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Introduction: spare parts

Un pied un oeil le tout mélangé aux objets.

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Limit-bodies: an elusive corpus

An assemblage of prosthetic limbs (figure 1.1); a spark plug with the words 'FOREVER' stamped on it (figure 1.2); a hybrid of African statue and European woman; a readymade object, tube or piston, eggbeater or hat; a blot, blob or blur. The Dadaists rejected mimetic representations of the human form: the body in Dada is displaced, deformed or dissolved, a mutating organic limb or an elusive limit-form of the human anatomy. In their paintings, collages and assemblages, their readymades, manifestos, poems and films, the Dadaists exposed, expelled or exploded the human figure, loudly proclaiming its demise or tentatively announcing its renewal.

Can a common denominator be found among such seemingly disparate and contradictory bodily images? In the principle of subversion of the once-whole classical body, for instance? Such an approach would risk branding Dada as a mere anti-art strategy. In the image of the fragmented body of the wounded soldiers, the shattered identities of the shell-shocked of the First World War, or the image of the machine-body of the post-war assembly lines? This would risk reducing Dada to a mirror of the reality of wartime and post-war Europe, a mere form of (second-degree) mimeticism. In the idea of a therapeutic strategy, in which collective or individual vital energies that had been constricted in the coffin-corset of the wartime years, are liberated anew in a carnivalesque space? This would be to bypass Dada's political import or its satirical dimension. In the elaboration of a monstrous rhetoric of the body, the dissection of its parts and links? This would be to forget that Dada cannot be subjected to an overarching

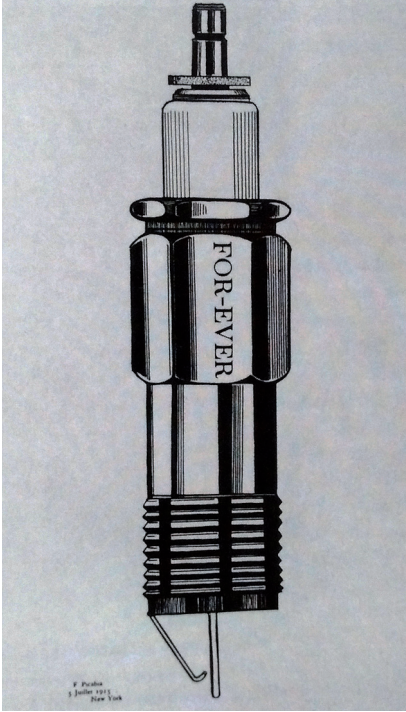


1.1 Max Ernst, *Jeune chimère* (*Young Chimera*, c.1921)

system; indeed, that it is an aleatory, mutable entity, often displaced, abstract or near-invisible.

Inadequate though they are as grounds for a meaningful common denominator when taken individually, each of these aspects of Dada, along with their caveats, will be shown to be relevant to the analysis of our corpus. Dada was primarily the voice of revolt and vitality, its urgency encapsulated in a woodcut by German artist Otto Dix titled *Der Schrei* (*The Shout*, 1919), and echoed in a text written by Romanian poet Tzara in 1930, which repeats the word ‘hurle’ (‘howl’) 275 times (Tzara 1975: 387).² It was a cry of protest against a civilisation that was reducing much of Europe to rubble. In Tzara’s ‘Manifeste dada 1918’, war is seen as the manifestation of the bankruptcy of Europe’s political, social and moral values, ‘the state of madness, aggressive complete madness of a world abandoned in the hands of bandits, who rend and destroy the centuries’ (1918: 3; 1975: 366).³

Why choose to turn the spotlight on the body in Dada?⁴ Primarily, in response to the centrality of images of the human form in Dada, not only as



1.2 Francis Picabia, *Portrait d'une jeune fille américaine dans l'état de nudité* (*Portrait of a Young American Girl in a State of Nudity*, 1915)

a physical reality but more specifically as a social and political reality. Dada's corporeal figurations, when considered as constructs, appear as the site of cultural mediations between the individual and the collective, as the locus of conflicts and reconfigurations, or the theatre of contradictions. Embodying Dada's rebellion, they are a site for the philosophical, political and aesthetic questioning, erosion or subversion of social conventions, undermining dominant power relations, challenging enshrined gender differences and defying notions of fixed identities. Such images can therefore be read as tropes, essentially critical statements on the dominant ideology, exposing the dislocated body and body politic which the post-war 'return to order' was actively seeking to suppress or deny. Dada's bodily images are overt fictions and fabrications which act both as a reflection *of* the disjunctive body of the early twentieth century, and a reflection *on* the dehumanised body of wartime and post-war Europe. Moreover, Dada's strategies of perversion or subversion of the normative body transcend the simple act of resistance against social norms and initiate an exploration of new modes of individual or collective experience, offering a blueprint of the possible body.

This study explores the fabrications of the human figure across Dada art, texts, film, manifestos and performances in the context of the tensions and

contradictions of the ideological, socio-political and artistic situation across Europe during and after the First World War. Born in Zurich in 1916, at the heart of a war-torn Europe, Dada emerged at a time of social, economic and moral crisis, and of major developments in technology and media culture. It is this period of widespread upheaval that Walter Benjamin evokes in ‘The Storyteller’:

With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent – not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? ... For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of forces of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body. (Benjamin 1999: 84)⁵

Through their literary, artistic and programmatic activities, the Dadaists both reflected and reflected on these radical changes and the ensuing turmoil. Their fabrications of the human figure have both a critical and a utopian dimension. In critical guise, they exposed the lies of an ideology that sought to clothe the corpse, to shore up the ‘tiny, fragile human body’ of war-torn Europe and to deny the disturbing presence in society of shattered bodies and minds. In this confrontation, the Dadaists staged in their texts and images the demise of the integral body of pre-war Europe, both the body politic, founded on the principle of the authoritarian state, and the aesthetic body, epitomised by the classical Greek statue. These they replaced by the dismembered, dehumanised, reconstructed or mechanised beings of a post-war Europe mired in its inability to heal physical and psychic wounds. In utopian guise, on the other hand, Dadaists disavowed traumatic memories, denying the demise of the whole body and reaffirming, on the contrary, its continuing vitality in images of the body transformed and reconfigured. It is this paradoxical aspect of Dada, as dystopian body (dysfunctional, disjunctive, dismembered) and utopian body (extended, exploded, ex-static), that this study will explore, arguing that Dada’s bodily images occupy an ambivalent space, between death and rebirth, between the battlefield (in the satirical exposure of the physical and psychic violence of the times) and the fairground (in the regression to the infantile and the celebration of the life-force).

The exploration of Dada’s bodily imagery will be taken further by considering Dada itself as corporeal, in the sense developed by Jean-Luc Nancy: ‘To write, not *about* the body, but the body itself. Not corporeality, but the body.

Not the signs, images and figures of the body, but again the body. This was, and probably is no longer, one of modernity's objectives' (1992: 12).⁶ The notion is central to Tristan Tzara's claim that whereas Western man has lost his sense of the tactility in favour of the head in what constitutes a form of disembodiment, Dada poetry and art are literally embedded in the body: 'Thought is produced in the mouth' ('La pensée se fait dans la bouche'), he writes about Dada poetry in 1920 ([1924] 1963: 57; 1975: 379); and in 1947: 'Thought is produced through the hand' ('La pensée se fait sous la main', 1992: 368). Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes champions the same direct language-body connection when he writes in his 1920 'Manifeste selon Saint-Jean Clysopompe': 'Words come swirling out of your navel. Like a troop of archangels with candlewhite buttocks. You talk out of your navel, your eyes turned to heaven' (1920a: 3).⁷

The aim of the present study is thus neither to retrieve Dada by reducing it to a homogeneous movement – anti-war, anti-logic, anti-modernity – nor to uncover a unifying principle beyond the proliferation of its spare parts. If Dada was a bomb, as Max Ernst claimed in an interview with Patrick Waldberg in 1958, why should one now wish to put the pieces back together: 'Dada was a bomb. Can you imagine someone, almost half a century after the explosion of a bomb, intent on collecting the shards, pasting them together and displaying them?' (1970: 411).⁸ Endorsing Ernst's statement, this study investigates the make-up and impact of some of the splinters, in particular those shards which succeeded in dislocating the unified body of pre-war Europe and fabricating the anti-body, the new body or the possible body of the immediate post-war years. Hence, sidestepping any urge to recuperate Dada, it is the heterogeneity of the movement that will occupy centre stage. To this end, this study acknowledges Dada's geographical multi-centredness and the distinctive social and political contexts which shaped the activities of its various groups. If Dada was indeed a chameleon, as Tzara proclaimed in 'Dada est un microbe vierge' (1920a), it changed its colours in response to its targets: 'Dada has 391 different attitudes and colours according to the sex of the president ... Dada is the chameleon of rapid and self-seeking change' (1975: 385).⁹ In a similar spirit, Francis Picabia playfully assembles Dada as a multi-limbed and multinational figure in his text 'Dada philosophique':

DADA has blue eyes, a pale face, curly hair; he has the English look of young sportsmen.

DADA has melancholic fingers, the Spanish look.

DADA has a small nose, the Russian look.

DADA has a porcelain arse, the French look. (Picabia 1920a: 5; 1975: 225)¹⁰

The Dada movement had its origins in Zurich in neutral Switzerland, 'a birdcage, surrounded by roaring lions', according to Hugo Ball (1996: 34), in

the revolt of a cosmopolitan group of displaced writers, artists and performers against the traditional values which had led to the catastrophe of the First World War.¹¹ It was in Zurich on 5 February 1916 that German writer and theatre director Hugo Ball (1886–1927) opened a literary cabaret, the Cabaret Voltaire, where the first Dada activities took place. It was here that an international group of writers and artists first gathered around Ball, including Richard Huelsenbeck from Germany, Hans Arp from Alsace, Marcel Janco and Tristan Tzara from Romania.¹² The movement soon spread to other European cities, including Cologne, Barcelona and Hanover.

In 1917 Huelsenbeck returned to Berlin, where he founded the Club Dada with Franz Jung and Raoul Hausmann. On 12 April 1918 Huelsenbeck declaimed the ‘Dadaistisches Manifest’, signed by Hausmann, Jung, Grosz and others. Berlin Dada culminated in the international *Dada-Messe* in 1920, held at Dr Otto Burchardt’s gallery (see chapter 4). The Zurich Dadaists were also in touch with a group of young French poets – André Breton, Paul Éluard and Louis Aragon – around the publication *Littérature*, which took on a resolutely Dada tone in 1920 when Tzara accepted Breton’s invitation to join them in Paris. Over the next two years he acted as impresario of a series of Dada soirées, but these activities were brought to an end in 1922 following a quarrel between Tzara and Breton. Dada was also active in Cologne (see chapter 7) and in New York, from 1916, where the key figures were Duchamp, Picabia and Man Ray (chapter 4).

Dada as an international movement was thus embodied in exchanges and collaborations across Europe and New York, while each Dada centre had its own distinctive character and preoccupations. Zurich, for instance, was invaded by the carnival masks of a grotesque *Totentanz*, while in Hanover Kurt Schwitters’s collages played nostalgically with fragments of nineteenth-century iconography. Berlin Dada proved to be a much more violently political animal, exploiting photomontage’s prosthetic bodies as a critique of Weimar Republic policies and the new media, while Cologne’s Dadaists exploited black humour and the grotesque to mock the post-war situation. And in Paris we encounter dadaist ‘exquisite corpses’, which are, arguably, more playful, more exquisite than corpse. As for New York, the human figure provided both a playful embrace and a critique of machine and commodity culture. It is in pursuing the tendency towards significant diversification that Höch’s fragmented figures, for example, will be shown to contrast with George Grosz’s bestial beings or Max Ernst’s erotic hybrids. And these, in turn, will be viewed in relation to the ironic manipulations of machine images by Francis Picabia or Marcel Duchamp. Dada’s proliferation and paradoxes, its ludic and morbid dimensions, its regressive or projective impulses thus constitute the focal points of the investigation. It will be argued that it is this very proliferation and these paradoxes which

constitute the specificity – and not the (impossible) essence – of Dada as a mobile and fluctuating body.

Historical context

Dada developed in the midst of the First World War, ‘in a field of forces of destructive torrents and explosions’, yet the upheaval described by Benjamin did not originate with the war itself, as Philip Blom (2008) has rightly argued. At the end of the nineteenth century and in the first years of the twentieth century, with the critique of Enlightenment thought and the development of urban modernity, the traditional concept of the humanist subject defined as an autonomous and rational individual was undermined, accompanied by a crisis in the notion of bodily integrity and body–mind continuum. The very idea of a fixed human essence was called into question by new models of identity developed by Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and others. Alternative forms of subjectivity considered identity as constructed and fluid, as process rather than essence. In the arts, pre-1914 modernist figures such as artists Egon Schiele and Ludwig Meidner, composer Igor Stravinsky or novelist Robert Musil subverted traditional aesthetic conventions and explored new forms of artistic expression. So, while Dada emerged in the disruption of the First World War, the movement resists reduction to a simple reaction – however far-reaching – to the war in Europe. As Dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck would later express it, Dada rebellion was a broader form of protest: ‘Dada was a moral protest not only against the war but also against the malaise of the time’ (1969: xviii).

The First World War can thus be read both as event – the mechanical and inescapable collapse of humanism – and as a process of creative destruction. There were a total of seventeen million military and civilian deaths, and twenty million wounded, in the course of the war. Germany lost 2 million soldiers and 4.2 million were wounded or crippled (*Kriegsbeschädigte*); while in France 1.7 million were killed, and of the 4.3 million wounded 1 million suffered lasting injuries (*grands mutilés*). Modern technology on the battlefield stripped Western consciousness of the myth of the heroic soldier; a collapse exposed in Henri Barbusse’s novel *Le Feu* (1916), or satirised in Charlie Chaplin’s film *Shoulder Arms* (1918). Besides the millions expeditiously accounted for as ‘casualties’, those soldiers who made it through no man’s land were, for the most part, relegated, dehumanised: ‘The gloomily bruised modernist antiheroes [became] not just No Men, nobodies, but *not* men, *unmen*. That twentieth-century Everyman, the faceless cipher ... is not just publicly powerless, he is privately impotent’ (Gilbert 1987: 198).

While Germany underwent the humiliation of defeat, the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II (1918) and the failed Spartakist uprising (1919), in France the

orchestrated euphoria of victory gave way all too soon to disillusionment. By the early 1920s a writer like Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, close to the Dadaists, could present the widely shared vision of a decadent France, writing in his essay *Mesure de la France*: ‘We are here, knee-deep in corpses, among our sterile womenfolk’ (‘Nous sommes ici, les pieds dans nos cadavres, parmi nos femmes stériles’, 1922: 14). Looking back on this period, the French surrealist André Breton would recall the generalised feeling of waste, disillusionment and mediocrity: ‘a feeling of the uselessness of the sacrifice of so many lives, ... the break-up of innumerable families, utterly mediocre prospects for the future. The initial euphoria of military victory did not last’ (1999: 456).¹³ Pre-war values of social stability and wholeness were destroyed, established concepts of the inviolability and integrity of the human being, at one with an ordered environment, were negated.

In a cutting article published in 1919, ‘Menschliche Fragmente’ (‘Human Fragments’), the Austrian journalist Joseph Roth wrote of this essential shift, materialised in the body as the site of degradation. The opening lines adopt a mock biblical tone: ‘There was once man. Claimed to be in the image of God, crown of creation, he walked upright on his feet through the dust of which he was made. He walked freer than the lion, he looked more bravely than the tiger and raised his eyes towards the flight of the eagle and the stars of the cosmos’ (1919: 21).¹⁴ But far from corresponding to the humanist ideal of a godlike being, contemporary man has lost even his human identity, become a godless creature, degraded to the level of an animal: ‘What is that? Fabulous beast, insect, reptile of legendary times? His upper body horizontal, his arms bent outwards on either side, a club in each hand, his face parallel to the road surface: a quadruped’ (1919: 21).¹⁵ Insect or reptile, man has become a trembling, staggering, crawling, disorientated being, Lazarus-like, a mere ‘fragment, a remnant of humanity’ (‘Fragment, Überbleibsel eines Menschentums’). It is this image of the degeneracy of the human being, reduced to an animal state as a consequence of the war, that haunts the writings of Dadaist Hugo Ball, for instance (see chapter 2).

Faced with the traumatic experiences of the 1914–18 war, with its mass destruction, its mutilated and disfigured bodies, its wounded psyches and hysterical disorders, its violence – not only the violence of the front (the massacres and squalor of trench warfare) but also of the home front – the Dadaists resorted to the absurd to express their violent reaction to the absurdity of the war, privileging art forms based on spontaneity, chance and the irrational. As André Breton acknowledged: ‘For a time, we simply responded in kind to a world that scandalised us’ (1999: 485).¹⁶

The human figure in Dada, wounded, divided, wrenched from nature and society, was both symptom and product of a double dehumanisation: by the destructive military machine of the First World War and by the industrial machine of the post-war period. In his ‘Dadaistisches Manifest’, recited at the

first Dada soirée in Berlin on 12 April 1918, Richard Huelsenbeck claimed that in comparison with Expressionism, which failed to burn ‘the essence of life into the flesh’ (‘die Essenz des Lebens ins Fleisch’), Dada’s violence was much more radical: ‘The best and most extraordinary artists will be those who every hour snatch the tatters of their bodies out of the frenzied cataract of life, who, with bleeding hands and hearts, hold fast to the intelligence of their time’ (trans. in Motherwell 1951: 40).¹⁷

The post-war *tabula rasa* left no get-out for European thought and the movements it spawned, whether harking backwards (refusing to bury, make disappear) or forwards (promoting perspectives either positive, utopian or negative, dehumanised). In the immediate post-war period, faced with the breakdown of the fundamental concepts and assumptions on which European humanism had long been grounded, both France and Germany attempted to resuscitate pre-war values and patch up the shattered social body. Government-driven reconstruction programmes sought to suppress the traumatic presence of the disfigured bodies and dislocated minds of soldiers blasted by mechanical warfare, or the squalid conditions and physical collapse of the munitions factory workers. Seeking to clothe the corpse and veil the injured, official discourse endeavoured to deny their pervasive and unsettling presence via a return to the illusory wholeness of the integral body. Major advances were made in reconstructive surgery and prosthetic medicine, reconfiguring the veteran to slot him into post-war society and industry as unobtrusively and productively as possible. In the art world, journals and exhibitions celebrated the smooth or fulsome bodies painted by artists such as Ingres and Renoir (see chapter 3).

Appalled by this systematic whitewash, the Dadaists and other avant-garde movements undertook, on the contrary, to expose the effects of the war. They produced bodies made up of disparate limbs, assemblages of parts that do not quite mesh together: images of the body as dysfunctional machine (Picabia, Grosz), grotesque (Dix) or hybrid (Höch), as fragment (Ernst) or fantasy (Hoerle), ghostly limbs lurking in the readymade (Duchamp). In short, images that display rather than suppress the violence exerted on the body. They attacked the military machine by satirising, vandalising and recycling wartime images, and highlighted the psychic wounds of the period by mimicking the language of the insane. They critiqued the dehumanisation of the individual by depicting him or her as an object, a thing, an inkblot, a mere trace.

The early 1920s were marked by further upheavals throughout Europe: rapid industrial rationalisation and the acceleration of the rhythms of metropolitan life; the expansion of mass culture and consumerism; developments in printing technologies and mechanical reproduction as evidenced in the proliferation of illustrated newspapers; shifts in gender-specific identities in fashion and art, with the fashioning of the androgynous figure of the New Woman, whether

flapper, *neue Frau* or *garçonne*; and increasing demands by women in France and Germany for social and political emancipation. Modernity itself, in its post-war guise, was questioned in the Dadaists' critical appropriation of advertisements, newspapers and mass-produced objects; their *détournement* of the machine; and their manipulation of shifting identities.

As we shall see, the human figure in Dada is actualised as trauma and potential liberation, whether in the tragic-ludic replay of Oedipal scenarios (regression to pre-war intertexts, the nostalgic images of the magic theatre or early cinema), or in the fragmented or exploded body as source of anxious separation from, or joyful transgression of, the containment and constraints of the contained, classical body. In the exploratory shifting and disruptive reconfigurations of the body and the self, distinctions – body/non-body, self/other, masculine/feminine, in/animate – merge or collapse in the dissolves and clashes of contradictory elements.

Aesthetics of the body

Depictions of the body in Dada can be broadly linked to two important trends in Western art: the classical body of the Italian Renaissance derived from Greek and Roman models, and the Northern European tradition of the grotesque. Dadaists both continue and defy this dual heritage: the classical aesthetics, against which they rebelled, and the grotesque, which they adopted and took to its limits.

The Renaissance ideal in art was derived from the Greek model of the perfect human form based on the harmony of proportions. Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of Vitruvian Man was considered by Renaissance artists not only as an ideal of human proportions but also as a model of the mathematical perfection of the macrocosm. This model, which portrayed the body in conformity with classical aesthetic norms (*egola, disegno, maniera, ordine*) and as the embodiment of social stability, was dominant in European culture until the mid-nineteenth century. The paradigmatic shift in science and philosophy that followed mirrors and informs a parallel shift in the artistic field, marked by the abandonment of the divine origin of the corpus. With the crisis of humanism and the development of materialism, the seamless, balance and integrity of the harmoniously composed human form, which had been central to Western culture, were challenged in early twentieth-century modernism in disturbing portrayals of the body, and by extension of social reality, as fragmented (Cubism), mechanised (Futurism) or monstrous (Surrealism).

The dadaist rebellion is exemplary of this shift, exploding classical aesthetic norms by parodying the (neo-)classical body as contained or framed, producing instead the anti-classical body, a reconfiguration of the human figure grounded

on fragmentation rather than the integral body; on the disjunctive rather than the harmonious; on the body as fabrication rather than representation; on the conceptual rather than the perceptual; as the site of allegory or myth rather than mimesis; as a network of signs rather than fixed meanings. The ideal body in harmony with the universe is violently dislodged by a two-dimensional mannequin figure in a disjunctive space, producing a hybrid figure (see chapter 4), the body assembled from spare parts, as in Grosz's *Daum marries her pedantic automaton 'George'* (1920; see figure 4.6), or Max Ernst's collage *Jeune Chimère* (1920; see figure 1.1).

The hybrid is also a key characteristic of the second aesthetic tradition inherited by the Dadaists: the grotesque. Although the term 'grotteschi' was coined in Italy (referring to the discovery around 1500 of Nero's Villa Aurea), the grotesque developed mainly in Northern Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with artists such as Bosch, Bruegel or Grünewald, in whose works the idealised forms of classical art are replaced by the materiality of the grotesque. While the Italian Renaissance valued the beauty of the human body in its harmonious proportions, the grotesque tradition depicts the body as monstrosity. Artistic practices of the grotesque were greatly extended from the late nineteenth century with the work on the unconscious in psychoanalysis, in 'primitivism' in art, collage in modernist aesthetics, the formless in Bataillean aesthetics, the abject in feminist criticism and virtual reality in contemporary culture.

Dada pushed the grotesque genre to its limits. Dada bodies are material entities spilling out of their contours, based on a cavalier disregard for consummate style. Rejecting the establishment denial operative in the suppression of the wounded body of wartime Europe and the commodified or prosthetic body of post-war capitalism, the Dadaists exposed the violence done to the body in scenes of distorted realism, transgressing normative contours, the skin no longer treated as marking the body's limits as in Albertian aesthetics. In opposition to the closure and restraint of the classical or naturalistic body, 'the closed, smooth, and impenetrable surface' (Bakhtin 1984: 317), Dada's grotesque bodies display excess and ambivalence, open bodies in process rather than a finished body (*perfectio*). The grotesque body is defined by Bakhtin as that which is 'unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits ... interrogates and subverts the prevailing culture' (1984: 26). This subversive force is at the heart of Dada's revolutionary politics: reviling the classical body, they celebrate the grotesque as an act of resistance to official hierarchies and norms, a critique of so-called high culture, and a utopian vision of renewal.

Pushed to extremes, Dada bodies, whether born of iconoclastic (anti-classical) gestures or grotesque tactics, are on the one hand limit-forms of anthropomorphic figuration, what Paul Ardenne refers to as the 'impossible

body': 'doesn't the body in art, finally, refer first and foremost to the *impossibility* of the body?' (2000: 10).¹⁸ In such limit-bodies anatomical boundaries are exceeded or obscured; they become hybridised with the animal or the machine; they replace academic, controlled delineation of form with deliberately messy execution; they become blob or blur, organic proliferation, exaggerating the ornamental, the tangential, the arbitrary. Moreover, because Dada's corporeal images are largely mediated, whether quoted, processed or displaced, this study will consider human forms as fabrications, overt fictions, rather than representations. The plural form 'bodies', considered in terms of process and performativity, will replace the singular 'body' and its burden of fixity and essentialism.

Consequently, the principle and practice of montage – and its cognates (photo)collage or assemblage – are central to any discussion of Dada's experimentation with depictions of the human figure. Assembled out of disparate elements, the body is highlighted as a hybrid, a construct rather than an organic integrated unity. This is not to deny that Leonardo's body itself is not also a form of montage, but, unlike Dada assemblage, it is based on principles of harmony and proportion. Dada montage, on the contrary, is grounded on radical disruption, the process of construction made visible in the seams and cracks between the assembled parts. According to Theodor Adorno, 'the principle of montage was conceived as an act against a surreptitiously achieved organic unity; it was meant to shock' (1984: 204). And as we shall argue, radical montage – embodied in collage or photomontage, as well as in caricature or disruptive text/image confluences – has a dual function: while formal disruptions mirror the ideological and social disintegration of post-war Europe, they are also part of a transformative process, fabricating the new body from the very fragments of the past.

The anatomy of disparate limbs and recycled fragments of the dadaist body was to be systematised in 1925 in the surrealist collective game of the 'cadavre exquis' or exquisite corpse, named after the first sentence produced using this method: 'The exquisite corpse will drink the new wine' ('Le cadavre exquis boira le vin nouveau'). Based on the principle of assemblage, each participant draws or pastes (the equivalent of) a head, shoulders, arms and so on, or writes a word or phrase, without seeing the contributions of the other participants, thus assembling disjunctive elements to form either (the other of) the body, limit-forms of anatomical structure, the body fabricated from spare parts, or poetic or absurd sentences, whose effect is based on the encounter of disjunctive elements. These are hybrid productions: on the one hand, the allusion to death is foregrounded in the name (death of the normative anatomy, of the order of syntax); on the other hand, death is denied and transcended in the 'exquisite' manipulation of body-parts. Such figures are open to multiple readings, and in particular

as an ironic comment on the dismembered soldier of the trenches or the taylorised body of industrial production. As Hal Foster has argued, the exquisite corpse is ‘a perverse assembly-line’ (1994: 160): in opposition to the taylorised body, where rational management of work sought to eliminate all random, that is, non-productive, movement, Dadaists and Surrealists irrationalise the body, reintroducing the incoherent and the gratuitous.

Faced with the range of Dada’s bodily images, as outlined above – iconoclastic, grotesque, ludic or limit-bodies, fiction and fabrication – the following chapters will be grounded on a critical framework based on several broadly overlapping categories. Walter Benjamin’s theory of montage is central to an analysis of the hybrid body, whether human-machine (chapter 4) or human-animal (chapter 5). Mikhael Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque underlies the discussion of Dada’s activities in Zurich (chapter 2) and the analysis of fairground figures (chapter 6), while his related concept of ‘grotesque realism’, focusing on the notion of the disjunctive body as a concatenation of incompatible and irreconcilable parts (Dix’s dismembered bodies) or bodily functions (Grosz’s spewing, pissing bodies) is developed in both the study of the grotesque body (chapter 5) and Hannah Höch’s photomontages (chapter 9). Since the notion of performance is central to dadaist practice, in dance (chapter 2), cabaret or exhibition (chapter 6), the analyses will draw on both performance theory and notions of play, pastiche and parody. As Susan Rubin Suleiman has shown, the modernist image is subversive, in the sense of ‘playing as fantasy, or playing as free invention, as mastery, as mockery, as parody ... as self mutilation ... as transgression, as perversion, as *jouissance*’ (1990: 4). The analyses that follow are thus informed not only by the notion of play as a subversive strategy but also by Linda Hutcheon’s (1985) analysis of parody and pastiche. And finally, when uncovering how Dadaists undermined essentialised concepts of race, gender and class, the analyses are critically informed by Donna Haraway’s (1991) perceptive work on the cyborg.

The importance of laughter encountered in Dada practice implies that the body is not only significant as an object of representation but also is engaged in the artwork as subject, both as producer and spectator. Dada artworks thus fit uneasily within the parameters of the Greenbergian theory of opticality and autonomy of the art object. Duchamp’s ‘visual indifference’ points to an alternative form of production and reception of the work of art, marking a major shift from the distance of sight to the physicality of touch, inviting an embodied encounter and interaction with the art object, as Martin Jay (1994) and Janine Mileaf and Matthew Witovsky (2005) have argued. It is this radical aspect of Dada artworks that Benjamin stresses when he writes: ‘the Dadaists turned the artwork into a missile. It jolted the viewer, taking on a tactile (*taktisch*) quality’ ([1936] 2002: 119).

Finally, the psychoanalytical model of desire based on lack or loss, theorised by Freud and Lacan, and developed by Hal Foster (1991) in the context of Dada and Surrealism, confronts the Deleuzian model of desire grounded on flow and surplus. The analysis will be based on an opposition: on the one hand, the disjunctive body as a narrative of loss and trauma; on the other, the celebration of Dada's bodies as fabrication and fiction. By focusing on limit-forms of the body – hybrid machine- or animal-bodies, part-bodies or displaced bodies – it will be argued that, far from being immobilised in the fixed traces of a trauma, or reducible to the nostalgic fragment of an impossible unity – such fragmented, grotesque, disjunctive or limit-forms can also be pregnant with possible bodies, new liberated realities.

Critical context

While critical literature on Dada in Germany has considered Dada essentially within the lineage of Expressionism (Sheppard 2000), Dada in France, notably among French scholars, has traditionally been treated as a noisy nursery for future Surrealists, as a negative phase, 'as a comical transition – or as a psychic slash-and-burn ploy – for its more successful cousin Surrealism' (Gordon 1987: 7), which is deemed to represent a coming-of-age of the group. In positioning it in this way, Marguerite Bonnet even referred to the years 1920–22 as the 'Dada interlude' ('l'intermède Dada', see Breton 1990: 1280). Exhibitions have often underscored the claimed filiation by presenting the two movements within a chronological framework tainted by the post hoc fallacy: for example, Alfred Barr's *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism* (MoMA, New York, 1936), William Rubin's *Dada, Surrealism and their Heritage* (MoMA, New York, 1968), or *Dada and Surrealism Reviewed* (Hayward Gallery, London, 1978), curated by David Sylvester. However, as Laurent Le Bon, curator of the 2005 *Dada* exhibition (MNAM Centre Pompidou, Paris), has claimed: 'Dada is neither prologue, prelude nor prehistory' ('Dada n'est pas un prologue, ni un prélude, ni une préhistoire', 2005: 519). Indeed, on the contrary, for Francis Picabia writing in 1924, the Surrealism of Breton and Philippe 'Coppeaux' (Soupault) was considered 'a poor imitation of Dada' ('une pauvre imitation de Dada'), and Breton's brand of Surrealism derided as 'simply Dada dressed up as an advertising float for the firm Breton & Co.' ('tout simplement Dada travesti en ballon réclame pour la maison Breton et Cie', 1924: 2; 1978: 152). The dependent relationship was in fact revised in the 1940s, after the Second World War especially, when art historians and museum curators reassessed Dada as a movement distinct from Surrealism, particularly in the United States. As Mel Gordon concluded: 'By the forties ... there was a total reevaluation among the new generation of museum curators and art historians: Dada had finally received its separate

and revolutionary status in twentieth-century art. In some ways, it became the bedrock of all late modern and postmodern art' (1987: 7). Robert Motherwell's anthology *The Dada Painters and Poets* (1951) played a key role in shaping this direction, corroborated by the 1953 exhibition *Dada 1916–1923*, curated by Marcel Duchamp for Sidney Janis's New York gallery.

Recent critical and curatorial interest in Europe and North America is evidence of a resurgence of interest in Dada, generating reprints and anthologies of Dada texts (Ades 2006), and above all a host of publications focusing on gender (Sawelson-Gorse 1999; Hopkins 2007; Hemus 2009); literature (Béhar and Dufour 2005); Dada and (post)modernism (Pegrum 2000; Sheppard 2000); Dada as an interdisciplinary object of study (Adamowicz and Robertson 2011, 2012; Hopkins and White 2014); Dada in Germany (Doherty 1999; Bergius 2000); in New York (Naumann and Venn 1996; Jones 2004); and in Eastern Europe (Sandqvist 2006). Exhibitions include the huge *Dada* exhibit (Paris, New York and Washington) with its linked publications (Le Bon 2005; Dickerman and Witkovsky 2005). The centenary of the founding of Dada in Zurich in 2016 was the occasion for a number of exhibitions, including: *Dadaglobe Reconstructed* (Kunsthau, Zurich, and MoMA, New York, 2016), and *Dada Africa* (Rietberg Museum, Zurich, 2016, and Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, 2017–18).

While earlier studies tended to focus on individuals, as attested by the large number of monographs on Dadaists such as Ball, Hausmann, Duchamp and Ernst, or the tirelessly replayed accounts of the disputes between Tzara and Breton, recent scholarship has treated Dada as a collective activity, analysing the movement within its historical context rather than rehearsing its anecdotes. Moreover, an important consequence of considering Dada as a distinct movement was recognition of its importance in informing post-1945 neo-avant-gardes (Bürger 1984; the *October* journal); the postmodern favouring of discursive and pictorial strategies such as montage, collage, heteroglossia, the aleatory, the grotesque, parody or pastiche; and contemporary developments in performance art.

In these reassessments, Dada has been considered less as an *ex nihilo* anarchist gesture (albeit shorn of effect) than as a movement forming an integral part of the broader European avant-garde, with its ambivalent relationship with Expressionism (Sheppard 2000: 236), Futurism (Sheppard 2000: 207–35) and Constructivism (Dachy [1994] 2011: 11). It is true that Dadaists collaborated with other avant-garde artists, for example at the Cabaret Voltaire (1916) or the Soirée du Coeur à barbe (1923), while the Congrès de Paris in 1922 was an attempt to bring together, albeit unsuccessfully, international avant-garde groups under the common front of 'l'esprit moderne'. The Dadaists (including Hans Richter, Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch and Franz Seiwert) also participated in the International Congress of Progressive Artists held in

Düsseldorf in May 1922; while Tzara, Arp, Richter and Schwitters took part in the International Congress of Constructivists in Weimar in September 1922 alongside Moholy-Nagy, El Lissitzky and others. Dadaists also contributed to avant-garde journals, such as Kurt Schwitters's *Merz* (1923–36), Theo van Doesberg's *De Stijl*, as well as his *Mecano* (edited in Leyden in 1922–23 under the pseudonym I. K. Bonset) and Émile Malespine's *Manomètre* (Lyon 1922–28).

However, among critical studies there has been no overarching analysis to date of the body in Dada. Valerie Preston-Dunlop (1996) has sketched the outlines of a possible study of Dada bodies, making useful distinctions between, for example, *Leib* (body as experienced or lived) and *Körper* (the body as a physical object), and related notions of *Erlebnis* (experience of lived body) and *Erkenntnis* (knowledge of the body as object). However, these distinctions are left undeveloped and the critic is content to list a number of works. Most critical literature focuses instead on specific aspects of the human figure in Dada. The most developed area of analysis focuses on Berlin photomontage (Doherty 1999; Bergius 2000; Schaschke 2004); while research on Dada's hybrid bodies – Hal Foster's prosthetic bodies (2004), Matthew Biro's cyborg (2009) – treats hybridity primarily as a response to the destruction of the First World War. The effects of the war on concepts of masculinity in 1920s Europe are the subject of works by critics such as Hal Foster (2004) and Amy Lyford (2007), and more specifically in the Weimar Republic by Heynen (2015), while David Hopkins (2007) analyses Dada homosociability in the work of Duchamp and its legacy in contemporary art. The Dadaists' assault on the neo-classical figure in the post-war 'return to order' has been studied by Arnaud Pierre (2001, 2002), and a final group of studies focuses on the grotesque figure (Lavin 1993; Connelly 2003). While most critical studies have situated Dada's fragmented bodies in the context of wartime destruction or post-war capitalism, the originality of the present study lies in the fact that, recognising the paradoxical nature of Dada's bodily images, it considers the affabulations of the human figure not only as a radical critique of dominant discourses and iconography but also as an exploration of utopian possibilities, within the historical, social, aesthetic and political context of the time.

Plan

'Centrifugal Dada, centripetal Dada!' ('Dada centrifuge, dada centripète!'), exclaims Laurent Le Bon (2005: 516), curator of the 2005–6 *Dada* exhibition at the Musée d'art moderne at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. The layout of the exhibition was based on French artist Daniel Burren's grid system of forty inter-connecting rooms or cells, originally designed for the 2002 exhibition *Le Musée qui n'existait pas*. Each section of the Dada exhibition focused on a geographical centre, an artist, a historical event or a theme. At the centre of the exhibition

space was a partial reconstitution of the 1920 Berlin *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe* (First International Dada Fair). Far from presenting a rigid chronological development or distinct thematic categories, the display encouraged multiple and varied trajectories, confrontations and dialogues within and between rooms. According to Le Bon, ‘the obligatory linear path is abolished in favour of crossings, dialogues between works, visitors and cells, between the most concealed and the most open’ (2005: 515).¹⁹ Thus, avoiding a linear history of Dada – a task precluded, practically, by the very diversity of the movement and, conceptually, by the rejection of a conventional historiographical perspective – the exhibition enabled a network of paths and intersections, convergences and divergences.

Like the exhibition, the present study proposes an itinerary of parallel developments, crossings, contradictions, echoes and affinities. Like its object of analysis, it has been conceived as a disjunctive body, an assemblage. It rejects the possibility of cohesion and closure of traditional discursive narratives to propose alternative micro-narratives which respect Dada’s refusal to be contained, and to focus on tensions and confusions, heterogeneity and, above all, continued vitality.

Chapter 2 situates Dada historically in the context of pre-1914 avant-garde art and thought, and traces the shift from the glorification of war’s destructive forces to Dada’s exposure of the war as absurd. It argues that if the Dadaists adopted a rhetoric of war and violence, it was to pervert it in the promotion of their own global revolt in the face of the machinery of destruction. An analysis of Zurich Dada’s grotesque *Totentanz* is developed, focusing on George Grosz’s poems, Marcel Janco’s masks, and Sophie Taeuber’s dances and puppets.

The Dadaists’ radical critique of the neo-classical revival promoted by the ‘return to order’ of post-war France and Germany is the subject of chapter 3, which examines how the cult of neo-Ingrism in art as a model for the reconstituted body of France is satirised in Francis Picabia’s parodies of the nineteenth-century artist, and in Man Ray’s photograph *Le Violon d’Ingres* (1924), thus exposing the official myth-making policies of post-war France. This is followed by a discussion of the cult of the healthy body forged through sport in the promotion of body-building in Germany in the post-war years, and the subsequent parodic remake in images of sportsmen by Ernst, Baargeld and Grosz.

Yet the Dadaists were not solely iconoclasts or Luddites. They proved to be, on occasion, engineers. It is in this light that the reconfigurations of the human form are explored in chapters 4 and 5 through the concept of the hybrid body, firstly as human-machine, and secondly as human-animal. Chapter 4 begins by exploring the machine-as-body in Picabia’s mecanomorphic drawings, read as a satire of a technological utopia. In his games of perversion, the ‘becoming-machine’ of the body is explored as a ‘becoming-erotic’ of the machine. The second part of the chapter focuses on an analysis of the body-as-machine

in Berlin Dadaists' violent exposure – through photomontage – of dismembered, prosthetic, mechanised bodies in the early 1920s. Chapter 5, meanwhile, extends the study of the theme of the composite body via an exploration of the grotesque, informed by the work of Mikhael Bakhtin. An analysis of Kurt Schwitters's *Merzbau* (1919–37) in terms of the corporeal dimension of architecture, structured on the principle of the grotto, is followed by a discussion of Grosz and Dix's *Phantastische Gebete* (*Fantastic Prayers*, 1920) and Otto Dix's savage depiction of wounded war-veterans in *Die Skatspieler* (*The Skat Players*, 1920). The grotesque is, finally, linked to the abject body, as exposed in Tristan Tzara's play *Le Coeur à gaz* (*The Gas Heart*, 1921).

In the chapter 6, Dada is treated as process rather than product, art as event rather than as object. It focuses, consequently, on carnivalesque spaces where the phantasmagoric body is seen as both nostalgia and parody of end-of-century entertainment. The first section deals with fairground spaces: the photographs of the Dada group; optical machines; and René Clair's *Entr'acte* (1924). The allegory of the male magician controlling his female victim is shown to be central to the theme of the dismemberment and reconstitution of the body. Both transgression (of body limits) and regression (a return to infantile fantasies) are thus revealed as modes of resistance to dominant ideologies. The following section extends the notion of performance to Dada texts, via an analysis of body, voice and gesture in Raoul Hausmann's phonetic poetry. Finally, the performative dimension of Dada exhibitions is addressed via a discussion of the 1920 *Dada-Vorfrühling* exhibition in Cologne, in order to highlight the ways in which it implicated the body of the spectator

Chapter 7, an analysis of Max Ernst's early collages and the fatagaga photocollages produced with Hans Arp, confronts the recycling of war images, arguing that they constitute not only a satire of the militaro-industrial machine of the First World War (the body as site of loss or trauma) but also a narrative of rebirth, informed by alchemical thought. The motif of the chrysalis or the man in flight in Ernst's works is contrasted with fellow Cologne artist Heinrich Hoerle's images of the wounded veteran in his series of lithographs, the *Cripple Portfolio* or *Die Krüppelmappe* (1919), which were shaped by a cynical view of the motif of renewal. Hoerle's 'unman' thus confronts Ernst's New Man.

Chapter 8 turns to the rejection of essentialist notions of identity in favour of the self as construct or process, constantly remodelled by chance or the irrational, and as multiple and open. It investigates, consequently, the Dadaists' subversion of patriarchal law, based on the work of German psychoanalysts such as Otto Grosz, through the figure of the jester in Hans Richter's film *Vormittagsspek* (1928). The fluidity they championed is approached through Dada self-portraits and Hausmann's *Klebebild* portraits; and the accompanying

breakdown of traditional gender categories surfaces in the analysis of Dada's dysfunctional couples.

Chapter 9 opens with a discussion of Man Ray's *Black and White* (1921), the photograph of an African female statuette juxtaposed with a classical European statue. The chapter investigates the relations between Dada's 'primitivism' and Expressionism and, particularly, the influence of Carl Einstein's *Negerplastik* ([1915] 2004). Hannah Höch's cycle of photomontages, *Aus einem ethnographischen Museum* (1924–34), composed of fragments from fashion magazines and ethnographic illustrations, is then discussed as her response to contemporary racist and colonial discourses in 1920s Weimar Germany, to tribal and commodity fetishism and as a challenge to contemporary aesthetics of the body.

The radical critique embodied therein takes the shape of limit-forms of the human figure in chapter 10, which examines the displacements, objectification or disembodiment of the human figure. This is exemplified firstly in Man Ray's film *Le Retour à la raison* (1923), where the human figure, montaged with moving objects and abstract forms, itself becomes abstract. The body as indexical trace is explored in the recurrent image of the handprint. In Max Ernst's lithographs *Fiat modes pereat ars* (1920) the theatrical spaces are occupied by surrogate human figures (a tailor's dummy, featureless automatons, round or cone-shaped forms) which seem to merge with the geometrical spaces in which they are placed. This is followed by a discussion of the performative function of Duchamp's readymades, which call for the viewer's bodily response in a tactile engagement. Lastly, on the path to a final vanishing point, the body as abstraction will be considered, as found in a number of Dada portraits by Picabia and others.

In the final chapter the notion of the ambivalence of Dada's bodies, as both 'corpse' and 'exquisite', is reasserted, in images of the body degraded and dissolved, or reconfigured and regenerated. Finally, Dada's heritage is considered in developments in contemporary art, focusing in particular on critical or playful reappropriations of corporeal images which the Dadaists themselves had already transformed, in the work of Damien Hirst, Anna Artaker or Sadie Murdoch.

The analyses undertaken in this study do not claim to coalesce into a coherent ensemble or, indeed, an exhaustive overview, not least because any such pretention would merely be seeking to reimpose the straitjacket that Dada dismantled. Like the object of study, they are offered as part-bodies, components of a monstrous body, grafted onto the (part-)body of work by other Dada scholars, and forming a body-in-progress to be cut up, mutilated and expanded by future scholars.

Notes

1. 'A foot an eye mixed with objects.' Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
2. The text was published in *Littérature* 18 (December 1920), 20.
3. 'l'état de folie, de folie agressive, complète, d'un monde laissé entre les mains des bandits qui déchirent et détruisent les siècles'.
4. While recent interest in theorising the body in art informs this reading, it is not to claim that Dada can be reduced to a postmodern phenomenon. Nor does this study seek to join the cohort of what art critic Waldemar Januszczak has scathingly referred to as 'modern body-maniacs': 'It is certainly true that "the body" is one of the most reliable obsessions of contemporary art, and that countless, tediously sensational explorations of it have been mounted in recent years by puerile and sex-obsessed modern imaginations. Blood, gore, penises, breasts and orifices are the bread and butter of the contemporary cultural feast' (Januszczak 2005).
5. 'Mit dem Weltkrieg begann ein Vorgang offenkundig zu werden, der seither nicht zum Stillstand gekommen ist. Hatte man nicht bei Kriegsende bemerkt, daß die Leute verstummt aus dem Felde kamen? nicht reicher – ärmer an mitteilbarer Erfahrung. ... Denn nie sind Erfahrungen gründlicher Lügen gestraft worden als die strategischen durch den Stellungskrieg, die wirtschaftlichen durch die Inflation, die körperlichen durch die Materialschlacht, die sittlichen durch die Machthaber. Eine Generation, die noch mit der Pferdebahn zur Schule gefahren war, stand unter freiem Himmel in einer Landschaft, in der nichts unverändert geblieben war als die Wolken und unter ihnen, in einem Kraftfeld zerstörender Ströme und Explosionen, der winzige, gebrechliche Menschenkörper.' (Benjamin [1936] 2007: 104)
6. 'Soit à écrire, non pas *du* corps, mais le corps même. Non pas la corporéité, mais le corps. Non pas les signes, les images, les chiffres du corps, mais encore le corps. Cela fut, et sans doute n'est déjà plus, un programme de la modernité.'
7. 'Les mots vous sortent en tourbillonnant hors du nombril. On dirait une troupe d'archanges à fesses blanches comme la chandelle. C'est avec le nombril que vous parlez, les yeux tournés vers le ciel.'
8. 'Dada était une bombe. Peut-on imaginer quelqu'un, près d'un demi-siècle après l'explosion d'une bombe, qui s'emploierait à en recueillir les éclats, à les coller ensemble et à les montrer?'
9. 'Dada a 391 attitudes et couleurs différentes suivant le sexe du président ... Dada est le caméléon du changement rapide et intéressé.' Published in *Dadaphone*, *Dada* 7 (1920), [4].
10. 'DADA a le regard bleu, sa figure est pale, ses cheveux sont bouclés; il a l'aspect anglais des jeunes hommes qui font du sport. / DADA a les doigts mélancoliques, à l'aspect espagnol. / DADA a le nez petit, à l'aspect russe. / DADA a le cul en porcelaine, à l'aspect français.'
11. On Dada in the context of the First World War, see Kuenzli (1982); Buelens (2006).
12. See chapter 2 for details of the specific social and political contexts.

13. 'sentiment de l'inutilité du sacrifice de tant de vies, ... brisement d'innombrables foyers, extrême médiocrité du lendemain. L'enivrement de la victoire militaire avait fait long feu.'
14. 'Das war einmal Mensch. Nannte sich Ebenbild Gottes, Krone der Schöpfung, und wandelte aufrecht und mit den Füßen durch den Staub, aus dem er gemacht war. Er ging freier als der Löwe, blickte mutiger als der Tiger und erhob seine Augen zu dem Fluge des Adlers und zu den Gestirnen des Kosmos.'
15. 'Was ist das? Fabeltier, Insekt, Reptil sagenhafter Vorzeit? Der Oberkörper waagrecht, die Arme seitlich nach auswärts gebogen, in jeder Hand einen Stab, das Gesicht parallel zum Straßenpflaster: ein Vierfüßler.'
16. 'Durant une certaine période, nous allions en quelque sorte user de réciprocité à l'égard d'un monde qui nous scandalisait.'
17. 'Die besten und unerhörtesten Künstler werden diejenigen sein, die stündlich die Fetzen ihrer Leibes aus dem Wirrsal der Lebenskatarakte zusammenreißen, verbissen in den Intellekt der Zeit, blutend an Händen und Herzen' (Huelsenbeck 1920a: 45).
18. 'l'art corporel, pour finir, ne parlerait-il pas d'abord de *l'impossible* du corps?'
19. 'le parcours obligé et linéaire est aboli au profit des croisements, des dialogues entre les oeuvres, les visiteurs, les cellules, entre le plus caché et le plus ouvert.'