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# Post-Impressionism to World War II

Edited by *Debbie Lewer*

## Dada as “Buffoonery and Requiem at the Same Time”<sup>1</sup>

*Hanne Bergius*

In founding the Cabaret Voltaire, the Dadaists engaged the “dandyism of the poor”<sup>2</sup> – the “low art” of tricksters, conjurers, puppeteers, tightrope walkers, and comedians – as an affront to the academically oriented art of the theater, salons and galleries. Hugo Ball, one of the founders of Dada, brought them to life in his novel *Flametti*.<sup>3</sup> In order to release art from privacy, the Berlin Dadaists Grosz and Heartfield published regular reports on *variété* and the cinema in their weekly journal *Neue Jugend*,<sup>4</sup> because “your view of the world is colorful in *variété* alone . . .”<sup>5</sup> The Dadaists saw in itinerant people a metaphor for their own mobility and “homelessness.” They honored the restless tramp Chaplin, propeled by mechanistically functioning life yet all the while casually, playfully, and cheekily deflecting its blows, as both “the world’s greatest artist” and “good Dadaist.”<sup>6</sup>

The exile situation in Switzerland sharpened Ball’s awareness of his position in a cultural vacuum. As far as the Dadaists were concerned, the educational capital of bourgeois culture, this “vast sum of intellect [*Geist*]”<sup>7</sup> was at the mercy of a “junk sale.”<sup>8</sup> Long before its economic inflation, the war let loose an inflation of cultural values – a “bankruptcy of ideas.”<sup>9</sup> Evoking Voltaire, the Dadaists made use of “educational and art ideals as *variété* program – that is our kind of ‘Candide’ against the times,”<sup>10</sup> as Ball announced. The historical model for the dadaist role of the Fool emerged in the eighteenth century and was defined by the stark contradiction of folly and reason.<sup>11</sup> The Dadaists saw in Voltaire’s provocative conception of society as “*ce théâtre et d’orgueil et d’erreur*,”<sup>12</sup> a critical approach that they also used as an anti-German tactic. “Voltaire treated serious things humorously: the German *Geist* never forgave him,” so it went in the eighteenth century, “between the German *Geist* and Voltaire stood the secret horror, from which Gretchen, before the hidden Mephistopheles, cannot defend

Hanne Bergius, “Dada als ‘Buffonade und Totenmesse zugleich,’” pp. 208–20 from Stefanie Poley (ed.), *Unter der Maske des Narren*. Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1981. English translation © 2005 by Debbie Lewer. Reproduced by permission of Hanne Bergius.

herself."<sup>13</sup> The French rationalist was rejected by the German rationalists as too radical, and even in the year of Voltaire's death, the *Frankfurter Gelehrten Anzeigen* recommended its readers "to put aside and forget [that] French comic's brazen offspring."<sup>14</sup> To the enlightened German bourgeoisie of this period, all kinds of revolt against society, every joke and laugh at its expense, every individual urge and will to originality were seen as eccentric, notorious symptoms of outsider culture – as ridiculous folly. Besides Voltaire, the Dadaists's other "role models in folly" included Swift, Rabelais, Panizza, Stirner, Nietzsche, Bakunin, Salamo(!), and the Fool of the late Middle Ages.

Constantly reflecting antidadaistically and skeptically relativizing its positions, Dada found its ancestry as perpetual traveler in the Fool of the late Middle Ages. This figure, involuntarily outcast, traveling the waterways, corresponded to the Dadaists's own border situation. Rimbaud's *Bateau Ivre* had already provided the metaphor of the Ship of Fools in the late nineteenth century. Foucault described the madman of the late Middle Ages, who was first singled out from society, as "prisoner of his own departure" whose journey "is at once a rigorous separation and final passage."<sup>15</sup> His situation, caught on the threshold of two worlds that are not his, gave Dada a symbolism that Hausmann defined as "floating between two worlds." "When we have broken with the old [world] but are not yet able to create the new one, satire, the grotesque, caricature, the clown and the puppet appear, and it is the profound purpose of these forms of expression to allow us to perceive and feel a different life by demonstrating the marionette-like nature of things, by apparent and real petrification."<sup>16</sup>

The break with the bourgeois world meant rigorous separation, but it did not entirely rule out dialogue with the "old world," however grotesque the forms it could adopt were. The dadaist awareness of folly stretched from a sense of absurdity to the insight that society was ripe for comedy, "ripe for dada." In the dadaist Fool's game, an ambivalence oscillated between the rational intention to reveal the hostile and unforgiving powers of society and the irrational penetration of reality. Knowledge of the gigantic destructive war machinery and the victory of the anachronistic powers in European societies was not only a challenge to the Dadaists, but actually produced the "madness"<sup>17</sup> of their art. The dadaist insight that life and death are "one and the same" – "and life negates itself. You dead life"<sup>18</sup> – was described by Michel Foucault in his study *Madness and Society* in the passages dealing with the late Middle Ages, pinpointing an important element of the Fool's game: "man disarms fear in advance, making it an object of derision . . . by constantly renewing it during the spectacle of life, by scattering it among the vices, quirks, and eccentricities of all men. Destruction through death means nothing any more because it already means everything, for life itself consists only of hackneyed clichés, hollow words, empty ringing, and fools' bells."<sup>19</sup>

Within the dadaist Fool's game, bourgeois society – and not least art – was exposed by the omnipresence of death as lies and illusion. A clearly apparent mortal fear fueled the rapidly escalating dadaist actions and productions. "Catch

the speeding times before the Devil gets you and before the rotary presses sing the song of the grave,"<sup>20</sup> wrote Grosz to his friend Otto Schmalhausen. The Dadaist attempted eccentrically to defend himself from the fear of doom and the presence of death with his laughter, his game of folly, and sham irony. He concluded from the unresolved contradictions: "Dada is the cabaret of the world just as the world is the Dada cabaret. Dada is God, spirit, matter and roast veal at the same time."<sup>21</sup> With dadaist exclusivity, the world was equated with the cabaret and the cabaret with the world. Dada's total work of destruction [*Gesamtzerstörwerk*] emerged from the spirit of the cabaret, for the cabaret was not only scenic orientation, but also an existential and ambiguously clarifying symbol. In it, the metaphor of the "theatrum mundi," divine world theater that had dramatized its defining hierarchical order – God's government – as the unshakeable course of the world, came back to life as folly. In place of God, a similar nameless decree was at work in the dadaist "circus mundi," though here it appeared to emerge from the "turbulence of dear worldly life" (Grosz) itself. The theological baldachin had collapsed and in its place an "unholy harlequinade"<sup>22</sup> unfolded. In his hymn to the lost God, Hugo Ball took stock: "You are the Almighty, Almighty, magnificent, a burning vessel on your head. In reason and unreason, in the kingdoms of the dead and the living, your metal throat looms and your spoke roars..."<sup>23</sup> Richard Huelsenbeck also revealed a God of chaos in his poems entitled "Fantastic Prayers" [*Phantastische Gebete*],<sup>24</sup> and Hans Arp devised the parodic eulogy "woe our good Kaspar is dead."<sup>25</sup> This loss of orientation meant that the artists were inwardly "torn, dismembered, dissevered":<sup>26</sup> "Individual life died, melody died. The singular meant nothing any more. People were overwhelmed by surging thoughts and perceptions, symphonic feelings. Machines appeared and replaced individuals. Complexes and beings arose, superhumanly and superindividually horrific. Terror became a being with a million heads... new battles, collapses and ascensions, new festivities, heaven and hell. A world of abstract demons swallowed the single utterance, destroyed the 'I,' and swung seas of colliding feelings against one another. The most delicate vibrations and the most unheard-of mass monsters appeared on the horizons, amassed, crossed, and blended into one another."<sup>27</sup>

A cynically illusionistic world of images is opened up by the "Seven Schizophrenic Sonnets"<sup>28</sup> by Hugo Ball and the grotesque portrait of the times, "The Idiot,"<sup>29</sup> by Huelsenbeck. The world was chaos without meaning. Aim and purpose were ruled by chance and haunted by destruction. The "Wheel of Destiny" (Baader), present in many dadaist montages and collages, appeared only to follow the momentum of technological and economic impulses. With the awareness that "the world of systems was going to ruin," Dada began "its game with shabby remnants," "its Fool's game out of nothingness, in which all the highest questions are involved."<sup>30</sup> The Dadaist was, as a modern Fool, the dandy,<sup>31</sup> who took mass society's "unholy harlequinade,"<sup>32</sup> the "blessed cabinet of abnormalities,"<sup>33</sup> as his mirror, "before which he should live and die"<sup>34</sup> – for he drew all his power from the world that he negated. He was thoroughly aware

of his own dependence on the society that he despised. Thus he needed to demonstrate his independence, in striking the pose of the dandy, all the more. "Raised up above the world of the bourgeois though the double power of exterior and inner vision... we laughed heartily. So we destroyed, snubbed, mocked, and laughed. We laughed at them all. We laughed at ourselves as much as at the Kaiser, King, and Fatherland, beer-belly and dummy. We took laughter seriously; only the laughter guaranteed the seriousness with which we carried out our anti-art on the way to self-discovery."<sup>35</sup>

The Dadaist abhorred resignation. He demonstrated his "superiority" through a strict asceticism that did not rule out access to reality. He acted "the laughing equanimity that played the hangman's game with life out of the desire no longer to have to respond to the European swindle."<sup>36</sup> The Dadaist himself relinquished the world that in turn denied him. "The dancing spirit over the world's morals" (Huelsenbeck), that practiced the "balancing act above the abyss of murder, violence and theft" (Hausmann), was itself that of a Narcissus. His Fool's dance, his "tragic-absurd dance,"<sup>37</sup> referred to the self in a narcissistic self-blinding to fear, emptiness, and disempowerment.

"Our cabaret is a gesture. Every word that is spoken and sung here says at least one thing; that this humiliating age has not succeeded in winning our respect. What would be respectable and impressive about it? Its cannons? Our great drum drowns them out. Its idealism? That has long since become a laughing-stock, in both its popular and academic editions. The grandiose slaughters and cannibalistic heroics? Our voluntary foolishness and enthusiasm for illusion will destroy them."<sup>38</sup>

Hausmann accurately described the dadaist role of the fool as that of the "de-classed."<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the Dadaists's attempts to ally with the workers' movements in Berlin were – as Grosz reported, despite his membership of the KPD – marked by cynical swings back and forth, for unlike the *Proletkult*, the dadaists believed that the working class should find its culture for itself. They recognized attempts by petty bourgeois intellectuals to interfere there as a warping of proletarian culture and a vain undertaking on the part of the intellectuals. Besides that, and out of a certain antipathy towards organization, the Dadaist valued the "revolutionary sensibility" above "practical politics" (Aragon).<sup>40</sup> The Dadaist role therefore remained focused on the negation of its own culture. It was banished to an interim field. The Dadaists's symbolic aggression escalated. "Everything should live, but one thing must stop – the bourgeois, the fat sod, the greedy-guts, the little piggy of intellectuality, the doorman of all wretchedness" (Huelsenbeck).<sup>41</sup>

The conflict with the norms of bourgeois society and that society's exclusion of all tendencies that contradicted its rational self-image had already appeared in the early Expressionist revolt – the milieu from which the Dadaists emerged. The socially critical consciousness of artists before the war was especially heightened in the campaign led by Franz Jung, a Berlin Dadaist, for the well-known and important psychoanalyst Otto Gross,<sup>42</sup> which was published in 1913 in

“Revolution.”<sup>43</sup> The conflict erupted because Gross’s father, a famous professor of criminology from Graz, declared his rebellious and opium-addicted son (then already 33 years old) mentally unstable and had him put into an asylum. This brought into focus for the artists the harshness and censorship that was deployed against their antibourgeois radicalism. The artists reacted with solidarity against the forced internment: “The asylum guards, trust holders, state officials stick together. We, who have nothing to lose, stick together too. We circumvent them, we destroy their position, we undermine their property. Our pamphlets are more powerful than their connections,” wrote Rubiner on the solidarity campaign, as it increased in scale.<sup>44</sup>

In a letter to Maximilian Harden, the editor of *Zukunft*, Otto Gross referred to the relativity of bourgeois norms: “And one thing I am still charged with: that I do not agree with society’s form as it exists. Whether one can view this as proof of a mental disturbance depends on how one defines the norm of mental health . . . if one, who comes from the upper echelons of society, who has a good – in society’s view – career open to him, if I have broken with that society: in that, very many people will see a sign of madness.”<sup>45</sup>

The biographies of the Berlin Dadaists Baader and Grosz also reveal experiences of social exclusion and singling out. Baader<sup>46</sup> lived as Jesus *redivivus* in a solipsistic, megalomaniac system of madness. As “President of the world globe” he provoked an outrage comparable with Don Quixote and ended up several times in an asylum through his calls on numerous leading political and intellectual greats of the time. At the same time, Grosz was driven by the “norms” of the reality of war to a “madness of melancholy,”<sup>47</sup> but also to hatred and desperation so that he was taken into a mental hospital during his military service and made “harmless.”<sup>48</sup> Grosz despised war propaganda’s slogans of “comradeship, equality of the troops, faithful love of one’s superiors . . .”<sup>49</sup> as a “Hell’s sabbath of distortion.” A portrait of a moronic soldier as an image of the spirit of subordination was published by Grosz under the title “No-one Can Copy Him from Us” in the portfolio *Gott mit uns (God with Us)*.<sup>50</sup> His flabby lips, sloping brow, puffy eyes and the flat back of his head are all physiognomic characteristics of feeble-mindedness, as they were already indicative of the Fool of the late Middle Ages. I refer to the representation of the Fool of Duke Philip the Good in Burgundy. The drawing, from the “Recueil d’Arras,” is a representation of the Fool in the large society scene in the Palace of Versailles.<sup>51</sup>

“Europe’s decaying culture”<sup>52</sup> produced images of madness that served the Dadaists as socially critical metaphors. Grosz’s works, *Riot of the Insane*,<sup>53</sup> *Bloody Carnival*,<sup>54</sup> and *Dedicated to Oskar Panizza*,<sup>55</sup> for example, along with the representation of war cripples by Dix,<sup>56</sup> evoked a society overshadowed by death and ending in paralysis. The madness is the new presence of death in life. *Dedicated to Oskar Panizza* inaugurated as a “giant picture of Hell . . . a gin lane of grotesque dead and lunatics . . . a swarm of possessed half-animals – that this epoch is sinking into destruction – of that I am unshakeably convinced; our sullied paradise.”<sup>57</sup> Following the suppression of the proletarian uprisings in

Germany and especially in Berlin in 1919, Grosz broadened his metaphor of the lunatic asylum to a jail, with the proletariat as feeble-minded madmen watched over by brutal guards. The rounds in the prison compound<sup>58</sup> were a reminder of how society, contrary to its social rhetoric of "Light and Fresh Air for the Proletariat," "forcibly interned" revolutionaries in the cause of restoring law and order. While the proletarian uprisings meant as real a threat to bourgeois society as artists' loyalties did for the proletariat, the Dadaists's symbolic aggression in the cabaret, in Dada soirées and tours, were somewhat less dangerous. The Dadaists's revolt was an up-ending of bourgeois morals. It amounted to an "antagonistic complement" to the bourgeoisie and as such, it could be seen not only as an opponent of bourgeois culture but also as its "product and element."<sup>59</sup> The Dadaists deployed courage and dandyist asceticism against "fear and fat" (Huelsenbeck); against beer-bellied complacency they opposed their extreme agility. Against law and order they propagated "disturbance and disorder" (Hausmann).

Beyond the opposition, the Dadaist tracked down collective, unsublimated fantasies and attempted effectively to bring them to life. He operated in the role of a "collective shadow figure," as C. G. Jung attributed it to the Fool.<sup>60</sup> "It is as if he hides profound content beneath an inferior shell."<sup>61</sup> Hence, Dada endowed the "holiness of the senseless" with the dimension of a "being" wreaking revenge on bourgeois reason. The dadaists presented as artefacts in their collages and montages that which social value processes disposed of and rejected – "a child's discarded doll or a bright cloth are more urgent expressions than some donkey in oils seeking eternal posterity in endless parlours."<sup>62</sup> In the same way, they also tried to release the underlying layers suppressed by morality and culture and to reflect the night-side of bourgeois life that established itself especially in the urban underground. Their works and poetry emerged from expeditions in the city. The Dadaists found as yet unaffected aggression and libidinous projections in the sphere of triviality and in trivial myths. It is understandable that many Dadaists felt an affinity with the fifth social class, the unorganized "lumpenproletariat" because it was in the "holy mob" that collective fantasies were lived out. Its members were "prostitutes, subproletarians, collectors of lost objects, opportunist criminals, layabouts, lovers in the midst of an embrace, religious lunatics, drunkards, chain-smokers, the unemployed, gluttons, tramps, thieves, critics, hypersomniacs, riff-raff... We are the dregs, the dross, contempt. We are the unemployed, the unemployable, and the unwilling to work."<sup>63</sup>

The Dadaists recognized in the conflict between their "own" and the "foreign," between the "born individuals" and the "brainwashed and imposed upon" of social normality,<sup>64</sup> the unresolved problem of the cultural crisis. This, according to Otto Gross, would have to be converted into a revolutionary movement by means of the liberation of the powers suppressed in the unconscious, through "sovereign social and innate-ethical preformation."<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the child and madness were regarded as the enclaves in which the obligations of

reality were invalid and in which imagination and aggression could find free expression.

"The new theories we have been advancing are of great consequence for this field" (of lunatic asylums – H.B.), Ball wrote. "The child-like quality I mean borders on the infantile, on dementia, and on paranoia. It comes from the belief in a primordial memory, in a world that has been suppressed and buried beyond recognition, but that is liberated in art by unrestrained enthusiasm and in the asylum is released by illness."<sup>66</sup> At play in these ideas was the proximity of genius and madness (Hugo Ball mentions Lombroso in the same context<sup>67</sup>), as well as the metaphor of childhood, which has related, since Baudelaire, to genius. As rudimentary expression, Dada itself belonged to the sphere of the child as well as the lunatic. Dada parodied the winged horse of literature, Pegasus, with its little wooden horse. Hannah Höch and Sophie Taeuber-Arp created self-ironic, exemplary, weightless models with dolls and marionettes.<sup>68</sup> Dressed as Arlecchina<sup>69</sup> in a doll's costume, standing, locked eye-to-eye with her doll, Hannah Höch drew on a Fool's pose – as Hans Holbein the Younger depicted it, for example: "A Fool who appears to admire his own sceptre."<sup>70</sup> Indifference made it possible for the Dadaists to activate the spheres of the child and of madness, to present the pointless and aimless game as a positive aesthetic model of existence, and to liberate themselves through the artistic drive to experiment and adventure. Dancing weightlessness and the energetic release of tension were therefore also aspects of the dadaistic Fool's dance. This took on central significance as a kind of primal origin of art for Raoul Hausmann and for Sophie Taeuber-Arp in particular, and it became a key motif in many montages. Sophie Taeuber-Arp's dance of "The Song of the Flying Fish and Seahorse" was described by Ball as "dance full of spikes and fishbones, full of shimmering sun and sparkle and of cutting sharpness. The lines shatter on her body..."<sup>71</sup> The dance can be compared with the acrobatic levity of a tightrope dancer, who performs her trapeze number in the air, for the seated audience, at the highest existential stakes.

With the dadaistic combination of genius, madness, and childhood, the suspicion arises that in the dadaistic turn away from bourgeois artistry there is rooted a demand just as strong as that which has been relinquished. In the mask of the dandy, for whom the artist was still too bourgeois, the Dadaist could give the bourgeois his opinion, without revealing himself, his vulnerability, and his consternation. He maintained his ironic distance and challenging stance, without, however, betraying his incognito. His anonymity was grounded in the conventionality of the everyday.

"The Dadaist," wrote Serner in his handbook for swindlers, "is the desperado ... who gets up to mischief as prophet, artist, anarchist, as statesman, briefly as Rasta."<sup>72</sup> The Dadaists were presidents and women presidents. Vaché could have been compared with an everyday rowdy as he let loose with a revolver on a theater audience. He was also the dandy of the barracks, who carried out his service, and occasionally bad service, as a soldier. Cravan fought as a boxer; to his friends, George Grosz played the profit-hungry "merchant from Holland." "I ripped, so



to speak, three other personages out of my inner imaginary life... I believe myself in these imaginary pseudonyms: 1. Grosz, 2. Count Ehrenfried, the nonchalant aristocrat with the manicured fingernails, concerned only to cultivate himself, in a word: the distinctive aristocratic individualist, 3. The doctor Dr. William King Thomas, the more American practical-materialistic equalizer in the mother figure of Grosz."<sup>73</sup> This "Georg Ehrenfried" also signed his letters with the titles Knight von Thorn, Count Orfyren-Bessler, Lord Edward Hatton-Dixon, Count Diagnoso. "Grosz" took the names "George le boeuf," "your faithful Carissimo in the sewage tank," and "your trusty six-day bicycle race George." The "doctor Dr. William King Thomas" also greeted his friend with "Your faithful old Prof. Mechan. Inventor of the artificial arsehole."<sup>74</sup> In an analogy to his photomontage work, Grosz's friend and Dada comrade-in-arms John Heartfield always appeared dressed as a mechanic. Richard Huelsenbeck published "En Avant Dada" (1920) as a privy councilor. Hausmann was a photographer, monteur, philosopher, fashion designer, and dancer. Baader caused a sensation as an election candidate, Jesus *redivivus*, as a cherry-tree cultivator, and prophet. Duchamp came to terms with life inconspicuously as a librarian and as Rose Sélavy;<sup>75</sup> as femme fatale, he incorporated the ambiguous play with reality into his existence. Francis Picabia, obsessive automobile owner and driver, incidentally also a "jesus *rastaquouère*," mounted his countless "fille(s) née(s) sans mère."<sup>76</sup> In his various roles, the Dadaist was always the dandy, who strove incessantly to be superior: the only thing of importance: to be daily the greatest person.<sup>77</sup> The remains of heroism were salvaged in the mass age in the modern Fool, who sought above all to defend his autonomy. Along with the strategies of disguise came the necessity for the dandy to be silent. Otto Mann described him as "the most effective secret, he is not dumb... he is more mysterious than speech. In his intellectual stance his power can be felt everywhere. But never to be traced to his origins... he is always surprising, always baffling."<sup>78</sup> He baffles his "victims," dupes them, and stays in disguise. If, away from public life, the Dadaist did not embody the union in one person of actor and spectator – the dandy's rule: "play yourself to yourself"<sup>79</sup> – then he needed an audience. For since life was nonsensical, the only sense of the da-dandy lay in the self-realization of the provocative subject and in his indignation. Without the resonance of the crowd, the Dadaist had no point of reference. In the pose of the dandy, he attempted to leap the gulf that separated the artist and public. Whereas the court jester of the past related to the court audience, could be sure of princely protection, and had a clearly defined function as "banisher of melancholy,"<sup>80</sup> with the transition from courtly melancholy and aristocratic "ennui" to bourgeois society, the Fool became increasingly redundant. Benjamin recognized the isolation of the artist in the figure of Baudelaire, who continued to play the role of the Fool in the nineteenth century as a dandy: "he had something about him of the actor who has to play the role of a writer before the stalls and a society that the real writer already no longer needs and that gives him his stage only as an actor."<sup>81</sup>

The dadaist cabaret, Dada soirées and tours, were attempts to reconnect with the function of “melancholy banishment.” Yet, as “a game of folly out of nothing” they were failed attempts because they were basically subcultural manifestations. As such, they could only chalk up a certain degree of success where they managed to trump and co-opt for their own means the culture of leisure controlled by the media and cultural industries. The way in which the Dadaists dealt with the press was calculating as much as it was fateful. For when the game was roped back into the mechanism of society, the Fool’s exposing function was diminished in its effectiveness. The rift between artist and public became visible and appeared almost unbridgeable as long as the economy of leisure was omnipotent. Dada proceeded from the recognition that there was no possible retreat from the commercialization of all areas of life, including “high art” . . . Dada saw that its “real impetus” was the commercial and that, at the end of the day, its “indifference towards the masses, art and humanity” would be eclipsed by the affected behavior of the educated bourgeoisie. The Dadaists intended to “turn this swindle, as a bluff, back against the bourgeois himself,”<sup>82</sup> “. . . because Dada, that is the bluff. . . [and] as Dada can be equated with the bluff, so the bluff is the truth.”<sup>83</sup> Because the bourgeoisie was characterized by pretension, fashion, and convention, Dada reflected back on the bourgeoisie its terrible pretentiousness by means of its puzzle game. For this purpose, it invented a grotesque arsenal of hoaxes, illusions, surprises, and bluffs. “Fiat modes pereat ars,”<sup>84</sup> a portfolio of eight lithographs by Max Ernst, parodied a society losing itself in fashions and conventions with the image of a dressmaker’s dummy. Blindness, paralysis, and imprisonment in crushing apparatus were among the dadaist images of the bourgeois “imprisonment” of human nature. Dada did not fight heroically against heteronomy, instead, it infiltrated it – like the “good Dadaist” Chaplin – with its apparent conformity. The Dadaist entered the arena of industrial mass culture with the business practices of a market barker. Dada confronted the commodity’s deception with its own advertising agency, “that will lead everyone to happiness.” Where the progressive market economy accelerated its circulation, dadaist works and performances took on sharper contours and more clashing colors. Dada wanted to assert itself in the public market. Baudelaire had already had his writer in “Perte d’Auréole”<sup>85</sup> lose his halo in the chaos, which meant that the artist could no longer escape the conditions of mass society and its metropolitan forms. Everyday forms of publication such as small ads, posters, newspaper reports, as well as hoax reports, headlines, slogans, telegrams, postcards, letters, program sheets, invitations, catalogs, flyers, magazines, advertising, campaigns, and tours were all part of dadaist self-presentation. The business practices of the capitalist world were as well-suited to the dadaists as the sensational performance in the arena to the circus artist. As important as this was for the circus artist looking to trump his competitors, so the Dadaist too did not shy from deploying his disarming con tricks as ironic competitive principles. He invented enormous dadaistic advertising fireworks. As a mockery of the “typical methods of the wannabe politicians, founders, philosophers [and] prophets”

(Herzfelde) of the postwar period, the Dadaist invented coups (Dada against Weimar) and founded a Nikolasee Republic, a dadaistic "World Authority," an "Intertelluric Academy in Potsdam," a "Freedom Party," a "Central Council," an "Anational Council of Unpaid Workers," and no less than a "Gender Center." The Dadaists staged "World Congresses," International Dada Fairs, open-air meetings, and proceedings against writers they did not approve of – against Maurice Barrès, for example. They founded societies for research into dadaist language, "une société anonyme pour l'exploitation du vocabulaire dadaïste" – and appointed a "Congrès international pour la détermination des directives et la défense de l'Esprit Moderne" – a "Ministry of the Spirit." Dada made a fool of the bourgeois. The ambiguous, bluffing foolery with the institutionalizations and with the strategies of the media and advertising cast these targets in a dim light. The rules of profit, competition, and retail, in the supply of which the sensation-riddled media competed and outdid one another as if on a battlefield, not only set the tone for the Dadaists's stance and their propagandistic tactics, but also permeated, as a formal principle, their artistic and literary works, and characterized their montage-like, fragmentary, staccato quality. Events were, so to speak, atomized and disintegrated in a disorientating variety of single instances.

The dadaist performances were comparable with a "circus of elevated gravity" in which the spectators went "quietly mad."<sup>86</sup> In a lost image of the Cabaret Voltaire by Janco,<sup>87</sup> Arp gave a lively description of the reactions of the audience and the dadaist play with them: "On the stage of a motley, overcrowded bar, several weird and wonderful figures can be seen, representing Tzara, Janco, Ball, Huelsenbeck, Emmy Hennings, and my humble self. We are making pandemonium. The audience around us are shouting, laughing, and gesticulating. We reply with sighs of love, belches, poems, with 'moo moo' and 'miaow miaow' like medieval bruitists. Tzara is wiggling his behind like the belly of an oriental dancer. Janco is playing an invisible violin and bowing down to the ground. Frau Hennings, with the face of a Madonna, attempts the splits. Huelsenbeck bangs relentlessly on the kettledrum as Ball accompanies him, as chalky pale as a ghost."<sup>88</sup>

Arp saw the cabaret as a "prankster's pseudo-manoeuvre," in which a "macabre skit, a little dance of death" was never lacking.<sup>89</sup> The Berlin Dada evenings were more aggressive. For example, at the Berlin Dada soirées, simultaneous poems, sound poems, and bruitist poems were mixed up and thrown together. Tap-dance performances, antimusical demonstrations by Golyscheff, a dadaist dance with masks, a wooden-puppet dance by Musikdada Preiss, futurist poetry recitals, provocative aggression against the audience, dadaist manifestos, Berlin "jungle songs" by Mehring, the race between a typewriter and a sewing-machine, improvised sketches, and loud interruptions from the crowd came in staccato succession. The Dadaists transformed themselves into "thought jugglers," "brain somersaulters" (Grosz), into eccentric Americans and barking pamphletists.

The futurist influence on the forms the dada soirées took is unmistakable. It was not only the provocative performances of the Futurists, but also the scenic

inventory and the antidramaturgy, set down by Marinetti in his manifesto "The Variété,"<sup>90</sup> that influenced the Dadaists. The futurist concept of variété as "boiling pot of all laughter, all smiles and every derisive cackle, every contortion and every grimace of future humanity"<sup>91</sup> pervaded the Cabaret Voltaire. Both tendencies shared the desire not to present themselves as a "humorous magazine."<sup>92</sup> However, while the Futurists laid the most emphasis on "distraction from material pain,"<sup>93</sup> in order to "rejuvenate the face of the world [with] great futuristic merriment,"<sup>94</sup> Dada focused on the derisive exposure of its audience. Whereas the Futurists sought to transform variété through superlative sensations and attractions into "a theater of shock effects, of records and of psychomadness,"<sup>95</sup> Dada opened the "cabaret of people,"<sup>96</sup> whose nonsensical mechanism cut the bourgeois public off from its habitual and well-trodden ways of reassuring itself through the normality of everyday life. Dada created a cabaret not only of total confusion, but also of profound skepticism.

In addition to the cabaret and soirées, Dada attempted to reach as large an audience as possible by the means of exhibitions, Dada balls, Dada fairs, Dada carnivals, and other operations. At the Dada meeting on the Plaine Carrouge near Geneva, for example: "three days earlier, grotesquely-dressed sandwich-board men had walked through the town with huge, brightly-colored signs, which announced that at three in the afternoon the dadaist leader Walter Serner would give the 'cosmos a kick in the pants.' The Plaine was thronged with people at the appointed time and Dr. Serner arrived, a little late, in a sleeveless tailcoat with a green waistcoat, flanked by about a dozen dadaists wearing green ties and carrying megaphones in their hands, on the specially-erected podium, from which he declaimed his manifesto with a piercing roar..."<sup>97</sup>

This spectacle could only be read about in the newspapers, however; it never actually took place. Dada exploited the one-dimensional experience of the bourgeois, whose consciousness was interchangeable with the press, in order to confound him. There were other further hoaxes that already declared the bourgeois a fool under the heading "the international voluntarily insane." In this way, the Dada cabaret became a comprehensive cabaret of the media, of Americanism's cultural-industrial sphere, of the national assembly, of the church, and so on.<sup>98</sup>

The great extent to which the dadaist needed for his own self-affirmation the public that he so despised and for which he refused to make any compromises is evident in his obsession with activating the media and "living" from their reactions. The public sphere formed the basis of his narcissistic fool's existence, for the flip-side of his eccentric performances was the fear of slipping into obscurity. The dadaist's performances, which acted out his independence and smiling equanimity, escalated into self-assertion in the face of the objective conditions of mass society. The Dadaist found himself confronted with an audience that, as "monde oublié," already had Baudelaire's "vieux saltimbanque" at its mercy.<sup>99</sup> Hausmann's assemblage, "The Spirit of our Time,"<sup>100</sup> was the Dadaist's opponent, since this spirit "only had the abilities that chance had glued to its skull; the brain was empty."<sup>101</sup> That meant that the dadaist impresario was

vulnerable to the public's forgetfulness if he did not constantly retain his public profile and newsworthiness. Obscurity resulting from diffusion was for Dada both the object and the fate of its art. The power of the audience to decide on the "to be and not to be" of the artist could be felt in this. Therefore, so as not to perform like an ageing clown before empty seats, at the zenith of its "fame" after a two- to three-year fool's game, Dada chose to retreat.

Dada's legacy was the recognition that in a society emptied of meaning and marked by rigor mortis, it was impossible to create yet another culture-bound subject. In a society "that had no more integrity whatsoever to give,"<sup>102</sup> buffoonery was the only option for self-assertion. As such, Dada's effect also to a great extent determined its content.

The ultimate consequence for the Dadaists was not to be creative, because artistic activities were only a "refuge" (Tzara). The Dadaists already had a role model in Rimbaud. After a brief appearance in the arena of literature, he abandoned it and went into exile. Yet even this act was recognized by Vaché as an impossible way out – the same comedy was doomed to repeat itself everywhere.

Dada was banished to an interim field. Its inability to form relationships and bonds revealed itself in the further course of history as the flip-side of the search for identity.

## Notes

- 1 Hugo Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit* (1927), Luzern 1946, p. 78.
- 2 Hugo Ball, *Flametti oder vom Dandyismus der Armen* (1918) Frankfurt a.M. 1975.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 *Neue Jugend*, Berlin, May and June 1917.
- 5 George Grosz, *Briefe 1913–1959* ed. Herbert Knust, Hamburg 1979, p. 62.
- 6 "Dada Telegram: 'The international Dada Company sends Charlie Chaplin, the world's greatest artist and good Dadaist, its support. We protest against the boycott of Chaplin's films in Germany.' Grosz, Heartfield, Huelsenbeck, Hausmann, Bloomfield, Picabia, Guttman, Arp, Tzara, Serner, Schwitters, Ernst, Kobbe, Herzfelde, Archipenko, Chirico, Hustaedt, Noldan, Piscator," in *Der Dada* no. 3, Berlin 1920, p. "4371."
- 7 Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 88.
- 8 Ibid., p. 92.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid., p. 94.
- 11 Cf. Wolfgang Promies, *Die Bürger und der Narr oder das Risiko der Phantasie*, Munich 1966.
- 12 *Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire*, Nouvelle Edition, Paris 1877 (reprint 1967), vol. IX, p. 477.
- 13 Cited in Promies, op. cit., p. 114.
- 14 Ibid., p. 115.
- 15 Michel Foucault, *Wahnsinn und Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt a. M. 1969, pp. 28–9.

- 16 Raoul Hausmann, "Die neue Kunst," in *Führer durch die Abteilung der Novembergruppe, Kunstausstellung Berlin*, 1921, issue 1 of the Novembergruppe's publications, Berlin 1921, p. 9.
- 17 Louis Aragon, "John Heartfield oder die revolutionäre Schönheit," Paris, May 1935, in Wieland Herzfelde, *John Heartfield. Leben und Werk*, Dresden 1971, p. 125.
- 18 Carl Einstein, "Bebuquin oder Die Dilettanten des Wunders," in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Ernst Nef, Wiesbaden 1962, p. 232.
- 19 Foucault, op. cit., p. 34.
- 20 Grosz, *Briefe*, p. 62.
- 21 Alexis (pseudonym Richard Huelsenbeck), "Ein Besuch im Cabaret Dada," in *Dada Almanach*, Berlin 1920, p. 140.
- 22 Grosz, *Briefe*, p. 32.
- 23 Hugo Ball, *Tenderenda der Phantast (1914–20)*, Zurich 1967, p. 77.
- 24 Richard Huelsenbeck, *Phantastische Gebete*, Zurich 1967, p. 77.
- 25 Hans Arp, "Die Schwalbenhode," in *Dada Almanach*, Berlin 1920, pp. 145–6; cf. Reinhard Döhl, *Das literarische Werk Hans Arps 1903–1930. Zur poetischen Vorstellungswelt des Dadaismus*, Stuttgart 1967, p. 115.
- 26 Andeh Heinz Mößer ed., 'Hugo Balls Vortrag über Wassily Kandinsky in der Galerie Dada in Zürich am 7.4.1917,' in *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 51, 1977, p. 688.
- 27 Ibid., p. 689.
- 28 Hugo Ball, 'Sieben schizophrene Sonette – Narrenfest – Der Büßer,' in *Gesammelte Gedichte*, Zurich 1963, pp. 34–45.
- 29 Richard Huelsenbeck, 'Der Idiot,' in *Cabaret Voltaire*, ed. Hugo Ball, Zurich 1916, p. 18.
- 30 Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 92.
- 31 Cf. Hanne Bergius, 'Der Dadandy – das Narrenspiel aus dem Nichts,' in *Dada in Europa*, Ex. Cat. 15, *Europäische Kunstausstellung*, Berlin 1977, pp. 3/12ff.
- 32 Grosz, *Briefe*, p. 32.
- 33 George Grosz, 'Gesang an die Welt,' in *Gedichte und Gesänge*, Litomysl 1932, n.p.
- 34 With reference to the dandyist attitude: Baudelaire cited in *Baudelaire, in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, ed. Pascal Pia, Paris 1958, p. 68. Further literature on the dandy: 'Baudelaire, Le Dandy,' in *Curiosité esthétiques, L'Art romantique*, Paris 1962, pp. 481ff; Otto Mann, *Der Dandy. Ein Kulturproblem der Moderne*, Gerabronn 1962; E. Carassus, *Le mythe du dandy*, Paris 1971; Sebastian Neumeister, *Der Dichter als Dandy. Kafka, Baudelaire, Thomas Bernhard*, Munich 1973.
- 35 Hans Arp, cited in Döhl, op. cit., p. 45.
- 36 Raoul Hausmann, 'Dada ist mehr als Dada,' in *Am Anfang war Dada*, ed. G. Kämpf and Karl Riha, Gießen 1972, p. 89.
- 37 Hans Arp, cited in Döhl, op. cit., p. 42.
- 38 Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 85.
- 39 Cf. Raoul Hausmann, "Viking Eggeling, Zweite präsentistische Deklaration gerichtet an die internationalen Konstruktivisten," in *MA*, vol. VII, no. 5/6, Vienna 1922.
- 40 Louis Aragon, cited in Maurice Nadeau, *Geschichte des Surrealismus*, Hamburg 1965, p. 77.
- 41 Richard Huelsenbeck, 'Der neue Mensch,' in *Neue Jugend*, Berlin May 1917.

- 42 Emanuel Hurewitz, *Otto Gross, Paradies-Sucher zwischen Freud und Jung*, Zurich 1979.
- 43 *Revolution*, vol. 1, no. 5, Munich 1913.
- 44 Ludwig Rubiner in *ibid.*, p. 2.
- 45 Otto Gross cited in Hurewitz *op. cit.*, p. 13.
- 46 Cf. Johannes Baader *Oberdada, Schriften, Manifeste, Flugblätter, Billets, Werke und Taten*, ed. Hanne Bergius, Norbert Miller, Karl Riha, Lahn / Gießen 1977.
- 47 Grosz, *Briefe*, p. 46.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 50 George Grosz, 'No-one Can Copy Him from Us,' 1919, ill. in Alexander Dückers, *George Grosz, Das druckgraphische Werk*, Berlin 1979, MIII, 9. "No-one can copy him from us" was a comment of Wilhelm II's on the Hauptmann von Köpenick.
- 51 Information from Inas Schwebes, Berlin, whose dissertation on representations of the Garden of Love in the Middle Ages included investigation of the subject of the Fool. The painting in Versailles is a copy made in the sixteenth century after a lost Netherlandish original from the early fifteenth century. P. Post, "Ein verschollenes Jagdbild Jan van Eycks," in *Jahrbuch der preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, vol. 52, Berlin 1931, pp. 120ff.
- 52 Grosz, *Briefe*, p. 47.
- 53 Grosz, 'Krawall der Irren,' 1915/16 (Kleine Grosz Mappe), ill. in Dückers, *op. cit.*, MII6.
- 54 Grosz, 'Blutiger Karneval,' 1915/16, ill. in Dückers, *op. cit.*, E40.
- 55 Grosz, 'Widmung an Oskar Panizza,' 1917-18, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, ill. in Uwe M. Schneede ed., *George Grosz, Leben und Werk*, Stuttgart 1975, p. 55.
- 56 Otto Dix, 'Kartenspielende Kriegskrüppel,' 1920, ill. in Fritz Löffler, *Otto Dix, Leben und Werk*, Dresden 1977, no. 30. Dix, 'Prager Straße,' 1920, ill. in Löffler, no. 31. Dix, '45% Erwerbsfähig,' 1920, ill. in Löffler, no. 28.
- 57 Grosz, *Briefe*, pp. 56f.
- 58 Grosz, 'Licht und Luft dem Proletariat,' 1919, ill. in Dückers, *op. cit.*, MIII4.
- 59 Cf. Helmut Kreuzer, *Die Bohème. Analyse und Dokumentation der intellektuellen Subkultur vom 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Stuttgart 1971, pp. 45ff.
- 60 C. G. Jung, 'Zur Psychologie der Schelmenfigur,' in *Der göttliche Schelm, ein indischer Mythenzyklus*, ed. C. G. Jung, Karl Kerényi, Paul Radin, Zurich 1954, p. 205.
- 61 *Ibid.*
- 62 Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*, p. 27.
- 63 Ludwig Rubiner, *Der Mensch in der Mitte*, Berlin/Wilmersdorf 1917, p. 19.
- 64 Otto Gross, 'Vom Konflikt des Eigenen und des Fremden,' in *Freie Straße, Um Weisheit und Leben, 4. Folge der Vorarbeit*, Berlin 1916, p. 3.
- 65 Otto Gross, 'Protest und Moral im Unbewußten,' in *Die Erde*, vol. 1, Berlin 1919, p. 682.
- 66 Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 104.
- 67 *Ibid.*
- 68 Sophie Taeuber-Arp, 'Marionetten,' ill. in *Zweiklang. Sophie Taeuber-Arp / Hans Arp*, ed. Ernst Scheidegger, Zurich 1960, pp. 18-20. Hannah Höch, 'Dada Puppen,' 1916/18, ill. in Heinz Ohff, *Hannah Höch*, Berlin 1968, ill. 27.
- 69 Hannah Höch, ca. 1921, ill. in *Hannah Höch*, ed. Götz Adriani, Cologne 1980 (inner jacket).

- 70 Border drawing in Erasmus von Rotterdam, *Das Lob der Torheit* [In Praise of Folly], Basel 1515, Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kupferstichkabinett.
- 71 Hugo Ball, 'Die Tänzerin Sophie Taeuber-Arp' (1917), in *Zweiklang*, p. 24.
- 72 Walter Serner, *Letzte Lockerung*, Berlin 1964, p. 15.
- 73 Grosz, *Briefe*, pp. 30f.
- 74 Cf. *ibid.* Trans. Note: Grosz uses the word "Aasloch," which is an untranslatable play on the German for "arsehole" ("Arschloch") and the German for "carrion" ("Aas"), D.L.
- 75 Man Ray, 'Rose Selavy,' 1921, ill. in *Marcel Duchamp*, ex. cat. Paris 1977, p. 104.
- 76 Picabia called his machine-erotic drawings "fille née sans mère," ill. in *Francis Picabia*, Paris 1976, ill. 44.
- 77 Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 60.
- 78 Mann, *Der Dandy*, p. 77.
- 79 Cf. Serner, *Letzte Lockerung*.
- 80 Cf. Wolfgang Lepenies, *Melancholie und Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt a.M. 1972, chapter "Der Hofnarr."
- 81 Walter Benjamin, *Zentralpark*, Frankfurt a. M. 1974, p. 158.
- 82 Raoul Hausmann, 'Objektive Betrachtung des Dadaismus,' in *Der Kunststopp* 3, Berlin 1920, p. 64.
- 83 Hausmann, 'Dada in Europa,' in *Der Dada* no. 3, Berlin 1920, p. "642 kg."
- 84 Max Ernst, 'Fiat modes pereat ars,' 8 lithographs, 1919, ill. in *Max Ernst*, catalogue raisonnée, no. 65-73.
- 85 Sebastian Neumeister, op. cit., p. 70; I. Wohlfahrt, 'Perte d'Auréole: The Emergency of the Dandy,' *Modern Language Notes* 85, 1970.
- 86 Carl Einstein, 'Bebuquin oder Die Dilettanten des Wunders' in *Gesammelte Werke*, p. 235.
- 87 Marcel Janco, 'Cabaret Voltaire,' 1917.
- 88 Hans Arp, cited in Döhl, p. 44.
- 89 *Ibid.*
- 90 F. T. Marinetti, 'Das Variété,' 1913, in Umberto Apollonio, *Der Futurismus, Manifeste und Dokumente einer künstlerischen Revolution 1909-1918*, Cologne 1966, pp. 170ff.
- 91 *Ibid.*, p. 171.
- 92 *Ibid.*, p. 175.
- 93 *Ibid.*, p. 176.
- 94 *Ibid.*
- 95 *Ibid.*, p. 175.
- 96 Raoul Hausmann, 'Das Kabarett zum Menschen,' in *Schall und Rauch*, no. 3, Berlin 1920, p. 2.
- 97 Cited in Hanne Bergius, 'Christian Schad als Dada-Präsident in Genf,' in *Christian Schad*, Berlin 1980, p. 11.
- 98 Cf. *Johannes Baader Oberdada*.
- 99 Neumeister, *Der Dichter als Dandy*, p. 70.
- 100 Raoul Hausmann, 'Der Geist unserer Zeit,' 1921, Paris, Musée d'Art Moderne, CNAG, ill. in *Dada in Europa*, ex. cat., p. 3/7.
- 101 *Ibid.*, p. 3/50.
- 102 Benjamin, *Zentralpark*, p. 161.