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The Two Times of the Word: Reading and Watching Dadaist Photomontages

Introduction

This essay aims to analyze the influence of Futurist typographic experimentalism over Dadaist photomontage that inherited from Marinetti's *Words in Freedom* two elements: space-time simultaneity and the intuitive fruition of the composition. At the beginning of the twentieth century, individuals in metropolises experienced a neurotic speeding up of daily time that led to a progressive acceleration in ways of communicating and understanding simple everyday social messages. The leader of Futurism conveyed this anthropological transformation in typographic terms by giving new optical qualities to written composition to intensify its expressive power. He modified some factors, such as color, size, and the structure of text, to create a sort of assembled alphabetic composition that we might call typo-montage. Thus, the free-word page went from being a passive container of text to being the place of its exhibition, altering its grammar and absorbing the qualities of the new metropolitan system of communication: synchronic, fast, and intuitive. This happened in Futurist typography, but, in a certain sense, it also happened—and this is my argument—in the new Dadaist photographic composition: the photomontage. Indeed, between 1917 and 1920, Dadaists gradually applied to their artistic production the revolutionary principles of Marinetti's new typography, inheriting its grammar and its compositional properties. Typography and photography are mechanized processes of writing, media based on a specific language characterized by a code and a grammar. Both use a code composed of signs that in semeiological terms are defined indices, imprints—as suggested also by the *typos* root of *typography*—physically connected to their *relata*: the flatbed printing matrix and the photographed object. By inheriting from Futurism simultaneity as an organizational law, Dadaism applied to artistic composition (poetic and figurative) the new principle of montage: an act of isolating and reassembling signs in a fragmented composition that is spatiotemporally multifaceted. In this formal

procedure, the photograph and the word become hybrid signs: index and icon the first; index as type, symbol as lexeme, and icon as plastic element, the second. Within the specific borders of the layout—in Futurist free-word tables as well as in Dadaist sound poems and poster poems (*Lautgedichte* and *Plakat-Gedichte*)—the montage became a new component of the typographic grammar, conveying the formal process of combining and assembling typographical materials with photographs in the new processes of the “pasted image” (*Klebebild*) and photomontage.¹ This essay aims to retrace historiographically this passage from the typographic to the photographic montage, analyzing the gradual achievement by the alphabetic fragment of a spatial dimension in the composition where two times coexist for the first time: the diachronic time of reading and the synchronic time of watching.

Die Fotomontage: The Berlin Exhibition of 1931

In May 1931, after the inauguration of the first historical exhibition devoted to photomontage,² its curator, César Domela-Nieuwenhuis, published in the Dutch magazine *De Réclame* an article entitled “Fotomontage,” in which he declared officially the filiation between typographical experimentalism and Dadaist photomontage:

The cubists in Paris—I mention for example Picasso—and the Futurists in Milan under the leadership of Marinetti (Futurist Manifestos) were the first ones who tried consciously to utilize the type as a plastic element. The origin of photomontage can also be found in eighteenth century *quodlibets* (these whimsies were extremely realistic imitations, in oil or watercolour, of a pack of paper or printed matter with some other objects lying on top); nevertheless it is to the Dadaists that credit goes for combining photography and type for the first time within one composition.³

¹ See Hans Richter, *Dada – Kunst und Antikunst: der Beitrag Dadas zur Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Köln: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1964), Italian trans. ed. M. L. Fama Pampaloni (Milano: Mazzotta Editore, 1966), 39, 138, 139.

² *Fotomontage*, exhibition catalogue, April 25 to May 31, 1931, Staatliche Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen, Berlin (Berlin: n.p., 1931).

³ César Domela-Nieuwenhuis, “Fotomontage,” *De Réclame* (May 1931); English trans. in *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 211–15.

In the exhibition catalogue of 1931, Domela and Curt Glaser—director of the state art library where the exhibition was shown—distinguish between two different historical phases of photomontage: the first, characterized by the destruction of compositional unity, referred to Dadaist production between 1918 and 1920, and was followed by a second phase, during the 1920s and '30s, defined as the stage of construction (*Stadium des Aufbaus*). From being a free game of fantasy (*freie Spiel der Fantasie*), the technique (*der Weg*) gradually reached a practical use and application (*praktischer Verwendung*) in the field of political and commercial propaganda. Therefore, the mature period of photomontage is marked by greater awareness of its communicative potential in the social sphere. It developed when artists started to reflect on how to use the photograph's referentiality (*dokumentarische Charakter*)—and so its semblance of reliability (*der Anschein der Zuverlässigkeit*) for the community—to express an idea with strong expressive potential.⁴

The first phase—characterized by the apparent absence of compositional rules—was the topic of the exhibition's opening speech by Raoul Hausmann, an inventor of photomontage along with George Grosz, John Heartfield, and Hannah Höch.⁵ Describing the embryonic forms of the process, he declared that Dadaism applied to figuration, and then to the new procedure of photomontage, the typographical rules of its poetic production. If one considers the influence of Futurist typesetting—more precisely, of Marinetti's revolutionary typography—over the earliest forms of Dadaist assembled compositions, it is possible to understand the correlation between photomontage and typography. Hausmann's thesis focused on two points: on the one hand, it identified Marinetti's *Words in Freedom* as a reference model for Dadaist sound poetry; on the other hand, the analysis traced the progressive application of the new typographic rules to compositions addressed not only to reading, but also to vision: photomontages.

⁴ Curt Glaser, "Vortwort," and César Domela-Nieuwenhuis, "Fotomontage," in *Fotomontage*, exhibition catalogue.

⁵ The first Dadaist photomontage was published in the single issue of *Jedermann sein eigener Fussball* (February 15, 1919).

But the idea of photomontage was as revolutionary as its content. Its form was as stunning as the application of photography and printed texts that together become a static film. The Dadaists who invented the static poem, simultaneous and purely phonetic, applied accordingly the same principles to pictorial expression.⁶

Zurich and the Birth of Sound Poetry

Tristan Tzara, describing in *Chronique Zurichoise* what was affixed in February 1916 on the walls of Cabaret Voltaire, defined the Futurist verses of Marinetti, Cangiullo, and Buzzi as map poems (*cartes-poèmes géographique*), as noted by Hugo Ball on February 5, 1916, in his journal *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*.⁷ The fact that a poem was conceived in a dimension not only of reading, but also of billposting, gives an iconic value to its alphabetic signs and the role of expository device to the literary page considered like a billboard. Furthermore, the comparison with cartography confers optical qualities to words in addition to their symbolic referentiality.

On July 9, 1915—a year before his first phonetic poem, “Gadji Beri Bimba”—Ball received from Marinetti a package containing free-word poetry by himself, Francesco Cangiullo, Paolo Buzzi, and Corrado Govoni. He described them as poster poems made with only the alphabet’s letters (*die reinen Buchstabenplakate*), thus bringing back Tzara’s reflection about the visual character of Futurist poetry, as well as the parallelism with maps contained in the term *Landkarte*.⁸

⁶ Raoul Hausmann, “Fotomontage,” *A bis Z* 16 (May 1931): 61–64; slightly varied in *Qualität* 3-4 (1932): 14; French trans. idem, “Peinture Nouvelle et Photomontage,” in idem, *Courrier Dada* (Paris: Le Terrain Vague, 1958), 46–47. “Mais l’idée du photomontage était aussi révolutionnaire que son contenu, sa forme aussi renversante que l’application de la photographie et des textes imprimés qui, ensemble, se transforment en film statique. Les dadaïstes ayant inventé le poème statique, simultané et purement phonétique, appliquaient en conséquence les mêmes principes à l’expression picturale.”

⁷ Tristan Tzara, “Chronique Zurichoise 1915-1919,” in *Dada Almanach. Im Auftrag des Zentralamts der Deutschen Dada-Bewegung*, ed. Richard Huelsenbeck (Berlin: Erich Reiss Verlag, 1920), 10. “Das Lokal war überfüllt; viele konnten keine Platz mehr finden. Gegen sechs Uhr abends, als man noch fleissig hammerte und futuristische Plakate angebrachte, erschien eine orientalisches aussehende Deputation von vier Mannlein, Mappen und Bilder unterm Arm.” Hugo Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit* (München und Leipzig: Verlag Dunker & Humblot, 1927), Introduction. In the second issue of the magazine *Der Mistral. Literarische Kriegszeitung*, Marinetti’s revolutionary free-word table was published, “Sintesi futurista della Guerra,” *Der Mistral. Literarische Kriegszeitung* 2 (March 21, 1915).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 39. Ball also notes: “Ganz zuletzt, als schon der Krieg da war, am 29. Juli, traf noch ein Postpaket französischer Lyrik bei mir in. Es enthielt Gedichte von: Barzun, André Spire, Derème, Marinetti, Florian-Parmentier, Anthologie Lanson, Mandrin, Veyssié, 3 Bande ‘Vie des Lettres,’ 8 Nummern ‘Soirée de Paris,’” *ibid.*, 15. See also the letter sent by Ball to Tzara on September 27, 1916, in Hugo Ball, *Briefe 1911-1927* (Köln: Benziger Verlag, 1957), 63–65: “Bruder Wolf, das mußst du nicht mehr tun. Das ist schlecht von Dir. Keine Marinettis mehr, keine Apollinaires mehr (ach, die Fingerfertigkeit!) Keine ‘Ueberraschungen’ mehr (was ist das für eine Perfidie!) Sondern Plausibilitäten. Wirklichkeiten.”

It is likely that the booklet sent to him by Marinetti was *Parole, consonanti, vocali, numeri in libertà*, a collection of poems published in February 1915, a few months before Ball's annotation in his journal.⁹ The booklet consists of four free-word tables: *Montagne + Vallate + Strade x Joffre* by Marinetti, *Le Coriste* by Cangiullo, *Bombardamento aereo* by Buzzi, and *Il palombaro* by Govoni. These free-word tables revolutionized the traditional conception of poetic work, creating a hybrid composition of graphic signs, drawings, words, numbers, and mathematical elements that graphically anticipated the Dadaist *Klebebilder* and photomontages realized three years later in Berlin. The empty space of the page becomes a signifier in these literary compositions, where lexemes are manipulated, thanks to new optical qualities, to intensify their meaning and therefore their evocative power. The signs chosen and assembled on the page by Marinetti, who worked within the limits of the layout, seem to be the graphic version of what Dadaists were then realizing by assembling different materials, such as photographs, newspaper clippings, and poetic fragments, under the same organizational rules of these free-word tables.

On a theoretical level, Ball is close to Marinetti's solutions. However, he evolves the alphabetic language toward abstraction with the progressive sacrifice of the word's meaning. He notes on June 13, 1916: "The word and the image are one."¹⁰ Both the painter and the poet develop "the plasticity of the word" (*die Plastizität des Wortes*) that leaves the logically constructed sentence to create a new kind of hybrid composition. The result is a reflection on the single lexeme that, having lost its referentiality and therefore its title of word, gives life to verse without words, or the Dadaist sound poem.¹¹

With Marinetti's *Words in Freedom*, the page is gradually transformed in a device, not in an anonymous space or in a *container* of the literary work. It becomes a framework for the text's

⁹ *Parole, consonanti, vocali, numeri in libertà* (Milano: Direzione del Movimento Futurista, February 11, 1915).

¹⁰ Hugo Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit* (1927): 99. "Das Wort und das Bild sind eins."

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 101–02. See Sven Werkmeister, "Unlesbarkeit: Carl Einstein, Hugo Ball, Alfred Döblin. Literarischer Primitivismus. Literatur und die Grenzen der Schrift," in Werkmeister, *Kulturen jenseits der Schrift. Zur Figur des Primitiven in Ethnologie, Kulturtheorie und Literatur um 1900* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2010), 291–321.

presentation, a *dispositif*, as defined by Carl Einstein.¹² This is confirmed by the value given to white spaces devoid of graphemes, as in *Zang Tumb Tumb*, in which the empty spaces acquire the role of signifiers of the greater incisiveness of the word that follows compared with the others on the page.¹³

The artist who best illustrates the influence of Marinetti on Dadaist poetry is Richard Huelsenbeck. In his memoirs—published posthumously in the United States by Hans J. Kleinschmidt—Huelsenbeck narrates how Tzara, in correspondence with Marinetti, introduced Futurism into the circle of Cabaret Voltaire.¹⁴ He openly declares the importance of the free-word heritage for his collection of poems, published in 1916 and entitled *Phantastische Gebete*.¹⁵ His reflection is precious, not only because he acknowledges the Dadaist debt to *Words in Freedom*, but also because he clarifies what Dadaist poetry drew from Futurism. In 1920 he wrote two texts: *En avant dada: die Geschichte des Dadaismus* and *Dada siegt. Eine Bilanz des Dadaismus*, published in Hannover by Paul Steegemann Verlag and in Berlin by Der Malik Verlag, respectively. In the first, he introduces Tzara as the channel through whom Futurist ideas came to Zurich, in particular the value of simultaneity as an organizational principle of composition aimed toward intuitive and synchronic fruition. But, as is well known, the Romanian artist created a form of poetry that was simultaneous in the sense that it was recited synchronically by multiple voices, not one that used simultaneity to visually organize the text.¹⁶ Therefore, Huelsenbeck underscores the importance of simultaneity related not to the performance of text, but to its internal organization.

¹² Carl Einstein, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1926), French trans. in Giovanni Lista, *Les Futuristes* (Paris: Henri Veyrier, 1988), 224–26.

¹³ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Distruzione della sintassi, Immaginazione senza fili. Parole in libertà,” *Lacerba* 12 (June 15, 1913) and 22 (November 15, 1913). “Io inizio una rivoluzione tipografica diretta contro la bestiale e nauseante concezione del libro di versi passatista.”

¹⁴ Richard Huelsenbeck, “About My Poetry” (1956), *Memoirs of a Dada Drummer by Richard Huelsenbeck*, ed. H. J. Kleinschmidt (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), 14, 18, 169.

¹⁵ Richard Huelsenbeck, *Phantastische Gebete. Verse von Richard Huelsenbeck mit 7 Holzschnitten von Arp* (Zurich: Collection Dada, 1916).

¹⁶ Tristan Tzara, “Note pour les bourgeois,” and Richard Huelsenbeck and Marcel Janko, “L’admiral cherche une maison à louer,” *Cabaret Voltaire* 1, ed. H. Ball (1916): 6–7. In the same issue are the free-word poems “Dune” by Marinetti and “Addiooo” by Francesco Cangiullo. See also Richard Huelsenbeck, *Dada siegt. Eine Bilanz des Dadaismus* (Berlin: Der Malik Verlag, 1920), 16.

Simultaneity (first used by Marinetti in this literary sense) is an abstraction, a concept referring to the occurrence of different events at the same time. It presupposes a heightened sensitivity to the passage of things in time, it turns the sequence a=b=c=d into an a-b-c-d, and attempts to transform the problem of the ear into a problem of the face.

Simultaneity is against what has become, and for what is becoming.¹⁷

Indeed, this new compositional principle breaks with the narrative linearity that absorbs the reader in an illusory dimension, attracted by the plot's uninterrupted continuity. With *Words in Freedom* the illusion decays because the action is constantly interrupted. The text's evolution proceeds through images translated into individual words—most often into infinitive verbs—without punctuation or grammatical bridges, such as fragments assembled on the page.¹⁸ Therefore, from being diachronic and sequential—word by word—the act of reading becomes gradually synchronic and intuitive, approaching the text only by analogy to activate a chain of images simultaneously received by the reader.

In addition to the new category of simultaneity, Huelsenbeck recalls the importance of noise in *Words in Freedom* by the use of onomatopoeia.¹⁹ This figure of speech—which transforms into a linguistic sign a noise or a sound linked to an object—develops the iconicity of language: its capability to represent through words, but with the same potential of an icon or an image, the semantic values, the meanings, conveyed. Onomatopoeia guarantees a visual potential to the page.

It is able to grasp what Huelsenbeck defines as “die ‘Kantigkeit’ der Dinge,”²⁰ the angularity of things, by expressing an object through linguistic signs that direct the reader to its concreteness.

¹⁷ Richard Huelsenbeck, *En avant dada: die Geschichte des Dadaismus* (Hannover: Paul Steegemann Verlag, 1920), 21–22. “Simultaneität (von Marinetti in diesem Literatur-Sinne zuerst gebraucht) ist eine Abstraktion, ein Begriff für die Gleichzeitigkeit verschiedener Geschehnisse. Es setzt eine erhöhte Sensibilität für den zeitlichen Ablauf der Dinge voraus, es dreht das Nacheinander des a=b=c=d in ein a-b-c- d, es sucht das Problem des Ohrs in ein Problem des Gesichts umzuwandeln. Simultaneität ist gegen das Gewordene für das Werden.”

¹⁸ Many of Marinetti's literary rules were not new. Already Mallarmé, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud had used them. But the question of priority is not our topic, since this essay wants to analyze Marinetti's typographic revolution as an antecedent of a composition in terms of montage.

¹⁹ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Manifesto tecnico della letteratura futurista,” in *I poeti futuristi. Libero Altomare, Mario Betuda, Paolo Buzzi, Enrico Cardile, Giuseppe Carrieri, Enrico Cavacchioli, Auro D'Alba, Luciano Folgore, Corrado Govoni, G. Manzella-Frontini, F.T. Marinetti, Armando Mazza, Aldo Palazzeschi con un proclama di F.T. Marinetti e uno studio sul verso libero di Paolo Buzzi* (Milano: Edizione Futuriste di “Poesia,” 1912); “Distruzione della sintassi” (1913); “Lo splendore geometrico e meccanico e la sensibilità numerica” (March 18, 1914); and *Lacerba* 6 (March 15, 1914) and 7 (April 1, 1914).

²⁰ Richard Huelsenbeck, *En avant dada*, 5–7.

These signs activate chains of associations by getting in touch with the object itself—for instance, the sensation experienced in perceiving it, the noise originated by its use, the tactile perception of picking it up—all fragments of the object enclosed in the onomatopoeia.²¹ Therefore, in a free-word table, a shout or a thud expressed typographically—released from the sentence’s sequentiality thanks to simultaneity—works in the composition as an index, not only for having been printed by a flatbed press, but also for being in a certain sense a mark, a trace, almost physical, of its own referent, the object. In this, the onomatopoeia—with the same controversial ambiguity as the photograph in terms of transparency and opacity—improves what we might call the alphabetic objecthood.

Berlin Dada: From the *Lautgedicht* to the *Fotomontage*

Typographical experimentalism also reached Berlin in this period, just before Raoul Hausmann, George Grosz, John Heartfield, and Hannah Höch invented the photomontage. As an example, in the closing issue of the magazine *Neue Jugend* of June 1917, Wieland Herzfelde published a prospectus by his brother John Heartfield for George Grosz’s volume *Kleine Grosz Mappe*. It is presented in the catalogue of the 1920 Dada-Messe exhibition as “the first typographic experiment in Germany.”²² This collection of lithographs is indeed advertised by a graphic composition, created by Heartfield, the visual presentation of which is revolutionary. The main organizational rules of the free-word tables were applied: alternation of typefaces, different languages (alphabetic, iconic, and mathematical), scalar gaps, and a compositional structure built on multiple juxtaposed levels with conflicting directionalities (mostly on diagonals).²³

²¹ A brief review of *Phantastische Gebete* published in May 1919 describes the figurative potential of this figure of speech: “Sometimes the representation of noise becomes really and objectively noise – and the grotesque assumes the proportions of fast sentences cut and chaotic” (“La représentation du bruit devient parfois réellement, objectivement, bruit – et le grotesque prend les proportions des phrases vites entrecoupées chaotiques”). “R. Huelsenbeck – Phantastische Gebete,” in “Livres notes revues diversités divertissantes,” *Dada* 4/5 (May 15, 1919), 26.

²² John Heartfield, “Prospekt zur Kleine Grosz Mappe,” *Neue Jugend* (June 1917); *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe*, exhibition catalogue, 1920, Kunsthandlung Dr. Otto Burchard, Berlin (Berlin: Der Malik Verlag, 1920). “Die ersten Druckversuche in Deutschland.”

²³ The dependence of Dada typography on Futurism is underscored by Richard Huelsenbeck in *Dada siegt. Eine Bilanz des Dadaismus*, 29.

One year later, the March/April 1918 edition of Franz Jung and Richard Oehring's magazine *Die freie Strasse* was a special issue entitled "Club Dada"—the name given to the imaginary association founded by Jung that spring.²⁴ Raoul Hausmann designed the layout, whereas the writings are by Richard Huelsenbeck and Franz Jung.²⁵ Texts are printed in the traditional one-column format, respecting the Gutenbergian linear layout, but are intersected by red phrases juxtaposed to the body copy and inserted diagonally or in parallel. The multi-level structure, born from the juxtaposition of different texts on the same page—with multiple directional evolutions—is one of the elements that distinguishes the typographic experimentation of these years, as is the use of different inks.²⁶ These characteristics were inherited by the photomontage and introduced by Marinetti in his 1913 manifesto: "For that reason we will use, on the very same page, three or four different colors of ink, and as many as twenty different typographical fonts, if necessary."²⁷

The idea of organizing a text on several levels within a single page was precociously conceived by the Futurist leader when he was a fifteen-year-old student at the Jesuit school Saint François Xavier in Alexandria. In the special collections of the Getty Research Institute, I have found four postcards sent by Marinetti to his brother Leone in 1891. They are personal communications between familiars, whose text runs linearly along the size of the card, closed at the bottom by Marinetti's signature. However orthogonally, a new writing space is superimposed on the text body with a greater font size to allow readability to both alphabetic nucleuses. It is a sort of modern postscript to collect the latest greetings or any oversights, thus reinterpreting the traditional layout of the postcard. It is an early example of breakage of the classic textual composition along the axial

²⁴ Club Dada included Johannes Baader, Raoul Hausmann, George Grosz, John Heartfield, Hannah Höch, Richard Huelsenbeck, Franz Jung, Walter Mehring, and Jefim Golyscheff.

²⁵ Richard Huelsenbeck, Franz Jung, and Raoul Hausmann, *Club Dada* (Berlin: Verlags freie Strasse Herausgeber, 1918).

²⁶ Also, the two *Club Dada* illustrations, both by Hausmann, as well as the book's headlines and advertising pages, show an initial typographic experimentalism: indeed, the artist incorporates his abstract engravings with words and sentences in different fonts, placed on multiple directional axes (vertical, horizontal, and diagonal). Therefore, only Hausmann applies to the alphabetic language the new typographic rules; Jung and Huelsenbeck's narrative grids respect the traditional laws of composition. Compare Hausmann's typographic production on the magazine *Die Aktion*; for example, "Kollektiv – Ausstellung," *Die Aktion* 7-8 (February 23, 1918).

²⁷ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, "Destruction of Syntax-Untrammelled Imagination-Words- in-Freedom," in *Critical Writings*, ed. G. Berghaus (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 120–31.

structure of the page that already introduces the expedient of double reading time in a single text's spatial context.²⁸

Starting from the Dada Abend soiree held on April 12, 1918, in the Saal der Neuen Sezession—which marked the birth of Berlin Dada with Richard Huelsenbeck's reading of the first Dada Manifesto, *Dada in Life and Art (Der Dadaismus im Leben und in der Kunst)*—²⁹Raoul Hausmann's production underwent an experimental increase on the border between the text and the figuration. This will be analyzed, composition by composition, to retrace the evolution from sound poetry to photomontage in terms of dependence on Futurist typography. During this soiree, Else Hadwiger—the official translator of Marinetti's writings in Berlin—delivered a lecture entitled *Futurist and Dadaist Verse (Futuristische und Dadaistische Verse)*, embracing, already in 1918, the controversial filiation between Marinetti's *Words in Freedom* and Dadaist poetry. The soiree's program—typeset according to the traditional axial structure of text—is interrupted by a sort of alphabetic frame, orthogonal to the page sides, where the following text appears in bold font: “DADA caught the universe in his nets: go and learn DADA!”³⁰ This typographic particularity frames only the part of the program related to Hadwiger's lecture—and not the parts by Grosz or Hausmann, nor the Dada Manifesto—probably to underscore its relevance through the same tool, typography, that Dada drew from Futurism. On that occasion, Hadwiger also read a translation from Marinetti's *Zang tumb tumb: Adrianopoli ottobre 1912: parole in libertà*—in particular “*Verwundetentransport*” and “*Beschiessung*”—thus proving that Dadaists had encountered the book.³¹ Also during the soiree, George Grosz read his *Syncopations*, and Raoul Hausmann read *The New Material in Painting (Das neue Material in der Malerei)*.

²⁸ Four postcards sent by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti to Leone Marinetti, only two dated (July 14 and September 12, 1891), in Marinetti Student Notebooks and Other Papers, 1891–1936, box 1, folder 2, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

²⁹ Richard Huelsenbeck, “Dadaistische Manifest (April 12, 1918),” *Dada Almanach* (1920): 36–40.

³⁰ Huelsenbeck, *Dada siegt. Eine Bilanz des Dadaismus*, 30–31. “DADA halt das Weltall in seinen Angeln: Darum lernt DADA!”

³¹ During the lecture, Hadwiger also read “Brandenburger Tor,” “Die Wache zieht auf, Wertheim,” and “Aus dem Cyklus: Berlin,” three poems related to Berlin from Buzzi's collection *Versi liberi* (1913); “Die Häuser sprechen” (1912) by Libero Altomare, translated and published in *Die Aktion* in 1917; “Der Marsch” (1912) by Folgore and

The following October, Club Dada published Hausmann's *Material of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture (Material der Malerei, Plastik und Architektur)*, the cover of which confirmed his interest in the new Futurist typography by quoting the layout of page 105 of Marinetti's *Zang tumb tumb: Adrianopoli ottobre 1912: parole in libertà*. Indeed, both compositions share the spiral pattern of the alphabetic line that descends centrally on the page, as well as the same proportional relationship between the text and the white space of the surface.³²

Just a few months before this publication, in April 1918—the same month of the Dada Abend—Hausmann wrote his first sound poem, *Soul Automobiles (Seelenautomobile)*, which was presented to the public on June 6 at Café Austria and in May 1919 at the Graphisches Kabinett of J. B. Neumann. He later recalled the event:

The exhibition ended with a recital evening. I played my sound poem, during which I asked for greater silence since I had to read “Seelenautomobile” in a whisper, and then I thundered with the highest pitch the “BOUMM DE E” and so on. There was also the famous “Antisymphonie” of Golyscheff. This Dada foray was a success, but I found things had gone too “nice and pleasant.”³³

In this report Hausmann underscores the relevance of the sound poem's performance—following in Marinetti's footsteps, as Benedikt Livšic pointed out during his travels in Russia in February 1914.³⁴ Indeed, Hausmann describes the need for silence during the poem's reading in order to perceive, thanks to his voice's sudden rise, the thundering (*donnern*) of the final “BOUMM DE E.”

“Seele” (1911) by Corrado Govoni, published in *Die Aktion* in 1916; “Retraite” (1917) by Tzara, from *Vingt-cinq poèmes* (Zurich: Collection dada, 1918), 20–23; and Aldo Palazzeschi's “Lasst mir den Spass” (1910).

³² Comparison between the cover of Raoul Hausmann, *Material der Malerei, Plastik, Architektur* (Berlin: Club Dada Verlag, October 1918) and page 105 of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Zang tumb tumb: Adrianopoli ottobre 1912: parole in libertà* (Milan: Edizioni futuriste di “Poesia”, 1914).

³³ Raoul Hausmann, *Am Anfang war Dada* (Steinbach: Anabas-Verlag Günter Kämpf, 1972), 79. “Die Ausstellung wurde mit einem Vortragsabend beschlossen. Ich rezitierte meine Lautgedichte, für die ich größere Ruhe erbat, weil diese Seelenautomobile leise zu sprechen wären, und dann donnerte ich mit höchstem Stimmaufgebot los BOUMM DE E und so weiter. Auch gab es die berühmte Antisymphonie von Golyscheff. Dieser Dada – Vorstoß war ein Erfolg, aber ich fand, die Sache war zu „hübsch und angenehm“ verlaufen.”

³⁴ Benedikt Livšic, *L'arciere dall'occhio e mezzo. Autobiografia del futurismo russo* (1933), Italian trans. ed. G. Kraiski (Bari: Laterza, 1968). A documentary and detailed reconstruction of Marinetti's journey in Russia during January and February 1914 is contained in Vladimir P. Lapsin, *Marinetti e la Russia. Dalla storia delle relazioni letterarie e artistiche negli anni dieci del XX secolo* (Milano: Skira, 2008), published by the Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto and Centro Internazionale Studi Futurismo.

Besides the choice of the verb *donnern*—a clear reference to Futurism—there is the onomatopoeic similarity with the “TUUUMB TUUUM” of Marinetti’s book *Zang tumb tumb: Adrianopoli ottobre 1912: parole in libertà*, towering over its bright yellow cover, easily visible to even a careless eye, on the occasion of the Dada Abend in April 1918.

Furthermore, in May 1918 Hausmann wrote the *Manifesto on the Lawfulness of Sound (Manifest von der Gesetzmässigkeit des Lautes)*, which was published in 1919 by Carl Einstein in *Der blutige Ernst* and in July 1922 by Theo van Doesburg in *Mécano*.³⁵ At the end of the text, the Dadaist published a sound poem entitled “bbbb” that was innovative compared to his previous poetic work, especially for the central role of the page’s empty space. The traditional text’s axial structure is fragmented, still maintaining the horizontal pattern except for the word *oponneo*, which is developed vertically. In addition to its visual organization—according to Marinetti’s typographic rules—the poem shows affinities with *Words in Freedom* such as the use of the abstract onomatopoeia theorized by the Futurist leader.³⁶

The following summer, Hausmann closed this first phase of experimentalism within the limits of layout, formally maturing the idea of a visual textuality. Indeed, between April and October 1918, he focused his research exclusively on the iconic value of the alphabetic characters by realizing the first poster poems (*Plakat-Gedichte*), which represent the typographic evolution of the Futurist free-word tables affixed on the walls of Cabaret Voltaire.

In summer 1918, I gave my sound poems to Robert Barthe in Berlin (at W, Dennewitzstr. 11) in order to print them as posters (format 47, 5 x 32, 5 cm). There were originally four, but only two have been preserved. With the publication of

³⁵ Raoul Hausmann, “Manifest von Gesetzmässigkeit des Lautes,” *Mécano Blau* 1 (July 1922). In the special collections of the Getty Research Institute, there is a typescript of this text, where Hausmann notes: “Geschrieben Mai 1918, erstmalig veröffentlicht von Carl Einstein in ‘Der blutige Ernst’ 1919 unter dem Titel ‘Schulze philosophiert’, das 2te mal in ‘Mécano’ Herausgeber Th. Van Doesburg, Den Haag 1921 (sic) unter dem richtigen Titel.” Richard Huelsenbeck Papers, 1910–1978, box 1, folder 10, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

³⁶ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Rivoluzione tipografica,” in “Distruzione della sintassi.” Besides “bbbb,” which was among the first experiments with sound poetry in May 1918, Hausmann created the poem “grün”—printed on the back of a flyer kept in the Musée National d’Art Moderne of Paris. The artist breaks the linear and axial structure of text by combining differently sized alphabetic elements—such as words, onomatopoeic neologisms, and numbers—on conflicting directional axes.

“K’peri oum etc” in *Der Dada* no. 1 in June 1919, the first Dadaist sound poems were printed, as I believe that Ball’s sound poems were published for the first time only in 1920 in *Dada Almanach*.³⁷

He asked the publisher Robert Barthe to print his sound poem in poster format, thereby sanctioning an act of literal translation of the page into an exhibitory panel addressed to vision. In this way, the metamorphosis was complete a few months before the integration of the alphabetic language as a plastic element in the *Klebebild*, which opened a second phase in Hausmann’s production. In 1964—in another letter addressed to Huelsenbeck—Hausmann recalled the event,³⁸ specifying that the poster poem’s birth coincided with the publication, by the same Robert Barthe, of the volume *Material of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture*. Its cover—as previously illustrated—is a clear reference to the revolutionary typography of Marinetti’s *Zang tumb tumb: Adrianopoli ottobre 1912: parole in libertà*, thus confirming the artist’s reflection between April and October 1918 on these topics.

Due to the Nazi art burnings and the Hitlerian diaspora, only two poster poems have survived, one of which was long held by César Domela-Nieuwenhuis, the curator of the 1931 historical exhibition on the photomontage.³⁹ These poster poems were also shown in a 1958 exhibition in Düsseldorf entitled *Dada: Documents of a Movement*. Their captions in the catalogue underscore the new semantic role of the page, which acquired an iconic value by abandoning its role of anonymous container and becoming a colored exhibitory panel (an orange paper and a green paper, respectively).⁴⁰

³⁷ Letter sent by Raoul Hausmann to Richard Huelsenbeck on January 7, 1962, in Richard Huelsenbeck Papers, 1910–1978, box 1, folder 9, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. “Meine Lautgedichte ließ ich im Sommer 1918 bei Robert Barthe in Berlin W, Dennewitzstr. 11 als Plakate drucken (Format 47, 5 x 32, 5 cm). Es waren ursprünglich 4, aber nur 2 sind erhalten geblieben. Mit der Veröffentlichung von ‘K’peri oum etc.’ in ‘Der Dada’ Nr. 1 vom Juni 1919, waren dies meines Wissens die ersten dadaistischen Lautgedichte, die veröffentlicht wurden, denn ich glaube, Ball’s Lautgedichte wurden vor dem ‘Almanach dada’ 1920 nirgends gedruckt.”

³⁸ Letter sent by Raoul Hausmann to Richard Huelsenbeck on October 13, 1964, *ibid.*, box 1, folder 10.

³⁹ As confirmed by Raoul Hausmann in his letter sent to Richard Huelsenbeck on April 19, 1947, Raoul Hausmann Correspondence, 1909–1971, box 1, folder 11, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, and to Noël Arnaud on February 23, 1969, *ibid.*, box 1, folder 1.

⁴⁰ Ewald Rathke, ed., *Dada. Dokumente einer Bewegung*, exhibition catalogue, 1958, Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf (Frankfurt: Der Kunstverein, 1958), 388, 389.

The titles of the two poster poems are literal quotes of their first lines of characters, respectively “fmsbwtözäe” and “OFFEAHBDC” (fig. 1). Indeed, both poster poems are composed of lines of two different typefaces, the first with four punctuation marks, and the second with two commas and the famous Dada hand’s pointing finger. The white space is the protagonist, and the word’s iconic value is officially reached by abandoning the temporally sequential dimension of text meant to be read—almost impossible without lexemes—for the synchronic vision of a graphic composition.

Fig. #1

Raoul Hausmann, *fmsbwtözäu*, Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1918

Furthermore, in a letter sent by Hausmann to Dom Sylvester Houédard in February 1966, the Dadaist described these poster poems as following the laws of the image, and not those of text. Hausmann aligned the two lines of typefaces perfectly in accordance with the spatial proportions between the characters and the outlined white space, just as in the originals. Reduced to the role of simple typeface, having completely lost its referential value, the alphabetic language is quoted as an image: a poem would be transcribed irrespective of its optical qualities, but in Hausmann’s letter there is no transcription. He reproduced an alphabetic image, preserving its formal properties and thus the spatial proportions of its internal organization.⁴¹

The following step was instinctive. The typographic fragment evades its container, the page—transformed into an exhibitory space thanks to the new layout rules—and reaches, as a formal element, the surface, the traditional space of figuration, to be manipulated and combined in the Dadaist *Klebebilder* and photomontages. The Futurist typographic grammar—with its scalar contrasts, juxtapositions, and directional gaps—was thus inherited by these new assembled

⁴¹ Letter sent by Raoul Hausmann to Dom Sylvester Houédard on February 4, 1966, Raoul Hausmann Correspondence, 1909–1971, box 1, folder 10, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

compositions, representing the formal law to organize both elements: the alphabetic and the figurative.

In *Der Kunstkritiker*—shown as *Der Kunstreporter* in the Dada-Messe catalogue (n. 37)—Hausmann used photomontage’s jeering properties (attributable to its combining potential) to deride the critic’s figure via the contrast of his portrait with the body—achieved thanks to the techniques of reduction and blow-up (fig. 2). Photography is here assembled with a banknote cut, a stamp, and evidently some press clippings, whereas a sound poem’s fragment is enlarged to become the composition’s background, like a sort of theatrical backdrop for the central figure. The page’s role is thus transformed: from functioning as text’s exhibitory framework, revolutionized by the new typographic laws, it becomes the picture’s canvas. And this is not an isolated example in Hausmann’s production.

Fig. #2

Raoul Hausmann, *Der Kunstkritiker*, Tate Gallery, London, 1919-1920

My sound poem “Soundrel” from 1919 was published in an appendix of the book *The Dada Painters and Poets* (New York, 1951). But the original can be seen in my photomontage of 1919, on which in 1920 I pasted the title of Max Ernst’s collection *Fiat Modes*.⁴²

In this letter sent to Werner Schmalenbach in 1964, Hausmann explained that he pasted the original of his sound poem “Sound-Rel”—published in 1951 by Robert Motherwell in an appendix to *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*⁴³—in his photomontage of 1919/1920, *Fiat Modes*.

Indeed, above the watercolor entitled *Kutschenbauch dichtet*—published in his book *Hurrah!*

⁴² Letter sent by Raoul Hausmann to Werner Schmalenbach on October 19, 1964, Richard Huelsenbeck Papers, 1910–1978, box 1, folder 11, Special Collections, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles. “Mein Lautgedicht ‘Soundrel’ von 1919 ist im Appendix des Buches ‘Dada Painters and Poets’ New York 1951 abgedruckt, aber das Original ist auf meiner Fotomontage von 1919 zu sehen, über das ich 1920 den Titel der Mappe von Max Ernst klebte ‘Fiat Modes’.”

⁴³ Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology* (New York: Wittenborn Schultz, 1951), Appendix.

*Hurrah! Hurrah!: 12 Satires*⁴⁴—he juxtaposes a fragment of “Sound-Rel” beneath some typefaces and photographic elements and, at the top, the title of Max Ernst’s lithograph collection *Fiat Modes Pereat Ars*. By choosing to manipulate his original poem like any other material, cutting and pasting it into the new montage, Hausmann completes the path of the alphabetic sign from the literary page to photomontage—as he will declare in 1931 in his opening speech of the *Fotomontage* exhibition.

Another interesting example of dialogue between typographic experimentalism and these new forms of montage (*Klebebilder* and photomontages) is the magazine *Der Dada*. The first and second issues (June and December 1919) were edited by Hausmann; the third, edited by Grosz, Hausmann and Heartfield, was published by Der Malik Verlag in April 1920, just before the First International Dada Fair. A comparative analysis of the three covers confirms the progressive abandonment of the word—from pure typesetting to *Klebebild* to photomontage—and of the diachronic dimension of reading, thanks to the newly achieved iconic and indexical qualities. The first cover, entitled *dadadegie*, made by Hausmann and Baader, is a pure graphic composition whose elements—numbers, words, mathematical signs—are organized on the page following the new typographic rules of the free-word tables (fig. 3). The Gutenbergian axial linearity, according to the vertical evolution of the cover, is broken. It is an ambiguous composition whose signs range from both the iconic and the alphabetic language, losing the lexeme’s referentiality.⁴⁵

Fig. #3

Raoul Hausmann, “dadadegie”, *Der Dada*, n. 1, Berlin, June 1919

This hybrid use of the word evolves in Hausmann’s second *Der Dada* cover, a *Klebebild* entitled *dada siegt! Tretet dada bei* (fig. 4).⁴⁶ The artist starts using scissors and glue, abandoning the

⁴⁴ Raoul Hausmann, *Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!: 12 Satiren* (Berlin: Der Malik Verlag, 1921), 43.

⁴⁵ Raoul Hausmann and Johannes Baader, “dadadegie,” *Der Dada* 1 (June 1919), cover.

⁴⁶ Raoul Hausmann, “dada siegt! Tretet dada bei,” *Der Dada* 2 (December 1919), cover.

flatbed printing press for the direct manipulation of the alphabetic language. He juxtaposes papers and textual extracts, following the same rules applied within typography—multiple directional axes, different fonts, and scalar gaps—but with the clear aim to emphasize the manipulation of the alphabetic fragment like any other material assembled in the composition. This alteration is underscored not only by the operation of cutting, but also by the rotation of the mounted words, which overturns the traditional linearity of reading.

Fig. #4

Raoul Hausmann, “dada siegt! Tretet dada bei”, *Der Dada*, n. 2, Berlin, December 1919

Finally, the third cover, of April 1920, incorporates the photographic image: John Heartfield assembles a close-up picture by Hausmann with press and advertising clippings (fig. 5).⁴⁷ The photographic referentiality replaces the illusionism of representation, following the logic of creative economy as illustrated by Wieland Herzfelde in the catalogue of the First International Dada Fair.

If in the past we spent a lot of time, love, and effort to paint a body, a flower, a hat, a shadow, etc., it is enough now to take the scissors and, using paintings and photographic representations, cut all the things we need. If there are objects of lesser importance, we do not need their representation. We take directly the objects themselves, such as pocket knives, ashtrays, books, etc.⁴⁸

Fig. #5

John Heartfield, “mont.”, *Der Dada*, n. 3, Berlin, April 1920

⁴⁷ John Heartfield, “mont.”, *Der Dada* 3 (April 1920), cover.

⁴⁸ Wieland Herzfelde, “Zur Einführung,” in *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe*, exhibition catalogue, 1920. “Wenn früher Unmengen von Zeit, Liebe und Anstrengung auf das Malen eines Körpers, einer Blume, eines Hutes, eines Schlagschattens usw. verwandt wurden, so brauchen wir nur die Schere nehmen und uns unter den Malereien, photographischen Darstellungen all dieser Dinge ausschneiden, was wir brauchen; handelt es sich um Dinge geringeren Umfangs, so brauchen wir auch gar nicht Darstellungen, sondern nehmen die Gegenstände selbst, z. B. Taschenmesser, Aschenbecher, Bücher etc.”

Conclusion

To conclude this documentary analysis of the alphabetic and photographic montage in Dada production, it is important to focus our attention on the catalogue of the *First International Dada Fair*—the last public event of Dadaism in Berlin. The catalogue contains two photomontages by Grosz and Heartfield, entitled *Korregierter Picasso: La vie heureuse (Dr. Karl Einstein gewidmet)* and *Korrigiertes Meisterbild: Henri Rousseau—Selbstbildnis*. They were made—as can be deduced from the titles—on top of reproductions of two masterworks: *Tête de jeune fille* by Picasso (1913) and *Moi-même, autoportrait paysage* by Henri Rousseau (1890). In the first, the Dadaists pasted, directly above the reproduced painting, a photograph of a young Freikorps alongside the name of the minister Gustav Noske and the phrase “*Vollendete Kunst*” (finished art), with a photo clipping of an eye—cut from the cover of *Der Dada 3*—and other elements such as images, typefaces, and numbers. In the second, some clippings—a detail of a flag, a picture of a chair in the lower left—have been pasted over the reproduction; these are less invasive, however, than the elements pasted onto the previous montage, except for Hausmann’s portrait perfectly glued on the face of Rousseau. The choice of the verb *korrigieren* (correct) in the titles is indicative of both photomontages’ purpose—to correct the masterpieces—increasing the satirical potential of Heartfield and Grosz’s work. But from the first to the second composition we note a change: the visual treatment of alphabetic fragments is replaced by photography that covers a good percentage of the whole, relegating language to the role of mere caption—according to a model that would emerge in the 1920s, especially in Heartfield’s work. The second phase of photomontage—that of the construction (*Aufbaus*) described by Domela and Curt Glaser in the 1931 exhibition’s catalogue—was thus ushered in: a stage of greater neatness and distinction between the different signs, alphabetic and photographic, made the photomontage’s message clearer for commercial and political purposes. According to this new use of the medium in the social sphere, alphabetic language began to withdraw from the composition, becoming its caption, aimed at directing the viewer to better understand the concept enclosed in the caesuras between the assembled photo

clippings. In this way, detached from the moment of looking at the figurative montage that it now aimed to explain, the word recovered its referentiality and the lost diachronic dimension of reading.⁴⁹

The greater formal complexity of the photomontage's first phase—with hybrid signs assembled on multiple levels—was reduced in order to reach a greater simplicity and clarity of the message, which was necessary to the new practical use of photomontage in advertising and political propaganda during the 1920s and 1930s. This second phase is formally characterized by the decrease of glued-on, juxtaposed levels and a return to the traditional model of separation between languages and to the detached coexistence of the figurative montage with its explicative caption. The circle is now complete. The word, escaped from the page to share the image's iconicity, recovers its explicative role, directing the reader to understand the meaning of the mute montage. After being perceived—as index, icon, and symbol—in two ways at the same time, the diachronic of reading and the synchronic of watching, the word again inhabits text's traditional linearity.

⁴⁹ *Sonniges Land* is a photomontage made by Grosz and Heartfield in 1919 and published in 1920 as the cover of Richard Huelsenbeck's *Dada siegt. Eine Bilanz des Dadaismus*. It is another example of this phase of transition between the first and the second stages of the process: a heterogeneous montage composed of images and alphabetic fragments, whose different linguistic natures are cancelled by their comparison as clippings. Once cut, the press clipping, although alphabetic, becomes a shape to be mounted in the whole picture like the photo fragment.