Attracting Dust in New Zealand Lost And Found: Betty’s Waistcoat and Other Duchampian Traces

In 1983, three works by Marcel Duchamp found their way into the collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa, Wellington, New Zealand). The following account demonstrates how two New York-based friends of Duchamp, Judge Julius Isaacs, and Betty Isaacs (Fig. 1) are tied to this course of events.

Moreover this essay exposes how this process, despite the diligence of Duchamp scholarship, led to the virtual disappearance of these works from the record. This essay will also draw (preliminary) conclusions about the significance of this process, both in terms of the new light shed on the fate of Duchamp’s work, and of the reception of this work outside the centers of art practice. These works are the BETTY

The Duchamp works are the most important items in a gift of over 200 artworks, publications, and articles donated to the museum by the estate of Mrs. Betty and Judge Julius Isaacs, who were New York-based friends of Marcel Duchamp. The bequest of Judge Julius Isaacs, as characterized by Betty Isaacs, born in Tasmania, Australia and a one-time New Zealand resident between 1886 and 1913, is an eclectic range of over 80 sculptures, of both carved and cast forms. These were made during Isaacs’ career as a sculptor after graduating from the Cooper Union Art School in 1928. The bequest also contains 45 amateur paintings by Julius Isaacs, a small grouping of artworks by the American artist Larry Rivers, and works by two important New Zealand expatriates Frances Hodgkins (NZ/London) and Billy Apple (NZ/London/New York). The bequest also originally contained a large number of books which found their way into the NAG or other Wellington libraries, or, deemed to be of little value, were otherwise thrown into the rubbish bin.

Duchamp’s works stand out in relation to the rest, as the entire Bequest was accepted on the basis of the Duchamp articles, as well as the biographical association Betty Isaacs has with New Zealand. This was a clear sign of the museum’s recognition of Marcel Duchamp’s significance and their desire to acquire such works for their collection. History would demonstrate that this was an astute and canny move, as unique works by Duchamp were rarely available or in art market circles. Such rarity has caused consternation for those wishing to collect works by the artist who has eclipsed other
20th Century figures as holding the central importance to the history of contemporary art.

Of the various artworks by Duchamp in the bequest, the following can be recorded. *The Box in a Valise* (**Fig. 2**) contains 68 unnumbered items enclosed in a light-green cloth and signed by Marcel Duchamp in blue ball-point pen, characteristic of the edition of 30 boxes assembled by Jacqueline Matisse Monnier in Paris, 1961.\(^4\) While this may have been a gift directly from Duchamp, no dedication appears within it. However, the *Chess Players* (**Fig. 3**) is indeed a gift from Duchamp to the Isaacs. It is an unnumbered artist’s proof, inscribed on the lower left in pencil ‘*epreuve d’artiste,*’ dedicated ‘*pour Betty and Jules Isaacs*’ in pencil on the lower centre, and signed and dated in pencil on the lower right ‘*Marcel Duchamp/1965.*’ This print belongs to a series of etchings engraved after Duchamp’s charcoal drawing, *Study for Portrait of Chess Players* (1911) (**Fig. 4**). The first series of etchings were a limited edition of 50 proofs, printed in black on handmade paper and hand numbered 1/50-50/50; plus ten artist’s proofs (one of which was a gift to the Isaacs).\(^5\) A single print from this edition was given to each of the artists who had contributed to the group
exhibition *A Homage a Caïssa*. This exhibition was arranged by Duchamp in which works by selected artists were sold for the benefit of the Marcel Duchamp Fund of American Chess.

click images to enlarge

- Figure 3
- Figure 4

- Marcel Duchamp, *The Chess Players*, 1965
- Marcel Duchamp, *Study for Portrait of Chess Players*, 1911

click to enlarge

Figure 5
of Judge Julius Isaacs,
of the Museum of New
Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

The Betty waistcoat (Fig. 5) is signed ‘Marcel Duchamp/1961’ in blue ball-point pen on the inside lining. Belonging to the series “Made to Measure” (1957-1961), this modified readymade is catalogued by Arturo Schwarz in The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp as ‘present location unknown’. Schwarz writes, “Duchamp designed this waistcoat for Isaacs, a New York jurist and close friend (The occasion of the gift is unknown)”.(6) The Betty waistcoat is another instance of Duchamp’s habit to sign works and then to send these works to his peers, friends, or family. Three out of the four waistcoats from the series, “Made to Measure,” were gifts: the Teeny waistcoat (Fig. 6) was a gift from Duchamp to his wife in 1957, and the Sally waistcoat (Fig. 7) was a gift to his son-in-law Paul Matisse on the occasion of his marriage to Sarah “Sally” Barrett on December 27, 1958. The fourth, the Peret waistcoat (Fig. 8), was named after Duchamp’s friend Benjamin Péret.(7) The Betty waistcoat was in all likelihood presented as a gift to the Isaacs for their 40th wedding anniversary (celebrated on September 11 1961). In a 1st edition copy of Richard Hamilton’s typographic translation The Bride Stripped Bare and Her Bachelors, Even (1960), gifted to the Isaacs, Duchamp pens: “Dear Betty, dear Jules en attendant le gilet, affectueusement Marcel et Teeny” (Fig. 9) – here is a short correspondence setting up an exchange in the production of the work of art, one that demonstrates the awareness Marcel and Teeny would have had of the Isaacs’ forthcoming wedding anniversary. This is backed in 1967 when Duchamp penned a dedication to the long union of the judge and the sculptress: theirs was “an amicable institution.” (Fig. 10)
Marcel Duchamp,
*Teeny Waistcoat*, 1957
Marcel Duchamp,
*Sally Waistcoat*, 1958
Marcel Duchamp, *Peret Waistcoat*, 1958

click images to enlarge
Page from The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (1960), Richard Hamilton. Collection of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

A waistcoat, ‘made to measure’ through tailoring, recalls Duchamp’s earliest thought for the term ‘readymade’ as an article of clothing available and ready to wear. A waistcoat, when worn, constitutes a union of sorts to the body. Through linguistic ploy, the letters B. E. T. T. Y (spelled in a 24-point lead font) are individually affixed to the waistcoat as buttons, and spell the name of Julius Isaacs’ wife in mirror reverse. By threading buttons Isaacs joins with his wife, a union that evokes an erotic connotation – “considering the fact that Duchamp’s most celebrated work is based on the theme of a bride being stripped bare, any piece of wearing apparel used in his art could carry the potential for a more erotic meaning”.\(^8\) Waistcoats were not the only garments used by Duchamp at this time; during the same period that the waistcoats were made for the series “Made to Measure” (1957-61), Duchamp also made the *Couple of Laundress’s Aprons* (1959, Paris) (Fig. 11), which are erotic garments of clothing of another (gendered) sort: domestic, not suited attire.

* * *

Betty Isaacs, forming the first-hand link to New Zealand, is the principal connection behind the bequest of Judge Julius Isaacs and New Zealand’s National Art Gallery. Betty Isaacs
was born Ettie Lewis on September 2, 1894 in Hobart, Tasmania, and died aged 76 on February 4, 1971 in New York. She was one of four children to Annie Lewis (nee Cohen) a New Zealander, and Henry Lewis an Australian, who were married in Hobart in 1882. Upon the death of Henry Lewis in 1886, the Lewis family (Annie and children Gabriel, Rachel, Ettie and Rosalie) were brought by Betty’s grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Cohen, to Wellington, New Zealand where Betty was educated. Betty’s mother married a second time to Maurice Ziman on January 27, 1896 and together began a new family, eventually producing three children. In 1902, the family traveled to London and New York, returned to Wellington in 1903, and soon thereafter suffered a tragic setback: the death of Betty’s youngest sister Rosalie in 1905, and Betty’s 49 year old mother Annie Lewis in 1906. Betty remained in New Zealand for seven years, completed her education, and then, at age 19, departed for New York in 1913.\(^9\)

Upon arriving in New York, Betty Isaacs changed her name and reverted back to her original family name Lewis. She trained and then served as a librarian between the years of 1915 and 1918. She then, for a period, worked at the New York City Public library where she met Julius Isaacs. They married on September 11, 1921. Between the years of 1925 and 1928 Betty Isaacs trained at the Cooper Union Art School and emerged as a sculptor in the late 1930's after working as a designer in the textiles industry. Betty Isaacs’ debut exhibition was in 1953 at the Hacker Gallery, New York, and included 38 items of sculpture, 5 ceramic pictures and 2 mosaic panel drawings. The exhibition drew varied reviews from the \textit{New York Times} staff critics: “Betty Lewis Isaacs . . . devotes herself to portraying animals from fish to polar bears, and she has evolved a manner of representing them that is naturalistic without being photographic”.\(^\text{10}\) But one critic found that “her animals tend to be petty,” instead favoring: “an inscrutable, poetic “Girl’s Head” just a little in the Zorach vein”.\(^\text{11}\)
Isaacs worked with a range of materials including wood, stone, alabaster and bronze. She was an enthusiast of wood in particular, and on a 1966 return trip to New Zealand hoped to find examples of carvings in the native Totara and Kauri.\(^\text{(12)}\)

It was Betty Isaacs’ fond remembrance of her time spent in New Zealand that drew her and Julius Isaacs back to visit between August 25 and September 15, 1966. These memories are evident in the poem written by John Cage that recalls Isaacs’ early pastimes living in the suburbs of Wellington. In Number 66 of his many one minute read aloud stories published in *Silence* (1961) and *A Year to Remember* (1968), Cage writes:

Betty Isaacs told me that when she was in New Zealand she was informed that none of the mushrooms growing wild there were poisonous. So one day when she noticed a hillside covered with fungi, she gathered a lot and made catsup. When she finished the catsup, she tasted it and it was awful. Nevertheless she bottled it and put it up on a high shelf. A year later she was housecleaning and discovered the catsup, which she had forgotten about. She was on the point of throwing it away. But before doing this she tasted it. It had changed color. Originally a dirty gray, it had become black, and, as she told me, it was divine, improving the flavor of whatever it touched.\(^\text{(13)}\)

John Cage was a friend of Betty Isaacs who he would have met sometime after 1941 in the close neighborhood of Greenwich Village. Cage wrote about Betty Isaacs as a subject for the above story and one other, and forms the connection to the Duchamps during the period he built a closer friendship with Marcel and Teeny Duchamp in the early 1960s in Greenwich Village. He would have introduced the Isaacs who lived at 21 East 10th Street in the years between 1941 and Julius Isaacs’ death in 1979, near the Duchamp’s 28 West 10th Street apartment. Prior to Marcel and Teeny’s departure from New York in 1964, Cage often visited the Duchamps at their apartment.
In an interview with Calvin Tomkins, John Cage commented, “I was living in the country then, and I would bring wild mushrooms I had gathered and a bottle of wine, and Teeny would cook dinner.” It is highly probable that Betty Isaacs would share stories of New Zealand over a dinner of mushrooms, in the company of her husband Julius, John Cage and Marcel and Teeny Duchamp. The relationship Marcel and Teeny Duchamp had with the Isaacs does not feature significantly in published literature. Judge Julius Isaacs was a patron of the arts, particularly of music and writing, and according to Arturo Schwarz, a “close friend” of Marcel Duchamp. Julius Isaacs was born in 1896 and died in New York on his 83rd birthday on December 31, 1979. After studying at the City College, City University of New York where he was valedictorian and class president in 1917, he trained in law and his public service began in 1934. During the 1940’s he became Acting Corporation Counsel of the City of New York and was appointed as a New York City Magistrate by Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia. Julius Isaacs may well have been acquainted to Duchamp through legal practice or through social circles of New York arts patrons. Little extant correspondence (if any) between the Isaacs and Duchamp’s still remains. Betty Isaacs and Judge Julius Isaacs did not have any children, and Betty’s surviving family members in New Zealand are found on Betty’s stepfather’s side, Maurice Ziman, who, while remembering meeting the Isaacs on their 1966 New Zealand visit, have no knowledge of the extent of their New York based lifestyle or their friendships that developed in the 1960s.
The nature of the Duchamp/Isaacs friendship is verified by four short personal inscriptions written by Duchamp in publications gifted to the Isaacs, now in Te Papa’s works on paper collection. Dating from 1959 with the publication of Robert Lebel’s "Sur Marcel Duchamp" in English (translated by George Heard Hamilton) these read: “pour Betty, pour Jules Isaacs le magician des portes qui, pour lui, ne sont jamais ni ourestes . . . en grande affection, Marcel Duchamp N.Y. Oct. 1959.” (Fig. 12) Secondly, the aforementioned dedication in Richard Hamilton’s "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even" (1960): “dear Betty, dear Jules en attendant le gilet, affectueusement Marcel et Teeny”. On the inside cover to the catalogue "NOT SEEN and/or LESS SEEN of/by MARCEL DUCHAMP/RROSE SELAVY 1904-64" (Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery, N.Y., 1965) Duchamp scribed: “To the judge of all things, dear Jules and Betty. Marcel.” And, as also previously noted, in Calvin Tomkins’ "The World of Marcel Duchamp 1887 – (1966): “pour Betty et Judge Isaacs, an amicable Institution, et affectueusement. Marcel Duchamp, 1967.” One can conclude that their friendship was
based through contact in Greenwich Village after 1941, and that these were also strengthened by John Cage’s friendship with Betty Isaacs. The ‘BETTY’ waistcoat and the personal dedications stand as proof, and from these are gleaned certain insight into the nature of their friendship.

Fondness for New Zealand was shared by both Betty and Julius Isaacs. On occasion, they dined and entertained the Minister of New Zealand’s foreign affairs, and over the years entertained other notable New Zealanders at their New York home: including Paul Gabites and Richard Taylor (New Zealand Consular-Generals), Sir Thaddeus McCarthy (Judge and president of the New Zealand Court of Appeal), John Hopkins (symphony conductor and co-founder of the New Zealand National Youth Choir) and the New Zealand expatriate artist Douglas MacDiarmid. Their bequest contains works by two of New Zealand’s most significant expatriate artists, Frances Hodgkins (NZ/London) and Billy Apple (NZ/London/New York). In addition, on June 1966, Julius Isaacs managed an exhibition of an important New Zealand expatriate, the writer and novelist Katherine Mansfield, for the 34th annual International Congress of the P.E.N. Club entitled “The Writer as Independent Spirit”. Shortly after this congress, the Isaacs embarked on their New Zealand visit.

The Isaacs’ relationships with the New Zealand Consulate in New York underpin connections established for Betty Isaacs’ work in the NAG in New Zealand. Paul Gabites’ efforts (through photographs) to bring her work to the attention of the Selection Committee of the NAG in 1964, was met with “great interest.” However, the Selection Committee’s reply to Paul Gabites in 1964 also informed him that two purchases, a Barbara Hepworth and a Derain oil painting, had “more than absorbed our import collection for the next two years!” They added that “the members, however, have been made aware of the work of Betty Isaacs and we are that much ahead”. It was
after Betty Isaacs’ death in 1971 that Julius Isaacs, with increased energies, offered her works to the NAG, which ultimately formed further origin for the later bequest. In 1972, nearly one year after Betty Isaacs’ death, Julius Isaacs wrote to Melvin Day, the director of the NAG, outlining brief biographical details of his wife Betty Isaacs. Two years later, the Selection Committee agreed to accept one work by Betty Isaacs, a gift sent from Julius Isaacs. In 1974, New Zealand’s Minister of Overseas Trade, Mr. Walding, accepted as ‘a gift to the Government and people of New Zealand’ the abstract sculpture “Torso in Bronze” (1962, New York). This transaction forms a definite trace to the bequest later confirmed in 1981 to the NAG by the executors of Judge Julius Isaacs’ estate.

Instruction left in Julius Isaac’s will asked the executors of his estate (representatives of the Chemical Bank Corporation, New York) to determine a suitable repository for the collection of his art works and related items either in the United States or abroad. Isaacs’ will, dated August 29 1979, reads under paragraph (U) of Article Second: “I give and bequeath all my books and art objects, including paintings, sculpture and drawings to such museums and libraries in this country, Israel and New Zealand, as my executor shall select, to be kept as intact as possible or distributed separately to various such institutions, to be known as the BETTY LEWIS ISAACS and JULIUS ISAACS COLLECTION or COLLECTIONS. . . . I urge my executor to follow the advice of MEYER SHAPIRO and DOROTHY MILLAR as to the proper allocation of these works of art, especially of the sculpture of BETTY LEWIS ISAACS so that her reputation as an artist may best be preserved.”

The initial offer of the estate’s collection was sent by L. David Clark (representative executor) to the Secretary of the Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand (AGMANZ) on 13 November 1980. Luit Bieringa, who was the vice-president of AGMANZ and director of the NAG, does not recollect the
broad possible scope of benefactors for the bequest. Bieringa’s opportunity to view objects, works and books in the estate became the opportunity “to not miss out on something unique” making sure that “the sequence from Betty Isaacs and the Judge Julius Isaacs bequest to the National Gallery was a natural one”.\(^{(22)}\) Furthermore, the trace of origins outlined in this article certainly support Bieringa’s claim and would have determined the executor’s decision.

Figure 13
Telegram from Chemical Bank Corporation (N.Y) to the NAG. Postmarked 06 June 1981, Wellington, New Zealand. Archives of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

It was Bieringa who secured the bequest for New Zealand. With AGMANZ support, Bieringa entered into a protracted process of disposition and scheduled a meeting with Paul F. Feilzer, the Senior Trust Officer of Chemical Bank Corporation, for February 8 and 9 1981 in New York, when he viewed selected works in the bequest. The collection of artworks and other related items in the Isaacs estate had been appraised by William Doyle Galleries, Inc., New York, who appraised (in U.S. dollars) the *Betty Waistcoat* at $20,000.00; the *Chess Players* at $2,000.00 and the *Box in a Valise* at $3,000.00. The bequest of Judge Julius Isaacs was confirmed via telegram to Luit Bieringa on June 6, 1981 from the Chemical Bank
Corporation (Fig. 13), and the Board of Trustees of the National Art Gallery voted unanimously to approve acquisition on June 11, 1981. Although this approval was passed in June 1981, and Bieringa personally signed the receipt and release of the bequest in New York on November 9, 1981, it took until February 1983 before the works were formally accessioned into the national collection.

Delays are not an uncommon occurrence a propos a peripheral location. The news of obtaining the bequest originally in June 1981 was in fact new news again by the time of its actual arrival in Wellington and its formal acquisition in 1983. The delay was due to the distance the freighted works had to travel across the Pacific Ocean (and also due in part to the large size of the entire bequest). The total freight was comparatively expensive (estimated at $5,700.00 US dollars),
yet approval of the bequest was conditional on NAG’s meeting associated costs for its climate-controlled freight to New Zealand. The full inventory of the bequest of Judge Julius Isaacs was shipped by Day & Meyer, Murray & Young Corp. — Packers, Shippers and Movers of High Grade Household Effects and Art Objects (Fig. 14), and departed New York on the Malmros Monsoon on November 23, 1981, arriving in New Zealand on December 18, 1981 through Auckland. The shipment reached its final destination at the National Art Gallery in Wellington in February 1982. It took another full year for formal acquisition processes to be completed, but, finally, ‘Duchamp’ had arrived in New Zealand.\(^{(23)}\)

Bieringa, delighted by the acquisition of Duchamp’s works, writes: “As a young country New Zealand cannot, apart from its superb indigenous cultural assets, boast of rich assets reflecting the art historical developments of the Western world. As such several of the works contained in the Isaacs Estate, in particular the Duchamp items, will have a significant impact with the art museum collections in New Zealand, whereas their retention in Europe and America will only marginally affect the stature of any significant collection. Given the limited financial resources of our museums the impact of the Isaacs collection will be substantial.”\(^{(24)}\)

While the bequest was somewhat serendipitous, Bieringa exhibited a presence of mind in securing a small but significant collection of Duchampian works and articles for the NAG, especially at a time contemporaneous to a wider desire in collecting works by Duchamp. The bequest belongs to a limited transfer of his works to international museum collections after the artist’s death. Museums and curators arrived at the significance of Duchamp’s work much later than that of other 1960’s New York based artists, and so a period of institutional interest in Duchamp’s work grew belatedly.\(^{(25)}\)
Within a period in which very few Duchamp works might have actually been purchased or exchanged, the National Art Gallery of New Zealand succeeded in obtaining a small but unique collection.

Bieringa’s enthusiasm for the transaction made in 1983 has not been sustained by the institution that had facilitated the bequest. Indeed, *The Box in a Valise*, documented on its acquisition, has been shown on two occasions: at the Auckland Art Gallery, for the exhibition ‘*Chance and Change*’ in 1985, and more recently in 2003 at the Te Papa Museum, in ‘*Past Presents*’ an exhibition of works focusing on gifts to the collection. The *BETTY* waistcoat and *The Chess Players* were also documented upon their acquisition, but Te Papa museum art catalogue files have not recorded any further movement of these items for exhibition, either within the institution or beyond. In addition, the 80 sculptural works by Betty Isaacs have never had any comprehensive exhibition, and remain in their brown cardboard boxes in storage. Duchamp’s works have never formed a collective basis for any exhibition in New Zealand, though such an exhibition is long overdue. Therefore, akin to one of Duchamp’s time based pleasures (from his delayed work on the *Large Glass*) these three Duchamp works have, as in that figure of speech, attracted dust.

* * *

So what can be made of the fate of these Duchampian artworks? Firstly, their disappearance into a Museum Collection in a small city in an isolated country at the “bottom” of the South Pacific has effectively meant they were lost (until now) to Duchamp scholars. This fact starkly reminds us of New Zealand’s peripheral situation vis-à-vis the centres of culture and for which delays are a particular and peculiar circumstance. Yet, delay is also a favored operation and
strategy of Marcel Duchamp and the sequential ‘delays’ to the uptake of Duchamp’s work in the 20th Century suggests that the marginal geographical location where these three Duchamp works are located is an affirmation of the ubiquity of their maker. These facts only impress a stronger urge to make some sense out of these works within the cultural context in which they reside, in relation to the wider operations and strategies of Marcel Duchamp’s work. Rather than simply celebrate their re-discovery, I would argue the fate of these works actually tallies with aspects of Duchamp’s practice and this approach would stitch the works back into the picture.

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Figure 15
Marcel Duchamp as Rrose Sélavy, 1921, photographed by Man Ray, retouched by Duchamp

In attributing ubiquity one might think of Duchamp’s demeanor, his trans-gendered performance as Rrose Sélavy (Fig. 15), his employed translation and turns in meaning between French and English, his personal history and status as an expatriate between Paris and New York, travelling and slipping between varying reputations on both sides of the Atlantic. It is Duchamp’s ability to resist classification, at variance to other 20th century artists, that spawned a highly mobile legacy across historical periods and across generations of art
makers. It is here that register is found with the Isaacs’ bequest: not for the first time material and visual artifacts by Duchamp’s hand slipped across national borders, arriving in a new context. The Isaacs’ bequest is part of a navigation of ‘Duchamp’ beyond the cultural centers within which he had historically operated. Marcel Duchamp’s legacy functions in the New Zealand context, as elsewhere, as an inescapable and indispensable example for local artists, but who have developed their distinctive practices not only as faint echoes of mainstream models but as canny adaptations within the limits of a local situation.

Returning to the dedications by Duchamp to the Isaacs, the earliest of which was signed by Duchamp in 1959, and the last in 1967, it is within this period that Duchamp was somewhat of a traveling inscriber: a (supposedly) retired artist, pen in hand, authorizing and laying claim to various reproductions of his work. “The sixties are notably the replica years – replicas of his own work, made by others and signed by Duchamp”. Here the works in the bequest of Judge Julius Isaacs (1983) offer a vital model to a culture that has historically relied on the reproducibility of art and the beneficiaries of “friends” to participate in wider culture. New Zealand’s position in the history of art is necessarily replete with (international) comings and goings: replete with networks formed overseas, of generating acquaintances, friendships and unions to serve as contacts and to sustain lines of communication upon returning. It is befitting that gifts from Duchamp are, in turn, gifts to New Zealand’s National Museum, made under the auspices of friends of this country.

Notes
1. This research is ongoing. I would like to acknowledge Christina Barton (Art History, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand) for considerable support in writing this article and her teachings.

2. A complete list and the Written dedications appear later in this article.


5. Ibid. 853.

6. Ibid. 808-9.

7. Ibid.


9. Biographical details have been established through Julius Isaacs’ Letter to Melvin Day (10 Oct. 1972) and with descendents of Betty Isaacs: in email correspondence with Rob Golblatt “Betty Isaacs,” E-mail to the author (17 April
2005), and in personal interview with David Heinemann (30 May 2005).


19. Francis M. Naumann, one authority on Duchamp’s personal correspondences, writes “I have never come across any references to Judge Julius Isaacs or to Betty Isaacs in my research through the extant Duchamp correspondence.” “Re: Duchamp correspondences- Betty and Judge Julius Isaacs/ New Zealand connections,” E-mail to the author (4 April 2005).


22. Luit Bieringa, Personal interview with the author (17 May 2005).

23. However, this was not the first time works by Marcel Duchamp had arrived to New Zealand. 78 works from The Mary Sisler Collection toured the country in 1967.


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_____. “Re: Duchamp correspondences- Betty and Judge Julius Isaacs/ New Zealand connections.” E-mail to the author. 4 April 2005.


Fig. 2-4, 6-8, 11, 15 © 2007 Succession Marcel Duchamp, ARS, N.Y./ADAGP, Paris.
The Artist as a Social Critique

A controversy about Duchamp

The following text is based on an interview with Ms. Rhonda Roland Shearer, the founder of the Art Science Research Laboratory located in Soho, Manhattan, New York and her findings about the art of Marcel Duchamp. Ms. Shearer, an artist herself, has concentrated her work completely on the rewriting and manipulation of art history—“I have learned my lesson from Duchamp,” she says, and consequently has discarded the object from her work. Ms. Shearer is the initiator of the quarterly online-magazine “Tout-Fait” and is in the process of publishing a book revealing a detailed discussion of her research, which ultimately redefines Duchamp’s position in art history. Since Ms. Shearer went public with her ideas, a controversy about the results of her research has broken loose. How can we know what Duchamp’s true intention was when he “created” the ready-mades? Is there much more to them than the collection of art history books has repeatedly told us over the decades? The answer lies in the very objects themselves and now that we are well familiar with his work, it might be time to leave old views behind and take a fresh look at it, which is exactly what Ms. Shearer has done.

The text will give a detailed discussion of some famous examples such as the urinal, the hat rack and the coat rack to make visible her ideas and then compare them to the harsh criticism she has received from art historians, several critics of major newspapers and art magazines and then evaluate the arguments. To which side more weight is given
will be left to the reader. Additional theoretical and visual material as well as some interactive 3-D models of some of the discussed works can be found in the Multimedia section of Tout-Fait (Vol. 2, issue no. 3) in an article by Ms. Rhonda Roland Shearer herself.

“Besides: It is always the others who die.”
The role of Duchamp, the French American Dadaist, as a critic of the art world and of the laxness and inattentiveness of our perceptual conventions is today commonly accepted, as well as his witty and critical spirit as it is expressed in many of his quotes and interviews. But now, since Ms. Rhonda Roland Shearer took a more detailed look at the entirety of his work, profounder issues seem to reveal themselves. We need to ask ourselves, if perhaps there was another surprise hidden behind the one we today have so well integrated into our sense of art history and the foundations Duchamp’s invention of the ready-made has laid for later art forms.

“Besides—it is always the others who die”, reads a quote he had inscribed on his gravestone. Does this suggest that we would die or better: the accuracy of our perception, our curiosity, while he would not? The issues hidden in the ready-mades, objects and studio photography, “once discovered indeed would give him a second revival and guarantee his spirit and influence to live on far beyond the fame of his time”.\(^1\) Once again Duchamp is holding the mirror for us to realize the blind spots and self contentedness of our perception. “And it was all planned out”\(^2\).

Ms. Rhonda Roland Shearer’s findings which seem more and more obvious once the eyes are opened to the deceptions suggest that this indeed is true. Many statements Duchamp made in interviews and his own writings, which are primarily concerned with perceptual research and theories seem to support this theory. Furthermore Duchamp explicitly expresses his interest in a public to come, “you should wait for fifty years or a hundred years for your true public. That is the only public
that interests me”, he states.\(^{(3)}\) Obviously the inventiveness of Duchamp’s spirit was underestimated for the past decades, but not our capacities as supposed by his mind. Marcel Duchamp sustained a long lasting interest in mathematics and physics, especially in the theories of Henri Poincaré, the forefather of chaos theory and researcher of geometry. Poincaré “claimed that axioms of geometry are neither a synthetic a priori truth nor an empirical truth and that they are a convention in a disguised form. We choose an appropriate convention in the light of our experience and thus the question is not whether it is true or not but whether it is convenient or simple.”\(^{(4)}\)

Likewise the objects of our three dimensional world are neither unchangeable facts nor are they clearly consistent with the data we collect through our perceptual experience especially when it comes to two dimensional representation of three dimensional objects. They happen in the mind, which means when we perceive with our senses, and this is especially true of our eyes, “we build a mental map of the things, a collection of snapshots gathered through movement in time and space. In our mind they fuse together to one idea of an object”\(^{(5)}\) we then call fact, but many times it is not. The potential “gap between the reality of the object outside of us and the object as it exists in our mind as it happens due to our perceptual blind spots are the zone where Duchamp’s work sets in”.\(^{(6)}\) When we perceive we are drawn to the convenient and simple. Duchamp was well aware of all of this, aware of it before anybody else and “his work functions as a set of proof of these findings and the flaws of our visual perception”.\(^{(7)}\)

\(^{(1)}\) click images to enlarge
Photograph of Duchamp’s studio in New York, 1917-18
Marcel Duchamp, *Hat Rack*, 1917/1964

Marcel Duchamp, *Tu m’* (detail), 1918
How huge the gap between the reality of an object and its representation of it in our mind can become we realize when we follow the research of Ms. Shearer about one of Duchamp’s well known ready-mades, the hat rack. In our mind as well as in art history books it exists as one single object, while in fact it is not. The documentation of the object, a drawing, studio and object photography, a photograph of its shadow and a blueprint (Figs. 1-4) reveal that different versions of the object exist and only one of them matches the original Thonet bend wood hat rack as you could buy it in stores of Duchamp’s time. The other versions are alterations and distortions (blueprint) and one of them even reveals itself as an unusable object as we can see in the little video animation where a research member places hats on the different works and replicas of Duchamp’s “ready-made”: The lower row of S-shapes is directed downward. (Fig. 5) Accurate scientific research with the aid of computer technology has helped to unveil the true nature of the “ready-made”.

The hat rack is in fact an object that was altered over time, opposed to the one single object that was just purchased in a department store to then be put on a pedestal and named an object of art. Reality is far more complex. The hat rack is a
creation and “what Duchamp means by hat rack can be understood only if we put all versions together”\(^{(8)}\), in the mind they meld together and become the second shock of the ready-made, the shock about the incapacities of our “reliable” perception as the collector of truth.

For Duchamp “our blind spots become the very spots where he can fool us”.\(^{(9)}\) Another example is the coat rack. A photography of the object looks like the manufactured one. It sits on the floor of Duchamp’s studio and we see it slightly turned, but what seems to be in perspective is, as a closer look reveals—in fact we have to employ the aids of geometer and lines to find out—that what we look at is a distorted version of the piece: the different hooks all are slightly tilted. A frontal view of the object would disclose its unevenness, but of course put in perspective, we miss it. (Fig. 6)

Duchamp hated the retina, for him it was the source of misperception and to rely on it as the only origin for insight in truth and reality finally means to be led astray. Accordingly, as stated in an interview, he expresses his dislike for all art based on the visual alone, e.g. impressionism, and calls it retinal.\(^{(10)}\) Already Courbet had
introduced the physical emphasis into the painting of the 19th century, while Duchamp approves art that integrates mental images, symbols and allegories, art, that is primarily concerned with ideas.\(^{(11)}\) It gives us a broader and more truthful representation of how reality is present in our minds.

**Cabanne:** Where does your antiretinal attitude come from?

**Duchamp:** From too great an importance given to the retinal. Since Courbet, it’s been believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was everyone’s error. The retinal shudder! Before, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral.\(^{(12)}\)

In another interview held 1956 Duchamp states: “Painting should not be exclusively retinal or visual; it should have to do with the grey matter, with our urge for understanding”.\(^{(13)}\) Herein we certainly find the root for his extended research (visual experiments, cast shadows, mirror reflections etc.) and interest in the introduction of the fourth dimension into the representation of objects, which then manifest in his long term project the *Large Glass*. In the *Large Glass* he no longer uses realistic, but mathematical, scientific perspective, based on calculations and dimensions. “Everything was becoming conceptional,” Duchamp states.\(^{(14)}\)

Already the Egyptian art applied time span principles versus the single moment’s “photographic-like” representations as later made systematic in Renaissance. Egyptian art shows frontal and side views mixed all in order to convey what is meant; it is a series in time and space, not a one single point, central perspective.

Researching Duchamp’s perceptual theories as given in his visual work, two findings seem to become crucial for understanding his point: “Perspective is more than just
vision. And: all visual language is based on the mind. The idea of an object is a stack of information and perspective is just one single snapshot taken out of the stack, but incapable of giving us an accurate idea of what the object truly is, in total. Even if we look or meditate on it for a very long time, it keeps its hidden secrets”.\(^{(15)}\) We are unchangeably bound to the actual time and space experience, as Kant already stated in his *critique of pure reason*. “Duchamp through his work gives us the visual version of a truly new mathematical system that describes how eye and mind work together”.\(^{(16)}\)

While cubism is working according to similar principles, the time-space process of perception, it emphasizes the fragmentation of perception through splintering the visual information—Duchamp goes one step further. He places all weight on the process beyond the fragmented snapshot collection and concentrates only on the process of the fusion of the different elements into one single idea.

Many works of his show his interest in optical experiments such as stereo vision, a new way to go beyond photography. A card with two different pictures is placed on a device that allows one eye to see one picture each. Duchamp’s system is “working by these very principles, but formally it goes beyond it”\(^{(17)}\), since he employs different versions of objects over a longer time period, which leaves us mostly completely unaware of the fact that we are fooled.

Let us for a moment go back to the statement about Poincaré’s research on geometry and the conventions in disguised forms: “We choose an appropriate convention in the light of our experience and thus the question is not whether it is true or not but whether it is convenient or simple.” We see what we know and convenience probably plays a far greater role in our perception than we would like to admit. How much information do we collect to determine that what we see is a tree, a car, a broom, a human being or a person that we know? The idea,
once it is formed in our mind is quite durable and the time spent on attentive and close observation is commonly reduced to a very minimum amount, so many details fail to reach the level of consciousness.

click to enlarge

Figure 7
Photograph of Duchamp’s Fountain (1917) by Alfred Stieglitz published in Blindman No. 2, 1917

gain we follow Ms. Shearer’s research of another famous “ready-made”, Fountain, the urinal. (Fig. 7) Taking a closer view at its depiction, we find that some manipulation must have taken place either on the object or more likely on the photograph. The upper part of the object shows a frontal view, while the lower part is seen slightly in profile. Once this is discovered it seems quite obvious and we ask ourselves how we could not have noticed a grave “mistake” like this before. Three photographs are the only evidence we have of the urinal’s existence, because the original object has been “lost”. Above that Ms. Shearer’s research into manufactured alike objects of Duchamp’s time resulted in the finding that urinals in this version were never produced, so there is also the option that Duchamp did have produced and/or altered the object for his own purposes, like the coat rack, a comb, a perfume bottle and many others.

We would not go wrong to call “Duchamp the
ultimate manipulator even from his grave”.\(^{(18)}\) And his witty spirit suggests that “he intended to have art history to be rewritten long after his death. Once again a new belief is forced on us to adopt”\(^{(19)}\) and he probably would have a smile of contentment on his face watching us in the very spot we find ourselves today looking at his work with a new mind through the help of Ms. Shearer’s and her team members’ efforts.

But not everyone is willing to embrace the results of her research. Critics of her work find fault in her usage of 3-d rendering and other scientific methods of research as opposed to traditional art-historical methods. Others want to see more visual evidence or assume that she reads facts to her advantage in anticipation of these facts to conform to her theory.\(^{(20)}\) Then others simply do not believe her and decline any comment. Is this perhaps another blind spot, the attempt to dwell on conventional methods of research in art history and ultimately the reluctance to give up well known and comfortable beliefs about what art can be and what our perception is capable of? Indeed, if Ms. Shearer is right, then in fact art history has to be rewritten and with its many hundreds and thousands of artists’ statements as well.

In another quote Henri Poincaré states: “To doubt everything or to believe everything are two equally convenient solutions; both dispense with the necessity of reflection”\(^{(21)}\). Well, Ms. Shearer hasn’t. What do we do?

Notes

1. Ms. Shearer, interview
2. Ms. Shearer, interview
3. A conversation with Marcel Duchamp, television interview conducted by James Johnson Sweeney, NBC, 1956


5. Ms. Shearer, interview

6. Ms. Shearer, interview

7. Ms. Shearer, interview

8. Ms. Shearer, interview

9. Ms. Shearer, interview

10. Dialogues with Duchamp, Pierre Cabanne


12. Dialogues with Duchamp, Pierre Cabanne

13. A conversation with Marcel Duchamp, television interview conducted by James Johnson Sweeney, NBC, January 1956
On Swift Nudes and Flying
In researching the lives of the saints, I recently came across some interesting parallels with Marcel Duchamp’s use of the female nude. The unreachable ‘Brides’ that appear in many of his works are thought to be sources of desire and creativity, which drive the ‘Bachelors’ into a frenzy. But this passion turns out to be one of reason and almost scientifically meticulous attention, and as emotionally detached as a game of chess. What are we to make of this?

During my research I came across a conversation between the Russian monks Gregory Rasputin and Iliodor. Rasputin said he felt great energy and spiritual inspiration from being around women. He said Saints and church Elders would undress prostitutes to gaze at them, but without any physical contact. What occurred was a strange combination of scoptophilia (sexual gazing) and angelophany (meeting angels). Rasputin himself practiced this method, visiting St. Petersburg brothels and women at the royal palace. By managing one’s lust, the soul could become so refined as to rise into the air despite the weight of the body, and Rasputin cited the miracles of Jesus as examples of this soul levitation.

Figure 1
St. Joseph of Cupertino
In the history of the Catholic Church there are 200 noted cases of male and female Saints who had the spectacular ability to fly. The most impressive is St. Joseph of Cupertino, Italy (Fig. 1), a Franciscan friar born on June 17, 1603, whose ecstatic flights earned him the epithet ‘Flying Friar.’\(^{(2)}\) As a boy he was sickly, absent-minded, nervous, hot-tempered and unable, because of his states of ecstasy, to stick to a job. Often he would stop in mid-sentence, forgetting the conversation he was engaged in; and suddenly kneel or to stand stock still at awkward moments. Joseph was sent to Grotella in 1628, where for ten years he performed many miracles, to the wonder of the people in the surrounding countryside. Because he drew so many large crowds, his desperate superiors sent him from convent to convent, hidden from the world and basically imprisoned. His life was threatened when he was denounced to the Inquisition at Naples, but after three ‘examinations’ he was freed. After that, Joseph was sent to Pope Urban the 8th. When he saw the Holy Father, he flew into the air and remained there until the Pope ordered him down. Hordes of Pilgrims followed Joseph. The Spanish ambassador and his cohorts saw him take off and fly over their heads to the high altar, uttering his usual shrill cry. After twice seeing Joseph in ecstasy, the Duke of Brunswick became a Catholic. The monks tried to distract him with needles and burning embers, but they could not divert him from his trance. He would be caught by a vision that fixed him like a statue. At dinner he was known to fly around holding his plate; or, when working outdoors, suddenly hover in a tree, caught in a state of amazement at the world. When Pope Innocent the 10th ordered him to retire, he spent the rest of his life in seclusion.
In the life of Joseph, no mention is made of desire as an agent for his gift of flight. But the lives of Saints have been dominated by desire and repentance ever since St. Anthony the hermit, who can be seen flying in a stunning picture by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. (Fig. 2)

The origins of the sacred ‘muse’ appear from the court magician of Emperor Nero, Simon Magus, who has been erased from Catholic history and is remembered only as ‘the Father of all Heretics.’ Born in Gitta in the first century A.D. this man, the founder of Gnosticism, battled mightily with St Peter, we are told, in an attempt to overthrow Christianity. He had the power to heal, to turn stones into bread, travel
through the air, stand unharmed in fire, change shape, become invisible, move objects, and open locks without touching them. Simon, a Faustian figure, is thus a scientist turned magician. In trying to imitate Simon’s gift of flight, St. Peter broke his legs. But many accounts, such as this picture by Benozzo Gozzoli (Fig. 3) tell of Simon’s tragic fall.

Nearly all records concerning the Magus have been destroyed. Simon explained the purpose of the Magus (which was misunderstood by the followers of Jesus), as enlightenment. The consciousness of the magician is at one with ‘Nous,’ or Reason. Adam’s knowledge before the Fall is a true and perfect knowledge of nature, a Natural Magic. Such Reason must be combined with ‘Epinoia,’ or Thought. Simon found this aspect of enlightenment in a relationship with a prostitute from Tyre, in whom Simon claimed to see the spirit of God. This is reminiscent of the frenzy of Duchamp’s ‘Bachelor’ as caused by his ‘Bride.’

In early Christianity, as in most religions, there were sacred prostitutes whom the community held in high esteem. These women were manifestations of direct physical interaction with the divine. The Gnostics believed the spirit of God had been trapped in matter, especially in humans, during the creation of the world. Thought can be trapped in form, and the images created can be abused by corrupt men. This abuse must be redeemed by ‘Nous.’

Some Gnostics claim Jesus rescued Mary from a life of prostitution, as Simon did Helena. And that that the Church felt ill at ease with this similarity, so Simon was erased from history.

click to enlarge
In Duchamp’s *Large Glass*, *(Fig. 4)* a nude female levitates. This elevated muse creates a frenzy among the ‘bachelors’ that physically remain below. And as long as their admiration of the nude remains a visual one, they will not rise, just like the church Elders. They can only leave their mundane lives when they can see in her the beauty of Creation.
In Duchamp’s last work, *Etant donnés (Fig. 5)*, the bride seems to have fallen, like Simon, and has crashed into a tree. Why this happened is a mystery, but perhaps she fell because her ‘bachelor’ is no longer there. Theun Karelse, 2003, Amsterdam.

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**Notes**

1. Rasputin the Last Word’, Edvard Radzinsky

2. New Catholic Encyclopaedia, various books on Saints and web sources via the Google directory of Saints

3. New Catholic Encyclopaedia, various books on Saints and web sources via Google

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**Unpacking the *Boîte-en-valise*: Playing off Duchampian Deferral and Derrida’s “différance”**

Assembled between 1935-41, *Boîte-en-valise (Fig. 1)* is a “traveling museum” of 69 works by Duchamp that include Fountain, Large Glass, Broyeuse de chocolat, Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy, Tu m’, Paris Air, Pliant de voyage, 3 Stoppages Etalon, Bride, Comb (Figs. 2-11), and others. Duchamp’s aim was “to reproduce the paintings and the objects [he] liked and
collect them in a space as small as possible.” But the traveling museum of miniature reproductions performs other things cleverly absent from the ‘artist statement’ being proffered here. If the readymade is that object which should be “a work without an artist to make it,” the objects in the Boîte-en-valise upset the concept of the readymade by their quality of being remade readymades. Fountain and Paris Air are reconstructed as a mini-urinal ironically restored to its upright position, and a mini-ampoule respectively. Pliant de voyage is reincarnated as a smaller, stitched version of the original typewriter cover. No longer independent of the artist’s manual act of creation, the readymade becomes an anti-readymade, or a made, made by an artist. Is Duchamp contradicting himself? Why does he choose such elaborate methods of physical replication and attention to detail in the production of the miniatures? Why emphasize the unreadymadeness of the readymade?

Perhaps the apparent reversal of the readymade into the made is not really a reversal, but emblematic of a complicated Duchampian exercise. Levi-Strauss’ concept of bricolage, as interpreted by Jacques Derrida in his essay, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” can help us interpret the process:

The *bricoleur*, says Lévi-Strauss, is someone who uses “the means at hand,” that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous—and so forth.” (Derrida, 1970: 231)

Taking the operation of making a readymade as an exemplar of bricolage, what is described here coincides with the idea of the readymade-making artist who uses the means at his disposal
which are “already there” and chosen at random — urinals, typewriter covers and the like; trying by “trial and error” to adapt them unhesitatingly and even putting them in combination — adjoining bicycle wheels and stools, for instance, even if their form and origin are heterogenous, trying “several of them at once.” However, it is this unresolved “and so forth” that closes Derrida’s description in a relatively unimportant way, which concentrates the possibilities about this concept of the readymade, which the Boîte-en-Valise sets into motion. Adaptation, change, and heterogeneity are compounded by the pending nature of bricolage, which opens the object up to change “whenever it appears necessary.” Conceptual bricolage serves to underscore the impurity, impermanence and futurity of the gesture of the readymade, marking its place in a larger experiment concerning the nature of the art object and the value we subscribe to it.

If one were to strictly adhere to the readymade as an unmediated, un-created commercial object, this would ironically disqualify most of the readymades—especially the ‘assisted’ and ‘reciprocal’ ones(1), such as Bicycle Wheel, Fountain and L.H.O.O.Q. (Figs. 12, 13 and 14). Evidently, delimiting the readymades inhibits the scope of the possible Duchampian commentary, for the issue of the readymade’s createdness is relatively unimportant, as seen in Duchamp’s defense of the readymades in The Blind Man (Fig. 15): “Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it” (Ades, 154). Such an approach would ignore the open-ended “operation” and the progressive play of ideas that Duchamp might otherwise be performing through his delightfully self-parodying Boîte-en-valise.

Duchamp is himself a portmanteau of artistic associations, like his Boîte. His career appears to be a product of random assemblage, exemplifying a proclivity to change and the employing of several styles, materials and artistic allegiances at once; a bricoleur’s approach to art-making.
Witness his abandonment of the “Cubist straitjacket,” his flirtations with Dada, Surrealism, science and optics in the form of the Rotoreliefs (Fig. 16), his overall refusal to be identified with any of these categories and crowning dissimulation: that of giving up art to play chess. He switched mediums like an adept con artist, using paint, canvas, glass, found objects, verbal play and puns, and finally installation in Étant-donnés (Fig. 17). Such heterogeneity, witnessed at the level of the artwork, commits us to investigating the effects of Duchamp’s bricolage at a theoretical level. By examining the reconstructed miniatures in the Boîte against Derrida’s (non)concept of différance, we can understand the readymade in the light of its place in a modifiable series of comments.

The concept of difference outlined by Saussure refers to how the value of a sign derives from the fact that it is different from adjacent and all other signs. Consequently, différance incorporates and reorganizes that, adding that the value of the sign is not immediately present, but is deferred until the next sign in the syntagm appears. Différance is not merely an activity, but contains many traces of former and future activities: “What is written as différance, then, will be the playing movement that “produces”—by means of something that is not simply an activity;” “every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences. Such a play, then—différance—is no longer simply a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual system and process in general” (449). Thus, indeterminacy and intervals are inscribed into the word itself; ‘différance’ performs what it is a trace of. But this indeterminacy between passive and active signification by the sign does not condemn itself, but provides the possibility of conceptuality.

In the same way, the value of an artwork derives from the fact that it is different from “adjacent and all other artworks.”
In order to gain meaning, readymades occurring in new incarnations must differ from their predecessors. The readymades are therefore an erratic experiment, whose practical outcomes as conceptual pieces were deferred as Duchamp’s career, progressed, disarming static habits of interpretation. As different signs in the syntagm, *Fountain, Comb,* etc., were reincarnated twice: as 1964’s full-size replicas of the lost originals, and as the three diminutive 1936-41 replicas that we find in *Boîte-en-valise.* (Figs. 18 and 19) Different permutations of the original ‘sign,’ they modified their values as sign-objects, reminding us that the readymades are not conceptually pure, but instead produce effects that emerge from their internal differences.

If so, *Boîte-en-valise,* as a “traveling museum” assembling 69 ‘seminal’ works, expands the debate about what takes on the value of art by the sheer diversity of its content and heterogenous forms. If *différance* means that the value of the sign is not immediately present, but is deferred until the next sign in the syntagm, then *Boîte* is the sum of all the successive signs of the works that came before. If *différance* “contains many traces of former and future activities,” it is also a composite of contesting signs and signifiers, of works and their statements, catalogued within *Boîte* in a self-conscious genre-forming gesture. As archive, it invites Duchamp’s immortalization as a producer of fine art, and as an act of formal shrinkage, participates in Duchamp’s own self-devaluation. It is an ingenious stunt, inviting one to partake in a nostalgic vision of his career through self-citation, and interrupting the act of nostalgia at the same time.

*Boîte* traces the previous terms in the syntagm that precede it. As a container of signs, it contains not only the *Fountain,* but also little replicas of paintings, which was the very form he renounced before producing the readymades. An internal logic of contradiction exists in Duchamp’s self-citation, maintaining a multiplicity of active and passive
voices, valorizations and disavowals. In the work, he references, quotes and contradicts himself. One imagines the pre-Tu m’ paintings (Fig. 20) competing with the post-Tu m’ readymades, the readymades quarrelling within themselves; the Three Standard Stoppages (Fig. 21) proposing theories of chance; the urinal, reversed to its normal vertical position, poised in a state of self-doubt. As a contestation ground between these works, it also engages in its own art-historical project. The museum contains collotypes of Bride, Nine Malic Moulds (Fig. 22) and prints like Man Ray’s Dust Breeding (a picture showing dust collecting on his studio floor, which becomes immortalized in the Sieves), (Fig. 23) and so on, all of which are cast members of the eventual production of the Large Glass. These working models mirror their final image in the painting, and in a playful gesture of historiography, even the cracks which emerged from the “chance completion” of its shattering in 1927 are faithfully replicated. Another example of this archival fever is Tu m’, which is itself an “anthology” of three readymades, Bicycle Wheel, Hat Rack and a corkscrew that was not ‘realized’ as a readymade (Figs. 24, 25 and 26). These are represented in the painting by their shadows, cast upon the canvas using a projector and subsequently traced by hand (Ades, 173).

Oppositional conversations co-exist with statements-within-statements, similar to the concentric circles of indeterminacy that orbit around the Marcel Duchamp/Rrose Sélavy riddle. Which is the authentic, original art piece? Multiplying these exercises of multiplication, the Boîte itself was remade several times, and different versions exist. More than a refutation of an earlier thesis, Duchamp gives us an ever self-multiplying hypertrophy of artistic commentary. Far more than a simple locution, it is a polyvocal, polyfocal work; a composite of mutually-interacting and conversing miniaturized manifestoes that participate in a freeplay of meanings. As its own field of contestation, Boîte seems to also mock the art world’s endgames of theoretical one-up-man-ship by presenting
a “playing movement” of concepts in this dizzying scheme of solipsistic intertextuality. It never allows “yes” or “no.” Hence his “a-art,” or “an-art” (Ades, 133), a term which denies the possibilities that something is either art, or not.

Is this différance at work? Does one’s inability to get a grip on Duchamp catch us at the moment of our desires for theoretical arrest? Perhaps Duchamp’s artistic statement is the very disinterest in articulating one, but providing the possibility of conceptuality through slippage and changeability in meaning. Duchamp’s games demonstrate the playing movement of différance:

[...] that which lets itself be designated différance is neither simply active nor simply passive, announcing or rather recalling something like, the middle voice, saying an operation that is not an operation, an operation that cannot be conceived either as passion or as the action of a subject on an object, or on the basis of the categories of agent or patient, neither on the basis of nor moving toward any of these terms. For the middle voice, a certain nontransitivity, may be what philosophy, at its outset, distributed into an active and a passive voice, thereby constituting itself by means of this repression. (Derrida, 1982: 11)

What is written as différance, then, will be the playing movement that “produces”—by means of something that is not simply an activity—these differences, these effects of difference.
(Derrida, 1982: 13)

There is neither active nor a passive in the operation of self-referencing and self-refutation collected within Boîte. As another sign in the syntagm, the work confounds “repressive” attempts at epistemological equilibrium. As the overall gesture of the “and so forth” means that the value of any sign is not immediately present, but open to augmentation by future permutations, then this is true to the extent that
Duchamp’s art still ‘operates’ today, distributing into “active and passive voices,” which contemporary criticism on Duchamp can be then said to prolong. The “playing movement” never really “produces;” it is an activity that is not simply an activity, an operation that is not an operation, by a man whose position is that of not taking a position, revealing the dominance of oppositional thinking in Western thought.

This sort of delay and deference results in the kind of freeplay which Derrida outlines as a way to interpret interpretation, which has bearings on art-historical interpretation as well. His work is the preparation for a performance and a meeting that will be; a moment that is to come. The work is not simply the work in its totality, but sets up the conditions for the deferred event, rather than prescribes it. As we see in the ‘Specifications for “Readymades”‘ in The Green Box, (Fig. 27)

by planning for a moment to come, [...] to inscribe a readymade – The readymade can later be looked for. – (with all kinds of delays)

The important thing then is just this matter of timing, this snapshot effect, like a speech delivered on no matter what occasion but at such and such an hour. It is a kind of rendezvous.
(Ades, 155)

What is art is always deferred. The object waits for its own inscription, which occurs in a “snapshot” rendezvous. It is only a plan. In this sense, Boîte, with its conflicting theses, becomes many readymades, which exist independent of the manipulation of the artist, and whose effects hereafter are enacted in eternal exodus from him.

Let us examine how the act of assigning meaning is not prescribed but deferred. First, the title of the Boîte itself is a bewildering fragment – “Of or by Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy”–that contains statements within a statement, delving
us in semiotic freeplay. “Of” indicates belonging—the Boîte is the traveling exhibition or personal shrine, primarily finding its meaning as an object belonging to Duchamp or Sélavy. It reinforces the concept of the readymade as a commodity object independent of artistic creation. Alternatively, “by” emphasizes authorship and creation, where the object’s existence is conditional to its maker. This could be an ironic reinstatement of the artist as creator, a gesture set up against a whole career of refuting the auteur-ship creed. However, the possibility of final statement is subsumed within another circle of indeterminacy created by the “or” which adds a further qualification or question—Is it Marcel Duchamp or Rrose Sélavy who owns or created the work? Secondly, the Boîte also collects numerous verbal puns of his career, and puns are another site of interacting and limitless passive and active voices—meaning that is ‘waiting to occur.’ Large Glass performs différance constantly by way of its transparent glass ‘canvas,’ taking on the status of a new work with each locale it is placed within, such as in Katherine Dreier’s library, in his studio, galleries, museums etc. In 1920, he declared Large Glass “definitively unfinished.” The transparency demonstrates deferral in action because it has no “fixed locus,” but is instead of “function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions [come] into play.” (Derrida, 1970: 225). His work reveals the innate conditionality of signs and gestures where value and meaning are always subject to and parasitical upon its immediate circumstances.

Finally, the concept of the ‘inframince,’ or ‘infra-thin’ demonstrates a new kind of impossible thought which brings the work of art to the realm of speculation and conceptuality. It is described several ways—as a ‘below-thin’; as the “interval between two identicals” (Ades, 184); as a trace that is not necessarily an index but “a kind of interface or state of being ‘inbetween’” (Ades, 183) and which can be applied as “allegory,” pointing to the separation between the signifier and signified. Duchamp avoids teleology and the “repression”
of what has developed in Western philosophy into the binaries of active and passive voices, gestures which are ‘agent’ and ‘patient.’ In his work we encounter positions that are not positions, locutions that are not locutions and operation that are not operations, demonstrative of Derrida’s statement, “the center is not the center” (1982: 224). We see readymades that are not readymades per se, and a nostalgic anthology that is not merely a nostalgic anthology but a paradox of manually reproduced replicas of mass-reproduced objects, put into traveling albums which are themselves reproduced in different versions. In this serial scheme of infinite regression, conditionality and claim both coexist in infinite interplay and inter-information:

[...] every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, différance, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general. (1982: 13)

The inframince, readymades and Boîte exist in a space of the imagination. Just as the Large Glass exists within the intersections between texts of the Green Box and the viewer’s interpretations, his works are always in a potential state of becoming, adhering to the logic of punning, which generates many meanings in the hands of the interpreter, of which Duchamp was so fond.

At cross-positions, Duchamp and Derrida inquire into our conceptual processes and habits. The Boîte-en-valise demands of us the ability to consider that a sign—whether a word or a readymade—can mean perform many things at the same time. By playing on absence and presence, patient and agent, active and passive, Duchamp’s work reinforces conditions of indeterminacy that will come to define the postmodern experience of art and representation. This condition, however, does not simply implode on itself, but through a “systematic play of
“differences” which refers to “the other” (one opposite) or “other concepts” (many opposites), produces “the possibility […] of a conceptual process in general.” Large Glass, Tu m’, the Boîte, etc. all set up the conditions for such an event, which must always exist in the future. Duchamp prizes conceptual process over static artworks, which reflects in the ability of his work to generate debate to this moment. Given that Marcel Duchamp’s plural claims and practice seem to presage the politics of postmodern representation, it is “no historical accident” that he should have been rehabilitated as the godfather of 1960s postmodernism (Huyssten, 119).

NOTES

1. ‘Assisted’ readymades refer to found objects altered by the artist, such as the altered Mona Lisa in L.H.O.O.Q.. Other assisted readymades, such as In Advance Of The Broken Arm (Fig. 28) and Fountain, see the utilitarian object taking on the status of art. ‘Reciprocal’ readymades refer to the reverse—the work of art taking on mundane, utilitarian role, such as a Rembrandt painting being used as an ironing board, as Duchamp suggested.

2. The originals of Bicycle Wheel (1913), Fountain (1917), Hat Rack (1917), Pliant de voyage (1919), etc. were lost and re-enacted in 1964 versions. Similarly, In Advance of a Broken Arm (1915) was remade in 1945.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Figs. 1-28
©2005 Succession Marcel Duchamp, ARS, N.Y./ADAGP, Paris. All rights reserved.
Response to Thomas Girst’s mention of some debate on whether Duchamp used Gruyère or Emmentaler cheese for cover illustration of the catalogue to “First Papers of Surrealism” exhibit in 1942 (Thomas Girst, Shooting Bullets at the Barn, Tout-Fait vol 1/issue 2, notes).

We can take it for granted that Duchamp used a slice of Swiss cheese, because cheese showing big eyes (‘eye’ being the official term for the ‘hole’ in hard and semi-hard cheese) in a large quantity even when produced elsewhere is always a derivation or variety of Swiss cheese originally manufactured in Switzerland. This is especially true for big eyed Dutch cheese.

Messrs Arturo Schwarz and Francis M. Naumann claim\(^{(1)}\) that what Duchamp used was Gruyère cheese or so called ‘Greyerzer’. As much as I respect the expertise of these two eminent Duchamp scholars, I am afraid that in this particular case they are mistaken. In my book on Kurt Seligmann I wrote that the cover of the catalog shows the profile of some Emmentaler cheese\(^{(2)}\). I shall briefly explain why there is little room for debate. Before going any further I simply recommend to stop by at some local cheese dealer. It won’t be the first time that blunt empirical (sensual) observation will refute scholastic (rational) conclusion. The finest loaf of Gruyère cheese I saw and tasted in recent times had a shelf life of 12 months, in addition to the approximate six months of
ripening before going on sale. It had next to no eyes, just a few haircracks due to its age. And indeed, Gruyère is supposed to have no or only a few and then but small eyes. The very fine cracks are a sign of age and quality. They’re officially called ‘gläs’ – a local, colloquial term I cannot translate. On the other hand, large quantities of eyes of all sizes are typical for Emmentaler cheese. One reason why it is hard to confuse Gruyère and Emmentaler cheese is that the former underwent a smear ripening and the latter a dry-ripening process.

Emmentaler Cheese

Now I shall go a little bit further, adding some learned information — mainly because I think it is quite entertaining stuff. Swiss-type cheese was originally manufactured in the Emmen valley in Switzerland. Its precursors were mountain cheeses. Gruyère cheese can be understood as such since there is still a (very aromatic) mountain variation produced. So, as a nutritive product, Gruyère cheese may be more ancient than Emmentaler, but this is not the point. The 1000-2000 round eyes — the diameters of which range from less than half an inch to one and a half inches — which we find in one single loaf of Emmentaler cheese are caused by propionic acid fermentation. Yet, the quantum of propionic acid is very low in Gruyère cheese (arithmetic mean of 10.0), but very high in Emmentaler cheese (a. m. of 84.0).
Therefore, by means of fermentation Gruyère cheese can develop some eyes, but never a great many of them, and at no point can they be big. Propionic acid fermentation is brought about by short-rod propionic acid bacteria, which occur naturally in the ruman and intestine of ruminants (bon appétit!). Their name is *propionibacterium freudenreichii subsp. shermanii*. Additional heterofermentative lactic acid fermentation ensures that with Emmentaler cheese the building and growing of eyes will continue where in other (smear ripening) cheeses the process soon discontinues itself. The characteristic eye formation of Emmentaler cheese is due mainly to the presence of carbon dioxide produced by propionic acid bacteria during lactate breakdown. The steep rise in the production of carbon dioxide coincides with the onset of the propionic acid fermentation. Eye formation is a lengthy process. The maximum rate is attained after about 50 days, which is also the time of rapid eye enlargement. Eye formation can be so aggressive that it sometimes continues in the cold room.


click to enlarge
Sure, Duchamp would hardly have cared about the name of the cheese. So what does the recognition of Emmentaler lead us to? Well, I believe it mattered to him that it was Swiss cheese, but even more so that it had eyes — and so many of them. Kurt Seligmann, on whose farm Duchamp shot into the wall of the barn, was Swiss (born and grown up in Basel) and (as we can learn from several documents) he liked to make this evident. We know from scattered sources that Seligmann and Duchamp were not the only people present that day, but that the shooting was part, or even the highlight of some outdoor party that other surrealists and American friends from New York were attending as well. It is likely that Seligmann served Emmentaler as a welcome to the guests (together with other kinds of cheese and homegrown Swiss food peculiarities, we can assume).

On the front and back cover of the catalogue to the First Papers of Surrealism exhibit the visual juxtaposition is obvious and meaningful. I see the playful contradiction of natural eyes/holes (bacteriologically inflicted, hence on the spot, but ‘en retard’) in the cheese and the artificial (artistic) holes inflicted forcefully (and from a distance, but ‘at high speed’). None of the two occurrences makes for art in conventional terms, but together
they create an artistic, or rather aesthetic, tension. For the substantial differences between art (artificial actions) and nature (natural processes) has always been at the bottom of all creative understanding, especially of artists, as well as “an-artists.” Under the condition of art, criteria for substantial and accidental categories can change dramatically from under the condition of nature. Think only of the object and its shadow being substantially different in nature (real world), but substantially identical in painting (aesthetic world). Sometimes art(ificial) actions and natural processes are hard to be kept separate from one another. They can be distinguished (unterschieden), but they cannot be decided upon (entschieden).

While the eyes in the Emmentaler grow out of a natural process, it is also a highly artificial thing to happen, since cheese does not exist in nature and would not take on any of its peculiarities without human intervention. Shooting holes into a wall is a thoroughly artificial action, yet based on physical (natural) laws that cannot be denied unless the shooting is declared imaginary. Maybe Duchamp took the gun and shot out of mere boredom. Then his intention was mindless and destructive. Maybe he shot with a picture in mind, and then his intervention had a metaphorical underlining. Maybe he shot out of boredom and happened to make sense out of it later, then a real (literal) action would be transfigured into an imaginary process, or a metaphor. But a metaphor for what? We can say that the manufacturing of cheese is an aspect of art in the old sense of techne. Duchamp always felt himself closer to the artisan than to the artist. Rather than an otherworldly, élitist genius, he was a firm-grounded manufacturer (bricoleur) of holes/eyes, which he imposed upon the well-knit web of conventionalism (by using the essentials of conventionalism, as we know from his conscious or unconscious perceptions of Henri Poincaré’s own findings).
When Duchamp shot holes into the wall he turned these into eyes to-see-through-with when he punched them out after print. Duchamp enables us to watch and eventually to see through (to theôrein), to get to the theory of what at first seems a mere practical joke on his ‘cheesy’ Swiss friend and host of the day. It had to be Emmentaler cheese bespangled with eyes, although it would not necessarily had to go by that name. Because only the real ‘eyes’ of the Emmentaler cheese would the ‘real’ eyes, (peep holes) punched into the image of the wall shot at, allow to take on the potential of questioning that understanding according to which the limits of what can be grasped is also the limits of what can be seen.

(Addendum: In recent issues of Swiss newspapers you could read a short message which translates as follows: According to the U.S. Ministry of Agriculture, eyes in Swiss cheese must not exceed 14 millimeters in diameter. This rule applies as of September 1st, 2000, upon which Mr. Peter Eichenberger, a member of the Verband Emmentaler Switzerland, said that “our experts can produce cheese with eyes of any size you wish.”)

click images to enlarge
“Commercial Cheese Label,”
from: Marcel Duchamp, Notes, 1980, #116 (recto) © 2000 Succession Marcel Duchamp ARS, N.Y. / ADAGP, Paris
Note #116 (verso),
from:
Marcel Duchamp, Notes, 1980 © 2000 Succession Marcel Duchamp ARS, N.Y. / ADAGP, Paris

Notes


Do it Yourself! Die Geburt der Co-Autorschaft aus dem Geiste Duchamps

»Everybody had studied Duchamp«, (1) so fasste der New Yorker Kunsthändler Richard Bellamy rückblickend die Wirkung Marcel Duchamps auf die Künstler der späten fünfziger und sechziger Jahre zusammen. Diese speiste sich nicht allein aus der Anschauung seiner Werke (respektive ihrer Repliken), (2) sondern in gehörigem Maße auch aus den unzähligen Statements und Interviews, in denen Duchamp die Rolle des Betrachters, des Anschauers, des »regardeur« hervorgehoben hatte: »Ce sont les regardeurs qui font les tableaux.« (3) Dieses Credo kulminierte in jenem Vortrag, den Duchamp unter dem Titel »The Creative Act« im Frühjahr 1957 bei einer Tagung der American Federation of Arts in Houston gehalten hatte. »All in all,« so hatte Duchamp darin bekanntlich resümiert, »the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications Wenige Monate später erfuhen Duchamps kunstkonstitutive Thesen durch einen Nachdruck dieser Rede im Kunstmagazin Art News eine breite Rezeption. (5) Und so schickten sich in den späten fünfziger und frühen sechziger Jahren Duchamps künstlerische Epigonen an, sein berühmt gewordenes Verdikt, dass es immer die Betrachter seien, die ein Werk machten, (6) wortwörtlich in die eigene ästhetische Praxis zu überführen.

Ein spezifischer Ausdruck dieser künstlerischen Haltung, die lediglich vordergründig die poststrukturalistische These vom
Tode des Autors zu spiegeln scheint, ist die Vielzahl der in
dieser Zeit aufkommenden ‚Do it Yourself´-Objekte. Ihnen hatte
der schweizerische Künstler, Editeur und Essayist Karl
Gerstner bereits 1970 in einem kleinen, von der Kölner Galerie
Der Spiegel verlegten Band einige grundlegende Gedanken
gewidmet. Verlor sich Gerstner bezüglich der, wie er es
nannte, »Do it Yourself Kunst« (7) allerdings aus heutiger Sicht
rasch in spätfluxistischen Plaudereien, so liegt in seiner
einleitenden Feststellung viel Wahres, dass nämlich nicht etwa
im Imperativ ‚Do it´, sondern erst im pleonastischen
′Yourself´ die wahre Beschwörung veritablen Heimwerkertums und
avancierter Hobbykunst liege. Diese Formel verleihe, so
Gerstner, »Kraft und Mut« und ermuntere den Laien, »aus seinen
Reservaten herauszutreten und bei den Profis zu wildern.« (8)
Das beschwörende ′Yourself´ fungiert also im syntaktischen
Zusammenspiel mit dem imperativen ′Do it´ als Appell an das
Ich, als Provokation des Selbstvertrauens, als nachhaltiger
Aufruf, einem Vorbild nachzueifern. Zugleich aber wird in ihm
der Zweifel an einer Überlegenheit des Fachmanns, in unserem
Fall: des Künstlersubjekts genährt; und so fordert es – mit
Duchamp im Rücken – die Emanzipation von tradierten
Kompetenzzuschreibungen ein, die bis dato dem Künstler allein
den künstlerischen Schöpfungsakt überantwortet hatten.
Sein Do it Yourself (10) von 1969 (Abb. 1), ein unlimitiert aufgelegtes Multiple, bestehend aus einem Holzbrett, zwei darin eingeschlagenen Nägeln und einem an diesen aufgehängten Hammer, war – bei aller materiellen Simplizität dieses Objektes – der unverhohlene Kommentar, »wer eine weitere, lediglich bereits Geleistetes wiederholende Nagelarbeit von Uecker wolle, solle sie sich doch gefälligst selbst machen.« (11)

In diesem Sinne ist sein Do it Yourself wenig mehr als das lakonische Statement zur eigenen Werk- und Wirkungsgeschichte, gleichwohl aber auch nicht weniger als das emphatische Angebot an den Betrachter, es doch einmal selbst zu versuchen und dem eigenen Gestaltungswillen freien Lauf zu lassen.

vier Wochen über 4000 Meta-Zeichnungen angefertigt worden.\textsuperscript{(15)} Dabei war der wohl prominenteste Besucher der Galerie – wir ahnen es – Marcel Duchamp, der die \textit{Méta-matic No. 8 (Meta-Moritz)}\textsuperscript{(16)} mittels Einwurfs einer eigens für die Ausstellung angefertigten Münze in Betrieb genommen hatte: »Die Maschine«, so berichtet Calvin Tomkins, »[...] fuhr mit zwei Filzstiften sprunghaft über ein leeres Blatt Papier und brachte in weniger als einer Minute ein glaubhaft aussehendes abstraktes Gemälde zustande.«\textsuperscript{(17)} Jeder Ausstellungbesucher konnte folglich ein aus seiner Kooperation mit der Maschine hervorgegangenes Bild nicht nur sein eigen nennen, ondern sich überdies im Glauben wähnen, an der Produktion eines Kunstwerkes nachhaltig partizipiert zu haben.

click to enlarge

Figure 3
Niki de Saint Phalle,
\textit{Schützenbild},
1964 © VG Bild-Kunst,
Bonn 2002

weniger gelungene Einschüsse sein Bild zu ‘komponieren’.«
Diese Kompositionsoption hatte de Saint Phalle in einem
undatierten Brief an den Editeur Karl Gerstner präzisiert:

Niki des Saint Phalle / GEBRAUCHSANWEISUNG: für’s
‘Schützenbild’

1. Bild an einer Auswand [sic] anlehnen

2. Starkes Brett dahinter (zum event. Schutz der Wand)

3. Gewehr (22 Long Rifle) mit Kurzmunition laden

4. So lange schießen bis alle Beutel sich ‘ergossen haben’
(oder bis IHNEN das Bild gefällt)

5. Aufpassen! Bild in der gleichen Position lassen – Bild gut
trocknen lassen UND dann immer noch aufpassen: denn es kann
ein Farbrückstand quer fließen.“

De Saint Phalles ‘Do it Yourself’-Kunstwerk folgte also genau
genommen der Logik eines ‘Shoot it Yourself’. Der Besitzer
hätte – so die Idee – die performativen Schießaktionen der
Künstlerin nacherleben können: Ekstase des künstlerischen
Schöpfungskaktes inklusive. De Saint Phalle: »Nach jedem
Schießen fühlte ich mich vollkommen stoned. Ich war total
schützich nach diesem makabren und freudigen Ritual.«

click to enlarge
In ganz ähnlicher Weise gestaltete sich das Kooperationsangebot, das Jasper Johns in Target (Do it Yourself)\textsuperscript{22} offerierte, welches 1970 in der Edition Gemini G.E.L. erschien (Abb. 4). Auch Johns wählte hierfür die Form des Multiples, wie es überhaupt bezeichnend ist, dass das Prinzip des ´Do it Yourself´ weitgehend an das Multiple und damit an die vermeintlich demokratischste aller Kunstformen gekoppelt scheint. Im Prinzip bot Johns dem Besitzer von Target die Möglichkeit, den feinen Haarpinsel zu ergreifen und die in konzentrischen Umrisslinien angedeutete Struktur einer Zielscheibe mittels dreier Aquarellplättchen farbig zu fassen, es also einem der bereits damals in der New Yorker Kunstwelt
erfolgreichsten Künstler in gewisser Weise gleich zu tun. Für den Besitzer von Target hätte es folglich bedeuten können, in eine Kooperative mit dem Künstler einzutreten, die Koautorenschaft zu übernehmen und diese zudem neben des Künstlers Signatur durch die eigene zu dokumentieren.

vielmehr die Aufgabe zu, im Sinne der Duchampschen
Dechiffrierung der »inner qualifications« die metaphorische
Botschaft dieser ‘Ready-made’-Malerei, ihre »aboutness«, wie
es Arthur C. Danto nennen würde, zu entschlüsseln. Warhols
‘Do-it-Yourself’-Bilder also als Epitaphe eines Endes der
Malerei?

Figure 6
Niki de Saint Phalle, 
_Schützenbild_,
1964 © VG Bild-Kunst, 
Bonn 2002

Figure 7
Klara Hulten, _Peinture exécutée avec la Méta-matic N° 20_, 
undatiert

Zumindest sind wir mit Warhol an einem Punkt angelangt, an dem
es gilt, die bisherigen Ausführungen einer Revision zu unterziehen. Betrachtet man nämlich die wenigen in den einschlägigen Katalogen abgebildeten 'Shoot it Yourself'-Bilder de Saint Phalles mit präzisem Blick, so fällt auf, dass nahezu keines Verletzungen der Bildfläche durch Einschüsse an jenen Stellen aufweist, an denen das Relief nicht erhaben ist, unter denen also a priori keine Farbeinschlüsse zu vermuten waren (Abb. 6). Wer immer ein solches Bild erworben haben mag – so ist wohl zu schließen –, wird die paradox Werkgenese aus Bildkreation und -destruktion kaum Zufallstreffern überlassen haben. Eher schon ist zu vermuten, dass die Farbe ganz gezielt durch Einstiche zur Eruption gebracht wurde, dass es sich folglich um einen sehr gezielten Akt der Bildschöpfung und nicht um ein performatives, der Kontingenz des Moments unterliegendes Nacherleben einer künstlerischen Attitude gehandelt haben wird. Bei Jasper Johns wiederum ist in der gesamten Literatur zum Künstler bezeichnender Weise nicht ein einziges Beispiel einer Kooperation dokumentiert, wie sie sein 'Do it Yourself'-Target vorzuschlagen scheint. Dokumentiert sind vielmehr die unangetasteten, büttenerweißen Zielscheiben, welche die ihnen zugrunde liegende Idee visuell dokumentieren. Selbst bei Tinguelys Méta-matics erscheint es mehr als fraglich, ob die Ausstellungsbesucher tatsächlich – abgesehen vom Einspannen des Papiers und der Stifte sowie dem Einwurf der Münze – eigenständig auf die Bildkreation einwirken konnten. Zu eng geschnitten erscheint der zumal nach den Vorgaben des Künstlersubjektes definierte Handlungsrahmen zu sein, als dass der Ausstellungsbesucher tatsächlich ein, wie Tomkins es beschreibt, »glaubhaft aussehendes abstraktes« Bild hätte gezielt herstellen können (Abb. 7). Die koauktorial zu vollendennden Kunstwerke also lediglich als Repräsentanten der ihnen zugrunde liegenden Ideen? Und die vermeintlichen Koautoren doch als nicht mehr, denn willfährige

In diesen Fragestellungen scheint immerhin die Möglichkeit auf, dass alle besprochenen multiplen 'Do it Yourself'-Objekte letztlich nichts anderes darstellen als Metaphern des von

Epilog:

Andreas Slominski, um willkürlich ein anderes Beispiel zu bemühen, fordert indes die Realisierung folgender absurden Notation ein: „Tip a bicycle seat so that the front points upwards and use the seat to squeeze lemons.“ Begleitet werden derartige Instruktionen von der Aufforderung, bei etwaigen Realisierungen diese photographisch zu dokumentieren, um derartige Bildbelege den andlungsanweisungen exemplarisch beifügen zu können. Auch hier zeigt sich allerdings, wie schon bei den Notationen der Fluxuskünstler in den sechziger Jahren, das der Aufführungscharakter weit hinter den Charakter als ‘Denkstücke’ zurücktritt. Zumindest sind bezeichnender Weise in ‘Do it’ bislang keine Realisierung dokumentiert. Der geneigte Leser darf sich also aufgefordert fühlen, die Vorgeblichkeitsthese des Autors Lügen zu strafen: „Do it (Yourself)!

Notes


10. Günther Uecker, Do it Yourself, 1969, Hammer und Holzbrett mit zwei Nägeln, 34,0 x 16,5 x 7,5 cm, VICE-Versand Remscheid, Auflage unlimitiert.


23. Andy Warhol, *Do it Yourself (Landscape)*, 1962, Öl auf Leinwand, 177,8 x 137,2 cm, Museum Ludwig Köln.


Mirror, Mirror: The Strange Case of the Salon de Fleurus

Marcel Duchamp, beholding the flowering of the New York art scene, once said that “the great artist of tomorrow will go underground.” In at least one case, that prediction has proved truer than even the grand old trickster may have imagined.

The Salon de Fleurus (Fig. 1 & 2), an art space inconspicuously situated in a rear building on Spring Street in downtown Manhattan, is just about as far underground one can go before hitting bedrock. Its two ornately furnished rooms are crowded with paintings that closely resemble famous works by Picasso, Matisse and Cezanne—except that they have been painted anonymously (Fig. 3 & 4). The familiar images bear no signatures, and in the 10 years of the salon’s existence, no one has stepped forward to claim authorship. There is no advertising to peruse or fend, not a whit of ambition hanging in the air. An affable, insightful gentleman is on hand to explain the environment to visitors, but his involvement, by his own admission, amounts to no more than that of “a doorman.” To all outward appearances, the Salon de Fleurus is a place without provenance.
- Figure 1
- Figure 2
- Salon de Fleurus
- Salon de Fleurus

- Figure 3
- Figure 4
- Painting at Salon
“To all outward appearances” being the key phrase. In recent years, various artists have gone down the art-copying trail, notably Sherrie Levine and Mike Bidlo (Fig. 5). Casting further backward, one hits upon the venerable tradition of apprentices copying their masters. The complete removal of authorship from copied works, however, is another story. All his life, Duchamp flirted with the appearance of quitting art “in the professional sense.” Here, someone has done so in earnest.

The immediate effect is clear enough. Typically, the process of integrating art into the world begins with an advance broadcast of the artist’s personality, often a single memorable word (“insane,” “British,” “doctor,” etc.), which serves as a seed for all that follows. At the salon, this strategy of reductionism has reached its apogee: the viewer no longer knows whom to turn to for the expected explanation. Like the spherical caves in E.M. Forster’s *A Passage To India*, the Salon de Fleurus is perfectly self-contained, canceling out every echo with an opposing one, until one is essentially left with one’s own thoughts.

But why, and to what end? Ten years after the day I first sat in the salon and breathed the pungent scent of mothballs, I am in no better position than the average observer to answer this question. I still bring my own ideas to the space, pitting my
forensic powers against hints and clues, with no hope of confirmation or denial. What follows are some of the thoughts I’ve accrued in the presence of this artistic sphinx.

First and foremost, it is not really correct to speak of the Salon de Fleurus as an art space. This may explain why so few have tried. It has been described as a curiosity, a recreation of Gertrude Stein’s storied salon, a sardonic comment on Modernism, a masterful reflection of the same, and more.

But whatever the analysis, it has mobilized no great hope for the rebirth of Cubism—and understandably so. The salon may be about art spaces, but that is not the same thing as being one.

In the strictest sense, we cannot even call the individual paintings art, just as we cannot know if prehistoric cave painters would have consented to today’s definition of the term. Indeed, the only time any objects from the salon have only been classified as such is when they have appeared outside their original context, as in their recent inclusion in the Whitney Biennial.

An Australian aborigine, seeing his dreamings in a plush uptown gallery, would certainly appreciate the paradox.

We have entered the realm of archeology, then, but of archeology of what? Having opened a fault line between image and word, the salon seems to demand a re-examination of art criticism, which has become increasingly reliant on personality to find its way. Perhaps, in referring to the most iconic of Modernist painters, it seeks more specifically to disassemble the story of Modernism, which has been selling so many T-shirts of late.

Of course, Picasso, Matisse, and Cezanne have been interpreted in such widely varying ways by now that the spectrum would seem to include all possible responses to anything. In this sense, the salon has benefited from its longevity. The varied attempts to explain its contents—as a hoax, as an experiment,
as a subversive act—mirror the whole range of interpretations of 20th-century art. With each unconfirmed reading, the next prospect is trotted out, until the final exhaustion of Modernism is replayed.

That, perhaps, is a conclusion worth living with: where Duchamp introduced familiar objects as works of art (albeit in a magisterial act of misdirection), the Salon de Fleurus manages to cast familiar art works back to the unknown (Fig. 6). The structure of what we see is, if not shattered or exploded, at least rendered expertly tenuous, like a house with all of its nails removed.

At this stage in the game, it is worth asking whether such an intriguing project can ever bear offspring. Or rather, if it has, how would anyone know? With no one on hand to confirm or deny, anyone can lay claim to the salon as an influence—provided, among the infinite interpretations, he can discover what constitutes lineage. A space is open, waiting to be recognized and claimed, Should that come to pass, we can look forward to a growing body of work that is not only brilliant in its implications, but expansive as well.
Observations on Duchamp’s Color

Recent Investigations on the relative permanence of chromatic memory retention by Prof. Karl Gegenfurtner of Giessen University in Germany may throw light on Duchamp’s very conservative use of color in his mature work.

In summary account, The visual memory better and longer stores images in ‘natural color’ than either in black & white or bright, primary tints. The work in Germany was placed in an evolutionary context: “If stimuli are too strange, the system simply doesn’t engage as well, or deems them unimportant” (see: Franz, V.H., Fahle, M., Bülthoff, H.H. & Gegenfurtner, K.R. “The effect of visual illusions on grasping.” Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception & Performance, vol. 27, nr. 5 (October 2001), pp. 1124-1144).

Primary in Duchamp’s concern must have been a realization that his complex and inference rich constructions might not linger long enough in memory to permit recall at prolonged leisure and reflection. Anticipating much later research, he deliberately avoided the use of any means which could possibly hinder the visual memory’s work. Thus a characteristic natural effect was sought in his color schemes.

click to enlarge
In the final work, *Given: The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas*, (Fig. 1) Duchamp went out of his way to obtain colorations of light, landscape and flesh, that caused some critics to question such an apparent reversion of a revolutionary artist to mere ‘naturalism’ as practiced by the 19th century realists. The explanation may lie in another direction entirely. The writer believes Duchamp intuitively was aware of the phenomenon described by the German researcher and employed it cunningly in a major and little understood work.

(Timothy Phillips)

Fig. 1
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Duchamp the Gardener

Two years ago I went to a garden design festival on the river Loire, in France. 40 or so gardens had been built, all selected for innovation of ideas, material or execution. The festival is held in the grounds of a castle overlooking the river Loire. The theme of the show that year was “Erotomania”.

Figure 2
Céline Orsingher et Laurent Bailly, Erotomania-Erotomachia,
Nestling amongst the fibreglass breasts, suspended underwear and other (small) feats of the designers’ imagination was a garden enclosed by a corrugated iron wall. The only view of the garden was afforded by the occasional peep hole. Within the walls was a scene of urban decay: weeds grew high, plastic mannequins in various states of undress lay, erotically I suppose, in the overgrown vegetation. Experiencing the garden via the peephole made the experience short, private and intense. The title of the garden was *Erotomanie Erotomachie*. (Fig. 1) Had the idea been *Given* by Duchamp? (Fig. 2) I asked its architects but received no reply.

Marcel Duchamp, *Given: 1.*
There are other links to be made between Duchamp and gardening…and Duchamp and landscape, I’m here today to argue the case for Duchamp the gardener and would love to hear the counter argument. I’ll make them none the less.

Let us take a famous work: *Fountain*. I won’t labour this point but the simple fact is this man’s fame rests on a water feature. Duchamps horticultural aspirations can hardly be made more obvious…and the *Large Glass*…glass and horticulture go hand in hand, in fact the Palm House at Kew gardens is discussed by one contributor to Tout fait. Glass is a complicated, conceptual, challenging material that both allows us grow tropical plants in boreal places, as well as transmit cryptic artistic messages. Duchamp chose the latter way of using it…but could have fairly chosen the former.

What stronger argument than these? If I must go on I will. Duchamp’s liberation of Washington Square (attempted) was not, I would argue, the drunken detail in Duchamp’s life has (regrettably) been bypassed by Duchampians. It shows a clear commitment to the municipal landscape…possibly with aspirations to community gardening. Duchamp was a great fan of
New York City and was it would not surprise me at all if he had been planning a post secession community (organic) wildflower meadow for the children of New York. Serious.

Not convinced? I’ll continue. Rrose Sélavay? Quoi plus dire? Duchamp was of the field in name…of the flower in pseudonym. He didn’t only think about flowers but also about watering them, and selected this as a identifying himself. A practical man as well as an aesthete…a landscaper. What better qualification for my thesis?

Duchamp was once described as being in an anti-nature phase, and defiantly turning his back on a Forsythia bush (who wouldn’t). He doesn’t fool me. The line between love and hate is a thin one.

I could go on, there is a gardener in all of us. Duchamp was no exception. The big question is why did he hide it from the world? It was nothing to be ashamed of. Answers please.

Fig. 2-3
All rights reserved.

El Límite Soñado: Arquitecturas De Vidrio No Construidas, Reflexiones
Desde El Siglo XXI: Las Vanguardias Artísticas

Valores semánticos del vidrio.

1.1 Sobre Duchamp: La circularidad de la mirada.
1.2 El orden de la materia: A propósito de Robert Smithson.
1.3 La retrofia del límite en Dan Graham.

Valores semánticos del vidrio

La aparición del vidrio en el panorama de la producción arquitectónica se sumó a la introducción en los procesos constructivos de una serie de materiales cuya característica fundamental fue su carácter artificial: junto al hormigón armado y al acero, se inauguró una nueva tradición constructiva.

click to enlarge

Figure 1
The projection of
a painting on the glass window

Inicialmente vinculado a las estructuras de acero en construcciones destinadas a terminales de ferrocarril, a invernaderos, como los de Paxton y Burton, o a exposiciones temporales para los pabellones de las Exposiciones Universales\(^1\), como el Palacio de Cristal londinense de Joseph Paxton, las deslumbrantes posibilidades del vidrio se extendieron más allá de sus implicaciones técnicas. (Fig. 1)
La especificidad del vidrio como materia que afecta la habitación del espacio, supuso la alteración de algunos conceptos tradicionales para la arquitectura. Quizá el más significativo fuese la alteración de la idea de levedad en cuanto trasgresión de lo sólido: mientras los planteamientos arquitectónicos estuvieron asociados al muro pétreo, la ausencia de materia incitó a convocar la gravedad. Eran criterios de sustracción en el muro: horadar, abrir. Bien hacia la luz, bien hacia la visión: El óculo del Panteon, o el salón de Comares en la Alhambra.

El vidrio incorpora como actuación la de acotar, limitar. En este caso, la levedad se presenta como cualidad intrínseca de la materia, sin que en ella actúe la presencia de elementos anteriores. De algún modo se produce una densificación cualitativa del espacio.

El vidrio simbolizó de este modo una expectación antropológica (2), que los arquitectos tomaron como estigma de la incipiente modernidad (3). Produjo una serie de reflexiones sobre su capacidad de limitar y expandir el espacio interior. En la proyección espacial, el vidrio sólo es límite bajo ciertas circunstancias, porque puede significar al tiempo confín y umbral. Supone la materialización de la línea en tránsito hacia lo otro, y a la vez la disolución del borde.

La pérdida del marco de la ventana y por tanto del carácter objetual de la perforación destinada a relacionar el edificio con su entorno, significó en primera instancia una ampliación del límite arquitectónico, incorporando, en segunda instancia, una nueva noción de materia: La superficie vitrificada habla de continuidad visual, pero también de una contradicción interna entre el orden de la malla cristalina y la planeidad de la membrana, lo que provoca una intensa densidad conceptual. El aparente orden externo o final que expresa la delgadez transparente del vidrio no es tal, sino una expresión ideal de su capacidad entrópica (4).
Sea como fuere, la fascinación que este material ejerce sobre el hombre afecta a una cuestión de base: la naturaleza misma de la visión. La arquitectura que nos envuelve, desde el Quatrocento, ha sido una arquitectura vinculada por completo a la visión; al proceso de visualización que parte del hombre hacia el entorno. El desarrollo de planos de vidrio verticales entre los planos horizontales de la base y la cubierta, y la consiguiente reducción de la opacidad de estos paramentos a casi cero, fueron intentos de llegar a la absoluta transparencia del muro, superponiendo a la práctica constructiva una cierta voluntad ontológica\(^{(5)}\). Este proceso de asociación repercute directamente en el hecho constructivo y, lo que es más, en la definición de un modo de conocimiento específico: Ver es conocer\(^{(6)}\).

La sincronía de la percepción que permitió desarrollar el vidrio implicó la modificación de la visualización del entorno, por cuanto se amplía la multiplicación de puntos de vista o, incluso, se propicia la ausencia de objeto perspectivo. La imagen más simple es ya una estructura que se incorpora al entendimiento personal del entorno, transformada sucesivamente tras un horizonte que es el límite de nuestra capacidad personal de percepción\(^{(7)}\). El límite de vidrio significa para el espacio arquitectónico un lugar geométrico que engloba en su unidad una multiplicidad perceptible. El lugar, de este modo, deviene una creación de la propia producción espacial.

La reversibilidad del vidrio en procesos de transparencia y reflexión apoya estos aspectos, favoreciendo el desarrollo de una verdad plural, de la que se desprende una superposición de estratos convergentes: una constante desintegración del límite y una permanente activación del concepto de lugar. Realidad y verdad dejan de ser idénticas, anuncianto una totalidad potencial, múltiple. La mirada se involucra en la transformación de la consciencia del individuo.
Esta mirada detenida en el vidrio, cuando se abre a lo visible, propicia el instante. Fugitivamente, concibe lo uno inasible y lo duradero: La superposición de tiempo, el detenimiento y avance de la mirada, termina por convocar una dimensión casi ascética del vidrio. Entre las resonancias de la arquitectura, queda una cierta identificación entre la materia y la mente\(^{(8)}\).

El espacio de este modo imaginado es un espacio viviente, es el lugar de un continuo nacer, de todas las posibilidades y diferencias, matriz fecunda de signos, ritmos y formas. No es casualidad, pues, que el vidrio haya planteado diferentes cuestiones en torno a su capacidad expresiva y a su resonancia en el hombre.

1.1 Sobre Duchamp: La circularidad de la mirada.

El esfuerzo por reflejar el espacio como superposición de estratos independientes que actúan entre sí converge en la necesidad de registrar la huella transparente de todos los estratos: Cuando Marcel Duchamp comienza pintando su *Hombre*
descendiendo por una escalera⁹, (Fig. 2) indica claramente que el concepto de este hombre descendiendo no es sino una frágil sumatoria de instantes ficticios. Una seriación de ritmos que finalmente constituyen un obstáculo al entendimiento de esta situación como continuidad espacial, ya que esta multiplicación estática de ritmos lo que hace es disolver las expectativas de la idea central de movimiento efímero. Se trataba de captar, no un precipitado de tiempo puro, sino el tiempo mismo.

Esta pintura, en su desarrollo espacial, incorpora el tiempo (y por tanto el movimiento) como elemento definitivo de entendimiento del objeto. Aún no es un planteamiento técnico, despojado de atributos expresivos, como ocurrirá con Broyeuse de chocolat Nº2, de 1914, (Fig. 3) en donde se observa un desmedido interés por la precisión, por la exactitud. Una exactitud manipulada, en donde el objeto es una caja de resonancias enfrentado al observador. El salto entre una y otra obra resulta fundamental para comprender el origen conceptual de la obra duchampiana por excelencia: el *Gran Vidrio¹⁰*, (Fig. 4) ya que implica el paso de una visión retiniana, destinada a la expresión, a una visión intelectual destinada al entendimiento. Ya no se pretende representar la realidad, sino dotar a la realidad de presencia a través de la obra. Esta voluntad de evitar una contemplación estética del*Gran Vidrio* impulsó a Duchamp a presentar la *Boîte Verte¹¹* (Fig. 5) en 1934, un conjunto de escritos, cálculos y reflexiones que debían ser consultados al tiempo que se observaba el*Grand Verre*, de modo que cualquier tipo de asociación con la pintura tradicional quedara descartado.

La necesidad de un nuevo soporte plástico que permitiera estas lecturas, implicó al vidrio como posible soporte alternativo al lienzo, carente de posibilidades de relación más allá de las puramente visuales. Además, el vidrio como materia significa, hablando en términos pictóricos, ausencia. De esta
manera, las cualidades expresivas del vidrio, fundamentalmente su transparencia\(^{(12)}\), repercuten en la instalación, tanto por sus abiertas posibilidades de significación como por su capacidad de relación con el entorno. En el desarrollo de la obra se produce una vinculación del entorno al objeto y viceversa: una superposición de elementos significantes al espacio que las sostiene. Abandonado el proceso de desarrollo espacial cubista, en que la fragmentación y desplazamiento del objeto produce un espacio que genera la obra plástica, Duchamp extrae ese espacio del lienzo y genera un objeto capaz de activar el espacio que sustenta. Se establece de este modo un diálogo entre las ideas suspendidas en esta nueva tela vitrificada y las del observador que se acerca, gira, encontrando su posición en un espacio compartido por primera vez con la obra, alimento del proceso de reconocimiento en el lugar.

En los primeros estudios para el *Gran Vidrio*, como *Neuf Moules Mâlic* (Fig.6) y *Glissiére contenant un moulin à eau en métaux voisins*\(^{(13)}\) (Fig. 7), Duchamp descubre estas posibilidades de ambigua significación del vidrio, fotografiando en diferentes ocasiones estos pequeños esbozos sobre vidrio en distintos espacios, colocándose delante o detrás de ellos. De este modo la obra no es ese objeto de museo, sino el objeto-con-él-en el espacio. Una propuesta que desplaza todo el interés del objeto representado hasta la superficie que funda el objeto. Ya no se trata de ver sin más, sino de ver a través-de, o, en el caso de la encriptación del *Gran Vidrio*, no ver a través-de lo transparente. Fundamentalmente, la idea de concentrar toda la capacidad de relación al límite, a la superficie de relación entre dos caras, actualiza los intereses espaciales que paralelamente se desarrollan en el espacio arquitectónico propuesto por el Movimiento Moderno. Confirmar mediante una delgada frontera la posibilidad dual del espacio. Si bien la posición de Duchamp se antoja aún más conflictiva, por cuanto se instala en el lugar, negándolo por el carácter positivo de
su presencia, mientras que, por sus cualidades de relación, lo afirma, potenciando las capacidades de un espacio al que activa después de haberse impuesto sobre él.

- Figure 3
  Marcel Duchamp, Chocolate Grinder number 2, 1914
- Figure 4
  Marcel Duchamp, The Large Glass, 1915-23
- Figure 5
  Marcel Duchamp, The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Eeven [a.k.a.
Se produce, por tanto, una superposición de posibilidades sobre la superficie, una suerte de espacio acumulado, proyectado sobre una mínima transparencia: la máxima capacidad de significación se confía al mismo límite que apetece disolver. En este punto resulta altamente significativo el concepto de *inframince*\(^{(14)}\) con el que Duchamp califica la máxima capacidad de emoción. Lo “infradelgado” supone de este modo el foco de atención, el punto de mira de las disposiciones espaciales. Un nexo definitivo con las posteriores concepciones de la arquitectura, que desplaza las bondades del espacio hasta su máxima envolvente: una piel cristalizada que resuelve al mismo tiempo el carácter del espacio interior y
las maclas exteriores del edificio.

Figure 8
16th century perspectives by Durer

La proyección de diferentes estratos significativos en un mismo nivel, implica al Gran Vidrio en la suspensión crítica de la perspectiva. Los trabajos de Duchamp en la biblioteca de Sainte Geneviéve en París le permitieron estudiar distintos tratados perspectivos, de los que extraería buen número de notas. Surgen aquí relaciones explícitas del vidrio con los sistemas perspectivos del siglo XVI, como las demostraciones de Durero (Fig. 8), que abrieron a Duchamp nuevos caminos para el desarrollo espacial del conjunto. La posibilidad de alterar el concepto tradicional de representación espacial le llevó a concebir el Gran Vidrio como una proyección espacial dentro del mismo espacio, es decir, no indiferente a él como un cuadro, sino dependiente de él. Al hacer desaparecer el soporte, los objetos quedan involucrados en una suerte de idealización espacial, no obstante el marco, y su señalada línea de división, que actúan con la inescriptible fuerza del marco de una ventana extraída del muro, descontextualizado su papel de articulación, y sin embargo con la capacidad de enfatizar la idea de tránsito, de límite, de espacio significante.
Un espacio que ofrece al vidrio como vuelta hacia el observador: al suspender los valores retinianos y por tanto el placer estético de la contemplación, señala un doble camino de extrañamiento del objeto y afirmación del espacio, con lo que finalmente se vuelve al hombre cuestionando el acto de mirar\(^{(16)}\). La multiplicidad de lecturas acumuladas, así como la proyección sobre la obra de diferentes visiones del entorno, variaciones de luz, reflejos fragmentados, suponen una ampliación del proceso de conocimiento. (Fig. 9) Una activación por tanto de la mirada que ha traspasado su nacimiento como visión para alcanzar su madurez como reconocimiento. El hombre se ve mirar, y de este modo, el encuentro con el vidrio deviene consigo mismo, con su espacio y su voluntad de conocer, provocando la circularidad de la mirada.

**Notes**

1. Las posibilidades de ampliar el uso del vidrio a otros tipos edificatorios fueron muy escasas, al menos en
sus inicios en Inglaterra, hasta que se suprimió el impuesto sobre el consumo de este material en 1845. La Palm House de R. Turner y D. Burton (1845-1848), fue uno de los primeros edificios en beneficiarse de la disponibilidad de vidrios laminados.


5. “...el vidrio consagra la visibilidad, invitando a la experiencia de una verdad objetiva.”

6. “El ojo como órgano de la vista es parte de la actividad total del alma; mira, pero su intención profunda, su finalidad, es “ver” lo que no se puede ver con la mirada. Mirar debe convertirse en contemplar para poder llegar a “la visión” que es conocimiento...La visión es un estado de la conciencia, un estado extremo de la atención, la cual –como en una atenta escucha- ve lo que ya sabía el cuerpo profundo.”

7. “Dichosamente porque es ya una casa, imagen del firmamento y del hueco que le separa de la tierra. En ella, en la tienda o choza, primera morada fabricada por el hombre, el horizonte es confín, círculo que limita y abriga, es como un horizonte propio de su habitante...”

8. “La energía inteligente se compenetra con la energía material. La capa más profunda de nuestra mente “es naturaleza”, la naturaleza que contiene la materia y lo desconocido.”

“Mi objetivo apuntaba a la representación estática del
movimiento –una composición estática de indicaciones estáticas de las diversas posiciones adoptadas por una forma en movimiento- prescindiéndodel intento de crear efectos cinemáticos mediante la pintura."


10. La marie mise á nu par ses célibataires, même (LE GRAND VERRE). 1915-1923 (New York). “Óleo, barniz, hoja de plomo, hilo de plomo y polvo sobre dos placas de vidrio (quebradas), cada una montada entre dos paneles de vidrio, con cinco hilillos de vidrio, hoja de aluminio; marco de madera y acero. Especie de subtítulo: Retraso en vidrio.

- Emplear retraso en lugar de cuadro o pintura; cuadro sobre vidrio se convierte en retraso en vidrio -pero retraso en vidrio no quiere decir cuadro sobre vidrio. Es simplemente una manera de llegar a dejar de considerar que la cosa en cuestión es un cuadro- hacer un retraso en todo lo general posible y no tanto en los distintos sentidos en que puede tomarse retraso, sino más bien en su reunión indecisa. Retraso –un retraso en vidrio- como diría un poema en prosa o una escupidera de plata.”


11. La marie mise á nu par ses célibataires, même (BOÎTE VERTE). 1934 (París). “...Quería que este álbum acompañase al Verre, y que pudiese ser consultado para ver el Verre, porque, en mi opinión, el Verre no tenía que mirarse en
el sentido estético de la palabra. Había que consultar el libro y verlo conjuntamente. La conjunción de ambas cosas le quitaba todo aquel aspecto retiniano que no me gusta nada. Era muy lógico."
Marcel Duchamp. 1934.

12. son cosas técnicas. El vidrio me interesaba mucho como soporte, a causa de su transparencia. Eso ya era una gran cosa. Por otra parte, el color, que puesto sobre el vidrio es visible desde el otro lado y si se encierra pierde toda posibilidad de oxidarse…"


14. En la revisión de la obra de Duchamp para la exposición de Tokio de 1980, aparecieron nuevos manuscritos y notas inéditas, entre las que fue frecuente encontrar la palabra inframince, (Fig. 10) palabra inexistente en francés, compuesta en uno de los muchos juegos verbales del arte conceptual por Infra- (bajo) y –mince (delgado). La absoluta conexión entre lenguaje y expresión plástica arroja luz sobre este punto, encontrando, entre otras citas: “…la pintura sobre vidrio, vista desde el lado sin pintar, da un infradelgado. El intercambio entre lo que uno pone a la vista y la mirada
glacial del público (que ve y se olvida inmediatamente). A menudo este intercambio tiene el valor de una separación infradelgada…”. Yoshiaki Tono, responsable de la organización de esta exposición, ilustró este término con diferentes fotografías de la superficie del agua, continua, dual, sin grosor alguno. (Fig. 11)

click to enlarge

Figure 10
Marcel Duchamp, Note on the inframince

Figure 11
Photograph of the surface of water

15. Las referencias a los tratados perspectivos de esta biblioteca son importantes, especialmente al Manual del pintor de Durero, de 1538, y a La Perspectiva Práctica de Du Breuil, de 1642, existiendo, además, una similitud significativa entre los dibujos con dos planos superpuestos de este último tratado y la disposición final del Gran Vidrio. Entre las notas omitidas en La Caja Verde, destacan la publicada en A l’Infinitif, en 1964: “use transparent glass and mirror for perspective… [...] paint the definitive picture
A Note on Duchamp/Saussure and the Mysterious Sign of Accordance

The Large Glass, on the evidence of Marcel Duchamp’s own notes from The Green Box, is the result of an attempt at a kind of pataphysical proof. Duchamp is looking to demonstrate that it is possible to isolate what he calls in his notes—“the sign of accordance”\(^1\)(quite specifically). This is ultimately Duchamp’s aim and the test of whether his scientific experiment has been successful. What are the factors at work in this attempt? What are the conceptual tools at his disposal? The sign of accordance between what elements?

In Duchamp’s notes from the Green Box he makes reference to
one element, namely, a succession “[of a group] of various facts” that seem to depend on each other under “certain laws.” He wants to determine the conditions which bring about the instantaneous State of Rest (extra-rapid; perhaps a photographic exposure; an indexical mark or trace) – that which brings a sudden halt to this succession of interdependent various facts. This accord (agreement/conformity) is between then, this State of Rest (a particular) and a choice of possibilities (authorised and determined by these certain laws). Here, as elsewhere, the thinly veiled language of photography and other physical-indexical processes is apparent in Duchamp’s notes. This much has already been noted by Duchamp scholars.

In another note from The Green Box Duchamp re-frames the problem in a slightly different way. Here, what was also previously an allegorical appearance has also become an allegorical “reproduction.” What remains unchanged in this other note is that the required proof is still the isolation of “the sign of accordance.”

A third re-framing of the problem by Duchamp – again from The Green Box – takes an algebraic turn: he writes a sort of ur-formula:

\[ a \div b \]

Here “a” is the instantaneous State of Rest or extra-rapid exposition (or exposure), whilst “b” is the (or a) choice of possibilities. Duchamp makes a point in his notes here to the effect that this ratio of “a” over “b” is not given by a resultant (say) “c,” but by the sign (the horizontal bar) that separates “a” and “b.” This is effectively the sign of his pursuit…”look for it.”

click to enlarge
And here also he writes a curious thing: as soon as “a” and “b” are known they become new units and lose their relative value. In other words, as soon as a and b become – somehow – concrete or qualitative, they lose their previously held abstract quantitative character. Here again Duchamp rehearses the refrain of looking for the sign of accordance or rather of something else related to the concept of accordance (perhaps parallelism or something else?). Where else might we find a similar search?

Some speculations – hopefully not too idle. Duchamp seems to be searching for some process, some abstract relation, not dissimilar from the concerns of classical semiotics\(^{(2)}\) – a theoretical discipline struggling to be born in the years prior to the First World War via the nineteenth century research and writings of, for example, William Dwight Whitney in America and Hippolyte Taine in France. For where can we find a similar set of problems articulated (almost during the same time)? Look at Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics*\(^{(3)}\). Some of the parallels, at the level of ideas, with Duchamp’s writings from *The Green Box*, are quite uncanny (as in a kind of unfamiliarity within familiarity...). The interesting thing here is that, despite being at the beginning of a new Science of Signs, Saussure’s researches into the workings of language were tinged with a kind of madness and, in that sense, it makes a comparative study all the more
compelling.

At the time Duchamp was formulating his ideas for The *Large Glass*, it appears untenable that he knew anything of Ferdinand de Saussure’s research. (Saussure wrote very little and published less.) Saussure’s *Course*, based on the notes of his students, was published posthumously by Payot in Paris in 1916, but there appears to be no biographical or documentary evidence that Duchamp ever read the book. However the “correspondences” were in the air at the time, and it should be of little surprise that these two thinkers were approaching similar intellectual projects — albeit from radically different directions.

So Saussure’s “sign of accordance”—how did he “look for it?” What follows is a rather sketchy and caricatured version of (a small part of) Saussure’s *Course* but it will, possibly, go some way to illustrating some of the similarities in the thinking of these two very different “researchers.”

Because of his dissatisfaction with previous attempts to map out the specific and detailed contours of a study of language, Saussure set about the task himself and in doing so focused on what he saw as the most elemental characteristics. For example, Saussure had to first establish the building block of his discipline. How did he do this? He started from an act of speech from a specific spoken sound and as he saw it its accompanying idea. From this simple coupling, he articulates the beginning of a new social science.

A language…is a social institution. But it is in various respects distinct from political, juridical and other institutions. Its special nature emerges when we bring into consideration a different order of facts. A language is a system of signs expressing ideas, and hence comparable military signals and so on. It is simply the most important of such systems. It is therefore possible to conceive of a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life. It would form part of social psychology, and hence general psychology. We shall call it semiology…(4)
So here we have Saussure’s momentous founding of a new social science. Its most elemental structure, according to Saussure, is “The Sign” which he illustrates thus:\(^5\) (Fig. 2)

What we have here is three ways of picturing what Saussure called a “two-sided psychological entity.”\(^6\) In this diagram he is using (appropriately enough for a comparison with Duchamp and The Large Glass) an example of the word “arbor” where the concept or idea of “tree” sits above what Saussure calls the “sound pattern.” This “concept” has a relation with its “sound pattern” which involves a kind of two-way communication across the line that “divides” the two psychological entities. At one point in his notes Saussure also compares this relation to the two sides of a sheet of paper. Recto (say) is the idea or thought and verso being the sound pattern. “Just as it is impossible to take a pair of scissors and cut one side of paper without at the same time cutting the other, so it is impossible in a language to isolate sound from thought or thought from sound...Linguistics, then, operates along this margin, where sound and thought meet.”\(^7\)

It is important to remember that what we have here is
effectively a structural relationship between an idea and the mental imprint, if you like, of that idea’s articulation. Although Saussure called the sign “concrete,” in many ways it is actually an abstract construction, more or less. It, the Saussarian sign, is neither a relation between a spoken word and its concept nor a thing entirely in the world. As Saussure says, “A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern” and “…[a] sound pattern is the hearer’s psychological impression of a sound…” Today, these structural features of the sign are known more familiarly. However, often they are misunderstood as “signifier” (the Saussurian “concept”) and “signified” (the “sound pattern”). In the Saussurian view, moreover, the relation between the signifier and the signified is to a greater or lesser extent unmotivated, conventional relation here but ask for this to be taken—for the purposes of this short essay—as “given.” What this amounts to though is that signs (or potential signs) it can only be isolated by what it is not. Saussure says that “…language itself is nothing other than a system of pure values…” and that, the ultimate law of language is, therefore, dare we say, that nothing can ever reside in a single term. This is a direct consequence of the fact that linguistic signs are unrelated to what they designate, and that therefore “a” cannot designate anything without the aid of “b” and vice versa. In other words, both have value only by the differences between them, or neither has value, in any of its constituents, except through this same network of forever negative differences.

So we have at this point a sign constructed of two conventionally related components (both psychological) which as a combination have value only in relation to what the combination is not. It is at this point that Saussure’s Course takes what I would call, an even more Duchampian turn. Look at this diagram: 


Figure 3
Ferdinand de Saussure, sign of accordance

Here we have, effectively, Saussure’s illustration of his sign of accordance. (Fig. 3) For in this diagram what haunts his ideas on the sign is the nature of the relation between the signifier (A) and the signified (B). However, look at that gap! A shifting nothingness sliced by the temporal relation with other signs. Moreover these “other signs” are never really present as such. What is more, a substitution of a form of ideogramme for a phonetic text derived from the Greek alphabet brings more clearly into focus the “vulgar” comparison with not only The Large Glass, but also, perhaps, begins to show the limitation of the Saussurian sign—one which (albeit unwittingly) I believe Duchamp was questioning.

Like the cleavage between The Bride and Her Batchelors, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is, coincidentally, a separation and a pulling together. Saussure indicates that the two elements of the linguistic sign are intimately linked. Elsewhere in the Course, however, Saussure describes the relation between signifier and signified as mysterious. When it comes to establishing the nature of the “bar,” or the entity, that both separates and links the two entities of the sign together, Saussure starts to struggle (we might even say teeter) on the edge of Reason. Prior to this point in his Course his articulations have largely followed a form of logic. But then…

Psychologically, setting aside its expression in words, our thought is simply a vague, shapeless mass. Philosophers and
linguists have always agreed that were it not for signs, we should be incapable of differentiating any two ideas in a clear and constant way. In itself, thought is like a swirling cloud where no shape is intrinsically determinate. No ideas are established in advance, and nothing is distinct, before the introduction of linguistic structure.

But do sounds, which lie outside this nebulous world of thought, in themselves constitute entities established in advance? No more than ideas do. The substance of sound is no more fixed or rigid than that of thought. It does not offer a ready-made mould, with shapes that thought must inevitably conform to. It is a malleable material which can be fashioned in to several parts in order to supply the signals that thought has need of. So we can envisage the linguistic phenomenon in its entirety the language, that is as a series of adjoining subdivisions simultaneously imprinted both on the plane of vague, amorphous thought (A), and on the equally featureless plane of sound (B)…. Thought, chaotic by nature, is made precise by this process of segmentation. But what happens is neither a transformation of thoughts into matter, nor a transformation of sounds into ideas. What takes place is a somewhat mysterious process by which “thought-sound” evolves into divisions, and a language takes shape with its linguistic units in between those two amorphous masses. One might think of it as being like air in contact with water: changes in atmospheric pressure break up the surface of the water into a series of divisions, i.e. waves. The correlation between thought and sound, and the union of the two, is like that.\(^{(14)}\)

Saussure is trying to grapple with the problem he has, himself, set up. For he is struggling, metaphorically, with a strange and mysterious confluence which, earlier in his notes, was a single fixed line (albeit one which entertained contrary vectors). We could perhaps go further and say that Saussure’s construction of the sign held within itself its own critique, and, further, it could be argued that Duchamp was more aware of this than Saussure. Within The Large Glass the relationship
between the The Bride and Her Bachelors is represented by three (not one) glass bars which are subject to feeble and faltering breaches – both electrical and mechanical. In contra-distinction to Saussure’s amorphous “middle term,” even Duchamp’s middle has a middle.

Before Duchamp’s *Large Glass* was broken and repaired the few photographs of it show that the division between The Bride and
Her Bachelors was not as distinct as it is now. The repair of the two sections and the subsequent reframing have given The Large Glass a visual heaviness that it did not have when it was shown at the Brooklyn Museum in 1926. (Figs. 4 & 5) Then, although the heavy wooden frame almost seemed to threaten to crush the work it seemed to maintain its visual lightness and physical integrity. Now of course, the heavy framework more brutally (but only visually) separates The Bride and, her fantasies, Her Bachelors. By 1936 Duchamp’s interests had moved on although to developments of very much related matters.

Notes:

1. Marcel Duchamp, The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even: a typographic version by Richard Hamilton of Marcel Duchamp’s Green Box, trans. George Heard Hamilton (Stuttgart: Edition Hansjorg Mayer, 1976) unpaginated. All quotes are from this publication unless stated otherwise.


4. Ibid., p.15.

5. Ibid., p.67.

6. Ibid., p.66.

7. Ibid., p.111.

8. Ibid., p.66.

9. Ibid., p.110.


12. Ibid., p.15.

13. What contradictions exist within the text of the *Course*, and there are a few (whether due to the inconsistencies in Saussure’s exposition, interpretation by Saussure’s students, or his translator), they are not the subject here.

A Note on Linda Dalrymple Henderson’s “Duchamp in Context” (Niceron, Leonardo, Poincaré & Marcel Duchamp)

Figure 1
The recent discovery by Rhonda Shearer of the influence of the Renaissance geometer Niceron on Marcel Duchamp’s *Large Glass* (note from *White Box*) is confirmation of both his debt to Poincaré and his status as a sophisticated geometer in his own right.

The formidable academic scholarship of Professor Henderson may tend to limit the overall influence of Poincaré in favor of a “smorgasbord mix” of contemporary science on Duchamp’s formulation of the *Large Glass*. In another context, the brief introduction by Prof. Henderson of Niceron missed an important contribution to the
understanding of M.D.’s approach to Optics and Perspective.

Similar to his friend Apollinaire, Duchamp, in lieu of academic training, immersed himself in intensive studies of Optics and Perspective (as opposed to the generality of Apollinaire’s varied studies) in the St. Genevieve Library becoming, also a savant of the history of ideas. More information about Duchamp makes it untenable to deny the focus of Duchamp on Poincaré’s ideas, as proposed in “Science and Method” and “Science and Hypothesis.”

A concern with Optics and Perspective is common to Duchamp, Poincaré and Leonardo (in his Notebook). This focus on the geometry of vision is inseparable from the physiology of vision and the mechanics governing perception. Such a density of material, presented to even the most sophisticated public, might require a “light touch” (not of the hand, so despised by Duchamp) in presentation. Comic relief is afforded by such notions as “hilarious invention.” Niceron himself, in “La Perspective Curieuse,” is at no loss for subtle jokes at the expense of the Pope’s Turkish foes!

Click
to enlarge

Figure 4
Marcel Duchamp, Plate of Eau & Gaz à tous les étages affixed to the box for the limited edition of Robert Lebel’s Sur Marcel Duchamp, 1958

Blake wrote, “energy is eternal delight.” This sums up the pervasive erotic element which everywhere humanizes Duchamp’s
exploration of the theme of a universal energy which ascends from the prosaic “Bachelor Realm” to the higher dimension proper to the “Bride.” This vary complex being, the Bride, seems to embody a gradient of stages (gas on all floors) from the strictly mechanical, to the electromagnetic, to the Wasp of Fabre, the etymologist, to Rrose Sélavy and – perhaps – in some empyrean splendor, the Virgin Mary herself.

The concept of a continuum of progressive states from the micro to the macro-scotic realms is essential to both Poincaré and Duchamp. Such a progression implies, at some point, a separation in dimensions which nonetheless still communicate. Thus, the Bachelor Realm is redeemed from isolation and yet supplied the gross fuel, which undergoes transformations as a distilled essence, at last arrives to nourish the Bride and to enable her, in turn, to provide for the limited world of the Bachelors a way of transcending their prescribed orbits, clothed in liveries and uniforms of stultifying conformity.

Everywhere this continuum appears buffeted by chance or, more accurately, refined by chance, so that an alternative to the dead stasis of thermodynamic equilibrium is revealed in the universal play of energy states–as well as in the mind as in Nature. As chance has its play in the mind, Poincaré brings forward a theory of human creativity and genius, in the chapter formulation, following an intensive but more or less random input of study, ideas appear to sort themselves out in what he calls the unconscious mind. There follows “tout fait,” the illuminating flash of insight. This vividly recalls Kekules’s epochal discovery of the benzine ring. Poincaré elaborates on this process from his own experience; service in the army only served to grant him a time for unconscious reflection on a problem. Freed of military obligations, he was struck all of a sudden with a path to a solution to his problem. Of course this epiphany had to be paid for in the laborious working out of the happy inspiration!

Click to enlarge
In accordance with his universal postulate of collisions producing phenomena—from random collections of dust mites (an important Duchampian motif) to the vast interstellar space of the Milky Way where flaming gases mingled following principles laid down by Clerk Maxwell—all nature, including Mind, was subject to a process in which destined outcomes proceeded in an orderly fashion from inputs randomly fed into closed systems. Similarly in the mind of genius, ideas, like molecules, collided and bumped against each other. At length, the closed system of the unconscious mind sorted out the most fruitful outcome, giving rise to a new paradigm. This is the central theme of the \textit{Large Glass}. Through an almost the “illuminating gas” arises and, becoming increasingly refined, passes from the three dimensional realm of the Bachelors into the higher fourth dimensional realm of the Bride. This process mirrors in contemporary form the transmutations that the alchemists made with the array of crucibles, furnaces, alembecs, etc.
Figure 6
Marcel Duchamp, *Dust Breeding*, 1920 (Photograph by Man Ray)

When confronted with the suggestion he was an alchemist, Duchamp replied, “If I have practiced alchemy it has been in the only possible way that it can be practiced today, namely unknowingly.”

The thesis, shared by Duchamp and Poincaré, infers that any effort to place Duchamp in any other orbit (*pun intended*) than that of Poincaré is to deny M.D.’s consistency and his basic seriousness, however concealed by the rubric of “playful physics” or “hilarious picture.” A very serious mind has addressed the basic problem of human creativity. In so doing, he has adopted as a model the thoughts of a leading mathematician and physicist of his day. Without Poincaré, the Great Glass would lack cohesion and relevance to seminal modern thought. Duchamp would have spent so many years of thoughtful labour in vain (neglecting the dreary months of repairing his masterwork in Katherine Dreier’s garage after it was shattered by careless handling); producing only a witty commentary on contemporary science.

*Poincaré was a foremost astronomer interested in the three-dimensional problem.*

Without wishing to in the least diminish Linda Henderson’s monumental work, *Duchamp in Context*, the writer seeks to put Duchamp in a leading place in the history and development of science—not as an original theoretician or as an experimentalist in any but a “thought experimentalist mode.” (Remember that Einstein’s great discoveries came from the use of imaginative “thought experiment.”) The notes for the *Great
Glass, in themselves, furnish an extraordinary essay in thought experimentation. Without intensive academic training, without a well-furnished laboratory, without consistently available help from hired co-workers or staff, Duchamp’s commentary on science has much to do with Jarry’s pataphysics.

Pataphysics, as Jarry himself defines it, consists of, “the science of imaginary explain the universe supplementary to this one.” The writer believes that the universe supplementary to this one could only be apprehended from a higher dimensional standpoint, attainable solely through mathematical insight. This would confirm that Duchamp had recourse to the brilliant insights of Poincaré, who above all others at the time understood the inter-dimensional tensions between the familiar third-dimensional world and the so-called fourth, where the fourth is a spatial dimension (five dimensions would include time). Such tensions, according to Duchamp and Poincaré, could be resolved in the subconscious mind following an intensive period of effort or study. (The phrase “tout faite,” in fact, originated with Poincaré.)

Jarry’s pataphysics were propounded (posthumously) by his character Dr Faustroll. The so-called laws of science were, according to the doctor, merely exceptions occurring more frequently than others. This skeptical iconoclasm gave rise to Duchamp’s notion of “playful physics.” Perhaps the concept of “meta-irony” would better serve than any other to characterize Duchamp’s approach to “exact science.” His mentor Poincaré was applying a statistical, probabilistic model to descriptions of that range of phenomena, dust mites to galactic gaseous formations, already referred to.

The intrusion of probabilistic consideration into exact science displaced an earlier confidence in Determinism—followers of Newton and Laplace Physicists, e.g. Einstein, were uncomfortable with a world in which “God played dice.” Although a fervent amateur of advanced science, Duchamp was nevertheless capable of a gentle (and very intelligent)
mockery of that which so fascinated him.

Click to enlarge

Figure 7
Marcel Duchamp, Note from the Green Box, 1934

In Niceron, Duchamp may have seen a quality of “hiddenness.” By this the writer refers to the use of “folded prisms and multiple viewpoints to convey unsuspected images, lurking,” as it were, awaiting detection—as with Duchamp’s ‘Wilson-Lincoln effect,’ Rhonda Shearer has consistently drawn attention to the quality of ‘hiddenness’ in the oeuvre of Duchamp. This is not obscurantism; although there is a traditional linkage to the obscure language of the classical alchemists.

The reference to the “language” of the alchemists brings up Duchamp’s fascination with language and the subtle level of meaning. Word puns, anagrams — the whole elusive verbal trickery of Cabalism— is common both to Duchamp and Jarry. In a period where ciphers and codes are looked for everywhere (affording a wealth of humorous material to comedians and cartoonists), why waste intellectual effort on “schoolboyish” pursuits? The answer lies in the deconstruction of language itself. Consider the contribution of so many and so diverse intellects to this endeavor of our time: Levi Strauss; Noam Chomsky; Moore; Ayer; Wittgenstein, Charles Dodgson (e.g. ‘Alice’— a word means what I choose it to mean); Roussel; Jarry; Apollinaire; etc, etc. the critical analysis of language is a major preoccupation of our time.

If Duchamp is much more than a very clever master of word
play, it is essential to look at the entirety of his life’s work—even his period of just “breathing!” The readymades, for example, form a continuous commentary on the *Large Glass*. In fact, every note and every artifact or “precision painting” or “tout fait” forms part and parcel of a big “closed system.” Such smaller closed systems—mechanics; entymology (the Wasp); electo-magnetism; eroticism; non-Euclidian geometry; chess; verbal manipulation; symbolism; alchemy—all figure in the “compendium” / encyclopedia, as it were, of the *Large Glass* and the Bride. Duchamp, from this viewpoint, is a major philosopher of our time, on a level with Popper Jasper, Wittgenstein, or whomever one chooses to nominate. Only his medium is different from the strictly verbal-literary works of the forgoing. Also, it might be added, he conveyed in an urbane and witty manner insights made ponderous and hard to follow by the savants. Then, it might be asked, who are the real obscurists? The writer much prefers to be amusingly enlightened by the *Large Glass* than to pour over wordy and weighty tomes, the output of scholars caring little but for the approbation of academic peers.

Figs. 3-7 ©2002 Succession Marcel Duchamp, ARS, N.Y./ADAGP, Paris.
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**Jarry = Duchamp**

click to enlarge
Figure 1. Anonymous
Woodcut of Jesus’ feet

1. Jarry
“La Passion: Les Clous du Seigneur”.
2. Duchamp “Sculpture-morté”

Figure 2. Marcel Duchamp
Torture-Morte
1959
Painted plaster and flies, on paper mounted on wood, 11 5/8 x 5 5/16 x 2 3/16 inches (29.5 x 13.4 x 10.3 cm)

Illustration to Alfred Jarry’s article, “La Passion: Les Clous du Seigneur”
*L’Ymagier IV* (July 1895) Page 221
Spencer Museum of Art
Museum Purchase: R. Charles and Mary Margaret Clevenger Fund, 94.32

Fig. 2
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Die Bedeutung des Ready-mades für die Kunst der Gegenwart

click to enlarge
Es sieht so aus, als enthielte das Œuvre Duchamps kein einziges Ready-made im buchstäblichen Sinne. Wie in den verschiedenen Artikeln dieses Magazins nachzulesen ist, hat Rhonda Shearer starke Indizien dafür vorgelegt, daß Duchamp keine ‘echten’ Ready-mades präsentiert hat. Vielmehr handelt es sich bei den ‘Ready-mades’ offenbar sozusagen um Fälschungen, also um von Hand hergestellte Imitate der Produkte, die sie zu sein vorgeben, oder um Alltagsgegenstände, die Duchamp gezielt manipuliert hat.\textsuperscript{(2)} Das


Für die Theorie ist die Frage, ob die Ready-mades von Duchamp ‘echt’ sind, natürlich entscheidend. Vor allem für Ansätze, die auf der Ununterscheidbarkeitsthese beruhen, wird die Datenbasis deutlich schmaler, wenn die Werke von Duchamp als
Beleg wegfallen: Die Ununterscheidbarkeitsthese besagt nach Danto, daß es Paare von perzeptiv ununterscheidbaren Gegenständen gibt bzw. geben kann, von denen einer ein Kunstwerk ist und der andere nicht; als Bestätigung dieser These kann Duchamp somit, wie es aussieht, nicht mehr herhalten.

Im Bereich der Kunst sind die Verhältnisse dagegen verwickelter. Kunst bezieht sich auf ihr Material als auf eine gesellschaftliche Realität. Entsprechend ist ihre Selbstthematisierung in der Regel nicht abhängig davon, inwieweit sich aus dieser Reflexion wahre oder falsche Aussagen extrahieren lassen. Kritisch mögen die neuen Erkenntnisse über Duchamp lediglich für solche Projekte sein, deren Pointe Duchamp verschwiegen

click to enlarge

Figure 3
Sherrie Levine, After Walker Evans, 1979

so Fotos hergestellt, die nicht von Gegenständen sind, sondern von Fotos. Damit erhalten die Fotos eine geistige Dimension, die ihrem Objekt abgehen, obwohl sie diesem –: Fotos von Gegenständen – bis auf die Schärfe genau gleichen: Die Fotos von Evans sind gerade auf Objektivität, auf ihren dokumentarischen Wert berechnet, während die Fotos von Levine ihren Ausdruck durch geringfügigste Differenzen erhalten, die das ansonsten fast unsichtbare Objekt verraten.


II.

click to enlarge

![Figure 4](image)

**Figure 4**
Alexander Ginter, *Landschaft* (Provence), 1999 (installation view)

Bäume, Wiesen und Hirsche haben ihre Zeit gehabt, sollte man meinen. Soweit sie heute noch dazu dienen, unsere Häuser wohnlicher zu machen, hat das weniger mit Kunst zu tun, als mit Dekoration. Wenn sich dennoch ein Künstler der Gegenwart mit der Landschaft auseinandersetzt, kann der Fall entsprechend kaum sonderliches Interesse provozieren. Und doch empfiehlt sich der Zyklus Landschaft unserer Aufmerksamkeit, zumal insofern er zeigt, wie durch subtile Anspielungen auf innerästhetische Begriffe eine Position gewonnen werden kann, die auch durch eine veränderte kunsthistorische Forschungslage

Es bleiben jedoch Zweifel an der Echtheit des Materials. Die

Das ganze Ensemble wirkt eher schlicht, fast harmlos. Hinter dieser Fassade verbirgt sich indes ein raffiniertes Spiel mit Kategorien und Erwartungen, das uns bei der Betrachtung nach und nach in seinen Bann zieht. Um einen Begriff davon zu geben, seien hier nur einige der Zusammenhänge analysiert.

Das übergreifende Thema des Zyklus ist ‹Landschaft›. Womit wir es aber zu tun haben, sind keineswegs Landschaften im herkömmlichen Sinn, also Landschaften, die sich mimetisch auf ihren Gegenstand beziehen. Das Konzept der malerischen Darstellung selbst wird vielmehr hintersinnig ‘analysiert’, in die begrifflichen Bestandteile zerlegt, und es sind diese Bestandteile, die dargestellt werden: Oben sehen wir die, wenn auch stark reduzierte, ‘Form’ und unten das ‘Material’. Das Verhältnis dieser Ginterschen Bilder zu ihrem Sujet ist dabei durch ihre Materialität wesentlich eines der Methexis an dem, worauf sie sich beziehen. Die Wahrheiten dieser Landschaften ist die Wahrheit der sinnlichen Gewißheit, von der Hegel sagt, wir „haben uns [...] aufnehmend zu verhalten, also nichts an ihm [dem Gegenstand, dem Ding], wie es sich darbietet, zu verändern“. Sie ist „unmittelbar [...] die reichste“ und zugleich die „abstrakteste und ärmmste“[4]. Jede der Mikrolandschaften, die sich in den Erdflächen verbirgt, ist hoch strukturiert und zugleich fast eintönig, so daß sich aus der Entfernung die Bilder nahezu gleichen. In einer ironischen Wendung gegen das Genre der Landschaft wird hier aus der ‘konkreten’ Landschaft das Konkreteste genommen und nicht abgemalt, sondern eingeklebt.
Was wir damit vor uns haben, ist die Landschaft als Ready-made, als fertig Vorgefundenes. Das Verfahren erinnert an Picasso, der das Etikett einer Suze-Flasche in ein Bild klebte, um gegen den Realismus in der Malerei zu polemisieren, es wird aber noch dadurch radikalisiert, daß die ‘eingeklebte’ Erde anders als das Etikett sich nicht einmal für ihre eigene Authentizität verbürgen kann. Für die Serie Provence wird diese Funktion, wenn überhaupt, schlecht und recht von den schwarzen Silhouetten übernommen, an deren Stelle bei der Installation Yucatan scheinbar die Fotos treten. Daß die Fotos die Erdhaufen supplementieren und

click to enlarge

Figure 6

nicht umgekehrt die Erde die Fotos, wird dabei vor allem durch den Zusammenhang mit den Provence-‘Landschaften’ sichtbar. Das Foto als eines der genuinen Medien der Landschaft tritt, weil sich die Erde als ‘eigentlicher’ Stoff des Zyklus darstellt, in den Hintergrund und fungiert als Kommentar. Der Eindruck wird dadurch verstärkt, daß die Bildausschnitte wie zufällig wirken und die Folge der Fotos eher darauf angelegt ist, einander zu einem bestimmten ‘Farbrhythmus’ zu ergänzen, als sich beschreibend oder gar erzählend auf die Motive zu beziehen. Der Umgang mit Fotografie erinnert so an die große
Fotoinstallation Atlas von Gerhard Richter, die auf der *dokumenta X* in Kassel zu sehen war.

Die Pointe der durch die Fotos repräsentierten Authentisierungsstrategie ist indessen, daß sie durch das Arrangement selbst unterlaufen wird. Die Erwartung, daß je einem Erdhaufen ein Foto entspricht, wird enttäuscht, denn tatsächlich haben wir neun Erdhaufen, aber zehn Fotos. Dadurch wird der Verdacht genährt, die Erde stamme vielleicht gar nicht von den angegebenen Plätzen. Allerdings ist unklar, was im Falle der Gleichzahligkeit von Erdhaufen und Fotos durch die Fotos überhaupt bewiesen würde.

Wir werden hinsichtlich der Herkunft des Materials verunsichert. Nicht nur der Begriff der Landschaft wird hier also reflektiert und in Frage gestellt, auch das Konzept des natürlichen Materials und insbesondere das der Authentizität werden thematisiert und kritisch durchleuchtet.

**III.**

Die Interpretation macht deutlich, daß der Begriff des Ready-mades, des schon fertig Gemachten, Vorgefundenen, außerordentlich wichtig für die *Landschaft* ist, ohne daß die Installation in diesem Begriff aufgeht. Vielmehr wird das ‹Ready-made› für eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Thema ‹Authentizität› und dem Genre der Landschaft in Anspruch genommen und weiterentwickelt. Das gilt unbeschadet der Tatsache, daß eine unmittelbare Auseinandersetzung mit Duchamp hier nicht intendiert ist. Die durch den Duchampschen Begriff vermittelte Auseinandersetzung, und nicht dessen Applikation ist das, was den Zyklus so interessant macht.

Solche Arten der Aneignung werden durch die neuere Forschung zu Duchamp in der Tat nicht widerlegt: Auch andere Begriffe, denen in der Realität nichts entspricht oder die in sich widersprüchlich sind, wie die des Äthers oder der Dreieinigkeit, haben ein außerordentliches kreatives Potential freigesetzt;
wo sich die Kunst mit solchen Konzepten auseinandergesetzt hat oder wo diese wie auch immer implizit in sie eingegangen sind, ist die Kunst nicht dadurch entwertet worden, daß die Begriffe für uns ihre Relevanz eingebüßt haben. Es sind die Theorien, die bei einer Revision unserer Begriffe ihre Gültigkeit verlieren, nicht die Kunst.

Das gilt übrigens auch da, wo die Kunst selbst theoretisch wird. Entsprechend geben die Untersuchungen des ASRL eher Anlaß zu der Erwartung, daß der Einfluß Duchamps auf die gegenwärtige Kunst fortbestehen wird, als daß die Kunst der letzten Jahrzehnte entwertet würde. Die Theorie der Kunst kann sich dagegen nicht damit begnügen, die neuerliche Finte Duchamps achselzuckend zur Kenntnis zu nehmen, auch wenn gegenwärtig die Neigung dazu groß ist.

Notes:


Duchamp et Jarry ou l’inverse

Vous ne trouvez ci-après que les lieux où ont été trouvées les citations. Il est à vous de construire les relations – clairement objectives – entre les citations, comme pour le jeu des sept familles.

CITATION I

‘Pourquoi chacun affirme-t-il que la forme d’une montre est ronde, ce qui est manifestement faux, puisqu’on lui voit de profil une figure rectangulaire étroite, elliptique de trois quarts, et pourquoi diable n’a-t-on noté sa forme qu’au moment où l’on regarde l’heure?’

Alfred Jarry, Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien; Livre IIa, éléments de pataphysique ; VII Définition (Œuvres complètes tome I, La Pléiade, 1972, p. 699)

CITATION II

“M. et Mme Bonhomme (Jaques) ... élisant domicile en mon étude et encore à la mairie du Qe arrondissement.” Il s’agit du cabinet de René-Isidore Panmuphle, HUISSIER.”

Alfred Jarry, Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll,

CITATION III

“Nosocomé, Interne des hôpitaux, actuellement soldat de deuxième classe au Qe de ligne.”

Alfred Jarry, Les Jours et les Nuits (Œuvres complètes tome I, La Pléiade, 1972, p. 776)

CITATION IV

“La Pendule de profil”


click to enlarge

Figure 1
Marcel Duchamp, The Clock in Profile, 1964
Figure 2
Marcel Duchamp, Note from the Box of 1914, 1914

Figure 3
Marcel Duchamp, L.H.O.O.Q., 1919

CITATION V
“arrhe = merdrearert merde”
La comparaison mathématique de Duchamp se trouve dans la Boîte de 1914. Le mot Merdre est le premier mot d’Ubu roi de Jarry.

CITATION VI
“L.H.O.O.Q.”


CITATION VII
L’ Attente
L’ Envie
L’ Amour
L’ Argent

“Mais ce qui, pour Nadja, fait l’intérêt principal de la page, sans que j’arrive à lui faire dire pourquoi, est la forme calligraphique des L.” est une question non posée par Breton à Nadja à propos d’un brouillon de Nadja.” André Breton dans: Nadja (Œuvres complètes tome I, La Pléiade, 1988, p. 710 et aussi p. 725 et p. 1550).

CITATION VIII


Il est certain : Duchamp a lu Jarry, Breton a lu Jarry et Breton a connu Duchamp. Les citations ci-dessus ne sont pas forcément la preuve que Duchamp a lu les pages de Jarry où apparaît le Q ou l’horloge, ou que Breton se réfère dans Nadja au L de L.H.O.O.Q. Les citations démontrent peut-être seulement un ‘Humour de Lycéen’ partagé par les quatre écrivains.

Figs. 1-3
All rights reserved.
From a modern point of view, astrology and alchemy are early forms of our scientific thinking that are limited by superstition. To the historian they appear as partial spheres of a uniform or holistic take on the world. In recent times, it is surprising to note an aestheticizing return to the era of “Kunst – und Wunderkammern” [editor’s note: a curious way in which art – often displayed from floor to ceiling – was exhibited alongside odd objects, scientific instruments, archeological findings and anatomical models] of early modern
times. The exhibition, which was staged at great cost (around $15 million) and labor under the mystical title “7 Hills” at Berlin’s Gropiusbau-Museum, entertains the thought of an encyclopedic sum within which the knowledge of our times is contained. It is true that while doing so, one risks losing one’s level-headedness, but via a more artistic approach one might also gain a better understanding of the cosmos on a micro- as well as a macro-level. In view of the euphoria of natural scientists to simultaneously have deciphered the genome and the elementary particle, even winners of the Nobel prize talk about a new mysticism. The four letters of the DNA are supposedly nothing less than a re-formulation of the old four elements-fire, water, earth, air. Furthermore, it is no coincidence that 12 fermions exist in the standard model of the elementary particles. It might well be that man, always striving for more knowledge, can only project new versions of old prejudices, whose common structure lie in particular numbers.

The horoscope is the portrait of the planets in the ecliptic. It is a clock that, unlike ordinary time, is not restricted by the position of the Sun alone, but also takes into account other celestial bodies—from Mercury, located close to the Sun, to far away Pluto. These are astronomical facts; only with our belief in a possible interpretation of this constellation, ever-changes according to time and place, do we leave safe terrain and enter the realm of superstition of historical traditions.

The 12 signs of the zodiac are the projected combinations from the three areas (body, soul, spirit) and the four elements, which since C.G. Jung can also be understood as four functions (sense, feeling, thinking, will). Since the notions are not unequivocal and diverge in different languages, various possibilities of interpretation are always possible. One can thus designate the signs according to the system of the religious philosopher from Vienna, Arnold Keyserling, as

Within this cosmic human being, the planets create a structure that can be looked at as a sort of grammar. Jupiter would be the “and” of the language, which connects everything, Venus the noun, which is fixated upon the world of the object, etc. Each human being has all the components of such a systematic structure, a sort of ontology, different with each individual. But here, we shall not pursue further any ethical inclinations. In this sense, a horoscope can be anything-ranging from the “characteriologic” analysis to the representation of a course of life.

With all of our knowledge about Duchamp today, it does not make much sense to read Duchamp’s horoscope retro-prophetically as a potential life. The record would constantly be set straight by biographical data. This a posteriori view would not be very interesting. What one could try to accomplish however, is to redraw the easily available course of his life by taking into account the most important data. What was really important to him? And how can one explain his ability to let the world in the dark about his work? Every “house” (indicated by Roman numerals), beginning with the ascendant to the left, lasts for seven years. That is, one moves first through one’s own horoscope under the horizon, until, at the beginning of the 7th house (at the descendant right), one rises from the “night,” and, with 42 years (6×7), one appears before the public. In their meaning, the individual houses adhere to the respective state of development; they are, however, present throughout the entire life (similar to the genetic code, which is nowadays given more credence to. It is true that it has been deciphered, but we are far from understanding it.) A horoscope discloses that
missed opportunities can hardly be taken up again. Life goes on. One should not, for example, raise small children (5th house) when one is in the 9th house (older than 63 years). One is not always equally young or old; but everybody has the focal points of his or her development at another place, so that not even these statements should be generalized.

In the following, we will restrict ourselves to the indicated data. Such a reading will certainly be a very general one. Everybody who is interested in astrology can further spin it out. Accordingly, planet Venus in the 10th house in Virgo has manifold meanings within the frame of a certain spectrum. Here though, this will be reduced to one location, namely 19.43 degrees, that for MD is the year 1953. We will proceed in this manner with every planet, and we will also consider the place directly opposite, that is displaced by 180 degrees, in this case 1911. The point situated directly opposite to one’s own location represents the complementary goal in one’s horoscope.

The individual astrological traditions differ considerably with regards to the tolerance of the Aspects. These are the relations between the planets themselves. One can compare them with the relation between notes that blend together to more or less harmonious music. Generally, one assumes a tolerance of 10 degrees between the planets, between a planet and the Sun or the Moon respectively 12.30 degrees and between the Sun and the Moon 15 degrees. This may seem arbitrary, and it differs from other systems. Opposition and conjunction (0 or 180 degrees respectively + tolerance, yellow) are impulses that have to be controlled through Will; Square (90 degrees, red) is feeling; Sextile (60, 120 degrees, green) = Sense; semi-sextile and trigon (30, 150 degrees, blue) = Thought. Traditionally, green is considered to be positive, red to be negative. It can also be characteristic when two planets are not related through any Aspects.

Below, an abbreviated interpretive overview will be given, together with a record of the planets throughout MD’s life.
All the planets are located above the horizon. It is true that this is characteristic of a public life, yet it is also characteristic of a late fame. Usually, it is said that a horoscope, which does not enclose the center, is eccentric. Focal points are the 7th house (community, society), with Neptune in Taurus and Pluto in Gemini, as well as the 9th house (journey, ideas) with Saturn in Cancer, the Sun in Leo and Mercury in Leo, as well as the 11th house (friendships with the rich and famous, works) with Uranus and Jupiter in Libra. From the viewpoint of the Aspects, most of it is concentrated in the 9th house. This is why we are dealing with a person destined for (journeys and) ideas, and less with an artist in the traditional sense—the 2nd house (art, possession) is empty and in Taurus, we find only Neptune, that is acquaintances. Venus in the 10th house in Virgo is only connected through Aspects with 4 other planets. Venus occupies a prominent spot in the house of the public and has no negative Aspect. Since Venus is the creative force (and, from a mythological stance, the goddess of love), we could start analyzing her first, asking for the two corresponding moments.

Venus in Virgo in the 10th house: 1911 and 1953/4
During this year, Duchamp paints his most important paintings (family, nudes, chess) in Blainville. The long-term project refers to the passage from the “virgin” to the “Bride.” The background or frame to these years (opposite the goal) is the sign of Virgo. As the one formative incident that enters with Venus one has to assume the wedding of his favorite sister Suzanne in August. The inaccessibility of the “bride” will later become a subject of the Large Glass. Almost exactly opposite, that is 42 years later, in the 10th house, the 66 year-old MD marries Alexina “Teeny” Matisse-Sattler in January of 1954. From the viewpoint of the Aspects, it was a harmonious event. MD nevertheless manages to portray himself publicly (10th house) as (male) virgin, as bachelor (Venus). Only years later MD found out by chance that he had become the father of a girl in 1911.
Moon in Scorpio in the 12th house: 1929
The female (the mother) is generally represented by the Moon. The Moon also stands for the changeable and for (in the 12th house) regenerating in seclusion. As one can see from the two squares in the 9th house to Mercury and the Sun, this iridescent seclusion clashed with the self-confident talk and his judgment of himself. Externally this became evident in the 41st year (1929) of his life. This does not concern his short marriage to Lydie Sarazin-Levassor since it was divorced just a year before. Henry McBride asked the question why, in view of the “fat” bride and her father’s rather inadequate endowment, MD did not marry Kathy Dreier. At the crucial moment (1929), MD met up with her and her friend Mrs. Thayer to travel around Spain and Germany. Dreier saw in MD “another side of me.” She was probably the most important woman in his life, gravely underestimated by his biographers, even though she did not understand all the ideas (squares in the 9th house) of her “adopted son.” The opposition to Neptune in the 7th house brings forth the speculation that this friendship would not have fared too well with his other public acquaintances.

Neptune in Taurus in the 7th house: end of 1931 / beginning of 32
Except the already mentioned inclination to leave people in the dark about his relationships to women, MD obviously had many acquaintances (Neptune), which were not least (favorable Aspects in the 9th house) conducive to his journeys and ideas. In his vitae this talent manifested itself officially when he wrote a chess book together with Vitaly Halberstadt that was published in three languages during June of 1932 in Brussels. This cooperation must have been important for him since it is also the first planet he reaches in the horoscope (because so far the houses were empty and the other mentioned planets stood opposite).

Mars in Cancer in the 8th house: 1940
The ruler of nativity (the regent of the ascendant Scorpio) is on good terms with Venus and the Moon, but not so with Neptune. Next to the Sun, the ruler of nativity is often seen as the most important planet in a horoscope. Initiative as sublimated aggressiveness, the tendency to keep searching for the roots (Cancer), has to be accepted here as a principle. The square that points toward Uranus in the 11th house indicates the longing for the intellectual dealing with the work for which the foundation stone only is laid. In 1940, MD decides to start working on his private museum-on his Boîte-en-Valise. From 1941 on, MD will, little by little, put the samples of the edition together in seven series and publish them.

As mythological figure, Mars is naturally the god of war. Yet the German occupation of Arcachon, to where MD had retreated together with Mary Reynolds, his sister Suzanne and her second husband Jean Crotti, Salvador Dalí and his wife Gala, scarcely seemed to have bothered him.

Uranus in Libra in the 11th house: 1915/16 and 1957/58
MD has a balanced (Libra) intellectual-dialectic relationship (Uranus) to his friends (11th house) in society. The time during which his personality (Aries) is emphasized-from 1913 to 1922-is determined by the Ready-mades. When he arrives in New York as a twenty-seven-year-old, he becomes friends with the Arensbergs. Directly opposite, 42 years later, the occupation with his work takes place through dealings with the publishers of his writings, George Heard Hamilton and Michel Sanouillet. He also meets with his important biographer and interpreter, Robert Lebel.

Jupiter in Libra in the 11th house: 1921 and 1963
The second planet in this house of the lifework is Jupiter. Jupiter stands for the capability of synthesis. What is better to announce an oeuvre than bringing works together in a big personal exhibit? MD is already 76 years old and only now is he offered this exhibit in Pasadena. 42 years earlier, in the
house of mastery (5th) of his personality (Aries), MD brings about this synthesis in a completely different way than in an accumulation of his works. Through his alter ego Rose Selavy he explores the female side of his personality. The integrative force of Jupiter can be rendered in many different ways. Particularly noteworthy is the big tension to the conjunction of the three planets gathered in the 9th house, that is, to his ideas.

Saturn, Sun, Mercury in the 9th house in Cancer and Leo: 1943-1946
This is a big emotional conflict. Saturn as Authority, the Sun as Being, and Mercury as rhetoric economy not only set up priorities of the entire horoscope-so to speak the culmination of all his efforts-but they also create a symbiosis of apparent crisis. MD is now generally perceived as authority (Saturn) or in his mastery (Mercury and the Sun in Leo). He is almost popular, in any case a legend. Not only does the magazine “VIEW” dedicate an issue to him, but the Large Glass also appears as prop for a fashion shoot on the cover of “VOGUE.” There is an exhibit of the three Duchamp-brothers, etc. The squares from here to Jupiter and to the Moon display his yearning in two ways. On the one hand a longing for a synthesis of his oeuvre, which he realizes through the work on individual examples of the Boîte-en-Valise. On the other hand, it is evident through the fulfillment of his female side, namely in a sexual way (Moon in Scorpio) and through loneliness (Moon in 12th house). Of utter importance here is his liaison with a Brazilian artist and wife of an ambassador, Maria Martins, to whom he dedicates a personal “valise.” The “faulty landscape” within is painted with ejaculate. Through this, one can grasp the ironic message of the proverbial bachelor, who “grinds his own chocolate.” The speculation is permitted that similar things have happened 42 years before, directly opposite in the horoscope. His work will from now on be restructured. He moves into a new studio that he will use for the next 22 years, until the end of the sign of Libra.
From now on, he will come up, in this modest studio with the idea and realization of a sexualized, lonely woman (Moon in Scorpio in the 12th house), that is Etant donnés. The model for her body was Maria Martins, who soon was to disappear to Paris and Brazil, her native country. She became for MD the bedded Maria, in memory of the far-away Mariée.

Another chapter could be written on the allocation of cities. This differs, however, according to the various schools of astrology. We will restrict ourselves to note that New York as city of Neptune and Paris as city of Venus agree with the corresponding meanings in the 7th and 10th house.

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**Psychological Analysis of Duchamp’s Handwriting**

Marcel Duchamp, Note from the *Green Box*, 1934 © 2000 Succession

Marcel Duchamp, ARS, N.Y./ADAGP, Paris
Marcel Duchamp’s handwriting shows that he is a highly intelligent, creative and expressive individual. We see this in the overall appearance of his writing. It is legible and well placed on the paper. We see that he has both artistic and literary talents by the way he writes the letter “d”.

The upper zone in handwriting analysis is the area of intellect and creativity and because Duchamp’s writing contains loop additions to the letters h’, b’, f’, and to the capital ‘L’, and we can see a certain degree of dishonesty. Here is an individual who will mean something entirely different from what he appears to be showing. These additions are an attempt to fool you into believing that what you see is not entirely what he originally intended you to see. He also crosses many of his ‘t’s’ with a long dagger-like cross with the point of the dagger pointing away from the letter which indicates a certain degree of hostility.

His writing also shows an uncomfortable connection to his father. He appears to have some problems with authority and authority figures. He pays a great deal of attention to details and appears to be looking ahead to the future and moving from the past and a possible connection to his mother. I would not be surprised to find that there has been some disharmony in his early years at home.

He is given to simplification in his mental activities and carries this out in his day to day life. In all probability, he is more comfortable by himself than he is in the company of others. His “World Directness Syndrome” is limited, which is to say that he expects others to contact him and reach out to him, rather than extend himself. He shows a tendency to keep people at a distance, as seen in long ending strokes, which is another attempt to control relationships. He also has a great deal of stubbornness that is indicated by his tented ‘t’s’. He stands strongly on his convictions.

The way he writes his ‘q’s’ and ‘y’s’ show some confusion
about his sexuality and the pastocity (thickness and heaviness of the letters plus the crossing out of thoughts) in the “Emotional Release Syndrome” (IV) shows his need, desire or demand for gratification of one or more of his senses. It tells us that he was an emotional individual who was repressed, probably emotionally, as seen in the “World Directness Syndrome” (III).

So that’s what I’ve come up with so far. Looking at his handwriting as he ages, there are no great differences between 1910’s and his elderly handwriting. I will do further analysis sometime in the future.

The psychogram is a psychological chart or “map” on which an individual’s essential handwriting characteristics are recorded. The Psychogram is arranged in syndromes and plotted on a circle. It is divided into eight syndromes, Klara Roman, who developed the Psychogram in Hungary and took it with her to America in the 1940’s, defined it as a profile in a circle” of the writer’s personality. The upper half of the Psychogram deals with intangible values, aspirations, imagination and
things of the mind and spirit. This includes artistic ability, creativity, literary talent and overall intelligence. The lower half deals primarily with the unconscious and measures drives, libido, emotions and repressions. Although in plotting a psychogram, some of the values are subjective, many are measured on an instrument called a Psychogram Guide.

Notes

1. I will work on analyzing his writing in the thirties, but basically it doesn’t change much from what I’ve seen. This is the first analysis but before we begin, allow me to insert a few disclaimers. 1. Because I do not have the originals before me I have to make some assumptions: I cannot tell the true margins because there are no lines delineating where the paper begins and ends and that will affect to a small degree the past, future reading in my report, so I just assumed that he had an average on the Psychogram.

Ready-Aid?: A Note on Philippe Duboy’s Lequeu: An Architectural Enigma


If the aura of the “original” in the work of art has been effectively dismissed by the techniques of modern mechanical reproduction, then we might say that that other aura (the aura
of the fake, the inauthentic, the spurious) has been more effectively installed. The aura of the dupe, the stand-in, the hoax can be seen as a particularly “modern” incarnation—one directly relevant to, if not entirely generated by, Duchamp and Duchamp studies. So much of Duchamp criticism, before it can make even a single claim or observation, must contend with the possibility that it is itself being “taken,” shown for a “Duchump”—Duchamp as the proto-typical postmodern trickster, but also as the academic grifter par excellence. Just what’s real in the Duchamp corpus? What’s the angle?

So it was, so it is!, that I really bit at a reference (in a non-Duchamp related text about “Eccentric Spaces”) to an architecture book by contemporary French writer Philippe Duboy that concerns an 18th Century French Architect, Jean-Jacques Lequeu, and specifically the relationship between this architect and Marcel Duchamp. The reference seemed to be implying, if only tentatively, that Duchamp was Lequeu or, at the very least, was profoundly influenced by him. Amazing reference, if only because I had never come across mention of Lequeu’s work before—let alone any intimation that he was a Duchamp influence (along the important lines of Raymond Roussel or Alfred Jarry) or even, maybe, a Duchamp creation.

Click to enlarge

**Img left**
Lequeu: An Architectural Enigma was not (I had feared as much!) available at my university library and so I made an “inter-library” request and awaited its arrival from Toronto. When Duboy’s rather massive book-translated from the original French by Francis Scarfe-finally arrived, I fanned the pages and scanned for graphics. While there are only about 8 colour plates, there are over 420 stunning illustrations in the book. Under the heading “Figures lascives,” for example, one encounters a range of erotic Lequeu figures: drawing of a woman, wearing what I think you’d call an erect penis necklace, masturbating with two hands; many paintings that mercurially detail male and female genitalia; and lots of cocksucking satyr stuff with saucy, suggestive inscriptions. This is just to point out that, before reading a single line of Duboy’s text, Lequeu: An Architectural Enigma was positively radiant with “aura.”

click to enlarge

Img left
Jean-Jacques Lequeu, The Gate of the Hermitage; Drinking Den of the arid wilderness; The Rendezvous of Bellevue is on the tip of the rock, in Duboy, p.83

Img right
Jean-Jacques Lequeu, The boudoir on the ground floor, known as the Temple of Earthly
Venus, in Duboy, p. 27

The facts are, apparently, that Lequeu was born in 1756 (in Rouen), went to school at the Ecole Gratuite de Dessin, won a few prizes for architecture, and died some time in the 1820s: at which time his papers were anonymously (?) donated to the Bibliotheque Royale (now Nationale). Duboy’s ingenious study, as much about Duchamp as it is about Lequeu, is really a Dada chronicle of a Dada mystery. Duboy isn’t so much preoccupied with a sober, academic clearing-up of the nebulousness surrounding Lequeu as a fantastically, nearly impossibly radical 18th Century architect (he designed buildings such as “The Drinking Den for an Arid Wilderness” and “The Boudoir on the Ground Floor, known as the Temple of Earthly Venus”); rather, Duboy seems bent on stoking the avant-garde fire of modern art studies.

click to enlarge

Img left
Jean-Jacques Lequeu,
Self-Portrait,
in Duboy, p. 10

Img right
Jean-Jacques Lequeu,
Self-Portrait, 1773,
in Duboy, p. 11

Basically, Duboy unmasked Lequeu’s obsessive punning (his name itself could be slang for penis); his penchant for the erotic
and the absurd (many of his drawings have drawing-room phrases such as: “The young cunt in an attitude of the conjunctions of Venus”); his Rose Selavy-like alter egos; his detailed, science-minded draughtsmanship; his pathological portraiture etc. as unmistakably Duchampian tropes.

The kicker is that Duboy indirectly proposes a number of theories or plots concerning these awesome similarities. So I suppose the big question is: what was Duchamp really up to for that year and a half that he was employed by the Bibliothèque nationale…? Could there have been a secret society? A sort of Oulipo- or Pataphysics-based conspiracy to infiltrate the library and insert a Lequeu? Were Jacques Lacan, or Raymond Queneau, or even Georges Bataille in on the scam, too?

This note is really just a S.O.S. Can anyone out there save me, tell me what the deal is? Does the Lequeu archive constitute a new wealth of material for Duchamp studies? Or have I been taken: hook, line, and sinker?

Involuntary Muscular Action as an Untapped Energy Source: An Invention by Leonardo da Vinci and Marcel Duchamp

(The following example of Marcel Duchamp’s encounter with the mind of Leonardo da Vinci is excerpted from a longer essay. Duchamp discovered Leonardo’s anatomical writings and drawings, through photogravure reproductions, in the Bibliothèque Sainte Géneviève in Paris, first as a curious
visitor in 1910, then as a professional librarian with a great deal of spare time, in 1913-14.)


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A Pun Among Friends

Marcel Duchamp, Note 224, from Paul Matisse, Marcel Duchamp: Notes, 1980 © 2000 Succession Marcel Duchamp,
Francis Picabia, Cover of *Litterature*, No. 7  
(1 December, 1922)

Marcel Duchamp’s teammate Francis Picabia illustrated Duchamp’s *lits-et-rature* pun for the cover of *Litterature* No. 7, 1.12.1922. Two large male shoes are pointing downward between two smaller upwardly pointing female shoes. One sole has a picture of a woman; another sole the picture of a man. Picabia trisected the name “Litterature” and wrote above the shoes “LITS” [“beds”], in-between the shoes “ET” [“and”], and below “RATURES” [“erasures”]. (The relative position of the shoes unambiguously indicates what bedroom activity the couple is enjoying.) In a generation afreud of nothing this is a picture of sublimation: literature is a product of erasing what we do in bed.
...and Eve Babitz posing for
the photographer Julian Wasser
during the Duchamp retrospective
at the Pasadena Museum of Art,
1963 © 2000 Succession Marcel

Forty-one years later Duchamp responded to his departed friend’s gambit with this picture of Duchamp and the nude Eve Babitz playing chess. The goal of chess is to mate. We can thus see this picture as the record of a tableau vivant of a word play. Since Freud, vulgar theorists have held that chess and art, to pick two examples, are sublimations of sex. Given Duchamp’s attitude towards wordplay versus theory, it is better to see his life long interest in chess and eroticism as a sublimation of this picture’s wordplay! Given that the double meaning of “mate” does not exist in French, at last we have a satisfactory explanation of why Duchamp had to emigrate to America. In other words: in the beginning was the word; in the center the pun.

Notes

1. Cabanne asked Duchamp “Who have your best friends been?” Duchamp replied, “Obviously Francis Picabia, who was a teammate, so to speak.” A few paragraphs later, speaking of Litterature’s editor, Andre Breton, Duchamp used chess as a trope for engaged human interaction: “It’s a somewhat difficult sort of friendship, you see what I mean? We don’t play chess together, you understand?” Pierre Cabanne, Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp, trans. Ron Padgett, Da Capo Press, Inc., 1979, p. 101.

2. Stephen Jay Gould discusses this annihilating

3. Attributed to the American expatriate “Lost Generation” which occupied Paris in the 1920s.

4. Marcel Duchamp and Eve Babitz playing chess during the Duchamp retrospective at the Pasadena Museum of Art in 1963. The photograph by Julian Wasser is reprinted in numerous places, including West Coast Duchamp, Bonnie Clearwater, ed., Grassfield Press, Miami Beach, 1991, p. 75, fig. 34; additional photographs of the scene, including a page of Wasser’s contact sheets, are on p. 73, fig. 33 and p. 75, fig. 35. Dickran Tashjian discusses the circumstances of

5. For a Man Ray photograph of a Picabia/Duchamp tableau vivant, see Hulten, 1993, pp. 140-141. See also Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, trans. Pears & McGuinness, Routledge, 1961 [the original was published in the same year as Litterature No. 7], 4.0311: “One name stands for one thing, another for another thing, and they are combined with one another. In this way the whole group—like a tableau
Marcel Duchamp in 1962

Early in 1962 Marcel Duchamp visited the students at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia.

I had seen his works at the Philadelphia Museum of Art when I was 12 years old and taking classes there. Now Marcel came into each studio and viewed our works. I was doing a series of “Housewives” entangled with shower nozzles, toilets, irons, etc. in an expressionistic way. He thought they were a mix of Matta and deKooning. I did like both of them. In fact the summer before while on a travel grant from the Academy I had bought two Matta Color Lithographs for $25. each in Rome.

Figure 1
“Marcel Duchamp and the Academy Bones,”
He then spoke in the auditorium about his art and said that now he was an underground artist. I was the only one with a camera, and posed him next to the Academy Skeleton. I took one shot and filed it away. This year it dawned on me to show it and publish it after 38 years.

In 1968 I started to sell my work in Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery in the penthouse over the old Park Bernet Auction House in New York. Duchamp and Man Ray, Noguchi, Bearden, Chryssa etc. were Arne Ekstrom’s artists then and here I was sharing a Gallery with Duchamp. There was, I remember, a great exhibition of Chess, and once Arne showed me the Valise of Duchamp in his back office.

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**Duchamp at NASA**

click to enlarge

Our computer duchamp.arc.nasa.gov was the erstwhile host for our website. Well, it’s not quite a *Nude Descending a Staircase* but it worked well for years and met the criterion of being named after well-known artists or contributors to the understanding of perspective images. Now it languishes in the backwaters behind our new firewall computer which protects it
and us from the ravages of international hackers challenged to bring NASA to its knees, wondering in a UNIX-sort-of-way how the next Duchamp, contemplating a staircase descent on the International Space Station, will render his cubic dreams.

Stephen R. Ellis, PhD Head of the Advanced Displays and Spatial Perception Laboratory Human and Systems Technologies Branch Flight Management and Human Factors Division NASA Ames Research Center

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Between Gadget and Re-made: The Revolving History of the Bicycle Wheel


click to enlarge

Eines der diesbezüglichen, von Duchamp in diversen Interviews immer wieder bemühten Statements sei hier nochmals – in jener
Version die uns Arturo Schwarz überliefert hat – in Erinnerung gerufen: “To set the wheel turning was very soothing, very comforting, a sort of opening of avenues on other things than material life of every day. I liked the idea of having a bicycle wheel in my studio. I enjoyed looking at it, just as I enjoyed looking at the flames dancing in a fireplace. It was like having a fireplace in my studio, the movement of the wheel reminded me of the movement of the flames.” Die Analogie zum Kaminfeuer war sicher nicht zufällig gewählt. Mit den im Kamin tanzenden Flammen benannte Duchamp ein gemeinhin nachvollziehbares Analogon für die ‘kontemplative’ Wirkung, welche das sich drehende Speichenrad auf ihn, den damals ersten und einzigen Betrachter und Benutzer, ausgeübt haben soll; gleich, ob er sich dabei am ‘optischen Flackern’ der Speichen oder der vermeintlichen, durch die wirkenden Fliehkräfte provozierten Instabilität der Apparatur erfreut hatte. Ob die Drehung der Felge “very soothing, very comforting” oder, wie es Roland Shearer vermutet, eher “hardly relaxing” ausfiel, sie gehörte ursprünglich zur Idee des Fahrrad-Rades.

Marcel Duchamp, 
*Bicycle Wheel*, 1913/64
© 2000 Succession Marcel

View of the Duchamp gallery,
“The Art of Assemblage”
(October 2 – November 12, 1961),
The Museum of Modern
Art, New York

Diese Janis-Replik wurde einige Jahre später, im Herbst 1961,
in der legendäre Ausstellung “The Art of Assemblage” im Museum of Modern Art erneut und vollkommen unzweifelhaft im Kontext des Ready-mades zur Schau gestellt. Das Fahrrad-Rad wurde im Status eines ‘museum piece’ in das Stadium einer visuellen Dokumentation des als historisch betrachteten Ready-made-Konzeptes transformiert. Es war nicht mehr notwendig, das Rad in Rotation zu versetzen, um sich daran zu delektieren; vielmehr war dieses sogar untersagt, wie der amerikanische Photograph Marvin Lazarus bezüglich eines Photoshootings mit Duchamp in der Ausstellung am 10. November 1961 berichtete: “I wanted to move the Roue de Bicyclette so that I could shoot through it. Duchamp moved it. [...] the guard [...] ran over to me and asked if I had moved the object. Before I could answer, with a little smile, Duchamp said quietly, ‘No, I did it.’ The guard then turned on him and said, ‘Don’t you know you’re not supposed to move things in a museum?’ Duchamp smiled again and speaking very softly said ‘Well, I made the object – don’t you think it’s all right for me to move it a little?’

Eine interessante Frage, die der Künstler dem vermutlich verblüfften Museumsaufseher hier gestellt hatte. Hatte sich Duchamp auf seine nominelle und ideelle Autorenschaft berufen dürfen, um sich bezüglich einer Benutzung zu privilegieren?
Diese Frage erscheint zu gut, um sie durch eine Antwort zu verderben, wirft aber zugleich eine weitere, generellere Frage auf, die nicht unbeantwortet bleiben soll.


Der Geist in jenen Tagen, so Hulten, sei eben ein anderer gewesen (11). Ein anderer Geist? Eher wohl die Tatsache, daß der zunächst ohne jegliche Autorisierung ergestellten Kopie nur ein geringer finanzieller Wert beigemessen werden mußte, so daß die Kuratoren Hulten und Sandberg das Wagnis einer öffentlichen Benutzbarkeit eingehen konnten ohne allzu großen Schaden fürchten zu müssen (12).

Um zur gestellten Frage zurückzukommen: wenig wäre erreicht, dürfte der Betrachter das Rad in Bewegung versetzen. Ich möchte mich auf zwei Gründe beschränken. Der eine, das konservatorische Problem tangierende: Die Geschichte der partizipatorischen Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert zeigt, daß die taktile involvierten Betrachter stets entweder mit dem ihnen unterbreiteten Handlungsangebot überfordert waren oder die ihnen offerierten ahrungspotentielle nicht zu entfalten wüßten. Allan Kaprow beispielsweise berichtete, daß die Besucher

Ähnlich erging es auch George Brecht bei einer Ausstellung seines *Cabinet* aus dem Jahre 1959 – einem Wandschrank mit diversen Alltagsgegenständen. Die intendierte, an die taktile Partizipation der Betrachter rückgekoppelte epistemologische Erfahrung wurde hier durch übereifrige Zeitgenossen, die das Cabinet ausgeräumt hatten, zunichte gemacht (14).

Edward Kienholz, *Cockeyed Jenny*, 1961/62


‘Dokumente’ gesetzt. Und schon bald traten die die Ideenwelt Duchamps repräsentierenden Fahrrad-Räder ihren Siegeszug durch die internationalen Museen an – Musealisierung inklusive.

Geschichte hatte aus dem Fahrrad-Rad ein Artefakt werden lassen. Reziprok dazu hatte letzteres seinen Schwung eingebüßt.

Notes

1. Roland Shearer, Rhonda: Why is Marcel Duchamp’s Bicycle Wheel Shaking on Its Stool?


6. Roland Shearer, Rhonda: Why is Marcel Duchamp’s Bicycle Wheel Shaking on Its Stool?

8. Dafür spricht nicht nur die den Präsentationsmodus dokumentierenden Photographien, sondern auch ein Eintrag im begleitenden Ausstellungskatalog, in dem es unter anderem heißt: “The ´readymades´ are among the most influential of Duchamp´s works. They are ordinary objects that anyone could have purchased at a hardware store [...]. The first readymade, however, done in 1913 by fastening a bicycle wheel to a stool, was “assisted” by Duchamp, and hence is an assemblage on the part of the discoverer as well as the original manufacturer.” (Ausst.-Kat. The Museum of Modern Art, New York: The Art of Assemblage. 2. Oktober – 12. November 1961 [hrsg. von William C. Seitz] New York : The Museum of Modern Art und Doubleday, 1961, S. 46).


12. Diese Replik wurde bei einem Besuch Duchamps


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**The Gift of Cassandra**

click to enlarge
In the spring of 1961, Euripides’s *The Women of Troy* opened at the Récamier Theater in Paris. The first night was attended by many of the intellectual elite: André Pierry de Mandiargue, Alain Jouffroy, Robbe-Grillet and Octavio Paz; our party was made up of Noma and Bill Copley, Marcel Duchamp and myself. *The Women of Troy*, being both anti-war and anti-misogynist, has been produced more times than any other Greek play so that Marcel might have seen it before, though he did not say so. The play was given an extravagant production in New York in 1964, so he might have seen it again at the very
time he was changing the name of the foundation that was to donate his yet secret work [Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas] to the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

click to enlarge

Attributed to the Brygos Painter Vase,
ca. 480 B.C. – 475 B.C.
© Musée du Louvre

Euripides opens his play with Cassandra, possessed with prophecy, coming on stage with a flaming torch in each hand. One she places in a sconce on the statue of Hymen, God of Marriage, and the other she holds high in her right hand singing the marriage song, prophesying her betrothal to Agamemnon; this despite the fact that even Apollo had respected her virginity.

“Hecabe,” says Hephaestus. “In our weddings you are the torch-bearer; but this torch-bearing is a hideous mockery.”

At dinner after the play the four of us discussed the predicament in which Cassandra had put Apollo. Apollo appeared to her and promised to teach her the art of prophecy if she would lie with him. After accepting his instruction, Cassandra went back on the bargain. A successful teacher communicates the facility of achieving certain significant results which become intuitive once acquired by the student. So it was with
Cassandra, and she saw no reason to lose her virginity for something that was already hers. (This is heuristic education and can at times be disconcerting.) Apollo, accepting the fact that what he taught her was irretrievably hers, begged her to give him just one kiss. A sentimental compliance to what seemed to be an innocent reward was her demise. As she gave Apollo his kiss, he spat into her mouth thus ensuring that none would ever believe what she prophesied. What he did in spite was not instruction but a God-given gift.

Not long after this I made a sculpture called The Torch of Cassandra which was bought by Barnet Hodes, one of the directors, along with Marcel Duchamp and Noma and William Copley, of the William and Noma Copley Foundation. Some years later, Hodes told me that because of my sculpture he had investigated the story of Cassandra, so that when Marcel presented the motion to change the name of the foundation to the Cassandra Foundation, he (Hodes) said, he was the only one to know her story.

Bill Copley recounted an incident that happened in his sixty-ninth street apartment in New York. Noma did not, naturally enough, see why the Noma and William Copley Foundation should be changed to the Cassandra Foundation. Marcel was waiting in the living room while Bill was in the bedroom, which was just off the living room, trying to convince Noma to change the name of the Foundation. After quite a time, Bill blew a cloud of white cigarette smoke out the door of the bedroom to let Marcel know that he had been successful.

I see a relation between Marcel Mauss’s “Essai sur le don,” “Étant donnés,” “don de la Fondation Cassandra,” the gift of Cassandra (which Marcel seemed to think was among his gifts as well) and all that potlatch entails. Marcel spent the war in the German-speaking part of Switzerland and had lived in Germany and so was able to add a common Teutonic word to his arsenal of puns, “Gift”: die Gift, gift, das Gift, poison.
(In a telephone conversation, March 1, 2000, Noma Copley would not comment on Mr. Metcalf’s remarks. However she assured us that “his statements are all fine.”)

Duchamp as Trickster

click to enlarge


click to enlarge

The white square needs to be in the lower right-hand corner. Seen in James Eade,
In the accompanying photograph of Duchamp sitting in front of a Max Ernst designed chess set, the master chess player Duchamp has the board set up with a dark square in the lower right corner! (The proper setup is to always have a light square in that corner.) Following the theme of the articles in the first issue of this journal, Duchamp seems to always both 1) deceive, yet 2) leave clues of his deception. (Of course, a deception a without a clue would be hard to uncover.)

As a personal note, most of my previous scholarly work has been on Wittgenstein’s philosophy of mathematics. I have just begun an investigation of the confluences between Duchamp’s readymades and Wittgenstein’s conception of ordinary language. For the moment, I have a title — “Still Life with Wittgenstein and Duchamp” — and some hints. Consider the following sample from remark 129 of Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations:

“The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one’s eyes.)[...] we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful.”

Chess should play an illuminating and complicating role, as in this passage from Wittgenstein’s Blue Book (p. 65): “I want to play chess, and a man gives the white king a
paper crown, leaving the use of the pieces unaltered, but telling me that the crown has a meaning to him in the game, which he can’t express by rules. I say: ‘as long as it doesn’t alter the use of the piece, it hasn’t what I call a meaning’.’”

I hope to report further in a future issue of Tout-Fait. Fellow investigators are welcome to contact me at Steven.B.Gerrard@williams.edu.

[José Antônio Fabiano Mendes Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, informs Tout-Fait’s readers that 39 chess games played by Marcel Duchamp can be retrieved at http://www.chesslab.com/positionsearch.html Date range: select Historical archive(1485-1990)].

________________________________________

Leonardo’s Optics Through the Eyes of Duchamp: A Note on the Small Glass

click to enlarge

Marcel Duchamp, To Be Looked at (from the Other Side
The following example of Marcel Duchamp’s overlooked encounter with the mind of Leonardo da Vinci is excerpted from a longer essay. The edition of Leonardo’s Treatise on Painting referred to is Josephin Peladan’s 1910 French translation Leonardo de Vinci, Traite de la Peinture. This publication aroused great interest among the Duchamp brothers and their Cubist friends at Puteaux.

To Be Looked At, With One Eye, Close To, For Almost An Hour (in French: A regarder d’un oeil, de près, pendant presqu’une heure) is a cruel set of commands. Nobody would want to look at anything following this prescription. Duchamp wrote the phrase in small capital letters across the face of a glass painting, and insisted that his directive, issued in the infinitive, serve as its title. But the owner of this work, Katherine Dreier, hated the title, and referred to it instead as Disturbed Balance.

Duchamp, however, was being uncharacteristically descriptive with To Be Looked At... because the image on glass is based upon optics and experiments with the functioning of the eyes. It follows Leonardo da Vinci’s study of vision. In fact, the idea, the image and the phrase itself all come from this short illustrated passage in the Treatise on Painting (1):

Click images to enlarge
D F. But if you look at it with one eye, M, it will seem to be at G. Painting only presents this second form of vision.

Marcel Duchamp, *Note*, 1919
© 1993 Pontus Holten, ed.
*Marcel Duchamp: Work and Life*,
Paintings are flat surfaces. Spacial illusions in paintings are derived from monocular, not binocular, vision. Leonardo was fascinated by the transformation from physiological optics to the artifice of painting, so he studied the behavior of a pair of human eyes. When an object to be looked at is placed close to the face, the paths of vision of the two eyes cross. Duchamp took Leonardo’s X-shaped diagram of cross-eyed vision, along with the wording of his title, directly from this passage in the Treatise. In a posthumously-published sketch for To Be Looked At… he even used Leonardo’s letters “A” and “B” to identify the eyes, or viewing points, represented by circles at the extremities of the cross. But he then placed the configuration on a receding plane, in perspective, and turned it into a pair of giant scissors, a device soon to appear in The Large Glass. Now the cross-eyed observer, it would seem, could cut his way through the visual field by flexing his eyeballs together and apart to make the scissors work. In the small glass To Be Looked At… most of this peculiar tool lies outside the rectangle of the picture, so only its tips can be seen.

The squat, transparent pyramid hovering above the scissors would appear to transport the setting of this one-act farce for eyeballs to ancient Egypt. But it does not. Instead we are right back in the arena of the optics of Leonardo, who wrote frequently and vehemently about the “pyramid of vision.” According to Leonardo:

The body of the atmosphere is full of infinite pyramids composed of radiating straight lines (or rays of light), which are produced from the bodies of light and shade, existing in the air; and the further they are from the object which produces them the more acute they become, and although in their distribution they intersect and cross they never mingle together, but pass through all the surrounding air, independently diverging, spreading, and diffused. If you look into a mirror and close one eye, you will have
formed a visual pyramid pointing at your open eye, whose base is the shape of your face. Leonardo displays remarkable insight into the mechanism of light as it reflects off our surroundings. The receiving human eye always forms the apex of a complex geometric solid, whose base is delineated by the outline of an object in view, and whose sides are formed by the rays of light racing towards the viewpoint from its edges. Leonardo’s use of the word “pyramid,” however, is confusing, because in common usage a pyramid sits on the earth, on a perfectly square base, its axis pointing up to the sky. Duchamp’s Egyptian pyramid in To Be Looked At… is a deliberate and mocking distortion of Leonardo’s idea as it occurs, in the Treatise on Painting, at the center of his theory of optics.

In 1918, from the isolation of Buenos Aires, where he made To Be Looked At…, Duchamp had good reason to poke fun at the visual pyramid. He was probably sick to death of it. His brother, the painter Jacques Villon, was, in contrast, obsessed. Villon believed that Leonardo’s pyramid could provide the unifying theory in his enterprise to make Cubism more than just a passing fad, to transform it into an enduring, classical art form. In 1915, the last time the two were able to meet until after the Great War, Villon would talk of nothing else. All this had started in 1911, when the brothers and their Cubist friends became fascinated by Leonardo’s optical formulations: “Every body in light and shade fills the surrounding air with infinite images of itself; and these, by infinite pyramids diffused in the air, represent the body throughout space and on every side.”

Was Leonardo da Vinci a Cubist himself? He was, it is true, presenting a vision of the space around objects filled with latent images. The eye at any given location could only perceive one image at a time. Visual pyramids “intersect and cross [but] they never mingle together…” But could a painter, a Cubist painter, overcome the laws of light and vision? Could his imagination and intuition capture these half-formed,
transparent images, as evoked by Leonardo, before they are
condensed into a point, as they overlap, interpenetrate, and
jostle for predominance? Jacques Villon struggled to embed
this concept of latent visual pyramids into his paintings for
the rest of his life.

Marcel Duchamp discussed these ideas with his brother in the
eyearly days of Cubism. Then he chose a different path, a
directly-perceptual method of creating transparency and
overlapping planes in the visual field. He preferred the
method that children use. He crossed his eyes.

Marcel Duchamp, Portrait of Chess Players, December 1911
© 2000 Succession Marcel Duchamp, ARS, N.Y./ADAGP, Paris

Only one painting, supported by a group of studies, was
produced using the cross-eyed method: the Portrait of Chess Players.

Marcel Duchamp, Portrait
Duchamp asked his two brothers, Jacques and the sculptor Raymond Duchamp-Villon, to sit in front of a chess table, in the midst of a game, and face each other nose-to-nose. Marcel then stationed himself within a foot of his motif, and, in an experiment with scissored configurations of his binocular vision, observed his brothers’ profiles merging and multiplying, engulfing the armies of chessmen behind them. Next, to sort things out, he studied Jacques, on his right, “with one eye, close to, for nearly an hour.” He followed this procedure with Raymond, this time with his left eye, all the while intending the physical proximity of the three artist-brothers (one behind and two in front of the canvas), clustered around their favorite game, to reflect their intellectual and emotional closeness. It is a rare glimpse into a private world.

Duchamp left a clear record of the steps leading up to his finished painting. Five preparatory drawings survive. One is in the format of a triptych, with a central square drawing flanked by two smaller contiguous squares. At first glance it looks as if all three squares are filled with Cubist studies of a man’s head. A closer look reveals Raymond’s, then Jacques’s, physiognomies, delineated separately on either side, on the flanking panels. These two monocular visions are
repeated, combined and merged in the central panel, which became the prototype for the final painting, the Portrait of Chess Players. Duchamp had put Leonardo’s visual scissors, as depicted a few years later in the small glass painting of 1918, into practice, in the service of Cubism. He never repeated this experiment.

Notes


A Life in Pictures Revisited

*Marcel Duchamp: A Life in Pictures* by Jennifer Gough-Cooper & Jacques Caumont, Translated by Antony Melville, Illustrations by
See Marcel. See Marcel pun. See Marcel’s toys: Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy is Lego. The *Box-in-a-Valise* is a Matchbox dinky car suitcase. *Given* is a Bar bie StrippedBare By Her Kens, Even. I was hoping that Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jacques Caumont’s new kid-focused biography, *Marcel Duchamp: A Life in Pictures*, would really exploit the silly, outrageous possibilities of M.D.’s work. Just as the *Box-in-a-Valise* enchantingly opens, then unfolds and even slides into place, I was looking for a little bit of innovation here: pop-up features, scratch-n-sniff illustrations, interactive text, maybe even one or two pull-out posters. But this compact biography, the first English translation of the 1977 work *La Vie illustrée de Marcel Duchamp*, though indeed elegant and informative, seems more geared for the art world set than for the sandbox crowd. It makes Duchamp, and his work, appear quite adult-serious, even.
What the biography does well is cover eighty-one years of a fairly event-filled life. In less than thirty, compact pages we follow M.D. from his early days in Blainville, to his rebuff at the hands of the jury of the Salon des Indépendants, to his revelatory viewing of Roussel’s *Impressions d’Afrique* and finally to his lionization in New York. The writing, though occasionally a touch technical, is never condescending: “Far from being oppressed by the event he found that fate had arranged things quite well, and the symmetry of the cracks looked rather intentional; instead of being disfigured the work was actually embellished.” And the book’s general shape may appeal to some young readers as it physically resembles the classic Golden nursery book: small and colorful with glossy pages and a hardcover. André Raffray’s vivid illustrations, however, so replete with Duchampian allusions (note the brides, bachelors and fresh widows hinted at in his chocolate grinder picture) seem, again, more adult than kiddy-ready.

The idea of a Duchamp-bio for children is very cool and it may be just the infinitely amusing potential of such an idea that renders *A Life in Pictures* merely satisfactory. I imagine – if only for Raffray’s intriguing pictures – that most Duchampions will want to check out this little volume but I can’t see too many others, especially the juniors, squealing about either
the text or the art. So for now, I suppose, it’s back to the
Playstations, the Furbys, and the Easy Bake ovens. See Marcel.
See him frown.

An Open Letter to Donald Kuspit

All quotations in the following letter were taken from a taped
recording of the “Jewish Holocaust in Art” session (24 February
2000; 9:30 AM – Noon) at the 88th Annual Conference of the
College Art Association held at the Hilton Hotel in New York
City, 23 – 26 February 2000. The recording was made by the
CAA.

Dear Donald:

In regard to an exchange of words we had at the College Art
Association Conference 2000 during the panel “Jewish Holocaust
in Art” (February 24, 2000), I would like to add the
following.

Rudolf Herz, Zugzwang,
1995 (Room installation at the
Kunstverein Ruhr e.V.,
Essen, Germany)
© photo:
Werner J. Hannappel

You were on the dais with several co-presenters in easy reach of a microphone and I was sitting in the audience attempting to voice my puzzlement on a specific work of art being presented by Norman Kleeblatt of the Jewish Museum. The work in question was a wall-like installation by the contemporary German artist and photo-historian Rudolf Herz, depicting reproductions of photographs of Marcel Duchamp and Adolf Hitler. The work was completed in the late 1980s and, according to Kleeblatt, the images were “probing [a] new aesthetic discourse on Nazi representation.” The work’s raison d’être was the apparent discovery that photographer Heinrich Hoffmann photographed Duchamp when he was in Munich in 1912, and later became Hitler’s official photographer. Both subjects appear to be dressed in a dark coat and tie.

I was puzzled about the work and asked for clarification. In my short discourse I said I thought that the juxtaposition of Duchamp with Hitler was bizarre, and I suggested (tongue in cheek) that it might have been appropriate to also include a photograph of Lee Miller since Man Ray (who had become the (un)official photographer of Duchamp) also photographed Miller. Plus, Lee Miller, who reportedly bathed in Hitler’s tub, was one of the subjects of a presentation by Carol Zemel of the State University of New York, Buffalo. In her discussion of the so-called liberation photographs by Margaret Bourke-White and Miller, Zemel suggested that the two women’s photographs tended to “anesthetize and aestheticize” the Holocaust. I could not agree more and I indeed feel that Herz’s Zugzwang “anesthetizes and aestheticizes” Hitler.

Kleeblatt was confused by my question – indeed he had a right to be – but you, Donald, asked for the microphone and said, “I don’t think it’s so bizarre at all. Duchamp was a terrorist, wasn’t he? [Microphone disturbances] I just wanted to say that I don’t think it’s so bizarre at all. Duchamp was a terrorist and so was Hitler, and Duchamp was a fetish object, as Hitler
is. And a lot of art historians, there are a whole group of art historians who click their intellectual heels and make the Duchamp salute these days. They are both fairly disruptive figures. I think Duchamp was an extremely disruptive influence on art, despite the rationalization of it as, quote, conceptual and so forth. So I think it is a wonderful and actually rather insightful connection to put Hitler and Duchamp together.”

At this point I said,”The fact that Duchamp skipped out of France in World War I might make him a draft-dodger or a coward … but to call … a coward a terrorist is ridiculous.” Your response was: “Cowards can be terrorists — the art world is a place were artists can be terrorists.” This drew some laughter from the audience as I protested and gestured trying to show you that there was no proportion to your statement.

The discussion moved on to other statements and questions but toward the end of the session you took hold of the microphone again and said, “Incidentally, I’d like to say one last thing to defend myself about what looks like mockery — artists as cowards — you know, the art world as cowards. There is a famous incident … there was a Dadaist happening in Germany and … I believe there was one of the events where one of the Dadaists went and took all the money and invited people to a lecture and didn’t give the lecture — took the money and made
some mockery. They were brought into court – this is documented, okay. They were brought into court – some famous Dadaist, and they were trembling, trembling – brought into court and the judge said to them, ‘How do you explain the fact that you stole all the people’s money?’ Then he looked at them trembling and said, ‘Oh, you’re artists, you were artists. Oh, okay. Case dismissed.’"

If the case existed (neither I nor those I’ve consulted have found any evidence of it), its German judge was the Weimar equivalent of the New York Supreme Court Judge “turn ‘em loose Bruce” Wright of the 1970s. And who was the “famous” Dada artist or artists? The Jew Tristan Tzara, the Communist George Grosz or the diminutive Helmut Herzfelde, a.k.a. John Heartfield – who in utter disgust for the Kaiser’s militarism anglicized his name after WWI and who depicted the Nazis, Hitler, Göhring, et al, in unflattering situations? cowards, you say. Yes, I suppose in the end they were cowards because they did choose to flee (an instinct we share with other species when they or we feel threatened).

I suppose that cowards can be terrorists, but we more often associate terrorists with martyrs. Can one call Hitler a terrorist? I believe that one can call Hitler any bad name possible. I prefer mass-genocidal murderer, myself. Does Duchamp fit those descriptions? No!

As for the “fetish object” association you assigned to both Duchamp and Hitler, were you referring to Rrose Sélavy of the Man Ray photographs or Duchamp portraying the fig-leafed Adam on stage, his playing chess with a nude woman, or smoking a cigar? Dare I say that skinheads surround themselves with Nazi images, and not with those of Duchamp? Were you being cynical when you said that “they are both fairly disruptive figures”? But lastly, I can’t help but put together rather horrible images and thoughts about Nazis when in two short sentences you use “fetish,” “clicking … heels” and “salute” to describe Duchampian art historians. Who would that include? Arturo

Sincerely,

Elliott Barowitz

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**Shooting Bullets at the Barn**

click to enlarge

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Left subtitle

Marcel Duchamp, *Cover for the First Papers of Surrealism*, New York, 1942 (verso)

© 2000 Succession Marcel Duchamp ARS, N.Y./ADAGP, Paris

Right subtitle

Marcel Duchamp, *Cover for the First Papers of Surrealism*, New York, 1942 (recto)

© 2000 Succession Marcel Duchamp ARS, N.Y./ADAGP, Paris

click to enlarge
In 1942 Marcel Duchamp is said to have fired five shots at the base of artist-friend Kurt Seligmann’s barn in Sugar Loaf, New York. Shortly thereafter, for the 1942 New York exhibition, *First Papers of Surrealism*, organized by the exiled Surrealist leader André Breton, the cover of the catalogue was perforated where Duchamp’s bullets hit the nineteenth century stone wall. Other holes on the cover look similar but remain without cut-through circles.

It has been suggested that by firing the bullets, Duchamp was referring to the Nine Shots of the Bachelors in the Bride’s Domain of his *Large Glass*, whose location, according to one of his notes (written between 1911-15) published in the *Green Box* (1934), was to be achieved by randomly firing matches dipped...
in fresh paint from a toy cannon. (1)

On close examination almost sixty years later, the exact location of the barn’s detail depicted on the cover of *First Papers of Surrealism* can no longer be made out on the surface of the crumbling and weather-beaten wall. As for the cheese on the back of the cover, the debate still continues. It is definitely Swiss cheese (2), from Seligmann’s native country, but is it a refined “gruyère” as Francis M. Naumann and Arturo Schwarz maintain or just “emmentaler,” as Stephan E. Hauser (3) claims? One final incidental: According to Charles Shaughnessy, a longtime family friend and neighbor, the .22 rifle Duchamp used is considered the same one that killed Seligmann twenty years later.

click image for video (0.8 MB)
Kurt Seligmann’s barn in Sugar Loaf, NY, 26 April 2000

On Wednesday, April 26th, 2000, Bonnie Garner, Lester Lockwood and the author drove to the Seligmann homestead, 26 Oak Drive, Sugar Loaf, New York (Telephone: 914-469-3849), to examine the barn. We’d like to thank Ms. Patricia Gilchrest, Executive Director of the Orange County Citizens Foundation, and Mr. Charles “Chuck” Shaughnessy for their hospitality. We’d also like to thank Stephan E. Hauser for establishing the contact.

Notes:


Duchamp’s most fervent biographers, Jacques Caumont and Jennifer Gough-Cooper, tell us that Duchamp was in New York City on 22 December 1944 and that, on this day, he met up with Frederick Kiesler in the afternoon for a discussion about a forthcoming issue of View magazine. This issue was going to be dedicated exclusively to Duchamp. After meeting with Kiesler,
Duchamp cabled Walter Arensberg in Hollywood to inquire about the address of a photographer who had taken some pictures of Duchamp’s work before World War II. Duchamp wanted to contact him again in connection with View. The cable said, “PLEASE WIRE ADDRESS OF MR LITTLE WHO PHOTOGRAPHED MY PICTURES SOME YEARS AGO STOP VIEW MAGAZINE PREPARDING [sic] DUCHAMP NUMBER WRITING= MARCEL DUCHAMP.”

Not noted by his biographers but also on that same day, Duchamp ran a very important errand. He asked Ms. Elsie Jenriche to confirm the authenticity of his rectified readymade L.H.O.O.Q. (Figure 1), made twenty-five years earlier in 1919. We know this from an inscription on the reverse side of the readymade. It reads, in ink: This is to certify / that this is the original / “ready made” LHOOQ / (Figure 2) Paris 1919 / Marcel Duchamp. Beneath this, also in ink, is a testimony: Witnesseth: / This 22nd day of / December, 1944 / Elsie Jenriche.

A rubber stamp to the right of Ms. Jenriche’s name declares that she was a notary public (Figure 3): NOTARY PUBLIC, New York Co. / N. Y. Co. Clk. No. 63, Reg. No. 82J-3 / Commission expires March 30, 1945. But can we be sure of this?

The 1943 A to L volume of Notaries Public N.Y. County Term Expires 1943 (archive #0394442), begins to eliminate doubt. Ms. Jenriche is listed, along with her profession (public stenographer) and signature. Then, in the 1945 A to K volume of the Notaries Public N.Y. County Term Expires 1945 (archive #0394442), Elsie Jenriche is listed again, this time as a public stenographer at the Hotel St. Regis (Figure 4,5). The entry is dated 17 March 1943 with an expiration of 30 March 1945 (Figure 6). This is precisely in accordance with the stamp on the back of L.H.O.O.Q.

Fast forward some fifty years. On Thursday, 29 April 1999, Mr.
Jonathan van Nostren, archivist of the Division of Old Records at New York County’s Surrogate Court Hall of Records, declared that Elsie Jenriche’s signature on verso L.H.O.O.Q. is “authentic,” adding that “there’s no doubt that the work was properly notarized.”

Notes:

2. I am grateful to Francis M. Naumann for pointing out that four years prior to this ‘errand,’ Duchamp intended to sell L.H.O.O.Q. to Louise and Walter Arensberg. In a letter dated 16 July 1940, Duchamp writes from Arcachon, France: Une autre chose dans la même genre est l’original de la Joconde aux moustaches (1919) / Pensez-vous que $100 soit trop pour la dite Joconde (Something else in the same category is the original of the Mona Lisa with a mustache (1919) / Do you think that $100 would be too much for the so-called Mona Lisa). The Arensbergs are not known to have acquired the work. Arturo Schwarz in his The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, vol. 2 (New York: Delano, 1997) lists the Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery in New York and the collector Mary Sisler as previous owners of L.H.O.O.Q. As for its current status, it is now in a private collection in Paris. As yet unaccounted for is the Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York, which on a label on the work’s verso is credited (as Matisse Gal.) for loaning the work to the Museum of Modern Art’s traveling exhibition The Art of Assemblage which was on display in New York from 10 October – 12 November 1961.

“Faucon” or “Perroquet”? A Note on Duchamp’s Morceaux choisis d’après Courbet
Illustration 1.
© 1999 Succession Marcel
Morceaux choisis d’après Courbet, 1968

Illustration 2.
Gustave Courbet, Woman with White Stockings, 1861

Illustration 3.
Gustave Courbet, Woman Holding a Parrot, 1866

I have always thought that the bird in Duchamp’s 1968 etching, Morceaux Choisis d’Après Courbet, looks odd (Illustration 1). To me, the bird more resembles a parrot, or perhaps a pigeon, than a falcon (faucon in French). The bird is taken to be a faalcon because Duchamp explained to Arturo Schwarz that “he’s curious, and furthermore he’s a falcon, which in French yields an easy play on words; so that here you can see a faux
I have tried to confirm my suspicions by looking at stuffed birds in science museums, at real birds in zoos, and at drawings and photographs of birds in guide books. To me, Duchamp’s bird just doesn’t look like a falcon or any other bird of prey. The beak is too small, the sitting position is too upright, the body is too slender, the eye is too small and vacuous, the feet are too unlike talons, etc. To be sure, it is not impossible to see a falcon in Duchamp’s etching, but I think there is room for doubt about the bird’s identity. As an alternative, we can read a dual-language pun in addition to the faucon/faux con suggestion made by Duchamp himself. Namely, we can interpret the image in terms of its being a “false” image, a “con” in the sense of a confidence game. The faux/con in this latter connotation would “parrot” a falcon.

In addition to Woman with White Stockings (Illustration 2), the painting that Duchamp reworks in the print, there is another of Courbet’s paintings, Woman Holding a Parrot (Illustration 3), that is often compared with the nude in Duchamp’s last piece, Given: 1st, the Waterfall; 2nd, the Illuminating Gas. (It was the then still secret last piece
that Duchamp apparently intended to index with the print, where the bird takes the place of the viewer at the peepholes in the assemblage.) The various connections in the complex, voyeuristic matrix of possible meanings involving parrots and nude women in these works indicate that Duchamp was concerned with “looking” and “interpreting.”\(^4\) He manipulates the viewer’s gaze.

Illustration 5.
Bird Illustrations

Notice also that the nude in Duchamp’s etching looks at her stockings rather than directly at the viewer as she does in Courbet’s original painting. Given Duchamp’s changes, the viewer of the etching can be taken as a kind of dupe, a pigeon, who can be made to misconstrue a falcon. Considering Duchamp’s interest in perceptual matters, it is possible that he was familiar with, or interested in, psychology experiments involving perceptual set.\(^5\) Expectation can lead to very different perceptions, especially when the stimulus is labile. As has been pointed out by a number of scholars, including Stephen Jay Gould and Rhonda Roland Shearer in a recent essay\(^6\), Duchamp was clearly up to something in the domain of “looking” and “not looking.” There is still a great deal of material in Duchamp’s oeuvre that deserves to be looked at again, and again, from various points of view.
Notes:


2. Thomas Girst has pointed out to me that, in the page of bird illustrations that Duchamp used as a source for his 1967 collage *Pollyperruque* (see Schwarz, 2: 871, for a discussion of this work) (figure 4), there is a “faucon,” mirror-reversed from Duchamp’s, that is not wholly unlike the image in the etching. To my eye, however, the differences are greater than the similarities. Girst also reminds me that the source for *Pollyperruque* was identified by Thomas Zaunschirm in his *Marcel Duchamps Unbekanntes Meisterwerk* (Klagenfurt, Austria: Ritter, 1986), 101 (figure 5). Zaunschirm also discusses Duchamp’s etching (pp.92-93), but he does not connect it with *Pollyperruque*. Carol James has discussed both *Pollyperruque* and *Morceaux choisis d’après Courbet* in her essay “An Original Revolutionary Messagerie Rrose, or What Became of Readymades,” in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry de Duve (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 277-96. James does not compare the two works in her text, but images of them are reproduced on facing pages. I am also indebted to Girst for pointing out that Juan Antonio Ramírez has discussed Duchamp’s collage and etching in his recent book, *Duchamp: Love and Death, Even*, trans. Alexander R. Tulloch (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), 214-16. Ramírez, apparently following Carol James’s implicit comparison, argues that “the supposed falcon (*faucon*) in the foreground was taken from the parrot of *Pollyperruque*, a 1967 readymade.” Here too, even though I’m arguing that Duchamp’s bird resembles a parrot, I think the differences between the bird in the
etching and the parrots in *Pollyperruque* are greater than the similarities.


4. In this context, the general surrealist strategy of juxtaposing unlikely items comes to mind. For example, *Joan Miró’s Object*, 1936, has a stuffed parrot and woman’s leg with white stocking suspended in a keyhole-like opening.


“Fountain” avant la Lettre

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In his as yet unpublished article “Duchamp’s New Leap,” on Duchamp’s *Given*, the infrathin and the readymades, Juan José Gurrola draws our attention to the following quotation in Norbert Elias’ *The Civilizing Process* of 1939 which we thought too amusing not to share with our readers. The quote is taken from a letter written by Madame du Deffand to Madame de Choiseul in 1768:

“I should like to tell you, Dear grandmother, as I told the Grand Abbé, how great was my surprise when a large bag from you was brought to meat my bed yesterday morning. I hasten to open it, put in my hand and find some green peas… and then a vase… that I quickly pull out: it is a chamber pot. But of such beauty and magnificence, that my people say in unison that it ought to be used as a sauce boat. The chamber pot was on display the whole of yesterday evening and was admired by everyone. The peas… till not one was left.”
Chamber Pot, ca. 1750

(“Je voudrais, chère grand’mamam, venir peindre, ainsi qu’au grand qu’au grand-abbé, qu’elle fut ma surprise, quand hier matin on m’apporte, sur mon lit, un grand sac de votre part. Je me hâte de l’ouvrir, j’y fourre la main, j’y trouve des petits pois…et puis un vase…je le tire bien vite: c’est un pot de chambre. Mais d’une beauté, d’une magnificence telles, que mes gens tout d’une voix disent qu’il en fallait faire un saucière. Le pot de chambre a été en représentation hier toute la soirée et fit l’admiration de tout le monde. Les pois…furent mangés sans qu’il en restât un seul.”)


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**Marcel Duchamp and Glass**

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Illustration 1.
Detail of the cover of
Vogue magazine (July 1945),
showing parts of Duchamp’s
Large Glass in the foreground

I. CRACKS

Cracks travel, but never in a straight line. They are always slightly deflected, but a crack that starts at one edge of a sheet of glass will hardly ever stop until it reaches another edge. Cracks in glass have virtually no physical dimension. They are breaks in the molecular structure made visible. Marcel Duchamp loved cracks (figure 1). For several years Duchamp was a glass painter, and three of his four works in this medium are shattered. He would say that these transparent paintings were not broken but merely “wrinkled,” and even enhanced, or “brought back into the world,” by the new linear designs that accidental falls or jolts had imposed upon them. (1) Duchamp never acknowledged that this breakage was a part of his intention. Instead he gave two different explanations for his decision to work on such a fragile ground.

Firstly, when Cabanne asked “How did the idea of using glass come to you?” Duchamp replied, “Through color. When I painted, I used a big thick glass as a palette and, seeing the colors from the other side, I understood there was something interesting from the point of view of pictorial technique. After a short while, paintings always get dirty, yellow or old
because of oxidation. Now, my own colors were completely protected, the glass being a means for keeping them both sufficiently pure and unchanged for rather a long time.”

Even as he was turning his back on the medium, Duchamp remained surprisingly curious about oil paint. It would be a messy and disruptive maneuver to invert a palette, because a sheet of glass on a painter’s table is the field of action, encumbered with his tools. It supports his brushes and palette knives, jars of medium and turpentine, and mounds of wet or drying colors. Most artists have never thought of turning over their palettes to consider fresh paint from behind. But Duchamp investigated paint, wet paint, and went to great lengths to study and preserve it. He tried to trap ponds of fresh oil color against the glass within boundaries of lead wire. He sealed these from behind with lead foil. But his experiments failed. The paint did not stay fresh, but, in many places, reacted with the foil, turned into a powdery cake, and discolored badly.

Duchamp’s second stated reason for working on glass was very different. He was concerned, not with color, or the technical properties of oil paint, but with space. When pressed by Cabanne, “The glass has no other significance?” Duchamp replied, “No, no, none at all.” Then, without skipping a beat, he offered another significance: “The glass, being transparent, was able to give its maximum effectiveness to the rigidity of perspective.” The transparency of glass offered a means of interjecting a painted image into the space of a room. But, for many reasons related to the rules of single-point perspective, The Large Glass can never work this way. Anyone who has seen it, or any of its full-scale reproductions, knows that the Bachelor Machine always looks flat, distorted and out of place in any gallery configuration. It hangs there, an artifice in space.
Duchamp’s ideas about color and space in his works on glass remained unrealized. He could have pursued them, but chose not to. What interested him most was not the material’s transparency, or its ability to seal and preserve, but its fragility. *Nine Malic Molds* (figure 2), was the first glass to be broken. Someone propped it up against an easy chair in Arensberg’s apartment to study it, not noticing the castors on the chair’s feet. Someone else approached from the opposite side and rolled the chair away. The glass fell and shattered. Although the carpet on the floor could not cushion the blow, its pile did keep the splinters from scattering. Duchamp was present. He must have kept everyone calm. The breakage of his glasses had begun, and would continue for a decade.

Duchamp derived great pleasure from repairing these glasses, or “bringing them back into the world,” each in its turn completed with a web of cracks. He expressed these feelings emphatically to James Johnson Sweeney, standing before the *The Large Glass* in the Philadelphia Museum of Art: “The more I look at it the more I like the cracks: they are not like shattered glass. They have a shape. There is a symmetry in the cracking, the two crackings are symmetrically arranged and there is more, almost an intention there, an extra- a curious
intention that I am not responsible for, a ready-made intention, in other words, that I respect and love.”

II. SCRATCHES

In 1910 Marcel Duchamp and his brother Jacques Villon studied the Treatise on Painting by Leonardo da Vinci in its new French translation. They noted passages on perspective in which da Vinci advises young painters to make studies on sheets of glass set up before a landscape. By looking through the glass like a window, for example, and tracing a row of trees regularly spaced at the edge of a field, a novice could investigate the rate at which objects appear to diminish in size as they recede into the distance. But da Vinci never recommended using glass as a ground for a finished painting. It would never last. When da Vinci, elsewhere in the book, addressed the question of permanence, he gives the following prescription: “A painting made on thick copper, covered with white enamel, then painted upon with colors of enamel, returned to the fire, and fused, is more durable than sculpture.”
Illustration 4.
Detail of Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Last Supper*, 1498

A picture made this way would be impervious to cracks, scratches or virtually any kind of wear and tear. But da Vinci himself never used a fired enamel technique, or if he did, his works in the medium have been lost and forgotten. His largest and most influential painting, by contrast, is so fragile that, even as it was being created, it started to disintegrate. The Last Supper, executed in a mysterious tempera technique on a layer of pitch mixed with gesso, immediately began to separate from the wall and fall away (figure 3 and 4). Soon after da Vinci’s death, patches of mold appeared, and the surface was attacked from behind by salts and moisture, which seemed to ooze out of the mortar in the wall. Seen at close range, all that was left was a field of blots. Restoration efforts were initiated at once and continued, with limited success, to the present day. But as the physical painting faded away, the image of The Last Supper gathered force and grew more complex in the minds of those who traveled to Milan to see it. In 1850 Theophile Gautier wrote: “The first impression made by the marvelous fresco is in the nature of a dream. All trace of art has disappeared; it seems to float on the surface of the wall, which absorbs it as a light vapor. It is the ghost of a painting, the specter of a masterpiece returned to earth.”

(7)
The wreck of an artwork can take on a dramatic life of its
own, like a play with many acts over time as accidents accumulate and deterioration continues. Marcel Duchamp noticed this process, became its student and critic, and learned to make use of it for his own purposes. He saw America as a wide-open landscape, free from the obstacles of battered relics. Europe, however, was crowded with churches and museums stuffed to their roof-lines with old war-horses. He told Calvin Tomkins that the European terrain made life difficult for its young, independent-minded artists: “When they come to produce something of their own the tradition is indestructible. They’re up against all those centuries and all those miserable frescoes which no one can even see any more – we love them for their cracks.”

Illustration 5.
So Duchamp took a lesson from history. He set up in the New World, in Philadelphia, his own bettered relic, the masterwork of a tradition with no past that leads nowhere. It is indestructible precisely because it is so fragile. In the late 1930s, Duchamp’s glass paintings took on another life as miniatures in his portable museum, the Boîte-en-Valise. He had three of them printed on sheets of celluloid, the clear plastic that, when coated with light sensitive silver salts, becomes photographic film. Celluloid serves as a good stand-in for glass in miniature, except for one property – it is very flexible, and cannot be cracked. In his reproductions of the glasses the component that Duchamp fretted over longest was the network of cracks. He wanted it reproduced as accurately as possible. Photographic cracks, printed in black ink as part of the image, would not suffice. Fortunately celluloid scratches easily. Duchamp made from acetate two miniature scratching stencils, with cuts that follow the breaks in Nine Malic Moulds and The Large Glass (figures 5 and 6). Each of the 300 reproductions was scratched by hand with an etching
needle. The surfaces of the miniature glasses were interrupted. They were as good as broken.

Notes:

1. Lawrence Steefel writes “As Duchamp remarked to me in 1965 the cracks brought the glass back into the world. When asked where it had been before this he threw up his hands and laughed.” Lawrence Steefel, *The Position of La Mariée Mise à Nu Par Ses Célibataires Même* (Anne Arbor: Xerox University Microfilms, 1975 [1960]), 22.


3. Ibid., 41.


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**Marcel Duchamp’s Three Threads**

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![Image](image-url)
In 1963 the Pasadena Art Museum in California presented Marcel Duchamp’s first retrospective exhibition. Organized by the young curator Walter Hopps, this exhibition introduced, for the first time, Duchamp’s works to the West Coast’s spectators and artists. The exhibition space was designed according to themes based on Duchamp’s works. His early Cubist-influenced paintings (including two versions of *Nude Descending A Staircase*, 1911-12) were shown in one room, and a replica of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, 1915-23, was shown in another room with some of Duchamp’s ready-mades (such as *Fountain*, *Paris Air*, and *Traveler’s Folding Item*). The exhibition’s announcement implicitly mentioned an ongoing Duchamp project (which was, in fact, *Étant Donnés*, Duchamp’s famous posthumous work, revealed to the public after his death) but no evidence of this project was displayed at the exhibition.

Juan Antonio Ramírez, Professor of Art History at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and author of several books on art, architecture and film, has written *Duchamp: love and death, even* along the same themes as the Pasadena Art Museum’s retrospective, with an interesting and telling twist of perspective. The book focuses on three topics: Duchamp’s readymades, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, and *Étant Donnés*. In the last chapter, the book provides an appendix addressing Duchamp’s early paintings. A shift has been made from the importance of his early work (so carefully spotlighted in the retrospective exhibition) to the profound importance of Duchamp’s final piece.

*(1)*
First, Ramírez addresses the readymades and describes a “readymade” as a work of art that has been, prior to the artist’s handling, “‘already-made,’ or previously produced. The artist does not create, in the traditional sense of the word, but chooses from among the objects of the industrial world or (to a lesser degree) the world of nature.” Ramírez then summarizes Duchamp’s readymades according to their “degree of rectification,” the “complexity of the assemblage” and the “degree of necessity for manipulation […] and structure.”

Here, Ramírez tries to link the concept of the readymade to industrial production by highlighting the technical and material aspects of the readymade. On the other hand, he also suggests there is a sensual quality to the readymade. The form of the readymade renders its industrial counterpart an aesthetic sense, even an erotic one. Therefore, the readymade, for the author, presents us with a double character, showing us both industrial significance and erotic pleasure.
Following this, Ramírez spends two chapters discussing Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. Chapter Two begins the topic from the bachelor section of *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* and Chapter Three moves to the section of the bride. By referring to notes in the *Green Box*, the author explicates the functions of the mechanical apparatuses in the bachelor section. For example, he gives a detailed chart showing the elements and significance of the malic moulds. The author compares Duchamp’s apparatuses with those of the industrial culture of that time, and he indicates that these industrial designs inspired Duchamp.
The bachelor section illuminates a precise and solid blue print of a mechanical device which reveals a masculine sense. In opposition to this masculine sense, the bride section conveys a feminine sense. The left side of Female Pendant (“Bride Hanging” or, the top portion of The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even) in 1913 shows a female figure, and the composition of this female figure echoes the optical concern in Oculist Witness of the bachelor section. Ramírez further suggests that a transparent body is contained in the area known as the Milky Way of the bride’s section. “The human being with his halo can be contained within the cinematic expansion [otherwise known as the Milky Way] of the bride.” Finally, an electronic circulation between the bride and the bachelor functions according to the devices of Tender of Gravity, Tripod, Rod, and Black Ball. This circulation implies, perhaps, the sexual relationship between woman and man (the bride and the bachelor).

In chapters four and five, the author undertakes the shift from The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even to Duchamp’s most secretive work, ÉtantDonnés. According to a Green Box note, Ramírez draws a possible link between these
major pieces. He believes that Étant Donnés continues what Duchamp didn’t finish in The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even. Also, Ramírez shows how several of Duchamp’s early works relate to Étant Donnés. La Bagarre d’Austerlitz (1921), for instance, corresponds to the Spanish wooden door of Étant Donnés. He surveys Duchamp’s oeuvre and finds direct inspiration for the design of not only the door, but also the brick wall, landscape, table, electrical installation, and female torso in Étant Donnés. Ramírez elaborates upon the construction of Étant Donnés in detail.

Both Maria Martins and Teeny Duchamp served as models for the piece and Ramírez asserts that Étant Donnés was begun as a result of the erotic influence of Martins upon Duchamp. (She was later “displaced” by Teeny Duchamp.) The author places the composition of the female torso of Étant Donnés into the context of some nineteenth-century figurative paintings and twentieth-century surrealist works. The works of Jean Léon Gerôme, Courbet, and Cézanne, for example, directly or indirectly influenced Duchamp’s design of the female figure. Also, the photos of Man Ray and Hans Bellmer and the paintings of Magritte, Max Ernst and Paul Delvaux evoke a female figure, similar to the one in Étant Donnés, which epitomizes surrealist fascination with the erotic and the sexual.
In the last chapter, Ramírez introduces Duchamp’s earliest eight paintings: *Landscape in Blainville* (1902), *Nude in Black Stockings* (1910), *Portrait of Dr. Dumouchel* (1910), *Paradise* (1910-11), *Spring* (1911), *Dulcinea* (1911), *Coffee Mill* (1911), *Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2* (1912), and *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes* (1912). These paintings, created during Duchamp’s Paris period before 1912, show the influence of late-Impressionism, Symbolism, Fauvism, and Cubism on his early career. Ramírez describes and captures Duchamp’s growth as an artist during this time, noting that, finally in 1912, with *Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*, “Duchamp had exhausted the possibilities of this thousand-year-old art form at the same rapid pace as his nudes— that is to say, vertiginously.”

In *Duchamp: love and death*, even, Ramírez fails to deal with several key points. He classifies *Trois stoppages* (“Three Standard Stoppages”) of 1913-14 as a readymade while most
Duchamp scholars don’t attribute the work as a readymade. Duchamp explained the process of this work to Richard Hamilton: “Three canvases were put on long stretchers and painted Prussian blue. Each thread was dropped on a canvas and varnish was dropped on the thread to bond it on a canvas. The canvases were later cut from the stretchers and glued down onto strips of plate glass.”

Trois stoppages, in this sense, is Duchamp’s experiment of chance, not a readymade. Second, Ramírez draws a direct link between the female figure (called the “Sacrificial Dummy” in his book) and Duchamp’s intimate relationship with Maria Martins. In fact, Duchamp already had a similar idea in mind, and it appears in note 142 of the Green Box. In the note, there is a figure’s head and the inscription: Give The Object., considered in its physical appearance. (color, mass, form.)/define (graphically i.e. by means of pictorial conventions). The mould of the object./By mould is meant: from the pt. Of view of form and color. So perhaps Martins is not the key to Duchamp’s ideas about designing a female figure.

On the other hand, Ramírez offers some convincing and intriguing interpretations of Duchamp’s art. He shows that Duchamp’s experience of life does not tie in with his final
creation and that love, intellectual rigor and sense of humor play out as the three threads that shape the core of Duchamp’s works. Furthermore, because Duchamp’s art reflects his particular interest in industrial culture and society, Duchamp challenges the orthodox discourse of traditional art and builds a provocative route for the modern art that later prompts the emerging of contemporary art in the 1960’s and 70’s. Duchamp’s oeuvre maps the avant-garde art and establishes him as one of the most important figures of twentieth-century art and culture.

Notes:

1. The whole announcement is folded in half. The front view shows Duchamp looking at the viewer and standing close to a door as if he is entering a room from outside. The door is reminiscent of Duchamp’s Door: 11, rue Larrey, 1927. The design of the back view, showing a hole, foreshadows Duchamp’s two peep holes on the door of Étant Donnés.

When Hopps was working on the exhibition, he had an interview with Duchamp. He asked Duchamp: “If there were something you had been working on privately, would this have been the show that you would have wanted it to be seen in?” And then Hopps noted: “After this exchange, I was quite convinced in my own mind that time would turn up something important, as indeed it did.” (Bonnie Clearwater ed., West Coast Duchamp, Florida: Grassfield Press, 1991, p. 121.)

Later, Hopps realized of course that Duchamp had been secretly working on Étant Donnés.

2. The readymades are examined under “technical aspects and materials,” “geometrical and/or speculative aspects,” “erotic significance,” “relations with the large
glass,” “other aspects.”

3. According to the note in the Green Box, it says that “this angle will express the necessary and sufficient twinkle of the eye.” (Author’s italics.)

4. Étant Donnés: 1. La chute d’eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage.
