Dadaist Disgust

Every product of disgust capable of becoming a negation of the family is Dada; a protest with the fists of its whole being engaged in destructive action: Dada; knowledge of all the means rejected up until now by the shamefaced sex of comfortable compromise and good manners: Dada; abolition of logic, which is the dance of those impotent to create: Dada; of every social hierarchy and equation set up for the sake of values by our useless: Dada; every object, all objects, sentiments, obscurities, apparitions and the precise clash of parallel lines are weapons for the fight: Dada; abolition of memory: Dada; abolition of archaeology: Dada; abolition of prophets: Dada; abolition of the future: Dada; absolute and unquestionable faith in every god that is the immediate product of spontaneity: Dada; elegant and unprejudiced leap from a harmony to the other sphere; trajectory of a word tossed like a screeching phonograph record; to respect all individuals in their folly of the moment: whether it be serious, fearful, timid, ardent, vigorous, determined, enthusiastic; to divest one's church of every useless cumbersome accessory; to spit out disagreeable or amorous ideas like a luminous waterfall, or coddle them — with the extreme satisfaction that it doesn't matter in the least — with the same intensity in the thicket of one's soul — pure of insects for blood well-born, and gilded with bodies of archangels. Freedom: Dada Dada Dada, a roaring of tense colors, and interlacing of opposites and of all contradictions, grotesques, inconsistencies:

LIFE

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

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

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

No! No! No!

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

No! No! No!

Under the pretext of turning inward, the expressionists in literature and painting have banded together into a generation which is already looking forward to honorable mention in the histories of literature and art and aspiring to the most respectable civic distinctions. On pretext of carrying on propaganda for the soul, they have, in their struggle with naturalism, found their way back to the abstract, pathetic gestures which presuppose a comfortable life free from content or strife. The stages are filling up with kings, poets and Faustian characters of all sorts; the theory of a melioristic philosophy, the psychological naiveté of which is highly significant for a critical understanding of expressionism, runs ghostlike through the minds of men who never act. Hatred of the press, hatred of advertising, hatred of sensations are typical of people who prefer their armchair to the noise of the street, and who even make it a point of pride to be swindled by every smalltime profiteer. That sentimental resistance to the times, which are neither better nor worse, neither more reactionary nor more revolutionary than other times, that weak-kneed resistance, flirting with prayers and incense when it does not prefer to load its cardboard cannon with Attic iambics — is the quality of a youth which never knew how to be young. Expressionism, discovered abroad; and in Germany, true to style, transformed into an opulent idyll and the expectation of a good pension, has nothing in common with the efforts of active men. The signers of this manifesto have, under the battle cry:

Dada! 1 1 1
gathered together to put forward a new art, from which they expect the realization of new ideals. What then is DADAISM?
The word Dada symbolizes the most primitive relation to the reality of the environment; with Dadaism a new reality comes into its own. Life appears as a simultaneous muddle of noises, colors and spiritual rhythms, which is taken unmodified into Dadaist art, with all the sensational screams and fivers of its reckless everyday psyche and with all its brutal reality. This is the sharp dividing line separating Dadaism from all artistic directions up until now and particularly from FUTURISM which not long ago some puddingheads took to be a new version of impressionist realization. Dadaism for the first time has ceased to take an aesthetic attitude toward life, and this it accomplishes by tearing all the slogans of ethics, culture and inwardness, which are merely cloaks for weak muscles, into their components.

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

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

The Static poem makes words into individuals, out of the letters spelling woods, steps the woods with its treetops, liveried foresters and wild sows, maybe a boarding house steps out too, and maybe it's called Bellevue or Bella Vista. Dadaism leads to amazing new possibilities and forms of expression in all the arts. It made cubism a dance on the stage, it disseminated the BRUTIST music of the futurists (whose purely Italian concerns it has no desire to generalize) in every country in Europe. The word Dada in itself indicates the internationalism of the movement which is bound to no frontiers, religions or professions. Dada is the international expression of our times, the great rebellion of artistic movements, the artistic reflex of all these offenses, peace congresses, riots in the vegetable market, midnight suppers at the Esplanade, etc., etc. Dada champions the use of the new medium in painting.

Dada is a CLUB, founded in Berlin, which you can join without commitments. In this club every man is chairman and every man can have his say in artistic matters. Dada is not a pretext for the ambition of a few literary men (as our enemies would have you believe), Dada is a state of mind that can be revealed in any conversation whatever, so that you are compelled to say: this man is a DADAIST — that man is not; the Dada Club consequently has members all over the world, in Honolulu as well as New Orleans and Meseritz. Under certain circumstances to be a Dadaist may mean to be more a businessman, more a political partisan than an artist — to be an artist only by accident — to be a Dadaist means to let oneself be thrown by things, to oppose all sedimentation, to sit in a chair for a single moment is to risk one's life (Mr. Wenga pulled his revolver out of his pants pocket). A fabric tears under your hand, you say yes to a life that strives upward by negation. Affirmation — negation: the gigantic hocus-pocus of existence fires the nerves of the true Dadaist — and there he is, reclining, hunting, cycling — half Pantagruel, half St. Francis, laughing and laughing. Blast the aesthetic-ethical attitude! Blast the bloodless abstraction of expressionism! Blast the literary hollowheads and their theories for improving the world! For Dadaism in word and image, for all the Dada things that go on in the world! To be against this manifesto is to be a Dadaist!
Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974) and Raoul Hausmann (1886–1971) ‘What is Dadaism and what does it want in Germany?’

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

1 Dadaism demands:

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

2 The Central Council demands:

a) Daily meals at public expense for all creative and intellectual men and women on the Potsdamer Platz (Berlin);

b) Compulsory adherence of all clergymen and teachers to the Dadaist articles of faith;

c) The most brutal struggle against all directions of so-called ‘workers of the spirit’ (Hiller, Adler), against their concealed bourgeoisie, against expressionism and post-classical education as advocated by the Strum group;

d) The immediate erection of a state art center, elimination of concepts of property in the new art (expressionism); the concept of property is entirely excluded from the super-individual movement of Dadaism which liberates all mankind;

e) Introduction of the simultaneist poem as a Communist state prayer;

f) Requisition of churches for the performance of brutalism, simultaneist and Dadaist poems;

g) Establishment of a Dadaist advisory council for the remodelling of life in every city of over 50,000 inhabitants;

h) Immediate organization of a large scale Dadaist propaganda campaign with 150 circuses for the enlightenment of the proletariat;

i) Submission of all laws and decrees to the Dadaist central council for approval;

j) Immediate regulation of all sexual relations according to the views of international Dadaism through establishment of a Dadaist sexual center.

The Dadaist revolutionary central council.

German group: Hausmann, Huelsenbeck

Business Office: Charlottenburg, Kanstrasse 118.

Applications for membership taken at business office.

Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974) from En Avant Dada

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

[...]

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

The Dadaist, as the psychological man, has brought back his gaze from the distance and considers it important to have shoes that fit and a suit without holes in it. The Dadaist is an atheist by instinct. He is no longer a metaphysician in the sense of finding a rule for the conduct of life in any theoretical principles, for him there is no longer a ‘thou shalt’; for him the cigarette-butt and the umbrella are as exalted and as timeless as the ‘thing in itself’. Consequently, the good is for the Dadaist no ‘better’ than the bad – there is only a simultaneity, in values as in every other thing. This simultaneity applied to the economy of facts is communism, a communism, to be sure, which has abandoned the principle of ‘making things better’ and above all sees its goal in the destruction of everything that has become bourgeois. Thus the Dadaist is opposed to the idea of paradise in every form, and one of the ideas farthest from his mind is that ‘the spirit is the sum of all means for the improvement of human existence.’

The word ‘improvement’ is in every form unintelligible to the Dadaist, since behind it he sees a hammering and sawing on this life which, though useless, aimless and vile, represents as such a thoroughly spiritual phenomenon, requiring no improvement in a metaphysical sense. To mention spirit and improvement in the same breath is for the Dadaist a blasphemy. ‘Evil’ has a profound meaning, the polarity of events finds in it a limit, and through the real political
that feeble opposition, which sidles up to prayers and incense when it does not prefer to make paper cannons out of Attic iambics—these are traits of a youth who never knew how to be young. Expressionism, discovered abroad and—true to style—transformed in Germany into a fat idler with hope of a good pension, has nothing in common with the efforts of active men. The signers of this manifesto have, under the battle cry DADA!!! assembled together to put forward a new art, from which they expect the realization of new ideals. What then is DADAISM?

The word Dada symbolizes the most primitive relation to the surrounding reality; with Dadaism a new reality comes into its own. Life appears as a simultaneous whirl of noises, colors, and spiritual rhythms, which Dada takes unflinchingly into its art, with all the spectacular screams and fevers of its feisty pragmatic attitude and with all its brutal reality. This is the sharp dividing line separating Dadaism from all artistic directions up until now and particularly from Futurism, which not long ago called these minds to be a new version of impressionist realization. By tearing to pieces all the platitudes of ethics, culture, and inwardness, which are merely cloaks for weak muscles, Dadaism has for the first time ceased to take an aesthetic position toward life.

the BRUTIST poem represents a streetcar as it is, the essence of the streetcar with the passenger 22 Schulze yawning and the brakes screeching.

the SIMULTANEIST poem teaches a sense of all things in mad, chaotic pursuit of one another; while Herr Schulze is reading, the Balkan Express crosses the bridge at Nish, a pig squeals in Butcher Nucke's cellar.

the STATIC poem makes words into individuals... The word Dada instantly signals the internationalism of the movement, which is bound to no frontiers, religions, or professions. Dada is the international expression of the times, the great rebellion of artistic movements, the artistic reflex of all these offensives, peace congresses, riots in the vegetable market, suppers at the Esplanade, etc., etc. Dada champions the use of the new materials in painting.

Dada is a CLUB, founded in Berlin, which you can join without commitments. In this club every man is chairman and every man can have his say in artistic matters. Dada is not a pretext for the ambition of a few literary men (as our enemies would have you believe), Dada is a state of mind that can be revealed in any conversation whatever, so that you are compelled to say: this man is a DADAIST—that man is not; the Club Dada consequently has members all over the world, in Honolulu as well as New Orleans and Meseritz. Under certain circumstances, to be a Dadaist may mean to be more

a businessman, more a political partisan than an artist—to be an artist only by accident—to be a Dadaist means to let oneself be moved by things, to oppose all sedimentation; to sit in a chair for a single moment is to risk one's life (Mr. Wengs pulled his revolver out of his pants pocket). One feels torn, one says yes to a life that seeks to progress by saying no. Affirmation—negation: powerful hocus-pocus of existence fires the nerve of the true Dadaist—whether he is reclining, hunting, cycling—half Pantagruel, half St. Francis, laughing and laughing. Down with the aesthetic-ethical attitudes! Down with the bloodless abstraction of expressionism! Down with the world-bettering theories of empty-headed literati. Up with Dadaism in word and image, with all the Dada things that happen in the world! To be against this manifesto is to be a Dadaist!


71. Raoul Hausmann, "The German PHILISTINE Is Annoyed," Der Dada, December 1919*

The Austrian-born artist Raoul Hausmann (1886–1971), who moved to Germany in 1900, represents the anti-institutional, anti-establishment direction of much of Berlin Dada. Hausmann worked in 1917 and 1918 on the journal Die Frei Straße along with Huelsenbeck and Franz Jung, whose absorption of the psychoanalytic theories of Otto Gross affected Hausmann's outlook. News of the Russian Revolution in 1917 encouraged the three men to maintain that an understanding of psychoanalytic theories, with their emphasis on sexual freedom for men and women, would contribute to the undermining of authoritarian structures and would therefore further the possibility of world revolution. Writing in 1919 for the literary

magazine Die Erde, Hausmann declared that "Freud and (Adler) were as significant as Marx and Engels."24 Although he had once admired the artists of the Sturm Gallery and had explored mystical writings with his friend Johannes Baader,25 in the essay reprinted here Hausmann attacked Herwarth Walden and other Expressionists for obscuring profit-making enterprises behind a facade of Buddhism and Theosophy. In his own work during this period Hausmann was oriented toward abstraction,26 with clear ties to the Cubo-Expressionist and Futurist sources he criticized. But, determined to distinguish his output from what he called Expressionist "pure painting," he began by late 1919 to use photographs from popular magazines in his Klebebilder (literally, glued paintings) as his companion Hannah Höch was doing that year. Hausmann and Höch are generally recognized as pioneering experimenters with photomontages.27 By 1921 Hausmann became more involved with Kurt Schwitters, Theo Van Doesburg, and Ivan Puni and their interest in constructivism.

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Why? Just who is the German philistine to be annoyed about Dada? It is the German poet, the German intellectual, bursting with fury because his perfectly larded soul was left to stew in the sunshine of laughter, who rages because he has been hit dead center in his brain whizzing, in his case, is located where he sits. Now he has nothing left to sit on. No, do not attack us, gentlemen, we are our own opponents already and know better than you do how to get to us. Understand that we couldn't care less how you react, we are made of different stuff. Just use your physical powers to beat the drum of your spiritual business, beat firmly about your bellies so that some God may be moved to pity. We threw that old drum in the trash long ago. We pipe, squeak, curse, and laugh out the irony: Dada! Because we are—Antidadaists!

There you have it! Give your oppressed bones a rest and mend your tattered traps, you did it all in vain! We feel like celebrating because you cannot line us up against the wall. And so we want you to spill your guts so we can present you with an account of your celebrated values.

After [our] emotional vitality had been thinly diluted into aesthetic abstractions and moral-ethical farces, there arose out of the European sausage-pot the Expressionism of the German patriot, which, laying the enthusiasm on thick, fashioned a profitable little war business out of a decent movement started by Frenchmen, Russians, and Italians. The same old story about pure poetry, painting, music played in Germany on an exceptionally competent business basis. But this pseudo-theosophical German tea party, which got as far as winning recognition of the East-Prussians, Junkers, shall not concern us here, no more than the business machinations of Mr. Walden, who, typical German philistine, thinks he needs to drape his transactions in a buddhistic-bombastic garb. Respect to his business genius, but his aesthetics and his art-prussianism should go where they came from, the hysterer's office. If Walden and his poet-school were revolutionary in the least, they would have to understand this one fact first, that art cannot be aesthetic harmonization of bourgeois ideas of ownership.

Oh my Herr Philistine, you say art is in danger? Don't you know that art is a beautiful female form, without clothes; it counts on being taken to bed, or at least arousing someone. No, my Herr, art is not in danger—because art does not exist any more. It is dead. . . . Give up the sex-romantic, my dear poets—we don't feel like that any more; rather show your nice tattooed bellies, spit out words, splash geometry with colors and call it abstract art—we care as much for that as we care for your tightrope act around Expressionism. The absolute inability to say something, to grasp a thing, to play with it—this is Expressionism, a spiritual truss for herniated guts, leftovers bad from the start, which caused great ceremonial bellyaches. The bourgeois writer or painter could feel himself properly sanctified, finally he somehow grew beyond himself into an indeterminate, common world-fuddle—oh, Expressionism. You, the world apotheosis of romantic deception! But the face only became unbearable at the hands of the activists who wanted to bring the spirit and the art they saw in Expressionism to the people. These imbeciles, who somehow read Tolstoy once and of course never understood him, now dip with an ethic one can only approach with a pitchfork. These dolts, unfit to pursue politics, have invented Activist/Eternist18 sauce in order to approach the proletarian too. But the proletarian is not so dense, excuse my expression, that he would fail to notice the absolute vacuity surrounding such raving. Art to him is something that comes from the bourgeoisie. And we are Antidadaists enough that if anyone of us wants to set up something beautiful, aesthetical, a safely fenced in little feeling of well-being such as abstract art for example—that we will knock his well-spread sandwich into the muck. To us the world makes no deep sense except that of a most such unobtainable nonsense; we don't want to hear about spirit or art. Science is silly—probably the sun still revolves around the earth today. We do not promote any ethic—which always remains ideal (swingle)—but we don't consequently want to tolerate the bourgeois who hangs his money-bags over life's possibilities. . . . We wish to sort out economy and sexuality in a reasonable manner, and we don't give a hoot for culture which
was not tangible. We wish it to come to an end, and thus an end to the philistine poet, the manufacture of the ideals which were nothing but his excrement. We want the world in motion and emotional, unrest instead of rest,—away with all chairs, away with the sentiments and noble gestures! And we are Antidadaist because for us the Dadaist is still too concerned with feelings and aesthetics. We have the right to any amusement, be it in words, forms, colors, noises; but all this is wonderful nonsense, which we consciously make and cherish,—an immense irony just like life itself: we finally recognize perfect mastery of nonsense as the only sense in the world!!

Down with the German philistine!