DA DA DADA DADA DA DA

The Age of Anti Art

HANNA ELRAYIS

"99 Ways" Collage by Babak Mo

The Anti Art Crusade Circa 1916

The poiesis of an anti-art movement of the avant-garde, better known as Dada, revitalized the nature of art and broke through the precedent of a bourgeoisie attitude which influenced society in the early twentieth century. It was July 14, 1916 that sparked the advent of Dadaism in Switzerland, in response to the materialism, rationalism and nationalism of a society that some believe were motivations for bringing about the first World War ("Dadaism-Art and Anti Art", n.d.). Hugo Ball, the founder of Dada, saw the inception of the war as both a horrific and senseless one ("Dada-Art Term", n.d.). In reaction to this, there emerged the anti-war crusade which challenged the absurdities of the bloodshed with pastiche and absurdity of its own ("Dada-Art Term", n.d.). Dadaism nestled itself within the cities of Zürich, Paris, Berlin, Cologne, Hanover, and New York, gaining both traction and enmity for for its anarchist ideals ("Dada Movement", n.d.). The name "Dada" means 'hobby horse' in French; the meaningless context

behind the word appealed itself to the group members at the time and the values they held in regards to the anti-war, anti-bourgeoisie Dada (Novin, 2011). The rest, as one would say, is history.

What Dada supplemented into the minds of the public was a sentiment that summoned the meaning of meaning and questioned the value of art controlled by pre-established traditions ("Dadaism-Art and Anti Art", n.d.). The impact which it had on artistic culture was founded on the basis of its diversity, concentrating on graphic art, typography, poetry, the photo collage, sculpture, performance art, and photography as a means of communicating the import behind its crusade (Collins et al., 2015). Furthermore, members of Dada encouraged form over essence in regards to their work whilst expressionism was dismissed in their vision for how life should be lived and art should be practised (Novin, 2011).

As militants in the world war were combating opposing forces, Dada fought in opposition to a traditional society cemented in prehistoric values, with their weapon of choice being ambiguity, parody, provocation, and nihilism (Trachtman, 2006). Where society in that moment was built on rationality, Dada was the irrationality that contradicted the system; a catalyst for conventional norms (Trachtman, 2006). In Ball's manifesto from 1915, he said, "We are not naive enough to believe in progress. We are only dealing with 'today" (Schaub, 1985). Even as Dadaism began to fade in 1924 with the rise of its successor, surrealism, it introduced the idea of mindfulness for both art and daily life rather than looking towards conventions which were very deep-rooted in the past ("Dadaism-Art and Anti Art", n.d.). Dadaism provoked people to think with minds of their own, and in the present day, much of which Dada has succeeded in disseminating has changed ideals surrounding modern art and the value of typography (Collins et al., 2015).

L H O O Q by Marcel Duchamp,1917

The Emphasis On Type

Dada's resounding presence introduced a new taste of artistic flavour foreign to the aesthetically pleasing conventions of society, especially through its employment of typography. Dada greatly emphasized the close and necessary relationship between the word and the image, holding typography at a high regard and ensuring that it remained at the forefront of the design and not as an afterthought ("Dadaism", n.d.). Dada's intentions were to communicate the visual and textual elements of its work independent from one another (Novin, 2011). To limit the viewer from seeking any underlying meaning beyond the honest form of the typography and typefaces used (Novin, 2011). Dada explored the nature of typography from a place of chance, variety, and disorder as artists experimented with their employment of type through constructivist and suprematist paradigms as inspiration (Collins et al., 2015). As a result, the movement radically breathed life into the dull conventions of typography, in ways in which the avant-garde movements preceding it, such as futurism, had found no value in (Novin, 2011). In another one of his manifestos from 1916, Hugo Ball said:

"Dada is the heart of the words."
(Sterling, 2016)

Suffice to say, Dada's application of typography within its works has developed the essence of type in art as a medium, sans the influence of predetermined guidelines (Collins et al., 2015).

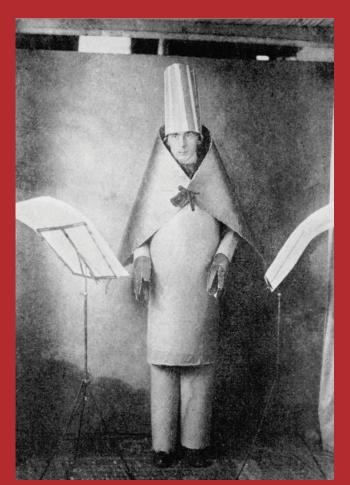# Legibility Out the Window
Hierarchy in the Spotlight

The anti-art crusade's philosophy steered its curators in a direction of visual rebellion, dismissing the cautions of tradition in place of creating with chaos and disorder in mind (Novin, 2011). It was upon the publishing of Dada's third issue in late 1918 that the movement had fully conformed to the ambitions of its manifesto, through its apathy towards orthodox rulings on typography and design (Novin, 2011). Dada went with a bold approach with its design for Dada 3, applying an extensive change to the format from its previous periodicals, with an emboldened san serif style for its title, and the random placement and orientation of text thrown along the breadth of the page (Novin, 2011).

Typography, as influenced by Dada, catered to no rules, instead encompassing a variety of fonts and typefaces, the inclusion of random symbols and characters, the misuse of punctuation, and varying orientations of horizontal, vertical, and diagonal angles ("Typography", n.d.). As a result, Dadaists wanted to push readers onto the edge, applying typography in such a fashion that it neared illegibility ("Typography", n.d.). In spite of the fact that legibility was continually at risk of suffering, it was more crucial that anything made for Dada be visually explosive in the sense that it would scream at those who observed it ("Dada Movement", n.d.). Simultaneously, they exercise hierarchy through upper and lower-case characters and variations of size and bold text ("Typography", n.d.). The odd placement and hierarchy of type in their designs was both an alien display for readers and a deliberate attempt by Dada artists to apply a blemish on the adored, conventional aesthetic that enveloped art (Novin, 2011). However, the employment of chaos as an art form was also meant for Dada to appeal to those who attached themselves to the movement's anarchist sentiment towards society (Novin, 2011). Similarly to futurism's use of typographic elements, Dada used chance as part of its process which posed a blatant contradiction to the norms of conscientious art-making (Novin, 2011).

The style which Dada embodied had explored elements pertaining to a display of visual chaos in order to provide an essence of motion to the designs (Novin, 2011). Essentially the point has always been for Dada to challenge the reader, the art, and the artist ("Dada Movement", n.d.). To pose a question of where control over the creation was present, and if the creator themselves held any agency that would bring them closer to creating something authentic.

Hugo Ball at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916

A typeface salad of Dada Typography

The third issue of the Dada periodical published in December of 1918

References

"99 Ways" Collage. (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2020, from https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Collage-99-Ways/780601/2866648/view?utm_source=google

Archives-Dada. (2012, April 18). Archives-dada. Retrieved November 23, 2020, from https://archives-dada.tumblr.com/post/21323844473/dada-3-zurich-1918-cover

Collins, W., Hass, A., Jeffery, K., Martin, A., Medeiros, R., & Tomljanovic, S. (2015). Graphic design and print production fundamentals. Victoria, BC: BCcampus.

Dada Movement Overview and Key Ideas. (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2020, from https://www.theartstory.org/movement/dada/

Dada Was Born 100 Years Ago. So What? (2016, July 08). Retrieved November 23, 2020, from https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/10/arts/dada-100-years-later.html

DADAISM - ART AND ANTI ART. (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2020, from https://artyfactory.com/art_appreciation/art_movements/dadaism.htm

Dadaism. (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2020, from https://www.linotype.com/786-12586/dadatypography.html

Marcel Duchamp 1887-1968. (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2020, from http://www.dadart.com/dadaism/-dada/035a-duchamp-cage.html

Novin, G. (2011). Dadaism; The meeting point of all contradictions. Retrieved November 23, 2020, from http://-guity-novin.blogspot.com/2011/08/chapter-44-dadaism-meeting-point-of-all.html

Schaub, G. (1985). Hugo Ball Almanach (Vol. 9). Pirmasens, Palatinate.

Sterling, B. (2020, July 11). Hugo Ball's Dada Manifesto, July 1916. Retrieved November 23, 2020, from https://www.wired.com/beyond-the-beyond/2016/07/hugo-balls-dada-manifesto-july-2016/
Tate. (n.d.). Dada – Art Term. Retrieved November 23, 2020, from https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/d/dada

Trachtman, P. (2006, May 01). A Brief History of Dada. Retrieved November 23, 2020, from https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/dada-115169154/

Typography. (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2020, from http://designseminar-1.blogspot.com/p/typography.html