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BETWEEN “CRITIQUE” AND PROPAGANDA: THE CRITICAL SELF-
UNDERSTANDING OF ART IN THE HISTORICAL AVANT-GARDE.
THE CASE OF *DADA*

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to analyze the tenets that relate to Dada's self-understanding of art. The phenomenon Dada is notoriously difficult to describe; some critics hesitate even to use the term “movement.” Focusing on Dadaists' reflections about the phenomenon itself, we will try to delineate a general image of the Dada in the context of the European avant-gardes of the 20-th century. We will also try to analyze the historical and political context inside which the dada phenomenon occurred. Our main focus will be on two main tenets of Dadaism: the “self-critical” feature of Dada's self-image as it emerges during the main phases of its history, especially during its early phase, and the political commitment of Dada during its last phases of development.

Key Words: Dada, art, Romania, Hasidism, modernity, mostmodernity, politics, critique, ideology, propaganda

The Meaning(s) of *Dada*

The montage, the collage, the photomontage, the *ready-made*, or the *happening* have all developed nowadays into typical artistic techniques, occasionally clichéd to the point of tasteless kitsch. Surely, since the beginnings of XX-th century mass-culture, these techniques have been, in various forms and concentrations, entering the mainstream production lines of consumerist cultural objects. Despite all these, to the usual contemporary reader of art literature, it is relatively unknown that these modes of expression and these techniques were, basically, inventions of groups of artists at the beginning of the XX-century, "revolutionary" artists that rebelled against societal conventions, political structures, and social norms, against *bourgeois* institutions, narrow habits and mindless ideologies, and finally, against the situation of the "art" itself, which they considered artificial, immoral, false, and depraved.

These artists were later labeled "avant-garde" artists. In its earliest use, "avant-garde" denominated the artistic groups around 1825, commonly associated with Saint-Simonism and Fourierism. The pre-socialist Olinde Rodrigues called upon artists "to serve as an avant-garde" for social change and for a "glorious future." He considered that art had the power to affect its audience and to produce sensations that would ennoble thought as well as provide the energy for social change towards the common good. Richard Murphy, in his *Theorizing the Avant-Garde* (2004), produces evidence of a number of texts from the English Romantic writers, such as Wordsworth or Shelley. They echoed the humanitarian ideas of their age and held that the function of the work of art is to generate enlightening and civilizing emotions, which would "bind people together, strengthening and purifying the affections and so enlarging the individual's capacity to resist early modernity's negative effects – most notably those of alienation." In the German-speaking world, the most influential Romantic writer who encouraged this form of utopian aestheticism was Friedrich Schiller.¹ In France, the utopian ideas about art were discussed earlier by Condorcet and Rousseau and put into practice by the French Revolutionaries, especially Gracchus Babeuf and Pierre Sylvain Maréchal (see their famous *Manifesto of the Equals*, 1796). Different from the German or the English writers, the French intellectuals of the Revolution were more interested in the propagation of real political goals or social policies. Purifying passions through art and seeking virtuous instruction in the artistic *oeuvres* were not their main concern. Commenting on different meanings of the term „avant-garde," Richard Murphy differentiates between the "idealist" avant-garde of the XIX-th century, characterized by the "goal of reducing distance from art and life" and by the "elevation of the worldly to the ideal sphere of art," and the "historical

avant-garde" of the early XX-th century, delineated by its cynical attack on the once progressive function of "social-based," utopian art.²

Of these so-called "avant-garde" artists, the Dadaists were perhaps the most popular group in and outside the world of art. Dada's popularity inside the artists' "professional" guild, so to speak, came from the hostility of its unequivocal message directed at the mechanisms, the institutions and the ideology of the world of art, a message which was persuasively summed up in a single catchword: *dada*. This popularity also transformed the Dada, which originally emerged in Zürich, into an international art phenomenon: artists in Paris, Berlin, Cologne, New York, or the Netherlands soon became supporters of the Dada. In New York, Dada produced one of its iconic symbols: Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, which was photographed by Alfred Stieglitz in 1917. The Dada also related very strongly to the larger sphere of modern early XX-th century mass culture, not simply because many of their "productions" were already produced by the mass culture (in visual arts, the main "materials" out of which the Dada artworks were created were, generally, used consumer goods), but also because some of their ideas caught the attention of the mass media. For example, the motif of the "mustachioed" artwork, embodied by Marcel Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.*, was popularized by a Warner Bros cartoon of 1946, *Daffy Doodles*, directed by Robert McKimson, featuring Daffy Duck as the mustache "artist" or the "mustache fiend," bent on drawing a mustache on every lip.

Perhaps the epitome of Dada is the cheap postcard representing the *Mona Lisa*, onto which the same Marcel Duchamp drew in pencil a mustache and a beard, naming his new "work" *L.H.O.O.Q.* (the title is a pun, the letters pronounced in French giving the sentence *Elle a chaud au cul*). Duchamp offered his new "version" of *Mona Lisa* as a jest, deriding not only the *Mona Lisa* itself, Leonardo's masterpiece, but also unveiling *Mona Lisa* as a bourgeois symbol, as a "mustachioed" social icon, an icon essentially produced emblematically by the *establishment* itself. This provocation created a scandal, of course, but also raised a serious question about the nature of what a "modern" or "classical" artwork represents.

To the current art *connoisseur*, the name *Dada* cannot be submitted to a general definition.³ Tristan Tzara himself confirmed much later, in an interview in 1959, that Dada was not a "school," not a "direction," but an "adventure," "against all conventions, theories and dogmas." Comparing Dada to Surrealism, he also stated that the Dadaists were too individualistic to attach themselves to politics in general or to any political doctrine, such as Marxism. He contended that, in his Dada period, he had no notion of "Marxism" or of "politics" in general. Only the Surrealists were really into politics. In his view, Dada was generally "anarchistic enough" for not being political at all. After Tzara's death in 1963, these views became typical of the history of the Dada "movement" in Zürich.

The indefinable character of *Dada* is perhaps caused by the strong performative nature of the term itself, "dada." "Dada" could not be referred to anything in particular. Eventually, this did not deterred a historical dispute between the German and the French Dadaists. In his 2009 *Posthuman Dada Guide*, the Romanian-born American writer Andrei Codrescu summarizes the historical dispute around the paternity of the name *Dada* between Tzara and Huelsenbeck and suggests that, probably, Tzara must have been the first to suggest the name *Dada*. This is also confirmed by the importance of *Da* in Russian and Romanian, meaning "Yes." Therefore, the name *DaDa* would probably simply mean a radical No, which is, ironically, the result of a double affirmation "YesYes." The author also suggests that the name has not been chosen by pure accident and it had been selected especially because of its strong performative character and that its use had been initially a rhetorical one, since it skeptically overemphasized an affirmation. Thus, a double affirmation can mean, ironically, "Yeah, right" or "Sure enough!," generally suggesting that overagreeing with anything is the mark of the general stupidity of people always willing to give up their freedom. Codrescu's speculations about *dada* do not contradict the general opinion of the so-called "founders" (Tzara, Huelsenbeck, Ball), that *Dada* cannot be used as a manifesto of a movement, since *Dada* is entirely negative to any affirmation, system or theory and, thus, there cannot be any real manifestos supporting *Dada*: the manifesto of *Dada* can be an anti-manifesto only.⁴

As for the manner it has been invented, the term *Dada* emerged without having a particular meaning. Also, *Dada* had no founding father. In the same manner, *Dada* had no place of origin: *Dada* emerged, almost simultaneously, in many places: Zürich, Berlin, Cologne, Hanover, Paris, and New York, with support from many significant, but very different artists, such as Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Tristan Tzara, Max Ernst, Johannes Baargeld, Marcel Janco, Jean Arp, Hugo Ball, Kurt Schwitters, Raoul Hausmann, etc.

Dada's forms of expression are also very diverse. Literary historians discuss *Dada* as performed manifestos and recited sound poems (a sequence of syllables without rhyme or meaning), a form of poetry announcing the Surrealist *écriture automatique*. On the other hand, art historians designate *Dada* artworks as defying the limits of their visual medium.

Dada "artworks" were usually conceived as all-in-one theatrical performances, art *happenings*, counting music, dance, poems, theory, costumes, as well as paintings. Jangling keys, gymnastic exercises called *noir cacadou*, and screaming presentations of sound poetry or other texts accompanied these performances. All of this took place in tight and crowded spaces with almost no distance between the spectators and the performers. The *dada* music and dance parodied African music, and the

costumes featured body masks made of painted cardboard, copying a mix of African themes and other motifs based on the machine aesthetics of the Futurists. A large number of Dadaist artworks were ads, posters, manifestos; but, as Tristan Tzara suggests, the Dadaist ads, unlike the Cubist or the Futurist ads, were not intended to boost the social appeal of the artworks themselves: "Dada has also used advertisements, but not as alibi, as allusion, as matter used for suggestive or aesthetic purposes. Dada put the reality of the advertisement itself in the service of its own commercial purposes."

Recently, more historically focused studies, such as Tom Sandqvist's *Dada East*⁵ adds up another dimension to the Dada's puzzling question of "origin": the local ethnic, religious and cultural dimension of the "Easterners" that took part in the formation of the Dada in Zürich. These "Easterners" were mostly Romanians of Jewish origin. The cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds of artists such as Tristan Tzara (Samuel Rosenstock, born in Moinești), Marcel Janco (Marcel Hermann Iancu, born in Bucharest), Jules Janco (Iuliu Iancu, Marcel's brother), Arthur Segal (Aron Sigalu, born in Botoșani) are of great importance in documenting the early origins of Dada. Sandqvist's study, for example, describes the Dada "processions" or performances in relation to ancient Romanian Christian and Pre-Christian religious festivals and rituals, such as the Romanian folk dances that celebrated the coming of the New Year's Eve. He suggests that the ancient ritual masks of the Romanian folk festivals, for instance, inspired the Dada grotesque masks manufactured by Janco for the performances at the Cabaret Voltaire. Also, Dada's dances and songs, which were performed in front of a noisy audience, allegedly may originate from the ecstatic songs of the Hasidic folklore. Also, the influence of the Jewish folk theater in the Eastern part of Romania may have been a strong cultural incentive for these Eastern exiles. The mixture of Romanian and Jewish folklore that surfaces in the Dada events suggests, in Sandqvist's opinion, the thesis that the Dada could have been originated from Eastern Europe. Sandqvist goes even further, by delineating a political, social, religious and cultural environment that could have set the scene for the so-called chaotic, senseless, cynical features of the Dadaistic *Weltanschauung*. *Ex oriente Dada*, one of the book's chapter titles, is also the main thesis of his study. He contends that, ultimately, Dada would most probably not have happened as it happened without its essential Eastern European cultural backdrop. To the émigré artists from Romania, the country itself was the main source of inspiration. Romania's struggle for modernization during the last three decades of the 19-th century generated a peculiar identity crisis in every aspect of life, emerging as a result of the violent clash between newly adopted Western values and a long-established Oriental way of life⁶. This phenomenon created a confusing display of Western European political, cultural or religious influences weighed down by deeply rooted Oriental *mores*. Some of the

Romanian intellectuals at the end of the 19-th and the beginning of the 20-th century saw the newly born Romanian society not only as an unusual "mixture", but also as a realm of deep contradictions⁷. Romanian literature of the 1900's, although still for the most part in its early euphoric and nationalistic stage, already had its literary "absurdism" at the end of the 19-th century, represented by satirists such as I. L. Caragiale. Caragiale's sarcastic comedies were later followed by the absurd and grotesque short stories of Urmuz (pseudonym of Demetru Demetrescu-Buzău).⁸

It is also worth mentioning that the Romanian-Jewish founders of Dada had a subtle relation to Hasidism. Arthur Segal could be the first example, although his involvement with the Dada has not been particularly long lasting. Segal's theory of *Gleichwertigkeit* in painting, expressed in his pseudo-cubist productions, suggests influences from the Hasidic doctrine of the all-penetrating, all-filling God. Thus, a particularly avant-gardist feature of the XX-th century painting suddenly can be traced back to an early modern form of Jewish Mysticism. The basic idea that painting is not autonomous, but a part of reality and, therefore, that the painted surface should not be limited by the frame – an idea which is also fundamental to the XX-th century theory of "collage" and "ready-made" – is not only a common attribute of XX-th century visual aesthetics, but also has a potential ancestry in the 18-th century Jewish Hasidism. Besides the vision of the decentralized image, which is particularly obvious in Segal's paintings, there is also a possible Hasidic influence, as Sandqvist suggests, in Tzara's theory of poetic language⁹. The Hasidic decentralized vision of God is a potential source for Tzara's "decentralized" or non-hierarchical view of language. The Hasidic doctrine is also related to Tzara's idea about the illusion of reference outside the spoken language itself. Tzara's famous phrase "Thought is made in the mouth"¹⁰ may be interpreted in a Hasidic vein. Another feature of Hasidism that reflects its influence upon Dada is the communitarian view, which is nevertheless common to almost all Dada artists, not only to the Eastern Europeans. Furthermore, there are other religious aspects that could have influenced Dada not merely in an indirect way, but these do not pertain directly to our present study¹¹.

"Dada is political"

It is probably taken for granted in art criticism today that the function of contemporary art is, primarily, a self-critical one, *i.e.* the primary task of the artist's work is, apparently, to question the conditions and the techniques of its own artistic genre. To the critic, it becomes obvious that the self-conscious discourse about art must be interpreted as a discourse that is conscious of its own conditions of emergence. In addition, every analysis of the qualities or the characteristics of a "work of

art" must take into account, in any of its aspects, be it aesthetical, political, or social, the special conditions of the development of that particular aspect. If one might speak, for example, of the "politicization" of a certain art genre or art movement, the first thought that comes into mind is the idea that "art is, in some sense, always already politicized," that "the category of art has been constructed differently at different times and places, and within different, social and political systems."¹² Moreover, this is a virtue of the contemporary artwork itself, deeply embedded into its construction, sometimes evident even to the untrained eye.

The expression "critical self-understanding of art," present in the title, points to the stage of "self-criticism," drawing on Peter Bürger's formula, characteristic to the avant-garde in general, a "self-criticism" to which the Dada was committed.¹³ Undoubtedly, the formula "self-criticism" does not refer to a critical function of art in society but, first, to a critical function of art in relation to itself. Considering the advent of the avant-garde in the XX-th century, one can emphasize that Dada's main contribution to the history of art was to instill an emerging uncertainty about any kind of "universal validity" to be claimed about art in theory, or, to quote Peter Bürger, "the subsequent impossibility of any particular form or movement claiming universal validity."¹⁴ Of course, the discussion about Dada's "self-criticism" also reflects the status of contemporary theory, a paradoxical "postmodern" theory,¹⁵ which is bent to produce a discourse, a theory, under the provision of a constant self-awareness of its own conditions of emergence, viz. of a constant awareness of the hidden ideological assumptions behind the "stereotype," "modernistic," in essence "bourgeois" artwork.¹⁶

Nonetheless, the "self-criticism" present in Dada is, apparently, relentlessly foreclosed by its political commitments. The Zürich Dada, for instance, is generally considered not the "political" phase of Dada, an opinion which is, nevertheless, still open to debate.¹⁷ However, a social criticism and a strong aversion against all that seemed similar to "eternal values," "universal feelings," or "sublime art" were common to all Dadaists. The horrors of war shattered their faith in everything that was believed to have an "eternal value." According to Tzara, the Dada was not simply an "individualistic" phenomenon at all. On the other hand, to put it more clearly, the revolt of the artist could not simply be coined as "individualistic." Dada was abhorrent of any "-ism." In protest, the personal revolt fused with a vitriolic social criticism, which announced the ruling out of the modernist idea of "individualism" in art. The expressionists, the cubists, and the futurists were criticized as being "aesthetic" individualists. The artist's individual "sentiments" were no longer fashionable to a Dadaist. Also, artists who expressed "universal feelings," even when they were expressing despair or powerlessness, were considered "bourgeois." As Walter Benjamin states in his famous *Work of*

Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, "the Dadaists turned the artwork into a missile,"¹⁸ by essentially transforming its contemplative function into a radical distraction (*Ablenkung*), the creation of scandal. Benjamin reaches the conclusion that what Dadaists wanted to do with their art was similar to the desired effect of the cinema, which was created with the purpose of reaching an audience by "distraction" and "shock:"

"The Dadaists attached much less importance to the commercial usefulness of their artworks than to the uselessness of those works as objects of contemplative immersion. They sought to achieve this uselessness not least by thorough degradation of their material. Their poems are "wordsalad" containing obscene expressions and every imaginable kind of linguistic refuse. The same is true of their paintings, on which they mounted buttons or train tickets. What they achieved by such means was a ruthless annihilation of the aura in every object they produced, which they branded as a reproduction through the very means of its production. Before a painting by Arp or a poem by August Stramm, it is impossible to take time for concentration and evaluation, as one can before a painting by Derain or a poem by Rilke. Contemplative immersion-which, as the bourgeoisie degenerated, became a breeding ground for asocial behavior- is here opposed by distraction as a variant of social behavior. Dadaist manifestations actually guaranteed a quite vehement distraction by making artworks the center of scandal. One requirement was paramount: to outrage the public."¹⁹

Some of the early Zürich Dadaists, such as Hugo Ball and Richard Huelsenbeck, who later became an entrepreneur for the fellow artists in Berlin, had been expressing strong political opinions against capitalism, war, nationalism, and imperialism during their Dadaist adventure.²⁰ Yet, they weren't committed to any political ideology during those years spent in Zürich. As Tzara contended later in his 1959 interview, the attribute "political" relates generally to a certain degree of commitment to a political program or ideology.²¹ Still, after 1918, Dada artists supported political programs. Also, in an interview from 1944, the Berliner artist John Heartfield summarized the history of Dada and also its political ambitions:

"Before the 1917 Revolution, dada was nihilistic. This means: destroying the 'spiritual' for being able to infiltrate to the core of basic reality. Out of this emerges a militant agitation in politics and art: not being satisfied with the general considerations on corruption and government incompetence, but 'Naming names!' – Who is guilty? With nihilism, this period has also known the consciousness of solitude – a cry in the wilderness of corruption, indifference, and servile submission. Afterward, there came the Revolutions of 1917, 1918, the emergence of the Soviet State despite the counter-revolution and the interventions. Suddenly, awareness: we are not alone. More important than Krupp, Thyssen, Morgan and Rockefeller were the masses who wanted to destroy the roots of the bourgeois lifestyle and wished to rebuild a whole new society in its place. Moreover, these masses are our allies – they are putting into practice what we can only hope for, what we cannot achieve, in spite of our desperate efforts. The nihilism wasn't helping anymore. There was a positive period of intensive development, of enlargement, of new perspectives and influences: from the *Proletkult* – passing through Russian experimentalists such as Tatlin and Maïakovski and, above all, the writer Ehrenburg – to a progressive displacement of the center of gravity. The Revolution conveyed the message: We are not alone. The lesson we are learning from the Soviets is: not the 'how', but the 'what'. Not *how* to express something, it is not the form that counts, but *what* is said, the content."²²

One of the most famous moments of Dada's commitment to politics was the "*Kunstlump Debatte*," or the "*Art Scoundrel Debate*," that took place in Dresden in the spring of 1919, as a reaction to the bloody clashes between government troops and the workers of Dresden.²³ The debate was between George Grosz and John Heartfield, on one hand, which were both founding members of the German Communist Party and, on the other hand, Oskar Kokoschka, the Expressionist painter who had, at the time, asked the public to secure the preservation of the cultural heritage under conditions of political unrest. In April 1919, Grosz and Heartfield published a pamphlet in the Communist journal *Der Gegner*, entitled *Der Kunstlump* (*The Art Scoundrel*), where they replied to Kokoschka's plea for the preservation of the invaluable artworks in the museums and galleries. Kokoschka's own appeal was a reaction to an episode in Dresden, where,

during the fighting, a stray bullet had pierced Rubens's masterpiece *Bathsheba*. Kokoschka pleaded for a preservation of the "human culture" that "might come into danger." Grosz and Heartfield accused Kokoschka of bourgeois indifference towards the tragic loss of human lives²⁴.

The exact moment of the publication of this manifest is very important in understanding its vehemence. Grosz and Heartfield were Communist artists trying to defend their cause in a historical period when Germany was somewhere between the end of the war and the signing of the Weimar Constitution. Grosz manifesto appeared at the highest point of the Communist revolution in Germany, in the spring of 1919. The success of the 1917 Russian Revolution filled the left-wing German intelligentsia with high expectations for the future of Communism in Germany. One of the German states (Bavaria) had already declared itself a "Soviet" Republic after a Communist putsch in the autumn of 1918. In 1918, revolutionary forces besieged German cities, such as Kiel, Hanover, Munich, and Frankfurt. After violent riots and mass demonstrations, the SPD government stopped the revolutionaries by force. With the signing of the Weimar Constitution in August 1919, the Revolution was officially ended. Nevertheless, the political struggle of the left-wing parties in Germany was not over yet. From 1919 on, during the relatively stable and democratic political climate of the Weimar Republic, numerous German philosophers, writers, and artists have also supported this struggle.

Some of the Dada artworks themselves were conceived as reactions to certain situations. As Carl Einstein wrote about Otto Dix, the Dadaists and the Expressionists of the Weimar period practiced iconoclasm by ruining forms through representation, "aiming the exploding kitsch of the present matter-of-factly in the faces of their contemporaries."²⁵ This is the case of a Berlin Dada "masterpiece," a sculptural montage by Grosz and Heartfield named *Der wildgewordene Spießer Heartfield* (*The Middle-Class Philistine Heartfield Gone Wild*) – created especially for the 1920 *International Dada Fair* in Berlin. The title, *Middle-Class Philistine Heartfield Gone Wild* alluded to a phrase Lenin used earlier that year to attack "radicalist" artists or intellectuals (particularly from Germany) who were Communist themselves, but not particularly attached to the party-line drawn by Lenin himself. In a brochure entitled *Radicalism, The Infantile Sickness of Communism* (*Der „Radikalismus,” die Kinderkrankheit des Kommunismus*), the leader of the Russian Revolution complained about the "extreme revolutionism (...) incapable of displaying any stability, organization, discipline and firmness" represented by the "petit bourgeois who is beside himself with rage as a consequence of the horrors of capitalism" (*der infolge der Schrecken des Kapitalismus ‚außer sich geratene’ Kleinbürger*). Lenin's attack split the German Communists into followers and contesters of Leninism. Grosz and Heartfield responded by attributing to Lenin a "bureaucratic mentality of an arrogant leader who thinks the revolution is his monopoly."²⁶

Some of Hugo Ball's texts from this period are, for instance, steady pieces of social and political criticism. On the whole, his attitude about the political future of Germany was very skeptical: although he did not trust democratic parliamentarism in a capitalism form, he considered that Germany's chances of overcoming its problems with socialism were really irrelevant. In a fragment dated 31.5.1919, during the last days of Communist Revolution in Germany, he added:

"The latest disappointment that Germany was preparing to the world, the revolution ... we thought that our sufferings during the war will bring tranquility, that the nation would get rid of its nightmares, of its heroes and blood suckers through an upheaval. We were wrong. The exhaustion of this people is stunning (...) it is more advanced than is commonly believed."²⁷ In another fragment, he writes: "The capitalist industrial state of today, just as the socialist state of tomorrow ... (are) based on needs that are identical to nothing. Its fatalistic goal is a self-governing, self-regulating process of economic processes (...) [About capitalism and bolshevism] State capitalism and a future massive bureaucracy on the one hand, on the other hand, a worker's slavery; these will, by no means, override the class difference between the centralized administration and the national working class (...) The anti-capitalist principle can be expanded and can take on more human forms. This principle ... is a tremendous step in the future. It is a consequence not of Marxism, but of the humanitarian and philanthropist socialist beginnings between 1780 and 1850, a profoundly Christian movement."²⁸

The period between 1918 and 1920 was very rich in exuberant political and social manifestos written by groups of artists: the *November Group Manifesto* of 1918, an Expressionist group led by Max Pechstein and Rudolf Belling, and the *Work Council for Art Manifesto* of 1919 both advocated the role of the visual arts in achieving a progressive political order.²⁹ The Work Council program would later become part of the social program of the German Bauhaus. Besides breaking with traditional art forms, The November Group pleaded for unification of all "revolutionaries of the spirit" (expressionism, cubism, futurism) and hoped for achieving "the closest possible relation between people and art" and "the moral cultivation of a young, free Germany." They saw themselves not "as a party, or a class," but more humanistic, as "human beings." The Work

Council text was signed by Oskar Kokoschka himself and expressed several demands: a revolutionary liberation of the arts from traditional state domination: the "dissolution of the Academies," recognition of the public character of all state and private buildings, freedom of art training from state supervision, the depoliticization and the liberation of art education, the just distributing of state revenues for the "old" as well as for the "new" art, etc.

Later, in 1924, a group of Communist artists (among them, Wieland Herzfelde, John Heartfield, George Grosz, Rudolf Schlichter, Otto Schmalhausen, Alois Erbach, Erwin Piscator) formed the "Red Group," or the Association of Communist Artists, issuing a manifesto in their party newspaper, *Der Rote Fahne* (*The Red Flag*). The group was dissatisfied with the too many "anarchistic" productions of their fellow left-wing artists and pleaded for a more "planned" collaboration. By that time, these artists were already producing propaganda art for the German Communist Party.

The German Dadaists of 1919, Grosz and Heartfield, were different in their political radicalism. Their message was nihilistic, violent, and exceedingly utopian: there could be no compromise between the workers and the middle class; therefore, all signs of a bourgeois society and culture should simply disappear. "Old" art simply could not exist in a workers' society.

In their anti-art message, the artists demanded the utter transformation of all social and political conditions of the working class. Their point was obvious: the disappearance of all bourgeois remnants in a new society would also include the disappearance of all "bourgeois" artworks that were the living cultural icons of a society once ruled by class domination. Grosz and Heartfield's message was very similar to Babeuf's revolutionary slogan from his anarchistic *Manifesto of the Equals* (1796):

„We need not only that equality of rights written into the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen; we want it in our midst, under the roofs of our houses. We consent to everything for it, to make a clean slate so that we hold to it alone. *Let all the arts perish, if need be, as long as real equality remains!*”³⁰

Later, in an article entitled *Art is in Danger* (1925), Grosz highlighted the importance of Dada to the history of art by resuming its main distinctive characteristics: its "anti-art" impetus, its tremendously critical social force, and its essentially "tendentious" nature. The "tendentiousness" is not only related to the overtly political or social commitment of the artist. It is also related to its "critical" task, namely "self-critical," as long as Grosz does not see a problem in recognizing that every art is created inside a certain *milieu* and that its purpose is always under the influence of a set of ideological presumptions. Therefore, every

artist must be aware of the conditions of the emergence of its art. Moreover, this awareness does not contradict with the artist's social or political message. It completes it³¹.

The thesis about the self-critical character of art is nowadays common to almost every postmodern art circle. With the occasion of a 1984 New York exhibition, organized by the New Museum of Contemporary Art, entitled *Art and Ideology*, one of the curators, Lucy Lippard, a leading feminist critic, declared: "now all art is ideological and all art is used politically by the right or the left, with the conscious and unconscious assent of the artist. There is no neutral zone." She also contended that "artists who remain stubbornly uninformed about the social and emotional effects of their images and their connections to other images outside the art context are most easily manipulated by the prevailing systems of distribution, interpretation, and marketing."³²

If "ideology" means nothing more than a set of cultural concepts or a manner of thinking, which is characteristic to a certain group, then the statement that "all art is ideological" is entirely acceptable, because "ideology," seen as a set of values, becomes a question of cultural hermeneutics, which implies the constant awareness of the conditions of emergence of an artwork. In this case, "ideology" does not exclude self-criticism, because "ideology" itself turns into a term of cultural criticism, designating a set of cultural markers for a particular cultural medium.

Deconstructionist critics, such as Lucy Lippard, abandoned the early Marxist view that discussed "ideology" using a "dualist" scheme: ideology vs. non-ideology. To the early Marxist thinkers, ideology initially meant the "false" worldview shaped by the dominant class.³³ Later, critics used the term against Marxism itself, by unmasking arguments that lead Marxist thinking to an intellectual monologue.³⁴ Nowadays, critics of deconstruction, such as Peter Zima, fear that "deconstruction" might become more of an "ideological provocation"³⁵ instead of a sustained mode of criticism. The German Critical Theory understood the concept of "ideology" in a pejorative sense and considered that "critique" can never be "self-critical" if it cannot provide for itself a "meta-critical" function.

In the current state of affairs, the "critique" of ideology cannot differ from ideology itself. This tenet creates a real paradox, since the provision of "self-criticism" is satisfied not by a concept of "critique," which is in itself meta-critical, but by a "critique" that is aware of its object, but cannot resist it.

However, Marxism and deconstruction are two opposite types of approaches to the question of "critique." In questioning the "ideological" character of art in society, Marxism relies on a rationalistic method to secure the existence of a relationship between a theory and its object. Thus, the theory becomes the *Ideologiekritik*, while "ideology" is a rational, well-defined object. The early Marxists never suspected that their *Kritik* would soon turn into a well established, scientifically based, and politically

motivated ideology. Deconstruction, on the other hand, never relies on a strong relation between a well-defined theory and a well-established object. On the contrary, deconstruction dismisses the very relationship between a theory and an "object" of theory, since it presupposes a form of theoretical heresy, which questions the very notions of "theory" and "object." Deconstruction is continually practicing a discourse on indeterminations, which upsets the rationalistic behavior of the early modernistic (including Marxist) theories. For instance, Derrida's discourse on Kant's aesthetics in *The Truth in Painting* unmasks Kant's indirect venture of undermining his own discourse by explaining conceptually that the understanding of the beautiful cannot be realized by ways of logical judgment. The Marxist and the deconstructionist ways of appropriating the Other (of ideology) are quite different in their nature. Under the influence of Surrealism and Freud, deconstructionist critics see "ideology" as the Other of Reason. The only way to help one not to fall under the "ideological" spell, which is basically a mystique created by Reason, is to speculate upon the unconceivable, indefinite sides of "ideology."

A highly upsetting issue is related to the prescriptive political Communist influences in art, which produced an ill-fated hybrid named the "propaganda art." In propaganda art, namely the art that was produced by command to openly support Communist parties or Communist state policies, the contradiction between critique and ideology is fully manifested. During the Stalin era, the "Socialist realism" had been invented in Russia to ensure the power of the state's propaganda. Many of the Russian "revolutionary" artists of the 1920's were physically eliminated for speaking against this abuse. By the end of World War II, the "Socialist realism" had become, in various forms, the main policy on arts in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, after the Soviet communization. In communized countries, such as Romania, the "Socialist realism," combined with autochthonistic motifs, developed into a national enterprise ruled by the state until 1989. In Communist China, Mao's cult ensured the development of an industry of state propaganda art. However, Western Marxist authors, such as Terry Eagleton, consider that "propaganda art" is not the same thing as art's political commitment.

Engels and Marx's opinions were moderate in relation to art's propagandistic purposes. Engels dismissed the overt political commitment in art, although he still contended that realist art is the best way to inspire the masses. He came up with the theory of the "objective partisanship" in art, which rejected both the photographic transport of sheer reality into art and the "political solution" overtly suggested. Engels considered that "the author needs not foist his own political views on his work because, if he reveals the real and potential forces *objectively* at work in a situation, he is already in that sense partisan. Partisanship, that is to say, is inherent in reality itself; it emerges in a method of treating social reality rather than in a subjective attitude towards it."³⁶

Another set of Marxist critics writing on the subject of "commitment" attacked the problem from a different angle: production. Their theory could suggest a different kind of answer to the question of Dadaist political commitment. The fact that an artist is committed does not come from the fact that he is committed only to a theory or a program, but essentially from the fact that he is a producer of a work, and that this process of social production itself determines the nature of its art. Art is not only a part of the superstructure, but also a part of the economic base of society. Walter Benjamin's theory from *The Author as Producer*, a text he wrote in 1934, addresses the following question: What is the work's position with respect to the productive relations of its time?³⁷ The originality of Benjamin, Terry Eagleton contends³⁸, lies in his application of the theory of productive relations to art itself. Benjamin considers that the revolutionary artist should work on the emancipation of the forces of artistic production, creating new social relations between artist and audience: thus, the "revolutionary" task would be not the propagation of political ideas, keeping the old modes of artistic production in place, but developing the forces of production themselves, namely the new artistic media: cinema, radio, photography, or musical recording. The newspaper is a new media of production as far as it dismisses conventional separations between literary *genres*, between writer and poet, scholar and popularizer, between author and reader. Gramophone records, the new media for classical music, have transformed the common concert hall. Cinema and photography alter the conventional modes of perception. The "committed" artists, Benjamin states, are always working on their means of production. Their interests are not primarily in the art object. The commitment to the revolutionary art turns out not to be propaganda, but a commitment to the new forms of production: the artist not only conveys a message, but changes the society by transforming the media and, finally, by transforming its spectators into collaborators. In support of his idea, Benjamin portrays the case of the Dada photomontage. He speaks of the emergence of a "materialist critique," in place of the old "strategic critique," because, given the materiality of the artwork that develops into "technique," the "object" (of critique) in fact becomes object of "experience." In the case of Dada artworks, a vision about an anti-art is reflected by the technical manipulation of material:

"The revolutionary force of Dadaism lays in the fact that it put the authenticity of art to the test. The Dadaists made still-lives out of tickets, spools, cigarette butts that were integrated into painted elements. Then, they showed it to the public: see, the picture-frame explodes time, the tiniest real fragment of everyday life says more than painting. Just as a bloody fingerprint of a murderer on the page of a book says more than the painting."³⁹

Thus, Benjamin's contention that Dadaism "turns the artwork into a missile" does not eventually refer to the political message conveyed by the artist through his work, but to the "revolutionary" character of the medium created by the artwork itself. The construction of a traditional artwork has a unique character, due to the uniqueness of its producing. But the reproduction of an artwork using new technologies affects the nature of the work itself. Photography or film-cameras demystify the art object, by bringing it closer to its audience. The process of the transformation into the medium itself, which, in Dada's case, is the fabrication of collage, the ready-made or the photomontage, conveys a "shock" effect to its audience. "Shock" is an essential category to Benjamin's aesthetics and it is directly related to the transformations inside the medium of art. Actually, Benjamin suggests that the collage "reproduces" in the artwork the tremendous transformations of the modern urban life experience: the discontinuous perceptions, the tumultuous noise, and the impact of the fragmentary. The moment when the audience experiences this insight about the nature of its own everyday life experience is what Benjamin, the Dada's aesthetician, characterizes as a new kind of aesthetic experience created by the new media, such as a film: "The function of film is to train human beings in the apperceptions and reactions needed to deal with a vast apparatus whose role in their lives is expanding almost daily."⁴⁰

Commenting on avant-garde's achievements, Peter Bürger emphasized its anti-modernistic focus on criticizing the aesthetic autonomy of the modern artwork, a provision defined later by Habermas as the "independence of artworks from extra-aesthetic uses."⁴¹ By dismissing art's autonomy, avant-garde criticized, on one hand, art's lack of social impact and, on the other hand, the inability of aestheticism to criticize itself. In this context, Dada is considered the most radical gesture of self-criticism in the history of art as a modern institution. Dada's acts of irreverence against the modern ideals of beauty and sublimity in art attack the problem at its core: it is not necessary only to condemn beauty and sublimity, while still keeping up with the traditional ideology of art institutions and perpetuating their ways of thinking the autonomy of art. If we want to dismiss modernism, then we should also abandon the institutional frameworks through which art is generated, as well as the "dominant social discourses" emerging in relation to art during the XIX-th century. As a result, the avant-gardes of the XX-th century responded first with an attempt to "deconstruct" *avant la lettre* the mimetic theories of art and its ideological counterpart, aestheticism. Second, artists emphasized art's "affirmative" function of responding to social and political situations.⁴² In dada's case, the "deconstruction" of aesthetic ideologies became a nihilistic critique against modern art. As far as the "affirmative" function is concerned, this paper very well documented Dada's militant reactions against political ideologies.

There remains the apparent contradiction between Dada's initial ideological and epistemological skepticism and its subsequent involvements into political activism. How are we to understand, simultaneously, a revolt against representationalism in all artistic media, a kind of "decomposition" and "disintegration" always demanded by the Dadaists, close to a militant, activist, social message? How can these tendencies be brought together?

This problem can also be addressed to Bürger's main thesis about the avant-garde, which emphasizes the undermining of aesthetic autonomy and the reintegration of art and reality, "the principle of overcoming art in the realm of life-praxis" (*das Prinzip der Aufhebung der Kunst in der Lebenspraxis*). In Richard Murphy's view, Bürger's thesis about the reintegration of art into life is problematic, as long as the instrumentalization of art for social or political causes might fail distinguishing between a commitment, which still keeps its capacity to criticize, namely a "real" reconciliation, and a "false reconciliation of art and life," exemplified by the "aestheticized" fascism, by socialist realism, or by consumerist aesthetics.

In Benjamin's as well as in Grosz's views, there is no real danger that emancipated art might become instrumentalized for political purposes. On the contrary: instead of constantly fearing the spectrum of ideology, society should benefit from art's new ways of transforming social reality. Benjamin sees a direct relationship between reproducibility, politicization, and distraction. Real art converges educational value in consumer value: its emancipatory appeal is better released in these conditions:

"Just as the art of the Greeks was geared toward tasting, so the art of the present is geared toward becoming worn out. This may happen in two different ways: through consignment of the artwork to fashion or through the work's refunctioning [*Umfunktionierung*] in politics. Reproducibility- distraction- politicization. Educational value and consumer value converge, thus making possible a new kind learning. Art comes into contact with the commodity; the commodity comes into contact with art."⁴³

Commenting on Schmitz's conservative review of Eisenstein's political oeuvres, Benjamin considers that the new media of film is perfectly fitted to reflect art's deep seated political tendency:

"Why does [Schmitz] make such a fuss about the political deflowering of art? ... The claim that political tendencies are implicit in every artwork of every epoch-since these are, after all, historical

creations of consciousness-is a platitude. But just as deeper layers of rock come to light only at points of fracture [*Bruchstellen*], the deeper formation of a political position [*Tendenz*] becomes visible only at fracture points in the history of art (and in artworks). The technical revolutions-these are fracture points in artistic development where political positions, exposed bit by bit, come to the surface. In every new technical revolution, the political position is transformed-as if its own-from a deeply hidden element of art into a manifest one. And this brings us ultimately to film. Among the points of fracture in artistic formations, film is one of the most dramatic."⁴⁴

When writing on the condition of Dada in relation to new forms of art, he is seeing the effects of the development of new techniques that defy the traditional ways of representation as a historical opportunity to radically transform social relationships. In Benjamin's case, there is no confusion between a social emancipatory tendency and a significant transformation of the very nature of "art." Moreover, he associates "destruction" with "distraction," assuming that the revolutionary tendency of avant-garde is always associated with a real moment of "critique:"

"The history of every art form has critical periods in which the particular form strains after effects which can be easily achieved only with a changed technical standard- that is to say, in a new art form. The excesses and crudities of art which thus result, particularly in periods of so-called decadence, actually emerge from the core of its richest historical energies. In recent years, Dadaism has amused itself with such barbarisms. Only now is its impulse recognizable: Dadaism attempted to produce with the means of painting (or literature) the effects which the public today seeks in film."⁴⁵

In sum, our study has delineated two major tenets of Dada, both contributing to the unique anti-modernistic, "deconstructionist" nature of this rather exceptional avant-garde group.

One tenet is Dada's "self-critical" tendency, which portrays the unique, individualistic, anarchic, and nihilistic relation of Dada to art institution itself. Promoting the unreserved dismissal of all modern aesthetic ideologies, the sheer rejection of "all conventions, all theories and all dogmas," Dada, more than Expressionism or Futurism itself, brings art definitively into the XX-th century. The "self-critical," namely

nihilistic, anti-rationalistic step in the development of Dada, represents, to my opinion, its authentic feature, the characteristic that transformed Dada into a real "adventure" of the avant-garde, to quote Tzara. Embodying the "incomprehensibility" or the "meaninglessness" in art, emphasizing art's basically indeterminate character, against all theories on the more or less "formal" qualities of the aesthetic "object," is the feature that brought not only art itself, but also the theory of art to a groundbreaking point.

The second, notable tenet of Dadaism is its unmistakable, albeit utopian politicization of art, which, under any conditions, must not be ignored. There are, of course, many interpretations relating to this aspect. Benjamin's theories of "distraction" and "emancipation" offered a good starting point for the discussion of Dada's political momentum. We have analyzed art's promotion of political ideas in its special historical context, interpreting this tenet as a result not only of a special political situation, but also mainly as a result of Dada's anti-modernistic nature. Ultimately, we have also emphasized the apparent contradictions that emerge from this surprising association between anti-modernistic nihilism and utopian politics.

Appendix 1

John Heartfield & George Grosz, *Der Kunstlump*, from: *Der Gegner*, 1. Jahrg. 1919, Heft 10-12. The English translation is from: Kaes, Anton; Jay, Martin; Dimendberg, Edward (Eds.), *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994

"Yes, what is the worker supposed to do with art? Have painters given their works the appropriate content for the working people's struggle for liberation, the content that would teach them to free themselves from the yoke of a thousand years of oppression? (...) What is the worker supposed to do with art, which, despite all these disturbing facts, wants to lead him into a pristine world of ideas, tries to stop him from the revolutionary action, makes him forget the crimes of the wealthy, and deceives him with the bourgeois idea of a world of peace and order? (...) What is the worker supposed to do with the spirit of poets and philosophers who, in the face of everything that constricts his life breath, feel no duty to take up battle against the exploiters? Yes, what is the worker to do with art? (...) Workers! By presenting you the ideas of the Christian churches, they wish to disarm you, in order to deliver you more conveniently to the murderous machinery of state. Workers! By representing things in their paintings that the bourgeois can cling to, things that give you a reflection of beauty and happiness, they sabotage your class-consciousness, your will to power. By directing you to Art with the cry 'Art to the people!' they wish to seduce you into believing in a

common possession that you share with your oppressors, for the love of which you should cease the most just struggle the world has ever known (...) They once again wish to use the 'spiritual' to make you submissive and instill in you the awareness of your own smallness in relation to the wonders of the human spirit. (...) Workers, you, who continually create the surplus value that allows the exploiters to hang their walls with this 'aesthetic' luxury, you who thereby guarantee the livelihood of artists, which is nearly always more affluent than you own; workers, now listen how such an artist regards you and your struggle. (...) He who wishes his business with the brush to be regarded as a divine mission is a scoundrel. Today the gleaming of a gun by a Red soldier is of greater significance than the entire metaphysical output of all the painters. The concepts of art and artist are an invention of the bourgeoisie and their position in the state can only be on the side of those who rule, i.e. the bourgeois caste.

The title 'artist' is an insult.

The designation 'art' is a cancellation of human equality (*die Bezeichnung ,Kunst' ist eine Annullierung der menschlichen Gleichwertigkeit*)

The deification of the artist is equivalent to self-deification.

The artist does not stand above his milieu and the society of those who approve of him. For his little head does not produce the content of his creation, but processes (as a sausagemaker does meat) the worldview of his public. (...) Kokoschka's statements are a typical expression of the attitude of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie places a culture and its art higher than the life of the working class. This, too, leads to the conclusion that there can be no reconciliation between the bourgeoisie, its approach to life, and the proletariat (...) With joy we welcome the news that bullets whiz into the galleries and palaces, into the masterpieces of Rubens, instead of into the homes of the poor in the workers' districts. (...) There is only one task: With all possible means to speed with all the intelligence and consistency to the decay of these exploiters culture. Any indifference is counterrevolutionary! (...) We urge everyone to take a position towards the masochistic reverence for historical values, culture and for Art! (...) Of you, workers, we know that you will create your working class culture alone, as you created your own class organizations through your own efforts."

Appendix 2

Tristan Tzara, *Dada Manifesto* 1918

"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 Romanian, 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 - noise 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 (...)* Thus DADA was born, *out of a need for independence, out of mistrust for the community*. People who join us keep their freedom. We do not accept any theories. We have 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?*"⁴⁶

Appendix 3

George Grosz/Wieland Herzfelde, *Die Kunst ist in Gefahr* (Art is in Danger), 1925

"Dada was the first significant art movement in Germany in decades. (...) Dada was not a 'made' movement, but an organic product, originating in reaction to the head-in-the-clouds tendency of so-called holy art, whose disciples brooded over cubes and Gothic art while the generals were painting in blood. Dada forced the devotees of art to show their colors. (...) Today I know, together with all the other founders of Dada, that our only mistake was to have been seriously engaged at all with so-called art. Dada was the breakthrough, taking place with bawling and scornful laughter; it came out of a narrow, overbearing, and overrated milieu, and floating in the air between the classes, knew no responsibility to the general public. We saw then the insane end products of the ruling order of society and burst into laughter. We had not yet seen the system behind this insanity. (...) The demand for tendency irritates the art world, today perhaps more than ever, to enraged and disdainful opposition. Admittedly all times have had important works of tendentious character, although such works are not appreciated for their tendentiousness, but rather for their formal, 'purely artistic' qualities. These circles completely fail to recognize that at all times all art has a tendency that only the character and clarity of this tendency have changed. (...) NO ANSWER IS ALSO AN ANSWER. (...) The artist, whether he likes it or not, lives in continual correlation to the

public, to society, and he cannot withdraw from its laws of evolution, even when, as today, they include class conflict. Anyone maintaining a sophisticated stance above or outside of things is also taking sides, for such indifference and aloofness is automatically a support of the class currently in power—in Germany, the *bourgeoisie*. Moreover, a great number of artists quite consciously support the bourgeois system, since it is within that system that their work sells...Yes, art is in danger: Today's artist, if he does not want to run down and become an antiquated dud, has the choice between technology and class warfare propaganda. In both cases he must give up 'pure art.' Either he enrolls as an architect, engineer, or advertising artist in the army (...) or, as a reporter and critic reflecting the face of our times, a propagandist and defender of the revolutionary idea and its partisans, he finds a place in the army of the suppressed who fight for their just share of the world, for a significant social organization of life."

* Acknowledgments: This work was supported by CNCSIS–UEFISCSU, project number PNII – IDEI code 2469/2008 "Culture and creativity in the age of globalization: A study on the interactions between the *cultural policy* and artistic creativity".

Notes:

¹ See my reading of Schiller's aesthetic utopia in: Mihaela Pop, Dan-Eugen Rațiu (Eds.), *Estetica și artele astăzi*, (București: Editura Universității din București, 2010), 91-112.

² See: Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde. Modernism, Expressionism and the Problem of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 33 sqq.

³ For a helpful historical introduction to Dada, see: David Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). The critic Georges Hugnet defined *Dada* as a self-destructive form of nihilism: "Dada is ageless, it has no parents, but stands alone, making no distinction between what is and what is not. It approves while denying, it contradicts itself, and acquires new force by its very contradiction. Its frontal attack is that of a traitor stealing up from behind. It undermines established authority. It turns against itself, it indulges in self-destruction, it sees red, its despair is its genius. There is no hope, all values are levelled to a universal monotony, there is no longer a difference between good and evil - there is only an awareness. Dada is a taking stock, and as such it is irreparable as it is ridiculous. It knows only itself" (Georges Hugnet, *Dada*, in: *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art*, vol. 4, no. 2/3, (1936): 3.

⁴ See Andrei Codrescu, *The Posthuman Dada Guide. Tzara and Lenin Play Chess*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 142-146. See also Appendix 2.

⁵ See Tom Sandqvist, *Dada East. The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006).

⁶The identity crisis generated by Romania's backwardness on the road to modernization was more nuanced in the case of the Jewish community. The first

Romanian Constitution of 1866 created a special statute for the Jewish community by denying them the usual political and civil rights that were attributed to ethnic Romanians. According to the sociologist Victor Karady, the identity of the Jews in Central and South-East Europe formed as an *in between* between the ethnic identity and the "assimilated" identity. Karady contends that, for example, the identity of the Romanian-Jewish elites contained a strong intellectual element, generated by the perpetual attempts of the Jewish person to be recognized by Romanian society. During its struggle for recognition, the identity of the aspiring Jewish intellectual acquired a special social competence, supporting and supported by its multilingual skills and its cultural mobility. The „assimilation”, Karady contends, was never fulfilled, but the cultural competence determined by the tendency to being assimilated increased the person's cultural productivity. Therefore, creating an *in between* identity that pendulated between two identities initiated a social model characterized by a larger degree of modernity than that of the socially accepted model. In other words, the aspiring identity of the Romanian-Jewish intellectuals was perceived as being more „modern” than that of the regular Romanian elite. In practice, this sociological phenomenon transformed the Jewish intellectual into a vigorous critic of autochtonist or nationalist cultural tendencies and a supporter of social emancipation and progressive cultural movements. In this context, it is not an unusual fact that a major part of the Romanian avant-garde after 1920 has been created and supported by Jewish elites. For further details, see Victor Karady, *The Jews of Europe in the Modern Era. A Socio-Historical Outline*, (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004).

⁷ See Sandqvist commentary on Romania's *début de siècle* stage of modernization, just before the beginning of World War I: "What is not possible in a country where the government does everything possible to imitate the Belgian one, where the royal palace looks like a French town hall surrounded by a pompous small garden, and where every intellectual claims that the country is the true heir of the great Roman Empire, a country where a new political party is born every hour of the day in the nearest coffee shop and where all the daily newspapers are owned by the party leaders, of whom the richest of all is said to be so far in favor of everything French that he sends his laundry to Paris, while others are trimming their sails according to the mistress in vogue? (...) What is not possible in a country whose capital appears mostly like a confusing piling up of overlapping events with neither consequences nor logic, where every fragment expresses the city's disrupted identity? (...) What is not possible in a country characterized by its *mahala* mentality, a kind of Oriental petit bourgeois attitude focused only on business, power, and political plots? The country which claims to be Latin but which has an Orthodox religion and an Orthodox church paradoxically paying respect to the pope in Rome? A country where the Oriental influence is reflected in the incompetence of the road builders and the skillfulness of the violinists and where the monasteries and the churches are meeting places of Byzantium and the Italian Renaissance, Cistercian monks and Russian holy fools? A country that is a conglomerate of influences coming from all four points of the compass, a melting pot of different cultures and civilizations complementing each other, a crossroads for peoples, experiences, and events, a focal point of cultural compromises and violent confrontations?" Sandqvist, 24 sqq.

⁸ Sandqvist, 208 sqq.

⁹ Sandqvist, 294 sqq.

¹⁰ Tristan Tzara, *Sept manifestes Dada* (1924), *Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love*.

¹¹ Hugo Ball was deeply involved in theosophy, mysticism and religious speculations. These aspects are well documented in: Cornelius Zehetner, *Hugo Ball. Portrait einer Philosophie*, (Wien: Turia + Kant, 2000). Marcel Duchamp’s passion for occultism is described at large in: John F. Moffitt, *Alchemist of the Avant-Garde The Case of Marcel Duchamp*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003).

¹² Will Bradley, *Introduction*, in: Charles Esche & Will Bradley, *Art and Social Change. A Critical Reader* (Tate Publishing, 2008), 9.

¹³ See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 22 sqq.

¹⁴ In: Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde. Modernism, Expressionism and the Problem of Postmodernity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 8.

¹⁵ See Richard Murphy’s own discussion about the conditions of a “post-modern” theory in Chapter 7 of his *Theorizing the Avant-Garde*.

¹⁶ See Richard Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde*, 255 sqq. Murphy’s views will be discussed in more detail later.

¹⁷ There is an ongoing debate about the political commitment of the Dadaists to Marxism in the early 20’s. Marxist critics still consider Dada extensively “Marxist” in its achievements. See Lieven Soete, “Les photomontages de John Heartfield *L’art comme projectile politique*,” *Études Marxistes* 30/1996.

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, Eds. M. Jennings, B. Doherty, T.Y. Levin, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 39.

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, 39.

²⁰ Cf. Richard Huelsenbeck, *En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism*, in: Charles Esche, Will Bradley, *Art and Social Change. A Critical Reader*, (Tate Publishing, 2008), 61-66. Later in this study I will refer to Ball’s political ideas during the Dada period. For a clearer understanding of Ball’s artistic, political and philosophical thinking, see the comprehensive study of Cornelius Zehetner, *Hugo Ball. Portrait einer Philosophie*, (Wien: Turia + Kant, 2000).

²¹ This is also what is usually considered to be the difference between the Zürich Dadaism and the “political” Communist wing of the Dada which emerged in Berlin, roughly around 1918-1919. Also in Petrograd, Russia, in the early 1915, Velimir Khlebnikov, David and Vladimir Burliuk, Vladimir Maïakovski and the “cubofuturists” organized political *soirées* where they experimented with a kind of art which was very close to the *Dada*. For a review of the political Dada around 1920, see my “Art as Unfulfilled Utopia: The Experience of The Political in Dada’s Redefining of Art,” *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai, Philosophia*, LIV, 2, (2009): 119-138.

²² Francis D. Klingender, *Diskussion mit John Heartfield über Dadaismus und Surrealismus*, 1944, quoted by Soete.

²³ See Ştefan Maftei, “Art as Unfulfilled Utopia”, 125.

²⁴ See Appendix 1.

²⁵ Carl Einstein, *Otto Dix*, in: Kaes, Anton et al. (Eds.), *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 490 sqq.

²⁶ For further references, see Ştefan Maftei, “Art as Unfulfilled Utopia”, 126.

²⁷ Quoted by Zehetner, 20.

²⁸ Zehetner, 21.

²⁹ These texts appear in: Kaes, Anton *et al.* (Eds.), *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, 477 sqq.

³⁰ Babeuf & Maréchal, *Manifesto of the Equals*, 1796.

³¹ See Appendix 3.

³² *Art & Ideology*. Texts by Tucker, Marcia; Buchloh, Benjamin H.D.; Kuspit, Donald B.; Lippard, Lucy R.; Peraza, Nilda *et al.*, (New York: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984).

³³ In relation to ideology, Marxists have considered art either as a pure product of "false consciousness," or as an anti-ideological product. The French critics Louis Althusser and Pierre Macherey have expressed more moderate views about art and ideology. For further details, see Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, (Routledge, 2006).

³⁴ See Peter Zima's excellent introduction to the major tenets of deconstruction, in his *Deconstruction and Critical Theory*, transl. Rainer Emig, (London: Continuum, 2002).

³⁵ Zima, vi.

³⁶ Terry Eagleton, 22.

³⁷ Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", in: *New Left Review*, 1970, 1/62, 83-96.

³⁸ Terry Eagleton, 29.

³⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Author as Producer*, 90.

⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, 317.

⁴¹ Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde*, 6.

⁴² Murphy, *Theorizing the Avant-Garde*, 10.

⁴³ Benjamin, *Theory of Distraction*, in: Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, Eds. M. Jennings, B. Doherty, T.Y. Levin, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 56-57.

⁴⁴ Benjamin, *Reply to Oscar A. H. Schmitz*, in: Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 316-317.

⁴⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, Eds. M. Jennings, B. Doherty, T.Y. Levin, 38.

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