

Chance and Collaboration in the Dada Movement

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Introduction

As much as any ideology of its kind can begin in one place at one time, Dada began at the Cabaret Voltaire, a club that became a lasting exemplar of artistic freedom in the dreary backdrop of 1916 Zürich. The Russian Revolution was still a year off, and the November Revolution had two years left to brew. Before World War One Germany had assumed an expansionist foreign policy (*Weltpolitik*) that both increased Germany's land holdings and isolated it from its neighbours, turning allies to enemies. The domestic economy had been booming, but by 1916 Germany and its citizens were suffering from the effects of aggressive warfare. The war on two fronts had taken its toll, and the government placed increasing pressure on its dwindling citizenry. Though many citizens had supported the camaraderie and identity provided them by the war, all at home could see the writing on the wall, and internal revolts began in 1916. The founders of the Dada movement reacted in different ways. Several of the Dadas, before they were so known, attempted to enlist in the war effort. Others purposefully had themselves found unfit to serve. None were drafted, and all eventually joined the newly popular anti-war tide, preferring to leave Germany altogether. But escape in such circumstances is never absolute. Their German upbringing, German friends, and constant news of the war haunted them. Far removed in Zürich, their work could respond to German politics without fear of censorship and address broader European artistic and ideological trends, but they could not (or preferred not to) help the antiwar efforts directly. Dada was born amid this semi-impotence, hopelessness, and refusal: frothing, kicking, and screaming.

The environment of the Cabaret was intensely collaborative, and the group began producing work together immediately after their first meeting. Young artists performed new works daily to cheers and boos from local students and alcoholics. Among the rotating cast of artists, each new noise poem or masked performance turned the wheels of inspiration. Artists came, left, created, and were formed. Though the Cabaret itself only survived four months, the community and energy it created lasted, in some form or another.

The first "official" Dada soirée was held at the Cabaret in 1916. It featured collaborative works from Tristan Tzara (1896–1963) and Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974), before their later fame and eventual feud. Huelsenbeck returned from Zürich to Berlin in 1917, where he told his friend and fellow artist Raoul Hausmann (1886–1971) of his new ventures. The first reading of a Dada manifesto in Berlin was only a year later. From Huelsenbeck's departure the Dadas were in regular contact, travelling often to see each other, and to stage exhibitions and performances. Originally, the Cabaret was a place for young artists to express their frustration with the government and the society that surrounded them. Life was moving too quickly, and not in the right direction. World War One dragged on. There was little in recent memory to look back on or forward to. Though the Dadas likely did not anticipate the later instabilities of the Weimar Republic, or the horrors of the Second World War, they were united in the belief that the future was not likely to be bright.

When the movement came to Berlin it was met with a far fiercer local political scene. Berlin Dada was, by necessity, more explicitly political than its Zürich progenitor. Where Zürich Dada sought to escape from political life entirely with absurdity, Berlin Dada was increasingly attracted to the new political ideology of socialism. Germans were hungry, overworked, and grieving. They had been let down by a government that no longer cared for their opinion or wellbeing. In both cities,

the young collaborators saw their work as entirely unprecedented. As the world swept on in search of “progress,” and young artists were moving away from classical styles towards the abstraction of Cubism and Futurism, Dada declared itself unique in both content and technique. In their bid for freedom, the Dadas’ art and messaging pushed against traditional politics and art history to different degrees and ends. Though to the public eye they were a united menace against every kind of normalcy, the movement was fraught with internal divisions that mirrored the post-Bismarck patterns in the German left at large. Some artists were against the current regime but favored another (Tzara, Huelsenbeck), some were anti-politics in the anarchist sense (author and performer Johannes Baader, 1875–1955), some removed themselves from the political altogether and turned to a quiet life of artmaking (collage artist and sculptor Jean Arp, 1886–1966), and some claimed to feel one way but acted another. Dadas opposed to modern political systems, or any political system at all, were also often opposed to the relevance of the art historical canon: systems of power were the enemy, and their records and categories were means of control.

Unlike other artistic movements, Dada was not united by a single style or technique, though it laid claim to many. The Arps, Jean and Sophie, are generally credited with inventing collage.¹ Pieces were often ripped, not cut, and scattered across canvas according to chance, forming numerous untitled compositions that ideally had no input from their creator. They were expressions of the universe in the purest form accessible, with the smallest amount of human input. The Arps’ collages were quintessential Zürich Dada: art as an escape from politics and daily life, from human choices and deliberations, rather than a critique of certain political forms. Collage was an immediate hit. Quickly embraced by most Dadas, the form progressed simultaneously toward chance (through the Arps) and, paradoxically, away from it. In contrast to the Arps’ work, highly structured and carefully selected compositions were a hallmark of the myriad Dada magazines. These collages prefaced seemingly endless Dada manifestos, politicizing an artform that, for the Dadas, began as strictly formal. Another favorite medium of the Dadas was the “sound poem.” The Dadas sought to abstract speech itself, reducing poetry, a form where word choice is crucial, to collections of noises.

Though artists had favorite techniques, there was no sense of ownership in the Cabaret. Anyone was free to write a sound poem or make a collage. The sense of free collaboration united the disparate personalities and techniques into an aesthetic that was singular in all senses of the word. Both unique and surprisingly defined, early Dada had a definite “look.” Early Dada was united despite and because of the differences in its parts. The aesthetic was eclectic, but eclecticism was a defining characteristic. As every work influenced and bled into others, friends were influenced by friends, artworks given were cut up for collages, and a chaotic consensus formed.

The community that developed at the Cabaret Voltaire was key to the limited revolution that the Dadas did achieve, but like the Cabaret itself the communal sentiment did not last long. Friendships gave way under social pressure, eventually turning to hostility, functional disregard, or outright hatred. Tzara and Huelsenbeck had particularly large personalities and a particularly large blowup. Huelsenbeck found Tzara too obsequious, too interested in ingratiating himself with those he saw as socially significant. They got along as well as they could for several years, but their mutual dislike was reinforced by increasingly opposing political views. People were eventually encouraged to take sides.² Other Dadas had consistently had issues with Tzara as well. Hugo Ball (1886–1927), a friend of Huelsenbeck and another founder of Dada, did not get along easily with Tzara, though the split between the two was less definitive. After some close calls with Nazi authorities, Huelsenbeck eventually fled Europe entirely, changed his name, and denounced Dada and his revolutionary past. Tzara remained on the continent but spent much of his time in Paris.

¹Richard Huelsenbeck and Hans J Kleinschmidt, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer* (University of California Press, 1991), 113.

²Huelsenbeck and Kleinschmidt, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, 81.

After moving to the city in 1919 he attempted to open a Dada chapter there, failed, and joined the Surrealists.

Others drifted away from the movement with less ado. Lives, careers, and interests grew apart in the usual way, though the constant infighting catalyzed the estrangement. The friendships that survived were largely maintained through correspondence, though this became strained during the Second World War and its aftermath, when some were forced to leave their countries for fear of condemnation. Others stayed but became less politically inclined, and some turned more seriously to religion. Eventually some Dadas sought out their old friends, to mixed results.

Each player in the Cabaret was entirely unique. When their stories are told in sequence, one wonders how they worked together at all. Missing are many specifics from the time at the Cabaret Voltaire. It was a whirlwind of creation that left behind little record. Rather their art was their history and vice versa. Though the Cabaret was the uniting thread, it could only pull so far before snapping: after its closure and the schism, there was a void left in the historical record by the collaborative practice. Works entered museums or collections and required accreditation. Dadas began to claim ownership over previously communal techniques, works, and stories. Objects and performances created in cooperation were suddenly subject to intense evaluations of provenance. Unwilling to accept partial credit, the men issued competing claims of primacy in the discovery of certain techniques and ideas, and claims of ownership based on that primacy. Chance, another technique of the Dadas, was as much responsible for this void as subject to its effects. In service of these claims to ownership, chance was often used to avoid identifying any author at all. Its use, though unintended at first, eventually formed a similar anti-authorial hole. This paper will examine these claims of proprietorship to argue that chance and collaboration have parallel but opposite characteristics that made both central to the phenomenon of repossession in the post-Dada historical landscape. As will be shown, Jean Arp's work in chance maintained the spirit of the Cabaret by substituting a metaphysical foundation for a political one.

Literature on the subject of chance in twentieth-century art often falls into one of two areas of focus. The first primarily deals with Surrealism. Though these books usually give Dada a few pages, they often frame the movement as little more than the precursor to Surrealism. Such is the case in Denis Lejeune's 2012 work *The Radical Use of Chance in 20th Century Art*. Its consideration of the Surreal is framed around André Breton, though Lejeune addresses Dada in a short summary early on.³ Other recent works such as Susan Laxton's 2019 *Surrealism at Play* and the 2009 co-authored book *The Exquisite Corpse: Chance and Collaboration in Surrealism's Parlor Game* show the attention given by recent scholarship to chance as a medium, but this attention is rarely turned solely to the Dadas. The work is nevertheless useful to the project of this paper, as many of the theories and considerations applied by scholars to Surrealism are also easily adapted to Dada.

The second group of scholarship on chance addresses Dada directly, but often restricts its scope to a single artist in an ever-continuing effort to explain and categorize the huge quantities of work the artists created over their many productive years. Marcel Duchamp's (1887–1968) work stands out in the field of chance, and secondary scholarship analyzing these works are thus especially common: art historian Herbert Molderings' *Duchamp and the Aesthetics of Chance: Art as Experiment* is a recent example, providing an especially thorough exploration of the artist's corpus. Jean Arp and his wife Sophie Taeuber receive similar attention in works like the 1958 MoMA publication *Arp*. Arp's work often features alone, even in comprehensive collections. Photographer and author Dafydd Jones's book *Dada 1916 in Theory: Practices of Critical Resistance* characterizes Arp's attitude as similar to the passive resistance of Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*.⁴ Jones also addresses Arp's chance works specifically, identifying tensions between the artist's invocation of chance and the

³Denis Lejeune, *The Radical Use of Chance in 20th Century Art* (Rodopi, 2012), 94–96.

⁴Dafydd Jones, *Dada 1916 in Theory: Practices of Critical Resistance* (Liverpool University Press, 2014), 120–152.

author's perception of order in his compositions, a tension this paper will address. Jones' book, however, fails to compare Arp's chance works to larger patterns in the movement.

Harriett Ann Watts' dissertation on chance in Dada seems to overcome this problem. Watts analyzes multiple Dadas' views of chance through the lens of psychoanalysis and addresses the tension between art and life, or a potential of a unification between the two. Watts argues the integral role of the author in mediation of these poles, a statement with which this paper agrees. However, her distinction between art and life is too categorical, conflating many disparate things under the category of "work," and, much more problematically, vast amounts of minutiae under the umbrella of "life," a category she sees as largely irrational because, by her distinction, it is by definition not immediately relevant to artistic production. The strictness of her categories misrepresents the Dadas' endeavors, in particular failing to account for the difference between the type of chance used by Arp and that used by the other Dadas. In these respects, Watts is representative: the scholarship that addresses the properties and uses of chance in Dada fails to note all of its real-world effects, and tends to ignore the relationship between chance and collaboration. The question of how chance and collaboration together facilitated the later claims of authorship over work and ownership over technique is understudied, and will be taken up today. In contradistinction to previous scholarship, this paper argues that the anti-authorial powers of chance and collaboration in the movement account for the political desires of some of the Dadas and the apolitical transcendent desires of Jean Arp.

Introductions (plural)

Tristan Tzara

Despite all resistance and his own poverty, Tristan Tzara was incredibly prolific. His work stands out for both quality and quantity: he edited major publications like *Dada* (1917–21), and wrote manifestos, poems, and books. He penned many of the early texts considered foundational: the reading of his *Manifesto of Mr. Antipyrine* (1916) at the first Dada performance is commonly cited as an inaugural event of the movement. Huelsenbeck, in his 1969 retrospective *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer* said of his once-friend: "He was the litterateur, the writer who wanted to record everything on paper instantly."⁵ Because Tzara was, at least for a time, "the creative centre of gravity for the group," it is not surprising that claims about his invention of various techniques abound.⁶ Some say he introduced the concept of simultaneity, the relation of two or more conflicting artistic elements in one work, drawing from his time with the Futurists.⁷ There are claims that the word "Dada" comes from his Romanian affirmative ("da, da"), though Arp (albeit under duress and very satirically) claimed the term was without a backstory, and was an idea straight from Tzara's overflowing creative capacity.⁸

Tzara had a talent for provocation. His ability to incite made him central to the early Dada mission, in which provocation was a key technique. It also made him difficult to get along with. An incessant need to push boundaries coupled with his lack of German heritage made him one of the more controversial figures in the movement. Though his inflammatory attitude aided early Dada,

⁵Huelsenbeck and Kleinschmidt, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, 18.

⁶Kenneth Coutts-Smith, *Dada* (Studio Vista, 1970), 11.

⁷Coutts-Smith, *Dada*, 11. The meaning of simultaneity varied across movements: Futurists depicted multiple visual planes at the same time, Dadas used multiple overlapping voices in one poem, Surrealists combined unrelated subjects in each painting.

⁸Coutts-Smith, *Dada*, 18. Mentioned in *Dada Drummer* introduction, xxiii, where Kleinschmidt claims that Arp's statement was knowingly untrue and a product of Tzara's interference, and that Huelsenbeck was the one to encounter the word.

it was his eventual feud with Huelsenbeck that ended the movement, staining the whole group as the Dadas were forced to take sides in the debate. After Dada staged its own funeral in 1922, Tzara found a place with the Surrealists of Paris, and continued more quietly than he had begun.

Richard Huelsenbeck

Richard Huelsenbeck was born in Germany. His formal education was in medicine, a field that would serve him later when he took up the profession of psychoanalysis, but his early scholarly interests lay in art history and literature. As a young man, he had the fortune to be a student of the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin,⁹ whose development of analytic principles for the study of art was perhaps the birth of Huelsenbeck's "chronicling"¹⁰ tendencies. Huelsenbeck met Hugo Ball in 1912, travelled with him to Berlin in 1914, and followed him again to Zürich in 1916. He spent a year at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich, focusing on the literary arts before moving again to Berlin, where he informed Raoul Hausmann of the principles of Dada. Like Tzara, Huelsenbeck wrote a Dada Manifesto in 1918, though Huelsenbeck's was "a mixture of Communism and anarchy," perhaps because of this year spent in war-stricken Berlin. And, like Tzara, Huelsenbeck was prolific. The "chronicler" title is largely a reference to his two most famous works: *En Avant Dada* and the *Dada Almanach* (both 1920–21), works of Dada historiography.¹¹

Huelsenbeck left Dada and the art world entirely in 1922 to practice medicine. In 1936 he fled to the United States, escaping repeated Nazi investigations. He changed his name and opened a psychoanalysis practice, fending off investigations of Bolshevism from the US government. Only in 1949 did he return publicly to the Dada movement. He gave lectures and published memoirs, but his work had changed: the years he spent in exile put a shade over his past life. Huelsenbeck's later writings are avowedly anti-Communist, clearly a reflex after years of hiding. He was always full of contradiction: he swung between silence and intense production. At first he was politically committed to a leftist agenda, later against Communism entirely. Movement seemed to be the only constant, but it is difficult to ascertain how much of his actions were motivated by circumstances. Likely it was a lucky combination of the two: a flexible personality adapting necessarily to turbulent surroundings.

Raoul Hausmann

Raoul Hausmann was born in Austria, but raised in Berlin.¹² The son of a painter, he was well-trained in the classical arts. Together with Huelsenbeck and Johannes Baader, Hausmann founded the Berlin chapter of Dada, a group whose scholarly analysis often lacks the reverence and magic attributed to the Zürich Dadas. Huelsenbeck himself seemed to consider Hausmann a second-fiddle: "an unusually intelligent man with versatile interests... always on the point of robbing some really great man of his eternal fame, [he] never managed to come out with any great accomplishment."¹³ Despite his seeming ambivalence about Hausmann, the two were good friends while Huelsenbeck was in Germany. Whether or not he really thought Hausmann was a second-rate genius-robber, he said of their time together in Berlin that "Hausmann restored a good deal of the sense of collectivity and camaraderie that I had missed so much since leaving Zürich."¹⁴

⁹Huelsenbeck and Kleinschmidt, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, xx.

¹⁰Huelsenbeck is often called "the chronicler of the Dada movement" in Kleinschmidt's introduction to *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*. Huelsenbeck published several works of Dada self-historiography in addition to this book. Huelsenbeck and Kleinschmidt, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, xvii.

¹¹Lucy Lippard, ed., *Dadas on Art* (Prentice-Hall, 1971), 45.

¹²Lippard, *Dadas on Art*, 57.

¹³Huelsenbeck and Kleinschmidt, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, 59.

¹⁴Huelsenbeck and Kleinschmidt, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, 60.

Hausmann was a poet and a print artist. He edited several magazines and periodicals for the movement, but his real work was in sound or “phonetic poetry,” a medium he believed he invented.¹⁵ His poems played with typesetting and nonsense-language to abstract language and sound as they were read aloud, sometimes through the use of chance. After the dissolution of Dada, Hausmann bounced around Europe, continuing his work in poetry and photography. He became interested in electronic music, a new medium through which he explored the abstraction of language and sound.

Jean Arp

Jean Arp, like Tzara, was always prefaced by his nationality. Arp’s French birth made him an outsider, but he was not excluded because of his alterity. It became part of a fairylike persona that surrounded Arp and his wife, Sophie Tauber-Arp—a persona that made him, according to Lippard, “perhaps the best-loved member of the group.”¹⁶ After dodging the French draft under falsified reasons of mental deficiency, he went to Zürich, where he fell in with the Cabaret.¹⁷ The majority of his work was collage according to the laws of chance. These early paper works and poems inspired his later *papiers déchirés* (torn paper) of the 1930s.

Scholarly writing about Arp, whether from the Dadas or their later biographers, tends to place him off to the side of the action. His attraction to abstract forms and concepts adds a detachment to his personality, creating a picture of Arp as a friendly, well-meaning daydreamer. That said, Arp was not entirely free from controversy: he published a “Declaration” in 1921 that stated his official position in the intense debate on the origin of the word “dada”:

I hereby declare that on February 8, 1916, Tristan Tzara discovered the word Dada. I was present with my twelve children... I am convinced that this word has no importance and that only imbeciles and Spanish professors can be interested in dates... The morality of idiots and their belief in geniuses makes me shit.¹⁸

It is significant that he made a statement on the debate, but its obvious satire (Arp did not have twelve children) mocks the whole affair. Even when pulled into the fray, Arp dismissed the petty concerns of his contemporaries and their belief in (their own) genius.

Dada and/or History

Dada had a tenuous and eclectic relationship with history. Its artists, disparate in political belief and technique, are thus difficult to categorize. When style and opinion did not converge—and they often didn’t—the new work would contradict the old, often never addressing any change in position. In the same vein, many Dadas considered “art history” a farcical practice: “only imbeciles and Spanish professors can be interested in dates.”¹⁹ Dada was simply the new art. In the 1918 Dada Manifesto he read publicly in Berlin, Tzara declared that “every pictorial or plastic work is

¹⁵Huelsenbeck and Kleinschmidt, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, 60. Huelsenbeck speaks of Hausmann’s desire to be credited with the invention, Lucy Lippard agrees: “Discovered his own version of photomontage... at the same time he was inventing his phonetic poems, paralleling those being done in Zürich” Lucy Lippard, ed., *Dadas on Art* (Prentice-Hall, 1971), 57.

¹⁶Lucy Lippard, ed., *Dadas on Art* (Prentice-Hall, 1971), 21.

¹⁷Lippard, *Dadas on Art*, 21.

¹⁸Lippard, *Dadas on Art*, 22. Lippard also mentions original publication info for the work. The first part of this quote is often used out of context, and taken seriously. The second half implies that Arp was unimpressed by the presence of any debate on the subject, but it is worth mentioning that he was writing this with Tzara, who wanted the subject put to bed (with his word as final).

¹⁹Lippard, *Dadas on Art*, 22.

unnecessary.” Though he rejected past art, and thus art history, he remained firmly tethered to the political: “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 the consulates.”²⁰

Collage, perhaps Dada’s most preferred artform, can be seen as an anti-historical practice in itself.²¹ In the linear structure of Western history, the event—a happening or occurrence—is a sort of masterwork. As time passes, a string of events is created and situated chronologically, one following another in an unalterable chain like works in the art historical canon. When one creates a historical canon, the event is unassailable. Events are necessary to trace a line of cause and effect through time. Though each historiography may take different events, or position them in different cause/effect chains, each must contain some selection of events. The singularity of the “event” as a concept is not in question. Collage, through its cutting and reusing, transforms the masterwork. It splits its components, and reforms them into something far from the original idea, rejecting and altering the linear passage of time by combining objects from different places and periods. Conversely, though, it is this use of the event that makes collage inherently historical as well. A collage cannot exist without the repurposing of other artworks. Its pieces draw from and alter the previously unbroken chain of events through the cutting and pasting of periodicals, newspapers, and other artworks. Nothing about a collage can be untouched by the hands of the past, and every piece brings the old into the new, reminding us of the selection of events that went into its making. The doubled and contradictory meanings of collage are what makes it available for use in escapism, by the Arps, and political messaging, by others like Hausmann and Huelsenbeck. Fueled by the same practice, construction and destruction both flourished in Dada.

As the movement splintered, interest in the individual replaced the prior collaborative spirit of the community. As in everything, Dada was divided. The split followed well-trodden lines: the Arps went in one direction and Tzara, Huelsenbeck, and Hausmann went in another. The first group saw the end of the collaborative period as an opportunity to withdraw from Dada collaboration entirely, focusing on continuing their own work. As they had used collage anti-historically, they cut and pasted the ideas and techniques they had learned in collaboration, continuing the development of a new practice into the future. The latter group went the other way. They became intensely focused on their own collective past, relitigating the origins of old techniques and collaborations repeatedly. Each one claimed ownership over a concept, a work, or even a single word.

“L’amiral Cherche Un Maison à Louer” will serve as an example of the tensions inherent to Dada (Fig. 1). Written in 1916 by Tzara, Huelsenbeck, and Marcel Janco, the printed sheet of poetry, originally published in the one-issue magazine *Cabaret Voltaire*, was accompanied by the performance of the poem by its authors.²² The printed sheet provides the verse and the drum notation for the interlude. The names of the authors are in alphabetical order in the accreditation. Rhythm parts are also assigned by name. As in all simultaneous poetry, collaboration is central to “L’amiral Cherche Un Maison à Louer.”²³ For the poem to have the intended effect, all of the orators must be speaking at the same time. Tzara’s choice to identify the speakers—himself, Huelsenbeck, and Janco—indicates that these parts were not only written in collaboration with them, but specifically for them to speak. Tzara’s inclusion of his friends’ names is particularly significant. Firstly, of course, it provides proof of collaboration between Huelsenbeck and Tzara before their falling out. Secondly, Tzara’s willingness to have his name appear last is interesting

²⁰Tristan Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries*, trans. Barbara Wright (Calder, 1977), 1.

²¹Anne Duprat et al., *Figures of Chance* (Routledge, 2024), 275.

²²Leah Dickerman and Brigid Doherty, eds., *Dada: Zürich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (National Gallery of Art and Distributed Art Publishers, 2005).

²³Despite the credit on “L’amiral” itself, which attributes the poem to all three men, The Getty maintains Tzara as the main credit.

given the obsession he would later develop with his own name. Tzara's name—a pseudonym of debated origin—appeared with increasing prominence and quantity as his career continued. Tzara routinely signed his later works by hand, even those that were printed in multiple. Huelsenbeck later referred to Tzara's attitude as a "lack of inhibition in regard to proprietorship."²⁴

Returning to "L'amiral": Tzara has, presumably for the audience's sake, included a "Note pour les bourgeois." In his note, Tzara relays the inspirations for the poem: early Cubist painting, Mallarmé, Marinetti, Apollinaire, and Barzun, among others. Not only is Tzara familiar with the contemporary experiments and theory in the abstraction of various art forms, he needs us to know that he knows. An artistic statement attached directly to a work is odd, especially when it takes up such a large percentage of the text's visual weight. Quoting his inspiration in depth accomplishes a few things. The first is to situate himself and simultaneous poetry in the realm of legitimate artistic experimentation—desirable for a young artist working among a public that finds him a nuisance. The second is to downplay his own involvement. He attributes the initial idea to Henri Martin Barzun, an experimental poet and contemporary of the Dadas. Later in the note, Tzara includes Huelsenbeck and Janco as authors and uses "we" over "I" to refer to the authorship. He even gives credit to the listener's interpretation:

I wanted to create a poem based on other principles, which consist in giving each listener the possibility of making suitable associations. They retain the characteristic elements for their own personality, intertwine them, fragment them, etc., remaining nonetheless in the direction the author intended.²⁵

The interest in his own place in art history is consistent with Tzara's later historiographic streak. The collaborative spirit is not—and it did not last long.

A few years after and 650km away from Tzara's simultaneous poetry, Raoul Hausmann published his 1918 phonetic poem posters "Off" and "Fmsbw" using moveable type (Fig. 2). Another example of Dada's tensions, the posters, like the simultaneous poetry, involved a print and spoken component, a concrete manifestation and an ephemeral performance. Hausmann originally denied his own participation in production of the 1918 phonetic poem posters, instead saying that he asked his printer, Robert Barth, to select the letter-press letters "according to his own mood and chance."²⁶ The amount of direction that Hausmann actually gave to Barth is unclear, though it was clearly enough for the work to be attributed to Hausmann and not Barth himself. The artist maintained that he made choices in the creation of the work, eliminating some letters in favour of others.²⁷

Of course, it is impossible to decide to choose according to chance. The human mind seeks reason and pattern. It cannot create a truly random pattern. Either Barth chose the letters, trying his best to manufacture chance, or Hausmann cherry-picked the letters that he considered compositionally acceptable. Either way, someone had input into the selection process. Comparing the two posters makes it clear that true chance was not a factor.

Both poems have a long string of letters (12 in the first, 15 in the second) that are either all uppercase or all lowercase. Because uppercase and lowercase letters were separated (hence the name, in the "upper" and "lower" cases), it is possible to conclude that all these letters were pulled from the same physical letterpress cases. Already matters are not completely left to chance.

²⁴Huelsenbeck and Kleinschmidt, *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer*, 103.

²⁵Tristan Tzara, "L'amiral Cherche Un Maison à Louer" (The Getty Research Institute, 1916).

²⁶Anne Umland et al., *Dada in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 47.

²⁷The aspect that can be actually attributed to chance is the distribution of ink across the print. As the ink was rolled or brushed across the typeset letters and the letters were pressed to paper, natural variations would appear—small blotches or gradients in quantity of ink or weight distribution. In multiple prints, the ink would have made subtle differences in each, from which Hausmann presumably selected a favourite.

These strings are followed by a special character (hand pointing down and hyphen), two standard punctuation marks, and a second string of text. These similarities make the overall composition consistent in both poems: There is greater visual weight towards the left. The eye is drawn into a right to left diagonal by following the empty space made by the punctuation marks. One might begin to suspect that someone had a heavy hand in the choice of letters.

The second, shorter strings differ more. In “Off”, there are 3 formally similar letters (q, j, y), a capital, and another standard punctuation. Presumably these were pulled from the second case, which had already been opened to find the special characters. The uppercase E had already appeared in the first string, so the typepieces may have been sitting out and easily accessible. Or there may have been a choice to include a second E: purposeful repetition for composition. The two E’s appear across the composition diagonally; there is a similar repetition of letters across the composition in the “BD”, a string that appears in the top right and bottom left of “Off”. In both cases BD is followed by a more circular capital (C and Q). This is one of several style units visible across the two compositions.

The second string in “Fmsbw” is “?mü.” It also seems to be pulled from the lower type case, but it lacks the uppercase letter found in “Off”. However, it does contain another style unit: the lowercase “m” appears twice, both times preceded by a tall, rounded typepiece (an f or ?) that balances out the heavy serifs on the m’s bottom. It is also used in separate diagonal poles of the composition, as were “BD” and “E”. This is not the only style unit in “Fmsbw”: the “pgg” is a string of three letters that use descenders, just as in the aforementioned “qjy” of “Off”. These consistent style units and the two posters’ compositional similarity both imply that true chance was not used, and that Barth or Hausmann chose letters with the composition in mind.

The truth of the matter is unknowable, but luckily also unimportant for purposes of this discussion. What is true in any case is that chance and authorship have some fundamental incompatibility, and that this tension became apparent for the Dadas in the question of ownership of specific techniques and concepts. Some Dadas cared about chance, and some about historiography. Forty years later in a letter to another Dada, Hannah Höch, Hausmann insisted that he was lacking credit for the ‘discovery’ of sound poetry. His justification was the exhibition of these posters.²⁸ Though Hausmann claimed to use chance, it was clearly impossible to use chance alone. His need to manage all steps of the artmaking process made that impossible. And if he had used chance, could it really be argued that he pioneered sound poetry in the way he claims? In fact, he is consistent over time in his desire for control over his work. This impulse, the inability to surrender control, is the basis of the incompatibility.

A third example is the third issue of *Der Dada*, published in 1920, where Hausmann again appears on the cover (Fig. 3). The issue includes submissions from around the globe, both bigger and smaller names. The whole issue is a collage. Without an index, accreditation is difficult to find. Photos are mixed with text, submissions are placed in no particular order. *Der Dada* was a place for Berlin Dadas to take advantage of and lay claim to new techniques, including the co-opting of collage and photomontage. It was founded by Hausmann, and most of the five issues were edited by Hausmann, Huelsenbeck, and prominent Berlin Dada George Grosz (1893–1959).²⁹ This particular issue features Huelsenbeck prominently, but lists John Heartfield (1891–1968) as an editor instead. The “big three” of Berlin Dada (Grosz, Hausmann, Huelsenbeck) are very visible in the issue. One of Hausmann’s contributions is another historiographical manifesto declaring Huelsenbeck, Tzara, and Ball the “original inventors” of Dada. As mentioned, Hausmann’s face is on the cover. His name appears as well, with those of Baader and Grosz. Hausmann’s name and face are the clearest sense of accreditation on the cover. The inside cover lists the editors’ names as “Groszfield, Hearthaus,

²⁸Hausmann to Hannah Höch. Limoges. 1960.

²⁹George Grosz was known in Berlin for his caricature sketches. Like Huelsenbeck, he emigrated to America later in life, though he eventually returned to Europe.

and Georgemann”, a mash-up of Grosz, Heartfield, and Hausmann, the three main editor’s names. The issue only had a run of one hundred-twenty-five; presumably it was mostly circulated in Dada circles who would understand the joke. Just in case they didn’t, though, Hausmann, Huelsenbeck, and Grosz all include almost comically flattering photographs of themselves (or, in Hausmann’s case, their flexed back) next to their written pieces (Figs. 4–6). An obsession with their own names and pictures pervaded the issue.

Der Dada exemplifies the pro-historiographical, pro-authorship use of collage. Unlike the work of the Arps, Hausmann, Huelsenbeck, and Grosz take collage to the extremes of self-reference. The medium becomes aggressively historical: the reader is bombarded with references and in-jokes. So, then, little had changed for the Dadas between 1918 and 1920. Hausmann, in particular, employs the same tactics of co-opting chance-based media without using chance. In a 1930 letter to calligrapher and book designer Jan Tschichold, Hausmann claimed credit for both this issue and photomontage as a medium:

You know perfectly well that Heartfield only produced Issue no. 3 of *Der Dada*, which I founded... In March 1918, Mr. Johannes Baader produced the first so-called collage, which I followed with several of my own in the following months. I created the first photomontage, exhibited at the 1920 Dada Fair... at the beginning of 1919.³⁰

Though Hausmann did not claim to use chance in this work, he used collage, a medium with inherent ambiguity. Its dual nature, equally open to the historical and the ahistorical, is part of what allowed him to claim authorship years later, evidencing his claim for ownership over the technique of photomontage as a whole. The collage and the collaboration worked in tandem in the original publication to obscure any sense of singular authorship. *Der Dada* instead became a whirlwind of photos and text that featured multiple artists on each page. In Dada’s heyday, the group wanted to be known as a whole. The mashup of editors’ names, the inclusion of photos still point to a desire for credit, but credit to the movement, not to individual artists for individual works. This is also visible in Tzara’s simultaneous poem: credit is still noted, but much more freely. The three examples discussed show that the tensions between chance and choice, between collaboration and individual authorship, and between apolitical and political are manifestations of consistent ideological divisions in the movement: divisions that would eventually facilitate its end.

An Artist and Nothing But An Artist

Jean Arp is a somewhat different case. A collage artist and sculptor while working in Zürich Dada, Arp focused on clean forms, simple but original. Some of his most famous works are the *papiers déchirés* or “torn papers,” collages of undecorated paper on a solid background. Before Dada, he had familiarized himself with many of the concurrent movements in Europe: he knew and worked with Kandinsky and Der Blaue Reiter, Picasso and the Cubists. Fluent in these visual languages, as well as that of Futurism, Arp was especially attentive to the formal qualities of his works and their implication.³¹ He was especially interested in the innovation of form, which he used as a tool to seek a larger truth. Arp was one of the Dadas most interested in chance. His chance works are unique from those of other Dadas because of Arp’s belief that chance contained something of the spiritual or metaphysical.

In 1915—pre-Dada—Arp said that his works “seek to approach the ineffable truth concerning

³⁰Hausmann to Jan Tschichold. Berlin. 1930.

³¹Jean Arp, “Conversation in Meudon,” in *Arp on Arp: Poems, Essays, and Memories*, ed. Marcel Jean (Viking Press, 1972), 337.

mankind and the eternal. They turn away from everything egotistical in man.”³² His time as a Dada was spent in just this way. Unlike his colleagues, he did not often spend time at the Cabaret Voltaire. The Cabaret was loud, at times violent, conflict-oriented, and vociferous. Arp was none of these things: he reacted to war not by fighting or making fun, but by turning inward.³³ Though he was much liked, he chose to refrain from the nightly soirees, preferring his own company or that of his future wife, Sophie Tauber. While the other Dadas were onstage, Arp was making automatic drawings: expressions of the subconscious, chance, and accident that preceded and inspired his work in Surrealism.³⁴ Many of his experiments attempted to remove himself from the work entirely. He sought to erase the bias, conceit, and earthly concerns of the artist, touching instead on some expression of the law inherent in the universe. Some of his most famous abstractions are his works “according to the laws of chance.” The size of this corpus of (mostly untitled) works speaks to Arp’s drive to formal experimentation: the sheer number of these works and their visual eclecticism indicates that Arp did not see each of his works as precious or significant. Rather they were tools through which he learned about the eternal.

The most referenced of Arp’s chance collages is one of the works called “Untitled (Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance)” from the early Dada period (Fig. 7). The work is associated with a story, told by Arp’s friend and contemporary Hans Richter. Arp was arranging pieces for a collage, but could not get the composition right. In frustration, he threw the pieces in the air. When they landed, he realized that they had made the composition he was searching for: one with expression and energy. This, so Richter and many scholars say, was the spark that ignited the flame of “chance” in earnest. Chance was the fastest and smoothest route towards the “ineffable truth” that Arp wanted to find. After this work, chance became one of the most used tools in Arp’s repertoire.

As in the examples from the last section, it is possible to see a fundamental tension here. While chance may have provided the broader compositional framework, the specificities of the assembly remain, as in Hausmann’s phonetic poems, clearly human. The pieces are clearly selected and finished—a proportion of 2:1 blue and white squares, regular edges, uniform size ratios—but this is unsurprising, as Arp was allegedly expecting to make a standard collage. The more relevant indications of artist interference are in composition. Anchoring the work are four large blue rectangles in a left-skewed diagonal. Surrounding them are eleven smaller rectangles, some white and some blue. The larger squares in the middle provide a visual foundation for the set of fifteen, maintaining order in spite of the diagonal skew intensified by the errant blue square in the bottom left corner. None of the squares overlap. None of them are diagonal—in fact they have very little tilt at all, due in part to the shared gridlines on which they sit (Fig. 8). The collage is deceptive: somehow, Arp has managed to retain the spontaneity of the original (chance) composition while inserting elements of uniformity.

Similar phenomena are visible in a slightly later composition of the same name (Fig. 9). This time the squares are cut, not torn; Arp often used a paper cutter to further eliminate his own hand.³⁵ Several of the squares seem to have landed partially off the cardboard backing and been trimmed off, another suggestion that chance was at play. However, many of the squares are diagonally adjacent to others—clearly impossible without human intervention. Towards the top of the work is the outline of another square that is no longer attached to the cardboard. Its placement suggests

³²Jean Arp, “Introduction to a Catalogue,” in *Art in Theory: 1900–2000*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 276–277.

³³Astrid Von Asten, “Arp and Dada—A ‘Win-Win Situation’” in *Genesis Dada: 100 Years of Dada Zürich*, ed. Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck and Cabaret Voltaire (Scheidegger & Spiess, 2016), 126.

³⁴See, for example: Jean Arp, *Untitled (Automatic Drawing)*, 1917–18, dated 1916, ink and pencil on paper, Museum of Modern Art, New York City, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/34023>.

³⁵Astrid Von Asten, “Arp and Dada—A ‘Win-Win Situation’” in *Genesis Dada: 100 Years of Dada Zürich*, ed. Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck and Cabaret Voltaire (Scheidegger & Spiess, 2016), 131–132.

that it was stuck down and then moved after the glue had partially dried.³⁶ If it was not removed it may have fallen off, but its placement would overlap or tangent the square above it, a relationship inconsistent with the other squares in the collage.

Some of Arp's works show less artistic interference than others. His 1928 piece, "Dada Brush and Ink Drawing, Torn and Arranged According to the Laws of Chance", is less structured than his previous collages (Fig. 10). The paper has been torn from a previously inked image in black and white. Its smooth lines are consistent with Arp's other works in brush and ink. The torn pieces, when reassembled, do not form a complete image. Arp has aligned several lines of previously disparate shapes to form new indications of forms. The main focal point, in the upper right, is one of these: though on initial glance the shape appears consistent, there is a slight buckle at the collision point. To similar effect, the artist has aligned two pieces that mirror each other in colour but have a similar pattern in line. The pieces still do not overlap, but there is no consistent relationship in their placement: some are tangent, some share sides with multiple pieces. The compositional weight is still placed in the bottom left, as seen in the 1916–17 composition (if Arp was right-handed, however, the natural motion of his hand would have lent itself to a right-left diagonal). These aspects show at least some involvement by the artist, consistent with his earlier works. However there are also other things that seem "accidental." The pieces are no longer in a grid. They vary in size and shape. Some are much larger than others, and none are perfectly square. Arp has also kept some of the paper's smooth edges, creating inconsistency even in singular forms. It is unclear how Arp selected which pieces from his original drawing to use. Because they do not form a complete image, some must have been removed, but it is also possible they were scattered and fell outside of the compositional plane. These aspects point to a looser process, less guided by the artist's hand. This could indicate a change in process over time. It also raises the possibility that Arp was always making more experimental works, but that these have been lost or retroactively altered.³⁷

It would be much easier to claim that Arp had a consistent process, that all his works either used chance or did not. Always a true Dada, Arp embraced complexity and contradiction. He seems to be, at times, taking a page out of Hausmann's book: claiming chance where it was not in play. But it is known that he edited his works. Astrid Von Asten, in her essay on Arp in *Genesis Dada*, maintained that he "selected a form of chance in which he retained a certain amount of control, creating a balance between the conscious and subconscious."³⁸ Arp himself was honest about the level of involvement he had in his work: "I further developed the collage by arranging pieces automatically, without will. I called this process 'according to the laws of chance'.³⁹ Because of Arp's admittance of some control, it may be more fruitful to take "according to" to mean "harmonizing with" rather than "adhering to". Arp was then aligning his processes with the laws of chance, but not adopting new techniques altogether. Gideon-Welcker, in the 1958 compilation *Arp*, proposes a similar reading:

Directed from within by a mysterious principle of order, his art retains its spontaneity without ever ignoring discipline or falling into chaos. His is an art which obeys the "laws of chance," but never chance itself. Within its confines, age-old memories of mankind are released from their deep dwelling-places and well up to suffuse the primitive forms.⁴⁰

Through this lens, Arp's process comes more clearly to light. He began his compositions by

³⁶Or even fully dried, if the discolouration is not a glue stain but sun-bleaching of the backing around the construction paper.

³⁷For the story of Arp's destroyed and altered collages, see James Thrall Soby, ed., *Arp* (The Museum of Modern Art, 1958), especially 15.

³⁸Von Asten, "Arp and Dada—A 'Win-Win Situation'", 132.

³⁹James Thrall Soby, ed., *Arp* (The Museum of Modern Art, 1958), 77.

⁴⁰Thrall Soby, *Arp*, 27. Emphasis added.

chance—he made no preliminary sketches or compositions.⁴¹ Without thinking, allowing the subconscious to take over, he quickly resolved any issues from this process (removing overlap, establishing tangents between pieces). Chance is thus present in the majority of the work, while the rest falls to the hand—but ideally not the mind—of the artist.

Arp's willingness to describe his process, repeatedly explaining why he found chance important, makes Hausmann's silence and contradiction about his phonetic poetry seem damning, indicative that he is hiding or misrepresenting some part of his process. He vacillated between claiming credit for the word choice, giving credit to his printer Barth, and invoking chance. This desire for credit is additionally incriminating: whether Hausmann was truly interested in the transcendent properties of chance, or just the appearance he gained from using the medium, is unclear. While Hausmann claimed his work was proof of his invention of sound poetry, Arp did not use his chance compositions in any intense battle of ownership over any technique or principle. His detachment from the Cabaret must have been a product of this interest in spirituality. Huelsenbeck noted about this early period: "All of us felt the impact of our new publicity, and we often discussed the prospects of fame. Arp alone did not seem to be very interested in all this."⁴²

Arguably then, Arp came closer than most Dadas to reflecting on and coping with the impossibility of the elimination of the artist. For a work of art to exist, some person must create it. That person, no matter who they are, Arp or Hausmann or Robert Barth, has no choice but to install their own "biases": a system of signs that makes sense to them. Rather than push against or ignore this, Arp accepted it. His attempts at automating his own thinking acknowledge that, while the artist must be active, he can attempt to limit his effect in service of a goal. Arp said of his work: "These torn pictures, these *papiers déchirés* brought me closer to a faith in things other than earthly."⁴³ His goal was not pure chance—and, in any case, this paper has already recognized the impossibility of such a goal. Arp was not using chance for the sake of doing something new, but rather because it served his goal of getting closer to the ineffable—innovation was a side effect.⁴⁴ Though looking back, it is easy to discount his practice as merely an early figuring of later chance artists like Pollock, Cage, or Richter, Arp's work was always singular. His techniques were unheard of and inspiring to his contemporaries, and remain that way to modern critics. Scholars are eager to provide an alternative interpretation of Arp's claim of chance, one that defends his "editing": "that the work may be as much a visual representation of chance as a product of it."⁴⁵ He used chance as a starting point both to learn and to communicate new ways of artmaking to his audience. Like the later movements it inspired, one of the goals of Dada was to shock, to free people from the shackles of convention. If Arp achieved the same spiritual fulfillment of any academic or Renaissance painter, there was nothing stopping the audience from appreciating his work with the same reverence they would afford a Rembrandt or Caravaggio.

It is clear that Arp was using chance, but not bowing to it entirely. While other Dadas claimed a use of chance, they were often merely interested in the sense of novelty and resulting proprietorship it afforded their work. Arp, on the other hand, did not use chance for fame. His early works took inspiration from chance in service of a higher meaning, some cosmic order. As he became more comfortable with the medium (and the audience became more comfortable with him) his later *papiers déchirés* show a looser hand, a product of his increased trust in the ineffable. This tool served his audience as much as it did him, as his work facilitated later innovations in chance in the

⁴¹Von Asten, "Arp and Dada—A 'Win-Win Situation'", 127.

⁴²Thrall Soby, *Arp*, 17.

⁴³Thrall Soby, *Arp*, 15–16.

⁴⁴On Arp's religious beliefs: He was a communicant and considered taking religious orders after the death of Sophie Taeuber. Alexander Liberman, "Jean Arp, Sculptor and Founder of Dada, Is Dead," *New York Times*, 8 June 1966, <https://www.nytimes.com/1966/06/08/archives/jean-arp-sculptor-and-a-founder-of-dada-is-dead.html>.

⁴⁵Rebecca Roberts et al., *MoMA Highlights: 375 Works from The Museum of Modern Art* (The Museum of Modern Art, 2019).

remainder of the 20th century.

It becomes relevant to consider the properties of chance implied by Arp's use of the medium. Several questions come to mind when one investigates the reverence that is often lent to Arp's work. For example: what is it, outside of the novelty, that makes chance worthwhile? The next task is to establish the properties innate to the medium and, through them, attempt to answer remaining questions about Arp's approach, as well as scholars' and artists' shared appreciation for it. Chance is recognizable and presumably, a "visual representation" of chance, as described above, would adequately expose how it was created—whether this be randomness, some innate sense of cosmic order, or both—to any viewer, not just one educated in the processes of the Dadas. The subconscious must be communicable through the composition. Secondly, a chance work is transcendent; mark here the difference between chance used and chance claimed, the difference between Arp and the other Dadas.

Dada for many was a primarily destructive force against art, history, and systems of power. For many, this worked well: the novelty of chance was part of its destructive power, a new weapon against which there was no defense yet-developed. Chance was the exact opposite of the 'great man' theory of the salons and academies. There was no Old Master behind a chance work, and in fact no artist at all. Over time, as its novelty ran dry, it gained constructive power. After destroying the old ways, chance helped create the new through imagination, rather than novelty. Arp had always focused on this constructive aspect, and his use of chance did not wane throughout his career. Even in his choice of material, Arp rejected the temporal aspects associated with chance. The simultaneous (anti)-historical qualities of collage, the formal medium most associated with chance in Dada, have already been mentioned. In his collages Arp used blank paper. He did not reuse photos or newspaper articles. In his *papiers déchirés*, Arp shopped for new meaning, rather than co-opting the symbols of the old meaning.⁴⁶ But one man's chance is not another man's chance. In wanting to destroy the past, the other Dadas were always concerned with it, drawn up into it. Their collages were intensely historical, words and images densely packed and layered repeatedly, meanings and sources talking over each other in an incessant din. The past ruled their lives; some, like Huelsenbeck, dwelled in Dada even into old age. Retroactive claims of chance, numerous memoirs and historiographical publications, manifestoes on manifestoes were published, edited, copied, reprinted, cut apart and put back together.

Another aspect of chance comes to mind in the comparison between Arp and the other Dadas: acausality. In her dissertation on chance in Dada, art historian Harriett Ann Watts identifies the individual conception of chance that allowed Arp to target a particular hidden knowledge. Watts uses Arthur Koestler's work of theory, *The Roots of Coincidence*, which in turn works with Carl Jung's concept of synchronicity, to analyze the Dadas' use of chance. Koestler's focus is extra-sensory perception and its consideration in the sciences. He identifies many theories of ESP with the general belief in a shared consciousness common to many religious practices, stating that the common principle is the implication of unity in all things or cosmological oneness. This common principle, which Koestler describes as the "a-causal principle active in the universe which tends toward unity,"⁴⁷ is the ineffable that Arp seeks through chance. The use of chance, then, attempts acausality in an effort to achieve oneness. In the ideal form of chance there is a sort of melding, a simultaneity and constantness that can only exist once the artist, the catalyst who puts pen to paper, steps away from the work. Once the causal factor is removed, there is, in effect, no creation, or else one could say that creation was simply the flow of reality, taking place endlessly all the time. Art is just what happens. The artist, ideally, did nothing, and art and life were one all the

⁴⁶Dafydd Jones in his book on Dada Culture refers to this as Arp's "subversive complicity to function in such a way as to sever reference." Dafydd Jones, *Dada 1916 in Theory: Practices of Critical Resistance*, 127.

⁴⁷Harriett Ann Watts, "Chance: A Perspective on Dada" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1975), 157. ProQuest (7524979).

time. This is not the view of every Dada, but it is arguably Arp's view, and it is why, to return to the analysis of Harriet Ann Watts, the relationship between life and art was not psychological for Arp but metaphysical, pointing to a seamless universe that Watts does not incorporate into her account. Arp acknowledges the possibility of nothingness in his comparison of chance to the first living organism, an unlikely creature who, except in a very specific set of circumstances, might not have come into being at all: "The law of chance, which embraces all laws and is unfathomable like the first cause from which all life arises, can only be experienced through complete devotion to the unconscious."⁴⁸ Both Koestler and Arp reach for words of connection and harmony in their descriptions: chance facilitates unity, it embraces all things within it.

An endless, incomprehensible, collaborative force, one that removes the singular hand of the artist in favour of constant artmaking, could describe chance—or the Cabaret Voltaire. Like the use of chance, the atmosphere of the Cabaret removed the single author. Collaborative works like "L'amiral Cherche Un Maison à Louer" or *Der Dada* were fundamentally anti-author, because they expressed the Cabaret's goal of constant and embodied arts practice. Chance is a similar but in some sense opposite exercise: removing the author, but with the intent to express truth about life through art. This removal, however, paradoxically allowed the retroactive claiming of authorship; it is much easier to steal something that has been left unattended. Once authorship over a work had been claimed, that work could be used as evidence of ownership or origination of technique. In both cases, ahistoricity may have been a coping mechanism, a manifestation of anti-war or anti-government sentiment. Watt quotes sociologist Lewis S. Feuer in her analysis, identifying chance with the Dadas' "emotional compulsion to lay bare a world of chance and indeterminacy that would be more real than the everyday order."⁴⁹ This aligns with Arp's belief in cosmic order, a theory which implicitly dismisses human order as frivolous or simply incorrect, unrelated to the real workings of the universe.

Conclusion

Though Arp and the other Dadas sought the same things—ahistoricity, acausality, expression, and knowledge—they had a difference in technique. Arp's works, especially his later ones, united life and art through chance, seeking enlightenment through connection to the ineffable. The other Dadas, at least initially, used collaboration: in dismissing the single author, the single point of view yielded to an average of the multiple. This theory is most directly demonstrated in simultaneous poetry. In the din of many voices forms a single, almost meditative drone note, including all voices but sounding like none. This unification has an equal but opposite force to that of chance. Rather than escaping from the terrestrial, removing oneself from the earthly horrors of the 20th century, it revels in the simplest manifestations of collective humanity. Both sides dabbled in the others' medium: Arp was a Dada, of course, but never really took to the Cabaret. Hausmann, Huelsenbeck, and Tzara were active in the performances but could never truly abandon their contribution as authors and artists.

Arp acknowledged the presence of mediation in his use of chance from the start in the same way the other Dadas acknowledged their cooperation. The chance he used was distinct from his colleagues in form and content, but this difference is often overlooked. In his book on conceptions of chance, *Le Hasard en littérature*, Erich Köhler identifies "L'absurde" as the third of three periods, roughly correspondent to the 20th century. Lejeune uses this work in his book on chance, identifying L'absurde with Surrealism, specifically in the works of André Breton. He later argues that Dada

⁴⁸Jean Arp, *On My Way: Poetry and Essays, 1912–1947* (Wittenborn Schultz, 1948), quoted in James Thrall Soby, ed., *Arp* (The Museum of Modern Art, 1958), 33.

⁴⁹Watts, "Chance," 162.

prefigured (at a “primary level”) the Surrealist use of chance.⁵⁰ Lejeune identifies the problem that chance solves, paraphrasing Köhler, as “the impossibility of justifying the coming into being of what is, and its philosophical absence of necessity.”⁵¹ Chance introduces the possibility of non-meaning. There is no reason that what happened must have happened, yet somehow it did. If there is order to the universe, then the fact of being is enough. Its justification is impossible for us, but accordant to some larger force. If the universe is made up of random collisions of particles, then the absence of necessity can look quite grim. Watts also identifies this tension between optimism and pessimism: “Chance must either offer a new approach to mystical apprehension of divine correspondences and unity in the universe, or else serve as a radical expression of a universe devoid of some sort of divine presence.”⁵² Arp was in the former camp. Chance allows him to reach a prevailing cosmic order. For Arp, what is is justified by its being. Its being has worth. Hausmann, Huelsenbeck, and Tzara focus on the latter point. This tendency is often identified as a reaction to the German circumstances of war and social unrest. It is, at least partially, a manifestation of the “fight or flight” reaction: a war with no meaning can be met with radical meaning, or radical nihilism. However, there is also the second implication of a chance being, the idea that something might have been different. This is what Arp’s colleagues focused on, which allowed them to instate themselves as author. The idea that circumstances may have been different is enough to erase how they are.

Figures

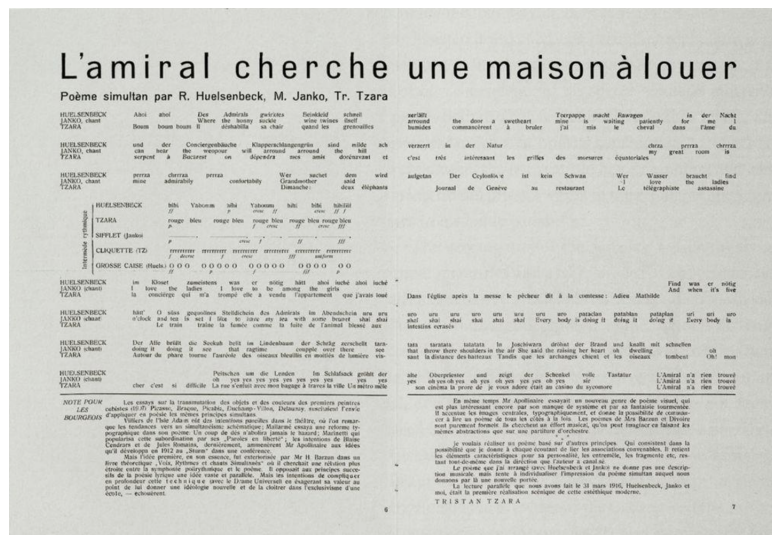


Figure 1: Tristan Tzara. “*L’amiral Cherche Un Maison à Louer*,” simultaneous poem recited by Richard Huelsenbeck, Marcel Janco, and Tristan Tzara, in *Cabaret Voltaire*. 1916. Research Library, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

⁵⁰Lejeune, *The Radical Use of Chance in 20th Century Art*, 94–96.

⁵¹Erich Köhler, *Le Hasard en littérature* (Klinkcksieck, 1986), quoted in Denis Lejeune, *The Radical Use of Chance in 20th Century Art* (Rodopi, 2012), 78.

⁵²Watts, “Chance,” 154.



Figure 2: Raoul Hausmann. "Off" and "Fmsbw." Phonetic poem posters, 1918.



Figure 3: George Grosz, Raoul Hausmann, John Heartfield. *Der Dada*, no. 3, 1920.



Figure 4: Grosz' portrait, top of page 4 of *Der Dada* Issue 3, <https://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/derdada/3/index.htm>



Figure 5: Huelsenbeck's portrait, bottom of page 8 of *Der Dada* Issue 3, <https://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/derdada/3/index.htm>



Figure 6: Hausmann's portrait, top of page 9 of *Der Dada* Issue 3, <https://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/dada/derdada/3/index.htm>

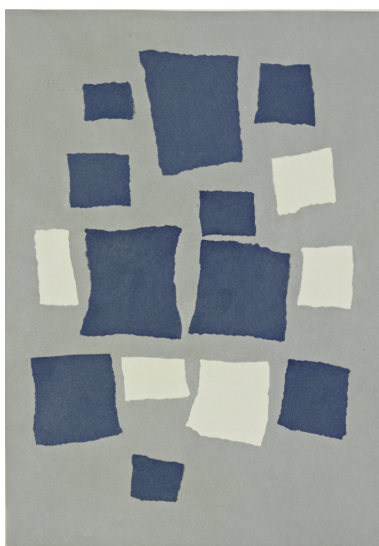


Figure 7: Jean Arp. *Untitled (Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance)*. 1916–17, from MoMA, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/37013>

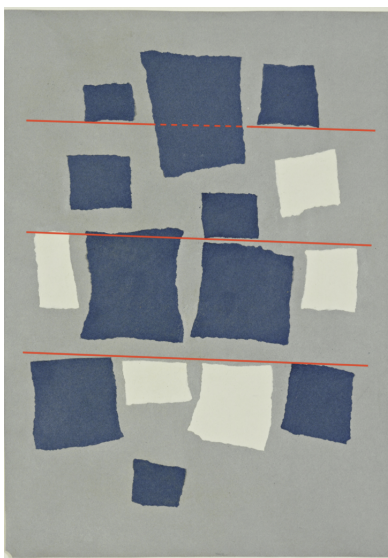


Figure 8: Lines added. Jean Arp. *Untitled (Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance)*. 1916–17, from MoMA, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/37013>



Figure 9: Jean Arp. *Untitled (Squares Arranged According to the Laws of Chance)*. 1917, from MoMA, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/37166>

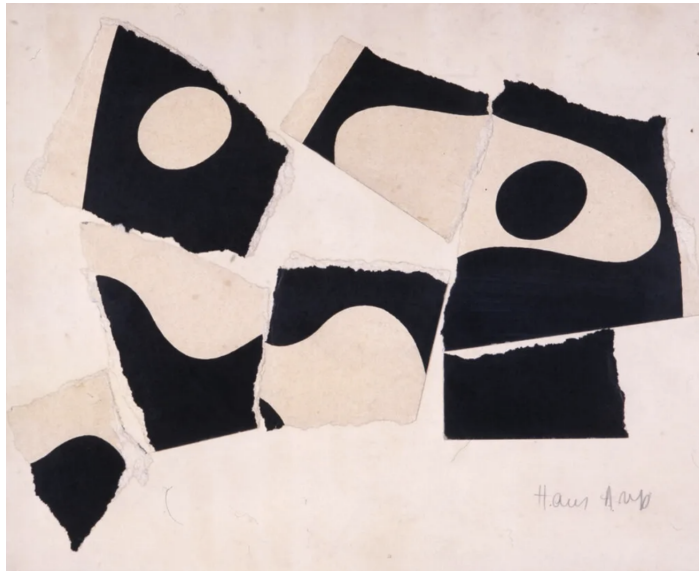


Figure 10: Jean Arp, *"Dada Brush and Ink Drawing, Torn and Arranged According to the Laws of Chance"*, 1928, ink and paper on cardboard, <https://www.hydecollection.org/exhibition/nature-without-measure/>.

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