

Dada's Female Form:

**The interventions of five women artists, writers and performers
in the European Dada movement**

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own composition and that it contains no material previously published or submitted for the award of any other degree.

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Abstract

This thesis establishes the ways in which women made important contributions to the Dada movement in Europe by exploring the work of five individuals: Emmy Hennings and Sophie Taeuber in Zurich, Hannah Höch in Berlin, and Suzanne Duchamp and Céline Arnaud in Paris. Between them, these women represent the three principal geographic centres of the movement and encompass contributions across fine art, literature and performance. In each of five chapters I examine the work of the individual woman within the Dada context. In the case of the two women participants in Paris, the painter Duchamp and poet Arnaud, this work has scarcely been documented, let alone examined. More research has been undertaken into the work of the fine artists Taeuber and Höch, but there has been a tendency to distance these individuals from the Dada context, and not all aspects of their contributions have been given weight. In Hennings's case, the emphasis on biography has all but obliterated her contributions to both performance and poetry.

In general accounts of Dada, the names of these women participants, and others, have been frequently relegated to footnotes, with scarce consideration of the nature and impact of their work. They are often mentioned only as the wives, girlfriends or sisters of Dada men. The memoirs of male protagonists, amongst the most respected of these accounts, have contributed to Dada's reputation as a men's club. The question of women's position, status and interventions in Dada, meanwhile, has been largely overlooked or even rejected as a course of enquiry. Yet Dada is acknowledged as a revolutionary movement, a challenger of aesthetic, cultural and even socio-political conventions, so that an evaluation of gender relationships is even more compelling. I discuss the ways in which each woman's work displays techniques and approaches characteristic of Dada. Additionally, I demonstrate how her interventions extend Dada and challenge accepted definitions. Finally, I explore the impact of gender both on the relationships within each group, and on the resulting artistic work. In these ways I show the women to have been not just imitators but innovators. Over the last decade, studies of women in Surrealism have demonstrated the desirability of re-examining avant-garde movements previously considered male domains. They have resulted in not only an increased profile for individual women but also a reconsideration of the movement in its entirety. This thesis, equally, presents the work of hitherto little-known women avant-garde artists and extends our knowledge about Dada, approaching it as a more multi-faceted, nuanced movement, and inviting re-evaluations in terms of its range and its gender/s. It perceives it less as a monolithic, fixed entity, and rather as a shifting sign, under which more heterogeneous work can, and should, be accommodated.

Note on Quotations and Translations

All quotations are given in the original language, where possible. Where a publication was not available in the first language, I have used the English translation. I have provided English translations of all quotations in French and German. Where a published translation exists and is available, I have quoted from it and acknowledged it. In all other cases, translations are my own. With reference to titles (for publications, poems and paintings): where English versions are in use, I have used those, otherwise I have provided my own translations.

'Dada kann JEDER.'

Poster displayed at the 'Dada Messe' (International Dada Fair) in Berlin.¹

¹ Recreated in the Dada exhibition room at 'Die Berlinische Galerie' in Berlin. 'Anyone can be DADA.'

Introduction

‘Why have there been no great women Dadaists?’ or: ‘Dada kann jeder?’

In an unpublished letter to Tristan Tzara dating from 1924, a woman dadaist poet writes the following reproach:

Mon cher ami,

Je suis très étonnée que dans votre historique du Mouvement Dada – où vous vous montrez assez généreux même pour vos adversaires actuels – vous oubliez mon effort tant dans le lyrisme que dans l’action.²

The letter is from the Paris-based poet Céline Arnaud, but it can be seen as paradigmatic for the fortunes of a number of women Dadaists. Their stories have been omitted from many accounts of the movement, beginning with the memoirs of the Dadaists themselves, and their names are less well-known than those of their male colleagues.

The letter is a first piece of evidence in my exploration of the question ‘Why have there been no great women Dadaists?’ It is a question that echoes the classic enquiry ‘Why have there been no great women artists?’ set out by the art historian Linda Nochlin over thirty years ago, in an essay that became a core text for feminist

² Céline Arnaud to Tristan Tzara, Paris, 24 October 1924. Part of the Tristan Tzara papers in the ‘Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet’, Paris [hereafter BLJD]. ‘My dear friend, I am very surprised that in your history of the Dada Movement – where you show yourself to be quite generous even towards your present enemies – you forget my efforts in lyricism as much as in action.’

scholars.³ During these last three decades, scholars have taken up the challenge to uncover, research and bring to light forgotten, neglected and unrecognised women artists across a huge scope of periods and geographical contexts. The legacy of this research is a body of valuable individual biographies and bibliographies as well as wide-ranging surveys that have radically altered perceptions of women's roles in the arts.⁴

Feminist scholars have acted on an impetus to reinstate women within the histories of the arts, and in tandem with that objective drawn out vital issues underlying Nochlin's question. Firstly, they have examined the ways in which the work of creative women has been excluded from cultural institutions, or even discouraged altogether. Research into the experiences of individuals has provided insights into the financial, political, social and cultural obstacles women have faced, and illuminated how many had to battle with difficult circumstances or were thwarted altogether. Secondly, researchers have investigated the ways in which some of those women who did succeed in producing accomplished and innovative work have been ignored or relegated to obscurity in ensuing historical and critical accounts, throwing into relief how 'greatness' is perceived and bestowed by the institutions of the arts. These approaches have exposed ideological subtexts at work in cultural institutions that operate through patriarchal traditions.

Feminist theory has developed and diversified, so that we begin the twenty-first century with a wealth of theoretical discourses and tools. Theorists and researchers have confronted core ideological questions regarding the status of creative women and their relationship to the institutions of the arts: the categorisation and reduction of women's art in cultural histories as well as the stereotypes attached to both women and their work. They explore fundamental issues about identity, subjectivity and gender and their relationship to the production and reception of

³ Originally published in *Art News* 69, January 1971. Abridged version in: Amelia Jones, ed., *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 229-233.

⁴ Useful surveys of women in art include: Rozika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*. London: HarperCollins, 1981; Griselda Pollock, *Vision & Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991; Frances Borzello, *A World of our Own: Women Artists*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

artworks.⁵ Meanwhile, the ideological bases and genealogies of the discourse of art history itself have been re-evaluated and its usefulness as a framework for women artists continues to be questioned.

It may seem strange, then, to echo a question from 1971 that seeks to reinstate women into art histories, especially when both feminism and postmodernism have sought to deconstruct notions of history, the canon and greatness. It could be maintained that the 'first wave' of feminist scholars has already fulfilled the task of re-inscribing women in our cultural histories. Some have perceived this objective as flawed, moreover. They accuse it of either attaching women to dominant traditions that cannot accommodate them, or dividing them off into 'ghettos' of women artists and women writers. Instead, it is proposed, the very mechanisms of cultural institutions (including art and literary history) should be revolutionised. And yet gaps still exist in our fundamental knowledge about individuals or groups of women, such that Nochlin's motivating question has not lost its potency.

Despite her disappointment in Tzara, Céline Arnauld was optimistic not only that others would examine her work but also that they would grant her a place in Dada history. In her letter to him, she continues:

Pourtant d'autres que vous ont étudié sans parti pris l'évolution lyrique des dernières années et ne tarderont pas à me donner ma place.

Car on peut jongler avec les noms et les individus, selon l'opportunité, mais non avec les oeuvres, qui ont du poids et ne se laissent pas manier comme des balles.⁶

Arnauld's optimism was misguided. She has been almost universally ignored, as have some other women contributors to Dada. Mention of women in Dada as a topic frequently prompts the retort: 'Were there any women Dadaists?' This response shifts the focus of my original question, 'Why have there been no great women Dadaists', slightly but significantly. Such a reaction confirms a common impression of Dada as not only male-dominated, but entirely devoid of women. The notion of

⁵ In addition to the publications mentioned in footnote 4, see Jones, *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, for a survey of key theories.

⁶ 'Yet people other than you have studied the lyrical evolution of recent years, without bias, and will not hesitate to grant me my place. Because one can juggle with names and individuals, according to the occasion, but not with works, which are weighty and cannot be manoeuvred like balls.'

Dada as male follows from the fact that the majority of publications on Dada are written by, or focus on, male participants. These publications do not explicitly declare the movement to be male; they simply neglect women participants. It is only with recent publications, which engage with the issue of gender, that the notion of Dada as male is explicitly articulated. So we read, for example, ‘Dada war [...] primär eine Männersache’⁷ and ‘Dada embodied the male as a term and a movement’.⁸

Yet women did participate in Dada, and scholars have begun to declare their opposition to a purely masculinist conception of the movement: ‘Dada war keine reine Männersache!’ or even ‘Dada ist weiblich’.⁹ It is certainly possible to compile a long list of names of the women involved. Since their names so often appear only in lists, for example in ‘cast’ lists within programmes for soirées, and later in documentary descriptions and footnotes, I am reluctant to repeat that practice. However, by bringing together a list of only women, unseen elsewhere, I hope at the very least to give an indication of the presence and participation of women in Dada. Across European centres names include: Céline Arnould, Alice Bailly, Marguerite Buffet, Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, Til Brugman, Nelly van Doesburg, Suzanne Duchamp, Renée Dunan, Gala Eluard, Germaine Everling, Emmy Hennings, Hannah Höch, Angelika Hoerle, Greta Knutson, Maja Kruscek, Adon Lacroix, Marie Laurencin, Adrienne Monnier, Suzanne Perrottet, Adya van Rees-Dutilh, Käthe Steinitz, Sophie Taeuber, Maria Vanselow, Mary Wigman and Käthe Wulff. These names encompass hubs of activity including Zurich, Paris, Berlin and Cologne; the women’s nationalities are as diverse as French, Swiss, German, Dutch and Swedish. Those women based in New York, meanwhile, include: Margaret Anderson, Louise Stevens Arensberg, Djuna Barnes, Katherine S. Dreier, Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Jane Heap, Mina Loy, Agnes Ernst Meyer, Katharine Nash Rhoades,

⁷ Hubert van den Berg, ‘... wenn sich der Sexus meldet.’ Otto Gross und die Imagination und Repräsentation des Sexuellen im Kreis der Zürcher Dadaismus.’ In: Gottfried Heuer, ed., *2. Internationaler Otto Gross Kongress. Burghölzli, Zürich, 2000*. Marburg-Lahn: Literaturwissenschaft.de, 2002, section 4.2.1.

⁸ Nadia Sawelson-Gorse, ed., *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001, p. x.

⁹ Britta Jürgs, ed., *Etwas Wasser in der Seife: Portraits dadaistischer Künstlerinnen und Schriftstellerinnen*. Grambin and Berlin: Aviva, 1999, p. 7 and p. 10.

Juliette Roche, Clara Tice, Louise Norton Varèse, Beatrice Wood, and Carrie, Ettie and Florine Stettheimer.¹⁰ In addition, there may have been women participants in less well-known Dada constellations in Belgium, The Netherlands, Yugoslavia and even Japan. The women I list here admittedly had varying degrees of involvement in Dada, but the list at least provides a useful starting-point for investigating the phenomenon of Dada women.

Women do not fare well in most Dada histories. Often, where their names appear, they are accompanied by nothing more than a few scant details. Frequently, these are biographical points of interest, with little or even no information provided about the nature and impact of the work. The following chapters, each of which focuses on an individual dadaist woman, will provide numerous examples of this state of affairs. Many women – including each of the five in this study – were involved in a personal relationship with one of the men in the group, and they are generally referred to in relation to their more famous male counterparts. We often read about an individual as ‘the wife of’, ‘the girlfriend of’, ‘the lover of’, ‘the mistress of’ or ‘the sister of’ better-known protagonists. To give the most acute example: the Paris-based artist Suzanne Duchamp was not only the wife of another artist, Jean Crotti, but the sister of three brothers, all artists: Marcel Duchamp, Raymond Duchamp-Villon and Jacques Villon. She is frequently referred to in these terms, and yet none of the four men is generally referred to as ‘the husband of’ or ‘brother of’ Suzanne Duchamp.

Where does the lack of recognition begin and end? Even though detailed conclusions must be reached on a case-by-case basis, some initial observations can be made. Firstly, many of the best-known accounts of Dada were, and remain, those written by the male Dadaists themselves. As the key chroniclers of the movement, these individuals are open to reproach for having neglected to include details about their female colleagues. Their omissions also invite questions about their attitudes to Dada women at the time, and about the various groups’ inclusiveness. The long-term

¹⁰ My list has been supplemented by names from Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*. This volume of essays, which even includes Gertrude Stein, will be discussed in more detail shortly. Finally, I would argue against including a number of the women as Dadaists, not least because their contributions, connections and proclamations as Dadaists were not as substantial as their activities in other areas.

effect, furthermore, has been that art-historical and literary anthologies and accounts, following on from the primary versions, have perpetuated this paucity of accounts of female participants, resulting in a tradition of exclusion. This is at best lazy and at worst an indication of patriarchal ideologies at play in art and literary histories.

Secondly, and unfortunately for researchers, women Dadaists left few accounts of themselves. The reasons for this remain a matter for speculation: they might include a desire to establish distance retrospectively; modesty; or a lack of self-belief. Nevertheless, we have already seen that these factors did not apply to Arnauld, who is insistent on the strength of her own work. Were the women, in general, simply less adept at self-promotion? Dadaists like Hugo Ball, Raoul Hausmann, Richard Huelsenbeck, Hans Richter and Tristan Tzara each left memoirs which, predictably, emphasise the author's key role in the movement. Of the five women in this study, the Zurich-based poet and performer Emmy Hennings left the most extensive written accounts of the Dada period, but she distanced herself from Dada retrospectively, and mainly discussed her husband's contributions. None of the five women wrote a monograph on Dada, to set out her side of the story, but then neither did any woman proclaim herself to be an 'Oberdada' (Johannes Baader), 'Weltdada' (Huelsenbeck), 'Dadasoph' (Hausmann), 'World Dada' (Heartfield) or 'Monteurdada' (Heartfield). Notwithstanding the huge disadvantages of having few memoirs, we at least also avoid their potential pitfalls: their exaggerations, ideological subtexts and egotistical revisions.

Women in Dada are not the only set of women to have been neglected in art-historical accounts of the early twentieth century avant-garde, and feminist critics, especially since the late 1980s, have steadily sought to challenge entrenched viewpoints. Two influential books by Whitney Chadwick, and a volume of essays edited by Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Gwen Raaberg, have convincingly highlighted the role of women in Surrealism, especially in fine art.¹¹ An anthology by Penelope Rosemont extends to written work, too, and includes a wide range of

¹¹ Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1991 (first pub. 1985); Whitney Chadwick, *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-representation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998; Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Gwen Raaberg, eds, *Surrealism and Women*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1991.

participants.¹² As for the German context: a comprehensive study of women Expressionists has been published by Shulamith Behr.¹³ Women participants in the Russian avant-garde have also been the object of attention, including a publication in 2000 by John E. Bowlt and Matthew Drutt, which accompanied an exhibition bringing together work by six different women.¹⁴ These successful publications highlight the gap in research on women in Dada. Marjorie Perloff, for example, in noting the revival of interest in women in the Russian avant-garde, writes, ‘women artists [...] made a much greater contribution to Futurist painting, collage, and book illustration than did [...] women artists to Dada. Why this was the case remains to be investigated.’¹⁵

Perloff is right to note the need for investigation, but she should not assume that women did not contribute to Dada. The issue might rather be a lack of visibility and acknowledgement. Research into women’s contributions to other avant-garde movements has fundamentally altered our perceptions of women’s roles within them. Where once Surrealism, especially, was considered the domain of men only, now names such as Claude Cahun, Dora Maar, Lee Miller and Dorothea Tanning, in the European context, have become almost as well known as their male counterparts. In addition, connections between the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo’s work and Surrealism have been intensely debated.¹⁶ Knowledge of their work has, in turn, stimulated research into connections between contemporary artists and their female predecessors.¹⁷ The successes of these ventures underscore the exigency to make Dada the object of a similar re-examination, and to challenge the assumption that

¹² Penelope Rosemont, *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*. London: Athlone Press, 1998.

¹³ Shulamith Behr, *Women Expressionists*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1988.

¹⁴ John E. Bowlt and Matthew Drutt, *Amazons of the Avant-Garde: Alexandra Exter, Natalia Goncharova, Liubov Popova, Olga Rozanova, Varvara Stepanova, and Nadezhda Udaltsova*. New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2000.

¹⁵ From Preface (1985) to: Perloff, *The Futurist Movement, Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. xxxviii. She refers to the exhibition ‘The Avant-Garde in Russia, 1910-1930’, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

¹⁶ Kahlo’s profile has steadily increased over recent decades. Consider, e.g. the show *Frida Kahlo* at Tate Modern, 9 June – 9 October 2005. Catalogue: Emma Dexter and Tanya Barson, eds. *Frida Kahlo*. London: Tate Publishing, 2005.

¹⁷ See, for example, Susan Rubin Suleiman. ‘Dialogue and double allegiance: Some contemporary women artists and the historical avant-garde.’ In: Chadwick, *Mirror Images*.

women simply did not contribute in any substantial way.

To date, two recent collections of essays have taken up the challenge to reverse this perception, opening the way for further research. The first, *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity* (first issued 1998), edited by Nadia Sawelson-Gorse, is an invaluable publication that illustrates the breadth and depth of women's work in the movement. Specifically, it engages with a wide range of questions around gender and identity. However, it is principally concerned with those artists who worked in New York, with only three out of the nineteen essays focusing on artists based in Europe. In this aspect, the volume does not reflect the internationalism of Dada, and its selection underscores the lack of research into those women working in other cities, including the major hubs of Zurich, Berlin and Paris.¹⁸ The second publication, a German-language set of essays from the Aviva Press (1999), deals more extensively with women in Europe, as well as those based in New York, but its short mainly biographical overviews invite further, more detailed research.¹⁹

In addition to these collections, which have started the work of bringing together research into the activities of numerous Dada women, two very recent publications focus on a single Dada individual. Irene Gammel's biography of the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, a German-born Dada artist, poet and performance artist based latterly in New York, seeks to reinstate this individual woman and her work within the avant-garde scene.²⁰ Amelia Jones, building upon Gammel's study, aims, via the Baroness, to examine the effect of gender both within Dada and, more broadly, as a pivotal factor in art-historical discourses. She proposes not only radical reframings of Dada but also new approaches to art history itself. Jones explains:

I am interested in [...] challenging the very rationalism of art history itself by using the Baroness's disruptive, irrational example as a way of looking at the canonical

¹⁸ The editor is well aware of this limitation, and explains that the New York emphasis came as a result of not having essays ready for publication. See footnote 10, pp. vii-viii.

¹⁹ Britta Jürs, ed., *Etwas Wasser in der Seife: Portraits dadaistischer Künstlerinnen und Schriftstellerinnen*. Berlin: Aviva, 1999.

²⁰ Irene Gammel, *Baroness Elsa. Gender, Dada and Modernity: A Cultural Biography*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2002.

works from a different, resolutely feminist point of view. In so doing, I hope to begin to question [...] the very ways in which art histories of this movement and the avant-gardes in general have been written.²¹

These two examples draw attention to the huge potential inherent in discovering neglected women artists. Their analyses aim not simply to insert them into any notional canon, but also to stimulate wider reappraisals of Dada, the avant-garde and – in Jones’s case – art history. They also, once again, highlight a relative gap in research into women Dadaists based in Europe.²² My work, meanwhile, aims chiefly to make further inroads into this relative gap on European women Dadaists, by highlighting, analysing and reappraising the work of five women, and the impact of gender on their participation and interventions.²³

The discovery, or recovery, of significant bodies of avant-garde work by women has intensified our appreciation of their roles within some of those radical movements that characterised the invigorating art scene of the early twentieth century. Moreover, it has profoundly affected or even revolutionised perceptions and accepted notions of the constituencies and legacies of those movements. If women were active in Expressionism, the Russian avant-garde, and in Surrealism, then why not in Dada? An analysis of the work of European women Dadaists must build on studies of New York women to address the following, fundamental question: What exactly was the position of women artists in Dada, and what contributions did they make to aesthetic innovations? Additionally, it invites us to review Dada as a whole. If Surrealism, as a concept, has come to accommodate women artists alongside its male luminaries, in current perceptions, can Dada do the same?

²¹ Amelia Jones, *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2004, pp. 12-13.

²² The notable exception to the lacuna on women in Europe is one further study on an individual woman Dadaist, Maud Lavin’s, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1993. Due attention will be drawn to this important publication in the section on Höch.

²³ My research has been inspired by Jones’s work, in particular the ways in which she confronts the limitations of art-historical attitudes, already acknowledged and briefly discussed in this introduction (p. 12). Her approach, however, is far more radical (e.g. her close identification with her object of study and questioning of objectivity), and her attempts to transform art-historical discourses are a step beyond the more modest objectives of this thesis.

Dada as new deal or Dada as men-only club?

For researchers interested in women's roles in the arts, the period of the historical avant-garde offers a fascinating socio-political as well as aesthetic context. The first two decades of the twentieth century in Europe were a period of exceptionally rapid change. Developments in industry and technology were transforming all aspects of everyday life, including work, travel and communications, and the First World War was to have a profound impact on notions of civilisation and progress. Concurrently, political changes were taking place all across Europe that included questions about women's roles, including issues such as suffrage, women at work and birth control. It was a time of transitions and oppositions: of optimism and utopian belief on the one hand, and of despair and disillusionment centred on the devastation of war on the other.

In this volatile context, avant-garde art movements launched their challenges to, and assaults on, traditions and conventions that they perceived as belonging to the past. Dada mainly operated outside of standard, and subsequently restricted, modes of artistic production, using instead a variety of strategies from assemblage to action, and pamphlets to performances. Its contributors frequently worked outside any notional areas of 'expertise' and across disciplines. Dada defied academic and cultural rules governing artistic production and distribution. It opened a revolutionary forum, the 'Cabaret Voltaire', in which artists could gather to deliver a mix of art forms, and encouraged the use of various materials and techniques. The organisation of its own publications, performances and exhibitions meant that deals with publishers or gallery owners were less crucial: Dada created its own showcases and publicity machines. It advocated freedom rather than dogmatism on all levels. All these factors potentially offered unprecedented opportunities for women artists, both in pragmatic terms (spaces in which to create, publish, exhibit and perform) and in aesthetic terms (the loosening of notions of what constituted appropriate subject matter, the acceptance of a greater variety of techniques and forms, and the admittance of multiple, inner viewpoints, as opposed to a rigid external realism).

Additionally, collaboration between artists on exhibitions and performances, with a shift in emphasis away from single authorship, was characteristic of early Dada activity in particular. In a guide to an important retrospective exhibition 'Dada

and Surrealism Reviewed' at the Hayward Gallery in London in 1978, David Sylvester writes that the work of various artists and groups was intentionally mixed,

in order to emphasise the unusually sustained interchange of ideas between the artists in the movements together with the degree of their readiness – remarkable in an age of artistic individualism – to perceive themselves as contributors to a common enterprise.²⁴

It was collaborative performances and exhibitions such as those at the 'Cabaret Voltaire' and its successor the 'Galerie Dada' in Zurich that formed the beginnings of the artistic enterprise that became Dada. Here were potential opportunities for women to participate and, crucially, to collaborate, as artists and writers tested the limits of the tools, materials and techniques at their disposal. Through these experiments, they claimed not only to push back the boundaries of the arts, but also to challenge the sign systems, norms and conventions governing the cultural and socio-political consensus. Such claims would undoubtedly have been attractive to women writers, artists and performers.

Dada's modes of operation centred on diversity, flexibility and the discovery of new forms of expression. It was a cross-national movement, from its very conception in neutral Zurich during the First World War. Its founding protagonists included exiles from a number of national backgrounds, who subsequently exported Dada to other European cities over the following years, including Berlin, Hanover, Cologne, Barcelona and Paris. Through its transgression of national boundaries, it challenged accepted notions of identity, nationality, tradition and culture at a time when national sentiment was pervasive. Hans Richter perceived its diversity, in fact, as an essential strength and motivation:

Es schien geradezu, als ob die Verschiedenartigkeit, ja Unvereinbarkeit der Charaktere, der Herkunft, des Lebensbildes der Dadaisten jene Spannung ergab, die dem zufälligen Zusammentreffen von Leuten aus aller Herren Länder schließlich die gleichgerichtete 'dynamische' Energie lieferte.²⁵

²⁴ David Sylvester, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed: A brief guide to the exhibition*. [Jan 11-Mar 27 1978, Hayward Gallery, London]. London: Westerham Press, 1978, p. 1.

²⁵ Hans Richter, *Dada – Kunst und Antikunst: Der Beitrag Dadas zur Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1964, p. 11. 'It seemed that the very incompatibility of character, origins and attitudes which existed among the Dadaists created the tension which gave, to this fortuitous conjunction of people from all points of the

But did its openness in terms of nationality and background extend to gender? Were women also embraced as part of this open, dynamic force? And were they in a position to participate?

The opportunities available to women in the arts had undoubtedly improved by the early decades of the twentieth century, through changes in education, training and public policy, but there were still manifold obstructions to their successful occupation and, crucially, acknowledgement as painters, poets, photographers and performers. Restrictions, though reduced, persisted, and the all-too-familiar pronouncement that great talent should just ‘rise to the top’ failed to take into account complex limitations to women’s success. In addition to pragmatic issues such as suitable workspace and financial viability, there was still great pressure on women to lead a socially respectable lifestyle and to meet the demands of family. Meanwhile, women’s work on the one hand suffered from too little critical attention, and, on the other, was subjected to more intense scrutiny. Women were increasingly becoming more visible in social, professional and political spheres, but not without difficulties in terms of acceptance. Gaining recognition in the artistic domain posed another challenge, and the stakes must necessarily have been higher in the case of avant-garde movements, where even men risked – or courted – derision and social exclusion.

Avant-garde groups represented exciting alternatives for women, but neither the individuals who joined them, nor the groups as entities, could entirely escape their cultural and socio-political contexts. Studies on women in Expressionism and Surrealism have both explored these groups’ masculinist aspects, and illustrated how women nevertheless made substantial contributions within them. The portrayal of women in Expressionist men’s art, for example, has been the object of feminist research, as has an emphasis on the work of women artists including Käthe Kollwitz, Paula Modersohn-Becker and Gabriele Münter.²⁶ As for Surrealism, Whitney

compass, its unified dynamic force.’ Translation in: Hans Richter, *DADA Art and Anti-Art*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1997, p. 12.

²⁶ As well as Behr’s *Women Expressionists*, see Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds, *Feminism and Art History. Questioning the Litany*. New York: Harper & Row, 1982. It includes two essays on Expressionism and gender: (i) Alessandra Comini, ‘Gender or

Chadwick has examined the predominance of fetishistic and stereotypical attitudes towards women in male artists' work, and in addition highlighted the alternative approaches of numerous individual women.²⁷

Dada's reputation, meanwhile, is complicated. On the one hand, it has been perceived, like Expressionism and Surrealism, as a men's movement and, on the other, it is celebrated as a highly radical group, in social and political terms. In his recent monograph, *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction*, David Hopkins includes a useful summary discussion of the issue of gender in both movements. He highlights the successful participation of Taeuber and Höch in Dada, for example, and suggests 'Dada often provided more breathing space for female creativity' but also notes: 'Beyond this, male Dada tended to be as masculinist as Surrealism.'²⁸ Hopkins acknowledges the realities of the socio-historical context within which Dada and Surrealism operated, and seeks to draw out nuanced attitudes towards sexuality and gender. His approach highlights the tension between avant-garde movements' claims to radicalism, and their 'ideological blindspots'.²⁹ This tension is implicit in a statement by Richter:

Dada hatte nicht nur *kein* Programm, es war ganz und gar anti-programmatisch. Dada hatte das Programm, keins zu haben ... und das gab zu der Zeit und in dem geschichtlichen Moment dieser Bewegung die explosive Kraft, sich nach ALLEN Seiten ohne ästhetische und soziale Bindungen frei zu entfalten.³⁰

Richter at once celebrates Dada's anti-programmatic approach, and its aesthetic and cultural force. But might Dada's rejection of any programmes ultimately prevent it from engaging with, and confronting, issues such as patriarchy? And did it practise this alleged freedom from social constraints by being expansive enough to accommodate women artists?

Genius? The Women Artists of German Expressionism', pp. 271-291 and (ii) Carol Duncan, 'Virility and Domination in Early Twentieth-Century Vanguard Painting', pp. 293-313.

²⁷ See *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* and *Mirror Images*.

²⁸ David Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 124 and p. 125. See Chapter 5, in particular, for gender.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

³⁰ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 33. 'Dada not only had *no* programme, it was against all programmes. Dada's only programme was to have no programme ... and, at that moment in history, it was just this that gave the movement its explosive power to unfold *in all directions*, free of aesthetic or social constraints.' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 34.

In her introduction to the collection *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity*, Sawelson-Gorse confronts the question of Dada's gendered conditions head-on, and emphasises the movement's limitations as a forum for women. She cements the notion of Dada as a men's club and decries the attitudes of the male Dadaists as misogynist. She begins her introduction by tackling the name Dada itself:

In the historicizing and mythologizing trajectory of the Dada logos, several "origins of the word" implicate female gendering in which the signification of the female is ultimately a "wet-nurse" whose primary biological and aesthetic functions are as the male artists' muse.³¹

After quoting Richter's account of the various meanings of the name, she continues, 'Missing from this list are the connotations of its obvious meaning: the reference of Dada to the male parent, the father, the patriarch.'³²

Sawelson-Gorse's approach is a radical one. The readings of the name that she privileges conflict with most of the protagonists' accounts or memoirs, which claim various and unfixed meanings. Tzara recalls:

Un mot fut né, on ne sait pas comment DADA_{DADA} on jura amitié sur la nouvelle transmutation, qui ne signifie rien, et fut la plus formidable protestation, la plus intense affirmation armée du salut liberté juron masse combat vitesse prière tranquillité de guerrilla privée negation et chocolat du désespéré.³³

Ball, meanwhile, claims:

Mein Vorschlag, sie [die Zeitschrift] Dada zu nennen, wird angenommen. [...]. Dada heißt im Rumänischen Ja Ja, im Französischen Hotto- und Steckenpferd. Für Deutsche ist es ein Signum alberner Naivität und zeugungsfroher Verbundenheit mit dem Kinderwagen.³⁴

³¹ Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, p. xiii.

³² Ibid.

³³ Tristan Tzara, *Chronique Zurichoise 1915-1919*. Crisnée, Belgium: Editions Yellow Now, 1979, p. 10. 'A word was born no one knows how DADADADA we took an oath of friendship on the new transmutation that signifies nothing, and was the most formidable protest, the most intense armed affirmation of salvation liberty blasphemy mass combat speed prayer tranquillity private guerrilla negation and chocolate of the desperate.' Translation in Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 236.

³⁴ Entry for 18 April 1916. In: Hugo Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*. Zurich: Limmat Verlag, 1992, p. 95. 'My proposal to call it [the periodical] "Dada" is accepted. Dada is "yes, yes" in Rumanian, "rocking horse," and "hobbyhorse" in French. For Germans it is a sign of foolish naïveté, joy in procreation, and preoccupation with the baby carriage.' Translation in: Hugo

Huelsenbeck states: 'It is a children's word meaning hobby-horse [...]. The child's first sound expresses the primitiveness, the beginning at zero, the new in our art.'³⁵ Finally, Hans Arp maintains: 'The Larousse dictionary was consulted for an international word free from any political or partisan colour, and even from any exact meaning.'³⁶ These statements express a common intention: to free language of its meaning and connotations and to invent a name for the group that is liberated from pre-conceived semantic associations.³⁷ Sawelson-Gorse's deconstructive approach, which seeks to expose entrenched, gendered subconscious meanings, leads her to select and emphasise certain meanings. The most apparent flaw in her reading of the word 'dada' is that it takes an English-language approach to a word that was chosen by speakers of other languages, privileging a reading of it as 'father' above the numerous other readings recorded by the Dadaists themselves.

Sawelson-Gorse does succeed in drawing attention to gender issues at work within Dada. Is she right? Was Dada a men-only club? Or did it offer 'the beginning at zero, the new in our art' to men and women alike? Each of the following chapters will explore this question. Uncovering answers relies on accounts and memoirs in the intervening years which themselves are discourses with particular, time-bound, ideological approaches. The task of drawing conclusions is further complicated by the fact that one examines historical statements and evidence from a contemporary standpoint, arguably with heightened consciousness and expectations where gender relations are concerned. It is, nevertheless, an important process in understanding the contexts within which women operated and, more interestingly, the effects of those contexts on the production of their work. One only has to look at statements, such as the following, from Huelsenbeck, to recall how women's status was far from equal, both in the broad socio-political context, and in terms of one-to-one relationships. He admits:

Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996, p. 63.

³⁵ Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 265.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

³⁷ Dada was also the brand name for a cream soap and cosmetic products manufactured in Zurich. See Michael Howard and Debbie Lewer, *A new order: An Evening at the Cabaret Voltaire*. Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 1996, p. 9 for a reproduction of an advert for 'Dada Haarwasser.'

Meine Beziehung zu Frauen waren kärglich genug, obwohl Zürich im Jahre 1916 voll von interessanten weiblichen Wesen war. Die sexuelle Revolution, die man auch die Befreiung der Frau genannt hat, hatte damals noch nicht eingesetzt oder war noch nicht sichtbar. Sie wurde auch in unseren Köpfen nicht gefühlt. Oder zum mindesten ich fühlte sie nicht. Meine Haltung Frauen gegenüber war so primitiv wie möglich. Ich wollte eine Freundin, und ich wollte sexuelle Freuden. Ich hielt es für selbstverständlich, daß jede Frau sich meiner Lebensform anzupassen hätte. Ich wußte nichts von weiblichen Wünschen, von weiblichen Interessen. In der Schweiz ebenso wie in Deutschland bestand damals noch eine patriarchalische Ordnung, und ein männliches Wesen lebte zum großen Teil von der Illusion seiner Überlegenheit.³⁸

Huelsenbeck's later self-awareness allows him to reflect on the particular context of Dada, and the less developed gender relations in effect at that time.

Some individual Dadaists did confront socio-political questions, including women's roles, more explicitly. Raoul Hausmann, for example, took a particular interest in gender relations and the status of women. In the essay 'Zur Weltrevolution' ('Towards World Revolution'), for example, he discusses the failures of patriarchal values, and makes such feminist statements as: 'Die Befreiung der Frau muß gerade hier einsetzen' and 'Die 'wahren' Männer treten heute für die Ablösung der Besitzrechte des Mannes an der Frau'.³⁹ He was the exception rather than the rule, however, and his actions mainly failed to meet his proclamations, as manifest in aspects of his relationship, both personal and professional, with Hannah Höch.⁴⁰ Arp, in Zurich, though not a theoretician of gender issues, provides us with an apparently exemplary collaborative male-female artistic partnership with his wife

³⁸ Richard Huelsenbeck, *Mit Witz, Licht und Grütze: Auf den Spuren des Dadaismus*. Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1957, pp. 34-35. 'My relations with women were meager enough, although Zurich in 1916 was full of interesting female creatures. The sexual revolution, also known as the liberation of women, had not yet started or at least it was still invisible. Nor did we really feel it in our heads. I, for one, didn't. My attitude towards women was as primitive as could be. I wanted a mistress, and I wanted sexual pleasure. I took it for granted that any woman would have to adjust to my way of living. I knew nothing of a woman's desires or a woman's interests. Both Switzerland and Germany had a patriarchal system, and a male lived mainly in the illusion of his own superiority.' Translation in: Richard Huelsenbeck, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*. New York: The Viking Press, 1974, p. 17.

³⁹ Originally published in *Die Erde*. Breslau, 1919. Abridged version in: Hubert van den Berg, ed., *Das Ding an sich und das Ding an ihr: Dada Erotikon*. Hamburg: Nautilus, 2003, p. 92 and p. 93. 'The liberation of women must begin right away' and 'Real' men today stand for the removal of a man's ownership rights over a woman.'

⁴⁰ Höch and Hausmann had a volatile seven-year relationship, during which time he remained married with a child.

Sophie Taeuber. Evidently it is not possible to make a single, simplistic claim about the men in Dada, and too much speculation regarding interpersonal relationships tends to shift the emphasis away from the artists' work. Nonetheless, taking these relationships into account casts light on the nature of women's participation in Dada; not least since they go some way to answering the question of when, how, and under what circumstances a given artist became associated with Dada.

Questions around the extent of accessibility, openness and inclusiveness offered by the Dada movement to women artists and writers are perennially interesting, even as the answers remain equivocal. They will form a key undercurrent in this study, which will seek not simply to expose exclusion but also to establish where women did succeed in participating. Dada consisted mainly of men. Dada functioned in a socio-political context where women's status and roles were being debated and were in transition. Instead of focusing on patriarchal behaviours and male perspectives, it will be more fruitful to look at the ways in which women operated within Dada. How did they manage their lives and work? How did they situate themselves and their work within Dada? And how does their work represent specific challenges to any male Dada club?

Dada's female side: strategies of intervention

This study will focus on the participation and output of five women, who have received varying degrees of critical attention over recent decades on an individual level, but who have not been treated together in a comparative study that establishes them within the Dada context, and which looks specifically at gender as a factor in their participation, production and reception. The first chapter deals with Emmy Hennings, a performer and poet, involved from the very beginnings of Dada in Zurich. Interest in her has increased over recent years, such that she has been the object of two biographies.⁴¹ The second chapter focuses on Sophie Taeuber. Also Zurich-based, she is recognised for her innovation in geometric painting, though mainly in a post-Dada context, whilst her work in dance and puppet-making has been

⁴¹ René Gass, *Emmy Ball-Hennings: Wege und Umwege zum Paradies*. Zurich: Pendo Verlag, 1998; Bärbel Reetz, *Emmy Ball-Hennings: Leben im Vielleicht*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001.

given less attention. Hannah Höch, the Berlin photomontage artist considered in the third chapter, has become the best-known female Dadaist by far, ever since interest in Dada, in general, was revitalised from around 1958. She has been the object of numerous monographs and individual exhibitions over the last twenty-five years and as recently as 2004.⁴² In addition, an exemplary study by Maud Lavin has examined her work in relation to gender.⁴³ The participants in Paris are much less well-known: there is still only one catalogue and one published essay that deal with the painter Suzanne Duchamp, who is examined in chapter four.⁴⁴ Finally, the life and work of the poet Céline Arnould, explored in the final chapter, has been scarcely documented, let alone analysed.

The five artists I have chosen are diverse in a number of ways. In geographic terms, they provide examples of women's participation in the three major European centres of the movement: Hennings and Taeuber within the Zurich group, Höch in Berlin, and Duchamp and Arnould in Paris. I have chosen to focus on European women Dadaists, as opposed to those working in New York, in order to breach the greater gap in research in this area. My selection of women is, for pragmatic reasons, restricted, and leaves the way open for research into numerous other artists who participated in Dada – especially beyond these three European hubs, in other geographic outposts of the movement – as well as for further research into these five individuals.

As well as being based in different geographic, linguistic and cultural contexts, the five women represent a number of different art forms, reflecting Dada's range of activity. Between them, they ventured into experimental work in prose, poetry, editing, dance, singing, recital, puppetry, doll-making, tapestry, sculpture, painting, collage, assemblage and photomontage. None of the five restricted herself to a single art form. This interdisciplinary approach was characteristic of Dada, in which fine art, literature and performance co-existed and cross-fertilised. In the fine

⁴² Exhibition at: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 20 January to 11 April 2004. Catalogue: *Hannah Höch*. Madrid: Aldeasa 2004.

⁴³ Maud Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1993.

⁴⁴ Catalogue: William A. Camfield and Jean-Hubert Martin, eds, *Tabu Dada: Jean Crotti & Suzanne Duchamp, 1915-1922*. Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1983. Essay: William A. Camfield, 'Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris.' In: Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, pp. 82-103.

arts, the Dadaists experimented with new materials, developing techniques such as assemblage and pioneering photomontage. In literature it was equally radical, its poets producing sound poetry and simultaneous poetry in a quest to challenge and problematise linguistic sign systems. Finally, it is crucial not to overlook the performance aspect of Dada, which, though by its nature difficult to recreate, was of the utmost importance to the way in which work was delivered. It was through performances, in which the Dadaists sought interactions from each other and the audience, that they produced new techniques such as sound poetry and mounted a general challenge to relationships between the artist, the artefact and the audience.

It has been a weakness in some approaches to Dada and the avant-garde more generally that some art forms have been granted less recognition than others. Even Peter Bürger, who in his influential *Theorie der Avantgarde (Theory of the Avant-Garde)* published in 1974,⁴⁵ set a precedent for interdisciplinary study, has been criticised for excluding those art forms that do not fit his theory of the avant-garde.⁴⁶ In particular, he neglects important activities such as film and performance. The latter, especially, is an area in which women made significant contributions, including as singers, reciters and dancers. Other activities that have received less acknowledgement, and which will be considered in this study, include doll-making, embroidery and tapestry. It is highly likely these Dada manifestations have been neglected because they do not concur with more 'high art', or customarily male, practices. Such transgressions, however, are precisely what make them of interest as dadaist endeavours, since Dada sought above all to break down aesthetic and cultural boundaries. They also highlight questions about the relationship between gender and chosen modes of artistic expression.

This introduction has posed two major questions, which are really two aspects of the same issue. The second of these questions, 'Was Dada a men-only club?', involves critical readings of predominantly male texts and contexts, the ways in which women are represented and positioned, and an ideological critique of the

⁴⁵ Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974. Translation by Michael Shaw: Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

⁴⁶ Recent research by Dietrich Scheunemann has focused on re-evaluating Bürger's theory, examining the shortcomings of his central assumptions and subsequent conclusions. See: *European Avant-Garde: New Perspectives*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000.

patriarchal forces at play. It comes under what Elaine Showalter calls 'the feminist critique'.⁴⁷ The first question, 'Why have there been no great women Dadaists?', also brings in what Showalter terms 'gynocriticism', examining the particular identity of work produced by women. Of course, both questions involve complex issues and tensions. In her book, *A World of our Own: Women Artists*, Frances Borzello looks at women in fine art across the centuries. She writes:

Until the eighteenth century, women artists tended to fall into one of two categories: working woman or prodigy. In the eighteenth century, they were able to benefit from a culture that valued the charming and accomplished woman. In the nineteenth century they were fuelled by self-belief. In the twentieth century they tried to be artists not women. And with feminism, they set out to change the art world.⁴⁸

Borzello provides a useful historical overview, but would admit that the junctions between these contexts are not strictly time-bound, but are instead continuous and unresolved. As late as the nineteenth century, certain techniques, such as pastels and miniatures, were seen as more appropriate for the delicate female hand, and women were expected to deal with limited subject matter, such as portraiture. These limits were justified by some critics as natural or biological, concealing the ideological discourses involved in propagating them.⁴⁹ Women's work was often judged according to the artist's gender and, where women chose to diversify their choices of subject matter, forms and techniques, they might be judged unfavourably. Where a display of femininity could not be construed, the fallback position was sometimes the conclusion 'she paints like a man'.⁵⁰

Dada women sought to break with such limitations, so that any notion of, and focus on, 'feminine' subject matter and forms immediately appears absurd, especially in their cases. The Dadaists sought to overturn the very idea of narrative representation, and to challenge restrictions on materials and techniques. It is appropriate, however, to ask questions about the impact of gender on women's

⁴⁷ See: Elaine Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness'. In: Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. London: Virago, 1986, pp. 243-270, for a detailed introduction to, and discussion of, these terms.

⁴⁸ Borzello, *A World of our Own*, p. 13.

⁴⁹ See: Borzello, *A World of our Own*, p. 44, and Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses*, Chapter I.

⁵⁰ Charles Baudelaire commented this with regard to Eugénie Gautier in 1846. See: Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses*, p. 8.

participation and production. The following questions will all be pertinent: How does each woman's work 'fit' what we know of Dada? How is her work distinguished? How does it challenge or extend our concept of Dada? How might her work be distinguished by experience that is specifically female? How did she find ways of creating her own work that did not merely imitate the men either formally, or in terms of imagery based on male subject positions? Does the work in any way reveal different preoccupations, for example with the cultural context in which she was operating? Does the notion of resistance to, and subversions of, norms take on particular resonance when related to the gender of the artist and expectations of her? In addition, does the work reveal any specific resistances to gender stereotypes and categorisations?

The body of work by Dada women offers a relatively unexploited body of material through which to consider gender issues as they affected cultural production, distribution and reception. Theories relating to language and gender, from Dale Spender and Cora Kaplan,⁵¹ to Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous,⁵² have informed a new consciousness in relation to women's writing. Theories around the body, including Judith Butler's, reflect on the two-way relationship between artistic representation, including performance and body images in fine art, and the social construction of gender.⁵³ These discourses recognise the effect of gender on production and reception, and help us to explore subjectivity, representation and identity. Looking at issues of 'femininity' and Dada immediately invites questions about men and Dada too, about masculine perspectives, social contexts and, in turn, specifically male representations and projections.⁵⁴

⁵¹ See, for example: Cora Kaplan, 'Language and Gender', and Dale Spender, 'Extracts from "Man Made Language"'. In: Deborah Cameron, ed., *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 1998, pp. 54-64 and 93-98 respectively.

⁵² E.g. Luce Irigaray, 'Linguistic Sexes and Genders'. In: *Ibid.*, pp. 119-123. Writings by Hélène Cixous include, *Coming to Writing' and Other Essays*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1991.

⁵³ For an important essay see: Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.' In: Jones, *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, pp. 393-402. See also: Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. London: Routledge, 1993.

⁵⁴ David Hopkins, in particular, has research interests and publications in this area. See, for example, 'Questioning Dada's Potency: Picabia's 'La Sainte Vierge' and the Dialogue with

Dada is about to take centre stage again, in a major forthcoming exhibition at the 'Centre Pompidou' in Paris, organised with, and travelling to, the National Gallery of Art in Washington and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.⁵⁵ The first major Dada exhibition in France since 1966, it is described on the Pompidou's English version website as 'the first nothing-but-Dada-by-Dada-exhibition'.⁵⁶ In the French-speaking world, especially, but not exclusively, Dada has long been overshadowed by Surrealism, viewed as its unformed, nihilist and anti-aesthetic precursor. A character in Tom Stoppard's play *Travesties*, which rejoices in Dada, enunciates this satirically: 'You remember Dada! – historical halfway house between Futurism and Surrealism.'⁵⁷ However, Dada has steadily and increasingly been granted recognition for its innovations, radicalism and eclecticism. The exhibition will undoubtedly put it in the spotlight again, both in academic and popular discourse. It also offers an optimum moment to address the participation of women in the movement.

As an epigram to this study, I chose the slogan 'Dada kann JEDER', which I translated as 'ANYONE can be Dada'. That translation conceals the fact that German uses the masculine declension where any doubt exists about the gender of the subject, in this case 'anyone'. This grammatical factor highlights the fundamental impetus behind this study, which is to find out whether Dada – apparently the most radical, iconoclastic and inclusive movement of the historical avant-garde – had a female aspect, as well as a male aspect. The question might be posed as follows: does the proclamation 'Dada can JEDER' manage to contain within it, also, the following assertion: 'Dada kann JEDE'?

Duchamp.' In: *Art History* 15, no. 3, September 1992. For a consideration of sexuality in general, in dadaist and surrealist work, see chapter 4 of *Dada and Surrealism*.

⁵⁵ Paris: 5 October 2005 to 9 January 2006; Washington: 19 February to 14 May 2006; New York: 16 June to 11 September 2006.

⁵⁶ www.cnac-gp.fr

⁵⁷ Tom Stoppard, *Travesties*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1975, p. 24, spoken by Carr.

Chapter 1 – Emmy Hennings

1.1 The ‘mother’ of the ‘Cabaret Voltaire’

The birth metaphor is frequently applied to art movements, and Dada is no exception. The ‘Cabaret Voltaire’ at Spiegelgasse 1, in Zurich, is renowned as its legendary birthplace; its date of birth is recorded as the first performance on 5 February 1916; and Hugo Ball is exalted as its visionary father. This metaphor, however, has its shortcomings. It implies a single dramatic moment of entry into the world, but Dada did not just arrive on the artistic scene in Zurich intact. Instead, it grew steadily out of a loose grouping of artists and writers gathered together by a call from Ball, who on 3 February 1916 had the following notice published in the Press:

Künstlerkneipe Voltaire. Unter diesem Namen hat sich im Saale der “Meierei” an der Spiegelgasse 1 eine Gesellschaft junger Künstler und Literaten etabliert, deren Ziel es ist, einen Mittelpunkt für die künstlerische Unterhaltung und den geistigen Austausch zu schaffen. Das Prinzip der Künstlerkneipe soll sein, daß bei den täglichen Zusammenkünften musikalische und rezitatorische Vorträge der als Gäste verkehrenden Künstler stattfinden und es ergeht an die junge Künstlerschaft Zürichs die Einladung, sich ohne Rücksicht auf eine besondere Kunstrichtung mit Vorschlägen und Beiträgen einzufinden.⁵⁸

Only two days later, those artists who had responded staged their first soirée. In ensuing accounts and memoirs some of these earliest arrivals and participants would

⁵⁸ *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 3 February 1916, second morning edition. See: Richard Sheppard, *Dada Zürich in Zeitungen: Cabarets, Ausstellungen, Berichte und Bluffs*. Siegen: Siegen University, 1992, p. 8. ‘Cabaret Voltaire. Under this name a group of young artists and writers has formed in the hall of the ‘Meierei’ at Spiegelgasse 1 with the object of becoming a centre for artistic entertainment and intellectual exchange. The Cabaret Voltaire will be run on the principle of daily meetings where visiting artists will perform their music and poetry. The young artists of Zurich, whatever their orientation, are invited to bring along their ideas and contributions.’ Translation in: Howard and Lewer, *A new order*, p. 12.

come to claim for themselves a hallowed status as ‘fathers’. This contest over who was the ‘real’ originator was intensified by the fact that the naming of the group, which for some marked the point of its true establishment or birth, only came about several weeks into the venture. Initially known simply as the ‘Künstler-Gesellschaft Voltaire’ (‘Voltaire Artists’ Society’), the term Dada was introduced later by one or more of Dada’s protagonists. Heated debates over Dada’s genealogy have occurred between the protagonists in their memoirs over the conception of the name. Because of this contention around the engendering of the term, and because of the retrospective historicising of the group’s origins, the fluidity of Dada’s beginnings – its gradual emergence from a shifting group of participants, and the deliberate avoidance of doctrine and style – are sometimes overshadowed.

Another outcome of these processes has been the sidelining of some Dada participants. This includes Emmy Hennings, a woman who was present alongside Ball at the very beginning of the ‘Cabaret Voltaire’, that is prior to the earliest respondents to Ball’s call for participants. At the time of the founding of the ‘Cabaret Voltaire’ Hennings and Ball were a couple. Both exiles with insecure status, they subsisted in circumstances of enormous financial insecurity, taking casual jobs together in cabarets, whilst harbouring aspirations to start their own theatrical venture. In an early letter Ball wrote to his sister from Basel: ‘Ein eigenes Ensemble haben, selbst die Sachen dafür schreiben, es herausarbeiten bis ein richtiges Theater daraus wird: unser letzter Ehrgeiz.’⁵⁹ Ball’s use of ‘our’, as opposed to ‘my’ clearly includes Hennings, and just prior to the start-up of the ‘Cabaret Voltaire’ the couple had already started a first ensemble together. In January 1916 they left the ‘Flamingo’ troupe in which they both worked, to start ‘Arabella’, which toured to Arbon and Baden. That very same month they began talks with Jan Ephraim, owner of the ‘Holländische Meierei’ in which the ‘Cabaret Voltaire’ would open at the beginning of February.

Whilst the birth metaphor is something of a cliché, it offers an opportunity to

⁵⁹ Ball to Maria Hildebrand-Ball from Basel, 12 Nov 1915. In: Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings, *Damals in Zürich: Briefe aus den Jahren 1915-1917*. Zurich: Arche Verlag, 1978, p. 28. ‘To have our own ensemble, to write for it ourselves, to work on it until a proper theatre comes out of it: our ultimate ambition.’ Translation in: Howard and Lewer, *A new order*, p. 11.

re-examine the beginnings of Dada and to widen the focus to include the 'mother'. If Ball, by setting up the 'Cabaret Voltaire' as performance venue and gathering place, is lauded as Dada's founding father, then Hennings, the only other individual to be present and active at this birth, should be celebrated as the founding mother. These two were soon joined by Marcel Janco, Tzara, Arp, and later Huelsenbeck, who each played significant roles in shaping the group, as well as by Sophie Taeuber, who was involved from an early stage. Hennings was never a player in the retrospective, somewhat individualistic game of name-claiming that went on amongst the men, for which Huelsenbeck coined a beautifully self-referential phrase, 'battle of the Dada greybeards'.⁶⁰

Like Dada itself, the concept of Emmy Hennings has undergone multiple transformations over time. Perceptions of her in the diaries and memoirs of her contemporaries, in later art-historical accounts and now in recent biographies combine to produce the fascinating story not only of her experiences, but of how those experiences have been delivered and reconstructed, perceived and interpreted, alongside the trajectory of Dada. A steady resurgence of interest in her over the last decade has begun to redress her relative obscurity. In 1996 Hubert van den Berg published an important essay 'The Star of the Cabaret Voltaire: The Other Life of Emmy Hennings', in which he examined Hennings's life and role in Zurich Dada, and points to her importance as cabaret artiste, writer and also networker.⁶¹ Two long overdue and detailed biographies appeared in 1998 and 2001 respectively: René Gass, *Emmy Ball-Hennings: Wege und Umwege zum Paradies*⁶² and Bärbel Reetz, *Emmy Ball-Hennings: Leben im Vielleicht*.⁶³ An exhibition staged in 1999 in Zurich and then in Flensburg, the town in which Hennings was born, also revived interest.⁶⁴ Reetz recalls a headline from a local newspaper: 'Emmymania in Flenstown'.⁶⁵ One aspect remains reasonably constant in treatments of Hennings over the entire period,

⁶⁰ Huelsenbeck, *Dada Drummer*, p. 32. Huelsenbeck claims that he and Ball invented the term.

⁶¹ In: Brigitte Pichon and Karl Riha, eds, *Dada Zurich: A Clown's Game from Nothing*. New York: G.K. Hall, 1996, pp. 69-88.

⁶² Zurich: Pendo Verlag, 1998.

⁶³ Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001.

⁶⁴ Catalogue: Bernhard Echte, ed., *Emmy Ball Hennings: 1885-1948. 'Ich bin so vielfach...'* Texte, Bilder, Dokumente. Frankfurt am Main and Basel: Stroemfeld, 1999.

⁶⁵ Reetz, *Emmy Ball-Hennings*, p. 34.

from her first appearances on stage in 1905, through Dadaists' memoirs, to later accounts: that is the enormous interest in her life, to the neglect of her work, which has still been granted little attention. Hennings, writing in the year before her death, envisioned this perceptively: 'Von mir will man kein Werk – nur ich wünsche es von mir, aber die Menschen wollen nur meine Person.'⁶⁶

The fascination with Hennings's life story is unsurprising, given its dramatic and unorthodox content. Her first marriage, which produced a son in 1905, failed and the child, whose care she had left to her mother, died when just over a year old. Hennings had a second child, a daughter Annemarie, whose paternity has been open to question, and who was also left in her grandmother's care.⁶⁷ When the latter died, the nine-year-old Annemarie had to leave Germany to join her mother and Ball in Zurich. From 1905 Hennings travelled almost incessantly, taking jobs in theatres, cabarets and variety clubs. She also worked intermittently as a prostitute (police files in Munich and Zurich refer to this), was arrested and imprisoned for stealing from clients on more than one occasion, and was imprisoned for forging papers to help Franz Jung avoid the war-draft.⁶⁸ She was a drug-user, taking morphine frequently, enduring periods of addiction to ether and suffering from regular bouts of ill health. In Germany, she had become involved with the Expressionists, prior to Dada, and had sexual relationships with a number of well-known writers, including Johannes R. Becher, Erich Mühsam, Ferdinand Hardekopf, and Jakob van Hoddis, as well as with

⁶⁶ Diary entry, 20 December 1947. In Robert Walser Archive, Carl Seelig-Stiftung, Zurich. From: Reetz, *Emmy Ball-Hennings*, p. 319. 'They don't want any work from me. It's just me who wants that from myself, but people want only me as a person.'

⁶⁷ Hennings always claimed publicly that her first husband, Joseph Paul Hennings, was the father. Reetz claims it was Wilhelm Vio, a member of the touring group in which both Vio and Hennings were engaged. See: Reetz, *Emmy Ball-Hennings*, p. 46.

⁶⁸ Her daughter, Annemarie Schütt-Hennings, puts her imprisonment for several weeks in 1914 in Munich down to a mistake: She was helping a woman whom she did not know on the street, whose husband was a deserter, but both were arrested. In: Ernst Teubner, ed., *Hugo-Ball Almanach 1984: Emmy Ball-Hennings zum 100. Geburtstag*. Pirmasens: Stadt Pirmasens, 1984, p. 14. However, Hubert van den Berg, and Bärbel Reetz, have investigated the circumstances of Hennings's imprisonments further, showing that she was arrested and imprisoned twice for stealing from clients and once for assisting with passport forgery. For more detail see: van den Berg 'The Star of the Cabaret Voltaire.' In: Pichon and Riha, *Dada Zurich*, p. 77 and Reetz, *Emmy Ball-Hennings*, chapter *Ekstasen*, p.102 onwards. Ball was also arrested once, in 1915, for not having papers and kept in custody for 14 days. See: letter to Maria Hildebrand-Ball from Zurich, 30 August 1915. In: Ball and Hennings, *Damals in Zürich*, p. 20.

the cabaret performer René Morax, and the painters Ernst Moritz Engert and Reinhold Rudolf Junghanns, for whom she posed as artist's model.

Already in memoirs by Zurich Dada protagonists, there is a tendency to focus on Hennings's biographical details and to neglect her artistic output. Many references to both her life and her work are frustratingly brief. In Robert Motherwell's renowned anthology *The Dada Painters and Poets*, for example, her name appears only a few times. Richter and Huelsenbeck refer to her religious beliefs, Richter speculates about her affair with Vio, and finally there is a reprint of a letter about her death.⁶⁹ Even in their brevity, the topics touched upon – religion, sex and death – prove to be typical themes in Hennings's life and work, but in the absence of further detail, they fail to give any indication about how she contributed within the Dada forum.

Richter's memoir *Dada – Kunst und Antikunst* is typical of this approach, his perceptions of Hennings's personality far exceeding any indications of her role or contributions. He writes:

Ihr kindliches Gehabe, ihre toternst vorgetragenen Unwahrscheinlichkeiten konnte ich nicht deuten; das machte sie mir fremd, als Frau wie als Mensch. Nur Ball verstand in seiner liebevollen Menschlichkeit ihr Wesen durchaus. Und wenn er das Gehabe auch nicht übersah, so durchschaute er es doch und fand in Emmy das Bild eines einfachen Mädchens, dessen oft mißbrauchte Zutraulichkeit seine Männlichkeit ansprach, ohne diese stark zu beanspruchen.⁷⁰

Richter's choice of language with relation to gender is extremely troublesome and highlights the problems faced by a woman in a male-dominated circle. In other memoirs, the term 'child', as used here, as well as other gendered stereotypes such as 'diva' 'muse' and 'madonna' persist, even dominate, with reference to Hennings. The child metaphor is especially prevalent in Huelsenbeck's *Mit Witz, Licht und*

⁶⁹ Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, Huelsenbeck p. 265; Richter p. 280 and p. 285; Letter about her death p. 290.

⁷⁰ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 24. 'Her child-like manner, the deadly earnest in which she said the most wildly improbable things, were a mystery to me. She was alien to me, as a woman and as a human being. Only Ball, in his loving humanity, fully understood her. Without overlooking her affectedness, he saw through it to a simple girl whose often-abused trustfulness appealed to his masculinity without making excessive claims on it.' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 26.

Grütze and seems absurd given the sexual reality of this woman's life.⁷¹

Despite the absence of fuller comment, most of the early Zurich participants at least include Hennings in the statistics of the original group members.

Huelsenbeck includes her alongside Ball in several passages discussing the start of the 'Cabaret Voltaire'.⁷² Accounts by both Arp and Richter, meanwhile, note the same 'six-piece band', comprising Arp, Ball, Huelsenbeck, Janco, Tzara and Hennings.⁷³ Though her part reads very briefly, the following statement, by Richter, points to Hennings's distinctive role from the start of the 'Cabaret Voltaire':

Zu Beginn des ersten Weltkrieges 1915 kam ein ziemlich verhungertes, leicht pockennarbiger, langer und sehr dünner Schriftsteller und Theaterregisseur nach der Schweiz. Es war Hugo Ball mit seiner Freundin Emmy Hennings, die Lieder zu singen und Gedichte vorzutragen verstand.⁷⁴

Although he does not mention her credentials as a poet, Richter does reproduce one of her poems *Nach dem Cabaret (After the Cabaret)*.⁷⁵ Finally, it is Ball who, incredibly, fails to count Hennings in to his tally of original participants. A phrase such as 'Wir sind fünf Freunde' effectively excludes his wife.⁷⁶ This phrase appears in his memoirs *Flucht aus der Zeit (Flight Out of Time)* for which no trail of manuscripts survives. It is known, however, not only that Ball heavily edited the text

⁷¹ Huelsenbeck, *Mit Witz, Licht und Grütze*. Translations in: Huelsenbeck, *Dada Drummer*. Examples include: (i) 'Sie war seine Geliebte, seine Mutter, sein Engel und sein oberster Priester [...] Sie war nicht nur ein Kind, sie verstand es auch, Kind zu spielen.' pp. 35-6. ('She was his mistress. His mother, his angel, and his high priest. [...] She wasn't merely a child, she knew how to play the child.') p. 18. (ii) 'Hugo suchte aber bei Emmy keine hausfrauliche Sorge, sondern die Unschuld, die Kindlichkeit, das Unbewußte, die Fee und das Übersinnliche.' p. 83. ('Hugo wasn't looking for a housewife in Emmy; he was seeking childlike innocence, childhood, the unconscious, the fairytale world.') p. 49. N.B. *Dada Drummer* is translated from, and based on the German publication but does not equate with it exactly.

⁷² See chapter I of *Witz, Licht und Grütze*, or *Dada Drummer*.

⁷³ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 25; Hans Arp, 'Betrachten' (1958). In: Ernst Scheidegger, *Zweiklang: Sophie Taeuber-Arp und Hans Arp*. Zurich: Arche Verlag, 1960, pp. 97-98.

⁷⁴ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 12. 'In 1915, soon after the outbreak of the First World War, a rather undernourished, slightly pock-marked, very tall and thin writer and producer came to Switzerland. It was Hugo Ball, with his mistress Emmy Hennings who was a singer and poetry reader.' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 12. The translation does not do the original German justice, in which Hennings's abilities are rather highlighted. It might read 'who knew how to sing songs and deliver poems.' This example illustrates how translation can also skew memoirs.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25. Full translation in: *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷⁶ Ball, *Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 96. 'There are five of us.' Translation in: *Flight Out of Time*, p. 63.

before he died in 1927 (when it was first published) but that Hennings also revised it before it was reissued again in 1946.⁷⁷ The complexity of the Ball-Hennings story appears at its most acute, in fact, in their own memoirs. Even in her accounts of the period Hennings distances herself from Dada, as will be discussed more fully in the final section of this chapter ('Conversions and Chronicles'). The genealogy of negligence cannot be established too cleanly then. It can neither be attributed solely to Hennings's fellow Dadaists, nor can she be held entirely responsible for her disappearance from Dada histories.

Meanwhile, a primary source provides evidence of Hennings's participation.

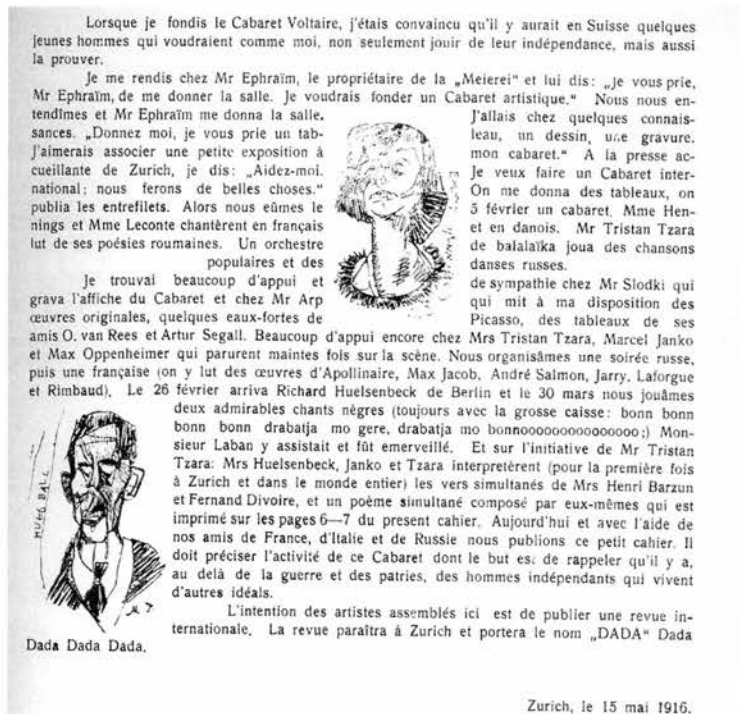


Figure 1: Text from *Cabaret Voltaire*, ed. Hugo Ball (1916)⁷⁸

In the anthology *Cabaret Voltaire*, the first publication from the group, and where the name 'Dada' appears in print for the first time, Ball's introduction is flanked by two drawings by Marcel Janko, one of himself and one of Hennings (fig. 1, above). This key early document provides an indication of her presence and prominence at

⁷⁷ Howard and Lewer, *A new order*, p. 35.

⁷⁸ Full issue of *Cabaret Voltaire*, dated 15 May 1916, reprinted in Michel Giroud, ed., *Dada: Zurich, Paris, 1916-1922*. Paris: Jean Michel Place, 1981. The introduction falls on p. 5 of the issue, p. 21 of the volume.

the beginning of a venture whose impact was yet to be realised and whose history had not yet been written. Janco also produced a painting *Cabaret Voltaire* in 1916. Unfortunately the painting has been lost, but the image endures in reproductions. There are two women on stage. One of them, Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, describes the other thus: 'Mrs. Hennings, with the face of a madonna, tries to do the split [*sic*].'⁷⁹ These early images, unmediated by words and judgements, offer glimpses of Hennings's appearance from the very beginnings, in the Dada cabaret.

Looking beyond Hennings's presence at Dada's conception, there remains plenty of scope for analysis of her role and her contributions during the 'Cabaret Voltaire' period. Whilst this study will emphasise her work over her life, it remains difficult to separate the two, not least because her status as woman, as physical and sexual presence, dominates perceptions of her and her stage work. The juncture of these roles, and the slippages between them, are illuminated by Judith Butler's theory of gender as a social (or cultural) construction: as performative. As she puts it: 'the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts.'⁸⁰

A diary entry written by Erich Mühsam, one of Hennings's lovers, points to the complex character of her physical, sexual and emotional existence. He writes: 'Ich habe sie so gern in ihrer naiven Hurenhaftigkeit, die von nichts weiß als vom Lieben und Liebenlassen.'⁸¹ This disturbing statement reflects a fascination with her sexuality that gripped many of her male bohemian peers. A further quote from Mühsam points to the very real, pragmatic effects of her sexual availability:

Das arme Mädchen kriegt viel zu wenig Schlaf. Jeder will mit ihr schlafen, und da sie sehr gefällig ist, kommt sie nie zur Ruhe. Bis drei muß sie bei der Kathi [Kobus] sein, die sie scheußlich ausnutzt, und morgens um 9 Uhr sitzt sie dann schon in der Malschule.⁸²

⁷⁹ Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, 'Some Memories of Pre-Dada: Picabia and Duchamp (1949)'. In: Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 265.

⁸⁰ Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution.' In: Jones, *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, p. 393.

⁸¹ From the manuscripts of Mühsam's diaries, 28 August 1910. In Echte, *Emmy Ball Hennings*, p. 48. 'I like so much the naïve whorishness in her which only knows about loving and being loved.' Translation in: Van den Berg, 'The Star of the Cabaret Voltaire.' In: Pichon and Riha, *Dada Zurich*, p. 72.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 25 May 1911. 'The poor girl gets too little sleep. Everybody wants to sleep with her, and, since, she is so accommodating, she never gets any rest. Until 3 a.m. she has to be at

Recent biographies have revealed much more about Hennings's extraordinary lifestyle. They also afford insights into her ambitions to perform and to write, about the challenges she faced in her unconventional lifestyle and her strategies for survival as a social outsider. A more detailed consideration of Hennings's contributions as performer and as poet – both of which have been neglected – will highlight the momentous role she played in the unfolding of Dada.

1.2 Hennings as Dada body: presence and performance

Ball's background makes him the most obvious focus as the 'genius' behind the foundation of the 'Cabaret Voltaire'. Well-educated in literature and philosophy, with experience of theatre direction gained in Munich, his memoirs *Flucht aus der Zeit* detail the aesthetic and philosophical thinking behind his experimental work in Dada. For Ball, a career as a writer had always beckoned. As he wrote to his sister on his arrival in Zurich: 'Wenn jemand nach mir fragt: Ich bin Schriftsteller, im Ausland, und ich kämpfe für meine Erkennung.'⁸³ Hennings, in contrast, was not educated beyond the age of fourteen, her first ambitions were to become a famous actress, and the bulk of her experience was as a variety artiste. However, she too was a poet, arriving in Zurich with a publication record dating back to 1911. This aspect of her work is often forgotten. Her standing was largely defined in terms of her work as a performer, together with the connotations of status and reputation that entailed, even within Bohemian circles.

Nevertheless, it is exactly Hennings's vast experience of popular performance that constitutes her greatest contribution to Dada. By the time of her arrival in Zurich in 1915, she had a ten-year history of engagements as actress, singer and dancer, principally in Germany. She had travelled extensively, working in venues in Hanover, Cologne, Berlin, Munich and Budapest. After working in theatres as an actress she had turned increasingly to popular cabaret, and from there had 'risen' to mixing in literary circles, performing regularly in literary cabarets both at the 'Café

Kathi [Kobus'] place, where she is taken horrible advantage of, and by 9 a.m. she is already at art class.' Translation in: *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁸³ To Maria Hildebrand-Ball from Zurich, 30 August 1915. In: Ball and Hennings, *Damals in Zürich*, p. 22. 'If anyone should ask after me, I'm a writer, abroad, and I'm fighting for recognition.'

des Westens' in Berlin and the 'Café Simplizissimus' in Munich, where she met Ball in 1913. In these venues, she worked with writers such as Mühsam and Johannes R. Becher, and performers like Morax, both performing their material and developing her own.⁸⁴ Together, they tested the form of literary cabaret, mixing popular entertainment with experimental poetry and drama.

A number of German writers, Hennings included, imported the literary cabaret trend to Zurich when they sought exile there. By the time she and Ball embarked upon their plans for the 'Cabaret Voltaire' Hennings had a wealth of contacts. As van den Berg points out, some (future) Dadaists such as Franz Jung and Huelsenbeck had difficulties gaining access to the 'Simplizissimus.' He specifies: 'If the later Dadas were thus more or less marginal figures or newcomers in the firmly established prewar bohemia, Hennings, on the other hand, was in close contact with many prominent figures of the subculture.'⁸⁵ She not only had a background of popular performance and first-hand experience of the literary cabaret, but links with key figures, who would also become involved in Dada.

In her account of her first meeting with Ball, Hennings points to theatre as their common area of interest. At first she had assumed him to be a philosopher, she says: 'Dann aber sagte er mir, daß er Dramaturg an den Kammerspielen sei, und da hörte die Einsilbigkeit zwischen uns beiden rasch auf. Wir begannen über das Theater zu sprechen, über Wedekind, Sternheim und Claudel.'⁸⁶ Extracts from letters and memoirs reveal how each of them was reflecting on the limitations as well as possibilities of performance as an art form. Ball's memoirs detail in particular his attraction to the concept of the 'Gesamtkunstwerk' ('total work of art').⁸⁷ His proposal for eclectic events, combining a variety of art forms, would eventually be realised in Dada soirées that presented music, dance, poetry, costume and paintings

⁸⁴ See: van den Berg, 'The Star of the Cabaret Voltaire.' In: Pichon and Riha, *Dada Zurich*, p. 73.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁸⁶ 'Erste Begegnung.' Teubner, *Hugo-Ball Almanach 1984*, pp. 91-92. 'But then he said he was a dramaturge at the 'Kammerspiele' and so the uncommunicativeness between the two of us quickly stopped. We started talking about theatre, about Wedekind, Sternheim and Claudel.'

⁸⁷ Wagner used the term originally in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1849) for a dramatic work in which drama, music, song, poetry, and paintings would be united into a complete art form. Kandinsky also promoted the concept.

together as aspects of a single show. There was, however, to be no artifice of coherence, no narrative wholeness, but instead an onslaught of unexpected contrasting images, actions and sounds.

Meanwhile a diary extract from Hennings displays frustration with the artificial and illusory nature of popular drama. In Zurich, she continued to work on stage wherever she could make the money necessary for her own and Ball's survival. At one point, they both worked for the touring vaudeville troupe 'Flamingo's Maxim-Ensemble'.⁸⁸ Hennings describes in a diary entry how her boss advertised her performance as the Greek mythological figure Arachne: 'Ewige Wahrheit, nur zwanzig centimes.' She mocks such grandiose claims:

Die ewige Wahrheit kommt natürlich von mir und das finde ich komisch. Und daß diese so billig sein soll. Als wäre nicht viel wert, wonach wir verlangen. Ein Theatertod, ein richtiger Varietéod wäre eigentlich das Gegebene für mich. Man möchte doch die Wahrheit sein, nicht nur scheinbar und wenn man mich in meinem Netz erdrosselt vorfände, wäre ich die Wahrheit. Noch im letzten maskiert.

Hennings laments illusionism: 'wir glauben an die erwiesene Wahrheit der Illusion'.⁸⁹ The shock techniques and disturbing tactics that Dada would develop offered an alternative to this kind of superficiality. Comfortable emotional involvement with the actors or characters was replaced by a reduction of the distance between performer and writer, the audience deliberately provoked to re-examine the powerful uses, and abuses, of language.

Even more revealing than points of convergence are the differences between Ball and Hennings in their approaches to, and experiences of, theatre and performance. This comes through in Henning's memories of their first encounter. She writes:

⁸⁸ Ball's experience as piano player and occasional sketch writer in this ensemble formed the basis of his novel *Flametti* (1916-1918).

⁸⁹ 'Aus dem Tagebuch'. In: Karl Riha and Franz-Josef Weber, eds, Emmy Hennings, *Betrunken taumeln alle Litfaßsäulen: Frühe Texte und autobiographische Schriften 1913-1922*. Hanover: Postskriptum, 1990, pp. 88-89. 'Eternal Truth, only 20 centimes.' 'Eternal Truth comes from me of course and I find it comical. And that it should come so cheap. As if what we demand were not worth much. A theatre death, a real variety death would be the right thing for me. One would really like to be the truth, not only appear to be it, and if I were to be found entangled in my net I would be the truth. Masked to the last.' 'We believe in the proven truth of illusion.'

Er sagte, daß ihm das Theater die Freiheit, die unfaßbare Freiheit bedeute, während ich annahm, daß diese mehr innerhalb des Lebens zu finden sei. [...] Das war kurz vor Kriegsausbruch, im Jahre 1913, da man einen visionären Advent in der Kunst glaubte. Schon stand man im Begriff, auch in der Kunst das Leben zu erfassen ohne den Umweg durch den Intellekt.⁹⁰

Hennings's disenchantment with illusory popular theatre, as well as her actual experiences as a performer, likely stopped her from sharing in Ball's utopian views of theatre as the way to liberation. Whilst Ball undoubtedly widened her knowledge of theatre on an intellectual level, introducing to her new trains of theoretical and philosophical thought, Hennings initiated him into a different sphere of popular performance and the lifestyle that went with it.

Finally, however, the second part of her statement reveals a shared vision of a new art: one that would be connected to life experience, received through direct impact and mediation, rather than via intellectual theorising. In this aspect, Hennings's views clearly connect with core dadaist beliefs. Lucy Lippard describes this characteristic mode of Dada, which was to prove influential on future concepts about art within Dada and beyond: 'art-as-action or art-as-idea rather than art as *objet d'art* and commodity'.⁹¹ This 'art-as-action' was unfixed, unmediated, experimenting with untheorised, unprogrammatic approaches. Work took shape through communication between performers, and between performers and spectators. It left behind no art object to be bought and displayed: only the effects of its provocations.

Performance was key to the working out of Dada developments but has often been neglected in theories of the avant-garde. In the mythologizing of Dada, its status as an outsider on the fringes of the institutions of art as well as its lack of commercialisation are frequently cited as measures of its authenticity. Notwithstanding the iconoclasm and fearlessness of the group, however, Dada required audiences in order to make any sort of impact. Whilst the Dadaists sought ultimately to make use of the cabaret forum as a means of exploring experimental literature, art and performance, they achieved this by combining untried and

⁹⁰ 'Erste Begegnung.' In: Teubner, *Hugo-Ball Almanach 1984*, p. 92. 'He said that the theatre meant freedom for him, untouchable freedom, whilst I assumed that this was rather to be found in real life. [...] That was shortly before the outbreak of war, in 1913, when there was belief in a visionary advent of art. Already there was this concept of grasping life in art without any detour via the intellect.'

⁹¹ Lucy Lippard, *Dadas on Art*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971, p. 1.

iconoclastic work with accessible, popular entertainment. Hennings was a crowd-puller, incorporating popular songs, ballads and entertainment alongside readings of classic and experimental literary texts. Her ‘low art’ contributions made for literary cabaret, as opposed to esoteric literary readings. An aside by Huelsenbeck is telling here: ‘Emmy, von deren Erfolg oder Mißerfolg als Sängerin die Existenz des Kabarets abhing.’⁹²

A newspaper report from that time in Zurich also offers us an insight into Hennings’s crucial presence, and the impact that it had on the audience. The following review appeared in the *Zürcher Post* on 7 May 1916:

Der Stern dieses Cabarets aber ist Frau Emmy Hennings – Stern wie vieler Nächte von Cabarets und Gedichten-, wie sie vor Jahren am rauschend gelben Vorhang eines Berliner Cabarets stand, die Arme über den Hüften emporgerundet – reich wie ein blühender Busch, so leiht sie auch heute mit immer mutiger Stirn denselben Apachenliedern einen Körper, seither nur wenig ausgehöhlt von Schmerz.⁹³

The account given here reveals how Hennings was already well-known as a performer; she was a ‘star’ or attraction in her own right. Moreover, while this report is somewhat lyrical, it emphasises the physicality of her performance and of her visual presence as body on the stage. The powerful effect she asserted through performance was well rehearsed. Ferdinand Hardekopf recalls a visit to the ‘Lindenkabarett’ in Berlin in 1912:

Man nehme es nicht leicht. Denn wer kann dieses Mädchen, das die Hysterie, die Gereiztheit und die Hirn zerreiende Intensität der Literaten besitzt, hindern, zu einer Lawine anschwellend, sich auch gegen den Parlamentarismus zu wälzen, die einzige Institution, wo Verzweiflung und Zerstörungswut der Unterdrückten verpuffen können, gefahrlos, ohne Spuren zu hinterlassen und die Geschäfte fördernd. Man nehme es nicht leicht.⁹⁴

⁹² Huelsenbeck, *Mit Witz, Licht und Grütze*, p. 22. ‘Emmy, on whose success or failure as a singer the existence of the cabaret hinged.’ Translation in: *Dada Drummer*, p. 10.

⁹³ ‘Cabaret Voltaire.’ From: *Zürcher Post* morning edition, 23 May 1916. In: Sheppard, *Dada Zürich in Zeitungen*, p. 12. ‘The star of the cabaret is Emmy Hennings, star of many nights of cabarets and poems. Years ago, she stood by the rustling yellow curtain of a Berlin cabaret, hands on hips, as exuberant as a flowering shrub; today too she presents the same bold front and performs the same songs with a body that has since then been only slightly ravaged by grief.’ Translation in: RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1988, p. 60.

⁹⁴ Writing as Ravien Siurlai, ‘Emmy Hennings’. In: *Die Aktion*, Year 2, no. 23, pp. 726-727. Berlin 1912. Taken from: Anna Rheinsberg, ‘Ein blonder Hunger, weltumarmend. Emmy Ball-Hennings (1885-1948)’. In: *Kriegs/Läufe. Namen. Schrift. Über Emmy Ball-Hennings*,

Hennings accompanied her singing with bizarre gestures and body movements, the combination of aural and visual effects heightening the audience's uneasiness. Richter, describing her singing at a Dada soirée, echoes accounts of the extreme effects of her interpretations:

Als einzige Frau in diesem nur mit Dichtern und Malern bestückten Kabarett brachte Emmy eine höchst notwendige Note in die Darbietungen, auch wenn (oder vielleicht gerade weil) ihre Vorträge weder stimmlich nicht vortragmäßig im herkömmlichen Sinne künstlerisch waren. Sie stellten vielmehr in ihrer ungewohnten Grelle einen Affront dar, der das Publikum nicht weniger beunruhigte als die Provokationen ihrer männlichen Kollegen.⁹⁵

There is a problem with this comment in that it separates Hennings from the poets and painters who 'man' the group, whereas in fact she was not only a performance artist but a poet too, who also read her own contributions at soirées. It is this combination that makes her participation so exceptional. After all, the Dada group was essentially made up of poets and painters who had thus far worked with words on the page or with static visual images, and not via performance.⁹⁶ It is unclear what Richter means when he says she added a 'very necessary note' to the cabaret as the only woman. Was she necessary as a representative (for women), or simply an attraction (for men)? In any case, he acknowledges her assumption of a unique role as an experienced performer, who adopts a deliberately iconoclastic mode of delivery. I would argue that the affront to the audience was not only as perturbing as that of her male colleagues but even more perturbing, given her position as the only woman in Dada, and given her status as an accomplished performer who had

Claire Goll, Else Rühel. Mannheim: Persona Verlag, 1989, p. 12. 'Don't take it lightly. For who could prevent this young woman, who possessed the hysteria, edginess and skull-breaking intensity of the literati, from swelling to an avalanche, from surging up against parliamentarianism, the only institution where desperation and destructive anger can make the oppressed fall flat, harmless, leaving no traces, and going ahead with business. Don't take it lightly.'

⁹⁵ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 24. 'As the only woman in this cabaret manned by poets and painters, Emmy supplied a very necessary note to the proceedings, although (or even because) her performances were not artistic in the traditional sense, either vocally or as interpretations. Their unaccustomed shrillness was an affront to the audience, and perturbed it quite as much as did the provocations of her male colleagues.' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, pp. 26-27.

⁹⁶ Ball performed as a pianist in cabaret but not as an actor. For his background and involvement in theatre as a writer, literary manager and director see Elderfield's introduction to *Flight out of Time*, pp. xv-xix.

evidently chosen to subvert expectations of popular performance.

If Hennings's presence as a performer was significant, so was her sexual presence. Elements of the cabaret that are lost to us now include the audience and the atmosphere. Huelsenbeck recalls the former, 'Frauen gab es wenig im Kabarett. Es war zu wild, zu rauchig und zu seltsam',⁹⁷ and a phrase by Tzara evokes the latter: 'le mélange cosmopolite de dieU et de boRdel.'⁹⁸ If Ball's sound poetry produced uncanny religious and spiritual moments in the cabaret, Hennings's physical and sexual appeal evoked a highly-charged sexual atmosphere in a cabaret filled mainly with men. As Reetz has described in her biography of Hennings, the lines between being a cabaret artiste and being sexually available were often blurred. She notes, 'Die Grenzen zwischen Animation und Prostitution waren fließend' and paints a vivid picture of the status of an actress in the first decades of the century.⁹⁹

Untrained, these young women were frequently perceived as not only decorative on stage but sexually available off stage. Women performers, attracted by myths of liberation, often found themselves struggling financially, paying for their own costumes from meagre salaries, and expected to satisfy the expectations of mainly male employers and audiences. Many, Hennings included, supplemented their income by 'entertaining' or prostituting themselves after performances. Before the 'Cabaret Voltaire', many of Hennings's expressionist acquaintances had already shown themselves, through their actions and writings, to be intrigued by street life, prostitutes and sexual openness. Hennings's body and sexual appeal provided her with access to predominantly male literary circles but also, as Mühsam's earlier comments indicate, led to physical, and doubtless emotional, hardships.

Still, Hennings's input should not be considered only in terms of her physical presence. Ball's letters from that time arguably offer us more authentic indications of what went on than his later memoirs, in that they were not written with publication in mind. In one letter he writes to his sister: 'Sie hat so treu mit mir ausgehalten und wir

⁹⁷ Huelsenbeck, *Mit Witz, Licht und Grütze*, p. 22. 'It was too wild, too smoky, too way out.' Translation in: *Dada Drummer*, p. 15.

⁹⁸ From: Tzara, *Chronique Zurichoise*, p. 8. 'The cosmopolitan mixture of goD and bRothel.'

⁹⁹ Reetz, *Emmy Ball-Hennings*, p. 55. 'The boundaries between hosting and prostitution were often fluid.' See p. 53 onwards for more detail.

haben das Cabaret hochgebracht.’¹⁰⁰ As the only experienced popular professional performer in the initial Dada grouping, Hennings undoubtedly had enormous input into organising and staging soirées. Her vast experience must have informed the day-to-day running of this radical new venture, the first to offer nightly literary cabaret.¹⁰¹ In his history *L’aventure Dada*, Georges Hugnet gives a short summary of Hennings’s pivotal role: ‘elle participe activement à la bonne marche du Cabaret Voltaire [...] chanteuse, elle est l’animatrice du cabaret.’¹⁰² Such a short reference may seem insignificant, but it reminds us that Hennings’s presence in the Dada cabaret was crucial not only as body, and hostess, but also as voice. In the next section, I will examine this vital facet in her participation.

1.3 Hennings as Dada voice: the word between page and stage

The melding of different effects was crucial to the Dada cabaret. Visually, these combinations and juxtapositions were achieved through physical performance and gesture, backdrops, costumes and masks. Sound, additionally, played a major role, the soirées incorporating music, songs, poetry and finally manifestos. The front of the publication *Cabaret Voltaire* records Hennings’s participation in the very first performance at the venue, in 1916:

Da hatten wir am 5. Februar ein Cabaret. Mde. Hennings und Mde. Leconte sangen französische und dänische Chansons. Herr Tristan Tzara rezitierte rumänische Verse. Ein Balalaika-Orchester spielte entzückende russische Volkslieder und Tänze.¹⁰³

Already in literary cabarets in Germany, such as in the ‘Simplizissimus’, Hennings had made use of Danish folk songs, passed on by oral tradition, which she translated

¹⁰⁰ To Maria Hildebrand-Ball from Zurich, 22 March 1916. In: Ball and Hennings, *Damals in Zürich*, p. 49. ‘She has stood by me so faithfully and we have got the cabaret going.’

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1 March 1916, p. 44. ‘Es ist, glaube ich, das erste Mal, daß man versucht, täglich literarisches Programm zu bieten.’ ‘It is, I think, the first time that anyone has tried to offer a daily literary programme.’

¹⁰² Georges Hugnet, *L’aventure Dada (1916-1922)*. Vichy: Seghers, 1971, p. 176. ‘she participates actively in the successful running of the Cabaret Voltaire [...] a singer, she is the cabaret’s hostess.’

¹⁰³ Full issue of *Cabaret Voltaire* reprinted in Giroud, *Dada: Zurich, Paris*, p. 21. ‘On 5 February we had a cabaret. Mrs. Hennings and Mrs. Leconte sang French and Danish songs. Mr. Tristan Tzara recited Rumanian verses. A balalaika band played delightful Russian folk-songs and dances.’

into German.¹⁰⁴ Popular song was to form a major part of the cabaret, as Ball indicates in a letter to his sister about the new venture on 1 March 1916: 'Ohne Emmy und eine kleine Französin, die entzückende französische Liedchen singt, wäre es mir nicht möglich.'¹⁰⁵ The employment of various forms, styles and languages underpinned the disturbing and unexpected effects of the cabaret on the audience. Richter attempts to convey something of their force when he writes:

Wenn man Balls Klavier-Interpretationen, Emmy Hennings dünne, kleine, künstliche Mädchenstimme, (die zwischen Volks- und Hurenliedern wechselte), mit den abstrakten Negermasken von Janco zusammenbringt [...] so erlebt man einen Teil der Vitalität und des Enthusiasmus, der die Gruppe belebt.¹⁰⁶

This second reference to brothels indicates the mix of intellectual experimentation and a more sexual aspect that has already been highlighted. The group used well-known traditional religious songs, appropriating them for the cabaret venue, alongside folk, popular and political songs that roused the audience. Stimuli came from the oral tradition, and the effects on an audience were immediate, especially as compared with the medium of print. Huelsenbeck recalls:

Diese Chansons, die man nur in Mitteleuropa kennt, sind Lieder, die die Politik, Literatur, das menschliche Benehmen oder sonst etwas ironisieren, was jedermann versteht. Dies Chansons sind frech, aber nicht verletzend. Sie wollen niemandem wehetun, aber dennoch eine Meinung vermitteln. Manchmal sind sie erotisch, sie behandeln alte Lustspielthemen, den betrogenen Ehemann oder die Unwissenheit der Braut vor der Hochzeitsnacht. Ihr intellektuelles Niveau ist niedrig, aber nicht unangenehm. Sie leben von Refrains und populärer Musik. Ball erfand die Melodie, die zu jedem Chanson gehörte.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Hennings was born in Flensburg, in the state of Schleswig-Holstein, on the German-Danish border. It has a large Danish population.

¹⁰⁵ To Maria Hildebrand-Ball from Zurich 1 March 1916. In: Ball and Hennings, *Damals in Zürich*, p. 44. 'Without Emmy and the little French girl, who sings charming little French songs, there would be no cabaret.'

¹⁰⁶ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, pp. 18-19. 'Imagine the combination of Ball's piano improvisations, Emmy Hennings' thin, unrefined, youthful voice (which was heard alternately in folk-songs and brothel songs) and the abstract Negro masks of Janco [...] and you will have some idea of the vitality and enthusiasm by which the group is inspired.' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁷ Huelsenbeck, *Mit Witz, Licht und Grütze*, p. 22. 'These songs, known only in central Europe, poke fun at politics, literature and human behavior, or anything else that people will understand. The songs are impudent but never insulting. There is no intention of hurting anyone, only the desire to express an opinion. Sometimes they are erotic, treating old farce themes such as the cuckold or the ignorance of the bride on her wedding night. The intellectual level is low but not unpleasantly so. Usually, they subsist on refrains and popular

The presentation and incorporation of popular songs alongside canonical texts and radical new work would have appeared highly irreverent to conservative audiences. Ball writes: ‘Die Bildungs- und Kunstideale als Variétéprogramm – : das ist unsere Art von *Candide* gegen die Zeit.’¹⁰⁸ The naming of the cabaret was a tribute to Voltaire’s opposition to, and satirisation of, contemporary society. Dada railed against its particular temporal context with expressions against the war, in particular. Huelsenbeck provides a specific example: ‘When Emmy Hennings sang ‘They kill one another with steam and with knives’ in Switzerland, which was encircled by fighting armies, she was voicing our collective hatred of the inhumanity of war.’¹⁰⁹ Hennings sang *Totentanz* (*Dance of Death*), an anti-war poem written by Ball, at numerous performances, to the tune of a well-known jingoistic song *So leben wir* (*This is how we live*):¹¹⁰

So sterben wir, so sterben wir.
Wir sterben alle Tage,
Weil es so gemütlich sich sterben läßt.¹¹¹

This unexpected juxtaposition of the words and the music with its associations of patriotism represented a startling anti-war statement. As Ball notes to his sister: ‘Man ist ganz erschüttert, wenn Emmy das Lied singt.’¹¹² In theatre, Brecht’s ‘separation of the elements’ was to employ similar deliberate disconnections between aural and visual stimuli with an aim of unsettling the audience in their comfortable

music, but Ball made up a melody for every song he wrote.’ Translation in: *Dada Drummer*, p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Entry for 16 June 1916. In: Ball, *Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 101. ‘The ideals of culture and art as a program for a variety show – that is our kind of *Candide* against the times.’ Translation in: *Flight Out of Time*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁹ Huelsenbeck, *Dada Drummer*, p. 137. Original German not found.

¹¹⁰ First performed at the ‘Cabaret Voltaire’ on 5 February 1916, Ball’s *Totentanz* had been published in *Der Revoluzzer* in 1915 and was later printed on postcards and apparently dropped over the trenches. Hennings claims that Hardekopf called it ‘das beste Lied der Revolution’ (‘The revolution’s best song’). See: Letter from Hennings to Ball, from Ascona in 1916. In: Ball and Hennings, *Damals in Zürich*, p. 72.

¹¹¹ Taken from: Karl Riha and Jörgen Schäfer, eds, *DADA total: Manifeste, Aktionen, Texte, Bilder*. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1994, p. 51. ‘This is how we die, this is how we die / We die every day / Because they make it so comfortable to die.’

¹¹² To Maria Hildebrand-Ball from Zurich, 1 March 1916. In: Ball and Hennings, *Damals in Zürich*, p. 44. ‘People are quite shaken when Emmy sings the song.’

expectations.¹¹³ Ball, like Brecht, was interested in the techniques used in Chinese theatre as an alternative approach to classic Western drama. An entry in Ball's diaries discusses Chinese theatre's recognition of the impact of song within dramatic performance: 'Wo der Dramatiker sein Publikum rühren oder erschüttern will, da läßt er zum Gesang übergehen. [...] Die Worte des Gesanges sind gleichgültig, die rhythmischen Gesetze sind wichtiger.'¹¹⁴ Hennings provided the effective singing voice. David Howard alludes to the way in which this Ball-Hennings partnership was the mainstay of soirées: 'Ball and his colleagues offered a constantly changing programme of activities, centred around Ball's piano playing and Emmy Hennings's songs.'¹¹⁵

Reciting, too, was a complex and revolutionary act, with performers employing unusual vocal effects and gestures. Ball's early contemplation on the musical and rhythmic qualities of words, as opposed to their semantics, would manifest itself in his and other Zurich Dadaists' radical experimentations with sound poems and simultaneous poems. In its use of words in non-syntactic ways, selected for their sound value instead of for their meaning, and its stringing together of sounds to invent new words, sound poetry was inextricably linked with performance. Richter writes:

Man kann zwar Laute – musikalisch-rhythmisch-melodisch sich zufällig miteinander verbinden lassen, aber mit ganzen Worten wird es schwieriger. Worte sind für den praktischen Gebrauch mit Inhalt geladen und fügen sich nicht ohne weiteres dem Zu-Fallen und der freien Handhabung.¹¹⁶

Avant-garde poets examined words as material in the way that painters examined the limitations and associations of paint by experimenting with new materials and collage. Poetry was explored not only on the page but also aloud and spontaneously.

¹¹³ See: Bertolt Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre'. In: *Brecht on Theatre: The development of an aesthetic*. [Edited and translated by John Willett]. London: Eyre Methuen, 1978, pp. 33-39.

¹¹⁴ Entry for 11 April, 1915. In: Ball, *Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 28. 'When the dramatist wants to move or shock his audience, he switches over to song. [...] The words of the song do not matter; the laws of rhythm are more important.' Translation in: *Flight Out of Time*, p. 16.

¹¹⁵ Howard and Lewer, *A new order*, p. 28.

¹¹⁶ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 54. 'Sounds are relatively easy to put together, rhythmically and melodically, in chance combinations; words are more difficult. Words bear a burden of meaning designed for practical use, and do not readily submit to a process of random arrangement.' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 54.

Sentences were broken down into words and combined in strange ways, and words themselves were broken down into sounds. Ball writes: 'Im Ausschaltung der angreifbaren Syntax oder Assoziation bewährt sich die Summe dessen, was als Geschmack, Takt, Rhythmus und Weise den Stil und den Stolz eines Schriftstellers ausmacht.'¹¹⁷ In another diary entry he notes:

Nirgends so sehr als beim öffentlichen Vortrag ergeben sich die Schwächen einer Dichtung. [...] Das laute Rezitieren ist mir zum Prüfstein der Güte eines Gedichtes geworden, und ich habe mich (vom Podium) belehren lassen, in welchem Ausmaße die heutige Literatur problematisch, das heißt am Schreibtische erklügelt und für die Brille des Sammlers, statt für die Ohren lebendiger Menschen gefertigt ist.¹¹⁸

Ball hints at the esoteric nature of published poetry, whereby books are relics to be collected and little impact is made on the readership. The switch to the stage was in part an attempt to close the gap between writer and reader. Through reciting poems in the cabaret venue, the Dadaists had an immediate means of experimenting with the effects of their work, and the artistic process became more a collaborative venture than an individual one, and more public than private. Spontaneous interference from the audience was welcomed, and fed into the radical new techniques and styles of sound poetry. Ball writes of the simultaneous poem: 'Der Eigensinn eines Organons kommt in solchem Simultangedichte drastisch zum Ausdruck, und ebenso seine Bedingtheit durch die Begleitung.'¹¹⁹ Each reading, and reception, of the poem was different, shaking up its status as a static entity conceived and concretised by the author.

Emmy Hennings's experience as a professional performer was important in this effective transferral of literature from the page to the stage. Bernhard Merkelbach writes of her contribution:

¹¹⁷ Entry for 9 July 1915. In: Ball, *Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 42. 'In eliminating vulnerable syntax or association one preserves the sum of the things that constitute the style and the pride of a writer – taste, cadence, rhythm, and melody.' Translation in: *Flight Out of Time*, p. 25.

¹¹⁸ Entry for 4 March 1916. *Ibid.*, p. 83. 'Nowhere are the weaknesses of a poem revealed as much as in a public reading. [...] Reciting aloud has become the touchstone of the quality of a poem for me, and I have learned (from the stage) to what extent today's literature is worked out as a problem at the desk and is made for the spectacles of the collector instead of for the ears of living human beings.' Translation: *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹¹⁹ Entry for 30 March 1916. *Ibid.*, p. 87. 'In such a simultaneous poem, the willful quality of an organic work is given powerful expression, and so is its limitation by the accompaniment.' Translation: *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Die avantgardistische Stoßrichtung des Dadaismus, die sich in diesem *Cabaret* entfaltete, hat Emmy Hennings – anders als Hugo Ball – jedoch nie ganz mitvollzogen. Sie blieb als Brettel-Künstlerin stärker an den Text-Vortrag mit begleitender Mimik, Gestik, Musikbegleitung zurückgebunden.¹²⁰

His conclusion that Hennings was never quite caught up by the avant-garde drive of the Dada group could be, in part, a consequence of the way in which she distances herself from Dada in retrospective accounts. Merkelbach also suggests that Hennings was left behind because, as a stage performer, her focus was on the actual delivery of performances, as opposed to the ideology behind them. Anna Rheinsberg, in her imaginative rewriting of Hennings's life, suggests that her role may have been circumscribed by expectations of her as a woman: 'Bohème ist männlich. Die Frau hat kein Wahlrecht. Sie tritt auf, niemals aber ein (in den Kreis), sie ist Lied, (Mal-)Modell oder Schreibmaschine.'¹²¹ Meanwhile, the second part of Merkelbach's statement points more positively to her very real and dynamic contributions on stage. Richter's summary of Dada, as literary phenomenon, is pertinent in this respect:

Die schöpferische Aktivität der Gruppe bestand in Herstellung, Vortrag und Veröffentlichung von Gedichten, Geschichten und Gesängen. Alle diese Gedichte, Gesänge und Geschichten fanden ihre entsprechende Form der Darstellung.¹²²

The delivery of texts within the performance venue – in fact each single delivery – is emphasised in this statement, as much as their production.

Hennings does stand out as a professional performer, but there should be no misconception that performance activity was limited to those who had experience. Many of the Dadaists took to the stage, their renditions of sound and simultaneous poetry providing some of the most famous moments in Dada history. Performers read both their own and others' work, with ownership and individual production assuming

¹²⁰ Bernhard Merkelbach, 'Nachwort'. In: Riha and Weber, *Betrunken taumeln*, p. 101. 'However, unlike Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings never fully went along with the avant-garde thrust of Dadaism that was developing in this *Cabaret*. As a stage artist, she remained tied up with the delivery of text and the accompanying facial expressions, gestures and musical accompaniment.'

¹²¹ Rheinsberg, *Kriegs/Läufe*, p. 27. 'Bohemia is masculine. A woman doesn't have any vote. She steps up to, but never into, (the circle). She's Song, (Painter's) Model or Typewriter.'

¹²² Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 17. 'The creative energies of the group were devoted to the composition, performance and publication of poems, stories and songs. For each of these poems songs and stories there was an appropriate style of delivery.' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 18.

lesser importance than is the case with written literary work. Ball perceived his role in the group as a catalyst. He writes: 'Producere heißt herausführen, ins Dasein rufen. Es müssen nicht Bücher sein. Man kann auch Künstler produzieren.'¹²³ As Thomas F. Rugh notes of Hennings: 'She and the other Dadaists worked together not to produce a timeless art work but a 'gesture'.¹²⁴ This 'gesture' involved the combination of numerous art forms, explored through interactive and collaborative performances. RoseLee Goldberg has written of performance that 'no other artistic form of expression has such a boundless manifesto, since each performer makes his or her own definition in the very process and manner of execution.'¹²⁵ Hennings's participation, in this respect, provided a distinctive contribution, one that constituted a vital bridge between the experimental artistic forum and the more popular cabaret forum, and between the largely male poets and painters and the audience.

Although her name is scattered through memoirs and accounts of Dada, Hennings's part in its evolution is rarely emphasised either by the Dadaists or by art historians. Early sources, though, reveal a different picture of her remarkable role. Just a few weeks after the first performances at the 'Cabaret Voltaire', and at the height of its activity Ball wrote to his sister:

Den größten Erfolg hat Emmy. Man übersetzt ihre Verse für Bukarest. Sie hat dort eine ganze Kolonie von Freunden. Die Franzosen küssen ihr die Hand. Man liebt sie unaussprechlich. Sie liest aus den Gedichten, *Aetherstrophen* und *Krankenhaus*. Daneben neue Sachen. Dann singt sie ihre kleinen zärtlichen Chansons.¹²⁶

This short testament reveals Hennings's talents as networker, singer, collaborator and performer. Those roles, although rarely valued as much as writing, played an essential part in the unfolding of Dada in Zurich. Finally, there is one more aspect of Ball's words in this letter that merits highlighting. In his reference to Hennings'

¹²³ Entry for 1 March 1916. In: Ball, *Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 82. 'Producere means "to produce," "to bring into existence." It does not have to be books. One can produce artists too.' Translation in: *Flight Out of Time*, p. 53.

¹²⁴ Thomas F. Rugh, 'Emmy Hennings and Zurich Dada'. In: Mary Ann Caws and Rudolf E. Kuenzli, eds, *Dada/Surrealism 10/11*. Iowa: The University of Iowa, 1982, p. 5.

¹²⁵ Goldberg, *Performance Art*, p. 9.

¹²⁶ To Maria Hildebrand-Ball, from Zurich, 1 March 1916. In: Ball and Hennings, *Damals in Zürich*, p. 45. 'Emmy has the greatest success. They translate her verses for Bucharest. She has a whole colony of friends there. The French are kissing her hand. They love her beyond words. She reads from the poems *Atherstrophen* (*Etherstanzas*) and *Krankenhaus* (*Hospital*) as well as new things. Then she sings her tender little songs.'

recitals, he names two poems. These poems belong, in fact, to her own body of work. Hennings's role as performer has been underrated in accounts of Dada, but that fate is surpassed by an almost complete disregard for her writing. This negligence of a further aspect to her creative output, which stretches from pre-Dada years to post-Ball years, demands a thorough reassessment.

1.4 From Expressionism to Dada: poetry as cabaret

Emmy Hennings's status as poet is almost universally ignored in Dadaists' memoirs. In 1948 Richter comments on what became of her after Ball's death:

Emmy Hennings, die während ihrer Lebenszeit einige der besten deutschen Dichter getroffen und inspiriert hatte, die immer, solange ich mich erinnern kann (1912), unter Künstlern und Schriftstellern gelebt hatte, wurde schließlich selbst Schriftstellerin. Bücher über Hugo Ball, Kurzgeschichten und empfindsame, intelligente Gedichte erschienen in der 'Neuen Zürcher Zeitung', der Basler 'Nationalzeitung' und in Zeitschriften.¹²⁷

This particular account, though doubtless intended to be complimentary, implies a stereotypical muse figure whose own writing career began only in later years whereas in fact Hennings had begun writing and publishing poetry years before she met Ball. Her poems had appeared in various avant-garde publications such as *Pan*, *Die Neue Kunst*, *Die Aktion*, *Der Revoluzzer* and *Die Ähre* from as early as 1911 through to 1915.¹²⁸ Additionally, her first volume of poetry *Die Letzte Freude* (*The Last Joy*) was published in Berlin in 1913, as part of the series *Der Jüngste Tag*.¹²⁹ The list of her contributions to journals and newspapers throughout her life, as well as the bibliography of her own book publications, is extensive.¹³⁰

The newspaper account in which Hennings is described as a star, quoted in the last section, has been reproduced in several publications. It is interesting to note

¹²⁷ In: Ball and Hennings, *Damals in Zürich*, p. 177. Originally from *Dada-Profile*. Zurich: Arche, 1961. 'Emmy Hennings who had met and inspired some of the best German poets during her lifetime – who had always, as long as I can remember (1912), lived among artists and writers – had become a writer herself.' Corresponds in part to translation in: Hans Richter, 'Dada X, Y, Z...' (1948). In Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 286. It continues: 'Books about Hugo Ball, short stories and sensitive, intelligent poems appeared in the 'New Zurich Newspaper', the Basel 'National Newspaper' and in magazines.

¹²⁸ Her first published poem was *Äther* (*Ether*), in *Die Aktion*, August 1911.

¹²⁹ Published by the Kurt Wolff und Erich Reiss Verlag.

¹³⁰ See the bibliography for this study, in which I have incorporated a comprehensive list of her work. The most useful source was: Teubner, *Hugo-Ball Almanach 1984*.

that the rest of the review, which is never quoted, reads: ‘Sie wurde, als in Berlin die neueste Prager Dichtergeneration, nur ein wenig fett von Gefühl, aufkam, auch als Dichterin entdeckt und die Anmut ihrer Verse, irrtümlich genug, für die neue Richtung ausgebeutet.’¹³¹ If the newspapers knew Hennings as a poet in 1916, then why is her status as poet so rarely acknowledged in Dadaists’ memoirs?

To some degree, her prominence as a performer may have occluded her production as a poet. Richter’s ignorance of Hennings’s poetry can be seen to be symptomatic of attitudes towards women performers, and indeed towards women in the broader context. For him, it would seem, her role as a stage artiste overshadowed her status as poet, and her bodily presence outweighed her literary creativity. This corporeal identity was arguably reinforced by perceptions of her as a predominantly sexual, rather than intellectual, presence offstage too: firstly, as the promiscuous cohort to a number of Expressionists, and then as the partner of the key Dada figure Ball. Given that Hennings already had a substantial publication record, that she contributed three texts to the first Dada issue *Cabaret Voltaire*, and that she regularly read her own poems at Dada soirées, such disregard on the part of a fellow Dadaist is disappointing.

Another reason for the relative neglect of Henning’s poetry is the trajectory of Dada inventions and innovations. Dada Zurich has become known, appropriately it must be said, for its radical formal experimentations such as sound poetry and simultaneous poetry. Georges Hugnet describes the characteristics of Zurich Dada poetry as follows:

images catastrophées, juxtapositions insolites, recours au hazard (mots tirés d’un chapeau), langage inventé dont les sonorités rappellent les chansons africaines, simultanéisme... Son aventure est une révolte de l’esprit, une révolte morale et poétique.¹³²

These characteristics, as Hugnet’s last phrase implies, arose out of a new

¹³¹ ‘Cabaret Voltaire.’ From: *Zürcher Post* morning edition, 23 May 1916. In: Sheppard, *Dada Zürich in Zeitungen*, pp. 12-13. ‘When the newest generation of Prague poets, who were just a little rich with sentiment, arrived in Berlin, she too was discovered as a poet, and the grace of her verses was mistakenly exploited for this new trend.’

¹³² Hugnet, *L’aventure Dada*, p. 23. ‘catastrophic images, strange juxtapositions, recourse to chance (words pulled out of a hat), invented language whose sound patterns recall African songs, simultaneism... its adventure was a revolt of the spirit, a moral and poetic revolt.’

philosophical approach to literature and its traditions. Language, the material of literature, was seen as being bound up with propaganda and war. Dada experimental poetry sought to question the value of words as meaningful signs, to reappropriate them, to make them malleable and scrutinise language anew. These objectives resulted in the creation of sound poetry and simultaneous poetry, radical new forms in which semantics and narrative were forsaken in favour of the total breakdown of language components.

Hennings's work is considerably less radical in formal terms in comparison to these developments. Unlike the evolving highly experimental poems of some of the Dadaists, her poetry is mainly based on regular rhyme and rhythm patterns. Nevertheless, this kind of work was not totally isolated, either in performances or publications. The Dadaists in the early stages in Zurich made use of an eclectic range of literature in their search for new forms, including broadly expressionist poems by Jakob van Hoddis, Erich Mühsam and Else Lasker-Schüler – all of whom Hennings had established contacts with – as well as work from early French forerunners such as Arthur Rimbaud. Because Expressionism, the dominant avant-garde precursor to Dada in German-speaking artistic circles, would later be rejected in Dada manifestos as having been absorbed and neutralised into dominant bourgeois culture, an enduring opposition has been set up between them. This opposition must be seen in context as the rejection of the status quo by the 'new' avant-garde, and is continued in histories that neatly compartmentalise movements but, in practice, periods of crossover are apparent.¹³³

Hennings, coming from Expressionism to the early stages of Dada, illuminates such a crossover point. Of those few critics who have looked into her work in detail, some embrace her fully as an expressionist poet, owing to the formal style and thematic content of her poems, as well as her activities in expressionist circles. Others, particularly those with a focus on Dada, refute that categorisation altogether. Thomas F. Rugh, commenting on *Morfin (Morphine)*, asserts that its pessimistic ending and universal, rather than social or contemporary, protest

¹³³ The links between Dada and Surrealism are more readily accepted, or even over-emphasised. This relationship makes sense in the Paris context. They simply do not apply, however, to Dada in the German-speaking context, where Expressionism dominated before and 'Neue Sachlichkeit' after. See Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism*, pp. 26-7

distinguish it from the utopian messages of much expressionist poetry. He notes: 'Expressionist poets eagerly proclaim their visions of a new reality, and it is their eagerness and enthusiasm that differentiate them from the Dadaists and Emmy Hennings.'¹³⁴ Renée Riese Hubert also considers Hennings to be a Dadaist, but for the following reason: 'Her verse is in no way reducible to lament and elegy. Far from indulging in polemics it barely hints at protest, an underlying note often found in expressionistic poetry.'¹³⁵

However, since many of Hennings's poems, including those examples that we know to have been read at Dada performances, were completed and published before dadaist experiments with simultaneous and sound poetry began, comparisons with expressionist poetry are not only appropriate but also fruitful. It was through her activities in the literary cabarets in Berlin and Munich, after all, that Hennings found her first inspirations, began writing, and accessed opportunities to publish. In a letter to Ball in 1917, that is even after her involvement with Dada, Hennings refers to the impact of Jakob van Hoddis,¹³⁶ including his poem *Weltende (End of the World)*, considered by many critics to be the quintessential expressionist poem.¹³⁷ Michael Howard, for example, writes:

This ironic and satirical verse is characterised by abrupt shifts of imagery and metre, that evoke a sense of spatial and social dislocation. Its collage-like format or *Zeilengedicht* describes a dysfunctional world in the process of collapse. The "good bourgeoisie" only learns of the catastrophe second hand and is unable to comprehend its significance.¹³⁸

This same poem exemplifies how cross-fertilisation and intertextual workings between poets and precursors was fundamental, not isolated. Poetry by van Hoddis was recited in Dada performances, including at the second Dada 'Sturm' soirée,

¹³⁴ Rugh, 'Emmy Hennings and Zurich Dada', in: Caws and Kuenzli, *Dada/Surrealism 10/11*, p. 22. He also comments in detail on *Gesang zur Dämmerung*.

¹³⁵ Renée Riese Hubert, 'Zurich Dada and its Artist Couples'. In: Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, p. 520.

¹³⁶ Hennings and van Hoddis met in 1910 and had a sexual relationship during 1912 to 1913. As well as biographies on Hennings, see: Regine Nörtemann, ed., *Jakob van Hoddis: Dichtungen und Briefe*. Zurich: Arche Verlag, 1987.

¹³⁷ 'Brief an Hugo Ball' (Zurich, November 1917). In: Riha and Weber, *Betrunken taumeln*, pp. 96-97.

¹³⁸ Howard and Lewer, *A new order*, p. 95. The poem is reproduced in this publication, which centres on a recreation of the 'Cabaret Voltaire' experience. German p. 62; English translation p. 63.

when it was read by Hennings.¹³⁹ Else Lasker-Schüler, too, had written a poem *Weltende* in 1905, which would have been known to van Hoddiss and those who visited the Café des Westens.¹⁴⁰ Finally, Huelsenbeck wrote a poem entitled *Weltende* in 1916.

In the very early stages, the programme of Dada soirées was inclusive, eclectic, and crossed boundaries between movements. This is reflected in *Cabaret Voltaire*, the content of which was remarkably mixed. Cubist, expressionist and futurist visual and literary work feature in it, alongside the celebrated simultaneous poem *L'Amiral cherche une maison à louer* (*The Admiral in Search of a House to Rent*) by Huelsenbeck, Tzara and Janco. Hennings contributed three poems: *Gesang zur Dämmerung* (*Twilight Song*), *Morfin* (*Morphine*) and *Die vielleicht letzte Flucht* (*Perhaps the Last Flight*).¹⁴¹ Given the circumstances of this first publication, the insistence on dadaist (or expressionist) credentials is not necessarily productive in Hennings's case. Instead, the work that she published as part of this first Dada publication will be taken as concrete evidence of her contributions to the group's output, and examined by drawing on models of expressionist and dadaist techniques as appropriate.

Gesang zur Dämmerung (fig. 2, below) has a dreamlike quality. Reminiscent of the thoughts of a tormented, fearful or even hallucinatory mind, it evokes visions of death and despair: 'Gespenster gehen um beim Küchenbord / Und kleine Tannen sind verstorbene Kinder / Uralte Eichen sind die Seelen müder Greise.'¹⁴² Its use of dream-work and the transformation of everyday objects, through vivid imagination and juxtapositions, are common to other dadaist, and later surrealist, poetry. There is a lack of spatial coherence as the poem moves between interior and exterior, between the domestic space of curtains and kitchens and the garden beyond, which are

¹³⁹ 'Galerie Dada' 14 April 1917. His poems are also read at the 'Cabaret Voltaire' on 7 February 1916.

¹⁴⁰ Michael Howard must be credited with making the connections between the work of van Hoddiss, Huelsenbeck and Lasker-Schüler. Howard and Lewer, *A new order*, p. 95.

¹⁴¹ Full issue of *Cabaret Voltaire* reprinted in Giroud, *Dada: Zurich, Paris*. This (first) poem falls on pp. 6-7 of the issue, pp. 22-23 of the volume.

¹⁴² 'Ghosts haunt the edge of the kitchen / And little fir trees are dead children / Ancient oaks are the souls of tired old men.' Translation in: Willard Bohn, ed., *The Dada Market: An Anthology of Poetry*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993, p. 101.

permeated and transformed by imaginary influences. The ‘Reihungsstil’ (or serial style), whereby phrases follow on from one another without an insistence on grammatical or logical coherence, is typical of expressionist poetry. The technique is meant to reflect the fragmented state of subjective reality, rather than impose a coherent ‘realist’ view.

G E S A N G Z U R D Ä M M E R U N G

für Hugo Ball

Oktaven taumeln Echo nach durch graue Jahre.
Hochaufgetürmte Tage stürzen ein.
Dein will ich sein —
Im Grabe wachsen meine gelben Haare
Und in Hollunderbäumen leben fremde Völker
Ein blasser Vorhang raunt von einem Mord
Zwei Augen irren ruhelos durchs Zimmer
Gespenster gehen um beim Küchenbord.
Und kleine Tannen sind verstorbene Kinder
Uralte Eichen sind die Seelen müder Greise
Die flüstern die Geschichte des verfehlten Lebens.
Der Klintekongensee singt eine alte Weise.
Ich war nicht vor dem bösen Blick gefeit
Da krochen Neger aus der Wasserkanne,
Das bunte Bild im Märchenbuch, die rote Hanne
Hat einst verzaubert mich für alle Ewigkeit.

Figure 2: Emmy Hennings, *Gesang zur Dämmerung*¹⁴³

Death, the passing of time, and fear are dominant themes. There are also references to the unfamiliar exotic or ‘Other’ (‘in Hollunderbäumen [*sic*] leben fremde Völker’ and ‘Da krochen Neger aus der Wasserkanne’).¹⁴⁴ Connections with Lasker-Schüler’s work, some of which was also included in the Dada cabarets, are apparent. Both her *Heimweh* (*Homesickness*) and *Weltflucht* (*Flight from the World*)

¹⁴³ *Cabaret Voltaire*, June 1916, p. 12. From: Giroud, ed., *Dada: Zurich, Paris*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁴ ‘A strange race lives in lilac trees / Negroes crawled from the water pitcher.’ Translation in: Bohn, *The Dada Market*, p. 101. ‘Hollunderbüsche’ should be translated as ‘elder bushes’ rather than ‘lilac trees’. According to Reetz, these grew in the garden of Hennings’s childhood home. Reetz, *Emmy Ball-Hennings*, p. 16.

have much in common with Hennings's poetry.¹⁴⁵ Each uses nature in imaginative, sometimes exotic ways to recreate personal and troubled experiences of the world, including flight, escape, homesickness, fear, isolation and despair. As she became disillusioned with theatre, Hennings had written: 'Es wäre interessant, das kaum mehr Begreifliche darzustellen. Das unbekannte, unlogische Leben.'¹⁴⁶ In poetry such as this, she apparently strives for this kind of depiction.

Furthermore, the influence of theatre can be glimpsed in this poem, in that as well as visions, sound features strongly: 'Oktaven taumeln Echo nach', 'Ein blasser Vorhang raunt von einem Mord', 'Uralte Eichen [...] / flüstern die Geschichte des verfehlten Lebens' and 'Der Klintekongensee singt eine alte Weise.'¹⁴⁷ This evocation of sounds as well as sights ties in with Hennings's experience as an actress, reader and singer. The poem recalls ghost tales, lending itself to an atmospheric reading aloud. Indeed, and which might easily be overlooked, Hennings chooses to call it a 'Gesang' or 'song'.

The second poem *Morfin (Morphine)* (fig. 3, below), repeats the line 'Hochaufgetürmte Tage stürzen ein'¹⁴⁸ from the first poem, *Gesang zur Dämmerung*, and continues that poem's pessimistic tone: 'Wir lesen auch nicht mehr die Tagespost / Nur manchmal lächeln wir still in die Kissen / Weil wir alles wissen, und gerissen / Fliegen wir hin und her im Fieberfrost.'¹⁴⁹ The poem may refer to a hospital scene, where returning and wounded soldiers were treated with morphine for pain relief. It may also come out of Hennings's own experiences of drug use. Finally, the poem has wider, more general resonance in its evocation of despair, frustration and hopelessness. The morphine of the title might be seen as the cause of feverish concern or alternatively the only means of escape. The ending brings no resolution,

¹⁴⁵ Howard and Lewer, *A new order*. Poems reproduced in German on p. 60 and p. 66 respectively; English translations p. 61 and p. 67.

¹⁴⁶ 'Aus dem Tagebuch'. In: Riha and Weber, *Betrunken taumeln*, pp. 88-89. 'It would be interesting to depict that which is scarcely graspable any more. The unknown illogical side of life.'

¹⁴⁷ 'Octaves stumble like echos'; 'A pale curtain whispers about a murder'; 'Ancient oaks [...] / whisper the story of unsuccessful lives'; 'Lake Klintekongen sings an old tune'. Translations in: Bohn, *The Dada Market*, p. 101.

¹⁴⁸ 'High-towered days crumble into ruins.' Translation in: *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ 'We no longer read the daily mail / Only sometimes do we smile quietly in the pillows / Since we know everything, and fly / To and fro slyly in attacks of shivering.' Translation in: *Ibid.*

expressing instead the same sense of powerlessness that pervades the whole poem:
'Wir treiben haltlos durchs Leben / Und schlafen, verwirrt, hinüber...' ¹⁵⁰

M O R F I N

Wir warten auf ein letztes Abeuteuer
Was kümmert uns der Sonnenschein?
Hochaufgetürmte Tage stürzen ein
Unruhige Nächte — Gebet im Fegefeuer.

Wir lesen auch nicht mehr die Tagespost
Nur manchmal lächeln wir still in die Kissen,
Weil wir alles wissen, und gerissen
Fliegen wir hin und her im Fieberfrost.

Mögen Menschen eilen und streben
Heut fällt der Regen noch trüber
Wir treiben haltlos durchs Leben
Und schlafen, verwirrt, hinüber . . .

Figure 3: Emmy Hennings, *Morfin* ¹⁵¹

Both poems evoke distressing experiences of life, and the despairs and fears of a tortured mind.

The third of Hennings's three inclusions in *Cabaret Voltaire*, *Die vielleicht letzte Flucht* (*Perhaps the Last Flight*) (fig. 4, below), is strikingly different from the other two texts. Its beginning is characteristic of Hennings's poetic work, the first few lines collating aspects of a scene in typical 'Reihungsstil': 'Tiefe Nacht. Still. In einer fremden Stadt ein stilles Zimmer. Eckig. / Mattes Kerzenlicht flackert. / Dämonisch öffnet sich eine Tür.' ¹⁵² This text is essentially a dialogue between a man and a woman and resembles a short dramatic script for the stage.

¹⁵⁰ 'We push unsteadily through life / And sleep, confused and exhausted...' Translation in: *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁵¹ *Cabaret Voltaire*, June 1916, p. 12. Reproduced from: Giroud, ed., *Dada: Zurich, Paris*, p. 28.

¹⁵² 'Deep night. Silence. In a foreign city a steep room. Cornered / Feeble candle light flickers / Demonically, a door opens.' Translation in: Howard and Lewer, *A new order*. 'Steep' is a mistranslation and should rather read 'still'.

DIE VIELLEICHT LETZTE FLUCHT

Tiefe Nacht. Still. In einer fremden Stadt ein steiles Zimmer. Eckig.
Mattes Kerzenlicht flackert.
Dämonisch öffnet sich eine Tür.
Zwei Wesen sitzen einander gegenüber. Ein Mensch und die Frau.
Der Mann (sich in zwei graue Seen versenkend, die auch unruhig waren) spricht: „Ich möchte
Dich ansehen. Immer anschauen — ganz genau ansehen. —“
Die Frau (langsam und gedehnt): „Ich glaube man soll nichts genau anschauen. Nur nicht genau
ansehen. Ich glaube — —“
Der Mann: „Du glaubst, sagst Du?“
Die Frau (zögernd): „Ja. Mir erscheint alles zweifelhaft. Alles fraglich.
Vielleicht —“
Er (wie trinkend): „O sprich zu mir — ich höre!“
Sie (verzehrend, mit abgerissener Gebärde): „Nimm mich! Nimm mich!“
Sie fielen in einander. Sie Hög ihm zu . . .
Später greift er sofort nach einer Cigarette.
Sie lächelte leise (ein Lächeln, das unso süßser wirkte, weil es selten war): „Ah! Du bist einer
von denen. Hin. Sofort neue Reize.“
Er: „Ein anderes Thema.“
Seine Augen blickten kühl. Um die Lippen, boshaft schmal irrte ein graues Lächeln. Das Lächeln
des Mörders.
Sie sah entgeistert auf seinen offenen Mund. Seine Augen kniffen sich zynisch zusammen.
Da schlug es in sie. Augen brannten in einander. Saugten sich fest. Da erkannte sie ihn.
Hinüber und herüber ein geheimes Zeichen.
Er: „Ja, ja, . . . Ich bin derjenige — — —“
Sie zitterte. Sie fiel schüchtern in seine Hände. Und dann zu ihm aufblickend und hingeworfen
gestreckt: „Dir leb ich — Dir sterb ich.“
Und wieder dieses graue Mörderlächeln um seinen schmalen Mund.
— Am andern Tage trafen sie sich. Er fragte „Wie geht es Dir?“
Und sie starb, weil sie sich beobachtet fühlte.

Figure 4: Emmy Hennings, *Die vielleicht letzte Flucht* ¹⁵³

Two characters appear: ‘Zwei Wesen sitzen einander gegenüber. Ein Mensch und die Frau.’¹⁵⁴ This line has been translated as ‘Two beings sit opposite one another. A man and a woman’. However, it fails to get across a contrast between the two individuals inherent in Hennings’s specific choice of language. The man is ‘Ein Mensch’ (‘a human being’). The article ‘ein’ denotes a specific individual, and the choice of ‘Mensch’ (as opposed to ‘Mann’) makes clear that he is a distinct person or human being. The woman, on the other hand, is introduced as ‘die Frau’ (‘the woman’), as opposed to ‘eine Frau’ (‘a woman’), suggesting a generic category of woman.¹⁵⁵ Neither character is identified by name, so that each appears to be more a representation of his/her gender, with the woman apparently existing principally in relation to the man.

The dialogue between the two characters is difficult, stilted, hesitant and ultimately unsuccessful. Frequently their words trail off. They fail to connect or

¹⁵³ From: *Cabaret Voltaire*, June 1916, p. 28. From: Giroud, *Dada: Zurich, Paris*, p. 44.

¹⁵⁴ Translation in: Howard and Lewer, *A new order*.

¹⁵⁵ This distinction reminds us of Richter’s comment that Hennings was alien to him ‘als Frau wie als Mensch’ in section 1.1. Ref. Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 24.

conclude through their language, only coming together through a physical sexual encounter that is finally tragic, at least for the woman who submits, in spite of the man's coldness and threatening air. Howard writes of this poem: 'it is deeply Expressionistic in tone and effect and creates an intense psychological picture of a tragic sexual encounter of the type so familiar in the poems, plays, prints and paintings of the period.'¹⁵⁶ The last line is especially poignant. It relates back to Hennings's experience as performer and her consciousness of the performativity of her gender role. She writes: 'Und sie starb, da sie sich beobachtet fühlte.'¹⁵⁷ Being observed, existing under the male gaze, is the woman's fate. In *Vor der Premiere (Before the Premiere)* Hennings describes the same experience, as the cabaret actress prepares for the opening night: 'Da bemerkte sie, daß man sie beobachtete. Ihre Schultern sanken herab, das Gesicht wurde schlaff und fiel zusammen. [...] Jetzt zweifelte sie an ihrer Schönheit.'¹⁵⁸

Die Vielleicht letzte Flucht is also unusual in formal terms, maintaining an uneasy status as a short dramatic dialogue, but with poetic aspects. Hennings adds notes in brackets, for example, reminiscent of straightforward stage directions. The following line gives instructions for the voice:

Die Frau: (langsam und gedehnt): "Ich glaube man soll nichts genau ansehen. Nur nicht genau ansehen. Ich glaube ..."¹⁵⁹

At other points the notes are poetic, rather than instructive, addressing a reader or listener as opposed to a director, such as:

Der Mann (sich in zwei graue Seen versenkend, die auch unruhig waren) spricht.
Or:

¹⁵⁶ Howard and Lewer, *A new order*, p. 101. He goes on to say 'For more information and examples of Expressionist drama, see Mel Gordon, ed., *Expressionist Texts*, New York, 1986, 1992.'

¹⁵⁷ 'And she died, because she felt watched.' Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ In Rheinsberg, *Kriegs/Läufe*, p. 31. Taken from: Emmy Hennings, *Frühe Texte*. Edited by Bernhard Merkelbach. Siegen: Universität-Gesamthochschule Siegen, 1987, p. 17f. 'Then she noticed that she was being watched. Her shoulders sank, her face became slack and fell. [...] Now she doubted her beauty.'

¹⁵⁹ 'The woman: (slowly and drawn out): "I don't think one should look directly at anything. Just don't look directly. I think ..."'. Translation in: Howard and Lewer, *A new order*.

Sie lächelte leise (ein Lächeln, das umso süßter wirkte, weil es selten war)¹⁶⁰

In her recitations of poetry Hennings adds a visual element to the words, through gestures, costumes and bodily movements. Here she adds visual notes too:

Seine Augen blickten kühl. Um die Lippen, boshaft schmal irrt ein graues
Lächeln. Das Lächeln des Mörders.
Sie sah entgeistert auf seinen offenen Mund. Seine Augen kniffen sich
zynisch zusammen.¹⁶¹

The dialogue, visual clues and gestures combine to form a fragmentary, disturbing and incoherent scene. The text represents a crossing of the boundaries between poetry and drama, the written word and the spoken word, and the 'real' and fantastic.

The disconnection of the two voices and the lack of communication emphasise the semantic futility of language, a notion that other Dadaists take to extremes with their reciting of simultaneous and sound poetry. In this dialogue, although Hennings does not break words apart, she portrays an acute failure of language as social system, thematised in terms of relationships between men and women. In this dialogue, and her poetry in general, Hennings focuses especially on spoken language and the oral tradition. Many of her poems are intense emotional laments, love poems or short dramatic tales, lending themselves to recitation and performance. Some are songs. They are frequently intense first-person appeals, their tone passionate and histrionic.¹⁶² The Dada cabaret provides Hennings with a new forum in which to promote poetry, her own material and others'.

Hennings had come to poetry via an unusual route. Even after her first volume was published, in Germany, she continued to write out or type her poems herself, bind them into volumes, and offer them for sale during performance intervals. It was common for women cabaret artists to sell pictures of themselves to the audience following performances, and Hennings describes how she would circulate with these in the 'Simplizissimus', as well as poems by authors such as

¹⁶⁰ 'The man (sinking into two grey restless seas) speaks'; 'She smiled quietly (a smile that was all the sweeter for its rarity).' Ibid.

¹⁶¹ 'His eyes glanced coolly. Around the lips, maliciously small, a grey smile wandered. The smile of the murderer / She looked dumbfounded at his open mouth. His eyes creased cynically.' Ibid.

¹⁶² For others see: Riha and Weber, *Betrunken taumeln*. Most of the examples collected here were first published between 1912 and 1915.

Ringelnetz.’¹⁶³ This, she claims, is how she first met Ball, to whom she gave a picture as a gift. Hennings subsequently took a step further by selling her own work as well as her image: another example of her particular, sometimes uneasy oscillation between body/mind and performer/writer.

The ‘Kunsthau Zürich’ owns a surviving example of one such volume from 1916. It is stamped with the address ‘Künstlerkneipe Voltaire (Meierei), Spiegelgasse 1, Zürich’.¹⁶⁴ Hand-bound, typed, and signed in ink, the volume contains six poems. Emmy Hennings describes her booklets as follows:

Die Gedichtbändchen waren federleicht, doch war eines dem anderen insofern nicht ähnlich, da ja jedes anders illustriert war, auch verschiedenartig ausgestattet, mit Schilfgras beklebt oder mit kleinen Bildchen aquarelliert.¹⁶⁵

The hand production of these volumes and their sale in the cabaret venue represents a crossing of the boundaries between art and craft and between high art and low art. Literature is presented in a different form in a different arena. Hennings’s actions are reminiscent of the ‘Moritatensänger’ (or street ballad singers) who recounted stories in song, accompanied by boards with illustrations. After the oral presentation, they would then sell broadsheets with pictures and texts. Each copy of Hennings’s books is slightly different, in contrast to mass-reproduced publications.

After *Cabaret Voltaire* no further work by Hennings is included in Dada magazines, since her and Ball’s involvement with the group was so short-lived. However, she continued to write poetry throughout the twenties and thirties, and continued to have it published. A description by Arp of a visit by him and Sophie Taeuber-Arp to Ball and Hennings in 1926 praises her ongoing output: ‘Emmy Hennings las uns Gedichte, tiefe Träume vor, und wir vergaßen die schaudererregende Klage des Empedokles über die Erde.’¹⁶⁶ The 1957 volume *Dada*

¹⁶³ Emmy Hennings, ‘Erste Begegnung.’ In: *Ibid.*, pp. 86-102. Originally from *Das flüchtige Spiel*.

¹⁶⁴ Catalogue entry in: Hans Bolliger, Guido Magnaguagno, Raimund Meyer, eds, *Dada in Zürich*. Zurich: Kunsthau Zürich und Arche Verlag, 1985, p. 275.

¹⁶⁵ *Ruf und Echo. Mein Leben mit Hugo Ball*, Zurich, Cologne, Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1953, p. 58. ‘The little books of poems were feather light, but no two were alike, since they were each one illustrated differently, even produced variously, stuck with reeds or painted with tiny watercolour pictures.’

¹⁶⁶ Arp, *Unsern täglichen Traum, Erinnerungen, Dichtungen und Betrachtungen aus den Jahren 1914-1954*. Zurich: Arche Verlag, 1955, p. 179. ‘Emmy Hennings read her poems,

Gedichte: Dichtungen der Gründer, which he edited, provides a welcome recognition of Hennings as poet. It includes seven of her poems, putting her on a rare equal footing with four other Zurich Dada poets.¹⁶⁷ These comprise the three texts from *Cabaret Voltaire*, as well as *Ätherstrophen* (*Ether verses*), *Nach dem Cabaret* (*After the Cabaret*) *Tänzerin* (*Dancer*) and *Mädchen am Kai* (*Girl on the Quay*). These poems offer powerful glimpses of life for outsiders in a particular socio-historical context. In *Mädchen am Kai*, for example, she depicts the life of a prostitute: 'Ich, Passagier im Zwischendeck des Lebens.'¹⁶⁸ In *Tänzerin*, the on-stage vitality of the performer stands in stark contrast to her angst and hesitation in dealing with the realities of life. In the *Äther* poems, her topic is drug addiction.¹⁶⁹

Hennings's poetry tells us a lot about the transitions between Expressionism and Dada in formal terms. She contributed to two major avant-garde movements as both performer and poet. Her involvement in both reminds us of the ways in which approaches, styles and innovations cross over in time periods, geographies, people and poems. Her poetry and prose also provide a useful and intense evocation of alienation, and of the experiences of outsiders in a rapidly changing socio-historical urban context. At the end of *Cabaret Voltaire*, there is a list of contributors to the issue. Next to Hennings's name, and in place of nationality, the term 'sans patrie' has been chosen.¹⁷⁰ For Hennings, this notion of homelessness is of great significance both to her life and her work, extending far beyond a detachment from national roots to include a deep-rooted, complex sense of being adrift that relates to issues including gender, personal and social circumstances, and her professional and cultural position.

her profound, creative dreams. We forgot the cruel plaint of Empedocles; we forgot the earth.' Translation in: Arp, 'Dada Was Not a Farce' (1949). In: Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 293.

¹⁶⁷ Hans Arp, *Dada Gedichte: Dichtungen der Gründer*. Zurich: Peter Schifferlei Verlag / die Arche, 1957. The others are Arp, Ball, Huelsenbeck and Tzara. There is a section on simultaneous poems from Arp, Walter Serner and Tzara, plus a selection of one poem from various other writers.

¹⁶⁸ 'I, passenger between the decks of life.'

¹⁶⁹ Bernhard Merkelbach deals with this series in a published treatment of Hennings's poetry but fails to discuss the meaning of 'Äther' as a drug, undoubtedly a weak point in his readings. See: Teubner, *Hugo-Ball Almanach 1984*, chapter 9.

¹⁷⁰ Full issue of *Cabaret Voltaire* reprinted in Giroud, *Dada: Zurich, Paris*. This note falls on p. 32 of the issue, p. 48 of the volume.

1.5 Post Dada: conversions and chronicles

In the thirty years following her departure from Dada, and up until her death, that is throughout the years 1918-1948, Hennings continued to write and to publish prolifically. Nevertheless, this period of her life is frequently distilled into two broad lines of thought in any commentaries about Dada that include mention of her. The first common observation is of a devoted wife, who spent the remainder of her life writing memoirs about her husband. The second tends towards criticism of that work: it laments the damaging and limiting influences of Catholicism on her accounts of Ball's life. Whilst both these facts contain some truth, they fail to take account of the difficult and less linear processes and circumstances in her post-Dada life, both before and after Ball's death in 1927.

Hennings's relationship with religion, that is her conversion to Catholicism, is an interesting and intricate element of her life story, but, just like Dada, it did not come about in a single moment. What Reetz makes clear in her biography is that Hennings's dialogue with religion began long before Dada: this was no post-Dada, post-bohemian reaction, as some accounts would have us believe. She also evaluates the ways in which Hennings herself reports on her religious experiences in her own prose work, making clear that the truth is open to question here too. The blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction in memoirs is common, and in Hennings's work can be quite blatant. In a memoir text about her performance as Arachne, she states, for example: 'Ich habe doch noch nie die Wahrheit gesagt, nicht einmal als wahrsagende Spinne.'¹⁷¹

Hennings's tendency to make use of life experience in her poetry and prose is a strong feature of her writing, as is her tendency to make use of fictions to make sense of her life. Her discourse with Catholicism is interwoven with questions about morality, spirituality and structure. What riles critics so much, perhaps, is the intrusion of religion per se. Hennings's account of Ball's history is particularly unsettling for Dada devotees, who adhere strictly to the notion that religion was

¹⁷¹ In: 'Einmal Königin'. First published in *Berliner Tageblatt*, Vol. 55, no. 321, 10 July 1926. In: Teubner, *Hugo-Ball Almanach 1984*, p. 69. 'I have never spoken the truth however, not even as a truth-speaking spider.' Hennings refers to her performance with Flamingo's Maxim-Ensemble, as discussed in section 1.2 above.

amongst the enemies of the nihilist Dadaists, even though Hennings was far from alone in seeking spiritual alternatives. The fact that in her case the choice fell on organised religion and the fact that Ball also converted to his wife's religion post-Dada has made her something of a scapegoat for Ball enthusiasts.

Hennings's actual texts merit more detailed focus. She wrote three volumes on Ball, the anthology *Hugo Ball: Sein Leben in Briefen und Gedichten* (*Hugo Ball: His Life in Letters and Poems*) (1930), and two biographies: *Hugo Balls Weg zu Gott* (*Hugo Ball's Path to God*) (1931) and *Ruf und Echo: Mein Leben mit Hugo Ball* (*Call and echo: My Life with Hugo Ball*) (1953).¹⁷² John Elderfield, a Ball scholar, writes of these: 'The Hennings works are unfortunately all uncritical hindsight interpretations of Ball as a devout believer whose youthful excesses never really hindered his path to ultimate righteousness.'¹⁷³ In *Ruf und Echo*, for example, Hennings's accounts are highly romantic, depicting Ball as a visionary, emphasising the special emotional bonds between the two of them, and insisting on his life's work as a progressive search for 'meaning' and 'truth'. In an earlier text, too, she writes that while she cannot clarify Ball's 'Entwicklung' ('development'), his life story is essentially that of 'ein konvertierender Mensch'.¹⁷⁴ The title alone tells us much about her approach to Ball's biography and about Hennings. Not only does it allude to the story, as she tells it, of her husband's religious or spiritual calling, but it could also be read in terms of her relationship to him. She describes him metaphorically as the call that she had been listening out for since childhood, and to which she responded as an echo.¹⁷⁵ The imagery not only has obvious religious overtones but also implies a more passive-responsive role for Hennings, in relation to Ball. Certainly in these memoirs she attaches enormous importance to her husband's work, neglecting in large part her role in the story and making frequent omissions.

Erickson concludes that Hennings's accounts are 'distorted by her touching

¹⁷² *Hugo Balls Weg zu Gott*, Munich, 1931; *Ruf und Echo. Mein Leben mit Hugo Ball*, Zurich, 1953.

¹⁷³ 'Introduction' in: Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, p. xliii, footnote 8.

¹⁷⁴ 'Das Varieté: Die Zeit vor dem Cabaret Voltaire'. In: Riha and Weber, *Betrunken taumeln*, p. 86. 'A person in the process of converting.'

¹⁷⁵ See: Ball and Hennings, *Damals in Zürich*, p. 78.

desire to depict Ball in the best light'.¹⁷⁶ There are other factors to consider, however, in assessing Hennings's output during the years after Ball's death. On a pragmatic level, she still had severe financial difficulties, and the 'Benziger Verlag', as a Catholic publisher, may have made certain demands on her to shape her accounts.¹⁷⁷ Her consistent struggle with guilt and redemption doubtless also played a part, as well as her determination to preserve and further her husband's reputation. Hennings's accounts of Ball are indeed flawed on grounds of pure accuracy, that is as documentary records, but they should not be dismissed as of no interest. They shed light on one woman's extraordinary relationships, not only with Ball and Dada but also with writing and representation.¹⁷⁸

It is seldom mentioned that Hennings also wrote a substantial collection of memoirs about her own experiences, and that she began this project long before chronicling her husband's life. Her semi-autobiographical novel, *Gefängnis (Prison)*, was published as early as 1919 and *Das Brandmal: Ein Tagebuch (Stigma: A Diary)* in 1920. Later, she published the story of her childhood and youth *Blume und Flamme: Geschichte einer Jugend (Flower and Flame: The history of my youth)* (1938), followed by *Das flüchtige Spiel: Wege und Umwege einer Frau (The fugitive Game: Roads and detours of a woman)* (1940). In *Brandmal* her character has the name Jessy; *Blume und Flamme* centres on the life of Helga, a cabaret performer, and *Das flüchtige Spiel* features Helga and Finny, but each book has strong autobiographical elements and obvious resonances with Hennings's own life, not least in this assumption of different roles and names.¹⁷⁹ *Ruf und Echo*, meanwhile, can be viewed as a continuation of these works, as opposed to simply a book about Ball. This period was in fact the most productive of Hennings's writing life: her books were critically well received at the time, and it marked a new beginning in her

¹⁷⁶ John D. Erickson, *Dada: Performance, Poetry, and Art*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984, p. 139.

¹⁷⁷ See: Reetz, *Emmy Ball-Hennings*, p. 37. The chapter 'Goldene Eva und Hurenkind' looks at Hennings's Catholicism in much greater detail than appropriate here.

¹⁷⁸ Of course every autobiography or biography takes a certain ideological stance towards the past. Ball, as discussed, revised his diaries significantly to instil them with coherence. See: John Elderfield's introduction to *Flight out of Time*, p. xiv.

¹⁷⁹ For more detailed treatment of these works see: Sabine Werner-Birkenbaum, 'Emmy Hennings: A Woman Writer of Prison Literature.' In: Brian Keith-Smith, ed., *German Women Writers 1900-1933*. Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter: E. Mellen, 1993, pp. 167-200.

artistic career, that is fully off-stage. Additionally, she wrote literary and travel-related pieces for numerous magazines and newspapers, and left behind countless letters, amongst them a large amount of correspondence with Hermann Hesse, to whom she and Ball became very close.¹⁸⁰

Hennings's chronicles of Ball did not completely occlude other writing projects. In her work, as in her life, Ball was a significant character but it cannot be maintained that she simply privileged his interests over her own. On a personal level their partnership was beset with difficulties, including her desire to travel and her love affairs, despite the rosy picture that is often presented in Dada accounts. To perceive her as having devoted herself personally and professionally to Ball is to be won over by the fictions of her own accounts. These particular works have received considerably more attention than any of her other works principally because of the interest in Ball. Meanwhile, the rest of her output as a writer is still largely ignored.

Hennings's relationship with Dada was no less complicated. In *Ruf und Echo* Hennings fails to detail her role in Dada and begins the chapter 'Dadaismus' with a statement of her reluctance to discuss the period. Where other protagonists sought to underline their roles as motivating forces in Dada, Hennings practically obliterates her participation. This may be down to a more pressing determination to preserve Ball's legacy, following his death. It may also be because she became increasingly critical of Dada as an enterprise. In the text 'Das Cabaret Voltaire und die Galerie Dada', dating from 1930-31, for example, she writes: 'Gebannt, unter dem Zwang der Zeit stehend, regte sich lediglich das Tumultane in ihren Jüngern, obwohl es meines Empfindens nach die Aufgabe der Kunst ist, zu klären und nicht zu verwirren.'¹⁸¹ Furthermore, in the scheme of her life, Hennings's time with Dada was brief, however important the repercussions of its innovations now appear to us with

¹⁸⁰ Hennings's daughter, Annemarie Schütt-Hennings, states her aim to point out her mother's varied work beyond memoirs of Ball in 'Emmy Ball-Hennings. Anmerkungen zu ihrem Werk und ihrer Person.' With Franz L. Pelgen. In: Teubner, *Hugo-Ball Almanach 1984*, pp. 1-18. But in fact, other than noting her mother's works, she restricts herself mainly to 'correcting' misconceptions about her life.

¹⁸¹ 'Das Cabaret Voltaire und die Galerie Dada'. Ibid., p. 93. 'Spellbound, acting under the duress of the times, these disciples were simply stirred up with turmoil, although it is my feeling that the task of art is to make things clear and not to confuse them.' Nevertheless, this text is a useful atmospheric recreation of that time and betrays an enthusiasm for Dada.

hindsight.¹⁸²

Finally, it may simply have been that the memories of her bohemian life were too much for Hennings to process or accept. Her religious beliefs and her ongoing intellectual dialogue with the dialectics of sin and forgiveness, morality and immorality, and life and art undoubtedly influenced her writings. As van den Berg writes of the Catholic turn in her writings on Ball and her own incomplete autobiography: 'It was probably the result of a repugnance of a lifestyle [...] seen from the perspective of a pious catholic women of conservative values.'¹⁸³ In this respect, a note recalling the period just prior to the 'Cabaret Voltaire' acts as a warning: 'Über diese Zeit habe ich einmal Aufzeichnungen gemacht, die ich bald und zum größten Teil vernichtet habe. Vergessen, begraben sein lassen wollte ich, was gewesen ist.'¹⁸⁴ This destruction of her notes appears to be symptomatic of a desire to obliterate a difficult period of her life. Her experience offers one example of the difficulties inherent, for women especially, in being involved in a socially and culturally marginal grouping. What happens to an individual after that period of affiliation ends? Does she re-integrate or is she isolated? Hennings, having been rootless and unsettled for so long, evidently chose to find some more orthodox niche for herself.

It becomes clear, on reading biographies about Hennings as well as work by her, that life and work, fiction and memoirs, poetry and confession, performance and persona overlapped. At times, it is difficult to separate her personality from her performance, her real-life experiences from her fiction. Hennings played many roles in her life and in her work. As she wrote in *Gefängnis*, 'Wissen Sie, daß man spielen kann, wie man leben möchte? Wie soll ich Ihnen sagen? Ich spielte immer, was ich ersehnte. Spielte mir mein Ideal ... spielte so lange, und alles wurde mir Wahrheit

¹⁸² The 'Cabaret Voltaire' was open for a total of five months. Ball left Zurich and Dada for a short period in July 1916 before coming back to found the 'Galerie Dada' with Tzara in March 1917 (which ran until the end of May). By July 1917 he had left Zurich for good, with Emmy Hennings following shortly afterwards.

¹⁸³ 'The Star of the Cabaret Voltaire.' In: Pichon and Riha, *Dada Zurich*, p. 71.

¹⁸⁴ 'Das Variété: Die Zeit vor dem Cabaret Voltaire'. In: Riha and Weber, *Betrunken taumeln*, p. 78. This text is an extract from the unpublished work *Rebellen und Bekenner. Aus dem Leben von Hugo Ball, c. 1930-31*. 'About this time I occasionally made notes, which I soon destroyed for the most part. I wanted to forget, to bury what had been.'

...¹⁸⁵ She was pulled between pursuing experimental paths of freedom, and being consumed by guilt about these same unorthodox paths. Nevertheless, she had no illusions that art was superior to, or removed from, life. She writes of a fellow performer: ‘Dabei war er so naiv und leicht mitgenommen, daß er das Theater mit der Wirklichkeit, dem Leben, verwechseln konnte.’¹⁸⁶ For Hennings, art was a part of life, not its replacement.

Hennings’s rebellions were not confined to theory but were lived: before, during and after Dada. One role that highlights the conflicts in Hennings’s life is that of mother. This chapter began by considering a notion of her as the missing mother in the birth metaphor used so frequently in relation to Dada. This figurative notion of Hennings as mother inevitably draws attention to her literal status as a mother. Here, in privileging her own desires and needs over those of her child, she broke one of the greatest social taboos. She confesses: ‘Von einer Spielgier besessen, von einer Wander- und Melodiensucht, war selbst mein Kind nicht fähig, mich zurückzuhalten. Das Ungewisse, in das es mich hineinzog, war stärker noch als die Liebe zu meinem Kinde.’¹⁸⁷ It is a startling admission, and highlights the radical choices she made in life. Her highly unconventional background and experiences, as well as her status as exile, had made her a social outsider already by the time of Dada’s conception. She was no stranger to controversy or to existing on the fringes of socio-cultural norms. If Dada rejected the status quo and advocated liberating and democratising artistic activity, Hennings was a living dadaist example. She challenged convention, and rejected the expectations of normative patriarchal society in ways that others only talked, or wrote, about.

Hennings made one further contribution to the publication *Cabaret Voltaire*:

¹⁸⁵ Hennings, *Gefängnis*. Wetzlar: Büchse der Pandora, 1981, p. 23. ‘Do you know that one can act like one would like to live? How can I put it? I always acted what I longed for. Acted out my ideal ... acted for so long, and everything became the truth to me.’

¹⁸⁶ ‘Das Varieté. Die Zeit vor dem Cabaret Voltaire.’ In: Teubner, *Hugo-Ball Almanach 1984*, p. 115. ‘And with it he was so naïve and easily taken in, that he thought he could exchange theatre with reality, with life.’

¹⁸⁷ From: *Das flüchtige Spiel*, p. 199. In: Reetz, *Emmy Ball-Hennings*, p. 51. ‘Possessed by a greed for acting, by a desire for travel and melodies, even my child was not capable of holding me back. The uncertainty that pulled me towards it was stronger even than the love for my child.’

as well as the three written texts attributed to her, there is a representation of dolls.¹⁸⁸ In addition, she was photographed with a doll or hand puppet in around 1917 (fig. 5, below).



Figure 5: Photograph of Emmy Hennings with doll (1917)¹⁸⁹

References to dolls also come up in written texts. Recalling her time as a cabaret artiste, for example, Hennings writes:

Wenn der Mensch lebt, handelt, ist er Automat, Puppe. Doch wie empfindlich ist der Mensch als Puppe. Wir waren Marionetten und Gott war wie ein Kind, das uns am Fäden hält, um uns spielen zu lassen nach Belieben. Es war schwer, nicht von der Szene verschwinden zu dürfen.¹⁹⁰

Nothing could be more appropriate than the doll as a metaphor for Hennings's experience as performer, and as female body, onstage and off. Once again, for Hennings, experiences of performance and of life feed into one another, stimulating fundamental questions about individual agency and control, presence and absence,

¹⁸⁸ *Puppen: Emmy Hennings*. Full issue of *Cabaret Voltaire* reprinted in Giroud, *Dada: Zurich, Paris*. This picture falls on p. 20 of the issue, p. 36 of the volume. Hennings knew the doll-maker Lotte Pritzel in Munich, and she may well have been an inspiration.

¹⁸⁹ Reproduced in: Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, fig. 17.1, p. 518. Original in the 'Kunsthaus Zurich'.

¹⁹⁰ 'Das Varieté. Die Zeit vor dem Cabaret Voltaire.' In: Teubner, *Hugo-Ball Almanach 1984*, p. 111. 'When man lives, acts, he is an automaton, a doll. But how sensitive he is as a doll. We were puppets and God was like a child who held us by the strings, making us play according to his whims. It was difficult, not being allowed to disappear from the scene.'

mind and body. *Brandmal* provides a further example, where her character writes:

Da sitze ich vor meinem Spiegel und kann diese Puppe betrachten. Ich weiß, daß ich mich verdoppeln kann. [...] Male mir ein rotes Herz auf den Mund, wo doch das richtige Herz unsichtbar ist. [...] Die rechte Schwindeldämonie.¹⁹¹

If the doll offers a potent metaphor for man's experience, in times of social crisis and personal upheaval, it offers an even more powerful metaphor for woman's experience. In the chapters that follow, it will transpire that two more women Dadaists – Sophie Taeuber and Hannah Höch – fabricated, and were photographed with, dolls or puppets. It is surely no coincidence, and constitutes the start of a thread of enquiry about how women saw themselves, and their particular roles, in art and in life.

¹⁹¹ *Brandmal*, p. 150. 'I sit there in front of my mirror and I can observe this doll. I know that I can be double [...] Paint a red heart on my mouth, where the real heart, though, is invisible. [...] True demonic lying.'

Chapter 2 – Sophie Taeuber

2.1 ‘Quietly’ multi-tasking: towards the *Gesamtkunstwerk*

Where Hennings’s name was often associated with her body, voice and overt sexuality, Sophie Taeuber’s evokes, for her fellow Dadaists, a gentle quietness. Richter, for example, whose recollections of Hennings are tinged with unease, as discussed in the last chapter, remembers Taeuber’s character with more affection. He describes how she talked very little: ‘Meistens ersetzte ein scheues oder sinnendes Lächeln bei ihr die Notwendigkeit zu reden.’¹⁹² This quality of quietness is evidently preferable to him, in contrast to the forthright and candid personality he saw in Hennings. Taeuber’s role within the social set-up and mechanics of the group was likely more palatable. As Richter states, ‘So gesprächig, angeberisch, krachmachend, herausfordernd wir waren, so still war Sophie.’¹⁹³ This contrast leaves many questions open, not least whether Taeuber’s quietness was not prompted or exacerbated by the rowdy machismo of some of the group, and how this might have impacted upon her opportunities and interventions.

This character assessment has tended to be carried over to later histories, just as it has with Hennings and just as it did with Höch, who, it transpires in the next chapter, was characterised as ‘the good girl’. In the preface to an exhibition catalogue on Taeuber from the 1970s, for example, the author writes, ‘Cleverly using, with a great tact, the mischievous aspects of her nature (confirmed by all who knew her) Sophie bore with a smile her most bitter attacks on the architectural and decorative

¹⁹² Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 45. ‘She usually obviated the necessity of speech with one of her shy and thoughtful smiles.’ Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 45.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 72. ‘Sophie was as quiet as we were garrulous, boastful, rowdy and provocative.’ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

ugliness of her time.¹⁹⁴ Even while the author acknowledges the radical nature of her work, he renders this unfeminine ‘bitterness’ more acceptable by emphasising the artist’s pleasant, undemanding character. A second example illustrates the ludicrousness of maintaining such a simplistic characterisation as a thread through both her life and work: ‘Even her death, accidental and premature (she was only 54 years old), was discreet.’¹⁹⁵ Taeuber died of asphyxiation, caused by a faulty boiler at the artist Max Bill’s house, in 1943. It is difficult to accept an alliance of her personal traits, aesthetic approach and death as coherently ‘discreet’. Finally, even a sympathetic biography on Taeuber has continued this theme, as evident in its title, *Von ihren Träumen sprach sie nie (She never spoke about her dreams)*.¹⁹⁶

Nevertheless, Taeuber fares markedly better than Hennings in Richter’s memoirs, not only in terms of personal judgements but also in references to, and a critical appreciation of, her work. In noting that she was a pupil at the Rudolf von Laban dance school, designed costumes, taught at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* (‘Applied Arts and Crafts School’) in Zurich, was a painter, and also created puppets, Richter succeeds in conveying something of the variety of Taeuber’s artistic activity within Dada. He also reproduces a number of pieces of her work, including a tapestry, a watercolour, and a painted wooden head.¹⁹⁷ Whilst these inclusions are welcome, it is noticeable nonetheless that Taeuber’s works often appear in Dada volumes as illustrations, but with relatively little explicit comment about the contributions they represent.

Huelsenbeck provides us with another, somewhat mixed, review:

Sophie Täubers Talent und Kraft waren erstaunlich. Ich sah sie nur selten, sie zeigte sich im Kabarett, nahm aber nicht an unserer Wildheit teil. Sie arbeitete als Lehrerin und lebte mit Arp, der heute den Ruhm seiner inzwischen verstorbenen Frau

¹⁹⁴ J.P.L. Fine Arts, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889-1943): Works on Paper (1915-1943)*. J.P.L. Fine Arts: London, undated. [Gallery Catalogue]. Text extracted from catalogue of the exhibition catalogue ‘Sophie Taeuber-Arp’, Musée d’Art Moderne de Strasbourg, March – June 1977.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Roswitha Mair, *Von ihren Träumen sprach sie nie: Das Leben der Künstlerin Sophie Taeuber-Arp. Romanbiographie*. Freiburg: Herder, 1998. This imaginative cross between a novel and biography is nevertheless a useful account of Taeuber’s life.

¹⁹⁷ The tapestry is *Formes élémentaires* (or: *Elementary Forms*) (1917), Plate 10; the watercolour is *Komposition* (or: *Composition*) (1920), plate 13; The head is *Dada-Kopf* (or: *Dada Head*) (1920), plate 20.

liebevoll pflegt. Sie ist so die einzige Frau geworden, die in der Entwicklung der neuen Kunst einen großen Namen bekommen hat.¹⁹⁸

It is a fine testament to Taeuber as a prolific, productive and innovative artist. However, Huelsenbeck's suggestion that Taeuber took a passive, almost non-existent part in the cabaret, simply 'showing up', demonstrates a blindness to her involvement as a choreographer and dancer and, it follows, to the dance element in Dada's 'wild' activities. The final phrase, which states that Taeuber was the only woman to be acknowledged as a contributor to 'new' art, contains within it issues at the heart of this study: to what extent women participated and innovated in avant-garde practices, and to what extent their names have been established, or omitted.

Huelsenbeck also points out Arp's role in reinforcing Taeuber's reputation. The relationship between Arp and Taeuber has to be taken into account, in that it had such impact on her status both within Dada and beyond. The label 'the wife of Arp' has brought with it both negatives and positives, but has been pivotal to her interventions and reputation. Of course it can be reductive: Arp is not referred to as 'the husband of Taeuber' in the same way as a Taeuber is 'the wife of Arp'. This reversal alone, seemingly ridiculous, indicates how such terms can be limiting. However, the partnership between Arp and Taeuber was exemplary of the fertile possibilities of partnerships and collaboration. It is customary to think of Arp as a generous contributor in this respect, but Taeuber's reciprocal generosity is also noteworthy. In pragmatic terms, her job as a teacher over thirteen years (1916-1929) provided financial support for them as a couple (echoing the balance of monetary affairs between Hennings and Ball). She also did the more painstaking work of making many of his designs into tapestries. Furthermore, Arp readily acknowledges the aesthetic impact of her work on his own.

Finally, Ball includes a number of important references to Taeuber in *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*. His comments predominantly deal with her work as a dancer in Dada soirées and are particularly valuable, given the relative scarcity of information

¹⁹⁸ Huelsenbeck, *Mit Witz, Licht und Grütze*, p. 61. 'Sophie Taeuber's talent and energy were amazing. I saw very little of her, she sometimes showed up in the cabaret but never took part in our wild doings. She taught school and lived with Arp, who now lovingly attends to his deceased wife's fame. Thus she is the only woman who really made a name for herself in the development of new art.' Translation in: *Dada Drummer*, p. 35.

on this aspect of her contributions. His accounts of Dada soirées, underpinned by his thoughts on literature, performance, and cabaret, provide vital access to her contributions to early Dada and to their significance in relation to Ball's own experiments. What emerges from these accounts, above all, is that Taeuber was a versatile artist who worked with a wide variety of art forms, making her an excellent contributor to his eclectic soirées, underpinned by *Gesamtkunstwerk* objectives.

Taeuber's relative success as a woman artist really owes itself to her continued activity and innovation alongside Arp, and in experimental fine art groups, beyond the Dada years. She is less often written about specifically in relation to her participation in Zurich during the Dada period, and generally still appears as a peripheral figure in that context. The extent and range of her contributions within the Dada forum have not been fully emphasised. Moreover, although her painting and sculpture are relatively widely acknowledged, there is less recognition of her work using textiles, and even scarcer exploration of her contributions to performance both via dance and via her puppet-making. Taeuber was, quite clearly, productive and prolific. Did she simply work away quietly? Was she integrated within the Dada group, or did she remain on the periphery? In what ways did her work have an impact within the group? Taeuber apparently contributed extensively to Dada, but without self-promotion. If her quietness meant that she was not always audible to her colleagues, it is still hard to imagine what blindness meant that she, and her work, were not always visible.

2.2 Taeuber as Dada body: the subversion of dance

According to Huelsenbeck, 'Sophie [...] shied away from the noisy cabaret, filled with drunken students and intellectuals not unwilling to express their antagonism in a fist fight.'¹⁹⁹ We know, however, that she did participate in Zurich Dada soirées, both as a choreographer and as a dancer. Dance has been given less weight than it merits in accounts of Dada soirées. There are several potential reasons for this. Firstly, it is difficult to reconstruct performances in any detail. Performance is, by its nature, ephemeral, and in Dada's case especially, soirées were characterised by

¹⁹⁹ Huelsenbeck, *Dada Drummer*, p. 97. It is fair to note that he also remarks on how Arp tended to keep a distance from the noise and publicity around the cabaret.

improvisation and chance occurrences. Reconstruction must draw principally on memoirs and on the few photographs that were taken and retained. In a tribute to Taeuber, Emmy Hennings describes the difficulty of recreating performance and of conveying its impact in words: ‘Wie man aber Musik nicht recht beschreiben kann und man sie selbst hören muß, so ergeht es mir auch mit dem Tanz von Sophie Taeuber, von dem ich gerne einen Begriff geben möchte.’²⁰⁰ Hennings is not only referring to the fact that transient performances have been lost, but also to the fact that dance, Taeuber’s particular contribution, can neither readily nor effectively be transposed into words.

A second possible factor in the negligence of dance is its status as a predominantly female occupation, an undercurrent of which is the association of the corporal with woman, and the intellectual with male. In Dada’s case, the dancers that became involved from outside of the group were all women, with the exception of one man, the experimental choreographer Rudolf von Laban. Having moved to Zurich from Munich in 1916, Laban (actually Hungarian-born) became involved with Dada shortly after the opening of the ‘Cabaret Voltaire’ in around April 1916.²⁰¹ As a theoretician and teacher of free, expressive dance, based around organic movement as opposed to classical traditions, and the developer of a new system of notation, he is well known as an avant-garde innovator.²⁰² The names of the numerous female dancers involved in Dada – such as Mary Wigman, Maria Vanselow, Suzanne Perrottet, Maja Kruscek and Käthe Wulff – are rarely cited, however. They crop up on posters and programmes, but otherwise have become footnotes.

Thirdly, the dance element in Dada soirées is considered by some critics to be not fully dadaist. David Hopkins, for example, writes, with reference to Laban that: ‘these innovatory dances, which bespeak an attempt to rid the body of constricting habits of expression [...] were not, in the strictest sense, motivated by Dada

²⁰⁰ Emmy Hennings, ‘Zur Erinnerung an Sophie Taeuber’. In: Georg Schmidt, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*. Basel: Holbein Verlag, 1948, p. 17. ‘Just as one can not quite describe music and must hear it oneself, so it is with Sophie Taeuber’s dancing too, which I would so much like to put into words.’

²⁰¹ Ball notes in his diary that Laban visited the ‘Cabaret Voltaire’ 2 April 1916.

²⁰² Laban’s *Schriftanz*, dating to 1928, was one of two modern dance notation systems, consisting of abstract symbols for direction, rhythm, and level of movement.

concerns.²⁰³ I seek to demonstrate in this section the ways in which at least some aspects of the experimental dance elements in Dada soirées converge with broader Dada ideology. Hopkins continues: ‘They sit a little oddly next to the edgier, more anarchic aspects of Dada performance, including the ‘negro dances’ of the male Dadaists.’²⁰⁴ This opposition, I argue, is in part linked to gender, and need not necessarily be so distinct.

It appears from memoirs that the Laban school dancers were something of a novelty to most of the male Dadaists, viewed chiefly as potential, or in fact actual, sexual conquests. Richter writes:

War das Odeon unser irdisches Hauptquartier, so war Labans Tanzschule unser himmlisches. Dort trafen wir die jungen Tänzerinnen der Generation: Mary Wigman, Maria Vanselow, Sophie Taeuber, Susanne Perrotet, Maja Kruscek, Käthe Wulff und andere. Nur zu bestimmten Zeiten war es uns erlaubt, in dieses Kloster einzudringen, mit dem uns mehr oder weniger zarte Bande vorübergehend oder dauernd verknüpften.²⁰⁵

Richter’s fondness for stereotype is evident here once again. His references to the heavens and to a nunnery are somewhat romantic choices that contrast with the women’s actual existence as corporal and sexual human beings. He writes about love affairs between the dancers and male Dadaists (Maja Kruscek and Tzara; Maria Vanselow and Georges Janco; Maria Vanselow and himself) declaring finally:

Serner dagegen, flatterhaft wie er war, liebte es nicht, seine Laban-Zelte oder was immer es war an einem einzigen Platz und dauernd in dieser schönen Umgebung aufzuschlagen. Es war jedenfalls ein reiches Feld von Gefahren, in das wir uns mit nicht geringerem Enthusiasmus stürzten als in Dada. Es gehörte dazu!²⁰⁶

Here, using a decidedly macho metaphor, Richter declares that sexual conquest and

²⁰³ Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism*, p. 116.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 71. ‘If the Odéon was our terrestrial base, Laban’s ballet school was our celestial headquarters. There we met the young dancers of our generation: Mary Wigman, Maria Vanselow, Sophie Taeuber, Susanne Perrottet, Maja Kruscek, Käthe Wulff and others. Only at certain fixed times were we allowed into this nunnery, with which we all had more or less emotional ties, whether fleeting or permanent.’ Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 69.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 72. ‘Serger, on the other hand, fickle as he was, did not like to pitch the tents of Laban (or anything else) in these lovely pastures for too long at a time. Into this rich field of perils we hurled ourselves as enthusiastically as we hurled ourselves into Dada. The two things went together!’ Translation in: Ibid., p. 70.

Dada went together.

Sophie Taeuber acted as a different type of bridging point between Dada and the Laban school. She had already seen performances by Laban's dancers in Munich as early as 1911.²⁰⁷ A few months after the start of Dada, in Summer 1916, she had visited his school in Monte Verità, with Käthe Wulff, and signed up as a pupil in Zurich. Dance became a component of Dada soirées in the Spring and Summer of 1916.²⁰⁸ Taeuber's involvement in Dada and the Laban school doubtless played an important role in cementing collaboration and intensifying dance activity. Both Suzanne Perrotet and Käthe Wulff, for example, point to Taeuber as a point of connection. Perrotet assumes that Taeuber secured contact between the two groups.²⁰⁹ Wulff, in response to the question 'Und die ersten Kontakte mit den Dadaisten?' replies, 'Arp und seine Frau Sophie Taeuber kannte ich bereits vor den Dada-Veranstaltungen. Sophie Taeuber war ja Schülerin bei uns und eine gute Freundin von Mary Wigman.' She goes on to say that Laban's parties and social events intensified contacts.²¹⁰ In September that year, Taeuber too held a 'Fête Littéraire' for the Dadaists and Laban dancers. The links were formed not only through Laban and the 'Cabaret Voltaire' but also via Taeuber and the dancers. By the time of the establishment of the 'Galerie Dada', Laban dancers, too, were taking part in Dada soirées.

Taeuber was not a dancer by profession but in line with dadaist preoccupations strove to cross her borders of expertise as a fine artist. Hennings writes that while she and her contemporaries had seen other dancers, including the renowned Mary Wigman, perform at Dada soirées, 'Keine aber hat auf uns solch starken Eindruck hinterlassen wie Sophie Taeuber.'²¹¹ Of course her praise must be seen within its context. The text in which it appears is a tribute following Taeuber's

²⁰⁷ Mair, *Von ihren Träumen sprach sie nie*, p. 34. Mair quotes a letter to her sister dated 27 November 1911.

²⁰⁸ Bolliger, Magnaguagno and Meyer, *Dada in Zürich*, p. 42.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41. This information comes from conversations between the author(s) of *Dada in Zürich* and Perrotet on 19 February 1981 and 30 March 1982.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44. 'And the first contact with the Dadaists?'; 'I knew Arp and his wife Sophie Taeuber already, before the Dada performances. Sophie Taeuber was actually a pupil of ours and a good friend of Mary Wigman.'

²¹¹ Emmy Hennings, 'Zur Erinnerung an Sophie Taeuber'. In: Schmidt, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*, p. 17. 'None, though, had left us with such a strong impression as Sophie Taeuber.'

death and, where Hennings attempts to convey the unique nature of Taeuber's dancing, her descriptions have a tendency towards lyricism. In one passage, for example, she uses the metaphor of a bird, in another that of a flower, and in a further extract she writes:

Sie stand um diese Zeit, da ich sie kennenlernte, in der Blüte ihrer Mädchenjahre, doch schon des Lebens innig bewußt und ihrer Bestimmung als Künstlerin entgegenreifend. Sie war von mittelgroßer, schlanker Gestalt, auch waren Gang und Bewegung bei ihr sehr schön, von natürlicher Anmut und Grazie. Nichts Starres, nichts Ungelöstes haftete ihr an.²¹²

This comment indicates grace and charm, qualities associated with traditional ballet. While Taeuber doubtless possessed these capabilities as a dancer, she cast them aside for dance interpretations at the Dada soirées, which made little use of such conventional aesthetic effects. As Perrotet states of the impetus for her own involvement: 'Ich wollte weg vom Harmonischen, vom Konsi-Stil ... das stimmte für mich einfach nicht mehr. Ich wollte kreischen, mehr kämpfen.'²¹³ Her choice of terms is far removed from the conventional vocabulary of grace, poise and charm associated with classical women dancers.

A description by Ball, from 1917, conveys an impression of the more radical nature of Taeuber's dance:

An Stelle der Tradition treten bei ihr die Sonnenhelle, das Wunder. Sie ist voller Erfindung, Kaprizie, Bizarrerie. [...] Jede Geste ist hundertmal gegliedert, scharf, hell, spitz. Die Narratei der Perspektiven, der Beleuchtung, der Atmosphäre wird hier einem übersensiblen Nervensystem Anlaß zu gestreicher Drolerie, zur ironischen Glosse. Ihre Tanzgebilder sind voller Fabulierlust, grotesk und verzückt.²¹⁴

²¹² Ibid., p. 15. 'At that time, when I came to know her, she was in the bloom of her youth, yet already inwardly conscious of life, and reaching towards her destiny as an artist. She was of medium, slight, build, her posture and movement were also lovely, with natural poise and grace. There was nothing stiff, nothing unrelaxed about her.'

²¹³ Bolliger, Magnaguagno and Meyer, *Dada in Zürich*, p. 71 footnote 145. 'I wanted to get away from harmony, from a consistent style ... It just didn't work for me any more. I wanted to screech, to fight more.'

²¹⁴ Ball, 'Die Tänzerin Sophie Taeuber' (1917). In: Schmidt, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*, p. 20. 'Instead of tradition, sunlight and wonder operate through her. She is full of invention, caprice, bizarreness [...]. Every gesture consists of a hundred, is sharp, bright, pointed. The narrative of the perspectives, of the lighting, of the atmosphere brings the over-sensitive nervous system to real drollness, to an ironic gloss. Her dance patterns are full of romantic desire, grotesque and enraptured.'

Ball's account emphasises the unexpected and disturbing elements of these renditions that, as he states, were far from traditional. The dances, 'grotesk und verzückt', must have been shocking to conservative audiences. Like other avant-garde groups, Dada deliberately sought extreme reactions. The title of a manifesto by the Futurist F. T. Marinetti, for example, *Pleasure of Being Booed*, conveys such an approach with powerful immediacy. Applause, for him, was the sign of a passive, unmoved audience and thus a sign of failure.

The Dadaists sought, and received, equally strong reactions and their soirées became infamous for audience outrage and participation. It is a sign of Dada's iconoclasm that the arts and craft school at which Taeuber taught so disapproved of her involvement in such radical manifestations, that she was compelled to adopt a pseudonym and mask when she appeared as a dancer.²¹⁵ At the end of the first issue of the journal *Dada*, a note acknowledging the Laban dancers reads: 'Mlle. S. Taeuber: bizarrerie délirante dans l'araigné de la main vibre rythme rapidement ascendant vers le paroxysme d'une démente goguenade capricieuse belle.'²¹⁶ It is an appropriately dadaist description. Both Taeuber and Käthe Wulff used principles such as the abandonment of strict ballet traditions, and the adherence to a musical score, as well as Laban's new system of dance notation, to choreograph radical new dances within the Dada forum.

The specifics of performances, that is the details of participants, timings and the dances themselves, cannot be fully recovered but memoirs provide some vivid accounts.²¹⁷ Richter describes the ballet *Die Kaufleute* (*The Merchants*), as having taken place against an abstract backdrop of cucumber plantations designed by himself and Arp, with masks by Janco, and performed according to choreography by Wulff and Taeuber.²¹⁸ Tzara recalls the dance that formed part of the last major Dada

²¹⁵ See: Arp, *Unsern täglichen Traum*, pp. 17-18.

²¹⁶ Full issue of *Dada* no. 1 reprinted in *Dada, Zurich Paris, 1916-1922*. These notes fall on p. 112 of the volume. 'Miss Sophie Taeuber: delirious bizarreness in the spider of the hand vibrates rhythm rapidly ascending to the paroxysm of a beautiful capricious mocking dementia.'

²¹⁷ Bolliger, Magnaguagno and Meyer, *Dada in Zürich*, p. 42, list those performances where it is proven that the Laban dancers participated as: 29 March 1917, 14 April 1917, 28 April 1917, 31 December 1918 and 9 April 1919.

²¹⁸ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 72; *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 70.

soirée in the 'Kaufleuten' Hall.²¹⁹ 'NOIR CACADOU, Danse (5 personnes) avec Mlle Wulff, les tuyaux dansent la rénovation des pythécantropes sans tête, asphyxie la rage du public.'²²⁰ Richter also remembers that same night and how the dance followed anarchist readings from Walter Serner that, according to Richter, had moved the audience from contempt to a state of self-awareness.²²¹ The dancing continued this success, though Richter is surprised that the programme survives the third section without violent incident:

Das war um so bemerkenswerter, als der Tanz 'Noir Kakadu' mit wildesten Negermasken von Janco, die helfen sollten, die hübschen Mädchengesichter zu verbergen, und mit abstrakten Kostümen über den schlanken Leibern unserer Labanenserinnen etwas völlig Neues, Unerwartetes, Antikonventionelles war.²²²

He rightly draws attention to the fact that any emphasis on beauty is abandoned, but is unlikely to be aware just how strong a statement this makes in terms of gender roles and expectations. In contrast to their normal performative roles (both on stage and in life), here the dancers' femininity, beauty, sexuality and even individuality are deliberately concealed. The unconventionality of this approach is underlined, though doubtless unconsciously, by Richter's earlier description in which he characterises the Laban girls as an alluring, sexual presence.

In a further reference, Richter observes: 'I don't know whether this was the first abstract dance performance ever done, but it was sensational anyhow.'²²³ Dadaist performances sought to restore original, ritual qualities to dance, influenced by their perceptions of primitive, non-Western dance. They perceived dance, like poetry and painting, as having been severely limited and restrained by expectations and tradition. Not only adept dancers but all of the Dadaists, including Hennings,

²¹⁹ This performance took place on 9 April 1919. It was the second, and last, Dada public soirée in Zurich. Taeuber was absent because of illness.

²²⁰ Tzara, *Chronique Zurichoise*, p. 23. 'NOIR CACADOU, Dance (5 persons) with Miss Wulff, the pipes dance the renovation of the headless pythecantropes stifles the public rage.' Translation in: Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 240.

²²¹ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 82. 'Das Publikum war doch durch Serner's Ausführungen zum Bewußtsein seiner selbst gekommen.' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 79. 'Through Serner's contribution the public had gained in self-awareness.'

²²² Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 82. Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, pp. 79-80. 'This was all the more remarkable since the ballet *Noir Kakadu*, with Janco's savage Negro masks to hide the pretty faces of our Labanese girls, and abstract costumes to cover their slender bodies, was something quite new, unexpected and anti-conventional.'

²²³ 'Dada X, Y, Z....' (1948). In: Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 288.

Ball, Huelsenbeck and Tzara were involved in performing. Dance became a democratised activity within Dada, its particular subversions requiring no formal training. One of its appealing characteristics, in terms of Dada principles, would have been its potential as a direct, unmediated form, a means for the artist to communicate directly, physically with the audience. The contrast with the disciplined, learned techniques of dance – especially the canonical and time-honoured traditions of ballet – is emphatic.

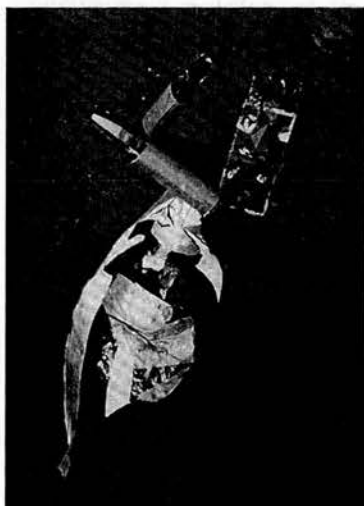


Figure 6: Photograph of Sophie Taeuber at opening of the 'Galerie Dada' (1916) ²²⁴

Nonetheless, the more professional Laban group of dancers, like Hennings, were an attraction and steady force in the soirées, and their involvement took experimentation to a more intense level. The two-way cross-influence between Dada and the Laban school constituted a productive dialogue within the Zurich avant-garde scene. Käthe Wulff, for example, recalls the nature of her involvement in a Dada soirée: 'Wenn jemand einen Tanz machen wollte, zum Beispiel die Sophie Taeuber, so habe ich mir den Tanz zeigen lassen und ihn mit ihr besprochen.' In a clear indication of a mutual dialogue, she continues, 'Neu dazugekommen sind die Masken, das gehört zur Gruppe, zu uns und zu dieser Zeit.'²²⁵ Masks, and costumes,

²²⁴ Reproduced in: Nadia Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, fig. 17.2, p. 518.

²²⁵ Conversation with Wulff on 20 January 1982, in: Bolliger, Magnaguagno and Meyer, *Dada in Zürich*, p. 43. 'If someone wanted to do a dance, for example Sophie Taeuber, I would have her show me the dance and discuss it with her.' 'A new addition was the masks: that belonged to the group, to us and to the time.'

were evidently integral to the impact of performances, as a photograph of Taeuber dancing on the opening night of the 'Galerie Dada' (fig. 6, above) illustrates. She wears a large rectangular mask made by Janco. Painted with ox blood, it is reminiscent of primitive tribal design. Her costume, designed by Arp, is made up of cardboard tubes for arms, which end with claws instead of fingers. The masks and costumes are discomfiting, the whole effect contrasting starkly to the usual graceful, attractive spectacle of dance. The Dadaists explored African imagery and music in various art forms, including in Ball's sound poems, Janco's masks, and Taeuber's dancing, challenging the notion that European culture was the only acceptable aesthetic.

Laban was especially interested in the expressive qualities of the body, which initially seems a great contrast with dadaist principles, where individual expression (along the lines of Expressionism) is seen as inward looking. Nonetheless, if the body is perceived as the material of dance, essentially, then an emphasis on that material can be seen as a point of convergence with dadaist preoccupations in fine art and literature. In the Dada forum, moreover, experiments took off in their own directions. In some dances, the costumes and masks were designed to limit the performer's physical movement, conceal the body, and prevent individual psychological expression. Perrotet, for example, remembers being 'eingengt' ('restricted' or 'cramped'), such that the performers could hardly move.²²⁶ The whole effect combined elements of the human, the animal and the machine, juxtaposing the primitive with the modern. Ball writes: 'Was an den Masken uns allesamt fasziniert ist, daß sie nicht menschliche, sondern überlebensgroße Charaktere und Leidenschaften verkörpern.'²²⁷ The dressing-up and stylization of the body, reminiscent of the abstraction of the body in cubist painting, constituted a rejection of representation or mimesis. It drove a wedge between the spectator and the performer and incited surprise from the audience instead of empathy and identification. In addition, it sought to reach something outside of reality and existence as perceived in the everyday 'civilised' world.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 71 note 55.

²²⁷ Entry for 24 May 1916. In: Ball, *Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 97. 'What fascinates us all about the masks is that they represent not human characters and passions, but passions and characters that are larger than life.' Translation in: *Flight out of Time*, pp. 64-65.

A text by the contemporary experimental musician Germaine Albert-Birot sheds light on the thinking around dance at that time. In 'Réflexions sur la Danse' ('Reflections on Dance'), published in *SIC*, she writes:

Elle [la danse] peut et doit s'accompagner de chants et de cris suggérés par le rythme même.

La danse par excellence ce sont les enfants qui sautent en riant, qui font une ronde en chantant; ce sont les paysans qui claquent leurs sabots en rythmant la bourré ou autre; ce sont les sauvages, les sauvages surtout, criant, hurlant, gesticulant, trépigant, exprimant frénétiquement de TOUT leur être l'émotion rythmique.²²⁸

This attitude towards non-Western expression was widespread in avant-garde circles. It aimed to celebrate it, even though, especially from a current perspective, it was at times patronising, simplistic and naïve. The other vital component to these performances, alongside the visual aspect, and which Albert-Birot highlights, was sound. Music was often basic, and frequently improvised. Again, African instruments like drums were used, and rhythm emphasised. Underneath an outline programme for the opening night of the 'Galerie Dada', which includes dance by Taeuber (with poems by Ball and masks by Arp), Ball writes, 'ein Gongschlag genügt, um den Körper der Tänzerin zu den phantastischen Gebilden anzuregen. Der Tanz ist Selbstzweck geworden.'²²⁹ Instead of following a dance score that is strictly conceived around a piece of music, as in traditional dance, the dancer reacts freely and spontaneously to sound, and the transient, ever-changing act of dancing assumes importance as an unrepeatable event. The music, equally, might react to the dance: the two aspects are inter-related. This aspect relates to the Dadaists' celebration of chance over intellect, and spontaneity over fixity, as evident in some manifestations in poetry, fine art and performance.

Alternatively, and even more radically, the performer might dance to poetry.

²²⁸ *SIC* no. 25, January 1918, ed. Pierre-Albert Birot. 'Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art Archive and Library Gallery' in Edinburgh [hereafter SNGMA]. 'It [dance] can and should be accompanied by songs and cries suggested by the rhythm itself. Dance, par excellence, is children jumping and laughing, making circles and singing; it's the peasants banging their clogs in rhythm to some 'bourré' (old French dance tune) or other; it's the savages, above all the savages, shouting, yelling, gesticulating, stamping their feet, frenetically expressing rhythmic emotion with ALL their being.'

²²⁹ Entry for 29 March 1917. In: Ball, *Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 149. 'A gong beat is enough to stimulate the dancer's body to make the most fantastic movements. The dance has become an end in itself.' Translation in: *Flight out of Time*, p. 102.

On the occasion Ball describes above, his sound poem *Gadji Beri Bimba* was spoken aloud, in place of musical accompaniment, as Taeuber danced.²³⁰ On other occasions Taeuber danced to his poems *Karawane (Caravan)* and *Gesang der Flugfische und Seepferdchen (Seahorses and Flying Fish)*. Ball writes, in reference to a dance accompanied by the latter poem: ‘Hier im besonderen Falle genügte eine poetische Lautfolge, um jeder der einzelnen Wortpartikel zum sonderbarsten, sichtbaren Leben am hundertfach gegliederten Körper der Tänzerin zu verhelfen.’²³¹ The qualities of the sounds were reflected in, and reflected, the physical movements of the dancer. Words, usually confined to the pages of a book, were broken into sounds, transferred into the space occupied by the performers, and contributed to the creation of new performance experiences not dulled by visual, linguistic and aesthetic sets of conventions.

Dance, in some form, was introduced as part of dadaist experimentation quite early on. For example, Tzara recalls ‘Danse cubiste costumes de Janco, chacun sa grosse caisse sur la tête, bruits, musique nègre / trabatgea bonooooooooo oo ooooo’ at the ‘Saal zur Waag’ soirée on 14 July 1916.²³² However, following the move to the ‘Galerie Dada’, there was a new concentration on the dance element in Dada performances, which must be credited in large part to Sophie Taeuber. As a Laban pupil, apprentice choreographer and experimental dancer she played a vital role in the incorporation of dance as an art on the Dada stage. She could act with comparative autonomy in this area, possibly because it was not an art form in which the men were either skilled, or especially interested.

The dance elements of the Dada soirées offered exemplary contributions to the search for a ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ in that they each combined physical movement, colour, shape, texture and sounds. In themselves they can be viewed as ‘Gesamtkunstwerke’, whilst also significantly intensifying the visual and physical

²³⁰ Entry for 24 May 1916. Ibid., p. 97.

²³¹ Entry for 29 March 1917. Ibid., p. 149. ‘Here, in this special case, a poetic sequence of sounds was enough to make each of the individual word particles produce the strangest visible effect on the hundred-jointed body of the dancer.’ Translation in: *Flight out of Time*, p. 102.

²³² Tzara, *Chronique Zurichoise*, p. 10. ‘Cubist dance, costumes by Janco, each man his own big drum on his head, noise, Negro music / trabatgea bonooooooooo oo ooooo.’ Translation in: Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 236.

elements of the shows as whole. Moreover, dance was not simply added as a new, separate element, but incorporated into the ongoing experimental aspects of the Dada cabaret. Taeuber created dances that responded to the impromptu music practised in the soirées as well as to the rhythms of words and language, in sound poems. The collaboration between Ball in particular, as poet, and Taeuber, as dancer, was highly productive to both parties, allowing for the conjunction, exploration and extension of both poetry and dance, and contributing to the release of the latter art form from its restrictive traditions, in line with the revolutions taking place in approaches to literature and painting.

2.3 Agency and authorship: Taeuber's puppets

A further area of Taeuber's activity in Zurich, one which connects her interests in both performance and fine art, was puppet making.



Figure 7: Photograph of Sophie Taeuber & Hans Arp in front of Taeuber's puppets (1918)²³³

It was an interest she developed during the Dada years and that peaked in a major project outside of Dada: in 1918, she made seventeen polychromed wood marionettes for a production of Carlo Gozzi's *König Hirsch/Roi Cerf (King Stag)* at

²³³ From: Marc Dachy, *Journal du Mouvement Dada 1915-1923*. Geneva: Skira, 1989, p. 50.

the 'Théâtre Zurichois de Marionnettes'.²³⁴ Two photographs of Arp and Taeuber in front of a wall hung with puppets, one of which is reproduced below (fig. 7, above), give an idea of the variety of her creations.²³⁵ These images, alongside other photographs, help to build up a picture of this little-explored area of her work, supplementing references and notes in memoirs.

The following two short accounts are offered as an introduction to Taeuber's work as a puppet-maker. The first is an extract from a newspaper review, published in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in February 1919: 'Dann Sophie Täuber (Zürich), die vortreffliche Marionettenfiguren zu entwerfen weiß aus sicherm Farbengeschmack und lebendigem Charakterisierungsvermögen heraus, und die in Halsketten und Perltaschen exzelliert.'²³⁶ The review relates to an exhibition by 'Das neue Leben', a group in which Taeuber also participated, but it highlights her established reputation as a puppet-maker. Closer to Dada, Richter also recalls Taeuber's puppets. The following comments form part of his recollections of the soirée at the 'Kaufleuten' Hall on 9 April 1919:

I know [...] that the puppets [...] were the first abstract puppets ever used at puppet shows. They consisted mostly of thread spools joined together, decorated with feathers (to make a prince) or with pearls (to make a princess) or rags (to make the villain). They moved with a grace not of this earth and would have out-circused even Calder's circus in their purity. (They were lost later on).²³⁷

Both accounts, though relatively short, highlight two major areas for consideration. The first is the construction of the puppets, that is the materials selected and the forms given to the figures. The second is how they were conceived of as 'performers', that is the actions, movements or roles ascribed to them. Together, they raise questions about authorship, agency, representation and the body.

²³⁴ The premiere took place on 11 September 1918. *Le Re Cervo* was written by the Italian Carlo Gozzi in 1762. Essentially a fairytale, it has been described as a mixture of commedia dell'arte, puppet theatre, political satire, and romantic comedy.

²³⁵ Both appear in Scheidegger, *Zweiklang*, p.18 and p. 20.

²³⁶ 'Kunstchronik: Aus dem Zürcher Kunsthaus III [Auszug].' Hans Trog, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 2 February 1919, Sonntagblatt. In: Sheppard, *Dada Zürich in Zeitungen*, p. 50. 'Next, Sophie Täuber (Zurich), who knows how to design superb Marionette figures, through a self-assured eye for colour and through giving them lively character traits, and who excels in necklaces and pearl bags.'

²³⁷ 'Dada X, Y, Z...' (1948). In: Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 288. Richter attributes the puppets to Arp and Taeuber, but I have found no other sources that link Arp with puppet-making.

Taeuber used a variety of materials, including wood, metal, feathers, textiles, and pearls to construct her puppets. *Der Zeltweg*, the last Dada journal to be produced in Zurich,²³⁸ includes a photograph of one example, a single-jointed wooden figure. The puppet's arms are disproportionately long; the legs shorter and immobile. Rather than being modelled like a human figure, mimetically, it is composed of basic geometric shapes such as cylinders, pins and balls. Like many of her puppets, it is only partly dressed, leaving the functioning and mechanics of the joints visible. Taeuber chose occasional, interchangeable decorations, like the pearls and feathers that Richter notes above, to represent the puppet's character, gender or status. As with trends in other art forms, the construction of the puppets as stylised forms of human figures represents a move away from figuration and illusionism.

Another surviving photograph shows one of the puppets, *Die Wachen (The Guards)*, constructed for the *König Hirsch* show. Although made out of wood, it is painted silver to resemble metal. Made up of a torso and five legs, with multi-jointed arms extending above it, it has no head, but five spikes protruding upwards, each stacked with three blue-painted conical shapes. It is more like a replica of a machine, renouncing any particular human identity.²³⁹ Where the wooden puppets recall crafting and handiwork, and the reduction of form to basic organic shapes, the metal puppet calls to mind industrial production and the machine. Again, the puppet's mechanism is exposed instead of concealed. This example is reminiscent of the Futurists, whose performances took technology as a particular focus: their robot plays used puppets as performers and, conversely, human performers to represent the components of machines. It also anticipates the workshops and performances of the Bauhaus group in the 1920s, into which Oskar Schlemmer introduced puppets as a means of exploring the relationships between man and machine.²⁴⁰

Taeuber's experiments using puppets, as an alternative to human actors or

²³⁸ October 1919. Edited by Otto Flake, Walter Serner and Tristan Tzara.

²³⁹ See: Scheidegger, *Zweiklang*, p. 19. Or: Carolyn, Lanchner, ed., *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*. [Catalogue of an exhibition, 16 September to 16 November, 1981]. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1981, p. 29, plate 10. No scan available.

²⁴⁰ For excellent chapters on both Futurism and Bauhaus see: RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1988. For a more recent overview of performance art up until the present day see: Günter Berghaus, *Avant-Garde Performance: Live Events and Electronic Technologies*. Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

dancers on stage, represents an engagement with an ongoing ‘man or marionette’ philosophical and aesthetic debate.²⁴¹ This debate foregrounds the capabilities or limitations of the performer, the effect on the audience, and – beyond the stage – the agency of the individual. All of these themes are encapsulated in an essay by Heinrich von Kleist, ‘Über das Marionettentheater’ (‘The Puppet Theatre’), which is central to any discussion of puppetry.²⁴² Written in 1811, it relates a conversation between the narrator and a Herr C. (Mr. C.). The latter convinces the narrator of the value of what he had otherwise relegated to ‘diese, für den Haufen erfundene, Spielart einer schönen Kunst.’²⁴³

Kleist’s essay has particular resonance for Taeuber’s dadaist performance objectives. The puppet has an advantage over the performer in that it works as an operated mechanism. In purely pragmatic terms, it is not restricted by gravity.

Kleist’s Mr C. writes:

Zudem [...] haben diese Puppen den Vorteil, daß sie antigrav sind. Von der Trägheit der Materie, diese dem Tanze entgegentrebendsten aller Eigenschaften, wissen sie nichts: weil die Kraft, die sie in die Lüfte erhebt, größer ist, als jene, die sie an der Erde fesselt.²⁴⁴

What is interesting here is the replacement of the human with an inanimate object, one that can be operated using a more scientific set-up. As Kleist’s essay observes, since each movement has its centre of gravity, the ‘Machinist’ (or ‘operator’) of the puppets simply needs to control that centre. The limbs are just pendulums, and follow in a mechanical way, according to the laws of gravity. The use of puppets

²⁴¹ Olga Taxidou’s paper ‘Actor or Puppet: the Body in the Theatres of the Avant-Garde’, delivered at the conference *Avant-Garde – Neo-Avant-Garde*, The University of Edinburgh, 22-24 March 2002 was useful in informing this section. Publication forthcoming in: Dietrich Scheunemann, ed., *Avant-Garde / Neo-Avant-Garde*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2005.

²⁴² Heinrich von Kleist, ‘Über das Marionettentheater.’ In: Walter Müller-Seidel, ed., *Aufsatz über das Marionettentheater: Studien und Interpretationen*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1967, pp. 9-16. Translation: Heinrich von Kleist, ‘The Puppet Theatre’. In: *Selected Writings: Heinrich von Kleist*. [Edited and translated by David Constantine]. London: J.M Dent, 1997, pp. 411-416.

²⁴³ Kleist, ‘Über das Marionettentheater.’ In: Müller-Seidel, *Aufsatz über das Marionettentheater*, p. 11. ‘This popularized version of a noble art.’ Translation in: Kleist, ‘The Puppet Theatre’. In: *Selected Writings*, p. 412.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12. ‘Also, [...] these puppets have the advantage of being *resistant to gravity*. Of the heaviness of matter, the factor that most works against the dancer, they are entirely ignorant: because the force lifting them into the air is greater than the one attaching them to the earth.’ Translation in: *Ibid.*, p. 414.

allows the artist to investigate the total removal of the human subject or body, replacing it with a manipulable object.

There is still the question of the intervention of the human hand, not only in the fabrication of the puppet, but also in its operation. The essay's discussion as to whether the person operating the puppet requires any sensitivity and experience as a dancer raises key questions. Kleist's narrator views the removal of the human individual as a negative, and challenges his opponent: 'Ich sagte, daß [...] er mich doch nimmermehr glauben machen würde, daß in einem mechanischen Gliedermann mehr Anmuth enthalten sein könne, als in dem Bau des menschlichen Körpers'. Mr. C replies that a human being could not even equal a marionette and, furthermore, 'Nur ein Gott könne sich, auf diesem Felde, mit der Materie messen.'²⁴⁵ This privileging of materials and mechanics is at the heart of avant-garde concerns. Taeuber, as both dancer and puppeteer, implicitly confronts these questions by exploring both inanimate and human performance in Dada soirées. Where, in dance performances, she conceals her body in angular costumes, through employing puppets she removes it from the field of view altogether. The actor or dancer's individual intervention, or 'Zierei' ('affectation') as Kleist calls it, is removed as much as possible.

This retreat from individual psychology is a key issue for dramatists in the early decades of the twentieth century. Evidently puppets are not endowed with the character and emotions of the performer, there is no intrusion of personality or empathy, and they can be readily manipulated. A reflection on puppet theatre informs techniques in live theatre too. In his diaries, Ball writes of Chinese theatre, 'Das Drama [...] führt in eine Welt der Magie, die oft einen marionettenhaften Charakter annimmt und die Einheit des Bewußtseins fortwährend in der Art und Weise des Traumes unterbricht.'²⁴⁶ Bertolt Brecht, later, explores these issues extensively, using various techniques to alter, or essentially distance, the actor's

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 13. 'I said that [...] he would still never persuade me that there was more grace in a mechanical marionette than in the form and build of the human body.' 'Only a god was a match for matter.' Translation in: Ibid., p. 414.

²⁴⁶ Entry for 11 April 1915. In: Ball, *Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 28. 'The drama [...] leads to a world of magic, which often takes on a marionette-like character and keeps on interrupting the unity of consciousness, as dreams do.' Translation in: *Flight out of Time*, p. 16.

relationship with his/her role and with the audience in his theory of epic theatre.²⁴⁷ He seeks to avoid audience empathy, proposing that it prevents a reasoned reaction.

Within Dada, it is Taeuber who is most prolific in making puppets, but there are other instances of Dadaists using mannequins or dolls. Georges Hugnet describes some of the more unexpected events in a series of performances: 'Serer instead of reciting his poems placed a bunch of flowers at the feet of a dressmaker's mannequin. Some marionettes and some masks of Sophie Täuber-Arp, curious objects in painted cardboard, recited the poems of Arp.'²⁴⁸ The audience, expecting to see the poet reciting, is confounded by seeing the performer concealed behind a mask, reciting off stage with a puppet on stage, or even replaced totally by a silent mannequin. These unexpected experiments raise far-ranging questions: Where is human agency in the production of the performance? How much decision-making is involved in the aesthetic effects? How might mechanical processes take over some of the functions of the human hand or figure – even of the artist? The (in)visibility of the artist is thematised, his/her subjective presence diminished. These questions all relate to wider Dada experiments with chance, readymades and technology. The relationships between the artist and his or her work, and between the artist and the audience, are thrown into relief. Ideologically, the use of puppets questions agency and authorship, foregrounding questions about the artist's role, as well as about self-determination more broadly.

As discussed in the last chapter Hennings, too, produced dolls during the Dada period. As well as featuring in the Cabaret Voltaire publication, they were animated on at least one occasion. An entry in Ball's *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*, alluding to the soirée celebrating the opening of the 'Galerie Dada' in March 1917, provides a rare mention of these dolls, noting how an acquaintance from the audience (a writer) used the dolls to improvise a performance offstage: 'Später kamen Schickele und Grumbach; der letztere improvisierte im Türrahmen zwischen zwei

²⁴⁷ See: Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre'. In: *Brecht on Theatre*.

²⁴⁸ Essay by Hugnet in: Alfred H. Barr, ed., *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*. New York: Arno Press for the Museum of Modern Art, 1968, p. 17.

Sälen mit *Zar* und *Zarin* von Emmy ein politisches Puppentheater.²⁴⁹ Taeuber's programmatic transference of the puppet from the popular puppet theatre to the experimental artistic forum, as well as this brief episode, echoes Emmy Hennings's ready incorporation of music hall techniques in Dada soirées.

As well as Hennings, another woman Dadaist, the Berlin-based photomontage artist Hannah Höch, also produced dolls. Her two 'Dada-Puppen' were included at the 'Dada Messe' ('Dada Fair') in Berlin in 1920, and can be made out in photographs, on a pedestal by the entrance. Höch was photographed with them at least twice. This coincidence of doll or puppet making by three women protagonists in two different centres raises the question of gender as a factor. Issues around the body have already been discussed with reference to Hennings on and off stage, and to Taeuber and the Laban dancers. Mimetic, figurative representations all but disappear in Dada art with, in the main, a shift away from the objectification of the female body. This was more than likely liberating for women artists. Their use of dolls, meanwhile, arguably constitutes an ongoing engagement with, and exploration of, representations of the female body. It is a question that I will come back to in the next chapter, on Hannah Höch.

2.4 Explorations in colour, line and surface: paintings

The rejection of imitation and figuration demanded by tradition was a common catalyst for avant-garde painters. As Arp writes: 'Wir wollen nicht mehr die Natur nachahmen, wir wollen nicht abbilden, wir wollen bilden.'²⁵⁰ Partly in response to the advent of photography, Cubism and Expressionism had begun to challenge the role of painting as purely referential or representational, based on the one-point perspective, omnipresent in painting since the Renaissance. They variously employed new formal techniques using colour, framing, texture, composition and materials to revolutionise painting. In the later years of Dada, in Berlin, the move to multiple perspectives was manifested in photomontage, which Dietrich Scheunemann calls

²⁴⁹ Entry for 29 March 1917. Ball, *Flucht aus der Zeit*. 'Schickele und Grumbach came later; the latter improvised a political puppet show with Emmy's 'Czar' and 'Czarina' in the doorway between two pillars.' Translation in: *Flight Out of Time*, p. 102.

²⁵⁰ Arp, 'Konkrete Kunst' (1955). In: Scheidegger, *Zweiklang*, p. 73. 'We no longer want to imitate nature, we do not want to reproduce, we want to produce.'

‘the avant-garde’s fully developed alternative concept to the traditional central-perspectival organisation of works.’²⁵¹

As well as constituting a response to photography, the rejection of figuration had an ideological basis too. Ball describes this as follows:

Daß das Bild des Menschen in der Malerei dieser Zeit mehr und mehr verschwindet und alle Dinge nur noch in der Zersetzung vorhanden sind, das ist ein Beweis mehr, wie häßlich und abgegriffen das menschliche Antlitz, und wie verabscheuenswert jeder einzelne Gegenstand unserer Umgebung geworden ist. Der Entschluß der Poesie, aus ähnlichen Gründen die Sprache fallen zu lassen, steht nahe bevor. Das sind Dinge, die es vielleicht noch niemals gegeben hat.²⁵²

His words also make clear the vibrant cross-fertilisation between painting and literature. Whilst the Zurich group is renowned above all for its experimental poetry, its participants took inspiration from, and employed, numerous art forms. Paintings and tapestries formed backdrops to performances and costumes, masks, sculptures and puppets all became part of Dada’s eclectic soirées. The following summary description by Richter points to the breadth and consistency of Taeuber’s artistic input alone:

Abstrakte Zeichnungen, merkwürdige Dada-Köpfe auf bemalten Holz, Teppiche, alles Dinge, die sich selbständig neben denen ihrer männlichen Kommilitonen behaupteten. Sie war sowohl Arps Entdeckung wie Arp die ihre, und in ihrer anspruchslosen Weise wirkte sie aktiv an jeder Dada-Veranstaltung mit.²⁵³

By the time she joined the Dada group, Taeuber was already searching for renewed means of expression, and her meeting with Arp came at a key point for both. In Motherwell’s anthology, Taeuber pays tribute to his wife. The poem *Sophie*

²⁵¹ ‘On Photography and Painting’. In: Scheunemann, *European Avant-Garde: New Perspectives*, p. 33.

²⁵² Entry for 5 March 1916. In: Ball, *Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 84. ‘The image of the human form is gradually disappearing from the painting of these times and all objects appear only in fragments. This is one more proof of how ugly and worn the human countenance has become, and of how all the objects of our environment have become repulsive to us. The next step is for poetry to decide to do away with language for similar reasons. These are things that have probably never happened before.’ Translation in: *Flight out of Time*, p. 55.

²⁵³ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, pp. 45-46. ‘There were abstract drawings, extraordinary Dada heads on painted wood, and tapestries, all of which could hold their own alongside her male colleagues. She was Arp’s discovery, just as he was hers, and in their unassuming way they played a part in every Dada event.’ Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 46. In fact the translation should read ‘she played a part in every Dada event.’ In the translation, Taeuber is conflated with her husband.

written in 1946 and the following eulogy in 'Dada Was Not a Farce' from 1949 are evidence of his high regard for her: 'Like the leaves of a tree in a fairytale, her luminous works descended on my existence. Only a few days after our first meeting, we executed embroideries and collages together. Together we planned large montages.'²⁵⁴ Parts of this account are highly lyrical, but these first lines give an explicit indication of the early productivity of this artistic partnership, which began soon after the two artists met, and which straightaway focused on non-mimetic expression. Arp comments:

(En 1915), Sophie Taeuber et moi, nous avons réalisé les premières oeuvres tirées de formes les plus simples en peinture, en broderie et en papier collés. Ce sont probablement les toutes premières manifestations de cet art. Ces tableaux sont des réalités en soi, sans signification ni intention cérébrale. Nous rejetions tout ce qui était copie ou description, pour laisser l'élémentaire et le spontané réagir en pleine liberté.²⁵⁵

Taeuber's work abandoned spatial illusionism and mimesis, instead working consciously with the materials, surface and frame of an artwork. Anticipating concrete art, she and Arp perceived the artwork as having its own inherent reality, rather than being primarily a representation of, or abstraction from life. Freed from such limitations, texture, colour and line could be explored as autonomous elements within the frame.

Richter's praise of Taeuber's work is striking in the acknowledgement of its impact on his own considerations of visual art:

In der Auseinandersetzung, in der ich damals begriffen war, die Elemente einer Zeichen- und Bildersprache suchend, waren Sophies Beiträge stets anregend für mich. Als langjährige Lehrerin am Kunstgewerbemuseum in Zürich war sie gewohnt und gezwungen, die Dinge, die Welt der Linien, Flächen, Formen, Farben, auf ihre einfachste und präziseste Gestalt zu bringen und einfachste Formulierungen zu finden.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 294.

²⁵⁵ Arp, 'Sophie Taeuber-Arp'. In: Scheidegger, *Zweiklang*, p. 51. He quotes this from an original article appearing in *Xxème Siècle*, Paris, 1915. '(In 1915) Sophie Taeuber and I, we made the first works that drew on the simplest of forms in painting, in embroidery and in papier collé. These were probably the very first manifestations of the type. These works were realities in themselves, with neither meaning nor cerebral intention. We rejected everything that was a copy or description, in order to allow the elemental and the spontaneous to react in full liberty.'

²⁵⁶ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 46. 'I was engaged at that time in a search for the elements of a language of sign and image, and Sophie's work was always a stimulation to

That Taeuber continued to work, even as she took part in Dada, entailed a transfer of new ideas from one sphere to the other. Like Hennings, as discussed in the last chapter, and Höch, as we will see in the next chapter, she moved between different work-life arenas, drawing various inspirations from each.

In the way that the dadaist poets broke down language into its basic components of words and then sounds, Taeuber reduced visual images to their most basic components. In ideological terms, these experiments were an attempt to reclaim art forms that seemed inextricable from expectations that art should faithfully imitate external reality, but they also sought to avoid connotations of the artist as privileged 'seer' of inner visions. Ball notes Arp's ideas on form, ideas which the latter had presented at a Dada soirée:

Er möchte die Imagination reinigen und alle Anspannung auf das Erschließen nicht so sehr ihres Bilderschatzes als dessen richten, was diese Bilder konstituiert. Seine Voraussetzung dabei ist, daß die Bilder der Imagination bereits Zusammensetzungen sind. Der Künstler, der aus der freischaltenden Imagination heraus arbeitet, erliegt in puncto Ursprünglichkeit einer Täuschung. Er benutzt ein Material, das bereits gestaltet ist, und nimmt also Klitterungen vor.²⁵⁷

Taeuber was concerned with building images using the basic elements of painting: the 'lines, surfaces, forms and colours' of which Richter writes.²⁵⁸

What distinguishes Taeuber's work from that of her contemporaries in Dada is that the basis of her composition was pure, basic geometric shapes, with blocks of colour (squares, rectangles and sometimes triangles) placed horizontally and vertically beside one another. Arp describes the characteristics of her early work:

me. She had lectured at the Zurich museum of arts and crafts for years, and had by necessity acquired the skill of reducing the world of lines, surfaces, forms and colours to its simplest and most exact form, and formulating ideas in the simplest way.' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 46.

²⁵⁷ Entry for 1 March 1916. Ball, *Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 82. 'He wants to purify the imagination and to concentrate on opening up not so much its store of images but what those images are made of. He assumes here that the images of the imagination are already composites. The artist who works from his freewheeling imagination is deluding himself about originality. He is using a material that is already formed and so is undertaking only to elaborate on it.' Translation in: *Flight out of Time*, p. 53.

²⁵⁸ Roland Barthes discusses the flawed nature of realism, suggesting that all textual and visual images refer to preconceived images and codes rather than replicating reality, and as such are copies of copies. See: Roland Barthes, *S/Z*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.

Schon in den Aquarellen aus dem Jahre 1916 ordnet Sophie Taeuber rechteckige und quadratische Felder senkrecht und waagrecht nebeneinander an. Wie ein Mauerwerk füllt die Komposition das Bild aus. Die Farben leuchten und gehen vom grellsten Gelb bis zum tiefsten Rot und Blau.²⁵⁹

A watercolour painting from as early as 1916, *Vertikal-horizontale Komposition* (fig. 8, below) is exemplary of this geometric composition.²⁶⁰

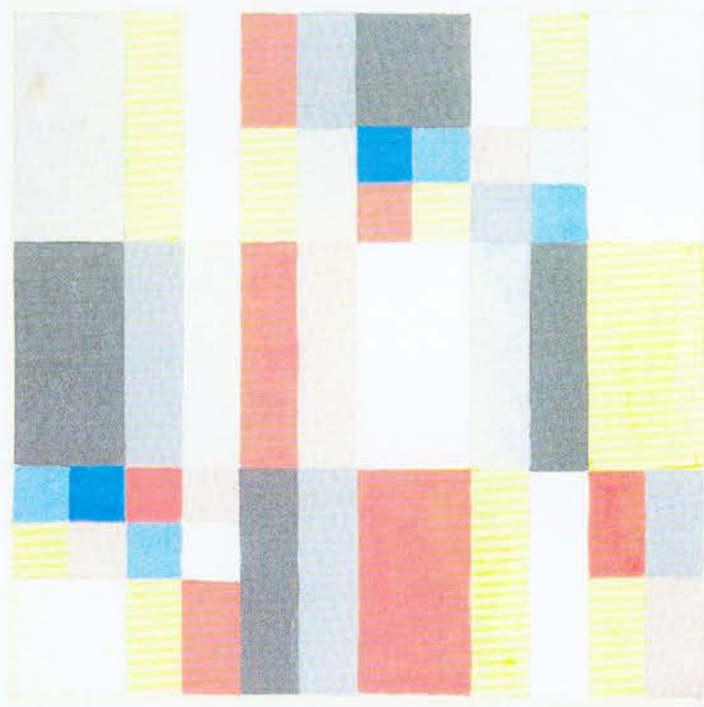


Figure 8: Sophie Taeuber, *Vertikal-horizontale Komposition* (1916)²⁶¹

Composed purely of rectangles and squares, there is no central focal point to this painting or illusionist perspective: instead it explores the vertical and horizontal planes of the canvas itself. Lesley Baier observes of Taeuber's paintings and textiles of the early period: 'In their rejection of superfluous detail [...] strictly vertical and horizontal in their orientation of line and colour, they define and submit to the

²⁵⁹ Arp, 'Sophie Taeuber-Arp' (1948). In: Schmidt, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*, p. 24. 'As early as the watercolours from 1916 Sophie Taeuber was putting square and rectangular fields diagonally and horizontally next to each other. The composition filled out the way a wall is built. The colours shone and went from the darkest grey to the deepest red and blue.'

²⁶⁰ For detailed discussion of this painting see Thomas Janzen, 'Struktur, Komposition, Figur. Zu einigen frühen Arbeiten von Sophie Taeuber-Arp'. In: Siegfried Gohr, ed., *Sophie Taeuber-Arp 1889-1943*. Stuttgart: Gerd Hatje, 1993, pp. 33-34.

²⁶¹ From: Gohr, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*, p. 63.

limitations of the two-dimensional plane.²⁶² Taeuber's approach is methodical and ordered, and rejects esoteric concepts of inspiration and painterly genius. Kandinsky acknowledges her strong awareness of form and considered approach:

Pour posséder la maîtrise de formes *muettes*, il faut être doué du sens affiné de la mesure, savoir choisir les formes mêmes, selon la rapport de leurs trois dimensions, selon leurs proportions, leur hauteur, leur profondeur, leurs combinaisons, leur manière de concourir à un ensemble, - en un mot il faut avoir le sens de la composition.²⁶³

Where expressionist artists had sought through an unrestrained approach to colour and form to express inner emotion, Taeuber's work is distinct in its controlled geometric approach, no doubt drawing on her work with the composition of tapestry. Carolyn Lanchner highlights her precociousness in comparison to many of her contemporaries: 'Für Sophie Taeuber-Arp stand die bildnerische Abstraktion nicht am Ende, sondern am Anfang ihres künstlerischen Forschens.'²⁶⁴ Taeuber's work has much in common with the work of Piet Mondrian, the main proponent of the De Stijl movement in the Netherlands (founded 1917). Her investigations into geometric form were taking place simultaneously and independently. Because of the First World War, it is most likely that she was unaware of these similar developments by other artists. Arp recalls seeing news of Mondrian and van Doesburg in international newspapers only after the end of the war.²⁶⁵ Huelsenbeck, meanwhile writes, 'Von Piet Mondrian [...] wußte man damals noch wenig, und es ist deshalb umso erstaunlicher, daß in Sophie Täubers Werken der Kern alles dessen erschien, was die

²⁶² Robert L. Herbert, Eleanor S. Apter and Elise K. Kenney, eds, *The Société Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest at Yale University: A Catalogue Raisonné*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984, p. 653.

²⁶³ Wassily Kandinsky, 'Les reliefs colorés de Sophie Taeuber-Arp'. In: Scheidegger, *Zweiklang*, 1960, p. 34. 'In order to possess mastery of 'silent' form, one has to be gifted with a refined sense of measurement, to know how to choose the forms themselves, according to the rapport of their three dimensions, according to their proportions, their height, their depth, their combinations, their ways of working with the whole, - in a word one has to have a sense of composition.'

²⁶⁴ Lanchner, 'Sophie Taeuber-Arp: Eine Einführung'. In: Gohr, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*, p. 11. 'For Sophie Taeuber-Arp pictorial abstraction stood not at the end but at the beginning of her artistic enterprise.' This volume provides a comprehensive collection of her work.

²⁶⁵ Arp, *Unsern täglichen Traum*, p. 19.

Zukunft wahr machen sollte.’²⁶⁶ Moreover, her focus on pure form and the autonomy of the artwork anticipates the principles and practices of concrete art, such as in the work of her colleague and friend Max Bill.

There is nevertheless a freedom in Taeuber’s oeuvre, in that she neither restricted herself by art form (as this chapter illustrates as a whole) nor to one group or programme. Richter writes that, in his work he aimed towards ‘[eine] Art von gebundener Freiheit oder freier Disziplin.’²⁶⁷ This description applies fittingly to Taeuber’s work. Though always associating with other artists, and contributing to movements throughout her life, she did not adopt a programmatic approach, allowing herself the freedom to pursue her own diverse interests. Thomas Janzen attributes her flexibility and varied explorations to her strong focus on her materials: ‘Die Gegenstandslosigkeit war für Sophie Taeuber-Arp kein Dogma, sondern erscheint eher als die Möglichkeit einer direkten Beschäftigung mit den Grundverhältnissen des bildnerischen Materials.’²⁶⁸

The cross-influence between her portfolio of interests is evident in much of her work. There are paintings, for example, in which she recreates the impression of movement, suggesting a transfer of principles from dance and music to painting. As Renée Riese Hubert writes: ‘Pure and applied arts, permeated by her vital interest in dance, cross-fertilized each other. Rhythmic qualities invariably underlie her geometric patterns.’²⁶⁹ Lanchner, too, points to a relationship between her dancing and painting: ‘das Umwandeln der rhythmischen Muster des Tanzes in eine zweidimensionale Oberfläche schien ihr völlig natürlich, insbesondere deswegen, weil die Notenschrift für den Tanz dem Muster abstrakter Malerei ähnlich sein

²⁶⁶ Huelsenbeck, *Mit Witz, Licht und Grütze*, p. 61. We were fairly unaware of Piet Mondrian [...] therefore it is all the more astounding that Sophie Taeuber’s works contained the seed of everything that the future would realize.’ Translation in: *Dada Drummer*, p. 35.

²⁶⁷ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 63. ‘a kind of controlled freedom or emancipated discipline.’ Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 62.

²⁶⁸ Janzen, ‘Struktur, Komposition, Figur. Zu einigen frühen Arbeiten von Sophie Taeuber-Arp’. In: Gohr, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*, p. 38. ‘For Sophie Taeuber-Arp abstraction was no dogma, but represented to her rather as the possibility of being directly involved with the basic relationships of a painter’s material.’

²⁶⁹ Riese Hubert, ‘Sophie Taeuber und Hans Arp: A Community of Two’. In: *Art Journal*, vol. 52, no. 4, Winter 1993, p. 25.

kann.²⁷⁰ Karla Bilang also points to Laban's abstract system of notation as having an impact on her visual art.²⁷¹ Taeuber's painting *Elementarformen in vertikal-horizontaler Komposition* (*Elementary Forms in vertical-horizontal Composition*) (fig. 9, below) from 1917 is exemplary both of the use of geometric shape and an incorporation of the impression of movement. As in many of her paintings, the canvas is divided into squares or rectangles, but within these are more geomorphic shapes. The juxtaposition of forms results in the impression of movement within the two-dimensional space. Taeuber made tapestries using very similar constructions.



Figure 9: Sophie Taeuber, *Elementarformen in vertikal-horizontaler Komposition* (1917)²⁷²

Relationships between time and space, and their representations in art, were a key concern of avant-garde movements, evident in the Cubists' new techniques in

²⁷⁰ Lanchner, 'Sophie Taeuber-Arp: Eine Einführung'. In: Gohr, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*, pp. 15-16. 'the transference of the rhythmic pattern of dance onto a two-dimensional surface seemed to her totally natural, especially since the written sign system for dance can be seen as similar to the pattern of abstract painting.'

²⁷¹ Karla Bilang, 'Sophie Taeuber'. In: Jürgs, *Etwas Wasser in der Seife*, p. 94.

²⁷² From: Gohr, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*, p. 67.

depicting the planes of three-dimensional objects, the Futurists' evocation of speed in their paintings and poetry, and the Dadaists' photomontage techniques in Berlin. Taeuber's interest in performance, feeding her fine art, is a combination that anticipates the cross-disciplinary concerns of the Bauhaus. In their *Mechanische Ballett (Mechanical Ballet)*, for example, brightly coloured flat planes are carried by 'invisible' performers across the frame of a black stage, accompanied by music, addressing fundamental questions of form, space and colour through a combination of performance and painting. Bernd Vogelsang writes: 'die Bühne sollte ursprünglich als Medium zur Darstellung der Dynamisierung einer abstrakten bildnerischen Komposition eingesetzt werden.'²⁷³ Taeuber's broad interests across fine art and performance placed her in a unique position to explore aesthetic principles across disciplines, resulting in innovative painting techniques. She was not only concerned with painting, however. A second significant aspect of her oeuvre, and her life, was her readiness to work with a variety of materials. This readiness, and her particular professional skills, meant that – like Hennings, though in somewhat different arenas – she crossed boundaries between 'high art' and 'low art'.

2.5 Art or craft? Tapestries and embroideries

The employment of a variety of materials in visual art was a significant characteristic of avant-garde movements, beginning with the Cubists' introduction of papier-collé and collage. The Dadaists' expansion of new materials reached its peak in Berlin, with the introduction of photomontage, and in Hanover, with Kurt Schwitters's collages and assemblages. Huelsenbeck theorises these changes most explicitly in his 1918 'Dadaistisches Manifest' ('Dadaist Manifesto'), in which he declares: 'Dada will die Benutzung des neuen Materials in der Malerei.'²⁷⁴ In Zurich, Taeuber and her contemporaries had begun exploring new materials as early as 1915, paving the way for ensuing expansions of the principles of new materials. In part, this new approach sprang from a rejection of oil painting, which was perceived as atavistic,

²⁷³ In: Thomas Föhl & Michael Siebenbrodt, eds, *Bauhaus-Museum: Kunstsammlungen zu Weimar*. Munich, Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1999, p. 75. 'The stage was originally supposed to be employed as a medium for depicting an abstract pictorial composition made dynamic.'

²⁷⁴ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 109. 'Dada wants to see the use of new materials in painting.' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 105.

bound up with the traditions of the past, the academies, bourgeois homes, and the aims of realistic reproduction. Arp explains why he and Taeuber increasingly turned to paper and textiles: 'Das Ölgemälde schien uns einer überheblichen, anmaßenden Welt anzugehören.'²⁷⁵ Such approaches highlight questions about the nature and appropriateness of materials, processes and artistic intervention in a rapidly evolving aesthetic, cultural and industrial environment.

As well as working with watercolours as an alternative to oils, Taeuber used more unusual materials, especially textiles and embroidery. She had trained in textiles at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* ('Applied Arts and Crafts School') in St. Gallen, undertaking, in addition, periods of study in progressive schools in Germany.²⁷⁶ In November 1915 she met Arp at the 'Galerie Tanner' where, together with Otto van Rees and Adya van Rees-Dutilh, he was showing work in a pre-Dada exhibition, which included tapestries and embroideries alongside paintings and drawings. Taeuber, too, was already working with a variety of materials. Arp recalls: 'In den Arbeiten, die Sophie Taeuber mir damals kurz nach unserer ersten Begegnung zeigte, waren als Materials ebenfalls Wolle, Seide, Stoff und Papier verwendet.'²⁷⁷ Subsequent collaborations between Arp and Taeuber marked an important stage in innovations in fine art in Zurich.

Ovale Komposition mit abstrakten Motiven (*Oval Composition with abstract Motifs*) (fig. 10, below) from 1916 provides an example of one of Taeuber's early tapestry works.²⁷⁸ Semi-figurative shapes (the shape in the lower right could, for example, be a woman with her hands on her hips) are combined with geometric shapes to explore form over straightforward narrative content. The stitchwork, meanwhile, reveals the process that has gone into achieving the overall composition. The mode of production (the stitch) and the material texture (the thread) are highly visible, demystifying the creative process. The initials 's.h.t' are sewn into the top

²⁷⁵ Arp, *Unsern täglichen Traum*, p. 12. 'Oil painting seemed to us to belong to an exaggerated, assumed world.'

²⁷⁶ Studies at the St. Gallen 'Gerwerbeschule' 1908-1910; attends Wilhelm von Debschitz's 'Studio for Training and Experiment in the Applied and Fine Arts' in Munich and the 'School of Arts and Crafts' in Hamburg during 1911-1913.

²⁷⁷ Arp, *Unsern täglichen Traum*, p. 10. 'In the works that Sophie Taeuber showed me soon after our first meeting, wool, silk, fabric and paper were all used as materials.'

²⁷⁸ For further examples see: Lanchner, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp* [MOMA catalogue].

right-hand corner, recalling the Cubists' and Dadaists' incorporation of letters into the artwork, as well as drawing attention to the artist's intervention.

Riese Hubert takes another textile work, *Stoffplastik (Fabric Sculpture)* (c.1918-1919) as exemplary of the significance of tapestry and Taeuber's working of it. She writes:

This figure is treated like a highly refined and self-sufficient work of art even though it is neither drawn nor painted, but sewn. By displaying conspicuous stitches, various kinds of weaving, and even loose ends, the crafts, treated with deliberate clumsiness, here usurped the prerogatives of the so-called higher arts.²⁷⁹ Materials and process are privileged above all.

Both examples illustrate Taeuber's engagement with the question of the division between arts and crafts.



Figure 10: Sophie Taeuber, *Ovale Komposition mit abstrakten Motiven* (1916)²⁸⁰

Evidently, Taeuber was a capable and skilled craftsperson. Emmy Hennings recalls:

²⁷⁹ Riese Hubert, 'Sophie Taeuber und Hans Arp: A Community of Two'. In: *Art Journal*, vol. 52, no. 4, Winter 1993, p. 26.

²⁸⁰ From: Gohr, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*, p. 85.

Sie verstand die kunstgerwerblichen Handarbeiten, Stickereien und Webereien mit bewundernswerter Exaktheit auszuführen. Ich sah damals Perlenstickereien von ihr, sowie Webereien mit farbigen Arabesken, die so bildhaft wirkten, dass man diese Handarbeiten kaum mehr als Kunstgewerbe bezeichnen konnte. Sie waren weit mehr als dies.²⁸¹

Taeuber, however, was less interested in whether her 'craft' should be elevated to the status of art, and more interested in the fluid intersections between art and craft, skilled execution and experiment, and process and aesthetic effect, as Riese Hubert's statement about the exposure of the stitching process indicates. Taeuber challenges arbitrary lines between the artist and craftsperson, and thus the very repertoires of both arts and crafts.

Taeuber was able to effect these explorations by moving between aesthetic and professional arenas that had generally remained separate. From 1916 up until 1929, she maintained a position as a teacher at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* in Zurich, where she taught textiles, embroidery and weaving. The marriage between this position and her intervention in Dada was undoubtedly an unusual but fertile one. Arp recalls, for example:

Es gehörte viel Mut dazu, im Jahre 1915 an der Kunstgewerbeschule von Zürich zu unterrichten, wenn man die Absicht hatte, den Kampf gegen den Blumenkranz aufzunehmen. Der Blumenkranz war ein Ungeheuer, und Sophie Taeuber rang mit ihm wie der Ritter St.Georg mit dem Drachen. Scharen junger Mädchen eilten aus allen Kantonen nach Zürich mit dem brennenden Wunsch, unaufhörlich Blumenkränze zu sticken.²⁸²

Taeuber, with her more experimental approach and Dada experiences, challenged this conservatism. Likewise, she brought and adapted elements from crafts into her Dada contributions. This focus on the connections between craft, arts and experiment, is reflected in her membership of the group 'Das neue Leben' formed in

²⁸¹ Emmy Hennings, 'Zur Erinnerung an Sophie Taeuber-Arp'. In: Schmidt, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*, p. 16. 'She understood how to execute applied handicrafts, embroidery and tapestry with astounding exactitude. At that time I saw beadwork by her, as well as tapestries with colourful arabesques, that had such a pictorial effect that one could hardly again describe them as applied arts. They were far more than this.'

²⁸² Arp, *Unsern täglichen Traum*, p. 73. 'It took great courage to teach at Zurich's Arts and Crafts School in 1915, if one intended to take up the fight against the floral wreath. The wreath was a monster, and Sophie Taeuber wrestled with the way St. George the knight did with the dragon. Throngs of young girls hurried to Zurich from every region of Switzerland, with the burning desire to endlessly embroider wreaths.'

1918, whose focal point was the integration of crafts with art, design and production.²⁸³ She was also a member of the ‘Schweizerischer Werkbund’ from 1915 to 1932. Its goals were to prepare artists and artisans for industry, whilst maintaining popular, traditional forms, and to bring an aesthetic aspect to functional products. Alongside colleagues such as Otto Morach and Fritz Baumann, she moved between the school, the ‘Werkbund’ and Dada, bringing with her new questions about the role and nature of aesthetic production. The following statement refers to the uneasiness between handicrafts and function: ‘Max Bill recalls that she tried to give her students an idea of the problems of that time so that the young girls following her course did not waste themselves with useless handicrafts but instead became useful members of society.’²⁸⁴

Both statements – the first from Ball, and the second in reference to Max Bill – mention young girls, and thus draw attention to gender as a factor. That textiles and embroidery are mainly considered female vocations is highlighted, in addition, by the following statement, taken from a preface to a catalogue on Sophie Taeuber:

One has to remark upon the contrast of her subversive and revolutionary Dada character (“Dada is our intensity ... it is a life without conformities or parallels”) with the creation of [these] very feminine and delicately embroidered works. However, one must remember that it is one of the fundamental traits of Dadaism to seize as a whole the totality of the faculties and creative instincts of man. It is not one of the lesser paradoxes of this movement that they were as equally interested in the most common and ordinary objects, as they were in the most audacious creations.²⁸⁵

The author uses ‘delicate’ and ‘feminine’ to characterise Taeuber’s embroidery work, and sets up an opposition between these ‘common’ and ‘everyday’ (female) objects, as compared with Dada’s subversion and radicalism. S/he does concede, however, that Dada was ultimately concerned with transgressing boundaries between art and the everyday. Indeed, it is precisely here that Taeuber’s prerogatives not only tie in with Dada but also extend it. By bringing craft into fine art Taeuber, like her fellow

²⁸³ Other members included Arp, Janco, Richter, Eggeling, Giacometti and Tzara. For more information see Hubert van den Berg, *Avantgarde und Anarchismus*, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter Heidelberg, 1999, pp. 58-9.

²⁸⁴ J.P.L. Fine Arts, *Sophie Taeuber-Arp*. Text extracted from catalogue of the exhibition Sophie Taeuber-Arp Musée d’Art Moderne de Strasbourg, March – June 1977.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Dadaists, challenged aesthetic categories and limitations. Moreover, her everyday objects and processes brought a different aspect, in that they tend to be associated with women, as evident in each of the above quotes. The introduction of areas perceived as minor, with lesser (female) status, can be perceived, then, as representing an equally radical, revolutionary gesture.

In 1927, Taeuber published a booklet *Zeichnen für Textile Berufe (Designs for Textile Careers)* in which she discussed issues including industrial application, functionalism and the presence or absence of décor. Her statement, ‘Zur Erkenntnis vom Wesen des Materials kam diejenige von der Bedeutung der Funktion des Gegenstandes’²⁸⁶ not only roots her firmly in Dada, where materials are taken as a major focus, but also with future movements such as the Bauhaus, which orientates itself towards design. That school’s tapestry work, especially, which includes work by women artists such as Gunta Stölzl and Benita Otte-Koch in the early 1920s, displays great similarities with Taeuber’s early work.²⁸⁷ It is in this respect, and others – she also develops interests in areas as diverse as furniture and architectural plans – that Taeuber can be considered, too, a forerunner to Oskar Schlemmer, who worked, and encouraged his pupils to work, across disciplines as diverse as painting, sculpting, dance and puppetry.

Taeuber’s activities crossed the boundaries between art and craft, ornamentalism and aestheticism, decoration and function, and – as Peter Bürger would have it – even art and life. It is easy to dismiss the craft focus of her work, especially when Dada strove to reject the traditional training of the artist or craftsman, and reacted to changes in the industrial and cultural environment. However, Taeuber was also interested in the relationships between handicrafts and industrial reproduction. In her booklet she wrote of developments in applied art schools, ‘über den Weg der Handarbeit kam man dazu, auch die Maschinenarbeit zu werten.’ She also makes reference to architecture, to Loos in Vienna and Wright in

²⁸⁶ Extract from ‘Anleitung zum Unterricht im Zeichnen für Textile Berufe.’ Zurich: Gewerbeschule der Stadt Zurich, 1927, pp. 5-7. In: H. R. Fricker, *Sophie Taeuber Arp: Kindheit und Jugend in Trogen*. Trogen: Kronengesellschaft Trogen, 1995. ‘It was only with the knowledge of the reality of materials that the understanding of the function of the objects came about.’

²⁸⁷ See: Thomas Föhl and Michael Siebenbrodt, eds, *Bauhaus-Museum: Kunstsammlungen zu Weimar*, 1999, pp. 57-61.

America, and to how artists recognised advantages in technology too: ‘Die maschine leistet, was die Menschenhand nicht leisten kann.’²⁸⁸ Her own experiments with, and subversions of, decorative art undoubtedly inspired and advanced new possibilities for art. Arp notes: ‘Manchmal sind ihre Arbeiten als angewandte Kunst bezeichnet worden. Dies geschah teils aus Dummheit, teils aus Böswilligkeit. Kunst kann mit Wolle, Papier, Elfenbein, keramischen Platten, Glas ebenso gebildet wie mit Ölfarbe, Stein, Holz, Ton.’²⁸⁹ His words illustrate how Taeuber’s use of materials is closely aligned with the Dadaist principle that all materials should be available to the artist. Taeuber extends this principle to embrace materials and techniques associated with handicrafts.

2.6 Life after Dada: when innovation doesn’t end

The ongoing collaboration between Arp and Taeuber during and beyond Dada stands out as a successful professional man-woman partnership within Dada.²⁹⁰ Rejecting the egotistical approach of creating a purely individual style, they worked together on countless pieces of work, leaving decisions not only to one another but also often to chance. In their *duo-collages*, dating back to 1915 and at their peak in 1918, they would cut out rectangles of paper and construct collages in a systematic way. They even used a cutting machine in some instances, to remove the artist’s hand even further from the process. In some examples, alternatively, they would randomly rip up fragments, allowing them to fall according to chance, such that the artist’s, or in this case artists’, decision-making was totally bypassed. These experiments are the visual equivalent of Tzara’s recipe for a chance poem, in which one selects an article from a newspaper, cuts out each word, shakes the words together in a bag, pulls them

²⁸⁸ *Zeichnen für Textile Berufe*. In: Fricker, *Sophie Taeuber Arp*. ‘Through handicrafts people came to to value machine work.’ ‘The machine achieves what the human hand cannot achieve.’

²⁸⁹ Arp, *Unsern täglichen Traum*, pp. 10-11. ‘Sometimes her work has been described as applied arts. This happened partly out of stupidity, partly out of bad will. Art can be created out of wool, paper, ivory, ceramics, glass, just as well as out of oils, stone, wood or clay.’

²⁹⁰ For more nuanced biographical readings of their personal relationship (its problems as well as successes) see: Mair, *Von ihren Träumen sprach sie nie*.

out indiscriminately and copies them out in that (random) order.²⁹¹

Numerous works were signed by both artists and some cannot be definitely attributed to either one of them. Indeed, Taeuber did not regularly sign or date any of her work up until the last two years of her life: a rejection not only of the cult of the individual artist but also of the artwork as relic. Marcel Duchamp writes in this regard: 'Sophie Taeuber-Arp, in her attitude of detachment about herself as an artist, reminds one of the anonymous artisan of the middle ages.'²⁹² Arp, too, emphasises the importance of collaborative working in later avant-garde art, recalling the employment of that principle as far back as pre-Dada:

Die Arbeiten der konkreten Kunst sollten nicht die Unterschrift ihres Autors tragen [...] Die Künstler sollten in einer Gemeinschaft arbeiten wie die Künstler des Mittelalters. In 1915 schon versuchten dies O. van Rees, C. van Rees, Freundlich, Sophie Taeuber und ich.²⁹³

Incredibly, Arp continued the principle of collaboration even after Taeuber's death, tearing up some of their duo-collages and reassembling them, as well as tracing in ink on paper her geometric wood reliefs.

Riese Hubert emphasises the collaborative nature of the Taeuber / Arp partnership but, likely fearing that Taeuber's work may be subsumed, is keen to avoid an amalgamation of the two artists: 'The partners overlapped in the practice of some art forms, but not in others, no doubt because each had already established his or her own goal at the time of their first encounter.'²⁹⁴ The variety of Taeuber's endeavours clearly refutes any notion that she was simply a follower (a common accusation levelled at women, especially those in close partnerships), and not an innovator. It also reveals different characteristics and foci. This aesthetic partnership was evidently mutually beneficial, one in which each acknowledged the influence of

²⁹¹ From 'Dada manifeste sur l'amour faible et l'amour amer' ('Dada manifesto on Feeble and Bitter Love'). Published in: Tzara, *Sept Manifestes Dada*. Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1963, p. 62. Translation in: Motherwell, *Painters and Poets*, p. 92.

²⁹² *Collection of the Société Anonyme*. New Haven, CT: Associates in Fine Art of Yale University Art Gallery, 1950, p. 69.

²⁹³ Arp, 'Konkrete Kunst'. In: Scheidegger, *Zweiklang*, p. 73. 'The work of concrete art should not bear the signature of its author. [...] Artists should work in a community like the artists of the Middle Ages. As early as 1915 O. van Rees, C. van Rees, Freundlich, Sophie Taeuber and I were trying to do this.'

²⁹⁴ Riese Hubert, 'Sophie Taeuber und Hans Arp: A Community of Two'. In: *Art Journal*, vol. 52, no. 4, Winter 1993, p. 25.

the other.

If Taeuber was inspired by Arp and by Dada, she also drew on her experiences as a teacher, craftsperson and collaborator in various artists' groups. Her artistic activity was not entirely dependent on the dynamics of Dada, and did not end with that movement, but continued to unfold in new directions. In 1927 she was given a commission to decorate the interior of the 'Restaurant Aubette' in Strasbourg, which she shared with Arp and Theo van Doesburg. Throughout the 1930s, she collaborated in progressive groups including 'Cercle et Carré' and 'Abstraction-Création.' Her major areas of work include a series of *Reliefs*, sculptures of geometric shapes mounted on rectangular bases, between 1931 and 1939, and the later *Lignes* series of pictures, which used stylised shells, parasols, and leaves. She worked with both constructivist and concrete artists, and her work had an impact on the development of Minimalism and Serial art. She also founded and edited her own journal, *Plastique*, which ran to five issues between 1937 and 1939, before being forced out of existence by the war.²⁹⁵ It featured paintings, sculptures and critical texts from a variety of important European and American artists, as well as experimental literature.²⁹⁶ Dada, then, can be seen in Taeuber's case as one grouping, or collaboration, in a line of many. She not only survived it, but also continued to expand her fields of innovation, acting as a link between Dada and subsequent developments in visual art.

Richter writes, 'in einer Kunstgeschichte, in der heute eine Jagd auf 'wer war erst?' getrieben wird, sollte Sophie's Beitrag zur Disziplin und Problemstellung moderner Gestaltung nicht verschwiegen werden.'²⁹⁷ As well as acknowledging the extent of her innovation, it returns to the question as to whether her contributions might be left uncovered, unstated, because of the quietness and modesty for which

²⁹⁵ *Plastique*, edited by Sophie Taeuber and César Domela. Paris: Imprimerie des 2 Artisans, 1937 to 1939. In SNGMA. The editors described it as 'a magazine devoted to the study and appreciation of Abstract Art'.

²⁹⁶ The first issue was devoted to Kasimir Malevich. Others included, for example, Kandinsky, van Doesburg, El Lissitzky and Max Bill. The last two issues, edited by Taeuber alone, featured *L'Homme qui a perdu son squelette* (*The man who has lost his skeleton*), a collaborative novel by Arp, Leonora Carrington, Marcel Duchamp, Paul Eluard, Max Ernst, Georges Hugnet, Michel Pastoureau and Gisèle Prassinós.

²⁹⁷ Richter, 'Sophie Taeuber' (1960). In: Scheidegger, *Zweiklang*, p. 37. 'In a history of art driven by a chase for 'who was first,' Sophie Taeuber's contribution to the discipline and problematising of modern figuration should not be left uncovered.'

she was renowned. Yve-Alain Bois has considered this issue in an essay ‘Sophie Taeuber-Arp against Greatness’.²⁹⁸ He rejects what he calls ‘the ready-made answer – that Sophie Taeuber-Arp had to live her too-short life in the shadow of a much more famous husband [...] and was thus a typical victim of patriarchy.’²⁹⁹ He does not specify where he finds this ‘readymade answer’, with the effect that his complaint sounds like a tirade against a general, imagined feminist approach. However, he does reject quietness as a factor (‘by all accounts Taeuber-Arp was “modest” in character, but she is also known to have been quite forthcoming’),³⁰⁰ and instead emphasises the variety of her work and of Arp’s support of it. For Bois, the fault lies with critical approaches that have suffered from ‘piety’, either praising her after her tragic death, or trying to reconcile the many different aspects of her work.

He attempts to formulate, instead, a different approach:

“Glory” and “major” are words that do not quite fit when dealing with Sophie Taeuber-Arp’s achievement, and this may be what is lying at the core of most writers’ embarrassment about it. What if she had found “glory” and “majorness” repulsive? What if she had seen heroism, in its phallogentric bravado, as that which her art should try to undercut?³⁰¹

This alternative approach, whereby Bois calls her mode of operating ‘programmatically “minor”’ highlights the problem of trying to incorporate women’s work into a framework that does not always prove appropriate. Nevertheless, critics apply these words to many other avant-garde artists who sought to reject the cult of personality, and there is a danger that in rejecting ‘major’ in her case, a distinct separation is enforced between artists, based on readings of their different intentions and viewpoints.

Moreover, Bois cannot completely avoid distinctions between ‘major’ and ‘minor’. His selection of the work that he perceives to be the most innovative and important is useful and constructive (even if, as he admits, inevitably selective), but the distinction between this and ‘major’ is difficult to pinpoint. Bois takes the

²⁹⁸ Yve-Alain Bois, ‘Sophie Taeuber-Arp against Greatness.’ In: Catherine de Zegher, ed., *Inside the Visible: An elliptical traverse of 20th Century art in, of, and from the feminine*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1996, pp. 413-417.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

approach that ‘the major works of art have to be understood first, especially if they invent a way of forcefully being “minor.”’³⁰² Thus, he plays down Taeuber’s handicrafts and textiles, stating that her desire not to distinguish too definitely between crafts and art should not prevent critics from doing so (this time he does not go along with her approach). The hierarchy of ‘major’ and ‘minor’, with which Bois tries to battle, constitutes an impenetrable trap. I would prefer to point out that Taeuber’s work contributed to Dada in the following terms: it is exemplary of collaboration, authorial rejection, refusal of longevity, multi-disciplinarity, diversity, and above all major innovation. It encompasses dance, puppetry, handicrafts and painting, a span of activity which enhances her oeuvre, that of Dada, and the scope of movements that came afterwards.

Taeuber is an artist for whom appreciation has grown gradually and who has become ever more visible. This recognition is apparent from the current fifty franc ‘Swiss National Bank’ note. Over its two sides it features a portrait of Taeuber, *Lignes Ouvertes* from 1939, *Relief rectangulaire* from 1936, a composition from the ‘Aubette’ from 1927, and *Tête Dada* from 1919. The banknote is representative of the ways in which Taeuber’s work has been highlighted and perceived, in that it includes a reference to Dada, alongside several images of her work in the 1930s. Taeuber took her part in Dada, and made valuable and eclectic contributions to it, without limiting herself within it: she succeeded in pursuing an artistic life outside of it, and beyond it. She contributed to Dada without being consumed by it, and had an enormous impact on the history of women in art more generally. As the Swiss National Bank’s website reports: ‘For the first time [...] a woman, a historical personality who actually lived, and not a symbolic figure – is shown on a Swiss banknote.’³⁰³ That it took until 1995 to produce such a cultural tribute – to Taeuber and to women who ‘actually lived’ rather than ‘symbolic figure[s]’ – illustrates her achievements in reconfiguring modes of representation all the more poignantly.

³⁰² Ibid., p. 417.

³⁰³ Website of the ‘Swiss National Bank’ as at 19/8/2005. See: www.snb.ch for this quotation, as well as for a colour reproduction of the banknote, which was designed in 1991 by Jörg Zintzmeyer, and issued 3 October 1995. The other four banknotes each feature men.

Chapter 3 – Hannah Höch

3.1 The ‘Good Girl’ and the Dada club

Aber wie kam Hannah Hoech, die Stille aus dem Städtchen Gotha, die brave Orlik-Schülerin, zu der ganz unstillen Berliner Dada-Bewegung? [...] Ein tüchtiges Mädchen!³⁰⁴

Sie war niemals Mitglied des Club.³⁰⁵

Hannah Höch’s work within Berlin Dada has received more recognition than any other woman artist’s involved in any Dada centre. The list of exhibitions including her work, or entirely devoted to it, over a period from 1919 up until her death in 1978 and beyond is substantial.³⁰⁶ The body of research on Höch, too, has grown – albeit later than that on her male colleagues – especially since her death and the subsequent release of her collected material to form an archive in Berlin.³⁰⁷ This material comprises thousands of books, letters, catalogues, posters, manifestos, periodicals, diaries, poems and artworks, including work produced not only by her but by artists such as Hausmann, Arp and Schwitters. It survived the Second World War concealed behind a chimneystack and buried in chests in the garden at her retreat in Heiligensee, on the outskirts of Berlin. It offers vivid insights not only into her personal and professional relationships, but also more broadly into discussions,

³⁰⁴ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 136. ‘But how did Hannah Hoech, a quiet girl from the little town of Gotha, a model Orlik pupil, come to be involved in the decidedly unquiet Berlin Dada movement? [...]. A good girl.’ Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 132.

³⁰⁵ ‘Nachhall’. In: Raoul Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*. Gießen: Anabas, 1972, p. 153. ‘She was never a member of the Club.’

³⁰⁶ The first solo exhibition of her work took place in 1929, the most recent in 2004.

³⁰⁷ The archive material is held at the ‘Berlinische Galerie’, and published in: Cornelia Thater-Schulz, ed., *Hannah Höch: eine Lebenscollage*. [Volume 1, Part 1. 1889-1918. Volume 1, Part 2. 1919-1920.] Berlin: Argon; Berlinische Galerie, 1989.

stimuli and new concepts that contributed to Dada's development in Berlin. The collection, in all its variety, provides much valuable documentation that might otherwise have been lost, and in its unedited eclecticism it is an ample substitute for memoirs.

As in the cases of both Emmy Hennings and Sophie Taeuber, Höch's initial links with Dada were forged within the context of a personal relationship: she was involved with the Berlin 'Dadasoph' Raoul Hausmann from 1915 to 1922. Access to Höch's personal papers, including a large volume of correspondence from Hausmann during their relationship, has facilitated biographical analyses. Letters reveal how the relationship was evidently volatile, not least because Hausmann was married with a child when he became involved with Höch. Although he would not split with his wife, he was also reluctant to let Höch go. There is even a publication, authored by Karoline Hille, devoted entirely to the story of their relationship.³⁰⁸ Most decisive for this thesis, however, is the fact that Höch's involvement with Hausmann clearly informed her relationship with Dada to a significant degree. She remembers, for example, that, with the exception of a close friendship with Baader, 'Meinen persönlichen Beziehungen zu den Berliner Dadaisten waren durch die Autorität Hausmanns Grenzen gesetzt.'³⁰⁹ She also notes: 'Durch meine nahe Beziehung mit Hausmann, sie währt fast 7 Jahre, war ich mit DADA von Anfang an verwachsen.'³¹⁰

If judgments about Hausmann's role as a personal and professional partner to Höch in art-historical accounts have generally been unfavourable, so too have been conclusions about attitudes of the Berlin Dadaists generally towards the only female artist involved in their group. Höch herself recalls in an interview in 1959:

Vor dreißig Jahren war es für eine Frau nicht leicht, sich in Deutschland als moderne Künstlerin durchzusetzen. Die meisten männlichen Kollegen betrachteten uns lange

³⁰⁸ Karoline Hille, *Hannah Höch und Raoul Hausmann: eine Berliner Dada-Geschichte*. Berlin: Rowohlt, 2000. This account is unusual in that it seeks to emphasise a more fruitful relationship and so offers a counterpoint to criticisms of Hausmann. Most interestingly, it illustrates how an entire discourse has arisen around the Höch-Hausmann association.

³⁰⁹ Heinz Ohff, *Hannah Höch*. Berlin: Mann, 1968, p. 25. 'My personal relationships with the Berlin Dadaists were determined by the authority of Hausmann's boundaries.'

³¹⁰ Ibid. Original quoted from: Walter Mehring, *Berlin Dada*. Zurich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 91. 'Through my close relationship with Hausmann, it lasted almost 7 years, I was entwined with DADA from the start.'

Zeit als reizende, begabte Amateure, ohne uns je einen beruflichen Rang zuerkennen zu wollen.³¹¹

Grosz and Heartfield were apparently against showing Höch's work in the 1920 Dada Fair and only conceded after Hausmann championed her case. The almost complete absence of her work in Dada periodicals may also indicate reluctance on the part of her contemporaries to include Höch in their circle. The only example of her work in any publication is the reproduction of a woodcut in *Dada* no. 2, from 1919, and this is attributed, unfortunately, to 'M. Höch'. On the copy Höch retained, now in her archives, 'M. Höch' is crossed out, and a handwritten note reads 'H. wieder mal verstümmelt'.³¹²

Richter, once again, provides us with a somewhat troubling account of one of his female colleagues:

An den ersten Dada-Veranstaltungen in Berlin hat sie außer mit ihren Collagen kaum teilgenommen. Ihr Stimmchen wäre sowieso von dem Tosen ihrer männlichen Kommilitonen überdröhnt worden. Aber als Vorsteherin der Atelier-Abende bei Hausmann war sie unentbehrlich, sowohl durch den grellen Kontrast ihrer leicht klösterlichen Grazie zu dem Schwergewichtsanspruch ihres Meisters, als auch durch die belegten Brötchen mit Bier und Kaffee, die sie trotz Geldmangel auf irgendeine Weise hervorzuzaubern verstand. An solchen Abenden durfte auch sie ihre kleine aber sehr präzise Stimme erheben und, wenn Hausmann die Anti-Kunst proklamierte, für die Kunst und für Hannah Höch in die Bresche springen. Ein tüchtiges Mädchen!³¹³

³¹¹ Quoted by Herbert Remmert and Peter Barth, *Hannah Höch: Werke und Worte*. Berlin: Fröhlich und Kaufmann, 1982, p. 74. Originally from: Edouard Roditi, 'Hannah Höch und die Berliner Dadaisten. Ein Gespräch mit der Malerin', which appeared in *Der Monat*, Heft 134/November 1959. The interview is not an exact transcription, Roditi wrote it up into a dialogue afterwards. A significant turning point in the 'rediscovery' of Höch, it appeared in English in *Arts*, New York: December 1959 and a version is reprinted in: Lippard, *Dadas on Art*, pp. 68-77. 'Thirty years ago it was not easy for a woman to make it as a modern artist in Germany. Most of the male colleagues considered us for a long time as charming, gifted amateurs, without ever wanting to afford us professional status.'

³¹² 'Höch mutilated again.'

³¹³ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 136. 'At the first Dada shows in Berlin she only contributed collages. Her tiny voice would only have been drowned out by the roars of her masculine colleagues. But when she came to preside over gatherings in Hausmann's studio she quickly made herself indispensable, both for the sharp contrast between her slightly nun-like grace and the heavyweight challenge presented by her mentor, and for the sandwiches, beer and coffee she somehow managed to conjure up despite the shortage of money. On such evenings she was able to make her small, precise voice heard. When Hausmann proclaimed the doctrine of anti-art, she spoke up for art and for Hannah Höch. A good girl.' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 132. 'Meister' might actually be translated as 'master' rather than 'mentor'.

It is difficult to know where to begin with this statement. When asked about Richter's idea that she 'conjured up' coffee and sandwiches, Höch expressed surprise, and said 'Das ist ein Märchen [...] die Höch, die hat die Dadaisten so schön versorgt bei Zusammenkünften.'³¹⁴ Richter's version of events taps into common conceptions about how women should be valued for performing nurturing, domestic and supporting roles, and he emphasises her quietness and grace using stereotypical images, again, such as a nun and a child. Nevertheless, he at least displays some sympathy, as he did in Taeuber's case, with the difficulties each may have had in making her voice heard within an all-male group. Participation evidently required persistence: 'Bei den Ausstellungen und Vorträgen war sie dabei und gab ihrer kleinen Stimme Gewicht durch die Ernsthaftigkeit ihres Wesens ...'³¹⁵ Meanwhile, the reference to Höch as 'Ein tüchtiges Mädchen' ('A good girl'), quoted at the start of this chapter, prevailed for far too long, encouraging neat, stereotypical presentations of her as the feminine touch or tempering influence in the Berlin group. Critical writings subsequently took up the label as an illustration of the misogyny of the Dada group, and as a starting-point to redress a one-sided image of her.³¹⁶

There has been a tendency by some more recent critics to focus on Höch's creative output beyond the Dada years. Maria Makela, for example, has written: 'I want to disentangle Höch from the Dada knot'.³¹⁷ Peter Boswell, too, warns against overplaying her associations with Dada and trying to make her work fit the mould.³¹⁸ Höch herself expressed frustration in later years that all people wanted to know about was her connection with Dada.³¹⁹ Nevertheless, unlike Emmy Hennings, Höch does not distance herself from the Dada group retrospectively. She gives a short review of

³¹⁴ Suzanne Pagé, 'Interview mit Hannah Höch.' (Berlin, 18 November 1975). In: *Hannah Höch: Collagen, Gemälde, Aquarelle, Gouachen, Zeichnungen*. Berlin: Mann, 1976, p. 26. 'That's a fairytale. [...] Höch, who looked after the Dadaists so beautifully at their get-togethers.'

³¹⁵ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 136. 'At exhibitions and readings she would turn up and the earnestness of her nature would lend weight to her tiny voice.' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 132.

³¹⁶ For example: Lanchner, 'The Later adventures of Dada's 'good girl': The Photomontages of Hannah Höch after 1933.' In: Peter Boswell, Maria Makela and Carolyn Lanchner, eds, *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Centre, 1996.

³¹⁷ 'By Design: The early work of Hannah Höch in context.' *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³¹⁸ 'Hannah Höch through the Looking-Glass.' In: *Ibid.*, p. 7 and footnote 1.

³¹⁹ See interview with Roters, quoted in Adriani Götz, *Hannah Höch. Fotomontagen – Gemälde – Aquarelle*. Köln: DuMont, 1980, p. 53.

her time in Dada in an essay 'Lebensüberblick' ('A Life Overview') written in 1958, for example, in which she acknowledges the ways in which Hausmann, and Dada, represented important and fruitful stages in her life, in terms of aesthetic ideas.³²⁰ In further reminiscences, 'Erinnerung an Dada: Ein Vortrag' ('Memories of Dada: A Lecture'), from 1966, she remembers and celebrates the Dadaist project and her colleagues, including Hausmann.³²¹ Importantly, Höch continued collaborations with some of the Dadaists even as Dada in Berlin was disintegrating. She continued to work with Arp, and especially Schwitters, contributing, for example, to his famous 'Merzbau' construction.

As with most artists involved in the relatively short life of the Dada movement, Höch's work certainly was not confined to those few years, nor can the whole of her artistic output be simply appended to Dada. This fact should not obscure the significance of her work within the Dada timeframe, however. What is evident in the approaches mentioned above is their implicit frustration with art-historical reductions of Dada to a fixed homogeneous category, into which Höch's work must somehow be inserted. It is only through insisting on the inclusion of her contributions, however, that accounts and perceptions of the movement are properly extended to embrace a full range of contributors. Maud Lavin's excellent monograph has been crucial in this respect. It insists on the importance of Höch's photomontage work in the Dada and broader socio-historical context, and engages in detailed analyses of her work, with a particular focus on gender.³²²

Höch's place in Dada history was undoubtedly dealt a blow by the fact that Hausmann gave very little space to her in his memoirs.³²³ His negligence of her is tied up with the notion of the 'Dada Club', which was a Berlin phenomenon. Höch

³²⁰ Original text in the 'Berlinische Galerie' Hannah Höch archives. Published in: Elizabeth Moortgat and Cornelia Thater-Schulz, eds, *Hannah Höch 1889-1978: ihr Werk, ihr Leben, ihre Freunde*. Berlin: Argon, for the Berlinische Galerie, 1989, pp. 195-199. English version in Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, p. 213.

³²¹ In: *Ibid.*, p. 201-213. Original manuscript in the Hannah Höch Archives at the 'Berlinische Galerie', labelled 'Vortrag Düsseldorf' 1966.

³²² Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*.

³²³ See Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*. The author includes whole sections on Baader, Schwitters, Jung, Golyscheff and even his 'rival' Huelsenbeck. Höch is mentioned briefly in a number of sections, but without particular comment on her contributions.

herself testifies that she was not a part of this club, made up of six key members.³²⁴ It was an elite band: for example, Huelsenbeck refused Schwitters entry into it. Nevertheless, the club need not be taken too literally, as the sole definition of Berlin. In Hausmann's memoirs, it justifies a relative sidelining of Höch ('Sie war niemals Mitglied des Club'³²⁵) and this attitude has been continued by critics. Erickson writes, for example, 'Club Dada, launched by Huelsenbeck in 1918, attracted a variety of personalities even more diverse than those in Zurich Dada.' This diversity, though, is apparently limited. He lists the six key members before consigning a large list to a secondary group beginning: 'several personalities composed a fringe group: Hannah Höch (Hausmann's girlfriend), the poet-adventurer Franz Jung, the writer Carl Einstein [...] [etc.]'.³²⁶ Apart from the unfortunate fact that Erickson ascribes each of the men in his list an artistic occupation, whereas Höch is referred to only as a girlfriend, many would argue against the relegation of Höch to the fringes. Mostly she is aligned with Hausmann, Richter and Baader, as compared with the more Communist-oriented grouping of Heartfield, Herzfelde and Grosz.

This kind of rigid adherence to the club concept reveals its subtext: that Dada was an exclusive club, effectively made up of men, whose members had to be agreed by some kind of authority. Such an attitude directly contradicts the principles of openness to style, approach and, above all, people that Ball instigated at the start of Dada. It also contradicts the 1918 Berlin 'Dadaistisches Manifest':

Dada ist ein CLUB, der in Berlin gegründet worden ist, in den man eintreten kann, ohne Verbindlichkeiten zu übernehmen. Hier ist jeder Vorsitzender und jeder kann sein Wort abgeben wo es sich um künstlerische Dinge handelt. Dada ist nicht ein Vorwand für den Ehrgeiz einiger Literaten (wie unsere Feinde glauben machen möchten).³²⁷

³²⁴ 'Erinnerung an Dada: Ein Vortrag.' In: Moortgat and Thater-Schulz, *Hannah Höch*, p. 203.

³²⁵ 'Nachhall'. In: Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*. Gießen, p. 153. 'She was never a member of the Club.'

³²⁶ Erickson, *Performance, Poetry, and Art*, p. 36.

³²⁷ Reprinted in: Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 109. 'Dada is a CLUB, founded in Berlin, which you can join without commitments. In this club every man is president 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).' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 107.

It should be remembered, nevertheless, that the club was likely conceived, and perceived, rather more ironically by its members at the time.

Immediately before his statement that Höch was never a member of the club, Hausmann proclaims: 'Hannah Höch hat nur an zwei Ausstellungen teilgenommen.'³²⁸ The two exhibitions in which Höch participated, and which Richter mentions as her 'only' participations were, firstly, a show of visual work at J.B. Neumann's 'Graphisches Kabinett' in May 1919, which was effectively the first exhibition of Dada art in Berlin and, secondly, the now infamous 'Dada Messe' ('Dada Fair') at Dr. Otto Burchard's Berlin Gallery in 1920. These two exhibitions were, in fact, the only two major exhibitions of Dada visual art in Berlin. They therefore shaped public and critical perceptions of Dada at the time and are vital to our understanding of Dada activity in Berlin. As Hausmann himself concedes, Höch participated in both.

The first event was a three-day exhibition of architectural sketches and Dada work. It opened with a soirée on 30 April, which culminated in a bruitist musical piece *Anti Symphonie, 3 Teile (Anti Symphony, 3 Parts)* by Jefim Golyscheff. A handwritten note on the programme that Höch kept indicates how she participated in the performance, in fact playing a tin drum ('Ich mitgemacht' or: 'I took part').³²⁹ She also contributed watercolours and drawings to the exhibition.³³⁰ Alfred Behne described these enthusiastically in the following review: '*Hannah Höch und namentlich Jefim Golyscheff* zaubern fabelhafte Ornamente.'³³¹

These non-mimetic, sometimes geometric, experiments in aesthetic form would make way at the next exhibition for newer, differently innovative work. The 'Dada Messe' was the most important single event in Berlin Dada, and an epochal stage in the history of avant-garde art. Alongside all the Berlin protagonists –

³²⁸ 'Nachhall'. In: Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*, p. 153. 'Hannah Höch took part in only two exhibitions.'

³²⁹ Programme in: Thater-Schulz, *eine Lebenscollage* (Volume 1, Part 2), p. 569. She also participated in other performance events not specifically tied to Dada. On 10 February 1921, for example, she performed her own 'Grotesken' alongside Hausmann and Mynona, alias Salomon Friedländer.

³³⁰ For example: *Konstruktion mit Blau (Construction with Blue)* (1919). In: Thater-Schulz, *eine Lebenscollage. Volume 1, Part 2*, p. 561.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 563. '*Hannah Höch* und especially *Jefim Golyscheff* conjure up fabulous ornaments.'

Hausmann, Baader, Grosz, Heartfield, and Höch – it brought together many other artists including Otto Dix, Max Ernst, Francis Picabia and Rudolf Schlichter to stage a huge show of visual art, attracting the attention of the public and press with its provocative approach and radical innovations. Höch, the only woman artist to be well represented,³³² exhibited seven pieces, three of which have been lost. *Ali-Baba-Diele* (*Poster Ali-Baba-Hall*) (actually a typographical collage, but described in the catalogue as ‘Plakat’) and *Diktatur der Dadaisten* (*Dictator of the Dadaists*) (described as a ‘Relief’) can just be seen in a photograph of Höch and Hausmann at the Fair (fig. 11, below). A photograph also survives of a sculpture-assemblage that was not included in the catalogue, but which Höch has added to her copy of the catalogue list (calling it a ‘Plastik’).



Figure 11: Photograph of Raoul Hausmann & Hannah Höch, first room of the Dada Fair (1920)³³³

In addition, she displayed an assemblage-montage *Mechanisches Brautpaar* (*Mechanical Wedding Couple*) (described in the catalogue as a ‘Relief’), two hand-

³³² According to the programme, the only other woman artist to exhibit was Maud E. Grosz.

³³³ From: Dachy, *Journal du Mouvement Dada*, p. 105.

sewn dolls and for the first time, most importantly, two photomontage works: *Dada-Rundschau (Dada Panorama)* (not included in the catalogue), and the large-scale *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser Dada durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands (Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany)*.³³⁴

It is clear from Höch's comments, and correspondence between her and Hausmann, that her status within Dada was filtered in part through her personal relationship with him. However, a focus on her work must take precedence over speculations about relationships, membership and power struggles. Instead of approaching Dada in Berlin as a 'knot', a 'mould', or even an exclusive club, we might perceive it as a complex, dynamic context, within which Höch undoubtedly played a significant role as an artist. Examination of her substantial contributions to the 'Dada Messe' in particular emphasise how, through its innovative techniques, her work was of vital importance both to her history and to that of Dada.

3.2 Photomontage: pioneering and engineering

It is, of course, for her work in photomontage, the distinctive art form developed by the Berlin Dadaists, that Höch is best known. The technique of photomontage was a revolutionary new idea in art, an exciting innovation at the heart of Dada endeavours that would prove to have a lasting impact on modern art. In a step further than collage, as employed by the Cubists, photomontage did not merely introduce new elements alongside paint, but actually replaced paint altogether, making use exclusively of readymade photographic images as its material.³³⁵ The technique, which was unveiled most dramatically at the 'Dada Messe', challenged accepted notions about the artwork, the artist and the reception of art. It represented a willingness by the artist to engage with the modern world, specifically with new technology, manifesting this new approach through both content and technique.

³³⁴ Accounts of Höch's exhibits differ slightly. Höch gives this same list (with the exception of a further assemblage) in 'Lebensüberblick'. In: Moortgat and Thater-Schulz, *Hannah Höch 1889-1978*, p. 196. It is common to Götz and Remmert/Barth. Lavin includes the photomontage *Da Dandy* 'and other photomontages'. In: *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, p. 14 and footnote 1.

³³⁵ The term 'collage' is not used by the Dadaists but instead 'Klebebilder'. Finally, with the introduction of photographic material the term 'photomontage' comes about.

Photomontage is undoubtedly one of the most important legacies of Dada, indeed of the historical avant-garde more broadly, and it is apparent that Höch was at the centre of these endeavours.

Not surprisingly, claims differ as to the exact point of origin of the technique. In various accounts, Heartfield claims invention with Grosz, Grosz with Heartfield, and Hausmann claims it for himself. The debate is reminiscent of Richter's expression 'wer war erst' ('who was first'), which he uses in relation to Taeuber (chapter 2). Höch attributes its introduction into Dada to Hausmann: 'Der Gedanke jedenfalls stammte von ihm.'³³⁶ In a 1934 essay she describes the stimulus for the establishment of the technique, citing a common contemporary practice whereby photographs of individuals' heads were pasted onto ready-made scenes, either painted or photographed. The particular examples she gives include pasting the faces of soldiers into groups of Prussian regiments and adding family members into country landscapes.³³⁷ She provides further examples in an interview in 1975:

Bereits als Kind kannte ich diese Technik. Es gab z.B. Juxpostkarten, die durch Zusammenkleben von Fototeilen komische Situationen bewerkstelligten. Oder Hochzeitspaare, die mit den zukünftigen Freuden und Leiden der Ehe konfrontiert wurden. Und ähnliches.³³⁸

These examples use the juxtaposition of different photographic elements, together with painted or drawn scenes in some cases, to various effect, ranging from romantic to celebratory to comic. They are all rooted in popular culture. The unique contribution of Höch and her fellow Dadaists consisted of taking inspiration from these popular practices to develop a new artistic technique.

Whilst Hausmann fails to mention that Höch was with him on holiday at the Ostsee when he alleges he discovered the technique, in his detailed accounts of

³³⁶ Ohff, *Hannah Höch*, p. 15. 'The idea came from him in any case.'

³³⁷ 'A few words on photomontage', 1934. In: Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, p. 220. Originally published in the journal *Stredisko* 4, no. 1, on the occasion of Höch's solo photomontage exhibition in Brno. See also: 'Die Fotomontage' (1946) in: Moortgat and Thater-Schulz, *Hannah Höch 1889-1978*, pp. 218-219.

³³⁸ Pagé, 'Interview mit Hannah Höch.' In: *Hannah Höch: Collagen, Gemälde, Aquarelle, Gouachen, Zeichnungen*, p. 31. 'Already as a child I knew this technique. There were, e.g., jokey postcards, contrived by sticking together photo-bits of comical situations. Or wedding couples, who were confronted with the future joys and sorrows of marriage. And suchlike.'

photomontage, he is impelled, however, to note her participation. Given his reluctance to acknowledge her otherwise, this can be taken as evidence that she played a pivotal role. Firstly, he ascribes to her a part in naming it: ‘In meinem Neuerungeifer brauchte ich auch einen Namen für diese Technik. Gemeinsam – George Grosz, John Heartfield, Johannes Baader, Hannah Höch und ich – beschlossen wir, die Erzeugnisse *Fotomontage* zu nennen.’³³⁹ Secondly, he acknowledges her part in developing it: ‘Es waren vor allem ich, Johannes Baader und Hannah Höch, die die neue Technik entwickelten und ausbauten.’³⁴⁰ More interesting than pinpointing a single moment of conception or ownership (we are reminded of Dada’s ‘birth’) is an appreciation of its applications and unfolding. What is beyond speculation is that Höch was instrumental, together with Hausmann and other key figures, in taking up and foregrounding the technique in the Dada context.

Maria Makela makes an exciting claim about the best known of Höch’s photomontages, *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser Dada durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands* (*Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany*) (fig. 12, below). She writes, ‘Cut with the Kitchen Knife telescoped the methods and meanings of the Dada-Messe into a single, iconic image.’³⁴¹ This huge montage is entirely composed of images taken from a variety of magazines and newspapers, juxtaposed in size, colour and position. Phrases, words and letters, in varied typography and scale, are interspersed with pictures, given new and numerous meanings by their removal from context. Höch incorporates diverse subjects: photographs of politicians, machinery, buildings and crowds, alongside images of women including dancers and sportswomen. The images and text extracts refer out of the frame to everyday life: to posters, advertisements, newspapers and illustrated magazines aimed primarily at women.

³³⁹ ‘Fotomontage’. In: Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*, p. 45. ‘In my enthusiasm for innovation I also needed a name for this technique. Together – George Grosz, John Heartfield, Johannes Baader, Hannah Höch and I – we decided to name the results *Photomontage*.’

³⁴⁰ Ibid. ‘It was, above all, myself, Johannes Baader and Hannah Höch, who developed and exploited this new technique.’

³⁴¹ Makela, ‘By Design: The early work of Hannah Höch in Context’. In: Boswell, Makela and Lanchner, *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch*, p. 49.

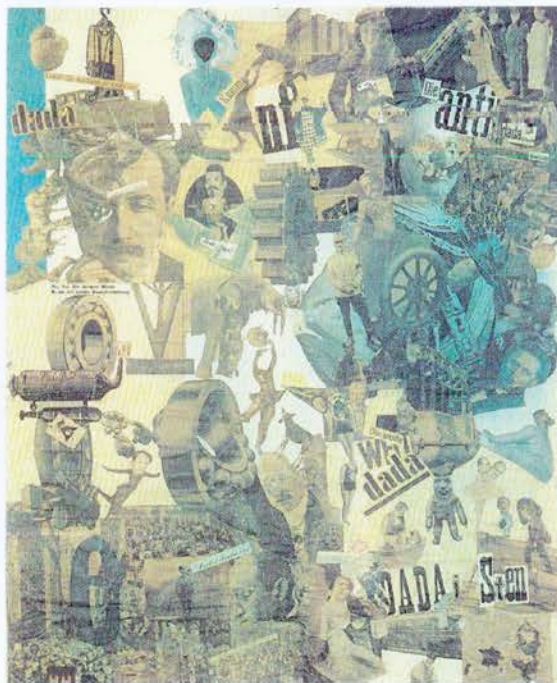


Figure 12: Hannah Höch, *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser Dada durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands* (1919-1920)³⁴²

Instead of offering a static, framed, single-point perspective, its work seeks to engage with and portray multiple simultaneous experiences. Its ‘staccato audacities’, to use a phrase by Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, offer almost infinite juxtapositions, contrasts and connections.³⁴³ Maud Lavin has looked into the images in this work in great detail, and in many cases has traced their sources. Through a focus on specific aspects – images and text, and the relationships between them – she brings out multiple readings around areas as diverse as female pleasure, the female body, emancipation, utopianism, class, technology, identity and politics. In so doing, she makes a compelling case for the multiple impressions that Höch conveys through this work, including attitudes that are celebratory, fearful, critical and ironic.³⁴⁴

³⁴² Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, plate 2.

³⁴³ Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976, p. 58.

³⁴⁴ See, in particular, Chapter 1: ‘The Berlin Dada Photomontages’. In: Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*.

In this and other works, Höch uses fragments of photographs and text cut from mass-circulation media, from areas as diverse as travel articles, health features and advertising, calling it 'photomatter'.³⁴⁵ These cuttings would have been considered by many commentators and critics to be superficial and inappropriate as artistic material, at a time when photography itself was not considered an art form. The title makes explicit reference to the tool of the photomontage artist and the process of cutting-out – in this case, moreover, with a domestic tool. Höch compares her 'photomatter' with other basic materials employed by artists and rightly declares its significance: 'Ich benutze es [das Foto] wie die Farbe oder wie der Dichter das Wort. Soviel zu der mich bis heute intensivst beschäftigenden Form von Dada'.³⁴⁶ Photomontage extended the ongoing experimentation of avant-garde artists with new materials to a new level, replacing paint altogether and substituting it with its new 'rival', the photograph.

Höch's comments in a 1934 essay are unequivocal about the place of photography in the emergence of Dada's innovative new technique: 'Photomontage is based on photography and has developed from photography'.³⁴⁷ She attributes the re-emergence of experiments with photography and their introduction into Dada art to the following three factors: 'This rebirth was due, in the first place, to the high level of quality photography has achieved; second, to film; and third, to reportage photography, which has proliferated immensely'.³⁴⁸ She thus recognises, and highlights, the impact of new popular and commercial media, and technical advances within those media, on the traditional arts. Dietrich Scheunemann emphasises this crucial issue: of how developments in photography and film were posing a threat to the traditional role of art around the turn of the century, especially in view of their potential to render mimesis in painting obsolete. He proposes that, where some artists avoided confrontation with these new questions, avant-garde movements including Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism and Dada had in common an impetus to find new

³⁴⁵ 'A few words on photomontage', 1934. In: *Ibid.*, p. 220.

³⁴⁶ Remmert and Barth, *Werke und Worte*, p. 7. Original quoted in: Walter Mehring, *Berlin Dada*, p. 92. 'I use it [the photo] like colour, or how the poet uses the word. As far as I'm concerned, its Dada's most intensively used form ever.'

³⁴⁷ 'A few words on photomontage.' In: Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, p. 219.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

means of expression.³⁴⁹ Höch and her colleagues reacted to the possibilities of new technology in an exceptional way, uniquely appropriating some of its aspects and methods into their artwork and establishing an explicit relationship between new media and the traditional arts.

The process itself, of cutting out, collecting and assembling chosen fragments, is apparent in the composition. In its use of mass-produced ready-made images and text, the photomontage manifests a new attitude by, and towards, the artist. The artwork is not seen as the vehicle for an individual's expression of her unique insight and creativity but is rather self-effacing. It is in the selection and assembling of the material that the artist produces a piece of work, a process that is potentially open to anyone. It contrasts, as Dawn Ades points out, with the traditional employment of oils that is 'essentially unrepeatable, private and exclusive.'³⁵⁰ Höch's description of the photomontage process reveals pragmatism over intuition:

Ich finde irgendwo etwas Nebensächliches, je nebensächlicher desto besser – etwas Nichtssagendes, das aber meine Phantasie schlagartig anregt und mich zu einer Aussage zwingt. Diese wird dann systematisch erarbeitet. Das heißt, daß von nun an Zufälliges kaum noch eindringen darf, nicht im Formaufbau, nicht im Inhalt (sofern einer angestrebt wird). Das heißt auch, daß im weiteren Fortgang der Arbeit ein oft mühseliges Suchen nicht aufhört.³⁵¹

Her description is of a measured construction, a production process, a piece of work. It bypasses any reference to mystical creativity, intuition or genius, instead referring to conscious composition. Hausmann is explicit about this philosophical aspect of Dada: 'DADA verzichtete auf jede magische oder mystische Prozedur.'³⁵²

³⁴⁹ Scheunemann, 'On Photography and Painting.' In: Scheunemann, *European Avant-Garde: New Perspectives*, p. 25. Still, Scheunemann emphasises diversity: 'the formation of the avant-garde follows neither a single, uniform intention, nor does it advance in a one-dimensional fashion.' His focus on new technology challenges Peter Bürger's notion that movements shared a unified ideological orientation, that of subverting art into life.

³⁵⁰ Dawn Ades, *Photomontage*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1976, p. 8.

³⁵¹ Ohff, *Hannah Höch*, p. 30. 'Somewhere I find something trivial, the more trivial the better – something that doesn't say anything, but which suddenly stimulates my imagination and forces me to make a statement. This is then systematically worked through. From that point on, that is, chance can hardly intervene: not in the building of form, and not in the content (in so far as any is sought). It also means that progressing the work further is an often tiring search that never ceases.'

³⁵² Hausmann, 'Morphopsychologie Dada's'. In: *Am Anfang war Dada*, p. 11. 'DADA did without any magical or mystical procedure.'

The challenge to the elevation and separation of the artistic process, the rejection of the creative ‘personality’ of traditional art, and the shift in focus from inner necessity to a technical process was fundamental to the Dadaists’ approach. The photomontage artist was a ‘monteur’, cutting and pasting readymade materials. As Höch states with reference to the conception of the term photomontage: ‘Wir nannten diese Technik Photomontage, weil dies unsere Aversion enthielt, den Künstler zu spielen. Wir betrachteten uns als Ingenieure, wir gaben vor, zu konstruieren, unsere Arbeit zu ‘montieren’ (wie ein Schlosser).’³⁵³ Höch in fact maintained a three-day working week over a period of ten years (1916-1926) as an illustrator, calligrapher and designer for the ‘Ullstein Verlag’, producing designs for wallpaper and fabric, dress and embroidery patterns, magazine covers and advertising layouts. In addition, then, to practising the philosophy of the dadaist ‘engineer’ through her part in photomontage, she embodied it as a commercial worker too.

Finally, a description by Höch of the thinking behind the dadaist ‘Klebebild’, a precursor to photomontage, elucidates how the fusion of technology and art were at the core of the dadaist approach:

Ja, unser ganzes Ziel bestand darin, Dinge aus der Maschinenwelt und aus der Industrie von der Kunst her zu erfassen. Und unsere typographischen Klebebilder oder Collagen bezweckten etwas ähnliches, denn sie verliehen einem Gegenstand, der nur mit der Hand gefertigt werden konnte, den absoluten Anschein eines Maschinenproduktes. In einer erdachten Komposition vereinigten wir, in einer Anordnung, die keine Maschine bewerkstelligen konnte, Elemente, die Büchern, Zeitungen oder Reklameblättern entnommen waren.³⁵⁴

³⁵³ Ohff, *Hannah Höch*, p. 16. Götz and Barth/Remmert use it too. ‘We called this technique Photomontage, because it contained our aversion at playing the artist. We considered ourselves to be engineers, we professed to construct, to ‘assemble’ our work (like a fitter).’ This statement is strikingly similar to the better-known statement from Hausmann: ‘Dieser Name entstand dank unserer Abneigung, Künstler zu spielen; wir betrachteten uns als Ingenieure (daher unsere Vorliebe für Arbeitsanzüge), wir behaupteten, unsere Arbeiten zu konstruieren, zu montieren.’ Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*, p. 45. ‘This name arose from our aversion at playing the artist; we considered ourselves to be engineers (hence our preference for work clothes), we professed to construct, or ‘assemble’ our artworks.’

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.* ‘Yes, our whole aim consisted of seizing things from the world of machinery and from industry, and into art. And our typographical ‘Klebebilder’ or collages intended something similar, as they lent an object, which could only have been made by hand, the absolute appearance of a machine product. In a made-up composition we united, in an arrangement, which no machine could manage, elements taken from books, newspapers or advertising flyers.’

Höch describes how the dadaist artwork consciously mimics the appearance of a manufactured object, but can nevertheless only be made by an individual. Her statement reflects on commercial or mass production, and the challenge that it posed to the artist. At the 'Dada Messe' the poster bearing the slogan 'Die Kunst ist tot. Es lebe die neue Maschinenkunst Tatlins',³⁵⁵ hanging alongside the work of Höch and Hausmann, embodied most radically this dadaist materialist approach, its rejection of esoteric spirituality, and its essential reference to the new possibilities of mechanical reproduction.³⁵⁶

Exemplified by photomontage, Berlin Dada established a new approach that acknowledged the implication of the artist in a world where production methods were changing rapidly and where mechanical reproduction had become possible. Scheunemann writes: 'The dadaist photomontage marks the point where technological reproduction becomes a recognised integral part of artistic production.'³⁵⁷ Hannah Höch was an excellent representative of the new dadaist artist-engineer, and her photomontage work illuminates this crucial technical aspect of the movement just as much as does the work of colleagues such as Hausmann or Heartfield. As well as technical innovation on a par with her male colleagues, she shared with them certain ideological concerns, as will be discussed in the next section (3.3) and, finally, used photomontage in different, more gender-related ways, as will become clear in 3.4.

3.3 The politics of photomontage

The innovative approaches of Berlin Dada, as detailed above, have sometimes been overshadowed by misconceptions that Dada was only provocative and nihilistic, more concerned with anti-art than art. The fact that the Berlin Dadaists made use of the photomontage technique to offer far-ranging political critique tends to dominate in some commentaries, and is erroneously proposed as evidence that the Dadaists'

³⁵⁵ 'Art is dead. Long live Tatlin's new machine art.'

³⁵⁶ Walter Benjamin's essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' is of course pertinent to this argument. See: Benjamin, *Illuminations*. London: Pimlico, 1999, p. 211-244

³⁵⁷ Scheunemann, 'On Photography and Painting.' In: *European Avant-Garde: New Perspectives*, p. 26.

concerns were only political and not aesthetic. The discussion of Höch's work, here, has already emphasised the innovations that are inherent in photomontage, including its use of new material, its reappraisal of the artist's role, and its introduction of a new technical process that engages with new technology. Berlin Dada should not be distilled down to its politics, then, nor should photomontage be perceived only as a political tool. Still, political critique was an important motivation for the Berlin Dadaists and, according to Hausmann's memoirs, the initial stimulus behind the conception of photomontage.³⁵⁸ Moreover, as a characteristic element of Berlin Dada, its place in Höch's work must be considered. The question is interesting: what does the only woman in Berlin Dada have to say about politics?

Politics, especially pacifism, was already an important element in Zurich Dada. By the time of Huelsenbeck's arrival in Berlin in 1918, the war was over, but Germany was suffering enormous social, political and economic problems. Huelsenbeck has pointed out the different conditions in the two cities, comparing the relative insouciance in the neutral city to the realities and hardships of the German capital, and insisting on political urgency in art. In an explicit rejection of Expressionism in his April 1918 manifesto, he derided those artists who he saw as maintaining a hierarchical distance from everyday concerns: 'Der Haß gegen die Presse, der Haß gegen die Reklame, der Haß gegen die Sensation spricht für Menschen, denen ihr Sessel wichtiger ist als der Lärm der Straße.'³⁵⁹ He demanded that the Berlin Dadaists should be involved in all aspects of contemporary life. A further statement exemplifies this less distanced, less hierarchical attitude: 'Dadaist sein kann unter Umständen heißen, mehr Kaufmann, mehr Parteimann als Künstler sein – nur zufällig Künstler sein.'³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ See 'Fotomontage.' In: Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*, pp. 45-77, in which he gives a detailed account of its conception and subsequent development.

³⁵⁹ 'Das dadaistische Manifest', read by Huelsenbeck on 12 April 1918. Reproduced in: Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*, p. 24. 'Hatred of the press, hatred of advertising, hatred of sensations, are typical of people who prefer their armchair to the noise of the street.'

Translation in: Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 40.

³⁶⁰ 'Das dadaistische Manifest', read by Huelsenbeck on 12 April 1918. Reproduced in: Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*, p. 25. 'To be a Dadaist can mean, under different circumstances, to be more a salesman, more a party man than an artist – to be an artist only by chance.'

Heartfield, most notably, became a prolific producer of anti-Fascist pieces throughout the 1920s and 1930s, employing photomontage to convey overt political messages. Standing in stark contrast, as it does, to the quite definite political messages we receive from Heartfield's well-known work, Höch's work has been perceived as non-political and many critical accounts have sought to distance her entirely from any political engagement. In an introduction to an exhibition catalogue from 1982, for example, while the author states that Höch was 'anything but apolitical', this is a partial concession, a prelude to denoting her 'the least engaged' and her photomontages as 'poetic not propagandist, more personal than public' and displaying qualities of 'whimsy and beauty.'³⁶¹ Such differentiation may be intended to single out Höch's uniqueness and independence, but uses simplistic distinctions. The oppositions set up here conform to stereotypical separations between aesthetics and politics, male and female, and personal and political. Richter's words encompass these attitudes – he calls her a 'little girl' and 'lyrical' (the two are linked for him) – but he does grant her work some political aspect:

Ihre Collagen waren manchmal politisch (denn man war ja im Schützengraben), manchmal dokumentarisch (sie klebte alle Berliner Dadaisten und Freunde in bedeutungsvollen Posen auf ein riesiges Klebebild, das sich jetzt im Museum in Berlin Dahlem befindet), manchmal lyrisch (als kleines Mädchen, das sie war).³⁶²

The political aspects of her work, which are, in fact, substantial, will be discussed shortly. Already, biographical material refutes suggestions that Höch was less engaged politically. Heinz Ohff, for example, quotes Höch stating at the outbreak of the First World War: 'Von diesem Augenblick an habe ich auch politisch sehr bewußt gelebt.'³⁶³ In conversation with Roditi in 1959, she also talked of her own commitments, and those of her contemporaries including Herzfelde and Grosz,

³⁶¹ Frank Whitford, 'Introduction'. In: *Hannah Höch 1889-1978. Oil paintings and works on paper. June-July 1983*. London: Fischer Fine Art Ltd., 1983, pp. 2-4.

³⁶² Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 136. 'Her collages were sometimes political (everyone was in the line of battle), sometimes documentary (she put all the Berlin Dadaists and their friends, in significant attitudes, into an immense collage which is now in the Dahlem Art Gallery, Berlin), sometimes lyrical (little girl that she was).' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 132.

³⁶³ Ohff, *Hannah Höch*, p. 11. Höch provided this statement, along with others that are not otherwise attributed in this book, for the publication. 'From this moment on I too lived in a politically conscious way.'

to politics, indicating shared pacifist, anti-nationalist and anti-militarist tendencies during and following the First World War.³⁶⁴ The substantial collection of magazines and periodicals she left behind indicate broad interest in various political, social and aesthetic issues. She participated in numerous exhibitions of the ‘November Group’ but also maintained a critical stance, signing the open letter published to the Group in *Der Gegner* in 1920.³⁶⁵ This letter appealed for more revolutionary aims: for commitment to radical aesthetic and social changes, and closer alignment of the artist with the average worker. It effectively criticised the group’s stance as having become too commercial and too concessionary to bourgeois norms.

Speculation on her political stance and activities notwithstanding, it is the combination of the content of images and the techniques used in their presentation that inspire socio-political readings of Höch’s photomontages possible. She makes the following comment with regard to the circumstances of the time: ‘Ich [...] sah eine, meine Aufgabe darin, zu versuchen, diese turbulente Zeit bildlich einzufangen. Es entstand ‘Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser’ und ähnliches.’³⁶⁶ Several political figures appear in *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser*, including Wilhelm II and General von Hindenburg in the top right-hand corner of the piece. The former figure is made ridiculous by the elements of his portrait – his moustache is made up of wrestlers – and the latter’s body is replaced with that of a female dancer. Their images, once serious newspaper portraits, usually symbolic of military power, are rendered comic. The composition establishes unexpected hierarchies and correspondences between disparate elements. The words ‘Die anti dadaistische Bewegung’ (‘The anti-dadaist movement’) set up further opposition and a shift in power, with the authorities aligned against Dada rather than vice versa. The presentation and positioning of the selected images suggests anti-militarism and criticism of the government. Finally, the long dramatic title itself makes a statement. Combined with the cutout, fragmented images of the photomontage, it proposes a dissection, or even destruction, of the prevailing male-dominated ‘beer belly’ culture by a domestic knife.

³⁶⁴ Roditi, ‘Ein Gespräch mit der Malerin.’ Translation in: Lippard, *Dadas on Art*, pp. 68-77.

³⁶⁵ A member from the beginning, she exhibited in 1920-23, 1925, 1926, 1930, and 1931.

³⁶⁶ Pagé, ‘Interview mit Hannah Höch.’ *Hannah Höch: Collagen, Gemälde, Aquarelle, Gouachen, Zeichnungen*, p. 25. ‘I [...] saw one of my tasks as being to try to capture this turbulent time. *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser* and similar works came about.’

Dada-Rundschau (Dada Panorama) (fig. 13, below), the other of the two photomontages displayed at the 'Dada Messe', also has a political aspect.

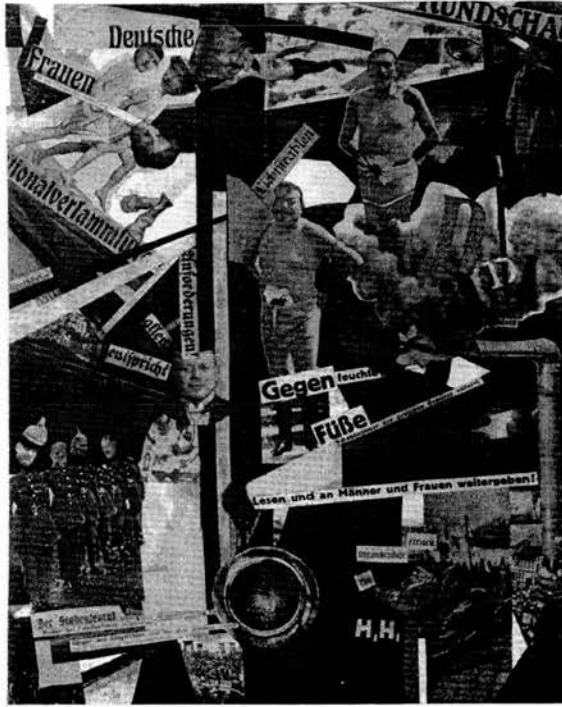


Figure 13: Hannah Höch, *Dada Rundschau* (1919)³⁶⁷

The composition is like a scrapbook of newspaper images, dispersed to four corners, with headlines of text arranged horizontally, vertically and diagonally. Two men in swimming trunks, President Ebert and the Army Minister, Noske, are prominent. These figures were cut from a newspaper image of the two SPD leaders that had appeared on the cover of the magazine *BIZ* on 24 August 1919. The photograph of the men in their bathing suits had already been the object of public mockery, and provides a good example of the weight of meaning such images carry, even before subversion and re-contextualisation by Höch. She adds a flower to the costume of each, military boots to Ebert, and has Noske's feet in a cloud bearing cutout letters that make up 'Dada'. An assembled headline 'Gegen feuchte Füße' ('against damp feet') completes the ridicule.

³⁶⁷ Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, ill. 18, p. 36.

Furthermore, Höch calls attention specifically to the issue of women's participation in political life. In the top left-hand corner the words 'Deutsche Frauen in der Nationalversammlung,' ('German women in the National Parliament') overlays several figures made up of dancing torsos and women's heads. It points to the election of women to office for the first time in 1919. The morphed figure of an athlete's body with Woodrow Wilson's head reaching towards them, almost in salute, celebrates this as a positive development. Finally, the 'signature' itself is noteworthy. Made up of words and letters cut out from newspapers, and situated towards the right-hand corner, it declares 'Schrankenlose Freiheit für H.H.' ('Unlimited freedom for H.H.'). Here is a concise and poignant demand, or declaration, which might be interpreted as social or artistic, political or personal.

The photomontage technique offered great possibilities for making political comment through its choice of images and texts, and specifically through the combinations of heterogeneous fragments. However, its potential to offer new perspectives is more complex than the delivery of didactic political messages. In a close study of *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser* Gertrud Jula Dech rightly emphasises the political potency of the use of photomontage itself, outlining three elements she sees as generic to the technique.³⁶⁸ The first is that the cutout material is selected from contemporary sources; the second is the emphasis on the technical as opposed to irrationality and spirituality; and the third is the accessibility of the technique to laypeople. These arguments illustrate that the designation of political goes beyond pinpointing the artist's stance, or even the work's didactic message, to a perception that the choices involved in the conception and delivery of the work itself reflect political, philosophical and aesthetic explorations. In photomontage, the artist cuts through existing, everyday material, and reassembles the pieces to create a new order.

To the contemporary viewer, many of the images used in Höch's photomontages would have been familiar, seen already in newspapers or magazines, and here presenting a challenge to look again. Indeed, it was the familiarity, the 'already-seen' aspect of the newspaper and magazine images that provided their

³⁶⁸ In: Götz, *Hannah Höch. Fotomontagen – Gemälde – Aquarelle*, p. 18. Originally from: Gertrud Jula Dech, 'Untersuchungen zur Fotmontage bei Hannah Höch anhand des Bildes *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser Dada durch die letzte Weimarer Bierbauchkulturepoche Deutschlands*'. In: 'Maschinenschrift', Berlin 1978, p. 15.

impact when subverted. Language is similarly subverted, with headlines broken up and re-formulated. The re-assembling of this material in the new art form confronts the viewer with questions about the visual 'reality' s/he consumes through commercial media and about the appropriate content and context of art. Open to multiple readings, it highlights political and social complexities by questioning appearances and the presentation of reality.

An account by Höch that makes clear the contrast between the popular photomontage technique in military photos, and Dada's reinvention of it, illuminates the potency of its use in Dada:

Wenn man bei dieser primitiven Fotomontage überhaupt von einem ästhetischen Ziel sprechen kann, so bestand es darin, die Wirklichkeit zu idealisieren, während die Dadamontage einem gänzlich Unwirklichen den Anschein von etwas Wirklichem geben wollte, das tatsächlich fotografiert worden war.³⁶⁹

Her statement points to how the early photomontage techniques were used to refer to the 'real' world, to produce, through illusion, an idealised reality in a manipulated image. Dada, by contrast, combined real photographic or textual fragments in unusual contexts. These combinations in photomontages at first produced images that appeared trustworthy because of their photographic sources. Each consumption, however, subverts expectations and raises questions about accepted realities and impressions. The realisation that they had been manipulated is then all the more powerful. The technique of re-contextualising familiar images or objects successfully disrupted the viewer's understanding or acceptance of what is real or factual. In an essay on Heartfield's photomontages John Berger expresses this very clearly:

The peculiar advantage of photomontage lies in the fact that everything that has been cut out keeps its familiar photographic appearance. We are still looking at *things* and only afterwards at symbols. But because these things have been shifted [...] we are made conscious of the arbitrariness of their continuous normal message. [...] Appearances themselves are suddenly showing us how they deceive us.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁹ Remmert and Barth, *Werke und Worte*, p. 23. Quoted from: Roditi, 'Ein Gespräch mit der Malerin', p. 63. 'But the aesthetic purpose, if any, of this very primitive kind of photomontage was to idealize reality, whereas the Dada photomonteur set out to give something entirely unreal to all the appearance of something real that had actually been photographed.' Translation in Lippard, *Dadas on Art*, p. 73.

³⁷⁰ John Berger, 'The Political Uses of Photo-Montage'. In: Berger, *Selected Essays and Articles: The Look of Things*. Middx, England and Victoria, Australia: Penguin, 1972, pp. 185-6.

The Berlin Dadaists responded to the challenge of photography and mass media by incorporating its material. The photomontage technique uniquely develops the possibilities of the photograph and, as Dawn Ades aptly puts it: ‘the fascinating paradox of being able to distort reality with the medium which is its truest mirror.’³⁷¹ This statement is at the heart of the power of the photomontage technique and the invitations it offers to reappraise information. In some cases it is used to great effect to deliver overt political messages. Even more consequential, however, than its potential to subvert by offering explicit viewpoints, is the fact that the technique implicitly challenges and questions aesthetic, social and political norms.

Höch was clear about the intersections between politics and art. She stated, in 1976: ‘Hierzu möchte ich sagen, daß mir zu allen Zeiten daran lag, meine Aussagen, auch die Kritik, über die Mittel der Kunst zu machen.’³⁷² I have argued that Höch was immersed in these concerns along with her male contemporaries, and have sought to emphasise that she should neither be separated from the focus on technical and material innovation, nor from a broad engagement with public politics (both sometimes perceived as male domains). In the following section, I will highlight the ways in which her photomontage works, through incorporating images of and references to women, bring to the fore questions of politics that challenge the distinctions between public and private, and political and personal. In this aspect, her work anticipates the feminist claim that ‘the personal is the political’. As Judith Butler writes, ‘At its best, feminist theory involves a dialectical expansion of both these categories.’³⁷³ At their best, Höch’s photomontage works approach the same.

3.4 Women as subject, women as object: fragmented figures

This distinctive aspect of Höch’s work, that is her many representations of women using ‘photomatter’, is one that has brought her to the attention of critics, especially feminist critics, over the last two decades. It is an outstanding feature of her work,

³⁷¹ Ades, *Photmontage*, p. 19.

³⁷² Pagé, ‘Interview mit Hannah Höch.’ *Hannah Höch: Collagen, Gemälde, Aquarelle, Gouachen, Zeichnungen*, p. 24. ‘I would like to add that, for me, art has always been a means for making statements, including criticisms.’

³⁷³ Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution.’ In: Jones, *Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, p. 395.

but one that is not separate from either her own multiple dadaist preoccupations or from the work of other Dadaists. The flaw in such a distinction is that it propagates a belief that women's experiences, and questions around the representation of women, are somehow separate from other socio-political or indeed aesthetic concerns. Some critics, in seeking to emphasise Höch's differences from Dada, have promoted the idea that her work displays a particular interest in representations of women, or a feminist consciousness, only after her participation in the movement. However, early works such as *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser*, *Dada-Ernst* and *Da-Dandy*, in which images of women feature prominently and which are clearly associated with Dada by their very titles, refute such a distinction. I prefer to see Höch's works as examples of interventions in, and extensions of, a more heterogeneous Dada.

Images of women are scarce in the work of other Dada visual artists. Hausmann, interestingly, provides a small number of notable exceptions, including the photomontage *Fiat Modes* from 1920.³⁷⁴ In its centre are the cutout face and one breast of a model, a sportswoman celebrating the finishing-line, a smiling woman in a swimming-cap and a woman doing the high jump. There is a tailor's dummy in the background. Dominating the composition are six pairs of legs, cut from photographs of sportswomen and fashion models, and structured to form an almost circular shape reminiscent of a clock or a wheel, giving the unmistakable impression of dynamic movement. It is a subtle work, mixing fashion and sport, passivity and power, femininity and androgyny, and finally encapsulating an impression of modernity.³⁷⁵ Such examples notwithstanding, it is Höch who gives images of women a substantial presence. She selects the fragments that make up her women from a wide spectrum of mass-media publications, drawing on – and reflecting on – the proliferation of images of women in magazines and advertising in the 1920s.

In her book *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* Maud Lavin links a close reading of Höch's photomontages with a thorough socio-historical study, stating that, 'my object is to explore the connection between the production of avant-garde

³⁷⁴ See: Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*, p. 17.

³⁷⁵ For an excellent discussion of this photomontage in relation to fashion, the body, gender and modernity, see: Brigid Doherty, 'Fashionable ladies, dada dandies.' In: *Art Journal*, Spring 1995.

photomontage and the fractured experience of everyday life in Weimar Germany.³⁷⁶ In particular, she uses Höch's work through the 1920s and 1930s to illuminate the development of the 'New Woman' construct in publishing and advertising.³⁷⁷ Lavin is careful to clarify the particular focus of her work at the outset, and her study is extremely illuminating in terms of proposing socio-political and psychoanalytical readings of Höch's work.

Lavin avoids ascribing particular conscious intentions and motivations to Höch and fixed meanings to her works.³⁷⁸ After all, attempts to 'read' the content of the photomontage, to try to make fixed sense of its elements, can obscure some of its most important innovations. The technique was a deliberate attempt to free the artist from depicting a coherent subject or scene. It abandoned the traditional use of perspective that makes for an illusionist scene and instead revelled in the visual material itself and in the extraordinary possibilities for combining that material. Where Lavin's study is most interesting, then, is where it emphasises the complexity of Höch's work, its contradictions and multiplicity of meanings. She seeks to explore various interpretations: 'On multiple levels Höch both criticized and reproduced the media's representation of women in her day.'³⁷⁹ In all Höch's works the images are intricately linked at many levels to the overall structural composition. As Lavin emphasises:

these photographic fragments of women should not be regarded separately, with each having a discreet, fixed meaning. Rather, the meaning of each fragment is contingent and incomplete, open to a variety of supplementary readings in juxtaposition with other fragments.³⁸⁰

In *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser* those images of women are predominantly the figures of dancers and skaters. Lavin discusses these images as potential

³⁷⁶ Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, p. 9.

³⁷⁷ Some of Höch's early work predates the 'New Woman' concept. Still, Lavin acknowledges and emphasises the fluidity of the term and its applications: 'For my purposes, the New Woman is best considered as a cumulative perception of female stereotypes, collected over time by women newly self-conscious of their modern status – and by their observers.' *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁷⁸ She reiterates this openness in a later essay: 'The Mess of History or the Unclean Hannah Höch.' In: de Zegher, *Inside the Visible*, pp. 117-124.

³⁷⁹ Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, p. 5.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

allegories of physical freedom, female liberation, anarchism and utopianism, contrasting with the hierarchical militaristic images of the Weimar men in power. Höch's inclusion of a map depicting those countries in which women had won the vote is the most explicit reference to the political and social roles of women. It is important that these references are included in a work that, more than any other, succeeds in creating an impression of a modern urban world, in which post-war politics and industry were revolutionising everyday life, and in which messages and images were being transmitted incessantly. Höch's combination of subject matters that are normally treated in different domains is especially noticeable. The dichotomies of public and private, and male and female, come together and the lines between them are blurred. This is demonstrated in the title itself, as briefly discussed: in contrasting the kitchen knife with the beer belly, it collides images that are associated separately with stereotypical male and female domains, or with public and domestic spheres.

Dada-Ernst (fig. 14, below), completed 1920-1921, provides another early example of Höch's combinations of images of women, together with a variety of objects and backdrops. As in *Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser*, she selects and positions images of people from the popular press, but in this case images of women clearly dominate. These are refigured in uncanny ways, set against a cluttered mixed-up background, and contrasting sharply with the way women are usually represented in art. Taken individually, some of the mass-media images appear clichéd, but even within that context they no doubt represented exciting possibilities for women in the 1920s, reflecting different aspirations and potential for change.

Höch's new combinations both celebrate such images and invite re-examination of them. In the bottom left-hand corner is the figure of a modern woman doing gymnastic exercises, which contrasts with a classical-romantic image of a cherubic woman playing a musical instrument above. In the centre-right is the profile of an elegant woman's figure, on which has been overlaid a black leg and cone hat, accoutrements which make her comical. In the top left-hand corner is an overtly masculine image: a newspaper cutting of boxers in action (boxing was a favourite theme of the Berlin Dadaists). Coins, a large bow-like piece of machinery and a skyscraper are also included, adding new visual layers, reference points and potential

readings. The largest image, almost in the centre of the piece, is a pair of free-floating legs. Severed from the rest of the body, they look like the legs of a mannequin. This example, one of many, highlights the employment in photomontage not only of juxtaposition of objects, but of the isolation of an object from its usual context. Most remarkably, an eye, inverted by ninety degrees, is placed between the legs, where the genitals would be, subverting and reversing the gaze.



Figure 14: Hannah Höch, *Dada-Ernst* (1920-1921)³⁸¹

The viewer's eye is drawn between these various images, with their attitudes and symbols of modernity. Flashes of colour next to black-and-white, gaps and edges add to the complexity of the juxtapositions. The strange composition of *Dada-Ernst* represents a disturbance of the traditional focus on a subject matter. There is neither a central focal point nor clear linear pattern for the eye to follow but instead an invitation to revel in this eclectic visual collection of material, freed from its fixed meanings. There is a comical aspect to this composition (for example, the woman with the cone hat), but the tone is confused by the heavy dark cross in the centre. The

³⁸¹ From: Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, plate 1.

title *Dada-Ernst* contributes to the uncertainty: ‘ernst’ means ‘serious’, but the title, like the images, is infused with irony.

The photomontage *Da-Dandy* (fig. 15, below) also brings gender to the fore. In it, fragments of body images almost morph into one another, against a collaged backdrop of coloured pasted papers. The figures display the accessories of femininity – pearl necklaces, lipstick, bangles, heeled shoes, a hat and a handbag. Four female faces and a man’s face overlap at the head of the figure(s), with eyes closed, obscured or replaced with cutouts, giving the impression of a single figure made up of many disparate parts.



Figure 15: Hannah Höch, *Da-Dandy* (1919)³⁸²

The title comes from the pasted words ‘Da Dandy’ on the lower right-hand side, whose large capital D draws attention to the words. ‘Dada’ also features in the top left-hand corner, the word pasted vertically. Höch’s representation of the dandy draws attention to gender attributes and positions as social constructions. This playing with gender, or the assumption of femininity by a man, becomes most prominent within Dada through Marcel Duchamp’s alter ego Rose Sélavy. Höch, in

³⁸² From: Dachy, *Journal du Mouvement Dada*, p. 93.

bringing together dandy and Dada, could be referring to the group's eccentricity, its non-conformism and refusal of social norms, to herself as a woman (a feminising influence) within the male-dominated Dada group, or – as Brigid Doherty has suggested – to the male Dadaist, specifically Hausmann, as dandy. Doherty writes of this photomontage: 'it is a witty image of his [Hausmann's] identification with fashionable ladies, an image that at the same time takes its own ironic distance from the dandy's fantasy.'³⁸³

This examination of just two of Höch's photomontage works that feature women prominently has illustrated how she makes women visible in Dada work, in ways that challenge conventional representation and upset the traditional gaze. In 'Das dadaistische Manifest' ('The dadaist Manifesto') Huelsenbeck declares:

Die höchste Kunst wird diejenige sein, die in ihren Bewußtseinsinhalten die tausendfachen Probleme der Zeit präsentiert, der man anmerkt, daß sie sich von den Explosionen der letzten Woche werfen ließ, die ihre Glieder immer wieder unter dem Stoß des letzten Tages zusammensucht.³⁸⁴

Given this interest in reacting to the 'thousandfold' new developments in everyday life, Höch's broadening of subject matter and material to include images of women is entirely fitting, and makes prominent many contemporary issues. Asked about feminist interpretations of her work in a 1976 interview, Höch agrees that irony is a vital component in her work, targeted at marriage, the family, and the modern woman, but clarifies that she is not fully against any of these. Of the latter, she states:

Die Verherrlichung der modernen Frau war in meiner Arbeit nicht angestrebt. Dagegen hat mich öfter die leidende Frau engagiert. Wenn ich aber ein Zeitbild geben will, dann lasse ich natürlich die guten Leistungen von Frauen nicht aus.³⁸⁵

³⁸³ Brigid Doherty, 'Fashionable ladies, dada dandies.' In: *Art Journal*, Spring 1995. I have already made reference to this essay in relation to Hausmann's *Fiat Modes* (fn 375). Doherty uses both *Fiat Modes* and *Da-Dandy* to examine Dadaist attitudes to fashion and gender.

³⁸⁴ 'Das dadaistische Manifest', read by Huelsenbeck on 12 April 1918 at Berliner Sezession. Reproduced in: Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*, p. 23. '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 the last week, which is forever trying to collect its limbs after yesterday's crash.' Translation in Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, p. 40.

³⁸⁵ Pagé, 'Interview mit Hannah Höch,' In: *Hannah Höch: Collagen, Gemälde, Aquarelle, Gouachen, Zeichnungen*, p. 27. 'The glorification of the modern woman was never something I looked for in my work. I have, however, often been motivated by women's

Höch goes on to say that she is totally in favour of women's rights ('Ich bejahe die Rechte der Frau natürlich voll und ganz').³⁸⁶ Her work evidently engages with women's issues, but she does not pursue an overt agenda. On the contrary, she plays with oppositions and questions. Thematically, her work is at once playful and disturbing, familiar and surprising, reminding us of the multiple ways in which photomontage proved to be a versatile technique.

Höch continued to work with photomontage at various stages in her career, in 1941 producing her first photomontages from colour photographs. These have an interesting effect on the modern viewer in that they appear more closely related to the gloss and high-colour of current print media, as compared with the works in black-and-white that now have a different aesthetic context. These colour examples give a better impression of how the early photomontages might have appeared to viewers, with their appropriations and subversions of popular and mass culture. Höch saw the introduction of colour as an enriching possibility, an indication of a continued commitment to accepting new technical advances: 'Heute, wo das Fotomaterial so reichhaltig und durch das Farbfoto so überaus reizvoll zur Verfügung steht, ist es geradezu eine immerwährende Verlockung, damit neue sehr phantastische Gebilde zu schaffen.'³⁸⁷

Although the term 'phantastische Gebilde' initially suggests a very different use for photomontage than any socio-political engagement, the distinction is not clear-cut. One of the characteristics of Höch's work is its reflection on how images are presented in visual media. Her Dada photomontages deal with the excitement and conflicts inherent in visual images, especially as presented by mass media. They demand reflection, the deconstruction of illusions, and leave the way open for the construction of new meanings. This interrogation of visual signs and their subversion is what Höch ultimately has in common with Hausmann, Grosz, Baader and even a

sufferings. When I want to show a vision of the times, I naturally do not forget to portray the interesting contributions made by women. Translation in: *Hannah Höch*. Madrid: Aldeasa, 2004, p. 318.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁸⁷ Remmert and Barth, *Werke und Worte*, p. 90. 'Today, with photo-material so ubiquitous and with the colour photograph so exceedingly charming and available, there is really a perpetual temptation to produce new, very imaginative creations with it.'

more explicitly political artist like Heartfield. Each uses the photomontage technique to examine the artist's modes of interaction and expression, and to challenge habitual strategies of production and reception.

3.5 Paper, scissors, stitches: the subversion of handicrafts

Höch has been quite rightly recognised – here and elsewhere – for her contributions to the core dadaist technique of photomontage, her depictions of fragmented female bodies making her work of particular interest to feminist scholars. A less examined aspect of her work is her incorporation of materials associated with domestic handicrafts into a number of collage and photomontage works.³⁸⁸ Höch's interventions in this area provide an interesting parallel to Taeuber's explorations of embroidery and textiles. Where Taeuber's work reflects on the boundaries between arts and crafts, Höch's touches on the relationships between arts, crafts and also technology, since her engagement with crafts runs alongside her employment of technology-driven techniques.

In *Schneiderblume (Tailor's Daisy)*, from 1920,³⁸⁹ and in *Entwurf für das Denkmal eines bedeutenden Spitzenhemdes (Sketch for Memorial to an Important Lace Shirt)* from 1922 (fig. 16, below), Höch uses fragments of sewing patterns as collage elements. Paper pieces are cut out into wedges and strips. Angular shapes feature lines, in dots and dashes, which are used in sewing patterns to indicate seams and cuts. These fragments are combined into compositions that privilege the aesthetic qualities of the material. The paper pattern, cut apart and glued into a new formation, creates a new design. In *Schneiderblume*, as Harris and Nochlin note, Höch also includes 'snaps, hasps, needles, and a zipper that runs the length and breadth of the image, holding and framing the still unsewn garment.'³⁹⁰ At the centre, Höch has added a single cut-out flower. This organic, pretty, symbol, the stuff of more traditional artworks, stands out against the dots, dashes and lines of the pattern,

³⁸⁸ Riese Hubert discusses several works briefly, in this respect, in 'The Revolutionary and the Phoenix: Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann'. In: *Magnifying Mirrors: Women, Surrealism and Partnership*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994, p. 302.

³⁸⁹ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, plate 67a. Or: Harris and Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*. p. 306 fig. 141. Comment on p. 309.

³⁹⁰ Harris and Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, p. 309.

and the grid of uncut fabric behind it. In both examples the artist takes everyday, somewhat mundane tools and materials out of their context and reshapes them.

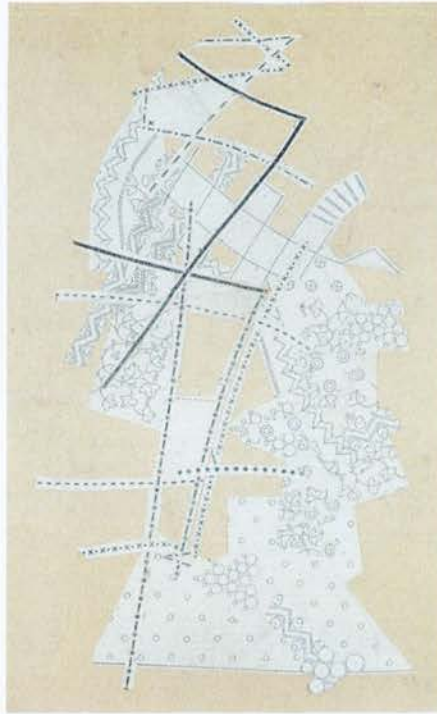


Figure 16: Hannah Höch, *Entwurf für das Denkmal eines bedeutenden Spitzenhemdes* (1922)³⁹¹

These two pieces of work, produced in 1920 and 1922 respectively, provoke the following fundamental question: why, at a time when Höch was making extensive use of photomatter from magazines, including images of modern women, leisure, consumerism and industry, should she have chosen handicraft patterns as her material in these and other examples? Firstly, her employment of materials other than paint ties in with the dadaist principle of the extension of materials available to the artist, to include everyday and found materials. Höch's diverse choices, in this context, compare with Schwitters's use of all sorts of found detritus from everyday life. The interpretation of everyday materials varies according to experience, of course, and Höch's selections frequently include and allude to the domestic, personal and female spheres. Secondly, this particular choice to use handicrafts patterns

³⁹¹ *Hannah Höch*. Madrid: Aldeasa 2004, p. 107.

reflects on Höch's work-life experience. Part of her role at the 'Ullstein Verlag' consisted of designing patterns for fabric, lace, embroidery and clothing. Some of these patterns were sold in department stores, and also photographed and featured in magazines such as *Die Dame*. The material refers both to commercial labour then, as well as to popular leisure pursuits, specifically women's experiences of these domains. Höch's choices address a female audience, in particular, to whom this material would more likely have been familiar.

Höch refers to handicrafts in these examples but does not adopt handicraft skills or processes. Rather than fabric, she uses the blueprint for a pattern, that is printed matter. She cuts the pattern into pieces, pastes the pieces into a new design, and turns it into a piece of art. *Denkmal* is made up of printed matter after all. There is no drawing or painting, and the resulting work, in some sense, gives the impression of graphic or machine design. Its humorous title venerates the practical task of producing a blouse, even as the cutting and pasting fragments it. The contrast between the old-fashioned associations of the materials and the printed pattern sits at the juncture between domesticity and industry, and between handicrafts and the possibilities of mechanical reproduction. In response to a question about her choice of handicrafts materials, Höch herself alludes to some of these ideas, 'Die Zartheit der Spitze, aber mehr noch ihre, aus ihrer spezifischen Technik erwachsene Eigenart reizte mich. Ebenfalls der immer unterschiedlich unterbrochen sein müßende Strich bei dem Schnittmuster.'³⁹²

A more familiar type of photomontage, *Staatshäupter (Heads of State)* (1918-1922) (fig. 17, below), offers a third example of references to handicrafts. It features the same image of President Ebert and Army Minister Noske that Höch had used once already in the 1919 photomontage *Dada Rundschau* (discussed above). This time she sets them against the background of an embroidery pattern, featuring a butterfly, flower and female figure. The selection of the backdrop effectively ridicules the politicians, the stereotypically feminine material and images

³⁹² Pagé, 'Interview mit Hannah Höch.' In: *Hannah Höch: Collagen, Gemälde, Aquarelle, Gouachen, Zeichnungen*, p. 27. 'The delicateness of the lace, but even more than that its peculiarity, in that it has developed out of a specific technique, was stimulating to me. Likewise the pattern's markings, which always have to be interrupted, and always in different ways.'

undermining the men's status and masculinity. Moreover, it introduces the female or domestic domain into the male or public sphere. It is both an aesthetic strategy and political comment. Pictures of patterns, lace and fabrics, as well as actual collage elements, recur in Höch's works right through into the 1960s. Her concerns are with aesthetic experimentation, firmly rooted in the context and possibilities of industrialisation and advancing technology but also drawing on and making reference to traditionally female creative processes, materials and experiences.

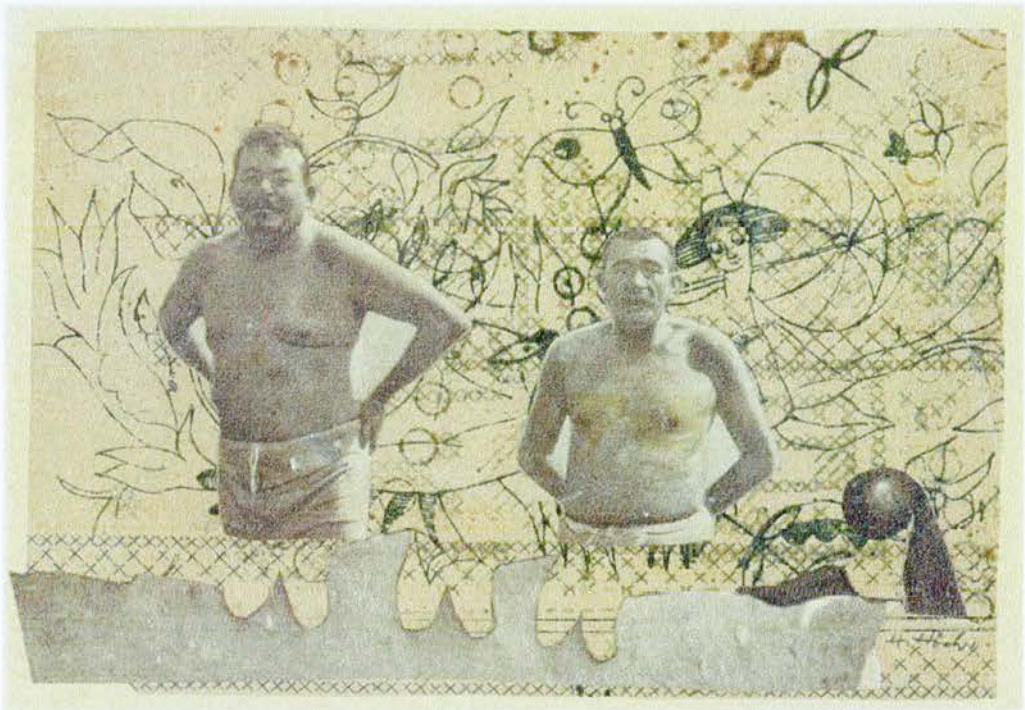


Figure 17: Hannah Höch, *Staatshäupter* (1918-1920)³⁹³

A final, but very different example of engagement with handicrafts is offered by Höch's dolls (fig.18, below). The dolls were one of the exhibits in the 'Dada Messe', and can be seen in photographs of the event. Propped on a podium near the entrance, and elevated to the status of artworks, they no doubt had a striking effect on visitors expecting to see paintings and sculptures. The two haphazardly sewn dolls illustrate a more direct use of fabrics and sewing, and have connotations not only with women's production, but also with representations of the body. They dispense

³⁹³ *Hannah Höch*. Madrid: Aldeasa 2004, p. 108.

with conventional skill or mimesis, and too with the feminine, ideal beauty usually recreated in dolls. They have mismatched eyes, straggly hair and appear clownish and grotesque. Their breasts, made out of circular fabric and beads, and sewn on the outside, give them an overtly sexual aspect. They caricature the doll, with its representations and stereotypes of femininity.



Figure 18: Hannah Höch, *Puppen* (1916)³⁹⁴

The dolls appeared on a cover for the periodical *Schall und Rauch*, four years later. Höch, like Hennings and Taeuber, was also photographed with her dolls. On one occasion she sits with one doll on her knee, her face turned towards the other, and in another, she dances in a stage costume, with one of the two dolls.³⁹⁵ In both instances she looks to the side instead of facing the camera, so that the viewer's gaze is directed at both her and the dolls. The photographs not only draw attention to the social construction of femininity but also to the woman as artist, her role and status. Post Dada, Höch makes use of the doll as image in numerous photomontages.

³⁹⁴ The dolls are displayed in the 'Berlinische Galerie.'

³⁹⁵ Heft 5, April 1920. This cover and both photographs (from 1920) are in the 'Berlinische Galerie'. Both photographs are reproduced in Lavin, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*, p. 136.

Fragments of dolls are interspersed with women's body parts and facial features, as well as with tribal artefacts and figures.³⁹⁶ Once again, then, the doll is employed by a woman Dadaist. It is, of course, a figurative representation for the human body, but is deeply entrenched, more particularly, as a cultural signifier for the female body. A staple of a woman's childhood experience, it is used to encourage maternal and familial feelings, and to evoke ideals of femininity. As such, it raises questions about everyday objects as visual signs, loaded with social and cultural significance. In making use of the doll, the artist reflects upon issues including agency, identity and gender and, most importantly, selects a form that has particular resonance for women viewers.

3.6 Berlin Dada: the diversified product

Höch's use of photomontage was highly sophisticated, and did not stop with Dada. In subsequent years she created works that even more explicitly engage with questions of gender: with love, marriage, sexuality and femininity, such as in the pair of works *Kokette I (Coquette I)* (1923-1925) and *Kokette II (Coquette II)* (1925), which thematise courtship and sexual attraction. In her extensive series of some twenty works *Aus einem ethnographischen Museum (From an Ethnographic Museum)*, she explores issues of both gender and race.³⁹⁷ These photomontages combine fragments from fashion magazines, featuring idealised Western women's figures, with doll, mannequin and statuette parts, and photo fragments, from travel and scientific magazines, of mainly African women. Her use of pedestals in these photomontages, on which her creations – sometimes comical, sometimes grotesque – are displayed, knowingly holds these images up to view, and calls attention to the artwork as artwork: as representation and, at times, as a means of objectification. At a time when the Dadaists and Surrealists were exploring 'primitive' art, but arguably in a somewhat patronising way, Höch's configurations are remarkably sophisticated.

³⁹⁶ For example: *Zerbrochen (Broken)* (1925); *Der Meister (The Master)* (1926); *Liebe (Love)* (1926); *Zweigesichtig (With Two Faces)* (1927-30). Lavin looks at these in chapter 4 ('portraits, dancers and coquettes') of *Cut with the Kitchen Knife*.

³⁹⁷ For a detailed discussion of the series, see: Lavin's essay, 'Hannah Höch's *From and Ethnographic Museum*.' In: Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, pp. 330-359.

Berlin Dada has been accused, at times, of failing to move beyond political critique, into more aesthetic and philosophical debates.³⁹⁸ Whilst political comment is a significant element in many of the Berlin Dadaists' works, including Höch's, the term political should neither dominate nor be too narrowly interpreted. Alongside the most politically explicit works by Heartfield and Grosz, there are numerous examples of more diverse works. Schwitters, Hausmann and Baader all used photomontage to various effect, ranging from the political to the satirical to the playful. Manifestos and declarations insist on ever-evolving eclecticism. As Hausmann declares: 'DADA suchte nichts als den PREsenten Augenblick herbeizuführen; DADA war der Konflikt mit ALLEM.'³⁹⁹

Höch's photomontages recast familiar images in order to foreground a wide range of social, political, personal and aesthetic issues. Engaging fully and immediately with modern experiences, she combines critique with celebration, and nurtures dadaist ambiguity. Headlines, images, symbols and signs are broken down and re-assembled in new contexts, the process expressing fragmentation and multiplicity. Höch's exploration of images of women adds dimensions to Dada that would otherwise have been missing. Her work extends the notion of what is 'political' by including not only public affairs but also issues to which the individual, and especially the female individual, can relate. Thus, fashion, sport, celebrity and the domestic arena feature and the lines between political and personal, male and female are contested. Hausmann explains the Dada spirit: 'Die Epoche, in der DADA auftauchte, war gegen die Vorherrschaft der, ewigen und unwandelbaren, Ideale gerichtet, von viel tiefer liegenden Gemeinschaftskomplexen her als einer bloß oberflächhaften Skandalüberkompensation.'⁴⁰⁰ Höch's work foregrounds social norms in patriarchy and the representations of women in art and popular media, in ways that do not simply scandalise but raise subtle and complex questions about ways of seeing. Thematically, this is Höch's unique contribution to dadaist endeavours, and her challenge to the status quo.

³⁹⁸ For example: Ades, *Photomontage*, p. 8.

³⁹⁹ 'Vorwort'. In: Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada*, p. 7. 'DADA sought nothing other than to bring about the PREsent moment / DADA was the conflict with EVERYTHING.'

⁴⁰⁰ 'Morphopsychologie Dada's' in: *Ibid.*, p. 12. 'The epoch in which DADA appeared was directed against the supremacy of eternal and fixed ideals, came from much deeper public complexes than merely a superficial overcompensation of scandal.'

Through a fundamental ideology of contemporary engagement, challenge to norms and finally renewal, Dada Berlin found an innovative technique that made a lasting impact not only on visual art, but also on literature and film. Ohff summarises the group's trajectory as follows: 'Dada-Berlin bricht auf und los, destruktiv, obstruktiv – und konstruktiv, wie sich dann, sehr viel später herausstellen wird.'⁴⁰¹ Höch's contribution to this legacy was considerable. In the ways that she addresses change in gender roles, technology, production and advertising her work has retained its resonance. It might have been even more substantial in different circumstances. In 1959, she was asked: 'Who were, in your opinion, the most imaginative or creative among the artists of the Berlin Dada group?' She replied: 'I would say that the most active and productive artists in our group were Grosz, Baader, Heartfield, Hausmann, and myself.'⁴⁰² This might be taken up as an alternative designation of the Dada club which, in contrast to Hausmann's version, includes her name. Looking back on her time with Hausmann, she also reveals:

Poor Raoul was always a restless spirit. He needed constant encouragement to be able to carry out his ideas and achieve anything at all lasting. If I hadn't devoted much of my time to looking after him and encouraging him, I might have achieved more myself.⁴⁰³

In spite of the pressure of the nurturing 'Good Girl' role assigned to her by her circumstances, peers and/or gender, and in spite of her difficult relationships within (or on the margins of) the Dada Club, Höch's contributions and achievements were nevertheless both substantial and distinct.

⁴⁰¹ Ohff, *Hannah Höch*, p. 13. 'Dada Berlin burst open and broke out, destructive, obstructive – and constructive, as it would then, much later turn out.'

⁴⁰² Quoted by Lippard, *Dadas on Art*, p. 74. Originally from Roditi, 'Ein Gespräch mit der Malerin.'

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Chapter 4 – Suzanne Duchamp

4.1 The family name and the Dada connection

For the final two women in this study, the backdrop shifts to Paris. Whilst the configurations of Dada in Zurich, Berlin and Paris were in many ways very different, common threads can still be found. In the case of Dada's women, the situation in terms of access to, and involvement in, the artistic circle, shares characteristics. Both women – Suzanne Duchamp in this chapter, and Céline Arnould in the next – had personal, as well as professional, connections to Dada. Both have suffered enormous neglect in art-historical accounts, more than their female counterparts in Zurich and Berlin. Their work, in painting and in poetry respectively, is of significant interest in terms of Dada, and in terms of gender.

Suzanne Duchamp, the painter, has scarcely been perceived as an artist in her own right. Her family name instantly connects her with her famous brothers, so that most often she is left stranded in references as 'the sister of Marcel' or, failing that, as the sister of two more artists – the sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon and the painter and print-maker Jacques Villon.⁴⁰⁴ Additionally, in 1919 she married an artist, the Swiss painter Jean Crotti, who had shared a studio with Marcel in New York, and whom she had met when he came to Paris three years earlier. In so doing, she acquired the additional status of 'the wife of'. Partly as a result of these family circumstances, Suzanne Duchamp's own standing as an artist has been obscured, her

⁴⁰⁴ In biographical notes of the brothers, Suzanne's name is often omitted altogether, along with any mention of two more, younger, sisters, Yvonne and Magdeleine. Even in a rare publication about Suzanne – Nane Bettex-Cailler, ed., *Suzanne Duchamp*. [Les Cahiers d'Art-Documents, no. 56]. Geneva: Éditions Pierre Cailler, 1957 – the notes state that she has three brothers and makes no mention of her sisters.

participation in the Paris artistic scene barely acknowledged, and her work rarely included, let alone treated in any detail, in accounts of Dada.⁴⁰⁵ The only art historian to treat her work in any detail is William A. Camfield. His 1983 exhibition catalogue *Tabu Dada: Jean Crotti & Suzanne Duchamp, 1915-1922*, co-edited with Jean Hubert-Martin, unites many of her works, as well as biographical details and critiques.⁴⁰⁶ The scarcity of treatments of her work and career belies her contributions to innovations in avant-garde art in Paris over the course of a number of very critical years.

Where Suzanne Duchamp's name does appear in academic and popular discourse, it is overwhelmingly with reference to two persistent sagas, both relating to her brother Marcel Duchamp. The first is the speculation that Marcel had incestuous desires for her. This notion was initiated by Arturo Schwarz's 1969 catalogue raisonné *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*.⁴⁰⁷ In this influential publication, as well as in later accounts, he pursues psychoanalytical readings of a number of Marcel's works, affirming that they reveal sublimated incestual desires. Schwarz discusses it again at length in an essay 'Prolegomena to the 'Large Glass'', published in 1989, and the concept reappears in the 1996 new edition of the above-mentioned catalogue raisonné.⁴⁰⁸ He tries to clarify the notion as 'an allegory for the reconjunction of the masculine and feminine components of one's divided self rather than a meaning in 'the vulgar sense.'⁴⁰⁹ In spite of this, and in spite of little support from other scholars and critics for the hypothesis, it has left its imprint.

The second perennial Suzanne / Marcel legend is the claim that Suzanne

⁴⁰⁵ The great renown of her brother, Marcel Duchamp, makes it difficult to refer to Suzanne Duchamp as only 'Duchamp', especially since I also discuss him in this chapter. I prefer, in general, to use her full name, rather than 'Suzanne', which can sound belittling. Where I write about both artists, I use first names for both.

⁴⁰⁶ See: William A. Camfield and Jean-Hubert Martin, eds, *Tabu Dada: Jean Crotti & Suzanne Duchamp, 1915-1922*. Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1983. For a more recent essay also see: William A. Camfield, 'Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris.' In: Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*.

⁴⁰⁷ Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*. New York: Abrams, 1969/1996.

⁴⁰⁸ In: Klaus Beekman & Antje von Graevenitz, eds, *Marcel Duchamp*. [Avant Garde Interdisciplinary and International Review 2]. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989. Schwarz reads Marcel's painting *Young Man and Girl in Spring*, for example, which he gave to Suzanne and Crotti as a wedding gift, as an illustration of incestuous desire.

⁴⁰⁹ Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, p. i-ii.

threw away what was to have become the first of her brother's 'readymade' sculptures, the bottle-dryer that he intended to turn from an everyday object into an art object, when carrying out his request to clear out his apartment in Paris in 1915. This story has created an impression of her as destructive, or even foolish: as a woman who failed to connect to her brother's highly original conceptual processes. Later developments show the impression to be misguided. Correspondence from Marcel to Suzanne, dating from the time when she was still in Rouen, and continuing when Marcel moved to New York and Suzanne to Paris, testifies to a constructive relationship between the two artists. Moreover, many aspects of Suzanne Duchamp's work reveal shared aesthetic and conceptual concerns with that of her brother.

As for the *Bottle-Drying Rack*, it is evident that Suzanne threw it away before Marcel had communicated to her his intentions for it. Following the enormous critical reaction provoked by the showing of *Nude Descending a Staircase* at the Armory Show in New York in 1913, Marcel had begun to exhibit his readymades from 1915 onwards, the impact of which would resonate in Paris and beyond. It was in January 1916, as a now famous letter testifies, that he asked Suzanne to go to his studio and to inscribe the *Bottle-Drying Rack* for him:

Prends pour toi ce porte bouteilles.

J'en fais un "Readymade" à distance. Tu inscriras en bas et à l'intérieur du cercle du bas. en petites lettres peintes avec un pinceau à l'huile en couleur blanc d'argent la inscription que je vais te donner ci après, et tu signeras de la même écriture comme suit: [d'après] Marcel Duchamp.⁴¹⁰

This letter to Suzanne is an important document for Dada scholars, since Marcel not only outlines his thinking about readymades for the first time but also introduces the concept of a readymade created at a distance. His readymades confront the role of the artist and the nature of his/her creative materials, processes and interventions. By selecting and assembling everyday objects as art objects, he

⁴¹⁰ 15 January 1916, New York. In: Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk, eds, *Affectionately Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*. Ghent and Amsterdam: Ludion Press, 2000, p. 43. 'Take this bottle rack for yourself. I'm making it a "Readymade," remotely. You are to inscribe it at the bottom and on the inside of the bottom circle, in small letters painted with a brush in oil, silver white color, with an inscription which I will give you herewith, and then sign it, in the same handwriting, as follows: [after] Marcel Duchamp.' Ibid., p. 45. In a letter of 17 October 1916 Marcel makes further enquires about it. Translation in: Ibid., p. 45.

shifts the emphasis from skilled craftsmanship and technical ability to the conceptual. In conceiving his *Fountain* in 1917, Marcel selects a urinal and signs it 'R. Mutt'. In the case of the *Bottle-Drying Rack*, he was already exploring the meaning of the artist's signature. Usually evidence of the artist's hand or intervention, it was to be subverted, the artwork signed by someone else on his behalf, and not even in his presence. His action draws attention to the complex relationships between artist, materials, processes and the final art object.

In asking Suzanne to collaborate with him, Marcel must have had, at the very least, belief in her openness to, and comprehension of, his radical ideas about art production. In 1921, he created a second version of *Bottle-Drying Rack* for her, and in 1936 produced a third. This entire saga constitutes, finally, a revealing anecdote with reference to the story of Marcel's readymades. After all, the power of the readymade lies in the uneasy status of the everyday prefabricated commodity converted into an art object, and in contemplation of the reverence that the newly created aesthetic object is then afforded.

A second collaboration between Suzanne and Marcel was the *Unhappy Readymade*. When Suzanne married Crotti in 1919, Marcel sent them a geometry textbook as a wedding present, with instructions that it should be hung outdoors, suspended from their balcony with string. He stipulated that its title should be *Unhappy Readymade*. Marcel says of this experiment:

The wind had to go through the book, choose its own problems, turn and tear the pages. Suzanne made a little picture of it: *Marcel's unhappy ready-made*. That's all that's left because the wind destroyed it. It amused me to introduce the idea of happy and unhappy into ready-mades.⁴¹¹

The geometry textbook, a symbol of rationalism and scientific truth, is removed from its normal function and desecrated. The 'unhappy' of the title has been interpreted as alluding to Marcel's feelings about his sister's marriage. On a less simplistic level, it anticipates and privileges the emotional response that the viewer has to an artwork, as well as alluding to the object's uncertain fortune and vulnerability to chance. It is exposed to the elements, its longevity, permanence and 'aura' threatened. Left

⁴¹¹ From: Dawn Ades, ed., *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*. London: Arts Council of Great Britain, Westerham Press, 1978, p. 48. Originally from: Duchamp, *Entretiens with Pierre Cabanne*, p. 111.

outside in all weathers, it is vulnerable to unpredictable changes effected by another 'creator'. This 'production' or decay of the work over time anticipates concepts about art that privilege concept over content, process over subject matter, and responses to the artwork over any objective view of it.

Suzanne photographed the readymade and sent it to her brother, who replied: 'J'ai beaucoup aimé la photo du Ready Made qui s'ennuie sur le balcon. S'il est complètement déchiqueté vous pouvez la remplacer.'⁴¹² This object turned artwork was transient, then, and could be replaced by another, just as the original bottle-rack was substituted by a similar one, and more than once.

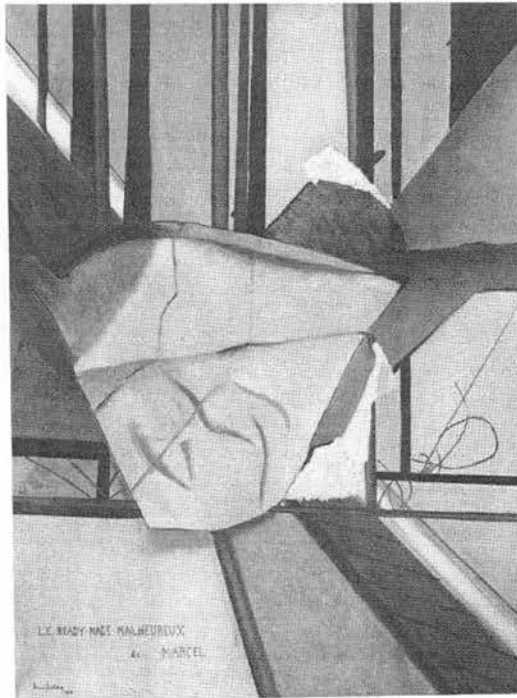


Figure 19: Suzanne Duchamp, *Le Ready-made malheureux de Marcel* (1920)⁴¹³

Suzanne recorded the experiment by making an oil painting of the textbook, *Le Ready-made malheureux de Marcel (Unhappy Readymade of Marcel)*, in 1920 (fig. 19, above). The entire series of actions between Marcel and Suzanne constitutes an interesting narrative. Firstly, Marcel created an artwork at a distance via instructions

⁴¹² c. 20 October 1920, New York, to Duchamp & Crotti. Naumann and Obalk, *Affectionately Marcel*, p. 92. 'I really liked the photo of the Ready Made getting bored on the balcony. If it's completely torn to shreds, you can replace it.' Translation in: *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁴¹³ From: Camfield and Martin, *Tabu Dada*, p. 138, fig. 18.

to Suzanne. Subsequently, by photographing it, she produced a new artwork in the form of an 'assisted' mechanical reproduction, and finally she made yet another, painted, copy of it. These steps further throw into relief the questions of originality and repetition that her brother's readymades explore.

There are two photographs of the readymade, which reveal that Suzanne Duchamp's painting of it is in fact an inverted or upside-down representation. This deliberate decision to turn the image upside down provides an interesting re-take on the original: the third artwork is not quite a literal copy but one more altered version. Her gesture ties in with other experiments with perspective in her work. An early painting *Jeune fille et chien (Young Girl and Dog)* from 1912 is painted with a main subject face-on but the images of dogs on the left and right-hand sides are at ninety degrees angles either way.⁴¹⁴ Another painting, *Multiplication brisée et rétablie (Multiplication Broken and Restored)* from 1918-1919, looks too as though it may have been turned upside-down, one of its dominant images most probably an inverted Eiffel Tower. In both these paintings, and in *Le Ready-made malheureux de Marcel*, Suzanne privileges experiments with perspective over faithful imitation of the subject matter, challenging the recipient and thematising methods of representation.

Marcel also took an ongoing interest in Suzanne's work, offering her his assistance, opinions and encouragement. She had pursued formal training at the 'École des Beaux-Arts' in Rouen from the age of sixteen, later moving to Paris to join the artistic community in Montparnasse. Following contributions to exhibitions in Rouen, she showed three exhibits at the 'Salon des Indépendants' and two at the 'Section d'Or' in Paris in 1912, at the age of only twenty-two. A letter from Marcel reveals that she sent her paintings to him, inviting his comments and advice.⁴¹⁵ Subsequently, after the outbreak of the war, she served as a nurse's aid in Paris, during which period either she produced almost no work or little survived. It was over the next six years, from 1916, that she created a number of works using

⁴¹⁴ For reproduction see: Camfield and Martin, *Tabu Dada*, fig. 28, p. 52. Camfield draws attention to the orientation in this painting, p. 17.

⁴¹⁵ The letter is dated 15 March 1912, Neuilly. In: Naumann and Obalk, *Affectionately Marcel*, p. 23. The paintings were: *Portrait (Magdeleine et Yvonne)*, *Intimité* and *A des Esseintes (fleurs)*.

innovative techniques that place her firmly at the heart of avant-garde preoccupations.

The unfolding of Paris Dada is documented more according to its literary activities than its visual art. Richter declares that the emphasis on literature over painting is the great difference between Paris Dada and that of other cities, but he goes on to declare: 'Jean Crotti [*sic*], der Marcel Duchamp in New York kennengelernt und seine Schwester, die Malerin Suzanne Duchamp, geheiratet hatte, trug, wie diese selbst, zur Belebung Dadas in Paris bei. Beide stellten im Rahmen der Bewegung in Paris aus.'⁴¹⁶ Since this was a period of enormous mutual influence and crossovers between innovations in fine art and literature, the role of the former in Paris Dada can scarcely be discounted. In February 1920, Suzanne Duchamp's work featured at an exhibition at the 'Salon des Indépendants' in Paris, newly reopened after the war, alongside work by Picabia, Ribemont-Dessaignes and Crotti.⁴¹⁷ Although some of the artists who exhibited here had not at that time associated themselves explicitly with the Dada movement, and although there was never to be a cohesive group of visual artists working in Paris on the scale of those in Zurich and Berlin, they were aware of ideas that were flourishing under Dada in these other centres, as well as to developments in New York. Through journals, personal contacts, and various correspondences with Dadaists, most notably instigated by Tzara, Dada was materialising in Paris.

The 'Salon des Indépendants' exhibition was fully launched by a soirée on 5 February 1920, where thirty-eight individuals were billed to read out 'Les Vingt-trois Manifestes Dada'. It was accompanied by Tzara's periodical *Bulletin Dada*, in which both Suzanne Duchamp and Crotti are listed as Dada presidents. There had thus far been only one event, 'Premier vendredi de Littérature', organised within weeks of Tzara's arrival in Paris.⁴¹⁸ Moreover, whilst there would be a proliferation of journal activity and events over the course of 1920 and 1921, there would be only two large-

⁴¹⁶ Richter, *Kunst und Antikunst*, p. 174. 'Jean Crotti, who had met Marcel Duchamp in New York and had married his sister, the painter Suzanne Duchamp, joined both of them in breathing life into Paris Dada. Both exhibited in Paris under the auspices of Dada.' Translation in: *Art and Anti-Art*, p. 170.

⁴¹⁷ The 1920 'Salon des Indépendants' ran from 28 January to 29 February.

⁴¹⁸ 23 January 1920, Palais des Fêtes. See: Hugnet, *L'aventure Dada*, pp. 84-85 for an account of the evening.

scale exhibitions, this first major exhibition and the *Salon Dada* at the 'Galerie Montaigne' in June 1921. The 1920 'Salon des Indépendants' exhibition constituted an explosive and comprehensive introduction to Dada, and would in effect set an image in the minds of visitors, critics and the public of what dadaist visual art was. Suzanne showed three works at this event: *Multiplication brisée et rétablie* (1918-1919), *Un et une menacés (A Male and Female Threatened)* (1916) and a watercolour portrait. These first two works will be shown, in the following sections, to be exemplary of innovations in Suzanne Duchamp's work, as well as of connections between her new ideas and dadaist approaches to visual art.

4.2 Word-image intersections: from cryptic title to poetry-painting

In his letter to Suzanne about readymades, quoted above, Marcel took great care in describing the creation of the writing for his *Bottle-Drying Rack*. The 'assisted' signature and the inscription were to be the crucial elements in making the functional object into an art object. As Marcel wrote in this same letter to Suzanne, language was the key to this process: 'I sign them [the readymades] and I think of an inscription for them in English.'⁴¹⁹ For many avant-garde artists working during the first decades of the twentieth century, language was a vital area for exploration. From Apollinaire, who in literature invented *Calligrammes* or pictorial poems, through the Cubists and Futurists, who incorporated words as material into their paintings, right up to the word-image experiments of Dadaists such as Marcel Duchamp, Picabia and Marius de Zayas working out of New York, the relationship between writing and painting, word and image, became a core concern. In general, the cross-fertilisation between literature and painting represents a key characteristic of the avant-garde arts, including Dada. As Ball declared in his diary, at the height of the 'Cabaret Voltaire' programme: 'Das Wort und das Bild sind eins. Maler und Dichter gehören zusammen.'⁴²⁰

In Paris, Suzanne Duchamp was one of only a few dadaist painters to innovate substantially using language as early as 1915. In each of her small body of

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Entry for 13 June 1916. In: Ball, *Flucht aus der Zeit*, p. 99. 'The word and the image are one. Painter and poet belong together.' Translation in: *Flight Out of Time*, p. 66.

paintings and drawings, she places particular emphasis on the written word. Firstly, almost all her works feature cryptic titles, usually inscribed prominently on the canvas, and evidently a composite part of their conception. These include: *Un et une menacés* (*A Male and Female Threatened*) (1916); *Radiation de deux seuls éloignés* (*The Radiation of Two Solitary Beings Apart*) (1916-1918-1920); *Ariette d'oubli de la chapelle étourdie* (*Arietta about the Forgetfulness of the Absent-Minded Chapel*) (1920) and *Chef d'oeuvre: accordéon* (*Accordion Masterpiece*) (1921), all of which will be discussed in detail in this chapter. In some of her works, words form an integral part of the composition of the overall image. Two works, *Give me the right right to Life* (1919) and *Multiplication brisée et rétablie* (1918-1919), combine words and images in substantial and inventive ways. In the latter, the words are akin to a poem within the painting. These two works illustrate most vividly the prominence of language in Suzanne's work.

The 1919 work on paper *Give me the right right to Life* (fig. 20, below) depicts a clutter of objects in ink and watercolour, comprising both the natural and the fabricated, not all of which are easy to decipher. They include plant sprigs (each with three leaves, and appearing four times), a clock, a machine part or tool (some kind of serrated cog), a butterfly or fan, a scarf, a large ring-shaped object (potentially a life-saving ring), a cylindrical object (possibly a horn) and a plumb bob (or lamp). The dark ring towards the top centre is echoed in the larger, unshaded, pencil-drawn ring below. The collection of objects is entangled against a backdrop of lines, which recall netting from a hot-air balloon, and the top right-hand corner is filled with semi-circular radiating lines. A large open pair of scissors dominates the right-hand side, as if poised to cut through the netting / lines. The materials (pencil, blank areas of paper, half-filled areas) and some of the objects (the clock, scissors, leaves, netting, butterfly) combine to give the impression of something unanchored, ephemeral and non-permanent to which the scissors clearly represent a threat.

At the centre of the composition is a sketched, stylised eye underneath an eyebrow with a second (right) eyebrow next to it, but no eye. The composition in its entirety appears to be a portrait and, given the inscription, most likely a self-

portrait.⁴²¹ In their positional relations to the eye, some objects appear to be representations of outward physical aspects, such as the scarf as hair and the horn as mouth. The latter is interesting, since it does not clearly function as an instrument, that is as a metaphorical mouthpiece; instead, it turns in on itself, suggesting a silenced or ineffective voice.

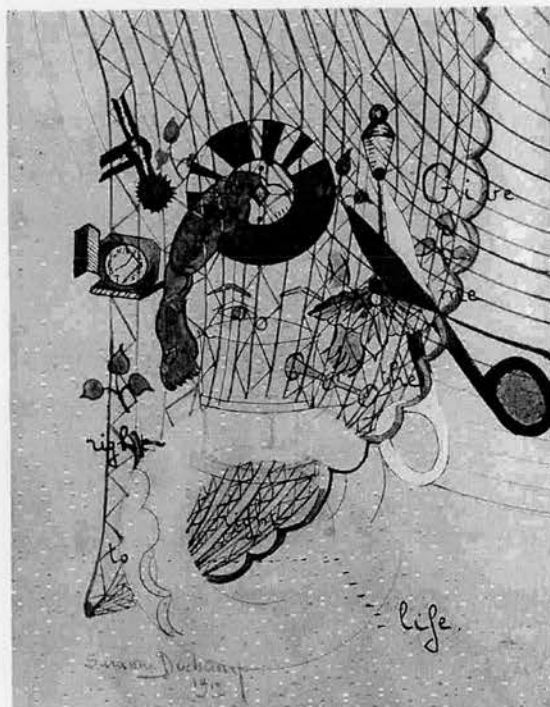


Figure 20: Suzanne Duchamp, *Give me the right right to life* (1919)⁴²²

Other objects, such as the machine-part and the clock, hovering around the top of the head, can be perceived as representing thought processes, preoccupations or ideas. Each image has potential associative meanings amplified by their unusual combinations, this juxtaposition of disparate objects anticipating the Surrealists' interest in 'objets trouvés'.

The phrase 'Give me the right right to life', inscribed through the images, compounds the sense of threat to the subject set up by the scissors. The words are a

⁴²¹ Another self-portrait from 1919, *Portrait de l'artiste (Portrait of the Artist)*, is a more conventional watercolour portrait, but also features only one eye. The other half of the face is blank. For reproduction see: Camfield and Martin, *Tabu Dada*, p. 20, fig. 7.

⁴²² From: Camfield, 'Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris.' In: Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, p. 90, ill. 43.

vital component of the whole composition. The phrase is key both to the conception of the work and to the ways in which the viewer interprets it. The words are entangled with the images, their existence as visual material or signs highlighted. The first word (it is capitalised) is written towards the top right-hand corner. From there the eye is drawn word by word down a curve, the relatively comfortable sweep of 'Give me the right' broken by a second 'right' positioned higher up to the left, before dropping back to 'to', a series of dashes, a pause, and finally a drop to the last word 'life'. It reads as a plea, the repetition of the word 'right' implying hesitation or emphasis, and simultaneously posing the question of what the 'right', as in 'correct', right to life might be, that is playing on two different meanings of the word. 'Life' is given prominence via the pause and its position on the canvas. The whole phrase imitates a thought or speech pattern, encompassing repetition and hesitancy. Unusually, Suzanne chooses English here, rather than her native French, recalling Marcel's choice of English phrases in his work.⁴²³

William A. Camfield has examined this work, amongst others, in an essay on Suzanne Duchamp in Sawelson-Gorse's *Women in Dada* publication.⁴²⁴ He makes the following statement at the outset of his readings:

Inasmuch as she provided no programs, interpretation becomes an exercise in judgement and analysis regarding forms and inscriptions within the art object and the relationship of those forms and inscriptions to the conditions of her life in both its intimate, personal dimension, and in the larger social context.⁴²⁵

Camfield's emphasis on 'forms and inscriptions within the art object' is essential, since it recognises that any interpretations about the work's meanings rest on her aesthetic choices. It is also crucial not to limit these readings to the 'intimate' or 'personal' as so often happens with women's work, so the acknowledgement of a 'larger social context' is also welcome. Camfield examines *Give me the right* as a comment on the issue of abortion. France, at this time, was suffering from a declining birth rate, coupled with the huge loss of life in the First World War, and

⁴²³ The title *Give me the Right to Life* was used in Camfield and Martin, *Tabu Dada*, ill. 60, p. 122, but Camfield uses *Give me the right right to life* in his essay in Sawelson-Gorse's *Women in Dada*, ill. 4.3, p. 90. The second version of the title is more appropriate.

⁴²⁴ Camfield, 'Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris.' In: Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, pp. 82-102.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

had adopted aggressive pro-life policies, including the banning of abortion. Camfield interprets the sketch as an expression of the woman's right to choose whether to have a child or not. It is a good interpretation of a powerful composition, benefiting from the addition of the word 'political' to 'personal and social', since the issue of abortion was, and remains, a political issue. His interpretation, however, also leaves room for more nuanced and more numerous readings.

Camfield takes into consideration a work by Crotti, *Solution de Continuité* (*Continuity Solution*) (circa 1916), which he interprets as anti-abortion,⁴²⁶ but appropriately does not assume that Suzanne shared her husband's views. Although it is tempting to agree with his interpretation that *Give me the right* is a pro-choice work, its complex combination of images and words nevertheless allows some room for doubt. The leaf shoots and circular forms, for example, would suggest fertility, growth, new life, reproduction and continuity. The clock might represent the biological clock. Meanwhile, the serrated machine part floating over the subject's head and the scissors are overwhelmingly hostile images. My agreement converges with Camfield's readings of fertility and threat, but I perceive more ambivalence in the image. To whom is the threat posed? Is it justified or unjustified?

Suzanne Duchamp's choice of words is crucial for Camfield's interpretation, but that choice is problematic. The interpretation of the phrase 'Give me the right right to life' as the woman's pro-choice statement is convincing firstly if we identify the 'me' in the title with the 'me' that is the woman's eye, and secondly if we interpret pregnancy as a threat to that life. (Incidentally, it should not be assumed that the 'me' is purely autobiographical). On the other hand, the use of the phrase as a plea from an unborn child must not be discounted, in which case the message would be the opposite: that is, anti-abortion. Moreover, even accepting the plea as that of the woman, it is conceivable that this is the expression of a demand, or desire, for the opportunity to give or produce life.

The formulation is unusual, 'the right to life' recalling a legal term.⁴²⁷ Suzanne's doubling of the word 'right' plays with the ambiguity inherent in the

⁴²⁶ Ibid., p. 101, footnote 16.

⁴²⁷ Picabia scholars have shown how he often selected phrases from the Larousse dictionary, specifically French translations of Latin phrases. It is possible that Suzanne has taken an English phrase here from the dictionary, or from some other written source.

English term: what, or whose, is the 'right' right to life? What does a 'right' mean in any case? French does not have the same double term, so it seems that Suzanne has chosen to use the English intentionally to explore ambiguities. The 'right to life' is at once a dearly held moral principle of Western culture and at the same time the site of controversies when it comes to interpretation. Employed with reference to debates including capital punishment, euthanasia and abortion, it is a loaded cultural construct, dependent on social mores and having various impacts in differing historical contexts. In this case, in a post-war context, when huge loss of life has occurred, the 'right to life' is especially pertinent and the connection with fertility and the abortion issue a strong one. If it is pro-choice, it at the very least contains within it the traces of a difficult argument. It is the visualisation of a dilemma, as compared with a more certain moral message.

There are also conflicts and ambiguities in the images. What appears to be netting might offer either safety or entanglement, security or restriction. The reproduced sprigs or saplings might be threatening to take over or – given their numbers – offer the assurance of future alternatives. What Camfield sees as a lamp (top right-hand corner), a sort of life-representing light whose cord is being cut, might be a plumb bob. This symbol appears in another, earlier work by Suzanne, *Un et une menacés* (1916), which uses an actual plumb bob as a collage element.⁴²⁸ It is a conical metal weight, suspended from a line, directed exactly towards the earth's centre or gravity, and used as an instrument to determine verticality or depth. In this instance, though, its line is absent and it is turned upside down. Instead of scientific certainty and rectitude, there is reversal and a lack of grounding, which might be physical or moral.⁴²⁹

Beyond its particular socio-historical context, the sketch has other resonances as a more general examination of identity and subjectivity. Confusion, tensions, uncertainty and risk are expressed in the sketch. The subject is fragile, buffeted by fears, threats and the passing of time. The body is not only fragmented but almost

⁴²⁸ This work, and the plumb bob in its particular context, will be discussed in detail in section 4.3.

⁴²⁹ One further possibility is that it is a wireless antenna, similar to the one Suzanne uses in *Radiation de deux seuls éloignés* (see 4.4). In this case, the cutting would represent a break in communication.

absent. Instead, the portrait attempts to depict the interior, a state of mind or consciousness, made up of complex and diverse influences. It is not an overt statement, but the visualisation of a struggle to make sense of conflicts that inevitably persist for the modern subject, in this case with a particular resonance for women. Fernand Drijckoningen writes the following phrase with reference to Picabia: 'Un jeu de langage à la base de la fabrication d'une oeuvre.'⁴³⁰ It applies equally to this work by Suzanne Duchamp, and reiterates how, rather than a mimetic representation of external reality, this work is a visual conception of a conceptual idea.

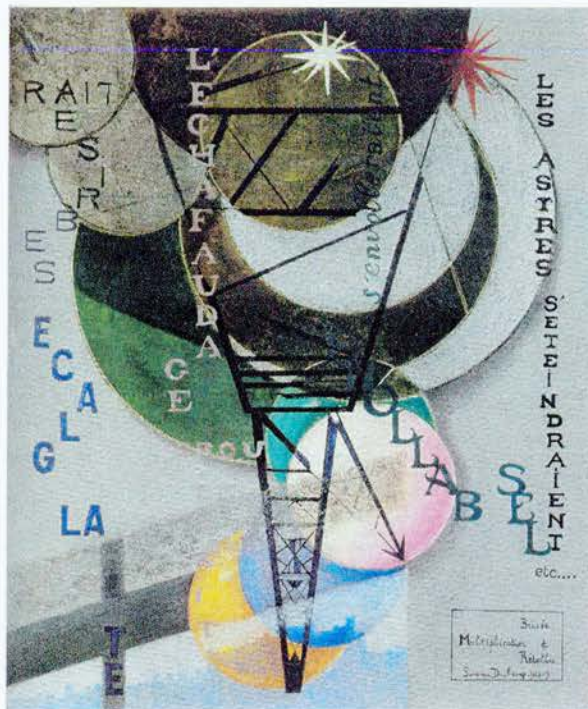


Figure 21: Suzanne Duchamp, *Multiplication brisée et rétablie* (1918-1919)⁴³¹

In *Multiplication brisée et rétablie* (*Multiplication broken and restored*) (1918-1919) (fig. 21, above), completed in the same year as *Give me the right right to life*, Suzanne Duchamp's use of language is even more prominent. One of the two major works she displayed at the (Dada-dominated) 'Salon des Indépendants', it uses

⁴³⁰ Fernand Drijckoningen, 'Un tableau-manifeste de Picabia: Le double monde.' In: Beekman and von Graevenitz, *Marcel Duchamp*, footnote 10, p.111. 'A language game at the basis of the fabrication of a work.'

⁴³¹ From: Camfield and Martin, *Tabu Dada*, p. 125.

words in combination with images more extensively than any other of her works. In this work, a series of circular discs in oils and silver paper collage (potentially balloons, mirrors or suns) overlap, giving the impression of a mass of shapes pushed upwards and towards the viewer, as opposed to the illusion of depth that one might expect. The circles towards the bottom are painted in bright, optimistic colours (yellow, blue, pink, green), contrasting with the darker greens, grey and silver (including the collaged silver paper) of the more dominant shapes above. There are strong parallels between this collage-painting and Crotti's work, including, for example, his painting on glass, *Les forces mécaniques de l'amour en mouvement* (*Mechanical Forces of Love in Movement*), dating from 1916.⁴³² Like Suzanne's work, it contrasts smooth, basic, organic forms with fabricated objects and machinery. Crotti was interested in the symbolism and associative properties of forms and colours, and made frequent use of circular forms especially, to denote light and sound waves.⁴³³

In *Multiplication brisée et rétablie* perspectives are confused and the limitations of the flat canvas exposed. Two stars are painted on the top circles, exaggeratedly artificial renderings of glints of light, in white and red. Similarly, there are non-mimetic shadows around the right-hand side of the balloons. In the bottom left-hand corner there is a pale city skyline, dominated by a heavy, skewed black cross, above which is a strip of metallic silver paint, recalling metal and the modern fabric of the city. In the centre of the canvas is a fabricated structure, most likely an inverted Eiffel tower, its base splintered. Here is a symbol of man's progress and optimism turned upside-down. There is a contrast between the circles and the tower structure, the former reminiscent of organic or natural phenomena like the sun or moon, the latter of engineered, fabricated objects. Together they seem to be without foundations, disappearing upwards, floating or crumbling, and giving the impression that the whole picture is upside-down.⁴³⁴

⁴³² Ibid., p. 96, fig. 8.

⁴³³ Another useful reference point for situating Suzanne Duchamp's work is Orphism. Named by Guillaume Apollinaire in 1913, and inspired by late Symbolism and Cubism, this grouping included Robert Delaunay and Frantisek Kupka, who extensively explored theories of colour and motion in their work.

⁴³⁴ Again, reference must be made to Delaunay, who from 1909 produced a series of images of the Eiffel Tower, informed by Cubist fragmentation and Futurist light and motion.

The letters, words and phrases further confuse orientation and reinforce awareness that this is a two-dimensional artwork. It is not immediately apparent which way the words should be read, nor how they fit together, since Suzanne varies font styles, sizes, colours, upper and lower cases, and directions. Habitual reading strategies lead the viewer to start in the bottom left-hand corner, from which point s/he reconstructs the phrase: 'La glace se briserait' ('The mirror would shatter'); 'L'échafaudage croulerait' ('the scaffolding would crumble'); 'Les ballons s'envolleraient'⁴³⁵ (the balloons would fly away) and 'Les astres s'éteindraient' ('the stars would go out'). As the viewer reads, s/he must change reading directions several times (bottom to top, top to bottom, right to left and up, top to bottom.) Varied typefaces are also disorientating, and words are only assembled little by little. For example 'La glace se brisea' ('the mirror broke') ends as 'briserait' ('the mirror would break'), when all the letters are included. Camfield has translated this, and the other three phrases, as past tense but in fact, they are all conjugated in the conditional tense.⁴³⁶ The choice of tense is significant, the use of the conditional tense making this apparently a forewarning or vision rather than a description. The viewer, naturally seeking to understand the context, is confused by the fact that the title is in the past tense.⁴³⁷ The temporal slippage between title and poem offers us a puzzle: has what we are seeing already happened? Or is this a vision, an exteriorisation of thoughts and fears, ideas and mental pictures about what might happen?

The title is cryptic, adding a further element to the enigma made up of the words, images, and materials. 'Multiplication' suggests both reproduction and fragmentation. The overlapping circles could be seen to be reproducing, as potentially a hopeful, natural phenomenon (the brighter circles) but the upper half of the canvas, where the dark circles appear to be obliterating space and light, is more pessimistic. It might allude to industrialisation, wartime destruction and turmoil. Fragmentation, meanwhile, is acted out in the breaking up of the words and the

⁴³⁵ 's'envolleraient' would usually be spelled with one 'l' only. This may be a mistake, or a deliberate alteration.

⁴³⁶ Camfield, 'Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris.' In: Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, p. 87.

⁴³⁷ This title has also been translated as *Broken and Restored Increase*. See: Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998, p. 281, note 175.

shattering of the mirror. But if the words on the canvas are pessimistic, the title offers a more ambiguous message of a state of affairs at once 'broken' and 'restored.' The layout of the title, with 'broken' and 'restored' lined up vertically instead of horizontally, maintains ambiguity. Perhaps multiplication refers to fertility and fragmentation to a state of affairs that requires to be recognised, aspects of life that the war and its attendant destruction has interrupted. Multiplication and fragmentation are also implicit in the work: they are employed as aesthetic techniques, replacing the rational one-point perspective with an onslaught of impressions.

There are several examples of word play that merit comment. 'Les', for example, reads 'sel' ('salt') at first glance. The letters that make up 'ballons' ('balloons') must be put together by reading from bottom to top, and from right to left: the letters then 'perform', the word appearing to drift upwards, iconically reflecting its meaning. 'Glace', on the left, means both mirror and ice in French. As this phrase begins its path in a geometric metallic strip, and ends its path in the silver-paper discs, the most apparent connection is with glass. However, on reading from the 'G' in two directions, 'Gla Gla' also emerges, an onomatopoeic phrase for 'cold' or 'icy' that introduces an element of humour. The phrase 'L'échafaudage croulerait' begins with an upright vertical form that echoes the structure of the signified object, but the words themselves then crumble in line with the semantics of the phrase.⁴³⁸

Two small words, which might almost be missed, generate questions and inspire reflection on language. In the right hand corner a small 'etc', followed by four dots, ends the four phrases, frustrating and mocking a search for closure, as well as adding a touch of levity to this bleak outlook. In the very bottom left-hand corner two letters 'T' and 'E' are barely discernible. Firstly, it reads as 'te' (the pronoun 'you' or 'yourself' in French), so that it appears to address the viewer. When it is reversed, and read as 'et', it makes the viewer question the strategy of reading the painting from left to right, since a first word 'and' implies that something came before. This implication is destabilising. These two small signifiers mean that any beginning, the stimulus or causal explanation for this scenario, is missing, as is any

⁴³⁸ I am grateful to Karine Mue-Gaspais for her reading of 'gla gla'.

outcome or ending.

In these works, Suzanne Duchamp rejects coherent semantic and narrative content, exploring instead connections and slippages within and between sign systems. The word-image synthesis between title and painting is an area that is extensively explored in New York from 1915 onwards by artists such as Crotti, Picabia, de Zayas, Stieglitz and Marcel Duchamp, representing a significant development in avant-garde visual art. The tradition of the title as a description of, or explanatory label for, the content of the painting is rejected. Instead, the title is an integral part of the production of the painting or drawing, as well – crucially – of its reception. Not only does the image no longer stand alone, but also the expectation of the title as elucidation is thwarted, that approach rejected in favour of offering instead cryptic clues.

Crotti's approach offers a case in point of how a painting's title became a primary concern. Early in his career, whilst associated with Orphism, he had maintained that a painting should stand alone, the forms and colours being the expressive crux, without the need for a title.⁴³⁹ He chose titles that were playful, religious and/or cryptic. By the time of an exhibition in April 1916 at the 'Montross Gallery' with Marcel Duchamp, Gleizes and Metzinger, Crotti's titles had become so provocative that Gleizes, fearing too great a controversy, tried to persuade him to get rid of them.⁴⁴⁰ Picabia too placed great emphasis on the question of the title. An extract from *291* in 1916 illustrates how important the title had become to his conception of the artistic process: 'In my work the subjective expression is the title, the painting is the object. But the object is nevertheless somewhat subjective because it is the pantomime – the appearance of the title.'⁴⁴¹ His statement indicates heightened awareness of the artwork as a material object, a manifestation of ideas first conceived in linguistic terms. Moreover, it suggests a gap between concept and form, between what can be thought and what can be shown in words and images.

⁴³⁹ Camfield and Martin, *Tabu Dada*, p. 10. From: Unsigned interview quoting Crotti in 'French Artists Spur on An American Art', New York Tribune, 24 October, 1915, part iv, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁰ Crotti agreed to cover one title with a flap of paper, which some visitors peeked beneath. Camfield and Martin, *Tabu Dada*, p. 10.

⁴⁴¹ Statement by Francis Picabia in *291*, no. 12, February 1916. Quoted from: William Camfield, *Francis Picabia*. Paris: Eric Losfeld, 1972, p. 18.

Suzanne Duchamp, in Paris, selects cryptic titles for all her works, a characteristic of her oeuvre that establishes connections not only between her work and that of Picabia and Marcel Duchamp, but which is recognised as constituting a core aspect of both Dada and Surrealism.

Suzanne Duchamp not only exploits the possibilities of language through her titles but also incorporates it into the body of a number of her works. This fluent application of familiar words in unfamiliar patterns and contexts is typical of Dada's challenges to linguistic certainty, as evident in radical experiments with the spoken and written word, in simultaneous and sound poetry, manifestos and journals. In New York in 1916, de Zayas coins the term 'psychotype', a concept that is illuminated in an article in *Camera Work* as: 'an art which consists in making the typographical characters participate in the expression of the thoughts and in the painting of the states of the soul, no more as conventional symbols but as having significance in themselves.'⁴⁴² This statement refers to experiments with typography – typesetting and design – at the heart of various avant-garde journals, experiments that intrinsically challenge the sign-system of language. In Suzanne Duchamp's *Multiplication brisée et rétablie* the viewer is made to work, to assume different perspectives, approach familiar words in new contexts, even to physically move his/her position. S/he is asked to see the words as images and read the images as signs.

In both works discussed, Suzanne Duchamp pushes the boundaries of painting as an art form. She experiments with perspective, materials, colours and symbols. However, painting has its limitations: 'the tyranny of the rectangle, the relative absence of time, movement, thought in the materials of composition.'⁴⁴³ By adding language, like the Cubists before her, she stretches the possibilities of what can be represented in the frame. The painted letters and words themselves form part of the visual material. They are explored as both physical objects in themselves, evoking sound and movement, as well as symbols loaded with associative meanings.

⁴⁴² Anon., '291-A New Publication', in *Camera Work*, no. 48 (New York, October 1916), p. 62. Taken from William A. Camfield, *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life and Times*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 75.

⁴⁴³ William H. Gass, In: Jane E. Neidhardt and Lorin Cuoco, *The Dual Muse. The Writer as Artist, The Artist as Writer*. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: Benjamin Publishing Company, 1997, p. 71.

In employing both word and image, the works highlight the connections or harmonies between verbal and visual vocabularies. The images rely on the words and the words on the images: one cannot exist without the other.

Equally, and more importantly, her work highlights the tensions within, and between, different sign systems, their elusive qualities, their resistance to legibility and their slippages. Any assumption that the image will narrate or represent is thwarted, as is the expectation that written language will be explanatory or reliable. In these and other works, tension emerges strongly as a theme. There is the human/machine; harmony/threat; organic/industrial; destruction/restoration; real/imagined – and then in the material itself the tensions between word/image; symbol/material; real/metaphorical; conception/visualization; signifier/signified, writing and painting and reading/seeing.

The programmatic transgression of established genre boundaries was one of the chief preoccupations of Dada. Writers painted and painters wrote, crossing notional borders of expertise. To quote Georges Hugnet:

Mais, plus qu'à préconiser l'usage des moyens hors de leur spécialité, Dada tend à confondre les genres et c'est là, me semble-t-il, une de ses caractéristiques essentielles (tableaux-manifestes ou poèmes-dessins de Picabia, photomontages de Heartfield, poèmes simultanés à orchestration phonétique, etc.).⁴⁴⁴

These first two examples of Suzanne Duchamp's work, *Give me the right right to Life* and *Multiplication brisée et rétablie*, likewise violate boundaries of artistic categories, merging poetic language with painting, and might best be described as 'painting-poems', a new aesthetic form. Technically innovative, they already offer evidence of a substantial contribution to avant-garde art. Thematically and formally, they explore fragmentation: the dissolution of the environment and the subject are shown via the breaking-up of signifying systems. The instability of the images and disruption of language reflect on the fractured state of the social order in a wartime, or post-war context (both are painted in 1918). In *Multiplication brisée et rétablie*, the environment is unstable, disintegrating and fracturing. In *Give me the right*,

⁴⁴⁴ Hugnet, *L'aventure Dada*, p. 7. 'But, more than advocating the use of media outside of their speciality, Dada tends to confuse genres and that, it seems to me, is one of its essential characteristics (painting-manifestos or poem-drawings by Picabia, photomontages by Heartfield, simultaneous poems with phonetic orchestration etc.).'

uneasiness is enacted through a disembodied, unfixed female subject. In the next painting to be discussed, *Un et Une menacés*, the artist replaces the human body by a machine, and brings identity, agency, gender and also sexuality to the fore.

4.3 Machinery and the body

Un et une menacés (A Male and Female Threatened) (fig. 22, below) was completed in 1916, and shown at the Dada 'Salon des Indépendants' four years later. It was therefore one of the works that introduced the notion of Dada to a wider Parisian audience.

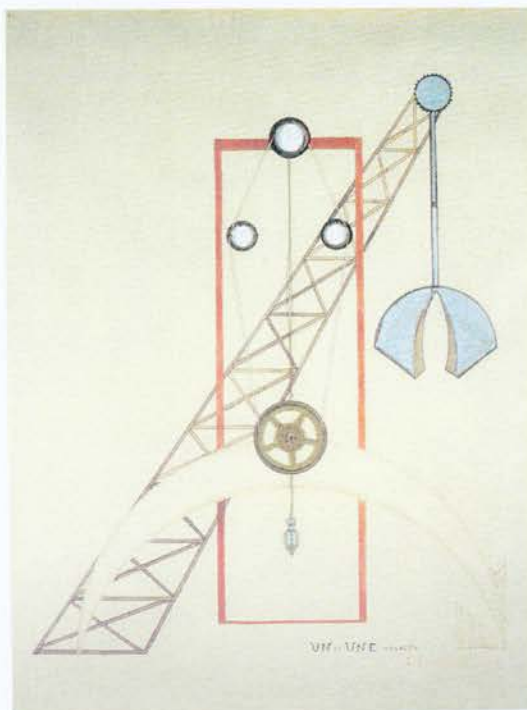


Figure 22: Suzanne Duchamp, *Un et Une menacés* (1916)⁴⁴⁵

Suzanne Duchamp's use of mechanical forms in this work is especially remarkable, not only in that it is an early work in her career, but also because it represents a very early example of the employment of machine imagery. In Italy, the Futurists had taken the machine as a focus for the modern age, glorifying it and celebrating its power. In Zurich and Berlin, it would soon become a theme for the Dadaists, though their attitudes towards it were more ambivalent. In all cases, artists were responding

⁴⁴⁵ From: Dachy, *Journal du Mouvement Dada*, p. 76.

to the rapid changes in the modern world, to mechanisation, pace and noise, and to the possibilities of industrial production that were affecting the artistic domain too. Whether perceived and portrayed as a boon or a threat, the importance of the machine to avant-garde artists lay in its references to, and evocations of, modernity.

Here, Suzanne Duchamp combines machinist images with a title that evokes the human element. Forsaking traditional portrayals of the human body, along with conventions of beauty and taste, she draws on symbols and structures from the industrial world, in an attempt to give expression to ideas about the human condition. The stimulus for this innovation was the search for alternatives to outdated symbols and aesthetic signs, perceived by avant-garde artists as worn out by classical art traditions. Her use of machine imagery at this time in Paris was hugely innovative. The other artists producing mechanomorphic images around this point were Marcel Duchamp, Picabia, Crotti, Man Ray, de Zayas and Morton Schamberg, all based in New York.⁴⁴⁶ Picabia first showed work incorporating machine imagery in 1915 and is quoted that same year, in a now famous *New York Tribune* article:

The machine has become more than a mere adjunct of life. It is really a part of human life - perhaps the very soul. In seeking forms through which to interpret ideas or by which to expose human characteristics I have come at length upon the form which appears most brilliantly plastic and fraught with symbolism. I have enlisted the machinery of the modern world, and introduced it into my studio. [...] I mean to simply work on and on until I attain the pinnacle of mechanical symbolism.⁴⁴⁷

Using machine imagery, geometric lines and even machine parts, *Un et une menacés* evidently depicts two 'people,' the male and female of the title. The enigmatic title is typical of Suzanne Duchamp. Handwritten in the bottom right-hand corner above the artist's name, the 'UN' and 'UNE' stand out in larger, upper case letters, and immediately provoke questions as to the identity of these anonymous pronouns. The pronouns might refer to a particular man and woman, or more likely to men and women generically. Though Camfield notes that many readings are possible, and that the identity of the 'UN' and 'UNE' can never be fully established,

⁴⁴⁶ Camfield, 'Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris.' In: Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, p. 82.

⁴⁴⁷ *The New York Tribune*, 'French Artists spur on American Art.' 24 October, 1915, part IV, p. 2. Quoted in: Camfield, *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life and Times*, p. 77. Picabia arrived in New York in June 1915 and started producing his machine imagery within a month.

he speculates that it deals with the unusual personal relationships between Suzanne and Jean Crotti, Jean and Yvonne Chastel (Jean's first wife), Yvonne and Marcel, or Marcel and Suzanne. While these connections are not impossible, such a biographical reading tends to overshadow the possibilities of broader potential meanings.

The unconventional image challenges the viewer to make out the male and the female of the title. Some of the visual symbolism is relatively apparent. The erect, right-angled crane can be read as the male, for example. Meanwhile the female is represented by the triangle of circles and clock gear, set within the central rectangle, and with crescent 'legs' that overlap the entire (double) structure. The possibilities are complex, however. Camfield designates the 'pincers' as female and, given their shape, this is the most immediate interpretation.⁴⁴⁸ On the other hand, if the crane is taken to be the male, the position of the pincers would lead to the conclusion that they are part of the male too. Camfield's reference to this part of the structure as the female's 'grasping pincers' is problematic, in that his choice of the term 'grasping', to describe a physical facility, also has negative connotations. It reminds us of stereotypes of women as acquisitive.

It is at this point that the notion of threat, coming from the 'menacés' of the title, must be considered. The translation, *A Male and Female Threatened*, is faithful to the grammar in the French, the 's' on 'menacés' indicating that both 'UN' and 'UNE' are menaced. The title alerts us to the questionable nature of the contact between the two genders, as well as the agency of each. Are they threatened, endangered, by some external force: the predominance of technology perhaps? Does this representation alert us to human alienation in the face of mechanization? Or do the male and female pose a threat to one another, fragilely interdependent as they are?

Returning to the detail of the machine structures opens up new readings. The female structure, with its triangle of circles, is balanced and symmetrical, emphasised by its enclosure in the geometric rectangle, and poised on the crescent legs that stretch across the lower half of the picture. The three circles are connected to the

⁴⁴⁸ Camfield, 'Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris.' In: Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, p. 86.

clock gear with string, the whole formation appearing perfectly vertical thanks to the plumb bob. In his first study of this work, Camfield writes, 'The central frame and pulley structure indicate a simpler up-and-down punching movement',⁴⁴⁹ but in theory, any movement would constitute a rotation of the string around the circles, in a continuous and functioning movement.

The male structure at first glance appears powerful and sturdy, with the reinforced crane and metal gear and claw. Camfield writes, 'the crane suggests a more dynamic ability to grasp and to swing as well as to move up and down.'⁴⁵⁰ However, the line, which connects the claw to the round gear at the top of the crane, is solid, which would prevent it from working. The connection would have to be string or chain (as it was in an earlier study for the picture), rather than a solid piece, to allow the claw to move up and down. If it were to be set in motion, it would only swing from left to right, or rotate round and round, on its 'arm', in circles, from the top of the crane, ultimately failing to grab or make contact.

Much of the interpretation relies on a reading of the (actual) machine parts, the clock gear and the plumb bob, which are naturally arresting and crucial elements. If we read them as Camfield does, with the clock gear representing the female and the plumb bob the male, thus connected in a common groin area, we subsequently interpret a sexual intertwining or connection. But it may be that the plumb bob is part of the female, a centring and balancing device. Using this interpretation, the male and female actually fail to connect at all. Instead they are stuck, machinery at rest, apparently moveable but not by their own volition. The apparatus indicates the potential of motion yet it is finally powerless and suspended, deprived of any real energy source. The female structure is more-or-less enclosed within the rectangle, operating internally, the male behind it, an external operation. Only the legs stretch across the two: they are not as intertwined as they first appear. At the same time, overlapping as they do, they are not wholly independent. Each is part of a tenuous system but ultimately isolated. There is no real contact between him and her, nor any real agency.

⁴⁴⁹ Camfield and Martin, *Tabu Dada*, p. 18.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

A text from *291* by Paul B. Haviland is pivotal to any discussion about machine imagery, especially in relation to gender:

We are living in the age of the machine. Man made the machine in his own image. She has limbs which act; lungs which breathe; a heart which beats; a nervous system through which runs electricity. The phonograph is the image of his voice; the camera the image of his eye. The machine is his "daughter born without a mother." That is why he loves her. He has made the machine superior to himself ... Having made her superior to himself he endows the superior beings which he conceives in his poetry and in his plastique with the qualities of machines. After making the machine in his own image, he has made his human ideal machinomorphic.⁴⁵¹

Where God made man in his image, man makes the machine in his image. In both cases, the female is 'daughter born without a mother': Eve in the Bible, and the machine in Haviland's statement. Rapid industrialisation and the preponderance of the machine were invoking both celebration and fear, exercising a radical impact on everyday life and perceptions of human agency. Haviland echoes Biblical rhetoric, but places man – instead of God – at the centre of control. In Haviland's description, furthermore, the male creates the female, recouping the power of fertility from the mother. Man makes this (female) machine and then worships it as an ideal. Picabia's painting *Fille née sans mère* (*Girl Born without a Mother*), from 1916-1918, based on drawings dating from 1915, also works on this theme. Sharing in biblical allusions, it suggests an absence of consummation.

Following on from the statement above, Haviland writes in *291*:

But the machine is yet at a dependent stage. Man gave her every qualification except thought. She submits to his will but he must direct her activities. Without him she remains a wonderful being, but without aim or anatomy. Through their mating they complete one another. She brings forth according to his conceptions.⁴⁵²

It would be easy, from these statements, to assume an extreme masculinist edge to mechanomorphic imagery. This is certainly one aspect. However, the full range of work reveals more subtle explorations of gender and sexuality.

Picabia develops the style most consistently, using realistic and invented machine forms to represent, or replace, the human figure. Perhaps his most well-

⁴⁵¹ *291*, nos. 7-8 (New York, September-October 1915). From: Camfield, *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life and Times*, p. 80.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

known drawing is *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité* (*Portrait of a Young American Girl in the State of Nudity*) (1915), which features the young woman as a spark-plug. It overturns any conventions for aesthetic representation, replacing the female nude with an industrial-style drawing, and is one of many examples in which he represents women using machine imagery.⁴⁵³ In addition, he produces machine portraits of his male colleagues, some of which featured in issues five to six of *291*,⁴⁵⁴ as well as occasional, more universal representations of the male, such as *Le Fiancé* (c. 1916). Cathy Bernheim describes these examples, in which the male is isolated, as follows: 'des mécanismes inutiles tournent à vide, des machines célibataires s'enroulent sur elles-mêmes.'⁴⁵⁵ Finally, but more rarely, there are images in which machines apparently depict both man and woman, including *Prostitution universelle* (*Universal Prostitution*) (c. 1916-1917) and *Parade Amoureuse* (*Amorous Parade*) (1917). That the female structure in the former example features the phrase 'sexe féminin idéologique' ('ideological feminine sex') illustrates that Picabia's depictions of human as machine explores the construction and acting out of sexuality and gender in nuanced ways.

Suzanne Duchamp's *Un et une menacés* has much in common with Picabia's machanomorphic images, especially the latter examples. In this (and in other artworks, which do not use mechanical imagery, to be discussed in the next sections), she presents the male and female together. In this respect, her work shares common ground, too, with Marcel's major work *La Mariée mise à nue par ses célibataires, même* (*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*), known as (*The Large Glass*), of 1915-1923, which explores the complex workings of male-female sexual relationships. Avant-garde artists had begun to perceive humanist notions of romantic love as absurd in the mechanised world, and views of man's agency or supremacy as utopian. Machine imagery was employed to indicate the mechanical or functional aspect of relations between men and women, as constructed by automatised social conventions rather than individual determinacy. Where *The Large*

⁴⁵³ Other examples include *Voilà elle* (*Here She Is*) (1915); *Voilà la femme* (*Here is Woman*) (1915) and *Novia au premier occupant* (*Sweetheart of the First Occupant*) (1917).

⁴⁵⁴ New York, July-August, 1915.

⁴⁵⁵ Cathy Bernheim, *Picabia*. Paris: Éditions du Félin, 1995, p. 93. 'Useless mechanisms turn in a void, celibate machines wind back on themselves.'

Glass suggests a total failure of consummation or communication, *Un et une menacés* depicts some connection, but it is a connection that leads to a standstill, to gridlock and paralysis. In *The Large Glass*, and in several of Picabia's works, the woman emits signals to attract the male, who is at once predatory but also fallible. In *Un et une menacés* there is a marked ambiguity about male-female representation, sexual attraction and power structures: the threat is apparently mutual and shared.

The materials used in *Un et une menacés* are also exceptional. Not only was Suzanne Duchamp the only artist to produce a mechanomorphic work like this in Paris as early as 1916, but she also produced a unique work by combining mechanical drawing and real machine parts – a clock gear, plumb bob and metal rings – as assemblage elements alongside paint. Camfield discusses *Très rare tableau sur la terre* (*Very Rare Picture on the Earth*) as Picabia's first known collage work.⁴⁵⁶ Produced in 1915, it uses two wooden half cylinders painted in metallic gold. Otherwise, however, his work during 1915-1916 uses metallic paint as an innovative material, just as Suzanne Duchamp uses silver paper in a number of her works, but no three-dimensional objects. Her introduction of industrial objects onto the canvas in *Un et une menacés* is a radical innovation, then. She takes up the collage practice of the Cubists, but instead of using pasted papers selects actual found mass-produced objects in an innovation that is reminiscent of Marcel's use of objects as readymade sculptures. Like Marcel and Picabia, Suzanne appropriates images and materials from the modern world that allude to industry and technology and that transgress the boundaries between science and art, handcrafted artwork and mass-production.⁴⁵⁷

Camfield rightly emphasises with regard to *Un et une menacés*: 'It was a radical departure for Duchamp and a work unmatched anywhere in Europe during 1916.'⁴⁵⁸ It is exemplary of her employment of unorthodox materials, mechanical symbolism, and cryptic titles in a search for a new visual language that might adequately convey modern human experience and relationships, and that implicitly

⁴⁵⁶ Camfield, *Francis Picabia: His Art, Life and Times*, p. 88.

⁴⁵⁷ Crotti also makes *Clown* in 1916, which makes use of collage objects on glass, including a spring, wire, discs and glass eye.

⁴⁵⁸ Camfield, 'Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris.' In: Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, p. 82.

rejects orthodox sign systems. It is an enormously important work not only in Suzanne Duchamp's oeuvre, but also in terms of dadaist work more broadly, and demonstrates the important link she represented between artistic activity in New York and Paris.

4.4 Science, sexuality and radio-waves

*Radiation de deux seuls éloignés (The Radiation of Two Solitary Beings Apart)*⁴⁵⁹ (see fig. 23, below) offers another example of Suzanne Duchamp's engagement with modern technology. This scarcely known collage was completed over a long period, as the inscription '1916-1918-1920' makes evident.⁴⁶⁰ It is a long gestation period, and she evidently returned to the work repeatedly, as the existence of studies also proves. Her choice to indicate these stages of composition, as opposed to only a completion date, alludes to its processual nature. In it, she uses various 'found' materials, including string, wire, glass beads, pearls, straw and crumpled foil. However, the main drawn images are reminiscent of technical or scientific design, reinforced by the presentation of the whole composition on a grid background.

Like *Un et une menacés*, this collage deals with 'deux seuls' (two 'souls' or 'subjects'), whom we might assume to be two lovers. Once again, the images are far from usual representations of human figures. Instead, they are reduced to basic forms and drives, stripped of conventions of representation and far removed from the larger narrative or aesthetic context. Linda Dalrymple Henderson's detailed studies of Marcel's *Large Glass* have inspired her to look at Suzanne's *Radiation de deux seuls éloignés*, and her short treatment of the work benefits from research into the concerns and motivations behind Marcel's oeuvre. She identifies the first and most dominant form, in the upper part of the composition, as some sort of cage-like antenna, which she illustrates by reproducing a diagram of one.⁴⁶¹ The shape in the lower half,

⁴⁵⁹ Camfield's translation. An alternative is: *Radiations of Two Lone Ones at a Distance*. As used in: Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, p. 111.

⁴⁶⁰ In *Ulysses*, James Joyce will also use this method of dating, the final line of which reads 'Trieste-Zürich -Paris, 1914-1921.' Both examples place emphasis on the creative process over the final product.

⁴⁶¹ Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*. See p. 112 for discussion of this work, and figure 103 for a drawing: 'Guarini's antenna with Ducretet method of suspension', from

meanwhile, is read as some sort of rectangular receiving grid, at the centre of which is a large dot. The two forms are connected by a vertical line, which is actually made up of two lines that meet in the middle. In the background, semicircular and angular shapes protrude, and radiate, at various angles across the paper, both behind and in front of the dominant image.



Figure 23: Suzanne Duchamp, *Radiation de deux seuls éloignés* (1916-20)⁴⁶²

The term ‘seul’, in the title, indicates that each being is alone, whilst the term ‘éloignés’ makes clear the distance between them. Camfield proposes a biographical aspect again, the years during which Suzanne Duchamp produced the work being a period when she and Jean Crotti were frequently separated.⁴⁶³ Dalrymple Henderson, too, writes: ‘Suzanne suggests the communication of two lovers at a distance – probably in response to her own periods of geographic separation from [...] Jean

Henri Poincaré and Frederick Vreeland, *Maxwell's Theory and Wireless Telegraphy*. New York, 1904, p. 142.

⁴⁶² From: Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed*, plate 2.15.

⁴⁶³ Camfield and Martin, *Tabu Dada*, p. 18.

Crotti.⁴⁶⁴ She also points out a connection with Marcel's use of the term 'éloignement' in the notes in the *Box of 1914*, which he uses to denote spatial remoteness.⁴⁶⁵ Evidently, the collage deals with physical separation and could refer to personal circumstances, but its implications are more manifold. For instance, the separation, and subsequent communication, implied have not only a physical, but also a psychological aspect.

The most interesting feature of Suzanne Duchamp's collage is its attempt to represent communication, as evident in the title, which does not refer to two figures, but the 'radiation' between them. The term suggests lines of communication, unseen energies or forces, which are invisible. It is at once associated with the transmission of feelings and, on a more scientific level, with the transmission of light, energy, or sound. Suzanne Duchamp's image either suggests the emission of some sort of magnetic or telepathic force between the lovers, a metaphor for sexual or romantic attraction, or the possibilities of communication via new technology. Although the former notion, of telepathic connections, might seem clichéd now, the discoveries of new technologies at the turn of the century, such as the proof of electromagnetic waves, had reignited debates about the nature of communication between human beings and the possibilities of telepathy or thought transfers.

Suzanne Duchamp's use of imagery relating to science, technology and industry both reflects on the rapid changes that were taking place during these early decades of the century, and seeks new imagery that might prove adequate in portraying human relationships and experiences in the modern age. For many avant-garde artists, technology was both a challenge to current aesthetic practice and an enormous stimulus to react to the pace of change. The relatively new possibilities of communication, in particular, were a topic of great interest, the first radio signals having been transmitted around the turn of the century.⁴⁶⁶ In literature, the futurist

⁴⁶⁴ Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, p. 111.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 111 and p. 268 note 44. She writes: 'The term *éloignement* is translated in *Salt Seller* as "deferment," but the word signifies a spatial remoteness and distancing, not the temporal deferment derived, perhaps, from the military-service context of the note.'

⁴⁶⁶ In 1888 Hertz proved the existence of electromagnetic waves, as well as their capability to generate a spark in a second circuit at a distance from the first. In 1899 Guglielmo Marconi sent the first radio signal across English Channel and in 1901 the first across the Atlantic.

leader Marinetti pronounced his fascination with new technology, stating unequivocally: 'Futurism is grounded in the complete renewal of human sensibility brought about by the great discoveries of science.' He reflects on the speed and economy new technologies allow, and their potential to revolutionise language, allowing 'imagination without strings' and 'words-in-freedom'.⁴⁶⁷ He and other poets explore the impact of telegraphy on linguistic and grammatical structures and conventions.

Painters also respond to scientific phenomena. As Dalrymple Henderson writes:

Although Duchamp's *Large Glass* has often been treated as a solitary masterpiece, it was, in fact, squarely at the center of the modernist response to a radically changed paradigm of reality, now redefined in terms of electro-magnetic waves. [...] Duchamp's response was distinguished from that of other modernists by his use of science and technology for humorous and iconoclastic ends and, specifically, as a commentary on sexuality, religion, philosophy, and art making itself. In this regard, his closest colleagues in spirit were Apollinaire and Picabia and, subsequently, his sister Suzanne, and Jean Crotti.⁴⁶⁸

It is a welcome recognition of the presence of other fine artists operating in similar areas to Marcel Duchamp, Suzanne included, and of their explorations of the impact of technology on human relationships and communications using visual images.

Again, affinities with Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass* are appreciable. The antenna-like object might be seen as the equivalent of the Bride, emitting erotic signals. Unlike Marcel's *Large Glass*, however, whose theme is the failure of consummation between the bride and the bachelors, Suzanne's take is not so pessimistic about the male-female relationship. The two lovers may be at a distance, but there is a successful connection between them, which allows for optimism or at least ambiguity about the nature of their sexual relationship. Nevertheless, whether a physical, sexual or psychological attachment, the bond between the two souls is not represented sentimentally or romantically. The unusual visual vocabulary disallows cliché.

Radiation de deux seuls éloignés is not Suzanne Duchamp's only aesthetic

⁴⁶⁷ F.T. Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax – Imagination without Strings – Words-in-Freedom 1913.' In: Umbro Apollonio, ed., *Futurist Manifestos*. New York: The Viking Press, 1973, pp. 95-106. Quotations from p. 96 and p. 95 respectively.

⁴⁶⁸ Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, p. 204.

experiment with the phenomenon of communications technology. *Multiplication brisée et rétablie*, examined thus far principally in relation to its use of language, also examines the relationships between nature and industry, people and technology, and men and women. In this painting she makes use of one of the great symbols of modernity and engineering: the Eiffel Tower. Built for the 1899 Universal Exhibition, the tower also served as a telegraphy station and was an icon of modern communications technology. Among other artists and writers, the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, was interested in telegraphy. In his poem *2e Cannonier Conducteur* (2nd *Gunnery Driver*), which is reminiscent of a soldier's fast, fragmented communication from the front, he incorporates the tower as a visual motif.⁴⁶⁹ The wartime context is a backdrop to Suzanne Duchamp's work too. Here, in turning the tower upside down and splintering it, she apparently critiques the fact that Europe was in the middle of a war that the wonders of communications and technology had failed to prevent.

The circular shapes, in this context, might be renditions of sound waves emanating from the tower. At the same time, they act as symbols for female fertility, with the tower as a phallic emblem. In addition, the arrow that the artist has added, which points away from the main structures at forty-five degrees, is reminiscent of the symbol for male gender made up of a circle and arrow. This in turn contrasts with the cross in the bottom left-hand corner, which, together with a circle, would combine to make up the female symbol. These symbols, referred to obliquely here, are commonly used for denoting gender and date back to ancient Rome, where they began as signs for the Gods and planets Mars and Venus respectively and, with their astrological origins, tie in with the circular shapes and stars that dominate the painting. Once again, Suzanne Duchamp explores new vocabularies outside of aesthetic clichés to portray gender, sexuality and relationships. There is a volatile, unfathomable, potentially destructive, aspect to the clash of factors portrayed in *Multiplication brisée et rétablie* which, on the one hand, can be read as an expression of socio-political fears and, on the other, a depiction of flawed or fragile

⁴⁶⁹ *2e Cannonier Conducteur* in: Guillaume Apollinaire, *Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War (1913-1916)*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1991, p. 124. With thanks to Anna Schaffner for some of the references in this discussion about telegraphy. Her thesis, *Assaulting the Order of Signs: Language Dissection in Avant-Garde Poetry*, was submitted to The University of Edinburgh in July 2005. See also: Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, p. 204.

communications on the personal level.

One final painting is relevant here, that is *Séduction* (1920).⁴⁷⁰ The title makes the most explicit reference to sexual relationships. It is painted in bold upper-case letters, split into two angled parts 'SEDUC' and 'TION.' Underneath it, a further phrase can just be made out: 'FORCE et Grace.' On the left of the canvas is a dark vertical structure; on the right a double semicircular structure apparently emanating, in rays, from the lower right-hand corner. Here Duchamp presents male and female principles again and, although the symbols and words are relatively easy to decipher as male/female respectively, she still leaves us unsure as to who is seducing whom. Each of these images deals with the precarious interdependence of the sexes, and on the fragile communications between them.

4.5 Materials, motion and music

Two of Suzanne Duchamp's slightly later pieces, *Chef d'oeuvre: accordéon* (*Accordion Masterpiece*) (1921) and *Ariette d'oubli de la chapelle étourdie* (*Arietta about the Forgetfulness of the Absent-Minded Chapel*) (1920), embody many of the experimental aspects of her work discussed so far. They include an innovative use of language, the investigation of unconventional sources of imagery, and the employment of various materials as collage elements alongside paint. A further theme, which has been an undercurrent in the discussion of Suzanne Duchamp's works so far, and which is an important element in the next two painting-collages, is the exploration of movement. In both *Give me the right right to life* and *Multiplication brisée et rétablie* she depicts floating, ephemeral, almost airborne scenes. In *Un et une menacés* and *Radiation de deux seuls éloignés* she configured the mechanics (physical and psychological) of human relationships. The next two works build on investigations of motion within two-dimensional space. They also reflect upon sound. This has been touched upon already, in the form of sound waves. The next two examples of her work refer, additionally, to music.

Dated 1921, and exhibited at the Salon d'Automne that year, *Chef d'oeuvre: accordéon* (*Accordion Masterpiece*) (see fig. 24, below) employs the sort of disorienting perspective, circular forms, and mix of materials (including oils,

⁴⁷⁰ Camfield and Martin, *Tabu Dada*, p. 126, fig. 65.

gouache and silver leaf) used in *Multiplication brisée et rétablie*. A large oval-shaped object dominates the canvas, filling the lower space as if barely contained within the frame. It appears to be suspended by a dark vertical spindle, stretching from the centre to the top of the canvas. The oval is split down the front, emphasised by two red and pink half-circles that do not quite meet up with the darker semi-circle on the other side of the diagonal axis. Curved strokes, some of them not solid but painted in dashes, add to the impression of movement conveyed by the mismatching parts. The dominant shape overlaps another black circular shape, which gives the suggestion of a dark circle or shadow, across which the silver structure ‘moves’.

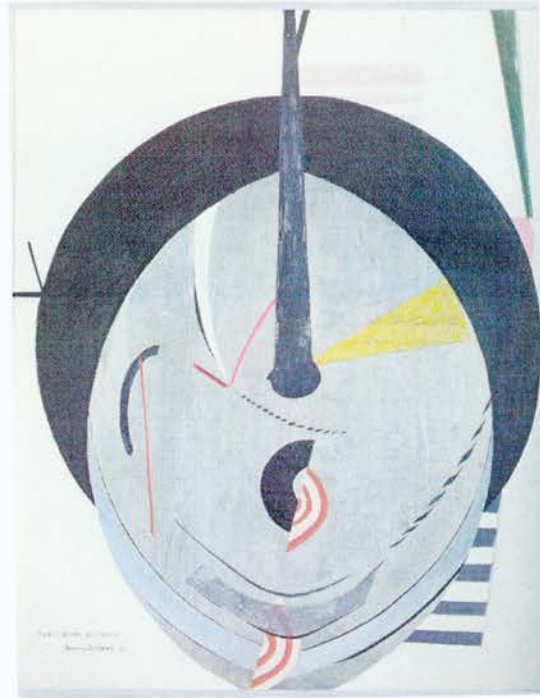


Figure 24: Suzanne Duchamp, *Chef d'oeuvre accordéon* (1921)⁴⁷¹

The title is open to multiple readings, the word ‘accordéon’ alone offering several different semantic possibilities. Firstly, and most apparently, it signifies the musical instrument. The oval shape can be interpreted as an accordion, the structuring of the image suggesting two sections moving apart and coming together. In a short study for a ‘Société Anonyme’ catalogue raisonné, Lesley Baier has

⁴⁷¹ From: Herbert, Apter and Kenney, *The Société Anonyme and the Dreier Bequest at Yale University*, plate 15.

interpreted the object either as an accordion, or as ‘a pendulum momentarily arrested in its course.’⁴⁷² Either way, Suzanne Duchamp’s attempt to depict movement is marked. Baier describes how the geometric shapes are in no way random but have been carefully arranged to give the impression of motion. Not only does the image suggest the movement of the instrument but also, I would argue, the intangible movement of music itself.

‘Accordéon’ can also mean ‘harmony.’ Baier, in drawing attention to the meticulous structure of the image, maintains: ‘Despite apparent randomness, the shapes are in harmony, or ‘accordéon’.’⁴⁷³ The two halves of the oval meet, yet with slight mismatches in symmetry, especially in terms of the patterns where they come together. However, the spindle, spearing through its centre, disrupts any harmony, and its material, the silver foil, is wrinkled and imperfect. If this shape is a musical instrument, its functioning remains ambiguous, and the viewer is left to imagine whether it might produce harmonious or clashing sound.

Baier points out a further possibility associated with the term ‘accordion’, noting that it features in the manifesto *Dada Soulève Tout* as well as in the June 1921 invitation to the Salon Dada, where it is used pejoratively, the Dadaists claiming no interest in (bourgeois) ‘accordions’. Finally, she notes that ‘les accordés’ is a colloquialism for bride and groom, a further subtle but very significant aspect to the title. This is a strong interpretation: that is of the oval as ovoid, or female, and the male as spindle. This theme of sexuality links to Suzanne Duchamp’s other works *Un et une menacés* and *Radiation de deux seuls éloignés* as well as, once again, to Marcel Duchamp’s *Large Glass*. In this painting, however, there is a stronger possibility of harmony.

The first half of the title, ‘chef d’oeuvre’ (‘masterpiece’), is highly self-referential, drawing attention to the painting as an art object, mocking the veneration of artworks and claiming for this provocative artwork its place in the art world.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷² Lesley Baier, *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁴⁷⁴ The English translation Camfield offers employs two phrases to get over the complexity of the French: *Accordion Masterpiece or Wrinkled Masterpiece*. The second phrase offers a juxtaposition between the perfection and timelessness implied in ‘masterpiece’ and the passing of time and imperfections in ‘wrinkled’, thus introducing some irony that the first title may not evoke. It is, however, a step away from the most apparent translation. See:

The questioning of reverence of artworks was a key theme in Marcel Duchamp's work, in particular his readymades and also in *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919), his iconoclastic refiguring of the *Mona Lisa*. More directly comparable with Suzanne Duchamp's choice of title here are two works by Picabia. In 1915, he had used a similar strategy in naming *Révérance (Reverence)* and *Très rare tableau sur la terre (Very Rare Picture on the Earth)*. In each case, the status of the art object is thrown into relief.

In *Chef d'oeuvre: accordéon* Suzanne Duchamp introduces impressions of movement and allusions to sound (and thus time) into the static, silent, surface of the canvas. Like her use of language and three-dimensional objects, these elements investigate and stretch the limits of what can be portrayed within two-dimensional art. The 1920 collage-painting *Ariette d'oubli de la chapelle étourdie (Arietta about the Forgetfulness of the Absent-Minded Chapel)* (fig. 25, below) also uses music as a theme.⁴⁷⁵ The title refers to a song instead of to an image: an 'ariette' or 'arietta' is a musical term for a short aria, or accompanied solo vocal piece. Here, a painting attempts to visualise a piece of music. Once again, words are a critical element of the whole. 'Ariette', standing on its own in the upper-left corner of the canvas, and in combination with the poised bow and arrow, not only alludes to music, but also calls to mind the command 'Arrête' ('stop'). It is made up of letters of mixed height, placed in a curve, thus evoking movement in intonation and emphasis, or even melody. Additionally, three larger letters can be extracted to make the word ART, another self-conscious gesture to the artwork itself.

On another level, the ART in the title also refers to Crotti the artist. Like *Give me the right right to Life*, this work is a portrait, and Camfield identifies the bearded man's head just top-left of centre as Crotti's. This head is actually a piece of painted wood stuck onto the canvas, the object causing a slight shadow, and the eye is a piece of glass. The single eye has already appeared in the self-portrait *Give me the right right to life* from 1919. It is also a leitmotif in Crotti's work, from his Dada contributions through to 'Tabu', where he and Suzanne Duchamp use an eye as the

Camfield, 'Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris.' In: Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, p. 95.

⁴⁷⁵ Exhibited in 1921 in a joint exhibition with Crotti. (4-16 April: 'Exposition des Oeuvres de Suzanne Duchamp et Jean Crotti', Galerie Montaigne – at the 'Théâtre des Champs-Élysées').

symbol for this new movement (the same year as *Ariette* is completed), to the glass eyes he uses in an early assemblage bust of Marcel Duchamp and in *Clown*.⁴⁷⁶ Additionally, he makes numerous mentions of them in reference to himself, in poems between 1916 and 1921, and especially in *Courants d'air sur le chemin de ma vie* (*Currents of air on my life's path*).⁴⁷⁷

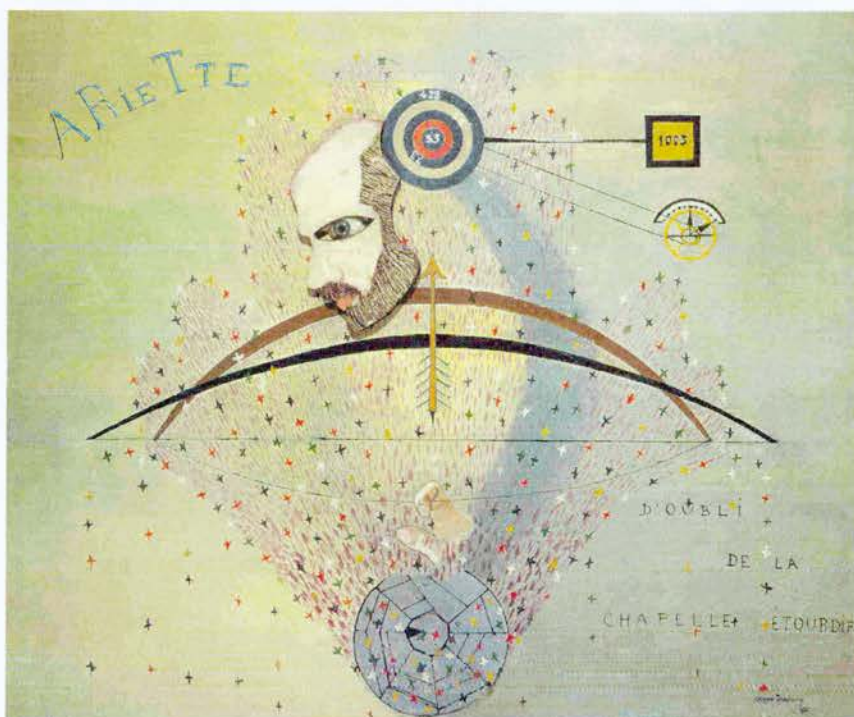


Figure 25: Suzanne Duchamp, *Ariette d'oubli de la chapelle étourdie* (1920)⁴⁷⁸

In *Ariette*, the eye is both an obvious reference to Crotti and his work, and a symbol with longstanding symbolic value. The eye symbolises sight, vision, ways of seeing and perspective, and has particular associations with the artist and the primacy of visualization. In the early twentieth century the concept of the camera eye becomes especially prominent, and the eye's powerful symbolic value goes back to Aristotle, whose declaration 'the soul never thinks without a mental image' can allude to the combinations of conceptual process and visual representation

⁴⁷⁶ *Portrait de Marcel Duchamp sur mesure* (1915-1916). See: Camfield and Martin, *Tabu Dada*, p. 93. *Clown* (1916) can be seen in fig. 30 in this study (as featured in 391 no. 14).

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, taken from front cover.

highlighted in and through Suzanne Duchamp's works. She is not interested in mimetic reproduction, but questions the objective truth of vision, and engages in depictions of subjective experiences and visions.

As in *Give me the right right to Life*, Suzanne Duchamp combines various disparate elements, including actual objects, machine imagery and natural elements, to illustrate the human subject. A target at the top centre of the canvas, to the right-hand side of the head, draws the viewer's eye. There is a number in each band (428, 56, 73 and 33) from the outer band to the inner. To the right is a box linked with a straight line to the target; the target is also linked to a cog, or gauge, via a pulley, containing the number 1003. There is no apparent logic to the choice of numbers, contrary to any expectations of a rational mathematical structure, in which the number of points would increase towards the centre of the target. In fact, a study for this painting shows that originally the numbers were presented in this more predictable way, their inversion later therefore evidently conscious. Suzanne Duchamp introduces numbers, like letters, into this painting, undermining their logic by omitting any rational or mathematical relationships between them. They too are merely painted signs.

The two heavy bows placed horizontally across the centre, with an arrow poised facing towards the target, create tension. One bow is static. A disembodied hand draws back the string of the other, as if ready to release its grip. Camfield describes it as a woman's hand, possibly Suzanne's, but it could equally be Crotti's, and if so, it works in combination with the eye as the artist's other tool. The arrow is mid trajectory, as if released already, on its way to a target, an image that appears repeatedly in Picabia's work. Here the target might represent the artist's intellect, with its attendant processes depicted by the cog and numbers. Below the hand, in a blue sphere, is what appears to be a spider's web, a symbol that appears in some works by Crotti and Marcel Duchamp. It carries traditional associations of industry, entrapment or punishment (*Arachne*).⁴⁷⁹ In this case, it radiates scores of crosses or stars, as well as a crescent moon shape, calling to mind an astrological chart.

A further reading brings us once again to the theme of wireless telegraphy. The crosses might represent signals emanating towards the artist's head. In her

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

discussion of the cultural context in which Marcel Duchamp and others were operating, Dalrymple Henderson describes ‘the emergence of a conception of the artist or poet as a sensitive “registering apparatus,” and of artistic communication as a process of emitting and receiving signals.’⁴⁸⁰ She cites Ezra Pound’s 1913 essay ‘The Approach to Paris,’ in which he discusses ‘wave-lengths’ and ‘verbal receiving stations’, as well as Frantisek Kupka’s theories about the artist emitting ‘telepathic’ transmissions to the viewer. Suzanne Duchamp’s painting takes its place in this intellectual context, one in which artists and writers were speculating on how new technologies might be applied to understanding the ‘mysteries’ of aesthetic processes. Both Suzanne Duchamp’s and Crotti’s works show them to be at the heart of such debates, where esoteric attitudes towards art are in the process of responding to new technical developments.

In his comment on this painting, Camfield suggests an alternative reworking of the full phrase. By taking out ‘ART’ and combining the remaining letters, he produces ‘Art d’oubliette de la’, or ‘The art of forgetting’.⁴⁸¹ It is an imaginative interpretation, using free associations, which are in keeping with the possibilities that Suzanne Duchamp’s word plays proffer. ‘Chapelle’ may refer to religion and/or to music and can, in addition, signify a clique or select group. The word ‘étourdi’, meaning absent-minded or scatterbrained (or ‘without thinking’, when used with the verb ‘to act’), suggests fallibility: of religion, of a clique, even of art? Alternatively, it may propose art as a replacement for religion. Certainly Crotti was interested in spirituality, and in finding a new art that would supplant worn-out grand narratives. Suzanne Duchamp’s playful experiments here with typography alert us to the visual materiality and sounds of the words, and their unstable existence as signs: legibility is deliberately muddled.

This painting brings together all the innovations of Suzanne Duchamp’s work: new materials, science, industry, movement, sound and word play. It explores mathematics, language, machinery, intellect, religion, reason, and astronomy: each providing fragments in the subject’s psyche. It unites (without imposing any false

⁴⁸⁰ Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, p. 204.

⁴⁸¹ He acknowledges a colleague, Jean-Louis Menin, for this interpretation. Camfield, ‘Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris.’ In: Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, p. 102, footnote 20.

coherence) those conflicts so strong in her work: motion and rest, harmony and tension, word and image, signifier and signified, visualisation and representation, science and spirituality, reality and fantasy. It is an appropriate depiction of Crotti, rejecting the conventions of portraiture as a way of showing what the subject looks like, in favour of showing what he is about, which in itself is a collection of diverse aspects and influences, as opposed to an immutable core identity. In a text 'Un homme pas comme un autre', Crotti wrote:

Il semble puiser dans les grands espaces des Infinis les ondes qui le font vibrer et qu'il retransmet dans ses tableaux par des signes, formes et couleurs. Il semble être un instrument de Dieu chargé de transmettre aux hommes des messages ... L'art serait donc une sorte de magie apportant des signes et des messages à l'homme et non la reproduction déformée ou non de la nature.⁴⁸²

No single quotation could so adequately relate to Suzanne Duchamp's representation of Crotti. Equally, no single quotation could so succinctly reveal both the convergent and divergent points between her and Crotti, and between the breakaway movement Tabu and Dada, which will be considered in the next section. Whilst the rejection of 'the reproduction of nature' lay at the heart of avant-garde concerns, and of Suzanne Duchamp's and Crotti's oeuvre, the magic, religion, and spirituality, with which Crotti was preoccupied, was undoubtedly a point of variance.

4.6 Factions and flux: the demise of Dada in Paris, and Tabu

By 1924, Suzanne Duchamp's approach had evidently changed dramatically, so much so that paintings from that year can be more appropriately described as 'naïve' than Dada. A 1957 'Cahiers d'Art' issue devoted to her described the change as follows: '1924-1927. Suzanne Duchamp s'évadant du mouvement Dada retourne en arrière aussi loin que possible.'⁴⁸³ The author of this statement betrays a particular stance. She describes Suzanne Duchamp's break with Dada, which by then was itself

⁴⁸² Camfield and Martin, *Tabu Dada*, p. 26. Taken from: Jean Crotti Papers, Archives of American Art, pp. 1-2. 'In the vast spaces of the Infinite, he seems to touch lightly the waves which make it vibrate and which he retransmits in his paintings by signs, forms and colours. He seems to be an instrument of God charged with transmitting messages to men ... Art must be therefore a kind of magic bringing signs and messages to man and not the reproduction of nature, deformed or not.' Translation in: *Tabu Dada*, p. 9.

⁴⁸³ Bettex-Cailler, *Suzanne Duchamp*, p. 9. '1924-1927. Suzanne Duchamp, escaping from the Dada movement, retreats, as far back as possible.'

collapsing in any case, as an 'escape'. She also uses the emphatic expression 'aussi loin que possible' ('as far back as possible') to laud her aesthetic separation. The author is right in assessing the artist's work as a retreat into past styles, but where she seeks to present this change in a positive light, her expression 'en arrière' ('backwards') can be perceived as evidence of atavism. The Dada period was precisely an attempt to evade retreating into the past. This text was written shortly before the major appraisal of Dada that took off in the 1960s, and it evidently views Dada as a failed endeavour. This well-meaning attempt to distance Suzanne Duchamp's work from Dada only contributes to the lack of acknowledgement of her role in that period.

Suzanne Duchamp continued to paint, and to exhibit, until shortly before her death in 1963, but the period of her work that coincided with Dada was undoubtedly the most exciting and innovative. Her position in relation to Dada in Paris is complex. There is a gap in her (and Crotti's) associations with Paris Dada between the 'Salon des Indépendants' exhibition in January 1920 and further participation in 1921, when they exhibited at the 'Salon d'Automne'. During the Summer, Crotti took part in a number of Dada group activities but neither he nor Suzanne exhibited in the 'Salon Dada' in June. However, they had exhibited together in Paris only in April, and Crotti did contact Marcel Duchamp, on Tzara's request, asking him to participate. In January 1921, they both signed the manifesto *Dada Soulève Tout* (*Dada Stirs Up Everything*) at one of the most intense points in Paris Dada's history.⁴⁸⁴ Most of the Paris group signed this tract, an attempt to distinguish Dada from other movements, but the show of unity was to precede by only several weeks Picabia's split, who in May criticised Dada and began to distance himself from it and its supporters. By March 1922 Suzanne Duchamp and Crotti had aligned themselves clearly with Picabia, collaborating with him on *La Pomme de pins* (*Pinecone*) the publication that was to prompt Tzara's counter-attack *Coeur à barbe* (*The Bearded Heart*). Around the same time Crotti produced the tract *Plus de Cubisme* (*No More Cubism*)⁴⁸⁵ signed by Suzanne Duchamp, as well as Picabia, which did not succeed

⁴⁸⁴ Reproduced in full in: Poupard-Lieussou and Sanouillet, *Documents Dada*, doc. 26, pp. 52-53.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, doc. 48, pp. 80-81.

in halting the escalating splits between Dada artists.

The clearest manifestation of a break with Dada by Suzanne Duchamp and Crotti comes with their conception of the term 'Tabu'. They had first introduced the term at their exhibition in April 1921, and it appeared in Picabia's *Pilhaou-Thibaou*. In October, they went on to publish a 'Tabu' manifesto, to be distributed at the 'Salon d'Automne' opening on 1 November.⁴⁸⁶ Similarly to Dada, this short-lived movement used typographical and semantic experimentations with language in its manifesto. Appearing at the point of Dada's disintegration, it emerged as an attempt to maintain that movement's dynamics of aesthetic experimentation, but with a new perspective. It essentially shared in a search to discover new means of expression, in the face of disillusionment with tradition and despair at institutional 'truths', but was dominated by Crotti's yearning for truth and spiritual essence.

The reasons for the couple's dissociations from Dada and their formation of 'Tabu' are a matter for speculation. Camfield conjectures that their distancing 'probably reflected both their reservations about the rowdier nature of Dada and the discomfort of two gentler, less intellectual souls among the likes of André Breton, Tzara, Louis Aragon, Philippe Soupault, and Ribemont-Dessaignes.'⁴⁸⁷ The editors of *Documents Dada* assume Picabia to be the likely motivating force or even instigator.⁴⁸⁸ Neither gives Crotti and Suzanne Duchamp much credit for their own aesthetic experiments, as manifest in their work over the Dada years, and Camfield's suggestion that the two were 'less intellectual' is especially speculative. Both hypotheses underscore the circumstances of Dada in Paris during the latter part of 1920, when protagonists were struggling to take control of its direction. Of course, the history of Dada is filled with factions, splits, sub-groups, disagreements and various alignments and different directions. Schwitters's 'Merz' movement, for example, ran alongside Berlin Dada. 'Tabu', likewise, though more temporary and less successful, was a breakaway attempt to continue and expand aesthetic experiments outside of the dominant group which, by that time in Paris, was near to breaking up.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., doc. 38, p. 68.

⁴⁸⁷ Camfield, 'Suzanne Duchamp and Dada in Paris.' In: Sawelson-Gorse, *Women in Dada*, p. 92.

⁴⁸⁸ Poupard-Lieussou and Sanouillet, *Documents Dada*, p. 16.

What remains, from Suzanne Duchamp's oeuvre, is work that has clear associations with Dada, and which evidently both took from, and contributed to, its unfolding in Paris, as well as to avant-garde developments more broadly. Spanning 1916-1922, it reveals much about the myriad changes and innovations in visual art during that period, roughly equating to Dada's materialisation in Paris. The years before the war had seen a proliferation of ideas and debates about art, with the unfolding of ideas originating in Cubism and the profound insights into both fine art and literature of Apollinaire still feeding into avant-garde experiments. Suzanne Duchamp's work from 1916 onwards not only takes inspiration from developments in Paris, up to and including Dada, but also responds to artists including de Zayas, Duchamp and Picabia, who had made such an impact in New York.

Suzanne Duchamp's work displays a complexity, in terms of intellectual and aesthetic concerns, to match her male colleagues. Her work innovates with its mechanomorphic inventions, its employment of new materials including machine parts and its applications of technology. It challenges the limitations of the painter's two-dimensional canvas by bringing in references to music, movement and language. The poetic, mysterious characteristics of her titles, in particular, anticipate the language focus – not only in poetry but also in painting – that was to become characteristic of Surrealism. In addition, she provides us with visions of sexuality and male-female relationships from a woman's viewpoint, in the midst of a largely male-dominated spread of visual art.

When interpretation becomes challenging, the work of women artists is too often reduced to 'private symbolism', suggesting a smaller scale of engagement and, subsequently, interest and value. Women's work is frequently viewed in terms of biographical, personal or narrative readings, with terms such as 'intimate', 'personal' and 'private' brought into play. I hope rather to have demonstrated the ways in which Suzanne Duchamp's work examines themes, form and techniques that give her work life beyond the entanglements that have left her stranded as a footnote and her work absent. It is clear from the complexity of her work that her preoccupations are neither explicable solely through her relationship with her brother, nor through that with her husband, but rather through the impetus to stretch and expose the limits of visual and verbal sign systems, to extend the materials available to the artist, and to investigate

new ways of depicting identity and sexuality. Her work displays the sort of conceptual complexity and technical innovation evident in her Dada brother's work, and invites us to reconsider Dada as rather double-gendered.

Chapter 5 – Céline Arnould

5.1 The literary scene in Paris and ‘The Gospel of Céline Arnould’

Of the five women included in this study, Céline Arnould is undoubtedly the least known. All her work is long out of print, and there is not a single published monograph, chapter nor article about her life or her work. There is just one place in which examples of Arnould’s poetry appear in print and in translation. Willard Bohn, in his collection *The Dada Market: An Anthology of Poetry*, includes three of her poems: *Entre Voleurs (Among Thieves)*, *Les Ronge-bois (The Wood-Gnawers)* and *Avertisseur (Alarm)*. This volume is one of the most comprehensive collections of Dada poetry. It is exemplary, as far as the interests of this study are concerned, in its inclusion of both Arnould and Emmy Hennings.⁴⁸⁹

Beyond this volume, one poem by Arnould, *Mes trois péchés Dada (My Three Dada Sins)*, appears in Hugnet’s history, *L’aventure Dada*. Hugnet includes Arnould’s name and this poem in his alphabetical listings of key protagonists, but in place of the short biographical entry that appears under every other name, he writes: ‘CÉLINE ARNAULD (voir PAUL DERMÉE).’⁴⁹⁰ This phenomenon, whereby a woman Dadaist features primarily in relation to a male relative (in this case her husband) is familiar by now. Perhaps Hugnet could not bring himself to give Arnould her own entry as only the third person to feature in his alphabetical compilation, after Pierre Albert-Birot and Louis Aragon. Nevertheless, Arnould fares relatively well,

⁴⁸⁹ Willard Bohn, ed., *The Dada Market: An Anthology of Poetry*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993. Unfortunately the volume is, at the time of writing, out of print. In correspondence, Professor Bohn wrote that he had come across Arnould’s writing chiefly through examining Dada journals and periodicals.

⁴⁹⁰ Hugnet, *L’aventure Dada*, p. 131. ‘CÉLINE ARNAULD (see PAUL DERMÉE).’

albeit under 'DERMÉE', if measured in terms of word-count, both in relation to her husband and to other 'minor' characters in this volume. Hugnet's entry reads:

Sa [Dermée's] femme, la poétesse Céline Arnould, dirige également une publication éphémère, *Projecteur*, où se trouvent des textes des principaux dadaïstes de Paris. Céline Arnould et Paul Dermée collaborent entre autres à *Dadaphone* qui reproduit leurs photographies avec celles d'Aragon, Breton, Tzara... et figurent au sommaire du no. 13 de *Littérature* parmi les signataires des 23 manifestes du mouvement dada (1920).⁴⁹¹

If this information appears scarce, it outweighs the bibliographical detail in all other sources except for one. Michel Sanouillet's comprehensive and detailed history, *Dada à Paris*,⁴⁹² includes a number of useful references to Arnould, principally noting where she made contributions to journals or events. The longest passage on her discusses her journal *Projecteur* (*Projector*) published shortly after Dermée's review Z. It reads:

Au mois de mai, la femme de Dermée, Céline Arnould, auteur d'un roman *Tournevire*, et de *Poèmes à claires-voies*, dadaïste active dont le nom paraît dans toutes les revues où écrivait son époux, reprit le flambeau abandonné par ce dernier. Elle lança *Projecteur*.⁴⁹³

Sanouillet goes on to provide some further, welcome detail about the journal, but the above statement is disappointing in that, like Hugnet's, it relates Arnould, and her work, to her husband and his work.

This negligence is surprising, given that Arnould produced a long line of individual publications – eleven volumes of poetry, one novel and an anthology – between the years 1914 and 1948 (her output is especially concentrated in the 1920s during the height of Dada activity in Paris) and made an impressive list of contributions to prominent avant-garde journals and pamphlets, including: 391,

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 154-155. 'His [Dermée's] wife, the poetess Céline Arnould, also edited an ephemeral publication *Projecteur*, in which texts by the principal Dadaists are to be found. Céline Arnould and Paul Dermée collaborated, amongst other things, on *Dadaphone*, which reproduced their photographs with those of Aragon, Breton, Tzara ... and they feature in the summary of no. 13 of *Littérature* amongst the signatories of the 23 manifestos of the dada movement (1920).'

⁴⁹² Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*. Paris, Flammarion, 1993.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., p. 225. 'In May, Dermée's wife, Céline Arnould, author of a novel *Tournevire*, and of *Poèmes à claires-voies*, an active dadaist, whose name appears in all the reviews for which her husband wrote, took up the flame abandoned by him. She launched *Projecteur*.'

Action, Ça ira, Cannibale, Contimporanul, DADAphone, L'Esprit Nouveau, Littérature, Le Pilhaou-Thibaou, Le Phare de Neuilly, Proverbe and *Z*. Even more remarkably, as both Hugnet and Sanouillet indicate, Arnauld started up and edited her own journal, *Projecteur*, which appeared as a single issue in May 1920. Since there is no bibliography of her work, I have compiled a list of her publications via notes at the front of her own volumes, as well as via searches through a wide range of journals.⁴⁹⁴

In addition, Arnauld participated in two major performance events. The programme of the 'Manifestation Dada de la Maison d'Oeuvre', which took place on 27 March 1920, credits her as 'La femme enceinte' ('the pregnant woman') in the first Parisian performance of Tzara's *La Première Aventure Céleste de M. Antipyrine* (*The First Heavenly Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine*). She also participated in the 'Festival Dada' at the 'Salle Gaveau', on May 26 1920. In this instance, she was not only a performer but also author of one of the pieces featured in the line-up: a dialogue entitled *Jeu d'Échecs* (*Chessboard*).



Figure 26: Photograph of Paris Dadaists, including Céline Arnauld⁴⁹⁵

An undated photograph of the Paris Dada group (fig. 26, above) provides a visual record of its contributors. It unites most of the key players: on the back row Louis Aragon, Théodore Fraenkel, Paul Eluard, Clément Pansaers, and Emmanuel

⁴⁹⁴ The SNGMA in Edinburgh and BLJD in Paris were especially helpful in providing me with these where facsimiles are not readily available. See my bibliography for a work in progress.

⁴⁹⁵ From the 'Carlton Lake Collection'. See: www.hrc.utexas.edu/newsletters/2002/summer. Photographer and date unknown.

Faÿ; in the middle row Benjamin Péret, Paul Dermée, Philippe Soupault and Ribemont-Dessaignes; and on the front row Tzara, Arnauld, Picabia and Breton. Apart from the fact that it depicts so many of the period's avant-garde literati together, the additional striking element in this photograph is that, taking her place amongst this group of twelve men is one woman, Céline Arnauld, seated between Tzara and Picabia.

Searches for the name 'Céline Arnauld' on the internet most commonly bring up the following phrase: 'The Gospel of Celine [*sic*] Arnauld'.⁴⁹⁶ In fact this phrase has little to do with Arnauld. It is the title of a pamphlet of poems written by the American poet Clayton Eshelman, and printed in 1977.⁴⁹⁷ In 'A Note on the Text' Eshelman describes how he was asked to translate some poems by Arnauld, 'who published a dozen or so books of poetry in the 20's and 30's and lived in Paris.' Eshelman is disappointed with the work: 'It was run-of-the-mill French poetry, worn-out language, superficial emotion, nothing new in short.' In spite of this damning assessment, Eshelman finds himself inspired to write his own versions, which he does, he states, in a kind of trance. Not only does he imitate Arnauld's style but he also rewrites a narrative for her with two characters. The first is Latumba, 'a dream figure who was also a bohemian magician who was transmitting an obscure doctrine of sexual magic to her, whom she feared but who was teaching her something important' and Carmen, 'who immediately was Celine's lover and also involved with Latumba.' Eshelman is not modest about his achievements: 'I found myself discovering the "gospel" of the gradual release of Celine Arnauld from the bourgeois Catholic mind of her era'. He says that his final image, of a cross sinking, 'signaled Celine's release from the forces the original Celine was under the sway of.'

Of course Eshelman, as a poet, has total liberty to pursue his creative experiment. Mention of it is included here for comment, however, because his text demonstrates quite clear misunderstandings, assumptions and prejudices about Arnauld. Eshelman apparently fails to comprehend the conditions under which Arnauld was writing, is ignorant of the rebellion inherent in her participation in

⁴⁹⁶ The accent is missed off Céline's name, by Eshelman, in the title and throughout.

⁴⁹⁷ Clayton Eshelman, *The Gospel of Celine Arnauld*. Berkeley, CA: Tuumba Press, 1977. All quotations that follow are from 'A Note on the Text', which follows the main text, but has no page numbers.

Dada, and does not perceive any aspects of innovation in her body of work. Furthermore, he effectively takes inspiration from Arnauld's work, albeit to rework it, without assigning it any value. Finally, the fictional rewriting based on Eshelman's own imagination, with its fantasies about the rescue of this woman by a male figure, is much closer to worn-out cliché than Arnauld's work. His text provides us with a microcosmic example of what happens to undervalued women writers in histories, biographies and/or fictions. *The Gospel of Celine Arnauld* does not make any headway into her gospel but instead usurps it with a more 'knowing' re-interpretation that is foisted on her name.

The challenge now is to reconstruct Arnauld's own context, position and achievements. In her letter to Tzara, which was quoted in the introduction to this study, Arnauld articulated her contributions concisely: 'mon effort tant dans le lyrisme que dans l'action.'⁴⁹⁸ She left behind a large body of work, but in the next sections I will focus on a number of examples of her poetry, prose and short dramatic pieces that featured in Dada journals. Literary Dada flourished in Paris. Journals, pamphlets and tracts thrived in the early 1920s, and the names of many of their innovative editors and contributors are familiar: from Picabia and Tzara, to future Surrealists including Aragon, Breton and Eluard. Arnauld's status as a woman writer and editor within these circles makes her case of particular interest, not least given some misconceptions – reinforced by, or symptomatic of, gaps in research – that women, apart from the great and often cited exception Gertrude Stein, did not feature amongst the most experimental writers of the avant-garde. Susan Rubin Suleiman proposes: 'The avant-garde woman writer is doubly intolerable, seen from the center, because her writing escapes not one but two sets of expectations / categorizations; it corresponds neither to the "usual revolutionary point of view" nor to the "woman's point of view."⁴⁹⁹ While great inroads have been made into perceptions, or misconceptions, of the avant-garde visual arts as purely male, the potential for discovering forgotten women avant-garde writers remains wide open.

⁴⁹⁸ Céline Arnauld to Tristan Tzara, Paris, 24 October 1924. Part of the Tristan Tzara papers in the BLJD. 'My efforts in lyricism as much as in action.'

⁴⁹⁹ Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics and the Avant-Garde*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 15.

5.2 Transporting language: Arnauld's poetry

'Les poètes badins sont aussi des poètes.'⁵⁰⁰

Arnauld's poetic output was prolific. Her first volume of poetry, *La Lanterne Magique* (*The Magic Lantern*), was published as early as 1914,⁵⁰¹ followed by *Poèmes à Claires-Voies* (*Openwork Poems*) in 1920, *Point de Mire* (*Focal Point*) in 1921, and *Guêpier de Diamants* (*Diamond trap*) in 1923. These latter three volumes, which appeared during Dada's manifestation in Paris, would doubtless be considered part of her Dada oeuvre if she were a more established figure in literary histories. As it is, they have neither been reprinted, nor translated. After the end of Dada as a coherent movement in Paris, Arnauld continued to publish volumes with reasonable regularity right up until 1948, from *La Nuit rêve tout haut, poème à deux voix & Le Clavier Secret, poèmes (1925 à 1934)* (*The Night Dreams high and loud, poem for two voices & The Secret Piano, poems from 1925 to 1934*), to *Rien qu'une étoile; suivi de Plains-chants sauvages* (*Nothing but a Star; followed by wild plain-songs*) in 1948.⁵⁰² These books are rare, and even the Bibliothèque Nationale de France does not hold a full set. They continue Arnauld's experimental approach post Dada. *La nuit rêve tout haut*, for example, is intended to be recited aloud by two voices, accompanied by a secret or imaginary piano setting.

Like Emmy Hennings, Arnauld published both poetry and prose, but the larger part of her oeuvre, especially her own full publications, was poetry. In later life, Hennings had turned to prose, writing contributions for newspapers and journals, as well as books on Ball, not least to finance herself. Arnauld managed to be consistently published as a poet in her lifetime, although without any real recognition. Where Hennings figured on the cusp of Expressionism and the beginnings of Dada in the German language context, Arnauld came into view in the heart of Dada Paris, as Surrealism was being forged. Her links were formed there with both established Dadaists such as Tzara and Picabia, and future Surrealists

⁵⁰⁰ *Proverbe* no. 1. Paris, 1 February 1920, ed. Paul Eluard. In SNGMA. 'Playful poets are poets too.'

⁵⁰¹ This volume is listed at the front of her (later) books, but I have as yet been unable to find a copy of it.

⁵⁰² See Bibliography for full list and details of publications.

including Aragon, Breton, Eluard and Soupault, and her work features some aspects that would come to be seen as characteristic of surrealist writing.

I have chosen to focus on three of Arnauld's poems, all of which were published in core Dada journals, that is in *DADAphone*, *Cannibale* and *Z*, edited by Tzara, Picabia and Dermée respectively. These three poems have themes and motifs in common, including a fascination with transport, both in the sense of modern modes of travel and of movement and flight in a more metaphysical sense. They also display similar preoccupations and innovations with language as material, which characterise Arnauld's entire experimental oeuvre, both poetry and prose. Whilst this small selection cannot possibly fully represent her extensive poetic output, it at least serves to give an idea of her work and the nature of her contribution to Dada.

It is fitting to start with a publication by Tzara, who was in large part responsible for 'importing' Dada from Zurich to Paris. He quickly followed up a first Paris-produced publication *Dada 6* (or *Bulletin Dada*), in February 1920, with *DADAphone*, printed in March 1920. The two publications marked his, and Dada's, arrival in the fast-moving world of avant-garde Paris journals. *DADAphone* was effectively the seventh and final publication of the original *Dada* journal started in Zurich. Illustrated with drawings by Picabia and photographs by Christian Schad, it also includes portraits of the eight contributors, one of whom is Arnauld. Hugnet's description of the portraits points out their deliberately humorous effect:

Soupault, chapeau melon et monocle; Tzara, mèche, lorgnon et lavallière; Dermée, derrière une raquette de tennis; Eluard, le front haut; Ribemont-Dessaignes, le front plus haut; Céline Arnauld, en cheveux; Breton, lunettes et pochette; Aragon, *amant de coeur du dadaïsme*, comme dit Picabia; et ce dernier, cannibale en tenue d'été.⁵⁰³

Arnauld, appearing simply 'en cheveux' ('bareheaded') stands out, just as she does in the photograph reproduced in the first section of this chapter, as the only woman amongst this group of men.

Her contribution to *DADAphone* is the poem *Énigme-Personnages (Enigma-Figures)* (fig. 27, below), whose title would make perfect sense with reference to

⁵⁰³ Hugnet, *L'aventure Dada*, p. 91. 'Soupault, bowler hat and monocle; Tzara, forelock, pince-nez and cravat; Dermée, behind a tennis racquet; Eluard, high forehead; Ribemont-Dessaignes, higher forehead; Céline Arnauld, bareheaded; Breton, glasses and pocket handkerchief; Aragon, *noble-hearted lover of Dadaism*, as Picabia puts it; and he, the latter, a cannibal in summer clothes.'

The journey in the poem evokes, on the one hand, a physical displacement and, on the other, a mental voyage, stimulated by so many sights. Arnould seems to be challenging the reader to free his or her thoughts from the evidence of physical reality. At the very start she makes the accusation ‘Pas assez mystérieux au volant de ta voiture’.⁵⁰⁷ Her object of critique is apparently the failure to perceive anything beyond everyday logic and external appearance. Then, repeating the ‘énigme’ of the title she declares: ‘Tu ne trouveras jamais la clé de D / à l’envers énigme en autobus M’.⁵⁰⁸ It is a direct taunt to any reader who might seek to discover or impose semantic coherence on the poem. Instead, the poem celebrates the ‘feu follet’ and ‘rire du délire enfantin’ that comes with fantasy, and with being ‘assez Dada’.⁵⁰⁹

The poem revels in free-flowing thought and the collision of images. Some images are fantastical, such as ‘Raccrochée par une étoile l’échelle renversée’.⁵¹⁰ The alliterative ‘envers’, ‘énigme’, ‘étoile’ and ‘échelle’ in the third and fourth lines of the poem play as much with the visual and sound quality of the words, as with their semantic aspect. ‘La clé de D’, too, might have arisen simply from the rhyme, or from its visual shape, rather than hinting at a meaning for ‘D’. Along with the ‘M’ (for the bus), this is an example of language broken down into its smallest component, the letter, the arbitrary sign. Grammar is partially abandoned, with the subject of a phrase often unspecified or unclear. The ‘Énigme-Personnages’ of the title seem to haunt the poem and evade identification. The result is the fusion of an actual physical journey with the sights it produces, the visions and mental meanderings that pervade the mind if it is allowed to wander. The poem advocates the liberation of imagination and of language, and identifies Dada as an agent.

In *Avertisseur* (*Alarm*) (fig. 28, below), published in Dermée’s *Z* in the same month that *Énigme-Personnages* appeared in *DADAprhona* (March 1920), Arnould uses transport as a motif once again.⁵¹¹ It is full of movement, both physical and cerebral. The subject of the poem is clear, but it appears to depict a daily commute, from getting out of bed, to seeing a plane in the sky, to taking the train. In this sense,

⁵⁰⁷ ‘Not mysterious enough at the wheel of your car.’

⁵⁰⁸ ‘You’ll never find the key to D / back-to-front enigma on bus M.’

⁵⁰⁹ ‘will-o’-the-wisp’; ‘laugh of childish delight’; ‘Dada enough’.

⁵¹⁰ ‘The overturned ladder, hung up by a star.’

⁵¹¹ This poem is also included in her volume *Poèmes à Claires-Voies*, published 5 March 1920.

master is equally evocative: ‘le chef de gare [...] divague en jonglant avec les colis / sévèrement remplis du café réveil-matin’.⁵¹⁴ The words and concepts tumble and crash together, reflecting the speed, confusion and exhilaration of early morning urban activity. Arnould uses language to flash up visual signs, unmitigated by syntax and conventions, and reminiscent of the Expressionist serial style. With its fragments of rapid, visual experiences, in a succession of short lines, it also recalls the Berlin Dadaists’ city photomontages, such as Grosz and Heartfield’s *Leben und trieben in Universal-City, 12 Uhr 5 Mittags* (*Life and Work in Universal City. 12:05 Noon*) (1919) and Paul Citroën’s *Metropolis* (1923). In Arnould’s poem, a myriad of aspects appear and disappear in the mind’s eye just as briefly. Like developments in fine art, her literary experiments reflect the increasing importance of the visual sign in the culture of the early decades of the twentieth century, propagated through mass print media, advertising and film. The ‘Manifeste du surréalisme’ (‘Manifesto of Surrealism’), published in *Surréalisme* no. 1 in October 1924, was to make this explicit. It discusses how poetry had been ‘ruled’ by the ear, and continues: ‘Depuis une vingtaine d’années, l’œil prend sa revanche. C’est le siècle du film. Nous communiquons davantage par de signes visuels. Et c’est la rapidité qui fait aujourd’hui la qualité.’⁵¹⁵

On one level, *Avertisseur* celebrates modernity and urbanity. It reminds us of Marinetti’s evocation of the city, and the exciting potential of transport to cross space in minimal time: ‘An ordinary man in a day’s time can travel by train from a little dead town of empty squares, where the sun, the dust, and the wind amuse themselves in silence, to a great capital city bursting with lights, gestures and street cries.’⁵¹⁶ On another level, *Avertisseur* issues cautions and warnings, as though the poet were not entirely convinced of the desirability of modern technology and modes of living. Again, Arnould uses direct address: ‘Mes amis mes amis / ne vous fiez pas à

⁵¹⁴ ‘the station master [...] rambles on while juggling the packages / full to the brim with alarm-clock coffee.’ Translation in: Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ *Surréalisme* no. 1, ed. Ivan Goll. In SNGMA. This manifesto, published by Goll, appeared a month before Breton’s own ‘Surrealist Manifesto.’ ‘For some twenty years now, the eye has been taking its revenge. It’s the century of the film. We increasingly communicate via visual signs. And it is rapidity that makes for quality today.’

⁵¹⁶ Marinetti, ‘Destruction of Syntax – Imagination without Strings – Words-in-Freedom 1913.’ In: Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*. p. 96.

l'étincelle / le feu prend partout / même dans vos cervelles.'⁵¹⁷ The 'avertisseur' of the title might allude, then, not only to a morning alarm call, but also to a metaphorical wake-up call, or warning, to readers. The poem is at its most ominous at the very end: 'le temps passé / la pluie tombe méfiante et mesquine / Vos paroles sont des schrapnells / sur les roues tournesol / Les cimetières s'allongent jusqu'à l'herbe morte... / Prenez garde aux tombes ouvertes.'⁵¹⁸ These more pessimistic images arise from a particular historical context – the devastating First World War had ended only two years before – and from mixed feelings about new technology, the thrills and possibilities associated with it, and conversely the potential for its terrible abuse.

Mes trois péchés Dada (*My Three Dada Sins*) (fig. 29, below) was included in Picabia's *Cannibale no. 2*, which appeared in print on 25 May 1920.

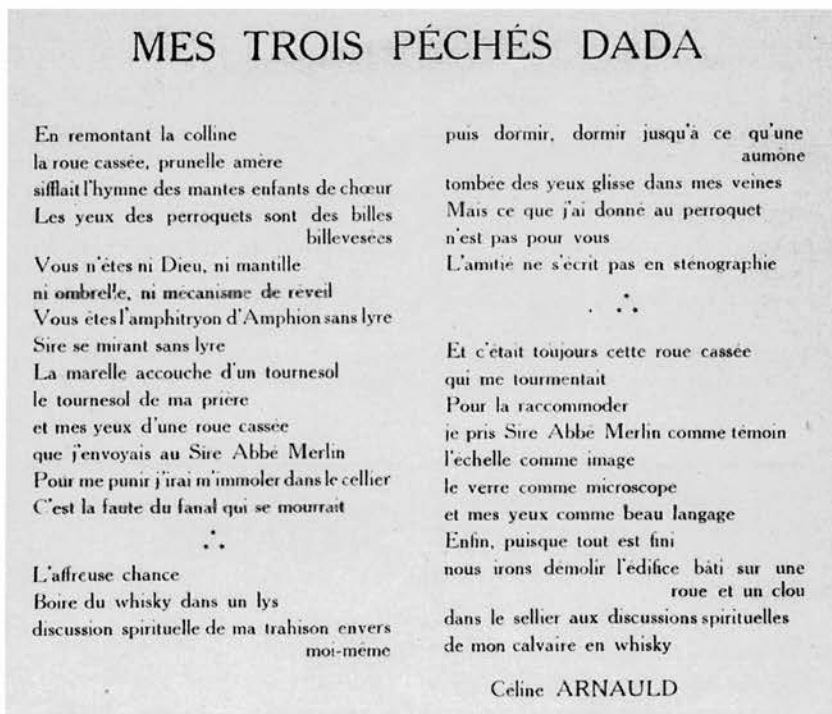


Figure 29: Céline Arnauld, *Mes trois péchés Dada*⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁷ 'My friends my friends / don't trust in sparks / fire erupts everywhere / even in your brains.' Translation in Bohn, *The Dada Market*, p. 19.

⁵¹⁸ 'time passes / over feelings of getting out of bed / the rain falls suspicious and petty / Your words are shrapnel / on the sunflower wheels / The cemeteries extend to the dead grass ... / Watch out for the open graves.' Translation in: *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ Downloaded from DDA.

A ‘*mécanisme de réveil*’ (‘alarm-clock’) appears once again, (*Avertisseur* featured a ‘*réveil-matin*’), apparently a recurring motif for Arnauld, and with obvious connections to time and awakening. Leitmotif was not unusual in the work of the Dadaists, who would repeat and remould phrases in future texts, including poems, manifestos, journal titles and paintings. The references and images here are extraordinarily eclectic, and more surrealist in their apparently unconscious and bizarre juxtapositions, such as: ‘*La marelle accouche d’un tournesol.*’⁵²⁰ Words are brought together to create these visual, fantastical conundrums, and also for their pure linguistic assonances or discord, such as in ‘*les yeux de perroquets sont des billes billevesées*’.⁵²¹

Once again, Arnauld addresses ‘you’, this time using the polite or plural form ‘vous’, who might represent her opponent, observer or reader. She claims, ‘*Vous n’êtes ni Dieu, ni mantille / ni ombrelle, ni mécanisme de réveil.*’⁵²² This list initially appears nonsensical and random. Each object, however, has the potential to exercise some power or effect: God, most obviously, as authority, the mantilla (a traditional scarf, worn by women, which covers the head), the umbrella as shelter, and the alarm clock as rousing. Arnauld declares that her addressee is none of these, and so pronounces them ineffectual. Instead, she writes: ‘*Vous êtes l’amphitryon d’Amphion sans lyre / Sire se mirant sans lyre.*’⁵²³ The language play is evident in the combinations of ‘amphitryon’ and ‘Amphion’ as well as the rhyming of ‘Sire,’ ‘se mirant’ and ‘lyre’. In Greek mythology, Amphion was the son of Zeus who, together with his twin Zethus, built a wall around Thebes by charming the stones with his magical lyre. Without his lyre, as he is imagined here, he would be powerless: hence, this can be read both as an insult to the mythological figure and a provocation to the reader, who is compared with him. Since the lyre is also associated with Orpheus, the musician and poet of Greek myth, this might also be a provocation to the poet.

⁵²⁰ ‘The hopscotch gives birth to a sunflower.’

⁵²¹ ‘Parrots’ eyes are nonsense marbles.’

⁵²² ‘You are neither God, nor mantilla / nor parasol, nor alarm clock.’

⁵²³ ‘You are the host of Amphion without a lyre / Sire gazing at himself without a lyre.’

Although not immediately clear from the first lines, there is also a first person subject who, in the three sections of the poem, articulates a conflict, which presumably centres on the three Dada sins in the title. The scene begins with a pitiful struggle: ‘En remontant la colline / la roue cassée, prunelle amère.’⁵²⁴ The subject goes on to confront adversaries and, as discussed, seeks to deny them power. Yet at the end of this first section, s/he is apparently still suffering and declares: ‘Pour me punir j’irai m’immoler dans le cellier.’⁵²⁵ The second section represents a transition, as the subject falls asleep, still tormented by ‘ma trahison envers moi-même’.⁵²⁶ In the third section s/he rails against this apparent state of suffering, possibly the consequence of judgements made by herself and others.

Throughout the poem there is a recurring circular motif: references to eyes and wheels, as well as sunflowers and headlights. The broken wheel, or broken circle, which appears in the second line, and again in the eleventh line – in both cases linked to the eye and to vision – represents discord. The third section returns to this broken wheel ‘Et c’était toujours cette roue cassée / qui me tourmentait.’⁵²⁷ She takes steps to repair it, and the result, ‘mes yeux comme beau langage’, contrasts with the former description of ‘mes yeux d’une roue cassée’.⁵²⁸ Vision is portrayed as a vital, positive force. Finally, the subject demolishes ‘l’édifice bâti sur une roue et un clou’.⁵²⁹ The physical, logical edifice is destroyed in favour of explorations of, and escapes into, language, imagery and vision. The Dada sins, it turns out, are principally considered sins by opponents. This poem could be read as an articulation of the conflicts inherent in self-expression. The subject is torn between freedom and convention, and personal liberty and social expectation. The equation of transgressions with sin recall some of Emmy Hennings’s writings, in which she works through questions of guilt and choice.

Arnauld’s poems are open to multiple narrative interpretations. They are characterised by the free and playful use of images common to many Dada texts. Above all, they can be appreciated for their fantastical qualities and for their

⁵²⁴ ‘Climbing up the hill / broken wheel, bitter pupil.’ ‘prunelle’ can also mean ‘sloe’.

⁵²⁵ ‘To punish myself I’ll banish myself to the storeroom.’

⁵²⁶ ‘my betrayal of myself.’

⁵²⁷ ‘And it was still this broken wheel / that was tormenting me.’

⁵²⁸ ‘my eyes like beautiful language’; ‘my broken wheel eyes,’

⁵²⁹ ‘demolish the building built on a wheel and a nail.’

privileging and highlighting of the language material. Additionally, each of the three poems considered here has a more ominous, critical side, which emerges as a distinctive aspect of Arnauld's work. *Avertisseur*, especially, ends on a tangible warning note about death and destruction, while *Mes trois péchés Dada* seems to enact a battle between guilt and liberation, restriction and freedom, authority and self-determination. *Énigme-Personnages*, meanwhile, is more playful, but wilfully rejects authority, logic and the imposition of answers, and holds no great faith in other people.

More positively, each of the three presents a conviction of the power of visual perception. Arnauld's free use of language sets itself against semantic logic, and her images aim to enlarge the scope of what can be thought and experienced. A statement by Dermée in *Z*, applies to the spontaneity and freedom in her work:

Dada ruinant l'autorité des contraintes tend à libérer le jeu naturel de nos activités. Dada mène donc à l'amoralisme et au lyrisme le plus spontané, par conséquent le moins logique. Ce lyrisme s'exprime de mille façons dans la vie.⁵³⁰

5.3 Experiments in prose: from fairytale to dramatic dialogue

The objective to liberate language has potential consequences beyond the poem. Bohn notes: 'In the best [Dada] poems, one encounters a critique of language itself and an attempt to deconstruct the cultural sign system.'⁵³¹ Arnauld's prose work is equally interested in liberating language from 'reality' and in the bringing together (and tearing apart) of thought and language. If she criticises and fears the status quo, and communicates doubts about modern life, technology and above all people, she also celebrates perception and expression, and it is through a renewed use of language that she glimpses alternative possibilities of extension and escape. Some of the motifs glimpsed already in her poetry are equally apparent in her prose, beginning with the use of mythology and fantasy.

⁵³⁰ March 1920. 'Dada's shattering of the authority of constraints tended to liberate the natural playfulness in our activities. Dada led, then, to amorality and to the most spontaneous – and consequently least logical – lyricism. This lyricism expresses itself in a thousand ways in life.'

⁵³¹ Bohn, *The Dada Market*, p. xx.

Arnauld's testing of prose had begun as early as 1919, with the publication of the novel *Tournevire*. This experimental fiction, which reads like a macabre fairytale, was published by 'Editions de L'Esprit Nouveau'.⁵³² It is a highly ambitious work, not least since experimental novels were much less common than poetry or short prose pieces, which could be published in journals. The title, *Tournevire*, is a dated, specialist term that refers to an old marine navigation tool.⁵³³ The novel features a number of characters drawn from myth and legend, who interact at a forest fair. It intersperses description with large sections of dialogue, and ends with songs by some of the protagonists, so that it is reminiscent of popular or musical theatre. Is it an attempt to rework and debunk fairytale and myth? It certainly infuses fantasy and romanticism with a sense of absurdity, menace and threat. It also reveals hints of elements to come in her dadaist work, such as a love of the absurd, unbounded imagination, lack of realism, rejection of narrative coherence, free mixing of symbols and pure indulgence in the possibilities of language as a pursuit in itself.

It appears that Arnauld planned, and may have drafted, more novels following *Tournevire*, but none was actually published.⁵³⁴ Her book publications afterwards were all volumes of poetry. However, she contributed a number of prose texts in late 1920 and in 1921 to Dada publications, in which inventiveness with language is apparent, as well as the attempt to access experience that lies beyond the established boundaries of language. Her short prose pieces combine deconstruction and iconoclasm with lyricism and invention.

In *Périscope* (*Periscope*) (fig. 30, below) published in 391 no. 14, in November 1920, Arnauld's free use of language is at its most apparent. In this prose text of some one hundred and seventy words, she more or less bypasses punctuation. The text is divided into just six sentences, and features no commas, so that phrases

⁵³² The experimental publishing house founded by Dermée, Amedee Ozenfant and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier). They produced twenty-eight issues of a long-running journal between 1920 and 1925.

⁵³³ Definition: '– 1672; de *tourner*, et *virer*. Mar. (Ancient). Chaîne ou cordage sans fin, manoeuvré à l'aide d'un cabestan, d'un guindeau.' In: Alain Rey, ed., *Le Grand Robert de la Langue Française*. 2nd ed. Paris: Dictionnaires le Robert, 2001. 'From *turn*, and *heave*. Chain or ropes/rigging without an end, manoeuvred with the help of a capstan or windlass.'

⁵³⁴ *Poèmes à Claires-Voies* (1920) lists *Serpentine* and *La lune dans le puits* (*The moon in the well*) ('féerie' or 'fairytale') as forthcoming, and *L'Apaisement de l'Eclipse* (1925) signals *Le Musicien des Marées* (*The Musician of the Tides*) ('roman poétique' or 'poetic novel').

run on from one another. Words are brought together for the pure pleasure of the sound and sight of them, as the first sentence illustrates: ‘La rapière s’est plantée dans le limon tatoué de la taupinée maison faite à tâtons avec l’aide du violon après le solstice la mort des chanteurs des buissons et des javelles cathédrales séchées par des chansons.’⁵³⁵

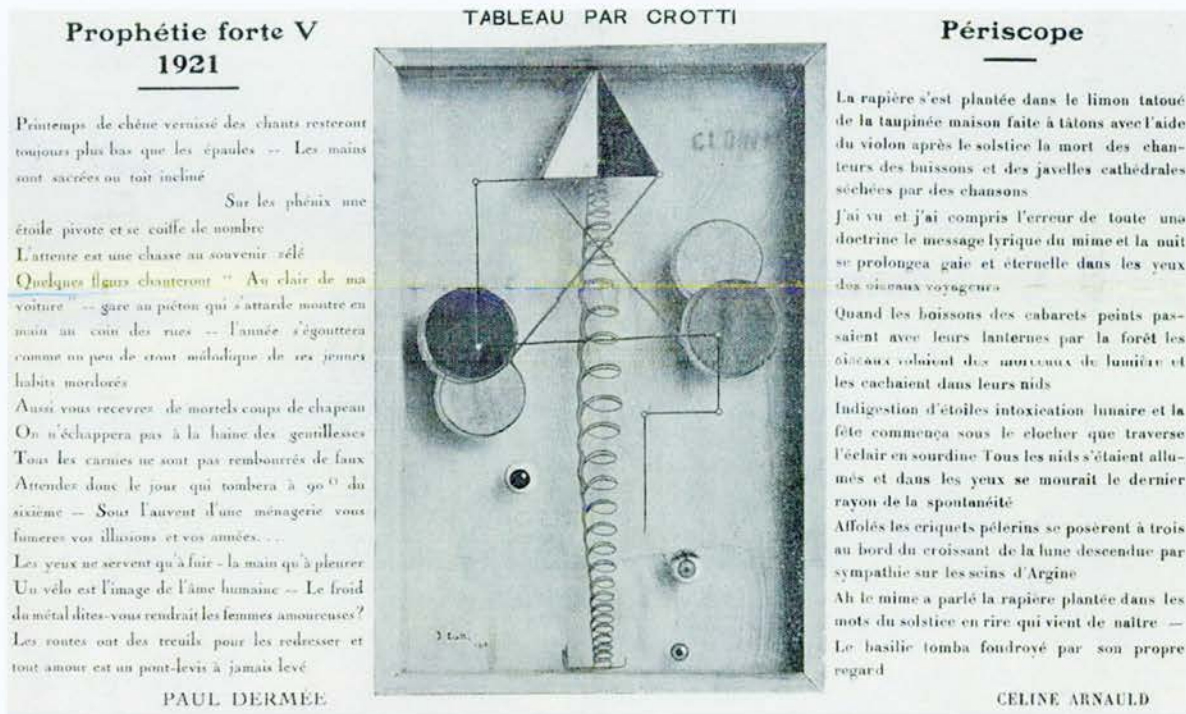


Figure 30: Céline Arnauld, *Périscopes*⁵³⁶

Arnauld chooses uncommon words, such as ‘rapière’ (‘rapier’), ‘javelles’ (‘swathes’) and ‘taupinée’ (‘molehill’), which are unusual both for what they signify, and for their sound quality. In combination, they have even more extraordinary effects, such as the fantastical ‘Affolés les criquets pèlerins se posèrent à trois au bord du croissant de la lune descendue par sympathie sur les seins d’Argine.’⁵³⁷

⁵³⁵ ‘The rapier sank into the lemon tattooed with the molehill house made gropingly with the violin’s help after the solstice the death of the singers the bushers and the cathedrals swathes dried up by songs.’

⁵³⁶ Downloaded from DDA.

⁵³⁷ ‘Panic-stricken the pilgrim crickets lined up in threes at the side of the crescent moon come down out of sympathy on the Queen of Club’s bosom.’

Arnauld's approach is positioned within the broader context of the historical avant-garde. In 1913 Marinetti had succinctly theorised his approach to language with the term 'imagination without strings'. He explains: 'By the imagination without strings I mean the absolute freedom of images or analogies, expressed with unhampered words and with no connecting strings of syntax and with no punctuation.'⁵³⁸ The Zurich Dadaists, meanwhile, expressed their love of chance, random juxtapositions and liberated linguistic signs in sound poems. Finally, Breton and Soupault develop the concept of automatism as a central tenet of Surrealism. Like Freud's 'free association' method, it indulges in an outpouring of words unhindered by preconceived ideas. In each case, avant-garde poets sought to focus on the material quality of the words, to privilege that over semantic arrangements, and to reinvigorate language that had become worn and customary. As Eluard declares in the first issue of *Proverbe*, 'Les mots s'usent à force de servir, et quand ils ont une fois réussi ne donnent plus beaucoup d'eux-mêmes, (comme il arrive aux hommes).'⁵³⁹ A re-invigorating of language is linked to a re-invigorating of thought and action. In a text like Arnauld's, words become unfamiliar once again and have a different, unexpected impact.

Périscopie also exalts nature, as an alternative to 'civilisation'. Birds feature here, as in many of Arnauld's texts, most likely as symbols of freedom and flight. Another recurring motif in her work is light. *Périscopie* makes numerous references to lanterns, morsels of light, stars, the solstice, lightning and the moon, to suggest, again, the primacy of vision. Whilst the Dadaists tended to focus on modernity and everyday, urban experience, its poets were also attracted to 'primitive' cultures, and to the impact of language outside of (or prior to) linguistic systems familiar to them. The Zurich poets' invention of sound poetry, in which language is broken down into the smallest units of sound, provides the clearest example of a free flow of language, to break open patterns of thinking and seeing. Arnauld's lyrical flights of imagination indulge in the material visual and sound quality of the words. Meanwhile, her flow of

⁵³⁸ Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax – Imagination without Strings – Words-in-Freedom 1913.' In: Apollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, p. 99.

⁵³⁹ *Proverbe* no. 1. Paris, 1 February 1920. In SNGMA. 'Words wear out through being used, and once they have succeeded they have nothing more to give (as happens with men).'

words and interest in fantasy anticipates the Surrealists' love of the unconscious, dreamlike and childlike.

Envoi du Japon (Consignment from Japan) (fig. 31, below), appeared in Picabia's review *Le Pilhaou-Thibaou* on 10 July 1921.

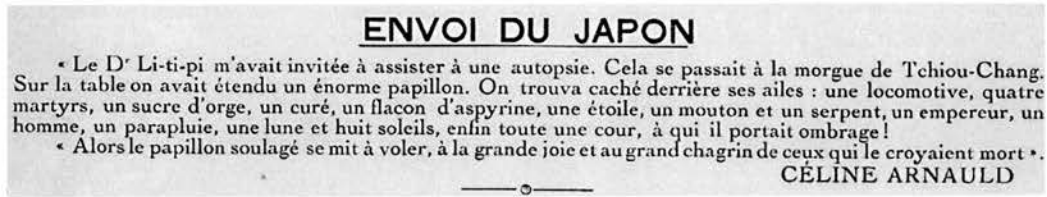


Figure 31: Céline Arnaud, *Envoi du Japon*⁵⁴⁰

This short prose piece tells the story of an autopsy, performed on a butterfly, which reveals a collection of objects hidden beneath its wings. Once these have been removed, the butterfly is able to fly away, to the 'great joy and great chagrin' of the people, who thought it dead. The text is extremely condensed, reminiscent of an ancient Japanese parable, which it simultaneously reveres and plays with. It could be read in a semi-serious way: the butterfly is laden with the cares and responsibilities of the civilised world, with parasites and invented burdens. These parasites include a parish priest, an emperor, four martyrs and a man, who can be seen to represent civilisation and authority, or 'an entire court', as Arnaud puts it. It could also be read as a purely fanciful, humorous and unrestricted juxtaposition of objects, in the way that the Surrealists celebrated 'objets trouvés'. As well as the human figures, the unlikely collection includes: a locomotive, a barley sugar, a bottle of aspirin, a star, a sheep, a snake, an umbrella, a moon and eight suns. This edge of humour begins with the rhyming name 'D' Li-ti-pi', Arnaud's invention of a Japanese name.

The 'lyrical dialogue' *Jeu d'Echecs (Chessboard)* offers one final example of Arnaud's experiments with prose. It was performed at the 'Salle Gaveau' on 26 May 1920, the second major performance event staged in Paris, which also featured sketches by Aragon, Breton, Ribemont-Dessaignes, Soupault and Tzara, among others. Dadaist performances in Paris frequently featured short dialogues and dramas, some of which were reproduced in journals, but they are often neglected in

⁵⁴⁰ Downloaded from DDA.

analyses of Dada work.⁵⁴¹ This interest in drama may be seen as a disaffection for poetry, perceived as esoteric and paper-bound, in favour of more immediate communication in the form of performance, as practised so prolifically by Zurich Dada.

Céline Arnault's dialogue constitutes a sort of verbal chess game between two players. In a number of important drawings and paintings, from as early as 1912, Marcel Duchamp used images around chess to explore human relationships, especially sexual relations, exploring the metaphor for themes including the notion of predetermined moves.⁵⁴² In her dialogue, Arnault chooses two characters: 'Le Roi' ('The King') is of course a chesspiece; 'le Fou' ('The Fool') is a classic character from fairytale. Together, they are reminiscent of the type of characters she uses in *Tournevire*.⁵⁴³ The fluidity and apparent irrationality of their conversation stands in stark contrast to the concentration and logic demanded by a game of chess. The responses each makes to the other do not follow a rational pattern: each appears to pursue, and unload subconscious thoughts, to produce language and ideas that have somehow been triggered by the other's words or actions. As Antonin Artaud writes: 'Une image appelle une autre image d'après des lois qui sont les lois même de la pensée.'⁵⁴⁴

There is an element of absurdity about the characters' situation, who appear to be trapped in a social set-up, signified by the chess board. As in Samuel Beckett's (later) *Waiting for Godot*, their steps are prescribed and free will limited. The King is confined by his position and expectations: 'moi le seul gardien des hallucinations' ('I, the sole guardian of hallucinations'). In his last speech he declares: 'Enfin que me voulez-vous? Je suis le roi, la route épineuse des assassins est la mienne – je vous nargue tous – vos paroles sonnent faux – faux – faux – on ne prend pas mon coeur

⁵⁴¹ See programmes for the 'Manifestation Dada' and 'Festival Dada', for example, in Poupard-Lieussou and Sanouillet, *Documents Dada*, pp. 36-37 and p. 45.

⁵⁴² See, for example: David Hopkins, *Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst: The Bride Shared*. Oxford, Clarendon, 1998, p. 13 and pp. 119-120.

⁵⁴³ The characters in *Tournevire* include a clown, a juggler, the Mistress of the house, as well as more fantastical characters named Mirador ('Watchtower'), Luciole ('Firefly'), an ogre, white bear and angel.

⁵⁴⁴ Antonin Artaud, 'À propos de la littérature et des arts plastiques: *Point de Mire* par Céline Arnault.' In: *Oeuvres Complètes, Tome II*. Paris: Gallimard, 1961, p. 227. The review is based around *Point de Mire*, but Artaud refers to *Jeu d'Échecs*. 'One image calls up another image according to laws that that are the very same as those of thought.'

aux échecs.⁵⁴⁵ Significantly, the King is not shown to be any wiser than the Fool. The latter is given the last word, with a song. He is insightful and prophetic in contrast to the failing king. He could be compared with the Dada project: unfettered by social convention and expectations, he follows his thoughts and expression: ‘Enfin, je suis l’unique affront.’⁵⁴⁶

There is a third character in this dialogue, the ‘curé’ (‘pastor’), who does not appear but is referred to by the other characters. He is a ridiculous figure, not even granted a voice, and he certainly fares less well than the Fool does. The text demonstrates a total irreverence with regard to religion. This is most apparent in the shortest turn of dialogue in the whole drama, when the King pronounces – and Arnauld gives the direction ‘*prophétique*’ – ‘Le Christ n’a jamais aimé personne.’⁵⁴⁷ Language, once again is paramount and, although its arbitrariness and failings as a stable communication tool are exposed, it is also shown to offer potential. This is made most explicit by the Fool who, just before his song, ends with a declaration of the ‘fecund buisson universel des mots.’⁵⁴⁸

Arnauld seeks to apply the same level of liberation to her prose as she allows in her poetry. In this way, she shares preoccupations with other dadaist writers, including with Tzara, who likewise explored drama. Bohn notes:

Jacques Baron has argued that the subject of Tzara’s plays is really the birth of language via the destruction and reconstruction of the word. Thus, the Dada poets wished to stimulate thought and to achieve new states of consciousness by manipulating their (verbal) medium.⁵⁴⁹

Arnauld is drawn to the codes of fairytales and fables, perhaps because of their power to shape thought and uphold moral and social systems. The King’s first phrase in *Jeu d’échecs* reflects explicitly on this issue: ‘La clé des histoires enfantines est une cravate étroite qui serres les paroles.’⁵⁵⁰ By reformulating familiar genres,

⁵⁴⁵ ‘In the end, what is it you want of me? I am the king, mine is the thorny route of assassins – I scoff at you all – your words sound false – false – false – they will not take my heart at chess.’

⁵⁴⁶ ‘In the end I am the only affront.’

⁵⁴⁷ ‘(prophetically)’; ‘Christ never loved anyone.’

⁵⁴⁸ ‘fecund universal bush of words.’

⁵⁴⁹ Bohn, *The Dada Market*, p. xvii. From: Jacques Baron: *L’An du surréalisme* and *L’An dernier*. Paris: Denoël, 1969.

⁵⁵⁰ ‘The key to children’s stories is a tight tie that squashes speech.’

Arnauld ponders the ways in which language imposes itself through narratives, beginning with childhood. Her work envisions a prelogical existence, when language is less fettered, narrative more fantastical, and when the imagination might be less constricted.

5.4 Manifestos: on 'Aart' and 'Poésie'

As one of the Dada group of writers, Arnauld contributed numerous short pieces to journals that, as we have seen, encompass poetry, prose fiction and drama. The freedom to experiment with categories was a key feature of Dada work. In Dermée's *Z*, from March 1920, to which Arnauld contributed the poem *Avertisseur*, she is also credited with a number of one- or two-line phrases.⁵⁵¹ The first, under the title 'Phrase' reads '*Le cafard est cubiste.*'⁵⁵² It is a neatly absurd and derogatory slogan, issuing an insult to the Cubists. The rejection of Cubism, increasingly seen as outdated, bourgeois, and overly associated with merely formal innovation, became a thread in Dada attitudes. The third issue of *Proverbe*, published a month later in April 1920, would feature several insults to the Cubists, from Picabia, Ribemont-Dessaignes and Cocteau. *Cannibale* no. 2, published in May, also attacked the Cubists, not least via the spoof column 'Cabinet du Docteur Aïsen'. In *Dada Soulève Tout*, launched 15 January 1921, the Dadaists would make a clear effort to distinguish themselves from other movements in the eyes of the public, stating: 'Le cubisme construit une cathédrale en pâté de foie artistique.'⁵⁵³ Similarly, Picabia announces almost two years later in *La Pomme de Pin*: 'Le Cubisme est une cathédrale de merde'⁵⁵⁴ and produces a tract *Plus de Cubisme*, produced to coincide with it.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵¹ For the full journal *Z*, see: <http://sdr.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/collection.htm>

⁵⁵² '*The cockroach is cubist.*'

⁵⁵³ Reprinted in full in: Poupard-Lieussou and Sanouillet, *Documents Dada*, pp. 52-53. 'Cubism is constructing a cathedral out of artistic liver pâté.' Cubism is at the top of a list that includes: 'expressionisme', 'simultanéisme', 'futurisme', 'unanisme', 'néo-classicisme', 'paroxysme', 'ultraïsme' and 'créacionisme' – ('expressionism', 'simultaneism', 'futurism', 'unanism', 'neo-classicism', 'paroxysm', 'ultraism' and 'creationism').

⁵⁵⁴ February 1922. 'Cubism is a cathedral of shit.'

⁵⁵⁵ Reproduced in full in: Poupard-Lieussou and Sanouillet, *Documents Dada*, doc. 48, pp. 80-81. March 1922. Both Arnauld's name and Suzanne Duchamp's name appear on it. In December 1912 Gleizes and Metzinger had published *Du Cubisme*, in which they outlined a vision of art that celebrates the artist as the arbiter of beauty and taste.

Arnauld's phrase ties in with the trajectory of these attacks on 'old' art. It also displays a typically dadaist absurd twist. Instead of calling the Cubist a cockroach, she calls the cockroach a Cubist. Ultimately, the juxtaposition of the artist with the lowliest parasitical insect is insulting. Nonetheless, given this playful slogan-like aspect it cannot be taken too seriously but is an excellent instance of the sort of irreverent provocation that is half affront and half pure humour. Meanwhile, 'cafard' is one of those words that re-appear as motifs in Dada texts. One month later *Cannibale*, for example, includes a poem *Cafard* by Ribemont-Dessaigues, in which he derides the irritating cockroach: 'Il sait plus que je ne sais il n'en est pas à une dimension'.⁵⁵⁶

The next two contributions by Arnauld in *Z* come under the title *Réponse/s* (*Reply/Replies*). These short phrases mimic those sections of journals, which are devoted to readers' comments, and feedback. In this case, however, they are not genuine but the ironic, mocking inventions of the dadaist author herself, who cares little, or at least declares that she cares little, about responses to her work. The first of the two phrases reads 'à P. R. – Le mépris, voilà ma réponse',⁵⁵⁷ and the second contribution: 'La plus basse littérature, c'est la littérature de vengeance. A ceux qui ne sont pas mes amis: "Suivez la foule, troupeau d'imbéciles."⁵⁵⁸ These phrases are typically dadaist – provocative, humorous, witty and self-reflexive. Both heap scorn on their audience. The first addresses a particular detractor and although the identity of 'P. R.' is not made explicit, it is most likely to be Pierre Reverdy, the poet and editor of the journal *Nord-Sud*, with whom Arnauld's husband Dermée had an acrimonious split. The second phrase, on the other hand, apparently expresses a rejection of the use of literature to get back at enemies. Given that the author's first phrase does just that, the second phrase immediately contradicts the first phrase, and vice versa. It effectively throws doubt upon its own integrity and credibility, and refuses to be taken at face value.

⁵⁵⁶ Original in SNGMA. Reproduced in Hugnet, *L'aventure Dada*, p. 201. 'He knows more than me and he's not one dimensional about it.'

⁵⁵⁷ 'to P. R. – Scorn, that's my reply.'

⁵⁵⁸ 'The lowest form of literature is revenge literature. To those who are not my friends: "Follow the crowd, you bunch of imbeciles."'

Arnauld's phrases, both in their mockery of the reader, and self-reflexive irony, echo Dermée's attitude in the opening text to *Z, Qu'est-ce que Dada!*: 'Les dadaïstes connaissent leurs dadas et s'en moquent. C'est la grande supériorité qu'ils ont sur vous.'⁵⁵⁹ Arnauld's interventions demonstrate how she shared in the ideological concerns of the Paris Dadaists, and participated in their literary attacks on convention. Her frequent, explicit use of the term 'Dada', in several examples of her work, make clear her close alignment with the group.⁵⁶⁰

In April 1920, a short text *Dangereux (Dangerous)* appears in Picabia's *Cannibale* no. 1. It reads:

Pour mettre fin à la stupide comédie de ceux qui se croient les défenseurs d'une nation qu'ils empoisonnent avec leur art fait de commérages, j'ai inventé une chanson filmée, une chanson qui tue, une chanson qui étouffe et qui désinfecte les regards en épluchures d'oignon; c'est le dernier film-fusée insecticide, visible au *Cinéma Céline Arnauld*, à Montmartre.⁵⁶¹

It is an explicit rejection of tradition and of those who uphold it. It is also an acknowledgement of the power of the culture industry and establishment, whom she views as the defenders not only of a flawed art, but also, via that poisonous art, as the defenders of the nation. There is anger behind this piece, as well as playfulness and, although it voices no political agenda, it is political in tone. Arnauld's alternative to the stagnant status quo is extraordinarily imaginative. She envisions a filmed song, one that will be destructive, will strangle and kill the present situation. The concept of the prevailing culture as poison is reinforced by her desire to use, metaphorically, disinfectant and insecticide to destroy it. She does not propose modification but total destruction. However, there is still the proposal of a future alternative, this in the form of a 'rocket-film', to be screened at the imaginary Céline Arnauld cinema. It is a distinctive, modern, solid vision, in which new art will sweep away the old.

⁵⁵⁹ 'The Dadaists know their dadas and make fun of them. It's the great superiority they have over you.'

⁵⁶⁰ *Mes trois péchés Dada, Énigme-Personnages and Ombrelle Dada.*

⁵⁶¹ Consulted in SNGMA. 'To put an end to the stupid comedy of those who believe themselves to be the defenders of a nation that they poison with their art, made up of gossip, I've invented a filmed song, a song that kills, a song that strangles and that disinfects gazes into onion peelings; it's the last rocket-film insecticide, screening at the *Céline Arnauld Cinema* in Montmartre.'

In May 1920 the journal *Littérature* printed the ‘Vingt-trois Manifestes du Mouvement Dada’ (‘Twenty-Three Manifestos of the Dada Movement’). These texts were first read on 5 February at the ‘Salon des Indépendants’, the second significant event staged by the Dadaists in Paris, as well as to audiences at the ‘Club du Faubourg’ and the ‘Université Populaire du Faubourg Saint-Antoine’.⁵⁶² Hugnet writes of these *Littérature* manifestos as a whole: ‘Nous connaissons déjà les manifestes de Tzara. Comme ceux-ci, les autres rivalisent d’insolence ou d’absurdité, de lyrisme, de gratuité ou d’humour.’⁵⁶³ One of the twenty-three manifestos was written by Arnauld, who more than likely participated in the infamous readings.

Hugnet relates that the order of publication of the manifestos in *Littérature* no. 13 was both entirely random and appropriately democratic: ‘L’ordre de leur publication a été tiré au sort.’⁵⁶⁴ *Littérature* was one of the most renowned and long-running avant-garde journals in Paris, founded by Aragon, Breton and Soupault in March 1919. During that time, it had featured a range of avant-garde writers, charting the journey through pre-Dada to Dada, and finally it would herald Surrealism. Hugnet appropriately alludes to its key role: ‘Elle procède [...] à une enquête qui pourrait aller loin et tout remettre en question: Pourquoi écrivez-vous?’⁵⁶⁵ The thirteenth issue, appearing after a two-month pause, is situated at a key turning-point in avant-garde literary activity: it is the issue in which the editors fully embraced Dada and orientated themselves and their publication towards it.

In the now fully dadaist *Littérature* Arnauld takes her place alongside eleven other contributors, all men, and all well-known protagonists.⁵⁶⁶ That Arnauld’s name features on the cover is remarkable. That it is mis-spelt (as ‘Arnault’) unfortunately recalls the fate that befell Hannah Höch.⁵⁶⁷ Nevertheless, her manifesto, entitled *Ombrelle Dada (Dada Parasol)* (fig. 32, below), represents an important stage in her

⁵⁶² For a detailed account of these events see: Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, chapter VII.

⁵⁶³ Hugnet, *L’aventure Dada*, p. 93. ‘We are already familiar with Tzara’s manifestos. These others, just like them, vie for insolence or absurdity, lyricism, gratuity or humour.’

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid. ‘The order of publication was selected at random.’

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 84. ‘It carried out [...] a potentially far-reaching enquiry that might throw everything into question: Why do you write?’ On 1 October 1919 the editors, under Breton’s direction, sent a letter to various writers. For full reprint see: Poupard-Lieussou and Sanouillet, *Documents Dada*, p. 27. In the next issue of *Littérature* they published responses.

⁵⁶⁶ They are: Picabia, Aragon, Breton, Tzara, Arp, Eluard, Soupault, Serner, Dermée, Ribemont-Dessaignes, and W.C. Arensberg.

⁵⁶⁷ See chapter 3. Höch’s name was printed as ‘M. Höch’.

contributions and participation. She evidently wrote her text with the rhetoric of a spoken manifesto. It begins by addressing its audience provocatively, anticipating hostility: ‘Vous n’aimez pas mon manifeste? Vous êtes venus ici pleins d’hostilité et vous allez me sifflez avant même de m’entendre?’⁵⁶⁸ It continues throughout to directly address its audience, anticipate responses, and create a ‘dialogue’ by throwing out provocative rhetorical questions such as ‘Êtes-vous contents maintenant?’ (‘Are you happy now?’). It is an especially dramatic text that maintains its provocative power on the page, and that was undoubtedly effective as a performance piece.

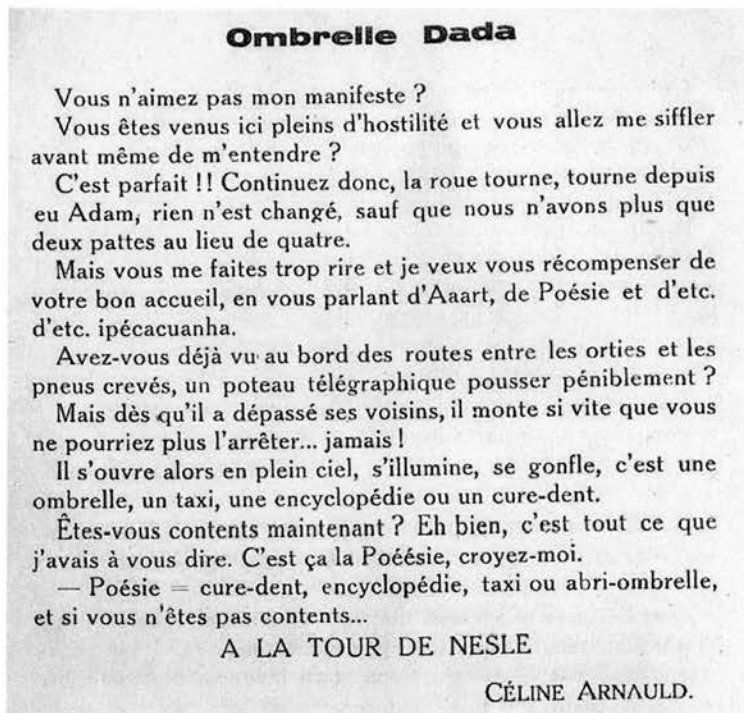


Figure 32: Céline Arnauld, *Ombrelle Dada*⁵⁶⁹

Arnauld’s manifesto displays the absurd and playful characteristics so beloved of the Dadaists. Its very title, *Ombrelle Dada* (*Dada Parasol*), juxtaposes the group’s name with an everyday, banal, object, which creates in turn a fantastical concept. Around halfway through the author asks the audience:

⁵⁶⁸ ‘You don’t like my manifesto? You’ve come here full of hostility and you’re going to whistle before you’ve even heard me?’

⁵⁶⁹ Downloaded from DDA.

Avez-vous déjà vu au bord des routes entre les orties et les pneus crevés, un poteau télégraphique pousser péniblement?
 Mais dès qu'il a dépassé ses voisins, il monte si vite que vous ne pourriez plus l'arrêter... jamais!⁵⁷⁰

This scene might be read as a metaphor for Dada's impact: a new, unexpected and unstoppable force outgrowing its neighbours or peers. The next lines strengthen the concept, with the telegraph pole opening out, lighting up and swelling. The parasol is mentioned again: 'c'est une ombrelle, un taxi, une encyclopédie ou un cure-dent'.⁵⁷¹ These words re-appear just a few lines later, this time in relation to poetry: 'Poésie – cure-dent, encyclopédie, taxi ou abri-ombrelle'. The strange collection of juxtaposed objects is evidently playful on one level, but also delivers a message: that poetry should not be treated too reverently, but should, like Dada, encompass life's banalities and multiplicities.

Arnauld's criticisms of art and poetry, which are implicit throughout her work, are at their most explicit and accessible in this manifesto. She decries stagnation and lack of change in general: 'C'est parfait!! Continuez donc, la roue tourne, tourne depuis eu Adam, rien n'est changé, sauf que nous n'avons plus que deux pattes au lieu de quatre.'⁵⁷² Her deliberately exaggerated sphere of reference renounces with one sweep all of Western Christian civilisation. She then goes on to condemn the Arts more specifically: 'Mais vous me faites trop rire et je veux vous récompenser de votre bon accueil, en vous parlant d'Aart, de Poésie et d'etc. d'etc. ipécacuanha.'⁵⁷³ And towards the end she sums up: 'c'est tout ce que j'avais à vous dire. C'est la Poésie, croyez-moi.'⁵⁷⁴ By playing with the vowel sounds in 'Aart' and 'Poésie', Arnauld ridicules the pretensions and self-importance of art and literature'. It is reminiscent of a statement by Dermée in *Z*: 'Dada est irrité de ceux

⁵⁷⁰ 'Have you ever seen, at the side of the road, between the nettles and the burst tyres, a telegraph pole that seems to be growing? / But as soon as it has overtaken its neighbours, it shoots up so quickly that you can't stop it any more... ever!'

⁵⁷¹ 'it's a parasol, a taxi, an encyclopaedia or a dental cure.'

⁵⁷² 'That's perfect!! Carry on like that, the wheel turns, has been turning since Adam, nothing's changed, except that we've only got two legs instead of four.'

⁵⁷³ 'But you've made me laugh too much and I want to pay you back for your lovely welcome, by talking to you about Aart, and about Poetry and about etc. etc. ipécacuanha.'

⁵⁷⁴ 'Well then, that's all I have to say to you. It's Pooetry, believe me.'

qui écrivent “l’Art” “la Beauté”, “la Vérité” avec des majuscules.’⁵⁷⁵ Dada rather advocates relativism over any totalizing system.

At the very end Arnould throws in this confrontational and initially mystifying statement: ‘Et si vous n’êtes pas contents ... A LA TOUR DE NESLE.’⁵⁷⁶ It is a reference to a historical incident known as the ‘de la tour de Nesle’ scandal. During the last year of Philippe IV le Bel’s reign, in April 1314, the pious and austere king discovered his two daughters-in-law were having adulterous affairs with two knights, the ‘d’Aunay’ brothers. The two men were cruelly and publicly executed, whilst the daughters Marguerite and Blanche were confined and punished. The king was also angry with his wife when he realised she had known about the deception but forgave her and, following her death, is said to have lived out his life in the Tower of Nesle.

‘A la tour’ can mean either ‘to the tower’, or ‘it’s the turn of’, and contrasts with the ‘de la tour’ so familiar in the context of the legend. Presumably, Arnould is accusing her Dada detractors of being self-righteous, conservative and sanctimonious and she condemns them, metaphorically, to the tower. Although the adulterers were condemned in the legend, it is the pious who are condemned in Arnould’s version. Her reference to this legend reflects her fascination with myths and histories. Her interest in the immorality beneath the surface of civilisation, and with unconscious or uncontrolled urges breaking out from order, also becomes a favourite theme of the Surrealists in later years.⁵⁷⁷ Her victims, in this case, are women, condemned because of their sexually liberated behaviour and refusal to submit to their father’s and husbands’ wills.

In Picabia’s *Le Pilhaou-Thibaou*, issued on 10 June 1921, to which she contributes *Envoi du Japon*, Arnould also publishes *Extrait de Saturne (Extract from Saturn)* (fig. 33, below). This text falls somewhere between poetic prose and manifesto. It is less aggressive than *Ombrelle Dada* and requires greater reflection to extract any message, but once again, it comments on the arts. It also philosophises

⁵⁷⁵ ‘Dada is irritated by people who write “Art” “Beauty”, and “Truth” with capital letters.’

⁵⁷⁶ ‘And if you’re not happy... TO THE TOWER OF NESLE.’

⁵⁷⁷ Consider, for example, the photographs of the murderous Papin sisters in *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* from May 1933. Discussed by Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism*, pp. 50-1.

about the power of language. The text begins: ‘Un mot, cela court plus vite qu’un champion de course, on s’en empare et l’on en fait ou une histoire personnelle ou même une oeuvre. Méfiez-vous des voleurs de bribes d’intrigues.’⁵⁷⁸ This first short section at once suggests the positive potential of language as well as warns against its misuse.

The second section describes a forest fair. Its characters include a thief, loyal man, rich man, poor man, and merchant, whose fate is described as follows: ‘Le marchand se drape dans ses tapis et ses couvertures et devient le roi.’⁵⁷⁹ The text implies that, even at a ‘careless and gay’ fun fair, social restrictions are in force and individuals must act out certain roles.



Figure 33: Céline Arnauld, *Extrait de Saturne*⁵⁸⁰

In the third section, Arnauld outlines how poetry, in contrast, might engender freedom: ‘La poésie ne pense pas au lendemain; elle n’aime pas les gros habits de bourgeois; elle est en maillot, elle est transparente. C’est plutôt un papillon – Mais il

⁵⁷⁸ ‘One word runs more quickly than a running champion, you grab hold of it and make it into a personal story or even a whole piece of work. Watch out for thieves of intrigue bribes.’

⁵⁷⁹ ‘The merchant drapes himself in his carpets and becomes the king.’

⁵⁸⁰ Downloaded from DDA.

y a des amateurs qui lui piquent une épingle dans le corps.’⁵⁸¹ She continues by using a metaphor for poetry that evokes speed and movement once again: ‘Vous prenez la poésie pour un match de boxe ... c’est plutôt une course de chevaux, une course cycliste et même une course a pied.’⁵⁸²

Finally, Arnauld launches the sort of attack we saw in *Ombrelle Dada*. If bad (or conventional) poets are anathema to Dada and liberated language, then silence and passive acceptance is even worse: ‘Ce silence de bourreau sur vos figures nous fait honte. Quelle accumulation de haine, de rancune et de méchanceté derrière ce calme!’⁵⁸³ Arnauld would prefer to see free expression at any event: ‘Croyez-moi, vomissez tout cela en paroles mauvaises, écrivez-le, criez-le devant tout le monde et vous serez soulagés. On a besoin de purger son esprit comme son corps. On peut tout dire dans la colère et garder le coeur pur.’⁵⁸⁴ Throughout the manifesto, there is a strong sense of opposition between freedom and constraint, integrity and contrivance. Finally she warns those who criticise: “‘Connais-toi toi-même” c’est-à-dire: “Savonne-toi toi-même avant de savonner les autres”.’⁵⁸⁵ These statements represent remarkable criticisms of the status quo, as well as a resistance to bowing to others’ opinions. Arnauld’s texts, considered more or less chronologically here, display a trend towards manifesto-style texts. This might reflect the general direction taken by Dada as, firstly, it established itself in Paris and, subsequently, it broke into factions, resulting in a series of opposing and often incendiary publications. It might also be a sign of Arnauld’s growing confidence, or even influence.

5.5 Arnauld as editor: project *Projecteur*

Arnauld’s contributions to journals were prolific and passionate. Conceived of as collective endeavours, these valuable remnants of avant-garde history encompass a

⁵⁸¹ ‘Poetry doesn’t think about tomorrow; it doesn’t like gross bourgeois habits; it’s in a bathing costume, it’s transparent. It’s more like a butterfly – but there are amateurs who stick a pin in its body.’

⁵⁸² ‘You take poetry for a boxing match ... it’s more a horse race, a cycle race and even a running race.’

⁵⁸³ ‘This executioner’s silence on your faces shames us. What an accumulation of hatred, of rancour and of evil behind that calm!’

⁵⁸⁴ ‘Believe me, vomit all that up in bad words, write it, shout it in front of everybody and you’ll be relieved. One needs to purge one’s mind like one’s body. One can say anything in anger and keep the heart pure.’

⁵⁸⁵ ‘“Know yourself” that is to say: “Soap yourself before soaping others”.’

variety of content, styles, and presentation by a diversity of authors. Every one of the five women considered in this study contributed in some way to at least one Dada journal, with either images, texts and/or signatures. Every one was a collaborator in Dada's published output. But did any of the women actually have the opportunity, or even the desire, to lead or edit these journals? Hennings played a major part in the 'Cabaret Voltaire' performances, and undoubtedly had some input into the first publication, though we cannot be sure how much. Taeuber went on, post-Dada, to edit her own journal *Plastique*. Höch was a steady participant, but apparently struggled to penetrate the Berlin Dada club. And Suzanne Duchamp formed an offshoot of Dada with *Tabu*. It seems that none of them lacked ambition, and Arnauld was no exception.

In Paris, Dada journal activity hit its peak, the proliferation of journals culminating in a series of rival publications issued by Tzara and Picabia. Prior to this segmentation, Arnauld took the opportunity, uniquely as a woman, to publish and edit her own Dada journal. On 21 May 1920 *Projecteur* (*Projector*) appeared. She evidently intended future editions, since the front page advertises subscription to twelve editions for ten francs, but only one issue was ever published. Such ephemeral publications were not untypical amongst avant-garde writers. Two months prior to *Projecteur*, for example, Dermée's *Z* only ran for one issue, and even Picabia's celebrated *Cannibale* only ran for two, in April and May.⁵⁸⁶

Projecteur was not the only journal, or at least title, that Arnauld had planned, but it was the only one to reach print. During the first few months of 1920, Tzara had printed a letterhead (fig. 34, below). With 'Mouvement Dada' across the top, and the cities Berlin, Geneva, Madrid, New York, Zurich and Paris, it offered 'consultations' for ten francs. Eight to ten thousand copies were printed, distributed by Tzara to friends and colleagues for their use. On the left-hand side, seven journals and their editors are listed. Included alongside titles such as *Dada*, *Proverbe*, *Littérature* and *391* is 'M'AMENEZ'Y. Directeur: Céline Arnauld.' The title is also listed on a flyer for *Littérature*, distributed just a few weeks after Tzara and Breton

⁵⁸⁶ *Z*: March 1920. *Cannibale* no. 1, 25 April 1920, *Cannibale* no. 2, 25 May 1920. Of course Picabia was more prolific in terms of journals, rather choosing to begin new names to maintain change.

began collaborating (in around January 1920),⁵⁸⁷ and was advertised as part of a list of forthcoming reviews in *DADaphone*, from March 1920. The latter instance can be seen in figure 27 (section 5.2, above), next to Arnauld’s poem *Énigme-Personnages*.



Figure 34: Letterhead for ‘Mouvement Dada’ (1920)⁵⁸⁸

‘M’amenez-y’ is a typically dadaist phrase. Firstly, it plays with language and esoteric meaning. The nearest grammatically correct phrase to it would be ‘Amenez-moi’ (‘take me’), but it is refigured. The sound of the phrase calls to mind ‘amnésie’ (‘amnesia’) and the ‘M’ also sounds like ‘aime’ (‘like’).⁵⁸⁹ Secondly, it is used and re-used by several Dadaists. Picabia used the phrase in an oil painting on cardboard *M’Amenez’y* (*Take me There*) (1919-1920), as a slogan in *Le Double Monde* (*The Double World*), a painting first displayed at the Dada matinee of 23 January 1920, and in the 1920 poem *Le rat circulaire* (*The Circular Rat*).⁵⁹⁰ It also

⁵⁸⁷ For reprint see: Poupard-Lieussou and Sanouillet, *Documents Dada*, p. 29.

⁵⁸⁸ Reprint included in: *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵⁸⁹ I am grateful to Karine Mue-Gaspais (a linguist but non-Dadaist) for her readings of the phrase.

⁵⁹⁰ Published in *Proverbe* no. 1, Paris, 1 February 1920. In SNGMA.

features in a text by Marcel Duchamp, written as Rose Sélavy.⁵⁹¹ Arnauld's planned adoption of this 'ready-made verbal' puts her right at the heart of dadaist interplay.⁵⁹²

Dermée discusses Arnauld's planned adoption of the title 'M'Amenez'y', and another, 'Ipéca', in a letter to Tzara. His words suggest there was some question about Arnauld's first choice. He writes:

Il est inutile de changer "M'Amenez'y" jusque c'est déjà sur les prospectus de "Littérature". C'est que Céline Arnauld avait trouvé un bien beau titre: "Ipéca" ou "I.P.K". vomitif extrêmement puissant! Ce sera pour une autre publication ou forme de pamphlet.⁵⁹³

Like 'M'Amenez'y', the word 'Ipéca' had also appeared in more than one text. It featured in a poem, *ZA*, by Ribemont-Dessaignes, in *Z* (March 1920),⁵⁹⁴ and the unabbreviated form 'ipécacuanha' featured in Arnauld's manifesto *Ombrelle Dada*, published (*Littérature* no. 13, May 1920). The word translates as 'ipécacuanha' (or 'ipecac' in American English). It refers to a medicinal preparation made from a low-growing tropical American shrub of the same name and is used, as Dermée indicates, to induce vomiting, for example in patients who have suffered poisoning or drug overdose. Arnauld presumably chooses the word firstly for its strange sound and appearance, which she renders as 'I.P.K', and secondly for its connotations. It suggests an extremely radical, purging agent.

In the end, neither 'M'Amenez'y' nor 'Ipéca' was used, but instead *Projecteur*. This final, published journal includes a reference to Arnauld's initial choices. In his contribution, the text *Signalement (Particulars)*, Dermée lists a few humorous lines on each writer. Of this journal's editor he writes: 'Céline Arnauld a déjà tué deux revues: "M'Amenez'y" et "Ipéca" aujourd'hui introuvables. N'insistez

⁵⁹¹ From: *Rose Sélavy: Oculisme de précision, poils et coups de pied en tous genres*. (*Precision Oculism, Complete Line of Whiskers and Kicks*.) [Collection of puns published in 1939]. Seen in: Hugnet, *L'aventure Dada*, p. 162.

⁵⁹² For discussion of the term with reference to Picabia, see: Drijkoningen, 'Un tableau-manifeste de Picabia: Le double monde.' In Beekman and von Graevenitz, *Marcel Duchamp*, pp. 97-112. He uses the term 'ready-made verbal.'

⁵⁹³ Letter dated 1920, in BLJD. Also quoted by Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, p. 227, footnote. 43. 'There is no point changing "M'Amenez'y" since it's already on the prospectus for "Littérature". The point is Céline Arnauld had found a really great title: "Ipéca" ou "I.P.K". an extremely powerful vomiting agent! This can be used for another publication or some type of pamphlet.'

⁵⁹⁴ 'Coffre-fort à mot ipéca' ('ipecac word safebox').

pas M. Doucet ... introuvable, introuvable.⁵⁹⁵ The extract is noteworthy for its self-referentiality, as well as its refusal – and presumably its editor’s, who prints it after all – to take publication and prestige too seriously.

Projecteur includes contributions by many of the key Dada writers at that time: Breton, Dermée, Renée Dunan, Eluard, Picabia, Ribemont-Dessaignes, Soupault and Tzara, with Arnauld herself contributing two poems, *Luna Park* (*Luna Park*) and *Les Ronge-Bois* (*The Wood-Gnawers*). She introduces the review with a front-page text entitled *Prospectus Projecteur* (fig. 35 below). The text reads like a manifesto, but Arnauld chooses the word ‘prospectus’ because it specifically outlines and introduces this particular journal.



Figure 35: Front page of *Projecteur* (May 1920)⁵⁹⁶

The opening line, ‘*Projecteur est une lanterne pour aveugles*’, both sums up the tone and attitude of this short text, and is characteristic of Dada, with its forthright statement, immediate provocation, and humorous edge.⁵⁹⁷ Aiming itself at ‘aveugles’, an unseeing, ignorant or uncritical populace, it effectively scorns its own readership. This message is continued yet more sharply: ‘il inonde de soleil ceux qui vivent dans le froid, dans l’obscurité et dans l’ennui.’⁵⁹⁸ The metaphors, clichés even,

⁵⁹⁵ ‘Céline Arnauld has already killed off two reviews: “M’Amenez’y” and “Ipéca” are nowhere to be found today. Don’t go on Mr. Doucet ... whereabouts unknown, whereabouts unknown.’

⁵⁹⁶ Downloaded from DDA.

⁵⁹⁷ ‘*Projecteur* is a lantern for the blind.’

⁵⁹⁸ ‘It bathes in sunshine those people who live in the cold, in darkness and in ennui.’

of coldness and darkness are pinned down to ‘ennui’ – boredom, lethargy or apathy. The claim ‘*Projecteur se moque de tout: argent, gloire et réclame*’ is equally direct and critical on a socio-political level.⁵⁹⁹

At the same time the text’s grandiose claims to offer to shed light are evidently self-mocking in the way that so many of Dada’s extravagant proclamations are. If there is any doubt as to a humorous edge to Arnauld’s prospectus, it is dissolved by the final phrase: ‘D’ailleurs, la lumière est aussi produite par une pullulation madréporique dans les espaces célestes.’⁶⁰⁰ It is heavily ironic, not least since it begins this excessive concept with ‘d’ailleurs’, as if it were merely an aside. It invites the reader not to take anything too seriously, confounding him/her with obscure words, juxtaposed to create an ungraspable image. Most importantly, Arnauld revels here in the appearance and sounds of words: ‘produite par une pullulation madréporique’, for example, is driven by alliteration.

The content of *Projecteur* is made up of a mix of poems, short prose texts and odd phrases. There are five prose texts, each invoking an absurd scene: *Julot* by Eluard, *L’un pour l’autre* (*One for the other*) and *Philosophie de l’Histoire* (*Philosophy on History*) by Dermée, *Parfums d’Orsay* by Breton, and *Hyper Dada*, by Renée Dunan. The poems are *Handicap* by Picabia, *Le Cierge et la Vierge* (*The Candle and the Virgin*) by Tzara, *Les Méditations du Saladier* (*Salad Bowl Meditations*) by Dunan, *Salutations Distinguées* (*Coridal Greetings*) by Soupault, *Pneumatique* (*Pneumatic*) by Ribemont-Dessaignes, and Arnauld’s own poems *Luna Park* and *Les Ronge-Bois* (*The Wood-Gnawers*). Additionally, there is a dialogue, *Café Crème* by Aragon, the text *Signalement* (*Particulars*) by Dermée (referred to above) and finally short notes and phrases at various points. The latter are likely to have been written by Arnauld. Like the *Réponses* in *Z*, they are short phrases, addressed directly to the reader. The first, labelled ‘N.D.L.R.’ (‘Note de la Rédaction’ or ‘Editor’s Note’), reads ‘*Projecteur* n’insère aucune rectification, aucun droit de réponse, aucune publicité!’ – another rejection of its readership and proclamation of an independent attitude. The second states, ‘*Les Marges* feignent de croire que le

⁵⁹⁹ ‘*Projecteur* mocks everything: money, glory and advertising.’

⁶⁰⁰ ‘The light, moreover, is also produced by a madreporian proliferation in heavenly spaces.’

Dadaïsme est un produit d'inculture. Hélas, hélas si les citrouilles murissaient sur les chênes!⁶⁰¹

There can be no doubt about the dadaist affiliation of Arnauld's journal. The final text she includes is *Hyper Dada*, by a fellow woman writer Renée Dunan.⁶⁰² In it, Dunan attacks logic and rationality, and advocates free, unlimited thought over routine and regulation. She writes: 'Dada ouvre enfin le palais fastueux où l'âme pourra se baigner dans la totalité de ce qui vit.'⁶⁰³ In the main, this particular text is straightforward and serious, relative to many Dada proclamations, but reveals the impetus behind so many dadaist manifestations: a break with past traditions, a rejection of individual artistic introvertedness, and a desire for boundless expression. Dunan's use of metaphors of air and water, 'Le monde est un milieu mental, analogue à l'eau ou à l'air, illimité et impersonnel (au sens circulaire) et formé de toutes les idées possibles',⁶⁰⁴ reminds us of Arnauld's recourse to nature, especially birds, flight and light. Both women's approaches might also be read in terms of gender. Nature is commonly personified as female, with associations of fecundity and instinct, and is set in contrast to patriarchal systems. Later, feminist literary theories enable new ways of thinking about such practices. For example, Hélène Cixous, in *La Jeune Née (The Newly-Born Woman)*, draws attention to the ways oppositions are set up between 'Nature' (as female) and 'History', 'Art' and 'Mind' (as male).⁶⁰⁵ Her concept of 'écriture féminine' offers a particularly rich frame of reference for Arnauld's work. Cixous emphasises women's writing as flow and drift; as plural, chaotic, spontaneous, endless and without closure; as tactile, passing through the ear, drawing on the symbolic and archaic; and against the constraints of reason and logic. All are characteristic of Arnauld's

⁶⁰¹ 'Projecteur will include no rectifications, no right to reply, no advertising!' And: '*Les Marges* pretends to believe that Dadaism is a product of a lack of cultivation. Alas, alas if nuts were to be ripening on oak trees!'. Note: 'citrouilles' means 'pumpkin' literally, and is also used humorously for 'nut' (as in 'head').

⁶⁰² Dunan went on to write some fifty novels, the most famous of which is the erotic story *Les Caprices du sexe ou Les Audaces érotiques de mademoiselle Louise de B*, published under the name Maurice Duflou in 1928, but since attributed to her.

⁶⁰³ 'Dada finally opens the sumptuous palace where the soul will be able to bathe in the totality of what is alive.'

⁶⁰⁴ 'The world is a mental environment, analogous to water or to the air, unlimited and impersonal (in the circular sense) and formed out of all the ideas that are possible.'

⁶⁰⁵ Cixous, *La Jeune Née*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975.

writing. In the broader context, Susan Rubin Suleiman has, indeed, noted the applicability of the term *écriture féminine* to avant-garde writing: 'H.C. reinvents [...], in describing the process of a free-flowing writing that she associates with femininity, some of the vocabulary of early Surrealism. [...] Cagey H.C., to rewrite the avant-garde by feminizing it!'⁶⁰⁶

To end this section, I will return to Arnauld's journal, *Projecteur*, drawing one last point from its final pages, in order to clarify the close relationship between Arnauld's production and Dada. The publication ends with the programme for the (then) forthcoming Festival Dada, to take place on 26 May, just five days later, at the 'Salle Gaveau'. This event was one of only a handful of major events staged by the Paris Dadaists. Its advertisement in *Projecteur* brings home the fact that Arnauld's journal sits, chronologically, at the most intense and fertile point of Dada's manifestation in Paris.

5.6 In transition: from Dada to Surrealism

As disagreements between Picabia and Tzara / Breton, and then between Tzara and Breton intensified, individuals had little choice but to ally themselves with one or other faction. Arnauld was no exception. In July 1921, as discussed, she contributed to Picabia's publication *Le Pilhaou-Thibaou*, a demonstration of his break with both Tzara and Breton. On 25 February 1922, she attended a meeting held at the 'Closierie des Lilas', arranged by Gleizes, to sign the resolution against the Congrès, backing Tzara in the face of Breton's attack on him, along with many other Dadaists.⁶⁰⁷ In 1924, she contributed a text *Faux Managers (False Managers)* to an anti-Breton pamphlet published by Dermée called *Le Mouvement Accéléré (The Accelerated Movement)*. In it, she attacks Breton and his conception of Surrealism, accusing him of megalomania, a negligence of his precursors and a restrictive, exclusive approach

⁶⁰⁶ Introductory essay, 'Writing Past the Wall'. In: Cixous, *Coming to Writing' and Other Essays*, p. x. For a recent critical overview of Cixous's work, see: Abigail Bray, *Hélène Cixous: Writing and Sexual Difference*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

⁶⁰⁷ The Resolution is reproduced in: Hugnet, *L'aventure Dada*, p. 111. For a detailed account see Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris*, p. 168.

to poetry.⁶⁰⁸ She even announces her own manifesto, on *Projectivisme* (*Projectivism*).⁶⁰⁹

Arnauld's body of work sits at the intersection between Dada and Surrealism. In its extraordinary versatility, it displays a number of interesting aspects that relate to each movement. At its core is a focus on free experimentation with language as material, and a challenge to the prevalence of linearity, rationality and logic. This challenge is directed, on the one hand, at the arts. Arnauld's prose pieces and manifestos make explicit attacks on outdated aesthetic conventions. These attacks also take place in a wider context. Arnauld advocates a liberation of language, and so thought, from strict convention and limitations. Her challenge to language may also be seen as an attack on the social consensus and hierarchies that it upholds. In the introduction to his anthology of Dada poetry Bohn writes:

Dada's one overriding concern was the achievement of total liberty: social, moral and intellectual. In this vein, its adherents questioned the basic postulates of rationalism and humanism as few had done before. Taking as their watchword Tzara's declaration "Thought is made in your mouth," they strove to liberate language and poetry in particular.⁶¹⁰

This key dadaist concern is always evident implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, in Arnauld's work. It bridges Dada and Surrealism in other ways too. She plumbs fantasy and the unconscious, for example, and so anticipates concepts and approaches that would be explored more programmatically by Surrealism. Her apparently unfettered use of language, in some examples, ties in with the famous automatic writing techniques developed by Breton and Soupault. In addition, we might make cross-disciplinary comparisons with the painter Leonora Carrington, who foregrounds and subverts the codes of mythology and fantasy in her images.

⁶⁰⁸ *Le Mouvement Accéléré*, Nov 1924. Consulted in BLJD. Other contributors included: Erik Satie, Picabia, Ivan Goll, René Crevel, Francois Kupka, Vincente Huidobro and Ribemont-Dessaignes.

⁶⁰⁹ She briefly outlines her concept of 'Projectivisme' in her foreword 'Avertissement aux lecteurs' ('Warning to readers') in the publication: *L'Apaisement de l'Eclipse, Passion en deux actes. Précédé de Diorama, confession lyrique*. Paris: Ecrivains Réunis, 1925.

⁶¹⁰ Bohn, *The Dada Market*, p. xvii. Tzara quote, in translation, from: Tristan Tzara, 'Dada manifeste sur l'amour faible et l'amour amer,' in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Béhar. Paris: Flammarion, 1975, 1: 379.

In view of Arnauld's highly experimental work and participation, Clayton Eshelman's judgements, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, appear all the more ridiculous. It seems Arnauld rattled the chains of her background and tradition long before he 'resurrected' her gospel. In fact, she played some considerable part in loosening those shackles herself. Arnauld has suffered from obscurity more than any other woman in this study, and a great deal of work remains to be done in order to uncover more details about her life and work. According to several biographical notes and sources, she committed suicide the day after Dermée's death in 1952. However, at the time of writing, the 'Bibliothèque Nationale de France' does not list any date of death. The circumstances of her birth are equally mysterious. Different sources list her place of birth as Nice or even as Romania.⁶¹¹ Her year of birth is variously listed most often as 1893 or 1895, and sometimes as early as 1885.⁶¹² Her name has been spelled 'Celine Arnauld' (by Eshelman), 'Céline Arnauld' (in *Littérature* no.13), and 'Céline Arnaud' (by John D. Erickson).⁶¹³ Finally, it is possible that her real name may not even have been Céline Arnauld but Carolina Goldstein.⁶¹⁴ This absence of biography is at once frustrating – further research is imperative – and liberating: such scant details can scarcely overshadow readings of her work – but invites further research. For now, her identity remains unclear, and her name a shifting sign, but her work provides ample confirmation of her claim to have been a productive contributor in the story of Dada.

⁶¹¹ The 'Bibliothèque Nationale de France' assigns her French nationality but no place of birth; Bohn, in *The Dada Market*, gives no nationality or place of birth; the 'University of Iowa Dada archive' gives Nice as place of birth; S. Dreher and M. Rolli, eds, *Bibliographie de la littérature française 1940-1949* and J. Rousselet, *Dictionnaire de la poésie française contemporaine: Volume 136* give Romania as place of birth.

⁶¹² 1893 is listed by the 'Bibliothèque Nationale de France'; Bohn, in *The Dada Market*; the 'University of Iowa Dada archive', and Christine P. Maxward and Madeleine Cottenot-Hage, *Dictionnaire littéraire des femmes de langue française*. 1895 is listed by S. Dreher and M. Rolli, eds, *Bibliographie de la littérature française 1940-1949*, and J. Rousselet, *Dictionnaire de la poésie française contemporaine: Volume 136*. 1885 is given by Michel Sanouillet and Dominique Baudouin, eds, *Dada: Réimpression intégrale et dossier critique de la revue publiée de 1917 à 1922 par Tristan Tzara*. [Tome II. Dossier Critique]. Nice: Centre du XXe siècle, 1983, p. 121.

⁶¹³ Erickson, *Performance, Poetry, and Art*, p. 57, p. 62 and index. On p. 60 he spells it Arnauld.

⁶¹⁴ Sanouillet and Baudouin, *Dada*, p. 121.

Conclusion

Dada's Women

In the letter quoted in the introduction to this study, in which Céline Arnould reproached Tzara for omitting her from his Dada accounts, she nevertheless sanguinely wrote: 'mes livres sont là, et ils ne manqueront pas de se défendre eux-mêmes, par leur propre force, par leur lyrisme nouveau.'⁶¹⁵ Unfortunately, Arnould's belief proved to be at best optimistic and at worst naïve, and did not reckon with a continued tradition of exclusion. Still, it is an apt reminder of the ambitions and resilience of those women who chose to intervene in Dada, and a further impetus, if any were needed, to pay heed to those qualities and their resulting achievements, by giving a fuller account of their work.

We have seen that women did intervene in Dada, but that their status was uneasy. Ultimately, it is disappointing that this movement's radical political approach, sometimes explicit but always implicit, did not extend to any significant appraisal, or understanding, of women's issues. In part, this is down to the socio-historical context – it is perhaps unfair, after all, to expect a sophisticated gender-consciousness from Dada's men in the early decades of the century. In part, it may be a result, in fact, of Dada's very freedom of restriction. Its eschewal of any specific programmatic agenda also, arguably, meant that it stopped short of any real engagement with principles of inclusiveness and equality. In order to attack conventions, such as patriarchal traditions, there must first be understanding and recognition of how they operate and persist. Whilst there is evidence of elements of

⁶¹⁵ Paris, 24 October 1924. Tristan Tzara archives, BLJD. 'My books are there and they will not fail to defend themselves, through their own strength, through their new lyricism.'

such consciousness within Dada, they remained in the background, articulated theoretically, rather than pragmatically. By the time the Dadaists wrote their memoirs – most were written in the 1950s and 1960s – the socio-political and cultural context had changed substantially, but still not enough to inspire a positive commitment to include Dada's women. Memoirs have played an important role in setting perceptions of Dada, and the absence of women in these histories has been to the detriment of not only women artists and writers, but also of Dada as a complex, heterogeneous and diverse movement.

More recent critical studies, which have taken up the stories of individual women involved in Dada, have still tended to distance the artist from her role in the movement. This bears witness to misconceptions, or at least fixed conceptions, of Dada, which fail to embrace its different aspects. Where some critics have sought to illustrate that the women were aesthetic, 'unlike Dada', others, not least scholars with a feminist approach, have sought more acceptable, more politically and socially constructive aspects to the women's work: again 'unlike Dada'. In each case, little justice is done either to Dada, or to the women artists, whose histories do not always conform to certain ideologies. With the benefit of a large body of scholarly research into Dada, compounded by an awareness of developments in contemporary arts almost a century after its appearance, Dada's innovations and the impact of these innovations are clearer.

Close examination of the work of these five women has been valuable in terms of heightening awareness of each individual's work. Additionally, it has augmented our understanding of the practices of the Dada movement in Zurich, Paris and Berlin. By considering the work of five women together, it has been possible to offer examples of engagement across three geographical centres and across a wide range of art forms. Each woman's work displays many of the formal preoccupations and techniques that we associate with Dada and with the historical avant-garde more broadly, entrenching the women firmly within that particular environment. Key issues include the rejection of mimesis and narrative, the thematisation of the role of the artist or writer, exploration of the material qualities of the medium, the recognition of the impact of technology and its appropriation into art, the transgression of boundaries between art forms, the use of performance, the use of

collaborative working, and experimentation with language. Between them, the women in this study have contributed to every one of these key areas. Their work demonstrates how they were as concerned as their male counterparts with areas such as the impact of technology and the material basis of art, aspects that are often considered male domains. Thus, we see examples of machine imagery, photomontage and geometric painting. At the same time as enriching our ideas about core Dada concerns and manifestations, the particular approach of each of these artists brings to light individual differences, highlighting new treatments of similar themes and techniques, and thus augmenting our body of knowledge about Dada and, in particular, its heterogeneity.

Additionally, examining women Dadaists' work has offered fertile ground for considerations about gender and art more broadly. Their fate in accounts of the movement has been paradigmatic of the fate of women artists and writers excluded from histories of art and literature. A close look at Dada has revealed that such exclusions are not confined only to the canon or mainstream but also to the avant-garde. Even on the so-called social, cultural or aesthetic margins there will be yet more margins. Even where art and literature are called upon to extend their materials, some materials chosen by women (handicrafts for example) or art forms (dance) are considered less appropriate or trivial; even where the notion of the author or artist as personality is rejected, women's lives are analysed more than their work; and even where in those cases where mimetic realism is rejected in favour of interior or fragmented experiences of life, women's concerns are labelled 'personal' or 'intimate' as compared with some elusive male standard.

In the following key points, I draw conclusions based on the conviction that dadaist women and men shared similar key preoccupations, but that manifestations of these preoccupations differ from individual to individual, and – in addition – that they are inevitably fed in interesting ways by gender and by the different social and cultural experiences that gender entails. The issues that I draw out in this respect are not removed from avant-garde techniques, but are essentially rooted in shared innovations, distinguished by a particular female twist. Whilst I do not propose a conscious feminist stance or aspect to these women's work, I propose that there are a

number of specific aspects that anticipate later, more cognisant, explicitly feminist approaches to the arts.

Diffused bodies: artworks and artists

An underlying issue that has emerged during the course of this study, and that provides one pathway through this diverse selection of Dada themes, women Dadaists, and gender issues, is that of the body. The work of each of these five Dadaists engages at some point with questions around the body – as subject or object, as artist, as the site of expression, representation, or resistance, and around which questions of agency, passivity, identity, threats, gender, sexuality, politics and technology revolve. Here, feminist and postmodern theories prove useful in raising consciousness about different aspects of the work, enhancing our understanding of the avant-garde, and revealing connections between the work of the historical avant-garde and later developments in the arts. In each case, I will start with describing the shared innovations, followed by the gender-connected aspect I seek to highlight.

The most obvious point of departure in this line of thinking is performance, in which the literal use of the body is evident. It is also an appropriate point at which to begin, since the form is too often confined to an afterthought or footnote in accounts of avant-garde movements. Dada began in a performance venue, the Dadaists taking their endeavours from the page to the stage, no longer concealed as hierarchically removed artists but instead implicating themselves in an immediate communication process with the reader/viewer. Theatre and popular performance were arenas in which women frequently participated during the early decades of the century, but in which opportunities to direct or produce were scarcer. Emmy Hennings's career illustrates this most prominently, but through the 'Cabaret Voltaire' at least, her opportunities to innovate broadened. For Hennings, her body was her material: both her means of acceptance and survival, and her site of rebellion. Her physical presence in front of an audience, in the forum she helped to establish, was a major facet of Dada's materialization in Zurich. Her body strongly shaped her identity, sexuality and work. She also provided a female voice in the cabaret, the experience of which is obviously lost to us now, but which constituted an actual, material component of the cabaret soirées. Additionally, she placed herself as a subject at the

core of her own poetry, which centres on her physical and emotional existence in the world, and the threats she perceives from her environment, the results also lending themselves to performance, unmediated by the page.

Sophie Taeuber, conversely, conceals her body in Dada dances. With the aid of costumes and masks, the contours of the human body are disguised, the figure geometrised and personal, individual expression assigned a lesser role. Instead, the body is used as sign to represent areas beyond the single figure. It is shown in various guises: as primitive or as machine, as threat or under threat, as agent or pawn. The physical body is put into the service of aesthetic experimentations that involve language, music and movement. Artists appear and perform as bodies; they are not removed from view. These performance activities challenge dialectical divisions between the intellectual and physical, mind and body, and poetry and performance. In the cases of both Hennings and Taeuber, different though they are, the body as the artist's tool or material anticipates later modern and postmodern performance where the body becomes the artwork, and the performance space the artwork event.

In literature, Dada questions language as the body's communication tool: here, Céline Arnould is key. In Zurich, the Dadaists sought to break down the conventions of language, and to throw into relief its arbitrariness and untrustworthiness. Sound and simultaneous poetry exemplify their approach. In Paris, Arnould and other poets aimed, too, at a liberation of written expression from governing norms. The deconstruction of language was a vital issue, since language structures social, political and human relationships, and thus maintains hegemony. After the Dada years, literary theory takes more explicit leaps with respect to language, as does feminist theory. Scholars within the latter argue that the restrictions of language are a particular issue for women, who do not share the communication norms of the dominant patriarchal modes of discourse.⁶¹⁶ It can be argued that the non-linearity and anti-rationality of Dada with respect to language held a particular appeal for women who, prior to consciousness-raising and theorising by feminists, questioned how to engage with man-made language systems

⁶¹⁶ See, for example: Kaplan, 'Language and Gender', and Spender, 'Extracts from "Man Made Language"'. In: Cameron, *The Feminist Critique of Language*.

(spoken and/or written) that ultimately fail to allow for one's own expression but that instead circumscribe it. As briefly discussed in the chapter on Arnauld, the concept of 'écriture féminine', too, has intensified theoretical questions around gender and literary creativity. Abigail Bray's recent overview of Cixous considers the strengths and weaknesses of the notion. One criticism, she notes, has been that 'Cixous's celebration of what she argues is a specifically feminine style of writing is largely derived from male avant-garde writers.'⁶¹⁷ Increased visibility for less well-known women's avant-garde writing, such as that by Arnauld, surely has the potential to revitalise the debate about whether, and to what extent, gender informs modes and techniques of writing.

In the fine arts, the rejection of mimesis or narrative was a key issue. Avant-garde artists across art forms challenged the insistence on semantic content and abandoned the naturalistic. Instead of producing figurative portrayals of the external world, artists and writers aimed for new ways of depicting multiple views of the world and of experience. Fragmentation as opposed to coherence was the motif. This freedom from restrictions was undoubtedly part of the avant-garde's appeal for women artists who, historically, had been expected to deal with delimited, 'appropriate' subject matter, and who had different perspectives, views and visions to offer. Greater freedom from realistic representation is especially pertinent for women, since the woman's body is so often the subject matter in the fine arts, with the traditional gaze directed at the female form. The loosening of expectations with regard to subject matter, then, and of the means of representing it, draws attention away from the objectification of figures, especially the female figure, and offers liberation from the restriction to represent bodies in a certain way.

Hannah Höch explores subverted and fragmented bodies, especially female bodies, the subjects in her photomontage work offering multi-faceted representations encompassing contrary impulses of modernity, including participation and passivity, pleasure and fear. In a prescient step, she tackles issues of race as well as gender in her photomontage series *Aus einem ethnographischen Museum (From an Ethnographic Museum)*. Suzanne Duchamp replaces the human body with machine imagery, and thematises representation of the female (and male) subject/object. Her

⁶¹⁷ Bray, *Hélène Cixous: Writing and Sexual Difference*, p. 32.

use of technology and mechanomorphic forms makes connections between the human body and machinery and explores sexuality and threats against the body. Her combinations of word and image, and interest in sound and music, pre-dates structuralism, which theorises how different sign systems codify and shape our understanding of the world. Sophie Taeuber abandons the body altogether, in favour of an even more gender-anonymous approach that explores geometric patterns and attempts to break aesthetic expression down into the simplest forms. Where pioneering women Impressionists had responded to the focus on the fleeting moment to thematise domestic scenes, itself enormously useful in drawing attention to female experience, the dadaist women responded to, and drove, an even greater loosening of content in suitably diverse ways. Be it the fragmentation of the body, the challenge to conventional forms of representation, or the removal of the (unstable) figure altogether, these radical gestures constituted attempts to find new means of expression.

With the freedom from narrative, came the freedom from delimited materials. The focus shifts from the story to what is used to tell the story. Overturning expectations about the suitability of materials for art, Dada sought new ways and means of creative expression, questioning the very tools and processes that go into creating a piece of artwork (be it fine art, a text or a performance), and exploring new combinations that transgress categories. In literature, words were broken down to their most basic elements and re-assembled freely. In fine art, the processes of collage and assemblage brought everyday materials into the frame. Works by Taeuber, Höch and Duchamp are exemplary in their use of a variety of materials and techniques to create forms encompassing painting, tapestry, collage, photomontage, sculpture and assemblage. Of particular interest to any examination of developments in women's art over the last century is their use, and subversion, of traditionally female materials. Höch's use of sewing patterns and Taeuber's use of tapestry are key examples here.

Most striking of all is the fact that three of these five artists made either dolls or puppets during their period of involvement with Dada. Hennings and Höch both fabricated dolls, whilst Taeuber assembled a series of puppets. Each woman was photographed with her creations. The use of dolls, puppets and mannequins became a

chief aspect of the surrealist movement, demonstrated most radically and graphically in the work of Hans Bellmer. Claude Cahun, too, photographed herself in poses and costume reminiscent of dolls, as well as fashioning dolls out of different materials, which she then photographed. In the 1938 'International Surrealist Exhibition', mannequins took up considerable space, but chiefly presented from a male point of view. The dolls and puppets, variously used by the three dadaist women examined here, can be investigated both as new materials or art objects, and as representations of the female body and identity.

All these approaches represent challenges not only to the shape and form of the art object but also to the status of the artist. The artist as body is a major point of debate in avant-garde art. How does the artist's hand effect creation? The methods and techniques of production are foregrounded and demystified. Conceptual questions, and the use of machine-made, found and reproduced objects take on unprecedented significance. Through an examination of the artist's position and authority, the place of the individual in the world – in art and in life – is thematised explicitly and implicitly. Rather than a far-removed, superior genius, the avant-garde artist is implicated in life, as elucidated by the Berlin Dadaists' use of terms such as engineer and monteur. This was arguably an appropriate and palatable principle for women, since women artists had generally enjoyed less status in any case: Dada's women are exemplary of collaborative workers, working in partnerships and without inflated self-promotion.

A common prejudice is that women's work concerns itself less with materials and techniques than men's work, that it is personally and socially driven and not technique- or material- driven. Yet in each case, the women in this study have innovated with materials, genres and form. Two of the three fine artists in this study – that is Sophie Taeuber and Hannah Höch – went on to take an interest in Constructivism, in which material, structure and process are privileged above all. In general, the critical gaze is turned on the relationship between the artist or writer and the artwork. Art reflects on itself and is demystified. Moreover, in each case the women here demonstrate a liberal attitude to the materials and processes of high art and low art: Hennings incorporates cabaret and entertainment; Taeuber explores

textiles and ornament; Höch innovates with photography and handicrafts; Duchamp examines technology and Arnauld looks at fantasy and mythology.

Yet, despite this general shift from the artist as personality, and away from narrative, many critical treatments of women Dadaists display a predisposition towards subject matter and meaning, and biographical details and readings, over materials and techniques. This approach appears absurd in the cases of many avant-garde women. The Dadaists, these women included, sought to turn art away from an introverted, personal, esoteric pursuit to a collective, social, political and cultural context. The insistence on highly personal readings, when they are applied over-zealously to women's work, must be challenged since it often takes the place of broader connections that place the artist at the heart of technical and formal innovations. The integration of art and life, which Peter Bürger viewed as the objective that unified the avant-garde, may never have been a viable option, but there were many attempts to blur rigid lines between categories of experience such as art and life, self and other, inner space and outer space, and the personal and political.

Dada's multiple names; Dada's multiple genders

What conclusion can we draw, then, about Dada's gender? Many instances have shown how Dada was not a fully radicalised forum. Whatever the nuances of attitudes within the various Dada groups, the socio-historical and cultural background within which women artists operated still presented them, in any case, with various difficulties, pragmatic and cultural. Dada as a forum did not provide a utopian alternative to exclusion and prejudice, especially from a modern feminist perspective. In theory, its non-programmatic approach offered unlimited freedom, but in practice it fell short – arguably inevitably – of such an ideal. Dada's men were radical and revolutionary on some levels, but shockingly conventional, or even reactionary, on others. Nor, however, did Dada exclude women altogether. Somewhere on the spectrum between the extremes of misogyny and open collaboration, women participated and contributed. During the course of these chapters, I have deliberately shifted the emphasis away from judgments about men in Dada, about Dada as men's club, to a focus on the contributions individual women

made, and on aspects that demonstrate gender and multiplicity even where they might neither have been welcomed nor fully recognised.

This work has addressed Dada as a whole, not setting up women's work as an annexe to men's, but as a series of 'cells' that constituted part of Dada. Much has been made of the name 'Dada'. The debates around the name, in seeking specific meanings and origins, favour a single identity for the movement, arguably in direct contradiction to avant-garde objectives of freeing language and to the Dadaists' attempts to find a term that could not be so easily neutralised. Perhaps this objective could never be reached, since language has not been broken down after all, but continues to betray and be betrayed by ideological positions. Readings such as that by Sawelson-Gorse, in which the term Dada is deconstructed for subconscious misogynistic tendencies, illustrate the difficulties, or impossibility, of finding 'new' language – as well as new attitudes.

But why pin Dada down so absolutely in the first place? The Dadaists each continued to produce conflicting, humorous, baffling, contrary, provocative statements about what Dada was throughout its existence. Even then, they too became caught up in establishing the parameters, pinpointing the founders and the 'real' aims retrospectively, just as critics have done, in trying to make everything fit a coherent ideological model. A remark by Debbie Lewer reminds us of a more pragmatic, less fanciful aspect of Dada

Given the diversity of material shown and performed at the Cabaret, it is clear that the newly-found "Dada" banner did not refer to a new style or set of aesthetic characteristics. Initially, it encompassed a loosely defined interest in abstract art. There were, however, very practical reasons for putting a new name to the activity of the group; "Dada" was a distinctive name under which performances could be staged and publications sold.⁶¹⁸

This remark draws attention to Dada as a sort of brand name, applied to a set of activities, as opposed to determining those activities. Rather than make the name a starting-point, seeing it as an indicator of intentions and attitudes, (as Sawelson-Gorse does, to some degree), we might see it as an inadequate and fluid signifier. This attitude to language was one that the Dadaists themselves realised and emphasised in language experiments.

⁶¹⁸ Howard and Lewer, *A new order*, p. 15.

If Dada was a shifting sign, then the attempts to extend our understanding of it in this study are perhaps not so objectionable. Arp claimed: 'Il y avait des dadaïstes avant que n'existe pour Dada le nom Dada et que les dadaïstes ne soient Dada.'⁶¹⁹ The Dadaists claimed Dada as a philosophy of life as opposed to an artistic movement: they did not demand adherence to a rigid style or framework. If this attitude is adopted, questions about who was and was not a 'true', or 'core' Dadaist assume lesser importance, as do questions about its founders, its key players and their gender. Where John D. Erickson, for example, distinguishes between 'Dadas' and 'Dadaists', the former being more 'truly' Dada or more 'authentic' than the latter,⁶²⁰ I have preferred to take a more open approach to definitions of Dada. My approach is closer to the stance taken by Penelope Rosemont, for example, who in her anthology of Surrealist women sets out her definition of a Surrealist according to three criteria. These, which I have paraphrased here, are: that s/he considers herself/himself a Surrealist, that she is recognised as a Surrealists by other Surrealists and accepts the designation, and that she takes part in surrealist activity (such as demonstrations, exhibitions or periodicals). The women she selects, and it is a wide selection, meet at least one of the first two criteria, and contribute in more than one way under the third category.⁶²¹

The second criterion (acknowledgement by colleagues) has proved to be the most contentious aspect in my study of Dada. But even then, for all the exclusiveness of some of Dada's men (then), and the negligence of women participants (since), both primary and secondary sources have disclosed many references, covert and overt, to the participation of each of the five women. More importantly, for me, each woman considered herself a Dadaist, at some point, and each participated in substantial and innovative ways to Dada events and publications. Where Ball used writing and performance to pursue his philosophical and intellectual interests, Hennings made use of both to work through her unconventional lifestyle and approaches, both on- and offstage, and in spite of severe material and cultural

⁶¹⁹ José Pierre, *Le Futurisme et le dadaïsme*. Lausanne: Rencontre, 1967, p. 69. 'There were Dadaists before the name Dada existed for Dada, before the Dadaists were Dada.' Translation from Bohn, p. xi.

⁶²⁰ Erickson, *Performance, Poetry and Art*. See chapter 4.

⁶²¹ Rosemont, *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*, p. xxxvii.

restrictions. If Huelsenbeck celebrated Zurich's rowdy, macho performances, Taeuber nevertheless featured steadily on stage in innovative dance performances and developed her own form of non-representational, geometric art. After Dada, she continued to collaborate and innovate. If Hausmann saw Berlin Dada as his men's club, and his colleagues each carved out their territory and hierarchy, Höch recognised this and nevertheless made every use of the forum to advance her art. Suzanne Duchamp, arguably overshadowed as much by history as by her colleagues at the time, pursued the fine art side of Paris Dada in technically and thematically innovative works that intersected with peers such as Picabia, Crotti and Marcel Duchamp, but which are distinguished by her particular concerns. Finally, Arnauld raised a lone female voice in the male-dominated dadaist-surrealist literary group, insisting to the last on her abilities. Both Suzanne Duchamp and Arnauld responded to the break-up of Dada with attempts at their own movements: *Tabu* and *Projectivisme*. These women were not short on ambition and ideas.

Many of the issues emphasised in the cases of these five women were key to both men and women participants. Even issues around the body and the subject, to continue this conclusion's focus, were core to male and female Dadaists, but treated in nuanced ways. The menace to the concrete or whole being as a subject centre, to the place of the individual or body in the world and world order, is explored by avant-garde artists in the early twentieth century and has not waned. As visual culture has become increasingly important, the body as sign has assumed ever great significance. The angst of the multi-faceted subject's existence, and the suggestion that both reality and identity are unstable, are core to postmodernist theory. Each Dadaist's work deals, in some part, with the dialectics between self / subject, other / object, personal / political and male / female. In each case, gender has played a part, offering specific challenges and resulting in particular approaches by both women and men.

From 1920s to 2020s: women and the avant-garde

This study has sought to bring out nuances in the approaches of women Dadaists that represent extensions, if not revolutions, in the ways we think about Dada. The conditions in the various groupings notwithstanding, the work examined here exists

and persists beyond that context, and its 'value' can be considered in ways that acknowledge developments since. The debate about the death of the avant-garde is a complex one, which cannot be fully discussed here. Suffice to say that a purely temporal, linear approach to the history of the avant-garde is already flawed, if we accept that artistic approaches from the early decades of the twentieth century, such as those myriad practices of the five Dada women discussed here, are still being uncovered and re-explored. These delays in reception illustrate how cultures disappear and reappear, are neglected, discovered or repeated in ways not clearly defined by time and space.

Without returning to the language of influence and origins, there is, as a next step, plenty to ask about the relationships between women artists over the last century. How does Hennings's overtly confessional work relate to the soul-baring of the British artist Tracey Emin? How does Hannah Höch's photomontage work compare with Barbara Kruger's more explicitly feminist work, which makes use of similar techniques? What does Kruger owe to Höch and how does she take the connections between advertising, photography and fine art further? How do Suzanne Duchamp's word-image combinations relate to examples by Louise Bourgeois? How does Arnauld's approach to language make sense now, in the context of feminist evaluations of language? How might the concept of 'écriture féminine' illuminate avant-garde women's writing, and vice versa? Might Arnauld's wild poetic experimentation now be explained using these terms? And why is it that dolls persist in the art of the twentieth century, from a fledgling start by the Dada women, through Surrealism, up to artists such as Louise Bourgeois and Sarah Lucas, as well as in the work of the brothers Jake and Dinos Chapman?

This revisiting of Dada and its 'second' gender is not a historical rewriting. It is an uncovering of themes, aspects, techniques and approaches that have resonance in ways that are not necessarily time-bound. In response to the publication of Sawelson-Gorse's book *Women in Dada*, David Hopkins's review invites links between Dada 'women behaving badly' and Young British Artists such as Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas.⁶²² In her introduction to an exhibition catalogue, which

⁶²² David Hopkins, 'Women Behaving Badly.' In: *Art Monthly* 1/236, May 2000, pp. 317-333.

traverses twentieth century women's art via a diverse set of individuals, Catherine De Zegher writes: 'Through repoliticizing the body, the ceaseless play of unraveling (hidden) traps of language, and challenging the triumphant gaze, some women have participated for decades in the development of issues essential to the art of the 1990s.'⁶²³ This statement applies as far back as Dada's women, and can be taken forward into the twenty-first century. There is huge potential for comparative work between the early experiments of women Dadaists and later developments in art, literature and performance. This means that, both within and beyond the Dada context, these women's work offers plenty of scope for further examinations into how avant-garde women have challenged and continue to challenge the institutions of art, and the wider social, political and cultural status quo. It demonstrates that avant-garde women both exist and persist.

⁶²³ de Zegher, *Inside the Visible*, p. 21.

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