Poems by Maya Chrusecz

Anca Roncea

God in Heaven see see me love freezes left

limps the sickle cuts tirelessly we fight

blossoms sprout without fragrance

blood is like water and it colors all rivers

around the earth the procession of the dead moves

God when you do exist tear the sun from the sky

give us our the darkness and forgive us our longing

Gott im Himmel sieh sieh mich friert links

hinkt die Liebe die Sichel hiebt unermüdlich

wir bekriegen treiben Blüten ohne Duft Blut

ist wie Wasser und färbt alle Flüsse rings

um die Erde zieht der Zug der Toten Gott wenn

Du bist reiss die Sonne vom Himmel und schenk

uns das Dunkel und vergieb uns unsere Sehnsucht

Endlessly silver

sing sun

seven skies

echocenter

watch over my moth wings

doors ring when you speak

does light break?

O crystal

drops fall

nipping nodding

plinkeplitsch

steep and sharp scratches the bite

Endlos silbern

singe Sonne

Sieben Himmel

Echomitte

Meine Mottenflügel hüten

Türen klingeln wenn man spricht

bricht das Licht?

o Kristall

die Tropfen fallen

nippen wippen

plinkeplitsch

steil und spitz ritzt der Biss

Does lilac light laugh?

around the gingham opening

Tell the clock to stop

O gallery you cause me sorrow the comet was buzzing downwards long shoals

All eyes and octagons wake me Amsterdamm

Lacht lila Licht?

um die Karrierte Oeffnung

sage der Uhr sie soll stillstehn

O Galerie du machst mir Kummer Sausend war der Komet abwärts gefahren lange Schaaren

alle Augen und Achtecke necken mich wecken mich Amsterdamm

Two

Violinhands Chainrings

Period yes and I know I am

you who calls me

search fog

Turning dark faces

Silent cry and brown waves

Unbound red torn

Sense in nonsense

Mad roar

Nine times you cold warm I sink

Zwei

Geigenhände Kettenringe

Punkt ja u ich Weiss ich bin

Du wer ruft mich

Suchen Nebel

Wenden dunkle Angesichte

Stummer Schrei und braune Wellen

ungebunden rot gerissen

sinn in Unsinn

Irres Tosen

neunmal Du Kalt warm ich sinke

Bremgarten

3 and bell

and cracks

Meterwall pushes crooked

Lighting and rest inhibits errant direction

Hunger, stretch and feel

Soft wonders confused

Seeds, grow, light

Light, stings, breaks

kill kill kill

Bremgarten

3 und Klingel

und ritzen

Metermauer schiebt schief

Blitz und Ruhe hemmt irrende Richtung

Hunger, dehnen und fühlen

Weiches wundert Wirres

Samen, wachsen, Licht,

Licht, sticht, bricht

töten töten töten

Translator's Note on Unreliable Translations of Poems and Letters

Towards the end of his life, Tristan Tzara gathers his papers to compile his archive. He finds letters, poems from lovers, from friends, from his mother. In French, in English, in German, in Romanian. They all open him, they all open the writers, the moments they wrote them in, the intimacy in those moments seeps into the room. He leaves the friends and lovers open in his archive that I and others would go into 100 years later. The letters in Romanian from his mother he tosses away, he feels no one speaking Romanian would go in, no one would understand, his mother belongs to him alone. He closes the box.

In Paris I go through various papers in folders; there are poems and letters from Céline Arnauld, Maya Chrusecz, Berthe Trumpy, Emmy Hennings, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, and someone who signs their name JD. Their language pours out uncontrollable, uncalled upon speech, undirected, self-directed. In translation language moves uncontrolled, me crossing borders with them, breaking through. What comes through for me is a history of curating language, of care as a practice for archiving, where archiving is keeping, holding as in embracing. Maya may have never written a poem again after Zurich but Tzara's care for her kept her four poems in a box among her letters to him. As I run across her poems, I recognize her name from one of Tzara's poems in *Vingt-cinq poèmes*, a collection of poems he wrote during the early days of the Dada movement in Zurich. Poems enacting the creative gestures of Dada but permeated by all his friends: Arp draws engravings for the collection, Tzara dedicates poems to Arp, Berthe, Maya. It reveals that perhaps it's difficult to write a history of the movement without these relationships; some of the artists at Cabaret Voltaire would make art for the rest of their lives but others fall to the margin of recording this movement. Yet, in Tzara's poems and in his archive what comes across is that the movement for an avant-garde is also a movement where their closeness during the war fuels the art.

I'm trying to imagine these relationships, how many literary movements have so many couples in them? The dancers and the writers, the dancers as writers and artists, the writers as performers. They all couple up, they love each other and support each other's art. Arp would forever include Taeuber's work in his own or support it independently; Hennings wrote the introduction to Ball's book as his biographer; later in Berlin, Hausmann and Höch would also work together. There are many other couples in Dada; within the movement relationships are centers of gravity; friends, lovers, collaborators, they intermingle and fuel each other. Still, in her letters Maya doesn't seem to understand where or what her relationship is. She makes gestures to ground herself but any attempt at involving Tzara leads to an imbalance. The imbalance now is in the archive that only holds her letters; his are absent; it's hard to understand what may have grown between them without his responses to her. It is a translation of only half the text.

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Her poems at times speak to God and her longing both together, longing to be seen and for a god to see; the natural world is suffering and death creeps in seeping through the water, almost unnoticed until the red is everywhere. Although the war was far from Zurich its effects were felt, the darkness of the frontline echoed through to her and the dadaists. In the midst of this war she repurposes a Christian prayer asking god to forgive her her longing. At times the sky is an anchor. In one of her most striking poems, she creates what she calls an echocenter echoing the sun in an alliteration of *s* and then *m*, a poem as a sound event like a waterdrop reverberating through the surface of the water.

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I become Maya Chrusecz unarchivist, like the computer software undoing a condensed zip file that is a compressed version of the original I am trying to unwrap, my subjectivity, my body is an integral part of taking her writing out of the archive. I take pictures of her poems and letters with my phone, they make it out of the building and it is the only way they can be part of my work. It becomes part of the story that I am a Romanian woman poet writing in English and each of these modifiers in my identity are parts of what lead me to find Maya's poems. There is intimacy and vulnerability in translation, and as a poet I wonder about those I write out of. Among Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Emmy Hennings, Maya Chrusecz, there is a constellation of women in Europe in the early 20th century who are experimenting with what the life of a woman artist looks like, fashioning such a life and a profession for the first time for women in their spaces. Their work speaks from one to the other, travels in new ways; in translation the work is carried on trains, planes, subways. In my thinking of her I call her Maya, because she signs all her letters with that name, born Maria Josepha Deodata, Maya Chrusecz is the person she becomes within the Dada movement just as Samuel Rosenstock becomes Tristan Tzara.

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Maya opens a poem asking: *does lilac light laugh?* The liquids reverberating throughout the surface of the poem echo Tzara; she speaks to him and the Galerie, her experience as poetic imagery. It felt like a comet buzzing down. Her lilac is Tzara. In her letters to him she addresses him as Lila Lee, a nickname for him beyond the persona of sad-in-country out of another one of his poems. In 1914 Tzara wrote a poem called "Realités cosmiques vanille tabac eveils" (Cosmic Realities Vanilla Tobacco Awakenings) that he published in 1922 in a journal called *Aventure* edited in Paris. In the thirteenth section of the poem, he writes the word lila that then grows through five lines expanding the page: "But I am seriously thinking of what happened to me/lila/LILA/LILA/LILA/LILA/your brother cried/you told him/inbetween the pages of the book/the hand/humid/with lime paint my belief/bruns without light in iron wire." She brings this word to sit between their poems, like a binder, a Dada gesture conjuring up a light tone of violet in the same word carried that holds the same form in multiple languages of

Dada: German, French, Romanian. The poems echo the relationship, echo the gallery, echo the experience, and become a dance through archiving, it is a speculation, a story.

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In Tzara's archive these four poems by Maya Chrusecz typed on paper with Mouvement Dada letterhead vibrate with the strength of a main character. They defy the way we tell stories about the avant-garde; from the margin the strength of her voice makes me wonder what other poems she may have written, or if she maybe just wrote four as another iteration of herself in that moment. A margin is a best friend, a side character, a lower case maya on the right side of an upper-case Maya. As is standard in German, every noun in the poems is capitalized; she makes her city and lies at its center. She holds her own borders between poetry and the poetics of letters dancing. She asks god twice to see; she creates a mirror doubling language; she sees herself; her poem starts mirroring her. Including myself in their fabric through translation we're all weaving in and out of French, German, English, and Romanian, each time there is an in and an out through translation there is loss, interlaced in the loss of archiving something that is not archivable.

Her letters to Tzara are handwritten, deeply personal and intimate stream of consciousness writing. Nothing remains of what happened to her after the war ended in Zurich.[1] The last letter she wrote to him was dated 1922. A typewriter at the time required access, it would most likely sit outside her room while letters she could write from anywhere. The word "typewriter" can mean both machine and woman; orders and poems were processed through the same channels as poets had secretaries. Tzara's archives contain none of his responses to Maya, only her questions to him. We have no idea what he wrote to her; she ends up with a monologue, an impossible communication; doors ring when he speaks, they slam shut on her in an archive. The intimacy of handwriting no one loses voluntarily. Text is tissue, woven tissues. A made-up word shows presence.

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I'm in Berlin looking for signs of Maya in archives in Germany. I'm trying to imagine where she went after Zurich, what else she wrote or created or if she danced anywhere. Points through the city draw me to her infrequently. We both draw maps of what we thought the city was. We frequent the same spots and peoplel our contacts grow.

[1] General editor's note: In the meantime, Chrusecz's name has been found in Hamburg phone directories available through Ancestry.com. She is listed at various addresses between 1928 and 1950. Since her occupation in each listing is in some way related to clothing design, it seems likely that she is the person discussed in this essay. Nevertheless, we have been unable to find any information on her date of death or her literary heirs.

Birth Certificate
No. 3081
Hamburg November 8, 1890
P: Hope you're doing well! this situation in Ukraine is making me really sad, send my love to R!
I finally got to look at this birth certificate there are parts I just cannot read, the handwriting is in such a different script than what I'm used to now.
The first section before the undersigned bureaucrat this person appeared living in Hamburg, protestant religion I think, long name of the mother: Mathilde Franziska Josephine Friederike born Baur living there, going to the apartment the birth was on October 31st a child born with the name Maria Josepha Deodata which I believe is the person you're looking for
Signed by bureaucrat 1 Georg
bureaucrat 2 Cramer
bureaucrat 3 notary
unclear what some parts mean
P: also I believe she was born in the apartment, that seems unique

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Roswitha Mair writes a biography of Sophie Taeuber-Arp, mostly out of Sophie's letters to her sister Erika; these stories become about language flowing in unsanctioned ways. Maya comes up in the margins of Sophie's biography; it seems they were close friends during the early Dada days in Zurich and Sophie mentions her to her sister often. Up to now, whenever I try to write about Maya, I often hit a wall, there are pieces I know about her but little else. It is through her relationships that I can learn about her, the idea of research as a verifiable truth does not stand up here. In the now, her creativity is all bits of poetry and unreliable narrators. A life stitched up of bits, senses I can find. I begin to wonder what makes an archive, do the pieces of Maya I found contingent on other people's care of her make her, Tzara, Arp, Ball, Taeuber, and Hennings's pieces inseparable, an archive as a fabric sewn of the pieces kept, memories embedded in objects, memories as bits of life, a piece as one's making coffee in the morning, the piece of dance she performed that night. To re-create Maya Chrusecz as a poet I need pieces to construct as much as I can but it will ultimately be a fabric with tears lacking structural integrity and yet wearable.

Taeuber danced to "Karawane," a sound poem by Ball, wearing a frightening Cubist mask created by Marcel Janco and a costume designed by Arp and made by her friend Maya Chrusecz.

(From Erika Schlegel's diary, from Sophie Taeuber-Arp to Erika Schlegel, from Mary Wigman to Tristan Tzara (March 1917), from Tristan Tzara to Dada, from Emmy Ball Hennings to the memory of Sophie Taeuber-Arp)

[Sophie] made her own costumes with Maya Chrusecz, who was also sewing dresses for others — for example, a long evening gown for Mary Wigman. Taeuber and Chrusecz could often be seen bent over a dress pattern in a side room at the

Laban School. Chrusecz — every bit the equal of her boyfriend, Tzara, with her loud voice and fiery temperament — would be talking away a mile a minute, Sophie listening with a small smile and occasionally interjecting a word (Mair).

Her story is much like a poem, a compilation of small notes, images, emotions, and impressions that hold affect but resist a coherent narrative.

Terrible reports reached Zurich that combat had devolved into a trench war. The soldiers faced cold, hunger, physical hardship, and unspeakably agonizing deaths. There had been too much talking already, and Sophie Taeuber wanted to take a stand against all the horrors she had no power to stop. She had her work, but that was not enough, so she helped to organize antiwar parties. On September 29, 1916, on Magnolienstrasse, she held a fête littéraire for the dadaists and her friends from the Laban School. On March 10, 1917, at 7:30 P.M., a costume party took place at Mary Wigman's, 2 Seegartenstrasse. Any kind of clothing except business suits was allowed, "as long as it is fantastic, Futurist, Simultaneist, Cubist." Questions were to be directed to Arp, the dancer Maya Chrusecz (Maria Josefa Deodata), or Sophie H. Taeuber (Mair).

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The biography of Dada Zurich is made up of Ball's journal, Hennings's novel, letters they all wrote each other, literary journals, telegrams, costumes and drawings; their art on stage and their feelings towards each other are in the same fabric; interwoven in the movement are these relationships of friendship, romance, artistic collaboration, emotions that all fuel one another. Ten years later in Berlin, Hannah Höch would make Dada collages, assemblages out of scraps, new wholes that are obviously not wholes. To blow up museums, the academy, archives become about art shown, performed, kept as acts of care of the artists towards one another. The collage is a tapestry of bits of their lives and their relationships. Emmy Hennings forged passports, did sex work, wrote poems, ran a cabaret all as breaths of the same rhythm that then pulsed in a novel. She is not alone in her biography; there is no center periphery; for a brief while, her life does not border Sophie or Maya. Biography's etymology is life writing, two words which without borders open up to lifewriting, biowritting, selfwriting.

A small piece of paper with an almost illegible handwritten note from Maya Chrusecz to Tristan Tzara letting him know about something that went on during one of their days together, but the words are smudged and my translation is unsteady. This letter is smudged on the edges and some words are wiped out. A corner of it is ripped out as if someone needed a piece of paper to quickly note down something. Maya's is a quick note written in between running from one place to another, but she is there, she has shoes and pills, a life has traces. It shows no academy, here history is presence. What I miss most about people I lost is their presence. There is no fact production in this letter or my translation. This building was not built for Maya's letters; the shelves are for Tzara's life and art, but it seems impossible to reconstruct without the others.

There is bromine in the tubing
and the two tablets are the cleaning lady's
The black tea is for the voice
Dear Le, I was here
The shoes were lying on the steep
I'm going to look for you now
in the Odeon and terrace and
and I will give you
back home and pre-
serving you
M

Tubing is a conduit word the actual word on Maya's letter is smudged Tüben is what I speculated it must have been, her word is a vessel a tube for something to remain intimate and private. Every year I go visit Maya's poems in the Jacques Doucet Archive. For a researcher it is a useless process, a pointless waste of money, when I took photos of the letters that was all the information I needed. I go for the physical act of calling them, getting them out of the shelves and on the table. They move vertically horizontally there is tension and slack. Every time I call them, they get incrementally destroyed, they are less. Still, they live they get imperfectly translated out of the sight of curators and the academy.

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Does Maya Chrusecz have an estate? I try to think through its definition, but the word doesn't have a translation in Romanian, there is an adjective used for real estate that could be used to translate it, but private property has been a coming and going concept in Romanian twentieth-century history. I'm trying to draw an estate, how wide are its borders, what dimensions of an artist's life do they contain, Maya Chrusecz does not have an archive or papers. She danced, made costumes so whenever she died, wherever she died, whoever next to her life couldn't be formulated as an entity with rights to disperse.

Estates: common law's word for a person's property, entitlements and obligations, bodies of the realm, ground, tenancy, a group of houses, the intellectual property of the deceased author. She authored movements in lines, hands in stitching, drawing and four poems buried in someone else's archive among her love letters.

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Dear A,

On the basis of all we have transcribed everything Hannah Höch and Raoul wrote up to 1945 I made a query on Maya which produced no results. I tried respelling her name unspelling it also without results unfortunately this does not mean her name doesn't appear in the letters. We cannot 100% rule her out. She may be mentioned, consult the letters yourself.

My history teacher would look at me angrily when I speculated, because the story of history he dictated had to be reproduced word per word. There is distance between me and the archive, there is space in-between that distorts, contorts, blurs hues I'm looking at. I do not hold windows, I hold mirrors. Archiving is a process still moving. "To speculate" is out of sixteenth-century Latin "speculat" as in observed from a vantage point, a specula was a watchtower, a speculum is an instrument ENT doctors use to look down someone's throat by pushing down their tongue.

A bunch of letters and five poems is not a window but perhaps a mirrored piece of glass the size of a forget-me-not in bloom. Another mirror held up in dance to move through different points of view can magnify. We carry small mirrors inside our eyes, a system that reflects the image upside down, we wouldn't be able to look out without mirroring.

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I'm in a taxi in Paris in April in 2022 across the Seine with the radio on listening I realize the French word for spokesperson is port parole, someone who is a word carrier — a language transporter — someone was talking about the French president's language carrier on my way to meet R for dinner — the letters I had just transcribed began to hold a presence in my bag next to me adjoined to me and my work — this day I carry what I can of Emmy of others I take notes in the archives and become obsessed with how my handwriting looks — by rules of the archive I can only write in pencil but my writing slides uncontrollably it becomes hard to understand my own handwriting — to carry is also to wear in French — pret-a-porter — what would this archive feel were it not carried like a child but worn like a dress like .pants like a suit — language a poem worn taken on as a second skin.

Undated letter from Emmy Hennings to Tristan Tzara and Maya Chrusecz

Dear Tzara-Dada So far out of the way long since out of the ordinary [in Romanian ordinary ordinar is to be awful harmful sordid vile] me, a badly made colorful wimpenboot that cannot withstand the tumult of the soul storms I am writing to you right now and on this day of the opening I hope from the bottom of my heart that you make sure a woman's career is possible [this entire letter Emmy writes to Tzara for me hinges on the word Karriere and my hope that I transcribed it correctly that I understood her handwriting, often words or phrases in the letter don't make sense, I cannot call this a translation, I'm not sure I understood her handwriting or her German but she still makes a point] wild and questionably infinite is the woman and so I wish a career [when I'm transcribing that first letter is confusing it could be "bild"? an image a scene a sight questionably infinite leading Emmy to need a career where a bidimensional image can gain presence volume "hild"? help] Dear Tzara-Dada I long for it intensely it is the only thing I can long for, my most radiant scent and I believe my enlightening longing is above the house at 19 Bahnhofstrasse [not the original space of the Cabaret Voltaire but the location they moved into in March of 1917 where they opened the Galerie

Dada]. Galerie Dada will spurt sheaves of light since I have sense [sinn: sense, meaning, mind, point, feeling? Emmy grounds herself in the gallery but not corporeally she ties her feelings to the space] and friends in the business I will scream out the first success of the Dada Galerie: Long live dada! then you must not be alarmed by the insecure voice because you know that it is me, and Hugo will back me up and should he ask you, you will also tell him that he shouldn't be sad about me, on the contrary, I'm looking for an abysmal change [perhaps she means profound but there are small abysses everywhere in this letter, spaces in between the words and sentences I can't get through my German and Emmy's German handwriting the change and the shift she was looking for made its way in her letter] dear Tzara, I've felt for months that I need to make an attempt at making a change. Perhaps hope is an unbearable levity for me. I feel something in me is heavy and is looking for reason be this reason itself the inscrutable infinity. I can't lie low at all [her letter also cannot stand still and be discreet perhaps she wanted to fade all this poetry all this movement in a mundane form, but it stands out even flattened out in a gallery or an archive] I'm suffering perhaps overhanging suffering from the low-falling air. So it's incalculable and kind of a necessity. Actually I don't like to speak, how reluctant to talk about patches alone in the night there is so much light in me that my meager reason collides with my flying longing: career

Rose happiness to the Dada Galerie and for Tzara who I feel: a child in love and I have the bond that is only beautiful you are right dear Tzara, so live and I will greet you immer as much as I can.

Yours Emmy Hennings.

[this letter is addressed to] Mr Tzara and Mrs Chruseck, [but only at the end]

dear Tzara! I was very tired and put me to sleep a bit, please say 3 and I'm down and I'm just sleeping

Works Consulted

This essay references several works of Dada scholarship which have shaped my thinking and filled in the blanks and are sometimes quoted directly:

Aventure. 1922. http://dada.lib.uiowa.edu/collections/show/8.

Ball, Hugo. *Flight out of Time: A Dada Diary.* Edited by John Elderfield, translated by Ann Raimes, U of California P, 1996. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520354388

Hennings, Emmy. *Branded: A Diary.* Edited and translated by Katharina Rout, Broadview Press. 2022.

Hentea, Marius. *Tata Dada: The Real Life and Celestial Adventures of Tristan Tzara.* MIT Press. 2014.

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