Seven Dada Manifestos
and
Lampisteries

Translated by Barbara Wright
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Seven Dada Manifestos
DADA is our intensity: it erects inconsequential bayonets and the Sumatral head of German babies; Dada is life with neither bedroom slippers nor parallels; it is against and for unity and definitely against the future; we are wise enough to know that our brains are going to become flabby cushions, that our antidogmatism is as exclusive as a civil servant, and that we cry liberty but are not free; a severe necessity with neither discipline nor morals and that we spit on humanity.

DADA remains within the framework of European weaknesses, it’s still shit, but from now on we want to shit in different colours so as to adorn the zoo of art with all the flags of all the consulates. We are circus ringmasters and we can be found whistling amongst the winds of fairgrounds, in convents, prostitutions, theatres, realities, feelings, restaurants, ooh ooh, bang bang.

We declare that the motor car is a feeling that has cosseted us quite enough in the dilatoriness of its abstractions, as have transatlantic liners, noises and ideas. And while we put on a show of being facile, we are actually searching for the central essence of things, and are pleased if we can hide it; we have no wish to count the windows of the marvellous élite, for DADA doesn’t exist for anyone, and we want everyone to understand this. This is Dada’s balcony, I assure you. From there you can hear all the military marches, and come down cleaving the air like a seraph landing in a public baths to piss and understand the parable.
DADA is neither madness, nor wisdom, nor irony. Look at me, dear bourgeois.
Art used to be a game of nuts in May, children would go gathering words that had a final ring, then they would exude, shout out the verse, and dress it up in dolls' bootees, and the verse became a queen in order to die a little, and the queen became a sardine, and the children ran hither and yon, unseen ... Then came the great ambassadors of feeling, who yelled historically in chorus:
Psychology Psychology hee hee
Science Science Science
Long live France
We are not naive
We are successive
We are exclusive
We are not simpletons
and we are perfectly capable of an intelligent discussion.
But we, DADA, don't agree with them, for art isn't serious, I assure you, and if we reveal the crime so as to show that we are learned denunciators, it's to please you, dear audience, I assure you, and I adore you.
II

DADA MANIFESTO

1918

The magic of a word — DADA — which for journalists has opened the door to an unforeseen world, has for us not the slightest importance.

To launch a manifesto you have to want: A.B. & C., and fulminate against 1, 2, & 3, work yourself up and sharpen your wings to conquer and circulate lower and upper case As, Bs & Cs, sign, shout, swear, organise prose into a form that is absolutely and irrefutably obvious, prove its ne plus ultra and maintain that novelty resembles life in the same way as the latest apparition of a harlot proves the essence of God. His existence had already been proved by the accordion, the landscape and soft words. ☆ To impose one’s A.B.C. is only natural — and therefore regrettable. Everyone does it in the form of a crystalbluff-madonna, or a monetary system, or pharmaceutical preparations, a naked leg being the invitation to an ardent and sterile Spring. The love of novelty is a pleasant sort of cross, it’s evidence of a naive don’t-give-a-damn attitude, a passing, positive, sign without rhyme or reason. But this need is out of date, too. By giving art the impetus of supreme simplicity — novelty — we are being human and true in relation to innocent pleasures; impulsive and vibrant in order to crucify boredom. At the lighted crossroads, alert, attentive, lying in wait for years, in the forest. ☆ I am writing a manifesto and there’s nothing I want, and yet I’m saying certain things, and in principle I am against manifestos, as I am against principles (quantifying measures of the moral value of every phrase — too easy; approximation was invented by the
impressionists). ☆
I'm writing this manifesto to show that you can perform contrary actions at the same time, in one single, fresh breath; I am against action; as for continual contradiction, and affirmation too, I am neither for nor against them, and I won't explain myself because I hate common sense.
DADA — this is a word that throws up ideas so that they can be shot down; every bourgeois is a little playwright, who invents different subjects and who, instead of situating suitable characters on the level of his own intelligence, like chrysalises on chairs, tries to find causes or objects (according to whichever psychoanalytic method he practises) to give weight to his plot, a talking and self-defining story. ☆
Every spectator is a plotter, if he tries to explain a word (to know!) From his padded refuge of serpentine complications, he allows his instincts to be manipulated. Whence the sorrows of conjugal life.
To be plain: The amusement of redbellies in the mills of empty skulls.

DADA DOES NOT MEAN ANYTHING

If we consider it futile, and if we don't waste our time over a word that doesn't mean anything ... The first thought that comes to these minds is of a bacteriological order: at least to discover its etymological, historical or psychological meaning. We read in the papers that the negroes of the Kroo race call the tail of a sacred cow: DADA. A cube, and a mother, in a certain region of Italy, are called: DADA. The word for a hobby-horse, a children's nurse, a double affirmative in Russian and Roumanian, is also: DADA. Some learned journalists see it as an art for babies, other Jesuscallingthelittlechildrenuntohim saints see it as a return to an unemotional and noisy primitivism — noisy and monotonous. A sensitivity cannot be built on the basis of a word; every sort of construction converges into a boring sort of perfection, a stagnant idea of a golden swamp, a relative human product. A work of art shouldn't be beauty per se, because it is dead; neither gay nor sad,
neither light nor dark; it is to rejoice or maltreat individualities to serve them up the cakes of sainted haloes or the sweat of a meandering chase through the atmosphere. A work of art is never beautiful, by decree, objectively, for everyone. Criticism is, therefore, useless; it only exists subjectively, for every individual, and without the slightest general characteristic. Do people imagine they have found the psychic basis common to all humanity? The attempt of Jesus, and the Bible, conceal, under their ample, benevolent wings: shit, animals and days. How can anyone hope to order the chaos that constitutes that infinite, formless variation: man? The principle: “Love thy neighbour” is hypocrisy. “Know thyself” is utopian, but more acceptable because it includes malice. No pity. After the carnage we are left with the hope of a purified humanity. I always speak about myself because I don’t want to convince, and I have no right to drag others in my wake, I’m not compelling anyone to follow me, because everyone makes his art in his own way, if he knows anything about the joy that rises like an arrow up to the astral strata, or that which descends into the mines strewn with the flowers of corpses and fertile spasms. Stalactites: look everywhere for them, in creches magnified by pain, eyes as white as angels’ hares. Thus DADA was born*, out of a need for independence, out of mistrust for the community. People who join us keep their freedom. We don’t accept any theories. We’ve had enough of the cubist and futurist academies: laboratories of formal ideas. Do we make art in order to earn money and keep the dear bourgeoisie happy? Rhymes have the smack of money, and inflexion slides along the line of the stomach in profile. Every group of artists has ended up at this bank, straddling various comets. Leaving the door open to the possibility of wallowing in comfort and food.

Here we are dropping our anchor in fertile ground.

Here we really know what we are talking about, because we have experienced the trembling and the awakening. Drunk with energy, we are revenants thrusting the trident into heedless flesh. We are streams of curses in the tropical abundance of vertiginous

* In 1916 at the CABARET VOLTAIRE in Zurich.
vegetation, resin and rain is our sweat, we bleed and burn with thirst, our blood is strength.
Cubism was born out of a simple manner of looking at objects: Cézanne painted a cup twenty centimetres lower than his eyes, the cubists look at it from above, others complicate its appearance by cutting a vertical section through it and soberly placing it to one side. (I’m not forgetting the creators, nor the seminal reasons of unformed matter that they rendered definitive.) ☆ The futurist sees the same cup in movement, a succession of objects side by side, mischievously embellished by a few guide-lines. This doesn’t stop the canvas being either a good or a bad painting destined to form an investment for intellectual capital. The new painter creates a
world whose elements are also its means, a sober, definitive, irrefutable work. The new artist protests: he no longer paints (symbolic and illusionistic reproduction) but creates directly in stone, wood, iron, tin, rocks, or locomotive structures capable of being spun in all directions by the limpid wind of the momentary sensation. ☆ Every pictorial or plastic work is unnecessary, even if it is a monster which terrifies servile minds, and not a sickly-sweet object to adorn the refectories of animals in human garb, those illustrations of the sad fable of humanity. — A painting is the art of making two lines, which have been geometrically observed to be parallel, meet on a canvas, before our eyes, in the reality of a world that has been transposed according to new conditions and possibilities. This world is neither specified nor defined in the work, it belongs, in its innumerable variations, to the spectator. For its creator it has neither cause nor theory. Order = disorder; ego = non-ego; affirmation = negation: the supreme radiations of an absolute art. Absolute in the purity of its cosmic and regulated chaos, eternal in that globule that is a second which has no duration, no breath, no light and no control. ☆ I appreciate an old work for its novelty. It is only contrast that links us to the past. ☆ Writers who like to moralise and discuss or ameliorate psychological bases have, apart from a secret wish to win, a ridiculous knowledge of life, which they have classified, parcelled out, canalised; they are determined to see its categories dance when they beat time. Their readers laugh derisively, but carry on: what’s the use?

There is one kind of literature which never reaches the voracious masses. The work of creative writers, written out of the author’s real necessity, and for his own benefit. The awareness of a supreme egoism, wherein laws become insignificant. ☆ Every page should explode, either because of its profound gravity, or its vortex, vertigo, newness, eternity, or because of its staggering absurdity, the enthusiasm of its principles, or its typography. On the one hand there is a world tottering in its flight, linked to the resounding tinkle of the infernal gamut; on the other hand, there are: the new men. Uncouth, galloping, riding astride on hiccups. And there is a
mutilated world and literary medicasters in desperate need of amelioration.
I assure you: there is no beginning, and we are not afraid; we aren't sentimental. We are like a raging wind that rips up the clothes of clouds and prayers, we are preparing the great spectacle of disaster, conflagration and decomposition. Preparing to put an end to mourning, and to replace tears by sirens spreading from one continent to another. Clarions of intense joy, bereft of that poisonous sadness. ☆ DADA is the mark of abstraction; publicity and business are also poetic elements.
I destroy the drawers of the brain, and those of social organisation: to sow demoralisation everywhere, and throw heaven's hand into hell, hell's eyes into heaven, to reinstate the fertile wheel of a universal circus in the Powers of reality, and the fantasy of every individual.
A philosophical question: from which angle to start looking at life, god, ideas, or anything else. Everything we look at is false. I don’t think the relative result is any more important than the choice of pâtisserie or cherries for dessert. The way people have of looking hurriedly at things from the opposite point of view, so as to impose their opinions indirectly, is called dialectic, in other words, heads I win and tails you lose, dressed up to look scholarly.
If I shout:
Ideal, Ideal, Ideal
Knowledge, Knowledge, Knowledge,
Boomboom, Boomboom, Boomboom
I have recorded fairly accurately Progress, Law, Morals, and all the other magnificent qualities that various very intelligent people have discussed in so many books in order, finally, to say that even so everyone has danced according to his own personal boomboom, and that he's right about his boomboom: the satisfaction of unhealthy curiosity; private bell-ringing for inexplicable needs; bath; pecuniary difficulties; a stomach with repercussions on to life; the authority of the mystical baton formulated as the grand finale of a phantom orchestra with mute bows, lubricated by philtres with a basis of animal ammonia. With the blue monocle of an angel they