

Dada in the Low Countries

“Dada Holland” and “Dada Belgium”

I.

In *principio erat verbum*. After the rediscovery of Dada in the 1960, it became common praxis to divide and describe its history in geographical entities, combining the word “Dada” with the names of cities, regions, countries, and even continents. Beside “Dada Zurich,” “Dada Berlin,” and “Dada Paris” (or inversely, “Zurich Dada,” “Berlin Dada,” “Paris Dada”), it became customary to speak of “Holland Dada” (or “Dada Holland”), referring to the (alleged) dissemination of Dada in the Netherlands, and—likewise, to speak of “Dada Belgium,” referring to (alleged) Dada in Belgium.¹

These fixed denominations were uncommon in the days of historical Dadaism. To put it differently, they are historiographic inventions from more recent literature on Dada. It was probably Hans Richter who, in his influential monograph of 1964, *DADA, Kunst und Antikunst* (DADA—Art and Anti-Art) introduced (or at least popularized) the provisional subdivision of Dada into more or less independent sections with particularities of their own. Richter distinguished six centers of Dadaist activity: Dada Zurich, Dada Berlin, Dada Paris, Dada Hanover, Dada Cologne, and Dada New York. Richter’s division seems to have been generally accepted as an elegant solution for the eminent problem confronting each Dada historian: how to tell the history of Dada as an extremely short-lived phenomenon that can be found simultaneously in many places with many different faces, yet has no clear-cut chronological dimension as a possible story line. The *diachronic* extension of Dada, at least of the historic Dada movement, is rather short: strictly speaking, Dada existed—for only seven years, from 1916 to 1923. However, in this short period of time, Dada can be traced *synchronically* in many different places all over the world. Richter’s geographical solution may seem here to be like the egg of Columbus, which Columbus proved could be made to stand upright by smashing its bottom end. Actually, since the first

2 Dada in the Low Countries

publication of *Dada—Kunst und Antikunst* in 1964, Richter's original set of six Dada sections has been extended progressively, as "forgotten" Dada ramifications have been recovered again and again.

Whereas Richter didn't report any kind of Belgian participation (Pansaers is not mentioned at all), Dada in the Netherlands was partly and not unjustifiably treated as an offspring of Kurt Schwitters's Merz enterprise.² In a final chapter, under the heading "Post-Dada," Richter conceded, however, that the "only Dada movement, outside the main centers, that struck an independent and truly Dadaist note" was to be found in Holland, initiated and directed by Theo van Doesburg. Richter added, though that "Dutch Dada lasted only a short time, a Dada shower that fructified men's minds but produced few new recruits."³

In 1974, the Dutch writer K. Schippers published his seminal monograph, *Holland Dada*. This book documented not only the Dutch "Dada campaign" of 1923 referred to by Richter, but also the affiliation of other Dutch artists and writers, whether by form, content, or personal contacts.⁴ As a result, "Dada Holland" became one of the more substantial branches of historical Dadaism. Yet when Hanne Bergius and Eberhard Roters offered the first comprehensive panorama of the diffusion of Dadaism in Europe and beyond, at the Fifteenth Art Exhibition of the European Council in 1977, Dada Holland was not the only subsidiary to Richter's original set of six Dada branches in the accompanying catalog, *Tendenzen der Zwanziger Jahre*. These six allegedly city-based branches appeared as the core of a considerably extended classification; more than twenty Dada branches were named.⁵ As in Richter's division, some of the additional branches in the Berlin catalog were labeled with names of other cities, while one—"Dada South America"—was liberally situated on a continent. The majority of new branches were, however, topographically defined by country names: "Dada Poland," "Dada Rumania," "Dada Yugoslavia" and "Dada Serbia" (*sic*), "Dada Italy," "Dada Spain," "Dada Austria," as well as "Dada Holland" and "Dada Belgium." While "Dada Holland" was arranged beside the main Dada "centers" discerned earlier by Richter, in *Tendenzen der Zwanziger Jahre*, "Dada Belgium" was still only accounted as one of the minor "epicenters."

Meanwhile, more recent Belgian historiography of the local avant-garde gave rise to the assumption that Belgium was not just a minor "epicenter." At least one Dadaist, Clément Pansaers, was of Belgian origin, and he started his engagement in Dada while still living in Belgium. In addition to Pansaers, other Belgian artists and writers allegedly had shown symptoms of a "Dada spirit" as well.⁶ As a consequence, in 1994—thirty years after the publication of Richter's book—Dada in Belgium was finally classified as an entity equal to "Dada Holland," among others, in the Zurich exhibition catalog, *Dada global*.⁷

As an inventory, *Dada global* undoubtedly marked the final stage of the development deployed by Richter and elaborated on by Bergius and

Roters; not only was Dada mapped in Europe—and in its American outposts, but worldwide. This caused a considerable number of new ramifications.⁸ At the same time, the nomenclature of *Dada global* differed from *Tendenzen der Zwanziger Jahre*, as the book returned to the situation before the introduction of the fixed denominations. Wordings like “Dada Zurich,” “Dada Berlin,” and “Dada Paris” were avoided; instead, the manifestations of Dada in the implied cities were discussed as Dada *in* Zurich, *in* Berlin, and *in* Paris. Whereas the global Dada province was still mapped in countries, *Dada global* combined this national classification of the Dada orbit with the location of Dada exploits in cities within these countries. As far as Dada in Holland and Belgium are concerned, the first is located in Leiden and The Hague (domiciles of van Doesburg) and the second in Brussels and Antwerp (residences of Pansaers and some Flemish artists with alleged Dadaist affiliations). These additional topographical specifications may be desirable for a more precise and uniform mapping of Dada. This move towards a stronger nominal similarity suggests, however, an even higher degree of parity between Dada in Holland as Dada in Leiden and The Hague, Dada in Belgium as Dada in Antwerp and Brussels and, for example, Dada in Switzerland as Dada in Zurich and Geneva—a misleading suggestion.

Whereas his monograph, *Holland Dada*, established the reputation of Dada in Holland as a branch of stature, in a small contribution to the Berlin catalog *Tendenzen der Zwanziger Jahre*, Schippers revoked the apparent importance of Dada Holland as one of the main centers of Dadaism. “Dada in the Netherlands? As a question it is already too much said. Nearly no Dutch artist was interested in Dada. They were not informed about the real explosion in Zurich. Or they didn’t want to be.”⁹

Despite Schippers’s attempt to put “Holland Dada” into perspective, implying that no such phenomenon as Dada Holland could be distinguished on an equal level with Dada Zurich, Dada Berlin, or Dada Paris, the denomination “Dada Holland” survived in *Tendenzen der Zwanziger Jahre*. It was even joined by “Dada (in) Belgium,” even though the Belgian literature on Dada in Belgium (apart from the writings of Marc Dachy) also puts the Belgian Dada dissemination into perspective as a “marginal case”¹⁰ of just one proper Dadaist and a few artists showing traces of an allegedly Dadaist mentality in their work and activities.

II.

When leaving the main strongholds of the Dada movement in Zurich, Berlin, and Paris, as well as the lesser bastions in Cologne, Hanover,

4 Dada in the Low Countries

and New York, on first sight, it may seem a matter of course to map the Dada "province" in larger entities, not town by town, but rather by regions, by countries, and from a firmly Eurocentric perspective, somewhere at the other end of the world, by continents. Yet at least in the case of the dissemination of Dada in the Low Countries, the division of Dada along national boundaries poses several fundamental questions. The main problem is indubitably the suggestion implied by the topographical nomenclature that the phenomena summarized as "Dada Holland" and "Dada Belgium" are in one way or another entities comparable to those designated as "Dada Zurich," "Dada Berlin," "Dada Paris," etc. The expectation is raised that a sort of Dada group, Dada section, Dada branch can be found in Holland and Belgium as well, standing on a more or less equal footing with the Dada sections in Zurich, Berlin, and Paris. Richter had already made this suggestion with regard to Dada Holland, at least; as mentioned before, he posited that the only genuine Dada branch outside the main centers of Dadaist activity could be found in Holland. In this context, Richter attested that van Doesburg initiated Dada in Holland, although he found only few new combatants, among them Paul Citroen.¹¹

As it turns out, Richter's assessment was wrong in several respects. Citroen did not join van Doesburg; it was actually Citroen who presented himself as the first Dutch Dadaist, independent of van Doesburg. Furthermore, while Dada in Zurich, Berlin, or Paris also constituted a social framework—a fluctuating, yet continuous group involved in a collective project called Dada—nothing commensurable can be found in Holland. A Dada group never existed in the Netherlands. Although the historical Dadaists never used fixed designations such as "Dada Zurich," "Dada Berlin," or "Dada Paris,"¹² these historiographic denominations refer nevertheless to more or less stable Dada groups located in the cities mentioned. In Zurich and Berlin as well as in Paris, the Dadaist project possessed an undeniable social dimension.¹³ In these cities, Dada didn't manifest itself as a fixed style or as a clear-cut school or current, but rather as a movement—a collective project.

Nothing more than a feature of the letterhead on Tristan Tzara's stationery, the term "movement" was originally to a large extent just a bluff, in several respects a (too) big word for an informal bunch of avant-garde émigrés in Zurich. However, Dada developed a relatively stable infrastructure that existed for several years not only in Zurich, but also in Berlin and Paris. Nothing similar can be found in the Netherlands, to say nothing of Belgium. Instead, Dada in the Netherlands and Belgium consisted of a series of isolated incidents. In the Netherlands, and even more so in Belgium, Dada was by and large the individual affair of a few isolated artists and writers. And even when—as in the Netherlands—some ad hoc groups could be discerned as local sections of the global Dada movement, these groups had only an occasional character. One example is the Dadaistische Hauskapelle

(Dadaist resident orchestra), responsible for a Dada campaign in the Netherlands in January and February 1923. This "resident orchestra,"¹⁴ consisting of Schwitters, Theo and Pétro van Doesburg, and Vilmos Huszár, only lasted for the duration of the campaign.

III.

The designations "Dada Holland" and "Dada Belgium" may seem obvious inventions from the last decades. Aside from "Dada New York"/"New York Dada" as the title of a publication by the New York avant-gardists generally associated with Dada, "Dada Holland" and "Holland Dada" could, nevertheless, well be the only geo-historiographic designations already in use by the historical Dadaists in the early twenties. The Zurich Dadaists did not present themselves as "Zurich Dada," but rather as Galerie Dada and Mouvement Dada. The Berlin Dadaists did not present themselves as "Berlin Dada," but rather as Club Dada or, on Huelsenbeck's stationery, Zentralamt der deutschen Dada-Bewegung (Central Office of the German Dada Movement). "Holland Dada," however, is not only the title of Schippers's monograph, but can also be found on the cover of the first issue of the journal *Merz*, edited by Schwitters on the occasion of the aforementioned Dada campaign in the Netherlands in early 1923.

The simple though effective title of Schippers's first comprehensive presentation of "Holland Dada" obviously drew on the cover of this first issue of Schwitters's journal *Merz*. Yet a closer reading of the "Holland Dada" issue of *Merz* reveals that Schwitters at least did not speak of "Holland Dada" as the name of a Dutch Dada group or, as in the case of Schippers, as a general denomination for all Dadaist activity related to Holland in one way or another. On the contrary; Schwitters firmly denied the existence of such a group and even the Dadaist "resident orchestra" itself was not—as he stressed—Dada, but rather against Dada—"Anti-Dada." And this is far more than just the repetition of Tzara's famous Dada pun: "*Les vrais Dadas sont contre DADA*" (The true Dadas are anti-Dada)¹⁵ as will be shown later. Schwitters's "Holland Dada" was not another denomination for the "resident orchestra" but pointed instead at the ecstatic reactions of the Dutch public to the Dada campaign, in which he took part:

DADA in Holland is a novelty. Only one Dutchman, I. K. BONSET, is Dadaist. (He lives in Vienna). Only one Dutchwoman, PETRO VAN DOESBURG, is Dadaist. (She lives in Weimar). Besides, I know a Dutch Pseudo-Dadaist, but he isn't a Dadaist. Holland, though, HOLLAND IS DADA. Our appearance in Holland resembled an enormous triumph march. Holland is now completely Dada, because it always has been Dada.¹⁶

6 Dada in the Low Countries

It should be obvious: at least Schwitters's "Holland Dada" is of a stature quite different from "Zurich Dada" or "Berlin Dada," certainly in the way these fixed denominations are generally applied by literary and art historians when discussing the different sections of the historical Dada movement. The same is true for "Dada Holland," or rather "Dada Hollande," which appears in the heading of Bonset's "Manifest 0,96013," published in 1922 in the review *Mécano*: "DADA HOLLANDE/I.K.B."¹⁷ Since Bonset was van Doesburg's imaginary single Dutch Dadaist living in Vienna, this "Dada Holland" was by and large the designation of a fictitious Dadaism as well—at least, not a Dadaism in accordance with our current understanding of the term. What's more, both Schwitters's "Holland Dada" and Bonset's "Dada Hollande" are used only once. They may have the same formula-like appearance as the designations currently in common use. They are, however, non-recurrent conscious mystifications—nothing else.

IV.

The designations "Dada Holland" and "Dada Belgium" are not only misleading insofar as their nominal parity with "Dada Zurich," "Dada Berlin," or "Dada Paris" suggests the existence of Dutch and Belgian Dada groups. For example, when speaking of "Dada Zurich," most manifestations of the Dada group in Zurich actually took place in Zurich or were organized from Zurich. In the case of the Dadaist exploits summarized under the headings "Dada Holland" and "Dada Belgium," most of them actually took place beyond the national borders of the Netherlands and Belgium. Many can be regarded as immediate extensions or direct continuations of Dada in Zurich, Berlin, and Paris. A locally rooted Dadaism never existed in either Holland or Belgium. Van Doesburg, as the main protagonist of "Dada Holland," may have originated from the Netherlands, may have resided in Leiden and the Hague, and may have been the editor of what was probably the most important Dutch avant-garde journal, *De Stijl* (The Style). His Dadaist activity was, however, incited by mail from Zurich and by van Doesburg's acquaintance with the work of Paris-based Dadaists. Van Doesburg's first major Dadaist contributions were written for Tzara's *Dadaglobe*, to be published in France. The first issues of the Dutch Dadaist journal, *Mécano*, edited by van Doesburg and his alter ego, Bonset, were not only published when van Doesburg resided in Weimar, but were also part of a polemic by van Doesburg against certain developments in the Bauhaus. The foundations for the Dada campaign in the Netherlands in early 1923—the apex of "Dada Holland"—were laid in Weimar as well, during a conference of constructivists and

Dadaists at the Bauhaus in September 1922. Schwitters's share in (and understanding of) the Dutch Dada campaign was by and large a continuation of his contribution to a series of Dada and Merz soirées—some of which he organized on his own, while others were in collaboration with Raoul Hausmann—as a resumption of Berlin-based Dadaist activity. Another offspring of "Dada Holland," the so-called Dada-Centrale (Dada Head Office) in Holland, led by Citroen and Erwin Blumenfeld, was a more or less fictional outpost of Dada in Berlin, which manifested itself only in the *Dada-Almanach*, an anthology edited by Richard Huelsenbeck in Berlin. The painters Otto van Rees and Adya van Rees-Dutilh, two other Dutch nationals often mentioned in surveys of "Dada Holland," had already been living in Paris for some years when they became involved in the proto-Dada in Zurich.

The Belgian writer Pansaers may have been the only self-declared Belgian Dadaist; however, even though he still resided in Brussels, he was mainly a corresponding member of the Parisian Dada branch. Another Belgian writer, Paul van Ostaïjen, never joined the Dada movement but he made Dadaist overtures during his Berlin exile, in the proximity of the Berlin Dada group. In short, "Dada Holland" and "Dada Belgium" do not primarily refer to two Dada sections in the Low Countries, but rather point at Dada from the Low Countries, insofar as most of the discussed artists and writers were in the possession of a Dutch or Belgian passport. In this respect, the seeming parity between "Dada Holland" and "Dada Belgium" on the one hand, and "Dada Zurich," "Dada Berlin," and "Dada Paris" on the other, is only of a nominal order. By content, they tend to overlap, as several manifestations of "Dada Holland" and "Dada Belgium" can be seen as components of Dada in Zurich, Berlin, Paris, or in the case of Schwitters, of the Dada-related Merz project in Hanover.

How does one fingerprint a Dadaist?

I.

A basic problem of the historiography of Dadaism in (and from) the Low Countries is the question: how can one determine when a certain artist or certain activities or works of an artist can be regarded as Dadaist? Membership of or participation in Dada groups may offer decisive clues about who can be regarded as a Dadaist in Zurich, Berlin, or Paris. Both in the Netherlands and in Belgium, no such group ever existed. A relationship with Dadaism is, therefore, often assumed on formal aesthetic grounds or based on the assumption of an apparent Dada mentality in the work or behavior of the artists under discussion. Although stylistic congeniality may have an obvious heuristic function,

8 Dada in the Low Countries

it only indicates some similarity. Assuming that Dadaism was unique as a style or a mentality, a considerable dissemination of Dadaism in Belgium and the Netherlands seems the case. However, Dada wasn't as unique as sometimes supposed. Even though certain avant-garde typography of whirling letters and words may be regarded nowadays by some as "typically Dadaist," and the same is unquestionably true for some types of collage and assemblage, it should be remembered here that a specific Dadaist style cannot be distinguished. As Werner Haftmann has observed, "If one surveys the individual techniques of expression and formal inventions of Dada, these can... virtually without exception be derived from the stylistic directions of [expressionism, cubism, and futurism]:... Whenever the single techniques of Dada are scrutinized in isolated form, they always point back to the main stylistic directions of the pre-war period."¹⁸

Haftmann argued instead that the specific nature of Dada is concealed in its combination, in its heterogeneous synthesis of the different and divergent stylistic innovations of the pre-war period. "In Dada," he wrote, "these isolated elements, methods and techniques were regarded for the first time as one and as something holistic. Dada apprehended all these single clues and concentrated and established them as holistic expression for the experiences and impressions of the pure present."¹⁹

This conception of the particularity of Dadaism may explain in part why Dada was rather unsuccessful in the Low Countries (as will be discussed later), yet it offers no workable solution to the question of how to determine whether a work of art or a text is Dadaist or not. Rather, Haftmann's observations indicate the impossibility of determining whether a single work of art is typically Dadaist or not. This is particularly true when only certain aspects of individual works are identified as Dadaist due to similarities in style. In respect to the dissemination of Dadaism in the Low Countries, this implies that even when resemblances between an individual work and some Dada reference material seem apparent, one should be cautious not to mistake common traits for Dadaist influence or the manifestation of a Dadaist mentality, since they could also be related to common roots or some other kind of congeniality. For example, the typography of *Bezette Stad* (Occupied City) (1921), a poetry collection by the Flemish author van Ostaijen, seems to be distinctively influenced by Dadaist experimental typography (figs. 1.1–1.4).²⁰ Yet, can one qualify a book as a Dadaist publication solely on the basis of a typographic likeness, which, in the case of *Bezette Stad*, can also be discerned in works by Guillaume Apollinaire and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti as well?²¹

II.

Even more problematic is the assumption of an errant Dadaist mentality or spirit. This mentality frequently serves as a makeshift solution. Since Dada cannot be defined by style—it is characterized instead by stylistic multiformity—and since Dada in the Low Countries cannot be described in terms of an organizational unity either—as Dada as a movement is composed instead of a whole range of more or less independent groups using the same “battle cry,” as Huelsenbeck put it²²—this mentality functions as a historiographic binding agent which seems on first sight to allow the examination of incompatible and not directly coherent phenomena, artists, writers, and their respective works as one (heterogeneous) whole. In a discussion of Dada in Zurich or Berlin, for example, this may seem an elegant solution for the mere impossibility of giving a fitting and workable definition of Dadaism in the terms usually applied in definitions of artistic and literary currents (since Dada wasn't such a current). As on the level of style, one has to be aware, however, that at least the separate constituents of this mentality can be traced in other avant-garde formations as well.

The supposed Dadaist mentality is generally characterized by a spirit of revolt, protest, destruction, and nihilism—the radical rejection of existing values and orders in every respect. However, it is also characterized by self-subverting paradoxes, a high degree of self-irony and incoherence, as well as by an unbridled, innovative drive to experiment. Futurism, though, was certainly no less aggressively destructive than Dadaism. Even constructivism, although its name may suggest otherwise, was profoundly destructive as far as conventional art and aesthetics were concerned. Dada certainly wasn't the first artistic movement embroiled in paradoxes. And for the nihilism that appears to be one of the trademarks of the Dadaist mentality, this same (or at least a closely affiliated) nihilism can be found in the work of the Russian suprematist artist Kazimir Malevich, who painted not only his famous black square on a white canvas, but also a white square on a white canvas in an attempt to present a “liberated nothing.”²³

The construct of a Dadaist mentality may, again, possess some heuristic value. Still, this state of mind as a criterion becomes highly problematic when the periphery of the Dada orbit is entered, especially when this mentality—as often suggested—assumes a life of its own: a mentality that may be detected independently from the Dadaist movement as an organizational or programmatic framework and independently from stylistic and aesthetic criteria (as far as these can serve as criteria at all). The scope of this mentality was stretched considerably by the historic spokesmen of Dada. Dadaist witticisms like Tzara's “*Les vrais Dadas sont contre DADA*,” Hans Arp's “*Bevor Dada da war, war Dada da*” (Before Dada existed, existed Dada),²⁴ and Hausmann's “*Dada*

10 Dada in the Low Countries

ist mehr als Dada" (Dada is more than Dada)²⁵ implied that anyone and anything can be Dada at their own discretion. When supposed Dadaism has to be identified by the criterion of a thus typified Dadaist mentality, the inflationary force of this standard leaves no doubt, or rather, doubts all Dadaism discerned according to this criterion. What of Richter's remark that after Dada dissolved in 1923 "[van] Doesburg himself remained Dadaistsimply because he was one?"²⁶ Doesn't this actually imply that *De Stijl*, edited by van Doesburg, as well as the aesthetic objectives of *De Stijl* and its editor—constructivist neo-plasticism and elementarism—were Dadaist as well? Does this mean that van Doesburg's constructivism was only a negligible thin layer of veneer, even when van Doesburg operated as a constructivist? And what of Schippers's characterization of another Dutch artist, Hendrik Werkman, as a Dadaist, because Dada would have been "for Werkman," as Schippers argued, "a self-evident mentality, which didn't even have a name for him, and which he didn't have to brag about,"²⁷ although Werkman explicitly turned down any association with Dada in the first issue of his review *Next Call* in 1923²⁸ and later repeated his rejection by proclaiming "*Dada is dood*" (Dada is dead)?²⁹ And was Paul Neuhuys, the editor of the Antwerp-based expressionist journal *Ça Ira!* (It'll Work!), infected by the ominous Dada mentality, as Jean-Paul Bier argued, simply because he showed himself sympathetic to Dada? While Neuhuys did offer Pansaers a platform for publication in *Ça Ira!*, Neuhuys emphatically characterized Pansaers as the sole Belgian Dadaist, implying that he, Neuhuys, was not a Dadaist.³⁰ Where does Dada end if one accepts the validity of attributions like these? In the end, isn't the notion of "Dada" stripped bare of all its content?

III.

The flexible yardstick of the Dadaist mentality allows the description of Dadaism beyond Dadaism. This is particularly problematic when the wider Dada orbit is entered. One of the pressing questions in this orbit is the question of where and when Dada reached its limitations. These boundaries and margins of Dadaism are obscured when the qualification "Dadaist" is stretched by leaps and bounds, obscuring the boundaries of Dadaism, which were obviously reached when, for example, Werkman rejected the classification of his work as a "Dadaist joke," or when Neuhuys regarded someone else as the only Belgian Dadaist.

The indefinable Dadaist mentality is not only problematic because it tends to hide from view the limitations of Dadaism. The assumption of such a free-floating mentality also eliminates the possibility—or rather the circumstance—that in different settings, compatible developments did occur which may have had a common background but are still

marked by particularities of their own. Dada can be seen as a passage in the European avant-garde from pre-1914-isms—like futurism, cubism and expressionism—to other avant-garde “isms” of the period between the two World Wars—like constructivism and surrealism. Dada was not, however, the only passage.

To avoid an all too inflationary account of Dada in the Low Countries, the following chapters will neither focus primarily on seemingly Dadaist stylistic features nor on a Dadaist state of mind wandering independently of the historical Dada movement. The following chapters will concentrate instead on the way the contemporary Dutch and Belgian avant-garde adopted, adapted, rejected, and negated Dada as a project, a programmatic framework, and as a set of stylistic and programmatic considerations which are not unique by themselves, but only in their combination.³¹

Certainly the question of whether an artist considers himself a representative of one current or another cannot be the only criterion to count him as part of this or that current. However, Dada was not a current at all; rather, it was an avant-garde project, more or less of the stature of German expressionist alliances like *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider) and *Die Brücke* (The Bridge) or Herwarth Walden's *Der Sturm* (The Storm), be it with more fundamental programmatic implications. When the dissemination of Dada in the Low Countries and among artists and writers from the Low Countries is addressed on the following pages, Dada is discussed, therefore, not primarily as a specific style or a rather unspecified mentality, but as a project—a project that started in Zurich, Switzerland in early 1916 and reached Belgium and the Netherlands in late 1919 and early 1920, more or less as a foreign proposition, an open project in which one could participate (if accepted by the leaders of the Dadaist peer group) or not.³² In order to avoid terminological inflation, at least one precondition has to be met: Dada has to be addressed explicitly as Dada.

Dada and the Low Countries

I.

To eliminate the unwanted implications of the fixed denominations “Dada Holland” and “Dada Belgium”—the suggestion of some national Dada groups, the implied parity with “Dada Zurich,” “Dada Berlin,” etc.—these historiographic designations are not used as a dual framework for the following historiographic accounts, although the continuous Dadaist involvement of van Doesburg and his pivotal role in the Dutch avant-garde may allow a more or less continuous and rounded narration of Dadaism in a Dutch setting. This would, however, misrepresent the

12 Dada in the Low Countries

actual fragmentary, incoherent character of the history of Dadaism in the Netherlands. The history of Dada in Holland and Belgium is described, instead, as Dada in and from the Low Countries. The "Low Countries" are not to be understood as a new fixed denomination, but only as a provisional framework in the geographically subdivided approach in this *Crisis and the Arts* series.

The Low Countries as the area of Dadaist dissemination addressed here are not negatively defined simply as an attempt to avoid some problematic aspects of the conventional country-by-country classification of the Dada orbit. In drawing a map of Europe, Belgium and the Netherlands appear from a distant, global perspective as two small neighboring stretches of land at the shores of the North Sea, enclosed by the larger empires of Germany in the east and France in the south (together with the even smaller Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, in which Dada never emerged). Belgium and the Netherlands share a common geo-morphological feature, they are, to a large extent, "low," "nether," "flat" countries. Their common and colloquial denomination as "Low Countries"³³ also points to a long collective history and, simultaneously, an undeniable cultural kinship. The Netherlands and the northern half of Belgium not only share the same language—Dutch—but also many cultural articulations in the Dutch language, most notably a common literature, can be distinguished.

At the same time, some profound differences should not be ignored. A Calvinist-styled Reformation may have started in the early sixteenth century in the area currently named Belgium, but after several decades of war, was finally successful in the north of the Netherlands. The firm rule of the Roman Catholic Church secured the Counter Reformation in the south—Belgium, as well as the southern provinces of the Netherlands "below" the Rhine and Meuse delta. When, in 1648, the Dutch Republic was officially recognized as a new political entity in the Peace of Muenster at the end of the Eighty Year War, the Southern Netherlands (where the Dutch revolution had actually started) remained under Spanish-Habsburgian rule, later becoming a part of the Austrian Empire. Although the division of 1648 was reversed at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, turning Belgium again into a part of a newly founded Kingdom of the Netherlands, the restored unity remained intact for only fifteen years. In 1830, an uprising in Belgium resulted in the secession of the Southern Netherlands and the foundation of a Kingdom of Belgium. Hence, despite all commonalties, at least the political history of Belgium and the Netherlands went through a separate development for almost three hundred years by the time Dada arrived at the shores of the North Sea.

Another fundamental difference between the Netherlands and Belgium concerns language. Although a language issue has also existed on a very modest scale in the Netherlands (the discrimination against the Frisian language in the North), Dutch was and is the undisputed

lingua franca in the whole territory of the Netherlands. In contrast, Belgium was and is divided in two by an east-west language boundary running from the North Sea (actually starting in Northern France near Dunkirk and entering Belgium near Lille, Dutch: Rijssel) through Brussels to the German border. This language boundary divides the Belgian territory in two proportionally more or less equal halves: the Dutch-speaking Flemish provinces in the north and the French-speaking Walloon provinces south of this language boundary. There was (and to a certain extent, still is) not only a language boundary dividing Belgium in two, but also a language conflict, which has polarized Belgian society since the foundation of the Belgian state in 1830. This language conflict had a substantial impact on Belgian politics, as well as on social and cultural life, especially since this boundary had not only a geographical, but also a socio-economical extension. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Belgium was by and large ruled in French by a French-speaking elite. Whereas Dutch was the common language of the ordinary people in Flanders, the upper classes in the Belgian north generally spoke French as well. Only people speaking French could occupy higher positions in the administration or in the omnipresent Catholic clergy. All higher education was conducted in French; there was no Dutch-language university in Flanders. Thus, those who spoke only Dutch were by and large excluded from upward mobility and more or less condemned to second-class citizenship. This discrimination incited growing resistance from the Flemish half of the population. As a result, a politically variegated Flemish national movement came into existence in the last decades of the nineteenth century. This Flemish movement campaigned against the discrimination and exclusion of the Flemish in public life. At the same time, this movement tried to further the emancipation of the (in many respects backward) Flemish population and to develop an independent Flemish cultural life, be it by the development of a Flemish literature and press or by the attempted foundation of a Flemish university. As in politics, all different literary and artistic currents were represented in the Flemish movement, although the movement was dominated both politically and culturally by conservatives and traditionalists.

A final substantial difference between Belgium and the Netherlands concerns World War I. In the years 1919 and 1920—at the time that Dada arrived in the Low Countries—Belgium was recovering from its invasion by German troops in 1914, which turned parts of Flanders into an entrenched battlefield along the small Yzer river and most of the Belgian territory into a militarily governed occupied area for the duration of the war. In a way, the German occupation aggravated the Flemish-Walloon conflict. For a long time, Flemish nationalism had been infected by Grand-Dutch as well as pan-Germanic conceptions. The Grand-Dutch ideology regarded Belgium, or at least Flanders, as “Southern Netherlands”—an ethnic, cultural, and historical part of a Netherlands

14 Dada in the Low Countries

as it had existed in early modern times, before the independence of the north in 1648. Pan-Germanicism implied that the Flemish were part of a larger ethnic unity, comprising not only the Dutch, but also the Germans as part of a northwest European Germanic "race" with common roots. In this respect, the Dutch and the Germans (and the Nordic peoples of Scandinavia) were regarded as natural allies in the fight against Romantic, Francophone predominance and oppression.

When Germany invaded Belgium, some sections of the Flemish national movement didn't regard the advance of German troops as a foreign occupation of their home country, but rather as the arrival of new racially kindred rulers who could be expected to put an end to the discrimination against Flanders. The Germans, in turn, saw their chance to placate this German(ic)-minded part of the population in occupied Belgium. They developed a cautious and quite successful *Flamenpolitik* (Flemish policy), intended to realize some of the objectives of the Flemish movement in exchange for support. One of the most significant acts was the opening of a Flemish section at the University of Ghent. This gesture gained broad sympathy among Flemish nationalists, of whom a considerable number, the so-called "Activists" (in contrast to those remaining "passive"), collaborated with the German occupiers. When the old Belgian central government regained control again over the whole of Belgium after the Armistice of 1918, this Flemish collaboration with the Germans was met with rigorous measures, including the prohibition of collaborationist organizations and the persecution of known "Activists." Yet some achievements from the wartime occupation, such as the Flemish University of Ghent, were not reversed.

Whereas in the course of World War I, Belgium had been struck by large devastations, by the displacement of large sections of the population, and by the aggravation of the language conflict, the Netherlands had managed to remain neutral during the war. However, this significant difference contributed to a temporary intensification of Belgian-Dutch cultural exchange, even though cultural life in the Netherlands and Belgium had been developing in slightly different ways in the course of time. Although Dutch and Belgian modernist and avant-garde writers and artists were oriented toward Paris, Berlin, and Munich, rather than toward Antwerp or Brussels (in the case of the Netherlands), or toward Amsterdam (in the case of Belgium), cross-border cultural relations were intensified during World War I because many Belgian artists were part of the large stream of Belgian refugees seeking asylum in the Netherlands between 1914 and 1918.³⁴ The periodical *Revue du Feu*, which would launch Dada in Holland for the first time, was actually a Belgian-Dutch project, financed and led by the Belgian musician and poet Arthur Pétronio, who was among those Belgian intellectuals fleeing from the horrors of war and foreign occupation after 1914.

II.

Considering the fact that Belgium and the Netherlands, despite all historical, political, cultural, and linguistic similarities, have been separate entities for a long time, with particularities of their own, it may seem more logical to treat both countries individually. The following pages however, are not conceived as a contribution to the national history of Dadaism in Belgium or the Netherlands, but rather as a contribution to the history of international Dadaism. From this perspective, several arguments favor the joint discussion of the history of Dadaism in both countries. The adoption, manifestation, and discussion of Dadaism in the Low Countries shared many common features and also some basic preconditions, structuring the apprehension of Dada in Belgium and the Netherlands according to comparable coordinates. These coordinates may actually be observed as well in other sectors of the wider Dada orbit; a broader comparativist approach could well put things in a different light. It should be repeated once more that "Dada in the Low Countries" is not to be understood as a new fixed denomination replacing "Dada Holland" and "Dada Belgium" by another fixed transnational (or from a Grand Dutch perspective, disowned national) entity. "Dada in the Low Countries" is only a provisional framework in the geographically subdivided approach of the present series, which should only be regarded as a temporary focus for the duration of the following narrative.

As far as the similarities between the Netherlands and Belgium from the perspective of an international historiography of Dadaism are concerned, attention should be drawn—in first instance—to a commonplace with profound implications: Dada started in Zurich, Switzerland, and not in Belgium or in the Netherlands. Dada was, in other words, a foreign phenomenon, a movement from abroad that did not originate in either country, despite the involvement of some Dutch nationals in Dada in Zurich and Berlin, notwithstanding the explicit claim by Pansaers that he was already a Dadaist "as the word Dada was not yet invented,"³⁵ and despite the imaginary biography of Bonset, to whom Dada-like poetry was attributed in a comprehensive anthology published in 1921, although the poetry was actually written by van Doesburg in 1915 or even 1913.³⁶ Examined more closely, Bonset's early Dada poetry comprised cubo-futurist experiments by van Doesburg, whereas Pansaers's claim to be a Dadaist before the invention of Dadaism was rather part of his personal mythology, corresponding with a tendency that can also be observed in other Dada sections: the predating of one's Dada involvement, thus allowing the claim of a more important role in the development of the Dada movement.³⁷ To put it in terms of Tzara: "There are some people who have antedated their manifestos to make other people believe that they had the idea of their own

16 Dada in the Low Countries

greatness a little earlier."³⁸

The fact still remains that Dada was initiated in Zurich and adopted in Berlin and Paris before reaching the Low Countries. And the same can be said for the avant-garde innovations that manifested themselves around 1910: cubism in France, expressionism in Germany, and futurism in Italy. These currents didn't arise in the Low Countries immediately, but reached Belgium and the Netherlands with some delay.³⁹ This may in part be caused by a certain degree of conservatism, due to which, according to an apocryphal maxim by Heinrich Heine, everything happened fifty years later in the Netherlands.⁴⁰ In the same key, van Doesburg began an article on Dutch avant-garde writing in the Flemish review *Ça Ira!*: "Holland is the country of pretentious ignorance and rigorous conservatism."⁴¹

Probably more relevant is the fact that it took some time before a certain new "ism" became recognizable as a new current, and that it took even more time before this "ism" was not only recognized but also appreciated as an innovative new movement. In general, it seems that only during, and particularly, immediately after World War I, a plethora of fluctuating new groupings of artists and writers with an apparent avant-garde inclination emerged in both the Netherlands and Belgium. These artists and writers opposed the hegemonic pre-war literary and artistic establishment, which was by and large still in the grasp of the nineteenth century. No doubt this opposition was in part dictated by the practical necessity for the newcomers to conquer a place of their own in the literary and artistic field. To create opportunities for publication or exhibition of their work, new reviews were founded and artistic alliances—as temporary communities of interest—emerged to enable the organization of collective exhibitions after the model of the Parisian *Indépendents* and *Section d'Or*. Yet, in part, the young opposition also possessed a genuinely innovative dimension. Some groups consciously went off the beaten track. They tried to initiate new aesthetic approaches of their own or appropriated recent developments from abroad, in particular, the pre-war avant-garde developments from France, Germany, and Italy.

Although, broadly speaking, Dutch and Belgian artists familiarized themselves with the foreign avant-garde only in the course of and immediately after World War I, some exceptions to this rule can be distinguished. For example, Piet Mondrian,⁴² Otto van Rees, and Adya van Rees-Dutilh⁴³ were already recuperating aspects of cubist innovation before the war started. They were, however, living close to the avant-garde fire in Paris. Other examples are the Belgian painter Henri Le Fauconnier and the Dutch painter and writer Erich Wichman, who appropriated elements of cubist and futurist aesthetics before 1914,⁴⁴ and the Belgian writer Henri Maassen, who contacted Marinetti in 1909, to discuss the formulation of a Belgian Futurist manifesto; Maassen died, however, in 1911.⁴⁵ But the cases of Mondrian, the van Rees

couple, Le Fauconnier, Wichman, and Maassen are mere exceptions. The experimental avant-garde turn in the development of van Doesburg and an Ostajen was more symptomatic of the relatively late entry of the historical avant-garde in the Low Countries. As late as the spring of 1914, van Doesburg submitted three paintings of an epigone impressionist provenance to the Parisian Salon des Indépendents.⁴⁶ It was only after the beginning of the war that van Doesburg started to develop more advanced avant-garde conceptions, particularly in the years 1915-16. The champion of Belgian—or to be more precise, Flemish—modernism, van Ostajen revealed himself as an expressionist during the war, whereas his pre-war beginnings were, like those of van Doesburg, still by and large of an impressionist provenance.⁴⁷ It is expressionism, in particular, that gained considerable support among innovative Dutch and Belgian artists in the war years, although expressionism grew to full stature in the Low Countries only after the war, at a time when expressionism in Germany had already reached its apex and was unmistakably in decline.⁴⁸ Whereas cubism and futurism were also noticed and, to some extent, appropriated, expressionism was the most popular trend in modernist art and literature among the new generation of Dutch and Belgian writers and artists with an avant-garde inclination.

III.

As for the European avant-garde as a whole, the avant-garde in the Low Countries was marked by an unremitting innovative urge. This implies that developments from abroad were not adopted unquestioningly. Instead, attempts were made to enhance the innovations retrieved from foreign expressionism, cubism, and futurism by self-developed accentuations and alterations or by idiosyncratic combinations of elements from the different pre-war "isms." In part, this resulted in self-styled, rather obscure, mediocre, and artificial private "isms," combining avant-garde elements with previous styles—symbolism, impressionism, and naturalism. In Holland, for example, in the so-called "transcendental realism" of Laurens van Kuik,⁴⁹ the "rhythmic pointillism" of Bernard Canter,⁵⁰ or the private style of Johannes Tielens, whose oeuvre showed—according to Canter—"many styles, Futurist, Cubist, Rhythmic, Impressionist, sometimes attempts to unify these different styles."⁵¹ Van Kuik, Canter, and Tielens were leading representatives of the Rotterdam-based artists' association De Branding (The Breakers), one of the main artistic groupings rivaling De Stijl in the early 1920s. It was actually De Branding that showed works by Schwitters for the first time in the Netherlands.

Along with the relatively broad apprehension of expressionist aesthetics, the self-developed adaptations of the pre-war avant-garde

18 Dada in the Low Countries

achievements not only led toward the half-baked provincialism of De Branding, they also generated a completely new development toward a constructivist aesthetic, although contemporary developments in the same direction can be observed in other countries. In Germany and Switzerland, a comparable development took shape in the wake of expressionism and Dadaism, exemplified in *Der Sturm* and the Swiss Dada-related artists' associations *Neues Leben* (New Life) and *Radikale Künstler* (Radical Artists).⁵² A development towards constructivism also gained momentum in Eastern Europe among Russian cubo-futurists and Hungarian Activists. The avant-garde in the Low Countries was soon no longer abreast of events, but, on the contrary, held a leading position in the development of a constructivist aesthetic.⁵³ This was especially true for the artists and writers related to the review *De Stijl*—on an international level, a main platform for and a driving force behind the constructivist turn of large sections of the European avant-garde.

From a contemporary perspective, however, *De Stijl* can be regarded as a rather peripheral phenomenon in the Low Countries. The relevance of *De Stijl* was only recognized many years later, after World War II. In the 1910s and 1920s, *De Stijl* had a quite marginal status in the Netherlands, judging by the rather distanced or even negative reception of the journal, the often scathing verdicts on *De Stijl* in contemporary criticism, and the fact that most of its subscribers were actually contributors to the review.⁵⁴ *De Stijl* was, however, not entirely isolated. In Flanders, the program and aesthetic principles of *De Stijl* struck a sympathetic chord among artists and writers with avant-garde inclinations,⁵⁵ corresponding to a considerable extent with the constructivist direction of *De Stijl*. A constructivist interest, and to some extent, a constructivist turn (though not as rigid as in *De Stijl*), can be observed in reviews like the Antwerp-based *Ça Ira!*, *Het Overzicht*, and *De Driehoek*,⁵⁶ as well as in the work and conceptions of van Ostaijen, who termed his own constructivism “emancipated Cubism.” In Groningen, a town in the north of the Netherlands, a constructivist strand can also be observed in the work of Werkman and some other members of the local artists' association *De Ploeg* (The Gang, or The Plow), although *De Ploeg* as a whole was oriented towards expressionism rather than constructivism.⁵⁷

It is in particular among those artists and writers who belonged to the constructivist-oriented spectrum of the avant-garde in the Low Countries that Dada could count on a certain response, albeit on the whole a rather meager, dispersed reaction. Schippers's earlier quoted assessment of the quite unsuccessful ventures of Dadaism in the Netherlands seems even more true for Belgium. It is not just impossible to distinguish a Dada group in either country—it was also impossible to speak of a collective or coherent reception of Dadaism. Not only in the Low Countries as a whole, but also in Holland, Belgium, or Flanders respectively, such a collectivity is virtually non-existent. In summary, the history of Dadaism in the Low Countries is a largely fragmented

20 Dada in the Low Countries

Jean Weisgerber (Brussels: Labor, 1991), 289-312.

6. See *Dada global*, Raimund Meyer, Judith Hossli, Guido Magnaguagno, Juri Steiner, and Hans Bolliger, eds., (Zurich: Limmat, 1994).

7. A simultaneously published anthology with almost the same title, *DADA total. Manifeste Aktionen Texte Bilder*, ed. Angela Merte, Karl Riha and Jörgen SchSfer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994), however, still employs Richter's original set of six, extended with "Dada Holland." The only difference with Richter's classification is the separate staging of "Dada Geneva" (Serfer and Schad continued their Dada activity elsewhere in Switzerland) and "Dada Tyrole" (Dada in Zurich, Cologne, and Paris on collective holiday in the Austrian mountains, as separate branch forwarded by Raoul Schrott in, *Dada 21/22. Musikalische Fischsuppe mit Reiseindrucken. Eine Dokumentation der beiden Dadajahre in Tirol* [Innsbruck: Haymon, 1988]).

8. K. Schippers, "Dada Holland," in Bergius and Roters, *Tendenzen*, 3/92. See note 7.

9. Weisgerber, *Les Avant-gardes littéraires*, 283. See note 8.

10. Richter, *DADA - Kunst und Antikunst*, 205-06.

11. Not even when Dadaism in Zurich, Berlin, and Paris are rigorously played off against one another, as in Huelsenbeck's early accounts of the Dada movement, originally published in 1920. See Richard Huelsenbeck, "Die dadaistische Bewegung. Eine Selbstbiographie," in *Neue Rundschau* 31 (1920), no. 2:972-979; Richard Huelsenbeck, *En avant Dada. Die Geschichte des Dadaismus* (Hamburg: Nautilus, 1984); Richard Huelsenbeck, "Dada siegt," in Richard Huelsenbeck and Tristan Tzara, *Dada siegt! Bilanz und Erinnerung* (Hamburg: Nautilus/Nemo Press, 1985), 7-53.

12. Cf. Miklavz Prosenec, *Die Dadaisten in Zürich* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1967); Raimund Meyer, "'Dada ist gross, Dada ist schön'. Zur Geschichte von 'Dada Zürich,'" in *Dada in Zürich*, ed. Hans Bolliger, Guido Magnaguagno and Raimund Meyer (Zürich: Arche 1985), 9-95; Hanne Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas. Die Berliner Dadaisten und ihre Aktionen* (Giessen: Anabas, 1989); Michel Sanouillet, *Dada à Paris. Nouvelle édition revue et corrigée* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993).

13. The qualification "*Dadaistische Hauskapelle*" is used by Kurt Schwitters; cf. Kurt Schwitters, "Dadaismus in Holland," *Merz* 1 (1923): 3. *Hauskapelle* can be translated as "resident orchestra" or "resident band." The name allows quite divergent interpretations. It refers to Schwitters's specific conception of Dada as developed in relation with the 1923 Dada tour in Holland: it was, according to Schwitters, the duty of those "responsible for Dadaism in Holland" to stimulate the dormant, resident Dadaism in the audience at the carnivalesque soirées (see chapter seven), like a resident band creating a party ambiance by means of musical entertainment. "Resident orchestra" hints at the same time at the fact that the tour was directed from The

20 Dada in the Low Countries

Jean Weisgerber (Brussels: Labor, 1991), 289-312.

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Hague, the royal residence with an official Resident Orchestra. The starting point of the Dada tour was the premises of the respectable *Haagsche Kunstkring* (The Hague art circle). These premises were at Binnenhof (literally, "Inner Court"), the official seat of both the Dutch government and parliament.

14. Tristan Tzara, "Quelques Présidents et Présidentes," *Bulletin Dada*, no. 6 (1920): 3.

15. Schwitters, "Dadaïsmus in Holland," 3.

16. I. K. Bonset, "Manifest 0,96013," *Mécano*, no. blue (1922): 2.

17. Werner Haftmann, "Nachwort," in Hans Richter, *DADA—Kunst und Antikunst*, 222-23.

18. *Ibid.*, 223.

19. See Fernand Baudin, "Typo-DaDa DaDa-Typo au Royaume des bilingues," in *Cahiers Dada-Surréalisme* 3 (1969): 45.

20. See Gerrit Borgers, *Paul van Ostajen. Een documentatie* (The Hague: Bert Bakker, 1971), 1:309-313; José Boyens, *De genesis van Bezette Stad. Ik spreek met de mannen en regel alles wel. Brieven van Oscar Jespers aan Paul van Ostajen 1920-1921 over het ontstaan van Bezette Stad en de Antwerpse groepering van het Sienjaal* (Antwerp: Pandora, 1995), 27-40.

21. Richard Huelsenbeck, "Dadaïstisches Manifest," in *Dada-Almanach. Im Auftrag des Zentralamts der deutschen Dada-Bewegung*, ed. Richard Huelsenbeck (Hamburg: Nautilus, 1980), 38.

22. See Hubertus Gassner, "Utopisches im russischen Konstruktivismus," in *Die Konstruktion der Utopie. Ästhetische Avantgarde und politische Utopie in den 20er Jahren*, eds. Hubertus Gassner, Karlheinz Kopanski, and Karin Stengel (Kassel/Marburg: documenta/Jonas, 1992), 51.

23. Hans Arp, *Unsern täglichen Traum... Erinnerungen, Dichtungen und Betrachtungen aus den Jahren 1914-1954* (Zurich: Arche, 1995), 48.

24. Raoul Hausmann, "Dada ist mehr als Dada," *De Stijl* 4, no. 3 (1921): 40-47.

25. Richter, *DADA - Kunst und Antikunst*, 206.

26. Schippers, *Holland Dada*, 130.

27. Hendrik Werkman, "Groningen. 1923 Groote Verzoendag," *The Next Call*, no. 1 (1923): 3.

28. Quoted in Jan Martinet, ed., *Hendrik Nicolaas Werkman 1882-1945. "druksels" en gebruiksdrukwerk/"drukse" prints and general printed matter. Een keuze uit de collecties van de Stichting H.N. Werkman, Amsterdam en het Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. A selection from the collections of the H.N. Werkman Foundation, Amsterdam and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum 1977), 58.

29. See Bier, 305-07; Paul Neuhuys, "Quelques Poètes. IV. —Jean Cocteau. —Le Dadaïsme. —Tristan Tzara. —André Breton. —Philippe Soupault. —Louis Aragon. —Paul Eluard. —Francis Picabia. —Clément Pansaers," *Ça Ira!* 14 (1921): 64; Clément Pansaers, "DADA. Sa

22 Dada in the Low Countries

Naissance, sa vie, sa mort," *Ça Ira!* 16 (1921).

30. For a more extensive discussion of Dada as a project and the problems addressed in this paragraph, see Hubert van den Berg, *Avantgarde und Anarchismus. Dada in Zürich und Berlin* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Carl Winter 1999), 34-75.

31. The history of Dada in the Low Countries is by and large a history of the reception of Dada, since Dada as a project was previously developed abroad. It should be noted here that the following contribution doesn't completely cover the history of its reception. On the contrary, as part of a series on the (international) extension of the Dada movement, the present monograph focuses only on that section of the reception of Dada that can be regarded as the Dutch and Belgian adaptation of Dadaist programmatics. This adaptation was confined to the avant-garde strata of cultural life in the Low Countries. The reception of Dada, be it as an international project or be it as its local adaptation in Holland and Belgium, was much wider. "Dada" was widely adopted as a critical category and classification in contemporary debates on literature, visual arts, and music. Examples include the following: in Johan Meylander [André de Ridder], "Dada," *Het Roode Zeil* 1, no. 5 (1920): 194-95; and Martinus Nijhoff, "Over eigen werk" [1935], in Martinus Nijhoff, *Lees maar, er staat niet wat er staat. Keuze uit de oorspronkelijke gedichten* (The Hague: Bert Bakker/Daamen, 1959), 17. The exact purport of the way Dada is addressed by these and other key figures of cultural life in Belgium and Holland can, however, not be discussed properly from a perspective starting from the Dada movement (and, hence, its auctorial intentions), but only from a perspective starting from the state of the arts, from the considerations and discussions in the contemporary critique, from the specific horizon of the (non-Dadaist) authors addressing Dada or using "Dada" as a critical term. Although this wider apprehension of Dada is to be distinguished from the proper history of the Dadaist project, it could give decisive clues about the contemporary significance of Dada in the cultural life of the Low Countries between the two World Wars.

32. Present-day Dutch distinguishes between *Nederland* (singular) for Holland and *Nederlanden* (plural) for the area designated also as "Low Countries", i.e. Holland, Belgium and some other odd bits, especially when the interrelated history and culture of these countries is addressed. Since this distinction cannot be made in English, only the indication "Low Countries" is used here. For "Low Countries" and *Nederlanden* as a single historical framework and for a more extensive description of the commonalties and differences mentioned in the following brief outline; cf. Jan Romein, *De Lage Landen bij de zee. Geïllustreerde geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche Volk van Duinkerken tot Delfzijl* (Utrecht: W. de Haan, 1934) and *Algemene geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, ed. D. P. Blok et. al. (Haarlem: Fibula-Van Dishoeck, 1977-1983).

33. See Leen and Adriaens-Pannier, *Avant-garde in België*, 12; Adriaan Venema, *De ballingen. Frits van den Berghe, Gustave de Smet en Rik Wouters in Nederland 1914-1921* (Baarn: Het Wereldvenster, 1979).

34. Pansaers, *Bar Nicanor*, 199.

35. See I. K. Bonset, "Anthologie-Bonset," *De Stijl* 4, no. 11 (1921), 162-173; this imaginary biography is even further backdated to 1902 in I. K. Bonset, "Van het woord en de letterkunde 1917-1927," *De Stijl* 8, no. 79-84 (1927): 10-13.

36. Notably, in the cases of Johannes Baader and Walter Serner. Baader claimed the invention of the word "Dada" in 1913; cf. Johannes Baader, *Oberdada. Schriften, Manifeste, Flugblätter, Billets, Werke und Taten* eds. Hanne Bergius, Norbert Miller, and Karl Riha (Lahn-Giessen: Anabas 1977), 22. Serner antedated his manifesto *Letzte Lockerung* from early 1919 to March 1918. This enabled him to launch a campaign against Tzara, accusing him of committing plagiarism with the "Manifeste Dada 1918;" cf. Van den Berg, *Avantgarde und Anarchismus*, 379; and Hubert van den Berg, "Tristan Tzara's 'Manifeste Dada 1918': Anti-Manifest oder manifestierte Indifferenz? Salomo Friedlaenders 'schöpferische Indifferenz' und das dadaistische Selbstverständnis," *Neophilologus* 79, no. 3 (1995): 366-67.

37. Tristan Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries* (London/Paris/New York: Calder/Riverrun, 1992), 40.

38. For a general discussion of the belated advance of the foreign avant-garde in the Low Countries; see Jan Brandt Corstius, "The International Context of Dutch Literary Modernism 1915-1930," in *Nijhoff, Van Ostaijen, "De Stijl," Modernism in the Netherlands and Belgium in the First Quarter of the 20th Century. Six Essays*, ed. Francis Bulhof (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 8-20; A. van Elslander, "Flemish Literature in the First Decades of the Twentieth Century," in *Nijhoff, Van Ostaijen*, 23-36; Frederik Leen, "In cirkels en kringen. Kunstenaarsgroepen en-bonden van de voorhoede in België 1917-1929," in *Avant-garde in België*, 11-57; Paul Hadermann, "De modernistische doorbraak in Vlaanderen: tijdschriften, van Ostaijen, Burssens, Moens, Brunclair en verwante figuren," in Paul Hadermann, *Paul van Ostaijen en de kunst van zijn tijd 1896-1996*, eds. Michel Bartosik, Michel Dupuis and Jean Weisgerber (Ghent: Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde, 1997), 3-118.

39. See Martin van Amerongen, *Heine en Holland* (Amsterdam: Ambo, 1997), 13.

40. Theo van Doesburg, "La Littérature d'Avant-Garde en Hollande," *Ça Ira!* 12 (1921): 241.

41. See Carel Blotkamp, *Mondriaan. Destructie als kunst* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1994), 54-81.

42. See Schippers, *Holland Dada*, 3-20.

43. See Frans van Burkom and Hans Mulder, *Erich Wichman 1890-*

24 Dada in the Low Countries

1929, *tussen idealisme en rancune* (Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 1983).

44. See Walter Gobbers, "Résonances futuristes," *Les Avant-gardes littéraires*, 173-204; Walter Fähnders, "'Vielleicht ein Manifest.' Zur Entwicklung des avantgardistischen Manifestes," in *Die ganze Welt ist eine Manifestation*, 24-25.

45. Carel Blotkamp, "Theo van Doesburg," in *De beginjaren van De Stijl 1917-1922*, Carel Blotkamp, et al., eds. (Utrecht: Reflex, 1982), 16-17.

46. See Paul Hadermann, *Het vuur in de verte. Paul van Ostaïjens kunstopvattingen in het licht van de Europese avant-garde* (Antwerpen: Ontwikkeling, 1970), 15-19.

47. See José and Piet Boyens, eds., *Expressionisme in Nederland 1910-1930* (Zwolle/Laren: Waanders/Singer Museum, 1994).

48. Cited in Els Brinkman, *De Branding 1917-1926* (Rotterdam: Kunstpublicaties, 1991), 99-104.

49. Cited in *ibid.*, 74-75.

50. Cited in *ibid.*, 83.

51. See Martin Heller and Lutz Windhöfel, "Das Neue Leben," in *Künstlergruppen in der Schweiz 1910-1936* (Aarau: Kunstmuseum Aarau 1981), 60-93.

52. For a global outline of constructivist avant-gardism in the Low Countries; see Jan Fontijn, "Het constructivisme," in *Historische Avantgarde. Programmatiese teksten van het Italiaanse Futurisme, het Russisch Futurisme, Dada, het Constructivisme, het Surrealisme en het Tsjechisch Podtisme*, ed. Ferdinand Drijkoningen and Jan Fontijn (Amsterdam: Huis aan de drie grachten, 1982), 215-23.

53. See Carel Blotkamp, "Inleiding," Carel Blotkamp et. al., *De beginjaren*, 10.

54. See Paul de Vree, "'De Stijl' in Vlaanderen," *De Tafelronde* 3, no. 5-6 (1957): 221-26; Robert Melders, *Jozef Peeters (1895-1960)* (Antwerp/Amsterdam: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1978), 35-74.

55. See Leen and Adriaens-Pannier, *Avant-garde in België*, 177-90.

56. See Cees Hofsteenge, *De Ploeg 1918-1941, de hoogtijdagen* (Groningen: B&P, 1993); Jurrie Poot, "Werkman en de avant-garde/Werkman and the avant-garde," in *Hendrik Nicolaas Werkman 1882-1945*, ed. Han Steenbruggen and Sjoukje Posthuma (Groningen: Groninger Museum, 1995), 22-41.