



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 6. Weimar Germany, 1918/19–1933

Raoul Hausmann, "The German PHILISTINE Is Annoyed" (1919)

Why? Just who is the German philistine to be annoyed about Dada? It is the German poet, the German intellectual, bursting with fury because his perfectly larded soul was left to stew in the sunshine of laughter, who rages because he has been hit dead center in his brain which, in his case, is located where he sits. Now he has nothing left to sit on. No, do not attack us, gentlemen, we are our own opponents already and know better than you do how to get to us. Understand that we couldn't care less how you react, we are made of different stuff. Just use your physical powers to beat the drum of your spiritual business, beat firmly about your bellies so that some God may be moved to pity. We threw that old drum in the trash long ago. We pipe, squeak, curse, and laugh out the irony: Dada! Because we are—Antidadaists!

There you have it! Give your oppressed bones a rest and mend your tattered traps, you did it all in vain! We feel like celebrating because you cannot line us up against the wall. And so we want you to spill your guts so we can present you with an account of your celebrated values.

After [our] emotional vitality had been thinly diluted into aesthetic abstractions and moral-ethical farces, there arose out of the European sausage-pot the Expressionism of the German patriot, which, laying the enthusiasm on thick, fashioned a profitable little war business out of a decent movement started by Frenchmen, Russians, and Italians. The same old story about pure poetry, painting, music played in Germany on an exceptionally competent business basis. But this pseudo-theosophical German tea party, which got as far as winning recognition of the East-Prussians, Junkers, shall not concern us here, no more than the business machinations of Mr. Walden, who, typical German philistine, thinks he needs to drape his transactions in a buddhistic-bombastic garb. Respect to his business genius, but his aesthetics and his art-prussianism should go where they came from, the shyster's office. If Walden and his poet school were revolutionary in the least, they would have to understand this one fact first, that art cannot be aesthetic harmonization of bourgeois ideas of ownership.

Oh my Herr Philistine, you say art is in danger? Don't you know that art is a beautiful female form, without clothes; it counts on being taken to bed, or at least arousing someone. No, my Herr, art is not in danger—because art does not exist any more. It is dead.... Give up the sexromantic, my dear poets—we don't feel like that any more; rather show your nice tattooed bellies, spit out words, splash geometry with colors and call it abstract art—we care as much for that as we care for your tightrope act around Expressionism. The absolute inability to say

something, to grasp a thing, to play with it—this is Expressionism, a spiritual truss for herniated guts, leftovers bad from the start, which caused great ceremonial bellyaches. The bourgeois writer or painter could feel himself properly sanctified, finally he somehow grew beyond himself into an indeterminate, common world-fuddle—oh, Expressionism. You, the world apogee of romantic deception! But the farce only became unbearable at the hands of the activists who wanted to bring the spirit and the art they saw in Expressionism to the people. These imbeciles, who somehow read Tolstoy once and of course never understood him, now drip with an ethic one can only approach with a pitchfork. These dolts, unfit to pursue politics, have invented Activist/Eternist²⁸ sauce in order to approach the proletariat too. But the proletariat is not so dense, excuse my expression, that he would fail to notice the absolute vacuity surrounding such raving. Art to him is something that comes from the bourgeoisie. And we are Antidadaists enough that if anyone of us wants to set up something beautiful, aesthetical, a safely fenced in little feeling of well-being such as abstract art for example—that we will knock his well-spread sandwich into the muck. To us the world makes no deep sense except that of a most unfathomable nonsense; we don't want to hear about spirit or art. Science is silly—probably the sun still revolves around the earth today. We do not promote any ethic—which always remains ideal (swindle)—but we don't consequently want to tolerate the bourgeois who hangs his moneybags over life's possibilities.... We wish to sort out economy and sexuality in a reasonable manner, and we don't give a hoot for culture which was not tangible. We wish it to come to an end, and thus an end to the philistine poet, the manufacture of the ideals which were nothing but his excrement. We want the world in motion and emotional, unrest instead of rest,—away with all chairs, away with the sentiments and noble gestures! And we are Antidadaist because for us the Dadaist is still too concerned with feelings and aesthetics. We have the right to any amusement, be it in words, forms, colors, noises; but all this is wonderful nonsense, which we consciously make and cherish,—an immense irony just like life itself: we finally recognize perfect mastery of nonsense as the only sense in the world!!

Down with the German philistine!

Source of English translation: Rose-Carol Washton Long, ed., *German Expressionism, Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993, pp. 270-72.

Source of original German text: Raoul Hausmann, "Der deutsche SPIESSER ärgert sich," *Der Dada*, No. 1, December 1919, p. 1; reprinted in *Bilanz der Feierlichkeit, Texte bis 1933*, Volume 1, edited by Michael Erlhoff. Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 1982, pp. 82-84.