

The Emergence and Establishment of Yugoslav Dada: From Prague to Zagreb (1920–1922)



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THE EMERGENCE AND ESTABLISHMENT OF YUGOSLAV DADA: FROM PRAGUE TO ZAGREB (1920–1922)

The article focuses on the transnational aspect of Yugoslav Dadaism, which was already an integral part of its founding stage in Prague in 1920, when the main Yugoslav Dadaist, Dragan Aleksić, was a student there. Through an analysis of the already known (but rare) primary and secondary sources and a presentation of some newly found primary sources, the article presents the cooperation between Yugoslav and Czech artists and clarifies the circumstances of establishing this Yugoslav avant-garde movement. Furthermore, because Aleksić's work was closely connected to Ljubomir Micić's Zenitism and the activity of Branko Ve Poljanski in Prague, we compare their journals (*Zenit*, *Dada-Jok*, *Dada Tank*, *Dada Jazz*) and emphasize the points of conflict and competitiveness among them, which was a constructive part for the further development of Yugoslav Dadaism. Thus, the article contributes to both the local and international positioning of the Yugoslav Dada in the context of the Central European avant-garde.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:

Jugoslávský dadaismus — Dragan Aleksić — jugoslávská avantgarda — středoevropské avantgardy — zenitismus — Branko Ve Poljanski — Ljubomir Micić
Yugoslav Dada — Dragan Aleksić — Yugoslav avant-garde — Central-European avant-gardes — Zenitism — Branko Ve Poljanski — Ljubomir Micić

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INTRODUCTION

This article is dedicated to the phenomenon of Yugoslav Dadaism, initiated in 1920 in Prague by one of the south Slavic students studying there — Dragan Aleksić. It was later established as a specific avant-garde current with its own publications and public manifestations in Zagreb in 1922. It is important to emphasize, however, that in a broader sense, we can find Dada tendencies also in the work of other Yugoslav writers and artists and all spheres of art in Yugoslavia: poetry;¹ visual art (Poljanski's

1 Donat 1985.



magazine *Dada-Jok*;² Petrov's modernist graphics; Aleksić's typography and advertisements); exhibitions and installations (Černigoj used subversive practices based on Dada principles at his first constructivist exhibition in 1924 in Ljubljana and in his costume design and so-called "portraits")³; theatre and performance art (Travelers' play *I oni će doći*, Zagreb, 1922)⁴; "theoretical performances"⁵ (Aleksić's public Dada manifestations in 1922; Zenitist soirees organized by Mikac in 1923).

Yugoslav Dadaism emerged in a particular socio-political situation between the two wars, which is associated with the emergence of the first Yugoslavia. The terms "Yugoslav avant-garde" and "Yugoslav Dada" are used consciously in the paper, although there is no specific notion of Yugoslav or Balkan avant-garde⁶ or even Yugoslav literature.⁷ The plurality and internationalization itself, which can today be addressed as "Yugoslavia", also work productively in the context of the study of Dada, which placed notions of plurality and transnationality in its center.⁸ By doing so, we methodically distance ourselves from any national takeover of the Yugoslav Dadaism by national canons, regardless of some theoreticians using it to determine the importance of particular national art and literary canons of the early twentieth century, which was mostly based on the dichotomy of Serbo-Croatian relations.

Even though Yugoslav Dada represents an established movement with its own goals and poetics, its placement in both the local and broader European avant-garde history and theory context has so far been fragmented. Considerably more attention within the Yugoslav avant-garde has been given mainly to Micić's Zenitism, Belgrade surrealism, and the constructivism of Černigoj and his group of Trieste constructivists. Nevertheless, the importance and radicality of the Dada movement were already proposed in Richter's book *Dada: Art and Anti-art*⁹, yet Yugoslav Dada remains relatively unknown even by the researchers working in the field of Central European avant-garde. Therefore, it is very encouraging to observe that this Yugoslav avant-garde current is gaining more and more validity in international publications and avant-garde chronologies, in which Aleksić and his Dada publications are placed alongside Duchamp and Tzara.¹⁰

When studying this avant-garde movement, we are undoubtedly confronted with the lack of accurate information and data resulting from the ephemerality and rarity of documentary evidence. Aleksić's papers, which were the largest archive of primary "Yugo-Dada" (the term coined from French "Yougoslavie" by Aleksić in *Dada Tank*, 1922) sources, and a collection of Dadaist artworks (incl. works by Tzara, Schwitters, Huelsenbeck) were destroyed after his death in 1958.¹¹ It is no coincidence that Jovanov

2 Šimičić 2003, p. 304.

3 Golubović 1985, p. 202.

4 Susovski 1997, p. 16; Golubović, Subotić 2008, p. 127–8.

5 Marjanić 2014, p. 110.

6 See Šuvaković 2003, p. 20.

7 Marčetić et al. 2019.

8 Janecek 1998, p. 9.

9 Richter 2016, p. 199; originally published in 1964.

10 Hage 2021.

11 Todorović 1989.

entitled her book dedicated to Aleksić and Yugoslav Dada *Demistifikacija apokrifa* (Disclosing the Apocrypha; 1999). The course of her study follows Aleksić's memoir text "Sergeant of a Dadaist Troop" published on 6 January 1931 in the newspaper *Vreme*, in which the author describes the beginning, development and the end of Yugoslav Dadaism, ten years after his stay in Prague, where he became acquainted with Dada.

Along with the apparent lack of primary sources, it is essential to note that Yugoslav Dada was also repeatedly marginalized. Because Micić, the Alpha and Omega of Zenitism, disagreed with it, it was already marginalized in the context of its avant-garde contemporaries. In addition to that, it was also marginalized within the later art and literary history, which was mostly centered on Zenitism and surrealism, currents that were more durable in time and had more followers and art production. Not to mention the fact that the Yugoslav avant-garde itself is marginal within the European avant-garde and has been also marginalized within the local context of the Balkan province. Any chronological work is further complicated by the specific development of the Yugoslav avant-garde within its context of the socio-political historical discontinuity of Yugoslavia, which was constantly in the process of change and a conflicted state, in which "there is no linear development, but catastrophic models that intertwine without a chronological historical meaning of the evolution of modernism."¹²

OUT OF THE PRAGUE CRADLE (1920/21)

At the turn of the twentieth century, Prague had become a modern city with a rich cultural life. Similar to Vienna, Berlin, and Budapest it was one of the metropolises, a city of art, theatre, and social activities. It also became one of the "creative centers" and "exchange sites" of Central European modernism and the avant-garde.¹³ In the interwar period, many Yugoslav students studied in multiethnic Prague.¹⁴ Among them was Aleksić, who arrived there in October 1920 to enroll in Slavic studies at Charles University. In the university student registry, Aleksić is enrolled for two terms in 1920/21, studying at the Faculty of Arts. Later, he was prevented from returning to Prague to continue his studies, as his documents were confiscated during the summer 1921 holiday while he was in Croatia.¹⁵

12 Šuvaković 1996, p. 117; 2003, p. 12.

13 Benson 2002.

14 In the 1921 editions of the *Čas* newspaper (published in the period when Aleksić and Poljanski were both in Prague), we notice several articles showing the extremely tight connections and cooperation between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia at that time — on 16 Jan. 1921 (p. 9) we find information on the visit of a Zagreb University delegation; in February, The Club of South-Slavic Students of Art in Prague was founded; already at the end of March or beginning of April, there are daily reports on the First International Congress of Students in Prague (e.g., 31 March 1921, p. 3; 1 April 1921, p. 5), in which Yugoslavia was participating. We must also mention the establishment of the Czechoslovak-Yugoslav League, which meant the socio-political cooperation between the states (14 April 1921, p. 5).

15 Jovanov 2017, p. 10.





In Prague, Aleksić had the opportunity to get acquainted with the new radical avant-garde currents. It was the cosmopolitan Prague “that was both German and Slavic” which Janecek identified as a “transfer point for the eastern Dada orbit,”¹⁶ while Toman described it as the “*Dada-Messe* for central Europe.”¹⁷ In Prague, the first appearances of Dada happened soon after the end of World War I. The September 1919 edition of the student journal *Ruch* already features the Czech translation of Huelsenbeck’s manifesto “Was ist Dadaismus?” and announces a new Dada magazine (although it was never realized), which should be the collective work of young Czech writers-poets, such as Kalista, Berák, and Černík, who founded the Czech Dada Society in 1920.¹⁸ Toman highlights that Prague, which maintained and even increased its multiethnic character after 1918, was one of the few cities that the most famous Dadaists actually visited. Hausmann and Huelsenbeck visited Prague in March 1920, when they staged two Dada evenings there; Hausmann returned with Schwitters on 6 and 7 September 1921.¹⁹ Schwitters also appeared at two Prague soirees in May 1926, and in 1927 he exhibited his Merz collages.²⁰

Based on his residence registration in Prague,²¹ we can now confirm that Aleskić was not yet in Prague when the first Dada manifestation happened, and that he and Branko Ve Poljanski, Ljubomir Micić’s younger brother, who joined Aleksić in spring 1921, had already left Prague by the time Schwitters came in 1921, so they could not witness the above-mentioned Dada events in person. Nonetheless, Aleksić’s independent, active engagement in the Prague avant-garde art scene started soon after his arrival. In the memoir text mentioned above, he reports on his “salon conference on *Orgart*,” which he organized immediately in October 1920 at the King John Square (today Jiřího z Poděbrad Square) in the Vinohrady district, within walking distance from his home, which was on today’s Italská Street. He aimed to present the theoretical conceptualization of his invention, the so-called “organic art” or “orgart”. His newly established artistic movement was dismantled immediately after his lecture by “Mr. Brenner,” “a consular officer from the neighborhood,” who introduced him to Dada, which was incredibly similar to what he himself called “orgart”. This “finding of what had already been found” led him to the acquaintance with Karl Noll, the director of the Prague theater *Revoluční scéna*, who instructed him on Dada and all its prominent international representatives, to whom he supposedly sent the translated

16 Janecek 1998, p. 2.

17 Toman 1998, p. 13.

18 Ibid., p. 11–2, 33.

19 Ibid., p. 14.

20 Ibid., p. 28, 29. For more on the importance and reception of these events in Prague, see Armand 2018.

21 The database of Prague Police Directory keeps archived the residence registration documents of Aleksić, who was registered in Prague from 18 Oct. 1920 to 6 May 1921 on today’s Italská Street, Vinohrady district, and from 10 May 1921 on today’s Umělecká Street, Holešovice. Aleksić’s departure date is not known, but most likely it is similar to Poljanski’s, who left Prague on 2 Aug. 1921. Poljanski, whose real name, Branislav Micić, is written on the registration document, arrived to Prague as an actor in 1921. He first stayed in the Adria Hotel (arrival date unknown), and from 4 July 1921 to 2 Aug. 1921 he was registered in the Vinohrady district, Pod Karlovem.

lecture on “orgart” and received encouraging feedback from Tzara and Schwitters, as he reports.²²

Aleksić organized genuine soirees in Prague only after Poljanski’s arrival. This date is unknown, but we can say with certainty that they met after 10 May 1921, when Aleksić was already registered at his new address on today’s Umělecká Street. He writes that Poljanski “rushed to Prague and looked for me in the neighborhood of Vlaho Bukovac near Stromovka.” Thus, he was already living in that district when he met Poljanski. Aleksić describes his meeting with Poljanski, who came there to “do miracles” and convince the “Central European inflated world” that there are “interesting beasts” in Yugoslavia as well. Aleksić and Poljanski agreed to “manifest two literary twins, Dadaism and Zenitism, each talking about his own” in Prague: “In Štěpánská Street, right in the middle of Prague, in the large Yugoslav Hall, we announced our evening with giant color posters in constructivist style, and so one day 1,000 visitors showed up who all wanted to see something. What poetry, what impertinence”²³

Poljanski came to Prague as an actor. He initially registered at the Adria Hotel, not a coincidental choice for his accommodation, since the cabaret-type theater *Revoluční scéna* was established in the hotel’s basement in the summer of 1920. In the foreword to Poljanski’s *Panic Under the Sun*, Micić notes that after Ljubljana and Trieste, Poljanski traveled to Prague, where he “unforgettably passes through the stage boards of the famous ‘Revoluční scéna’.” There he was also the first Zenitist actor.²⁴

Poljanski’s activity in Prague and his cooperation with local artists bear the first visible results in the sixth issue of *Zenit* in July, in which Czech artists and information on their cooperation with Yugoslav avant-gardists start to appear. The first published work by Czech artists is Teige’s woodcut “Summer” printed across one page. Short information on the group *Devětsil* is also included in the last section of the journal. Here, we also find a report about establishing the “Art Club ‘Zenit’ in Prague,” founded in June 1921, which would organize lectures on Zenitism. Even though this meant *Zenit*’s first official public presentation outside of its local environment, Micić expresses his dissatisfaction with the reports published in Prague’s *Červen* and *Čas* on this occasion. The reason for this was that Czech reporters interpreted *Zenit* and Zenitism through Dada tendencies, which he sharply rejected with the statement: “Zenitism completely excludes Dadaism and has nothing to do with it.” Prague periodicals confirm that Poljanski and Aleksić had joint performances on Zenitism and Dada from the start, as Aleksić also reports in his memoirs.

The presentation of Czech artists in *Zenit* continues in the next, the seventh issue, in which we find works by the youngest generation of Czech painters, whose work

22 Only two of Aleksić’s letters have been found, both of them addressed to Tzara, yet much later in the year 1922. They are kept in the Tristan Tzara Archives at the Jacques Doucet Library in Paris, they were found and published by Patricia Stoldony, and translated into Serbian by Predrag Todorović; see Jovanov 2017, p. 10. In the Schwitters Archive in Sprengel Museum Hannover, only Josip Seissel’s poster *Help the Students* (1924) sent by Micić has been found.

23 Aleksić 1931.

24 Micić 1988, p. 4



was published in the Czech left-wing magazine *Veraikon*: Havlíček, Wachsmann, Süß, Piskač, Hoffmeister. The reproductions by Havlíček and Teige also appear in the next volume. Subotić highlights the importance of the *Zenit* publication of Czech artists, members of the artistic group Devětsil, who at the time did not have their own periodical: “It should be especially emphasized that at that time, *Zenit* was the only foreign journal that published articles by Devětsil’s associates.”²⁵ In Prague, Teige would report that the international art revue *Zenit* presented Czech artists. He also announced the new Yugoslav “literary and musical soirees” by Poljanski, the representative of the *Zenit* editorial board in Prague, which were planned to take place in Prague.²⁶ Although Poljanski intended to return to Prague, he never did. Yet, the productive correspondence between Zagreb and Prague continued.²⁷ A newly-found letter from Poljanski²⁸ addressed to Seifert on 22 February 1922 confirms the continued connections between four Prague friends — Poljanski, Teige, Seifert, and Aleksić. With his letter, Poljanski sent five issues of his *Kinofon* magazine, in which Aleksić was also cooperating, asking Seifert to advertise it, and also to send him any mentions of *Kinofon* in Czech publications, together with his own poetry editions. Moreover, he expressed his regrets that he could not visit them again due to financial reasons. He also greeted his “dear friend” Teige and sent greetings from Aleksić to them.

Toman is correct in concluding how important the Yugoslav Dada activity was for the Prague avant-garde: “Assuming this was true, one would have to conclude that together with Hausmann, Huelsenbeck and Schwitters, the future Zagreb group was instrumental in spreading Dada in Czechoslovakia.”²⁹ Micić also highlighted the importance of Aleksić’s and Poljanski’s activity for the Prague avant-garde milieu. He described, although with some exaggeration, the significance of Poljanski and *Zenit* in Prague in 1921:

After “Svetokret” and after the first poetic acrobatics, Poljanski travels through Vienna to Prague, propagating zenitism, hungry and unhappy. [...] The flood of Zenitism and Zenitist schools is more and more obviously penetrating Czechoslovakia. In Czechoslovakia, Zenitism carried out the strongest revolution and influence on the modern young generation, generously brought up in ZENIT.³⁰

25 Subotić 2008, p. 94.

26 Čas, 10 Sept. 1921, p. 4

27 Subotić, who edited Micić’s papers (kept by the National Museum and National Library in Belgrade), wrote about *Zenit*’s collaboration with Czech artists especially through their correspondence which confirms the engaged and continuous cooperation between Yugoslav and Czech avant-gardists (1995, p. 105–108; 2018, p. 494): a part of Micić’s correspondence with Teige in 1923–4 has been preserved (Subotić 2008, p. 94) and Černík (ibid., p. 94), and Ivan Goll’s correspondence with Kalista (ibid., p. 97).

28 In the archives of the Memorial of National Literature in Prague together with Poljanski’s letter to Seifert, new correspondence of Micić from 1921 and 1925 with Černík and Laurin, editor of the Brno monthly journal *Bytová kultura* (in German *Wohnungs Kultur*), was found.

29 Toman 1998, p. 15.

30 *Zenit* 38, 1926.

At the same time, the opposite was also true: Aleksić's Dada emerged and was directly transferred from Prague to the territory of former Yugoslavia. The Prague artistic environment also greatly influenced the radicalization of Poljanski's poetics, which we can see in his work written after the Prague period.³¹ After they departed for Zagreb at the beginning of August 1921, Aleksić stopped in Vienna, where he met Lajos Kassák,³² the editor of the Hungarian activist journal *MA*; later, his Dada poem "Taba Ciklon II" appears in *MA*. In Zagreb, Aleksić joined Micić and became one of the collaborators of *Zenit* journal.

DADA VERSUS ZENITISM (1921/22)

The continuity of Aleksić's contributions published in *Zenit*, especially in its first period, shows that Aleksić was a key figure in the development of the Yugoslav avant-garde evolving around Micić and his circle from the start. Aleksić started publishing his Dada contributions in spring 1921 when he was still in Prague. His collaboration with Micić lasted until their sudden and declarative break-up in May 1922, when Aleksić established his independent Dada avant-garde fraction, founding his Dada Club and issuing *Dada Tank* in Zagreb.

Initially, *Zenit* represented a periodical with expressionist tendencies, influenced by the German magazine *Der Sturm*. Nevertheless, the word "Dada" appears in *Zenit* already in its second issue in March 1921. In the last section of the journal, entitled "Makroskop," we can read the notice "Dada — Dadaism," signed by a "Zenitist," Micić himself, who announces the appearance of the local "first Yugoslav Dadaist" and his new original article to be published in the forthcoming issue. In the next issue in April, Aleksić's manifesto "Dadaism" appears together with his two Dada poems sent from Prague, proclaiming: "DADA is developing everywhere. In Prague, there are DADA representations, and success spreads as fast as drum fire." Aleksić's manifesto is the first one to be published in *Zenit*, even before the Zenitist one.

In his text, Aleksić sets himself apart from expressionism and symbolism, proposing a different approach to creating art, represented by Dada, which sets free the artistic potential (interestingly, he refers here to Suprematism, which, in his words, even "gave up color"). He mentions Tzara, Schwitters, Vischer, and Serner, showing that after one winter semester spent in Prague, he is already fluent in Dada and familiar with the international Dada figures. Furthermore, it shows he can engage critically with this avant-garde movement and even propose his own Dadasophy, in the center of which he sets his notion of *kakotedragost* or "as-you-likeness."³³ This Dada method will later become a stumbling block for Micić and his Zenitism, more radical in its content than form. Micić's Nietzschean "life-affirming" postulates, which aimed to preserve humanistic values, could not come to terms with the mere nihilism of Dada.

31 Petrov 1988, p. XXV–XXVII.

32 Jovanov 1999, p. 46.

33 Trans. by Kusik 2007, p. 95; "asyoulikeism" in Kujundić, Jovanov 1998, p. 57; "pleaseyourselfness" in Hage 2006, p. 276.





As we will see, it would be an oversimplification to label the schism between Micić and Aleksić as a duality between Micić's "nationalist agenda" and Aleksić's "individualism and internationalism,"³⁴ which happens very often and stems from the interpretation of Micić's work on the premise of his Serbian nationalist tendencies.³⁵ A closer look shows us that Micić's attitude towards Dada was ambivalent from the very beginning.³⁶ Golubović speaks of Micić's "doubt of Dada emancipatory power," so he considers it a parasite, to which he attributes "creative non-inventiveness," "sterility," and "intellectual perversion."³⁷ All of this indicates that in Micić's reception, "Dadaism led to abolishing the Zenitist compass, previously defined as 'meta-cosmic expressionism'".³⁸

In the June issue of *Zenit*, Aleksić published his first essay, which he had sent from Prague, entitled "Kurt Schwitters Dada," more of a declaration on Dada than a review of Schwitters's work. Upon returning from Prague first to Vinkovci in the summer of 1921, Aleksić continues to publish his work in the October issue of *Zenit*, to some extent, even overlapping with some of Micić's topics such as the East and the Urals, and the figure of Zarathustra. Also, Aleksić's next contribution for *Zenit* in Nov. 1921, written in Zagreb, the essay "Tatlin HP/s + Human," focuses on the topic that was cardinal for Micić — new Russian art. At the beginning of his text, Aleksić even states: "Art needs transformation, Zenit and parable."

The first *Zenit* issue published in 1922 starts advertising Aleksić's Dada-novel, the so-called "novel-grotesque" *Burglary of Mister Christ*, which was planned to be published as the third book of the *Zenit Library*. This issue also includes Aleksić's Dada poem "Padlock Factory" alongside Černik's poem, followed by Teige's graphic. Based on the initials of the author "Dr. Al.," Aleksić is also the author of a short text on Seifert's *City in Tears*. We can conclude this based on Aleksić's style of writing, which is extremely humorous and full of turns, short sentences bursting with meaning, the use of parentheses that give new associations, and, last but not least, the poet's salute to Seifert and Teige at the end, written in Czech language: "Seiferte, soudruhu, Teige, soudruhu zdar zdar zdar! At' žije třeti ...! [sic!]"

The April issue brings Aleksić's last works published in *Zenit*: a two-page Dada hybrid text "Whistle Walks Down the Street and Mr. Tipka," printed together with Petrov's graphic. Both of them would be excluded from *Zenit* in the next issue. *Burglary of Mister Christ* is now announced as a published book available for order. Based on Aleksić's memoirs, this project showed the incompatible tendencies of both avant-garde artists that would lead to their final departure. Aleksić explains that the work on this novel and the changes that he had to make on Micić's instructions, together with Micić's refusal of Aleksić's appearance in Kassák's *MA*, were the main reasons for the worsening of their relationship:

34 Janecek 1998, p. 3

35 For the problematization of Micić's (trans)nationalist tendencies, see Pranjić 2020.

36 See "First Yugo Dadaist", *Zenit* 2, p. 17; "Political Dadaism" published in a *Zenit* supplement on 23 Sept. 1922; "We Must Destroy Antisocial Art" (*Zenit* 35, Dec. 1924), written in response to an international survey in *Bytová kultura*.

37 Golubović 1996, p. 158

38 Subotić 2008, p. 239.



The tension in relations with Micić grew with each page of corrections. Every morning he said: You are preparing a Dadaist raid so that you could outplay my magazine. Or: You are messing with Begović and Tokin. You are printing things in Vienna and not telling us anything. Finally (what a heavy power of thought): You are a Dadaist. I said: Thank God you finally saw it after a year. I'm leaving, my issue of the new magazine *Dada-Tank* ...³⁹

May 1922 is the most critical month for the further development of Yugoslav Dadaism. In Zagreb, two new Yugoslav avant-garde periodicals, *Dada Tank* (Aleksić) and *Dada-Jok* (Poljanski), will soon be published along with *Zenit* as a result of the Micić-Aleksić split. In the "Makroskop" section of this issue of *Zenit*, we find out that Aleksić and Petrov are excluded from being *Zenit* members because they do not adhere to the "fundamental principles of *Zenit*." Everything is revisited: instead of Aleksić's (presumably already published) novel, Micić's work "By Hundred Gods" is now being announced as the third book of the *Zenit Library*. Micić's book was released, but there is no mention of Aleksić's novel, and no trace was left of it, which most likely means that Micić destroyed the entire edition of Aleksić's novel — if this was not "just another Dada-Zenit mystification" and the book never existed in the first place.⁴⁰

Already in this pivotal May issue of *Zenit*, the new *Dada-Jok* journal is being advertised on the cover and reviewed in "Makroskop" as "the wittiest sensation in our country" and an "anti-Dadaist campaign" (the anti- is also included in the title of the journal: "jok", from the Turkish *yok*, is used in the Serbo-Croatian language to mean "no"). Another significant piece of information in "Makroskop" is the notice on the jubilee double-issue of *MA*, published in May 1922, which presented avant-gardists from all over the world. Yugoslavia was represented by Micić's poem "13" in Hungarian translation and Aleksić's Dada poem "Taba Ciklon II." Micić could not help but comment that some "redundant and shallow experiments" were also published in *MA*; intending, of course, to devalue the work of Aleksić. This attack on Aleksić continues in the June issue, where Micić writes the "Makroskop" text "From the Zenitist Crime" to comment on the work of the "student of philosophy" Aleksić and his *Dada Tank* as a "stupid onanistic little paper." Aleksić is accused of printing some works without the author's knowledge, stealing a pseudonym from *Zenit*, and allegedly threatening Poljanski.

YUGOSLAV DADA MAGAZINES AND PUBLIC MANIFESTATIONS (1922)

If we first observe Poljanski's *Dada-Jok* as a whole, we notice that it communicates on three levels — the first is intended to discredit all "Yugoslav literature before 'Zenit'", Western Europe, and members of the current "Society of Croatian Writers" and their periodicals. The second function is self-evident — to discredit Dada, which is expressed in Micić's text "I Welcome DaDaJok" and Poljanski's "Dada. Antidada". Their humorous and cynical criticism is nothing new in this publication; it is an already

³⁹ Aleksić 1931.

⁴⁰ Jovanov 1999, p. 49.



used strategy to present Zenitism as a “remedy” for all artistic *faux pas* in the Balkans. What is new here is the third level of communication, which is the appropriation of Dada methods in words and images with which the authors seek the limits of Dada expression, showing how effortless it is to demystify Dada methods with its own tactics, thus not actually confirming anything other than what Dada has claimed itself. Which brings us to the question of whether the Micić brothers were actually Dadaists because of this?

The anonymous author of the “Dada-anti, Antidada” text published in the *Vreme* newspaper⁴¹ believed *Dada-Jok* a genuine source of entertainment. The author writes that Micić and Poljanski used an effective method to attract the attention to themselves and that “[t]heir ‘anti-Dadaism’ does not have much serious connection with ‘Dadaism’ in literature.”⁴² Petrov interprets these cases of Dada poetry written by Micić and Poljanski as a “parody of Dadaist lyric.”⁴³ As it is extremely difficult to talk about parodic and non-parodic Dada poems, Petrov accurately bases his conclusion on the poet’s attitude toward his work. Since Poljanski does not include these poems in any of his collections of works published later, they were merely “Dadaist means mentioned by Micić, which served the collaborators of ‘Dada-Jok’ as a struggle against Dadaism and which, once used, were left to oblivion.”⁴⁴

The true innovativeness and importance of this journal lie in its visual strategy: each page is designed differently, certainly the most original being the cover page “on which Poljanski — unlike Aleksić — applied the principle of photomontage,”⁴⁵ and the overall appearance indicates “that this is the first and the most radical graphic treatment of a periodical” in this region.⁴⁶ In addition to *Dada-Jok*, another issue was published most likely in August of the same year with the subtitle *Zenit-ekspres*, in the form of a four-page leaflet. Again, it was very progressive in its form, “in addition to the futuristic title, motivated by speed, it brought examples of the use of telegraphic style and simultanism.”⁴⁷

On the other hand, Aleksić’s *Dada Tank* clearly intended to present the already formed movement within the Yugoslav avant-garde at that time.⁴⁸ This intention is evident from the following facts: local (Aleksić, Mihailo S. Petrov, Nac Singer, Fer Mill, Vido Lastov, Jim Rad) and international (Tzara, Schwitters, Huelsenbeck) Dada representatives are included in the journal, which gives the impression of an already established international Dada network; the foundation of the Dada publishing house *Moći-Tučići/Können-Schlagen* is announced together with the establishment of a Dada Club in Zagreb, which is supposed to organize Dada soirees across the whole Yugoslavia in the autumn of the same year. Furthermore, along with declarations on Dada (with in-

41 *Vreme*, 13 June 1922, p. 5.

42 See reproduction in Tešić 1983, p. 547.

43 Petrov 1988, p. XLIII.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., p. XLV.

46 Subotić 2008, p. 49.

47 Ibid., p. 119.

48 *Dada Tank* was published in two slightly different editions, in a censored and an uncensored version (archived in the Library of the Museum of Contemporary Art Zagreb).

ternational cosmopolitan — in his words “worldman” — character, standing against utilitarianism and logic), examples and descriptions of Dada poetry (simultaneity, “as many events as possible in as little time and as fast vibrations as possible”), we find proclamations on Dada music (jazz, noise, cacophony), Dada theatrical plays (elements of surprise, grotesque, against expressionist ethics and aesthetics), Dada visual arts (composition of different materials, abstraction), and Dada architecture (verticality, machine, Schwitters’s “church”) are included. Also, two of Petrov’s graphics are published, and the entire fourth page of the journal is devoted to Aleksić’s optophonetic, visual poem “ObilaTnoStI,” which represents his most radical Dada work.⁴⁹

In the manner of Micić, Aleksić in *Dada Tank* reacts to the recent events from the standpoint of the journal’s editorial board. He writes that Dadaists, who tried for the “Dadaisation” of *Zenit* by political and artistic means, will no longer waste their time on *Zenit*’s “improvement.” He accuses Micić’s periodical of “bad sentimental discourses,” stating that the new journal *Dada-Jok*, “an anti-Dadaist little pamphlet,” was only good as an advertisement for his *Dada Tank*. Apart from diminishing the importance of Poljanski’s publication, he also boasts of publishing his poem written in an international language (“nigger lingue”) in *MA*. At the same time, he announces his new international publication, the grotesque *TIK-TAK-BAR*, to be a part of Steege-mann’s well-known *Silbergäule* series.⁵⁰

Aleksić’s second publication in Zagreb was entitled *Dada Jazz*; in addition to the re-published proclamation “Dadaism (club dada bluf),” he publishes a new essay on Archipenko. Jovanov notices that compared to the first periodical, this one “announces a certain calming down, it is more visually refined [...], it looks serious and, above all, intellectual.”⁵¹ If *Dada Tank* had the function of internationalization or placing Yugoslav Dada as an important point on the global Dada map by analyzing the Dada discourse as a whole, then *Dada Jazz* tried to synthesize it locally, to justify Yugoslav Dada as a movement with its manifesto, and strengthen international connections, adding the subtitle “Dada Anthology” on its cover, “analogous to Richard Huelsenbeck’s *Dada Almanach*, which Aleksić had translated in full and excerpted in *Dada-Tank*.”⁵²

Aleksić’s founding of the avant-garde movement was thought out and gradual, as evidenced by his two letters to Tzara: the first had the function to inform Tzara about the launching of the first Dada periodical on the Balkans; the second to present him with a report on the initial event of the Yugoslav Dada tour. On behalf of a group of Dadaists, Aleksić sent one letter on 14 May 1922 from Petrinjska Street in Zagreb before the first journal was published, and one on 20 August 1922 from Sloboda Square, Vinkovci. In the first letter, he expresses his wish to start a Dada

49 Šimičić 2003, p. 307. See a lucid analysis of this poem and its translation to English in Bošković, Zoble 2016.

50 Although the last announcement was probably one of Aleksić’s Dada fabrications, it confirms that he was familiar with all the important points of development and dissemination of Dada. In his work, he referred to at least five books from this series: Schwitters’s *Anna Blume* and *Die Kathedrale*, Huelsenbeck’s *En avant Dada. Eine Geschichte des Dadaismus*, Serner’s *Letzte Lockerung — manifest dada*, and Vischer’s *Sekunde durch Hirn*.

51 Jovanov 2017, p. 16.

52 Voloder, Miller 2013, p. 1117.





movement in Zagreb (marking that “Finally, we have in Yugoslavia (Serbia) a new Dada”). He announces the launch of *Dada Tank*, asking Tzara to send him French or other Western Dada works (“we already have German works”), “so that we can have an overview and a model.” He also introduces himself as a reliable and skilled editor, which “completely Dadaized” *Zenit* and “was very popular in Prague Dada-club.” The second letter was sent on the day of the first Yugoslav Dada matinee in Osijek. In this letter, he informed Tzara about the details of his successful event, the “first Dada-matinee in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes,” attaching the criticisms from the newspapers and informing him about his plans to organize soirees in Novi Sad, Subotica, Belgrade, and Zemun.

The planned Yugoslav Dada tour follows in the summer and autumn of 1922, soon after the announcement in *Dada Tank*. In his memoirs, Aleksić mentions two successful Dada matinees, the one mentioned above, in Osijek, and one in Subotica. Jovanov precisely follows the realization of four manifestations during that year, in which Aleksić took part: on 3 June in Novi Sad with a group of Hungarian activists; on 20 August in Osijek; on 1 October in Vinkovci (where *Dada Tank* and *Dada Jazz* associates also participated); and in Subotica on 3 November, along with Dada journal associates and Hungarian activists.⁵³ The manifestations in Novi Sad and Subotica were demonstrations that Yugoslav-Hungarian activists and artists around the *Út*⁵⁴ magazine organized all over Vojvodina.

After the Novi Sad manifestation, the “first Dada matinee on the territory of Yugoslavia,”⁵⁵ which took place in the bar Ameriken in June and in which Aleksić, Petrov, and Tokin took part, Aleksić organized a Dada matinee in the Royal Cinema in Osijek and a Dada soiree in Vinkovci.⁵⁶ On the matinee in Osijek, Aleksić gave a theoretical introduction on Dada movement; the event was accompanied by a poetry recital, three Dada dramas, and an exhibition of paintings (reproductions of works by several Dada artists: Picabia, Hausmann, Moholy Nagy, Arp, and originals by Petrov and Aleksić, who exhibited his “sculptopicture *Projection of Love onto the Moon*.”⁵⁷ This event was followed by the “made in Yugoslavia” Dada “conferanse” in the Slavonija Hotel in Vinkovci, organized by Aleksić and his Dada Club, which offered an “evening of modern poems,” “modern paintings,” “projection of love,” and “machine art,” as stated on the poster. Later, in early November 1922, in the Korzo cinema in Subotica, Yugoslav avant-gardists and Hungarian artists and activists collectively organized an even more intermedial matinee, which was advertised as a “Concert of Scents,” “Architecture of Light,” and “Architecture of Sound.”⁵⁸

53 Jovanov 1999, p. 67–70.

54 Aleksić published two Dada poems in the second issue of *Út* (1922): “Blasfemija 60,” and “Durchtraverse,” under the title “Zenit csoport”, meaning “Zenit group”.

55 Jovanov 1999, p. 68.

56 Posters from both of these events are preserved, see reproductions in Jovanov 1999, p. 65, 73.

57 Kusik 2007, 94. Two reviews of this event have been found, one in the *Hrvatska obrana* newspaper (21 Aug. 1922; it was reproduced together with the poster of the event in Marjanić 2014, p. 117), and in the *Straža* newspaper (23 Aug. 1922; published in Tešić 1983, p. 304–6).

58 In *Hírlap*, the program of the matinee was printed, as well as the names of the performers, see Subotić 2008, p. 132.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we aimed to revise the chronology of the formation of the Yugoslav Dada and outline the major themes that characterize this reception and further development of Dada, which speaks to the specific international influences and also the development of the original local Dada methods and concepts within the Yugoslav avant-garde. According to the responses and correspondence of Yugoslav Dadaists, it becomes evident that this Yugoslav movement was integrated into the European avant-garde events of that time. Therefore, it is recognized as an integral part of the international Dada movement. Although Yugoslav Dada did not last long and did not involve many individuals, in his short 1977 article on Aleksić, Denegri concluded that “thanks to their timely manifestation and connections with other leading European centers, they form a marginal, but also an authentic component of the general complex of Dadaism.”⁵⁹

To integrate Yugoslav Dadaism in the Central European avant-garde, it is necessary to consider both the international and local aspects that formed this avant-garde current already in its initial stage in Prague. In this context, we have highlighted the following essential points for Aleksić and the establishment of Yugoslav Dada: the Prague international environment, Aleksić’s cooperation with Poljanski in promoting Dadaism and Zenitism, his active collaboration with Micić in *Zenit*, and later conflicting and competitive relationship with Micić and Poljanski, which contributed constructively to the very institutionalization of the Yugoslav Dadaism, its publications and public manifestations.

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⁵⁹ Denegri 2012, p. 228.



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