

HUGO BALL
“Dada Fragments” (1916-17)

March 12, 1916—Introduce symmetries and rhythms instead of principles. Contradict the existing world orders...

What we are celebrating is at once a buffoonery and a requiem mass...

June 12, 1916—What we call Dada is a harlequinade made of nothingness in which all higher questions are involved, a gladiator’s gesture, a play with shabby debris, an execution of postured morality and plenitude...

The Dadaist loves the extraordinary, the absurd, even. He knows that life asserts itself in contradictions, and that his age, more than any preceding it, at the destruction of all generous impulses. Every kind of mask is therefore welcome to him, every play at hide and seek in which there is art inherent power of deception. The direct and the primitive appear to him in the midst of this huge anti-nature, as being the supernatural itself. . .

The bankruptcy of ideas having destroyed the concept of humanity to its very innermost strata, the instincts and hereditary backgrounds are now emerging logically. Since no art, politics or religious faith seems adequate to dam this torrent, there remain only the *blague* and the bleeding pose...

The Dadaist trusts more in the sincerity of events than in the wit of persons. To him persons may be had cheaply, his own person not excepted. He no longer believes in the comprehension of things from *one* point of departure, but is nevertheless convinced of the union of all things, of totality, to such an extent that he suffers from dissonances to the point of self-dissolution...

The Dadaist fights against the death-throes and death-drunkenness of his time. Averse to every clever reticence, he cultivates the curiosity of one who experiences light even in the most questionable fortes of insubordination. He knows that this world of systems has gone to pieces, and that the age which demanded cash has organized a bargain sale of godless philosophies. Where bad conscience begins for the market-booth owners’ mild laughter and mild kindness begin for the Dadaist...

June 13, 1916—The image differentiates us. Through the image we comprehend. Whatever it may be—it is night—we hold the print of it in our hands...

The word and the image are one. Painting and composing poetry belong together. Christ is image and word. The word and the image are crucified...

June 18, 1916—We have developed the plasticity of the word to a point which can hardly be surpassed. This result was achieved at the price of the logically constructed, rational sentence, and therefore, also, by renouncing the document (which is only possible by means of a time-robbing grouping of sentences in a logically ordered syntax). We were assisted in our efforts by the special circumstances of our age, which does not allow a real talent either to rest or ripen, forcing it to a premature test of its capacities, as well as by the emphatic clan of our group, whose members sought to surpass each other by an even greater intensification and accentuation of their platform. People may smile, if they want to; language will thank us for

our zeal, even if there should not be any directly visible results. We have charged the word with forces and energies which made it possible for us to rediscover the evangelical concept of the "word" (logos) as a magical complex of images...

November 21, 1916—Note about a criticism of individualism: The accentuated "I" has constant interests, whether they be greedy, dictatorial, vain or lazy. It always follows appetites, so long as it does not become absorbed in society. Whoever renounces his interests, renounces his "I." The "I" and the interests are identical. Therefore, the individualistic-egoistic ideal of the Renaissance ripened to the general union of the mechanized appetites which we now see before us, bleeding and disintegrating.

March 30, 1917—The new art is sympathetic because in an age of total disruption it has conserved the will-to-the-image; because it is inclined to force the image, even though the means and parts be antagonistic. Convention triumphs in the moralistic evaluation of the parts and details; art cannot be concerned with this. It drives toward the in-dwelling, all-connecting life nerve; it is indifferent to external resistance. One might also say: morals are withdrawn from convention, and utilized for the sole purpose of sharpening the senses of measure and weight...

April 18, 1917—Perhaps the art which we are seeking is the key to every former art: a salomonic key that will open all mysteries.

May 23, 1917—Dadaism—a mask play, a burst of laughter? And behind it, a synthesis of the romantic, dandyistic and demonistic theories of the 19th century.