

positions contrast gracefully with the calligraphic craftsmanship and "beauty" that "decorate" the world of other artists. The "object-reliefs" of the same period, full of unexpected associations, are the product of Arp the jester. The same may be said of his poetry, in which there abound absurdities mockingly expressed in inflated mannerisms of speech, in imaginative deformations of words, in puns and grotesque irrational images. The realities and banalities of everyday life are, for him, part and parcel of poetry.

A mere glance at the titles⁶ of Arp's works illustrates to what an extent he was preoccupied with odd "configurations," as he called them, of beings and objects, of bottles, mouths, neckties, navels, moustaches, leaves, anchors and heads, etc. How are we to explain his marked tendency, especially typical of the early period, to break man's body down into sundry parts? There can be no doubt that it springs from a desire to place man on the level of the innumerable things that surround him, "*pour elles, il n'y a pas de quartier de noblesse,*" Picasso has said. For Arp, man is not the crown of creation, but simple, lost, transient, like a leaf in the wind. Everywhere in his work a kind of romantic irony disrupts man's bombastic self-satisfaction, reducing him to the humble scale of his surroundings. Precisely the same

6. *Tête moustache et bouteille; Soulier, lèvres, nombril; Têtes et cravattes; Tête et feuille; Le gant; La moustache sans fin; Le corpusculus; Objets placés comme l'écriture; Objets placés d'après la loi du hasard; Configurations, etc.*

tendency is present in Arp's poems, "The Pyramid's Petticoat," "The Cloud Pump," etc. Arp starts by throwing everything conceivable into a vast bag which is thoroughly shaken in order to upset all logical order and to annihilate any rigid hierarchy of values. He subsequently conjures up a transformed world, full of ingenious and paradoxical ties between bodies and ideas, an irrational world where everything is fraternally compatible with everything else. New life is imparted to the basic unit of speech, the *word*, and its power to evoke images and associations. Consecutive description (the result of a mechanical conception of time) is as foreign to Arp's poetry as perspective (the result of an analogous conception of space) is foreign to his art.

As early as 1908, Arp had been interested in the problem of deformation and in the deliverance of art from servile imitation. During a long stay in Weggis⁷ (Switzerland) in 1909-12, Arp, together with some Swiss artists, founded the "*Moderner Bund.*" The group arranged meetings and exhibitions in Zurich and Lucerne, through which they hoped to launch their ideas. However, the most decisive influence upon Arp was his coming into contact with the well-known "*Blaue Reiter,*" a group founded in Munich (1912) by Kandinsky and Franz Marc. Even today Arp regards Kandinsky's inspiring personality, next to Ball's ascetic fervor, as one of the crucial experiences of his life. The

7. Where he first met Paul Klee.