

## COMBINATION IN DUCHAMP (1.0.0)

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### 1. The Large Glass

#### A

In the work of Marcel Duchamp, we find a method of combination. This method was used to go beyond purely retinal art, a purity that reached its most complete expression in the work of Gustave Courbet. In this purely retinal approach, there is only the visual image devoid of any ideas that thought can engage with. Duchamp acknowledged that before Courbet painting had expressed ideas that could be religious, philosophical, or moral,<sup>1</sup> yet they were no longer operative in artworks that sought only to please the eye. As he approached these problems, Duchamp aimed to reconnect art with the movements of thought, but he wanted to invent rather than simply reproduce the traditional ideas of art history. He could not simply return to the visual style and ideology of Christian art. This invention required a new combination, a new visual style with a new set of ideas. The end result would be *The Large Glass (La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même—The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even)*.

The origin of the combination used in *The Large Glass* can be traced from a number of sources. In 1911 Duchamp painted *Coffee Mill*, a work which depicted a kitchen utensil with an emphasis on its nature as a machine. Duchamp explained that this work was the first time he became interested in machine forms.<sup>2</sup> But the work is not merely a realistic representation: it includes an arrow that indicates the direction that the machine turns, and repeated instances of the handle to show its possible positions.<sup>3</sup> By including the idea of movement, there is not merely a visual form, but a diagrammatic expression that is not just for the

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne (1966), published as: *Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp* (1967). Paris, Éditions Pierre Belfond, p. 74. Translated by Padgett, R. (1979) *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*. London, Thames and Hudson, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Dorothy Norman (1953), in: *Art in America* (July–August 1969). Vol. 57, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

eye but is also for thought. The work is not only something to be looked at because the arrow and handle positions bring to the image an aspect of the ideational. Duchamp said that *Coffee Mill* was the source of things that came later in *The Large Glass*.<sup>4</sup> It would provide a basis for the further development of his work, a way in which to open a new area. But there is also another fundamental influence that would transform his view of machines.

The origin of the combination used in *The Large Glass* can also be traced from when Duchamp saw Raymond Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique* at the theatre in 1912:

It was fundamentally Roussel who was responsible for my glass, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. From his *Impressions d'Afrique* I got the general approach. This play of his which I saw with Apollinaire helped me greatly on one side of my expression. I saw at once I could use Roussel as an influence. I felt that as a painter it was much better to be influenced by a writer than by another painter. And Roussel showed me the way.<sup>5</sup>

It was the originality of Roussel's work that impressed Duchamp, who explained that he had never seen anything like it, that it was something that was completely independent and untouched by the preceding ideas of great names and influences.<sup>6</sup> For *The Large Glass*, what Duchamp gained from Roussel was a new way to approach the idea of machinery; after seeing Roussel's play, he moved from the everyday machinery of grinding coffee to the Rousselian world of machines that can only belong to the imagination. *Impressions d'Afrique* includes, for example, a performance from a thermo-mechanical orchestra, demonstrated as part of a grand gala alongside the coronation of an African king.<sup>7</sup> Its inventor, the chemist Bex, wheels his machine onto a stage in a glass cage. The various

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Calvin Tomkins (1964), published as: *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews* (2013). New York, Badlands Unlimited, pp. 47–48.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with James Johnson Sweeney (1946), published as: 'The Great Trouble with Art in this Country', in: Sanouillet, M. & Peterson, E. eds. (1973) *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*. New York, Oxford University Press, p. 126.—In all quotations, minor changes such as capitalisation will be done silently. Any other changes will be noted. All italics are in the original.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> *Impressions d'Afrique* (1910). Paris, Alphonse Lemerre, p. 52–55. Translated by Polizzotti, M. (2011) *Impressions of Africa*. Champaign, Dalkey Archive Press, pp. 33–34.—The thermo-mechanical orchestra was listed as one of the theatrical version's principle scenes in a programme for the performance at the Théâtre Antoine in 1912. One of Duchamp's notes in *The Green Box* (1934) also includes a reference to a musical sculpture, and a note dated 1913 in *À l'Infinitif* (1967) refers to mechanical music. (See Schwarz, A. (1969) *Notes and Projects for The Large Glass*. London, Thames and Hudson, notes 44 and 45. *Salt Seller*, p. 31 and p. 75.)—Where possible, this will be the format for all references to Duchamp's notes. Any English translations are from *Salt Seller*.

musical instruments inside the cage are controlled by a mechanism powered by an electric motor. This motor powers a heat source contained in a cylinder, and a cooling substance contained in another, where the differences in temperature affect the instruments due to the properties of a new metal that the machine's inventor calls bexium. This purely fictional material provides the core functional mechanism of the orchestra. As a result of the changes in temperature, the movement of the bexium can depress certain springs, which in turn activate or deactivate a given keyboard or group of pistons. The result is a virtuoso performance of an infinitely rich orchestral repertoire.<sup>8</sup>

As a continuation of his experiments in *Coffee Mill*, Duchamp's innovation was to combine the literary influences from Roussel with his own approach to visual expression, an expression he described as being completely divorced of straight realism that arose from going beyond his previous association with cubism and interest in kinetic painting.<sup>9</sup> The result was a conceptual art, an art for both thought and the eye. *The Large Glass* contains a narrative of functioning machines as the basis of the idea it combines with its visual form. But Duchamp's machines are not for making music; they are machines for desiring.

## B

Begun in 1912, the development of the ideas for *The Large Glass* is captured in the notes which Duchamp would later publish in *The Green Box*. These notes present the narrative of the glass. They unfold the idea of a work of two principal elements, belonging to separated realms: an upper realm belonging to the bride machine, and a lower realm belonging to the bachelor machine. The bachelors consist of nine malic moulds, each shaped according to a certain mundane profession.<sup>10</sup> They receive an illuminating gas, which is formed into a gas casting according to the shape of each mould.<sup>11</sup> The gas from the bachelors is then cut into bits as it enters their capillary tubes.<sup>12</sup> Then, in a playfully imaginative phys-

<sup>8</sup> *Impressions d'Afrique*, pp. 55–61. English, pp. 34–38.

<sup>9</sup> *Apropos of Myself* (9 November 1962), an audio recording of a lecture at the Cleveland Museum of Art, ~23:25–23:40. A transcript of the same lecture delivered at the Baltimore Museum of Art is available from: [https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDP\\_B002\\_F004\\_001/](https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDP_B002_F004_001/), p. 10. These page numbers will refer to those in blue ink on the transcript itself.—The origin of this visual expression can be seen in a number of Duchamp's paintings, for example, *Bride and Transition of Virgin into a Bride*, both from 1912.

<sup>10</sup> *The Green Box*, notes 91 and 92. *Salt Seller*, p. 51.—The notes show that initially the idea was to have eight moulds. The full list of nine professions is: priest, department store delivery boy, gendarme, cuirassier, policeman, undertaker, flunkey, busboy, and station-master.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, note 92. P. 51. See also the interview with Pierre Cabanne, p. 85. English, pp. 48–49.

<sup>12</sup> *The Green Box*, note 98. *Salt Seller*, p. 53.

ical process, the gas is stretched in its unit of length and breaks into unequal spangles.<sup>13</sup> The parasol captures these spangles<sup>14</sup> and liquefies them;<sup>15</sup> then, after being directed downwards, they cause a splash after falling down the slopes of flow.<sup>16</sup> From here, in their upward trajectory, the drops of liquefied gas are dazzled by the oculist witnesses, forming them into a sculpture of drops on their way towards the realm of the bride.<sup>17</sup> They also pass through the scissors, a device whose movement is oriented upon an axis created by its connection to a chocolate grinder<sup>18</sup> and is generated by a water-powered mechanism called the chariot, where a playful physics appears again in the statement that the chariot is free from all gravity in the horizontal plane.<sup>19</sup>

The final element of the bachelors' realm was initially described as a principal cog where the eroticism is revealed, as something steam-driven that could change its mechanical state into that of an internally combusting desire-motor, an element that remains distinct from the bride's realm but nonetheless constitutes an electrical connection with it.<sup>20</sup> The process of this final element was meant to end in something within the realm of the bride, a clockwork mechanism, specifically that of an electrical clock of the type found in railway stations, where the effects of the bachelors' electrical stripping take place.<sup>21</sup> The notes make clear that there was an intention for the further development of these ideas, of both the desire-motor and the clock, particularly the latter in terms of the throbbing jerk of its minute hand.<sup>22</sup> Yet both of them were superseded by something else: the final element of the bachelors' realm became a clockwork mechanism called the boxing match (combat de boxe), in which the descent of mechanical rams is controlled by the movement of the combat marble (bille de combat).<sup>23</sup> The marble ascends three summits, and at the points of contact with

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. See also note 100. Pp. 48–49.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. P. 49.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., note 101. P. 50.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., notes 116 and 118. P. 66 and p. 63. The slopes of flow were not depicted in the final unfinished version of *The Large Glass*, but are included in Duchamp's sketch *The Large Glass Completed* from 1965–1966.

<sup>17</sup> *The Green Box*, note 119. *Salt Seller*, p. 65.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., note 128. Pp. 60–61.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., note 132. P. 57.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., note 1, parts 1, 2, and 3. P. 39.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., part 7. P. 43.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., parts 2 and 7–8. P. 39 and p. 43.—We also know that the note which discusses the desire-motor and clock is very early because it still refers to *The Large Glass* as a work on canvas. (Ibid., part 1. P. 39.)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., note 123. P. 66. Unlike the desire-motor and the clock, the boxing match is another element that was included in *The Large Glass Completed*. However, Duchamp did say that the boxing match wasn't originally incorporated into the glass because he felt that it wasn't quite what he wanted (a later interview with James Johnson Sweeney (1956),

the second and third, the rams descend, carrying with them the garment of the bride, a garment that appears as an aspect of the borderline between the two separated realms.<sup>24</sup> In this process, the role that the desire-motor and the clock were meant to provide—i.e. an aspect of the stripping that originates from the bachelors—is now constituted by another element that belongs to the bachelors' realm; at this point the design of the machines was changed, yet their purpose remained the same.<sup>25</sup>

As the drops of liquefied gas reach towards the bride's realm, we find that they are restricted to the realm of the bachelors. The actual drops themselves are unable to pass to the other side; instead, it is their mirror image that is generated within the bride's realm.<sup>26</sup> The bachelors and the bride constitute two fundamentally separate natures. The bachelors are depicted in a lower realm of gas, water, and clockwork machinery. The terms 'cheap' and 'crude' were applied to certain elements that belong to it.<sup>27</sup> It is a realm that is in contrast with that of the bride's: the bride belongs to an upper realm of filament-generated light and internal combustion—a realm of the most recent technology above one of raw materials, clockwork mechanisms, and the light of gas lamps.<sup>28</sup>

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published as: 'Regions which are not ruled by time and space...', in: *Salt Seller*, p. 129).

<sup>24</sup> *The Green Box*, note 123. *Salt Seller*, p. 66.

<sup>25</sup> The notes do not make clear whether the electrical stripping of the bachelors—as opposed to the purely mechanical stripping via the descent of the rams—was meant to be an aspect of the boxing match. But if we are inclined towards understanding the narrative of *The Large Glass* as a whole, then we must assume that a source of electricity was somewhere present in the bachelor machine. Other notes published posthumously discuss a desire-dynamo that belongs to the bachelors. (See Matisse, P. ed. (1983) *Marcel Duchamp, Notes*. Boston, G.K. Hall, notes 98 and 112. For an image of the dynamo, see *ibid.*, note 163.) There are also notes that describe how the motion of the combat marble is set off by the rising liquefied gas exploding after a collision with a sponge, where the marble is also magnetised (see *ibid.*, notes 140 and 153). The desire-dynamo is connected with the sponge (*ibid.*, note 162), and plays a role in the explosion (*ibid.*, note 143), yet neither the dynamo itself nor the sponge were included in *The Large Glass Completed*. Whether it's possible—on the basis of the physics of electromagnetism—that the movement of a magnetised combat marble alone could somehow be responsible for generating electricity is entirely speculative. Overall, it appears that Duchamp never reached a final position on the presence of an electrical source in the bachelor machine.

<sup>26</sup> *The Green Box*, note 119. *Salt Seller*, p. 65.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, notes 131 and 132. P. 56 and pp. 56–57. In the notes, these lists of attributes are crossed out.

<sup>28</sup> This contrast is also expressed in the way that the bachelors belong to a scene depicted in a three-dimensional classical perspective, whereas the bride is an image of a figure reflecting a geometrical fourth dimension. (See the interview with Richard Hamilton (1959), in: *Audio Arts Magazine* (1975). Vol. 2, no. 4. Cassette recording: side A, ~22:40–23:30.) There is a possible implicit reference to the four-dimensional nature of the bride in *The Green Box*, where a note mentions her true form in contrast to ordinary perspective. (See note 69. *Salt Seller*, p. 45.) A note from *À l'Infinif* describes the fourth

The bride hangs from the upper limit of her realm, and is in no way obliged to visibly conform to the laws of weighted balance.<sup>29</sup> The bride is a motor that runs on love gasoline,<sup>30</sup> a substance secreted by osmosis via an element called the wasp<sup>31</sup> and ignited with the sparks from the bride's desire-magneto.<sup>32</sup> The bride communicates to the bachelors through her top inscription, a flesh-coloured milky way which contains three spaces for the presentation of alphabetical units.<sup>33</sup> This communication is concerned with the nine shots,<sup>34</sup> i.e. the points of impact for the mirrored drops of the nine bachelors. It is a linguistic response to the bachelors' physical process; it is a sense responding to something real.

The stripping of the bride is conducted by the bride and the bachelors together: among the ways that the stripping takes place, the notes explain that the sparks from the bride's desire-magneto are combined with the electrical sparks produced by the bachelors,<sup>35</sup> where the latter are apparently transmitted to the bride via the long metal conductor that reaches towards the borderline from the bride's body.<sup>36</sup> The dual-origin of this electricity shows, in a purely physical way, how the bride accepts the bachelors' stripping: the bride machine is a two-stroke motor—she generates one stroke; the bachelors generate the other.<sup>37</sup> Although they are presented as opposed in their respective natures, the bride and the bachelors do not operate in opposition to each other but operate together. The notes explain how *The Large Glass* itself is an attempt to portray this combined operation:

Donc développer graphiquement

1° l'épanouissement en mise à nu par les célibat.

2° l'épanouissement en mise à nu imaginative de la mariée désirante.

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dimension as something virtual (*Salt Seller*, p. 99), and another defines the four-dimensional continuum as essentially the mirror of the three-dimensional continuum. (Note 5. *Salt Seller*, p. 92.) Duchamp did admit, however, that the fourth dimension was something that you talked about without knowing what it was. (Interview with Pierre Cabanne, p. 34. English, p. 24.)

<sup>29</sup> *The Green Box*, note 1, part 3. *Salt Seller*, p. 39. In this connection, note one also mentions a gallows.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, note 66. Pp. 43–44.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, note 70. P. 45.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, note 66. P. 44.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, notes 77, 81, and 82. P. 38 and p. 36.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, note 82. P. 36.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, note 66. P. 44.

<sup>36</sup> See *ibid.*, note 1, part 5. P. 42.—Such a transmission along the horizontal dividing point between the two realms seems to have appealed to Duchamp from an artistic point of view; there is a note that reads: “*L'électricité en large*. Seule utilisation possible de l'électricité ‘dans les arts’.”—“*Electricity breadthwise*. The only possible utilisation of electricity ‘in the arts’.” (*The 1914 Box* (1914), note 39. *Salt Seller*, p. 23.)

<sup>37</sup> *The Green Box*, note 66. *Salt Seller*, p. 44.

3° Des 2 développements graphiques obtenus, trouver leur conciliation, qui soit « l'épanouissement » sans distinction de cause.

Mixture, composé physique des 2 causes (célibat. et désir imaginaire) inanalysable par la logique.

Develop graphically

1st the blossoming into the stripping by the bach.

2nd the blossoming into the imaginative stripping by the bride-desiring

3rd From the 2 graphic developments obtained by their conciliation, which should be the "blossoming" without causal distinction.

Mixture, physical compound of the 2 causes (bach. and imaginative desire) unanalysable by logic.<sup>38</sup>

In the stripping of the bride, there is the bride's own imagination combined with the physical operation of the bachelors. The unison of these two aspects is beyond logic but not unthinkable, beyond classical physics but not beyond sense.<sup>39</sup> Through the depiction of these mechanisms of imagination and physical nature, *The Large Glass* shows us the various processes involved in the bride's blossoming: Duchamp described one of them as the sum total of the bride's splendid vibrations, as forming the image of a motorcar climbing a slope in a low gear.<sup>40</sup> The glass shows us the final moments of the bride before reaching orgasm (jouissance).<sup>41</sup> It shows us the approach towards the attaining of desire rather than a desire attained.

## C

*The Large Glass* was born from the combination of art and literature; it involves, not just an image, but a narrative of ideas—not just something visual, but something which engages directly with thought. Concerning the relationship between the visual expression and the ideas, Duchamp explained that, even though he had "tried in that big glass to find a completely personal and new expression, the final product was to be a wedding of mental and visual reactions. In other words, the ideas in the glass are more important than the actual visual realisation."<sup>42</sup> This combination of the mental and the visual produced the unique result

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., note 1, part 7. P. 42.

<sup>39</sup> Another example of a combined operation is found in the handler of gravity, an element included in *The Large Glass Completed* that appears attached to the borderline in the bride's realm: it dances to the will of the descending rams of the boxing match and is also moved by the iridescent flame of the bride's filament substance, a flame that licks the handler's ball, displacing it as it pleases. (*The Green Box*, note 123 and 72. *Salt Seller*, p. 66 and 48.)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., note 1, parts 6 and 8. P. 42 and p. 43.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., part 7. P. 43.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with George Heard Hamilton (1959), in: *Audio Arts Magazine* (1975). Vol. 2,



that Duchamp's artistic instincts were searching for:

This welding of two different sources of inspiration gave me a satisfactory answer in my research for something that had not been previously attempted. Being the young man who wants to do something by himself and not copy the others, not use too much of the tradition, my research was in that direction—to find some way of expressing myself without being a painter, without being a writer, without taking one of these labels, and yet producing something that would be an inner product of myself. The two things—mixing up the ideas and their visual representation—attracted me as a technique, if it has to be a technique after all.<sup>43</sup>

Through the introduction of the conceptual, *The Large Glass* involves a unique use of words; it is not purely literary, yet not purely visual.<sup>44</sup> The notes provide the depth of narrative to the art; they are the explanations that enable the spectator to see the meaning of the machines. The glass requires the notes to supply a way for thought to engage with the ideas and mechanical operations depicted in visual form. It is not a visual work separate from its textual and diagrammatic explanations; it is a work whose experience lies in the efforts made to understand its obscure workings, where both the visual object and the notes create a work for thought to engage with just as much the eye: “les deux éléments, verre pour les yeux, texte pour l'oreille et l'entendement, devaient se compléter et surtout s'empêcher l'un l'autre de prendre une forme esthétique-plastique ou littéraire”—“the two elements, glass for the eye and text for the ears and the understanding, were to complement each other and, above all, prevent the other from taking an aesthetic-plastic or literary form.”<sup>45</sup>

The glass itself is a combination of the ideational with the visual, a combination that is accentuated through the glass being combined with the notes which elaborate it. The notes constitute another higher-level combination that goes beyond the dimensions of the glass: the glass itself is combined with something that exists outside its own form, yet the two fundamentally belong together. Duchamp acknowledged that you can't ask the public to look at the diagrammatic explanations in *The Green Box* while looking at the glass itself, which makes understanding the glass more difficult, but despite the separation between them, the glass should be appreciated with the text to inform it.<sup>46</sup> The two are

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no. 4. Cassette recording: side A, ~7:50–8:10.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., ~8:15–9:10.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., ~10:20–10:40.

<sup>45</sup> Letter to Jean Suquet (25 December 1949), in: Suquet, J. (1974) *Miroir de la Mariée*. Paris, Flammarion, p. 247. This translation appears in Tomkins, C. (2014) *Duchamp: A Biography*. New York, The Museum of Modern Art, pp. 3–4. Translation altered.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Joan Bakewell, from the BBC broadcast of *Late Night Line-Up* (15 June 1968), ~5:45–6:20.



not only connected but were made for each other.<sup>47</sup> The notes are the expression of the literary aspect of the glass in words; the glass is the expression of the visual aspect of the notes. With the two sides combined, the one supports the other, the other supports the one.

There is a certain combinational structure that belongs to the glass, a way in which it has been formulated through combination itself (see figure 1). The glass, which is a combination of narrative and the visual, is combined with *The Green Box*, itself a combination of text and image. As well as this external combination, there are also other internal combinations that create the structure of the work. On the visual side, there are the materials used: paint and glass, and the methods of expression in the work's construction: the deliberate precision of mechanical drawing and chance—alongside the precise depiction of perspective, there are the contingent positions of the nine shots, generated by firing a matchstick with a painted tip out of a toy cannon,<sup>48</sup> and the lines of the capillary tubes, generated by the random fall of lengths of string from a set height, where the string distorts itself “*as it pleases*” (“*à son gré*”).<sup>49</sup> On the narrative side, there is a combination of the parallel situations of the bachelor machine and the bride machine, and the dualities of their respectively crude and advanced oppositional natures: gas lamps and filament bulbs, clockwork and internal combustion, physicality and language. These oppositional combinations create an effect, a narrative divergence within the work itself. The glass combines the differences in the nature of two separated realms; it consists of the two panes of glass displaying opposing ideas.

Through the influence of Roussel's machine world, Duchamp created a new set of literary ideas to combine with his own unique visual form. The combination of literature and art was not chosen at random; it was chosen to solve specific problems, to achieve specific aims. Duchamp desired to remain committed to visual art, but he wanted to go beyond the purely retinal. This tension is expressed in the work; the two sides had to be reconciled through the operation of combining influences. The combination of literature and art allowed the conceptual to reappear in his work, to be reborn in a new visual form. It must be the problem that defines the direction; if we are dissatisfied with a certain issue in

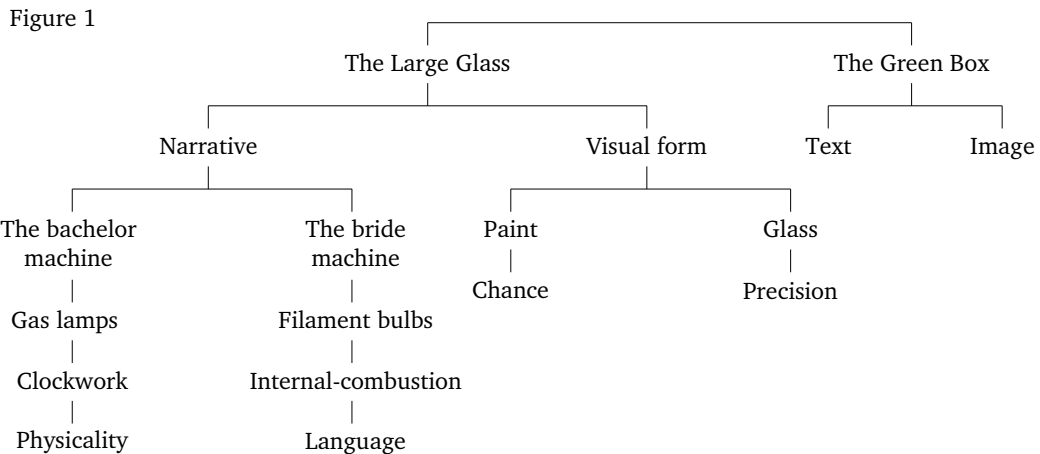
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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Calvin Tomkins, p. 78.—Although *The Green Box* is literally a box of loose notes, here Duchamp referred to it as a book. This might be because it was initially conceived as an accompanying catalogue, but this idea, like the glass itself, was left unfinished. (See the interview with Katharine Kuh (29 March 1961), in: *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists* (1962). New York, Harper Row, pp. 81–83. Available from: [https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE\\_B013\\_F049\\_002/](https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE_B013_F049_002/).)

<sup>48</sup> *The Green Box*, note 84. *Salt Seller*, p. 35.

<sup>49</sup> *The 1914 Box*, note 96. *Salt Seller*, p. 22. See also the painting *Network of Stoppages* from 1914.

painting, a literary mechanism arrives to solve it. The difficulty is in finding the correct things to combine, things that are distinct but also complement each other, things that are not merely placed alongside each other but combine in such a way that creates another unity, a unity that is grounded in them but creates movements of its own.



In order to emphasise the idea over the visual, to push the ideational side of his art towards greater prominence, Duchamp created the duality of the glass and *The Green Box*—the text and images of the latter could bring the ideational side of the former into view; the visual expression of the former could present a vision, although incomplete, of the latter’s narrative. *The Green Box* allows us to understand the combinational nature of the glass, the way it consists of a sequence of combinations of diverging elements, the way the literary side, as the narrative of the scene, is combinational in itself. *The Large Glass* is a work in which literature and art have become one in the visual depiction of literary ideas. In the bride’s stripping, we could say that both art and literature are developed together: a new aesthetic approach arises with a new narrative. The method of this creation is combination.

## 2. The Readymades

### A

Soon after Duchamp began developing the ideas for *The Large Glass*, in 1913 the readymades began appearing.<sup>50</sup> The first one was *Bicycle Wheel*, except in the beginning it was not yet considered a readymade art object: “It was not intended to be shown, to be seen. It was just for my own use, the way you have a pencil

<sup>50</sup> The work on *The Large Glass* itself took place from 1915 to 1923. See *Apropos of Myself*, ~29:40–29:50. P. 11.

sharpener, except that there was no usefulness to it.”<sup>51</sup> It was a combination of two useful objects, a stool and a wheel, in which their unified form made them useless. The result was something that simply existed in Duchamp’s room, but the idea would later grow into something else, allowing these objects to be given a new meaning. In thinking them through, he would realise their basis as a continuation of the path begun with *The Large Glass*: after the removal of the artist through mechanical drawing and the use of chance, the readymades became “a conclusion or consequence from the dehumanisation of the work of art.”<sup>52</sup>

As a development of Duchamp’s artistic ideas, the readymades also involve the combination of the literary and the visual. In choosing a readymade, the object qua artwork is given a title. Duchamp stated that “even if it doesn’t take a long time to choose a snow shovel from the hardware shop, even so, you have to think and put a word on it, and it’s half poetry and half plastic.”<sup>53</sup>

For Duchamp giving a title to something is a dimension of the artistic act:

J’ai mis des titres ... parce que ça ajoute une couleur, si vous voulez, au sens figuré du mot. C’est une couleur verbale. Ce qui m’intéresse n’est pas du tout dans le sens aussi descriptif, c’est-à-dire logique, descriptif. Par exemple, si c’est un porte-bouteille, je n’écris pas ‘porte-bouteille’. Vous pouvez être tranquille. Donc, ce qu’on fait ajoute une dimension donnée par les mots qui sont comme une palette avec des couleurs, n’est-ce pas? On met une couleur de plus qui est une couleur verbale.

I attach titles ... because it adds colour, if you like, in the figurative sense of the word. It’s a verbal colour. What interests me is not at all in that descriptive sense, I mean the logical descriptive sense. For example, if it’s a bottle rack, I don’t write ‘bottle rack’, you can rest assured. So by doing this we add a dimension given by the words, which are like a palette with colours, are they not? We add one more colour, which is a verbal colour.<sup>54</sup>

In the case of the readymade snow shovel, the title ‘*In Advance of the Broken Arm*’ was an instance of literary non-sense (or anti-sense as Duchamp would

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Calvin Tomkins, p. 73.

<sup>52</sup> Later interview with James Johnson Sweeney, p. 134.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Mike Wallace (12 December 1960), in: *Art History* (March 2000). Vol. 23, no. 1, p. 43.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with a journalist from the broadcast of *Le Nouveau Dimanche* (21 January 1968), ~0:20–2:15. Available from: <https://enseignants.lumni.fr/fiche-media/0000000593/marcel-duchamp.html>. My translation.—A similar point was made in the discussion of the title of his *Bush* painting from 1910–1911 in *Apropos of Myself*. (~11:30–11:45. P. 5.)—Regarding descriptive titles, it does appear that Duchamp himself used ‘bicycle wheel’ and ‘bottle rack’ to name those readymades (see the interview with Calvin Tomkins, p. 51).

say);<sup>55</sup> the title is not an explicit description of something external to itself, but concerns only its own absurdity. Duchamp explained that we are not meant to take the broken arm in question as related in any way to the act of shovelling snow.<sup>56</sup> The intention was for there to be nothing in the title that tells us about the object; the title simply tells us about itself.

Another example of absurdity can be found in the readymade entitled ‘*Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?*’, which was not a purely found object but one whose creation involved a certain intervention on the part of Duchamp. Concerning the title it is not merely descriptive because, as Duchamp explained, there is no connection between the marble sugar cubes and sneezing.<sup>57</sup> The absurdity of the title concerns what Duchamp referred to as the work’s literary aspect: there is a paradox between the idea of sneezing and the question ‘why not sneeze?’ because sneezing is not a voluntary act that we can perform at will.<sup>58</sup>

Alongside the titles, another use of language is found in the short sentence that was inscribed on certain readymades. “That sentence, instead of describing the object like a title, was meant to carry the mind of the spectator towards other regions more verbal.”<sup>59</sup> For example, on the readymade entitled *Comb*, we find the following: “3 ou 4 gouttes de hauteur n’ont rien à faire avec la sauvagerie”—“3 or 4 drops of height have nothing to do with savagery”.<sup>60</sup> Once again we are given a pure instance of absurdity, a form that does not concern the absurdity of an imaginary scene of literature, but one that concerns the absurd possibilities of language itself.<sup>61</sup>

A feature of Duchamp’s literary wordplay is the use of puns. The origin of this was, he later recalled, when the works of Jean-Pierre Brisset began circulating among his associates in Paris.<sup>62</sup> For Brisset the pun is the source of an essential

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne, p. 70. English, p. 41.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., pp. 96–97. English, p. 54.—Another example of literary non-sense in Duchamp is the ‘meme’ (‘even’) in the title of *The Large Glass*. (Ibid, p. 69. English, p. 40.)

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Jean-Marie Drot (1963), from the re-edited version of the television documentary *Jeu d’échec avec Marcel Duchamp* (1981). Directed by Jean-Marie Drot, ~45:05–45:45.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.—He also explained that the word ‘literary’ makes no sense here, but it was all he could think of.

<sup>59</sup> *Apropos of Readymades* (19 October 1961), a lecture at the New York Museum of Modern Art, in: *Salt Seller*, p. 141. (This discussion was later used in *Apropos of Myself*.)

<sup>60</sup> *Comb* (17 February 1916), in: *Salt Seller*, p. 175.

<sup>61</sup> Other examples of this from Duchamp include: “Quand on a un corps étranger entre les jambes, il ne faut pas mettre son coude près des siennes”—“When you have a foreign body between your legs, you must not put your elbows next to hers” (*Salt Seller*, p. 113); “Faut-il réagir contre la paresse des voies ferrées entre deux passages de trains?”—“Should one react against the laziness of railway tracks between the passage of two trains?” (ibid.).

<sup>62</sup> Earlier interview with James Johnson Sweeney, p. 126.

truth. Here we find a fundamental definition of sex as a primal excess, that is, in short, generated from the homophonic relationship between ‘sexe est’ (‘sex is’) and ‘ce excès’ (‘that excess’).<sup>63</sup> And although Duchamp may only have known this after reading a work of Jean Ferry’s first published in 1953, Roussel was also a master of puns.<sup>64</sup> While discussing a secret method that was only revealed posthumously, Roussel explained, for example, that the idea of Bex’s thermo-mechanical orchestra was based on the homonymic relationship between ‘sabot à degrés’ (‘clog with steps’) and ‘sabot à degrés’ (‘dud violin with degrees’).<sup>65</sup> Here the combination of music and temperature is based on a pun with the combination of clogs and steps, and the absurdity of the result is the ground of the absurdity of the constructed narrative.

With their use of puns, Brisset and Roussel became focused on the nature of language. In the case of Brisset, the purpose was to reach the absolute knowledge of a divine science; in the case of Roussel, it was to create narrative elements in the ongoing movements of his imaginative thought. In the case of Duchamp, puns were used as a way to develop the combination of the literary and the visual; they were used to create a particular form of the verbal colour that gave his work the operative element of ideas.

When spoken in French, the title ‘L.H.O.O.Q.’ sounds like ‘elle a chaud au cul’, potentially meaning ‘she has a hot arse’ or as Duchamp himself phrased it ‘there is fire down below’.<sup>66</sup> There is also the readymade perfume bottle entitled *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette*—a ‘beautiful breath’ that sounds like a reference to the beauty of Helen of Troy; and the original label’s description of the fragrance as ‘eau de violette’ (‘violet water’) becomes a nonsensical ‘eau de voilette’ (‘veil water’). This work also features an image of Duchamp’s alter-ego Rose Sélavy, whose name is often seen as a pun for ‘Eros c’est la vie’,<sup>67</sup> although Duchamp also explained that the double R was required when signing ‘en 6 qu’habillarrose

<sup>63</sup> *Les origines humaines (La science de Dieu, entièrement nouvelle)* (1913). 2nd ed. Angers, Chez l’auteur, pp. 87–88.

<sup>64</sup> See the interview with Pierre Cabanne, p. 70. English, p. 41. Ferry’s book is *Une étude sur Raymond Roussel* (1953). Paris, Arcanes.—*Chiquenaude* (1900) was an earlier published work of Roussel’s that clearly featured a pun for its opening and final lines, but it is unclear if Duchamp was aware of it.

<sup>65</sup> *Comment j’ai écrit certains de mes livres* (1935/1979). Paris, Gallimard, p. 17. Translated by Winkfield, T. (1995), in: *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*. Cambridge, Exact Change, p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Herbert Crehan, published as: ‘Dada’, in: *Evidence* (Fall 1961), p. 36. Available from: [https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDP\\_B014\\_F016\\_001/](https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDP_B014_F016_001/)—‘Au cul’ was also used as a pun for ‘a que’ in Brisset (*Les origines humaines*, p. 80).—And Duchamp once described *L.H.O.O.Q.* as a combination of readymade and iconoclastic Dada. (*Apropos of Myself*, ~42:35–42:50. P. 15.)

<sup>67</sup> There is a note where Duchamp describes ‘c’est la vie’ as an “easy pun” (“jeu de mots facile”) (*Marcel Duchamp, Notes*, note 286).

Sélavy' on Francis Picabia's *Oeil cacodylate*, potentially meaning 'Francis Picabia arroser la vie' ('toast to life Francis Picabia').<sup>68</sup>

Duchamp's view of language was one that allows an everyday practical function, but through the use of puns, there is also a greater potential:

For me, words are not merely a means of communication. You know, puns have always been considered a low form of wit, but I find them a source of stimulation both because of their actual sound and because of unexpected meanings attached to the interrelationships of disparate words. For me, this is an infinite field of joy—and it's always right at hand. Sometimes four or five different levels of meaning come through. If you introduce a familiar word into an alien atmosphere, you have something comparable to distortion in painting, something surprising and new.<sup>69</sup>

The inter-relationships between disparate words that Duchamp described here are expressed in the pun itself, relationships that, in any normal context would be ignored, become clearly manifest. Puns and their absurdity create a friction that brings language into view in a way that is distinct from how it seamlessly operates for the most part. And this is based on the way that a pun is, we might say, inherently combinational. As Roussel explained about his own pun-based method, which he understood as being related to rhyme, "in both cases there is unforeseen creation due to phonic combinations. It is essentially a poetic method." ("Dans les deux cas il y a création imprévue due à des combinaisons phoniques. C'est essentiellement un procédé poétique.")<sup>70</sup>

Yet Duchamp's view of language included a certain scepticism towards it:

Le langage est une erreur de l'humanité. Entre deux êtres qui s'aiment, le langage n'est pas ce qu'il y a de plus profond. Le mot est un galet très usé qui s'applique à trente-six nuances d'affectivité. On ne dit jamais rien d'intéressant. Le langage est commode pour simplifier, mais c'est un moyen de locomotion que je déteste. C'est pourquoi j'aime la peinture: une affectivité qui s'adresse à une

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne, p. 118. English, pp. 64–65. 'En 6 qu'habillarrose Sélavy' is what appears on the painting, but in the discussion with Cabanne, Duchamp says 'Pi qu'habilla Rose Sélavy'.—The combination of poetry and visual plasticity also runs through a number of other works. Another glass was given the title *To be Looked at with One Eye, Close to, for almost One Hour*, which Duchamp explained was meant to complicate things in a literary way. (Ibid, p. 107. English, p. 59.) A later painting, which includes the depiction of shadows cast by his readymades, was given the title *Tu m'*, which he explained allows you to add whatever verb you want as long as it begins with a vowel. (Ibid, p. 109. English, p. 60.)

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Katharine Kuh, pp. 88–89.

<sup>70</sup> *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*, p. 23. English, p. 16.—Roussel also remarked that just as rhymes can be used to compose both good or bad verse, we can also use this method to produce good or bad works (ibid.).

autre. L'échange se fait par les yeux.

Language is an error of humanity. Between two beings who love each other, language is not the deepest thing. The word is a very worn pebble that applies to thirty-six shades of affectivity. We never say anything interesting. Language is convenient for simplifying, but it's a means of transport that I hate. This is why I love painting: an affectivity that addresses another. The exchange is done through the eyes.<sup>71</sup>

How can we reconcile Duchamp's view of the pun as the source of an infinite field of joy and the point that language is an error of humanity? Duchamp stated that it is poetic language that he likes rather than essential concepts such as 'being' which, he added, do not exist at all in reality.<sup>72</sup> The generalisations of language are useful for communication, but they do not concern things in themselves or ways that a truth is grasped absolutely. But these limitations of language allowed Duchamp to open areas of linguistic creativity, to form the pun that for him results in joy. The denial of language and this joy come from the same source: the lack of any pure, essential connection to external things does not mean that language is rejected; it allows us to make other uses for words, according to our linguistic or artistic purposes. This apparent contradiction between joy and error only shows the multifarious ways in which language can be understood: it is not a contradiction per se but a moment in which one view of language is emphasised over another.

We can bring these ideas into a certain structural view of language, where its limitations are understood in terms of a fundamental gap between sense and referent: a word does not entirely capture what it refers to but generalises in order to allow itself to function. In poetic language, however, there can be a certain deliberate disregard for the referent; the imaginative expression can refer not just to a narrative scene but also to itself qua a linguistic aesthetic form. This self-referential nature of sense reaches its maximum limit in the example of logic, where sense can be seen as primarily concerned with the necessity that it expresses from itself. Although an understanding of the basic nature of the physical world is a prerequisite for logical statements to be meaningful, this self-reference is the fundamental linguistic form of logic in general, a self-reference of *logic as a whole* rather than one that appears *within logic* in the form of self-referential paradoxes.<sup>73</sup> In the example 'if p then q, and q then r, therefore p then r', we can

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Otto Hahn, published as: 'Entretien Marcel Duchamp', in: *Paris-Express* (23 July 1964), pp. 22–23. My translation.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne, p. 169. English, pp. 89–90.

<sup>73</sup> For example, the liar paradox and Russell's paradox.—It should also be said that the necessity in question here regards logic in general, rather than a particular intra-logical modal operator. In this way, the operator of possibility in modal logic expresses a *neces-*



understand that sense refers only to its own necessity; expressing no concrete content about the actual external world, it immediately expresses a formal syntactical relationship in abstract terms. As such an expression, its complete self-referral results in the gap between sense and referent being closed.

In the absurdity of Duchamp, there is also a self-referral of sense. In the line ‘3 or 4 drops of height have nothing to do with savagery’, sense includes terms that refer to objects of the world, but it primarily refers to its own absurdity. The absence of any serious attempt towards a surrounding context means that language concerns itself, its own internal possibilities rather than what it says about an external actuality. This self-reference further extends to the sonorous relationship between the terms of Duchamp’s puns. The pun that combines two words refers to itself, showing us another possibility that belongs to language. The gap between sense and referent as another sense is here not in the form of a title referring to the content of a book, but concerns a sense that refers to a multiplicity of senses in an immediate simultaneity through its own sound. But this is the initial transformation that the pun creates in sense; after this a reference to the world may reappear: the letters ‘L.H.O.O.Q.’, for example, can refer to the sexualised physicality of the Mona Lisa, but the primarily self-referential form of absurdity is another possible result: for example, the substitution of ‘eau de voilette’ for ‘eau de violette’.

For the purest possible form of self-reference in the remit of absurdity, we can provide the following: ‘if p then q, and q then r, therefore p then s’, where the absurd nature belongs to the way in which it presents itself in the likeness of logical validity without expressing any at all.<sup>74</sup> Similar to a pure necessity, the

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sary possibility through its formal position in logically valid arguments: it is necessary, for example, that if p and q is possible then p is possible and q is possible, i.e. ‘ $\diamond(p \wedge q) \rightarrow (\diamond p \wedge \diamond q)$ ’ is valid.

<sup>74</sup> The logical form may be absurd, but it may still express something true in practice: it may be that the contents of p and s are not independent from each other (which could be expressed in logical terms through the insertion of ‘and r then s’). For example, ‘if I do not wake up, then I cannot go to work, and if I cannot go to work, then I will not get paid, therefore, if I do not wake up, then I will not be able to pay the bills’ (which leaves ‘if I do not get paid, then I will not be able to pay the bills’ implicit). But this is not an issue in the conception of logic given here because such a lack of independence is based on something beyond the immediate sense of the argument, towards which the gap would be reopened.—Another example is given by Elizabeth Anscombe, where the necessary truth ‘if all x are y, and some x are z, then some y are z’ is concealed within the invalid ‘if p and q, then r’. (See *Introduction to Wittgenstein’s Tractatus* (1959/1965). New York, Harper & Row, pp. 31–33.) Does this mean that we must also say that ‘if p and q, then r’ is absurd? On a formal logical basis, if we see it as aiming towards logical validity, then we must. But we should also bear in mind that in these examples the level of absurdity is very low, but the purity is as high as possible: within their sense the absurdity is a minor aspect that belongs to the overall self-referential invalidity.

gap here is closed. In the example of necessity, it is a self-coherence that is referred to; in the examples of absurdity it is a self-incoherence, the latter pseudo-logical the former para-logical. In these ways we can see how the structure of the gap is altered according to the relation of sense towards itself, and how creativity in language can concern its closing and reopening. To be creative in language through the absurd is to experiment with the gap; in Duchamp the gap can be affected because sense has disregarded any serious concern for the referent. Duchamp's denial of language is an acknowledgment of its limitations, but these experiments, where language turns primarily to itself, are how these limitations can be disregarded. In abandoning the view that sense must involve a fundamental connection with something real beyond itself, Duchamp opened a field of creativity based on accentuating language's self-referential nature. To state the absurd is to produce a unique form of the gap between sense and referent that implicitly acknowledges the limitations of language while producing joy from it; this joy is found through the possibility of language to look beyond its limitations through self-reference. The joy and the denial do refer to the same language, only one that is taken from two different sides of its possible structural forms.

## B

The readymades were also a form in which Duchamp's views on defining art could be expressed:

In every century there's a new definition of art, meaning that there's no essential one, one that is good for all centuries. So if we accept the idea of trying not to define art, which is a very legitimate conception, then the readymade comes in as a sort of irony because it says: 'Here it is, a thing that I call art—I didn't even make it myself'. As we know 'art,' etymologically speaking, means 'to hand make.' And there instead of making it, it is ready-made. So it was a form of denying the possibility of defining art.<sup>75</sup>

Like the dry, precise visual style of *The Large Glass*, the readymades were an attempt to remove the artist from the artwork—the removal of personal expression, of an elaborate individual style or aesthetic taste, of the otherworldly virtuoso skill of the artist's hand. A readymade is, Duchamp explained, an iconoclastic gesture, involving the de-deification of artists, the lowering of their status in society.<sup>76</sup> "The idea was to find an object that had no attraction whatsoever from an aesthetic angle. This was not the act of an artist, but of a non-artist, an artisan

<sup>75</sup> Interview with George Heard Hamilton, ~4:05–4:50.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Francis Roberts, published as: 'I Propose to Strain the Laws of Physics', in: *Art News* (December 1968), p. 47. Available from: [https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE\\_B013\\_F050\\_001/](https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE_B013_F050_001/).

if you will.”<sup>77</sup> Duchamp aimed to bring the artist down from the pedestal created by nineteenth century aesthetic theory, to bring the artist back to the status of a worker or artisan, which had been the case for the ancient Greeks and during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.<sup>78</sup> This shows us the meaning of non-art for Duchamp: he explained that he was not an advocate of anti-art because, whether we are for or against something, it is only two sides of the same thing.<sup>79</sup> To bring himself out of the pure opposition of an anti-artist, of an artist that remains fundamentally tied to the object or idea that is opposed, he needed to find another ground from which to situate his practice: this ground was that of the non-artist, the artisan who makes both things and ideas like everyone else.<sup>80</sup>

The readymades show us the unreal quality that belongs to art, a quality that betrays the impossibility of an art that would consist of an eternal aesthetic validity. Regarding *Fountain*<sup>81</sup> Duchamp explained that he was “drawing attention to the fact that art is a mirage, a mirage exactly like an oasis that appears in the desert. It is very beautiful, until you are dying of thirst of course. But you don’t die in the field of art. The mirage is solid.” (“J’attirais l’attention que l’art est un mirage. Un mirage exactement comme dans le désert, l’oasis qui apparaît. C’est très beau jusqu’au moment où l’on crève de soif évidemment. Mais on ne crève pas de soif dans le domaine de l’art. Le mirage est solide.”)<sup>82</sup>

On the side of the artist, there is the reduction to the artisan; on the side of art, there is the reduction to a mirage. Through choosing these objects, Duchamp redefined the artistic act. The readymades did not concern the expressive depiction of an object but the decision to bring a pre-existing object into the context of art. The outcome of the creative act was not the object itself but a new sense and situation for it, a new association of ideas in new concrete visual surroundings. Duchamp explained that a definition of the readymade is that “the choice of the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> See *ibid.*—The distinction between the terms ‘an-artist’ and ‘anti-artist’ is discussed in the interview with Richard Hamilton (side B, ~3:50–4:30).

<sup>81</sup> There is sometimes confusion around whether Duchamp himself was the creator of *Fountain*, due to a letter to his sister Suzanne, where he wrote that one of his female friends sent it in under the masculine pseudonym ‘Richard Mutt’. (Letter from 11 April 1917, reproduced in: Naumann, F.M. ‘Affectueusement, Marcel’, in: *Archives of American Art Journal* (1982). Vol. 22, no. 4, p. 8.) Alfred Stieglitz, however, did assume Duchamp’s involvement despite this: “a young woman (probably at Duchamp’s instigation) sent a large porcelain urinal on a pedestal to the *Independent*.” (Letter to Georgia O’Keeffe from 19 April 1917, reproduced in: Greenough, S. (2011) *My Faraway One: Selected Letters of Georgia O’Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz, Volume One, 1915–1933*. New Haven, Yale University Press, p. 135.)

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Otto Hahn, p. 22. My translation.

artist is enough to transfer it from a functional or industrial form into what is supposed to be aesthetic but very different from aesthetic in general.”<sup>83</sup> The fabrication, in the dual sense of the making and the mirage, is still there in the distortion of the object’s usual context. We might say that the presence of the ordinary object is combined with the context of art which transforms both.

However, Duchamp also stated that the readymades have limits. He decided that he would not make too many of them, primarily to avoid repetition, to avoid the creation of a new conformity of artistic taste.<sup>84</sup>

If I had systematized the readymades I could have made a hundred thousand readymades in ten years, easily. They would have been fake, because they would have been quick, easily chosen, and then regretted a year later. I would be compromised. [*laughs*] ... Anything systematized becomes sterile very soon. There is nothing that has eternal value. It’s according to the way society takes it.<sup>85</sup>

Although the approach of the readymades towards the visual side of art was radically new, Duchamp realised that it could soon become very old through the pressure of repetition upon it. The readymades are a movement towards an extreme in that the visual side is nothing more than the pre-existing object itself, is nothing more than something pre-made, involving only the act of choosing on the part of the artist. As such they are limited in themselves: although an extreme can have its own importance, it will inevitably manifest itself as a dead-end once it has been reached. The readymades that involved a certain intervention by Duchamp were a possibility of further development, but this development would only involve greater and greater interventions, meaning that it could only return to a more conventional form of art. The pure readymades—*Bottle Rack* and *Fountain* for instance—could only be done a very limited number of times because the idea of their visual form is itself so limited. It was, however, an idea that had to be made. We must reach the limit in order for this limit to be demarcated as such; we must dwell within the dead-end in order to explore what we find there, but we must not be adverse towards turning from it in order to find another direction. As the expression of this limit belongs to the readymades themselves, their extreme form holds within itself a path that can only be followed so far. The readymades are an important idea, but poor as a genre in themselves.

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Tristan Powell, entitled ‘Rebel Ready-Made’ from the BBC broadcast of *New Release* (1966), ~16:35–16:55.—Also Duchamp once said that he had never been able to come up with a definition or explanation of the readymade that entirely satisfied him (see the interview with Katharine Kuh, p. 90).

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Calvin Tomkins, p. 55. See also *Apropos of Readymades*, p. 142.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Calvin Tomkins, pp. 59–60.

### 3. Artist and Spectator

The structure of combination in Duchamp gains new aspects as we move into his aesthetic theory because this includes the idea that the work of art involves another combinational dimension between two poles of the creative act: firstly the artist that creates the work, and secondly the spectator that judges.<sup>86</sup> On the side of the artist, Duchamp stated that

in the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realisation through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realisation is a series of efforts, pains, satisfactions, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the aesthetic plane.<sup>87</sup>

Because this creative process remains instinctive, i.e. remains a process that is not entirely present within consciousness, there will be a difference between the intention and realisation that the artist is not fully aware of. Duchamp's view was that artists cannot explain exactly what they are doing or why;<sup>88</sup> in this way, the spectator is needed to define the aesthetic nature of the completely raw result. Duchamp described this process in terms of how pure sugar is refined from molasses:<sup>89</sup> the spectator is shown the artwork and, through an assessment of its value and meaning, makes a judgement, in some way resolving the unknown difference between the artist's intention and realisation. On this basis Duchamp concluded that

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 and thus adds his contribution to the creative act. This becomes even more obvious when posterity gives its final verdict and sometimes rehabilitates forgotten artists.<sup>90</sup>

In the example of *The Large Glass*, through its contact with the spectator, the work enters a new combination with something external to what Duchamp himself created. The work is altered through the way it is judged, through the physical settings that become possible places of residence for it, through the way in which its ideas are sustained through other literature. The history of art is not simply a history of artists; it is a history of artists engrained within the sense and the real of the world that surrounds them. The artwork depends upon this surrounding world just as it depends on the inner world of the artist: it was Duch-

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<sup>86</sup> *The Creative Act* (April 1957), in: *Salt Seller*, p. 138.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

amp's view that a work of art only exists when the spectator has looked at it; before this act of looking, the artwork is no more than something that has been done but might disappear without anyone knowing.<sup>91</sup> This role of the viewer belongs to the development of art itself; although it remains outside the work of individual artists, it is nonetheless essential to art's ongoing developmental movement. Yet the factors involved in these external dependencies are not entirely predictable; concerning the great works preserved in museums, Duchamp described why it is that they have survived: "It's not because they are beautiful. It's because they have survived by the law of chance. We probably have lost many, many other artists of those same periods who were as beautiful, or even more beautiful."<sup>92</sup>

The complexity of this artwork/spectator relationship was also discussed in an early 1915 interview, where Duchamp made the point that Rembrandt could never have intentionally expressed all the ideas and thoughts that people have found in his work—in one age he is considered a great religious painter; in others he is a profound psychologist, a poet, or a master craftsman.<sup>93</sup> Duchamp's point was that this shows that we give more to a painting than what we take from it because no single artist could be a profound psychologist and a great religious preacher at the same time.<sup>94</sup> In this way, the combination of viewer and work is variable: different ideas will combine with the work according to the preoccupations of different times; the historic surroundings of an artwork have a profound impact not only on its creation but also on its interpretation. In a later interview, Duchamp provided an example of how radical changes in the nature of the viewer have taken place: "The bore with art, as it is now, is this necessity for having the public on its side. Under the kings, it was at least a little better: the sanction of a single person, or of a small clique was sufficient. Just as dumb, but in smaller numbers."<sup>95</sup> The audience that judges art is variable according to different historical circumstances; the interpretations that can be given to an artwork will depend on the communal world that surrounds it.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Interview with Richard Hamilton, side A, ~27:10–27:35. Duchamp specified that we should call this view a theory to allow him to be wrong (ibid.).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., ~28:20–28:40.

<sup>93</sup> Another interview with a journalist, published as: 'A Complete Reversal of Art Opinions by Marcel Duchamp, Iconoclast', in: *Arts and Decoration* (September 1915). Vol. 5, no. 11, p. 427. Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43807860>.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Later interview with Otto Hahn, published as: 'Passport No. G255300', in: *Art and Artists* (July 1966). Vol. 1, no. 4, p. 8. Translated by Andrew Rabeneck. Available from: [https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDR\\_B002\\_F010\\_001/](https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDR_B002_F010_001/). (The original French is unavailable.)

<sup>96</sup> There is also the more negative example of the removal of art from its original context: while pointing at the African and pre-Columbian sculptures at his residence, Duchamp

We can also say that there is another aspect in this form of combination between the viewer and the artwork: the combination becomes a way towards creation that is not only based on an existing work but also concerns the creation of the new. We must remember that Duchamp was himself a spectator: his negative assessment of purely retinal art set the movement of his ideas in another direction; his view of mechanical drawings as a dehumanised form of art, as an art that rejected the artistry of the artist, gave a new idea to them; his view of Roussel's work as a source of inspiration for art brought it into a new territory, preserving it in some way for those who come to find it through the desire to understand Duchamp himself; his reading of Brisset allowed certain linguistic techniques to gain a new purpose in the development of art; his view of everyday objects meant that they could be given a new iconoclastic artistic potential. The point is that Duchamp was a spectator like no other, resulting in combinational forms that had never been seen. In viewing the cultural elements that lay around him, Duchamp allowed the combination of work and viewer to branch off into greater levels of complexity, resulting in alternative movements being formed in the development of culture itself.

#### 4. Art and Money

Duchamp's work is full of combination, but this is not arbitrary. There are certain combinations that should be avoided for specific reasons. This can be seen in his views on the combination of art and money: "The dollar and art shouldn't mix, but they do, and since you can't destroy money, money is destroying art."<sup>97</sup> For Duchamp this mixture involves a lack of purity, like water being mixed with wine, that dilutes art into mediocrity.<sup>98</sup> Instead, Duchamp's aim was to allow his work to remain independent from the need to make money. As he once explained: "I didn't have to sell [paintings] to live. All my life I've been able to live

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remarked: "Look at those poor things ... so important in our lives. We've made modern art of them." (Interview with Dore Ashton, in: *Studio International* (June 1966). Vol. 171, no. 878, p. 246. Available from:

[https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE\\_B013\\_F042\\_001/.](https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE_B013_F042_001/))

—This point also relates to the film *Les statues meurent aussi*, directed by Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, and Ghislain Cloquet (France, 1953).

<sup>97</sup> See John Canaday's quotations from the lecture *Where do we go from here?*, in: 'Whither Art?', *New York Times* (26 March 1961), p. 15. Available from:

[https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDP\\_B037\\_F009\\_002/.](https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDP_B037_F009_002/)—

But there is also a somewhat contradictory point in the Mike Wallace interview: "[Art and money] hardly mix, to my taste. I mean they occasionally do, but it's not important whether they should mix or not" (p. 44).

<sup>98</sup> Interview with William Seitz, published as: 'What's Happened to Art?', in: *Vogue* (15 February 1963), p. 129. Available from:

[https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDP\\_B019\\_F006\\_001/.](https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDP_B019_F006_001/)



on very little money.”<sup>99</sup> Duchamp’s view was that living concerns what we spend more than what we earn.<sup>100</sup> Although he acknowledged that living cheaply was easier in the past,<sup>101</sup> the point is that reducing financial overheads, as far as this is possible, becomes a key part of the artistic life.

But Duchamp did receive money related to art. Alongside selling the works of other artists (such as the sculptures of Constantin Brâncuși), he sold editions of *The Green Box*, rotoreliefs, the *Boîte-en-valise*, and later the reproductions of certain readymades. He also sold his own paintings on occasion, but as he explained:

Il fallait bien vivre. C’était simplement parce que je n’avais pas tellement d’argent. Il faut bien faire quelque chose pour manger. Manger, toujours manger et faire de la peinture pour faire de la peinture sont deux choses différentes. On peut très bien faire les deux simultanément sans que l’une détruise l’autre. Et puis, je n’ai pas donné à cette activité tellement d’importance.

One must live. It was simply because I didn’t have enough money. One must do something to eat. Eating, always eating, and painting for the sake of painting, are two different things. Both can certainly be done simultaneously, without one destroying the other. And then, I didn’t attach much importance to selling them.<sup>102</sup>

The point here is that he did not produce work to make money; any money that was made was simply to live, which in turn allowed him to produce work. The importance of a purity of purpose relates to the effects created within the work itself: money does not necessarily disrupt or dilute art as long as their purposes can remain distinct.

In New York in 1916, Roland Knoedler offered Duchamp ten thousand dollars a year for his entire annual production.

J’ai refusé, et pourtant je n’étais pas riche. J’aurais très bien pu accepter 10 000 \$ mais non, j’ai senti le danger tout de suite. J’avais pu l’éviter jusque-là. En 1915–

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<sup>99</sup> Interview with Robert Lebel, published as: ‘Art Was a Dream...’, in: *Newsweek* (9 November 1959). Vol. 54, no. 19, p. 119. Available from: [https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDP\\_B015\\_F007\\_001/](https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDP_B015_F007_001/).

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne, p. 156. English, p. 83 (translation altered).

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Barbara Ashford, published as: ‘Artists Can’t Shock People Today, Marcel Duchamp Says’, in: *The Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia) (10 May 1961), p. 56. Available from: [https://www.duchamparchives.org/amd/archive/component/SBK2\\_1961-63\\_35/](https://www.duchamparchives.org/amd/archive/component/SBK2_1961-63_35/).

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne, p. 138. English, p. 74.—This clearly contradicts what was said in the *Newsweek* interview above, but it is only the ideas expressed in these statements that are important to us, rather than the coherence of a factual reconstruction of Duchamp’s finances.

16, j'avais tout de même 29 ans, j'étais donc d'âge à me défendre. Je vous dis cela simplement pour vous expliquer mon attitude. Ce serait la même chose aujourd'hui si on m'offrait 100 000 \$ pour faire quelque chose.

I said no, and I wasn't rich, either. I could have very well accepted ten thousand dollars, but no, I sensed the danger right away. I had been able to avoid it until then. In 1915–16, I was twenty-nine, so I was old enough to protect myself. I'm telling you this simply to explain my attitude. It would be the same today, if I were offered a hundred thousand dollars to do something.<sup>103</sup>

Duchamp wanted to keep himself free from any commercial commitments. As soon as an external source of money becomes involved, we begin to owe someone something. Certain demands can then be made on us; certain claims become possible. To accept such an offer would be to incorporate an outside influence that does not belong to the trajectory of the work itself. He was, however, commissioned for various works—*Tu m'* by Katherine Dreier, *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?* by Dorothea Dreier, and the *Rotary Demisphere* by Jacques Doucet—but these remained singular instances. The ability to step outside these requests remained due to their singularity; there was no danger to sense, no need for the protection of his independence.

Duchamp and his brothers also received an allowance from their father in order to support them in their artistic activities, but whatever was spent was deducted from their inheritance.<sup>104</sup> Duchamp described this income as being just enough to live on,<sup>105</sup> and it was entirely independent from any external creative obligations, but nonetheless the time came when Duchamp decided he needed to find a job. His work as a librarian was unrelated to his artistic work. The importance of this was that it allowed him to focus on the paintings he wanted to paint at the time: "I looked for a job in order to get enough time to paint *for myself*."<sup>106</sup> In the avoidance of combining money and art, perhaps the purest approach (but not always the most practical) is to work in jobs that are unrelated to art. Time constraints will ensue, but nonetheless this allows a clear demarcation between earning money to live and the energy and time needed to create; the one stands separate from the other, allowing the least dilution possible. It is a combination

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne, pp. 202–203. English, p. 106.—Elsewhere, Duchamp appeared to claim that he wasn't aware of this offer but would have rejected it anyway. (See 'Marcel Duchamp', in: *New Yorker* (6 April 1957), p. 26. Available from: [https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE\\_B013\\_F053\\_001/](https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE_B013_F053_001/).)

<sup>104</sup> Later interview with James Johnson Sweeney, p. 129. See also the interview with Jean-Marie Drot, ~21:40–22:50.

<sup>105</sup> Later interview with James Johnson Sweeney, p. 129.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.—For other examples of Duchamp's employment, see 'J for Jobs' in: Girst, T. (2014) *The Duchamp Dictionary*. London, Thames & Hudson, pp. 101–102.

that is purely temporal in terms of the culmination of time spent on each, rather than one of intertwined influences: the one is an escape from the other, a separate dwelling rather than a single space where the two simultaneously exist. In this way, risks can be taken without resulting in potential difficulties for our living circumstances, allowing us to innovate with our work, free from adverse consequences.<sup>107</sup>

Money was also the reason why Duchamp avoided having a wife and family. “J’ai évité tout cela soigneusement jusqu’à l’âge de 67 ans. J’ai pris une femme qui à cause de son âge ne pouvait pas avoir d’enfant. Moi-même, je n’avais pas envie d’en avoir, pour diminuer les frais tout simplement.”—“I carefully avoided all that, until I was sixty-seven. Then I married a woman who, because of her age, couldn’t have children. I personally never wanted to have any, simply to keep expenses down.”<sup>108</sup> He wanted to protect himself from the needs associated with such a life, from “the family that forces you to abandon your real ideas, to swap them for things it believes in, society and all that paraphernalia!” (“La famille qui vous force à abandonner vos idées réelles pour les troquer contre des choses acceptées par elle, la société et tout le bataclan!”)<sup>109</sup> The ground had to be prepared for his attempts towards invention, and Duchamp felt that a certain level of focus was needed through an everyday life which would not prevent him from coalescing around his own artistic purposes. If the combination of art and the expense of family life means that both sides feed off the same time and energy, while the one provides little in the way of insight for the other, the combination in question is problematic.<sup>110</sup>

The problem of combining art and money has many consequences. Speaking in the 1960s, Duchamp referred to the integration of art into society, explaining that, compared to 1915—when the life of an artist was non-existent as a money-making proposition—artists are now integrated into society in the same way that lawyers and doctors are.<sup>111</sup>

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In the olden days, when the artist was still a pariah and a bum, the resistance of

<sup>107</sup> In relation to this, Roussel was extremely rich due to an inheritance from his father who worked as a stockbroker, so his experimentation, and the costs of publishing his books and staging elaborate theatre productions, was in no way hindered by any need for an income. Brisset, who also had to publish his works at his own expense, worked as a professional soldier, an inventor (unsuccessfully), a language teacher, a stationmaster, and a policeman.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne, p. 143. English, p. 76.—Duchamp was also married at the age of 40, but there were no children and it only lasted from June 1927 to February 1928. (Ibid., p. 142. Ibid.)

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 143. Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Yet many creative people do have children. Perhaps the combination of children and creativity may have a productive value of its own, alongside an inherent value in itself.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Calvin Tomkins, pp. 24–25.

society to his way of life would bring about a meaningful explosion within himself. Provided he had something to say. It may be that great art can only come out of conditions of resistance, out of a state of war which forces the artist into an attitude of dedication that is almost religious and does not need the acceptance of society.<sup>112</sup>

The problem with society's influence over art is that the former has certain appetites which demand to be fulfilled. On the one hand, the result of this is that artists can make a living, but on the other, there is a detrimental effect on the quality of the work: "I feel that things of great importance have to be slowly produced. I don't believe in speed in artistic production, and that goes with integration."<sup>113</sup> For Duchamp we should not attempt to complete works in five minutes or five hours, but should take five years: "I think there's an element in the slowness of the execution that adds to the possibility of producing something that will be durable in its expression, that will be considered important five centuries later."<sup>114</sup> The avoidance of combining art and money results in a certain timelessness: while the interests of financial gain seek the immediate purposes of their day, an independence from money allows us to seek purposes which lie beyond the present. As Duchamp explained, the life of a pariah "may not be very comfortable but at least you have a feeling that you may be accomplishing something that will last for centuries after you die."<sup>115</sup>

Referring to how a great artist could overcome the problem of being integrated into society, Duchamp described the need to go underground:

Going underground means not having to deal in money terms with society. ... The underground business is very interesting because an artist may be a real genius today, but if he is spoiled or contaminated by the sea of money around him, his genius will completely melt and become zero. There may be ten thousand geniuses today but they will never become geniuses, unless they have luck and very great determination.<sup>116</sup>

Art is disrupted when it is combined with the pursuit of money; the two sides do not complement each other but become subject to divergent purposes. To make money requires speed; to make great works requires a long period of painstaking care and attention. The combination results in one side overruling the other: art

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Francis Roberts, p. 63.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Calvin Tomkins, p. 26.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.—Tomkins' next question was to ask Duchamp whether he has gone underground. Duchamp replied: "No. Maybe I was underground at the beginning but now I'm not underground, people ask me so many questions! [*laughs*] It's probably my doom, too" (*ibid.*).

becomes subject to the needs of money-making; the work is determined by these needs rather than the needs of the artistic ideas themselves. In the remit of creative production, the point is to find complementary combinations in which both sides are not at war, are not serving their own needs while undermining the other, but are enhanced through the combination itself.

In Duchamp's lecture entitled *Where do we go from here?*, there is a condensed summary of his views regarding the influence of society and its money on the movement of art. Here Duchamp explained that, due to the public demand for the supply of an enormous amount of art, the conditions are created where art becomes a commodity, like soap or securities; it is where art is not only there for aesthetic purposes but also for the creation of material and speculative value.<sup>117</sup> For Duchamp this is what constitutes the dilution of art:

Cette dilution massive perdant en qualité ce qu'elle gagne en quantité s'accompagne d'un nivellement par le bas du goût présent et aura pour conséquence immédiate un brouillard de médiocrité sur un avenir prochain. Pour conclure j'espère que cette médiocrité conditionnée par trop de facteurs étrangers à l'art per se amènera une révolution d'ordre ascétique cette fois dont le grand public ne sera même pas conscient et que seuls quelques initiés développeront en marge d'un monde aveuglé par le feu d'artifice économique. The great artist of tomorrow will go underground.

This enormous dilution, losing in quality what it gains in quantity, is accompanied by a levelling down of present taste and its immediate result will be to shroud the near future in mediocrity. In conclusion, I hope that this mediocrity, conditioned by too many factors foreign to art per se, will this time bring a revolution on the ascetic level, of which the general public will not even be aware and which only a few initiates will develop on the fringe of a world blinded by economic fireworks. The great artist of tomorrow will go underground.<sup>118</sup>

For Duchamp experimentation becomes possible in an underground separated from the demands of society. When referring to the artists working in New York around the time of the first world war, he explained that there was a small but cohesive group who did not do much for the public at large. "The great advantage of that earlier period was that the art of the time was laboratory work; now it is diluted for public consumption."<sup>119</sup> From a technical point of view, Duchamp suggested that experimentation could involve the movement away from the tra-

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<sup>117</sup> *Où allons-nous à partir de maintenant?* (20 March 1961), in: *Studio International* (January–February 1975), p. 28. Translated by Meakins, S., as: *Where Do We Go From Here?*, *ibid.*—Today we even have pension funds purchasing art.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* The final line of the French is in English.

<sup>119</sup> Earlier interview with James Johnson Sweeney, p. 123.

ditional techniques of oil painting that can restrict freedom of expression through their academic ties.<sup>120</sup> He explained that in such a movement, just as the invention of a new musical instrument can change the whole sensibility of an era, new developments in science around the phenomenon of light may create new artistic tools.<sup>121</sup> But there is also the methodological point of view: in the independence of experimentation, just as certain combinations can be removed (of our work with the external demands of profit and prestige), certain other combinations can be introduced. An art of the underground will be one in which new combinations become possible, combinations that have never been seen, that are not being asked for. As such the works that result from them will be immediately worthless, but this worthlessness itself is the condition for the development of their value.

## 5. The Critique of Art

### A

Duchamp provided his view on the state of American art in 1946 during an interview with James Johnson Sweeney:

The great trouble with art in this country at present, and apparently in France also, is that there is no spirit of revolt—no new ideas appearing among the younger artists. They are following along the paths beaten out by their predecessors, trying to do better than what their predecessors have already done. In art there is no such thing as perfection. And a creative lull occurs always when artists of a period are satisfied to pick up a predecessor's work where he dropped it and attempt to continue what he was doing. When on the other hand you pick up something from an earlier period and adapt it to your own work an approach can be creative. The result is not new; but it is new inasmuch as it is a different approach.<sup>122</sup>

Duchamp's art involved a fundamental emphasis on invention. He did not create an idea and then spend his lifetime adding to it, endlessly elaborating on the same theme. When asked in a later interview with Sweeney about the idea of contradicting himself in terms of his previous work, Duchamp explained that the habit of repetition results in the formation of taste: "If you interrupt your work, I mean after you have done it, then it becomes, it stays a thing in itself; but if it is repeated a number of times it becomes taste."<sup>123</sup> *The Large Glass* contradicted his earlier paintings in its dehumanisation of art; the readymades contradicted *The*

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<sup>120</sup> *Where Do We Go From Here?*, p. 28.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Earlier interview with James Johnson Sweeney, p. 123.

<sup>123</sup> Later interview with James Johnson Sweeney, pp. 133–134.

*Large Glass* in that the latter was immensely difficult to construct, while the former were mostly a case of simply choosing objects. Duchamp stated that repetition, as it is the opposite of renewal, is a form of death.<sup>124</sup> Art must keep moving in new directions for it to live; the absence of this constitutes a great trouble in art at any given moment.

To remain within the operations of invention, Duchamp adopted the principle of Cartesian doubt.

I, with my Cartesian mind, refused to accept anything, doubted everything. So, doubting everything, if I wanted to produce anything I had to find something that gave me no doubt because it didn't exist before. Having invented them there was no doubt about them, ever. [laughs] All along, I had that search for what I had not thought of before.<sup>125</sup>

Duchamp arrived at the terrain of art and aimed to avoid the simple adoption of the pre-existing; every element had to be questioned until it showed its value for the work in question. The classical perspective used for the bachelor's realm in *The Large Glass* was not adopted because the technique was a commonplace method at the time; the use of perspective had to be reborn as a new idea in the development of the oppositions between the bachelors and the bride. It was doubted just like everything else, but it was used because it proved itself to be an important way that the narrative of the glass could be expressed.

To invent we cannot be drawn into the ideas of those around us; we must remain independent. Regarding his refusal to conform to the ideas of any particular artistic group, Duchamp explained that "it's a form of individualism. ... I never enjoyed being part of a group; I've always wanted to make something of a personal contribution to it, which can only be done if you think by yourself, and not follow the general rules of the group."<sup>126</sup> This idea of creative independence is not absolute; there are always subtle ways that the world around us provides lines of thought, yet the explicit pull of a preformed group must be resisted: we cannot search for that which has not been thought of before by searching the coalesced form of the ideas of others; another terrain must be sought out, one that belongs to our own direction alone.

In Duchamp's understanding of art, there is a questioning of its basic concepts. He distrusted the idea of progress: "Art is produced by a succession of individuals expressing themselves; it is not a question of progress. Progress is merely an enormous pretension on our part."<sup>127</sup> There is no predetermined out-

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<sup>124</sup> Interview with Jean-Marie Drot, ~49:10–49:20.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Calvin Tomkins, p. 64.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Joan Bakewell, ~4:15–4:40.

<sup>127</sup> Earlier interview with James Johnson Sweeney, p. 123.



come for the development of art; there is no divine source that it incrementally works towards; there is not a singular line but an area open for exploration. And within art understood as no more than a field of individual expression, we must similarly avoid subjecting the word ‘creation’ to unquestioned presuppositions: “J’ai peur du mot « création ». Au sens social, ordinaire, du mot, la création, c’est très gentil mais, au fond, je ne crois pas à la fonction créatrice de l’artiste.”—“I shy away from the word ‘creation’. In the ordinary, social meaning of the word—well, it’s very nice but, fundamentally, I don’t believe in the creative function of the artist.”<sup>128</sup> If ‘creation’ has been elevated to the sublime operation of the singular deified artist, then it can also be brought back down. Yet we must understand this in terms of Duchamp’s fundamental emphasis on invention. In the de-deification of the artist, even if we are to distrust the idealised meaning of creation, we must not thereby reduce ourselves to the repetition of the same. Invention is possible through an artisanal work; the new is a possibility in the movements of art as an activity of makers. But at the same time, we should not attempt to take this to an extreme. Duchamp also acknowledged that you can’t always be inventive.<sup>129</sup> There are limits to invention; there are times when the relentless pursuit of it can cease. But there must be attempts within the developmental movements of the whole; a pure repetition is to be entirely avoided.

## B

Duchamp’s purpose was to rethink art, to give art itself a new thought, an art independent from its own tradition, a demystified art that challenged its own concept, that concerned a new idea that was neither a repetition of its past, nor the basis for further repetitions of itself; it was an art that could forget its predecessors and take a new, unexplored direction. When Duchamp gave art a new thought, it was given a new space with new possibilities of movement. In later conceptual art, movements into new spaces would continue, with not only new challenges to art’s concept but also challenges to the concepts of objects, ideas, and relations, habits of thought, of vision, of understanding. These directions open further possibilities and purposes for art to connect with.

But as a new space is opened, at the same time there are new possibilities for conformity. Duchamp’s point about the great trouble with art concerned the problem of artists who are not creating new ideas. We could say that many contemporary artists follow Duchamp’s work, but only few follow his method. To adopt conceptual art uncritically, without the Cartesian doubt towards every element, without the desire to invent something previously unseen, is to follow Duchamp in his ideas but not in his mode of operation. If the results of innova-

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<sup>128</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne, p 19. English, 16.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187. English, p. 98.

tion are habitually followed, do we not lose the innovative itself? If we do not continually incorporate difference into the development of culture, does it not thereby stagnate? As we have seen, Duchamp acknowledged that there are limits to the possibilities of invention. In practice there wouldn't be very much art in the world if Duchamp's method was strictly followed by all, but it remains necessary nonetheless for art to fundamentally remain a developmental activity.

New ideas in art can arise through a process we can demarcate as the pursuit of extremes. Duchamp's work involved a combination of the visual and the ideational, but the development of later conceptual art included the depreciation of the visual through a complete focus on language. Preliminary movements towards this can be found in works such as Mel Bochner's *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art* from 1966, a set of four identical notebooks displayed on sculpture stands, containing photocopied papers of notes, working drawings, and diagrams from people in various fields.<sup>130</sup> Although the title acknowledges a certain ambiguity regarding its status as an artwork, it was nonetheless curated for and appeared in an art exhibition; it also gave art itself another direction: we might say that this work is like *The Green Box* without the glass. Bochner explained that, unlike a sketch that refers to a final visual form, "a working drawing is the site of private speculations, a snapshot of the mind at work."<sup>131</sup> The words and images of these notebooks are simply displayed for themselves rather than to elaborate the meaning of a separate visual object. The side of Duchamp's combination that consisted of the actual object is now physically absent; the work itself is primarily no more than the idea itself.

Bochner's later works such as *The Domain of the Great Bear* with Robert Smithson further pursue language;<sup>132</sup> although they include visual images, their artistic form is that of the written document: as magazine articles they provide a new territory for art to explore, where there is no original but the mass reproduction comes first and is the work itself.<sup>133</sup> But this trajectory finds its most extreme point in the work of the Art and Language collective. In their 1969 editorial for the first issue of *Art-Language*, the question was asked as to whether a purely written work of art theory, including this editorial itself, could be con-

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<sup>130</sup> See *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art* (1997), in: Bochner, M. (2008) *Solar Systems and Rest Rooms*. Cambridge, The MIT Press, p. 177.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Published in *Art Voices* (Fall 1966), pp. 44–51.—Bochner also explained that the pointing hand used in the article for the 'solar systems and rest rooms' sign was a tongue-in-cheek nod to Marcel Duchamp (*Secrets of the Domes* (1997), in: *Solar Systems and Rest Rooms*, p. 200). (See the pointing hand in *Tu m'*.)

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., pp. 199–200.

sidered as a work of conceptual art.<sup>134</sup> Having explained that what is important in these considerations is the artist's intention,<sup>135</sup> their view was that the procedure of conceptual art does allow such intentions as a possibility: "inside the framework of 'conceptual art' the making of art and the making of a certain kind of art theory are often the same procedure."<sup>136</sup>

Bochner could still describe *The Domain of the Great Bear* in combinational terms as "an inextricable fusion of word and image",<sup>137</sup> yet Art and Language explicitly stated that the visual side of an essay exhibited as an artwork is reduced to an absolute minimum:

The appearance of this essay is unimportant in any strong sense of visual-art appearance criteria. The prime requirement in regard to this essay's appearance is that it is reasonably legible. Any decisions apart from this have been taken with a view to what it should not look like as a point of emphasis over what it should look like. These secondary decisions are aimed at eliminating as many appearance similarities to established art-objects as possible.<sup>138</sup>

The visual aspect of such an essay is merely concerned with its legibility: its visual aspect only concerns its nature qua language. This form of conceptual art involves a fundamental depreciation of the visual. The art is simply the written page itself. Rejecting even an aesthetic typography, the literary element is pushed to its most extreme point, to the point where the visual nature of art is undermined.<sup>139</sup> But at the same time such an essay is not simply a written work; it is an artwork that expresses the literary side of art alone.

In comparison to Duchamp's readymades, which are extremes due to their total indifference towards the visual side of the visual/literary combination, artworks that consist of pure works of literature are extreme due to their rejection

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<sup>134</sup> Introduction by the editors of Art-Language, in: Alberro, A. & Stimson, B. (1999). *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*. Cambridge, The MIT Press, p. 99.—At this point, the collective was composed of Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge, Michael Baldwin, and Harold Hurrell.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>137</sup> *Secrets of the Domes*, p. 201.

<sup>138</sup> Introduction by the editors of Art-Language, p. 101.—The point is also made that this distances them from Duchamp: if his aim was to put painting back into the service of the mind, Art and Language acknowledge that this remains restricted to the visual language of painting. They add that if some commentators have claimed that Duchamp's influence is all-pervasive, and if this means that Duchamp is treated uncritically, "then it is certain that at least the British group [of conceptual artists] will disagree with this assessment" (ibid., p. 103).

<sup>139</sup> This provides a contrast to earlier work where typography was considered an art form: see Kurt Schwitters' 'Thesen über Typographie', in: *Merz* (November 1924). No. 11, p. 91.

of the visual itself, their attempt to break the combination, i.e. the readymades are still meant to be looked at qua art objects, while these pure works are only meant to be read. The readymades do not disregard the visual side of art; they disregard visual taste while being inherently visual in themselves. The readymades are fundamentally a combination of the visual and the literary, rather than stating themselves in the form of literature alone.<sup>140</sup>

The structure of art's developmental terrain demanded that a purely ideational form of art was explored; as the visual/ideational combination became explicit, the possibility of abstracting the ideational from the visual appeared. A new form of conceptual art was the result, a way in which art could re-imagine itself as a pure work of literature. But this exploration could not continue indefinitely; just like the extremity of the readymades, although different in combinational form, this level of purity can only be performed a limited number of times: the radical nature of choosing a bottle rack as an artwork can only be matched by choosing a snow shovel, or a comb, and so on; likewise the radical nature of a purely literary essay exhibited as an artwork can only be matched by another. This is not to say that such literary artworks shouldn't exist, only that qua extremes they are inherently limited. What these extremes ultimately result in is repetition. They follow a singular line rather than attempting to enter an open space; they create within an impasse rather than presenting an expansive area opened for exploration.

If these purely ideational forms of conceptual art can be seen as the structural opposites of the purely retinal works of Courbet, the problem is in having the idea *and nothing else*, or the visual *and nothing else*. Duchamp was clear that, on

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<sup>140</sup> There is the case of a text entitled *Before the Mirror*, which is attributed to Rose Sélavy in Man Ray's *Photographies 1920–1934* (1934, Paris, Cahiers d'Art, p. 67) but was apparently written by one of Man Ray's female friends known only as 'L.D.' (see *Salt Seller*, p. 189). Duchamp does not tell us how to understand the significance of this text, but it has been described by others as "a kind of literary readymade" (ibid.). The question for us is whether it can be taken as a precursor to these works where art is literature itself. It appears not, however, firstly because Duchamp's silence on it, and its absence from the *Boîte-en-valise*, suggest that it was not seen as an important, radical leap forward. Secondly, given our view on the importance of the visual aspect of the readymades, it seems that we should see it as a literary appropriation rather than a readymade per se. The visual aspect of the text—the typography etc.—is simply the same as the other essays in the book. This work is not a readymade object containing a literary content which Duchamp signed and Man Ray photographed; it is a text that was recreated in the pages of the book alongside others. Perhaps Duchamp's interest in its message of masculine fragility was to give its words to Rose, to make it a theoretical view of his alter-ego (which would also be the case if, as some imagine, the text was written by Duchamp himself). But even if someone were to argue that this total indifference to the visual would itself be an aspect of its readymade character, it is still not art as literature per se but, qua readymade, a visually indifferent page of writing that is brought into the context of art.

the side of the visual, it was the purity that he opposed: “Remarquez qu’il ne me faut pas beaucoup de conceptuel pour me mettre à aimer. Ce que je n’aime pas c’est le non-conceptuel du tout, qui est le pur rétinien; cela m’agace.”—“Please note that there doesn’t have to be a lot of the conceptual for me to like something. What I don’t like is the completely non-conceptual, which is purely retinal; that irritates me.”<sup>141</sup> We have already seen that the combination of the glass with *The Green Box* was meant to prevent them from taking a purely aesthetic-plastic or purely literary form respectively. In the further development of conceptual art, however, purely literary works would also arise. Compared to the somewhat momentary appearance of the purely literary, the purely retinal does have a far richer developmental history (the history of pure landscape painting, the visual experiments of Impressionism, of Abstract Expressionism, and so on), but nonetheless we can also see purely visual works as constituting the limitations of a pure form. Due to the nature of its chosen space, of its restriction to visual appearance only, here creation also becomes a singular route rather than a fluid matrix of interconnected pathways. Although the purely visual may not present itself as the dead-end of an extreme, primarily due to a certain primacy of the visual in art—i.e. the visual is in some way dominant over the ideational because the purity of the former is a limitation, whereas the purity of the latter is not only a limitation but also an extreme—nonetheless the purely visual makes its movements along the axis of only one side of art’s fundamental constitution, giving itself a tendency towards stagnation and repetition. It is the variability of both sides of the combination of the visual and the ideational that prevents this tendency towards repetition: as the two are mixed together in different ways and forms, the possibilities for innovation are opened. If purely ideational art is the structural mirror image of purely retinal art, combination can be the way to overcome the limitations of both. In the case of conceptual art, the possibility of a new extreme was opened, and it was entirely right that it was pursued. But other avenues opened through new combinations are needed if art is not to remain tied to a historical formalism, no matter how radical it might have been during its inception. The Art and Language collective would reintroduce the visual into their work as they continued their artistic development; their movement into an extreme purity would only last a limited length of time.<sup>142</sup>

The three basic structural aspects of artistic creativity are the visual, the ideational, and the setting in which the previous two combine, i.e. *what* is combined and *where* the combination takes place. A new combination could be found

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<sup>141</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne, p. 145. English, p. 77.

<sup>142</sup> See, for example, their work entitled *Gustave Courbet’s ‘Burial at Ornans’; Expressing a Sensuous Affection .../Expressing a Vibrant Erotic Vision .../Expressing States of Mind that are Vivid and Compelling* from 1981: three panels of black ink, wash, gouache, and wax crayon alongside two panels of written text.

in Pierre Huyghe's *La déraison*, where a sculpture was left outside to allow biological life to flourish on its surface.<sup>143</sup> The lifeforms provided a certain visual appearance but also, through their innate living development, a new conceptual narrative for the sculptural work: just as Duchamp combined painting with a new modernist literature inspired by Roussel, Huyghe combined sculpture with the concept of organic life. Duchamp himself made use of organic material, e.g. the dust for *The Large Glass*, but this was something encased in the glass, trapped and somewhat determined by the artist, rather than something allowed to grow freely on its surface.<sup>144</sup> For any statue left outside, there would of course be certain lifeforms that become attached to it, but this is not the intention of the artist; it is something to be removed in the statue's restoration rather than a fundamental idea in the artwork itself.

A new setting for the combination of the visual and the ideational could be found in Marina Abramović's *512 Hours*, where the artist used a gallery space for visitors to participate in various exercises, including the counting of grains of rice and slow, methodical walking, potentially with the artist herself.<sup>145</sup> The visual aspect is what we see within the space: the aesthetic simplicity of the gallery itself and the precise yet humble furnishings needed for the exercises, along with the movement of the participants directed by helpers; the actualisation of an ideational aspect, however, remains hidden within the internal meditative states that the exercises create in the participants: just as Duchamp created a combination that took place within the duality of the glass and *The Green Box*, here Abramović combines the gallery space with a terrain that primarily belongs to the personal remit of the participants themselves, who in this way cannot be considered as mere spectators. The primary expression of the ideational is not found within an object or performance that creates an internal reaction, but is in the internal reaction itself.

These combinations of Huyghe and Abramović show how possible new territories are opened, which do not need to involve a simple return towards classical forms of beauty. Modern art was a reaction against what preceded it, but its fundamental movement was to open new spaces. If art stagnates as a cultural form, the point is to open new fields, but what is most difficult is to avoid a simple one-dimensional return to something in the past that is simply lifted up as some-

<sup>143</sup> Construction: concrete, marble, heating system (to give the impression that the human form of the sculpture is living), water, and plants. Shown at the IN BORDER DEEP exhibition at the Hauser & Wirth gallery in London, 2013–14.

<sup>144</sup> See Duchamp's note that reads: "faire entrer des mat. organiques dans la guêpe et ailleurs"—"add organic matter in the wasp and elsewhere". (*Marcel Duchamp, Notes*, note 102. See also note 104.) For the use of dust in *The Large Glass*, see *The Green Box*. (Notes 105, 107, and 108. *Salt Seller*, pp. 52–53.) These notes also suggest that dust was used primarily for its chromatic properties.

<sup>145</sup> The idea was implemented at the Serpentine Gallery in London, 2014.



thing available. The difficulty is to find a new path, one that contains the same innovation that we can find in Duchamp.

On the basis of the fundamental combination of the visual and the ideational, the way in which art develops is through the search for new forms of the real to combine with new forms of sense. Art may concern revolutions within its visual side, but remain conservative in terms of its ideas; it may also concern revolutions within its ideational side, but remain motionless in the remit of the visual. This duality of vision and idea is the fundamental terrain in which innovation occurs; the development of art can be a continual play between the two sides, its possibilities of invention appearing as new balances between them, new combinations, and new situations for them to occur within. Development through the pursuit of a visual or ideational purity is fundamentally different from development through the pursuit of new combinations. To simply push towards a pure form will only ever lead us towards artistic limitations. If one side is negated, this creates limitations for the other; if one reaches an impasse, the other will stagnate alongside it. The point is that the visual and the ideational should be developed together if we are to avoid the limitations of artistic purity; if art will always involve forward movements, then it can develop both sides in an interdependent trajectory. And perhaps there is no third fundamental element because there is only sense and the real, the literary and visual, the idea and the physical form: the duality of sense and the real is the basic terrain of the development of art just as it is the basic terrain of anything else within the remit of our subjective experience of the world. This combination of the literary and the visual has appeared in art history before: narratives expressed in a visual form have appeared in religious art, but in Duchamp it is the form of the combination that is unique: *it is an explicit combination*. The two sides are not only there implicitly; it isn't that we simply choose a biblical scene and paint what it would look like in its physical actuality. The two sides are accentuated through a conscious process of combination; the two sides are *developed*. The concept stands alongside the visual representation as a form of sense that the work expresses; both sides are combined in the work in question, but the combination qua combination remains explicit due to the possibility of abstraction: their explicit nature allows the two sides to remain distinct as they become fundamentally entangled with each other within the work itself.

If extremes are to be pursued in art, it must be remembered that an exit from them is necessary. The paradox of a developmental movement that creates a total reaction against an aspect of art's own fundamental constitution is that it concerns a movement towards stagnation. The negative is a force in the development of art in general, but we must prevent it from being taken too far in order to avoid a simple ongoing repetition. We can see that even the negativity in



Dada was not entirely pure: Duchamp explained that “Dada was a yes and no affair—both a reaction against positive values and healthy. ... Dadaism opposed the pompous; it said no to no, but was not pessimistic; it did not feel the world should come to an end.”<sup>146</sup> The negativity of Dada did not prevent it from remaining within the pursuit of new avenues; it was not a pure negativity: having the positive within itself allowed it to create new forms of art.

Duchamp’s critique of contemporary art was directed towards its reliance on the past.<sup>147</sup> Even Duchamp’s own conceptualism is now an art of the past. If we are the spectators of it, we can understand it in new ways. It can be understood as something to overcome but not thereby reject. But as we have seen, Duchamp also thought that we can adopt something from an earlier period and adapt it to our own needs.<sup>148</sup> The result is not something new in an absolute sense, but is new in terms of another trajectory of development. And if these trajectories are to continue into open spaces, we must negotiate the negative within them; we must find combinations rather than extremes, if we are to move forwards without endlessly tying ourselves down. In the development of art, there is a need to think through its possibilities, rather than blindly pushing it towards new extremes without any thought of an exit.

## C

During the 1950s and 60s, there were movements in art that Duchamp felt were genuine developments in ideas. “I have been watching contemporary art. Take the New York School, or the advent of pop art. This is good. The important thing is that a group of young men do something different. The deadly part of art is when generation after generation copies one another.”<sup>149</sup> He also affirmed the happenings in performance art: the interesting point that he found in the work of Allan Kaprow was in the production of a play of boredom. “It’s very interesting to have used boredom as an aim, an aim to affect the public; in other words,

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Dorothy Norman, p. 38.—In what is perhaps another contradiction, Duchamp did once state that Dada—specifically literary Dada—was purely oppositional in its negativity. (See Sanouillet, M. ed. (1999) *Duchamp du signe*. Paris, Flammarion, p. 227.)

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne, pp. 196–197. English, p. 103.

<sup>148</sup> Earlier interview with James Johnson Sweeney, p. 123.

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Harold Schonberg, published as: ‘Creator of “Nude Descending” Reflects after Half a Century’. *New York Times* (12 April 1963), p. 25. Available from: [https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE\\_B013\\_F037\\_005/](https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE_B013_F037_005/).—This new generation could, however, also produce the purely retinal: “the ops do return to pure retinal painting, to retinal art, and I deplore it because I am against the retinal. ... I like the pops much more than the ops” (interview with Joan Bakewell, ~23:15–24:00).—Although Duchamp created his own optical works, they could also include lines of text: ‘Rose Sélavy et moi esquivons les ecchymoses des Esquimaux aux mots exquis’ (‘Rose Sélavy and I dodge the Eskimos’ bruises with exquisite words’) was added to the *Rotary Demisphere* from 1925 (*Salt Seller*, p. 106).

the public comes to a happening not to be amused but to be bored. And that's quite an invention, quite a contribution to new ideas."<sup>150</sup>

From 1946 to 1966, Duchamp himself was developing another contribution of his own: *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage*—*Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas*. This was something new, not only in art in general, but also in the development of Duchamp's work. Amid all the pure conceptualism of the 1960s, he unveiled a new work with realistic intentions. It was a realism that was a contradiction of the previous dehumanised approach, a new opening that avoided any repetition of what preceded it.<sup>151</sup>

The waterfall and the illuminating gas in the title provide a grounding in the narrative of *The Large Glass*; in this way, like the glass itself, *Étant donnés* is a work combined with *The Green Box*. The two realms of the bachelors and the bride are now unified within a single three-dimensional assemblage. The separation of the two glass panes has now been resolved into a single image. We see the bride's stripping in a state of completion, with a gas lamp in her hand and the waterfall flowing constantly behind her. If *The Large Glass* shows the bride before orgasm,<sup>152</sup> *Étant donnés* shows the bride post-orgasm. *The Green Box* mentions that this orgasm may bring about the bride's fall *qua pendu femelle*,<sup>153</sup> *Étant donnés* shows that the bride did fall, and is now laid on the ground in a state where her desire has been attained.

Another literary combination also occurs with *Étant donnés* in that Duchamp created a manual of instructions for its dismantling and reconstruction. At first we may say that this manual is purely practical: its primary purpose was to instruct those who were to transport the work from Duchamp's New York studio to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. But the work gains something when the two are seen as a pairing: certain aspects of the ideas within the work are uncovered by the manual that would otherwise be invisible. The manual describes *Étant donnés* as a "demountable approximation" ("*approximation démontable*"), adding that "by approximation I mean that there is a margin of *ad libitum* in the taking apart and putting together again" ("*par approximation j'entends une marge d'ad libitum dans le démontage et remontage*").<sup>154</sup> There is a choice to be made regard-

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Joan Bakewell, ~24:25–25:00.

<sup>151</sup> Other realistic later works of Duchamp are *Torture-morte* and *Sculpture-morte*, both from 1959. And in a somewhat ironical turn, it is possible that *Étant donnés* was influenced by Courbet's *L'Origine du monde*. (See also Duchamp's *Morceaux choisis d'après Courbet* from 1968, which is his remake of Courbet's *La Femme aux bas blancs*.)—Regarding *L'Origine du monde*, we must say that this title does give a work composed of a female nude with open legs an ideational content, but the vast majority of Courbet's works involve purely descriptive titles given to purely visual images.

<sup>152</sup> *The Green Box*, note 1, part 7. *Salt Seller*, p. 43.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Manual of Instructions* (1966/2009). Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, p. iii,

ing the placement of clouds in the background;<sup>155</sup> adjustments are possible in the lighting for the waterfall;<sup>156</sup> and there is a white plastic shade above the main lighting which can be adjusted for the overall brightness.<sup>157</sup> This approximation is also combined with a certain exactitude: Duchamp created six distinct bushes and instructed them to be placed in a specific order,<sup>158</sup> and each brick that the viewer—or voyeur as the manual describes—sees before the bride is numbered for its exact position; the manual also highlights that brick twenty-seven has been altered so that more of the bride's hair is visible.<sup>159</sup>

This duality of precision with liberty is also translated into the overall construction itself: what the viewer sees is a precise visual collage, but what the viewer does not see has a makeshift aspect to it. The joint between the bride's leg and thigh is not neat, the manual states, so it will be hidden by twigs and dead leaves;<sup>160</sup> the elbow joint is also hidden by bush number four;<sup>161</sup> and the electric wire that powers the bulb for the gas lamp is obscured behind the underside of the bride's arm.<sup>162</sup> We could say that even a traditional canvas painting will have a side that is untouched because the viewer will not see it, but in *Étant donnés* these concealments are all explicitly thought through and thereby belong to the work's ideational content. The viewer only sees one side of the work; to see both sides we must combine our experience of it with the manual of instructions, whose presentation also involves a certain makeshift style of its own.

*Étant donnés* is an example of an artwork made in the underground: produced in secret for twenty years, it was not open to criticism in the process of its development because its development was left hidden—as a work which combined the conceptual with realism, it was something that no one was asking for. In this work the same combination occurs of literature and art, but the ideational and the visual have both reached unexpected developmental forms: in the use of realism, the visual style has reappropriated something from art history, and the literary has entered the systematic description of a work's reconstruction, its form as demountable. *Étant donnés* involves a new combination that opens an area for exploration. It does not consist of a one-dimensional purity of either the visual or the ideational; it consists of a two-dimensional developmental space, composed of the duality of visual realism and its own ideational elements. In avoiding both a simple repetition of the past, and the extremes that lead us to-

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paper strip.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. v and p. 5.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 38, flap, outside.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. viii and p. 35, flap, outside.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 35, flap, outside.

ward repetition, *Étant donnés* involves a forward movement, not into a dead-end, but into an open space. Its innovative form is conducive towards further innovation, rather than being conducive only towards repetition. Although it gives closure to the narrative of the glass, it points art towards possible new beginnings.

## 6. Art and Chess

In Duchamp combination not only occurs within the remit of art but also extends beyond it. His time and energy were not spent on art alone; outside of art he was also interested in chess. Duchamp's thoughts on this show that there are two ways in which combination can be found here: art and chess combined because they are divergent or because they are convergent.

For the divergence Duchamp described a beautiful series of chess moves as something that is without mystery, whose result is a pure, logical conclusion that cannot be refuted.<sup>163</sup> He then explained that “the attitude in art is completely different. Probably the two things pleased me because they opposed one another—the two attitudes—as a form of completeness. And I was not on one side any more than on the other side.”<sup>164</sup> From the viewpoint of their difference, this combined completeness was one of two opposed things that reside together. In the pure logic of chess, “there are no bizarre conclusions like in art, where you can have all kinds of reasoning and conclusions.”<sup>165</sup> The thought of the artist is less clear and distinct, less Cartesian as Duchamp would say:<sup>166</sup> its flow is not without mystery; we can produce ideas that open an unknown space rather than a conclusion that can only be final. In the case of the glass and *The Green Box*, the aim was to prevent them from taking a purely aesthetic-plastic or literary form. In the same way, the combination of chess and art prevented his life from being dominated by either a purely logical or purely alogical attitude.

For a divergent combination of this kind, the two sides can result in a battle over the same territory, the same efforts of thought, the same energy, the same time. But this divergence was of use to Duchamp: he explained that by playing chess, “you were able to waste a fantastic amount of time in your life. This is what happened to me and probably helped me do what I wanted: paint as little

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<sup>163</sup> Interview with Calvin Tomkins, p. 41.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.—There is also the following from the interview with Francis Roberts: “in my life, chess and art stand at opposite poles” (p. 63).

<sup>165</sup> Interview with Calvin Tomkins, p. 41. While explaining these points, he admitted that he was giving explanations that he had never previously thought of.

<sup>166</sup> On this he explained: “I’ve never read Descartes to speak of. I was thinking of the logical meaning, the reasoning Cartesianism implies. Nothing is left to the vapours of the imagination. It implies an acceptance of all doubts, it’s an opposition to unclear thinking” (interview with Dore Ashton, p. 244).—In the interview with Richard Hamilton, he described himself as a defrocked Cartesian (side A, ~17:40–18:15).

as possible and not repeat my paintings. The one goes well with the other to help pass the time when you're not painting." ("[En jouant aux échecs] vous a été pouvait perdre un temps fantastique dans votre vie. Ce qui m'est arrivé à moi et qui m'a aidé probablement à faire ce que je n'ai ce que je voulais: c'est à dire faire le moins possible de peinture ne pas répéter mes peintures. Ça va avec ça fait passer le temps quand on ne fait pas de peinture.")<sup>167</sup> A divergent combination appears if two things feed off the same time and energy but give little insight from one to the other; the one becomes a distraction, a way to lose time. We can make indirect contributions to many different things, consuming different art forms, different forms of culture, but we can only fully make a direct contribution to one: we can only create without compromise in a single area at a time; we can only seek to incorporate depths of information in a single space. A focused interest in any other will produce a conflict and thereby a diminution of our powers. Just as art is diluted through its mixture with money, when we take on these other interests, we are diluting ourselves. Duchamp wanted this dilution for the purpose of keeping himself away from painting; the divergence between art and chess was affirmed for its usefulness. But there is another possibility: the development of another interest can have benefits of its own.

Another explanation of Duchamp's on the relationship between art and chess concerned their convergence because both were grounded in his prioritisation of the intellectual over the visual: "I took [chess] very seriously and enjoyed it because I found some common points between chess and painting. ... It was another facet of the same kind of mental expression, intellectual expression, one small facet if you want, but it differed enough to make it distinct, and it added something to my life."<sup>168</sup> On the one hand, we can see that this intellectual expression that is common to both chess and art can be developed through their co-existence. Certain operations of thought are strengthened in chess that can be made use of in art. On the other hand, we can say that chess belongs to the development of the ideational for Duchamp. In this convergent form, it can be seen as an analogue of art itself; although Duchamp defined chess as a violent sport,<sup>169</sup> he could also recognise a significant relationship between them. He could see, for example, that chess was as another way in which the visual and the ideational combine:

Une partie d'échecs est une chose visuelle et plastique, et si ce n'est pas géométrique dans le sens statique du mot, c'est une mécanique puisque cela bouge;

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Jean-Marie Drot, ~27:55–28:20.

<sup>168</sup> Later interview with James Johnson Sweeney, p. 136.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Frank Brady, published as: 'Duchamp, Art and Chess', in: *Chess Life* (June 1961). No. 6, p. 168. Available from: [https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDR\\_B001\\_F016\\_001/](https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDR_B001_F016_001/).

c'est un dessin, c'est une réalité mécanique. Les pièces ne sont pas jolies par elles-mêmes pas plus que la forme du jeu, mais ce qui est joli—si le mot « joli » peut être employé—c'est le mouvement. ... Dans le jeu d'échecs des choses extrêmement belles dans le domaine du mouvement mais pas du tout dans le domaine visuel. C'est l'imagination du mouvement ou du geste qui fait la beauté, dans ce cas-là. C'est complètement dans la matière grise.

A game of chess is a visual and plastic thing, and if it isn't geometric in the static sense of the word, it is mechanical, since it moves; it's a drawing, it's a mechanical reality. The pieces aren't pretty in themselves, any more than is the form of the game, but what is pretty—if the word 'pretty' can be used—is the movement. ... In chess there are some extremely beautiful things in the domain of movement, but not in the visual domain. It's the imagining of the movement or of the gesture that makes the beauty, in this case. It's completely in one's gray matter.<sup>170</sup>

What the chess player makes on the chessboard are forms and patterns that create something like an aesthetic satisfaction through the ideational meaning they have within the tactical process of the game. This ideational nature of chess can be compared to the ideational nature of literature: Duchamp explained that “beauty in chess is closer to beauty in poetry; the chess pieces are the block alphabet which shapes thoughts; and these thoughts, although making a visual design on the chess board, express their beauty *abstractly*, like a poem.”<sup>171</sup> In this way, the combination of the visual and the literary finds a new area to move into: “I believe that every chess player experiences a mixture of two aesthetic pleasures, first the abstract image akin to the poetic idea in writing, second the sensuous pleasure of the ideographic execution of that image on the chess boards.”<sup>172</sup> This abstract image could be expressed through a purely written notation, but in the actual game of chess, it is expressed through the visual position of the pieces on the board. In this way, chess itself is combinational: it involves an abstract idea of a sense expressed through an actual visual reality.

For a convergent combination between art and chess, the two sides can contribute to the same lines of development. Just as there is a difference between the glass and *The Green Box*, a fundamental separation remains between art and chess, but nonetheless both sides are affected by their constructive cohabitation.

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<sup>170</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne, p. 24. English, pp. 18–19.

<sup>171</sup> Untitled lecture given for the New York State Chess Association (30 August 1952), pp. 1–2. Available from: [https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE\\_B013\\_F025\\_001/](https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE_B013_F025_001/).

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.—This aesthetic nature of the visual in chess should not be seen to contradict the point made above—i.e. that only the ideational in chess concerns beauty—because this aesthetic nature is no more than the visual expression of the abstract image.



We look at the glass through the ideas of *The Green Box*; we read *The Green Box* through our vision of the glass. In the same way, Duchamp could see chess from an artist's point of view and could see art from the viewpoint of chess. The combination of the ideational and the visual that formed Duchamp's understanding of art could be applied to chess; the intellectual expression of the chess player could be applied to art. Chess brought a cool logic to his art, and art brought an aesthetic heat to his chess. His art expressed itself in mechanistic themes, dismissive of subjectivity; his understanding of chess became couched in poetic feeling.

Duchamp also thought that chess represented a purity that art can struggle to achieve. He stated that there is no money in chess,<sup>173</sup> that it is something that cannot be commercialised and is thereby much purer than art in its social position.<sup>174</sup> During the time he was playing, in some way chess remained underground; Duchamp explained that "an artist knows that maybe someday there'll be recognition and monetary reward, but for the chess master there is little public recognition and absolutely no hope of supporting himself by his endeavours."<sup>175</sup> His advice to Bobby Fischer would not be to discourage him but to make clear that he will never have any money from chess; as a young championship winning player, he will nonetheless "live a monk-like existence and know more rejection than any artist ever has, struggling to be known and accepted."<sup>176</sup>

## 7. Art and Life

The connection between art and life in Duchamp can appear with a similar duality of convergence and divergence that we have seen in the case of chess. Art was a fundamental aspect of Duchamp's life, but at the same time there was a certain distance between them. Duchamp was not ruled by his commitment to art; as well as slowing things down to avoid any detrimental effect on the quality of the work, there were also more personal reasons. Duchamp explained that he only worked on *The Large Glass* for two hours a day: "It interested me, but not enough to be eager to finish it. I didn't care. I had no intention to show it or sell it at that time. I was just doing it: that was my life. And whenever I wanted to do it I would. That's my makeup, I can't complain."<sup>177</sup> Art did not dominate his life;

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<sup>173</sup> Interview with Calvin Tomkins, p. 42.

<sup>174</sup> Quotation from 'Art: A Family Affair', in: *Time* (10 March 1952). Vol. 59, no. 10, p. 82.

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Frank Brady, p. 169.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*—At the height of his fame during the early 1970s, Fischer was featured in *Life* magazine and appeared on various mainstream television talk shows.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with Calvin Tomkins, p. 76.—There is also a very similar quotation where Duchamp said that, when he wasn't working on the glass, he would go out and enjoy America. (See Tomkins, C. (1965) *The Bride and the Bachelors: Five Masters of the Avant-Garde*. New York, Viking, p. 38.)



it wasn't something he did out of an imposed necessity, but instead from a conviction towards the ideas that was exercised as and when the impetus was there. The development of culture can be interwoven with the development of the self, without the one overwhelming the other. If there is an all-encompassing desire to work, then we may do so; if there is not, then we may not. Just as we saw in the limitations of the purely visual and the purely ideational, if we pursue only one side of our existence, then we will find ourselves exposed to stagnation and repetition. If our developmental movements are only focused on a single line, this will hinder our development rather than opening a new space for it.

But in Duchamp's life, art was not an activity that was separated from his other concerns; it was not like a job that he used to earn money simply to live. While acknowledging that he doubted the future social importance of his artistic work, he explained that "my art would be that of living: each second, each breath is a work which is inscribed nowhere, which is neither visual nor cerebral. It's a sort of constant euphoria." ("Mon art serait de vivre; chaque seconde, chaque respiration est une œuvre qui n'est inscrite nulle part, qui n'est ni visuelle ni cérébrale. C'est une sorte d'euphorie constante.")<sup>178</sup> First of all, why did Duchamp emphasise that such work does not concern the combination of the visual and the ideational? Perhaps there is a certain metaphorical nature to this statement that means that it does not concern any theoretical view on the structure of actual artworks. In practice, Duchamp's life did not have a text that explicitly elaborated it; it was not something whose primary form was to be looked at. But there is a combination here nonetheless: it was a life combined with a pure aesthetic, a euphoria that was ethical in the ancient sense of a way of living.

This convergent combination is seen in the way that Duchamp's ideas could belong within both his life and his art. There was a point when Duchamp considered including a bottle of Benedictine around the mechanism of the chariot in *The Large Glass*, and the density of this bottle would oscillate according to an imaginative physical nature that he referred to as involving a liberty of indifference.<sup>179</sup> This idea of indifference was not only a potential feature of the glass; Duchamp found a certain peace when indifference became incorporated within himself. When asked why he was for indifference, he replied: "Because I hate hatred, I hate too much love of your mother. All this is no good. I mean the world is not made of these things. Indifference is the real state of repose."<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne, p. 135. English, p. 72.

<sup>179</sup> *The Green Box*, note 130. *Salt Seller*, p. 62. This bottle was neither included in the glass itself nor in *The Large Glass Completed*.

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Mike Wallace, p. 47.—There is an endnote that explains how Duchamp slurred his speech here, where it sounds like he said 'respose', but the transcriber writes 'response' rather than 'repose' (*ibid.*, p. 55). The transcriber's italics have also been removed.—Elsewhere he asked "what's the use of hating? You're just using up your

From this point of view, our positive and negative emotions are not the real substance of the world but consist of arbitrary sufferings that our internal states impose upon us. A healthy indifference is a way to no longer be ruled by them, a resting place beyond the extremes that we become attached to. Duchamp explained that “for me, if there was any philosophical idea involved, it was that nothing is serious enough to take seriously.”<sup>181</sup> And why should there be this lack of seriousness, this freedom through indifference? “The whole world is based on chance, or at least chance is a definition of what happens in the world we live in and know more than any causality.”<sup>182</sup> There is an innocence of the happenings of the world rather than the rewards and punishments of a higher being; chance does not judge but merely unfolds among the ongoing flow of things. Seen as such we can accept this unfolding as what it is; we can remain with a certain indifference towards it to prevent ourselves from being overwhelmed by the movement of our emotional reactions.

Duchamp once told Arturo Schwarz that, during his time as a librarian, he had found that the ideas of Pyrrho of Elis were the closest to his own.<sup>183</sup> In the description of Pyrrho’s views that originates from his pupil Timon, we are told that things are indifferent (ἀδιάφορα), unstable (ἀστάθμητα), and indeterminate (ἀνεπίκριτα), and thereby neither our sensible perceptions nor our opinions are a source of truth.<sup>184</sup> For this reason, we should live without opinions, saying about each thing: “οὐ μᾶλλον ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν ἢ καὶ ἔστι καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἢ οὔτε ἔστιν οὔτε οὐκ ἔστιν”—“it no more is than is not or both is and is not or neither is nor is not.”<sup>185</sup> The result of such a view will firstly be speechlessness (ἀφασία), but then freedom from worry (ἀταραξία) and, according to Aenesidemus, pleasure (ἡδονή).<sup>186</sup>

There is a practical example of how Duchamp applied an indifference towards things to give rise to a freedom from worries of his own. Duchamp explained that in his Broadway studio, the heat of spring and summer forced him

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energy, and die sooner” (interview with Calvin Tomkins, p. 63).

<sup>181</sup> Interview with Dorothy Norman, p. 38.—This lack of seriousness also relates to Duchamp’s humour: his view on the importance of this is in the interview with Francis Roberts (p. 47); also when listening to the *Apropos of Myself* lecture, we can hear the audience laughing at his descriptions of his artistic works, which Duchamp himself appears to relish.

<sup>182</sup> Interview with Francis Roberts, p. 63.

<sup>183</sup> Schwarz, A. (1969/2000) *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*. Revised and expanded edition. New York, Delano Greenidge, p. 38, note 23.

<sup>184</sup> Eusebius quoting from Book VIII of Aristocles’ *On Philosophy*, in: Bett, R. (2000) *Pyrrho, his Antecedents, and his Legacy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 16.—It’s possible that the term ‘ἀδιάφορα’ means ‘undifferentiated’, but we are not focused on a exegesis of Pyrrho himself but on an exegesis of Duchamp’s own ethical views in relation to him.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

to keep the windows open, but this meant that noise from the traffic and tram lines was what he described as infernal.<sup>187</sup> But Duchamp's view was that we can learn to live with these situations, and this is a way of finding peace (tranquillité).<sup>188</sup> In Pyrrhonian terms, the way in which this peace (ἀταραξία) occurs is through seeing things as indifferent (ἀδιάφορα). The point is that he gained an inner state wherein he no longer cared whether the noise was or was not there, a neutral acceptance of the noise wherein it was simply allowed to be. The emotional strain of the noise then dissipates because the desire for it to no longer be heard has gone. It was this desire that kept him from ἀταραξία; without this desire he can live with or without the noise, with or without the disruption to his work. We are indifferent when we are the same whether the difficulty is there or not; either case is simply the result of chance in the world, a world wherein our emotional states do not exist as substantial entities.

Regarding Pyrrho's view that we should be without opinions and inclinations, we can see that this was implicit in Duchamp's approach. If at certain points he appeared to take a particular position, Duchamp admitted that it would be attenuated with irony or sarcasm, simply because he doesn't believe in positions.<sup>189</sup> He was then asked by Pierre Cabanne what he did believe in, to which Duchamp responded: "Mais à rien! Le mot « croyance » est une erreur aussi. C'est comme le mot « jugement ». Ce sont des données épouvantable sur lesquelles la terre est basée."—"Nothing, of course! The word 'belief' is another error. It's like the word 'judgment'; they're both horrible ideas on which the world is based." Cabanne then asks whether he believes in himself. Duchamp denied this, explaining: "Je ne crois pas dans le mot « être ». Le concept être est une invention humaine."—"I don't believe in the word 'being'. The concept of being is a human invention."<sup>190</sup> Firstly, this shows the extent of his Cartesianism: rejecting even the certainty of the cogito, Duchamp achieved a level of doubt that Descartes himself could not reach, a doubt that he in fact *is* in any essential sense.<sup>191</sup> Secondly, this reflects the Pyrrhonian approach to opinions in that we avoid having them because we should say about each thing that it no more is than is not or both is and is not or neither is nor is not.<sup>192</sup> This non-ontology, i.e. an ontology that neither states what is nor what isn't, belongs to the indifference of Duchamp's approach to the world; we see here that it is a total indifference, an indifference that is so far

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<sup>187</sup> Interview with Jean-Marie Drot, ~7:00–7:30.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne, pp. 168–169. English, p. 89.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid. Translation altered.

<sup>191</sup> See the interview with William Seitz, p. 113.

<sup>192</sup> The connection between Pyrrho and this exchange with Cabanne was previously highlighted by the art critic Thomas McEvilley, in: 'Empyrrhical Thinking', *Art Forum* (October 1988), p. 123.

reaching that it can only result in a peace formed of silence (ἀφασία), a silence that leads to euphoria (ἠδονή). Duchamp's scepticism towards language suggests an inclination towards a peace without words. In this connection it is also of interest that Duchamp once said that chess is a school of silence.<sup>193</sup>

If our view of ethics can be combined with art, we can also see that our view of art can be combined with ethics. Duchamp once compared the domineering one who holds opinions of taste to the one who humbly allows him or herself to be shaken by an aesthetic echo in the moment of viewing an artwork:

Taste presupposes a domineering onlooker who dictates what he likes and dislikes, and translates it into beautiful and ugly when he is sensuously pleased or displeased. Quite differently, the 'victim' of an aesthetic echo is in a position comparable to that of a man in love or of a believer who dismisses automatically his demanding ego and helplessly submits to a pleasurable and mysterious constraint. While in exercising his taste, he adopts a commanding attitude when touched by the aesthetic revelation, the same man, almost in ecstatic mood, becomes receptive and humble.<sup>194</sup>

What we see here is another way that the development of culture can be interwoven with the development of the self, how an artistic approach can result in a form of ethics. We must remember, however, that Duchamp denied the idea of progress. But this development is not the same as a progress that would inevitably move towards a set goal: in development wrong turns are possible; there may be certain developments that are lost; and there is nothing transcendent guiding us, only the ongoing movements of development itself, which are not entirely free-floating in the total absence of any ground, but engrained in the sense and the real of the actual world. As opposed to an imaginary progress that would require a certain article of faith, for innovation in art to happen, there must be a process of development; for a self to change from one ethical state to another, there must likewise be a process of development.

In Duchamp's development of the self, where an ethics is interwoven with art, we can see that it does not only concern the individual; it is reflected in what Duchamp does in the world, in his relations with others: "Je n'ai pas d'ennemis, ou très peu. Il y a des gens qui ne m'aiment pas, c'est certain, mais je ne les connais même pas. Je veux dire que ce n'est pas une inimitié déclarée, ce n'est pas une guerre. En général, je n'ai que des amis."—"I don't have any enemies, or very few. There are people who don't like me, that's for sure, but I don't even

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<sup>193</sup> Interview with Jean-Marie Drot, ~3:35–3:45.

<sup>194</sup> Audio recording from The Western Round Table on Modern Art in San Francisco (~11:25–12:25, tape 6, side A from the session on 9 August 1949). A transcript is available from: [https://www.ubu.com/historical/wrtma/transcript\\_c/index.htm](https://www.ubu.com/historical/wrtma/transcript_c/index.htm) (p. 44-c).

know them. I mean that it's not a declared hostility, it's not a war. In general, I only have friends."<sup>195</sup> This can be seen as the difference that his thought brings to his surrounding communal world, the effects that his thought has upon it. The artist of the self who accepts the chance of the world with pleasure, with a lack of seriousness, with an indifference that leads to liberty, that leads away from a domineering taste, an indifference that results in the development rather than a regression of the self, this artist is not the pessimist that shuns the world, but can use it as the medium in which the self develops. Such artists do not shun the big city for the hermitage; such artists live in peace with themselves and others. This artist is one that has combined the skill of the artisan with the peace of ἀταραξία in the development of the self.

## 8. Combination

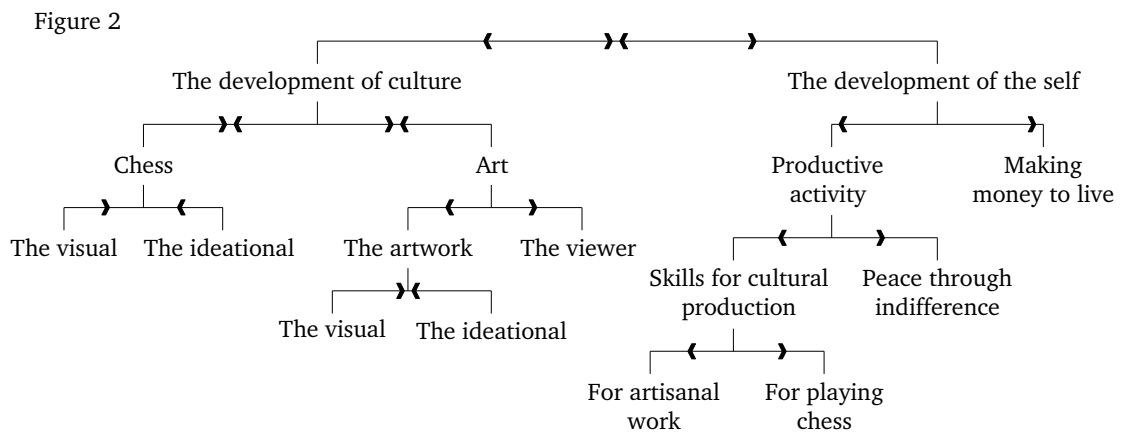
### A

As a methodological operation of thought, combination can itself be conceptualised through a demarcation of its general features. We can immediately see that it contains a necessary relationship to multiplicity: the combinations of Duchamp concern the creation of dualities—the literary/the visual, the artwork/the viewer, etc. In general this multiplicity may simply have the form of an indefinite continuation, if there is the possibility of a combination of three, of four, and so on. But the essentially unique form of multiplicity in combination is seen in the feature of layering, i.e. the way in which various combinations themselves combine at different levels to create a new whole. In practice this layering can occur intuitively: one layer may simply follow from another without any explicit thought. We can, however, break down the whole in order to see the combinational structures within, in order to abstract the conceptual property of layering in general, giving us a feature of combination that is most often unseen yet fundamental to the possibilities that belong to it.

In the case of Duchamp, a multiplicity of combinations appears, both within and beyond his art, which can be formed into a structure that is unique to the combinational whole that was Duchamp's life and work (see figure 2). At the first level, the layering begins with a combination of the development of culture and the development of the self, i.e. a combination of the developmental work we share with others, and the developmental work that is within or for ourselves. From this primary combination, the next layer under the development of culture includes a combination of art and chess, and under the development of the self a combination of productive activity and making money to live. In the next layer within this productive activity, the skills needed for cultural production—which include a combination of skills for the artisanship of art and the

<sup>195</sup> Interview with Pierre Cabanne, p. 191. English, p. 100.

sport of chess—are combined with a peace cultivated through indifference. In art as a form of cultural development, further layers include the combination of the artwork itself and the role of the viewer, with the artwork containing another layer of the visual combined with the ideational. Different versions of the same combination also occur in multiple areas, as the next layer under chess similarly contains the combination of the ideational with its own visual plasticity. In this way, the fundamental combination of the visual and the ideational gains an influence over multiple areas of Duchamp’s developmental work; the basic form of this combination can be used to give other areas the meaning of art.



The figure also includes chevrons which, through a movement of abstraction, can be used to categorise certain features of combination for the purpose of their diagrammatic representation. They indicate, firstly, the general possibilities of convergence and divergence in the context of Duchamp’s work: if the chevrons point inwards, this represents convergence; if they point outwards, divergence; if they do both, this represents a possible cohabitation of the two. Secondly, the chevrons indicate how the combinational dualities are not of a strictly static nature, i.e. how there is a variability in the level of integration between the two sides: if the chevrons are close together towards the centre, this shows high integration; if they are far apart towards the outer limit, the integration is low; if they are in the middle, this shows a medium level of integration.

The high level of integration can be found in artworks where the visual and the ideational are fundamentally interwoven: we can have both the visual idea and the concrete manifestation of the ideational, i.e. there is the idea (in its visual expression) and the physical work (in its expression of a visual idea), where their combination is fused into what they themselves are qua an objective artistic form. For a medium level of convergent integration, there is the same combination of the idea and the visual in chess: as opposed to art, the visual in

chess is, like in writing, primarily there for ensuring the legibility of the situation of the game rather than a fundamental part of the players' expression; although the aesthetic beauty of chess can be expressed through the position of the pieces on the board, Duchamp's view was that this beauty is fundamentally ideational. For a medium level of divergent integration, there is the separation in the combined creative work of the artist and viewer, and in Duchamp's productive activity within the form of his self-development: in his case the cultivation of peace belonged with but was not fundamentally tied to the same developmental movements as his acquisition of the skills of the artisan/chess player—themselves divergently integrated in the same way for the same reason. For the low level of integration, there is the combination of this productive activity and the ways he made money to live: these are combined in that they are linked within Duchamp's life but remain separated in terms of any mutual influence; although there is always the need for a source of income in the development of ourselves, this can be a monetary gain that remains independent from our fundamental productive activities, while sustaining their basic possibility nonetheless. For the cohabitation of the convergent and the divergent, in the combination of art and chess within the development of culture, they can be seen in terms of a divergence where chess is simply a way to waste time when not painting, but there is also the convergence where art is seen in terms of chess, and chess is seen in terms of art.

For the primary combination of the development of culture and the development of the self, the structure displays a certain independence between the levels, a certain fluidity of meaning based on each level's context. Just as the viewer in the art/viewer combination has an independence towards the level above it—i.e. art and chess combined specifically in the context of Duchamp's own work—at the level of the primary combination, the development of the self is independent from the self developments concerning Duchamp's productive activity. In this way, the primary combination concerns the relationship between art and life: here there is the medium level of divergence where art and life belong together without the former dominating the latter, and there is also the high level of convergence where life is given an aesthetic meaning through an ethical euphoria, i.e. the level of integration is high because this is where Duchamp's contribution to culture was the development of himself.

In the examples above, we can see the structural relationship between the convergence/divergence distinction and the level of integration: low integration does not occur with convergence, and high integration does not occur with divergence, but either can occur with medium integration; in other words, high integration is a form of convergence, whereas low integration is a form of divergence, but beyond the extremes, integration can be either. This fourfold abstrac-



tion, along with the layering, constitutes the basic structural form of the concept of combination; together they represent the conceptual nature of combination inasmuch as it can operate on a layered and integrated basis.

In our general overview of combination in Duchamp, the point is not to document every single possible combination that could be found in Duchamp's life and work, but to describe those that point us in certain directions. We outline a combinational whole for the purpose of using it to inform our understanding, potentially changing both our own thought and practice. The reality of combination is in the way it operates in the development of culture and the self. For our own developmental work, combination is where a need arises: a gap exists and we must find an additional element to fill it. If we have a problem, this strategy of looking for a new element involves the question of whether there is something missing in what we are doing. It asks whether our approach is complete. The problems must first become apparent for what the combinations can then solve. We problematise, combine, and develop, and then repeat this threefold sequence as needed in the ongoing processes that engage us.

This sequence shows that combinations are not merely formed for the purpose of problem solving alone; in solving a problem—such as how to overcome the limitations of purely retinal art—they are intended to open new areas for art to develop into. In our conceptualisation of combination, we can see that it concerns a certain relationship with temporality. Combination can look backwards towards a problem that it is intended to solve, and also forwards towards its potential developmental possibilities; it looks towards the past in order to create changes within our present concerns for the potential of its movement towards the future. Duchamp looked back towards purely retinal art in the beginning, but was then concerned primarily with looking forwards. The areas that resulted from the initial critique of the purely retinal were then pursued for their own sake; the possibilities that were opened became the primary orientation of further developmental movements.

In the pragmatic of combination, 'purpose' is the general defining term. The questions to ask are 'what are we trying to achieve?', and then 'what combinations may allow this?' Duchamp wanted to invent, and the method of combination opened a possible route for this; he wanted to guard against the purity of both the aesthetic-plastic and literary forms, so a combination of the two was the result. In the pursuit of developmental movements, we must understand how combinations can be judged. If our aim is to innovate, we judge them according to how far they allow us to push something forward. If money and art is a regressive combination, we reject it. If the combination of literature and art opens a new area, we accept it.

Combination on its own is not enough to produce great work. A combination

can be ineffective if it is concerned only with an arbitrary or obvious juxtaposition of two things. What is it about Duchamp's glass that makes the result of the combination so unexpected, as far as it is not just any combination, but one with as fundamental repercussions as that of Duchamp's own combination of visual art and literature? We cannot say that creation lies purely in the individual, nor only in outside influences. We may pursue a description of creation in either way for whatever reason we might choose, but the important point is that in this duality of the individual and the collective surroundings, there is the possibility of unique results. There was no other moment like the creation of *The Large Glass* because of the difference it creates. The combinations that Duchamp introduced into his work were the matrix of difference in which a new difference arose. Creativity and its background influences seep into the cracks of individuality. It is possible to create something that only a single person could have created. In the end, combination is an answer to the question as to how we approach the search for the new. In Duchamp's case his experience provided him with unique elements to solve his problems; it allowed a forward movement to be made through the reconciliation of what at first appears opposed.

The conceptual structure of combination consists of the layering and the variability of convergent and divergent integration; in terms of its temporal movement in practice, there is the momentum generated by its purpose. This purpose may itself be present in a combinational form, i.e. purposes themselves are not always singular but combine with each other to create a multifarious context for developmental forces: in the case of Duchamp, this would include the aim of opening new territories for art, the critique of the purely retinal, the development of linguistic games as a feature of art, and the development of art for the development of the self. In this way, the multiplicity of combination reverts back into its driving force: its purpose can be structured in layers and variable integration, can produce combinations from its own combined form.

These features of structure and purpose differentiate combination from the operation of moderation. Although combination may sometimes involve the moderation between two extremes, conceptually the two must be differentiated. Combination is not as simple as moderation, as finding a mean. Combination is the opportunity for creation, for difference to enter both creative work and life. It can result in something new, involving unexpected lines to follow. The combination of divergent influences is a distinct operation of thought in comparison to moderation: we are not presented with two available things that we must moderate, but with the problem of a missing element in a developmental movement. While both can be seen to be involved in the avoidance of extremes, combination involves the avoidance of particular kinds of extreme but not others: although the pure readymade avoids the extreme of the purely ideational, it rep-

resents an extreme of the combination of the literary and the visual; its limitations qua an extreme could, we might say, be moderated through artistic intervention, a moderation that would be distinct from the development of the combinational extreme itself.

We must also differentiate combination from the operation of opposition. The former is related to the latter, but it has a wider application. Two things can be combined that are opposed to each other, but two things that are not opposed can also be combined. In Duchamp's approach to innovation, art and literature are not antagonistically opposed; they are simply different art forms. In combination there can be no opposition at all; we can fully affirm both sides. In opposition we can only more or less oppose one side with the other. If Duchamp combined the visual with the ideational, this was different to where Art and Language purely opposed the visual: in the former there was a developmental movement that applied to both sides; in the latter one side was developed while the other was repressed. We have also seen how oppositional dualities appear in *The Large Glass*: bachelors/bride, the crude/the advanced, and so on. But do the bachelors really oppose the bride? Here we need a distinction between *opposition per se* and *the combination of opposites*. In the glass Duchamp made use of the oppositional aspect within the combination. If we are emphasising this oppositional aspect, we are viewing it in terms of the concept of opposition; if we are emphasising their unity, we are viewing it in terms of the concept of combination. Like in the differentiation between combination and moderation, combination and opposition can in some way flow into each other: these concepts connect to each other; perhaps we can say that they combine. But combination can either be totally indifferent to opposition or can make use of it. And for opposition to connect with combination, it must remain impure: only with high levels of non-opposition can oppositional factors find a certain reconciliation in the unity of combinational development.

## **B**

We have seen what Duchamp was able to do with combination, what transformations he could make with it. But we must also ask what we can do with it, what transformations we can make. There is the possibility that the combinational life and work of Duchamp could become a guiding thought for developments in philosophy. It was Duchamp's view that repetition is the opposite of renewal, and we may well say that philosophy is itself in need of renewal, and we may well say that certain ideas in Duchamp provide a method for doing so. If the dominance of a purely visual art sent Duchamp in the direction of being inspired by a writer, perhaps the proliferation of the pure, dry literature of academic philosophy sends us in the direction of being inspired by an artist. But to begin in

this direction, to understand how philosophy can be transformed through combination, we must start by asking what can happen if philosophy itself was to go underground.

If we are to work in complete independence, we must be aware of the possibilities of change that this creates for the work. A work that follows the same lines as others will not benefit from isolation; such a work would only lose in substance cut off from the lines it is attempting to follow. For independence to have an operative meaning, it must be responsible for generating an intended effect on the actual work itself. The meaning of independence will be the difference it makes to thought: in its purity from external purposes, how its development can change, how it can reach something that was previously unreachable, how it can adopt another form. The fundamental question to ask concerns what it is that external purposes do to thought: what lines do they channel our thought into, what spaces do they close, what movements do they reject? For both art and philosophy to be fully alive, they must have an underground. When all we have is the long dead and the previously established, we are unable to reach the deeper soils where other roots are able to grow. There is no need for a total rejection of what precedes us, but nonetheless we can begin to look beyond it to seek what is new. And this novelty may not only be confined to content; it can relate to stylistic concerns, to method, to publication—to an ethic of independence that runs throughout the entire process of a work's inception.

But are there those who would criticise this subterranean depth? Is there an argument for the superior vitality of the surface, understood as the phenomenological surface of immediate presence or as the surface of a post-classical metaphysics? But we can say that the surface is the terrain of the result, while the underground is the terrain of the process. To create a strict opposition between the two is to miss the value of both. We need minoritarian thought, a thought that has freed itself from dominant ideas and purposes, to be able to create change in thinking. Minoritarian thought is untimely because it has not been shaped by the predominant movements that surround it but by the movements that it has found out for itself. For philosophy, this minoritarian thought is essential. If we think like everyone else, we only follow the prevailing habits rather than digging for something rarer. But there is no need for this underground to be focused only on the pursuit of an obscurity that purely opposes every feature of the mainstream.<sup>196</sup> In the underground, clarity can also be pursued. If the future of philosophy is the road towards the extremes of a radically experimental form, it will find itself with the same basic problem as a purely ideational conceptual art: if

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<sup>196</sup> We may say that this obscurity relates to what Duchamp called pseudo-philosophy, i.e. philosophical work that sounds good but does not mean anything. (Ibid., p. 195. English, p. 102.)

the only aim is to follow a singular, closed route, it will struggle to find any other meaningful progress. The point is that we must search for difference, but not just any difference. The difference that we search for is the one that allows the pursuit of previously unseen developmental areas.

And this return underground may well involve a certain de-deification of the philosopher, a certain way that everything can be questioned before moving somewhere new, a doubt that we apply to our preconceptions as a form of preparation. Is there a need for a faith in something metaphysically absolute for philosophical thought to move forwards? Doesn't this faith itself involve a restriction of movement? We may say that the philosopher becomes an artisan, but this should not be taken in a purely negative way: the philosopher's work belongs within the development of human culture as a whole, not as a deified language outside of culture, but one that resides within it; the philosopher remains within the development of the finite self, not as a transcendent subject beyond any worldly conditions, but one that engages in a singularity that belongs within the multiple. These places of residence should not be taken as limitations, but as fundamental aspects of the philosopher's purpose; they are not extremes that restrict movement, but areas in which a freedom of movement is possible.

The minoritarian should not be seen to imply weakness; it should not be seen as an ineffectual thought that can only refrain from establishing itself in the collective whole. There could be the argument that there is a powerlessness in philosophy, a lack of action in an abundance of words. Its form may lack the ability to affect the ideas of the majority opinion and the world that collectively surrounds us. But perhaps philosophy has a more subtle effect; perhaps its ideas can sink in from the underground. If we are aiming to make changes to the sense and the real of the actual world, aren't changes only temporary, or more fragile, if conceptual systems of ideas do not exist to sustain them at the level of subjects? But how can a minoritarian thought enter the majoritarian without thereby losing itself as minoritarian? If we should criticise something not merely for what it is in itself but for its majoritarian tendencies, how can anything avoid criticism when it has gained such ground? But there is the possibility of staying within the minoritarian form. For a dictum we may say: remain connected to your roots. The majoritarian and the minoritarian are two necessary poles—the one should not impose itself on the other; the quieter voices should continue to speak alongside the voices of others. The aim should be to ensure there is a space for the minoritarian in all things, so that its unique developmental properties are not suffocated. In their most abstract forms, the extreme result of the majoritarian losing connection with the minoritarian is tyranny, and the extreme result of the minoritarian losing connection with the majoritarian is erasure. Both sides are needed as co-players in the development of culture: if the majorit-

arian remains alone we arrive at a dominating stasis; if the minoritarian remains alone we arrive at its loss, a vanishing of the minoritarian because it remained silent everywhere other than in the privacy of its hiding place.

Duchamp once gave the following advice to John Cage regarding chess: “don’t just play your side of the game, play both sides.”<sup>197</sup> This idea of playing both sides can be seen to add a certain aspect to Duchamp’s aesthetic theory: because spectators play a role in the creative act, the creator should also understand art from their point of view.<sup>198</sup> It can also be seen to be operative in life in general: we can realise through the external aspect of our nature that even the most individualistic people remain fundamentally social. We can also see that this playing of both sides is needed for a philosophy that is beginning to waken into the light, having grounded itself in its independence: like in art, we should understand how the reader is an essential element in the life of a philosophical work, how its ongoing pertinence is defined by the effects it will generate from outside of itself. But there are limits to how far we should go in this playing of the other side: we can change our approach to publishing and promotion, to how a work finds its exposure, but we should neither change ourselves nor the work itself according to the influence of any external purpose, of any way that we might presuppose the needs of the other side; to do so would introduce diversions in these developments of the self and culture, diversions that may create a certain dilution though the loss of the original ideas being the sole generators of movement.<sup>199</sup> But once the work is created, once it has grown in the soil of independence, we must see the other side of the game as fundamental to its ongoing existence and meaning. The creative act continues with the activity of readers because a work can allow them to create ideas of their own. These acts belong to the ongoing flow of the development of culture; for this development to continue, we must ensure the work does not vanish in the void of the pure independence wherein it was created. The dictum is: make an effort to be read or disappear in the unknown. Some form of promotion is necessary, but there are ways to do this which do not compromise the form of the work itself.

The basic development of the self and culture can remain independent, but given the right moment, it can also begin to reach outwards. While remaining

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<sup>197</sup> John Cage interview with Moira and Bill Roth (1971), p. 7. Available from: [https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE\\_B013\\_F040\\_002/](https://www.duchamparchives.org/pma/archive/component/MDE_B013_F040_002/).

<sup>198</sup> The connection between the advice to Cage on chess and the spectator in art was previously made by Dalia Judovitz, in: *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit* (1998). Berkeley, University of California Press, p. 185.

<sup>199</sup> A possible counter example could be Kant’s revisions for the second edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, made in response to a negative review. But Kant’s intention for these changes involved no more than a clarification of the original ideas, rather than a capitulation to the tastes and ideas of others. Kant’s moral and theoretical positions remained entirely his own.

within the underground, there is a protection from nihilistic tendencies, from those tendencies that pull us down while we are making our first attempts towards something higher, but the stem of a germinating seed must eventually reach the surface if it is to continue to grow. The point is to work in the underground but without disappearing therein. Any philosophers who aim towards independence would do well to spend perhaps a decade alone, remaining only with themselves in the initial torrent of their development, to simply follow themselves in order to see what comes out of it. And this development may well be founded upon a new combination. In this independence, new problems can arise that ask for new solutions. For a problem that is only fully apparent from within an independent position, that is only questionable without the entrenched forces of habit that sustain it, a solution can be found somewhere unexpected, which in turn produces an unfamiliar result, a result that must grow alone in order to find its own movement without the blockages that would otherwise surround it. A new methodological need can be fulfilled through the method of combination, allowing philosophy to reconcile divergent principles through which to guide its ongoing operations, to move forward into other purposes that can become the ground of a renewed source of momentum. If an art form stagnates, a new element can give it a new direction; if philosophy reaches a state in which only pre-existing movements seem possible, a newly combined method can be the ground of another territory of thought.