

# Art in Theory

## 1900–2000

*An Anthology of Changing Ideas*

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Edited by Charles Harrison  
and Paul Wood

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# IIIB

## Dissent and Disorder

### 1 Hugo Ball (1886–1927) 'Dada Fragments'

Together with Emmy Hennings, Ball founded the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich on 5 February 1916. The aim, as he later declared, was 'to remind the world that there are independent men "beyond war and Nationalism" who live for other ideals'. These 'Fragments' and diary entries from 1916–17 were originally published in Ball's book *Flucht aus der Zeit* (*Flight from Time*), Munich/Leipzig, 1927. The present translation, by Eugene Jolas, is taken from Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, New York, 1951, pp. 57–4. (The ellipses are integral.)

*March 12, 1916* – Introduce symmetries and rhythms instead of principles. Contradict the existing world orders...

What we are celebrating is at once a buffoonery and a requiem mass...

*June 12, 1916* – What we call Dada is a harlequinade made of nothingness in which all higher questions are involved, a gladiator's gesture, a play with shabby debris, an execution of postured morality and plenitude...

The Dadaist loves the extraordinary, the absurd, even. He knows that life asserts itself in contradictions, and that his age, more than any preceding it, aims at the destruction of all generous impulses. Every kind of mask is therefore welcome to him, every play at hide and seek in which there is an inherent power of deception. The direct and the primitive appear to him in the midst of this huge anti-nature, as being the supernatural itself...

The bankruptcy of ideas having destroyed the concept of humanity to its very innermost strata, the instincts and hereditary backgrounds are now emerging pathologically. Since no art, politics or religious faith seems adequate to dam this torrent, there remain only the *blague* and the bleeding pose...

The Dadaist trusts more in the sincerity of events than in the wit of persons. To him persons may be had cheaply, his own person not excepted. He no longer believes in the comprehension of things from *one* point of departure, but is nevertheless convinced of the union of all things, of totality, to such an extent that he suffers from dissonances to the point of self-dissolution...

The Dadaist fights against the death-throes and death-drunkenness of his time. Averse to every clever reticence, he cultivates the curiosity of one who experiences delight even in the most questionable forms of insubordination. He knows that this world of systems has gone to pieces, and that the age which demanded cash has organized a bargain sale of godless philosophies. Where bad conscience begins for the market-booth owners, mild laughter and mild kindness begin for the Dadaist...

*June 13, 1916* – The image differentiates us. Through the image we comprehend. Whatever it may be – it is night – we hold the print of it in our hands...

The word and the image are one. Painting and composing poetry belong together. Christ is image and word. The word and the image are crucified...

*June 18, 1916* – We have developed the plasticity of the word to a point which can hardly be surpassed. This result was achieved at the price of the logically constructed, rational sentence, and therefore, also, by renouncing the document (which is only possible by means of a time-robbing grouping of sentences in a logically ordered syntax). We were assisted in our efforts by the special circumstances of our age, which does not allow a real talent either to rest or ripen, forcing it to a premature test of its capacities, as well as by the emphatic élan of our group, whose members sought to surpass each other by an even greater intensification and accentuation of their platform. People may smile, if they want to; language will thank us for our zeal, even if there should not be any directly visible results. We have charged the word with forces and energies which made it possible for us to rediscover the evangelical concept of the 'word' (logos) as a magical complex of images...

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*November 21, 1916* – Note about a criticism of individualism: The accentuated 'I' has constant interests, whether they be greedy, dictatorial, vain or lazy. It always follows appetites, so long as it does not become absorbed in society. Whoever renounces his interests, renounces his 'I'. The 'I' and the interests are identical. Therefore, the individualistic-egoistic ideal of the Renaissance ripened to the general union of the mechanized appetites which we now see before us, bleeding and disintegrating.

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*March 30, 1917* – The new art is sympathetic because in an age of total disruption it has conserved the will-to-the-image; because it is inclined to force the image, even though the means and parts be antagonistic. Convention triumphs in the moralistic evaluation of the parts and details; art cannot be concerned with this. It drives toward the in-dwelling, all-connecting life nerve; it is indifferent to external resistance. One might also say: morals are withdrawn from convention, and utilized for the sole purpose of sharpening the senses of measure and weight...

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*April 18, 1917* – Perhaps the art which we are seeking is the key to every former art: a salomonic key that will open all mysteries.

*May 23, 1917* – Dadaism – a mask play, a burst of laughter? And behind it, a synthesis of the romantic, dandyistic and – daemonistic theories of the 19th century.

## 2 Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) 'The Richard Mutt Case'

Duchamp, having abandoned painting and emigrated to America, began to produce 'Ready-mades', works calculated to reveal, among their other effects, the workings of the art institution as inseparable from the attribution of artistic value. In 1917, under the pseudonym 'R. Mutt', he submitted a urinal to the open exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in New York, with the title 'Fountain'. The piece was refused entry (as he no doubt intended). Accompanied by a photo taken by Alfred Stieglitz, the present text was originally published in the second and last issue of *The Blind Man*, New York, May 1917. Duchamp was unquestionably responsible for its publication, though he never acknowledged authorship of the text itself. It is reproduced here from Lucy Lippard (ed.), *Dadas on Art*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1971, p. 143.

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 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.

## 3 Tristan Tzara (1896–1963) 'Dada Manifesto 1918'

Romanian by birth, Tzara arrived in Zurich in 1915 where he participated in the Cabaret Voltaire, which opened early in the following year. He later edited *Dada*, the most important of the French Dada reviews. The 'Manifesto 1918' was originally read in Zurich on 23 March 1918. It was first published in *Dada*, no. 3, 1918 and reprinted in *Sept Manifestes Dada*, Paris, 1924. The present extracts, translated by Ralph Mannheim, are taken from Motherwell, op. cit., pp. 76–82.

The magic of a word – Dada – which has brought journalists to the gates of a world unforeseen, is of no importance to us.

To put out a manifesto you must want: ABC

to fulminate against 1, 2, 3,

to fly into a rage and sharpen your wings to conquer and disseminate little abcs and big abcs, to sign, shout, swear, to organize prose into a form of absolute and irrefutable

evidence, to prove your non plus ultra and maintain that novelty resembles life just as the latest-appearance of some whore proves the essence of God. His existence was previously proved by the accordion, the landscape, the wheedling word. To impose your ABC is a natural thing – hence deposable. Everybody does it in the form of crystalbluffmadonna, monetary system, pharmaceutical product, or a bare leg advertising the ardent sterile spring. The love of novelty is the cross of sympathy, demonstrates a naïve je m'enfoutisme, it is a transitory, positive sign without a cause.

But this need itself is obsolete. In documenting art on the basis of the supreme simplicity: novelty, we are human and true for the sake of amusement, impulsive, vibrant to crucify boredom. At the crossroads of the lights, alert, attentively awaiting the years, in the forest. I write a manifesto and I want nothing, yet I say certain things, and in principle I am against manifestoes, as I am also against principles (half-pints to measure the moral value of every phrase too too convenient; approximation was invented by the impressionists). I write this manifesto to show that people can perform contrary actions together while taking one fresh gulp of air; I am against action; for continuous contradiction, for affirmation too, I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate common sense. [...]

### Dada Means Nothing

If you find it futile and don't want to waste your time on a word that means nothing... The first thought that comes to these people is bacteriological in character: to find its etymological, or at least its historical or psychological origin. We see by the papers that the Kru Negroes call the tail of a holy cow Dada. The cube and the mother in a certain district of Italy are called: Dada. A hobby horse, a nurse both in Russian and Rumanian: Dada. Some learned journalists regard it as an art for babies, other holy jesuses calling the little children of our day, as a relapse into a dry and noisy, noisy and monotonous primitivism. Sensibility is not constructed on the basis of a word; all constructions converge on perfection which is boring, the stagnant idea of a gilded swamp, a relative human product. A work of art should not be beauty in itself, for beauty is dead; it should be neither gay nor sad, neither light nor dark to rejoice or torture the individual by serving him the cakes of sacred aureoles or the sweets of a vaulted race through the atmospheres. A work of art is never beautiful by decree, objectively and for all. Hence criticism is useless, it exists only subjectively, for each man separately, without the slightest character of universality. Does anyone think he has found a psychic base common to all mankind? The attempt of Jesus and the Bible covers with their broad benevolent wings: shit, animals, days. How can one expect to put order into the chaos that constitutes that infinite and shapeless variation: man? The principle: 'love thy neighbor' is a hypocrisy. 'Know thyself' is utopian but more acceptable, for it embraces wickedness. No pity. After the carnage we still retain the hope of a purified mankind. I speak only of myself since I do not wish to convince, I have no right to drag others into my river, I oblige no one to follow me and everybody practices his art in his own way, if he knows the joy that rises like arrows to the astral layers, or that other joy that goes down into the mines of corpse-flowers and fertile spasms. Stalactites: seek them everywhere, in managers magnified by pain, eyes white as the hares of the angels.

And so Dada was born of a need for independence, of a distrust toward unity. Those who are with us preserve their freedom. We recognize no theory. We have enough cubist and futurist academies: laboratories of formal ideas. Is the aim of art to make money and cajole the nice nice bourgeois? Rhymes ring with the assonance of the currencies and the inflexion slips along the line of the belly in profile. All groups of artists have arrived at this trust company after riding their steeds on various comets. While the door remains open to the possibility of wallowing in cushions and good things to eat. [...]

Cubism was born out of the simple way of looking at an object: Cézanne painted a cup 20 centimeters below his eyes, the cubists look at it from above, others complicate appearance by making a perpendicular section and arranging it conscientiously on the side. (I do not forget the creative artists and the profound laws of matter which they established once and for all.) The futurist sees the same cup in movement, a succession of objects one beside the other, and maliciously adds a few force lines. This does not prevent the canvas from being a good or bad painting suitable for the investment of intellectual capital.

The new painter creates a world, the elements of which are also its implements, a sober, definite work without argument. The new artist protests: he no longer paints (symbolic and illusionist reproduction) but creates – directly in stone, wood, iron, tin, boulders – locomotive organisms capable of being turned in all directions by the limpid wind of momentary sensation. All pictorial or plastic work is useless: let it then be a monstrosity that frightens servile minds, and not sweetening to decorate the refectories of animals in human costume, illustrating the sad fable of mankind. –

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Philosophy is the question: from which side shall we look at life, God, the idea or other phenomena. Everything one looks at is false. I do not consider the relative result more important than the choice between cake and cherries after dinner. The system of quickly looking at the other side of a thing in order to impose your opinion indirectly is called dialectics, in other words, haggling over the spirit of fried potatoes while dancing method around it.

If I cry out:

*Ideal, ideal, ideal,  
Knowledge, knowledge, knowledge,  
Boomboom, boomboom, boomboom,*

I have given a pretty faithful version of progress, law, morality and all other fine qualities that various highly intelligent men have discussed in so many books, only to conclude that after all everyone dances to his own personal boomboom, and that the writer is entitled to his boomboom: the satisfaction of pathological curiosity; a private bell for inexplicable needs; a bath; pecuniary difficulties; a stomach with repercussions in life; the authority of the mystic wand formulated as the bouquet of a phantom orchestra made up of silent fiddle bows greased with philtres made of chicken manure. With the blue eye-glasses of an angel they have excavated the inner life for a dime's worth of unanimous gratitude. If all of them are right and if all pills are Pink Pills, let us try for once not to be right. Some people think they can explain rationally, by thought, what they think. But that is extremely relative. Psychoanalysis is a dangerous disease, it

puts to sleep the anti-objective impulses of man and systematizes the bourgeoisie. There is no ultimate Truth. The dialectic is an amusing mechanism which guides us / in a banal kind of way / to the opinions we had in the first place. Does anyone think that, by a minute refinement of logic, he had demonstrated the truth and established the correctness of these opinions? Logic imprisoned by the senses is an organic disease. To this element philosophers always like to add: the power of observation. But actually this magnificent quality of the mind is the proof of its impotence. We observe, we regard from one or more points of view, we choose them among the millions that exist. Experience is also a product of chance and individual faculties. Science disgusts me as soon as it becomes a speculative system, loses its character of utility – that is so useless but is at least individual. I detest greasy objectivity, and harmony, the science that finds everything in order. Carry on, my children, humanity... Science says we are the servants of nature: everything is in order, make love and bash your brains in. Carry on, my children, humanity, kind bourgeois and journalist virgins... I am against systems, the most acceptable system is on principle to have none. To complete oneself, to perfect oneself in one's own littleness, to fill the vessel with one's individuality, to have the courage to fight for and against thought, the mystery of bread, the sudden burst of an infernal propeller into economic lilies [...]

### Active Simplicity

Inability to distinguish between degrees of clarity: to lick the penumbra and float in the big mouth filled with honey and excrement. Measured by the scale of eternity, all activity is vain – (if we allow thought to engage in an adventure the result of which would be infinitely grotesque and add significantly to our knowledge of human impotence). But supposing life to be a poor farce, without aim or initial parturition, and because we think it our duty to extricate ourselves as fresh and clean as washed chrysanthemums, we have proclaimed as the sole basis for agreement: art. It is not as important as we, mercenaries of the spirit, have been proclaiming for centuries. Art afflicts no one and those who manage to take an interest in it will harvest caresses and a fine opportunity to populate the country with their conversation. Art is a private affair, the artist produces it for himself; an intelligible work is the product of a journalist, and because at this moment it strikes my fancy to combine this monstrosity with oil paints: a paper tube simulating the metal that is automatically pressed and poured hatred cowardice villainy. The artist, the poet rejoice at the venom of the masses condensed into a section chief of this industry, he is happy to be insulted: it is a proof of his immutability. When a writer or artist is praised by the newspapers, it is a proof of the intelligibility of his work: wretched lining of a coat for public use; tatters covering brutality, piss contributing to the warmth of an animal brooding vile instincts. Flabby, insipid flesh reproducing with the help of typographical microbes.

We have thrown out the cry-baby in us. Any infiltration of this kind is candied diarrhea. To encourage this act is to digest it. What we need is works that are strong straight precise and forever beyond understanding. Logic is a complication. Logic is always wrong. It draws the threads of notions, words, in their formal exterior, toward illusory ends and centers. Its chains kill, it is an enormous centipede stifling independence. Married to logic, art would live in incest, swallowing, engulfing its own tail, still part of its own body, fornicating within itself, and passion would become a nightmare

tarred with protestantism, a monument, a heap of ponderous gray entrails. But the suppleness, enthusiasm, even the joy of injustice, this little truth which we practise innocently and which makes us beautiful: we are subtle and our fingers are malleable and slippery as the branches of that sinuous, almost liquid plant; it defines our soul, say the cynics. That too is a point of view; but all flowers are not sacred, fortunately, and the divine thing in us is our call to anti-human action. I am speaking of a paper flower for the buttonholes of the gentlemen who frequent the ball of masked life, the kitchen of grace, white cousins lithe or fat. They traffic with whatever we have selected. The contradiction and unity of poles in a single toss can be the truth. If one absolutely insists on uttering this platitude, the appendix of a libidinous, malodorous morality. Morality creates atrophy like every plague produced by intelligence. The control of morality and logic has inflicted us with impassivity in the presence of policemen – who are the cause of slavery, putrid rats infecting the bowels of the bourgeoisie which have infected the only luminous clean corridors of glass that remained open to artists.

Let each man proclaim: there is a great negative work of destruction to be accomplished. We must sweep and clean. Affirm the cleanliness of the individual after the state of madness, aggressive complete madness of a world abandoned to the hands of bandits, who rend one another and destroy the centuries. Without aim or design, without organization: indomitable madness, decomposition. Those who are strong in words or force will survive, for they are quick in defense, the agility of limbs and sentiments flames on their faceted flanks.

Morality has determined charity and pity, two balls of fat that have grown like elephants, like planets, and are called good. There is nothing good about them. Goodness is lucid, clear and decided, pitiless toward compromise and politics. Morality is an injection of chocolate into the veins of all men. This task is not ordered by a supernatural force but by the trust of idea brokers and grasping academicians. Sentimentality: at the sight of a group of men quarreling and bored, they invented the calendar and the medicament wisdom. With a sticking of labels the battle of the philosophers was set off (mercantilism, scales, meticulous and petty measures) and for the second time it was understood that pity is a sentiment like diarrhea in relation to the disgust that destroys health, a foul attempt by carrion corpses to compromise the sun. I proclaim the opposition of all cosmic faculties to this gonorrhea of a putrid sun issued from the factories of philosophical thought, I proclaim bitter struggle with all the weapons of –

### Dadaist Disgust

Every product of disgust capable of becoming a negation of the family is Dada; a protest with the fists of its whole being engaged in destructive action: *Dada; knowledge of all the means rejected up until now by the shamefaced sex of comfortable compromise and good manners: Dada; abolition of logic, which is the dance of those impotent to create: Dada; of every social hierarchy and equation set up for the sake of values by our valets: Dada; every object, all objects, sentiments, obscurities, apparitions and the precise clash of parallel lines are weapons for the fight: Dada; abolition of memory: Dada; abolition of archaeology: Dada; abolition of prophets: Dada; abolition of the future: Dada; absolute and unquestionable faith in every god that is the immediate product of spontaneity: Dada; elegant and unprejudiced leap from a harmony to the other sphere; trajectory of a word tossed like a*

screeching phonograph record; to respect all individuals in their folly of the moment: whether it be serious, fearful, timid, ardent, vigorous, determined, enthusiastic; to divest one's church of every useless cumbersome accessory; to spit out disagreeable or amorous ideas like a luminous waterfall, or coddle them – with the extreme satisfaction that it doesn't matter in the least – with the same intensity in the thicket of one's soul – pure of insects for blood well-born, and gilded with bodies of archangels. Freedom: Dada Dada Dada, a roaring of tense colors, and interlacing of opposites and of all contradictions, grotesques, inconsistencies:

LIFE

### 4 Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974) 'First German Dada Manifesto' ('Collective Dada Manifesto')

Having been active in Zurich Dada, Huelsenbeck returned to Germany in January 1917. Berlin Dada became the most explicitly political part of the movement, associated with German Bolshevism. This first manifesto nevertheless remains largely oriented to artistic struggles, simultaneously mounting an attack on the failure of Expressionism, and allying Dada with 'the new medium', viz. collage and montage. It was delivered at the I. B. Neumann gallery in Berlin in February 1918, and originally published in *Der Zweemann*, Hanover, c.1919; reprinted in Huelsenbeck (ed.), *Dada Almanach*, Berlin, 1920. It was then reissued in 1920 as 'Collective Dada Manifesto' signed by: Huelsenbeck, Tristan Tzara, Franz Jung, George Grosz, Marcel Janco, Raoul Hausmann, Hugo Ball, Pierre Albert-Birot, Hans Arp et al. The present translation by Ralph Mannheim is taken from Motherwell, op. cit., pp. 242–6.

Art in its execution and direction is dependent on the time in which it lives, and artists are creatures of their epoch. The highest art will be that which in its conscious content presents the thousandfold problems of the day, the art which has been visibly shattered by the explosions of last week, which is forever trying to collect its limbs after yesterday's crash. The best and most extraordinary artists will be those who every hour snatch the tatters of their bodies out of the frenzied cataract of life, who, with bleeding hands and hearts, hold fast to the intelligence of their time. Has expressionism fulfilled our expectations of such an art, which should be an expression of our most vital concerns?

No! No! No!

Have the expressionists fulfilled our expectations of an art that burns the essence of life into our flesh?

No! No! No!

Under the pretext of turning inward, the expressionists in literature and painting have banded together into a generation which is already looking forward to honorable mention in the histories of literature and art and aspiring to the most respectable civic distinctions. On pretext of carrying on propaganda for the soul, they have, in their struggle with naturalism, found their way back to the abstract, pathetic gestures which

presuppose a comfortable life free from content or strife. The stages are filling up with kings, poets and Faustian characters of all sorts; the theory of a melioristic philosophy, the psychological naiveté of which is highly significant for a critical understanding of expressionism, runs ghostlike through the minds of men who never act. Hatred of the press, hatred of advertising, hatred of sensations are typical of people who prefer their armchair to the noise of the street, and who even make it a point of pride to be swindled by every smalltime profiteer. That sentimental resistance to the times, which are neither better nor worse, neither more reactionary nor more revolutionary than other times, that weak-kneed resistance, flirting with prayers and incense when it does not prefer to load its cardboard cannon with Attic iambics – is the quality of a youth which never knew how to be young. Expressionism, discovered abroad, and in Germany, true to style, transformed into an opulent idyll and the expectation of a good pension, has nothing in common with the efforts of active men. The signers of this manifesto have, under the battle cry:

Dada!!!!

gathered together to put forward a new art, from which they expect the realization of new ideals. What then is DADAISM?

The word Dada symbolizes the most primitive relation to the reality of the environment; with Dadaism a new reality comes into its own. Life appears as a simultaneous muddle of noises, colors and spiritual rhythms, which is taken unmodified into Dadaist art, with all the sensational screams and fevers of its reckless everyday psyche and with all its brutal reality. This is the sharp dividing line separating Dadaism from all artistic directions up until now and particularly from FUTURISM which not long ago some puddingheads took to be a new version of impressionist realization. Dadaism for the first time has ceased to take an aesthetic attitude toward life, and this it accomplishes by tearing all the slogans of ethics, culture and inwardness, which are merely cloaks for weak muscles, into their components.

#### *The Bruitist poem*

represents a streetcar as it is, the essence of the streetcar with the yawning of Schulze the coupon clipper and the screeching of the brakes.

#### *The Simultaneist poem*

teaches a sense of the merrygoround of all things; while Herr Schulze reads his paper, the Balkan Express crosses the bridge at Nish, a pig squeals in Butcher Nuttke's cellar.

#### *The Static poem*

makes words into individuals, out of the letters spelling woods, steps the woods with its treetops, liveried foresters and wild sows, maybe a boarding house steps out too, and maybe it's called Bellevue or Bella Vista. Dadaism leads to amazing new possibilities and forms of expression in all the arts. It made cubism a dance on the stage, it disseminated the BRUITIST music of the futurists (whose purely Italian concerns it

has no desire to generalize) in every country in Europe. The word Dada in itself indicates the internationalism of the movement which is bound to no frontiers, religions or professions. Dada is the international expression of our times, the great rebellion of artistic movements, the artistic reflex of all these offensives, peace congresses, riots in the vegetable market, midnight suppers at the Esplanade, etc., etc. Dada champions the use of the

*new medium in painting.*

Dada is a CLUB, founded in Berlin, which you can join without commitments. In this club every man is chairman and every man can have his say in artistic matters. Dada is not a pretext for the ambition of a few literary men (as our enemies would have you believe), Dada is a state of mind that can be revealed in any conversation whatever, so that you are compelled to say: this man is a DADAIST – that man is not; the Dada Club consequently has members all over the world, in Honolulu as well as New Orleans and Meseritz. Under certain circumstances to be a Dadaist may mean to be more a businessman, more a political partisan than an artist – to be an artist only by accident – to be a Dadaist means to let oneself be thrown by things, to oppose all sedimentation; to sit in a chair for a single moment is to risk one's life (Mr Wengs pulled his revolver out of his pants pocket). A fabric tears under your hand, you say yes to a life that strives upward by negation. Affirmation – negation: the gigantic hocuspocus of existence fires the nerves of the true Dadaist – and there he is, reclining, hunting, cycling – half Pantagruel, half St Francis, laughing and laughing. Blast the aesthetic-ethical attitude! Blast the bloodless abstraction of expressionism! Blast the literary hollowheads and their theories for improving the world! For Dadaism in word and image, for all the Dada things that go on in the world! To be against this manifesto is to be a Dadaist!

### 5 Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974) and Raoul Hausmann (1886–1971) 'What is Dadaism and what does it want in Germany?'

The First German Dada Manifesto emphasized 'movement' and 'struggle'. The remaining requirement for a 'program of action' was fulfilled by the present manifesto. Its utopian character is evident. Some erstwhile Dadaists such as Grosz and Heartfield rapidly took the more practical step of joining the German Communist Party (KPD) at its foundation in January 1919. The manifesto appeared in *Der Dada*, no. 1, 1919, where it was co-signed by Jefim Golyscheff, and was reprinted in Huelsenbeck's *En Avant Dada*, Hanover, 1920. The present translation by Ralph Mannheim is from Motherwell, op. cit., pp. 41–2.

#### 1 Dadaism demands:

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



2 *The Central Council demands:*

- a) Daily meals at public expense for all creative and intellectual men and women on the Potsdamer Platz (Berlin);
- b) Compulsory adherence of all clergymen and teachers to the Dadaist articles of faith;
- c) The most brutal struggle against all directions of so-called 'workers of the spirit' (Hiller, Adler), against their concealed bourgeoisism, against expressionism and post-classical education as advocated by the Sturm group;
- d) The immediate erection of a state art center, elimination of concepts of property in the new art (expressionism); the concept of property is entirely excluded from the super-individual movement of Dadaism which liberates all mankind;
- e) Introduction of the simultaneist poem as a Communist state prayer;
- f) Requisition of churches for the performance of bruitism, simultaneist and Dadaist poems;
- g) Establishment of a Dadaist advisory council for the remodelling of life in every city of over 50,000 inhabitants;
- h) Immediate organization of a large scale Dadaist propaganda campaign with 150 circuses for the enlightenment of the proletariat;
- i) Submission of all laws and decrees to the Dadaist central council for approval;
- j) Immediate regulation of all sexual relations according to the views of international Dadaism through establishment of a Dadaist sexual center.

The Dadaist revolutionary central council.  
 German group: Hausmann, Huelsenbeck  
 Business Office: Charlottenburg, Kantstrasse 118.  
 Applications for membership taken at business office.

6 **Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974) from *En Avant Dada***

Huelsenbeck wrote a major article surveying the history of the Dada movement from its inception in Zurich to its virtual dissolution by 1920. The closing passages, reprinted here, repeat the alignment of Dada to Bolshevism while reserving to it a wider programme than mere economic amelioration. The article is also suspicious of the widespread ethos of (re-)construction, and maintains a hostile attitude to both German and French national traditions in culture. Originally published as *En Avant Dada: Eine Geschichte des Dadaismus*, Hanover, 1920. This extract is taken from the translation by Ralph Mannheim in Motherwell, op. cit., pp. 42–5.

[...] In an article on expressionism Kornfeld makes the distinction between the ethical man and the psychological man. The ethical man has the child-like piety and faith which permit him to kneel at some altar and recognize some God, who has the power to lead men from their misery to some paradise. The psychological man has journeyed vainly through the infinite, has recognized the limits of his spiritual possibilities, he knows that every 'system' is a seduction with all the consequences of seduction and every God an opportunity for financiers.

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

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

The Dadaist considers it necessary to come out against art, because he has seen through its fraud as a moral safety valve. Perhaps this militant attitude is a last gesture of inculcated honesty, perhaps it merely amuses the Dadaist, perhaps it means nothing at all. But in any case, art (including culture, spirit, athletic club), regarded from a serious point of view, is a large-scale swindle. And this... most especially in Germany, where the most absurd idolatry of all sorts of divinities is beaten into the child in order that the grown man and taxpayer should automatically fall on his knees when, in the interest of the state or some smaller gang of thieves, he receives the order to worship some 'great spirit.' I maintain again and again: the whole spirit business is a vulgar utilitarian swindle. In this war the Germans (especially in Saxony where the most infamous hypocrites reside) strove to justify themselves at home and abroad with Goethe and Schiller. Culture can be designated solemnly and with complete naivety as the national spirit become form, but also it can be characterized as a compensatory phenomenon, an obeisance to an invisible judge, as veronal for the conscience. The

Germans are masters of dissembling, they are unquestionably the magicians (in the vaudeville sense) among nations, in every moment of their life they conjure up a culture, a spirit, a superiority which they can hold as a shield in front of their endangered bellies. It is this hypocrisy that has always seemed utterly foreign and incomprehensible to the French, a sign of diabolical malice. The German is unnaïve, he is twofold and has a double base.

Here we have no intention of standing up for any nation. The French have the least right of anyone to be praised as a *grande nation*, now that they have brought the chauvinism of our times to its greatest possible height. The German has all the qualities and drawbacks of the idealist. You can look at it whichever way you like. You can construe the idealism that distorts things and makes them function as an absolute (the discipline of corpses) whether it be vegetarianism, the rights of man or the monarchy, as a pathological deformation, or you can call it ecstatically 'the bridge to eternity,' 'the goal of life,' or more such platitudes. The expressionists have done quite a bit in that direction. The Dadaist is instinctively opposed to all this. He is a man of reality who loves wine, women and advertising, his culture is above all of the body. *Instinctively he sees his mission in smashing the cultural ideology of the Germans.* I have no desire to justify the Dadaist. He acts instinctively, just as a man might say he was a thief out of 'passion,' or a stamp-collector by preference. The 'ideal' has shifted: the abstract artist has become (if you insist, dear reader) a wicked materialist, with the abstruse characteristic of considering the care of his stomach and stock jobbing more honorable than philosophy. 'But that's nothing new,' those people will shout who can never tear themselves away from the 'old.' But it is something startlingly new, since for the first time in history the consequence has been drawn from the question: What is German culture? (Answer: Shit), and this culture is attacked with all the instruments of satire, bluff, irony and finally, violence. And in a great common action.

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

The gentlemen who demand the 'constructive' are among the most suspicious types of a caste that has long been bankrupt. It has become sufficiently apparent in our time that law, order and the constructive, the 'understanding for an organic development,' are only symbols, curtains and pretexts for fat behinds and treachery. If the Dadaist movement is nihilism, then nihilism is a part of life, a truth which would be confirmed by any professor of zoology. Relativism, Dadaism, Nihilism, Action, Revolution, Gramophone. It makes one sick at heart to hear all that together, and as such (insofar as it becomes visible in the form of a theory), it all seems very stupid and antiquated. Dada does not take a dogmatic attitude. If Knatschke proves today that Dada is old stuff, Dada doesn't care. A tree is old stuff too, and people eat dinner day after day without experiencing any particular disgust. This whole physiological attitude toward

the world, that goes so far as to make – as Nietzsche the great philologist did – all culture depend on dry or liquid nutriment, is of course to be taken with a grain of salt. It is just as true and just as silly as the opposite. But we are after all human and commit ourselves by the mere fact of drinking coffee today and tea tomorrow. Dada foresees its end and laughs. Death is a thoroughly Dadaist business, in that it signifies nothing at all. Dada has the right to dissolve itself and will exert this right when the time comes. With a businesslike gesture, freshly pressed pants, a shave and a haircut, it will go down into the grave, after having made suitable arrangements with the Thanatos Funeral Home. The time is not far distant. We have very sensitive fingertips and a larynx of glazed paper. The mediocrities and the gentry in search of 'something mad' are beginning to conquer Dada. At every corner of our dear German fatherland, literary cliques, with Dada as a background, are endeavoring to assume a heroic pose. A movement must have sufficient talent to make its decline interesting and pleasant. In the end it is immaterial whether the Germans keep on with their cultural humbug or not. Let them achieve immortality with it. But if Dada dies here, it will some day appear on another planet with rattles and kettledrums, pot covers and simultaneous poems, and remind the old God that there are still people who are very well aware of the complete idiocy of the world.

## 7 Alexander Blok (1880–1921) 'The Decline of Humanism'

Almost alone in his milieu Blok allied himself with the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917. His poem 'The Twelve' of January 1918 celebrates the struggle of a group of Red Guards through a blinding snowstorm; they are being led, the poem's conclusion discloses, by the figure of Jesus Christ carrying a red banner. This contemporaneous lecture was delivered on 9 April 1918. After it, Blok reportedly said, 'For me, it [the revolution] is not just a fundamental change in all our outward life but something much more. First of all, it is the birth of a new kind of man such has never been seen on earth before.' The present extract is taken from the translation by I. Frieman in Alexander Blok, *The Spirit of Music*, London, 1946, pp. 68–70. (See also IIA5.)

Every movement has its birth in the spirit of music, through which it acts, but after a lapse of time it degenerates and begins to lose the musical, the primal element out of which it was born and, as a result, perishes. It ceases to be culture and becomes civilization. Thus it was in the ancient world – thus it is with us.

The guardian of the spirit of music becomes just those elements to which music always reverts (*revertitur in terram suam unde erat*): namely the people or the barbaric masses. Those masses who have never had anything but the spirit to call their own remain, therefore, the guardians of culture in those epochs in which a limping and no longer resounding civilization has become the enemy of culture – and this in spite of the fact that civilization governs all the factors of progress such as science and technique and the rest. This is no paradox. A civilization dies and a new one, similar to the perishing movement, rises out of the same musical elements.

The culture of the future was not being nourished by the discordant efforts of civilization to remedy that which cannot be improved, not by resuscitating the dead, or by trying to unify Humanism anew, but by those synthesized, revolutionary exertions,



by those musical and will-stressed floods and forces to which Wagner, in particular, has given expression. The entire complicated system of poetic and musical rhythms (especially towards the end of the nineteenth century) against which the Philistines of Humanism took up a more and more hostile and stubborn attitude, was nothing but the musical preparation of a new cultural movement, a reflection of those elemental rhythms of nature out of which emerged the overture of the present epoch.

Music followed its accustomed ways. It floated like a shimmering cloud above the last of the Humanists and then, darkened, descended as rain or enveloped mankind of the nineteenth century in a shroud of mist through which those errant beings who had lost their way, called out trying to find each other.

In Europe's most important lyrics of those times the musical sounds perceived through rain and mist resounded. Under the sodden earth there trembled a musical rustling and roaring as the elemental voices of the barbaric masses and the utterances of the great artists of the century rose. That new flood, which had been flowing underground for a century, swelled more and more, breached the surface of civilization now here, now there, until with irresistible force it broke through, intoxicated and saturated with the spirit of music.

The civilized ear apprehended that music as a wild choir of discordant voices. For a great many the music of that time was intolerable, and I do not exaggerate by any means when I maintain that many of us, overwhelmed by it, broke down under its stridency. It was destructive of all those achievements of civilization which were considered unassailable. It ran counter to all our established melodies of 'Truth, Goodness and Beauty' and it confronted, almost with hostility, the education and cultural development which Humanist Europe had inherited from the preceding century.

It is an established fact that a new movement, hostile to the civilized world, extended itself, a movement which disrupted civilization and so shook the continent that at the very outset it resembled a group of scattered islands in danger of being swept away by the all-destroying flood. The most important things which civilization had produced, from the Humanistic viewpoint of ethics, aesthetics and justice, were menaced. As civilized Humanists we can never submit to the new movement's persuasion. But if we cannot submit, if we must cling rather to the values which the Humanistic civilization had proclaimed as indestructible, shall we not then soon be isolated from that culture and that world which perceives in the broken flood the rustling and roaring of the elemental music of the masses?

Man is animal; man is plant and flower; in him slumbers the beast, in him lives mimosa-like softness. Both are transitory appearances, sometimes masks. This flight of appearances involves a change of methods; *man's entire being is in revolt; he has risen from a century-long stupor of civilization. Spirit, soul and body have been caught up by the storm and, in the turmoil of the spiritual, political and social revolutions which have their causes in the cosmos, there takes place a transformation – the birth of the new man.*

I have attempted to determine the climacteric in the past of Humanism's decline. The artists who remained faithful to the spirit of music I look upon as witnesses of that decline because they participated in it. It is time to order and revalue that crisis according to these characteristics: according to its artistic sensibility and to the degree of perfection with which its rhythms mirrored the world's life. All other characteristics,

national characteristics not expected, are, to my mind, of secondary or of no consideration at all.

We Russians have no historical memories, but in us lives the elemental, and is sufficiently strong; it is still reserved for our immeasurable country to realize the significant. We have not heard of Petrarch or Hutten – only of the wind which courses across the steppes and the musical notes of our own wild nature which resound in the ears of Gogol, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky.

I sum up and draw the conclusion that there can be no shadow of doubt as to the final outcome of the struggle and that a new movement, born out of the spirit of music, has taken the place of the old human civilization. So far, it still resembles a runaway stream which carries with it the debris of civilization. But already in this movement a metamorphosis out of which the new personality is to emerge is taking shape: not the ethical, political or humanist, being but, in the words of Wagner, the creative being, the artistic person, who alone will be capable of living life in the epoch of storms and whirlwinds into which mankind unwittingly has jettisoned itself.

## 8 Novembergruppe: Draft Manifesto 1918 and 'Guidelines' 1919

The Novembergruppe was an organization of artists formed on 3 December 1918 in response to the German revolution of November 1918. Leading figures included Max Pechstein and Cesar Klein. Others involved were Rudolf Belling, Heinrich Campendonk and Otto Müller. After the defeat of the Revolution, and the establishment of the bourgeois Weimar Republic, differences of opinion emerged about the group's role and commitments. These early statements mark the utopian moment of the group's enthusiastic foundation. The present translations are taken from V. H. Miesel (ed.), *Voices of German Expressionism*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1970, pp. 169–70, 171.

### Manifesto

We are standing on the fertile soil of the revolution.

Our slogan is: *Freedom, Equality, and Fraternity!*

We are uniting because we have human and artistic convictions in common.

We believe that our first duty is to dedicate all our energies to the moral regeneration of a young and free Germany.

We plead for excellence in all things and we shall support this plea with all the means at our disposal.

We insist upon an unlimited freedom of expression as well as public acknowledgement of it.

We believe it is our special duty to gather together all significant artistic talent and dedicate it to the collective well-being of the nation.

We belong to no party, no class. We are human beings, human beings who work tirelessly at the task appointed us by nature. It is a task, like any other if it is to benefit the whole *Volk*, which must take into consideration the general public good and requires the appreciation and recognition of that general public.

We respect every achievement in every sphere and we are of the opinion that the most competent men will assume the heaviest duties, submitting themselves to such duties for the sake and benefit of the whole *Volk*.

Our goal – each at his place in hard, tireless, collective, creative work.

We feel young, free, and pure.

Our spotless love belongs to a young, free Germany and we shall fight against all backwardness and reaction, bravely, without reserve, and with all the power at our command.

We send our fondest greetings to all those who have heard the call and feel responsible – Cubists, Futurists, and Expressionists. Join us!

### Guidelines

- I. *The November Group* is the (German) alliance of radical artists.
- II. *The November Group* is not a union for the defence of economic interests, nor is it (merely) an association for exhibition purposes.
- III. *The November Group* wishes to exercise a decisive influence upon all artistic matters by merging into a general alliance all like-minded creative forces.
- IV. We demand a voice and an active role in:
  1. All architectural projects as a matter of public concern: city planning, new settlements, the public buildings of government, industry and the social services, private building projects, the preservation of monuments, the suppression of artistically worthless architectural monuments.
  2. The reorganization of art schools and their curricula: the suspension of authoritarian supervision, the election of teachers by artists' associations and students, the elimination of scholarships, the unification of architecture, sculpture, painting, and design schools, the establishment of studios for work and experimentation.
  3. The transformation of museums: the suppression of biased collecting policies, the elimination of an overemphasis upon the acquiring of objects having only scholarly value; their transformation into people's art centres, unprejudiced centres of timeless principles.
  4. The allotment of exhibition halls: the elimination of special privileges and capitalistic influences.
  5. Legislation on artistic matters: giving artists equal rights as spiritual creators, the protection of artistic property, the elimination of all duties and taxes on works of art.
- V. *The November Group* will demonstrate their solidarity and their achievement by continuous public announcements and by an annual exhibition in November. The central committee will supervise these continuing announcements and exhibitions. All members are entitled to equal exhibition space and will not be judged by any jury. The central committee will also arrange all special exhibits.

### 9 Novembergruppe Opposition: 'Open Letter to the Novembergruppe'

A Left Opposition to the Novembergruppe leadership coalesced as the group appeared to vacillate over its commitments to the Revolution. In artistic terms the Opposition was opposed to the individualism associated with Expressionism and sought to develop instead either a 'new objectivity' or a 'non-objective art'. Its 'Open Letter' was originally published in *Der Gegner*, II, nos. 8–9, June, 1921. The present translation was made by Elizabeth Lane-Thussu for the Open University, 1983.

The present leaders of the November Group are continually insisting that the November Group is no more than a purely aesthetic-revolutionary organization, founded also for economic reasons. They are lying. The first circular, which called for its setting up, expressly stressed the 'revolutionary' artists' commitment to the Revolution. The first statement of aims begins with the sentences: 'At last our call to arms has been taken up. The Revolution has come down on our side. The Revolution demands that we painters, sculptors and architects of the new spirit join together!' [...]

The November Group was founded ostensibly by artists who wanted to realize a revolutionary desire for a new ideal community and for cooperation with the working people, free from the machinations of elitist art clubs and dealers' speculations. That is why young and proletarian-oriented artists joined up with the November Group. In innumerable meetings and statements they stressed that the November Group should only exclude the Right and in no way the Left. Not for a moment did any of the leading members seriously confront the problem of hierarchy common to all other bourgeois artists' groups, even with the awareness afforded them by the proletarian revolution – all they did was to confuse the issue with their slippery rhetoric, so that they could foster their own egos in the old sordid way of artists, by having the largest possible membership, a despised herd they looked down upon from the heights of their fame. [...]

Those at the top realized that among the younger members there was a certain number who believed in the proletarian revolution, and felt the necessity of integrating artists into the body of the workers; and that a certain section of the membership did not wish to be artists in the bourgeois-cultural sense, because they saw the way to fulfil themselves not in promoting an apparently revolutionary aesthetic, but instead sought the justification of the artist's existence as the instrument of the people's latent desires for a new, untainted way of life, and because they did not want to appear to be superior, conceited experts, dismissing in a high-handed way any attempts for a better way of working, condemning them on the basis of values borrowed from a bourgeois aesthetic. All the hopes and wishes of this section of the membership were squashed by these leaders, who used all kinds of dodges and misleading references to the 'well-known lack of unity among artists' on the one hand, and a brutal exploitation of their powers, on the other. [...]

What was the use of the revolutionary members demanding a clear-cut stand against the authorities over the pressures and difficulties they made with the November

Group's participation in the Great Berlin Art Exhibition at the Lehrter Bahnhof? None, because these leaders had their reputations and sinecures to protect despite the views of the group's vital forces. The Ministry had threatened not to open the November Group section if, as last year, works were exhibited which did not correspond with the authorities' ideas about art. So they submitted; the President of the Great Berlin Exhibition committee, Schlichting, mobilized a completely false moral campaign *against two pictures by Rudolf Schlichter and Otto Dix that didn't find favour with him*, threatened them with the Public Prosecutor, and even the Group, it appeared, had to submit; Reichspräsident Ebert sauntered through the galleries at the opening, showing the futility of the exercise. And these sycophants of artists were happy – their egos could bask in the presence of their 'rulers' – those lackeys of exploitation and supporters of courts martial.

These leading lights have received a box on the ears for their lack of principle, but we, who feel responsible for promoting an ideal society, have never had nor ever will have anything in common with them. Our love is for the proletariat, because only the proletariat will bring about, through communism, equality for all people and forms of work, and freedom from slavery and exploitation. We have not become artists in order to have a comfortable and irresponsible life, living off the exploiters' demand for luxury. *We feel solidarity with the proletariat's struggle* for the realization of a humane society, in which there is no oppression, in which we will not, as we do now, have the contradiction of working in opposition to society only to exist by its permission, like parasites.

We feel bound by the task laid on us by the world's proletariat in their struggle for a new existence inspired by a new spirit. We are aware of our duty to work together with the masses towards the achievement of this society. And so we say this to those prominent figures: *Our goal must be seen to be the overthrow of this aesthetic-formalist pedantry, either by a new objectivity, born of a disgust with exploitative, bourgeois society; or by the explorative preliminary attempts of a non-objective art form which is equally seeking a victory over individualism in rejecting this aesthetic and this society, to benefit a new kind of person.* There is neither understanding nor room for these ideas in the November Group as it is presently constituted; the leaders dismiss such demands as *nonsensical rubbish* and on the contrary emphasize their own position, which comes close to being a *dictatorship of 'fashionable' people and businessmen* over the energetic, progressive members. The November Group should not let its name become a term for fellow-travellers, a label which could hang on for years, and we must resist this dictatorship; we must shake off these leaders and by our secession force other individuals to that decision. The actions of the leading figures who neither have ideas nor have ever been capable of leading, who suppress us out of pure self-interest, have resulted in the most deplorable compromises such as submitting to the orders of the Ministry of Culture and the Berlin Artists' Association; their actions have also led to the November Group being totally unaware of the public, although their sufferance of the efforts of the proletarian-minded artists has served to lend the group a revolutionary image; but they have stamped on all the progressive spirits in so far as there were any, instead of extending a friendly hand to them. But a group that is not capable these days of recognizing and adopting the strivings and goals of these independent spirits has no justification for its existence.

This is the decisive hour: *expressing the will of the people, carrying out productive work for a new, emerging community* demands relentless rejection of the trade in compromises. We call on those members who grasp *that today Art means protest against the sleep-walking bourgeoisie, against continual exploitation and philistinism, to join in our opposition* and help to carry out the necessary purge.

We know that we have to be the expression of the revolutionary forces, the instrument of the needs of the age and the people, and we reject any connection with the aesthetic profiteers and pedants from tomorrow onwards. We must bear witness to the revolution, to the new society, and this must be no mere lip-service, and so we want to put our explicit aims into effect, to co-operate in establishing the new humane society, the community of workers!

#### *The November Group Opposition:*

Otto Dix, Max Dungert, George Grosz, Raoul Hausmann, Hanna Höch, Ernst Krantz, Mutzenbecher, Thomas Ring, Rudolf Schlichter, Georg Scholz, Willy Zierath.

### 10 Walter Gropius (1883–1969) Reply to Arbeitsrat für Kunst Questionnaire

In early 1919 a questionnaire was circulated by the Arbeitsrat für Kunst (Workers' Council for Art), an artists' organization, like the Novembergruppe generated by the November Revolution. Thirteen questions addressed issues ranging from art education and public housing to the best ways for modern art to 'harmonize' with the people. Gropius, founder and director of the Bauhaus (see IIC15), was at this time a member of the Arbeitsrat, and succeeded Bruno Taut as Chairman in March 1919. His answers to questions V and VI concerned the position of the artist in a socialist state and the nature and role of art exhibitions. Originally published in *Yes! Voices of the Workers' Council for Art*, Berlin, 1919. The present translation is taken from Miesel, op. cit., pp. 173–4.

V. Art and state are irreconcilable concepts. They are by their very nature opposed. The creative spirit, vital and dynamic, unique and unpredictable, refuses to be limited by the laws of the state or by the straitjacket of bourgeois values. And if the state uses force to interfere with the free development of such 'abnormal' creators it is actually cutting its own life's blood supply. Thus our age is suffocated by a world of shopkeepers, is trapped in a quagmire of materialism. The real task of socialism is to destroy the evil demon of commercialism in order that the creative spirit of the *Volk* might once more flourish. The mentality of our nation has already been profoundly shaken by the recent disaster and after the total collapse of the old life it has been made so sensitive that it might make Germany more receptive to the new spirit than any of the other European nations. For war, hunger, and pestilence have jarred us out of our obstinacy, they have aroused us out of our inertia and self-satisfaction, they have finally awakened our sleepy and lazy hearts. Through pain we have been taught once again to feel. Feeling is, after all, the source of inspiration, feeling leads to finding, to that creative power which organizes and structures, in short – in the broadest sense – to a passion for building. And this passion for building, for structure – *this architectural*

*spirit* – is the natural antithesis to the world of shopkeepers, to the spirit of disintegration and destruction which is the deadly enemy of all art.

VI. Art exhibitions are the misbegotten creatures of an art-starved Europe. Since art is dead in the actual life of civilized nations it has been relegated to these grotesque morgues and there prostituted. Today a work of art no longer occupies a well-defined and hallowed place in the midst of the *Volk*, it is free as a bird and has become merely a luxury object in the salons of the bourgeoisie. An art exhibition is its warehouse and market. The *Volk* leaves empty-handed and has no conception of a living art. Therefore, in place of the old salon art exhibition, let us have *traveling art shows* in temporary, brightly painted huts or even tents, shows featuring not only paintings and sculptures but also architectural models, large and small or stereo and cinematic presentations of architecture. The task of future art exhibitions is to show painting and sculpture in the context of architecture, to show how they function in buildings and thus to make art once again living and vital.

## 11 Max Beckmann (1884–1950) 'Creative Credo'

The author was invalided out of the German Army in 1915. His 'Credo' was composed in 1918 at the moment of the Empire's defeat and the subsequent revolution of November 1918, but before the defeat of the revolution and the establishment of the Weimar Republic, which took place in 1919. Originally published in Kasimir Edschmid (ed.), *Schöpferische Konfession, Tribüne der Kunst und Zeit*, XIII, Berlin, 1920. The present translation is taken from Miesel, op. cit., pp. 107–9.

I paint and I'm satisfied to let it go at that since I'm by nature tongue-tied and only a terrific interest in something can squeeze a few words out of me.

Nowadays whenever I listen to painters who have a way with words, frequently with real astonishment, I become a little uneasy about whether I can find language beautiful and spirited enough to convey my enthusiasm and passion for the objects of the visible world. However, I've finally calmed myself about this. I'm now satisfied to tell myself: 'You are a painter, do your job and let those who can, talk.' I believe that essentially I love painting so much because it forces me to be objective. There is nothing I hate more than sentimentality. The stronger my determination grows to grasp the unutterable things of this world, the deeper and more powerful the emotion burning inside me about our existence, the tighter I keep my mouth shut and the harder I try to capture the terrible, thrilling monster of life's vitality and to confine it, to beat it down and to strangle it with crystal-clear, razor-sharp lines and planes.

I don't cry. I hate tears, they are a sign of slavery. I keep my mind on my business – on a leg, on an arm, on the penetration of the surface thanks to the wonderful effects of foreshortening, on the partitioning of space, on the relationship of straight and curved lines, on the interesting placement of small, variously and curiously shaped round forms next to straight and flat surfaces, walls, tabletops, wooden crosses, or house façades. Most important for me is volume, trapped in height and width; volume on the plane, depth without losing the awareness of the plane, the architecture of the picture.

Piety? God? Oh beautiful, much misused words. I'm both when I have done my work in such a way that I can finally die. A painted or drawn hand, a grinning or

weeping face, that is my confession of faith; if I have felt anything at all about life it can be found there.

The war has now dragged to a miserable end. But it hasn't changed my ideas about life in the least, it has only confirmed them. We are on our way to very difficult times. But right now, perhaps more than before the war, I need to be with people. In the city. That is just where we belong these days. We must be a part of all the misery which is coming. We have to surrender our heart and our nerves, we must abandon ourselves to the horrible cries of pain of a poor deluded people. Right now we have to get as close to the people as possible. It's the only course of action which might give some purpose to our superfluous and selfish existence – that we give people a picture of their fate. And we can only do that if we love humanity.

Actually it's stupid to love mankind, nothing but a heap of egoism (and we are a part of it too). But I love it anyway. I love its meanness, its banality, its dullness, its cheap contentment, and its oh-so-very-rare heroism. But in spite of this, every single person is a unique event, as if he had just fallen from a star. And isn't the city the best place to experience this? They say that the air in the country is cleaner and that there are fewer temptations. But I believe that dirt is the same wherever you are. Cleanliness is a matter of the will. Farmers and landscapes are all very beautiful and occasionally even refreshing. But the great orchestra of humanity is still in the city.

What was really unhealthy and disgusting before the war was that business interests and a mania for success and influence had infected all of us in one form or another. Well, we have had four years of staring straight into the stupid face of horror. Perhaps a few people were really impressed. Assuming, of course, anyone had the slightest inclination to be impressed.

Complete withdrawal in order to achieve that famous purity people talk about as well as the loss of self in God, right now all that is too bloodless and also loveless for me. You don't dare do that kind of thing until your work is finished and our work is painting.

I certainly hope we are finished with much of the past. Finished with the mindless imitation of visible reality; finished with feeble, archaic, and empty decoration, and finished with that false, sentimental, and swooning mysticism! I hope we will achieve a transcendental objectivity out of a deep love for nature and mankind. The sort of thing you can see in the art of Mälesskircher, Grünewald, Breughel, Cézanne, and Van Gogh.

Perhaps with the decline of business, perhaps (something I hardly dare hope) with the development of communism, the love of objects for their own sake will become stronger. I believe this is the only possibility open to us for achieving a great universal style.

That is my crazy hope which I can't give up, which in spite of everything is stronger in me than ever before. And someday I want to make buildings along with my pictures. To build a tower in which mankind can shriek out its rage and despair and all their poor hopes and joys and wild yearning. A new church. Perhaps this age may help me.

## 12 Max Pechstein (1881–1955) 'Creative Credo'

An Expressionist painter since the formation of the Brücke group in Dresden in 1905 (see IB4), Pechstein here offers a singularly expressionist 'Credo'. His individualism would at

this date (1920) have sat in a somewhat strained relationship with the more overtly left-wing elements of the post-war German avant-garde. Originally published in Edschmid, op. cit. The present translation is taken from Miesel, op. cit., pp. 180–1.

Work!

Ecstasy! Smash your brains! Chew, stuff your self, gulp it down, mix it around! The bliss of giving birth! The crack of the brush, best of all as it stabs the canvas. Tubes of color squeezed dry. And the body?

It doesn't matter.

Health?

Make yourself healthy!

Sickness doesn't exist! Only work and I'll say that again – only blessed work! Paint! Dive into colors, roll around in tones! in the slush of chaos! Chew the broken-off mouthpiece of your pipe, press your naked feet into the earth. Crayon and pen pierce sharply into the brain, they stab into every corner, furiously they press into the whiteness. Black laughs like the devil on paper, grins in bizarre lines, comforts in velvety planes, excites and caresses. The storm roars – sand blows about – the sun shatters to pieces – and nevertheless, the gentle curve of the horizon quietly embraces everything.

Beaten down, exhausted, just a worm, collapse into your bed. A deep sleep will make you forget your defeat. A new day! A new struggle! Ecstasy again! One day after the other, a sparkling, constantly changing chain of days. One experience after the other. That damned brain! What is it that churns and twitches and jumps in there? Hah! Tear your head off, or grab it with both hands, turn it around, twist it off. Then we'll scrape it out and scratch it out. Get rid of every last little bit. Sand! Water! Scrub it clean. There now!! Almost as good as new! an unused skull. Night! Night! No stars, pitch black. Without desire!

Tomorrow is another day.

### 13 George Grosz (1893–1959) 'My New Pictures'

Grosz had made a series of transitions, from an amalgam of Futurism and Expressionism, to Berlin Dada, and to membership of the German Communist Party on its foundation in January 1919. By 1920 he had virtually abandoned painting and had produced several portfolios of prints attacking bourgeois society. These were published by the Communist-oriented press Malik Verlag. The 'new pictures' to which he refers in this text of 1920 mark a resumption of painting in a style influenced on the one hand, ideologically, by the demands for a socialist objectivity, and on the other, technically, by the more traditional forms of pictorial space paradoxically exemplified in the concurrent work of conservatives like Carrà (IIIA4). Originally published in *Das Kunstblatt*, V, no. 1, Berlin, 1921. The present translation is taken from Miesel, op. cit., pp. 185–8. (For further texts by Grosz see IVB8 and IVC7.).

Today art is absolutely a secondary affair. Anyone able to see beyond their studio walls will admit this. Just the same, art is something which demands a clearcut decision from artists. You can't be indifferent about your position in this trade, about your attitude toward the problem of the masses, a problem which is no problem if you can see

straight. Are you on the side of the exploiters or on the side of the masses who are giving these exploiters a good tanning?

You can't avoid this issue with the old rigmarole about the sublimity and holiness and transcendental character of art. These days an artist is bought by the best-paying jobber or Maecenas – this business of commissions is called in a bourgeois state the advancement of culture. But today's painters and poets don't want to know anything at all about the masses. How else can you explain the fact that virtually nothing is exhibited which in any way reflects the ideals and efforts, the will of the aspiring masses.

The artistic revolutions of painters and poets are certainly interesting and aesthetically valuable – but still, in the last analysis, they are studio problems and many artists who earnestly torment themselves about such matters end up by succumbing to skepticism and bourgeois nihilism. This happens because persisting in their individualistic artistic eccentricities they never learn to understand revolutionary issues with any clarity; in fact, they rarely bother with such things. Why, there are even art-revolutionary painters who haven't freed themselves from painting Christ and the apostles; now, at the very time when it is their revolutionary duty to double their efforts at propaganda in order to purify the world of supernatural forces, God and His angels, and thereby sharpen mankind's awareness of its true relationship to the world. Those symbols, long since exhausted, and the mystical raptures of that stupid saint hocus-pocus, today's painting is full of that stuff and what can it possibly mean to us? All this painted nonsense certainly can't stand up to reality. Life is much too strong for it.

What should you do to give content to your paintings?

Go to a proletarian meeting; look and listen how people there, people just like you, discuss some small improvement of their lot.

And understand – these masses are the ones who are reorganizing the world. Not you! But you can work with them. You could help them if you wanted to! And that way you could learn to give your art a content which was supported by the revolutionary ideals of the workers.

As for my works in this issue, I want to say the following: I am again trying to give an absolutely realistic picture of the world. I want every man to understand me – without that profundity fashionable these days, without those depths which demand a veritable diving outfit stuffed with cabalistic and metaphysical hocus-pocus. In my efforts to develop a clear and simple style I can't help drawing closer to Carrà. Nevertheless, everything which is metaphysical and bourgeois about Carrà's work repels me. My work should be interpreted as training, as a hard workout, without any vision into eternity! I am trying in my so-called works of art to construct something with a completely realistic foundation. Man is no longer an individual to be examined in subtle psychological terms, but a collective, almost mechanical concept. Individual destiny no longer matters. Just as the ancient Greeks, I would like to create absolutely simple sport symbols which would be so easily understood that no commentary would be necessary.

I am suppressing colour. Lines are used in an impersonal, photographic way to construct volumes. Once more stability, construction, and practical purpose – e.g., sport, engineer, and machine but devoid of Futurist romantic dynamism.

Once more to establish control over line and form – it's no longer a question of conjuring up on canvas brightly coloured Expressionistic soul-tapestries – the object-



ivity and clarity of an engineer's drawing is preferable to the uncontrolled twaddle of the cabala, metaphysics, and ecstatic saints.

It isn't possible to be absolutely precise when you write about your own work, especially if you're always in training – then each day brings new discoveries and a new orientation. But I would like to say one thing more: I see the future development of painting taking place in workshops, in pure craftsmanship, not in any holy temple of the arts. Painting is manual labor, no different from any other; it can be done well or poorly. Today we have a star system, so do the other arts – but that will disappear.

Photography will play an important role: nowadays a photographer can give you a better and cheaper picture of yourself than a painter. Besides, modern artists prefer to distort things after their own fashion – and they have a peculiar aversion to a good likeness. The anarchism of Expressionism must stop! Today painters are forced into this situation because they are unenlightened and have no links with working people. But a time will come when artists – instead of being scrubby bohemian anarchists – will be clean, healthy workers in a collectivistic community. Until this goal is realized by the working class the intellectual will remain cynical, skeptical, and confused. Not until then will art be able to break out of its narrow and shallow confines where it flows anaemically through the life of the 'upper ten-thousand', not until then will it become a great stream capable of nourishing all of working humanity. Then capitalism's monopoly of spiritual things will be ended. –

And here also communism will lead to a truly classless society, to an enrichment and further development of humanity.

#### 14 Francis Picabia (1879–1953) 'Thank you, Francis!'

The author passed through a succession of avant-garde styles before becoming a leading figure in international Dada, moving between Paris and New York. He founded the Dada review *391* in 1917 and edited it until 1924. The present text, which includes a refusal of the then ascendant classicism, was originally published as 'Francis Mercil' in *Littérature*, new series no. 8, Paris, January 1923. The present translation is taken from Lippard, 1971, op. cit. pp. 171–2.

One must become acquainted with everybody except oneself; one must not know which sex one belongs to; I do not care whether I am male or female, I do not admire men more than I do women. Having no virtues, I am assured of not suffering from them. Many people seek the road which can lead them to their ideal: I have no ideal; the person who parades his ideal is only an arriviste. Undoubtedly, I am also an arriviste, but my lack of scruples is an invention for myself, a subjectivity. Objectively it would consist of awarding myself the légion d'honneur, of wishing to become a minister or of plotting to get into the Institute! Well, for me, all that is shit!

What I like is to invent, to imagine, to make myself a new man every moment, then forget him, forget everything. We should be equipped with a special eraser, gradually effacing our works and the memory of them. Our brain should be nothing but a blackboard, or white, or, better, a mirror in which we would see ourselves for a moment, only to turn our backs on it two minutes later. My ambition is to be a man sterile for others; the man who sets himself up as a school disgusts me, he gives his

gonorrhea to artists for nothing and sells it as dearly as possible to amateurs. Actually, writers, painters, and other idiots have passed on the word to fight against the 'monsters,' monsters who, naturally, do not exist, who are pure inventions of man.

Artists are afraid; they whisper in each other's ears about a bogey man which might well prevent them from playing their dirty little tricks! No age, I believe, has been more imbecilic than ours. These gentlemen would have us believe that nothing is happening anymore; the train reversing its engines, it seems, is very pretty to look at, cows are no longer enough! The travelers to this backward Decanville are named: Matisse, Morandi, Braque, Picasso, Léger, de Segonzac, etc., etc. . . . What is funniest of all is that they accept, as stationmaster, Louis Vauxcelles, whose great black napkin contains only a foetus!

Since the war, a ponderous and half-witted sentiment of morality rules the entire world. The moralists never discern the moral facts of appearances, the Church for them is a morality like the morality of drinking water, or of not daring to wash one's ass in front of a parrot! All that is arbitrary; people with morals are badly informed, and those who are informed know that the others will not inform themselves.

There is no such thing as a moral problem; morality like modesty is one of the greatest stupidities. The asshole of morality should take the form of a chamber-pot, that's all the objectivity I ask of it.

This contagious disease called morality has succeeded in contaminating all of the so-called artistic milieux; writers and painters become serious people, and soon we shall have a minister of painting and literature; I don't doubt that there will be still more frightful asininities. The poets no longer know what to say, so some are becoming Catholics, others believers; these men manufacture their little scribbles as Félix Potin does his cold chicken preserves; people say that Dada is the end of romanticism, that I am a clown, and they cry long live classicism which will save the pure souls and their ambitions, the simple souls so dear to those afflicted by dreams of grandeur!

However, I do not abandon the hope that nothing is finished yet, I am here, and so are several friends who have a love of life, a life we do not know and which interests us for that very reason.