

DADA WAS THERE BEFORE DERRIDA WAS THERE: THE SOUND POETRY  
OF HUGO BALL

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## ABSTRACT

In 1916, a group of artists met in Zurich, Switzerland to escape the horrors of war and to create art. The leader of this group was Hugo Ball who renamed a small café the Cabaret Voltaire. The members of the cabaret presented art in many forms. The group that met, and regularly performed at the cabaret, were known under the name dada. Ball became the unofficial poet of the group. At the cabaret, Ball presented what he called “sound poems” or “verse ohn vorte” poems. These poems lacked traditional language where words were replaced with a new language of Ball’s creation. Ball did not rely on his native German to create his sound poems. Instead, he took small snippets of many languages and his own “sounds” to create a performance based language. To aid in the creation of meaning, Ball would perform in fantastical costumes while he was reading his poems. His body would move in violent convulsions and his voice would rise to ear splitting volumes. The power of Ball’s performance reinforced the scope of his project. Meaning would come from both his “new” sounds and small parts of other languages. In doing this he would touch on many tenants of deconstruction created by Jacques Derrida. Through Derrida’s work concerning, “aural metaphors,” “difference,” and “signsponge” it is possible to see Hugo Ball, and some of the other members of dada, as early deconstructionists.

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Breanna Boulton. For the past few years we have fueled each other in the enjoyment and pleasure of art. We have even built our love for each other on this foundation. Thank you for challenging me and thank you for exposing me to so many amazing and inspiring things. Bre, your art contains the “richness and life” that so many people lack both in art and life.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

When Hugo Ball, a traveling actor from Germany, organized a group of artists in a small café under the name the Cabaret Voltaire, in Zurich Switzerland February 1916, his aim was to alter the way people interacted with art. At the cabaret, in conjunction with a loose aggregate of artists gathered under the title of dada, Ball took apart and pieced back together language in a seemingly haphazard fashion through poetry and performance. As Ball performed his sound poems, or as he called them *lautgedichte*, in glorious costumes and masks created by members of the cabaret, he drew attention to the sounds of each newly created word. Ball accented these new words with intense movement and vocal expression to enforce the scope of his project. By enforcing both sight and sound within his poetry he was helping to recreate the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or “total art work” where many art forms are present. Wagner used the term to only apply to his opera. Ball loosely interpreted the phrase and co-opted *Gesamtkunstwerk* to title his work in the cabaret. New art for Ball would be an amalgamation of these many forms of art where he would emphasize both the performative nature of his work as well as the sounds of his poetry. This combination of differing aspects of art and performance would guide much of Ball’s work at the Cabaret Voltaire and then later at the Galerie Dada.

The focus of this paper centers on the events of the Zurich dada at the onset of World War I and their deconstructive-like experiments. In Zurich, dada had a profound impact on contemporary art, how it was performed, and how the movement’s abundance of projects led to its own demise. Dada never allowed itself to define exactly what it was.

A definition of dada works as explanation to the project as a whole. Dada was a retreat into itself and away from a world at war from 1916 to early 1917. The world outside of the cabaret was violent and out of control. To oppose the fighting in contemporary Europe, Zurich acted as a meeting place for performance and Fine Art. Art, from all over Europe was presented and reinforced with fierce performances, affected but not totally controlled, by the politics of the day.

At the center of Zurich dada was one of the group's chief architects, Hugo Ball. Ball through his sound poetry created a whole new language for the cabaret. His contributions not only to Fine Art but to poetry show depth in creative control. It is through Ball that one can trace the movement of dada, what dada tries to stand for and what it rejects. Ball's sound poetry made it possible for a spectator at the cabaret to come away with a different meaning than the person that sat beside him. Ball's poetry deconstructed itself, giving the audience an infinite number of possible meanings all which could be validated. Ball's experiments in poetry were done years before the term "deconstruction" or its proponent, Jacques Derrida had entered the discourse of literary theory and practice. The paper will highlight the achievements of the cabaret and how elements of deconstruction can be used to explain their art. In order to situate dada's work in relation to deconstruction, it will be important to look at several aspects of Derrida's theories concerning deconstruction. First, the argument will be made showing how Ball creates an explosion of possible meanings through the break in signifier and signified. This process occurred over a period of time while Ball worked through his Expressionist poetry. Words for Ball became obsolete in his later sound poetry. And from this banishment of traditional language comes an emotive and powerful new language. In

order to create meaning of Ball's work it is useful to employ "aural metaphors," particularly Derrida's ideas of "difference" and "signsponge." Through the theories of Derrida it's possible to fully reveal the power of Hugo Ball's poetry and the extent of Zurich dada's significance.

## CHAPTER 2. HUGO BALL

Hugo Ball was born in 1886 in Pirmasens Germany. The town he grew up in was small and near the French border. His upbringing was religious and structured around the church. His family was poor and couldn't afford for Ball to study at a University, and for years he took classes when he could in his spare time. Fortunately, his family arranged for him to qualify to enter college in Munich. Without formal training it would have been difficult for Ball to develop his unique style of writing. Many of Hugo Ball's influences were met through his education. Without these connections and influences Ball easily could have continued his apprenticeship as a leather worker and not as a poet.

His major movement towards the theatre, and to Zurich dada, came when he quit his studies in philosophy to join Max Reinhardt's drama school in Berlin in 1910. Ball was soon to quit Reinhardt's school falling under his teachers "influence of his productions in the circus and the intimate theatres" (Ball 9). For the next few years Ball moved back and forth from Munich to Berlin, acting and writing for several performing troupes. In 1914, at the start of World War I, Ball tried to sign up for military service. After failing medical examinations three different times, he visited the front lines in 1914 in search of his friend and colleague Hans Leybold. Ball was so appalled by what he saw there that he became, "unwilling to participate in what he understood as German folly, he determined to flee the country" (Elderfield xviii). Ball had traveled through Western Europe acting in various troupes before the war. But when World War I started, he quickly moved to Switzerland to avoid service.

While in Zurich, the wheels of dada began to move with other artists fleeing a Europe at war and entering a neutral Switzerland. Ball was described by one of the first five members of the Zurich dada and closest confidant, Richard Huelsenbeck, in his Memoirs of a Dada Drummer as, “Tall, his hair was black, and his complexion bad. He was obviously poor; he could never spend much money, and he lived in very modest rooms” (Huelsenbeck 2). Ball like Huelsenbeck had fled Germany at the start of the war and had also avoided military service. Unlike Huelsenbeck, who was supported by his wealthy parents, Ball was not a man of means. Ball lived in near poverty with his wife and adopted child all of his life. Many of Ball’s closest friends supported him and his writing right until his death in 1927. It was difficult for Ball to ever make a living solely off of his writing. Huelsenbeck, even though financially stable, was Ball’s closest ally at the Zurich cabaret. Both men’s work even resembled each other’s in style and scope but Ball led the initial shock wave of sound poetry on Zurich’s unsuspecting crowds.

Huelsenbeck implies that much of Ball’s inspiration for sound poetry came from his environment. Huelsenbeck wrote of Ball that he, “always leaned slightly as he walked, his head bent as if he were listening to something and as if it seemed important not to miss the least word spoken by whomever he was with” (2). Hugo Ball was very in tune with the world around him; he paid attention to the sounds and clamors that people made. In his diary he even compares competition between people on the street to the process of beating a drum. One person beats a little louder to drown out the other’s influence. He goes on to state in Flight Out of Time, “everyone always has a year to think of a new fault in tremolo, so each person is always competing with and listening carefully to others” (Ball 39). According to Huelsenbeck listening influenced Ball’s poetry greatly.

Huelsenbeck writes, “he [Ball] coupled a whole world of critical reflection with a superior education” (Huelsenbeck 3). Ball’s sound poetry was a product of academic contemplation and poetic experimentation through close study of people through the languages they spoke.

Many writers and academics have concluded that the output of the Zurich dada, specifically Ball’s sound poems, is less than quality work. Even his wife, Emmy Hennings who had tried to elevate his name had glossed over his sound poetry in her 1946 foreword to Flight out of Time. In spite of Ball’s contemporaries who glossed over his sound poetry, the poetry stands as an avant-garde marvel. Ball’s poem “Karawane,” considered by many Ball disciples as his finest poem, is composed of made up words coupled with existing sounds. Although Hugo Ball spoke German, his sound poetry did not reflect his German language upbringing solely. Sound poetry was a new language as the poem itself clearly suggests.

jolifanto bambla o falli bambla  
großiga m'pfa habla horem  
egiga goramen  
higo bloiko russula huju  
hollaka hollala  
anlogo bung  
blago bung blago bung  
bosso fataka  
ü üü ü  
schampa wulla wussa olobo  
hej tatta gorem  
eschige zunbada  
wulubu ssubudu uluwu ssubudu  
tumba ba-umf  
kusa gauma  
ba – umf.

Many academics discredit and treat “Karawane” and other sound poems as avant-garde nothingness, full of squeaks and shrieks. This, however, misses the value of the work. Ball’s sound poetry was performance based, entertaining, and it created an emotional language experienced through performance. His new language came alive when Ball moved on the small cabaret stage. The sounds stood for something that each audience member created differently in their minds.

Even Ball’s contemporaries had a tough time understanding his new language. Walter Serner, an artist and intellectual floating in and around Zurich stated of the group, “They no longer believe in the intellect and its words...and all they produce are monkey-tricks” (Green 25). The radicalism of Ball’s poetry was challenged not for its merit but because it alienated the listener. Serner saw Ball’s new language as, “Unforgivable blasphemy against the intellect” (25) because the language did not follow traditional elements of meaning. Serner was looking for a conventional meaning for understanding. When that was not presented he gave up on Ball’s new language. Serner missed that a large part of Ball’s goal was to create a new language through poetry and performance. When the artist is the only one speaking a “wordless” language accentuated with grotesque movements and crude costumes, it is easy for the conventional listener to dismiss how the poem works. Serner clearly did not understand he only wanted to criticize without involving himself directly in the new language. Overall the biggest supporters of this new language came from Ball’s fellow cabaret performers. Unlike their sometimes fickle audiences the members of the cabaret were on the same wavelength as Ball. After a few performances at the cabaret, Ball asks of Huelsenbeck, “Is that an idea of yours” (Ball 66). For those situated nearest to the cabaret sound poetry was both an

exercise in creating language and a viable medium for artistic expression. To examine the poetry of Hugo Ball, this paper argues, is to find a wealth of exciting ideas created at the cabaret that many of Ball's contemporaries saw as sheer noise.

### CHAPTER 3. ZURICH AND THE CABARET VOLTAIRE

All of the “noise” created by the cabaret was generated from a small floor with no stage located at 1 Spiegelgasse in Zurich, Switzerland. Richard Huelsenbeck wrote of the cabaret in his memoirs: “Whenever someone opened the door, thick clouds of smoke would come pouring out like the smoke that hovers over fields during the burning of harvest leaves” (Huelsenbeck 9). The cabaret was not the most charming or inviting place. Performance over décor came first at the cabaret and for all of its members. Huelsenbeck states that, “the furnishings of the cabaret were inconceivably primitive” (10). The Zurich dada acted and recited their work without luxury. Spectators in the know came to the cabaret expecting artistic entertainment devoid of a rigid professionalism. The average audience member would listen to poetry. The audience would hear discussions about painting, and would see the members of the cabaret performing their own original works, including Ball and his sound poetry.

Hugo Ball’s sound poems, or *lautgedichte* as he sometimes called them, were created from existing sounds with much of his inspiration coming from as many as four different languages. Ball also created new sounds that did not resemble existing language. To accentuate his “sounds” or new words, he would transform his body to match the particular poem that he was performing by improvising his movement based on the poem. The performance and the poem came together to unify Ball’s art. Ball wrote in his diary Flight Out of Time published in 1927, that he wanted, “rewrite life every day” (Ball 56) and a way for him to do this was in public performance. For Ball, “nowhere are the weaknesses of a poem revealed as much as in a public reading....Art is joyful only as

long as it has richness and life” (54). Poetry and especially the reading of it should be exciting. Poetry he asserted is only an adequate tool for expression if you can feel its power. The performance for Ball was crucial in order to show the “richness and life” he saw missing from the popular art of the day. Ball wrote about the effort to capture this “richness:” “Our attempt to entertain the [cabaret] audience with artistic things forces us in an exciting and instructive way to be increasingly lively, new, and naïve” (54). It wasn’t enough for Ball to create “richness in life” but he felt he needed to continually reinvent that “richness” into a new and entertaining experience each time for the audience. Art should be a spectacle and it should be joyful and fresh.

Ball’s co-conspirators at the cabaret also felt the need to entertain. The group that would come to define themselves as dada were four “sailors” from around Europe: Richard Huelsenbeck, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, and Hans Arp. The makeup of the Cabaret Voltaire was thus an international mix when it formed the first week of February 1916. Outraged by the horror of World War I the members of the cabaret met in Zurich, like many other artists and innovators of their time. Zurich was a meeting spot for those wanting to escape war ravaged Europe. Not one of the original members of the cabaret was from Switzerland where the group was making its home. Ball was born in Germany as well as Huelsenbeck; Tzara and Janco were both from Romania, and Arp was from the disputed Alsace. This multi-national mix was reflected in the way the group created its art. As Ball noted in his diaries about the world around the cabaret, “our cabaret is a gesture. Every word that is spoken and sung here says at least this one thing: that this humiliating age has not succeeding in winning our respect....Its cannons? Our big drum

drowns them” (61). The outside world for the cabaret was a muse for creating “high art” they made culture while guns were firing all over Europe.

The five main members of the Cabaret Voltaire, while in Zurich, distinguished themselves from the other “exiles” in town under the name of dada. Under this name the events of the cabaret became public through the opening of the Cabaret Voltaire.

Although the origins of the word are disputed by various members of the group, the word itself has many meanings. In French the word dada means “hobby horse” and in Romanian the word simply means “yes.” The auspicious origins of the group’s name plays into its aura. After all, dada could mean a hobby horse, the word “yes,” or a loosely structured group of people creating art. Either answer you choose to define dada is correct, because as Ball writes of those aligned with dada the artists, “welcome any kind of mask. Any game of hide-and-seek, with its inherent power to deceive” (65).

This strange explication works because dada never takes itself too seriously and intentionally tries to deceive. Dada as conceived by these artists welcomed the idea that their group could be a “hobby horse” or the word “yes.” Dada was a kind of mask that shifted its meaning in an enigmatic way. Most inferred definitions of dada could possibly be true. To further the “veiling” of their performances, physical masks were created by Marcel Janco. Ball writes of Janco’s masks, “the motive power of these masks was irresistibly conveyed to us. All at once we realized the significance of such a mask for mime and for the theater” (64). The use of the mask not only created distance between performer and audience, it allowed each performer to become a new character. The masks were metaphors for the types of art the Zurich dada was creating. Masks didn’t allow the spectator to see fully what was going on. Masks shield, deceive, and hide the

reality behind them. Dada shielded, deceived, and hid the reality of the meager surroundings around it. Dada was a type of mask that presented whatever visage it wanted at the time of performance and then retreated behind that “false” visage.

Dada’s deceptive style draws attention to itself by creating art that places the audience into the world of dada. And the world of dada was not an easily decipherable place. Ball would say about dada (quoting Oscar Wilde) that, “common sense must always be opposed, and at any price” (6). Dada thus was an “intellectual movement” that rejected varying members of the group’s attempts at definition and uniform philosophy. Richard Huelsenbeck writes, “Being a Dadaist means saying yes to everything that dada was committed to: insecurity, lostness, the paradox of the human attitude in an age seeking new forms, not only artistically but also and mainly morally” (Huelsenbeck 141). Dada was an experience unto itself. Dada was meant to be deceptive; dada was meant to be fun, and dada was meant to be dada. Dada was a new movement; although not overtly intellectual, it forced itself to be exciting and spontaneous. Dada was a new practice meant to change the way art is performed, viewed, and created through performance.

The space in which cabaret members performed was very small and done in a decidedly amateurish style. Marcel Janco created most of the costumes and masks the performers used and, besides Ball, no one had prior experience in the theatre. Even Ball’s acting experience had been considered a failure, though he had written and performed in many plays. Out on the road in Europe before the war Ball was never able to connect with a troupe of actors and subsequently bounced from place to place. He did however, act in Munich as well as in Zurich right before the formation of Zurich dada. Ball’s partner and future wife Emmy Hennings, who was present during the initial wave of the

Zurich dada, was considered a talented actress and was a valued performer at the Cabaret Voltaire. With only a handful of actors of experience the cabaret began to create and recreate art in Zurich even though no one was considered an expert on how to run a cabaret. Very little is mentioned in Ball's diary about the creation of the cabaret. With barely any fanfare, 1 Spiegelgasse became the home to the Zurich dada.

Even with Ball's experience and education in the theatre the performances at the cabaret were crude. As Annabelle Henkin-Melzer notes, "The dada actor is an anti-actor. All craft is ignored. He uses his unskilled body and spirit capable of spontaneous emanations, allows himself manifestos and poems, some pots and bells, cardboard and paint, a chair or two and perhaps a bed-sheet" (Henkin-Melzer 59). The events at the Cabaret Voltaire were done on a miniscule budget. Emotion and overall spectacle was more important than professionalism. Performance was the focus of the cabaret and that performance was left to the discretion of the artist. Henkin-Melzer writes of the dada performer, "Placing himself and the moment of his creation at the center of the artistic event, the dada performer explored the boundary between primitive exaltation and manic excess" (59). Although their costumes and movements may have been crude and unskilled, the spectator was treated to what Ball called "manic excess." The excess would be channeled through the power of Ball's riveting performances.

For Ball this "manic excess" was later seen in the terms of religion and not through performance. Hugo Ball saw his actions as releases of the highest order sometimes verging on the spiritual. After moving away from Zurich, Ball spent the rest of his life coming to grips with his Catholic faith and his dada past. When recounting one of his performances at the cabaret, Ball sees himself as a priest and notices the, "face of a

ten-year-old boy, trembling and hanging avidly on the priest's words in the requiems and high masses in his home parish" (Ball 71). He considered himself something of a "bishop," especially as he edited his diary heavily after coming back to the faith of his youth. At the time though, religion was not something the members of dada concerned themselves with. Huelsenbeck writes, "we were [Zurich dada] totally unconcerned about race, nationality, or religion" (Huelsenbeck 2). Ball, later in life, interjected faith into his work with dada, a faith that the members rejected. Huelsenbeck, in his memoirs, noticed Ball's movement toward the church. He states, "When I met Ball, he was anything but religious and never spoke about Catholicism" (3).

Ball's metaphorical connections with a "bishop" could easily be the work of editing later in life that was preoccupied with religion. Ball spent much of his last years writing about religious figures from centuries ago. But, religion at the cabaret and even for Ball was non-existent at the time of his residence in Zurich. If religion was not important what was central to both Ball and the rest of the performers was the interaction between actor and audience. By continually changing the repertoire it helped keep the ideas fresh, but it also kept people coming through the door. The audience for the cabaret was an already established group. The whole of Europe, with the notable and neutral exception of Switzerland, were fighting to keep their land or to move their borders outward. The people that traditionally fight war all over the world are young people, and Zurich was full of them. Zurich at the onset of war was considered a college town.

The college students of Zurich could see how their lives were spared by their adoptive home of Switzerland's lack of bloodthirst. Switzerland and especially Zurich became a haven for pilgrims all over Europe escaping war. At the center of the town

lived a large percentage of students looking for places to spend their time. As Henkin-Melzer states about Zurich, “the old university town with under 200,000 inhabitants, was just enough at peace to allow the ideological conflicts of its residents to rage” (Henkin-Melzer 11). The people of Zurich could peacefully gather with one another while the rest of the world was making war with one another. The center of this artistic upheaval and safe haven was very small and the actual size of the cabaret was tiny. Henkin-Melzer writes about the size of, “The cabaret, with its 15 or 20 round tables, and a seating capacity of 35 to 50, boasted a stage of about 100 square feet” (12). Although small, the cabaret was packed the first night it opened. Ball notes in his journal that, “The place was jammed; many people could not find a seat” (Ball 50). The cabaret had an audience on opening night to witness first hand the power of dada performance that would drown the shrill sound of war.

The cabaret was not the only place that the Zurich dada presented its art. After the cabaret became riddled with financial troubles, arrangements were made for a new place called the Galerie Dada, started in March of 1917. The opening of the galerie had prompted even Hugo Ball to return to Zurich. Ball had been living in rural Italy because of absolute exhaustion from the cabaret’s nightly performances as well as his interest to finish his first and only novel. Ball wrote in his diary about the galerie that, “this is a continuation of the cabaret idea from last year. About forty people were there. Tzara came late, so I spoke about our plan to form a small group of people who would support and stimulate each other” (100). Ball’s dream was short lived; the galerie much like the Cabaret Voltaire met a quick death. The galerie lasted from March 11<sup>th</sup> to May 28<sup>th</sup> 1917 and before its short run had ended, Ball had already retreated back into rural life.

Although they were only around briefly, both the cabaret and the galerie were focal points for Ball's sound poetry and radical performances.

At the Cabaret Voltaire performances were simply called exhibitions, but at the galerie they were soirees and were performed less frequently than at the cabaret, giving the performers more time to work on their material. Soiree's were "evening parties" to showcase art in its many forms. The name "soiree" fits very comfortably with the light tone of dada. The word "soiree" implies that you are involved in a party, a party that will undoubtedly educate and entertain you, but a party nonetheless. The exhibitions and soirees at the Cabaret Voltaire and later the Galerie Dada were parties where hosts, Ball, Huelsenbeck, Janco, Tzara, and Arp led one through the world predominantly modern art. Not only did the major contributors of the Zurich dada exhibit their work, but they also showcased work from Western Europe's most daring innovators without a unifying theme for who they chose to exhibit. Music from Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg, paintings from Pablo Picasso, and the not so radical work of the Russian dramatist Anton Chekhov was presented at these soirees. Each member of the cabaret chose what they wished to write or present. Even with the openness of dada, most presentations were of contemporary art from around Europe. John Elderfield wrote in the introduction to Ball's diary notes, "There was no certain direction, (in content) and nearly all brands of modernism were equally welcomed, although, inevitably perhaps, most of the material came from French and German sources" (Ball xxiii). The Zurich dada's intentions to be truly an international in the art they presented did not work out. Zurich dada relied too heavily on their predominantly Western European origins to be a well defined grouping of international artists.

## CHAPTER 4. HUGO BALL'S EXPRESSIONIST POETRY

When one looks back on dada as a movement or a grouping of individuals it is difficult to grasp what really happened. If there is no system for explaining their motives then how does one begin to study the group? The only thing left is the art they produced devoid of their divergent definitions of it. Dada poetry, or specifically “sound poetry,” stands as a testament to their creation of a new language and a new art at the cabaret. Hugo Ball was the leader in creating this new language. Ball states about his first experiments with language in his diary, “I have invented a new genre of poems, ‘Verse ohne Worte’ [poems without words] or Lautgedichte [sound poems]” (Ball 70). Before Ball had started writing sound poetry, his poems were more traditional. In a period of only a couple years Ball went from an Expressionist line of poetry similar to, “Deine Brust stehe da wie die Torturme” (Your breasts jut out like the gate towers) to “jolifanto bambla o falli bambla.” Ball moved from traditional language to a new language of his new device. Ball’s “Expressionist” poems, his work right before his experiments with sound poetry, did not seek to rewrite language. In these poems Ball wasn’t trying to create a new language. He was solely expressing himself through a more tried and true poetic medium.

Much of Ball’s influence for his Expressionist poetry came from exhibit showcasing futurist art in 1913. Erdmute Wenzel-White writes that, “The futurist exhibit he saw yielded the kind of exuberant aesthetic emotions he sought to convey in his own work” (Wenzel-White 27). What struck Ball about this exhibit of artists such as Luigi

Russolo and Gino Severini was their, “color, line, and form all imbued with anarchic vigor that streams out far afield from the canvas” (27). For Ball, emotion and form were important in creating poetry, poetry explicitly influenced by painters of his time. From this exhibit Ball began to experiment more with his work which would eventually lead to sound poetry at the Cabaret Voltaire. Ball saw in the futurists and especially Kandinsky, “word, color, and sound that worked in a rare harmony, and he knew how to make even the most disconcerting things appear plausible and quite natural” (Ball 8). Through the use of many forms of art such as sound, performance, and literature Ball could reproduce art where each aspect of it would create an overall and unifying feeling. Sound would reinforce the performance and the performance would establish the power of the sound. But, in Ball’s Expressionist poetry, he had not yet brought all of these elements together. Instead, Ball relies heavily on a traditional form of poetry. Expressionist poetry was not meant to be performed and the value of each sound in the poem was not as important as it would become later.

But, just a few years before his inclusion with the Zurich group, Ball was making small steps toward the direction of sound poetry in his Expressionist work. “Der Henker,” one of Ball’s first published poems appeared in the short lived *Die Revolution* journal published in Munich 1913. The poem is set in a brothel where sexuality is placed at the forefront. Ball would make connections between sexuality and war in these early poems. Later, conventional language would be thwarted for a new kind of poetry. But with “Der Henker” Ball was beginning to experiment. His choice of subject matter and imagery were decidedly dark for its time. The poem is filled with scathing metaphors of women and war. The tone of the poem is harsh and unrelenting towards its subjects. Although the

poem is of a graphic nature, “Der Henker” follows strict rules of grammar but chooses somewhat taboo subjects in sexuality imbedded with dark imagery. Ball writes about a woman in the poem:

Deine Bruste stehan da wie die Torturme  
Einer besturzten Stadt, die den Feind erwartet  
Aus der Ebene.

(Your breasts jut out like the gate towers  
Of an affrighted city, that awaits the enemy  
From the plain.)

When “Der Henker” first appeared, it was confiscated by the police on the grounds of obscenity for its frank description of women. The charges of obscenity were later dropped, but Ball’s movement towards the artists that would become dada, becomes clearer with this period of work. In “Der Henker” Ball tries to write in a way that reflects the contemporary world around him influenced by others artists of the day. Rex W. Last writes that “Der Henker,” “Reflects the violent antipathy of the creative artist and intellectual toward contemporary society, and the fear that the Western world was inevitably hurtling toward the final catastrophe” (Last 7). Ball continues with unrelenting images of sexuality in “Der Henker:”

Hilf, heilige Maria! Dir sprang die Frucht aus dem  
Leibe  
sei gebenedeit! Mir rinnt geiler Brand an den Beinen  
herunter

(Help, Holy Mary! For the fruit that sprang from thy  
womb  
blessed be thou! A lustful fire courses down my legs,)

Ball's Expressionist poems are imagistic and frank and hold very little sacred. Only a few of his Expressionist poems were ever published and most of those were in small journals that lasted only a few issues.

Rex W. Last goes on to state about the reaction the citizens of Germany had towards Ball's work. Last states about "Der Henker" that, "Literary extremism of this nature is to be found everywhere in the front lines of the contemporary avant garde: and the less sympathetic the world at large became, the louder and more hysterical the voices grew" (7). Ball in "Der Henker," reflected the disenchantment the world was helping to breed. Sound poetry would soon become the ultimate response to a world in turmoil. Sound poetry abstained from the world of traditional meaning and composition. But even Ball's Expressionist poems were filled with pessimism and ambivalence for a society that was sending its citizens to war. The world was changing and art was following the trend. A poem that reflected this changing trend was "Der Verruckte," another poem in the *Die Revolution* series. Ball writes about his subjects as frail and drastically affected by their environment:

Wahsinnig sind sie vor zuviel Empfindlichkeit. Sie  
Zucken vor Schmerzen bei jedem Hauch.

(They are made with an excess of sensitivity. They  
twitch with pain at ever breath).

Ball's poetry before dada gathered in Zurich was daring and bold. Although, he used more traditional poetry forms in his Expressionist work (words), Ball was still exploring the bounds of poetry through emotion and imagery. Wenzel-White notes the gap between Ball's Expressionist poetry and the sound poetry that would come later, "the sobriety of his early war poems leads to his exquisite lament of the lack of all meaning, when words

no longer transcribe the fleeting world but break into symmetries and palpitations of pure sound” (Wenzel-White 41). Poems like “Der Henker” and “Der Verruckte” were direct responses to a pessimistic age before a World War. During the war, Ball’s poetry would be transformed from a response to transcendence through sound. In Ball’s Expressionist work he had not yet found that connection between poetry and performance.

When Ball first performed his sound poetry he was dressed in an outrageous costume. The costume consisted of fabricated cardboard cut into a long cylinder to cover the trunk of his body, which created the allusion of wings, and a hat that looked like a “witch doctor.” Ball squeaked, shouted and whispered his sound poem “Karawane” in the middle of war on 23 June 1916. His performance was created to draw attention to the sounds that he was making. Ball stated in his *Dada Manifesto* that, “I don’t want words that other people have invented. All the words are other people’s inventions. I want my own stuff, my own rhythm, and vowels and consonants too, matching the rhythm and all my own” (Ball 221). “Der Henker” was a poem made up of words that were not Ball’s. “Karawane” on other hand, was entirely his own invention made of his sounds. Ball’s language was not nonsense, it was performative, it was powerful, and it captured the “richness and life” that art he felt should express. Ball’s Expressionist poetry did not achieve this goal because it was grounded in traditional language. Sound poetry would be Ball’s greatest artistic achievement. If the audience followed Ball’s sound poetry, by deciphering what they heard, then language would be newly created at the cabaret. “Richness and life” would be found. Through the many minds of the cabaret, Ball’s language would come alive, and mean something when the sounds hit their ears. Sound

poems were a new language, a new dada language to be experienced as outlined in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5. THE SOUND POETRY OF HUGO BALL

“Karawane” was one poem in a grouping of a six poem cycle named after the fourth poem in the group, “gadji beri bimba.” This cycle contains Ball’s most famous work and all of the poems in this cycle are considered sound poems. Jon Erickson writes about how the sound poetry or *lautgedichte* becomes a valuable medium for expression. He writes that performing sound poems, “is a sounding of one’s human space and the establishing of a resonating field, creating a harmonious sub-or pre-linguistic communication between poet and auditor” (Erickson 280). Erickson notes the importance the audience had on understanding and interacting with the poetry. Without the audience the poem would lose its dramatic power. Ball accentuated this power by dressing up and allowing himself to be taken over by the poem. In using this method to create meaning within his audience, Ball is in direct concert with Derrida. Derrida wrote of the abundance of meaning that traditional language creates. When Ball subverts traditional language, in lieu of language as a performance, he is deconstructing the role of language. For Ball, language can be understood through performance and things like “aural metaphors.” Hugo Ball and Jacques Derrida have much in common. But at first glance, and taken out of the context of performance, the poem is read as a jumbled mess.

“Karawane” reads:

jolifanto bambla o falli bambla  
großiga m'pfa habla horem  
egiga goramen  
higo bloiko russula huju  
hollaka hollala  
anlogo bung  
blago bung blago bung  
bosso fataka

ü üü ü  
schampa wulla wussa olobo  
hej tatta gorem  
eschige zunbada  
wulubu ssubudu uluwu ssubudu  
tumba ba-umf  
kusa gauma  
ba - umf

Ball, dressed in an outrageous costume, made his new language out of scraps of other languages and his own newly created sounds. After all, Ball didn't feel that he was being creative even with the words that he was using for the first time. Ball wrote in his diary, "The artist who works from his freewheeling imagination is deluding himself about originality. He is using a material that is already formed and so is undertaking only to elaborate on it" (Ball 53). Poetry for Ball was a culmination, a cut and paste effort to include sounds taken from other sources and "borrowed" sounds of his own device. "Karawane" was not original because it sounded different but it was original because it was a composite of older things. Ball saw this creation as something fantastical and created in a magical realm. From this composite of old and new borrowed and created, "magically inspired vocables conceived and gave birth to a new sentence that was not limited and confined by any conventional meaning" (68). The creation of sound poetry would be raised from the grave of older and more traditional languages. Ball would act as bishop to raise this new language from ashes of "conventional meaning." From old comes new meaning and a new language.

One way to look at sound poetry is through the lenses of deconstruction espoused by Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction deals with the construction of language and how meaning continually eludes the speaker or writer. When we shape our thoughts in the

form of language, we can never express what we wish to. This lack of a unifying meaning happens between the slippage of signifier (word) and the signified (the physical object). Languages are based on these two elements and how they continually interact with each other. When a language names an object the word on the page is the signifier. The signified is the physical image of the thing being named. The relation of these two elements do not resemble each other. In his book Of Grammatology excerpted in Between the Blinds Derrida writes, “The sign must be the unity of a heterogeneity, since the signified (sense or thing, noeme or reality) is not in itself a signifier” (Derrida 34). The “heterogeneity” in this case is contained within written language even though written language has strict rules governing how that language is constructed. Derrida is saying the physical image of a thing (signified) does not correlate with the name given to it in written language (signifier). Because of this “slippage” between signifier and signified, language can never accurately portray what something is.

Geoffrey Bennington simplifies this slippage by writing, “*Every* signifier refers to other signifiers, we never reach a signified referring only to itself” (Bennington 78). Words relate to one another but objects have little representational value in language. The physical image of an object never resembles the name given to it. In a sense, then, what we hear in language is sound only. Sound poetry can be seen as an example of this philosophical position when it divorced itself from a well defined linguistic structure. Sound poetry, using the stance taken by Derrida, is outside the traditional realm of signifier and signified. Sound poetry referred to nothing at all even though it was masquerading as language. Sound poetry was another type of dada mask. The poetry, by not directly entering the realm of signifier and signified, was in some ways already

deconstructed. Ball's signifiers stood for little if anything. Yet sound was coming from his mouth backed by the voraciousness of his performance; a context for meaning was being presented while subverting traditional language. Ball's sound was purely performance based, since no audience member knew the language he was performing.

To place the poem "Karawane" into another context, the performance of Ball's sound poetry is similar to a developing American art form in the first decades of the Twentieth Century. Around the time of the Zurich dada, jazz was in its infant stages in America. One similar aspect of both jazz and Zurich dada is their often used power of the voice. Jazz singers would routinely imitate the sounds horns were making. This type of singing was called "scat." The jazz performer's voice would convey a variety of sounds that would give the performance another musical voice. In the cabaret the performer would also use the voice as an instrument. The difference between scat and cabaret was the vocal performances at the cabaret were divorced from the music that would sometimes accompany the dada performer. Scat singing was tonal, it was in key, and had a more prominent role in the music and thus in the performance. And yet the voice in both scat and cabaret performance was used to say something without really saying it explicitly. Neither in scat or in the cabaret were the voices conveying meaning in a traditional manner. With scat no words were being produced, much as in Ball's sound poems. If a scat singer uttered a somber vocal line then a tone would be set. Meaning in both the jazz and cabaret setting could be created through pure sound and performance. The production of emotion thus did not rely solely on words.

Jacques Derrida understands meaning constructed by pure sound through both scat and sound poetry as "aural metaphors." An "aural metaphor" occurs, for example,

when you hear a song on the radio that reminds you of your hometown or a past lover. Your mind creates meaning when it associates sounds with past memories. Pure sound whether in music or speech, without proper words, can create meaning in any context. Derrida writes about the physical voice, “The logic of the event is examined from the vantage of the structures of expropriation called timbre (tympanum), style, and signature....They make every event possible, necessary, and unfindable” (Derrida 158). Timbre is the how the ear recognizes sound when the sound resonates in the ear. When the performer modifies movement and projects the voice both “timbre, style and signature” are affected. These three elements, according to Derrida, create meaning for our ears and eyes. The ears perceive the “timbre” and our eyes are affected by the “style and signature” of the performer. When hearing and seeing a performance of language, our minds work over time to make sense out of the presentation. From these elements the audience member can understand a scat singer’s melancholy while scatting a melodic vocal line. The voice becomes a valuable tool in understanding the emotion of the performer. That emotion is conveyed to the audience as meaningful to the song or a poem. A similar phenomenon occurs when dada performers yells at his audience.

For Derrida, meaning abounds for the audience during the performance of “Karawane.” Derrida writes, “As soon as it perforates, [the sound] one is dying to replace it by some glorious cadaver [meaning].” (168). For Derrida, an audience continually tries to make sense of the “noise” presented. When we hear something we try to figure out what it means. To find meaning in alien contexts we use “timber, style and signature.” When we do this we explode the possible meanings of a text and thus replace the meaning with a “cadaver.” In other words when we try and vocalize or write our

perceptions of pure sound, we lose a grip on the actual meaning of our text. Because of this loss of “real” meaning, language is continually failing at the same time it creates infinite possibilities of meaning. The audiences at the cabaret hear Hugo Ball’s language; they create meaning out of it; they vocalize it, and meaning once again escapes them.

Derrida says that meaning is present through Ball’s “timbre, signature and style.” Therefore meaning can be deciphered, but not through the “traditional” rules of grammar and structure. How close can one get to a uniform idea in the work of Hugo Ball’s sound poetry? The apparatus that creates sound is a physical part of the human body. Sound is a physical gesture our bodies produce. According to Derrida, “Our vocal chords, which can be broken instantaneously when, for example, one screams too loudly, subjecting them to excessive tension (in the case of anger, grief, or even a simple game dominated by the sheer pleasure of shrieking)” (156). The production of sound is located in a physical place and for Derrida this place is the initial construction of meaning. Our bodies serve as “meaning machines.” Our voices become microphones in the machine. Our movements convey the feeling of the machine. Although we create the machines of language, we are never fully in control of them. The “meaning machines” of language have become autonomous, creating meaning from its many mechanical faces and expressions. The body, or the machine, is continually pumping out meaning through vocal performances. Whether speaking at a conference, with a stranger, or in front of the cabaret, the body is a “meaning machine” that creates meaning whether intentional or unintentional. Meaning machines continue to operate well after we think we have cut the power to them.

Because he or she inhabits a “meaning machine” a reader analyzing “Karawane” closely can decipher clues that are in conjunction with the sounds that Ball is producing.

The poem when read aloud, is dreamlike and childish; the sounds are not harsh and flow into one another. It is easy to imagine the poem as a lullaby for a child. The soft vowel sounds work to soften the much harsher consonant sounds. The heavy weight of “bl” is softened with the addition of the drawn out “blago.” Many recorded performances of “Karawane” perform the poem very slowly and deliberately. The words are drawn out, almost to the point of slow motion. Words like “blago” when performed, end up sounding as “bla[aaa]go[ooo].” “Karawane” when read very slowly and deliberately is a poem of soft lumbering. The sounds slowly crash into one another exposing the weight of the vowel sounds. Ball may have had the image of a large animal in mind while performing the poem.

“Karawane” was titled twice appearing in print after the break up of Zurich dada. The subtitle of “Karawane” is “Elefantenkarawane,” which appeared in Ball’s only novel Tenderenda the Fantast published years after his death. The first word that calls attention to itself in “Elefantenkarawane” is obviously “elephant.” If we take the word “elephant” as a clue then the poem begins to take a shape. Even the word “russula,” could loosely be translated to the German word for “trunk,” “Russula” alludes to the most visual feature of an elephant. As the poem moves forward so does elephant with the lines, “tumba ba-umf / kusa gauma / ba – umf.” The elephant lumbers and slowly moves in a child like state or dream. The vowel sounds are long and slow and similar to the immense size of an elephant. “Karawane” according to Erdmute Wenzel-White is, “A procession of words, it fulfills all desires to experience the slowed down, visual, and verbal transport brought to mind by the word ‘Karawane.’ (Wenzel-White 113).

Finding meaning in Ball's poetry is sometimes like searching for a needle in a haystack. The needles are there if one searches for familiar sounds and the made up ones that accompany and reinforce them. Derrida calls this search for meaning through the use of words "Signsponge." For Derrida the sign is very similar to a sponge. He writes, "The sponge [the signifier] can retain the name, absorb it, shelter it, and keep it within itself. Then, too, it holds clean and proper water as well as dirty water, insatiably" (Derrida 64). When one looks for meaning the signifier soaks up every possible meaning. More accepted meanings are soaked up right beside ones that do not favor as well in the free play of signifier and signified. Derrida uses the sponge as a metaphor because no boundaries are established. No barrier for unaccepted meanings can be erected to thwart the capacity of language for excessive meaning. Derrida goes on to make a case for what language isn't metaphorically. Language is a sponge, "that finds itself condemned in contrast to the orange; it is because the sponge remains undecided and undecidable" (64). Meaning can not metaphorically penetrate the skin of the orange. Multiple meanings, because of the orange's skin, are not possible because those meanings are not allowed to flow in and out.

Languages accept all possible meanings and therefore act like sponges; soaking up meaning. Derrida is saying that language is never uniform and constant. It is impossible to regulate the infinite meanings that continually shape language. This works especially well for Ball's performances. He creates an untraditional poetry that asks the audience to conceive many interpretations from it. Ball acts as the sponge that contaminates language as well as illuminating it. Meaning, through Ball's poetry, starts with his performance. He is the creator; he is the sponge that allows meaning to permeate

in the minds of the cabaret audience. No one interpretation is valued over the other and therefore most is accepted. Ball's performance takes in all types of meaning like a sponge takes in all types of water.

This comprehensive effect of language is one that Hugo Ball employs over and over again in his sound poems. The reader has to decipher meaning in the context of a poem that is not easily given to conventional meaning. Ball's language is like Derrida's sponge. The sponge allows for all types of meanings and interpretations without regulation. Ball states in his diary, "Touching lightly on a hundred ideas at the same time without naming them, the sentence made it possible to hear the innately playful, but hidden, irrational character of the listener" (Ball 68). To listen to the poem being performed is to unlock its infinite or as Ball writes it's "hundred[s]" of ideas through multiple languages and created sounds. Ball understood that by challenging the traditional assumption of an audience concerning meaning-making, they would have to create meaning for themselves. Ball thought he was creating the possibility of meaning for the audience. According to Derrida, Ball with his sound poetry was leading the audience toward some type of meaning but he was not creating something completely new.

Through the lenses of deconstruction, Ball is clearly playing with the role of the sign or signifier. The audience understood his language in reference to the more traditional languages they already knew. The audience would identify a word because it was either similar to a sound they recognized or not at all similar to the language they spoke. Derrida writes of the position the sign holds, "The sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, 'thing' here standing equally meaning for

the referent” (61). The word “Karawane” stands as the title of a Hugo Ball poem. The signifier represents something or takes the place of something. When Ball performed the poem the title stood for what he wanted the poem to be. However according to Derrida, the signifier “Karawane” is only a ghost to meaning. Once the signified becomes the signifier meaning has lost any representational merit. To try and verbally describe what “Karawane” represents is to try and represent an already vacant signifier. Derrida calls this replacement of meaning “difference.” He writes, “When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through a detour of the sign” (61). Language is a “detour of the sign” that is manipulated through the production of sound formed into words and then sentences. Linguistic systems create formal languages by establishing strict rules and conventions for everyone to follow. When one follows the rules of a particular language a semblance of meaning is created. But according to Derrida, words on the page cannot have a stable, fixed meaning because words do not represent what is being signified. There is an arbitrary correspondence between the signifier and the signified.

The power of any language rests on the listener. Poetry and more specifically language, is meant to be performed. The audience has to hear the poetry for the play between signifier and signified to begin. Sound poetry represents this immediate play between signifier and signified. Jon Erickson writes of that sound poetry or, “development of a non-rational, emotive, intonational language contains the possibility of cutting across linguistic boundaries and becoming a universal language” (Erickson 282). The universal language is one of listening to a performance. Language is always a

performance of some kind and in that performance each person finds meaning or purpose in sound. The listener creates meaning out of the clues the performer has presented.

To explain the role language has on the listener, it makes sense to briefly look at Reader-Response criticism. Reader-Response and one of its chief proprietors, Stanley Fish, believe that language does stand for something. For Fish, the reader has the last word in what a text meant. Fish writes, “The reader’s activities are at the center of attention, where they are regarded not as leading to meaning but as having meaning” (Fish 2079). Fish barely mentions whether or not language really means what it tries to which for him isn’t the point. Language is a system we have to use whether or not the signifier and signified are aligned. In other words, we need language to write and think about language disregarding that it may eventually fail. In using deconstruction, which Ball’s poetry is definitely in concert with, I am also interpreting his poetry based on my own prior knowledge and thus employing one of the crucial principles of Reader-Response Criticism.

From a deconstructive perspective, language will eventually fail. To describe this break between signifier and signified, a writer has to try and represent the unrepresentable. Reader-Response Criticism helps to understand sound poetry that has little to do with conventional language. Meaning according to people like Fish, lies in the skilled analysis of the interpreter. Derrida would see the struggle to explicate through language as a fruitless mission since to write about language you have to use language itself and for Derrida that means eventual failure. But, for Derrida this “eventual failure” is the point in which he finds “success.” The scope of Derrida’s project is to follow meaning until it does eventually fail. The struggle to convey any idea whether in poetry

or in a thesis continues and is never ending. The signifier has no connection with the signified but an individual's language still has to be utilized in order to try and express a thought or a whim.

The main break between Derrida and Fish lies in the physical setting. Fish asks the question in "Interpretive Communities," "if interpretive acts are the source of forms rather than the other way around, why isn't it the case that readers are always performing the same acts or a sequence of acts..." (2085). The community of the cabaret has "shared interpretive strategies." The cabaret has a clientele that understands the work of dada similarly. When sound poetry is misinterpreted the audience member, "executes different interpretive strategies [the audience] will produce different formal structures" (2086). Without coherence within the interpretive community meaning will be lost. But when the interpretive community is agreed upon meaning arises for Fish. With Derrida there is little coherence between the members of the cabaret. The achievement in Ball's poetry is in its many interpretations. How then could a multi-national group of unrelated audience members create similar opinions of Ball's poetry? An audience could not interpret Ball's sound poetry as one large group agreeing upon its meaning. Meaning is not created by the audience because it contains an expectation. How does one going to the cabaret for the first time have a predetermined community that dictates meaning?

Ball's sound poetry relies both on the deconstructive elements as well as analysis and interpretation to make sense of the work. Deconstruction and the traditional ways in which to think about literature still matter. But the audience is not predetermined and the meaning is therefore never uniform like Fish would argue. To find meaning in sound poetry it is once again valuable to return to what Ball writes of his work. But Ball says

very little about how to interpret his poetry. Theoretical frameworks are thus needed to try and make sense of the sounds Ball is creating. It is difficult however to use only one framework. Ball himself, gives little direction to his audience. He does however go on to name what one can recall or understand from his poems as “word images.” He states in his diary, “Such word images, when they are successful, are irresistible and hypnotically engraved on the memory, and they emerge again from the memory with just as little resistance and friction” (Ball 67). Ball’s poetry serves as a reminder to meaning or an awakening to meaning. What we have known, and what we think we know will resurface in our memories and the listener will find something in the sounds. To understand how meaning is recreated we can return to Derrida’s use of “aural metaphors.” The audience hears sounds that remind them of other sounds and memories. From this structure the listener creates meaning that already exists in some framework created in the mind. Language or more specifically meaning for Derrida is always already constructed. The listener has to tap into the meanings already available to make sense out of the sounds presented. Conventional language attempts to codify meaning that already exists but because of “difference” and “slippage” fails in the process.

When the listener recognizes the sounds of the elephant in “Karawane” as the poem ends with the lines, “tumba ba-umf / kusa gauma / ba – umf.” then the poem has achieved part of its goal for both Ball and Derrida. The poem is successful by disturbing meaning, both in its elusiveness while at the same time it revives “aural” meaning with each listener. Meaning is not uniform throughout everyone in the audience. Some audience members will pick up on the sound of the elephant and others may not. This creation of meaning occurs from a continual play against Derrida’s “difference” and

“aural metaphors.” The “signsponge” of language never allows for only one interpretation. Language soaks up all interpretations as somewhat plausible. This responsibility given to the listener, with little direction, allows meaning to explode into a large number of possibilities. But, as Jon Erickson writes, “The more emotional the information and expression which wants to be mediated, the more unmistakable its meaning” (Erickson 282). For Erickson, the meaning of the poem lies in the ability of the performer. Language if meant to hold any sort of information is only as good as the performance.

Language is a type of performance. With “Karawane” the performer has much at stake in the outcome of the poem. Everyone in the audience will see the same things, but the sounds lack of coherence will not allow them to hear the same thing. The audience lacks a coherent guide for the sounds; they are completely alien to the listener. The movements of the performer can however be described and interpreted because the audience has not been instructed to see for the first time. But their ears have been inundated with new sounds that have very little commonality with traditional language. The performer leads the audience in a certain direction, any direction, and then the audience members create meaning from what they have been presented.

While “Karawane” can be said to loosely follow an elephant lumbering down its path, “gadji beri bimba” is a poem of music. The direction Ball leads the audience in “Karawane” is the image of the elephant. “Gadji beri bimba” is a musically enriched poem. If language is a performance then “gadji beri bimba” is a musical performance. The title of the poem implies the sounds of bells. The high-pitched sounds that that letter “i” makes dominates the poem. The “i” in the poem replicates the “tink” or “bing” that

bells make. The poem is very musical as it invokes sweet sounds, possibly the sounds of church bells ringing. Erdmute Wenzel-White writes that the poem is, “A medley of bells, ‘gadji beri bimba’ establishes a musical pattern that winds in and out of the other texts. For the Schoenberg group of artists (Schoenberg circled in and out of Zurich at the time), bells reveal soaring energy and the spiritual in art” (Wenzel-White 109). Bells are soothing and generally pleasing to the ear. While reading over the poem, it is easy to hear how the bells come in and out of the poem, they even dominate it. Your mouth, in a repetitious pattern, falls time and time again on this high pitched sound similar to a bell:

gadji beri bimba glandridi laula lonni cadori  
gadjama gramma berida bimbala glandri galassassa laulitalomini  
gadji beri bin blassa glassala laula lonni cadorsu sassala bim  
gadjama tuffm i zimzalla binban gligla wowolimai bin beri ban

Every few words produce this high pitched “bi” or the lower “be” sound. If you separate these first four lines of the stanza into variations of “b” sounds the reader gets a very hypnotic sound from the poem. The dull thud of the “b” sound moves higher in pitch with the edition of the “i” or the “e.” The repetition of the “b” sounds:

beri bimba  
berida bimbala  
beri bin blassa  
binban...bin beri ban

By repeating the “b” sounds the sound becomes very hypnotic and musical. The lines breakup in a way where, “The pause before each line causes the repeated word to ring out like the striking of a bell” (110). Ball is not speaking at all with “gadji beri bimba.” With his newly created words he is only guiding his listener to meaning. And once again meaning will vary from seat to seat based on the individual. Judging on each listener’s

experiences, aural metaphors could take a listener back to the church, or any possible place. Ball is creating a poem of infinite meanings and therefore is creating a deconstructed poem. Meaning in “gadji beri bimba” is not limited to one interpretation but a wealth of interpretations.

Besides the repetition of the bell sound “gadji beri bimba” is difficult to decipher from a tradition standpoint. When the poem is taken out of the performance arena each reader has even less to follow. This poem, out of cycle of six by the same name, does not leave as many clues as “Karawane” does. Signifier and signified are allowed more room to play with one another in “gadji beri bimba.” The reader has to try to recreate how to pronounce these words, which creates meaning according to each varying pronunciation. “Gadji beri bimba” is the ultimate in sound poems because of this “lack” of direction and responsibility given to the reader. Steven Scobie writes about the difficulty of deciphering sound poetry like this and especially the poem “gadji beri bimba.” Scobie states that “sound poetry” is, “difficult to describe and account for in the normal language of literary criticism – and this is of course part of their intention. The ‘contents’ of the sound poem are, and always have been more emotional than intellectual, more visceral than mental” (Scobie 216) as I have been suggesting.

Sound poetry is “difficult” to criticize from traditional standpoints because it doesn’t fall under conventional ways of describing poetry. Sound poetry is a new language that the listener experiences or tries to recreate through a reading of it. In order to interpret the poetry the reader uses instinctual linguistic tools that Derrida says exists without prior knowledge. A new language and a new system of how to speak require a new method of critique that is basic but meticulous. While using Derrida we can begin to

make sense out of Ball's poetry. If we understand language as a performance, laced with sounds that remind us of our memories, Ball's language is then rich with ideas. Ball's poetry allows itself to be inflated with multiple meanings that flow through the poetry like water through a sponge.

## CHAPTER 6. OTHER ART AT THE CABARET VOLTAIRE

The members of the Zurich dada not only promoted work such as Ball's sound poetry but also included other types of art. Although exhibitions and soirees were limited in scope (because of the main focus on art created only by Western Europeans) the members of Zurich dada tried to include art from around the world. The inclusion of all types of art was part of the Zurich dada's goal. Many times the authorship of the art work would be disguised from the crowd. Art and all its glory was the main focus at the cabaret, the relevance and origin was not nearly as important as the work itself. Sound poetry was just as significant as anything else presented at the cabaret. Looking only at sound poetry would undermine the overall achievement of the Zurich dada. Sound poetry was invaluable to dada's development, but it wasn't its only valuable contribution.

One example of the more interesting types of art presented and not of European decent, were Richard Huelsenbeck's "Negro poems." With the "Negro poems" Huelsenbeck would read poetry originating in Africa. While reading he would accentuate parts of the poem in a rhythmic fashion and at the end of every poem he would add his word, "Umba" to excite the crowd. In his book, Memoirs of a Dada Drummer Huelsenbeck notes the impression many had of his readings when he wrote, "I recited my new 'authentic' Negro poems, and the audience thought they were wonderful. Naturally, no force on earth could have gotten me to leave out 'Umba' at the end of every verse" (Huelsenbeck 9). Huelsenbeck was taking a poem that he had not written and had claimed new ownership of by changing a few words. The audience had no idea that the poem Huelsenbeck was reciting wasn't originally written by him. Original authorship

didn't really matter but the performance and thus entertainment that came from the presentation was invaluable. If we briefly deconstruct the "Negro poems" the sound was more important than the words the audience could not understand. The "Negro poems" were in another language and therefore the "proper" meanings of the words were lost to the audience. Much like Ball's sound poetry, the performance was more important because no one had a prior context for the language Huelsenbeck was performing.

Each member of the Zurich dada read or performed works each thought would spark interest from the crowd. The performance at the cabaret was treated as an art form unto itself that both spectator and presenter fed off of. Huelsenbeck altered his poems to fit the context of the cabaret. Just by adding one word and a large drum he kept beat with, he could create a new poem. When he did this the poem was not the same as when it was written and Huelsenbeck claimed new ownership of the poem. This recreation was a type of mask deceiving the audience by hiding the original author and context which forced the poem to become new again. When Huelsenbeck started reading his poems from Africa, his words only resembled what he thought African words sounded like and none of Huelsenbeck's "Negro poems" were authentic. Huelsenbeck states, "I recited some Negro poems that I had made up myself" (9). It wasn't the point for Huelsenbeck that the "Negro poems" were authentic or not, it was how he presented them. Huelsenbeck took little if no responsibility for the poems that were laced with implied racism. He simply used the stereotyped "sounds" of Africa to convey his intentions caring little for the ramifications of his actions. Dada, as in the case of Huelsenbeck's incorrectly titled "Negro poems," did not always represent a fair view of art from around the world.

Dada tried to promote and awkwardly present “authentic” art from around the world, but they also mixed the mediums of art they chose to display and perform. Music, paintings, theater and even academic readings were presented in the confines of the small cafe. The press notice created by the members stated, “The idea of the cabaret will be that guest artists will come and give musical performances and readings at the daily meetings. The young artists of Zurich, whatever their orientation, are invited” (Ball 50). This encompassing interest in art called for both musical and prewritten texts. Richard Huelsenbeck wrote of one joyous night of song, “The songs created the intimate atmosphere of the cabaret. The audience liked listening to them, the distance between us and the enemy grew smaller, and finally everyone joined in” (Huelsenbeck 10). The cabaret was communal entertaining above everything else. All types of people fed off of each other’s energy. The only stipulation for a certain type of person was the call for “young” artists. From the start the cabaret and later the galerie was designed as meeting place for art and its many forms.

At the cabaret, each of the five members and their “guests” would take turns as critic, presenter, and reader of whatever was on the program for that particular night. One evening would be led by Hugo Ball reading a paper on the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky and the next evening Ball would be reciting his own poems. Much of this haphazard style was dependent on the very divergent personalities of each presenter. Ball wrote in his diary, “There are five of us, and the remarkable thing is that we are actually never in complete or simultaneous agreement” (Ball 63). A spectator at the cabaret would never exactly know what to expect on any given night, and that was part of the point. It was hard to expect pretension and complete seriousness out of a dark cafe where people

dressed in costumes, recited sound and collective poetry, and played classical as well as improvised music. The enjoyment of fine art was never supposed to be this entertaining and fun. But that was part of the point. Dada created an atmosphere for artistic freedom.

The mix of artists and forms of visual and aural arts showcased at the cabaret and the Galerie Dada were directly related to dada's intrinsic view of multi-nationality. T.J. Demos notes about Zurich cabaret art that, "What appears to be the radical element of Dada is precisely the publicness of its performances as constitutive of a new form of community-one constituted by national difference and linguistic diversity" (Demos 4). The most radical aspect of Zurich dada was not its composition and form but rather its lack of composition and form. Demos does note correctly the value of the collective nature of dada centered at the Cabaret Voltaire and later the Galerie Dada. Zurich dada was a loose group of people creating art outside of a well defined nationality and theoretical framework. This is where dada finds its muse, strength, and setting but not its greatest achievement. The aggregate of artists from all around Europe create the collective nature of the group but do not constitute its greatest power. Dada is viable, not because of its loose but accepting form, but for its art. Dada did not convene in Zurich just to try and escape the restrictions the WWI era gave them, Zurich dada gathered to perform and create.

During one performance at the cabaret, Hugo Ball was so taken over physically by the words he was creating that he had to be carried off stage. In his diary he writes about being overcome by one of his poems. In his diary he notices that, "the lights went out, as I had ordered, and bathed in sweat, I was carried down off the stage like a magic bishop" (Ball 71). Even though Ball had "ordered" the lights turned off, his reaction to

his words had taken over his emotions and physical movements. It was as if God, he claimed, was speaking through his performance. Although Ball was trying to manipulate his audience with cheap light tricks, the work itself greatly affected him. Once again, the reader has to be careful when making religious connections concerning Ball at this point in his life. Later in life Ball wanted to become a “magic bishop” but while in Zurich Ball seems skeptical of religion. Either way, Ball is reacting off the energy of the crowd which causes him to loose himself in the performance. The meaning machines of language had overcome Ball to change his physical movements.

Henkin-Melzer writes about the breakdown between spectator and artist in her essay noting, “The dada performer, inasmuch, as he is a personal actor, performs outside the matrix of character and time. The time is now, the performer is himself. There are no ‘given’ circumstances” (Henkin-Melzer 61). The Cabaret Voltaire never constructed sets for their actors to play upon the stage and therefore all eyes were on the performer. Henkin-Melzer goes on to write, “The stage represented no-place. It was the stage. For the dadas it was important that it remain a stage-a clear dividing line between the actor and the audience” (61). The performance was for the performer who tried to create distance between himself and the audience even though he could not totally separate himself or his emotions from a particular performance. The dada performers could never transcend the audience or themselves because they were conscious of the dramatic effect they were trying to create.

Ball’s instructions to turn out the lights during reading are as elaborate as the cabaret set got. Without focus diverted elsewhere, as in the backdrop, the set, or the room itself, the performer became the only focus of the cabaret. All eyes were on the poet when

he performed and many of the poems recited at the cabaret were done there for the first time, composed solely for the cabaret. Because of this everything was new, or at the very least recreated and reinterpreted. Sometimes more than one poet took to the floor of the café to recite poetry together. The most famous of the “simultaneous poems” is Tristan Tzara’s “L’amiral Cherche Une Maison à Louer” performed by Tzara, Janco, and Huelsenbeck. The poem details an admiral’s failed attempt to find a place to rent which reads,

Huelsenbeck und der Conciergenbäuche Klapperschlangengrün sind milde ach  
Janco (cantando) can hear the weopour will arround arround the hill  
Tzara serpent à Bucarest on dépendra mes amis dorénavant et

Huelsenbeck verzerrt in der Natur chrza prrrza chrrrza  
Janco (cantando) my great room is  
Tzara c'est très intéressant les griffes des morsures équatoriales

The poem was a noisy one with all three performers trying to speak, squeak, and out perform the other. The audience during the reading of “L’amiral” could not focus on all three performers at one time. Because of this each audience member came away with a different interpretation based on the performer’s poem. The three performers recited the poem in three different languages. Although the audience was given conventional language in “L’amiral,” it is not presented in a conventional way. Instead, the performance becomes more important than the words spoken. The way in which the language is presented dictates the meaning. The meaning, we understand from the poem, is never uniform. Much like Ball’s sound poetry, with the simultaneous poem the audience has an explosion of possible meanings. Derrida would find comfort in both Ball’s sound poetry and the groups “L’amiral” because it creates possible meanings instead of restricting them.

Ball notes in his diary about the simultaneous poem that it, “is a contrapuntal recitative in which three or more voices speak, sing, whistle, etc., at the same time in such a way that the elegiac, humorous, or bizarre content in the piece is brought out by these combinations” (Ball 57). With the simultaneous poem the performers would disregard the person reading right beside them who would speak in different languages and strange sounds. Ball writes, “The ‘simultaneous poem’ has to do with the value of the voice” (57). The more creative the “sounds” and the projection of those sounds the wider range of meaning will appear. The “simultaneous poem” was a noisy onslaught of the senses. The “simultaneous poem” was the best example of Zurich dada and its connection with deconstruction.

The sponge that Derrida speaks of concerning language was soaked with the “simultaneous poem.” The listener was assaulted with sound and therefore having to create order out of a system of signifiers. Meaning was deciphered only if the audience could hear the particular performer and “understand” his language. Not only did the sound poem contribute to the Zurich dada’s importance but there were many other factors. Poetry such as the simultaneous poem and Huelsenbeck’s Negro poems were crucial in the development of a dada art form. Since it is sometimes difficult to understand exactly what dada was it is best to illuminate what dada did. The Negro poems, the “simultaneous poems” and Ball’s sound poems were acted out on equal terms in front of the audience. No one type of poetry was given a higher standing over the other.

## CHAPTER 7. PERFORMANCE AND POLITICS

For dada performance to be successful the audience had an active role in the cabaret. Without an effective performance Ball's sound poetry could have fallen on deaf ears. Because of this, Ball knew how to try and manipulate the audience from his previous work in the theater. He needed the audience to make his poetry come alive. The audience were so important that they altered the way in which Ball performed his work. Ball states about his poem "Gadji Beri Bimba" "I realized that, if I wanted to remain serious (and I wanted to at all costs), my method of expression would not be equal to the pomp of my staging" (70). Ball is very aware of how his movements would be perceived by the crowd. He realizes that he alone is responsible for the work that he is presenting; he has nowhere else to hide. The crowd, although distant, plays an active roll in the performance.

Cabaret performance was often lonely, especially for Hugo Ball, who performed his work mostly solo with input given by the expression and presence of his audience. He knew who was watching his performance and it changed his movement. Ball, by looking into the small audience, could even see exactly who was listening to his work. He even notices particular people and can name, "Brupbacher, Jelmoli, Laban, Mrs. Wigman in the audience" (70). After seeing and naming specific people in the audience while performing Ball notes in his diary that, "I feared a disgrace and pulled myself together" (70) as to avoid being too emotionally ostentatious. The instant gratification of a small crowd made Ball somewhat conform to the expectations and reactions of the crowd which caused him to change his performance. His art was not solely created by him.

Ball's art was partially composed by the spectators at the cabaret. If members of Zurich dada took from outside sources to create their art then the audience was taking from the performer.

When Huelsenbeck recreated his "Negro poems" and Ball read his work, they were both subject to the scorn of the audience. Huelsenbeck and Ball rode the waves of the crowd to alter how their particular dada performance was being presented. Huelsenbeck felt the audience and even noticed the joy they had in his work. But, Ball was more directly affected by the audience. Ball writes of his performance of "gadji beri bimba," "I am preoccupied with my bishop's costume and my lamentable outburst at the last soiree. The Voltaire-like setting in which that occurred was not very suitable for it" (75). For a man that continually tried to create poetry that his audience would have no stable ground to stand on, Ball was always aware of his context, whether or not he or his poetry was appropriate for the setting. Ball was creating new words that no one understood but he worried that the audience would find his "outbursts" as "unsuitable." He would try and regain composure at all costs as to not upset the audience. From time to time he could put himself in check, making sure that he didn't get away from the goals he set for his performance.

Because of the influence of the audience Hugo Ball was as much performer as puppet to the audience who was altering his performance. The intimate climate of the cabaret played a large role in how he projected himself. Since the cabaret was small and intimate an instant crowd reaction could alter how a performer creates. Ball remarks in his diary, "Our attempt to entertain the audience with artistic things forces us in an exciting and instructive way to be incessantly lively, new and naïve" (54). He needed to

be aware of the audience even though he could sometimes succumb to his art and be moved by it. Ball felt it important to go the extra step but he also “wanted to remain serious (and wanted to at all costs)” (70) so he pulled himself back. Audience and performer fed off of each other at the cabaret, they both demanded each other. He goes on to state in the journal that, “One cannot exactly say that the art of the last twenty years has been joyful and that the modern poets are very entertaining and popular” (54). Ball, at the cabaret, had to have an entertaining performance as well as a challenging one that transformed language and the audience had a say in how this happened.

A connection can be made about the important role Europe played on Ball’s audience driven style of acting. Much like Switzerland’s effort to totally divorce itself from world affairs in 1916, the influence and pressure of others became apparent in Ball’s performance. Space and who controlled it or who had influence over the other was always in negotiation both in world affairs and in the cabaret. Zurich and the world, audience and performer would continually break down and overlap. It was impossible to totally divorce the individual from the harsh reality of European life. Ball tried to ease the tension between himself and audience by altering his movements when he felt the crowd wanted more out of him. He speaks directly about the audience and performer writing, “The artist as the organ of the outlandish threatens and soothes at the same time. The threat produces a defense. But since it turns out to be harmless, the spectator begins to laugh at himself about his fear” (54). The performer can easily represent the Europe dada is creating against in this passage. Both the members of the cabaret and the outside world were performing. Although both dada and Europe were performing, dada was performing and creating art, whereas Europe was creating violence at a world wide scale. Europe and

the performer created the fear that the spectator of both the population of Europe and the cabaret felt. The fear that the spectator at the cabaret felt turned out to be “harmless” but the fear of war outside of the doors was very real. The cabaret was an artificial microcosm of the larger world at war. The cabaret was a war of words and the outside a war of bullets. For Ball, you are subject to your surroundings and if you can not completely change them, treat their advances as harmless.

Even though politics were not a major theme for the members of the Zurich dada, it was surely part of their motivation. Ball wrote about politics by noting, “Oppose world systems and acts of state by transforming them into a phrase or a brush stroke” (56). Politics for Ball should only influence the choice to become an artist but it should not dictate what the artist portrays. Be subversive Ball is implying, but do not let politics motivate the artists reasons for creating. To overcome, “The grandiose slaughters and cannibalistic exploits of the time” one should use “spontaneous foolishness and enthusiasm for illusion...to destroy them” (61). The act of creating is a response to the time when the artist is not involved in the mechanisms of war. But even this is contradictory because the plight of Europe forced Ball and the others to physically move. After all, the members of the cabaret convened in Switzerland because of its neutrality; if a person moved to Switzerland, it was possible avoid possible death. Because of this mobility and subject to international policy the artists migrating to Zurich were part of a direct political process. In coming to Zurich, the cabaret members tried to create art that was not politically motivated or broken into national barriers even though politics was still somewhat central.

T.J. Demos, in his essay, writes about the role of politics, “Similarly, the Dadaist rebellion (especially in Zurich) emerged in critical and sometimes desperate response to the brutal protection of national interests and the cynical manipulations of patriotic energies” (Demos 1). Dada was not interested in national identity. Dada was only interested in dada. They came to Zurich, and away from their homelands because of national conflict between the nations of Europe. War was a manifest of national interests and the cabaret Voltaire was the inverse of this. The cabaret was a meeting place not of nations and politics but of art and free design. But, without war between each of their nations, then the cabaret may have not been possible because who then would have fled to Zurich? Zurich dada’s responses to animosity between their nations were to create art and poetry across national lines.

Dada divorced themselves from an obvious political agenda by not creating “political” art in a time when national politics was center stage. According to Demos, “Geopolitical dislocation-from both national geography and nationalistic ideology-is fundamental to Dada’s identity” (2). Without war, the dada movement in Zurich may not have been possible. Even though war motivated the architects of dada to move to Switzerland, dada avoided obvious political art. Instead they created art located in the margins and devoid of a direct political context, paintings did not depict political images and Ball’s “sound poetry” did not contain the sounds of war. Performance however, was key to the dada agenda. The world was performing outside of the cabaret doors. This performance was not acceptable by the members of dada. In order to combat the performance of war, the members of the Zurich dada created their own performances

inside. Dada's performances were grand and full of life whereas the performances Europe was reenacting were full of death.

## CHAPTER 8. WHAT IS DADA

The foundations of dada are somewhat unstable, but it would make sense to try and approach Zurich dada from a theoretical approach of their own creation. Hugo Ball's take on dada was somewhat playful and admittedly elusive. Ball admits in his *Dada Manifesto*, reprinted in Flight Out of Time, that dada is, "An international word. Just a word, and the word a movement" (220). If the word dada becomes a "movement" like Ball states it is, then it is more than just a "word." The "word," then for Ball, becomes the larger context of what he believes dada is and the "word" is bigger than just him. If the "word" becomes the "movement" then Ball's belief in the "word" becomes part of the larger meaning representing the five main members and what they have created. Everything that dada does, everything that dada creates, becomes an entity larger than Ball's words and creations and therefore past his power to control dada as a "movement." Dada was not a product of just one person. Everyone that created under the banner of dada was one part of an elusive group of artists.

The "word" for Ball, writes Elderfield, in the introduction to Ball's diary is "that the 'power' of words necessitates care in their use and that art generally is something irrational, primitive, and complex that speaks 'a secret language'" (Elderfield xxvii). Dada according to Ball is an extension of art that is not only expressed in the language of words but in the "movement" of dada all together. The "word" or the creation of an "irrational" and "secret language" is what language does for Ball and how it relates to what he created while affiliated with the Zurich dada. Dada is best described through Ball as his attempt to create a new language at the cabaret. At the very least dada, was the title

in which Hugo Ball's work fell under while living in Zurich. Ball states, "My manifesto on the first public dada evening (in the Waag Hall) was a thinly disguised break with friends....When things are finished, I cannot spend any more time with them. That is how I am" (Ball 73). When Ball projected his voice above the crowd at the Cabaret Voltaire he was presenting dada, his language. He had accomplished what he had wanted to in a short time. Ball's ability to leave the dada "movement," if we can call it a "movement" shows dada was only a short lived project of eight months for Ball.

To try and understand the value of dada on Hugo Ball one must look back at his manifesto. The correct interpretation of the manifesto and his explanations of it are somewhat troubling, though. Ball simply could be trying to promote himself in his manifesto, but he is only complicating what dada represents. In his diary he writes about dada as a reaction to the times. Ball states, "The Dadaist loves the extraordinary and the absurd. He knows that life asserts itself in contradiction and that his age aims at the destruction of generosity as no other age has ever done before" (65). With Hugo Ball, two ways exist about how to define dada. On one side you have the highly philosophical leanings about the "word" and then you have his ideas about dada as a "movement." Since dada doesn't have one key manifesto, Ball's ideas can work against the other members. Simply put, Ball's work at the very least is representational of the work other members of the dada "movement" produced; it was radical; it was new, and it challenged the contemporary perceptions of art. Both of these definitions do not quite fit together and that works out perfectly because dada never claimed to know what dada really was. One opinion is individualistic and the other treats the group more as an entity devoid of conflict and struggle for control. These two opinions of how dada works do not mutually

exclude one another. Ball created under the banner of dada and when he left, it continued on. He created as part of a group and for himself. Ball could both be a spectator to dada at the same time he was one of its chief architects since no one agreed on what dada meant.

Dada itself outlived Ball; before the start of 1920 dada was carried to Paris by Tzara and to Berlin by Huelsenbeck. Dada lived on while Ball continued writing about things not at all related to the group he helped to create. Eventually Tristan Tzara emerged as dada's rally man, much to the dismay of Ball. After all, Ball stated in his diary concerning Tzara's "organization" of dada that, "One should not turn a whim into an artistic school" (60). A school is a uniform mechanism for teaching someone how to do something. By turning a "whim into an artistic school" the members of dada would be teaching someone how to be a member of what they created. Ball is saying to his readers that dada is much more difficult than one could possibly imagine. Ball did not want to be a producer of well defined and easily explicated art, he did not want a movement, he wanted to create and for a short while Zurich dada provided him with that cover. It is easy to infer that Ball was aloof and uncaring about the group but that was not the case. He wrote about his first break with dada by saying, "With all the tension the daily performances are not just exhausting, they are crippling. In the middle of the crowds I start to tremble all over" (57). When Hugo Ball finally left Zurich for good in 1917, after his brief stint at the Galerie, he was finished with dada. His diary simply picked back up in Magadino Italy with little or no reason why he left.

A universal definition of dada is elusive because Hugo Ball and Zurich dada was more interested in creating and disrupting the meaning of their art than defining their "movement." Ball complicates meaning when he reads his manifesto posing the question,

“How can one get rid of everything that smacks of journalism, worms, everything nice and right, blinkered, moralistic, Europeanized, enervated? By saying dada” (220). Dada is a retreat into itself that shakes away the muck of modern life that was eating at the European’s soul. Dada was devoid of a unifying form that restricted movement. While at the cabaret and later the galerie, a person was expected to be free. The world outside of the cabaret doors was dying and dada was a ticket out of that world. Ball goes on to state about the dada participant, “He knows that the world of systems has fallen apart, and that this age, with its insistence on cash payment, has opened a jumble sale of godless philosophies” (66). In this, one of many explanations of what dada is, the movement comes off as a feeling or a shock more than a system of balanced ideas and practices. A way to elude moralistic capture is to give everything to dada, which for Ball, will allow the listener to enjoy the work of himself and his comrades. When the participant of dada realizes the world has failed, and how art will replace the loss, the participant will be filled with, “hearty laughter and gentle encouragement” (66). Dada is a soothing reliever for all that ails the modern man in wartime.

Ball’s *Dada Manifesto* was in effect, a way to warm up the crowd that would hear his new language, his sound poems, his *laudgedichte*, his “noise.” Dada was a term used to define the Zurich dada’s art and then that definition created a troubling explication because no one was giving the same answers. Dada was an encompassing and difficult term for somewhat likeminded artists. The world outside of the cabaret was “rational.” It created government and war. Dada was a direct escape from the mire of civilization that kills and destroys by creating and screaming against the world outside their door. For Ball, artists were, “creators of new worlds and new paradises” (7). Art allowed someone

to find another world that did not resemble the one given. An art devoid of war and madness that was entertaining created a new world and the cabaret succeeded in doing this even though the content was never consistent. Zurich dada never agreed on what they wanted to accomplish with their project. That is why it is best to try and define the Zurich dada by what they presented as their art, and not from their own theoretical opinions of the movement. Dada, like Hugo Ball's sound poetry, has many meanings and many interpretations that are never quite conclusive.

## CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSION

At best dada is a mix of signs; a large collection of meaning never quite uniform and never quite stable. Dada was a grouping of pre-Deconstructive and linguistic hooligans that skirted the rules of traditional language and then moved on. Only two of the original five members of Zurich dada continued to promote dada as a movement after the events in Zurich had died down. Huelsenbeck, while most of the time on the side of Ball, not wanting to promote dada as a movement, introduced Berlin to dada after the breakup of the Zurich group. Tzara considered by many as the chief promotional tool in and around Zurich dada, continued as a “dadaist” after moving to Paris and starting a Parisian movement. Hans Arp continued to paint and sculpt but moved more into the realm of surrealism and abandoning dada as a movement altogether. Marcel Janco moved back to Romanian when things were no longer active in Zurich. Later in life Janco fled to Israel to escape the Nazi’s where he was a pilgrim once again. Ball left dada to focus on his writing about religious and literary figures. Zurich dada in the most direct sense only lasted when the five chief architects of the movement lived and worked together from the opening of the Cabaret Voltaire to the closing of the Galerie Dada.

The legacy of the Zurich dada lives on in a strange capacity. The movement by itself was primarily gobbled up by surrealism. One of the main reasons for this was dada’s own distain for self definition. Dada dissolved because it never formally existed in a cohesive structure. Hugo Ball would have been proud; his sound poetry became a metaphor to describe dada. By the 30’s the movement was dead. Near the end of the twentieth century there was a revival in dada. Artistic movements from the Situationists

in the 50's and 60's to the Punks in the late 70's were inspired by dada. These groups even resurrected dada images to show their allegiance to an inspiring and subversive group of artists. What many have thought as dada's greatest achievement is its ability to redirect distain into art. Much of what dada created was a type of collage. By using fragments of traditional language to create poetry, artists like Hugo Ball were able to recontextualize the language of war.

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