

A Cultural Revolution for the “Free Spirits:” Hugo Ball’s Nietzschean Anarchism*

Maftai Ștefan-Sebastian**

Babeș-Bolyai University

Addressing *Dada*: Methodological Concerns

Addressing the general issue of Dada’s anarchism by taking the case of Hugo Ball’s writings one finds a major motivational support in the confidence on the actuality of Dada. At the beginning of the last century, Dada represented not only an artistic, but also an intellectual phenomenon. In its development as an artistic movement, Dada reached a certain point, from which today we are still essentially not further. Questions, such as “What can we build if we cannot hold on God, the State, and the good reason?,” “Is the only positive value in this life tied to the noise of life itself?,” “Is there an inherent structure of the world or is it sheer chaos?,” and “What is really art good for, if it isn’t beautiful anymore?,” are questions that keep haunting aesthetics and philosophy almost one century after (Braun 1995). In aesthetic terms, according to Herbert Braun, Dada shares with us a radicalism of questions and problems that is becoming more and more acute in the wake of this long postmodernist age: the lack of a coherent understanding of the world, the alienation of the artist from its audience, the incomprehensible character of his art – these are questions that have been increasingly resounding in recent times.

However, the specter of incomprehensibility still lurks not only in the contemporary artworld itself, but also behind the interpretations that have been shaping the outline of Dada as we see it today. And when we say interpretations, we refer to all kinds of receptions, from academic reviews to the widespread use

* Parts of this essay appeared in my “Art as Unfulfilled Utopia: The Experience of the Political in Dada’s Redefining of Art,” *Studia UBB Philosophia* LIV.2, 2009.

** E-mail: stmaftei@yahoo.com.

of the term Dada in the pop-culture of the 1960's and 1970's. Following Herbert Braun, we might contend that the presence in the last decades of the XXth century of a rich secondary literature on the subject of Dada has not always informed on the significance of this artistic phenomenon for XXth century art (Braun 1995). There are still methodological barriers, Braun thinks, which have kept us and are still keeping us from having a clearer view on the meaning(s) of Dada. Even the name *Dada* itself has been a commonplace for debate, as several opposing theories still quarrel over the name's origins and its basic meanings.¹ Nevertheless, according to Braun, starting our discussion on Dada with the issue of Dada's reception and not with original Dada texts is not without its benefits. Firstly, we are continuously aware of the fact that even this research is only one act of reception among others, striving for objectivity. Secondly, by keeping in mind the history of Dada's *reception* we are cautioned against monopolizing interpretations that are still shaping our contemporary views on this matter.

Generally, the name of *Dada* is widely used today, formally, in academic circles, as well as informally, as a general term describing artistic nonsense, anti-conventional art, and creative activity. As an undertone, the term reads out a "harmless nonsense" or a playful activity directed against dry rationalism, almost inevitably involved in positive connotations (Braun 1995). Among the artists, "Dada" has been best represented in the context of visual arts, traditionally related to Futurism or Surrealism. A particular widespread technique used by the Dada visual artists was the *collage* (although the *collage* had been earlier invented by Picasso and Braque in 1912). In the 1960's, the *collage* has been widely embraced by many neo-avant-garde movements, such as Pop-Art and Op art. Usually, the expansive concept and the techniques of Dada were better accredited by the neo-avant-gardes of the 1960's. As Braun contends, the re-reading of the term Dada in the 60's also occasionally generated misunderstandings regarding the concept of Dada art. The fact is that the Dadaists did not see their art as a "harmless nonsense," as it has been traditionally agreed upon, but as an "appendage of a great religion" or even as a kind of intense "suffering" (Braun 1995). In Hugo Ball's own terms:

Dadaism was only an appendage of a great religion. We suffered not only at the time, but we suffered mainly on ourselves (...) You will understand that the deeper meaning of our work was suffering. Only in suffering at the time and suffering on ourselves, we had the opportunity to go beyond our own borders, because only the suffering gives you a passport to leave yourself.² (Ball 1963, p. 118)

¹ See the meanings of Dada discussed in (Codrescu 2009, pp.142-146).

² "Der Dadaismus war nur eine Beigabe einer großen Frömmigkeit. Wir litten nicht nur an der Zeit, sondern wir litten hauptsächlich an uns selbst. (...) Du wirst begreifen, daß der tiefere Sinn unserer Tätigkeit das Leiden war. Nur im Leiden an der Zeit und im Leiden an uns selbst hatten wir die Möglichkeit, über unsere eigenen Grenzen hinauszugehen, da nur das Leiden einem einen Paß gibt, sich selbst zu verlassen."

Besides the misreading in the Dada reception starting with the interpretations of the 1960's, there is also the "mystification" problem, related to the various accounts of the "story" of Dada, which were transmitted by the Dadaists themselves in their memoirs (Braun 1995).³ The later memoirs of the ex-Dada (Huelsenbeck, Tzara, Ball) – such as the journal we will be quoting from, *Flight out of Time*, published by Hugo Ball in 1927, way after his Dada years – deal with the Dada in a form of an anecdotic storytelling, at times forgetting some aspects or overemphasizing others. Nevertheless, this does not weaken their historical value as first-hand subjective accounts of Dadaism.

In sum, research on Dada nowadays has to fight on several fronts. First, against the traditional interpretations, which sometimes rely too much on the artists' personal accounts by taking these as "objective" historical sources. Second, against the mainstream, informal interpretations, which misread and also trivialize the subject to the point of commodifying "Dada" into a brand name for all "avant-garde" art. Third, against the new interpretations, which start either from neo-Marxist, or from historical-hermeneutical positions, confronting, in the end, the same incomprehensibility towards the phenomenon itself.

Another issue for the research is the interdisciplinary character of Dada, which constitutes an advantage as well as an obstacle. In Dada, poets and painters, musicians and philosophers are usually one and the same person. One simply cannot discuss Dadaism without an interdisciplinary approach. Dada texts are often written in German, French, Italian, and English. The backgrounds of different Dada artists are very different and very informing of the achievements of the Dada itself.

The first Dada: Hugo Ball in Zürich

Keeping in mind the methodological concerns related to the general study of Dada, we would try to sketch out at this point Hugo Ball's intellectual influence upon Dadaism. We will not refer here to his early career before the Dada, neither will we mention his intellectual biography in detail, which is a very sinuous one: from a cabaret musician to an Expressionist poet and writer, from a visionary anarchist to a Christian mystic during his latest period, his career and life has always fluctuated between extremes.

It is credible enough to say that, without the First World War, the first Dada group, the "Zürich Dada" of 1916, made of artist refugees from the war in Europe, often considered deserters by the people in their own lands, probably would not have been born. Various artists with quite different backgrounds, such

³ However, I do not think that the *memorabilia* of the Dadaists can be simply dismissed as "mystifications." These documents are valuable sources. This would merely underscore some of the most interesting takes on the concept of Dada as described by the artists themselves. Leaving aside the issue of a certain historical "objectivity" as related to the critique of art, we should take for granted at least some of the aspects transmitted by these historical sources, even if we must, at the same time, admit their inevitable subjective character.

as Hugo Ball, Richard Huelsenbeck, Emmy Hennings, Hans Arp, Marcel Janco, and Tristan Tzara have seized that particular moment, turning it into an opportunity to manifest themselves creatively against all the madness that surrounded them. Hugo Ball, in particular, understood the war as a "natural" result of domineering modern technological and ideological state-power. In his views, borrowed, to a certain degree, from the XIXth century Russian anarchism, he perceived the world war as a self-destructive and nihilistic step in the history of the modern state. According to its own logic of power, Ball argues, the modern state may come to an end because of its own desire for domination, which is, in the end, self-destructive.⁴ Ball, who was the intellectual leader of the group in the first phase of the "Zürich Dada," fused these anarchist views about the state into a nihilistic vision about modern politics, a vision which is very much resembling to Nietzsche's own views on modern politics.⁵

As well as Nietzsche, Ball, who had been for a long time, starting from his teenage years, a devoted reader of Nietzsche, was hostile to modern politics. The core of Ball's later choice for a cultural or artistic utopianism instead of a political utopianism, a cultural utopianism which also includes a vision of a new man shaped by a new form of culture – an aspect which will be later discussed – is very well reflected by one of Nietzsche's comments from his early *Untimely Meditations* (III. 4):

Every philosophy, which believes that the problem of existence is touched on, not to say, solved, by a political event is a joke- and pseudo-philosophy. Many states have been founded since the world began; that is an old story. How should a political innovation suffice to turn men once and for all into contented inhabitants of the earth? (...). Here, however, we are experiencing the consequences of the doctrine, lately preached from all the rooftops, that the state is the highest goal of mankind and that a man has no higher duty than to serve the state: in which doctrine I recognize a relapse not into paganism but into stupidity. It may be that a man who sees his highest duty in serving the state really knows no higher duties; but there are men and duties existing beyond this and one of the duties that seems, at least to me, to be higher than serving the state demands that one destroys stupidity in every form, and therefore in this form too. That is why I am concerned here with a species of man whose teleology extends somewhat beyond the welfare of a state, with philosophers, and with these only in relation to a world which is again fairly independent of the welfare of a state, that of culture. Of the many rings which, interlocked together,

⁴ The main source for Ball is Bakunin (*Statism and Anarchy*, 1873), who recognizes the state's necessity for domination as being unavoidable, yet not inevitably self-destructive: "The modern State is by its very nature a military State; and every military State must of necessity become a conquering, invasive State; to survive, it must conquer or be conquered, for the simple reason that accumulated military power will suffocate if it does not find an outlet. Therefore the modern State must strive to be a huge and powerful State: this is the indispensable precondition for its survival."

⁵ One of the best readings of Nietzsche's view of the state is Daniel Conway's "The Birth of the State," in: (Siemens & Rood eds. 2008, pp. 37-67).

make up the human community, some are of gold and others of pinchbeck.⁶
(Nietzsche 1997, pp. 147-148)

In fact, as Daniel Conway suggests, Nietzsche observed that the modern state's only goal was self-perpetuation (Siemens & Rood eds. 2008: 38 sqq.). Nietzsche considered thus that the modern state was doomed, since the justification of human existence cannot reside solely in man's service to the state, as the fragment quoted above clearly shows. To justify human existence, Nietzsche argues, one must find *culture* as a warrant of human ideals. The only meaningful purpose of politics would thus be the supporting of culture, the only guarantee of the *advancement* of humanity, or the "enhancement of the human type" as Nietzsche declares in *Beyond Good and Evil* (§ 257). According to Nietzsche, this vision should translate into politics the following way: the legislators should support the highest "human type," the exemplary individuals who represent humanity by their own self-perfection. Others should be inspired by and imitate the self-perfection of their most advanced fellow individuals. His aristocratic vision of society is not concerned at all with political power, on the contrary: seeking the accumulation of political power as a purpose in itself is one of the basest forms of "stupidity." If, as Conway argues, Nietzsche should be deemed as a "political realist," then his realism abhors the "might makes right" version of Bismarckian *Realpolitik*. Instead, he creates a counter-slogan by proclaiming, in his *Twilight of the Idols (Germans, § 1)* that political power itself "makes stupid" (*die Macht verdummt*). In *Twilight of the Idols*, he also explicitly asserts that what has been "culturally great" has always been "unpolitical, even anti-political" (*Germans, § 4*).⁷ He thus emphasizes that the sole accumulation of political power by the modern state is ultimately a symptom of its own decadence that manifests primarily as obliviousness towards its own *future*.

Remembering the apocalyptic times of the first modern world war, Hugo Ball declared: "It is the total mass of machinery and the devil himself that has broken loose now. Ideals are only labels that have been stuck on. Everything has been shaken to its very foundations." (Ball 1996, p. 11) In June 1917, towards the end of the first Dada adventure, he noted that he was amazed of the fact that Lenin used to live a few steps away from the *Cabaret Voltaire*:

7.VI. 1917. Strange incidents. When we had the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich at Spiegelgasse 1, there lived at Spiegelgasse 6, opposite us, if I am not mistaken, Mr. Ulyanov-Lenin. He must have heard our music and tirades every evening: I do not know if he enjoyed them or profited from them. And when we were opening the gallery in Bahnhofstrasse, the Russians went to Petersburg to launch the revolution. Is Dadaism as sign and gesture the opposite of Bolshevism? Does it

⁶ See also *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* I.11 (*On the New Idol*), where Nietzsche perceives the state as "the coldest of all cold monsters" and considers that "the state... whatever it may tell you, it lies ... everything about it is false." Loyal to his early views, he concludes that "there, where the state ends, only there begins the human being who is not superfluous" (Nietzsche 2006, pp. 34-36).

⁷ The passages are quoted by Conway in: Siemens & Rood eds. 2008, p. 38.

contrast the completely quixotic, inexpedient, and incomprehensible side of the world with destruction and consummate calculation? It will be interesting to observe what happens here and there. (Ball 1996, p. 117)

Here, Ball seeks to picture a difference between his own ideas about anarchism as opposed to anarchistic Bolshevism. Actually, as David Weir explains, the remarks from June 1917 might be interpreted as an allusion to the views of anarchists, such as Mikhail Bakunin and Fritz Brupbacher. The latter was a biographer of Bakunin. The former has been a fierce opponent of any kind of Statism, including Marxist Statism.⁸ Brupbacher identified Bakunin with the literary figure of Don Quixote, explaining that Bakunin was quixotic in his rebellion against "all scientific and manmade systems." Anarchists, such as Bakunin, were entirely opposed to Bolshevik-type revolutions, which, according to him, were not genuine political revolutions, but power overthrows, through the means of the dictatorship of the working class.⁹

Hugo Ball had been preoccupied with anarchism even before the emergence of Dada. In 1915, Ball has published in revolutionary journals, such as *Die Aktion*, *Der Sturm*, *Die Revolution*. He read Bakunin, Kropotkin or Merezhkovsky (Ball 1996, p. 14). Journal notes from 1915 deal with subjects, such as nihilism or Russian anarchism. One particular entry from June 1915 comments extensively on the subject of anarchism:

The anarchists say that contempt for laws is their main principle. Against laws ... any methods are permitted and are just. To be an anarchist means then to abolish rules in every connection and case. The prerequisite is the Rousseau-like belief in the natural goodness of man and in an immanent order of primitive nature left to its own resources. All additions (guidance, control) are, as abstractions, evil. The citizen is deprived of his civil rights. He is unnatural, a product of his uprooting and of the police who have perverted him even more. With such a theory the political haven is shattered. The stars go haywire. God and the devil change roles.

I have examined myself carefully. I could never bid chaos welcome, throw bombs, blow up bridges, and do away with ideas. *I am not an anarchist* (my emphasis). The longer and farther I am away from Germany, the less I am likely to be one.

Anarchy is attributable to the overstraining or corruption of the idea of the state. It will show itself more clearly where individuals or classes have grown up in idyllic circumstances, with close ties to nature and religion, and are then kept under strict political lock and key. The superiority of such individuals to the

⁸ See: Bakunin. 1873. *Statism and Anarchy*: "(...) No state, however democratic – not even the reddest republic – can ever give the people what they really want, i.e., the free self-organization and administration of their own affairs from the bottom upward, without any interference or violence from above, because every state, even the pseudo-People's State concocted by Mr. Marx, is in essence only a machine ruling the masses from above, through a privileged minority of conceited intellectuals, who imagine that they know what the people need and want better than do the people themselves (...)."

⁹ See, Bakunin. 1873. *Critique of the Marxist Theory of the State*.

constructions and mechanisms of a modern monster-state is obvious. About the natural goodness of man, we can say that it is possible, but it is certainly not a rule. This goodness feeds mostly on a more-or-less known store of religious education and tradition. Viewed without prejudice and sentimentality, nature has for a long time not been so totally benevolent and orderly as one might wish it to be. (...) As a theory of the unity and solidarity of total humanity, anarchism is a belief in the universal, natural, divine childhood, a belief that an unconstrained world will produce the maximum yield. Allowing for the moral confusion and catastrophic destruction that centralizing systems and systematized work have caused everywhere, no sensible man will reject the idea that a South Sea community (...) is superior to our vaunted civilization. As long as rationalism and its quintessence, the machine, continue to make progress, anarchism will be an ideal for the catacombs and for members of an order, but not for the masses, however interested and influenced they are and presumably will remain. (Ball 1996, pp. 19-20)

The question whether Ball was a committed anarchist is answered by his personal confession:

(...) And yet ideals should be identical with the person who advocates them; the style of an author should represent his philosophy, without his expressly developing it. Basically it is an adventure that I am not really taking part in. *I am an observer, I only dabble* (my emphasis). What kind of cause would I participate in body and soul? With all my varied interests in beauty, life, the world, and with all my curiosity about their opposites? (Ball 1996, p. 22)

Reading his journal, we can see that the importance of political anarchism will fade away towards the end of 1915. From this year on, Ball slightly turned towards pacifist anarchism, where the anarchist becomes the "brainworker," the *Kopfarbeiter*, a creator of new life through new forms of art and a destroyer of the old "basis of belief:"

Perhaps it is necessary to have resolutely, forcibly produced chaos and thus a complete withdrawal of faith before an entirely new edifice can be built up on a changed basis of belief. The elemental and the demonic come to the fore first; the old names and words are dropped. For faith is the measure of things by means of the word and of nomenclature. The art of our time, in its fantasizing based on complete skepticism, deals primarily not with God but with the demonic; it is itself demonic. But all skepticism and all skeptical philosophy, which brought this about, are also. (Ball 1996, p. 60)

He began to believe in the idea that art had to manifest itself more directly in society. Along with his new Zurich friends, Ball opened the *Cabaret Voltaire* in February 1916. Ball chose the name "Voltaire" not by chance, but with a belief that Voltaire was the symbol for the beginning of a revolution (Voltaire had been indeed the precursor of a Revolution). In fact, fragments from Voltaire were read aloud on the first night of the Cabaret. In the first review of the cabaret, named *Cabaret Voltaire*, published in May 1916, Ball explained the intent of his protests:

[The review] is intended to present to the public the activities and interests of the Cabaret, which has as its sole purpose to draw attention, across the barriers of war and nationalism, to the few independent spirits who live for other ideals" (*über den Krieg und die Vaterländer hinweg an die wenigen Unabhängigen erinnern, die anderen Idealen leben*) (Ball, "Preface" to *Cabaret Voltaire*, quoted in: Weir 1997, p. 234)

"Free Spirits"

In his "Preface" to *Cabaret Voltaire*, an anthology of texts from 1916 that is the first publication of the "Zurich Dada" group, Ball hints to one of Nietzsche's famous terms, the "free spirit" (*Freigeist*). According to Nietzsche, the kernel of the "free spirit" resides in its relation to belief (Wolting 2001, p. 26). As opposed to the "free spirit," the "fettered spirit" is in a constant need for certitude and stability. By contrast, the "free spirit" is defined by its independence and its capacity to detach itself from the authority of traditional values and also by its ability to question these values. Therefore, in Nietzsche's view, the "free spirit" is always capable of living with values different or even opposite to the values put into question:

Once a human being arrives at the basic conviction that he must be commanded, he becomes 'a believer'; conversely, one could conceive of a delight and power of self-determination, a *freedom* of the will, in which the spirit takes leave of all faith and every wish for certainty, practiced as it is in maintaining itself on light ropes and possibilities and dancing even beside abysses. Such a spirit would be a *free spirit* par excellence. (Nietzsche 2001, p. 206)¹⁰

When speaking of "independent spirits," Ball is especially alluding to another meaning of the term *Freigeist*: Nietzsche's definition of the "free spirit" as "the good European," an expression that is sometimes interpreted as a political proposal. In reality, Nietzsche spoke of a detachment from any political partisanship when he coined the expression "the good European." In his notebooks, he used the term "supranational" when he spoke of the "good European." He also defined "good European" as "vagabond, stateless, *voyageur*" (Wolting 2001, p. 27). Nietzsche also uses "free spirit" when referring to the "legislator," or to the creator of new values. These different meanings of the "free spirit" are all alluded to in Ball's review.

It is also worth mentioning that the first edition of Nietzsche's *Human All too Human* (subtitled *A Book for Free Spirits*), issued in 1878, was dedicated to Voltaire, marking Nietzsche's shift from Romanticism and the break-up with Wagner. The "free spirit," who appeared in *Human All Too Human*, was an heir of the Enlightenment, and the actor of an uncompromising, sober philosophical

¹⁰ See also *Human, All Too Human* (I, § 225): "He is called a free spirit who thinks differently from what, on the basis of origin, environment, his class and profession, or on the basis of the dominant views of the age, would have been expected of him. He is the exception, the fettered spirits are the rule (...)," in: (Nietzsche 1996, p. 108).

undertaking of examining the possibility of a "higher humanity" in the absence of any transcendent meaning.¹¹

Nevertheless, Nietzsche's "free spirit" is still connected, although not observably, to its backgrounds: the Romantic model of a community of intellectuals. As Olivier Ponton remarked, Nietzsche's "free spirit," appearing in the subtitle of his *Human, All too Human* of 1878, is closely connected to one of Nietzsche's personal experience from the summer of 1876, when, disillusioned with Wagner's Bayreuth, he joined some of his closest friends, Malwida von Meysenbug, Paul Rée, and Albert Brenner, in Sorrento, for a communal experience of "mutual learning" (*gegenseitiges Lernen*) and "friendly living together" (*freundschaftliches Zusammenleben*) (Ponton 2007, pp. 254-316). Actually, it was Malwida who came out with this idea of an educational venture, a venture which Nietzsche baptized as "a kind of monastery for free spirits" (*eine Art Kloster für freie Geister*) in a letter to Reinhart von Seydlitz. In the same letter, Nietzsche confessed that this project could still be a path to creating a real "school for educators," where the educators would educate *themselves* (Ponton 2007, p. 263). He also named this venture a "modern monastery, an ideal colony, a free university" in a letter to his sister, dated January 20, 1877. Nietzsche's adherence to this project is also very close to his earlier intellectual preoccupations with Greek culture and with the foundation of a new educational model, a contemplative way of life based not on "learning from," but on "self-learning." It is the same educational impetus revealed by the expression "Be your self!" which appears as a kind of motto in his early *Schopenhauer as Educator*. In Nietzsche's view, this is the moment where, paradoxically, the "free spirit" can be your "educator." Because every man has an intrinsic nature that is basically individual, irreducible, therefore uneducable,¹² the "free spirit" cannot be the educator *per se*. The "free spirit" as an educator acts as more as a "liberator." The only real education is a self-education, but the "free spirit" can set the example.¹³ And the only way this education, i.e. "liberation" becomes possible is through culture. "Culture is liberation" declares Nietzsche in a famous fragment; therefore, culture is education and the only possible way for the self-emancipation of man.¹⁴

¹¹ See Richard Schacht's *Introduction*, in: Nietzsche 1996, pp. vii-xxiii.

¹² "In his heart every man knows quite well that, being unique, he will be in the world only once and that no imaginable chance will for a second time gather together into a unity so strangely variegated an assortment as he is (...). The man who does not wish to belong to the mass needs only to cease taking himself easily; let him follow his conscience, which calls to him: 'Be your self!' All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not you yourself." (Nietzsche 1997, p. 127)

¹³ "Your true educators and formative teachers reveal to you that the true, original meaning and basic stuff of your nature is something completely incapable of being educated or formed and is in any case something difficult of access, bound and paralyzed; your educators can be only your liberators." (Nietzsche 1997, p. 129)

¹⁴ "And that is the secret of all culture: it does not provide artificial limbs, wax noses or spectacles that which can provide these things is, rather, only sham education. Culture is liberation, the removal of all the weeds, rubble and vermin that want to attack the tender buds of the plant, an outstreaming of light and warmth, the gentle rustling of nocturnal rain, it is imitation and worship of nature where nature is in her motherly and merciful

Surely, the figure of the "free spirit" is not a real, but a utopian response¹⁵ to a crisis of modern European culture, a crisis that Nietzsche identifies with an "atomistic chaos." He perceives this "chaos" as a result of the dissolution of a higher form of authority into individual forces. This dissolution is largely related to a long process of weakening of religious authority that first began with the advent of Christianity. Nietzsche perceives the modern political authority of the state as an heir to the former spiritual authority of the Church. But he also witnesses his contemporary world, which, in his view, is indisputably a world made not for the state, but for the individual. To Nietzsche, this aspect has its dangers as well as its opportunities. A world made for the individual urges chaos, dissolution, as well as hope. The individual, as the most significant element of modern times, foregrounds the opportunity for an "atomistic revolution," for a renewal of the ideal or the "image" of man. Here, the term "revolution" does not, in any way, refer to a political change,¹⁶ but should be interpreted both as destruction of previous decadent ideals of "humanity," and as a renewal, as a rebirth of a more dignified "image of man:"

We live in the age of atoms, of atomistic chaos. (...). The revolution is absolutely unavoidable, and it will be the atomistic revolution: but what are the smallest indivisible basic constituents of human society? It is incontestable that the spirit of humanity is almost in greater danger during the approach of such eras than it is when they and the chaotic turmoil they bring with them have actually arrived: the anxiety of waiting and the greedy exploitation of every minute brings forth all the cowardice and the self-seeking drives of the soul, while the actual emergency, and especially a great universal emergency, usually improves men and makes them more warm-hearted. Who is there then, amid these dangers of our era, to guard and champion *humanity*, the inviolable sacred treasure gradually accumulated by the most various races? Who will set up the *image of man* when all men feel in themselves only the self-seeking worm and curish fear and have thus declined from that image to the level of the animals or even of automata?¹⁷

This view about the persistence of a major crisis in modern civilization and about the necessity of a spiritual revolution is thoroughly consistent with Ball's own

mood, it is the perfecting of nature when it deflects her cruel and merciless assaults and turns them to good, and when it draws a veil over the expressions of nature's step-motherly mood and her sad lack of understanding." (Nietzsche 1997, p. 130)

¹⁵ See the *Preface of the Human, All Too Human*, written ten years after the first publication of his work, where Nietzsche recognizes the advent of the "free spirit" as an event to come and as a sign of hope for a future Europe: "Thus when I needed to I once also invented for myself the 'free spirits' to whom this melancholy-valiant book with the title *Human, All too Human* is dedicated: 'free spirits' of this kind do not exist, did not exist (...). That free spirits of this kind *could* one day exist, that our Europe *will* have such active and audacious fellows among its sons of tomorrow and the next day, physically present and palpable and not, as in my case, merely phantoms and hermit's phantasmagoria: I should wish to be the last to doubt it." (Nietzsche 1996, p. 6)

¹⁶ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* (III.4): "How should a political innovation suffice to turn men once and for all into contented inhabitants of the earth?" (quoted above).

¹⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1997, p. 150.

interests in the possibilities of a cultural renewal. The "liberation" and "education" are current themes in Ball's writings. As early as 1909, as student in Munich, Ball initiated a thesis on Nietzsche with the title *Nietzsche in Basel. Eine Streitschrift*, where he saw Nietzsche as a *Kulturreformator* of Germany.¹⁸ Here he criticized the common views about Nietzsche's vocational philological career and about his philosophical discipleship of Schopenhauer, stressing more his vocation towards "culture" in general and his lifetime as *Kulturdenker*: "culture as his mission, his task, his muse and his life goal" (*die Kultur als seine Aufgabe, sein Beruf, seine Muse und Lebensbestimmung*). In this writing, Ball shows a very intimate knowledge of Nietzsche's life and works. He is also very aware of Nietzsche's solution concerning the utopian renewal of a modern, "higher" image of man, through a new kind of art, an art that could be, by Nietzsche's definition, "human, all too human," more concerned with man as such:

Artists alone hate this sluggish promenading in borrowed fashions and appropriated opinions and they reveal everyone's secret bad conscience, the law that every man is a unique miracle; they dare to show us man as he is, uniquely himself to every last movement of his muscles, more, that in being thus strictly consistent in uniqueness he is beautiful, and worth regarding, and in no way tedious.¹⁹

It is obvious Hugo Ball's cultural anarchism transformed anarchism as a political doctrine into spiritual (*geistig*) anarchism. One can see the "cultural" anarchism permeating Ball's writings after 1917. According to Wolf Lepenies, this remains a special feature of the German notion of "culture," which has always been very carefully separated from German politics (Lepenies 2006). Lepenies contends that from Herder's notion of "cultural nation" onwards, almost every German intellectual sought to perceive "culture" as a "noble substitute" for "politics." Moreover, he says, the German intellectuals always exhibited not only a propensity to separate culture from politics but also an indifference to politics. Another specific feature was the "urge to solve a political problem in the field of culture" (Lepenies 2006, p. 205). This probably explains why Hugo Ball's own "anarchism" takes shape as a cultural utopia which constantly exhibits social and political aspirations towards "emancipation," "liberation," "education," yet never seeks to relate these goals to particular political actions.

¹⁸ See *Nietzsche in Basel. Eine Streitschrift* (1910), in: Hugo Ball, *Schriften zum Theater, zur Kunst und Philosophie*.

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations* (fragment quoted above). See also a posthumous fragment of Nietzsche from 1883-1888: "The most universal sign of the modern age: man has lost *dignity* in his own eyes to an incredible extent. For a long time the center and tragic hero of existence in general; then at least intent on proving himself closely related to the decisive and essentially valuable side of existence – like all metaphysicians who wish to cling to the *dignity of man*, with their faith that moral values are cardinal values. Those who have abandoned God cling much more firmly to the faith in morality." (Nietzsche 1968, p. 16)

References

- Bakunin, M. 1873. *Statism and Anarchy* (online: www.marxists.org, accessed 25.06.2011).
- Ball, H, 1963. *Gesammelte Gedichte*. hrsg. v. Annemarie Schütt-Hennings. Zürich: Arche.
- Ball, H. *Schriften zum Theater, zur Kunst und Philosophie. Schriften: Geschichte und Politik* (online: www.textlog.de, accessed 1.05.2011).
- Ball, H. "Die Kunst unserer Tage," in: Pörtner, P. 1960. *Literatur-Revolution 1910-1925. Dokumente, Manifest, Programme*. Bd. I. Darmstadt: Luchterhand, pp. 136-140.
- Ball, H. 1927. *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*. München: Duncker & Humblot.
- Ball, H. 1996. *Flight Out of Time: A Dada diary*. Introduction and notes by John Elderfield. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Braun, H. 1995. *Wege aus dem Dadaismus. Am Beispiel von Hugo Ball und Kurt Schwitters*. MA Thesis. Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (online: <http://woerter.de/hb/texte/ball-schwitters.html#12>, accessed 25.06.2011).
- Codrescu, A. 2009. *The Posthuman Dada Guide. Tzara and Lenin Play Chess*. Princeton: PUP.
- Lepenies, W. 2006. *The Seduction of Culture in German History*. Princeton: PUP.
- Nietzsche, F. 1968. *The Will to Power*. transl. by W. Kaufmann & R. J. Hollingdale. edited with commentary by W. Kaufmann. New York: Vintage.
- Nietzsche, F. 1996. *Human, All Too Human*. transl. by R. J. Hollingdale, with an introduction by Richard Schacht. Cambridge: CUP.
- Nietzsche, F. 1997. *Untimely Meditations*. Daniel Breazeale ed. transl. by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: CUP.
- Nietzsche, F. 2001. *The Gay Science*. Bernard Williams ed. transl. Josefine Nauckhoff. Poems transl. by Adrian del Caro. Cambridge: CUP.
- Nietzsche, F. 2006. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*, Adrian del Caro & Robert B. Pippin eds. transl. Adrian del Caro. Cambridge: CUP.
- Ponton, O. 2007. *Nietzsche - Philosophie de la légèreté (Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung Bd. 53)*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Siemens, H. W. & Roodt, V. eds. 2008. *Nietzsche, Power and Politics. Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought*. Berlin: DeGruyter.
- Weir, D. 1997. *Anarchy and Culture: The Aesthetic Politics of Modernism*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Wolting, P. 2001. *Le vocabulaire de Nietzsche*. Paris: Ellipses Édition.