**Dadaism**

**Zurich Dada**

**By Jay Hetrick**

Dada began in Zurich, Switzerland, in the midst of the First World War. Several expatriate artists converged in the city to escape the brutal and seemingly nonsensical destruction of the war. They responded in turn with nonsense, creating an anarchic and subversive anti-aesthetic that would have profound effects on the history of the avant-garde. Indeed, nearly every major Western art movement since the 1920s, as well as culture jammers of all kinds, can claim some connection to the Zurich Dadaists. They initially met at the Cabaret Voltaire – named after the French Enlightenment philosopher – that was opened by theatre director Hugo Ball and his partner, the performer, Emmy Hennings, on 5 February 1916. Until the summer of that year, the international group met nightly in a charged Dionysian atmosphere where an audience of fellow expats and dissidents experienced a provocative mix of sound and simultaneous poetry in different languages, Cubist dances with African masks, as well as readings from Expressionist and Futurist texts, Voltaire, and from the artists’ own manifestoes. Works by Hans Arp and Otto van Rees hung on the walls. The Dadaists violently rejected the values of Western art and culture, which they believed had contributed to the outbreak of war in the first place. They were especially against the ideas of beauty, mimesis, the myth of originality, the truth of reason, and the transparency of communication.

In order to avoid being drafted, Hennings forged Ball’s passport in 1915 and they crossed from Germany into neutral Switzerland. In Zurich, they met the artist Hans Arp and dancer Sophie Taeuber at Galerie Tanner in November of that year. The Romanian poet Tristan Tzara and his compatriot, architectural student and painter, Marcel Janco, joined the group after responding to a press announcement for the new Cabaret. Richard Huelsenbeck, who had collaborated with Ball in Berlin, arrived shortly thereafter, rounding out the original members of Zurich Dada.

The name Dada, which was conceived between the opening night of the Cabaret Voltaire and the publication of a periodical of the same name in June 1916, itself highlights some important aspects of the movement. Against the growing nationalisms of the time, it emphasizes the international nature of the group since the word has connotations in German (the child’s fort-da game as described by Freud), French (‘hobbyhorse’), and Romanian (‘yes, yes’). It also brings attention to the role of chance in the Dada anti-aesthetic, in contrast to the old ideas of artistic intention or even genius: in Huelsenbeck’s account of the word’s origin, he and Ball simply plunged a knife blindly into a dictionary. Finally, it points to the growing rivalry between Huelsenbeck and Tzara, who would later claim to have invented the name. This internal tension eventually drove Ball from the group. Additionally, Huelsenbeck left for Germany at the end of 1916, where he would contribute to the Berlin Dada movement, leaving Tzara as the de facto leader of the Zurich Dadaists in their new venue at Galerie Dada. Subsequently, Tzara facilitated the publication of several more periodicals under the title Dada and inspired other Dada groups around Europe through his incessant networking. But after the war, the refugee artists were again free to travel, bringing the Zurich chapter of Dada to an end. Arp joined Max Ernst in Cologne while Tzara followed Francis Picabia to Paris, where Dada would continue to flourish before it gave way to Surrealism in 1924.

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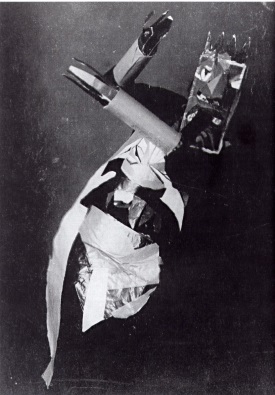
**Suggested Images**

Anonymous photograph of Marcel Janco’s Cabaret Voltaire, 1916, dimensions unknown (lost work). <http://frieze-magazin.de/archiv/features/kuenstlerische-selbstenthuellung/?lang=en>



Sophie Taeuber dancing at the opening of Galerie Dada, 29 March 1917

La Fondation Arp, <http://www.fondationarp.org>/





**Berlin Dada**

**By Sabine Kriebel**

When German medical student and poet Richard Huelsenbeck returned to Berlin from Zurich in 1917, he brought with him tales of the raucous, absurdist performances, subversive magazines, and provocative pictures and objects of Zurich Dada’s Cabaret Voltaire. These anecdotes and their subversive spirit fertilized the imaginations of fellow artists and writers Johannes Baader, George Grosz, Raoul Hausmann, John Heartfield, Wieland Herzfelde, Hannah Höch, Franz Jung, Walter Mehring and Otto Schmalhausen, who participated in the founding of Berlin’s ‘Club Dada,’ a critical response to the mounting political and social friction brought on by the First World World in Germany’s capital. Berlin Dada’s activities included boisterous street performances, unruly poetry readings, seditious exhibitions, rebellious magazines (often censored by the authorities), and insubordinate, visually innovative assemblages, sculptures, paintings, drawings, collages, and photomontages.

In April 1918, at an exhibition celebrating the paintings of Munich Secessionist Lovis Corinth, Huelsenbeck issued his ‘Dadaist Manifesto,’ a three page declaration and the first Berlin Dada publication, available for sale at the price of five marks per signed copy. In his speech, he castigated the inwardness, sedimentation and social distance of Expressionism, asking: ‘Have the expressionists fulfilled our expectations of an art that burns the essence of life into our flesh? No! No! No!’ Instead he promulgated an art whose form and content were inextricably melded with the troubles of the historical moment, asserting: ‘The highest art will be that which in its conscious content presents the thousandfold problems of the day, the art which has been visibly shattered by the explosions of last week, which is forever trying to collect its limbs after yesterday’s crash.’ Thus Dada’s remit, according to Huelsenbeck, is to enfold within it the tension-laden, political and social present in all of its crisis and contradiction. But rather than wring its hands in grim melancholy, the Dadaist was ‘half Pantagruel, half St. Francis, laughing and laughing,’ embracing the ‘giant hocus-pocus of existence’ with absurdist merriment.

The First International Dada Fair, masterminded by the Berlin Dadaists Grosz, Hausmann and Heartfield to showcase Dada activity, opened on 30 June 1920 in the gallery of Otto Burchard, known for his expertise in Chinese bronzes. Displaying nearly two hundred works, the exhibition presented work by Francis Picabia and Hans (Jean) Arp of Zurich, Max Ernst and Johannes Baargeld of Cologne, as well as Rudolf Schlichter, Georg Scholz and Otto Dix. The exhibition installation was a multi-media text-image montage in its own right, with photomontages, paintings, photographs, manifestos and typographically-innovative declarations assembled next to and on top of one another, while Heartfield and Schlichter’s *Prussian Archangel*, a stuffed military uniform topped by a papier-mâché pig’s head, dangled from the ceiling, looking on. The exhibition catalogue, published by the Herzfeld-Heartfield Malik Verlag, appeared in mid-July and accompanied the Dada Fair until it closed on 25 August 1920. News of the Dada Fair extended beyond avant-garde circles, thanks to concerted publicity efforts by its members, with newspapers and illustrated weeklies in Buenos Aires, Boston and Milan reporting on the now-infamous event.

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**Cologne Dada**

**By Tina Yarborough**

Cologne Dada (1919-1922) emerged as a complex double pivot between wartime and postwar Dada with a later turn from Dada to Surrealism. Dada was both stimulated and suppressed by the dire conditions in Cologne under British occupation after the war. Through several publications and two major exhibitions, Cologne Dada evolved an independent and distinctive character best described as parodic and contradictory. The central figure was Max Ernst, an intellectual whose fantastical ideas were inspired by the absurdity of the postwar era. Ernst’s main collaborator was Alfred Grünwald whose pseudonym, Johannes Baargeld (Moneybags), reflected the affluence of his father, an insurance director. Their first collaboration, financed by Baargeld in February 1919, was an anarchic-Communist, satirical publication *Der Ventilator* (*The Fan*) meant to further fan the ire of bourgeois culture. Other leading figures of Cologne included Luise Strauss-Ernst, Franz Seiwert, Anton Räderscheidt, Marta Hegemann, and Heinrich and Angelika Hoerle. Towards the end of 1919, Ernst and Baargeld were invited to exhibit with the Cologne Society of the Arts, whose overt political aims they challenged. By separating their work into a space known as Section D (Dada), Ernst and Baargeld published the journal *Bulletin D* to accompany their exhibition. Seiwert and Räderscheidt withdrew their art from Section D, claiming a lack of serious political intentions, and thus began the internecine splintering of Cologne Dada. The double view of poetic politics surfaced as *Bulletin D* raged against Berlin Dadaists, and Ernst and Baargeld turned postwar conditions into whimsical fantasies of a mechanized humanity.

In early 1920, Hans (Jean) Arp arrived from Zurich, and with Ernst and Baargeld, established a group known as Dada West Stupidia 3 or W/3, making collaborative, enigmatic collages called *Fatagaga* (Fabrication de tableaux garantis gazométriques) as in *Physiomythological Flood Picture*, 1920. Left out of the W/3, the other more politically committed Cologne Dadaists made a final split and by mid1920 Seiwert, Räderscheidt, and the Hoerles formed their own group Stupid, and journal, *Stupid I*, mocking in name their fellow Dadaists, but in concept the Stupid group remained dedicated to an accessible proletarian art. In April 1920 the Cologne Dadaists collaborated again to show solidarity with international Dada and produced a second publication, *die Schammade*, a Dada title with multiple aggressive puns and allusions. Cologne Dada emphasized its postwar position by confronting the abhorrent failure of high art in the “bashed ego” of traumatized male subjectivity. Mutilated bodies were morphed into transgendered-techno humanoids, as in Ernst’s *Untitled, 1920 Photographic collage,* a moral statement rendered in the juxtaposition of the unconscious with military materialism. Ernst collaged beckoning female arms as the wings of a military war plane that flies above soldiers whose arms carry the wounded. Ernst’s engagement with the unconscious and traumatized psyches will later inspire André Breton and the Surrealists.

The final Cologne event held in April 1920, called the Dada Early Spring Exhibition, was born when the artworks of Ernst and Baargeld were refused by a jury-free exhibition held at the Applied Arts Museum. In defiance, Ernst and Baargeld held their own show in the courtyard of a pub. Visitors had to walk through the men’s toilet where they staged a young female communion-cate reading lewd poetry. Visitors then were invited to destroy an Ernst sculpture with an axe he provided, suggesting the absurdity of art and life. Cologne police closed the exhibition for reasons of obscenity, but reopened it after the charges were attributed to Albrecht Dürer’s 1504 engraving, *Adam and Eve*. Shortly thereafter Cologne Dada ran its course as the group split, Baargeld left art for mountaineering, and Ernst left Cologne for Paris. The Cologne Dadaists lived in life and revealed in art the contradictions and tensions of the early 1920s.

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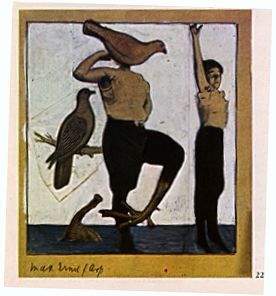
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**Images & Image information:** (If only one is used, I would use *Untitled, 1920 (photographic collage)***, the airplane.**



Max Ernst & Hans Arp. *Physiomythological Flood-Picture (Switzerland: Birthplace of Dada)*, 1920, photomontage, collage, gouache, pencil, and ink on paper on board, 11.2 x 10 cm. Sprengel Museum, Hannover

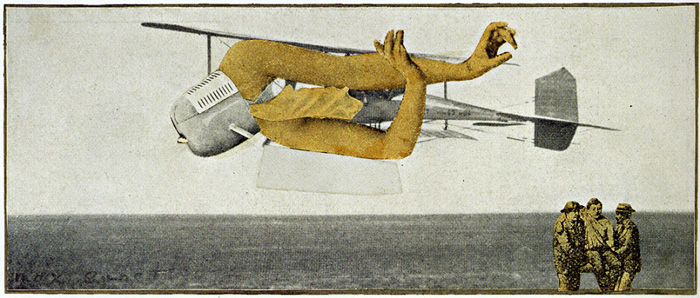


IMAGE number: XIR243729

Title: Untitled, 1920 (photographic collage)

Creator: Ernst, Max (1891-1976)

Location: Menil Collection, Houston, TX, USA

Medium: photographic collage

Date: 1920 (C20th)

Dimensions: 6x14.3 cms

Credit: Untitled, 1920 (photographic collage), Ernst, Max (1891-1976) / Menil Collection, Houston, TX, USA / Bridgeman Images

**New York Dada**

**By Sarah Archino**

Internationally the Dada movement attacked the concept of fine art by rejecting the values of uniqueness, craftsmanship, culture, and artistic genius in favor of chance, multiplicity, non-art materials, and absurdity. The movement known as New York Dada is perhaps a misnomer as Dada activities in New York predate the 1916 formulation of the movement in Zurich. Scholars have dated related activities to 1910, although most chronologies place the movement from 1915 to 1921. Like Zurich Dada, New York Dada is characterised by an irreverent attitude towards traditional forms of art production; however, New York Dada was less an organised ideology than a loosely affiliated celebration of popular culture and anti-authoritarianism. This association of American artists and European exiles centered around the New York apartment of Walter and Louise Arensberg. The Arensberg ‘salon’ counted among its frequent visitors Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia. These two artists, along with the American, Man Ray and Elsa von Freytag-Lovinghoven were the most active Dadaists in New York. Although no single style emerged, there was a common interest in the machine aesthetic, as seen in the mechanomorphic works of Picabia, the assemblages and photographs of Man Ray, and (most notoriously) the readymades of Duchamp.

The artists associated with New York Dada resisted identification as a group. With no manifestos, no statements of ideology and no group exhibitions, it is difficult to locate the movement chronologically. Only in 1921, months before leaving New York for Paris, did Man Ray and Duchamp edit the single issue of *New York Dada*, which included an ‘authorisation’ from the Zurich Dadaist Tristan Tzara. Perhaps the most significant challenge to the tradition of fine art were Duchamp’s readymades, mass-produced objects which he purchased and exhibited, with little or no alteration, and declared to be art. Although Duchamp had begun the practice in France, it was in New York that he called these works ‘readymades’ and exhibited them outside of his studio. Claiming they were chosen without regard to aesthetic value, Duchamp paired these items with punning titles, such as a snow shovel titled, *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915). Most infamously, he submitted *Fountain* (1917) to the jury-less Society of Independent Artists Exhibition in 1917, under the pseudonym Richard Mutt. When the work, which consisted of a urinal rotated ninety-degrees and signed by R. Mutt, was rejected despite the society’s founding principle of inclusion, Duchamp published the second issue of the art journal *The Blind Man* as a defense. Without revealing his identity as its author, Duchamp and his colleagues argued that the choice of the urinal had ‘created a new thought for that object’ and concluded that ‘The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges’.

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**Image included: Marcel Duchamp, Fountain, 1917, photograph by Alfred Stieglitz. Gelatin silver print. 9 ¼ x 7” Seccession Marcel Duchamp, Villiers-sous-Grez, France**

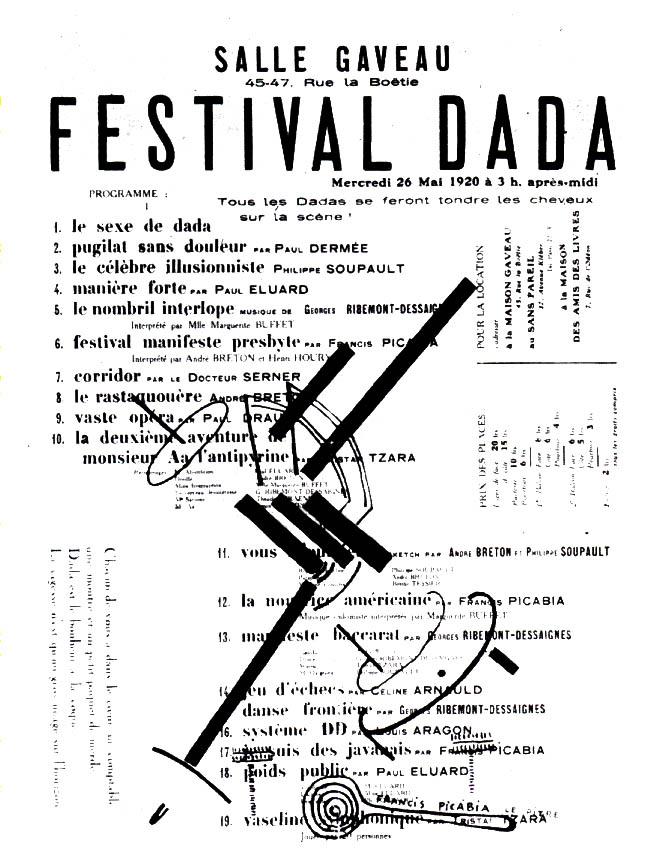
**Paris Dada (1919 – 1923)**

**By Hazel Donkin**

Dada in Paris was a slightly unstable movement with a strong oppositional strand and a powerful literary (anti-literary) side. Francis Picabia (1879 – 1953) was the focus initially due to his attack on the first post-war Salon for his exclusion. His arrival in Paris in March 1919 was followed by that of Tristan Tzara (1896 – 1963) from Zurich in January 1920. The dada group in Zurich had lost energy and Tzara had ambitions to revive the movement in the French capital. Both men had connections with Apollinaire and the French literary avant-garde. At the same time a group of poets formed around André Breton (1896 – 1966), Louis Aragon, Phillipe Soupault and their periodical *Littérature*. As a verbally agile and provocative central figure of the Dada movement, Tzara attracted Breton’s group as well as a number of writers and artists around himself and Picabia. Political and cultural conservatism, evident in the election of a right wing government in 1919 and the return to the ‘French tradition’ with the ‘call to order’, was directly challenged by dada. Group activities were characterised by provocation and opposition to tradition in art. Dada embraced chaos and the irrational, internationalism, anarchism, nihilism and popular culture. The group disintegrated between 1921 and 1923 due to ideological differences. Although Dada in Paris was short lived, it was charged with such energy and vitality that its legacy is evident in French Surrealism, launched by Breton in 1924 and thereafter.

Breton’s *Littérature* group included Paul Éluard, Théodore Fraenkel, René Hilsom Raymond Radiguet and Benjamin Péret. The group drew on the French tradition from Rimbaud, a poetic revolt against all contemporary art and life. This was combined with the experience of war. They experimented with automatic writing. Other members in the dada group included Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Serge Charchoune, Ilia Zdanevich, Marcel Duchamp, Suzanne Duchamp, Jean Crotti, Man Ray, Paul Dermée, Céline Arnauld, Clément Panscers and Vicente Huidobro.

Dada activities in 1920 included ‘manifestations’, notably the ‘*Littérature* Matinee’ on 23 January where nonsensical and obscene poetry readings, art exhibits, a musical interlude and a reading by Tzara outraged the audience. Exhibitions included Picabia’s solo exhibition at *Au sans pareil* in April and a second dada show at that venue in May. It was Picabia’s work, his mechanomorphic style as well as provocative pieces such as *La Saint Vierge* (1920) and *Portrait of Cézanne* (1920) that represented dada visual art in Paris. Publications included Tzara’s *Dadaphone (Dada 7),* Picabia’s *391* (issue 12) and Dermée’s *Z*, all in March. Breton and Soupault published *Les Champs Magnetiques* in May. *Festival dada* held that month closed the first dada season.



(N.B. Permanent ULR for above image is http://www.ieeff.org/sur1fstdadagaveau1920.jpg)

Dada called for the destruction of all contemporary systems and attacked bourgeois values with such ferocity that even members of the ‘old’ avant-garde, such as Juan Gris, distanced themselves from the movement. However, once the initial shock subsided, Paris embraced Dada and it enjoyed constant media attention. Dada journals including *391*, *Dada*, *Cannibale*, *Proverbe* and *Projecteur* proliferated. Dada was recognised by the mainstream, and dada ideology spread into cultural events such as the annual *Bal des Artistes Russes* at the Salle Bullier. In 1924 Picabia wrote the ballet *Relâche* with the composer Erik Satie and Jean Börlin (Ballet Sudéois). Together with René Clair and Erik Satie he also wrote *Entr’acte*, the short film shown in the interval.

The group had been languishing since 1921. ‘Interventions’ that year such as the public heckling of the Futurist leader Marinetti and events primarily organised by Breton such as the ‘dada visit’ to the church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre (April), the ‘trial’ of Maurice Barrés (May), the exhibition by Max Ernst (May), and Man Ray’s first solo show (December) revived the group but exacerbated tensions between Breton, Tzara and Picabia. The group was breaking up. Tzara’s nihilism and dismissal of psychoanalysis and Picabia’s dislike of seriousness were incompatible with Breton’s desire for a more positive way forward. This strained relationship came to a head in July 1923 at the *Soirée du Cœur à Barbe* which degenerated into a mass brawl. Breton was by that point focused on the establishment of the Surrealist group which he launched in 1924.

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CD Soirée Du Coeur À Barbe: Festival Paris Dada.

Anthology of piano music directly linked to the Dada movement in Paris between 1920 and 1923. Soirée du Coeur à Barbe: Festival Dada Paris is based on the piano repertoire performed at two landmark Dada events in Paris, the *Festival Dada* on 26 May 1920, and the infamous *Soirée du Coeur à Barbe* on 6 July 1923. Music from the 1920 event includes two pieces by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes as well as *The American Nurse* by Francis Picabia, the latter described as ‘three notes repeated to infinity’. Pieces performed at the riotous 1923 soirée include two fox-trots by Georges Auric and Darius Milhaud (both members of the celebrated group Les Six), the four-hand *Trois Morceaux en forme de poire* by Erik Satie (performed in person by the composer on the night), and *Three Easy Pieces* by Igor Stravinsky.)

http://www.dadart.com/dadaism/dada/024-dada-paris.html

Site containing information on the Paris group and individual members and a collection of documentary photographs.

**Dada and Dance**

**By Nell Andrew**

Dada’s origins on neutral ground in Zurich during the First World War were less rooted in a new style of art than in an effort to provoke a passive world into action. Performance and bodily expression were core mediums for the majority of the movement’s members, connecting Dada to dance in its earliest manifestations. Dada founders Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings had been a part of a circle in Munich guided by Vasily Kandinsky’s theatrical ideas on the interconnectedness of colour, music and dance. Once in Zurich, Ball created a fitting metaphor for Dada performance in his 1916 poem ‘Totentanz’ (‘Dance of Death’), which frames the war’s dehumanization as a *danse macabre*. As the First World War exposed the human expense of nationalist propaganda, political maneuvering and greed, Zurich Dada performers toppled conventions of thought, language, and behavior, thereby staging a mimicry of their war-compromised time and seeking an alternate expression of humanity and intelligence. Associated variously with trance, ritual, mime and the rhythms of popular entertainment, dance represented for Dada authentic and unmediated expression. Dadaists also made early contact with the free dance movement around Rudolf Laban and Mary Wigman, who theorized movement as the connector of soul-spirit-body and the cosmos. Dada Zurich used the performance of bodily humour, grotesque miming, and expressive dance as forms of resistance in the face of bourgeois propriety amid the ongoing carnage of the First World War. Following the war, Dada artists in Berlin, Paris and New York continued to employ dance in the service of political subversion and non-discursive intelligence.

**Dada and the New Dance**

In 1913 Rudolf Laban opened a school of art and movement within the utopian community at Monte Verità in Switzerland. There, he and his followers would develop the theories and notation for a new dance. Modern dance pioneer Mary Wigman and Dadaists Sophie Taeuber and Hans Arp were among those drawn to Laban’s school on the mountain. Taeuber trained extensively in dance under Laban and performed with the group in Zurich. When Laban opened a Zurich-based school of dance in 1917, many Dada artists became both personally and artistically involved with Laban’s circle. In an assertion of dance’s autonomy from the other arts and of its role as the unifier of emotion, intellect, and spirit, Laban and Wigman’s dancers often performed in masks to the spare sounds of percussion and invoked the Dionysian associations of the ecstatic and grotesque. The impact on Zurich Dada performance can be seen in repeated Dada descriptions of masks, a gong beat, and the direct and primitive expression of dance. Bypassing the corrupt discourses of language and logic, the theories of the new dance offered Dada access to an authentic expression of the self in connection with nature.

**Dance in Zurich, Berlin, and Paris Dada**

An anonymous photograph of Sophie Taeuber as dancer in full body costume and mask provides the only image of Dada dance in Zurich; yet dance played a role in the Cabaret Voltaire’s first event on February 5, 1916, where Tristan Tzara wiggled his behind and Emmy Hennings performance ‘simply demanded that their wearers start to move in a tragic-absurd dance’. During five months of near-nightly performances, absurd costuming, masks, and puppets were used for their allegorical and mimetic potential. After the closure of the Cabaret, the opening of Galerie Dada in March, 1917 included fully choreographed ‘Abstract Dances’ by Taeuber to the sounds of Ball’s poems. At least seven more Dada soirées followed, including one for which Ball rehearsed five Laban school dancers in masks and caftans for a geometric dance of ‘studied, deformed ugliness’. Mary Wigman gave a performance for Dada artists in 1918, and in a special issue of *Der Zeltweg* in October 1919 her photograph shares the page with Dada Tristan Tzara’s ‘Carnage Abracadabrant’. As if in confirmation of the centrality of dance to Zurich dada, the key event of the group’s final soirée on April 9, 1919, was Sophie Taeuber’s *Noir Kakadu*, a dance with abstract sets by Hans Richter and Hans Arp.

Dada’s continuation in Berlin, Paris, Cologne, Hanover and New York has left fewer records of formal dance events, but Dada continued to incorporate the body as an insubordinate provocateur. At Berlin’s ‘First Dada Evening’ on April 2, 1918, George Grosz improvised a syncopated jazz dance. In another matinée, the cabaret performer Valeska Gert, a sheaf of asparagus in her arms, danced and mimed to the sounds of Grosz and Walter Mehring battling on a typewriter and sewing machine; and Gerhard Preiss’ mimed invention known as the ‘Dada-Trott’ was photographed for *Der Dada* 3 in 1920. Among the Berlin Dadaists, Raoul Hausmann was most formally experimenting through dance. In the early 1920s, Hausmann performed a series of his own dances and discussed dance in writings for *De Stijl* and *Der Sturm*. Even as a poet, he considered the body’s movement primary over language; it was for him the form and articulation of relations in space. In Paris, a more formal collaboration was forged by Francis Picabia when he signed on to write the scenario for the 1924 Ballets Suédois production *Relâche* and accompanying *Entr’Acte,* an absurdly Dadaist anti-ballet and film. After the First World War, the image and idea of dance appear often as a subject or signifier in Dada art. In Berlin, for example, Hannah Höch’s 1919-20 photocollage, *Cut with a Kitchen Knife Through The Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany,* visually generates a chaotic commentary on Weimar culture and politics from the centrally placed headless body of dancer Niddy Impkoven. Here and elsewhere in Dada works, the connective figure of the dancer initiates provocative visual correspondences, as both a citation and mimicry of popular entertainment, consumer culture and desire, gender and the new woman, or colonial fantasies of primitivism.

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**Paratextual Material**

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Man Ray

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**Dadaism in Film**

**By Andy Lantz**

Members of the Dada cultural and artistic movement began to experiment with film as a means to disseminate their stylistic tendencies and cultural values through a new medium deprived of cultural respectability and aesthetic pretension. Unlike Surrealist film, Dadaist film did not seek to lure its viewers into the cinematic illusion. Instead, Dadaists employed unconventional methods in order to alienate the audience members and to provide them the distance with which to reflect upon the meta-artistic (and anti-artistic) quality of their productions. Film enabled the Dadaists to distort reality, motion, and perspective; it revealed familiar things in radically unfamiliar but persuasive new shapes.

It was an American artist, Man Ray, who would produce perhaps the first Dadaist film, *The Return to Reason* (1923). The title is blatantly ironic, as Ray was member of a group founded on the rejection of logic and reason and the prizing of nonsense, irrationality, and intuition. For him, the purpose of Dadaism was to test the audience’s patience, which he assuredly accomplished with *Reason.* To make the film, Ray spread out thirty meters of film, nailed it to a table, and sprinkled it with salt, pepper, nails, and tacks. The result was a puzzling succession of white flashes and shapes dancing over a black background with intermittent shots of Ray’s muse, Kiki of Montparnasse.

Hans Richter, another early pioneer of Dadaism, also produced one of his most influential films during 1923. In *Rhythmus 21*, Richter experimented with the constituent parts of the filmic medium by concentrating on the playful interaction between basic shapes, such as lines, squares, and rectangles. Throughout the 1920s, Richter would consistently highlight the importance of this minimalist rhythm in film while his post-WWI nihilism translated into a focused critique of German society. Some of the most notable titles in this critical vein include *Filmstudie* (1926), *Inflation* (1928), and *Ghosts Before Breakfast* (1928), all of which helped lay the groundwork for surrealism and other avant-garde movements.

Marcel Duchamp’s *Anémic Cinéma* (1926) is another significant example of screen Dadaism. Utilizing what he termed ‘precision optics,’ Duchamp attempted to create optical illusions by pairing rotating circles with puns written on the outer edge with rotoreliefs, or images that appear as three-dimensional when placed on a rotating surface. Set in motion, these abstract images appeared to move back and forth in a pulsating rhythm that, coupled with the suggestive wordplay, elicited an erotically charged process of free association that exploited traditional grammatical and filmic practices.

*Entr’acte* (René Clair, 1924) exhibited a more comprehensible (if absurd) storyline while demonstrating the Dadaists penchant for visual tricks. The film concludes with a lengthy chase scene that rivals the antics of Buster Keaton or Charlie Chaplin, both of whom the Dadaists admired for their tendency to poke fun at the bourgeois. In the final scene, a group of people magically disappear one by one. The scene exemplifies the Dadaists’ innovative use of the camera as an illusion-producing apparatus.

With *Emak-Bakia* (1926), Man Ray set out to make a surrealist film, but most critics agree that its techniques and reception better place it within the Dada movement. While most of the film employs Ray’s disorienting images (aided by his own invention, the rayograph), the final scene might be read as an allegory. A woman directly faces the camera with eyes painted on her eyelids, giving the audience the illusion of a fixed stare. She then opens her eyes, revealing the deception and suggesting the new way of seeing the world advanced by the Dadaists.

Unlike the more programmatically pursued literature, painting, and sculpture of the movement, film Dadaism was a scattered, decentralized activity. By the end of the 1920s, Dada’s influence diminished while many of its gestures fed into other projects, such as surrealism and other forms of modernism.

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