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**FIRST ADVENTURE TO FINAL FLIGHT: THE THEATRE OF TRISTAN
TZARA**

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ABSTRACT

To date, little research has been carried out on the complete theatrical works of Tristan Tzara; this thesis aims to provide a comprehensive discussion of Tzara's works for the stage. In addition to analysing each of Tzara's plays, I will consider actions performed by Tzara and the Paris dadaists at their theatrical events, to demonstrate the variety of performed gestures practiced during the Paris Dada period (1920-1923). I will then determine how Tzara's playwriting developed after Dada during the surrealist period, and towards the end of his theatrical career when he was not formally associated with any specific avant-garde movement. In particular, this thesis addresses three key research questions. What was distinctive about Tzara's approach to theatre as his career developed? To what extent were Tzara's dadaist and surrealist principles embodied in his subsequent period in Paris both during and after his relations with the surrealist group? What are the implications for subsequent theatre and performance practice in light of Tzara's innovations? In addressing this final question, I will show how Tzara's works for the stage anticipate certain tendencies that would become formalised by theatre practitioners such as Bertolt Brecht (alienation/distancing effect) and, more crucially, how Tzara's theatre foreshadows the Theatre of the Absurd, which developed on Parisian stages in the decade after the performance of Tzara's final play.

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DECLARATION

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Erica Kate O'Neill

INTRODUCTION

On the evening of 27 March 1920 at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in Paris, the curtain opened to a stage bathed in green light occupied by a bicycle wheel, picture frames and variously scattered objects. Immobile actors shrouded in hessian sacks and bearing incongruous character titles on nameplates, one by one began spouting the incomprehensible words of a stage play titled *The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine*. This was the Paris premiere of the theatre of Tristan Tzara, inaugurating a theatrical career spanning three decades.

Tzara wrote seven plays between 1916 and 1946: the aforementioned *La Première Aventure Céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine* (*The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine*), 1916; *La Deuxième Aventure Céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine* (*The Second Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine*), 1920; *Le Cœur à Gaz* (*The Gas Heart*), 1921; *Pile ou Face* (*Heads or Tails*, incomplete and unpublished, circa 1923); *Mouchoir de Nuages* (*Handkerchief of Clouds*), 1924; *Faust* (an incomplete and unpublished translation of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*), 1924; and *La Fuite* (*The Flight*), written in 1940 and published in 1946.

Despite the proliferation of playwriting undertaken across his career, the profession 'playwright' is rarely attributed to Tzara, being subordinate to his status as a 'poet.' Yet, in his works for the stage, Tzara combined the roles of avant-garde poet, playwright, director and actor. His early performances were generally short bursts of activity, invented to parody literary and theatrical traditions. Across his career, however, Tzara honed his theatre practice, developing linguistic and dramaturgical devices that have contributed to the evolution of avant-garde theatre. My research aims to re-establish Tzara as a playwright.

Chapter 1 of this thesis reviews current literature on Dada performance in general and Tzara's onstage activities in particular, to situate my research within its scholarly domain. As will be revealed, the majority of sources discussing Tzara and Dada's onstage practice, provide descriptions of Dada performances but often fail to mention in detail the plays that were presented at their events. Marius Hentea's recent study on Tzara – *TaTa Dada: The Real Life and Celestial Adventures of Tristan Tzara* (2014) – is the first English-language

Tzara biography. While this volume provides a detailed account of Tzara's contribution to avant-garde poetry, the theatrical works attributed to Tzara are explored to a lesser extent.¹

Scholarly volumes discussing avant-garde theatre and performance (for example Annabelle Melzer, *Dada and Surrealist Performance*, 1994; Günter Berghaus, *Theatre, Performance and the Historical Avant-Garde*, 2005) do not provide in-depth theoretical analyses of Tzara's contribution to theatre history. Michel Sanouillet's comprehensive opus *Dada in Paris* (2012, first published in French in 1965), offers detailed accounts of the performances that took place between 1920 and 1923 – the hey-day of Paris Dada. However, this study, amongst others (for example Theresa Papanikolas' *Anarchism and the Advent of Paris Dada*, 2010) serves to analyse the performances in relation to the growing antagonism that developed within the Dada circle, leading eventually to the dissolution of Dada and the emergence of Surrealism. While it is necessary to trace the development of Surrealism from the performance experiments of the Paris dadaists, the shortcomings of the literature reveal a lack of interrogation into Dada's theatrical outputs. This thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of the theatre of Tristan Tzara practiced during the Dada period and beyond.

Having reviewed the current literature on Tzara and Dada performance, it is then the task of this thesis to comprehend why Tzara's theatre plays have been largely overlooked in both art historical discussions on the avant-garde, and theatre history scholarship. This situation is compounded by the postmodern assessment that the avant-garde inaugurated performance art as a unique discipline. Performance historian RoseLee Goldberg published the first history of performance art in 1979, which traces the emergence of the discipline from the futurist and dadaist experiments of the early twentieth century.² Goldberg's study became the authorised general account for how performance art developed from pre- and post-World-War-I avant-garde activities, influencing subsequent treatises on performance art, which maintain an avant-garde heritage.³ The interpretation of Dada activity as performance art overlooks the dadaists' understanding and application of standard theatre

¹ This is not a shortcoming of Hentea's book; rather, Tzara's theatre is not its primary focus. Indeed, Hentea discusses each of Tzara's plays, albeit briefly. However, his text does not make space for a complete analysis of Tzara's theatre practice.

² RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988).

³ See: Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996); Annabelle Melzer, *Dada and Surrealist Performance* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1994); Robyn Brentano, 'Outside the Frame: Performance, Art, and Life,' in *Outside the Frame Performance and the Object: A Survey History of Performance Art in the USA from 1950* (Cleveland: Cleveland Centre for Contemporary Art, 1994); and Martha Wilson, 'Performance Art,' *Art Journal*, 56:4 (Winter 1997): 2-3.

practices, and neglects to appreciate Tzara's anticipation of future genres of theatre. In my view, to regard Dada theatre as performance art constitutes a misunderstanding of the avant-garde objective, and accounts for why the plays of Tristan Tzara have been somewhat excluded from both art and theatre history.

Chapter 2 of this thesis addresses this concern. I will detail how Dada and Tzara's theatrical experiments are perceived, after Goldberg, as early performance art manifestations, and have become central to theoretical discussions about the development of performance art. I aim to expose certain myths about Dada performance as spontaneous, immediate, and unrehearsed, pointing to why it is more appropriate to analyse Tzara's onstage activities through the lens of theatre. Furthermore, while Tzara's first plays were directed and performed by the Dada group and supported a somewhat amateur aesthetic, from 1923 Tzara worked with professional actors, directors and designers. It is my assertion that Tzara and the dadaists were not seeking to develop a new art form (latterly termed performance) but turned to the established practice of theatre to promote their art publicly. In my references to futurist, Dada and surrealist theatre, I use the term 'theatrical avant-garde' to differentiate these avant-gardes from post-war avant-garde performance art practitioners.

The peripheral sphere that avant-garde theatre occupies in art and theatre historiography is predominantly due to the uneasy relationship between the dramatic text and modernist avant-garde performance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Stanton Garner identifies:

Presentational rather than literary, bound to the performance moment in its occasionalness and ephemerality, the modernist avant-garde employed the written text as a limited part of a performance event defined predominantly in terms of non-literary elements. That certain currents of avant-garde performance rejected the idea of 'drama' itself in favour of gesture, confrontation, and display only deepens the temptation to view futurist, Dada, constructivist, and other avant-garde dramatic texts as historical footnotes, documents of the lost performance moment to which they are bound.⁴

The assessment of the anti-textual avant-garde is problematised when considering Paris Dada and Tristan Tzara's performance practice, which was firmly rooted in text-based works. The Paris dadaists were predominantly poets, whose creative output largely constituted written and published literary texts.

⁴ Stanton Garner, 'The Gas Heart: Disfigurement and the Dada Body,' *Modern Drama*, vol. 50, no. 4 (2007): 500-516, 500.

Nevertheless, attitudes demoting the text-based nature of avant-garde performance remain; avant-garde performance practice is viewed somewhat as the creation of spontaneous gestures in opposition to the embodied interpretation of theatrical texts. This situation is bound to a long history of anti-theatrical prejudice (inaugurated by Plato's disavowal of theatrical mimesis), which re-emerged in modernist theory in the post-World-War-II era, influencing theoretical frameworks adopted by performance art practitioners and theorists. This phenomenon is discussed in Chapter 2, where I develop the theoretical framework I have termed the performance/theatre complex. The term complex is applied to show that while definitions of theatre and performance point to their distinction, they are inextricably linked in a complicated relationship. Chapter 2 examines specific views on avant-garde modes of creativity that informed a split in the performing arts between theatre and performance. The performance/theatre complex shows how the categories are not so clearly delineated, and allows for a confluence of seemingly opposing situations: immediate and repeated; spontaneous and rehearsed; performativity and theatricality. As shown in Chapter 3 and throughout the remaining chapters, Tzara's onstage activities occupy the centre of this complex. The performance/theatre complex is a useful framework for analysing Tzara's works for the stage.

Chapter 4 introduces the theatre of Tristan Tzara. I will establish the linguistic and dramatic aesthetics of Tzara's plays; note how Tzara's theatre evolves over the course of his playwriting career; and discuss theoretical and dramaturgical practices that Tzara anticipates, including absurdism and alienation. Subsequent chapters of this thesis discuss each of Tzara's plays to address research questions pertaining to Tzara's distinct approach to theatre, and to how his dadaist, and latterly surrealist, principles are embodied in his playwriting practice. The dadaist theatrical programme is addressed in Chapters 3 – 7, which discuss the plays written and performed during the Dada period in Paris. Chapter 8 examines Tzara's relationship to Surrealism, followed by a discussion of Tzara's fourth play *Handkerchief of Clouds*, written and presented in 1924, the same year that André Breton published his first 'Manifesto of Surrealism.' Chapter 11 addresses Tzara's career after Surrealism to examine how Tzara's political and aesthetic principles altered in the immediate pre-World-War-II period, impacting upon his literary career. Chapter 12 discusses Tzara's final play *The Flight*. I will show that understanding Tzara's personal and political situation at the time of writing is crucial to comprehending the significance of the work.

Tzara's theatrical language develops as his playwriting career progresses. In the early Dada plays, Tzara confounds the reader/spectator with nonsense language spoken by humanoid characters lacking individual personalities in order to exemplify the fallibility of language as a rational means of communication. This endeavour is consistent with Dada's attack on language, evident also in the poetic works written during the early Dada period. As Tzara's playwriting practice develops, language becomes more accessible, and transparent narratives emerge in his writing from 1923.

Tzara applied various linguistic devices across his playwriting career, which are introduced in Chapter 4 and rigorously analysed in the subsequent chapters devoted to the individual plays. One notable method of Tzara's is the language collage. Tzara's fellow dadaist, and later surrealist, Louis Aragon described Tzara's application of collage in his 1965 essay 'Petite note sur les collages chez Tristan Tzara et ce qui s'en suit.' In this essay Aragon explains that collage is a medium that condenses separate works as a single essence, and he uses Tzara's theatre to formulate his theoretical thinking on language collage.⁵ In the 'Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love (December 1920),' Tzara provides instructions for how to write a dadaist poem by dismantling and rearranging words and phrases from existing texts. This process was latterly termed the cut-up technique. Tzara applied this procedure in performance at the inaugural Paris Dada event, the 'First Friday of *Littérature*' (23 January 1920), several months before publishing the manifesto. While it remains unknown if Tzara used the cut-up procedure to write poems, I will demonstrate how it features in his theatre practice.

Chapter 6 discusses the collage aesthetic in *The Second Celestial Adventure of Mr Antipyrine*. In this play, Tzara juxtaposes words of incompatible qualities to break down language's communicative function as a Dada device. Chapter 9 examines the language collage in *Handkerchief of Clouds*. Building on Aragon's assessment of this play, I will explain how Tzara inserted scenes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* into the narrative of his own play. This technique not only evidences Tzara's application of linguistic collage, but also his interest in classical theatre, which he both respects and neglects in his manipulation of *Hamlet*: one of Western theatre's seminal texts. Tzara's interest in

⁵ Louis Aragon, 'Petite note sur les collages chez Tristan Tzara et ce qui s'en suit,' *Les Collages* (Paris: Hermann, 1965), 145-146, in Henri Béhar, *Le Théâtre Dada et surréaliste* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1979), 207. All translations from this volume are mine.

theatrical tradition filters through his work even when the intent is to parody such tradition as is the case with his early Dada plays. In the prologue to *The Gas Heart*, for example, Tzara instructs that '[a]ctors are requested to give this play the attention due a masterpiece such as *Macbeth* or *Chantecler*.'⁶ This statement is ironic when applied to *The Gas Heart*, a play that champions the application of nonsense in both linguistic and dramatic form. However, the parodic reference to iconic texts from theatre history conceals an interest in theatrical tradition, which Tzara hoped to renew by his playwriting practice.

Tzara's fascination with classical theatre peaked with his 1924 translation of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, of which he translated only excerpts. Tzara said of his endeavour, 'there is a test to parallel the intensity and quality of Marlowe's work in a French translation.'⁷ However, like his transposition of *Hamlet* onto *Handkerchief of Clouds*, it is possible that Tzara was not satisfied with translating this play as a stand-alone work. I suggest in Chapter 10 that Tzara intended to combine the *Faust* extracts with another play written contemporaneously: the incomplete and unpublished *Heads or Tails*. These works have largely fallen into obscurity and have not been previously examined in any detail. However, a comparison of the two plays provides a missing link to understanding Tzara's application of the language collage. I will show that Tzara's *Faust* fits into the absent Act II of *Heads or Tails*.

Tzara's theatrical collages reveal his distinct approach to the theatre text and to dramaturgy; they foreshadow more contemporary practices, notably postdramatic theatre as described by Hans-Thies Lehmann. Lehmann suggests that in postdramatic theatre, the text is 'material' that may be manipulated, and is considered only one part amongst elements (of equal importance) that contribute to the theatrical performance.⁸ This thesis demonstrates how Tzara anticipates theatrical tendencies decades before their commonplace use in contemporary practice.

Tzara's manipulation of the physical stage space identifies another aspect of innovation. In the opening stage direction to *Handkerchief of Clouds*, Tzara describes a space that is

⁶ Tzara, *The Gas Heart*, trans. Michael Benedikt, in *Modern French Drama: An Anthology of Plays*, ed. Michael Benedikt and George E. Wellwarth (New York: E.P Dutton & Co., Inc., 1996), 133.

⁷ Tzara, Letter to the editor, *Transatlantic Review* no. 3 (September 1924), 311, in Tristan Tzara, *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. Henri Béhar, 6 vols. (Paris: Flammarion, 1975-1991), I:724. Hereafter cited as *OC*. All translations from Tzara's *OC* are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁸ Hans Thies-Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 17.

divided across two playing areas: a platform centre stage, and an area below the platform occupied by secondary characters. Tzara's physical arrangement for *Handkerchief of Clouds* takes inspiration from the split-level stage designs of Alexander Tairov, director and founder of the Kamerny (Chamber) Theatre in Moscow, whose productions toured Paris in 1923.⁹ In his essay 'Le théâtre Kamerny de Moscou,' Tzara reproduces Tairov's theatrical edict: 'the floor of the stage should not have a single surface but should be broken, depending on the problems of the show, in a series of surfaces, either horizontal or inclined and at different levels, because a plain floor is obviously inexpressive.'¹⁰ This situation would be applied in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, and also in Tzara's incomplete and unperformed play *Heads or Tails*. In the stage directions for the latter, Tzara commands the stage be broken by a section of floor that can be removed and replaced dependent on the scene. Tzara's experimental stage designs are consistent with modernist reconstructions of theatrical space, such as those by Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig in the early twentieth century.¹¹ These practitioners, like Tzara, altered the traditional organisation of the stage to better support the mechanisms of the play.

Additionally, after the practice of the Moscow theatre, Tzara exposes the (usually hidden) mechanical elements of stagecraft. Therefore, in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, set and costume changes occur without a curtain being drawn, stage technicians remain onstage during the performance, and lighting projectors are placed downstage in front of the audience. In this way, Tzara's dramaturgy highlights the artifice of dramatic construction, providing an alternative framework to representational notions of theatrical mimesis. Such devices, which Tzara introduced on stage in 1924, would be formalised by Bertolt Brecht on European stages in the late 1920s. While Brecht and Tzara were never formally affiliated, this thesis demonstrates that dramaturgical techniques established by Tzara in Paris in the early-mid 1920s align to Brecht's later-defined alienation or distancing effect.

⁹ Tzara's innovative stage designs of 1923-24 arrive just after the revolutionary designs of the Constructivist theatre in Russia. Notably, Lyobov Popova's sets designed for Vsevolod Meyerhold's Russian Constructivist theatre, and also the mobile sets designed by Varvaro Stepanova, circa. 1922, share in Tzara's application of movable scenery. For Constructivist theatre and stage design see Denis Bablet, *Les révolutions scéniques du XXe siècle* (Paris: Société internationale d'art XXe siècle, 1975). While this thesis will consider Tzara's influence of the Kamerny Theatre specifically, there is scope for further research to consider Tzara's awareness of these other experimental theatre practices issuing from Russia at the same time as Tzara's theatrical experiments of the early 1920s.

¹⁰ Alexandre Tairov, reproduced by Tzara in 'Le théâtre Kamerny de Moscou,' (undated) *OC*, 1:618.

¹¹ For the modernist revision of scenography, see Bablet.

Chapters 8 and 9 address Tzara and Surrealism. It is necessary to chart the relationship between Tzara and the leader of Surrealism, André Breton, to establish the wider relationship between Dada and Surrealism, and subsequently, the distinction between Dada and surrealist theatre. In my discussion of *Handkerchief of Clouds*, I examine to what extent this play evidences surrealist tendencies. Tzara introduces cinematic techniques in *Handkerchief of Clouds* and *Heads or Tails*: with the aid of backdrops and projected images, scenes switch rapidly from place to place like cuts in film. I will argue that, in opposition to Surrealism, Tzara applies cinematic techniques onstage to navigate the spectator through certain nuances and shifts in the dramatic narrative. The application of similar techniques in Surrealism is, by contrast, to disorientate the viewer.

Tzara's affiliation with Surrealism ended in 1935. Chapter 11 deals with Tzara's work in the post-surrealist phase up to the outbreak of World War II, followed by a discussion of Tzara's experience during and after the war. At this time, Tzara's works evidence a transparent humanism. In the immediate post-World-War-II period, existentialism became the dominant intellectual and philosophical movement in France. This chapter discusses how Tzara's final play *The Flight* (1940, published in 1946) indicates existential humanism as described by Jean-Paul Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism*, also published in 1946. Tzara presents themes relating to the human experience across his playwriting; however, these themes are clouded in nonsense language and inconsistent dialogue in the Dada plays, and a close analysis of the early texts is required to identify the social concerns contained therein. Chapter 7 determines how Tzara's humanism presents in *The Gas Heart*: a play comprising characters who make up a broken and deformed face (Eye, Ear, Nose, Mouth, Neck and Eyebrow). Following Stanton Garner's assessment of *The Gas Heart*, I situate this play within its socio-historical context. Tzara wrote *The Gas Heart* during the immediate post-World-War-I period in France, when physical deformity (caused by trench warfare) and reconstructive surgery were prominent issues in both medical fields and wider society. *The Gas Heart*'s characters, language and dramaturgy highlight this historical moment of corporeal crisis. Tzara's humanist concerns become more immediate in his later plays. *Handkerchief of Clouds* and *Heads or Tails* deal with human relationships around the theme of unrequited love. *The Flight* follows a family as they experience the entirety of human existence: birth, death, love, pain, loss and war. While *The Flight*'s dialogue contains complex visual images, its themes are more accessible than is the case in Tzara's earlier plays.

At the same time as Sartre prepared *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Albert Camus was writing his seminal text *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in which he defines the concept of the absurd. Absurdism identifies the conflict that arises between man's attempt to rationalise the experience of existence, and his inability to do so. Each of Tzara's plays evidence an early example of absurdism on stage, notably through his use of absurd language (language satire and verbal farce, which are introduced in Chapter 4 and returned to throughout), and also in the themes presented (Tzara's characters are often trapped in futile situations). These tropes would become typified by absurdist drama as it developed in France in the decade following the first performance of Tzara's *The Flight*.

Tzara's influence on the Theatre of the Absurd is fundamental to addressing my final research question on the implications for subsequent theatre practice in light of Tzara's innovations. In his seminal text on *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin discusses Tzara amongst the forerunners of absurdism on stage. However, like other sources discussing Dada theatre and performance (to be clarified further in Chapter 1), only a brief mention is made of Tzara's early Dada works: the *Celestial Adventure* plays and *The Gas Heart*.¹² A closer reading of each of Tzara's works for the stage reveals that the linguistic and dramatic techniques of Dada theatre, and the themes raised in Tzara's plays, directly anticipate stylistic and thematic tendencies that would emerge with Eugene Ionesco's and Samuel Beckett's absurdist dramas.

Certainly, the exuberance, hope and optimism of the avant-garde is not present in absurdist texts; the Theatre of the Absurd can be described as a saturnine version of Dada. Where Dada's playful and colourful costumes, and sets comprising strange objects – bicycle wheels, musical instruments, mannequins, giant papier-mâché phalluses all arranged in striking combinations designed to delight the visual senses – offer an optimistic alternative to the horrors of World War I, the Theatre of the Absurd presents a hopeless and stark assessment of life in the wake of World War II. However, a close analysis of Tzara's texts reveals characters trapped in conflict between the will for action (or communication), and their inability to achieve said action, as would become commonplace in the Theatre of the Absurd. While this thesis does not exhaust the connections between Tzara, Dada and the Theatre of the Absurd as it is not the central focus of the current work, I will examine how

¹² Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 307-9.

specific instances in Tzara's theatre mirror moments from iconic Theatre of the Absurd texts, predominantly those of Samuel Beckett.

Furthermore, while I will not pretend to draw a direct line of influence from Tzara to Beckett (although a connection can be made by following Beckett's interaction with the surrealists in Paris from 1928, during which time Tzara was still affiliated with Surrealism), I will illustrate how dramaturgical techniques practiced by Tzara are also evident in Beckett's work decades later. Tzara (and absurdist playwrights) emphasise the dadaist (and absurdist) intention: in the face of human suffering, and the reality of death, human existence lacks meaning and purpose. In the absence of meaning, the experience of reality is rendered absurd, and language as a means of communication breaks down, giving way to irrational and illogical speech. By analysing the language and form of Tzara's plays and by noting their evolution, the specific nature of dadaist theatricality can be recognised.

Fundamentally, I argue for Tzara's works to be included as important contributions to avant-garde theatre, and for Tzara's plays, and his role as a playwright, to be situated in the timeline of theatre history. This thesis demonstrates that studying Tzara's play texts reveals previously unexamined nuances in his approach to language and art.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Before investigating Tristan Tzara's works for the stage, this chapter will survey the current literature on Tzara and Dada. I will review discussions of Tzara's onstage practice, and sources that theorise avant-garde theatre and performance, to identify how Tzara and Dada are represented in this field. I will show how my research intersects this literature. This review is divided into thematically grouped sections, which I have identified as primary concerns for Dada historians: audience, chance, language, and politics.

Audience

Literature discussing Dada theatre and performance largely prioritises investigating Dada's relationship with its audience. Dada developed out of onstage activities at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, 1916, and continued to create live events guided by a quest to better reach their public. Deborah Lewer examines the relationship between Zurich Dada and its various audiences; discussing the 'Eighth Dada Soirée,' 9 April 1919, Lewer notes that it has been historicized by its participants as 'the climax of the movement. It was designed both to antagonise and to please an audience who were by now expecting a scandal.' The audience's 'outraged actions and reaction' dominate subsequent discussions on this event.¹³ I have identified that this phenomenon permeates the literature and archival material on Dada events, neglecting comprehensive discussion on the programmed performances. In retrospective accounts of their activities, the dadaists mythologised their events by highlighting the vehement nature of audience relations.¹⁴ Antagonism between onstage performer and an irritated audience would become a central tenet of the Paris Dada soirées, and Lewer's account provides an early example of this development in Zurich.

While audiences of Dada activity at the Cabaret Voltaire generally consisted of those who had an interest in a new tendency in modern art, the later, larger performances in Zurich and Paris served a much wider, theatre-going public. Günter Berghaus suggests that these later Dada events were designed specifically to provoke spectators. Berghaus explains that

¹³ Deborah Lewer, 'Dada's Genesis: Zurich,' in *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, ed. David Hopkins (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 32.

¹⁴ For first-hand accounts of Dada's onstage activities see Robert Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), and Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2016). Responses to Dada events are included throughout this thesis.

rather than challenging accepted structures of theatrical presentation, Dada aimed to challenge traditional forms of communication between active performer and passive recipient. That is, the purpose of Dada performance was ‘to provoke its bourgeois audience to the extent that they reversed the direction of theatrical communication and “performed the script in the hall.”’¹⁵

While Berghaus’ observation is true of the audience/performer dynamic at Zurich Dada soirées and the manifestations of Paris Dada that took place in theatre venues, later Dada performances did attempt to challenge traditional theatrical frameworks. In 1921, certain Paris Dada performances relocated from indoor theatres to outdoor settings to emphasise audience interaction. By ‘guiding our public to places,’ André Breton explained at the time, these excursions had greater impact as ‘we could hold their attention better than in a theatre, because the very fact of going there entails a certain good will on their part.’¹⁶ However, Breton’s concept of inclusivity was not always the goal of Dada’s audience relations, generally accepted as predicated on antagonism and violence. Discussing the 1920 series of Dada manifestations, Breton conceded that ‘by a curious phenomenon [...] we ended up gauging our appeal by the cries made against us.’¹⁷ Tzara’s biographer, Marius Hentea, notes that during Breton’s performance of Francis Picabia’s ‘Manifeste Cannibale Dada’ at the ‘Manifestation Dada’ (25 March 1920, Théâtre de l’Œuvre), the audience responded with such violence that Tzara, crying tears of joy said: ‘listen to them... [D]ada lives, it’s magnificent!’¹⁸ I find this account particularly useful, for it suggests that Tzara measured the success of Dada activities by audience participation.

Tzara had arrived in Paris on 17 January 1920, and Paris Dada was inaugurated at ‘Le Premier Vendredi de *Littérature* (First Friday of *Littérature*),’ 23 January 1920 at the Palais des Fêtes. Hentea describes Tzara’s contribution to this event, providing a more detailed account than is given elsewhere. He describes how Tzara entered the stage with exaggeratedly tiny steps and took from his pocket the most recent parliamentary address by far-right politician Léon Daudet. Tzara proceeded to cut the speech into fragments and,

¹⁵ Günter Berghaus (quoting Tzara, ‘Chronique Zurichoise,’ *OC*, 1:546), *Avant-Garde Performance: live events and electronic technologies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 45. Hereafter cited as *AGP*.

¹⁶ André Breton, ‘Artificial Hells. Inauguration of the “1921 Dada Season,”’ trans. Matthew S. Witkovsky, *October*, Vol. 105, Dada (Summer, 2003): 137-144, 140.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁸ Germaine Everling, *L’Anneau de Saturne* (Paris: Fayard, 1970), 122, quoted in Marius Hentea, *TaTa Dada: The Real Life and Celestial Adventures of Tristan Tzara* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2014), 145.

pulling the pieces from a hat, performed the rearranged speech to a cacophony of clanging instruments from the wings.¹⁹ Louis Aragon later explained that with Tzara's input, the tone of the first planned event took a turn from a poetic recitation to an 'anti-poetic event of the most violent order.'²⁰

In his discussion of this event, Berghaus notes that 'pandemonium broke out and a mass exodus occurred' when Tzara 'read Léon Daudet's latest pro-royalist speech.'²¹ However, Berghaus does not describe *how* Tzara performed the speech. Other accounts fail to address Tzara's performed action completely. Michel Sanouillet describes how 'Tzara stepped forward and began to read the last speech of Léon Daudet.'²² Janine Mileaf and Matthew Witkovsky discuss Tzara's 'decision to read, with cacophonous accompaniment, the words of reactionary French politician Léon Daudet...'²³ Elizabeth Legge also neglects Tzara's cut-up method.²⁴ This performed moment has not been rigorously analysed. Reciting a speech previously read in parliament is considerably different from chopping it into pieces, thus undermining its communicative function. This situation is addressed in Chapter 3 where I reveal the impact of Tzara's performance on subsequent Dada experiments. Notably, Tzara's 'First Friday' action predates the 'Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love (December 1920),' in which Tzara first explained his 'cut-up' technique.

Understanding the manner in which Tzara performed this action impacts how the performance is perceived, and stimulates debate about the audience's hostile response. It is of note to mention that Daudet's heritage granted him a significant position in French politics and culture. Married to Jeanne Hugo, Victor Hugo's granddaughter, and son of the novelist Alphonse Daudet, Léon Daudet's 'cultural patrimony was incomparable.'²⁵ Hentea suggests that the sight of 'this foreigner [Tzara] mutilating the words of a staunch

¹⁹ Hentea, 2014, 134.

²⁰ Louis Aragon, 'Premier Vendredi de *Littérature*,' in *Projet d'histoire littéraire contemporaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 66, quoted in Berghaus, *Theatre, Performance and the Historical Avant-Garde* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 157. Hereafter cited as *TPH*.

²¹ Berghaus, *TPH*, 157.

²² Michel Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, trans. Sharmila Ganguly (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2009), 104-105.

²³ Janine Mileaf and Matthew S. Witkovsky. 'Paris,' in *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hanover, Cologne, New York, Paris*, ed. Leah Dickerman (Washington: D.A.P/The National Gallery of Art, 2005), 351.

²⁴ Elizabeth Legge, 'Blinds and Blackness: Looking Again at Tristan Tzara,' in *Virgin Microbe: Essays on Dada*, ed. David Hopkins and Michael White (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 193-4.

²⁵ Hentea, 2014, 134.

French patriot [...] sent the audience into a delirium.’²⁶ André Salmon was ‘enraged,’ and Juan Gris, though ‘hardly sympathetic toward Daudet’s politics [...] threatened to punch Tzara.’²⁷ Tzara neglected to comment on the political bent of his action and later recalled: ‘all that I wanted to convey was simply that my presence on stage, the sight of my face and my movements, ought to satisfy people’s curiosity and that anything I might have said really had no importance.’²⁸ However, as Hentea notes, Tzara ‘knew that his actions on stage were not politically innocent.’²⁹ Additionally, Legge’s discussion of this event successfully reveals the political dimension of Tzara’s action. Juxtaposing Tzara’s status as a foreign Jew and Léon Daudet’s anti-Semitic views, Legge suggests that ‘Daudet provided a perfectly hostile frame for Tzara’s debut.’³⁰ Tzara, Dada and politics is further addressed in the ‘Politics: Dada into Surrealism’ section of this review.

First-hand accounts of the 1920 Dada events reveal the dadaists’ intention regarding their audience. For example, this comment from an unspecified source (dated to 1920), explains:

We search out the proper stimulants to make the public eloquent, comic, indignant, furious [...] we play the public like an immense sensitive instrument [...] it unconsciously collaborates with us [...] We have transposed the moment where the work of art is created.³¹

I find this quotation particularly striking, for it suggests that the site of creation for Dada works is located in the interaction between performers and spectators. This thesis addresses assumptions about Dada works that developed out of performative actions, as opposed to literary traditions. I will return to this notion in detail to investigate the tension between rehearsed (repeated) theatrical actions, and immediate (unique) performed moments: the performance/theatre complex. This complex questions to what extent a work can be said to exist only in the moment of its incarnation onstage.

Claire Bishop’s overarching account of the role of ‘participation’ in twentieth-century art, defines participatory art whereby ‘people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theatre and performance.’ In this way ‘the artist is conceived

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Tzara, ‘Memoirs of Dadaism,’ in Edmund Wilson, *Axel’s Castle: A Study in Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (New York and London: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943), 304.

²⁹ Hentea, 2014, 134.

³⁰ Legge, in *Virgin Microbe*, 194.

³¹ Source unspecified (1920), Picabia Dossiers, vol. 2, Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet (hereafter cited as BLJD), quoted in Hentea, 2014, 147.

less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*.³² This formulation questions the condition of passive spectatorship.

In his seminal text *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Rancière analyses discourse on passive spectatorship as beginning with humanist thought in the Enlightenment. Such views define the spectator as an inactive and passive receiver of onstage action.³³ Rancière suggests that theatre reformers such as Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud, sought an alternative understanding of the spectator, whereby ‘the passive optical relationship implied by the very term [spectator] is subjected to a different relationship – that implied by another word, one which refers to what is produced on the stage: *drama*. Drama means action.’³⁴ In 1916, the poet and playwright Guillaume Apollinaire defined his play *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (*The Breasts of Tiresias*) as ‘a drama, meaning an action,’ and sought to reform theatre by restructuring the relationship between the audience and performers.³⁵ Apollinaire’s play influenced subsequent avant-garde theatre, notably, dadaist. Therefore, Rancière’s analysis also applies to the theatrical avant-garde’s understanding of theatre as ‘the place where an action is taken to its conclusion by bodies in motion in front of living bodies that are to be mobilized.’ In this way the spectator’s ‘power’ is ‘reactivated in the performance;’ the spectator participates in the construction of the onstage drama/action.³⁶

Rancière establishes that the reformation of theatre – based on a need to promote active participation (in turn based on an assumption that the spectator in theatre is passive) – revived Platonic anti-theatricalism³⁷ that I argue is sustained in discourse on performance art. Rancière’s discussion on spectatorship and Artaud will be assessed further in the second chapter of this thesis on the performance/theatre complex. I will show that the postmodern reading of Artaud led to a misunderstanding of the avant-garde objective, establishing binary positions that categorise performance art as fulfilling active spectatorship and theatre as promoting passivity.

³² Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells* (London: Verso, 2012), 2.

³³ Rancière suggests the view of the spectator as passive is based on an understanding of: viewing being the opposite of knowledge (the spectator is considered to view theatre in a state of ignorance); viewing is the opposite of acting (the spectator remains immobile in their seat; passive). Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 2.

³⁴ Rancière, 3.

³⁵ Guillaume Apollinaire, ‘Prologue,’ *The Breasts of Tiresias*, trans. Michael Benedikt, in *Modern French Drama*, 56.

³⁶ Rancière, 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5

Bishop establishes that binary positions of active/passive spectatorship emerged with Futurism, one of the first art movements to incorporate performance as an artistic practice, and which sought to break down conventional modes of spectatorship.³⁸ Chroniclers of Dada performance necessarily discuss Dada's absorption of Italian Futurism, for the soirées and manifestations organised by the dadaists have a heritage in the futurist *serate* and futurist theatre theory. Filippo Marinetti's 1913 manifesto defines the 'variety theatre' as:

the only theatre in which the public does not remain inert like a stupid onlooker, but noisily participates in the action. Itself singing, accompanying the orchestra, communicating with the actor with unexpected quips and extravagant dialogues. The action is carried on at the same time on stage, in the boxes and in the pit.³⁹

This definition can be ascribed to Dada's ambition for performance also. As Tzara stated, the dadaist theatre 'will entrust the stage direction to the subtle invention of the explosive wind, scenario in the audience, visible direction, grotesque props...'⁴⁰

Berghaus suggests that Dada took on 'many of the central tenets of Futurism, but step by step filled them with new meaning, or – one might say – they drained them of their old meaning and thereby moved beyond the parameters of what had been established by the futurists.'⁴¹ However, the dadaist manifestation and the futurist *serate* are so closely related that Berghaus' claim for the specificity nature of Dada performance remains to be established. The futurist *serate* and the dadaist manifestation were variety events staged in theatre halls.⁴² Their programmes consisted of poetry and manifesto recitals, onstage presentations of artworks, music, dance, and plays. While the content of the individual programmed items were unique to each movement's agenda for art (given the socio-political differences between pre-war Italy and post-war France), their structures followed the same format. Above all, both sought a direct interaction with the public.

Berghaus maintains, however, that while there is undoubtedly an inheritance from the futurist theatre, 'the specific quality of the interaction with the audiences in Zurich, Berlin, and Paris determined the emergence of a recognisable [d]adaist performance art.'⁴³

³⁸ Bishop, 44.

³⁹ F.T Marinetti, 'The Variety Theatre,' trans. D. Nevile Lees, *The Mask*, vol. 6, no. 3 (January, 1914): 188-193.

⁴⁰ Tristan Tzara, 'Zurich Chronicle (1915-1918),' in Motherwell, 238.

⁴¹ Berghaus, *TPH*, 177.

⁴² Part of the mythology surrounding avant-garde performance deals with the supposed spontaneous nature of the events; lacking preparation or rehearsal. This fallacy will be addressed by my research as I debunk the myth that the dadaists did not rehearse.

⁴³ Berghaus, *TPH*, 169.

Berghaus' statement reveals how commentary on Dada performance impacts categorical definitions which separate theatre from performance art. Maintaining that Dada's onstage activities heralded a new art form, distinguishes their practice from the established format of theatre. I argue that Dada practice eschews neat classification. Furthermore, I will discuss the legacy of Dada's onstage activity – not in terms of establishing a recognisable performance art – but rather how Tzara's plays impacted subsequent theatrical developments. This genealogy, left unattended in Dada scholarship, is a clearer framework for discussing the 'specific quality' of Dada performance.

Bishop explains that the 1921 Dada season of events (which included 'The Visit to the Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre' and 'The Trial of Maurice Barrès') shifted focus away from the production of scandal, which characterised the manifestation format. Guiding this new direction was a desire to take Dada audiences out of the theatre: 'breaking out of cabaret and theatre conventions to create situations where the public would be confronted with a new type of artistic action and spectatorship.'⁴⁴ Berghaus explains how certain dadaists realised that to create works in theatres and galleries was not sufficient, that they had to 'leave the closed world of art and literature behind and link up with the political events on the street.'⁴⁵ Additionally, Janine Mileaf and Matthew Witkovsky recognise that 'translating confrontation from the stages of rented entertainment halls into the "free" space of the street did entail a revolutionary incursion, a model of confrontational urban performance.'⁴⁶ However, what is not discussed by these chroniclers of the Dada season 1921, is that Dada never performed on 'the street.' 'The Visit to the Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre' required spectators to gather in a church yard; 'The Trial of Maurice Barrès' took place on a proscenium stage in a lecture hall.

In Breton's post mortem of Dada's 1921 activities, he says: 'The "Dada Season," which began 14 April 1921, with a visit to the church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, does not intend to resemble the preceding season. Last year, Dada activity remained wholly artistic (or anti-artistic, if one prefers – I don't distinguish between the two). This year, Dada proposes to raise the debate and take the discussion on moral grounds.'⁴⁷ Bishop suggests that the new direction of the 1921 events, 'leaned instead towards more refined and meaningful forms

⁴⁴ Bishop, 71.

⁴⁵ Berghaus, *TPH*, 168.

⁴⁶ Mileaf and Witkovsky, 354.

⁴⁷ Breton, 'Artificial Hells,' 140.

of participatory experience.’⁴⁸ However, Bishop fails to discuss the individual performances that took place at ‘The Visit.’ Breton’s ‘impromptu’ lecture for example, I argue, maintains the provocation of the 1920 events:

BRETON: ...We let people believe that Dada was dead. But it was just an experiment. We find you as stupid as you were at the first Dada event, rushing in as a crowd after reading the first notice in newspapers made in your image! [...] Do you believe that we have talent, that we are destined for any success other than the scandalous success that we are having from you? [...] We will never come to any good... but neither will you!⁴⁹

Breton’s speech reveals a contradiction in his intention. His address is directed *at* the audience, opposing interaction. Furthermore, the content of the speech retains the mode of attack characteristic of the manifestos read during the 1920 events. Breton’s new vision for participatory experience consequently retains a division between performers and audience. Returning to Breton’s quotation about the 1921 Dada season – ‘[by] guiding our public to the places we could hold their attention better than in a theatre’⁵⁰ – identifies the audience as attentive spectators, not participants or fellow creators of the work.

Bishop also discusses the 1921 ‘Trial of Maurice Barrès.’ Bishop claims that this event encouraged a more active role on the part of the public, since fliers advertising the event invited twelve people to apply to act as the jury:

Twelve spectators will constitute the jury. We would be grateful to everyone who would like to take part to register in advance at Au Sans Pareil, 37 Avenue Kléber, before 11 May 1921.⁵¹

Bishop fails to mention (and I have not discovered elsewhere) if the public indeed took part, the only available photograph of the event (Fig. 1) shows only the dadaists onstage. The structure of the auditorium (the Salle des Sociétés Savantes) is notable for its raised stage under which the audience were seated, creating a physical division between onstage performers and spectating audience. Colby Chamberlain’s account reveals that the audience – bored with the solemn proceedings – threw peas and flowers onstage, and applauded latecomers:

But if this unruly behaviour was intended to goad the young Dadas into further audacity, Breton would deny the satisfaction. Furiously he rang the bell of the chief magistrate, until the audience again settled into silence.⁵²

⁴⁸ Bishop, 71.

⁴⁹ Breton’s speech was printed in Asté d’Esparbès’ review of the event, *Comœdia*, 15 April 1921, quoted in Sanouillet, 179.

⁵⁰ Mileaf and Witkovsky, 354.

⁵¹ Quoted in Bishop, 72.

⁵² Colby Chamberlain, ‘Dada on Trial: The Barrès affair and the end of a movement,’ *Cabinet*, issue 45 (2012): 24-29.

Breton's denial of interaction complicates its status as participatory art. Annabelle Melzer discusses 'The Trial' as 'a highly organised evening of theatre,'⁵³ and Mileaf and Witkovsky explain how 'The Trial' represented 'Dada theatre as a courtroom debate.'⁵⁴ The latter statements here imply that rather than engaging a new form of participatory performance, the dadaists had returned to the presentational structure established in the previous year. Yet unlike the 1920 manifestation format, audience interaction was now discouraged.

In my discussion of the 1921 Grand Season Dada, I will synthesise the arguments discussed here, first-hand accounts of the dadaists, and contemporaneous press reviews, to better analyse the condition of audience participation.⁵⁵ I will ascertain to what extent the mythology of Dada performance as participatory and improvisational can be challenged.

Chance: Improvisation versus Rehearsal

This section discusses literature dealing with chance in Dada performance. An area of research that is central to my study concerns to what extent Dada performances were rehearsed. The earlier Dada events in Zurich promoted an aesthetic of spontaneity and improvisation. According to Dieter Mersch, the Cabaret Voltaire was a place for experimentation: 'There was an abundance of commercial and amateurish performances – a spontaneous improvisational theatre [...] There were no extensive rehearsals...'⁵⁶ Conversely, Lewer suggests that despite the spontaneous nature of the Cabaret Voltaire evenings, rehearsals did take place. Furthermore, Lewer provides a compelling and detailed account of how the programme for the 'First Dada Soirée,' 14 July 1916, at the Zunfthaus zur Waag included reprisals of performances (or types of performances) that had previously taken place at the Cabaret Voltaire.⁵⁷

⁵³ Annabelle Melzer, *Dada and Surrealist Performance* (Baltimore, Md.; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 154.

⁵⁴ Mileaf and Witkovsky, 353.

⁵⁵ Press reviews are collected in Picabia Dossiers, BLJD. All translations from BLJD documents are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁵⁶ Dieter Mersch, 'Research Institute Dada Soirees. The Cabaret Voltaire and its Consequences,' in *Genesis Dada: 100 Years of Dada Zurich*, ed. Astrid von Asten, Sylvie Kyeck and Adrian Noltz (Zurich: Landes-Stiftung Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck and Verlag Schiedegger & Spiess, 2016), 162.

⁵⁷ Lewer, in *A Companion...*, 27.

After the Cabaret closed, Dada established the Galerie Dada in January 1917, and ‘Tzara increasingly took over the management of affairs...’⁵⁸ Hentea discusses Tzara’s ambition to move away from an improvisational aesthetic at this time. ‘Although Dada had thrived on the spontaneity of the stage, Tzara felt that the movement could reach greater heights through calculated performances.’⁵⁹ Lewer explains that ‘events at the Galerie Dada were “controlled” from the outset. Programmes were planned, printed, and distributed in advance,’ and events were staged according to conventional theatre/exhibition practices. ‘Dada at the Galerie operated in closer accord with the formats and spaces of bourgeois culture.’⁶⁰ Furthermore, Hentea suggests that the new programme for planned theatrical events, aligned Dada with the ‘institutional trappings of culture.’ Under Tzara, Dada had penetrated the sphere it sought to attack: the bourgeois theatre.⁶¹

Undoubtedly, Dada events in Zurich post Cabaret Voltaire were produced on a grander scale, and the presentations were more experimental: simultaneous poems grew from three persons to twenty (on one occasion); scripted plays were presented with lights, sound and costume; professional dancers from Rudolph Laban’s school contributed masked dances; musicians performed both traditional and experimental music. Tanja Buchholz recognises that this new structure (with its fixed programme, large audience, and ticketed entry) informed Tzara’s approach to theatrical presentation.⁶² This is an important shift in Tzara’s operation of Dada. As will be detailed in subsequent chapters, Tzara continued this *modus operandi* in Paris, where Dada performances were tightly organised and staged in popular theatres and elegant opera houses.

The status of Dada’s ‘improvisational’ performance aesthetic relates to the application of chance in Dada works. Abigail Susik discusses Dada chance as practiced within a controlled framework and cites Tzara’s cut-up technique as a seminal example of Dada chance. Susik surmises that chance in Dada was always practiced ‘through a deliberate system of dismantling, only thereafter inviting hazard into the work in the guise of ineradicable forces...’⁶³ As previously established, Tzara performed the cut-up technique at

⁵⁸ Lewer, ‘From the Cabaret Voltaire to the Kaufleutensaal: “Mapping” Zurich Dada,’ in *Dada Zurich: A Clown’s Game from Nothing*, ed. Brigitte Pichon and Karl Riha (Boston: G K Hall & Co., 1996), 52-3.

⁵⁹ Hentea, 2014, 82.

⁶⁰ Lewer, in *Dada Zurich*, 53.

⁶¹ Hentea, 2014, 82.

⁶² Tanja Buchholz, ‘Galerie Dada,’ in *Genesis Dada*, 56-57.

⁶³ Abigail Susik, ‘Chance and Automatism: Genealogies of the Dissociative in Dada and Surrealism,’ in *A Companion...*, 245.

the 'First Friday of *Littérature*' when he took Daudet's speech from his pocket, dismantled it and performed the rearranged speech. In performance, Tzara experiments with the pretext of chance; his action (producing a poem/speech from his pocket) appears unplanned. However, as previously discussed in relation to his *choice* of Daudet's speech, Tzara's performances are calculated and deliberate. Tzara's actions demonstrate how Dada chance operates within a context regulated by choice.

Berghaus offers a definition of Dada's performance aesthetic.

Art had to be produced as a creative free act, free of any restrictions normally imposed by taste, rules, logic, and so on. The performer had to give in to his or her spontaneous impulses and create without premeditation, or let the scripted event transform itself under the imponderable influence of chance, the inspiration of the moment, and the unpredictable reactions of the audience.⁶⁴

This analysis argues that Dada's performed works were spontaneous acts, yet also explains how the 'scripted' (organised) event might welcome chance into the moment of performance. However, chance is a factor in every live event, whether scripted or not. The very nature of the live event includes the potential 'hazard' of unexpected moments, and this is true for rehearsed works as it is for spontaneously performed actions.

Tzara asserted that '[a]ll of our sketches were of an improvised nature, full of fantasy, freshness, and the unexpected.'⁶⁵ However, as Hans Richter remembers, while discussing the final major Dada soirée in Zurich: 'Tzara had organised the whole thing with the magnificent precision of a ringmaster.'⁶⁶ This dichotomy identifies the creation of a Dada mythology, which promotes spontaneity and improvisation in Dada's onstage practice. And this myth filters into subsequent narratives on Dada. For example, Robert Varisco suggests that '[d]irection and rehearsal must have been something of a joke among the group.'⁶⁷ Yet, accounts by Lewer, Hentea and Buchholz (detailed above) explain how Dada performances (largely after the Cabaret Voltaire) were precisely planned and controlled.

While Tzara promoted the aesthetic of chance, and his theoretical analysis of Dada theatre emphasises spontaneity, he subscribed to established practices to stage his plays, including:

⁶⁴ Berghaus, *TPH*, 171-172.

⁶⁵ Marcel Janco in a personal letter to Elmer Peterson, quoted in Peterson, *Tristan Tzara: Dada and Surreational Theorist* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 9.

⁶⁶ Richter, 57, quoted in Berghaus, *TPH*, 43.

⁶⁷ Robert Varisco, 'Dada Language, Anarchic Theatre, and Tristan Tzara's *The Gas Heart*,' in *Paris Dada: The Barbarians Storm the Gates* ed. Stephen Foster and Elmer Peterson (New York: G.K. Hall, 2001), 283.

rehearsal, ticketed entry, and set and costume design. These elements of theatrical presentation do not materialise spontaneously, and require considerable planning for the show to be realised. Additionally, across his career, Tzara employed trained actors, hired directors and designers for the staging of his productions, and rigorously rehearsed ahead of performance, destabilising the myth that Dada always promoted an amateur aesthetic.

Language

I will now address scholarship in the field of Dada and language. Research in this area prioritises the application of mechanisms that destabilise language's communicative function. While this is certainly the case for the early Dada plays, as his career progressed, Tzara honed theatrical language towards accessible dialogue and transparent narratives.

The quintessence of Dada's attitude to language is to critique its application as a rational means of communication. As Ball said in his 1916 'Dada Manifesto': 'One shouldn't let too many words out. A line of poetry is a chance to get rid of all the filth that clings to this accursed language [...] The word, gentlemen, is a public concern of the first importance.'⁶⁸ Dada works dislodge language from meaning by various methods of linguistic dissociation.⁶⁹ These include stripping words of their signifying function by deliberate misapplication (or denial) of syntax and punctuation, and applying invented words and sounds to disrupt cognitive processes of linguistic recognition.

Tzara described his play *The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine* as a 'boxing match between words.'⁷⁰ This play is partly written in a pseudo-African language. Eric Robertson discusses how Tzara's attack on language derived in part from African and Oceanic sources. Influenced by the tribal and oral poems of Oceania and Polynesia, Tzara assembled *poèmes nègres* from various scholarly sources citing examples of such poems. Robertson notes that at 'the Dada soirées, the *poèmes nègres* were just one instance of the group's fascination with the "primitive" [and] the poems became the basis of

⁶⁸ Hugo Ball, 'Dada Manifesto' (1916), *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*, ed. John Elderfield, trans. Ann Raimés (Berkeley, California; London: University of California Press, 1996), 221.

⁶⁹ On language dissociation and Dada see, for example: Robert Varisco, 2001; Abigail Susik, in *A Companion...*; Eric Robertson, "'Hollaka Hollala Anlogo Bung.'" Dada's Subversive Glossolalia,' in *Genesis Dada*.

⁷⁰ Tzara, 'Quelques Souvenirs,' *OC*, 1:595, translation from Hentea, 2014, 145.

performances...'⁷¹ While Robertson's essay is primarily concerned with Tzara's poetry, I am interested in how the plays written contemporaneously might be investigated in terms of so-called 'primitive' language and performance aesthetics. Comparing the language of *The First Celestial Adventure* with Tzara's 'primitive' poems, I will analyse the presentation of this play in terms of early oral poetic traditions.

For Hugo Ball and Tristan Tzara, amongst others, the texts of Dada were written to be voiced. Martin Puchner discusses Dada's manifestos, stating that they 'were born from the spirit of the theatre. True, both the Italian and Russian futurists [...] sought out drama and the theatre at various points, but no movement was as fully at home in the theatre as [D]ada.'⁷² Dawn Ades suggests that Dada performance originated in 'Ball's early ideal of the theatre as a form of total expression, especially suitable for radical ideas. [He also] found performance necessary to his poetry.'⁷³ Ball said:

Reading aloud has become the touchstone of the quality of a poem for me, and I have learned (from the stage) to what extent today's literature is worked out as a problem at the desk and is made for the spectacle of the collector instead of for the ears of living human beings.⁷⁴

Tzara, too, insisted on the oral tradition of poetry. The invented words and sounds of his poems and plays are best experienced in performance. Notably, the oral impact of the simultaneous poems (discussed in more detail below) is sacrificed when read; they were written with the intention of being perceived by a chorus of voices.

Katherine Papachristos suggests 'the different forms of orality that make up the dramaturgy of Tzara,' demonstrate how the phonic freedom of the first manifestos and poems are organised little by little into a theatrical aesthetic: a transition from oral communication to written communication.⁷⁵ Tzara's first performed poems and manifestos, and his early plays, evidence a crisis of representational notions of mimesis in the production of language; prioritising the oral tradition, these early works comprise onomatopoeic word/sounds devoid of signifying function. Notably, *The First Celestial Adventure*, as detailed above, resembles Tzara's early experiments in oral poetry. Papachristos then suggests that *The Gas Heart* occupies a transitional phase between

⁷¹ Robertson, 'Dada and Surrealist Poetics,' in *A Companion...*, 230.

⁷² Martin Puchner, 'Dada and the Internationalism of the Avant-Garde,' in *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 146.

⁷³ Dawn Ades, *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (Kent: Westerham Press, 1978), 58.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Ades, 58.

⁷⁵ Katherine Papachristos, *L'inscription de l'oral et de l'écrit dans le théâtre de Tristan Tzara* (Oxford: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 1999), 21. All translations from this volume are mine.

speech and writing. In *The Gas Heart* language becomes more coherent: the written text can be analysed for traces of semantic meaning, though language remains largely devoid of its communicative function. In *Handkerchief of Clouds*, Tzara engages fully in theatrical writing with the emergence of a transparent narrative, which Papachristos suggests demonstrates writing before speech.⁷⁶ Papachristos does not address Tzara's unpublished plays or his final play, *La Fuite*, in which the written form before the oral form is most apparent.

Sarah Bay-Cheng discusses the tension between text, language and performance in Dada theatre. Bay-Cheng suggests that Tzara presupposes the late-twentieth-century concept of performance 'as an alternative to text-based drama.'⁷⁷ Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* examines performance and theatre history as an historical shift, which subjugates spoken dialogue to physical gesture.⁷⁸ As Bay-Cheng identifies, it can be argued that this shift occurred with Tzara's experiments. Bay-Cheng suggests that avant-garde theatre, and Dada in particular, serves as the benchmark for 'theatre and performance studies seeking to avoid the tyranny of the text.'⁷⁹ Lehmann's book, while briefly citing Dada as a precursor to postdramatic theatre, does not address Tzara's contribution.

James Harding discusses antitextuality and the avant-garde. Harding claims that twentieth-century distinctions between text and performance, 'though hard to maintain as clear binary oppositions, are grounded in an historical antagonism between text and performance that has been one of the avant-garde's greatest sources of vitality.'⁸⁰ I have identified in the wider Dada scholarship that while analyses on Tzara's poetic texts have been achieved, discussion on Dada's play texts are somewhat lacking.⁸¹ For the most part, discussions on Dada theatre are rather discussions about Dada spectacles, 'that is to say about the social reality of the theatre, the reports of the spectator and the actor, neglecting the other

⁷⁶ Papachristos, 21.

⁷⁷ Sarah Bay-Cheng, 'Translation, Typography, and the Avant-Garde's Impossible Text,' *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (October 2007): 467-483, 471.

⁷⁸ Lehmann.

⁷⁹ Bay-Cheng, 471.

⁸⁰ James M. Harding, 'Introduction,' *Contours of the Theatrical Avant-Garde: Performance and Textuality*, ed. Harding (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 3.

⁸¹ This is certainly the case for English-language Dada scholarship. French-language scholarship on Dada includes comprehensive analyses of, predominantly, the first three plays, and some discussion on *Handkerchief of Clouds*. Tzara's later plays have been largely overlooked. See Henri Béhar, 'Tristan Tzara ou la spontanéité,' in *Le théâtre Dada et surréaliste*. Béhar discusses each of Tzara's play texts but prioritises the plays in performance to demonstrate the dadaist provocative performance programme. In *OC*, Béhar provides performance and publication details accompanied by a very short discussion of each play. Michel Corvin, 'Le Théâtre Dada Existe-t-il ?' *Revue Histoire du Théâtre*, No. 91 (1973): 217-310, provides comprehensive textual analyses of the first four plays. Similarly, Papachristos discusses the first four plays.

elements constituting a dramaturgy,' including the text.⁸² This situation is compounded by an assumed antagonism between text and performance in the avant-garde, as noted by Harding and Bay-Cheng. Furthermore, Michel Corvin suggests that the dadaist theatre demonstrates how 'the play' only receives 'its reality from the stage [...] only the cries of the hall could make felt the "shouted theatricality" of the work, for nothing at the level of the writing can detect such an exchange.'⁸³ The result is an assumption that Dada performance cannot exist as a literary form, separate from the moment of its incarnation on stage, for this would betray the immediacy of the performed moment. Such views lead to a reduced understanding of Dada theatre. It is therefore necessary to undertake a textual analysis of the plays in addition to discussing Dada's onstage practices.

I argue against the 'common assumption [...] that the theatrical avant-garde was fundamentally at odds with text-based theatre,'⁸⁴ and suggest alternatively that Dada theatre employed the written text in performance as a transgressive means of mass communication by its very dismantling of communicative structures. I will show that the avant-garde reacted to language as distinct from text, and the dichotomy between text and performance in the avant-garde, can be better understood as an antagonism between language and Saussurean semiotics on stage.⁸⁵

Robertson discusses the tension between Dada text and language in performance, with particular attention to the trilingual poem *L'amiral cherche une maison à louer*. When read on the page, this poem can be comprehended. It is only in performance that Tzara, Huelsenbeck and Marcel Janco's true poetic/performance experiment was experienced, where 'the potential power of heteroglossia gives way to sheer cacophony.'⁸⁶ For Robertson:

Dada's tongues express an attitude to language that is ambivalent but not contradictory. Critical of language as a vehicle for authority, reason, and logic, they celebrate the visceral power of the voice and its ability to tap into what it is to be in the world.⁸⁷

⁸² Corvin, 251. All translation from this volume are mine.

⁸³ Ibid., 281-282.

⁸⁴ James M. Harding and John Rouse, 'Introduction,' *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 9.

⁸⁵ The linguist Ferdinand de Saussure deduced that signs consist of signifiers and signifieds. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: Duckworth, 2005). In the theatre of the avant-garde, words, signs and actions often do not correspond to any logical referent.

⁸⁶ Robertson, in *Genesis Dada*, 144.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 145.

In relation to Dada's application of language 'to tap into what it is to be in the world,' I will consider how Tzara's theatrical language demonstrates an inability to explain the experience of existence through rational systems of thought, which relates to absurdist theory.

Robert Pfaller poses that the philosophy of Dada is one that identifies meaning as absurd, and opposes it to a philosophy that attempts to create sense when there is none.⁸⁸ Stephen Forcer, too, discusses how Dada texts demonstrate a discord between 'language and the world it describes.'⁸⁹ Forcer proposes that Dada poetry, which 'distorts language to the point of meaninglessness' suggests that all language is 'mad;' always somehow removed from what it attempts to describe.⁹⁰ Forcer's argument does not include an analysis of Dada play texts, which can also be analysed this way, given the supposed mimetic world of theatre and the stage. The incongruity between the mimetic human figure and the incongruous words and actions presented in Dada plays is more effective, I would argue, at creating a disharmony between content (language) and form (theatre, predicated on communication).

Scholarship on Dada language necessarily prioritises how Dada's senselessness performs an attack on the application of language to communicate reason. However, when considering the transparency of Tzara's theatrical language from 1923, it remains to be assessed how Tzara's cohesive language can be read in terms of Dada's linguistic provocation. In his discussion on Dada poetry, Forcer also questions the extent to which the lyrical and coherent appearance of language problematizes Dada's kinship with nonsense and nonsensical language:

What does this mean for Dada's traditional and self-determined relationship with nonsense and meaninglessness? Does the existence of poetic, literary and semantic coherence in Dada writing compromise the performed collapse of language, sense and reason for which the movement is traditionally enjoyed and valued?⁹¹

I will apply this observation to question the 'meaning' of coherence in Tzara's theatrical works. The later (and lesser discussed) plays of Tristan Tzara, notably *Handkerchief of Clouds* and *The Flight*, demonstrate aesthetic and linguistic cohesion, complicating Dada's programme for negation.

⁸⁸ Robert Pfaller, 'How Would It Be if Fists Could Speak? Dada Philosophy, in *Genesis Dada*, 99

⁸⁹ Stephen Forcer, *Dada as Text, Thought and Theory* (Cambridge: Legenda; Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2015), 54.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

This section has identified that while researchers of Dada provide detailed analyses of language in relation to poetry, the consequence for theatre and performance is lesser examined. Certainly, Dada's application of language is bound to a political viewpoint. The dadaists who gathered in neutral Switzerland applied language to express their sense of outrage at the powers that had driven Europe to war in 1914. This condition is most transparent when looking at the poems performed during the Zurich Dada phase, as shown previously. However, when observing the theatre and performance experiments of Paris Dada, complexities arise around Dada's relationship to politics.

Politics: Paris Dada into Surrealism

Historians of Dada and Surrealism are concerned with how the two movements share a common genealogy, yet with diverging tendencies and aesthetic outputs, as will be discussed in Chapter 8. In addition to theoretical discrepancies between Tzara's and Breton's programme for art, the question of Dada's politics is embroiled in the dissolution of Dada and the emergence of Surrealism. Christopher Middleton notes that 'there are several uncertainties which blur our present picture of Dada's politics. It is agreed that Dada's nihilism covered many other sectors of the moral, social and intellectual upheavals of its time: Dada, after all, did flourish in an epoch which revolutionized art, morals, social structures, science and ideas. But it is not agreed whether Dada had, like Surrealism afterwards, a social revolutionary side.'⁹²

Richard Sheppard recognises that 'not all Dada was politically concerned and the main foci of political involvement were Zurich, Berlin, and, to a much lesser extent, Cologne.'⁹³ Middleton also notes how Paris Dada differed from the political attitude of Dada's other centres: 'Paris Dada developed [...] in an ambience unlike that of Berlin. In Paris Dada could safely leave politics to the political, or to the anarchists, and thrive on the tradition of scandal and buffoonery which had flourished in the arts before the war.'⁹⁴ It remains to be examined to what extent Paris Dada activities were politically motivated.

⁹² Christopher Middleton, *Bolshevism in Art: And other Expository Writings* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1978), 38.

⁹³ Richard Sheppard, *Modernism – Dada – Postmodernism* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 304.

⁹⁴ Middleton, 56.

Sheppard suggests that

while Dada never made a major contribution to political theory [...] it did implicitly pose three serious political questions. What kind of state is most appropriate to human nature? What political stance should the individual adopt in his everyday life? How, if at all, can art be political?⁹⁵

When considering their distinct responses to these questions, the conflict between Tzara's and Breton's direction for Dada can be examined. 'Dada is by no means uniformly apolitical, but its political thinking has often to be disengaged from a mask of ironic flippancy and self-mockery.'⁹⁶ Breton sought more direct political action, while Tzara maintained disengagement as the primary source for Dada's politics.

These diverging attitudes were played out during key events which are generally cited as causing the end of Dada in Paris: 'The Trial of Maurice Barrès,' 13 May 1921; and the 1923 'Soirée du Cœur à Barbe.'⁹⁷ Examining these events reveals not only political differences amongst the Paris Dada group, but also nuances in Tzara's and Breton's approach to theatre and performance.

Claire Bishop suggests that 'The Trial of Maurice Barrès' in particular marks a turning point for Breton from Dada into Surrealism: towards a political intellectualism and away from Tzara and Francis Picabia's 'anarchic provocations.'⁹⁸ 'The Trial' allowed Breton to disengage from the format of the Dada manifestations, which he viewed as anti-art demonstrations lacking direction. As Middleton points out: 'Anti-art in the service of sterile agitation was the aspect of Dada which Breton now judged to be remote from the actual revolutionary mood of the time as he understood it.'⁹⁹

Elizabeth Legge explains that Barrès – once a Nietzschean hero of the young avant-gardes – had failed this generation by shifting philosophical focus from the 'self,' to the 'land and war dead.'¹⁰⁰ Breton jumped on a bandwagon of writers, re-evaluating Barrès as a traitor

⁹⁵ Sheppard, 305.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁹⁷ The 'Congress of Paris' is the third (never realised) event that provoked political differences between Breton and Tzara, and contributed to the dissolution of Dada in Paris. See Marius Hentea, 'Federating the Modern Spirit: The 1922 Congress of Paris,' *PMLA*, vol. 130, no. 1 (2015).

⁹⁸ Bishop, 73.

⁹⁹ Middleton, 59.

¹⁰⁰ Legge cites Albert Thibaudet, *La vie de Maurice Barrès* (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1921), 307-9, 312; and Albert Thibaudet, 'La conscience libre at la guerre,' *Nouvelle Revue Française* 88-90 (1921): 67-80, for contemporaneous accounts of Barrès as outmoded. Legge, 202, note 72.

to their cause, and he wanted Dada to follow suit. However, Dada's political and aesthetic position was not unified. While Breton used his opposition to Barrès as an example of Dada's political motivation, Tzara and Picabia remained ambivalent to Barrès. Malcolm Cowley suggests that Dada events were politically 'ineffectual in spite of their violence, because they were directed against no social class and supported by no social class.'¹⁰¹ Despite Breton's ambition for Dada to take a direct stand against Barrès, he could not unify the Dada group to his cause.

During his testimony at 'The Trial,' Tzara made clear his distrust of Breton's political direction for Dada. He stated: 'I have no confidence in justice, even if this justice is made by Dada' and called both prosecutor and accused alike 'a bunch of bastards... greater or lesser bastards is of no importance.'¹⁰² While chroniclers of this event discuss the antagonism that played out between Tzara/Picabia and Breton, theoretical analyses of 'The Trial' – in terms of avant-garde theatre – are somewhat lacking. It is noteworthy that Breton published the script of 'The Trial' in *Littérature* some months after the event.¹⁰³ The existence of the script denotes the theatrical character of 'The Trial,' and as identified previously, the presentational format (performed on a raised stage with a separated audience; Breton's refusal of spectator interaction) complicates the status of the event as participatory art, and falls more neatly into the category of courtroom drama. 'The Trial' will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 where I provide a fuller account of Tzara's actions at the event, and how they contribute to understanding Tzara's distinct approach to theatre and performance.

I will now turn to literature discussing the 1923 'Soirée du Cœur à Barbe.' This event is notable for presenting Tzara's *The Gas Heart* for the second time, and because, during the soirée, André Breton stormed the stage wielding a cane. The onstage brawl that ensued is chronicled as the final break between Tzara and Breton, signalling the end of Paris Dada and the emergence of Surrealism. Although accounts of this event generally cite the

¹⁰¹ Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (1934) (London: Penguin Classics, 1995), quoted in Middleton, 59.

¹⁰² Quoted in Matthew S. Witkovsky, 'Mr. Picabia Breaks with the Dadas,' *October* 105 (Summer 2003): 145-146.

¹⁰³ *Littérature* no. 20 (August 1921) reproduces the indictment read by Breton and several witness depositions. A fuller account of 'The Trial' was due to be published in *Littérature* no. 21, which did not materialise. However, Marguerite Bonnet combines the *Littérature* no. 20 speeches with those found in the proofs to *Littérature* no. 21 in *L'affaire Barrès* (Paris: Corti, 1987).

performance of *The Gas Heart* to be the cause of the onstage fight,¹⁰⁴ according to Sanouillet, Berghaus and Hentea, it was during a manifesto performed by Pierre de Massot. Massot's manifesto included the line 'Pablo Picasso killed in action,' inciting Breton (in defence of Picasso who was present in the audience) to jump onstage and strike Massot, breaking his arm. The police were called and promptly removed Breton. Then, during *The Gas Heart* performance, Paul Éluard stormed the stage demanding that Tzara explain the rough treatment Breton had received. Éluard was also removed and later sued for damaging the set. Only Hentea explains that the play was finally performed after this disruption. However, I am yet to discover accounts discussing *The Gas Heart* in production at the 'Soirée du Cœur à Barbe.'

This performance differs from Dada's previous onstage activities, and not because of the onstage fight. Rather, this performance was the first time in Dada's history (and Tzara's playwriting career) that an advanced technical and theatrical production was staged. For *The Gas Heart*'s reprisal, Tzara employed professional actors, a costume designer (Sonia Delaunay), a set designer (Alexander Granovski) and a director (Yssia Siderski).¹⁰⁵ Sanouillet explains that Tzara intended the evening to be 'a show – an extremely avant-garde show, perhaps, but a show nonetheless – intended to be performed, seen, and heard under normal conditions – that is to say, in relative silence and with the audience's assent.'¹⁰⁶ That is, the more his playwriting career progressed, the further Tzara attended to traditional frameworks for theatrical presentation. This new direction is not fully discussed by Sanouillet, Hentea or others. This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive discussion of Tzara's transition towards more sophisticated production aesthetics.

After Dada, Tzara continued to experiment with theatrical staging with *Le Mouchoir de Nuages* (*Handkerchief of Clouds*), which premiered at 'Les Soirées de Paris,' 1924. *Handkerchief of Clouds* received a season of shows under professional conditions: a large budget was granted to assist in the hiring of Jeanne Lanvin for costumes (one of Paris' leading fashion designers); a complex set was built; technical elements including onstage projections animated the stage; and Tzara undertook extensive rehearsals with his professional cast. Nowhere have I discovered analyses on how the staging of *The Gas Heart* at the 'Soiree du Cœur à Barbe' might have impacted later avant-garde programmes

¹⁰⁴ See Peterson, 2001, 24; Goldberg, 88; and Nahma Sandrow, *Surrealism: Theatre, Arts, Ideas* (London: Harper and Row), 17.

¹⁰⁵ Berghaus, *TPH*, 165.

¹⁰⁶ Sanouillet, 278.

for theatrical presentation. Accounts of the ‘Soiree du Cœur à Barbe’ are overshadowed by the violent onstage antics. It is my intention to remedy gaps left in discussions of this production.

Overall, the literature discussing Paris Dada focuses on the failure of the movement, overcome by the emergence of Surrealism. In contrast, my research discusses Paris Dada’s unique contribution to theatre history, and how Tzara’s playwriting and onstage activity impacted new modes of theatre practice.

Tzara’s Onstage Activities: Towards the Performance/Theatre Complex

The structure of this literature review serves to identify how my research intersects current Dada scholarship, and how my arguments address underdeveloped areas in this broad and thoroughly documented (largely art historical) sphere. Sources in the current literature citing Dada’s onstage activities do not provide detailed analyses of Tzara’s contribution to theatre and performance history, or complete discussions on Tzara’s plays, on the page and on the stage. In particular, I have identified that the following areas require further analysis. What was distinctive about Tzara’s approach to theatre as his career developed? To what extent were Tzara’s dadaist and surrealist principles embodied in his subsequent period in Paris both during and after his relations with the surrealist group? What are the implications for subsequent theatre and performance practice in light of Tzara’s innovations? My research, as presented in the following chapters of this thesis, addresses these areas.

Additionally, the question remains of how Tzara’s onstage experiments with Paris Dada inform debates around the nature of performance and performativity, and the relationship between the categories of theatre and performance art. The following chapter details how Dada performance activity is implicated in the development of performance art, and how the retrospective attribution of Dada onstage activity as heralding performance art practice diminishes our understanding of avant-garde theatre. It is my intention to provide a theoretical underpinning for Tzara and Dada’s theatrical activities, and how their performance experiments are implicated in a schism in the performing arts separating theatre from performance.

CHAPTER 2: THE PERFORMANCE/THEATRE COMPLEX

As outlined in the previous chapter, Dada's onstage activities are post-facto related to the development of performance art. I have identified that this establishes a reduced understanding of Dada theatre; the theatrical texts of Tzara and the dadaists have been largely overlooked, for they sit somewhat uncomfortably in the assessment of avant-garde performance as improvised, spontaneous and participatory. This chapter will establish how Dada's onstage activities intersect the theatre/performance debate.

It is necessary to establish how performance and theatre are understood as distinct disciplines, before discussing how Dada's onstage works are situated across these categories. Theatre and performance practices evidence 'compositional differences' that require analysis. As Carl Lavery and Clare Finburgh reflect:

While it is certainly the case that visual artists and poets interested in performance are keen to root their work in theatrical principles of 'liveness,' transience and embodied spectatorship, their engagement with those principles is not of the same order as that undertaken by theatre makers, however experimental. Whereas theatre practitioners [...] might be concerned with subverting dramaturgical notions of plot, language and character, performance makers are usually more interested in exposing or opening up their respective disciplines (for instance, poetry and fine art) to experiences of embodiment and duration.¹⁰⁷

Tristan Tzara's onstage activities do both. Tzara employed embodied performance to extend literary practices, and to bring Dada art closer to the public. However, his theatrical works align with the order of the theatre maker as defined above. That is, Tzara simultaneously turned to performance as a vehicle to communicate his poems and manifestos, and wrote and produced plays as a means of subverting theatrical traditions. Tzara's distinct approach to theatre and performance will be explored by applying the theoretical framework I have termed the performance/theatre complex. This theory is developed by assessing debates around theatre and performance as set out in theatre, art historical and performance studies.

I will then examine how Tzara's performance practice celebrates avant-garde theatricality, which is non-mimetic and flouts traditional semiotic functions. This view of theatricality is more productive than is offered by the Platonic understanding of theatre as mere representation: 'a pale, secondary derived imitation of life.' Rather, theatricality is an

¹⁰⁷ Clare Finburgh and Carl Lavery, 'Introduction,' *Contemporary French Theatre and Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 8.

‘intensified variation on life, not so much a mirror as an exploration and celebration of possibility.’¹⁰⁸ Or as Samuel Weber suggests, theatricality is a medium.¹⁰⁹ If theatricality is a medium, theatricality presented by Tzara (and Dada) engages an existing mode of presentation (a medium) that is not new or invented; avant-garde performance is not a new art form, but fulfils a medium of theatricality.

Despite the fact that the theatrical avant-garde engaged dramaturgical practices to undermine theatrical traditions (the order of the theatre maker), Dada’s onstage works are categorised largely under performance art and not theatre. This situation is problematic because implicated in the history of performance art is a marginalisation of theatre. Discussing his 1971 action *Shoot* (which comprised the artist being shot in his arm), Chris Burden stated: ‘No, it’s not theatre. Theatre is watered down if you see what I mean [...] Getting shot, that’s for real.’¹¹⁰ In 2010, Marina Abramović said: ‘To be a performance artist, you have to hate theatre [...] Theatre is fake... The knife is not real, the blood is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is just the opposite: the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real.’¹¹¹ These reflections exemplify how two of performance art’s most active proponents understand their work in relation to the theatrical medium. Notably, both Burden and Abramović define performance by rejecting theatre.

Emerging properly in the United States post World War II, performance art reached its peak in the 1970s. Discourse on performance art charts its inheritance from early-twentieth-century avant-garde activity. There are two important contributions to post-World-War-II art history in the United States that facilitated avant-garde theatre being retrospectively categorised as performance art: the 1951 publication of Robert Motherwell’s *The Dada Painters and Poets*; and John Cage’s performance experiments at the Black Mountain College, North Carolina from 1948.

The Dada Painters and Poets introduced Dada to a new international audience. Motherwell’s book highlights the artistic and literary practices of the dadaists across its various host cities: collecting poems, manifestos and essays about Dada art by the

¹⁰⁸ Marvin Carlson, ‘The Resistance to Theatricality,’ *SubStance*, vol. 31, no. 2/3, issue 98/99 (2002): 238-250, 246.

¹⁰⁹ Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

¹¹⁰ ‘Chris Burden: The Church of Human Energy. An Interview with Willoughby Sharp and Liza Béar,’ *Avalanche Magazine*, no. 8 (Summer/Fall, 1973): 54-61.

¹¹¹ Interview with Sean O’Hagan, 2010, quoted in *The Live Art Almanac: Volume 3*, ed. Lois Keidan and Aaron Write (London: Oberon Books, 2013).

movement's contributors. However, the book also includes first-hand accounts of Dada performances.¹¹²

Of Motherwell's collected essays, Georges Hugnet's 'The Dada Spirit in Painting' provides the most comprehensive account of Dada's theatrical works. Hugnet notes that 'on March 27 [1920], at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre, one of the most significant Dada demonstrations took place. It consisted of plays (*Le Serin muet* by Ribemont-Dessaignes, *La Première aventure céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine* by Tzara, and *S'il vous plaît* by Breton and Soupault), written in the Dada manner, pursuing every gratuitous fancy, every absurdity of thought, and all eminently demoralising.'¹¹³ Of this event, Hugnet states 'the Théâtre de l'Œuvre had not witnessed such goings-on since the riot caused by the presentation of Alfred Jarry's play, *Ubu Roi*,' thereby aligning Dada's plays to those of the pre-war playwrights, whose works have become central to avant-garde theatre history.¹¹⁴ Hugnet discusses the plays of Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, which 'were quite astonishing and showed him to be a [d]adaist of extreme purity.'¹¹⁵ Hugnet mentions the plays performed at the 'Dada Festival' at the Salle Gaveau, 26 May 1920: *Vous M'oubliez* by Breton and Soupault, and *La Deuxième Aventure Céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine*, by Tzara.¹¹⁶ Additionally, Hugnet lists all the dadaists who produced theatrical works for the 'Salon Dada,' 10 June 1921: 'productions of plays by Aragon, [É]luard, Péret, Soupault and Tzara (whose *Le Cœur à gaz* (*The Gas Heart*) was given for the first time...'¹¹⁷ Hugnet mentions the planned tours of 1921, and noting their failure, explains that the dadaists returned to theatrical demonstrations.¹¹⁸

Most crucially, in relation to the Dada theatre, Tzara's 'Zurich Chronicle (1915-1919)' discusses the 1917 production of Oskar Kokoschka's play *Sphinx and Strawman*: 'This performance decided the role of our theatre, which will entrust the stage direction to the subtle invention of the explosive wind, scenario in the audience, visible direction, grotesque props: the DADAIST theatre [original emphasis].'¹¹⁹

¹¹² See Richard Huelsenbeck, 'En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism (1920); and Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, 'History of Dada,' in Motherwell. Motherwell's book was first published in New York by Wittenborn, Shultz, Inc. in 1951.

¹¹³ Georges Hugnet, 'The Dada Spirit in Painting,' in Motherwell, 176.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 176-7.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹¹⁹ Tzara, 'Zurich Chronicle (1915-1919),' in Motherwell, 238.

Given these accounts of dadaist activity – which specify the production of theatre plays, and include a description of Dada’s intentions for the theatrical medium as noted by Tzara – it remains to be addressed why this important element of Dada performance becomes somewhat forgotten in the development of performance art in light of Dada’s operations. While Motherwell’s book discusses the theatre plays and performed events of the dadaists, much of its content necessarily concentrates on visual art outputs, notably, Marcel Duchamp’s contribution to Dada. The book characterises Dada primarily as an (anti)visual arts and literary movement.

Motherwell’s *Dada Painters and Poets* would become a textbook of sorts, employed by John Cage in his courses at the Black Mountain College (where he first taught during the 1948 summer school), and at New York’s New School for Social Research (where he taught from 1956). Cage gave his students assignments whereby, through performance, they had to solve compositional problems, and he read from Motherwell’s book to provide historical precedents for the kind of work in which they engaged.¹²⁰ Through Cage, via Motherwell, dadaist processes and concepts were bequeathed to a new generation of artists. Galvanised by dadaist methods for making art, by the late 1950s artists were experimenting with unorthodox materials, with renewed techniques, and staging exhibitions in non-traditional venues.

These artists developed a performance practice from avant-garde experiments in the visual arts. Notably, performance artists translated Duchamp’s conceptual understanding of art, which asserts the primacy of the idea. Following Duchamp’s example, post-World-War-II artists created work in the medium best fitted to the creative idea, which included performance. The idea remains of central importance, and the performance is the secondary product of that idea. This practice is not of the same order as Dada’s programme for performance, which first established a mode of practice (theatre) and then scheduled works to be shown at performed events.

When revisiting the onstage activities of the dadaists, it becomes apparent that the avant-gardes were not necessarily engaged in developing an autonomous performance art expression, but employed the theatre format (communication between performer and

¹²⁰ Brentano, 58.

audience) as a mechanism for public engagement. Fundamentally, I assert that the theatrical avant-garde and the post-World-War-II performance artists' reasons for performing differ, and that their methods of presentation are incompatible.

I will now examine how theoretical claims about the development of performance art from futurist and dadaist onstage experiments are problematic, and demonstrate how this assumption can be contested. I offer as an alternative that performance art developed out of a very specific understanding of avant-garde activity in America from the 1950s, and has very little aesthetic similarity or shared objectives to the onstage activities of Tzara and the dadaists. Fundamentally, I challenge the understanding of Dada's onstage practice as performance (art).

Performance Art and Avant-Garde Theatre

When the magazine *High Performance* was founded in 1978, its editors Linda Burnham and (later) Steve Durland applied the basic tenets and ideologies of avant-garde practice to performance art, and in turn used this as a framework for arranging their magazine around the dominant theme: 'the integration of art with life.'¹²¹ To comprehend performance art's application of avant-garde tendencies, it is necessary to outline some definitions of avant-gardism in relation to modernism. Clement Greenberg explains the history of art with regards to modernism as a reformist, developmental search for 'the irreducible working essence of art.' Within this framework, each individual art renounces the 'dispensable, unessential' traditions of its own discipline, and components of the other arts, to establish its own precise essence.¹²² Jürgen Habermas traces modernism from the Enlightenment as a programme for separating cultural domains into autonomous spheres within which the 'production and criticism of art, could in turn be institutionalised' and managed by specialised experts. The modernist retreat alienated art from life and 'withdrew into the untouchableness of complete autonomy.' The avant-garde emerged in response to the project of modernity by attempting to 'negate' the autonomous sphere of cultural production and reconcile the forces of art and life.¹²³

¹²¹ Britta B. Wheeler, 'The Institutionalisation of an American Avant-Garde: Performance Art as Democratic Culture, 1970-2000,' *Sociological Perspectives*, vol. 46, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 491-512, 494.

¹²² Clement Greenberg, 'After Abstract Expressionism,' *Art International*, vol. 6, no. 8 (October, 1962), 30.

¹²³ Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity,' *New German Critique*, No. 22 (Winter, 1981): 3-14.

Peter Bürger examines the avant-garde efforts to break open the autonomous sphere, to reintegrate art with life, and to amalgamate the arts in creative production. Importantly for Bürger, the modernist project, which withdraws art from the masses and into the privileged realm of bourgeois culture, serves only this self-same bourgeois capitalist system. The avant-garde recognises a lack of political drive in the modernist agenda, and thus rejects the concept of aesthetic autonomy and its privileging of high culture. In protest against the modernist project, the avant-garde celebrates the vitality of popular culture and attempts to sublimate art into the praxis of life, to affect a transformation of, not only the privileged, but also the entire social sphere.¹²⁴

Josette Féral suggests that one of performance art's central objectives is the '[i]ncorporation of art into life and the refusal of a split which would make art an autonomous sphere with no influence on the real.'¹²⁵ This condition of performance art is bound to an avant-garde agenda. Furthermore, Olivia Georgia states that 'the oppositional nature of the European avant-garde characterises its fundamental relationship to performance art.'¹²⁶ The historical avant-garde movements (Dada, Constructivism, Surrealism) reacted against the political and social consequences of European political realities occurring between the late nineteenth century and the outbreak of World War II, and the limitations presented by conventional creative media and modes of presentation. The avant-garde is characterised by an impulse to reject conformity and establish new modes of creative expression. This impulse contributed to the expansion of visual arts practices into wider disciplines.¹²⁷

These are the very same drives that post-World-War-II avant-gardes revived by their practice. RoseLee Goldberg points out that artists have turned to performance when reaching an impasse in their creative practice as a way of 'indicating new directions.'¹²⁸ Performance became a way for artists to reassess artistic and cultural relations, by evaluating the experience of art in everyday life, via direct public engagement.¹²⁹ Thus, because performance artists carried these avant-garde tropes into their practice, the

¹²⁴ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

¹²⁵ Josette Féral and Carol Tennessen, 'What is Left of Performance Art? Autopsy of a Function, Birth of a Genre,' *Discourse*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 142-162, 146.

¹²⁶ Olivia Georgia, 'Framing Out,' in *Outside the Frame*, 86.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

historical avant-garde was retrospectively attributed with having invented performance art as a unique discipline.

Despite futurist performance specifically pertaining to a new form of theatre,¹³⁰ Goldberg states that '[b]y the mid-twenties the [f]uturists had fully established performance as an art medium in its own right.'¹³¹ Robyn Brentano, too, cites the futurist soirées as the first performance art events.

The [f]uturists envisioned an art of the streets, of technology and speed, of danger and hyperbole. This type of aggressive, anti-establishment attitude has been associated (correctly) with performance art throughout this century [...] artists have used performance to challenge our assumptions about the relationship between art and life, and, in the discoveries they make at the borders of experience, to find fresh ways to envision the world.¹³²

Recognising that the performance artist's impetus for re-establishing the relations between art and life was realised in a public-facing performance programme, it is 'correct' to associate performance art with avant-garde notions. However, this theory fails when establishing the avant-garde inclination towards performance, and when investigating avant-garde manifestos, which were firmly grounded in developing a new theatre.

In 1911, Marinetti declared that 'among all literary forms, the one with the most immediate significance for Futurism is certainly the theater.'¹³³ When Dada embarked upon performance it was, as with the futurists, to employ theatre as a platform for creative expression. Theatre became the optimal means for realising their avant-garde motivations, largely encouraged by Hugo Ball's previous theatrical experience. Before relocating to Switzerland, Ball studied at the Max Reinhart School of Dramatic Art.¹³⁴ Ball then developed his theory of a new theatre while directing at the Munich theatre *Kammerspiele*, where he worked from June 1913 until the outbreak of war.¹³⁵ Closely affiliated with Wassily Kandinsky, and inspired by Kandinsky's expressionist essay on stage composition,¹³⁶ Ball 'developed his [own] notion of [e]xpressionist theatre as a [...]

¹³⁰ See F.T. Marinetti, Emelio Settimelli, and Bruno Corr, 'The Futurist Synthetic Theatre,' 1915, in *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi and Laura Wittman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009); and Marinetti, 'The Variety Theatre,' 1914.

¹³¹ Goldberg, 29.

¹³² Brentano, 31.

¹³³ Marinetti, 'The Pleasure of Being Booed,' 1911, *Futurism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi and Laura Wittman (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 96.

¹³⁴ John Elderfield, 'Introduction,' Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, xvi.

¹³⁵ Alan Young, *Dada and After: Extremist Modernism and English Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), 12.

¹³⁶ Wassily Kandinsky's *Über Bühnenkomposition* was first published in *Der Blaue Reiter Almanac*, 1912.

Gesamtkunstwerk that would regenerate society by releasing the pent-up forces of the unconscious.’¹³⁷ In 1915, Ball and Emmy Hennings arrived in Zurich with plans ‘to have our own ensemble, to write by myself the plays for it, and work on it until it becomes a proper theatre: our final ambition.’¹³⁸ Ball enacted his theories on theatre at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, where Dada superseded his expressionist tendencies. Ball was also inspired by the playwright Frank Wedekind,¹³⁹ and would later work with artist and playwright Oskar Kokoschka to stage his play *Sphinx and Strawman* at the dadaist ‘Sturm Soirée,’ Zurich, 14 April 1917, co-organised by Tzara. It was with the impetus of staging plays that Tzara later influenced the most notorious Paris Dada events.

Tzara recognised the importance of renewal over invention and employed the established format of the theatre play for his artistic activity. In 1920 – the first year of Paris Dada’s performance programme – Tzara stated that rather than creating new modes of expression, the dadaists ‘seek to renew existing forms.’ In this same speech Tzara demanded, ‘art must return to be entertaining, only joy is simple and natural.’¹⁴⁰ This concept had been introduced by Apollinaire who believed that the purpose of theatre was to ‘interest and entertain. That is the aim of every dramatic work.’¹⁴¹ Favouring a less sombre style of dramatic theatre, Apollinaire did not believe that ‘theatre should make anyone feel despair,’ instead, his aim was to integrate entertainment with a socially moralising goal. Marinetti anticipated this sentiment in a 1914 manifesto: ‘The Variety Theatre is absolutely practical because it simply sets out to distract and amuse the public...’¹⁴² Tzara’s theatre would aspire to this notion in the 1920s. As Henri Béhar suggests: ‘In Tzara, the theatre [...] remains joy and poetry. From each of his plays emanates a dynamism, an impressible pleasure.’¹⁴³

The dadaists did indeed perform. However, rather than consciously developing a performance art, they looked to renew the established theatre format. Dada sought a framework for disseminating their creative outputs, and theatre provided the means. This phenomenon can be viewed in futurist theatre theory, and from the onstage activities of the

¹³⁷ Sheppard, 237.

¹³⁸ Letter from Ball to Käthe Bodnitz, 29 December 1915, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 63.

¹³⁹ See Ball, *Flight out of Time*, 62, for Ball’s account of Wedekind’s play *Oh-Aha*.

¹⁴⁰ *OC*, 1:571.

¹⁴¹ Raymond C. La Charite and Virginia A. La Charite, ‘Guillaume Apollinaire: Poet of the Modern Theatre,’ *South Atlantic Bulletin*, vol. 33, no. 2 (March, 1968): 4-7, 5.

¹⁴² Marinetti, ‘The Variety Theatre,’ 188.

¹⁴³ Béhar, 1979, 196.

dadaists. Later in this chapter, I address Antonin Artaud's theatre theory. Championed by the post-World-War-II avant-gardes, Artaud's theories were, in my view, misread as a criticism of theatre. While Artaud critiqued conventional, specifically occidental, theatre, he turned to non-Western practices (Balinese) to seek out a more direct (non-mimetic) theatrical experience. It is this practice that I have identified as also being sought by the dadaists, and the futurists before them.

This section has discussed the somewhat misplaced assessment that avant-garde onstage activity established a new art form, latterly termed performance. Complications arise from this genealogy, for if the genesis of performance art is the theatrical avant-garde, how can performance artists seek to deny their affiliation with theatre? By way of addressing this question, I will now discuss crucial moments in the development of performance art where, post-war, predominantly American, artists translated, or rather mistranslated, avant-garde developments for their own objectives.¹⁴⁴

Happenings

Performance art was properly established with Allan Kaprow's Happenings. The execution of the Happenings is an interesting case when discussing the relationship between performance art and theatre, and the translation of the avant-garde onstage objective by the post-war performance artists. The title 'Happenings' was chosen specifically to denote something that 'just happens to happen,' emphasising spontaneity, yet these events were usually scripted, rehearsed and carefully controlled.

Despite commitment to rehearsal, Kaprow was careful to isolate this practice from a theatrical endeavour. In 1966, Kaprow sets out the following guidelines for Happenings. Firstly, Kaprow insists on multiple locales for each Happening because 'a single performance space tends towards the static and, more significantly, resembles conventional theatre practice.' Closely related to multiple performance spaces, is 'variable and discontinuous' time. The performance occurs in 'real' or 'experienced' time, not a fictional

¹⁴⁴ Erik MacDonald has suggested: 'despite its international diffusion, performance art is both historically and theoretically a primarily American phenomenon, and a proper understanding of it must, I believe, be centred on how it has developed both practically and conceptually in the United States.' *Theatre at the Margins: Text and the Post-Structural Stage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 2. I will follow this line of enquiry.

time as denoted by theatrical narrative. ‘Happenings should be performed only once.’ Kaprow discusses how several Happenings have been repeated, ‘ostensibly to accommodate larger attendances, but this, I believe, was only a rationalisation for the wish to hold on to theatrical customs.’ Kaprow finds theatre practice ‘inadequate,’ for repetition counters the values of ‘spontaneity and originality.’ Finally, the audience must be ‘eliminated entirely.’¹⁴⁵ Eventually, Kaprow did indeed remove the audience – the division between performer and spectator – by inviting (enforcing) participation from everyone who attended the event. Only when all the elements are integrated – people, environment, materials, and time – can ‘the last shred of theatrical convention [disappear].’¹⁴⁶

While Happenings resemble a non-traditional presentation for their lack of narrative and insistence on participation, they were characterised, above all, by a ‘strong visual dimension.’ The theatrical avant-garde employed visual devices (set design), however, because their creators were predominantly from a literary background, vocal intonation of written texts was the dominant characteristic of their events. Kaprow’s priority is somewhat different, ‘indeed Kaprow traces [the Happenings’] historical evolution not back through these performance avant-gardes but through modern painting,’ specifically Jackson Pollock’s action painting.¹⁴⁷ Unlike the theatrical avant-garde events, predominantly staged in theatre venues, Happenings occurred most often in art galleries.

Discussing the format of Happenings, both Richard Schechner and John Cage reveal their ambivalence towards Kaprow’s method. In an interview with Cage by Schechner and Michael Kirby, Schechner said:

The thing that bothered me about the Happenings I’ve seen is that they were obviously rehearsed but badly done. Either they shouldn’t have been rehearsed, or they shouldn’t have gone half way.¹⁴⁸

In agreement, Cage suggested that due to their lack of theatricality, the Happenings were poorly executed. For the word ‘theatrical’ means to perform ‘convincingly. Either they should have done it well or not at all.’¹⁴⁹ Thus, on the grounds of its lack of theatricality, Kaprow’s practice shifts away from the non-hierarchical, collaborative and theatrical

¹⁴⁵ It is of note that, unlike Happenings, the futurist and Dada events of the early twentieth century insisted on a (fee-paying) public attendance for their events to be both artistically impactful and financially successful.

¹⁴⁶ Allan Kaprow, *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings* (New York: H.N Abrams, 1966), 261.

¹⁴⁷ Carlson, 1996, 105.

¹⁴⁸ John Cage, Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner, ‘An Interview with John Cage,’ *The Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Winter, 1965): 50-72, 56.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

working practices of Dada. By alienating audience spectatorship, Kaprow's programme retreats from the public sphere. Controlling the performance environment in this way, Kaprow sacrifices the avant-garde ethic and moves towards the concept of the performing artist as discrete creator of unique works, which aligns more closely to the modernist agenda. Kaprow's framework for performance filters through the history of performance art, further encouraging its separation from theatrical arts. This separation reached its peak with the 1970s body artists whose concept of performance further establishes an anti-theatrical agenda. Anti-theatricalism in performance art relates to high modernist theory (late 1950s and 1960s), specifically that of Michael Fried, as will now be discussed.

Modernism, Anti-Theatricalism and Performance Art

In its first manifestations, performance art was primarily concerned with using the body as an object of creative expression: in Paris, 1960, the Nouveau Réaliste Yves Klein used female models dipped in blue paint as paintbrushes to create his *Anthropometry* paintings; in Milan, Piero Manzoni signed people's bodies to designate them as art; Gilbert and George became *Living Sculptures* in London; and Hermann Nitsch's Dionysian rituals involved bound bodies, nudity and blood as part of Vienna Actionism. These artists sought to collapse the distance between art and artist, influencing New York and Californian artists in the mid-1960s. By around 1970, the term body art was in use.¹⁵⁰

Body artworks that gained the most public notoriety were those of artists that pushed their bodies to extreme limits of pain or danger. Chris Burden was the artist most associated with these types of performances. His inaugural performance, *Five Day Locker Piece* (1971), witnessed the artist locking himself in a confined space for five days. In *Shoot* (1971), with onlookers present, an assistant shot the artist in his left arm. Burden said of his work that the extreme physical feats were to encourage specific mental states: 'The violent part wasn't really important, it was just a crux to make all the mental stuff happen.'¹⁵¹ The other reason was to remove his actions from the 'more mushy' world of theatre. 'It seems that bad art is theatre. Getting shot is for real [...] there's no element of pretence or make-believe in it.'¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Carlson, 1996, 112

¹⁵¹ Robin White, 'Interview with Chris Burden,' *View*, 1979, quoted in *Performance Anthology* ed. Carl E. Loeffler and Darlene Tong (San Francisco: Last Gasp Press, 1989), 399.

¹⁵² Willowby Sharp and Liza Béar, 61.

Carlson suggests that by the early 1970s, when artists and critics struggled to define this new genre of performance, 'theatre was probably the most common "other" against which the new art could be defined.'¹⁵³ A 1975 panel on 'Performance and the Arts' held in Washington, and headed by Kaprow, suggested that performance artists avoid 'dramatic structure and psychological dynamics of traditional theatre or dance' in order to prioritise 'bodily presence and movement activities.'¹⁵⁴ The visual arts background of most of these performance/body artists, and the heavy influence of Kaprow who traced performance art from a specifically painterly background, enabled this sentiment to dominate attitudes about performance in the 1970s.

Despite the tendency to characterise performance art as a progression of avant-gardism, I suggest that its roots and intentions are contained more appropriately within high modernism. Michael Fried's 1967 essay 'Art and Objecthood' presents a potent modernist anti-theatrical discourse. In this essay, Fried states: 'The success, even the survival, for the arts has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theatre.'¹⁵⁵ For Fried, theatre is a 'common denominator' made up of fractions of other art forms, and therefore is a dilution of the arts, which works against the modernist agenda.

It is important to highlight that Fried's attack is directed against certain types of sculpture, not theatre itself. Fried differentiates between two types of modernist sculpture: that which is theatrical and that which is not. Fried is concerned by 'presence,' which he equates to 'stage presence,' and the relationship between a work of art and its audience. Fried argues that when artworks command a viewer to take into account their 'presence' (often by their size, which confronts the viewer physically, forcing a consideration of the work from a distance) a 'situation' is created, resulting in a contract between viewer and the work, which is akin to the spectator/actor relationship. 'Everything counts – not as part of the object but as part of the situation in which its objecthood is established and on which that objecthood at least partly depends.'¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Carlson, 1996, 114.

¹⁵⁴ Andree Hayum, 'Notes on Performance and the Arts,' *Art Journal*, vol. 34 (1975): 337-340, 339.

¹⁵⁵ Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood,' *Artforum*, 1967 (New York: Artforum, 1962-1982): 12-23.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

Fried suggests that whereas modernist art strives to escape its objecthood, literalist (minimalist) sculpture embraces objecthood. Objecthood is a condition that Fried terms 'non-art.'

...the literalist espousal of objecthood amounts to nothing other than a plea for a new genre of theatre; and theatre is now the negation of art. Literalist sensibility is theatrical because [...] it is concerned with the actual circumstances in which the beholder encounters literalist work.¹⁵⁷

When the viewer becomes a spectator, art becomes theatre. It is the necessity of the audience required by both theatre and literalist art that Fried (and he claims, modernism) finds offensive: 'For theatre *has* an audience – it *exists* for one – in a way that the other arts do not; in fact, this is more than anything what modernist sensibility finds intolerable in theatre generally. [...] And] literalist art, too, possesses an audience.'¹⁵⁸ The problem of the audience in art is echoed in Kaprow's guidelines for Happenings, as previously established.

Fried's rejection of the audience in art responds to the modernist programme for arts autonomy (within its own sphere). As theatre is the most public of the arts, Fried's anti-theatricalism can be comprehended on the grounds of the modernist aversion to the public sphere. Conversely, the avant-garde's embrace of theatre and theatricalism can be viewed as indicative of their kinship to mass culture.¹⁵⁹ While modernism celebrates the primacy of the individual artist, theatre (and the avant-garde project) relies on collaboration and collectivity to create an art presented in a public forum.

Martin Puchner asserts that the rise of the modernist anti-theatricalism can be understood, in part, as a reaction against the late-nineteenth-century 'celebration of theatre and theatricality that one could call theatricalism.'¹⁶⁰ Turn-of-the-century reformers sought to salvage theatre from its perceived decline, as is evident in the theatre of Alfred Jarry, Jean Cocteau and Guillaume Apollinaire. This reformation was accelerated by Marinetti's 1915 declaration that 'everything of any value is theatrical,'¹⁶¹ and can be viewed in the dadaist project to put all the arts on stage.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 15.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 21

¹⁵⁹ See Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

¹⁶⁰ Martin Puchner, 'The Invention of Theatricality,' *Stage Fright* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 6.

¹⁶¹ Marinetti, 'The Futurist Synthetic Theatre.'

What we begin to see here is that the polarisation between anti-theatricalism and theatricalism corresponds to some extent to the distinction made by a number of theorists between high modernism and avant-garde. We may thus speak of a modernist anti-theatricalism and an avant-garde theatricalism.¹⁶²

I suggest that performance artists distinguish their art from theatre by a comparable theoretical framework upon which the modernist attack on theatre was established.¹⁶³

Performance artists active in the 1970s attempted via performance to approximate Fried's concept for art: a performance that embraces the purity of the single performed gesture, to seek the essence of their art practice. Actions by Burden insist on the presence of the performing body: real actions occurring to real bodies in the immediate present moment. The agenda to be immediately present is what Fried would call 'presentness:' a work that can be perceived in the immediate moment (like watching someone being shot).¹⁶⁴ Therefore, there exists a situation of the presentness of performance and the absentness of theatre, if theatre is deemed a medium that relies on repetition. This differentiation between theatre and performance was highlighted with the introduction of the term 'performativity' into the lexicon of theatre and performance theory.

Performativity is a term for the dimension of speech that not only communicates ideas but also accomplishes actions. Performative utterances have actual consequences in the world, that is; to *say* something is to *do* something. J.L Austin differentiates between constative utterances and performative utterances: to describe something in language is constative but to do something with words, to bring about a reality (ontology) is performative.¹⁶⁵ For

¹⁶² Puchner, 2002, 7.

¹⁶³ However, it cannot be assumed that a binary situation exists between modernism and the avant-garde in either art historical or theatre studies theory. Indeed, several theatre practitioners grouped under the modernist umbrella looked to reform theatre through radical and non-mimetic presentations, as did the avant-garde. It is crucial to acknowledge that discussing modernism is a complex issue, not least of all because there are several modernisms. Richard Sheppard suggests that it is redundant to attempt to define a singular theory of modernism, and more useful to accept a plurality of definitions and applications of the term modernism (Sheppard, 5). There are modernisms that do not fall into the category of anti-theatricalism. However, there is a tradition within modernism that exemplifies a resistance to theatre. Within this latter category, and the modernism I refer to (concerning anti-theatricalism), is specifically a tradition of high modernism as set out by Greenberg and Fried. This concept of modernism affiliates closely to the development of performance art and its somewhat strained relationship to theatre. Thus, a situation has developed in which the relationship between modernism and the avant-garde is bound to divergent opinions about theatricalism: what it is and how it should be employed. See Puchner, 2002, 7.

¹⁶⁴ Fried argues that in opposition to the time-based nature of theatre, modernist work can be perceived in a moment; it is instantaneous and completely present. 'I want to claim that it is by virtue of their presentness and instantaneousness that modernist painting and sculpture defeat theatre.' Fried, 22.

¹⁶⁵ J.L Austin, *How to do things with Words* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 5-6. Austin uses the example of wedding rights. When the bridegroom says 'I do (take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife),' this performative speech act enacts the law binding contract of marriage.

Austin, theatrical performance utterances (constative as opposed to performative) will ‘be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage [original emphasis].’ Theatrical language is ‘parasitic,’ and falls into the category of ‘etiologies,’ working in opposition to singular performative acts.¹⁶⁶

Austin’s performativity renews debates around representational notions of theatrical mimesis as established by Plato in the fourth century BC. In the Greek classical tradition, mimesis was considered to be a representation of nature; the actor would observe from life and reproduce the emotion and behaviour on stage through character portrayal. For Plato, mimesis attempts to conjure the real world but fails because ‘truth’ (the real) is incarnated in thought, the idea, which is a divine incarnation and which cannot be physically represented.¹⁶⁷ Plato viewed theatre as a problematic means of expression for playwrights make ‘lies’ look like ‘truth.’

Plato’s argument has proved to be a strong foundation for the further development of anti-theatrical attitudes in Western thought, which are implicated in the development of performance art. Jonas Barish identifies that the tension between theatre and performance relies on the assumption of the terms ‘real’ and ‘true.’ In contrast to theatre, performance is seen as an authentic practice – for ‘real’ rather than for ‘show.’¹⁶⁸ This attitude is echoed by certain performance artists’ definition of their practice in opposition to theatre, as exemplified by Burden and Abramović, noted above. For Rebecca Schneider, Plato’s disregard for mimetic representation, and Austin’s revision of theatrical performance, ‘is in accord with archival logic that performance is given to disappear, and mimesis (always in a tangled and complicated relationship to the performative) is, in line with a long history of anti-theatricalism, debased if not downright feared as destructive of the pristine ideality of all things marked “original.”’¹⁶⁹

With the introduction of performativity, a separation between theatre and performance emerged. Stephen Bottoms suggests that

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 22 .

¹⁶⁷ In *The Republic*, published around 380 BC, Plato distinguishes three orders of creation: the first order is the ‘idea’ or concept that is divinely ordained. The second order is ‘social reality,’ the artisan who creates a version of the idea. The third order is imitation (mimesis) which is a copy of a copy. For Plato, a fictive representation on stage is thus twice removed from the truth/source. See C. D. C Reeve, *Plato, Republic* (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2004).

¹⁶⁸ Jonas Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: The University of California Press, 1981), 262.

¹⁶⁹ Rebecca Schneider, ‘Performance Remains,’ *Performance Research*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2001): 100-108, 102.

We now seem to be living with a strangely dichotomous situation, in which much more that once would have been regarded as ‘theatrical’ has been annexed off and relabelled as ‘performative’ [...] the performative is regarded as active and dynamic, that which does things – with words or otherwise – while the theatrical has become increasingly ‘etiolated.’¹⁷⁰

Early-twentieth-century avant-garde performance practice identifies a moment before such annexation occurred. The dadaists theatrical events aimed to provide social commentary, to animate audiences to active spectatorship, and to entertain. Often the social function was shock and confusion. The dadaists experimented with new forms of theatre within traditional theatre establishments, unsettling the status quo from within the ranks they sought to attack. The resurgence of performance as a mode of artistic expression post World War II brought the ‘dichotomous situation’ – between the theatrical and the performative – into sharp relief.

The anti-theatrical stance established by certain performance artists is further developed by the post-World-War-II reading of Antonin Artaud’s theatre theories.¹⁷¹ Interestingly, Artaud and Fried’s theories share certain aims, for Artaud demands theatre enact – employing Fried’s term – presentness. Artaud’s theatre seeks to banish representation from the stage in favour of immediate, present actions. For Artaud, theatre must find, within its own medium (as opposed to in other arts), a purity of expression: its essence. Where Fried finds spectatorship damaging to the integrity of modernist art, Artaud views audience passivity as problematic for theatre. In Fried’s essay, the distance between the artwork and the beholder (the situation) caused by the literalist espousal of objecthood can be aligned to Artaud’s concern about the distance caused by the physical framework of the traditional theatre in which the audience is a passive contemplator of onstage activity.¹⁷²

Realising theatre’s potential for social motivation, Artaud seeks to develop an alternative to the Aristotelian framework for theatre as education. Aristotle inferred that tragedy

¹⁷⁰ Stephen J. Bottoms, ‘The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid: Unpacking the Performance Studies/Theatre Studies Dichotomy,’ *Theatre Topics*, vol. 13, no. 2 (September 2003): 173-187, 173.

¹⁷¹ For Artaud’s influence on performance art, see: Susan Sontag, ‘Happenings: an art of radical juxtaposition,’ in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Octagon Books, 1982); Joanna Pawlik, ‘Artaud in performance: dissident surrealism and the postwar American avant-garde,’ *Papers of Surrealism*, issue. 8 (Spring, 2010); and Lucy Bradnock’s forthcoming *No More Masterpieces: Modern Art after Artaud* (London: Yale University Press, 2021).

¹⁷² To reinvigorate the participation of the spectator, Artaud’s theatre relies on a drastic renovation of the traditional stage/auditorium layout – the proscenium arch abolished. ‘Instead of making stage and auditorium into two closed worlds without any possible communication between them’ Artaud’s stage removed the physical division so that ‘direct contact will be established between the audience and the show, between actors and audience...’ Antonin Artaud, ‘The Theatre of Cruelty: First Manifesto,’ *The Theatre and Its Double* (London: Calder Publications 1993), 66/74.

functions as a form in which the viewer, engaging with mimetic representation, will experience pity and fear leading to catharsis, thus gaining a clearer understanding of human experience.¹⁷³ Rejecting the mimetic theatrical format, Artaud envisages a new catharsis, which results not from the re-presentation of classical texts (artificial constructions of fictional worlds), but from the presentation of contemporary concerns, of common everyday cruelty, because ‘the masses tremble at railway disasters, are familiar with earthquakes, plagues, revolutions and wars.’¹⁷⁴ As established in Artaud’s ‘Theatre of Cruelty’ essays, the presentation of violence on stage will animate theatre’s healing power and divert humanity from societal violence.

Artists such as Abramović, Burden and Gina Pane engaged in performances that were oftentimes physically violent. For example, Pane’s 1971 *Unanaestheticized Climb* involved the artist climbing a ladder spiked with sharp metal objects, cutting her body as she climbed. By shocking their audience with live bodily feats, these artists might be seen as invoking Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty. Yet where Artaud insists on theatre as (non-verbal) spectacle incorporating all the (visual and sonic) elements of theatrical production, performance artists reject theatrical attributes in favour of the singularity of the body in space enacting unique performative actions. And where Artaud applies shock and violence to animate the social and healing power of theatre, performance artists apply shock and violence to test the boundaries of the artistic medium (the body) as a modernist experiment. This is how performance art distorts Artaud’s vision for its own agenda.

Furthermore, Artaud’s understanding of theatrical repetition reveals further complexities around performance artists’ application of Artaudian theory. Artaud described theatrical repetition as an event or movement that is not repeatable in the same way twice. For Artaud, each expression has only one incarnation, and herein is revealed how artists such as Kaprow and the later body artists read in Artaud a programme for performance art.

an expression twice used is of no value since it does not have two lives. Once spoken, all speech is dead and is only active as it is spoken. Once a form is used it has no more use, bidding man find another form, and *theatre is the only place in the world where a gesture, once made, is never repeated in the same way* [my emphasis].¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Aristotle’s *Poetics*, first published in 335 BC, responded to Plato’s condemnation of theatrical mimesis. Aristotle employed mimesis as a supple concept, which examines the human capacity for understanding the world via fictive representation and imaginative enactment of experience. See Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle, Poetics* (Massachusetts: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1995).

¹⁷⁴ Artaud, ‘No More Masterpieces,’ *The Theatre and It’s Double*, 56.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

And thus, unlike Kaprow who deemed theatre as the empty repetition of rehearsed acts, Artaud believed that theatre was the only place for authentic gestures.

For Artaud the non-repeatable repetition mirrors Austin's discussion on performativity: acts that cannot be repeated, for when they do they become inauthentic. However, Artaud's (and performance art's) call for the singularity of the performance gesture, and Austin's claim that performativity relies on unrepeatable acts, are complicated by the introduction of poststructuralist theory in which the terms repetition and performativity, and the relationship between theatre and performance, are treated 'in radically different' ways.¹⁷⁶

Challenging Austin's assertion that performative acts cannot be repeated, Jacques Derrida calls for a framework for reading all acts, events, utterances as repeatable. For Derrida all acts are citational:

Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a 'coded' or iterable utterance [...] Rather than oppose citation or iteration to the noniteration of an event, one ought to construct a different typology of forms of iteration.¹⁷⁷

In other words, all performative acts must be recognised as citational, thus only in the reiteration of the act can it be recognised as performative. Applying this model to performance, repetition is necessary for the act to be read as performative. Derrida calls these repetitions 'different kinds of marks or chains of iterable marks,' which do not create an 'opposition between citational utterances, on the one hand, and singular or original event-utterances, on the other.'¹⁷⁸ Therefore, reiterated, rehearsed theatrical performances cannot be excluded from the realm of originary acts, they are merely different kinds of iterable marks.

To recognise the speech acts means they are (by their very recognition) repetitions of previously existing (and spoken) acts. This is what Derrida considers the performative. Derrida wrote two essays on Artaud and theatre: 'La Parole soufflée,' and 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation.' In the latter, Derrida rejects Artaud's vision of a revolutionary theatre on the grounds that repetition is inescapable. Derrida shows us that the performance artist's call for a pure presence, one that invokes Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, is built on a falsehood of immediate presentation that can affect actual

¹⁷⁶ Carlson, 1996, 148.

¹⁷⁷ Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context,' trans. Samuel Weber, *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwest University Press, 1988), 18.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

consequences in the world (performativity). Derrida's analysis of Artaud remains central to philosophical discussions of representation, reality and consciousness, which I will unpack to examine the relationship between the theatrical and the performative: the performance/theatre complex.

The Performance/Theatre Complex

Derrida divides two key concepts permeating Artaud's discussion on representation: 'repetition' and 'pure presence.' Derrida reads that Artaud wanted to erase repetition from theatre, and recognises that the tension present in Artaud's work is hinged on the 'possibility and impossibility of pure theatre' that is immediate, present and non-repeatable.¹⁷⁹ For theatre to be comprehended, it must rely on recognisable signs, which are repetitions: 'a sign which does not repeat itself, which is not already divided by repetition in its "first time," is not a sign.'¹⁸⁰ What Derrida suggests here is that human cognition functions by negotiating the capacity of memory to recognise signs (the temporal phenomenon of repetition) without which there can be no meaning made of the world. Derrida infers that Artaud conceived a closed space outside of repetition, which fundamentally announces the death of meaning.¹⁸¹

For Derrida then, there can be no signification without the recognised signifier. Artaud's 'pure presence' exists outside of the signifying process. Derrida's criticism of Artaud rests on this discussion: without representation, 'pure presence' negates theatre. The performance gesture must always be recognised for it to exist; the gesture is always perceived within a specific context of meaning making. Derrida's discussion is based on metaphysics: we know the world through a process of signification, of recognising signs, that point to other signs, always deferring meaning from being immediate and wholly present. Derrida reads in Artaud a will to escape representational signs, in which there is no deferral of meaning (*différance*), which is deemed impossible, for the immediate moment of incarnation (of Artaud's theatre) will always already be a representation of a repeatable and changeable gesture. It could be inferred that Artaud is searching for a higher level of awareness in which a repetition, which repeats itself as an original (always for the

¹⁷⁹ Jacques Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation,' *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), 249.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

first time), can be recognised. However, to re-cognise, (re: to do again, cognise become aware of, thus to become aware of again) for the first time is beyond the limits of our experience.

Derrida's discussion on Artaud can be applied to understanding how the early-twentieth-century avant-gardes also viewed theatre, and how their theatrical agenda was appropriated and misconstrued by post-World-War-II performance artists. If there can be no claim to the pure present, or the non-repeatable repetition, then there is no basis for performance art to be separated from theatre.¹⁸² The early-twentieth-century avant-garde were ambivalent to the possibility (and impossibility) of 'pure presence,' and actively rehearsed their works. Unconcerned with the theoretical categories of theatre and performance, the dadaists did not claim to create a new art form but employed theatre for their performance programme. The differentiation between theatre and performance emerged in the post-World-War-II period. Yet the difference between the two collapses when applying the framework of the performance/theatre complex.

My definition of the performance/theatre complex is situated between Artaud's and Derrida's theories: that the immediate present moment of theatre cannot be repeated because with every incarnation a performance gesture will be somehow different due to temporal flux (we cannot perceive the same gesture twice in the same way; even recognisable signs will be experienced somewhat differently with each incarnation). Simultaneously it is only in repetition that the gesture can be (re)cognised, enacting performativity. This situation suggests a constant exchange between two states. Presence is always penetrated by repetition, permanently between immediacy and representation. Neither one nor the other: not binary situations, but on a continuum. This continuous flux between two opposing conditions is defined by the performance/theatre complex.

The performance/theatre complex shows that every performed gesture is unique *and* never for the first time. Therefore, I infer that each gesture is one iteration of infinite

¹⁸² Herbert Blau and Richard Schechner also show how performance art cannot be separated from theatre. Blau rejects attempts to construct an experience of unmediated presence by separating theatre from performance. Blau insists that the condition of theatre, which involves both mediation and repetition, 'haunts all performance.' Blau's concept allows us to see that there is something in both theatre and performance art that 'implies no first time, no origin, but only recurrence and reproduction.' See Herbert Blau, 'Universals of Performance: or Amortizing Play,' *Sub-Stance*, vols 37-38 (1983): 140-161, 143 and 148. Schechner also tells us that performance is never for the first time: it is 'twice behaved behaviour.' Thus moving beyond performance's claim to 'originality' and 'immediacy.' Schechner, 'Restoration of Behaviour,' *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 36.

permutations of pre-existing physical gestures, and that with each new iteration, it will be somehow different.

Theatricality

As introduced at the beginning of this chapter, in addition to the performance/theatre complex, the definition of theatricality is central to my discussion on Dada theatre. Like the performance/theatre complex, theatricality denotes an inescapable relationship between the categories of theatre and performance.

Josette Féral investigates how performance is removed from the representational quality of theatre, and applies this situation to define theatricality. According to Féral, theatre cannot escape the representational. Performance on the other hand eschews representation, free from the responsibility of representing anything for anyone. Performance reveals theatre's margins. The margin is not what is excluded, but in the Derridean sense of the 'frame' (*parergon*) that which is necessarily present, but which is hidden: the relationship between the artwork and the world. The margin refers to the subject's 'entire store of non-theatricality,' the non-theatrical (according to Plato) being life; the margin is the true subject (personality) of the performing agent. Performance demystifies the subject onstage, revealing both its centre and its margin. Theatre is incapable of showing the margin because the subject is clouded by representation. Because performance shows both, performance can be said to consist of all the accessories (the symbolic structures) that theatre needs for its representational agenda. Performance then is a 'storehouse for the accessories of the symbolic,' upon which theatre is founded.

Féral defines theatricality as arising from the interplay between two realities: 'one highlights performance and is made up of the *realities of the imaginary*; and the other highlights the theatrical and is made up of *specific symbolic structures* [original emphasis].'¹⁸³ Thereby, theatricality is between theatre and performance, employed by both. Theatricality informs the performance/theatre complex.

¹⁸³ Josette Féral, 'Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified,' *Modern Drama*, vol. 25, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 170-181,178.

Continuing the concept of theatricality as occupying a position between two realities, I turn to Samuel Weber's definition of theatricality. Weber suggests that theatricality creates a split or separation in theatre: theatricality explains the unique ability for theatre to destabilise the site as concrete. The 'place' or 'stage' of theatre is a 'place of *singular duplicity* [original emphasis],' occupying opposing forces: both here and now, and there and then.¹⁸⁴ For Weber, 'theatricality' is 'the staging of separation.' I interpret Weber's analysis to mean that theatricality stages the separation of life and theatre, and 'takes place in the hollow of this separation.'¹⁸⁵ The 'hollow' refers to Plato's cave in which spectator-prisoners are bound, witnessing a shadow play that they perceive as reality.¹⁸⁶ Weber's analogy is more positive.¹⁸⁷ Theatricality creates the void (cave) between the theatre (shadow play) and reality (the world outside). However, the act of separation (splitting or tearing), touches reality *and* theatre (it tears along the seam of both) thereby joining them in the space (the hollow void) created by the tear. Reality and theatre are linked by their separation; the split creates a converse position between theatre and reality (which for Féral is performance), occupying both, and at the same time separating one from the other. In this separation, theatricality invents itself 'as a medium of a displacement or dislocation that opens other ways.'¹⁸⁸

Jean Alter discusses the 'dual appeal' of theatre, which further defines theatricality. Alter describes two semiotic functions of theatre, the 'referential' (which is the generally held view of the purpose of Saussurean semiotics: theatre's ability to communicate a story, carried out with 'signs that aim at imparting information') and the 'performant,' which relates not to signs, but to a function that is designed to please, or amaze: theatre's ability to entertain. Alter's definition of the performer includes public displays by circus actors and musicians, whose virtuosic skill is sought out by spectators.¹⁸⁹ What Alter describes, and more so when it pertains to the non-acting theatre arts, is more commonly referred to as theatricality.

Wolfgang Matzat also defines a particular type of 'theatrical theatre' in which 'theatrical playing takes precedence over the represented dramatic process because the "theatrical

¹⁸⁴ Weber, 293.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁸⁶ Plato uses the cave scenario to explain that theatre presents a false reality, because the spectator cannot separate the truth (outside world) from the lie (the shadows on the wall of the cave).

¹⁸⁷ Weber, 28.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁸⁹ Jean Alter, *A Sociosemiotic Theory of Theatre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 32.

perspective” here dominates.’ Matzat warns of the emptiness that exists in this type of theatre because, ‘the presented actions become signifiers without signifieds, symbols without meaning, because they cannot be filled with an emotional substance.’¹⁹⁰ Matzat’s differentiation between theatrical theatre and represented dramatic processes, aligns to Alter’s distinction between the performant and referential functions of theatre. Theatrical theatre privileges the performant function, designed to entertain; represented drama adheres to referential functions whereby the application of Saussurean semiotics allows the communication of a story.

Theatrical theatre is exactly the kind of onstage activity that Tzara and the dadaists presented. The dadaist theatrical theatre presents signifiers without signifieds, it lacks representational notions of mimesis, for there is no illustrative quality for the human observer to identify with; no acknowledged semiotic framework to recognise. Furthermore, by combining Weber’s and Féral’s evaluation of theatricality as a play between two realities (theatre and reality/performance), and Alter’s binocular view of theatre (communication and entertainment), it is my assessment that theatricality is the most useful term for discussing Tzara’s onstage practice. This view of theatricality allows for the confluence of dual realities, as does the performance/theatre complex.

A reassessment of Dada performance shows how avant-garde experiments elude categories that separate performance from theatre. As Thi Minh-Ha Trinh has pointed out, ‘[d]espite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak.’¹⁹¹ Throughout the remainder of this thesis, I will demonstrate how Tzara’s onstage practice is situated at the border of categories, at the centre of the performance/theatre complex. It is at the frontier of categories that meaning is negotiated, and that Tzara’s contribution to theatre/performance history is established.

¹⁹⁰ Wolfgang Matzat, *Dramenstruktur und Zuschauerrolle* (Mucich: Fink, 1982), 54, quoted in Lehmann, 136.

¹⁹¹ Thi Minh-Ha Trinh, *Women, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1989), 94, quoted in Carlson, 1996, 206.

CHAPTER 3: THE MANIFESTATIONS OF PARIS DADA

The previous chapter reassessed the relationship between early-twentieth-century avant-garde onstage activity and performance art. Certain attitudes about mimesis, theatre and performance as presented previously, assist in comprehending why Tzara's theatrical works have been somewhat overlooked: for the (largely) art historical assessment of Dada's onstage practice favours a performance art lineage, and inadvertently denigrates the category of theatre as a mode of presentation. I have shown how the definition of performativity, and high-modernist theory, re-establish anti-theatrical attitudes based on the assumption that theatricality dilutes the essence of the unique performed moment (performativity) and artwork (modernism). These attitudes are incompatible with the avant-garde objective to amalgamate the arts, and in doing so, embrace the theatrical form.

Tzara's theatrical works do not fit easily with the post-World-War-II delineation of performance art; theatre and theatricality are more useful terms for discussing Tzara's performed works. It is my assertion that theatre is a supple term that encompasses a wide variety of performance modes, and eschews neat categorisation. Nonetheless, Tzara's onstage activities blur distinctions between accepted definitions of theatre and performance, and therefore, in order to provide a theoretical underpinning for Dada's onstage activities, I have developed the framework of the performance/theatre complex. In this chapter, I apply this framework to discuss the onstage activities of Paris Dada.

Between 1920 and 1921, the Paris dadaists executed seven public manifestations. The manifestations of Paris Dada followed the convention of the later Zurich Dada soirées organised by Tzara, and included music, dance, theatre plays, skits, and the onstage presentation of visual artworks. Tzara's first three plays were staged at these events. After Dada, Tzara continued to stage his plays at organised gatherings, alongside performances by other playwrights, artists and musicians. Only his final play, *La Fuite*, received a solo staging. The manifestations of Paris Dada exploited a particular theatrical framework: communication between onstage performer and a responsive audience. They incorporated traditional theatrical aids such as costume, lighting and scripted dialogue. I investigate some key examples here to determine how Dada's onstage practice fulfils the performance/theatre complex.

Le Premier Vendredi de Littérature

Avant-garde magazines played a significant role in preparing Paris audiences for the arrival of Dada. Amongst *Nord-Sud*,¹⁹² *SIC* and Apollinaire's *Les Soirées de Paris*, the small publication *Littérature* was significant in its promotion of Dada.¹⁹³ Elmer Peterson notes that *Littérature*, founded in March 1919 by André Breton, Philippe Soupault and Louis Aragon was the most important link between the French avant-garde and what would become Paris Dada and later Surrealism.¹⁹⁴

'Le Premier Vendredi de *Littérature*' (the 'First Friday of *Littérature*'), 23 January 1920 was to be the first (and subsequently, only) manifestation organised by the *Littérature* editors. These events were to be distinct from their regular poetry readings. Tzara had arrived in Paris just a few days earlier on 17 January and his contribution to the 'First Friday' was invaluable for establishing Paris Dada's performance project. Tzara's stage technique allowed for a shift from the recitation of poems towards 'pure action.'¹⁹⁵ Tzara wrote in an open letter to Jacques Rivière: 'If one writes, that is nothing but an escape: in any case I don't write as a profession and have no literary ambitions.'¹⁹⁶ Like Ball before him, Tzara wrote his material with the intention to perform. For Tzara, reading fails to capture the performance of the 'lived text.'¹⁹⁷ And so, Tzara took to the stage.

Breton and Aragon rented an auditorium in the Palais des Fêtes on rue Saint Martin for the afternoon show. Inaugurated in 1910, the Palais des Fêtes is located between the 3rd and 4th arrondissements, near the main shopping district Les Halles (Paris's central food market) and Le Marais (a historical district hosting buildings of cultural importance), on the right bank of the Seine.¹⁹⁸ In 1915, a second large hall was added providing the venue with two auditoriums, predominantly serving as movie theatres. A party room with a small stage located between the two cinema halls hosted the 'First Friday of *Littérature*.'¹⁹⁹ Despite

¹⁹² *Nord-Sud* is named after the Metro line linking the artistic centres Montmartre and Montparnasse.

¹⁹³ While still in Zurich, Tzara fostered links with Pierre Albert-Birot (editor of *SIC*) and Pierre Reverdy (*Nord-Sud* editor). Tzara's works were published in these journals. From 1919 a regular 'advert' for Dada, along with Tzara's poetry, featured in *Littérature*, introducing Dada to France. See Ades, 59 and 162.

¹⁹⁴ Elmer Peterson, 'Paris Dada: Publications and Provocations,' in *Paris Dada: The Barbarians Storm the Gates*, 9.

¹⁹⁵ Sanouillet, 103.

¹⁹⁶ *Littérature* 7, quoted in Melzer, 140.

¹⁹⁷ Hentea, 2014, 70.

¹⁹⁸ The Palais des Fêtes is now called L'Espace Saint-Martin: a conference and exhibition centre, boasting eleven spaces including two large auditoriums. The Centre Pompidou (opened in 1977) is situated one block from the venue.

¹⁹⁹ During the show, the dadaists competed with sound from the cinema orchestras.

being situated in central Paris, away from the artistic centres of Montmartre and Montparnasse, a large number of poets and painters attended, paying 2 francs entry.²⁰⁰

The group visited the venue on the morning of the performance and arranged the stage. The set was created from props left behind by an amateur dramatic group's previous performance; some shrubberies provided a semi-forest scene. The programme was divided in two parts and included music from Les Six composers and a presentation of artworks and sculptures by Fernand Léger, Juan Gris and Giorgio De Chirico (accompanied by a lecture on each artist by Breton). Two works by Francis Picabia were presented as part of a performance scripted by the artist.²⁰¹ Professional actors – Pierre Bertin and Marcel Herrand – were hired to read poems by Guillaume Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars, Max Jacob and Pierre Reverdy.

The first act was rather tame, and a reviewer from *Comœdia* (who left during the interval) reflected that 'much should be expected' from these young artists 'full of talent.'²⁰² In the second act, provocative poetic recitations animated the spectacle. Aragon read from Tzara's *Le géant blanc lépreux du paysage*. This poem includes the lines 'ma queue est froide [my dick is cold]' and 'he is thin idiotic dirty he does not understand my verses he screams,' to which the audience responded by whistling loudly.²⁰³ On completion, Aragon announced that the leader of Zurich Dada would now perform. As discussed in Chapter 1, Tzara entered the stage with exaggeratedly tiny steps, took from his pocket the most recent parliamentary address by Léon Daudet and cut it into fragments. Pulling the pieces from a hat, Tzara performed the rearranged speech accompanied by clanging instruments from the wings. Of all the presentations at the 'First Friday,' the audience responded most violently to Tzara's performance.²⁰⁴

As previously noted, denying any political motivation, Tzara said of his performance: 'all that I wanted to convey was simply that my presence on stage, the sight of my face and my

²⁰⁰ Hentea, 2014, 133.

²⁰¹ Breton exhibited Picabia's *Riz au nez*: a composition on blackboard consisting of the title (amongst other inscriptions) written in chalk. *Riz au nez* is a play on words meaning either 'rice on your nose' or 'laugh in your face.' Sanouillet describes that once the impertinence of the pun was realised angry shouts burst out from the audience. As scripted by Picabia, Breton then proceeded to wipe the chalk from the slate thus ending the performance. Sanouillet, 104.

²⁰² *Comœdia*, 24 January 1920, 3, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 133. The daily arts tabloid *Comœdia*, responsible for reviewing theatre and film, would become a platform of discussion for Paris Dada events.

²⁰³ Hentea, 2014, 134.

²⁰⁴ See Chapter 2, pg. 21.

movements, ought to satisfy people's curiosity and that anything I might have said really had no importance.'²⁰⁵ Tzara's stage technique, described by Sanouillet as 'pure action,'²⁰⁶ comprises the body of the performer 'speaking' the performance language: gesture subjugates words. This action predates Artaud's theatre theory, which demands theatre abandon its privileging of literature. However, Tzara's action relies on the written text of Daudet's speech. Indeed, all Paris Dada's vocal performances are based on written poems, manifestos, speeches or play texts. Tzara's action requires further investigation in relation to the performance/theatre complex.

Tzara's performance technique resembles his instruction for how 'To write a dadaist poem' from the 'Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love.' In this manifesto, Tzara instructs:

Take a newspaper.
Take some scissors.
Choose from this paper an article of the length you want to make your poem.
Cut out the article.
Next carefully cut out each of the words that makes up this article and put them all in a bag.
Shake gently.
Next take out each cutting one after the other.
Copy conscientiously in the order in which they left the bag.²⁰⁷

Tzara would not write this manifesto until December 1920, eleven months after the 'First Friday.' In this way, Tzara's performance impacts his subsequent poetic method, known as the 'cut-up' technique. While Tzara's performance relies on the previously written (and printed) text, the application of the technique in performance results in a unique combination of spoken words. And while the same text might be reused, the technique disallows for any exact repetition of the specific performed moment. In performance, Tzara's action is simultaneously pre-meditated (reliant on the written text) and delivered as an immediate, spontaneous performance. In this way, Tzara's action fulfils the performance/theatre complex.

In this first Dada gathering, poetic, plastic and performance elements collided on the Parisian stage. Tzara's action created an upheaval, and by the final performance the hall was empty. Hentea notes that 'the show had created a public outcry and, most importantly,

²⁰⁵ Tzara, 'Memoirs of Dadaism,' in *Axel's Castle*, 304.

²⁰⁶ Sanouillet, 103.

²⁰⁷ Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love,' *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries*, trans. Barbara Wright (London: Alma Classics Ltd., 2013), 39.

Dada had fired its opening salvo in Paris.²⁰⁸ By a strange coincidence, Jacques-Émile Blanche – a prominent art critic of classical inclination – suffered a heart attack on his way to the event. This pleased the young dadaists, and as Aragon stated, ‘Dada has just made its first victim.’²⁰⁹

Unlike Paris Dada’s subsequent (and larger scale) manifestations, the ‘First Friday of *Littérature*’ is notable for its lack of theatre plays. After a further three matinees (at different locations) with offerings similar to those of the first show, Paris Dada events required a new format. Hans Richter defined the dadaist motivation for the manifestations:

... to outrage public opinion was a basic principle of Dada [...] And when the public (like insects or bacteria) had developed immunity to one kind of poison, we had to think of another.²¹⁰

The following manifestation identifies the dadaists striving for new methods of presentation to renew the theatrical experience. Here, they conflate the aesthetic of spontaneity of the manifestation format with (somewhat more traditional) musical recitals and theatre play productions. The manifestations were intended to exist only within their own time, instantly obsolete and irretrievable. The plays on the other hand were recorded documents, which sought a place in history via publication and re-performance. The introduction of staged plays in the manifestation format further destabilises the myth of Dada performance as spontaneous, immediate and improvised.

Manifestation Dada

For their first large-scale event in Paris – the ‘Manifestation Dada’ on 27 March 1920 – Tzara hired Aurelian Lugne-Poe’s Théâtre de l’Œuvre, the venue that infamously premiered Alfred Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* in 1896. According to Tzara, this soirée ‘showed the

²⁰⁸ Hentea, 2014, 132.

²⁰⁹ Claude Arnauld, *Jean Cocteau* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), 244, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 132. During the second Paris Dada event at the Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, the Théâtre-Français de Bordeaux burned down. Like Blanche’s heart attack, these chance events ‘added to Dada Mythology (and Surrealism later made the connection between random events as a key area of investigation.)’ Hentea, 2014, 138.

²¹⁰ Richter, 66. Tzara described Dada as ‘virgin microbe which penetrates with the insistence of air into all those spaces that reason has failed to fill with words and conventions.’ (Tzara, ‘Conférence sur la fin de Dada,’ quoted in Richter, 191). Dada transmitted like a virus, spreading its miasma across Europe and America with ‘outbreaks’ in Zurich, Paris, Berlin, Cologne and New York. David Hopkins suggests that Dada drew attention to the sickness of a culture and homeopathically replaced one form of contagion with another. Hopkins, from the paper ‘Virgin Microbe: Dada, Dissemination, Contagion,’ *Dada 1916-2016: A Century in Revolt* symposium, CCA, Glasgow, 3 November 2016.

vitality of Dada at its height.’²¹¹ Tzara had the idea for an event in which the dadaists would present a series of performances that were scripted, composed, designed and directed by the group. This was their first venture into theatre production and ‘by adopting the standard methods of these extremely conventional art forms, the [d]adaists revealed their inner workings, and “desacralized” them – in short, they used the absurd to expose the absurdity of old and solemn traditions.’²¹² Realising that perhaps the best approach to revolutionise theatre was from within the ranks they sought to attack, the dadaists lured their audience by advertising a more conventional theatre show.

Alongside the musical programme, performances included: Ribemont-Dessaignes’ one-man play, *Le Serin muet (The Mute Canary)*; *S’il vous plaît (If You Please)*, a comedy by Breton and Soupault; and *La Première Aventure Céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine (The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine)*, an eight character play by Tzara.

A full analysis of *The First Celestial Adventure* is provided in Chapter 5. However, certain moments from the text and production are discussed here to determine how Tzara’s theatre occupies the centre of the performance/theatre complex. The dramatic structure of *The First Celestial Adventure* was organised as follows: the first part of the play consists of a relationship of sorts between characters, which establishes a mock convention of theatre. After a few scenes of ‘dialogue’ during the performance at the ‘Manifestation Dada,’ Tzara, playing the character ‘Tristan Tzara,’ transcended the dramatic action and recited a Dada manifesto. Stepping outside the dramatic frame, Tzara’s appearance blurs the distinction between the audience’s perception of Tzara’s identity and his function within the play. Tzara here embodies the self-dramatization of the character/author. After the monologue Tzara then commanded the action to continue, and the characters entered into dialogue once more. By this structure the designation of the play was exploited for poetic and theatrical provocations.

The First Celestial Adventure was a visual spectacle. Dressed in costumes made of paper bags of various colours and holding name placards, Tzara’s characters herald the actor-object. That is, the actors/characters are depersonalised by restrictive costumes and nameplates (designating inhuman beings such as Mr. Cricri and Mr. Boumboum), becoming anti-mimetic performing entities. The actor becomes an object of performance

²¹¹ Tzara, ‘Memoirs of Dadaism,’ in *Axel’s Castle*, 306.

²¹² Sanouillet, 118.

standing in for the character, which in turn stands in for the ‘actual’ self. Considering the body artists of the 1960’s briefly, the performativity of the performing body is determined by actual real bodies, performing in real time, causing real immediate effects. However, as Jacques Derrida argues, all bodies are supplements for the self, negating immediate presence from the performing body.²¹³

As previously established, Platonic discourse suggests that mimetic representation of dramatic texts results in a process of removal from the truth. However, this situation transcends that of theatrical representation. Performing an ‘original’ act remains representative of existing bodily gestures: even supposedly unique actions comprise permutations of previously existing bodily movements; it is impossible to perform an unrecognisable gesture. Therefore the body supplements the ‘actual’ (original gesture) as the costume/character supplements the body. All performance then is an infinite process of removal, of supplementation for the ‘actual,’ which stands in for the very thing it subsequently defers. Derrida states: ‘the indefinite process of supplementarity has always already infiltrated presence, always already inscribed there the space of repetition and the splitting of the self.’²¹⁴

The splitting of the self accounts for the instability of ‘immediate’ and ‘present’ performance gestures, and identifies how the categories of performance and theatre, performative and theatrical, true and inauthentic, collapse into a plethora of performance gestures which do not vary in effect, but in kind. Tzara does not attempt to disguise the theatrical device of the character in costume. Rather, Tzara highlights theatricality: using the accessories of the symbolic, such as costumes and characters that identify the dramatic persona, *and* show reality: the performative body of Tzara (as himself). That is, theatricality defines Tzara’s action for it enacts the tear between theatre and reality. Tzara simultaneously interrupts the illusion of theatre by presenting himself on stage, as Tristan Tzara, in the immediate moment of performance. Yet, this moment, and his identity as Tzara, is always already supplementing the actual self (the splitting of the self in the ‘present’), deferring and representing the ‘original,’ as theatre does. Therefore, performing a dual reality; enabling the confluence of life and representation, Tzara’s play enacts the performance/theatre complex.

²¹³ Jacques Derrida, ‘That Dangerous Supplement,’ *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press: 1976), 154.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

The manifestation format motivated the audience by a method that would be theorised by Artaud. The visual spectacles incorporated music, dance, light, sound, physical gesture and spoken word. But after another event (the ‘Festival Dada,’ May 1920) with a programme closely resembling that of the ‘Manifestation Dada,’ the events had lost their shock value. The audience were coming to *expect*, to *predict* what the dadaists had to offer. Furthermore, while the dadaists embraced Futurism’s (and later Artaud’s) theatre theory, which aimed for the spectator to be central to the action, there was an undeniable separation of performer and spectator at dadaist events. Apart from the shouts and insults, there was little direct interaction between the two sides. In order to elicit direct audience engagement, the dadaists (under Breton) organised excursions and outings for their 1921 season of events.

La Grande Saison Dada

This section investigates two events performed as part of the 1921 Grande Saison Dada: ‘The Visit to the Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre,’ and ‘The Trial of Maurice Barrès.’ As with the manifestations, these events were planned and scripted. Here I discuss how, by altering the format, the new Dada season failed to provoke their intended audience response. These events, however, allow me to further demonstrate the specificity of dadaist theatricality.

The dadaist’s 1921 events aimed to animate audiences with a series of participatory visits to sites chosen for their supposed lack of interest and importance to Parisian history.²¹⁵ Printed flyers, bulletins, magazines and invitations planted in the press announced a series of ‘Excursions et Visites Dada,’ conceived as ‘visits to selected spots, in particular those that do not really have any reason to exist.’²¹⁶ The first (and subsequently only) Dada outing was announced in early April as the visit to the Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre (Fig. 2). The dadaists enticed their public by announcing: ‘To take part in this first visit is to become aware of human progress, of possible destruction, and the need to pursue out

²¹⁵ The advertised tours were in fact to sites of cultural and historical importance: the Louvre; the Gare Saint-Lazare; and the Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, which faces the cathedral of Notre-Dame and is notable for its picturesque garden boasting the oldest tree in Paris (figs. 3-5). The dadaists intended to demote the importance of these sites by claiming their lack of interest.

²¹⁶ Quoted in Sanouillet, 178.

action, which you will want to encourage in every possible way.’²¹⁷ ‘Action’ re-emerges here as the central tenet of the new regime, yet, as we shall see, despite the lack of a physical stage dividing the audience from performers, spectators remained passive recipients of the performance.

The guides were (amongst others) Aragon, Breton, Benjamin Péret, Paul Éluard, Ribemont-Dessaignes, Soupault and Tzara. Some of the group made a preliminary visit to the church grounds on 2 April to rehearse. They decided they would read the windows of an adjacent hotel, a mocking alternative to scholarly commentary on cathedral stained glass windows.²¹⁸ A letter from Aragon to Tzara reveals the latter was not present at the rehearsal. Aragon wrote: ‘We waited to see you yesterday. The St Julien le Pauvre church is amazing for the visit. We will speak about the windows of the hotel opposite. But everything has to be settled. Do everything you can to come with GRD [Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes] to my home at 8.30. Breton will be there.’²¹⁹ The date of this letter (3 April 1921) reveals the dadaists had started planning at least two weeks before the event. This level of on-site planning was as vigorous as the preparation for the manifestations of the previous year.²²⁰

The exact programme is unknown, however, an article printed in *Comœdia* the following day reveals that the event included: a duologue between Tzara and Soupault; speeches by Breton, Tzara and (a toga clad) Raymond Duncan; and recitals from a dictionary. Asté d’Esparbès describes Tzara and Soupault’s contribution:

At this moment a discussion arises between Tristan Tzara and Phillippe Soupault. It seems to me that I am the presence of two fanatics from another age. I grab snatches of sentences (of intelligible words) that continue from time to time: ‘Wash your seines like your gloves,’ shouts Tzara. ‘Take cutting lessons,’ roars Soupault. ‘Cleanliness is the luxury of the poor, be dirty!’ says Tzara, addressing me. ‘Thank you...’ ‘Cut your nose like your hair,’ Soupault advises me. ‘So it is agreed, you will come tomorrow Thursday at 2pm at 3am, in the garden of the church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre. Get off at metro St. Michel. Free entry, easy exit!’²²¹

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ The most famous example of stained glass on the Notre-Dame cathedral is visible from this site; the south rose window faces the garden of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre.

²¹⁹ Letter from Aragon to Tzara on 3 April 1921. BLJD TZR 1321.

²²⁰ Rehearsals for the manifestations of the previous year most likely took place at Picabia’s home, where Tzara stayed for most of 1920. It is also likely that much of the planning for the manifestations occurred in the Café Certa where the dadaists were regular customers during 1920.

²²¹ Asté d’Esparbès, *Comœdia*, 15 April 1921, BLJD TZR 864 VI, Box: Avril and Mai 1921, 317.

Tzara and Soupault's dialogue was scripted from phrases printed on the poster advertising the Visit (Fig. 2).²²² While giving the appearance of improvised dialogue (d'Esparbès' response to the performance indicates its spontaneous appearance), as with all Paris Dada actions, this moment initiates in the written text.

Breton contributed a lecture, which was printed in *Comœdia* the following day:

We let people believe that Dada was dead. But it was just an experiment. We find you as stupid as you were at the first Dada event, rushing in as a crowd after reading the first notice in newspapers made in your image!²²³

A photograph of Breton at 'The Visit' (Fig. 7) shows him reading from a document, which holds his focus. The intermediary of the page creates a division between performer and audience, discouraging interaction. By shifting location from the proscenium stage to the open space of the churchyard, the dadaists removed the physical distance between audience and performer. However, they nevertheless retained the format of active performer and static spectator, and the image of Breton performing establishes this situation. It is therefore ill judged to suggest that such dadaist outings provide a framework for the participatory events that emerged with performance art, such as Happenings.

'The Visit' was not as well attended as the theatre manifestations of the previous year. No doubt the bad weather on the day contributed to the lower turnout (Fig. 6). After a while the crowds started to scatter. Those who remained were given envelopes containing proverbs, drawings, obscene sketches and business cards.²²⁴ The event was literally a wash out: the rain dampened spirits, and the dadaists retreated to a nearby café to regroup. Asté d'Esparbès ends his review of the event saying:

It had been going on for an hour and a half! [...] Despite everything, I admit to breathing large sigh of relief when I found myself alone in the charming rue St-Julien-le-Pauvre having finally escaped from this meeting [with the dadaists...] I nevertheless thank the [d]adaists for having attracted me to this old corner of Paris, because I was able to admire this little church at leisure, and to choose between the powerful worship of the art of the ancients and the puerility of the present century, a cruel comparison for the [d]adaist cult.²²⁵

Peaceful contemplation of this site of cultural heritage was exactly the opposite of what the dadaists hoped to achieve with their visit to the church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre.

²²² Poster translation in Motherwell, 115.

²²³ *Comœdia*, 15 April 1921, quoted in Sanouillet, 179.

²²⁴ The dadaists made up these envelopes at the Café Certa on 12 April, two days before the event. BLJD TZR 1324.

²²⁵ BLJD TZR 864 VI, 317.

‘The Trial of Maurice Barrès’ is discussed in Chapter 1 in terms of its role in the dissolution of Dada. Here I discuss how ‘The Trial’ also assists in our understanding of dadaist theatricality. A new discursive platform about the complex relationship between theatre and performance emerges when considering this performance, notably the existence of a script, which was published in *Littérature* three months after the event.²²⁶

‘The Trial of Maurice Barrès,’ put the moral integrity of the writer Barrès – a sometime libertarian who became a staunch nationalist after World War I – on trial in the form of a courtroom play. The event caused friction amongst the dadaists, for Breton employed the very sort of institutionalised system of order that Dada opposed: the state-run law courts. Picabia publicly declared that he was ‘breaking with Dada,’ and Tzara commented during his testimony that ‘I have no confidence in justice, even if this justice is made by Dada.’²²⁷ ‘The Trial’ was staged at 8.30 pm on 13 May 1921, at the Salle des Sociétés Savantes, a lecture hall on rue Serpente.²²⁸

According to a newspaper report, the proceedings were rather dull, audiences expectant of the activities that permeated the manifestations were disappointed. The stage curtain opened in silence. Breton and members of the tribunal walked on stage, bedecked in judiciary costumes, taking their place at a row of lecterns that completed the set (Fig. 1.). Setting the tone thus as serious, the mock trial lacked mockery. As reported in *Comœdia*: ‘The idea of putting Maurice Barrès on trial was amusing, but this gesture suggested a humorous potential that we looked for in vain among the [d]adaists.’²²⁹ The audience, bored with the solemn proceedings, threw peas and flowers onstage. Latecomers were applauded, yet, as previously stated, with each interruption, Breton sounded the magistrate’s bell until the audience were settled. The lack of interaction observes the traditional audience/performer relationship for theatrical events. And after the open-air format of their previous outing, for ‘The Trial,’ the dadaists returned to the proscenium setting with its clear physical division of audience and performer.

²²⁶ ‘L’Affaire Barrès,’ *Littérature* 20 (1921): 10-11.

²²⁷ Quoted in Witkovsky, 2003, 145-146.

²²⁸ The Hôtel des Societies Savantes is in the 6th arrondissement between the Luxembourg Gardens and the Seine. It is now a research annex of the Sorbonne University, and is very near to the Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre.

²²⁹ Asté d’Esparbès, ‘Les dada ont dépassé la mesure,’ *Comoedia*, 15 May 1921, 1, quoted in Chamberlain, 26.

Tzara's testimony provided a break in the monotonous proceedings. When asked by Breton: 'Do you swear to tell nothing but the truth?' Tzara responded 'no.' I reproduce here the script to the subsequent cross-examination:

Q. [Breton] – Do you know why you have been asked to testify?

R. [Tzara] – Naturally, because I am Tristan Tzara. Something of which I have yet to be persuaded.

Q. – What is Tristan Tzara?

R. – It is the opposite of Maurice Barrès.

Q. [Soupault] – The defense, convinced that the witness envies the lot of the accused, asks if the witness dares to admit it.

R. – The witness says shit to the defense.

Q. – Apart from Maurice Barrès can you name any other great pigs?

R. – Yes, André Breton, Théodore Fraenkel, Pierre Duval, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Louis Aragon, Phillipe Soupault, Jacques Rigaut, Pierre Drieu La Rochelle, Benjamin Péret, Serge Charchoune.

Q. – Is the witness trying to insinuate that Maurice Barrès is as agreeable to him as all the pigs who are his friends and whom he has just listed?

R. – For God's sake! This is about pigs, not friendship.²³⁰

Tzara testimony appears to undermine Breton's plan for 'The Trial,' nonetheless, the document of the event reveals this was planned; Tzara's testimony remains in Breton's published account of the event.

Other moments are notable for enlivening the show. Benjamin Péret caused a furore when, dressed in a gas mask and a uniform caked in mud, he burst onstage announcing himself as the exhumed Unknown Soldier. The Unknown Soldier had been interred under the Arc de Triomphe on 11 December 1920, only six months before 'The Trial.' The audience responded to Péret's transgressive act by singing the Marseillaise. A contingent attempted to bring down the curtain and Breton's bell ringing did little to quell the crowd this time.

Finally, when Ribemont-Dessaignes' made the closing speech – as opposed to a virulent attack on Barrès, which Breton expected – he recited some definitions of Dada:

Love, sensitivity, death, poetry, art, tradition and liberty, individual and society, morals, race, homeland. But what does Dada think of these pretty objects, Dada that judges Barrès? Gentlemen, Dada does not think, Dada thinks nothing. It knows, however, what it doesn't think. Which is to say, everything...²³¹

This moment was followed by the verdict: instead of capital punishment and a unanimous vote (which Breton pursued) Barrès was sentenced to twenty years of hard labour.

²³⁰ 'L'Affaire Barrès,' *Littérature* 20 (1921): 10-11, quoted in Sanouillet, 191.

²³¹ Bonnet, 27-28, quoted in Sanouillet, 193.

The event unfolded more or less as planned, and Breton later commented that '[o]verall, the session kept to a rather serious level of discussion.'²³² Rather than engaging the kind of audience hostility encouraged at the manifestations of the previous year, under Breton a serious attempt at staging a courtroom drama replaced Dada's (by then established) theatrical provocations. Contradictory to his intentions for participation, as set out at the beginning of the Grande Saison Dada of 1921, Breton's directive disallowed for spontaneous moments of performance to be realised; his overseeing of the event encouraged performers to follow the script. As 'The Trial' went on stage, the Dada group was dividing into two camps. It is likely that the two groups planned their performances separately (Tzara, Ribemont-Dessaignes and Péret preparing for dadaist provocations, and Breton, Aragon and Soupault arranging a more serious show). After this event, the dadaists returned to the manifestation format staged in theatre halls; Breton would no longer perform with them. Tzara regained control of event planning, re-establishing dadaist theatricality.

As established in the previous chapter, theatrical theatre diverts from the usual semiotic function of drama.²³³ Theatrical theatre privileges a performant function, designed to please or amaze (or in the case of Dada, to bemuse); represented drama adheres to a referential function that applies Saussurean semiotics to communicate a story. As theatrical theatre presents signifiers without signifieds, it lacks mimesis, for there is no representational quality for the human observer to grasp.

Tzara's onstage actions do not follow semiotic or referential frameworks (for example, performing a rearranged speech rendered illogical by the cut-up technique, as established at the 'First Friday of *Littérature*'). Furthermore, Tzara's theatre rejects mimetic representation: characters are inhuman entities clothed in bizarre costumes and engaged in nonsensical dialogue (*The First Celestial Adventure*). In opposition to Tzara's theatrical theatre, Breton's performance programme introduced semiotic frameworks (costumes designating actors as courtroom judges) and mimetic representation (a narrative constructed around a recognisable courtroom scene). In his attempt to regenerate the Dada performance programme, Breton established a more conventional format of theatre that somewhat betrayed the provocative theatrical theatre conceived by Tzara.

²³² Breton, *Conversations*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Paragon House, 1953), 53, quoted in Sanouillet, 189.

²³³ Matzat, in Lehmann, 136.

Under Tzara, the dadaists aimed to regenerate the theatre spectacle, and they did so by embracing non-mimetic theatricality. They presented their works on theatre stages where the provocation was more potent; the dadaists performed their subversive dramas within the accepted framework of the medium they sought to renew. The following chapters discuss Tzara's plays: those that were performed at manifestations, followed by Tzara's solo works after Dada. As his playwriting progressed, Tzara developed his own brand of theatricality. Tzara's onstage activities anticipate subsequent theatre practice; by investigating Tzara's plays, on the page and on the stage, the specific quality of Dada theatre is realised, and Tzara's contribution to theatre history established.

CHAPTER 4: THE THEATRE OF TRISTAN TZARA

The previous chapter introduced the dadaist theatrical programme and Tzara's onstage technique. This chapter charts the development of theatrical writing and production across Tzara's career – from nonsensical action to dramatically considered plays – to determine how he established his practice as a playwright. By introducing each of Tzara plays, I will present the main characteristics of Dada theatre: critique of language; the non-mimetic 'Dada actor;' and simultaneity and spontaneity. Specific inclinations in Tzara's theatre anticipate the alienation device that would be formulated by Bertolt Brecht, and the stylistic tendencies that would characterise the Theatre of the Absurd; each of these theatrical developments are considered here. Tzara wrote his first play in Zurich, yet it was in Paris that his theatrical career began in earnest, and the consequence for subsequent avant-garde theatre practice was established.

Theatre in Paris circa 1900

The fin de siècle in Paris brought a wave of experimental theatre to its stages, and enthusiastic audiences encouraged theatrical productivity. Newly established theatres – notably the Théâtre de l'Œuvre founded by Aurelian Lugne-Poe in 1893 – supported innovative writing by young French dramatists and introduced new international plays. In 1896, Lugne-Poe presented Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*. With its infamous opening line 'Merdre!' (one letter removed from the French expletive) – Jarry's play contains scatological language, and obscene and often nonsensical action. With *Ubu Roi*, Jarry overturned the dramatic triad of time-place-action established by Aristotle, which constituted the structure of Western playwriting until the end of the nineteenth century. Jarry's stage is an environment of anarchic emancipation, 'where the law of non-contradiction does not apply.'²³⁴ Overturning conventional semiotic frameworks, objects become other than what they appear. Dramatic time, once linear, becomes fluid and changeable. This renewed and unconventional theatricality shocked contemporary audiences and paved the way for the future of avant-garde theatre practice.

²³⁴ Papachristos, 36.

It was not until 1917, when Erik Satie and Jean Cocteau's ballet *Parade* premiered at the Théâtre du Châtelet, that a new trend for experimental theatre in Paris was realised. *Parade* overturned traditional balletic themes and aesthetics: incorporating scenes from contemporary popular culture such as music hall and fairground entertainment. With cubist costumes and sets designed by Pablo Picasso, and choreographed by Sergei Diaghilev's experimental Ballets Russes, the *Parade* dancers occupied impressive cardboard structures, and their movements challenged the image of the fluid and graceful tutu-ing ballerina. *Parade* further paved the way for a theatre of the avant-garde that the poet and playwright Guillaume Apollinaire pursued.

Having completed *Les mamelles de Tirésias* (*The Breasts of Tiresias*) in 1916, Apollinaire's play received its premiere at the Théâtre Maubel on 24 June 1917. *The Breasts of Tiresias* is inspired by the tale of the blind seer from Theban mythology who is transformed into a woman for seven years by the goddess Hera. Apollinaire inverts the myth and follows Thérèse as she changes sex to gain equality in the world of men by becoming liberated from her breasts (two balloons which floated into the rafters of the theatre). Apollinaire's play delighted avant-garde audiences. Louis Aragon wrote 'I will always cherish, from [...] 24 June 1917, the souvenir of a unique freedom which permits one to foresee a theatre liberated from the philosopher's cares.'²³⁵ André Breton wrote: 'Never again, as at that evening, did I plumb the depths of the gap which would separate the new generation from that preceding it.'²³⁶ The soon to be dadaists, Breton and Aragon, championed Apollinaire's new artistic direction, and when Tzara arrived in Paris on 17 January 1920, together they embraced the theatrical form for artistic presentation, which honoured Apollinaire's precedent.

Despite the seemingly fertile theatrical environment as substantiated by these examples, the production of theatre in wartime Paris was far from booming. In 1916, collectively, the theatres in Paris earned less than one-fifth of their average takings from before the war.²³⁷ In *The Era Annual* review of 'The Paris Stage in 1916,' John Raphael notes that the Paris stage witnessed a dearth of new writing. Indeed, the longest-established producing theatre, the Comédie-Française, produced no new plays that year. 'Old favourites,' and 'spy-plays,' dominated the scene, alongside melodramatic comedies and operettas, while newly written

²³⁵ *SIC* 27 (May 1918), quoted in Peterson, 2001, 6.

²³⁶ André Breton, *Entretiens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 27, quoted in Peterson, 2001, 6.

²³⁷ See John N. Raphael, 'The Paris Stage in 1916,' *The Era Annual*, January 1917: 46-48, 48.

war dramas failed to achieve success. Finally, Raphael notes '[t]here have been very few productions of real interest.'²³⁸ The same review of 1917 notes that Parisian theatre 'has been more animated in fresh productions, albeit a long series of reprises has likewise prevailed.' Looking ahead to 1918, Edward Kendrew notes that 'many authors who have been holding back for better times are coming forward with their scripts, and it is anticipated the season' will bring new works, however 'more revivals may be expected during the coming year.'²³⁹ A report at the end of 1918 confirmed that it was the most financially successful since the outbreak of war, 'but it was not rich in new works.'²⁴⁰

By 1920, a revival of plays being produced for the stage occurred. While there was an increase in new writing, it was French classical drama that dominated. Marius Hentea notes that on the day of Tzara's arrival in Paris, Sarah Bernhardt was rehearsing Racine's *Athalie*, and theatre audiences were limited to three-act comedies or operettas.²⁴¹ While the avant-garde community was galvanised by the possibilities that Jarry, Cocteau and Apollinaire had introduced, 'it is not to be supposed, however, that afterwar conditions have not left their mark on the Paris theatre.'²⁴²

Despite the period of theatrical conservatism that reined in the immediate post-war period, the beginning of *Les Années Folles* in 1920 brought unprecedented economic prosperity to Paris. A 'new rich' class emerged with an influx of American artists and writers to Montparnasse, impacting a resurgence of theatre going in Paris. Additionally, a particular theatrical phenomenon established in Paris created possibilities for avant-garde performance: the microdrama. John H. Muse defines microdramas as plays shorter than twenty minutes, written by playwrights who consciously choose brevity as a form.²⁴³ Tzara's theatrical outputs fulfil this format; his longest play written during the Dada period consists of only fifteen pages of dialogue. The microdrama was prevalent in Paris before Tzara's arrival; towards the end of the nineteenth century, Parisian theatre audiences welcomed the naturalist *quart d'heure* (15-minute play) and the symbolist one-act play.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Edward G. Kendrew, 'The Paris Stage in 1917,' *The Era Annual*, January 1918: 57-61, 57.

²⁴⁰ Kendrew, 'French Production in 1918,' *The Era Annual*, January 1919: 39-40, 40.

²⁴¹ Hentea, 2014, 132.

²⁴² Philip Carr, 'The Theatre in Paris' (8 December 1922), *The Manchester Guardian (1901-1959)*: 16.

²⁴³ John H. Muse, *Microdramas: Crucibles for Theatre and Time* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), 2.

The invention of the microdrama was influenced by the numerous little theatres that sprang up in France in the 1880s, including Lugne-Poe's l'Œuvre. Paris was the crucible for the little theatre movement, which quickly spread across Europe. Such independent spaces were free from the censorship subjected to larger commercial theatres.²⁴⁴ These small laboratories, and the numerous short plays written for them, enabled new theatrical possibilities. The short plays were practical as well as experimental: they allowed for smaller production costs; showing several shorter plays lessened the critical failure of one play; and they allowed for theatres to take chances on new playwrights and actors. Therefore, a pre-existing framework for the dissemination of Tzara's theatre was in place when he arrived in Paris.

The availability of independent spaces in Paris allowed for the development of an active theatrical avant-garde. The theatrical avant-garde staged short plays amongst other theatrical skits and musical interludes in variety shows, as demonstrated by the dadaist manifestations discussed in the previous chapter. Despite the dominant conservative tastes of the early 1920s, Dada theatre flourished with the availability of these new venues and drew audiences comprising of the artistic communities populating Montmartre and Montparnasse.

By 1920, Dada had travelled across Europe like a 'travelling carnival show whose acts varied considerably according to the city where the [d]adaists pitched their tents.'²⁴⁵ In Paris, the scars of war that emerged after the armistice of 1918 called for a different kind of Dada from the 'noisy shenanigans of the Zurich [d]adaists – draft dodgers' from across Europe who inhabited neutral Switzerland.²⁴⁶ France suffered 20 million casualties in World War I. Breton, Aragon, Soupault and Péret all served. The young dadaists who survived populated what Gertrude Stein described as 'a lost generation.'²⁴⁷ A shift in political and cultural agitation began in 1919, a year characterised by political reaction due to widespread disappointment over the terms of peace. In 1920, Dada theatre in Paris responded to the horrors of war with nonsensical dramatic action and incomprehensible dialogue. Where Zurich Dada celebrated carnivalesque vitality, in Paris, dadaist theatricality overturned the dramatic conservatism of mainstream theatre in response to the intellectual and political climate in the wake of World War I. Notably, Tzara's theatre

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 23-4.

²⁴⁵ Peterson, 2001, 1.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Quoted in Melzer, 139.

engages a futility of experience that would come to be defined by absurdism, which responded to the mass deaths of the next world war.

The pre-World-War-I pioneers prepared the Parisian public for theatre that departed from convention, and it was into this arena that Tristan Tzara introduced his new theatre. With the arrival of Tzara in Paris, a radical form of theatre re-emerged. By employing shock and surprise; forging a new relationship between actor, play and audience; merging the actor with set design so the actor transformed into a theatrical object; and courting deliberate incoherence, Tzara brought back to Parisian stages the innovation of *Ubu Roi*, *Tiresias* and *Parade*.

Towards a Dada Theatre

The first work officially labelled Dada had been a theatre play. Before the first issue of the *Dada* magazine, Tzara published *La Première Aventure Céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine* in July 1916, released under the imprimatur 'Collection Dada.' And before it received a complete presentation in Paris in 1920, the dadaists performed excerpts from this play at the first 'public' Dada event, July 1916.²⁴⁸ It is crucial to recognise that alongside simultaneous and sound poems, music recitals and dances, theatre contributed to how this new movement presented itself. Tzara's play includes a manifesto outlining the principles of Dada: 'Dada is our intensity / Dada is life without slippers or parallels / Dada remains in the European frame of weakness / Dada exists for no one and we want everyone to understand that / Dada is neither folly, nor wisdom, nor irony...' ²⁴⁹ Tzara performed the manifesto during the presentation of the play at the Zurich event, publicly declaring the intentions of this new movement. Henri Béhar suggests that *La Première Aventure Céleste*, 'is conceived as a programmatic work, gathering the experiences and propositions of the' Zurich dadaists, within which they announced their common perspectives: 'their way of viewing poetry as an act.'²⁵⁰ By this act, poetry became theatre.

²⁴⁸ This was the first performance outside of the Cabaret Voltaire and the first time that the word 'Dada' was attached to an event.

²⁴⁹ Tzara, *The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Excedrin, Fire Extinguisher*, trans. Ruth Wilson, *Theatre*, vol 4, issue 1 (Winter 1973): 133-141, 137-8.

²⁵⁰ Béhar, 1979, 183.

Michel Corvin suggests that Tzara ‘would have invented a new way of being a poet in the theatre, but at the same time a new poetry of the theatre.’ That is, Tzara’s theatrical works develop on two levels: a poetic plan, exclusive of any theatrical concern; and a theatrical plan, non-exclusive of poetry.²⁵¹ Asserting that the only ‘natural vigour’ which theatre can demonstrate is of the order from ‘amusement’ or ‘poetry,’ Tzara dismisses specific scenographic elements.²⁵² And in the absence of traditional theatrical components – external structures (entrances, exits, relations between characters) deemed unnecessary on the avant-garde stage – Tzara invents a poetry/theatre. This is certainly the case for the early Dada plays. However, by the time Tzara produced *Handkerchief of Clouds* in 1924, dramatic and scenic organisation are included fully in Tzara’s dramaturgy.

Considering the trajectory of Tzara’s playwriting career, Dada’s requirement for anarchy and incoherence negotiates with the theatrical requirement for cohesion. Tzara’s theatre presents a dichotomy, one that both challenges and embraces theatrical structures. In the early Dada plays, linguistic conventions of theatre are dismantled with incoherent language and onomatopoeic sounds voiced by characters lacking human personae. However, Tzara relies on the organisation of theatre’s physical structures to present these works: costume, lighting, set, script and stage. In his discussion on Tzara’s theatrical turn, Béhar notes: ‘Dada theatre is born of both a theatrical technique that was scorned, but restored at the same time, and a language exploded but expanded at the same time to the dimensions of the poetic [and] scenic images.’²⁵³ That is, Tzara extends his poetic activity to theatrical principles of liveness, yet also engages in theatre practice to subvert traditional dramaturgical structures (language, character, plot). To recall from Chapter 2, these two orders identify the difference in intent for performance and theatre practitioners.²⁵⁴ Tzara’s theatricality hovers between poetry and theatre, and rejects distinctions between artistic categories. Certainly, Tzara intended his written works to be spoken: performed. Thus, a Dada theatre aesthetic emerged despite itself.

If the Dada theatre aesthetic can be described, it is by its contradictory elements, including: simultaneous and improvised action / carefully planned gestures and theatrical images; non-relatable characters occupying unknown realms / universal characters in empathetic situations; nonsense storylines consisting of episodic skits / narrative arcs concluded by

²⁵¹ Corvin, 254.

²⁵² Tzara, ‘Guillaume Apollinaire,’ *OC*, 1:397.

²⁵³ Corvin, 248.

²⁵⁴ Finburgh and Lavery, 8.

denouement; invented and incomprehensible language / poetic and relatable dialogue. And therefore, Tzara's theatrical aesthetic remains unspecified and undefined. Refuting the traditions of genre or form, Tzara attempted to reinvigorate dramaturgical and linguistic practices.

Dada Language and Tzara's Theatre

In his poems, manifestos and plays, Tzara interrupts standards of Western writing practice. Exploiting techniques such as repetition, enumeration and listing, Tzara rejects syntactical structures and abuses literary processes to his own end. Determining that 'thought is made in the mouth,'²⁵⁵ Tzara transforms writing to orality, leading him to the theatrical sphere: a place of spoken language production.

Language in Tzara's early theatre comprises oral images, non-reliant on rational semiotic structures; Tzara systematises 'literality' of language. Michel Corvin explains that 'literality' is a type of symbol of a symbol. Whereas in classical writing, the word is a symbol for an idea related as a literary image, in Tzara's texts, 'literality' replaces the literary image. The word is not encoded with symbolic meaning, but is a being: the word does not *mean* anything, it *is*. In the theatre the word-being is conferred the 'opacity of the flesh. They had possessed until then only transparency of the mind.'²⁵⁶ This is what Béhar refers to when he suggests that Tzara's language becomes a 'subject for itself [...] manifested in acts.'²⁵⁷ Therefore, language in Tzara's early theatre does not serve to communicate some idea external to the play; language is related as word-beings that establish meaning only through theatrical presentation. This is particularly prevalent in Tzara's first play where words are invented as sounds.

In *The First Celestial Adventure*, Tzara invents a pseudo-African language:

MR SHRIEKSHRIEK: Dschilolo mgabati bylunda

PREGNANT WOMAN: Toundi-a-voua. Soco bgye affahou [...]

MR BLEUBLEU: Soco bgye affahou. Zoumbye zoumbye zoumbye zoum²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love,' *Seven Dada Manifestos*..., 35.

²⁵⁶ Corvin, 281.

²⁵⁷ Béhar, 1979, 196.

²⁵⁸ Tzara, *The First Celestial Adventure*, 133.

Before Dada, the futurists experimented in phonetic poetry, which they termed ‘motlibrist.’ From 1916, Hugo Ball performed sound poems on stage at the Cabaret Voltaire. *The First Celestial Adventure* was written in Zurich, where experimentation with sound poetry was fertile, and where Tzara first explored so-called ‘primitive’ poetry in performance with his *poèmes nègres*.²⁵⁹ The sounds created by enunciating the non-words in Tzara’s play create an onomatopoeic rhythm, which cannot relate concepts or ideas but rather identifies literality of language. The invented words/beings are theatrical images, non-symbolic of any idea. In this way, Tzara dismantles theatre’s semiotic functions. As established in Chapter 2, the presentation of actions and words as signifiers without signifieds (non-mimetic) establishes the dadaist theatricality.²⁶⁰ In these early plays, Tzara presents non-semiotic dialogue designed to obscure language’s communicative function.

The Gas Heart’s text is more fluent and comprehensible, yet remains critical of the application of language to communicate reason. *The Gas Heart* presents a series of logical sentences, alluding to rational thought, yet Tzara removes denotative value from the words by redistributing them in a new syntactical order: ‘One evening-while out walking in the evening-someone found, deep down, a tiny little evening. And its name was good evening.’²⁶¹ Furthermore, the dialogue of *Heads or Tails*, which exhibits some techniques in common with *The Gas Heart*, consists of blunders and recoveries, like a scratched record.

HELEN: What an exquisite being! What a charming boy!

THE DIRECTOR: Let him speak first, Helen. Your remarks come after Foam’s declaration.

FOAM: I did my studies at the source of light.

THE DIRECTOR: It’s not true.

FOAM: It’s not true. I did my studies at the source of light.²⁶²

The elegance of the first line gives the illusion of a classical text, but the following lines suggest the sentences are arranged by disparate elements: characters interrupt one another, incapable of communicating or progressing the narrative of the play. In the final act, language disappears altogether, and Tzara writes only stage directions for a series of visual actions.

²⁵⁹ Tzara and primitivism is discussed in Chapter 5, pg. 103-6.

²⁶⁰ See Chapter 2, pg. 62.

²⁶¹ Tzara, *The Gas Heart*, 136.

²⁶² Tzara, *Pile ou Face*, OC, 1:526-7. Tzara’s plays *Pile ou Face (Heads or Tails)*, *Faust* and *La Fuite (The Flight)* have not been previously translated into English language; I have translated these plays. Excerpts from my translations appear throughout this thesis.

The language presented in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, evolves a step further from *The Gas Heart* and *Heads or Tails* towards accessibility. Here, Tzara does not articulate linguistic banality. He does however continue to undermine the semiotic function of language by signifying multiple meanings in individual words and phrases of dialogue, enacting what Béhar refers to as linguistic polysemy.²⁶³

STATIONMASTER: one after another the diffuse hours fall
on the tumours puffed up with memories and air
shorter or longer according to the boredom of the blood
prowling on the unstable launch over the snows
the pistils stretch out and suck the heart of the countryside.²⁶⁴

In this segment, words relate the image of a train's motion, and simultaneously suggest boredom or longing experienced by an unidentified protagonist. The poetic images do not progress the plot of the play, but act as an interlude of thought signifying myriad meanings dependent on the reader/viewer's subjectivity. René Crevel said at the time, for giving us the *Handkerchief of Clouds* 'we must thank Tzara doubly for finally bringing to the theatre all his gifts of poetry, lyricism, intelligence, humour and language.'²⁶⁵ *Handkerchief of Clouds* is Tzara's first (completed) play to present a coherent narrative and fully comprehensible dialogue. Apart from poetic interludes, as detailed above in the Stationmaster's reflections, the majority of the dialogue presented in *Handkerchief* contributes to developing the narrative.

Faust is a pure experiment in language and accessibility. As previously noted, Tzara said of his endeavor 'there is a test to parallel the intensity and quality of Marlowe's work in a French translation.'²⁶⁶ Here Tzara attempts to transparently relay the narrative and themes of Marlowe's text in a new French version. Tzara's final play, *The Flight*, contains a complex dramaturgical structure of two intertwined narratives: the Son revolts against his family at the same time as a war is devastating the nation. In this play, Tzara presents the horrors of war: destruction of the family unit; the Son's inability to enact positive change in the world; and the ultimate alienation of each character as they recognise the futility of existence. It is told in a series of long dramatic monologues interspersed with scenes of consistent dialogue, and character relations are clearly realised.

²⁶³ *OC*, 1:692.

²⁶⁴ Tzara, *Handkerchief of Clouds*, trans. Aileen Robbins, *The Drama Review: TDR*, vol. 16, no. 4, (December 1972): 112-129, 116.

²⁶⁵ Quoted in *OC*, 1:690.

²⁶⁶ *Transatlantic Review* no. 3 (September 1924), 311, *OC*, 1:724.

Tzara's transition towards accessibility evidences a return to classical writing, which I argue was never absent from his playwriting, even during the early dadaist phase. In each of his plays, Tzara presents universal themes (unrequited love, death, family, war), and commentary on worldly issues is discovered therein. This concept complicates discussions on the literality of Tzara's theatrical language, and reveals underlying humanist interests. While the destruction of language in Tzara's early sound and simultaneous poems demonstrates the fallibility of language as a rational means of communication, in Tzara's playwriting, language evolves as a mechanism to comment on the human experience, and is relatable to the condition that would be defined by absurdism.

Tzara's Theatre of the Absurd

If incoherence in Tzara's theatre has a meaning, it is a global meaning of a moral and social order in accordance with the Dada ethic.²⁶⁷ Stephen Forcer defines Dada as 'a particularly pure form of cultural subversion in which absurdity was not simply an element or entertaining fancy but rather an over-arching anti-principle.'²⁶⁸ Forcer's study predominantly executes a reading of Tzara's poetry. Yet, by looking to Dada's theatrical anarchism, this 'over-arching anti-principle' of absurdity is better demonstrated. Tzara's theatre paved the way for the absurdist theatre practice of Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett. It is possible to chart the moral principles of dadaist theatre – it's 'meaning' – by investigating how Dada's intentions align with absurdist theory.

Absurdism identifies a conflict that arises between man's attempt to rationalise the experience of existence, and his inability to do so. As Jean-Paul Sartre said, 'the world of explanations and reasons is not the world of existence.'²⁶⁹ The experience of this disjuncture – between explanation and existence – Sartre and Albert Camus termed 'the absurd.' Camus clarifies his concept of the absurd in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. The human condition is governed by the certainty of death – 'the only reality' – and the probability of suffering.²⁷⁰ 'Dying voluntarily implies [...] the absence of any profound reason for living

²⁶⁷ Corvin, 253.

²⁶⁸ Forcer, 2.

²⁶⁹ Jean Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1964), quoted in Stephen M. Halloran, 'Language and the Absurd,' *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Spring, 1973): 97-108, 97.

²⁷⁰ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 57.

[...] and the uselessness of suffering.’²⁷¹ Therefore, the absurd arises from the realisation that the world is not rational: ‘At this point of his effort man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.’²⁷²

When the perception of reality cannot be explained, the human effort to make sense of the world becomes futile, becomes a joke. Dada recognised the futility in attempting to express the meaning of existence ‘and resolved that the world is fundamentally inexpressible.’²⁷³

Tzara defined Dada as ‘le point où le *oui* et le *non* se recontrent [original emphasis]’ (the point where yes and no come together).²⁷⁴ Tzara’s definition of Dada summarises the absurdist experience, which resides at the meeting point of two opposites: the human need to express in rational thought the experience of being, and the inability to do so.

Furthermore, Tzara articulates this experience in his theatre plays. For example, absurdism is characterised in *The Gas Heart* by ineptitude to comprehend definite questions:

NOSE: You over there, man with a scream like a fat pearl, what are you eating?
EAR: Over two years have passed, alas, since I set out on this hunt.²⁷⁵

In Tzara’s play, the yes and no meet at the juncture of the will to enunciate (characters asking direct questions) and the inability to communicate (characters incapable of comprehending and responding accordingly). In this way, Dada theatre shows the impossibility of rationalising what it is to be in the world. This is particularly apparent in Tzara’s earlier plays written during and in the wake of World War I.

Absurdist playwrights use a range of techniques to uncouple language from reality: a deliberate misuse of logic such as negative expressions being taken as affirmatives; nonsensical and non-sequitur dialogue to demonstrate the inability of language to act as a system of communication; the use of language to invent ways of passing time;²⁷⁶ complete abstraction of language reduced to inarticulate sound. Stephen Halloran divides these techniques into: ‘language satire’ in which the writer demonstrates the futility of attempting to rationalise the world through systems of thought (language); and ‘verbal farce,’ which expresses the perception of reality beyond accepted structures and behaviours

²⁷¹ Camus, 5-6.

²⁷² Camus, 28.

²⁷³ Forcer, 55.

²⁷⁴ Tzara, ‘Conférence sur Dada,’ in *Lampisteries*, OC: I, 424.

²⁷⁵ Tzara, *The Gas Heart*, 134.

²⁷⁶ Often it is the passing of time while waiting for death that features in absurdist drama.

governing our experience of the world. The latter includes liberating words from their signifying function and destabilising syntax. By doing so ‘the playwright shows the possibility of a reality that is infinitely various, wholly without rational foundation, and thus “more real” than the systems of convention within which we ordinarily live.’²⁷⁷

Tzara utilises both devices across his theatrical oeuvre. The *Celestial Adventure* plays and *The Gas Heart* engage verbal farce, where nonsense language and illogical syntax present ungraspable systems of thought. The invented language of *The First Celestial Adventure* reduces meaning to linguistic banality. In *The Gas Heart*, communication is rendered futile with non-sequiturs and incorrect responses to statements. ‘EYE: I’ve already seen it in Paris,’ to which Neck responds: ‘Thank you not bad.’ Martin Esslin observes that the meaningless clichés and machine-like responses present in the Theatre of the Absurd identify the prevalence of such pointless exchanges in everyday conversation.²⁷⁸ Before the advent of absurdist theatre, Tzara attended to the futility of such small talk in *The Gas Heart*.

In *The Second Celestial Adventure*, characters do not communicate in dialogue; each one in turn proclaims lengthy and individual statements. They float as on separate plains, beings that cannot express themselves through dialogic communication. Samuel Beckett would experiment with this notion in *Play*: three characters, trapped in giant funeral urns, in turn, declare an onslaught of monologue detailing their relationship to the others, without communicating together. The characters cannot acknowledge the presence of the others, nor do they appear aware of any experience outside of their own. In *Play*, an emphatic pause follows each character’s monologue in which words are left hanging in dead space. Eugene Ionesco stated, ‘*Beckett destroys language with silence. I do it with too much language, with characters talking at random, and by inventing words* [original emphasis].’²⁷⁹ Ionesco dislocates meaning from language to the point where words become sounds. For example, in *The Chairs*, an old couple’s conversation is reduced to an infantile state as it regresses towards babble, to onomatopoeic sounds. Tzara prefigures this technique in the *Celestial Adventure* plays where characters often speak an invented language consisting of sounds.

²⁷⁷ Halloran, 106.

²⁷⁸ Martin Esslin, ‘The Theatre of the Absurd,’ *The Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 4, no. 4 (May, 1960): 3-15, 5.

²⁷⁹ Eugene Ionesco, ‘The Art of Theatre, no. 6,’ *The Paris Review*, no. 93 (Fall 1984).

Tzara applies repetition as another verbal farce device. In *The Gas Heart*, ‘Tzara innovates, for himself and for the theatre in general, by making systematic use of commonplaces repeated over and over again throughout the three acts, [...] repeated, crescendo and decrescendo about everything and nothing.’²⁸⁰ *The Gas Heart* contains a sequence entirely composed of two lines, which are repeated. Mouth says to Eye: ‘the conversation is lagging’ to which Eye replies ‘but yes.’ The characters repeat these words over eighteen lines of dialogue. The whole sequence is then repeated at a later point in the play. Esslin discusses repetition as a device in the Theatre of the Absurd whereby through ‘lists of words and phrases’ language degenerates: ‘gets bogged down in endless repetitions like a phonograph record stuck in one groove.’²⁸¹ Tzara’s use of repetition in *The Second Celestial Adventure* is more explicit (than in *The Gas Heart*), exemplifying the condition outlined by Esslin:

MR SATURN: definitely definitely definitely
 definitely definitely definitely
 definitely definitely definitely
 the uncovered forehead of the sun
 naturally naturally²⁸²

Absurdist language is evident in each of Tzara’s plays, and it is with Tzara’s particular approach to language that absurdism on stage can be viewed as a development of Dada theatre.

While the transition towards a more stable language develops in *The Gas Heart* and *Heads or Tails*, it is not until *Handkerchief of Clouds* and finally *The Flight* that Tzara fully respects syntactical structure. While language in the latter plays is more accessible, characters remain bound by absurdism: language is often tedious, or invented as a game to pass time. The above example from *The Gas Heart* indicates an incidence of a ‘boring’ conversation in Tzara’s theatre. At the end of each act in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, four commentators comment on the action of the drama and the themes of the play. The first two acts establish this formula. By the end of the third act, the commentary drifts outside the realm of the play. Here, conversation breaks down, reduced to inconsequential statements that have no bearing on the dramatic action:

A: It would be nice of you to pass my hat to me.
 B: Do you have any lipstick?

²⁸⁰ Béhar, 1979, 198.

²⁸¹ Esslin, 1960, 3.

²⁸² Tzara, *The Second Celestial Adventure of Mr. Excedrin, Fire Extinguisher*, trans. Ruth Wilson, *Theatre*, vol. 4, issue 1 (Winter 1973): 142-151, 144.

C: I adore this play.²⁸³

Béhar suggests that '[w]hen two people speak, [...] uncertainty can be partly rectified during conversation. The same is not true of the theatre, especially when the author has decided to criticise the language that symbolises the cement of social order.'²⁸⁴ Even when Tzara respects standards of writing and speech, language breaks down, and when the mode of communication is destroyed, individuals become isolated from the world and from themselves. In this way, Tzara's theatrical language, even as it diversifies and progresses across his playwriting career, always demonstrates absurdism.

Concepts utilised by absurdist playwrights are evident in not only the presentation of language in Tzara's plays, but also in the dramatic form. In each play, Tzara presents either, characters as entities inhabiting unknown realms (the *Celestial Adventure* plays, and *The Gas Heart*), or archetypal figures (the Poet, the Husband, the Wife in *Handkerchief*). In *The Flight*, the Mother, the Father, the Son and the Daughter occupy an undefined world, on the background of an unspecified war. Each character experiences abandonment. They exist in a state of perpetual waiting for an event that will never occur (the return of the loved one who abandoned them, and the end of the war). They are incapable of making positive decisions as to what to do with their lives while they wait. Their existence recalls Samuel Beckett's Vladimir and Estragon waiting for Godot who will never come. Regardless of the decisions (or lack thereof) made by the characters in these absurdist plays, the result is the same – life is meaningless and full of suffering. As the Poet states in *Handkerchief of Clouds*: 'there is never a solution; either you do things or you don't, and the result is always the same: you drop dead in the end.'²⁸⁵ As established, the fact of death in life is what – in the absurdist mind – finally and ultimately renders all human life absurd. 'In Dada, as in the Theatre of the Absurd, it is often death, or the threat of it, that gives life its absurdity and meaninglessness.'²⁸⁶

The 1950s theatrical insurrection attributed to Ionesco and Beckett – which undermined the logical structures of theatrical language and action – began in the 1920s with Tzara's critique of language, and the presentation of the absurd on the stage of Paris Dada. By analysing the language and form in Tzara's plays, and noting their evolution, Dada

²⁸³ Tzara, *Handkerchief of Clouds*, 116.

²⁸⁴ Béhar, 1979, 184-185.

²⁸⁵ Tzara, *Handkerchief of Clouds*, 116.

²⁸⁶ Forcer, 56.

theatricality, and Tzara's contribution to theatre history can be recognised. I will now discuss non-linguistic dramatic conventions introduced in Tzara's writing.

The Dada Actor

Before 1923, the dadaists (who lacked professional training or theatre experience) acted in the Dada plays. Béhar recognises that for Tzara, the onstage presence of the playwright was essential: 'the poet will not be content to write his text, he will have to declaim it publicly, in order to take better responsibility. [...] Responsibility in every way, to the public as well as to himself. There is in every word uttered in the public a degree of uncertainty that the poet must learn to know...' ²⁸⁷ Tzara acted in all his plays presented at Paris Dada manifestations in 1920 and 1921. Combining the role of the playwright, player and director, Tzara more immediately influenced the development of the Dada actor.

Annabelle Melzer identifies three types of Dada actor: the 'skilled;' the 'masked;' and the 'personal' actor, for whom the actors' offstage identity remained intact on stage. The dadaist actor 'did not become subordinate to the role they were playing, even if this role was a scripted character...' ²⁸⁸ Furthermore, Robert Varisco suggests that opposed to 'becoming' a character, the Dada actor, 'against all other dramatic conventions, featured all the colour of their identifiable selves through a transparent "character" cocoon; never was the actor lost to the role but the role being played served to underscore the actor.' ²⁸⁹ Tzara first presented this kind of self-actor with the character 'Tristan Tzara' from *The First Celestial Adventure*. Then in the initial drafts for *The Gas Heart*, Tzara allocated lines of the play to his fellow dadaists, as opposed to invented characters. ²⁹⁰ In *Handkerchief of Clouds*, characters are named after the actors who play them: 'C. I think Andrea loves Marcel, but she doesn't yet know it.' ²⁹¹ Andrea and Marcel are the names of the Wife and the Poet, for these characters were played by Andrée Pascal and Marcel Herrand in the 1924 production. Discussing the characterisation and staging of *Handkerchief*, Tzara explains that the actors:

²⁸⁷ Béhar, 1979, 184-185.

²⁸⁸ Melzer, 206.

²⁸⁹ Varisco, 283.

²⁹⁰ *Le Cœur à Gaz* (first draft), BLJD TZR 91.

²⁹¹ Tzara, *Handkerchief of Clouds*, 115.

bring on stage, the real name that they have off stage. The play is based on the drama of the theatre. I do not want to hide from the audience that what they see on stage is theatre.²⁹²

In this way, the real life of the actor remains intact onstage, and this technique destabilises representational notions of theatrical mimesis to emphasise the artifice of dramatic action.

In 1917, Viktor Shklovsky suggested that ‘making strange,’ or ‘defamiliarization’ was the essence of all art.²⁹³ In his 1936 essay ‘Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting,’ Brecht formulated this concept as the alienation or estrangement effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*).²⁹⁴ Actors applying the alienation effect eschew mimetic acting. They do not inhabit or represent the role but present the action of the drama, remaining distant from the characters they play. Brecht’s theatre discloses the fictive elements of the theatrical medium, encouraging audiences to identify with the situation presented, as opposed to empathising with emotional characters. In this way, the audience becomes a critical observer, and the theatre can serve a social function.

Tzara experimented with several of the techniques that would become integral to practicing alienation on stage. Stating that ‘the stage must not be a mystery to the public,’ Tzara actively exposed illusion.²⁹⁵ In *Handkerchief of Clouds* the lighting projector is placed on stage in front of the audience, and characters ‘perform’ their costume changes in full view. In each of his plays, Tzara includes a chorus, or characters that perform the role of the director or commentator who address the audience and other characters from outwith the dramatic narrative. Finally, Tzara renders his characters strange by either disallowing them human qualities (the *Celestial Adventure* plays and *The Gas Heart*), or by designating titles that denote human archetypes (Mother, Father, Poet). In Tzara’s plays, characters are devoid of personal attributes to encourage the audience to identify with the situation presented over the individual’s plight.

Furthermore, in his early plays, Tzara employed the concept of the actor-object to disengage the character from the individual. The actor-object commands a non-representational or psychological character portrayal; the actor becomes an entity,

²⁹² Tzara, *Integral* (Bucharest), no. 2, 1 April 1925, 7, in *OC*, 1:689.

²⁹³ Viktor Shklovsky, ‘Art as Device,’ trans. Alexandra Berlina, *Poetics Today*, vol. 36 no. 3 (September 2015): 151-174.

²⁹⁴ Bertolt Brecht, ‘Alienation Effects in Chinese Theatre’ (1936), trans. John Willett, *Brecht on Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966).

²⁹⁵ Tzara, ‘The Dadaist Masks of Hiller,’ *OC*, 1:605-606.

disallowing emotional recognition for the audience. The evolution of avant-garde costume design impacted the development of the actor-object; rigid costumes and full body masks turned actors into dramatic artefacts.

In the stage directions to Act I of *The Breasts of Tiresias*, Apollinaire introduces the Kiosk: a newspaper stand covered with local daily papers and with moving arms. This piece of set-design is embodied by an actor, and is simultaneously a character who contributes to the dramatic action. Another character, the Policeman, attached to a cardboard cut-out horse, prances on and off stage fluidly throughout the play. The Gendarme-Horse is not a policeman mounted on a horse; he is both horse and man of the law. Cocteau's *Parade* also utilised the concept of the actor-object with characters representing skyscrapers and boulevards, rendered thus by Picasso's cubist costume designs.

Tzara built on this concept. In performance – despite the illusion to figurative wholeness in the presence of the live actor – Dada theatre employs strategies of deforming the body and isolating body parts with the use of masks and restrictive costumes. At the presentation of *The Second Celestial Adventure* in 1920, actors wore long cylindrical cardboard tubes on their heads, appearing as giant candles from the perspective of the auditorium (Figs. 8 and 9). For the reprisal of *The Gas Heart* in 1923, this device was further established by Sonia Delaunay's geometric cardboard costumes that divorced the actor's head from an abstracted body (Fig. 10). The actor-object image allowed for a physical alienation of the character from a human persona, designated as an object or as a universal archetype.

Simultaneity and Spontaneity

The dadaist dedication to simultaneity and spontaneity is, like the actor-object, inherited from their avant-garde predecessors. Donna Kristiansen defines the perception of simultaneity as sensitivity to the passage of things in time, and suggests that for 'one who possesses such sensitivity, life appears as a simultaneous muddle of noises, colours, and rhythms.'²⁹⁶ For the dadaists, and the futurists before them, the application of sound was an integral device for presenting this muddled perception of life onstage. The futurists performed bruitist music, which consisted of sounds created by non-traditional instruments

²⁹⁶ Donna M. Kristiansen, 'What is Dada?' *Educational Theatre Journal*, vol. 20, no. 3 (October, 1968): 457-462, 459.

played simultaneously. The Paris dadaists combined percussive rhythms and bell ringing with spoken text at 'The First Friday of *Littérature*' (January, 1920), and the sound of a hooting horn accompanied dialogue during the presentation of *The First Celestial Adventure* (March, 1920).

In addition to simultaneous sound, the theatrical avant-garde also championed simultaneous action. In the 1914 'Variety Theatre' manifesto, Marinetti commanded: 'the action is carried on at the same time on the stage, in the boxes and in the pit.'²⁹⁷ This sentiment is echoed in Tzara's 1919 'Zurich Chronicle,' where he calls for a new theatre with 'scenario in the audience...'²⁹⁸ The theatrical avant-garde believed simultaneous action could communicate the vitality and intensity of life to the spectator. Therefore, multiple actions take place on stage and in the auditorium concurrently.²⁹⁹

Apollinaire's *The Breasts of Tiresias* provides one of the first practical examples of this notion. In Act I, while Thérèse makes her transition to Tirésias on stage, the characters Lacouf and Presto (two 'bourgeois') enter through the auditorium quarrelling as to whether they are in Zanzibar or Paris. Instances of simultaneous action abound: Lacouf and Presto are in Paris and Zanzibar simultaneously; an argument between Thérèse/Tirésias and the Husband occurs at the same time as Lacouf and Presto duel; and the entrance of the People of Zanzibar is accompanied by the simultaneous sounds of a toy flute, clanking wooden blocks, broken dishes and cymbals.

Tzara applied similar techniques on stage during Paris Dada.³⁰⁰ *The First Celestial Adventure* includes instances of simultaneous spoken word in addition to sound effects as noted above. For *The Gas Heart* (1921), Tzara organises the physical arrangement of characters to enact simultaneity. The opening stage directions position Neck and Nose downstage and above the audience, they remain separate from the dramatic narrative occurring in the main playing area. Neck and Nose comment on the play's action from their external position, yet simultaneously they are characters that contribute to the development of the plot. In *Handkerchief of Clouds* of 1924, commentators commentate from the side of the stage while the action of the play continues onstage; they are at the

²⁹⁷ Marinetti, 'The Variety Theatre,' 189.

²⁹⁸ Tzara, 'Zurich Chronicle (1915-1919),' in Motherwell, 238.

²⁹⁹ See also Pierre Albert-Birot on *Le théâtre nunique SIC* 8 (September, 1916), quoted in Melzer, 125.

³⁰⁰ Tzara first experimented with simultaneous poetry on stage in Zurich from 1916.

same time within and outwith the dramatic action. By employing such dramaturgical devices Tzara achieved simultaneity on stage.

Spontaneity is another concept championed by Dada. In his 1922 ‘Lecture on Dada,’ Tzara explained:

What we want now is spontaneity. Not because it is more beautiful or better than anything else. But because everything that comes from us freely, without the intervention of speculative ideas, represents us.³⁰¹

Reflecting on Dada’s history in 1952, Tzara returned to this concept: ‘[For Dada] which advocates “[d]adaist spontaneity,” [art is] one of the forms, common to all men, of that poetic activity whose deep roots become one with the primitive structure of life.’³⁰²

It is necessary to discuss how Tzara’s concept of spontaneity translates to the circumstance of writing his texts. To examine Tzara’s statement quoted above, spontaneity is structured according to the freeness of ideas – the primitive structures of life – as they enter the mind during the construction of poetic and theatrical texts. Yet how can spontaneity be used as a description of a performance gesture that is written, rehearsed, presented, and re-presented? This notion evidences a further contradiction in the dadaist intent and contributes to assumptions about Dada performance being at odds with literary theatre. Indeed, discussions on Tzara’s theatrical writing tend to privilege the ‘spontaneous’ nature in which they were written.

Michel Sanouillet states that Tzara wrote *The Gas Heart* in the space of a few days, under pressure to have the piece performance ready for the 1921 ‘Salon Dada.’³⁰³ However, the fonds Tzara at the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet contain several documents evidencing that Tzara worked on the play in a series of edited drafts.³⁰⁴ In addition, within a separate small handwritten notebook in the archive can be found two sections of dialogue from *The Gas Heart*, one of these sections being ‘the conversation is lagging sequence’ discussed above. In this incarnation, the conversation does not take place between the characters Mouth and Eye (as it appears in the final published text), but between characters titled Mr. Mygod and Mr. Aa (‘Mr Aa the Antiphilosopher’ is the title of a 1920

³⁰¹ Tzara, ‘Lecture on Dada’ (1922), in Motherwell, 246-51.

³⁰² Tzara, ‘L’Art océanien,’ quoted in Béhar, 1979, 191.

³⁰³ Sanouillet, 280.

³⁰⁴ BLJD, TZR 91-3.

manifesto).³⁰⁵ There is no date attached to this document and so it remains unknown exactly when Tzara began working on dialogue for *The Gas Heart*. However, the introduction of the character Mr Aa suggests it could have been as early as the year before the first performance of the play. It is undeniable that the dialogue was compiled over several stages, different parts being written at different times (in different pages of his notebook) as opposed to in one complete sitting ahead of the 1921 performance. That Tzara returned to this play and revised it for a second publication further evidences his attention to playwriting as a craft, not as spontaneous activity.

In the Dada theatre, spontaneity is practiced within permissible limitations, and spontaneity in performance was always planned if not rehearsed. The spontaneous element of Dada performance is exemplified by the use of inconsequential sound, the presentation of myriad images, and nonsensical verbal arrangements. Tzara bombards the audience with all the theatrical devices at hand to convey a seemingly chaotic visual spectacle. Spontaneity then is structured by a deliberate stage-craft giving the *illusion* of spontaneous action.

In 1950, Tzara stated that Dada ‘was a question of proving that poetry was a living form in every aspect, even anti-poetic, the writing being an occasional vehicle, by no means indispensable, and the expression of this spontaneity that for lack of an appropriate qualifier, we called [d]adaist.’³⁰⁶ Béhar suggests that with hindsight Tzara was able to clearly explain his initial intentions, whereas at the beginning, the only consistent attitude was to reject everything in its entirety, including the logic of discourse, in order to better live the much advocated spontaneity: ‘To work subversively and at the same time to develop a theoretical reasoning on the aims of this subversion presupposes a split of the personality.’³⁰⁷ Tzara’s enigma is defined by this split of the personality, and the contradictions that lie at the root of his theoretical reasoning: yes meeting no. Tzara’s theory can be defined then as a refusal to be categorised. As Kristiansen identifies:

Dada was born of a need for independence and a distrust toward unity. Dadaists cling to their freedom because the world, according to their view, is not specified or defined – it belongs in the innumerable variations of the spectator.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ BLJD, TZR 665.

³⁰⁶ Radio interview by Ribemont-Dessaignes with Tzara, May 1950, quoted in Béhar, 1979, 184.

³⁰⁷ Béhar, 1979, 184.

³⁰⁸ Kristiansen, 458.

The non-specificity of Dada exemplifies how Tzara's theatre is variously categorised as: the origins of performance art; the invention of the play-manifesto;³⁰⁹ and poetry in action. However, Tzara's theatre, like all his works (and statements he made about them) eludes categorisation. Tzara's theatre creates a conundrum (where the yes meets no), being both, and neither: theatre/performance; poetry/action; literature/spontaneity. I have suggested that Tzara's onstage activities are best described (but not defined) as a mode of theatricality.

Tzara's Theatrical Theatre

Theatricality presupposes a split or tear between theatre and life: in between two states and at the same time touching both. As Samuel Weber suggests, in the space of this tear, theatricality invents itself 'as a medium of a displacement or dislocation that opens other ways.'³¹⁰ For Josette Féral, theatricality is between theatre and performance, employed by both.³¹¹ Theatricality informs the performance/theatre complex, which allows for the confluence of two seemingly opposing conditions: performativity and theatricality; immediate and rehearsed actions; life and its representation. In the theatre of Tristan Tzara, theatricality is a mechanism whereby life becomes theatre.

Tzara outlines his ambitions for the theatre in a selection of his manifestos and essays. In the 'Zurich Chronicle,' Tzara presents bombastic declarations about Dada theatre, which contains 'above all masks and revolver effects... Bravo! & Boom Boom!'³¹² In his essay 'The Dadaist Masks of Hiller,' Tzara includes a sub-section on 'Dadaism in the Theatre' where he discusses the need to overcome representational mimesis on stage:

Dadaism, which proposes to revive not only the forms and values of life, but also those of art, has brought to the field of theatre innovations that have left deep traces. [...] We must not imitate life, but keep our artistic autonomy, that is, to live by our own scenic means. The realistic idea is overcome, as in painting, the stage will lend itself to all kinds of experiences and performances that will entertain the viewer.³¹³

Tzara said his theatre aimed at a 'new and real life on the stage.'³¹⁴

³⁰⁹ Hentea categorises Tzara's *The First Adventure* as a 'play-manifesto,' Hentea, 2014, 83; Papachristos calls both *Adventure* plays 'poem-manifestos,' 5.

³¹⁰ Weber, 29.

³¹¹ Féral, 178.

³¹² Tzara, 'Zurich Chronicle (1915-1919),' in Motherwell, 238.

³¹³ Tzara, 'The Dadaist Masks of Hiller,' *OC*, 1:605-6.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 606.

The theatre of Tzara challenged playwrights to rescind dramatic convention by introducing non-mimetic and non-semiotic theatrical techniques. Despite the undeniable influence of the theatrical avant-garde that came before him, Tzara assisted in the emancipation of theatre from tradition. As René Crevel reflects, ‘After having listened to *Handkerchief of Clouds*, one feels avenged by all the usual blandness and all the monotony and one no longer despairs of the theatre to which the strange magician wanted to bring back life.’³¹⁵ The remainder of this thesis performs a close analysis of the theatrical works of Tristan Tzara.

³¹⁵ René Crevel, ‘Tribune Libre,’ *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 25 May 1924, quoted in *OC*, 1:690.

CHAPTER 5: THE FIRST CELESTIAL ADVENTURE OF MR. ANTIPYRINE

If they are mad, their madness is contagious; for, at the end of the evening, the entire hall, in a frenzy, howled with them, whistled with them, repeated after them the absurdities and obscenities that were being played on the stage.³¹⁶

This review, written by Alfred Bicard, describes the scene at the ‘Manifestation Dada,’ Théâtre de l’Œuvre, 27 March 1920, where *The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine* received its Paris premiere.³¹⁷ Programmed for the finale, the play (and the entire evening) was to culminate in a rendition of Henri Duparc’s *Claire de Lune* sung by professional vaudeville chanteuse Hania Rouchine. However, following the uproar that ensued thanks to Tzara’s largely unintelligible play, the audience were so disruptive that Rouchine refused to complete the song and exited the stage in tears.³¹⁸ Pleased with these results, Tzara confirmed that the event displayed ‘the vitality of Dada at its height.’³¹⁹

Of the programmed performances at the ‘Manifestation Dada,’ Tzara’s play received the most critical attention, for, as Michel Sanouillet suggests, the text is so obscure that staging it was a ‘wager.’³²⁰ Tzara highlighted the play’s inventiveness by directing ‘characters, confined in sacks and trunks [to] recite their parts without moving.’ He later said, ‘one can easily imagine the effect this produced – performed in greenish light – on the already excited public. It was impossible to hear a single word of the play.’³²¹ Max Roger wrote in the Marseille journal *Theatra* that ‘a double wave of delirium seemed to sweep from the stage to the auditorium and return from the audience to the stage.’³²² And Georges Barenson said, the dadaists ‘have exasperated their spectators and I think this is exactly what they wanted to do.’³²³ By presenting incomprehensible dialogue with a bizarre and motionless dramaturgy, Tzara achieved his theatrical plan: to animate the audience.

Realising that perhaps the best way to disseminate their work was via commercial theatres, the dadaists set sight on the Théâtre de l’Œuvre. Established in 1893 as a home for experimental theatre, the l’Œuvre still remains committed today to presenting new works. With a capacity of 326, a raised proscenium arch stage, and an auditorium decorated in red

³¹⁶ Alfred Bicard, ‘Une soirée chez les Dadas,’ *l’Œuvre*, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 7164 5, 200.

³¹⁷ Excerpts of the play were performed at the First ‘Public’ Dada Evening, July 1916.

³¹⁸ Tzara, ‘Memoirs of Dadaism,’ in *Axel’s Castle*, 308.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 306-307.

³²⁰ Sanouillet, 119.

³²¹ Tzara, ‘Memoirs of Dadaism,’ in *Axel’s Castle*, 307.

³²² Max Roger, ‘Le Dadaïsme,’ *Theatra*, Marseille, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7164 5), 455.

³²³ George Barenson, *Commædia*, 29 March 1920, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 7164 5, 194.

with red velvet seating, it is a traditional theatre setting, marking a contrast to the halls that housed the dadaists previous exploits. The l'Œuvre is situated in the elegant 9th arrondissement known for its theatres and opera houses, and near to the luxury department stores Printemps and Galeries Lafayette. The chic location, and the l'Œuvre's infrastructure, allowed the dadaists to reach a wider public.

The 'Manifestation Dada' marks a shift in Dada's approach to performance, for here, Tzara advances the dadaist attack on the theatrical medium. That is, for the first time in Paris Dada's history, the dadaists presented a large-scale spectacle designed not only to animate audience interaction with inconsequential skits, provocative poems and manifestos, but also to challenge accepted notions of dramatic form with the presentation of dadaist theatre plays. Under Tzara's direction, this format would govern Paris Dada's programme for public events for the remainder of 1920.

Linguistic and Dramatic Structure of The First Celestial Adventure

Introduced in the 'Manifestation Dada' programme as a 'double quatologue,' the play includes the following characters: Mr. Bleubleu; Mr. Cricri; The Pregnant Woman; Mr. Antipyrine; Pipi; The Director; Mr. Boumboum; Npala Garoo;³²⁴ The Parable; and Tristan Tzara.³²⁵ The dadaists played the roles, with Tristan Tzara as Tristan Tzara.

The text includes a series of freely occurring sentences which defy logic, syntax and reason. A mock convention of theatre is established by the character-driven plot, yet it is ultimately devoid of any gesture to organised narrative. The individual lines may be analysed for traces of semantic meaning, yet the successive lines do not relate to one another; characters do not answer their colleague's previous statements. Tzara stated: 'this

³²⁴ Béhar notes that Npala Garoo is the name of a character adopted by Hugo Ball at the Zurich Dada soirées. The name also resembles an early collection of Tzara's poems: *Mpala Garoo*. According to Tzara, *Mpala Garoo* was his first book of poems and was to precede *The First Celestial Adventure*, however, in the winter of 1916 he decided to destroy the edition. The collection of *Mpala Garoo* poems printed in *OC* is taken from a manuscript of unpublished abandoned poems. *OC*, 1:719.

³²⁵ These are the characters that appear in Tzara's play text. In the programme for the 'Manifestation Dada,' the character list is reduced to eight (Mr. Bleubleu, Mr. Cricri, The Pregnant Woman, Pipi, Mr. Antipyrine, Mr. Boumboum, Npala Garoo, Tristan Tzara) hence the 'double quatologue.' What remains unknown is why Tzara altered the play for performance. It is most likely that due to a lack of actors he distributed the lines to other characters.

play is a boxing match with words.’³²⁶ It is his first venture into verbal farce³²⁷ (which he refined in *The Gas Heart*) consisting of a series of unrelated poetic images, interspersed with nonsense words, and an invented pseudo-African language. It is anti-semiotic linguistic literality.³²⁸

MR CRICRI: masks and rotting snows circus
pskow
i push factory in the circus pskow
the sexual organ is square is iron is
bigger
than the volcano and flies off
above mgabati
offspring of distant mountain
crevasses
tropical portugal wharf and
parthenogenesis
of long iron hiding things
dschilolo mgabati bylunda (133)³²⁹

The interspersed ‘pskow’ is striking when considering Tzara’s use of literality. Pskow is a city in north-western Russia. In the context of Tzara’s play however, ‘pskow’ becomes a word-being encoded with nothing but the sounds as they are pronounced by the actor. With special reference to *The First Celestial Adventure* Tzara explained: ‘This method presupposed that words could be stripped of their meaning yet still be effective in a poem by their simple evocative power – a kind of magic as hard to understand as it is to formulate.’³³⁰ The most extreme example of linguistic literality in Tzara’s text appears with invented words such as ‘dschilolo mgabati bylunda;’ their nature as non-words disallows semantic meaning.

The word ‘mgabati’ – occurring twice in Mr. Cricri’s opening line – appears to be derived from the Cebuano language of the Philippines. ‘Sa mga batan’ means ‘youth’ or ‘young people,’ in Cebuano, and ‘bata’ refers to ‘child.’³³¹ It is possible that Tzara had knowledge

³²⁶ Tzara, ‘Memoirs of Dadaism,’ in *Axel’s Castle*, 307.

³²⁷ As established in the previous chapter, verbal farce is a technique employed by absurdist playwrights to uncouple language from reality. Approaches include abstraction of language reduced to inarticulate sound.

³²⁸ As established in the previous chapter, linguistic ‘literalism’ creates a symbol of a symbol. The word is not encoded with symbolic meaning, but is in itself a being.

³²⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the text are from Ruth Wilson, ‘The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Excedrin, Fire Extinguisher.’ Lines referenced here are denoted by page numbers from this article. Wilson altered the names of some of the characters, I have chosen to keep Tzara’s original character titles to correspond better with the original French language text.

³³⁰ Tzara, ‘An Introduction to Dada,’ in Motherwell, 402-406.

³³¹ John U. Wolfe, *A Dictionary of Cebuano Visayan*, 1972. Produced by Jeroen Hellingsman, Scott Robertson and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net/> for Project Gutenberg. Accessed at: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/40074/40074-h/40074-h.htm>, on 18 May 2020.

of Cebuano poetry (Tzara first translated Oceanic poetry while in Zurich) and alternated an approximation of Cebuano for an equivalent in French. Were this his intention, the inclusion of the word 'mgabati' relates to Mr. Cricri's following line beginning with 'offspring,' and a previous statement by Mr. Bleubleu who discusses 'a child.' However, these words read by, and spoken to, the European reader/audience, are unlikely to convey meaning other than the experience of perceiving the shapes and sounds of the words. This linguistic device interrupts cognitive processes for the words cannot be automatically recognised.

Except for the manifesto pronounced by the author/character 'Tristan Tzara,' the dialogue is distributed amongst characters seemingly without discrimination. When spoken, the individual lines do not assist in distinguishing character traits. Henri Béhar suggests the dialogue evokes a 'Dada circus,' for which "The Director" has a mission to make the most noise possible.³³² And Michel Corvin offers that in addition to the circus director, the other characters are clowns as denoted by their names: Bleubleu, Cricri, Pipi.³³³ By these means, Tzara turns the theatre space into a circus tent. In *The First Celestial Adventure*, the character/clowns act as a dramatic device, reducing the long-form theatre play to an interlude of comic relief:

Clowns are traditionally introduced to break the tension of the 'serious' demonstration of the rider or the juggler. But, unlike the real circus where the clowns are entitled only to limited interventions that cannot deter the machine of the show, the exhibition of character-clown in *The First Celestial Adventure* [...] occupies the whole play and replaces it.³³⁴

On the Dada stage then, clown performers (usually reserved for the interlude) overtake the main event and become a means to undermine the serious art of theatre, because, as is stated towards the end of the play: 'art is not serious (139).'

The circus effect is further established by the introduction of sound effects, including hooting horns. Tzara explains:

[I] invented on the occasion [of the 'Manifestation Dada'] a diabolic machine composed of a klaxon and three successive invisible echoes, for the purpose of impressing on the minds of the audience certain phrases describing the aims of Dada. The ones which created the most sensation were: 'Dada is against the high cost of living' and 'Dada is a virgin microbe.'³³⁵

³³² *OC*, 1:639.

³³³ Corvin, 257.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ Tzara, 'Memoirs of Dadaism,' in *Axels' Castle*, 317.

This technique, which Tzara enlisted to highlight Dada's 'objectives,' also obscured the spoken text with the sound of the horn (in addition to the audience's interruptions). One reviewer commented that 'the tumult has prevented us from following the episodes of this play.'³³⁶ With sound effects accompanying (obscuring) theatrical action, Tzara enacts simultaneity on stage to convey to the viewer the dynamism of lived experience.

Tzara disguised not only speech but performed action. The set, designed by Francis Picabia, was not placed behind the performers as a traditional 'backdrop,' but in front of them, partially obscuring the action from the audience. The set comprised of variously scattered objects, including a bicycle wheel³³⁷ and a few ropes stretched across the stage to which were attached picture frames containing 'hermetic inscriptions.'³³⁸ Sanouillet notes that these inscriptions included: 'wisdom begins with paralysis' and 'hold out your arms your friends will cut them off.'³³⁹ We know from Tzara that this incongruous set was bathed in a green light projected onto the stage where immobile characters standing in line, voiced (often inaudible) dialogue. Thus, with the combination of language obscured by sound, and static dramatic action disguised by set design, Tzara confounds theatrical traditions on stage.

Orality and Primitivism in Language and Art

With its focus on audio techniques over physical stage direction, Tzara's play comprises various gestures of orality. As Katherine Papachristos explains, orality is a complex mode of presentation for it combines not only the mouth and voice, but also the entire body of the speaking agent: body; psyche; and social personality.³⁴⁰ And via this process Tzara and the dadaists were able to invest more completely in their art; by using their bodies and voices as the site of creative expression, the dadaists were better able to collapse the distance between artist (psyche and social personality) and artwork (the performing body and voice). Furthermore, Elza Adamowicz suggests that Dada's literary works: 'were, in

³³⁶ Max Roger, 'Le Dadaïsme,' *Theatra*, Marseille, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7164 5), 455.

³³⁷ Recorded as being Marcel Duchamp's 1913 readymade *Bicycle Wheel*. See Robert Lebel, *Sur Marcel Duchamp*, bibliography no. 365, plate 85, noted in Sanouillet, 552.

³³⁸ The set is described thus in Georges Charensol's *Comœdia* review, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7164 5), 194.

³³⁹ Sanouillet, 552.

³⁴⁰ Papachristos, 6.

fact, far less a semantic reality than a bodily one; less a written genre than a vocal one.’³⁴¹ This notion is most apparent in Tzara’s early theatre plays.

According to Béhar, alongside the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, Tzara was one of the first writers to underline that language is predominantly a spoken phenomenon: ‘thought is made in the mouth.’³⁴² Performance is central to the Dada text, for Dada performance ‘located speech in the body, not merely on the page or in an object, but in a speaking subject.’³⁴³ Tzara’s engagement with oral performance is somewhat related to his interest in so-called ‘primitive’ cultures. As established, part of the dialogue of *The First Celestial Adventure* is written in a pseudo-African or pseudo-Oceanic language.

In the early twentieth century, modernist artists discontented with what they deemed as a stagnating European culture, looked to non-European ‘primitive’ cultures in search of innovation.³⁴⁴ ‘Dada advocated the consideration by Europe of an authentic black culture, but not for the sake of exoticism, but to rediscover the expression of purity.’³⁴⁵ In his essay ‘Oceanic Art’ Tzara confirmed Dada’s interest in ‘primitivism:’

Dada, who advocated ‘[d]adaist spontaneity,’ intended to make poetry a way of life far more than the incidental manifestation of intelligence and will. For him, art was one of the forms, common to all men, of this poetic activity whose deep root merges with the primitive structure of affective life. Dada has tried to put into practice this theory, linking Negro, African and Oceanic art to mental life and its immediate expression at the level of contemporary man by organising ‘soirées nègres’ of improvised music and dance.³⁴⁶

For Tzara then, art was a means to access the essence of lived experience, and ‘primitive’ art provided a pathway to engage this theory in practice. Before the Zurich ‘soirées nègres,’ the cubists had incorporated ‘Negro art’ influences in their paintings and sculptures, represented by simplified forms and mask like expressions. For Dada, the expression of ‘primitive’ culture in performance was a more direct means of attacking the structures of Western art and culture, and from 1916, *poèmes nègres* were performed at the Cabaret Voltaire.

³⁴¹ Elza Adamowicz, *Dada Bodies: Between battlefield and fairground* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 125.

³⁴² Tzara, ‘Dada Manifesto on Feeble Love and Bitter Love,’ *Seven Dada Manifestos...*, 35.

³⁴³ T.J Demos, ‘Circulations in and around Zurich Dada,’ *October*, vol. 105 (Summer, 2003): 147-158, 150.

³⁴⁴ In the eighteenth century, the rise of scientific rationalism in Enlightenment thinking created a dichotomy between ‘civilised’ civilisations and archaic, ‘primitive’ cultures. See Papachristos, 15.

³⁴⁵ Béhar, 1979, 191.

³⁴⁶ Tzara, ‘L’Art océanien,’ quoted in Béhar, 1979, 191.

Tzara's interests in 'primitive' cultures led him to examine 'primitive' poetic expressions based on an oral rather than written presentation. Morton Bloomfield, scholar on poetry in early societies,³⁴⁷ explains that in the pre-writing stage 'poems are recited in a loud voice, almost a shout. The poet also frequently dresses in somewhat unusual and decorative clothing, to stress the significance of his words.'³⁴⁸ The description of the performance of *The First Celestial Adventure* is not dissimilar, and it is likely that the dadaists were forced to shout their lines from within their brightly coloured sacks³⁴⁹ to be heard above the sound effects and audience. The tradition of voicing loudly had been part of Dada performance since 1916, and David Gascoigne notes that the early Cabaret Voltaire performances were often delivered in a 'fortissimo shout.'³⁵⁰

The insertion of unknown words/sounds into Tzara's texts fulfils an avant-garde ambition to renew Western culture, and to re-engage the subject via oral presentation. Tzara wrote of his intention: 'A word placed by a secret association, not discernible by known methods of investigation, next to another, may, by means of a shock – strange process – disclose to certain readers, who are particularly sensitive or experienced, an emotion of a poetic nature.'³⁵¹ However, the specificity of Tzara's invented language choices must be analysed here. The appropriation of African and Oceanic art and poetry into modernist discourse has resulted in theories of misappropriation and cultural exoticisation. Tzara's invented 'African' language is a point of concern in terms of exoticism versus poetic and theatrical innovation.

Tzara's colleagues from the early phase of Dada in Zurich contributed to his interest in African poetry, notably: owner of the Holländische Meierei (site of the Cabaret Voltaire), Jan Ephraim, who conducted business in Africa and provided the dadaists with some *chantes nègres* to be performed at the cabaret;³⁵² Hugo Ball, who wrote and performed sound poems (though his were not explicitly derived from African language); and Richard

³⁴⁷ Bloomfield does not specify a particular society or tradition, suggesting rather: 'practically all societies have developed a poetical mode of communication, all having certain features in common.' Morton W. Bloomfield, 'Poetry in Early Society,' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 130, no. 2 (June 1986): 247-250, 247.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Tzara describes the costumes as sacks (see above) while Sanouillet describes them as coloured paper bags. Sanouillet, 119.

³⁵⁰ David Gascoigne, 'Boomboom and Hullabaloo: Rhythm in the Zurich Dada Revolution,' *Paragraph*, vol. 33, issue 2 (July 2010): 197-214, 198.

³⁵¹ Tzara, 'Le papier collé ou le proverbe en peinture,' *Cahiers d'Art*, 6 (1931): 61-64, 62, quoted in Berghaus, 'Dada Theatre or: The Genesis of Anti-Bourgeois Performance Art,' *German Life and Letters*, vol. 38, no. 4 (July 1985): 293-312, 307.

³⁵² Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 58.

Huelsenbeck, who performed ‘Negro poems’ at the Cabaret Voltaire from February 1916.³⁵³ Unlike Huelsenbeck who presented African poems as his own invention, Tzara was careful to acknowledge the origin of his appropriated poems in both performance and print.³⁵⁴ Tzara intended his first published work to be *Mpala Garoo* of which the nine poems collected in *Œuvres Complètes* resemble *The First Celestial Adventure* for their mixture of French language, pseudo-African, and indistinguishable sounds. From 1916, Tzara worked on a book of translations of over fifty African and Oceanic poems.³⁵⁵ However, having failed to find a publisher he abandoned the project. Certain poems from this unpublished anthology were printed in *Dada 1* and other reviews.³⁵⁶ For Tzara, ‘*art nègre*’ signified an art opposed to a civilization governed by rationality, and its particular syntax and elliptical style provided an answer to his own aesthetic interrogations.³⁵⁷ With regards to *The First Celestial Adventure* (as with his *poèmes nègres*) the effect is a striking collage of language and sound, which undermined Western traditions of playwriting and poetry production.

In addition to appropriating ‘primitive’ poetry as a means of introducing oral traditions into his theatre practice, Tzara’s works include gestural devices synonymous with early poetic and theatrical performance, such as the use of masks. Additionally, Tzara incorporates the classical Greek tradition of the chorus.³⁵⁸ These situations exemplify how Tzara interpreted traditional poetic and theatrical devices to develop his dramaturgical craft. I will now discuss how Tzara’s dramaturgy, in turn, influenced later theatre practices.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁵⁴ *OC*, 1:715; Hentea, 2014, 71.

³⁵⁵ *Poèmes Negres* is Tzara’s translation of 79 poems derived from African, Polynesian and Aboriginal Australian poems that had been first translated and printed in the Swiss anthropological magazine *Anthropos*. Via this journal, African and Oceanic poems ‘entered an economy of exchange which transformed them into second-hand cultural products.’ Twentieth-century ethnographers transcribed African and Oceanic poems into Latin characters derived from the phonemes of the original poem. These were then literally translated into various languages respecting the syntactical structure of the original. See Cosana Eram, “‘Lost in Translation’? Tristan Tzara’s Non-European Side,” *Dada/Surrealism* 20 (2015), 8. Béhar notes that *Anthropos* published such poems in several languages including German, French, Italian and English, which Tzara studied and transcribed as a poetic enterprise. *OC*, 1:715.

³⁵⁶ Hentea, 2014, 71.

³⁵⁷ Eram, 7.

³⁵⁸ The chorus in Tzara’s plays is discussed in subsequent chapters.

The First Celestial Adventure's Social Function

In addition to designing *The First Celestial Adventure's* bizarre set, Picabia designed the costumes, which were described as 'amazing, unexpected, ridiculous. They clearly evoke the drawings imagined by fools and correspond perfectly to the inconceivable text of M. Tzara.'³⁵⁹ Picabia's coloured paper bag/sack costumes included name placards worn by the actors, labelling them as dramatic objects. The denigration of the character to an immobile object inaugurates the tradition of the actor-object on the Dada stage: characters become talking props, devoid of social or psychological status. Martin Esslin shows that in the Theatre of the Absurd, characters appear as marionettes stripped of autonomy, pointing to how humans are ultimately powerless to initiate any direction over their destiny,³⁶⁰ and this is evident in Tzara's theatre too. As the character Tristan Tzara in *The First Celestial Adventure* states: 'we know wisely [...] that we are not free and shriek liberty (138).' This speech encourages the audience to become aware of the constraints placed on their thoughts and actions, voiced by a character that is physically bound (by the costume), caught in a strange narrative, and lacking individual autonomy.

In addition to the actor-object device, Tzara's linguistic experiments in *The First Celestial Adventure* (written in 1916) predate the development of alienation and absurdism on stage by employing language dissociation, a notion developed by Viktor Shklovsky. In 1917 Shklovsky explained that poetry applies imagery to create a framework for comprehending complex ideas or experiences. The function of imagery is to communicate meaning, and thus the image must be known to us (recognised) even when the experience or thing being conveyed is not. This applies not only to poetic language, but also to language in life. Language recognition results in automatization, whereby thought becomes abstracted, reduced to base acknowledgement. That is, we recognise sounds and acknowledge their related word without considering what the word means.³⁶¹ For Shklovsky, automatization is dangerous, for when we perceive lived experience automatically, we are not aware of it, as if it had never happened. Shklovsky uses the example of sweeping a floor: when completing one room, the sweeper may not remember if they have swept the previous room because the act of sweeping is an automatic action. And 'this is how life becomes

³⁵⁹ *Comœdia*, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7164 5), 194.

³⁶⁰ Esslin, 1960, 5-6.

³⁶¹ Shklovsky, 161.

nothing and disappears [...] If the whole complex life of many people is lived unconsciously, it is as if this life had never been.’³⁶²

Shklovsky writes that art ‘exists in order to restore the sensation of life [...] The goal of art is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing, things; the device of art is the “estrangement” of things,’ to delay the machine process of recognition.³⁶³ In other words, by the process of estrangement – rendering the subject strange – art disturbs the automatic acknowledgement process, promoting a reengagement with the subject. Tzara fulfils this operation by refusing to explain poetic and dramatic content by recognisable signs:

MR CRICRI: there is no humanity there are the
lamplighters and the dogs
dzin aha dzin aha bobobo tyao
cahiiii hii hii
ayboom
yeya yeyo

MR BLEUBLEU: incontestably. (134)

Here, Mr. Bleubleu automatically acknowledges words that are inconceivable, drawing attention to automatized linguistic perception. For the reader/audience, the words in Tzara’s play are not symbols to be recognised but to be perceived as things, what has been previously defined as literality, and literality interrupts automatic cognition. Shklovsky calls this dissociation. By applying methods of linguistic dissociation, Tzara’s play disturbs the automatic acknowledgement faculties of human thought as it perceives language.

Dada theatre presents not only unfamiliar language, but also unfamiliar worlds. In *The First Celestial Adventure*, the onstage world is not a representation of the world of existence (as in naturalist theatre) but rendered strange with the aid of set design, costume, lighting and sound devices. Tzara’s dramaturgy for *The First Celestial Adventure* disallows the application of automatic cognition, forcing an active reengagement with the subject. Bertolt Brecht advanced this concept with his framework of alienation, which is a form of dissociation.³⁶⁴ Although his methods are not as obscure as Tzara’s, Brecht’s characters too lack personal qualities. Dissociated from individual characterisation, Brecht

³⁶² Ibid., 162.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ As previously noted, Brecht first committed the term alienation effect to print in his essay ‘Alienation Effects in Chinese Theatre’ (1936).

encouraged viewers to reflect upon the social situation presented in his plays, above the individual's plight.

Addressing the audience head on (breaking the fourth wall) is another device that Brecht employed to achieve the alienation effect, and which Tzara introduced in 1920. Standing in a row, Tzara's characters recite their lines facing forward, as opposed to one another. In this way, Tzara relays his message directly to the viewer, not as an imaginary discussion between characters closed-off from the 'real' world of the auditorium. In the 1960s, Peter Handke developed the technique termed *Sprechstuck* (translated in English as 'speak-in'). Handke's *Sprechstucke* are not so much plays as direct addresses, lacking any scenographic component and consisting of incantatory words. *Sprechstucke* are predominantly language games without dialogue, presented by performers functioning as speakers, rather than actors playing roles.³⁶⁵ In many ways, Tzara's first plays anticipate Handke's *Sprechstucke*. In *The First Celestial Adventure*, Tzara confronts viewers with polemical statements that appear somewhat unrelated to the play's 'narrative:' 'DADA remains within the European framework of weaknesses, it's nevertheless shit, but henceforth we want to shit in diverse colours (138).' Discussing the scatological language presented in Tzara's play, Berghaus suggests that the dadaists acted like children 'shitting on the bourgeois and thoroughly enjoying doing so.' However, despite their aggressive language, they intended to create 'something pure and beautiful.'³⁶⁶ As Mr. Antipyrine states: 'a lily just bloomed in its asshole (140).'

Amongst the contentious statements and nonsense language, identifying the social situation being presented (which is the aim of alienation) is a complex task. Here I return to the notion of Dada and the absurd to determine what the language in Tzara's first play *does*, as opposed to what it *means*.

The destruction of language through art as enacted by the dadaists defines the absurdist condition: the desire and ultimate failure to capture in rational systems of thought (language) the experience of being in the world. *The First Celestial Adventure* engages in verbal farce, whereby dislocating words from meaning, the reader/viewer is forced to perceive the world beyond accepted boundaries of reality. The experience of verbal farce

³⁶⁵ See Bonnie Marranca, 'The *Sprechstucke*: Peter Handke's Universe of Words,' *Performing Arts Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Autumn, 1976): 52-62.

³⁶⁶ Berghaus, 1985, 309.

offers new and unconventional modes of perception in comparison to those normally enforced in communicable language. In Tzara's words: 'If Dada was not able to give language the slip, it certainly established the unrest language caused and the shackles it placed upon the liberation of poetry.'³⁶⁷ Tzara introduces certain perceptible phrases:

THE DIRECTOR: he died saying that farce is a
poetic element
like sorrow for example
then they sang (135)

Then instantly halts comprehension with the lines that follow, read by four characters (Mr. Cricri, The Pregnant Woman, Pipi and Mr. Antipyrine) simultaneously:

crocrocrocrocrodri
crocrocrocrocrodrel
crocrocrocrocrocrodrol
crocrocrocrocrocrodral³⁶⁸

At each juncture, Tzara eventually interrupts cognitive processes by reducing meaning to linguistic banality. In this case, and often throughout *The First Celestial Adventure*, language is reduced to a demented drivel. Reflecting on the language presented at the 'Manifestation Dada,' one reviewer suggested that 'Dadaism is a musico-artistic-literary religion that consists of aligning incoherent words, extravagant traits and discordant notes. Dada makes babies who, without knowledge, want to talk, chat or draw. But babies do their best to express something [...] The dadas, on the contrary make every effort to say nothing at all.'³⁶⁹ Yet by saying nothing specific with individual sentences, by breaking language down into individual words, they express a larger concept regarding the very status of language.

Dada distrusted mechanisms that had led Europe to war in 1914, crucially the mechanism of language. Tzara's application of language in *The First Celestial Adventure* shows how the experience of existence, including war, is fundamentally inexpressible. If it is impossible to express the realities of human suffering in organised language, then the abstracted language in Tzara's play, for example, 'mataoi lounda ngami with the hug of a child suicide (133)' is perhaps more relatable to human horror such as the ungraspable notion of a child's suicide.

³⁶⁷ Tristan Tzara, 'Essai sur la Situation de la Poésie,' quoted in J. H. Matthews, *Theatre in Dada and Surrealism*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1974), 26.

³⁶⁸ Tzara, *La Première Aventure Céleste de M. Antipyrine*, OC, 1:79.

³⁶⁹ Alfred Bicaud, 'Une soirée chez les Dadas,' *l'Œuvre*, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I I 7164 5, 200.

Other linguistic devices such as babbling, tics and stutters, which Tzara simulates in the text of *The First Celestial Adventure*, are relatable to the war neurosis commonly known as ‘shell-shock.’³⁷⁰ The term shell-shock was first published by Dr. Charles Myers in the medical journal *The Lancet* in 1915. In his study, Myers recorded three cases of shell-shock while working in a hospital in France that year.³⁷¹ Between 1915 and 1916, the number of shell-shock cases grew exponentially.³⁷² Symptoms included physical tics, vocal stuttering and screaming.

Written in 1916 when the shell-shock epidemic was widely experienced in Europe, *The First Celestial Adventure* relates the notion of shell-shock more accurately than contemporaneous Dada poems. Dadaist sound poems, such as those written and performed by Ball, tend to be entirely of linguistic nonsense; *The First Celestial Adventure* combines *nonsense with coherent dialogue*. Lines often slip from discernible words into nonsense words:

PIPI: bitterness without church let’s go
Let’s get synthetic charcoal camel
Bitterness upon the church
Urururch the curtains
Dodododo (133)

It is the creeping degradation of language that makes Tzara’s text more relatable (to shell-shock) than other dadaist texts. Shell-shock victims’ speech, that was once articulate, often dissolved into sound as a consequence of experiencing combat in war. And these symptoms did not always present immediately, but gradually upon returning home.³⁷³ The fluctuating language (between rational and irrational) in *The First Celestial Adventure*, mirrors this trajectory from coherence to incomprehension. Amongst Dada texts, this framework is specific to Tzara.

As broken-down language in Tzara’s play resembles shell-shock behaviours, so too does the use of repetition present a degeneration of language and knowledge. In the final

³⁷⁰ For analyses of Dada and shell-shock, see also: Brigid Doherty, ‘“See: “We Are All Neurasthenics”!’ or, the Trauma of Dada Montage,’ *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Autumn, 1997): 82-132; and Forcer, 56.

³⁷¹ A D Macleod, ‘Shell Shock, Gordon Holmes and The Great War,’ *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 97 (2004): 86–89.

³⁷² Edgar Jones, Nicola T. Fear, and Simon Wessely, ‘Shell Shock and Mild Traumatic Brain Injury: A Historical Review,’ *Am J Psychiatry* 164 (2007): 1641-1645.

³⁷³ Roy Grinker and John Spiegel identify two strains of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in returned war veterans. Acute, as appearing in the first six months after combat, and chronic or delayed, with duration or onset occurring beyond six months. RR Grinker and JP Spiegel, *Men Under Stress* (Philadelphia, Pa: Blakiston, 1945).

monologue of the play, Tzara incorporates lists of repeated words as an alternative device to represent the failure of language to communicate rational concepts:

MR ANTIPYRINE: ... the mustard runs from a nearly
squashed brain
we have become lamplighters
lamplighters lamplighters
lamplighters
lamplighters lamplighters
lamplighters
lamplighters lamplighters
lamplighters
and then they went away (141)

Tzara's use of repetition here demonstrates verbal farce, whereby communication is rendered more and more futile with each new iteration of 'lamplighters.' As established, Esslin discusses repetition as a device in the Theatre of the Absurd in which lists of repeated words degenerate language.³⁷⁴ Tzara enacts this device where Mr. Antipyrine's character becomes stuck in a loop while contemplating how 'we have become lamplighters.'

Tzara also employs repetition beyond mere listing to create complex vocal patterns, as exemplified in this section of simultaneous dialogue spoken by four characters:

MR CRICRI: zdranga zdranga zdranga zdranga
MR BLEUBLEU: di di di di di di di di
PIPI: zoubai zoubai zoubai zoubai
MR ANTIPYRINE: dzi dzi dzi dzi dzi dzi dzi dzi³⁷⁵

David Gascoigne suggests that repeated staccato rhythms in Tzara's texts create systems of phonic repetition that carry an implication of order (even when the intention may be to express disorder):

the fact of repetition, at this level of density, suggest to a listener that the choice and sequence of verbal components is not random, but governed by some limiting principle or underlying system, whether the implied order be that of a meaningful linguistic idiom unknown or unavailable to the listener or whether, more likely, it be that of a performative 'magic' language, akin to shamanic utterance or 'speaking in tongues.'³⁷⁶

Eric Robertson discusses the application of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) in Dada texts whereby, in performance, words give way to cacophonous sounds.³⁷⁷ Tzara's repeated

³⁷⁴ Esslin, 1960, 3.

³⁷⁵ Tzara, *La Première Aventure Céleste de M. Antipyrine*, OC, 1:79.

³⁷⁶ Gascoigne, 205.

³⁷⁷ Robertson, in *Genesis Dada*, 144.

words, and presentations of unknown languages spoken by characters seemingly automatically, destabilise language beyond meaning. However, the rhythmic order created by the formula of repetition creates new meaning (beyond accepted systems of thought) as does a prayer or chant.

toubo matapo the viceroys of the
nights
they have lost their arms
mouncangama
they have lost their arms
managara
they have lost their arms irregular (134)

The ever-shifting language in *The First Celestial Adventure* poses a challenge to the actor who must vocalise a juggernaut of words and sounds presented on the page. Repetition instils urgency in the written text; the lines convey immediacy with each iteration of ‘they have lost their arms,’ resulting in a rapid and rhythmic intonation.

In addition to repetition of known and unknown words, which render the speaker inarticulate (or articulate but beyond rationality), notions of madness are present in Tzara’s text. The presentation of madness as sanity, or of sanity as madness, is another device of absurdist theatre. For, in the absurdist tradition, when the world is incomprehensible, it is often the madman who speaks sense.

NPALA GAROO: you roll up the rainbow the clocks
vaporize
the navel the sun contracts
and the student measured his last
intensity
he was nevertheless in love and croaked (137)

The youth of the student is ‘vaporised’ by time measured with clocks and setting suns. Regardless of his passion (‘intensity’) and ‘love,’ he nevertheless died (‘croaked’). In the Theatre of the Absurd, as in Tzara’s theatre, the certainty of death in life renders meaningful life absurd, and madness becomes a logical means of expression.³⁷⁸

When words cannot rationally express the experience of living in the shadow of death, language becomes defunct. In *The First Celestial Adventure*, lines tend to end abruptly as

³⁷⁸ For an example of this notion in the Theatre of the Absurd, see Lucky’s speech from Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, in *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1990), 42-43. Midway through Act I, Lucky pronounces a relentless monologue which paints poetic images about God, death and the human condition. Beckett, like his predecessor Tzara, approached these concepts in the form of a madman’s rant: the only ‘rational’ programme for expressing such concepts.

if characters suddenly forget how to communicate. Tzara achieves this either by retreating into sounds (as previously discussed) or by cutting off mid ‘narrative.’ Often characters appear to be getting somewhere with their discussion, before suddenly stopping: ‘Mr. BLEUBLEU: [...] but where are the houses. The viceroys of the night (134).’ What did the viceroys of the night do? And ‘THE DIRECTOR: [...] for example, then they sang (135).’ What did they sing? Tzara halts language mid-way, for no matter what we might say, in the end it will not matter.

The Manifesto of Mr. Antipyrine and the Performance/Theatre Complex

The most complete speech in *The First Celestial Adventure* is the ‘Manifesto of Mr. Antipyrine.’ A reviewer of the ‘Manifestation Dada’ described that this manifesto is ‘interpreted by the author himself bearing his name hanging on a sign on his collar, so that we do not ignore it.’³⁷⁹ Adorned with his own name label, Tzara embodies the self-dramatization of the character/author. As established in Chapter 3, by this act, Tzara’s onstage presence blurs the distinction between the audience’s perception of his identity, and his function within the play. After the manifesto, the action continues, and the characters The Parable and Mr. Antipyrine in turn pronounce their closing monologues.

Via the manifesto, Tzara explains the meaning of Dada to the reader/audience: ‘DADA is our intensity / Dada is life without slippers or parallels / Dada exists for no one and we want everyone to understand that / Dada is neither folly, nor wisdom, nor irony, look at me friendly bourgeoisie / We are not naïve, We are successive, We are exclusive, We are not simple and we are all well-versed in intelligence (138).’ In addition to describing Dada’s primary aim: ‘we search for the essence,’ he declares that upon finding the essence, ‘we are content if we can hide it (138).’ This statement exemplifies one of Tzara’s many paradoxical statements on Dada, art, and politics, encapsulating his enigmatic nature. Béhar suggests a further reading: that the dadaists were happy to hide the central essence upon discovering it because they did not intend to add their theory to other artistic schools.³⁸⁰ The manifesto is not a sermon designed to convert the audience to Dadaism, but a demonstration of how the dadaists live their ideas – as Tzara later stated – ‘somewhat in the manner of Heraclitus, whose dialectic implied that he himself was part of his

³⁷⁹ Max Roger, ‘Le Dadaïsme,’ *Theatra*, Marseille, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I I (7164 5) 455.

³⁸⁰ Béhar, 1979, 189.

demonstration as an object and subject both in his conception of the world.’³⁸¹ For Tzara, the only way to create art is to be art: both subject and object. Proclaiming his ideas on stage as Tristan Tzara, rather than through the medium of a hired actor, he took immediate responsibility for his ideas and his work.

While certain phrases remain ambiguous, unlike the majority of the play’s dialogue, the ‘Manifesto of Mr. Antipyrine’ does not obscure language; here, Tzara speaks in complete and intelligible sentences. The transparency of this outburst further destabilises audience perception of Dada theatre. When the reader/audience becomes accustomed to the rhythm of nonsense streaming from the page/stage, Tzara disrupts the dramatic framework by stepping forward as ‘himself’ to address the audience. Tzara straddles the spheres of life and art by ‘being’ Tristan Tzara, while simultaneously playing the role of ‘Tristan Tzara:’ a fictional entity in the narrative of *The First Celestial Adventure*. By this act, Tzara bridges the unique performative act (his lecture on Dada’s artistic goals, unrelated to the play) and the repeatable dramatic gesture (his actions as a character in the play); the categories collapse on the Paris Dada stage. As previously established, Tzara’s first play occupies the centre of the performance/theatre complex. That is, by blurring the boundaries between reality (Tzara’s self-presentation) and theatre (the play), Tzara demonstrates dadaist theatricality: the staging of the separation of theatre from life, and simultaneously the mechanism connecting theatre to life.³⁸²

Tzara playing Tzara demonstrates how the dadaists lived their ideas in parallel with ‘playing’ the Dada role. As Ruth Wilson suggests, the dadaists adopted personas in life as they did on stage; the dadaist dislocates ‘the poet from his personality, forcing each to adopt a new, Dada identity.’³⁸³ In Tzara’s case, Samuel Rosenstock became S. Samyro, who became Tristan Tzara who played the role of Tristan Tzara on stage in *The First Celestial Adventure*, as he played Tristan Tzara in life. And in this way Tzara lived Dada in life and on stage in the manner presented in the ‘Manifesto of Mr. Antipyrine.’

³⁸¹ Tzara, ‘Le Surréalisme et l’après-guerre,’ quoted in Béhar, 1979, 190.

³⁸² See ‘Theatricality’ in Chapter 2, pg. 60-2.

³⁸³ Ruth Wilson, ‘The Plays of Tristan Tzara,’ *Theatre*, vol. 4, issue 1 (Winter 1973): 129-132, 130.

The Manifestation Dada on Stage and in The Press

The ‘Manifestation Dada’ audience responded rather well to Tzara’s play. Of the seven reviews collected by Francis Picabia archived at the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, five are of a positive nature. *L’Éclair* says of the dadaists: ‘Talented men are there. All seemed to me to be courageous and incomprehensible.’³⁸⁴ The more unfavourable reviews complain about the inflated price of attending an evening of theatre, performed by unskilled actors ‘deprived of finesse and good taste,’ to which the public responded by ‘screaming, stamping and whistling.’³⁸⁵ George Remon notes that while the performance ‘included a hint of humour [...] the dadaists] still have a long way to go, if they pretend to catch up with the comedians they had fun stealing from [...] in a disappointing manner.’³⁸⁶ In support of the dadaists, Alfred Bicard writes that ‘it is probably imprudent to want to judge what one does not understand.’³⁸⁷ Another review discusses the social healing enacted by the dadaist theatre: ‘all this gives us a beautiful headache, inflicts a moment of delirium. [...] We laughed so much, that it is perhaps to the Dadas that we owe our best theatrical evening of the year.’³⁸⁸ In addition, Max Roger, reviewing the plays of the week, states ‘one of the most sensational was without a doubt the premiere of the Dada theatre.’³⁸⁹

The success of the evening was largely due to Tzara’s programme, which allowed the dadaists to manipulate audience response to a level previously unprecedented in Paris Dada’s history. Before the ‘Manifestation Dada,’ only the ‘First Friday of *Littérature*’ had included professional actors and musicians. However, at the ‘First Friday,’ the dadaists hired actors to recite poems, which were detailed as individual performances in the programme. That is, these professionals did not act alongside the dadaists. For the ‘Manifestation Dada,’ Tzara had the idea for an event in which professional actors and musicians would perform with the dadaists in their plays. And by hiring Lugne Poe’s *l’Œuvre*, Tzara intended to align Dada theatre to that of the popular avant-garde of the fin de siècle.

³⁸⁴ L. P. ‘Manifestation Théâtrale des ‘Dadas,’ *L’Éclair*, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7164 5) 197.

³⁸⁵ Georges Remon, ‘Une Manifestation dadaïste,’ *Radical*, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7164 5) 197.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Alfred Bicard, ‘Une soirée chez les Dadas,’ provenant de *l’Œuvre*, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7164 5), 200.

³⁸⁸ Unsigned, ‘Maison de l’Œuvre, manifestation Dada,’ *Le Carnet de la Semaine*, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7164 5) 260.

³⁸⁹ Max Roger, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7164 5) 455.

The programme contained three plays: André Breton and Phillipe Soupault's *S'il vous plait (If You Please)*; Ribemont-Dessaignes' *Le Serin muet (The Mute Canary)* in which the 'skilful actress' Mlle Annette Valery acted;³⁹⁰ and Tristan Tzara's *The First Celestial Adventure*.³⁹¹ Additionally, Dada skits – including *Denières créations dada (Latest Dada Creations)* performed by professional actress Jeanne Roques known as Musidora – contributed to the programme. From 1914, Musidora had entertained the Parisian public in Louis Feuillade's serial film *The Vampires*. She was a figure of popular culture and well known to the Parisian audience in 1920.³⁹² Finally, the accomplished pianist Marguerite Buffet played music composed by Ribemont-Dessaignes and Picabia.

The cast of the 'Manifestation Dada' therefore, comprised both professional and amateur performers. The 'Manifestation Dada' programme is somewhat based on that of the final Zurich Dada soirée at the Klaufleten Guild Hall, 19 April 1919. Tzara organised and directed this event. Alongside Dada poetry, manifesto recitals and short skits of bizarre performed action (for example, Walter Serner carried a headless dummy onstage and presented it with a bunch of flowers), the programme also included dances and music performed by professional artists, and crucially, the event included a theatrical production aesthetic with painted sets and costumes. This final soirée was the most ambitious of the Zurich Dada shows, and provided the framework for the Paris Dada manifestations with its combination of the professional and the amateur. In this way the dadaists were able to provoke the desired audience reaction, which they had failed to achieve with their previous programmes. Peter Dayan notes that during the musical recitals at the Cabaret Voltaire and other Dada venues in Zurich, there is no evidence to suggest that the audience did not listen in 'reverent silence.'³⁹³ However, at the last Zurich soirée, when Tzara programmed the final musical piece to come after a particularly provocative manifesto by Walter Serner, the audience were too distracted to receive the musical finale.

A similar situation occurred during the 'Manifestation Dada' in 1920. The most striking clash of the amateur and the professional occurred when Mlle Hania Rouchine entered towards the end of *The First Celestial Adventure*, to perform (according to the programme)

³⁹⁰ Unsigned, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7164 5) 260.

³⁹¹ For the full performance programme see Sanouillet, 551.

³⁹² Sanouillet, 521.

³⁹³ Peter Dayan, 'Why the music of Satie is the only genuine music of Paris Dada,' *Hugo-Ball-Almanach*, vol. Neue Folge 8: 148-161, 3.

a dadaist manifesto. However, when the acclaimed chanteuse began singing a sensitive rendition of Henri Duparc's romantic tune *Claire de Lune*, the audience erupted. Tzara later noted that despite pleas for order to be restored, the crowd were so animated by the action of the play that they refused to listen. In response, Routchine refused to complete the performance. Tzara later commented that: 'The audience either took this [sentimental song by Duparc] for a sacrilege or considered the thing so simple – it was intended to produce a contrast – was out of place on this occasion; in any case, they did not restrain their language.'³⁹⁴

The deliberate contrast of the (would be) sophisticated performance of Routchine with that of Tzara's play succeeded in creating the greatest tension, as the musical recital after Serner's manifesto at the Zurich soiree had. As Barenson notes:

I am convinced that it is voluntarily that the Dadas have chosen this stupefying 'background' to reveal the charming Hania Routchine, who decided to sing melodies of Duparc. It was heartily booed for no reason, perhaps because of the antithesis created between the setting and the melody. The people who whistled at the Dadas cried: 'Ah! No, not that!' with equal conviction. And the Dadas were delighted to have 'lead' the public to be as illogical as themselves.³⁹⁵

The tension between sophisticated and clumsy performance aesthetics evidences the avant-garde graduating from the fusing of high and low forms (poetry, painting and cabaret) to more spectacular contrasts. In doing so, Tzara's succeeded to frustrate his audience.

The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine never received a reprise during the Paris Dada period. However, the format of the 'Manifestation Dada' became the model for further events of 1920. The more ambitious 'Festival Dada,' 26 May 1920, would premiere Tzara's *The Second Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine*, which will now be discussed.

³⁹⁴ Tzara, 'Memoirs of Dadaism,' in *Axel's Castle*, 308.

³⁹⁵ George Barenson, *Commædia*, 29 March 1920, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I I 7164 5, 194.

CHAPTER 6: THE SECOND CELESTIAL ADVENTURE OF MR. ANTIPYRINE

For the first time in the history of the world, people threw at us, not only eggs, salads and coins, but beefsteaks as well. It was a very great success. The audience were extremely [d]adaist.³⁹⁶

This was Tzara's response to the 'Festival Dada,' 26 May 1920. After the success of the 'Manifestation Dada,' Tzara set to work organising a more ambitious theatrical programme, which promised such spectacles as: public head shaving; a Dada magician; sodomist music; a painless boxing match; a vast opera; motionless dancing; a symphony for twenty voices; three plays; and 'finally, we will discover Dada's sex.'³⁹⁷ Michel Sanouillet suggests that if the 'Festival Dada' was 'not the most successful, [it] was at least the most eventful' performance in the history of Paris Dada.³⁹⁸

Deciding that the Théâtre de l'Œuvre had been too small, for their next performance the dadaists rented the spacious Salle Gaveau, rue de Boétie in the Saint-Honoré district of the 8th arrondissement. This chic neighbourhood is bisected by the Boulevard des Champs-Élysées that connects the iconic Arc de Triomphe and Place de la Concorde. The architect Jacques Hermant had designed the venue with particular attention to the building's acoustic quality. When it opened in 1907, the Gaveau became the most prestigious concert hall in Paris. The location marks a shift towards the centre of Paris for Dada's next manoeuvre to dominate the city's cultural scene.

The theatre has a capacity of 1020, considerably greater than the l'Œuvre's 326, and the show was a sell-out.³⁹⁹ The audience comprised the elite Parisian literary and artistic community including André Gide, Constantin Brancusi, Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger and Fernand Léger, and critics such as Jacques Rivière and Paul Valéry. The English *Daily Mail* newspaper reported that 'It was a brilliant scene: in the stalls and boxes were gathered all that is known as the "Tout Paris" of the great theatrical first nights.'⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁶ Tristan Tzara, 'Memoirs of Dadaism,' in *Axel's Castle*, 308.

³⁹⁷ Press release for the 'Festival Dada,' in Sanouillet, 125-126 .

³⁹⁸ Sanouillet, 173 .

³⁹⁹ Hentea, 146; Sanouillet, 127. Sanouillet notes that the show was packed partly due to the press invitations, but also because of the numerous complimentary tickets handed out generously by Picabia.

⁴⁰⁰ 'Dadaistes Disappoint: Still Unshaven' (Paris Notes and News), *The Daily Mail*, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 166.

Partly attributed to its sophisticated location, the ‘Festival Dada’ was not well received. The next day the reviewer André Germain wrote: ‘Yesterday [...] the respectable Salle Gaveau was the site of a laborious, methodical madness.’⁴⁰¹ The dadaists’ presence was rather an insult to the reputation of the theatre with the journal *L’Eclair* stating that ‘this stupid and lugubrious madness’ included a performance of ‘dada music [...] on the grand piano where reputed pianists perform the immortal works of Beethoven and Mendelsohn; that is to say, for ten minutes [Marguerite Buffet] struck at random the ivory keys making inharmonious sounds that wrenched our ears.’⁴⁰²

The programme for the event is remarkably similar to that of the l’Œuvre show: *The Second Celestial Adventure* replaces *The First*; Breton and Soupault’s *You’ll Forget Me* resembles their first play *If You Please*; and Ribemont-Dessaignes’ *Dance of the Curly Endive* performed by Marguerite Buffet recalls her performance of *The Shady Belly Button*, also by Ribemont-Dessaignes. However, the ‘Festival Dada’ hoped to be more enterprising, with nineteen programmed items.

Predominantly, the audience found the entire event too long: ‘these people gave us, during three hours, endless speeches, read in a monotone voice.’⁴⁰³ In addition ‘about twenty other absurdities, without fantasy, without wit, without even the slightest humour.’⁴⁰⁴ Several attendees left, and ‘when finally, the dada assembled for the final chorus, the hall was already half empty. The shortest jokes are the best.’⁴⁰⁵ Aste d’Esparbes – who wrote a favourable review of their previous show – said that ‘in spite of all my good will not to take seriously the sometimes unseemly rantings of these “Dadas,” I could not help but feel a deep sense of sadness [...] The best thing would be to ignore these events.’⁴⁰⁶ Finally, in an article titled ‘Dada is dying... Dada is dead!’ Robert Kemp surmised ‘yesterday from 3 – 5pm, Salle Gaveau, we attended the funeral service of Dada.’⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰¹ André Germain, ‘Chez les Dadas,’ *L’Ere Nouvelle*, 27 May 1920, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 143.

⁴⁰² J. G., ‘Une première manifestation du mouvement “Dada,”’ *L’Eclair*, 26 May 1920, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 171.

⁴⁰³ A d’Esparbes, ‘La Manifestation “Dada,”’ *Comœdia*, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 141.

⁴⁰⁴ J. G., in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 171.

⁴⁰⁵ Jacques Patin, ‘Un Festival Dada,’ *Le Figaro*, 27 May 1920, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 140.

⁴⁰⁶ A d’Esparbes, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 141.

⁴⁰⁷ Robert Kemp, ‘Dada se meurt... Dada est mort!’ *Liberté*, May 1920, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 2.

Despite the unfavourable reviews, the 'Festival Dada' received more press attention and garnered more public involvement than any prior Dada event. It is noteworthy that it took place during a paper crisis.⁴⁰⁸ The paper shortage put heavy sanctions on journalists to limit their newspaper entries, or to closely prioritise what articles were to be printed. Several reviews comment on the crisis in relation to the press attention Dada received, with one stating: 'Paper is so rare that it is criminal to waste it so foolishly.'⁴⁰⁹ However, it appears that reviewers were incapable of not writing about Dada. As Jean Paulhan reflects: 'If you must speak of Dada you must speak of Dada. If you must not speak of Dada you must still speak of Dada.'⁴¹⁰

The press were unanimous in discussing the animated audience response. While reviewers condemned the dadaists' ability to entertain, suggesting that 'the show was much more amusing, moreover, in the hall than on the stage,'⁴¹¹ this response was exactly what Tzara intended. Indeed, an announcement that the show would take place in the auditorium was delivered during the opening act.⁴¹² The moment that the first programmed spectacle – 'Dada's Sex' – appeared on stage in the guise of a giant phallic cylinder of white paper atop two balloons⁴¹³ the crowd reacted: 'from the beginning, the audience [...] shouting – sometimes insults – [gave] an abominable heckling. Nothing could be heard, neither dada poems, nor dada music. Everyone remained dada.'⁴¹⁴

Spectators and performers sparred throughout the event. For 'The Famous Illusionist' sketch, Soupault, in 'blackface,' wearing a white bathrobe and brandishing a knife, opened a suitcase to release five coloured balloons bearing the names: Benedict XV (Pope), Mme Rachilde (who was in attendance), Clemenceau (Prime Minister), and Pétain (Marshall of France, known as 'The Lion of Verdun'). The fifth, which he punctured with his knife, was labelled Jean Cocteau.⁴¹⁵ The audience joined in by attempting to burst the remaining balloons.⁴¹⁶ Tzara managed, by his programme and dramaturgy, to transform the Parisian

⁴⁰⁸ André Lichtenberger, 'Primeur' *La Victoire*, 29 May 1920, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 179.

⁴⁰⁹ 'A tire-d'aile,' *La Nouvelle*, May 1920, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 165.

⁴¹⁰ Quoted in 'Memoirs of Dadaism,' in *Axel's Castle*, 308.

⁴¹¹ J. G., in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 171.

⁴¹² Patin, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 140; Jacques-Napoleon Faure-Biguet, 'Dada ou le Triomphe du Rien,' *L'Echo de Paris*, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 146.

⁴¹³ Germaine Everling recalled: 'The prevailing heat did something to the rubber structure... and slowly, slowly, the balloons shrank. Tzara rushed into the wings, announcing with dismay: "The sex is deflating!"' 'C'était hier: Dada...' *Œuvres Libres*, no. 190 (June 1955): 119-178, quoted in Sanouillet, 556.

⁴¹⁴ *Le Menestral* (Unsigned), 4 June 1920, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 251.

⁴¹⁵ Jean Cocteau had recently split with Dada.

⁴¹⁶ Sanouillet, 127.

smart set into a wild crowd: ‘an uninterrupted series of interjections, squeaks, yelps, whistles, and cries from every corner of the room filled the two hours of the show. And that would not matter if there had not been notable personalities of letters, real artists, and many beautiful ladies who have a name in the world.’⁴¹⁷ While it was Breton’s intention to invigorate audience interaction at the tours and trial organised in 1921, never did Dada achieve a more active spectatorship than at their theatrical events in traditional venues like the Salle Gaveau.

While it was poorly received, *The Second Celestial Adventure of Mr. Aa the Antipyrine* (as the title appears in the programme) became a *succès de scandale* and is the most discussed programme entry in reviews. Attendees found the verbose and incoherent dialogue troublesome, and one reviewer wrote that hopefully ‘this gentleman does not have a third adventure of the same kind!’⁴¹⁸

Tzara’s second play challenges dialogic and narrative conventions with ‘shouted words which did not follow one another,’⁴¹⁹ and abstract characters titled: Mr. Absorption; Ear; Mrs Interruption; The Disinterested Brain; M. Saturn; M. Aa.⁴²⁰ The dadaists played the roles, and a photograph taken during the performance shows them standing in line styled as ‘phantom being dressed in black paper [Fig. 8.]’⁴²¹ Character names are written across the costumes, reproducing the nameplate concept from *The First Celestial Adventure*. This time, however, their heads are concealed by enormous cylinders of white card ‘like candles extinguished and leaning towards each other.’⁴²² Tzara stands in front of the other actors with his back to the audience, directing the onstage action from within the show. Once again, his nameplate denotes his self-presentation as ‘Tristan Tzara.’ Here, Tzara fulfils his definition of the Dada theatre, which promises ‘visible direction.’⁴²³

Reprising his role as set designer, Francis Picabia dressed the stage in artificial greenery arranged in tiers, lining two sets of stairs at either side of the stage. A gigantic yellow and white stovepipe obscuring the organ is topped with an open umbrella on which the words

⁴¹⁷ Faure-Biguet, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 146.

⁴¹⁸ J. G., in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 171.

⁴¹⁹ ‘Dadas and Pears,’ (unsigned), *La France*, 27 May 1920, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 167.

⁴²⁰ Mr. Aa is replaced by Mr. Antipyrine in the published play text.

⁴²¹ ‘Dada ou les croquet-morts facétieux,’ article non coté, signé H.S., 6 June 1920, Fonds Rondel, Rj 2212, quoted in Béhar, 1979, 197.

⁴²² Kemp, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (2) 2.

⁴²³ Tzara, ‘Zurich Chronicle (1915-1919),’ in Motherwell, 238.

‘Francis Loustic [Francis funny guy]’ are written. Below the umbrella are large cartons wrapped in paper, placed as if under a Christmas tree, and labelled Tristan Tzara and Ribemont-Dessaignes (Fig. 9). Marking a dramaturgical shift from Tzara’s direction for *The First Celestial Adventure* (where the action took place behind the set), the actors performed in front of and amongst the set design so that the impressive tube-like costumes could be admired in full view.

Shortly after its premiere at the ‘Festival Dada,’ Tzara’s text was published in two parts in *Littérature* (New Series), no. 14, June 1920, and in *391*, no. 14, November 1920. In 1938 a limited edition of 125 numbers (including 7 luxury copies) was published with a grey cover page, and in stencil, the title to which the play is now known: *The Second Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine*. *The First and Second Celestial Adventure* texts evidence structural similarities: both consist of irrational sequences of dialogue intersected by a manifesto. There are no stage directions, indeed the external structures of theatre are entirely absent: entrances and exits are either non-existent or fluid. Characters are abstract entities ‘whose interchangeable lines do not correspond to the quality they supposedly embody’ (as denoted by their names).⁴²⁴ There is no identifiable relationship between protagonists. Finally, both plays include a sort of denouement: in *The First Celestial Adventure* the closing line ‘and then they went away (141)’ signals the end of the play to the reader/audience. In *The Second Celestial Adventure* the denouement is more pessimistic. The Disinterested Brain announces that there are ‘no more concerts’ for the ‘proverbs are exhausted (151),’⁴²⁵ a statement which signals that the play is exhausted; has ended.

Theatricality in The First and Second Celestial Adventure

While the similarities between the two *Celestial Adventure* plays are striking, the differences between them are also noteworthy. As the following sections demonstrate, the linguistic devices employed in *The Second Celestial Adventure* are more nuanced and complex than those of *The First*. Rather than being a continuation or variation of *The First*

⁴²⁴ Corvin, 258-9

⁴²⁵ Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are from Ruth Wilson’s translation, ‘The Second Celestial Adventure of Mr. Excedrin, Fire Extinguisher,’ *Theatre*, vol. 4, issue 1 (Winter 1973): 142-151. Lines referenced here are denoted by page numbers from this article. Wilson altered the names of some of the characters, I have chosen to keep Tzara’s original character titles to correspond better with the original French language text.

Celestial Adventure, in the trajectory of Tzara's playwriting career *The Second Celestial Adventure* marks a transitional stage between *The First Celestial Adventure* and the theatrical structure adopted in *The Gas Heart*.

Scholarly discussions on these works, however, tend to consider the *Celestial Adventure* plays as episodes of a unified body of work, each lacking unique attributes to distinguish them as separate pieces. Several commentators even deny their status as theatre plays, with Michel Corvin suggesting that while the *Celestial Adventure* plays are exceptionally dadaist works, they are not works of Dada theatre.⁴²⁶ This assessment is unhelpful, leading to a reduced understanding of Tzara's theatre practice. As established earlier in this thesis, such notions about the avant-garde have led to Dada's onstage activity being designated proto-performance art in opposition to theatre, rather than a form of non-mimetic theatricality as I propose. Other authors are at odds with discussing these works as theatre plays: Katherine Papachristos characterises the *Celestial Adventure* plays as 'poem-manifestos.'⁴²⁷ Marius Hentea is more generous suggesting that *The First Celestial Adventure* is a 'play-manifesto,' and concedes that *The Second Celestial Adventure* is a 'play,' however 'plotless.'⁴²⁸

The anti-theatrical designation of Tzara's onstage works highlights an assumed antagonism between text and performance in the avant-garde.⁴²⁹ As previously noted, Corvin suggests that Tzara's plays receive their 'reality from the stage' [...] nothing at the level of the writing can detect such an exchange.'⁴³⁰ This notion creates a hierarchy privileging onstage action as performative, and the written play text (which advocates repetition) as somewhat secondary to the unique performed moment. However, the theoretical framework of the performance/theatre complex allows for the confluence of repeated theatrical gestures and spontaneous performative moments, collapsing neat distinctions between theatre and performance.

Günter Berghaus's assessment that Tzara's plays are 'untheatrical' deviates from attitudes about the binary status of theatre and performance. Berghaus suggests that the *Celestial Adventure* plays are 'untheatrical' because neither the texts nor performances assist in

⁴²⁶ Corvin, 265.

⁴²⁷ Papachristos, 5.

⁴²⁸ Hentea, 2014, 83 and 146.

⁴²⁹ See Garner, 500, and Bay-Cheng, 471.

⁴³⁰ Corvin, 281-282.

understanding ‘the meaning of the play.’⁴³¹ Berghaus describes the impression of reading the plays as total chaos: ‘sounds, words and phrases are thrown together and no regard is paid to the rules of dramatic convention.’⁴³² However, while it is problematic to apply standard frameworks for analysing ‘meaning’ in the early plays, Tzara’s strategy does not render the work untheatrical. While Tzara rejects, for the most part, the external structures of dramatic convention – character relations, scenes, entrances and exits – by disseminating his written works through invented characters to be spoken onstage, Tzara invests in theatricality. Theatricality acts as a mechanism connecting art to life, and this notion is central to the avant-garde agenda. Presenting their ideas on art and life as stage-plays, the dadaist objective – to disrupt static perceptions of art and reawaken engagement with the subject – is actively performed. And by employing a standard means of entertainment that is theatre, Tzara brings Dada art closer to the public. Therefore, by choosing theatricality, Tzara reconciles the artistic and public spheres.

The Utilisation of Dramatic Language in The Second Celestial Adventure

While I have demonstrated that the *Celestial Adventure* plays fulfil a theatrical status, the assessment that they are not ‘plays’ rests somewhat on the characters’ inability (for the most part) to relate to each other. Tzara’s dramatic characters are, certainly in *The First Celestial Adventure*, isolated beings locked within their own narrative. They exist in a vacuum, speaking in turn short poetic statements that do not contribute to an overall plot. While there is a distinct lack of clear narrative in *The Second Celestial Adventure* too, a close assessment of the script reveals that the characters are more capable of relating to one another than in Tzara’s first play.⁴³³ Certain elements of the text appear to establish a game between characters. Mr. Absorption states: ‘I already,’ to which Ear responds: ‘he already (143).’ Later, The Disinterested Brain states: ‘eye wears moustaches,’ to which Mrs Interruption quips: ‘well my eye wears moustaches too (143).’ While the discourse in both plays cannot assist in plot development, the echo of the language game in *The Second Celestial Adventure* creates a relationship between lines. In addition, Tzara forms linguistic relationships when characters resume words spoken by their neighbours. For example, this

⁴³¹ Berghaus, *TPH*, 306-7.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 307.

⁴³³ For another analysis of the use of language in *The Second Celestial Adventure*, see Corvin, 258-265.

list spoken by Mrs Interruption: ‘feathers and sawfish radiator insecticide’ is acknowledged by Mr. Saturn who responds ‘insecticides are bitter (142).’

Occasionally, the characters converse in direct dialogue:

EAR: ...you are likeable and skinny lord
your brooches of light you know
have entombed you in walls of
feldspar

THE DISINTERESTED BRAIN: I haven’t interrupted you but
that’s pronounced feeeeeeld-
spaaaaar (147)

In *The Second Celestial Adventure*, while still investing in poetic monologue, the introduction of devices that form character relations through dialogue (echo, resumption, and direct conversation), creates a more complex dialogic form than is presented in Tzara’s first play.

Consequently, Tzara’s critique on language is more nuanced in *The Second Celestial Adventure* than in *The First*. As noted in my discussion of *The First Celestial Adventure*, Tzara combines nonsense language and inarticulate sound with recognisable words. By doing so, Tzara enacts the absurdist condition of the desire, yet fundamental inability, to describe through rational structures (language) the experience of human existence. While language in *The Second Celestial Adventure* does not implode with greater effect than in *The First Celestial Adventure* (where incoherence is already applied with impunity), it does manifest linguistic destruction by new processes. The pseudo-African language of *The First Celestial Adventure* has disappeared, and the language is for the most part more playful, as noted by the character relation word games.

The playful language of *The Second Celestial Adventure* is also more accessible, predominantly comprising of known words, however illogically distributed. For example: ‘you aspirin understand the down there of whom (142);’ and ‘whistle swollen with loveless lemonade (143).’ These lines are graspable yet incomprehensible for they consist of recognisable words curiously juxtaposed. Additionally, *The Second Celestial Adventure* includes Tzara’s first experiment with non-sequitur dialogue. Characters often articulate fully formed sentences: ‘do you remember for example the visit at the ministry five negresses in a car,’ yet the reply that this question receives disrupts the structure of logical conversation: ‘oh yes fathers and bills honour, nevertheless (142).’

Most significantly, as a development of dramatic language, Tzara *reduces* the instance of word-sounds in *The Second Celestial Adventure*. Sentences presenting impossible conceptual metaphors in *The Second* replace Tzara's usual subordination of language through meaningless sounds and symbols in *The First*. In *The First Celestial Adventure*, subjecting language to linguistic banality creates a hierarchy of: recognisable words, symbols, nonsense words, and sounds:

MR CRICRI: the rabbits surround the cathedral
dral dral and
turn until they become daylight
H2O
like the northerly parties who
surround themselves in
ndjaro (135)

In a bid to create meaning, the reader is able to disregard the non-words, to follow the statement thus: 'the rabbits surround the cathedral, and turn until they become daylight, like the northerly parties who surround themselves in ndjaro.'⁴³⁴ The inserted 'dral dral' and 'H2O' act as punctuation marks, breaking down the sentence into separate but associated phrases. Read this way, the sentence creates a conceptual metaphor relating to one possible idea: rabbits running around a cathedral like some kind of northerly ritual. Such attempts at cognition can be applied only in reading the text, where a linguistic hierarchy can be attributed. In performance however the flow of words is disjointed by the insertion of sounds; it is through performance that *The First Celestial Adventure* better realises its creative revolt.

In *The Second Celestial Adventure*, the attack on language is played out equally on the page and on the stage. By including longer stretches of uninterrupted monologue/dialogue comprised of full sentences, the effect of these words is perceived equally whether audibly or visually. For example:

EAR: sum paid at destination
stammered the queen
decoration with flowers of
hardened casein
to violate the envelopes
to prepare on the route of
round-heads indignation across
the

⁴³⁴ Ndjaro may refer to Kilimandjaro. Alexandre Le Roy published *Au Kilimandjaro (afrique orientale)* in Paris in 1914. Another edition appeared in 1920. Le Roy was a Catholic missionary in Tanzania. His book is an account of African society, politics, religion and culture before the advent of Western civilization.

ice floes (143)

While the images presented are somewhat confusing, the words and phrases are comprehensible. Limiting occasions of nonsense by replacing sounds and symbols with rational words presents a more sophisticated linguistic structure, yet a more damning judgement on language's function as a method of communication. Tzara applies a new and surprising attack on language here: the *lack* of nonsense words/sounds ironically forces the reader/viewer to work harder to experience the play, as I will now demonstrate.

Tzara achieves this by attributing similar value to each part of the sentence. With no distinction between recognisable and unrecognisable words (for they are all recognisable here), the reader/viewer cannot discern a linguistic hierarchy and therefore must acknowledge each element of the syntax equally:

MRS INTERRUPTION: feathers and sawfish
radiator insecticide

Here, Tzara presents four nouns with equal emphasis, rendering the cognition of one dominant idea or conceptual domain impossible. By this structure, Tzara emancipates language: by proposing images and concepts evenly, no specific direction, meaning or point of view is imposed by the author. Therefore, it is up to the reader/viewer to establish possible associations and initiate potential responses.

Corvin notes that in classical writing, the author's direction allows the reader to form relationships between concepts and images. In Western literature, the concept takes primacy over the image.⁴³⁵ Tzara's text confuses, for the words create abstract notions with no identifiable relation between concept and image:

MR ANTIPYRINE: bells and plateaux of straw-crust
dilate the pupils of the toothsome
pelican despite the agitation of the
bloodmeter policeman of the
volcano
predisposed to tuberculosis (142)

To offer a possible reading of this opening line: 'pelicans' pupils are dilated by bells despite the policemen being agitated by erupting volcanoes,' might suggest two related conceptual situations (pelicans with dilated pupils, and agitated policemen). However, simultaneously, the words also present vivid images: pelicans with teeth; agitated

⁴³⁵ Corvin, 262.

policemen; erupting volcanoes; bells and plates full of hard straw. The lack of distinction between possible concepts and related images causes the concept to be *replaced* by a series of images – in opposition to classical Western writing – rendering any attempt to extract conceptual meaning from the language redundant.

In addition, *The Second Celestial Adventure* advances Tzara's attack on semiotic structures in the theatre. In this play, Tzara creates the *illusion* of a semiotic formula, which he then proceeds to dismantle. In *The First Celestial Adventure*, pseudo-African language, sounds and symbols cannot be perceived as signifiers, but as things. In *The Second Celestial Adventure*, recognisable words can act as signifiers, but when these words are distributed illogically, Tzara scrambles cognitive processes. When reading/perceiving *The Second Celestial Adventure*, cognition fluctuates between comprehension and incomprehension:

MR ABSORPTION: leave via an eraser pump
calculate or fumigate
or ignite for i am always possible (143)

Within this sentence, verbs can be identified as signifiers for actions: 'leave,' 'calculate,' 'fumigate,' 'ignite.' However, the combination of two incompatible signifying words: 'eraser' and 'pump' creating 'eraser pump' renders an image without a signified concept. In addition to Tzara's semiotic disruption, the final statement in this line: 'I am always possible,' renders the notion of communication through organised language farcical, for the insertion of the adjective 'possible' does not linguistically follow the first-person conjugation 'I am.'

Finally, Tzara challenges the reader (and actor) with a complete lack of punctuation. In *The First Celestial Adventure*, Tzara applies punctuation only to the manifesto spoken by the character Tristan Tzara, and the occasional question mark. However, as established, the text is broken up by the insertion of sounds, symbols or repeated words, signalling a pause or break in the speech pattern in place of punctuation. In *The Second Celestial Adventure*, the sentences are long and relentless:

MR ANTIPYRINE: i known a number with knees that
isn't a poem brush playing with
shell-fish mouths
but the address of a french artist
and a composition of black
staccato
of vegetable balcony metronome
on the twinkling of an eye
medically for the pulmonary

waves in a sack (144-145)

The first line must be carried over to the subsequent line to create a flow when reading/speaking: 'I know a number with knees that isn't a poem.' But when Tzara inserts a line break in an unexpected place in the (already disjointed) sentence, the challenge faced by the reader/actor to create a linguistic flow is exacerbated.

Tolerating the incoherence presented in Tzara's dialogue requires creativity on the part of the reader/actor to recite the lines with disregard to the author's possible intentions. Abandoning punctuation, Tzara emancipates language by recognising that the opportunities presented in traditional linguistic structures are already limited. By disregarding syntax, Tzara exposes these limitations and liberates the sentence from singular meaning. The construction of language in this play creates the effect of a collage.

Tzara's Language Collage

In his 1931 essay 'Le Papier collé ou le proverbe en peinture,' Tzara explains that language collage attempts to 'graft new meaning onto words that are turned away from their usual direction.'⁴³⁶ Kathryn Brown identifies that Tzara's application of linguistic collage is a means to disrupt 'habits of expression.' Tzara believed that 'thought is held in check by familiar patterns of referentiality and grammatical codes.'⁴³⁷ Tzara's juxtapositions elude conventional patterns and create a linguistic restlessness from which playwriting can profit. By viewing *The Second Celestial Adventure* text as a collage it is possible to move 'beyond the appearance of incoherence.'⁴³⁸

Words in a sentence acquire significance from their situation. In Tzara's text however, words lack significance because, as I have demonstrated, equal and incompatible terms are placed side by side. Louis Aragon advises:

You did not think that this could be a challenge to the reader, but to the author himself, no longer a provocation, but an experience, which you must acknowledge having in front of you the manual of collage which Tzara, just as much as the painter with the newspaper, the stamp-post, caning or sand, places poetic creation outside of

⁴³⁶ Tzara, 'Le Papier collé ou le proverbe en peinture,' *OC*, 4:358.

⁴³⁷ Kathryn Brown, 'Collage as Form and Idea in the Art Criticism of Tristan Tzara,' *French Studies*, vol. 73, issue 4 (October, 2019): 544–560, 546.

⁴³⁸ Corvin, 262

it, recommends itself to inimitable chance, and abdicates before an obscurity (poetry) to which he recognises that he cannot reach by ordinary writing.⁴³⁹

That is, for Tzara, the dadaist creative experience cannot be achieved by the means of standard methods of writing. To enact the dadaist revolt with effect, Tzara cannot apply rational linguistic structures, for Dada is required to address the irrationality of their contemporary socio-cultural situation. He must therefore invent a new formula. By creating a word collage, Tzara produces the effect he would later devise in his instructions 'To make a dadaist poem,' that is, the cut-up technique. As established, this technique requires the 'author' to create a poem according to the laws of chance, by dismantling existing texts and rearranging the words at random. In *The Second Celestial Adventure*, Tzara constructs a jumbled discourse that 'gives the impression of being made before our eyes: the sentence by its reticence and its errors of orientation.'⁴⁴⁰

Considering Tzara's method for creating chance works returns us to the notion of Dada's relationship with chance versus choice. To reiterate: dadaist chance experiments were carried out within controlled frameworks. Berghaus suggests that Tzara created his *Celestial Adventure* texts by an automatic, associative (chance) method of writing.⁴⁴¹ I would offer that it is equally possible that Tzara constructed complete sentences, then, by application of choice, removed certain grammatical parts to give the impression of a language collage. For example:

THE DISINTERESTED BRAIN: the sleep the general the rumpus
of heart
the grape... (146)

Might have (to offer one possibility) originated as:

the sleep **of** the general **who heard** the rumpus
of **his** heart
ate the grape

By deleting the words in bold, the collage is revealed. And by removing from certain phrases, grammatical parts that relate terms and contextualise sentences (prepositions, conjunctions, and determiners), Tzara's text *appears* to have been constructed by automatic-associative or chance experiments. Whether or not Tzara created this text by chance application, it offers the *illusion* of automatism.

⁴³⁹ Aragon, 'Petite note sur les collages chez Tristan Tzara et ce qui s'en suit,' 143, quoted in Corvin, 262.

⁴⁴⁰ Corvin, 260.

⁴⁴¹ Berghaus, *TPH*, 159.

By creating a linguistic collage, Tzara evades (for the most part) any attempt at textual analysis by the reader, and emphasises his commitment to indifference by obscuring an authorial objective. The lack of authorial objective is emphasised by the illusion of automatic writing; however, as detailed above, the controlled framework within which Tzara created ‘chance’ works, reinstates his authority. Regardless, the message gets through: by refusing to communicate with rational language, (it would appear) the author has nothing to say. This is the success of the dadaist programme. By obfuscating his intentions, Tzara simultaneously reveals the dadaist ambition more readily: to create an incongruity between the word and the thing it describes, for all language, to the dadaist, is already incapable of rational communication.

Dramatic Form and Theme in *The Second Celestial Adventure*

While language in *The Second Celestial Adventure* challenges conventional theatrical speech, Tzara borrows from classical theatre history to organise the dramaturgy of this play, notably by including a chorus. Towards the close of *The Second Celestial Adventure*, characters group together as a chorus to recite the dramatic climax, discussed further below. In each play from *The Gas Heart* onwards, Tzara would incorporate a more defined chorus or commentator to narrate the onstage action. *The First Celestial Adventure* contains an early attempt at this device through the character The Director, who appears to comment on some dramatic action: ‘he died saying that farce is a poetic element (135).’ However, in the absence of stage directions or coherent dramatic action, it remains unknown whether this statement refers to an event occurring within the play. In *The Gas Heart*, Tzara makes direct reference to onstage action through the character Nose who calls for ‘A little more life on the stage (140).’ In this instance, Nose directs the onstage action from outwith the dramatic narrative as a metatheatrical device. In *Handkerchief of Clouds*, a chorus of commentators comment on each scene after it is played. Finally, in *The Flight*, three characters – Narrator, First Female Narrator, and Second Female Narrator – report on the dramatic action.

In ancient Greek theatre, the chorus fulfils several functions. First, it offers a summary of the plot at the closure of each scene, enabling narrative cohesion. In addition, the chorus comments on the themes presented in the play to guide the audience in their response to the drama. The chorus is a mimetic device in tragic plays: it alerts the audience to the fault of

the central characters (hubris), revealing their tragic flaw (hamartia). When the audience identifies with the characters via representational mimesis, they experience pity and fear leading to catharsis. In this way, Greek theatre served a social function.

August Schlegel interprets the chorus as the ‘ideal spectator,’ for it serves to provide the actual spectator with an ‘expression of his own emotions, and elevates him to the region of contemplation’ for the purpose of cathartic transformation.⁴⁴² The chorus is also considered a character in the narrative. Aristotle’s *Poetics* tells us that ‘the chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action.’⁴⁴³ Tzara’s theatre follows this structure: *The Second Celestial Adventure*’s chorus is not differentiated from other actors; the chorus comprises previously introduced characters. While Tzara’s theatricality embraces a non-mimetic quality, the traditional structures of classical dramaturgy are present nonetheless.

Towards the close of *The Second Celestial Adventure*, the characters conspire as a chorus to narrate the process of a conception followed by childbirth, which occurs offstage. Marius Hentea suggests that references to childhood in *The Second Celestial Adventure* can be contextualised by Tzara’s contemporaneous living arrangements.⁴⁴⁴ During 1920, Tzara lived with Picabia and Germaine Everling. At the time of writing, Everling had recently given birth to baby Lorenzo. Hentea notes that sounds and smells associated with living with the child influenced Tzara’s playwriting, for example: ‘awake and make warm milk (143);’ and ‘coagulated child on the collapsible chamber-pot (142).’ However, references to conception, pregnancy, and childbirth were already established in *The First Celestial Adventure* (written in Zurich in 1916) with the character of The Pregnant Woman.

In *The Second Celestial Adventure*, Tzara relates the erotic memories of a pregnant woman (leading to conception), and the act of childbirth simultaneously. The theme emerges from across a series of lines beginning after Mr. Antipyrine’s manifesto. Each character in the play is involved in the narration, taking turns to recount separate points in the narrative, as a chorus does in classical drama. To begin, Mr. Absorption introduces the labour:

⁴⁴² August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. John Black (London, 1846; reprint, New York, 1973), 76–77.

⁴⁴³ Aristotle, *Poetics*, Chapter 18, in Albert Weiner, ‘The Function of the Tragic Greek Chorus,’ *Theatre Journal*, vol. 32, no. 2 (May 1980): 205–212, 205.

⁴⁴⁴ Hentea, 2014, 147

feel your knees go away
luminescently
from which departs the scarlet
obscurity and sometimes clarity
and does not look at the doctor
who approaches with instruments (147)

This line is followed by the recounting of a strange courtship between Ear and The Disinterested Brain which appears to return to the moment of their sexual encounter: 'You are likeable and skinny lord' says Ear to The Disinterested Brain, repeating these words again across the three lines which 'narrate' their affair. Next, Mr. Saturn describes the conception occurring in the 'centre' of the womb, which creates another 'centre' of life:

return to the most interior centre
look for the most interior centre
on the centre there is a centre
and on the centre there is a centre
and on the centre there is another
centre... (148)

During the labour, The Disinterested Brain speaks of 'our love' which 'hangs in shreds like a putrid glacier (149),' before the birth occurs:

EAR: slowly pull the red and crying
foetus barge
and the woman jumps out of bed
boombarassassa
and the woman jumps out of bed
all of a sudden boombarassasa
and the woman jumps out of bed
boombarassassa and runs with the
lamp between her legs (149)

If the encounter between the lovers and the experience of conception is imbued with humour, the description of the childbirth is distressing and physically violent: 'the doctor excavates;' 'the doctor runs brusquely tears away the form;' 'on the central part a drapery pulled from the stomach (148-150).' The description of the child as it emerges from 'the stomach' is even more harrowing:

EAR: ...hypocampal hemorrhoidal head
with propped-up eyes under the
frontal cock, one open wide like a
balloon and the other half-closed
like the boat the ears breathe
buckled skatefish or wet banners,
the wide and toothless black
laugh, the arms come out of the
jaws one is long like a lamprey
with fingers turning wind-mill-like (150)

This child is described as deformed with haemorrhoids on its head, with testicles for eyes, ears as gills, a wide-open mouth from which the eel like arms extend into agitated fingers. This part-humanoid form is diseased, and prefigures the fantastically deformed bodies presented in *The Gas Heart*, where Tzara rendered deformity a ‘guiding artistic principle’ in the context of World-War-I trench warfare.⁴⁴⁵ Here, Tzara presents a haunting visual image of the deformed body of a child, undermining the humour and playfulness of the previous passages.

The dramatic interlude here is made more complex by the dramatic device of the chorus’ narration. As established, Tzara developed more complex dialogic forms as his playwriting career advanced. *The First Celestial Adventure* is written predominantly in monologue. Monologues offer insight into specific characters. They can also be removed from the text as individual works (as poems, or in the case of Dada theatre, manifestoes). Monologues can show character development as they share their thoughts directly with the audience, oftentimes revealing decisions to be acted upon, which will advance the plot. The monologue itself, however, does not alter the course of the narrative, this occurs in dialogue and action.

Dialogue features in Tzara’s theatre from *The Second Celestial Adventure* and *The Gas Heart* onwards. In Tzara’s 1924 *Handkerchief of Clouds*, an advanced linguistic structure becomes evident. Yet, choosing to narrate part of the action in chorus in his second play evidences an early phase in his maturing, dramatically speaking. The chorus can synopsise complex plot developments occurring offstage. This can also be done in monologue form by one character recounting an event or action to another character. Unique to the chorus, however, is an ability to imbue the narrative with a driving rhythm, which builds urgency and dramatic tension into the action. This can only be conveyed by the use of multiple voices, in turn, speaking a singular narrative. Tzara’s inclusion of the chorus for this particular dramatic moment is a specific choice, and evidences once again his awareness of, and attention to, dramatic form. Even, and especially here, if the intention is to parody the tradition. For the chorus’ tale does not relate to the rest of the play, and the larger narrative is not made clearer by its inclusion.

⁴⁴⁵ Garner, 505

While I have predominantly discussed Tzara's advancement of the dialogue form, the use of manifesto/monologue is carried into *The Second Celestial Adventure*. I will now conclude my discussion of Tzara's second play by discussing briefly the manifesto/monologue.

The Second Manifesto of Mr. Antipyrine and the Foreshadow of Surrealism

The manifesto of *The Second Celestial Adventure* includes foreboding statements about Dada's future. It has lost the vitality and optimism of *The First Celestial Adventure's* manifesto, written in 1916 when Dada had newly formed. To recap: in *The First Celestial Adventure*, the character of Tristan Tzara steps out of the dramatic frame to recite the 'Manifesto of Mr. Antipyrine.' This manifesto is a declaration describing the 'meaning' of Dada, beginning with 'Dada is our intensity,' before listing the ways in which Dada will influence art and the world. The monologue closes with Tzara stating that Dada action is performed 'to please you, good listeners, I love you so much, I assure you and I adore you (139).' The character Mr. Antipyrine pronounces the manifesto in *The Second Celestial Adventure*. While *The Second's* manifesto also discusses Dada ambitions, it reads rather as a lament by the author through his spokesman Mr. Antipyrine:

and we are all idiots
and very suspicious of a new form
of intelligence and
of a new logic like
ourselves
that is not at all Dada
and you let yourselves be taken in
by Aaism
cataplasms
from the alcohol of purified sleep
bandages
and idiots
virgins (147)

This manifesto/monologue, addressed directly to the reader/audience, is rather an attack. Tzara accuses the audience (and the dadaists) of being 'idiots.' This is not novel in the history of Dada; the presentation of works that actively provoke the audience had been central to Dada performance since its inception. Tzara states that the public let themselves 'be taken in by Aaism,' in reference to the eponymous character (Mr. Aa the Antipyrine) from both *The First* and *Second Celestial Adventure* plays. Tzara alerts the audience to having been duped by Dada activity. Again, this is not surprising given Dada's

antagonistic audience relations. What is new and somewhat alarming is Tzara's negative attitude about the Dada movement as revealed in the manifesto. Tzara is suspicious of 'a new form of intelligence and of a new form of logic,' which may foreshadow the rise of André Breton's vision of Dada that would become Surrealism. For Tzara, this new direction is 'not at all Dada.'

Early in the manifesto, Tzara warns of:

irregular maritime values like the
depression of
Dada in the blood of a two-
Headed beast

Tzara speaks of 'the depression of Dada,' which results from it being 'in the blood of a two-headed beast.' This reference might suggest that Tzara, in 1920 was already aware that Dada was becoming jointly 'headed' by himself and Breton, which was not at all a productive situation and led to the eventual decline of the Dada movement in Paris.

In only three years after the performance of this play Tzara and Breton would part ways, and Dada would become redundant in Paris. However, at the time of writing and performing *The Second Celestial Adventure*, tensions between Tzara and Breton's differing opinions on Dada were already emerging, with Breton reflecting that:

Each time a Dada demonstration was planned – by Tzara, of course, who never tired of them – Picabia gathered us in his salon and *enjoined* us, one after the other, to come up with *ideas*, for it. In the end, the harvest was not very abundant. The crowning touch was inevitably the first, or second, or n-th adventure of Mr. Antipyrine by Tristan Tzara, performed by his friends [...] (this was his favourite 'idea' of last resort; Zurich had no doubt been flabbergasted by it.)⁴⁴⁶

Breton's comment regarding the endless series of Mr. Antipyrine's adventures invented by Tzara for Dada's events is a comment on the stagnating programme structure of the manifestations. Breton was not alone in his frustration. Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes commented that during the 'Festival Dada' 'the performers, who were the [d]adaists in person, sometimes showed little ardour in execution. Moreover, unexpected considerations of personal vanity made themselves felt.'⁴⁴⁷ Tzara experienced reluctance from the group to stage his finale, and 'though so expert at breathing life into these affairs, had all the trouble in the world getting his "Vaseline symphonique" played; though scarcely very

⁴⁴⁶ Breton, *Conversations*, trans. Polizzotti, 45.

⁴⁴⁷ Ribemont-Dessaignes, 'History of Dada,' in Motherwell, 113.

musical, it encountered the open hostility of André Breton.’⁴⁴⁸ And Hans Richter stated that ‘Breton and even Ribemont-Dessaignes were not entirely pleased with the performance.’⁴⁴⁹ According to Robert Short:

It being beyond the wit even of [d]adaists, perhaps as early as autumn 1920, continuously to reinvent the present, Dada became a stereotype. Its shocks became mere tics. And nothing could be less Dada than the effort to prolong an activity that had become sterile and repetitive. Nevertheless, this was what the unfortunate Tzara, who had invested so much creative capital in Dada, tried to do.⁴⁵⁰

The similarity of the programmes between the ‘Manifestation Dada’ and ‘Festival Dada’ was felt to have stagnated the dadaist shock tactic ‘with anti-art neutralized as an aesthetic taste in its own right.’⁴⁵¹ The audience were coming to *expect*, to *predict* what the dadaists had to offer, words that signed the death knell for the spontaneous performance gesture they sought to present. This situation encouraged Breton to establish an alternative format for Dada operations in 1921. However, the ‘Festival Dada’ was by no means the last event of its kind and towards the end of the 1921 Grande Saison Dada, Tzara staged the ‘Salon Dada,’ where his best known and most influential play *The Gas Heart* received its premiere.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Richter, 103.

⁴⁵⁰ Robert Short, ‘Paris Dada and Surrealism,’ *European Studies*, ix (1979): 75-98, 88.

⁴⁵¹ Paul Ingram, ‘Songs, Anti-Symphonies and Sodomist Music: Dadaist Music in Zurich, Berlin and Paris,’ *Dada/Surrealism* 21 (2017): 1-33, 19.

CHAPTER 7: THE GAS HEART

Neck stands downstage, Nose opposite, confronting the audience. All the other characters enter and leave as they please. The gas heart walks slowly around, circulating widely; it is the only and greatest three-act hoax of the century; it will satisfy only industrialized imbeciles who believe in the existence of men of genius. Actors are requested to give this play the attention due a masterpiece such as *Macbeth* or *Chantecler*, but to treat the author—who is not a genius with no respect and to note the levity of the script, which brings no technical innovation to the theatre.⁴⁵²

With this prologue Tzara introduces *Le Cœur à Gaz* (*The Gas Heart*): a three-act play populated by characters titled Ear, Neck, Nose, Mouth, Eye and Eyebrow. Aligning this work to quintessential texts by Shakespeare (*Macbeth*) and Edmond Rostand (*Chantecler*), Tzara also reveals his parodic intent: the play is a ‘hoax,’ bringing ‘no technical innovation to the theatre.’ Despite this iconoclastic introduction, *The Gas Heart* evidences a development in Dada theatre towards dramatic convention: it is divided into acts; the story builds towards a climax; and as the play progresses, a relationship of sorts develops between characters. Predominantly, *The Gas Heart*’s dialogue is constructed from rational sentences. However, syntax is illogically organised and characters often speak in non-sequitur. Where stage directions had been previously absent in his plays, here Tzara includes: entrances and exits; instructions for the physical arrangement of characters onstage; and guidance for how certain lines should be delivered. The play is notable for its inclusion of a dance interlude during Act III, detailed as a typographical diagram in the published text.

The Gas Heart would be the only play reprised during the Dada period: first performed at the ‘Salon Dada,’ 10 June 1921; and again at the ‘Soirée du Cœur à Barbe,’ 6 July 1923. As this chapter reveals, when it was performed in 1923, *The Gas Heart* became the most notorious of Dada’s theatrical shows. After its initial performance, *Le Cœur à Gaz* was published in *Der Sturm* vol. 13, no. 3, 1922, and in 1946 Tzara revised the play (notably altering the dance diagram) in a limited edition of 380 numbers including 25 deluxe copies with an engraving by Max Ernst.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵² Tristan Tzara, opening stage directions to *The Gas Heart*, 133.

⁴⁵³ A subsequent French language version of the play was published in 1977 (Paris: J. Damase). English language translations include: *The Gas Heart*, trans. Michael Benedikt; *The Gas Burning Heart*, trans. Leslie Singer, *Chicago Review*, vol. 20, no. 4/vol. 21 no. 1 (May, 1960): 48-64; *The Gas Heart: The Dada Masterpiece of Drama*, trans. Eric von der Luft (North Syracuse, New York: Gegensatz Press, 2008).

This chapter provides an analysis of *The Gas Heart* in performance and print. I will discuss how the presentation of linguistic and dramatic form in *The Gas Heart* marks a progression from the incoherence presented in the first two plays, and towards the organised dramaturgy of Tzara's later plays. Themes presented in this play will be contextualised within their historical situation. Finally, I will discuss the typographical dance diagram. I will examine how the inclusion of the dance illustration impacts the play's translation from page to stage.

The Gas Heart at the Salon Dada

On the evening of 10 June 1921, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées overlooking the Seine, attendees paid 10 francs to enter the building and climb seven flights of stairs littered with inscriptions warning: 'Don't forget your lungs. Thank you.' and, 'Have you seen yourself in the mirror?'⁴⁵⁴ Upon arriving at the top floor, spectators entered a large rectangular room filled with unusual objects and a stage at one end. This was the 'Salon Dada,' an exhibition of paintings and sculptures created for the occasion by the Dada poets.⁴⁵⁵ The 'Salon' had opened on Monday 6 June however the exhibition was simply a prelude to the Friday soirée. Works on display included 'strange drawings and watercolours, pink question marks on a blue background, cubist quirks, monstrous human figures, apocalyptic animals, wax ears [and] a pair of suspenders.'⁴⁵⁶ In addition to the artworks, posters were pasted all over the place stating: 'This summer elephants will be wearing moustaches... what about you?' and 'Dada is the greatest swindle of the century.' This latter statement would be echoed during the presentation of *The Gas Heart*, programmed for the finale. Tzara introduced the play by reading its prologue announcing, as detailed above, that *The Gas Heart* is the 'greatest three-act hoax of the century.'⁴⁵⁷

The stage – where the majority of the evening's acts took place – was divided into two levels and decorated as follows. At centre stage was a mirror with the inscription 'if you wanted to be disgusted, look at yourself in this mirror.' Next to the mirror 'a buff-coloured tent covered something which later proved to be, from the sounds that issued forth, a piano

⁴⁵⁴ Sanouillet, 202; Hentea, 2014, 168.

⁴⁵⁵ Tzara had asked all the dadaists who contributed to the 'Salon' to provide works, resulting in some poorly executed paintings by untrained artists. Additionally, the catalogue included works by artists Man Ray, Johannes Baargeld, Max Ernst and Hans Arp. See Sanouillet, 204.

⁴⁵⁶ Jean Jacquemont, *Chronique Parisienne*, 11 June 1921 in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7164 7) 209.

⁴⁵⁷ Prologue to *The Gas Heart*, 133.

and at the left was the apotheosis of Dada – nothing.⁴⁵⁸ A workman's ladder connected the lower stage to a platform, where a mannequin dressed in a tuxedo was stationed. At the border separating the two levels was a collection of more than fifty ties strung together as a garland. From the ceiling was suspended 'the most heterogeneous objects:' an open umbrella, a cello wearing a white tie, and a hat.⁴⁵⁹

The event commenced with a musical performance. From the concealed piano came the sound of discordant popular tunes accompanied by 'a pretty female voice' singing the exhibition catalogue with 'a commentary for each entry.' It was 'long and boring!'⁴⁶⁰ Next, Mr. Joliboit, porcelain repairer from the 6th arrondissement, mounted the stage.

Unbeknownst to the dadaists, Joliboit would be the hit of the evening:

This is not a vulgar actor disguised and playing a role. Joliboit is authentic and natural. He is the real repairer of porcelain and earthenware who passes through the streets singing familiar songs on his little wooden musette. Joliboit launched into the opera. He attacked it too high and hit a few off notes. But who cares: we cheered and applauded him, and asked for an encore. And the old boy with a cheerful face and mischievous eyes, delighted in his emerging popularity.⁴⁶¹

Then, with a fanfare from the back of the hall, Philippe Soupault as 'The President of the Republic of Libera' (in a black mask) made a majestic entrance, greeting spectators as dignitaries and commenting on the artworks as he passed. Upon mounting the stage he presented each of the dadaists with a candle, which he lit and immediately extinguished before returning them to his pocket. He then proceeded to deliver a dadaist lecture. Soupault's performance was well received and the 'audience laughed uproariously.'⁴⁶²

The following acts were not so well enjoyed. Louis Aragon stood on the platform and, parodying a popular evangelist, read fragments from 'a dadaist gospel.'⁴⁶³ The unimpressed audience chanted for Joliboit to return. Next, Valentin Parnak wearing tennis shoes as wings, climbed down the ladder from the platform to the lower stage, attached a metal foot to his arm and danced a fox trot 'in the manner of a drunk.'⁴⁶⁴ Finally, a chorus of dadaists gathered on the platform and taunted the audience with phrases such as 'he will not speak anymore because no one will understand him.' For some reason this performance

⁴⁵⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, no title, 13 June 1921, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7264 7), 155.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁰ Jean Jacquemont, *Chronique Parisienne*, 11 June 1921, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7164 7) 209.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² *Chicago Tribune*, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7264 7), 155.

⁴⁶³ Jacquemont, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7164 7) 209.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

created frenzy (reviewers do not note what other lines were spoken), and just as the ‘crowd was ready to storm the stage, Joliboit appeared, a new Orpheus in Hell, who with his joyfully off-key song, charmed the angry Cerberus.’⁴⁶⁵

Finally, Tzara entered the stage and read *The Gas Heart* prologue. The crowd erupted with laughter once again at the content of the speech, which describes the play as a masterpiece.⁴⁶⁶ The dadaists commenced in their roles, with Tzara as Eyebrow.⁴⁶⁷ Not a word of the play – ‘performed in a mind-boggling style’ – was heard.⁴⁶⁸ In the ‘midst of the uproar,’ the audience called for Joliboit once more who began singing the Marseillaise. The audience stood up and began to exit the building ‘letting the “dadaists” finish, in front of the messy chairs, *The Gas Heart*, masterpiece of Tzara the Romanian “Dada.”’⁴⁶⁹ After attending the ‘Salon Dada,’ a reviewer from the *Chicago Tribune*, wrote: ‘There is no better way for one who is bored to be brought back to normalcy than to attend a soirée Dada; nor is there a better way for a sane person to loose his mind, easily and painlessly, than by attending the same soirée.’⁴⁷⁰

There were three performances planned for the ‘Salon Dada,’ and only the first was staged. The dadaists did not have sole occupation of the theatre for the entirety of the ‘Salon’ (due to run until 30 June); the futurist Luigi Russolo hired the space for a bruitist concert on 17 June, and Jean Cocteau would premier his play *Wedding on the Eiffel Tower* the following night. Frustrated that the futurists were to feature in the middle of the ‘Salon Dada,’ Tzara decided to sabotage Russolo’s event. However, Marinetti, expecting such antics from the dadaists,⁴⁷¹ forewarned the theatre’s director Jacques Hébertot, and when Dada handbills began flying around the auditorium and the dadaists began heckling the performers, Tzara was reprimanded and asked to leave. When he refused, a policeman was called and stationed next to him. Hébertot informed Tzara that the ‘Salon’ would be closed forthwith and when the dadaists arrived for their matinée the following day, they found the theatre

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ The Salon Dada programme details the cast as follows: Ear: Phillipe Soupault; Mouth: Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes; Nose: Theodore Fraenkel; Eye: Louis Aragon; Neck: Benjamin Peret; Eyebrow: Tristan Tzara; Dancer: Valentin Parnak (interlude created by the dancer). BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7164 7).

⁴⁶⁸ Jacquemont, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, BLJD, A I 1 (7164 7) 209.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ *Chicago Tribune*, in BLJD, Picabia Dossiers, A I 1 (7264 7), 155.

⁴⁷¹ Only a few months earlier, in January at the Théâtre de l’Œuvre, Tzara and the dadaists interrupted a lecture by Marinetti by distributing fliers stating ‘Futurism is dead... of what? Dada,’ and shouting insults at the stage before Marinetti had begun speaking.

doors locked. Philippe Soupault summoned a bailiff complaining that Hébertot was in violation of contract, but to no avail. Later, Hébertot explained to the press: ‘I thought that it was first necessary to prevent the children from disturbing the theatre, and then to punish them by depriving them of their exhibition.’⁴⁷²

With nothing to lose, the dadaists took their revenge during Cocteau’s performance that evening: they stood up and sat down in different parts of the theatre for the entire performance, shouting ‘Long Live Dada’ to such effect that critics were unable to properly review the performance, and all that appeared in the press the following day were descriptions of the set and costumes.⁴⁷³ The dadaist’s victory was however small recompense for their events being cancelled.

Scandal and The Gas Heart at the Soirée du Cœur à Barbe

The early closure of the ‘Salon Dada,’ foreshadows the fate of Tzara’s next theatrical venture two years later. By 1923, Dada had lost momentum. The continuing disagreement between Tzara and Breton (about the direction of Dada, and of art moreover) gathered momentum after 1921. Between January and April 1922 their dispute achieved notoriety when played out in the press, irrevocably damaging their relationship and the future of Dada.⁴⁷⁴ Dada experienced a decline in 1922 with no public performances in Paris.

In January 1923, Tzara began scoping out theatres for the next, and subsequently last, Paris Dada event. However, Tzara soon found that he was blacklisted by many of Paris’ theatres after the scandal at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in June 1921. Fortuitously, about the same time, Iliia Zdanevich (known as Iliazd) invited Tzara to collaborate on an event with his Russian theatre group Tcherez.⁴⁷⁵ Iliazd (who had no prior theatrical infractions) booked the Théâtre Michel for the ‘Soirée du Cœur à Barbe,’ its main feature would be Tzara’s *The Gas Heart*. With support from the Tcherez group, Tzara was able to give *The*

⁴⁷² Quoted in Sanouillet, 207.

⁴⁷³ Sanouillet, 208.

⁴⁷⁴ The dispute between Breton and Tzara played out in the Paris press over the ill-fated 1922 ‘Congress of Paris.’ See Hentea, 2015 (i).

⁴⁷⁵ Born in Tblisi, Zdanevich began organising avant-garde performance events while at university in Petrograd from 1911. In 1921 Zdanevich moved to Paris, settling in Montparnasse. Gathering a group of avant-garde Russian exiles, Zdanevich organised meetings and soirées at the Café Caméléon, Boulevard du Montparnasse.

Gas Heart a professional staging: directed by Yssia Sidersky; a set designed by N. Granovsky; and with costumes by Sonia Delaunay-Terck and Victor Barthe. Professional actors were hired: Jacqueline Chaumont and Saint-Jean from the Théâtre-Odéon; Marcel Herrand, who performed in Apollinaire's *The Breasts of Tiresias* and had previously worked with the dadaists on the 'First Friday of *Littérature*;' and the Romanian dancer Lizica Codréano who provided the dance for Tzara's play.⁴⁷⁶ The dadaists Jacques Baron, René Crevel and Pierre de Massot played the remaining parts.

This event made *The Gas Heart* infamous when a riot ensued during the performance, provoked by André Breton and Paul Éluard. The following is what happened: Breton believed the restaging of Tzara's play, and the professional production it received, was a condemnable pursuit designed for Tzara's self-promotion. In April 1923, in an interview by Roger Vitrac, Tzara said that he was not 'against publicity, nor against success, because [he considered them] to be elements of life as acceptable as their opposites.'⁴⁷⁷ This statement confirmed Breton's suspicions about the nature of the event. Furthermore, Jean Cocteau (a figure of derision to the proto-surrealists) was named on the Soirée's programme alongside Éluard, who had not been consulted. Éluard demanded his name be removed from the programme, a request that was granted.⁴⁷⁸ Nevertheless, both Éluard and Breton were incensed when they arrived at the theatre that evening and a violent confrontation was in store.

When Pierre de Massot read a manifesto including the lines: 'André Gide killed in action, Pablo Picasso killed in action, Francis Picabia killed in action,' Breton stormed the stage on the pretext of defending Picasso (who was in attendance, though seemingly unperturbed at his name being mentioned).⁴⁷⁹ Using his walking cane as a weapon, Breton struck Massot breaking his arm. Tzara called on the police who removed Breton from the theatre. The performance resumed with music by Satie, poems by Apollinaire and Soupault and, before the interval, a film by Man Ray. After the intermission, the stage was set for *The Gas Heart*. As soon as the curtain raised, Éluard mounted the stage commanding that Tzara explain the rough treatment Breton had received. The police demanded Éluard return to his seat and calm was restored. After a short while Tzara entered the stage (although he was not due to perform that evening), and immediately Éluard ascended the stage once again

⁴⁷⁶ See Hentea, 2014, 195; Sanouillet, 610.

⁴⁷⁷ 'Tristan Tzara va cultiver ses vices,' interview with Roger Vitrac, quoted in Sanouillet, 279.

⁴⁷⁸ Pierre Reverdy replaced Éluard on the programme. Hentea, 2014, 195.

⁴⁷⁹ Hentea, 2014, 195

and assaulted him. The audience, now aware that this was not some Dada act, rushed to Tzara's aid and a genuine riot broke out with 'fighting in the four corners of the hall.'⁴⁸⁰ *The Gas Heart* was eventually performed. After the show, fighting resumed in the street outside the theatre and continued well into the night.⁴⁸¹ The 'Soirée du Cœur à Barbe' was due to receive a second staging the following day (7 July), however, after the violence at the premiere, the theatre cancelled subsequent performances. Despite the (twice-) cancelled season of Tzara's third play, *The Gas Heart* would become Tzara's best known and most discussed theatrical work. However, in-depth analyses are somewhat lacking, overshadowed by its polemic performance history.

Scholarly discussions on *The Gas Heart* – as is the case for Tzara's earlier plays – often deny its status as a work of theatre. Discussing the professional production of 1923, Michel Sanouillet states that *The Gas Heart* is a 'quick sketch with no other pretension than to be aggressive, [and] did not lend itself well to a serious effort of theatrical adaptation. To put more into its production than the author had into its conception was to misjudge the play's meaning.'⁴⁸² Roger Vitrac, discussing the attitude of the actors during the 1921 performance, noted that 'these men at the time considered *The Gas Heart* not as a poetic or theatrical work, but as part of the demonstration fit simply to make the public mad.'⁴⁸³ And another of Tzara's contemporaries, Jacques Baron (who acted in the 1923 production) considered *The Gas Heart* as 'nothing more, or less than a poem by Tzara set in dialogue – and perfectly dishevelled dialogue, if I dare say so.'⁴⁸⁴

Nonetheless, *The Gas Heart* remains Tzara's most influential play, and has impacted subsequent avant-garde theatre developments and the rise of the Theatre of the Absurd. As Martin Esslin identifies, *The Gas Heart* is 'a piece of "pure theatre" that derives its impact almost entirely from the subtle rhythms of its otherwise nonsensical dialogue, which, in the use of the clichés of polite conversation, foreshadows Ionesco.'⁴⁸⁵ Furthermore, Hentea suggests that the play 'radically calls into question theatrical conventions and whose absurdist humour brings to mind Beckett and Ionesco.'⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁰ Theo van Doesburg, 'Ils ont presque tué Tzara,' in Marc Dachy, *Archives Dada*, 342, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 197.

⁴⁸¹ Hentea, 197.

⁴⁸² Sanouillet, 206/280.

⁴⁸³ Quoted in Matthews, 47-58.

⁴⁸⁴ Jacques Baron, *L'An I du Surréalisme suivi de L'An dernier* (Paris: Denoë, 1969), 145, quoted in Garner, 513.

⁴⁸⁵ Esslin, 309.

⁴⁸⁶ Hentea, 169.

Dramatic Form in The Gas Heart

Tzara's third play continues to disrupt mimetic theatrical presentation. Characters, which are disembodied body parts and organs, are not introduced in the traditional sense: they do not announce themselves, neither are they introduced by other characters. By de-humanising his characters Tzara destabilizes meaning; without names or identities, the characters appear as unknown entities, inhabiting an unknown realm. Non-mimetic characterisation was established further in the 1923 production when Sonia Delaunay dressed the actors in rigid geometric costumes (see Fig. 10).⁴⁸⁷ For Tzara, 'Dada is the mark of abstraction,'⁴⁸⁸ and he employs abstraction as a dramatic device by rejecting organic concepts of human based drama in his theatre plays.⁴⁸⁹ This non-mimetic theatricality establishes *The Gas Heart* as the epitome of Dada theatre. However, a closer analysis reveals that conventional modes of dramatic organisation are evident.

The Gas Heart comprises fourteen pages of dialogue and is an example of the avant-garde short play, which John H. Muse calls the microdrama.⁴⁹⁰ However, its composition adheres to a traditional theatrical structure (as observed by Gustav Freytag): exposition, (rising action), climax, (falling action), denouement.⁴⁹¹ The typical three act formula divides Freytag's structure thus: act one is the exposition where the characters are introduced and a conflict is revealed; in act two, the main character(s) encounter a problem, preventing them

⁴⁸⁷ From 1918 in Zurich, Sophie Taeuber created abstract marionettes for the theatre. Having worked closely with Taeuber during the Zurich Dada period, Taeuber's theatrical innovations may have influenced Tzara's characterisation and bodily representation for *The Gas Heart*. For Taeuber's marionettes, see Jill Fell, 'Sophie Täuber: The Masked Dada Dancer,' *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. 35, no. 3 (1999): 270-285, and Joyce Suechun Cheng, 'Cardboard Toys and Dancing Marionettes: Play, Materiality, and Agency in Zurich Dada,' in *Virgin Microbe*. There is confluence also with Tzara's theatre practice and the experimental theatre produced in Germany by the Bauhaus stage shop, headed by Oskar Schlemmer from 1921. Tzara's de-humanised characters for the 1923 production of *The Gas Heart* echo Schlemmer's humanoid performers for the 1920s Bauhaus parties. For the Bauhaus theatre, see Oskar Schlemmer, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Farkas Molnár, *The Theatre of the Bauhaus*, ed. Walter Gropius and Arthur S. Wensinger, trans. Wensinger (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).

⁴⁸⁸ Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto 1918,' *Seven Dada Manifestos...*, 8.

⁴⁸⁹ Abstraction has been employed in theatre since Symbolist playwrights attempted to render human bodies into ideas: Maurice Maeterlinck hoped androids would replace actors; Edward Gordon Craig proposed an actor-less theatre of marionettes; W.B Yeats employed masks. These playwrights and theatre theorists influenced the abstracted theatre of Cocteau and Apollinaire who in turn influenced Tzara.

⁴⁹⁰ See Chapter 4, pg. 79-80 for the emergence of the microdrama in France in the late nineteenth century.

⁴⁹¹ Gustav Freytag, *Freytag's Technique of the Drama: an exposition of dramatic composition and art*, trans. Elias J. MacEwan (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1968).

from fulfilling their desires (rising action); in act three a climax occurs, followed by falling action and the story is resolved (denouement).

Tzara organises *The Gas Heart* according to this structure as follows: Act I begins with an exposition on the theme of unrequited love. Eye is in love with Clytemnestra, ‘the diplomat’s wife [...] you are as tender and as calm as two yards of white silk. Clytemnestra, my teeth tremble [...] I’m afraid [...] hopeless, and without family (135).’ Clytemnestra is Mouth (see below). Mouth and Eye are in a relationship, but Mouth rejects Eye’s declarations of love: ‘I have decided to shut off the faucet. The hot and cold water of my charm will no longer be able to divert the sweet results of your sweat, true love or new love (135-6).’ In the second act Eyebrow, Mouth, Ear and Eye embark on a day out at the races where we discover that Clytemnestra is a racehorse. Eye laments that Mouth/Clytemnestra has ‘shut off the faucet’ of her love, and says: ‘Your eyes are stones because they only see the wind and rain.’ He cannot understand why she no longer loves him: ‘Don’t you breathe the same air as I do? Don’t you speak the same language? (140)’

Act II ends with the climax: ‘Fire! Fire! I think Clytemnestra’s ablaze (142).’ The situation is resolved in Act III. Eye and Mouth will marry. Mouth is revealed to be Clytemnestra in the dramatic action as it develops across Act III. At the beginning of Act III, Mouth is preparing her wedding dress: ‘We make fine material for the crystal dress with it (143).’ Mouth exits and later re-enters. Eye repeats his love for Clytemnestra by addressing Mouth: ‘Clytemnestra, you are beautiful. I love you with the intensity of a diver.’ Mouth exits and ‘Eye falls to the stage (stage direction, 144).’ Eye’s love for Clytemnestra is directed to Mouth, it follows therefore that Mouth and Clytemnestra are the same being. Later Ear enters with Mouth ‘who crawls on all fours.’ Ear auctions Mouth by calling out ‘Clytemnestra, race horse: 3,000 francs (145).’ ‘Eye goes up to Mouth on all fours,’ as each character repeats ‘This play will end with a lovely marriage (146).’ While Tzara’s play dismantles traditional frameworks of theatrical presentation, it simultaneously acknowledges dramatic structure.

The Gas Heart also introduces stage direction to Tzara’s theatre, and the characters are arranged in a physical relationship both to one another and to the audience: ‘Neck stands downstage, Nose opposite, confronting the audience.’ An unspeaking character, the gas

heart, ‘walks slowly around, circulating widely (133).’⁴⁹² Eye, Mouth, Ear, and Eyebrow ‘enter and leave as they please (133).’ Spatial concepts exist in *The Gas Heart* where they had been previously absent in Tzara’s theatre: Ear, Mouth, Eye and Eyebrow occupy the stage space and exist in time (stage-time); when the play is over, they disappear. Neck and Nose exist outside the stage space and time. Neck transcends the action and remains detached throughout. Nose is an objective critic: he comments on the play and refers directly to onstage action. During the 1921 production, Nose (played by Théodore Fraenkel), delivered commentary from the platform above the stage, conducting the action as the director of the show: ‘A little more life on the stage (140).’ On another occasion Nose addresses Eyebrow (played by Tzara in the 1921 production): ‘Your piece is quite charming but you really don’t come away enriched,’ to which Eyebrow replies: ‘There’s nothing to be enriched by in it (141).’ *The Gas Heart* features Tzara’s first application of metatheatricality: characters comment on the dramatic quality of the play from within the play’s frame. This presentation of metatheatricality is a transitional phase towards the external commentary established in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, where four commentators discuss the play from the side of the stage while the action is progressing.

While *The Gas Heart* develops Tzara’s stagecraft by detailing a physical arrangement for the stage space, this organisation has consequences for how the play is ‘read.’ Placing Nose outside the narrative blurs the distinction between onstage action and audience reception. An essential feature of *The Gas Heart* is Nose’s inability to mediate between the world of the spectators and the world on stage. Nose often speaks directly to the audience: ‘You over there, man [...] what are you eating (134);’ ‘You over there, man [...] where do you come from? (134)’ At each juncture, the other characters interrupt Nose, disabling his line of questioning. After Nose’s final attempt to engage the audience: ‘Hey you over there, sir... (135),’ Ear interrupts, and adopting the first word of Nose’s line repeats: ‘hey hey (135),’ disallowing any rational response to Nose’s interrogation. Tzara invites the audience via the conduit of Nose to interact with the performance, yet simultaneously alienates them with inconsistent dialogue, denying intellectual or emotional participation.

⁴⁹² The gas heart is not noted in the character list or attributed an actor. It remains unknown if the gas heart is a character occupying the stage in the manner described in the prologue. It is possible that this seventh character was played by the dancer, Valentin Parnak as listed in the programme for the 1921 performance, and Lizica Codréano for the 1923 production. If this assumption is correct, the dancer/gas heart remains onstage throughout and also provides the dance interlude in Act III.

Tzara's arrangement of stage space and time is established further by references to organised time in the play text: 'clock-tic,' 'precision chronometer,' 'watch hand,' 'hour,' 'calendars,' 'organised time' and 'compressed time.' Such indications alert the reader/audience to the regulation of time as arranged in society, and serve as a reminder that theatre experience is a durational phenomenon also: in the theatre, time passing on stage does not resemble the time passing in the auditorium. In the case of avant-garde short plays, time is often manipulated: condensed, extended, or trapped in the present moment.⁴⁹³ Avant-garde playwrights use various devices to alter the experience of time on stage: rapid succession of dramatic action with no scene break, like a jump-cut in film; repetition of dramatic action so that specific moments may be experienced as *déjà vu*; non-action or lack of action resulting in the expansion of experienced time (often Dada performances were painstakingly slow,⁴⁹⁴ or acted in a deliberately monotone manner to illicit boredom); and finally, simultaneous action where multiple events occur in a single time frame.⁴⁹⁵

At the beginning of Act II, Eyebrow announces 'We're going to the races today.' A short dialogue (consisting of three lines) follows, before Nose '(shouts): Clytemnestra is winning (138).' The distance between the announcement that the characters are going to the races and the representation of the horse race is condensed into a brief moment of dramatic time. With no stage direction or scene change to denote time passing between the intention (to attend the race) and the moment of the race, the audience experience the individual segments of the drama in quick succession. This technique resembles early film, in which moments of action jump from one scene to the other. However, in early film, new locations are specified by inter-titles, alerting the audience to the progress of the characters' journey. Tzara would apply this device in *Handkerchief of Clouds* where a backdrop flicks between locations denoting scene changes. In *The Gas Heart*, Tzara occludes such navigational devices; different locations are presented simultaneously disorientating narrative flow.

In addition to compressing time onstage, Tzara interrupts the separation of time occurring in the auditorium and on the stage. Positioning Nose and Neck externally to the drama, and

⁴⁹³ One of the earliest and most extreme examples of the avant-garde short play's manipulation of time is Francesco Cangiullo's 1915 futurist play *Detonation: Synthesis of all Modern Theatre*. The entire play consists of the following stage directions: 'CHARACTER. A BULLET. Road at night, cold, deserted. A minute of silence. —A gunshot. CURTAIN.'

⁴⁹⁴ Consider Tzara's action at the 'First Friday of *Littérature*' where he entered the stage with exaggeratedly tiny steps.

⁴⁹⁵ For theatre and the experience of time on stage, see also, Muse.

engaging directly with the audience (while remaining onstage), *The Gas Heart*'s dramatic action is determined to be occurring in the here and now. By including characters that exist in dramatic time (Ear, Mouth, Eye, Eyebrow), and characters that transcend dramatic time (Nose and Neck), Tzara draws attention to the duality of the real, immediate present experience, and the fictional, repetitious dramatic moment. That is, Tzara's play exemplifies the earlier discussed performance/theatre complex, which highlights the coexistence, or continuum of immediate present and repeated past acts. Tzara's play emphasises, simultaneously, the viewer's experience of time onstage and in the world.

The prevalence of the performance/theatre complex in Tzara's theatre relies on the combination of seemingly opposing situations. Tzara's theatre disrupts the conventional organisation of stage space and time while simultaneously adhering to theatrical structures, determining the paradox that is characteristic of his works during the Dada period. Each theatrical element of *The Gas Heart* is distinguished by a combination of order and disorder; destruction and construction; tradition and avant-gardism. This is notable in Tzara's application of language, which is typical of the Dada theatre where language is rendered incapable of performing its communicative function. Additionally (and contradictory to the outright destruction of language as a Dada device) traces of semantic meaning, relating to physical deformation caused by World-War-I combat, are revealed via textual analysis. Language and *The Gas Heart* will now be examined followed by a discussion on the historical context of the play.

Linguistic Form in The Gas Heart

Tzara applies three notable linguistic devices in *The Gas Heart*: repetition, non sequitur, and reproductions of ready-made phrases. The first two devices had been developed in *The First Celestial Adventure*, and advanced in *The Second Celestial Adventure*. The introduction of ready-made phrases collaged on to *The Gas Heart*'s play text, highlights the banality of such exchanges in everyday communication:

EAR: Your daughter is quite charming.

EYE: You're very considerate.

EYE: Do you care for sports?

EYE: Yes, this method of communication is very practical. (141)

The revelation however, is that this method of communication is not at all practical, for these exchanges fail to progress the plot. What follows is a complete breakdown of understanding:

EAR: You know of course that I own a garage.

EYE: Thank you very much.

EAR: It's spring, it's spring... (141)

What is striking about the language in *The Gas Heart* (in comparison to the earlier plays), is that meaninglessness and nonsense infiltrate language unexpectedly. Dada's suspicion of communicable language presents more sinisterly here than in Tzara's previous plays. *The Gas Heart* does not destroy language outright with nonsense words, sounds and symbols as the *Celestial Adventure* plays do; here Tzara undermines the function of language by presenting logical sentences that are senseless. For example, 'The bark of apotheosized trees shadows wormy verse but the rain makes organised poetry's clock tick. The banks filled up with medicated cotton wool (134).' Each grammatical component is in its correct place, yet somehow the words that would make this sentence rational have been replaced with incongruous images.

The Gas Heart's language does not appear at first to be problematic, and the reader/listener can grasp the general flow of the text: 'Over two years have passed, alas, since I set out on this hunt.' However, the following sentence renders the speaker confused as to the initial subject of his speech: 'But do you see how one can get used to fatigue and how death would be tempted to live, the magnificent emperor's death proves it, the importance of everything diminishes – every day – a little...' The line trails off as if the matter established in the first line, is no longer relevant. The pattern of speech breaks down, and linguistic methods for rationalising thought become futile. As Ear says at the end of this speech: 'the importance of everything diminishes.'

The issue with language as presented in *The Gas Heart* is the disjuncture between the intention and perception of the word. For once the thought is articulated, its meaning may be distorted.

MOUTH: We'll make a fine material for the crystal dress with it.

NOSE: You mean to say: 'despair gives you explanations regarding its rates of exchange.'

MOUTH: I don't mean to say anything. A long time ago I put everything I had to say into a hatbox.

Through Mouth, Tzara states that anything anyone might have once *meant* to say – onstage or otherwise – has been banished to the hatbox of history. Mouth’s statement recalls Tzara’s defence of his crowd-provoking action at the ‘First Friday of *Littérature*’ (when he dismantled, reordered, and recited Léon Daudet’s parliamentary speech). When questioned about his performance, Tzara said, ‘all that I wanted to convey was simply that my presence on stage, the sight of my face and my movements, ought to satisfy people’s curiosity and that anything I might have said really had no importance.’⁴⁹⁶ For Tzara, actions and words should be mutually exclusive. Most crucially, when such words, in their original context, relay a political message. And herein lies the dadaist provocation with regards to Tzara’s ‘First Friday’ action and subsequent explanation: when political statements lead to action, destruction often follows. In *The Gas Heart*, Mouth’s condemnation of applying meaning to words is conveyed playfully, exemplifying Dada’s utilization of nonsense to address serious issues.

Considering the political consequences of words, and Dada’s response to war, Stephen Forcer suggests that Dada distorts language ‘to the point of meaninglessness, suggesting that all language is “mad” in a general sense – always existing at a remove from the things it describes – and certainly mad within the specific context of the First World War...’⁴⁹⁷

For Forcer, Tzara offers

an original and compelling way of understanding the First World War and other catastrophes caused by human consciousness: the fundamental, root cause of that war lies not in Imperial expansionism, international arms races, pacts and ultimatums, or in the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand but in the attributing of meaning to these and other material events...⁴⁹⁸

When meaning is attributed to words, language becomes problematic, and so in the dadaist theatre, words are stripped of their original meaning. In *The Gas Heart*, where other characters/organs prattle incessantly, the only character/organ capable of rational speech is solely capable of understanding the dilemma of applying meaning to words; it is Mouth who articulates that words do not ‘mean’ anything.

Tzara applies various linguistic devices to dislodge meaning from words, such as listing and repetition. And, as previously noted, these methods would become a feature of the Theatre of the Absurd. In *The Gas Heart*, characters repeat themselves in perpetuity. Acts I

⁴⁹⁶ Tzara, ‘Memoirs of Dadaism,’ in *Axel’s Castle*, 304.

⁴⁹⁷ Forcer, 55.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

and II, consist predominantly of dialogues comprising repeated responses to banal observations, interspersed with short monologues and individual lines that do not follow each other. The first repetition of Act II occurs between Ear, Eye, Nose and Neck. The characters not only repeat themselves but each other, and the effect is like a child's word game:

EAR: Yes, I know, the dreams with hair.
EYE: Dreams of angels.
EAR: Dreams of cloth, paper watches.
EYE: The enormous and solemn dreams of inaugurations.
EAR: Of angels in helicopters.
NOSE: Yes I know.
EYE: The angels of conversation.
NECK: Yes I know.
EAR: Angels in cushions.
NOSE: Yes I know.
EYE: Angels in ice.
NOSE: Yes I know.
EAR: Angels in local neighbourhoods.
NOSE: Yes I know. (138-9)

Eye and Ear's dialogue progresses successively from each prior statement, yet Neck and Nose are capable only of base acknowledgement. The characters' 'conversation' comprises solely of banal observations that are acknowledged immediately. As established, Viktor Shklovsky warns that automatized language reduces the experience of life to nothingness. If we are not aware of the words we say and the actions we make, it is as if we have not lived them.⁴⁹⁹

By his incessant repetitions, Tzara draws attention to the automatization of language. The staccato reiterations, experienced both in reading and hearing, jolt the reader/listener from passivity because the extent of the repetition is perceived as a mistake, like a machine that breaks down, becomes looped and must be reset. Tzara breaks the cycle by inserting sections of dialogue, as if restoring language to its communicative function – fixing the fault – only to re-enter another cycle of repetition almost immediately:

MOUTH: I've made a great deal of money.
NOSE: Thank you not bad.
MOUTH: I swim in the fountain. I have necklaces of goldfish.
NECK: Thank you not bad.
MOUTH: I'm wearing the latest French coiffure.
NOSE: Thank you not bad.
EYE: I've already seen it in Paris.
NECK: Thank you not bad (139)

⁴⁹⁹ Shklovsky, 161-2.

The dialogue continues this way for another eight lines. By highlighting the prevalence of meaningless exchange in polite conversation onstage, Tzara encourages the reader/audience to identify the incidence of these occurrences in life.

Tzara's application of repetition is most striking in 'the conversation is lagging' sequence, which occurs between Mouth and Eye in Act I:

MOUTH: This conversation is lagging isn't it?

EYE: Yes, isn't it?

MOUTH: Very lagging, isn't it?

EYE: Yes, isn't it?

MOUTH: Naturally, isn't it?

EYE: Obviously, isn't it? (133)

And so on. The audience are made aware not only that they are watching a boring conversation, but just how boring a conversation can be. This segment is not only a repetition of words but also a repetition of moments, for only a short while after its first presentation, the entire cycle is repeated again at the climax to Act I with Eye speaking Mouth's original lines and Mouth repeating Eye's interruptions. This repetition acts as a damning critique on the application of organised language and action in life. We structure our lives, for the most part, into segments of time denoting when certain actions occur (the working week; transport schedules) repeating actions and conversations according to the agenda. Samuel Beckett emphasises the endless recurrence of lived action in *Waiting for Godot*, a play in which 'nothing happens, twice.'⁵⁰⁰ For Beckett's characters, as for Tzara's, life consists of endless repetitions of actions and conversations leading to automatization, and ultimately meaninglessness of existence.

Discussing the obfuscation of meaning in Dada texts, Stanton Garner states that:

Like the word 'Dada,' whose multiple, decontextualized, and ultimately random referents reduce meaning to repetitive, percussive sounds, *The Gas Heart* seems to offer a self-contained theatrical and linguistic world that refuses external, culturally conditioned structures of meaning.⁵⁰¹

I have previously discussed how linguistic literality replaces meaning in Tzara's early theatre. This does not apply to *The Gas Heart*. When looking closer at *The Gas Heart*'s dialogue, Tzara's play can be read as situated within its historical moment.

⁵⁰⁰ Vivian Mercier on *Waiting for Godot*, 'The Uneventful Event,' *The Irish Times*, February 18, 1956.

⁵⁰¹ Garner, 501.

Disfigurement and Deformation: the Socio-Cultural Context of *The Gas Heart*

At an historical juncture when society witnessed the physical consequences of World War I, Tzara presents characters as disembodied organs, the wholeness of the face separated into parts. Embodied in performance however, they evolve as autonomous living entities, and the broken face is reassembled when gathered onstage. That is, Tzara simultaneously disassembles and refigures corporeal wholeness. Employing a dramaturgy of fragmentation, Tzara reconstructs a body anchored in its historical, cultural and artistic moment. Tzara's play then can be read as an analysis of the socio-political context that the dadaists strived to challenge, that of a Europe traumatised by war. In this way, the play communicates wider cultural concerns, that of disfigurement, defacement, and fragmentation.

Disfigurement and fragmentation are essential features of Dada art, specifically collage and photomontage.⁵⁰² Bodily fragmentation and isolation are prevalent also in Dada performance. As previously noted, despite the allusion to figurative wholeness in the presence of the live actor, dadaist performance had, from 1916, employed strategies of deforming the body and isolating body parts with the use of masks and restrictive costumes.⁵⁰³ While Dada was not the first avant-garde movement to investigate corporeal fragmentation in artistic media (for example, from 1905, cubist painting and collage disassembled and disrupted the human form), and while issues of gross physical injury predate the historical moment that Dada occupied, Tzara's play emerges in the aftermath of World War I, when new and complex injuries became an immediate concern. Stanton Garner points out that the multitude of injuries resulting in facial mutilation led to 'a social crisis of appearance and representation.'⁵⁰⁴ In response to this socio-cultural phenomenon, Dada 'rendered physical deformation a guiding artistic principle.'⁵⁰⁵

The prevalence of facial injuries during World War I resulted from trench warfare in which the head was often exposed, and from the use of metal helmets. While these helmets protected the wearer's skull and oftentimes prevented death, they also contributed to facial injury. As Elizabeth Haiken explains: 'fragments of helmets (and of the projectiles that

⁵⁰² For disfigurement in Dada's visual art practices see Doherty.

⁵⁰³ For the use of masks in Zurich Dada performance see Hugo Ball, *Flight out of Time*, 64-5; and Cheng.

⁵⁰⁴ Garner, 505.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 504.

shattered on them) often hit soldiers' unprotected face.'⁵⁰⁶ As a result, many faces were horrifically disfigured. In France, these deformed returned soldiers were referred to as *les gueules cassées* (the broken faces) or *les grands mutilés* (the grievously wounded), and the appearance of these men in society after the war was both commonplace and harrowing. The concept of the broken face is clearly established by the disassembled facial parts that are *The Gas Heart's* characters.

In addition, Tzara's theatrical language presents images of corporeal fragmentation and deformation. Littered throughout the text are phrases such as: 'String man supported by blisters (134);' 'He is not a being because he consists of pieces (136);' 'I love the young man who make such tender declarations to me and whose spine is ripped asunder in the sun (143);' and 'Bony sacraments in military prisons (140).' In Act I, Nose addresses a 'man with starred scars (134),' and later a 'man with wounds of chained molluscs [and] with various pains (134).' The image of facial disfigurement is at its most extreme in this line from the opening monologue: 'eyes replaced by motionless navels (133).' The place where the eyes should be has become a fleshy expanse marked only by a hollow umbilicus, motionless in death. Here, corporeal deformation presents as a shocking and harrowing textual image.

As a response to the overwhelming number of men suffering facial injury, post-war medical practice achieved significant advancements in plastic surgery. In order to reintegrate the patient into society, faces were rebuilt, restoring and reconstructing missing or damaged tissue, skin and bone. In many cases jaws were rewired and noses restructured. In cases where reconstructive surgery was not successful, elaborately painted tin masks based on pre-war photographs of war patients refigured the damaged face. At the Val-de-Grâce hospital near Paris, the artist Anna Coleman Ladd created some 220 masks between 1918 and 1919, two years before Tzara wrote *The Gas Heart* in Paris.⁵⁰⁷ The Val-de-Grâce was a military training hospital where images of bodily trauma and surgical reconstructions were collected and displayed publicly. As Amy Lyford notes: 'By creating painstakingly accurate displays of the surgical repairs of soldiers' bodies, the Musée du Val-de-Grâce framed France's reconstruction in bodily terms,' and these bodily reconstructions filtered

⁵⁰⁶ Elizabeth Haiken, *Venus Envy: A History of Cosmetic Surgery* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 29, quoted in Garner, 505.

⁵⁰⁷ In 1917, both Louis Aragon and André Breton trained as physicians at Val-de-Grâce, where mutilated and shell-shocked veterans of World War I were treated.

into the work of the dadaists and surrealists.⁵⁰⁸ Certainly, when the activities of the dadaists are paralleled with the reconstructive technologies advancing in post-war Europe, Dada theatre can be read within the context of this historical moment of corporeal crisis.

In addition to textual and dramaturgical images of physical fragmentation, Tzara's play offers possibilities for new and wonderful organic and machine reconstructions: 'The beauty of your face is a precision chronometer (135),' says Eye to Mouth in Act I. The face becomes part machine consisting of cogs and dials where facial organs once were. The image presented here by Tzara is not one of horror and mutilation but one of newly imagined 'beauty.' As Lyford says, in relation to the disfigured and reconstructed bodily images on display at the Val-de-Grâce museum: 'from the ruins of war, new bodies would spring, in some cases becoming more efficient and productive than before.'⁵⁰⁹ In *The Gas Heart*, Tzara enacts the organic-mechanic hybrid on the Dada stage.

As reparatory bodily constructions enacted physical healing post World War I, so too can the onstage world of *The Gas Heart* act as a form of social healing in the medium of theatre, whereby the performance recreates the broken face in the text. That is, the body in Tzara's play is simultaneously representative of corporeal disfigurement and reconstructed as complete. In the opening stage directions, Tzara instructs 'Neck stands downstage, Nose opposite.' The nose next to the neck creates a distorted facial configuration. Eye enters and stands next to Nose, which figures a normal human face, but when Mouth enters next to Eye the face is reconfigured as strange yet wonderful.

Garner suggests that the reimagined human form on Tzara's stage, 'subverts the notion of normativity against which disability is defined,' as the reconstructive surgeries of post-war were to normalise anew those disfigured by war.⁵¹⁰ Herein, Tzara's humanist concerns are identified in his theatre practice. Tzara's dismembered characters, and the striking reconfiguration of the body, offer new possibilities for corporeal wholeness and body normativity. In Tzara's text, the simultaneous presentation of the broken body, and the wholeness of the performing body fantastically reconstructed onstage, enacts a contradiction between text (where the body is dismembered) and performance (where the

⁵⁰⁸ Amy Lyford, *Surrealist Masculinities: Gender Anxiety and the Aesthetics of Post-World War I Reconstruction in France* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2007), 47.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵¹⁰ Garner, 511.

body is refigured). This contradiction will now be discussed with specific reference to the dance interlude in *The Gas Heart*'s Act III.

The Gas Heart Between Text and Performance

As identified previously, *The Gas Heart* includes a dance interlude, detailed as a diagram printed under the stage direction 'Dance of the gentleman fallen from a funnel in the ceiling onto the table (143).' This diagram was radically altered between its first and second publication (Figs. 11 and 12). The 'Salon Dada' and 'Soirée du Cœur à Barbe' programmes substantiate the performance of the dance at both presentations of the play during the Dada period. The programme to the 1921 production of *The Gas Heart* lists Valentin Parnak as the dancer, and in 1923, the professional dancer Lizica Codréano appears in the programme. The inclusion of the dance in both productions, and Tzara's alteration of the diagram between publications, suggests that the dance should not be dismissed in analyses of *The Gas Heart*.

Tzara's inclusion of the dance recognises Western theatrical traditions, even when *The Gas Heart* subverts dramatic convention. Music and dance, entr'actes, and pantomime interludes have been included between acts in written and performed plays since Western theatre's inception with Greek Antiquity, through Shakespeare and the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, and were included in the written texts and productions of naturalist theatre (which avant-garde theatre reacted against).⁵¹¹ Historically, the dance interlude performs a structural function: provides a break, or comic relief in tragic plays; masks a scene change; or serves as a metatheatrical device in which the audience can interact with onstage activity. It is unclear what specific function Tzara's dance fulfils, for there is no prior introduction of a gentlemen, who may at one moment in the play's narrative 'fall from a funnel in the ceiling onto the table' in the manner of danced action. Tzara's dance confounds perception, for the illustration has no precedent in written theatre. By simultaneously acknowledging and disrupting structures of Western theatre, Tzara establishes his practice as a playwright. This conflict filters throughout Tzara's theatre practice, as established above in relation to the representation of dramatic and linguistic

⁵¹¹ For a detailed discussion on dance in theatre see Kate Elswit, *Theatre and Dance* (London: Palgrave, 2018).

form in *The Gas Heart*. The appearance of a dance segment follows this contradictory situation by both parodying and respecting theatrical tradition.

There are two diagrams in the published editions of *The Gas Heart*: the dance, and a diagram of mistletoe and an arrow pointing to the word 'l'Amour' appearing at the end of the play. The dance occurs partway through Act III. In the original *Der Sturm* publication (1922), the dance is represented by an assortment of standard and inverted capitalised letters (Fig. 11). This version appears also in Tzara's *Œuvres Complètes* Volume 1, edited by Henri Béhar. However, Béhar inverts the 'dance' and 'l'Amour' diagrams, removing the dance to the close of the play, away from its functional position as an interlude within the dramatic action. In the 1946 revised edition the dance appears in its original position (Act III), yet this time as a combination of lower case and capitalised r's, y's and v's in varying positions (Fig. 12). Tzara's revision of the dance diagram transforms a block of alphabetical Roman letters 'into a dynamic illustration of a typological character dancing across the space of the page.'⁵¹² Significantly, the revision appears after the play's second performance; having experienced its possibilities in production, Tzara rethought the dramatic action sequence of the dance.

Sarah Bay-Cheng suggests that the illustration as it appears in the 1946 publication, interrupts the play's progress, for when analysing the diagram, it appears to form a 'seemingly endless loop [... suspending] dramatic time by locking the reader/audience into an endlessly repeating, rotating moment,' interrupting 'the presumed performance of the play as a time-based-embodied enactment.'⁵¹³ For Bay-Cheng, the illustration disallows 'embodied action,' and is realised only on the page having no physical equivalence in performance. To perform the play, the illustration must be eliminated.⁵¹⁴ However, as Bay-Cheng concludes, 'to fully understand the play, one must engage this illustration both as a text that performs autonomously and as a text that requires translation into performance.'⁵¹⁵ The performance of the dance is simultaneously dependent on *and* independent of the text, confounding and confirming the relationship between text and performance.

⁵¹² Bay-Cheng, 469-70.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 469.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 472.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

In my assessment, Tzara's dance diagram operates in the same manner as stage directions: isolated textual interludes that are both independent of and dependent on the production of the play. Given that Tzara includes stage directions for the first time in *The Gas Heart*, it is conceivable that the dance diagram fulfils a similar function: the diagram may act as instruction for interpretation, which is also akin to dance notation. While in Zurich, Tzara worked with dancers from Rudolph Laban's dance school. Both Mary Wigman and Sophie Taeuber, who trained with Laban, performed at Zurich Dada soirées.⁵¹⁶ Under Laban, dancers practiced a series of repeatable movements that were notated like notes on a musical score. Labanotation is composed of a series of shapes that correspond to specific actions, and symbols which denote the emphasis of the action. It is possible that Tzara, aware of these practices, created for the purpose of *The Gas Heart* a form of avant-garde dance notation, to be interpreted by choreographers and dancers. In performance then, the dancer's body presents a physical equivalent to the typographical lettering. And without instructions for how the typography relates to specific movements, Tzara emancipates the performing body, allowing choreographers to interpret the notation freely. This is how stage directions also perform a double function enabling both directors and readers to envisage scenography, and the physical arrangement of the actors' bodies on stage, even during the private activity of reading. While the diagram pauses the reading/performance (as do all stage directions), the play is not indefinitely suspended. Indeed, by encouraging consideration for the possibilities of performance that this diagram presents, Tzara enlists the reader in the meaning making process of theatrical presentation to imagine the performing body in both text and performance.

The simultaneous dependence and independence of the dance to *The Gas Heart* is an interesting case when considering the performance/theatre complex, which proposes a continuum between contrary states. To accept the diagram as both an illustration mutually exclusive of the performance, *and* as an instruction to the embodied dance in performance, is to re-establish how Tzara's onstage practice informs the performance/theatre complex as will now be demonstrated.

⁵¹⁶ Naima Prevots points out that while Laban attended Dada events in Zurich, there is not enough documentation to 'indicate an ideological interchange' between Laban and Dada. However, a 'more valuable [...] understanding of any connection between Laban and Dada' can be traced through Sophie Taeuber and Mary Wigman's interaction with both Dada and Laban in Zurich between 1916 and 1920. 'Zurich Dada and Dance: Formative Ferment,' *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Spring-Summer, 1985): 3-8, 4.

Despite evidence supporting the inclusion of a dance in Tzara's text, it remains unknown if the diagram informed the dancers' interpretations; we know that a dance was performed, but cannot know how the performed dance relates to the printed instruction in the play text. It is unlikely that the two dancers interpreted the dance in the same way, therefore, the ontology of the dance remains bound to the moment of its incarnation in performance, mutually exclusive of the printed play text. To experience the dance, one must have attended the performance. However, the dance also exists in perpetuity as a diagram in the printed text, which can be interpreted, performed and re-performed. Therefore, the inclusion of the diagram collapses distinctions between: repeated and immediate; theatrical and performative; text and performance. The reality of the dance enacts the performance/theatre complex.

The Gas Heart presents myriad contradictory situations between: text and performance; corporeal disfigurement and wholeness; comprehension and incomprehension. Certainly, Tzara's third play disrupts automatic perception: his characters are alienated from human recognition; the narrative structure lacks a transparent plot; and deliberate faults in the dialogue alert the reader/viewer to a defect in the application of language for communication. Furthermore, the illustration of the gentleman's dance disrupts and assists in the play's translation from page to stage. The peculiarity of the diagram appearing midway through Act III is not a straightforward stage direction, subsequently enlisting the reader as an active participant. These theatrical characteristics of *The Gas Heart*, and the atmosphere around which it was presented, resulted in Tzara's third play being received first with laughter ('Salon Dada') and then hostility ('Soirée du Cœur à Barbe'). In the history of avant-garde theatre, *The Gas Heart* is considered Tzara's most influential and controversial play.

Towards Surrealism

By restaging *The Gas Heart*, Tzara engaged in standard practices for theatrical presentation, and after Dada, each of his performed plays would receive a season of shows. Breton and the proto-surrealists abhorred the notion of the repeat performance – arguably aimed at self-promotion by reaching a wider audience with each new presentation. However, the personal differences between Tzara and Breton that erupted on stage at the 'Soirée du Cœur à Barbe' had been developing since 1921, and the consequences of this

fallout negatively impacted both Tzara's theatrical career at the time and the future of Dada.⁵¹⁷ After *The Gas Heart* scandal, Dada was finished. Between 1923 and 1924 Breton's nascent Surrealism developed into a fully-fledged movement. Tzara remained on the periphery of Surrealism for several years during which time he wrote and staged *Handkerchief of Clouds*. The next chapter discusses Tzara and Breton's relationship in the intervening period between the end of Dada and the emergence of Surrealism, before discussing Tzara's theatre practice between Dada and Surrealism.

⁵¹⁷ Due to the cancellation of the Soirée, Tzara sought legal damages from Éluard for damage to the set, and disruption to his theatrical career. The case however was dropped. See Hentea, 2014, 197; Sanouillet, 281.

CHAPTER 8: TZARA BETWEEN DADA AND SURREALISM

Despite the dramatic end to Dada around the ‘Soirée du Coeur à Barbe,’ July 1923, in the following year Tzara’s literary and theatrical career prospered. Tzara presented his most successful play, *Mouchoir de Nuages (Handkerchief of Clouds)*, in summer 1924 as part of a series of events titled Les Soirées de Paris. Additionally, Tzara published a collection of *Sept Manifestes Dada (Seven Dada Manifestos)* in a luxury edition illustrated by Francis Picabia. Despite the publication of dadaist works, by 1924 Tzara had conceded that Dada was officially over, and he made no efforts to revive the movement. With the *Handkerchief of Clouds*, Tzara discarded the dadaist linguistic experiments of the *Celestial Adventure* plays, and developed a more cohesive plot than is evident in *The Gas Heart*.

Having lost most of the friends he had made in Paris in just three years, Tzara’s alliance with other artists and writers (many of whom shared in their common isolation from Breton’s group) provided new and fruitful opportunities. In spring 1924, Tzara met the writer and shipping magnate heiress Nancy Cunard at a social gathering in Montparnasse, and the two became close friends and collaborators. That year, they worked together on two plays: *Handkerchief of Clouds*; and a translation of Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*. Marius Hentea recounts how on an evening at the Bœuf sur le Toit cafe, Tzara confided to Cunard that his new play lacked a title. They both agreed to write a single word on a napkin resulting in *mouchoir* and *nuages*. Tzara accepted the ‘literary game of chance’ for the play’s name.⁵¹⁸ Despite Tzara’s continued application of chance experiments, which were contemporaneously being formalised under Breton’s Surrealism, he would not reconcile with Breton and the Surrealists until 1929. For five years after Dada’s demise Tzara carved out individual projects, and in 1927 stated that ‘right now I continue to write for myself and unable to find other men, I keep searching for myself.’⁵¹⁹

Before discussing Tzara’s first post-Dada theatrical work, it is necessary to chart the relationship between Dada and Surrealism. Tzara wrote *Handkerchief of Clouds* during what is officially within the timeline of the Surrealist movement, and there are certain modes that Dada and Surrealism share. Therefore, a discussion on their joint heritage, as well as their divergences, is required to frame an analysis of Tzara’s theatre after Dada.

⁵¹⁸ Hentea, 2014, 201. Additionally Sanouillet notes that the play was dedicated to Cunard and that she owned the typed manuscript. Sanouillet, 612.

⁵¹⁹ Ilaire Voronca, ‘Marchez au Pas: Tristan Tzara parlé à *Integral*,’ *Integral* 3, no. 12 (April 1927): 6-7, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 214.

Of the newly emerging Surrealism of 1924, Tzara remained wary. In an interview in *Les Nouvelles littéraires* he stated that where Dada ‘did not attack only literature,’ but ‘wanted to question everything,’ Surrealism left him ‘indifferent.’ Tzara said ‘I have always thought that writing was without control [...] and I even proposed in 1918 that Dada spontaneity should be applied to life.’ Surrealism on the other hand, Tzara viewed as ‘a kind of technique.’⁵²⁰

Tzara was uninclined to conform to a movement that he saw as attempting to systematise dadaist spontaneity and irrationality. Hentea notes that for Tzara, the opening of the ‘Bureau of Surrealist Research’ – with its office which advertised opening hours for receiving visitors, and where records of correspondence and other documents were maintained – symbolised an institutionalising of the avant-garde, suspiciously in line with the post-war return to order.⁵²¹ Additionally, Tzara was unconvinced by the new avant-garde’s political affiliation. In 1927, Tzara described the surrealists’ recent foray into communism as ‘a bourgeois form of revolution [...] a regrettable necessity’ resulting in ‘bureaucracy, hierarchy, the Chamber of Deputies, the Académie Française.’⁵²² Despite Tzara’s efforts to alienate Dada from Surrealism, the publication of his *Seven Dada Manifestos* coincided with the publication of Breton’s first ‘Manifesto of Surrealism’ and reviewers could not help but compare their aspects.⁵²³

Robert Short notes that much of the confusion between Tzara’s concept of Dada and Breton’s Surrealism, results from their applying a similar vocabulary but with a different understanding, specifically around theories of automatism, spontaneity and the relationship between language and thought.⁵²⁴ Breton endorsed Tzara’s assertion that ‘thought is made in the mouth,’ but with an almost opposing understanding of Tzara’s original sense:

Tzara meant to discredit thought by saying that it was simply words – mere verbiage and arbitrary convention – and to destroy the notion that there was any established relation between words and their referents. Breton however, took the ambiguous phrase to mean that ‘words contain all thought.’ Although both identified word and

⁵²⁰ René Crevel, ‘Voici Tristan Tzara et ses souvenirs sur Dada,’ *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 25 October 1924, 5, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 199.

⁵²¹ Hentea, 2014, 207.

⁵²² Voronca, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 214. Tzara’s attitude towards communism would change radically over the course of the next two decades.

⁵²³ See Hentea, 2014, 199.

⁵²⁴ Short, 94.

idea, Tzara did so in order to demote idea as prattle and Breton to invest words with all the authority that comes from the conceptual world.⁵²⁵

This point of conjecture is crucial. Surrealism believed that automatism allowed speech to be expressed free from 'aesthetic or moral concern' resulting in 'the actual functioning of thought' being voiced.⁵²⁶ For Tzara, however, automatism was not a quest for a hidden or privileged knowledge, rather it was a reawakening of the primordial 'cry-baby in us' that 'we have thrown out:' instinctive and primitive.⁵²⁷ As Michel Corvin notes, dadaist 'automatism does not have the ambition to reveal the hidden depths of being, as would be the case with surrealist writing, but to translate the freedom of indifference of the author capable of writing anything...'⁵²⁸

It is apparent that Dada engaged similar techniques (chance, automatism, spontaneity) to those that Surrealism would implement, and the two movements shared certain beliefs (the need to undermine language). However, Dada did not systematise their applications or utilise them for any specific enquiry. Where Dada looked to destroy language with incoherence and nonsense, Surrealism critiqued the structure of language by applying a specific framework. While Tzara, in Zurich, formulated his concept of automatism based on chance and spontaneity, Breton and Soupault in Paris were writing their first novel by means of psychic automatism: *Les Champs Magnétiques* (1919). This novel was constructed by one author writing any thought that came to his mind, as a whole or part sentence, and the other completing it.

An analysis of *Les Champs Magnétiques* in relation to Tzara's contemporaneous works allows for early Surrealism to be distinguished from Tzara's Dada. Breton and Soupault's experiments were not inspired by Dada but by Breton's studies in psychiatry. As a medical student and assistant at the neuro-psychiatric centre Saint-Dizier in 1916, Breton first discovered the writings of Sigmund Freud.⁵²⁹ Freud's ideas of free-association led to Breton's application of automatic writing. Breton's interest in 'these psychic phenomena in 1916 already stemmed from a concern to elucidate the nature of poetic speech...'⁵³⁰ Freud

⁵²⁵ Short, 93.

⁵²⁶ André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), in *Manifestos of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 26.

⁵²⁷ Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto 1918,' in Motherwell, 80.

⁵²⁸ Corvin, 262.

⁵²⁹ These works were yet to be translated into French but had been written about in Dr. E Régis' *Précis de psychiatrie*. Short, 86.

⁵³⁰ Short, 87.

allowed Breton and Soupault to conduct scientific (rather than literary) analyses in their written experiments of 1919, and Short notes that they altered the speed of their pens to record the varying effects.⁵³¹ The process was performed as a series of scientific trials. Contrarily, in 1918 Tzara warned against Freudian concepts by declaring that ‘psychoanalysis is a dangerous disease.’⁵³²

Unlike *Les Champs Magnetiques*, language in Tzara’s contemporaneous writing is irrational in both structure and content: syntax is regularly disrupted, words may be reduced to onomatopoeia or pseudo-language, and lists of words and phrases are repeated crescendo and decrescendo. These linguistic tendencies feature prominently in his early plays, notably *The First Celestial Adventure* written in 1916. Despite their differences, the characteristics of Tzara’s writing attracted Breton. When *Dada 3* (containing Tzara’s ‘Dada Manifesto 1918’) reached Paris in early 1919, an intimate correspondence between Breton and Tzara ensued, leading to the latter’s eventual relocation from Zurich.⁵³³ The relationship between Dada and Surrealism fundamentally hinged on the collaboration between the progenitor of Dada, Tzara, and the organiser of Surrealism, Breton. As Breton explained, ‘Dada and Surrealism, even if the latter is still only potential, cannot be thought of except in reciprocal relation, like two waves riding each other by turn.’⁵³⁴

When Tzara arrived in Paris in 1920, his chant of ‘Freedom: DADA DADA DADA, a roaring of tense colours, and interlacing of opposites and of all contradictions, grotesques, inconsistencies. LIFE [original emphasis],’⁵³⁵ aligned with Breton and Soupault’s notion of art. They set a course for a joint venture, resulting in eventual separation, and within four years Surrealism was formalised. Tzara recounted in 1947 that ‘[i]t is sure that the “tabula rasa” which we made into the directing principle of our activity, only had any value in so far as something else would have to succeed it’⁵³⁶ – Surrealism. Five years after the end of Dada, having cultivated independent creative directives, Tzara and Breton were reconciled.⁵³⁷

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Tzara, ‘Dada Manifesto 1918,’ in Motherwell, 79.

⁵³³ See correspondence between Breton and Tzara in Sanouillet, 332-359.

⁵³⁴ Breton, *Entretiens*, 59, in Short, 96.

⁵³⁵ Tzara, ‘Dada Manifesto 1918,’ in Motherwell, 82.

⁵³⁶ Tzara, *Le Surréalisme et l’après-guerre* (Paris, 1948), 21, quoted in Short, 76.

⁵³⁷ In the ‘Second Manifesto of Surrealism’ (1929), Breton openly apologises to Tzara, and praises his recent publication of the poetry collection *Des nos oiseux* (*Of Our Birds*, 1929). Breton’s gesture was reciprocated by Tzara who joined Surrealism in 1929. Tzara became one of the original members of *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*, the journal issued by the surrealists between 1930 and 1933.

A Surrealist Tzara

During his involvement with Surrealism, Tzara's thoughts on language retain certain notions developed under Dada. Tzara's continued efforts to establish an alternative method for communication, non-reliant on rational language, remains his primary focus during and after Dada; these concerns filter into his surrealist writing. Tzara's approach to language is, I argue, most immediate in his theatrical works – a medium predicated on oral language and communication – and this argument is resumed below, and in the following chapter, where I return to analysing Tzara's works for the stage. While *Handkerchief of Clouds* has been discussed as a potential surrealist play (as will be outlined), there is little evidence of a surrealist theatrical career for Tzara. This section discusses, predominantly, Tzara's poetic and critical works written during the surrealist period, which more clearly align to surrealist tendencies.

Mary Ann Caws describes Tzara's position in French literature as 'unique' and regards him as 'the only poet who has left us a vast body of significant material from both the dada and surrealist epochs.'⁵³⁸ Indeed Tzara's poetic outputs from 1924 to the end of World War II crystallised his position as a major surrealist poet alongside Breton and Éluard,⁵³⁹ in addition to his critical works interpreting Surrealism. In his 1935 *Grain et Issues* – a combination of poetry, prose and critical notes – Tzara's surrealist proclivities reached their pinnacle. In this book, Tzara introduces the concept of the 'experimental dream,' contributing to surrealist theory about dream, trance and subconscious mental states. Tzara explains that poetry is the locus where the boundary between dreams and reality cease to exist. These ideas align with Breton's demand for a 'resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*.'⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁸ Mary Ann Caws, *Tristan Tzara 'Approximate Man' and Other Writings* (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2005), 19.

⁵³⁹ The epic poem *L'Homme approximatif (Approximate Man)* is considered amongst Tzara's important contributions to Surrealism. However, while it was not published until 1931, Tzara had begun work on *Approximate Man* as early as 1923, during which time he was fully immersed in Dada activities: a notebook containing the first act of Tzara's unfinished play *Pile ou Face*, dated to 1923, contains the words 'L'Homme approximatif' on the first page. BLJD, TZR 650. Unlike the physical journey associated with classic epics, the journey of the *Approximate Man* is of the self, mitigating a world of chaos and confusion as he works towards shaping his consciousness.

⁵⁴⁰ Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism,' 41

Breton's first 'Manifesto of Surrealism,' is a serious attempt to chart the realms of the unconscious. The order and content of this first manifesto stands in contrast to the oftentimes frivolous and incoherent content of Tzara's *Seven Dada Manifestos* published in the same year. However, several Dada techniques are defined anew in Breton's manifesto. As noted, the automatic unconsciousness of Tzara's 'thought is made in the mouth' is redefined as Breton's 'psychic automatism,' 'by which one proposes to express-verbally [...] the actual functioning of thought.'⁵⁴¹ Arguably, both concepts derive from attempts to access the subconscious. Additionally, Tzara's instructions for how 'To make a dadaist poem' by collages of cut-up, pre-existing texts, was retained by Breton who explained that '[i]t is even permissible to entitle POEM [original emphasis] what we get from the most random assemblage possible (observe, if you will, the syntax) of headlines and scraps of headlines cut out of the newspapers.'⁵⁴² When Breton expanded his ideas in the 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism (1929),' Dada remains: by announcing that '[t]he simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd,' Breton shares in Dada's aggressive spirit.⁵⁴³

These shared attitudes towards art and poetry renewed Breton and Tzara's relationship. However, while his poetic and critical writing in the period after Dada has been attributed to Surrealism, here I will demonstrate that during his surrealist phase, Dada continued to impact Tzara's artistic output.

Tzara's first critical work under the surrealist banner: 'Essai sur la Situation de la Poésie' (Essay on the Situation of Poetry) was published in *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* 4 December 1931. In this essay, Tzara defines two types of poetry: 'poetry as a means of expression,' which he relates to 'directed thought' (*le penser dirigé*); and 'poetry as a mental state,' which derives from 'non-directed thought' (*le penser non dirigé*). Tzara is critical of the limitations of the former (which serves only the elite) and perceives the latter as being relatable to all humanity.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁴² Ibid., 41.

⁵⁴³ Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism' (1929), in *Manifestos of Surrealism*, 125. This statement, however, may also be a tribute to Jacques Vaché (a dear friend of Breton's), who died in 1919 of a heroin overdose. During the interval of Apollinaire's *The Breasts of Tiresias* (Théâtre Maubel, Paris, 1917), Vaché entered the theatre with a revolver threatening to fire into the crowd.

⁵⁴⁴ Tzara, 'Essai sur la situation de la Poésie,' *OC*, 5.

Marius Hentea suggests that Tzara's thoughts on poetry, as established in 'Essay on the situation of poetry,' were in part based on Carl Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1912).⁵⁴⁵ In this book, Jung inaugurates his departure from the psychoanalytic movement and sets out to refute several of Freud's theories. In chapter two of his book, Jung explains:

Thus we have two forms of thinking – directed thinking and dream or phantasy thinking. The first working for communication with speech elements, is troublesome and exhausting; the latter, on the contrary, goes on without trouble, working spontaneously... the first creates innovations, adaptations, imitates reality and seeks to act upon it. The latter, on the contrary, turns away from reality, sets free subjective wishes, and is, in regard to adaptation, wholly unproductive.⁵⁴⁶

Jung attests that non-directed dream thinking (which opposes the structures of speech and communication) allows for spontaneous, unconscious thought. This assertion not only heralds surrealist tendencies, but also relates to dadaist spontaneity which 'emerges freely out of us without the intervention of speculative ideas, it represents us.'⁵⁴⁷ In his surrealist writing, Tzara maintains an effort for this non-directed thinking proposed by Jung, in a bid to undermine directed thought.

Tzara's 'Essay on the Situation of Poetry' retains a certain dadaist ambiguity with regards to the relationship between art and politics. Tzara's political affiliation would not resolve fully until the mid-1930s, up to which point the dadaist antithesis remains in his writing. In this essay, Tzara announces that poets are mistaken in thinking that formal innovation can transform social conditions: 'the social revolution does not need poetry, it is poetry that needs the revolution.'⁵⁴⁸ However, as Hentea notes, Tzara's call for poetry to be 'subordinate to political action' is contradicted by an insistence that '*poésie-activité de l'esprit* could be free of politics and ideology because it was a pure expression of the self.'⁵⁴⁹ The latter notion recalls Tzara's 1918 statement that 'Art is a private affair, the artist produces it for himself.'⁵⁵⁰

Further dadaist tendencies are found in this essay, some of which are at odds with the Surrealism of 1929. Above all, Tzara proposes non-directed thought as an alternative to

⁵⁴⁵ Hentea also notes, however, that the 'poetic implications' elucidated in Tzara's 'Essay on the situation of poetry,' 'could already be found in Dada's attack upon the organisation of the senses and the rationalism of *poésie-moyen d'expression*.' Hentea, 2014, 225.

⁵⁴⁶ Carl Jung, *The Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido*, trans. Beatrice M. Hinkle, 1916 (New York: Dodd, Meade and Company, 1949), 17.

⁵⁴⁷ Tzara, 'Conférence sur Dada,' *OC*, 1:421, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 225.

⁵⁴⁸ Tzara, 'Essai sur la situation de la Poésie,' *OC*, 5:18, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 226.

⁵⁴⁹ Hentea, 2014, 227.

⁵⁵⁰ Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto 1918,' in Motherwell, 80

verse writing. Where his fellow surrealists Breton and Éluard share in his demand for mental liberation and the application of poetry as a communal manifestation, they do not attack poetic traditions. Indeed, Breton counted Dante, Shakespeare and Victor Hugo, amongst others, as precursors of Surrealism, which sits uncomfortably next to Tzara's criticism of 'poetry as a means of expression.' It is surprising that Breton, a supporter of 'good verse,' published Tzara's critique. Fundamentally, Tzara complicated the surrealist attitude to poetry.⁵⁵¹

In addition to seeking a reformation of verse writing, Tzara's criticism of poetry stems from implications posed by language, which was for Tzara a constant concern. Tzara returns to Dada to relay the issue:

Language, with respect to human relations, was for Dada a problem and a constant worry. Across the sprawling and dispersed activity that was Dada, poetry – a certain poetry, it must be specified, art poetry, based upon the principle that beauty is static – was harassed, insulted, and despised. Dada opposed to this a certain *state of mind* which, despite its principled antidogmatism, was capable of showing that everything is movement, a constant alignment with the flight of time.⁵⁵²

While Tzara recognises the failure of Dada as he embraces Surrealism – 'Today I understand perfectly that the hopes of some of us with regard to Dada were disappointed, Dada had promised too much and the Revolution didn't come'⁵⁵³ – he brings a certain iconoclastic Dadaism to Surrealism.

Between Dada and Surrealism, Tzara's attitude towards language and poetry varies little. As he adapts to the new movement, Tzara's belief that poetry exists everywhere in 'daily life,' remains consistent: 'It is clearly accepted today that you can be a poet without ever having written verse, and that there is a poetic quality in the street, in a commercial spectacle, anywhere.'⁵⁵⁴ And this notion aligns with Surrealism. Surrealism was above all a way of life. Wandering the city as urban flaneurs, the surrealists sought moments of 'objective chance:' seemingly random encounters fraught with meaning. Tzara's 'Essay on the Situation of Poetry' is an attempt to evaluate modern poetry in its transition towards communal expression. His dadaist anarchy has given way somewhat to a more serious effort to explain Surrealism, and therein, his transition from Dadaism to Surrealism can be

⁵⁵¹ See Ferdinand Alquié, *The Philosophy of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965) for further discussion on Tzara and Surrealism's differences with regards to poetry.

⁵⁵² Tzara, 'Essai sur la situation de la Poésie,' *OC*, 5:18, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 226.

⁵⁵³ Tzara, 'Essai sur la situation de la Poésie,' *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* Issue 4 (December 1931), 20, quoted in Peterson, 1971, 98.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 86

identified. However, while Tzara formally and publicly insisted on his ‘adhesion to Surrealism,’⁵⁵⁵ as Hentea notes, ‘no shadow followed Tzara’s life and works as persistently as Dada.’⁵⁵⁶

The Dada paradox: ‘le point où le oui et le non se recontrent’ (the point where yes and no come together) reappears throughout Tzara’s career but is most specifically played out in his theatre practice. While Tzara criticised the production of language as a means of communicable expression, he could not escape the application of language. More than any other literary medium, the status of language as a means of communication is most problematic in Tzara’s theatrical writing, for the mechanism of theatre relies on communication (most often supported by language). Where Breton’s Surrealism was critical of theatrical expression (clarified in the following section, Dada and Surrealist Theatre), Tzara explained that Dada considered poetry as a means to connect to its audience and was always situated within a broader social context, not ‘an end in itself.’⁵⁵⁷ Tzara turned to the theatre as a means of escaping what he viewed as the limitations of poetry.

Dada and Surrealist Theatre

Having discussed Tzara’s relationship with and contribution to Surrealism, the next chapter will discuss Tzara’s *Handkerchief of Clouds*, and ascertain to what extent this play can be considered a work of surrealist theatre. It is important to acknowledge that *Handkerchief of Clouds* was performed in May/June of 1924, and Breton’s ‘Manifesto of Surrealism’ was not published until autumn that year. However, concepts presented in Tzara’s play (notably the merging of dreams, memories and fantasy with reality) were contemporaneously being formalised by Breton. I will now discuss the relationship between Dada and surrealist theatre before analysing Tzara’s *Handkerchief of Clouds*.

Dada proposed to unite the genres that separated art from life, and sought to dismantle (modernist) structures which divided the arts into specialist categories. The dadaists deemed the separation of the arts incompatible with the creative heterogeneity of the early

⁵⁵⁵ Tzara, ‘Open letter to the *Journal des Poètes*,’ 22 December 1932, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 233.

⁵⁵⁶ Hentea, 2014, 233.

⁵⁵⁷ Tzara, ‘Essai sur la situation de la Poésie,’ *OC*, 5:20, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 226.

twentieth century. In each of its activities (poetic, literary, theatrical) Dada intended to be subversive. Dadaist theatricality – its expressions, gestures, dramaturgy, and audience relations – strives to supplant mimetic and semiotic structures, ‘to demonstrate a new semiotics that encompasses the plural reality.’⁵⁵⁸ Life and theatre.

In addition to the plays of Tristan Tzara, the dadaist dramaturgical philosophy is evidenced in other avant-garde dramas of the early twentieth century. Erik Satie’s ‘lyrical comedie in one act’ *Le piège de Méduse* (*The Trap of Medusa*, 1913, published in 1921) alienates syntactical linguistic forms as Tzara’s plays would. Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* (1896), futurist *serate* performances (ca. 1914), Cocteau’s *Parade* (1917) and Apollinaire’s *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* (1917) have been previously discussed as progenitors of Dada theatre for their reintegrating audience/performer relations. Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes’ *Le serin muet* (*The Mute Canary*, 1919) is a theatrical work that shares in Tzara’s ambition to undermine language as a means of communication on stage. Written before Tzara arrived in Paris, *The Mute Canary* received its premiere at the ‘Manifestation Dada’ (1920) alongside Tzara’s *The First Celestial Adventure*.

Ribemont-Dessaignes’ *The Emperor of China* (1916) presents a world inspired by Jarry-esque caricatures and can be considered an early Dada play.⁵⁵⁹ However, there are other elements of Ribemont-Dessaignes’ writing that do not align to Dada theatre, and anticipate a surrealist aesthetic several years before the movement was formalised. Most specifically, brutal depictions of violent sexuality in *The Emperor* echo the works of other dissident surrealists Georges Bataille and Andre Masson, and pre-empt Artaud’s ‘Theatre of Cruelty.’ Breton and Soupault’s *S’il vous plait* (*If You Please*, 1920) and *Vous M’oubliez* (*You’ll Forget Me*, 1920) were performed during Paris Dada events. Notably, *If You Please* can be considered a proto-surrealist play for each act introduces a new and unrelated story. The experience of reading/viewing the distinct narratives spliced together recalls an episodic dream.

Surrealist theatre originates with Guillaume Apollinaire’s 1917 *Les Mamelles de Tirésias*, which he introduced as a ‘surrealist drama.’ Apollinaire applied the term ‘surrealist’ in the sense of larger than life: ‘modern, simple, swift-paced, with the shortcuts or expansions

⁵⁵⁸ Papachristos, 30.

⁵⁵⁹ Next to Tzara, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes was the most active playwright of the Paris Dada movement. Like Tzara, Ribemont-Dessaignes continued to write plays after Dada dissolved.

that are needed to move the spectator.’⁵⁶⁰ Surrealist theatre utilises fantasy and the marvellous and is based on a ‘total rejection of realism in favour of a surreality that aims at the astonishment and wonder of the spectator.’⁵⁶¹

It is important to distance theatre written during the surrealist period with the views on theatre by the surrealists, predominantly Breton. After Dada, Breton refused to associate with theatre; he discontinued his brief playwriting practice and denounced anyone who wrote for the stage. After 1925, the surrealists launched an opposition to the presentation of theatrical works by Louis Aragon and Roger Vitrac. When Vitrac, with Artaud, inaugurated the Théâtre Alfred Jarry company in 1926, they were expelled from Surrealism. Breton’s disdain for professional theatre was based on a distrust of commercialism in creative endeavours, but also his disregard for narrative, which extended to a criticism of the novel.⁵⁶² In his 1928 *Nadja* he wrote ‘I have never been able to tolerate the theatre.’⁵⁶³ While arguably not all theatre is performed with commercial intent, Breton viewed the performance of theatre as a form of self-publicity (by the playwright), predicated on commercial success. Breton’s attitude has been discussed in relation to his anger at Tzara’s re-presentation of *The Gas Heart*. Despite the (self-appointed) leader of Surrealism being decidedly against theatre, in the plays of Aragon, Vitrac, Artaud, Robert Desnos, and finally Pablo Picasso, Surrealism finds a place on the theatre stage.⁵⁶⁴

Dadaist and surrealist theatre share a common lineage. Yet where dadaist theatre embraces an aesthetic of nonsense, surrealist theatre (more linguistically accessible) includes devices clearly associated with the more formalised movement: representations of violence, dream aesthetics, and scenes which interrupt the division between fantasy and reality. Through automatic writing, verbal collage, randomness, dreams, lapses, cinematic techniques (flashback or rewind), the surrealist theatre ‘questions the real and the language which supports it.’⁵⁶⁵ That Tzara’s *Handkerchief of Clouds* more transparently invests in these devices (than is apparent in his earlier dadaist plays) accounts for why his fourth play has

⁵⁶⁰ Apollinaire, ‘Preface,’ *The Breasts of Tiresias*, in *Modern French Drama*, 59.

⁵⁶¹ Papachristos, 31.

⁵⁶² Peter Nicholls, ‘Anti-Oedipus? Dada and Surrealist Theatre, 1916-35,’ *New Theatre Quarterly*, no. 7, issue 28 (November, 1991): 331-347, 341.

⁵⁶³ Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 60.

⁵⁶⁴ For examples of surrealist theatre see: Roger Vitrac, *The Mysteries of Love* (1924); Antonin Artaud, *Jet de Sang (Spurt of Blood)*, 1925; Louis Aragon *L’Armoire à glace un beau soir (The Mirror-Wardrobe One Fine Evening)*, 1924; Robert Desnos, *La Place de l’étoile*, 1928 (revised in 1944); and Pablo Picasso, *Le Désir attrapé par la queue (Desire Caught by the Tail)*, 1941.

⁵⁶⁵ Papachristos, 32.

been considered amongst the canon of surrealist theatre. I return to the condition of Surrealism in my discussion of *Handkerchief of Clouds*.

CHAPTER 9: HANDKERCHIEF OF CLOUDS

Oh! There is nothing so tedious as these endless discussions on the difference between theatre and reality.⁵⁶⁶

...the most remarkable dramatic image of modern art.⁵⁶⁷

Tristan Tzara's fourth play, *Mouchoir de Nuages (Handkerchief of Clouds)*, was presented in summer 1924 as part of a series of events titled *Les Soirées de Paris* funded by the aristocratic patron of the arts, Count Étienne de Beaumont. Staged in Montmartre's Théâtre de la Cigale, the *Soirées* 'became the centre of Parisian artistic life' for six weeks between 17 May and 20 June.⁵⁶⁸ Tickets were priced between 10 and 300 francs and proceeds were donated to charities for war widows and Russian refugees.⁵⁶⁹ The rotating programme provided new events weekly with productions from Paris' leading artists including: Jean Cocteau's *Mercury* scored by Erik Satie and designed by Pablo Picasso; *Salade*, a ballet with music by Darius Milhaud and costumes by Georges Braque; *Le Beau Danube*, a ballet with music by Johann Strauss and set designed after Constantin Guys; *Gigue*, a dance based on classical themes with set and costume designed by André Derain;⁵⁷⁰ an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* by Jean Victor Hugo and directed by Cocteau; and the debut of Tzara's *Handkerchief of Clouds*.⁵⁷¹ An exhibition of Impressionist works entertained the public during intermissions.

Of Tzara's theatrical endeavours before *Handkerchief of Clouds*, only the 1923 presentation of *The Gas Heart* received a professional staging. For *Handkerchief*, the Count's patronage enabled Tzara to employ a professional ensemble with direction by Marcel Herrand (who also played the lead role),⁵⁷² lighting and projections by Loie Fuller, and costumes designed by renowned fashion designer Jeanne Lanvin. Additionally, while the earlier Dada plays involved limited rehearsal, Tzara now worked closely with the actors and director, devoting substantial time to practicing the performance.⁵⁷³ He insisted

⁵⁶⁶ Act V, *Handkerchief of Clouds*.

⁵⁶⁷ Aragon, 'Petite note sur les collages chez Tristan Tzara et ce qui s'en suit,' quoted in *OC*, 1:689.

⁵⁶⁸ Hentea, 'The aristocratic avant-garde: Le Compte Etienne de Beaumont and "Les Soirées de Paris,"' *Neohelicon* vol. 42, issue 1 (2015): 55-69, 61.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁷⁰ The Ballets Russes' Léonide Massine choreographed all four ballets: *Mercury*, *Salade*, *Le Beau Danube* and *Gigue*. Massine had been choreographer for Satie and Cocteau's 1917 *Parade*.

⁵⁷¹ Programme sourced in BLJD, TZR 13 (2).

⁵⁷² Tzara had previously worked with Herrand on the second production of *The Gas Heart* at the 'Soirée du Coeur a Barbe' in 1923.

⁵⁷³ Beaumont had said that for four weeks leading up to the premiere of *Les Soirées*, his hotel was full of artists and actors (including Tzara) rehearsing their performances. Hentea, 2014, 204.

that costumes and set were prepared ten days before the premiere to ensure that technical elements worked smoothly and that actors were accustomed to set and costume changes.⁵⁷⁴ A manuscript page from Jacques Doucet's Tzara archive lists the actors and indicates costumes and accessories for each scene, providing greater detail than for any of his previous theatrical productions.⁵⁷⁵ The professional staging lent an air of sophistication that had been previously absent in Dada theatre. Tzara's leading lady, Andrée Pascal, was known for her 'talent and stunning beauty,'⁵⁷⁶ and Fuller's projections were described as 'a true poem [...] an orgy of iridescent lighting through which the works of our young avant-garde artists appeared fixed like precious jewels.'⁵⁷⁷

Handkerchief of Clouds was included in the programme for the opening gala of Les Soirées, attended by not only French aristocracy but also nobility from across Europe, including the King and Queen of Romania. René Crevel noted that the audience appeared from across 'five continents, every language was spoken.'⁵⁷⁸ The journal *Comœdia* described the scene:

It was really the social event of the season for Parisian high society. The hall was scintillating with lights and the balconies were illuminated. The artists, whose reputation has grown over the past few years, were received with great enthusiasm. Tristan Tzara's creative whims did raise a few eyebrows, but since everybody had already chosen sides, protest was immediately followed by applause.⁵⁷⁹

On *Handkerchief*, the press was divided between 'effusive praise of a theatrical masterpiece and fulminous critiques on an arriviste who betrayed his friends in the avant-garde by sidling to Beaumont's riches.'⁵⁸⁰ Despite its mixed reviews, Tzara perceived the presentation of *Handkerchief of Clouds* a success. In a letter to his mother Lucia Rosenstock dated 7 June 1924, Tzara notes that by this date the play had been performed fourteen times, making *Handkerchief* the first of Tzara's plays to receive a season of performances.⁵⁸¹ The play was also financially profitable with Tzara earning 40, 000 Francs for his efforts.⁵⁸² For the first time, Tzara staged his theatre by his own design – rather than as a collaborative Dada enterprise – and it was an achievement.

⁵⁷⁴ Hentea, 2015 (ii), 65.

⁵⁷⁵ BLJD, TZR 13.

⁵⁷⁶ Hentea, 2014, 204.

⁵⁷⁷ Bibliothèque Richelieu (Paris), Fonds Rondel 12581, f. 92, quoted in Hentea 2015 (ii), 66.

⁵⁷⁸ Crevel, 'Les soirées de Paris,' *La Revue Européenne*, quoted in Hentea, 2015 (ii), 62.

⁵⁷⁹ Bibliothèque Richelieu (Paris), Fonds Rondel 12581, f. 92, quoted in Hentea 2015, 63.

⁵⁸⁰ Hentea, 2015 (ii), 64.

⁵⁸¹ Tzara to Lucia Rosenstock, 7 June 1924, in 'Scrisori către familie, în România,' (1996, 15), quoted in Hentea, 2015 (ii), 68.

⁵⁸² *OC*, 1:688. While proceeds from tickets sales were given to charities, the individual contributors were paid handsomely by the Count.

After its performance *Handkerchief of Clouds* was published in the Belgian review *Sélection* (November 1924). In 1925, a luxury edition featuring nine original etchings by Juan Gris was published (Fig. 13). The special edition cost between 200 and 300 francs, and by 1930, only twenty-nine copies had been sold.⁵⁸³ As indicated, however, the performance was well attended, and the evolution of Tzara's theatrical career was noted by the press and public alike. Henri Béhar suggests that 'it is curious, if not scandalous, that none of those who attended or participated in the original performances attempted a new staging, or at least a reissue of a work that played for one month only.'⁵⁸⁴

Dramatic Innovation in Handkerchief of Clouds

Tzara introduces *Handkerchief of Clouds* as 'an ironic tragedy or a tragic farce in fifteen short acts, separated by fifteen commentaries. The action belongs to the realm of the serial novel and cinema.'⁵⁸⁵ The scenes are episodic, interspersed with short cuts mimicking cinematic techniques, and the dramatic action unfolds from scene to scene without interruption. *Handkerchief of Clouds* marks a shift in Tzara's playwriting: for the first time he presents individualised characters in a transparent narrative. While a sort of denouement can be discerned in the *Celestial Adventure* plays and, as previously noted, dramatic organisation is evident in *The Gas Heart*, Tzara's fourth play marks his first transparent application of the classic dramatic structure including: exposition, (rising action), climax, (falling action), denouement.

The action relates to the sentimental romance of popular literature or early cinema and presents a classic love triangle: the Wife (Andrea) abandoned by her husband (the Banker) writes to the Poet (Marcel) whose work she admires.⁵⁸⁶ They meet and discuss matters of love. Andrea realises she is in love with the Poet. The Poet, however, claims he 'cannot

⁵⁸³ Hentea, 2014, 201.

⁵⁸⁴ Hentea notes that there were plans for *Handkerchief* to be staged in Budapest, Moscow and New York, but these plans did not manifest.

⁵⁸⁵ Tzara, 'Le Secret de *Mouchoir de nuages*,' *Integral*, Bucharest no. 2, 1 April 1925, *OC*, 1:689.

⁵⁸⁶ The character names are listed as follows: Wife of the Banker; The Banker; The Poet. The characters retain their off-stage names in production and in the 'Author's Introduction' to the published edition Tzara explains that the script also includes the names of the characters who played the roles: Andrea (Andrée Pascal) and Marcel (Herrand).

submit to the love of another human being,' for he loves only 'pure poetry.'⁵⁸⁷ The Banker loses all his money gambling in Monte Carlo. Having lost his material wealth, he realises that 'It is only now that I have become rich (117)' and is renewed in his love for his Wife. The Poet journeys to a deserted island where he realises, too late, that he was in love with Andrea all along. The Poet returns and attempts to separate the couple during a night at the theatre (where *Hamlet* is playing) and fails. The Banker is killed by Apaches, an action which may or may not have been a plot of the Poet's. Forty years later, the Poet commits suicide and his soul is auctioned in heaven. In addition to the three central characters, *Handkerchief* includes five Commentators (A, B, C, D and E) who also play the secondary roles. After each scene is played, the Commentators dissect the action as a chorus. The Commentary, minimal at the outset, is organised gradually into a play parallel to the primary action. Tzara stated that '*Handkerchief of Clouds* is a poetic work; it shows the relativity of things, feelings and events.'⁵⁸⁸ As the character Andrea explains, it is a tale of three people caught in a 'reciprocal exchange of attractions and reactions (113).'

Béhar suggests that 'all the great works from Dumas to Rostand [...] could serve as references to the constitution of the fable and the conception of the characters.'⁵⁸⁹ Indeed, the characters represent types taken from theatre history, most notably Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The Poet mimics Hamlet, unsure in his love for Andrea and bent on revenge when his position is usurped. Andrea is both Ophelia (the lover) and Gertrude (the mother): the inaccessible object of the Poet's desire. The Banker's actions align with Claudius (the usurping King), for he reclaims his wife's love only when the Poet realises he is in love with her, thus rendering Andrea and the Poet's love impossible. The Banker, despite proclaiming his (new-found) love for his wife, is unable to comprehend the psychological complexity of others. He inhabits a world where tangible objects are controlled, and he fails to recognise the inner struggle of those around him. His opening line: 'I'm bored,' sums up The Banker's assessment of life. The Poet is more complex: modelling himself after Hamlet, his ennui does not issue from indifference but rather the romantic notion of the tortured poet: wallowing in melancholia, finding love only in words. Like Hamlet he questions the meaning of human existence and realises that 'there is never a solution; either you do things or you don't, and the result is always the same: you drop dead in the end

⁵⁸⁷ Tzara, '*Handkerchief of Clouds*,' trans. Aileen Robbins. All subsequent quotations from the play are denoted by page numbers from this translation.

⁵⁸⁸ Tzara, 'Le Secret de "Mouchoir de nuages,"' *OC*, 1:689.

⁵⁸⁹ *OC*, 1:689.

(117).’ Like Hamlet he faces the inevitable decision ‘to be or not to be;’ in Act IX the Poet muses ‘To live, to die (121),’ and in the final act, commits suicide.

Despite Tzara’s attention to dramatic structure and characterisation, they are secondary to the technical and physical aspects of the play. The novelty of *Handkerchief*, described by Louis Aragon as ‘the most remarkable dramatic image of modern art,’ resides in its dramaturgical construction.⁵⁹⁰ The external structures of theatre (scene, costume and lighting changes, sound effects, entrances and exits) are fully incorporated here and treated with more care and competence than in Tzara’s previous theatrical outputs. Firstly, the stage is divided by a raised platform that occupies the main playing area. Tzara’s concept of the split-level stage was inspired by Alexander Tairov, director and founder of the Kamerny (Chamber) Theatre in Moscow whose productions toured to Paris in 1923. In his essay on the Kamerny Theatre, Tzara reproduces Tairov’s instructions for the stage:

The floor of the stage should not have a single surface but should be broken, depending on the problems of the show, in a series of surfaces, either horizontal or inclined and at different levels, because a plain floor is obviously inexpressive; it does not allow the play to be played with elevation [...] By breaking the stage floor and relying on scenic terrains of different levels, we move from the area of horizontal construction into a series of vertical-dimensional construction problems.⁵⁹¹

While Tzara’s set design for *Handkerchief* was not as innovative as that described by Tairov, the raised platform allowed Tzara to organise his dramaturgy around the separate narratives of the play: the main action, and the Commentary. The primary action takes place on the rostrum in the middle of the stage. Commentators occupy the playing area in front and to the side of the platform.⁵⁹² Added to this split-level stage, Tzara instructs that ‘the action takes place in a closed space, like a box, from which the actors cannot leave [they are] on set for the duration of the play.’⁵⁹³ The closed box and split level enabled Tzara’s primary goal: the exposé of theatre fiction. For Tzara, *Handkerchief of Clouds* is a play ‘based on the drama of the theatre’ and when the actors are not performing, they remain at the side of the platform talking amongst themselves, breaking in and out of character. They change costume and apply make-up in view of the audience.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹⁰ Aragon, ‘Petite note...,’ quoted in *OC*, 1:698.

⁵⁹¹ Alexandre Tairoff, reproduced by Tzara in ‘Le théâtre Kamerny de Moscou,’ *OC*, 1:618.

⁵⁹² Another precedent is Ancient Greek theatre where the chorus occupy a playing area on a lower level from the principle characters.

⁵⁹³ ‘Author’s Introduction,’ *Handkerchief of Clouds*, 112.

⁵⁹⁴ Tzara, ‘Le Secret de “Mouchoir de nuages,”’ *OC*, 1:698.

In his essay on 'Dadaism and the Theatre,' Tzara states that 'the "rigged" theatre – illusionist – no longer needs to exist, it must not imitate life, but keep its artistic autonomy [...] the stage must not be a mystery to the public.'⁵⁹⁵ Innovating *mise-en-scène*, Tzara places all the (usually hidden) elements of stagecraft in view, and scene changes are orchestrated by technicians without the curtain being drawn or lights lowered: the 'stagehand [...] is visible at all times to the audience.'⁵⁹⁶ A year before writing this play, Tzara had written of the Meyerhold Theatre in Moscow:

the stagehands are on the stage among the actors who play, they operate the instruments of the machines that turn to activate the action of the play and to arrange the lights. That's new and real life on the stage!⁵⁹⁷

Tzara appropriated this technique for *Handkerchief of Clouds*, bringing 'real life' to the stage by exposing the mechanisms of stage craft and design, in a manner that was later employed by Bertolt Brecht.⁵⁹⁸ Additionally, the characters in the play bear their own names onstage; fusing the character and the personality of the actor. Or, designating the character as equal to the 'real life' of the actor. In this way, *Handkerchief of Clouds* highlights Tzara's application of theatricality: the vehicle connecting theatre to life. Concurrently, by displaying the mechanisms of fictive construction, Tzara demonstrates the gap separating theatre from reality. This dual situation is defined by theatricality: the rupture between theatre and life; dividing two states and simultaneously touching both.

In addition to the transparent scene changes, Tzara instructs: 'In the back, at a certain height, there is a screen that indicates where the action occurs, by means of reproductions blown up from illustrated post cards. These are rolled up on two rollers by a stagehand...'⁵⁹⁹ The picture post-card aesthetic contributes to the theatrical artifice and renders a cinematic quality whereby scenes switch between distant locations swiftly. The spectator is taken on tour to Paris, Venice, Monte Carlo, South America and a desert island with the aid of backdrops and projections.

The scenic shifts and cuts between the primary narrative and the action of the Commentary, are denoted by sharp changes of lighting: 'At the end of each act, the

⁵⁹⁵ Tzara, 'Les masques dadaïstes de Hiller,' *OC* I:605-606. This essay is undated in *OC*, however, Béhar places it amongst works dating from 1923.

⁵⁹⁶ 'Author's Introduction,' *Handkerchief of Clouds*, 112.

⁵⁹⁷ Tzara, 'Les masques dadaïstes de Hiller,' *OC*. I:605-606.

⁵⁹⁸ While there is no direct relation between Tzara's works and those of Brecht, Tzara's stagecraft anticipates devices for which Brecht would be later celebrated.

⁵⁹⁹ 'Author's Introduction,' *Handkerchief of Clouds*, 112.

lighting changes abruptly so that only the Commentators are lit [...] The lighting also changes abruptly at the end of each Commentary, when the light projectors light only the platform.’⁶⁰⁰ Additionally, Fuller’s onstage projections merged the on- and offstage realities. In an interview after the first performances, Tzara explained: ‘I do not want to hide from the audience that what they see on stage is theatre. That’s why the projections of Miss Loie Fuller are also on stage with the projector. The sets are not there to give an illusion of reality, but to locate the place where the action takes place.’⁶⁰¹ Béhar suggests that Tzara’s ‘tricks’ of the stage ‘make the show a reality in itself and a labyrinth of mirrors where the imagination goes astray.’⁶⁰²

Throughout Tzara’s playwriting career, beginning with the *Celestial Adventure* plays, he seeks to bridge the relationship between the stage world and the auditorium. In *Handkerchief*, Tzara’s ambition advances to include the audience in the drama by revealing how the theatrical spectacle is manufactured. In an economic and transparent manner, Tzara provides the viewer with basic visual information to comprehend the narrative, establishing ‘*mise-en-scène* as an indispensable source of meaning.’⁶⁰³ Tzara’s contribution to critical analyses on theatre theory and stagecraft (notably the aforementioned ‘Les masques dadaïstes de Hiller’ and ‘Le théâtre Kamerny de Moscou’ essays) was prolific in the intervening period after Dada. By the time he presented his fourth play, Tzara was able to put his theory to action, realising his ambitions for the stage.

The Duality of Greek Tragedy and Alienation in Handkerchief of Clouds

Tzara’s awareness of traditional forms of theatrical writing is evident in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, notably by the inclusion of the Commentary. Tzara’s Commentators fulfil the same function as the classical Greek chorus: they act as ‘the subconscious of the drama (118).’ Tzara’s commentaries, as with choral interludes, mark the change from one scene to another: they announce events that will occur and interpret what has been said.⁶⁰⁴ When

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Tzara, ‘Le Secret de “Mouchoir de nuages,”’ *OC*, 1:698.

⁶⁰² *OC*, 1:690.

⁶⁰³ Papachristos, 36.

⁶⁰⁴ Due to a lack of stage curtain (and other scenic devices) in classical Greek drama, the Chorus was necessary to mark scene changes. Tzara’s stage for *Handkerchief*, as discussed, is also an open (curtain-less) format.

the Banker's happiness in sudden poverty confounds his colleagues, the Commentators explain:

A: Why don't they understand that the content of a word is not necessarily related to its sound? The Banker says: 'I am rich' when he is poor, because he was poor when he was rich. He is rich with life, now that the wallet of his heart is no longer encumbered with innumerable visiting cards that destiny deposits with bitterness on persons who, never being at home, are constantly causing traffic jams of the spirit on the principal arteries of the city and of memory.

B: And it was the casino that rendered this great service to him, by lifting off all that which, without his knowing it, was troubling him deeply (117).

Moreover, the chorus can reveal what has *not* been said by the protagonists: 'C: I think Andrea loves Marcel [the Poet] but she doesn't know it yet. D: That would be sad, because the Poet does not love anyone (115).' The chorus can explain narrative action that is not easily presented on stage, such as a physical journey: in Act X, C stands upon a chair and announces that 'the Poet, in the throes of his love, or the illusion of his love, or the image of his love, or his love plain and simple, returns to Paris... (123)' Finally, the chorus interacts with the protagonists. In Act XI, Andrea, torn between her love for the Poet and loyalty to her husband, rejects the Commentators' advice. Commentator A responds: 'Permit me to protest, Madame, for it is more than possible that you yourself do not know what you wish; but we, removed from the action, can understand the will of the Gods who rule us (125).'

Additionally, Tzara's Commentators create a distancing effect. For example, in Act XI the Commentary deviates from its explanation of the protagonists' actions to consider a technical point in the script:

A: Pardon me, I don't understand at all what our heroes are doing on the Avenue de l'Opéra.

E: I have already told you, they are going to the theatre.

D: It is not absolutely necessary that they go by the Avenue de l'Opéra.

C: Actually, that is true; this scene could have been represented in a more abstract fashion (123-124).

Tzara removes the audience from the fictional narrative being played in the theatre hall, onto the streets of Paris outside.⁶⁰⁵ The spectator is challenged to maintain lucidity; is constantly reminded of the artifice of theatrical form, thereby remaining a critical observer

⁶⁰⁵ Part of Hausmann's mid-late-nineteenth-century renovations of Paris, the Avenue de l'Opéra bisects the 1st arrondissement, running from the Louvre to the Palais Garnier (Paris's primary opera house) in the 9th arrondissement. This district is host to several theatres including the Theatre Michel, the location of the infamous 'Soirée du Cœur à Barbe.'

of the actions and destinies of the characters. The Commentators' duality allows Tzara to combine the classical device of the chorus with an alienation or distancing effect that was introduced by Shklovsky in 1917⁶⁰⁶ and formalised by Brecht in the 1930s.⁶⁰⁷ In Tzara's theatre, prohibiting audience/character empathy (alienation) allows the spectator to identify the larger (philosophical) themes raised by the drama: 'One could place here a nice problem of a general nature: how true is the truth. How false is the lie. How wrong is the truth. How true is the lie (124).'

Continuing this metatheatrical tradition, the Commentators act as spokesmen of the author; they allow Tzara to explain his intentions with regards to dramatic structure: 'D: Since it is the middle of the play, don't you think an intermission would go well here? C: No, the author did not want any intermission. He says that it is the intermission which has killed the theatre (120).'

⁶⁰⁸ They also enlighten the public on certain dramaturgical devices. For example, Tzara manipulates dramatic time by instructing a tulle curtain be pulled across the stage for flashback sequences, mirroring the soft-focus effect of cinema flashbacks. The Commentary explains that '[t]he vagueness of the objects is not that of the dream. It indicates only that this scene does not occur in a normal progression of time, within the logical sequence of the acts (119).'

Finally, the Commentary undertakes a comedic role, complementing its educational function. At several intervals throughout the play, the Commentary acts as a structural device, breaking the dramatic action in the manner of the comedic interlude in tragedy.⁶⁰⁹ In Act V after the climactic moment when the Poet announces he is leaving, causing Andrea to exclaim: 'are you thus abandoning me? What am I going to do all alone? (118).'

The Commentary proceeds: 'B: You who have travelled so often, Staquet, what do you do in order to avoid being bored? C: Well, I travel (118).'

Sometimes the Commentators exchange commonplace statements to break, not only the dramatic tension, but the

⁶⁰⁶ See Chapter 5, pg. 107-8 for a discussion on Shklovsky's 'Art as Device.'

⁶⁰⁷ As described in 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Theatre' (1936). Brecht also employed a chorus of commentators in his plays, notably *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, 1944.

⁶⁰⁸ Matthews suggests that this line may signify a lesson learned by Tzara after the audience at 'Festival Dada,' Salle Gavueau (May, 1920) organised a protest and mass exodus during the interval, after which the *Second Celestial Adventure* played to a limited crowd (Matthews, 42). However, this is not consistent with Tzara's subsequent programming in the immediate aftermath of the 'Festival Dada.' *The Gas Heart* premiered at the 'Salon Dada' (June 1921) and was programmed immediately after the interval. At the 'Soirée de Cœur à Barbe' (July 1923), which had two intermissions, *The Gas Heart* was the finale of the show.

⁶⁰⁹ Consider Shakespeare's dramatic structure: the drunken porter in *Macbeth* Act II, scene 2 (after the murder of the King); Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's sequences in *Hamlet*.

dramatic narrative completely: 'A: It would be nice of you to pass my hat to me.' To which B responds: 'Do you have any lipstick? (116).' And at other times provide an expression for the author who does not take himself seriously: 'C: I adore this play. A: It wouldn't surprise me if it were a smash (116).' Equally and opposingly: 'That is the reason this play is badly made. Even though we are the Commentators [...] the playwright never even let us know why the Poet does not love Andrea (118).'

Tzara's Commentary disallows audience immersion. These metatheatrical traditions are an advancement on devices introduced in Tzara's previous plays. In *The Second Celestial Adventure*, the characters rally as a chorus to commentate the childbirth occurring at the climax, which appears unrelated to the narrative. In *The Gas Heart*, Nose and Neck remain downstage outside the dramatic action, commenting on the play as external observers. The evolution of these techniques in *Handkerchief of Clouds* mainly relies on a more accessible theatrical language than in Tzara's previous plays, as will be demonstrated now.

Theatrical Language in Handkerchief of Clouds

In addition to its scenic and dramaturgical developments, theatrical language advances in *Handkerchief of Clouds*. Katherine Papachristos notes that 'the play is built on the demonstration of the very process of theatricalisation which leads to a reflection (a meta-language) on the relationship between fiction and reality.'⁶¹⁰ The metatheatrical device, introduced in *The Gas Heart*, is fully formed here in the style of Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921): a piece of metatheatricality on the relationship between authors, their characters and the actors who play them. Tzara had attended a performance of Pirandello's play a few months before writing *Handkerchief of Clouds*.⁶¹¹

In Act I of Tzara's play, the Commentators introduce the conflict between the characters and actors; theatre and reality.

A: Do you think that Herrand [the Poet] is traveling because he was getting tired of Andrea?

D: I myself am unable to come to any conclusion.

E: Me either. [...] Yet she is pretty and intelligent; you are aware that I know her very well myself.

⁶¹⁰ Papachristos, 36.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

B: The fact that you act the role of Andrea's friend on stage does not give you the right to believe that you are her friend in real life.

A: But she could easily be his friend outside this dramatic action, this play, in real life, in her own life – how would you know?

C: Oh! There is nothing so tedious as these endless discussions on the difference between theatre and reality (118).

Entangling events occurring 'in real life' and 'on stage,' the Commentary demonstrates the intersection of the fiction being played on the rostrum and the Commentators' 'genuine' discussion, which appears to occur in the immediate present. Once again, Tzara's theatre highlights the performance/theatre complex, which allows for a confluence of supposed opposites: immediate and re-presented; spontaneous and rehearsed; performative and theatrical. That is, by obfuscating 'the difference between theatre and reality,' Tzara's theatre integrates the play as a fictional construct with the real life and actions of the performers; drawing attention to the 'immediate present' via the representational format, Tzara's play enacts the performance/theatre complex.

The inclusion of the above-cited 'tedious' conversation repeats a device Tzara first introduced in *The Gas Heart*,⁶¹² although its purpose here differs from that of 'the conversation is lagging' sequence of his previous play. In *The Gas Heart*, Tzara repeats over and over, commonplace statements to comment on the banality of civil conversation, and to undermine theatrical language. In *Handkerchief*, Tzara's metatheatre now considers dramatic language as theoretical intervention. As J. H. Matthews notes, Tzara's Commentary indicates 'a revealing shift of emphasis in his writing for the stage. He now talks on the level of ideas, of concepts – arguing the conflict between theatre and reality. He has become a self-conscious artisan of drama...'⁶¹³ The directness with which Tzara presents these ideas diverts from the anarchic dadaist presentations of his previous theatrical works, which attempted to bring art into life by disabling passive spectatorship with incoherence and nonsense theatrical action. Here, Tzara merges art and life with the application of more nuanced theatrical mechanisms.

Handkerchief of Clouds evidences further advancement of Tzara's theatrical language with the application of complete and coherent dialogic interaction. Additionally, each character has their own linguistic signature. The Commentators' exchanges are clear, direct and descriptive (see examples above). Andrea's lines contain a lyrical rhythm: '...he coated

⁶¹² To recap: in *The Gas Heart*, the characters Mouth and Eye engage in an exchange where the line 'The conversation is lagging...' is repeated several times. The entire conversation is then repeated later in the play.

⁶¹³ Matthews, 41.

each gesture with a layer of indifference, like Time burying an event by covering it with veils of forgetfulness (119).’ The Banker speaks in short, basic sentences: ‘I don’t know. I’m bored. I’m going to leave this evening (115).’ And his comments and responses are matter of fact: ‘Alibi: The necklace has been found. Banker: Necklaces are made to be found (117-118).’ Finally, the Poet speaks in lengthy and elegiac prose:

There I was on the cliff ... In the distance I could hear the sounds of farm machinery, like rattling chains, which, during the day, had imprisoned men in fear of the day to come, crowded together under the shed. The day was coming to an end... (123)

The most noteworthy theatrical language convention in *Handkerchief of Clouds* is the monologue. In the *Celestial Adventure* plays, Tzara includes longer speeches, however, these take the form of Dada manifestos inserted into the drama. The character Eye in *The Gas Heart* speaks some longer sequences; however, Eye’s lines are written in disjointed sentences, and there is no identifiable structure to the character’s speech. The Poet’s monologue in Act IX of *Handkerchief of Clouds*, however, follows the classic structure of the monologue: it introduces a specific problem upon which the character expresses his mental thoughts.

The traditional theatrical monologue is a long-form piece of poetry or prose written in the first person, and usually has a confessional quality: it unmask the conscience of the character whereby they reveal their innermost feelings. In tragedy the monologue often features a dramatic revelation, which will advance the plot, and usually ends in a climax. In the Act IX monologue of *Handkerchief*, alone on an island, the Poet realises he is in love with Andrea:

To live, to die. To the right, to the left. Standing up, lying down. In front, behind. Above, below. Why these gymnastics about an evil that has nothing to do with the body? I love her ... Yes, miserably, and from what a distance (121).

Regardless of the pleasures offered by the island, he remains bereft: ‘The islands have so many surprises in store for me. [...] But to what end? I would like to be able to tear open the meninges of my brain like the inside of a toy, in order to see the mechanism of my love for her. I, who have never loved (121).’ It climaxes with the Poet listing all the ways in which he is tormented:

Love covers the eyes of my heart and mind.
Rapacious fish, the monsters of the clouds,
the hatreds, the pains, the crises, the horrors,
the vices, the germs and the evil spirits,
all strike me, humiliate me, bite me and tear
the prepared behaviour with its propitious
cares

which I was supposed to carry this evening to
the ball at the Opera.
And all of this for two blue eyes
and for the five o'clock tea which dusk offers
to the
Spring in porcelain cups, invisible
As the stars (122).

The monologue allows Tzara to reveal the Poet's true feelings, which are hidden from the other characters. In this way, Tzara applies a standard theatrical speech device to advance the plot of his drama.

Michel Corvin suggests that while *The Gas Heart* is a 'feast of the destruction of theatre,' *Handkerchief of Clouds* is a classical work.⁶¹⁴ However, both *The Gas Heart* and *Handkerchief* are subversions of bourgeois drama including: intrigue in the form of a trip to the races (*The Gas Heart*) / the theatre (*Handkerchief*); speeches on the subject of love; and dialogue comprised of clichés parodying civil conversation. In one instance in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, Tzara returns to one of his early linguistic experiments: repetition. Here, C attempts to explain the passing of time between Acts:

Time flows flows
Time flows flows flows
Time flows flows flows flows
Time flows flows flows flows flows
drop by drop
drop drop by drop drop
drop drop drop by drop drop drop
drop drop drop drop by drop drop drop drop (128).

The incremental repetition is identical to the structure applied in *The First Celestial Adventure*.⁶¹⁵ This device is commonplace in Tzara's theatrical writing, and by employing repetition, Tzara undermines language by rendering the word absurd; removed from its semiotic function.

Handkerchief is undoubtedly more accessible than Tzara's first three plays, however, the inclusion of absurdist language (verbal farce in the form of repetition) recalls his earlier works. As Béhar suggests: 'the goal remains the same: to show that poetry is an activity of the mind as fundamental as freedom or love.'⁶¹⁶ Tzara is explicit about the centrality of poetry in *Handkerchief* by including the role of the Poet. However, he continues to

⁶¹⁴ Corvin, 265; 285.

⁶¹⁵ Recall the 'crocroc' verse from *The First Adventure*. Chapter 5, pg. 110.

⁶¹⁶ *OC*, 1:690.

undermine poetic language, adhering to beliefs that have remained central since the beginning of Dada:

As for me, if I hadn't known at the beginning how the author was going to end this play, I would not hesitate for a moment in proclaiming that poetry is a negligible product of latent madness, and that it is not in the least necessary for the onward march of civilization and progress (122).

Simultaneously, Tzara elevates the role of poetry and the Poet, who like Tzara, 'needs to take poetry as reality, and reality as an illusion (122).' Tzara investigates the relationship between reality and illusion with more technical skill in *Handkerchief of Clouds* than in his earlier works, most notably with the inclusion of cinematic techniques.

Cinematic Dramaturgy in Handkerchief of Clouds

As discussed, the complexity of dramaturgy and language in *Handkerchief of Clouds* evolves Tzara's theatre practice, while retaining elements of Dadaism to subvert theatrical norms. It remains a task of this chapter to elucidate to what extent this play evidences surrealist tendencies. The most appropriate aspect of *Handkerchief* to discuss in relation to Surrealism is Tzara's treatment of temporality. Previously, I have introduced the technical innovations that allowed Tzara to merge on- and offstage realities (onstage scene and costume changes; technical apparatus, including the lighting projector, being placed in view of the audience; metatheatrical dialogue and action), and indicate sequences occurring outwith the play's 'present' (tulle curtain being drawn). I will now discuss these inclusions in more detail to analyse specific instances of temporal manipulation in Tzara's fourth play: flashback, fast cuts, and memory.

Aileen Robbins suggests that at the time of writing *Handkerchief of Clouds*, Tzara was aware of contemporaneous experiments in avant-garde film, and suggests that the 'condensation of space and time – the jumping over distance and mixture of past and present – may be a convention for us today, but it was unusual in 1924.'⁶¹⁷ Tzara's application of cinematic techniques is one of the earliest in theatre history; the inclusion of flashback sequences, and rotating and blown-up postcard images combined with stage

⁶¹⁷ Aileen Robbins, 'Tristan Tzara's "Handkerchief of Clouds,"' *The Drama Review: TDR*, vol. 16, no. 4 (December 1972):110-111, 111.

projections, were novel in European theatre of the 1920s.⁶¹⁸ Tzara's cinematic dramaturgy predates Erwin Piscator's pioneering of cinema like projection on stage in Berlin from 1925.⁶¹⁹ And in Paris, not until 1953 did devices similar to those used by Tzara become a fixture on the theatre stage. That year, Jean-Louis Barrault's production of Paul Claudel's *The Diary of Christopher Columbus* at the Théâtre Marigny, revolutionised operatic *mise-en-scène* with the use of enlarged images projected onstage as backdrops. In theatre history, I am yet to find an earlier application of cinematic aesthetics before Tzara's 1924 *Handkerchief of Clouds*.⁶²⁰

The most notable cinematic influence in Tzara's play is the flashback. The typical cinema flashback rearranges the sequence of narrative events, which can be reconstituted into a cohesive temporal order, and is intended to be comprehended in this way. Therefore, the flashback is a sequence occurring before (or, in the case of the flashforward, after) the dominant time frame of the narrative, and slotted into a rational sequence of events by the viewer. Before the commonplace use of flashback in cinema, that is before audiences were habituated to the tradition, the technique had to be explained. In early silent film, captions or an image of a clock or calendar flicking backwards alerted the audience to disturbances in the narrative sequence. William Earle notes that without such indications, 'the audience experienced the disruption of natural narrative order as confusing, that is, disruptive of real time and space.'⁶²¹

Tzara's use of flashback aligns with its application in early cinema (in this case, indicated to the audience by the tulle curtain being drawn and the Commentators' explanations). Narrative disruption in Surrealism, however, does not correlate to the common cinema flashback, rather it was intended to manipulate the viewers' experience of time and space, causing confusion. The scenes presented in Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's 1929 film *Un*

⁶¹⁸ While we do not know what Fuller's projections looked like, the combination of blown-up postcards and onstage projections contributed a cinematic aesthetic to Tzara's stage. This aesthetic would be advanced by other theatre practitioners.

⁶¹⁹ For Piscator's cinematic stage projections see Bablet, 128-134,

⁶²⁰ Roger Vitrac's 1922 *Entrée Libre* (which contains six scenes recounting the dreams of the three protagonists) instructs a slide picturing the corresponding dreamer's face be projected onto the backdrop. This play was never realised onstage during the Dada/surrealist period. While the onstage use of rolling illustrated images combined with projections is not predated by Tzara, in the late nineteenth century, the lighting designer Hugo Bähr invented an optical projection system that used painted scenes placed on rotating disks. Backlit by powerful lamps, these scenes could be projected as moving images onto a cyclorama. Chris Salter notes, 'Bähr's device, which quickly found itself into the scenic inventories of international theatres, proved a first for the use of moving, albeit painted images in a stage environment.' Chris Salter, *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010), 143. Bähr's device is similar to that employed by Tzara in *Handkerchief of Clouds*.

⁶²¹ William Earle, *Surrealism in Film: Beyond the Realist Sensibility* (London: Routledge, 2017), Chapter 4.

Chien Andalou (*An Andalusian Dog*) for example, cannot be restructured into a whole narrative sequence for there is no indication as to when certain scenes or events are occurring (in a rational temporal order).⁶²² Breton and Soupault's *S'il vous plait* (1919) provides an example of narrative disruption in early surrealist theatre. The play consists of three acts (which do not relate to each other), comprising actions and events that do not follow any coherent sequence. Withholding vital information about the events that are taking place onstage, Breton and Soupault engage the audience in what Béhar describes as 'cognitive vertigo,'⁶²³ and Nahma Sandrow calls 'a giddy sensation of serious conversations gone awry.'⁶²⁴ Roger Vitrac's proto-surrealist drama *Les Mystères de l'amour* (1923) contains a scene between a young man and his father, which has no relation to the dominant narrative. These characters do not re-appear, and the audience is not instructed as to when in the narrative order the scene is occurring. Unlike Tzara's application of narrative disruption, these early surrealist plays enact deliberate temporal disorder. Therefore, while Tzara employs devices that were simultaneously being developed in Surrealism, his application of narrative disruption does not align with surrealist intentions.

It is crucial to indicate that while Tzara interrupts temporal order – through scenic devices and choral interjections which step out of the narrative frame – rather than disorientate, he navigates the spectator through sequential disruptions. Before the flashback of Act VII, the Commentary invites the audience into the scene: 'C: Let us travel back in time now. D: Like the movies do (119).' Here Tzara is explicit about the application of cinematic techniques in his play. After the flashback the Commentary once again explains: 'A: Let us now return to the other reality, to true reality, the reality of the handkerchief of clouds (120).' These lines are spoken in lieu of a caption such as those appearing in early film. It is my understating that Tzara intended his narrative to be comprehended as a cohesive

⁶²² Phillip Drummond identifies *Un Chien Andalou* as a parody on contemporary film. Pierre Batcheff, lead actor in *Un Chien Andalou*, was known for his romantic roles, described by Drummond as the James Dean of French film in the 1920s. Over several scenes of *Un Chien Andalou*, Batcheff pursues the heroine, played by Simone Mareuil. Drummond suggests that 'Such a connection installs *Un Chien andalou* within the realm of parody by isolating the "star," underpinned by authorial continuity, as the main axis for its intertextuality with previous cinema.' Phillip Drummond, 'Textual Space in *Un Chien Andalou*,' *Screen*, Volume 18, Issue 3 (Autumn 1977): 55–120, 79. Five years before *Un Chien Andalou*, Tzara employed stage heroine Andrée Pascal for his leading lady in *Handkerchief*. The presence of this popular theatre actress, parodying the roles she played in boulevard theatre of the time, anticipates Buñuel and Dalí's application of the famous film actor in their surrealist parody of 1929.

⁶²³ Henri Béhar, *Etude sur le Théâtre Dada et Surréaliste* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 248.

⁶²⁴ Sandrow, 89.

piece of work, unlike the merging of dreams, reality and flashback as an aesthetic device in surrealist works.

In addition to the flashback sequence, Tzara interrupts the logical progression of time by the application of fast cuts: scenes switch rapidly between locations, and time is condensed between moments of narrative action, as is also the case in cinema. For example, in Act I, the Poet and Andrea have a phone conversation and a moment later she is announced at his door.

Tzara's manipulation of time aligns to theatrical techniques applied by Henri (le Douanier) Rousseau.⁶²⁵ While Rousseau is best known for his paintings and drawings, he was also a musician and writer. However, as Nancy Ireson notes, his plays *L'Etudiant en gougette* (1899), *Une visite à l'exposition de 1889* (1899) and *La vengeance d'une orpheline russe* (1898) 'fell into obscurity.'⁶²⁶ In 1921 (three years before he wrote *Handkerchief of Clouds*) Tzara attempted to purchase the unpublished manuscripts of *La vengeance d'une orpheline russe* and *Une visite à l'exposition de 1889*.⁶²⁷ Having finally acquired the manuscripts in 1945, in 1947 Tzara published the two plays accompanied by an appraisal of Rousseau's work. Rousseau's plays interested Tzara for they include dramaturgical devices which Tzara hoped to achieve in his own theatre practice: simultaneity, temporal manipulation, and cinematography.

Rousseau's plays consist of rapid successions of scenes, which Tzara viewed as pre-empting cinema. Tzara writes in his preface to *Une visite à l'exposition de 1889*:

Having become accustomed to a scene, the swift movement which is imposed on us, from past to future or to a different location, demands an effort of abstraction, analogy and deduction by our intelligence which, like a ladder as opposed to a staircase, removes all that is unnecessary, forcing us to accept the same principle of continuity that lies at the very heart of cinema.⁶²⁸

By the analogy of the ladder, Tzara aligns Rousseau's technique to cinematic editing. Scenes jump between moments of narrative action (pausing at essential episodes only),

⁶²⁵ Rousseau was also called Le Douanier (the customs officer) after his occupation as a tax and toll collector.

⁶²⁶ Nancy Ireson, 'Tristan Tzara and the plays of Douanier Rousseau,' *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 146, no. 1218 (September, 2004): 616-621, 616.

⁶²⁷ Sonia and Robert Delaunay owned the manuscripts of Rousseau's plays; Tzara became aware of Rousseau's theatrical works through his friendship with the Delaunay couple.

⁶²⁸ Tzara, Preface to H. Rousseau, *Une Visite à l'Exposition de 1889* (Geneva: Pierre Cailler, 1947), 14, quoted in Ireson, 619.

condensing time and space, and it remains to the viewers' imagination ('intelligence') to fill in the gaps.

This notion is demonstrated in *Une visite à l'exposition de 1889*: a play about a group of country travellers who visit Paris for the 1889 Universal Exhibition as the title denotes. The group tour around Paris in record time; they seemingly fly from place to place in a synthesis of movement. Tzara suggests that 'this synthesizing which, in certain ways anticipates cinematographic cutting is responsible for, among other things, the *modern* character of his work [original emphasis].'⁶²⁹ The same concept can be recognised in in *Handkerchief of Clouds*. Over the course of Acts VI to X, the following various actions and locations are presented. In Act VI, the Poet is on a boat. In the Act VII flashback sequence, Andrea and her friend are in a boudoir discussing the Poet. Act VIII consists entirely of a Colonial Gentleman's monologue, which takes place on an island. In Act IX, the Poet is in a forest delivering a monologue. Partway through Act X the Commentators announce that the Poet is returning to Paris, and immediately afterwards the heroes are reunited at a restaurant table. The audience receives limited information about the Poet's journey, and the activities of the couple while the Poet is away, and are left to fill in the gaps.⁶³⁰ In this way, Tzara mimics cutting techniques in film.

With the aid of a rolling screen on which are seen blown up postcards denoting location, Tzara's scenes flip between place and time. Its fifteen short acts play across various locations, time fluctuates between present and past and the final two scenes jump forward twenty years each. In doing so, Tzara brings to the stage the simultaneity of space and time that he praised in Rousseau's work, allowing him to translate cinematic methods to the stage.

The cinematic tropes present in Tzara's work do not only offer an 'economy of action' as is the case in Rousseau's plays,⁶³¹ they are also designed to introduce thematic complexities. Here I return to the moment of the flashback to reveal an important theme presented in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, that of the role of memory. In cinema, the flashback can offer information about a character which is not revealed in the dominant narrative. This is not always the case in Tzara's play. In the flashback sequence of Act VII, Andrea

⁶²⁹ Tzara, Preface to H. Rousseau, *Une Visite...*, 16, quoted in Peterson, 1971, 151.

⁶³⁰ In Act VII Andrea is still in love with the Poet. When Andrea appears next, she seems content in her marital life. Tzara does not provide information as to if, how, or when Andrea stopped loving the Poet.

⁶³¹ Ireson, 619.

confesses to her friend that she is in love with the Poet. Tzara's flashback does not give further insight into the lives of the characters for the audience is already aware of Andrea's feelings at this point in the narrative. The Banker, upon seeing his wife upset, remarks: 'Andrea, calm yourself. Don't you realize that my tenderness knows no obstacles? (119)' yet again, the audience is already aware that the Banker (post-financial loss) loves his wife. This scene does not progress the narrative and therefore it remains to be discussed what purpose this device serves.

The Role of Memory in *Handkerchief of Clouds*: The Return of The Absurd

Tzara includes the flashback to establish a wider theme present in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, that of the futility and inconsistency of memory. As the Commentary has already explained in Act I regarding the first meeting between Andrea and the Poet:

C: ... They are in the process of dropping the stories of their lives like a rosary of pebbles that they let fall on the road in order to help them find their way back.

B: But soon it will be night and they will not be able to find the road that they marked with the pebbles, because the next day those pebbles will look just like all the others on the road, and everything will be thrown into confusion, the confusion which we try to escape from every day.

C: You are right, we can never turn back on the road of memory [...] but always on another road than that on which memory has run. (115)

The theme of memory reappears throughout *Handkerchief*. The Poet's Act IX monologue muses how memory is all he has to remind him of Andrea. Here, memory serves only as a torment, a way to measure the distance of time since he has not seen her: '...vibrant as her word at the sound of memory, I was standing here trying to measure the residue of time which memory deposits along its journey...' Just before he kills himself, the Poet reflects on the Banker and Andrea, saying that after he had been killed, the Banker 'did not know that he was going to trouble the memory that he left behind in the life of Andrea (128).' In these examples, memory is a wasteful exercise from which nothing productive comes. And this is also the case with the representation of memory in the flashback sequence as discussed above.

The representation of memory in *Handkerchief of Clouds* does not align to surrealist tendencies whereby through accessing memory, dreams and the subconscious, a greater or hidden knowledge can be gained (psychoanalysis). Rather, Tzara's presentation of memory

suggests that it cannot be harnessed for psychological insight. Hentea notes that the ‘causal links created by memory, the unity of life that such a faculty can provide, is radically critiqued here – the idea that the future world is necessarily the result of some ordered, meaningful past is the central lie that Tzara wants to expose.’⁶³² This returns us to the presentation of absurdism in Tzara’s playwriting.

To reiterate: absurdist theatre presents narratives within which – regardless of the decisions (or lack thereof) made by the characters, or their thoughts, emotions, ambitions and desires, the result is the same – life is meaningless and full of suffering. As C quips in Act IX: ‘nothing can have any importance; you can say “rubber” and think “chrysanthemum” (122).’ This latter statement about the confluence of two seemingly incompatible concepts, relates to both Tzara’s definition of Dada: ‘the point where yes and no come together,’ and to the absurdist condition: the experience of the disjuncture between explanation (language) and existence.⁶³³ Due to these opposing realities, the characters in *Handkerchief of Clouds* are prevented from fulfilling their ambitions. When the Poet has the Banker killed by Apaches,⁶³⁴ this action does not cause Andrea to reveal her love to the Poet. Neither does the Poet find it possible to proposition Andrea after her husband has gone. Several years later, during a conversation with her children as presented in Act XIV, Tzara explains how the Poet’s actions amounted to nothing:

ANDREA: It was not the Poet who did it, it wasn’t him, I’m positive about that. His feelings were more noble.

SECOND CHILD: True, because if it were the Poet who killed him, why would the Poet have hidden his love from Mother, *after* as well as before the murder? (128)

It *was* the Poet who killed the Banker, but this action did not progress the Poet’s ambition, on the contrary, it halted further action. Hentea notes that ‘every movement in the play contains an opposite reaction that repulses its forward motion.’⁶³⁵ Andrea loves her husband when he does not love her; Andrea loves the Poet when he does not love her; the Banker loves Andrea when she does not love him; the Poet loves Andrea when she has forgotten him. These opposing motions create ‘a situation where the actors, actions, and psychological motivations are ensnared in a never-ending, inescapable circle of futility.’⁶³⁶

⁶³² Hentea, 2015 (ii), 67.

⁶³³ To recall, absurdist theory as presented by Albert Camus explains that existence cannot be explained through rational thought. This situation results in a conflict between a will to articulate the experience existence and the inability to do so.

⁶³⁴ The Poet’s part in the Banker’s death is finally revealed in Act XV.

⁶³⁵ Hentea, 2015 (ii), 67.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

Vasile Maruta also discusses futility in Tzara's play, and her argument specifies the theme of futile love. Maruta suggests that the 'vital force' of 'shouted,' 'suggested' or 'manufactured' love rendered as 'total confusion of existential facts' characteristic of Tzara's early Dada plays (consider the bizarre relationship between Eye and Mouth from *The Gas Heart* for example), is replaced in *Handkerchief* by a 'stammering, even aberrant reflection on the pathways of love.'⁶³⁷ This is also the case with Tzara's *Heads or Tails* (based on the legend of Helen of Troy), written around the time of *Handkerchief of Clouds*. *Heads or Tails* is discussed in the following chapter. These plays take classical sources (*Hamlet* and *The Iliad*) to 'develop such a debate about an idea of love that has become inconceivable in the modern context, where morality and reason take away the creative force by transforming it into a permanent source of distress.'⁶³⁸

This condition of permanent distress is described by absurdism. Regardless of her love for the Poet, moral behaviour prevents Andrea from fulfilling her desire. As Andrea's friend, reminding her of her husband, advises: 'love is a duty like any other. It is nothing interesting... All the rest is romanticism (119-120).' Albert Camus suggests that to recognise the absurdity of existence liberates us from the desire for another existence (which absurdism renders impossible) and allows us to live in the present.⁶³⁹ Andrea realises the impossibility of her love for the Poet and accepts her domestic situation. The Poet is incapable of accepting the impossibility of his love for Andrea and lives in torment, eventually finding escape only in death.

Existential philosophy, which relates to absurdism via Camus and Jean Paul Sartre, explains the simultaneous acceptance and rejection of death in life. That is, we are aware of death all around us as something that occurs to others, consequentially removing the reality of our own death from our everyday mode of being. Martin Heidegger explains this situation as follows: 'One of these days one will die too, in the end, but right now it has nothing to do with us.'⁶⁴⁰ In Tzara's play, as in the Theatre of the Absurd, the reality of death, and the impossibility of imagining death in life, renders meaningful life absurd. As

⁶³⁷ Vasile Maruta, 'Théâtre Dada de Tristan Tzara et *Métamorphoses Illogiques* de l'Amour,' 288. Article source online at <http://www.diacronia.ro/ro/indexing/details/A5355/pdf>, on 10 July 2019.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

⁶³⁹ In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus concedes that 'one must imagine Sisyphus happy' for he accepts the absurdism of his existence. Camus, 123.

⁶⁴⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 296-297.

the Captain in Act VI explains: 'death' is of all dangers 'the worst' because 'it is impossible to imagine the abrupt end of consciousness, which sets in motion the wristwatch of time (119).'

Andrea realises the futility of action reflecting that all her life 'I was thrown from one event to the next like a tennis ball (119),' yet she lives on accepting this (absurd) situation. In the final act, the Poet faces a crisis caused by an inability to accept the absurdity of existence, and realising the futility of his love for Andrea and his life moreover, kills himself. The questions of whether to exist or not, what it is to exist, and the struggles of man in the face of love and passion are exemplified in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, as they are throughout theatre history. Indeed, living under the restraints of moral life is what Shakespeare's Hamlet faces, as does Tzara's Poet. I will now discuss the representation of *Hamlet* in *Handkerchief of Clouds*.

Tzara, the Poet, and Hamlet

Tzara's fixation with Hamlet began when he was affiliated with the symbolist movement while still in Romania.⁶⁴¹ Aileen Robbins notes that Hamlet:

was one of the central myths of the [s]ymbolist poets and figured in the work of Mallarmé, who regarded Hamlet not as a man struggling to resolve an Oedipal dilemma but as a morbid dreamer who spent long hours staring at a skull, obsessed and tempted by death.⁶⁴²

Between 1913 and 1915 Tzara worked towards publishing a book of verses about Hamlet. Although this venture was never realised, Tzara's Hamlet poems were translated into French by Ilarie Voronca and appear in Tzara's *Œuvres Complètes* volume 1.⁶⁴³ In these poems, Tzara muses 'What kind of woman was Ophelia? She was blonde with tousled hair like the moon in the cushion of an unravelled cloud. Like the moon through the cauldron of water seen at the monastery and she was tall and she was slim.' Of Hamlet, Tzara says: 'Nails were thrust into his soul and small bunches of flowers were suspended.'⁶⁴⁴ The reader can discern a sympathy and passion for both figures and the poetic tragedy of their

⁶⁴¹ During 1912, Tzara, Marcel Janco and Ion Vinea co-edited the short-lived but influential Bucharest journal *Simbolul*.

⁶⁴² Robbins, 111.

⁶⁴³ *OC*, 1:437-440. In 1974, a poem by Tzara titled *Hamlet* was published in the journal *La Quinzaine littéraire*.

⁶⁴⁴ *OC*, 1:437/439.

demise. The affiliation with the symbolist hero of Shakespeare's text is sustained in *Handkerchief*, evidenced by the pivotal role of the poetic dreamer – not only represented in the character of Hamlet as he appears in Act XII, but in the play's main character – the Poet. As previously noted, despite some dadaist quips about poetry being 'a negligible product of latent madness, and that it is not in the least necessary for the onward march of civilization and progress (122),' the necessity of poetry in life is embodied in the characterisation of the Poet, who, like Tzara, 'needs to take poetry as reality, and reality as an illusion (122).' Or, as Andrea says of the Poet (and equally of Tzara): 'I never understood much of what he used to write... But then he wrote much less than he thought, since he wished to live his poetry (128).'

In Act XI of *Handkerchief of Clouds*, the protagonists are on their way to the theatre. The proceeding Act consists of three abridged scenes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Shakespeare's text is collaged into Tzara's, played for the characters as well as for the audience. The Poet, like Hamlet, intent on revenge (on the Banker/the King) plays out his fantasy on the stage within the stage. The Act XI Commentary explains: '*Hamlet* is playing. This production is a mousetrap and a surprise. It is the Poet who is the surprise, and who plays Hamlet. You will ask me why; but that is the mystery of the drama. The intelligent public will discover the key on the following day (125).' *Hamlet* in *Handkerchief* mimics the presentation of *The Mousetrap* (also known as *The Murder of Gonzago*)⁶⁴⁵ in Shakespeare's play: a play within the play in which the protagonist (Hamlet/the Poet) attempts to trap his enemies by representing, in dramatic interpretation, a crime similar to their own. In Shakespeare's play Hamlet presents a scene for the King and Queen (his uncle and mother) in which a man murders the King who is sleeping in the garden, marries the Queen and usurps the King. It is an internal representation of the external plot of *Hamlet*.

The composition of *Hamlet* in *Handkerchief* is as follows. Act XII: 'The Ramparts of Elsinore,' begins with Ophelia explaining to Polonius how Hamlet frightened her in her sitting room (Shakespeare's Act II, scene 1). This scene is cut short and is transposed to an exchange between Hamlet and Polonius in which Hamlet feigns madness. When asked what he is reading, Hamlet responds 'Words, words, words.' (Act II, scene 2). There are

⁶⁴⁵ In Act III, scene 2 of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Hamlet asks players to perform scenes from a play titled *The Murder of Gonzago*. When asked by his uncle, the King, for the name of the play, Hamlet responds: '*The Mousetrap*.'

several lines cut from the dialogue, ‘as if the modern director [Tzara] found it talkative.’⁶⁴⁶ Polonius exits (‘take my leave’), not before Hamlet pronounces: ‘You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal – except my life, except my life, except my life.’ Now alone, Tzara’s *Hamlet* flashes forward to a familiar monologue from Act II, scene 2 of Shakespeare’s play.⁶⁴⁷ In this monologue, in both Tzara and Shakespeare, Hamlet reveals his intentions:

I have heard that guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions (126).

Tzara’s scene then jumps to Shakespeare’s Act III, scene 2, sometime after *The Mousetrap* has been played and the King and Queen have exited. Polonius returns to the stage to inform Hamlet his that mother would like to see him, after which Hamlet finishes with: ‘now could I drink hot blood and do such bitter business as the day would quake to look on (126).’

Louis Aragon described the representation of *Hamlet* in Tzara’s play as a collage. In his essay on Tzara and collage, Aragon explains that collage is a medium that condenses separate works as a single essence, and he analyses Tzara’s collaging of *Hamlet* into *Handkerchief* to formulate this theory. According to Aragon the text is transposed from Jean Victor Hugo’s translation of *Hamlet*.⁶⁴⁸ As above detailed, the content of Shakespeare’s play is modified; Tzara selects only the essential elements of *Hamlet*, and redirects them.

Henri Béhar suggests that the combination of *Hamlet* and *Handkerchief* is composed of ‘two elements of the same nature.’ *Hamlet* in *Handkerchief* is ‘an aged fragment on a younger body, capable of better supporting the transplant.’⁶⁴⁹ The process Béhar describes relates to cubist (rather than dadaist) collage which transposes an outer reality into the pictorial world of the canvas, creating a new whole.⁶⁵⁰ The synthetic cubist collages of Picasso and Braque used pieces of glued material (often newspaper print) repurposed into pre-conceived compositions (forms were drawn on canvas before applying collaged

⁶⁴⁶ Aragon, ‘Petite note...’, quoted in Béhar, 1979, 207.

⁶⁴⁷ The monologue beginning: ‘Now I am alone. O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!’

⁶⁴⁸ Aragon, ‘Petite note...’, quoted in Béhar, 1979, 207.

⁶⁴⁹ Béhar, 1979, 208.

⁶⁵⁰ In 1931, some years after writing *Handkerchief of Clouds*, Tzara published ‘Le papier collé ou le proverbe en peinture,’ in which he discusses cubist collage.

material). For example, in Picasso's *Bottle and Glass on a Table* (1912), a rectangle newspaper fragment is collaged onto a drawing of a bottle. The newspaper shape matches that of the bottle; the bottle's form is completed by the collaged material (Fig. 14).

Dada collage is distinct from the cubist practice and juxtaposes incongruous images to create discordant realities (often reflecting the broken nature of the subject being presented: war, society, politics). The dadaist (and later surrealist) Max Ernst defined collage as 'the systematic exploitation of the chance or artificially provoked confrontation of two or more mutually alien realities on an obviously inappropriate level – and the poetic spark which jumps across when these realities approach each other.'⁶⁵¹ This definition relates to the language collage of the *Celestial Adventure* plays in which Tzara unites words of incompatible qualities and meanings alien to one another to create linguistic restlessness. This is not the case with *Handkerchief of Clouds*: here, the disparate elements are compatible. Tzara transposes a fragment of an existing play into a new play; the material is repurposed to fit its new mould. Additionally, the presentation of *Hamlet* in *Handkerchief* is not unexpected; it is foreshadowed by the Commentators who explain that the characters will attend the theatre (Commentary to Acts X and XI) and introduce the play before it is played.

Tzara chooses *Hamlet* because the Poet's actions match Hamlet's. The scenes transfer because the mousetrap ruse fulfils the same role in both Shakespeare and Tzara. Just as Hamlet chooses the tale of the *Murder of Gonzago* to be performed before the King and Queen, the Poet selects scenes from Shakespeare that he believes best represent his assessment of the situation with Andrea and the Banker. In these scenes, Hamlet feigns madness in his love for Ophelia, and reveals his intentions with regards to the mousetrap. Tzara's Poet hopes that Andrea will realise that he is incapable of expressing his love (as Hamlet cannot show his love for Ophelia), and that the Banker will realise he has usurped the Poet's position as revealed in the plot of Hamlet.

Hamlet intends his mother and uncle to cower at the content of *The Mousetrap*. This is also the intention of the Poet in his choice of scenes from *Hamlet*. Where Shakespeare's Hamlet is justified in his actions, Tzara's Poet is misguided. The analogy of *Hamlet* is not comprehended, for the Banker has committed no treacherous act. Commentator A

⁶⁵¹ Max Ernst, quoted in Dietmar Elger, *Dadaism* (Köln: Taschen, 2015), 24.

explains: ‘the Poet is mistaken, because the Banker is the legal spouse of Andrea. It was moreover their first and last marriage. We saw that the Poet was neither Andrea’s son nor the Banker’s nephew... (127)’ In his obsessive love for Andrea, the Poet places the Banker in the role of the usurper. He believes, like Hamlet, that it is his task to unmask (what in his mind is) unjust behaviour: the Banker reclaiming his Wife when the Poet loves her. The Poet is unable to act because of the renewed love of the spouses and he uses Hamlet to represent his feelings and to avenge him. This is in vain because, as A explains: ‘the Banker and his wife are a very respectable family, carp of the truth, and are not in any way related to either the worm-eaten King or Queen of Denmark (127).’⁶⁵² The Poet’s plot backfires for the Banker is not the villain of the piece, and in the next act, the Poet will become the murderer.

Hamlet does not solve the Poet’s dilemma, and after the scene at the theatre, he assassinates his rival. While it is unknown who was behind the Apaches’ violent killing of the Banker in Act XIII, the Commentary that follows questions: ‘Was it a simple or complex murder of the drama of jealousy? Would Hamlet have killed the Banker? (127)’ The Commentary does not ponder whether the Poet killed the Banker, but rather did Hamlet. Having previously announced that the Poet plays the role of Hamlet, the audience can ascertain that the Commentators are implicating the Poet in the murder.

The final act of Tzara’s play occurs forty years after the murder of the Banker. The Poet is seated at a table and announces: ‘Let’s add a little more confusion to these acts; but graciously and ironically. Hamlet (he laughs) (128).’ He catches a fly and explains that the fly is an irritant to the world, but it is unconscious to this fact. He then reveals:

The Banker is dead, assassinated, but he did not know it. He was like the fly: he did not know that he was going to trouble the memory that he left behind in the life of Andrea. Who killed the Banker? I know who (128).

A concierge enters and the Poet reminisces with him about ‘the plays we used to act in together (129).’ At this point the Commentary interrupts to analogise the Poet’s loneliness:

A: That’s what became of Ophelia.

B: The lake in which she tried to drown herself froze over with death and terror at the approach of her innocent apparition.

A: She never could find shelter anywhere except near the heater in a vacant concierge’s room (129).

⁶⁵² ‘Carp of the truth’ refers to Polonius’ line in Act II, scene I: ‘You see now, your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth,’ meaning that by telling a lie the truth will be revealed.

Alone, with only a concierge for occasional company, the Poet kills himself. The Commentators auction his soul which sells for '49 million.' 'A: They put his soul up for auction in Heaven. They buy it by numbers from the cloud of forgetfulness. On the ladder of numbers, they raised the value of his soul.' In the final stage direction 'The Poet rises to heaven... (129)' The Poet is not sanctified for good deeds, but for the monetary value his soul wins.

Why did the Poet wait forty years to commit this act? To return to the 'over-arching anti-principle of Dada': absurdism,⁶⁵³ the Poet's lack of action up to this point, relates to the condition of life as presented in the Theatre of the Absurd. The Theatre of the Absurd abounds with characters who are trapped in limbo like existences while passing the slow wait till death. Winnie and Willie in Beckett's *Happy Days* mete out an impossible boredom while waiting to be finally consumed by their surroundings. May in Beckett's *Footfalls* paces up and down a narrow strip with painful slowness across four acts. In the final act May has disappeared; finally becoming a ghost, having lived her entire corporeal existence as a ghost, slowly pacing. Tzara pre-empts these absurd narratives in *Handkerchief of Clouds* and the fate of its heroes.

Tzara's Poet waits until he is old, and death is upon him before making his final gesture. Andrea too finds little comfort in her long life after the death of the Banker. To repeat the above Commentary, here in relation to Andrea:

A: That's what became of Ophelia.

B: The lake in which she tried to drown herself froze over with death and terror at the approach of her innocent apparition.

A: She never could find shelter anywhere except near the heater in a vacant concierge's room (129).

The Commentary here suggests that in this variation of events, Ophelia does not drown in the lake, but lives on as an 'apparition' finding comfort only 'in a vacant concierge's room,' mirroring the Poet's final days. Andrea as Ophelia grows old this way in Tzara's version of Shakespeare's narrative.

Andrea says to the Poet towards the beginning of the play: 'I would also like to benefit from the carelessness of those who do not perceive that time passes with painful slowness (117).' And this is Tzara's point (as it would be Beckett's): time passes with painful

⁶⁵³ Forcer, 2.

slowness, therefore the fate of the Poet, and that of Andrea, is to move gradually towards inevitable demise when they will ‘drop dead in the end (117).’ In the final act, Tzara rejects the destinies of the characters in *Hamlet*, in favour of another tragic finale. To conclude, I will now return to the performance of *Handkerchief of Clouds* to discuss how this ‘tragic farce’ was received.

The Performance and Reception of Handkerchief of Clouds

Reviews of ‘Les Soirées’ discussing Tzara’s play are mostly critical, with one suggesting *Handkerchief of Clouds* was ‘a case of incoherence and snobbery, the manifestation of a desire to be admired in spite of a complete absence of talent, to mystify a few clueless bourgeois – and most importantly, a sign of hopeless stupidity.’⁶⁵⁴ An article in the London Observer notes the beauty of the setting with ‘blue hydrangeas on the stage [...] attractive scenery and costume,’ yet ‘the *Mouchoir de Nuages*, by Tristan Tzara, is incoherent stuff, which the Comte de Beaumont and his distinguished collaborators and interpreters had best have left alone.’⁶⁵⁵

The performance caused such diverse opinion that *Les Nouvelles littéraires* on 25 May 1924 gave two contradictory reviews. This is the first by Fernand Gregh:

Marry the *Wedding on the Eiffel Tower* with *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and you have *Handkerchief of Clouds* by M. Tristan Tzara. I accept all innovators if they really search. But when they offer me ‘already done’ I protest. What is put there, obviously to make a scandal, in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, has already served: a firecracker does not burst twice.⁶⁵⁶

The comparison to Pirandello is an easy one given that both plays interrogate the illusory nature of acting and theatrical representation. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, this had been Tzara’s ambition since the early Dada plays.

A review by Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes in *Les Feuilles libres* identifies this theatrical nuance in Tzara’s work, and replies point by point to Gregh’s reproaches:

Handkerchief of Clouds is a work absolutely characteristic of Tristan Tzara. [...] There is nothing in common with Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, where the drama is woven between the characters and the actors in charge of

⁶⁵⁴ Bibliothèque Richelieu (Paris), Fonds Rondel 12581, f. 86, quoted in Hentea, 2015 (ii), 67.

⁶⁵⁵ *Observer* (London), 25 May 1921 [sic. The date logged in the archive is 1921, however this performance occurred in 1924], BLJD TZR 864 VI.

⁶⁵⁶ Fernand Gregh, *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 25 May 1924, quoted in *OC*, 1:690.

representing them. One wanted to restrict the beauty of *Handkerchief of Clouds* to this originality: the stage represents both the stage and the offstage environments.⁶⁵⁷

Ribemont-Dessaignes continues his discussion of Tzara's dramaturgy and hails the theatrical medium as superior to the visual medium for its ability to convey striking imagery, and its innovation of scenography, poetry and visual reality on stage: 'The soft and fluid light of poetry enlightens this compression, so clearly that any precision of the visual artists of reality becomes inert darkness.'⁶⁵⁸

Les Nouvelles littéraires' other review of Tzara's play also defends the play's poetry and daring. Giving an overview of the Soirées de Paris, René Crevel writes:

So at the end of the season, we must thank Tzara doubly for finally bringing to the theatre all his gifts of poetry, lyricism, intelligence, humour and language. [...] the intensity of poetry that manifests itself in the humour of a dialogue or the lyricism of a monologue, reveals in Tzara that flame which burned the best...⁶⁵⁹

That is, with *Handkerchief*, Tzara translates his poetry to the stage. The centrality of poetry in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, which 'stages the poet,' is further clarified by Ribemont-Dessaignes and he concludes his article by saying that 'Tzara is really the poet. And after all, now that Dada has given its soul to God, that is, poetry to the poet, we must recognise that there is nothing so consoling in the world as poetry...'⁶⁶⁰

Where Crével and Ribemont-Dessaignes appreciate that *Handkerchief* evidences Tzara's evolution from Dada, other reviewers accuse Tzara of having 'betrayed his friends.' Furthermore, they bemoaned the lack of 'scandal.'⁶⁶¹ Yet for Tzara, who shed Dada with seemingly great ease, *Handkerchief of Clouds* was not meant to be a Dada provocation.⁶⁶² As Crével recognises: '*Handkerchief of Clouds* is not a Dada manifestation, but a tragedy of a whole new form [in which] the author wanted to realise all his poetry and philosophy.'⁶⁶³ That is, by the time of writing *Handkerchief of Clouds*, Tzara's motivations had shifted from dadaist destruction to constructive creative pursuits.

⁶⁵⁷ Ribemont-Dessaignes, *Les Feuilles libres*, no. 41, January-February 1926, quoted in *OC*, 1:691.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁹ René Crevel, 'Tribune Libre,' *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, 25 May 1924, quoted in *OC*, 1:690-691.

⁶⁶⁰ Ribemont-Dessaignes, *Les Feuilles libres*, quoted in *OC*, 1:691.

⁶⁶¹ Bibliothèque Richelieu (Paris), Fonds Rondel 12581, f. 74, 75, quoted in Hentea, 2015 (ii), 67.

⁶⁶² In an interview with Roger Vitrac in 1923 when asked 'Have you considered Dada to be an end?' Tzara responded: 'Never, and moreover, I intend never to pronounce that word again. Dada has been a purely personal adventure, the materialisation of my disgust [...] After Dada, active indifference, spontaneity, relativity, and the current couldn't-care-less attitude invaded life.' 'Tristan Tzara va cultiver ses vices,' *Le Journal du peuple*, 14 April 1923, quoted in Sanouillet, 277.

⁶⁶³ Crevel, *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, quoted in *OC*, 1:691.

While his detractors outweighed his supporters, Tzara remained undiscouraged and responded to negative reviews by stating that his ‘essentially poetic [play] could only find a few supporters [...] I am thrilled that the defenders of the *théâtre de boulevard* found my piece bad, incoherent, insane.’⁶⁶⁴ And despite the thematic content of the play, Tzara was at this time not discouraged in love. In a fateful encounter in his personal life, Tzara met the Swedish artist Greta Knutson at an after-party for *Handkerchief*.⁶⁶⁵ They married the following year and in 1927 their son Christophe (who would be Tzara’s only child) was born. And so, while the Poet in Tzara’s play never reaches fulfilment in love, succumbing to death in the end, by the close of the season of *Handkerchief of Clouds*, the poet Tzara had entered the most important romantic relationship of his life.

Tzara’s Theatre after Handkerchief of Clouds

Katherine Papachristos suggests that with *Handkerchief of Clouds*, Tzara finally succumbs to literature.⁶⁶⁶ Whereas in Tzara’s previous Dada plays, ‘the public had been required to divest themselves of respect for drama and for the contract into which playwrights are assumed to enter with their audiences,’ with *Handkerchief*, Tzara creates a complicity between audience and performer: the humour is transparent and ‘meant to be enjoyed by everyone.’⁶⁶⁷ Notably, the Commentary in Tzara’s fourth play explains the author’s intentions and elucidates its dramatic form, whereas commentary in the earlier plays was included to subvert dramatic convention.

Having devoted much of the intervening period since the end of Dada to critical writing on theatre history and contemporaneous dramatic innovation, Tzara’s fourth play achieves his ambitions for the stage. His theatrical works written around the same time and after *Handkerchief of Clouds* – *Heads or Tails*, *Faust*, and *The Flight* – continue to develop conventions that undermine the fictive nature of dramatic convention. For the remainder of his theatrical career, Tzara continued to experiment with and challenge the medium of theatre, yet never again would he return to the incoherence of the early Dada plays.

⁶⁶⁴ Bibliothèque Richelieu (Paris), Fonds Rondel 12581, f. 108, quoted in Hentea, 2015 (ii), 68.

⁶⁶⁵ Hentea, 2015 (ii), 68.

⁶⁶⁶ Matthews suggests that this is Tzara’s betrayal of Dada, 43; Papachristos discusses *Handkerchief* as a return to writing, 103.

⁶⁶⁷ Matthews, 43.

CHAPTER 10: THE UNPUBLISHED PLAYS OF TRISTAN TZARA

Of Tzara's seven plays, two have fallen into obscurity; they remained incomplete, unperformed and unpublished during Tzara's lifetime. The first, *Pile ou Face (Heads or Tails)*, manipulates the Helen of Troy legend, and parallels the classic love triangle structure of *Handkerchief of Clouds*. Henri Béhar suggests that the dialogue dates from 1923 for its resemblance to Tzara's other works written at that time.⁶⁶⁸ Thematically and linguistically, it sits somewhere between *The Gas Heart* and *Handkerchief of Clouds*. The other unpublished play, *Faust*, is the issue of Tzara's second collaboration with Nancy Cunard of 1924. *Faust* is a French translation of Christopher Marlowe's Elizabethan tragedy, *Doctor Faustus*, of which Tzara completed the beginning, the end, and some other fragments.⁶⁶⁹ In a letter to the publisher of the *Transatlantic Review* (no. 3, September 1924), Tzara said of the endeavour that 'there is a test to parallel the intensity and quality of Marlowe's work in a French translation.'⁶⁷⁰

These plays have been grouped together here for their status as incomplete and unpublished, but also because they are included amongst Tzara's plays based on classical themes. Together with *Handkerchief of Clouds* (loosely premised on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*), *Heads or Tails* and *Faust* take classical sources, which Tzara both respects and neglects. The two narratives also relate thematically, for the figure of Helen of Troy appears in the Faustian legend.⁶⁷¹ I propose that, had Tzara completed these plays, the tales of Helen and Faust might have been united in one theatrical work, collaged together.

Heads or Tails and *Faust* have been overlooked in Dada and Tzara scholarship.⁶⁷²

However, when considered alongside Tzara's other theatrical works, these unpublished plays further determine how Tzara's theatre poses a challenge to traditional dramaturgical values. It is crucial to this thesis' discussion on the theatre of Tristan Tzara to provide a complete account of Tzara's theatrical career. This chapter fulfils a missing link in the narrative of the theatre of Tristan Tzara.

⁶⁶⁸ *OC*, 1:723.

⁶⁶⁹ It is generally agreed that Marlowe wrote *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* between 1589 and 1592. Two versions were published some years later. Tzara's translation is taken from a 1604 edition.

⁶⁷⁰ *Transatlantic Review* no. 3 (September 1924), 311, quoted in *OC*, 1:724.

⁶⁷¹ Helen of Troy appears in scene XIII of Marlowe's version and significantly features in Goethe's nineteenth-century play *Faust, Part II*.

⁶⁷² Béhar provides a short discussion on these plays in *OC*, and mentions them in a footnote in his *Le théâtre dada et surréaliste*, 214.

Heads or Tails

In the fonds Tzara archived in the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, there appears (in typed form) Acts I and III of a play titled *Pile ou Face, ou le raccroc sentimental*.⁶⁷³

Additionally, there is a notebook containing a handwritten draft of Act I of the same play, and a separate handwritten page including a different version of the opening monologue along with some fragments of dialogue that were never posthumously published.⁶⁷⁴ Henri Béhar compiles the most complete versions of Acts I and III in Tzara's *Œuvres Complètes* volume 1.

Heads or Tails is structured around three characters: Helen, Paris and Écume (which translates as Foam).⁶⁷⁵ A fourth character, the Director, introduces the premise. Both Paris and Foam are in love with Helen. When the Director calls them, they present themselves to Helen and declare their love. Helen is tasked to choose between them; incapable of deciding, she asks the Director to select for her. The Director responds that 'this is totally forbidden to me. It's against the play (532).'⁶⁷⁶ As a compromise, the Director suggests to Helen: 'decide your fate with a Franc coin. You throw it on the ground. Heads or tails. Heads is Foam, tails is Paris. But you must make yourself hold the promise that chance will dictate to you (532).' The outcome of this game of chance reveals that Foam has won. Paris and Foam re-enter and engage in an argument. The Director breaks off the fight and all four sing: 'The street lights up with the sound of the bus / The birds fly like snow upside down / But the spectators who listened to our nonsense will know that I love... (533)' Paris and Foam complete the song by singing in unison: 'Helen.' Helen deceives the game and announces that she chooses Paris. The Director shouts 'Treason!' and demands that Helen be shot. A revolver is produced. Foam shoots and kills the Director. The three remaining characters fall over then get up and run away.

⁶⁷³ BLJD TZR 652-3.

⁶⁷⁴ BLJD TZR 650-1.

⁶⁷⁵ The French word 'écume' translates as foam (on waves) or froth (on liquid). In Mallarmé's symbolist poetry 'écume' relates to the sea foam or sea spray of Ancient Greek mythological tales, especially in relation to Aphrodite. See A. Lytton Sells, 'Reflexions on Stéphane Mallarmé: Some Greek and English Reminiscences,' *The Modern Language Review*, vol. 41, no. 4 (October, 1946): 362-381. Before relocating to Zurich in 1916, Tzara was affiliated with the symbolist journal *Simbolul* in Bucharest. *Simbolul*, which promoted the French movement Symbolism, was a 'training ground for Tzara's poetic development...' (Hentea, 2014, 32). It is possible that Tzara includes the character Écume in relation to symbolist poetry.

⁶⁷⁶ *Pile ou Face* has not been published in an English translation. I have translated the play from *OC*. Page numbers refer to the original French text in *OC*, 1.

Tzara subtitled his play: ‘a pantomime in three acts.’⁶⁷⁷ The term pantomime applies most fittingly to the third act, which consists of a series of tableaux in which the protagonists are chased by the police. The visual structure of Act III revisits the cinema aesthetic realised in *Handkerchief of Clouds*. A full analysis of Act III will follow.

Tzara’s Characters and Greek Legend

As introduced, the primary characters in *Heads or Tails* are taken from Ancient Greek mythology: Helen (of Troy/Sparta), Paris (Prince of Troy) and Foam (who stands for both Menelaus the King of Sparta, and the sea foam from which the goddess Aphrodite was born). The fourth central character is the Director.⁶⁷⁸ The Director explains that Paris’ ‘origins date back to mythology, and his beauty draws a savoury sap through such long and illustrious roots (525-526).’ Tzara’s Paris lacks ambition and intelligence. He is incapable of explaining in competent language why he loves Helen:

PARIS: ...I have seen you and I love you.

THE DIRECTOR: Is that all?

PARIS: That’s all (528).

Like Paris of Troy, Tzara’s Paris wins Helen through no deed of his own, but rather by deception. In Tzara’s play, Helen cheats the coin toss (and her betrothal to Foam) by eloping with Paris. In the contest known as the Judgement of Paris in Ancient Greek legend, Helen is promised to Paris by Aphrodite after Paris judges the goddess of love the most beautiful. However, the judgement is a trick (by Aphrodite) as Helen is already married to Menelaus. In order to claim his prize, Paris ‘steals’ Helen from Menelaus and they flee to Troy. Menelaus and the Spartans pursue them and thus ensues the ten years Trojan War.

⁶⁷⁷ The terms pantomime and mime were often used interchangeably in France in the early twentieth century. Annette Lust notes that ‘in the twentieth century, both mime and pantomime refer to a purely silent art that depicts actions through gestures and movements.’ As the art of mime developed in France, the terms evolved: ‘twentieth century mime is a silent art that does not, like the older, conventional pantomime rely on a limited gesture language – however eloquent.’ Mime aspires to ‘a more intense and poetic expression [...] and while pantomime deals more often with comedy, mime has a noble quality and excels at expressing the tragic.’ Annette Lust, *From the Greek Mimes to Marcel Marceau and Beyond: Mimes, Actors, Pierrots and Clowns: A Chronicle of the Many Visages of Mime in the Theatre* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press Inc., 2000), 3. Tzara’s application of the term pantomime refers to a physical and comedic silent gesture.

⁶⁷⁸ The final character in *Heads or Tails* is a secondary non-speaking character, the Policeman, who appears only in Act III.

The deeds of Helen of Troy are depicted contrarily in Ancient Greek literature, and Tzara's Helen is as elusive as her mythical equivalent. In accounts by varying sources, Helen of Troy is either willingly seduced or is raped by Paris; she either elopes with, or is abducted by Paris.⁶⁷⁹ Equally contradictory is Helen's fate after the Trojan war. In some accounts she returns to Sparta and lives a harmonious marital life with Menelaus, in others she is forced back to Sparta to be sentenced to death. In Tzara's *Heads or Tails*, Helen's inability to choose between Paris and Foam reflects the inconsistency of Helen's position in Greek mythology. Tzara's Helen lacks autonomy, and she is charmed equally by both suitors: of Foam, Helen exclaims: 'he is so sweet... (527).' Six lines later Helen says of Paris: 'He is so sweet, so charming! (528).' Having no definite preference, she lets chance decide her fate, as Helen of Troy's fate was decided by an arbitrary competition between vain goddesses, vying to be crowned most beautiful by the mortal Paris. In the opening monologue to *Heads or Tails*, the Director announces that Helen's 'obvious coquetry has put many sticks in wheels (525).' Just as Helen of Troy's beauty unwittingly triggered the Trojan War.

The final character in the love triangle of Tzara's narrative is Foam: 'Born from the friction of water against the wave. My father was Greek, my mother international (526).' In Greek myth, Aphrodite is born from the sea foam.⁶⁸⁰ Tzara's Foam represents the goddess who promises Helen to Paris. During the Trojan War, Aphrodite intervenes on behalf of the Trojans by rescuing Paris from combat with Menelaus. This notion is confused in Tzara's play for Foam is also a contender for Helen's love. In this way, Foam also represents Menelaus. Like Menelaus, Foam is the rightful claimant to Helen, only to have her stolen by Paris in a swift turn of events.

The Director characterises Foam as having 'a fiery temperament, which does not exclude his need for intelligence in love (526).' In Homer's *Iliad*, Menelaus is described as 'war-loving,' yet his deeds stem from a duty to reclaim his wife and his battle lust is secondary to that of his elder brother Agamemnon, the Spartan hero Achilles, and the Trojan Prince Hector. When Tzara's Helen announces 'May I love only... PARIS! (533)' Foam does not kill Helen as the Director insists but saves her by killing the Director and the three lovers

⁶⁷⁹ To offer a few examples from Ancient Greek literature: Herodotus claims that Helen was abducted; Sappho writes that Helen willingly abandoned her husband Menelaus and their child to elope with Paris; in Homer's *Iliad* it is unclear whether Helen was complicit or not in her relocation to Troy with Paris.

⁶⁸⁰ Aphrodite's origins in Greek mythology are as follows: Uranus, one of the first primordial beings, was castrated by his son, the Titan Cronos. Cronos threw Uranus' genitals into the ocean causing a foam to rise up in the waves. From this foam was born Aphrodite.

escape together pursued by the police. Tzara reconfigures the outcome of the Ancient Greek myth as a farcical spectacle.

Tzara's characters are hollow, only the Director displays psychological realism, primarily because he remains outwith the narrative action. The Director becomes frustrated with the behaviour of the characters as he conducts the order of the drama. The Director fulfils a dramatic technique that is by now a signature of Tzara's dramaturgy: a metatheatrical character who breaks the dramatic action. After being introduced, Foam announces: 'My name is Foam.' To which The Director quips: 'Everyone already knows that (526).' At her first impression of Foam, Helen announces: 'What an exquisite being! What a charming boy! (526)' The Director, directing from within the scene, interrupts to instruct: 'Let him speak first, Helen. Your remarks come after Foam's declaration (526).' The Director's interactions with the characters continue in this manner throughout the play.

The Director fulfils the roles occupied by Neck and Nose in *The Gas Heart*, and the Commentators of *Handkerchief of Clouds*; they are the external observers of the narrative who comment on and guide its progress. In Act I the Director explains: 'I am the director of the show. (Orchestra noise.) I conduct the action (525).' The other characters 'only appear when the Director calls them (525).' After Paris' opening speech, the Director calls for 'More restraint (528)' in his delivery. The Director moderates the other characters' actions, encouraging or constraining, dependent on individual moments in the plot sequence. For example, to elicit further dialogue between Paris and Helen, the Director advises the former that: 'Helen may not be very happy with this brief explanation...' prompting Paris to continue his speech.

In *Handkerchief of Clouds*, Tzara's Commentators fulfil a double function: they act as a chorus (in alignment with classical Greek drama); and alienate the audience from character identification (in opposition to mimetic tradition). This is also the case with the Director in *Heads or Tails*. Firstly, the Director fulfils the practical responsibilities of a chorus: introducing events that will occur and announcing character entrances and exits. The Director also provides a voice for the author: 'I represent, here, the author, his play and his views. (Orchestra noise.) Who is the author? A young man who has suffered enough to allow him to wear a monocle and even to be frivolous (525).'⁶⁸¹ Here, Tzara's Director

⁶⁸¹ Tristan Tzara indeed wore a monocle throughout the 1920s.

echoes the Commentary of *Handkerchief of Clouds*, critiquing the play (and its author) from within the play. To recall from the previous chapter, *Handkerchief's* Commentator C states: 'That is the reason this play is badly made. Even though we are the Commentators, that is to say, the subconscious of the drama, the playwright never even let *us* know why the Poet does not love Andrea.'⁶⁸²

Finally, the Director fulfils an alienating function: tasking the audience to remain objective observers by highlighting the artifice of the drama. Recalling *Handkerchief of Clouds* where the actors bear their own names onstage, in the opening monologue to *Heads or Tails*, the Director introduces each character and the actor who plays them: 'the role [of Helen] is played by Madame X' ; 'Monsieur Y interprets this difficult role [Paris] which has not aged him' ; 'Z is Foam this evening, but he is paid for it. Like me who directs the action. Only the author is entirely clean in this affair (525-526).'⁶⁸³ The Director ends the opening monologue by announcing that 'the scene occurs on the theatre stage (526),' leaving no illusion as to the artifice of the drama.

The Director's external comments maintain a distance between audience and performer, disallowing spectator/character sympathy (leading to catharsis), thereby fulfilling alienation. Tzara first attempted this technique with Nose and Neck in *The Gas Heart*. In his later play, *Handkerchief of Clouds*, Tzara combines the function of the traditional chorus with distancing or alienating devices, which would be formalised on the European stage by Bertolt Brecht. The character of the Director in *Heads or Tails* marks the shift from the style of *The Gas Heart* to that of *Handkerchief of Clouds*, identifying Tzara's theatrical evolution.

Heads or Tails and the Absurd: Language Satire and Verbal Farce

In Tzara's drafts to this play, the title vacillates between *Pile ou Face (Heads or Tails)*, and *Le Raccroc sentimental (The Sentimental Fluke)*. Both titles remain possible; left undecided at the time of writing. The French term 'raccroc' translates as a lucky stroke or

⁶⁸² *Handkerchief of Clouds*, 118.

⁶⁸³ Madame X is the moniker for the actress Jacqueline Chaumont, who played Mouth in the 1923 version of *The Gas Heart*. It is my assumption that 'Y' and 'Z' were to be replaced by the actors' names in production. By including Madame X's name in the script for *Heads or Tails*, indicates that potentially, Tzara was considering a production of the play at the time of writing.

fluke in the context of games, especially billiards: an unexpected stroke, which corrects a missed shot, more often to do with chance than intended action. In the prologue to the play, the Director, describes the fluke:

[The author] takes a green table which limits a moral situation, in any environment, of heterogeneous preference. On this table he places three balls, of which two are white and one is red. They are set in motion according to the rules of billiards. The first must touch the second, and by a skilful movement, calculated at the source of geometry and mechanics, go towards the third, and meet it in a triumphant collision. – The author has won. But the author also wins by mistaken calculation. That is called a fluke. He aims for the second ball, but by a surprising play of nature, independent of his will, his ball goes towards the third and returns to the second, resulting in a fortunate coincidence. The game begins (526).

The epilogue introduces the metaphor of the piece: the illusory nature of the free will of its characters. Tzara utilises a similar concept in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, that is, the instability of human emotions. Recall the relationships between Andrea, the Banker and the Poet in *Handkerchief*, whose every forward motion is counteracted by a negative motion. Andrea loves her husband when he does not love her; Andrea loves the Poet when he does not love her; the Banker loves Andrea when she does not love him; the Poet loves Andrea when she has forgotten him. These opposing motions create deadlock in which the characters are incapable of fulfilling their desires. A similar situation presents itself in *Heads or Tails*. Here, Tzara shows the fallibility of language to progress human affairs:

HELEN: Yes, indeed, Paris, have you nothing else to tell me?

PARIS: It may be raining tonight... I was planning to walk back... I could not smoke my pipe...

[...]

HELEN: But let's see let's see...

PARIS: But yes, because the rain will put out the fire (529).

Paris is incapable of entering into conversation with Helen, whom he is supposed to seduce, as if he inhabits another narrative. The lovers are ultimately incapable of organising a relationship.

While the narrative is presented more playfully in *Heads or Tails*, there remains at the heart of Tzara's playwriting the condition of the absurd. Absurdist playwrights use a range of techniques to uncouple language from reality. As detailed in Chapter 4, Stephen Halloran divides absurdist language into 'language satire' in which the writer demonstrates the futility of attempting to rationalise the world through communicable language, and 'verbal farce,' which presents language incompatible with accepted systems. The latter includes stripping words of their semiotic function and destabilising syntax.

While the earlier Dada plays invest more obviously in verbal farce with language reduced to sounds, symbols and nonsense syntax, this thesis has demonstrated that Tzara applies both systems across his playwriting career, pre-empting the Theatre of the Absurd. The middle plays (*The Gas Heart* and *Heads or Tails*) engage in both techniques with equal measure. Finally, the latter plays (*Handkerchief of Clouds* and *The Flight*) exemplify absurdism predominantly by their narratives, although language satire is evident also. *The Gas Heart* presents language satire when Tzara, speaking through the character Mouth demonstrates the futility of applying language to rationalise human experience: ‘I don’t mean to say anything. A long time ago I put everything I had to say into a hat box.’⁶⁸⁴ Following *The Gas Heart*, *Heads or Tails* also invests in language satire, where repetition and negative/positive questions/responses continue to reign. Helen and Paris’s interactions, as detailed above, demonstrate the application of language satire where the lovers are incapable of direct communication.

Helen’s interactions with Foam are equally futile, for she is unable to comprehend the meaning of his dialogue; selecting irrelevant information as the primary content.

FOAM: I will not mention my student days, which were perhaps quite sad because of the regime that we all suffer in our youth, the tyranny of the family in the first place, which I knew how to get rid of at the approach of my manhood, like a dirty shirt....

[...]

HELEN: But I hope that since then you have changed your shirt.

FOAM: ... like a dirty shirt, I said, to arrive at the crossroads of my life where the road must continue under the vibrant auspice of incandescent love (529).

Helen misunderstands Foam’s attempt to describe how life has led him to this moment; where destiny brings him to Helen. Helen mostly disregards the speech and construes his metaphor as a literal discussion about dirty laundry. In his analysis on Dada and Lacanian theory, Stephen Forcer suggests that:

Like characters in a Dada play (or in the Theatre of the Absurd) who drive forward a staged event even as they speak in preposterous non-sequiturs, for Lacan, human relationships are characterised by ‘a series of acceptable misunderstandings.’ [...] Dada, the exuberantly authentic proliferator of meaning, takes a Lacanian view of language – embracing the paradox whereby the contingent, approximate meaning is ubiquitous, and final, permanent meaning is impossible...⁶⁸⁵

Helen’s inability to comprehend Foam’s intentions exemplifies these ‘acceptable misunderstandings,’ finally rendering exact meaning between the characters impossible.

⁶⁸⁴ *The Gas Heart*, 143.

⁶⁸⁵ Forcer, 70.

The dynamic between Helen and Paris, and Helen and Foam, disallows the narrative to progress.

The overall linguistic structure consists of blunders and recoveries, like a scratched record. Lines commence, are stopped, begin again and are interrupted.

FOAM: I did my studies at the source of light.

THE DIRECTOR: It's not true.

FOAM: It's not true. I did my studies at the source of light.

THE DIRECTOR: It's not true.

FOAM: It's not true. I did my studies at the source of light.

THE DIRECTOR: It's not true.

FOAM: It's not true. I did my studies at the source of light.

THE DIRECTOR: Idiot, imbecile, cretin! Don't you understand? It's not true, it's not true, it's not true! I'm cutting you off (527).

Only a few lines later, this abortive dialogue continues only now it is Paris who repeats:

PARIS: I did my studies at the source of light.

FOAM (enters): This is unfair. Director, you are biased.

PARIS: Sorry, I beg your pardon. I did my studies at the source.

FOAM: Director, I protest, and if he continues...

PARIS: Sorry, I beg your pardon. I did my studies.

THE DIRECTOR: Very well!

PARIS: I did my studies (528).

While this linguistic format was introduced in *The Gas Heart*, the lines in *Heads or Tails* follow one another (although unsuccessfully) as opposed to the non-sequitur style of the previous play. Now, the characters engage in complete dialogue, and they compete for their lines to be heard. Yet the Director interrupts, and manoeuvres the focus from one to the other before each one can complete their speech.

FOAM: I have something to say.

THE DIRECTOR: Go for it!

[...]

PARIS: I have something to say.

THE DIRECTOR: Let him finish so that Helen can respond.

[...]

HELEN (flirting, walking around): Can I speak?

THE DIRECTOR: Please!

HELEN: Monsieur!

THE DIRECTOR: No.

HELEN: Dear Monsieur!

THE DIRECTOR: No.

HELEN: Dear and distinguished Monsieur!

THE DIRECTOR: No!

[...]

FOAM (enters): But I have not finished speaking yet.

THE DIRECTOR (to Paris): That's quite enough. (530-1)

While the language of *Heads or Tails* is ineffective for progressing the plot, investigation identifies a unique style to each character's dialogue. This unique linguistic signature is fully formed in *Handkerchief of Clouds* as discussed in the previous chapter. More than the other characters, Paris' speech resembles that of *The Gas Heart*: dialogue that respects syntax but is often removed from sense. Here is an example of Ear's speech pattern from *The Gas Heart*: 'His neck is narrow but his foot is quite large. He can easily drum with his fingers or toes on his oval belly which has already served as a ball several times during rugby.'⁶⁸⁶ And Paris in *Heads or Tails*: 'Dear Madame, I am not a negligible product of bottlenecked crowds. I am not the natural son of a Parisian suburb with an anonymous sewing machine (527-528).' In his interactions with Helen (see above), Paris appears to inhabit his own narrative, as do the characters in *The Gas Heart*.

Despite Paris' declaration that he is 'without parents and without history. Coming from the feverish fantasy of a faraway poet, I work to complete his imagination (528),' it is Foam who most resembles the figure of the poet in *Heads or Tails*, and his dialogue occasionally comes close to that of the Poet character from *Handkerchief of Clouds*. Here is an example of the Poet's Act IX monologue from *Handkerchief*: 'I, full of the sound left by her words, – of the erased prints of footsteps in the desert which was my destiny the day when I first saw her.'⁶⁸⁷ Similarly, Foam rhapsodies: 'You are beautiful Helen, and my admiration knows no bounds. Why must your beauty slide down my eyes like a shy sailboat, and my arms like the wind, powerless to hold her tight against their strength? (531)' The Director speaks in clear and direct dialogue: 'Is it me or you who directs the action? If you insist I will give you my place (527).' Finally, Helen represents the typical ingenue, her speech is simple and coquettish, imbued with feminine charm: 'Foam is intelligent. Paris is not. Foam is poor, but Paris is rich. The choice is difficult, but it is necessary to decide. Paris is beautiful but Foam has heart. Foam is simple but Paris is elegant. What to do? (531)'

All this gives the impression of extreme levity, offering an ironic alternative to boulevard theatre. Boulevard theatre developed in eighteenth-century Paris. Crime dramas and melodramas were performed in theatres on the Boulevard du Temple. These plays often included pantomime, acrobats and other attractions as interludes, which developed the boulevard theatre aesthetic. Tzara parodies the crime dramas of the boulevard theatre with his plot built on a love triangle gone wrong, which results in a murder (of the Director)

⁶⁸⁶ *The Gas Heart*, 136.

⁶⁸⁷ *Handkerchief of Clouds*, 122.

followed by a police chase. Dialogue disappears in the final act, replaced by stage directions for the dramatic action of a pantomime sequence. Indeed, the final act proves the real interest for Tzara as he experiments with scenic problems that he would not physically achieve on stage until the production of *Handkerchief of Clouds* at the 'Soirées de Paris' in summer 1924.

Cinematic Dramaturgy in Heads or Tails Act III

The *Heads or Tails* opening stage direction reproduces the desired topographical situation of *The Gas Heart* where 'Neck stands downstage, Nose opposite, confronting the audience.' In *Heads or Tails*, the Director (like Neck and Nose) is positioned outside the main action, sitting upstage on horseback conducting the action. The set design, however, looks ahead to Tzara's *Handkerchief of Clouds* and innovates stage design with the application of screens placed either side of the stage onto which images might be projected (525). The scenography of Act III however, surpasses even that of *Handkerchief*:

The backdrop represents, in horizontal striped lines, fragments of houses, fields, interiors, factories, streets, shops, landscapes, machines, etc. Six horizontal bands, to which fragments of objects, painted canvases, shapes and very different types of colours have been attached, can be alternatively unfolded from right to left or from left to right... (533).

The physical aspects of Tzara's stage for *Heads or Tails* incorporate cinematic tropes whereby scenes can switch rapidly between location with the aid of the alternating backdrop; locations transfer fluidly from one dramatic moment to the next, like short cuts between scenes on film. These techniques, like those Tzara would apply in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, are attributed to his appreciation of the plays of Henri (le Douanier) Rousseau.⁶⁸⁸ As established, Tzara's interest in Rousseau stems from a recognition of dramaturgical problems that Rousseau poses in his playscripts, and which Tzara hoped to achieve by his own practice.

Tzara recognised a synthesis of information in Rousseau's plays, most notably in the rapid succession of scenes which Rousseau's narratives traverse, but also in the stage directions describing physical action. As Nancy Ireson explains: 'In the Douanier's writing, the importance placed on conveying vision in its entirety overtook the practical constraints of

⁶⁸⁸ See also Chapter 9, pg. 189-90 for Tzara's critical writing on the plays of Henri Rousseau.

the *mise-en-scène* [...] he was untroubled by the practical constraints of theatrical space.’⁶⁸⁹ In the playscript to *La vengeance d’une orpheline russe*, Rousseau includes an exchange of letters between eloped lovers (written in the script as actual correspondence) followed by an escape by horse-drawn carriage, yet he does not include stage directions to indicate how these events might be realised on stage. For Tzara, Rousseau’s disregard for the constraints of scenography inspired him.

In Tzara’s playscript for *Heads or Tails*, the primacy of the dramatic image takes precedence over practical dramaturgical applications. The tableaux presented in Act III switch rapidly between location and situation; Tzara describes a kaleidoscope of images in his stage directions noted above. As Béhar suggests:

In the theatre, the function of shaking certain fundamental problems such as the relativity of feelings, the illusion of reality, the necessity of chance, the vanity of literature, is given in a form that leaves the greatest room for gestures and scenic gags.⁶⁹⁰

Of Tzara’s plays, these ‘scenic gags’ are most evident in *Heads or Tails*. In the first scene of Act III, ‘a road,’ the three actors run on the spot, pursued by the policeman who also runs on the spot behind them. In the second scene, described as ‘a grazing,’ two actors dressed in false legs imitate cows, the third acts as a shepherd. ‘They are all motionless except the policeman who continues his race and passes in front of them. At this moment the three actors start to run in the opposite direction, on the spot [...] pursued by the policeman who saw the manoeuvre and who turned behind them (on the spot also) (534).’

In the following scenes, the actors stand in various positions imitating statues. The policeman passes not noticing them. The actors are then on a bicycle continually pursued, and in the final scene:

The three actors imitate, motionless, the attitude of a known public monument. While the gendarme crosses the stage, not noticing the manoeuvre of the actors, the stage is invaded by eight devils who run slowly in different directions, and at a given moment, raise on their shoulders, the motionless group of actors who have made their statues come alive on a removable part of the stage, so that they leave behind a hole when leaving the stage, the gendarme pursues them and falls into the hole (534-535).

Unlike Rousseau, Tzara provides some clues for how these scenes might be realised, with the aid of backdrops and scenic devices (of note are the set of horizontal bands which,

⁶⁸⁹ Ireson, 618-619.

⁶⁹⁰ Béhar, 1979, 214.

while unfolding, give the illusion of displacement of the landscape). Also, Tzara instructs that stage design for Act III includes ‘A big screen on which the texts are projected (533),’ so that the scenic locations and situations which switch between ‘a road,’ ‘a clothes shop,’ ‘a bicycle race,’ amongst other places (left undecided in the script and called ‘place X’), can be clearly discerned by the reader/viewer. The moveable part of the stage (into which the policeman falls) echoes the split-level stage from *Handkerchief of Clouds*, which was inspired by Alexander Tairov’s instructions for the broken level stage, as established in the previous chapter. For Tzara to realise the physical requirements of his play, the stage is necessarily moveable.

Had *Heads or Tails* been realised on stage, the scenic devices which Tzara describes in his script would have been more visually dramatic (and no doubt amusing) than the scenography and dramaturgy presented in *Handkerchief of Clouds*. That Tzara did not complete this play leads to a consideration of his other incomplete play *Faust*. It is my assessment that Tzara may have left both plays unfinished for he intended, but did not manage, to unite the narratives in one play.

Heads or Tails and Faust

In a small notebook now contained in the Jacques Doucet library, Tzara sketched acts for *Pile ou Face*. On the first page of this notebook, is a draft for the Director’s opening monologue. On the second page, are fragments of dialogue which do not appear in the version compiled and published by Béhar. Of note is the following section:

Here is the beautiful Paris [...] putting his spark to the service of the revolution.
Here is Faust, whose knowledge he acquired at the price of his soul...⁶⁹¹

The inclusion of Faust in Tzara’s drafts for *Heads or Tails* is compelling for it reveals that Tzara had been contemplating *Faust* at the time of writing *Heads or Tails*; he appears to have been working on including the character Faust in his earlier play. From this limited material, it remains unknown how Tzara intended to conflate the two works. Given what comes down to us through Béhar’s compilation of the play, the character Faust is removed from *Heads or Tails*. However, it remains of interest that the two myths coalesced at one time in Tzara’s playwriting.

⁶⁹¹ BLJD TZR 651. The handwritten notes are difficult to comprehend and so only this fragment is being translated here.

Considering how Tzara integrated *Hamlet* in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, I believe that my discovery (of *Faust* appearing in a draft to *Heads of Tails*) suggests that *Faust* and *Heads or Tails* might have been included amongst Tzara's language collage works. Tzara's application of language collage is evident in his early Dada works and culminates with the literary collage of *Hamlet* in *Handkerchief*. In my discussion on Tzara's *Faust*, I hypothesise that Tzara's translation of *Faust* might have been collaged onto the second (missing) act of *Heads or Tails*.

Faust

The draft for Tzara's version of *Faust* appears as a handwritten manuscript (on various states of paper) in the Jacques Doucet archives, and the text is compiled in *Œuvres Complètes* volume 1.⁶⁹² Béhar suggests that it was shortly after the 'Soirées de Paris' when Tzara began work on *Faust*, although we now know, as detailed in my note above, that Tzara contemplated the character of Faust while writing *Heads or Tails*.

Having exorcised his fascination with one masterpiece, *Hamlet*, his new endeavour dealt with another of literature's greatest figures, the erudite Faust. The legend of Faust (Faustus or Doctor Faustus) narrates the deeds of a German necromancer who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge, magic and power. The travelling astrologer, alchemist and magician of the German Renaissance, Johann Georg Faust (believed to have died around 1540), inspired the tale. Faust owes his posthumous fame to the *Historia Von D. Johann Faust* chapbook, known as the first *Faustbuch* (Faust book). It is a collection of stories about Faust written by an anonymous German author and published in Frankfurt in 1587. The *Faustbuch*'s descriptions of hell, the introduction of Lucifer's servant, Mephistopheles (called Mephistophilis by Marlowe and Tzara; known also as Mephisto), and its descriptions of the fearful state of its eponymous hero, made it popular in sixteenth-century Europe. The *Faustbuch* was translated into several languages, and an English prose translation of 1592 became the main source for Marlowe's play, *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* (better known by the title *Doctor Faustus*).

⁶⁹² BLJD TZR 600; OC, 1:539-547.

Marlowe's play follows Faustus, a respected German scholar who becomes bored with traditional knowledge and seeks to know magic arts. He is encouraged in his endeavour by his friends Valdes and Cornelius who teach him spells. Faustus conjures Mephistophilis and, signing a writ with his blood, exchanges his soul for twenty-four years of knowledge and magical powers. With Mephistophilis at his disposal, Faustus travels across Europe impressing royalty and aristocracy with his magic. Approaching the end of his contract, Faustus begins to dread his impending doom. He is urged (by an old man) to repent, instead, Faustus conjures Helen of Troy, indulging in her physical beauty. On the final night, Faustus pleads for his soul, but it is too late. On the stroke of midnight, Mephistophilis appears with devils and they take Faustus away.

Tzara's *Faust* is based on the 1604 edition of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Tzara translates Faust's opening monologue, some intermediate fragments of dialogue, and Faust's last monologue followed by the chorus' final song. Some additional speeches (which appear earlier in Marlowe's play) are added hereafter, slightly altering Marlowe's narrative sequence. Tzara selects dramatic moments from Marlowe's play which convey the tale of Faust in an abridged version, much as he condenses scenes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* for *Handkerchief of Clouds*. In both endeavours, Tzara treats the classical play text as material, which may be manipulated. This approach foreshadows more contemporary practices, notably postdramatic theatre as described by Hans Thies-Lehmann, in which the text is treated as pliant 'material,' and as but one part amongst elements (of equal importance) that contribute to the performance.⁶⁹³

Tzara's translation begins with Faust revealing his interest in the study of magic. Next, Valdes and Cornelius agree to teach Faust dark arts, after which the narrative jumps to the moment after Marlowe's Faustus first meets Mephistophilis. Here Faust rhapsodies on the powers he will have once Mephistophilis returns with the contract to bind his soul: 'Had I more souls than there are stars in heaven / I will give them all to Mephistophilis / By him I will be king of the world (534).'⁶⁹⁴ Tzara's text then jumps to Faust's swansong: 'Ah Faust, you have only an hour left to live / And you will be damned forever (for all eternity) (544),' followed by the Chorus' final lament.

⁶⁹³ Lehmann, 17.

⁶⁹⁴ As with *Heads or Tails*, I have translated Tzara's *Faust*. The page numbers correspond to the original French text as it appears in *OC*, 1.

After the choral song in Tzara's condensed version of the play, are added some fragments of dialogue which appear (in the following order). A monologue in which Faust's first doubts his deeds (before he signs the contract):

Faust, do not give in; no, Faust, be resolved!
Do you falter? A voice whispers in my ear:
'Renounce this magic, return to God!'
Return to God?... But God no longer loves you (545)

These lines, spoken by Faustus in Marlowe's play, are attributed to the chorus in Tzara's version. In doing so, Tzara elevates the role of the chorus to act as the moral voice of the piece, relaying the hero's doubts. This segment precedes a monologue by Faust, in which he resolves to continue with his plan by reminding himself of the riches he will have:

Riches! What! I will have the lordship of Embdem
By Mephistophilis! As long as I have his help
No one will hurt me. What are you still doubting?
Come Mephistophilis! Bring me good
News from Lucifer. Did Midnight not chime?
Oh come, come, come. Oh Mephistophilis (546).

Tzara's text then jumps several dialogic exchanges to a monologue by Mephistophilis that appears in Marlowe's play after Faustus signs away his soul. Here Mephistophilis scorns Faust's request for a wife by telling him:

Marriage is just a ceremonial farce
And if you still love me, think of it no more
I will choose for you the most beautiful courtesans
And will lead them each day to your awakening
The one your eye desires, your heart will have too
Were she as chaste as Penelope
Were she even wiser than the Queen of Sheba
Or more radiant than Lucifer before his fall (546).

Finally, Tzara translates a choral song that occurs midway through Marlowe's play. At this moment, Faust resolves to visit Rome to torment the Pope:

But I predict he'll go first to Rome
To see the Pope, the rules and morals of his court
And take part in the feast for St. Peter
Which takes place solemnly these days (546).⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹⁵ Béhar includes another fragment of text alongside *Faust* in *OC*. However, what appears to be a final monologue in Tzara's *Faust* is not a translation of any part of Marlowe's text, it is a poem from Tzara's collection *Où boivent les loups* (*Where the Wolves Drink*). This poetry collection was not published until 1932. From the fragment contained in the notebook with *Faust*, it appears that Tzara was already working on poems that would appear in this collection in 1924. I believe the inclusion of this fragment in *OC* is an oversight; this poem/monologue does not belong to Tzara's *Faust*. The poem (in its rightful place) is found at part III of *Où boivent les loups* (*OC*, 2:215).

Tzara's approach to *Faust* echoes his treatment of *Hamlet*; he economises the story, selecting only crucial moments from the Marlowe's play to recount the narrative.

Hentea suggests that for Tzara, '*Faust* – was not driven by a desire to reconnect with literary tradition but, rather, to understand his own personal evolution. He had been obsessed with *Hamlet* as a schoolboy, and *Faust* was a means of coming to grips with the personal cost of that quest.'⁶⁹⁶ That is, having already dealt with the quintessential text of Western theatre – *Hamlet* – the translation of *Faust* allowed Tzara to continue his consideration of classic drama, and the nuance of meaning across two languages. After all, being a bilingual poet who wrote only in his second language, translation of meaning between languages was a constant issue for Tzara.

In a letter to the publisher of the *Transatlantic Review* (no. 3, September 1924, 311), Tzara outlines the conditions and goals of his endeavour:

It is an adaptation that I am preparing in collaboration with Miss Nancy Cunard. The two existing translations, those of Francois-V Hugo and de Rabbe are both good and bad at the same time, and I am not anxious to increase the false value of an exercise of erudition which I find insufficient. Rather, as far as I am concerned, there is a test to parallel the intensity and quality of Marlowe's work in a French translation, even at the risk of moving away, if need be, from the meaning of the original text. But you know even better than I, the difficulties which, by translating the meaning of a sentence by retaining its original value, the strength of words evolves unequally in two languages as divergent as English and French.⁶⁹⁷

Béhar suggests that compared to the translations of Francois V. Hugo (*Les faust anglais de Marlowe*, 1858), and de Rabbe (Christopher Marlowe: *Théâtre*, 1889), the work of Tzara and Cunard is not without interest:

faithful to the letter of the text (at least at first, the one that has come down to us), proposes a less romantic interpretation than the earlier versions and certainly closer to the original meaning. This is not to say that Tzara would have been satisfied with the role of the literal translator: it seems that these fragments had to be integrated into a new composition, just like *Hamlet* in *Handkerchief of Clouds*.⁶⁹⁸

Béhar's reflection is crucial; however, he does not offer a possible destination for Tzara's version of *Faust*. It is my assessment, that Tzara may have intended to collage *Faust* into *Heads or Tails*, that is, to insert the character Faust in the Helen of Troy legend, just as Marlowe includes Helen of Troy in his *Doctor Faustus*.

⁶⁹⁶ Hentea, 2014, 208.

⁶⁹⁷ *OC*, 1:724.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

In scene XIII of Marlowe's play, Faustus asks (of Mephistophilis) to have 'that heavenly Helen' for his 'paramour.'⁶⁹⁹ Mephistophilis, granting Faustus' request, conjures Helen. Upon seeing her Faustus utters the famous line: 'Was this the face the launch'd a thousand ships / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?' This scene occurs in Marlowe's play when Faustus, nearing his death, begins to realise the consequences of the pact he has made. Despite comprehending that only repentance might save his cursed soul, Faustus seeks carnal love:

Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss. – (Kisses her)
Her lips suck forth my soul: see, where it flies! –
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for Heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena.

Regardless of his sense of doom, Faustus continues to squander his magical powers and falsely seeks transcendence in the image of a woman who, rather than the immortal powers he desires, can only offer earthly pleasures. Tzara's *Heads or Tails* characters employ a similar language to Marlowe's Faustus in their descriptions of Helen: 'You are beautiful Helen, and my admiration knows no bounds. Why must your beauty slide down my eyes [...] my arms like the wind, powerless to hold her tight... (531).'

Considering the possibility of Tzara's *Faust* as a collage for *Heads or Tails*, I reassert that Tzara's theatrical collage in *Handkerchief* (and the possible collage in *Heads of Tails*) relates to cubist rather than dadaist collage.⁷⁰⁰ With *Hamlet* in *Handkerchief*, Tzara transposes a fragment of an existing play into a new play, that is, the compatible material is repurposed into a new whole. The combination of *Hamlet* and *Handkerchief* is composed of 'two elements of the same nature.'⁷⁰¹ The same is potential for a collage of *Faust* in *Heads or Tails*: a pre-existing play text inserted into a new play where the narratives share commonality. That is, Marlowe's play provides precedence for the combination of Faust and Helen of Troy in a theatrical work. Tzara may have intended to reverse the transposition and collage a fragment of Faustian mythology into the tale of Helen of Troy, inverting Marlowe's original narrative.

⁶⁹⁹ In Johan Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust: The Second Part of the Tragedy* the legend of Helen of Troy is more prominent. In Goethe's version, the union of Faust and Helen allegorises the confrontation of classical and Enlightenment ideals.

⁷⁰⁰ Cubist collage repurposes material into pre-existing forms on canvas where the elements combine to create a new whole. Dadaist collage on the other hand juxtaposes 'alien realities on an obviously inappropriate level;' incongruous images are combined to create discordant realities. Max Ernst's definition of collage, quoted in Elger, 24.

⁷⁰¹ Béhar, 1979, 208.

Tzara's *Heads or Tails* ends with 'eight devils' who 'raise [the actors] on their shoulders,' before carrying them offstage (see above on *Heads or Tails*, Act III). Marlowe's play ends with devils appearing to take Faustus away. Devils do not appear in Act I of *Heads or Tails*, and their introduction in Act III is unexpected. However, had they been introduced in Act II, where I propose Tzara's *Faust* might be placed, the devils in Act III of *Heads or Tails* read as part of the Faustian mythology previously presented in the narrative. Here, instead of carrying off to hell, the eponymous hero of Marlowe's tale, Tzara's devils spirit away the *Heads or Tails* lovers in a comedic moment of the pantomime. Other themes presented in both plays also relate: in Tzara's *Faust*, Mephistophilis states that 'Marriage is just a ceremonial farce.' The love story in *Heads or Tails* is presented as a sentimental farce, in which the characters are romantically matched by the application of a game of chance. Like Helen, whose choice of husband is left to the Director (via the coin toss), so too does Mephistophilis say to Faust: 'I will choose for you the most beautiful courtesans.' The alliance between the two narratives becomes more immediate when applying my theory that Tzara intended *Faust* to be transposed onto *Heads or Tails*.

Furthermore, the *Hamlet* transplant in *Handkerchief* provides a framework for Tzara's theatrical collage. Comparing the dialogue in *Heads or Tails* and *Handkerchief*, further identifies how *Faust* and *Heads or Tails* might have followed the collage format. The fragment of text from Tzara's handwritten draft for *Heads or Tails* in which the Director introduces the character Faust into the narrative ('Here is Faust, whose knowledge he acquired at the price of his soul...'), echoes the Commentary's introduction of the character Hamlet in *Handkerchief* before the *Hamlet* scenes are played: '*Hamlet* is playing [...] it is the Poet [...] who plays Hamlet.' As the Director in *Heads or Tails* fulfils the role occupied by the Commentary in *Handkerchief*, then it would follow that the Director's introduction of Faust would precede scenes in which Faust is a protagonist (as Hamlet becomes a protagonist in *Handkerchief* once the character is introduced). And here then is where Tzara's *Faust* fragments would find a home within the missing Act II of *Heads or Tails*.

That Tzara's *Faust* and *Heads or Tails* were incomplete and never staged, points to why they have been largely ignored in dadaist literature. Only Henri Béhar, who includes them in Tzara's *Œuvres Complètes*, provides minimal discussion on their state as they appear in the archive, and indicates their possible date in relation to Tzara's other works of the

period. Tzara's biographer, Hentea, also refers to them briefly. My assessment of these forgotten plays, however, details how Tzara's experiments in theatrical language collage go further than the collage experiments of his better-known poems and manifestos. While Tzara provided instructions 'To make a dadaist poem' from cut up and rearranged versions of existing texts, it is not proved that he applied this method in his poetic outputs. This thesis' current and previous chapters explore the application of the language collage in his theatrical writing, providing impetus for further analysis of this largely ignored field of his practice.

After working on the plays discussed here, and *Handkerchief of Clouds*, Tzara's theatrical career experienced a hiatus. As described in Chapter 8, between 1929 and 1935, Tzara's poetic and critical works were attributed to Surrealism. I will now provide a brief discussion on Tzara after Surrealism – during which time he was not engaged in writing for the stage – to describe how his political and artistic motivations altered in this period, and how Tzara's experiences at this time impact upon his future playwriting. After this interval, my narrative on Tzara's theatrical career resumes in occupied France during World War II when Tzara wrote his last play *La Fuite (The Flight)*. With *The Flight*, Tzara's theatrical style peaks. As will be demonstrated, the language and thematic structure of this play resemble, even more closely than his previous plays, Tzara's humanism, and also anticipate the Theatre of the Absurd, which would come to prominence within one decade of Tzara writing and staging his final play.

CHAPTER 11: TZARA AFTER SURREALISM

Tzara's relationship with Surrealism ended in 1935. Tensions between him and the surrealist group were already developing in 1933 around the journal *Minotaure* to which Tzara contributed on only one occasion.⁷⁰² Tzara's aversion to *Minotaure* stemmed from a growing belief that artists should evolve from writing 'revolutionary poetry' towards political action. In his final work under the surrealist banner, *Grains et Issues* (1935), Tzara stated: 'It is not necessary to renounce poetry in order to conduct revolutionary social actions, but being revolutionary is an inherent necessity to being a poet.'⁷⁰³ While Tzara made considerable contributions to Surrealism, he could not remain within its confines on two grounds. Firstly (for many of the avant-gardes, including Tzara) Surrealism remained a literary movement, rather than the revolution it set out to be. Secondly, Surrealism became estranged from the Communist Party, with whom Tzara would become fully affiliated.

Tzara's attitudes and politics were becoming gradually more transparent; maturing from the political ambiguity and commitment to '*rien*,' 'indifference,' and '*je m'enfoutisme*' (not-giving-a-stuff attitude) of the Dada days.⁷⁰⁴ Marius Hentea notes that in 1923, Tzara viewed communism as a 'bourgeois form of the revolution.'⁷⁰⁵ A decade later, Tzara formally joined the Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires, an association closely tied to the French Communist Party. In his 1935 speech at the 'International Congress of Writers,' Tzara openly declared himself a communist.⁷⁰⁶ Elmer Peterson explains how the majority of Surrealism's members eventually chose 'between art and revolution, [S]urrealism and communism; these last two, at times unified in aim, became progressively more incompatible.'⁷⁰⁷ As Roland de Renéville notes:

While the surrealists meant to liberate man through the analysis of his inner nature and devoted themselves to an idealistic idea of reality, the communists, on the other hand, followed Karl Marx by opting for a materialist interpretation of the world and

⁷⁰² Tzara's 'D'un certain automatisme du goût [Of a Certain Automatism of Taste]' appears in *Minotaure* no. 3-4 (December 1933).

⁷⁰³ Tzara, *Grains et Issues*, OC, 3:137, quoted in Hentea, 237.

⁷⁰⁴ As established in his 'Conférence sur Dada,' OC, 1:420.

⁷⁰⁵ Voronca, 'Marchez au pas,' 7, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 235.

⁷⁰⁶ Tzara did not formally join the French Communist Party until 1947 (when he acquired French citizenship) and he resigned in 1956 in protest against the Party's attitude towards the anti-communist Hungarian Revolution. Corina Jordache-Martin, "Le Venu de Zurich" or Tristan Tzara and the Insolence of the Margin.' *The Centennial Review* 42, no. 3 (1998): 569-88, 578.

⁷⁰⁷ Peterson, 1971, 118.

aimed at integrating the individual into a rigorous social order where individual initiatives would find themselves commanded by the interest of the collective.⁷⁰⁸

By the mid-1930s, the fundamental beliefs that formed the basis of Tzara's artistic theories, had not altered, but his experience of life at that time shifted his outlook on the relationship between art and humanity – the latter taking precedence. The origin of Dada's revolt was an opposition to World War I, and as Ellen Sharp suggests, Tzara's 'high jinks' during the Dada period 'concealed a deep concern with morality and the human condition.'⁷⁰⁹ The events of the Spanish Civil War and of the occupation in France during World War II confirmed Tzara's view that 'involvement with aesthetic matters is much less important than vigorous social action.'⁷¹⁰ The rise of fascism and persecution by nationalist factions across Europe had a profound effect on Tzara, and from the mid-1930s he became active in anti-fascist protests and openly critical of France's official neutrality during the Spanish Civil War.⁷¹¹ It was on the grounds of political action (or lack thereof on Surrealism's part) that, after his brief collaboration with Surrealism, Tzara denounced the movement openly.

In January 1947 Tzara was in Romania where his play *La Fuite* was being restaged.⁷¹² While travelling, he gave a talk on 'Surréalisme et l'après guerre' ('Surrealism and the post-war period') at the French Institute, Bucharest in December 1946 (a Romanian translation appeared in the journal *Orizont* the following year)⁷¹³ and again in February 1947 at the French Institute in Prague. The content of 'Surrealism and the post-war period' centres on a retrospective assessment of the development of poetry in the context of Dada and Surrealism, a forecast of poetry's future, and its relationship to revolution. In this speech, Tzara surmises that 'Dada was born out of moral necessity.' Singling out 'our one life rule [...] spontaneity' as Dada's lasting contribution to art, Tzara

⁷⁰⁸ 'Les Poètes dans la Société,' *Les Cahiers de Sud* (Décembre 1935): 852-856, quoted in Peterson, 1971, 119.

⁷⁰⁹ Ellen Sharp, 'Towards an Iconography of Tristan Tzara,' *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (1976): 191-205, 203.

⁷¹⁰ Peterson, 1971, 143.

⁷¹¹ In December 1936, rather than attending the New York vernissage of the Museum of Modern Art's 'Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism' exhibition, Tzara was in Madrid writing about how the Spanish Civil War had 'overturned [...] the habitual notions that we have about life' (Tzara, 'Aux Avant-postes de la liberté,' *OC*, 5:310, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 245). Tzara remained in Spain for several months during the war, witnessing frontline action and urban destruction. In January 1937, Tzara replaced Aragon as secretary of the Committee for the Defense of Spanish Culture. From Spain he liaised with Spanish intellectuals in Paris to write in support of the Republican cause and to organise productions of plays by Cervantes in France. Hentea, 2014, 246-8.

⁷¹² *La Fuite* was first performed in Paris in 1946.

⁷¹³ Tzara first gave this talk in April 1946 in London, noted in *The Times*, 25 April 1946, 2 and Hentea, 2014, 269

aligns Dada with the revolutionary spirit of French poetry in the wake of Jarry, Apollinaire and Rimbaud. Of Dada's attack on literature, Tzara explains 'our impression was that the world was drowning in futile palaver and art and literature had become institutions serving an outdated society instead of humanity. They served war, pretending the best of intentions while covering up cruel inequality, emotional dearth, injustice and low drives.' Tzara then explains how 'out of the ashes of Dada that saw its role as finished' Surrealism was born and 'all former [d]adaists took part in it, with individual breaks.' Tzara suggests that under Surrealism, 'revolutionary action' and 'poetry' shared a 'common criterion, one and only root and goal: human freedom.' He concedes that 'we're still far from managing to unite these opposite terms, but the problem was at least posited in all its breadth and seriousness' by Surrealism.⁷¹⁴

After his review of the dadaist and surrealist pursuit, Tzara then uses the latter part of his speech to attack Surrealism. Tzara's frustration with Surrealism was based on his political conviction at the time. For Tzara, Surrealism's insistence on revolutionary action, and its inability to perform such action, evidenced the movement's strictly literary concerns. In comparison to the anti-fascist efforts of many avant-gardists in France during World War II, Surrealism was notably absent from political activity with several of the surrealists being (self-) exiled in America.⁷¹⁵ For Tzara, poetry is only valid if it is lived. It cannot be reduced to an aesthetic activity, but rather finds its worth via moral commitment. The accusations Tzara levels at Surrealism throughout his speech, touch upon a divide in Surrealism which had plagued it from its inception causing a split into two Surrealist camps: 'those who are interested in art mainly as an adjunct to revolutionary politics, and those who view [S]urrealism primarily as an attack on aesthetic conventions.'⁷¹⁶ Despite Breton's attempts to reconcile aesthetic and political efforts under Surrealism, the divide prevailed. Eventually those who aligned with political action disowned Surrealism, Tzara included.

'Surrealism and the post-war period' provoked a confrontation with Breton when Tzara delivered the paper in Paris on 17 March 1947 at a literary event at the Sorbonne. Breton hoped to revive Surrealism in Paris when he returned after the war, however, he faced

⁷¹⁴ These excerpts from 'Surréalisme et l'après guerre' are taken from the translation by David Vichnar accessed at <https://equuspress.wordpress.com/2019/03/11/tristan-tzara-surrealism-and-the-postwar-era-part-one-prague-dada-miscellany-part-eight/> on 4 July 2020.

⁷¹⁵ Breton fled to America in 1941, returning to France in 1946.

⁷¹⁶ Peterson, 1971, 192.

hostility from fellow avant-gardes, and the Communist Party discredited his silence during the war years.⁷¹⁷ As a convert to the French Communist Party, Tzara took hold of these charges:

What is Surrealism today and how does it justify itself historically when we know that it was absent from this war, absent from our hearts and from our action during the Occupation, which, needless to say, has deeply affected our ways of acting and understanding reality?⁷¹⁸

Tzara judges that during the war, the surrealists were absorbed in '[s]urrealist competitions and games which were harmless to say the least.'⁷¹⁹ Finally, Tzara states that Surrealism is 'incapable of adapting itself to current conditions and regaining the powerful virus that we once knew it had.'⁷²⁰ Breton was offered the opportunity to respond but refused, however, he had become infuriated over the course of Tzara's speech and shouted from his bench that Tzara 'should be ashamed to be speaking in such a place!' before jumping on stage and knocking Tzara's glass of water off the table.⁷²¹ According to *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, the confrontation involved 'insults, fists, projectiles' and held '[t]he atmosphere of the former good times of Dada,' however, the 'grey-haired' opponents now argued over politics instead of aesthetics.⁷²² Breton, now in his fifties, did not muster the same aggression as his onstage cane swinging antics at the 'Soirée du Coeur à Barbe' twenty-four years previously.

'Surrealism and the post-war period' reveals Tzara's shifting position away from Surrealism towards the French Communist Party, his continued solidarity with the Resistance (as demonstrated throughout the war), but most revealing is his reflection on Dada in relation to Surrealism in the context of life after the war:

Have we found a solution to the problems that brought about this war? Where is the end of this war, this shredded end that prolongs itself in each individual, bringing about new questions and temporary solutions and necessary but makeshift repairs and the crushing weight of pains and destructions and the gravity of wounds that are still raw? There is no war now, but there is no afterwar yet.⁷²³

Within the economic and social anguish that continued after 1945, Hentea suggests that Tzara conceded, 'aesthetic movements were largely powerless.'⁷²⁴ Where Tzara found

⁷¹⁷ Hentea, 2014, 270.

⁷¹⁸ Tzara, 'Le Surréalisme et l'Après-guerre,' *OC*, 5:71, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 270

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷²¹ Mark Polizotti, *Revolution of the Mind: The Life of André Breton* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), 491, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 271.

⁷²² *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, 20 March 1947, 4, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 271.

⁷²³ Tzara, 'Le Surréalisme et l'Après-guerre,' *OC*, 5:77, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 271.

⁷²⁴ Hentea, 2014, 271.

Surrealism incapable of healing the social post-war issues, he reminds his audience that Dada was ‘born of a moral exigency, the implacable desire to attain an absolute morality.’⁷²⁵

However, Tzara did not have the solution to the tension between action and art in the post-war moment either. His comments on Dada in 1947 are re-evaluated in the context of his political beliefs at the time. Tzara explained that Dada, with its attack on and rejection of all institutions, may relate better to the challenges faced by writers in the post-war period. For Dada set out to eliminate ‘the distinction between life and poetry, our poetry was a manner of existing.’⁷²⁶ And, as Tzara explained, the post-war writer had to sustain the example of the Resistance that poetry and action be inseparable:

‘We found our unity. We know now that the problem is not unsolvable, but that it is in action itself on the field of the struggle [...] that the problem ceases to exist.’⁷²⁷ Tzara asked for the maintenance of the literary Resistance, because those who had experienced ‘the edge of death,’ during the wartime Occupation ‘have the impression that the entire nation, in going through a new adolescence, is becoming aware of its being.’ And as adolescence denotes a period of change, Tzara concludes that ‘at every stage of human evolution, everything becomes again an object to be conquered.’ Poetry is ‘a conquest,’ and the poet must issue from a ‘movement which puts into question the entirety of his existence,’⁷²⁸ which had been the foundation of Dada since 1916. As Hentea notes:

The theoretical basis of Tzara’s argument – that poetry was not an expression of reality, but reality itself – had not changed in any significant way since the closing line of *Manifeste Dada 1918*, ‘LA VIE [original emphasis].’ What had evolved was the acknowledgement that contemporary circumstances had brought an even greater urgency to the question.⁷²⁹

These impulses will now be discussed in relation to Tzara’s final play *The Flight*, written during World War II, when Tzara was exiled in the South of France. The confluence of poetry, politics and life become an immediate concern in *The Flight*: a dramatic poem in which the characters, like Tzara at the time of writing, are caught in the midst of war.

As previously identified, Tzara’s dadaist proclivities concealed a deep-rooted humanism, which remained constant during Dada, through Surrealism and beyond. In his plays written

⁷²⁵ Tzara, ‘Le Surréalisme et l’Après-guerre,’ *OC*, 5:65, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 271.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*, 271-272

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁹ Hentea, 2014, 272.

during the Dada period, Tzara presents abstracted humanoid characters devoid of individualised personalities, suggesting a derisive anti-humanism.⁷³⁰ However, even in his early plays, Tzara's concern with humanity is evident: recall the themes of war and physical disfigurement in *The Gas Heart*, for example. In *Handkerchief of Clouds* and *Heads or Tails*, Tzara considers human experience around the themes of love and personal liberty (or lack thereof) with characters who are trapped in conflict between desire and the inability to achieve their desires. *The Flight* directly concerns the human condition: the narrative follows the Son as he grows from adolescence to adulthood, and experiences love, loss, pain and death. At the same time as we follow the Son, an unspecified conflict ravages the land occupied by the central characters, and disperses their community. That is, in Tzara's final play, aesthetic concerns are eclipsed by social concerns, exposing a more obvious humanism than is evident in his other works for the stage. In his career after Surrealism, Tzara combined humanist and anti-fascist viewpoints in his effort against the Spanish Civil War, and later, in his affiliation with the French Resistance during World War II. These concerns filter into his playwriting practice.

Tzara's interest in humanism, somewhat relates to existentialist theory as developed by Jean-Paul Sartre around the same time as Tzara wrote *The Flight*. Elmer Peterson suggests that 'one of the parallels between dadaists and existentialists is found in a shared contempt for systems which are preoccupied with everything but the conduct of human life itself.'⁷³¹ Human conduct: man's relationship with those around him, and the world, is the central theme of *The Flight*. Fundamentally, Tzara's later works more obviously examine his concern for the plight of man, especially during war. Tzara's transition from an ironic anti-humanism, towards transparent humanism is identified here. While Tzara was not formally affiliated with Sartre, in the immediate post-war period, 'Jean-Paul Sartre and [e]xistentialism were poised to dominate French cultural life.'⁷³² It is improbable that Tzara was not aware of existentialist developments.

This thesis has provided a comprehensive discussion on absurdism and Tzara's theatre, which will be concluded in my analysis of *The Flight*. As briefly outlined in Chapter 8, existentialism relates to absurdism via Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. In 1946, the

⁷³⁰ In the 'Dada Manifesto 1918,' Tzara stated, 'what is divine in us is the awakening of anti-humanist action,' trans. Wright, 12.

⁷³¹ Peterson, 1971, 57.

⁷³² David Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 143.

same year that Tzara published *The Flight*, Sartre released *Existentialism is a Humanism*. In this essay Sartre explains existentialism is founded on a belief that ‘existence comes before essence,’⁷³³ and sets out the following to explain this credo: ‘man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards.’⁷³⁴ At the inception of human life, man is nothing, and conceives his essence (what he will be) only after existing. The essence is determined by the individual; it is not preordained. ‘Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism.’⁷³⁵ Sartre uses this text to confirm that existentialism is a humanism for it emphasises the centrality of human choice and action, and ultimately, human responsibility and accountability in the face of his actions, and those of all men.

Sartre explains that ‘abandonment’ leads to human accountability. This is the opposite of determinism: there is no God that preordains man’s life, or (as in naturalist theory) social condition or genetic predisposition that defines a man; it is left to the individual to take responsibility for his actions and deeds. Responsibility is not individual, but universal: ‘it concerns mankind as a whole.’

every man [is] in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility of his existence squarely upon his own shoulders. And, when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men...⁷³⁶

Therefore, each individual’s actions relate to all human actions: ‘I am thus responsible for myself and for all men, and I am creating a certain image of man as I would have him to be. In fashioning myself, I fashion man.’⁷³⁷ But whether or not man’s actions are deemed for good or ill, it is for the individual to choose. Therefore, according to Sartre, existentialism rests on ‘the absolute character of the free commitment, by which every man realizes himself in realizing a type of humanity;’ each individual bears ‘the responsibility of the choice which, in committing myself, also commits the whole of humanity.’⁷³⁸ In concluding, Sartre explains that ‘there is no other universe except the human universe [...] it is this that we call existential humanism. This is humanism, because we remind man that there is no legislator but himself.’⁷³⁹ In *The Flight*, Tzara reveals the universality, or

⁷³³ Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘Existentialism is a Humanism,’ trans. Walter Kaufman, *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956): 287-311, 289

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*, 290

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*, 291

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, 291-2

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1956, 292

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*, 304-5

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*, 310

humanism of all men. As will be shown, each character's actions are reflected and repeated in the actions of others. In this way, *The Flight* relates universal as opposed to individual themes.

In relation to Sartre's assessment of essence, the characters in Tzara's *The Flight* only reveal their nature through action. The Son propels himself forward into the world in order to determine his essence. In doing so, he learns to take responsibility for his actions and deeds, fails, and finds himself alone in the world. He is, as Sartre would say, 'abandoned' and must decide for himself, his own nature. This is not a futile reflection on human experience, rather, *The Flight's* Son is governed by his own will which guides him. If he fails in one task, this task was not suited to him, and this is only revealed in the failing of the task; only through existence does he determine his essence. Or in Sartre's words: 'man is no other than a series of undertakings, that he is the sum, the organisation, the set of relations that constitute these undertakings.'⁷⁴⁰ Therefore, the characters in Tzara's play are determined only by their own actions; 'by the deed that he has done.'⁷⁴¹

The next, and final chapter of this thesis, discusses Tzara's *The Flight*; a play that is largely overlooked in critical discussions on Tzara's literary career, and certainly absent in discussions on avant-garde theatre. I will analyse the themes presented in this play, which echo certain existentialist proclivities as defined by Sartre's discussion on humanism. Additionally, my argument will return to Tzara and the absurd. While absurdist theory and its representation on stage in the Theatre of the Absurd were not developed until a decade after Tzara's theatrical career concluded, more than any other philosophical doctrine, absurdism presents in Tzara's playwriting. While existential thought was being developed concurrently with Tzara's writing *The Flight*, and while certain tendencies regarding humanism – man's deeds, actions and his relationship to humanity – are presented in Tzara's play as they are in Sartre's essay, it is the foreshadowing of absurdism that is most striking in Tzara's works for the stage, as will now be concluded.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., 301

⁷⁴¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 12: THE FLIGHT

...the text of *The Flight* is perhaps one of the most beautiful texts written in the French language.⁷⁴²

Tzara reaches the fullness of his talent.⁷⁴³

After 1924, Tzara ceased to produce works for the stage; in the intervening period between the end of Dada and the outbreak of World War II he focused primarily on poetry and critical writing.⁷⁴⁴ When Germany attacked France in May 1940, Tzara was still in Paris. France was quickly overrun by German forces and by 5 June, Paris was bombed. With thousands of others, Tzara joined the exodus, taking refuge in the as yet unoccupied south. Between August and September of 1940, while in the village of La Favière on the Côte d'Azur, Tzara returned to theatrical writing, completing his seventh and final play, *La Fuite (The Flight)*. The play was not staged until 1946, and along with the poetry written during the war, Tzara refused its publication: 'silence became a principled strategy of resistance.'⁷⁴⁵

Described as a 'dramatic poem,' *The Flight* would be Tzara's most personal play: it analogises his flight from occupied Paris, and the fracturing of families during wartime. Across four acts, *The Flight* narrates the journey of the Son as he grows from adolescence to adulthood: his relationship with his parents, his mistress, his wife and his child. An unspecified war, which is quietly backgrounded in acts two and three, bursts forth in the final act when a mass exodus of a war-torn community takes place. As with all Tzara's plays, *The Flight* deals with aspects of the human condition; here however, is presented its entirety: birth, death, love and pain. It is told in a series of poetic monologues and intimate dialogues.

For his final theatrical venture, Tzara abandons the satirical frivolity of the early Dada plays. Neither does he reengage the dramatic farce of *Handkerchief of Clouds* and *Heads or Tails*. Marius Hentea notes that during World War II, Tzara's poetry 'sought a clarity of expression and directness, although it continued to insist on the primacy of image.'⁷⁴⁶ This

⁷⁴² Interview with the Compagnie de L'Ancelle, 'Tzara au théâtre française,' *Paris-Théâtre*, no 209 (August 1964), quoted in *OC*, 3:624.

⁷⁴³ Jean Pierre Han, 'La Fuite ou Le Mouvement de la vie,' *Europe*, no. 555-556 (July-August 1975): 225-230, 230.

⁷⁴⁴ See Chapter 8 for a selection of Tzara's works written during the post-Dada/pre-World-War-II period.

⁷⁴⁵ Hentea, 2014, 257.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

quality is carried into the dramatic text of *The Flight*. Though not as transparent as that of *Handkerchief of Clouds*, the plot of *The Flight* is linear. *The Flight*'s visual language, saturated in poetic imagery, was considered both its triumph and failing at the time of its presentation.⁷⁴⁷

The Flight is about the flight of individuals from those they love. 'Flight of the child who, in order to live his life, must tear himself away from his parents. Divorce of lovers who cannot remain the one to the other without alienating their freedom and who must deny their love if they do not want to deny themselves.'⁷⁴⁸ *The Flight* is a universal story of family relationships, and the moral and emotional conflict between individual ambition and family loyalty. Furthermore, *The Flight* narrates the cyclical nature of history: 'The flight of man. The flight of seasons. The flight of time. The relentless course of things, which continues to revolve.'⁷⁴⁹ The fourth act still follows the Son, but the narrative expands from the flight of the individual to encompass the flight of communities during war, that is, 'historical flight: exodus, rout, dispersion of all men and women.'⁷⁵⁰

The principle characters are: Mother, Father, Daughter and Son. After the first act, the Son no longer enters the stage, and is substituted by the Narrator. The Narrator, speaking in the third person, accounts for the Son's activity and occasionally represents it. Two other Narrators (First Female Narrator and Second Female Narrator)⁷⁵¹ personify two women: one who is abandoned by the Son, the other, who leaves him. During key climatic dialogues, the Narrators are transformed into central characters; they speak in place of the respective Son and lover/wife. After each of these dialogic exchanges, they resume their roles as Narrators. The final act is populated by multiple characters called either Man, Woman, Gendarme, or Soldier.⁷⁵²

⁷⁴⁷ Reviews to follow.

⁷⁴⁸ Michel Leiris, *Brisées* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1966), 96-100 (first published in *Labyrinth*, Geneva, no. 17 (15 February 1946): 9), quoted in *OC*, 3:623.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵¹ Tzara differentiates between the genders of the Narrator ('Le Recitant') and the two female narrators ('La Première Recitante' and 'Le Deuxième Recitante'). I have acknowledged this gender specification in my translation of the character titles.

⁷⁵² These are not individually named characters. There are multiple soldiers for example, each one called 'Soldier.'

The Flight's Dramatic Form

The opening stage direction to Act I of *The Flight* describes an interior, bare but for a table, centre stage, around which the family are placed. The Son remarks on an unknown destiny which stirs within him: 'I only feel a formless call a force of wind which rises [...] I am the master of this thought which is mine but I feel myself a slave to the tempting force (447).'⁷⁵³ He knows that 'there are only two issues – death or flight (452).' He chooses flight. And the relentless succession of flights begins, '[b]ecause the flesh detached from the flesh goes towards the other flesh / and the child runs with outstretched arms towards the world (452).' The Son promises to return: 'I will come back filled with all the perfumes of joyful science of all that I will have seen (454).'

In Act II the Narrator describes the Son's experience of life alone: 'I see him visiting a great city in Italy / He walks the street with map in hand / Looking at house after house (460-1).' Meanwhile, the Mother mourns the flight of her son: 'Empty is the house we built for life when the breath on which it was founded exhaled [...] Void is the heart of speech when the breath that we created is no longer there to fill it (461-2).' Out in the world, the Son knows romantic love for the first time and suffers for it: 'I see him heart-breaking (468).'

Throughout *The Flight*, the Narrators describe the Son's encounters to both the audience/reader and the other characters in the play. Additionally, the Narrators comment on the action of the drama, and highlight its themes. In this way, Tzara employs a dramatic technique now commonplace in his theatre: the chorus. However, the Narrators in *The Flight* do not address the audience directly, as do characters in Tzara's other theatrical works. To recall, in each of Tzara's previous plays commenting characters (sometimes representing the playwright or director) step out of the narrative to comment on some technical detail. The Narrators in *The Flight* act as commentators, yet their primary task is not to manipulate the dramatic frame: they do not compromise the boundary between the onstage world and that of the audience, or discuss issues outwith the play's themes. The Narrators here are storytellers.

⁷⁵³ *La Fuite* has not been published in an English translation. I have translated the play from *OC*. Page numbers correspond to the original French text in *OC*, 3.

Tzara described his playwriting process for *The Flight*: ‘the author, instead of placing himself on the spectator’s side, is resolutely within the action.’⁷⁵⁴ Both the playwright and the characters he writes are immersed in the drama. That is, for the first time, Tzara does not employ metatheatre in the stylistic presentation of the play. While *The Flight* includes a chorus, they are resolutely bound to the dramatic action, thereby fulfilling a more traditional choral function.

Tzara applies various dramaturgical devices to differentiate between the Narrators’ role as a chorus, and the characters they personify in the primary narrative. The Narrators are physically separated from the other characters for the majority of the play. The household interior is the main playing area, which is occupied by the family. The Narrator ‘sits a short distance from the others (stage direction, 460).’ Here, Tzara recreates a division of the stage space in a manner resembling the arrangement of *Handkerchief of Clouds*, where the primary action occurs on a raised platform. *Handkerchief’s* Commentators remain on the side of the platform commenting on the action from outside the scene and talking amongst themselves when they are not ‘playing.’ The dramaturgical arrangement of characters in *The Flight* is more subtle. Here, the roles are designated by a physical relationship to other characters, and by varied lighting states and costume changes.

The first time the Narrator appears, he is separated from the scene by a lighting change. Tzara’s stage direction reads: ‘Abrupt darkness. Only the face of the Narrator appears lit (449).’ What follows is a prophetic monologue examining the passing of time. The Narrator describes how the Son’s actions echo those of men who came before him, revealing the cyclical nature of history: ‘The Son is there at the very centre of circular destiny [...] Time goes by /And as long as you think about it time goes by (450).’ After which ‘he disappears’ (stage direction, 450), and *The Flight* returns to its central plot. Tzara employs the isolated lighting state to demonstrate that this moment addresses themes raised by the play and does not advance the plot of the drama.

The Narrator, ‘from time to time looks at the pages and orders them before him’ (stage direction, 464). These pages refer to pages from *The Flight’s* script; the Narrator describes the Son’s actions from a written chronicle. He holds the ‘script’ of the Son’s life before him and recounts it to the family second hand. Tzara’s theatrical composition navigates the

⁷⁵⁴ Tristan Tzara, *Europe* (February 1946), quoted in *OC*, 3:621-2.

reader/audience around the construction of the play. Here, Tzara demonstrates that the stage space is divided into two mental states: one occurring in the 'present' of the family, the other recounting the experiences of the Son as memory.⁷⁵⁵

The Narrators transform into primary characters on three occasions. The Narrator plays the Son, the First Female Narrator plays the lover, and the Second Female Narrator is the wife. The first scene of this type is between the Son and his lover. The Son, who has been living in a *ménage à trois*, flees one lover in favour of the other: 'I feel a mysterious cowardice spread its fearful and enveloping scent on me, because I must run to the other woman who does not know how to live and who has suffered. I need to rescue her (470).' The 'other woman' becomes his wife. The subsequent transformations of the Narrators into primary roles are for exchanges between the Son and his wife.

Tzara's choice to have the Narrators double as primary characters identifies another dramaturgical device. The doubling of actors is not a choice of convenience (one actor playing several roles for economy) but to show that the situation being presented is ubiquitous. The scene is not unique to the characters representing it but relates to all human relationships. In this way, Tzara emphasises humanism on stage: individual actions concern all human actions, or as Jean-Paul Sartre would say some years later, 'I am thus responsible for myself and for all men.'⁷⁵⁶ Furthermore, in doubling his actors/characters, Tzara's dramaturgy demonstrates an alienation effect, which further impacts the humanist endeavour of *The Flight*.

In Tzara's previous plays, alienation is controlled by presenting stock characters who lack individual personalities. In the early Dada plays, humanoid entities with no human characteristics occupy the stage (consider the characters from *The Gas Heart* named after body parts). In the later plays, *Handkerchief of Clouds* and *Heads or Tails*, the narratives engage typical human dilemmas around the theme of love, yet the characters here too are types (the Poet, the Wife, the Husband in *Handkerchief*). In *The Flight*, Tzara titles his characters based on their position in the family unit, society, or by their dramatic function; without names. Furthermore, the playwright alienates his characters by alternating the

⁷⁵⁵ In 1972, Samuel Beckett applied a similar device in *Not I*. Beckett's stage, in complete darkness, illuminates only the mouth of the female protagonist as she utters a monologue. Beckett applies this lighting state to demonstrate that the character (Mouth – no relation to Tzara's *The Gas Heart* character) narrates an experience that does not occur in the play's temporal 'present,' it is a memory.

⁷⁵⁶ Sartre, 1956, 292.

actors who play them. Tzara disallows the audience from identifying with individual characters, for they are not attributed specific personalities. Rather, Tzara encourages the spectator to recognise the circumstances of the situation being presented. In this way, *The Flight* relates a social, rather than an emotional message.

In Act III, scene 4, the Second Female Narrator transforms to play the wife. The Narrator again represents the Son. Before this moment, the Narrators explain that the Son and his wife have had a child. The wife struggles to adjust to motherhood, she is ‘unable to understand the birth of her son without sharing or breaking (471).’ The Son becomes discontented and the desire for flight returns. Tzara then instructs that the Narrators undergo ‘some costume changes [to] give the appearance of the character[s]’ they embody (stage direction, 481). These changes occur in view of the audience. In *Handkerchief of Clouds*, Tzara orders that actors remain in sight throughout the performance and all costume changes happen on stage. Tzara applies these techniques to highlight the artifice of the drama. In *The Flight*, character transformations are transparent to guide the audience through the dramatic moments of the play, alerting them to the character switch and demonstrating that the situation is not unique to the characters presenting it. In this scene, the Son and his wife find their domestic situation intolerable: ‘You killed in me the faculty of loving, that of loving you [...] don’t you see that I am withering? Do you not see that it is necessary that you go? (483).’ And so, the Son flees his wife, as he fled his lover and before them his parents. Later, he returns, but his wife no longer wants him. She has experienced her own flight, that is, the freedom she found without him: ‘I saw that apart from you there was the world and other men (488).’

Tzara demonstrates that the flight instinct is universal, and that those who abandon will be abandoned in turn. The wife will leave, the cycle continues. Just as the Son promised to return to his family, his wife says, ‘I know that one day I will come back to you (491).’ But the situation is hopeless; the wait is eternal for those left behind. The Father dies while expecting his son to return. The Son continues his journey. The war that appeared in Act II as a secondary narrative thread becomes more immediate. ‘The war goes on and eats us as a contrition. It grows and overwhelms us (491).’ In Act IV, war is ravaging the country. More people begin to flee. The Mother and the Daughter still waiting for the return of the Son, are caught in the mass exodus sweeping the land. The Son eventually returns home, but it is too late: his family have joined the flight.

The Flight and Theatricality: A Conflict Between Theatre and Poetry

In an interview with Charles Dubreuil published after its first performance, Tzara explains that while *The Flight* is ‘not a theatre play,’ the dramatic quality of the piece is found in ‘the very heart of the characters [...] These are not “ideas” that have a carnal body, but rather beings of life, taken at its source, in their depths – the most confused perhaps – but probably also the most authentic.’ The drama arises from the emotional struggles of these individuals, ‘of the departure of the Son, the nostalgic desire of the parents to retain him, of the continuity of the flight...’⁷⁵⁷ *The Flight* attempts to disentangle the dramatic meaning of these events.

The conflict around *The Flight*’s status returns us to the performance/theatre complex, and the definition of theatricality as set out in Chapter 2. The performance/theatre complex allows for the confluence of seemingly opposing situations: immediate and repeated; spontaneous and rehearsed; performativity and re-presentation. Theatricality also enacts a juncture, for theatricality is the mechanism that separates theatre from life, and also the means to connect theatre to life. Despite his denial of its status as a ‘theatre play,’ as with all his works for the stage, Tzara imbues *The Flight* with theatricality.

To recall, Josette Féral defined theatricality as a composite of two realities: performance (life) and theatre.⁷⁵⁸ Tzara’s theoretical analysis ‘that poetry was not an expression of reality, but reality itself,’⁷⁵⁹ coupled with the representational format (actors portraying characters), reveals how Tzara’s works for the stage hover between theatre and poetry. If for Tzara, poetry is life, then Féral’s equation for theatricality – the combination of theatre and performance (life) – can be reconfigured as the combination of theatre and poetry (life). Therefore, Tzara’s understanding of the dramatic poem fulfils the definition of theatricality that this thesis applies as a framework for examining his works for the stage. It is this theatricality that complicates the category, fulfilling the performance/theatre complex, for both theatricality and the performance/theatre complex create a conduit between life and theatre.

⁷⁵⁷ Tzara, *Les Lettres Françaises*, no. 91 (19 January 1946), *OC*, 3:621-622.

⁷⁵⁸ Féral, 178.

⁷⁵⁹ Hentea, 2014, 272. Tzara’s proposition that poetry and life are unified was first established in the ‘Dada Manifesto 1918’ and restated in ‘Le Surréalisme et l’après-guerre.’ See Chapter 11 for Tzara’s argument as set out in ‘Le Surréalisme et l’après-guerre’

This is because the performance/theatre complex demonstrates that the immediate moment of any executed original gesture (performance/performativity) is always and already infiltrated by repetition.⁷⁶⁰ Simultaneously, temporal flux causes each gesture to be experienced differently with each iteration: it is impossible to perceive the same thing twice in the same way.⁷⁶¹ This situation suggests a constant exchange between two states: not binary positions, but on a continuum. The performance/theatre complex defines this continuous flux between two opposing conditions. Therefore, the performance/theatre complex, like theatricality, collapses the distance between life and representation; performance and theatre, for the space of the separation, is also the mechanism that joins them.

The Flight's elusive category made it difficult to review at the time of its production and subsequent publication. Pol Gaillard emphasises the dramatic force of the symbols, the beauty of the theme, but suggests that the pitfall of the play resides 'in the poetic complexity of the work' tolerated with difficulty in the theatre.⁷⁶² Gaillard suggests that dramatic images and poetic images are mutually exclusive. Others, who assert *The Flight's* poetry fails when transposed to the stage, are forgetting its dramatic elements. Those who state it is not a work of theatre deny that poetry can enter the realm of theatrical performance.

This conflict is identified in Francis Crémieux's review:

The Flight is a long dramatic poem. Its poetic qualities are not enough to make it a definite theatrical work and its author is perfectly aware of it. According to him, the theatre is the expression of a stylised realism. There is no absolute realism.⁷⁶³

My discussion of Tzara's previous theatrical works has already demonstrated that theatre is not the privileged domain of realism. Tzara's rejection of realism onstage heralds a theatricality that would be embraced by Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre and subsequently the Theatre of the Absurd. Tzara anticipates such genres. Moreover, symbolist works presented at Aurélien Lugne-Poe's Théâtre de l'Œuvre (where Tzara's first dadaist play was presented in Paris) and most notably in the theatre of Alfred Jarry (which also

⁷⁶⁰ Derrida establishes that there can be no cognition without a recognised signifier; the performance gesture must always be recognised for it to exist, for our consciousness cannot conceive of any permutation of physical gesture that is not pre-existing. See Derrida, 'The Theatre of Cruelty.'

⁷⁶¹ This is how Antonin Artaud understood theatre action. 'No More Masterpieces,' *The Theatre and It's Double*.

⁷⁶² *Les lettres Françaises*, 2 February 1946, quoted in *OC*, 3:623.

⁷⁶³ Francis Crémieux, *Europe*, 24 A. no 3 (1 March 1946): 123, quoted in *OC*, 3:624.

premiered at the l'Œuvre), had already abolished realism on the European stage before Tzara's theatrical experiments.

Crémieux maintains however, that the 'reality' presented in *The Flight* cannot belong to the theatre: 'Transposition of the real plane, on the plane of a more synthetic reality, more collected, where the words themselves replace the action, is called a poem.' Tzara 'obviously thinks of himself as a poet and not a theatre man...' ⁷⁶⁴ However, as Corvin notes, 'In wanting to be a poet, in spite of himself, [Tzara] would become a man of the theatre.' ⁷⁶⁵ Crémieux suggests that 'the language of the theatre, the succession of events, the construction of the play, the framing by acts, the stage, the light of the lamp, are all conventions accepted by the public but not the author.' ⁷⁶⁶ Yet Tzara employs each of these dramatic protocols in *The Flight*.

Reviewers of the publication of *The Flight* tend to comment on its literary nature. Jean-Pierre Han discusses 'the extreme coherence of the work,' and suggests that *The Flight* unites human concerns and literary processes, concluding that with this piece 'Tzara reaches the fullness of his talent.' ⁷⁶⁷ In other words, in this play Tzara's humanism is presented transparently. Others are not so approving. Serge Fauchereau suggests that '*The Flight* marks a regression of Tzara towards a conventional literature.' ⁷⁶⁸ Certainly, *The Flight*'s longer monologues evidence a return to the symbolist poetry of his pre-Dada days. Before Dada, Symbolism, was a 'training ground for Tzara's poetic development.' ⁷⁶⁹ And symbolist themes were already reappearing in Tzara's theatrical writing with the figure of Hamlet in *Handkerchief of Clouds*, and Greek mythology in *Heads or Tails* of 1923. ⁷⁷⁰

Yves Lévy discusses the imagery presented in *The Flight* with reference to both Tzara's inability to attain the imagery of Symbolism and a regression from the powerful images presented in his works during the Dada period.

Perhaps it will be regretted that the richness of images is lesser than in Tzara's previous works, and especially that, as the poem advances, the images become less and less dense, more and more sparse. This is Tzara's weakness, as a creator of images, in relation to the symbolist poets. In symbolist poetry, the entire poem has both image value and symbolic value. In Tzara, the image has little time to be

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁵ Corvin, 253.

⁷⁶⁶ Crémieux, *Europe*, quoted in *OC*, 3:624.

⁷⁶⁷ Han, 230.

⁷⁶⁸ *Expressionism, Dada...* (Denoël 1977), 58, quoted in *OC*, 3:625.

⁷⁶⁹ Hentea, 2014, 32.

⁷⁷⁰ See Chapter 9, pg. 194-200 and Chapter 10 pg. 206-9.

reconstructed in the mind of the reader because it is the fruit of momentary intention...⁷⁷¹

This criticism considers *The Flight* as a written work only, and not a work for the stage. The very image, which Lévy suggests must be ‘reconstructed in the mind of the reader,’ does not relate to the image as presented on the stage where the dramatic image replaces the poetic image by means of gesture, light and sound. The image on stage does not need to be reconstructed in the mind of the reader; it is given to them visually. And so, when the images presented in *The Flight* are read as dramatic images (as opposed to literary images, whether symbolist or not) the nuance of expression in *The Flight* can be read with more cohesion.

Phillipe Soupault notes that *The Flight* ‘is so strange in its wisdom that I came to question if T.T did not believe his wisdom was the surest way to scandalise everyone, including his friends. I hear beautiful images but drowned in a fog of words.’⁷⁷² While appreciating *The Flight*’s dramatic imagery, Soupault infers that it lacks the bombast of Tzara’s dadaist works, and relaying an intimate portrayal of the human experience, scandalises his Dada friends. I would argue that this ‘wisdom,’ which Soupault asserts Tzara presents here, is not unique to *The Flight*. As this thesis has demonstrated, Tzara’s commitment to addressing human issues – war, love and family relationships – is evident in each of his theatrical works since *The First Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine*. In this way, Tzara’s humanist concerns during Dada remain constant as his career progresses.

The Flight and the Humanist Dada Theatre

Louis Aragon recognises that Dada remains in Tzara’s later works and cites *The Flight* to illustrate the image of the ‘moralist’ that Tzara has always been since Dada.⁷⁷³ And as Jean-Pierre Han identifies, when comparing *The Flight* to the dadaist revolt: ‘we will then see that [Tzara’s] desire for destruction was an aspiration towards purity and sincerity and that the centre of all his concerns was man.’⁷⁷⁴ Additionally, Elmer Peterson discusses that Tzara’s ‘sincerity in trying to find a more satisfactory and universal method of

⁷⁷¹ Yves Lévy, *Paru*, no 41 (Avril 1948): 41-43, quoted in *OC*, 3:625

⁷⁷² *Les lettres Françaises*, 2 February 1946, quoted in *OC*, 3:623-24.

⁷⁷³ ‘L’homme Tzara,’ *Lettres françaises*, no 1011 (9 January 1964), reprinted in *Europe* (July-August 1975): 30-32, quoted in *OC*, 3:625.

⁷⁷⁴ Han, 228.

communication made him a humanist involved deeply and passionately in a poetic solution to the problem of understanding others and the world around us.⁷⁷⁵ *The Flight*'s central themes and the format in which they are presented highlight Tzara's humanism while retaining the dadaist directive.

Tzara weaves three predominant themes through the narrative of *The Flight*: family, war, and the cyclical nature of history. The themes are intertwined and relatable. As will be discussed here, the fracturing of families during wartime (predominantly the departure of sons) is mirrored in *The Flight*'s primary narrative: the Son's flight from his family. Equally, the family's grief at the loss of their Son and the subsequent outbreak of war, relates to the third theme: the cycle of life and death. The Son leaves home devastating the family; the Father dies as the Son becomes a parent; war ravages the land and further divides the family. These themes are interdependent in Tzara's narrative. The flight instinct at the heart of the play binds the themes together.

Family

Tzara introduces the reader/viewer to the concept of the flight through the experiences of the central characters: the family. The family suffer the Son's first flight for he 'pursues a great unknowable dream [...] making him haughty and indifferent (464).' The quest for this dream will be the source of the Son's fractured relationships, causing him to suffer in turn. His lover states: 'Who could know you better than me? You follow an unknowable dream. No woman will have the strength to bear you heartbreak (470).' He leaves her and marries the other woman, believing 'he has reached the source of his indomitable dream. In the love and resignation of daily tasks. In the ardour of love and fidelity (470).' But he is mistaken, and the pursuit of the dream causes marital discord. The Narrator (as the Son) states: 'Have I not even given up my dream believing I found the source in you?' To which the Second Female Narrator (as the wife) responds, '[you] could not let me be free within myself, within my dream, because I too am chasing one (481).'

The pursuit of one's own dream is the cause of all human flight, and individual objectives can never be reconciled: 'I thought I could unite you in the pursuit of my dream [...] I believed it, I loved you so much (490).' In doing so, the Son inadvertently destroys his wife's dream: 'you took the beginning and end and my reason for living and my dream

⁷⁷⁵ Peterson, 1971, 222-223.

(483).’ Here, Tzara narrates the impossibility of human relations, for ‘never will two beings make one (490).’ There is either individual objective or domestic harmony, which are mutually exclusive concepts. Michel Leiris notes that ‘this shift, this constant divorce, this separation that responds to the very movement of life’ is the guiding theme of *The Flight*. Each living being will dissociate from others, will suffer and make others suffer, ‘but cannot do otherwise because to realise himself he needs a certain solitude.’⁷⁷⁶ Yet, the freedom that is found in flight comes with sacrifice: the flight fights the desire to remain and to return. As the Son realises: ‘I suffer now from no longer being with you (490-1).’ But the dream and the flight are stronger and the Son will remain alone.

Tzara had previously introduced the theme of flight from family in his unpublished play *Heads or Tails*. The character Foam declares: ‘I will not mention my student days, which were perhaps quite sad because of the regime that we all suffer in our youth, the tyranny of the family in the first place, which I knew how to get rid of at the approach of my manhood, like a dirty shirt...’⁷⁷⁷ Tzara revisits the concept of tyranny in relation to family dynamics in *The Flight*. In Act II, the Mother announces that her ‘[revolt] against the tyranny of mine / Made me see freedom in you (459),’ to describe her own youthful flight from her parents towards her husband. Later, the Second Female Narrator (as the wife) also discusses her experience of the ‘tyranny and the exclusive love of my father (487-8).’ And furthermore, compares the control she felt under her family to the suffocation she now feels with her husband:

No, I can no longer be silent. I was a slave. Always a slave. The tyranny of my family, I wanted to break it by coming to you. And you have become a tyrant a thousand times more powerful, more insidious, more dangerous. (481)

Tzara applies these phrases (tyranny of family; pursuit of the dream) as linguistic signatures, which are repeated to illustrate the force of the flight instinct.

It is important to highlight that there is no correlation between Tzara’s childhood experience and that of *The Flight*’s characters. The young Samuel Rosenstock experienced freedom from his family when he was just ten (1906). That year he was sent to boarding school in Bucharest, three hundred kilometres from his hometown Moineşti. In 1910, Tzara’s family relocated to Bucharest. Hentea notes that ‘this reunification of the family did not make life easier for Samuel, who had become used to independence.’⁷⁷⁸ But soon

⁷⁷⁶ Leiris, *Brisées*, quoted in *OC*, 3:623.

⁷⁷⁷ Tzara, *Pile ou Face*, *OC*, 1:529.

⁷⁷⁸ Hentea, 2014, 31.

he would be free from his family once more. When war broke out in 1914, Tzara had just finished high school. He was eighteen years old and eligible for conscription. Romania initially declared neutrality, yet most ‘observers understood it was only a matter of time before Romania took up arms.’⁷⁷⁹ Tzara’s parents sent him to Zurich in autumn of 1915 for two reasons: to continue his tertiary education in a city that boasted some of the best universities in Europe, and to avoid war.⁷⁸⁰ Never in Tzara’s early life did he feel the need to escape, to flee from his family – he was granted his independence at an early age. In this way, the Son’s adolescent desire to flee the family home is not autobiographical.

The Flight, however, relates to Tzara’s experience at the time of writing. In 1940, separation from, and safety for, Tzara’s family posed a significant concern. In April 1939, Tzara’s sister Lucică visited Paris in hope of escaping the rise of anti-Semitism in Romania. Tzara was not yet a French citizen and was unable to help his sister and her family obtain visas. When war was declared in September, Lucică was forced to return to Romania. For the duration of the war, she remained unable to travel or communicate with Tzara.⁷⁸¹ Cut off from his sister, Tzara was isolated from the family of his childhood.

Moreover, Tzara’s immediate family were divided by the war because of Tzara’s Jewish status. In the years that Tzara remained in the south, he relocated several times to avoid deportation. Until 1942, Tzara followed regulations for residing in France under the Vichy regime, but in January 1942 the Services des Étrangers in Marseille deemed Tzara ineligible for an identity card unless he obtained an ‘authorisation to stay’ (*autorisation de séjour*) by the authorities of each town he arrived in. Tzara was now living illegally, hiding in the Pyrenean mountains. At this point, the Southern Zone had commenced the deportation of foreign Jews to death camps. Of the 80,000 Jews deported from France, 64,000 had either immigrant parents or were born abroad.⁷⁸² Tzara was at immediate risk and removed himself from his family during this time. Tzara’s wife, Greta, and their son, Christophe, had remained in Aix-en-Provence since 1939 near to Christophe’s school. Tzara worked on *The Flight* while cut-off from his sister abroad and in exile from his wife and child in France. The time spent isolated from his family, and the dangers of war are

⁷⁷⁹ Hentea, 2014, 57.

⁷⁸⁰ Tzara’s position at the University of Bucharest (where he studied in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters) was compromised when he and a fellow student co-signed a disparaging letter about one of their tutors and sent it to the Dean of Faculty. Hentea describes this action as ‘either childish naïveté or a deliberate provocation.’ Hentea, 2014, 52.

⁷⁸¹ See Hentea, 2014, 254.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*, 260.

reflected in *The Flight*: 'I see time. I see the piling up of time. I see time carrying large luggage. I see threatening thunderstorms (463).' *The Flight* 'restages Tzara's personal anguish at being separated from his family.'⁷⁸³

The notion of fatherhood is examined in *The Flight*, first through the Father's relationship with the Son, and then in the Son's experience at becoming a father. The latter is relatable to Tzara's situation of estrangement from Christophe. In Act II, scene 4, the Son's wife is in labour. The danger of birth is highlighted: 'His wife I see her dying / His wife is there waiting for him.' And the physical pain of labour is described: 'There are glaciers and the scorching sun (471).' Tzara first explored the theme of childbirth in *The Second Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine*, when the chorus graphically narrates a labour occurring offstage. *The Flight* examines less the physical experience of childbirth, emphasising the emotional pain of bringing life into the world and the eventual tearing of the child from their parents. However, the trauma of childbirth and the frailty of the infant reappear in *The Flight*. The wife 'is pale, thin.' The child, 'the frail being who still hesitates between shadow and weight' is so delicate that even 'leaves of the trees in the park' can weigh down on him (471). This child is given to the Son 'in joy' but it is a 'short-lived joy (471).' Later the Son sees his child 'on the operating table, his son is tied up as a prisoner and does not understand why (477).' The child is bound and separated from the Son in a dramatic reflection of Tzara's own separation from Christophe. Seeing his child in this way, the Son feels 'As if the weight of the world had advanced to his weak arms the ludic fear of punishment... And so he flees (477).'

The Flight also examines the relationship between brothers and sisters. The Son follows his flight while the Daughter remains behind. She resents him for it but their love for each other is greater. Act I, scene 5, contains an intimate dialogue between the Son and the Daughter. It is the only scene in which the siblings converse alone. While the Son discusses his anguish at the choice he must take: to remain or leave ('death or flight'), the Daughter expresses her frustration at being treated differently from her brother. Mimicking the Mother, the Daughter states:

...for me it's: 'Be very good my little girl, you'll always remain our good little girl.'
And for you: 'Do you want chocolate, I'll buy you a gramophone, you will have a bicycle, don't get cold my little boy [...] You have to love the boys better and more, do you understand...' (455)

⁷⁸³ Ibid., 256

After this exchange, the Son departs and the Daughter remains as a silent witness. In *The Flight*, the Daughter, cut off from her brother, sees everything pass: the ‘breaking horrors’ of war, the hardships experienced by the Son (mediated through the Narrator), and the heartbreak of the parents at home.

The Daughter remains with the Mother who awaits the Son’s return, encouraged by his letters – ‘he writes that he is happy [...] If he left it was only for his happiness we could not prevent him (463).’ However, the Narrator explains that ‘A subtle melancholy wreaks havoc and because he hurts, in turn causes pain. Already indifferent, difficult to control (462).’ The Mother and Father deny his misfortune, hoping to keep the memory of the Son untainted: ‘Who are you then to bring here in broad daylight our pain distressing new and bad omens.’ The Narrator responds, ‘I am time (463-4).’

The Narrator represents the inescapable reality of time. He speaks of the inevitable changes that befall each individual as they grow and die. The Mother struggles to comprehend how time will ravage her son as it does all life:

I no longer want to hear the time
I know he trots and he drags me in his wake [...]
Which goes from the cradle to the first shoes to the school uniform to the torments of
exams to the crazy intoxications of the grasshopper races
It stops at the start when the watch is broken against the jagged rock (464)

Time stops all in death. Yet, with every death there is birth. ‘And so it is that despite the pain, births and deaths follow one another (445).’ This is the second theme that Tzara weaves into *The Flight*: the relentless cycle of history.

The Cyclical Nature of History

Tzara presents the revolution of history through the experiences of the family. The characters are not driven by an internal conflict or personal narrative but are driven by external forces that compel them: the realities of life and death. Tzara dramatizes different aspects of life, which are repeated across the narrative in a cycle. Each character has a counterpart, and their actions are reflected in corresponding characters. The Son’s actions mirror the Father’s memories of his life as a youth; the Mother’s behaviour is repeated in the lovers’ actions towards the Son. In Act IV, the soldiers signify every son who has gone to war, and an old woman becomes a symbol for all mothers. The old woman is ‘Alone, of course. She was waiting for someone, who knows, her son, a brother... (492)’ This situation is also that of the Mother and the Daughter. The woman’s predicament resembles

that of all who wait for the return of their loved ones. The unification of characters in *The Flight* identifies the pervasiveness of the human condition.

In an interview published in 1946, Tzara explains that the conflict experienced by *The Flight*'s central characters 'could equally well apply to the community as to the fate of the individual.'⁷⁸⁴

It overflows the individual because this process of escaping and wrenching, birth and death, engages all human lives, not only individuals but also communities. It is through these crises that societies and individuals are gradually born into consciousness.⁷⁸⁵

Tzara recognises that personal experiences of life and death magnify and encompass all human history, driving the formation of communities: the individual becomes the collective. And this formula aligns with Sartre's explanation of individual and collective accountability: 'every man realizes himself in realizing a type of humanity;' each individual bears 'the responsibility of the choice which, in committing myself, also commits the whole of humanity.'⁷⁸⁶ In *The Flight*, Tzara presents his own humanist beliefs: the suffering of the family is universal, and the characters lack unique personalities because the situation presented is greater than the individual's journey.

The Son is absent from the stage after the first act and lives only in the memory of those he has fled. For Tzara, the Son is typical of all young men, and therefore (after the first two scenes) he does not have a designated character. The actions of the Son are presented not only in the actions of the Narrator, but also through the character of the Father. The Father discusses his youth and his own flight: 'My young life was desire / And for the fulfilment of this desire the only way was to leave (458).' The Father comprehends the actions of the Son, for he sees in him the nature of his own youth; in the Son's actions, we see 'the father at his early age (449).' The Father knows that 'the substance of life is made from this impetuous flight (459).' Just as the father was 'called by this voice,' it now passes 'from father to son, is perpetuated at an even faster rate (449-450).'

As Tzara conflates the actions of the Son and the Father, so too, the young women substitute the Mother. In exchanges between the Narrator (as the Son) and the First Female Narrator (as the lover) it becomes unclear if the exchange is occurring between a romantic

⁷⁸⁴ Tzara, *Europe* (February 1946), *OC*, 3:621-2.

⁷⁸⁵ Tzara, *Les Lettres Françaises* no 91 (19 January 1946), *OC*, 3:621-622.

⁷⁸⁶ Sartre, 1956, 304-5.

couple, or a mother and son. The Narrator (as the Son) says to his lover: ‘I was a child when you knew me, through you I grew up. So, even when I was much younger, I had to leave, to separate, I had to go (470).’ This dialogue also explains the Son’s relationship to the Mother. Furthermore, when the lovers nurse the Son from sickness the Narrator explains: ‘life is stronger which brings the tenderness of mothers into the hearts of younger women [...] They are already inventing the gestures they will later hold towards their sons (468).’ Tzara is explicit about the conflation of behaviour across character types, signifying the experience of all human relationships, whether between lovers/spouses or parents and children. As the First Female Narrator (as the lover) says to the Son before his second flight, ‘I have loved you like no one else will love you. You were for me the son and the brother and the lover and the father. (469).’

Jean-Pierre Han suggests that in choosing ‘man’ as the focus of all his activities, Tzara, during and after Dada, continues to address the nature of man as always evolving, as ‘moving material,’ for ‘what is man if not a perpetual becoming? He is nothing in the moment itself, always elusive, “approximate.”’⁷⁸⁷ Or as Sartre suggests: man is at first nothing, and becomes only through his experiences.⁷⁸⁸ This ever changing, ever becoming man is demonstrated in *The Flight*’s evolving characters: the Father knows himself only when recognising the Son; the Son accounts for himself only after losing those he loves; the younger women exhibit traits of mothers. Tzara indicates the ‘moving material’ of human life transitioning between the various stages and ages; *The Flight*’s characters are caught in perpetual movement, and their actions, thoughts and motivations are identified in other characters in turn.

In Act IV, Tzara introduces a host of new characters who also suffer from the flight. The flight will never cease and the reader/viewer witnesses the experience of the family through secondary characters:

A MAN. So fled ours from father to son passed on the flame
The flame of the flight that set their whole being on fire
And from century to century the flight weighed down with its heavy threat
And the punishment of giving birth to the seeds of senseless flight
In turn the flight of ours punished us in our fruit (496)

The flight is never ending, passing from generation to generation in relentless succession. And these reflective experiences, between the primary and secondary characters, relay the

⁷⁸⁷ Han, 229.

⁷⁸⁸ Sartre, 1956, 290.

continuity of human life. The individual/character changes but the situation remains the same.

Each character is governed by the flight, which causes movement and change. Speaking of the first Dada performances, Tzara announced that the ‘conception’ of Dada ‘was one of continuous movement, perpetual change, a headlong flight of time.’⁷⁸⁹ In 1940, Tzara’s theatre practice continues to address these basic tenets of Dada. This need to demonstrate ‘continuous movement’ also reveals why Tzara chooses the theatrical medium, for the cyclical nature of ever-evolving matter is a concern shared by Dada and the theatre. ‘Because the theatre is the very place of spontaneous creation where words burst, live and die at the same time and at the same moment.’ For this reason, ‘Dada did not condemn the theatre – and the play – as did Surrealism much later.’⁷⁹⁰ *The Flight*’s transposed characters and episodic scenes present man’s ‘flight of time’ in each of its stages.

The cycle of nature as examined in *The Flight* is presented not only in the continuity of individual experience, but also how Tzara embeds in the text, the reality of death in life. As examined in reference to the ‘unknowable dream’ and the ‘tyranny of family,’ there are certain phrases which Tzara repeats. One such linguistic signature refers to killing a part of yourself, or part of someone you love, in order to thrive: ‘And that joy kills at some point in you a part of someone else’s life. Each parcel of life leads to a share in death [...] No one can endure so much love without wanting someone to die (476).’

The Mother recognises these small deaths. For her Son to grow, ‘a small part of his great life also died (476-7).’ Later, the Narrator discusses the Son’s relationship to his child: ‘what he gave birth to by the attachment of his strength / Is born again so that some part inside him must die (486).’ Finally, the Narrator acknowledges that the flight and death are related: ‘Thus, each one, when he kills a part of a loved one, leaves... (489).’ The cycle of life and death becomes explicit in Act II. The Son is given a child therefore the Father must die; each new life must be paid for with death. ‘The Father is dead. So each birth in the bouquet of each community is accomplished only near death. And each time that a new degree of life is born, a higher passion dies out in the collective soul... (472).’

⁷⁸⁹ Tzara, ‘An Introduction to Dada,’ in Motherwell, 404.

⁷⁹⁰ Han, 229.

The Flight demonstrates how ‘each birth corresponds, on a certain plane, to a death, a rupture.’⁷⁹¹

Man is born for the first time from the unconsciousness of inconsistency
And then he is born to the external world
and once more again becomes aware of himself and is born
Once more again he believes to be born but already begins his decline
Because with each new birth he kills those around him whether he wants to or not
(485-6)

The above is described in another way by Sartre to define existentialist humanism: ‘man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards.’⁷⁹² In *The Flight*, Tzara states of the human condition: ‘this is the natural course we must know to accept the allegiance’ of death and life (486). And in this way, *The Flight* engages, more than existentialism, a fundamental principle of absurdism: the impossibility of life faced with the reality of death. As Tzara states, ‘If, in order to be born to consciousness, one must have risked death, to have passed through a total crisis that engages the life of man, this dramatic poem wants to show the first phase of this [...] process.’⁷⁹³ *The Flight* shows the confusion of knowing the risk of death in life. And the crisis that arises from this situation – the inability to comprehend, through rational systems of thought, the experience of existence – causes a disjuncture, which is explained by absurdism. As Stephen Halloran describes, ‘the term absurd,’ indicates the ‘essential disharmony between man and the world he must live in.’⁷⁹⁴ In each situation presented across *The Flight*, the characters suffer; they are at odds with the world they live in, which gives rise to the flight.

The dramaturgical arrangement of *The Flight* resembles that of absurdist theatre. At the beginning of Act I, scene 4, the Father reflects that ‘Here we are again sitting around the table me in the same chair (450).’ Each act begins in this way: the same family, sitting around the same table, repeating the same conversations. They exist in an undefined location, in an unknown world, while an unspecified war goes on in the background. And like characters from the Theatre of the Absurd, the family are caught in a perpetual and hopeless situation of waiting. Only in Act IV, with the explosion of war into the narrative does the scene change, yet the situation remains the same: the flight destroys those who wait. Now the flight conquers the nation becoming a mass exodus.

⁷⁹¹ Tzara, *Europe* (February 1946), *OC*, 3:621-2.

⁷⁹² Sartre, 1956, 290.

⁷⁹³ Tzara, *Europe* (February 1946), *OC*, 3:621-2.

⁷⁹⁴ Halloran, 97.

War

The final theme that Tzara addresses in *The Flight* is war. The precariousness of human existence highlighted by World War II influenced the development of both existential philosophy and the Theatre of the Absurd. In 1942, Albert Camus introduced the philosophy of the absurd in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Absurdist playwrights adhere to concepts introduced by Camus, but absurdism did not appear on stage until around 1947 with Arthur Adamov's *La Parodie*. Elmer Peterson recognises that 'Tzara grasped the tragedy of human solitude in this century as fully as the existentialists, and (as a critic) he attempted to reach out to others by transcending the restrictions of language and reason.'⁷⁹⁵ Written in the same year as Camus' essay, and performed one year before *La Parodie* was written, Tzara's *The Flight* addresses the 'tragedy of human solitude' before existentialist theory and absurdism emerged properly.

Act IV of *The Flight* directly addresses the realities of life during World War II: 'exodus, rout, dispersion of all men and women through the anonymity of roads, and the brouhaha of stations, where civilians and military elbow each other. Bankruptcy, collapse, confusion...'⁷⁹⁶ War features in Tzara's earlier plays, most notably in *The Gas Heart*. As with the theme of childbirth, the presentation of war in *The Flight* is less graphic than how it appears in the earlier plays. No longer does the dialogue describe physical deformation of the war-wounded (*The Gas Heart*) but the traumatic impact of war on individuals and communities. In *The Flight*, war is described as an unknown scourge sweeping the land.

In Act II, scene 3, the Narrator foreshadows the coming war: 'I see the preparation of death,' and explains the economic complexity of war from which some profit:

...body fat extracted by modern means, frenzied dance in the rain, the rain of money, sections of walls collapsing and still the blissful laughter soaked in champagne foam, scavengers preparing to profit from it all, those who know that time is running out; I see the preparation for panic before the judgement, the panic of the stock exchange, of honour, of trains, motley crews, piles of mattresses and bare earth (465).

The following scene commences with the outbreak of war: 'Countries intertwine as if under the desperate action of the wind. Paperwork gathered in haste, like a shameful rumour (466).' War overcomes everyone: 'We are pressed. War is at the door. Do you hear

⁷⁹⁵ Peterson, 1971, 222-223.

⁷⁹⁶ Leiris, *Brisées*, quoted in *OC*, 3:623.

the hideous convoys, brandishing scorpions, centipedes and gliding like snails, leaping into the stud farms and inspecting destruction? (491)'

The primary product of war that Tzara relates is exodus, reflecting his immediate situation at the time of writing. That is, 'the shocking experience of the exodus – occurring as a sign of the times' becomes 'the crystallising principle' in Act IV.⁷⁹⁷ The characters have fled their homes and gather in a train station. Tzara describes the scene:

The stage represents the waiting room of a train station where misery has settled. People squatting or lying on benches, bales, crates. Luggage everywhere. Amongst the women, children and old people, we see the Mother, the Daughter and the First Female Narrator. The Narrator stands at a short distance. Also, a group of ragged soldiers. A woman, downstage, lies on the ground. It's evening, low lighting. An old man coughs from time to time, children moan. (492)

The occupants of the station are waiting for a train that will never come: 'Tonight, there will still be no train. The station master went to bed. / I've been waiting for this train for three weeks. But where would it take me? (492)' Once again, Tzara anticipates a dramatic situation that would become a convention of absurdist drama: endless waiting for an unknowable event to occur. In Acts I, II and III, the family wait for the Son to return; the lover, abandoned by the Son in Act II waits with them. In Act III, the Father dies waiting. Now, the Mother will die still waiting: 'Wait for a loved one until death becomes one with the waiting (479).' And the wait consumes them all:

A SOLDIER: Me, I'm waiting, it's far from here.

A SOLDIER: I have a grown son that I would like to see.

A SOLDIER: (*approaching the old woman to examine her face.*)

I have a mother somewhere, no news for a year. Each of us was thrown into dispersal. (*After watching her.*) It's not her.

(*The other soldiers, in silence, one after the other, come to look closely at the lying woman.*)

A MAN: To die alone, when someone every moment of the day, calls you and wants you. What fault do we atone for? To wait, to wait, to lose ourselves, to know nothing more, or what to expect, or why. (492)

Each one hopes to identify the loved one they seek in the unknown woman who is close to death. The waiting is pervasive: 'Everyone is looking for someone, and the one who is sought, seeks in turn.' And they will never be fulfilled; they 'are stuck waiting in a loop in the mud of hope (495).'

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid.

The waiting is caused by the flight from which everyone suffers. 'Happy are those who die before knowing the scourge and the flight' states a Man. The men and women in the station explain the great movement in the land. Everyone is leaving to seek those that fled before them. 'And flight after flight has amassed / And the whole country started to flee / Those waiting for returns began to flee (496).' A crisis is caused by this mass flight for 'those who wanted to return no longer knew where to find theirs / So the flight of ours consumed our souls (496).'

...The whole country was emptying. Old men, women, children, on foot, on carts, their faces hollowed out, pushing, carrying, dragging bundles, luggage, mattresses. The infirm on carts pushed by small old women and clusters of unarmed soldiers on foot among them, they said they were going to find theirs. We didn't understand yet. But the fugitives said: your turn will come soon. You will be like us. [...] So, we joined them. (497)

Without knowing where they were going, or where it would lead them. It did not matter for 'the flight was stronger.' And lost from their families, they become refugees 'feeding on grass and chance [...] they were not beggars and yet people rescued them and they all accepted by giving thanks (497).' Tzara equates the war evacuation to the crisis of the family; the reason for exodus is both war and volition. As a Woman seeking her soldier son explains: 'He fled of his own free will at the age of the flight of sons (496).'

The flight is both personal and political; affected by nature and war. Therefore, while the train station occupants worry about war and the exodus, the Narrator returns to the journey of the Son. He comes home: 'Here he returns after a long absence which carried stones / His grey hair hiding the frail old youth part remained intact.' He retraces 'all the horizons towards which his steps carried the flight of joy (500).' A chorus of voices join in the pageantry and echo in unison 'Joy... He came back.' They tell of his wonder at returning to the place of his youth, he sees it 'with new eyes / With the eyes of a child who made the little town where he grew up so big [...] He is surprised the houses are so small that he had left high (500/2).' And he relives the memories of his youth, and everything he experienced in this town, before the flight: 'He was running through his life / Through his life (501).' The Mother asks to be laid near the dying woman and says once again: 'He wrote me that he is happy. He will come back (503).' The Son continues towards her: 'His feet bloodied, thirst, hunger, horror at seeing the misery of others, because the pain is more dreadful to see around you, than to undergo itself... it will be nice to find his own [family].' And the Mother who 'rises halfway (stage direction, 503) says with her last breath: 'I knew he was coming back (503).' She dies before he returns.

And the Son ‘came back with tears in his mouth... He opened the door.’ The choir sing: ‘Blessed be the moment where he finds his loved ones.’ But the Narrator knows better: ‘We told him why did you come back [...] And it was a pity (*A moment of silence.*) And the time has bled (*A moment of silence.*) He closed the loop (*A moment of silence.*) [...] (*Some people, in tears, go back to their places.*) He is the one who comes and who leaves (507-8).’ Now he comes home too late.

At the time of writing *The Flight*, there was no indication yet when World War II might end, and when Tzara might be reunited with his family. As stated above, Tzara refused to publish *The Flight* at the time of writing, for during the war, all publications printed in the unoccupied south were censored; subject to approval by the Vichy regime.⁷⁹⁸ Hentea notes that Tzara, along with other avant-garde writers saw publication as an act of collaboration and sought silence as resistance.⁷⁹⁹ Tzara, entirely committed to the refusal to publish, wrote personal attacks on those whom he viewed as collaborating with Vichy. Of his former friend Marcel Jouhandeau, he wrote: ‘may the blood of victims indirectly struck by your writings fall upon you! May your hands tremble every time you pick up a pen, because it is from your hand that the hand of the executioner gathered force to handle the axe.’⁸⁰⁰

Tzara’s silence during World War II has further implications when compared to the dadaist revolt against language during and after World War I. As noted, *The Flight* does not engage the linguistic destruction of Dada and Tzara’s earlier plays. Here the protest is more final: Dada’s deconstructed language becomes a language of no words, of silence. ‘We followed in the footsteps of men through the tumult and the silence to arrive at the long silence which burdens (453).’ The dadaists promoted nonsense language and sought to destroy language’s communicative function, for the application of language they recognised as complicit in the organisation of war. The dadaists enacted a noisy protest, but they did so by using words (however deconstructed) and sounds as derivatives of the

⁷⁹⁸ In June 1940, Marshall Phillipe Pétain signed an armistice with Germany, effectively dissolving the Third Republic (established since 1870) and inaugurating the French State (État français), also known as Vichy France after its headquarters in Vichy, South of France. Pétain established an authoritarian government and began a programme for National Regeneration. The media was tightly controlled, all publications and letters of correspondence were censored, conservative Catholicism became prominent and in schools, teaching by religious clerics was reintroduced. Widespread anti-Semitism was promoted.

⁷⁹⁹ Hentea, 2014, 257.

⁸⁰⁰ Tzara, ‘Marcel Jouhandeau,’ *OC*: 5, 290-291, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 257.

self-same language they viewed as problematic. Tzara's attitude to language during World War II is not consistent with the dadaist response. However, Tzara continues to demote language. That is, in opposition to the noise of Dada, Tzara refuses for *The Flight* to be seen, heard, or read. He remains silent. Tzara's silence, can be viewed as a more damning critique on language than was undertaken during the Dada days; here, it disappears.

Through the Narrator, speaking of the Son, Tzara explains his feelings about the war:

He wants the carnage to end. He who felt resonate in him the echo of all the complaints that flow, he wants to cry alone in front of the world, the lie, deception, disgust, so that soldiery drunk with discipline, trembling, drops the weapons from his hands.

But Tzara realises this is 'Madness! No one hears.' His words are 'Barely a rustle of paper in the snowy silence. An icy crumple...' And so, because of the political climate of wartime, Tzara's words will be empty, he feels 'himself only a paper carelessly thrown away (468).' Pierre Seghers described Tzara's silence during the war: 'raging, orderly, meticulous, and ardent, Tzara does not want to publish. But he writes for himself to extirpate the burning fragment, the shrapnel of time that tears him apart – poems that he will take up once the German have left.'⁸⁰¹ In the final scene of *The Flight* Tzara suggests that there is hope for 'the word,' but only after the war: 'perhaps the power will come to him to help others and by the force of the word to restore order.' Tzara waits for the war to end, for the end of silence in France and elsewhere, bringing 'kindness in the country delivered to the wolves (503).'

Germany surrendered Paris in August 1944, and in just over a year, Tzara published *The Flight*. Excerpts of the play were printed after its production in 1946. Act IV was printed in *Europe* (February 1946), accompanied by an introduction by Tzara. In the same month, excerpts of the play were printed alongside an essay by Michel Leiris. Finally, in April 1947 the entirety of *The Flight* (a dramatic poem in four acts and an epilogue) was published by Gallimard. *The Flight* would be Tzara's only work published by the distinguished publishing house during his lifetime.⁸⁰² Before these publications however, as with all Tzara works for the stage, it was performed.

⁸⁰¹ Pierre Seghers, *La Résistance et ses poètes* (Paris: Seghers, 1974), 392, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 257.

⁸⁰² Hentea, 2014, 268.

The Flight on Stage

The Flight received its premiere as a ‘lecture-performance’ at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier on 21 January 1946.⁸⁰³ Michel Leiris organised the event, and Hentea notes that Leiris felt so passionately about *The Flight* that he almost resigned from the editorial board of *Les temps Modernes* for refusing to publish an excerpt from the play.⁸⁰⁴ The set was designed by Marcel Lupovici with music by Max Deutsch. Leiris gave a speech as an introduction to the play outlining its importance for post-war France.

This lecture-performance provided some youthful avant-gardes an opportunity to express themselves publicly.⁸⁰⁵ The young Romanian-Jew, Isidore Isou who had recently arrived in Paris, heckled Tzara about modern art, echoing Tzara’s protest against Marinetti during a lecture on ‘tactilism’ at the Théâtre de l’Œuvre in January 1921. Prior to this 1921 lecture, Marinetti had described Dada as a continuation of Futurism. A few days before the lecture, the dadaists printed leaflets stating: ‘The Futurist is dead. Of what? DADA.’ The pamphlets were distributed to the audience at the lecture and before Marinetti had begun speaking Tzara, Breton and Aragon began shouting insults. The audience joined in.⁸⁰⁶ During Leiris’s speech at *The Flight*’s premiere, Isou shouted: ‘Mr. Leiris, we know about Dadaism... Talk to us about a new movement, like Lettrism for example.’⁸⁰⁷ Hentea recounts how ‘Isou then went on stage to explain to a stunned audience that while Dada had detached words from phrases, Lettrism would detach letters from words. Isou, who had founded a review in Romania called *Da*, idolised Tzara, but Tzara was also the poetic double whom he had to kill off.’ Tzara knew nothing of Isou and was bewildered by the action.⁸⁰⁸ The symmetry between Tzara and Isou is remarkable, and like the cyclical themes reflected in *The Flight*, Tzara, approaching his fiftieth birthday, witnessed at this performance the revolution of modern art; the mantle of the avant-garde passing to a new generation.

⁸⁰³ *OC*, 3:624.

⁸⁰⁴ René Leibowitz to Tzara, 29 June 1945, BLJD TZR C2348, quoted in Hentea, 268.

⁸⁰⁵ See Maurice Nadeau, ‘Writers heckle a Tzara lecture at the Vieux-Colombier,’ *Combate*, January 22 1946, in *OC* 3:623.

⁸⁰⁶ Hentea, 2014, 161.

⁸⁰⁷ Isidore Isou, *Introduction à une nouvelle poésie et à une nouvelle musique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 29-30, quoted in Hentea, 2014, 268.

⁸⁰⁸ Hentea, 2014, 268.

The Flight then received a radio broadcast in Paris on April 3, 1946 (with the same cast as the lecture-performance). After the lecture-performance of January 1946, Tzara embarked on a European tour, returning to Romania in November. Unlike the Son in *The Flight*, Tzara was reunited with his mother and sister, who were both in good health despite the harsh treatment of Jews in Bucharest during the war. In December, Tzara travelled to Prague. During his stay in the city *The Flight* was presented by the D.47 theatre company, directed by J. Raban.⁸⁰⁹ The Tzara archives housed at the Jacques Doucet Library contain photographs of the production (Figs. 15-17). The costumes are contemporary with soldiers dressed in ubiquitous military outfit, no particular country or army is designated. The setting is minimal: a doorframe, two upright chairs, a rocking chair, and a table topped with a vase containing a single rose. One photograph shows a smiling Tzara with the director of the theatre company, E.F Burian (Fig. 18). Hentea notes that ‘it was the only time in his life that Tzara saw his most personal play staged, and it brought back memories of loss.’⁸¹⁰

The final presentation of *The Flight* occurred on June 25 1964, exactly six months after Tzara’s death. This production by the Compagnie de L’Ancelle at the Théâtre Gramont in Paris was directed by Jacques Gaulme with set and costume designed by Michèle Hagar. An interview with Jacques Gaulme and Claude-Pierre Quémy (producer) reveals that they ‘wanted while producing *The Flight*, to initiate an ascent towards the heart of the theatre of the absurd, precisely demonstrated by *The Gas Heart* written in 1921.’⁸¹¹ By 1964, the Theatre of the Absurd dominated Parisian stages. The Compagnie de L’Ancelle recognise *The Flight*, and Tzara’s earlier Dada plays, amongst works issuing from this theatrical movement.

Tzara died on 25 December 1963. Buried in the Montparnasse Cemetery alongside Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett, in death Tzara remains amongst the kings of the Theatre of the Absurd. While art, theatre and literary history have not acknowledged Tzara’s status as a playwright, deferring to the more befitting ‘poet,’ it is my hope that this thesis demonstrates his importance for subsequent theatrical developments. Most crucially that Tzara’s theatre from 1916 inaugurates traditions that would become characteristics of the Theatre of the Absurd, decades before its official incarnation.

⁸⁰⁹ OC 3:624.

⁸¹⁰ Hentea, 2014, 270.

⁸¹¹ ‘Tzara au théâtre française,’ *Paris-Théâtre*, no 209 (August 1964), quoted in OC, 3:624.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated Tzara's importance to theatre history. By way of indicating the necessity of this study, the first chapters have shown why Dada theatre is often overlooked. Dada performance activity is mythologised as being predicated on immediacy, spontaneity, and an amateur aesthetic; notions that would become associated with the practice of performance art. Tzara's humanist theatre is at odds with the dadaist nonsense revolt, and Tzara's later plays, which are both linguistically and dramatically accessible somewhat betray his early dadaist tendencies. Furthermore, the peripheral sphere occupied by avant-garde theatre in art and theatre historiography results from the uneasy relationship between the dramatic text and avant-garde performance of the later twentieth century. And finally, the anti-mimetic and anti-theatrical prejudice that re-emerged in Michael Fried's modernist revision, which subsequently influenced theoretical frameworks adopted by performance art practitioners and theorists, further alienated the practice of theatre from modernist and avant-garde activity.

However, as I have shown, rather than dismissing Tzara's plays as historical footnotes, lesser than the poetic and critical works that more clearly establish his avant-garde affiliation, Tzara's contribution to theatre history must be acknowledged. A close analysis of Tzara's complete theatrical works enriches our understanding of his approach to art and literature. Finally, Tzara's innovative theatrical language and dramaturgy – the linguistic collage, the split-level stage, alienation, absurdism, humanism – are crucial to the development of subsequent theatre practices.

Tzara's theatrical innovations point towards the post-1960s experimental theatre of Robert Wilson, Tadeusz Kantor, Heiner Müller, Forced Entertainment and the Wooster Group. These practitioners examine the development of theatre and performance as an historical shift, which responds to new technologies and which seeks to limit the importance placed on the spoken word in favour of physical gesture.⁸¹² The Wooster Group's multimedial theatrical events incorporate filmic technology on stage, whereby projections act as both backdrop and interactive content. Before the advent of such technologies in the post-1960s theatre, Tzara experimented with projected images and moveable stage sets, enhancing and manipulating the live actions of the actor. In Forced Entertainment's 1994 *Hidden J*, actors

⁸¹² See Lehmann.

wearing textual signs around their necks (on which are written words that do or do not correspond to the embodied 'character') presented diverse fragments of seemingly unrelated theatrical action. This aesthetic recalls Tzara's early works for the stage, notably the *Adventure* plays. In the theatre of Kantor, the performing body is a mechanism that can be deconstructed; mannequins and human bodies undergo the same treatment for they are equally material. This notion echoes Tzara's handling of the human actor in his early plays, in which the live body becomes an object of performance, transformed by both inflexible costumes and de-humanised characterisation. Heiner Müller's 1977 *Hamletmaschine*, like Tzara's 1924 *Handkerchief of Clouds*, dismantles and re-presents Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Like Tzara, Müller repositions *Hamlet* within his own play, simultaneously respecting and neglecting the original text. And in 1994, Robert Wilson's *Hamlet – A Monologue* deconstructs Shakespeare's play by presenting the eponymous character's deeds and non-deeds as memory and reflection. Wilson's *Hamlet* resembles Tzara's *Poet*, reflecting on his life as he approaches death, replaying the scenes of his life in flashback sequences, made possible in 1924 by Tzara's dramaturgical innovations.

In 1920, Tzara said of his performance at the 'First Friday of *Littérature*,' that 'the sight of my face and my movements, ought to satisfy people's curiosity and that anything I might have said really had no importance.'⁸¹³ Decades later, on 27 April, 1971 at the Grand Théâtre de Nancy in Northern France, Wilson produced his play *Deafman Gance*, a silent work constructed of fantastical scenes and composed purely of performed images in which the performers' bodies 'speak' the language of the performance gesture. After attending the performance, Louis Aragon published a letter to his friend, the then deceased André Breton, stating: 'I have never seen anything more beautiful since I was born. Never has any spectacle ever got anywhere near this one because it is [...what we] dreamed would come after us and go beyond us.'⁸¹⁴ It is in the practice of such experimental theatre that the legacy of Tzara's theatricality is identified, and Tzara's position as pioneering playwright is established.

Tristan Tzara: Pioneering Playwright

While establishing Tzara as a playwright, this thesis has also demonstrated the difficulty of categorising his works for the stage, resulting from Tzara's commitment to the paradox, his

⁸¹³ Tzara, 'Memoirs of Dadaism,' 304.

⁸¹⁴ quoted in Maria Shevstova, *Robert Wilson* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 9.

refusal to classify his written works into any specific genre or form, and his contradictory comments on art and literature. This thesis has accounted for these inconsistencies in Tzara's artistic programme, and for this reason I have applied the performance/theatre complex as a useful framework for analysing Tzara's works for the stage. The performance/theatre complex allows for the confluence of seemingly opposing situations: immediate and repeated; spontaneous and rehearsed; performativity and theatricality.

Tzara's works for the stage complicate the traditional category of the play. He employs anti-mimetic strategies: his characters are not played with psychological realism; and oftentimes his actors retain their own names onstage, collapsing the distance between the 'real' life of the actor and the characters they portray. His metatheatrical techniques, including direct address, invite the audience into the 'immediate' action of the play. In this way, Tzara's theatrical works appear to exist in the moment of their incarnation on stage (albeit they are written works that were rehearsed and sometimes repeated). These techniques echo strategies that would be employed by performance artists to demonstrate that, in the presentation of their work, art and life are not mutually exclusive. However, Tzara (and Dada) did not produce works for the stage to develop a new art form, but rather they engaged an existing and recognisable format (theatre) to promote publicly their programme for art. While the dadaists' intention to collapse the distance between art and life would be the same ambition for performance artists, they did not reject mechanisms of theatrical presentation as performance artists would. Ultimately, Tzara's works for the stage qualify him as a pioneering playwright, whose theatrical endeavours require due attention as theatre.

When reattributing the designation 'playwright' to Tzara, the theatrical avant-garde onstage activity can be better comprehended. Tzara's early works written and performed during the Dada period – *The First and Second Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine*, and *The Gas Heart* – evidence a linguistic revolt consistent with Dada's suspicion of language as a method for rational communication. Tzara's application of nonsense dialogue (verbal farce) and his characters who, try as they might, are incapable of engaging in rational conversation (language satire), echo devices that would become standards of the Theatre of the Absurd.

In his plays after Dada, Tzara developed dramaturgical applications that were pioneering techniques on the theatre stage in the 1920s. These include cinematic aesthetics, the split-

level stage, and dismantling illusionist theatrical structures. Related to this latter phenomenon is Tzara's ability to compromise the boundary between the 'real' world of the auditorium and the fictional space of the theatre stage. Across his playwriting career, Tzara employed various techniques to enact the confluence of the on- and offstage realities, notably by applying standard theatre elements such as a chorus or narrator who breaks out of the dramatic narrative to highlight themes raised by the play, or to discuss some technical point in the theatrical presentation. Furthermore, transparent theatre mechanics – such as onstage costume and set changes, and lighting equipment and technicians being placed in full view of the audience – offer an alternative to mimetic representation. In this way, Tzara encourages spectators to reflect on the themes raised in his work, discouraging an emotional response to the individual plight of fictional characters. Unlike the performance art programme, which seeks to dissolve the distance between art and life in works that reject theatrical frameworks, Tzara affects these techniques by writing and producing theatre plays, as would Bertolt Brecht in the later 1920s and 1930s.

This thesis has shown how Tzara's humanist tendencies interact with his playwriting practice across his career, becoming fully transparent in his final play *The Flight*. *The Flight* presents the form of humanism that would become crucial to existential theory as described by Jean-Paul Sartre six years after Tzara began work on *The Flight*. A close reading of Tzara's theatre plays within their socio-historical moment allows for an understanding of their significance to the contemporary situation in which Tzara was writing. This phenomenon is apparent in reading *The Gas Heart* in light of physical deformation and reconstructive surgeries after World War I, and *The Flight* in terms of the mass exodus from occupied Paris during World War II. Understanding Tzara's personal and political situation at the time of writing this final play is crucial to comprehending the relevance of the work.

Furthermore, this thesis has offered an analysis of Tzara's unpublished plays *Heads or Tails* and *Faust*. My comparison of these two works – an endeavour that has not been previously undertaken – demonstrates that these plays might have been conflated into one work, evidencing another potential example of Tzara's linguistic collage. This thesis provides the first scholarly work on the complete theatrical oeuvre of Tristan Tzara, and I have shown that considering Tzara's lesser known plays reveals not only unexplored nuances in his approach to art, but his continued fascination with classical texts. Tzara's attraction to quintessential works of Western theatre is revealed in his translation of

Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, and by the transplant of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* onto *Handkerchief of Clouds*.

Tzara's onstage innovations evidence a knowledge of theatrical advancements that were emerging contemporaneously with his playwriting (the Kamerny Theatre of Moscow's physical stage arrangement), and, more crucially, how Tzara's theatre practice inaugurates linguistic and dramaturgical traditions that would be developed on European stages in the decades after Tzara's theatrical career: the aforementioned Epic Theatre of Brecht, and the Theatre of Absurd. Looking further ahead in the timeline of theatre history, Tzara's treatment of the script as material that may be manipulated, heralds contemporary – or as Hans Thies-Lehmann offers, postdramatic – theatre practice. In both Tzara's theatre and contemporary practice, the theatre script is no longer viewed as the authorised instruction for dramatic presentation; instead it is considered one part amongst elements contributing to the theatrical event, and a part that can be interpreted in infinite ways by practitioners.

This thesis has shown the depth and breadth of Tzara's theatre practice, largely overlooked in both art historical literature and theatre history scholarship. Tzara was never formally considered a playwright; this thesis shows that understanding Tzara as a pioneering playwright, reveals previously unexamined nuances in his approach to art and literature, and allows for a fuller appreciation of the theatre of Tristan Tzara.

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FIGURES

Figure 1.



The Trial of Maurice Barrès, Salle des Sociétés Savantes, 8.30pm, 13th May 1921. From left to right: Louis Aragon, Pierre Deval, André Breton, Tristan Tzara, Philippe Soupault, Theodore Fraenkel, 'Maurice Barrès,' Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Benjamin Péret, Jacques Rigaut, René Hilsum, Serge Charchoune. Courtesy of Collection Timothy Baum, New York.

Figure 2.

LA PROPRETE EST LE LUXE
DU PAUVRE
SOYEZ SALE

Excursions & visites **DADA**
UN CULTE NOUVEAU

DADA

1^{ÈRE} VISITE:
Eglise
Saint Julien le Pauvre

PROCHAINES VISITES
Musée de Louvre
Boulevard Charbonnet
Gare Saint-Lazare
Maison de Pierre Curie
Canal de l'Ourcq
etc.

JEUDI 14 AVRIL A 5 h.
RENDEZ-VOUS DANS LE JARDIN DE L'ÉGLISE
Rue Saint Julien le Pauvre — (Métro Saint-Michel et Cité)

COURSES PÉDESTRES DANS LE JARDIN

ON DOIT
COURIR
SON NEZ
COMME
SES
CHEVEUX

LAVEZ VOS SEINS
COMME VOS GANTS

DISTRIBUTION DE BAS DE SOIE A 5,85
LEÇONS DE COUPE

Les dadaïstes de passage à Paris voulant remédier à l'incompétence de guides et de cicerones suspects, ont décidé d'entreprendre une série de visites à des endroits choisis, en particulier à ceux qui n'ont vraiment pas de raison d'exister. — C'est à tort qu'on insiste sur le pittoresque (Lycée Janson de Sailly), l'intérêt historique (Mont Blanc) et la valeur sentimentale (la Morgue). — La partie n'est pas perdue mais il faut agir vite. — Prendre part à cette première visite c'est se rendre compte du progrès humain, des destructions possibles et de la nécessité de poursuivre notre action que vous tiendrez à encourager par tous les moyens.

EN HAUT LE HAUT
EN BAS LE BAS

MERCI
POUR
LE FUSIL

et encore
une fois
BONJOUR

Sous la conduite de: Gabrielle BUFFET, Louis ARAGON, ARP, André BRETON, Paul ELUARD, Th. FRAENKEL, J. HUSSAR, Benjamin PÉRET, Francis PICABIA, Georges RIBEMONT-DESSAIGNES, Jacques RIGAUT, Philippe SOUPAULT, Tristan TZARA.

(Le plan a été mis très gentiment à notre disposition par la mairie de Gerault.)

Tristan Tzara, *Excursions et Visites Dada, 1^{ère} visite: Eglise Saint Julien le Pauvre*, 1921. Letterpress with stamped ink additions, 27.4 × 21.9 cm. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift. MoMA object number 3217.2008. <http://www.moma.org>.

Figure 3.



The oldest tree in Paris, grounds of the Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre with Notre-Dame in the background. June 2018. © Erica O'Neill.

Figure 4.



View of Notre Dame Cathedral from the grounds of the Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, June 2018. © Erica O'Neill.

Figure 5.



Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre. June 2018. © Erica O'Neill.

Figure 6.



Visit to the Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, Paris, 14th April 1921. Courtesy of Collection Timothy Baum, New York.

Figure 7.



André Breton performing at the Visit to the Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, Paris, 14 April 1921. Anonymous. Reprinted from Hentea, 2014, 162.

Figure 8.



The Second Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine, Festival Dada, May 1920, Salle Gaveau, Paris. Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, GMA A33/3/DSL/054.

Figure 9.



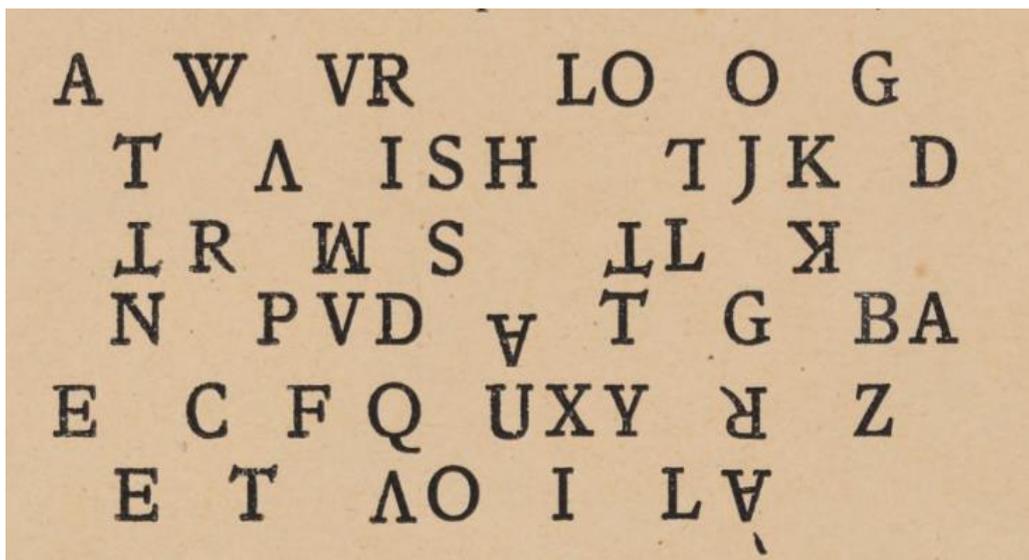
Detail from *The Second Celestial Adventure of Mr. Antipyrine*, Festival Dada, May 1920, Salle Gaveau, Paris. Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, GMA A33/3/DSL/054.

Figure 10.



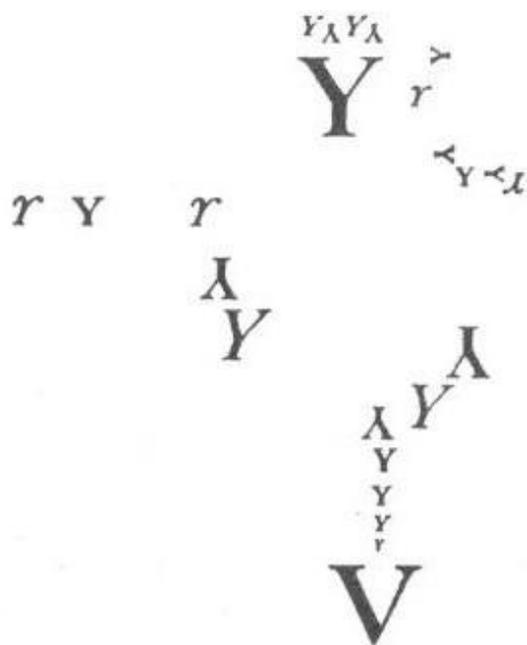
Madame X (Jacqueline Chaumont) (Mouth) and René Crevel (Eye) in costumes by Sonia Delaunay for Tristan Tzara's *The Gas Heart*, Théâtre Michel, 6th July 1923. Bridgeman Images, PVD1956836.

Figure 11.



DANSE, reprinted from Tristan Tzara, *Le Cœur à gaz*, *Der Sturm*, vol. 13, issue 3 (March 1922).

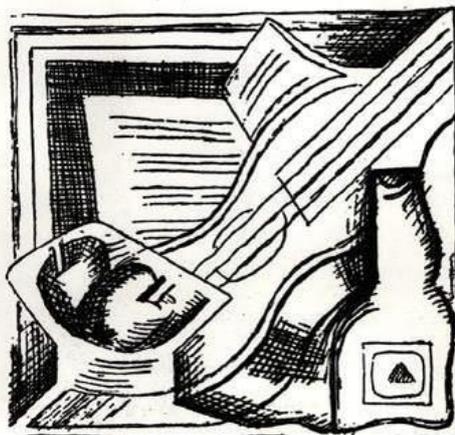
Figure 12.



DANSE, reprinted from Tristan Tzara, *Le Cœur à gaz*, *OC*, 1:180.

Figure 13.

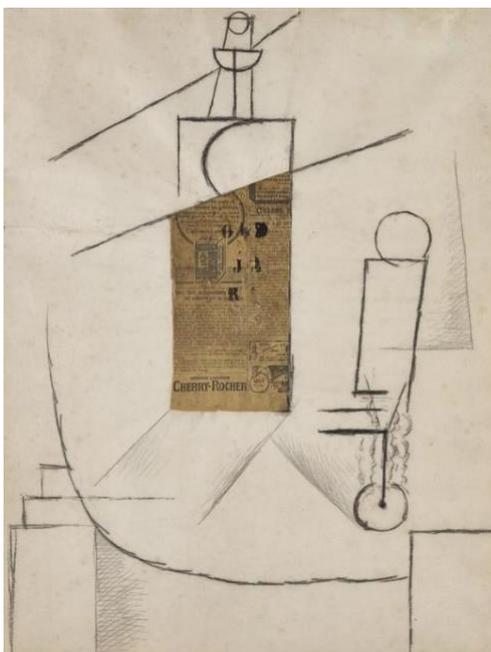
MOUCHOIR DE NUAGES



Eau-forte par Juan GRIS pour *Mouchoir de nuages*
Ed. Galerie Simon (1925).

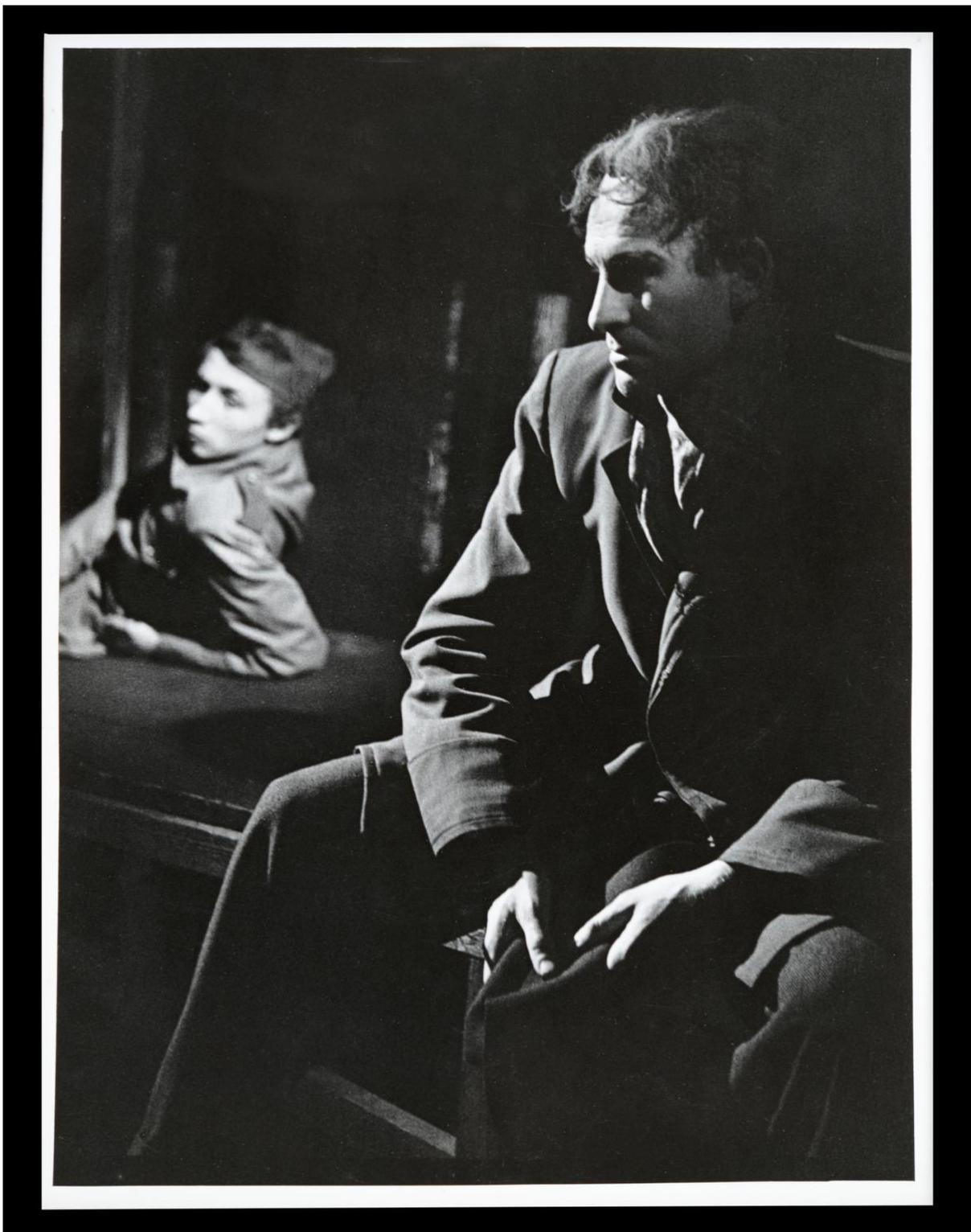
Juan Gris, title page for *Mouchoir de Nuages* by Tristan Tzara, 1925. Etching. Bridgeman Images, XIR160130.

Figure 14.



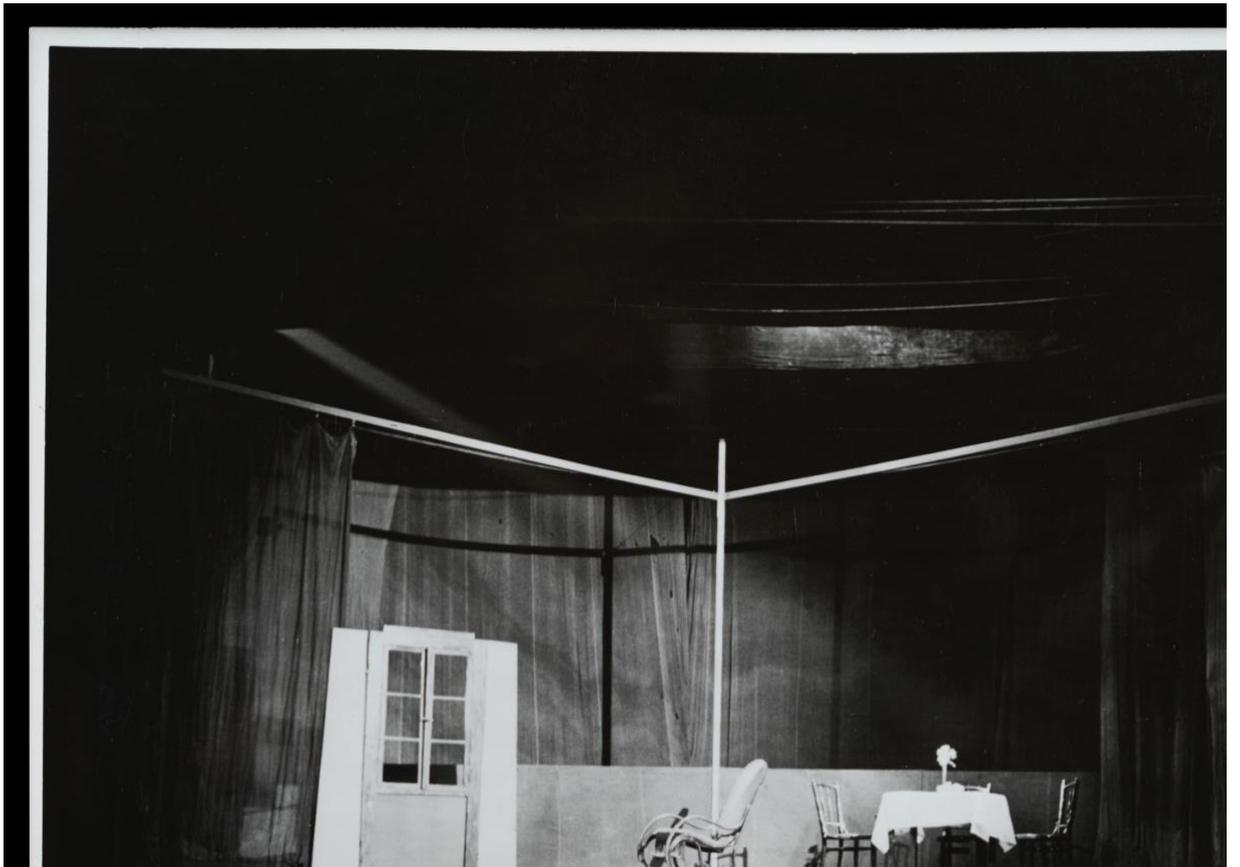
Pablo Picasso, *Bouteille et Verre sur un Table (Bottle and Glass on a Table)*, 1912.
Charcoal on paper, collage, 61.60 x 47.00 cm. Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art,
Edinburgh, GMA 5530.

Figure 15. The Flight On Stage



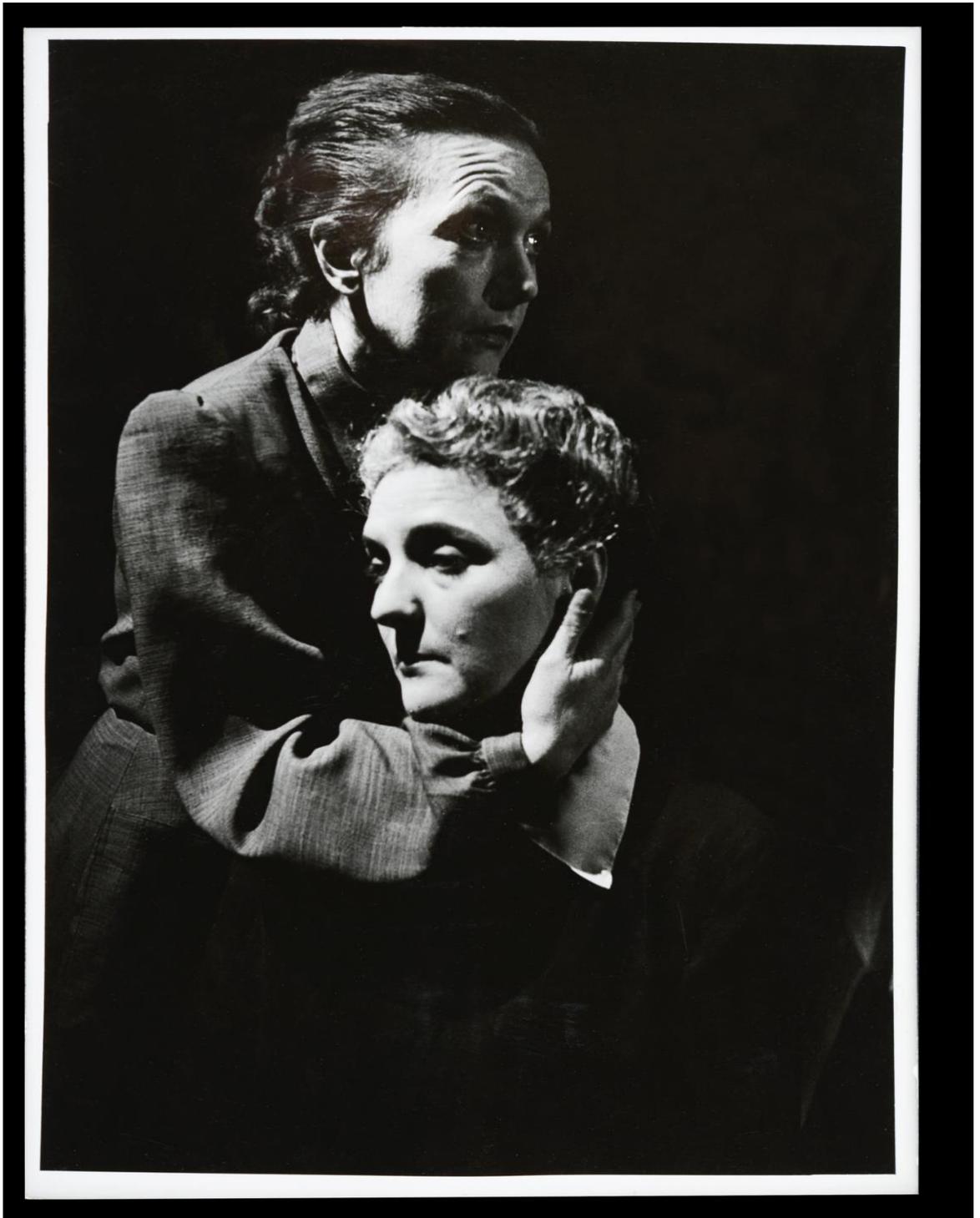
Tristan Tzara's *La Fuite*, D.47 theatre company, directed by J. Raban, Prague, 1946.
Courtesy of Marie-Thérèse Tzara.

Figure 16. The Flight On Stage



Tristan Tzara's *La Fuite*, D.47 theatre company, directed by J. Raban, Prague, 1946.
Courtesy of Marie-Thérèse Tzara.

Figure 17. The Flight On Stage



Tristan Tzara's *La Fuite*, D.47 theatre company, directed by J. Raban, Prague, 1946.
Courtesy of Marie-Thérèse Tzara.

Figure 18. Tristan Tzara and E.F Burian



Tristan Tzara and E.F. Burian at the presentation of *La Fuite*, D.47 theatre company, directed by J. Raban, Prague, 1946. Courtesy of Marie-Thérèse Tzara.