1916_a

In Zurich, the international movement of Dada is launched in a double reaction to the catastrophe of World War I and the provocations of Futurism and Expressionism.

D ada encompassed a wide range of practices, politics, and places, so it could hardly be coherent even if it wanted to be, which it did not: most of its participants viewed any coherence, any order, with derisive laughter (legend has it that the word "Dada" was picked at random from a German–French dictionary). The Dadaist idea of an anarchic assault on all artistic convention quickly caught fire. Despite its short life—by the early twenties it was mostly burned out or variously subsumed into ▲ Surrealism in France and Neue Sachlichkeit in Germany—it had no fewer than six major bases of operation: Zurich, New York,

Paris, Berlin, Cologne, and Hanover, some of which were connected intermittently by various journals, nomadic artists, and ▲ ambitious impresarios (such as Tristan Tzara and Francis Picabia). Born in double reaction to the catastrophe of World War I and the • provocations of Futurism and Expressionism, Dada took direct aim at bourgeois culture, which it blamed for the butchery of the war; yet in many ways this culture was already dead for Dada, and Dada arose to dance on its grave (Hugo Ball, a principal figure in the Zurich group, once called Dada a "requiem mass" of the most ribald sort). In short, the Dadaists pledged to attack all norms, even ›·

1 • Hugo Ball in his "Magical Bishop" costume, at the Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich, June 1916

▲ 1924, 1925b, 1929, 1930b, 1931
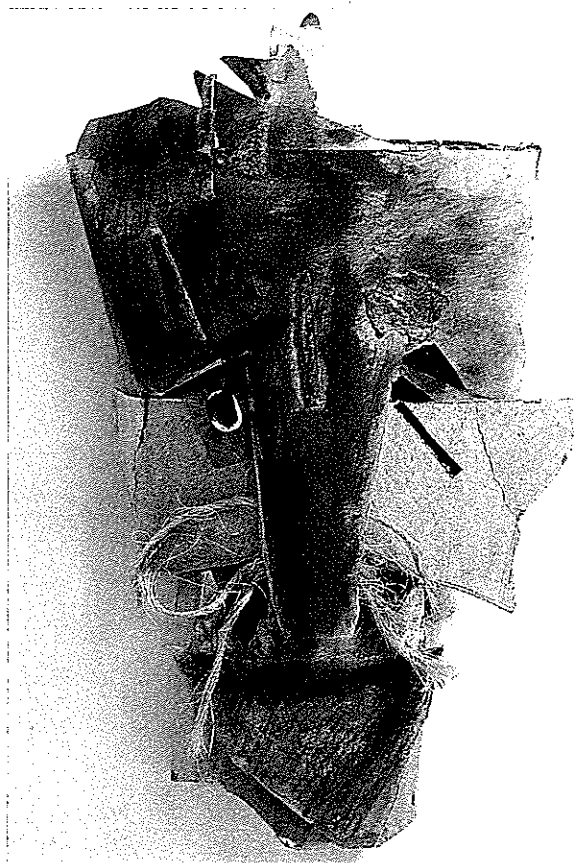
2 • Marcel Janco, *Mask*, c. 1919
Paper, cardboard, string, gouache, and pastel, 45 x 22 x 5 (17¾ x 8⅝ x 2)

▲ 1916b, 1919   • 1908, 1909

incipient ones of their own ("Dada is Anti-Dada" was a favorite refrain), and they did so, in Zurich, through outlandish performances, exhibitions, and publications.

A farce of nothingness

The international group of poets, painters, and filmmakers drawn to neutral Switzerland before or during the war included the Germans Ball (1886–1927), Emmy Hennings (1885–1948), Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974), and Hans Richter (1888–1976), the Romanians Tzara (1896–1963) and Marcel Janco (1895–1984), the ▲ Alsatian Hans Arp, the Swiss Sophie Taeuber, and the Swede Viking Eggeling (1880–1925). Zurich was a principal refuge for other vanguards too: James Joyce lived there for a time, as did Vladimir Lenin—indeed diagonally across the street from the Cabaret Voltaire that served as Dada headquarters. Named after the great French satirist of the eighteenth century (author of *Candide*, an attack on the idiocies of his age), the Cabaret was founded on February 5, 1916, as a vaudevillian mockery of "the ideals of culture and of art"—"that is our *Candide* against the times," Ball wrote in his extraordinary diary, *Flight Out of Time*. "People act as if nothing had happened, [as if] all this civilized carnage [were] a triumph." The Dadaists aimed to act out this crisis in hysterical fashion, but also, amid this performed chaos, "to draw attention, across the barriers of war and nationalism, to the few independent spirits who live for other ideals" (Ball). Surrounded by Expressionist posters and primitivist pictures by Janco and Richter, these provocateurs recited contradictory manifestos (both Futurist and Expressionist), poems in French, German, and Russian (that is, in languages on different sides of the war), and quasi-African chants; they also contrived concerts with typewriters, kettledrums, rakes, and pot covers. "Total pandemonium," Arp described it in retrospect. "The people around us are shouting, laughing, and gesticulating. Our replies are sighs of love, volleys of hiccups, poems, moos, and miaowing of medieval Bruitists [literally noise-makers]. Tzara is wiggling his behind like the belly of an Oriental dancer. Janco is playing an invisible violin and bowing and scraping. Madam Hennings, with a Madonna face, is doing the splits. Huelsenbeck is banging away nonstop on the great drum, with Ball accompanying him on the piano pale as a chalky ghost. We were given the honorary title of Nihilists."

Yet they were not nihilists alone. The Dadaists acted out the dislocations of exile in almost solipsistic ways ("Tristan Tzara," the pseudonym of Sami Rosenstock, suggests "sad in country"), but they also formed a community of artists committed to internationalist politics and universal languages (which Richter and Eggeling, for example, sought in abstract film). They were destructive in spirit, but also often affirmative; regressive in posture, but also sometimes redemptive; and for Ball the term "Dada" held all these associations together: "In Romanian Dada means yes yes, in French a hobby horse. To Germans it is an indication of idiotic naivete and of a preoccupation with procreation and the baby

carriage." If some Dadaists were nihilistic, others like Ball had mystical leanings, and this paradoxical position was pronounced ▲ in their relation to language. Like Futurists such as Marinetti, Dadaists such as Ball worked to release language from conventional syntax and semantics into raw sound (the Hanover Dadaist • Kurt Schwitters figures prominently here as well). Yet the Dadaist interest in sound poetry diverged greatly from the Futurist embrace of nonrational expression: in his "words-in-freedom" the jingoistic Marinetti worked to plunge language into a bodily matrix of all the senses, in a production of meaning understood as force, while the pacifist Ball sought to empty language not only of conventional sense but also of the instrumental reason that had underwritten the mass carnage of the war. "A line of poetry is a chance to get rid of all the filth that clings to this accursed language," Ball wrote. "Every word that is spoken and sung here says at least this one thing: that this humiliated age has not succeeded in winning our respect." Even as Ball worked to shatter language, however, he also sought to recover the word as "*logos*," to transform language into "magical complex images."

The short life of the Cabaret Voltaire ended abruptly on June 23, 1916, with a legendary performance by Ball [1], recounted here in *Flight Out of Time*:

> My legs were in a cylinder of shiny blue cardboard, which came up to my hips so that I looked like an obelisk. Over it I wore a huge coat collar cut out of cardboard, scarlet inside and gold outside.... I also wore a high, blue-and-white-striped witch doctor's hat.... I was carried onto the stage in the dark and began slowly and solemnly: "gadji beri bimba/ glandridi lauli lonni cadori/ gadjama bim beri glassala/ glandridi glassala tuffm i zimbrabim/ blassa galassasa tuffm i zimbrabim...."... Then I noticed that my voice had no choice but to take on the ancient cadence of priestly lamentation, that style of liturgical singing that wails in all the Catholic churches of East and West.... For a moment it seemed as if there were a pale, bewildered face in my Cubist mask, that half-frightened, half-curious face of a ten-year-old boy, trembling and hanging avidly on the priest's words in the requiems and high masses in his home parish.... Bathed in sweat, I was carried down off the stage like a magical bishop.

In the performance Ball is part shaman, part priest, but he is also a child once again entranced by ritual magic. This "playground for crazy emotions" witnessed other such performances with fantastic costumes and bizarre masks, often contrived for the occasion by Janco [2]; Sophie Taeuber contributed theatrical props and dance pieces as well. "The motive power of these masks was irresistibly conveyed to us," Ball remarked of the masks, which he regarded as modern equivalents of those in ancient Greek and Japanese theater. "[They] simply demanded that their wearers start to move in a tragic-absurd dance."

Clearly Ball saw Dada as an avant-garde rite of possession and exorcism. The Dadaist "suffers from the dissonances [of the world] to the point of self-disintegration.... [He] fights against the agony

and the death throes of this age." In effect Ball regarded the Dadaist as a traumatic mime who assumes the dire conditions of war, revolt, and exile, and inflates them into a buffoonish parody. "What we call Dada is a farce of nothingness in which all the higher questions are involved," he remarked less than two weeks before his Magical Bishop performance, "a gladiator's gesture, a play with shabby leftovers." Here Dada mimes dissonance and destruction in order to purge them somehow, or at least to transform such shock into a kind of protection that nonetheless retains a strong dose of terror and agony. "The horror of our time, the paralyzing background of events, is made visible," Ball once commented of the Janco masks; and of the poetry of Huelsenbeck he had this to say: "The Gorgon's head of a boundless terror smiles out of the fantastic destruction."

Exhausted, Ball left Zurich soon after his performance (eventually to return to the Church), and Tzara took over as instigator of Zurich Dada. Tzara was the "natural antithesis of Ball," Richter once remarked, as dandyish in his stance of disgust as Ball was desperate. His model as avant-garde impresario was Marinetti: Tzara not only stressed the Futurist aspects of Dada but also orchestrated Dada much as Marinetti had Futurism—with manifestos, a journal, even a gallery. In a self-contradictory development, Zurich Dada thus became less a chaotic mix of other styles than an artistic movement of its own. In the third issue of *Dada* (1918), Tzara published the "Dada Manifesto," which put Dada on the map of European avant-gardes; it also attracted Picabia from New York, and together he and Tzara prepared the Dadaist campaign in Paris that was to follow the war. When the war did end, so, effectively, did Zurich Dada, as refugees were free to move once again.

A juxtaposition of avant-garde devices

The key figure of the second phase of Zurich Dada was Hans Arp. Active in the Paris avant-garde before Dada, Arp adapted Cubist collage to Dadaist ends: it became a medium less of semiotic analysis than of chance composition. In his *Collage of Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance* (1916–17), Arp tore rough squares, irregular in size, out of sheets of commercial paper of different colors, let them fall, and then glued them where they landed on the support. Over the years he did many other such collages, sometimes with the paper neatly cut and composed, sometimes roughly torn and arrayed. Probably also inspired by Duchamp, in such experiments in chance as his *Three Standard Stoppages* (1913–14), Arp worked "against the bombast of the gods of painting (the Expressionists)," as Ball once remarked—that is, against the authority of the expressive artist. Arp regarded his collages as "a denial of human egotism"; but they are more as well—indeed they enact a brilliant juxtaposition of avant-garde devices only recently invented. For active here are not only collage and chance, but also the readymade (in the commercial paper) and the abstract grid, which many of the early collages evoke, only to defy. As the critic T. J. Demos has commented, "The grid indicates the logic of scien-

tific rationality, the use of chance represents its total rejection. Surely Arp invoked the former only to attack it with the latter."

For Arp these devices served to displace the "volition" of the artist toward a condition of "anonymity," an interest he also explored in early experiments with automatic drawing (some date to 1916), a device later elaborated by the Surrealists—with whom Arp came to be associated—to access the unconscious. He also produced many extraordinary reliefs, mostly in painted wood: these are abstract compositions that are also suggestive of biomorphic shapes of the body (human and animal) and other natural forms [3]. Such works attest to a metamorphic impulse in Zurich Dada that qualifies its destructive drive (it is also pronounced in the films of Richter), but their beauty might make them seem atypical of Dada; with titles like *Torso, Bird Forms*, and the like, they are also vaguely referential. On this score Arp was most adventurous in the gridded "duo-collages" that he produced with his wife Sophie Taueber. Taueber was teaching textile design in Zurich when she met Arp in 1915, and almost immediately they began to collaborate on paintings, collages, and woven works—"probably the first examples of 'concrete art'," Arp later remarked, at once "pure and independent" and "elementary and spontaneous." Here Arp and Taueber added collaboration to the other techniques that helped to loosen art from
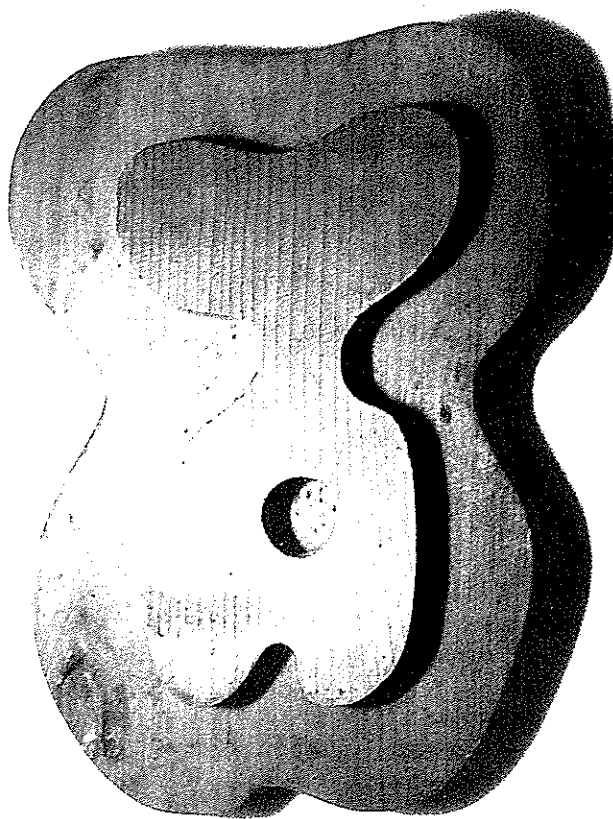
3 • Hans Arp, *Torso, Navel*, 1915
Wood, 66 x 43.2 x 10.2 (26 x 17 x 4)

▲ 1912   ● 1918   ■ 1918   ▲ 1924, 1930b, 1931, 1942b   ● 1913

Dada journals

The group of artists and poets who gravitated toward Zurich at the outbreak of World War I immediately started *Cabaret Voltaire* (1916), the journal through which Dada was able to spread throughout Europe and into North America. If art is understood by psychoanalysis as sublimatory—a way of rising above the animal instincts that form the underbelly of the psyche—Dada saw itself as desublimatory—scoffing at the spiritual ambitions of poetry and painting. In his short history of the movement, Richard Huelsenbeck wrote, "The German *dichter* [poet] is the typical dope.... He does not understand what a gigantic humbug the world has made of the 'spirit'."

By 1917, *Dada*, edited by Tristan Tzara, was also being published in Zurich. *Dadaco*, an anthology with Dada works of art, such as photomontages by George Grosz, soon followed. That the very word "*dada*" was provocative is heralded by an article in *Dadaco* which begins: "Was ist dada? Eine Kunst? Eine Philosophie? Eine Politick? Eine Feuerversicherung? Oder: Staatsreligion. Ist dada wirkliche Energie? Oder ist es Garnichts, d.h. alles?" (What is dada? An art? A philosophy? A politics? A fire insurance policy Or: Official religion? Is dada truly energy? Or is it nothing at all, i.e., everything?")

The Dada movement in the United States soon resulted in Man Ray's *Ridgefield Gazook*, published from 1915, as well as *New York Dada*, the periodical he produced with Marcel Duchamp. The international character of Dada journals is further illustrated by Kurt Schwitters's *Merz* in Hanover and Francis Picabia's *391*, the latter published out of Barcelona. But in France, *La Nouvelle Revue Française* resumed publication in 1919 (after having been suppressed during the war) by accusing the "new school" of nonsense symptomatized by the "indefinite repetition of the mystical syllables 'dada dadada dada da.'" The French novelist André Gide joined the debate with an article announcing: "The day the word Dada was found, there was nothing left to do. Everything written subsequently seemed to me a bit beside the point.... Nothing was up to it: DADA. These two syllables had accomplished that 'sonorous inanity,' an absolute of meaninglessness."

Indeed, in Gide's novel *The Counterfeiters* (1926), the villain Strouvilhou imagines what a Dada journal should be when he says, "If I edit a review, it will be in order to prick bladders—in order to demonetize fine feelings, and those promissory notes which go by the name of *words*." In the first issue, he announces (with the Duchamp collage *L.H.O.O.Q.* in mind), there will be "a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*, with a pair of mustaches stuck on to her face." It is this linking of abstraction and nonsense that is associated, in Gide's narrative, with the emptying out of the sign's meaning: "If we manage our affairs well," says Strouvilhou, "I don't ask for more than two years before a future poet will think himself dishonored if anyone can understand a word of what he says. All sense, all meaning will be considered anti-poetical. Illogicality shall be our guiding star."

traditional strictures of authorship and composition (Arp would ▲ soon collaborate with Max Ernst in Cologne as well): made just ● prior to the first modular abstractions of Piet Mondrian, the duo-collages eliminate autographic elements just as radically.

A miniature sublime

The genius of the term Dada lay in the force with which it radiated a contemptuous meaninglessness, and the Zurich Dadaists used this confusion strategically to stage the work of very different artists—not only Futurists like Marinetti and Expressionists like ■ Wassily Kandinsky, but also the German-Swiss painter Paul Klee, whose art was shown at the Galerie Dada in 1917. Again, Marinetti sought to glorify the war: his 1914 collection *Zang Tumb Tuum* extolled the Italian campaign in Libya, and in 1915, at the front near Lake Garda, under the Alps, he threw himself into capturing the dynamics of this huge battlefield, certain that his pictographic medium would be equal to the task. Marinetti not only viewed the war as representable but sought to aestheticize it as well. "We Futurists," he would become notorious for declaring, "have rebelled against the branding of war as anti-aesthetic.... War is beautiful because it initiates the dreamt-of metallization of the human body. War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine guns. War is beautiful because it combines the gunfire, the cannonades, the cease-fire, the scents, and the stench of putrefaction into a symphony."

Klee represents a position antipodal to Marinetti's. Still mobilized in the German army in 1918, Klee continued to practice his art during the waning days of the war, with the agonizing immobility of trench combat exacerbated by aerial bombing and systematic gassing. In its opening weeks the war had taken the life of Auguste Macke, Klee's closest collaborator in the Blaue Reiter; and two years later it would claim another Expressionist colleague, Franz Marc, killed near Verdun. During his momentous trip to Tunis with Macke in early 1914, Klee had bathed himself in the sensuous immediacy of light and exotic color, expressing his impressions of this world in a vibrant grid patterned in part on Delaunay's ◆ "Windows"; now he felt sickened by the very thought of reality. "I dally in that shattered world only in occasional memories," he wrote in 1915. "The more horrifying this world becomes (as it is these days) the more art becomes abstract."

It is this impulse toward abstraction that powers a work like *"Einst dem Grau der Nacht enttaucht..."* ("Once Emerged from the Gray of Night..." [4]. In his Tunis pictures Klee had used blocks of juxtaposed pink and ocher wash to evoke the forms of the Casbah or the geometries of sunstruck walls. Here he refused to use anything like visual resemblance to summon an experience of the real world. If the colored grid remains, it has been evacuated of the airy mobility and spatial expansiveness that it formerly possessed. Instead the wiry edges of printed letters grip the colored patches, flattening and tightening them as though they were the panes of stained-glass windows and the writing were its leading. The work's

▲ 1922, 1924   ● 1917   ■ 1908, 1909, 1913   ◆ 1908, 1913
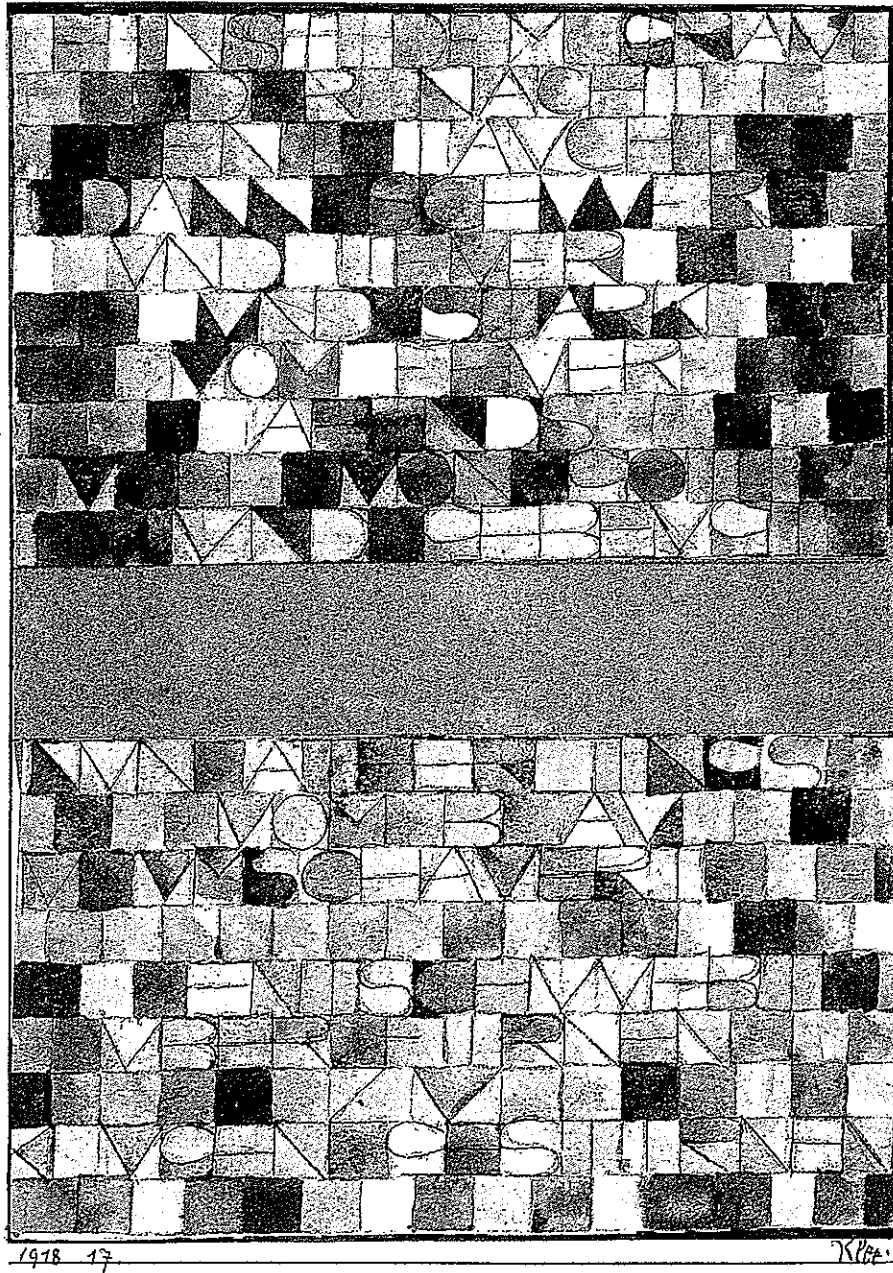
1910–1919

4 · Paul Klee, *"Einst dem Grau der Nacht enttaucht ..."* (*"Once Emerged from the Gray of Night ..."*), 1918
Watercolor and pen drawing, 22.5 x 15.9 (8⅞ x 6¼)

5 · Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920
India ink, colored chalks, and brown wash on paper, 31.8 x 24.2 (12½ x 9½)

tiny size and the band of silver paper that separates the grid's upper and lower registers also evoke a page of manuscript illumination on which is inscribed a poem. Although one can barely make out the verse, one is nonetheless compelled to read: "Once emerged from the gray of night / that hard and costly / and thick with fire / the God-filled evening emerged and arches over." And after the silver break it continues: "Now toward the ether, showering in blue / vanishing over glaciers / toward the wisdom of stars."

Modernist art's drive toward abstraction might not signal its withdrawal from reality so much as reality's withdrawal from it—that is, from art's capacity to represent a reality transformed by technology and war. The turn toward the written sign executed by Klee in *"Once Emerged from the Gray of Night ..."* suggests the truth of this position. What he termed "the cold romanticism of abstraction" captures his own understanding of the requirements of representing the fundamentally unrepresentable—what Enlightenment thinkers and Romantic artists had called "the Sublime." These authors had used the term to describe a combination of oppressive fear and exalted release, folded into an intimation of an immensity beyond human comprehension. In this regard the Sublime entered into the opening years of the twentieth century through two new forms of the fearfully unrepresentable: the millions of dead as a result of modern warfare and the unappeasable drives of the unconscious mind.

Klee's script painting addressed the first of these conditions in a kind of miniature sublime. Unlike the German Expressionist poet Christian Morgenstern (1871–1914), who had suspended linguistic marks between verbal and visual images, Klee refused this sort of calligrammatic embrace, in which the visual depiction is folded ▲ over the verbal naming (as in Guillaume Apollinaire's practice of the form). In Morgenstern's "Fishes' Serenade," lines of what look like the indications of poetic meter—the little iambic curves of the unstressed syllables—constellate into an oval shape, thus transforming the written dashes of the poem into the visual form of a fish replete with scales, or alternatively, the wavy surface of a pool of water. Despite his admiration for Morgenstern, Klee withdrew from the calligram's excess of representation, its determination to throw a double net over reality. Instead he used an elusive statement about emerging from chaos into clarity to summon the idea of immensity; at the same time this statement insists on the impossibility of directly portraying its own terrible contents.

Klee also evoked this programmatic indirection in a lapidary remark that became his credo: "Art does not represent the visible; rather, it makes visible." This conceptual approach was not limited to "abstract things like numbers and letters," which characterize other paintings such as *Villa R* (1919) and *The Vocal Fabric of Rosa Silber* (1922); it also extended to his belief that the movement of a line in the process of its execution could be conveyed to the viewer, for whom the image would unfold in time more than in space. This narrativization of his work, captured visually in what Klee called a "line going on a walk" and verbally in his suggestive captions and titles (often inscribed in the margins of his pictures), led some of

his admirers to project their own interpretative accounts. One ▲ such admirer was Walter Benjamin, who had purchased Klee's *Angelus Novus* [5] at the time of its initial exhibition. In "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), the last essay completed before his death, Benjamin uses the picture as the basis for a parable about the destructive effects of capitalist technology's vaunted "progress," a parable that is also in keeping with Klee's *"Once Emerged from the Gray of Night ..."*:

> A Klee painting named Angelus Novus shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

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Leah Dickerman (ed.), "Dada," special issue, *October,* no. 105, Summer 2003
Richard Huelsenbeck, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer,* ed. Hans J. Kleinschmidt, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Viking Press, 1974)
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1910–1919

▲ 1912   ▲ 1935

1920

The Dada Fair is held in Berlin: the polarization of avant-garde culture and cultural traditions leads to a politicization of artistic practices and the emergence of photomontage as a new medium.

The Dada Fair held in June 1920 at Dr. Otto Burchard's gallery in Berlin was the first public appearance of the group of artists—diverse in both project and origin—who came to constitute the official Berlin Dada movement. The fact that the event was announced as a fair rather than as an exhibition signals that from the very outset its parody of the display of commodities, whether at the level of window design or of large commercial presentations, emphasized the Dadaists' intention to radically transform both the structure of exhibitions and the art objects within them [1].

Some of the central objects of the fair—specifically Hannah Höch's (1889–1978) *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Beer Belly of the Weimar Republic* [2], Raoul Hausmann's (1886–1971) *Tatlin at Home* (1920) and *Mechanical Head (Spirit of the Age)* [3], and the collaborative contributions of George Grosz (1893–1959) and John Heartfield (Helmut Herzfelde) (1891–1968)—indicate the diversity of strategies employed by the newly defined group. In contact with the work of both the Italian Futurists and the Soviet avant-garde, Berlin Dada situated itself at the intersection of a critical revision of traditional modernism, on the one hand, and a manifest embracing of the new synthesis of avant-garde art with technology on the other. But more specifically, Berlin Dada also stood in radical opposition to the local avant-garde, namely the hegemonic model of German Expressionism. It was Expressionism's ethos, with its universalizing humanitarian aims, and its practice, with its fervent attempt to fuse spirituality and abstraction, that came under scrutiny and devastating critique at the hands of the Dadaists.

Dada: distraction and destruction

Under the impact of World War I, in which Expressionism had played the fateful and ultimately failed role of trying to appeal to the supposedly universal terms of human existence, Dada explicitly positioned itself against this aspiration for artistic practice. This stance has erroneously appeared to many to be a form of nihilism, but what needs to be stressed instead is the positive nature of Dada's critique. Against Expressionism's effort to fuse the aesthetic and the spiritual, Dada constructed a model of antiaesthetics; against the attempt to claim universality for human experience by
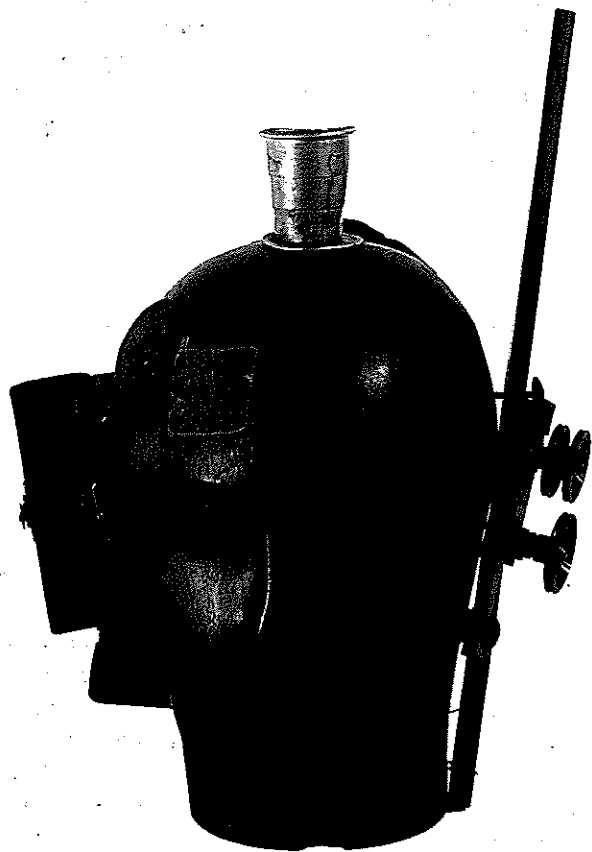

1 • First International Dada Fair at Kunstsalon Dr. Otto Burchard, Berlin, June 1920

assimilating the aesthetic to the mystical, Dada emphasized extreme forms of political secularization of artistic practice.

Several of the Berlin Dada group rallied to the left, identifying with the aims of the Communist Party to the degree, in the cases of Heartfield and Grosz, of becoming members of the Party when it was founded in Germany in 1919. From that perspective it is important to recognize that Berlin Dada is an explicitly politicized avant-garde project previously unknown in the German context. However, this project's axis ranges from a critique of bourgeois concepts of high art to a model for activist propaganda and from embracing French examples of earlier proto-Dada practices—such as Duchamp's and Picabia's—to the systematic development of montage techniques intended to undermine the emerging mass-cultural power of the Weimar publication industry.

The simultaneity of objects, textures, printed matter, and surfaces to which Heartfield and Grosz relate in their initial work from 1918 (no longer extant) clearly has a precursor in Cubism. But this earliest photomontage work to come out of Berlin is explicitly conceived of as a mockery of Cubism's aestheticized, apolitical approach to the emerging power of mass-cultural imagery. In 1919, immediately following this parody of Picasso's form of

▲ 1909, 1915, 1921   ● 1908   ▲ 1914, 1916b, 1918, 1919

2 • Hannah Höch, *Cut with the Kitchen Knife through the Beer Belly of the Weimar Republic*, c. 1919
Collage, 114 x 89.8 (44⅞ x 35⅜)

specifically Rosa Luxemburg (1870–1919) and Karl Liebknecht (1871–1919), at the hands of his Minister of the Interior, Gustav Noske (who is depicted by Heartfield in a later photomontage as well), to figures of the cultural world such as Albert Einstein, Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945), and the dancer Niddy Impekoven. All of these are disseminated across the field of the work according to a nonhierarchical, noncompositional, and aleatory principle of distribution, mingled with a variety of textual fragments that often invoke the nonsensical syllables "da-da." According to Huelsenbeck's claim, "*dada*" was found by inserting a knife into the pages of a dictionary; other origin stories for the term "dada" have been given, for example by the Cabaret Voltaire Dadaists.

But whether in the context of the Weimar Republic or in that of the Soviet Union, what links Heartfield, Grosz, Höch, and Hausmann on the one hand, and Rodchenko and Klutsis on the other, is first of all, the discovery of the photographic permeation of the visual world as a result of the emergence of the mass-cultural distribution of photographic images. Secondly, both groups participate in a nonsemantic production of meaning intended to destroy visual and textual homogeneity, to emphasize the materiality of the signifier over a presumed universal legibility of either the textual or iconic signified, and to stress the rupture and discontinuity of temporal and spatial forms of experience. The critical impulse behind this alogical attack on the very fabric of legibility was the intention to dismantle the mythical representations promoted by the mass-cultural production of commodity imagery and advertising. Lastly, photomontage represents the shared desire to construct a new type of art object, one that is ephemeral, one that has no claim either to innate worth or transhistorical value, one that is instead located within the perspective of intervention and rupture. This defines the political dimension of the photomontage practitioners' decision to stage artistic practice within the very medium of mass-cultural representation rather than outside or in opposition to it,

3 · Raoul Hausmann, *Mechanical Head (Spirit of The Age)*, c. 1920
Wood, leather, aluminum, brass, and board, 32.5 x 21 x 20 (12⅞ x 8¼ x 7⅞)
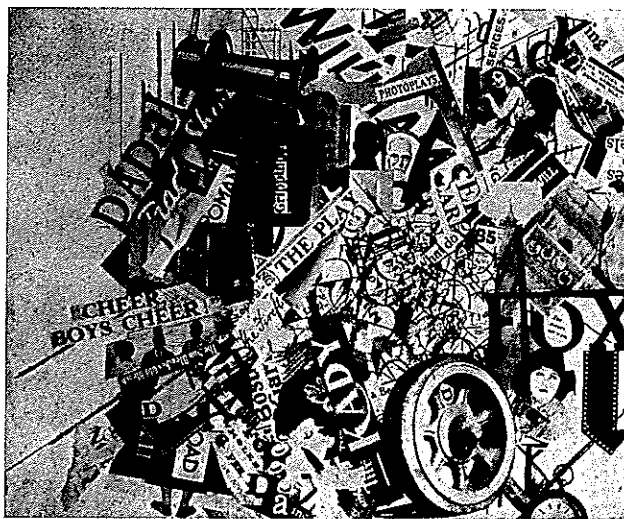
collage, Heartfield, Hausmann, Höch, and Grosz—jointly and collaboratively—developed their first photomontage projects [4].

These were paralleled in the Soviet Union by the simultaneous development of photomontage by Gustav Klutsis and Aleksandr Rodchenko. Although both sides claim to have invented the medium, photomontage had been developed as early as the 1890s as a commercial technique for the design of advertising. In fact, in their first text on the montage, Hausmann and Höch refer to populist models for combining and transforming images as their inspiration, and identify the picture postcards soldiers sent home from the Front as the examples from which they took their cues.

One of the key works of 1919 is Höch's *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* ... in which the full range of technical and strategic ambiguities that would form the project of photomontage is apparent. From an iconically rendered narrative to a purely structural deployment of textual material, the possibilities established in Höch's work would become the axis of a dialectic operation within photomontage itself. In *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* ... the iconic narrative consists of a detailed inventory of key figures from the public world of the Weimar Republic. These move from political figures such as Friedrich Ebert, the Social Democratic President who had been responsible for the murders of members of the Spartakist Bund,

4 · George Grosz and John Heartfield, *Life and Activity in Universal City at 12.05 midday*, 1919
Photomontage, dimensions unknown

▲ 1921, 1935   ▲ 1916a

as was the case in abstract art's attempt to retreat into the values specific to the mediums of painting or sculpture. These strategies link both groups' activities around 1919.

From photomontage to new narratives

As photomontage developed in Weimar Germany its range of options led its practitioners in various directions. In Hausmann's case the emphasis was increasingly textual with the verbal sign dismantled into graphic and phonetic fragments [5], whereas in Höch's work the focus on photographic imagery eventually displaced the structural separations that characterize the disjunction of textual elements. This was in favor of an increasingly homogeneous type of photomontage in which only two or three fragments are used to form peculiarly enigmatic figures.

John Heartfield, a third member of the original Berlin Dada group, quickly moved away from what he came to criticize as the "avant-gardist" dimension of the aestheticizing photomontage model, whose nonsensical or anomic qualities he rejected in favor of a new type of photomontage of communicative action. In this new form, photomontage was meant to reach an emerging working-class audience within what the Left hoped would become a proletarian public sphere. Those audiences are directly addressed through a strategy in which all former montage techniques are inverted: disjunction is replaced by narrative; the discontinuity of textures, surfaces, and materials is replaced by an artificially constructed homogeneity that is the result of Heartfield's careful airbrushing techniques; extreme forms of the fragmentation of language that isolated the grapheme or the phoneme are abandoned in favor of the insertion of captions whose function is to construct a revelation that will take a dialectical form. This type of commentary, which operates through the sudden juxtaposition of different types of historical and ▲ political information, is similar to what Bertolt Brecht subsequently developed in his own theatrical montage technique which, like Heartfield's work, was intended as an initiation to dialectics.

Heartfield's work also implicitly criticized early Berlin photomontage for having resulted in a set of singular objects that in the end possessed the status of traditional works of art just like any other individual work on paper or on canvas. Heartfield's attempt to create a work within the emerging proletarian public sphere, however, was specifically meant to alter the distribution form of photomontage by making it the vehicle of a printed medium and thus a mass-cultural tool.

The triggering moment in Heartfield's development was his encounter with Willi Münzenberg, who hired Heartfield to become the major designer of the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, the Communist Party organ founded in opposition to the old-style illustrated ▲ press. The *AIZ*, as it came to be called, specifically aimed to challenge the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, which had achieved a circulation ranging in the hundreds of thousands and could legitimately be called one of the first examples of mass media, serving as the model for subsequent magazines such as *Life* or *Paris Match*. The *AIZ* was thus conceived as a mass-cultural countertool.

Until his departure from Berlin after the Nazis' takeover of the government in 1933, Heartfield did most of his work for the *AIZ*, or as covers for books published by his brother Weiland Herzfelde and his Malik-Verlag publishing company. A typical example of his shift from the Berlin Dada photomontage aesthetic, as represented by Höch and Hausmann, would be Heartfield's *The Face of Fascism*, his cover illustration for *Italy in Chains*, published in 1928 by the Communist Party. Although juxtaposition, rupture, fracturing, and fragmentation are still operative here, they are so forged into a new coherence as to be able to serve different purposes altogether. Mussolini's head is fused with a skull that penetrates it from within and the vignettes that surround it work, on the right-hand side, to fuse images of victims of violence with the representation of dignitaries of the Pope and the Catholic Church and on the left, to fuse the top-hatted bourgeois capitalist with the armed Fascist street gangs. This technique of fusion was the alternative to what Heartfield criticized as the construction of
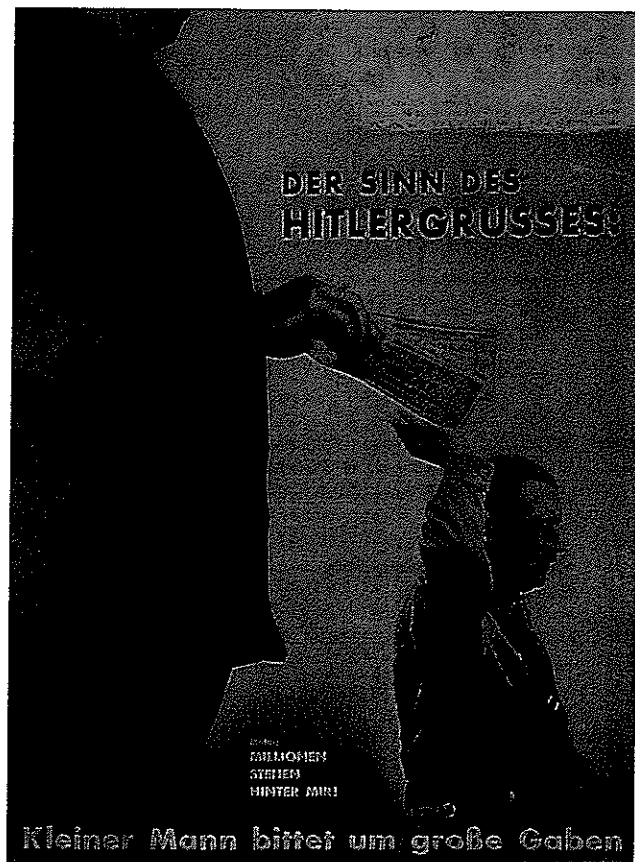
5 · Raoul Hausmann, *Off* and *fmsbw*, 1918
Two phonetic poem posters,
32.5 x 47.5 (12¾ x 18¾)

▲ Introduction 3   ▲ 1930a

6 · John Heartfield, *The Meaning of the Hitler Salute: Little Man Asks for Big Gifts. Motto: Millions Stand Behind Me!*, 1932
Photomontage, 38 x 27 (15 x 10¾)

Asks for Big Gifts. Motto: Millions Stand Behind Me! [6], makes this point even more manifest in that Hitler is presented as a miniature figure standing in front of a huge, anonymous "fat cat" figure of a man passing a bundle of bank notes into the little man's raised arm and hand, thereby producing an ironic rereading of the "Hitler salute." Extremely simplified, grotesque, comical, and therefore all the more stunning, this form of argument was meant to clarify the otherwise inscrutable political and economic links that attracted big business to the leader of German fascism, seen as a counterforce and as a violent form of oppressing Socialist and Communist tendencies within the Weimar Republic. The assumption that *AIZ*, whose circulation at that time reached 350,000, would have a propagandistic effect turned out to be false since large numbers of the working class who had formerly voted Communist would vote for the Nazi Party in 1933, thereby dealing a final blow to the leftist aspirations of the Weimar Republic.

Unsurprisingly, Heartfield was one of the first artists to be prosecuted by the Gestapo after Hitler's rise to power. In 1933 he left for Prague, where his polemical, didactic, and propagandistic efforts against Hitler's regime were so widespread that Hitler intervened with the Czech government to order the closure of Heartfield's exhibitions in Prague.

From semiosis to communicative action

In the parallel evolution of photomontage within the Weimar and Soviet contexts, the changes that emerged around 1925 were aimed at transforming the original strategies. The techniques of alogical shock, of the nonsensical destruction of meaning, of the self-referential foregrounding of the graphic and phonetic dimension of language through an emphasis on fragmentation were now recast so as to be repositioned within the radical project of creating a proletarian public sphere. If by the mid-twenties a key cultural project of the avant-gardes was the transformation of audiences, this in turn required a return to the instrumentalized forms of language and image, where visual recognition and readability are paramount. The type of photomontage that Heartfield and Klutsis went on to produce now focused on the values of information and communication. The alogism, the shock, and the rupture of the previous work were discarded as so many bourgeois, avant-gardist jokes; its antiart position was seen as simply performing an act of shadow-boxing with the bourgeois public sphere and a model of culture that had long since been surpassed. The specific task that was now assigned to photomontage was no longer the destruction of painting and sculpture or culture as a separate, autonomous sphere; its task now was to provide mass audiences with images of didactic information and politicization.

One such example comes from a series of photomontages and posters Klutsis made between 1928 and 1930 [7], in which the metonymy of a raised hand is used as an emblem of political participation and a key image of the actual representation of the masses in the voting process. Substituting a part of the body for the whole,

mere nonsensical juxtapositions that generated rupture and shock but carried no political orientation, no countertruth, no moment of sudden revelation.

The fusion of opposites in Heartfield's work in 1928, five years before the rise of the Nazi Party, is particularly astonishing since it indicates the degree to which certain intellectuals were fully aware of the increasing threat to bourgeois institutions and democratic politics and were fully apprised of the need to locate cultural projects within strategies of opposition and resistance. This is even more evident in two of the images that Heartfield designed for the *AIZ* in 1932, portraying the Chairman of the German National Socialist Party, Adolf Hitler, a year before his election to become Chancellor in 1933. In each image, Hitler is depicted as a puppet, a hollow, artificial figure who executes the interests of capital. In the first, *Adolf—the Superman. Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk*, Hitler's body is shown in X-ray with a swastika in place of his heart, an Iron Cross instead of a liver, and his vertebrae made of gold coins, clearly framing the political argument that it was the German entrepreneurial class that was financing the Nazi Party in order to avert and eventually liquidate a proletarian revolution that had been initiated by the formation of the first Communist Party on German territory in 1919. The second, *The Meaning of the Hitler Salute: Little Man*

the hand clearly "stands for" the subject who raises it, just as the single hand, within the boundaries of which a multitude of other such hands can be seen, "stands for" the unity of purpose produced by a single representative who can speak for a massive electorate. Variations on the image with different textual inscriptions were used for several purposes: one for a call to participate in the election of the Soviets; in another version for an appeal to women to become active in the Soviets through their own vote. The metonymy of the hand as a sign of physical, perceptual, and political participation in the collective process is a central example of how photomontage's initial strategy of cropping and fragmentation had been transformed by this time.

With the means of photomontage, Heartfield and Klutsis therefore became the first members of the avant-garde to invoke propaganda as an artistic model. Almost all discussions of twentieth-century art have shunned this term, since it is seen as being in direct opposition to the modernist definition of the work of art. The term *propaganda* implies manipulation, politicization, and a pure instrumentality that heralds the destruction of subjectivity. Yet Heartfield's and Klutsis's practice intervened in the very institutions and forms of distribution that had heretofore defined what artistic practice can be. By contrast, they sought the transforma-

tion of an aesthetic of the single object into one lodged in the mass-cultural distribution of the printed magazine, and a shift from the privileged spectator to the participatory masses then emerging through the industrial revolution of the Soviet Union or the changing industrial conditions in Weimar Germany. It was those aspirations that formed the actual structures and historical framework within which the formation of an aesthetic of a proletarian public sphere should be addressed. Propaganda as a counterform to the existing forms of ever-intensifying mass-cultural propaganda, namely advertising, clearly has to be recognized as a deliberate project undertaken by the Dada and Soviet avant-gardes to abolish the contradictions still maintained by the bourgeois vanguardist model of a pure, abstract opposition to the existing forms of mass culture.

FURTHER READING
Hanne Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas (The Dada Laughter)* (Giessen: Anabas Verlag, 1989)
Hanne Bergius, *Montage und Metamechanik: Dada Berlin* (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann Verlag, 2000)
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Brigid Doherty, "We are all Neurasthenics, or the trauma of Dada Montage," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 24, no. 1, Fall 1997

7 • Gustav Klutsis, *Let us Fulfill the Plan of the Great Projects*, 1930
Lithograph poster, dimensions unknown