

CHANGEchance_ The Duchamp Paradigm

By & About Marcel Duchamp

*The word ludic in Latin ludo, means to jouer to play, which is a thing to live for. You play chess and you kill but you don't kill much, people live after being killed you see in chess but not in normal wars. Yeah it's a peaceful thing it's a peaceful way of understanding life. Play anything else not chess alone but all games, all games. Play with life then you are just as alive and more alive than people who believe in religion and art.*¹

Marcel Duchamp

It was necessary to assemble Marcel Duchamp's own words on his life and work in this selection to support the ideas and interpretations discussed in the essays of *CHANGEchance_ The Duchamp Paradigm*, which has a physical counterpart in a relativist and interactive environment, *PERPETUUMmobile_ Enchanted Domain*.

The *TEXTS by & about MARCEL DUCHAMP* that follow below can be taken as direct transmission from the artist, whether his writing or his conversation that has been transcribed.

SOURCES + RESOURCES follows in a document that provides links to thirty-six important texts that were edited for accuracy and rendered as pdfs before they were posted online. Active links are in the document making previously difficult to acquire texts directly available to Readers, thus it is possible to enlighten interested minds and dissipate many entrenched assertions about Duchamp's life and work by critics and historians. *CHANGEchance_ The Duchamp Paradigm* seeks to render a level playing field for the apprehension of Duchamp's contributions, freed as much as possible from interpretation.

No attempt has been made to address the deep and rich veins of Duchamp's own published notes in the, *Box of 1914*, the *Green Box*, *A l'Infinitive* or *Notes*. Forming part of *CHANGEchance* are a series of films of artists who knew Duchamp or who work with his legacy, they include Carolee Schneemann, Alison Knowles, William Stone and Mike Bidlo [see Vimeo channel].

PERPETUUMmobile_ Enchanted Domain is the physical counterpart to *CHANGEchance_ The Duchamp Paradigm*. It is an artist's trajectory departing from the *Large Glass* and brought forth as a relational field of experience in an environment including two sound pieces, multiple projections, an ensemble of large scale sculptural works and *A Cloud in the Room*.

¹ Transcribed from a film, "Jeu d'échecs avec Marcel Duchamp," shot in 1968 by Jean Clair in Cadaques.

² The catalog that Duchamp grew was called MANUFACTURE D'ARMES et CYCLES de Saint-up with

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“A Complete Reversal of Art Opinions by Marcel Duchamp, Iconoclast”,
Arts and Decoration, September 1915, pp.427-442. [The article is “By Marcel Duchamp,
Iconoclast” with editorial comments interspersed.]

It is just because Rembrandt is one of the things that posterity has given that he remains.

[Editor remarks have been expunged except for this excerpt from the introduction: Monsieur Duchamp explodes figurative bombs like this one in a tone that is matter of fact but not arrogant. He is neither modest nor vain. He has red hair, blue eyes, freckles, a face, except for a certain sensitiveness, and a figure that would seem American even among Americans. He is young and strangely unaffected by the vast amount of argument created by his work...]

Rembrandt could never have expressed all the thoughts found in his work. In the religious age he was the great religious painter, another epoch found in him a profound psychologist, another a poet, still another, the last one, a master craftsman. This may prove that people give more to pictures than they take from them. Certainly no man can be a profound psychologist and a great religious preacher at once. Rembrandt dipped his pictures in a solution of sentiment. If they are good, they are good despite that.

There may be an association between Cézanne and Rembrandt. I do not know. The greatest scientific spirit of the nineteenth century, greater in that sense than Cézanne is Seurat, who died at the age of thirty-two. The twentieth century is to be still more abstract, more cold, more scientific. The American character contains the elements of an extraordinary art. Your life is cold and scientific. Perhaps you are too young in art. The traditions weigh too heavily upon you, turns you into a sort of religious fanatics as little yourselves as possible.

In architecture the Florentine palaces here have disappeared with the advent of the skyscraper, with the call of utility that means. Assuredly the Plaza Hotel with its innumerable windows, voraciously taking in light, is more beautiful than the Gothic Woolworth Building, but I like the immensity of the latter.

New York itself is a work of art, a complete work of art. Its growth is harmonious, like the growth of ripples that come on the water when a stone has been thrown into it. And I believe that your idea of demolishing old buildings, old souvenirs, is fine. It is in line with so much misunderstood manifesto issued by the Italian Futurists which demanded, in symbol only however, though it was taken literally, the destruction of the museums and libraries. The dead should not be permitted to be so much stronger than the living. We must learn to forget the past, to live our own lives in our own time.

[Monsieur Duchamp was asked for opinions upon the work of men whose names are written large in the list of art.]

Velasquez, like Constantin Meunier, is the type of great man. You feel that he asks you to stand by and admire his greatness, his dexterity, his grandeur and he is terrifically

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suave. That is not so true of Rodin who is more subtle [sic.] and thus better able to fool us. His drawings may last for twenty years but next to those of Cézanne they are impossible. Rodin is always sensuous, a materialist, an animal, if you will. Cézanne reaches much higher.

Greco is the root of Picasso. They call Picasso the leader of the cubists but he is not a cubist strictly speaking. He is a cubist to-day – something else to-morrow. The only real cubists to-day are Gleizes and Metzinger.

But that word Cubism means nothing at all – it might just as well, for the sense it contains, have been policarpist. An ironical remark of Matisse's gave birth to it. Now we have a lot of little cubists, monkeys following the motion of the leader without comprehension of their significance. Their favorite word is discipline. It means everything to them and nothing.

Daumier was good in a caricatural way, selected by himself to be sure, but his irony was not so profound as Goya's. The spirit of Daumier is revived in the Greek cartoonist Gallinis who has lately done some very interesting themes in the manner of the cubists.

Gauguin is an impressionist and a romanticist – a great force – Beaudelarian, exotic, a traveler, gathering romances out of vague or rare or uncivilized or little known countries.

Sargent, Simon, Blanche, Cottett, Bernard are impossible. They trade upon antiquity. The prolific Besnard is an especially disgusting parasite. Maurice Denis is a little better. But he goes to mass and going feels that he must reflect the fact in his work. And so in the twentieth century we have what may be called neo-Catholicism in art. I do not believe that art should have anything in common with definite theories that are apart from it. That is too much like propaganda. I like Bouguereau better than any of these men, he is so much more honestly an Academician. The others pose as revolutionary and their puny little souls cannot know what revolution means. They must have taken their definition out of the dictionary.

Whistler has a living personality that he could not fully conserve in his pictures. Remove all the evidence of the influence of traditions upon the work of Gustave Moreau and you will find that is he the most isolated figure of his epoch. There is a great sympathy between the work of Redon and Moreau in refinement of color and sensitiveness.

Redon is one of the sources to which Matisse has gone consciously or not. Matisse's color has not the solidity of Cézanne's, but it cannot be viewed from the same angle. There is nothing that you can take hold of in Matisse's color, not in the old sense of quality in color. It is transparent, thin, perhaps, but when you have left his pictures you will see that they have taken hold of you.

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“The Nude-Descending-a-Staircase Man Surveys Us,” *New York Tribune*, Sept. 12, 1915.
[This article has a lengthy subtitle and introduction; it is by M.D.]

The American woman is the most intelligent woman in the world today – the only one that always knows what she wants, and therefore always gets it. Hasn't she proved it by making her husband in his role of slave-banker look almost ridiculous in the eyes of the whole world? Not only has she intelligence but a wonderful beauty of line is hers possessed by no other woman of any race at the present time.

And this wonderful intelligence, which makes the society of her equally brilliant sisters of sufficient interest to her without necessarily insisting on the male element protruding in her life, is helping the tendency of the world today to completely equalize the sexes, and the constant battle between them in which we have wasted our best energies in the past will cease.

This will not by any means produce race suicide, for the women of this state of the far future will be called upon to bear children at a due time, just as a man is called upon to pay taxes, all responsibility for her offspring being taken from her.

As things stand to-day [sic] this would be a heavy toll to pay under citizenship, but assuredly a time will come when science will have achieved that death in childbirth be unknown.

I cannot understand the view my compatriots have expressed about New York. I know of no city where I would rather be for the next two years – always provided my country does not call me back to it.

The capitals of the Old World have labored for hundreds of years to find that which constitutes good taste and one may say that they have found the zenith thereof. But why do people not understand how much of a bore this is? In Paris, for instance, everything is perfectly blended and in perfect harmony- Never in a whole day does one see anything the tiniest bit out of place. But here – from the very instant one lands one realizes that here there is a people yearning, searching, trying to find something.

If only America would realize that the art of Europe is finished – dead – and that America is the country of the art of the future, instead of trying to base everything she does on European traditions! And yet in spite of it, try as she will, she gets beyond these traditions, even if in dimension alone.

Look at the skyscrapers! Has Europe anything to show more beautiful than these? I have been trying to get a studio in one of their highest turrets, but unfortunately I find people are not permitted to live in them.

Why this adoration for classic art? It is as old-fashioned as the superstitions of the religions and the reverence given to it is mere stupidity.

And this fetich [sic] of “ideals.” There is not such thing. Every single factor of life should be for its own individual merit.

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Why do Americans make a God of Rodin? This “official” art is ante-diluvian – why always go backward instead of forward?

People have no idea yet what the futurist is doing even. They come to my studio and timidly ask me what the canvases represent. And it is a little difficult to explain to them that they do not represent concrete material mass but abstract movement.

I have, for instance, just completed a painting on glass which I call a “glissoir,” its lines represent simply the act of sliding, and it is supposed to be an irony on the feats of the modern engineer.

Cubism could almost be called a prophet of the war, as Rousseau was of the French Revolution, for the war will produce a severe direct art. One readily understands this when one realizes the growing hardness of feeling in Europe, one might almost say the utter callousness with which people are learning to receive the news of the death of those nearest and dearest to them. Before the war the death of a son in a family was received with utter, abject woe, but to-day it is merely part of a huge universal grief, which hardly seems to concern any one individual.

[The article continues with “Kenyon Cox Replies.”]

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“The Richard Mutt Case” The Blind Man 2 (May 1917), Beatrice Wood, H.P. Roché and/or Marcel Duchamp

They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit.

Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.

What were the grounds for refusing Mr. Mutt's fountain:

1. Some contend it was immoral, vulgar.
2. Others, it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.

Now Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bathtub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' shop windows.

Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view - created a new thought for that object.

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As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.

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“Men Before the Mirror” by Rose Selavy, 1934, *Photographies: Man Ray’s Friends on Man Ray, 1920 – 1934*, Paris.

Many a time the mirror imprisons them and holds them firmly. Fascinated they stand in front. They are absorbed, separated from reality and alone with their dearest vice, vanity. However readily they spread out all other vices for all, they keep this one secret and disown it even before their most intimate friends.

There they stand and stare at the landscape which is themselves, the mountains of their noses, the defiles and folds of their shoulders, hands and skin, to which the years have already so accustomed them that they no longer know how they evolved; and the multiple primeval forests of their hair. They meditate, they are content, they try to take themselves in as a whole. Certain traits appear too small, and it is well so, but others are too large and it is magnificent so. Women have taught them that power does not succeed. Women have told them what is attractive in them, they have forgotten; but now they put themselves together like a mosaic out of what pleased women in them. For they themselves do not know what is attractive about them. Only handsome men are sure of themselves, but handsome men are not fitted for love; they wonder even at the last moment whether it suits them. Fitted for love are the great ugly things that carry their faces with pride before them like a mask. The great taciturns who behind their silence hide much or nothing.

Slim hands with long fingers or short, that grasp forth. The nape of a neck that rises steeply to lose itself in the forest’s edge of the hair, the tender curve of the skin behind the ear, the mysterious muscle of the navel, the flat pebbles of the knee caps, the joints of their ankles, which a hand envelops to hold them back from a leap – and beyond the farther and still unknown region of the body, much older than it, much more worn, open to all happenings: this face, always this face which they know so well. For they have a body only at night and most only in the arms of a woman. But with them goes always, ever present their face.

The mirror looks at them. They collect themselves. Carefully, as if tying a cravat, they compose their features. Insolent, serious and conscious of their looks they turn around to face the world.

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“Eleven Europeans in America,” James J. Sweeney, *The Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* 13, no. 4/5 (1946) 19-21. Special issue. Supplemented by 1956 interview, a Duchamp-Sweeney kinescope, in television archive of the Museum of Modern Art. [The interview is reprinted in *Marcel Duchamp Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, edited by Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, 1973 Oxford University Press, New York.

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

Art is produced by a succession of individuals expressing themselves; it is not a question of progress. Progress is merely an enormous pretension on our part. There was no progress for example in Corot over Phidias. And ‘abstract or naturalistic’ is merely a fashionable form of talking – today. It is not a problem: an abstract painting may not look at all ‘abstract’ in 50 years.

During the other war life among the artists in New York was quite different—much more congenial than it has been during these last few years. Among the artists there was much more cohesion - much closer fellowship, much less opportunism. The whole spirit was much different. There was quite a bit of activity, but it was limited to a relatively small group and nothing was done very publicly. Publicity always takes something away. And the great advantage in that earlier period was that the art of the time was laboratory work; now it is diluted for public consumption.

The basis of my own work during the years just before coming to America in 1915 was a desire to break up forms - to ‘decompose’ them much along the lines the cubists had done. This was what resulted in *Nude Descending a Staircase*, and eventually led to my large glass, *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*.

The idea of the *Nude* came from a drawing which I had made in 1911 to illustrate Jules Laforgue’s poem *Encore à cet astre*. I had planned a series of illustrations of Laforgue’s poems but I only completed three of them. Rimbaud and Lautreamont seemed to old to me at the time. I wanted something younger. Mallarmé and Laforgue were closer to my taste – Laforgue’s *Hamlet*, particularly. But perhaps I was less attracted by Laforgue’s poetry than by his titles. *Comice agricole*, when written by Laforgue, becomes poetry. ‘*Le soir, le piano*’ – no one else could have written this in his time.

In the drawing *Encore à cet astre* the figure is, of course, mounting the stairs. But while working on it, the idea of the *Nude*, or the title – I do not recall which, first came to my mind. I eventually gave the sketch to F.C. Torrey of San Francisco who bought the *Nude Descending a Staircase* from the 1913 New York Armory Show.

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No, I do not feel there was any connection between the *Nude Descending a Staircase* and Futurism. The Futurists held their first exhibition at the Galerie Bernheim Jeune in January 1912. I was painting the *Nude* at the same time. The oil sketch for it, however, had already been done in 1911. It is true I knew Severini. But I was working quite by myself at the time – or rather with my brothers. And I was not a café frequenter. Chrono-photography was at the time in vogue. Studies of horses in movement and fencers in different positions as in Muybridge's albums were well known to me. But my interest in painting the *Nude* was closer to the cubists' interest in decomposing form than to the Futurists' interest in suggesting movement, or even to Delaunay's *Simultaneist* suggestions of it. My aim was a static representation of movement - a static composition of indications of various positions taken by a form in movement – with no attempt to give cinema effects through painting.

The reduction of a head in movement to a bare line seemed to me defensible. A form passing through space would traverse a line; and as the form moved the line it traversed would be replaced by another line – and another and another. Therefore I felt justified in reducing a figure in movement to a line rather than a skeleton. Reduce, reduce, reduce was my thought; – but at the same time my aim was turning inward, rather than toward externals. And later, following this view, I came to feel an artist might use anything – a dot, a line, the most conventional or unconventional symbol – to say what he wanted to say. The *Nude* in this way was a direct step to *The Large Glass*, *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*. And in the *King and Queen* painted shortly after the *Nude* there are no human forms or indications of anatomy. But in it one can see where the forms are placed; and for all this reduction I would never call it 'abstract' painting.....

Futurism was an impressionism of the mechanical world. It was strictly a continuation of the Impressionist movement. I was not interested in that. I wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting. I was much more interested in recreating ideas in painting. For me the title was very important. I was interested in making painting serve my purposes, and in getting away from the physicality of painting. For me Courbet had introduced the physical emphasis in the XIX century. I was interested in ideas, not merely in visual products. I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind. And my painting was, or course, at once regarded as 'intellectual' 'literary' painting. It was true I was endeavoring to establish myself as far as possible from 'pleasing' and 'attractive' physical paintings. That extreme was seen as literary. My *King and Queen* was a chess king and queen.

In fact until the last hundred years all painting had been literary or religious: it had all been at the service of the mind. This characteristic was lost little by little during the last century. The more sensual appeal a painting provided – the more animal it became – the more highly it was regarded. It was a good thing to have had Matisse's work for the beauty it provided. Still it created a new wave of physical painting in this century or at least fostered the tradition we inherited from the XIX century masters.

Dada was an extreme protest against the physical side of painting. It was a metaphysical attitude. It was intimately and consciously involved with 'literature.' It was a

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sort of nihilism to which I am still very sympathetic. It was a way to get out of a state of mind – to avoid being influenced by one's immediate environment, or by the past: to get away from clichés – to get free. The 'blank' force of dada was very salutary. It told you 'don't forget you are not quite so "blank" as you think you are.' Usually a painter confesses he has his landmarks. He goes from landmark to landmark. Actually he is a slave to landmarks – even to contemporary ones.

Dada was very serviceable as a purgative. And I think I was thoroughly conscious of this at the time and of a desire to effect a purgation in myself. I recall certain conversations with Picabia long these lines. He had more intelligence than most of our contemporaries. The rest were either for or against Cézanne. There was no thought of anything beyond the physical side of painting. No notion of freedom was taught. No philosophical outlook was ever introduced. The cubists, of course, were inventing a lot at the time. They had enough on their hands at the time not to be worried about a philosophical outlook; and Cubism gave me many ideas for decomposing forms. But I thought of art on a broader scale. There were discussions at the time of the fourth dimension and of Non-Euclidean geometry. But most views of it were amateurish. Metzinger was particularly attracted. And for all our misunderstandings through these new ideas we were helped to get away from the conventional way of speaking – from our café and studio platitudes.

Brisset and Roussel were the two men in those years whom I most admired for their delirium of imagination. Jean-Pierre Brisset was discovered by Jules Romains through a book he picked up from a stall on the quais. Brisset's work was a philosophical analysis of language – an analysis worked out by means of an incredible network of puns. He was sort of a Douanier Rousseau of philology. Romains introduced him to his friends. And they, like Apollinaire and his companions, held a formal celebration to honor him in front of Rodin's *Thinker* in front of the Panthéon where he was hailed as *Prince of Thinkers*.

But Brisset was one of the real people who has lived and will be forgotten. Roussel was another great enthusiasm of mine in the early days. The reason I admired him was because he produced something that I had never seen. That is the only thing that brings admiration from my innermost being – something completely independent – nothing to do with the great names or influences. Apollinaire first showed Roussel's work to me. It was poetry. Roussel thought he was a philologist, a philosopher and a metaphysician. But he remains a great poet.

It was fundamentally Roussel who was responsible for my glass, *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*. From his *Impressions d'Afrique* I got the general approach. This play of his which I saw with Apollinaire helped me greatly on one side of my expression. I saw at once I could use Roussel as an influence. I felt that as a painter it was much better to be influenced by a writer than by another painter. And Roussel showed me the way.

My ideal library would have contained all Roussel's writings – Brisset, perhaps Lautreamont and Mallarmé. Mallarmé was a great figure. This is the direction which art

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should turn: to an intellectual expression rather than to an animal expression. I am sick of the expression '*bête comme un peintre*' – stupid as a painter."

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"Interview by James Johnson Sweeney" *Museum of Modern Art Bulletin* (1946) p. 135.

Yes, I consider painting as a means of expression, not an end in itself. One means of expression among others, and not a complete end for life at all; in the same way I consider that color is only a means of expression in painting and not an end. In other words, painting should not be exclusively retinal or visual: it should have to do with the gray matter, with our urge for understanding. This is generally what I love. I didn't want to pin myself down to one little circle, and I tied at least to be as universal as I could. That is why I took up chess. Chess in itself us a hobby, is a game, everybody can play chess. But I took it very seriously and enjoyed it because I found some common points between chess and painting. Actually when you play a game of chess it is like designing something or constructing a mechanism of some kind by which you win or lose. The competitive side of it has no importance, but the thing itself is very, very plastic, and that is probably what attracted me to the game.

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Session on the Creative Act, Convention of the American Federation of Arts, Houston, Texas, April 1957. Panelists were, Professor William Seitz (1914-1974), Princeton University; Professor Rudolf Arnheim (1904-2007), Sarah Lawrence College; Gregory Bateson (1904-1980), Anthropologist; Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), mere artist. Published in *Marcel Duchamp Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*. Edited by Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, 1973, Oxford University Press, NY.

Let us consider 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.

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 a self-analysis, spoken or written, or even thought out.

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T.S. Eliot, in his essay on "Tradition and Individual Talent," writes: "The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material."

Millions of artists create; only a few thousands are discussed or accepted by the spectator and many less again are consecrated by posterity.

In the last analysis, the artist may shout from all the rooftops that he is a genius: he will have to wait for the verdict of the spectator in order that his declarations take a social value and that, finally, posterity includes him in the primers of Artist History.

I know that this statement will not meet with the approval of many artists who refuse this mediumistic role and insist on the validity of their awareness in the creative act — yet, art history has consistently decided upon the virtues of a work of art through considerations completely divorced from the rationalized explanations of the artist.

If the artist, as a human being, full of the best intentions toward himself and the whole world, plays no role at all in the judgment of his own work, how can one describe the phenomenon which prompts the spectator to react critically to the work of art? In other words, how does this reaction come about?

This phenomenon is comparable to a transference from the artist to the spectator in the form of an esthetic osmosis taking place through the inert matter, such as pigment, piano or marble.

But before we go further, I want to clarify our understanding of the word 'art' — to be sure, without any attempt at a definition.

What I have in mind is that art may be bad, good or indifferent, but, whatever adjective is used, we must call it art, and bad art is still art in the same way that a bad emotion is still an emotion.

Therefore, when I refer to "art coefficient," it will be understood that I refer not only to great art, but I am trying to describe the subjective mechanism which produces art in the raw state — *à l'état brut* — bad, good or indifferent.

In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfaction, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plane.

The result of this struggle is a difference between the intention and its realization, a difference which the artist is not aware of.

Consequently, in the chain of reactions accompanying the creative act, a link is missing. This gap, representing the inability of the artist to express fully his intention, this difference between what he intended to realize and did realize, is the personal "art coefficient" contained in the work.

In other words, the personal "art coefficient" is like an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed.

To avoid a misunderstanding, we must remember that this "art coefficient" is a personal expression of art "*à l'état brut*," that is, still in a raw state, which must be

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'refined' as pure sugar from molasses by the spectator; the digit of this coefficient has no bearing whatsoever on his verdict. 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.

All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act. This becomes even more obvious when posterity gives a final verdict and sometimes rehabilitates forgotten artists.

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"Art Anti-Art: Marcel Duchamp Speaks" BBC, Third Programme, 13 November 1959
London edition, vol. 145, schedules from 8 November 1959 to 14 November 1959.

The complete transcript of this interview was made for this project; it is online at a link from the text "SOURCES and RESOURCES" and it was received into the Museum of Modern Art Archives.

Pages 3-5: [On ready-mades] That is the very difficult point, because art first has to be defined. Alright, can we try to define art? We have tried, everybody has tried and every century there is a new definition of art. Meaning that there is no essential, one essential that is good for all centuries. So, if we accept the idea of trying not to define art, which is a very legitimate conception, then the readymade comes in as a sort of irony; because it says, here it is, a thing that I call art, I didn't even make it myself and as we know, art, etymologically speaking, means to make, hand make... and there instead of making it I take it readymade. So it was a form of denying the possibility of defining art, and because you don't define electricity, you just see the results of electricity, but you don't define it.

...

It has, it has a conceptual value, if you want to say conceptual, I don't know whether it means exactly what we want to say. It has, but it takes away all the technical jargon of painting. Painting should be made with colors, painting should be made with a pencil with brushes, and when you take something that is not made by those technical instruments then you don't know where you are, you don't know whether you should take it as a work of art and that's where the irony comes in.

...

Yes, but this welding of two different sources of inspiration gave me a satisfactory answer to, in my research for, something that had not been previously attempted. Being the young man who wants to do something by himself, and not copy the others, not use too much of the tradition. My research was in that direction, to find some way of expressing myself without being a painter, without being a writer, without taking one of these "labels." And

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yet, producing something that would be, a, an inner project of myself. The two things, mixing up, the ideas and their visual representation attracted me as a technique, if it has to be a technique after all. And this hybrid form explains why, I didn't have anyone to agree with me more or less, or to follow my ways of looking at it.

Page 7: Yes it is a joke alright [laugh]; but it's based on the fact that, I have my doubts about real causality. There is no real reason for using causality, why not use it ironically by inventing a world in which things come out differently from the usual one. You can imagine a new causality in which you invent your own reasons for this and that. Don't you think so...

...

Yes I do, it's not entirely fantasy. The subconscious really never, never interested me very much as a basis for art expression of any kind. It's true that I really was very much of a Cartesian if you could use the word *defroqué*, which means unfrocked Cartesian. Because I was very pleased by the so-called pleasure, of using Cartesianism as a form of thinking, logic and very close mathematical thinking, but yet I was also very pleased by the idea of getting away from it. It happened also in several plays of Roussel, a writer, who wrote these completely fantastic descriptions of the same order where everything can be done, especially when you describe it, in words, anything can be invented, and in *Locus Solus* and in *Impressions d'Afrique*, that's where really I found the course of my new activity in 1911 or 12.

Page 8: Yes, that gave me the real idea for the *Nude*, and it's only later, months later that I saw the Balla. The Futurist Balla with his dog and twenty legs, and even there, it was only Balla and I who had the idea of multiplying the legs. Boccioni was entirely different. He really used planes more than lines. In other words, and even today you can compare them and see, there is no direct influence from painter to painter, especially that I never knew them. I never knew Boccioni and met him end of January 1912 and I never had any real relationship with them at all. So, movement took me out of Cubism if I may say. Up to then I wasn't sure, I did the *King and the Queen*, after that it was the end of Cubism for me, end of 12. And already some other ideas came, how to get out of Cubism and I found it in the *Chocolate Grinder*, which was completely static then, although it might move if you let it move, but it was completely a reversal. Of forgetting about movement, forgetting about Cubism and finding some new way for my expression, and the source of it as I say was Roussel who gave me the idea of inventing, new men so to speak new beings, whether made of metal or of flesh. The *Bride* is a sort of mechanical bride, if you want to say. It's not the bride itself it's a concept of a bride that I had to put on the canvas one way or another. But it is more important that I should have thought of it in words, in terms of words, before I actually drew it. What the *Glass* does represent is not a copy of a bride in her best clothes or otherwise, yet there are parts that are called the *Bride* and the other part of the *Glass* which is called the *Bachelors*. In other words, you can see the bachelors in a sort of not abstract form, but at least not detailed forms, or not natural form. The same

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with the *Bride*, is a sort of an invention of a bride of my own, a new human being, half robot and half 4th dimensional. The idea of the 4th dimension also was very important in that period. Anything that has a 3 dimensional form is the projection in our world from a 4th dimensional world and my *Bride* for example would be a 3 dimensional projection of a 4th dimensional bride. Alright, then since it's on the glass it's flat, so my *Bride* is a 2 dimensional representation of a 3 dimensional *Bride* who also would be a 4th dimensional projection on the 3 dimensional world of the *Bride*.

★ ★ ★

"Apropos of "Readymades"." Talk given at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, October 19, 1961. Published in *Art and Artists* (London), 1, no. 4 (July 1966), p. 47.

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 that I want very much to establish is that the choice of these "Readymades" was never dictated by aesthetic 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."

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 for the artist, *art is a habit forming drug* and I wanted to protect my "Readymades" against such a *contamination*.

Another aspect of the "Readymade" is its lack of uniqueness... the replica of the "Readymade" delivering the same message, in fact nearly every one of the "Readymades" existing today is not an original in the conventional sense.

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A final remark to this egomaniac's discourse:
Since the tubes of paint used by an artist are manufactured and readymade products we must conclude that all the paintings in the world are "Readymades aided" and also works of assemblage.

★ ★ ★

"Whither Art ? It Seems to Be On Its Way Somewhere But Everything Else Is a Puzzle,"
John Canaday, New York Times, 26 March, 1961. [Excerpt from quotes of M.D. in a panel discussion that included Louise Nevelson]

"...Young artists will uncover new shock values... [new materials] used like new instruments in music...

The dollar and art shouldn't mix, but they do, and since you can't destroy money, money is destroying art...

Art now is a commodity like soap or securities. How about a union deciding on prices as the plumbers union decides on wages?...

Material speculation leads art to a massive dilution, a lowering of taste into the mist of mediocrity... to an ascetic revolution. Where do we go from here? The great artist of tomorrow will go underground...

Intelligence is the worst enemy of art... The minute you introduce intelligence (intellectualism, the rational) you have something that comes from the outside. Art comes from the inside... The figurative-nonfigurative dilemma is invented by intelligence and has nothing to do with art... You can turn intelligence into emotion— if you know how...

The public is too much interested in art. It imposes upon the artist all kinds of gestures that would not have been accepted before now... That's just a different opinion. That's alright..."

★ ★ ★

Interview with Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), by Francis Roberts [1963]
Art News, Vol. 67 (December 1968), pp. 46-64.

"I Propose to Strain the Laws of Physics"

Visiting his formal retrospective at Pasadena in 1963, he talked about his notorious Nude, the famous Glass, Ready-makes and his anti-logical logic of chance.

I arrived early at the Pasadena Art Museum where Marcel Duchamp was the subject of a large exhibition (in October-November 1963). The Museum director took me to the

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back gallery where the artist was seated at a chess table beside *The Large Glass* playing a game of chess with a nude, dark-haired girl while a fellow in a beard was snapping photos one after the other. Duchamp was wearing a blue summer suit and a white broadcloth shirt with a tie of a non-chromatic color in the red scale. He was carrying an exquisite straw hat with a flowered band. Because of the way he used the hat to gesture, I got the impression he wasn't used to one. I assumed that because of the formality of the occasion (his first full formal retrospective), he had made the concession of adding it to his costume. He spoke with a slight accent in softly modulated tones and well-articulated phrases. Later, when asked to speak louder for the microphone, he remarked that he spoke softly in order to save the force for his ideas.

Roberts: Which work do you think of as your first real contribution to painting?

Duchamp: To answer this I have to go first backwards and then forwards. You see at that time movement in art, motion in art, had never really been exploited. Rodin did a man walking, but that man did not walk actually. It was intended to walk, but it didn't walk. In other words, to introduce a movement, the actual movement in a work of art, had never been thought of before. And the Futurists thought of it. And I at the same time... it was in the air because of the invention of the movies, the cinema.

Roberts: Are you referring to the little movie, *Entr-acte*, you made with René Clair, Erik Satie, Man Ray and Francis Picabia?

Duchamp: Cinema never interested me as an artist. That little film called *Anemic Cinema* is the only one I ever made. I was interested in films as a means to express [another] dimension. As in the spinning roto-relief discs I experimented on with Man Ray in my studio in New York and his studio in Paris.

Roberts: Weren't you intrigued by the thought that with cinema the spectator stands still while time progresses?

Duchamp: Yes, yes, there is an inexorability about time, but you do not have to be an artist to feel it. What are the poet's words, "At my back I always hear, Time's winged chariot hurrying near...?" That is too simple. I may die tomorrow. It doesn't concern me. But the experiments of Muybridge and Marey at that time did interest me. Photochronography they called it; the fencing man or the galloping horse presented in successive images. The photochronographs gave me the idea how to put movement into a picture, as in, for example, *Nu descendant un escalier*.

Roberts: And you considered *Nude Descending a Staircase* to be your first contribution?

Duchamp: And it was really the introduction of movement *per se* as the motive for painting. I considered it a real achievement. An amusing achievement at least.

Roberts: Your original inspiration for the *Nude*, then, was ideatic rather than visual.

Duchamp: "Ideatic," what is that? Is that a word?

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Roberts: I don't know if it is. I think I made it up, but it means...

Duchamp: I know exactly, what it means. I like it. It is a good word! But, to answer your question, before the *Nude* my paintings were visual. After that, they were ideatic . . .

My hand became my enemy in 1912. I wanted to get away from the palette. This chapter of my life was over and immediately I thought of inventing a new way to go about painting. That came with The *Large Glass*.

Roberts: Why did you feel compelled to paint on glass?

Duchamp: The main point is the subject, "the figure. It needs no reference. It is not in relation. All that background on the canvas that had to be thought about, tactile space like wallpaper, all that garbage, I wanted to sweep it away. With the glass you can concentrate on the figure if you want and you can change the background if you want, by moving, the glass. The transparency of the glass plays for you. The question of painting in backgrounds is degrading for a painter. The thing you want to express is not in that background.

Roberts: Can you, explain why it remains unfinished?

Duchamp: Again it shows that, I really didn't care to finish, it. It was too long and in the end you lose interest. I felt that sometimes in the unfinished thing there is more warmth that you don't change or make any more perfect in the finished product. You see, the sketches, for the *Glass* I did before, some in 1914, and there was no creativeness left in it for me; just a translation of something already created.

Roberts: Did you feel you had exhausted the possibilities?

Duchamp: No, no, far from it. It was only another page to turn and that is how I came to the idea of the "Ready-made." As you know, in 1914, even 1913, I had in my studio a bicycle wheel turning for no reason at all. Without even knowing whether I should put it with the rest of my works or call it work. |

Roberts: Isn't that a paradox?

Duchamp: Yes it is a paradox, and the wheel was the first one and not even named Ready-made at the time. I never named anything. It just happened to be a matter... like fire in the fireplace or anything moving. Again, the idea of movement, you see, just transferred from the *Nude* into a bicycle wheel, at the same time I was working on the *Glass*.

Roberts: What is a Ready-made?

Duchamp: A Ready-made is a work of art without an artist to make it, if I may simplify the definition. A tube of paint that an artist uses is not made by the artist; it is made by the manufacturer that makes paints! So the painter really is making a Ready-made when he paints with a manufactured object that is called paints. So that is the explanation, but when I did it, it was not at all intended to have an explanation. The iconoclastic part of it was much more important. Well, the Impressionists were iconoclasts for the Romantics

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and the Fauves were the same and again Cubism against Fauvism. So when I came along, my little idea, my iconoclastic gesture, was ready made.

Roberts: Do you see this as an act of defiance?

Duchamp: There is that, but also there is a philosophical side to it. The de-deifying of the artist. Of lowering his status in society.

Roberts: This is a strange position for an artist to hold, isn't it?

Duchamp: It is paradoxical. It is almost schizophrenic. On one side I worked a very intellectual form of activity and on the other side de-deifying everything by more materialistic thoughts.

Roberts: Did you think of it as a cosmic joke that included everyone, even you?

Duchamp: It is very important for me to introduce humor, to doubt the seriousness of the work as in a cosmic whole of the world. Our little corner of the earth is so small, especially today as we get to know more about it. And we have always been anthropocentric, a little idea to be mocked. And I did include myself in the joke. I wanted to get rid of the herd instinct in artists; to individualize, to singularize, it is what every artist should do instead of going towards mass production as we do today.

Roberts: How do you choose a Ready-made?

Duchamp: It chooses you, so to speak. If your choice enters into it, then, taste is involved, bad taste, good taste, uninteresting taste. Taste is the enemy of art, A-R-T. The idea was to find an object that had no attraction whatsoever from the esthetic angle. This was not the act of an artist, but of a non-artist, an artisan if you will. I wanted to change the status of the artist or at least to change the norms used for defining an artist. Again to de-deify him. The Greeks and the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries thought of him as a worker, an artisan.

Roberts: Do you think of yourself as being anti-art?

Duchamp: No, no the word "anti" annoys me a little, because whether you're anti or for, it's two sides of the same thing. And I would like to be completely—I don't know what you say—nonexistent, instead of being for or against. If I have been blamed for anti-art, I am delighted to be blamed, because that was my intention in the first place, to do something that would not please everybody, to do something iconoclastic . . . The idea of the artist as a sort of superman is comparatively recent. This I was going against. In fact, since I've stopped my artistic activity, I feel that I'm against this attitude of reverence the world has. Art, etymologically speaking, means "to make." Everybody is making, not only artists, and maybe in coming centuries there will be the making without the noticing.

Roberts: Do you feel that the act of creating a Ready-made is an act of art?

Duchamp: I wouldn't say so, no. The fact that they are regarded with the same reverence

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as objects of art probably means I have failed to solve the problem of trying to do away entirely with art. It is partly perhaps because I have only a few Ready-mades. I can count 10, 12 gestures of this kind in my life, that is all. And I'm glad I did now because this is where the artists of today are wrong, I think. Must you repeat? Repetition has been the great enemy of art in general. I mean, formulas and theories are based on repetition.

Roberts: Do you consider your Ready-mades in the same order of achievement as your other works or do you think of them as being more trivial?

Duchamp: No, they're not trivial, for me at least. They look trivial, but they're not. On the contrary, they represent a much higher degree of intellectuality. And the one I love most is not quite. . . it's a Ready-made if you wish, but a moving one. By this I mean three meters of thread falling down and changing the shape of the unit of length. The *Three Standard Stoppages*, I prefer to call them. I was satisfied with the idea of not having been responsible for the form taken by chance. At the same time I was able to use it for other things . . . in my *Large Glass*, for example.

Roberts: Doesn't this depending on chance betray a certain disdain for the mechanics of art?

Duchamp: I don't think the public is prepared to accept it . . . my canned chance. This depending on coincidence is too difficult for them. They think everything has to be done on purpose by complete deliberation and so forth. In time they will come to accept chance as a possibility to produce things. In fact, the whole world is based on chance, or at least chance is a definition of what happens in the world we live in and know more than any causality.

Roberts: This chance method of measurement, as with the *Stoppages*, puts a severe strain on the laws of physics, doesn't it?

Duchamp: If I do propose to strain a little bit the laws of physics and chemistry and so forth, it is because I would like you to think them unstable to a degree. Even gravity is a form of coincidence or politeness since it is only by condescension that a weight is heavier when it descends than when it rises. Right and left are obtained by letting drag behind you a tingle of persistence in the situation.

Roberts: Your experiments in mechanical drawing, then, are not based on any physical laws as, say, Leonardo's were.

Duchamp: No, no, it was a reaction against the easy, splashing way. I was fighting against the hand, so to speak. Mechanical drawing was the closest thing I could use. This was a way to get a new idea without changing the means. From the bottom up. My approach to the machine was completely ironic. I made only the hood. It was a symbolic way of explaining. What was really beneath the hood, how it really worked, did not interest me. I had my own system quite tight as a system, but not organized logically. My landscapes begin where da Vinci's end. The difficulty is to get away from logic.

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Roberts: How do you reconcile your anti-mechanical ideas with your interest in chess?

Duchamp: In my life, chess and art stand at opposite poles, but do not be deceived. Chess is not merely a mechanical function. It is plastic, so to speak. Each time I make a movement of the pawns on the board, I create a new form, a new pattern, and in this way I am satisfied by the always changing contour. Not to say that there is not logic in chess. Chess forces you to be logical. The logic is there, but you just don't see it.

Roberts: The chocolate machine which appears in *The Large Glass* . . . ?

Duchamp: Appears in many places. Always there has been a necessity for circles in my life, for, how do you say, rotation. It is a kind of narcissism, this self-sufficiency, a kind of onanism. The machine goes around and by some miraculous process I have always found fascinating, produces chocolate. Chess, on the other hand, involves a purely Cartesian exercise or the decision you have to make is of a different order and the result is of a different order. In art I came finally to the point where I wished to make no more decisions, decisions of an artistic order, so to speak. In chess, as in art, we find a form of mechanics, since chess could be described as the movement of pieces eating one another.

Roberts: It seems that you came early on to a definition of your role as an artist.

Duchamp: In the olden days, when the artist was still a pariah and a bum, the resistance of society to his way of life would bring about a meaningful explosion within himself. Provided he had something to say. It may be that great art can only come out of conditions of resistance, out of a state of war which forces the artist into an attitude of dedication that is almost religious and does not need the acceptance of society. In France there is an old saying. "Stupid like a painter." The painter was considered stupid, but the poet and writer very intelligent. I wanted to be intelligent. I had to have the idea of inventing. It is nothing to do what your father did. It is nothing to be another Cézanne. In my visual period there is a little of that stupidity of the painter. All my work in the period before the *Nude* was visual painting. Then I came to the idea. I thought the ideatic formulation a way to get away from influences.

Roberts: Do you think of yourself, then, not only as an artist, but as an acute observer and commentator on *La Comedie Humaine*?

Duchamp: No, no; observer yes, but commentator, no. I'm nothing else but an artist. I'm sure, and delighted to be. And all these things that, you know, happened to me during my life, you become . . . the years change your attitude and I couldn't be very iconoclastic any more.

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"Apropos of Myself" lecture, Marcel Duchamp, The Baltimore Museum of Art, 1963.

A block formatted version [link below] was transcribed in June 2017 by L. Brandon Krall for the Baltimore Museum of Art Library and Archives, which has a formatted version available in the physical file and they will post it at academia.edu.

<http://cdm15264.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p16075coll3/id/14/rec/1>

Description: On February 10, 1963, French artist Marcel Duchamp presented slides and participated in a question and answer session with the audience as part of the Sunday Lecture Series at The Baltimore Museum of Art. In the recording Duchamp's French accent, intonations and cadences are of fundamental interest, and there is a mounting sense of fun as the audience starts to laugh with Duchamp at his flippant remarks about the art works and the times, and whether it is possible to define art. Duchamp's appearance coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the 1913 Armory Show in which his painting, "Nude Descending a Staircase" caused great controversy. The 1913 Armory Show was the first exhibition to expose the American public, in New York and Chicago, to a broad array of modern art from Europe, alerting the visitors to artistic revolutions that were underway, spurred by works by many artists including Picasso, Matisse, Brancusi, Redon and the three Duchamp brothers. In interviews Marcel Duchamp made a point of the fact that he was not a Cubist, Dadaist or Surrealist. In his slide presentation the influence of Cubism and Futurism is pointed out, and he made notable contributions to the actions of the artists who were making Dadaism and Surrealism happen. He and Man Ray were friends in New York by 1916 and involved in the small magazine scene which included publication in 1917 of "Blind Man No.1," Number 2 and "Wongrong." Duchamp and Man Ray produced one issue of "New York Dada" in April, 1921 before they both returned to live in Paris, Man Ray for the first time. They understood and assumed the Dadaist spirit themselves as individuals but they were not participants in the Dada actions in Switzerland during the War, or when they took place in Paris in the twenties, although both were in Paris at the time. The Dadaists were in revolt against the attitudes of class-based society that had allowed and perpetrated the horrors of the First World War. The original creators of the Dadaist phenomena at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zürich were not just painters. They were writers, musicians, performers, sculptors and artists finding and inventing new forms. They included Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco and Jean Arp among others. In Germany, Dadaists were targeted by the government as "degenerate artists," and they included Max Ernst, John Heartfield, Hannah Hoch and many others. Duchamp was a participant in Surrealist exhibitions as creator of the events at openings and remarkable installations. His participation as an exhibitor in the Surrealist exhibition of 1938, and installation and catalog designer for "First Papers of Surrealism" in 1945 in New York were done as an independent; Duchamp made a point of not being part of any group. For this lecture, Duchamp presented chronological slides of his works, beginning with his early oil paintings, showing the "Large Glass" and a sequence of ready-mades which was followed by a question and answer session with the audience. In conjunction with exhibitions on

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Surrealism and Man Ray over a decade later, BMA Curators Brenda Richardson and Jay Fisher replayed the recording at a public slide lecture on March 31, 1977. A formatted version of the transcription is available through the Library and Archives of the Baltimore Museum of Art. [Description revised by L. Brandon Krall, 2017]

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“Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews,” Calvin Tompkins, 1964.
Published in 2013 by Badlands Unlimited, New York. Excerpted texts:

Page 30: Bad, good or indifferent, I don't care. You don't have to be happy or unhappy about it, you see? That's the trouble: taste can't help you understand what art can be. The difficulty is to make a painting that is alive, so that when it dies in fifty years, it goes back into that purgatory of art history. As far as art history is concerned, we know that in spite of what the artist said or did, something stayed on that was completely independent of what the artist desired; it was grabbed by society, which made it its own. The artist doesn't count. *He does not count.* Society takes what it wants.

Pages 35-36: It was the beginning of the race for pennies. You could feel it - the beginning of monetizing art in the social form. You could feel that a young doctor, a young lawyer, would be attracted not by the fact that he would make money on it, no, by the fact that he would have some art on his walls by contemporary artists. Before that it was reserved to professional collectors, and these were a species of humanity, the same as dealers were: professional. After 1920, the people at large began to understand that they could buy... Yes, it was just after the First World War. A definite form of people thinking of buying for speculation. But at that time art was not a commodity, it was a fancy on the part of a certain group of people who were not professional collectors but who were on the way to become collectors.

Pages 51-53:

Calvin Tompkins: What was your interest in chance?

Marcel Duchamp: Nothing much more than to get away from things already worked out. A real expression of the subconscious through chance. Your chance. If I make a throw of the dice, it will never be like your throw - meaning that it's a marvelous expression of your subconscious. And so an action like throwing dice to find the notes of a piece of music was nevertheless a subconscious expression of myself... Chance is a thing that people have and don't have. Bad luck or good luck - in general, bad or good is the property of each individual... So the duty of chance is to express what is unique and indeterminate about us beyond the rational.

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Pages 59-61: Well, I didn't want to do anything new. I'd had enough. The minute you systematize anything... If I had systematized the readymades I could have made a hundred thousand readymades in ten years, easily. They would have been fake, because they would have been quick, easily chosen, and then regretted a year later. I would be compromised. [laughs]

So when people find something interesting in what I did, and then use it as a system, I have my little doubt about it. At least I'm conscious of the danger. Anything systematized becomes sterile very soon. There is nothing that has eternal value. It's according to the way society takes it. The poor *Mona Lisa* is gone because no matter how wonderful her smile may be, it's been looked at so much that the smile has disappeared. I believe that when a million people look at a painting they change the thing by looking alone. Physically. See what I mean? They change the physical image without knowing it. There is an action, transcendental, of course, that absolutely destroys whatever you could see when it was alive...

It's both. But I will go further and say that there is a physical action of the onlookers. The onlooker is part of the making of the painting but also exerts a diabolical influence by looking alone. The same with my damn *Nude*, you see, from a scandalous painting it became a boring painting, by being looked at so much. "Oh, that's the *Nude* again." [laughs] It's detrimental to the poor thing...

Calvin Tomkins: What is this whole mystique of the object in art?

Marcel Duchamp: I don't know. It's very curious because its one of these words that has no meaning to begin with. An object is an object, a three-dimensional form. But words are taken and repeated, and after a certain number of repetitions the word takes on an aura of mysticism, of magic. And it goes on because men love to do so that. They imagine the object as being something phosphorescent or something. That's what happened to the word *object*. But the minute you have a number of believers, then anything goes. You can do that with anything, you can create magic with anything, but it has to be done without preparation.

Page 64:

Calvin Tomkins: But how does it feel to have so many of your ideas now seem like prophecies and to have them adopted by so many of the younger generation?

Marcel Duchamp: There's a little exaggeration in that, but anyway, it is probably due to the fact that I, with my Cartesian mind, refused to accept anything, doubted everything. So, doubting everything, if I wanted to produce anything I had to find something that gave me no doubt because it didn't exist before. Having invented them there was no doubt about them, ever. [laughs] All along, I had that search for what I had not thought of before. When I had done one *Nude Descending a Staircase* I would not do another one.

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Page 92-93: No, no, I don't think so. All this talk about the fourth dimension was around 1900, and probably before that. But it came to the ears of artists around 1910. What I understood of it at that time was that the three dimensions can be only the beginning of a fourth, fifth, and sixth dimension, if you know how to get there. But when I thought about how the fourth dimension is supposed to be time, then I began to think I'm not at all in accord with this. It's a very convenient way of saying that time is the fourth dimension, so we have the three dimensions of space and one of time. But in one dimension, a line, there is also time. I also don't think in fact Einstein calls it a fourth dimension. He calls it a fourth coordinate. So my contention is that the fourth dimension is not the temporal one. Meaning that you can consider objects having four dimensions. But what sense have we got to feel it? Because with our eyes we only see two dimensions. We have three dimensions with the sense of touch. So, I thought that the only sense we have that could help us get a physical notion of a four-dimensional object would be touch again. Because to understand something in four dimensions, conceptually speaking, would amount to seeing around an object without having to move: to feel around it. For example, I noticed that when I hold a knife, a small knife, I get a feeling from all sides at once. And this is as close as it can be to be a fourth-dimensional feeling. Of course from there I went on to the physical act of love, which is also a feeling all around, either as a woman or as a man. Both have fourth dimensional feelings. This is why love has been so respected! Anyway, that's an amusing idea that doesn't have to be proved or catalogued...

I don't believe in art, I believe in the artist.

★ ★ ★

"Not seen and/or Less Seen" Calvin Tomkins, Profile, *The New Yorker*, Feb 6, 1965.
[Excerpted statements by M.D.]

Page 38: All through the last half of the nineteenth century in France, there was an expression, 'bete comme un peintre'...and it was true. The kind of painter who just puts down what he sees is stupid. In my case, I was thinking a little too much, maybe. But I don't care – that's what I thought...

I'll tell you what's going to happen, the public will keep on buying more art more art, and husbands will start buying little paintings for their wives on their way home from work, and we're all going to drown in a sea of mediocrity. Maybe Tinguely and a few others sense this and are trying to destroy art before it's too late...

Page 40: That business of my being influential is very much exaggerated... Whatever there is in it is probably due to my Cartesian mind. I refused to accept anything, doubted everything. So, doubting everything, I had to find something that had not existed before –

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something I had not thought of before. What I did with any idea that came to me was to turn it around and try to see it with another set of senses. But I'm not so interested in art per se, it's only one occupation, and it hasn't been my whole life—far from it. You see, I've decided that art is a habit-forming drug. That's all it is for the artist, for the collector, for anybody connected with it. Art has absolutely no existence as veracity, as truth. People always speak of it with great religious reverence, but why should it be so revered. It's a drug, that's all. The longer I go on, the more I am convinced of it. The onlooker is as important as the artist. In spite of what the artist *thinks* he is doing, something stays on that is completely independent of what he intended, and that something is grabbed by society—if he is lucky. The artist himself doesn't count. Society just takes what it wants. The work of art is always positioned between the two poles of maker and onlooker, and the spark that comes from this bipolar action gives birth to something, like electricity. But the artist shouldn't concern himself with this, because it has nothing to do with him—it's the onlooker who has the last word. Fifty years later, there will be another generation and another critical language—an entirely different approach. No, the only thing to do is try to make a painting that will be alive in your own lifetime. No painting has an active life of more than thirty or forty years—that's another little idea of mine. I don't care if it's not true; it helps me make that distinction between living art and art history. After thirty or forty years, the painting dies—loses its aura, its emanation, whatever you want to call it. And then either it is forgotten or it enters into the purgatory of art history. But that's all just luck - a game between artist and onlooker, or a drug. I'm afraid I'm an agnostic in art. I just don't believe in it with all the mystical trimmings. As a drug, it's probably very useful for a number of people—very sedative—but as religion it's not even as good as God...

Page 44: [About the poem *Encore a Cet Astre* by Jules LaForgue] That first study was almost naturalistic, at least, it showed some bits of flesh. Right after that, I started in to make a big painting of the same subject, but it was a long way from being naturalistic, and there were other changes, too. In the sketch for LaForgue's poem I had the nude ascending, but then I began to think that it would help my expression to have her *descending*. More majestic, you know—the way it's done in the music halls.

Page 47: I said nothing to my brothers, but I went immediately to the show and took the painting home in a taxi, it was really a turning point in my life, I can assure you. I saw that I would not be interested very much in groups after that.

Pages 48-50: From Munich on, I had the idea of 'The Large Glass,' I was finished with Cubism and with motion—at least motion mixed up with oil paint. The whole trend of painting was something I didn't care to continue. After ten years of painting, I was bored with it. In fact, I was always bored with it, except at the very beginning, when there was that feeling of opening the eyes to something new. There was never any essential satisfaction for me in painting. I just wanted to react against what the others were doing—Matisse and the rest. All that work of the hand. In French, there is an old expression, 'la

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patte,' meaning the artist's touch, his personal style, his 'paw.' I wanted to get away from 'la patte,' and from all that retinal painting. The painting around me was completely retinal. Forget about anecdotes, forget about emotion in the subject—that was the idea. Just concentrate on what comes in at the eye. The only man in the past whom I really respected was Seurat, who made his big paintings like a carpenter, like an artisan. He didn't let his hand interfere with his mind. Anyway, in 1912 I decided to stop being a painter in the professional sense.

Page 50: [Bicycle wheel ready-made] It just came about as a pleasure—something to have in my room, the way you have a fire or a pencil sharpener, except that there was no usefulness, it was a pleasant gadget—pleasant for the movement it gave.

Page 55: The problem was to draw and still avoid the old-fashioned form of drawing. Mechanical drawing was the answer— a straight line drawn with a ruler instead of the hand, a line directed by the impersonality of the ruler. The young man was in revolt, trying to add something never thought of by the fathers. Probably very naïve on my part. I didn't get completely free of that prison of tradition, but I tried to, consciously. I unlearned to draw. The point was to forget *with my hand*.

...The idea came from having used a piece of glass for a palette and looking through at the colors from the other side. That made me think of protecting the colors from oxidation, so there wouldn't be any of that fading and yellowing you get on canvas.

Page 56: As soon as we start putting our thoughts into words and sentences, everything gets distorted. Language is just no damned good; I use it because I have to, but I don't put any trust in it. We never understand each other. Only the fact directly perceived by the senses has any meaning. The minute you get beyond that, into abstractions, you're lost.

Pages 58-60: Words get their real meaning and place in poetry...

Your chance is not the same as my chance, just as your throw of the dice will rarely be the same as mine...

I got the idea that life would be more interesting, more of a game, if you could stretch the laws of physics and chemistry a little. After all, we have to accept these so-called laws of science because they make life more convenient, but that doesn't mean anything as far as *validity* is concerned. The word 'law' is against my principles. Science is apparently 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, so I gave it all a sort of pseudo-explanation. I never could stand the seriousness of life, but when the seriousness is tinted with humor it makes a nicer color.

Page 62: As a Frenchman, used to class distinctions, I got a feeling of what a real democracy, a one-class country could be. People who could afford to have chauffeurs went to the theatre by subway—things like that. Also, there was a much better climate for

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someone who wanted to keep aloof from movements and theories and people who want to categorize you. It was much, much freer than Paris. People left you alone more.

... [On *The Large Glass*] I bought two big plate-glass panes and started at the top, with the Bride. I worked at least a year on that. Then, in 1916 or 1917, I worked on the bottom part, the Bachelors. It took so long because I could never work more than two hours a day. You see, it interested me, but not enough to make me eager to finish it. I'm lazy—don't forget that. Besides, I had no intention of showing it or selling it at the time. I was just doing it—that was my life. When I wanted to work on it, I did, and other times I would go out and enjoy America. It was my first visit, remember, and I had to see America as much as I had to work on my 'Glass'.

...[On *Readymades*] The idea was to write something that had nothing to do with dogs or combs, something as nonsensical as possible. It's not easy to be nonsensical, because nonsensical things so often turn out to make sense.

Page 65: [On *Readymades*] I never intended to sell them. The readymades were a way of getting out of exchangeability, the monetarization, of the work of art. In art, and only in art, the original work is sold, and it acquires a sort of aura that way. With my readymades, a replica will do just as well.

Pages 72-75: I just wanted two identities, that's all. It was a sort of readymade-ish action I first wanted a Jewish name, but I couldn't find the right one. Then the idea jumped at me—why not a female name? Marvelous! Much better than to change religion would be to change sex. So I chose the name Rose Sélavy. Rose was the corniest name for a French girl at that time, and Sélavy, of course, was 'C'est la vie.' The double 'r' in 'Rose' came from a play on words in Picabia's painting 'The Cacodylactic Eye,' which he wanted all his friends to sign; in signing it I used the word 'arroser,' and that gave me the idea of using the two 'r's in the name.

...[On *The Large Glass*] It was too long, and in the end you lose interest. I felt that sometimes in the unfinished thing there is more—there is still more warmth that you don't get, that you don't change or perfect in the finished product.

Page 80: The *Large Glass*... wedding of mental and visual elements... the ideas... are more important than the actual visual realization... are concerned with what happens without being seen... My first idea was that after the 'Glass' was finished I would have the notes made into a book, rather like a Sears, Roebuck catalogue, to go with it.² I never did that, or course.

...[The *Glass*] is not my autobiography, nor is it even self-expression...
[Said to Geo. Heard Hamilton] There is no solution, because there is no problem.

² The catalog that Duchamp grew was called MANUFACTURE D'ARMES et CYCLES de Saint-up with Etienne, a history and it is described as something shared from childhood in his first wife's memoir.

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Pages 90, 93: In Europe, the young always act as the grandsons of some great man—Victor Hugo or Shakespeare or someone like that. Even the Cubists liked to say that they were grandsons of Poussin. They can't help it. And so when they come to produce something of their own, the tradition is indestructible. They're up against all those centuries and all those miserable frescoes that no one can even see anymore—we love them for their cracks. This doesn't exist here. You don't give a damn about Shakespeare, do you? You're not his grandsons at all. So it's good terrain for new developments. There's more freedom here, fewer remnants of the past. Young artists can skip all that tradition, more or less, and go quickly to the real. Also, people leave you alone here. In my case, anyway, I've found America a little better acceptance of my right to breathe. Of course, any place you stay in long enough becomes boring. Heaven especially, I imagine...

I'm afraid that our dear century will not be very much remembered. In the first place, the means employed today are very perishable. Painters use bad pigments, and they do everything so quickly. Quick art—that's been the characteristic of the whole century, from the Cubists on. The speed that is being used in space, in communications, is also being used in art. But things of great importance in art have to be produced slowly. And then, of course, there is the terrific commercialization. So many artists, so many one-man shows, so many dealers and collectors and critics who are just lice on the backs of artists. Some of them are my friends, but I still have no respect for the profession of dealer or critic. And with commercialization has come the integration of the artist into society, for the first time in a hundred years. In my time, we artists were pariahs, and we knew it and enjoyed it. But today the artist is integrated, and so he has to be paid, and so he has to keep producing for the market. It's a vicious circle. And artists are such supreme egoists! It's disgusting. No, the only solution for the great man of tomorrow in art is to go underground. He may be recognized after his death, if he's lucky. Not having to deal with the money society on its own terms, he won't have to be integrated into it, and he won't become contaminated, as all the others are.

★ ★ ★

"An Interview with Marcel Duchamp" by Jean Antoine, 1966. Interview by Jean Antoine, translated by Sue Rose, 1993, © The Art Newspaper No. 27, April 1993.

Jean Antoine: When you started out, you painted like everyone else; you created art. Then you became the man whom André Breton called "the most intelligent man of the twentieth century." So, does that mean, since you have given up painting, that you associate painting with stupidity?

Marcel Duchamp: No, not stupidity. First of all, I want to defend myself a little against the charge of being the most intelligent man in the world. It's fairly easy for someone to call you that, but it's fairly difficult to convince yourself that you are. And I find it hard to

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believe, because first of all you have to understand the word “intelligent” in the way he meant it and I’m not sure that I know what he meant; and there are any number of ways of being intelligent. I accept it because it was said by Breton whose opinions I respect greatly, but that’s all.

JA: But you haven’t answered my question about the problem of painting and stupidity?

MD: No, no, not at all. No, stupidity has got nothing to do with it. It’s simply an activity which has been a little overestimated and is regarded as something of major importance. Personally, I don’t believe it is all it’s cracked up to be. It’s one of those human activities that is not crucially important. That’s what I mean; especially now, when it has become completely esoteric and everyone paints, everyone buys it and everyone talks about it. I wonder if it counts for anything at all when it comes to expressing more profound thought.

JA: When you gave up painting, did you believe that painting was dead?

MD: No. First, you know, I haven’t given up painting; if I get an idea for a painting tomorrow, I’ll do it. I didn’t make any hard and fast resolutions at all, of any kind. I simply stopped because I didn’t have anything more to say at the time. I had run out of ideas; ideas don’t come as easily as all that. As I have never been in the habit of working at my easel every morning from eight am, I only feel inclined to work when something stirs me in some way. Then I try to find a way of expressing the idea and there isn’t one. There hasn’t been one for a long time and that’s all I can say. But I didn’t make any hard and fast decisions about giving up painting at all.

JA: Tell me something about your urinal which you sent to the Independents Exhibition, signed R. Mutt?

MD: That was a bit of an exception, as it was sent to the first Independents Exhibition in New York and, as is the case with all the Independents Exhibitions, there was no hanging committee. The whole point of the Independents Exhibition was to enable artists to satisfy their need to exhibit without having to submit their work to a hanging committee. So I sent that piece under the impression that there would be no problem having it accepted and that afterwards we would see how the public reacted to it. But the organizers, or the hanging committee, decided against exhibiting it. It was too shocking, I suppose, even though it was not obscene or pornographic, or even erotic. As the organizers couldn’t find any reason to suppress it or reject it, they dumped the piece behind screens where it could no longer be seen and we lost sight of it for the whole exhibition. We didn’t know where it was and it was only at the end of the exhibition, when everything was being dismantled, that we found the piece hidden away and realized what had happened. What is more, I was on the organizing committee, so I resigned and I never again exhibited at the Independents Exhibition.

JA: And what about the ready-mades you created afterwards?

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MD: Basically, they grew out of a thought process which was perhaps a little too logical, but logical all the same, relating to works made with your hands: you can cut off the artist's hands and still end up with something that is a product of the artist's choice since, on the whole, when an artist paints using a palette he is choosing the colours. So choice is the crucial factor in a work of art. Paintings, colours, forms, even ideas are an expression of the artist's choice. So you can take this even further if you want, by saying: why go to the trouble of using your hands at all? So the idea of making something that is not physically created by the artist, that simply stems from choices he has made, that is, something already created like the ready-mades, was valid - personally speaking, at any rate. But remember, I definitely do not want to create a school of the ready-made; far from it.

JA: As a matter of fact, doesn't your concept of ready-mades preclude the idea of a school?

MD: Yes, to some extent, but not entirely. But, ultimately, I know there is an inherent danger in the ready-made, and that is the ease with which it can be produced. So, if you were to create tens of thousands of ready-mades per year, that would become extremely monotonous and irritating. So I would recommend restraint in the production of ready-mades.

JA: You yourself provided detailed pointers to the inner workings of *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*, in the *Green Box*, which is a sort of instruction manual, and there have also been numerous commentaries by critics. Do you think that the work is accessible to the general public?

MD: Yes and no, because everything is accessible, you know! The analyses that have been put forward are not necessarily of any value, since I have not offered any explanation myself. That is, I have done something, but I don't analyze myself and above all I don't judge what I have done. What I intended is of no interest; what is interesting is the effect the work has on the spectator, on the public who will decide if the work is important enough to survive. If not, if the public decides against it, if they are unmoved by it, then *The Glass* will be broken and people will stop talking about it, which could quite easily happen in 20 years or 10 years, or even sooner. So, it's nothing to do with me; I have nothing to say. I created something and it's up to the public—they decide whether the work survives or disappears.

JA: You don't trust the judgment of art critics at all?

MD: No. I believe that a picture, a work of art, lives and dies just as we do. That is, it lives from the time it's conceived and created, for some 50 or 60 years, it varies, and then the work dies. And that is when it becomes art history. So, art history only begins after the death of the work, but as long as the work lives, or at least in the first 50 years of its life, it communicates with people living in the same period who have accepted it or rejected it and who have talked about it. These people die and the work dies with them. And that is

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where the history of art begins. In that sense, I believe that the history of art is extremely random. I am convinced that the works on view in the museums and those we consider to be exceptional do not represent the finest achievements in the world. Many geniuses have foundered due to their lack of direction; ultimately they could not find a way of remaining geniuses throughout their life. A simple error of judgment was tantamount to artistic suicide. Their works have disappeared as a result, and there are many more interesting things that have been consigned to oblivion. In other words, this is my understanding of mediocrity. Basically, only the mediocre works created in the past have survived, while the most beautiful works, the finest works, have vanished. This is something I really believe, but I'm not forcing anyone else to believe it too.

JA: Do you hold any specific beliefs about what might be called beauty?

MD: No. Beauty doesn't come into it, because I am not terribly interested in words like "beauty" and "truth". These are concepts, which are not exactly weak, but they lack substance; they are words and words are extremely dangerous. When you try to analyze a painting using words, you can only manage a very questionable approximation, worse than questionable, because, after all, painting and art in general, especially visual art, is a language in itself, a visual language instead of a spoken language. So it's already like a Chinese poem that has been translated into English—it doesn't mean anything any more.

JA: Generally speaking, are you wary of words?

MD: Very much so. I only recognize the poetic meaning of words, that is, the sound of words, their music, which has nothing to do with their meaning. The meaning of words changes every 50 years. The same word, used at the time of Louis XIV, no longer has the same meaning today.

JA: Have you ever been aware of belonging to a movement, a school?

MD: No. I belonged to them in the sense that when I was interested in something I tried to understand it as far as possible and, of course, even tried to make use of it. But the word "school" only leads to the word "group" and, ultimately, only individual works are produced, such as the works of a certain Leonardo da Vinci. It's down to the individual to emerge from any school or so-called school. The idea of a school in itself is basically of no interest to me at all.

JA: You were, however, closely linked with the Dadaists and then the Surrealists?

MD: Yes, but I probably tried to create my own personal brand of Dadaism, just as each of them had their own brand of Dadaism based on the same ideas but expressed in an intensely personal way.

JA: Do you think that your work would have been possible if these movements had not existed?

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MD: Absolutely not. I followed the ideas of various schools at various times, with my own reservations of course, but I was strongly influenced by each school, each time, like everyone else. No one can escape the influences surrounding them.

JA: Do you think that our century will be the age of Surrealism?

MD: Yes, probably, but I don't know for sure. Deep down, I believe that our century will not be very interesting compared to other centuries. I think we will be regarded as being rather limited. Ours isn't a century like the 18th century which is impossible to love but which has its own integrity, an identity. I believe that we will be regarded as a slightly frivolous century, and that we will not be showered with the sort of praise that we have blithely been giving ourselves. Playing games is an important element in everything you do, I believe.

JA: You have played chess all your life and I think that, in the same way, you have always approached your work as a player?

MD: Absolutely. I am extremely playful in that sense and I believe it's the only form of fun possible in a world which isn't always much fun. I am inclined to be witty. I regard humour as one of life's vital ingredients. Sorrow and pain, on the other hand, are not at all essential; there is no good reason for them and people seem to feel obliged to cry much more often than they laugh.

JA: Doesn't that imply that you don't take things seriously?

MD: No, not at all; it's a witty seriousness, black humour, or whatever you want to call it. It's such a necessary part of life that I don't even question it.

JA: I would like to talk to you now about what is being done today, which has often been inspired by you. What is your opinion, for example, of Pop Art?

MD: I have a very high opinion of Pop Art; I regard it primarily as a phenomenon that stands apart from everything else in this century. Turning its back on influences such as the distortion of art, systematic distortion, anti-photography and anti-perspective, the work of the Pop artists represents a restoration, a reintegration of ideas that are of great interest to me and that perhaps appear extraordinary. Yet their work also represents a very important process, unlike any of the preceding "-isms", which were always a continuation: Impressionism started the ball rolling, was continued by Fauvism, which was a distortion of it, followed by Cubism, again a distortion but still "retinal", because the importance of the visual experience was always the decisive factor. With Pop Art, this all changed.

JA: What do you think about the Nouveau Realistes, the creators of the Surrealist Object, whose work takes the idea of the object as its point of departure?

MD: I think it's very interesting since half the century has been concerned with this question of objects. The word "object" amuses me because no one talked about objects in

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the 18th century. This particular interpretation of the word “object” was invented as if to make it virtually some sort of fetish, serving as a basis for an entire movement; and that is what is interesting: found objects, this object, that object. It isn’t sculpture, and yet it is three-dimensional. It has a completely unique quality and is obviously one of the distinguishing features of our century.

JA: But you don’t seem to be advocating it as a way forward?

MD: On the contrary, it may not last but it represents perhaps one way to move away from traditional easel painting, for example. That has lasted for five centuries, which is long enough; especially oil painting, which certainly doesn’t last forever, and may possibly disappear completely. Once, there were frescoes, mosaics and other techniques that were dropped in favor of oil painting. But, in my opinion, oil painting is far from perfect: it darkens, it needs to be restored, any painting on show has generally been restored countless times and is no longer the painting that the artist originally created.

JA: You have lived on both sides of the Atlantic—you have lived in France and you have lived in the US for many years—and now you are going back there. Have you ever felt as though you don’t belong in either place?

MD: Yes, but I was quite happy to feel like that, precisely because I was afraid of being influenced by my roots. I wanted to get away from that. When I was in the US, I had no roots at all because I was born in Europe. So it was easy, I was bathing in a calm sea where I could swim freely; you can’t swim freely when you get tangled up in roots.

JA: So, European traditions were a sort of net in which you might have got caught?

MD: Exactly. Traditions are inevitably deep-rooted; distance enables you to see more clearly.

JA: You have taken up American citizenship. Should we regard you as an American artist?

MD: Absolutely! Officially speaking anyway, just as I have a passport. But that doesn’t mean a thing in any other way. Biological functions don’t give a damn about nationality; your arm works without knowing if it’s French or American. Officially, since you have to have an official existence, you have a nationality of which you are either proud or fond.

JA: And you are fond of this nationality?

MD: Yes, I’m fond of it. America’s a nice place to live; I have more friends over there than I do here and basically, as far as I’m concerned, nations do not exist; they are a place where you have friends, that’s all.

JA: Do you feel that people understand you better there?

MD: Perhaps. But, most importantly, it’s just that I have made more friends there. I have not necessarily been understood, because they don’t always try to understand, but the feeling of warmth is either there or it isn’t and that’s the only difference that counts.

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JA: If, when you attended the major retrospective of your works that recently took place at the Tate Gallery, someone had asked you: Marcel Duchamp, what have you done with your life? What would you say was your greatest achievement?

MD: Using painting, using art, to create a *modus vivendi*, a way of understanding life; that is, for the time being, of trying to make my life into a work of art itself, instead of spending my life creating works of art in the form of paintings or sculptures. I now believe that you can quite readily treat your life, the way you breathe, act, interact with other people, as a picture, a *tableau vivant* or a film scene, so to speak. These are my conclusions now: I never set out to do this when I was 20 or 15, but I realize, after many years, that this was fundamentally what I was aiming to do.

Note on the translation: To coincide with the exhibition on Marcel Duchamp at the Barbican, London, until 9 June 2013, here is the interview with the artist from our March 1993 issue, until then unpublished. Two years before Marcel Duchamp's death in 1968, the Belgian director, Jean Antoine, filmed an interview with the artist in his Neuilly studio in the summer of 1966. This was shown on French speaking Belgian television in 1971 in the program "Signe des Temps" (Sign of the Times). When the Video Library was set up ten years ago by the non-profit-making association, Jeunesse et Arts Plastiques, I suggested to Jean Antoine that he keep a U-matic video copy. A copy was stored in the Video Library of the non-profit-making association, Jeunesse et Arts Plastiques. Apart from being broadcast on Belgian television, the interview has been shown several times to the mainly student audience of the association, but the text has never been published. This transcript, edited for The Art Newspaper, is the most faithful rendering possible of the way Marcel Duchamp expressed himself. It is a remarkable document that gives us a fresh and immediate insight into his mind. Michel Baudson, Editor.

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"Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp" by Pierre Cabanne (1967),
Da Capo Press, New York, 1971 translated by Ron Padgett. [Selected statements by M.D.]

Page 46-47: Duchamp: 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, a bit of paper, to associate the idea of a perpendicular thread 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...

CHANGÉchance_ The Duchamp Paradigm

By & About Marcel Duchamp

For me the number three is important, but simply from the numerical, not 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 three million – it's the same 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 one 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.

Page 83: Cabanne: In 1942, you returned to New York, and stayed for four years. What was your life like in New York during the War?

Duchamp: It was very amusing because Peggy Guggenheim had also returned. Then all the Surrealists arrived, André Breton, André Masson, etc. There was lots of activity, Breton had gatherings. I attended. I never signed any petitions, things like that. He himself had to work; he spoke on the "Voice of America" during the whole war, with George Dethuit and all their friends. That was really a very nice thing to do...

Cabanne: You lived in New York during two successive wars. Was the New York of 1943 different from that of 1915?

Duchamp: Enormously different. From the point of view of social structure, it was completely different. Income taxes hardly existed in 1915 or 1916. After the crash of 1929, all that was changed by laws which completely transformed one's life. It was a much more brutal form of capitalism after the crash than before. The easy life was over after 1929 or 1930.

Page 93: Duchamp: I find that it's a very good solution for a period like ours, when one cannot continue to do oil painting, which, after four or five hundred years of existence, has no reason to go on eternally. Consequently, if you can find other methods for self-expression, you have to profit from them. It's what happened in all the arts. In music, the new electronic instrument is a sign of the public's changing attitude toward art. The painting is no longer decoration to be hung in the dining room or living room. We have thought of other things to use as decoration. Art is taking more the form of a sign, if you wish; it's no longer reduced to a decorative role. This is the feeling that has directed me all my life.

Page 98: Duchamp: Yes. The individual, man as man, man as a brain, if you like, interests me more than what he makes, because I've noticed that most artists only repeat themselves. This is necessary, however, you can't always be inventive. Only, they have that old habit which incline them to do one painting a month, for example. Everything depends on their working speed. They believe they owe society the monthly or yearly paintings.

Page 103: Duchamp: No, not at all. Let's not talk about it. I don't know anything about it, I don't understand anything about politics, and I say, it's really a stupid activity, which

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leads to nothing. Whether it leads to communism, to monarchy, to a democratic republic, it's exactly the same thing, as far as I'm concerned. You're going to tell me that men need politics as a great art in itself. Nevertheless, this is what politicians believe; they imagine themselves doing something extraordinary! It's a little like notaries, like my father. The politician's style is something like the notary's. I remember my father's legal papers; the language was killingly funny; the lawyers in the United States use the same language. I don't go for politics.

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