

"*Flucht aus der Zeit*," Hugo Ball says that art should be no more than "a motive, a method" towards such an end: it should be torn down, the Dadaists thought, from its high marble pedestal, and made to flow anonymously and freely from the vastness of pre-conscious life. Unfortunately, few persons today are willing, or dare, to penetrate the mockery and the voluntary shabbiness of Dadaism, to acknowledge the immense constructive forces that lay behind. To Hugo Ball Dada was a "fool's play founded on nothing at all, yet involving all higher problems."

This was the Dada of the Cabaret Voltaire, situated in one of the narrow Gothic streets of ancient Zurich. This was the young Arp in his heyday. During this period, his creative activity was marked by a definite urge towards the absolute, the direct; towards simplicity and, finally, towards anonymity: "*les oeuvres d'art devraient rester anonymes dans le grand atelier de la nature, comme les nuages, les montagnes, les mers, les animaux, les hommes. Oui! les hommes devraient rentrer dans la nature, les artistes devraient travailler en communauté comme les artistes du moyen-âge.*" In his wooden and cardboard reliefs of this period, the simple objects of everyday life are given back their original magic by means of witty transformation. In a truly romantic sense, the tragic discordance between corporeal insignificance and the vastness of the universe becomes apparent in Arp's extreme proportional contrasts, and

throughout his poetry. The sublime act of creation is reduced to a ludicrous bagatelle. Absolute relaxation of the mind is opposed to the cramped, hyperbolic pathos of the then contemporary German Expressionism, and the subsequent parodies of the politically active Dadaists in the same country. The essential difference of attitude between the Dadaism of the *Cabaret Voltaire* and that which flourished in Germany should be kept in mind: while the latter never became more than the hallmark of an economic inflation and was almost completely concerned with left-wing politics, the former, led by artists of great sensibility, directed the far more subtle attack on the parallel inflation of the mind.⁴

Apart from what in him was revolutionary and satirical, the young Arp possessed much that was quiet and contemplative. It was during this period that he became absorbed in the mystical writings of Lao-tse and Jacob Boehme. We find Arp making *collages* of grey, silver and black bits of paper.⁵ The extreme architectural severity and almost religious asceticism of these com-

Zurich protesting against German militarism in 1916 and soon became one of the leaders of the Zurich Dada movement, together with Arp, Hülsenbeck and Tzara.

4. Kurt Schwitters and Max Ernst should be mentioned here as the only German Dadaists of the same mettle as those in Zurich. Schwitters, who called his art *Merz* (1919), was even strongly attacked in his own country for his creative and non-political attitude.

5. It should be remembered that Picasso and Braque were making *collages* as early as 1911-12, though with quite a different stress.