

Arina Rotaru
(Shanghai)

*Colonial Sounds and Aural Interferences
in the Dadaist Sound Poetics of Hugo Ball and Tristan Tzara*

ABSTRACT. This essay juxtaposes practices of sound storage in a World War I context with the contemporaneous use of sound in Dadaist poems and the ways in which Dadaists reimagine ethnographic discourse from a visual construct into an aural one. By focusing on the change in discursive genre that emerges with war-era attempts at creating a museum of sound, this essay sheds light on the changing place of the Other between national imperatives and colonial possession, as mediated through Dadaist practice.

A German film documentary by the experimental director Philip Scheffner, *The Halfmoon Files* (2007), has at its center the impossible reconstruction of the story of a voice. Mall Singh, an inmate at the Wünsdorf Halfmoon POW Camp (*Halbmond Lager*), which was built during World War I as a special camp (*Sonderlager*) primarily for Muslim prisoners from India, Africa and the Near East, sings in Punjabi: «There once was a man / This man came into the European war. / Germany captured this man. / He wishes to return to India. / If God has mercy, he will make peace soon. / This man will go away from here»¹. Mall Singh's telling of his story in the third person renders his voice uncannily estranged from itself and testifies to the camp's paradoxical war enterprise, divided between a desire to enroll more subjects within its ranks by formally respecting their religion and customs and a will to manage and racially subvert them². The voice of the dis-

¹ The special camp was part of a larger effort by the German military to display model prison conditions and incentivize prisoners from countries colonized by the British and the French to form an anti-colonial jihad. See János Riesz, «Afrikanische Kriegsgefangene in deutschen Lagern während des Ersten Weltkriegs», in *Deutsch-afrikanische Diskurse in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Amsterdamer Beiträge zur Germanistik vol. 80, eds. Michael Hofmann and Rita Morrien (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

² Although she does not necessarily focus on this paradox between the German camp's «recruitment initiative» as a prelude to creating an alliance with Muslim colonial subjects

placed Mall Singh, recorded in 1916, will remain the only proof of his existence, since efforts by the director to trace the man's life in India, upon his camp release, led nowhere. Between 1915 and 1918 some 1,650 recordings in the vernacular of war prisoners from Africa, India, Russia, and the Near East in 175 or so POW camps were meticulously made by the so-called Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission, formed by experts in anthropology, linguistics and musicology³. The experiment laid claim, at the time, to the largest library of sound recordings in the world. Now included in the world's first *Lautarchiv* at the Humboldt Universität of Berlin, these sound archives and their wider significance remain largely unexplored.

The recordings undertaken at the Halfmoon Camp testify to the increasing role of sound, during World War I and beyond, as an instrument of colonial observation and classification of the exotic Other. One should not forget, however, the early use of the phonograph as an instrument of study and exploration among colonizers who would take gramophones with them into colonial spaces, eager to «record the exotic and play records to themselves»⁴. The project of the Phonographic Commission furthers these singular recording enterprises by organizing thousands of vocal testimonies in an archive. The ambition to start assembling, circa 1916, the largest archive of sound in the world corresponded closely to the model of the ethnographic museum, which represented, as Matthew Biro mentions, the primary context in which European artists claimed to discover non-Western art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries⁵. The archive of sounds thus becomes a place where «diverse cultures were often presented in a geographically and temporally mixed fashion, and where, by the mid-

during World War I and the racial science underscoring the use value of prisoners, Avery F. Gordon documents the ghostly reduction of a Sikh prisoner to a trace. See Avery F. Gordon, «'I'm already in a sort of tomb': A Reply to Philip Scheffner's *The Halfmoon Files*», *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 110, No. 1 (2011): 121-154.

³ From the materials provided by the film's official website on www.halfmoonfiles.de @ Philip Scheffner (accessed on May 10, 2010 and June 23, 2016). *The Halfmoon Files: A Ghost Story*, dir. Philip Scheffner, 2006.

⁴ Michael Bull relies on Michael Taussig's account of the use of the phonograph to record islanders singing traditional songs during A. C. Haddon's expedition to Torres Straits. «Sound, Proximity, and Distance in Western Experience», in *Hearing Cultures. Essays on Sound, Listening and Modernity*, ed. Veit Erlmann (New York: Berg, 2005), 179. Taussig also mentions the role played by the gramophone to entertain and gain the favors of the «savages». Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 199, 215.

⁵ Matthew Biro, *The Dada Cyborg: Vision and the New Human in Weimar* (Berlin: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 238.

1910s, modes of organization emphasizing formal similarities rather than cultural, geographical or historical information were increasingly prevalent⁶.

In Wünsdorf, the sound recordings seem to have distilled visual representations of prisoners from other camps, framed most frequently by subtly disparaging multilingual commentary about a «world of enemies» deployed by enemy nations to undermine Western civilization⁷. While the primitive and exotic value of prisoners is sometimes exaggerated through photographic experiment enrolled in the propaganda effort, the sound recordings seek to objectify their findings by echoing an alienated sense of self, as in Mall Singh's third-person account. This objectification reproduces the purpose of the experimental recordings from the Halfmoon Camp as designed mainly for anthropologists and linguists eager to record authentic African and Asian idioms. Unlike the case of photographs framed by commentary, the sound files of captives are less clear about their effort at demonstrating civilizational difference. This procedural ambiguity is foregrounded, enhanced, and turned on its head, I argue, in the contemporaneous Dadaist sound.

The uncannily similar attempt at assembling, «recording», and narrating sound in Dadaist sound practices made its debut in 1916. While neither the gramophone nor the tape recorder was ever used in Dada, since the former functioned in pre-World War II poetry solely as a trope and the latter became an instrument of poetic production only after that war, the Dadaists purported to improvise their own galleries of sound and assembled fictive and non-fictive sound materials. Thus they created their own museum of voices, albeit a museum, we might say, that operated on the run or only through loose connections to multiple geographical locations. As this article demonstrates, the story of the world's first «archive of sound» emerging from captivity has in common with its Dada contemporaries not only the shared ambition of collecting sounds, but also the relationship foregrounded between colonizer and colonized, the exotic and its observer. Furthermore, collecting sounds turns, in the hands of the Dadaists, from a practice related to the object of investigation and its subject into an aesthetic modality meant to conjure the erased subjectivities of colonial subjects.

Dada, long dismissed by literary history as a stage trick, or mere repetition of earlier poetic conventions, has been gradually revalued from the per-

⁶ Ibid., 238.

⁷ Riesz, *Afrikanische Kriegsgefangene*, 79. The expression «world of enemies» belongs to the photographer-anthropologist Otto Stiehl.

spective of its importance for sound theory and practice⁸. The movement spanned about eight years – from the year of the founding of Cabaret Voltaire in 1916 to the publication of Tristan Tzara's «Seven Manifestoes» in 1924 – and experienced successive occurrences in many world capitals, most famously in Zurich, Berlin, Paris and Tokyo. Founded during the war years, when the authority of empires was collapsing, Dada adopted the cacophonies of infant language and simulated the sonorities and discontinuities of a belligerent world, thus acting, paradoxically, as a link between nations and cultures from within an alleged civilizational divide. Here I will focus in particular on the work and literary agenda of two of Dada's main representatives, Hugo Ball and Tristan Tzara, and foreground their contributions to such a civilizational critique by re-assembling human sounds generated by war. The Dada polyglot sound, which was contemporaneous with the first extensive recording library in the world and its multilingual archives, does more than just accumulate testimonies of diverse religions and customs through chant or speech. It raises questions about the relations between «primitive» forces and their counterpart «other».

Among all the representatives of the historical avant-gardes, Dada most vigorously practiced a novel use of sound. Although the Futurists, notably through Luigi Russolo, were credited with the invention of the «art of noises», the Dadaists brought this art to new heights of expression⁹. Relying on inventions by their Futurist predecessors, the Dadaists reoriented the attention of their audience in an even more challenging way to experiments

⁸ One of the most significant Dada dismissals is Roman Jakobson's in an article from 1921, in which he notes that «there is nothing new in Dada» and associates the movement, among others with «Maschinenkunst», «primitivism», and «paroxysms of naïve realism». Roman Jakobson, «Dada» in Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, eds. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 38. Marjorie Perloff also interprets Dadaism as a mere echoing of Futurism. Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment. Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), xxi. Mauro Ponzzi lists the Dada Zurich as a «marginal» or «peripheral» avant-garde in need of reappraisal in his «Die "marginale" Avantgarde. Die *Dispositio* der Revolution der Formen», in *Klassische Moderne. Ein Paradigma des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Mauro Ponzzi (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010). For a reading of Dada sound as reflecting on the emerging science of linguistics, see Tobias Wilke, «Da-da: Articulatory Gestures and the Emergence of Sound Poetry», in *MLN* 128, No. 3 (2013) (German Issue): 639-668. See also Catherine Damman, «Dance, Sound, Word: The "Hundred Jointed Body" in Zurich Dada Performance», in *Germanic Review* 91, No. 4 (2017): 352-366.

⁹ On Dadaism, Futurism and noise, see Douglas Kahn, «Noises of the Avant-Garde» in *Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 427-448.

with sound. Moreover, with the arrival of Dadaism, we can note a re-evaluation of listening, accompanied by the reinvention of poetic performance and the co-involvement of the audience.

With particular emphasis on Dada's historical and ideological context from World War I through the interwar years, I propose that the concept of *interference* can be a useful critical tool for reconsidering the aesthetic purpose and practice of Dadaism. As critics have recently noted, interference and terms such as «wave» and «resonance», inspired by electrodynamics, are capable of dissolving the rigidity of binary oppositions that have dominated the field of social and human sciences¹⁰. Both a metaphor and concept at disciplinary thresholds, interference could designate a zone of confluence of body and machine, a relationship between the human and the technological. It is generally accepted in the relevant scholarship that a rebellion against a machine-governed world and against the objectifying language of journalism informed Hugo Ball's elaboration of sound poems. As we will see, however, the interferences foregrounded by Ball overcome the basic dualism of man and machine proposed by the Futurists and open up possibilities for new aural constellations.

Another important term for my analysis is «aurality». As Jonathan Sterne shows in his *Audible Past*, the term «aural» appeared in 1847 and meant «of or pertaining to the organ of hearing». The term did not appear in print denoting something «received or perceived by the ear» until 1860. While «auricular», the earlier term denoting something «of or pertaining to the ear», referred to the visible part of the ear, the «aural» component carried with it rather an invisible denotation by pointing to the middle ear or inner ear. The «aural» thus internalized the scope of hearing and restored to it a delicate connection between the ear and the brain¹¹. My term «aural interference» posits a connection between sound and its inner reflection in the intimate sphere of a listener. I contend that, through their audacious sound and performance experiments, the Dadaists unsettled their audience's frame of mind, exposing listeners to polyglot compositions of sound, paradoxically under the veil of «nothingness». Most famously, Tzara proclaimed in

¹⁰ Gabriele Gramelsberger, «Interferenzen zwischen den anthropotechnischen Räumen und den Sphären des Theoretischen. Metaphern und Methoden einer geisteswissenschaftlichen Praxeologie im Umgang mit Wechselwirkungen», in *Resonanz: Potentiale einer akustischen Figur*, eds. Karsten Lichau, Viktoria Tkaczyk, and Rebecca Wolf (München: Wolfgang Fink, 2009), 211-217.

¹¹ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 10.

his Dada Manifesto of 1918: «DADA MEANS NOTHING»¹². Ball also calls Dada a «harlequinade made out of nothingness» and emphasizes that «the Dadaist suffers from dissonances to the point of disintegration»¹³. To understand this recourse to «nothingness» within the Dadaist rhetoric, we must return to the status of listening in the early years of the twentieth-century.

In his comprehensive analysis of the cultural history of sound, Sterne attributes to listening the same fate that befell «looking» over the course of history: «audition becomes a site through which modern power relations can be elaborated, managed, and acted out. Starting in a few select contexts, the very meaning of listening drifts toward technical and rational conceptions»¹⁴. Against this conversion of listening into a rationalized process, the Dadaists offer an alternative approach. For them, audition and listening become an experiment with chance and an inversion of a process that can be controlled rationally. As Hans Richter, a Dada artist, pointed out, «chance became our trademark ... Coincidences of sound or form were occasions for wide leaps that revealed connections between the most apparently unconnected ideas»¹⁵. However, the principle of connecting disparate ideas and occurrences reveals the loose but still real control exerted by Dadaists over artistic materials and their final purpose. Yet, through their practice, rational listening is perturbed, and organs of listening and perception are challenged by their new mission of questioning rational filters of perception.

This attack on rationalized listening has several targets. One is Western civilization, a civilization often associated with the favoring of sight over

¹² Tristan Tzara, «Manifesto 1918», in *Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Motherwell (New York: Wittenborn/Schultz, 1951), 77. Interpreting this line within the context of Tzara's alleged Buddhist influence, Ko Won notes rightly that this line is to be read not as an expression of Dadaist nihilism but rather as an expression of liberation. However, he limits his interpretation to the sphere of religious meaning and only faintly outlines a possible criticism on the part of Dada, via a non-Western approach of inculcated Western beliefs. See Ko Won, *Buddhist Elements in Dada: A Comparison of Tristan Tzara, Takahashi Shinkichi and Their Fellow Poets* (New York: New York University Press, 1977), 87.

¹³ Hugo Ball, *Dada Fragments (1916-1917)*. In Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, 51. See Ball diary entry from June 12, 1916.

¹⁴ As can be gauged from Sterne's argument, in which he does not explicitly distinguish between audition and listening, audition is the result of a conscientious manipulation by the media and their creators, while listening is the process that leads to this result. Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 93.

¹⁵ «Hans Richter, «Dada Art and Anti-Art», in *Dadas on Art*, ed. Lucy Lippard (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 41.

sound¹⁶. The articulation of knowledge via sight goes back to the hierarchy of the senses articulated by Aristotle, wherein vision features as the highest ranked sense. The primacy of vision over sound is later mirrored by empiricist and rationalist methods of observation and rationalization that have been en vogue since the Enlightenment, with the anthropologist and ethnographer in particular inclined to view the Other as an object of aesthetic contemplation reduced to spatial-visual patterns¹⁷. The other target, mentioned by Ball in his «Dada Diary», is the Germans' «unbounded faith in the omnipotence of harmony». Ball's prescription against this desire for harmony, which in his view masks the imperialist ambitions of his age and its «cannibalistic exploits», finds its concrete manifestation in Cabaret Voltaire (1916), the first main organ of Dadaism, present as both a magazine and a literary cabaret¹⁸. On the cabaret stage artists dressed in outlandish costumes, recited gibberish or multiple languages, and created a new art of the spectacle involving both sound and sight.

Although sound poems had previously been designed by Christian Morgenstern with his famous «Das grosse Lalulà» and also by Paul Scheerbart, Ball couples the genre for the first time with performance, masquerade, live recitation and aggressive engagement with the audience. These poems are aural products *par excellence* in the way they address the audience and solicit inner and outer reactions from audience members. The reciter himself experiences immense pressure to maintain a balanced stage posture as well as to articulate the verses' multiple tonalities when driven by poetic fervor¹⁹. The vocabulary of these poems is suitably peculiar. In his diary, Ball recalls setting up music stands on stage, facing the audience, and ending the performance with a liturgical chant. Furthermore, Ball claims that through these verses the Dadaists managed to leave the language corrupted by journalism and return to the «innermost alchemy of the word». (Ibid). While acknowledging his debt to Marinetti and his words-in-freedom devoid of syntax, Ball explains how the Dadaists went a step further than the Futurists, by making it possible, through the power of the word, to «hear the innately playful but hidden, irrational character of the listener»²⁰. In his as-

¹⁶ See Harold B. Segel, *Turn-of-the-Century Cabaret* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 331.

¹⁷ For elaboration on the «primacy of vision» over sight, see «The Other and the Eye: Time and the Rhetoric of Vision», in Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 105-141.

¹⁸ Ball, *Flight out of Time*, 61.

¹⁹ Ibid., 71.

²⁰ Ibid., 68.

assessment the poems are not only a visual show but also a means or reappraising the value of listening itself.

Hugo Ball's best known *Lautgedichte* comprise six poems, listed in the first edited collection of his works (edited by Annemarie Schütt-Hennings in 1963) as «*Wolken*» (Clouds), «*Katzen und Pfauen*» (Cats and Peacocks), «*Totenklage*» (Funeral Chant), «*gadji beri bimba*», «*Karawane*» (Caravan), and «*Seepferdchen und Flugfische*» (Sea Horses and Flying Fish)²¹. «*Karawane*», recited at the Cabaret Voltaire on July 23, 1916, is the only sound poem published during Ball's lifetime, since the poems had been designed exclusively for live performance. Printed in 1920 in the *Dada Almanach* edited by Richard Huelsenbeck, «*Karawane*» was accompanied by a visual supplement and arranged as a montage featuring Hugo Ball dressed as a «magic bishop». The letters of the poem figure in a succession of fonts, type styles and sizes, and create the sensation of incessant motion:

KARAWANE

jolifanto bambla ô falli bambla
 grossiga m'pfa habla horem
égiga goramen
 higo bloiko russula huju
 hollaka hollala
anlogo bung
 blago bung
 blago bung
bossa fataka
 u uu u
 schampa wulla wussa ólobo
hej tatta gôrem
 eschige zunbada
wulubu ssubudu uluw ssubudu
tumba ba- umf
kusagauma
ba - umf

²¹ To understand Ball's gradual development of «sound techniques» and apparent dissolution of semantics in his later sound poems, we need to be aware of the structure and meaning of a poem such as «*Totentanz 1916*», which protests the war, is written as a medieval *danse macabre* and staged at cabaret shows. See the detailed analysis of «*Totentanz*» in Erdmute Wenzel White, *The Magic Bishop: Hugo Ball, Dada Poet* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1998), 47-57. Another creation that anticipates his sound poems is Ball's *Simultan Krippenspiel*, a bruitist concert made out of noise and nonsense syllables, which borrows the structure of multilingual Nativity Plays and precedes the simultaneous poems designed and recited by Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp and Richard Huelsenbeck on the stage of the Cabaret Voltaire. Some other poems such as «*Piffalamozza der Stier*» (Piffalamozza the Bull) were conceived independently of the *Lautgedicht* cycle.

Craftily designed, *Verse ohne Worte* (poems without words) or *Lautgedichte*, conceived as a cycle of poems, are defined by Ball as sequences such that the «balance of the vowels is weighed and distributed solely according to the values of the beginning sequence»²². This hermetic sentence schema alludes to a mechanism of vowel distribution based on the poetic material itself. In «Karawane», however, clusters of consonants attract similar sounds, as in «anlogo bung», or «blago bung», according to what we might term the logic of the echo: «anlogo bung / blago bung / blago bung / bosso fataka / ü üü ü». This progression of vocalic and consonantal impetus has also been termed «somatic vocalizations»²³. The term indicates that neither on the page nor in the actual rhythm of recitation do vocables gain priority over each other. In another twist taken from the aesthetic of the Futurists, Ball relies for stress and emphasis not only on fonts and type-sizes but also on vocal arrangements, where «the stresses become heavier» and the emphasis increases «as the sound of the consonants became sharper»²⁴. In «Karawane» as well as in other sound poems, we deal primarily with instances where words establish «aural connections» and anticipate each other, while also invoking something beyond immediate semantics.

As Ball stresses in his «First Dada Manifesto», read on July 14, 1916, in Zurich: «Why can't a tree be called Pluplusch, and Pluplubasch next time, when it has been raining (or: when it is soaked with rain)?». He goes on to question the real connections between words and things or between words and relations of power: «The word, the word, the word beyond your sphere of influence, your stuffiness, your ridiculous impotence, your stupendous smugness, beyond all the parrotry of your self-evident stupidity»²⁵. Although this association seems to refer to the arbitrariness of words and their putative correspondence to things, it might also be read as taking into account the evasion of meaning that occurs in confrontation with exotic languages, which are typically not-understood or at best misunderstood. This peculiar condition of unintelligibility would transcend any «sphere of influence». «Karawane», also known as «Elephantenkarawane», was inspired by a Debussy piano piece and written at the peak of the Dadaist «African fever», as Ball himself recalls in his *Dada Diary*. The text evokes a procession of animals and their herdsman. Except for the title, its words seem to be

²² Ball, *Flight out of Time*, 70.

²³ Jed Rasula, «Understanding the Sound of Not Understanding», in *Close Listening*, ed. Charles Bernstein (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 238.

²⁴ Ball, *Flight out of Time*, 70.

²⁵ Ball, «The First Dada Manifesto», Appendix in White, *Magic Bishop*, 229.

derived from various languages and dialects and assembled in fragmentary pieces. The narrator is unknown and so is the content of the words. One can derive meaning only by free association.

Whereas the first lines of «Karawane» offer a mixture of vowels and consonants («jolifanto bambla o falli bambla/ grossiga m'pfa habla horem»), the poem ends in consonant closure or thump of feet: «ba-umf». Do sounds of distant, imaginary drums resound on the horizon as in «tumba ba-umpf»? These assemblages of sound, through their manifest disregard for syntax and semantics, lie at the opposite end of the spectrum of ethnographic ambitions to expose and analyze sounds from different people and different places. In his play with sound and rhythmic beatings and consonants, Ball exposes the game of collecting and archiving sound for the purpose of ethnography and linguistics²⁶. He turns everything into a kind of exhibition in which words acquire new liberties and possibilities of articulation that evade the eye and ear of a collector. At the risk of creating outrage and confusion in his audience, Ball creates interference as a discrepancy between words, their anticipated meanings, and their acoustic reflections.

Is the effect of aural interferences to be equated with «nothingness», or is there a substantive correlative to all this? Inspired by Chinese and Japanese stage techniques, Ball uses in his poetry many elements from the arsenal of Asian theater such as syncopation, silence, pauses, surging tempi and brief melodies²⁷. As documented by his companion Emmy Hennings and other scholars, Ball was also familiar with Jakob Boehme's mysticism and his use of incantatory sounds, with the vowels A, E, I, O, U functioning as principles of divine creation²⁸. If we were to accept these influences as cen-

²⁶ In Hannah Höch's collage series *Aus einem ethnographischen Museum*, the artist deconstructs, through grotesque photomontages, the notion of the (visual) museum that exploits African art, especially African sculpture transported to Europe. In his comments on the relation between ethnographic representation and native policy, George Steinmetz emphasizes, among other things, the colonizers' imaginary cross-identification with images of their subjects. George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting, Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 27. This is still a visually articulated, posited relation, which is transcended by forms of sound ethnography and their use in Dadaism.

²⁷ See his diary entries from April 11, 1915 for his interest in Chinese theater and the power of song to shock the audience, and also for his exposure to Japanese theater plays in his «Prologue» to *Flight out of Time*. These influences are also stressed by White in writing of Ball's appreciation of Kandinsky and Von Laban and their use of Japanese theater methods, in particular.

²⁸ See Emmy Henning's quote from a letter by Ball to a Benedictine monk, where he

tral to his aesthetics, then we can regard Ball as a creator who, in his confessed disavowal of Germanic hegemony expressed as spurious harmony turns instead to Western mysticism and the Far Eastern role of silence. Ball's free associations and rhythms challenge the audience to explore what lies beyond a mechanized mode of audition and understanding. «The funeral chant» can also be regarded as a private or collective mourning song, which celebrates death and, above all, creation, through the importance assigned to basic vowels. The rules that govern Ball's poetics are not sequential but rather cross-referential, as documented by principles of cross-resonance, with sonorous constructions mirroring each other and building incantatory formulae across the six sound poems. Thus Ball creates rules that elude logical sequencing and point rather to mystical formulae and the use of silent gaps in meaning and syntax. «Blaulala», for instance, is a formula that occurs in «gadji beri bimba» but also in «Sea Horses and Flying Fish». «Glandridi» is to be found in «gadji beri bimba» and «Clouds». Sequences of sounds without localizable meaning are interrupted by the geographically identifiable name of the East African region of Zanzibar in «Gadji Beri Bimba». The name appears in the middle of incantation-like alliterative and repetitive formulae: «zimzim urullala zimzim urullala zanzibar zimzalla zam».

Zanzibar, not part of colonized German East Africa at the time, appears as a recognizable cipher in a non-semantic landscape and as potential trigger of abrupt colonial desires. As cultural critics have noted, against Edward Said's minimization of colonialism in the German context, it was precisely the lack of colonies that stimulated the German imaginary²⁹. The impression

confesses the couple's interest and readings of the mystics, including Boehme. See also the footnote on Boehme in White, *Magic Bishop*, 99. Kahn reads the *Verse ohne Worte* as a way of appealing to the Christian logos. Alternatively, verses without sounds can be read as a critique of national languages. Kahn, «Noises of the Avant-Garde», 430. Ball himself credits his performance with a form of liturgical-like fervor, yet his poetic trance seems to be more the consequence of the ancient stance of the poet as *poeta vates*. He formally reconverted to Christianity after he left Dada.

²⁹ Sabine Wilke, *Masochismus und Kolonialismus. Literatur, Film und Pädagogik* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 2007), 13. Wilke is expanding here on an observation by Susan Zantop. Richard Huelsenbeck's so-called *Negergedichte* contain the refrain «Umba!», which references the river that separated Deutsche Ostafrika from British East Africa and, in 1914, became «the frontline between two warring nations». See Michael White, «Umba! Umba! Sounding the Other, Sounding the Same», in *Dada Africa. Dialogue with the Other*, eds. Ralf Burmeister, Michaela Oberhofer and Esther Tisa Francini (Berlin: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2016), 165.

of hazardous desire and chance is also conveyed by the function of «Zanzibar» as the name of a dice game of the times³⁰. Besides providing this identifiable signpost, «Zanzibar», as a possible target of arbitrary colonial ambitions, «gadjji beri bimba» is unique also in its use of anaphoric sequences in its end verses: «gaga di bumbalo bumbalo gadjamen/gaga di bling blong/gaga blung». Here consonantal accumulation coexists with end rhymes and brings together, symbolically, a fractured or impossible harmony. The final lines of the poem simulate children's language and nursery rhymes and point to a clash between a desire for harmony and a procession of stray sounds and dismembered words. This unlikely harmonious unity achieved via incantation is more explicit in «Karawane», through the invocation «jolifanto bambla o falli bambla». If Ball's verses are marking a subtle rebellion against the colonialist principle of observation and regimentation, does the ultimate clash of vowels and consonants and penchant for harmony point to a struggle within his aesthetics? Or is this struggle rather the struggle of colonialism itself, with Ball's Dadaist verses mimetically reproducing a system and its own incongruities? What is certain is that Ball is not merely liberating words as his Futurist predecessors did; he is investing them with new powers. The poem mediates colonial ambitions as it reduces other languages to elementary particles, exposing the vacuity of the colonial enterprise.

«Totenklage», through its key verse «klinga inga M ao-Auwa», embodies Ball's principle of touching on a hundred ideas without naming them. This logic of suggestion would prompt us to read, for instance, a line such as «klinga inga M ao-Auwa» from «Totenklage» as the decomposition of a pseudo-African poem, popular with Huelsenbeck, for instance, and thus as exposure of the genre as spurious³¹. «Klinga» is a possible phonetic variation of «klingeln» (to sound, in German), whereas «inga» might allude to a phonetic variant of Inca, with «M ao-Auwa» possibly pointing to the colonized Maori population of New Zealand, at the time popular subjects of pseudo-ethnographic poems and «primitive» art. The vowels and consonants in this

³⁰ Christian Schiff points to this reference when discussing Apollinaire's play, «Les Mamelles de Tirésias», staged in 1917, one year after the performance of the first *Lautgedichte*. In that anti-war play, «the people of Zanzibar» is a one-person Greek chorus accompanied by instrumental sound that serves as character, commentator and generator of sound effects. For more, see Christian Schiff, «Banging on the Windowpane: Sound in Early Surrealism», in *The Wireless Imagination*, eds. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 144, 180 (fn).

³¹ Huelsenbeck published his poems *Phantastische Gebete* (Fantastic Prayers) in 1916.

poem stage an outright rebellion of poetic improvisation against the constrictions of language and power, with the recognizable cipher «Zanzibar» functioning both as a testimony of otherness and as the mark of a tension between semantics and pure sound arrangements. However, this hypothetical colonized Other is not exoticized in Ball's poems but rather expressed and liberated, through sound, from cultural functionalization³². The far-fetched aim of the fragmentation of language in sound, accompanied by the teasing of vision, will serve, more evidently with Tzara, to expose national and linguistic ambitions.

Ball's poems clearly seem to indicate something different from a pure exaltation of categories of the primitive and the exotic. They may be understood, I suggest, in terms of conjuration of chant as supreme aesthetic form situated antagonistically to the logic of meticulous archiving peculiar to a museum of sounds built on the Wünsdorf analogue. By alienating the *vox humana* through his verses without words, Ball reconditions the status of the colonized human as a target of ethnographic observation and its spurious humanization through the collection of its voice in camps such as Wünsdorf. Through his assemblages of sound, Ball pursues a novel manner of collecting voices and words as fragments, which reverses the logic of accumulation and careful depositing present in a museum or any other deliberate attempt at archiving. Ball's Other, although difficult to distinguish through fragmentary speech, is at least no longer the «other» of observation, contemplation and analysis³³. This exploration of alterity will acquire further dimensions in Tzara's work.

In addition to Ball's sound poems, three more types of poetry caused major stirs on the stage of the Cabaret Voltaire: Tzara's ethnopoetic poems (also known as «poèmes nègres»), Huelsenbeck's *chants nègres*, and the so-called simultaneous poems by a group of artists including Hans Arp, Huelsenbeck and Tzara. A closer look at the simultaneous and ethnopoetic poems will uncover how they relate to Ball's «poems without words».

Reflecting on the Dada movement in his «En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism» (1920), Richard Huelsenbeck credits F. T. Marinetti, the initiator

³² I read cultural functionalization along the lines of Steinmetz, who reminds us that colonial ethnography contributed to the creation of a form of cultural capital. Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting*, xv. The constitution of a Dadaist archive displaces the logic of collection, as it uncovers and mimics forms of desire intrinsic to colonial exploits.

³³ On «otherness» as articulation of desire and derision, see Homi Bhabha's «The Other Question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism», in Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 96.

of the Futurist movement³⁴, with inventing «bruitism» or «noise music» as a special type of music, targeted in principle at the awakening of «the capital», as in capital city³⁵. The chorus of typewriters, kettledrums, rattles and pot-covers summoned by the Futurists, turned later, with the sound-poetic performances of the Dadaists, into hyperbolic stage productions. Huelsenbeck also holds Marinetti responsible for the invention of the concept of simultaneity, which presupposes a heightened sensitivity that «attempts to transform the problem of the ear into a problem of the face»³⁶. Simultaneity is a «reminder of life» and very closely bound up with bruitism. Although these Futurist signposts were adopted by Dada, Huelsenbeck criticizes Tzara's equation of Dada with «nothing», saying that this could not lead to action, movement, revolt, but only to pure abstraction³⁷. While the Futurists saw in noise a direct call to action, more precisely, to war, they provided the Dadaists, by contrast, with the very weapons of Dadaist counter-action they sought and exposure of the dominion and practices of war. Unlike the Futurists, the Dadaists also mobilized noise as a weapon to ridicule and expose the colonial contests initiated by the European states. However, this is not Huelsenbeck's view; he claims that the Dadaists were unaware of the deeper meaning of their Futurist inheritance and regarded it as a purely artistic instrument. The subtle distinction I would highlight between Tzara's and also Ball's idea of «nothing» and the mere abstraction seen in their art by Huelsenbeck is worth analyzing from the perspective of the simultaneous poem and its use of noise. How does noise undermine colonial practices and disturb the glorification of the category of the primitive?

In *Flight out of Time* Ball engages in detail with the making of a simultaneous poem. He credits his colleagues Huelsenbeck, Tzara, and Janco with the performance of one and explains its particulars: «In such a simultaneous poem, the wilful quality of an organic work is given powerful expression, and so is its limitation by the accompaniment. Noises (an *rrrrr* drawn out for minutes, or crashes, or sirens, etc.) are superior to the human voice in energy»³⁸. Although Ball wants us to understand that noises represent the

³⁴ The First Manifesto of Futurist Literature dates back to 1909. We can interpret the war and technological fervor of the Futurists in the context of their idealization of a war that had not yet started, hence their glorification of war.

³⁵ Richard Huelsenbeck, «En Avant Dada: A History of Dadaism», in Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, 25.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 23-48.

³⁸ Ball, *Flight out of Time*, 57.

inarticulate and the primordial, the polar opposite of the *vox humana*, he explains the simultaneous poem as a construct based in equal measure on the two components of the human and the inhuman or the mechanical. And he establishes the principle of aural interference as a basic component of this poetic art.

Douglas Kahn offers a fitting interpretation of the Dadaists' use of noise in relation to the movement's ambiguous reference to the primitive Other or the colonized. He sees in the Dadaist production of noise a form of representing the distant Other, hence as a form of identification on the part of excluded artists with the foreign exotic Other³⁹. Kahn also provides a counterargument to his position, namely that the practice of noise can also refer indirectly to the mimicry of an incomprehensible Other, one who remains just that, noise, in the artistic imaginary. The latter interpretation construes the use of noise by the Dadaists as an exaltation of the primitive or as an emphasis on the impossibility of changing the order of things. The first understanding of noise here praises identification with the Other, also in the form of an improvisation of sounds and semantic components to illustrate the status of self as Other and, moreover, as noise. Are we to think that the renewal of language solicited by Ball is predicated on its birth from noise? In sharp contrast to this assumption, T. J. Demos suggests that the uses of eclectic «African» expressions are early signs of Ball's «fall in essentialism» and his later desertion of the movement in 1917⁴⁰. Huelsenbeck and later Tzara too would travel to Africa but only after the movement had ended, with Tzara becoming in time a connoisseur of African art. However, Africa was not the only source of inspiration for these Dadaists. So too were other colonized locales, as we will see especially in Tzara's «Poèmes nègres» and their linguistic and artistic testimonies⁴¹. The invisible sources for a museum of sound can be regarded here in a dual way: as a source of ethnographic evidence and as testimony to the Other's breaking from colonial bonds via sound. Both Ball and Tzara seem to have struggled against

³⁹ Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2001), 47.

⁴⁰ T. J. Demos, «Circulations: In and Around Zurich Dada», *October* 105 (Summer 2003): 158.

⁴¹ In «Memoirs of a Dada Drummer», Huelsenbeck writes on the emergence of the «new man» as «stuffed full to the point of disgust with the experience of all outcasts, the dehumanized beings of Europe, the Africans, the Polynesians, all kinds, feces smeared with devilish ingredients [...]». Quoted in Hal Foster, «Dada Mime», *October* 105, 169. The «new man» of the Dadaist projection seems to rely on a disenchantment with colonialism.

the unquestioned reception of ethnographic evidence, offering their own retelling of both «primitive» art and colonial conquests.

Tzara published his simultaneous poems in collaboration with Hans Arp, Walter Serner, Marcel Janco or Richard Huelsenbeck. The chosen language of the poems was either German or French. One of the most famous poems of the trio Tzara, Janco and Arp, «L'amiral cherche une maison à louer» (The Admiral is Looking for a Place to Rent), engages three languages at war at the time, French, German and English⁴². However, many more dispersed sounds and formulae are recognizable on the page. The poem starts, for instance, with a traditional Romanian New Year's song formula: «ahoi, ahoi». The languages compete ironically for supremacy within the space of a poem that includes stage directions in the manner of a musical score. A side note signed by Tzara, who claims authorship of this new invention, reveals the indebtedness of the simultaneous poem to the theory of voices, rhythms and simultaneous chants posited by Henri Barzun, in which, by contrast to lyric poetry and its principle of succession, the principle of simultaneity governs. The simultaneity posited by Tzara envisions itself also as a modern aesthetics. In Tzara's interpretation, every listener is invested with the liberty to make his/her own connections. The last line of the poem, spoken in unison as «l'admiral n'a rien trouvé», («the admiral has not found anything»), foregrounds the lack of a unifying principle and the ultimate lack of the sought object. The new aesthetic claimed by Tzara is no longer grounded in the visual, as was the case with his predecessors (Mallarmé, Apollinaire or Marinetti), but in the sonorous and the performative. In the performative act, languages succeed themselves and build coherence as polyglot syntax. However, the «speech» of the fictive admiral is reduced to logorrhoea, nonsense and absurd articulation; instead, a suite of voices, reproduced in print as onomatopoeic musical notations, take control of the stage. Human reconciliation and conflict gives way to glossolalia.

Tzara further elucidates his new aesthetics when, in 1916, he confesses in his correspondence his intention «to destroy literary genres». He also claims to have used in poems elements that otherwise would have been judged unworthy of being there: «newspaper phrases, noises and sounds». He further comments:

These sounds (which had nothing in common with imitative sounds) were supposed to be the equivalent of the research of Picasso, Matisse, Derain, who used in their paintings different subject matters. Already in 1914 I had tried to take away from words their meaning, and to use

⁴² Published in *Cabaret Voltaire*, 1916.

them in order to give a new global sense to the verse by the tonality and the auditory contrast. These experiments ended with an abstract poem, «Toto-Vaca», composed of pure sounds invented by me and containing no allusion to reality (21).⁴³

As much as Tzara might want to underplay the connection of his poems to reality, this reality is nevertheless discernible in many forms, from his words' sonorous form of semantics, to thematic patterns echoing Tzara's concern with «a new global sense». In this regard, Tzara is not far from Ball's verses and their apparent disconnection from immediate reality. Other poems credited to Tzara and Dadaism include, most importantly, «the poem of vowels» and the poem «mouvementiste». The former testifies to a closer relation to semantics, which will help us situate Tzara's political and aesthetic agenda in relation to those of Ball and others.

According to Marcel Janco, Tzara's «poem of vowels» differed from Ball's in that Tzara preserved the semantic component of his verses, while focusing in his recitation on the sonic articulations of words⁴⁴. The consequence of this technique was the acquisition of semantic relevance on the part of the sonic level of recitation. In Janco's view, Ball favored rather abstract verses made out of invented words. In the «miscellaneous poems» section in the collection of Tzara's completed works edited by Henri Behar, not translated into English so far, we encounter a poem such as «La Panka», deemed by the editor to be a practical illustration of Tzara's «poems of vowels». «La Panka» comprises successions of vowels and consonants that convey a landscape in tumult, animated by the sound of musical instruments. «La Panka» invokes a big mechanical fan that seems to establish from the beginning a link between the natural and the mechanical.

De la teeee ee erre moooooonte
des bouuuules
Là aaa aaaaaa où oùoù pououou
oussent les clarinettes
De l'intééé eee eee eee rieur mo onte
des boules vers la suuu uurfa
aaa aace

⁴³ Unpublished letter from Tzara to Jacques Doucet, October 30, 1922. Quoted in Tristan Tzara, «*Approximate Man*» & *Other Writings*, transl. Mary Ann Caws (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2005), 21. On «Toto Vaca» and Tzara's decision to publish it as a phonetic transcription, see Hélène Thiéard, «Negro poem, sound poem? Everyone his own Other», in *Dada Africa*, 24.

⁴⁴ This episode is cited in Tristan Tzara, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Tome I (1912-1924), ed. Henri Behar (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 721.

Yet, the poem «mouvementiste» particularly emphasizes what Tzara calls «primitive elements», that is, accompanying gestures that echo the notion of rhythm on a physical level. In this poem, Tzara appears to relate the «primitive» to infant language. It is appropriate to engage here in a more in-depth discussion of the significance of primitivism for Tzara and the Dadaists. As Biro writes in his *Dada Cyborg*:

«Primitivism» refers to the appropriation of non-Western artistic forms, styles, and subjects by European artists beginning in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. ... In terms of form, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century primitivism distorted «realistic» color, scale, perspective, and the three-dimensional space, which focused the viewer's attention on the artwork's formal and material qualities; it developed an often gestural or rhythmic handling of line and form that was understood to suggest emotional or «spiritual» states; and it developed earlier forms of artistic and «folk» art media (e.g., the woodcut and «reverse-painted glass»⁴⁵).

Is Tzara's «primitive» a glorification of the exotic Other or a means of exposing colonial practices? In Tzara's «Note 6 on African Art», published in 1917, «the light» is not coming from the German colonizing powers but rather from Africa⁴⁶. He concludes the note with the following sibylline saying: «Nobody has seen so clearly as I this evening, to grind out the white». Does Tzara imply here that the clichés that deem «the primitive» an ultimate source of inspiration need to be overthrown or is he rather a slave to this automatism as are many of his contemporaries? In the same «note» he also exalts the aural qualities of art and the virtues of humanity as a composite force that engages both nature and technology. He writes: «Art was at the beginning of time, prayer. Wood and rock were truth. In man I see the moon, the plants, the dark, metal, star, fish»⁴⁷.

In his *Dada Manifesto 1918* Tzara had already anticipated Dadaism as a victim of journalists who would associate the movement with «a return to a dry and noisy, noisy and monotonous primitivism»⁴⁸. Regarding this com-

⁴⁵ Biro, *The Dada Cyborg*, 11.

⁴⁶ The English translation of Note 6 on African Art was published in *Primitivism and Twentieth-Century Art: A Documentary History*, eds. Jack Flam and Miriam Deutch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 111. See also Tristan Tzara, *Découverte des arts dits primitifs. Suivi de Poèmes nègres* (Paris: Hazan, 2006), 26. The quote reads: «Let's draw light from the dark». («Du noir puisons la lumière»).

⁴⁷ Flam and Deutch, 111.

⁴⁸ Tzara, *Approximate Man*, 125.

plicated relationship with primitivist art as a potential artistic Other, he sarcastically states, in his 1920 «manifesto of feeble love and bitter love»: «My name is THE OTHER / desirous of understanding / Since diversity is diverting, this game of golf gives the illusion of a “certain” depth⁴⁹. I maintain all the conventions – to do away with them would be to create new ones, which would complicate life in a really disgusting way»⁵⁰. Tzara takes on the mask of the absolute OTHER to expose the dilemmas surrounding alterity as a source of inspiration for embracing diversity that nevertheless always risks becoming a farce of possession and appropriation. This OTHER functions as an epitome of alterity that reflects on its own construction.

Dada, as he would later claim in his «Colonial Syllogism» (1921), resembles fate or a verdict: «nobody can escape from DADA»⁵¹. It is only by means of DADA, capitalized, that one can evade the predicament of the present. Read in the context of colonialism, still a pervasive system of domination in Africa and Asia in the 1920s, Dada appears as a means of evading colonial bonds. By offering a solution in the form of a syllogism, Dada, through Tzara’s voice, also presents the public with a paradoxical statement of putative fact. In a world dominated by subjection and fatality, the arbitrariness of Dada can point to the bonds of fate and suppression and symbolically unravel them. The first lines of the syllogism, which reproduces the whole mechanics of the original philosophical pattern, including the conclusive line, read:

No one can escape from destiny
No one can escape from DADA

Only DADA can enable you to escape from destiny.⁵²

Although Dada itself, through this logic of non-escape, acquires violent traces, its violence points to a putative liberation from all types of constraints. By mimicking one of the core features of exoticism and colonialism, that is, liberation in the name of a superior doctrine, Tzara is inverting

⁴⁹ This manifesto is part of the cycle, Tristan Tzara, *Seven Dada Manifestoes* (Sept Manifestes Dada), translated in Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*. See Tzara, *Oeuvres Complètes*, Tome I, 359-390.

⁵⁰ Tzara, «Seven Dada Manifestoes», 91.

⁵¹ «Colonial Syllogism» is the final part of the Seven Dada Manifestoes, published in 1924, when Tzara was still trying to counterpose Dadaism to Surrealism. The DADA movement would officially disband around 1923-1924.

⁵² Tzara, *Oeuvres Complètes Tome I*, 390. The English translation is from Motherwell, *Dada Painters and Poets*, 97-98.

here the very tropes of Orientalism and deriding them in the form of a syllogism. Yet this does not mean that Dada is expressly overcoming the very problems it points out but merely plays against a very powerful force, colonialism, with weapons of colonialism.

Steve McCaffery compares the techniques of the two representatives of the Zurich Dada discussed here, Ball and Tzara, and sees them at two complementary poles. In Ball's case, McCaffery argues, the emphasis on the phoneme as a creational unit and the weight given to haptic and pathic effects lead to the possible dissolution of national languages and their structures and hierarchical relations⁵³. On the other hand, McCaffery continues, referring explicitly to Tzara's simultaneous poems, here it is the polyphony of voices that undermines national ambitions. Yet Ball does not dissolve all semantics in mantic invocation but keeps some locations, with their formulae un-dissolved, as in «zanzibar» in «Karawane». Similarly, Tzara cultivates mantic invocation in some of his «Poèmes nègres», especially in his so-called abstract poem «Toto-Vaca», but mostly he operates with plays on voices, processions, dialogues, (war) songs and dances. In so doing, Tzara strives to surpass «primitive» stereotypes associated with the first «pseudo-ethnographic» poems by Huelsenbeck, described by critics as «whimsical abstractions designed to evoke the rhythms and “semantics” of African songs»⁵⁴. He does so by incorporating and translating, with his poetic sensibility, fragments of authentic African songs transcribed from anthropology magazines in Zurich. Tzara reconstructs snippets of aural dialogues in the space of a poem but verifies his sources first, not merely embellishing them according to patterns that suit the poem as in Huelsenbeck's case⁵⁵. We could say that Tzara transfers the technique of simultaneous polyphony to the voices of un- or misrepresented nations, either diminished by primitivist representations or silenced by colonial ambitions.

The New Zealand poem «Toto-Waka» for instance, which recalls Huelsenbeck's own «primitive» poem «Toto-Vaco», recited on the stage of Cabaret Voltaire, contains the verses:

⁵³ Steve McCaffery, «Cacophony, Abstraction and Potentiality» in *The Sound of Poetry, The Poetry of Sound*, eds. Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 123.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁵ For Tzara's interest in ethnological sources, see also Christian Kaufmann, «Dada Reads Ethnological Sources. From Knowledge of Foreign Art Worlds to Poetic Understanding», in *Dada Africa*, 96-103.

Ah la racine
 la racine du Tu
 Eh le vent
 traînez plus loin
 vent rageur
 traînez plus loin la racine
 la racine du Tu
 Donc pousse, Rimo
 Kauea
 continue Totara
 Kauea
 continue Pukatea
 Kauea
 donne-moi le Tu
 Kauaea
 donne-moi le Maro ...⁵⁶

Tzara calls this poem an abstract one and claims to have experimented with invented sounds here⁵⁷. However, another poem of the same title, «Toto-Vaca», can be regarded as a careful translation of a Maori poem. This dilemma of «real» versus «invented» sounds will always haunt Dadaist aesthetics. «Toto-Waka» starts by mimicking bird language, as in «Kiwi crie l'oiseau», from the perspective of an omniscient listener, then turns into a meditation on a «You» sent abroad, trying strangely to reconcile with the «I»: Ah la racine / la racine du Tu / Eh le vent / traînez plus loin / vent rageur / traînez plus loin la racine / racine du Tu» (Oh the root / the root of You / eh the wind / drag more remotely / savage wind / drag more remotely / the root of You.) Alienation ensues, when the «I» dissolves into a You. This return to roots of a sort is a return to the «primitive» structures of affective life, as Tzara would later write his theoretical piece from 1928 on «Découverte des arts dits primitifs»⁵⁸. Tzara's live collections of polyphonic voices and Ball's almost unrecognizable vocables and mixed voices within a single poem tell the story of a failure to narrate the «primitive» or the «colonized». This is the story of a failure to order or to invest it with a logic of mastery from without.

⁵⁶ Reproduced in Tzara, *Découverte des arts dits primitifs*, 124.

⁵⁷ Henri Behar, *Oeuvres Complètes, Tome I*, 717.

⁵⁸ Tzara, *Découverte*, 33.

Martin Puchner observes in his book *The Poetry of the Revolution* that the Great War had a divergent effect on the avant-gardes⁵⁹. It exacerbated nationalist fervor on the one hand (as was the case with the Futurists and Expressionists), and on the other hand, in Dada's case, it promoted resistance to nationalism. Furthermore, turning our critical attention to Dada, we can discover, along the lines of T. J. Demos, an early model of resistance against the forces of nationalism, imperialism or their modern counterparts – even globalization⁶⁰. Does this model of resistance turn Dada into a solipsist practice, as Demos suggests? Interpreting Dada as solipsistic, another critic asks if the sound practice of the Dadaists facilitates «an arrival at the pulse and heave of language itself, thoroughly cleansed of its human shadows»⁶¹. Especially as practiced by Ball and Tzara, however, Dada is not concerned exclusively with the mechanics of rationalizing the exotic Other. The aim is to create an alternative poetic audience through non-rationalized sound.

By Tzara's account, Dadaism originates in a distrust of the community, while recent critics see the movement quite differently, that is, as a celebration of a new communal spirit, ignited by the collaboration and participation of international artists in times of crisis⁶². Both evaluations are true: Dadaism rejected a certain type of bourgeois community while reuniting artists from around the world across waves of sound. A proponent of the latter interpretation, Puchner emphasizes rather the international scope of Dada:

Dada sought to establish an internationalism best described by the figure of the network, a web organized not by nation-states or languages but by connections among cities ... What is required, therefore, is a method that captures Dada's theory and practice of internationalism, its peculiar modes of establishing networks that cross national borders. (136)

The term «aural interference» I proposed earlier in this essay denotes both the creation of dissonance and the permeation of spaces by sound. If we accept Puchner's definition of Dada as an early figure of the network, then the term «aural interference» gives us a supplementary model for understanding Dada's double reliance on noise and harmony. The Dadaist

⁵⁹ Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avantgardes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 135.

⁶⁰ Demos, «Circulations», 147-158.

⁶¹ Rasula, «Understanding», 239.

⁶² Tzara, «Approximate Man», 125.

practice of sound disperses the colonialist archive and makes us aware of the poetry of an «other» that cannot be conflated with an ethnographic Other. It also simulates unintelligibility as a reciprocal premise of the relationship between colonizer and colonized or the ethnographic observer and «the primitive».

While the languages of the Wünsdorf colonial subjects were carefully decoded by experts, the prisoners' sense of alienation permeates the renditions on tape. Yet the imprisoned subjectivities of the phonographic recordings in the first archive of sound can potentially find, through Dada's sound poetry and sense of aural interference, a method by which to challenge the grasp of positivism, racism and reduction of a person to a vocal trace. Beyond the separations of religion, nationality, race, and ethnicity perpetuated by the data collected in the World War I camps for colonial subjects, the Dadaists challenged the reduction of the human by offering its global audience the potential of contemplating sound beyond its customary confinement. Dadaism did not cleanse language of its human shadows but rather invoked the human's irreducible alterity before its methodical ethnographic construction in colonial and pre-colonial discourse.