







*Dada:*  
*Performance, Poetry, and Art*

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*Dada:*  
*Performance, Poetry, and Art*

By John D. Erickson

*Louisiana State University*

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*Dada: Performance, Poetry, and Art*

John D. Erickson

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For  
Cassandra and Catherine

*You could not discover the limits of soul, even if you traveled  
by every path in order to do so; such is the depth of its meaning.*

*Heraclitus*





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## *About the Author*

John Erickson, born in Minnesota, was educated in several universities: Sophia University (Tokyo), Harvard, and the Sorbonne, before receiving the Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota. He has taught at the Universities of Minnesota, Iowa, and Kansas, as well as the University of Morocco. He cofounded the quarterly of French literature *L'Esprit Créateur* in 1961, and has served as its editor since 1963. He presently teaches at and chairs the Department of French and Italian at Louisiana State University. Professor Erickson has published numerous articles on nineteenth- and twentieth-century French literature. He has coedited four volumes, of which the most recent was *Proust et le texte producteur* (University of Guelph, 1980). He is also the author of *Nommo: African Fiction in French* (1979).

## Preface

Above the entrance of the 1953 exhibition of "Dada, 1916–23," held at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York, the organizers hung a replica of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, overflowing with geraniums and decorated with mistletoe.<sup>1</sup> The original *Fountain*, as observers of Dada know, had been an ordinary porcelain urinal entered by Duchamp in the Exhibition of Independent Artists in 1917 under the name of R. Mutt, a manufacturer of sanitary hardware. Its effrontery had shocked the organizers' sense of decency, and they refused to exhibit it. By 1953, with irony a Dada could appreciate, it had become reduced to a mere decorative container, a piece of Dada sanitary hardware sanitized, redestructed. In a word, Duchamp's *Fountain* had become art historical.

Dada objects have undergone a fate similar to that of African masks in Western collections, which have been deprived of their previous religious and social meaning and reinscribed in a system of meaning based on Western aesthetic theory and consumerism. The cataloguing and exhibition of Dada objects of the past are often fraught with meaninglessness—the classification of forms devoid of the force invested in them. In an essay on force and signification, Jacques Derrida says that "*Form* fascinates when we no longer have the force to comprehend the force at its interior. That is to say, to create." He cites Flaubert's words in *Préface à la vie d'écrivain*, "We make criticism when we cannot make art. . . ."<sup>2</sup> The 1953 replica of Duchamp's *Fountain* had also become an act of second-level criticism, remote from the creative-critical act of Duchamp.

The objects Dada has left behind have become museum artifacts and icons to be interpreted in terms of (and coopted by) specific historical and cultural systems. The exhibitions or publications that convey these interpretations resemble nothing less than graveyards commemorating bodies whose spirit has moved on to other places. This book like other books on Dada records not Dada but the absence of Dada.

If the "force" or "spirit" of Dada (that is, the meaning with which it inflected its objects) abides only very tenuously in the debris it has left behind, however, that does not mean that the Dada spirit is dead. It abides

in the hubristic force that still shocks, excites, angers, and even titillates the beholder who for the first time reads a Tzara poem or unwittingly puts his eye to the peephole of Duchamp's door in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It abides in the cracks and seams of contemporary literature and art, leaves its traces in the works of writers and artists like Stoppard and Vonnegut, Gorky and Rauschenberg. Occasionally, it detonates, as if never dampened, in a Tinguely.

More, in fact, exists to the story of that 1953 Dada event at the Sidney Janis Gallery. Duchamp was asked to create a catalog for the exhibition. His "catalog" consisted of a 2-x-3-foot piece of tissue paper which was crumpled up and distributed to visitors from a wastepaper basket. Though this act might appear cynical, what more appropriate means to catalog the ephemerality of creative energy than by transparent paper hastened on its way to nonbeing by crumpling? Did Duchamp wish to indicate that Dada itself was dead? By no means. In an interview held by *Time* magazine in conjunction with the exhibition, Duchamp calmly affirmed, "The Dada Spirit is eternal."<sup>3</sup>

Duchamp's act of creating his tissue-paper catalog was attributable no more to a desire for obfuscation than for cynicism. It appears rather to have derived from a way of looking at art and the world that is dialectically opposed to the royal way of Western thought—Cartesian logic. While most traditional Western art has been arranged around a center, an absolute, a totalizing set of beliefs, explicitly or implicitly stated, that tempt and even encourage viewers and critics to reduce its operation to a set of agreed-upon tenets, Dada art is peripheral, decentered, born under the sign of the elusive Dionysus. Its value lies in its imperviousness to being assigned value, defined function, or meaning.

Dada, in all of its expressions—its poetry, plastic arts, performances, and manifestos—has attempted to obviate that type of programmatic reductionism which traditional Western art and criticism are so prone to valorize. Since reduction is negation, we can say that Dada set out to negate negation. Those commentators who interpret Dada as negative fail to perceive Dada discourse as metadiscourse, a discourse upon the reductionist, negative discourse of traditional Western art and modes of thinking. In all of its manifestations Dada exercises a positive life-preserving force, in reaction to the humbug of social, political, and artistic systems that determinedly delimit and destroy.

Somewhere I have heard a story about a Japanese artist whose paintings were admired by a Western woman who commissioned him to execute one

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for her. When he showed it to her, she saw, in one corner of the canvas, a branch of a cherry tree, meager with blossoms, and a bird perched upon it. The entire upper half of the painting consisted of white space. She looked at it critically, then asked the artist to paint something else in the upper half because it looked, well, so bare. He refused her request without the slightest hesitation. She asked him why. He told her that it was impossible. When she pressed him, he told her that if he did so the bird would have no room to fly.

This story is more than a parable of the imagination. The absent flight (or “white flight”) of the immobile bird was, to the Japanese artist, as integral to the painting as anything depicted in it. The apparent emptiness/whiteness of space was not to be filled with finite forms for that would only foreclose on the infinity of forms possible.<sup>4</sup> As with the psychoanalytic function of language as viewed by Lacan, so the function of pictorial representation is not to inform but to evoke. The void of the presence/absence continuum of art, that makes it untouchable by systems working only with realized, limitable, empirical data—and that composed the mind-set of the Japanese artist—escaped the comprehension of the Western woman’s mind. We find a similar mind-set in the phonetic and visual poetry of Ball and Schwitters, in Dada simultaneous verse, Tzara’s “automatic” texts, Arp’s baseless sculptures, Picabia’s functionless machines, and Duchamp’s “object-transformers.” The significance goes deeper than the form and structure of the objects and their representability or virtuality. It lies ultimately in the “force” that inheres in their simultaneous presence-absence.

Dada objects incite and disturb the Cartesian beholder precisely because they are unseizable. For the Dadas, the resistance of the object to representation is the first step on the way to the liberation of the beholder from functional control—in the end, from the control of the Dada artist himself. Dadas did not, in fact, introduce a new cult; they effected a liberation from ritual and cult conditioning that inhibit the participation of the beholder. Undeniably, the Dadas engaged in manipulation and control, but the end changed, for the “artistic” experience led not to institutionalized response but to individual reaction. The Dada artistic object was in this sense cathartic. Benjamin has spoken of the prototypical response of the beholder of Dada art (of the 1920s as well as the 1980s) in referring to Surrealism: “The same public which responds in a progressive manner toward a grotesque film is bound to respond in a reactionary manner to surrealism.”<sup>5</sup> Mere grotesqueness is assimilable because it too

has become institutionalized. But Dada or Surrealist objects, with their dearth of recognizable reference points, drive the viewer back on a conditioned reaction, an atavistic response resembling totemism or hysteria in its effect, the symptoms of which disappear "once we are persuaded to doubt that it is possible arbitrarily to isolate certain phenomena and to group them together as diagnostic signs of an illness, or of an objective institution. . . ."6

How does one set out to write a book on something so elusive of description as Dada? To begin, I chose a provisional title, "The Dada Movement." No such thing as a Dada "movement" has ever existed, however; only Dadas existed, and a Dada way of seeing. Mary Ann Caws speaks eloquently when she observes that "Dada is a pure art which refuses to be judged on its façade, a pure language and pure spectacle which leaves its listeners and its spectators behind, on the surface which the speaker or performer has already deserted and which disintegrates after him."7 How could such an art, in its convoluted and extravagantly varied forms that disintegrate on contact, have gathered anything in its wake that could be called a "movement"?

In an "Open letter to Jacques Rivière" (December 1919), Tzara, the titular head of the mythic "Dada Movement" says,

In the course of campaigns against all dogmatism, and as an ironic gesture towards the creation of literary schools, DADA became the "DADA Movement." Under the title of that nebulous composition were organized painting exhibits, I saw to press several publications, and angered the Zurich public which attended the art soirées proclaiming that illusory Movement. In the manifesto of DADA 3, I declined all responsibility for a school launched by the journalists and commonly called "Dadaism." It is, after all, only comical if some maniacs and some men having collaborated in the decomposition of the former German organism have propagated a school I never wished to found.<sup>8</sup>

The title of the present book, *Dada: Performance, Poetry, and Art*, acknowledges nonetheless the very real existence of a phenomenon that arose abruptly, replicated itself in a seemingly spontaneous fashion in several far-flung places in the Western Hemisphere, usually scandalized and occasionally delighted spectators by its intense exhibitionism between the years 1915 and 1923, and just as suddenly left center stage. The early chapters of this book present a general account of Dada's zigzag journey along the route from Zurich to New York to Berlin to Paris, with intermediate stops, as well as a description of its manifold personalities

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and activities. These early chapters, which set up historical categories, are followed by chapters on Dada performance, poetry, and the plastic arts, which, if I have achieved even partially what I have set out to do, bracket those same historical categories and put into question the procedures of selection, denotation, and classification underlying them. We can discourse on Dada, but the factitiousness of that discourse, its limitations, must be kept in mind. Finally, in a brief conclusion, I have wished to respond to e. e. cummings's question as to whatever happened to Dada, by affirming that the Dada phenomenon did not die, but infiltrated, insidiously and importantly, modern attitudes toward artistic and literary discourse. As Duchamp averred, the spirit of Dada is eternal.

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## Chronology

- 1913 (February) First American viewing of Duchamp and Picabia at the New York Academy Show.
- 1915 (July–August) Picabia's machine drawings first appear in nos. 5–6 of *291* (New York), devoted entirely to his work.
- 1915–Early 1920s Picabia creates his mecanomorphic art.
- 1915–1923 Duchamp creates his *Large Glass*.
- 1916 (February) Cabaret Voltaire opens in Zurich. Birth of Dada. (May) Publication of *Cabaret Voltaire*. (July) Closing of the Cabaret Voltaire; first Dada Evening held at the Zunfthaus zur Waag (Zurich); appearance of Tzara's *La Première Aventure céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine*. (September) Huelsenbeck's *Fantastic Prayers* published in Collection Dada. (October) Huelsenbeck publishes *Schalaben Schalomai Schalamezomai*. Duchamp and Man Ray edit *The Blind Man* and *Rongwrong* (New York).
- 1917 (January) Picabia founds *391* in Barcelona; to appear in nineteen numbers (1917–1924). (January–February) First Dada Exhibition held at the Galerie Corray (Zurich). (March) Galerie Dada opens (Zurich). (July) First appearance of the review *Dada* which will publish seven numbers. Duchamp's *Fountain* refused by the Exhibition of Independent Artists. Man Ray creates his "Rayogrammes."
- 1918 (April) Huelsenbeck delivers his *Dada Manifesto*, which announces the founding of the Club Dada (Berlin); Picabia publishes *The Girl Born Without Mother* (Lausanne). (June) Tzara's *Vingt-cinq Poèmes*

- published. (September) Dada exhibition at the Galerie Wolfsberg opens. Picabia's machine drawings first seen in Zurich. (December) Publication of Tzara's *Manifeste Dada 1918* in *Dada 3*. Schwitters creates Merz in Hannover.
- 1919 (January) Picabia arrives in Zurich; first collaboration with Tzara. (March) *Littérature* founded by Breton, Soupault, and Aragon (Paris). (April) The Dada soirée at the Saal sur Kaufleuten. (October) Publication of *Der Zeltweg* (Zurich). Breton and Soupault collaborate on *The Magnetic Fields*. Schwitters publishes *Anna Blume*. Ernst invents (ca. 1919) first assemblage called a "collage." Cofounding of *Dada W/3* by Ernst, Arp, and Baargeld.
- 1920 (January) Breton meets Picabia in Paris; Tzara arrives in Paris; first Paris Dada event at the *Palais des Fêtes*. (March) Ribemont-Dessaigne's *The Emperor of China* (perhaps the first authentic Dada text in Paris) put on at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre. (May) Ernst exhibition at the Galerie Au Sans Pareil (Paris) attracts attention of Paris Dadas. First International Dada Festival marks the climax of Berlin Dada. Second Dada Exhibition at Cologne (the review *Schammade* published as part of this event). Huelsenbeck publishes *En Avant Dada* and *Dada Almanach*. Arp publishes *Der Vogel Selbdritt* and *Die Wolkenpumpe*. Picabia publishes *Jésus-Christ Rastaquouère*.
- 1921 (April) Dada excursion to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre (Paris); first and last issue of *New York Dada* appears. (May) Picabia announces his disaffiliation from Dada in *Comoedia*; "Indictment and Trial of M. Maurice Barrès" held at the Salle des Sociétés Savantes (Paris). (June) Salon Dada exhibition organized by Tzara (Paris). (July) Man Ray exhibits thirty-five works at the Librairie Six (Paris).
- 1922 (February) Breton denounces Tzara in *Comoedia*.

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- 1924 Tzara publishes his *Sept Manifestes Dada*. Schwitters (ca. 1924) begins work on his Merzbau in Hannover.
- 1946 Ball's diaries, *Flight out of Time*, published.
- 1946–1956 Duchamp creates *Etant Donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage*.



## *Chapter One*

# Dada in Zurich: A Time, a Place, an Idea

Dada and Zurich represent the amalgam of an impulse aching to be born and an atmosphere that nowhere else, no other time, could better have favored its birth. Dada underwent no long and painful parturition. As from substances negligently mixed in an alchemist's laboratory, the sudden and violent precipitation that followed shattered the tranquillity first of an unwitting burgher community in a northern Swiss city and eventually of the major artistic centers of the Western world.

The substances came together innocently enough. If we must date the beginning, we might make it an inauspicious winter day in 1916, the first of February, when a tall, ungainly youth by the name of Hugo Ball approached Jan Ephraim, the proprietor of the Meierei, to request the use of a spare room to establish an artistic-literary cabaret. The Meierei, a café-Bierstube, was located in the lowbrow quarter of Niederdorf, in "the most obscure of streets in the shadow of architectural ribs, where you [found] discreet detectives amid red street lamps."<sup>1</sup>

With the blessings of Jan Ephraim, the Cabaret Voltaire opened four days later. It was to serve as the retort in which the vital substances of Dada were mixed.

Perhaps the most enigmatic variable surrounding Dada's birth is that it should have happened in such unlikely surroundings. Zurich prior to World War I was a quiet provincial city lying in a cradle of wooded hills and ringed by works thrown up in medieval times along the northwestern shore of the Zurichsee. The city was dominated by two structures: Zwingli's Cathedral and the Railway Station, which together provided the means of leaving Zurich spiritually and physically. The pleasures of the inhabitants were simple. Before the Cabaret Voltaire, little nightlife existed. By nine o'clock at night the town closed up. It became, as Huelsenbeck would later say, quite "as lonely as the Sahara."<sup>2</sup> Zurich was

not an undistinguished city, however, for it had already become an important banking and industrial center. The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, where Einstein trained and later taught, was, moreover, located there.

An unlikely birthplace for Dada? In retrospect we realize that, on the contrary, it was a propitious place. With the outbreak of World War I Zurich found itself overrun with refugees and human bric-a-brac set adrift by war. Conspirators, spies, revolutionaries, conscientious objectors, draft evaders, singers, musicians, scholars, scientists, philosophers, traffickers in war matériel, speculators, informers, and propagandists rubbed elbows there. Virtually overnight Zurich became the center for revolutionary intrigue in the realms of politics, culture, and art. As Stefan Zweig recalled during his visit in 1917, it was a "bewitched world."<sup>3</sup>

Switzerland generally, and Zurich in particular, became havens for the unwanted dissidents of other countries, just as they had been years earlier for English Protestants fleeing from Tudor persecution and, later, French Huguenots. As early as 1915, several young, little-known writers and artists had begun to congregate, whose diverse and even incompatible backgrounds and beliefs, as Richter notes, created the very tension needed to give "to this fortuitous conjunction of people from all parts of the compass, its unified dynamic force."<sup>4</sup> Huelsenbeck attributed their closeness to the experiences and feelings they held in common: "We had all left our native lands, we all hated war, we all wanted to accomplish something in the arts." Dada grew out of "friendship, congenial love and congenial hate."<sup>5</sup> Just so did these young artists and Zurich provide the personalities and the meeting ground from which Dada took root.

Hugo Ball had fled Germany early, out of disgust for the war. "I did not love the death's-head hussars," he wrote in one of his poems, "Nor the mortars with the girls' names / So unnoticed I went away."<sup>6</sup> With him came Emmy Hennings, an actress and cabaret singer he had met at the Café Simplizissimus in Munich in the fall of 1913. The couple spent the first few months of 1915 destitute, gleaning what little they could from odd jobs. After a brief engagement with a traveling vaudeville group, they returned to Zurich late in the year. There they found an ever-growing group of antitraditional artists and writers.

Ball's role as a conscientious objector reflected the profound moral concern that characterized all of his work, led to the founding of the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916, and served importantly in transforming the individuals who gathered around him into a group with a steadfast purpose. Is it anything but paradoxical that Dada, felt by so many

observers as representing nothing more serious than an impish iconoclasm, should have coalesced around that patient philosopher-priest, Hugo Ball, implacably bent on pursuing meaning to fill the void left by the nonsensical juggernaut of war grinding unrelentingly over the hedgerows of Europe?

Through a frenzy of creative artistic activity, as irrational and gratuitous as it seemed, Ball and his followers set out to expose the bankruptcy of pseudorational systems that had led Europe to the brink of insanity and death. The Cabaret Voltaire assembled the “six-piece band”—Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Hans (Jean) Arp, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, and Richard Huelsenbeck—around which the Dadas and their sympathizers rallied.<sup>7</sup> Their own accounts of their meeting differ. Ball mentions that Arp helped him to decorate the cabaret for opening night, and describes how Tzara and Janco arrived with a small delegation to offer their help as Ball and his friends were frantically making last-minute preparations.<sup>8</sup> Janco, on the other hand, describes events differently: “Looking for work, one evening I found myself in one of the medieval alleys of old Zurich. In an old night-club, there was music. To my amazement I discovered, seated at the piano, a gothic personality. Ball, the poet, was playing Tchaikovsky. . . . When he learned that I was a painter, he at once suggested that I should take part in his project and invite my friends too. So I brought along Arp, a great friend of mine, and Tzara, my little pal.”<sup>9</sup>

Whatever the circumstances of the first meeting of the proto-Dadas, we know that, on the first program, Emmy Hennings and a Mlle Leconte sang to an out-of-tune piano, the inimitable Tristan Tzara recited his Romanian poetry “which he fished out of his various coat pockets in a rather charming way,”<sup>10</sup> and the neighborhood resounded with lively dances and folksongs played by a Russian balalaika orchestra.

Ball’s plan in establishing the cabaret was influenced by three things: his fascination since childhood with the potentials of theater (“To me the theater meant inconceivable freedom”<sup>11</sup>), the experiments of futurism with which he had first become acquainted in Dresden in 1913 or 1914, and his preoccupied search for the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (“total work of art”). In regard to the latter, Ball was strongly influenced by Wassily Kandinsky, whom he had met in 1912 and later warmly praised for his efforts to bring about “the regeneration of society through the union of all artistic mediums and forces.” Ball relates how, in 1914, when he was considering his plan for a new theater, he felt “a distinct need for a stage for the truly moving passions; a need for an experimental theater above and beyond the scope of routine daily interest”—“A fusion of all regenerative ideas, not



only of art. Only the theater is capable of creating the new society. The backgrounds, the colors, words and sounds have only to be taken from the subconscious and animated to engulf everyday routine along with its misery.”

In *Der Blaue Reiter* Kandinsky had envisaged a monumental work of art based on “a counterpositioning of the individual arts, a symphonic composition in which every art, reduced to its essentials, provides as an elementary form no more than the score for a construction or composition on stage.”<sup>12</sup> Here lies the nucleus of Ball’s plan, which he had attempted to realize in 1914 through the development, along with members of the Blaue Reiter group, of an art theater (*Künstlertheater*). In the prologue to his autobiography, *Flight Out of Time*, Ball offers a fascinating glimpse of what an ideal *Künstlertheater* program should include: a Total Work of Art by Kandinsky to open the program, followed by recitation, ballet, music, and sketches by Marc, Fokine, Hartmann, Klee, Kokoschka, Yevrenov, Mendelsohn, Kubin, and Ball himself. The program was not unlike that of the Cabaret Voltaire in its diversity and fusion of multiple art forms.

The opening night of the cabaret was a smash success. So too were the following nights—“bustle and stir, the joy of the people, cries, the cosmopolitan mixture of god and brothel.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, the Cabaret Voltaire became even more lively as it went on. The first Zurich Dada review, *Cabaret Voltaire*, appearing four months later, described its contents as representative of the activities and interests of the cabaret, “whose purpose is to recall that there exists, beyond the war and national boundaries, some independent men who live for other ideals.”<sup>14</sup>

The group that gathered around Ball and Emmy Hennings at the Cabaret Voltaire did indeed live for other ideals—those of a counterculture which shared with the namesake of their gathering place a healthy skepticism for dogma and the desire to throw it over. Each played his own register in a clashing cacophonous ensemble that miraculously blended into a bizarre harmony. Their motto might have been “Strength through Disparity,” they composed such a heterogeneous group.

Around this nucleus formed a group of talented, if often eccentric, artists, writers, and intellectuals. Walter Serner, an “adventurer, detective novel writer, sophisticated dancer, skin specialist and gentleman-burglar,”<sup>15</sup> had published a review called *Sirius* and would later collaborate with Otto Flake and Tzara on the editorship of *Der Zeltweg* (1919). Sophie Taeuber, who collaborated closely with Arp, whom she would eventually marry, created abstract embroidered tapestries and contributed her *Dada-Köpfen* (“Dada-heads”), sculpted from wood. Through Sophie

Taeuber, who among her other activities studied dancing, nearly the entire dance troupe of Rudolf von Laban (inventor, in 1928, of *Schrifttanz*, one of the two major systems of modern dance notation) was drawn into the Dada activities. In August 1916, Hans Richter, who would become one of the leading memorialists of the Dadas, arrived in Zurich and soon became an active member of their group.

Other collaborators included Otto Flake, who would cofound *Der Zeltweg* and compose a *roman à clef* on Zurich Dada called *Ja und Nein* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1920). Christian Schad, Max Oppenheimer (Mopp), the painters Oskar Lüthy, Arthur Segal, Fritz Bauman, Gordon Mallett McCouch, and Otto Morach were also active. Hans Heusser became the musical composer for the Cabaret Voltaire. Several non-Dadas participated to varying degrees: Alexi Von Jawlensky, Paul Klee ("He would participate in all our positive experiments but, when dada set foot on a tight-rope, he fled"<sup>16</sup>), the Expressionist Walter Helbig, Viking Eggeling (who would work closely with Richter after the demise of Zurich Dada), and the Viennese poet-novelist Frédéric Clauser (Friederich Glauser).

The cabaret became a notable attraction in Zurich. In *Dadaland* Arp describes the tavern as "gaudy, motley, overcrowded"—"Total pandemonium. The people around us are shouting, laughing, and gesticulating. Our replies are sighs of love, volleys of hiccups, poems, moos, and miaowing of medieval *Bruitists*. Tzara is wiggling his behind like the belly of an oriental dancer. Janco is playing an invisible violin and bowing and scraping. Madame Hennings, with a Madonna face, is doing the splits. Huelsenbeck is banging away on the great drum, with Ball accompanying him on a piano, pale as a chalky ghost."<sup>17</sup>

Janco's 1917 painting *Cabaret Voltaire* beautifully illustrates Arp's description, for it recaptures the atmosphere of crowded tables, posters and masks and proclamations splashing the walls, and the entertainers pressed close together on a small wooden platform, appearing in Janco's masks like weird apparitions. In his essay "Dada Créateur" Janco describes the public as well: "It became a meeting place of the arts. Painters, students, revolutionaries, tourists, international crooks, psychiatrists, the demimonde, sculptors, and police spies on the lookout for information, all hobnobbed with one another. In that thick smoke, in the middle of the noise occasioned by declamations or some popular ditty, some sudden apparition would loom up every now and then, like the impressive Mongol features of Lenin, or Laban, the great dancer with his Assyrian beard."<sup>18</sup>

The program was loosely planned and often punctuated by impromptu performances in which the audience participated. The balalaika orchestra

was in fact begun by a group of Russians in the audience. At other times a contingent of Dutchmen would dance or join in with a makeshift band. Even the gray-haired owner, Jan Ephraim, "our worthy father of the inn and grillroom,"<sup>19</sup> could not resist partaking of the fun, one time tapdancing with his fellow Dutchmen, on another occasion composing Negro *chants*.

The show ran nightly, featuring the recitation of conventional and experimental poetry, simultaneous readings, songs, dances, and orchestral compositions. Later Ball added exhibitions with which he attempted to grasp that idea of total art so dear to him by juxtaposing and layering lectures, music, readings, and ballet with the paintings and engravings.

The cabaret introduced a bizarre but expected mixture of unknown and accomplished artists: one could see Picassos and Delaunays hanging alongside paintings that have long since disappeared, by artists unknown, or hear Rubinstein playing Saint-Saëns on the same program as the reedy-voiced Emmy Hennings. Unhappily, with the addition of the exhibitions and multiple art forms presented simultaneously, the poor cabaret finally did itself in. Within six months it closed.

Huelsenbeck attributes its closing to the fact that it went bankrupt because the Dadas were too impractical-minded to collect admissions and because carousing students had destroyed nearly every stick of furniture in the place. It seems more likely, however, that Herr Ephraim forced the Cabaret Voltaire to close because of public protest over the wild orgiastic proceedings. Too much intoxicating art combined with too much inebriated rowdiness.

Whatever the reasons for the closing of the cabaret, as early as mid-March the pace had begun to wear on the organizers, especially Ball, who was becoming exhausted by the tension. On 26 February Ball wrote, "The little cabaret is about to come apart at the seams and is getting to be a playground for crazy emotions."<sup>20</sup> Its closing represented for Ball as much the promise of respite as the fact of failure.

Tzara wrote the epitaph for its closing in his *Zurich Chronicle 1915–1919*: "The Cabaret lasted six months, every night we thrust the triton of the grotesque of the god of the beautiful into each and every spectator, and the wind was not gentle—the consciousness of so many was shaken—tumult and solar avalanche—vitality and the silent corner close to wisdom or folly—who can define its frontiers?—slowly the young girls departed and bitterness laid its nest in the belly of the family-man."<sup>21</sup> Today the old Meierei still stands in the Spiegelgasse, though no trace of the Cabaret

Voltaire remains in the interior and little if any in the memory of the patrons.

In the months following, the Zurich Dada group turned elsewhere to satisfy its need for expression. The richly varied forms of their artistic creations upon which they stamped their individual and heterogeneous personalities found outlet in the staging of numerous exhibitions and performances, as well as in the publication of manifestos and reviews (see the succeeding chapters on Dada theatrical, artistic, and literary activities).

On 14 July 1916 the Dadas held their First Dada Evening at the *Zunft*haus zur Waag. It was a raucous affair that enraged the audience and ended in fistfights and shouting, accompanied by the breaking of windows and the inspired beat of Huelsenbeck on his big drum.

The First Dada Exhibition occurred in January–February 1917 at the Galerie Corray, a foretaste of the Galerie Dada, which opened on 17 March 1917, produced three large exhibitions, and staged several smaller events such as a series of soirées, lecture evenings, and public tours of the gallery. The Galerie Dada existed only three months, until mid-1917. As Ball helped to close out its accounts, he was at the same time closing out his own accounts with Dada, which he was soon to leave (for a second and final time).

With Ball gone, Tzara beat the drum.

Hugo Ball had incessantly opposed the efforts of the Zurich Dadas to coalesce into anything resembling an artistic movement, for in doing so he felt it would assume too much self-importance and sacrifice the objectivity necessary to probe and analyze unrelentingly artistic, social, and cultural structures. Even as Ball was setting about to leave, despairing of having achieved his object, Tzara, commemorating the launching of the first number of *Dada*, proclaimed in his *Zurich Chronicle*, “Mysterious creation! Magic revolver! The Dada Movement is Launched.”<sup>22</sup>

In the first eighteen months of its existence Zurich Dada eluded definition, but after Ball’s final departure it began increasingly to develop characteristics that identified it as a distinct literary antimovement with a deliberate antiprogram and antigoads, under an acknowledged leader, Tzara. As if to inaugurate this tendency, the first public event of Dada after Ball’s departure was an evening devoted to Tristan Tzara at Meise Hall on 23 July 1918.

Richter dates the “end of this period of ‘balance’ within Dada” from the exhibition put on at the Galerie Wolfsberg in September 1918, and he

does so for rather specific reasons. Most of the pieces on exhibit were not new to Zurich Dada (Arp's colored reliefs, Janco's white plaster reliefs, Richter's visionary abstract portraits). Opposite these, however, in a darkened room off the main, brightly lighted gallery, as if to accentuate their diabolical aspect, a series of Picabia's "machine pictures" were on display. They dated from 1914 and earlier and offered to the perplexed viewer realistic-looking but unlikely machines carrying such tongue-in-cheek inscriptions as *Amorous Procession; Ici, c'est Stieglitz* (1915), showing an abstruse cameralike mechanism; *Paroxysme de la douleur* (1915), depicting a springlike object inserted into a frame; and *Machine Tournez Vite* (1916), a sexual fantasy with cogs intersected and overlaid by circles and lines. The pictures presented symbolic statements intermingling human emotions and attitudes with (and toward) mechanical contrivances. The result was a type of antipainting which marked "the first symptoms of the crisis of the object (denatured objects, divested of their specific *raison d'être*) which raged in Dada and which, with certain psychological deviations, assumed its full scope in surrealism."<sup>23</sup>

Finally, on 22 January 1919, Picabia blew in for a two-and-a-half-week visit, all ostentatious conviviality and enthusiasm, and with his wife hosted a champagne and whiskey bash for the Dadas at the Elite Hotel. Picabia's brilliance *imposed* itself on Zurich Dada, as it had on so many young artists (while the Zurich Dadas were mostly in their twenties, Picabia was forty in 1919). His rampaging cynicism and the total contempt for art of his writings in *391* fascinated the Zurich artists and, as one might suppose, in particular Serner and Tzara. *391* had started out rather mildly in Barcelona, picked up steam in New York, and by the time it reached Zurich was bent on absolutely savaging the world of art. Only one issue of *391* appeared in Zurich (no. 8) but it gives us a good idea of how Zurich Dada played the second of its two-part drama. *391*'s corrosive cynicism makes us realize how much Ball's gentle humanism had become eclipsed and how high the star of Tzara was in ascendance. With Picabia's arrival, the domination of Zurich Dada by the iconoclasts had become more and more evident.

*391* was the model for Dada's nihilistic side. From its inception, as Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia asserts, it "never had any programme, method or articles of faith. . . . Without other aim than to have no aim, it imposed itself by the force of its word, or its poetic and plastic inventions, and without premeditated intention it let loose, from one shore of the Atlantic to the other, a wave of negation and revolt which for several years would throw disorder into the minds, acts, works of men."<sup>24</sup> Despite the

overenthusiastic encomium given to 391, it was unquestionably an important review. Picabia did not create the new mood of Zurich Dada, for all the materials, ideas, and persons were there. He but helped to mold them and as an *agent provocateur* urge them on. He was influential in transfusing into Zurich Dada veins the vigorous blood of the foreign Dada movements. During his stay in Lausanne he and Tzara had begun a correspondence that cemented the bonds of friendship which were to inspire both of them. Above all, though Picabia was himself without a program, he encouraged the Dadas to make a program of nihilism itself and aggressively to expand its scope of activities far beyond the confines of art.

Zurich Dada reached its climax in the extravagant soirée organized by Tzara in the Saal zur Kaufleuten on 9 April 1919. That performance, calculated as were so many Dada performances to excite and stir the passions of the audience, succeeded in transforming curiosity-seeking individuals into an enraged mob of spectators leaping onto the stage and set on doing mayhem. If we are to believe Richter and Tzara, however, after the rage had run its course, it gave way to the sober realization of how close to the surface of the human psyche lies irrationality: "Dada had succeeded in establishing the circuit of absolute consciousness in the audience which forgot the frontiers of education of prejudices, experienced the commotion of the New."<sup>25</sup>

The last months of 1919 were anticlimactic for Zurich Dada. Little by little it disintegrated. With the war at its height, Zurich had served as an artistic center without equal, isolated from all other centers, a bastion against man's insanity. But as the barriers of war, leaving Switzerland in quasi-isolation, gave way and unimpeded travel in Western Europe became possible once again, the Zurich Dadas soon realized that important artistic groups were beginning to gather elsewhere, primarily in Paris, which was bursting with vigor, grafting new radical ideas brought to it by returning émigrés onto the old roots of the pre-war avant-garde.

Tzara himself set out for Paris, to which Picabia had preceded him, and which awaited the majordomo of Zurich Dada with eagerness. On 17 January 1920, Tzara entered Paris inconspicuously, but it took but a short while before "Paris Dada went off like a roman candle, raining sparks in the shape of names, ideas and events."<sup>26</sup>

Paris Dada was, however, to add little to the essential ideology of Dada: "it was reserved for Breton, Aragon or Eluard not so much to conceive new ideas as to refine them, exploit them, disseminate them and above all to transpose them into literature."<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, Zurich Dada itself had exploited the ideas and techniques of a conglomerate of predecessor artistic groups: futurist, orphist, cubist, and expressionist. Perhaps, as Werner Haftman points out, Dada's originality lies in the way it took disparate experiments and stylistic trends and forged them into "a unified expression of experiences and emotions that were wholly of the present."<sup>28</sup> Its best years were probably the shortlived Ball-Tzara years when the heterogeneous personalities composing it were held in a tenuous balance that gave it the richness and diversity of creative experience that approached the very *Gesamtkunstwerk* sought by its founder.

Often commentators are tempted to view Zurich Dada as consisting essentially of two periods: one of assemblage and carefully controlled experimentation presided over by Ball and, after 1917, under Tzara, an unrestrained schizoid push to the brink of nihilism. That generalization, however, emphasizing Ball's controlled and holistic approach as opposed to Tzara's free-wheeling, ad-hoc manner, glosses over the *similarities* existing in the activities of Ball and Tzara, which they shared with the other Dadas; it overemphasizes Ball's sense of order and Tzara's sense of disorder. The most we can say is that Ball's ability and desire to draw the Dadas together into a functioning chaos were much greater than those of the intensely individualistic Tzara, whose personality encouraged division and motivated the Dadas each to follow his individual instincts.

In *L'Homme révolté*, Albert Camus observes that, although revolt arises from the specter of irrationality and an unjust and incomprehensible condition, "its blind impulse seeks to uphold order in the midst of chaos and unity itself at the very heart of everything that slips away and disappears."<sup>29</sup> Such an observation calls to mind in turn Kandinsky's definition of artistic anarchy in his essay "Über die Formfrage" (On the Question of Form"), which influenced Ball's thinking: "It is thought, incorrectly, to mean unplanned upheaval and disorder. But anarchy is regularity and order created not by an external and ultimately powerful force, but by the *feeling for the good*."<sup>30</sup> Thus, the creative principle of artistic anarchy for Ball as for Kandinsky flows from inner necessity and, in conjunction with time and personality, shapes the artistic work. This idea accords with Camus's statement that the most elementary revolt paradoxically expresses an "aspiration towards an order."<sup>31</sup>

So Dada might be said to be intent upon destroying the disorder of unreason parading under the banner of Aristotelian logic and establishing in its place the fundamental order of simultaneity and paradox, at the heart

of which dwell an awareness and valorization of human existence and a condemnation of that which is iniquitous to it.

Ball's instinct for order and regularity appear to have been markedly stronger than Tzara's. Ball called forth *similarities*, moreover, while Tzara elicited *differences*. But both of them undeviatingly sought, through a variety of experimental modes, "an art based on fundamentals, to cure the madness of the age, and a new order of things that would restore the balance between heaven and hell." For the Dadas "had a dim premonition that power-mad gangsters would one day use art itself as a way of deadening men's minds."<sup>32</sup> The old art, like the art of Socialist Realism to come, of which Arp had a premonition, through exterior models institutionalized human behavior and sought to depict objects subservient to rigidly preconceived systems. On the contrary, the Dada artist, beginning in Zurich, strove to make art the expression of the individual's effusive inner world of desire and dream. Objects of the exterior world, deprived of their role as models, took on a life of their own. "The new artist . . . no longer paints / symbolic and illusionist reproductions / but creates directly from stone, wood, iron, tin—rocks and moving organisms susceptible of being turned this way and that by the limpid wind of momentary sensation."<sup>33</sup>

The principles expressed in Tzara's words—a return to fundamental form acted upon by the momentary sensation experienced by the artist—are at the base of the Dada creative act. What did "fundamental form" mean to the Dadas? In general terms it meant freeing the object from its arbitrary contextual relationships. But this freeing of the object, viewing the object as object, was not enough in itself, for traditional art had long been passing the false coin of representation, had fastened on things themselves; it mistook surface for substances, so as to miss sight of the essence of things. The Dada artist sought to free the object of its contingency, to seek those fundamental relationships which constituted its *essence*. In the object-artist relationship, of course, the role of the artist was important, for without him the objects are but objects. What do they become by the artist's mediation as they are "turned this way and that by the limpid wind of momentary sensation"? They become "signs," born of their coupling with the artist's perceptive faculties. Blake's visions were peopled with objects in movement, objects becoming people, people becoming objects, matter that is reversible and flows in and out of itself endlessly, like Moebius's band. This magical release of the object was the new idiom of the Dada artists. Ball spoke of "the painter as administrator



of the *vita contemplativa*. As herald of the supernatural sign language, that has an effect on poets' imagery too. The symbolic view of things is a consequence of long absorption in images." And he asks, "Is sign language the real language of Paradise?"<sup>34</sup>

Huelsenbeck in his *Memoirs* tells of going to Arp's apartment, where he noticed a painting depicting potatoes. "But what potatoes! They were the most unreal, the most anemic, the most cerebral potatoes in the world." Far from being nonplussed, however, he suddenly came to understand what Arp and modern art were striving to achieve—"the metaphysical formula for the existence of all potatoes in the world."<sup>35</sup> It was up to the Dadas radically to transform through whatever medium they found at hand, the object; to perceive and convey it through figurative rather than literal means; to purify it so that the object *became* essence (sign language) and fit for commerce with the angels in Paradise. The artist, like his object fallen, was promised redemption through the very object itself.

In attempting to make sense out of art, Arp sought through it a refusal of the grammar of previous artistic modes and an identification with nature in the form of composite images already formed in the human imagination, to be brought into the light of day by the artist. He and Sophie Taeuber began to experiment in 1916 with fabric and paper, whose geometric balance was established by chance. In the gratuitous configuration of pieces of paper from a drawing he had torn up and thrown on the floor, he was struck by the natural forms and, preserving the pattern the scraps of paper made, he created his composition *Nach dem Gesetz des Zufalls* ("According to the Laws of Chance"). The artistic implications are evident: the fact that the significance of the object lies not in its banal functional aspect, but rather in the banishment of that aspect, underscores the creative-destructive nature of the Dada poetic-artistic act wherein chance encounters uncover such antiart "creations" as the *objet trouvé*, wherein an interpenetration of art and life is achieved by means of bringing to life, or restoring to life, an inanimate object viewed through a special artistic perception that creatively transforms it (a process Duchamp called "meta-irony").

Thus the Zurich Dadas, through arrangements, juxtapositions, assemblages, chance correlations, etc., sought the metamorphosis of object into sign. Arp's wood compositions of the time, such as *Forest* (1916), *Portrait of Tzara* (1916), and *Enak's Tears* (1917), superimpose wood on wood, painted in bold, clashing colors such that between ground and figure develop a tension and a harmony that bring the pieces to life with new meaning. His wood compositions reveal that interpenetration of life

through their dynamic interaction with the artist's cognitive faculties. Even as his artistic work turns more and more to abstraction, a strongly identifiable human element is infused into the natural forms—not the cold rectilinearity of cubist art but humanoid spheres and sinuous forms. Even Janco's art, which did turn to geometrical, cubed displacement, is called by Arp "a naturalism in zigzag."<sup>36</sup> While failing to initiate a comprehensive art style, Dada invented a special vocabulary of forms and shapes that would become the "form-language" of the surrealist poets and painters.<sup>37</sup>

So too did the Dadas' bruitist poetry and noise music, which discarded the surface aspect of words in combination (semantics and syntax), restore the relationship of object and creator. We recall the 23 June 1916 performance of the phonetic (abstract) poetry of Ball at the Cabaret Voltaire, during which he noticed his voice taking on "the ancient cadence of priestly lamentation, that style of liturgical singing that wails in all the Catholic churches of East and West." We recall the performances of such simultaneous poems as "L'amiral cherche une maison à louer" (30 March 1916), which was recited and sung in unison by Tzara, Huelsenbeck, and Janco, and which, like Ball's noise poetry transmuted voice and sound into world image, world idea, of the conflictual forces composing our world and threatening to devour us.<sup>38</sup> So too we recall the total, simultaneous nature of the entire Cabaret Voltaire itself, with its conjunction of poetry, recitation, music, dance, mime, and painting—"The background of colours, words and sound must be brought out from the subconscious and given life, so that it engulfs everyday life and all its misery."<sup>39</sup>

We recall also the automatism of the Dadas' cabaret performances structured by chance events and fleeting moods, their automatic writing (such as the text contrived by Picabia and Tzara in 391, no. 8, to commemorate their Zurich meeting), as well as their many manifestos, the typography and layout of their reviews (*Cabaret Voltaire*, *Dada*, *Der Zeltweg*), their experiments with poetry in various modes: simultaneous, abstract, phonetic, newspaper, African, automatic, "fantastic," kinetic, etc. These experiments represent in common the attempt to rearrange in seeming casualness and play the very tempo of the universe, the interpenetration of all forms of life (animate and inanimate). We might cite only a snatch of verse from Arp's *The Cloud Pump* to grasp what links not only Ball and Tzara, but the endeavors of all the Zurich Dadas:

in january it snows graphite in the goatskin in february the bouquet of  
chalk-white light and white stars shows itself in march the angel of death  
copulates and tiles and pleats flutter away and the stars swing in their circles and

the wind-hunting flowers rattle their chains and the princesses sing in their pots of mist which hurries off on little fingers and wings in pursuit of the morning winds ("Aus 'Die Wolkenpumpe,'" from *Der Zeltweg*)<sup>40</sup>

Why does Arp tamper with objects in such a way that "reality" seems to lie just beyond our grasp? Arp tells us how, in his poems, he tried "to break down language into atoms, in order to approach the creative." He speaks of rejecting art during his Dada years "because it distracts us from the depths and disturbs the pure dream," of revering the law of chance because of the new "perceptions" and "immediate spiritual insights" it opened to him. "An insignificant word might become a deadly thunderbolt. One little sound might create a universe."<sup>41</sup>

We have a right to ask what "spiritual insights" are offered by stars swinging in circles and wind-hunting flowers rattling their chains. At the heart of Arp's work, as well as that of the other Dadas, is the eternal search of the poet-artist-creator for the Word-Sign, the ambitious attempt to return to the fundamental, to nature at the moment of its creation through the word of God-Jehovah-Yahweh. To achieve such a return would be to commune with the primal forces of spiritual-artistic creation—a desire shared by alchemists, necromancers, and saints. We can no more easily understand much less explain rationally the poet-artist's search for salvation through the re-creation of the Word than that of the saint who aspires to spiritual redemption. *Poiesis* is the explanation of itself.

## *Chapter Two*

# In the Land of Jazz, Skyscrapers, and Machines: New York Dada

While Dada was being baptized on the shores of the Zurichsee in northern Switzerland, a sibling counterpart was coming of age in New York City. Though they were in full flush in the years 1915–1916, word of each other's presence did not begin to filter back for two or three years.<sup>1</sup> The individual who was to become a conspirator in both—as well as in the shortlived Barcelona venture—Francis Picabia, was to do so more as a pawn of circumstance than as one with deliberate purpose. Picabia moved in and out of New York with the fluctuating fortunes of war and his own delicate health. He settled in Lausanne, not to be near his Swiss confreres but for personal reasons. Indeed, when Picabia went to Switzerland in late 1917, he knew hardly anything of what was happening in Zurich.<sup>2</sup>

Just as in prewar Paris the avant-garde rallied about the figure of Apollinaire and took up its haunts in Montmartre and Montparnasse, and, as in Zurich, Hugo Ball and the Cabaret Voltaire became focal points, New York Dada had its old man of the mountain and its particular purlieu. The old man was Alfred Stieglitz, forty-one years old when he opened his photography shop, the Photo Secession Gallery, at 291 Fifth Avenue in 1905. Much has been said about this venerable Maecenas who ran a one-man patrol in advance of the avant-garde groups of the early century. Stieglitz pioneered a medium as potentially artistic as painting and writing that would take its place beside other media as a favored Dada art form.

Crucial to the emergence of New York Dada, a loose affiliation named after the fact, were the acuity and energy of Stieglitz, who had an eye for talent and encouraged young artists in whom he saw it. He was “the friend, the counselor, apostle of bigger and better camera work,”<sup>3</sup> as Sandburg called him. When the twenty-year-old Edward Steichen exhibited in the Chicago Photographic Salon in 1899, Stieglitz served as a

member of the jury and fully supported Steichen's work. Stieglitz wrote to him, in fact, and when the young man left the Midwest to come to New York, he headed for the New York Camera Club, where he found the prophet himself. When Stieglitz asked if his photographs were for sale, Steichen wondered that anyone might want to buy them. "I'll buy some," Stieglitz said, and did, at five dollars a photo. As Sandburg recounts it, at least.<sup>4</sup>

As the linchpin of the New York avant-garde of the prewar years, it helps to know what type of a man Stieglitz was, for, in a sense, his life and his ideas about handling reality encapsulate what New York Dada became. To begin with, photography meant for Stieglitz not the slavish reproduction but the transformation of external contextual reality, the restoration of objects to things alive in their own right, "free of anecdote and cheap sentiment."<sup>5</sup> Reality for Stieglitz was a sheet of opaque development paper from which magic forms emerged. That the artistic credos of many of the artists moving in Stieglitz's shadow at that time sound similar refrains is not surprising. In 1913, in an interview, Picabia asserted, "Almost all paintings had tried to recreate objects which exist in nature, and that is precisely what art must not be."<sup>6</sup>

Three years before Stieglitz opened the Photo Secession Gallery in 1905, he and Steichen had founded, under that same name, a renegade group of photographers in revolt against tradition. Later, the group came to be called 291, after the address of the Fifth Avenue gallery. Stieglitz's gallery became a showcase for photographers as well as artists of vastly differing styles: Rodin, Toulouse-Lautrec, the Douanier Rousseau, Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso, Brancusi, and the anonymous mask and artifact-makers of Africa, not to mention several American artists. He sought to introduce art to what he regarded as an artless world: "There is certainly no great art in America today," he said in 1911, "what is more, there is, as yet, no genuine love of it."<sup>7</sup>

Stieglitz became in those days "an intermediary between European and American artists,"<sup>8</sup> in part thanks, one suspects, to Gertrude Stein, whom he visited in Paris in 1907.<sup>9</sup> Stieglitz gathered around him such young American artists as Alfred Maurer, Charles Demuth, Patrick Henry Bruce, Abraham Walkowitz, Morgan Russell, Marsden Hartley, Joseph Stella, Max Weber, John Marin, Macdonald-Wright, Arthur Dove, and Walter Pach. His young protégés moved between Paris and New York in those years—making their Paris stopping place the apartment of Gertrude Stein at 27 rue de Fleurus and their touching ground in New York 291 Fifth Avenue.

The “artless” world of America became aware of something going on in 1913. That year the Armory Show opened. However famed and defamed, the Armory Show was only the outward expression of what had been percolating for several years at the gallery at 291 Fifth Avenue. That was where the master conspirator and his acolytes had been laboring long hours, constructing the infernal machine that would go off in 1913.

The Armory Show is history, an event as explosive and frighteningly exhilarating in the world of art as the fiery crash of the *Hindenberg* or the throbbing shock waves of the first atomic bomb. The show, which gathered over 1,500 works of art, was the brainchild of Arthur Davies and Walt Kuhn, who assembled the exhibition for the Association of American Painters and Sculptors, which had been founded two years previously. The 69th Infantry Regiment, whose armory it was, never knew what hit it.

Among all the celebrated modern artists who, like Matisse and Picasso of that day, were then still unknown to the general public, it was Marcel Duchamp who caused the greatest outrage with his *Nude Descending a Staircase*. Dada knew nothing of it—it had not even a name at that time—but one of its phalanges was delivered of birth in the old arms repository on Lexington Avenue in 1913.

Aside from Duchamp, the other important Dada before the fact who had made himself known in New York (Duchamp was not to arrive in person until 1915) was Francis Picabia. Stieglitz had taken a special liking to Picabia. In March 1913 he opened an exhibition of Picabia’s work. In a catalog from that exhibition Picabia spoke of his own work and modern art in general, defending abstraction. Stieglitz thus helped set up the Dadas as he had helped set up so many other artists. He came, however, to experience disappointment over their lack of organizing principle; Dada appeared to him to have a “three-ring circus atmosphere.” Although he continued to lend his strong support to all artistic innovators and collaborated closely with Picabia, Duchamp, and the other Dadas, they more and more assumed poses to which the older man was unaccustomed. Holding to his steadfast belief in controlled art, he remained their friend and mentor even as they pushed ever farther into the exciting if dangerous realm of apocalyptic art that toyed with chance and creative destruction. His growing advocacy of “straight photography” did in effect set forth an antiart statement not out of synchrony with Dada experiments. Stieglitz, moreover, continued to publish Picabia’s iconoclastic antiart statements in *291*, to which *Camera Work* ceded its place in 1915. *291* was not a Dada review, but it gave currency to Dada just as it did to abstract art.

The three artist-poets most associated with New York Dada are Francis Picabia, Marcel Duchamp, and Man Ray. The American experience profoundly marked the work of the former two, while Man Ray moved easily from New York into the transatlantic avant-garde. From their Paris days Picabia and Duchamp had been inseparable friends—Pharamousse and Rose Sélavy, as they came to call themselves. Their relationship evolved as a continual exchange of ideas, enthusiasm, and works of art (in August 1912 Duchamp gave to Picabia the initial sketch of his most original work, *La Mariée*, [*The Bride*], which, he said “was no longer dependent upon schools already in existence”<sup>10</sup>). They shared the same attitudes toward art and life, and their work paralleled each other’s, redolent of a similarity of style and inspiration.<sup>11</sup> “To know Duchamp without knowing Picabia is to know only half the story.”<sup>12</sup> Duchamp and Man Ray would also develop a lasting relationship.

We shall look at these artist-poets in turn to see what they brought with them to the New York avant-garde and how the New York experience affected their forms of Dada.

### Francis Picabia

Picabia is one of the least known of major twentieth-century artists, though he is in many ways the most original of them all. He was born in Paris in 1879, on his father’s side descended from a branch of the Spanish nobility, the Della Torre y Picabia of Galicia. His grandfather had migrated to Cuba, and his father was born in the Antilles and moved to France, where he married a wealthy Parisienne. Already at an early age, the son was experimenting with abstruse ideas. His father once gave him a pair of scales, with which he set about weighing all manner of objects. Then he struck on the idea of setting the scales on a windowsill and covering one window pane with a screen to see if shadow weighed more than light. “. . . the scales must have had an extraordinary precision because the needle moved in the direction of the screen. I concluded from that that night was heavier than day.”<sup>13</sup>

In 1905 Picabia held his first exhibition. Early paintings like *The Church of Morise*, 1904, had revealed a type of neoimpressionism influenced by Pissarro and Sisley, others of pointillism (*The Shores of the Loing at Moret in Autumn*, 1906). Toward 1908–9, he began to simplify form and to highlight planes and color. Parallel with this fauvist tendency, he created in *Caoutchouc*, ca. 1909, one of the first examples of abstraction. In 1908 he met Gabrielle Buffet, whom he would soon marry. One of the

questions she asked him, in the course of their long discussions about art and aesthetics, bears directly on Picabia's work. "But then, what does one paint?" His answer: "Forms and colors freed from the sensorial qualities; a painting situated in pure invention, which recreates the world of form according to one's own desire and imagination."<sup>14</sup>

In 1911 Picabia met Duchamp at the Salon d'Automne. He also met Apollinaire, with whom he became fast friends ("Apollinaire would certainly have been *Dada*, like Duchamp and myself, if he had not died so prematurely"<sup>15</sup>). Picabia occasionally attended the Cubist gatherings on Sunday at Puteaux, at the atelier of Jacques Villon (the *nom de pinceau* of Gaston Duchamp, Marcel's oldest brother). Picabia's work, while compatible with that of the Cubists, was forging its own path. Apollinaire called it orphic for its remarkable transposition of light into color.<sup>16</sup>

In January 1913 Picabia and his wife left for New York, where Picabia's work, notably *Danses à la source* (1912), was to appear in the Armory Show the following month. He met Stieglitz and his avant-garde camp following, and threw himself into the frenetic life of New York with its brilliant misfits who "turned night into day, conscientious objectors of all nationalities and walks of life living in an inconceivable orgy of sexuality, jazz and alcohol." But it was above all the art world that exhilarated Picabia in 1913 and spurred him on to paint with renewed inspiration.<sup>17</sup> He created a series of abstract watercolors which reflect, through their title and forms, dancers, African music (jazz), and New York City.<sup>18</sup>

New York touched a particularly sensitive chord in Picabia. Touted as one of the most important representatives of modern art in France, Picabia gave several interviews. In one, entitled "How New York Looks to Me," which appeared in the *New York American*, he calls the city "the only Cubist city in the world."<sup>19</sup> His description of New York is worth quoting, for it exemplifies the attraction the "New World" held for the Dadas: "The spirit of your New York is so unseizable, so magnificently, so immensely atmospheric, while the city itself is so concrete, that it is difficult for me to describe by words alone the effect it has on me." One must look to his art for the expression of that collusion of the ephemeral and the concrete that he finds in New York. He speaks of how the public expects, however, to discern familiar forms in his work but sees nothing. He renounces mimetic art. The new art creates "a painting without models." Like music, it is charged with emotion without discernible visual reference. He feels New Yorkers above all should appreciate the new art because "Your New York is the Cubist city, the Futurist city. It expresses modern thought in its architecture, its life, its spirit. You have



bypassed all the old schools, and you are futurists in words, acts and thoughts." His paintings should, therefore, be comprehensible, for, "They express the spirit of New York such as I feel it and the crowded streets of your city such as I feel them, their swell and surge, their agitation, their shops, the charm of their atmosphere." He speaks of his art as having gone beyond Impressionism and Cubism: "I no longer even call myself a Cubist. I came to realize that one cannot always succeed in expressing through cubes the brain's thoughts, the soul's sensations."

Picabia seems to indicate that Cubist technique is too caught up in form to convey the thought and emotions aroused by the urban landscape of New York. Gabrielle Buffet has described her former husband's painterly efforts in those years immediately preceding the war as reflecting a search for "the disintegration of the concept of art, and the substitution of personal dynamism, of individual forces of suggestion and projection, for the codified values of formal beauty. These effects [*jeux*] of prospecting on an inaccessible dimension and in unexplored regions of being, this climate of invention never recaptured since, appears to me to have contained all the seeds of what eventually became Dada . . . ."20

The experiments of Cubism and Futurism with simultaneity strongly influenced Dada art and poetry, but Futurist art, in particular, in its glorification of modern technology and its latent dynamism, most resembles Picabia's work of the period. "Universal dynamism must be rendered as dynamic sensation," Marinetti insisted in his 1909 *Manifesto of Futurism*, and "movement and light [must] destroy the substance of objects."<sup>21</sup> Picabia's abstract, orphic watercolors, vibrant with color and line play, do seem to impart to the canvas "dynamic sensation" flowing from his contact with the urban landscape.

But questions arise, for, as we see in some of those same watercolors, Picabia was attracted as much to "primitivism" as he was to modernism. He found, for example, inspiration in the "African music" or jazz of Harlem and Greenwich Village. To be sure, "primitive" artifacts represented for European artists and poets like Picabia or Apollinaire, who were "weary of this ancient world" of Europe ("Zone"), the return to simpler forms of life.<sup>22</sup> (Stieglitz, at the urging of Maurius de Zayas, held the first American exhibition of African art in 1914.) Such forms were suggested to them, not only by the African and Oceanic worlds, but by America as well. American primitivism, however, was a legacy of the nineteenth century, either of frontier variety or of the Waldenesque type, and one wonders how the Dadas reconciled the simplicity of rural-frontier (and Afro-American) America with the complexities of urban technology.

With the appearance of Picabia's machine drawings in *291* in 1915, during the course of his second visit to New York, the reconciliation occurs. In an essay accompanying the drawings in *291*, De Zayas argued that Picabia "had broken away from Europe and accepted America as it was by living in its a-historical present, dominated by the machine and cut off from tradition."<sup>23</sup> This originless, rootless aspect was conveyed by the very titles of Picabia's drawings, such as one depicting a sparkplug and bearing the title *Portrait of a Young American Girl in a State of Nudity or Daughter Born Without a Mother*. By celebrating vulgarity, Picabia was renewing art through objective representation, a fact that allied his efforts with those of Stieglitz, who by this time was advocating straight photography. The stances of both men destroyed traditional aesthetic notions of art and replaced them with a type of antiart. On the other hand, while Picabia's machine pictures hold much in common with Stieglitz's photography and the Futurist valorization of the machine, Picabia actually went beyond both, for his machine creations, however seemingly objective, are actually parodies, machines endowed with a whimsical function if any function at all. They are parody-machines through which he sought to attain "the summit of symbolism."<sup>24</sup>

At the end of his first visit to New York in 1913, Picabia had returned to France. When war broke out, an event that held only repulsion for him, he managed to wrangle a commission to purchase molasses in Cuba for the army. It was en route to Cuba in 1915 that his second visit to New York took place. He promptly put his mission into cold storage and collaborated actively with the old friends that he met there. The machine drawings he published in *291* were exhibited for the first time, in January 1916, at the Modern Gallery, newly opened by De Zayas.

The frenzied pace of Picabia's life in New York during his second visit, aggravated by multiple illnesses and his abuse of alcohol and drugs, led to a severe nervous disorder. Temporarily granted medical leave from the army, he left in August for Barcelona. There he and Gabrielle Buffet found a small group of émigré artists, writers, and adventurers seeking refuge from the war. Among them were Marie Laurencin and her husband, the Baron Otto von Waetgen; the irrepressible Arthur Cravan (Fabian Lloyd), self-styled nephew of Oscar Wilde, adventurer, wanderer, and boxer; the Russian poet-painter Serge Charchoune, who would later join the Paris Dada group; the painter-writer Albert Gleizes and his wife, Juliette Roche; the poet-painter-journalist Maximilien Gauthier (Max Goth); Nicole Groult; and Canudo, who would, with Louis Delluc, provide influential in French film aesthetics in the 1920s. In this setting, Picabia's

condition improved and, casting about for something to do, in January 1917 he founded *391*. The review took its name, with Stieglitz's blessing, from *291*, which ceased publication in February 1916. While in Barcelona, Picabia also published his first volume of poetry, *Fifty-two Mirrors*.

In May 1917, Picabia and Gabrielle Buffet packed up and left for New York, where the Dadas, augmented by new recruits such as Jean Crotti, were in full swing. They were to be joined shortly by Cravan and the Gleizes. But the Picabias' stay was shortlived, for, with the tranquillity of their never very tranquil family life threatened, in October Gabrielle Buffet left for Switzerland to visit their children in boarding school there. Picabia went first to Barcelona, then to Paris, which he found nearly empty of friends, who had left for the front. Suffering from solitude, he finally rejoined his wife in Lausanne in February 1918.

Setting up in a hotel, he divided his time between consultations with the well-known neurologist Brunnschweiler and furious poetic activity.<sup>25</sup> The years 1916–1918 witnessed scant painting by Picabia, but he continued to produce his machine pictures and, in 1918, he published *Poems and Designs of the Girl Born Without a Mother*. In August 1918, Picabia received a letter from Tristan Tzara. The rest belongs to the story of Zurich and Paris Dada.

## Marcel Duchamp

According to Gabrielle Buffet, Picabia and Duchamp "emulated one another in their extraordinary adherence to paradoxical, destructive principles, in their blasphemies and inhumanities which were directed not only against the old myths of art, but against all the foundations of life in general."<sup>26</sup>

In many ways the deep friendship existing between Picabia and Duchamp grew from this attitude toward art. But something deeper distinguished the two artists, leading Apollinaire in 1913 to say about Duchamp that "perhaps it will be the task of an artist as detached from aesthetic preoccupations, and as intent on the energetic as Marcel Duchamp, to reconcile art and the people,"<sup>27</sup> i.e., to bring art down from its pedestal. That perhaps was the greatest achievement of Marcel Duchamp. His early activity seemed to belie the detachment foreseen by Apollinaire, but years later, after Duchamp had completed his painting career in 1923 and begun to devote his efforts as much to chess-playing as to anything else, Apollinaire's view seemed for André Breton, who spoke of Duchamp's indifference and "disdain of thesis," fully borne out.<sup>28</sup>

In speaking in 1946 of his years of artistic creation, Duchamp would say, "I wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting. . . . I was interested in ideas—not merely in visual products. I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind."<sup>29</sup> Duchamp saw art, from his earliest years, as a mental activity (*cosa mentale*), of no greater value necessarily than any other free expression of the human mind. "We have a lot of little Cubists," he had said in 1915, "monkeys following the motion of the leader without comprehension of their significance. Their favorite word is discipline."<sup>30</sup>

Born in 1887, eight years Picabia's junior, Duchamp, like the latter, went through Impressionist and Fauve stages. He kept abreast of the Cubist experiments by attending the Sunday meetings of the Cubists at his brother's studio in Puteaux. He struck up an immediate friendship with Picabia. Momentarily he flirted with Cubism but increasingly his work came to valorize a kinetic energy missing in their work, as for instance in *Portrait* (1911), which depicts five views of a woman in movement. In *Yvonne and Magdeleine in Tatters* (1911) he conveys the temporal movement of two women (his sisters), each of whose progression from youth to old age is juxtaposed. But with *Sad Young Man in a Train*, from the same year, we discover a prefiguration of his series of the *Nude Descending a Staircase*, the first version of which appeared the same year, in which representational depiction is replaced by abstract humanoids composed of successive, interlocking figures in motion. This mechanical aspect would imbue his art to the end of his artistic career. In 1912 he entered his second version of the *Nu* in the Salon des Indépendants, organized by the Puteaux group.

Duchamp has disclaimed the influence of the Futurists in these early works, while convincingly pointing out that he was influenced instead by Jules Etienne Marey's chronophotographs of the 1890s, which showed, through multiple exposures, human figures in movement. In any case, the Cubists sent a delegation composed of Duchamp's own two brothers to ask him to withdraw his painting from the show, or at least to call it something other than *Nu*. Despite their depiction of nude forms in such works as Metzinger's *Tea Time* (1911), Duchamp's nude, boldly illustrated by his title, disquieted them. Duchamp chose to withdraw it. Undeterred, he plunged ahead with paintings displaying a similar kinetic mode (*The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*, 1912). During a two-month visit to Munich (where Kandinsky was working), Duchamp created among other works the initial sketch for his revolutionary *The Bride Stripped Nude by Her Bachelors, Even*, which would engage his efforts for a decade to come. Upon his return from Munich, he declared himself finished with Cubism and even painting in any ordinary sense. He settled down to sort

out his ideas on scratch sheets that went into a green cardboard box (the celebrated "Boîte verte" that would be published in facsimile in 1934, containing ninety-three documents and sketches). His closest companions of that period were Picabia and Apollinaire.

When his *Nu descendant* appeared a year later in the Armory Show in New York, one American critic called it "an explosion in a shingle factory," others "a collection of saddlebags," "leather, tin and a broken violin," while a Chicago critic advised that viewers should fortify themselves in viewing it by eating "three Welsh Rarebits and sniff [ing] cocaine. . . ." <sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, a San Francisco art dealer by the name of F. C. Torrey recognized its possibilities and bought it for the princely sum of \$324.

Duchamp set about fulfilling Apollinaire's prognostication by removing art from the personal domination of the artist. He struck on using glass and the technique of draftsmanship with its "impersonality of the ruler." <sup>32</sup> In the period 1912–14 he set to work earnestly on studies for his composite masterpiece, the *Large Glass*. In the first version of the *Chocolate Grinder*, a painting to be incorporated into the *Large Glass*, he foreshadows Picabia's machine drawings while retaining, through an impression of moving parts, a Futurist dynamism. Importantly, certain aspects of the *Large Glass* incorporated chance configurations, such as those obtained by dropping cut pieces of thread onto a canvas and fixing them with varnish in the shape they landed, much like the experiments Arp was to make with his pieces of paper in Zurich. Duchamp saw chance not only as a form of liberation but as an expression of individual subjectivity ("Your chance is not the same as mine, just as your throw of the dice will rarely be the same as mine" <sup>33</sup>).

During this pre–New York period, Duchamp also fabricated his antiart "objects," the first of which was a conjunction of a bicycle wheel on its forks and a kitchen stool upon which it was mounted upside down (1914). Another consisted of an iron rack for drying wine bottles which he purchased in a department store in 1914 and signed, thus transforming it from a mercantile object into a work of art—antiart, to be sure, for he was deriding the act of an "artist" signing his name to an object as the seal of "artistic creation." Nowhere, better than in his readymades, did Duchamp bear out Apollinaire's estimation of his aesthetic indifference, as well as his reconciliation of Art and the people (or ordinary life, if we may interpolate). Duchamp said of his readymades: "The choice of these readymades was never dictated by aesthetic delectation. The choice was

based on a reaction of *visual indifference* with a total absence of good or bad taste."<sup>34</sup>

Unfit for military duty, Duchamp was invited to come to New York when the American painter Walter Pach visited Paris in 1915. To Duchamp's surprise, there he found himself somewhat of a celebrity because of his notorious nude. Like Picabia, Duchamp became enamored of the city and its robust unconventionality. In those months of 1915 he took up again with his old friend and together they attended the festivities, where they became inebriated with art and alcohol. They often met with their fellow American and European artists at the apartment of Walter C. Arensberg, where, "at any hour of the night one was sure of finding sandwiches, first-class chess players, and an atmosphere free from conventional prejudice."<sup>35</sup>

Duchamp continued work on the *Large Glass* (promised to Arensberg in exchange for a studio provided free to Duchamp at the former's apartment). He also continued work on his "objects," now baptized "readymades"—one a snow shovel signed and suspended from his ceiling, entitled *In Advance of a Broken Arm* (1915); another, *Trap* or *Trébuchet* (1917), which was a coatrack nailed to the floor for guests to trip over. He also fashioned "assisted readymades," which were improved upon by the "artist," such as his *Assisted Readymade with Hidden Noise* (1916), consisting of a ball of twine held between two metal plates and containing within an unknown object that rattled when shaken.

Duchamp was to create about two-dozen readymades between 1914 and 1915. But the granddaddy of them all was *Fountain*, entered at the Exhibition of Independent Artists in 1917 under the name of R. Mutt, a manufacturer of sanitary hardware. The signature was appropriate inasmuch as the object was a urinal. When the *Fountain* was refused, Duchamp withdrew from the organizing committee and immediately published his objections in the *Blind Man*, which Arensberg and Henri-Pierre Roché financed and he edited. His article was entitled "The Richard Mutt Case":

They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit.

Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.

What were the grounds for refusing Mr. Mutt's fountain:—

1. Some contended it was immoral, vulgar.
2. Others, it was a plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.

Now Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bathtub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows.

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.

As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.<sup>36</sup>

In 1918 Duchamp returned to what would be his last fling at painting after a lapse of four years, creating a work entitled *Tu m'* for Katherine S. Dreier. It is a work with a remarkable repertory of geometric forms, *trompe l'œil* effects, and phantom machines.<sup>37</sup> A short time later he left for a nine-month stay in Buenos Aires and then, in 1919, joined Picabia in Paris. In early 1920 he returned to New York. The Paris Dadas that same year asked Duchamp to send them some works for their exhibition at the Galerie Montaigne. He wired back a cable saying "Peau de balle" ("Nothing at all"), which they promptly hung.

Duchamp returned to his work on the *Large Glass* and also began to create constructions in motion. At this time he chose the feminine epithet Rose Sélavy (*Rose, c'est la vie*), under which name certain of his readymades appeared—one such a bottle of perfume with Duchamp's bewigged visage disguised as Rose Sélavy, carrying the label "Belle Haleine—Eau de Violette." A photo of it graced the cover of *New York Dada*, a single number of which was edited by Duchamp and Man Ray (largely the latter), and which pretty much spelled the last collective expression of Dada in New York (it contained a text by Tzara, a Rube Goldberg "machine" cartoon, and a unique Stieglitz "object"—the photograph of a woman's foot in an undersized shoe).

New York Dada, to the degree that it had ever existed, was essentially over. Duchamp returned to Paris in 1921, and January 1922 found him back in New York for good, but the American avant-garde artists were now intent on forging a "native American" art, notably through such efforts in the early 1920s as those of Marsden Hartley, William Carlos Williams, and Robert McAlman associated with the review *Contact*.<sup>38</sup>

By 1923 Duchamp became bored with his *Large Glass* and ceased work on it, calling the stage he had reached the "definitive stage of incompleteness."<sup>39</sup>

## Man Ray

Man Ray was born in Philadelphia in 1890. His family moved to Brooklyn when he was seven. He virtually grew up with color crayons and pencils in one hand and brushes in the other. While children of his age snatched candy, he made off with paint tubes from local art shops.

As a young man in 1911, he found work as a draftsman in a technical publishing house, where he could combine his love of drawing with his childhood interest in mechanical inventions. In the evening he attended live drawing classes at the Ferrer Center and discovered Stieglitz's 291 Gallery, to which he would rush during lunch breaks.<sup>40</sup> Stieglitz befriended him and asked to see his work. At the 291 Gallery Man Ray was struck by the monochromatic effects of the Cubists and, in 1911, created a quiltlike tapestry from tailor's samples which reflects their influence. But Ray was particularly impressed by the sense of organization and color in the work of Cézanne, an exhibition of whose works he saw at Stieglitz's gallery. We discern the influence of the Frenchman in his painting *Landscape (The Village)* of 1913, the same year he executed a Cubist portrait of Stieglitz.

Seeking solitude, Ray rented a country house in Ridgefield, New Jersey, in 1912. Adon Lacroix, a Frenchwoman and poetess who visited his house with a group of friends from the Ferrer Center, soon moved in with him. In the spring of 1913, they married. Two years later he was to draw a series of lithographs to accompany her poetry assembled in a deluxe volume, of which only twenty copies were printed.

He continued to experiment with Cubist technique in such paintings as *Portrait of Donna* (1913) but moved more and more in other directions. One canvas, *AD MCMXIV*, reveals heavy geometric forms and a fascination for color that would earmark his art, even as he turned to abstract studies in the years to come. Like Duchamp, whom he met in Ridgefield in 1915, he experimented with a wide variety of materials and antiart modes. One work called *Self-Portrait* shows the stark imprint of a hand against a black background, flanked by electric bells and a real pushbutton that infuriated viewers because it did nothing when pushed. His *Portrait Hanging* was attached crookedly to the wall so that, when straightened, it would swing back to its cockeyed position. "I wanted the audience, the visitors," he said, "to participate in a creative act."<sup>41</sup> He was asked if New York Dada was born when he met Duchamp. "No," he replied, "it existed already. I had it in me, and my contacts with the Dadaists and Surrealists only strengthened my attitude and opinions."<sup>42</sup>



By 1915 he was ready for his first showing at the Daniel Gallery. With Duchamp he edited the *Blind Man* and *Rong-Wrong* and cofounded the Society of Independent Artists. In the 1916 Independents Show he exhibited *The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself with Her Shadows*, scandalizing one critic, who wrote that "the man who did this painting must be a drug addict, a degenerate, a criminal." Commenting on that incident in an interview on 11 October 1972, he said, "When I was under attack from all sides, I knew I was on the right track."<sup>43</sup> Far from being intimidated, Ray pushed further in his experimentation. In a statement made in the catalog of an exhibition held in March 1916, he said, "The artist's work is to be measured by the vitality, the invention, and the definiteness and conviction of purpose within its own medium."<sup>44</sup>

In the period 1916–1917 Ray worked with collages, one such work being *Revolving Doors*, consisting of ten graphic plates mounted on a revolving stand so the spectator might see its successive views. Around 1918, inspired in part no doubt by Duchamp's renunciation of traditional media, Man Ray turned to painting without brushes, using stencils and a spray gun in a series of airbrush paintings or aerographs. He continued to work with machines, but, far from being enamored with them to the extent that the Futurists were, like other Dadas he kept ever in mind their potential for enslavement of their human inventor. One of his objects consisted of a grouping of cogwheels on a sheet of glass with the word DANCER superimposed on them. The letter "C," however, is pronged enough to suggest DANGER as well. What is more, the wheels are interlocked in such a way that they are frozen. Hence, the ironic pun on dance (which with the cogwheels conveys the value of movement) warns of, and the locked wheels ward off, the danger inherent in the machine. The machine "objects" of Ray, like those of Duchamp, Picabia, and the other Dadas, reveal ironic distance and humor, which hold at bay the threat of technological domination of man.<sup>45</sup>

Following Duchamp's lead, Ray invented a series of readymades that differ from those of Duchamp in the degree of their contentiousness if not implied hostility in regard to the spectator. While such motives occur in Duchamp's readymades (e.g., his snow shovel or trap) the latter is far more given to a benevolent willingness to share a joke with the spectator through urinal-fountains, readymades with hidden noise, etc., rather than to obstruct or harass him. One Ray readymade, for example, was an olive jar entitled *Export Commodity* (1920), containing steel balls. His famous *Enigma of Isidore Ducasse* (1920), consisting of a mysterious object (a sewing

machine) wrapped in an army blanket tied with cord, calls to mind the misanthropic Lautréamont (Ducasse's *nom de plume*) and his image of an umbrella and a sewing machine meeting on an operating table. In 1921, shortly after his arrival in Paris, Ray created the macabre *Cadeau* (*Gift*), a clothes-iron to whose bottom was glued a row of tacks, which he entered in his Paris Dada exhibition. In July of that year he left for Paris, where he exhibited thirty-five of his works at the Librairie Six. His interest, in New York, in the photographic reproduction of art and antiart works would lead, in Paris, to his discovery that would radically alter the technique of artistic photography: his famous Rayograms.

As Arturo Schwarz has pointed out, of those who could be called New York Dadas, only Man Ray was a real homeborn product.<sup>46</sup> The others involved, along with Duchamp, Picabia, and Gabrielle Buffet, were foreign: the Englishman Arthur Cravan, the Swiss Jean Crotti (who composed object-pictures and portraits, including *The Clown*, 1916), and the German Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. Several other foreigners rubbed elbows with the Dadas, such as Edgar Varèse and Henri-Pierre Roché, who helped Arensberg finance the *Blind Man*. The Americans other than Ray who associated with the Dadas and contributed to Dada publications—Mina Loy, Beatrice Wood, Carl van Vechten, Charles Demuth, Joseph Stella, Charles Burchfield, etc.—were not Dadas. Walter Arensberg, who alone styled himself a Dada and wrote the only manifesto of American Dada in *Littérature* in 1920, was more Dada in name than in deed.

The reviews one might call Dada appearing in New York in those years begin with the *Ridgefield Gazook*, edited by Man Ray, and of which only a single number appeared (31 March 1915). It consisted of four pages of nonsense graphics and illustrations. The title page bore the legend "We are *not* neutral," while its masthead advertised, "Published unnecessarily whenever the spirits move us. Subscription free to whomever we please or displease. Contributions received in liquid form only. This issue limited to local contributors." Other Dada reviews included the shortlived *Rogue*, published in 1916 by Allen and Louise Norton (in which appears "The," a text by Duchamp); the *Blind Man*, of which two numbers appeared (April and May 1917); and *Rong-Wrong*, with its single July 1917 number, both reviews edited by Duchamp with the collaboration of Man Ray. *291*, with its twelve issues (1915–1916), was strictly speaking not a Dada review, though it gave central billing to Picabia's work (nos. 5–6, July–August

1915, are devoted exclusively to Picabia's machine drawings). On the other hand, its offshoot, *391*, of which Picabia published three numbers in New York (no. 5, June 1917, and nos. 6 and 7, July and August 1917), was in every way Dada. Finally, *New York Dada*, with its lone issue of April 1921, baptized a phenomenon that had already existed for seven or eight years and was now gasping its last breath. Other reviews of the period shared something of the Dada spirit: *T.N.T.* (March 1919, edited by Man Ray with Henry Reynolds and Adolf Wolff, an anarchist sculptor, poet, and friend of Blaise Cendrars), which circulated only among friends, shared Dada's anarchist impulse; the *Soil* (1917), edited by Robert Coady, shared Dada's preoccupation with primitivism.

The Dada evenings, so familiar in Zurich, were rare in New York, the sole one of record being that organized by Duchamp and held at the Grand Central Gallery in March 1917 for the edification of a group of socialites. The program featured Arthur Cravan, who spoke on modern art. Accounts differ, though everyone agrees Cravan was drunk. Man Ray recalls Cravan entering with a valise which he slammed onto the table, opened, and from which he commenced to strew about dirty linen. (Richter says he stripped nude; Gabrielle Buffet says he merely began to undress.) Nearly everyone agrees as well that the police were summoned to apprehend Cravan (except Man Ray, who says "guards" were present). One account avers that he spent time in Sing Sing. But Gabrielle Buffet's version of how Arensberg saved him from being jailed is more plausible.<sup>47</sup> The only other Dada event of any proportion was a Dada symposium held on April Fool's Day 1921 by the Société Anonyme, Inc., which Katherine Dreier helped to found in 1920 with Duchamp and Ray. Marsden Hartley spoke on "The Importance of Being Dada."

The impact of New York Dada does not stop with its dispersal in 1921, however, for its blood ran into the veins of Zurich Dada (through Picabia's association with them in 1918–1919) and Paris Dada (with Man Ray and Duchamp's departure for Paris in 1921). New York, in sum, never gave birth to a native American Dada movement. Though it maintained flirtatious relationships with major foreign Dadas such as Picabia and Duchamp, its one important American son (Man Ray) was born as if through immaculate conception and was eventually to leave for more congenial surroundings in Paris. Man Ray attributed the failure of Dada to "take" in America in those years to the fact that "the idea of scandal and provoking people, which is one of the principles of Dada, was entirely foreign to the American spirit."<sup>48</sup> While few American artists other than Man Ray were touched by Dada—Morton Schamberg, Charles Demuth,

Marsden Hartley, John Covert, Arthur Dove, and Stuart Davis to varying degrees—its effect on the American art work of that time was in no sense deep and long-lasting. On the other hand, New York and America gave Dada a great many inspirational materials: such exotics as the cowboy, jazz, skyscrapers, machines, and the silent film.

## Chapter Three

### Dada in Berlin:

### “Bedding down on a volcano”

Walter Mehring's description of how the Dadas distributed their pamphlets in strife-torn Berlin conveys an idea of the unique dangers of being a Berlin Dada in 1919:

We hired a char-à-banc of the sort used for Whitsuntide outings, and also a little band, complete with frock coats and top hats, who used to play at ex-servicemen's funerals. We, the editorial staff, paced behind, six strong, bearing bundles of *Jedermann sein eigener Fussball* instead of wreaths.

In the sophisticated west end of the city we earned more taunts than pennies, but our sales mounted sharply as we entered the lower-middle class and working class districts of north and east Berlin. Along the streets of dingy grey tenements, riddled by the machine-gun fire of the *Spartakus* fighting and sliced open by the howitzers of the Noske régime, the band was greeted with cheers and applause as it played its two star pieces, which were the sentimental airs *Ich hatt' einen Kameraden* and *Die Rasenbank am Elterngrab*. . . . And “every man his own football” entered the Berlin language as an expression of contempt for authority and humbug. The periodical even looked like becoming a best-seller—and would have, if we had not been arrested on our way home from serenading the government offices in the Wilhelmstrasse.<sup>1</sup>

Richard Huelsenbeck had returned to Germany in January 1917. In contrast to the smug, fat, and tranquil city of Zurich, Huelsenbeck had found in Berlin a “city of tightened stomachs, of mounting, thundering hunger, where hidden rage was transformed into a boundless money lust and men's minds were concentrating more and more on questions of naked existence.”<sup>2</sup> To the emaciated city of Berlin, Huelsenbeck carried, somewhat reluctantly at first, the spirit of Dada.

Huelsenbeck's return to Germany marked his growing uneasiness with the Dada spectacle in Zurich and an increasing dislike of abstract art. In a

letter to Ball in Agnuzzo in October 1916, he wrote of his desire to return, a return delayed by "a severe nervous stomach disease. . . . perhaps punishment for that dada hubris that you now think you have recognized. I too have always been greatly opposed to this art."<sup>3</sup>

Huelsenbeck claims never to have mentioned during 1917, following his return, the name of "Dada," from which he had grown alienated.<sup>4</sup> It is true that in his article on "Der neue Mensch," published in the first issue of *Die Neue Jugend*, which he founded with Franz Jung and John Heartfield in 1917, he made no allusion to Dada. His article reflected, in fact, a revisionism we can interpret only in relation to his temporary rupture with Dada, for in it he proposed an un-Dada-like meliorist philosophy that envisaged a betterment of humanity through nonrevolutionary action (an implicit renunciation of Marxism as well). His thesis resembled the sort of fuzzy humanism Hausmann would later attack in Huelsenbeck's own edition of *Dada Almanach* (1920). "We are required," Huelsenbeck said, "to look deep into ourselves to understand man, what can be made out of him: there one sees the synthesis of capabilities and all things human. . . . The new man stretches wide the wings of his soul, he orients his inner ear toward things to come. . . . his strength splashes; in this expansion upward, without violence, the mystics of growth is no more adventurous than a *buon giorno* or a *felicissima notte*. In ecstatic redemption, the new man finds himself."<sup>5</sup>

In February 1918, in the course of an evening at the Neue Sezession Room, organized by Huelsenbeck and certain Expressionist poets and sponsored by J. B. Neumann, Huelsenbeck spoke of the Dada movement in Zurich. He recalled it with nostalgia and sympathy, adding a bellicose note unfamiliar in Zurich but representative of Huelsenbeck himself: "[Dada] wants to be the war party of the great international art movements. It is the transition to the new joy garnered from real things. The Dadaists are types who have fought with life, and who are capable of living experience, individuals with penetrating minds who understand that they find themselves at a turning point in their time. It is only one step to politics. Tomorrow minister or martyr in the Schlüsselburg."<sup>6</sup> He ended the evening, one of dismay to Neumann, with a reading of his *Phantastische Gebete*.

On this eventide Berlin Dada was born. Not long after, Huelsenbeck, newly re-inspired, composed his *Dada Manifesto*, which would carry the signatures of Zurich Dadas as well as aspiring German Dadas such as Franz Jung, George Grosz, Gerhard Preiss, and Raoul Hausmann. Huelsenbeck delivered the *Dada Manifesto* at a lecture evening organized by himself

with the help of Grosz and Hausmann on 12 April 1918. It unleashed an attack against the major avant-garde movements whose abstractions and sentimentality failed to relate to the problems of the time ("They have nothing to do with the tendencies of active men"). With these movements Huelsenbeck contrasted Dada: "The word Dada symbolizes the most primitive relation to the surrounding reality; with Dadaism a new reality emerges in its own right. Life appears as a simultaneous disharmony of noises, colors, and spiritual rhythms, which becomes subsumed whole into Dadaist art, with all the sensational screams and fevers of its insolent everyday psyche and with its total brutal reality. Here lies the sharply marked boundary separating Dadaism from all previous artistic tendencies, and above all from FUTURISM which until recently some imbeciles have taken to be a new version of impressionist realization. Dadaism for the first time stands against an aesthetic attitude towards life, while tearing to pieces all the slogans of ethics, culture and inwardness, which are only cloaks for weak muscles."<sup>7</sup>

In the same manifesto Huelsenbeck announced the founding of the Club Dada. "Here every man is president. . . ." He implicitly laid down the program for Dada in Berlin: "To be a Dadaist may mean under certain circumstances to be more a businessman, more a politician [Parteimann] than an artist. . . ."

Huelsenbeck's later comments about the effect of this first collective Berlin Dada endeavor strike a very different note from that found in his article in "The New Man." "I was already analyzing quite clearly," he says in *Dada seigt!*, "the only possibility offered to Dadaism in Germany: a relativist, anti-bourgeois, anti-capitalist and activist conception of life, of political and diplomatic intelligence, a manifesto of inquietude and energy in which art occupied only a minuscule place, which would even direct itself against art so long as art remained a profit-seeking product of a compact bourgeois class."

The irony of this statement two years after the fact rocks us on our heels, for the nonmaterialistic Huelsenbeck, according to Raoul Hausmann, fled with the evening's receipts and hid out in Brandenburg until October 1918.<sup>8</sup> Hausmann and Baader held the fort during Huelsenbeck's absence. But, apart from a second Dada event held at the Café Austria in June, little happened in Berlin Dada until 1919. (Meanwhile political events were moving quickly: in November the fleet mutinied in Kiel and northern German towns fell to the sailors. The revolutionaries set up worker and soldier collectives in Cologne, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and

Munich, and with the capitulation of the generals and the flight of Wilhelm II the Republic was proclaimed. In December, after infighting between the revolutionary groups, the government launched a counteroffensive and, in 1919, successfully brought to a close the revolutionary action.)

On 30 April 1919 the Berlin Dadaists assembled an exhibition at the Graphisches Kabinett of works by Hausmann, Grosz, Heartfield, and Jefim Golyscheff. The exhibition closed with an upbeat evening during which Huelsenbeck read his *Dada Proclamation 1919*; others recited simultaneous poems and noise poems, and Golyscheff's "Anti-Symphony" was performed.<sup>9</sup>

The next Dada event of note took place on 24 May at the Meistersaal. It found most of the German Dadaists participating. The program included a number called *Chaosplasma* with sound effects lent by two large drums and children's rattles and starring ten women and one postman. Grosz and Mehring (the latter participating for the first time) staged a "Race between a typewriter and a sewing machine." On 7 December the Club Dada held an event at the Tribune Theater which enjoyed a rare public success, particularly remarkable because of the enthusiasm of the press. Club Dada accepted with alacrity the opportunity to put on a second event at the invitation of the Tribune because of the disturbing success of their earlier performance. At a matinee on 13 December they set out to rile the audience. To their satisfaction, they succeeded.<sup>10</sup>

Huelsenbeck worked hard in the years 1919–1920 to gather Dada work into publication form. In 1919 he urged the publisher Kurt Wolff in Munich to take on the publication of *Dadaco*, which assembled the work of several international Dadas and stirred readers' interest through advertisements in *Der Dada*, *Der Zeltweg*, and *Die Schammade*. *Dadaco* never went beyond the proof stage, unfortunately, and had to await publication until 1970.<sup>11</sup>

In 1920, in honor of the First International Dada Festival (Erste Internationale Dada-Messe), Huelsenbeck published his important *Dada Almanach*, which brought together an international collection of Dada work. From Zurich came Tzara's *Zurich Chronicle*, poems, and *Dada Manifesto 1918*, Ball's "Karawane," and poems by Arp, among other contributors. From Paris came works by Picabia, Dermée, Huidobro, Ribemont-Dessaignes, Soupault, and Max Goth, along with Picabia's *Manifeste cannibale dada*. From Dada outposts came additional material (Mario d'Arezzo's poem from Italy, a poem by Adon Lacroix from New York).



Finally, the Club Dada came out in force with contributions by Baader, Hausmann, Mehring, Heartfield, Grosz, and Daimonides (Karl Döhmann).

Huelsenbeck, who wrote in *Dada Almanach* as if he were the spiritual advisor of Dada, like Breton in the *Second Surrealist Manifesto* praised and excommunicated in turn. He rejected Schwitters outright. Under the pseudonym Hans Baumann, he attacked Baader in "A Private Affair of Dadaism." And he did his best to discourage Hausmann from submitting his contribution, "Return to the Object." As for the latter text, one can conjecture that Hausmann's condemnation of Expressionism, "in which swim, peacefully reconciled, all the indecision, all the incomprehensibility of the German soul, like dumplings in soup," could hardly have sat well with the Expressionistically inclined Huelsenbeck (despite his own attacks on Expressionism).

The year 1920 was a prolific one for Huelsenbeck. Along with the *Dada Almanach*, he published *En Avant Dada*, *Dada seigt!*, *Deutschland muss untergehen*, and a second edition of his *Phantastische Gebete*, with illustrations by Grosz. But, like the extravagant soirée held at the Saal zur Kaufleuten in April 1919, which represented the last bang of Zurich Dada, so the First International Dada Festival marked the climax of Berlin Dada. Club Dada was never again to collaborate on a collective endeavor. Berlin Dada was breaking up.

Club Dada, launched by Huelsenbeck in 1918, attracted a variety of personalities even more diverse than those of Zurich Dada. Among them a few stood out: Huelsenbeck himself, Raoul Hausmann, Johannes Baader, the Herzfelde brothers (Wieland and his brother Helmut, who Americanized his name to John Heartfield), and George Grosz. Several personalities composed a fringe group: Hannah Höch (Hausmann's girlfriend), the poet-adventurer Franz Jung, the writer Carl Einstein, who edited *Der blutige Ernst*, songwriter and poet Walter Mehring, Gerhard Preiss, Jefim Golyscheff, Karl Döhmann (under his pseudonyms Daimonides and Biebergeil, or "Lewd Beaver"), the art dealer Dr. Otto Burchard ("Finanz-Dada"), the painters Rudolf Schlichter from Karlsruhe and Otto Dix, who exhibited at the 1920 Dada Festival (the mannequin dressed in a German officer's uniform and adorned with a pig's head was of Schlichter's making), Grosz's brother-in-law, Otto Schmalhausen ("Dada-Oz" or "Dr. Ooz"), who collaborated in the Dada events and contributed the cover to *Dada Almanach*, and the Dutch painter Paul Citroen, who exhibited at the 1920 Dada Festival and contributed to *Dada Almanach*.

From Club Dada flowed a stream of publications—pamphlets, flyers, manifestos, and periodicals—most of which were banned and instantly replaced by others. Among them appeared *Der blutige Ernst* (*Deadly Earnest*), *die Pleite* (*Bankruptcy*), *die rosa Brille oder ein Klosettdeckel* (*Rose-Colored Spectacles or a Laboratory Lid*), *die Pille* (*The Pill*), *Das Bordell* (*The Bordello*), *Der Gegner* (*The Antagonist*), *Jedermann sein eigener Fussball* (*Every Man His Own Football*) and *Der Dada*.<sup>12</sup>

The major figures in Berlin Dada ranged over a spectrum, on one end of which presided Hausmann the essential artist and on the other the Herzfelde brothers, the quintessential politicians. In between one found Huelsenbeck, Mehring, and Grosz, and, on a nowhere isle, the half-mad Baader. Hausmann was surely the most innovative and varied artist of the group, but also an impressive thinker whose thoughts ran easily from art to philosophy and politics. His comrades called him the Dadasopher.

Before the war Hausmann published critical articles on art in *Der Sturm*. In that period he met Emmy Hennings, Arthur Segal, and Hans Richter. In 1914 he defected to *Die Aktion*, a political-artistic journal whose views he found compatible. In 1916 he met Franz Jung, with whom he published the first Berlin Dada texts in *Die Freie Strasse*, of which he became editor in 1918.<sup>13</sup> After collaborating with the other Dadas on Club Dada, he founded *Der Dada*, of which three numbers appeared in 1919.<sup>14</sup>

Hausmann's first lengthy published work, *Material der Malerei Plastik Architektur*, appeared in October 1918. Always in search of new materials and forms for art, he saw in Dada favorable harbingers:

Dada is the perfect goodwilled malice, alongside straight photography [*der exakten Fotografie*], the sole justified, figurative form of expression and balance in ordinary life—the one who frees in himself his own tendency is Dadaist. In Dada you recognize your authentic state: miraculous constellations in authentic material: wire, glass, cardboard, fabric, organically corresponding to their own positively consummate fragility and batteredness [*Ausgebeultheit*]. Only here are there, for the first time, neither inhibitions nor anguished stubbornness; we are far from the symbolic, the totemic, the electric piano, gas attacks, established connections. . . .<sup>15</sup>

From 1918 on Hausmann performed radical operations on poetic and artistic form. In the former genre he created a series of phonetic poems entitled *Seelen Automobile* which he first recited at the June 1918 event at the Café Austria. "The sound poem is an art consisting of respiratory and auditive combinations," he explained, "firmly tied to a unit of dura-

tion. . . . In order to express these elements typographically I had used letters of varying sizes and thicknesses which thus took on the character of musical notation."<sup>16</sup> Hausmann and later Schwitters, who was attracted by the former's work and would collaborate with him from 1920 on, carried forward their experiments with sound poetry—generically similar to those of Ball in Zurich (whose own experiments were, in 1918, unknown to them)—and became two of the most conscientious practitioners of a form which would lead to lettrism. In 1918 Hausmann's *Manifest von der Gesetzmässigkeit des Lautes* (*Manifesto on the Ordering of Sounds*) appeared. Hausmann at this time also created the optophonetic poem, inspired by futurism and Zurich typographical layout, whereby he tried to integrate sound and visual values of nonsense syllables. His *Optophonetisches Gedicht* was published in 1921. (Cf. chapter on Dada poetry.)

In the realm of art, while creating collages, Hausmann again moved beyond the genre with his *photomontages*. The photomontage, the invention of which has been attributed both to Heartfield and to Hausmann, utilizes the same procedures as collage (scissors for cutting, glue for assemblage), but the materials are drawn not from newspapers, engravings, and the like but from original or reproduced photographs. Hausmann turned a form, previously toyed with by musing photographers, into a systematic art, along with Heartfield, Hannah Höch, and Baader from the beginning, and later Grosz.

For Hausmann, the photomontage symbolized perfectly the war years: on the one hand it supplanted Expressionist painting which he felt lacked objectivity and conviction, and on the other it offered an art of incitement and agitation. In his article *Definition der Foto-Montage*, he says,

Photomontage in its earliest form was an explosive mixture of different points of view and levels, more extreme in its complexity than futurist painting. Everywhere people are becoming aware that this particular optical element is an extremely versatile artistic resource. In the specific case of photomontage, with its contrast of structure and dimension, rough against smooth, aerial photograph against close-up, perspective against flat surface, the utmost technical flexibility and the most lucid formal dialectics are equally possible. . . . The ability to manage the most striking contrasts, to the achievement of perfect states of equilibrium, in other words the formal dialectic qualities which are inherent in photomontage, ensures the medium a long and richly productive span of life. . . .<sup>17</sup>

The techniques described by Hausmann call to mind the analogical mixture of various levels of dialogue and the shifting perspectives in the novels of Proust, Richardson, and Joyce, all writing during this same period, all reflective of the widening interest in simultaneity. Hausmann's objects (reminiscent of his photomontages rather than Duchamp's readymades) and his painting (which he called nonobjective and constructivist) participated in this same search for artistic flexibility and dialectical structure.

In speaking about other spheres of Hausmannian activity, I need to qualify my earlier characterization of Hausmann as the "essential artist" of Berlin Dada. By no means must one infer that he was a "pure" artist despite his love of abstraction. Huelsenbeck renounced abstraction because it seemed to him an evasion of involvement, whereas Hausmann made of abstraction an art of confrontation. Nonabstract art, as Hausmann saw it, with its thin water of moralistic, altruistic, sentimentalized thinking resulted from the same flaw in the German character that brought about social democracy with its savage regimentation (that would put the Republic on the road to fascism). Abstraction for Hausmann, as for Duchamp, Ball, and others, allowed the artist to strip away myths of the German "Soul" which had persevered from Schiller and Goethe to the present day. So, far from standing off from political involvement, abstract art for Hausmann was indistinguishable from his attacks on the Weimar Republic. While Huelsenbeck resembled the Hamletian character overcome by doubt which caused him to vacillate, Hausmann was rigorously consistent as artist/politician. Art was for him another way to make war, not so directly as Grosz's caricatures of the repressive police, but on a much broader front.

In the early years of the war Hausmann was attracted to the psychoanalytic ideas of Otto Gross, and later came to feel that the meliorist theories of Adler and Hiller, whom he called "workers of the mind" ("What is Dada and What Does It Want in Germany?"), and the Sturm group were all part of a bourgeoisification of German culture. He attacked the bases of Teutonic civilization in several articles, notably in his manifesto in *Der Einzige* (*The Unique*), an anarchist review, on 20 April 1919: "Pamphlet gegen die weimarische Lebensauffassung" ("Pamphlet Against the Weimar Point of View"), and in his political satires of the period.

By late 1920 the ill feeling between Huelsenbeck and the other Dadaists, and the defection of those like Heartfield who turned fully to the

Bolshevist cause, resulted in the demise of Berlin Dada. The following year, in May 1921, Hausmann summed up his feelings about Dada in a manifesto, "Dada ist mehr als Dada" ("Dada is More Than Dada"), printed in Theo Van Doesburg's *De Stijl*. He argued that Dada went beyond "Dada," the movement of the war period, that it had always existed but was merely ratified in Zurich, and that it survived the disintegration it had undergone in Zurich, Berlin, and elsewhere. "Dada passes beyond the free intelligible self with a smile and presents itself primitively once again to the world: that expressed itself in the utilization of naked sounds, noise imitations, in the firsthand use in painting of readymade materials like wood, iron, glass, fabric and paper." Dada is, in short, more than Dada. "Dada is the practical disintoxication of the self . . ." <sup>18</sup> Hausmann in fact attempted to found a post-Dada movement which he called "Presentism." In February 1921 he had written a "Manifesto of Presentism" in which he attacked prejudice, commercialism, conformism, and passivity, and urged the "enlargement and renewal of the sensorial emotions of man. . . ." <sup>19</sup>

One readily notes that the language of Hausmann's manifesto in *De Stijl* and of his Presentism manifesto sound the identical refrains found in "Synthetisches Cino der Malerei" of 1918 and his attacks against Teutonic civilization. The reason is that Hausmann, while evolving, did not become anything different after Dada from what he was before Dada. He remained consistent and, to use his own thoughts, while conforming to the notion of "Dada" as it was used in the years 1918–1920 in Berlin, he like Dada was more than Dada. It is the word that changes, not the phenomenon. "Dada war tot, ohne Ruhm noch Staatsbegräbnis. Einfach tot. Die DADAisten fanden sich im Privatleben" ("Dada was dead, with neither glory nor a state burial. Simply dead. The DADAists found themselves to be private citizens" <sup>20</sup>).

The audacious experiments of Hausmann continued as he moved beyond the purview of "Dada." Though many of the other Dadaists moved into nonartistic activities, Hausmann carried through the logic of his earlier activities while remaining an independent artist. He would collaborate with Schwitters, Van Doesburg, and Richter and made sallies into new and exciting fields such as optics (as would Richter and Duchamp) and cybernetics.

If Hausmann was consistently consistent, and Huelsenbeck inconsistently consistent, Baader was consistently inconsistent. From his earliest years Johannes Baader was given to delusions of grandeur. He was an *agent provocateur* who specialized in disruption of public functions. Richter called him "a stick of dynamite that blew itself up." <sup>21</sup> Before the turn of

the century (he was born in 1875), he wrote a work entitled "14 Letters of Jesus Christ" and imagined himself to be the reincarnation of Christ. He undertook a campaign against Wilhelm II and his Prussian generals Hindenburg and Ludendorff that resulted in his incarceration in an insane asylum.

But that was before Dada. In 1905 he befriended Hausmann, who was eleven years his junior. According to Hausmann, this "sagacious and pseudo-logical monomaniac" was just the personality needed by Dada; his attraction lay in his "natural irreality which . . . was strictly tied to an extraordinary practical consciousness." Baader was a madman with a purpose. To sate his Pantagruelian appetite, he became in turn President of the Christ Society, Ltd., Oberdada, President of the Society of Intertel-lurgical Nations, and President of the World. Hausmann tells how, in 1918, during the absence of Huelsenbeck, he and Baader acted on the latter's ideas in composing texts in the evening in order to carry them to the newspaper editors the next morning. From Baader's mind came a flurry of projects to harass the authorities: declaring, for instance, that Scheidemann, the minister, was a member of Dada; demanding, for another instance, the Nobel Prize for Dada.<sup>22</sup>

Baader persistently sought a pulpit—once breaking into the middle of a service in the Berlin Cathedral to call the faithful to Christ and to Dada, two entities to which he gave equal credence. One of the best known of his interventions involved the distribution of one of his tracts entitled "Das grüne Pferd" ("The Green Horse"). He scattered it from the balcony onto the heads of officials gathered at the Weimar Stadttheater in 1919 to celebrate the inauguration of the Weimar Republic. Issued under the bogus name of the Dadaist Central Council for World Revolution, the tract declared Baader the President of the World. In 1920 he undertook, with Huelsenbeck and Hausmann, a series of lecture performances in German and Czech cities which caused a scandal that put the Dadaists in fear for their lives. In Prague, Baader fled before the performance with the manuscripts (and, Huelsenbeck claims, the till), leaving his friends to face the aroused crowd. They might have been killed. According to Huelsenbeck, Baader knew it.

Among his sparse artistic endeavors Baader worked with collages and photomontages. The greatest of his projects, however, grew out of his architectural training. At the First International Dada Festival he displayed plans and a mock-up of the Great Plastro-Dio-Dada-Drama, which was designed as a monument to the Rise and Fall of Germany and the life of the Oberdada. It was a construction envisaged as having five stories, three

gardens, one tunnel, two elevators, and one cylindrical door. The ground floor was to represent the Predestination before birth; the second the Preparation of the Oberdada; the third the Metaphysical Proof; the fourth the Initiation; the fifth the World War; the sixth, World Revolution; and, on the Super floor: the Cylinder was to rise to the sky announcing "the resurrection of Germany by the teacher Hagendorff [Baader's teacher] and his student. Eternally."

In 1921 Baader felt the wrath of the authorities when the Reichswehr brought action for defamation against the abuses of the 1920 Dada Festival. In particular the authorities objected to the mannequin in a soldier's uniform suspended from the ceiling (and significantly sprouting a pig's head) and the stuffed torso of a woman with an Iron Cross decorating her behind. Baader, along with Dr. Burchard, Grosz, and Herzfelde, was brought to trial. Baader was found innocent because it was not proved that he helped to organize the festival. Grosz and Herzfelde were fined.

Baader was an internationalist at heart. He wrote to Tzara on one occasion, addressing his letter to the "noble Dada directorate":

Chers Présidents et Présidentes! I suggest to this noble Dada Directorate to organize in Paris a great world Dada celebration under the silent presidency of the President of the terrestrial globe, in view of celebrating the birthday of the Great-Dada, born the 21st of June, the day when the sun was at its zenith. During the entire day of celebration, which must acquit itself with pomp on June 21st in Paris, I take it upon myself not to say a word, but I demand in turn that you put at my disposition a firstclass pullman car on the Berlin-Paris line and an apartment on the Elysée, that of De M . . . who was defenestrated. In place of the pullman car, a French *chargé d'affaires* may send a postal order to my bank account and, instead of staying on the Elysée, I am prepared to stay at the Sacré Cœur or any other place worthy of me, arranged by the Dada high council. This proposition entails no obligation and if the Dada high council—which is sovereign—rejects it, there will be no political reprisals. But Paris *inter pares* requires great political resources if Dada does not want to be absorbed by the city of light and find itself derelativized. . . .<sup>23</sup>

A symbiotic relationship grew between Baader and Dada, which satisfied the former's thirst for the betterment of mankind, himself, and his pocketbook, and the latter's need for publicity. Hausmann remained sympathetic to Baader (though Jung felt Baader became a "tool" of Hausmann<sup>24</sup>), whereas Huelsenbeck, writing under the name of Hans Baumann in the *Dada Almanach*, felt Baader never represented the "Dadaist idea." Years later, Huelsenbeck reminisced about Baader: "He

was a kind of itinerant preacher, the Billy Graham of his time, a mixture of Anabaptist and circus owner. While we wavered between inhibition and the lack thereof, Baader was imbued with psychotic exhibitionism and impulsiveness. I still can't figure out whether he was fighting for a renewal of Christianity, an improvement in public schooling, or dada."<sup>25</sup>

And perhaps Huelsenbeck was right after all, for while Baader was acutely mindful of history and adhered to a meliorist philosophy in regard to himself and the world, "Dada [was] indifferent to world evolution; ideas and things [were] for the Dadaists only symbols."<sup>26</sup> To be sure, as Hausmann has pointed out, "Baader [had] never ceased to consider himself a Dadaist, even under the National Socialist regime, a fact that brought him internment in a labor camp."<sup>27</sup>

George Grosz, the "Dada Marshal," along with Hausmann, was the most artistically gifted of the Berlin Dadaists. But while Hausmann was attracted to abstraction, Grosz's work was rooted solidly in the real if nightmarish world of a beleaguered populace. Though Grosz went rather much his own way, he collaborated extensively with Dada. Wieland Herzfelde published the first collection of Grosz's work in the Malik Press (which he founded with Huelsenbeck in 1917). It was immediately seized and banned. In 1919 Grosz founded, with Herzfelde, *Die Pleite*, which he illustrated.

Much of Grosz's work, especially his album of lithographs entitled *Gott mit uns* (Der Malik Verlag, 1920), drew the ire of the authorities, who brought him to trial in 1921. Grosz's own feelings about Dada were summed up in his autobiographical account published by Richter in 1923 in the review *G*: "Dadaism was not an ideological movement but an organic product, born to react against all the vaporous tendencies of the so-called sacred art which reflected upon cubes and gothic structures while the marshals were painting with blood. Dadaism forced the artists to take a position."

Grosz, along with Daumier, was one of the most corrosive of caricaturists. His contributions to Dada publications (such as his illustrations for Huelsenbeck's *Phantastisches Gebete* in 1920) violently attacked the middle class, policemen, Junkers, Hussards, manufacturers, and clergy. "Grosz is the great poet of the street in revolt," wrote Pierre Mac Orlan. ". . . Grosz puts his feelings in order by lighting within himself all the arc lamps. And the shadow yields to him his people: the prostitute, the poor, the rich, the mutilated, the assassin in silent boots, the street which still reeks of blood, the squalid little detail on the pavement, when everything ferments in the crepuscule of the day."<sup>28</sup>



The older Herzfelde brother, John Heartfield, on whom was strung the epithet "Dada Engineer" ("Monteur Dada") because "he always carried folders, envelopes, and books around,"<sup>29</sup> collaborated with Grosz on the *klebebild* ("collage") and in conjunction with Hausmann experimented with the photomontage. His younger brother, Wieland Herzfelde, was to become the official publisher of Club Dada, though he published many non-Dada works as well. After the demise of Berlin Dada, the Herzfelde brothers moved ever more deeply into radical politics.

Walter Mehring also collaborated actively with Dada from 1918 on. His well-known "Dada Yama Song" appeared in 1919 in *Jedermann sein eigener Fussball*, which got both him and Wieland Herzfelde in trouble. At such times, the father protector of Berlin Dada, Harry Graf Kessler, intervened (a role remindful of the one Arensberg played for New York Dada).

Finally, one might mention Franz Jung, who was codirector of the *Club Dada* review. His comment in a letter to Grosz about German Dada stresses its political shading and his own biased view: "The German branch of the Dada Movement was born uniquely from political motifs. Its beginning was identified with the local Spartacus groups which, towards the end of 1918 and after the revolution, united into one political movement." He describes his own "resistance" activities in one such group. *Die Freie Strasse*, on which the Herzfelde brothers, Grosz, Hausmann and Huelsenbeck collaborated, was a Spartacus publication.<sup>30</sup>

Jung ceased to collaborate with Dada after 1918, though he attended Dada events as a spectator. Later he would earn notoriety when, in 1923, with a friend he commandeered a steamer in the Baltic and turned it over to the Russians (in Leningrad-Petrograd and Murmansk, according to different accounts). He also founded the Rhineland Communist party.

One can agree with Georges Hugnet that art in Berlin Dada played second fiddle to social-political involvement. He sees most of the Berlin Dada art as being transient, devoted to propaganda, and, in fact, with the exception of Grosz's work, little remains of Berlin Dada in any concrete form. This is in part owing to the confiscation and destruction of Dada works by the authorities (which he mentions), but also to the fact that much of Dada activity consisted of unprinted if not unprintable speech and body "events," wherever Dada held forth.<sup>31</sup>

As Huelsenbeck has said, ". . . in Berlin we projected our resentment into politics, but we were never really political. We remained eternal revolutionaries. We projected in art as well, but since there was more

politics than art in Berlin, art got the worse end of the bargain. There is a difference between sitting quietly in Switzerland and bedding down on a volcano, as we did in Berlin."<sup>32</sup>

Berlin Dada's devotion to world revolution, while fervent, was tinged by a hidebound suspicion of causes. It shied away from parroting the party line of Berlin communism, while parodying it in such documents as the manifesto of the so-called Dadaist Central Council for World Revolution published in 1919 and entitled "What Is Dadaism and What Does It Want in Germany?" This manifesto was likely the work of Hausmann alone, though it was signed by Huelsenbeck and Golyscheff as well. In it Dada poses thirteen demands—some political and social reforms, such as an international revolutionary union founded on radical communism, unemployment through mechanization (to free men to experience), and the abolition of private property; some seriously artistic (combat against Expressionism and the Sturm group as well as the establishment of a State Art Center); several tongue-in-cheek (to make the simultaneous poem the Communist State Prayer, the requisition of churches for Dadaist performances, and the creation of a Dada Center for Sexuality).<sup>33</sup>

The questionable nature of Dada's commitment, which depended more on personalities than on Dada principle, while arousing the suspicions of the Communists and Socialists, did not prevent Dada from inclusion in the National Socialist attack on left-wing radical groups. Even Adolph Hitler felt compelled to single out Dada for special invective.<sup>34</sup>

Berlin Dada will perhaps always carry the stigma of radical politics, if only because a few of its activists were indeed Communists or would become so—among them, Wieland Herzfelde, John Heartfield, and Franz Jung. However, just as Dada existed in spite of its epithet of the moment, as Hausmann puts it, it also existed in spite of any individual who associated with it. In a text on Dada in *Dada Almanach*, Daimonides (Karl Döhmman) poses this thought: "This singular disinterest in the world is what distinguishes the Dadaist from the pseudo-Dadaist. All involvement of Dadaism in temporal questions has only a paradigmatic meaning. Nor does it pursue meliorist or utilitarian ends. To be dada-like is far from being dada."<sup>35</sup>

## Cologne Dada

In 1918, returning from war service in which he was wounded, Ernst met Baargeld. Excited by Dada in Berlin and Zurich, they founded, with Arp's help, a counterpart.

Dada, for us in Cologne in 1919, was above all a moral reaction. We set out to sabotage the production of the *Young King*, a monarchist, patriotic play of an insulting inanity. My friend Baargeld and I were going to distribute *Der Ventilator*, our review, at factory gates. Our rage aimed towards total subversion. . . . A horrible and stupid war had frustrated us during five years of existence. We had witnessed the collapse and shame of everything we had held just, beautiful and true. My works at that period were not destined to seduce but to elicit howls. . . .<sup>36</sup>

Max Ernst, born in 1891, revolted against the stern religiosity of his childhood as well as the academic realism of his father, a weekend painter. He began to make "excursions in the world of marvels, chimeras, phantoms, poets, monsters, philosophers, birds, women, lunatics, magi, trees, eroticism, stones, insects, mountains, poisons, mathematics and so on."<sup>37</sup> During his adolescence he read Wilhelm Worringer's theory of aesthetics; in 1913 he read Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*.<sup>38</sup> Stirner, Nietzsche, the brothers Grimm, and Lewis Carroll helped influence his thinking. In 1912 the Sonderbund Internationale Kunstausstellung, held in Cologne, which featured the works of French postimpressionists as well as Munch, Picasso, Kirchner, and Heckel, prompted Ernst to devote himself to art.<sup>39</sup> His paintings of this period, such as *Immortality* (1913–14), reveal his themes of predilection: the father figure, death, night, birds, and forests, which move through metaphor toward myth. He tells how he "died" on 1 August 1914 and was "resuscitated the 11th of November 1918 as a young man aspiring to become a magician and to find the myth of his time."<sup>40</sup>

Dead or not, he met Delaunay and Apollinaire at August Macke's home in 1913, and was decidedly impressed by both men. He also met Arp the following year. The latter asked Ernst to flee with him to Alsace at the outbreak of the war, but Ernst, to his later regret, refused. So by the opening of the war, and because of it, Ernst was fully cognizant of the European avant-garde, as well as healthily politicized. Together he and Baargeld distributed the violent radical newspaper *Der Ventilator*, which sold 20,000 copies before being suppressed by the British Army of Occupation. Their moral outrage led to the founding of Cologne Dada, which they named Zentrale W/3 (for Zentrale West-stupidien/3). Following their success with *Der Ventilator*, they brought out *Bulletin D* and *Die Schammade*.

In 1919 Ernst published a collection of lithographs entitled *Fiat Modes* "Mondändada Max Ernst (pereat ars)", which superimposes Chiricoesque

motives onto a landscape of machines. In these years he also invented the first assemblage to be called (by others) a "collage," though it contained no glue. E. L. T. Mesens distinguishes between the "collage" and the Cubist use of "papiers collés":

The *papiers collés* of Braque and Picasso are simple plastic solutions in which cutout elements imitating a real material (wood, marble, newspaper) play the part of counterpoint to the lines or shapes which the artist has invented or interpreted. In his collages, on the contrary, Max Ernst is far from being principally concerned with plastic construction. With a single stroke he plunges us into the drama by making elements of our known world confront each other in an irritating manner, thus violating the accepted canons of thought, logic and morality. . . .<sup>41</sup>

While using chance, Ernst went beyond Arp's work by consciously altering the material to bring out confrontation. "One can define the collage as an alchemical composite of two or more heterogeneous elements, resulting from their unexpected meeting, owing either to a willful act working out of a clairvoyant love towards systematic confusion and the *dérèglement de tous les sens* (Rimbaud), or chance, or a will predisposed to chance."<sup>42</sup> His conscious manipulation resembles Duchamp's alteration of objects through titles and juxtaposition. Several of Ernst's works of 1919–20 also bear a resemblance to Picabia's machine pictures. Ernst ravaged illustrated catalogs and scientific journals. These materials he infused with dream matter to create an abstract figuration conveying through metaphor a fusion of inner existence and external reality. In *The Hat Makes the Man (The Tailor Is in Style)* of 1920, two-dozen hats are connected like joints in ventilation tubes, reminiscent of old hat blocks, but resembling humanoid figures (a sense reenforced by the title).

Ernst later executed frottages, perfecting a process of color impressions from rubbing raised or scratched surfaces. Tzara said of his work: "In the icy silence of a merciless introspection, in the borderline state between dream and reality, Max Ernst developed his poetic activity—in a state of intoxication, an uninterrupted contact between a passing world of images and the intuitive personality which absorbs them."<sup>43</sup>

Frottage appealed to Ernst because it diminished "the active part" of the artist or writer, who comes to play the role of spectator or assistant to the creative process, who projects "*that which sees itself in him.*"<sup>44</sup> This painterly equivalent of automatic writing, through which the artist seeks to dissolve the individuality of the painting, was carried out by Ernst and

Baargeld, who collaborated on paintings without a predetermined subject. The tendency toward the depersonalization of art could reach no further, however, than when Ernst and Arp took, for a while, to signing each other's work.

In 1920 Cologne Dada, with the collaboration of Arp and Picabia, capped its brief life with the second Dada Exhibition. (The first had been held in November 1919.) It took place in the courtyard of a Bierstube named the Brasserie Winter, reached by an entrance leading through a men's urinal. The event opened with a young girl in a communion dress reciting poems by Jacob van Hoddis. Ernst exhibited a destructable object with an axe chained to it for spectator use. Baargeld's *Fluidoscopic of Rotzwitha von Gandersheim* consisted of an aquarium filled with blood-red water, on the surface of which a woman's wig floated. At the bottom of the aquarium was an alarm clock, and a wooden arm protruded from the water. As spectators smashed the exhibits, the Dadas erected others in their place. The intervention of the police resulted in the seizure of material which turned out to be a reproduction of Dürer's *Adam and Eve*. The catalog published for the exhibition, *Dadameter (Die Schammade)*, printed contributions from the international Dada community, under the slogan "Dilettantes Arise."

Cologne Dada effectively ended with the 1920 Exhibition, but Ernst continued his activities in Cologne after finding it difficult to obtain a French visa. Nonetheless, his work drew the attention of the Paris Dadas through an exhibition at the Galerie Au Sans Pareil in May 1920. The advertisement carried the description: "dessins mécanoplastiques plastoplastiques peintopeintures anaplastique anatomiques antizymiques aérographiques antiphonaires arrosables et républicains." His collages, many of them done in collaboration with Arp, were assembled under the name of Fatagaga (fabrication de tableaux garantis gazométriques).

Of all the artists of the period, Ernst most resembles Hans Arp, for instead of a rational approach to external phenomena, he seeks an identification with external and natural objects and processes, a dynamism that projects onto the world feelings of desire, love, anger, and revulsion. The difference is that his grammar of forms is more evidently involved with the world and its institutions, which it confronts with irony and derision.

### Hannoverian Dada: Schwitters and Merz Art

After a brief period of army duty, Kurt Schwitters was demobilized as unfit and spent the duration of World War I in Hannover. In 1917 he was

conscripted for factory work, from which he resigned when the revolution broke out in 1918. In one of the few political acts of his life, he commemorated that event by creating a collage which he called "Merz," a name taken from the banking term *Kommerz- und Privatbank*. That same year, desirous of joining with artists of the avant-garde, he traveled to Berlin, where he met Arp at the Café des Westens. His relations with Berlin Dada never became close, particularly not with Huelsenbeck, who found Schwitters too romantic. On his part, Schwitters found Huelsenbeck and Berlin Dada too political: "Huelsendadaism is oriented towards politics and against art and against culture. I am tolerant and allow every man his own view of the world, but I am compelled to state that such an outlook is alien to Merz. As a matter of principle, Merz aims only at art, because no man can serve two masters."<sup>45</sup> His relations with other Dadas were limited. He once visited Ernst in Cologne, saw Arp regularly, and corresponded with Tzara. The publication of his collection of poems and prose texts entitled *Anna Blume* in 1919 won immediate recognition in avant-garde circles. Tzara published some of his work in *Der Zeltweg*, and in the early 1920s Schwitters began to collaborate with the Dutchman Theo van Doesburg, who had founded *de Stijl* (with Mondrian) in 1917 and *Mécano* in 1922.

Schwitters was a connoisseur of the throwaway, of *les moyens pauvres*, as the Surrealists would call them. He collected everything that came to hand—canceled stamps, tobacco labels, wire, cogs, tramway tickets, newspaper scraps, corrugated cardboard, fabric, candy wrappers, playing cards, spools, doorknobs—and pasted and nailed them onto his Merz collages and assemblages. The high years of the Merz collagistic period lasted until 1922 or 1923, when Schwitters turned toward constructivist-type art. He was, as Richter said, "absolutely, unreservedly, 24-hours-a-day PRO-art."<sup>46</sup> He worked in turn on his Merz art, his poetry, his periodical *Merz*, his theatrical sets, and his Merzbau which housed the legendary *Schwitters-säule* ("Schwitters's column"). His column, begun in the early 1920s, typifies his work: it was "pure, unsaleable creation [that] could not be transported or defined."<sup>47</sup> It started as a small shrine with hollowed-out niches to commemorate his friends, historical personages, cities, and contained as well a miniature sex-crime cave, a brothel, and a Grotto of Love. These came to be covered over by layers of plaster and wood displaying forms as idiosyncratic as Gaudi's architecture, a unique excrescence of the artist's subjective desires, a projection of his personality onto outer space. He termed his column the Cathedral of Erotic Misery. It was an art object that deconstructed itself through its construction.

Schwitters described it as “An arrangement of the most strictly geometrical cubes [that] covers the whole, underneath which shapes are curiously bent or otherwise twisted until their complete dissolution is achieved.”<sup>48</sup> This column, which took over Schwitters’s flat in Hannover, was destroyed during World War II.

The remarkably varied forms of Schwitters’s Merz art are organized around a recurrent strategy—an accretive principle that structures objects according to a “palpable sense of agglutination,” directed by chance, whim, and a feeling of rightness. This strategy at once throws into relief the being-in-and-of-itself of objects and sublimates them into a higher structure, an abstract, formal structure bereft of unifying anecdote or logical spatial reference that grounds it in the external world. His forms “bleed” off the edge of the frame to suggest, like Arp’s baseless sculptures, a projection beyond the confines of the visual.<sup>49</sup>

Schwitters began to write abstract and phonetic poetry in 1919–1920. His Merz poetry uses linguistic “collage”—phrases cut from newspapers and catalogs, snatches of conversation overheard, fragments from poster work, etc. One of the best examples is his “Merz-Poem I” or “An Anna Blume” (“O thou, beloved of my 27 senses, / I love thine! / Thou thee thee thine, I thine, thou mine, we? [ . . . ] Blue is the color of your yellow hair, / Red is the whirl of your green wheels”). Increasingly his poetry turned toward abstraction, such as in his “i-poems,” whose subject matter was minimalized to words, numbers, and letters of the alphabet (e.g., “Wand,” based on inflected sequences of that word) and depended for its effect on recitation. Out of a 1921 visit with Hausmann to Prague came his *Ursonate*, the finest example of his phonetic poetry. Schwitters’s poetic experiments, as interesting as they are for their “aleatory mixture of unexpected meanings,” lack the evocative power provided by the collision of sensical/nonsensical objects in his plastic art. Such is the case with most of Dada’s visual/phonetic poetry.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

The final word about German Dada might be left to Hans J. Kleinschmidt. To tell its story, he says, “one has to leave behind all preconceived notions about a cohesive group of artist-intellectuals sharing artistic theories and political and literary convictions.” The Berlin Dadaists were in fact a bizarre mix of artists, anarchists, poorly read Communists, political-social adventurers, visionaries, and madmen.

Each of them was a very special individual with a distinctly different past [only Mehring was born in Berlin], a highly developed character formation and a very personal *Weltanschauung*. The more one learns of their individual destinies, the more moving their struggle for survival in a harsh reality becomes and the greater our respect for their relentless tenacity and vitality.<sup>51</sup>

The same indeed is true of the Dadas in Cologne and Hannover, who exhibited varying degrees of overt politicization. One could not live in Germany in the period between the wars without relationship to external events. Even Schwitters, the least politicized, wrote of the nonconforming individual's threat to society in his 1919 work "Revolution" (*Transition*, no. 8 [November 1926]), and his own work was removed from German museums by the National Socialists and ridiculed in an exhibition of Degenerate Art held in Munich. Such was the inevitable, and not unexpected, fate of all German Dadas.



## *Chapter Four*

# In Paris: The Dadas and the Merchants of Change

The mature writers and artists in Paris during the years 1916–1917 were a group moved by divergent convictions and loyalties—some like Péguy, Bourget, Paul Déroulède, and even Apollinaire openly espoused the cause of patriotism, while others wrote as if the war did not exist. Whether through jingoistic utterance or silence the Paris artistic world gave the appearance of a united front in the war effort. Most of the writers and artists who might have participated in an antiwar movement had left the war zone.<sup>1</sup>

The young avant-garde artists and writers rallied for the most part around the hero-poet Guillaume Apollinaire. While turning their backs to tradition, they had as yet failed to replace it with a new identity or voice. By 1917 they grew cognizant of a radical group of artists in faraway Zurich, bearing the unlikely name of Dada and engaged in bizarre undertakings. As early as the Cabaret Voltaire days, Tzara had begun assiduously to establish contact with individual artists in Europe as well as in America. He corresponded with Apollinaire, who first saw a copy of *Dada* in 1917. He contributed articles on Negro art and poems to Parisian reviews such as *Nord-Sud* and *SIC*. News of Picabia's *391* was also reported by *SIC* in 1917 (no. 15 [March 1917]:8).

The Parisian reviews and avant-garde artists accorded only mild curiosity to Zurich Dada at the outset, and even regarded it with some suspicion. Apollinaire, a patriot of the first water, who introduced Breton to *Dada* by showing him the first two issues, took a jaundiced view of Tzara's collaborators who bore German names in a German-speaking area of Switzerland. Apollinaire even told Tzara as much in a letter dated 6 February 1918.

The death of Apollinaire, which left a distressing vacuum in the Parisian literary world, followed shortly by the death of Jacques Vaché,

affected Breton to such a degree that he eagerly received Tzara's *Manifeste Dada 1918*, with its vibrant novelty and strident proclamation of a new era and exciting new directions for art, literature, and life. The enthusiasm of Breton for Tzara suggests, according to Michel Sanouillet, that Breton transferred his feelings for the dead Vaché to the person of Tzara himself.<sup>2</sup> With these events, Zurich Dada took a foothold 300 miles away in the Parisian literary world.

Paris's sudden interest in Dada was not purely of Tzara's making, however, for the ground had been prepared in advance. Though the early works of Breton, Eluard, Soupault, and Aragon show little consanguinity with Dada, the intriguing Jacques Vaché was a Dada character before the fact. Vaché's concept of "l'UMOUR," which was "a sensation—I was going almost to say a SENSE—also—of the theatrical (and joyless) uselessness of everything," was not far from the ironic mode of Dada, which he may or may not have known.<sup>3</sup> He was dead (from an overdose of opium in January 1919) by the time the review *Littérature* published his *War letters* of 1917.

Vaché, real or imagined, was a symptom of the times in Paris artistic circles. Pre-Dada Paris was a hotbed from which sprang many-headed hydras of reformistic and experimental art. In 1917 Apollinaire's *Breasts of Tiresias* was staged and the ballet *Parade* grew out of the collaboration of Satie, Picasso, and Cocteau. Three important reviews shared a confraternity of artistic change with *Dada*, though they were far from being as adventurous: *SIC*, subtitled SOUNDS/IDEAS/COLORS/FORMS, founded in January 1916 by Pierre Albert-Birot; *Nord-Sud*, founded in March 1917 by Pierre Reverdy (for which Max Jacob, Apollinaire, Aragon, Soupault, and Breton wrote); and *Littérature*, founded in 1919 by Breton, Soupault, and Aragon.

Despite the growing enchantment with Tzara, Dada was slow to sink roots in the Paris literary world. Even Picabia's arrival in Paris in March 1919 and the publication of his *Thoughts Without Language* in September did not manage to set the Paris avant-garde astir, as one might have supposed. It may be, as Sanouillet suggests, that Breton and company were biding their time to establish themselves and their own identity around the review *Littérature* and, for that reason, postponed the pleasure of meeting Picabia, the emissary of Dada in Paris, as well as refrained from declaring openly for the Dada spirit.<sup>4</sup>

While Breton and his friends kept a discreet distance from Picabia, however, they closely followed the Dada happenings. Out of the correspondence between Breton and Tzara grew a friendship filled with

bonhomie and fervor. At one point Breton even contemplated the day when *Littérature* might fuse with *Dada* and there might appear "one sole review under your [Tzara's] direction."<sup>5</sup> Eventually Tzara's letters made Breton anxious to meet Picabia. Breton finally wrote to Picabia in December 1919. From their meeting on 4 January 1920 emerged a strong feeling of mutual regard and an open union between the Paris avant-garde artists and Dada.

In spite of Breton's aloofness toward Picabia, the expectations of the Paris camp in regard to Tzara grew to extraordinary proportions, enhanced by the appearance of number 9 of *391*, in which Picabia lauded Tzara. The Paris avant-garde eagerly awaited the coming of the Messiah out of the East.

For all the advance fanfare, Tzara's entrance was remarkable in its inconspicuousness. He arrived unannounced at the Gare de l'Est on 17 January 1920. He lugged his suitcase to the apartment of Picabia's mistress, Germaine Everling. Though she had given birth less than a fortnight earlier, she put up the monacled little man in her small apartment because he was broke. Tzara immediately set up an unofficial Dada center in her living room. Within a few hours he received a deputation made up of Breton, Eluard, Aragon, and Soupault.

From this rather strained meeting between the bespectacled, oriental-looking, diminutive gentleman with a funny Romanian accent and the *Littérature* group would follow, first, doubts on the part of the latter, then the slow discovery of the genius of Tristan Tzara for organization.

As consumed as these young Parisians were with the desire to tear down the old and build anew, concerted action could not be far off. The almost nonchalant anarchy of the Dadas of Zurich had heated their blood. With Monsieur Dada there in Paris with them, the *Littérature* group soon decided to go public. They held the first Dada event, a matinee, on 23 January 1920 at the *Palais des Fêtes*. Tzara and his newfound converts advertised a lecture by André Salmon on the "Crisis of Change." The ambiguity of the title in French, which could also be translated as "Market Crisis," attracted a diverse group of businessmen, merchants, and journalists, as well as curiosity-seekers who got wind of the subterfuge and came to witness or disrupt. The program alternated between readings of poetry and prose, the exhibition of paintings and musical presentations. The readings were rendered by the actors Pierre Bertin and Marcel Herrand as well as by the *Littérature* group. The texts in the first part of the program, devoted to the "ancestors" of Dada, included several non-Dada works by writers such as Jacob, Reverdy, and Cendrars.

An event introducing the derisiveness of a true Dada act came with the presentation of Picabia's "painting" *The Double World*, which consisted of black lines crisscrossing a white background, with the inscriptions "Top" painted at the bottom, "Bottom" painted at the top, "Fragile," "Collect" (*A domicile*), the inscription "Bring me there" (*M'amenez-y*), and, painted across the canvas in large red letters, L.H.O.O.Q.<sup>6</sup>

Next a blackboard was brought on stage. On it was a Picabian line drawing bearing nonsensical writings and the title *Riz au nez* (literally, "Rice with a nose," but a pun on *ris au nez*—"you laugh at [someone]"). As tempers rose, Breton erased the board. The first part of the program ended with music composed by three of the celebrated musical *Six* (Auric, Milhaud, Poulenc), as well as by Eric Satie and Henri Cliquet.

The second part of the program was devoted to readings of the younger generation, capped by the surprise announcement of Tzara's personal appearance (which had been held a general secret until then). Tzara began by reading Léon Daudet's latest speech given to the Chamber of Deputies, to the accompaniment of ringing electric bells.<sup>7</sup> The performance brought the crowd's anger to its highest pitch—the ideal moment for the curtain to fall. Unfortunately, Aragon, unattuned to Dada's sense of timing, allowed the performance to continue with further poetry readings. The first Dada performance in Paris ended somewhat lamely.

The Dadas held their second meeting on 5 February at the Salon des Indépendants. An announcement in the *Journal du peuple* that promised a personal appearance and speech by Charlie Chaplin attracted a large crowd. Without a word about Chaplin, the Dadas launched into a reading of manifestos. One by Picabia was read by ten persons—all at the same time; one by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes by nine persons simultaneously; and so on. The one by Aragon read like this:

No more painters, no more *littérateurs*, no more musicians, no more sculptors, no more religions, no more republicans, no more royalists, no more imperialists, no more anarchists, no more socialists, no more bolsheviks, no more politicians, no more proletariat, no more democrats, no more bourgeois, no more aristocrats, no more armies, no more police, no more countries, enough then of these imbecilities, no more nothing, no more nothing, nothing, *nothing, nothing, nothing*.

In that way we hope that newness which will be the very thing we no longer want will assert itself as less rotten, less egotistic, less mercantile, less obtuse, less immensely *grotesque*. Long live the concubines and the concubinists. All the members of the DADA Movement are presidents.<sup>8</sup>

The Dadas and the *Littérature* group next held performances at the Club du Faubourg on 7 February and the Université Populaire du Faubourg Saint-Antoine on 19 February. At the Théâtre de la Maison de l'Œuvre, on 27 March 1920, the program was much more diversified than that of earlier performances. It offered sustained antiliterary works, including such remarkable theatrical pieces as Ribemont-Dessaignes's one-act play *Le Serin muet* (*The Mute Canary*), Breton and Soupault's comedy *S'il vous plaît* (*If You Please*), and a "double quadrilogue" by Tzara (his *Première aventure céleste de M. Antipyrine*). Tzara has described how he invented for the occasion "a diabolical machine composed of a klaxon and three successive invisible echoes, for the purpose of impressing on the minds of the audience certain phrases describing the aims of Dada. The ones which created the most sensation were: 'Dada is against the high cost of living' and 'Dada is a virgin microbe!'"<sup>9</sup> Breton read Picabia's *Dada Cannibal Manifesto*:

You are all defendants, rise. The speaker can talk to you only if you stand. Stand as if for the *Marseillaise*, stand as if for the Russian hymn, stand as if for *God Save the King*, stand as if to face the national flag. Finally stand before DADA which represents life and which accuses you of liking everything out of snobbery, just so long as it is expensive. You've all sat down? So much the better, you can hear me with greater attention. What are you doing here, parked like serious oysters—for you are serious, aren't you? Serious, serious, serious to the death. Death is a serious thing, eh? People die heroes, or idiots, it's the same thing. The one word that's not ephemeral is the word death. You like death for other people. Death, death, death. It's only money which doesn't die, it just takes a trip. It's God, the one everyone respects, the serious person—money, family respect. Honor, honor to money: the rich man is an honorable man. [ . . . ] Whistle, scream, beat me up, and then, and then? I'll tell you again that you're all idiots. In three months my friends and I will sell you our pictures for a few francs.<sup>10</sup>

One of Picabia's creations was exhibited at the end of the program: a stuffed monkey attached to a canvas on which was painted the inscriptions: "*Portrait de Cézanne—Portrait de Rembrandt—Portrait de Renoir—Natures mortes.*"

The Dada god was in Paris to stay—for a while at least.

Everyone waited for the Dadas to state their purpose. What did they intend to bring about? It finally became apparent that Dada intended to bring about nothing—very literally nothing. To that end Tzara and his erstwhile Paris friends were very busy. A number of Dada reviews and

Dada-inspired reviews appeared in the early 1920s. Along with *Dada* (under its aliases *Bulletin Dada* and *Dadaphone*), 391 (nos. 9–19), *Littérature*, *Cannibale*, and *Le Pilhaou-Thibaou* appeared *Proverbe* (dir. Eluard, 5 nos. appeared), *Z* (dir. Paul Dermée, 2 nos.), *Projecteur* (dir. Céline Arnaud, 1 no.), and *Transbordeur Dada* (published in Paris in 1922 by Serge Charchoune). Other reviews were projected but never appeared, such as *D<sup>d</sup>O<sup>4</sup>H<sup>2</sup>* by Ribemont-Dessaignes and *M'amenez-y* by Céline Arnaud. Many marginally Dada reviews appeared, such as *Le Coq*, founded by Cocteau and Radiguet.

Meanwhile the Dadas carried on a variety of other activities. On 14 April 1921 occurred the first (and last) of a series of excursions to sites that “have truly no reason to exist.” They advertised this first outing to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre by distributing flyers on the Boulevard Saint-Michel. The day of the visit was cold and rainy. Apart from the Dadas, about fifty persons assembled. Tzara, Breton, and Raymond Duncan (Isadora Duncan’s brother) spoke impromptu and everyone soon hurried elsewhere. The soirées also went on. The Dada Festival held at the Salle Gaveau on 26 May 1920 turned out to be as notorious (and as successful) as the Zurich performance put on at the Saal zur Kaufleuten a year earlier. The Parisian public had been served notice that in their revered music hall the Dadas would cut their hair and stage a varied program, including “sodomist music,” a symphony for twenty voices, and a “stationary dance.” The public flocked. Instead of head-shaving, the Dadas hurled insults and abuse at the audience, which, fortified at a nearby shop, retaliated by flinging on stage pieces of raw meat, vegetables, eggs, and tomatoes, which the Dadas flung back. It took the Dada Festival to make everyone realize “that Dada was sacrilegious, subversive and altogether outrageous, which was precisely what it intended to be.”<sup>11</sup>

If Ball was eclipsed by Tzara in Zurich, Tzara encountered in André Breton a more formidable personality. Once the fireworks following Tzara’s arrival died down, in the afterglow Breton came more and more to assert himself. By 1921, Breton threatened to overshadow Tzara and impose a program upon Dada or upon what he construed Dada should be. Picabia had already signified his disaffiliation from Dada in an article in *Comoedia* on 11 May 1921, in which he expressed his feeling that Dada was being misrepresented by the seriousness of its organizers. In an article in the same review six days later, the Belgian Clément Pansaers also disclaimed Dada.

The “movement” was beginning to fall apart. Nonetheless, the errant Picabia participated in an affair called the “Indictment and Trial of M.

Maurice Barrès," held on 13 May at the Salle des Sociétés Savantes. Breton, enthusiastically supported by Aragon, had put together a tribunal to try Barrès. Why Barrès? Because he happened to be a major literary figure who had put his talent at the service of the ideals of property, country, and religion—values condemned by Breton, who feared the malicious influence of Barrès on French youth. The affair took place much against the will of Tzara, who was backed by Ribemont-Dessaignes and Picabia. Tzara went along, but he dragged his feet the whole way.

Acting on the idea of Picabia, Tzara set out in 1921 to organize a series of events under the auspices of the "Salon Dada" (originally envisaged as an exhibition of painters in protest against the Exposition des Indépendants). The Salon Dada exhibition was kicked off by a *vernissage* held on 6 June, which introduced a veritable feast of Dada antiart: paintings and assemblages of all descriptions, objects juxtaposed with an eye to the greatest incongruity, Dada sayings posted everywhere. This exhibition, one of the truly memorable (and little mentioned) Dada events, brought together the works of most of the Dada groups and their affiliates, including those in Paris, Cologne (Baargeld and Ernst), Italy, and the United States (Man Ray and Joseph Stella). The works of André Breton and Francis Picabia were notable among the missing.

Tzara, who had been frozen out of the Barrès Affair by Breton, recaptured for a moment the feeling of joyous camaraderie in this extensive collaboration. It was Breton's turn to be left in the cold. But Tzara's satisfaction would be shortlived. Not only would the *Littérature* group fall away from Dada, but Tzara would find himself more and more alone as he tried to carry through the series of events comprising the Salon Dada. Picabia, whose idea it originally was, pulled out completely.

In an article entitled "Francis Picabia and Dada," published by Paul Dermée in his journal *L'Esprit nouveau* (no. 9, June 1921), Picabia reaffirmed his break with both the *Littérature* group and Tzara. He aired his view that Dada existed but for three or four years following his meeting with Duchamp in 1912 and lost its purity after 1918. Picabia leaves no doubt that he felt that the *Littérature* group led by Breton, Soupault, and Aragon was not in the least Dada.

Tzara did manage to carry the Salon Dada forward some distance. On 10 June a soirée was held, during which the President of the Republic of Liberia (Soupault in disguise) made his grand entry surrounded by the Dadas. The high point of the evening, however, was the presentation of Tzara's *Le Cœur à gaz*, a Dada play. The roles of Ear, Mouth, Nose, Eye, Throat, Eyebrow, and the Dancer were played respectively by Soupault,

Ribemont-Dessaigues, Théodore Fraenkel, Aragon, Benjamin Péret, Tzara, and Valentin Parnak.<sup>12</sup> Tzara's play represents an exemplary Dada departure from the traditional theatrical repertory by its inconsequential manipulation of theatrical language and dramatic structure, as well as by the to-and-fro movement between crazy-mimetic (antiart) and everyday reality (nonart). Nose (Fraenkel) at one point remarks to Eyebrow (Tzara), for instance, that "Your play is charming but no one understands anything about it." The play illustrates especially well, as Henri Béhar points out, the Dada conception of theater set down in Tzara's own *Zurich Chronicle*: "subtle invention of explosive wind, the scenario in the hall, visible manipulation [*régie*] and grotesque means."<sup>13</sup>

The Salon Dada Exhibition came to a premature close. On the evening of 17 June the Dadas attended a Bruitist Concert staged by Marinetti and the Futurists with the intention of sabotaging it. When Tzara refused the request of the manager of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées to leave, the latter immediately canceled all his arrangements with the Salon Dada. A Dada matinee scheduled for the next day was not held. Tzara and his friends thereupon set out to disrupt the next evening's presentation of Cocteau's *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel*, which they did by moving about the room and shouting, "Vive Dada!"

About this time Pansaers, who had followed Picabia's lead in denouncing Tzara, envisaged the formation of a new group that would include Picabia, Cocteau, Jean Crotti, Duchamp, and Ezra Pound. One finds evidence of this tentative union in *Le Pilhaou-Thibaou*, in the pages of which Picabia, Pansaers, and Pound were joined by Cocteau, Crotti, Auric, Dermée, and Pierre de Massot. The constantly changing loyalties of these groups would be observed once again, as many of Pansaer's new group backed Breton when the falling out arrived over the "Congrès international pour la détermination des directives et la défense de l'esprit moderne," by means of which Breton sought to pull together the disparate avant-garde groups into a constructive, cooperative endeavor.

Breton headed several meetings of a committee composed of Robert Delaunay, Fernand Léger, Roger Vitrac, Jean Paulhan, Georges Auric, and Amédée Ozenfant, which anticipated the attempts of the Dadas to sabotage the proceedings. From the very outset, Tzara refused an invitation to join the organizing committee, expressing his regret in a letter dated 3 February: "I consider that the present stagnation, resulting from the mixture of tendencies, from the confusion of genres and the substitution of groups for individualities, is more dangerous than the reaction. I prefer therefore to hold myself apart [*tranquille*] rather than to encourage an



action I consider harmful to that *search for the new*, which I love so much, even if it takes the form of indifference."<sup>14</sup>

On 7 February Breton's organizing committee in a notice in *Comoedia* warned against "the activities of a personage known for his promotorship of a 'movement' originating in Zurich, which it is unnecessary to designate otherwise *and which no longer today answers to any reality*." The slurring chauvinism of this communiqué, grotesquely ironic in view of its having been issued by an organization seeking "international" cooperation, led Eluard, Ribemont-Dessaignes, Satie, and Tzara to protest and to call for an open forum at the Closerie des Lilas. At this forum the Dadas disaffiliated themselves from the organizing committee. Man Ray, Fraenkel, Huidobro, Arp, Dermée, Arnauld, Péret, Radiguet, and Cocteau, among others, sided with Tzara; Aragon held the fort with Breton.

In the ensuing weeks a series of accusations, counteraccusations, and denunciations appeared (Breton's article "Après Dada," Picabia's *La Pomme de pins*, Massot's "De Mallarmé à 391," Tzara's "Les Dessous de Dada," Breton's article "Lâchez tout," and the pamphlet "Le Cœur à barbe" of Tzara and his friends, which appeared in April). By this time the "Congress of Paris" was not the only casualty. So was Dada.

In 1923, Tzara, with the Russian Iliazd, organized several evenings. It was the turn of Breton and his cohorts, Eluard now included among them, to turn to sabotage. Tzara's good name and that of Dada—baptized less than a decade earlier on the shores of the Zurichsee—had become more and more tarnished. By 1924 Dada was effectively moribund as an international "movement."

The vital balance, the dialectic tension that obtained between the advocates of anarchy and those of order in Zurich Dada, was upset and resulted in the demise of the so-called Dada Movement. The main actors went off in three separate directions, following the divergent paths of Tzara, Picabia, and Breton. Tzara sought anarchy, Picabia more anarchy, and Breton an end to anarchy—a sort of Dada in carpet slippers. Michel Giroud speaks of "the purity of Breton, the negation of Tzara and Dessaignes, and the ironic and solitary indifference of Picabia."<sup>15</sup>

Where did Tzara and Breton diverge? The answer to that question crosses the fine edge between Dada and Surrealism, for few other orientations toward literature and art have reposed more profoundly in the soul and character of a single personage than have Dada and Surrealism in Tzara and Breton. At the time of which we are speaking, 1921–1922 or thereabouts, Dada as a concerted collaborative effort was dying, and Surrealism had not yet been baptized.

In his essay "Let Everything Go," Breton said this: "In our times people have come around to thinking of changing everything into its contrary, of resolving both in one single category, reconcilable itself with its initial premise and so on until the mind arrives at the absolute idea, the conciliation of all oppositions and the unification of all categories. If 'Dada' had been that, surely it would not have been so bad. . . . But Dada is a total stranger to these considerations." On the contrary, in the same essay, Breton saw Dada's refusal to commit itself to systematic thinking or acting as a total loss of "efficaciousness"—he saw Dada as taken with "a kind of mental mimicry which prevents us from penetrating to the depth of whatever it might be . . ."16

Breton's grammar of resolution, reconciliation, conciliation, and unification of oppositions that would pervade his first manifesto (1924) had already been conceptualized by early 1922. Tzara's refusal, moreover, to accept the sort of systematic, Cartesian-like process Breton and the Surrealists practiced in evolving Surrealism was also a matter of record by this time. Several critics and literary historians have thought of 1922–1924 as the end of Dada as a movement and as a period of transition to Surrealism. As for the death of Dada as a movement, one need go no further than 1921. As for the period 1922–1924 as a transition period, yes, that makes sense. Or perhaps it makes better sense to say that at that time the Dada machine had come to a halt, and parts were lying all over the place. The true Dadas had either ceased doing what they had been doing and turned to other occupations (like Duchamp and Man Ray and Picabia) or had retrenched (like Tzara) to bring Dada back to something like what it had been before the parts had been assembled into a machine. Leaving aside all of those who had flirted with Dada and never moved on to Surrealism, we are left with the *Littérature* group.

The most significant common effort of Dada and its Parisian sympathizers centered around the review *Littérature* founded by Breton, Soupault, and Aragon. The first number, published in March 1919, presented poems by Aragon, Breton, and Tzara ("Twenty-five poems"). Without a doubt it was highly conscious of Dada and evidence even exists to believe that it was inspired by Tzara's *Manifeste Dada 1918*, which figured as the subject of a note in the first issue.

The eleven issues that followed remained fairly eclectic in nature. Most of the poetry and prose contributed by the so-called Paris Dadas—Breton, Soupault, Aragon and Eluard—was disappointingly conventional. Picabia's "Papa fais-moi peur" and Tzara's pure Dada contributions—"Maison Flake," his *Aa l'Antiphilosophie* texts, "Noblesse galvanisée,"

“Atrocités d’Arthur et Trompette et Scaphandrier,” “Pic(3f9pl)bia,” and “Surface MLAADIE”—were, however, accompanied at times by some strikingly exceptional verse and prose of the Paris avant-garde that showed the latter as capable of Dada-like moments: e.g., Breton’s “le Corset mystère” and the fragments from *Les Champs magnétiques* by Breton and Soupault.

Number 13 of May 1920 not only brought the first hiatus (owing to a strike) in the rigorous monthly appearance of the review but represented a departure. In it appeared “Twenty-Five Manifestos of the Dada Movement” by Aragon, Tzara, Breton, Picabia, Eluard, Soupault, Ribemont-Dessaignes, Arp, Dermée, Dr. Val Serner, Walter Conrad Arensberg, and Céline Arnaud. The refrain of the collection sounded a bit redundant, for it was a case of twenty-three texts trying successively to find something new to denounce or a new twist in denouncing the usual things. The contributors demonstrated a certain uneasiness in speaking as Dadas—some considerably (Aragon’s lead essay argued for an essentially un-Dada-like egoism, Soupault’s “Littérature et le reste” sounded forced, and Dermée’s “Dada tue-Dieu” seemed irrelevant), some very little (Breton’s “Patinage Dada” and Ribemont-Dessaignes’s “Les plaisirs de Dada”). For the most part, the manifestos contributed by the Paris “Dadaists”—when compared to those of Tzara and Picabia—appeared self-conscious and repetitive.

In the three succeeding issues, *Littérature* leaned much more strongly toward Dada—in an interesting theoretical work by Jean Paulhan (“Si les mots sont des signes ou Jacob Cow le Pirate”), Clément Pansaer’s “Ici finit la sentimentalité,” Ribemont-Dessaignes’s “Rate automatique” (a Dada narrative), and Breton and Soupault’s Dada play *S’il vous plaît*. On the other hand, the works by Aragon and Eluard had little to do with Dada.

Before the appearance of no. 17 in December 1920, the collaborators and directors—Aragon, Breton, Drieu la Rochelle, Eluard, Fraenkel, René Hilsum (manager of the bookstore Au Sans Pareil), Jacques Rigaut, and Soupault—united to reject the “artístico-literary” policy established by the avant-garde. They agreed by a vote of 6–2 to print no more poetry or philosophical texts. Accordingly, in the next issue only narrative texts appeared—no poetry. Aragon, in his text, spoke of the “uselessness of poetry.”<sup>17</sup> The number ended with an announcement: “Readers, to whom we have promised extraordinary surprises, judge if we have kept our word, in reading this number which—with its entirely new formula—truly of LITERATURE creates NOVELTY so long awaited since the war.” To be sure, the “novelty” offered had only vague affinities with Dada.

If the review *Littérature* stood for the most memorable of the publishing events coming from the Breton-Aragon-Soupault circle in the years 1918–1920, the second most memorable publishing event had to be the appearance of *Champs magnétiques* (*Magnetic Fields*), the first three chapters of which were published in nos. 8–10 of *Littérature*. Soupault would later describe the circumstances surrounding the creation of the work by him and Breton: “In the course of our research, we had determined that the mind, disengaged from all the critical pressures and scholarly habits, offered images and not logical propositions and, that, if we agreed to adopt what the psychiatrist Pierre Janet called automatic writing, we discovered texts in which we described a ‘universe’ not hitherto explored. We therefore decided to allow ourselves 15 days to collaborate in the writing of a work in which we refrained from correcting or striking out our lucubrations.”<sup>18</sup>

Breton has elsewhere called it the first surrealist work and expresses little doubt that he and Soupault were the originators of automatic writing.<sup>19</sup> The work seems to have been undertaken no earlier than the spring of 1919, however,<sup>20</sup> which meant that it was preceded by automatic texts of Tzara and Picabia, especially the text jointly edited by the two Dadas appearing in *391*, no. 8, to commemorate their meeting in Zurich (a text which might well have influenced *Magnetic Fields*).<sup>21</sup>

The fact is, apart from a few memorable works, the “Dada” pieces of Breton, Aragon, Soupault, and Eluard were, from a Dada standpoint, decidedly innocuous and derivative. The works of most of the other Parisian avant-garde writers and artists associated with Dada—Drieu la Rochelle, Benjamin Péret, Jean Cocteau, Raymond Radiguet, Paul Dermée, Robert Desnos, Georges Limbour, Théodore Fraenkel, Jacques Rigaut, Eric Satie, Max Morise, Roger Vitrac, Jean Paulhan, Jacques Baron, René Crevel, Pierre de Massot—while exhibiting various Dada-like elements, were not in any thoroughgoing sense Dada.

Breton himself was later to call Tzara, Picabia, and Ribemont-Dessaignes “the only true ‘dadas.’” All the other members of the *Littérature* group, according to Breton, carried away a “rather bad conscience, little proud of the poor tricks of itinerant sideshows [*baragues foraines*] which had been necessary to lure the public.”<sup>22</sup> One might also point out Serge Charchoune, who was in Barcelona in 1917 when Picabia started *391* but who never met him,<sup>23</sup> and Clément Pansaers. Both were passingly authentic Dadas.

Breton, Aragon, Soupault, and Eluard were in fact never really Dadas.<sup>24</sup> They became excited by Dada, were inspired by it, worked

honestly and faithfully for it, but never instinctively appreciated it. Dadaists they may have been.<sup>25</sup> They worked to bring to life a movement called Dadaism—something resembling Dada but more programmatic and coherent, more consequential and systematic. It would be puerile and pointless to compare the Dadas and the Dadaists in order to assign blame or compare virtues. Sympathy is another thing. Nonetheless, whatever side one might sympathize with, one must indeed sense that Tzara-Breton and Dada-Surrealism, for all their similarities and subtle genetic ties, diverge at the point of system.

## *Chapter Five*

# Dada Performance: “The Great Spectacle of Disaster, Conflagration and Decomposition”

At the heart of any attempt to characterize and understand Dada performance lies the need to articulate the notion of theatricality: the relationships among text, voice, and body, the nature of the extended space that binds stage and gallery, actor/player, and spectator/auditor. Anyone familiar with the strategies of Dada performance as it evolved from the short, intense period of the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 to the early 1920's in Paris cannot help but note that a marked change occurred. During Dada's brief existence as a “movement,” Dada performance shifted emphasis from visual and sound event to written or textual event. The first event was displaced by the second only as a matter of degree, but such a shift reflected strongly the modifications taking place in the Dada notion of theatricality and threw light on the changing perceptions of how self interrelates and communicates with world (nonself). Such permutations lead us out of Dada and into Surrealism.

In speaking of theatricality, one must construe the specific effect of theater in its broadest sense—theater as a “place for viewing” (L., *theātrum* < Gr. *thēātron*, OED), from the standpoint of spectator, or a place where, from that of agent, form is effected or carried through (*perform* < Anglo-Norman root *par-perfourmer*).

The extremes of the theatrical event both work toward the impingement of the corporeal—whether the writerly, bourgeois theater of the late nineteenth century, which denied body through the imposition of a rigid, teleological structure, or the Japanese Noh play, which “makes it *speak* through the lexicon and syntax of mimes, songs, dances,” which is another

way of denying body: "body 'entirely' transparent, *skin* and *flesh* of *bone* which is mind, intact from all pulsional displacement, event, opacity."<sup>1</sup> Western theater has traditionally narrowed the scope of theater through the on-stage presentation of a rigorously defined action, circumscribed and expressed by an integrated "message," a dominant voice. Régis Durand, among other critics, holds that Western theater has repressed writing (*écriture*) by destroying its plurality of voices, and brought upon itself the distrust of writers (Mallarmé, Joyce, Artaud) as well as critics. True theatricality would lie, for Durand, in the restoration of the plurality existing in *écriture*, the displacement of Voice by voices.<sup>2</sup> He claims rather unconvincingly, however, that only in writing can that plurality be found, through the subordination of theatrical performance to writing, "Because no stage, if it is not that of the text, affords the listening post (*l'écoute*) and the crossing for all the world's discourses as does Joycean writing."<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, as if to restore to theater its true significance, Durand, following the example of Lyotard, attempts to shift critical discourse on theater from *semiotic* (theater as a flattening out and replacement of text by sign/representation) to *energetic*, that is, theater as the production of "libidinous displacements."<sup>4</sup> Theatrical technique viewed in terms of psychic energy expressive of biological impulses (libidinal economy as an analogue of political economy)<sup>5</sup> offers a means to recuperate theater. The prime characteristic of theater, from this point of view, is discontinuity—between stage and gallery, between parts of the text itself through dialogue.<sup>6</sup> The further fragmentation cultivated by contemporary experimental theater seems to effect an ever-growing distance between stage and audience. The distancing of discourse has as its corollary, however, the throwing into relief of the opacity of the body. It "renders us conscious of it as presence."<sup>7</sup>

Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekte* ("alienation effect"), developing out of his collaboration with the Schiffbauerdamm Theater in Berlin between the wars, was calculated to alienate, distance, or defamiliarize the familiar which blocks audience awareness of character/stage object in two ways: through indifference or empathy (possession). It was "designed to free socially-conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today."<sup>8</sup>

The actor must set out to "amaze" his audience by distancing himself from the character he plays. He must avoid "'fixing' a particular character prematurely, so that it has to be stuffed out with afterthoughts because he has not waited to register all the other pronouncements, and especially those of the other characters."<sup>9</sup> He must preserve for himself, as well as

leave to the audience, the freedom to question the character or the principle (dogma) set forth through a kind of retrospection.<sup>10</sup> The first observation of Brecht, in regard to actor/character, shows how, through the A-effect, the dramatist can restore to theater a plurality of voices to replace the dominant Voice. The second observation judges the positive effect alienation has on actor and audience by allowing them to move from the level of empathy to the level of perception through a drawing back.<sup>11</sup>

The device of distancing lies on the far end of the scale of identification (possession)-distanciation, which invokes the extremes of the problematic relationship between play and spectator, a relationship of crucial importance to the Dadas.

As useful as the theories posited by Durand-Lyotard are, one may object to the fact that they view theatricality through the focus of a writerly concept, whether *écriture* or literarity. For Artaud, "That idea of the supremacy of the word (*parole*) in theater is so rooted in us and theater appears to us so much like a simple material reflection of the text that everything in the theater that goes beyond the text, that is not contained in its limits and strictly conditioned by it, appears to us to belong to the domain of the setting, considered as something inferior in relation to the text."<sup>12</sup> The evolution of Dada performance, as we shall see, reveals an evolving dialectic between two distinct forms of discourse—nonwritten and written. "One touches here on the bipolarity of a globalizing fact marked by what one could call the opposition between *écriture* (as the imprint of compositional arrangement) and *enunciation* (as manifestation of the aesthetic object in its sensorial-perceptive materiality)."<sup>13</sup> With this opposition in mind, Ilie Balea sets out to characterize that prime example of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Wagnerian opera, which combines literarity, musicality, and visuality. If we apply Balea's terms to the evolution of Dada performance, we discern a movement from the pole of enunciation to that of *écriture*, from the sensorial-perceptive materiality of the stage-object (musicality/visuality) to literarity.

The phantasmagorical nature of Dada nowhere better expressed itself than in performance. Performance was epitomized in the activities of the Cabaret Voltaire, but performance went on as well in a variety of other places—at the soirées in the Zurich galleries; in the events held in the Graphisches Kabinett and the Meistersaal in Berlin; at the Dada happenings in the Palais des Fêtes, the Théâtre de la Maison de l'Œuvre, and the Salle Gaveau in Paris. Dada performance was far from constricted by cabaret, gallery, or stage walls, however; it spilled over into the cafés and invaded the streets and public places of Zurich, New York, Berlin, Paris,



and a dozen other major cities. Performance even expressed itself in the sordid spectacle put on by the drunken Cravan at the Grand Central Gallery in New York, in Baader's intrusions into the Berlin Cathedral or the Weimar Stadtheater in search of a pulpit, or in the inane antitour of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre in a Paris downpour.

The Dadas performed during most of their waking hours. Their every pore exuded performance. As Nahma Sandrow has observed, the Dadas thought and spoke in theatrical metaphors.<sup>14</sup> In his Dada Manifesto of 1918, Tzara boasts of preparing "the great spectacle of disaster, conflagration and decomposition."<sup>15</sup> Albert Gleize has said, somewhat ambiguously, that Dada's theatrical vanity counted for much more than the logic of its appeal—"never has a group gone to such lengths to react to the public and bring it nothing."<sup>16</sup>

The words "performance" or "theater" might appear so broad as to be meaningless if it were not for the fact that each of this multitude of Dada events—from Cravan's drunken debacle to the great *Salle Zur Kaufleuten* performance in Zurich—was staged, played out for an audience, and animated by an implicit theory of theatricality that challenged the tenets of conventional theater if not those of Western culture itself. Gleize's condemnatory praise falls short of understanding the paradox that the "nothing" Dada brought to the public was, phenomenologically speaking, a revitalization of being and object. If Dada transgressed the confines of stage, it was by reason of two new perceptions: (1) that the traditional relationship of stage and gallery had of necessity to be reversed; (2) that the spectator represented a paradoxical, dual personage (spectator *and* character) whose consciousness, vitiated by anticathexes,<sup>17</sup> could only be restored through shock. As for the first perception of Dada, what must transpire on stage (as opposed to the gallery) was not the ritualistic offering of aesthetic pleasure or the mere imitation of reality (mimesis), but reality itself. In contrast, the public sitting in the gallery was no more than a collective automaton playing a character role in which it was cast. "As perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic. Thus, for example, all our habits retreat into the area of the unconsciously automatic."<sup>18</sup> The good bourgeois of Zurich in the years 1915–1916, whose lives habitualization had overtaken, were (like the good bourgeois of other times and places) more characters in a drama than bodies of flesh and blood. The spectator, indeed, differed little from the traditional character of Western drama—fully determined by historical process, disembodied, and a puppet to be animated by the Dada company (rarely a willing puppet but a puppet nonetheless). The Dada players, in good Brechtian fashion, refused

in turn to be possessed by (identify with) the character (spectator)—“in order to produce the A-effects the actor has to discard whatever means he has learnt of getting the audience to identify itself with the characters [in this case, itself] which he plays [or acts upon].”<sup>19</sup> The Dada players set out to embody, to restore the body (or body consciousness) to, all elements of the play, to drive the spectator from his chrysalis of habit, to allow him to sense and feel things, to jolt him into awareness of the atavistic presence of things and of self. The Dadas sought to unleash in the spectator the psychical energy existing in his unconscious. This meant, as Jacques Rivière so astutely noted, that the Dadas had “to seize the being before it ceded to compatibility [possession], to attain it in its incoherence, or better, its primitive coherence, before the idea of contradiction appeared and forced it to subdue itself, to construct itself; to substitute for this logical [conscious] unity, acquired out of necessity, its absurd unity which alone was native [*originelle*].”<sup>20</sup>

In the founding city of Zurich, the emphasis of the Dadas on performance was influenced significantly by Hugo Ball’s drive to achieve the Total Work of Art. In the early weeks of the Cabaret Voltaire Ball felt the need for the Dadas to “race” with the expectations of the audience by calling upon all their “forms of invention and debate.” Visuality and musicality marked the Cabaret Voltaire’s enunciatory performances. “Reading aloud,” Ball said, “has become the touchstone of the quality of a poem for me.” The Dada stage, through an early form of the A-effect,<sup>21</sup> deriving from a plurality of “voices” (forms, actors, instruments) and alienating strategies, held the potential to jolt the spectator (character) out of his automatized trance and to render to him the sensation of life: “The artist as the organ of the outlandish threatens and soothes at the same time. The threat produces a defense. But since it turns out to be harmless, the spectator begins to laugh at himself about his fear.”<sup>22</sup>

The theater for Ball promised the means to create a new society through the fusion of “all artistic mediums and forces” which, in animating the unconscious, would “engulf everyday routine along with its misery.”<sup>23</sup> The point of departure for Ball was Kandinsky’s theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, based on “a counterpositioning of the individual arts, a symphonic composition in which every art, reduced to its essentials, provides as an elementary form no more than the score for a construction or composition on stage” (essay on Kandinsky, *Flight Out of Time*).

The performances put on at the Cabaret Voltaire set the tone for the Dada spectacles to follow. Three important alienating devices operated in them: bruitism, simultaneity, and automatism—forces that integrated

diverse elements, interwove them, played them off against each other, all with the ultimate design of reshaping the human consciousness, of bending and expanding the mind fifty years before psychedelic performances came into vogue.

Bruitism or “noise music,” as it is sometimes called, was essentially an invention of the Futurists, under the painter-composer Luigi Russolo, who developed a systematology of noises; the composer Balilla Pratella, who created some of the earliest examples of *musique concrète*; and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, whose first manifesto in 1909 glorified the dynamism underlying modern technology and war, both of which the Futurists felt contributed to an overthrow of past institutions. Apollinaire in *The Futurist Antitradition* described Futurism as the collective endeavor to suppress history in the name of art. The Futurists constructed life out of the present instant, out of life itself: “Music of whatever nature is harmonious, artistic, an activity of reason—but bruitism is life itself,” upon which no judgment can be passed. It is “a view of life, which, strange as it may seem at first, compels men to make an ultimate decision.”<sup>24</sup>

One cultural institution blown out at its seams by the exuberant potentials of the machine age was traditional harmony. Dissonance was of course not new, for late-nineteenth-century composers had experimented with dissonant texture and asymmetric rhythmic design, but into this form the Futurists transfused a special purpose, that of provoking the listener. To the Cubist reconstruction of form the Futurists added the notion of dynamic movement. “Universal dynamism must be rendered as dynamic sensation,” they proposed, “movement and light [must] destroy the substance of objects.”<sup>25</sup>

The Zurich Dadas played a role in this evolution of sound experimentation. Their version of bruitism consisted of vocal performances executed with an accompaniment of bells of all description (cow bells, Swiss mountain bells, dinner bells, shawms, even baby rattles) and whatever percussion instruments came into the imagination (drums, boxes, tabletops to be pounded by palms, etc.). At other times they made music by jingling tin cans and keys. The resulting disharmony roused the audience to a fury, exactly as the Dadas intended. Huelsenbeck has pointedly noted that “noise is a direct call to action.”<sup>26</sup> The Dadas had found another form of antiart to dislodge the listener from his lethargy and incite him to action and self-awareness. Noise, as it had been used by past civilizations, served to drive the demons from the door, the ones in this case being indifference and complacency.

The technique of simultaneity became immensely important to Zurich Dadas and would play an even greater role among the Paris avant-garde groups as Dada came to camp out on the steps of the European art capital. Simultaneity was a borrowed phenomenon as well. Though their techniques vary, the Cubists and Futurists both drew upon such currents as Bergsonian thought and experimented with simultaneity in their superimposition of planes so as to achieve an integration of varying perspectives exhibited on a single plane. Orphism, under Delaunay, had made use of *simultanéisme*, a technique based on Chevreul's law of simultaneous color contrast.

The Dadas in Zurich played with simultaneity in many ways but their most interesting use of it was in their contrapuntal recitative, in which multiple voices were called upon to speak, sing, scream, or whistle simultaneously, "in such a way that the elegiac, humorous, or bizarre content of the piece is brought out by these combinations."<sup>27</sup> These simultaneous poems made use of a technique not unlike bruitism. Perhaps the primary distinction lies in the fact that, while bruitism usually puts nonvocal music on a level above voice, the voice is all important and usually exclusive in the simultaneous poem. One of the latter, entitled "The Admiral Seeks a House for Rent," performed at the Cabaret Voltaire on 30 March 1916, according to Tzara provided the basis for the first stage presentation of "parallel reading."<sup>28</sup> Huelsenbeck and Tzara recited while Janco sang, all in unison, in German, English, and French. A "Rhythmic intermezzo" found Huelsenbeck singing nonsense syllables, while Tzara repeated "rouge-bleu, rouge-bleu," over and over and Janco whistled. The recitation-song trio then continued to sing several verses simultaneously, ending each on the phrase: "The Admiral found nothing."

In a "Note for the bourgeois," following the printed version of the performance,<sup>29</sup> Tzara speaks of wishing, in this work, to realize a poem based on innovative principles which "consist in giving to each listener the possibility of linking together the suitable associations. He retains the element characteristic for his personality, intertwines them, fragments them, etc., following nonetheless the direction in which the author has channeled them."

Tzara's efforts build on a type of Cubist poetry found in the earlier avant-garde and blended with bruitism. The true innovation of the bruitist-simultaneous poem such as "The Admiral" resides, according to Ball, in "the value of the voice. The human organ represents the soul, the individuality in its wanderings, with its demonic companions. The noises

represent the background—the inarticulate, the disastrous, the decisive.” The total effect is important: in the simultaneous poem “the willful quality of an organic work is given powerful expression, and so is its limitation by the accompaniment. Noises (an *rrrrr* drawn out for minutes, or crashes, or sirens, etc.) are superior to the human voice in energy.” The message of the poem according to Ball lies in the metaphor of mankind swallowed up in mechanistic process, the battle of the human voice against a menacing world that eventually destroys it, “a world whose rhythm and noise are ineluctable.”<sup>30</sup>

The effect as Ball points out is to establish a tension between voices, a counterpoint that serves as the metaphor for the conflicting forces composing our world and threatening to devour us. Voices and sounds are layered, so that the listener comes on the poem through many ports of entry and, as Tzara says, pulls everything together through a process of association meaningful to him in particular. Tzara adds, however, that the direction given these diverse elements is not that of the listener-reader but that ultimately of the writer and performer, for the latter control the expression and the general tendency of the poem, just as the Brechtian actor consciously controls the character he interprets.

The Dadas' individual simultaneous creations appeared in most of the varied and chaotic performances at the soirées and festivals held in Zurich, Berlin, and Paris. Indeed, simultaneity lay at the very heart of the Total Work of Art by which the Dadas sought to create not only a metaphor of life processes but a mode of exorcism and individual and social regeneration. On an even vaster scale, the entire Dada “movement,” which mustered an astonishing array of personalities, and artistic and antiartistic processes, in most of the major Western cities, taken all together resembles that Total Work of Simultaneous Art conceived by the early Dadas following Kandinsky.

One can draw the inference from Tzara's “Note for the Bourgeois” that the Dada creator-performer often exhibited a marked degree of conscious control over his creation, imparting to it a specific direction and intended effect. One must by no means, however, conclude that the Dadas shunned all that was not conscious activity. On the contrary, they put even greater faith in the unconscious expression of the human psyche in the theatrical act. Richter speaks of the vital equilibrium most Zurich Dadas wanted to achieve, especially Arp and Ball, between conscious and unconscious activity.<sup>31</sup> Tzara was one of the most fervent exponents of unimpinged chance and spontaneity which expressed itself in automatic creation.

There is of course a long history to automatism. Sensory automatisms exist in the age-old act of crystal gazing, in the use of divining or dowsing

rods, or in prognostication through the movement of a suspended ring. Divination through automatic writing existed in China, and trance speaking and oracles go far back into history, as does dream divination. All of these activities depend upon the intervention of forces emerging from our unconscious. Between 1850 and 1900 the involuntary or automatic inscription of thoughts (with conscious attention directed elsewhere—in sleep, trance, or hypnotic state) enjoyed something of a vogue and was thought to be divinely or supernaturally inspired, even to represent mediumistic powers.

At the turn of this century personality theories argued that such powers were grounded in the unconscious. Freud's investigation of "dream work" in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) opened an unimaginably fertile field of exploration for artists. Breton's celebrated definition of the procedure for automatic behavior ("pure psychic automatism") in his first Surrealist manifesto of 1924 describes precisely what the Dadas had already been experimenting with in Zurich years earlier: "The dictation of thought, in the absence of all control exercised by the reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupation."<sup>32</sup> The most important consequence of this process was momentary liberation from the constraints of external authority and ordinary (conscious) existence, as well as a movement inward, an attempt to explore the landscape of the human mind. Automatism represented for the Dadas the essence of revolt. Not only did it contain an implicit rejection of the work ethic of the middle class, by suspending habitual modes of labor and production,<sup>33</sup> but it renounced all forms of sociopolitical control, for it derived its effect from the unbridled expression of unconscious desire, without meddling with it or erasing, rewriting, painting over, or redistributing the parts of the work. It unleashed those charges of energy which Freud saw as fundamental to the human psyche.<sup>34</sup>

Usually the Dadas laid down a program for what they intended to present on stage. But the performance within the programmatic frame often was punctuated by spontaneous departures called forth by and adjusted to audience reaction.

The general formula of a Dada performance prescribed a carefully measured dose of insult and provocation that kept an edge on the audience's temper, fueling a slowly rising exacerbation that, when threatening to erupt too soon, was cooled by an intermission. By stages the audience's temper was heated white-hot through alternating augmentation and abatement, until the point it was allowed to spill over into physical agitation and even violence. A Dada performance failed of its object, as did the Club Dada performance at the Berlin Tribune Theater on 7 December

1919, when it met with an enthusiastic reception. For only in the realm of provocation and clash could the Dada ethos thrive. The key to the city of self and public expression lay not in identification or empathy but in conflict acted upon by improvisation. And when the fury abated, if things had happened the way they should, self-awareness had taken hold, and it was self-awareness that the Dadas sought, in theory at least.

Further components of the Dada performance deserve mention but do not fall neatly into the general categories of activities described thus far. One of these is phonetic poetry, which, while susceptible to being printed, depends for its realization as much as drama on performance. In his diary Hugo Ball notes how the plastic arts have progressively eliminated the human figure, proof, he felt, that the things that surround us have grown ugly and repulse us so much that we seek abstractions to veil them. He proposes that poetry as well “decide to do away with language” in the way that painting has discarded the object.<sup>35</sup>

Ball protested that he did not seek abstraction, but attempted to throw into relief archetypal images whose accumulation provides the reader-listener with a plurality of signs. Words were still words, units of meaning, even if they were unfamiliar combinations of letters, and as units of meaning they were supercharged with “instinctive” as opposed to “rational” creation. The writer-creator becomes a distiller of essences, a creator of existences, “which one calls images but which have a consistency of their own that is equivalent to that of a rose, a person, a sunset, or a crystal.”<sup>36</sup> Ball sought in poetry what he termed a supernatural sign language (that is, a metalanguage) that would convey objects not through mimesis or representation but through symbolization.

The synthesis manifested in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as it was cultivated by the Zurich Dadas, comes, with the late development of the Dada “movement,” particularly in Paris, to resolve itself more and more into its various components: musicality, visuality, and literarity. One sees such a phenomenon in the Dada plays performed on the Paris stage.

In the Dada years, Tzara staged three theatrical pieces: *The First Celestial Adventure of Monsieur Antipyrine*, *The Second Celestial Adventure of M. Antipyrine*, and *The Gaslight Heart (Cœur à gaz)*. The Antipyrine cycle consists essentially of verse dialogues marked by orality and a radical divergence from traditional theatrical form. It introduces characters with allegorical names like Mr. Bleubleu, Mr. Cricri, The Pregnant Woman, Monsieur Absorbtion, and Madame Interruption—only one of which reappears: Mr. Antipyrine. The names, like the dialogue form itself, while promising to divulge meaning, block representation and undermine func-

tion. They bear little if any relation to the narrative, and the dialogic structure is discontinuous (except for the last half of *The Second Adventure*) both between characters and between character and self. Both “plays” introduce a mixture of generic forms: verses drawn from Tzara’s early poetry, prose, and manifestos.

The impact of the “plays” comes from phonetic effect (a rich combination of rhyme, assonance, consonance, and anaphora) and from the alienation effect that phenomenologically transforms language into language-object and character into character-object. The fragmentation of dialogue and the circus allusions in *The First Adventure* give force to Béhar’s suggestion that the “play” stands as a metaphor for the circus,<sup>37</sup> for as in a circus (in its pure state) we witness a succession of unrelated “acts” devoid of moral statement and given over to pure technique and virtuosity.

Nonetheless, from *The First Adventure* arises a lexicon of death, disease, and decomposition, extending even to the life image of pregnancy, which lies under the shadow of puerperal fever. From these themes evolves an extended metaphor reflecting the processes of dramatic dissolution and decomposition at work in the piece. The first part of *The Second Adventure* picks up the themes of disease and decomposition, but not death.<sup>38</sup> The second part introduces a rudimentary but coherent action that displaces the negative modifiers by the positive modifier of childbirth. This action—a grotesque sequence leading up to the delivery of a child—entails for the first time an integration of discourse. It is introduced by the “Manifesto of Monsieur Aa Antiphilosopher,” which immediately precedes it: “I resubscribe to love which grinds like metal doors / and you are idiots / I will return once like your urine / return to the joy of living the child-delivering wind.”

The delivery of the child elicits Monsier Antipyrine’s utterance: “dadadi dadadi dadadi moumbimba dadadi,” and the ensuing dialogue describes a celebration of life: officers dance, functionaries sleep with Saturday evenings, princes piss in the streets, and even the heavens join in (“The light has been concentrated in spheres whiter than the narrowness of angels / the poles withdraw in modest ellipses”). As proper to the effect of afterbirth, The Disinterested Brain introduces images of absence, void, and exhaustion. The poetics of decomposition, as Béhar calls it,<sup>39</sup> which involves an implicit rejection of traditional theater in *The First Adventure*, is replaced in *The Second Adventure* by a poetics of rebirth bound up metonymically with the name of Dada—itsself carrying a child code.

*The Gaslight Heart* introduces a dialogue carried on by a cast of characters bearing names of parts of the body. The implicit theme of bodily



disintegration reflects the Dada rejection of integrated characters, and complements the dislocated nature of the rudimentary and abstruse action out of which there seems to flow, nevertheless, a bizarre love story involving Mouth and Eye.<sup>40</sup> Michel Corvin sees in this suggested story Tzara's rejection of traditional theater and his proposal of a new theater and theatrical language.<sup>41</sup>

The Dadas, as Tzara has noted, were not interested in dramatic competence: "It's not a new technique that interests us but the spirit."<sup>42</sup> Dada writing for the stage, as Matthews sees it, attacks the fundamentals of dramatic communication.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, it goes further than that, for it undermines the very notion of conventional literary-dramatic discourse by disrupting grammatical and semantic structure. In 1917, Tzara called for a renovation of theater: "The theater. Since it forever remains attached to a romantic imitation of life, to an illogical fiction, let us give it all the natural vigor that it first had: be it amusement or poetry."<sup>44</sup> The romantic perception of life, which Tzara saw as dominating theater, differs radically from the phenomenological perception of Dada. "Every moment, every particular flower, finds itself [in Romantic poetry] in a state of immediate identity with the prototypic Flower [*Fleur originelle*], of which it represents one of the particular emanations."<sup>45</sup> What is implied in Romantic language, then, is an absence of Being,<sup>46</sup> contrary to the *presence* of being and object on the Dada stage. The "ontological primacy of object"<sup>47</sup> that has informed the modern descendants of Romanticism and imposed strictures on language through intentionality clashes as well with Dada's discourse of presence.

With the staging of *Hankerbchief of Clouds* in 1924, however, Tzara departs from Dada theatrical strategies through elaborate and painstaking attention to staging, the delineation of plot structure and characters, and recourse to conventional modes of communication such as we find in a speculative dialogue of ideas overtly contrasting the notions of theater and reality. Tzara leaves behind the antitheatrical aspects of his earlier theater. No longer is the gallery thrown into an adversary, conflictual relationship with the stage, the energetics of which lead to transformation, but is permitted a participatory relationship marked by identification and possession, which invites passivity.

This departure from Dada's original concerns with theater and performance, such as were seen in Zurich, and which were carried over in Tzara's *Antipyrine* cycle staged in Paris, evinces itself as well, though in a subtler way, in the works growing out of Breton's collaboration with Soupault. These works reveal a shift from theater as oral and visual event to theater as

literary event (*écriture*). *If You Please*, performed in 1920, mixes fantasy (automatic writing) with banal, representational dialogue. The dialogic form is, admittedly, scored by incongruity, for characters often deliver monologues detached from those of the other characters, and the situations and the action, like the theatrical acts themselves, are for the most part discontinuous. Each act introduces an internal action which is coherent if bizarre, that raises the spectator's expectations only to fail to satisfy them, such that theatrical conventions collapse.

The authors have written into the fourth and last act a response by actors planted in the audience. They declare their inability to comprehend the play, and one spectator stands on his seat to address the audience: "For some time, under the pretext of originality and independence, our fair art has been sabotaged by a band of individuals whose number grows each day and who are for the most part only ranters, idlers or humbugs."<sup>48</sup> The curtain falls. After continuing his diatribe, the spectator is interrupted by another who calls for the former to be thrown out and the play resumed. The play continues. More protests by the spectator, and the play ends once again in a tumult. The surprising, programmatic nature of the last act, which consciously manipulates audience participation through illusionary means, while breaking down barriers between stage and gallery, indicates a remoteness from the type of spontaneity characterizing Dada performance.

In *You Will Forget Me*, staged in 1920, Breton and Soupault introduce four characters: Umbrella, Dressing Gown, Sewing Machine, and An Unknown.<sup>49</sup> The play is on the surface more strikingly unconventional than *If You Please*, owing to its diminishment of plot and character and its use of the alienation effect on all levels. The language of the play, however, while superficially resembling the language of Tzara's plays through its inconsequentialness, represents a radical departure from the latter. Tzara's language, which articulates words wrenched from their semantic and grammatical context ("words in liberty"),<sup>50</sup> and actualized only through orality, contrasts with the language of Breton and Soupault, which brings us, through its grammatical coherence, to the threshold of *écriture*. Surrealist writing, to be sure, uses grammatical coherence, with its appeal to seeming communication, to steer the spectator/reader's mind into that unexplored and unfamiliar region of Surrealist gratuity, where it will be "convinced little by little of the supreme reality of these images."<sup>51</sup> In his essay on "Words Without Wrinkles," Breton would later speak of restoring to language its "full destination," which is to extend its cognitive limits beyond those assigned to it by conventional usage.<sup>52</sup>

In speaking of how Sade, Fourier, and Loyola each created an isolated space in which they could forge a new language that would “spring from a material emptiness,” an anterior space which would separate that new language from other common languages, without the interference of signs, Roland Barthes theorized about the nature of theatricalization. “What does it mean to theatricalize?” asks Barthes. “It means not to ornament the presentation; it means to make the language illimitable.” The platitudes of the “grand style” are replaced by “the volume of *écriture*.”<sup>53</sup>

The physical withdrawal of Sade to his castles and convents, like the withdrawal of Fourier and Loyola, approximates the psychical withdrawal of Dada through the alienation effect. Each created a new grammar derived from a new form of theatricality. The operation carried out by the Dadas in developing this new idiom, however, shows an evolution. The permutations in the Dada notion of theatricality correspond to a changing perception of how self interrelates and communicates with world (nonself).

During the Paris years of Dada theater, we discover a mixture of the spontaneous spectacle-performances, characterized by musicality and visuality, the “playlets” of Tzara, which observe only a tenuous contract with conventional theatrical form while stressing orality, and the new theater set forth by Breton and Soupault, which manipulates the theatrical conventions it observes as it effects a shift toward theater as *écriture*.<sup>54</sup>

Such an evolution carried the Dadas away from the relatively free form of performance toward Surrealism, with its codification of structure. If Dada was play in its broadest sense—the release of psychic energy—with Surrealism we move to play (psychic release) within a play (codified structure).

## *Chapter Six*

# The Dada Poem: In Search of Traces

The so-called automatic poem, the most representative form of Dada poetry, undergoes several mediating processes in becoming words on a page. Far from representing the transcription of raw outflowings of unconscious thought, the Dada poem is acted upon by several factors: rudimentary thought processes of preconsciousness that impose a manifest form on the latent content of emotion and desire; the interposition of preexisting models (literary texts, media, everyday speech) whose borrowings direct or determine the text; the conscious mind of the poet who modifies the text to achieve specific effects (through lexical substitutions, etc.). The resulting form of poetic discourse, while offering an apparent unintelligibility to the reader, does contain certain discursive strategies that are susceptible to analysis.

Before considering these strategies, however, it is important not to deny that latent input of the psyche in the creation of the Dada poem, recoverable only to a limited degree through the repetition of archetypal motives. Indeed, the Dada poem remains in an important measure a textual imprint of the operative psyche, charged with its cathexes, its stores of impulsional energy. The Gestalt psychologists believed that perception derives from the linking up of a structured field outside the mind with identical coexisting structures in the mind. Tzara and the Dadas, in their "automatic" texts, reversing such a process through the projection of that psychic structure onto the external world, achieved a dynamism rare in conventional poetry.

Dada poetic discourse in this respect resembles the affective matter occulted by the dream-work. Though we can recognize in it general motives common to the collective human psyche, we cannot in any conclusive sense, however, "interpret" that latent content. Even were we able to do so, were we able to trace a poem by Tzara to its origins in personal obsessions, we would only lose sight of the poem itself.

What is important is the *poem-work*, the way in which the latent content of the poem undergoes transformation according to concealed mechanisms. The poem conveys the dynamism of the psyche solely through the operation of poem-work, which initiates strategies that work the way dream-work strategies operate—through condensation, displacement, and the submission of the whole of the text to secondary revision.<sup>1</sup>

To get at the specificity of the Dada poem (as any poem), one must discern how the mechanisms at work in it produce poetic meaning. As Michael Riffaterre has noted, critics, following Breton's definition of automatic writing, "have either resorted to psychological considerations or have relied exclusively on grammatical analyses of the texts."<sup>2</sup> We stop short of recovering the specificity of the poem if we content ourselves with seeking generic origins in the unconscious, but, on the other hand, the poetic meaning we seek is a combination of a psychic structuring process mediated by the conscious intervention of the poet.

Riffaterre suggests a semantic approach to obviate the deficiencies of grammatical analysis of automatic texts whose syntax reveals only minimal differences from that of conventional texts (223–24). The analyses that follow are semantically oriented but attempt as well to consider the role of the psyche in the determination of poetic strategies in Dada poetry. Tzara's poem "Springtime" (1918) introduces semantic oppositions that scatter traces of an exchange between unconscious (automatic) and conscious (artistic) mechanisms:

*Printemps*

- 1 placer l'enfant dans le vase au fond de minuit  
et la plaie  
une rose des vents avec tes doigts aux beaux ongles  
le tonnerre dans des plumes voir
- 5 une eau mauvaise coule des membres de l'antilope  
souffrir en bas avez-vous trouvé des vaches des oiseaux?  
la soif le fiel du paon dans la cage  
le roi en exil par la clarté du puits se momifie lentement  
dans le jardin de légumes
- 10 semer des sauterelles brisées planter des cœurs de fous le  
brouillard de sel une lampe tire la queue sur le ciel  
les petits éclats de verreries dans le ventre des cerfs en fuite  
sur les points des branches noires courtes pour un cri<sup>3</sup>

(Springtime)

- 1 put the child in the vase in the depths of midnight  
and the wound  
a compass dial with your beautifully nailed fingers  
the thunder in feathers see
- 5 a stagnant water runs down the limbs of the antelope  
to suffer below have you found cows birds?  
thirst gall of the peacock in the cage  
the king in exile by the brightness of the well mummifies slowly  
in the vegetable garden
- 10 sow broken grasshoppers plant ant hearts the  
salt fog a lamp draws its tail across the sky  
the brief sparkles of glassware in the stomach of stags in flight  
over the ends of short black branches for a cry)

The first verse of the poem—“placer l’enfant dans le vase au fond de minuit”—calls to mind the opening line of Tzara’s *Grains et Issues* written in 1934–35: “Following this day, the content of the days will be poured into the demijohn [*la damme-jeanne*] of the night.” In transposing these lines, and mindful of the existence of this post-text but without pretense of definitive relation between them, we broach a plausible elucidation regarding the discursive direction of the poem. In the latter line, Tzara alludes to the dream-work that transforms everyday events. “Printemps” valorizes the unconscious with its reference to the vase (an object that often recurs in Tzara’s work) into which the infant is placed in the depth of night. The image refers, of course, to the container-mind and its night work, which involves the transposition of everyday materials.<sup>4</sup> The line also invokes an archetypal return to the womb, another important motive of the discursive content. The title and line 1 of the poem introduce a composite code of springtime/childhood and birth. Childhood and birth form variants in a paradigm, for springtime has conventionally served as a metaphor for them (e.g., “le printemps de la vie”). The text sets up a provisional model, a semantic pointer, whose direction the reader is predisposed to follow in the ensuing lines.

Line 2 with its ellipticism and ambivalent semantics impedes the movement begun. Does it continue line 1 or elide with line 3? “Plaie” itself is ambiguous: it can mean “wound” or, figuratively, “evil” (e.g., “les dix plaies d’Egypte” = the ten plagues of Egypt). This negative signifier appears to stand, in any case, in opposition to the positive code of

springtime, with which it is linked by the oblique reference to the womb, the issue onto life, which Tzara usually associated with anguish and trauma. "Plaie" fresh in mind, the addition of "doigt" to our lexicon in line 3 and the implicit act of pointing (compass dial) call to mind the hackneyed phrase, "mettre le doigt sur la plaie" ("to put one's finger on the evil"). This extralexical pointer reinforces the connotation of birth—traumatic emergence into life and life itself. (Of course, "rose des vents" taken literally also introduces a variant of springtime.) The unnamed possessor of the "beaux ongles"—suitably a woman according to conventional code—addressed familiarly ("tes") belongs to the maternal code of birth.

In line 4 "tonnerre," while possibly a variant of springtime, by its harshness (spring showers usually suggest mildness) also reinforces the negative lexicon of wounds or evils. "Dans" repeated establishes a paradigmatic state of things existing within things or things put into things. "Plumes" serves as a variant of "ongles," both being extremities of living bodies, remote from the interior both of inner body and psyche. The absent bodies, moreover, undergo a transition as the text moves from human to animal form, an important dimension of the poem which will be discussed later.

Of immediate concern is the syntactically interruptive appearance of the infinitive *voir* with its dual passive and imperative usages. "Voir" forms part of a verbal paradigm, along with "placer," "souffrir," "semer," and "planter." This verbal repetition effects a tension between the states of being acted upon and acting upon, between quiescence or immobility, as inherent in the uninflected nature of the infinitive, contrasted with its usage as an injunction to act. The infinitival dual signifiers emerge as a basic linguistic source of the energy stored by the poem. The semantic antipode of immobility introduces a lexicon of death, stagnation, deprivation, and dissolution: "the wound," "a stagnant water," "thirst," "gall," "the cage," "the king in exile [who] mummifies slowly," "broken grasshoppers," and "short [stunted] black branches." The reader who anticipates a mimetic discourse on springtime experiences disappointment if not shock, for the freshness, wholeness, and promise of renewal of the springtime-birth code are irreparably upset by such a lexicon, which in catachrestic fashion builds on the connotations of *la plaie* ("wound," "evil"). Stagnant water belies robust streams of springtime; thirst calls forth dryness rather than refreshment; a king who mummifies and black branches bespeak not the beginnings of spring but the end of life or winter, and images of deprivation and dissolution blight the landscape: broken

grasshoppers, stunted growth, etc. The emotions involved are un-springlike: gall, suffering, outcry (*cri*). What has happened to readerly expectations? They are not without some reference, for one encounters a garden and the acts of sowing and planting. What of childhood? Here one can discern a movement from birth to childhood to adulthood (“tes doigts aux beaux ongles”) to kingship to exile to death. The movement depicts the ineluctable process of mortality. Only after the death theme (the mummifying king) arises does the poem return to a place of fruition (a garden) and acts involving the implantation of seed. This progression extends the cyclical development of the mortality theme, from implicit existence in the womb, through the trauma of life, to a return to the womb of nature (garden). Paradoxically the seeds from which life will presumably spring are composed of broken grasshoppers and ant-hearts used to sow the garden. Out of destructed life comes the promise of renewal. The reader may think of the metaphor of the phoenix, life born of death, which answers to a mimetic interpretation. If he contents himself with such a vision of the cycle of earthly existence, however, the poem withdraws it as suddenly in the last distich, for stags are in flight over black, stunted branches, and the poem concludes with the semantically (mimetically) irresolvable but despairing phrase “pour un cri.”

In *Grains et issues* Tzara says, “As opposed to the paranoiac who confounds dream and exterior reality, the poet employs himself, with the aid of dream, in rendering reality confused, in dislocating it, fragmenting it, disseminating it and rendering it imperceptible [*et l’insensibiliser*]”<sup>5</sup>—an explicit rejection of mimesis and referentiality. “Printemps” ultimately blocks a mimetic interpretation. Such is the nature of the “automatic” text of Tzara: “What *is* different [specific] is the automatic text’s departure from logic, temporality, and referentiality, that is to say, from the rules of verisimilitude. Although there is nothing ungrammatical about the syntax, the words make sense only within the limits of relatively short groups, and there are semantic incompatibilities between these groups. Or else the semantic consecution of the sentences does not present any problem, but their overall meaning is threatened or checked by smaller nonsensical groups.”<sup>6</sup> That process of checking, of impediment, arises throughout Tzara’s poetry. In “Printemps” the ostensible subject—springtime—is checked by terms of malignancy. The “theme” develops as an antitheme, a reversal of expectations not unlike the Dada’s use of the alienation effect in performance. An apparent unintelligibility consequently arises that gives the appearance of automatic writing, that is, of writing that, despite a coherent syntax, appears to manifest the pure and unimpeded flow of the



author's emotions and desires. Upon reading the poem retroactively, however, and noting the simultaneous play of variants, the reader, while recognizing that the manifest content of the poem is unrecoverable as a whole structure in mimetic terms, may perceive that (as in dream matter) the manifest content serves as a mantle for deeper significance.<sup>7</sup>

In *Grains et issues*, Tzara, in rejecting the ideology underlying the poetry of expression—the manifest, deictic poetry of referentiality—voices the need to free the poet from society and the work ethic, to give him leisure for creation of what he called “poetry-activity of the mind,” a latent, nonreferential poetry (“Essai sur la situation de la poésie”). The first type of poetry conforms to directed (rational) thought, the second to undirected thought (revery, dream). That “poetry-activity of the mind” more accurately characterizes Tzara's poetry than have accustomed ways of thinking of it as being the pure, automatic expression of psychic dynamism. Tzara's “poetry-activity of the mind” is an *accommodation* of the rational mind and the unconscious, of minimal conscious control and spontaneous creation—dream modified by logic: “The lyric element (of oneiric origin) and the logical element of the text stand in a dialectical relation and produce the waking dream like tree and fruit.”<sup>8</sup> The figure of the child becomes particularly significant in this synthesis of the unconscious and conscious reflected in “Printemps.” The text views him as both beginning (placement in the womb) and end (his role in the individuation process). Jung, whom Tzara ridiculed in Zurich but came to view with increasing interest, speaks of the child in the development of the individual psyche: “. . . the ‘child’ paves the way for a future change of personality. In the individuation process, it anticipates the figure that comes from the synthesis of conscious and unconscious elements in the personality. It is therefore a symbol which unites the opposites, a mediator, bringer of healing that is, one who makes whole.”<sup>9</sup> Jung also makes these observations: “The ‘child’ is therefore *renatus in novam infantiam*. It is thus both beginning and end, an initial and a terminal creature. The initial creature existed before man was, and the terminal creature will be when man is not. Psychologically speaking, this means that the ‘child’ symbolizes the pre-conscious and the post-conscious essence of man. His pre-conscious essence is the unconscious state of earliest childhood; his post-conscious essence is an anticipation by analogy of life after death.”<sup>10</sup> The child figure in “Printemps” is pivotal. It looks backwards and forwards and thus comes to represent the synthesis of conscious-unconscious existence.

In “Printemps,” as in Tzara's other poems of the period, poetic discourse is less important for what it says than for what it does. It operates

like the Dada manifestos, as a discourse of effect, of revolution, emphasizing doing rather than showing. At one and the same time, it restages through its paradox-creating strategies the operation of the psyche torn by its warring cathexes and anticathexes and transposes the conflict between the conscious and unconscious. *Grains et issues*, written sixteen years after "Printemps," formulates a poetic motive-mechanism that characterizes most of Tzara's poetry of the Dada years. In the late 1920s and 1930s Tzara would voice an increasing concern for the traumatism of childbirth. He saw birth trauma allied with the repressive forces of the external world (literary, social, economic, political, and moral) to create anguish in our conscious life: ". . . invariably it happens that this traumatism of birth acts to an infinite degree [and] in a collective way on so-called civilized societies."<sup>11</sup> Thus, birth trauma, acted upon by repressive external forces, could, Tzara felt, be assuaged through transference of anguish onto poetic discourse.

The poetry of Tzara, such as "Printemps," with its latent desire for reintegration into the depths of physical and psychic being, speaks often of love and birth. An eloquent lyric passage in *Grains et issues* might serve as a gloss for "Printemps": "And the way of love will be cleared, the way by which we will penetrate the marvelous realm, the one which will hold under its empire, dominating them from the height of [its] flux, the mineral, vegetable and animal realms, before there falls the night of prey and of immobility [*raideur*] and our members grow weary from combat, like helixes, the injury of time whose labyrinths of ash we are no longer able to follow through the ambushes and duperies of the panting world."<sup>12</sup>

The closing distich of "Printemps," impervious to mimetic interpretation, comes to signify in terms of Tzara's vision of the opaque worlds of the psyche, on the one hand, and reason on the other, that above which we must rise. The night will fall and we will return to the most fundamental state of existence where, as children born, we push forth that most primitive of linguistic utterances, the cry.<sup>13</sup>

"Printemps" effects a conjunction of varied forms of being: (1) intelligent life that consists of humans (the child, the woman who possesses the beautiful nails, the king) and its artifacts (vase, cage, well, lamp, glassware<sup>14</sup>); (2) animal life (antelopes, cows, birds, peacocks, grasshoppers, ant hearts, stags); (3) inanimate objects ("rose of winds" [literal sense], thunder in feathers, stagnant water that flows, vegetable gardens, salt fog, black branches).

This ontological enumeration evidences the existence of a continuum

marked by exchange and fusion between the human and nonhuman, totemic world of sensate and insensate being. In this exchange and fusion of forms of being, the Dada poet effects entry into a nonreferential world of hybrid form: compass dials made of a woman's fingernails, thunder in feathers, rivulets emerging from an antelope's limbs, the sowing of animal parts (dead and disincarnate, now composing insensate matter) that will presumably bring forth sensate matter, a lamp (plausibly an oil lamp) with a lobsterlike tail, glassware in a stag's stomach, etc. Tzara's world is not metaphoric, but oneiric in origin.

In his "Note on Poetry" (*O.c.*, 1:403), Tzara tells us that we have to "know how to recognize and gather the traces of the strength that we await, which are everywhere, in an essential language of numbers, engraved on crystals, on seashells, on railway tracks, in the clouds, in glass, inside snow, light, on coal, on the hand, in the rays which group themselves around magnetic poles, on wings." He is talking about an awareness not merely of things, but largely of natural things, an awareness of "traces" which suggest an internal logic, a consistency, a natural order that abhors "chance."

Once we have read the natural language, Tzara says, we must integrate it into poetry. We must avoid seeking analogies for what is natural, but preserve in every element of our poem, as he stresses, "its autonomy, the necessary condition for the creation of new constellations," in which each element has its place. The same importance is assigned to all objects—"to the crocodile, to burning ore, to grass. Eye, water, scales, sun, kilometer and everything I can conceive of together as representing a value which can be human: *sensitivity*" (*O.c.*, 404). In the miraculous world of poems like "Printemps" we discover an interchange between human and nonhuman, animal and vegetable, animate and inanimate—all of which assume an equal importance in the poet's eyes.

Reintegration is a dominant motive and determinant of poetic strategies in the poetry of Dada—reintegration into physical and psychic being and reintegration of the human into the natural and the primitive. We find these same motives and strategies in the poetry of Hans Arp.

Arp once said, "I let myself be led by the work in process of being born; I put my confidence in it. I don't reflect. The forms come, pleasing or strange, hostile, inexplicable, mute or drowsing. They are born of themselves."<sup>15</sup> As Tzara, Arp pays lip service to the automatic qualities of his verse which transposes "natural" forms: "I let them push forth until the original forms become accessory or almost indifferent."<sup>16</sup> The following poem is representative of his poetic work during the Zurich-Paris period of Dada:

*die nachtvögel tragen . . .*

- 1 die nachtvögel tragen brennende laternen im gebälk  
ihrer augen. sie lenken zarte gespenster und fahren auf  
zartadrigen wagen.  
der schwarze wagen ist vor den berg gespannt.  
5 die schwarze glocke ist vor den berg gespannt.  
das schwarze schaukelpferd ist vor den berg gespannt.  
die toten tragen sägen und stämme zur mole herbei.  
8 aus den kröpfen der vögel stürzen die ernten auf die  
tennen aus eisen.  
die engel landen in körben aus luft.  
10 die fische ergreifen den wanderstab und rollen in  
sternen dem ausgang zu.<sup>17</sup>

*(the night birds carry . . .*

- 1 the nightbirds carry lighted lanterns in the cross-beams  
of their eyes. they guide delicate ghosts and ride in  
tender-veined coaches.  
the black coach is harnessed at the mountain.  
5 the black bell is harnessed at the mountain.  
the black rocking-horse is harnessed at the mountain.  
the dead carry saws and tree limbs here to the jetty.  
8 out of the crops of the birds the harvests tumble onto the  
iron threshing-floors.  
the angels touch down in baskets of air.  
10 the fish grab their walking sticks and roll [revolve]  
in stars towards the exit [starting point].)

The automatic aspect of the nightbirds poem forces its presence on the reader by brazenly weakening or displacing mimesis through the reduction of surface referentiality to apparent nonsense. The poem resists the reader's attempt to assimilate words and phrases by reassembling them into a coherent pattern that accords with his known "reality." He can indeed find grammatical coherence in a line describing nightbirds carrying lighted lanterns in the crossbeams of their eyes, for syntactically it is as orderly as a conventional verse, but the semantic distortion overwhelms him. Our failure to assimilate such lines might tempt us to dismiss them as unliterary. If we recognize, however, that *all* poetry proceeds by indirection, by undermining mimesis through semantic indirection that displaces, distorts, or creates meaning, we may perceive that Dada poetry volatizes the process whereby we move from the referential level to the poetic or semiotic level.<sup>18</sup> In effect the Dada poem short-circuits the

process of reading set in motion by the traditional poem. The Dada poem is to be found in the interstices of the traditional poem. The latter, from the standpoint of the reader, evolves through a process of reversibility in which the tacit subjects (the space of semiotic reference) comes to replace the ostensible subject.

The Dada poem overtly announces the rejection of mimesis through the destruction of temporal and spatial sequences. It often presents images metonymically conveying this cancellation of mimetic impingement—in, for instance, recurring references to functionless objects (Arp: “the sand-towers,” “newly upholstered lions,” “sacks of leather and stone,” “oceans hanging upright like mirrors,” “kings gallop on chairs”—all from *Der Vogel Selbdritt*) and dismemberment and chaos. The reader who sees in this overt reference the significance of the poem itself (overt reference as “rejection of mimesis,” or literary chaos as reflection of natural chaos) judges hastily, however, for he has not effected the transition from the level of referentiality to that of poetic significance.<sup>19</sup>

The Dada poem does not merely *represent* nonsense, which is an interpretive reduction most traditional critics of Dada (and Surrealist) poetry have made; in fact, in destroying referentiality (or “meaning”), the Dada poet effectively and openly sets aside the very obstacle that lies between the reader and the significance of a poem. This characteristic Dada poetic act *prevents* the reader from mistaking mimesis for poetic substance (as he does more easily with traditional poems). The attempt of the reader to assign meaning to a Dada poem is frustrated at the outset. If he progresses at all toward an appreciation of the poem, he progresses more directly toward significance. To be sure, the Dada poem disturbs the reader not by its nonsense, but by its nonmeaning, or meaning fragmented to such a degree that the linear mimetic movement of the poem is disrupted if not destroyed. The more refined the Dada poetic process, the more simultaneously the verses operate, the more directly the poem moves toward its poetic realization (or the reader’s realization of it as a total unit of significance).

What is the poetic realization that emerges from Arp’s nightbirds poem? Our linear reading reveals several tying motives: the substantives in their consecution introduce a movement from animate creatures that move (nightbirds) to inanimate objects that move (coaches) to an inanimate object that moves in place (the black bell) to animate creatures without life (the dead) that move. The verses move from dynamism to stasis (a sense reinforced by the repetition of the past participle *harnessed* and the passive tense) to dynamic stasis. A corresponding verbal movement proceeds from

*carry to guide to ride in to is harnessed* to the act of carrying by the dead. The first sentence (lines 1–2) forms with line 7 a bridge for this movement from animated life (that carries) to deanimated life (that carries). The sense of a bridge is reinforced by the fact that the objects being carried are made of wood (cross-beams and tree limbs).

The color black predominates (nightbirds, a black coach, bell, and rocking-horse) and, by extension, absence—of life: ghosts and dead men; of a coachman, a bellringer, and a rocking-horse rider. Allied to this code of absence is the journey implied but not taken in line 7 (a jetty is a departure point). The lighted lanterns and the eyes which introduce a code of seeing, moreover, give way to the sightless dead and the unburned wood.

The semantic unit embraced by lines 1–7 deal as we cannot avoid feeling with an evolution toward stasis and death. The last three lines (8–10) shift to highly activated motion: tumble, touch down, grab, and roll. But curious inversions occur: the undigested seeds regurgitated by the birds become the source of a new harvest to be threshed; spiritual creatures par excellence (angels) touch down in baskets (presumably come to earth, though the German phrase is ambiguous); legless creatures move with walking sticks. A spatial inversion occurs as well: ethereal creatures (birds and angels) are inflected with a downward movement (crop contents tumbling down and angels landing) that is reversed by an earthbound creature of the ocean setting forth on a sidereal journey.

The fish move toward the exit or jumping-off point (both readings are possible) and we recall the other jumping-off point—the jetty. The function remains but the scale changes: from an ocean to a universe. Should we read *exit* and infer that the ocean journey and the journey outward through the stars are both metaphors of a death journey? One an exit from life and the other an exit from universal existence? The archetype of ocean as death seems to warrant this reading, as do earthly existence which moves toward stasis (ll. 1–7), the allusions to black (devoid of color), and the image of the dead carrying dead wood to the pier.

On the other hand, *Mole* and *Ausgang* do signify departure as well as termination, and departure in the context can be read also in a positive sense, for what are left behind are precisely death and materiality. Exit can become entry—into spirituality, into poetic existence.

The first seven lines, which form an autonomous semantic unit, with their death-night code and a corresponding immersion into blackness and stasis, suggest a descent into sleep. (Even the dead are metonymically associated with sleep through the noun *Sägen*, whose verbal form *sägen* has

an amusing figurative use in colloquial language to describe snoring sleepers as sawing wood.) The passive descent into sleep is reversed in lines 8–10 when the fish *leaves* the water and departs for the stars.

The poem turns on the last word of the first semantic unit (l. 7)—*herbei*. Up to this point, human beings are emphatically absent (“present” only in the absent dead). But *herbei*, modifying *Mole* (“jetty”), reverses the direction of the discourse. *Herbei* in German refers to movement from a remoter to a nearer place with relation to the speaker or the place contemplated by him. Thus, this one linguistic unit (sememe) signifies a special and specific vantage point. A real (poetic) presence intrudes into the hitherto personless discourse and signals the presence of a viewing persona. What is perhaps more important is that the proximity of the viewing-point is also the proximity of our (the reader’s) viewing-point. *We* stand on the jetty that both forms a harbor—a protected place for sleep or death—and looks out onto the ocean. We stand with the persona on the Dada jetty, midway between the old and known and the new and unknown, at the formal, thematic, and semantic breakwater between past and future.<sup>20</sup>

Undeniably the last verses valorize *emergence*—formal emergence from the preceding semantic unit; thematic emergence from the death-sleep code. The choice of fish as journeyers could not be more apt: *Fisch* is a pivotal signifier that looks back to what is left behind and what lies ahead. In popular usage fish refer to stasis and corruption (*stumm wie ein Fisch* = “silent or dumb as a fish”; *das sind faule Fische* = “these are rotten fish,” i.e., sorry excuses), as well as to health and wholeness (*gesund wie ein Fisch* = “healthy as a fish”; the fish as part of a life/birth code associated with the ocean). Moreover, they signify both material existence (the element of water, part of the death code) and ethereal possibilities (*Fisch/Pisces* is a sign of the zodiac).

Thus, Arp’s poetic discourse takes us through the code of sleep-death, by means of the structuring mechanisms of poetic/dream-work, to the latent potential of spiritual rebirth. The ocean is transposed from a death code to a life/birth code. (And, in retrospect, the verb *tragen*, to carry, associated with living being [ll. 1 and 7], may also mean to bear young or give birth.) The fish of Arp, like the child of Tzara, are mediators of opposites, symbols of the preconscious and postconscious essence of the human being, who at the same time reconcile opposites and symbolize the Dada preoccupation in their poetry with change, rebirth, and reintegration into the depths of physical and psychic being.

Though the automatic or pseudoautomatic poem most characterizes Dada, with the work of Francis Picabia we enter upon a different type of poetic discourse—one which no longer gives the impression of automatism except in scattered lines and poems. His work strikes the reader, rather, as possessing an extraordinary degree of overt control and calculated effect. Such is the poem "Sperm Fireplace," which appeared in no. 13 of 391 in July 1920:<sup>21</sup>

SPERME CHEMINEE

Le gigot sous le fouet des douches dans la crotte  
pardonne derrière le rideau dans un couvent de femmes.  
Le corps des lotions symboliques d'or  
fait une croix sur ses fesses.  
5 Jésus roi de l'astronomie  
le cœur en relief sur sa poitrine  
comme un rubis mont de piété  
mange une sanguine.  
Curés phénomènes dessert des luxures  
10 votre clientèle riche enfle des bottines humaines.  
Mon pénis à la forme de mon cœur  
sur les oreillers.  
Câliner quelle maladie  
mais vous reviendrez bientôt n'est-ce-pas?  
15 Un homme nu n'est jamais pauvre  
surtout s'il a perdu poliment le sommeil.  
Il faut bondir ma chérie et violer ton fils  
l'onanisme est une théorie de gestes  
qui crispe la cornemuse.  
20 Jeanne d'Arc bouteille à l'encre.  
J'ai envie de vous taquiner lecteur  
pas beaucoup.  
Je n'ai jamais vu de femmes sous un lit  
pouvant relever leurs jambes entre leurs seins.  
25 Je vous en supplie laissez-moi  
je veux vous faire plier les reins lectrices  
terribles allumeuses  
à qui je vais fouetter les sens.  
Je souffle sous les couvertures  
30 j'éteins le chat qui m'enveloppe la main  
je ne sais vraiment pas pourquoi ces scènes  
ressemblent à des loques.



Je vous baise la bouche en vomissant.  
 La mort doit être une chose exquise.  
 Je suis long.

1<sup>er</sup> P.S.

35 L'humidité des veilleuses  
 gomme le petit Jésus.  
 Un calice vêtu de rouge n'a pas l'air.  
 Une grosse brune à l'école de médecine  
 prit la queue d'un albinos  
 40 très ennuyée de ce tête à queue  
 elle se remit à examiner la rue.

2<sup>e</sup> P.S.

Soyons ridicules tout en hauteur poussés  
 auprès des chandelles studieuses.  
 Pas de courage photographique  
 45 nos cheveux blanchiront des supplices bien élevés  
 j'aime les noisettes.

3<sup>e</sup> P.S.

Bismut d'orgues l'horoscope des conquêtes  
 s'est fixé à la robe d'une personne  
 pampas bronchite se parlant à elle-même

#### (SPERM FIREPLACE)

The leg of lamb under the whip of the showers in the dung  
 pardons behind the curtain in a woman's convent.  
 The body of the symbolic lotions of gold  
 makes the sign of the cross on the buttocks.  
 5 Jesus king of astronomy  
 His heart standing out on his breast  
 like a ruby pawnshop  
 eats a bloodstone [or red chalk, drawing of red chalk or a sanguine person]  
 Priests phenomena dessert of lecheries  
 10 your rich clientele slips on human boots.  
 My penis in the form of my heart  
 on the pillows.  
 To caress what sickness  
 but you will return soon, won't you?  
 15 A nude man is never poor  
 especially if he has politely lost sleep.  
 You must leap my dear and violate your son  
 Onanism is a theory of gestures  
 which clutches the bagpipes.

- 20 Jeanne d'Arc inkbottle.  
I wish to tease you reader  
not much.  
I have never seen women under a bed  
able to draw up their legs between their breasts.
- 25 I beg you let me  
I wish to make you fold your loins [women] readers  
terrible flirts  
whose senses I am going to whip up.  
I pant under the covers
- 30 I smother (allay) the cat which sheathes (envelops) my hand  
I truly don't know why these scenes resemble rags  
I kiss your mouth while vomiting.  
Death must be an exquisite thing.  
I am tedious.
- 1st P.S.
- 35 The moisture of the vigilant woman (nightlamps)  
gums up the little Jesus.  
A chalice covered in red doesn't seem to be what it is.  
A hefty brunette at the medical school  
takes the tail of an albino
- 40 bored with this maneuver [i.e., reversal of direction]  
she goes back to looking at the street
- 2d P.S.
- Let's be ridiculous pushed even to annoyance  
alongside studious candles.  
No photographic courage
- 45 our hair will grow white from the well-merited punishment  
I like hazel-nuts.
- 3d P.S.
- Bismuth of organs the horoscope of conquests  
fixed itself on the dress of a person  
pampas bronchitis speaking to herself)

The highly worked-up effect sensed by the reader of "Sperm Fireplace" is overtly suggested in direct addresses to the reader (11. 21–22) and an autocritical comment on the fragmentary form of the poem (1. 31). Characteristic also is a preoccupation with nominal and situational banality, decidedly sexual in nature. The poem emphasizes the mundane aspect of the discourse by a triple closure, which is no closure at all, in the form of postscripts rather than *envois*. The lines of the postscripts become increasingly staccato and inconsequent—a linguistic affirmation of the

last line of the main poem where the persona breaks off out of tedium. The poem becomes increasingly mechanical as it moves toward its lame ending (and, ironically, moves closer to the automatic poetry of Tzara and Arp).

The form of this poem, typical of much of Picabia's writing, derives from the aphorism or *dit*. This is particularly evident in lines such as "A nude man is never poor" which follow on one another in rapid succession, usually in distichs. The use of periods, moreover, usually banished along with other punctuation marks from Dada poetry, emphasizes the staccato counterpoint of lines. Finally, the postscripts added to the poem, which indicate the near absence of semantic consecution, reinforce the impression that Picabian poetic discourse builds not through the elaboration of a coherent, organic whole, but through the accretion of disparate semantic groups.

Incongruity permeates the poem: in the sacred figures of Jesus placed in a profane role and situation (l. 5) and Jeanne d'Arc equated with an inkbottle (l. 20), or the equation of a penis and a heart (l. 11). In this gratuitous juxtaposition of objects-situations, Picabia follows in the steps of Lautréamont.<sup>22</sup> We even sense the presence of an intertext for the figure of Jesus-Christ-Madcap and the equation of religious figures (priests, nuns, women at a wake) and objects (the cross, the chalice) with rampant and scurrilous sexuality—Canto Three of Lautréamont's *Maldoror*. In that canto the Creator visits a house of prostitution, cohabits with a dissolute woman, and flays a young man. The story is told by a hair fallen from the Creator's head. The hair recounts how dead nuns, buried in the convent catacombs, form a circle about the Creator after these acts, "while he sought the rubble of his former splendour; while he washed his hands with spittle and wiped them on his hair (it was better to wash them with spittle than not at all, after spending a whole night in vice and crime). . . ."<sup>23</sup> The Creator, who returns for his hair, describes his reception by the archangels, who observed "on [his] brow a drop of sperm and a drop of blood. . . . Hateful stigmata! Resolute rosettes!"<sup>24</sup>

The *gigot* or gigolo (*gigot* literally means "leg of lamb" but was the phonetic equivalent of the contemporary slang abbreviation for *gigolo*) behind the curtain in the convent, whose buttocks are marked by stigmata in the form of a cross, who eats a full-blooded person, "slips on human boots," and over whom women hold vigil is the figure of Jesus-Christ-Madcap and an offspring of Lautréamont's prototype. Of further interest, the shock effect of "Sperm Fireplace" relies on the same linguistic mechanisms as those of Canto Three: desacralization through the incongruous juxtaposition of sacred and profane personages, objects, and acts;

and through such similar details as the metonymic blasphemy of the Creator's hair personified and the *gigot* (an ironic allusion to the biblical Lamb).

Another "intertext" figures in the aphoristic structure of "Sperm Fireplace": the machine pictures of Picabia's mechanomorphic period, created from 1915 on. In an interview in 1915, Picabia stated, "In seeking forms through which to interpret ideas or by which to expose human characteristics I have come upon the form which appears most brilliantly plastic and fraught with symbolism. I have enlisted the machinery of the modern world, and introduced it into my studio. . . ." <sup>25</sup> Picabia's machine art draws on the same potential dynamics found in his aphoristic poetry. Both turn to contemporaneous materials: the former to technological inventions (automobile parts, electrical wiring diagrams, etc.); the latter to the media and idiomatic speech (slogans, maxims, puns, advertising jingles, etc.). Both cast this material into a crystallized artistic-moral (or pseudomoral) statement characterized by fragmentation. The mechanical parts of Picabian art arrogate to themselves an autonomy through disengagement from real machines (e.g., the easily identifiable gears of *Machine Turn Quickly*, ca. 1916–1918) and reintegration into a new, artistic context that serves at once as condensed commentary on a human situation (the sexual relationship of woman and man) and an exuberant celebration of the latent power, simplicity, and symbolism of the machine as opposed to its real-life function. <sup>26</sup> Analogically, Picabia's poetry deflects aphoristic statement from its conventional role of purveying "truth" (maxim) or commercial enticement (jingle) and turns it in the direction of social and religious outrage, whereby mothers are urged to violate their sons and Christ and Jeanne d'Arc are desacralized. The overt intention of the persona in "Sperm Fireplace" says as much: "Let's be ridiculous pushed even to annoyance/alongside serious candles [i.e., late-night scholars]."

The ubiquitous inscription "Girl Born Without Mother" borne by Picabia's plastic art as well as his poetry signifies, on the one hand, the miraculous progeny created by man—the machine—and, on the other, the "new" Dada art unencumbered by conventional form and morality. The poetic equivalent of the mechanomorphic style of Picabia's plastic art is the most stripped-down form of discourse—the aphorism. Not only do aphoristic inscriptions abound in the mechanomorphic art of Picabia, moreover, but they spill over in the pages of *391* and in *Jesus-Christ-Madcap* (1920). As Sanouillet has stated, Picabia's "mode of expression is the maxim, terse, biting and definitive, an admirable counterpoint to his plastic art." <sup>27</sup>

Tzara, Arp, and Picabia—three of the most important Dada poets by virtue, in varying proportions, of the skillful execution or the abundance of their work—hold much in common. The poems we have seen, typical of a good part of their work, all leave a textual imprint of an operative psyche charged with affective energy. They involve the occultation of psychic impulses in the form of concrete and often natural objects in incongruous conjunction/disjunction. As a consequence of this process, which leads to mimetic blockage and a pervasive sense of fragmentation, words, verses, and the very poem itself become *objects-presences*, the effect of which, while not impervious to semantic analysis, yields its greatest power through the elicitation of basic feelings. Their poetry represents, like Tzara's "poetry-activity of the mind," an accommodation of the rational mind and the unconscious that rejects repressive external structures in favor of inner and natural structures—what we have seen as a reintegration into physical and psychic being.

In addition to the three poets mentioned, a list of Dada poets would include Ball, Huelsenbeck, Hennings, Serfer, and Hausmann. Other Dadas tried their hand at poetry though it was not their prime preoccupation (Janco, Schwitters, Morton Schamberg), and one could extend the list greatly with reference to non-Dadas who published in Dada reviews and often used Dada to work out their own forms of inspiration—De Zayas, Breton, Soupault, Aragon, Eluard, William Carlos Williams, Huidobro, Hardekopf, and so on. Some poems of the latter are indistinguishable from those of the Dadas (just as some of the poems of the Dadas are atypical forays into conventional discourse).

Nor do the types of poems singled out earlier exhaust the categories of Dada poetry. A plethora of forms dots the wild and woolly landscape of Dada poetic experimentation—phonetic or sound poetry (*Lautgedichte*), bruitist poetry, simultaneous poetry, optophonetic poetry, and the newspaper poem (Tzara), to mention the best known. All of them answer in some way to that state of creation called *poiesis*, that lies, as Johan Huizinga said, "on that more primitive and original level where the child, the animal, the savage, and the seer belong, in the region of dream, enchantment, ecstasy and laughter. To understand poetry," he tells us, "we must be capable of donning the child's soul like a magic cloak and of forsaking man's wisdom for the child's."<sup>28</sup> Never was this view of poetic creation truer than for Dada. Like the Dada painters the poets cultivated an atavistic art, a throwback to the dim epochs of the human past when all of art was brewed in the cauldrons of magic and oracle. As Raoul Hausmann

has said: "When language becomes petrified in the academies, its true spirit takes refuge among children and 'mad' poets."<sup>29</sup>

The Dada poets experimented with unaccustomed modes of expression in an attempt to restore to poetry the purity of language and instinct despoiled by traditional literary norms. This was a special concern of Hugo Ball, who, all his adult life, was absorbed in the power of language to reach beyond simple communication into the realm of incantation and magic. Arp speaks of how Ball's linguistic experiments connected him with "the language of Light and Darkness."<sup>30</sup> Ball's most significant work was his "verse without words," phonetic poems, or sound poems (*Lautgedichte*), as they are variously called. In them, "the balance of the vowels is weighted and distributed according to the values of the beginning sequence," which like a liturgical chant sets up an initial combination to be developed through to the final crescendo.<sup>31</sup>

When Ball claimed to have invented sound poetry, he conveniently overlooked some distinguished predecessors. Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll's nonsense rhymes relied strongly on sound for their effect. Closer in time and place, in 1897 Paul Scheerbart composed a sound poem entitled *Kikakoku* and, in 1905, Ball's countryman Christian Morgenstern published his *Galgenlieder* (*Gallow Songs*), composed largely of comic and nonsense rhymes. Such poems as "Das Grosse Lalulā" provided examples of pure sound: "Kroklok wafzi? Semememi!/Seiokrontro—prafriplo:/Bifzi, bafzi; hulalemī:/quasti basti bo . . . /Lalu, lalu lalu lalu la!" The Dadas unquestionably knew Morgenstern's poems, for they went so far as to recite them in the Cabaret Voltaire. Moreover, Ball's mentor, Kandinsky, had published his poetic experiments with sound in a collection called *Klänge* in 1913, two poems of which were reprinted in the *Cabaret Voltaire*.

Along with sound poetry, which approaches pure phonetic effect (contaminated only by the voice inflections and gestures that enhance the verse), the Dadas experimented with nonsense rhyme using conventional words in unconventional arrangement. In certain group creations read simultaneously at the Cabaret Voltaire, Arp, Serner, and Tzara violated grammatical, syntactical, and punctuational rules, the better to mix words through free association and produce a cacophony of fused sound effects (occasionally by mixing three languages in the same poem) that approximated the "white" effect of sound poetry.

Huelsenbeck struck on the reason for all this noisy nonsense: "In rejecting normal logic and trusting to instinct, we realized the existence of a structure in ourselves."<sup>32</sup> In other words, the Dada poet turned inward

to subjective, psychological processes of association and combination. By emptying poetry of all but its pure acoustical qualities, the Dadas were trying to create a state of mind approaching that brought about by ritualistic chant—the effect of which is to energize words with magical power.

Dada poetry ranged thus from the abstract sound poetry of Ball to poetic irrationality in the form of everyday words whose established meanings and contextual values Tzara in particular attempted to abolish by disrupting conventional grammatical and typographical patterns through chance creation. The extreme of Tzara's experimentation would manifest itself in his recipe for poetic creation through the "newspaper poem," which consists of individual words clipped from a newspaper, dropped into a bag, and shaken up. The words are then conscientiously copied in the order in which they are drawn forth. The resulting arrangement, like Arp's collages arranged "according to the laws of chance" (see Chapter 7), becomes an original artistic entity. Such a poem "will resemble you," Tzara tells the reader, "infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar."<sup>33</sup> This technique resembles that of the futurist poems consisting of letters of the alphabet "scattered and assembled again in a rough-and-ready way" that destroys syntax and conventional language—"Disintegration right in the innermost process of creation,"<sup>34</sup> a process which Ball rejected but with which Tzara eagerly flirted. In effect, Tzara's act of cutting up a newspaper—that cultural object that more than any stands for empirical truth—represents, as Kuenzli has indicated, a deconstruction of the cultural sign system.<sup>35</sup> His act is a metasemiotic act that underscores the arbitrary nature of social "truths." This same effect was achieved in the newspaper collages of the German Dadas and the optophonetic poetry of Hausmann and Schwitters which replaces signs by letters.

Somewhere between these extremes, which devalorize literarity, lies most of Dada's poetic discourse. In all of it, old poetic concepts were exchanged for new ones; poetic objects-words were liberated from the burden of everyday existence and found their source in inner necessity (Tzara). The new poem was "no longer a product of optics, sense or intelligence, but an impression or a means of transforming and applying the traces left by feelings." Anything else, as Tzara declared, was not poetry but literature.<sup>36</sup>

## *Chapter Seven*

# Dada Art and the Dynamics of Uninhabitable Space

Walter Benjamin was one of the first art critics to have contemplated the changes occurring in the transition from the traditional modes of visual expression, in particular oil painting, to the mass modes realized through technological innovations permitting reproduction and the means for wide dissemination.<sup>1</sup> These idioms of visual expression introduced new factors into the question of subject as well as into the relationships among the work of art, the viewer, and the external world.

Art in its origins in Western society served fundamentally as the ritualistic expression of religious cults. The questions of the beauty of an individual work of art and the identity of its creator existed as factors of secondary importance in the first instance and of little or no importance in the second. The primary value of the art object lay not in its aesthetic appeal but in the efficaciousness with which it depicted edifying subjects. Art usually took the form of religious artifacts to be stored away, like any other relic, in sacred places and viewed solely by priests, acolytes, and a limited number of the faithful. It served primarily a ceremonial use. Exceptions to this restricted circulation of the work of art were the great cathedrals, constructed for the rich and poor alike. Nevertheless, the cathedral builders like the guild members who executed the religious artifacts usually remained anonymous.

In the 400 years oil painting dominated the visual arts (from the early sixteenth to the end of the nineteenth century), a shift occurred from visual signifiers of transcendent, spiritual values, to signifiers of the growth of capitalism and the ideology of an oligarchic ruling class. The artist himself came of age as a name brand for a consumer product. Though with oil painting traditional art emerges from the temple, it preserves two essential qualities of cult art: unapproachability and exclusivity. It remains “‘distant, however close it may be.’ The closeness which one may gain



from the subject matter does not impair the distance which it retains in its appearance."<sup>2</sup>

Portraiture, still lifes, landscapes, and even religious paintings depicted the opulence of the ruling class—either in the representation of the objects it possessed or the social position of its members or their families. The still life, reveling in tapestries, slaves, exotic animals, game and shellfish for the table, musical instruments, and various bric-a-brac for leisurely pursuits, displayed either material goods which the buyer possessed or goods to which he aspired. The ubiquitous globe served as an ideal metaphor for worldly exploitation. Painting thus came to be an indicator of the owner's capacity to possess. As Lévi-Strauss has said, "It is this avid and ambitious desire to take possession of the object for the benefit of the owner or even the spectator which seems to me to constitute one of the outstandingly original features of the art of Western civilization."<sup>3</sup> The very possession of the painting, an exclusive and privileged object, symbolized the prerogatives of the possessor.

Portraiture commissioned by the ruling class signaled the social position of the buyer or a member of his family. "To see oneself (other than in a mirror): on the scale of history that act is recent, the portrait painted, sketched or miniaturized, having, up to the time photography was diffused, a limited possession, destined moreover to proclaim financial or social standing."<sup>4</sup> With the advent of photography in the nineteenth century and the possibility of reproducing the work of art for mass consumption, new attitudes developed toward art as well as toward its public. In being designated for reproducibility, the work of art witnessed, as Benjamin has observed, a shift from ritualistic value to exhibition value.<sup>5</sup> Art began to base its success on dissemination and acceptability among and by a vastly widening audience of beholders. Reproduction, good and bad, proliferated in the form of engravings, political cartoons, lithographic posters, illustrations in books and journals—but nowhere was the effect so profound as in photographic reproductions. In newspapers, portraiture, and the film, no other visual genre became so pervasive and far-reaching in effect. "When the age of mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever."<sup>6</sup>

In regard to the relationship between the spectator and the artistic object, Benjamin posits an important difference between traditional art and photographic art. Traditional art, and oil painting in particular, through the subject represented and the use of the medium of oil paint to highlight color, texture, and technique, while fostering an analogy be-

tween its objects and the wealth and standing of the possessor, grappled with the problem of keeping the spectator at a distance while providing him with the illusion of proximity.<sup>7</sup> Photography and art reproductions transformed the relationship between spectator and artistic object by collapsing the distance existing between them and by pulling the former into the work. The nature of the increased proximity of spectator and object in modern reproductive art must, however, be examined closely. Indeed, yes, it allowed the masses to identify with objects of everyday life, the possession of which was destined not solely for a privileged class but, in advanced technological societies, for the middle and lower classes as well. The unattainability of the object no longer raised barriers against the spectator. Nonetheless, though modern reproductive art enlarged the field of possible spectator participation, like traditional art it made the object subserve ethical-teleological determinations that exist outside it; it immobilized the object in a definable historical context that served "to inform, represent, surprise, signify, make desired" in accord with the spectator's cultural background.<sup>8</sup> Like traditional art, it gave visual expression to "a way of seeing the world, which was ultimately determined by new attitudes to property and exchange [ . . . ]. It reduced everything to the equality of objects. Everything became exchangeable because everything became a commodity. All reality was mechanically measured by its materiality. [Like] oil painting [it] conveyed a vision of total exteriority."<sup>9</sup> Art as mass media overdetermined one characteristic of traditional painting. The latter usually depicted objects which the wealthy consumer did and could possess; often, however, the objects were ones which the consumer longed to possess (a beautiful woman, slaves, bullion, a nostalgic paradise exemplified by the landscapes of Piranesi, etc.). This note of *futurity* was taken up by mass art as a dominant mode. Mass art propagated through film, radio, and television, and its poor relation, commercial art, encourages the spectator to possess something he does not now possess. It makes the prospective buyer conscious of the inadequacy of his present state, owing to his nonpossession of the commodities represented. The objects in themselves are unimportant: what matters is the state of bliss they promise. Consequently, the futurity aspect of mass art, by making us conscious of our deprivation, steals our love of ourselves as we are, to paraphrase Berger, and offers it back to us "for the price of the product."<sup>10</sup>

Various conclusions suggest themselves in regard to the visual message conveyed by traditional and mass art: they deal each in varying degrees with total exteriority and/or the promise of a future state in which the

spectator is regarded from outside (by his future self or others) as an object of envy. These characteristics exert a terroristic effect: by making the individual interests of the artist and spectator subserve those of ruling-commercial class ideology, they transform them into object-functions little different from Sartre's paper-opener. Their confinement within the system as transmitter-receiver of the visual message immobilizes them, while, in contrast, the visual message operates dynamically. The dual stases of creator/artist through whom, as social instrument and agent, the message *acts upon* and the createe/spectator who, as consumer, *is acted upon*, surround them both with the aura of death. Dada art, in refuting the premises upon which Western art has built, inveighs against more than art as reflection and expression of ruling-class ideology; it inveighs against the exteriorization of art, the circumscription of the object within a teleological system such that it becomes the *ëidos*-spectator-agent of death-immobility through its fixation of the artist-spectator.

### Dada Art as Confrontation

The Dadasopher Raoul Hausmann advanced several premises which sketch the direction Dada art would take. "Old art is construction, summary, absolutistically arranged around a center; new art is decentering, destruction of the center, a dissolution. It will lead either to the complete end of art or to a completely new art, in which the presently current concepts, the presently naive longing to validate the world through the human will as human representation and to equate this representation with the truth will be invalid, ineffective."<sup>11</sup>

The new art envisioned by Hausmann and carried out by such artists as Duchamp, Picabia, Arp, Ernst, Man Ray, Schwitters, and Hausmann himself worked in various and often divergent ways. But the work of all of them reacted against fundamental characteristics of traditional and modern reproductive art. In general, the Dada antiart (or new art) work called into question (1) the ethical determination and anthropomorphization of art which exteriorize it in order, through referentiality, through world as human representation, to privilege a legitimizing social-political ideology; (2) the exclusivity of art reserved for the needs and uses of predesignated groups; (3) the dissemination of art as commodity; (4) the aggrandizement of artist-ego consciousness through the actualization of the artist's intention of saying/painting something meaningful (his "vouloir-dire" or his "intention-de-signification," as Derrida terms it<sup>12</sup>).

In short, the Dada work refused to admit of the reduction of the work of art by either artist or beholder equipped with attitudes preformed by society, in accord with a set of beliefs or concepts anchored primarily in the outer world (i.e., neither in the world of the work of art nor in the particular inner world of the individual beholder<sup>13</sup>). To the Dada way of thinking, the characteristics of most previous and contemporary art<sup>14</sup>—exteriority, exclusivity, reproducibility, and the aggrandizement of the artist-ego—blocked (1) the experience of the art work as work-being, to use Heidegger's term, of the work in and of itself; and (2) the experience by the beholder of his own awareness unleashed by his confrontation with the otherliness of the work of art.

To begin with, the persistent use of the term "antiart"—used even by such Dadas as Richter—is unfortunate, for it is cast solely in negative, reactive terms, whereas the Dada concept of art also laid down exacting strategies that worked toward positive ends. The term "new art" suggested by Hausmann is less predisposed to misunderstanding. Undeniably, Dada work, particularly in its early phases, exhibited nihilistic and destructive strategies designed to negate the absolutistic, anthropomorphic, referential, and utilitarian art serving ruling-class ideology.<sup>15</sup> The latter art was debased, vain, and destructive of the artist and the individual.

The tendency to see things or beings in terms of function or use, to regard being as "equipmental being" (Heidegger), has dominated the interpretation of being in Western thought. Traditional art and modern reproductive art, which have bestowed preeminence on the truth-seeming aspect of things represented, are equally products and determinants of the beholder's preshaped way of interpreting being. "As soon as we look for [ . . . ] a thingly substructure in the work," Heidegger says, "we have unwittingly taken the work as equipment, to which we then also ascribe a superstructure supposed to contain its artistic quality."<sup>16</sup> Thus, in viewing an object of art, the Western eye sees it as artifact embellished by incidental aesthetic qualities. In looking upon Van Gogh's rendering of peasant shoes (Heidegger's example), we seek its realistic (mimetic) qualities which refer us to a particular code in regard to shoes (work shoes, etc.); abetted by the work of art itself, we assimilate it as function, a thing-function, to which we ascribe a superstructure we call artistic, which is in itself a thing-function, for we interpret artistry as merely a means to depict truth outside and apart from the work-being. To resist this process, determined by a preexisting equipmental perception of things

and encouraged by illusionist art, the Dadas set forth to create a new art. They faced the twofold task of deflating illusionist art and reconstituting the manner in which a beholder experiences the work. The new art and the (new) beholder in the Dada mind formed a symbiotic relationship similar to that in Dada performance. The Dada work of new art was a public act to be experienced privately.

The perversity of Marcel Duchamp's work—its refusal to be coopted, expropriated, or reduced—makes it a model of the new Dada art. The beholder who views for the first time Duchamp's masterwork, the *Large Glass*—a seeming hodgepodge of machinelike forms attached to two five-foot sections of plate glass, strangely shattered—or the work that represents his last substantial statement of art, *Etant Donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage* (1946–56)—a three-dimensional nude woman, vulva exposed, holding a gas lamp against a background containing a waterfall, viewed voyeurlike through peepholes in a wooden door and a breach in a brick wall—experiences sensations similar to those experienced by the beholder who first viewed Duchamp's urinal entitled *Fountain* at the 1917 Independents Show. He experiences, namely, an intransigence, an obdurateness, an imperviousness, in a thing that refuses to yield recognizable relationships with and imitative of the beholder's world. What world? The external (social-political) world in which he participates as collective being. This is the "world" described by Heidegger when he speaks of the nature and origin of the work of art: "The world is the self-disclosing openness of the broad paths of the simple and essential decisions in the destiny of an historical people." Heidegger opposes world to "earth": "The earth is the spontaneous forthcoming of that which is continually self-secluding and to that extent sheltering and concealing."<sup>17</sup> The traditional work of art, according to Heidegger, sets up the world-earth opposition as a striving, and builds of this tension its "work-being." The new art of Dada, however, expunges from the work (in such measure as it is possible) the "world" and confronts the beholder with (again in such measure as it is possible) "earth"—in a work-being that conceals and shelters itself, that depicts and privileges concealed and sheltered being.

In viewing the *Large Glass*, displayed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the beholder's glance passes through it to the museum window on the other side. In viewing Duchamp's *Etant Donnés . . .* at this same museum, this same beholder's perspective is fixed by the physical arrangements of the *mise en scène*. He cannot avoid the center focus on the woman's vulva. He cannot walk around the woman and glimpse her from a different perspective (the room is sealed and the sole vantage points are the two

peepholes). He can only walk away. The work refuses his attempt to penetrate it. Duchamp "has determined forever exactly the amount of detail and precisely the fixed perspective which he wants the viewer to perceive. The illusion is complete in itself; the essence of the piece is in the sheer visual impact of the view, and not in the materiality of the component parts assembled by the artist to create the illusion."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the beholder of Duchamp's *Fountain* in 1917 found himself unable to assimilate it, for the incongruity of a urinal displayed in an art museum neutralized the preconceived relationships he brought with him.

Though these works set up disparate strategies, they operate to identical ends. To begin with, Duchamp's "objects" are not objects in any conventional sense, but object-transformers, as Lyotard calls them. "There is no art, since there are no objects. There are only transformations, redistributions of energy."<sup>19</sup> The object-transformers of Duchamp offer the same strategies as those of pre-Socratic paradoxes, i.e., they disrupt the relationships established between the object and its contextual systems, from which the object emerges—that which society calls "real," but which is no more than what Hausmann calls "the human will as human representation" equated with a supposed absolute truth. Lyotard speaks of "the Terror of the True and the False" as arising in reaction to the strategies of the pre-Socratic thinker, who put effect above an imagined, eternal truth. The Dada object, in rejecting reference to teleological, controlling norms, emphasizes not the object but the dynamics of viewing inherent in the object-transformer, viewing that is carried through or deflected from the work-being. The beholder, whose glance passes through the *Large Glass* and who sees objects of the natural world beyond, "is returned to his own activity, without being able to lose himself in virtual objects, as the reality effect [mimesis] would permit. Transformation of the perspectivist transformation."<sup>20</sup> Analogously, the constructs *Etant Donnés . . .* and the *Fountain* refuse penetration and assimilation. With them the confrontation is direct, and the glance, instead of passing through, is returned because of the opacity of the work-being. Instead of deflecting the beholder's response into social-political-aesthetic channels, they bring about an incongruity or discontinuity between the work and its context, thus producing an alienation effect.

Thus, Duchamp's object-transformers operate like windowpanes and mirrors, which return the glance by passing it through or by reflecting it back. Whether the primary characteristics of his works are transparency or opacity, one fact stands out—the "being" of Duchamp's new art, with its solidity, its lack of context, its hardness, first imposes its presence as an

unaccustomed intrusion of otherness or thingliness into the ordered, comprehensible "world" of the beholder, then negates its own presence by returning the beholder to his own world. The beholder finds himself unable to seize the Dada work as a *sui generis* object or to transform it into a virtual object; instead he finds himself either on the other side of it or returned to the side from where he views. The surface of the Dada work, the space in which it operates, contrasts with the canvas or the plastic form of conventional art. In the space of the canvas or the plastic form of traditional art the beholder's perceived "reality," his "world," is reduplicated and there he can reside. The Dada work, on the other hand, exists nowhere: it is only a transformer that converts current variations in a primary circuit into current and voltage in a secondary circuit. Those variations in the secondary circuit are the glance of the beholder that has passed through or been returned to a hyper-real circuit whose intensity derives from the emotions aroused in the beholder and his own virtual, potentiated awareness. Duchamp describes the encounter between the beholder and the work as a spark which "gives birth to something, like electricity."<sup>21</sup>

In sum, the Dada work occurs in a space of uninhabitability, like that point lying between the state of dress and nudity of Duchamp's woman. The act of becoming nude is instantaneous—one is either nude or not. The duration of the act of becoming nude exists only as a theoretical point in time beyond which the beholder's perceived reality passes into another state. This dynamic work-being aspect of the Dada new art makes us aware of another of its characteristics—its ephemerality. Once the beholder has viewed Duchamp's *Etant Donnés . . .* or *Fountain*, once he has viewed Man Ray's *Gift* (a nail-studded clothes iron that would shred rather than press linen), once he has viewed a Dada "happening," the Dada work no longer exists for him. Its work-being lies in its initial effect, and that effect is not reproducible in a subsequent viewing by the same beholder. The Dada work-being becomes upon subsequent viewings a mere, inert object. Its significance passes into another phase that separates it from Dada work-being, for it becomes historical matter, to be exhibited and classified in catalogs and art books. Though the complexity of a few Dada works, like the *Large Glass*, will draw the beholder back and at each subsequent viewing continue to offer resistance and throw the viewer back on himself, most Dada works of new art exist, as authentic Dada work-being, only for future beholders.

Thus, the new art of Dada, in all of its variations, refuses egress and returns us to the natural. Or it admits us only to leave us outside, like

Duchamp's door, which, while opening onto one room; closed onto another. Or his pseudonymic female mask, Rrose Sélavy, which provided him with an elusive identity. In this sense Dada art, like that of Duchamp, is perverse and contrary. The artist refuses capture: "You won't have me," he says, "it's his *idée fixe*. It's I, Marcel, says Rrose. I am Rrose, says Marcel. I remain a bachelor, says the married woman. I am still married, says the bachelor. I have two dimensions, says the plate of glass, but its transparency says: there are three of them . . ." <sup>22</sup> The Dada work of art resembles Heidegger's description of color in painting: "Color shines and wants only to shine. When we analyze it in rational terms by measuring its wavelengths, it is gone. It shows itself only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained." <sup>23</sup> One must agree with Lyotard that Duchamp's work, like that of other Dadas, must, to survive, remain inconsistent and uncommentable. "Every time that one explicates it, one lifts it a step higher in the hierarchy of cultural power (= military), and one loses it." <sup>24</sup>

The machine played a preponderant role in Duchamp's art, from his early works such as the *Bride* (1912) to his *Large Glass*. It inspired other Dadas equally, in particular Francis Picabia. A careful distinction must be made between the mechanical and industrial properties of the machine. Industry, directed by an equipmental view of being, turns machines to a specific end through the utilization of natural forces (gravity, combustion, etc.)—namely, the production of consumer goods. As Lyotard says, "the industrial is the inhuman side of the mechanical." <sup>25</sup> Picabia's *Young Girls Born Without Mother*—his artistic equivalents for the man-created machine—like the bachelor machines of Duchamp, relinquish their ties with the industrial function. The machines of Picabia and Duchamp operate like Dada object-transformers; they resemble "a battery of metamorphosing machines." <sup>26</sup>

Picabia seized upon the possibilities offered to art by machinery during his visit to the United States in 1915. In an interview, he spoke of the machine as reflecting "perhaps the very soul of human life" through its brilliant plasticity and symbolic qualities. "I mean to simply work on and on until I attain the pinnacle of mechanical symbolism." <sup>27</sup> What has come to be called Picabia's mechanomorphic period—that period of his art most associated with Dada—was to extend from 1915 to the early 1920s. <sup>28</sup>

What are the symbolizing properties of Picabia's machine art? Obvious analogies between the human and the mechanical arise in Picabia's work. At the most superficial level, the titles reflect these: his series of *Young Girls Born Without Mothers*, *Paroxysm of Sadness* (1915), *Here Is Woman* (1915), *Child Carburetor* (ca. 1919), etc. More particularly, many titles



suggest an overt sexuality: *Portrait of a Young American Girl in a State of Nudity* (1915), *Sweetheart of the First Occupant* (1917), *Portrait of Marie Laurencin*, *Four in Hand* (ca. 1916–17, an allusion to Laurencin's men friends), *Universal Prostitution* (ca. 1916–17), *Amorous Parade* (1917). Other drawings carry annotations indicating sexual and reproductive functions, like *The Marquesas Islands* (ca. 1916–17), whose contraptions are labeled "penis" and "the female egg awaits." The motif of sexuality is reinforced by the proliferation of "male" and "female" parts: intermeshing cogwheels (*Machine Turn Quickly*, ca. 1916–17, which labels the smaller wheel "woman" and the larger one "man"), nuts and bolts, pistons and cylinders (*The Saint of Saints*, 1915), pistols and targets (*Here She Is*, 1915), rods and springs, plugs and sockets (*De Zayas! De Zayas!*, 1915), etc.

Camfield has shown how these drawings have been inspired by actual machines—e.g., the construct *Fantasy* (1915) suggests its origin in illustrations of a beam steam engine of the mid-nineteenth century; the visual reference to portable electric lamps, spark plugs, cameras, wiring diagrams, John Deere separators, engines, automobile parts and revolvers.<sup>29</sup>

These titles and annotations and the suggestive sexuality of the represented parts reveal a meaning deeper than a mere preoccupation with machine-age products. Picabia has said this: "In my work the subjective expression is the title, the painting is the object. But this object is nevertheless somewhat subjective because it is pantomime—the appearance of the title; it furnishes to a certain point the means of comprehending the potentiality—the very heart of man."<sup>30</sup> If the symbolizing properties of Picabia's mechanomorphic art, through pantomime, set forth to reveal the "potentiality," "the very heart of man," then their significance is great indeed.

Let us look first at the method (pantomime) as exemplified in the object (machine), then at the conceivable "things" symbolized, the subject of the machine creation. Two properties of Picabia's machines strike the beholder immediately: (1) the existence of a latent, explosive energy, as if the machines are about to leap into activity; (2) the antiindustrial aspect of the machines that either cannot function properly (e.g., the camera in *Here, This Is Stieglitz*, 1915) or function in a fantastic, nonutilitarian manner (e.g., the wiring diagram of *De Zayas! De Zayas!*). Picabia's machines at once glorify the mechanical and comment caustically on the industrial. What is there about machines that attracted the Dadas? The machine, object of a miraculous (man-made) birth, made of man the emulator of God and enabled him to reenact the Creation in a secular setting. The

subtitle of Picabia's *Fantasy* was *Man Created god in His Image*. This god, with a small "g," through its reproductive powers and its manipulation of physical forces, held forth the illusion of human liberation from the fatalism of history and nature. Man, through the machine, was seen as having the potential of becoming the master of his own destiny. The myth of the machine was most closely related to the urban world of America, with its skyscrapers and dynamos, for America was the Western nation least bound by tradition. Thus, the machine myth carried an exhilarating appeal in the second decade of the present century. The Dadas, who like Man Ray could remain aware of the danger existing in complete capitulation to the machine, nonetheless reappropriated certain of its properties—namely, its potential for energy and liberation. But they used the machine myth against itself, for while the machine offered an illusory liberation from history through the radical revision of consumer society by means of technology, the Dada machine pushed the ahistorical process to its extreme by rejecting the industrial in favor of the "mere" mechanical. It also brought the machine back to nature, by endowing it with a gratuitousness of operation that rendered it a producer of chance combinations and a metaphor of physical/mental realities.

This aspect of Dada machine art reflects the essentially dialogical structure of Dada discourse, which opposes and undermines the legitimizing, totalizing ideologies of the ruling class. This dialogical discourse is most explicit in the Dada manifestos but it informs equally importantly other Dada writing and art. The Dada voice engages in a systematic deconstruction of the ruling class text/object; the mechanomorphic art of Dada initiates a process of "reappropriation and neutralization" (Jameson's terms, in a Marxist context) whereby it strips industrial objects of their function and privileges them as mechanical work-being.

In contrast to the impersonality of Duchamp's metaphysical machines, Picabia's machines manifest an operative subjectivity. They often refer to individuals and events in his personal life (e.g., the machine portraits of Haviland, Stieglitz, De Zayas, Gabrielle Buffet, and others in 291), as well as to his proclivity to physical gratification. "Duchamp possessed uncanny discipline and objectivity; Picabia was an utter hedonist."<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, Picabia's machines share with Duchamp's the power of drawing attention to themselves as manifestations of otherness, as entities excised from their customary context (the workaday, consumer society). Picabia's machine drawings limit referentiality and rigorously select certain characteristics of the machine or pseudomachine for the beholder to consider—namely, the energies and rhythms of modern life, unimpinged

by moral and social suasion. More particularly, these energies and rhythms correspond to the Picabia ethos of unbridled pleasure. The Picabian machines metamorphose mechanical process into pleasure process and in so doing attack the myths of romantic love, social responsibility, and consumerism.

The main tenets of any cultural sign system, such as that upon which traditional art rests, are order and control. Control is needed to direct the message toward a specific ideological end ("world"); order, to facilitate the communication of that message in the most coherent, efficient, and effective manner. Dada worked toward a different end, however, by introducing chance into artistic creation. Duchamp's work *Standard Stoppages* developed from the following proposition: "If a straight horizontal thread a meter long falls from a height of one meter onto a horizontal plane, deforms itself as it wills and creates a new figure for the unit of length—3 examples thus obtained under similar conditions: in *their relation to each other* make an approximate reconstitution of the unit of length. The 3 *standard stoppages* are the meter diminished."<sup>32</sup> Duchamp's tongue-in-cheek search for a new physics of chance was an indication of the preponderant role chance played in the experiments of the Dadas.

Chance had from the beginning attracted the Zurich Dadas as a favorable field for the deployment of their artistic strategies.<sup>33</sup> The primary mover in experimenting with chance creation among the Zurich Dadas was Hans Arp. One anecdote relates how he tore into pieces a drawing that dissatisfied him. When he saw the configuration of scraps that had fluttered to the floor, he felt compelled to paste them onto a background in the identical pattern in which they had fallen. The result was his composition *Nach dem Gesetz des Zufalls* (*According to the Laws of Chance*).

With these *papiers collés* or *déchirés* Arp seized upon the possibility of deconstructing the order of form imposed upon an object by utilitarian codes and leaving its reconstruction to the gratuity accorded it by chance incident that followed natural order (in this case, gravity and air resistance). The disorder of his *papiers collés* put the artist in touch with the forces of nature. "The 'law of chance,' which embraces all laws and is unfathomable like the first cause from which all life arises, can only," he said, "be experienced through complete devotion to the unconscious. I maintained that anyone who followed this law was creating pure life."<sup>34</sup> Arp introduced into art the very realities (natural forces) that he saw subverted in traditional art and in social life. The tearing apart, with its archetypal motives of ephemerality and death, was followed by a reconstruction that restored life to the object and, the Dadas hoped, to the Beholder.<sup>35</sup>

Arp's art followed natural form. Richter describes how he once visited Arp in his studio in the Zeltweg: "[I] stood for a while watching as his hands danced over the paper, calling forth beetles, plants, fragments of human bodies, violins and stars, snakes and ears. When I called for him again at lunchtime, the table was festooned with Arpian vegetation." In response to Richter's expressed amazement, Arp lamented sadly, "What can I do? It grows out of me like my toenails. I have to cut it off again."<sup>36</sup>

W. S. Rubin has interpreted Arp's art as being anthropomorphic.<sup>37</sup> Indeed Arp does infuse into his artistic universe an identifiable human element. But the painted wood relief *Enak's Tears* (1917) is undisguisedly wood on wood, of which the pieces were "cut by machines in order to eliminate the human hand."<sup>38</sup> Arp described his works as "constructions of lines, surfaces, forms, colors. They attempt to approach reality. They hate artifice, vanity, imitation, tightrope walking. . . . Art should lead to spirituality, to a mystical reality."<sup>39</sup> In his combination of the organic and the abstract, the human and animal forms were placed on the same continuum as insensate being.

Arp's art sought neither representation nor anthropomorphism. His idiom tended more and more toward abstraction. Arp rejected traditional, illusionist painting, which, he felt, had brought about the death of wisdom, the feeling for abstract and eternal concepts, by replacing it with platitudinal themes. "Wisdom was the feeling for common reality, for mysticism, for the undefined indetermination, for the deepest definiteness. Illustration is imitation, spectacle, ropedancing."<sup>40</sup> He and Sophie Taeuber renounced oil-colors, which reminded them of the pretention and self-contented smugness of the world about them.<sup>41</sup> And even from childhood Arp had tried to destroy the significance of the frame or pedestal which immobilize the painting and the statue. "Sometimes [as a child] I took our pictures out of their frames and looked with pleasure at these windows hanging on the wall. Another time I hung up a frame in a little wooden shack, and sawed a hole in the wall behind the frame, disclosing a charming landscape animated by men and cattle."<sup>42</sup> By destroying those elements he felt immobilized art (social pretention, frame, and pedestal), Arp lifted the artistic object out of its context of social and aesthetic tradition and restored it to art as nature, as life. His work tended toward an undefinable subject matter evocative of natural form: "a picture or a sculpture without any object for model is just as concrete and sensual as a leaf or a stone."<sup>43</sup> Arp's concrete art (he rejected the word abstraction) valorized not a stylized object that represents something else, but an artistic object calling attention to itself, whose physical presence asserts its own dynamics as an object of nature instead of the dynamics of ideological

representation. "I remember a discussion with Mondrian in which he distinguished between art and nature, saying that art is artificial and nature natural. I do not share his opinion. I believe that nature is not in opposition to art. Art is of natural origin and is sublimated and spiritualized through the sublimation of man."<sup>44</sup> His sculptures in bronze, plaster, marble, limestone, and granite, such as *Human Concretion* and *Owl's Dream*, do not substitute themselves for natural objects but become objects in nature, often without base or pedestal, often placed like rocks on a green or in a wood.

Arp envisaged an art that would link men with "the life of light and darkness, with real life, the real collectivity."<sup>45</sup> This disappearance of the individual within the process and the movement away from the transparency of intentions and self-conscious presence that govern and control painterly discourse mark the desire of most of the Dadas to create an anonymous art. Such an anonymity would allow the beholder, like the artist, to participate more directly in the work by removing the blockages of social or idiosyncratic discourse.

The works of Duchamp, Picabia, and Arp present the quintessential attributes of all of Dada art. In the work of other artists whose early production was identified with Dada—Max Ernst, Man Ray, Kurt Schwitters, Raoul Hausmann, Marcel Janco, Hans Richter, John Heartfield, Christian Schad, Hannah Hoeh, Johannes Baargeld—we encounter variations on the same experimental strategies and preoccupations. One aspect of the work of Duchamp, Picabia, and Arp, for instance, which held considerable importance for the Dada artists was the technique of collage. Just as Duchamp and Picabia conjoined parts of various (pseudo-) machines and fabricated objects in a collagistic union in their ready-mades and machine art, and just as Arp rephrased the visual elements of his collagistic *Nach dem Gesetze des Zufalls*, so did several other Dadas recognize the singular power of collage. Ernst called collage: "THE MIRACLE OF THE TOTAL TRANSFIGURATION OF BEINGS AND OBJECTS WITH OR WITHOUT MODIFICATION OF THEIR PHYSICAL OR ANATOMICAL ASPECT."<sup>46</sup> The principle behind this miraculous act was displacement, from which chance arrangement or juxtaposition arose: "A readymade reality, whose naïve destination has the air of having been fixed, once and for all (a canoe), finding itself in the presence of another and hardly less absurd reality (a vacuum cleaner), in a place where both of them must feel displaced (a forest), will, by this very fact, escape to its naïve destination and to its identity; it will pass from its

false absolute, through a series of relative values, into a new absolute value, true and poetic: canoe and vacuum cleaner will make love."<sup>47</sup>

Upon analysis, Ernst's lexicon ("ready-made," "displaced," "escape . . . to its identity" in passing from its "false absolute . . . into a new absolute value, true and poetic") carries us over familiar territory, from Duchamp readymades to Picabian machines to Arpadic forms strewn like glacial rocks in wooded glens. Breton, in speaking of Ernst's collages, asked if, "in depriving ourselves of a system of reference, in disorienting ourselves in our memory—that is what provisionally holds us [ . . . ]—who knows if, in that way, we are not preparing ourselves to escape some day the principle of identity."<sup>48</sup> That was precisely the effect of Dada art, for, any principle of identity, insofar as it suggests "the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances" (*OED*), posits a principle of neutralization or reduction arranged around a fixed center, the function of which resembles that of "structure" as described by Derrida: "This center had as its function not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure—one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure—but above all to assure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what one might call the play [*jeu*] of the structure."<sup>49</sup> Identity, which, in fact, coincides with structure, is organized around the principle of delimitation, which involves a historical given that carries within it both *archè* and *telos*, beginning and end. To escape that situation, Dada art was seeking, in effect, to escape the principle of identity, through both the elusiveness of the art object itself and the artist, whose growing anonymity increased the play of that art object. The "center" of the Dada art object becomes uninhabitable ground.

## *Chapter Eight*

# The Janus Head of Dada: Destruction and Creation

The beginnings of Dada are as mysterious as those of the shadowy Olmecs. Several persons have vied for the copyright. Raoul Hausmann claims to have founded Dada in 1915. Others have attributed pre-Zurich Dada activity to Picabia, the New York avant-garde, the Futurists, Jarry. Assuredly, nothing is new in the universe. Dadas existed long before the fact.

It was left up to Zurich Dada to name and refine the impulse felt by countless young writers and painters in several far separated cities of the Western world around 1915 and 1916. The name is arbitrary, its origins obscure, as it should be for Dada, but the earnestness of the activity of the Dadas tempts one to try to discern its motivating factors. It is not enough to say, as does Albert Gleizes, that Dada "is not the voluntary work of individuals; it is the fatal product of a state of affairs."<sup>1</sup>

Dada did not germinate spontaneously but evolved from the chance intermingling of a half-dozen remarkably diverse minds who drew on an incredibly rich and disparate European avant-garde tradition. Dada was a conglomerate. Its stage performances, based in part on improvisation and the attempt to provoke the audience, were far from innovative. Futurism had put on several such performances in Europe from 1912 on. So too, Dada's manifestos, its provocative literary-artistic reviews, bruitist poems, and magazine and poster typography owed something to the Futurists, as did Ball's phonetic poems, which were modeled on the Futurist *parole in libertà* in combination with Kandinsky's poetic efforts. One also discerns the Cubist influence in Janco's collages, in Dada's experiments with simultaneity, and its interest in African art and stage costuming. The Expressionists influenced the Dada painter's experimentation with color and synesthesia, and his search for a synthesis of artistic processes and relationships into a unified whole.

Consequently, Dada was a collage itself of materials suggested or furnished by several avant-garde movements of the early century. But its originality lies in the way in which it took disparate experiments and stylistic trends and forged them into "a unified expression of experiences and emotions that were wholly of the present."<sup>2</sup> Haftmann has identified Dada's contribution to Western culture as lying in its "novel" concept of the artist in which the autonomy of the self is all important. It is true that Dada sought to unfetter the self from tradition, but it also sought to unfetter the self from self, to free it to act, unimpeded by convention or self-consciousness, wholly committed to the present moment, guided only by absolute spontaneity and chance in combination with the artist's specific perception. In this spontaneity, this flexibility, this phenomenon of exceedingly diverse artists with diverse aims willing for a while at least to adapt themselves to a common will, lay the strength of Zurich Dada. Paris Dada was perhaps more coherent and brilliant, but its self-consciousness and lack of spontaneity made it brittle and susceptible to fracture. Paris Dada lost the crucial balance existing "between the individual and the group which was so evident in Zurich."<sup>3</sup>

Janco says, "While it was flabbergasting and mystifying, Dada was also succeeding in creating pure poetry. While it was tearing down, Dada also experimented and created the foundations for a new social aestheticism to serve the artist—at least in its last, positive phase."<sup>4</sup> Here also lay a vital difference between early and late Dada, for, while beneath the Zurich Dadas' antics lay a serious endeavor to create a new art, the Paris Dada group often erupted into vehement denial of all forms of human creativity. The serious Dadas—Picabia, Duchamp, and Man Ray—fell away one by one as the Breton-Tzara feud smoldered.

What strikes one about Dada is that it has left relatively little art or poetry that is thought of as "Dada." The art the Dadas exhibited in Zurich was largely Futurist, Cubist, or Expressionist. Dada created relatively little durable art, and most of its innovations were appropriated by Surrealism. The point is this, perhaps: that the identity of Dada lies less in its artistic achievements than in its validity as an idea, an attitude expressed through diverse means.

Dada spurned any theoretical foundation. It took the form of unsystematic revolt, pure and simple. It revolted against a formidable list of things, "against conventionalism, against a sated middle class crammed full of victorian half-values, against the liberalism of intellectuals, against good people, against rabbit-fanciers in philosophy, against the members of church-women's organizations."<sup>5</sup> Breton, writing in *Littérature*, called



Dada a state of mind, an attitude of artistic freethinking. "Dada devotes itself to nothing, neither to love nor to work. It is inadmissible that man should leave a trace of his passage on the earth. Dada, only recognizing instinct, condemns explanations *a priori*. According to Dada we can keep no control over ourselves. We must cease to think about these dogmas: morality and taste."<sup>6</sup> Despite Breton's observations, Dada's revolt was essentially a moral one, a revolt against the unreasoning and incomprehensible condition of its time which left 10 million human beings dead and twice that number of casualties, against the system that countenanced such barbarity, against the myths that constituted the so-called human condition. At the heart of Dada lies paradox, for it countered destruction with destruction, violence with violence, as if in the belief that the sole way to heal a wound was through cauterization.

The fundamental paradox of Dada lies in the fact that it was fundamentally a revolt against the times that was inevitably born of the times. "Not for nothing did the cabaret come into being in Zurich, a town close to events yet untouched by war. The unreasonableness of the Cabaret Voltaire was the unreasonableness of the period," which juxtaposed carnage with noble, patriotic posters and songs.<sup>7</sup> Its contentment to leave things such as the choice of its name to chance and its reversion to primitivism and childlike behavior reveal, as Kreitler observes, a difficulty of Dada in coming to terms with external reality. Regressiveness is at once protest and self-defense against despair. "The irrational chaos in the pictures and poems of the Dadaists was not only a reflection of that despair, it also constituted the first step towards overcoming it."<sup>8</sup>

Dada's apparent nihilism, its attempt to deconstruct art and the world, was a means not only of decrying what went on in the so-called real world of commerce and industry, but of freeing oneself from it. It took on not a negative but a positive allure in the minds of such people as Ball, who saw Dada art and art in general as "an opportunity for true perception and criticism of the times" (*Flight Out of Time*, entry of 5 April 1916).

Janco summed up Dada in this way: "Dada was not a school of artists, but an alarm signal against declining values, routine and speculation, a desperate appeal, on behalf of all forms of art, for a creative basis on which to build a new and universal consciousness of art."<sup>9</sup> Ball saw Dada as the opposite of Bolshevism, in that it contrasted "the completely quixotic, inexpedient, and incomprehensible side of the world with destruction and consummate calculation" (entry, 7 June 1917). Richter saw Dada's intent as destroying the illusory certitude of tradition by introducing ambivalence into thought and art, by replacing dualism with pluralism. The

Dadas strove to create the ultimate simultaneous art, in which opposites would coexist side by side: reason and feeling, consciousness and unconsciousness. "The realization that reason and anti-reason, sense and nonsense, design and chance, consciousness and unconsciousness, belong together as necessary parts of a whole—this was the central message of Dada."<sup>10</sup>

Like the schizoid, in jumbling up irrational, nonsense words and schemes with correct, formal patterns, Dada juxtaposed two modes of existence. Its dual characteristic of uninhibited and carefully restrained action, whether in the work of different artists or of one single artist, gave it a Janus-like personality. Huelsenbeck, in his essay on "Dada and Existentialism," delineates the existential attitude of Dada, "this creative tension face to face with life, creative irrationalism which assigns the same place to both good and bad. . . ." <sup>11</sup> Dialectic, in fact, lies at the core of Dada.

Despite its varied origin, centers of artistic activity, and personalities, Dada has usually been classified bag and baggage under the rubric of artistic, or antiartistic, anarchy, which is generally taken to mean unswerving dedication to nihilism and disorder. Dada approached that definition in some of the activities of Tzara and Picabia, but one finds quite a different vision of Dada in the persons of Ball and Arp. Nonetheless, all the Dadas, in all aspects of their social and literary activities, evinced a trait found in the actions and writings of the classical anarchists of the previous century: ironic distance. It meant for them what it had meant for Proudhon: "Irony: true freedom, it is you who liberates us from the ambition of power, from the slavery of parties, from the respect of habits, from the pedantry of science, from the admiration of the great personages, from the mystification of the reformers, and from the adoration of one's self."<sup>12</sup>

Some commentators have emphasized the closeness of Dada and Surrealism, at least one finding their sole difference to lie in Dada sullenness as opposed to Surrealist joy. Of course, that *had* to be the case, for a world war made the difference. Others contrast the "negativism" of Dada with the "positivism" of Surrealism, but such a distinction glosses over Ball's and Arp's optimism as well as Vaché's and Crevel's pessimism. Indeed, one can make a case for the opposite viewpoint, as did Herbert Gershman: ". . . whereas the farce and the canular were integral parts of Dada, Surrealist humor is much more of a reluctant after-thought. One welcomed the ridiculous, the other feared it; the playful violence of Dada, amorphous and uncommitted, took on a more strained air when Breton tried to lead

the movement to the Communist Party and to specific social reforms."<sup>13</sup> We might, along with Michel Sanouillet, consider Surrealism as "serious dada." I am inclined to agree with Gershman and a few others, furthermore, that Surrealism brought substantially nothing to its endeavors that had not previously appeared in Dada. "Without *dada* surrealism might perhaps have existed, but it would have been entirely different."<sup>14</sup> Sanouillet suggests that from its inception Surrealism did not replace Dada so much as run parallel to it in Paris, and that we might reasonably consider Surrealism as a French form of Dada because the latter preexisted the former, exploited the very ideas and concepts Surrealism would exploit, and maintained with it an undeniable air of fraternity.

What's become of (if you please)  
 all the glory that or which was Greece  
 all the grandja  
 that was dada

(e. e. cummings)

Where did the Dadas go in the end? Ball quit Dada early to commit himself to a variety of causes and ended up in an obscure Swiss village, where he died. Huelsenbeck left to go to Berlin in early 1917, where he would play a significant role in Berlin Dada, while at the same time finishing medical school and preparing for his state board examinations. He continued to collaborate with the Dadas but broke definitively with Tzara in 1921–22. Serner went off to an early death in Russia, in search to the end of a classless society. Picabia and Tzara, of course, went to Paris, which would serve as the last playground of Dada before its demise in the early 1920s. In 1919 Arp left for Cologne, where he met Max Ernst and Johannes Baargeld and took part with them in the founding of Cologne Dada, which dissolved shortly after the notorious 1920 Exposition. He then went to Berlin and in April 1920 traveled to Paris. He returned with Sophie Taeuber, whom he married in 1922, to live in Switzerland until 1926, when they settled in Meudon. Janco went back to Bucharest in 1922 to take up the profession for which he had trained, architecture, but he also founded a review called *Contimporanul*, which for several years would serve as a focal point for Dada and the avant-garde groups in Eastern Europe. In 1919 Richter accompanied Viking Eggeling to an estate belonging to Richter's parents at Klein-Kölzig, near Berlin. There for three years they experimented with the development of a pictorial art composed of rhythmic sequences that purposed to make a painting tem-

poral as well as spatial. Such experimentation led Richter into scroll painting, then into abstract films. Eggeling died in 1922.

Pulled hither and yon by persuasions both commonplace and uncommon, the Dadas scattered. Dada passed into history after ruling a few brief moments as the supreme anarchical force in the world of art. Or, as Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia more eloquently puts it, "Dada vanished one fine day as a meteor disappears in the sky, leaving behind it the memory of its brilliant trajectory and the light of the numerous fires it kindled in passing."<sup>15</sup>

In May 1922 Tzara, Van Doesburg, Arp, Schwitters, and Richter held a funeral service for Dada at the Bauhaus festival in Weimar. Dada, as a concerted activity, had ceased. Nonetheless, the major Dadas all continued their work—some into the post-World War II period: Duchamp, Picabia, Ernst, Schwitters, to name a few. But the main comet, that had passed (or disintegrated) did, as Gabrielle-Buffet said, kindle numerous fires in its wake. At specific times these fires have flared brightly, particularly as the world passed through the holocaust of the Second World War and entered the Doomsday Age of atomic weapons. New groups arose, calling themselves neo-Dadas or New Realists. The spirit of Dada was carried forward in the works of Robert Rauschenberg, George Segal, and Claes Oldenburg in America and Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely, and Piero Manzoni in Europe, to mention but a few names. The Dada spirit broke forth as well in the Happenings of the late 1950s and early 1960s, in the transforming objects of Christo that take entire landscapes for their metamorphosing action.

As Coutts-Smith has indicated, "there is hardly an aspect of the mainstream fine arts today that has not been influenced by Dada."<sup>16</sup> One could say the same for literature. To answer e. e. cummings's question as to what has become of Dada, it is perhaps with us more today than ever it was in the early decades of the twentieth century. Above all, it survives in the penchant of a good many of our fellow beings for taking nothing for granted, for questioning everything, even ourselves. Tzara said, "A priori, that is with eyes closed, Dada places before action and above all: *Doubt./Dada* doubts all. Dada's an awl. All is Dada. Watch out for Dada./Anti-Dadaism is a disease: self-kleptomania, the normal state of man is Dada./But the true Dadas are against Dada."<sup>17</sup>

Dada more than anything survives in our doubt and awareness of those things in the world, including ourselves, which threaten to steal us from ourselves. That is not all Dada. But Dada is all that.



## Notes and References

### Preface

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3. Cited in Marquis, *Marcel Duchamp*. The interview appeared under the title of "Dadadada," *Time*, 27 April 1953, p. 93.
4. Jacques Lacan, "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse," in *Écrits* (Paris, 1966), p. 181. "Here the function of Language is not to inform but to evoke. . . . I identify myself in Language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming." (Trans. of Anthony Wilden, in Jacques Lacan, *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981], p. 63.)
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### Chapter One

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9. Marcel Janco, "Dada Créateur," in *Dada. Monography of a Movement*, ed. Willy Verkauf (Teufen, Switzerland: Niggli, 1961), pp. 18–19.
10. Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, entry of 5 February 1916.
11. This quotation and the others in this paragraph are found in the prologue to Hugo Ball's *Flight Out of Time*.
12. Ball, essay on Kandinsky, 7 April 1917, in Ball, *Flight Out of Time*.
13. Tzara, "Zurich Chronicle 1915–1919," p. 223.
14. Hugo Ball, ed., *Cabaret Voltaire*, Zurich, 15 May 1916.
15. Hans Arp, "Dadaland," in *Arp on Arp: Poems, Essays, Memories* (New York, 1972), p. 234.
16. Janco, "Dada Créateur," p. 27.
17. Arp, "Dadaland," p. 234.
18. Janco, "Dada Créateur," p. 19. In spite of Janco's assertions, the fact that Lenin lived with his wife, Kroupskaya, at no. 12 Spiegelgasse, across from the Cabaret Voltaire, and that Tom Stoppard's play *Travesties* (New York, 1975) brings together Tzara, Lenin, and Joyce (who also lived in Zurich at the time) in ludicrous union, no reliable evidence exists to substantiate a visit by Lenin to the Cabaret Voltaire.
19. Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 30 March 1916.
20. *Ibid.*, 26 February.
21. Tzara, *Zurich Chronicle 1915–1919*, pp. 223–24.
22. *Ibid.*, July 1917 entry.
23. Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, "Some Memories of Pre-Dada: Picabia and Duchamp (1949)," in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets* (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1951), p. 258.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 263.
25. Tzara, *Zurich Chronicle 1915–1919*, p. 228.
26. Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, p. 168.
27. Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris* (Paris, 1965), p. 52.
28. Werner Haftmann, postscript to Richter, *Dada*, p. 218.
29. Albert Camus, *L'Homme révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p. 21.
30. Cited in Ball's "Kandinsky" essay, in *Flight Out of Time*.
31. Camus, *L'Homme révolté*, p. 40.
32. Arp, "Dadaland," cited and trans. in Richter, *Dada 1916–1966*, p. 25.
33. Tzara, *Manifeste Dada 1918*, in *Dada 3* (Zurich, December 1918).
34. Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 8 April 1917.
35. Huelsenbeck, *Memoirs*, p. 15.
36. Arp, "Dadaland," p. 234.

37. W. S. Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism, and Their Heritage* (New York, 1968), pp. 39–41.
38. Cf. Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 30 March 1916.
39. Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, p. 35.
40. *Der Zeltweg* (Zurich: Mouvement Dada, November 1919), p. 13.
41. Arp, "Dada was Not a Farce," in Motherwell, *Dada Painters*, p. 294.

## Chapter Two

1. Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, p. 81. Richter says 1917 or 1918.
2. Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, unentitled essay, *Francis Picabia* (Paris: Centre National d'Art et de Culture, 1976), p. 7.
3. Carl Sandburg, *Steichen the Photographer* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929), p. 18.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Man Ray, *Self Portrait* (Boston, 1963), p. 20.
6. Cited by Ulfe Linde, "Picabia," *Francis Picabia*, p. 21.
7. Alfred Stieglitz, in a letter to the art critic and historian Sadakichi Hartman, December 1911. Cited by Dorothy Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz* (New York, 1972), p. 109.
8. Werner Haftmann, *Painting in the Twentieth Century*, 2 vols. (London: Lund Humphries, 1960).
9. Stein mentions how Stieglitz helped retrieve Manolo from obscurity by showing his statues in New York. Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, in *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein* (New York: Modern Library, 1962). Stieglitz was also the first to publish her work, "portraits" of Matisse and Picasso, in the August 1912 issue of *Camera Work*.
10. *Marcel Duchamp*, exhibition catalog (New York: MOMA & The Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), p. 263.
11. See examples given by Jean Hubert Martin, "Ses tableaux sont peints pour raconter non pour prouver," *Francis Picabia*, p. 45.
12. William Copley, "Du lièvre et de la tortue et principalement du lièvre," *Francis Picabia*, p. 14.
13. Francis Picabia, "Jusqu'à un certain point," *Comoedia* 16 (April 1922):1.
14. Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, *Aires abstraites* (Geneva, 1957), p. 24.
15. Francis Picabia, "Guillaume Apollinaire," *Esprit nouveau*, no. 26 (October 1924).
16. Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les Peintres cubistes*, 1913, cited in *Francis Picabia*, pp. 64–65.
17. Buffet-Picabia, *Aires abstraites*, p. 31.
18. For Picabia's painterly production and other details of the New York period, see the Biography, in *Francis Picabia*, pp. 66ff.
19. Francis Picabia, "How New York Looks to Me," *New York American*, 30 March 1913, Mag. Section, p. 11.



20. Buffet-Picabia, *Aires abstraites*, p. 32.
21. *Marinetti et le futurisme* (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1977), pp. 71–72.
22. Dickran Tashjian, "New York Dada and Primitivism," in *Dada Spectrum: The Dialectics of Revolt* (Madison: Coda Press, 1979), p. 121.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 132. Picabia's machine drawings, along with De Zayas's untitled essay, appeared in *291*, nos. 5–6 (July–August 1915).
24. Francis Picabia, "French Artists Spur on American Art," *New York Tribune*, 24 October 1915, part iv, p. 2.
25. Picabia was suffering from tachycardia (the abnormal paroxysmal speeding up of the heart) as well as a variety of other illnesses, including hypertension, neurasthenia, and assorted phobias (for open spaces, solitude, trains, bridges, and so on).
26. Buffet-Picabia, "Some Memories of Pre-Dada: Picabia and Duchamp," in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 257.
27. Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters*, Trans. Lionel Abel (N.Y., 1949), p. 48.
28. André Breton, "Marcel Duchamp," *Littérature*, no. 5 (October 1922), p. 9. Reprinted in *Les Pas perdus* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), p. 121.
29. Marcel Duchamp, "Eleven Europeans in America," *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 13, nos. 4–5 (1946).
30. Marcel Duchamp, "A Complete Reversal of Art Opinions," in *Arts and Decoration* 5, no. 11 (New York, September 1915):428.
31. Calvin Tompkins, *The World of Marcel Duchamp* (New York, 1966), p. 26.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
33. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 35.
34. Quoted by Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York & London, 1969), p. 39.
35. Buffet-Picabia, "Some Memories of Pre-Dada: Picabia and Duchamp," in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 260.
36. Marcel Duchamp, "The Richard Mutt Case," *The Blind Man*, No. 1 (10 April 1917), n.p.
37. The title suggests "Tu m'ennuies," which Marcel Jean interprets as a commentary on the content "as a recapitulation of pictorial conventions, dealt with here once and for all." *The History of Surrealist Painting* (New York, 1960), p. 59.
38. For a discussion of *Contact*, see Tashjian, "New York Dada," pp. 136–37.
39. An interesting detailed description of this enigmatic work, based on George Heard Hamilton's translation of *The Green Box*, in *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even: A Typographic Version* (New York, 1960), is offered by Tompkins in *The World of Marcel Duchamp*, pp. 89–93. One must agree with Tompkins's conclusion that the work defies rational interpretation and that

André Breton has best described it as "the trophy of a fabulous hunt through virgin territory, at the frontiers of eroticism, of philosophical speculation, of the spirit of sporting competition, of the most recent data of science, of lyricism, and of humor" (*Phare de la Mariée*, 1935).

40. Cf. "Interview with Man Ray," Arturo Schwarz, *New York Dada* (Munich, 1974), pp. 79–100. The Ferrer Center was named after Francisco Ferrer, an anarchist executed by the Spanish authorities in Barcelona. Man Ray met several of the anarchists who made the center a meeting place, notably Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

43. In *Man Ray*, text by Sarane Alexandrian (Chicago, 1973), p. 7.

44. From *The Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters*, Anderson Galleries, New York, March 1916, cited in *Dadas on Art*, ed. Lucy Lippard (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971), p. 156.

45. Cf. Roland Penrose, *Man Ray* (London, 1975), pp. 17–18. See also my article "Dada Distance," in *Dada*, a special number of *L'Esprit Créateur* 20, no. 2 (1980).

46. See Schwarz, *New York Dada*, pp. 36–40, for this and other comments in regard to the parameters of New York Dada.

47. Gabrielle Buffet, "Arthur Cravan and American Dada," *Transition*, no. 27 (April–May 1938).

48. "Interview with Man Ray," Schwarz, *New York Dada*, p. 99.

### Chapter Three

1. Walter Mehring, *Berlin-Dada* (Zurich, 1959). Cited by Richter, *Dada*, pp. 110–12.

2. Richard Huelsenbeck, *En Avant Dada: Eine Geschichte des Dadaismus* (Hannover, 1920). Trans. in Robert Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets* (New York, 1951), p. 39.

3. Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, entry of 6 October 1916, pp. 182–83.

4. Richard Huelsenbeck, *Dada seigt! Eine Bilanz und Geschichte des Dadaismus* (Berlin, 1920). When he returned to Berlin, the first place Huelsenbeck headed was the Café des Westens, where he met old friends such as Gottfried Benn and Else Lasker-Schüller (*Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, p. 54).

5. Trans. Hans J. Kleinschmidt, in Huelsenbeck, *Dada Drummer*, pp. xxx–xxxii. I agree with Kleinschmidt that this document was not at all a political manifesto, but the qualities of "religious fervor" and "exaltation" he finds in it are far afield from Dada.

6. Reprinted in Richard Huelsenbeck's *Dada Almanach* (Berlin, 1920; orig. German ed. rpt. New York: Something Else Press, 1966).

7. This and following quotations taken from Huelsenbeck's *Dadaistisches Manifest*, rpt. in Huelsenbeck, *Dada Almanach*.
8. In a letter to Georges Hugnet, cited in *Dictionnaire du dadaïsme, 1916–1922* (Paris, 1976), p. 155. We should, however, take this anecdote with a grain of salt, for there would be little love lost between Hausmann and Huelsenbeck.
9. Along with Edgar Varèse in New York and Eric Satie in Paris, Golyscheff was one of the few outstanding composers to collaborate with international Dada.
10. These events are described by Hausmann in a letter to Georges Hugnet, *Dictionnaire*, pp. 221–22.
11. Ed. Arturo Schwarz, "Archivi d'Arte del XX<sup>e</sup> secolo" (Milan, 1970).
12. Listed in this order and trans. by Hans Richter, *Dada 1916–1966* (Cologne, 1966), p. 10.
13. See the article on Hausmann in Hugnet, *Dictionnaire*, pp. 141ff.
14. Huelsenbeck claimed to have started *Der Dada* with Hausmann (*Dada Drummer*, p. 60), just as he claimed to have helped to write the 1919 manifesto "What Is Dadaism?"
15. "Synthetisches Cino der Malerei," in Raoul Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada* (Steinbach, 1972), pp. 28–29.
16. *Courrier Dada*, cited by Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, p. 121.
17. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 116.
18. Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*, pp. 84–89.
19. Cited in *Courrier Dada* (Paris, 1958).
20. Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*, p. 21.
21. Hans Richter, "Johannes Baader," *Dada Profile* (Zurich, 1961), p. 17.
22. Hausmann, *Courrier Dada*, pp. 74–75.
23. *Paris-Berlin 1900–1933* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1978), p. 126.
24. Letter to Grosz, December 1960, in George Grosz, *Eine kleines Ja und ein grosses Nein* (Hamburg, 1955). Cited in Hugnet, *Dictionnaire*, p. 160.
25. Huelsenbeck, *Dada Drummer*, p. 67.
26. Huelsenbeck ("Hans Baumann," pseud.), "A Private Dada Affair," in *Dada Almanach*.
27. Letter to Hugnet, *Dictionnaire*, p. 16.
28. "George Grosz," preface to the catalog of the Grosz Exhibition (Paris: J. Billiet, 1924). Cited in *Paris-Berlin 1900–1933*, p. 35.
29. Huelsenbeck, *Dada Drummer*, p. 74.
30. Letter to Grosz, December 1960, cited by Hugnet, *Dictionnaire*, pp. 158–60.
31. Georges Hugnet, *L'Aventure Dada 1916–1922* (Paris, 1971), p. 53.
32. Huelsenbeck, *Dada Drummer*, p. 52.
33. Huelsenbeck, *En Avant Dada*, pp. 41–42.

34. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler groups Dada and Cubism under *Kulturbolschewismus*—"the morbid excrescences of insane and degenerate men, with which, since the turn of the century, we have become familiar under the collective concepts of cubism and dadaism, as the official and recognized art of those [Bolschevized] states" (trans. Ralph Manheim [Boston, 1943], p. 258). He refers to Dada specifically on several occasions, particularly in his "Address on Art and Politics," delivered at the Nuremberg Parteitag on 11 September 1935 (*The Speeches of Adolph Hitler, April 1922–August 1939*, ed. Norman H. Baynes [London: Oxford University Press, 1942], pp. 570, 574, 577–78, 585, 605).
35. Letter to Hugnet, *Dictionnaire*, p. 330.
36. Interview with Patrick Waldberg, "La Partie de Boules," *Dada Dokumente einer Bewegung* (Düsseldorf: D. Kunsthalle, 1958), n.p.
37. "Some Data on the Youth of M(ax) E(rnst), as Told by Himself," in *Max Ernst: Beyond Painting and Other Writings*, ed. R. Motherwell (New York, 1948), p. 29.
38. Werner Spies, *Max Ernst 1950–1970: The Return of La Belle Jardinière* (New York, 1972), p. 38.
39. "Max Ernst," by Dianne Waldman in *Max Ernst: A Retrospective* (New York, 1975), pp. 16–17.
40. Ernst, *Beyond Painting*, p. 29.
41. Preface to the catalog of the Max Ernst Exhibition, Knocke-le-Zoute, Belgium, 1953, cited by Jean, *History of Surrealist Painting*, p. 77.
42. Max Ernst, "Au delà de la peinture," quoted in Paul Eluard, *Donner à voir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1939), p. 137. My translation.
43. Tzara quoted by Richter, *Dada 1916–1966*, p. 13.
44. Ernst, *Beyond Painting*, p. 8.
45. Werner Schmalenbach, *Kurt Schwitters* (New York, 1967), p. 46.
46. Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, p. 138.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
48. Kurt Schwitters, *Merz 21* (1931), trans Schmalenbach, *Kurt Schwitters*, p. 130.
49. Kate Trauman Steinitz, *Kurt Schwitters* (Berkeley, 1968), p. xv. In their preface, J. Coplans and W. Hopps make some interesting observations, which have directed my own ideas here.
50. Nicholas Zurbrugg, "Towards the End of the Line: Dada and Experimental Poetry Today," in *Dada Spectrum*, p. 234. See also his excellent discussion of the Dada influence on concrete poetry of post-World War II.
51. Hans J. Kleinschmidt, "Berlin Dada," in *Dada Spectrum*, pp. 170–71.

#### Chapter Four

1. The future directors of *Littérature*, according to André Breton, had no social consciousness. *Entretiens 1913–1952* (Paris, 1952), p. 40. We may be

expecting too much, however, for they were in their mid-teens at the onset of the war (Breton was born in 1896, Soupault and Aragon in 1897).

2. Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, pp. 99–100, 102, 139. In a letter from Breton to Tzara, dated 20 April 1919, the latter says: “If I have a blind confidence in you, it’s that you remind me of a friend, my best friend, Jacques Vaché, who died a few months ago” (reproduced in Sanouillet, p. 444). See also André Breton, chapter on “Clairemont” in *Les Pas perdus* (Paris, 1969), pp. 111–14. My account of the Dada activities in Paris owes much to the authoritative and magistrally researched work of Sanouillet.

3. “Lettres de Jacques Vaché,” *Littérature* 5 (July 1919):5.

4. In a letter to Tzara, 26 December 1919, Breton alludes to his having been unwarrantedly predisposed against Picabia by others. Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, pp. 453–54.

5. In a letter from Breton to Tzara, 8 November 1919, in *ibid.*, pp. 451–52.

6. The letters which phonetically describe the French obscenity “Elle a chaud au cul” (“She has hot pants”) would reappear in Duchamp’s *La Joconde*, a reproduction of Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* on which he had drawn a moustache.

7. The manner of presentation satisfied in part the Dada desire for simultaneity, in part Tzara’s self-consciousness in regard to his French accent which prompted him to cover it with noise.

8. *Littérature* 13 (May 1920):1.

9. Memoirs of Dadaism, in Edmund Wilson, *Axel’s Castle* (New York, 1932), p. 317.

10. Reprinted in *Dadaphone*, no. 7 (March 1920), p. 3.

11. David Gascoyne, *A Short Survey of Surrealism* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1935), p. 40.

12. *Le Cœur à gaz* appeared in print for the first time in *Der Sturm* 3 (Berlin, March 1922):33–42.

13. Tzara’s play appears in his *Œuvres complètes*, 1:153–80. Béhar’s comments are found in his notes on p. 669.

14. Printed in *Les Feuilles libres*, April–May 1922.

15. Michel Giroud, “Dada à Paris ou les métamorphoses de Dada,” in *Paris-Berlin 1900–1933*, p. 125.

16. André Breton, “Let Everything Go,” *Littérature Nouvelle Série*, no. 2, 1 April 1922.

17. *Littérature* 18 (1921), p. 19.

18. Philippe Soupault, *Profils perdus* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1963), pp. 166–67.

19. Breton, *Entretiens*, p. 56.

20. Cf. Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, p. 124.

21. Anna Balakian insists that Surrealist automatic writing derived not from Dada but (as Soupault pointed out) from Pierre Janet’s work on *L’Automatisme*

*psychique* and *De l'angoisse à l'extase*—an automatism derived from a “strictly scientific context” (*André Breton: Magus of Surrealism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 31–32.

22. Breton, *Entretiens*, pp. 64–65.

23. Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, p. 189.

24. Of the *Littérature* group, the truest Dada was Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes. His play *The Emperor of China*, put on at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre on 27 March 1920, was, according to Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, the first authentic Dada text in Paris. In discussing the *Littérature* group, we must be careful to point out that it is usually easier to speak of Dada versus Dadaist in terms of individuals, whose work in its cumulative totality reveals an *ethos* less easily seen in individual works. Hence, several works by members of the *Littérature* group are indiscernible from other Dada works, the most memorable of which are Breton and Soupault's plays *S'il vous plaît* (published in *Littérature*, nos. 15–16 [September–October 1920]) and *Vous m'oubliez* (put on at the Salle Gaveau, 27 May 1920). Both plays have been reprinted in André Breton and Philippe Soupault, *Les Champs magnétiques suivi de S'il vous plaît et Vous m'oubliez* [Paris, 1968]. It is of interest that the Dadas and their collaborators in Paris grew more and more ill at ease with poetry and turned increasingly to theater.

25. See Michel Sanouillet, “Dada: A Definition,” in *Dada Spectrum*, pp. 16–27, and John Erickson, “Dada Distance,” *L'Esprit Créateur* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1980):41–50.

### Chapter Five

1. Jean-François Lyotard, *Des dispositifs pulsionnels* (Paris, 1973), p. 100.

2. Régis Durand, “La Voix et le dispositif théâtral,” *Etudes Littéraires* 13 (December 1980):3, 387.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 387–88.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 389.

5. Lyotard, *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*, p. 97.

6. Durand, “La Voix et le dispositif théâtral,” p. 389.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 392.

8. Bertolt Brecht, “A Short Organum for the Theatre,” in *Brecht on Theatre. The Development of An Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York, 1964), p. 192. Brecht first used the term *Verfremdungseffekte* in an essay on Chinese acting written in 1935–36. The fact that he based his observations on the performance of a Chinese acting company he viewed in Moscow gives further credence to the probability that he derived his term from Victor Shklovsky's technique of *priem ostraneniye* (“defamiliarization”). Such a technique, according to Shklovsky, serves the true function of art, which is to “recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*” (“Art as Technique” [1917], in *Russian Formalist Criticism. Four Essays*. Trans L. T.

Lemon and M. J. Reis [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969], p. 12). Shklovsky further says that "An image is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it; its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object—it creates a "vision" of the object instead of serving as a means of knowing it" (p. 18). Defamiliarization works similarly in Dada theater.

9. Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 197.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

11. The two reactions toward an object or character in theater (identification-distance) resemble the process of poetic reading suggested by Michael Riffaterre, which occurs on two levels: the mimetic level (of meaning) experienced through a heuristic reading; the level of significance accessible only through retroactive reading (*Semiotics of Poetry* [Bloomington, Ind., 1978]).

12. Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double* (Paris, 1964), pp. 103–4.

13. Ilie Balea, "Vers une sémiologie de l'opéra," *Etudes Littéraires* 13 (December 1980):3, 442.

14. Nahma Sandrow, *Surrealism: Theater, Arts, Ideas* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

15. Tristan Tzara, "Manifeste Dada 1918," *Dada* 3 (Zurich, December 1918):3.

16. "L'Affaire Dada," *Action*, no. 3 (Paris, April 1920):26–32.

17. In Freudian terminology the anticathexis is "a force acting in a sense contrary to the primary instinctual energy." Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York, 1966), p. 360 and n. 2. Artaud says, "I propose bringing back into the theater that magic, elementary idea, taken up by modern psychoanalysis, which consists, to effect the cure of an afflicted person, in making him assume the exterior form of the state to which one would like to restore him." *Le Théâtre et son double*, p. 122.

18. Shklovsky, *Russian Formalist Criticism*, p. 11. Shklovsky cites Tolstoy to the effect that, "If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been." Leo Tolstoy, *Diary*, 1 March 1897 (Shklovsky, p. 12).

19. Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 193.

20. "Reconnaissance à Dada," *N.R.F.*, August 1920, pp. 400–401. Artaud expressed a similar desire for a theater that would seize upon the latent energies of the human psyche—"to arrive at a realization and also the possession of certain dominant forces, of certain notions which direct everything; and as these notions, when they are effective, carry with them their energy, to rediscover in ourselves those energies which in the last analysis create order and increase the strength of life [*faire remonter le taux de la vie*], or we have no longer but to abandon ourselves without reactions and immediately, and to recognize that we are henceforth good only for disorder, famine, blood, war and epidemics." The perception of life expressed is, of course, special to Artaud, but the author shares

with Dada the process by which he seeks awareness (*Le Théâtre et son double*, p. 122).

21. Not so early if one recalls Lyotard's comments on La Tour, Caravaggio, Dürer, and certain baroque artists: ". . . it could be that in all this representational technique, primitive, classic and baroque, the important thing is not the rule, synthesis, the harmonious totality, the thing lost or rendered, the achievement of a unifying Eros, but distortion, tearing to pieces, difference and externalness to all form. The formless and the defigured" (*Des dispositifs*, pp. 8–9).

22. Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 2 March 1916.

23. Ibid., Prologue.

24. Richard Huelsenbeck, *En avant Dada: Eine Geschichte des Dadaismus*, trans. in Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 26.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid. Shklovsky maintained that "Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important" (p. 12). Here Shklovsky and the Dadas part ways, for the object for the Dadas had to be dislodged from external systems that legislated "artfulness" and reintegrated into a context of human emotions.

27. Ball, *Flight Out of Time*,

28. Tristan Tzara, "Note pour les bourgeois," *Cabaret Voltaire*, 15 May 1916, p. 7.

29. Ibid.

30. Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 30 March 1916.

31. Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, p. 60.

32. André Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme* (Paris, 1963), p. 37.

33. Michel Beaujour, "The Game of Poetics," *Yale French Studies*, no. 41 (1968).

34. See, for example, "The Development of the Libido," in *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, p. 336.

35. Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 5 March 1916.

36. Ball, Kandinsky essay.

37. Tzara, *Œuvres complètes*, 1:629. In the manifesto accompanying the "play," moreover, Tzara states of the Dadas: "We are all circus directors."

38. It is incorrect to say that "There is no observable continuation of theme" in *The Second Adventure*, as does J. H. Matthews in his *Theater in Dada and Surrealism* (Syracuse, 1974), p. 28.

39. Tzara, *Œuvres complètes*, 1:639.

40. The title *Cœur à gaz* was suggested perhaps by "lyre à gaz," a fixture in the nineteenth century used for holding gaslights. The object is mentioned in Breton and Soupault's *Les Champs magnétiques* as well as the former's *Poisson soluble*.

41. Michel Corvin, "Le Cœur à gaz ou la fête de la destruction du théâtre," *Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre*, no. 3 (1971):265–83.

42. Tzara, "Conférence sur Dada," in *Œuvres complètes*, 1:422.



43. Matthews, *Theater in Dada and Surrealism*, p. 10.
44. Tzara, "Guillaume Apollinaire," in *Œuvres complètes*, 1:397.
45. Paul de Man, "Structure intentionnelle de l'image romantique," *Revue Int. de la Philosophie* 14 (1960):72.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
48. *S'il vous plaît*, in *Les Champs magnétiques, suivi de S'il vous plaît et de Vous m'oubliez*, p. 160. This last act was not performed in March 1920 and, in the text in the September–October 1920 issue of *Littérature*, in which Acts I–III were printed, the following note appears: "The authors of IF YOU PLEASE desire that the text of Act IV not be printed." Only in 1967 was the text reproduced for the first time from a copy in Breton's possession.
49. The naming of characters was inspired by Lautréamont's image of the "chance encounter, on a dissecting table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella." *Les Chants de Maldoror*, in *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, 1969), p. 234.
50. To my knowledge, only Matthews, *Theater in Dada*, has noted this contrast, p. 102. Most commentators have failed to see "You Will Forget Me" as a transitional piece between Dada and Surrealism because they have been predisposed to finding Dada characteristics in it.
51. Breton, *Manifestes du surréalisme*, p. 52.
52. In Breton, *Les Pas perdus*, p. 138.
53. Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), p. 10.
54. This general discussion of Dada performance, while treating only highlights of Dada theater in Paris, must acknowledge the latter's marked liveliness and diversity, as witnessed by the plays of Ribemont-Dessaignes, Vildrac, Aragon, and others.

### Chapter Six

1. Freud gave a fourth activity of dream-work, which is to represent latent content in plastic form, that is, the regressive transformation of thought into images ("The Dream Work" from "Dreams," in *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, pp. 182–83). He argued that the material forming dream matter is generated to a significant degree by verbal associations (puns, everyday language, etc.) that are transformed into plastic images. Freud also pointed out that "the mechanism of dream-construction is the model of the manner in which neurotic symptoms arise" (p. 183). Dali observed this mechanism at work in art and accordingly proposed his notion of paranoiac criticism: "I believe that the universe around us is but a projection of our paranoia, an enlarged image of the world we carry within us. I think that the object our eyes isolate from the real or that we invent is a pure expression of our delirium crystallized" (*The Unspeakable Confessions of Salvador Dali* [New York, 1976], pp. 143–44). Though Dali's ideas hold relevance for Dada poetry, they throw little light on the specificity of a Dada poem.

2. Michael Riffaterre, "Semantic Incompatibilities in Automatic Writing," in *About French Poetry from Dada to "Tel Quel"* (Detroit, 1974), p. 223.
3. From *Vingt-cinq poèmes*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 1:106 (Cited hereafter as *O.c.*). "Printemps" originally appeared in *Dada 2*.
4. The suggestion of the *vase de nuit* ("chamber pot") adds a humorous element that foreshadows the death-life continuum to be developed in the poem.
5. Tristan Tzara, *Grains et issues* (Paris, 1981), p. 105.
6. Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, pp. 223–24.
7. *Ibid.*, chapter 1.
8. Henri Béhar, Introduction to *Grains et issues*, by Tristan Tzara, p. 223, n. 1.
9. C. G. Jung, "The Psychology of the Child Archetype," in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Princeton, 1968), p. 164. The figure of the child is of special importance to Dada poetry (as later to Surrealist poetry).
10. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
11. Tzara, *Grains et issues*, p. 165.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
13. Cf. "Avant que la nuit ne tombe" (*O.c.*, 2:335–36), which develops the motives of the night to fall and the effort to push forth a cry. One might also compare Tzara's well-known statement: "La pensée se fait dans la bouche" ("Thought is created in the mouth") from "Dada Manifeste sur l'amour faible et l'amour amer" (*O.c.*, 1:379). See also Tzara's essay "Note sur le comte de Lautréamont ou le cri" (*O.c.*, 1:414–15), which inflects the cry with the sense of revolt.
14. Note that all are object-containers (assuming lamp=oil lamp).
15. Jean Arp, *Jours effeuillés* (Paris, 1966), p. 455 [JE].
16. *Ibid.*, p. 323.
17. Hans Arp, *Gesammelte Gedichte* (Zürich, 1963), 1:34. This poem appeared in *Der Vogel Selbdritt* (1920). Arp published one other collection during the Dada years: *Die Wolkenpumpe* (1920).
18. In regard to the levels of poetry discussed here, see Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry*, esp. chapter 1, "The Poem's Significance."
19. Such difficulty marks R. W. Last's attempts to explicate Arp's poetry in *Hans Arp: The Poet of Dadaism* (London, 1969).
20. R. W. Last says that "The search for an 'exit' is almost identical with the search for a pathway back to nature." *German Dadaist Literature: Kurt Schwitters, Hugo Ball, Hans Arp* (New York, 1973). Jacques Bersani also alludes to Arp's return to nature: "the state of beatitude and peaceful contemplation, the return to the elementary, to the vegetative, the vegetal, which constitute the first premise of all creation." "Arp et la poésie," *Cahiers Dada Surréalisme 2* (1968):16. The ambivalence of this exit-departure point ending of the poem is characteristic of much Dada poetry. Barbara Herrnstein Smith characterizes conventional poetic closure in this way: "Closure, then, may be regarded as a

modification of structure that makes *stasis*, or the absence of further continuation, the most probable succeeding event. Closure allows the reader to be satisfied by the failing of the continuation or, put another way, it creates in the reader the expectation of nothing" (*Poetic Closure: A Study on How Poems End*. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968], p. 34). If that is a good description of traditional poetic strategy for structuring meaning, then Dada poetry may be described as ending in false closure, for it reverses the process by opening the poem at the end. *Stasis* is alien to the "closure" of a Dada poem, which acts by invoking the probability of further continuation and preventing the reader from contenting him or herself with a sense of finality.

21. *391*, ed. Michel Sanouillet (Paris, 1960), p. 83. Picabia entered the world of literature only at the end of 1916. That year he began to write poetry and founded *391*, whose first number appeared in January 1917. His first collection of poems, rather unDada, appeared in October 1917 under the title *52 Mirrors*. In 1918, in Switzerland, Picabia published *Poems and Designs of the Girl Born Without Mother*, which attracted the attention of Tzara in Zurich. These volumes were followed in the same year by *The Isle of Beautiful Sojourn in the Canton of Nudity*, *The Mortitonal Athlete*, *The Firework-Muncher* and *The Platonic Dentures*. In 1919 appeared *Purring Poetry* and *Thoughts without Language* and a year later *Jésus-Christ Rastaquouère (Jesus-Christ-Madcap)*, his last and perhaps his most accomplished volume of poetry written under the aegis of Dada. In May 1921, Picabia's article "Picabia Breaks Off with Dada" appeared in *Comoedia*.

22. Germaine Everling describes a heated discussion about Lautréamont carried on by Picabia and Breton during their first meeting in 1920 (*L'Anneau de saturne* [Paris, 1970], pp. 98–99). Picabia claimed to have read Lautréamont at the age of nineteen (that is, by 1898). (Interview by R. J., "Chez Francis Picabia," *Paris-Journal*, 9 May 1924.) Moreover, the word *rastaquouère* referred to a South-American dandy during the period—perhaps only coincidentally recalling the fact that Lautréamont was born in Montevideo.

23. Lautréamont, *Maldoror*, trans. Alexis Lykiard (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1970), pp. 104–5.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

25. "French Artists Spur on American Art," *New York Tribune*, 24 October 1915, part iv, p. 2.

26. See Philip Pearlstein, "The Symbolic Language of Francis Picabia," *Arts* 30 (January 1956):37–43, and William A. Camfield, *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life and Times* (Princeton, 1979), pp. 77–90.

27. Michel Sanouillet, *Picabia* (Paris, 1964), p. 15.

28. Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

29. Raoul Hausmann, *Courrier Dada* (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1958).

30. In Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, pp. 224–25.

31. Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, diary entry, 23 May 1916.

32. Cited by Leonard Foster, *Poetry of Significant Nonsense: An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge, 1962), p. 31.
33. "Dada Manifeste sur l'amour faible et l'amour amer," in Tzara, *O.c.*, 2:382.
34. Ball, *Diary*, 9 July 1915.
35. Rudolf E. Kuenzli, "The Semiotics of Dada Poetry," in *Dada Spectrum*, pp. 58–59.
36. "Note 14 on Poetry," *Dada* 4–5.

### Chapter Seven

1. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," pp. 219–52.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
3. Claude Lévi-Strauss, cited by John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London, 1977), p. 84.
4. Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire* (Paris, 1980), p. 27.
5. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," pp. 226–28.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Cf. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London, 1977), p. 94 ff.
8. Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire* (Paris, 1980), p. 51; Barthes terms this effect *studium*.
9. Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, p. 87.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
11. Raoul Hausmann, "The Will to Anthropomorphize," in *Courrier Dada*, p. 90 (trans. Rudolf Kuenzli in "Semiotics of Dada Poetry," *Dada Spectrum*, pp. 60–62.)
12. Jacques Derrida, "signature événement contexte," in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris, 1972), p. 376.
13. This statement would appear to oppose the view of critics who speak of a social or political unconscious (cf., e.g., Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* [Ithaca, 1981]), Admittedly, individual psychic awareness does not develop without external stimuli and socio-politically determined attitudes, but, *relatively*, the work through its intentionality addresses not the *particular* experience of the beholder but the beholder as sociopolitical being.
14. The Dadas aimed their barbs not solely at the broad currents of representational art but also at avant-garde movements they perceived as pandering to the values of the ruling class. "We have enough of the cubist and futurist academies," Tzara declared in his 1918 *Dada Manifesto*, "[which are] laboratories of formal ideas. Does one create art to earn money or caress the nice bourgeois? Their rhymes play on the assonance of coinage and their inflexions follow the length of the belly's profile. All artistic groupings have led us to the

bank astride diverse comets. The door opens to the prospect of wallowing in cushions and consumption [*nourriture*]."

15. "We must destroy, so that the lousey materialists may recognize in the ruins what is essential." Hans Arp, "Notes from a Diary," *Transition* 21 (March 1932).

16. Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York, 1971), p. 38.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.

18. Anne d'Harnoncourt and Walter Hopps, *Etant Donnés: 1<sup>e</sup> la chute d'eau, 2<sup>o</sup> le gas d'éclairage. Reflexions on a New Work by Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia, 1973), p. 8.

19. Jean-François Lyotard, *Les TRANSformateurs DUchamp* (Paris, 1977), p. 39.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

21. Cited by Calvin Tompkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors* (New York, 1965), p. 18. The process resembles what Proust terms *transvertébration* in the Magic Lantern episode (*A la Recherche du temps perdu* [Paris: Pléiade, 1954], 1:10).

22. Lyotard, *Les TRANSformateurs DUchamp*, pp. 13–14.

23. Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," p. 47.

24. Lyotard, *Les TRANSformateurs DUchamp*, pp. 19–20.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

26. Lyotard, *Les TRANSformateurs DUchamp*, p. 37.

27. Picabia, "French Artists Spur on an American Art," p. 2.

28. This period, though often viewed as a striking departure in Picabia's artistic production, finds harbingers in his earlier work, which tended toward mechanical abstraction. His earlier work depicted forms interlocked through fauvelike colors and shapes suggestive of machinelike precision and unity (*Edtaonisl*, 1913; *I See Again in Memory My Dear Udnie*, ca. 1914). In them we often discern pastiches of machine parts—levers, pistons, drive shafts, transformerlike objects. The motif of dance in *Dances at the Spring I and II* (1912), moreover, captures machine rhythm. In his works on New York (1913–1915), we observe an absorption with the products of modern technology (skyscrapers) and city-map-like diagrams (*New York Perceived through the Body*, 1913), as well as the bustle of urban life (*Animation*, 1914). Additionally, Duchamp's experiments with machine forms dating from 1912 could not fail to have inspired Picabia, no less than could have the work of Delaunay, the Futurists, and perhaps the English Vorticists. See Camfield, *Francis Picabia*. The dating for Picabia's work is drawn from Camfield.

29. Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, pp. 82 ff.

30. *291*, no. 12 (New York, February 1916).

31. Camfield, *Francis Picabia*, p. 87.

32. Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp du signe. Ecrits*, ed. M. Sanouillet and E. Peterson (Paris, 1975), p. 36.

33. Richter's assertion that the Dadas used chance "not as an extension of the scope of art, but as a principle of dissolution and anarchy" is nonsense (*Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, p. 48).

34. Hans Arp, *On My Way* (New York, 1948), p. 77.

35. Carola Giedion-Welcker speaks of the spiritual regeneration of the artist through the *process* of chance creation: ". . . the mode of production, the artistic form, and the spiritual attitude were woven into a higher unity" (Intro. to *Jean Arp* [New York, 1957], pp. xxxii–xxxiii). "Process" in this sense meant the process undergone by the individual artist and not the historical process of teleological doctrines.

36. Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, pp. 44–45.

37. Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage*, pp. 39–41.

38. Giedion-Welcker, *Jean Arp*, p. xiv.

39. Arp, *On My Way*, p. 82.

40. Introduction to the catalog of the Galerie Tanner, November 1915.

41. *Jalons* (Paris, 1951), cited by Jean, *History of Surrealist Painting*, p. 66.

42. Arp, *On My Way*, p. 48.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

46. Ernst, *Beyond Painting*, p. 12.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

48. André Breton, Preface to the Max Ernst exhibition, May 1920, reprinted in *Les Pas perdus*, pp. 87–88.

49. Jacques Derrida, "La Structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines," in *L'Écriture et la différence*, p. 409.

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1. Albert Gleizes, "L'Affaire Dada," *Action* 3 (April 1920):26.

2. Werner Haftmann, in Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, p. 218.

3. Manuel Grossman, *Dada. Paradox, Mystification and Ambiguity in European Literature* (New York: Pegasus, Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), p. 34.

4. Marcel Janco, "Creative Dada," in Willy Verkauf, *Dada. Monograph of a Movement* (Teufen, Switzerland, 1961), p. 30.

5. Richard Huelsenbeck, "Dada and Existentialism," in Verkauf, *Dada*, p. 35.

6. Cited and trans. in Kenneth Coutts-Smith, *Dada* (New York: Dutton, 1970), p. 21.

7. Hans Kreidler, "The Psychology of Dada," in Verkauf, *Dada*, p. 46.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

9. Cited by Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art*, p. 49.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

11. Huelsenbeck, "Dada and Existentialism," p. 35.

12. Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *Les Confessions d'un révolutionnaire* (1848). Cited by Arturo Schwarz, *New York Dada: Duchamp, Man Ray, Picabia* (München: Prestel-Verlag, 1974), p. 17.
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14. Maurice Nadeau, *Histoire du surréalisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1945), p. 40.
15. Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, "Dada," *Art d'aujourd'hui*, nos. 7/8 (Paris, 1950).
16. Coutts-Smith, *Dada*, p. 158.
17. Tzara, "Dada Manifeste sur l'amour faible et l'amour amer," in *Œuvres complètes*, 1:381; trans., Motherwell, p. 92.

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