Introduction:
The Flight into Approximate Humanism

Erica O'Neill and Stephen Forcer

On 5 June 1940 Germany launched a massive military offensive into France. Paris was swiftly overcome, with close to four million people fleeing the capital and up to ten million on the move across France (Diamond 2, 150). The scale of chaotic human movement and escape evoked comparisons with the barbarian invasions of the fourth century and medieval famines (2). At risk under multiple markers of identity — Jew, Communist, foreigner, cultural degenerate — Tristan Tzara (1896–1963) joined the exodus, taking refuge in the unoccupied south. Between August and September of 1940, while in the village of La Favière on the Côte d'Azur, Tzara completed *La fuite* (*The Flight*). Described by Tzara as a "dramatic poem," *The Flight* would be his most personal stage play. It analogizes his escape from occupied Paris and his forced isolation from family during the war. At a broad level, *The Flight* deals with history as both cyclical and dynamic, the perpetual repetition of conflict and migration in human history, and the subsequent fracturing of families and friendships. It also narrates the flight of individuals from those they love, and the moral and emotional conflict between individual ambition and loyalty to family and other groups. As showcased in this special issue — which features the first ever English translation of *The Flight*, by Erica O'Neill, and a range of articles and other writing all appearing for the first time — *The Flight* is also a profoundly ethical, self-questioning piece of work. Viewed by some as the culmination of Tzara's qualities as a writer (Han 230), *The Flight* is a major text around which to ask pressing research questions about Tzara and other avant-gardists in ethical, (post-)humanist contexts.

As a leading dadaist emerging during World War I Tzara is associated by definition with historic cataclysm of the sort occasioned by the German Occupation of France (1940–1944), but conventional understanding of his relationship to history is paradoxical and can exert considerable bias on our understanding of the scope of his work. On the one hand, Tzara is emphatically of the material world and specific historical moments within it. Tzara and Dada are typically (and rightly) understood as symptoms of and responses to large-scale international conflict and the attendant death agonies of various European empires. On the other hand, Tzara's association with experimental language and the breakdown of identity can unmoor our understanding of him as a person having existed in the material world. Sometimes directly and sometimes by

implication, cultural history has often figured "Tzara" as a cultural cipher and producer with little of his own subjectivity rather than thinking of Tristan Tzara as an embodied, immanent human subject who had family and affective attachments, who faced and responded to urgent individual and collective problems, and who was recognized by his peers as a significant presence in intellectual and cultural history well beyond the Dada period.

It is notable, then, that recent academic work on Tzara has paid more direct attention to the fact that one of the twentieth century's most influential cultural agitators was a real person, as well as a serious writer and thinker. Indeed, in the last few decades research into Tzara has made considerable strides across the board, with a much greater understanding now available of his activity within and without the Dada period, his poetic and theatrical outputs, the extent of his connections to art history and philosophy, and his bio-historical trajectory. Between 1975 and 1991, Henri Béhar published his compilation of Tristan Tzara's *Œuvres complètes*.[1] These volumes are a core repository from which other authors have generated new ideas to enrich our understanding of the breadth of Tzara's creative practice. Tzara's modest gravestone at the Montparnasse Cemetery is inscribed with one word: POÈTE. Yet experts in Tzara studies expose the diversity of his literary career. Kathryn Brown (2023) has shown how Tzara created a new form of art criticism in his experiments in art critical prose poetry. Elizabeth Legge (2014) explores Tzara's personal and political situation during the Paris Dada period (1920–1923), the way in which Tzara was considered an outsider by his peers in Paris, and the political dimension of his provocative performances. Cosana Eram (2015) also discusses Tzara as an outsider, and as someone who looked outside to global cultures by exploring his translation of poems from Africa and Oceania. Ann Stephen and Andrew McNamara (2015) have made significant contributions to our understanding of Tzara's translations and performances of Luritja and Arrernte poems from the Central Desert of Australia.[2] Among studies on Tzara's poetry, Stephen Forcer's *Modernist Song* (2006) draws attention to Tzara's prose poetry to demonstrate how avant-garde techniques combine with ancient, classical, and conventional poetic practices. Marius Hentea's *TaTa Dada: The Real Life and Celestial Adventures of Tristan Tzara* (2014), the first English-language Tzara biography, reveals how during World War II, Tzara's poetry "sought a clarity of expression and directness, although it continued to insist on

[1] Hereafter referred to as *OC*.

[2] See also Walter F. Veit (2009). Tzara's translations of Arrernte and Luritja songs will be discussed in Erica O'Neill's chapter, "Reverse Avant-Garde in Contemporary Australia," in Ann Stephen and Andrew McNamara's forthcoming edited volume (2025).

the primacy of image" (255). This quality is carried into the dramatic text of *The Flight*. It is at once Tzara's most transparent narrative and his most linguistically and dramaturgically complex play, in which, according to Han, "Tzara atteint la plénitude de son talent" 'Tzara reaches the fullness of his talent' (230).

Since Béhar's *Le théâtre Dada et surréaliste* of 1979, other authors have turned to Tzara's theatrical writing to come to terms with this lesser studied aspect of his literary career. Michel Corvin (1973) provides comprehensive textual analyses of Tzara's Dada plays: *The First Celestial Adventure of Mr Antipyrine, The Second Celestial Adventure of Mr Antipyrine*, and *The Gas Heart*. Similarly, Katherine Papachristos (1999) discusses Tzara's early plays from 1916 to 1924. Most recently, O'Neill's *First Adventure to Final Flight: The Theatre of Tristan Tzara* (2025) accounts for Tzara's complete works for the stage. O'Neill's book focuses on the ways in which Tzara's theatrical works contribute to broader histories of the twentieth-century avant-garde. Addressing the linguistic, dramaturgical, and philosophical aspects of his theater, O'Neill positions Tristan Tzara as a pioneering playwright. It is therefore fitting that, in light of these recent interventions in Tristan Tzara studies that focus on his theatrical practice, this special volume takes Tzara's final play to explore what his contributions to cultural history tell us about our present moment.

In the context of *The Flight*'s themes of war, migration, and human accountability, the socio-political features of the contemporary world — such as racial and ethnic violence, armed conflict in Europe and the Middle East, the thrall of masculine despotism — represent not a sudden and shocking regression from a previous state but rather form part of a continuum which must be understood and resisted. There remains much more to be learned about Tzara, who was held in the highest esteem by some of the major figures of his day, and whose work was recognized as important in humanist, scientific, theatrical, philosophical, and poetic terms. Under the theme of humanism, this special issue celebrates the depth and difficulty of Tristan Tzara's humanism by presenting the first English language translation of *The Flight*. The volume acknowledges the breadth of the humanist avant-garde's contribution to social and cultural history by showcasing new work on other literary and artistic figures whose works share in Tzara's concerns for the plight of humanity. *The Flight* itself encapsulates a range of major topics targeted by this special issue in relation to Tzara and others with whom he is associated in different ways: the use of avant-garde culture to articulate experiences and choices in contexts of displacement, flight, violence, and conflict; a form of post-war cultural engagement that is at once oblique and profound; the search for new forms of artistic expression that respond to the urgencies of the moment and look forward to the future; the renewal of an age-old humanism; experimental writing as a challenge to theories and practices of translation; Dada

and post-Dada; debates about the history, composition, and fundamentals of post–World War II avant-garde culture(s).

Reflecting the spread of themes in *The Flight* — war and migration, family and relationships, the efficacy of poetic language to account for human experience — this special issue presents a range of articles dealing with the humanist avant-garde's expressions of conflict, relationships, and language. The issue opens with our co-authored commentary on Tzara's *The Flight*. Building on Elizabeth Benjamin's significant study *Dada and Existentialism: The Authenticity of Ambiguity* (2016), our article reflects on Jean-Paul Sartre's theory of Existential humanism as collective accountability, and Albert Camus's treatise on absurdism, in order to demonstrate an ethics that is already present in Tzara's earlier work but which is often cloaked by his dadaist proclivities. Tzara early texts demote conventional language as an expression of reason; yet a profound expression of care underlies Tzara's seemingly illogical language. Dada mistrusted language, for in 1914 as in 2025 what war could be executed without the application and manipulation of language? As his career progressed, however, Tzara's language becomes more transparent in lexis, syntax, and narrative, while retaining a strangeness that is sometimes concise (*The Flight* heralds the clipped, oddly straightforward utterances of Beckett's characters, for instance) and sometimes rich with metaphor and metonymy, allusion, and suggestiveness. With *The Flight*, Tzara exposes the universal concerns that were foundational throughout his life and career, but in a language that is often direct and tender, exposing a more obvious humanism than is evident in his previous works but which had been present from his earliest writing, as per the continuity that Tzara saw running throughout his writing from the pre-Dada days to his final work before his death in 1963.[3]

Rooted in the fact that *La fuite* shows Tzara both as a humanist and a human person, this special issue thus brings together articles that ask questions about Tzara in unfamiliar guises. We see Tzara within normative family relations. We see Tzara in love, and we see him angry and flawed. He is thought about not only in relation to spectacle, noise, and chaos but also in the context of sound, silence, and spatial design. In place of the big names of surrealism, Tzara's lesser known family, friends, collaborators, and peers are considered. Not that this is to set up a simplistic binary in Tzara's life and work between iconoclastic dadaism and subsequent sentimentalism and seriousness; as shown across the volume and in the research literature referred to earlier, intimacy, emotion, and inner life were emphatically part of Tzara's practice and output from his first experiments writing

[3] In discussions with Saşa Pană, Tzara says that during the preparation of *Primele poeme*, he explicitly rejected the suggested title *Poèmes d'avant Dada* [Poems from before Dada] as that title would have implied a break in his poetic persona, in which he has always seen a form of continuity (Béhar in *OC* I:632).

in Romanian as a teenager. Nonetheless, history does impose radical turning points in contexts and conditions. In this issue we see Tzara at a time when he is running not towards opportunity, friends, and acclaim in the Paris of 1920, but from people who want to capture and liquidate Tzara and millions like him two decades later. In our own article about *La fuite*, we will see Tzara as an ethical writer who offers a highly original articulation of humanist problems, writing in a style that is both candid and oblique, and candid because it is oblique. We see Tzara scared of life and death, and of the responsibility toward others, speaking in a difficult language that acknowledges these issues and makes him vulnerable.

Ruth Hemus takes Céline Arnauld's poetry written during and in the immediate wake of World War II to show how, like Tzara with *The Flight*, in Arnauld individual experience conflates with collective experience. In parallel with the Existential thinking being developed over the 1940s by Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre, for Arnauld and Tzara the individual and the collective are not only ethically intertwined with responsibilities to each other but also bound up in a causal relation whereby individual choices commit the collective. In Arnauld's poems, the protagonist's voice shifts around singular and plural terms, personal and communal expressions. With the application of such poetic devices, Arnauld leads the reader towards empathic recognition. Most crucially, in the context of the shared grief and trauma of World War II, Hemus identifies an echo of Dada in Arnauld's later poems to show how the longing for community that was central to the dadaist poets reverberates again during the Occupation of France when many former dadaists, including Arnauld and Tzara, were in exile. Yet, Arnauld's wartime poems, unlike the noisy exploits of the post–World War I dadaists, serve not to provoke the reader, but rather to move them. Again showing an unstated and perhaps unconscious affinity with the fine detail of Tzara's work, Arnauld writes in ways that recall ancient and modern practices of song but which sit across different genres and styles, and which — like *The Flight* — represent new forms while remaining to some extent unclassifiable.

Heather Green's translation of Tzara's poem "Straw Words" from the 1948 collection *Parler seul* (Speaking Alone) reveals an interest in the animal cosmos that is found also in Arnauld's later works as set out by Hemus. Where Arnauld writes of "winged things," Tzara's animals — hedgehogs, trout, and grasshoppers — burrow in the ground. Green reads that "Straw Words" is a lament for the word. The notion of loss of language also permeates *The Flight*. Tzara's central character, the Son, is powerless to speak about the war: "[he] wants, alone, to shout in the face of the world, lies, deception, disgust, so that soldiers drunk with discipline, trembling, drop the weapons from their hands." But he realizes the hopelessness of this: "Madness! No one hears." In the final act of *The Flight*, Tzara writes that

there is hope for the "force of the word" to "restore order and kindness in the country delivered to the wolves." Green explains that Tzara *Speaking Alone* after a long silence (like many if by no means all avant-garde writers, Tzara refused to publish during the war) is also paradoxical, because Straw Words are flimsy, fragile, and flammable; they are incapable of consoling for the loss, grief, and trauma of the war, but they are also necessary. To anticipate the "approximate humanism" that is the central theme of this issue, Green's work highlights that in Tzara's ethics the absence of certainty and conventional use value — as found by the Son in the approximate, incapable nature of words — is entirely compatible with the necessity of using language.

Takuma Ito also identifies a latent hope for the word in Tzara's wartime poetry that is revealed in the latter's application of prose. Ito's article contributes to an understanding of the relationship between Tzara's critical and poetic texts, and it draws attention to Tzara's alternating use of verse and prose in his later works. The article interrogates the prosaic form of the 1939 collection *Midis gagnés* in the context of Tzara's experiences of the Spanish Civil War, which he witnessed first-hand while in Madrid in December of 1936. The combination of mixed prose and verse in Tzara's *Midis gagnés*, argues Ito, creates a poetic rhythm that becomes a "living poetry" which articulates a passage from despair to hope. Ito focusses on the theme of revolution that is persistent in *Midis gagnés*. Undertaking a close structural analysis of the poems, Ito shows how the poetic expression achieved in Tzara's later works is not direct, but circuitous, because revolution — like poetry — is "un travail patient, mouvant et minutieux" 'a patient, moving, and meticulous work' (*OC* 5:36; authors' translation). Ito also foregrounds what is perhaps the most crucial faculty in Tzara's vision for poetry, revolution, and a form of humanist living in which individuals are both individual (creative, thinking, autonomous) and part of a peaceable, liberated collective: "l'esprit."

Anca Roncea's translations of Maya Chrusecz's poems offer an intimate glimpse into the tenderness of friendship shared amongst the avant-garde circles. Roncea positions herself, a Romanian poet who writes in English, within the words and world of Chrusecz to imagine and reimagine her position in Zurich Dada. Her translator's note is an intimate portrait of the care and affection that allowed members of the avant-garde to survive: a practical (sometimes obsessive) archiving of each other's letters, poems, and essays. Indeed, letters written and received between avant-garde figures tend naturally to have only been produced during periods of physical distance and separation. So much of their time was spent together, necessarily going undocumented, and it can thus be difficult to understand the intimate working practices of different avant-gardists. Roncea shows us that within the fecundity of the archive there is inherent loss. A loss for what is not there, was not recorded, was not salvaged, was not written. Tzara's

archive contains Chrusecz's letters written to Tzara, but none of his responses. Tzara's characters in *The Flight* are fundamentally alone and they speak in monologue often unheard by their counterparts. So too Chrusecz remains isolated without Tzara's answers. In the archive, Chrusecz is left with a monologue, an impossible communication. What Roncea offers us by translating Chrusecz's poems and letters is a rupture with the violence of Tzara's onstage persona during the Zurich Dada period (1916–1919); here we see an early glimpse of the humanist that Tzara always was. Roncea gives us a moving account of her own positionality and practice as a multilingual Romanian woman. She also provides an original perspective on the idea of an archive (Roncea's self-description as Chrusecz's "unarchivist"). As with other articles in this issue, and as a feature of current research generally, it is striking that the avant-garde holds such strong intellectual and personal attraction for so many early career scholars, which is driving considerable new momentum in avant-garde studies.

Mădălina Lascu also examines Tzara's relationships by looking to letters contained in archives across Paris, Bucharest, and Stockholm to show how Tzara's personal life infiltrated his professional life, while also exposing the risks of over-reading biographical and historical points of reference. Lascu begins with the decidedly un-Dada forms of love and affection found in Tzara's personal correspondence, drawing out the authenticity and importance of emotion and sentiment in Tzara's personal relations. Lascu also asks critical questions about some of the assumptions made about Tzara's life and associated aspects of Dada history, such as the idea that the movement was named after different Saints called Dada(s). She goes on to analyze Tzara's artistic works through the expressions of his familial relationships — with his family in Romania, his wife, Greta Knutson, and their son, Christophe — as documented in their correspondence. Emotional experiences, hidden sensibilities, dissimulated fragility, exalted love and affective abandonment, crises and depressions are intertwined in complex, tumultuous and vibrant poems of violent eroticism, sometimes in verses of a generous humanity and of an impressive social understanding and commitment. Lascu shows us that Tzara fully assumed the role of the father in his immeasurable love, selflessness, and generosity towards his son, but also in his maladroitness and excessive strictness. We find this paradoxical expression of love reflected in the relationship between parents and their children in Tzara's *The Flight* as discussed by O'Neill and Forcer in the first article of this issue.

Continuing the theme of correspondences and relationships, Felicity Gee explores the collaborative dialogue between Tristan Tzara and Jean Cocteau, showing not only the affinities between their work but also how the Tzara-Cocteau dynamic itself constitutes an embodied instance of open, (proto-)queer humanism in which disagreement and discord can and should be worked through. In an

important complement to the stress in avant-garde history on timelines, movements, and the fractious power struggles that accompanied avant-garde production, Gee makes clear the emphatic significance of positive affect, feeling, and respect in the exchange between the two men. Indeed, reading Gee it is striking to think that so little critical attention has been paid previously to the Tzara-Cocteau dynamic. Set against the prejudiced rejection of Cocteau by the proto-surrealists André Breton, Philippe Soupault, and Louis Aragon — which they presented in aesthetic and ideological terms, but which was undoubtedly a reaction to Cocteau's success, status, and homosexuality — Gee's article provides an intimate portrait of two creative thinkers who not only shared a (post)humanist perspective but who lived that perspective in their relationship with each other. Tzara's capacity to think outside and beyond the parameters of the human world resonates with Cocteau's poetic desire to redefine the human through bestial, plastic, and theatrical means. Comparing a selection of Tzara's and Cocteau's poems, manifestoes, plays, scores, and films, Gee shows how these two central yet outsider figures of the early twentieth-century avant-garde exploited and expanded possibilities for creative expression with equally distinctive artistry. Gee reveals a touching fraternity shared by the two artists, a fraternity that overcomes discord and discrimination, and which celebrates solidarity and humanity.

Where Gee takes the term Elective Affinities from Goethe's 1809 novel to discuss the resonance and rapport of Tzara and Cocteau, Edward Slopek takes this same term to discuss the sonority of Tzara, Great Knutson, and Adolf Loos, whose relationship is largely absent from existing research despite the fame — and monetary value — that has accrued to the house designed and built by Loos for Tzara and Knutson on avenue Junot in Montmartre (1925–1926). Entering the discussion through comparative pairings that are in some ways indistinguishable dualities (house/body, sound waves/light, silent reading/voice), Slopek explores this three-point relationship by thinking through sound and architecture around the construction of the Tzara-Knutson Villa. This monument of modernist architecture was home to Tzara and Knutson until their separation in 1938. It was eventually sold by their son Christophe in 1975. Working from the fact that Loos was almost deaf by the time of the project, Slopek asks how the distinct sound-worlds of the architect and the poet contributed to the comprehensibility of the Villa, and how the Villa's own sound-world embeds in the works written by Tzara while residing in the Villa, especially, *Approximate Man* (1931), from which we take the title of our special issue for its dual evocation of humanity as contingent, and contingency as human. As Gee established the outsider status of Tzara and Cocteau, Slopek explores the personal and social exile experienced by Tzara and Loos: Tzara was marginalized by Breton's emerging surrealism after the end of Dada in 1923, and Loos's progressive hearing loss alienated him from social life,

even as the heightened sensitivity produced by his hearing loss took him in decisive new aesthetic directions. Slopek sees the Tzara Villa as a spatio-temporal labyrinth through which the architect and poet communicate, concluding his multifaceted sonic analysis with a salutary parting reference to touch.

Florian Kaplick's collage poem FLUiCHTe explores exodus and war through sound and experimental writing. It is composed of text taken from Tzara's French-language *La fuite*, Kurt Schwitters's German language *Flucht*, and O'Neill's English translation of *The Flight*. In that sense, Kaplick's poem is an act of "transcreation," to borrow John Corbett and Ting Huang's term for the "informed, creative response to the translation of playful, enigmatic" concrete poetry, a literary form of course closely related to Dada free verse. The multi-lingual components of Kaplick's piece also evoke the idea that much avant-garde writing is inherently trans-national, as "language elements are not necessarily tied to the author's mother tongue" (Kirsten Malmkjaer paraphrased in Bassnett 12). The title "FLUiCHTe" mirroring the multilingual, multinational groups that made up the huge numbers of people escaping German offensive operations, Kaplick's poem brings together the shared experience of flight from armed conflict and Nazi persecution that Tzara in France and Schwitters in Germany endured during World War II. Kaplick reunites Tzara and Schwitters, two important contributors to the twentieth-century avant-garde who knew each well but did not meet again after 1936, the year that Schwitters fled to Norway and subsequently to England. In a touch authentic to Tzara and Schwitters, matters of interpersonal politeness ("Sorry, did I knock into you?") are simultaneous with the collective threat of extreme violence and death from strafing aircraft. Evoking directly the flight and migration from persecution and armed conflict that persist today, "FLUiCHTe" articulates the experience of Tzara and Schwitters not as a completed event in the past but as part of a continuum from which the modern world derives, and to which we have a responsibility. As Kaplick notes, taking from Tzara's text, "fuite sur fuite s'est amassée" 'flight after flight has amassed.'

Nefeli Zygopoulou also explores flight and migration by reading Tzara as part of an unusual but significant pairing. Taking Jacques Lacan's concept of the "littoral" — a gap that both separates knowledge and *jouissance*, and holds them together, where something of the real is grasped but not apprehended entirely — in order to compare works by Tristan Tzara with that of Giulio Caimi, a pivotal yet under-researched figure in Greek Modernism. Zygopoulou examines Tzara's texts that accompany images juxtaposing ancient and contemporary Egyptian life in *L'Égypte face à face* (1954) and Caimi's travel writings of his time in Israel and Mount Sinai in 1934 (published in 1938–39) and the collection of stories in *Ελληνικά Τοπία* (Greek Landscapes) (1973). As Zygopoulou shows, both Tzara and Caimi employ storytelling as an expression of active cultural memory making.

In the act of narration, the written account serves as a means through which the reality of everyday contemporary life is grasped. Zygopoulou draws attention to Tzara's and Caimi's Jewish identities in the context of the Nazi occupation — in Paris for Tzara and Athens for Caimi — to highlight how issues of national identity, migration, and minorities continue to occupy Tzara's writing in the decade after he competed *The Flight*, and how these concerns are shared by other Jewish-European writers, thereby expanding on existing understanding of Tzara's place in Jewish cultural history and in contexts outside of the Francocentric avant-garde. In the *littoral* spirit of an idea that is partially evoked but not present, Zygopoulou's article also gives rise to the question whether Tzara's figuring of Egypt and its people may have an unspoken connection to his Romanian roots and the peasant revolts of Romania. Such a focus on solidarity would fit with Zygopoulou's concluding modification of Lacan's *lituraterre* into *leituraterre*, the term she proposes for Tzara's and Caimi's writing, and which describes a combination of personal service and community.

Antonia Rigaud's essay on the relationship between Dada and the racial struggles in America between 2016 and 2020 returns us to the earliest period of Tzara's dadaism that attested to being "exclusive" while being inclusive. A pendant piece to D. Scot Miller's "Afrosurreal Manifesto" (2009) for 21st-century creativity and racial justice, Adam Pendleton's Black Dada Reader (2017) redirects the chant from Tzara's "Manifesto of Mr. Antipyrine" — "we are exclusive" — towards a more open version of Dada. In the Black Dada manifesto, Pendleton writes: "We are not exclusive." Rigaud shows how Pendleton's notion of Black Dada re-politicizes Dada in the context of contemporary political landscapes that seek to define colonial and post-colonial relationships by continuing to segregate and separate colonizer from colonized. Rigaud's essay explores the genealogy of Dada in America in three phases: the post World War II conceptual neo-avant-gardes (of the Black Mountain College, Abstract Expressionism); the Civil Rights Movement and Amiri Baraka's poem "Black Dada Nihilismus"; and the most recent phase, that of Pendleton's Black Dada, to establish how Dada is reconfigured in the present and in the past simultaneously. We are reminded here also of the power of language, a power that Dada in 1916 sought to reject, and that in the 1940s Tzara still continues to grapple with in The Flight. Rigaud explores how Pendleton uses the aesthetics of Dada: incongruity, chance, and collage, and the spirit of negation, as a protest for today. Rigaud also connects her analysis of Pendleton to debates about the nature, history, and (ir)relevance of the term "avant-garde." Rigaud shows that, where potential contradictions sit alongside each other, Pendleton, in true Dada style, regenerates and reformulates Dada aesthetics, and that this is part and parcel of recognizing the historic avant-garde as an encounter with racism and other forms of prejudice and power relations.

This special issue explores Tzara's and others' approaches to language and art across temporal, geographical, and historical arenas, from the inception of Dada in 1916, to the upheaval of World War II, into our contemporary moment and — in the spirit of history as a continuum — into the future. In that sense we already know much about what future threats will look like (like the *littoral*, the fullness of the future is not fully graspable but its character can be intimated). Profoundly connected to moments of human catastrophe and destruction, the avant-garde of which Tzara has become a figurehead gives us a vast repository from which to choose, test, and apply ways of (post-)humanist living, and which is proving to be regenerative for artists and scholars internationally. There is also a sense in which contemporary activism is drawing on the historic avant-garde, and this may expand as activist practice develops (Forcer, "Decidedly" 216–23). Drawing attention to the tenderness and passion of avant-garde operations, a new explorative discourse about the relationship between art and humanity is realized in the articles brought together in this issue. The bombast of Tzara's dadaism, its negation, destruction, and *je m'enfoutisme* ("not giving a damn") suggests a derisive anti-humanism. However, Dada's demotion of human behaviour — predominantly language and its consequences — is rather a humanist operation that seeks to find new ways of being in the world, more justly, more caringly, and more inclusively. Exploring experiences of war and migration, family and relationships, and approaches to language, the articles presented here demonstrate a fundamental humanism that was central to the twentieth century avant-garde. In formulating our title for this special issue, we particularly combine Tzara's term "approximate" with Sartre's humanism. Tzara's 1931 epic poem *L'homme approximative* (*Approximate Man*) describes the journey of the eponymous subject through a world of chaos and confusion. The approximate man is incomplete, which Tzara realizes is a universal condition: "approximate man like me like you reader and like the others" (29). Tzara's Approximate Man is unfinished because he cannot account for his experiences. For Sartre, what make us human is the self-determined discovery of our "essence": we exist, surge up in the world, and define and discover ourselves (our essence) afterwards. And in the making of ourselves through our actions and deeds, we account for all human actions and deeds (Sartre 289). This process is continuous for we are not fixed; but while life and knowledge are always approximate, it is also emphatically the case for Tzara that life can and must be described, and that knowledge can and must be acquired. In a classic avant-garde paradox, then, in Tzara's ethics world the inescapability of approximation — and of the temporary nature of life — is the basis for why we can and should act with conviction. For Tzara, as for many of the other figures explored in this special issue, to live approximately is to live candidly, imperfectly, and humanely with ourselves, and with and for each other.

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Dedication

This special issue of *Dada/Surrealism* is dedicated to the memory of Takuma Ito — who recognized the strength and particularity of Tzara's commitment to poetry — with our gratitude to Saki Ito for permission to present Takuma's article as part of the volume.

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