

dada manifesto by tristan tzara

23rd march 1918

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

To launch a manifesto you have to want: A.B. & C., and fulminate against 1, 2, & 3,

work yourself up and sharpen your wings to conquer and circulate lower and upper case As, Bs & Cs, sign, shout, swear, organise prose into a form that is absolutely and irrefutably obvious, prove its ne plus ultra and maintain that novelty resembles life in the same way as the latest apparition of a harlot proves the essence of God. His existence had already been proved by the accordion, the landscape and soft words. * To impose one's A.B.C. is only natural - and therefore regrettable. Everyone does it in the form of a crystalbluff-madonna, or a monetary system, or pharmaceutical preparations, a naked leg being the invitation to an ardent and sterile Spring. The love of novelty is a pleasant sort of cross, it's evidence of a naive don't-give-a-damn attitude, a passing, positive, sign without rhyme or reason. But this need is out of date, too. By giving art the impetus of supreme simplicity - novelty - we are being human and true in relation to innocent pleasures; impulsive and vibrant in order to crucify boredom. At the lighted crossroads, alert, attentive, lying in wait for years, in the forest. * I am writing a manifesto and there's nothing I want, and yet I'm saying certain things, and in principle I am against manifestos, as I am against principles (quantifying measures of the moral value of every phrase - too easy; approximation was invested by the impressionists). *

I'm writing this manifesto to show that you can perform contrary actions at the same time, in one single, fresh breath; I am against action; as for continual contradiction, and affirmation too, I am neither for nor against them, and I won't explain myself because I hate common sense.

DADA - this is a word that throws up ideas so that they can be shot down; every bourgeois is a little playwright, who invents different subjects and who, instead of situating suitable characters on the level of his own intelligence, like chrysalises on chairs, tries to find causes or objects (according to whichever psychoanalytic method he practices) to give weight to his plot, a talking and self-defining story. *

Every spectator is a plotter, if he tries to explain a word (to know!) From his padded refuge of serpentine complications, he allows his instincts to be manipulated. Whence the sorrows of conjugal life.

To be plain: The amusement of redbellies in the mills of empty skulls.

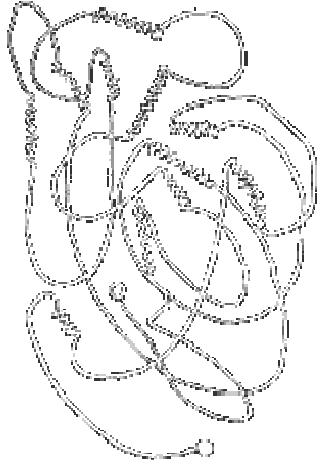


DADA DOES NOT MEAN ANYTHING

If we consider it futile, and if we don't waste our time over a word that doesn't mean anything... The first thought that comes to these minds is of a bacteriological order: at least to discover its etymological, historical or psychological meaning. We read in the papers that the negroes of the Kroo race call the tail of a sacred cow: DADA. A cube, and a mother, in a certain region of Italy, are called: DADA. The word for a hobby horse, a children's nurse, a double affirmative in Russian and 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. Do people imagine they have found the psychic basis common to all humanity? The attempt of Jesus, and the Bible, conceal, under their ample, benevolent wings: shit, animals and days. How can anyone hope to order the chaos that constitutes that infinite, formless variation: man? The principle: "Love thy neighbour" is hypocrisy. "Know thyself" is utopian, but more acceptable because it includes malice. No pity. After the carnage we are left with the hope of a purified humanity. I always speak about myself because I don't want to convince, and I have no right to drag others in my wake, I'm not compelling anyone to follow me, because everyone makes his art in his own way, if he knows anything about the joy that rises like an arrow up to the astral strata, or that which descends into the mines stewn with the flowers of corpses and fertile spasms. Stalactites: look everywhere for them, in creches magnified by pain, eyes as white as angels' hares. Thus DADA was born*, out of a need for independence, out of mistrust for the community. People who join us keep their freedom. We don't accept any theories. We've had enough of the cubist and futurist academies: laboratories of formal ideas. Do we make art in order to earn money and keep the dear bourgeoisie happy? Rhymes have the smack of money, and inflexion slides along the line of the stomach in profile. Every group of artists has ended up at this bank, straddling various comets. Leaving the door open to the possibility of wallowing in comfort and food.

Here we are dropping our anchor in fertile ground.

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



vegetation, resin and rain is our sweat, we bleed and burn with thirst, our blood is strength.

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

There is one kind of literature which never reaches the voracious masses. The work of creative writers, written out of the author's real necessity, and for his own benefit. The awareness of a supreme egoism, wherein laws become significant. * Every page should explode, either because of its profound gravity, or its vortex, vertigo, newness, eternity, or because of its staggering absurdity, the enthusiasm of its principles, or its typography. On the one hand there is a world tottering in its flight, linked to the resounding tinkle of the infernal gamut; on the other hand, there are: the new men. Uncouth, galloping, riding astride on hiccups. And there is a mutilated world and literary medicasters in desperate need of amelioration.

I assure you: there is no beginning, and we are not afraid; we aren't sentimental. We are like a raging wind that rips up the clothes of clouds and prayers, we are preparing the great spectacle of disaster, conflagration and decomposition. Preparing to put an end to mourning, and to replace tears by sirens spreading from one continent to another. Clarions of intense joy, bereft of that poisonous sadness. * DADA is the mark of abstraction; publicity and business are also poetic elements.

I destroy the drawers of the brain, and those of social organisation: to sow demoralisation everywhere, and throw heaven's hand into hell, hell's eyes into heaven, to reinstate the fertile wheel of a universal circus in the Powers of reality, and the fantasy of every individual.

A philosophical questions: from which angle to start looking at life, god, ideas, or anything else. Everything we look at is false. I don't think the relative result is any more important than the choice of patisserie or cherries for dessert. The way people have of looking hurriedly at things from the opposite point of view, so as to impose their opinions indirectly, is called dialectic, in other words, heads I win and tails you lose, dressed up to look scholarly.

If I shout:

Ideal, Ideal, Ideal

Knowledge, Knowledge, Knowledge

Boomboom, Boomboom, Boomboom

I have recorded fairly accurately Progress, Law, Morals, and all the other magnificent qualities that various very intelligent people have discussed in so many books in order, finally, to say that even so everyone has danced according to his own personal boomboom, and that he's right about his boomboom: the satisfaction of unhealthy curiosity; private bell-ringing for inexplicable needs; bath; pecuniary difficulties; a stomach with repercussions on to life; the authority of the mystical baton formulated as the grand finale of a phantom orchestra with mute bows, lubricated by philtres with a basis of animal ammonia. With the blue monocle of an angel they have dug out its interior for twenty sous worth of unanimous gratitude. * If all of them are right, and if all pills are only Pink, let's try for once not to be right. * People think they can explain rationally, by means of thought, what they write. But it's very relative. Thought is a fine thing for philosophy, but it's relative. Psychoanalysis is a dangerous disease, it deadens man's anti-real inclinations and systematises the bourgeoisie. There is no ultimate Truth. Dialectics is an amusing machine that leads us (in banal fashion) to the opinions which we would have held in any case. Do people really think that, by the meticulous subtlety of logic, they have demonstrated the truth and established the accuracy of their opinions? Even if logic were confined by the senses it would still be an organic disease. To this element, philosophers like to add: The power of observation. But this magnificent quality of the mind is precisely the proof of its impotence. People observe, they look at things from one or several points of view, they choose them from amongst the millions that exist. Experience too is the result of chance and of individual abilities. * Science revolts me when it becomes a speculative system and loses its utilitarian character - which is so useless - but is at least individual. I hate slimy objectivity, and harmony, the science that considers that everything is always in order. Carry on, children, humanity ... Science says that we are nature's servants: everything is in order, make both love and war. Carry on, children, humanity, nice kind bourgeois and virgin journalists... * I am against systems; the most acceptable system is that of have none on no principle. * To complete oneself, to perfect oneself in one's own pettiness to the point of filling the little vase of oneself with oneself, even the courage to fight for and against thought, all this can suddenly infernally propel us into the mystery of daily bread and the lilies of the economic field.

DADAIST SPONTANEITY

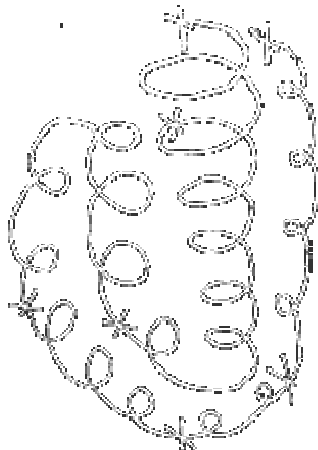
What I call the I-don't-give-a-damn attitude of life is when everyone minds his own business, at the same time as he knows how to respect other individualities, and even how to stand up for himself, the two-step becoming a national anthem, a junk shop, the wireless (the wire-less telephone) transmitting Bach fugues, illuminated advertisements for placards for brothels, the organ broadcasting carnations for God, all this at the same time, and in real terms, replacing photography and unilateral catechism.

Active simplicity.

The incapacity to distinguish between degrees of light: licking the twilight and floating in the huge mouth filled with honey and excrement. Measured against the scale of Eternity, every action is vain - (if we allow thought to have an adventure whose result would be infinitely grotesque - an important factor in the awareness of human incapacity). But if life is a bad joke, with neither goal nor initial accouchement, and because we believe we ought, like clean chrysanthemums, to make the best of a bad bargain, we have declared that the only basis of understanding is: art. It hasn't the importance that we, old hands at the spiritual, have been lavishing on it for centuries. Art does nobody any harm, and those who are capable of taking an interest in it will not only receive caresses, but also a marvellous chance to people the country of their conversation. Art is a private thing, the artist makes it for himself; a comprehensible work is the product of a journalist, and because at this moment I enjoy mixing this monster in oil paints: a paper tube imitating the metal that you press and automatically squeeze out hatred, cowardice and villainy. The artist, or the poet, rejoices in the venom of this mass condensed into one shopwalker of this trade, he is glad to be insulted, it proves his immutability. The author or the artist praised by the papers observes that his work has been understood: a miserable lining to a collaborating with the heat of an animal incubating the baser instincts. Flabby, insipid flesh multiplying itself with the aid of typographical microbes.

We have done violence to the snivelling tendencies in our natures. Every infiltration of this sort is macerated diarrhoea. To encourage this sort of art is to digest it. What we need are strong straightforward, precise works which will be forever misunderstood. Logic is a complication. Logic is always false. It draws the superficial threads of concepts and words towards illusory conclusions and centres. Its chains kill, an enormous myriapod that asphyxiates independence. If it were married to logic, art would be living in incest, engulfing, swallowing its own tail, which still belongs to its body, fornicating in itself, and temperament would become a nightmare tarred and feathered with protestantism, a monument, a mass of heavy, greyish intestines.

But suppleness, enthusiasm and even the joy of injustice, that little truth that we practise as innocents and that makes us beautiful: we are cunning, and our fingers are malleable and glide like the



branches of that insidious and almost liquid plant; this injustice is the indication of our soul, say the cynics. This is also a point of view; but all flowers aren't saints, luckily, and what is divine in us is the awakening of anti-human action. What we are talking about here is a paper flower for the buttonhole of gentlemen who frequent the ball of masked life, the kitchen of grace, our white, lithe or fleshy girl cousins. They make a profit out of what we have selected. The contradiction and unity of opposing poles at the same time may be true. IF we are absolutely determined to utter this platitude, the appendix of alibidinous, evil-smelling morality. Morals have an atrophying effect, like every other pestilential product of the intelligence. Being governed by morals and logic has made it impossible for us to be anything other than impassive towards policemen - the cause of slavery - putrid rats with whom the bourgeois are fed up to the teeth, and who have infected the only corridors of clear and clean glass that remained open to artists.

Every man must shout: there is great destructive, negative work to be done. To sweep, to clean. The cleanliness of the individual materialises after we've gone through folly, the aggressive, complete folly of a world left in the hands of bandits who have demolished and destroyed the centuries. With neither aim nor plan, without organisation: uncontrollable folly, decomposition. Those who are strong in word or in strength will survive, because they are quick to defend themselves; the agility of their limbs and feelings flames on their faceted flanks.

Morals have given rise to charity and pity, two dumplings that have grown like elephants, planets, which people call good. There is nothing good about them. Goodness is lucid, clear and resolute, and ruthless towards compromise and politics. Morality infuses chocolate into every man's veins. This task is not ordained by a supernatural force, but by a trust of ideas-merchants and academic monopolists. Sentimentality: seeing a group of bored and quarrelling men, they invented the calendar and wisdom as a remedy. By sticking labels on to things, the battle of the philosophers we let loose (money-grubbing, mean and meticulous weights and measures) and one understood once again that pity is a feeling, like diarrhoea in relation to disgust, that undermines health, the filthy carrion job of jeopardising the sun. I proclaim the opposition of all the cosmic faculties to that blennorrhoea of a putrid sun that issues from the factories of philosophical thought, the fight to the death, with all the resources of

DADAIST DISGUST

Every product of disgust that is capable of becoming a negation of the family is dada; DADA; acquaintance with all the means hitherto rejected by the sexual prudishness of easy compromise and good manners: **DADA**; abolition of logic, dance of those who are incapable of creation: **DADA**; every hierarchy and social equation established for values by our valets: **DADA**; every object, all objects, feelings and obscurities, every apparition and the precise shock of parallel lines, are means for the battle of: **DADA**; the abolition of memory: **DADA**; the abolition of archaeology: **DADA** the abolition of prophets: **DADA**; the abolition of the future: **DADA**; the absolute and indiscutable belief in every god that is an immediate product of spontaneity: **DADA**; the elegant and unprejudiced leap from on harmony to another sphere; the trajectory of a word, a cry, thrown into the air like an acoustic disc; to respect all individualities in their folly of the moment, whether serious, fearful, timid, ardent, vigorous, decided or enthusiastic; to strip one's church of every useless and unwieldy accessory; to spew out like a luminous cascade any offensive or loving thought, or to cherish it - with the lively satisfaction that it's all precisely the same thing - with the same intensity in the bush, which is free of insects for the blue-blooded, and gilded with the bodies of archangels, with one's soul. Liberty: **DADA DADA DADA**; - the roar of contorted pains, the interweaving of contraries and all contradictions, freaks and irrelevancies: LIFE.

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* in 1916 at the CABARET VOLTAIRE in Zurich