

Dada Unshelved:

Dada Publications from Library to Museum, 1936-1978

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“... the dada document can be classified only under protest.”

Bernard Karpel (323)

Today, art museum audiences are no longer surprised by an inclusive approach to Dada's history, one that brings its books, periodicals, documentary materials, posters, and other ephemera, items traditionally collected by libraries and archives, together with Dada paintings, sculpture, collages, and photographs, works traditionally at home in the art museum. Blockbuster shows like the 2006 *Dada* (Paris, Washington DC, and New York) or smaller displays like *Dada Futures* (University of Iowa Stanley Museum of Art, 2018) materialize the Dadas' interdisciplinary and performative practices by integrating examples of their interest in text and image, including experiments in graphic design, typography, and mass media appropriation, with their work in the visual arts, poetry, prose, performance, music, and theater. Such exhibitions also manifest the dadaists' attempts to define, document, and disseminate themselves and foreground their critical interrogations of the institutions that construct culture, including the museum itself. In short, these displays convey a more “historically accurate” concept of Dada's fundamental sense of itself as interdisciplinary and intermedial. They also simultaneously replicate and re-assert the Dadas' own “multimedia” exhibition practices, as seen, for example, at the 1920 International Dada Fair in Berlin where Dada posters, periodicals, and other publications comingled with paintings, collages, photomontages, and three-dimensional assemblages.¹

An approach that in a sense welcomes the library and archive into the museum was not standard practice at the earliest exhibitions of the history of Dada, which

¹ For more on the broader history of Dada exhibitions, see recent scholarship by Adam Jolles and the essays in the 2017 special issue of *Dada/Surrealism* on *Exhibiting Dada and Surrealism* (Floyd).

might better be described as an *art* history of Dada. In the second edition of the catalogue for Alfred H. Barr's well-known 1936 exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* at New York's Museum of Modern Art, arguably the first survey of Dada as a cohesive "movement" in a major art museum, Georges Hugnet's history of Dada, adapted from a previously published essay, repeatedly describes Dada journals — *Cabaret Voltaire*, *Dada*, *Der Dada*, *Der Zeltweg*, *Die Schammade*, *Proverbe*, *Cannibale*, 391, and others — as significant components of the dadaists' radical practices, evidence of their "communal activity," and testaments to their rejection of "narrow individuality" (23).² But with no Dada publications directly on view in the exhibition and no reproductions or translations of Dada texts in the catalogue, readers who wished to see the journals for themselves found only a brief note directing them to the MoMA's library (15). Instead, Barr's genealogical art exhibition distilled Dada's complex media landscape into traditional rows of paintings, sculptures, and collages that laid claim to Dada for the trajectory of modernism, tethered it to Parisian surrealism, and rendered its interactions with the museum, at least for the time being, decidedly art historical in nature.

What transpired between Barr's 1936 show and the interdisciplinary historical Dada events we take for granted today where Dada books, journals, and other publications, so central to Dada's interdisciplinary considerations of text and image strategies, have now been "unshelved" from the library, and find themselves exhibited alongside other aspects of Dada material culture? To better understand this shift, this essay explores a trajectory from the 1930s to the late 1970s that takes into account changes in the history of the study and appreciation of Dada, including practices of collecting and exhibiting avant-garde journals, the translation of Dada texts into English, and the expansion and proliferation of artists' books as a mainstream artistic format. This evolution, one primarily marked by an increase in accessibility to Dada for English-speaking audiences, in turn helps to contextualize two innovative 1978 exhibitions that, I argue, displayed Dada publications in radically new ways within the spaces of public art museums. *Dada and Surrealism, Reviewed*, curated by Dawn Ades and David Sylvester for the Arts Council of Great Britain at London's Hayward Gallery, and *Dada Artifacts*, organized by Stephen Foster with Rudolf Kuenzli at the University of Iowa Museum of Art in Iowa City, Iowa, both prioritized the Dadas' groundbreaking journals, books, and ephemera at a unique moment when Dada publications of all kinds were more accessible to broader audiences, especially in the English-speaking context, than they had ever been.³ While the London exhibition was a

² The first edition of Barr's catalogue had sold out in six months. The second, enlarged edition that included Hugnet's essays was published in July, 1937. See Umland 19.

³ As Leah Dickerman notes, much of Dada's history in the "Anglophone" museum context has been structured around monographic, single-artist exhibitions and retrospectives. This paper deals specifically with exhibitions that examine Dada as a broader concept, historical

true blockbuster that attracted thousands of visitors, produced a hefty catalogue, was covered in the international press, and has gone down in history as a landmark Dada exhibition, the Iowa City show was a much more modest undertaking in its scope, design, and character, but nevertheless a groundbreaking event in the study of Dada. The two events share an emphasis on the diversity of Dada tactics and spheres of influence through the display of both unique works of art and the ephemeral, cheap, portable, or reproducible pages of Dada's many publications to express its histories. They also share different, but equally enduring, impacts on Dada scholarship and reception, the important point that concludes this essay.

Exhibiting Dada as (Art) History

As Anne Umland reminds us, Alfred H. Barr's 1936 *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* at the Museum of Modern Art took place a mere decade after Dada's heyday from 1916 to 1924 (15). But the earliest histories of Dada activities originated from within the community itself, through the Dadas' own publishing activities, which they undertook intentionally right from the start. From the beginning in Zurich, the Dadas' many books, journals, essays, anthologies, and memoirs served as communal manifestations of their independent, often-transdisciplinary activities and as key documents of their often-ephemeral practices. The first Dada journal, the single-issue *Cabaret Voltaire* (1916), for example, operated as a record of the Zurich group's writing, artmaking, performances, and actions. Four years later Richard Huelsenbeck produced his Dada history *En Avant Dada: Eine Geschichte des Dadaismus* as well as *Dada Almanach*, an anthology that included pieces previously published in earlier Dada periodicals. The *Almanach* featured forty-three texts, photographic portraits of key players, and, importantly, two installation shots of the 1920 *Erste Internationale Dada-Messe*, the Berlin Dadas' self-curated group exhibition. The show, held at the Otto Burchard gallery, displayed paintings, collages, photomontages, and assemblages, as well as various Dada journals. The covers of *Neue Jugend* and *Der Dada*, for example, hung vertically on the walls. Copies, stacked neatly on a reception desk and presumably for sale, can be seen in photographs. As Emily Hage has astutely argued, the Dadas themselves made strong associations between their publications and exhibitions. Dada journals operated as portable displays that embodied avant-garde concepts, disseminated their texts and images, and created a nascent documentation of Dada practices.

In a 1923 issue of *Smith College Studies of Modern Literature*, Albert Schinz became the first scholar outside the movement to author a historical analysis of Dada, in this case an essay on Dada and literature. Like Schinz's article, most

"movement," or wider network encompassing multiple individuals and geographies. A thorough comparative study that examines the exhibition history of Dada through solo shows and artists retrospectives has yet to be accomplished. See Dickerman 4.

scholarly assessments of the movement have also taken the form of essays and monographic texts (Hopkins 2). But Dada's radical boundary breaking, its skepticism of language and rationality, critique of historical "objectivity," and fundamentally interventionist tactics, seem particularly suited to non-logocentric historical narration. These include formats that display and perform Dada's object-, image-, and event-based practices, sometimes through Dada-esque strategies, as Helen Adkins has acknowledged. In this way, art exhibitions can be an important means of communicating Dada's interdisciplinary history as they visually and materially enact its complex methods and concepts for a broader public.

But early exhibitions in the English-speaking context, beginning with the 1936 *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, presented German, French, Romanian, and other European avant-garde artists primarily through their visual practices, making European Dada accessible to new audiences through a history of the "fine arts" rather than through their texts, which remained mostly untranslated. Hans Arp's biomorphic abstractions, Max Ernst's uncanny paintings, George Grosz's stark drawings, and Kurt Schwitters's layered Merz canvases far outnumbered Berlin Dada photomontages, collages, assemblages, and text poems, "anti-art" forms that might have also challenged the fundamental frameworks of the art museum itself. The first major English-language exhibition of Dada's history, Barr's show also situated Dada art as part of a longer art historical trajectory beyond its immediate context. Part of a series of exhibitions meant to "present in an objective and historical manner the principle movements of modern art" (Barr 7), *Fantastic Art* also constructed an ancestry for Dada that stretched back to the Renaissance while simultaneously reauthoring its radicality as the prelude to (French) surrealism. Organized through broad chronological sections, and one of the earliest categorizations of Dada by its geographic centers (Umland 17), Barr's exhibition associated Dada's short existence with four hundred years of "fantastic art." The 1936 exhibition cemented Dada as a primarily art historical modernist "movement," an "-ism" that fulfilled its place in Barr's famous "flow chart" on the cover of the catalogue for *Cubism and Abstract Art* earlier that same year.

Within the pages of the *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* exhibition catalogue, however, a very different narrative about Dada emerged. While the exhibition installation communicated Dada as an art historical style and re-inscribed the material and historical value of its individual artistic objects (along with their makers and owners), the catalogue essays provided more nuanced analyses of Dada's diverse, interdisciplinary activities, including the production of innovative publications and experimentally designed periodicals that disrupted traditional concepts of "art." The catalogue offered a "Brief Chronology" of Dada and surrealism from 1910 to 1936 in which publications, exhibitions, and actions are the focus; here, the issuing of each important avant-garde book or journal appears as a significant event. Likewise, Georges Hugnet's historical essay recounts Dada's communal aspects, contradictory nature, multiple tactics, and "confusion of genres, of techniques and media" (23). Hugnet also continuously describes specific

Dada publications. Various noting contributors, publishers, distribution methods, contents, and the designs of these books and journals — in other words, both their text-based content and their materiality as objects — he asserts the important relationships of Dada art objects to these anthologies and journals, which offered “reproductions of [significant] works” (31).⁴ While neither Hugnet’s text nor the catalogue itself indexed or reproduced the specific content of the various publications, his essay nevertheless attests to the great importance of Dada books and periodicals as part of Dada practices. But relegated to the catalogue, the actual publications themselves, along with their radical, critical content, never disrupted the primacy of the works of art in the galleries nor the museum’s art historical celebration of Dada as a step in a longer trajectory toward what would eventually become “heroic” modernism.⁵

Collecting Dada Publications in the Anglo-American Context

From the 1930s to the 1960s, libraries, archives, and especially private collections, not museum exhibitions, were the primary places to find avant-garde publications and ephemera in the United States and Great Britain, if they could be found at all. As Bernard Karpel, the MoMA’s librarian from 1942 to 1973 wrote in 1951, “owing to its ephemeral nature, Dada constitutes a literature sparsely represented in public collections. Important items such as *Der Ventilator* and other publications known to have been issued by the German Dadaists, are either non-existent or inaccessible; others . . . have not, to this day, been presented in detail or seriously evaluated” (322). Instead, these materials were often the domain of private collectors, including émigré Dadas and surrealists as well as their associates and supporters like Walter and Louise Arensberg. But in the late 1940s and early 1950s these materials began to trickle into more accessible domains as interest in artists’ books, more affordable than unique works of art, and the influence of Dada on contemporary art grew.

In the United States, the collections of women like Mary Reynolds and Jean Brown are representative of the way Dada publications gradually moved from private to public spheres. Mary Reynolds, partner of Marcel Duchamp, friend of Peggy Guggenheim, and active member of the avant-garde scenes in New York’s Greenwich Village and Paris’s Montparnasse before and during the war, accumulated books, periodicals, and ephemera made by friends and associates. As

⁴ Moreover, two of the three illustrations for Hugnet’s essay foreground these activities. The caption for the illustration of Francis Picabia’s *The Dada Movement* notes its inclusion in *Dada* 4-5 (*Anthologie Dada*) (21) while the cover for the *Salon Dada* exhibition catalogue notes that this example is “from the Library of the Museum of Modern Art” (33).

⁵ Barr’s chart was used as the book jacket design for the 1936 *Cubism and Abstract Art*, for which *Fantastic Art*, *Dada*, *Surrealism* served as a kind of pendant. See moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_2748_300086869.pdf.

Irene Hofmann writes, “as a member of so many of the artistic and literary circles publishing periodicals, Reynolds was in a position to receive many journals during her life in Paris” (1). Or, as Marcel Duchamp put it, she was an “eye-witness” to Dada and surrealism (6). Reynolds came to her interest in avant-garde books and journals, and to her friendship with Duchamp, through her own practice in fine bookbinding beginning in the 1920s when it was a “fashionable vocation” for women in the arts (Godlewski 6). And although Reynolds’s work was particularly oriented toward surrealism, she collected publications and ephemera “from architectural journals to radical literary reviews,” including some of the most important Dada periodicals (Hofmann 1). Upon her death in 1950, her family donated the entirety of this valuable collection to the Art Institute of Chicago, which organized not an exhibition of these items, but a catalogue, *Surrealism and Its Affinities: The Mary Reynolds Collection* (1956), to celebrate the gift.

Of Reynold’s acquisitions, Duchamp remarked, “the assembling of these books, albums, magazines, catalogues of exhibitions, and pamphlets was not premediated as is the case of a formal library” (5). Jean Brown, on the other hand, who also amassed an impressive archive of avant-garde publications and ephemera, did in fact treat her collection as a semi-public library and historical archive. Brown, a public librarian whom John Held and others called “the archivist of the avant-garde,” began buying modern art along with avant-garde books and periodicals with her husband Leonard Brown, an insurance agent, on trips to Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. The couple, who were not particularly wealthy, found avant-garde ephemera more available than paintings and sculptures; they expressed the same concepts and formal innovations as unique works of art but were much more affordable. Brown, whose father was a rare book dealer in New York, was particularly drawn to Dada and surrealism after reading the important 1951 *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, a collection of Dada texts organized by abstract expressionist artist Robert Motherwell. Motherwell’s highly influential volume included not only translations of European Dada texts, but also reproductions of numerous covers of the original Dada journals, books, catalogues, and broadsides. While Brown, unlike Reynolds, came to her interest in Dada through such indirect channels, rather than personal relationships with the artists themselves, she later became a friend and colleague to many artists in the 1970s and 1980s. Individuals such as George Maciunas, Yoko Ono, and others working in the world of Fluxus, Pop, conceptual, and performance art, as well as with zines, mail art, and stamp art, whose work she avidly collected in those decades, helped to expand her collection. The “Tyringham Institute,” established at Brown’s Shaker Seed House in Tyringham, Massachusetts, was her “private foundation and study center” that held these archives. Her early materials became “The Leonard M. Brown Memorial Collection of Dada and Surrealism . . . a large, comprehensive collection of primary material including documents, periodicals, publications, photographs, and mementos of the two movements, in addition to selective works of art” (“Announcement”). Brown regularly made her materials

accessible to serious students, artists, and scholars, eventually donating them to The Getty Research Library in 1988.

Book dealers also formed a small but important conduit through which Dada publications and ephemera made their way to both private collectors like Jean Brown and public institutions like the MoMA's library. In Europe, the antiquarian market for early twentieth-century vanguard materials was primarily associated with a handful of dealers like John Vloemans, Hans Bollinger, and Jürgen Holstein. In the United States George Wittenborn was one important dealer and disseminator of modernist printed matter; Wittenborn, originally from Hamburg, worked with Karl Buchholz in Berlin before coming to New York in the 1930s where he began at Brentano's bookstore before becoming the co-founder of a publishing house. Wittenborn Schultz would go on to publish Motherwell's 1951 anthology as part of its Documents of Modern Art series.

The Motherwell cover and other books in the "Documents" series were designed by well-known graphic designer Paul Rand. An interest or expertise in design indeed figured prominently for some collectors, including the individuals behind Ex Libris, a rare book dealer and gallery on New York's upper East Side that specialized in the books, periodicals, and ephemera of the early twentieth-century modernists. Writer, publisher, editor, and Jewish theologian Arthur Cohen and his wife Elaine, an acclaimed graphic designer and widow of designer Alvin Lustig, founded Ex Libris in 1974. With their interests in avant-garde art and design, they had begun to assemble a private collection of constructivist, futurist, and other modernist materials after they married in 1960, including Dada ephemera. Financial woes in the early 1970s forced them to sell off duplicate copies of periodicals. They typed up a price list, posted a simple ad in the *New York Times*, and soon found themselves regularly buying and selling modernist materials to notable collectors, artists, designers, architects, libraries, and museums (Filler 31). Because competitors were few and far between, the Cohens filled a niche market for these items. While prices steadily increased in the late 1970s and early 1980s, multiples like Dada journals and posters remained more affordable than unique works of art. The Cohens' scholarly and aesthetically appealing approach to marketing these items — their regularly published lists and catalogues contained useful historical information and were themselves beautifully designed — likewise elevated the material's historical, cultural, and market value. Through their business, as well as their own private collection, the Cohens "virtually [defined] a previously unappreciated area of collecting" and "[kept] alive a fragile and precious part of a century in which the lyric voice has often been drowned out by darker dissonances" (Filler 30, 34).

Similarly, art dealers and gallerists brought Dada publications to greater recognition. Helen Serger, for example, who came to the US from Poland in 1939, became a New York art dealer in the 1950s. In 1963 she opened La Boetie, an Upper East Side art gallery specializing in prewar and avant-garde art. In 1977, with private art dealer Timothy Baum, she organized *Art of the Dadaists*, an art

exhibition that also included many examples of publications and ephemera. Critic John Russell took note of this important inclusion in his review of the show in the *New York Times*:

Some of the most treasured relics of the Dada movement are in the strictest sense ephemera: handbills, fliers, posters that fell apart at the sight of pastepot, souvenirs that were destined for one person's eyes only. The survival of these highly perishable relics is owed in large part to the fact that people who were anywhere near the Dada movement during its heyday (1917-1921, let us say) looked back on it as a time when they had lived more vividly than ever before or since. The La Boetie show . . . includes more than one souvenir of the kind I have just described. They might by now seem trivial, but they don't. There is an imaginative energy in these scraps of paper and these quite small vintage photographs that makes them as stimulating as ever.

The year following Serger and Baum's gallery exhibition, the two dealers, along with the Cohens and other collectors, would lend their materials to both the London and Iowa City exhibitions.

(Re)Publishing Dada in English

In addition to sparking the interest of modern artists and forward-thinking collectors like Jean Brown, Robert Motherwell's 1951 volume *The Dada Painters and Poets* also kicked off a significant shift in postwar accessibility to Dada texts in the English-speaking world. Slowly but surely, the international manifestoes, poems, essays, histories, and memoirs of the two movements began to be translated into English, giving audiences a new understanding of Dada, especially European Dada, through its primary sources. In his foreword to the 1981 second edition of Motherwell's volume, Jack Flam describes the book as "the first anthology in English of Dada writings, and the most comprehensive Dada anthology in any language," important also because it "rescued a number of important writings . . . from obscurity, it stimulated critical and scholarly interest in Dada, and it contributed to a revival of the Dada spirit among working artists and writers" (xi). For the first time English readers had increased access to the French and German texts that had defined the movement in Europe but were heretofore both physically and linguistically inaccessible.

Moreover, in contrast to the primary characterization of Dada as an art movement by exhibitions like Barr's 1936 *Fantastic Art*, Flam notes that Dada's "legacy" actually lies in its "attitudes . . . acts, stances, and (often ephemeral) printed matter rather than 'art objects'"; therefore the lack of attention to texts had kept the movement and its history "vague and obscure" (xi). The translated texts in the anthology by Hugnet, Huelsenbeck, Ball, Schwitters, Tzara, Breton, and others, with a slight emphasis on French over German sources, offered readers a

different view of Dada beyond the object-based narratives of the gallery or the general commentary of catalogue authors, specifically one told in the voices of the participants themselves. In the preface, Motherwell clearly states this intention for the book. The publication of Dada literature was meant, in part, as a corrective to the one-dimensional view of Dada seen in museum exhibitions. "Without an adequate grasp of the value judgments of dada as evidenced in its literature, the image of dada that emerges from consideration of its plastic works alone is distorted and incomplete," he wrote (xvii). The book was therefore to be "an accumulation of raw material," that included not only the original, longer version of Hugnet's essay, which had appeared in abbreviated form in the 1936 MoMA catalogue, and other important texts, but also numerous images, especially black and white reproductions of pages and covers of a host of rarely seen Dada periodicals and ephemera (xviii). For Motherwell, himself a visual artist, the ability to read the Dadas' texts was not enough. It was also necessary to see their ideas enacted together through words, reproductions of artworks, and experiments with design and typography on the page itself.⁶

The idea of providing "raw materials" for further study was also at the heart of the massive Dada bibliography that MoMA librarian Bernard Karpel contributed to Motherwell's anthology. Karpel, who succeeded Beaumont Newhall as library director in 1942, was also a key member of the network of American avant-garde collectors that included Jean Brown, the Cohens, and others. An innovative librarian, he employed novel means for expanding the museum's holdings, including microfilming original materials held in other archives, institutions, and private collections around the world. In the introductory essay to his Dada bibliography, Karpel acknowledges that his selection is not exhaustive, that it was "not practicable, in the present instance, to compile an index to the available periodicals and bulletins" that would list individual contents, and that the categories and organizational principal he employed to structure his bibliography ("Surveys & Outlines — Contemporary Documents — Bulletins & Periodicals . . ." and so on) are in some ways anathema to the Dada's disruptive and boundary-breaking spirit (322-23). Nevertheless, he writes that "this elemental attempt to penetrate muddled disguises may serve to clarify an overall picture now made possible, at least for the English reader, by the publication of an anthology of dada poets and painters. In spite of certain omissions . . . these latest Documents of Modern Art constitute the most comprehensive display of the dada universe since the spectacular era of the twenties" (323).

The Motherwell volume was the opening salvo to what would become over the next two decades a proliferation of new translations and re-publications of

⁶ The original 1951 edition of the text offered far more illustrations and reproductions of Dada periodicals and ephemera than the later edition reissued by Belknap Press.

Dada texts in the US, Europe, and beyond.⁷ In particular, European Dada texts were translated into English more and more, giving audiences, including contemporary artists influenced by Dada ideas, a new understanding of the movement through its primary sources. Translations and publications increased in the late 1960s around the fifty-year anniversary of the events at the Cabaret Voltaire in 1966. That year, to name one example, saw Fluxus and intermedia artist Dick Higgins's Something Else Press republishing the 1920 *Dada Almanach*. The deaths of certain prominent Dadas, for example Marcel Duchamp and Tristan Tzara, in the 1960s also sparked a number of reissues and new studies.

But it was actually the 1970s that saw the steepest rise in interest in Dada texts and publications with new anthologies and translations arriving on the scene each year, including texts by Ball, Hennings, Duchamp, Ernst, Schwitters, Picabia, and Tzara. English translations of Hugo Ball's and Richard Huelsenbeck's book-length memoirs, written in Germany in the 1920s, were published in 1974 by Viking Press. Three years later, an English translation of Tristan Tzara's seminal collection of French manifestos also appeared. More and more German texts were translated into English than ever before.⁸ In 1971 Lucy Lippard, critic, curator, and in 1976 the founder of Printed Matter, a non-profit store-cum-gallery for contemporary artists' books, zines, posters, and ephemera, edited the small volume *Dadas on Art: Tzara, Arp, Duchamp, and Others*, which included translations of French, German, and Dutch texts. In her book, dedicated to Bernard Karpel, Lippard notably mentions the Dada roots of contemporary art at that time, from Pop Art to Conceptual Art, and that the "anthology" format best reproduces the "fragmented nature" of Dada, an idea not unlike that at the heart of exhibition practice. Although it contained no illustrations, the book offered more selections by the radical Berlin group, including English translations of texts by Huelsenbeck, Hausmann, Höch, Grosz, and Heartfield.

⁷ Two important German examples, a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this essay, are Willy Verkauf's *Dada: Monograph of a Movement* (co-edited by Marcel Janco and Hans Bollinger), published in English, French, and German by Swiss publisher A. Niggli in 1957, and the catalogue for the 1958 exhibition *Dada: Dokumente einer Bewegung* (Düsseldorf and Frankfurt), which included a catalogue of images in the exhibition along with newly commissioned texts by some of the living Dadas like Max Ernst, Hans Richter, and Man Ray.

⁸ It is also interesting to note that the 1970s' increased attention to Dada texts and translations, especially new publications from the German, paralleled a broader renewed interest in German culture in the US and UK. German radicalism like the Red Army Faction and the history of the Holocaust entered the popular imagination. In American universities the 1970s saw the expansion of interdisciplinary approaches to German history and culture, resulting in the proliferation of "German studies" departments, part of the larger postwar trend of "area studies" in the US. The German Studies Association was established in 1976 and the West German government itself renewed efforts to further the cause of German education abroad.

Book Arts and Artists' Books in the 1970s

This new accessibility through translation was also supplemented by a kind of material translation — the production of facsimile reprints of original Dada texts including Arturo Schwarz's 1970 deluxe editions of Dada documents from his collection, Friedhelm Lach's 1974 portfolio of Schwitters's *Merzhefte*, and Michel Sanouillet's 1976 dossier of reprints of early Dada documents. These facsimile editions not only allowed viewers to see Dada documents, they could also hold these copies in their hands, as they were originally intended to be viewed and handled. By the end of the 1970s, with both new English translations of texts and the publication of facsimile reprints, a significant increase in the availability of Dada publications, both as readable texts and as viewable "objects," had been achieved.

Dada reprints and facsimiles may also be seen in the context of the contemporary art world's growing interest in the production of artists' books, zines, journals, mail art, and other cheap or reproducible artists' publications that were appropriate for a decade of economic recession as well as important for documenting conceptual art forms, performances, exhibitions, and events. Often associated with minimalism, conceptual art, Fluxus, and the Art & Language group, these served as the physical manifestation of concepts and ephemeral actions, taking the form of explanatory texts, diagrams, plans for potential works of art, scores, surveys, and other types of documents such as performances and event-based practices. Indeed, at this moment, the art world was witnessing a kind of breakdown of the divide between artwork and its documentation, a scrambling of definitions due in no small part to the influence of Dada. As Johanna Drucker discusses, artists' books, for example, emerged in the US and UK in the 1960s as alternative artistic formats that could stand on their own as artworks or sometimes serve a dual role of documenting or accompanying an exhibition, installation, performance, or other event-based work. These forms also expressed the idea of art as a linguistic construct and formulated a kind of attempt to reject the museum and art market. By locating art within the realm of ideas, conceptual artists also critiqued or bypassed the commodity systems of the art market, gallery, and museum. Self-printed or independently published artists' books and journals gave artists greater control over the dissemination of their work, as they had for their early twentieth-century counterparts.

Drucker, in particular, characterizes the 1970s as a time not just of the expansion of artists' books, journals, and other self-published artists' documents, but as a moment of the increasing institutionalization of the form, which began to gain a high profile in the art world at this time. New book arts programs were established at universities and small presses, non-profits, and specialist publications were founded to foster the movement. The New York Center for Book Arts was established in 1974 to teach contemporary and traditional book arts. In 1976 Lucy Lippard and Sol LeWitt started Printed Matter in New York. In 1978

Judith Hoffberg founded *Umbrella* journal, which covered artist's books, mail art, other publications. Even the MoMA staged exhibitions of artists' publications like the spring 1977 *Bookworks*, which showed off the museum's growing collection of contemporary artists' books, noted the form's connections to Dada, and acknowledged its use to circumvent the commercial gallery system (London). As Drucker writes, in the 1970s these textual forms and formats gained "institutional sites . . . within art school and university programs in the arts, museum and library collections, and private collections. By the 1970s, then, the artist's book had come of age" (Drucker 13).

Dada "Unshelved" in London and Iowa City

While certain Dada exhibitions in the 1950s and 1960s had begun to incorporate Dada documents in their displays of works of art, it was this 1970s' moment of increasing availability and institutionalization of avant-garde periodicals in which Dada publications found their full expression in the museum context. The important 1953 Dada exhibition at New York's Sidney Janis Gallery, primarily designed by Marcel Duchamp, included Dada periodicals "collaged" behind sheets of plexiglass hung vertically and horizontally from the ceiling. But within an exhibition that sometimes looked more like a work of installation art, the periodicals here seemed re-aestheticized as elements in new "works" by Duchamp. Curators Ewald Rathke and Karl Heinz Hering, inspired by the Dada anthologies of Motherwell and Willy Verkauf, included various examples of periodicals within the 1958 exhibition, *Dada: Dokumente einer Bewegung*, but here the "documents" were primarily seminal works of art borrowed from important international collections. Finally, the 1966 traveling exhibition organized by Hans Richter for the Goethe-Institut (Munich), *Dada 1916-1966: Dokumente einer internationalen Bewegung*, made use of enlarged reproductions of pages and covers of Dada periodicals, along with images of artworks and documentary photographs, that filled movable, curving walls. These reproductions formed an environment of images and texts, not unlike the Sidney Janis installation, that visitors entered into. However, none of these exhibitions made Dada publications, as both texts and objects, a centerpiece in the same way that the 1978 exhibitions in London and Iowa City would.

Dada and Surrealism, Reviewed, organized by the Arts Council of Great Britain at London's Hayward Gallery, became the first large-scale museum exhibition of the movement to make avant-garde publications its organizational principle and conceptual core. From January to the end of March, the Hayward curators David Sylvester and Dawn Ades and their team not only "unshelved" avant-garde periodicals, bringing them out of libraries, archives, and collections; they also clearly communicated the notion that the magazine or "review" was the embodiment of the individual and collective activities around which Dada's contradictory ideas, ongoing preoccupations, common enterprises, and

fundamental questions would momentarily crystallize. At the outset of his essay, "Regarding the Exhibition," Sylvester writes that the Hayward organizers sought to do something different from other Dada and surrealist exhibitions which have primarily offered "a conglomeration of one-man shows." Instead, he writes, "a scholarly exhibition of dada and surrealist art ought to show the works of art in a context that summons up the movements' persistent and changing ideas . . . to situate the art against a background representing the movements' wider preoccupations" (1). Noting from the outset that these Dada and surrealist preoccupations were manifested in a variety of permanent and ephemeral forms ("books, tracts, lectures, performances, meetings, demonstrations"), Sylvester asserted that the dominant vehicle, as both an "individual and . . . collective utterance[s]," was the magazine, which expressed the "matchless" quantity and diversity in form, design, and content as well as the "the intellectual and artistic history of the movements" (1-2).

The exhibition displayed 1,200 items organized into seventeen sections, each linked to a different Dada or surrealist journal (or set of related journals). The Dada selections, including 291, *The Blind Man*, *Cabaret Voltaire*, *Dada*, *Der Dada*, *Die Pleite*, *Der Ventilator*, *Bulletin D*, *Die Schammade*, and *Merz*, suggested, but did not overdetermine, the idea of Dada as a set of city centers. The surrealist selections, from *Littérature* to *La révolution surréaliste*, *Documents*, *Le surréalisme au service de la révolution*, *Minotaure*, and beyond, illustrated the overlap and interconnectivities, but also the differences in outlook, between the two "movements." A final "postscript" section presented "an anthology of reproductions of works showing the influence of Surrealism or Dada on artists who have emerged since the war" as "attitudes to life characteristic of Dada and Surrealism have become commonplace in the subversive mores of those who have grown up in the last decade or two" (Sylvester 5). The massive exhibition of diverse materials was lent by over 200 individuals and public and private institutions, including some of the Dadas themselves and collectors like Arthur and Elaine Cohen.

Because of the Hayward Gallery's "sculptural" architecture and the difficulty of circulation within its interior spaces, it could be challenging to create exhibitions that progressed in a particular direction, as was the intention for *Dada and Surrealism, Reviewed*, which "called for a sequential and chronological arrangement of sections generated by . . . the reviews" (Colquhoun and Miller 136). Designers therefore made use of curving half-cylinder walls, not unlike those of Richter's Goethe-Institut installation, set in a labyrinthine layout. This setup allowed the curatorial team to squeeze some 1,200 items into the Hayward's challenging floor plan, but also to create meaningful references to the histories and ideas of the movements. In his review of the show, George Melly observed that "as one passes through the maze which David Sylvester has invented to stand as a metaphor for those heroic years, the changes of direction, dead ends, defections become . . . heroic efforts to find a way through. En route the nodes of key

statements, manifestos, books and magazines, objects-turned-icons have the effect of inhibiting a purely 'artistic' response to the exhibition" (135).

Each of the seventeen sections began with a "wall montage" designed by Edward Wright that collaged reproductions from the journal issue, as well as associated books, pamphlets, leaflets, bulletins, catalogues, and posters.⁹ These panels also contained English translations of certain key texts so that spectators could both view and read elements from the reviews. While the introductory montages featured reproductions, the main area of each section presented unique works of art connected to the review, in many cases images reproduced within the pages of the journal. This part of the display also included original copies of the magazines themselves contained in vitrines. Finally, a third area displayed other "cabinets of curiosities" that held a variety of found or collected objects, images, books, and other materials belonging to the artists themselves as evidence of their own collecting activities (Sylvester 2).

The exhibition design and its contents also cautiously harkened back to original Dada and surrealist exhibitions, although Sylvester was careful to note that the curators sought "an exhibition about Surrealism, not a surrealist exhibition" (2). He writes, "while we have avoided any attempt . . . to recreate the atmosphere of the historic dada and surrealist shows, we have copied them in two respects." Organizers "jumble[d] up" works by different artists to avoid biographical structures, and they favored a "crowded" hang similar to the way artists kept their collections "in their private apartments" (2). And while the exhibition did not allow audiences to handle the publications themselves, the environment at least leveled the hierarchies between "fine art" works and the reproducible publications. Instead of remaining hidden in the library or buried in catalogue commentary, the reviews became central to a new definition of Dada and equal to their other products.

The notion of access to previously unavailable, hidden, unnoticed, or illegible objects stood at the center of the project. The installation design and its contents created an atmosphere of increased accessibility to the publications, and therefore the availability of more authentic notions of Dada and surrealism. While its montage walls and vertical displays suggested not just a Dada collage or the pages of a Dada journal, but also public city streets pasted over with posters and advertisements, its horizontal "cabinets" suggested viewers were privy to private collections. And while visitors were physically unable to leaf through the original journals themselves, the large catalogue provided detailed inventories of each review's contents as well as reproductions of journal pages, in addition to the English translations of key texts within the installation itself.

⁹ Designer Edward Wright had been part of the Independent Group of British pop artists in London. Among his important work is the catalogue for the 1956 *This Is Tomorrow* exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery.

While critics found the show and catalogue information-dense, the visitor study produced by the Arts Council suggested that spectators, especially the many younger viewers who were particularly drawn to the show, took this sense of access to heart. The graffiti found in the men's and women's restrooms, cataloged in the visitor study, illustrates that the Dada spirit and its interventionist stance took hold of some individuals, who signed their names to the urinals or wrote on the walls: "Dada destroys art," "Culture is the enemy of art, the negation of creativity," and, "this exhibition shows how ideology can recuperate even the most radical of ideas — with your help they will fail" (Wilson 60-61). These private "public statements" suggest an understanding of the tension between Dada and the museum's potential to neutralize or aestheticize its radical tactics, histories, and effects that the Dada journals and books themselves represented. David Sylvester seemed to echo this concern at the end of his catalogue essay: "It may even be that . . . culture [inspired by Dada and Surrealism today] will at long last engender a form of anti-art that will not end up, like all the others, looking like art; but probably not" (5).

A mere four days after the closing of *Dada and Surrealism, Reviewed* at the Hayward, 4,000 miles away at the University of Iowa Museum of Art in Iowa City, Iowa an exhibition solely focused on Dada opened. With a further concentration on Dada publications and ephemera, *Dada Artifacts* was significantly smaller than the London show, but nevertheless presented groundbreaking content and created an equally important ripple effect in Dada studies. Rather than an exhibition accompanied by ancillary programming, *Dada Artifacts* was a major component of a large international university conference on Dada. Organized by Stephen Foster and Rudolf Kuenzli, from the departments of Art History and English and Comparative Literature respectively, the idea for the event began as a modest plan for a team-taught course accompanied by a small exhibition of materials drawn from a single collection. But, as UIMA curator Joann Moser recounted, "[Foster] kept finding more objects and more collectors willing to loan. . . . He kept finding things and I kept saying 'Stop!'" (Givens 10).

With around 300 attendees, the conference attracted prominent academic speakers like Michel Sanouillet, Dickran Tashjian, Mary Ann Caws, and Richard Sheppard and notable attendees like Jean Brown, Timothy Baum, and Fluxus artist Ken Friedman. Truly transdisciplinary, the conference also welcomed collectors like Arthur Cohen and artists like Ben Vautier. Papers were presented on topics such as analyses of poetry, graphic design, mysticism, and primitivism, and musical performances and intermedia events ended each evening of the three-day conference. Some of the academic papers, like that of Elmer Peterson, also verged on performance in their presentation style. Administrators like University President Willard L. Boyd even got in on the Dada spirit. In opening the conference, Boyd offered "a graceful, eloquent sound-poem, he rendered thanks, praise to Dada, welcome and homage to the Dada spirit, all in a few lines, half of

which he read backwards. The laughter and applause lasted as long as the speech" (Friedman 47).

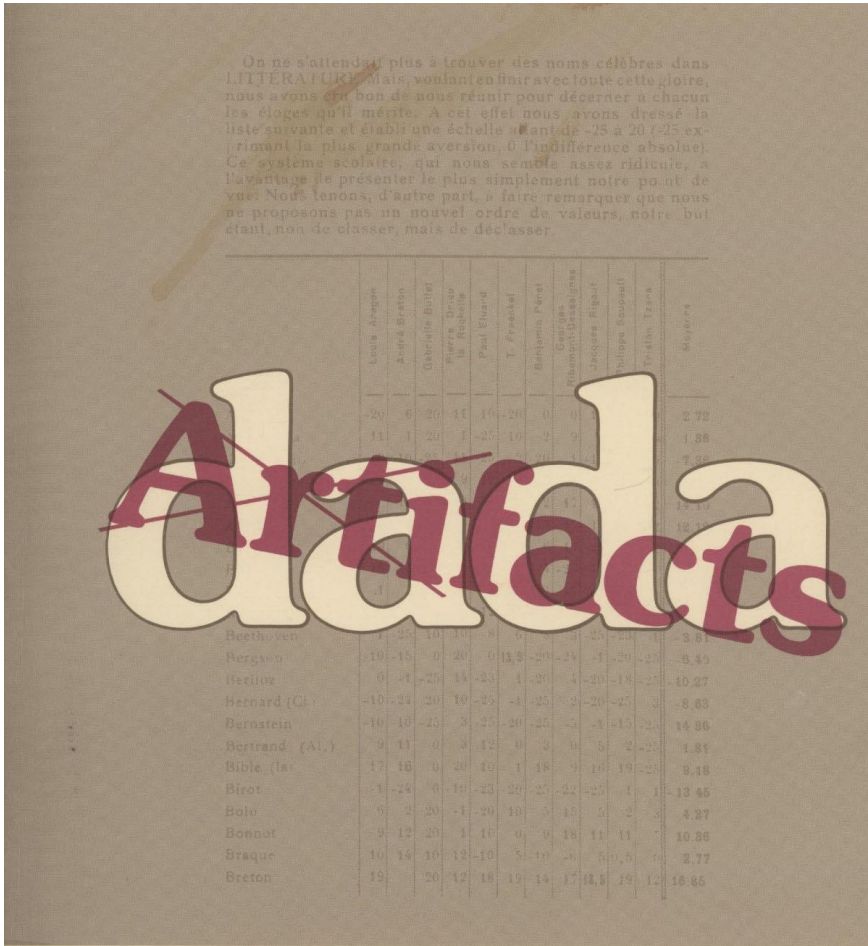


Figure 1: *Dada Artifacts*, ed. Stephen C. Foster and Rudolf E. Kuenzli (Iowa City, 1978) (Cover). Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries.

As Joann Moser described the import of the exhibition in the foreword to the *Dada Artifacts* catalogue, Foster's exhibition of Dada art and publications at Iowa represented "one of the largest and most complete surveys of the Dada movement ever undertaken in this country. It presents Dada as a distinct movement whose literary, political, and philosophical aspects were as important as visual and aesthetic considerations. Because of the unique character of this movement, emphasis has been placed on Dada documents rather than on art objects." The unique title, proposed by Rudolf Kuenzli, in which the "art" in "artifacts" was

crossed out in a *sous rature* gesture to signal the problematic, but not wholly inaccurate, association of the word with Dada, also communicated this theme (fig. 1). The “nucleus” of the show was drawn from the collections of the Arthur and Elaine Cohen and Ex Libris, but also included materials borrowed from Timothy Baum, Hans J. Kleinschmidt, Helen Serger, and institutions like the Museum of Modern Art and the Arensberg Collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Some of the items on display were also part of the university’s growing collection of avant-garde materials acquired for Special Collections by bibliographer Frank Hanlin and art librarian Harlan Sifford.

In the museum itself, the exhibition, with its significant lenders, was given, after some negotiation with the Director, a prominent space on the main floor, rather than in the basement as originally intended. Approximately 150 periodicals, books, posters, manuscripts, and even a few paintings, were organized by international Dada center. Copies of journals from Zurich, Berlin, Cologne, Hanover, and Paris were displayed alongside Dada books, announcements, posters, and other ephemera. With the exception of larger pieces like the poster for *Salon Dada* most of the materials were arranged in horizontal plexiglass vitrines, allowing viewers to examine them closely and approximate the natural posture of reading.

The accompanying catalogue, a small, portable, paperback book conceived as a “research tool,” contained essays by Foster and Kuenzli, Richard Sheppard’s Dada chronology, and numerous reproductions of the journals and books, along with helpful commentary about each example that visitors could consult. The following year many of the symposium papers were published as the volume *Dada Spectrum: The Dialectics of Revolt*. In the volume’s introduction Foster and Kuenzli note the Janus-faced problem of Dada scholarship in the 1970s that they had wished to tackle; Dada was either too bound up in popular myth or seemed “inscrutable and [therefore defied] analysis” (2). The purpose of the conference, and its exhibition, had been, in Foster’s words, “to get together a concentration of experts in the field to find new approaches. The literature in the field is disappointing and this is one way to get it going” (Givens 10). And although *Dada Artifacts* was more modest and straightforward in comparison to the Hayward show, it was equally impressive and had as much impact in its own way. The university museum had committed a large portion of its annual budget to organizing the show. A major gift from a local private donor had helped defray the costs of the conference and exhibition. Prestigious lenders contributed works and renowned scholars gave papers. The exhibition opening, which featured guests like Dary John Mizelle of the Electronic Studio at Oberlin College who performed Kurt Schwitters’s *Ursonate*, had “the largest crowd it had ever received for an opening” while the exhibition itself saw “record-breaking attendance” (Friedman 48). Most of all, as curator Joann Moser wrote in the catalogue foreword, the show brought to light “Dada artifacts that are rarely available for public view.” Fluxus member Ken Friedman, who was in attendance at the

exhibition and symposium, echoed this idea of new access in his review in *Umbrella*, describing *Dada Artifacts* as “a valuable step toward the opening of the field of Dada studies, particularly in the interdisciplinary mode [that is] required by the explosive, interdisciplinary movement which was Dada” (47).

From these 1978 events came further waves of interest in Dada. The Hayward show catalogue remains an important sourcebook on Dada publications. *Dada Artifacts* and the Dada conference helped birth the International Dada Archive at the University of Iowa, founded in 1979, which continues to manage an enormous bibliography of Dada materials and scholarship and houses original copies of many important Dada publications. These sources are now digitized and globally available to interested individuals. While Dada historians sometimes worry about the aestheticizing effects the museum can have upon Dada’s radical histories, potentially turning its critiques and interventions into “fine art,” in the case of these two exhibitions from 1978, the unshelving of the Dada publications from collections, libraries, and archives and the creation of new displays in the museum might ultimately be understood to have had the opposite effect, one of increased, and ever-increasing, access to Dada for specialized audiences and the public alike.

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