

Dada

Wedekind in Munich

Long before Dada's activities began at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916, cabaret theatre was already popular night-life entertainment in German cities. Munich, a thriving art centre before the war, was the city from which came the two key personalities of the Cabaret Voltaire – its founders the night club entertainer Emmy Hennings and her future husband Hugo Ball. Noted for the Blaue Reiter group of Expressionist painters and for its prolific Expressionist theatre performances, Munich was also famous for its bars and cafés, that were the focal point for the city's bohemian artists, poets, writers and actors. It was in cafés like the *Simplicissimus* (where Ball met Hennings, one of the cabaret stars) that their half-written manifestos and partly edited magazines were discussed in the dim light while, on small platform stages, dancers and singers, poets and magicians played out their satirical sketches based on everyday life in the prewar Bavarian capital. In these so-called 'intimate theatres', eccentric figures flourished, among them Benjamin Franklin Wedekind, better known as Frank Wedekind.

Notorious as a man determined to provoke, especially on sexual topics, his standard first line to young women was inevitably 'Are you still a virgin?', to which he would add a sensual grimace, said to be only partly the result of his ill-fitting dentures. Called 'libertine', 'anti-bourgeois exploiter of sexuality', a 'threat to public morality', Wedekind would perform cabaret when lost for capital to produce his plays or when thwarted by official censorship. He would even urinate and masturbate on stage and according to Hugo Ball, induce convulsions 'in his arms, his legs, his — and even in his brain', at a time when morality was still chained to Protestant archbishops' gowns. An equally anti-bourgeois arts scene appreciated the scathing criticism built into each of his provocative performances.

His plays were no less controversial. Following temporary exile in Paris and several months in prison for censorship violation, Wedekind wrote his famous satire on Munich life, *Der Marquis von Keith*. Greeted with derision by public and press, he retorted with the play *König Nicolo, oder So Ist das Leben* ('King Nicolo, or Such is Life') in 1901, a vicious tale of the overthrow by his bourgeois subjects of a king who, having failed all else, is forced to play

court jester to his own usurper. It was as though Wedekind sought consolation in each performance, using it as a counter-attack to adverse criticism. In turn, each play was censored by Kaiser Wilhelm's Prussian officials, and often abridged by his publishers. Financially drained by prison sentences and generally ostracized by nervous producers, he was to work again the popular cabaret circuit, at one time joining a famous touring group, The Eleven Executioners, in order to earn a living.

These irreverent performances, bordering on the obscene, endeared Wedekind to the artistic community in Munich, while the censorship trials which inevitably followed guaranteed his prominence in the city. Ball, who frequented the *Café Simplicissimus*, commented that from 1910 onwards everything in his life revolved around the theatre: 'Life, people, love, morality. To me the theatre meant inconceivable freedom', he wrote. 'My strongest impression was of the poet as a fearful cynical spectacle: Frank Wedekind. I saw him at many rehearsals and in almost all of his plays. In the theatre he was struggling to eliminate both himself and the last remains of a once firmly established civilization.'

Wedekind's *Die Büchse der Pandora* ('Pandora's Box'), the tale of an emancipated woman's career, published in 1904, was considered such an elimination. The play was promptly barred from public performance in



45 Frank Wedekind in his play *Hidalla*, 1905

Germany during the author's lifetime. Angry at the Public Prosecutor, who he felt distorted the evidence in such a way as to suggest indecency, Wedekind replied with an unpublished adaptation of Goethe's famous *Heidenröslein*, parodying court proceedings and legal jargon:

The tramp says: I will have sexual intercourse with you, female vagrant.

The female vagrant answers: I will infect you so badly with venereal disease that you will always have cause to remember me.

Clearly she has no interest in sexual intercourse at that time.

Wedekind's performances revelled in the licence given the artist to be a mad outsider, exempt from society's normal behaviour. But he knew that such licence was given only because the role of the artist was considered utterly insignificant, more tolerated than accepted. Taking up the cause of the artist against the complacent public at large, Wedekind was soon joined by others in Munich and elsewhere who began to use performance as a cutting edge against society.

Kokoschka in Vienna

Wedekind's notoriety travelled beyond Munich. While court proceedings on *Die Büchse der Pandora* continued in Germany, the play was privately presented in Vienna. There Wedekind himself performed Jack the Ripper, while Tilly Newes, his wife-to-be, played the heroine Lulu. Midst the popular wave of Expressionism in Munich, Berlin and Vienna around this time, albeit in written form rather than actual performance, Wedekind viewed with extreme disfavour any attempts to align his works with Expressionism. He had, after all, instinctively used expressionist techniques in his work long before the term and the movement had become popular.

It was in Vienna that the prototypical Expressionist production, ⁴⁶ Kokoschka's *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* ('Murderer, Hope of Women') was presented. It was to reach Munich, via Berlin, by way of the magazine *Der Sturm*, which published the text and drawings shortly after its presentation in Vienna in 1909. Like Wedekind, the twenty-two-year-old Kokoschka was considered something of an eccentric affront to public morals and to the taste of the conservative Viennese society, and he was threatened with dismissal from his teaching post at the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts by the Minister of Education. 'Degenerate artist', 'Bourgeois-bater', 'common criminal', the critics called him, as well as *Oberwilding* or chief savage, following the exhibition of his clay bust *The Warrior* at the 1908 Vienna Kunstschau.

Angered by such primitive attacks, he threw *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen* in the faces of the staid Viennese, at a performance in the garden theatre of the Vienna Kunstschau. The cast, his friends and acting students, had only one

46 Kokoschka, pen and ink drawing for his play *Mörder, Hoffnung der Frauen*, an early Expressionist production, presented in Vienna in 1909



rehearsal before opening night. They improvised with 'key phrases on slips of paper', after Kokoschka had demonstrated the essentials of the play, complete with variations of pitch, rhythm and expression. In the garden they dug a ditch for the musicians, building a stage of boards and planks. Central to the setting was a large tower with a cage door. Around this object, the players crept, flinging their arms, arching their backs, and making exaggerated facial expressions; these actions became the mark of expressionist acting techniques. Midst this eerie atmosphere they played out an aggressive battle between male and female, with a man ripping the dress of the leading woman and branding her symbolically with his sign. In defence she attacked him with a knife, and as theatrical blood oozed from his wounds, he was placed in a coffin by three masked men and raised to the grilled tower. However, the 'New Man', so important to later Expressionist writers, triumphed: by spilling his blood the woman had only spelt her own doom – she died, slowly and dramatically, while the virile and pure New Man survived.

Kokoschka was to reminisce in later years that 'hateful and malicious opposition was shouted forth' against his play. The literary argument would have degenerated into a bloody war, if Adolf Loos, the architect and patron of Kokoschka, 'had not intervened with a group of his faithful and rescued me from the fate of being beaten to death'. Kokoschka continued: 'What irritated people particularly was that the nerves were drawn outside the figures, on the skins as though they could in fact be seen. The Greeks put masks on their actors, to fix character – sad, passionate, angry, etc. I did the

same thing in my own way, by painting on faces, not as decoration but to underline the character. It was all meant to be effective at a distance, like a fresco painting. I treated the members of the cast quite differently. Some of them I gave cross stripes, like a tiger or cat, but I painted the nerves on all of them. Where they were located I knew from my study of anatomy.'

By 1912, the year in which Sorge's *Der Bettler*, generally regarded as the first Expressionist play, was published, Kokoschka's production was the centre of conversation in Munich. Although few explicitly Expressionist plays had actually yet been performed, the new notions of performance were already being seen as a possible means of destroying earlier realistic traditions by such people as the twenty-six-year-old Hugo Ball, who was by then deeply involved in the planning of performances of his own. To Ball, the Munich years meant plans to initiate a collaborative *Künstlertheater*. He teamed up with Kandinsky who 'by his mere presence placed this city far above all other German cities in its modernity', and the periodicals in which they expressed themselves were *Der Sturm*, *Die Aktion*, *Die Neue Kunst* and in 1913, *Die Revolution*. It was a period according to Ball when common sense had to be opposed at all times, when 'philosophy had been taken over by the artists', and an 'epoch of the interesting and of gossip'. Within this disturbing milieu Ball imagined that the 'regeneration of society' would come about through the 'union of all artistic media and forces'. Only the theatre was capable of creating the new society, he believed. But his notion of theatre was not a traditional one: on the one hand, he had studied with the innovative director Max Reinhardt, and sought new dramatic techniques; on the other, the concept of a total artwork, or *Gesamtkunstwerk*, put forward over half a century earlier by Wagner, involving artists from all disciplines in large-scale productions, still held a fascination for him. So Ball's theatre would, if he had had his way, have involved all the following artists: Kandinsky, to whom he would have designated the overall direction, Marc, Fokine, Hartmann, Klee, Kokoschka, Yevreinov, Mendelsohn, Kubin and himself. On several counts this programme outline prefigured the enthusiasm with which he brought together different artists two years later in Zurich.

But these plans never materialized in Munich. Ball did not find sponsors, nor did he succeed in his bid for the directorship of the Staatstheater in Dresden. Disheartened, he left Germany via Berlin for Switzerland. Depressed by the war and the German society of the time, he started to see theatre in a new light: 'The importance of the theatre is always inversely proportionate to the importance of social morality and civil freedom.' For him social morality and civil freedom were at odds and in Russia as well as Germany, theatre was crushed by the war. 'Theatre has no sense any more. Who wants to act now, or even see acting? . . . I feel about the theatre as a man must feel who has suddenly been decapitated.'

Ball in Zurich

Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings arrived in Zurich in the quiet summer of 1915. Hennings was only eight months out of prison for forging foreign passports for those who wished to avoid military service; he himself was carrying forged papers and living under an assumed name.

'It is strange, but occasionally people do not know what my real name is. Then officials come in and make inquiries.' Having to change names to avoid detection by official German spies on the lookout for draft evaders was only the least of their worries. They were poor, unemployed and unregistered aliens. Hennings took part-time menial jobs, Ball tried to continue his studies. When the Swiss police in Zurich discovered he was living under assumed names he fled to Geneva, returning to Zurich to twelve days' imprisonment. Then he was left alone. The Swiss authorities had no interest in turning him over to the Germans for military service. By the autumn their situation was serious – no funds, no place to go. Ball kept a diary in which he hinted at an attempted suicide; the police were called to stop him at Lake Zurich. His coat, which he salvaged from the lake, was no tempting buy at the night-club where he offered it for sale. But somehow his luck turned and he was signed up by the night-club with a touring troupe called the Flamingo. Even while touring with the Flamingo in various Swiss cities, Ball was obsessed with an attempt to understand the German culture that he had fled. He began to draw up plans for a book, later published as *Zur Kritik der deutschen Intelligenz* ('Critique of the German Mentality'), and wrote endless texts on the philosophical and spiritual malaise of the time. He became a confirmed pacifist, experimented with narcotics and mysticism, and began a correspondence with the poet Marinetti, the leader of the Futurists. He wrote for Schickele's journal *Die Weissen Blätter* and the Zurich periodical *Der Revoluzer*.

However, the cabaret performances and his writings conflicted with each other. Ball was writing about a kind of art that he was increasingly impatient to implement: 'In an age like ours, when people are assaulted daily by the most monstrous things without being able to keep account of their impressions, in such an age aesthetic production becomes a prescribed course. But all living art will be irrational, primitive, complex: it will speak a secret language and leave behind documents not of edification but of paradox.' Ball, after several tiring months with the Flamingo, returned to Zurich.

Cabaret Voltaire

Early in 1916 Ball and Hennings decided to start their own café-cabaret, not 47.48 unlike the ones they had left behind in Munich. Jan Ephraim, the owner of a small bar in Spiegelgasse, agreed to them using his premises for that purpose.

and there followed frantic days of collecting artwork from various friends to decorate the club. A press release was distributed: 'Cabaret Voltaire. Under this name a group of young artists and writers has been formed whose aim is to create a centre for artistic entertainment. The idea of the cabaret will be that guest artists will come and give musical performances and readings at the daily meetings. The young artists of Zurich, whatever their orientation, are invited to come along with suggestions and contributions of all kinds.'

The opening night attracted a large crowd and the place was full to overflowing. Ball recalled: 'At about six in the evening while we were still busy hammering and putting up Futurist posters, an oriental-looking deputation of four little men arrived, with portfolios and pictures under their arms; repeatedly they bowed politely. They introduced themselves: Marcel Janco the painter, Tristan Tzara, Georges Janco and a fourth gentleman whose name I did not quite catch. Arp happened to be there also, and we came to an understanding without many words. Soon Janco's sumptuous *Archangels* was hanging with the other beautiful objects, and on that same evening Tzara read some traditional-style poems, which he fished out of his various coat pockets in a rather charming way. Emmy Hennings and Mme Laconte sang in French and Danish, Tzara read some of his Rumanian poetry, while a balalaika orchestra played popular tunes and Russian dances.'

Thus on 5 February 1916 the Cabaret Voltaire began. It was a nightly affair: on the 6th, with many Russians in the audience, the programme included poems by Kandinsky and Else Lasker, the 'Donnerwetterlied' ('Thundersong') by Wedekind, the 'Totentanz' ('Dance of Death') 'with the assistance of the revolutionary chorus', and Aristide Bruant's 'A la Villette' ('To Villette'). On the following night, the 7th, there were poems by Blaise Cendrars and Jakob van Hoddis and on the 11th, Ball's friend from Munich, Richard Huelsenbeck, arrived. 'He pleads for a stronger rhythm (Negro rhythm)', Ball noted. 'He would prefer to drum literature into the ground.'

The following weeks were filled with works as varied as poems by Werfel, Morgenstern and Lichtenstein. 'Everyone has been seized by an indefinable intoxication. The little cabaret is about to come apart at the seams and is getting to be a playground for crazy emotions.' Ball was caught up in the excitement of arranging programmes and writing material with his various colleagues. They were less concerned about creating new art; indeed Ball warned that 'the artist who works from his free-wheeling imagination is deluding himself about his originality. He is using a material that is already formed and so is undertaking only to elaborate on it.' Rather he enjoyed the role of catalyst: 'Producere means "to produce", "to bring into existence". It does not have to be books. One can produce artists too.'

Material for the cabaret evenings included collaborative contributions by Arp, Huelsenbeck, Tzara, Janco, Hennings and other passing writers and

Als ich das Cabaret Voltaire gründete, war ich der Meinung, es möchten sich in der Schweiz einige junge Leute finden, denen gleich mir daran gelegen wäre, ihre Unabhängigkeit nicht nur zu geniessen, sondern auch zu dokumentieren. Ich ging zu Herrn Ephraim, dem Besitzer der „Meierei“ und sagte: „Bitte, Herr Ephraim, geben Sie mir Ihren Saal. Ich möchte ein Cabaret machen.“ Herr Ephraim war einverstanden und gab mir den Saal. Und ich ging zu einigen Bekannten und bat sie: eine Zeichnung, eine Gravüre. Ich möchte meinem Cabaret verbinden.“ Ging zu der bat sie: „Bringen sie einige Notizen. Es werden, Wir wollen schöne Dinge machen,“ brachte meine Notizen. Da hatten wir am Hennings und Mde. Leconte sangen Chansons. Herr Tristan Tzara rezitierte Orchester spielte entzückende russische Viel Unterstützung und Sympathie das Plakat des Cabarets entwarf, bei Herrn Arbeiten einige Picassos zur Verfügung Freunde O. van Rees und Artur Segall vermittelte. Viel Unterstützung bei den Herren Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco und Max Oppenheimer, die sich gerne bereit erklärten, im Cabaret auch aufzutreten. Wir veranstalteten eine RUSSISCHE und bald darauf eine FRANZÖSISCHE Soirée (aus Werken von Apollinaire, Max Jacob, André Salmon, A. Jarry, Laforgue und Rimbaud). Am 26.



Februar kam Richard Huelsenbeck aus Berlin und am 30. März führten wir eine wundervolle Negermusik auf (toujours avec la grosse caisse: boum boum boum boum — drabatja mo gere drabatja mo bonoooooooooooo —) Monsieur Laban assistierte der Vorstellung und war begeistert. Und durch die Initiative des Herrn Tristan Tzara führten die Herren Tzara, Huelsenbeck und Janco (zum ersten Mal in Zürich und in der ganzen Welt) simultanistische Verse der Herren Henri Barzun und Fernand Divoire auf, sowie ein Poème simultan eigener Composition, das auf der sechsten und siebenten Seite abgedruckt ist. Das kleine Heft, das wir heute herausgeben, verdanken wir unserer Initiative und der Beihilfe unserer Freunde in Frankreich, ITALIEN und Russland. Es soll die Aktivität und die Interessen des Cabarets bezeichnen, dessen ganze Absicht darauf gerichtet ist, über den Krieg und die Vaterländer hinweg an die wenigen Unabhängigen zu erinnern, die anderen Idealen leben. Das nächste Ziel der hier vereinigten Künstler ist die Herausgabe einer Revue Internationale. La revue paraîtra à Zurich et portera le nom „DADA“. („Dada“) Dada Dada Dada Dada.

ZÜRICH, 15. Mai 1916



47 Hugo Ball's press release for the Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich, 1916

48 Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings in Zurich, 1916

artists. Under pressure to entertain a varied audience, they were forced to 'be incessantly lively, new and naive. It is a race with the expectations of the audience and this race calls on all our forces of invention and debate.' To Ball there was something specially pleasurable in cabaret: 'One cannot exactly say that the art of the last twenty years has been joyful and that the modern poets are very entertaining and popular.' Live reading and performance was the key to rediscovering pleasure in art.

Each evening was constructed around a particular theme: Russian evenings for the Russians; Sundays put patronizingly aside for the Swiss – 'but the young Swiss are too cautious for a cabaret', the Dadaists thought. Huelsenbeck developed an identifiable reading style: 'When he enters, he keeps his cane of Spanish reed in his hand and occasionally swishes it around. That excites the audience. They think he is arrogant, and he certainly looks it. His nostrils quiver, his eyebrows are arched. His mouth with its ironic twitch is tired but composed. He reads, accompanied by the big drum, shouts, whistles, and laughter':

Slowly the group of houses opened its body.

Then the swollen throats of the churches screamed to the depths . . .

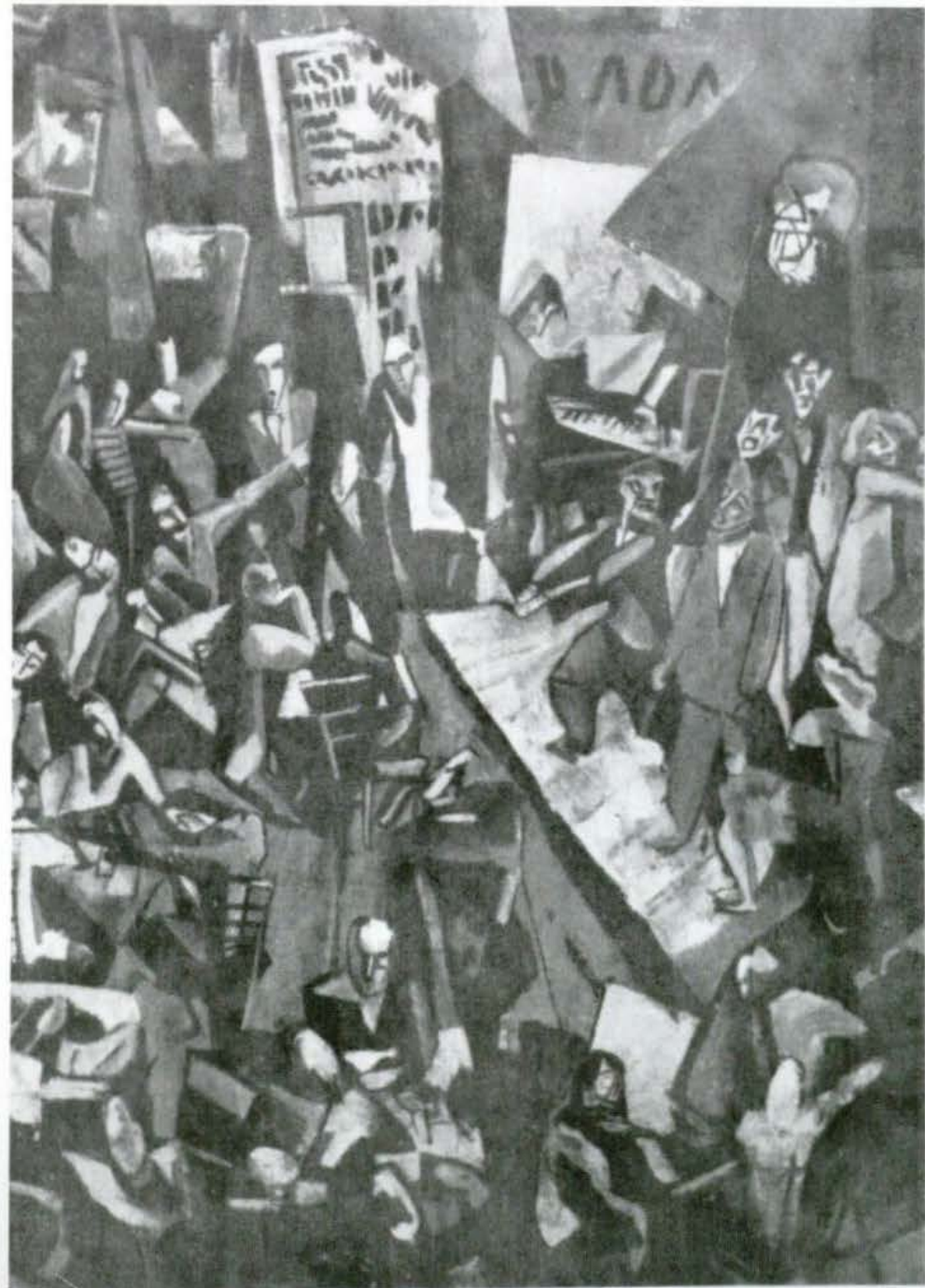
At a French soirée on 14 March Tzara read poems by Max Jacob, André Salmon and Laforgue; Oser and Rubinstein played the first movement of a Cello Sonata by Saint-Saëns; Arp read from Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, and so on. 'As long as the whole city is not enchanted, the cabaret has failed', Ball wrote.

The evening of 30 March marked a new development: 'On the initiative of Tzara, Huelsenbeck, Janco and Tzara recited (for the first time in Zurich and the whole world) the simultaneous verses of Henri Barzun and Fernand Divoire, and a simultaneous poem of their own composition.' Ball defined the concept of the simultaneous poem thus:

a contrapuntal recitative in which three or more voices speak, sing, whistle, etc. at the same time, in such a way that the elegiac, humorous, or bizarre content of the piece is brought out by these combinations. In such a simultaneous poem, the wilful quality of an organic work is given powerful expression, and so is its limitation by the accompaniment. Noises (an *rrrr* drawn out for minutes, or crashes, or sirens, etc.) are superior to the human voice in energy.

The cabaret was by now a roaring success. Ball was exhausted: 'The cabaret needs a rest. With all the tension the daily performances are not just exhausting,' he wrote, 'they are crippling. In the middle of the crowds I start to tremble all over.'

Russian Socialist exiles including Lenin and Zinoviev, writers such as Wedekind, the German Expressionists Leonhard Frank and Ludwig Rubiner, and younger German and East European expatriates, all milled



49 Marcel Janco, *Cabaret Voltaire*, 1916. On the podium, left to right, Hugo Ball (at piano), Tristan Tzara (wringing hands), Jean Arp, Richard Huelsenbeck (below Arp), Marcel Janco

around the centre of Zurich. Some of them visited the cabaret, some joined in. Rudolf von Laban, the choreographer and dance pioneer, attended while his dancers performed. Janco painted the *Cabaret Voltaire* and Arp explained the cast:

On the stage of a gaudy, motley, overcrowded tavern there are several weird and peculiar figures representing Tzara, Janco, Ball, Huelsenbeck, Madame Hennings, and your humble servant. Total pandemonium. The people around us are shouting, laughing, and gesticulating. Our replies are sighs of love, volleys of hiccups, poems, moos, and miaowing of medieval *Brutists*. Tzara is wiggling his behind like the belly of an oriental dancer. Janco is playing an invisible violin and bowing and scraping. Madame Hennings, with a Madonna face, is doing the splits. Huelsenbeck is banging away nonstop on the great drum, with Ball accompanying him on the piano, pale as a chalky ghost. We were given the honorary title of Nihilists.

The cabaret also generated violence and drunkenness in the conservative context of the Swiss city. Huelsenbeck pointed out that 'it was the sons of the Zurich bourgeoisie, the university students, who used to go to the Cabaret Voltaire, a beer parlour. We wanted to make the Cabaret Voltaire a focal point of the "newest art" although we did not neglect from time to time to tell the fat and utterly uncomprehending Zurich philistines that we regarded them as pigs and the German Kaiser as the initiator of the war.'

They each became practised in their specialities: Janco made masks which Ball said 'were not just clever. They were reminiscent of the Japanese or ancient Greek theatre, yet were wholly modern.' Designed to be effective from a distance in the relatively small space of the cabaret, they had a sensational effect. 'We were all there when Janco arrived with his masks, and everyone immediately put one on. Then something strange happened. Not only did the mask immediately call for a costume; it also demanded a quite definite, passionate gesture, bordering on madness.'

Emmy Hennings devised new works daily. Except for her, there were no professional cabaret performers. The press was quick to acknowledge the professional quality of her work: 'The star of the cabaret', wrote the *Zürcher Post*, 'is Emmy Hennings, star of many nights of cabarets and poems. Years ago, she stood by the rustling yellow curtain of a Berlin cabaret, hands on hips, as exuberant as a flowering shrub; today too she presents the same bold front and performs the same songs with a body that has since then been only slightly ravaged by grief.'

Ball invented a new species of 'verse without words' or 'sound poems', in which 'the balancing of the vowels is gauged and distributed only to the value of the initial line'. He described the costume that he had designed for the first reading of one of these poems, which he gave on 23 June 1916 at the Cabaret

Voltaire, in his diary entry of the same day: on his head he wore 'a high, blue- and-white-striped witch doctor's hat'; his legs were covered in blue cardboard tubes 'which came up to my hips so that I looked like an obelisk'; and he wore a huge cardboard collar, scarlet inside and gold outside, which he raised and lowered like wings. He had to be carried onto the stage in the dark and, reading from music stands placed on the three sides of the stage, he began 'slowly and solemnly':

gadji beri bimba
glandridi lauli lonni cadori
gadjama bim beri glassala
glandridi glassala tuffim i zimbrabim
blasa galassasa tuffim i zimbrabim

This recitation though was problematic. He said that he soon noticed that his means of expression was not adequate to the 'pomp of his stage setting'. As though mystically directed he 'seemed to have no other choice than to assume the age-old cadence of the sacerdotal lamentation, like the chanting of the mass that wails through the Catholic churches of both the Occident and the Orient. . . I don't know what inspired me to use this music, but I began to sing my vowel lines like a recitative, in the style of the church.' With these new sound poems, he hoped to renounce 'the language devastated and made impossible by journalism'.



50 Emmy Hennings and doll

51 Hugo Ball reciting the sound poem *Karawane*, 1916, one of the last events at the Cabaret Voltaire. Ball placed his texts on music stands scattered over the podium, and turned from one to the other during the performance, raising and lowering the cardboard 'wings' of his costume



KARAWANE
julianto bambia o talli bambia
grotocaga m pule habla bawani
Agiga geraman
hige bimbio rereola baji
holiaka hollala
aningo bung
biago bung
biago bung
boono fataha
• • •
schampa walia wassa dlobo
hej fatta goren
•••
wataha irolobo omo irobo
tumbha ba- um!
•••
da- um!

Dada

Tzara had other problems. He kept on worrying about a periodical and had more ambitious plans for the goings-on at the Cabaret Voltaire; he saw its potential – as a movement, as a magazine, as a means of storming Paris. Arp on the other hand, a quiet introspective personality, remained on the outside of the cabaret. 'Arp never performed', Huelsenbeck recalled. 'He never needed any hullabaloo, yet his personality had such a strong effect, that from the very first, Dada would have been impossible without him. He was the spirit in the wind and formative power in the burning bush. His delicate complexion, the balletic slenderness of his bones, his elastic gait, were all indicative of his enormous sensitivity. Arp's greatness lay in his ability to limit himself to art.'

The cabaret evenings continued. They began to find a particular form, but above all, they remained a gesture. Ball explained that 'every word spoken and sung here says at least this one thing: that this humiliating age has not succeeded in winning our respect. What could be respectable and impressive about it? Its cannons? Our big drum drowns them. Its idealism? That has long been a laughing-stock, in its popular and its academic edition. The grandiose slaughters and cannibalistic exploits? Our spontaneous foolishness and enthusiasm for illusion will destroy them.'

In April 1916 there were plans for a 'Voltaire Society' and an international exhibition. The proceeds of the soirées would go toward the publishing of an anthology. Tzara, especially, wanted the anthology; Ball and Huelsenbeck were against it. They were against 'organization': 'People have had enough of it', Huelsenbeck argued. Both he and Ball felt that 'one should not turn a whim into an artistic school'. But Tzara was persistent. It was by this time that Ball and Huelsenbeck had coined the name, which they had found in a German-French dictionary, for the singer Madame le Roy: 'Dada is "yes, yes" in Rumanian, "rocking horse" and "hobby horse" in French.' 'For Germans', Ball said, 'it is a sign of foolish naïveté, joy in procreation and preoccupation with the baby carriage.'

On 18 June 1916, Ball was writing: 'We have now driven the plasticity of the word to the point where it can scarcely be equalled. We achieved this at the expense of the rational, logically constructed sentence, and also by abandoning documentary work . . .' He cited two factors which had made such thinking possible: 'First of all, the special circumstance of these times, which do not allow real talent either to rest or mature and so put its capabilities to the test. Then there was the emphatic energy of our group . . .'. Their starting-point he acknowledged was Marinetti, whose words-in-freedom took the word out of the sentence frame (the world image) 'and nourished the emaciated big-city vocables with light and air, and gave them back their warmth, emotion and their original untroubled freedom'.



52 Sophie Taeuber and Jean Arp with puppets made by Taeuber used in various performances, Zurich, 1918

Months of nightly rumpus at the cabaret began to disturb the owner, Ephraim. 'The man told us we must either offer better entertainment and draw a larger crowd or else shut down the cabaret', Huelsenbeck wrote. The various Dadaists reacted to this ultimatum characteristically: Ball was 'ready to close shop', while Tzara, Huelsenbeck cynically remarked, 'concentrated on his correspondence with Rome and Paris, remaining the international intellectual playing with the ideas of the world'. Reserved as ever, 'Arp always maintained a certain distance. His programme was clear. He wanted to revolutionize art and do away with objective painting and sculpture.'

Cabaret Voltaire, after only five months, closed its doors.

Dada: magazine and gallery

A new phase began when Dada went public at the Waag Hall in Zurich on 14 July 1916. Ball saw the event as the end of his Dada involvement: 'My manifesto on the first public Dada evening was a thinly disguised break with friends.' It was a statement concerned with the absolute primacy of the word in language. But more particularly, it was Ball's declared opposition to the

idea of Dada as a 'tendency in art'. 'To make it an artistic tendency must mean that one is anticipating complications', Ball wrote. Tzara, however, was in his element. In his *Zurich Chronicle*, Tzara described his own role:

14 July 1916 – For the first time anywhere. Waag Hall: First Dada Evening
(Music, dances, theories, manifestos, poems, paintings, costumes, masks)

In the presence of a compact crowd Tzara demonstrates, we demand we demand the right to piss in different colours, Huelsenbeck demonstrates, Ball demonstrates, Arp *Erklärung* [statement], Janco *meine Bilder* [my pictures], Heusser *eigene Kompositionen* [original compositions] the dogs bay and the dissection of Panama on the piano on the piano and dock—shouted Poem—shouting and fighting in the hall, first row approves second row declares itself incompetent to judge the rest shout, who is the strongest, the big drum is brought in, Huelsenbeck against 200, Hoosenlatz accentuated by the very big drum and little bells on his left foot—the people protest shout smash windowpanes kill each each demolish fight here come the police interruption.

Boxing resumed: Cubist dance, costumes by Janco, each man his own big drum on his head, noise, Negro music/trabatgea bonoooooooo oo ooooo/5 literary experiments: Tzara in tails stands before the curtain, stone sober for the animals, and explains the new aesthetic: gymnastic poem, concert of vowels, bruitist poem, static poem chemical arrangement of ideas, *Biriboom biriboom saust der Ochs im Kreis herum* [the ox dashes round in a ring] (Huelsenbeck), vowel poem aaò, ieo, aã, new interpretation the subjective folly of the arteries the dance of the heart on burning buildings and acrobatics in the audience, More outcries, the big drum, piano and impotent cannon, cardboard costumes torn off the audience hurls itself into puerperal fever interrupt. The newspapers dissatisfied simultaneous poem for 4 voices + simultaneous work for 300 hopeless idiots.

The five principals read various manifestos. That same month *Collection Dada* issued its first volume, including Tzara's *La Première Aventure céleste de M. Antipyrine* ('The First Celestial Adventure of Mr Antipyrine'). This was followed in September and October of the same year by two volumes of poetry by Huelsenbeck. While Tzara was creating a literary movement out of the Dada idea, he was slowly alienating Ball. Huelsenbeck collaborated for a while, but he shared Ball's reservations about what Dada was becoming, if for different reasons. Huelsenbeck saw the move as codifying Dada, while Ball merely wanted to get away from it all to concentrate on his own writing.

From the public meeting to the magazine, the next step was a place of their own, a Dada gallery. First it was a rented space: in January 1917 the first public Dada exhibition opened at the Galerie Corray, including work by Arp, Van Rees, Janco and Richter, Negro art and talks by Tzara on 'Cubism', 'Old and New Art', and 'Art of the Present'. Soon Ball and Tzara took over the Galerie Corray and opened it on 17 March as the Galerie Dada with an

53 Arp, Tzara and Hans Richter, Zurich, 1917 or 1918



exhibition of *Der Sturm* paintings. Ball wrote that it was 'a continuation of the cabaret idea of last year'. It was a hurried affair with only three days between the proposal and the opening day. Ball remembered that about forty people arrived for the opening where he announced the plan 'to form a small group of people who would support and stimulate each other'.

The nature of the work had changed, however, from spontaneous performances to a more organized, didactic gallery programme. Ball wrote that they had 'surmounted the barbarisms of the cabaret. There is a span of time between Voltaire and the Galerie Dada in which everyone has worked very hard and has gathered new impressions and experiences.' There was, in addition, a new concentration on dance, possibly due to the influence of Sophie Taeuber, who worked with Rudolf von Laban and Mary Wigman. 52 Ball wrote about dance as an art of the closest and most direct material: 'It is very close to the art of tattooing and to all primitive representative efforts that aim at personification; it often merged into them.' Sophie Taeuber's *Gesang der Flugfische und Seepferdchen* ('Song of the Flying-fish and Seahorses') was 'a dance full of flashes and edges, full of dazzling light and penetrating intensity', according to Ball. A second *Der Sturm* show opened on 9 April 1917 and by the 10th, Ball was already preparing the second soirée:

'I am rehearsing a new dance with five Laban-ladies as negresses in long black caftans and face masks. The movements are symmetrical, the rhythm is strongly emphasized, the mimicry is of a studied deformed ugliness.'

They charged admission, but in spite of this, notes Ball, the gallery was too small for the number of visitors. The gallery had three faces: by day it was a kind of teaching body for schoolgirls and upper-class ladies. 'In the evenings the candlelit Kandinsky room is a club for the most esoteric philosophies. At the soirées, however, the parties have a brilliance and a frenzy such as Zurich has never seen before.' What was specially interesting was the 'boundless readiness for storytelling and exaggeration, a readiness that has become a principle. Absolute dance, absolute poetry, absolute art – what is meant is that a minimum of impressions is enough to evoke unusual images.'

The Galerie Dada lasted just eleven weeks. It had been calculated and educative in intent with three large-scale exhibitions, numerous lectures (including one by Ball on Kandinsky), soirées and demonstrations. In May 1917, there was a free afternoon tea for school parties and on the 20th a gallery tour for workmen. According to Ball, one single workman turned up. Meanwhile, Huelsenbeck lost interest in the whole affair, claiming it was a 'self-conscious little art business, characterized by tea-drinking old ladies trying to revive their vanishing sexual powers with the help of "something mad"'. But for Ball, who was shortly to leave Dada for good, it provided the most serious attempt yet to review the traditions of art and literature and to establish a positive direction for the group.

Even before the Galerie Dada had officially closed down, Ball had left Zurich for the Alps and Huelsenbeck had departed for Berlin.

Huelsenbeck in Berlin

'The direct reason for my return to Germany in 1917,' wrote Richard Huelsenbeck, 'was the closing of the cabaret.' Keeping a low profile in Berlin for the next thirteen months, Huelsenbeck reflected on Zurich Dada, later publishing his writing in *En avant Dada: Eine Geschichte des Dadaismus* (1920), analysing some of the concepts that it had attempted to develop. Simultaneity, for example, had been first used by Marinetti in a literary sense, but Huelsenbeck insisted on its abstract nature: 'Simultaneity is a concept', he wrote,

referring to the occurrence of different events at the same time, it turns the sequence of $a=b=c=d$ into an $a-b-c-d$, and attempts to transform the problem of the ear into a problem of the face. Simultaneity is against what has become, and for what is becoming. While I, for example, become successively aware that I boxed an old woman on the ear yesterday and washed my hands an

hour ago, the screeching of a tram brake and the crash of a brick falling off the roof next door reach my ear simultaneously and my (outward or inward) eye rouses itself to seize, in the simultaneity of these events, a swift meaning of life.

Likewise introduced into art by Marinetti, Bruitism could be described as 'noise with imitative effects' as heard for example in a 'chorus of typewriters, kettledrums, rattles and saucepan lids'.

These theoretical preoccupations were to take on a new meaning in the Berlin context. The early performers were far away. Ball and Emmy Hennings had moved to Aguzzo in the Ticino where Ball intended to live a solitary life, while Tristan Tzara had remained in Zurich, keeping the Dada magazine alive with additional manifestos. But Berlin's literary bohemians had little in common with Zurich's pacifist exiles. Less inclined to an art-for-art's sake attitude, they were soon to influence Dada towards a political stance that it had not known before.

Berlin Dada's early performances resembled the Zurich ones, however. The literary clientèle of the Café des Westens had indeed been anxious to see the Dada legend materialize and, in February 1918, Huelsenbeck gave his first reading. With him were Max Herrmann-Neisse and Theodor Däubler, two Expressionist poets, and George Grosz, his old satirist and activist friend; this first Berlin Dada performance took place in a small room in the gallery of I.B. Neumann. Huelsenbeck once more resumed his part of the 'Dada drummer', flourishing his cane, violent, 'perhaps arrogant, and unmindful of the consequences', while Grosz recited his poetry: 'You-sons-of-bitches, materialists/bread-eaters, flesh = eaters = vegetarians!!/professors, butchers' apprentices, pimps!/you bums!' Then Grosz, now an eager subscriber to Dada's anarchy, urinated on an Expressionist painting.

To top this provocation, Huelsenbeck turned to another taboo subject, the war, yelling that the last one had not been bloody enough. At this point, a wooden-legged war veteran left the room in protest, accompanied by supportive applause from the angered audience. Undaunted, Huelsenbeck read from his *Phantastische Gebete* ('Fantastic Prayers') for the second time that evening and Däubler and Herrmann-Neisse persisted with their readings. The gallery director threatened to call the police but several persuasive Dadaists succeeded in stopping him. The following day newspapers ran front page headline stories covering the scandal. The scene for numerous succeeding Dada performances had been set.

When, only two months later, on 12 April 1918, Huelsenbeck and a differently composed band of Café des Westens habitués – Raoul Hausmann, Franz Jung, Gerhard Preiss and George Grosz – presented the second Dada soirée, it was a meticulously planned affair. Unlike the first improvised event, press releases were widely distributed, co-signers were solicited for

Manifestos appeared in quick succession. But the mood had changed; Berlin had transformed Dada, adding a more aggressive spirit than before. Besides Radical Communism, the Berlin Dadaists demanded 'the introduction of progressive unemployment through comprehensive mechanization of every field of activity', for, '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'. As well as the 'requisition of churches for the performances of Bruitist, simultaneist and Dadaist poems', they called for the 'immediate organization of a large-scale Dadaist propaganda campaign with 150 circuses for the enlightenment of the proletariat'. Matinées and soirées took place throughout the city, sometimes at the Café Austria, and newcomers to Berlin joined the swelling ranks of the increasingly militant Dada group. Newly arrived from Russia, Efim Golyschef added his *Antisymphony in Three Parts (The Circular Guillotine)* to the Dada repertory, while Johannes Baader, who had been certified as insane by the Berlin police force, added his own brand of Dada insanity.

In May 1918, huge elaborately painted posters were pasted over hundreds of Berlin walls and fences advertising the 'First German Postwar Renaissance of the Arts'. On 15 May a 'Great Art Festival' opened at the large Meistersaal on the Kurfürstendamm with a race between a typewriter and a sewing machine. There followed a 'Pan-Germanic Poetry Contest' which took the form of a race, umpired by Grosz, between twelve poets reading their work simultaneously.

Dada was at the height of its notoriety and people flocked to Berlin to experience the Dada Rebellion at first hand. They clamoured for Grosz's and Mehring's 'Private Conversation of Two Senile Men Behind a Firescreen', Gerhard Preiss's 'Dada-Trott' and Hausmann's 'sixty-one-step' dance. The Berlin Dadaists also made a Czechoslovakian tour, Huelsenbeck opening each event with a typically provocative address to the audience.

Their return to Berlin at the end of 1919 was marked by the appearance on the Dada stage of the theatre director Erwin Piscator. At Die Tribüne, Piscator produced the first live photomontage with one of Huelsenbeck's sketches. Directing the action from the top of a tall ladder, Piscator held the stage while off-stage Dadaists shouted coarse speeches at the audience. Mehring's *Simply Classical - An Oresteia with a Happy Ending*, satirizing economic, political and military events, took place in the basement of Max Reinhardt's theatre, the Schall und Rauch. It employed two-foot-high marionettes designed by Grosz and executed by Heartfield and Hecker, as well as many technical innovations which were later used by both Piscator and Brecht in their productions.

Berlin Dada was drawing to an end. The First International Dada Fair at the Burchard Gallery in June 1920 ironically revealed Dada's exhaustion.

einleitung:	
Fümms bö wö tää zää Uu, pöggiff, kwii Ee.	1
Ooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo,	6
dll rrrrrr beeee bö, dll rrrrrr beeee bö fümms bö, rrrrrr beeee bö fümms bö wö, beeee bö fümms bö wö tää, bö fümms bö wö tää zää, fümms bö wö tää zää Uu:	(A) 6
erster teil:	
thema 1: Fümms bö wö tää zää Uu, pöggiff, kwii Ee.	1
thema 2: Dedesnn nn rrrrrr, ii Ee, mpiff silff too, nilli, Jüü Kaa? (gezwungen)	2
thema 3: Rinznkeere bee bee naz krr müü? ziuu entze, ziiuu rinznkermüü, raktere bee bee.	3
thema 4: Rrumpff silff toooo?	4

58 Text of Kurt Schwitters's *Ursonate*

MERZ 20 KURT SCHWITTERS



KURT SCHWITTERS. FOTO: GÖTTI HALL, BRUNNEN

KATALOG

59 Kurt Schwitters

Grosz and Heartfield, becoming increasingly politicized with the menace of current events, joined the more programmatic Proletarian Theatre of Schüller and Piscator, while Hausmann left Berlin to join Hanover Dada. Mehring, on the other hand, returned to the ever popular 'literary cabaret'. Huelsenbeck went on to complete his studies in medicine and in 1922 left for Dresden where he became assistant to a neuro-psychiatrist, later becoming a psycho-analyst.

German, Dutch, Rumanian and Czechoslovakian cities were equally besieged by visiting foreign Dadaists and locally formed groups. Kurt Schwitters travelled to Holland in 1923 and helped form a 'Holland Dada'; he also made regular visits to the Bauhaus where he mesmerized his audience with his staccato voice, intoning his famous poem *Anna Blume* or his 'Die Ursonate'. Schwitters even proposed a Merz theatre in a manifesto entitled 'To All the Theatres of the World I Demand the Merz Stage', calling for 'equality in principle of all materials, equality between complete human beings, idiots, whistling wire netting and thought pumps'.

In Cologne, Max Ernst organized a 'Dada-Vorfrühling' with Arp and Baargeld, which opened on 20 April 1920. Before the exhibition was

temporarily closed by the police, those that had a chance to visit it entered through the *pissoir* of a beer-hall. There they found Baargeld's *Fluidoskeptrik* – an aquarium filled with blood-coloured water, an alarm clock at the bottom, a woman's wig floating on the top and a wooden arm protruding from the water. Chained to an object of Ernst's was an axe, providing an open invitation to any willing passer-by to destroy the object. A young woman in first communion dress recited 'obscene' poems by Jakob van Hoddis. By 1921 Cologne Dada had run its course; like many Dadaists in Europe, Ernst too headed for Paris in that year.

Dada in New York and Barcelona

Meanwhile Dada's last years in Zurich were in the hands of Tristan Tzara. There he had transformed Dada from a haphazard series of mostly improvised events into a movement with its own mouthpiece, the magazine *Dada* (first issued in July 1917), which he would soon take with him to Paris. Some of the more reticent Cabaret Voltaire figures like the Viennese doctor, Walter Serner, came to the fore, and newcomers like Francis Picabia passed briefly through Zurich to make acquaintance with the Dada stalwarts.

Picabia, a wealthy, Parisian-born Cuban and temporarily resident in New York, Paris and Barcelona, introduced himself in 1918 to the Dada

60 Poster advertising the fight between the writer Arthur Cravan and the world boxing champion Jack Johnson, Madrid, 23 April 1916

contingent at a champagne party at the Hotel Elite in Zurich. Already known for his black and gold 'machine paintings' at the Dada exhibition held at the Galerie Wolfsberg in September 1918, he published a special Zurich issue of his magazine *391*. Picabia was more than familiar with the style of Zurich Dada. In New York, he and Duchamp had been at the forefront of avant-garde activities. With Walter Arensberg and others they organized the important Independents exhibition of 1917, marked by Duchamp's attempt to exhibit his notorious *Fountain* – a urinal. Consequently Picabia's published material – poems and drawings – preceded him to Zurich where he was welcomed by Tzara: 'Long live Descartes, long live Picabia the anti-painter just arrived from New York.'

Among those involved with *391* in Barcelona was the writer and amateur boxer Arthur Cravan (real name Fabian Lloyd), who had already acquired a following in Paris and New York with his polemical *Maintenant* (1912–15). Self-proclaimed French boxing champion, confidence man, muleteer, snake charmer, hotel thief and nephew of Oscar Wilde, he challenged the authentic world heavyweight champion, Jack Johnson, to a fight, which took place in Madrid on 23 April 1916. Cravan's amateur play as well as his drunken state ⁶⁰ assured that he would be knocked out in the first round; nevertheless this somewhat brief event was a sensation in Madrid and was much appreciated by Cravan's supporters. A year later at the Independents exhibition in New York he was arrested for offending a gathering of society women and men. Invited by Duchamp and Picabia to lecture at the opening night, Cravan arrived obviously drunk and was soon raving obscenities at the audience. He then proceeded to undress. It was at this point that the police dragged him off to the city jail, only to be rescued by Walter Arensberg. Cravan's end was equally bizarre: he was last seen in 1918 in a small town on the coast of Mexico, carrying provisions to a small yacht which was to take him to Buenos Aires to join his wife Mina Loy. He took off in his boat and was never heard from again.

Dada's end in Zurich

With his new collaborators Tzara organized a Tristan Tzara night at the Salle zur Meise in Zurich on 23 July 1918, when he took the opportunity to read the first actual Dada manifesto: 'Let us destroy let us be good let us create a new force of gravity NO=YES Dada means nothing', it read. 'The bourgeois salad in the eternal basin is insipid and I hate good sense.' This caused the inevitable riot and was followed in quick succession by a profusion of Dada events.

The final Dada soirée in Zurich took place on 9 April 1919 at the Saal zur Kaufleuten. An exemplary affair which was to set the format for subsequent

soirées in Paris, it was produced by Walter Serner and precisely coordinated by Tzara. As Tzara alliteratively put it: '1500 persons filled the hall already boiling in the bubbles of bamboulas.' Hans Richter and Arp painted the sets for the dances by Suzanne Perrottet and Käthe Wulff, consisting of black abstract forms – 'like cucumbers' – on long strips of paper about two yards wide. Janco constructed enormous savage masks for the dancers and Serner armed himself with several curious props, among them a headless dummy.

The performance itself began on a sombre note: the Swedish film maker Viking Eggeling delivered a serious speech about elementary 'Gestaltung' and abstract art. This only irritated the audience primed for the usual combative confrontation with the Dadaists. Nor did Perrottet's dance to Schoenberg and Satie pacify the restless crowd. Only Tzara's simultaneous poem *Le Fièvre du mâle* ('The Fever of the Male'), read by twenty people, provided the absurdity they had anticipated. 'All hell broke loose', Richter noted. 'Shouts, whistles, chanting in unison, laughter all of which mingled more or less anti-harmoniously with the bellowing of the twenty on the platform.' Then Serner carried his headless dummy onto the stage, presenting it with a bouquet of artificial flowers. When he began reading from his anarchistic manifesto, *Letzte Lockerung* ('Final Dissolution') – 'a queen is an armchair and a dog is a hammock' – the crowd responded violently, smashing the dummy and forcing an interval of twenty minutes on the proceedings. The second part of the programme was somewhat more sedate: five Laban dancers presented *Nor Kakadu*, their faces covered by Janco's masks and bodies concealed in weird funnel-shaped objects. Tzara and Serner read more poems. Despite the peaceful finale, Tzara wrote that the performance had succeeded in establishing 'the circuit of absolute unconsciousness in the audience which forgot the frontiers of education of prejudices, experienced the commotion of the NEW'. It was, he said, Dada's final victory.

Actually, the Kauffleuten performance only marked the 'final victory' of Zurich Dada. To Tzara it was evident that after four years of activities in that city, it had become necessary to find fresh ground for Dada's anarchy if it was to remain at all effective. He had been preparing a move to Paris for some time: in January 1918 he had begun a correspondence with the group which in March 1919 was to found the literary magazine *Littérature* – André Breton, Paul Eluard, Philippe Soupault, Louis Aragon and others – hoping for contributions to *Dada 3* and their tacit support of Dada. Only Soupault replied with a brief poem, and although the whole Paris group, including Pierre Reverdy and Jean Cocteau, sent material for *Dada 4-5* (May 1919), it had become obvious that from such a distance not even the energetic Tzara could coerce the Parisians into further participation. So, in 1919, Tzara made his way to Paris.

Surrealism

First Paris performance

Tzara arrived unannounced at Picabia's home and spent his first night in Paris on a sofa. The news that he was in town quickly spread and he soon became the focus of attention of the avant-garde circles, just as he had anticipated. At the Café Certà and its annexe the Petit Grillon, he met the *Littérature* group with whom he had been corresponding, and it was not long before they arranged the first Dada event in Paris. On 23 January 1920, the first of the *Littérature* Fridays took place at the Palais des Fêtes in the rue Saint-Martin. André Salmon opened the performance with a recital of his poems, Jean Cocteau read poems by Max Jacob, and the young André Breton some by his favourite, Reverdy. 'The public was delighted', wrote Ribemont-Dessaignes. 'This, after all, was being "modern" – Parisians love that.' But what followed brought the audience to its feet. Tzara read a 'vulgar' newspaper article prefaced by an announcement that it was a 'poem' and accompanied by 'an inferno of bells and rattles' shaken by Eluard and Fraenkel. Masked figures recited a disjointed poem by Breton, and then Picabia executed large drawings in chalk on a blackboard, wiping out each section before going on to the next.

The matinée ended in an uproar. 'For the Dadaists themselves this was an extremely fruitful experiment', wrote Ribemont-Dessaignes. 'The destructive aspect of Dada appeared to them more clearly; the resultant indignation of the public which had come to beg for an artistic pittance, no matter what, as long as it was art, the effect produced by the presentation of the pictures and particularly of the manifesto, showed them how useless it was, by comparison, to have Max Jacob's poems read by Jean Cocteau.' Once again, Dada had 'triumphed'. Although the Zurich and Paris ingredients were the same – provocations against a respectful audience – it was clear that the transplant had been successful.

The following month, on 5 February 1920, crowds gathered at the Salon des Indépendants, lured by an advertisement stating that Charlie Chaplin would make an appearance. Not suprisingly, Chaplin was quite ignorant of his supposed presence. Similarly unaware of the falsity of the pre-performance publicity was the audience, which had to make do with thirty-