elsewhere, Breton poignantly diagnosed the enervation effected by the “hard lesson” of 1914–1918 upon a “will to modernism that had previously tended to give itself free rein, and which, in the realm of the mind . . . appears at least as a call to arms against death.”⁵ The Congrès de Paris ought to have made manifest that will to fight against the morbid forces of regression.⁶

The call to arms was heard, as attested by the numerous, divergent responses it provoked,⁷ which certainly contained their share of aberrant proposals. But one is struck by the openness that characterizes this spectrum of free-flowing ideas. From within the dadaist camp, for example (leaving aside the dissension that would end up scuttling the Congrès), one notes the complexity of Francis Picabia’s stance. After initially reacting with caustic verve,⁸ Picabia affirmed his solidarity with the Congrès organizers and claimed to have recruited others to their cause, including sometime fellow dadaists Jean Crotti, Suzanne Duchamp, and her brother, Marcel Duchamp. The surprisingly unrancorous futurist leader Filippo T. Marinetti, meanwhile, decided to ignore the snubs he had suffered one year before at the hands of the dadaists and announced he would personally take part in the Congrès, an undertaking he judged “extraordinarily important” and that he said he would publicize in Italy.⁹ Still more notably, Theo van Doesburg, the advocate of international constructivism, sent in a positive reply to this call to arms on De Stijl letterhead—no doubt acting here on behalf of his dadaist alter ego, I. K. Bonset.¹⁰ Bonset, a completely fictive character, nevertheless served as the putative editor of the Dada-inspired journal *Mécano*, a publication allied to De Stijl that gives a striking example of the physical rapprochement among avant-garde tendencies taking place outside of Paris.¹¹ Indeed, the Congrès de Paris was but one of three major gatherings intended to bring dadaists together with modernists of various allegiances, the others being the International Congress of Progressive Artists, held in Düsseldorf in June 1922, and the International Congress of Constructivists and Dadaists that took place in Weimar in September. The little magazine *Manomètre*, meanwhile, published in Lyon from July 1922 by Emile Malespine, a colleague of Marinetti, assembled a coalition of purists, constructivists, and dadaists, such as Tristan Tzara, Philippe Soupault, Hans Arp, and Kurt Schwitters. The Congrès de Paris was but one of the symptoms that proliferated during the course of 1922, demonstrating a general mandate for a common front of modern values.

This common front was nonetheless soon shattered. In the case of the Congrès de Paris, Tzara’s mounting critique of it, coupled with a strategic blunder by Breton, dealt

the project its death blow.¹² Vexed that he had not received Tzara's approbation, Breton had publicly warned against the activities of "the promoter of the 'movement' issuing out of Zurich," alienating much of the Parisian intelligentsia with his xenophobic insinuations. Sensing the crux of this quarrel, Tzara reiterated his claim to the paternity of Dada in a way that stressed the schism introduced by that word: "[In 1916] I proposed the word Dada as the title for a magazine. This took place in Zurich, where several friends and I felt that we had nothing in common with the Futurists and the Cubists."¹³ Tzara hammered his point further: "If it is this intellectual thrust—which has always existed and which Apollinaire called *l'esprit nouveau*—of which you wish to speak, then modernism no longer interests me at all. And I feel that it has been incorrect to say that Dada, Cubism and Futurism shared a common basis. These last two tendencies were based specifically upon a principle of technical and intellectual improvement, while Dada has never rested upon any theory, and has only ever been a protestation."¹⁴

The Modern Spirit

Tzara thus made credible the notion of rupture as fundamental to Dada—a projection refuted by an examination of the factual record. On the contrary, the history of the genesis of Dada is marked by an intertwining of the literary and the visual avant-gardes of every modernist tendency. Dada at that time appeared to be less a movement with a specific identity than a consortium for "modern international activity."¹⁵ Even the third issue of the magazine *Dada*, which contained the radical "Manifeste dada 1918," remained largely dominated by representatives of Apollinairian poetry, such as Reverdy, Pierre Albert-Birot (the French modernist poet and artist who founded *SIC* in 1916), and Paul Dermée, as well as Apollinaire himself. In preceding issues of the magazine, these writers had shared space with the futurists Marinetti, Francesco Cangiullo, and Blaise Cendrars. Cendrars' references to futurism and simultaneism were inserted like signposts into his poem "Crépitements" (Sputters). Just one example of the pedigree of poetic modernism within which nascent dadaism sought to situate itself was the text "Rasoir mécanique" (Mechanical Razor) by Albert-Birot, published in *Dada 2* (December 1917). Albert-Birot's proclamation in the name of Dada, "poems to yell and dance to," as he called them, are easily identified with the oral and aural dimensions of dadaist poetry.

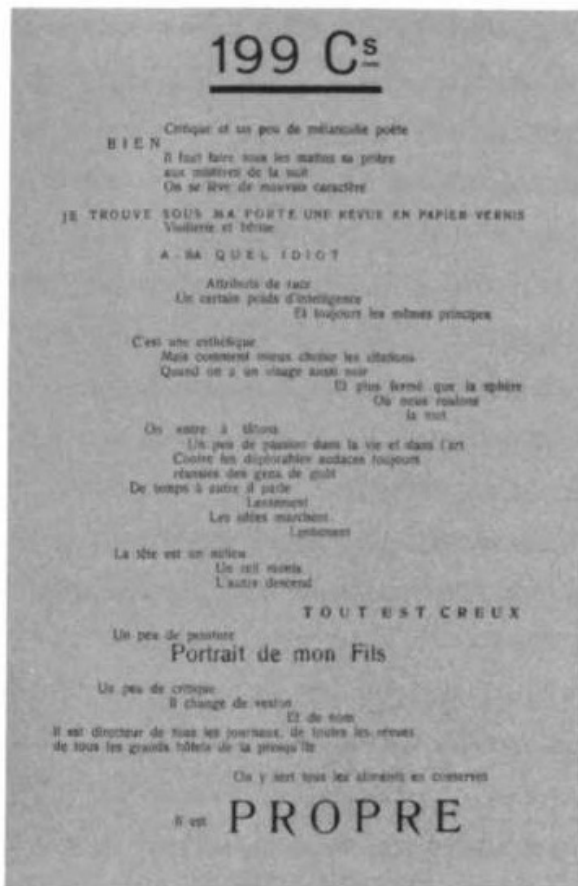
POUR DADA

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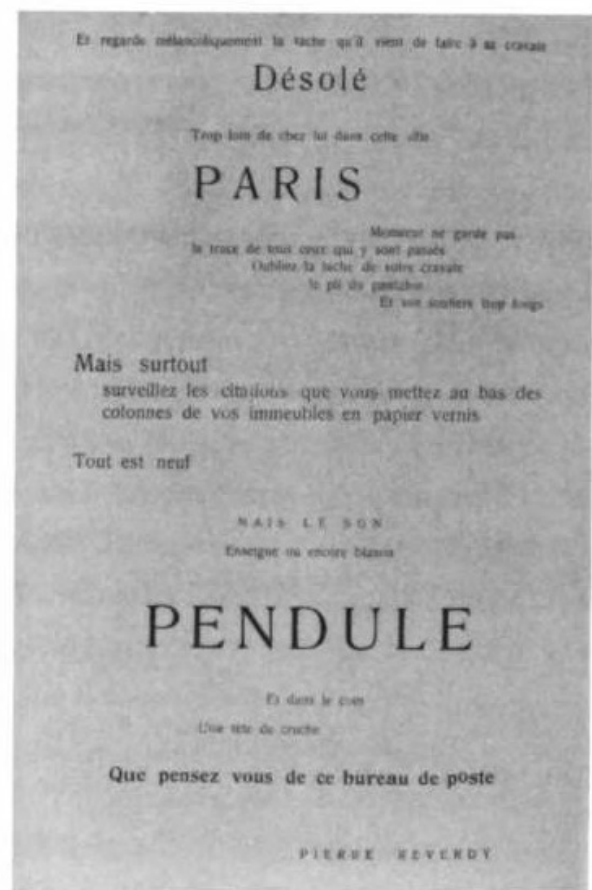
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I I I I I

POUH-POUH POUH-POUH RRRR



1a.



1b.

LES ANCIENS

*Oui Madame, oui Monsieur,
les Anciens ont fait
des chefs-d'œuvre*

NOUS LES CONNAISSONS

et c'est parce que nous les connaissons

que nous sommes

**CUBISTES, FUTURISTES, SIMULTANISTES, UNANIMISTES,
+ ...ISTES, + ...ISTES, en un mot NUNISTES**

et c'est parce que

vous ne les connaissez pas
que vous ne l'êtes pas.

CE SONT EUX, LES GRANDS AIEUX
qui nous ordonnent

d'être JEUNES

APPRENEZ A LES CONNAITRE

ILS VOUS DIRONT

DE NOUS AIMER

1a-b. Pierre Reverdy's poem "199 Cs," *Dada* 4-5 (September 1920), National Gallery of Art Library, Washington

2. Pierre Albert-Birot, "Les Anciens," *SIC* 11 (November 1916), 2, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

For the following issue, Albert-Birot would again submit a "poem of three simultaneous voices," "Crayon Bleu" (Blue Pencil), which referred to the first dadaists' longstanding fraternity with *simultanéisme*. According to one of its principal prewar promoters, Henri-Martin Barzun, *simultanéisme* fulfilled the ideal of total aural and visual communication, achieved through the polyphonic interpenetration of lyric poetry with visual plasticity. In *Cabaret Voltaire*, Hugo Ball and Tzara proudly claimed to have originated "the first stage production of this modern aesthetic"¹⁶ when, at the *Cabaret Voltaire* on 31 March 1916, they interpreted *simultanéist* verse by Barzun and Fernand Divoire.¹⁷ The organizers of this *soirée* did not limit themselves to reenactments as Tzara, Marcel Janco, and Richard Huelsenbeck premiered their own "poème simultané": the famous "L'amiral cherche une maison à louer" (The Admiral Is Looking for a House to Rent). That poem appeared in print in *Cabaret Voltaire*, accompanied by Tzara's "Note pour les bourgeois" (Note for the Bourgeois), which cited as inspiration the work of Villiers de l'Isle d'Adam, Stéphane Mallarmé, Jules Romains, Marinetti, Apollinaire, and Cendrars, along with that of Divoire and Barzun.¹⁸ Still in embryonic form, we have here the model for the genealogies Aragon subsequently sketched out in his "Projet d'histoire littéraire contemporaine" (Contemporary Literary History Project),¹⁹ and Pierre de Massot in *De Mallarmé à 391* (From Mallarmé to 391), a work unfortunately not widely known.²⁰

The openness to *l'esprit nouveau* poetry remains visible even in the last issue of *Dada* published in Zurich—witness Reverdy's poem "199 Cs," with its splendid typographic layout (fig. 1). Reciprocally, it was in Reverdy's *Nord-Sud* and in the journal *SIC*, managed by Albert-Birot, that the name *Dada* first appeared in Parisian circles. These two journals, which were devoted to literary cubism and *l'esprit nouveau* in poetry, operated under the guidance of Apollinaire. He directed toward them the young authors who turned to him: Tzara, for one, but also Breton, Soupault, and Louis Aragon, all still searching for their own voice. *SIC* and *Nord-Sud* each bridged the generations separated by the war. *SIC* offered an apologia for the golden present, for newness in all its forms, calling all efforts to be modern a united front of "nunism" against the ancients (fig. 2): "The Ancients / Yes Madame, Yes Sir, / the Ancients created / masterpieces / We know them / and it is because we know them / that we are / cubists, futurists, simultanéists, unanimists, / + . . . ists, + . . . ists, in a word nunists."²¹ *Dada* seemed appropriate in this context but not especially advanced, worthy of comment only for its annoyingly standard typographic design.²² *SIC* pursued a typographic inventiveness that approximated futurist "liberated words," with results as striking as some of Tzara's printed verse: "Sign-poems," "Land-

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Thermomètre Littéraire de "SIC"

EXPLO	11	391 SION
Dada 3 -	10	
Les Jokeys étonnés (Pierre Reverdy)	9	
Valeri plastici (n° 2 et 3)	8	Album de reproductions peintures et sculptures illustré de quelques poèmes
L'Instant. - La Nouvelle. - Moi.	7	- Valeri plastici (n°1) - J'ai fui (Clara Candrea)
Les 3 roses -	6	
Yeli i nou. - La Revue. - Baudouin sur André Bida (Christian).	5	Merveille de France - L'Étrange. Les ombres idéelles. - Le Croquis.
La Revue. - Le Carnet Critique. - Le Scandale. Jeuneur). - L'Art. - Les Cahiers. - Le Faubourg.	4	L'Étrange. - Après le Cubisme (Baudouin et Aya. - Archa. - Les Lettres partielles.
Les Diables. - Il Faut mourir (Louis Jacques). - Les Fleurs de Baudouin.	3	Le Mystère et le Verbe intégral (E. Adam).
Quand le soleil passe de l'ombre à la lumière (Braga). - La statue aux amants brisés	2	(Louis Soumi). - Le procession fleurie (Pierre Barrigou Barroca).
La Mère.	1	
Le Roman National. - La Jeunesse Française.	0	La Flamme. - L'Alba.

3-

scape Poems," "Ideogrammatic Poems," and "Poems to Cry and Dance to" are among the types proposed by Albert-Birot. The example of *SIC* doubtless spurred the typographic modernization of Dada, beginning with the third issue in December 1918—a development that Albert-Birot welcomed heartily. Early the next year, the "*SIC* literary thermometer," a chart of the most modern periodicals of the moment, listed *Dada 3* at the top, together with Picabia's 391 (fig. 3), forming the apex of the genre before the explosive era that would follow.²³

Reverdy, the editor of *Nord-Sud*, never favored the typographic whimsy of the futurists whose work Apollinaire translated and systematically directed to *SIC*. This did not prevent Reverdy from joining the common front of *l'esprit nouveau*, befriending Tzara in letters, defending him in print, and even suggesting at one point that *Nord-Sud* merge with Dada, to save his journal from financial ruin.²⁴ Reverdy was preempted in this proposal by Dermée, his former collaborator, from whom he was estranged owing to a bitter quarrel after a conference devoted to Max Jacob, where Reverdy had berated Apollinaire's young followers.²⁵ In 1918 Dermée inundated Tzara with propositions to become the official propagandist for the Dada movement in France; Tzara named him editor-in-chief for a French edition of *Dada*, which he envisioned as a "cry of anger," a "laboratory of dangerous experiments, not a little mouthpiece of orthodoxy, even if revolutionary."²⁶

3. Pierre Albert-Birot, "Thermomètre
Littéraire de 'SIC,'" SIC 42-43
(30 March and 15 April 1919), 339,
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris

Dermée's editorial ambitions were realized in 1920 through the creation of two short-lived journals: *Z* (February and March 1920) and, in collaboration with his wife, the poet Céline Arnould, *Projecteur* (Projector) (May 1920). Both journals listed as contributors such Dada figures as Tzara, Breton, Soupault, Aragon, Paul Éluard, Picabia, and Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, among others.

The porous interpenetration between manifestations of the modern spirit and Dada can also be observed in the journals that positioned themselves under the banner of modernism. In late 1920, Dermée took over the editorship of *L'Esprit nouveau*, the name-sake journal for this catch-all modernist movement, opening it to dadaist authors. Dadaist association with the journal continued even after its subscribers forced Dermée's expulsion when his engagement in the Dada movement was becoming too burdensome.²⁷ It has already been shown how *L'Esprit nouveau* recognized Dada as the useful destroyer of aesthetic traditions upon which a new world could be built. Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), for example, participated in this provocative bent through the persuasive use of visual documents illustrating his articles, by subverting advertisements and juxtaposing them with images that confounded their original meaning.²⁸ Meanwhile, Tzara published essential texts such as the "Manifeste sur l'amour faible et l'amour amer" (Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love), which contained the famous formula on how to create a Dada poem, and its adjunct, "Comment je suis devenu charmant, sympathique et délicieux" (How I Became Charming, Likeable, and Delicious), not in his own journal but in Nicolas Beauduin's *La Vie des lettres* (Life in Letters), a late-simultaneist magazine that championed "geometric beauty / having as surroundings / or crimson and gold / electric cities" in lyrical verse.²⁹ In the wake of the Picabia exhibition at La Cible gallery in December 1920, Beauduin had begun to correspond with Picabia by declaring: "I open my journal unambiguously to the Dada movement, which is the most lively and influential of them all. It is a current, not a school; its reach is global and it will carry away the whole generation."³⁰ Picabia responded favorably by contributing both poetry and prose³¹; *La Vie des lettres*, with its cover drawn by Albert Gleizes, could also count on the contributions of Dermée, Breton, Aragon, and Éluard. During this same period, Picabia was a regular at the Friday gatherings of Alexandre Mercereau, an important figure in the defense of artistic and literary cubism who published an extremely laudatory portrait of Picabia accompanied by a reproduction of one of his canvases (now lost), *Le Rastaquouère* (The Rastaquarian) in the journal *Les Hommes du jour* (Men of Today).³²

In the intense correspondence exchanged between Breton and Tzara throughout

1919, Breton repeatedly mentioned “this *esprit nouveau* for which we fight.”³³ Less than a year later, on 23 January 1920, Tzara (recently arrived from Zurich) made an appearance at the “1st *Littérature* matinée.” The journal’s collaborators read their own poetry, as well as that of Reverdy, Cendrars, Albert-Birot, and others, while works by Juan Gris, Jacques Lipchitz, and Léger were presented alongside those of Picabia and Ribemont-Dessaignes. What thus passed for the first public manifestation of dadaism in Paris once again exemplified this common front of modernism, represented here in full despite the prejudices the group around *Littérature* harbored for the founders of *SIIC* and *Nord-Sud*. The tutelary figure of Apollinaire remained a posthumous presence at this matinee. His poem “Before Cinema” appears on the program, an anodyne yet thoroughly pro-modern choice:

Artists what indeed are they
They are no longer those who cultivate the fine arts
They are no longer those preoccupied with art
Poetic or musical
Artists, they are the actors and the actresses . . .

The silent film star Charlie Chaplin was claimed by all the factions of *l’esprit nouveau*, as is evident in their many tributes to him: Aragon’s in *Nord-Sud* (1918),³⁴ Soupault’s in *Littérature*,³⁵ and the internationalist poet Ivan Goll’s, who authored *Die Chaplinade*, with illustrations by Léger.³⁶ While the German dadaists were conveying their affinity for Chaplin, “the greatest artist in the world and a good dadaist,”³⁷ the Parisian group, in one of its first hoaxes, claimed Chaplin’s membership in their movement by announcing that he would speak during their second matinee, organized at the Grand Palais on 5 February 1920 to coincide with the Salon des Indépendants.³⁸ At the moment of Chaplin’s supposed appearance, the dadaists offered their frustrated public an unsatisfying apologia: “Living subjectively in the present, Charlot, king of improvisation and the born enemy of tradition, is—perhaps without knowing it—the only ‘dadaist’ among the artists of the world.”³⁹ Apollinaire wrote in defense of cinema, demonstrating the awareness shown already before the war of film and photography as forceful competitors with the traditional visual arts.⁴⁰ The dadaists pitched this theme to the point of iconoclastic hyperbole, fueling the general crisis of confidence in traditional sources of artistic power in the postwar years.

Modernisthm[us] of Panama

In April 1922 Tzara and Ribemont-Dessaignes launched the *Coeur à barbe* (Bearded Heart), a “transparent newspaper,” as its subtitle proclaimed—true, perhaps, for the rare initiated reader capable of deciphering the series of derisive epigrams, sly innuendos, and

overtly insulting or malicious declarations that dotted its eight pages. Erik Satie authored several concise attacks for the single-issue journal, including allusions to an act of vandalism that had supposedly befallen one of Ozenfant's paintings—Satie intimated that the same fate awaited a work by Ozenfant's associate Jeanneret. Appearing alongside the contemporaneous Congrès de Paris project, the *Coeur à Barbe* seems mischievously obstructionist; Satie's mention of knife attacks on the work of the editors of *L'Esprit nouveau* (whether true or not) serves as a metaphor for the slashing of ties, a severing of connections forged, however haphazardly, between the creators of *Coeur à barbe*—Théodore Fraenkel, Benjamin Péret, Satie, Soupault, Tzara, and others—and the organizers of the Congrès. These connections were intended to bridge all of modernity's "isms." The "modernisthmus of Panama," wrote Ribemont-Dessaignes—a mocking phrase by one of the most wickedly corrosive voices in the *Coeur à barbe* journal, which also contained news of the Congrès' demise.

The failure of the Congrès de Paris marked the beginning of the end for the French branch of the Dada movement. It forms the counterpart to another aborted enterprise of the modernist common front, situated at the very beginning of the Parisian dadaist adventure that foretold the difficult relations among the factions of the modern spirit. In late 1919, Gleizes, Leopold Survage, and Alexander Archipenko attempted to revive the Salon de la Section d'or, one of the defining institutions of prewar cubism. Gleizes, who may have recalled memorable moments spent in New York and Barcelona with two original participants of the Section d'or, Duchamp and Picabia,⁴² began imprudently by acting conciliatory toward the dadaists—even though Picabia had already virulently contested attempts to censure his machine paintings at exhibitions at the Salon d'Automne and the Cirque d'Hiver. When the cubists realized that dadaist disruption threatened their enterprise, they reacted. At a memorably agitated gathering on 25 February 1920, the cubists voted to exclude the dadaists, who were represented that evening by Picabia, Tzara, Breton, Soupault, Ribemont-Dessaignes, Dermée, and Arnauld. As Dermée reported with aggressive derision immediately thereafter in 391, "The hurricane Dada appeared to Gleizes, Archipenko and Survage as a dream—and they watched it devastate everything in its path. . . . The Dada wolf [had to be] driven out of cubistry."⁴³ Picabia offered a collective resignation, provided that the Section d'or document its legal right of incorporation. Survage rendered the proposal null and void on the spot by mounting a chair and sentencing the opponents with the cry: "Ex-pe-lled! You are ex-pe-lled!"⁴³

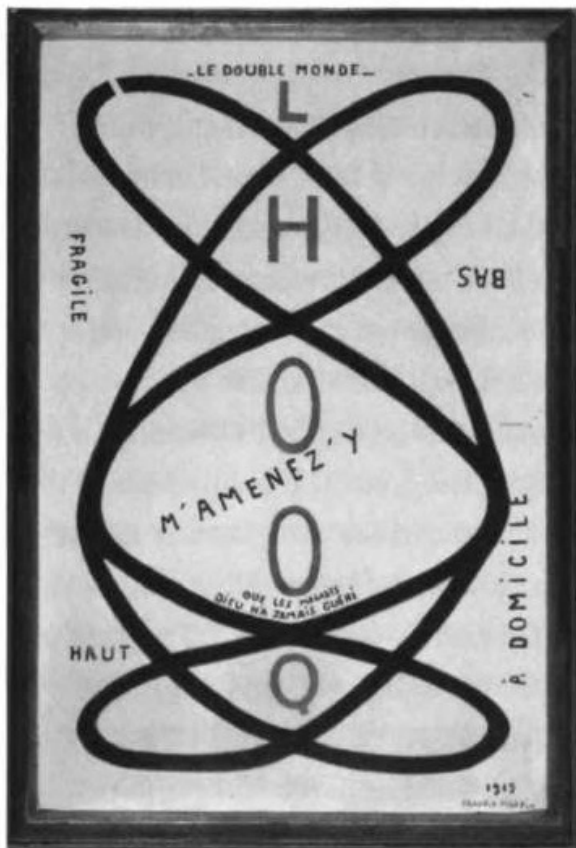
Ribemont-Dessaignes, himself a participant in the original Section d'or, rightly heard in its name such words as "relationships," "numbers," and "perpetuity of art, eternal laws," all indications of the prescriptive bent that Ribemont-Dessaignes punctured with the felicitous phrase "legislative cubism."⁴⁴ With the onset of World War I, and in the context of a call to order, reference to the mythical section d'or, the golden sec-

4. Francis Picabia, *Le Double monde* (*The Double World*), 1919, enamel and oil on cardboard, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

5. Francis Picabia, Cover of 391 12 (March 1920), Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

tion, would assume an even more dogmatic connotation. For his part, Picabia rose up against “the little school of cubist fine arts founded by L'Esprit nouveau: They know the why of everything, they have their laws, know good and evil, they imitate god chasing Adam and Eve from paradise, since god couldn't tolerate sin.” However, added Picabia, “sin, the serpent, it's dadaism!”⁴⁵ Picabia's enamel (Ripolin) painting *Le Double monde* (*The Double World*), 1919 (fig. 4), stands as the antimanifesto to constructively minded followers of the golden section and other “saintly proportions.” The intertwining lines running across the picture, and the lengthwise positioning of select points relative to one another, can be read as a parody of those famous diagrams that supposedly revealed the formulae governing masterworks—the same masterworks whose commercial value justified Picabia's inscriptions of “high,” “low,” or “fragile” on the painting, similar to those used on ordinary packing crates. Another inscription—the largest and loudest: L. H. O. O. Q. —calls into question the ultimate masterwork, Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. Duchamp rectified his readymade version of this painting, enhanced by a goatee, by adding a mustache and the five irreverent letters, for its use as a front-page illustration in the issue of 391 devoted to denouncing cubism (fig. 5). *Le Double monde*—brought onstage by Breton at that infamous first matinee in January 1920—did not bode well for the dadaists' relationship with the remade Section d'or group.

The rift in the common front of modernism can be dated to this moment (January 1920). Picabia recalled this rift again in protesting against the marginalization of his four contributions to the Salon d'Automne of 1919. A few weeks later, however, when he was asked to remove the titles and inscriptions of *Parade amoureuse* (*Amorous Parade*) and *Muscles brillants* (*Brilliant Muscles*), which were judged to be obscene, from an exhibition of modern art at the Cirque d'Hiver, Ribemont-Dessaignes joined Villon, Survage, and the Gleizes in solidarity with their colleague. The artists threatened to withdraw their works if the organizers' demands were imposed on Picabia.⁴⁶ The fracas of February 1920 at the Closerie des Lilas made such expressions of solidarity impossible; the modern spirit, as the cubists understood it, became the target of increasingly violent insults. For someone like Picabia, the very idea of modernism became synonymous with the name of the Léonce Rosenberg gallery, L'Effort moderne, which had taken up the defense of cubism immediately after World War I. The mere affiliation of cubism with a gallery sufficed to denounce it as shackled to commerce, as the original Dada ideal consisted in “working freely without mercantile preoccupations.”⁴⁷ Dada's refusal to be labeled “modern” became a question of moral survival. The dadaists repeatedly disparaged “this suppos-



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edly modern merchandise,"⁴⁸ and, in a falsely naive paradox, contrasted it with antique dealers' merchandise, which they described as "much more modern than that which is exhibited by the dealers of self-described modern art."⁴⁹ Modernism soon was ridiculed ferociously, as in this remark aimed at one of Picabia's favorite targets: "L'esprit nouveau, dear Mr. Ozenfant... is to walk on all fours."⁵⁰

Denials of adherence to modernism were now issued in quick succession. "Dada does not present itself as modern," Breton himself advised in his preface to the exhibition of Max Ernst's works at Au Sans Pareil in May 1921.⁵¹ "Mr. Paul Éluard declared: 'Dada does not like the modern,'" voiced *Comoedia* in January 1921, expressing the dadaist position most succinctly.⁵² These disavowals respond indirectly to Gleizes' attacks following the Section d'or controversy: "The fear of no longer being modern torments them, and they're questioning themselves to figure out what they should do. They should comfort themselves and get astride Dada without further hesitation because Dada is modern, if by this word one understands today's star attraction."⁵³ In such declarations, one senses the vexation and bitterness on the part of the generation Dada was soon to jettison. Gleizes was not alone in deploring the enmity that arose between the avant-garde of 1910 and that of 1920. Picabia's perceived excesses, for example, eventually put off some of the admirers he had retained among the poets of *l'esprit nouveau*. Upon the publication of his periodical *Pilhaou-Thibaou*, which cast malicious aspersions on the roles of the various dadaist figures in the movement's formation, Beauduin wrote a friend: "This magazine is abominable...

to push forward, yes; but not like these people. . . . It's bad and it's dirty. Let's pass [on it]. We need to create the real avant-garde."⁵⁴

Dada trampled not only cubism—futurism, personified by Marinetti, would also suffer heavily in this playful massacre of the modern spirit. Imprisoned in Italy at the end of 1919, with an additional sentencing to forced labor pending, Marinetti was still a figure to be defended.⁵⁵ But barely more than a year later, when he attempted to regain his foothold in Paris by publicizing a new “ism”—tactilism—the French Dada circle opposed him unremittingly. Picabia questioned the originality of Marinetti's notion of an art of tactile sensation, suggesting Apollinaire and one Miss Clifford-Williams, an obscure contributor to the New York Dada journal *Rongwrong*, as the true inventors of this idea.⁵⁶ Marinetti hoped to assert his importance at a performance on 14 January 1921 at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, yet exclamations by Breton, Soupault, Aragon, Jacques Rigaud, Tzara, Picabia, and Ribemont-Dessaignes brought the event to a standstill.⁵⁷ The provocateurs distributed their tract, “Dada soulève tout” (Dada Overthrows Everything) among the audience, offering the slogan: “The futurist is dead. What killed it? Dada.”⁵⁸

As Picabia concluded some months later, “Dada did its part by destroying an untoward movement, by denouncing the maneuvers of certain adventurers who are commercializing the modern idea.” Yet Picabia had announced his resignation from the movement,⁵⁹ which had lost support as a result of quarrels between its most visible leaders, Breton and Tzara—a development that exemplified the Picabian axiom that “leaders always have bad manners.” The parodic enactment of the “Barrès trial” on 13 May 1921, with a sham jury led by Breton, convinced Picabia and others of the need to abolish a movement that threatened to spiral into decline just like the postwar cubists with their disciples, markets, and commercialism. Picabia's desire to dispense with the Dada label must be interpreted as a crisis of loyalty toward what he himself had named a “dadaist spirit.” In the hands of Breton and Aragon, Picabia thought, Dada was evolving contrary to this spirit. “We have to make a clean break,” he argued, “because [Dada] was becoming a school.”⁶⁰

Dada Spirit (Anti-Values)

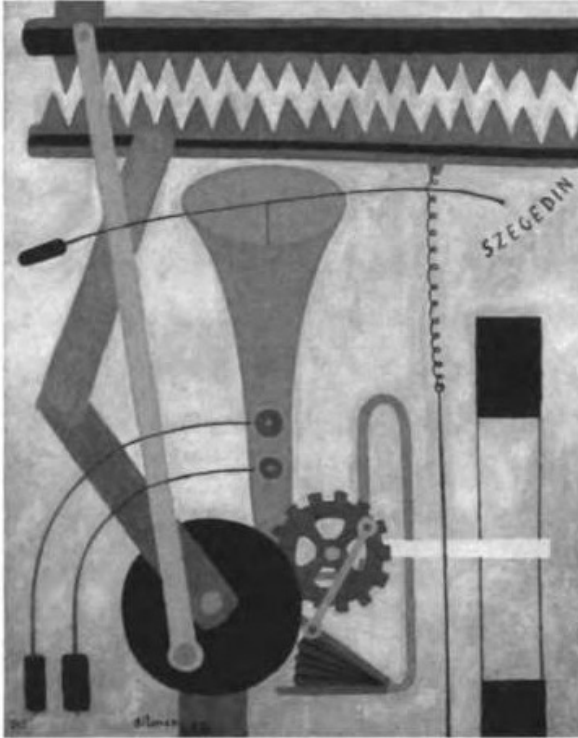
Something akin to a “dadaist spirit” had indeed developed in Paris, drawing on the crisis of values earlier ascribed to the avant-garde of 1910, but now amplifying these values to an unprecedented degree. From 1910 to 1920, accusations of anarchism, bolshevism, and antipatriotism (sometimes even from the same pundits) were leveled against the artistic “moderns.” On the heels of the first scandalous “Saison Dada,” all avant-garde “isms” were stigmatized as different names for the same threat: “futurism, cubism, dadaism, and bolshevism itself, exemplify, along with a thousand other phenomena and testimonies, the very modern desire for incoherence and nonsense.”⁶¹ For those authors slightly more

concerned with diachrony, filiation replaced assimilation but did not exempt the perpetrators: "Just as Marxism engendered Leninism, cubism produced dadaism."⁶²

The force of this threat began to find an echo in actual politics. Union officials, incriminated in early 1921 for instigating a Soviet-style workers' strike, defended themselves to the judge by claiming, "We seek new formulas. We are the 'Dadas' of the social movement."⁶³ For nationalist writers, on the other hand, "Dada" became a catchword for acquiescence to foreign powers, from the politics of President Wilson in America to the "generosities" ceded to Germany in the Treaty of Versailles.⁶⁴ A 1920 caricature in *L'Echo de Paris* depicts four well-dressed men in a bourgeois living room, one holding a tract on which can be read: "Dada nothing nothing nothing." Questioned about the meaning of this paper, another man answers: "Might well be President Wilson's latest manifesto!" Many cultural authorities, including the otherwise perceptive André Gide, expressed concern for Dada as a movement of foreigners and Jews: "So what! While our fields, our villages, our churches suffered so much, our language remained untouched! It is important that the mind not lag behind matter; it also has a right to some ruin. Dada will take charge of this."⁶⁵ Dadaism embodied what Marcel Arland would soon call a "new evil of the century," comparable to those that follow all times of great upheaval.⁶⁶

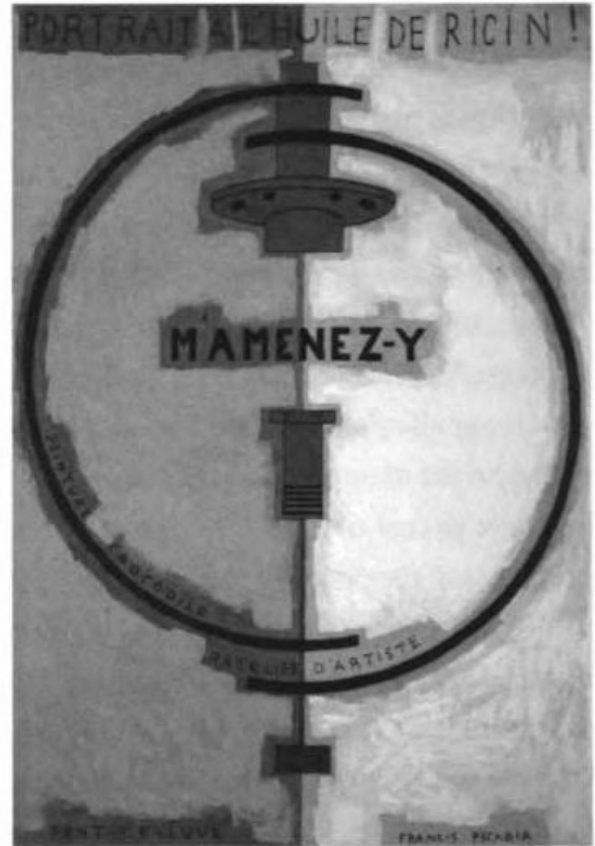
Faced with this blanket contempt, friends of dadaism had to regroup. In his book *De Mallarmé à 391*, the young poet Pierre de Massot evoked "the bitter and disheartened philosophy of this movement (Dada),"⁶⁷ and affirmed that "heartlessness is one of the most remarkable traits of the coming generation."⁶⁸ He goes on to describe a universe reified by technology and science, where traditional modes of artistic expression would be powerless: "Little by little, the sciences will be preponderant—will occupy one of the primary positions. . . . They will predominate, I think, the forthcoming eras, smothering the last works of the past until the day when . . . literature, music and painting will have become the three principal branches of neurology."⁶⁹ Picabia himself had perhaps anticipated such a world when he dedicated his 1918 collection of *Poèmes et dessins de la fille née sans mère* (Poems and Drawings by the Girl Born without a Mother) to the neurologists who had treated him for neurasthenia. Continually applying lucidity to a systematic unveiling of the world, science and technology disallowed trickery, mystification, or enchantment. Accordingly, machine iconography was joined to anatomy without a hint of amorous sentiment. Rather, physical relations became an absurd and repetitive play of connecting rods, pistons, and gears, sexualized by inscriptions that declared a need "to bite into each other with precision."⁷⁰ Following Picabia, Ribemont-Dessaignes echoed this iconography in little-known paintings (fig. 6), as did Jean Crotti and Suzanne Duchamp in their April 1921 exhibition at the Galerie Montaigne. The titles of the Crotti works, *Virginité en déplacement* (Virginity in Motion), 1916, and *Les forces mécaniques de l'amour en mouvement* (The Mechanical Forces of Love in Motion), 1916, reveal a common origin to this theme of amorous disillusionment: Marcel Duchamp's complex, electro-sexual labor

6. **Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes**,
Silence, c. 1915, oil on canvas,
The Museum of Modern Art, New York,
Katherine S. Dreier Bequest



6.

7. **Francis Picabia**, *M'amenez-y*
(*Take Me There* / "My Amnesia"),
1919–1920, oil on canvas, The
Museum of Modern Art, New York



7.

of love, *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*). Picabia's "machines of current ideas concerning love," thus entered, for better or for worse, the sphere of disenchanting modernity precociously announced by Apollinaire in *L'esprit nouveau et les poètes* (*Poets and the New Spirit*), in terms borrowed from Picabia himself: "Motherless machines (*machines qui n'ont pas de mère*), that are daughters of man, live a life in which feelings and passions are absent."⁷¹

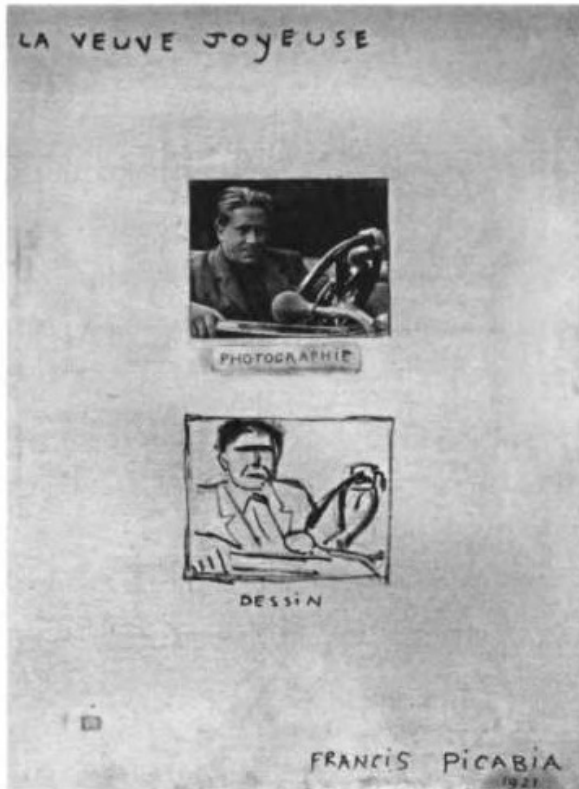
Parisian dadaism essentially found its pictorial incarnation through the visual language of precision and indifference taken from Duchamp via Picabia's paintings. In April 1920, Picabia showed his work at René Hilsum's gallery and bookshop *Au Sans Pareil*. Ribemont-Dessaignes followed with an exhibition introduced by Tzara. Ribemont-Dessaignes also illustrated Picabia's book *Jésus-Christ Rastaquouère* (*Jesus Christ Rastaquarian*) with mecanomorphic drawings that closely match Picabia's own illustrations in his *Poèmes et dessins de la fille née sans mère* (1918). These were the initial exhibitions of the first Dada season in Paris. A work such as *M'amenez-y* (*Take Me There* / "My Amnesia"), 1919, itself serves as a Dada manifesto of disdain for the craft of painting and its accompanying mythology

(fig. 7). Executed from a schema first published in October 1919 in *La Science et la Vie* (Science and Life), the work opposes the dryness of technical drawing with a parodic painterliness that is deliberately visible, slapdash, and falsely virtuoso. It is also interspersed with inscriptions that, by way of malicious wordplay, deride craft and a particular conception of painting. The largest of these proclaims: “portrait in oil . . . castor oil!” “Crocodile painting” suggests the expression “crocodile tears,” which refers to the false tears of a hypocrite: “crocodile painting” should thus be understood as “false painting” or referring to the “falsity of painting.” Finally, the title itself, “M’amenez-y,” sounds like *amnésie* (amnesia), a statement of opposition to the hyperamnesia that marked the postwar return to order.

This distaste for painting was accompanied by a ferocious critique of photographic realism, the theoretical premises of which can be discerned before the war in the writings of Picabia, Apollinaire, and Maurice Raynal. Its origins are also found in Picabia’s dialogue with Marcel Duchamp. The untreated canvas in Picabia’s *Veuve joyeuse* (Merry Widow) juxtaposes a Man Ray photograph of Picabia at the wheel of one of his many cars with a crude, rough drawing copied from the same photograph (fig. 8). Its public exhibition was accompanied by a notice ironically deploring that “many of our artists abuse such reproductions.”⁷² *Veuve joyeuse* was the translation of Duchamp’s readymade *Fresh Widow*, 1920, a French window with patches of black leather covering the panes to suggest the disappearance of painting when restricted to its age-old function as a window to the world (fig. 9). If *Tabac-Rat* (Tobacco-Rat), c. 1921—a plainframe meant to be suspended in midair so as to provide a view onto reality—upheld the traditional paradigm of the window, it did so in such an absurdly literal way that its relevance was called into question (fig. 10).⁷³

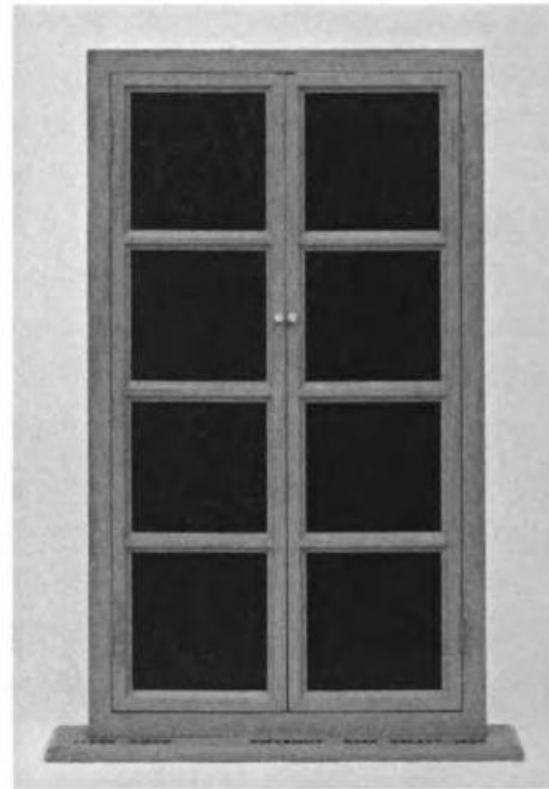
A substantial number of Picabia’s mecanomorphic images do function illusionistically, such as the drawings for 291 5–6 (July–August 1915) in New York, or those that decorate the covers of the first Barcelona and New York issues of 391 (fig. 11). These readymade images, however, found their justification in the arbitrary appropriation of reality begun by Picabia’s accomplice in anti-art, Marcel Duchamp. When the daily *Le Matin* revealed that one of Picabia’s paintings, *Les Yeux chauds* (The Hot Eyes), at that time on view at the Salon d’Automne, was simply a technical diagram transcribed from a popular scientific journal, the artist did not deny it. “Picabia has thus invented nothing, he copies,” he answered. “So yes, he copies an engineer’s working drawing instead of copying apples! Everyone can understand copying apples, but copying a turbine, that’s idiotic. In my opinion, what is more idiotic is that *Les Yeux chauds*, which were yesterday inadmissible have now, because they represent a convention, become a painting intelligible to everyone.”⁷⁴ Picabia’s reply articulates a theory of choice, validated by the signature of an artist who has renounced mimesis. Here one encounters the problematic of the Duchampian readymade in a virtually pure state: “The painter makes a choice, then

8. Francis Picabia, *La Veuve joyeuse* (*Joyous Widow*), 1921, oil paint, photograph, and paper glued to canvas, Private collection, courtesy Comité Picabia, Paris



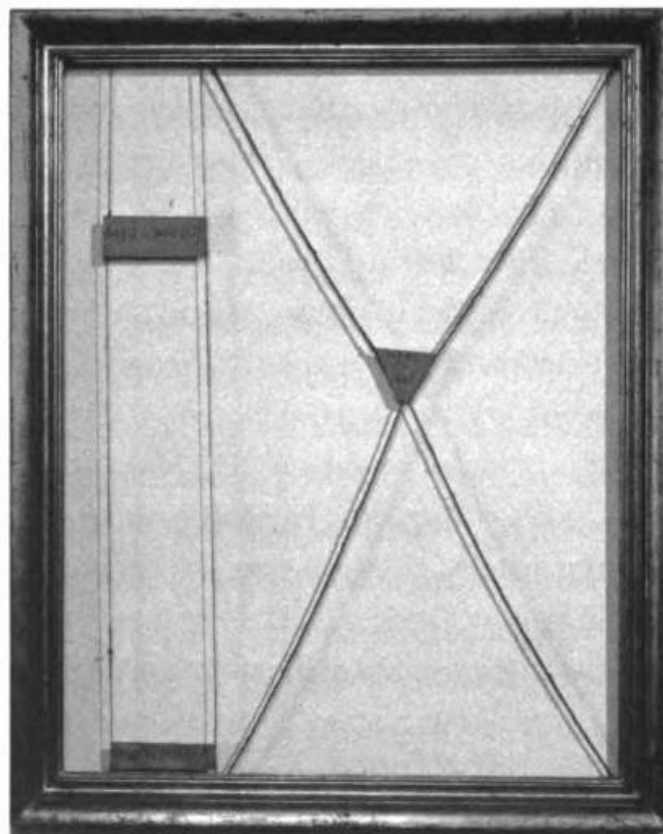
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9. Marcel Duchamp, *Fresh Widow*, 1920, painted wood and black leather glued to glass, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Katherine S. Dreier Bequest



9.

10. Francis Picabia, *Tabac-Rat* (*Tobacco-Rat*), c. 1921, reconstruction c. 1948–1949, cardboard, ink, and twine in wood frame, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris



11. Francis Picabia, Cover of 391
1 (25 January 1917), National Gallery of
Art Library, Washington

12. Francis Picabia, *Tableau Dada*
(*Natures mortes*) (Dada Painting [Still
Life]), 1920, mixed media on card-
board, location unknown, from
Cannibale 1 (1920), National Gallery
of Art Library, Washington

imitates his choice whose distortion constitutes art; why does he not simply sign the choice, instead of posturing, monkey-like, in front of it?"⁷⁵ As early as 1920, Picabia had revisited the long-standing iconography of the painter as a monkeylike mimic of appearances. He created a relief called *Tableau Dada* (*Dada Painting*), showing a toy monkey surrounded by irreverent inscriptions regarding hallowed painters (fig. 12).

Breton likewise began his preface to Ernst's exhibition of "peintopeintures," which opened at the Au Sans Pareil gallery on 3 May 1921, with the observation that "the invention of photography inflicted a mortal blow on the old modalities of expression."⁷⁶ In the context of Dada, this old modernist *topos* resurfaced as a force with which to corner painting and justify all attacks perpetrated against it. These included the use of collage and assemblage, or of industrial or enamel paints with which Picabia had dashed off grand parodies destined for the Salon (*La Feuille de vigne* [*The Grapevine Flower*, Tate Modern, London], and *Le Dresseur d'animaux* [*The Animal Trainer*, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris]) in 1922 and 1923. "The judgment of painting



11.



12.

was thus taken so far and the negation of painting carried out so violently that the impossibility of painting was imposed on painters," Aragon remarked some years later in "La peinture au défi" (Painting Challenged) (1930). If collage artists were continuing to paint traditional pictures, these "are but the reproduction of discoveries made by means of scissors and glue."⁷⁷ Aragon called such works "painted collages," a phrase that precisely describes the working method of both Ernst and Picabia, who reworked the technical and scientific imagery of popular magazines to "build" their composite paintings. The collages and objects of Man Ray, who moved to Paris in 1921 and had his first exhibition by the end of that year, further amplified the interrogation of painting. Simultaneous experimentation by Man Ray, Christian Schad, László Moholy-Nagy, and El Lissitzky yielded the first photograms. Assimilated by Aragon into the short history of modern collage, these works seemed to surpass both painting (by rejecting manual intervention) and photography (by circumventing the trivial realism of the mechanical eye). In the preface to *Champs délicieux* (Delicious Fields), a compendium of twelve rayographs published in 1922 by Soupault's Librairie Six (a bookshop where Man Ray had his first solo exhibition in Paris), Tzara emphasized the innovative quality of a procedure that revealed anew the obsolescence of painting, indeed supplanted it by a simple yet marvelous "physico-chemical product."⁷⁸ As Breton acknowledged at that same moment, Man Ray's invention decidedly opened up "the purview of an art richer in surprises than painting."⁷⁹

Dada Spirit (Surprise, Shock)

This remark is a reminder that surprise was an essential component of *l'esprit nouveau*. "It is through . . . the important place given to surprise," proclaimed Apollinaire in 1917, "that *l'esprit nouveau* distinguishes itself from all the artistic and literary movements that preceded it."⁸⁰ Surprise was the antidote to flagging habits of sustained perception, as well as the catalyst for assimilating the incessant novelties of the modern world. The critic and theoretician Jean Epstein explained as much in an essay of rare acuity, which drew on psychophysical research to demonstrate the modern necessity of compelling attention, of jolting the viewer, and of seeing quickly. Well before Walter Benjamin, Epstein advanced the idea that methods of distraction, less taxing than contemplation, would become the preferred conduit for communicating novel ideas to a broad public.⁸¹ To compel attention and to jolt: little separates the modern aesthetic of surprise from its exaggerated variant; the dadaist shock and commotion, itself born of a desire to work

Albert-Birot lauded film as the vehicle for “a great number of surrealities” (in the sense Apollinaire had recently given to the term).⁸⁵ Picabia paid sincere homage to Albert-Birot’s conceptions, eulogizing his “extremely curious cinematographic inventions,”⁸⁶ which remained at the project stage, even as Picabia worked to realize his own projects in this medium. In 1924, Picabia produced *Entr’acte* (Intermission), a fifteen-minute film made with the young René Clair to accompany the ballet *Rêlache* (Respite), for which Picabia had provided the script, sets, and costumes. In its succession of erratic shots, the speed of its editing (relative to the period standard), its innovative special effects, its cascade of burlesque and unexpected situations, and the overall incoherence of its narration, *Entr’acte* fulfilled Picabia’s paroxysmal intentions for cinema point by point. But no less than *Entr’acte*, the ballet itself contained its share of aggressive surprises—a background stage set was covered by 370 projectors trained on the audience, blinding it more or less intensely according to the rhythm of Satie’s music. “Bring black glasses and something to block your ears,” Picabia had warned,⁸⁷ while colorful promotional posters proclaimed: “Whoever is unhappy is authorized to get the h . . . out.”⁸⁸ At the *Soirée du Coeur à Barbe* of 6 July 1923, Tzara himself had previously shown a short film by Man Ray, *Le Retour à la raison* (The Return to Reason)—which adapted the rayogram technique to film projection—in a program that also included Hans Richter’s abstract film, *Rhythmus 21*, along with Paul Strand’s and Charles Sheeler’s *Manhatta*.

For Benjamin, provoking scandal effects of the same kind as those provoked by films was another means for the dadaists to inflict violent shock on the audience—a violence that was sanctioned, even desired. Indeed, Picabia claimed, “the audience needs to be violated in unusual positions”⁸⁹—and he and his dadaist colleagues had a great deal of experience with techniques of violation. These had been forged through audience participation in various events, from the “Manifestation Dada” of March 1920, to Tzara’s *Soirée du Coeur à Barbe* in mid-1923 at the *Théâtre Michel*, where police intervened to end a brawl that erupted between partisans of Tzara and Breton. The long press reports mirthfully churned out in response to these events evoke, even today, a volatile atmosphere. The journal *Comœdia*, for example, briefed its readers at the conclusion of the “Festival Dada”: “To give you a faint idea of what this session was about, consider that these people subjected us to three hours of interminable speeches read in a monotone concerning steak in brandy, tattoos on a goat’s dropping, bottled policemen, etc., etc. . . . Add to this an unimaginable, unbelievable cacophony produced by beings dressed alternately as negroes, as furnaces, as border signposts, etc. and you will have a vague sense of what the ‘Festival Dada’ might have been.”⁹⁰ The Max Ernst exhibition, conceived by the dadaists as the opening act of the “Grand Dada Season” of 1921, was the occasion for another form of game involving the public: “With their characteristic bad taste, this time the Dadas invoked terror as a means. The stage was in the basement with all the lights turned off in the store; heartbreaking groans could be heard through

a trap door, along with the murmurs of a discussion, of which we were only able to grasp a few snatches: 'One more word and we're bringing you the syllogism. — The poem is an asphyxiation. — In contests of intelligence, it is always the nude woman that wins. . . .' Following the old method of the cabarets of Montmartre, another prankster, hidden behind a chest of drawers, insulted the key figures present in the audience. . . . The Dadas, without ties and gloved in white, walked by again and again — André Breton sparked matches; at every moment Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes yelled: 'It's raining on a skull.' Aragon mewed; Philippe Soupault played hide-and-seek with Tristan Tzara while Benjamin Péret and Charchoune repeatedly shook each other's hand. Standing at the threshold, Jacques Rigaud counted out loud the automobiles and the pearls worn by female audience members."⁹¹

For Epstein, poetic and literary images alike obey a physiological law regarding the degeneration of human instinct: "Habit dulls the reach of words and metaphors, which end by becoming inexpressive."⁹² The solution, according to Epstein, was to raise to one's lips "the loudest megaphone,"⁹³ and to subject the craft of language to the same program of shock and violence. Dada in Paris excelled in such a register, particularly when poetry and other acoustic elements were integrated onstage. Beginning in 1920, Jacques Rivière effected this vast conflation (also advanced by Reverdy in *Nord-Sud* in 1918),⁹⁴ announcing an auspicious name: "Even when they don't dare admit it directly, the Dadas continue to move towards this surrealism that was Apollinaire's ambition. . . . Any word, because it came to mind, expresses the mind, for nothing other than precisely its aptitude—even if it remains incomprehensible—could have brought the mind to express it. Any word is thus justifiable and expressive, whether it arrives after another, or whether it is presented in a particular light, or whether it reveals one thing or another. Here again Dada was correct and profound."⁹⁵ Rivière's perceptive analysis carries a prescient surrealist critique, in the sense later given to the term by Breton. He took the word from the preface of Apollinaire's *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (*The Breasts of Tiresias*), subtitled a "sur-realist drama" and billed as having "two acts and a prologue, choruses, music and costumes in accordance with *l'esprit nouveau*." The performance of this play on 24 June 1917, under the auspices of the journal *SIC*, had rekindled in wartime Paris the spirit of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu roi*.

Surrealisms

Nothing would be more problematic than to acknowledge this filiation with the new Apollinairian spirit. From the moment that the failure of the modernist synthesis attempted in 1922 was acknowledged, Breton burned his bridges and renounced the "assassinated poet's" heritage. The man who had made himself the subtle and attentive interpreter of this "unexpected figure that portends modern taste"⁹⁶ and who had dis-

cerned the links between original surrealism and the unconscious,⁹⁷ referred to Apollinaire only to note, unjustly, the “emptiness of his meditation.”⁹⁸ Much later, when Breton invoked memories of *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, he would merely affirm that the play had permitted measuring “the depth of the pit that was to separate the new generation from that which preceded it”⁹⁹—a sentiment negated by the profundity of Aragon’s review, published at the time of its staging in *SIC*.¹⁰⁰ Yet one must agree with Breton’s lucidity in adding, “just a few more years—three or four—and the rupture between the two modalities of thought opposed here will be sealed.”¹⁰¹

It was precisely during 1924 that the history of Dada in Paris was indisputably implicated in the last episode of the “great confrontation of modern values,” a series of events that ultimately relate to the following question: which faction of the avant-garde—among all those that had participated in the failure to form a common front—would succeed in reassuming control of the modern spirit? This was a crucial question, and one that remained topical, as a special issue of *L’Esprit nouveau* appeared entirely devoted to Apollinaire. It contained numerous documentary pieces, tributes (including Tzara’s), and testimonies (among them Picabia’s). In June, after Breton had announced the end of *Littérature* and that “the usual contributors to this journal intend to devote themselves to surrealism” —actions that were a prelude to the October publication of the “Manifeste du surréalisme” —the quarrel among the pretenders to Apollinaire’s legacy erupted. Indeed, after the poet’s death, neither Reverdy nor Dermée or Albert-Birot could assume Apollinaire’s mantle; Tzara, Picabia, and Ribemont-Dessaignes, meanwhile, pretended to be uninterested in it.

Ivan Goll sparked the quarrel with the publication of the sole issue of *Surréalisme* (October 1924), devoted entirely to returning credit for this term to its proper owner, for Goll accused Breton of having shifted the idea from its original meaning.¹⁰² Goll found support with Reverdy, Dermée, Delaunay, and Albert-Birot, who published the following month the equally ephemeral *Paris*, in which Roch Grey recounted at length how Apollinarian surrealism was born through preparations for the historic evening on which *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* had had its premiere. Dermée followed suit with *Le Mouvement accéléré* (Accelerated Movement), accusing Breton of not only having pilfered Apollinaire’s work, but also of having plagiarized elements of his own theory of “panlyrisme.” In the tone employed by the obscenity-laden pamphlets of the dadaists, Dermée clarified why he would henceforth renounce all claims in this contest: “Mr. A. B. pissed on the bride, we don’t want her anymore. To him then the word surrealism, and may happiness reside in the newlywed’s bed. We are certain that Mr. A. B. won’t father any children.”¹⁰³ In the same publication, Picabia signaled a similarly determined refusal of labels: “I ask of the members of the *Mouvement accéléré* who have decided to live and evolve to sweep out the half-assed cubists, orphists, dadaists and surrealists that want to upstage us, and who set off on an artistic career like one signs on at the Galerie Lafayette or at Olida.”¹⁰⁴

Picabia launched “superréalisme,” then “instantaneïsme” and a *Journal de l’instantanéisme*—in fact the nineteenth and last issue of 391. It was likewise designed to confront Breton’s surrealism, which Picabia saw as nothing but “a poor imitation of Dada.”¹⁰⁵ Lucid to the end, Picabia nonetheless also successively dismissed all the protagonists of the surrealist affair, affirming that “Ivan Goll’s surrealism relates to cubism; that of Breton is simply Dada dressed up as advertising float for the Breton & Co. firm.”¹⁰⁶ Considering these conditions, to date precisely the death and burial of Dada in Paris one has merely to consult an announcement from *Le Mouvement accéléré*: “The friends and acquaintances of Dada, deceased in the prime of life from acute literaturitis, will assemble the 30th of November 1924 at 2:30 around the tomb of their brother in nothingness so as to observe a minute of silence. We will gather together at the entrance gate of the Montparnasse cemetery. —Attendees are asked not to wear any badge of a literary school.”

“There is only one *esprit nouveau*,” Paul Dermée affirmed again in 1927 in the *Documents internationaux de l’esprit nouveau* (International Documents of the New Spirit).¹⁰⁷ The declaration was of course made in vain: this final attempt to proclaim the unity of the modern movement had lost not only any chance to succeed, but also all pertinence. Indeed, by this date the heritage of the “modern values” had long since been sold off.

NOTES

This essay is an abbreviated version of the author’s *Dans la “Confrontation des valeurs modernes”: Une histoire morale de Dada à Paris*.

The essay was translated by Benjamin Leca and Matthew S. Witkovsky.

1 André Breton, “Caractères de l’évolution moderne et ce qui en participe,” in *Les Pas perdus* (The Lost Steps) (Paris, 1924; repr. Paris, 1969), 149–150.

2 Jacques Vaché used the term *esprit nouveau* in a letter written on the eve of his suicide in 1919, later published by Breton in *Littérature*; see “Lettres de Jacques Vaché,” *Littérature* 7 (September 1919): 16.

3 André Breton, “Avant le Congrès de Paris. Un manifeste des revues d’avant-garde,” *Comœdia* (3 January 1922).

4 Breton, “Avant le Congrès de Paris.” The italics and question mark are in the text and obviously emphasize the skepticism of the author and the other signatories.

5 André Breton, “Distances,” in *Les Pas perdus*, 136.

6 The openness to which the text testified was further demonstrated in the diversity of the channels of its diffusion: published on the same day (3 January) in *Comœdia*, the great daily devoted to cultural life, as well as in *L’Ère Nouvelle*, a more restricted publication, the text was reprinted the following month in the various journals controlled by the signatories: *La NRF* (Paulhan), *L’Esprit nouveau* (Ozenfant), and *Aventure* (Vitrac). As for *Littérature*, its publication had been suspended since fall 1921

7 Gathered by Breton, these documents constitute a rich file, which is preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Paris (NAF 14316).

8 Francis Picabia, “Les trompettes de Jérico,” *Comœdia* (19 January 1922), in *Écrits II* (Writings II) (Paris, 1978), 49–50.

9 Filippo T. Marinetti to André Breton, manuscript letter on paper with “Il futurismo” letterhead, adorned with Giacomo Balla’s *Il pugno di Boccioni* (15 February 1922); Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Paris, NAF 14316, no. 110.

10 Theo van Doesburg to André Breton, manuscript letter, 21 February 1922, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Paris, NAF 14316, no. 123.

11 In 1921 Theo van Doesburg, who exchanged magazines with Tristan Tzara, informed the latter that he had arranged in his studio "a table with all the avant-garde and Dada journals for the friends of the modern spirit" (my emphasis). Cited in Marc Dachy, "Dr Doesburg, Mr Bonset et le petit chien Dada," in Theo van Doesburg, *Qu'est-ce que Dada? (What Is Dada)* (Paris, 1923; repr. Paris, 1992), 45.

12 Organizing Committee, "Le Congrès de Paris," *Comoedia* (7 February 1922).

13 Tristan Tzara, "Les dessous de Dada," *Comoedia* (7 March 1922). Tzara here cites the terms of a "Lettre ouverte à Jacques Rivière" (an open letter to Jacques Rivière) published in *Littérature* 10 (December 1919), 3.

14 Tristan Tzara to Roger Vitrac, "Tristan Tzara va cultiver ses vices," *Journal du Peuple* (14 April 1923), in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, 1912–1924 (Paris, 1975), 622.

15 The publication of the journal *Dada* was announced in the following terms in *Cabaret Voltaire* (June 1916): "[*Dada*] has no connection to the war and is attempting to undertake an international modern activity."

16 Reprinted in *Dada Zurich Paris* (Paris, 1981), 21.

17 The editors of *Dada 1* reaffirmed this preexisting history in the pages of their journal, as they had found out about a similar event held in Paris in March 1917 under the aegis of the Art and Liberty of Louise Lara Association, "A propos de la poésie simultanée. Une rectification," *Dada 1* (July 1917): 112.

18 Tristan Tzara, "Note pour les bourgeois," *Cabaret Voltaire* (June 1916), in *Oeuvres complètes*, 22–23. For an interesting stylistic discussion of the relationship of Tzara with simultaneism, see Jean-Pierre Bobilliot, "Du visuel au littéral, quelques propositions," in *Poésure et peinture* (exh. cat., Musée de Marseille) (Marseille, 1993), 96.

19 Louis Aragon, "Projet d'histoire littéraire contemporaine," *Littérature*, new series 4 (1 September 1922): 3–6.

20 Pierre de Massot, *De Mallarmé à 391* (Saint-Raphaël, 1922).

21 Pierre Albert-Birot, extract from a placard poem published in *SIC 11* (November 1916). On 25 February Albert-Birot delivered a lecture at the Académie d'Éducation Physique et Sportive de la Femme, de la Jeune Fille et de l'Enfant, Paris, with the programmatic title, "L'Esprit nouveau contre l'esprit ancien" (The New Spirit against the Old Spirit).

22 Pierre Albert-Birot assessed *Dada 2* in these terms: "Boredom was one day born of uniformity: The presentation of works in this carefully designed journal put these lines on my lips. This completely mechanic regularity in the cadence of poems, notes, bibliographies and administration notices seems to me a parade rhythm. A poem, as the Romanian director of this journal well believes, is a construction, a monument, a whole; why then push in line and make part of something by force. Each poem has its physiognomy[,] why insist on its uniformity, and since it is an artwork why should it not have

a base or an isolating frame like a statue or a painting?" *SIC 3*, no. 25 (January 1918), repr., 192.

23 "Thermomètre Littéraire de 'SIC,'" *SIC 4*, nos. 42–43 (30 March and 15 April 1919), repr., 349.

24 As one learns from the correspondence between Pierre Reverdy and Tristan Tzara; compare Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris* (Paris, 1993), 614. Likewise Breton would affirm to Tzara: "Litt. very much bores me. I would like soon to announce that it is merging with *DADA* and that only one journal under your direction will hereafter be published." See Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, 471.

25 See Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, 613. Dermée, for example, had compared the work of certain modern poets with that of the mentally ill, without necessarily intending offense.

26 See Dermée's correspondence with Tzara in Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, 587–592.

27 Dermée's launching of a survey entitled "Must we burn down the Louvre?" created a strange discordance—Roger Bissière and even Ozenfant himself used one study after another to legitimate the avant-gardes in historical terms by constructing a noble genealogy for them, from Fouquet to Ingres and Cézanne. Paul Dermée, "Doit-on brûler le Louvre?" *L'Esprit nouveau 2* (November 1920).

28 I follow Yves Chevretil Desbiolles' commentary in *Les Revues d'art à Paris 1905–1940* (Art Journals in Paris 1905–1940) (Paris, 1993), 94–96.

29 Tristan Tzara, "Manifeste sur l'amour faible et l'amour amer" (Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love), *La Vie des lettres 4* (May 1921).

- 30 Nicolas Beauduin to Francis Picabia, 3 January 1921, Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris, Dossiers Picabia A11-4, folios 69, 70.
- 31 Francis Picabia, "Ninie," *La Vie des lettres* 3 (April 1921), in *Ecrits* 11, 13; and Picabia, "Zona," *La Vie des lettres* 6 (July 1921), in *Ecrits* 11, 20-21.
- 32 Alexandre Mercereau, "Francis Picabia," *Les Hommes du jour* (November 1920).
- 33 André Breton to Tristan Tzara, 18 February 1919; see Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, 458.
- 34 Louis Aragon, "Charlot mystique," *Nord-Sud* 15 (May 1918), n.p.
- 35 Philippe Soupault, "Une idylle aux champs. Charlie Chaplin," *Littérature* 12 (February 1920): 29. Soupault would also author *Charlot* (Paris, 1931).
- 36 Ivan Goll, *Die Chaplinade* (Dresden and Berlin, 1920). Re-edited as "La Chaplinade ou Charlot poète, poème, drame, film," *La Vie des lettres* 7 (July 1925): 535-551; and Goll, *Le Nouvel Orphée* (Paris, 1923), 9-41 (with illustrations by Léger, Delaunay, and Grosz).
- 37 Cited by Eric Robertson in "Yvan Goll et la poésie cinématographique," *Europe* 82, no. 899 (March 2004): 98.
- 38 As Jean Soly informs us, "Plus fort que le futurisme! Le 'Mouvement Dada' et Charlot, son prophète," clipping without provenance, Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris, A11 (5), folio 2, no. 6.
- 39 Recounted by F.V., "Quelques mots sur le mouvement 'Dada,'" *L'Ère nouvelle* 10 (February 1920).
- 40 See Guillaume Apollinaire, "La loi de renaissance," *La Démocratie sociale* 7 (July 1912), in *Oeuvres en prose complètes*, 964-965; Maurice Raynal, "L'exposition de la 'section d'or,'" *La Section d'or* 1 (9 October 1912).
- 41 Picabia's correspondence with Tzara in November and December 1919 contains several allusions to this project: "We have just re-founded the 'Section d'or' in which painters, writers, sculptors and musicians participate; I signed you up, of course. We are going to have a first demonstration in January and another much more important one in March. I assume that you will be in Paris at that time"; "At the first gathering of the Section d'or (last Saturday), absolutely disgusting things happened. Survage declared that he was the Section d'or, Birot and Roch Grey very energetically opposed the Dada soirée. I will plan with Dermée tomorrow a general gathering for next Saturday. If Roch Grey remains in the Section d'or, I will of course resign" (between 21 and 25 February 1920). These documents are reproduced in Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, 524-529.
- 42 Paul Dermée, "Premier et dernier rapport du secrétaire de la Section d'or. Excommuniés," 391 12 (March 1920). Paul Dermée was in charge of organizing a literary section of the Section d'or; he had asked that one of the three evenings planned for poetry and literature be reserved for Dada, a demand that was initially accepted by the organizing committee, which was composed of Gleizes, Archipenko, and Survage.
- 43 Dermée, "Premier et dernier rapport." Pierre Albert-Birot recalled this incident to the press only two days later, specifying unequivocally that "The group named Dada is not part of the Section d'Or group." *L'intransigent* (27 February 1920), 2.
- 44 Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, *Déjà jadis, ou du mouvement dada à l'espace abstrait* (Already Long Ago, or From the Dada Movement to the Realm of Abstraction) (Paris, 1958), 36, 38.
- 45 Francis Picabia, "La bonne peinture," *L'Ère nouvelle* (20 August 1922), in *Ecrits* 11, 79.
- 46 These events are recounted by Picabia in "Une protestation de Picabia," *Le Journal du Peuple* (19 December 1919), in *Ecrits* 1, 184.
- 47 Francis Picabia, "Origines du mouvement Dada," *Comoedia* (3 April 1920), in *Ecrits* 1, 219.
- 48 Francis Picabia, "Marihuana," *Comoedia* (21 December 1921), in *Ecrits* 11, 43.
- 49 Francis Picabia, "Anticoq," *The Little Review* (Spring 1922), in *Ecrits* 11, 66.
- 50 Francis Picabia, "Le génie et le fox-terrier," *Comoedia* (16 May 1922), in *Ecrits* 11, 72.
- 51 André Breton, "Max Ernst," in *Les Pas perdus*, 82.
- 52 Anonymous press clipping, Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris, Dossier Picabia, A11 [4].
- 53 Albert Gleizes, "L'Affaire Dada," *Action* 3 (April 1920): 26-32.
- 54 Cited in Léon Somville, *Devanciers du surréalisme. Les groupes d'avant-garde et le mouvement poétique 1912-1925* (The Precursors of Surrealism: The Avant-garde Groups and the Poetic Movement 1912-1925) (Geneva, 1971), 148.

55 "Un acte nécessaire," *Littérature* 10 (December 1919), 1. On 4 December 1919, Breton sought to implicate Tzara in his defense of Marinetti: "We are organizing a march to protest Marinetti's arrest. Could you send us the affirmations of support that you might be able to collect and a tribute to be read on the stage of the Renaissance or the Odéon?" See Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, 472.

56 Francis Picabia, "A propos du 'tactilisme,'" *Comoedia* (18 January 1921), in *Écrits* 11, 11. This text answers the publication of Marinetti's conference text ("Le Tactilisme. Un art nouveau inventé par le futurisme," *Comoedia* [16 January 1921]), which had appeared in the same journal two days earlier.

57 "Le futurisme est une imitation du Mouvement Dada," "Dada aura ta peau," "Va coucher avec Paul Verlaine," "Cache ton art," and so forth. See "Dada reçoit Marinetti à l'Oeuvre," *Littérature* (18 March 1921): 20.

58 Numerous accounts of this session appeared in the press and reflect the supercharged atmosphere. See, for example: R. V., "Une séance futuriste," *Paris-Midi* (15 January 1921); André Rigaud, "M. Marinetti nous révèle le 'tactilisme,'" *Comoedia* (15 January 1921); and C.-G. Sarti, "Les dadas de Paris contre Marinetti," *Don Quichotte* (15 January 1921). Marinetti, nonetheless, would find some lucid supporters in the Crapouillot: "But at the Crapouillot people could be fair, André Varagnac proved it, as he traced back to Marinetti the bulk of the cubisto-dadaist innovations.... Directly (Blaise Cendrars) or indirectly (through the Apollinarian junction), the men and schools said to be avant-garde owe their liberty to the futurist revolution. Marinetti

remained the great inventor. What is viable in the attempts of today, it was he who brought it forth yesterday. It should be violently proclaimed." See Dominique Braga, "Le Futurisme," *Le Crapouillot* (15 April 1920).

59 Francis Picabia, "M. Picabia se sépare des Dadas," *Comoedia* (11 May 1921), in *Écrits* 11, 14–15.

60 Francis Picabia, "Dada aux champs," *Le Petit Parisien* (26 November 1922), in *Écrits* 11, 97.

61 Pierre et Paul, "Le Dadaïsme au Guatemala," *Le Soir* (18 April 1920). See also Paul Bruyat, "L'autre péril," *Le Petit Méridional* (7 May 1920): "This attempt at sabotage, the most dangerous and audacious that has ever occurred, it is called cubism, futurism, dadaism, and this reveals a state of mind that is very worrisome."

62 Maurice Schwob, "Le Dada du Boche. Cheval de Troie moderne," *Le Phare* (26 April 1920).

63 Anonymous, "Le 'complot' aux assises," *Le Peuple* (8 March 1921).

64 See, for example, Léon Daudet, "Comment on annihile une 'bonne Chambre,'" *L'Action française* (24 July 1921); M. du C., "Le Dadaïsme," *Le Moniteur du Calvados* (26 June 1920).

65 André Gide, "Dada," *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (1 April 1920), 478–479.

66 Marcel Arland, "Sur un nouveau mal du siècle," *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (1 February 1924).

67 Massot, *De Mallarmé à 391*, 125. This work is jointly dedicated to Duchamp and Picabia.

68 Pierre de Massot, *Essai de critique théâtrale* (1922), in "Dossier Pierre de Massot," *Étant donné* 2 (1999): 143.

69 Massot, *De Mallarmé à 391*, 132.

70 Picabia was reprising Remy de Gourmont's metaphor from *La Physique de l'amour* (The Physics

of Love) (Paris, 1903). From 1918, Picabia borrowed numerous titles and inscriptions for his mecano-morphic paintings from Remy de Gourmont. See Arnauld Pierre, Francis Picabia. *La peinture sans aura* (Francis Picabia: Painting without Aura) (Paris, 2002), 153–157.

71 Guillaume Apollinaire, "L'esprit nouveau et les poètes" (1917), in *Œuvres en prose complètes*, 949. Apollinaire kept abreast of the evolution of Picabia's ideas through Gabrielle Buffet, Picabia's wife. Apollinaire wrote to her on 21 July 1915: "Send me the issue of 291 with *La Fille née sans mère*; it interests me enormously." See Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, 581.

72 Francis Picabia (no title), *Bonsoir* (20 January 1922), in *Écrits* 11, 51.

73 In 1921 Picabia declared ironically to Dermée: "Let us posit that in fact what makes the work of art is the frame. Certain persons first paint the frame with care and—of what remains of color on their palette—they paint the picture. There are some smart alecs that bring with them to the country a frame to capture landscapes. Why not rather use a black monocle with rectangular lenses that could be placed vertically for figures and horizontally for landscapes?" See Paul Dermée, "Vernissage au Whisky Picabia," *La Vie des Lettres*, April 1921.

74 Francis Picabia, "L'oeil cacodylate," *Comoedia* (23 November 1921): 2, in *Écrits* 11, 37.

75 Francis Picabia, "L'oeil cacodylate," *Comoedia* (23 November 1921): 2, in *Écrits* 11, 37.

76 Breton, "Max Ernst," in *Les Pas perdus*, 81.

77 Breton, "Max Ernst," in *Les Pas perdus*, 46.

- 78 Tristan Tzara, "La photographie à l'envers: Man Ray" (1922), in *Lampisteries, précédé de Sept manifestes dada* (Toadyisms, Preceded by Seven Dada Manifestos) (Paris, 1978), 130.
- 79 André Breton, "Caractères de l'évolution moderne et ce qui en participe" (1922), in *Les Pas perdus*, 154.
- 80 Guillaume Apollinaire, "L'esprit nouveau et les poètes" (1917), in *Oeuvres en prose complètes*, 949.
- 81 Jean Epstein, *La Poésie d'aujourd'hui. Un nouvel état d'intelligence* (Poetry Today. A New State of Intelligence) (Paris, 1921), 192.
- 82 On these points, see Massot and the correspondence between Breton and Tzara. "Dadaism, which was the contemporary movement's last formula, was born out of boredom," is the first sentence of a chapter in his book, where he proposed to summarize what "l'esprit dada" was (*De Mallarmé à 391*, 123). André Breton wrote to Tristan Tzara on 7 October 1919, in response to one of Tzara's letters, where the latter made a similar avowal: "All my efforts are momentarily directed in this direction: to vanquish boredom"; see Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, 469. On depression as a disease of the modern soul exposed to the jolts of urban life see Caroline A. Jones, "The Sex of the Machine: Mecanomorphie Art, New Women and Francis Picabia's Neurasthenic Cure," in Caroline A. Jones and Peter Galison, eds., *Picturing Science, Producing Art* (New York and London, 1998), 145–180.
- 83 Epstein, *La Poésie d'aujourd'hui*, 203.
- 84 Epstein, *La Poésie d'aujourd'hui*, 35. Epstein here draws from Hermann Ebbinghaus, *Précis de psychologie* (Handbook of Psychology) (Paris, 1910).
- 85 Pierre Albert-Birot, "Du Cinéma," *SIC* 49–50 (October 1919): 388. Examples in this context are Paul Dermée's "cinematographic poems" (*Films*, 1919), or Blaise Cendrars' *La Fin du monde filmée par l'Ange Notre-Dame* (The End of the World Filmed by the Notre-Dame Angel), 1920, illustrated by Fernand Léger, or Ivan Goll's kinodram (cinematographic drama). Goll would later turn films into the surrealist art par excellence: "Exemple de surréalisme: le cinéma," *Surréalisme 1* (October 1924), repr. 2004, with preface and foreword by Jean Bertho, x–xi.
- 86 Francis Picabia, "Opinions et portraits," 391 19 (October 1924).
- 87 Francis Picabia, 391 19 (October 1924).
- 88 This is according to Rolf de Maré, cited in Sanouillet, *Francis Picabia et 391*, 170.
- 89 Francis Picabia, *Le Pilhaou-Thibou* (10 July 1921), in *Écrits II*, 25.
- 90 Asté d'Esparbes, "La Manifestation 'Dada,'" *Comoedia* (27 May 1920).
- 91 Asté d'Esparbes, "La Saison 'Dada' est ouverte. Un vernissage mouvementé," *Comoedia* (7 May 1921).
- 92 Epstein, *La Poésie d'aujourd'hui*, 50–51.
- 93 Epstein, *La Poésie d'aujourd'hui*, 53. "Dadaphone" is the title of *Dada 7*, published in Paris in March 1920.
- 94 "The image is a pure creation of the mind. It cannot be born from a comparison; it is rather born of the rapprochement of two realities that are more or less distant. The more the relationships between the two realities are distant and exact, the more powerful the image—the more it will have an emotive power and a poetic reality." See Pierre Reverdy, "L'Image," *Nord-Sud* 13 (March 1918).
- 95 Jacques Rivière, "Reconnaissance à Dada," *La Nouvelle Revue Française* 83 (1 August 1920): 221, 234.
- 96 André Breton, "Guillaume Apollinaire" (1917), in *Les Pas perdus*, 28.
- 97 André Breton, "Pour Dada" (1920), in *Les Pas perdus*, 73.
- 98 André Breton, "Caractères de l'évolution moderne et ce qui en participe" (1922), in *Les Pas perdus*, 144.
- 99 André Breton, *Entretiens* (Discussions) (1952; repr. Paris, 1969), 35.
- 100 Louis Aragon, "Le 24 juin 1917," *SIC* 27 (March 1918): 206.
- 101 André Breton, *Entretiens*, 35.
- 102 Ivan Goll, "Manifeste du surréalisme," *Surréalisme 1*, v111–1x.
- 103 Paul Dermée, "Pour en finir avec le surréalisme," *Le Mouvement accéléré 1* (4 November 1924): 2.
- 104 Francis Picabia, "Première heure," *Le Mouvement accéléré 1* (4 November 1924), in *Écrits II*, 158–159.
- 105 Francis Picabia, "Opinions et portraits," 391 19 (October 1924), in *Écrits II*, 152. This last statement can be related to that by Ribemont-Dessaignes in *Le Mouvement accéléré*: "A little flank of Dada, that is what surrealism is."
- 106 Francis Picabia, "Opinions et portraits," in *Écrits II*, 158.
- 107 In 1927, in collaboration with Michel Seuphor and Enrico Prampolini, Paul Dermée published the sole issue of *Documents internationaux de l'esprit nouveau* (repr. Paris, 1977).

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Operating at their limits, even antiquated media become sensitive enough to register the signs and indices of a situation.

— FRIEDRICH A. KITTLER¹

The most magnetic record of Dada's community we have today is likely the many group photographs: Tristan Tzara lofted, grinning, onto the shoulders of Hans Arp and Hans Richter on a Zurich street; one of the Paris branch's mercurial factions assembled as if in a yearbook, tendering mysterious objects with equanimity, among them a signed painting (in another version a photograph) of Man Ray as a stand-in for the artist, busy snapping the shutter; John Heartfield dwarfed by George Grosz, or the diminutive Hannah Höch alongside a beamingly confident Raoul Hausmann at the unveiling of the Erste Internationale Dada-Messe (First International Dada Fair) in Berlin. These playful images convey the intense camaraderie that unfolded within small circles, at daily meetings and lengthy discussions in apartments and cafés.

An immense amount of epistolary material exists from the Dada years as well, however, and it tells a largely different story. Much activity in the movement took place at a distance, developing through exchanges between individuals who met in person only later or intermittently. Dada affiliates carried on a massive correspondence, feeding one another press clippings, publicizing their activities, and, above all, collecting submissions for inordinately ambitious exhibition and publishing projects. It is this transmissions network, properly understood, that shaped a handful of local groupings into the phenomenon known as the Dada movement and gave it a radical purpose: to test the meanings of community and artistic identity in this new age of media and technological warfare.

Dada would have been impossible without the postal system, that conduit for poems, manifestos, and works of art shared around Europe and across the ocean by peripatetic or displaced members of the group. Books and journals, or texts, images, and sometimes objects to be published in books and journals, represent the overwhelming majority of these postal items. "Dear Friends, I am sending you this poem," begins the first known letter from Italian poet and (naturally) journal editor Francesco Meriano to Tzara and Marcel Janco in November 1916. "Do what you want with it; I know you are intelligent and that you will like it." Meriano offered to swap his own revue, *Brigata*, for books by Tzara and Janco, and he affirmed, "Your artistic movement in Switzerland is very important; so I would be glad to help you."² Tzara adopted a similar method of in-

roduction: "Monsieur Valloton [sic] sent me your address," he wrote to Francis Picabia on official Dada stationery in August 1918, "and I take the liberty of informing you that I edit in Zurich a publication of modern art, 'Dada'...." After listing the magazine's many French collaborators (all likewise correspondents whom he had never met), Tzara solicited Picabia's contribution for "a large-format album with a large print run."³ Picabia had only a small drawing and a few lines of poetry in that "album," the landmark third issue of *Dada* (Fall 1918), which inaugurated the striking typography and rebellious proclamations that brought the movement its greatest fame. His work was magnificently represented, however, in *Anthologie Dada/Dada 4–5* the following spring; that issue included three full-page drawings, among them one of a disassembled alarm clock that appeared on the inside title page. Picabia and Tzara finally met in a Zurich hotel during the production of that piece, or so the story goes—but Picabia returned soon afterward to Paris, and throughout the first half of 1919 he peppered Tzara with pleas to receive copies of the journal.⁴

One would be mistaken to think of these piles of correspondence only as documentary background, or as a substitute for personal meetings and more formal collaborations. Were that the case, Dada would not be fundamentally dissimilar to the many international art formations, from symbolism or expressionism to the amateur photography movement, that evolved around printed and written exchanges. Dadaists instead focused on the very means of those exchanges, with the result that letters, postcards, and the mail system itself became sites of experimental practice that enabled new forms of creativity. Journals, meanwhile, developed into the principal vehicle for broadcasting dadaist identity, something akin to relay stations in this alternative pathway of transmissions.⁵

The projects discussed here—letters by Man Ray and Theo van Doesburg, the periodicals *Dada* and *391*, "FaTaGaGa" works by Max Ernst and Hans Arp, among others—address different aspects of this subcultural communications enterprise. Yet they share an abiding concern to interrogate the production and distribution of information in the media age, and to build upon that interrogation toward new artistic possibilities. In regard to production, the dadaists systematically augmented the distortion or "noise" generated by shifts of medium, showing particular attentiveness to interchanges between the handmade or handwritten and its transposition into print. As for distribution, affiliates of Dada rendered artistically meaningful the qualities of distance, delay, and censorship or other institutional interventions that are built into postal and telecommunications operations. Incorporating these patterns of interference, the dadaists created an operational network, a new kind of artistic formation that is de-centered or dispersed and yet moves roughly in-synch, like a weak atomic constellation or an eccentric mechanical device—images figured within the Dada circuit itself, in Picabia's drawings *Molecular Construction* and *Dada Movement* (see figs. 6, 7).

In their pervasive exhibition of interference and noise, the journals and other tele-collaborations of the Dada movement demonstrate that their makers did not just rise to the challenge of E. M. Forster's dictum, "only connect," but also tested the very nature and meaning of connection in the first media age. Dada's members both furthered and frustrated what Friedrich Kittler has more recently called the modern shift from writing to data streams, from matter to information. Kittler argues that in the late 1800s, with the advent of means to store the flow of thought and experience as electric signals, sensory perception became compartmentalized for the first time into sets of transmissible phenomena. Sight, sound, and language no longer needed to be "translated" in writing, which had formerly served as the universal intermediary for all sensory experience. Instead, experiences were "transposed" for preservation or communication through mechanical means—an epochal change in apprehending the world that created a contemporary media sensibility. Kittler's triumvirate of storage and preservation devices—typewriter, gramophone, and film camera—divided hands from paper, ears from eyes, bodies from the natural flow of time. They paved the way for a "mechanization of information which—in the hindsight of stories—already made today's self-recursive number stream possible."⁶

Although the members of Dada flirted with Kittler's principal media machines, they did not have regular access to them. A handful of films and film projects, one "single" by Kurt Schwitters of his *Ursonate*, released as the thirteenth installment of the journal *Merz*, and a typewriter portrait of Walter Serner by Christian Schad (fig. 1), constitute isolated if indicative examples of Dada experimentation with technologies of their time.⁷ But antiquated media can also confront a changed "situation" (the word has military overtones), as Kittler points out, if stretched to their limits. This is what the dadaists did in their journals and other mailings, operating contemporaneously with the first full-scale media war. Vaunting crossed signals of all kinds, they amplified the communications breakdown that characterized this conflict, a military contest precipitated by misdirected telegrams, which both sides began by severing cable lines and blocking signals around the world.⁸

The Dada media circuit played off the wartime structures around it, responding to them with critical echoes of their own means and effects. Dadaists disseminated messages through print, handwriting, and the occasional telegram, while military commanders directed troops—also remotely—via the more technologically advanced devices of radio, wireless telegraphy, and telephone. They primitivized apparatuses from the camera to the printing press, delighting in fuzzy pictures and typesetters' mistakes, even as an emergent military-industrial complex strove to minimize what Kittler calls the "noise of the real" in the service of reconnaissance and targeted destruction.⁹ They trumpeted art and poetry as cryptic mysteries, mocking a world divided into clear but censored channels for the public, and encoded battlefield lines kept silent, paradoxically, to hush



the noise of war.¹⁰ The dadaists realized that “noise,” a concept incommensurable with traditional notions of artistic expression, is a function of mechanical interfaces—and they *decreased* the signal-to-noise ratio precisely when the perfection of communications held urgent tactical importance. Dadaists thus not only established or furthered alternative transmissions pathways, but they also turned to creative ends manifold sources of friction that it is the business of networks (particularly in wartime) to regulate or remove.

Dada network operations are easily traced among the artists who interacted from a distance with one or another of the movement’s centers. Man Ray, for example, still in New York in 1921, formalized his ties to Dada in Paris by issuing the journal *New York Dada* with the help of Marcel Duchamp. A letter from Duchamp started the project, a sly request sent to Tzara via Picabia for “authorization” to use the word Dada in the title; Tzara’s page-long reply then appeared as the journal’s centerfold text, surmounted by a racy image that Man Ray boldly called his *Dadaphoto*. (This exchange offers a straight-

forward example of the Dada publishing circuit, wherein a solicitation by letter yields a handwritten epistle destined for transposition into a public, printed address.) *New York Dada* appeared in a single issue in April 1921, to general indifference. Man Ray prepared a new letter to Tzara soon afterward, claiming, “Dada cannot live in New York. All New York is dada, and will not tolerate a rival, will not notice dada. . . . So dada in New York must remain a secret.”¹¹

The status of “a secret” may not have been all bad, given the image cultivated within Dada of the movement as a sort of brotherhood. Man Ray sought full membership in that private society, an effort in which displays of sexual radicalism seemed sure to help. His letter to Tzara, which has been much discussed and reproduced in recent years, includes a photographic still from a rite of initiation: a film (never completed) of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven shaving her pubis. Man Ray selected a frame in which Freytag-Loringhoven’s pose approximates a capital letter A, then placed it inside his handwritten word “l’amerique.” The photograph, doubling with his own, lowercase a, forces a confrontation between the mechanical and the handmade that is highly characteristic of Dada transmissions. With this composition of manuscript text and manufactured image, and the border penned in small capitals above it (“merdelamerdelamer . . .,” a pun on mer/merde/amer-ique), the top third of the page looks a good deal like letterhead, like the stationery designed in several Dada centers to officialize the movement. Partway between a written and a printed sheet, Man Ray’s letter with the scandalous photograph may itself be understood as an initiatory tribute sent from “bitter” America to Paris, the precedent-setting capital of *merde*.

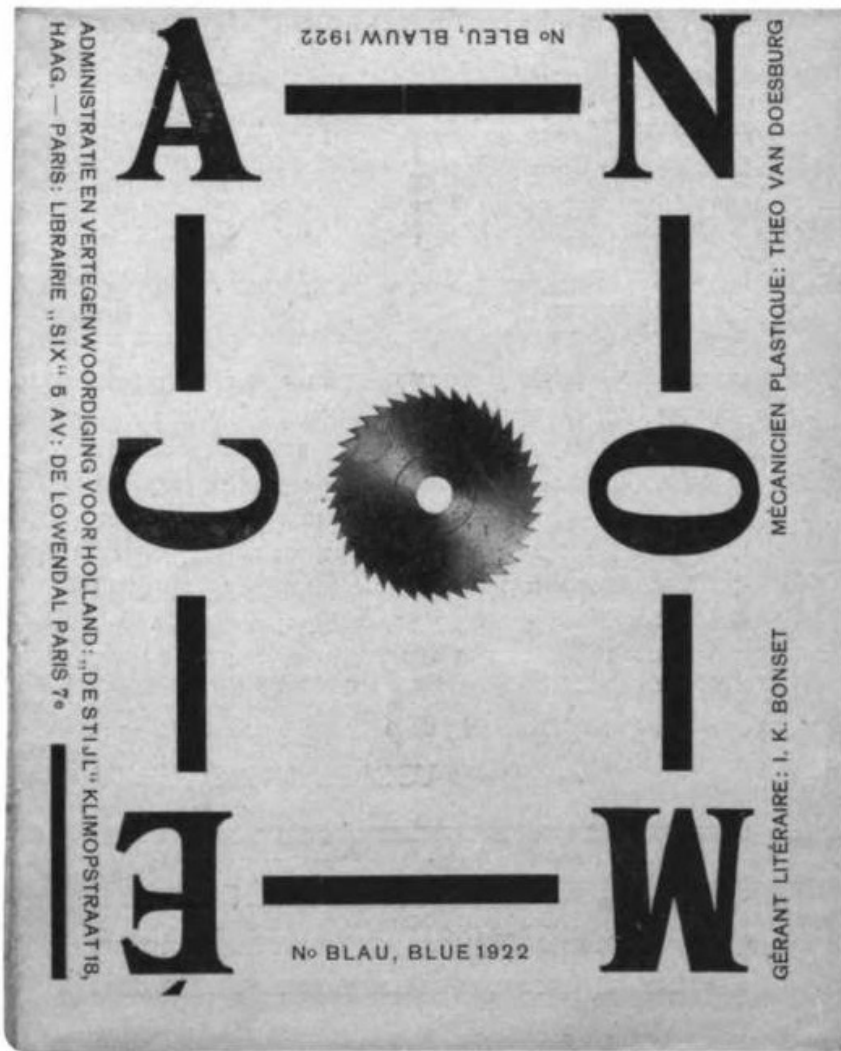
Man Ray’s missive, which enunciated its author’s dadaist identity and conveyed his aspiration for group membership, is original in form but typical in structure. Many declarations of solidarity with Dada were made in writing and likewise became closely associated with journals. The Belgian poet Clément Pansaers wrote to Tzara in December 1919, addressing him as “Monsieur le Rédacteur en Chef,” and offered to contribute to “Da Dada [sic], which I neither have seen nor could obtain, which seems to correspond, though, with my poetic and artistic conception, according to what I have understood from some lines of bad criticism.” Tzara promptly shipped copies of *Dada* to Pansaers and apparently asked him in return for local press clippings on the movement. In subsequent letters to Tzara and Pierre Albert-Birot, editor of the Paris journal *SIC*, Pansaers asked if he might “centralize everything concerning Dada for Belgium” by “tak[ing] care of the distribution of your magazine. . . .”¹² In that letter, Pansaers also asked if he might be

listed as a “member/editor/correspondent” for Dada; he was accordingly inserted into the list of “Dada presidents” for the sixth issue, which was printed in Paris in February 1920.

Pansaers’ assertion that he knew of Dada only as refracted by “some lines of bad criticism” was not, in fact, true. As he later recounted, Carl Einstein had told him about the Dada group in Berlin when the two men met there just after the war. Pansaers apparently declined at that time to join the movement.¹³ Indeed, he kept his distance from dadaists in person until he had announced his sympathies in writing. Citing the distortions of the press as a cover for his own misinformation, Pansaers took advantage of the anonymity of epistolary exchange to stake out his position within the Dada network in comfortable isolation. Following his declaration, his participation in the larger community would be realized in print and from a distance, as the Belgian correspondent for Dada and the person responsible for disseminating the magazine there. Tzara accepted this pledge of affiliation, happy to have a new outpost and apparently not greatly troubled over the question of Pansaers’ dadaist bona fides. (Pansaers broke violently with the Dada circle in April 1921, just two weeks after he moved to Paris, claiming philosophical differences.¹⁴)

The Dada career of De Stijl leader Theo van Doesburg gives a sustained example of the creative possibilities afforded by affiliation with this mail-order avant-garde. Van Doesburg saw something of Dada while in Paris in February and March 1920, but he established contact with the movement only by letter, after his return to Holland. He first wrote Picabia, commenting admiringly on works he had seen at the recent Salon des Indépendants, and received from Picabia a reproduction of one painting, which he used to illustrate a review of that exhibition for the daily paper *De Nieuwe Amsterdammer*.¹⁵ Van Doesburg’s fascination with Dada, a movement he understood as a mix of nonobjective art and blasphemous scandal, grew steadily throughout that year. Instead of modifying his reputation as an advocate of morally uplifting abstraction, changing the course of De Stijl or abandoning it altogether, Van Doesburg decided to channel his newfound, abject love of Dada into a secret alter ego. In a letter to Tzara that June, Van Doesburg mentioned casually that “one of my literary collaborators, I. K. Bonset, had the intention of establishing a dadaist journal, but he lacks money, time, and people.”¹⁶ Van Doesburg kept the character Bonset in circulation for many years thereafter and succeeded in hiding the fiction for more than two years because, as Craig Eliason observes, he interacted with fellow dadaists largely through the mail.¹⁷

Van Doesburg used Bonset most simply as a carnivalesque literary voice, the mischievous doppelgänger to his public identification with hygienic visual art. He signed Bonset’s name, for example, to scabrous poems he sent to the editors of *Bleu* in Italy and to Tzara for the latter’s *Dadaglobe* project, once again “a large [international] book . . . in a large edition” funded by “a large publishing house,” for which, Tzara intimated to Van Doesburg, his own work was a bit tame.¹⁸ But as putative editor of the journal *Mécano*, Bonset developed a working personality. Acting on behalf of his alter ego, Van Doesburg



2a-b. Theo van Doesburg, *Mécano* 2 (July 1922), I. K. Bonset, ed., Merrill C. Berman Collection, New York

2a.



2b.

3. (Clockwise from upper left:) André Breton, René Hilsum, Louis Aragon, and Paul Éluard with a copy of *Dada 3* (Summer 1919), photographer unknown, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris

solicited submissions from dadaists and ex-dadaists in Berlin, Paris, and Hannover; Bauhaus master László Moholy-Nagy; founding poets of the little reviews *Blast* (London) and *Broom* (New York); and others (figs. 2). Such an eclectic group would never have collaborated in person, for the dynamics of direct interaction favor declarations of unity and shared guiding principles (or bitter arguments, purges, and rejections). With his contributors pulled together from remote locations, however, and Bonset as his fence, so to speak, Van Doesburg mapped a separate Dada constellation that held an international variety of advanced artists within a common orbit.

Man Ray, Pansaers, and Van Doesburg all “connected” with Dada at a distance, taking advantage of anonymity and gaps in awareness to fashion identities they variously embellished, rejected, or denied when they came into direct contact with the movement. Significantly, all three men channeled their ambitions through Tzara, the preeminent impresario of an expanded Dada network. As “director” of the movement’s banner publication, *Dada*, Tzara undertook to internationalize his product through a low-budget campaign that entailed incessant exchanges of poetry and artwork, but also news, reviews, and mutual publicity with other journal editors, principally in Italy and France. Published in Zurich from 1917 to 1919, *Dada* became the main relay in a circuit across which flurries of correspondence from all directions yielded hundreds of copies of a magazine likewise sent out in all directions, prompting yet further expressions of affinity. André Breton and his cohorts in Paris, for instance, clowned in beards and glasses while brandishing a copy of *Dada 3* to signal their solidarity—again figured through performance and disguise—with this groundbreaking periodical (fig. 3). At the same time, remote collaboration brought a host of difficulties, ranging from the imposition of licenses or confiscation of “enemy” mailings, to misunderstandings between mutually invisible contributors working in different languages and artistic environments.¹⁹ Added to these external hindrances was the material impedance generated by shifts in medium, in this case the transposition of manuscripts, drawings, or photographic reproductions to printed text and images. Registering these obstacles, Tzara and his partners, Arp and Janco, made *Dada* a vehicle for interrogating the very formation of their new community.

Dada emerged from the ashes of the Cabaret Voltaire, birthplace of the word “dada” and locus classicus of the movement as such. The first magazine to publicize this



3-

new word was titled after the Cabaret, and it remained close to the events of that performance venue. For this reason, it seems, Tzara considered *Cabaret Voltaire* an artifact of lived experience rather than a periodical as such. “Please correct,” he wrote to Giuseppe Raimondi, editor of the short-lived magazine *Avanscoperta* (*Reconnaissance*), as he canvassed for contributions to the inaugural issue of *Dada* in early 1917: “[*Cabaret Voltaire*] is not a journal but a documentary publication on the cabaret we founded here.”²⁰ *Dada* would be different. It would include submissions from near and far, and would synthesize all manner of genuinely advanced work, which, as Tzara explained to Raimondi, meant “things must be abstract and have real worth.”²¹ Rather than simply storing local memories, the new journal would receive and transmit values far and wide.

Aside from its international connections in poetry and the visual arts, Tzara’s new magazine at first did not stand out. But Tzara came to have more ambitious ideas about the look of his publication, and there is reason to think he did so by reflecting on the material process of its compilation and diffusion. A truly remarkable letter of June 1918 to Paul Dermée, founder of the publishing house *L’Esprit nouveau* and initially one of Tzara’s strongest contacts in Paris, shows the self-consciousness that would manifest itself both formally and structurally in the forthcoming issue of *Dada*. “Your letter gave me the joy of a cool morning,” Tzara begins this summer correspondence, “one can tell

you're returning from the army... a firmness and an initiative that is impulsive and decided. — So I expect we will get along well. — I readily agree to a collaboration... Shall I announce you beginning with [Dada 3]: Editor in chief and representative in France / P.D. Paris etc. ———?" Pursuing this collegial confidence, Tzara then unveils his plan for the new issue, revealing in the process his tremendous ambition and his goals. His first sentences illustrate his method of delegating responsibility from the safe haven of Zurich, an ironic distortion of the new military practice whereby commanders, hidden in bunkers, wired or radioed their instructions to the front lines.

I need for this issue: your unpublished poems critical pieces on everything of potential interest (news as well, if you think it necessary). — You can see that one needs to move quickly... For subsequent volumes, please gather work by French literary figures. I give you complete freedom and I am sure you will do what is best.

The only difficulty, it seems to me, is with postal communication, fairly irregular; I advise you always to keep a copy of all manuscripts you send me. For the images, we need: photographs, drawings, woodcuts. As prices for copy prints are very high, it would be good if some of the contributors could make the prints in Paris — (or get ones that have already been published but are not well known). In any case, a certain number can be charged to Dada...

Having offered Dermée a post in his organization, Tzara evidently feels comfortable assigning him field duties, including measures to safeguard against losses in transmission, for communication is the lifeblood of the entire enterprise. Tzara's mention of an expense account ("charge it to Dada") and his phrasing more generally suggest that Dada and its eponymous journal are organized on a corporate model — a shift in the definition of artistic community that goes hand in hand with the reconception of artistic expressivity as information flow. Tzara goes on to share with Dermée an extended reflection on practical matters and their role in shaping a revolutionary creative sensibility:

ADMINISTRATION

Beyond my personal disorder (a sort of metalogical order) there is the order of the journal's administration; supervising copies and money. Dada has existed until now on the strength of its own resources. — New resources will permit an expanded journal, printing anthologies, publications, manifestos. We can talk together about these things. —

Please let me know how many copies to send you of each issue. How many for reviewers, etc. and how many for bookstores. You know that the latter demand bills and certain formalities. — Business is also an element of poetry, like pain or farce — it facilitates the existence of new art.

We must act with the precise, geometric exactitude of the cubist painters. Please make a detailed accounting for each issue and return the remaindered copies. I think you can understand that these matters are important. —

Sending the volumes poses the same difficulty. Many packages sent to Paris bookstores were confiscated for no reason, although, may God and my own activities serve as witness, I love France and wish it Victory. I am not a politician, documenting this in *Dada* — (I don't like tendentious literature) but I have always done it within the measure of my poetic abilities, whenever there was a meeting of politics and art.

In my opinion, you should do your utmost to obtain an import license for *Dada*. I don't know if you should write to the Board of Censors or the Ministry of Commerce, Dept. of Importation and Prohibitions, 101, rue de Grenelle. . . .²²

Tzara's competence and attention to detail come through at every step, along with his resolve to reflect such knowledge "within the measure of my poetic abilities," for business and politics are also "elements of art, like pain or farce." We begin to see in these phrases the most original impetus for internationalizing *Dada*, namely the desire to utilize organizational obstacles and practical determinants — professional competition, postal censorship, importation licenses, questions of finance and accounting — as spurs to creativity, components that "facilitate the existence of new art." Rather than seeking to ignore or merely protesting these institutional barriers, Tzara declared such interference beneficial to the critical-aesthetic potential of his journal. He expressed that potential first by seeking collaborators and distributors on both sides of the war, knowing that this would make his journal politically sensitive everywhere it was sold.²³ Within the pages of *Dada*, moreover, Tzara expressed the heterogeneity of his source material by creating visual "noise," a static of varying typefaces and off-kilter graphic design that worked like fuzz on the supposed purity of the messages within.

Tzara had tested the possibilities of media interference already in the *Cabaret Voltaire* with the simultaneous poem, using competing voices in different languages to create "crossed signals," again a poor man's spoof of communication in wartime. Perhaps the experience of printing one of those poems, "L'amiral cherche une maison à louer" (The Admiral Is Looking for a House to Rent) in *Cabaret Voltaire* attuned Tzara to what Kittler calls the "untranslatability of media." In the "discourse network" shaped by electrical media, when each order of cognitive experience (visual, aural, written) is sectioned off from the others by specialized mechanical devices, writing loses its privilege as a universal mediator. In this situation, translation, a process predicated on shared, complete meanings, gives way to transposition, or the necessarily incomplete reformatting of particulate elements: "To transfer messages from one medium to another always involves reshaping them to conform to new standards and materials. . . . [E]very transposition is to a degree arbitrary, a manipulation. It can appeal to nothing universal and must, therefore, leave gaps. The elementary, unavoidable act of EXHAUSTION is an encounter with the limits of media."²⁴ The polyphonic babble of "The Admiral Is Looking" corresponds directly with this insight. In its printed form, a sort of anti-Rosetta stone, the triad of voices in French, German, and English ranged one on top of the other suggest a single

text presented in several languages—yet in fact there is no translation here, and thus no possibility for a unified plane of interpretation.

The third issue of *Dada*, fairly well advanced though much delayed at the time of Tzara's letter to Dermée, made fully manifest the processes of transposition, in which source media (handwriting and the spoken word, photographs, works on paper) are divided into subcomponents (letters and punctuation, tonal values, lines), then transferred into a new structure of discrete elements (dots and block letters). It is an operation that tends toward regularity, but Tzara resisted that drive in multiple ways. More than the commodified language and advertising strategies for which he has been justly celebrated, it is his laying bare of the devices of transposition that seems fundamental to the structure of *Dada* nos. 3 and 4–5, particularly his attention to the shift in modes of transmission, from the oral or handmade to the mechanical. Before turning to specific examples, it is worth reading to the end of Tzara's letter to Dermée, for in a postscript Tzara makes clear his ideas about the new typography of his magazine (the *Almanach Dada* that he mentions became in fact the double issue *Anthologie Dada/Dada 4–5* [March 1919]):

I am preparing a 36-page book, 29 x 25 [cm]: *Almanach Dada*, very thick and vibrant, French and Italian texts strewn with 35 little drawings and woodcuts (in the corners of all the pages) lots of large reproductions; it must create everywhere an atmosphere of windstorm, dizziness, the timeless and the new, and must have the look of a great demonstration of new art in an outdoor circus. Each page must explode, either through deep and heavy seriousness, overwhelming farce, the enthusiasm of its principles, or the way in which it is printed. . . .

This almanach needs to be a revolution in the literary world.²⁵

Both *Dada 3* and *Dada 4–5* attest in their design to the fulfillment of Tzara's goal for a potent mix of the high-minded and the raucously energetic, with typography given a newly prominent role. As Johanna Drucker has noted, Tzara began with *Dada 3* to juxtapose text genres in a way that clouded the customary transparency of semiotic relations and thereby drew attention to the material presence of language on the printed page. Tzara additionally varied typefaces, tilted lines on the diagonal, and in later issues of *Dada* and other publications turned increasingly to advertising symbols, to create what Drucker calls “a scrapbook sense of order, typical of the busy pages of nineteenth-century gazettes” and ads from the back pages of newspapers.²⁶ But these concessions to commercial language and newspaper design were precisely not totalizing; they did not place art wholly under the sign of commerce or the newsroom. Instead, Tzara achieved his finely structured chaos by playing the regularizing qualities of movable type against the idiosyncrasies of individual creation.

Each page of these two issues of *Dada*, for example, features poems in conflicting typefaces, plus highly expressive visual marginalia (“in the corners”), just as Tzara



4. Cover of *Dada 3*, woodcut by Marcel Janco and typography by Tristan Tzara, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

proposed. The juxtaposition of typefaces and the diversity of art, much of it in postexpressionist styles, create a purposeful visual jumble that emphasizes the distinctiveness of each contribution. This layout preserves a trace of the magazine's manufacture from a multitude of individual submissions, underscoring its basis in one-to-one correspondence with the editor. Tzara's own snippets of publicity prose, compiled for instance in the poem "Bulletin" in *Dada 3*, could be read as mechanically produced newspaper clippings, but they seem

4-

closer in several lines to jottings penned by an urban *flâneur*: "5th crime on the horizon 2 accidents song for violin."²⁷ And his more than one dozen short essays, the "Notes" (on "Negro Art," "Painting," "Arp," and other subjects), published throughout the first four issues of *Dada*, evoke in their very title a diaristic flow of thought rather than phrases in the derivative idiom of the commodity. Drucker's emphasis on Tzara as a prescient manipulator of depersonalized language, a purveyor of hackneyed phrases intent upon "polluting" literary style and mechanizing its visual expression, obscures the tremendous tension in *Dada 3* and subsequent issues that is maintained between non- or premechanical expressions of individuality and the structures of mechanical transmission. This is not to say that Tzara harbored a naive resistance to commodification, but to suggest that the dynamism of *Dada*, in its layout and its language, results from a generative noise that offers a new form of critical intervention in a commodified world.

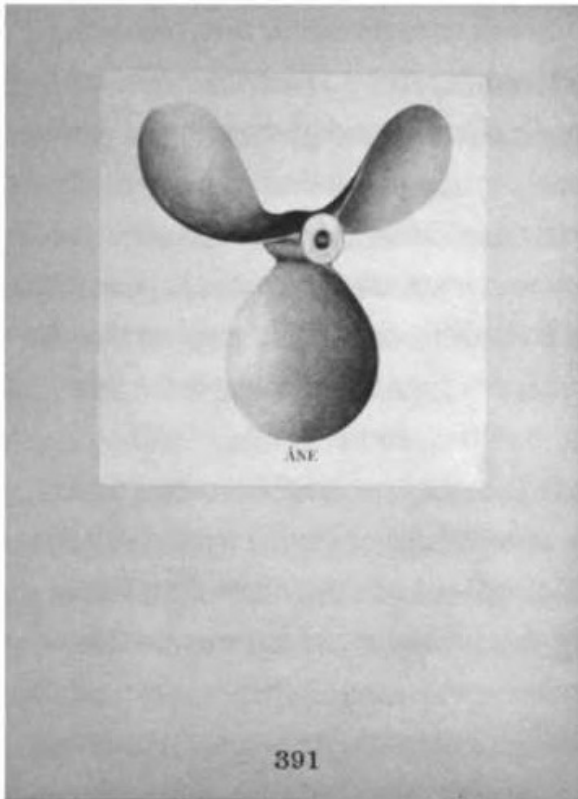
On the cover of the deluxe edition of *Dada 3*, in the lower right corner, Tzara set next to the editorial address (his own domicile) a rounded dab of printer's ink that gives the figure for this productive confusion (fig. 4). Colored red or blue (depending on the copy) to match the title and the woodcut by Janco, this inkblot looks more or less like a fingerprint. The four lines, "Administration / Mouvement DADA / Zurich / Zeltweg 83," radiate from this artistic touch as if broadcast through a megaphone or a radio transmitter. In Janco's woodcut, which appears on every copy of the journal, splotches of blue and

5. Francis Picabia, *Âne*, cover of 391 5 (June 1917), Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

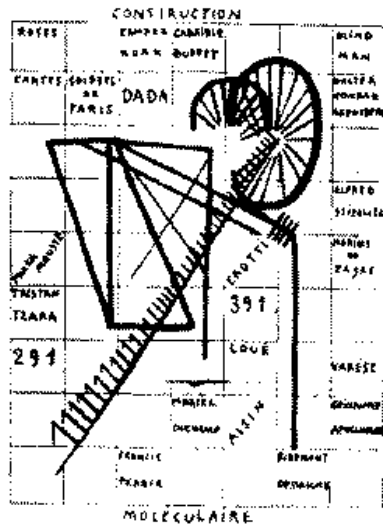
6. Francis Picabia, *Construction moléculaire (Molecular Construction)*, cover of 391 8 (February 1918), National Gallery of Art Library, Washington

yellow spill over the architectonic framework like carelessly applied makeup, mocking the bibliophile passion for carefully hand-tinted plates. The addition of a nebulous blot of color on deluxe examples completes this parody of an artistic signature, which doubles as a faulty registration mark.²⁸ Gestural uses of color, like sentences on the diagonal and other deviations from standard typesetting, mark a willful resistance to the conventional regularity of print by using the very devices of the print medium. Within a general frame of production that boldly accepts and promotes media communication, there is a remarkable level of interference from handmade interventions that both slows ordinary reading and creates new interpretive possibilities. Tzara's mechanical dab, his substitute fingerprint, symbolizes the hybrid authorial personality explored in manifold variations across the Dada network.

Picabia, who, as mentioned before, developed his correspondence with Tzara during the months preceding *Dada 3*, counts among the first members of international Dada to add to the lessons of its mascot journal. Picabia had begun his own magazine, *391*, as part of



a lighthearted “battle of periodicals” within the New York Dada circle.²⁹ “You’ll receive a magazine, *391*, which is the double of your *291*,” he bragged to Alfred Stieglitz from Spain, where the first issue appeared in January 1917.³⁰ His own insertions in *291*, a magazine managed by Stieglitz and Marius de Zayas, constituted an apotheosis of industrial design. In two separate issues from 1915, Picabia appropriated pictures of sundry goods to fashion parodic portraits with a blasphemous or erotic thrust. In these drawings, and in a suite of “mecanomorphie” canvases from that year and the next, Picabia apparently (to contemporary eyes) divested his art of style, taste, and artistic training. Six



391

6.

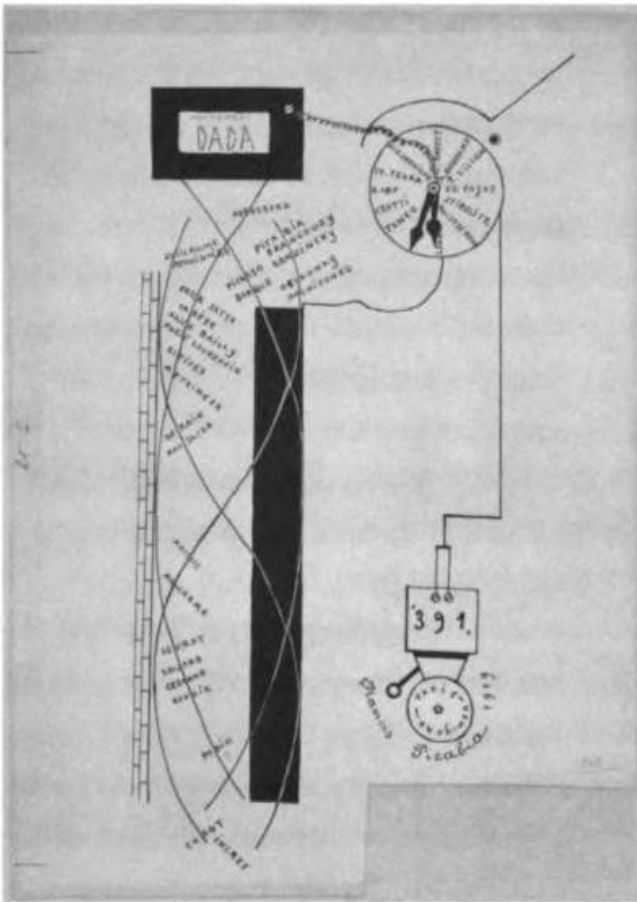
way serviceable drawings, their traceable sources in science manuals notwithstanding. They evoke the world of popular mechanics while scuttling the functional coherence fundamental to mechanical rendering. Yet the images do favor graphic clarity. As Pierre accurately observes, Picabia's diagrams derive from reproductions and are themselves destined for print once more.³² Their lines are made for circulation.

These new, diagrammatic forms that, as Joselit argues, dissolve the distinctions in spatial organization between writing and drawing, "deterritorializing" the printed page, bear a close relation to the omnidirectional vectors of communication established by Dada, 391, and other Dada journals. Two of Picabia's earliest diagrams say as much: *Construction moléculaire* (*Molecular Construction*) and *Mouvement Dada* (*Dada Movement*) both map an international network of Dada affiliates (figs. 6, 7). *Molecular Construction*, the cover image for the Zurich issue of 391, disperses the names of artists and, significantly, a number of admired publications (Guillaume Apollinaire's *Soirées de Paris*, *Dada* in Zurich, Picabia's own 391, and the New York publications *Camera Work*, 291, and *Blind Man*) across a square grid. Grouped but not ranked, the various nominal "molecules" hover around a threshertlike machine, which, lacking a clear purpose or motor, might either produce these floating cells or expend them as fuel.

Dada Movement, which appeared in Tzara's *Anthologie Dada/Dada* 4–5, has only slightly more apparent functionality. Picabia sets the names of artists past and present in a

of the first seven issues of 391 took this wager further by placing on the cover a series of reified advertising images, the sources for which have been painstakingly researched by Arnauld Pierre. Each issue reproduced a single object—a light bulb, a piano bed, a propeller, and others—nearly unaltered from photographs in popular science magazines, to which Picabia added enigmatic titles printed in an equally impersonal type-face (fig. 5).³¹

Beginning with the eighth number of his magazine, however, which Picabia published in Zurich with Tzara's collaboration, his engagement with machines takes on an overtly deconstructive cast. As David Joselit argues elsewhere in this volume, the "machine diagrams" that Picabia made at this time are in no



7. Francis Picabia, *Mouvement Dada* (Dada Movement), 1919, ink on paper, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Purchase

loosely chronological column at left that rises from patricidal targets (Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Georges Seurat, Paul Cézanne) to more or less admired contemporaries and even the artist himself. Close colleagues from Paris and New York mark the hours on a clock face at the upper right that is linked by electrical wire to the phrase “Mouvement Dada,” which might also be the nameplate on a large battery. A further device hangs below the clock, perhaps a pump of sorts to turn its hands. This element

7- unashamedly promotes Picabia’s own journal, 391, and carries as well the inscription “Paris-New York” (no Zurich); it suggests a continuation of the amicable rivalry among journal editors Picabia knew in New York. Despite hints at a constructive circuit, the whole apparatus looks vaguely like a time bomb, the herald of Tzara’s “exploding” typography (as he explained to Dermée) in the pages that follow.

The space mapped by Dada in these two drawings is diffuse and abstract, a homeless network made up, moreover, of correspondents and magazine publishers. The interchange between handwriting and mechanical production becomes palpable in these diagrams, where Picabia employs a looser, even sloppy line that obliterates distinctions between writing and drawing especially effectively. It seems incorrect to claim of these works, as Pierre does regarding the machine paintings generally, that they are “carried out according to graphic codes of a rigor and monotony that no longer appear to leave any place for invention, research, sensibility, or for ‘the hand.’”³³ On the contrary, marks of the hand become baldly evident, and there seems no useful distinction to be made in the facture of text and graphics; both are reduced to scribbles. Looking at these doodled diagrams, which proliferate throughout subsequent issues of 391 and in contemporaneous book projects, as well as at similar canvases by Picabia from the early postwar years, one feels that he has caused the world of reproducible imagery to collide with that of the pocket notebook or laundry list.

If diagramming marks an impulse to register words and images on a single

plane, the use of notational scribbling thoroughly deprofessionalizes this undertaking. Picabia's thin, wavering lines and marginalia convey an apparent ineptitude at simple illustration that belongs in the first rank of Dada's institutional attacks. It has a place alongside appeals to "dilettantes" in Berlin and Cologne, and the call by *Littérature* for collaboration with anonymous graffitiwriters around Paris.³⁴ But Picabia's key move was to reproduce these pseudoamateur drawings in print. His degenerated line transmits above all the cumulative noise of successive transpositions in medium: from a photo-mechanical image, to a drawing, to a copy photograph, to a printed page. By taking draftsmanship apart at the level of functionality and technique, then retransmitting the results in a new circuit of information, Picabia mixed the handmade and the manufactured to critical effect. Nor did these antiillustrations simply prompt skepticism about the ideology of professionalism in art and industry. Picabia's drawings helped visualize the communications network formed by Dada, and they opened a pathway for the transmission of a new set of media skills, along with a historical awareness transcending technology fetishism as well as the strictures of affirmative art practice.

Dada Movement and *Molecular Construction* are just two of many images with which dadaists memorialized their new transmissions network. Raoul Hausmann's collage *P*, for example, is composed of stationery, package labels, and bits of journals received from his colleagues at home and abroad (fig. 8). Hausmann also mailed postcards to Van Doesburg, Picabia, and others featuring upstanding artists of Der Sturm gallery, the leading Berlin gallery for expressionist art, whose faces he disfigured with puerile graffiti.³⁵ There is an entire subset of Dada "postal art," in fact, which consists largely of such modified or fabricated postcards. Picabia distorted his own face for a Christmas card he mailed to Arp and Ernst under the title *Tableau Rastadada* (*Rastadada Painting*), while Schwitters sent friends altered postcards from an edition made for him by Herwarth Walden, the owner of the Sturm gallery that Hausmann parodied. On one postcard to Hannah Höch, Schwitters delightfully pasted over his head a custom-made label with the name of his fictional alter ego cum love object, Anna Blume (fig. 9).

Probably in summer 1921, Max Ernst also produced postcard editions of three photo-collages—*die anatomie* (*The Anatomy*), *sambesiland* (*Zambeziland*), and an untitled view of a walrus—that Stefanie Poley has persuasively classed among the collaborative works by Ernst and Arp titled "Fatagaga."³⁶ *Fabrication de tableaux gasométriques garantis*, the full name of this mock venture, resembles the pseudocorporate administration for the journal *Dada* and so many other group projects within the movement. The postcards give full sense and meaning to this partnership in "fabrication," for which Ernst supposedly made pictures while Arp provided poetic texts. Although scholars have assumed that



8.



9.

Fatagaga works arose when Arp visited Ernst in Cologne (three times in 1920–1921), the division of labor between text and image production obviated the need for a joint presence. Indeed, one of the more intriguing offshoots of this project is a pair of biographies that Ernst and Arp wrote separately and swapped by mail, then circulated in print. Arp appears to have initiated this idea by sending some humorous lines about his friend; Ernst, in his delighted (and typically libidinous) reply, waxed enthusiastic over improvements in postal communication since the war:

Dear Arp. How much time, effort, and frustration getting off a letter to a friend used to cause, and how much joy one experiences today in the early morning, in a dewy bed, when the mail carrier brings one. Your letters really are the egg of Columbus as far as that goes. In just a few seconds the stem has been put in the brush and sits tightly. Like Liselotte in her letters, I've used the confidential Du, though I never saw thee.³⁷ I may take that liberty because I have sold a *vogel selbdritt* [a book of poetry by Arp]. . . . Your expressions "Easter circle," "Pentecost circle" and tropic [Osterkreis, Pfingstkreis, Wendekreis] move me to send excerpts from your excellent letter as "Fatagaga news" with my own additions to the *Querschnitt* in Berlin, where it will appear in the next issue.³⁸

Arp's biography, transmitted through and augmented by Ernst himself, appeared only a few days later, not in Berlin but in the Cologne cultural magazine *Das Junge Rheinland*.

8. Raoul Hausmann, P, 1921,
collage, Hamburger Kunsthalle

9. Kurt Schwitters, postcard to
Hannah Höch, 1921, collage and
pencil on cardstock, Berlinische
Galerie (Hannah Höch Archives)

It is a clever, engaging, and minimally informative text, literally a “fabrication” upon Ernst’s life and aims that fills the page with gaseous expansiveness. The made-up words *Osterkreis* and *Pfingstkreis* do not figure here, but *Wendekreis* (tropic) does, in the sentence: “His tropic is flower-stealing.” The entire piece radiates lyrical nonsense of this kind, emitted in a style that masquerades as explanatory but conveys no real explanations: “His [paintings’] coloring is sometimes full of holes and sometimes tubular. His excretions are full of plant and animal remains. He is known as a keen *ranunculus*. . . . His *Fatagaga* works are also available silently, meaning they are unsigned.”³⁹

The allusiveness of these claims, rich in potential references and suggestive puns, carries with it the indecent mystery of a private joke. This display of exclusionary intimacy gives Arp’s text its greatest power of consternation, proceeding from his own brand of confusion between private writing and the public nature of print media. Arp’s letter is a hybrid, a personal correspondence written with some view to wider dissemination (who writes a biography to be read by one person only?); yet when it is transferred from pen to print, all the private references are left perfectly in place as obstructions for the uninitiated. This confusion corresponds to what Leah Dickerman has called the solipsism, or “public display of privateness” characteristic of Dada performance, in which audiences are invited to the spectacle of their own rejection by those onstage.⁴⁰ In its long-distance variant (one could cite further examples: Schwitters-Arp letters in *Die Pille*, witticisms published in nearly every Dada journal, Johannes Baader’s open letters to politicians, the fake reviews mailed to newspapers by Walter Serner, and so forth), this strategy amounts to blatant secretiveness, the transparent communication of an opaque or fictitious message.

“Fabrication” is indeed the operative word in *Fatagaga*, and Ernst engaged in it as well. In November 1920, when he first sent news of the venture to Tzara—also for publication, in Tzara’s *Dadaglobe*—Ernst famously asked his friend: “Can you try to get the photographer to erase the seams in reproducing the collage works (to keep the secret of *Fatagaga*!)”⁴¹ This recommendation, like the statement in “Max Ernst” that his *Fatagaga* works are “silent” and “unsigned,” is often taken as an indication of Ernst’s (and Arp’s) desire to depersonalize the creative act and, in Ernst’s case, as a harbinger of the illusionistic surfaces he perfected in his surrealist years. To the extent that both artists embraced mechanical production and the possibilities for abstraction that it contained, the assertion seems accurate. But to treat the *Fatagaga* collages as a preparation for future ideas distracts attention from their actual appearance.⁴² In these postcards, as in



Sambesiland.

10.



die anatomie / may exist

10. Max Ernst, *sambesiland (Zambezi-land)*, 1921, postcard, photograph of a collage, Stiftung Hans Arp und Sophie Taeuber, Rolandseck, Germany

11. Max Ernst, *die anatomie (The Anatomy)*, 1921, postcard, photograph of a collage, Stiftung Hans Arp und Sophie Taeuber, Rolandseck, Germany

Ernst's overpainted collages, the manipulation of photographic images remains glaringly evident and deliberately awkward or clumsy.

Take the two Fatagaga postcards on which Ernst wrote his reply to Arp, both of which carry strong connotations of war (figs. 10, 11). *Zambezi-land* shows a devastated slope of land somewhat out of focus, the sort of trench snapshot taken in the thousands by bored, sequestered infantrymen. Two totemic growths have been unconvincingly superimposed on this barren hill, as if dropped from an alien planet. Small and odd, the scene is drained of any exotic association evoked by the Zambezi, fourth-largest river in Africa, a watercourse that spans more than twenty-five miles in places and feeds the majestic Victoria Falls. The crummy countryside in this mock postcard lacks water altogether, although it does seem to have enough moisture for a pair of mutant mushrooms. *The Anatomy*, meanwhile, shows a womblike mortar shell inhabited by a partly dismantled automaton, the figure, as Hal Foster argues of Ernst's work in general, for a mock parthenogenesis that places the mechanical-commodified body prized during World War I into a state of severe dysfunctionality.⁴³ This image explains little of anatomy in a scientific or artistic sense. The "fabrication," that is, the manufacture of lies to be disseminated as truth, is no less transparent because it exists at one generational remove from the evidence of its own production. If anything, Ernst's shift from photo-collage to photograph adds a layer of visual static that diminishes the credibility of his images still further.

Rephotographing these photo-collages as postcards does, however, turn them into vehicles of transmission. Their demonstrative inscrutability is now formatted for the mails, made to be posted privately and publicly as well, for postcards frequently are sent without an envelope and are thus accessible to anyone who handles them. The openness and the undecipherability of Fatagaga are at odds with each other—but once again the internal interference proves meaningful. As Daniel Headrick observes in his history of telecommunications and international politics, World War I divided the flow of information into two mutually antagonistic classes: "What would have been news in peacetime was now either a secret or a propaganda item."⁴⁴ Secrets needed to be enciphered, and enemy secrets decoded; suddenly and for the first time, the major powers concentrated after August 1914 on cryptanalysis, the art of cracking ciphers. Propaganda items, meanwhile, were to be disseminated as clearly and widely as possible, something that, as Headrick explains, the belligerents guaranteed by subsidizing but also monitoring press access to the greatly reduced network of international cables.⁴⁵ The Fatagaga enterprise defiantly corrupted that state of affairs. Codes that revealed no secret, secrets that

yielded no information, the postcards and texts by Ernst and Arp both hid and revealed, with the requisite poetry and cultural specificity of truly meaningful art.

"Hello, Hey Mama. Well, sorry I haven't been able to call. They took the phone seven days ago.... How is everyone? I'm doing fine. We are just out here in the sand in the windstorms waiting.... I cannot wait to get home and get back to my life.... Hope you guys are okay. And keep sending the mail, it makes getting through the days easier."—Sgt. Michael Pedersen's last letter to Lila Lipscomb, mailed 16 March 2003 from the Iraqi desert, as read by Lipscomb in Michael Moore's film *Fahrenheit 9/11*.⁴⁶

One final, poignant excerpt will be related here from the history of the Dada transmissions network. The episode is famous, for it concerns the beginnings of the readymade. In January 1916, half a year after emigrating from Paris to New York, Marcel Duchamp wrote his sister, the painter Suzanne Duchamp, about this promising new genre of work: "Now if you have been up to my place, you will have seen, in the studio, a bicycle wheel and a bottle rack. I bought [the latter] as a sculpture *toute faite*. And I have a plan concerning this bottle rack. Listen." Duchamp proceeded to recount that he had begun signing store-bought items with handwritten inscriptions as an experiment, offering a couple of examples by way of explanation. "You know enough English to understand the meaning of 'ready-made,'" he asserted, then contravened that invitation with the warning, "Don't tear your hair out trying to understand this in the Romantic or Impressionist or Cubist sense."⁴⁷ The impossibility of interpreting readymades using older terminology seems to be a problem of translation, but it equates implicitly to the much more serious problem of distance separating sender from receiver—the divide of displacement and exile that, as many writers on Duchamp have stressed, incited him to his most provocative work.

Duchamp's letter would remain merely the document of an experience anterior to and outside the space of the correspondence itself, were it not for his closing request: "Take this bottle rack for yourself. I'm making it a 'Readymade,' remotely. You are to inscribe it at the bottom and on the inside of the bottom circle, in small letters painted with a brush in oil, silver white color, with an inscription which I will give you herewith, and then sign it, in the same handwriting, as follows: [after] Marcel Duchamp."⁴⁸

The inaugural declaration concerning readymades thus included a proposal to make one, a long-distance request for collaboration mediated by the postal service. The possibility of creating remotely, of forging a telegraphic bond with a distant, kindred soul was clearly electrifying, to make a pun, and the Dada network was forged to exploit that thrill. Yet

this readymade project feeds off interference as well. The pathway connecting Marcel and Suzanne Duchamp to Marcel's desired result would take many detours: a set of handwritten instructions, processed through the mail, which call for further manual interventions upon an industrially manufactured object. In retrospect, it is not surprising that Duchamp's inscription for *Bottlerack* went astray, along with the object itself, leaving absence as a point of origin.

More distressing than these two prophetic accidents is the lack of response Duchamp received to his request. Suzanne seems never to have replied to her brother, scuttling through simple silence his plan for a readymade at a distance. Such a lapse in communication would have been impossible had the siblings spoken face to face—but then the project would not have been invented either, and it is one that clearly appealed to Duchamp. One need hardly emphasize that in its intended manner of fabrication *Bottlerack* exemplified his ambition to produce works by delay; the mail service, particularly in wartime, guaranteed that delay even as it held out the promise of long-distance connection. This method of delegating instructions in writing may have been used to create Duchamp's most famous readymade, *Fountain* (another machine-made item corrupted by amateurish handwriting), and mail played a generative role in works authored by his alter ego R(r)ose Sélavy, from the telegram-poems with Robert Desnos published in *Littérature* (November 1921) to the *Monte Carlo Bond* offered by subscription in 1924. Duchamp, like many participants in Dada, seized on media communication for contradictory reasons: on the one hand, to connect across space and nationality, to open artistic hierarchies and authorial uniqueness to the challenges of technological production, to establish an alternative information network; on the other, to exploit interference as a means of testing the processes of community formation and information flow.

These experiments remain rich examples of resistance to the ideal of united communities and constantly perfected telecommunications that dominates the world with renewed oppressiveness in the present moment. At the same time, Dada transmissions affirm the potential for expression in a media world saturated, by its very nature, with noise and loss. "My dear Suzanne," wrote Marcel in October 1916, an incredible nine months after his first communication about the readymades. "Did you write the inscription on the ready made? Do it. And send it to me (the inscription) and let me know exactly what you did." He then showed his anxiety at communication breakdown more clearly: "I'm writing more or less to everybody at the moment. That's what's most crippling. It's a pity cables are so expensive. It's so convenient. Farewell, my dear Suzanne. . . ."⁴⁹ Delay had drawbacks too—but it is unlikely that cables or even e-mail would have compensated for this profound sense of isolation. Such is life in a world at war.

Thanks for insightful discussion during the preparation of this essay go to Amanda Hockensmith, Leah Dickerman, and, as always, Janine Mileaf. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

- 1 Friedrich A. Kittler, *Literature Media Information Systems*, ed. and intro. John Johnston (Amsterdam, 1997).
- 2 Francesco Meriano (in Italian) to Tzara and Janco, 25 November 1916, in Giovanni Lista, *De Chirico et l'Avant-Garde* (Lausanne, 1983), 89.
- 3 Tzara to Picabia, 21 August 1918, in Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1965), 466.
- 4 See the correspondence from Picabia to Tzara, March–July 1919, in Sanouillet, *Dada*, 483–487. Significantly, Tzara did send copies of *Dada* 4–5 to Paris in June or July, only to have them returned for lack of an export license.
- 5 Not much work has been done on the journals as a category of Dada production, despite the tremendous visibility they received in the 1978 London exhibition *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, organized by Dawn Ades and David Sylvester (Arts Council of Great Britain). Timothy Benson has written a perceptive essay on the journals as vehicles for transaction and exchange; see “Conventions and Constructions: The Performative Text in *Dada*,” in Stephen Foster, ed., *Dada: The Coordinates of Cultural Politics* (New York, 1996), 84–105. A forthcoming dissertation by Emily Hage (University of Pennsylvania), meanwhile, promises to trace the journals network in its full extent.
- 6 Kittler, *Literature Media*, 29. I am very grateful to Amanda Hockensmith for bringing Kittler’s work to my attention and discussing it in relation to this essay.
- 7 There are further instances, particularly where the typewriter was concerned. Schad made a series of “typewriter pictures,” for example, in Munich in 1920, all of which he later destroyed, while Kurt Schwitters flirted with this device in the mid-1920s. Marcel Duchamp, meanwhile, selected a typewriter as one of his first readymades in 1916 (*Traveller’s Folding Item*, Philadelphia Museum of Art).
- 8 See Daniel Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics 1851–1945* (New York, 1991), 138–142. Within hours after the expiration of its ultimatum against Germany on 4 August 1914, for example, Britain cut all five German cables to the outside world; British land lines to India were severed in turn later that month, while connections to Russia from France and Britain were lost in September.
- 9 Kittler, *Literature Media*, 44.
- 10 “Command in war has to be digital precisely because war itself is noisy.” Kittler, *Literature Media*, 119.
- 11 Man Ray to Tzara, undated (likely June 1921), in facsimile in Francis M. Naumann with Beth Venn, *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York* [exh. cat., Whitney Museum of American Art] (New York, 1996), 151.
- 12 Clément Pansaers to Tzara, 8 and 20 December 1919, in Pansaers, *Sur un aveugle mur blanc et autres textes. Lettres à Tzara, Picabia et Van Essche*, ed. Marc Dachy (Brussels, 1972), 33; in English in Hubert F. van den Berg, *The Import of Nothing: How Dada Came, Saw, and Vanished in the Low Countries (1915–1929)* (New Haven, 2002), 25. Pansaers to Birot, 10 December 1919, *The Import*, 26.
- 13 Van den Berg, *The Import*, 46–47.
- 14 Pansaers had participated in Paris Dada events during brief visits in 1920 and 1921, as Van den Berg recounts, *The Import*, 48–53. He patched things up with Picabia and Tzara in 1922, months before his untimely death of Hodgkin’s disease and syphilis in October of that year.
- 15 Theo van Doesburg, “Dada,” *De Nieuwe Amsterdammer* (8 May 1920).
- 16 Els Hoek, ed., *Theo van Doesburg oeuvre catalogue* (Centraal Museum, Utrecht, and Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, 2000), 308.
- 17 Craig Eliason, “Manifestoes by Mail: Postcards from the Theo van Doesburg Correspondence,” *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation* (2001), 449–458. In his Ph.D. thesis, “The Dialectic of Dada and Constructivism: Theo van Doesburg and the Dadaists, 1920–1930” (Rutgers University, 2002), Eliason mentions a comic incident in which Van Doesburg, Hans Arp, and Tzara met to compose a joint letter to Bonset, who had supposedly remained in Holland (49–50).
- 18 Tzara to Van Doesburg, 29 November 1920, in Eliason, “The Dialectic of Dada and Constructivism,” 68.
- 19 Witness Tzara’s admission to Meriano in a letter of March 1917: “I can’t read Italian at all. Even your letters to me in Italian I have translated.” See *Dada. L’arte della negazione* (Rome, 1991), 110–111.
- 20 Tzara to Raimondi, 17 March 1917. See *Negazione*, 110–111.
- 21 Tzara, *Negazione*, 110–111.
- 22 Tzara to Dermée, June 1918, Tristan Tzara writings and ephemera, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (890164). Italics added.

- 23 Some concessions were made; the double issue *Anthologie Dada* was printed in French and German versions to facilitate distribution. No less a personage than Guillaume Apollinaire, however, declined to contribute to *Dada* on grounds that participation in "a journal that, however good its character, has Germans among its contributors, however Allied-friendly they may be." Cited in M. Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1965), 98.
- 24 Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Meteer, with Chris Cullens (Stanford, 1990), 265.
- 25 Tzara to Dermée, June 1918.
- 26 Johanna Drucker, *The Visible Word: Experimental Typography and Modern Art, 1909–1923* (Chicago, 1994), 204; Drucker treats Tzara's typography in depth on pages 201–215.
- 27 Tzara, "Bulletin," in *Dada 3* (1918), repr. in Tristan Tzara, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1 (1912–1924), ed. Henri Béhar (Paris, 1975), 135.
- 28 Registration marks are guide marks placed in the margins of a print sheet to indicate the placement of type and especially successive color layers on the page. They were introduced in the eighteenth century by the Japanese printer Kamimura to improve exactitude in making multicolor woodblock prints.
- 29 The incident in which Henri-Pierre Roché and Picabia determined in a chess match whether Picabia's journal or Roché's *Blind Man* would continue publication marks the high point of this humorous rivalry.
- 30 Cited in William Camfield, ed., "Chronologie," in Francis Picabia. *Singulier idéal* [exh. cat., Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris] (Paris, 2002), 434.
- 31 Arnauld Pierre, Francis Picabia: *La Peinture sans aura* (Paris, 2002), 133–137.
- 32 Pierre, Francis Picabia, 149.
- 33 Arnauld Pierre, "Dada Stands Its Ground," in Elmer Peterson, ed., *Paris Dada: The Barbarians Storm the Gates* (Detroit, 2001), 148.
- 34 André Breton, ed., *Littérature* (May 1921); see also Max Ernst and Johannes Baargeld, eds., *die scham-made* (April 1920).
- 35 See Craig Eliason, "Manifestoes by Mail," for a discussion of postcards made and mailed by Hausmann and Van Doesburg in 1920–1922.
- 36 Stefanie Poley, "Max Ernst und Hans Arp 1914–1921," in Wulf Herzogenrath, ed., *Max Ernst und Köln: Die rheinische Kunstszene bis 1922* (Cologne, 1980), 187–189. The number of works belonging to the Fatagaga enterprise has been in dispute; Werner Spies maintains, notably, that only four such collages exist. As several scholars have pointed out, however, at least one collage subtitled "Fatagaga" by Ernst, *The Chinese Nightingale*, was definitely made by him alone; it does not seem to have been essential for the two artists to create these works jointly.
- 37 The Rhineland noblewoman Liselotte von der Pfalz (1652–1722) was married against her will to Philippe I of Orléans, brother of Louis XIV. She spent most of her life in France where, at odds with courtly habits, she remained permanently estranged—feelings she conveyed in numerous insightful letters that were later published and became standard reading in well-educated German homes.
- 38 Ernst to Arp, 27 October 1921, in facsimile in Poley, "Max Ernst und Hans Arp," 189. My thanks to Walburga Krupp of the Stiftung Hans Arp und Sophie Taeuber, Rolandseck, Germany, the current possessor of these postcards, for her enthusiastic cooperation.
- 39 "Max Ernst," *Das Junge Rheinland* 2 (2 November 1921), 2, repr. in *Von Dadamax zum Grüngürtel. Köln in den 20er Jahren* [exh. cat., Kölnischer Kunstverein] (Cologne, 1975), 54.
- 40 Leah Dickerman, "Dada's Solipsism," *Documents* 19 (Fall 2000): 16–19.
- 41 Ernst to Tzara, November 1920, in Werner Spies, *Max Ernst Collagen: Inventar und Widerspruch* (Cologne, 1988), 237.
- 42 Poley, "Max Ernst und Hans Arp," 194, takes that course in her essay, using Ernst's sentence about "hiding the secret" as her guide.
- 43 Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 153. See also Foster's essay in the present volume.
- 44 Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon*, 138.
- 45 Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon*, 138.
- 46 Cited with the kind permission of Lila Lipscomb. Text verified from the transcript on www.redliners.com. Sgt. Michael Pedersen, U.S. Army E5, Crew Chief for the Black Hawk Helicopter, was killed on 2 April 2003 in Karbala, Iraq.
- 47 Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp, 15 January 1916, in Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk, eds., *Affectionately Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp* (Ghent and Amsterdam, 2000), 43–44 (with English trans.).
- 48 Naumann and Obalk, *Affectionately Marcel*, 43–44.
- 49 Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp, October 1916, in Naumann and Obalk, *Affectionately Marcel*, 45.

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