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# How to Survive as an A R T I S T

Examples from the Life of Marcel Duchamp

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# Preface

Years ago, I visited the Cathedral of Chartres, France, to take a look at the famous Labyrinth. I spent some time walking around, having in mind the image of that riddle from books and postcards. After quite a while I suddenly realized that I was already standing on - or in - it: it was much larger than I had thought and covered a large part of the stone floor, partly hidden by benches.

Entering the labyrinth of Marcel Duchamp's life and oeuvre always holds the danger of getting lost in it. And sometimes you are already—or still—in it although you are sure you are only an observer. In the early 1980s, while studying art and communication sciences, I first came across this artist. In 1988, after some experience in a completely different business—holography—I decided to return to Duchamp, writing a dissertation on questions of his representation of space and movement. Thereafter, again, I went into an apparently entirely different business: working as a consultant for organizational development.

There were some magical moments in 1996 in Lisbon, when I had the idea to do a workshop on *Duchamp as a Life-Entrepreneur* at the Art Institute of Boston and explained that to Stan Trecker, the AIB president, while in the beautiful capital of Portugal.

So I entered the labyrinth again, this time concentrating on the question of how Duchamp managed to survive as an artist. My earlier studies in the 1980s helped a lot, but there had been a huge number of books and articles published since then. The bad aspect was a lot of reading work, the good was a vast amount of helpful ideas and interpretations that gave proof of the relevance of my own concept. A great help was Calvin Tomkins' biography on Duchamp, as well as documents from recent symposia on the artist.

Starting to prepare the workshop, I realized that, in fact, I had never stepped out of that labyrinth. This paper is mainly based on the reflection of my own *patchwork-existence*—working as a consultant in organizational development processes, being a lecturer at universities, and, above all, studying art both in theory and in practice. So I came to the conclusion that the artist Marcel Duchamp definitively had the core skills and strategies of an entrepreneur and that he, therefore, can serve as a peculiar model for artists and life-entrepreneurs of today.

While I was traveling the United States in 1997, I spent days in bookstores; the bookshelves full of publications on "small businesses" inspired me to take a closer look at Duchamp as a businessman. By draw-

ing an ever growing "mind map,"<sup>1</sup> using an technique generating new ideas, I collected an immense variety of different roles Duchamp incorporated. Studying this "network" I came to identify certain groups and finally selected obvious key roles.

What could be an appropriate strategy for studying and classifying different roles in Duchamp's life? As Francis M. Naumann warns, "Any attempt to establish a formula, a key, or some other type of guiding principle by which to assess or in other ways to interpret the artistic production of Marcel Duchamp would be... an entirely futile endeavor."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, I will suggest looking at this approach as a highly personal one, trying to show the context in which his works were created and collecting the comments Duchamp himself has given. This does not imply or claim that there is an oeuvre as a logical system, neither does it strive for a universal understanding of the artist's work or life. However, the four key roles I have identified are *Duchamp as*:

- *Pseudo-Scientist*
- *Joueur*
- *Recycler* and
- *Director*

Serving as points of orientation for a journey into the life and oeuvre of Marcel Duchamp, these roles might help to show how this artist not only survived in the sense of earning a living, but, more than that, they are intended to understand how he managed to establish himself as one of the most important artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

One of the lessons to be learned from the late 1990s is that "whatever made you successful in the past, won't in the future", as Lew Platt, CEO of Hewlett-Packard Co. once stated.<sup>3</sup> With this paper I want to show some "patches" and provocations inherent in the *patchwork-existence* of Marcel Duchamp that might help to "choose off"<sup>4</sup> old perspectives and to "un-learn" worn out patterns. In this sense it is a recycling and exploitation of Duchamps works and other mines.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> concept by Tony Buzan

<sup>2</sup> Francis M. Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp: A Reconciliation of Opposites*, in Thierry de Duve (Ed.), *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA and London, England 1991, p.41

<sup>3</sup> Lew Platt, quoted in Tom Peters, *The Circle of Innovation*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1997, p.VII

<sup>4</sup> As this term does not exist yet, I would like to coin it, meaning to deliberately get rid of some old perspectives with the chance to "un-learn" and learn something new. (B.B.)

<sup>5</sup> see Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, *ibid.*, pp.260-261, this term is borrowed from Duchamp, who used it to describe his activities on the "exploitation of roulette, trente-et-quarante, "and other mines on the Cote d'Azur" (*ibid.*).

# Introduction

## *The Intellectual Blackhole*

Robert Lebel published the first monograph on Duchamp in 1959. In a new edition he looked back and wrote:

I described Marcel Duchamp the way he could be defined then: complex personality, uncommon, distant, esoteric, retired for a long time from art after the unforeseeable sensation at the Armory Show in 1913. Only a few initiated were attracted to him...Then, suddenly, infatuation set in. The reasons for the elevation are contradictory, but they can be found primarily in the sudden emergence of "anti-art," or better, "anti-esthetic" sentiments. This movement began in the United States, where Pop artists attacked their too "arty" predecessors, the Abstract Expressionists, and Duchamp became the chosen precursor for this new wave.<sup>6</sup>

Much later, in 1996, Calvin Tomkins published his biography on Marcel Duchamp. He points out that this artist "for a certain breed of obsessive academic... Duchamp could easily become an intellectual blackhole."<sup>7</sup>

Many scholars pretended to be aware of the danger that is inherent both in the life and oeuvre of this artist. In spite of this danger there were only a few that seem to have kept that in mind and, therefore, have developed counter-strategies or, as Francois Lyotard puts it, used a "counter-rule: in talking about Duchamp, one would not try to understand and show that one understood, but rather the opposite: to try not to understand and to show that one did not understand."<sup>8</sup>

What adds to the problem is the fact that Duchamp himself gave quite a lot of statements throughout his life that seem to be contradictory (MD in an interview for *Vogue* in 1963, "...so I insist every word I am telling you now is stupid and wrong."<sup>9</sup>) Virtually every statement, every work, every breath he took has been used as a starting point for absurd examinations.

It is not only the complexity of his oeuvre as a whole that makes it difficult to find a structure or a thread to get an orientation inside this labyrinth. Besides, trying to investigate his life and the different roles he obviously played will not necessarily lead to a stringent understanding.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp*, Paris, Belfond, 1985, pp.12-13; quoted in Rudolf Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann, Cambridge MA and London, England, The MIT Press, 1996 (fourth printing), pp.1-2

<sup>7</sup> Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1996, p.457

<sup>8</sup> Francois Lyotard, *Les Transformateurs Duchamp*, Paris, Editions Galilée, 1977, p.17, quoted in Kuenzli and Naumann, *ibid.*, p.5

<sup>9</sup> MD in an interview with William C. Seitz for *Vogue* (*What happened to Art?*), Feb. 15, 1963, pp.110 ff., quoted in Tomkins, *ibid.*, p.419

Still, Duchamp's position in the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century art, his influence on other artists, the flexibility he developed in changing the roles he played might force an author to get attracted, as there are quite a lot of traps—or *trebuchets*—connected with any attempt to approximate his life and oeuvre; it is, however, a question of the right strategy.

Having in mind that there are still lots of students in art schools trying to survive somehow later on in their "professional" lives, I suggest studying the life and oeuvre of Marcel Duchamp as a *Life-Entrepreneur*. My thesis is that he managed to survive by practicing and developing different roles, such as *pseudo-scientist*, *joueur/gambler*, *recycler* and *director*. I will try to reveal some concepts – obvious or hidden - that lie behind these roles.

### *Duchamp as a Multipreneur*

This paper is a still sketchy and highly personal approach to drawing a map for a journey into the life and oeuvre of Marcel Duchamp. It does not imply or claim that there is an oeuvre as a logical system, nor does it strive for a universal understanding of the artist's work or life.

The key question of this approach is, How did he manage to survive as an artist? When I use the term "artist" I would like to provisionally define it provisionally in the manner of the German artist Harry Kramer: "An artist is someone who produces art."<sup>10</sup> Though I am fully aware of the inherent tautology of this definition, I would, for the present, leave it at that. When we come to discuss what Duchamp had to say about this topic, we might (or might not) revise this definition. Among the multitude of his statements on "art" and "artists", he said in an interview with Dore Ashton, "I didn't want to be called an artist, you know. I wanted to use my possibility to be an individual, and I suppose I have, no?"<sup>11</sup>

Yet, in connection with the life and oeuvre of Duchamp, the question might be changed slightly to, *How did Duchamp manage to survive as an A R T I S T?*<sup>12</sup> This spelling indicates that there is more to it. I suggest defining A R T I S T as a *Multipreneur*, a term which was coined by the business writer Tom Gorman:

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<sup>10</sup> Harry Kramer to the author in 1982 or 1983; Harry Kramer was a multi-talent: artist, hairdresser, dancer and, finally until his death a few years ago, professor for "fine" arts at the Art School in Kassel, Germany; he was one of the very few professors who helped his students to do marketing for themselves

<sup>11</sup> MD to Dore Ashton in D.A., *An Interview with Marcel Duchamp* (first published in *Studio International*, vol.171, no.878), here in Anthony Hill (Ed.), *duchamp : passim. a marcel duchamp anthology*, p.74

<sup>12</sup> I have to confess that the extraordinary typography of Tom Peters book *The Circle of Innovation*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1997 might have influenced me to write A R T I S T in exactly this way... Be.



Multipreneuring means "more than one undertaking." The play on the word "entrepreneur" is obvious: to succeed in business today, and even in many non-business fields, you have to be something of an entrepreneur, that is "one who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business enterprise." This is largely what multipreneurs do. They organize their resources, manage their careers, and assume sensible risks.<sup>13</sup>

To highlight the use of this term in connection with Duchamp, the following is most important:

Multipreneuring entails actually having multiple skills, so that you can develop multiple sources of income and multiple careers, either simultaneously or serially. Multipreneuring enables you to manage risks... rather than deny them or be disabled by them. Multipreneuring represents a continual process of learning new skills, new fields, new strategies, new businesses, and new markets and of developing new contacts, customers, and friends. Essentially, multipreneuring entails understanding the principles and practices that will enable you to prosper in times of economic change, like for example, the times we live in now.<sup>14</sup>

One of the *Duchampian* roles is that of an art dealer, though perhaps not in the common sense of the word. As I will show, to earn a living he was selling not only his works (and even multiplying some, the first "multiples"), but he was also, for example, dealing with Brancusi sculptures. Despite his disgust for commercializing, he studied and learned the rules of the market. Moreover, although he claimed that "Living is more a question of what one spends than what one makes. You have to know how much you can live on,"<sup>15</sup> he nevertheless developed several self-marketing strategies.<sup>16</sup> Throughout his entire life he developed methods not only *to survive as artist*, but to gain a position in the contemporary art world and in art history itself.

With the hypothesis in mind that Marcel Duchamp, in fact, acted like a *Multipreneur*, the following chapters will show traces both within his life and oeuvre to give proof of the correctness of my statement. So this approach comes from the realm of business and looks at Duchamp as a "small business".

It has to be kept in mind, however, that this is a strictly personal approach; I will, as Lyotard suggests, "try not to understand and to show that one did not understand."<sup>17</sup> Yet, playing with the Duchampian puzzle can lead to some insights concerning skills and strategies to survive as an A R T I S T - or *Multipreneur*.

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<sup>13</sup> Tom Gorman, *Multipreneuring*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996, p.11

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> MD in an interview with Cabanne, in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, London 1987, p.83

<sup>16</sup> It was the German art historian Herbert Molderings who suggested to me to do an investigation into "Duchamp as an Entrepreneur" in 1988 or 1989.

<sup>17</sup> Lyotard, *ibid*.

### Four Key Roles

It might seem to be *ad libitum* to find ever new roles that Duchamp played. In fact, some interpretations are more stringent than others. I refrain from trying to state that Duchamp was an *Alchemist*, and I will not take a closer look into his paid or volunteer “jobs”—librarian, illustrator, actor, extra, dye shop keeper etc.—but I suggest investigating a fourfold of *roles*:

pseudo-scientist	recycler
joueur / gambler	director

Though there is a multitude of interconnections among these *roles*, I think one can clearly classify each of them and separate it from others. This is a game: the choice and the omission of certain works, statements etc. will create a kind of “mould” of the intentions, likes, and dislikes of this paper’s author. For example, I will completely set apart his *alter-ego-concepts*, like the “invention” of *Rrose Selávy*, because this would open up a totally different investigation. In the following chapters I will examine each role individually, delivering statements and works of Duchamp as well as facts from his life to describe them.

The core strategy of this approach is to borrow a concept from the world of business, and use it to structure and investigate the Duchampian labyrinth, as well as to apply it to the world of art, with the focus of the artist thus becoming a *Multipreneur* or A R T I S T in a broader sense. I suggest that this fourfold of roles could serve as a *thread* with at least two functions: to guide us through the life and oeuvre and to supply a concept for a flexibility training with a reflection of one’s own roles and concepts.

Let us do a meditation, taking a look at that moving mandala of the Duchampian roles, rotating like the spokes of a turning wheel in his first Readymade *Bicycle Wheel* (*Roue de Bicyclette*):

I liked the idea of having a bicycle wheel in my studio. I enjoyed looking at it, just as I enjoy looking at the flames dancing in a fireplace. It was like having a fireplace in my studio, the movement of the wheel reminded me of the movement of the flames.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> MD to Schwarz (unpublished interviews, 1959-68), quoted by Schwarz in: Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (Third Revised and Expanded Edition), Delano Greenidge Editions, New York 1997, p.588

# Duchamp as a *Pseudo-Scientist*

## *Acting as if...*

My suggestion to borrow a method from the world of business to approach an artistic oeuvre and to reconnect to one's own "survival strategies" is similar to the procedure Duchamp ventured on to become, what I call, a *pseudo-scientist*. When he was fed up with the conventional ways of the contemporary artists, he became a *pseudo*, as Duchamp revealed clearer in a statement that Tomkins quotes:

Science is so evidently a closed circuit, but every fifty years or so a new 'law' is discovered that changes everything. I just didn't see why we should have such reverence for science, and so I had to give another sort of pseudo explanation. I'm a pseudo all in all, that's my characteristic. I never could stand the seriousness of life, but when the serious is tinted with humor it makes a nicer color.<sup>19</sup>

It was around 1911 and especially after a his trip to Munich in 1912 that Duchamp was transcending traditional painting. In an interview with Cabanne he pointed out that he "was interested in introducing the precise and exact aspect of science," and that "It wasn't for love of science that I did this; on the contrary, it was rather in order to discredit it, mildly, lightly, unimportantly. But irony was present."<sup>20</sup>

Calvin Tomkins, in his biography on Duchamp, states that "not only traditional materials but the whole notion of the artist's sensibility as the guiding creative principle simply disappeared from his approach, to be replaced by mechanical drawings, written notations, the spirit of irony, and experiments with chance as a substitute for the artist's conscious control."<sup>21</sup>

Among the multitude of new inventions and new scientific systems there are at least a few that might have deeply influenced Duchamp.<sup>22</sup> It was the contemporary development in the field of photography, such as the multiple exposures studying motion by Marey and Muybridge, and X-ray photography, showing the insides of human bodies.<sup>23</sup> And it was the discussion of non-Euclidian and n-dimensional geometry in the circle of artists he met at that time. Duchamp paid a lot of attention to these top-

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<sup>19</sup> MD quoted in Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors. Five Masters of the Avant Garde*, London 1977 (Reprint of the expanded text of 1968), p.34

<sup>20</sup> MD to Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, Da Capo Press, 1987, p.39

<sup>21</sup> Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, Henry Holt and Co., New York 1996, p.123

<sup>22</sup> See Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context. Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1998

<sup>23</sup> Herbert Molderings points out, that Ferdinand Tribout, a physician and pioneer of X-Ray-photography, was a friend of Duchamp; see, for example Herbert Molderings, Marcel Duchamp. Parawissenschaft, das Ephemere und der Skeptizismus, Richter Verlag, Düsseldorf, Germany, 1997 (third revised edition)

ics, though he later claimed, "The fourth dimension became a thing you talked about, without knowing what it meant."<sup>24</sup>

In a 1966 interview with Dore Ashton, he looked back and said:

I'm not much of a mathematician. In those days 1910, 1911, 1912, there was a lot of talk about the fourth dimension and I was tempted. Non-Euclidian geometry had been invented in the 1840s but we were just hearing about Riemann in 1910. It was interesting because there were no straight lines left. Everything was curved. I'd say I liked the fourth dimension as one more dimension in our lives.<sup>25</sup>

He was not only spending time with other artists speculating about new geometry in the Puteaux circle, but he started his investigations, putting them down in his notes which, in his oeuvre, form a unique work of its own. To be able to focus on his research and, of course, to earn a living, he even took a job as a library assistant at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris.<sup>26</sup> As we will see later in this paper (see the chapter on *Duchamp as a Recycler*), throughout his life he reused and re-edited these notes.

Keeping in mind that this paper is restricted to investigating four key-roles Duchamp played, we will look at only a few of his key works. For developing the role of a *pseudo-scientist*, meaning that he acted *as if*, it was useful for Duchamp to study what was important in the popular discourse, especially in physics and mathematics. Beside his own studies of historical treaties on linear perspective, at that time he was reading publications of the French mathematician and physicist Henri Poincaré.<sup>27</sup> Duchamp's invention of a *new meter* may illustrate his method and its background. In another context he pointed out that "it was just the idea that life would be more interesting if you could stretch these things a little. After all, we have to accept those so-called laws of science because it makes life more convenient, but it doesn't mean anything so far as *validity* is concerned."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> MD to Cabanne, *ibid.*, p.24

<sup>25</sup> MD to Dore Ashton in D.A., *An Interview with Marcel Duchamp* (first published in *Studio International*, vol.171, no.878, June 1966), here in Anthony Hill (Ed.), *duchamp : passim. a marcel duchamp anthology*, p.73

<sup>26</sup> Herbert Molderings, *Objects of Modern Scepticism*, in Thierry de Duve (Ed.), *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA and London, England, 1991, p.243

<sup>27</sup> on this topic: Molderings, *ibid.*, pp.243ff.

<sup>28</sup> MD quoted in Tomkins, *The Bride and the Bachelors. Five Masters of the Avant Garde*, London 1977 (Reprint of the expanded text of 1968), p.34

### Example # 1: *Three Standard Stoppages*

The *Three Standard Stoppages* (*Trois Stoppages Étalon*)<sup>29</sup> are the result of a pseudo-scientific "experiment," executed by Duchamp in 1913-14. As the definition of a meter is a convention, a kind of scientific agreement, Duchamp came to invent his very own linear measure. Duchamp illustrated the concept that lies behind this playful experiment:

The idea of "chance," which many people were thinking about at the time, struck me too. The intention consisted above all in forgetting the hand, since, fundamentally, even your hand is chance.

Pure chance interested me as a way of going against logical reality: to put something on a canvas, on a bit of paper, to associate the idea of a perpendicular thread of a meter long falling from the height of one meter onto a horizontal plane, making its own deformation. This amused me. It's always the idea of "amusement" which causes me to do things, and repeated three times.

For me the number three is important, but simply from the numerical, not from the esoteric, point of view: one is unity, two is double, duality, and three is the rest. When you've come to the word three, you have tree million - it's the same thing as three. I had decided that the things would be done three times to get what I wanted. My "Three Standard Stoppages" is produced by three separate experiments, and the form of each is slightly different. I keep the line, and I have a deformed meter. It's a "canned meter," so to speak, canned chance; it's amusing to can chance.<sup>30</sup>

By using the technique of repeatable experiments, Duchamp rehabilitated *chance* and, furthermore, is able to "discredit it, mildly, lightly, unimportantly."<sup>31</sup> In taking up the role of a pseudo-scientist he still was an artist, acting *as if*, meaning that he began to think and speculate as a scientist. There are notes of this kind which he collected and reproduced. The editions are the *Box of 1914* (*Boîte 1914*); the *Green Box* (*Boîte Verte*, published in 1934), which has to be seen in connection with his famous work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even—The Large Glass* (*La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même - Le Grand Verre* 1915-23); and the *White Box* or *In the Infinitive* (*A l'infinifif*, published in 1967).

The notes in the *White Box*, texts from the years 1912 to 1920, show, as Tomkins stresses, "a far greater understanding of non-Euclidian mathematics than Duchamp was inclined to admit to in his later years."<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> see a description and photos on the internet:

<http://arthist.binghamton.edu/duchamp/Standard%20Stoppages.html> (Dec. 07, 2005)

<sup>30</sup> MD to Cabanne, *ibid.*, pp.46-47

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Tomkins, *ibid.*, p.128; Molderings points out, that these notes are mainly around "the thought of the world as projection", Molderings, *ibid.*, p.254

The idea of the fabrication is explained in texts in the *Box of 1914*:<sup>33</sup>

straight  
- If a thread one meter long falls from a height of one meter  
onto a horizontal  
plane distorting itself as it pleases and creates a new shape of the meas-  
ure of  
length.-

more or less  
- 3 patterns obtained in similar conditions: considered in their relation to  
one  
another they are an approximate reconstitution of the measure of length.

The 3 standard stoppages are the meter diminished.<sup>34</sup>

Later, in correspondence with Serge Stauffer, Duchamp wrote that there was no "edition" of the *Box of 1914*, only one box containing 14 notes as originals and two others with photographic reproductions.<sup>35</sup> In the same letter he emphasized that this was a phase when he tried to separate writing and drawing completely: "C'était l'époque où j'espérais atteindre une dissociation complète entre l'écrit et le dessiné pour amplifier le portée des deux."<sup>36</sup>

In retrospect, the *Three Standard Stoppages* were a real breakthrough, as he pointed out in an interview with Katherine Kuh:

In itself it was not an important work of art, but for me it opened the way - the way to escape from those traditional methods of expression long associated with art. I didn't realize at the time what I had stumbled on. When you tap something, you don't always recognize the sound. That's apt to come later.

<sup>33</sup> see Michel Sanouillet and Elmar Peterson (Eds.), *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, Da Capo, New York, 1989 (Reprint of *Salt seller*, Oxford University Press, New York 1973), p.23

<sup>34</sup> The reproduction of these notes is difficult, see: Sanouillet and Peterson, *ibid.* p.22 and Serge Stauffer (Ed.), *Marcel Duchamp. Die Schriften*, Theo Ruff Edition, Zürich, Switzerland, 1994, p.21; I prefer the slightly different typographical solution shown above, as it is more similar to Duchamp's originals.

<sup>35</sup> There are statements, e.g. by Adcock, that there are even four copies; Craig E. Adcock, *Marcel Duchamp's Notes from the Large Glass. An N-Dimensional Analysis*, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, London 1983, p.3

<sup>36</sup> MD in a letter to Stauffer *ibid.*, p.258

For me the Three Standard Stoppages was a first gesture liberating me from the past.<sup>37</sup>

### Example # 2: *Bicycle Wheel*

"It was not intended to be shown, it was just for my own use,"<sup>38</sup> Duchamp claimed in a talk with Calvin Tomkins. What he was referring to is his first sculptural object, the *Bicycle Wheel (Roue de Bicyclette)*<sup>39</sup>, which he constructed in 1913: a bicycle wheel mounted on a stool. As Molderings mentions, it might be seen as experiment to show the effect of centrifugal forces on a free axis,<sup>40</sup> but I agree with him to keep in mind what Duchamp said.

The Bicycle Wheel is my first Readymade, so much so that at first it wasn't even called a Readymade. It still had little to do with the idea of the Readymade. Rather, it had more to do with the idea of chance. In a way, it was simply letting things go by themselves and having a sort of created atmosphere in a studio, an apartment where you live. Probably, to help your ideas come out of your head. To set the wheel turning was very soothing, very comforting, a sort of opening of avenues on other things than material life of every day. I liked the idea of having a bicycle wheel in my studio. I enjoyed looking at it, just as I enjoy looking at the flames dancing in a fireplace. It was like having a fireplace in my studio, the movement of the wheel reminded me of the movement of the flames.<sup>41</sup>

It is helpful to be aware that Duchamp is *using* the methods of science to broaden his creative thinking and working, and that this is a very personal approach, not to be publicized (at least not in this phase, as we will see later). The *Bicycle Wheel* according to Mouldings "is a combination of humor, pseudoscientific device, and a meditation object,"<sup>42</sup> and its initially purely private character might be interpreted as typical for Duchamp: "Please note that I didn't want to make a work of art out of it... It was just a distraction. I didn't have any special reason to do it, or any intention of showing it, or describing anything."<sup>43</sup>

But what were the reasons that he later started to, as I want to call it, *recycle* a lot of his works and notes? Why did he change from being a pseudo-scientist to a *Recycler*, a *puppeteer of the past*, as Walter Arens-

<sup>37</sup> MD in Katherine Kuh ("Marcel Duchamp," in *The Artist's Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists*, New York and Evanston, 1962, p.81), quoted in Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, pp.131-132

<sup>38</sup> MD in a talk with Tomkins, quoted in Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, p.135

<sup>39</sup> see a description and photos on the internet:

<http://arthist.binghamton.edu/duchamp/Bicycle%20Wheel.html> (Dec. 07, 2005)

<sup>40</sup> Molderings, *Objects of Modern Scepticism*, *ibid.*, p.248

<sup>41</sup> MD to Schwarz (unpublished interviews, 1959-68), quoted by Schwarz in: Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (Third Revised and Expanded Edition), Delano Greenidge Editions, New York 1997, p.588

<sup>42</sup> Molderings, *Objects of Modern Scepticism*, *ibid.*, p.249

<sup>43</sup> MD in Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, Da Capo Press, London 1987 (Reprint of the Thames and Hudson Edition of 1971), p.47

berg claimed in a letter to him in 1943?<sup>44</sup> And, furthermore, the *Bicycle Wheel* was reproduced several times.

We can only speculate about this, but there will at least be a closer look at his role as a *Recycler* of his own oeuvre (see the chapter *Duchamp as a Recycler*).

### Example # 3: *The Artist's Studio as a Laboratory*

Among others, it was first of all Herbert Molderings who took a closer look at the working conditions, the studio atmosphere where Duchamp not only created his works but which also seem to have been his place of refuge and concentration. Throughout his life he usually worked alone, and with a few exceptions he never shared an art studio with others. From the early 1910's until the finishing of his last masterpiece, the complex tableau, *Etant Données...*, the studios were a place for concentration, meditation, and, as in the case of his last tableau, even secret work. To be creative, it seems to me, Duchamp had to create private settings, *ateliers*, that were obviously different from those of contemporary artists.

Looking at photographs of his studio, for example at 33 West 67<sup>th</sup> Street in New York<sup>45</sup>, which are contained in his *Box-in-a-Suitcase*, Molderings states that "Most of the readymades in Duchamp's New York studio in 1917-1918 seem to have been associated with ideas regarding the location of objects in space."<sup>46</sup>

What we see is the *Bicycle Wheel* (*Roue de Bicyclette*, second version 1916, first 1913), which will be discussed later, and the *Trap* (*Trébuchet*, 1917). The artist's studio becomes a laboratory,<sup>47</sup> and referring to explanations by Poincaré, Molderings writes:

In his mind Duchamp turned his studio by 90 degrees and the nailed coatrack to the floor instead of the wall. This arrangement, created in 917 in New York was titled Trébuchet... In scientific vocabulary, a trébuchet is a precision scale in a laboratory, a meaning that brings the notion of gravity into play. At that time

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<sup>44</sup> Walter Arensberg, quoted in Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, p.316

<sup>45</sup> see a description and photos on the internet:

<http://arthist.binghamton.edu/duchamp/bio.chronology.htm> (Dec. 07, 2005)

<sup>46</sup> Molderings, *Objects of Modern Scepticism*, *ibid.* p.249; details in different photos contained in his *Box-in-a-Valise*, see e.g. reproductions in Thierry de Duve (Ed.), *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA and London, England, 1991, pp.252-253, another photograph (*ibid.*, p.138) shows Duchamp "as a ghost" sitting under readymades hanging from the ceiling: the *Fountain*, the *Snow Shovel* and the *Hatrack*

<sup>47</sup> Molderings, *Marcel Duchamp. Parawissenschaft, das Ephemere und der Skeptizismus*, Richter Verlag, Düsseldorf 1997 (third revised edition), p.49



there was hardly any other principle in the classical mechanics that had been so shaken as the concept of gravity as an independent force.<sup>48</sup>

In his very own way, Duchamp sets up tableaux to work in, sometimes surrounded by installations of optical devices and readymades: it is neither the typical painter's studio, nor a space for an exhibition. For visitors, as well as for critics, this setting shows that it is not easy to find a way through it—without being "trapped."

### *Developing Core Skills of a Multipreneur*

Working as a *pseudo* makes the use, the *re-cycling* of science much easier. It seems to be one of the conditions, not actually to *become* a mathematician or physicist. Through his enlarging the field of art he does not widen the laws, the assumptions of science. His status as an amateur, as a *dilettante*, shields him from entering the systems of science to finally BEING a scientist. To me, working as a pseudo-scientist was the start of Duchamp's career as a *Multipreneur*. He started to "choose off" the alleged continuity of being a "painter" and started to act as a *pseudo*. After he had quickly passed through the artistic streams, e.g. cubism, of his fellow artists, he entered different fields and opened up his senses and intellect. Equipped with his irony, he was ready to analyze and use contemporary influences, such as popular scientific thoughts. When he started to "play" with science, he realized that this undertaking broadened his personal understanding of being an artist and revealed new methods, instruments, and results. Thus, the ways of expressing his intuition, what he later referred to by calling the artist a *mediumistic being*,<sup>49</sup> were enhanced and enlarged.

He started to become a *Multipreneur* because he left common ground, especially the techniques and concepts of art at that time, by refining his skills and his *gray matter*. Being able to take risks, to develop an unmistakable identity, and to exploit science and technology, as well as new and old knowledge of different fields, is certainly one of the core skills of an entrepreneur.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Molderings, *Objects of Modern Scepticism*, *ibid.* p.249

<sup>49</sup> MD, Session on the Creative Act, Convention of the American Federation of Arts, Houston, Texas, April 1957; see the text in Tomkins, *ibid.*, Appendix

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Gorman, *ibid.*, pp.30ff.



# Duchamp as a *Joueur*

## *Autotelic Activities?*

Maybe it is Duchamp's passion for play, especially for chess, which makes me describe this attitude as *autotelic*. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a professor of psychology, defines it in the following way:

"autotelic" is a word composed of two Greek roots: auto (self) and telos (goal). An autotelic activity is one we do for its own sake because to experience it is the main goal. For instance, if I played a game of chess primarily to enjoy the game, that game would be an autotelic experience for me; whereas if I played for money, or to achieve a competitive ranking in the chess world, the same game would be primarily exotelic, that is, motivated by an outside goal. Applied to personality, autotelic denotes an individual who generally does things for their own sake, rather than in order to achieve some later external goal.<sup>51</sup>

Taking a closer look at statements by Duchamp especially on chess one might analyze that there are various, partly controversial, comments on the game itself and on his "career" as a player. When he, for example, stated, "Of course you want to become champion of the world, or champion of something. I never succeeded, but I tried, for ten years or so I really took it quite seriously,"<sup>52</sup> then we seem to be forced to withdraw from such a classification as purely *autotelic*. As we take a closer look at the different roles Duchamp incorporated, the reasons for him to become a *joueur* have to be investigated. It seems to me that there are different purposes he was striving for and he might even have learned some lessons not only to survive and broaden his skills, but to prepare the position he later achieved in the world of art.

## Example #1: Chess

I would like to claim that at least after he declared his masterpiece, the *Large Glass*, as finely unfinished in 1923 he first of all wanted "to be a professional chess player" (Duchamp in a letter to Picabia<sup>53</sup>) because he saw a connection between *making art* and *playing chess*. The thesis is that he developed another role, the role as a *joueur*, to maintain his struggle for individual independence, insofar as acting in an *autotelic* manner.

Though playful aspects were already elaborated within his role as a *pseudo-scientist*, his devotion to chess and the decision to become a

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<sup>51</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow. The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*, Basic Books/Harper Collins Publishers, New York 1997, p.117

<sup>52</sup> MD quoted in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, Henry Holt and Co., New York 1996, p.289

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Tomkins, *ibid.* p.252

professional by systematically participating in tournaments, by even writing a book on chess,<sup>54</sup> in fact made him a professional.

What are the connections and the differences between art and chess in the view of Marcel Duchamp? He gives several hints in interviews and speeches. To me there are at least three aspects he stressed:

- chess has aesthetic qualities: *beauty in chess*
- chess is a *struggle*
- chess players are what artists are supposed to be: *madmen of a certain quality*

### ***Beauty in Chess***

The first aspect, the "beauty in chess,"<sup>55</sup> can be found in a reflex in early studies and paintings, for example *The Chess Game* (1910), *Portrait of Chess Players* (1911), *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes* (1912). While the painting from 1910 still shows a comparatively conventional execution of an outdoor scene, the other works show the influence of Cubism and the first approaches to invent a completely different way of representing movement, different from the Futurist's attempt.

Chess had been a fascination for Duchamp since his early years. When, in 1919, he pointed out in a letter to the Arensbergs: "*I feel altogether ready to become a chess maniac - everything around me takes the form of the knight or the queen, and the outside world has no other interest for me than its transposition into winning or losing positions,*"<sup>56</sup> he had already passed the phase of using this theme for paintings and was, instead, on his way to playing chess professionally. Though he competed in tournaments, these aesthetic aspects were obviously still alive for Duchamp:

Objectively, a game of chess looks very much like a pen-and-ink drawing, with the difference, however, that the chess player paints with black-and-white forms already prepared instead of having to invent forms as does the artist. The design thus formed on the chessboard has apparently no visual aesthetic value, and it is more like a score for music, which can be played again and again. Beauty in chess is closer to beauty in poetry; the chess pieces are the block al-

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<sup>54</sup> Marcel Duchamp and Vitaly Halberstadt, *L'opposition et les cases conjuguées sont réconciliées*, 1932

<sup>55</sup> MD quoted in Arturo Schwarz: *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (third revised and expanded edition), New York 1997, Volume One, p.72; this refers to MD in an address to the New York State Chess Association convention in 1952, see the typescript of that speech in the Crotti Papers in the microfilm collection of the Archives of American Art

<sup>56</sup> MD in a letter to Louise and Walter Arensberg in 1919; quoted above is the translation of the letter originally in French, by Jerrold Siegel (in Siegel, *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1995, p.208); see the French text in Kuenzli and Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp. Artist of the Century*, Cambridge/MA, London 1996 (fourth edition), p.218

phabet which shapes thoughts, although making a visual design on a chessboard, express their beauty abstractly, like a poem. Actually, I believe that every chess player experiences a mixture of two aesthetic pleasures, first the abstract image akin to the poetic idea of writing, second the sensuous pleasure of the ideographic execution of that image of the chessboards.<sup>57</sup>

His decision to turn completely professional as a chess player was made in a stage when he was still working on his huge construction, *The Large Glass*. So we might assume that aesthetic questions, such as perspective and movement - and its representation - were still on his mind. It was the time when the decision to stop painting *happened* because, as Duchamp later explained in a talk with Cabanne, "it came by itself, since the Glass" wasn't a painting; there were lots of lead, a lot of other things. It was far from the traditional idea of the painter, with his brush, his palette, his turpentine, an idea which had already disappeared from my life."<sup>58</sup>

What seems to have fascinated Duchamp, besides the other important aspects, is the "conceptual" aspect of the game; one might say it is a *readymade* setting, to be used by the "gray matter" of the artist, and in this respect chess in fact turns out to be an *autotelic* pursuit:

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. Well, it is mechanical, the way, for example, a Calder is mechanical. 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>59</sup>

### *Chess: A Struggle*

Though there are games with a purpose to create win-win situations, chess certainly knows only a winner and a loser when the play comes to its end. So it is no surprise to find aspects in Duchamp's statements that emphasize the struggle inherent in chess; one might even think of it as a metaphor for his life, leading to the conclusion that his devotion to chess is certainly not purely *autotelic*.

Chess is a sport. A violent sport. This detracts from it most artistic connections. Of course, one intriguing aspect of the game that does imply artistic connotations is the actual geometric patterns and variations of the actual setup of the pieces and in the combinative, tactical, strategical, and positional sense. It's a

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<sup>57</sup> MD in: Arturo Schwarz *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (Third revised and Expanded Edition), New York 1997, Volume One, p.72; this refers to MD in an address to the New York State Chess Association convention in 1952, see the typescript of that speech in the Crotti Papers in the microfilm collection of the Archives of American Art

<sup>58</sup> MD in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, London 1987, p.67

<sup>59</sup> MD in Cabanne, *ibid.*, p.19

sad expression, though - somewhat like religious art - it is not very gay. If it is something, it is a struggle.<sup>60</sup>

This gives an interesting hint at a difference between playing chess and making art, thus stating that entering the world of chess, actually becoming a chess professional, meant to him entering "a violent sport." To draw the conclusion that the art world is not a "violent" one is, in my eyes, incorrect. I would like to put it the other way around: for personal reasons, not to be discussed here, after leaving the ordinary existence of the painters and their struggle to survive as artists, after broadening his mind in using a scientist's methods and approaches, he then entered a different circus ring, with its own rules, with as Duchamp himself put it "no social purpose. That above all is important."<sup>61</sup> However, there are statements that—ironically?—point in different directions:

Of course you want to become champion of the world, or champion of something. I never succeeded, but I tried, for ten years or so I really took it quite seriously.<sup>62</sup>

Though one of the reasons to become a professional *joueur d'échec* (chess player) could have been to flee the existence of an artist, he was still occupied with scientific phenomena, as the construction of optical machines certainly prove. At least since the "invention" of readymades he maintained, even further developed his methods and strategies to enlarge the field of artistic work. And I think that in becoming a professional chess player, he trained the skills he needed to survive. "It's completely in one's gray matter," he described to Cabanne, "what makes the beauty."<sup>63</sup>

If life - both in the worlds of chess and art - is viewed as a struggle, then Duchamp can be described as an *autotelic* person, always stressing the independent individual. Csikszentmihalyi wrote:

... they are less dependent on the external rewards that keep others motivated to go on with a life composed of dull and meaningless routines. They are more autonomous and independent, because they cannot be as easily manipulated with threats or rewards from the outside. At the same time they are more involved with everything around them because they are fully immersed in the current of life.<sup>64</sup>

### ***Madmen...***

The way of life, the apparent characteristic features of the players, and the special atmosphere of chess clubs and tournaments obviously im-

<sup>60</sup> MD quoted in Schwarz, *ibid.*, pp. 73-74

<sup>61</sup> MD in Cabanne, *ibid.* p. 19

<sup>62</sup> MD quoted in Tomkins, *ibid.*, p. 289

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 117-118

pressed Duchamp and might be identified as the third aspect in the relation of art and chess, according to Duchamp. When he pointed out that he had “come to the personal conclusion that while all artists are not chess players, all chess players are artists,”<sup>65</sup> this might be an indication that he found the artists among these people who get absorbed by what they do. Looking back at the time when he was fed up with the group of painters he usually communicated with in the early 1910s, this atmosphere seems to be much more comfortable:

Also the milieu of chess players is far more sympathetic than that of artists. These people are completely cloudy, completely blind, wearing blinkers. Madmen of a certain quality, the way the artist is supposed to be, and isn't, in general. That's probably what interested me the most.<sup>66</sup>

Looking at Duchamp's life, it is obvious that he always stayed single, that he never really became a member of a group. He was never a Cubist, he never entered the Dada or Surrealist groups, though at least the latter often tried to make him a member of their family. In a statement in 1967 he claimed, “I myself have never had a part in any such group explorations of unknown lands, due to that something in my character which prohibits me from exchanging the most intimate things of my being with anyone else.”<sup>67</sup> He might have realized quite early the importance of the Arensberg's circle, but he was never really attached to it. For most of his life, Duchamp was a *traveler*, a role that may be one of the conditions for his innovations; he left places when he felt that they were either too comfortable or too restraining. The only places where he rested seem to be his studios, where his life showed a “hermitlike pattern.”<sup>68</sup> As a chess player, he had the chance simply to enter a club or tournament, needing nothing more than his “gray matter.” He is, at least in this phase of his life, the living illustration of the Latin phrase *omnium meum mecum porto*.<sup>69</sup> With his fellow chess people—“madmen of a certain quality”—he found a perfect setting: come and go as you like, enter and leave the realm of the “gray matter” to experience the beauty and struggle of chess—or of life itself. It is not surprising that Duchamp reflects on the chess players as the “real” artists.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> MD in an address to the New York State Chess Association convention in 1952 (*ibid.*), quoted in Tomkins, *ibid.*, p.211

<sup>66</sup> MD in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, *ibid.*, p.19

<sup>67</sup> MD in an interview with André Parinaud, in the catalog to “Omaggio a André Breton” (Milan, Galleria Schwarz, June 1967), quoted in Tomkins, *ibid.*, p.267

<sup>68</sup> Tomkins, *ibid.*, p.257

<sup>69</sup> approximately: “Everything I have I do carry with me”(B.B.)

<sup>70</sup> MD in an address to the New York State Chess Association convention in 1952 (*ibid.*), quoted in Tomkins, *ibid.*, p.211

## Example #2: Roulette

In April, 1924, Duchamp wrote to Picabia,

"With very little capital I have been trying out my system for five days. Every day I have won steadily—small sums—in an hour or two.

"I'm still putting the final touches to it and when I come back to Paris the system will be perfect... I haven't stopped being a painter, I am drawing on chance now."<sup>71</sup>

At that time, while traveling to take part in a chess tournament on the Riviera, he seems to have been investigating how to systematically "exploit" games of chance, such as roulette<sup>72</sup>. To me it is not easy to decide whether the reasons for playing these games lie in trying to make some money or simply being attracted by the play of chance. There are several hints, but none of them is compelling. Duchamp looks at artists as gamblers: "Artists of all times are like Monte Carlo gamblers, and the blind lottery advances some and ruins others..."<sup>73</sup>.

After he put chance at the service of his mind by performing his "canned chance" experiment, leading to the *Three Standard Stoppages (Trois Stoppages Étalon)*, he tried to use the game of Roulette to control chance: "Don't be too skeptical, since this time I think I have eliminated the word chance. I would like to force the roulette wheel to become a chessboard."<sup>74</sup>

While Duchamp was playing chess tournaments on the Riviera, he went to the casino and worked out a system, as Tomkins described, "which was based on mathematical calculations relating to one hundred thousand throws of the roulette ball."<sup>75</sup> Still the idea of movement was in his mind, and still he was doing optical investigations at that time, as his construction of the *Rotary Demisphere* demonstrates. His expedition into

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<sup>71</sup> MD in a letter to Picabia in 1924, quoted is the translation by Ecke Bonk, in E.B., *Marcel Duchamp. The Box in a valise*, Rizzoli, New York 1989, pp.12 and 18; compare the slightly different translation in Tomkins, *ibid.*, p.259

<sup>72</sup> see, for example, Tomkins, *ibid.*, pp.259ff.

<sup>73</sup> MD to Jean Crotti, April 17, 1952, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C. (Jean Crotti and Suzanne Duchamp, Walter Pach, Beatrice Wood), quoted in Tomkins, *ibid.*, p.400

<sup>74</sup> MD Duchamp in a letter to Jaques Doucet, quoted is the translation by Ecke Bonk, in E.B., *ibid.*, p.18; compare the slightly different translation in Peter Read *The Tzanck Check and Related Works by Marcel Duchamp*, in Rudolf Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann (Ed.), *Marcel Duchamp. Artist of the Century*, Cambridge, MA and London, 1996 (fourth printing of the 1990 paperback edition), p.112

<sup>75</sup> Tomkins, *ibid.*, p.261



the game of Roulette led him to offering a dividend of twenty percent for the buyers of his *Monte Carlo Bond*<sup>76</sup> in 1924.

Jane Harp, editor of the *Little Review*, promoted the *Obligations pour la Roulette Monte Carlo* and told her readers, "If anyone is in the business of buying art curiosities as an investment, here is the chance to invest in a perfect masterpiece. Marcel's signature alone is worth much more than the 500 francs asked for the share."<sup>77</sup>

Needless to say that if this "system" had really worked, Duchamp would have turned into a professional gambler. As this was not the case, and as wins and losses were balanced, he lost his interest in this venture.<sup>78</sup> It turned out that the signature on the bond was the real dividend. So we might see this gambling as a detour from reaching his goal, that is, to further establish himself *as an individual*.

### *Fine Tuning of the Intellect*

With all his approaches to "exploiting" chance, Duchamp obviously learned some skills and achieved some benefits by becoming a *joueur*. He developed his strategic thinking, he integrated the playful aspects of his role as a *pseudo-scientist*, and he managed to survive. The latter not only means the mere physical existence, but rather the "fine-tuning" of his intellectual abilities. Looking at his role as a chess player, which Duchamp took on in the late 1910s until the end of his life, there is a central perspective of the world. It might be found in connection with his role, still in use, as a *pseudo-scientist*: he can be described as a *modern scepticist*, as Molderings does.<sup>79</sup> Duchamp claimed:

Chess is a marvelous piece of Cartesianism, and so imaginative that it doesn't even look Cartesian at first. The beautiful combinations that chess players invent - you don't see them coming, but afterward there is no mystery - it's a pure logical conclusion. The attitude in art is completely different, of course; probably it pleased me to oppose one attitude to the other, as a form of completeness.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup> see a description and photos on the internet:

<http://arthist.binghamton.edu/duchamp/Monte%20Carlo%20Bond.html> (Dec. 07, 2005)

<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jaques Caumont, *Ephemerides on and about Marcel Duchamp and Rose Sélavy. 1987-1968*, published in the catalogue for the exhibition *Marcel Duchamp*, Venice; Thames and Hudson, London 1993 (as there are no page numbers, it is under "8 December, 1924")

<sup>78</sup> see the comment of Tomkins, *ibid.*, p269

<sup>79</sup> Herbert Molderings, *Objects of Modern Scepticism*, *ibid.* p.249; details in different photos contained in his *Box-in-a-Valise*, see e.g. reproductions in Thierry de Duve (Ed.), *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA and London, England, 1991, pp.243ff.

<sup>80</sup> MD to Calvin Tomkins, quoted in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, New York 1996, p.211

To me this strict labeling as a "scepticist" cannot be maintained. It seems obvious to me that in his early years he evolved the artistic ideas and expressions in a way that was both conscious and unconscious. He even gave a somewhat adjusting comment on "Cartesianism" in an interview in 1966:

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... You must understand that I am not a Cartesian by pleasure. I happen to have been *born* a Cartesian. The French education is based on sequence of strict logic. You carry it with you. I had rejected Cartesianism in a way. I don't say that you can't be both. Perhaps I am.<sup>81</sup>

Duchamp, as an artist, acted in the manner of a "mediumistic being", a term he coined in a statement in 1957.<sup>82</sup> As Duchamp pointed out earlier, in 1949, "I believe in the life of the work in itself and for itself—the work being the thing and the artist a blindman who takes his intentions for realities."<sup>83</sup> Still he developed a critical view of the position of the artist, speaking of two completely different positions: "There are two kinds of artists: the artist that deals with society, is integrated into society; and the other artist, the completely freelance artist, who has no obligations..."<sup>84</sup>

Taking the role of the *joueur* enabled Duchamp to watch the world of art from the outside; he managed to keep a certain distance and even claimed that the works he did while he was a professional chess player, such as the *Precision Optics*, were "things." Looking back at this period, he even preferred to characterize himself as a "cheap engineer"<sup>85</sup> (in a 1966 talk with Cabanne).

It was his experience as a professional chess player that exercised his brain. It enabled him to spread his attention, anticipating different possible moves of his opponent and, at the same time, having the ability to keep or generate a cohesive inner image of the situation as a whole. To me, this seems to be a perfect, ongoing training of the skills and profi-

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<sup>81</sup> MD quoted in Dore Ashton, *An Interview with Marcel Duchamp* (first published 1966 in *Studio International*, vol.171, no.878), here in Anthony Hill (Ed.), *duchamp : passim. a marcel duchamp anthology*, p.73

<sup>82</sup> MD, Session on the Creative Act, Convention of the American Federation of Arts, Houston, Texas, April 1957; see the text in Tomkins, *ibid.*, Appendix

<sup>83</sup> MD in a statement at The Western Round Table on Modern Art, San Francisco, 1949; see the text in Bonnie Camfield (Ed.), *West Coast Duchamp*, Miami Beach 1991, p.109

<sup>84</sup> MD to Sweeney, James Johnson Sweeney, edited version of "A Conversation with Marcel Duchamp," television interview conducted by James Johnson Sweeney, NBC, January 1956, filmed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, see the text in Michel Sannonoulet and Elmer Peterson, *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, Da Capo Press, New York 1973, p.133

<sup>85</sup> MD to Pierre Cabanne, *ibid.*, p.64

ciency he needs to both understand the rules of the art business and to renew his position in that field in later years.

The somewhat contradictory position of, on the one hand, *being* an artist and, on the other, reflecting upon art from a kind of intellectual meta-level might find a synthesis in a statement he gave to J.J. Sweeney in 1956:

...at any rate as you know, I am interested in the intellectual side, although I don't like the word "intellect." For me "intellect" is too dry a word, too inexpressive. I like the word "belief." I think in general when people say "I know," they don't know, they believe. I believe that art is the only form of activity in which man as man shows himself to be a true individual. Only in art is he capable of going beyond the animal state, because art is an outlet toward regions which are not ruled by space and time. To live is to believe, that's my belief, at any rate.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> MD to James Johnson Sweeney, *ibid.*, p.136



# Duchamp as a *Recycler*

## *Moulding History*

In various parts of the text above I point out that it is nearly impossible to draw a single thread through the labyrinth of Duchamp's life and oeuvre, leading a secure path without contradictions or dead ends.

Craig Adcock puts it this way: "The method Duchamp used is more complex; it involves the conscious modification of history by disregarding 'truth'... He apparently thought that his own history was something he could either learn from or reconstruct; it was not a matter directly connected with reality... " <sup>87</sup> If this is right, then "history" is a fund to be used *ad libitum*. Adcock continued, "Because final truth is inevitably distorted, he twists it further for himself for the fun of it. Moreover, he never corrects any of his interpreters. Duchamp goes beyond the straightforward reservation anyone would have about history and adopts history modification as a strategy." <sup>88</sup>

If this approach holds at least a little truth in it, then we might say that playing the role as a *recycler* was a training of skills for later becoming an art critic or "director" of both his own exhibitions and of shows of other artists. It was Friedrich Nietzsche who pointed out the "history's advantages and disadvantages for life" (Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben), claiming that we need history in a different way "as the spoilt idler in the garden of knowledge" <sup>89</sup> uses it. "Only insofar history serves life, we want to serve it [history; B.B.]." <sup>90</sup> For Adcock, Duchamp's strategy of history modification is both "a way of keeping interpreters off balance" and "of keeping such matters within the bounds of his own system." <sup>91</sup>

We should first of all take a closer look at his *Readymades* to better see the perspective of Duchamp as a *recycler*.

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<sup>87</sup> Craig Adcock, *Duchamp's Way: Twisting Our Memory of the Past "For the Fun of It"*, in Thierry de Duve (Ed.), *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA and London, England, 1991, pp. 311-312

<sup>88</sup> Craig Adcock, *ibid.*, pp. 311-312

<sup>89</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben (Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen, Zweites Stück)*, works in six volumes, first volume, edited by Karl Schlechta, Carl Hanser Verlag, München, Wien, 1980 (according to the 5<sup>th</sup> Edition of 1966); pp.209ff; (translation of the parts quoted above: B.B.; thanks to Andreas Braun for giving this hint)

<sup>90</sup> Nietzsche, *ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Adcock, *ibid.*, p.312

### Example #1: *Readymades*

In the chapter *Duchamp as a pseudo-scientist*, I try to describe the setting in which he invented the *Bicycle Wheel*. In many ways this was a starting point when he recycled the wheel and put it into a totally different context. So it was a concept of *shifting context* by making it a device for meditation, first of all. And it was another shift when he later made it a multiple, contained in his collection of reproduced works, the *Box-in-a-Valise*, though he claimed that it "was not intended to be shown," that it "was just for my own use."<sup>92</sup>

Recycling today means the re-use of waste to produce new, quite often completely different goods. In fact, with his readymades, Duchamp changed the whole concept of the production of the artist's "goods". They were not only a reaction to the contemporary world of art, as he once stated, "It was naturally, in trying to draw a conclusion or consequence from the dehumanization of the work of art, that I came to the idea of the Ready-made. That is the name, as you know, that I gave to those works which in effect are already completely made."<sup>93</sup> In the context of this paper it is important to stress that Duchamp's concept of recycling his own ideas and works follows a thread characterized not only by motives and themes, like the *Bride*, but also by a strategic attempt to innovate and create new forms of expression.

Keeping in mind that there have been many investigations on the ready-made by art critics, I prefer the considerations Duchamp gave in a talk at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (October 19, 1961).

IN 1913 I HAD THE HAPPY IDEA TO FASTEN A BICYCLE WHEEL TO A KITCHEN STOOL AND WATCH IT TURN.  
 A FEW MONTHS LATER I BOUGHT A CHEAP REPRODUCTION OF A WINTER EVENING LANDSCAPE, WHICH I CALLED "PHARMACY" AFTER ADDING TWO SMALL DOTS, ONE RED AND ONE YELLOW, IN THE HORIZON.  
 IN NEW YORK IN 1915 I BOUGHT AT A HARDWARE STORE A SNOW SHOVEL ON WHICH I WROTE "IN ADVANCE OF THE BROKEN ARM".  
 IT WAS AROUND THAT TIME THAT THE WORD "READYMADE" CAME TO MY MIND TO DESIGNATE THIS FORM OF MANIFESTATION.  
 A POINT WHICH I WANT VERY MUCH TO ESTABLISH IS THAT THE CHOICE OF THESE "READYMADES" WAS NEVER DICTATED BY ESTHETIC DELECTATION. THIS CHOICE WAS BASED ON A REACTION OF VISUAL INDIFFERENCE WITH AT THE SAME TIME A TOTAL ABSENCE OF GOOD OR BAD TASTE... IN FACT A COMPLETE ANESTHESIA.  
 ONE IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC WAS THE SHORT SENTENCE WHICH I OCCASIONALLY INSCRIBED ON THE "READYMADE."

<sup>92</sup> MD in a talk with Tomkins, quoted in Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, ibid. p.135

<sup>93</sup> MD to James Johnson Sweeney, edited version of "A Conversation with Marcel Duchamp," television interview conducted by James Johnson Sweeney, NBC, January 1956, filmed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, see the text in Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, Da Capo Press, New York 1973, p.134

THAT SENTENCE INSTEAD OF DESCRIBING THE OBJECT LIKE A TITLE WAS MEANT TO CARRY THE MIND OF THE SPECTATOR TOWARDS OTHER REGIONS MORE VERBAL.

SOMETIMES I WOULD ADD A GRAPHIC DETAIL OF PRESENTATION WHICH IN ORDER TO SATISFY MY CRAVING FOR ALLITERATIONS, WOULD BE CALLED "READYMADE AIDED."

AT ANOTHER TIME WANTING TO EXPOSE THE BASIC ANTINOMY BETWEEN ART AND READYMADES I IMAGINED A "RECIPROCAL READYMADE": USE A REMBRANDT AS AN IRONING BOARD!

I REALIZED VERY SOON THE DANGER OF REPEATING INDISCRIMINATELY THIS FORM OF EXPRESSION AND DECIDED TO LIMIT THE PRODUCTION OF "READYMADES" TO A SMALL NUMBER YEARLY. I WAS AWARE AT THAT TIME, THAT FOR THE SPECTATOR EVEN MORE THAN FOR THE ARTIST, ART IS A HABIT FORMING DRUG AND I WANTED TO PROTECT MY "READYMADES" AGAINST SUCH CONTAMINATION.

ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE "READYMADE" IS ITS LACK OF UNIQUENESS... THE REPLICA OF A "READYMADE" DELIVERING THE SAME MESSAGE; IN FACT NEARLY EVERY ONE OF THE "READYMADES" EXISTING TODAY IS NOT AN ORIGINAL IN THE CONVENTIONAL SENSE.

A FINAL REMARK TO THIS EGOMANIAC'S DISCOURSE:

SINCE THE TUBES OF PAINT USED BY THE ARTIST ARE MANUFACTURED ARE READY MADE PRODUCTS WE MUST CONCLUDE THAT ALL THE PAINTINGS IN THE WORLD ARE "READYMADES AIDED" AND ALSO WORKS OF ASSEMBLAGE.<sup>94</sup>

### *Shifting Context*

The concept of *shifting context* is a method not only used by inventors of all times but is also one of the most creative tools in every business. The problem, however, is to *unlearn*, to be destructive, to contradict. By this, the chain binding the "sign" and the "meaning" is severed: The wheel of the bicycle is no longer reduced to being a part of an apparatus to move from *A* to *B* in the ordinary world. It is recycled to be used for different journeys: into and inside the *gray matter*. Again, a statement by Duchamp might illustrate his "method" which, as a result, changed the definition of art:

So if we accept the idea that trying not to define art is a legitimate conception, then the ready-made can be seen as a sort of irony, or an attempt at showing the futility of trying to define art, because here it is, a thing that I call art. I didn't even make it myself, as we know art means to make, hand make, to make by hand. It's a hand-made product of man, and there instead of making, I take the ready-made, even though it was made in a factory. But it is not made by hand, so it is a form of denying the possibility of defining art.

You don't define electricity; you see electricity as a result, but you can't define it. I remember that a professor of physics always said that you cannot define electricity. You can't say what it is but you know what it does. You see, that is the same thing with art: you know what art does but you don't know what it is. It is a sort of inner current in man, or something which you don't have to define. The first definition is not necessary.

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<sup>94</sup> MD, text originally published in *Art and Artists* (London), 1, no.4.(July 1966), p.47, quoted in Sweeney, *ibid.*, pp.141-142 (in capital letters)

But with the readymades it seems to me that they carry out of the world of everyday life - out of the hardware shop, as in the case of the snow shovel - something of your own sense of irony and wit, and therefore can we believe that they have some sort of message? Not message but value, which is artistic even though you haven't made them. The actual intention in choosing and selecting, in setting them aside from everything else in the world, does that not give them some kind of possibly intellectual value?

... You don't know whether you should take it as a work of art, and that is where the irony comes in and yet... it is the artist's choice to make the decision, to sign it as a work of his own.<sup>95</sup>

To me, the ability to *shift context* is one of the most profound skills that characterize a *Multipreneur*. With the concept of the readymade, Duchamp clearly broadened our—or at least, his—understanding of *designing*. A successful *shift* must meet some basic requirements. First, there is sheer curiosity or the idea that a different context could give a new meaning or purpose for the same thing or thought. Second, there is the necessity to act out the experiment of *shifting*, for example the application of biochemical network-structures onto the construction of roofs. And third, there is the proof to be given that the shift finally leads to improvement or enlargement in the new field. Being able to play different roles successively or simultaneously, Duchamp obviously had command of this method and used it frequently.

Duchamp even went so far, that he later allowed others, for example Arturo Schwarz, to make replicas of readymades (when some originals were already lost or thrown away), an attitude which made Otto Hahn ask him how he judged statements that this could be considered as a betrayal of his "heroic standpoint."<sup>96</sup> Duchamp answered:

Ah. Complaining and whining, are they? They ought to be saying 'It's atrocious, it's an outrage, a disgrace...' It would have suited them nicely to have shut me up in some category or formula. But that's not my style. If they're dissatisfied, *je m'en fous*. One mustn't give a F---... *et merde, ha, ha...*<sup>97</sup>

## Example #2: *Box in a Suitcase*

Duchamp's method of *recycling* was not only applied to (al-)ready made products he had chosen. He used it for parts of his oeuvre, too. In 1934 Duchamp finished the first *Green Box*, planned to be an edition of 300 (plus ten deluxe copies). This Box contained reproductions of notes and material related to the *Large Glass*. Intended to give a background for

<sup>95</sup> MD to George Heard Hamilton in G.H. Hamilton, *A Radio Interview* (conducted in New York on January 19, 1959 for the broadcast on BBC Radio), here in Anthony Hill (Ed.), *duchamp : passim. a marcel duchamp anthology*, pp.76-77

<sup>96</sup> Otto Hahn, *Marcel Duchamp Interviewed* (first published in *L'Express*, Paris, no.684, July 1964, pp.22-23, also in *Art and Artists*, vol.1, no.4, July 1966), quoted in Anthony Hill (Ed.), *duchamp : passim. a marcel duchamp anthology*, p.71

<sup>97</sup> MD, *ibid.*



the reception of the *Large Glass*, the publication pushed scholars of all kinds even more to go into far-fetched speculations.

When we take a closer look at the genesis and execution of his *Box-in-a-Valise (Boîte-en-valise)*<sup>98</sup>, we can discover an astounding piece of art, a portable museum.<sup>99</sup> When the collector and friend of Duchamp, Walter Arensberg, saw a finished box in 1943, he called it "a new kind of autobiography... a kind of autobiography in a performance by marionettes. You have become the puppeteer of your past."<sup>100</sup> Duchamp explained the genesis of this portable museum:

Instead of painting something the idea was to reproduce the paintings that I loved so much in miniature. I didn't know how to do it. I thought of a book, but I didn't like that idea. Then I thought of the idea of the box in which all my works would be mounted like in a small museum, a portable museum...<sup>101</sup>

There were not only "the paintings that I loved so much," but reproductions of *readymades*, such as *Fountain*, too. And it was a carefully arranged "hanging" of the works, with the *Large Glass* in the center. It is a kind of miniature altarpiece<sup>102</sup> on the one hand, but on the other, especially in the leather suitcase version, a sample case of a traveling salesman, as well.

In wartime (the German troops had invaded Paris in June, 1940), he managed to become a *director* of his own museum, the portable one. The box was a predecessor of what would later become the collection of nearly all his important works in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. But in the late 1930s and early 1940s, there was a different situation as the world was at war. Duchamp developed his own strategy for crossing the borders between the two parts of France: he managed to get a document that proved his identity as a cheese dealer<sup>103</sup>; in this manner he managed to collect the pieces for the boxes.

In his attempt to recycle and thereby establish his works, he invented the first *multiplies*. In a very special and individualistic way the chosen works of art were multiplied before they reentered the art world. In addition, all the Boxes—the Box of 1914, the *Green Box*, the *Box in a Suitcase*, and *In the Infinitive*—both in the moment when they were published and in retrospect, significantly indicate that there is a system, a thread, weaving throughout the whole oeuvre. Whether this is really the case or simply a

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<sup>98</sup> see a description and photos on the internet:

<http://arthist.binghamton.edu/duchamp/Box%20in%20Valise.html> (Dec. 07, 2005)

<sup>99</sup> The most ambitious attempt to describe and analyze this Box is the book by Ecke Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp. The Box in a valise*, Rizzoli, New York 1989

<sup>100</sup> Walter Arensberg, quoted in Tomkins, *ibid.*, p.316

<sup>101</sup> MD quoted in Sweeney, *ibid.*, p.136

<sup>102</sup> cf. Tomkins: "those wings on either side of the *Large Glass*, which have led many a critic to suggest that what Duchamp had in mind here was a medieval or Renaissance altarpiece..." , in Tomkins, *ibid.*, p.322

<sup>103</sup> cf. Tomkins on this topic in Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, p.324

kind of faking his own history, is not to be discussed in the context of this paper.

It was Ecke Bonk, in his excellent investigation of the *Box in a Suitcase*, who pointed out that "Duchamp's elaborate reproduction process had resulted in 'authorized' new versions of his most important paintings; in the cases of *Mariée* and *Nu descendant un escalier No.2* the reproductions have been signed and notarized like stock certificates: the ironic implication is that Duchamp's 'equity' had a new 'market quotation.'" <sup>104</sup> Among others, Arturo Schwarz set up a "franchise" business with the authorized reproduction and multiplication of "Duchamps", following the tracks Duchamp himself had already laid down.

## Duchamp™ ?

The reproduction of his "goods" in the form of miniaturized samples occurred when Duchamp obviously not only stopped being a painter, but gave up producing works intended to be art. His explanation of his "method" of choosing readymades in an interview in 1966—"You have to approach something with indifference, as if you had no aesthetic emotion." <sup>105</sup>—might as well be reused to illuminate the state of indifference he achieved by completely devoting himself to the game of chess, thereby getting out of the "game of art" and watching it with "indifference." If the role of a *joueur*, as I try to show in the previous chapter, indeed broadened his strategy, skills and proficiency, then this role as a *recycler* enabled him to understand fully the mechanisms of the art market.

Calling Duchamp a *Multipreneur* signifies that he acts like an entrepreneur with a multitude of roles. In this sense I suggest perceiving this whole interconnected process as the establishment of a *brand*; we might call it *Duchamp™*. We will see later that this is only a step on the way to initiating and consolidating his position in art history for posterity (cf. the chapter *Duchamp as a Director*), thus creating the *Corporate Identity* for his "small business." As Ingrid Keller clearly shows in a book on the problems with Corporate Identity, <sup>106</sup> to set up a Brand Identity you need *competence* to deliver a special problem solution, *continuity* to keep a high level of quality and *consequence* or *consistency* as an entrepreneur to anchor this brand in the consumer's mind. <sup>107</sup> And she insists that

<sup>104</sup> Ecke Bonk, *ibid.* p.154; cf. Martha Buskirk's article *Thoroughly Modern Marcel*, in Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon, *The Duchamp effect*, pp.194-195

<sup>105</sup> MD to Cabanne, *ibid.*, p.48

<sup>106</sup> Ingrid G. Keller, *Das CI-Dilemma. Abschied von falschen Illusionen*, Gabler, Wiesbaden 1993 (second edition)

<sup>107</sup> see Keller, *ibid.*, p.55

"brands, as well as companies, have to adapt to the *Zeitgeist* and to the changing conditions of the economic market."<sup>108</sup>

*Branding*, in this case, means the establishment of goods connected with a special name, certified by at least a signature, as it was done by Duchamp, to reach a certain image in the market and, thus, a high reputation. To make the goods unmistakably his works, he assures their identity by letting them re-enter the art world in the form of samples. Furthermore, with this strategy he gains the control over his oeuvre and prevents others from counterfeiting. He realized that the reputation of his first success with paintings like the *Nude Descending a Staircase* got worn out, so he reacted by reestablishing his position, going beyond the status his goods and he, as an individual, had ever had before.

Still, it was clearly not his intention to establish the brand *Duchamp*<sup>™</sup> but the person, the individual: Marcel Duchamp. In an interview with Dore Ashton in 1966, Duchamp shed light upon this marketing of brands:

We don't speak about science because we don't know the language, but everyone speaks about art. Art is going down to the people who talk about it. You know, about that question of success: you have to decide whether you'll be Pepsi-Cola, Chocolat Menier, Gertrude Stein, James Joyce... or James Joyce is maybe Pepsi-Cola. You can't name him without everybody knowing what you're talking about. What happened to me is worse, though. That painting [meaning the *Nude Descending the Staircase*, which he referred to only as "that painting" throughout the interview] was known but I was not. I was obliterated by the painting and only later have I stepped on it. I spent my life hidden behind it... You know, an artist only does one or two or three things in his whole life. The rest is merely filling up the hole. It is not desirable to be Pepsi-Cola. It is dangerous.<sup>109</sup>

In the context of this paper, I suggest seeing the *Boxes* as marketing tools, and therefore I prefer the "sample case" interpretation of these artifacts. Duchamp manufactured them in the manner of a *craftsman*. He mechanically reproduced his works and, later, let others do the job of the assembling. Concerning the production of the *Green Box*, it is this approach that led him to state the following:

... 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. He's a man like any other. It's his job to do certain things, but the businessman does certain things also, you understand? On the other hand, the word "art" interests me very much. If it comes from Sanskrit, as I've heard, it signifies "making." Now everyone makes something, and those who make things on a canvas, with a frame, they're called artists. Formerly, they

<sup>108</sup> Keller, *ibid.*, p.56 (translation: B.B.)

<sup>109</sup> MD to Dore Ashton in D.A., *An Interview with Marcel Duchamp* (first published in June, 1966, in *Studio International*, vol.171, no.878), here in Anthony Hill (Ed.), *duchamp : passim. a marcel duchamp anthology*, p.75

were called craftsmen, a term I prefer. We're all craftsmen, in civilian or military or artistic life...<sup>110</sup>

Therefore, we have to come to the conclusion that the reproduction and the reentering of his works as "samples" have the function of referring to the individual Marcel Duchamp.

In his brimming reservoir of partly contradictory statements, there is a special flavor of "rarity" which he expressed in the same interview with Cabanne: "I dream of rarity, what otherwise could be known as superior aesthetic."<sup>111</sup> How do these concepts—rarity on the one hand, reproduction on the other—go together? We have to keep in mind that the core of his oeuvre consisted of only a few paintings, and of course, some readymades, which he (as we have seen before) did not see as "art." The few works he had produced "demanded precision work over a long enough period,"<sup>112</sup> so he "attached to it an importance comparable to anything one takes great care with."<sup>113</sup> If it is true that the *Boxes* had at least the additional function of sample cases, then Duchamp reached a certain attention by letting them circulate among his friends, collectors, and other multipliers.

As the creation of *attention* is certainly one of the main goals in the marketing of goods, Duchamp managed to reach this through the production and distribution of his *Boxes*. In addition, Duchamp reassured his prominent state for his main collector Walter Arensberg. With this strategy he re-installed his image as an acclaimed artist and accomplished a refreshed reputation. Whenever the plan to gather his most important works in one place, preferably a museum, was developed; it was his role as a *recycler* that supplied and improved his strategy, empowering him to finally get control over his oeuvre and to establish his position for posterity.

Moreover, while his early works were either already in a collection under his access, or, like some readymades, lost or abandoned, he created a new product - the *Boxes* - and both created and satisfied the demand for that.

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<sup>110</sup> MD to Cabanne, *ibid.*, p.16

<sup>111</sup> MD, *ibid.* p.69

<sup>112</sup> MD, *ibid.*, p.78

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*

# Duchamp as a *director*

## *Art Critic of His Own Oeuvre*

From the late 1940s until his death in 1968, Duchamp gave several important public speeches as well as interviews and took part in sessions on art. Though he claimed in a conversation with Pierre Cabanne in 1966 that the reasons were to “broaden my horizon” and to make “some money,”<sup>114</sup> I would like to give these activities a closer look. My thesis is that after his investigation of the rules of the art world and after the creation of a renewed attention he finally acted as the main source for the interpretation of his own life and oeuvre. Moreover, he influenced the reception of contemporary art by acting as an art critic. Through his status as an expert for his own creation—both life and work—he finally managed to create exactly the image he intended to have for posterity. In the last twenty years of his life, he became a *director*.

On April 5, 1957, he gave a speech entitled *The Creative Act* at the American Federation of Arts Convention in Houston, Texas. To me this speech very clearly shows that Duchamp, again, had changed his role, now acting as an art historian who explains a concept of the artist as a “mediumistic being.”<sup>115</sup>

He stated that there are “two important factors, the two poles of the creation of art: the artist on the one hand, and on the other the spectator who later becomes the posterity.”<sup>116</sup> In the discussion on the panel following his speech, he emphasized “that a creative act is performed half way by the public or the spectator or posterity,”<sup>117</sup> and later on, “There wouldn’t be any creation if there was nobody to look at it.”<sup>118</sup>

In contrast to his refusal to take a “position”—for example in the talk with Cabanne<sup>119</sup>—the speech on *The Creative Act* contains parts of the description of the *system of art*, so to say, according to Marcel Duchamp. With the help of these public statements, Duchamp might have even given an explanation of how his concept of the *readymade* really worked. To illustrate this approach, Thierry de Duve<sup>120</sup> tried to follow the tracks

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<sup>114</sup> MD quoted in P. Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, London 1987, p.89

<sup>115</sup> MD, *The Creative Act*, see the reprint in Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, *ibid.*, Appendix

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> MD, see a reprint of parts of the panel’s discussion in Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jaques Caumont, *Ephemerides*, April 5, 1957

<sup>118</sup> MD: “I don’t believe in positions,” quoted in Cabanne, *ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> MD quoted in Cabanne, *ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Thierry de Duve, *Critique of Pure Modernism*, in Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon, *The Duchamp effect, an October book*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, and London, England, 1996, pp.93-129; de Duve refers to the concept of the *enunciative paradigm*, developed by Michel Foucault

which lead to judging a *readymade* a piece of art, stating that the enunciation "This is art" is true when applied to a *readymade*.<sup>121</sup> De Duve suggests that there are four conditions:

1. There has to be an object, a *referent*.<sup>122</sup>
2. There has to be an *enunciator*, the "artist".<sup>123</sup>
3. There has to be a *receiver*.<sup>124</sup>
4. There has to be "a surface of emergence and inscription, where the statement 'This is art' is recorded and institutionalized."<sup>125</sup>

Applied to the *readymade*, this means, according to de Duve:

...*readymades* are the referents of these instances of "this" that are indeed considered and valorized as works of art; the utterance of the word *art* with regard to them has made Duchamp's reputation as an artist and has in fact consecrated him as their author; in judging that the *readymades* were art, the public has acknowledged receipt of the statement and has repeated it on its own behalf; finally, the statement has been recorded and institutionalized at the same time that the *readymades* have in fact been preserved, exhibited, fetishized as works of art by the museological institution...

...there are conditions for the existence of art in a given cultural formation. They are: given (1) an object, (2) an author, (3) a public, and (4) an institutional place ready to record this object, to attribute an author to it, and to communicate it to the public...<sup>126</sup>

It is this approach which leads de Duve to his thesis:

If it is true that it is art about art and that it uses "the characteristic methods of a discipline [art in general] to criticize the discipline itself - not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence," if it is true moreover that it reduces art to its enunciative function, then it must declare the necessity and sufficiency of its own conditions of enunciation, four in number.<sup>127</sup>

De Duve investigates parts of the oeuvre and finally manages to prove the correctness of his thesis.<sup>128</sup> Analyzing Duchamp's statements on art and artists, we may say that he was fully aware of the conditions that *make* art. With his speeches, interviews, etc., Duchamp even enforced his position as an artist, thus using the role of an art historian or art critic on the one hand to analyze and actually position his own life and oeuvre in retrospect and, on the other hand, to set the "public" context to maintain his position for posterity.

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<sup>121</sup> Thierry de Duve, *ibid.*, p.100

<sup>122</sup> see de Duve, *ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, p.101

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*, p.102

<sup>128</sup> de Duve, *Critique of Pure Modernism*, pp.102-129

When he described the artist as a “mediumistic being” in his speech “The Creative Act,” he then did this from a *meta-level*, having already analyzed his own life and his own oeuvre:

To all appearances, the artist acts like a mediumistic being who, from the labyrinth beyond time and space, seeks his way out to a clearing. If we give the attributes of a medium to the artist, we must then deny him the state of consciousness on the esthetic plane about what he is doing or why he is doing it. All his decisions in the artistic execution of the work rest with pure intuition and cannot be translated into self-analysis, spoken or written, or even thought out.<sup>129</sup>

Duchamp, the *pseudo-scientist*, the *joueur*, the *recycler*, finally disguises as an art historian or art critic, establishing himself on a higher level than the “mediumistic being,” aware of the process that turns mere works and remarks into “art”. Maybe it is only in this way that we can apply the term *alchemist* to Duchamp: it is a transmutation he is able to cause and to control. And it is even more than that: Duchamp is able to manage this alchemist’s process *ex post*:

The creative act takes another aspect when the spectator experiences the phenomenon of transmutation: through the change from inert matter into a work of art, an actual transubstantiation has taken place, and the role of the spectator is to determine the weight of the work on the esthetic scale.<sup>130</sup>

### *The Making of Duchamp*

If Duchamp’s concept of the artist as a “mediumistic being” is true, and if large parts of his life—not only until 1923, when he declared his *Large Glass* as finally unfinished—can be characterized by the artistic works he produced, then at least concerning the time from the 1940s on we have to look at him as a “fractal” or multiple identity, as I suggested in applying the term *Multipreneur* with him.

As I try to show in the chapter *Duchamp as a Recycler*, with his portable museum, the *Box-in-a-Suitcase*, he gained control over the conditions in which his work should be received. The multiples helped to reestablish him as a personality within the art world by applying his strategic experience as a *joueur* to the rules of the art market. What was still missing in the 1940s and 1950s was the assurance that posterity would regard him the way he had intended. What he had to learn were the skills of a *director*, to *mise en scène* his own film or play of life, according to Duchamp. Martha Buskirk, in her article *Thoroughly Modern Marcel*,<sup>131</sup> clearly touches this point when she states,

<sup>129</sup> MD, *The Creative Act*, *ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> MD, *ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Martha Buskirk, *Thoroughly Modern Marcel* in Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon, *The Duchamp effect*, *ibid.*, pp.191-203

...Duchamp was also doing for himself what is now generally accomplished by a whole network of professionals. One of the services now performed by a contemporary art gallery is to shape collections by judiciously placing the works of the artist they represent. Duchamp also set the stage, in a modest way, for a role that has become increasingly common: that of the artist who functions as a kind of organizer, bringing together the far-flung elements of a new, more technologically based workshop organization. In this respect, Duchamp anticipated a shift, prevalent particularly since the 1960s, toward an approach that allows authorship to be retained as a category even as artists increasingly utilize techniques of fabrication and appropriate mechanically reproduced imagery.<sup>132</sup>

In the 1910s, with the "invention" of the *readymade*, Duchamp had already understood—at least unconsciously—that "it is the artist's choice to make the decision, to sign it as a work of his own,"<sup>133</sup> that through the signature the artist as the *enunciator*<sup>134</sup> is "branding" a chosen object, a *referent*<sup>135</sup>, thereby producing "branded goods."

Let us try to develop a scenario for his life by drawing a line through the labyrinth of Duchamp's life and oeuvre. He had started as a young artist at the turn of the last century with "the enthusiasm of one who wants to 'make beaux-arts,'"<sup>136</sup> and he had intermediately become, as Cabanne called it, "the man of the 'Nude descending the Staircase,'"<sup>137</sup> when the referent—the painting—was famous, and he—the author—was not, when he went to New York in 1915. When the grown artist, the inventor of *that painting*, went to the United States, he quickly learned the rules of the art business. Though he later rejected the intention to become "Pepsi-Cola," he managed to play this game by liberating the author from his works and by establishing a kind of meta-authorship, using steps like choosing *readymades*, and even "de-signing" works of others, as one of the most famous of these *transmutations* or *transubstantiations*,<sup>138</sup> the recycling of the *Mona Lisa*, shows. But we have to be aware of the fact that these steps are only interludes in his "game of life" to create an epilog—or with his "peepshow" *Étant donnés...*, a sequel—which finds the individual Marcel Duchamp finally established for posterity. This line through the labyrinth finds a Buddha-like Duchamp sitting in the center...

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<sup>132</sup> Martha Buskirk, *ibid.* p.201

<sup>133</sup> MD to George Heard Hamilton in G.H. Hamilton, *A Radio Interview* (conducted in New York on January 19, 1959 for the broadcast on BBC Radio), here in Anthony Hill (Ed.), *duchamp : passim. a marcel duchamp anthology*, pp.76-77

<sup>134</sup> Thierry de Duve, *ibid.*, p.100

<sup>135</sup> see de Duve, *ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> MD quoted in Cabanne, *ibid.*, p.21

<sup>137</sup> Cabanne, *ibid.*, p.44

<sup>138</sup> Duchamp has mentioned these terms in his speech *The Creative Act*, Convention of the American Federation of Arts, Houston, Texas, April 1957; see the text in Tomkins, *ibid.*, Appendix; I am fully aware of the fact that I use these terms in a different context - still I think it fits...



### Example #1: *L.H.O.O.Q. Shaved*

The fact that he actually managed to develop a characteristic, recognizable line of "products" is illustrated by the two *readymades* related to da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*.

Duchamp gave a description of the result of an *unfriendly takeover* of this famous painting, executed for the first time in 1919:

This *Mona Lisa* with a moustache and a goatee is a combination Readymade and iconoclastic Dadaism. The original, I mean the original Readymade is a cheap chromo 8 x 5 which I inscribed at the bottom four [sic: in fact 5; B.B.] letters which pronounced like initials in French, made a very risqué joke on the *Gioconda*.<sup>139</sup>

The second *Gioconda* in the manner of Duchamp is a test of his ability to separate the work from its original author. Using another reproduction, mounted on a sheet of paper with the caption "rasée L.H.O.O.Q." and his signature,<sup>140</sup> three years before his death, Duchamp proved that he had established himself in the history of art, detaching the original significance *This is a work of art by Leonardo da Vinci* from the referent and now signifying *This is a work of art by Marcel Duchamp*, fully aware that the public accepts this manoeuvre, and that there is "an institutional place ready to record this object, to attribute an author to it, and to communicate it to the public" (de Duve).<sup>141</sup>

### Example # 2: *Étant donnés...*

In 1961, Duchamp gave a speech entitled "Where do we go from here?"<sup>142</sup> He was looking back at currents and trends such as abstract art and surrealism and stated,

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<sup>139</sup> MD quoted in Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (Eds.), *Marcel Duchamp*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Thames and Hudson, London 1973, p.289; according to Schwarz this statement was given in 1964 in a lecture at the City Art Museum of St. Louis (Arturo Schwarz, , *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, third revised and expanded edition, Delano Greenidge Editions, New York 1997, p.670)

<sup>140</sup> Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, *ibid.*, p.849; according to Arturo Schwarz, this readymade was done for a dinner invitation in January, 1965

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> MD, *Where do we go from here*, address to a symposium at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, March 1961, see the text in Anthony Hill (Ed.), *duchamp : passim. a marcel duchamp anthology* , p. 89

Therefore I'm inclined, after this examination of the past, to believe that the young artist of tomorrow will refuse to base his work on a philosophy as oversimplified as that of the 'representative or non-representative' dilemma. I am convinced that, like Alice in Wonderland, he will be led to pass through the looking-glass of the retina, to reach a more profound expression. ... Surrealism introduced the exploration of the subconscious and reduced the role of the retina to that of an open window on the phenomena of the brain. The young artist of tomorrow will, I believe, have to go still further in this same direction, to bring to light startling new values which are and will always be the basis of artistic revolution. If we now envisage the more technical side of a possible future, it is very likely that the artist, tired of the cult for oils in painting, will find himself completely abandoning this five-hundred-year-old process, which restricts his freedom of expression by its academic ties. Other techniques have already appeared and we can foresee that just as the invention of new musical instruments changes the whole sensibility of an era, the phenomenon of light can, due to current scientific progress, among other things, become the new tool for the new artist.<sup>143</sup>

We have to keep in mind that at the time he was giving this speech, he himself was already working on a totally new piece of art, the tableau *Etant données: 1° la chute d'eau 2° le gaz d'éclairage*, which was developed and assembled in total secrecy in about twenty years and was revealed to the public in 1969 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art one year after his death. (Coincidentally, in 1961 he was talking about the future of art in this museum, where he wanted to have the most important parts of his entire oeuvre to be exhibited.) Meanwhile he had gained control over the context in which his play should be received, and he, at last, had managed to have the idea of his portable museum, the *Box-in-a-Valise*, transferred into the reality of the museum context. Moreover, when he claimed, at the end of this speech, that "The great artist of tomorrow will go underground,"<sup>144</sup> he himself was already "underground" working on his last masterpiece, knowing that he would be able to give exactly the place where it should remain, among his other works in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

To me there is no chance to describe the *choc* of perception given by this strange installation; one has to have the experience for oneself. Still, to illustrate the way Duchamp was acting as a *director*, I would like to give a few hints. The "ordinary" visitors, as it can be viewed when watching them for a while in that museum, walk around in the well lit collection of Duchamp's works, and some of them enter the dark anteroom of this three-chamber-installation and take a quick look at a **wooden Spanish door**. Most of them quickly leave the room because there is no clue as to what could be behind that door. Only a few "experienced" visitors take the chance to come closer, suddenly discovering the two holes in that

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<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*

door. When they take the chance to look through, they have the experience of a strange peep-show.

There have been many comments on this last large piece of Duchamp's art, and still, nearly thirty years after its unveiling, the controversy continues as to how this work fits together with other "apparitions" created by Duchamp, especially what the connection to his *Large Glass*, installed in the main hall of this museum's collection, could be.

When I talked to Anne d'Harnoncourt, the George D. Widener Director, Philadelphia Museum of Art, she stated, " [Duchamp; B.B.] was extremely interested in the limitations of points of view, so that he really controlled completely what the viewer could see."<sup>145</sup>

D'Harnoncourt is the editor of the *Manual of Instructions*,<sup>146</sup> a reproduction of the manual Duchamp gave to the museum to make sure that the fragile installation in his studio (80 East 11<sup>th</sup> Street, New York) could be disassembled and reinstalled to remain permanently in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Keeping control not only over the installation and the reception of the tableau, he insisted, as d'Harnoncourt explains in the introduction text of the reproduction of this manual, that "no photographs of the interior of the construction itself nor of the notebook of instructions were to be published by the Museum for a period of at least fifteen years."<sup>147</sup>

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### *Gaining Control over Posterity*

With the control over the reception of his oeuvre, he might have been addressing the phrase "the artist, tired of the cult for oils in painting," to himself. And if this is true, he had indeed already abandoned "this five-hundred-year-old process, which restricts his freedom of expression by its academic ties."<sup>148</sup> Finally he was able to set the stage for his oeuvre, acting as the forerunner for "the young artist of tomorrow."<sup>149</sup> The apprentice had become a master, using a variety of skills and abilities to create the phenomena—or apparitions—he intended. With the tableau *Étant donnés...* he proved that he finally was able to combine all the experience and proficiency of the different roles he had mastered, including such as *pseudo-scientist, joueur, recycler, and director*. The *director* of this tab-

<sup>145</sup> Unpublished interview with the author, Philadelphia Museum of Art (May, 1988)

<sup>146</sup> *Manual of Instructions for MARCEL DUCHAMP: ÉTANT DONNÉS: 1° LA CHUTE D'EAU 2° LE GAZ D'ECLAIRAGE...*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, 1987

<sup>147</sup> MD, *Where do we go from here*, *ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*

leau is, in personal union, a *bricoleur* or *tinker*, too. Looking at the manual for the installation of *Étant donnés...* with its photos of the fragile scenery of that construction, we may draw a connection to a statement he gave in an interview in 1966, when the tableau was nearly finished, but still unknown to the public:

I'm very handy. I often repair objects. I'm not at all afraid, like people who don't know how to fix an electrical outlet. I learned the rudiments of these things; unfortunately I don't know everything about it, nor am I very exact or very precise. When I see certain friends of mine doing the same things, I really admire them. But I get along all right. It's fun to do things by hand. I'm on guard, because there's the great danger of the "hand", which comes back, but since I'm not doing works of art, it's fine.<sup>150</sup>

One of the questions connected with his becoming a *director* is certainly what might have driven him to develop such a "strategy." Martha Buskirk makes up a connection between the changes of the context for the reception of art and "Duchamp's later refashioning and repositioning of his [earlier;B.B.] work,"<sup>151</sup> stating,

...as museums like the Museum of Modern Art in New York and others began to display and collect contemporary art, Duchamp began to think in more and more specific ways about the relationship of his work to the museums. But Duchamp seemed to realize, at an early stage, the importance of mounting his rebellion against those conventions from within a context that would give structure and meaning to his gestures.<sup>152</sup>

A brief investigation into Duchamp's life and oeuvre shows traces that may support Buskirk's approach. It is not only the "First Papers of Surrealism" exhibition in New York (1942),<sup>153</sup> where Duchamp acted as organizer, designing the catalogue, arranging some miles of string to be stretched crisscross in the hall, and, finally, inviting some children to use the exhibition as a playground at the opening.<sup>154</sup> He acted as the "main designer and idea man"<sup>155</sup> for the International Exhibition of Surrealism in Paris in 1938, as well.

In January 1941 he had finished the first *Box-in-a Suitcase*, and further back in time, it might have been his lessons as an art dealer—for others and for himself—that trained his skills and made him understand the business rules of the "art world". Though—or, because—his attempts were often a failure, he understood quite early in his life how works of art were commercialized. In August, 1935, he tried to sell a set of six col-

<sup>150</sup> MD to Pierre Cabanne, *ibid.*, p.106

<sup>151</sup> Martha Buskirk, *Thoroughly Modern Marcel*, *ibid.*, p.202

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> see Buskirks reference to Benjamin Buchloh, in Buskirk, *ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> see, for example, Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, (third revised and expanded edition), New York 1997, Volume Two, p.767

<sup>155</sup> Calvin Tomkins, in Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, *ibid.*, p.312

ored cardboards, his *Rotoreliefs (Disques Optiques)* at the Concours Lépine, an industrial exposition, and looking back in a conversation with Cabanne remarked,

I rented a stand, even hired a secretary, since I didn't want to stay there all day; people went along, bought a refrigerator, then saw the "Rotoreliefs," which didn't mean much to them. At the end of the month - because it lasted a month - I had sold one example...<sup>156</sup>

In a letter to Roché, he called it a "complete failure."<sup>157</sup> The same judgment must be placed on his attempt to go into business with a dye shop in 1922, when after six months he lost his whole investment.<sup>158</sup> When Cabanne asked him (in 1966) what he was living on in the 1930s, he answered, a little brusque it seems,

No one knows how I lived... I could tell you that I sold Brancusi, and it would probably be true. In 1939, I had quite a few in my attic. I looked up Roché, offered him one, and he gave me quite a bit of money for it. And then it didn't cost me much to live, you know. I didn't really have my own house. In Paris, I was living in the rue Larrey. In New York, it cost me forty dollars a month. That was minimum. Living is more a question of what one spends than what one makes. You have to know how much you can live on.<sup>159</sup>

Tomkins claims that in the 1920s Duchamp "preferred to eke out a living through occasional forays into the art market, even though he was coming to detest the commercial side of art more and more."<sup>160</sup> To prove this statement, he quotes Duchamp in a letter to Katherine Dreier (July 2, 1928):

The more I live among artists, the more I am convinced that they are fakes from the minute they get to be successful in the smallest way.  
This means also that all the dogs around the artists are crooks.  
If you see the combination fakes and crooks how have you been able to keep some kind of faith (and in what?) Don't name a few exceptions to justify a milder opinion about the whole "art game." In the end, a painting is declared good only if it is worth "so much." It may even be accepted by the "holy museums. So much for posterity."<sup>161</sup>

In the 1920s, Duchamp seemed to have realized the importance of collectors, such as Arensberg and Dreier.<sup>162</sup> The chance to assemble the most important of his works in one museum, The Philadelphia Museum

<sup>156</sup> MD to Pierre Cabanne, *ibid.*, p.80

<sup>157</sup> MD, quoted in Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jaques Caumont, *Ephemerides*, September 1, 1935

<sup>158</sup> see Tomkins, *ibid.*, p.245

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*, pp.82-83

<sup>160</sup> Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, *ibid.*, p.285

<sup>161</sup> MD in a letter to Katherine Dreier, July 2, 1928 - in: Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, New York 1996, p.285f.

<sup>162</sup> see Tomkins, *ibid.*, p.294

of Art, was based on this assessment, understanding and using the position of the collector. He tied the knots of a network of supporters right from the beginning of his entering the Arensberg Circle in 1915. His friendship with Walter Arensberg started that year and lasted until Arensberg's death. When it came to decide to which museum the huge Arensberg collection—including major works of Duchamp—should go, Duchamp played the role, as Tomkins points out, as "Arensberg's main emissary."<sup>163</sup> He finally reached his goal when, on December 27, 1950, the contract was signed declaring that the whole collection should go to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Tomkins continues, "Duchamp, who played such a key role in the decision, was now poised to preside over his own posterity."<sup>164</sup>

The reasons for his strategy to keep control over his oeuvre might be expressed in different statements he has given in his talks with Cabanne, such as: "For me, the history of art is what remains of an epoch in a museum, but it's not necessarily the best of that epoch..."<sup>165</sup>

Duchamp had to accept that the museum was the place where the statement "This is art" is finally engraved, thus accepting the statement that there is a fourth condition (de Duve), besides an *object*, an *author*, a *public*: "an institutional place ready to record this object, to attribute an author to it, and to communicate it to the public..."<sup>166</sup> Later in talks with Cabanne, Duchamp stressed that "Posterity is a form of the spectator... It's the posthumous spectator, because the contemporary spectator is worthless, in my opinion."<sup>167</sup> Maybe another reason for his becoming a *director* is shown in the statement he gave to Cabanne in connection with the production of the *Green Box* (1934):

Everything I was doing demanded precision work over a long enough period; I found that it was worth the trouble to preserve it. I worked slowly; consequently, I attached to it an importance comparable to anything one takes great care with."<sup>168</sup>

Keeping in mind that from 1915 until 1950 more than forty major works were collected by the Arensbergs.<sup>169</sup> there is above all a very personal reason for Duchamp to gain control over the core of his oeuvre, as Duchamp made clear in an interview with J.J. Sweeney: "I always felt that

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<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*, p.373

<sup>164</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> MD in Cabanne, *ibid.*, p.67

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> MD in Cabanne, *ibid.*, p.76

<sup>168</sup> *ibid.*, p.78

<sup>169</sup> Cf. Ecke Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp. The Box in a Valise*, *ibid.* p.18

showing one painting in one place and another somewhere else is just like amputating one finger or a leg each time."<sup>170</sup>

There are more hints in his life to an evolving *Duchampian* strategy to accomplish the role of a director, but the ones referred to above already prove of this statement. The reception of his *Nude Descending a Staircase*, shaking the foundations of the art world when it was shown at the International Exhibition of Modern Art in New York (otherwise known as the *Armory Show*, March, 1913), had already given a certain reputation to Duchamp before he entered the Arensberg circle, and he definitely had the charm to establish contacts, even friendship with his collector. By and by, with the patience and concentration of a chess player he managed to acquire the position he needed to have a certain degree of control not only over the restricted distribution of his works, but over the final reception of his oeuvre and the image he, as an individual, had accomplished.

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<sup>170</sup> MD, unpublished text of a filmed interview with Sweeney, summer 1955, quoted in Bonk, *ibid.*, pp.18-19





## Excursion: *The Education of Artists*

"Dumb like a painter, *bête comme un peintre*": with this French saying Duchamp started a speech at the symposium entitled "Should the Artist go to College—and Why?".<sup>171</sup> Claiming that "the artist is now completely integrated in the society," he went on, "Emancipated for more than a century the artist today presents himself as a free man with the same prerogatives as the ordinary citizen and speaks on equal terms to the buyer of his works."<sup>172</sup> One of the responsibilities of the artist of today, according to Duchamp, is the education of his intellect. He continued:

Clearly the profession of artists has taken its place in today's society at a level comparable to the level of learned professions, and is not as before, a sort of superior artisanship. In order to remain at this level, and to feel on equal terms with lawyers, physicians, etc., the artist must receive the same college education. Furthermore, the artist in modern society plays a role much more important than the role of an artisan or that of a jester. He finds himself facing a world based on brutal materialism, where everything is valued in the light of physical well being, and where religion, after losing much ground, is no more the great dispenser of spiritual values. Today, the artist is a curious reservoir of para-religious values, absolutely in opposition to the daily functionalism for which science receives the homage of a blind worship.<sup>173</sup>

Duchamp had explained the position of art replacing religion in 1966 in an interview with Dore Ashton, pointing out that the artist "is some sort of missionary. Art has replaced religion and people have the same sort of respectful attitude towards art that they once had for religion. Art is the only thing left for people who don't give science the last word."<sup>174</sup>

In addition to this role of the artist, let us stick to the main topic of Duchamp's speech. Duchamp said, "Thanks to this education he [the artist; B.B.] will possess the very tools which permit him to oppose this materialistic state of affairs through a cult of the ego in an aesthetic frame of spiritual values." The question is, If students go to college, what are the skills and abilities to be imparted or developed? We have to keep in mind some hints Duchamp gave concerning his concept of the artist of today, which characterizes the artist first of all as an individual; he explained in a television interview to J.J. Sweeney in 1957:

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<sup>171</sup> MD, speech at the symposium at the Hofstra College, Contemporary Arts Festival, Hempstead, Long Island, New York (May 13, 1960); see the text in Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jaques Caumont, *Ephemerides*, May 13, 1960

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> MD to Dore Ashton in D.A., *An Interview with Marcel Duchamp* (first published in June, 1966, in *Studio International*, vol.171, no.878), here in Anthony Hill (Ed.), *duchamp : passim. a marcel duchamp anthology*, p.74

I believe that art is the only form of activity in which man as man shows himself to be a true individual. Only in art is he capable of going beyond the animal state, because art is an outlet toward regions which are not ruled by space and time.<sup>175</sup>

Defining the artist as an individual, with the stress on the last word, seems to be the Duchamp's core concept, emphasized in a talk with Cabanne: "I didn't want to be called an artist, you know. I wanted to use my possibility to be an individual, and I suppose I have, no?"<sup>176</sup> So he seemed to be talking about himself when he went on in his speech,

Internal or spiritual values, mentioned above, and of which the artist is so to speak the dispenser, concern only the individual singled out in opposition to the general values which apply to the individual as part of the society. And under the appearance, I am tempted to say, under the disguise of a member of a human race, the individual, in act, is quite alone and unique. And the characteristics common to all individuals *en masse* have no relationship whatsoever with the solitary explosion of an individual facing himself alone.<sup>177</sup>

He referred to the German philosopher, Max Stirner, when he claimed the necessity of a college education, training "the deeper faculties of the individual, the self-analysis and the knowledge of our spiritual heritage. These are the important qualities which the artist acquires in college, and which will allow him to keep alive the great spiritual traditions with which even religion seems to have lost its contact."<sup>178</sup>

To me these statements still do not reveal the contents of college education of artists; what Duchamp proposed seems more confusing than illuminating, ending his speech with these sentences:

I believe that today, more than ever before, the artist has this para-religious mission, to keep lit the flame of an inner vision of which the work of art seems to be the closest translation for the laymen. It goes without saying that to feel such a mission the highest education is indispensable.<sup>179</sup>

I suggest taking a closer look at Duchamp's way of life itself, as I try to do it with the investigation of his roles such as *pseudo-scientist*, *joueur*, *recycler* and *director*. Keeping in mind that he acquired all his skills and abilities and his position in the art world, by studying these—and many more—roles, it is highly questionable that a similar profile can be

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<sup>175</sup> MD to James Johnson Sweeney, edited version of "A Conversation with Marcel Duchamp," television interview conducted by James Johnson Sweeney, NBC, January 1956, filmed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, see the text in Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, Da Capo Press, New York 1973, p. 136

<sup>176</sup> MD to Dore Ashton, *ibid.*, p. 74

<sup>177</sup> MD, speech at the symposium at the Hofstra College, *ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> MD, *ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> MD, *ibid.*

achieved with a college education, which may be a start, but certainly is no valid ticket for the artist on his (or her) "para-religious mission."<sup>180</sup>

If the individual is truly "singled out in opposition to the general values," then we have to ask what the position of an art college in society really is, which is not the topic of this paper on the survival of ARTISTS, such as Duchamp.

We might come to the conclusion that (future) artists should only go to those colleges which are able to supply and develop skills and abilities in a highly individualistic way, allowing the students to both explore and nourish their inner vision—as "mediumistic beings,"<sup>181</sup> as well as to train and achieve the entrepreneurial characteristics they need to survive as ARTISTS, meaning as *Multipreneurs*.

The problem is  
never how to get  
new, innovative  
thoughts into your  
mind, but how to  
get the old ones  
out " Dee Hook<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> MD *ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> referring to the term coined by Duchamp in his speech *The Creative Act*, Session on the Creative Act, Convention of the American Federation of Arts, Houston, Texas, April 1957; see the text in Tomkins, *ibid.*, Appendix

<sup>182</sup> Dee Hook, "business visionary and creator of VISA" (Tom Peters), in M. Mitchell Waldrop, *The Trillion-Dollar-Vision of Dee Hook*, *Fast Company*, October:November 1996, p. 79, quoted in Peters, *ibid.*, p.76



# Conclusion

## *The Art of Living*

Marcel Duchamp, who at the start of his career wanted to “make beaux-arts,”<sup>183</sup> later stated that he preferred breathing to working, “therefore, if you wish, 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.”<sup>184</sup> Keeping in mind that Duchamp gave this comment in 1966, two years before he died, and three years before his last masterpiece, the tableaux *Étant donnés...* was shown to the public for the first time, it is fascinating how the trajectory of his life obviously reached its target in finally establishing Duchamp as one of the most important artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It is almost exactly twenty-five years ago today since he died on October 1, 1968, with “the most calm, pleased expression on his face,” as his wife Teeny once said.<sup>185</sup> Still today Duchamp holds the danger of getting lost in an intellectual blackhole.<sup>186</sup> Intended or not, the edition of 289 previously unknown notes of his, published in 1980 by the *Centre Georges Pompidou* (Paris, France) invited the old scholars and a new generation to go on scrutinizing Duchamp. The *director* is dead, but the play is not taken off the program. The Buddha is still patiently sitting in the center of the labyrinth...

Twenty-five years since he died—and the fascination seems to be more alive than ever. It was the intention of this paper to do a journey into the life and oeuvre of Duchamp by applying the concept of a *Multipreneur* to him. The proposal of four key roles—the *pseudo-scientist*, the *joueur*, the *recycler*, and, finally, the *director*—should supply points of orientation to do such a journey. Furthermore, in the context of a workshop on the theme of “survival,” it was meant to be a (still sketchy) map for the orientation of other possible *Multipreneurs*, such as students at an art college.

In this conclusion I want to come back to the proposal to put the word *artist* aside and instead of that write, in capital letters, ARTIST. If it is justified to see in Duchamp an avantgarde version of a *Multipreneur* of our time, then some useful characteristics should be recapitulated at the end of this paper.

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<sup>183</sup> MD quoted in P. Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, London 1987, p.21

<sup>184</sup> MD *ibid.*, p.72

<sup>185</sup> Teeny Duchamp, quoted in Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, *ibid.*, p.450

<sup>186</sup> Tomkins, *ibid.*, p.457

### *Surviving as an A.R.T.I.S.T.*

We have to collect all the results of our investigation to be able to give an answer to the question how he survived as an ARTIST. I suggest using the latter word as an acronym which reads A.R.T.I.S.T., so we may spell it this way:

**A** stands for **art** in a very broadened sense

In the case of Duchamp, *art* does not necessarily signify "the creation or expression of what is beautiful, esp in visual form"<sup>187</sup> or "fine skill or aptitude in such expression."<sup>188</sup> This might have been the first strategic platform from which he operated in his early years, entering the art world as an apprentice. *Art*—concerning the life and oeuvre of Duchamp—means mastering different roles at the same time, e.g., being able to combine the abilities and naivety of the *bricoleur* with the precision of a technician and the experience of a craftsman, thereby using a variety of skills. First of all, achieving the status of a Master of Arts, given by the "Academy of Life," not by traditional colleges, depended for him on putting the *gray matter* at the service of his mind.

**R** stands for **reputation**

To gain a position in the art world, Duchamp realized that the creation of a certain image is as important as the production of "goods" itself. He invented marketing tools, like the first multiples, both to reestablish an outstanding reputation and to create a demand for old, new and "recycled" products. Furthermore, he learned to be a *director* not only to comment on the status of the contemporary art world, but to *mise en scène* his own oeuvre, thus preparing the reception of his work for posterity.

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<sup>187</sup> cf. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, ed. by A.S. Hornsby, Cornelsen & Oxford University Press, Berlin 1983 (14.Edition), p.43

<sup>188</sup> *ibid.*

## T stands for thread

Though there is the possibility to see extended phases in his life dominated by a hermitlike way of life, Duchamp was obviously open to contemporary influences. As a *flâneur* he used the sensations of daily life and took advantage of new technologies, scientific news, and popular inventions. Aware of himself as a "mediumistic being," he found the thread of his personal themes and motives by perceiving the phenomena of modern life and investigating the reflections onto his personal existence. Duchamp always took care of his notes and of the core of his oeuvre because these expressions of his life seem to serve as an assurance of his existence. The futile search by scholars for the philosophers stone in his oeuvre is even more enlarged by puzzle pieces, like the *Boxes*, indicating that there is *the* system. It is not a question whether there really was an authentic thread leading through his life that is perceivable by others. On the contrary, it is his acting *as if* a thread can be drawn and stretched, thereby serving as an instrument of orientation for himself and as a fishing-line.

## I stands for intuition

Several times in speeches and interviews Duchamp described the artist as a *medium*,<sup>189</sup> which, for him, meant that he was dependant on the spectator or even posterity to give proof that he or she was a successful and important part of the history of art, a true individual. More than that, this statement indicates that an artist gifted with intuition is, foremost, what we called an *autotelic* person, meaning that he or she "generally does things for their own sake, rather than in order to achieve some later external goal."<sup>190</sup> Assuming that in these comments Duchamp was talking about himself, too, we find in them direct and indirect references to the artist and "intuition," strictly separated from self-analysis.<sup>191</sup> Although the multitude of different roles he embodied included businessman, chess player, and organizer, the romantic stress on intuition indicates that this is the given connection to his basic reservoir.

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<sup>189</sup> MD, e.g., in a talk with Cabanne, in: P. Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, Da Capo Press, London 1987, p.70

<sup>190</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow. The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*, Basic Books/Harper Collins Publishers, New York 1997, p.117

<sup>191</sup> cf. MD, Session on the Creative Act, Convention of the American Federation of Arts, Houston, Texas, April 1957; see the text in Tomkins, *ibid.*, Appendix

## S stands for strategy

If intuition supplies and nourishes the artist and he wants his works to be seen as art, then there is the need to understand the rules and mechanisms of the system to gain at least a little control over the process of a connotation that states, "This is a work of art." The devotion to the game of chess obviously helped Duchamp to develop and refine his strategic skills and apply them to the art world. As the problem for him was certainly not being creative, but establishing himself permanently as an individual, he learned how to position himself as an artist by becoming a *director* with the core skills and the connections to critics, collectors, and museums. This, at first unconscious (I suppose), later intentional patchwork of roles enabled him to even strategically connote his significance for posterity.

## T stands for trust

We do not know for sure how Duchamp managed to have trust in himself. Strategy may have helped him to reach a goal or overcome a defeat. He seemed to have been driven by an uncompromising self-experience as an individual, keeping away from groups and obligations. Trust in himself was obviously nourished by enjoying different roles and challenges; with this candor he witnessed himself, his basic characteristic features, and his growing abilities and skills. I suppose that Duchamp was already provided with a sheer curiosity and profound intelligence when he entered the world of art. But it was his traveling, both into the world and into his gray matter, that made him smart enough to qualify himself for the role of a *director*. Trust in himself could be assured by a process of learning and un-learning, on the basis of a growing ability to both "embrace" and "exploit" chance and coincidence in life, thereby constructing and deconstructing plans and strategies willfully.

Being openhearted, the methods of self-assurance and self-esteem enabled him to be trusted by others.



## Sources

As there are nearly innumerable books, articles and statements on Duchamp and related topics, I will only give a list of these sources I used for this paper; for an exhaustive bibliography see Jennifer Gough-Cooper and Jaques Caumont, *Ephemerides on and about Marcel Duchamp and Rose Sélavy. 1987-1968*, published in the catalogue for the exhibition *Marcel Duchamp*, Venice; Thames and Hudson, London 1993, Editor and Introduction: Pontus Hulten.

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