

New York Dada? Looking Back After a Second World War

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Toward the end of the 1950s in New York, an odd word surfaced to label Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and a handful of other young artists whose work seemed sharply at odds with those of their elders: Neo-Dada. Although the term often seemed less an indicator of an historical relationship than a sort of insult, there were nonetheless two points of reference taken for granted as deserving the credit, or blame, for a renewed interest in the movement. One was a book, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, published in 1951 and edited by the artist Robert Motherwell.¹ The other was an exhibition devoted to Dada held in 1953 at the Sidney Janis Gallery and organized by Marcel Duchamp.²

Although both projects are regularly mentioned in histories focused upon the development of art in New York after 1945, they have received comparatively little attention in Dada studies proper, even though both were groundbreaking achievements. Motherwell's book was the first anthology in English devoted to Dada and even today has few rivals in any language as a collection of primary documents on the movement. Similarly, the Janis show was the first serious, retrospective exhibition devoted solely to the movement. Both projects also presented visions of Dada that have proved remarkably persistent, lingering even in aspects of the current exhibition.

We can begin by thinking about these two projects not as points of origin for a renewed interest in Dada in the 1950s but as culminations of a process that actually began several years earlier, in the midst of World War II. In New York in the 1940s, as a community of émigrés gathered for safety, Dada began to get a history that it hadn't had before, as former participants talked among themselves and with a younger generation about the actions that the First World War had prompted them to take. Among those with memories to share were not only present-day Surrealists André Breton and Max Ernst but also Richard Huelsenbeck, Hans Richter and Duchamp himself.³

Listening carefully to them was Motherwell, a young artist who was also the editor of a series of books called the Documents of Modern Art.⁴ The idea for a book about Dada had its origins in Motherwell's interest in Surrealism; as far as he could tell from his conversations with Breton and others, Dada had been Surrealism's “older brother.”⁵ And so in 1945, Motherwell started with a simple plan: to publish in translation the full text of Georges Hugnet's *L'Esprit Dada dans la peinture*.⁶ Issued as a series of articles in the early 1930s, Hugnet's work was an historical account of the movement that tracked its development in major urban centers, with Paris receiving most of the attention. Then Motherwell learned of Richard Huelsenbeck's 1920 memoir-cum-manifesto *En avant Dada*,

which offered an impassioned account of the movement's development in Zurich and Berlin.⁷ Motherwell's decision to include this text as well set the book on the road to being an anthology. In the months that followed, as word of his project spread, Dada's "old warhorses" would charge into his publishers' bookstore to contribute texts and images, information and advice.⁸

Eventually, the anthology would contain more than two dozen pieces by a score of different writers. To our eyes, its contents lean heavily toward French contributors, but at the time its international character was an achievement not to be underestimated. For this, we have Motherwell to thank. As the Documents of Modern Art amply prove, Motherwell was an unquestionably talented editor, but his sensitive handling of Dada's complex history was an accomplishment of another sort, a triumph over his own assumptions. Predisposed toward a certain sympathy to Surrealism (and French culture generally), he nonetheless came to recognize the limitations of Dada seen through Parisian eyes.⁹ Motherwell's willingness to challenge his own preconceptions about Dada as he worked on the anthology would result not only in a broadly international, historical presentation of the subject not seen previously. Instead of merely the ashes from which Surrealism rose, Dada would also emerge from Motherwell's anthology as a vital and important avant-garde movement in its own right.

Its jazzy dustjacket aside, *The Dada Painters and Poets* was not an especially striking book, visually. Heavy on text, its black-and-white same-size illustrations were mostly reproductions of pages from Dada periodicals and photographs of the movement's various participants.¹⁰ Its visual pleasures took another form. The anthology's contents, arranged in a rough geographic and chronological sequence with little to link one contribution to the next, were matched by a collaged introduction of information and anecdotes created by Motherwell. The anthology was not a linear chronicle or an authoritative compilation but was instead, as he modestly put it, an "accumulation of raw material."¹¹ Its format encouraged readers to take the initiative, flipping through the book at random, stopping wherever an image or bit of text caught the eye.

Motherwell credited his editorial achievement to the fact that he was personally distant from Dada's concerns: "having no axe to grind," he explained, he could afford to be "detached and scholarly."¹² This was, however, not quite the case. It took six years for the book to reach publication, years that coincided with the development and emergence of Abstract Expressionism and also with Motherwell's own growth into artistic maturity. Subtly but unmistakably, the anthology would become enmeshed with his own concerns as an artist.

Motherwell summed up his accomplishment by commenting in the book's Introduction: "I believe it does succeed in its main objective, that it is not possible to read this book without a clearer image of Dada forming in one's mind."¹³ It comes as no surprise that as an editor and artist Motherwell made decisions about the shape of the anthology that

would effect the type of “clearer image” readers would be likely to form. Among the most conspicuous choices he made were those regarding the question of Dada’s relationship to politics, especially communism.¹⁴ Berlin Dada is a shadowy presence in *The Dada Painters and Poets* for reasons that seem attributable less to a Parisian bias than to a discomfort with its program of radical social critique. Similarly, although Ernst’s work was prominently featured, little attention was otherwise given to the activities of Cologne Dada. Motherwell devoted special sections in his Introduction to Dada in Zurich, Paris, and New York, but not to these two cities. Likewise, George Grosz, Raoul Hausmann and John Heartfield receive little mention, with the reproduction of only a handful of their works, and Hannah Höch was omitted altogether, leaving Huelsenbeck – who was by the 1940s a vehement anticommunist – as virtually the sole representative of Dada’s political voice.¹⁵

Here it may be useful to recall what was happening simultaneously in the Abstract Expressionist work of Motherwell and his peers. From the mid- to the late 1940s, overt signs of specific political or social content were slowly but inexorably being purged even as the artists insisted that their work was nonetheless primarily concerned with issues of protest, commitment, and moral courage. Motherwell’s series *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* had its genesis during this period, when questions of Dada’s relation to politics was a pressing concern in the anthology’s preparation. Motherwell was adamant throughout his life that his series contained no political message, only the insistence that “a terrible death happened that should not be forgot. . . .”¹⁶

As with Abstract Expressionism, the image of Dada that emerges from the anthology is thus not entirely apolitical. Instead, even as specific political commitments and activities were omitted or pushed quietly to the side, Motherwell lauded the ethical passion with which Dada’s participants responded to World War I. But for him, Dada’s soul rested not in Berlin or Paris but in Zurich. As a young artist emerging from a disastrous Second World War, disillusioned by the political entanglements enveloping much of the art he saw around him, Motherwell found himself especially drawn to the “touching” protests of Dada’s first participants, whom he described as those “few sensitive and intelligent men, hardly more than boys, insisting on the shame that all of Europe ought to have admitted.”¹⁷

For Motherwell, the most significant effect of Dada’s passion could be found in the area of greatest importance in his own life. Dada created not a society-changing revolution but rather in his words “a healthy feeling that gave a new vitality to European painting by everyone who felt it, Dada or not.”¹⁸ Painting per se is certainly not what we associate with Dada, whose participants singled it out for repeated attacks (also prominent in the anthology). Linking the two, however, was key to Motherwell’s image of Dada and his attraction to the form it took in Zurich. His assessment of Dada was the result of more than thirty years of hindsight, and the image that had formed for Motherwell as a result of time’s passage was one

of Dada not only as art but as painting – and not merely as painting but as *abstract* painting. As he put it: “Yet now, a generation later, the works of Dada appear more at home alongside abstract works than they do beside Surrealist ones. . . .”¹⁹

Aligning Dada with abstraction by recognizing a formal resemblance suggestive of shared processes enabled Motherwell to defuse Dada’s destructive energy. In turn, the realm of abstraction provided a constructive explanation for it:

In one of his last letters, the late Piet Mondrian wrote. . . : “I think the destructive element is too much neglected in art.” Both Dada and strictly non-objective art are trying to get rid of everything in the past, in the interests of a new reality.²⁰

If Mondrian’s example demonstrated to Motherwell that strategies of negation could fruitfully enter into the act of painting, Dada provided an important counterbalance, its raucous energies enlivening what was commonly perceived by the 1940s as abstraction’s sterile intellectualism. In making a connection between Dada and abstraction, Motherwell placed himself firmly in opposition to the French Surrealist stance typified by Hugnet, whose text contains a number of derogatory references to abstraction and who saw inclinations toward it as a central flaw of Zurich Dada.²¹ If Dada provided a boost to abstraction, it also presented Motherwell with a sort of alternative to Surrealism itself, embodying some of its most appealing elements, such as a rebellious dissatisfaction with the status quo and a supportive community of participants, but without the unpleasant consequences of Surrealism’s devotion to illusionistic modes of painting and its increasingly academic status as a movement.²²

Getting a distance on Surrealism may also have been on Duchamp’s mind in the 1940s. As is well documented, his connections to Dada proper were technically somewhat tenuous to begin with, as most of the works by him that are associated with Dada were conceived and executed before he was ever aware of Dada’s existence. While Duchamp recognized in Dada parallels to his own interests, he kept a careful distance from the movement at the time, reluctant to relinquish his independence, especially as he saw Dada shape itself into a movement like any other, its members bickering over control and fighting with other cliques in the art world. From Paris, he had ruefully assured a friend in New York: “From afar, these things, these Movements take on a kind of appeal they don’t have close-up, I can assure you.”²³

But in the 1940s, with Dada barely remembered except as Surrealism’s nihilistic forerunner, Duchamp began to associate himself with Dada as he had never done in the past. In one of his most well-known statements of the 1940s, he emphasized his identification with Dada, in turn shaping it to fit his own interests:

Dada was an extreme protest against the physical side of painting. It was a metaphysical attitude. . . . It was a sort of nihilism to which I am still very sympathetic. It was a way to get out of a state of mind – to avoid being influenced by one’s immediate environment, or by the past; to get away from clichés – to get free. . . .²⁴

Motherwell also observed that Duchamp was the only participant in Dada he had met who claimed “still to be a Dada.”²⁵ The connection seemed so powerful that in Motherwell’s estimation, “Duchamp is to this day a Dada. He gave his life to it, as André Breton is giving his life to Surrealism.”²⁶

It seems rather more likely that Duchamp turned to Dada in the 1940s in order, once more, “to get free.” In New York’s small community of émigrés, Surrealism pressed much closer than it had in Paris. Sympathetic with many of its concerns but deeply uneasy with its group agenda, Duchamp participated in a number of Surrealist exhibitions and activities but also tried to distance himself from its intrigues and rivalries. Identifying himself as Dada – past and present – caught Duchamp up in no political games, group pressures, or professional compromises. Dada was a way to fit into the history of modern art without conforming to it, to belong without joining. As Abstract Expressionism emerged toward the end of the decade, Dada would further offer Duchamp an anti-painterly position of subversive resistance against what he privately described to a friend as a “debacle in painting.”²⁷

At first, Duchamp’s unprecedented embrace of Dada attracted virtually no attention; there was almost no one in New York sufficiently familiar with both Dada’s history and Duchamp’s oeuvre to realize that a shift had occurred. The 1952 profile in *Life* magazine entitled “Dada’s Daddy” signaled an association that would become almost seamless over the next two decades, with Duchamp and Dada becoming almost interchangeable terms in popular culture as well as contemporary criticism.²⁸ Duchamp contributed to this process quite actively at first, largely by making himself available as he never had before to interviewers, researchers, curators and gallerists.²⁹ For *The Dada Painters and Poets* alone, he examined proofs of the book as it progressed, made suggestions for the inclusion of pieces, and helped Motherwell mediate conflicts between former participants.

Duchamp’s identification with Dada soon began to resonate in ways even he could not have anticipated. The association had distanced him from but did not sever his ties with Surrealism. In fact, there was already a Duchamp-Dada connection within Surrealism itself; Duchamp is, for example, a major figure in Hugnet’s text. Connecting Duchamp to Dada was another way, if an indirect one, of trying to connect Duchamp to Surrealism, but it also served another purpose, one that involved the question of Dada’s origins. The bulk of Duchamp’s activities that could possibly be assigned to Dada had taken place in New York but had

occurred largely before Duchamp had ever heard of the movement. It was thus possible to argue that if Duchamp were Dada, New York was Dada's birthplace as much as Zurich.

An early instance of this dawning realization can be seen in the Museum of Modern Art's two landmark exhibitions of 1936. The first of these, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, featured on the dustjacket of its catalogue Alfred H. Barr, Jr.'s famous historical flowchart, where Dada was prominently included, but with geographical centers limited to only Zurich, Berlin, Paris and Cologne.³⁰ In contrast, the catalogue for *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* featured a condensed version of Hugnet's text that stressed New York's role: "In New York at the same time and even somewhat earlier Marcel Duchamp and Francis Picabia and Man Ray were accomplishing a revolution of the same type."³¹ Barr echoed Hugnet in his introduction to the catalogue, similarly stating that "Dada began in New York and Zurich about 1916."³² The idea of a "New York Dada" would gain a wider appeal in the 1940s, for reasons that are clear from Motherwell's statement on the dustjacket for *The Dada Painters and Poets*: "Dada is the only important movement in modern painting that took place simultaneously in the United States and Europe. The world to which Dada was a violent response bears great resemblances to our own."³³

I have no desire to contest the legitimacy of New York Dada as an area of study, or to claim that New York Dada never really existed. My point is that the construction of "New York Dada" as a discrete and discernible historical category seems to have had its origins in what amounted to a tactical maneuver begun by the Surrealists and then taken up by certain parties in New York. If New York Dada allowed the Surrealists to bind Duchamp, not to mention Picabia, more closely to them and to dilute the centrality of Zurich – with its taste for abstraction and non-French founders – as the site of Dada's birth, it provided Americans with a direct link to the purest and most radical aspects of the European avant-garde, a vital precedent to the emergence of Abstract Expressionism.

Today, the study of New York Dada encompasses a rich array of individuals, activities and works, but initially its focus was limited and somewhat vague.³⁴ Despite Motherwell's endorsement of New York Dada, *The Dada Painters and Poets* displayed little interest in American artists as such, and even Man Ray complained to the publishers of being virtually omitted.³⁵ In contrast, Duchamp was deemed by Motherwell an important "Dada painter" and was prominently featured in the anthology, especially in association with New York Dada.³⁶

As for Duchamp himself, he not only welcomed New York's renewed interest in Dada: he cultivated it. In 1952 he went to Sidney Janis and proposed organizing a Dada exhibition at his gallery.³⁷ Duchamp had known Sidney Janis and his wife Harriet for a number of years. In 1945 the couple had published a laudatory essay on Duchamp, and when Sidney Janis opened his gallery in 1948, Duchamp was a contributor to its program and even

authorized Janis to create replicas of *Fountain* and *Bicycle Wheel* for two of the gallery's ambitious thematic exhibitions.³⁸ For the Dada show, Duchamp would select the works, design the catalogue, prepare translations of two of its essays, install the show, and talk with the press.

Later accounts of the exhibition have tended to emphasize the free hand Duchamp had in its organization, but Sidney Janis was no passive bystander. In his view, the "plan of the show was to focus on Duchamp," and focusing on Duchamp meant, by extension, focusing on New York.³⁹ In his 1944 book *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*, Janis had already traced a history of Dada's development that echoed Hugnet and Barr: Dada was started in 1916 in Zurich, followed in 1917 with its founding in New York by Duchamp and Picabia, both of whom had nonetheless "already done a number of Proto-Dada works."⁴⁰ Not only would the Sidney Janis Gallery's Dada exhibition include a section on New York Dada: it would occupy a central position in the main gallery, on axis with the doorway so that the small sign reading "New York" would be one of the first things a visitor saw. Thirteen of the twenty-seven New York Dada items listed in the catalogue were by Duchamp.⁴¹ Otherwise, apart from six works by Man Ray, New York Dada was limited largely to a handful of periodicals.

The favoritism did not go unnoticed. According to Sidney Janis, Huelsenbeck and Richter, who had assisted with the Swiss and German portions of the show, attempted to rearrange the installation, moving some of Duchamp's works to make space in the main room for pieces they considered more characteristic of the movement.⁴² As Janis recalled with bemusement, Duchamp made no effort to stop them:

Marcel's attitude was to let them do it. . . . He had no objection at all to being put in the back room. I wouldn't have it, and I finally had to lay down the law to the other two and tell them it was my show. Well, now, did Duchamp *know* I was going to do that? Or didn't he really care?⁴³

It may be more appropriate to say that Duchamp cared more about other things. During preparations for the show, he also submitted to a lengthy interview initiated by Harriet Janis, who had plans to write a book about him. For much of the interview, they were also joined by Sidney Janis and the Janises' son Carroll. I should add here that Carroll Janis, the author of a recent and very enlightening article on Duchamp's Dada exhibition, has requested that I paraphrase rather than quote from the interview.⁴⁴ Although it was not conducted in direct conjunction with Duchamp's project, a fair portion of the Janises' conversation with Duchamp was nonetheless devoted to Dada, and it was here, unexpectedly, that tensions surfaced about the nature of his connection to the movement, especially New York Dada.

Underlying the Janises' interview with Duchamp was a question, one that remains central to understanding Dada, even today: was Dada a movement, or is Dada an attitude? The current exhibition makes its status as a movement quite clear, yet it cannot be denied that the question of attitude or "spirit" is important, especially since it was often Dada's own participants – particularly Duchamp himself – who insisted upon characterizing Dada in this manner. Moreover, the character of Dada itself changes substantially when considered as an attitude rather than a movement. Dada as attitude is Dada at its most hostile to the constructs of history, but it is also Dada at its most vulnerable, capable of being manipulated and applied to any number of situations and objects. Among Duchamp's contributions to *The Dada Painters and Poets* was the suggested insertion of a "Pre-Dada" section: seemingly a solid move in favor of historical context, it was also a quiet, subversive thrust against history itself, as was his claim still to be Dada.⁴⁵ If Dada somehow existed before Dada as well as after Dada, did the Dada movement exist at all? If Dada was everywhere, could it be somewhere?

The consequences of this conundrum can be seen in Duchamp's discussion with the Janises. There were already hints of the coming problem, summed up in the idea of "Pre-Dada" itself. As the Janises themselves had put it in their 1945 article: "Always an active Dadaist, Duchamp's attitudes were articulated, however, in the years preceding Dada, and although acclaimed by the Surrealists, he retains these Proto-Dada attitudes in their nascent state."⁴⁶ As might be expected, one of the tasks the Janises undertook with Duchamp some eight years later was to clarify this question of Pre-Dada, Proto-Dada, always already Dada.

Central to this process of clarification was the status of the readymades, especially the early ones. In a myriad different ways in the interview, the Janises tried to fit what they knew about readymades together with what they knew about Dada, asking the dates of the earliest readymades and comparing them with the date of Dada's start in Zurich. Duchamp's confirmation that he had created readymades prior to Dada's founding in Switzerland in 1916 prompted both Harriet and Sidney Janis to suggest that Dada had perhaps originated not in Zurich but in New York, only to be met by Duchamp's adamant rejection of this idea. He argued instead that the founding of Dada was based on the discovery of the name and the idea to make a movement out of the name. As for the readymades, Duchamp insisted that they needed no such name – they were already called readymades, without needing to be called Dada as well.⁴⁷

As the discussion continued, Duchamp set forth something of an ultimatum: the Janises had to choose whether Dada was an attitude or a movement. If Dada were an attitude, then it was historically unbounded, taking in not only Duchamp's own "Pre-Dada" work but also surfacing randomly through the ages, from the time of Aristophanes right up to the present. If a movement, it began in 1916 in Zurich and ended in 1923 in Paris with the advent of Surrealism. The Janises' clear reluctance to choose between Duchamp's attitude-or-

movement options – voiced in an extended debate on the subject – indicates the unsatisfactory nature of the choice. Dada, it appears, is both more and less than a movement or an attitude.

In the end, of course, a détente was achieved. Even by the conclusion of the interview, Duchamp had made delicate concessions that pointed the way. Looking at a reproduction of *Tzanck Cheque*, he pointed out its date: 1919, and therefore a *bona fide* Dada work, as was *Bagarre d'Austerlitz* from 1921. In the end, Duchamp's Dada exhibition encompassed the years he proposed to the Janises as the lifespan of the movement – 1916 to 1923 – and it also included the readymades that fell into those years.⁴⁸ Thus, there was no bicycle wheel, no bottle rack, no snow shovel. Still, any museum would have been proud of the results – more than 200 items, listed according to Dada's various urban centers in the exhibition's distinctive catalogue, which was printed as a single broadsheet distributed as a crumpled ball.⁴⁹

Still, echoes of the issues raised in their conversation lingered. The catalogue included a text by Jacques-Henry Levesque reiterating the central theme of the discussion: "Dada may be considered as having two aspects, one enveloping the other: the Dada spirit and the Dada movement."⁵⁰ Duchamp would similarly declare to a journalist who visited the exhibition: "Dada is not passé. The Dada spirit is eternal."⁵¹ New York and Zurich shared the main room, but subtle interventions tampered with the city-model of Dada. Several works by Duchamp included in the New York Dada section had actually been made in Paris, while in the back room, *Tu m'*, made for Katherine Dreier's apartment on Central Park West, loomed over the small sign marked "Paris."⁵²

As for the design of the installation, Plexiglas panels suspended from the ceiling held posters, photographs and other materials. The resulting effect of transparency subtly disrupted the geographical distinctions promised by the blandly neutral signs bearing the names of cities.⁵³ The overlapping and interpenetrating visual impressions generated momentary collages for visitors, not only of texts and images but also of the various cities themselves. Paris? New York? Zurich? In Duchamp's presentation of Dada such categories appeared provisional at best, ready to shift or merge with nothing more needed than a visitor's movement through the exhibition.

Duchamp had managed to keep Dada from laying claim to his first readymades, but his victory was short-lived. He would be less and less able to control such associations in the years to come. By the 1960s, Duchamp and Dada, with the readymades marking the site of their conjunction, would be virtually synonymous. We now see little harm in expanding the Dada movement to encompass the attitude that inspired Duchamp to make the *Bicycle Wheel*, the *Bottle Rack*, and other objects prominently displayed in the "New York" room of the present exhibition.

One wonders whether Duchamp could already see it coming, the consequences of his newly emphatic association with Dada, as he made preparations for the Janis Gallery's show. A hint is provided, perhaps, by the installation of *Fountain*, the object whose original, deliberate provocation brought it perhaps closest of all his New York readymades to the confrontations of Dada. Duchamp placed it, festooned with a sprig of mistletoe, above the doorway that was the entrance to the exhibition's main gallery. Standing on its threshold, gazing at New York Dada and ready for a kiss, the visitor, Janis, or even Duchamp himself could expect only a slapstick dousing from above.⁵⁴

I wish to thank the Dedalus Foundation for supporting my research on this topic.

¹ Robert Motherwell, ed., *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, the Documents of Modern Art series (New York: Wittenborn Schultz, Inc., 1951; 2d ed., Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981; reprint, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981). All page references are to the reprint edition unless otherwise noted.

² *Dada 1916-1923* was held at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York City from 15 April to 9 May 1953. The catalogue featured texts by Jean Arp, Richard Huelsenbeck, Tristan Tzara, and Jacques Henry Levesque. For a description of the exhibition's organization and installation, see Carroll Janis, "Marcel Duchamp Curates Dada," *Art in America* (June/July 2006): 152-155, 215.

³ George Grosz had come to United States in the 1930s, and although he taught at the Art Students' League in New York, he seems to have taken little part in these informal, ongoing conversations about Dada. His autobiography, published during this period, included a discussion of his involvement with the movement; George Grosz, *A Little Yes and a Big No: The Autobiography of George Grosz* (New York: Dial Press, 1946). On Grosz and *The Dada Painters and Poets*, see below, note 15.

⁴ Motherwell became editor of the Documents of Modern Art, published by the booksellers Wittenborn and Schultz, in 1944. The series was intended to put the most important writings on art of the last fifty years into the hands of artists, students, and other interested readers, and during his tenure as series editor over the next seven years, Motherwell would bring out eleven titles: Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters* (1944); Piet Mondrian, *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art* (1945); Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1946); Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, *The New Vision* (1946); Louis Sullivan, *Kindergarten Chats* (1947); Jean (Hans) Arp, *On My Way* (1948); Max Ernst, *Beyond Painting* (1948); Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *The Rise of Cubism* (1949); Marcel Raymond, *From Baudelaire to Surrealism* (1949); Georges Duthuit, *The Fauvist Painters* (1950); and *The Dada Painters and Poets* (1951).

⁵ Max Kozloff, "An Interview with Robert Motherwell," *Artforum* 4 (September 1965): 37.

⁶ Hugnet's text was originally published in *Cahiers d'Art* 7, no. 1-2: 57-65, no. 6-7: 281-285, no. 8-10: 358-364, 1932; 9, no. 1-4: 109-14, 1934. The inception of the Documents of Modern Art project may be dated to the spring of 1945, when Wittenborn and Schultz contacted Christian Zervos, editor of *Cahiers d'Art*, to request permission to publish Hugnet's text; Zervos sent permission to proceed in a letter dated 22 April 1945. George Wittenborn Papers, Archives, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

⁷ Richard Huelsenbeck, *En avant Dada, eine Geschichte des Dadaismus* (Hannover, 1920). Motherwell learned of the book from Ralph Manheim, his translator for a number of texts in the Documents series. Letter from Ralph Manheim to Robert Motherwell, 10 February 1947, Wittenborn Papers, Archives, Museum of Modern Art. (Prior to discovering Huelsenbeck's book, Motherwell had already planned to add Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes's 1931 "Histoire de Dada," which also emphasized the movement's Parisian incarnation, as a companion piece to Hugnet's text.)

⁸ Preface, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, xvii.

⁹ Hans Richter was among those who encouraged Motherwell to consider another approach:

I feel that the misinterpretation that Dada was a French “invention” or movement ought to be corrected – by showing how much it came out of the general *European* situation, and that every country made something different of it.

Introduction, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, xxxviii.

¹⁰ Of the book’s nearly 150 illustrations, over two-thirds of them were devoted to documentary photographs of participants and to reproductions of pages from various Dada periodicals.

¹¹ Preface, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, xix.

¹² Motherwell, quoted in Stephanie Terenzio’s preface to *The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell*, foreword by Jack Flam, edited by Stephanie Terenzio, *The Documents of Twentieth-Century Art*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999; originally published New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), xii.

¹³ Preface, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, xix.

¹⁴ A thorough examination of this issue is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper. It will be discussed at greater length in my forthcoming book, *Open Country: Dada in New York, 1945-1969*. The publication of *The Dada Painters and Poets* was in fact delayed by more than a year due a bitter conflict between Huelsenbeck and Tristan Tzara regarding not only the founding of Dada but also Dada’s relationship to communism. Motherwell’s discussed the dispute in his Preface to the anthology, xvii-xviii.

¹⁵ Grosz’s relative absence from *The Dada Painters and Poets* is especially curious. In naming the “Dada painters” that he thought were the most important artists of the movement, Motherwell listed Arp, Duchamp, Ernst, Picabia and Schwitters, then added “that is, apart from George Grosz, who now prefers to forget his part in the movement.” Introduction, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, xxvii. However, Motherwell’s claim that Grosz did not want to participate in the anthology and moreover had no wish to discuss his involvement with Dada is somewhat belied by Grosz’s position in the late 1940s. In 1949, *Art News* published “Grosz Paints a Picture,” in which Grosz, while emphasizing his distance from the Dada years, showed no aversion to talking about them. Furthermore, Motherwell would have had a direct connection to Grosz not only through other participants in Dada but also through Romare Bearden, who showed at the same gallery as Motherwell and had studied with Grosz at the Art Students’ League.

Although Motherwell’s files at the Dedalus Foundation and the Wittenborn Papers contain ample correspondence with most of dada’s participants during the six years the book was in production, nothing survives to indicate when, whether, or how Motherwell might have attempted to involve Grosz in the project. One cannot help wondering whether the morbid subject matter and *réopardaire* style of Grosz’s post-1945 paintings – representative of everything that Motherwell and the other Abstract Expressionists were trying to get away from – made him any less eager to pursue Grosz’s participation. On Grosz’s work of the late 1940s, see Amy Robinson, “Grosz Paints a Picture,” *Art News* 48 (December 1949): 35-37, 63; “George Grosz,” *Art News* 47 (May 1948): 48; and Alonzo Lansford, “Yes, We Have No Mananas [sic],” *The Art Digest* 22 (14 April 1948): 22.

It should also be mentioned that by the 1940s, as Huelsenbeck’s example suggests, many of Dada’s participants – especially those Motherwell knew best – had either renounced or

distanced themselves from their previous political commitments (or else had, like Duchamp or Arp, never been particularly politically engaged to begin with). Furthermore, the political climate in the United States toward the end of the decade did not encourage the discussion of such issues, especially among those who had only recently come to this country.

¹⁶ *An Exhibition of the Work of Robert Motherwell* (Northampton, Mass.: Smith College Museum of Art, 1963), n.p., cat. entry 16.

¹⁷ Introduction, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, xxiv.

¹⁸ Introduction, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, xxiv.

¹⁹ Preface, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, xviii. For similar comments on Dada, art and abstraction, see also Introduction, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, xxiii, xxvii and xxxvii.

²⁰ Preface, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, xviii.

²¹ See Hugnet, "The Dada Spirit in Painting," *The Dada Painters and Poets*, 131-132, 134. On Hugnet's ties to Surrealism, see the biographical note on the author in Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Elodie Courter and Georges Hugnet, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, 2^d ed. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1937), 14.

In *En avant Dada*, Huelsenbeck also made pejorative remarks about abstraction, associating it with Tzara and his supposed transformation of Dada into an art movement. See *The Dada Painters and Poets*, 33, 37.

²² Dada's status in New York after the Second World War as an alternative to Surrealism as a model for avant-garde activity is discussed at greater length in my book *Open Country: Dada in New York, 1945-1969*. Forthcoming (in progress).

²³ Letter to Ettie Stettheimer, ca. 6 July 1921 in *Affect't Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, edited by Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk, trans. Jill Taylor (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 99-100. Duchamp's comments were prompted by a recent episode in which "The Dadas made too much noise at a Futurist (sound effects) show. As a punishment, they had their exhibition closed down."

²⁴ James Johnson Sweeney, "Marcel Duchamp" in *Eleven Europeans in America: The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin XIII*, nos. 4-5 (1946): 20. Duchamp's comments were taken from a February 1945 interview conducted by Sweeney, who planned to write a monograph on Duchamp that was unfortunately never completed. The notes for their conversation, one of a series of more than twenty such exchanges, may be found in the Alexina and Marcel Duchamp Papers, Archives, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

²⁵ Preface, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, xix.

²⁶ Robert Motherwell, "Dada Preface for American Readers," Motherwell Archives, Dedalus Foundation, New York. The file contains several drafts of the text, one of which is dated January 1948.

²⁷ Letter of 8 January 1949 to Yvonne Lyon, quoted in Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996; New York: Owl Books, 1998), 367.

²⁸ Winthrop Sargeant, "Dada's Daddy," *Life* 32 (28 April 1952): 100, 105. The occasion of Sargeant's piece was an exhibition at the Rose Fried Gallery dedicated to the Duchamp family of artists, yet Sargeant's article virtually ignored Duchamp's siblings.

²⁹ This was in marked contrast to Duchamp's previous attitude toward the prospect of exhibitions and books devoted to his work. Through the late 1920s into the 1930s, he declined opportunities to participate in exhibitions and encouraged those who owned his work to do the same, and also resisted the attentions of those wanting to write about his work. See, for example, his letter to Dreier of 11 September 1929 in *Selected Correspondence*, 170-171.

³⁰ In Barr's text on "Abstract Dadaism," he stated that "[Dada] began in Zurich in 1916. . . and developed strongholds during or after the War in New York, Cologne, Paris and Hanover with outposts in many other cities." Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 172.

³¹ *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, 2^d ed. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1937), 19.

There was no catalogue when the exhibition opened, so Hugnet's text initially appeared in *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 4, no. 2-3 (Nov-Dec 1936).

³² *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, 2^d ed. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1937), 10.

³³ Dustjacket, *The Dada Painters and Poets* (1st ed.).

³⁴ In the early years of scholarship on the topic, those who attempted to stray too far from Duchamp had difficulty in determining whether New York Dada had occurred at all. Brooklyn Museum of Art curator John I. H. Baur's 1951 publication *Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art* and the related article "The Machine and the Subconscious: Dada in America" attempted to link dada with the fascination in modern technology displayed in the work of such American artists as Joseph Stella, Charles Demuth and Morton L. Schamberg. In the end, however, Baur was forced to conclude: "Aside from such peripheral effects, Dada had little direct influence on American painting." John I. H. Baur, *Revolution and Tradition in Modern American Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951) and "The Machine and the Subconscious: Dada in America," *Magazine of Art* 44, no. 6 (October 1951): 236.

Over the last decade in particular, New York Dada has evolved into one of the most fascinating areas of study in twentieth-century art. Many scholars are responsible for opening up this field to encompass long-neglected or underappreciated individuals, but the greatest debt is undoubtedly owed to Francis Naumann's groundbreaking work on this period. Francis Naumann, *New York Dada 1915-1923* (New York: Abrams, 1994).

³⁵ Man Ray complained about this in a letter to the publisher dated 24 January 1948. Motherwell sent an apologetic reply, but Man Ray's presence in the anthology (other than as a portrait photographer) is limited to a recreation of the object *Gift*. George Wittenborn Papers, Archives, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

³⁶ Introduction, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, xxvii. On "Dada painters," see note 15, above.

³⁷ Duchamp had also tried to get Dada included in "L'Oeuvre du XXème Siècle," an exhibition that James Johnson Sweeney organized in 1952 for the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris. In Duchamp's letter of 17 August 1952 to Suzanne Duchamp and Jean Crotti, he

describes his attempt to get Sweeney to give “Dada a little plaque (just a little one) as it is one of the definite movements of the last fifty years.” In the same letter, he informed his sister and brother-in-law of Janis’s plans to do a dada exhibition and asked them for works to include in the show. *Selected Correspondence*, 320-321.

³⁸ Sidney and Harriet Janis, “Marcel Duchamp: Anti-Artist,” *View*, Series 5, no. 1 (March 1945): 18-19, 21, 23-24; the essay was subsequently reprinted in *The Dada Painters and Poets*.

Fountain was made for “Challenge and Defy” (1950), and *Bicycle Wheel* for “Climax in 20th Century Art, 1913” (1951). On Janis’s creation of the replicas, see Francis Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Ghent, Amsterdam: Ludion Press, 1999), 168. Furthermore, “Brancusi to Duchamp” (1951) featured two early paintings by Duchamp on loan from the collection of Henri-Pierre Roché.

³⁹ Sidney Janis, “A Recollection of the Dada Show,” in Anne d’Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine, eds., *Marcel Duchamp* (New York and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: The Museum of Modern Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973; reprint, 1989), 202.

⁴⁰ Sidney Janis, *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1944), 7.

⁴¹ Only Ernst and Kurt Schwitters had as many works in the exhibition as Duchamp, with most other participants represented by six to ten pieces each. Except for *Tu m’*, Janis’s replica of *Fountain*, *Fresh Widow*, and *To Be Looked at (from the Other Side of the Glass) with One Eye, Close to, for Almost an Hour*, the remaining items by Duchamp were represented in the form of photographs mounted to boards, from the *Box in a Valise*.

⁴² According to Carroll Janis, Arp, Tzara and Arp’s companion Marguerite Hagenbach also helped to obtain the loan of works in Europe. Carroll Janis, “Marcel Duchamp Curates Dada,” 155.

⁴³ Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (*Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996; New York: Owl Books, 1998), 379.

According to Carroll Janis, as a result of this confrontation, part of the vestibule was used for works from Cologne and Hannover, and a portion of the main gallery was devoted to Zurich and Berlin, “with Duchamp free to do the balance.” Carroll Janis, “Duchamp Curates Dada,” 155.

⁴⁴ The original transcript for this interview is in the possession of Carroll Janis; he made his request in a letter to the author dated 3 August 2006. For the citation of his article, see note 2.

Alexina Duchamp also had a transcript of the interview, which she shared with Francis Naumann. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 204, n. 4. Naumann and Linda D. Henderson in turn kindly shared this copy with the author.

The transcript is divided into several sections that may denote different sessions in the conversation. Comments from Duchamp and Harriet Janis appear in all the sections, while those from Carroll and Sidney Janis appear somewhat more sporadically. The middle sections of the interview, which concern Dada and the readymades, contain comments and questions from Sidney Janis throughout, indicating his presence during the discussion of this subject.

Various comments in the interview indicate that it took place while the exhibition was still in preparation. It has usually been dated to 1953, although one remark by Duchamp regarding the *Life* magazine profile by Winthrop Sargent suggests that the conversation may have taken place in the same year, i.e. 1952.

Harriet Janis's plans for a book on Duchamp were related to the author in a letter from Carroll Janis, 25 July 2006.

⁴⁵ On Duchamp as the source of the idea for a Pre-Dada section, see Preface, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, xviii.

⁴⁶ Sidney and Harriet Janis, "Marcel Duchamp: Anti-Artist," *The Dada Painters and Poets*, 307.

⁴⁷ Duchamp's insistence that the act of naming, the word itself, was integral to any historical understanding of Dada was not simply a matter of technicalities, for it touched upon issues vital to his own work. From the title of *Nude Descending a Staircase* to the readymades themselves, naming was vital to Duchamp's ideas about art. *Bicycle Wheel*, for example, was not quite a readymade – it involved movement, rather than the other ideas Duchamp would come to associate with readymades, but, as he explained to the Janises, it also did not yet have the name readymade given to it.

Nonetheless, Duchamp could also use such terms as "Dada" rather casually in conversation with friends, qualifying himself only when asked for clarification; he was friendly enough with the Janises that their line of questioning was also likely prompted by hearing him use the word "Dada" on various occasions to describe works, attitudes, or individuals. For a similar exchange, this time focused on Duchamp's use of the word "revolutionary," see William C. Seitz, "What's Happened to Art? An Interview with Marcel Duchamp on Present Consequences of New York's Armory Show," *Vogue* 141 (15 February 1963): 113.

⁴⁸ One exception to this was *Monte Carlo Bond*. Given its date of 1924, it should have been excluded from the exhibition, and in fact Duchamp mentioned this work specifically in the Janis interview as having been made after Dada was finished. It is not listed in the catalogue, but it can be seen in an installation photograph of the exhibition.

⁴⁹ Works in the exhibition were grouped under the cities Zurich, New York, Berlin, Cologne, Paris, Hanover and Amsterdam. Berlin and Cologne were, in fact, more strongly represented in the Janis Gallery exhibition than they had been in Motherwell's anthology.

The catalogue was both mailed as a crumpled ball and similarly offered in a laundry basket at the show's entrance. According to Sidney Janis in a 1963 letter to Arturo Schwarz: "Many clients complained that they did not receive the Dada catalog, and when we checked we discovered that various maids and butlers receiving these 'wads of paper' threw them away, without noticing them to be a catalog." Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, 3d rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 1997), 801.

Although Duchamp described the catalog to Schwarz as "a Dada gesture to cancel the 'seriousness' of exhibition catalogues" (Schwarz, 801), its fate at the hands of servants of the wealthy also echoes his readymades' first encounters with viewers – the *Bicycle Wheel* and *Bottle Rack* being discarded by his sister when he left for New York in 1915, and the following year one or more of his readymades going completely unnoticed when exhibited at the Bourgeois Gallery.

⁵⁰ Jacques-Henry Levesque, untitled essay, *Dada 1916-1923* (New York: Sidney Janis Gallery, 1953), n.p.

⁵¹ “Dadadadada,” *Time* 61, no. 17 (27 April 1953): 93.

⁵² The four Paris Dada works listed in the New York Dada section of the catalogue were *50 cc of Paris Air*, *L.H.O.O.Q.*, *Tzanck Cheque*, and *Bagarre d’Austerlitz*.

⁵³ When Carroll Janis assisted in the installation by placing a number of Dada publications on Plexiglas racks suspended from the ceiling, he was instructed by the artist to “make them go every which way,” a directive in keeping with the ordered irregularity of the installation overall. Janis has also noted that Duchamp’s use of Plexiglas as a support echoes the transparency of the Large Glass. Carroll Janis, “Marcel Duchamp Curates Dada,” 215.

⁵⁴ For other interpretations of *Fountain*’s placement, see William A. Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp Fountain* (Houston: The Menil Collection, 1989), 80 and Carroll Janis, “Marcel Duchamp Curates Dada,” 155.