

The Ambiguous Aesthetic of Dada: Towards a Definition of its Categories

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“L’histoire des collages sans doute n’est pas celle du réalisme: mais l’histoire du réalisme ne pourra demain s’écrire sans celle des collages.”¹

THE PRESUPPOSITIONS OF DADA ART-WORKS

Dada’s assault on conventional bourgeois culture involved not the complete rejection of all creative expression but the quest for new artistic modes. As Hausmann said: “Neues finden übersetzt sich nicht mit épater le bourgeois.”² In this quest, meaning is not totally destroyed—indeed, a discernible meaning had of necessity to remain if the parodistic intention of Dada art-works was to be effective since parody works only in relation to a sense of meaning.

Claiming that the War was the “irrsinnige Endprodukt der herrschenden Gesellschaftsordnung”³ and the reversal of all standards of truth and morality thitherto professed by bourgeois culture, the Dadaists felt the need to re-examine and re-define all accepted ideas about the production, content and effect of art. Dada, the “Narrenspiel aus dem Nichts”,⁴ declared that the artist had lost his function and, correspondingly, its artefacts were marked both by a sense of the transient nature of a seemingly solid human reality and by a protest against a culture which had concealed its basic hollowness beneath the trappings of humanistic values. The Dadaist who, like the dandy, was characterized by eccentricity, irony and melancholy and for whom death was a thoroughly Dadaistical event,⁵ lived at twentieth-century tempo, conscious of the simultaneity of all things, and his products reflected this consciousness, pointing to the ephemeral nature of time. Thus, the Dadaists did not seek to induce a state of contemplation in their audience but sought by shock, dissipation and confrontation to prevent this state of mind for, in their view, it presupposed the continuance of the bourgeois artistic tradition. Hence, they rarely worked in oils and if they did so, then it was to caricature the philistine bourgeois’ desire to be preserved on canvas for posterity and to bring into ironic relief the anachronistic nature of the class to which they belonged.

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The historical origins of the thinking behind montage lie in the Baroque—the age above all in which men became interested in sense-deception and in which metaphors, similes and allegories defined the terms of poetic practice. This was the age, wrote Michel Foucault, in which:

La similitude n'est plus la forme du savoir, mais plutôt l'occasion de l'erreur, le danger auquel on s'expose quand on n'examine pas le lieu mal éclairé des confusions. . . . c'est le temps privilégié du trompe-l'oeil, de l'illusion comique, du théâtre, du quiproquo, des songes et visions⁶

It was in this ambiguous area that the Dadaists operated at the beginning of the twentieth century, surrounded as they were by illusion-producing media such as advertisements, commodities, fashions, magazines and newspapers. The ambiguity of these media, claiming, as they did, to deal in reality, was the reverse of *trompe l'oeil*: Dada's problem was not the illusory nature of reality but the real nature of illusion, used by the powers-that-be to cover over primary reality like a coat of varnish.

According to the Dadaists, the move towards three-dimensionality had turned out to be deceptive, a trick of rationality. Reason had increasingly proved to be man's "schief verlegte[r] Schwerpunkt"⁷ and the nineteenth century had sanctioned this distortion. It had given pride of place to the one-dimensional cultivation of the rational faculties, and sanctioned the development of positivism, scientism, pragmatism and systematic categorization. It had also engendered an escalating technology of annihilation so that, in the end, reason gave rise to its own madness. The products of reason were seen to take on an independent existence and to trample men underfoot; the world of objects was seen to encroach more and more upon the human sphere, claiming man and eventually turning him into an object as well. As Ball had said in 1917:

Das individuelle Leben starb, die Melodie starb. Der einzelne Eindruck besagte nichts mehr. Komplektisch drängten die Gedanken und Wahrnehmungen auf die Gehirne ein, symphonisch die Gefühle. Maschinen entstanden und traten an die Stelle der Individuen. Komplexe und Wesen entstanden von übermenschlicher, überindividueller Furchtbarkeit. Angst wurde ein Wesen mit Millionen Köpfen . . . neue Schlachten, Untergänge und Himmelfahrten, neue Feste, Himmel und Höllen. Eine Welt abstrakter Dämonen verschlang die Einzeläußerung . . . zerstörte das Ich und schwenkte Meere von in einandergestürzter [sic] Gefühlen gegen einander. . . . Zärtteste Vibrationen und unerhörteste Massen-Monstra zeichneten sich auf den Horizonten, vermengten, zerschnitten, durchdrangen einander.⁸

Reason produced its own chaos and Dada was a reaction to that chaos. Hence, Dada-art is, despite its negativity and rootlessness, only apparently poetic madness. As Aragon put it, Dada-art is the insane product of a society in which hostile and irreconcilable forces stand in conflict with one another.⁹ Seeing man dismembered and dissected, turned into a fool's commodity, the Dadaists were forced to abandon the belief in a closed, organic society where the artist had a clearly assigned place. Indeed, according to Ball, the Dadaists found it impossible to believe any longer that things could be grasped from a single point of view, even though they themselves suffered to the point of self-destruction from the discords inherent in that situation.¹⁰

The lack of a clearly assigned place was both fateful and yet full of creative potential for the Dada artist. It produced Ball's thoughts on allegorization which prefigure the concern with collage to be evinced by Zurich Dada. In this connection, it is interesting to note how Ball's remarks parallel Walter Benjamin's statements about the function of the Baroque allegorist and how both sets of ideas have their roots in the problem of melancholy. According to Benjamin:

Wird der Gegenstand unterm Blick der Melancholie allegorisch, so läßt sie das Leben von ihm abfließen, bleibt er als toter doch in Ewigkeit gesicherter zurück, so liegt er vor dem Allegoriker auf Gnade und Ungnade ihm überliefert. Das heißt: Eine Bedeutung, einen Sinn auszustrahlen, ist er von nun ganz unfähig; an Bedeutung kommt ihm das zu, was der Allegoriker ihm verleiht.¹¹

This view is a perfect commentary on Ball's scepticism *vis-à-vis* a reality which is declared to be fundamentally at fault:

Die vollendete Skepsis ermöglicht auch die vollendete Freiheit. Wenn über den inneren Umriß eines Gegenstandes nichts bestimmtes mehr geglaubt werden kann, muß oder darf—dann ist er seinem Gegenüber ausgeliefert, und es kommt nur darauf an, ob die Neuordnung der Elemente, die der Künstler, der Gelehrte und Theologe damit vornimmt, sich die Anerkennung zu erringen vermag. Diese Anerkennung ist gleichbedeutend mit der Tatsache, daß es dem Interpreten gelungen ist, die Welt um ein neues Phänomen zu bereichern. Man kann fast sagen, daß, wenn der Glaube an ein Ding oder eine Sache verloren geht, sie ins Chaos zurückkehren, Freigut werden. Vielleicht aber ist das resolut erwirkte Chaos und also die vollendete Entziehung des Glaubens notwendig, ehe ein gründlicher Neuaufbau auf veränderter Glaubensbasis erfolgen kann. Das Elementare, Dämonische springt dann hervor, die alten Namen und Worte fallen.¹²

Underlying these words is the desire to de-objectify objects and dissolve

language. As Carl Einstein said, defining the task of the artist: “Man muß, um den Menschen zu behaupten, die Gegenstände, Konservenbüchsen zerstören.”¹³

The same desire is implicit in the very form of the montage and collage and is intimately bound up with Dada's confrontation with the Press, the medium which creates illusions while claiming for them an authenticity and objectivity. By seeming to produce art-works in a similar spirit, the Dadaists pilloried the Press, attacking its mechanized, stereotyped and reified language, exposing its tendency to reduce everything to a single level by the juxtaposition of the most disparate and contradictory items, and declaring it to be a means of categorizing and controlling man. Serner recommended: “lies von Zeit zu Zeit den politischen Teil der Tageszeitungen, um durch diese Komödien von Komödien zu Komödien dich anzuregen — zu Komödien.”¹⁴

The rootless position of the Dada artist, coupled with his ambiguous desire to negate and synthesize, generated three features which are typical of the Dada art-work: the use of *Chance*, a concern with *the inner logic of the creative process* (*gestalterische Konsequenz*) and a predilection for *indifference* and *irony*.

Tzara recommended the following procedure:

Prenez un journal. Prenez des ciseaux. Choisissez dans ce journal un article ayant la longueur que vous comptez donner à votre poème. Découpez l'article. Découpez ensuite avec soin chacun des mots qui forment cet article et mettez-les dans un sac. Agitez doucement. Sortez ensuite chaque coupure l'une après l'autre. Copiez consciencieusement dans l'ordre où elles ont quitté le sac. Le poème vous ressemblera.¹⁵

In formulating this recipe for total abstraction, Tzara was, first and foremost, concerned to negate the assumed objectivity of the documentary medium, represented above all by the mass circulation newspaper. Through the operation of *Chance*, Tzara aimed to expose how language becomes mechanized and reified through the clichés of the Press and, by shattering the illusion of authority, to give back language to man as a medium in which he could invest his energy. Furthermore, by analogy with the collage poem, the medium of the Press appears as a surrogate reality, as something that has already been assembled from dismembered fragments and whose content is therefore called completely into question by Tzara's abstract negation.

Hans Arp was working in exactly the same spirit when he took blank pieces of paper, ripped or cut them up with a guillotine, dropped them onto the ground and allowed *Chance* to dictate their order. The resultant picture entitled “Die Quadrate, nach dem Gesetz des Zufalls geordnet”

(Figure 3), exists in opposition to the controlled ordering of things by human reason and elevates the 'order' of *Chance* to an artistic principle. For Arp, *Chance* was *per se* the "Gesetz, das alle Gesetze in sich begreift und uns unerfaßlich ist wie der Urgrund, aus dem alles Leben steigt".¹⁶ Arp took this process one stage further when he began to use amorphous natural forms in his wood-reliefs which, as trace elements of the Unconscious, were intended to destroy the rigidified and fossilized layers of the civilized consciousness.

Max Ernst's montages use *Chance* as a creative principle in Hume's sense, as a "correlative of the uncertainty in which we find ourselves relative to the real causes of events".¹⁷ Through *Chance*, events seem to assert their right—or rather, the artist concedes a rightness to events. Which is not to say, however, that *Chance* is understood as an absolute principle of determination but, as Breton put it, as "la rencontre d'une causalité externe et d'une finalité interne".¹⁸ *Chance* manifests itself in the "moment privilégié", the faculty of choosing, as Ernst did, between everyday objects and elevating the selected ones to the status of art-works. Duchamp, like Ernst, was particularly concerned with the contradictions which arise when the spontaneous workings of *Chance* dictate that a particular object shall be thus elevated, speaking of "canned chance"¹⁹ and manifesting this concern in his readymade "Three Standard Stoppages".

This programmatic use of *Chance* inevitably if inconspicuously, points to the arbitrariness and inadequacy of reality. It also implies the abolition of the artist's signature and is thus in both respects an implicit protest against accepted modes of work and social determination.

Kurt Schwitters adopted the technique of abstraction to be found in Tzara's poems, using newspapers, rubbish and fragments of words and sentences which had been removed from spatio-temporal and functional contexts and which had, in their transient materiality, become aspects of organic process once more. Thus, Schwitters regarded his materials as though they were "products of Nature" and shaped them "aimlessly", according to *the inner logic of the creative process*.²⁰ Dead matter is brought to life again by being re-integrated into a subjectively formed network of relationships—a process which is closely related to Ball's description of allegory. Finally, Schwitters also became a theologian who, in the *Merzbau*, the "Cathedral of Erotic Misery", stylized his materials into profane relics (Figure 4).

Both artistic principles — *hasard objectif* and *gestalterische Konsequenz* — seem to lie outside the purely artistic domain and to follow apparently objective laws by which all matter is ultimately governed. Arp, Tzara, Ernst, Duchamp and Schwitters all felt the need to introduce such extra-aesthetic categories in order to oppose the reification of man without

having recourse to emotion-laden rhetoric: the same motive explains the Berlin Dadaists' predilection for *irony* and *indifference*.

"Primitive reality" with its "Gleichgültigkeit gegen Freude und Elend, Glück und Tod"²¹ was, in the Dadaist canon, to become closely related with the *indifference* of the artist. The Dadaist "nimmt sich und diese Welt auf sich als Schicksal, ohne Fatalismus, als seine eigene lächerliche Ernsthaftigkeit" and the "Dada-Cino" visualizes a world "die unendlich mit sich identisch bleibt".²² Hence, the picture of an embryo is stuck next to a shoe-advertisement and both components are assigned an equal value. In this formal juxtaposition, one can see both consumer society's principle of equivalent exchange and the Romantic concept of a chaotic universe in which anything can be discordantly combined with anything else. In other words, by assuming a standpoint of indifference, the Dadaists ironically mirrored the disintegration of bourgeois culture and the reduction of all values to a single level.

As can be seen from the title "Dada-Cino", the artist's standpoint is like that of the film camera. This is well instanced by Grosz's and Heartfield's montage "Universal City um 12 Uhr 5 Mittags" (Figure 5) whose theoretical basis could well be the lines: "Ich bin wie Bandstreifen Film . . . und wie ein Kind in tausend Luna-parks. Einer kurbelt fortwährend."²³ This attitude of mind—in which the artist lays himself open to the simultaneous turbulence of the world and, like the moving film cameraman, "kurbelt fortwährend" — corresponds to the Nietzschean concept of the "sinn- und zwecklosen Weltenspiel".²⁴ The wheel which is turned by the cameraman symbolizes the accelerated tempo of city life to which modern man is exposed and coincides with the Dadaist idea of the rapid inflation of values. Hence, the image of the wheel also communicates the idea of the "wheel that rolls by itself" which, according to Nietzsche, is the same thing as "das heilige Ja-Sagen",²⁵ the childish urge to play.

By abolishing perspective, refusing to allow the observer to maintain an unambiguous point of view and envisaging the relativizing diversity of a chaotic universe, the principle of *indifference* points to the ambiguous status of the camera. It is, as it were, a detective—like the Dadaist himself—close to the city underworld and immersed in the turbulence of its streets and yet, at the same time, ultimately removed from the scene which it records.

The detective, as a late example of the nineteenth-century *flâneur* who deciphers the hidden language of the streets like a voyeur, who stands apart from while participating in the life of the masses, is, as the montage illustrates, comparable with the cameraman. The Dada detective/cameraman has the task of synthesizing the fragmented codes of perception which, because of their simultaneity, tend to evade his glance. Although he cannot arrive at a total picture, he *can* pursue associations. His pene-

tration of the illusory layers of reality proceeds in the first instance through reflex-like utterances, extorted from him by the jungle of the great city. The structural similarity between the cameraman and the detective is so revealing for the Dadaists' use of photographs precisely because the detective story itself originated at exactly the same time as photography first made it possible to record an individual's history. This is why Benjamin mentions Poe's famous story "The Man of the Crowd" in the following way: "die bloße Armatur ist geblieben: Der Verfolger, die Menge, ein Unbekannter, der seinen Weg durch London so einrichtet, daß er immer in deren Mitte bleibt. Dieser Unbekannte ist der Flaneur."²⁶ Above all, the *flaneur* is someone who is ill at ease in his own company and hence seeks out the crowd. Grosz's montages again and again take the detective's standpoint as their own — as, for example, in "Der Schuldige bleibt unbekannt" or the illustrations which he did for detective stories. Here, the crowd is always depicted as a body in which the individual is neither completely transparent nor completely opaque to his fellows.

DADA AND THE PRESS

By assuming the stance of the detective, Berlin Dada left pure aesthetics and tried, as it were, to discern who in the crowd was victim and who murderer, and where the crime had taken place. In using the Press as a means of identifying the criminal, the Dada detective/cameraman became implicitly but actively political. As Hausmann wrote: "Dada gestaltet die Welt praktisch nach ihren Gegebenheiten, es benützt alle Formen und Gebräuche, um die moralisch-pharisäische Bürgerwelt mit ihren eigenen Mitteln zu zerschlagen."²⁷ In the Dadaists' view, the Press and the bourgeois consciousness stood in reciprocal relationship one to another: the small amount of information provided by the Press obscured actual events to such an extent that Johannes Baader, writing very much in the spirit of Karl Kraus, could make the following cynical comment on the War: "Der Weltkrieg ist ein Krieg der Zeitungen. In Wirklichkeit hat er niemals existiert."²⁸

The rest of this essay will discuss how the Berlin Dadaists tried to criticize this medium and how this confrontation altered their mode of expression. It will also deal with the Dadaists' move away from their initial critique of the connection between the bourgeois consciousness and the Press to an analysis of the medium itself and show how, in Dadaist satire, the strategies of the Press were turned against their originators, breaking the limits of *avant-garde* activity by using the Press itself as a Dadaist medium.

(i) *The Press as an Attribute of the Bourgeois Philistine*

In 1917, Grosz stuck a piece of the *Lokalanzeiger*, a conservative, mass-circulation Berlin daily, onto his oil-painting “Deutschland ein Wintermärchen” in order to show that the Press was just as much an attribute of the bourgeois as his food and his cigar. While the world tumbles into ruin, the headlines “Eine Republik in Oberschlesien” and “Arbeiter und Soldaten” are set one above the other as though they were pieces of objective information, while, in the foreground, the pillars of society — a clergyman, a general and a professor — still stand upright, representing the hollow forms of society.

In just such a way, Scholz included *Der Bote* in his picture “Die Industriebauern”, caricaturing the hypocritical Christian morality of the people depicted there. *Der Bote* is placed next to a Bible, father’s special glass, the murderous everyday equipment, a bust of Wilhelm II and the photograph of a soldier. By such caricature and the satirical deformation of the family, the beholder is automatically alienated from them.

In Otto Dix’s oil painting “Die kartenspielenden Kriegskrüppel” (Figure 6), Dresden newspapers and the *Berliner Tageblatt* are hanging up like fans at the back of the café. Their combination in a group of three replicates the hand of playing-cards held up by the war-wounded and thus, by implication, points to the way in which they operate. In Dix’s painting, newspapers are presented as similar in kind to card-games — both are governed by *Chance* and rules, motivated by a desire for excitement and competition, require quick mechanical reactions, preclude experience, kill time and canonize the here and now as an absolute in its own right. Thus, newspapers are seen as the playing-cards of reality according to whose dispositions men act. Furthermore, an explicit connection is made between mutilation and the Press. The deformation of the cripples’ organs of communication, their mutilated eyes, ears and mouths, implies a cynical parallel with the deformation of reality perpetrated by the organs of the Press.

(ii) *The Dialectic between Political Extract and Satirical Portrayal*

The Dadaists first used extracts from newspapers in conjunction with satirical portraits of politicians and soldiers which clarified the meaning of the quotation. From there, they went on to use extracts in order to set reality against its ideological trappings. Thus, when the workers’ sanatorium (Figure 7) turns out to be a political prison for those jailed during the German Revolution, the slogan “Licht und Luft dem Proletariat!” exposes as fraudulent the superficially friendly attitude of the SPD, then in power, towards the Proletariat. Then again, although the phrase “Auf der Flucht erschossen” is supposed to authenticate the innocence of those in power, this message is subverted by the picture’s statement that the

workers in question had been arbitrarily executed. Finally, the verb 'durchhalten' ('hold on'), a common slogan in newspapers which supported Ludendorff's policy of unconditional resistance, indicates that it was the war-wounded and lower social classes who had had to do that holding on and make the consequent sacrifices, while the ruling classes had been barely affected.

(iii) *The Photograph as Political Quotation and the Destruction of Illusion through Montage*

The advent of illustrated newspapers and magazines caused the photograph to gain in significance, and with that, the question of the objectivity of photographs became paramount. Dada saw a "mécanique morte" in the apparently-authoritative photograph which, for the Dadaists, was the expression of the static conceptual system of a fossilized society. Consequently, Dada sought to destroy this illusion by decreating photographs and alienating their beholders. Dada's montages, like its caricatures, were marked by disparate proportions, distorted perspectives and discordant relationships whose function was to generate an attitude of social criticism. By means of the destruction of illusion which is implicit in its form, the montage challenged conventional modes of perception and called into question the traditional consonance between the whole of a picture and its component parts. Dadaist satires, caricatures and montages, of which latter Hannah Höch's "Schnitt mit dem Küchenmesser" is a classic example, demonstrate the hostility which had arisen between individual citizens and society as a whole.

(iv) *The Function of Captions*

Although the captions used by Berlin Dada were employed, in the first place, as ironic commentaries, their effectiveness increased when they were used as a means of playing off illusion against reality — as happens, for example, in Grosz's graphic works. Heartfield's "Brüdergrüße der SPD" (Figure 8) is a good example of this, besides showing the change that Dada montage technique underwent. "Brüdergrüße der SPD" is one of a group of cuttings from *Vorwärts*, the SPD newspaper, and comes from the propaganda campaign against the Spartacists which was mounted by that newspaper. Press cuttings overlay the picture like a veneer, rendering visible the layer of illusion through which the artist must penetrate if he is to see what is going on behind the scenes — in this case, government soldiers firing rifles, the murdered Liebknecht and other Spartacists killed during the German Revolution. Within the picture itself, the following cutting encapsulates the meaning of all the others: "Brüdergrüße der SPD, die sich wie ein Pesthauch von Verleumdung, Gemeinheit und Lüge über das Leben der Arbeiterklasse gelegt haben."

In all Dada visual works, the caption is as important as what is actually depicted. This is particularly true for the works of Ernst and Duchamp where a poetical humour developed, involving puns whose solution extended the work's significance. The increasing importance of words in visual Dada works led to the word receiving the same importance as objects and, in the Grand Dada Fair of June 1920, being exhibited as an object in its own right.

(v) *The Processing of Newspaper Cuttings in the Assemblage*

Baader's assemblage "Deutschlands Größe und Untergang" is a good example of this. As Baader's idea of History always revolved around himself, his choice of cuttings was dictated by those newspapers which contradicted his idea of History and were, so to speak, a mirror-image of his own megalomaniac self-conception. To the fraudulent cultural consciousness of his time, Baader opposed his own extravagant frauds, using newspaper cuttings to confirm the idea that he was "Emperor of the Terrestrial Orb". By inverting the propaganda of the Press, he turned it into a means of self propagation.

(vi) *The Dadaist Parody of the Media*

Dada's relations with the general public were of supreme importance. Dada's self-appointed task was to give back art to everyday life and that could only be done by adapting it to the publicistic habits of mind of people at large while not permitting it to lose its anti-cultural and social-critical charge. Because autotelic art was unable to do that, Dada borrowed colloquial forms from the every-day life of the consumer — 'small-ads', posters, headlines, telegrams, post-cards, programmes, handbills and manifestos. In order to counter journalistic sensationalism with a sensationalism of its own, Dada also took over concepts from everyday life, speaking, for example, of the Dada "Central Office", "World Authorities", "A-national Council of Unpaid Workers" and "World Revolution". The business jargon of the Capitalist world was also worked into Dada periodicals — thus, in *Der Dada* 1 for example, the readers were exhorted to "invest their money in Dada". The two newspaper numbers of *Neue Jugend* (May and June 1917) took their lead directly from American newspapers and used, for the first time, the job-clichés and typographical material characteristic of their format. The artist had become a parody of the advertizing consultant!

(vii) *The Daily Newspaper as a Work of Art*

Just as Baader transferred the arena of Dada activity from the private *soirée* to the public milieu of the Weimar Nationalversammlung and the Berlin streets, so too, the daily newspaper itself became a forum for Dadaist

self-expression. The Dadaists fed false announcements and reports into the Press which, in the end, aroused so much attention that the Press was obliged to report on them! Furthermore, the Dadaists' journeys were planned in great detail and local excitement was stoked up by Press announcements and reports, written by the Dadaists themselves or professional reporters. Indeed, the Press became the means whereby Dada created its own image and the Press announcement released to advertize the Grand Dada Fair, for example, published in various well-known dailies in Berlin and elsewhere, ran as follows:

Eröffnung der großen Dada-Ausstellung. Die Fäden des gesamten internationalen Dadaismus treffen sich in der Ausstellung Monstre-Dada. . . . Auf medialem Wege haben alle Dadaisten der Welt ihre psychotechnische Elastizität auf die Berliner Vertreter des unsterblichen dada übertragen. Jedermann muß die Wunder dieser Psychometalogie gesehen haben. Dada übertrumpft jeden Okkultismus. Dada ist die Hellsicht der Einsicht in die Aussicht jeder Ansicht über Politik und Wirtschaft, Kunst, Medizin, Sexualität, Erotik, Perversion und Anästhetik. Die Arbeiten von Grosz, John Heartfield, Baargeld, Max Ernst, Hannah Höch, Raoul Hausmann, Baader schlagen alles bisher Dagewesene. Der General-dada: Otto Burchard.²⁹

(viii) *The Artist as Engineer and his Meta-Irony*

What significance does the artist impute to himself when he gives himself the extra-aesthetic title of "Ingenieur" or "Monteur"? The first quotation above by Ball makes it plain that machines were, for Dada, comparable with man-eating creatures. Furthermore, the Dada artist often seemed to ascribe feminine characteristics to the machine and to define his intimate relationship with it by calling himself its "engineer", or even "bachelor". Implicit here is the paradox of the artist-engineer's superiority over the machine and negative dependence upon it — a relationship which is above all instanced by the mechanical drawings of Picabia, Duchamp, Ernst, Man Ray, Grosz and Hausmann. The Dada artist was the bachelor who had come to an arrangement with the machine, the "fille née sans mère", eroticized it and placed it into a mysterious, alchemical system of relationships. As opposed to Léger's forceful, energy-charged engineer, the ironic Dadaist sees the machine as a mechanomorphic paradox — machine as man / man as machine — which he refuses to resolve.

The artist's identification with the machine was, on the one hand, ironic, but, on the other, tragi-comic because it implied that the artist was trying to escape the grip of mechanization by invoking it. Grosz, for example, wanted first and foremost the "Sachlichkeit und Klarheit der Inge-

neurzeichnung" which, for him, was "ein besseres Leitbild als das unkontrollierte Geschwafel von Kabbala und Metaphysik und Heiligenekstase". The "unindividuell photographisch gezogene Linie"³⁰ meant for him both the elevation of the utopian collective moment and the symbolic portrayal of man's fateful determination in rigidified surroundings. Similarly, Duchamp's and Picabia's preoccupation with the engineering drawing involved "die Unverbindlichkeit des Geschmacks", the *indifference* of a non-aesthetic attitude. As Duchamp said: "I want to go back to a completely dry drawing, a dry conception of art — I was beginning to appreciate the value of the exactness, of precision and the importance of Chance".³¹ Or, to quote Picabia: "En cherchant des formes pour interpréter des idées ou à travers lesquelles révéler les caractéristiques humaines, je suis tombé finalement sur la forme qui m'apparaît du point de vue plastique la plus convaincante et la plus symbolique, je me suis approprié de la mécanique du monde moderne et je l'ai introduite dans mon atelier"³² The "fille née sans mère" is the allegorical title of Picabia's machine-myth, and behind this implicit rejection of aesthetics and the use of technical means of depiction lay the desire to slander science. Just as the cameraman forced his way into the jungle of the city, so the artist-engineer forced his way into the world of the machine without allowing himself to be taken over by it, dissecting it in the name of the fourth dimension or a mathematical, scientific perspective as opposed to a realistic one.

The Dadaists rejected art only to the extent that it conformed to specifically bourgeois canons, but in doing so, they found themselves in the ambiguous situation of experimenters who are forced to use techniques derived from a context that is already familiar.

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