

Dada's Genesis: Zurich

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When I founded the Cabaret Voltaire, I felt there must be a few young people in Switzerland who, like me, wanted not only to enjoy their independence, but also to document it. I went to Herr Ephraim, the owner of the "Meierei" and said: "Herr Ephraim, please give me your room. I would like to start a cabaret." Herr Ephraim agreed and gave me the room. And I went to some people I knew and asked "Please give a picture, a drawing, an engraving. I would like to put on an exhibition in my cabaret." I went to the friendly Zurich press and said "Put out some announcements. There is going to be an international cabaret. We want to do great things." And they gave me pictures and put out my announcements. So on 5th February we had a cabaret.

Ball (1916, 5)

This sparse little story of the origins of the Cabaret Voltaire in a back room in Zurich in 1916 was written by Hugo Ball, German poet, dramaturg, intellectual, and occasional pianist. Inset into the editorial text, like manuscript illuminations, are two small, angular line drawings by Marcel Janco, vignette portraits of Ball and his partner, the poet and performer Emmy Hennings. The other "young people" Ball found to join him were the Romanians Tristan Tzara and Janco, the Alsatian Hans Arp, his fellow German Richard Huelsenbeck, and a handful of other international exiles in neutral Switzerland during World War I. The passage opens Ball's editorial, which in turn prefaces the eponymous "propaganda magazine," *Cabaret Voltaire*. Published in a French and a German version in May 1916, this slim anthology sought to "document" the cabaret, though comparison of its contents with what we know of the nightly performances of the cabaret show that the publication presented a distinct and judicious selection of particular elements only.

The first published appearance of the word "Dada" is also in Ball's text. He closes with a declaration that "The next aim of the artists brought together here is the publication of an International Review." The final sentence shifts into the future tense. It changes, in the German version, into French: "The review will come out in Zurich and will carry the name 'DADA' ('Dada') Dada Dada Dada Dada" (Ball 1916, 5).

The narrative set a tone for many creation stories of Dada in Zurich. That mythology emphasizes personal connections, humble beginnings in a provisional home with basic materials, donated work, and loaned facilities. Ambitions are formulated with the benevolent aid of an obliging local press. And on the fifth day (of February) there was a cabaret. From a man so attuned to the languages of drama and of religion, the story's semantic

and symbolic echoes of that of God's creation of the world from nothing, over a few days, in the Old Testament book of Genesis can be no coincidence. The irony of such associations is consistent with Ball's own stance in relation to the cabaret in the context of World War I. Claire Goll reported that Ball was once asked, by her husband Yvan Goll, "whether a cabaret could really be a laboratory for thought and a solid podium from which to address a Europe devastated by war" to which Ball replied: "I need a little irony to be able to tolerate life and even more, to be able to bear my times" (Goll in Echte 1999, 122).

Images of birth, biblical and bodily, are abundant in other witnesses' accounts. Huelsenbeck, who came to Zurich from Berlin to join Ball there, retrospectively hailed the cabaret "the Nazareth, the birthplace of artistic developments," from which "warnings dressed up in nonsense" were transmitted to the "so-called civilised Western world" (Huelsenbeck 1965). Arp spoke playfully of the group's parental joy "when in 1916 we engendered our Dada and it was born" (Arp 1958, 13). In his *Zurich Chronicle* of 1920, Tzara evoked the new arrival, in breathless, loosely simultaneist prose, stuttering between the visceral and material, the sexual and cerebral:

In the most obscure of streets in the shadow of architectural ribs, where you will find discreet detectives amid red street lamps – BIRTH – birth of the CABARET VOLTAIRE – poster by Slodky, wood, woman and Co., heart muscles CABARET VOLTAIRE and pains.

Tzara (1981, 235)

From the start, then, the Cabaret Voltaire was productively stylized by its own protagonists as a place of origin separate from and resistant to the habitual transactions of the cultural marketplace. It was implicated, rather, in a more provisional and personal economy or in one tantalizingly shady, illicit, and nocturnal. And in its mythologies its genesis was if not by miraculous, then at least by mysterious means.

The creation of "Dada" and subsequently of "Dadaism" as a working enterprise, however, was a more focused and purposive process. Involving radical eclecticism and encompassing an extraordinary range of concerns and perspectives, it nonetheless provided effective means to overcome the limitations of a local cabaret and enter, with a distinct identity, into the European marketplace for modern art and literature and into the wider public sphere. Martin Puchner discusses this aspect of Dada and his succinct conclusion is apt: "You do not need an ism to open a cabaret but you do need one to compete in the international avant-garde circuit" (Puchner 2006, 150). "Dada" served well the stylized topos of a radical break with the past inherent to the cultural politics and "propaganda" (as the dadaists themselves called it) of the wider avant-garde. Such claims, however, should be measured against Dada's interrelations with and dependence on other groups, networks, institutions, economies, and material contexts. There is tension between a working theoretical model for the historical avant-garde, such as that proposed by Peter Bürger in 1974 (Bürger 1974) and the danger, as Hal Foster has argued with regard to Bürger, of taking the "romantic rhetoric of the avant-garde, of rupture and revolution, at its own word" (Foster 1996, 10). As Hubert van den Berg has remarked: "Before 1918 one will search in vain, at least among the Zurich dadaists, for the term 'world revolution'" (van den Berg 1999, 159). The wider point is that in the rush to advance the revolutionary dada, sometimes lost is an accurate picture of its connectedness with, and indebtedness to the theory and practice of wider prewar and contemporary avant-gardes, to particular intellectual and spiritual traditions, and even to the institutions that were the very object of its critique.

Part of this connectedness had to do with individual biography. For all the poets, artists, and performers involved in what became Dada in Zurich, this was but one stage in careers that had taken in Paris, Munich, Berlin, Bucharest, and beyond. For all its radical challenges, Dada also meant a continuum of activity begun in other milieux. Before Dada or the Cabaret Voltaire was founded, its protagonists were active within a cosmopolitan avant-garde that increasingly countered aesthetic conservatism with a mixture of eclectic primitivism, abstraction, and internationalism. Tzara and Janco were working on the symbolist journal *Simbolul* in Bucharest, Ball, Hennings, and Arp on the peripheries of the *Blaue Reiter* in Munich, *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion* in Berlin. All were reading and publishing in progressive literary and artistic periodicals. Most were keeping a keen eye on Futurism and on the expansion of Cubism from Paris. By 1916, wartime conditions made international communication difficult and sometimes perilous. Nevertheless, such connections significantly informed the live performances and experiments of the cabaret and beyond (Berghaus 1985).

The Cabaret Voltaire was intended and experienced from the outset as an international creative forum. Humorously deploying the imagery of the battlefield, one of its earliest reviewers, writing in the *Zürcher Post*, described entering to find:

a herd of red-bedecked tables, but the walls call out in all the languages of the newest visual arts; there hang painted trumpet-blasts and speeches by Parisians, Berliners and Viennese artists, with whom a few young Zurichers, for example Heinrich (sic) Wabel, unite their works nicely, there hang too the furious manuscripts of futurist newspaper articles, veritable sketches on field fortifications, made of armed words (*bewaffneten Worten*).

Zürcher Post in Sheppard (1996, 201–202)

The review underscores not only the emphatic international and heteroglossic character of the cabaret, but also its intermediality – the paintings in this intimate little theatre of war take on a sonic and polemic quality (the “painted trumpet-blasts and speeches”). One is also reminded of Walter Benjamin’s well-known later description of the (later) dadaist artwork as “an instrument of ballistics,” that “hit the spectator like a bullet, it happened to him, thus acquiring a tactile quality” (Benjamin 1992, 231).

Beyond the name of Heinrich Wabel (this was Henry Wabel, a local artist and well-respected teacher of painting), we know little more about the “young Zurichers” among the visual artists. The cabaret had an overwhelmingly exilic character, as did, from the start, its histories. Dada’s homelessness was increasingly emphasized across many of its public and private activities. In the context of the war, the desire to distance the cabaret from association with the widely propagandized German “barbarism” was explicit.¹ An “editorial note” in *Cabaret Voltaire*, in French and German, stated: “In order to avoid a national interpretation of this collection, the editor explicitly declares that it bears no relation to the ‘German mentality.’” “Neutrality,” however, so definitive a concept for Switzerland, barely figured in Dada’s public vocabulary. The state of being “*sans patrie*” and “*heimatlos*” was presented as more natural to Dada. These are the last words in the *Cabaret Voltaire* publication. At the end of the “editorial note,” they describe Emmy Hennings.

There were no Swiss items in the *Cabaret Voltaire* anthology. Very few recorded performers or items on the live repertoire were from the country. Sophie Taeuber, so important for dada performance, dance, and the visual arts in Zurich in 1917 is often assumed to have performed at the cabaret itself, though the lack of any primary

documentation suggests otherwise (Obler 2014, 161–164). The dadaists produced, however, various readings of the Swiss. Here they appear – I would suggest, strategically – as a distinct element of Dada’s public, often aligned with the bourgeois, the “good citizen.” The superficially national category of “the Swiss” was often thus used as shorthand *ersatz* for the notional bourgeois and the provincial subject, doubly distinct from Dada. The device is at its most explicit in Huelsenbeck’s polemic *En Avant Dada* of 1920, where the “Zurich philistines” at the cabaret are “fat and utterly uncomprehending” (Huelsenbeck 1981, 23). “The Swiss prefer yodelling to Cubism” was Ball’s marginally more charitable, private verdict (Ball in Schaub and Teubner 2003, 111). He wished that they were “somewhat worldlier” (Ball in Schaub and Teubner 2003, 108). He complained that “they all believe in the Salvation Army” (Ball in Schaub and Teubner 2003, 108) and related this on another occasion to what he perceived as the Swiss resistance to progressive music, adding that, when it comes to music, “the Swiss are very untalented” (Ball in Schaub and Teubner 2003, 110). The pianist and composer Heusser was a notable exception. Yet here too, in Ball’s comment that “a young Swiss studied under Debussy in Paris and now and then plays his own compositions” (Ball in Schaub and Teubner 2003, 110), there is the implication that Heusser brought to the cabaret cosmopolitan, Parisian experience. With some exceptions therefore – drinking students, eccentric visitors, the odd amateur poet – in Dada’s histories the Swiss remain literally and figuratively outside “the cosmopolitan mixture of God and brothel” as Tzara saw the cabaret (Tzara 1981, 235).

Early press reports and other discussions confirmed the international emphasis. They drew attention to the cabaret’s French “patron,” Voltaire, and to its perceived model – Munich’s Café Simplizissimus (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in Sheppard 1996, 199). Its first few weeks included elements of Parisian cabaret (Aristide Bruant translated into German and a Madame Leconte singing contemporary French *chansons*), Munich cabaret and theatre (Frank Wedekind’s *Donnerwetterlied* and Erich Mühsam’s *Revoluzzerlied*), German Expressionist and French poetry, Russian drama and other diverse elements, including performers’ own pieces. Ball recited Italian Futurist poetry by Marinetti, Paolo Buzzi, and Aldo Palazzeschi. There was a strong Russian component in the cabaret – on and off stage – including music recitals of Rachmaninoff, Alexander Scriabin, “Russian marches,” and a Balalaika group.

The radical, experimental works of sound poetry, bruitist performance, and simultaneity that have come to exemplify dada performance at the cabaret emerged from collaboration bringing together art, music, dance, recitation. Costumes and masks were prepared, many by Janco in particular, for whom the “intermediary medium” of the mask opened up new synthetic possibilities (Cheng 2014, 280). Rehearsals were held. A pivotal evening was that of March 29, 1916. Ball marked this in his diary as a defining moment, in which “all the styles of the last twenty years came together” (Ball 1992, 87). This was where Tzara’s cacophonous simultaneous poem “*L’amiral cherche une maison à louer*,” the “contrapuntal recital” as Ball described it, made its debut (see Demos 2003 and 2005). Huelsenbeck performed his “*chant nègre*.” Such items were important for the productive challenges they issued to rationalist, European concepts of art and language. They were special and recorded as such. But in the live context they were nevertheless still numbers at the cabaret, which, it should be remembered, ran on a near-nightly basis. What made for a vital and unpredictable dialectic was that such modern elements coexisted with the cabaret’s more conventional quotidian offerings. Mixed with the frequent “readings” of poetry, drama, and literature was generic “entertainment,” routines, songs, chance performers, and improvised dilettantism. Ball’s initial invitation to participate in the cabaret had clearly

attracted many would-be performers. An early press notice, in the socialist paper *Volksrecht* (which stopped publicizing the cabaret as it developed a more overtly avant-garde character) informed readers:

Because more readings have been offered by the public than the Saturday programme could accommodate, it should be noted that the recitals will continue nightly, with a changing programme and without any special notice to the press, so that all offerings can be accommodated.

Volksrecht in Sheppard (1996, 200)

In April, another paper was reminding readers that “the recital podium at the Cabaret Voltaire is open to all” (*Zürcher Post* in Sheppard 1996, 202). We know almost nothing about these contributions, though entries in Ball’s edited diaries, published in 1927 as *Die Flucht aus der Zeit* (*Flight out of Time*), give a sense of their variety and unpredictability (Ball 1992). Ball and Hennings also brought extensive experience as *Tingel-Tangel* performers, that is, in the cheaper, itinerant version of cabaret.² Sources such as press reviews, programs, letters, and diaries all make clear that the works we now recognize as of a most demonstratively avant-garde character were performed at special occasions at the cabaret, before a more selected audience than usual, with a more structured evening’s program and often with a modest commercial dimension. Such evenings were by nature exceptional. If we imagine that every night at the Cabaret Voltaire featured all the dadaists, outlandishly costumed and banging, whistling, and polemicizing their way through a revolutionary, “anarchic” program before a shocked and baffled audience, we indulge in one of the more colorful fantasies that the popular image of Dada has conjured up.

Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism

We have seen that the word “Dada” was first used in connection with the title for a forthcoming publication. It occurred elsewhere in the *Cabaret Voltaire* publication too. The title of a poem by Tzara, dedicated to his friend Janco, was “La revue dada 2.” It is prominent in a comic “dialogue between a coachman and a lark” in which the lark (Tzara) inserts advance publicity for a “Revue Dada” to come and a compulsively farting German poet-coachman (Huelsenbeck) declares “*Dada ist gross Dada ist schön*” (Dada is great Dada is beautiful). It had been coined, however, as early as March 1916 – exactly when, where and by whom has always been matter of debate (Elderfield 1974). What is clearer is that for some time in Zurich “Dada” signified not separateness from, but connectedness *with* the wider international avant-garde. Indeed, the ways in which connections with Expressionism, Cubism, and Futurism were negotiated were decisive for many of Dada’s key developments, as the work of Richard Sheppard (2000) has shown. The point needs stating because it was a feature of Dada in Zurich in particular, one sometimes lost to the more aggressive polemics and conflicts of later Dada, in Berlin, Paris, and elsewhere. The Cubist, Futurist, and Expressionist texts and images collected in *Cabaret Voltaire* were implicitly collated under the banner of “Dada” while also retaining some sense of these identities, mutable though they were. Some surviving issues of the anthology still have its original paper band, which carry the words “Futurisme Cubisme Expressionisme,” under which appear the names of all contributors, from Apollinaire to Tzara (illustrated in Dachy 2006, 10). Ball described the artworks exhibited at the cabaret in these terms (Ball in

Schaub and Teubner 2003, 99). Advertisements made use of this formula. The “Grand Soirée” on May 31, 1916, at which the anthology was launched, highlighted the contributions to the publication by Apollinaire, Kandinsky, Marinetti, Picasso, that is, by their leading representatives.

The tripartite phrase “Cubism, Futurism, Expressionism,” in varying order, was in wide currency by this time. However, more than anywhere else it was most prominently and consistently deployed by Herwarth Walden for the marketing, description, and theorization of the modern movement in general and of *Sturm* exhibitions, artists, and publications in particular. Arp’s work, for instance, had already been included in one of these exhibitions in 1913, titled *Expressionisten, Kubisten, Futuristen*. The dadaists were keenly aware of the ways in which such terms were read and used. While there were many liberal, cultured citizens and art professionals who were open to the “new art” in other circles, in Switzerland as elsewhere, terms such as “Cubism,” “Futurism,” and “Expressionism” were also commonly used, interchangeably, as shorthand for the work of artists who were either incomprehensible, charlatan, talentless, or all three. In the context of a discussion of the first exhibition of *Der Moderne Bund* in Lucerne in 1911 (organized by Oskar Lüthy, with Arp and Walter Helbig), and the vehement press reaction to it, Doris Fässler has commented that: “In the Cubism debate something becomes clear: conservative circles use the word as a term of abuse in that they call everything new, other, modern, ‘Cubism’; even in professional art circles the term had yet to be clarified.” She notes that in this context, as elsewhere, the terms Cubism and Expressionism “frequently overlapped and consequently were not to be precisely distinguished” (Fässler 2011, 53). Walden himself observed: “The most common slogan used for the entirety of the new art is the word Futurism” (Walden 1917, 18). Confusion and negativity were brushed off and in some cases actively welcomed by the dadaists, who collected and cheerfully reproduced for advertising purposes reviews that expressed bafflement or hostility. Already in mid-1916 Ball was using such responses as advertising material, including a review that had apparently called him a representative of “a literary tendency which, whether one now calls it Cubism or Futurism or whatever, is the spawn of rampant fantasy and perverse sexuality. Eruptions of delirium, downright decadence!”³

The First “Public” Dada Evening

Dada’s public position in relation to Expressionism, Futurism, and Cubism was made more pointedly by the next Dada event in the city. After the Cabaret Voltaire closed, from July 1916 the dadaists moved their ventures away from the haphazard local contingencies of the cabaret milieu and the Niederdorf quarter of the city. It was a move that decisively redetermined Dada’s identity within the city (Lewer 1996). The “First Dada Evening,” as it was billed, took place in the venerable old guildhouse Zur Waag on July 14, 1916. When Ball referred to the soirée in his diary (on August 6) he called it “the first *public* dada evening” with emphasis on the word “public.” It was also the moment at which he felt he had made a “thinly disguised break with friends” at a time when he was losing faith and interest in the fledgling art movement. The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* reported: “The participants in this evening have coined the word “dada” for their tendency. Their goal with this demonstration evening is to introduce a movement of great style” (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in Sheppard 1996, 203).

The soirée was carefully planned. A program was printed in advance and a dress rehearsal took place at the Waag in the afternoon. The dancer Suzanne Perrottet recalled: “the first

big performance was in July 1916 in the Zunfthaus zur Waag and has become famous because all of the important public in Zurich had been invited" (Perrottet in Schrott 1992, 51). With justification Tzara recorded this in his chronicle as a Dada Night, "For the first time anywhere" (Tzara 1981, 236).

Only Heusser and the core members of the cabaret – Ball, Hennings, Tzara, Huelsenbeck, Janco, and Arp – performed at the Waag soirée. The program was divided into two parts. In the first part there was music by Heusser, recitals by Hennings of her own poetry and prose, a talk by Arp on his "paper pictures," Ball's "*Gadji Beri Bimba*" *Verse ohne Worte* (poetry without words) in cubistic costume (a famous photograph of which exists); two *chants nègres*, and a simultaneous poem "*La fièvre puerpérale*" performed by Ball, Huelsenbeck, Janco, and Tzara. In the second part, Janco spoke about his pictures, Heusser played more of his own compositions, Huelsenbeck and Tzara performed "movementist," "vowel," and bruitist poems in masks made by Janco, Hennings danced three "Dada dances" in masks by Janco and with piano accompaniment by Ball, and Huelsenbeck read his "*Mpala Tano*" poem. The soirée concluded with a "cubistic dance" performed by Ball, Hennings, Huelsenbeck, and Tzara, arranged and costumed by Ball, and accompanied by music from Andrejev's "*Leben des Menschen*" (Goergen 1996).

Of these elements, by no means all were in fact "new." Most were recycled or adapted from the cabaret and even before. "*La fièvre puerpérale*" was a four-man variation on the technique of the "hit" simultaneous poem "*L'amiral cherche une maison à louer*." In an interview in 1982, Janco remembered that "we had to repeat it [*L'amiral cherche*'] on three separate occasions because it was such successful folly. They couldn't understand it, nobody, yet they liked it" (Janco in Naumann 1982, 81). A series of collages made by Arp that year; his "paper pictures I–V" were shown at the Waag soirée. Of these, three had already been exhibited at the Cabaret Voltaire. They are listed and one is reproduced in the *Cabaret Voltaire* anthology along with a similar *Papierbild* by Otto van Rees, with whom Arp was close. The evidence suggests that Ball's now infamous performance of his *Lautgedichte* or *Verse ohne Worte* in cubistic costume was *repeated* at the Waag and indeed elsewhere. Ball himself only recorded in his diary performing these at the cabaret on June 23, 1916, yet the program for the Waag soirée bills his performance "'Gadji beri Bimba' (Poems without words, in own costume)" (illustration in Bolliger et al. 1985, 255). This discrepancy has often had the effect, in Dada historiography, of compressing the two events into one (e.g., Richter 1978, 41–43). Philip Mann has discussed in more detail the accounts of these events. He concludes that the *Lautgedichte* must have been performed by Ball at the cabaret on June 23, 1916 in a lesser-known makeshift costume, and at the Waag on July 14 in the cubistic costume (Mann 1976). Perrottet recalls Ball at the dress rehearsal for the Waag soirée:

He stood, dressed in cardboard as a priest quite simply before a lectern, on it lay a large book like a bible. He read from it what Dada wanted. Away with convention, away with the lie, away with forms that had become dead.

Perrottet in Schrott (1992, 51)

Ball records that he had made some programmatic statements prior to reciting his verses. His diary summary of these is close to the content of the latter passages of Ball's "First Dada Manifesto," read at the Waag soirée, indicating that this section of the manifesto may have been a development or even a repetition of statements he had already made at the cabaret. As Klaus Kiefer concludes: "We must assume that in the description of one

performance poetry and truth flow together. Aside from the one photo, which may be posed, Ball's performance is for us a reader's drama (*ein Lesedrama*)" (Kiefer 2012, 70).

The Dada dances performed by Hennings in Janco's masks had a precedent at the cabaret where the *Grosse Soirée* held on May 31 for the launch of the *Cabaret Voltaire* anthology included a "mask dance" with masks by Janco, of which Ball wrote at some length in his diary (Ball 1992, 96–97). Bruitism already had a firm place in the cabaret's repertoire where a "*concert bruitiste*," the *Krippenspiel* (nativity play), had had its debut too at the *Grosse Soirée*. Huelsenbeck read at least one of his "Fantastic Prayers" ("*Mpala Tano*"). These had been a regular hit at the cabaret, originating from the persistent "umba umbas" that Huelsenbeck fancied passed for "negro poems" and that he "roared and spouted over and over again into the audience" (Huelsenbeck 1991, 9) on the first night he entered the Cabaret Voltaire. The First Dada Evening was conceived as a distillation of the most innovative aspects of the cabaret. This helps form a more accurate picture of what "Dada" meant for the organizers of its public debut at this time. The Waag soirée was a "first" neither in terms of the program content, nor in terms of its cast of performers. Unprecedented, however, was the site and the scale of its intent. Ball recognized the portent of those factors. His manifesto opened with the declaration "Dada is a new art movement. You can tell this because until now no-one knew anything about it and tomorrow the whole of Zurich will be talking about it" (Ball in Bolliger et al. 1985, 256).

In relation to the wider marketplace for modern art, the launch of Dadaism in these terms involved a correspondingly decisive shift in publicity strategy. The notice in the press advertising the soirée contained, in bold type, the words "*Futurismus Dadaismus* (sic) *Cubismus*" (illustrated in Bolliger et al. 1985, 76). Not only does this underscore Dada's status as a "movement," an "ism," it now also inserts "Dadaism" in the place of "Expressionism" in previous publicity materials. To those who followed the business and developments of the European avant-garde, it conveyed a message. Walden and those who worked with him for *Der Sturm* often used "Expressionism" as an umbrella term under which "Cubism" and "Futurism" could be gathered (e.g., Behne 1914). This was not only a matter of semantics, but was at the core of Walden's "homogenizing of the avant-garde," the political dimensions of which have been examined by Kate Winskell (1995, 317). Tzara and Ball's "Dadaism" adopted from the start telling strategies that bore a resemblance to those of Walden. Before the war, in the summer of 1914, Ball had visited Walden in Berlin and worked on plans to develop a new synthesis of the arts with input from Walden's *Sturm* in Munich, so this is not surprising (Lewer 2014, 98). The connection of Dada with *Der Sturm* would become more formal in 1917 at the Galerie Dada. Nevertheless, the way in which this first "public" dada evening was presented and marketed adds a further dimension to this relationship. And the dadaists may even have been aware that at exactly the same time that the Waag evening was held under this banner, Walden's forty-third exhibition at the powerful gallery *Der Sturm* was on. Its title: *Expressionisten, Futuristen, Kubisten*. The placing of their word into the centre of the trio, from which "Expressionism" is removed, is in this respect a bold gesture for a "movement" at a nascent stage.

Tzara attributed great significance to this event. He gave a vivid evocation of the evening:

In the presence of a compact crowd Tzara demonstrates, we demand the right to piss in different colours ... shouting and fighting in the hall, first row approves second row declares itself incompetent the rest shout, who is the strongest, the big drum is brought in, Huelsenbeck against 200 ... The newspapers dissatisfied simultaneous poem for 4 voices + simultaneous work for 300 hopeless idiots.

Tzara (1981)

As the text accelerates, the impression of the crowd's size grows too. Tzara wrote to Apollinaire that 400 people had attended the event (Tzara in Schrott 1992, 71). In another letter, to René Gaffé, only recently published, he made similar claims – for the scale of the evening and for its pro-French character, celebrating the “revolutionary genius of France” (a suggestion for which there is little documentary evidence) (Tzara in Wohl 2007). This was a tactical exaggeration, not least because the largest room in the building, the Zunftsaal, where the soirée was held, could not feasibly have accommodated 400 people.

Collection Dada

For the next 6 months there were no public dada events in the city. Ball had been disturbed by a negative review of the *Cabaret Voltaire* anthology written by the respected Belgian socialist writer Henri Guilbeaux in *La Guerre Mondiale* and withdrew to the Ticino region of southern Switzerland where he spent time reassessing his own work and completing *Flametti*, his *roman à clef*. As he did so, however, Tzara seized the initiative and began to step up publishing activities. These played a key part in defining dada's presence beyond the local context and in producing what could now be thought of and marketed as “dadaist” art and literature. A series of publications under the mantle of the Collection Dada appeared: Tzara's *La première aventure celeste de Mr. Antipyrine* (Mr. Antipyrine's first celestial adventure) in July 1916; Huelsenbeck's *Schalaben, schalabai, schalamezomai* in August 1916; *Phantastische Gebete* (Fantastic Prayers) in September 1916; and Janco's *Album* of woodcuts with a poem by Tzara. Janco's semi-abstract linoleum cuts and Arp's geometric woodcuts in austere symmetry were prominent in these. Following a change in his formal language widely attributed to an intervening stay on the Monte Verità at Ascona in 1917–1918, Arp provided woodcuts in looser, biomorphic forms, to accompany Tzara's poems in the latter's *vingt-cinq poèmes*, published by the “Collection Dada” in Zurich in 1918.

Galerie Dada

Ball returned to Zurich in the autumn of 1916 but his antipathy towards the city's émigré artistic milieu continued to fester. He remarked in a letter to his sister:

Here in Zurich we have the Café des Westens (Berlin) incarnate. One can see just how sick the whole German intelligentsia is. Almost all of them are on leave in Switzerland (and feel that their stay is exile).

Ball in Schaub and Teubner (2003, 151)

His correspondence around this time suggests that what initially drew him back into collaboration with Tzara was the idea of a series of “authors' evenings.” In December 1916, Ball envisaged these as a means to work singly, not “ensemble” (Ball in Schaub and Teubner 2003, 154). The intended venue was Han Coray's gallery in Zurich. In January 1917, Coray hosted the First Dada Exhibition there. Work by Arp, Janco, Richter, Giorgio de Chirico, Otto and Adya van Rees, and others was shown along with African sculpture and weapons from Coray's extensive collection and what was billed as “old art.” In March 1917, Ball and Tzara acquired the premises from Coray. The Galerie Dada provided them

with a new space of operation in more than just physical terms. The rooms were above the exclusive Swiss chocolatier's, Sprüngli, on the Paradeplatz in the heart of Zurich's wealthy financial and shopping district. Dada now had a base in the center of the city's commercial and public life.

During the run of the First Dada Exhibition, Tzara gave three lectures on Saturday afternoons. His interpretation of the modern visual art exhibited here drew attention to the desire for "geometric simplicity" among these artists. In striking contrast to the pugnacious rhetoric of his declamatory writing, Tzara's observations here attribute to this modern art a redemptive and synthesizing capacity to lead the modern subject to the telos order, clarity, quiet. The process is one undertaken by artists who have subjected themselves to experiential rigors and spiritual discipline: "With Arp I see asceticism, which results from symmetry, a symmetry he imposes on himself like a monastic rule (*Ordensregel*)." For Tzara, the Swiss painter Oskar Lüthy "leads the way through the golden and bloody ambit of his sensibility to a mysterious and fantastic quiet." An important feature of the visual arts program at the Galerie Dada from the start was that it challenged conventional hierarchical distinctions between the fine and "applied" arts. Here too, for Tzara: "the mathematical purity of the embroideries of Ms van Rees calls the soul into a fountain of infinity" (Tzara in Bolliger et al. 1985, 259).

The Galerie Dada existed only until the end of May. Yet over this short period it staged four exhibitions (three large and one small), six soirées, and a series of lectures and afternoon tours. An observation by Ball articulates the extent to which the Galerie Dada operated in a range of registers:

The gallery has three faces. By day it is a kind of educational establishment for schoolgirls and upper-class ladies. In the evening the Kandinsky room is a candlelit club for the most esoteric philosophies. At the soirées, however, parties are thrown that have a brilliance and a frenzy such as Zurich has never seen before.

Ball (1992, 161)

The connection with *Der Sturm* was formalized here. The first two exhibitions at the Galerie Dada, in March and April 1917, were of a two-part touring selection of Expressionist works from Walden's gallery in Berlin. The murkier connections between Dada and *Der Sturm* have been investigated by Hubert van den Berg, revealing the extraordinary possibility (though not the certainty) of Dada's complicity, at least to some degree, in Walden's wartime activities on behalf of the German state in the neutral countries of Europe, as first investigated more generally by Winskell (1995; van den Berg 2012). The *Sturm* exhibitions had been taken on, in a more or less undiluted form, from Coray's other gallery in Basel. However, prior to that, in 1916, they had been seen in the Hague. After Zurich they were shown in Copenhagen. As van den Berg and Winskell have shown and discussed in more detail, these *Sturm* exhibitions, in the Netherlands and in Denmark, were undertakings that had demonstrable connections (evidenced by surviving documentation in the German Foreign Office archive and elsewhere) with the activities of the German information services, and with state efforts in cultural propaganda. Nell and Herwarth Walden are both implicated, more generally, in what Winskell calls "low-level espionage" in Scandinavia during the war (Winskell 1995, 327). Such documents and directly comparable circumstances are lacking in the case of the *Sturm* exhibitions at the Galerie Dada or elsewhere in Switzerland, so no direct link can be made. In the light of what is now known about Walden's international activities

on behalf of Germany during World War I, a reminiscence by Friedrich Glauser, who took part in several dada events in Zurich takes is nonetheless suggestive. He wrote:

In March 1917, the foundation of the Galerie Dada was agreed upon ... Picture crates arrived, Germany wanted to make artistic propaganda, just like every state at that time. The magazine *Der Sturm* provided the pictures. Kokoschka[’s work] was to be seen there, the German Cubist Feininger, Kandinsky, Klee.

Glauser in Schrott (1992, 91)

In the wider context of the standard history of Dada, the fact that Tzara’s own library contained a copy of Walden’s 1917 book, *Einblick in Kunst (Insight in Art)* is unremarkable. In the context of Dada’s operation in relation to Walden and *Der Sturm*’s more covert activities, the inscription that this volume bore, in Walden’s hand, is intriguing: “Mit Dank Herwarth Walden, Berlin am 30. Dezember 1917” (“With thanks Herwarth Walden, Berlin, 30 December 1917”).

Ball left Zurich and Dada for good at the end of May 1917, on such bad terms with Tzara that for a time he considered suing him over the financial mismanagement of the gallery. However, Dada continued to gain momentum and increase its international expansion. Huelsenbeck had left Zurich for Berlin at the end of 1916. In January 1918 he read his “First Dada Speech in Germany” in I.B. Neumann’s gallery in Berlin and founded the Club Dada (White 2013, 63–66). Berlin Dada quickly proved itself to be very newsworthy and was the subject of much praise, scorn, and debate in the press. German newspapers were readily available in Switzerland and especially in Zurich, and the attention Berlin Dada was receiving prompted the curiosity of journalists and the general public towards the activities of the dadaists in Zurich.

Dada

Between July 1917 and May 1919, Tzara also edited four magazines, or “reviews,” published in Zurich under the title *Dada*; the last of which was a “double edition,” *Dada 4–5*. Although not discussed in detail here, dance played a vital part in the live Dada events in Zurich and indeed in the critical thinking of various participants. Ball wrote on modern dance even after leaving the sphere of Dada (Ball 1917). The comprehensive notes that Tzara included at the end of the journal *Dada 1* began with a paragraph on the Laban Dance School. Tauber’s dancing was described there: “delirious bizarreness in the hand’s spider vibrates rhythm rapidly ascending towards the paroxysm of a beautiful, capricious, mocking dementia” (Tzara 1917).

Of the other Dada journals, *Dada 3*, with its radical typography and Tzara’s extraordinary, explosive *Manifeste Dada 1918* made the greatest impact. It won over Francis Picabia, André Breton, and others (Hentea 2014, 103–124). Tzara declaimed his manifesto at a one-man Dada soirée on July 23, 1918, in the Zunfthaus zur Meise on the Münsterhof. It was a prestigious, elegant, and somewhat incongruous setting for an evening at the center of which was such a shattering statement and challenge to all forms of habitual thought and affirmative culture. The eminent historian of Dada, Michel Sanouillet, has called the manifesto “the first, the true and the great gospel of Dadaism.” For him, it “contains in embryo the whole subsequent evolution of Dada and surrealism” (Sanouillet 2009, 99). A few months later, the manifesto hit Paris and other artistic centers in the vehicle of *Dada 3*, amplified by the newly radical visual approach to Dada typography and design that characterized that issue of the journal.

There were a number of other, related publications in Zurich until *Der Zeltweg* appeared at the end of 1919. Beyond the contents and immanent, formal qualities of the Swiss Dada

magazines, they played important functions: in publicizing Dada, in meeting certain aesthetic criteria (not least those of the collectors' market), in raising funds, in positioning strategically the "movement" as a new presence, in winning favor with prominent contacts, and in negotiating the minefield of international political tensions during the war years (Lewer 2013).

"Scandal" at the Eighth Dada Soirée

The eighth Dada soirée at the Kaufleutensaal on April 9, 1919 was the single largest Dada event in the city and has been historicized, not least by its participants, as the climax of the movement. It was designed both to antagonize and to please an audience who were by now expecting a scandal. Walter Serner had by this time become an active member of the Dada circle. His recital of his *Letzte Lockerung* (Final Dissolution) manifesto was accompanied by gestures intended to disorientate and provoke. He carried a headless tailor's dummy on stage, gave it a bouquet of artificial flowers to smell, then brought out a chair, which he sat on with his back to the audience (Richter 1978, 78). The importance of Dada's public profile and the contingency of its momentum, mediated by the press, are brought into sharp relief in the case of this soirée and indeed Serner's part in it. In the face of an initially apathetic press response to the Kaufleutensaal soirée, Serner seized the initiative. He could draw for this on considerable publishing experience and on his background in a newspaper and printers' family. As Thomas Milch's research has shown, usually writing under the abbreviated pseudonym "M. Ch.," Serner now sent out detailed "correspondent's" reports of the soirée, adopting a tabloidesque combination of disapproval and sensationalism. They went to newspapers in Switzerland and Germany, including a French version for Geneva. In this way, Serner achieved wide and effective coverage of the event. His reports were published in at least 10 papers, with slight variations. They appeared in Swiss papers in St. Gallen, Basel, Winterthur, Solothurn, and Geneva, and in German papers in Munich and Berlin (Milch 1982, 244).

Anonymous self-promotion through the press is by no means the original invention of the dadaists. However, Serner's accounts of the Kaufleutensaal soirée constitute a remarkable feat of self-publicity on many levels. As pieces of newspaper journalism they presented Dada as "newsworthy." They publicized the highlights of the soirée's program, such as Tzara's simultaneous poem for 20 people, the *Noir Kakadu* ballet, and Arp's poems. But the emphasis was overwhelmingly on the outraged actions and reactions of the audience. These reactions determined and substantiated the "scandal" around which the entire report revolves. The other dadaists' own accounts of the evening (such as those by Richter and Tzara) also indicate varying degrees of chaos and outrage in the audience. It is noteworthy that these audience responses are registered with satisfaction; indeed, as an index of the soirée's "success" (Tzara). Serner's article also constructs an account of the mounting disorder in the hall, beginning with amusement, but escalating to a "scandalous" crescendo. The text is structured so that the focal point, the catalyst for the eruption of audience energy that makes the scandal, is Serner's own reading of his *Letzte Lockerung Manifest*:

Whereas the first recitals and musical pieces were met merely with more or less noisy ironic cheering ... as Walter SERNER read a manifesto, "*Letzte Lockerung*" bristling with passionate spitefulness, it came to a scandal the likes of which old Zurichers claimed never to have seen before ... So it was really no wonder that the public got up in arms: they whistled, shouted; threw small change, orange peel and obscenities onto the stage and stamped their feet and chairs.

"M.Ch" [pseud] in Milch (1982, 19)

Serner concludes his incognito review with the verdict that the soirée “was an incomparable scandal.” He then reinforces the effect by adopting a tone of moral disapproval at its end. Yet even here he inserts some bald publicity for his own forthcoming (though actually never realized) publication – *Das Hirngeschwür* (*The Brain Tumour*):

The Dadaist gentlemen, who were never less needed than at present, should confine their manifestations ... to their many magazines (the one edited by Walter Serner bears the outrageous title “The Brain Tumour”) and should not bother the public with them.

“M.Ch” [pseud] in Milch (1982, 20)

Dada and Exile

We have seen that Dada’s relationship with its various publics was important at all stages. More specifically, scholarship on Dada has emphasized the significance of the dadaists’ situations of exile and “geopolitical displacement” (Demos 2003). Such considerations have brought insights into the complex politics, the dislocation of language, and the freighted questions of identity negotiated by Dada in Zurich (Demos 2005; Kramer 2011). There were also pragmatic, even calculated features of the decision, on the part of Dada’s protagonists, to go to Switzerland and assemble with others in Zurich. These detract neither from Dada’s radical gestures, nor from the trauma of many kinds of experience during the war years. But as Raymond Williams observed of the emigré artist in modernity: “Their self-referentiality, their propinquity and mutual isolation all served to represent the artist as necessarily estranged, and to ratify as canonical the works of radical estrangement” (Williams 2007, 35). The relations of production of these mobile emigrés also need to be incorporated into histories of Dada.

In the case of Zurich Dada, the considerable attractions of estrangement from dominant bourgeois culture, from “home” and to emigration to a place of productive connection with others relativize the dramatic emphasis that has been placed on these exiles as fugitives. The dadaists all experienced the paradoxical and “discontinuous state” of exile (Said 2000). The transnational, nomadic life, the endless crossing of borders was, however, itself a state familiar to the culture of “the internationally anti-bourgeois artist” (Williams 2007, 34). Michael Erlhoff sees Tzara as “the real emigrant” whose condition as such is declared through both his texts and his acts (Erlhoff 1996, 108). In many respects, Dada’s own self-understanding was positively attuned to its “moveable, transient and vagrant” qualities (Kramer 2011, 203). Common to numerous dadaists’ testimonies, for example, is the articulation of both Dada *and* exile as refusal and as protest against the war and the culture they associated with it. Such reminiscences foreground shared and individual exilic experience and the critical perspectives it afforded. Richter’s colorful and widely read Dada memoirs include a passage relating to Zurich culminating in a telling list of that from which Dada sought liberation:

We would have nothing more to do with the sort of human or inhuman being who used reason as a juggernaut, crushing acres of corpses – as well as ourselves – beneath its wheels. We wanted to bring forth a new kind of human being ... free from the tyranny of rationality, of banality, of generals, fatherlands, nations, art-dealers, microbes, resident permits and the past.

Richter (1978, 65)

His points echo, strikingly, what Richard Huelsenbeck was already claiming in 1920 in his polemic essay, “*En Avant Dada*”:

None of us had much appreciation for the kind of courage it takes to get shot for the idea of a nation which is at best a cartel of pelt merchants and profiteers in leather, at worst a cultural association of psychopaths who, like the Germans, marched off with a volume of Goethe in their knapsacks, to skewer Frenchmen and Russians on their bayonets.

Huelsenbeck (1981, 23)

This image of Dada’s collective dissent from the interests of nation and capital and from a compromised European culture was recognized by its detractors too. Provoked by Dada in the “Spartacus days” of 1919 in Germany, the prominent critic Camill Hoffmann wrote, in a caustic article:

In the midst of war Dada is international – is equally antinational as much as it can be antiinternational – Swiss, Frenchmen, Italians, Germans and literary Balkans sit together by Lake Zurich, all equally filled with *dégout-dadaïste*.

Hoffmann (1919, 491)

Dada was an attempt to articulate a distinct identity for the diverse activities and connections of a group of disparate Europeans in a state of absence – from home, family, “homeland” and from the war then consuming the continent. Though observing a different aspect of neutral Switzerland’s attraction for foreigners, like Hoffmann, Huelsenbeck too was sensitive to the dissonances and paradoxes of place and social behavior under extreme conditions. He wrote that when he saw the racketeers out on the terrace of Zurich’s most opulent hotel, the Baur au Lac, he had the feeling the whole of civilization stank to high heaven (Sheppard 2000, 182).

Notes

- 1 Charges of German “barbarism” were a feature of Entente propaganda, occasioned by such widely protested acts as the bombardment of the cathedrals at Reims and Soissons.
- 2 The differences between *Tingel-Tangel* and “elegant” (*vornehm*) cabaret in the city of Zurich were defined by the authorities in 1916 chiefly in terms of the class of performer and public (see police report of March 2, 1916 quoted in Meyer 1990, 36).
- 3 Extract from *Volksrecht* quoted on the program *Moderne Literarische Cabaret-Abende* (Nachlass Hugo Ball and Emmy Ball-Hennings, Schweizerisches Literaturarchiv).

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