

Regarding the Popular

European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies

Etudes sur l'avant-garde
et le modernisme en Europe

Studien zur europäischen
Avantgarde und Moderne

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Volume 2

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Regarding the Popular

Modernism, the Avant-Garde
and High and Low Culture

Edited by

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About the Series – Sur la collection – Zur Buchreihe

The avant-garde and modernism take centre-stage within European academia today. The experimental literatures and arts in Europe between ca. 1850 and 1950, and their aftermath, figure prominently on curricula, while modernism and avant-garde studies have come to form distinct yet interlocking disciplines within the humanities in recent years. These disciplines take on various guises on the continent. Within French and German academia, “modernism” remains a term rather alien – “die Moderne” and “modernité” coming perhaps the closest to what is meant by “modernism” within the English context. Here, indeed, modernism has acquired a firm place in research, signaling above all a period in modern poetics and aesthetics, roughly between 1850 and 1950, during which a revolt against prevalent traditions in art, literature and culture took shape. Similarly, the term “avant-garde” comes with an array of often conflicting connotations. For some, the avant-garde marks the most radically experimental arts and literatures in modernism from the 19th century onward – the early 20th-century vanguard movements of futurism, expressionism, dadaism and surrealism, among others, coinciding with the avant-garde’s most “heroic” phase. For others, the avant-garde belongs to a cultural or conceptual order differing altogether from that of modernism – the vanguard exploits from the 1950s onward marking that avant-garde arts and literatures can also perfectly abide outside modernism.

European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies, far from aiming to reduce the complexity of various European research traditions, aspires to embrace the wide linguistic, terminological and methodological variety within both fields. Publishing an anthology of essays in English, French and German every two years, the series wishes to compare and relate French, German and British, but also Northern and Southern as well as Central and Eastern European findings in avant-garde and modernism studies.

Collecting essays stemming mainly from the biennial conferences of the European Network for Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies (EAM), books in this series do not claim to exhaustiveness. Rather, they aim to raise questions, to provide partial answers, to fill lacunae in the research, and to stir debate about the European avant-garde and modernism throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The series attaches great value to interdisciplinary and intermedial research on experimental aesthetics and poetics, and intends to encourage an interest in the cultural dimensions and contexts of the avant-garde and modernism in Europe.

A digital addendum to the book series can be found on the website of the EAM: www.eam-europe.be. There, readers can consult and add to an open-source bibliography

of books in avant-garde and modernism studies, maintained by Gunther Martens (Ghent University). At present the bibliography already counts several thousands of titles in English, French and German, and it is our hope that it will become a vital point of reference in the exchange of expertise.

L'avant-garde et le modernisme occupent actuellement une place majeure dans les universités européennes. Les arts et les littératures expérimentaux en Europe de 1850 à 1950 et au-delà font partie intégrante des programmes universitaires, tandis que les recherches sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme sont devenues, à l'intérieur des sciences humaines, des disciplines à part entière mais solidaires les unes des autres. Ces disciplines varient néanmoins à travers le continent. Dans les universités françaises et allemandes, la notion de « modernisme » reste plutôt étrangère : les notions de « modernité » et de « Moderne » s'utilisent sans doute davantage pour ce que désigne la notion de « *modernism* » dans le contexte anglophone. Dans la recherche anglophone, en effet, la notion de « *modernism* » a acquis une certaine stabilité : elle désigne avant tout une période de la modernité poétique et esthétique, approximativement entre 1850 et 1950, au cours de laquelle a pris forme une révolte contre les traditions artistiques, littéraires et culturelles prédominantes. De la même façon, la notion d'« avant-garde » prend des connotations divergentes, souvent conflictuelles. Pour certains, l'« avant-garde » désigne les arts et les littératures les plus radicalement expérimentaux qui se développent à l'intérieur du modernisme à partir du XIX^e siècle. Dans ce cas, les mouvements avant-gardistes du début du XX^e siècle – dont le futurisme, l'expressionnisme, le dadaïsme et le surréalisme – correspondent à la phase avant-gardiste la plus « héroïque ». Pour d'autres, l'avant-garde appartient à un ordre culturel et conceptuel entièrement différent du modernisme. Dans cette perspective, l'avant-garde survit au modernisme, comme en témoigne la permanence d'une sensibilité avant-gardiste après 1950.

Loin de vouloir réduire la complexité et la variété des traditions de recherche européennes, *Etudes sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme en Europe* vise à embrasser la grande diversité linguistique, terminologique et méthodologique à l'intérieur de ces deux domaines de recherche. Par la publication d'un volume d'essais en anglais, en français et en allemand tous les deux ans, la collection souhaite comparer et mettre en rapport les résultats issus des traditions de recherche française, anglaise et allemande, mais également d'Europe nordique et méridionale, centrale et orientale.

Le premier objectif de cette collection est de rassembler une sélection des textes présentés lors des rencontres bisannuelles du Réseau européen

de recherche sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme (EAM). En ce sens, son ambition est moins d'épuiser un sujet que de soulever des questions, de suggérer quelques réponses provisoires, de combler certaines lacunes dans la recherche et, plus généralement, de maintenir vivant le débat sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme européens au cours des XIX^e et XX^e siècles. La collection attache beaucoup d'importance à la recherche interdisciplinaire et intermédiaire sur les esthétiques et les poétiques expérimentales et se propose de stimuler l'intérêt pour les dimensions culturelles et contextuelles de l'avant-garde et du modernisme en Europe.

Un complément numérique à la collection est offert par le site web de l'EAM: www.eam-europe.be. En ces pages, les lecteurs trouveront en libre accès, avec la possibilité d'y ajouter de nouvelles références, une bibliographie de livres sur l'avant-garde et le modernisme. La supervision et la mise à jour permanente de ce site sont assurées par Gunther Martens (Université de Gand). Actuellement, cette bibliographie comprend déjà plusieurs milliers d'entrées en anglais, en français et en allemand, et on peut espérer que cette banque de données se développera en un point de rencontre et d'échange de nos expertises.

Forschungsinitiativen zum Thema Avantgarde und Moderne nehmen in der europäischen Forschungslandschaft weiterhin zu. Die experimentellen Literaturen und die Künste in Europa zwischen ca. 1850 und 1950 und ihre Nachwirkungen sind als Lehr- und Forschungsbereiche an den europäischen Forschungsinstitutionen und in den Lehrplänen heutzutage nicht mehr wegzudenken. Avantgarde und Moderne haben sich in den letzten Jahrzehnten zu unterschiedlichen, aber mehrfach miteinander verzahnten Forschungsgebieten entwickelt. Innerhalb der französischen und deutschen akademischen Welt bleibt der Sammelbegriff „modernism“ weniger geläufig – „die (klassische) Moderne“ und „modernité“ fungieren hier als nabeliegende Äquivalente zu demjenigen, was im internationalen Kontext als eine zeitliche und räumliche Ko-Okkurrenz künstlerischer Ausdrucksformen und ästhetischer Theorien namhaft gemacht werden kann, die ungefähr zwischen 1850 und 1950 angesiedelt ist. Auf ähnliche Weise entfaltet die Bezeichnung „Avantgarde“ eine Reihe häufig widersprüchlicher Konnotationen. Für manche kennzeichnet die Avantgarde den radikalsten experimentellen Bruch der Künste und Literaturen mit den Darstellungs- und Erzählkonventionen des 19. Jahrhunderts: im frühen 20. Jahrhundert zeugen davon Avantgardebewegungen wie Futurismus, Expressionismus, Dadaismus und Surrealismus, Strömungen, die als die „heroische“ Phase der Avantgarde bezeichnet werden können. Ab den fünfziger Jahren kommt diese Avantgarde weitgehend ohne modernistische Begleiterscheinungen aus. Für andere gehört die Avantgarde zu einem kulturellen Umfeld, das sich, durchaus im Bunde mit der Klassischen Moderne, der Erneuerung ästhetischer Konventionen verschreibt.

Die Buchreihe Studien zur europäischen Avantgarde und Moderne möchte der Kompliziertheit der unterschiedlichen europäischen Forschungstraditionen gerecht werden und strebt danach, die breite linguistische, terminologische und methodologische Vielfalt abzudecken. Anhand einer zweijährlichen Sammlung von Beiträgen in englischer, französischer und deutscher Sprache möchte die Reihe nicht nur die französische-, deutsch- und englischsprachigen, sondern auch die nord-, süd-, zentral- und osteuropäischen Ergebnisse der Avantgarde- und Moderne-Forschung einbeziehen.

Die Aufsatzsammlungen der Reihe, die größtenteils aus Beiträgen von den zweijährlichen Konferenzen des Europäischen Netzwerks für Studien zu Avant-Garde und Moderne (EAM) bestehen, erheben keinen Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit. Ihr Ziel ist es vielmehr, Fragen zu stellen, einige Antworten vorzuschlagen, Forschungslücken zu schließen und Debatten über die europäische Avantgarde und die Moderne im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert auszulösen.

Die Studien zur europäischen Avantgarde und Moderne legen viel Wert auf die interdisziplinäre und intermediale Erforschung experimenteller Ästhetiken/Poetiken und setzen es sich zum Ziel, das Interesse an den kulturellen Zusammenhängen und Kontexten der Avantgarde und der Moderne in Europa anzuregen.

Ein digitales Addendum zur Buchreihe befindet sich auf der Internetseite von EAM: www.eam-europe.be. Dort können unsere Leser eine frei zugängliche Bibliographie zu Publikationen über Avantgarde und Moderne, die von Gunther Martens (Universität Gent) verwaltet wird, besichtigen und ergänzen. Die Bibliographie enthält derzeit einige Tausend Titel auf Deutsch, Englisch und Französisch und wir hoffen, dass sie ein wichtiges Forum für den Austausch von Fachkenntnissen präsentieren wird.

Leuven & New York, 2011

Sascha Bru & Peter Nicholls

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Introduction

Given the Popular¹

It is common knowledge that the rise of mass popular culture coincided with the arrival of modernism in Western Europe.² The function of the avant-gardes in this constellation remains somewhat unclear, however. As this book amply shows, those avant-gardes were certainly drawn to (aspects of) popular culture – Charlie Chaplin perhaps crowning the list of popular phenomena. But was the avant-garde itself also part of popular culture? Today it certainly is: denying Nelson Goodman’s distinction between allographic and autographic art forms, the number of walls in student rooms that have, say, a poster reproduction of a Mondrian must be uncountable. A century ago, work of Futurists in Italy was not unknown to hang on factory walls, Futurist shows or *serate* attracted considerable crowds, and the Futurists themselves often enjoyed the status of celebrities. Yet those Futurists formed part of a small group of exceptions that confirmed the rule. Most avant-gardists saw themselves as “high” artists, while other forces in and outside the field of art singled them out as wild and dangerous “anti”-artists. This has given rise to two interesting critical tendencies, that are also marked in this book. On one hand, as Marjorie Perloff shows in detail here, it cannot be denied that many classic avant-garde works such as Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* were intended as “high” art. From this perspective, it is quite possible to ignore “low” culture altogether and to zoom in on the “high” art of the avant-garde. On the other hand, those same works undeniably also had an effect beyond their original “high” artistic intent. Duchamp might not have wished it that way, but *Fountain* has in the least subtle of interpretations become known, simply, as an anti-“high”-art work. This has often been observed, but what is important here is that those two tendencies (“high” art *versus* “anti-high-art”) are not irreconcilable: Duchamp in both remains situated within the sphere or field of “high” art production. Only when Duchamp is seen as an “anti-artists”, however, does the relation with “low” culture become a

¹ Our work here was made possible by the Research Foundation - Flanders (FWO) and M.D.R.N., a large scale K.U.Leuven based research project (GOA). We would also like to extend our gratitude to our student Nicky Vanwinkel for her assistance.

² For a most recent update consult the chapters by David Glover and Nick Daly in *The Cambridge Companion to Popular Fiction*, David Glover and Scott McCracken (eds.), forthcoming in 2012.

pertinent *enjeu*. For here it is a given that warrants attention. Why should “low” culture be excluded from the realm of “high” art? Where does “low” culture’s attraction stem from? Why is it popular? And what, if anything, is the “popular”?

The young Clement Greenberg:

that thing to which the Germans gave the wonderful name of *Kitsch*: popular, commercial art and literature with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fictions, comics, Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc. etc. For some reason this gigantic apparition has always been taken for granted. *It is time we looked into its whys and wherefores.*³

Greenberg’s programmatic words not only remind us of the constant distance and desire that characterise the relation between the opposite poles of “high” and “low” or popular culture. His words also summarise the aim of this book well. A lot has happened since Greenberg’s essay “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” first appeared in 1939, not least within the domain of what he called *Kitsch*. The “gigantic apparition” he evoked more than half a century ago has irrefutably diversified and grown, as he predicted. Yet contrary to what Greenberg suggested right before the outbreak of World War II, the “high” (modernist) end of cultural production (and consumption, and distribution) has fared well too. Greenberg’s mandarin and somewhat pessimistic essay indeed implied that the demise of “great” or “high” art was imminent, and in that conviction he was certainly not alone among his generation, not to mention among the league of art critics who before or after him have lamented the downfall of artistic standards and aesthetic traditions, of sound mores and stringent codes. Such lament seems of all times, and, curiously, the “death” of art it projects is every so often evoked in relationship with some form of “low” culture.

Interestingly, as many of Greenberg’s contemporaries found it hard to place the work of the historical avant-garde “anti-art”, they often depicted the avant-garde as just that: as part and parcel of “low” culture, as a dangerous threat to tradition. Today, the common (if not, popular) view of those avant-gardes could not be more different, as they have come to form a “high” tradition in themselves. Could it be then that not the demise of “great” art but the deep divide between “higher” and “lower” forms of culture is of all times? And what, again, is the role of modernism’s and the avant-garde’s experimental art in all this? Despite varied and vivid attempts of avant-gardists throughout the 20th century to upset the

³ Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”, *The Collected Essays & Criticism, Vol. 1: Perceptions and Judgements, 1939-1944*, Chicago & London 1986, 5-22, here 11, emphasis added.

opposition between “high” and “low” culture, despite recurrent claims (especially in critical discussions of what was once called “postmodernism”) that the opposition between the “high” and “low” ends of culture was about to collapse, the divide between both appears as firm as ever. While nothing has changed, everything is different. Or is it?

Commerce

Let us start with the obvious: “low” or popular culture is most often intended to make a profit. Although, as David Hopkins reminds us here, few avant-gardists aspired to the career of a hunger artist, “capital” (in the complex sense of Pierre Bourdieu) certainly is earned differently in “high” art and mass culture. As such, “high” art or literature and “low” or popular cultural artefacts never really compete with one another on the market. This in part explains why the many modernists and avant-gardists discussed in this book experimented so freely with forms and themes that also figured prominently in popular culture. The work of Wyndham Lewis as portrayed by Anna Burrells, the magazine *Les Soirées de Paris* (here discussed by Maria Dario) and French Surrealism’s attraction to the once-commercial, to the outmoded, as evoked by Abigail Susik, all mark the rich and potentially long afterlife popular cultural elements have in the avant-garde. Márton Orosz’s discussion of the Central-European colour film shows that the other way round too producers of popular culture often took a keen interest in avant-garde experimentation, because the latter every now and then also yielded commercially viable ideas.

However natural the articulation of “low” culture with commerce or capital might appear, it is not without complications of course. For starters, if there ever was a time upon which the “low” end of the cultural spectrum simply coincided with “low class” (or the “high” end with “high(est) class”), that time has long gone. This is not the place to summarise the work of the many sociologists, cultural historians, philosophers and art and literary scholars who in recent years have scrutinised the dialectic between class and culture. Let us just stick to Greenberg’s essay. Like Hungarian Arnold Hauser in *The Social History of Art* (1951), he may well have had a point when he claimed that “high” art always has existed mainly by grace of the support and critical appreciation of a financially gifted but above all cultivated class with leisure. Yet he was at the same time also quick to highlight that “low” culture was being consumed by the highest classes as well, because, so Greenberg discovered, popular culture proved rather powerful as a means to kill time, an asset of which the culti-

vated rich had much to spend.⁴ “Low” culture for Greenberg thus by no means signified “low class” alone. Greenberg’s view of “high” culture, by contrast, was more quaint, as “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” further implied that only the cultivated rich could catch on to the critique of capitalism that was entailed by the avant-garde’s violation of aesthetic conventions. Two things are wrong here. First, the allegedly “difficult” modernist and avant-garde art was of course not only there for the rich. Jacques Rancière’s work on proletarian culture has convincingly done away with the idea that *the* proletariat lack(ed) cultivation and education; a unified “low class” culture simply never existed. Second, it is stating the obvious today to say that formal experiments in art need not involve a critique of capitalism. Complicating the matter further is the uneven development of capitalism itself. As this book evinces, the relationship between capitalism and the avant-garde’s and modernism’s experimental aesthetic was highly varied throughout Europe.

From Folklore to the Everyday

As complacent as the ties between “low” or popular culture and commerce may be, they do not exhaust the semantic range of the notion “popular”. Morag Shiach, Pascal Durand and Marc Lits, among others, have shown that the term “popular” has a long and complex history.⁵ In the “high” modernist, Greenbergian view of art, not much good can come from the popular – Theodor Adorno’s mandarin stance still appears so much more subtle in this sense. Unsurprisingly, the notion in Greenberg came mainly with negative overtones: popular culture is mechanical, vulgar and unrefined, inauthentic, at worst populist. This view was not uncommon among writers and intellectuals we now often associate with “high” modernism, as Dominika Buchowska reminds us in her chapter on *The New Age*. Yet as Raymond Spiteri illustrates in his discussion of Jean Cocteau’s and Luis Buñuel’s films, avant-gardists of course often deliberately sought out the abject in a productive attempt to renew art. Moreover, Walter Benjamin’s work on modern art’s loss of “aura” illustrates that all the negative overtones Greenberg attached to popular culture could

⁴ The late but great Matei Calinescu later expanded on this in his *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, Durham 1987.

⁵ Morag Shiach, *Discourse on Popular Culture: class, gender and history in cultural analysis 1730 to the present*, London 1989. See also the special issue (n° 42) of *Hermès, revue de l’Institut des sciences de la communication du CNRS* edited by Pascal Durand and Marc Lits in 2005, entitled, “Peuple, populaire, populisme”.

also be turned positive. And needless to say there are still other ways of regarding the popular.

In the most literal sense “popular culture” denotes the culture of the people, or, more aptly in light of Europe’s rich cultural history, peoples. Chapters reminding us here that modernism’s and the avant-garde’s attraction to popular culture also coincided with local geo-political stakes, and, perhaps more importantly, with a near *ethnographic* project include Pál Deréky’s and Geert Buelens’ discussion of avant-garde poets’ turn to traditional popular song, Regina Samson’s discussion of Jorge Luis Borges, and Jobst Welge’s work on Ramón del Valle-Inclán. In different ways these chapters evoke the complex bond between experimental writing and folklore. Taken together, the chapters in this section of the book further testify to the linguistic and formal as well as historical diversity of Europe’s popular cultures.

Debbie Lewer’s discussion of Dada draws on Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque to suggest that a deterritorialised notion of popular culture was often at work in the avant-garde as well. Stuart Hall’s seminal “Notes on Deconstructing the ‘Popular’” (1981) figures in the background here, not least because the “Folklore” section of the book as a whole also illustrates that popular culture is always the ground on which historical changes and cultural transformations are worked. When in doubt, it might help to read Beata Śniecikowska’s chapter on the reception and appropriation of that once “alien” entity called jazz in experimental interwar Polish poetry.

It is only when modernists and avant-gardists start paying attention to the smallest detail in so-called “ordinary” people’s lives as ethnographers, that yet another, radically different aspect of “low” culture shows itself. There is indeed a silent dimension to the “lower” end of the cultural spectrum, which “high” culture in particular for a long time deemed unimportant, not even worth words. Art, literary and cultural historians of diverse casts in the foregoing century have often just called that dimension the everyday. As readers familiar with that towering record of the quotidian, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, we know what attention to the everyday can amount to. At least we have a sense of it, for if there is any truth to Maurice Blanchot’s assertion that the everyday is that what remains (and still escapes) when everything has been said and done, then we also grasp why the everyday is at once an inherent aspect and a cognate, the shadow at best, of the popular.

In their chapters on Surrealist writing, Wolfgang Asholt and Ivanne Rialland exemplify that the everyday often came close to coinciding with the popular in the avant-garde. The ephemeral streetwise dimension of the everyday is also discussed in Caroline Blinder’s chapter on the representa-

tion of the municipal chair in interwar avant-garde photography. Upping the ante in her chapter, Agata Jakubowska's analysis of Magdalena Abakanowicz's work reminds us that the everyday also has a pronounced gender dimension. Jakubowska, along with Gregory Williams, whose chapter analyses the work of Joseph Beuys' student Imi Knoebel, and Harri Veivo, who scrutinises Finnish literature, explores how in the post-war avant-gardes the earlier fascination with the everyday was renewed and reinvigorated.

Media

The final section of the book looks at the interstices between popular (mass) media, the avant-garde and modernism. Sara J. Angel first looks at how the newspaper helped shape the work of Pablo Picasso up and until *Guernica* (1937). Károly Kókai and Gabriele Jutz then turn their attention to the centre of Europe, Kókai looking at the role of film in the journal *Ma* during its Viennese phase, Jutz at the incredibly rich and challenging work of László Moholy-Nagy in light of present-day media theory.

The bulk of the "Media" section turns to the so-called neo-avant-gardes. Covering film, the plastic arts and literature, Elena Hamalidi, Maria Nikolopoulou and Rea Walldén introduce an English readership to the fascinating work of the Greek avant-garde that began to form itself in the 1960s under the dictatorship. With Jesper Olsson we jump to the North of Europe to land in Sweden during the 1960s where Olsson invites us to relive an appearance of avant-gardists on a popular national television show. Ross Elflin brings us back to the South in a discussion of the Italian architecture collective Superstudio. Elflin unfolds an aesthetic programme that is in so many ways typical of the whole 20th-century avant-garde adventure, as Superstudio desired to have an architecture without buildings, an art with no more divides.

And yet divides there were as Koen Rymenants and Pieter Verstraeten remind us in their chapter on interwar Belgian radio. Rymenants and Verstraeten look into how the radical experimentation of modernists and avant-gardists was presented to a wider audience during the interwar period. They situate their work within a broader trend in Western modernism studies that turns to the vast cultural "space in between" high- and lowbrow: middlebrow. For, indeed, not all art and literature in the 20th century was as complex and self-conscious as that of the avant-garde and modernism, nor was all other art simply "low". There was a large proportion of work, in literature and art, that to an extent educated less cultivated consumers by incorporating certain innovative aspects of modernism and the avant-garde, while simultaneously also looking at the "low" end of

culture for inspiration. Such work, whether we enjoy reading it or not, deserves our attention too if we want to shed light on the vexed relation between “high” versus “low” culture in the first (and perhaps more so, the second) half of the 20th century. Greenberg, again, would come to recognise this, too, after the 1930s.

Terms and Canons

The aforementioned parameters are explored in the opening section of this book. Discussing various media and such diverse figures as Loie Fuller, Man Ray and Federico García Lorca, Esther Sánchez-Pardo shows how in a variety of subtle ways popular mass culture informed changes in avant-garde art production and technique too. Dominika Buchowska canvasses the inherent political dimension of this book’s theme, highlighting the tension between populism and elitism in modernism. Most contributions here, however, explore theoretical and terminological concerns in more detail. David Ayers wonders why those adhering to the “anti-art” interpretation of the avant-garde a century later still cling on to an essentialist notion of “high” art. His essay could be read in tandem with Marjorie Perloff’s. She argues that the distinction between “high” and “low” culture is essential. Not only does that distinction in her mind give shape to a dynamic ordering of art works in the field, it is, for that reason, also a very tangible point of anchorage in historical research. Charting the context in which Duchamp produced some of his readymades, Perloff puts forth a point Alexis Paterson rehearses in her chapter on British Experimentalism. Hierarchies, Paterson shows, are everywhere. Even within the respective fields of “high” and “low” culture, works, products if you want, are always ordered and ranked. There is bad popular culture too, as we all know. And there is “high” art that will come too close to popular culture, such as the compositions of Philip Glass and Steve Reich, which will be ranked lower within the field of “high” art. This complex dynamic, Christophe Genin illustrates, has gone through a series of changes in the course of the 20th century, as a great variety of forces and currents among “the people” at large always inform matters of taste. Yet if one thing stands out throughout this book, it is that, indeed, the division between “high” and “low” seems perennial.

Perhaps that division is as old as Antiquity. Already in *Rhetoric* Aristotle averred that all discourse needs to adapt its substance to its ends. Treatises on this pragmatic dimension of rhetoric since traditionally have distinguished between three sorts of style: the *stilus humilis*, *stilus mediocris*, and *stilus gravis*; a simple or low (pastoral) style, a moderate or middle one,

and an elevated or sublime style. The difference between high and low may in other words be just the offspring of a deeply sedimented rhetorical tradition. Depending on what we aim to achieve and who we address, we pick our register and pitch. This is so in modern and late modern times, but it was also so in Antiquity. Moreover, Cicero, in the *Orator*, believed that the three styles corresponded to three aims: *probere* (to prove), *delectare* (to charm), and *flectare* (to move). If that is still the case, too, then the question is what Greenberg's *Kitsch* or the popular "proves" beyond the abundance of time and boredom in the life of its consumer? More importantly, perhaps, if modernism and the avant-garde were part and parcel of high culture, who were they in turn trying to "move", really, apart from Greenberg's leisured class? Yes, it's true: while nothing has changed, everything is different.

Most chapters gathered in this book began as conference papers at the second biennial EAM conference organised in September 2010 at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. Let us hope that the EAM continues to prosper, too.

SB with LvN

Terms and Canons

“The Madness of the Unexpected”: Duchamp’s Readymades and the Survival of “High” Art

Marjorie Perloff (University of Southern California)

Some myths die hard. Almost a century after the creation of Duchamp’s early readymades – the *Bicycle Wheel* (1914), the *Bottle Rack* (1915), the snow shovel called *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915), and the upside-down urinal famously called *Fountain* (1917) – the common wisdom continues to be that the readymades, what Duchamp first called *la sculpture toute-faite*¹, are ordinary manufactured objects that the artist selected, labelled, and signed, pronouncing them “art” by simple fiat. “Duchamp’s Readymades”, Allan Kaprow remarked in 1973, “are radically useful contributions to the current scene. If simply calling a snow shovel a work of art makes it that, the same goes for all of New York City, or the Vietnam war, or a pedantic article on Marcel Duchamp. [...] Conversely, since any nonart can be art after the appropriate ceremonial announcement, any art, theoretically, can be de-arted (‘Use Rembrandt for an ironing board’ – Duchamp)”² Assessments like Kaprow’s recall Peter Bürger’s still influential (though more skeptical) pronouncement in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*:

When Duchamp signs mass-produced objects (a urinal, a bottle drier) and sends them to art exhibits he negates the category of individual production. The signature, whose very purpose it is to mark what is individual in the work ... is inscribed in an *arbitrarily chosen mass product*, because all claims to individual creativity are to be mocked. Duchamp’s provocation not only unmasks the art market where the signature means more than the quality of the work; it radically questions the very principle of art in bourgeois society according to which the individual is considered the creator of the work of art. Duchamp’s Ready-Mades are not works of art but manifestations.³

¹ Marcel Duchamp, letter to Suzanne Duchamp, 15 January 1916, in *Affect/Marcel: The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, Francis M. Naumann & Hector Obalk (eds.), Jill Taylor (trans.), London 2000, 43.

² Allan Kaprow, “Dr. M.D.”, *Allan Kaprow: Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Jeff Kelley (ed.), Berkeley CA 2003, 128.

³ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Michael Shaw (trans.), Minneapolis 1984, 51-52.

These words were written some thirty-five years ago but there is no indication that Bürger has ever changed his mind. In a recent catalogue essay for a Jeff Wall exhibition in Vienna, for example, Bürger repeats his conviction that Duchamp's readymades have nothing to do with individual artistic genius; they are famous simply because Duchamp was the first to make the claim that any ordinary object can be a work of art if the artist says it is.⁴

The corollary, of course, is that there can be no meaningful distinction between "high" and "low" art. In his influential *After the Great Divide* (1986), Andreas Huyssen echoes Bürger in asserting that Duchamp's urinal can be classified as art "only by virtue of the fact that an artist exhibit[ed] it". As Huyssen puts it:

In those days [e.g. the war years], the audience recognized the provocation and was shocked. It understood all too well that Dada attacked all the holy cows of bourgeois art-religion. And yet Dada's frontal attack was unsuccessful, not only because the movement exhausted itself in negation, but also because even then bourgeois culture was able to co-opt any kind of attack made on it. Duchamp himself saw this dilemma and withdrew from the art scene in 1923.⁵

This statement is oddly confused. Dada may well have "attacked all the holy cows of bourgeois art-religion" (even this is a sweeping generalization), but Duchamp is not synonymous with Dada.⁶ The fact is that Duchamp hadn't so much as heard of Dada when, on a notepad of 1913, he posed the urgent question, "Can one make works that are not works of 'art'?"⁷, or when in 1913-15, he produced the "mechanical drawing" of the *Chocolate Grinder*, the wood box with canvas "measure" strips on glass called *Three Standard Stoppages*, and the first readymades – the *Bottle Rack* and the *Bicycle Wheel* – these last two left behind in his Paris studio when he came to the US, and accidentally thrown in the trash by his sister Suzanne. The first enigmatic notes and drawings for the *Large Glass* were made in 1915. By 1916, when his friend François Picabia introduced Duchamp to Tristan Tzara's *La Première Aventure céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine*, Duchamp had completed *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (the snow shovel

⁴ See Bürger, "Zur Kritik der NeoAvantgarde", in *Jeff Wall Photographs*, exh. cat. Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna 2003, 174-98.

⁵ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Bloomington 1986, 147.

⁶ See Marjorie Perloff, "Dada without Duchamp / Duchamp without Dada: Avant-Garde Tradition and the Individual Talent", in: *Stanford Humanities Review*, 7, 1999, 1, 48-78; and *idem*, "The Conceptual Poetics of Marcel Duchamp", in: *Twenty-First Century Modernism*, Oxford 2002, 77-120.

⁷ Marcel Duchamp, "A L'Infini" (1913), in *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp, Marchand du Sel/Salt Seller*, Michel Sanouillet & Elmer Peterson (eds.), London 1975, 74.

suspended by its handle in a glass case), *With Hidden Noise* (the ball of string between brass plates with a "secret" noisemaker inside), and *Fountain*. "It wasn't at all *after* seeing Dada things", that these works were made, Duchamp assures Pierre Cabanne.⁸ Indeed, in 1920, he refused to participate in the Paris Dada salon, responding to his friend Jean Crotti's invitation with the two-word telegram "*Pode bal*" (*Peau de balle*, or "Balls to you"). As for withdrawing from the art scene in 1923, as Huyssen claims, Duchamp was, on the contrary, beginning a new phase of his career, which included the various boxes and *boîtes en valise*, the *Rotoreliefs*, and especially his ultimate "readymade", *Etant Donnés*. The latter, after all, did not go on view at the Philadelphia Museum of Art until 1967, the year before Duchamp's death.

Were the readymades, as Huyssen implies, a response to World War I? Indirectly, yes, in that it was the war that prompted Duchamp's decision to leave Paris and its increasingly oppressive "milieu artistique"⁹ for New York, where he came in contact with a whole new world of "advanced" technology. Were the "indifferent" objects Duchamp found or bought designed, in Bürgerian terms, as an "assault" on bourgeois high culture and rapidly co-opted by the capitalist art market? Was theirs an assault on the institutionalization of art in the modernist museum?¹⁰ Or was something else at stake?

Duchamp scholars – Calvin Tomkins, William Camfield, and especially Thierry de Duve¹¹ – have written brilliantly about *Fountain* itself – its purchase, its submission to the first exhibition of the *Society of Independent Artists* in April 1917, its vociferous rejection followed by witty rehabilitation via Stieglitz's "artful" photograph, and its particular visual and seman-

⁸ See Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, New York 1971 [1967], 56.

⁹ See Duchamp's letter to Walter Pach, 27 April 1915, in *Correspondence*, 35.

¹⁰ This is the view of T. J. Demos in *The Exiles of Marcel Duchamp*, Cambridge MA 2007. Duchamp's "first readymades of 1913-14", writes Demos, "[...] internalized the circulatory mobility of objects within modern capitalism by inserting commercial objections into either the domestic economy of the home studio or the institutionalization of the art gallery" (7). See also Benjamin H. D. Buchloch, "The Museum Fictions of Marcel Broodthaers", in *Museums by Artists*, A. A. Bronson & Peggy Gale (eds.), Toronto 1985, 45.

¹¹ Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography*, New York 1996; William A. Camfield, *Marcel/Duchamp/Fountain*, Houston 1989; Thierry de Duve, "Given the Richard Mutt Case", in *Kant After Duchamp*, Cambridge MA 1996, 88-143. An earlier version of de Duve's essay, with responses by other critics following, may be found in de Duve's edited book *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, Cambridge MA 1992, 187-241. I cite this version, which is longer and contains more images than the *Kant after Duchamp* version. See also de Duve's important earlier study, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, Dana Polan (trans.), Minneapolis 1991 [1984]. Some good documentation from the 1917 exhibition may be found in *Making Mischief: Dada Invades New York*, Francis M. Naumann & Beth Venn (eds.), New York 1997.

tic meanings¹² – but little attention has been paid to the relation of Duchamp's urinal to the art works (mostly paintings), submitted and shown by the Independents – works that reflect the popular conception of “art” in the war years. It is a relationship important, not only in clarifying Duchamp's own aesthetic, but in helping us attain a juster picture of the way individual genius positions itself vis-à-vis the dominant art practices and even the “experiments” of its own time.

The Deferral of Painting

The directors of the First Exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, held at the Grand Central Palace on Lexington Avenue in the spring of 1917, consisted of three groups. William Glackens, the president, George W. Bellows, Rockwell Kent, and Maurice Prendergast represented the Ash-Can School, which dealt primarily with realistic subject matter, although Bellows's entry for the Independents, *Cattle and Meadow Hills*, 1916, used bright Expressionist color to create mood. Alfred Stieglitz's 291 group was represented by John Marin; Stieglitz was not on the board, but he and Paul Strand did contribute some earlier photographs (for example, Stieglitz's great *The Steerage* of 1907) to the exhibition. The third group was drawn from the Arensberg circle – Arensberg himself was managing director – and included Duchamp, Man Ray, Joseph Stella, John Covert, and Morton Schamberg. Duchamp was also chosen to be the chairman of the three-man Hanging Committee (the others were Bellows and Kent) – an irony since he himself was no longer making paintings. It was Duchamp who came up with the notion that the sequence of exhibits, to be hung in alphabetical order, as had the paintings in the earlier (1910) “Exhibition of Independent Artists”,¹³ should be determined by drawing a letter from a hat. The arbitrariness of this procedure – the letter turned out to be “R” – caused consternation among Society members: the powerful artist Robert Henri withdrew from the Society and the noted patron and collector John Quinn called it “Democracy run riot”.¹⁴

The rationale of the “No jury, no prizes” policy governing the exhibition was based on the policy of the *Société des Artistes Indépendants* in Paris,

¹² *Catalogue of the First Annual Exhibition of The Society of Independent Artists* (New York: Society of Independent Artists, printed by William Edwin Rudge, 1917).

¹³ The 1910 Exhibition of Independent Artists in New York consisted of 260 paintings, 20 sculptures and 219 drawings and prints. Any artist who could pay the entry fee could submit work which was arranged alphabetically by each artist's last name. The organizers were the artists John Sloan, Robert Henri, Arthur B. Davies, and Walt Kuhn.

¹⁴ Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 180.

founded in 1884. The *Indépendants* had cited the authority of none other than the most prominent of classical painters, Ingres, who had declared, "A jury, whatever the means adopted for its formation, will always work badly. The need of our time is for unlimited admission [to the Salon ...]. I consider unjust and immoral any restriction tending to prevent a man from living from the product of his work".¹⁵ The great Impressionist painter Renoir was also cited as an opponent to the prize system.

No prizes, no juries: *ergo* anyone could be an artist. According to Article II, section 3 of the bylaws of the Society of Independents, "Any artist, whether a citizen of the United States or of any foreign country, may become a member of the Society upon filing an application therefore, paying the initiation fee and the annual dues of a member, and exhibiting at the exhibition in the year that he joins". The initiation fee was one dollar, the annual dues, five; for six dollars, any self-designated artist could therefore exhibit up to two works; for another four dollars, each artist could buy the space for one illustration in the catalogue.¹⁶

The response to this call for submissions was astonishing. The exhibition included 2125 works by 1235 artists (821 men, 414 women), arranged in alphabetical order "regardless of manner or medium", although in practice the medium was predominantly oil painting, along with a few sculptures, drawings, and photographs. Among the 1235 artists, were some famous names, from Picasso and Picabia to Jean Metzinger, Marsden Hartley, John Sloan, Arthur Dove, and Charles Demuth, most of these presented by earlier and lesser work and hence not especially noted by the exhibition's reviewers. The vast majority in any case, were entirely unknown: on the two-column list of P's in the catalogue, for example, Picabia is next to Love Porter, Picasso next to Alexander Portnoff. The democratic policy governing the exhibition elicited strong response: 20,000 people were reported to have filed through the galleries of the Grand Central Palace on Lexington Avenue during its month-long (April 10-May 6) run.

Duchamp, whose New York reputation was still based primarily on his *Nude Descending a Staircase*, exhibited at the Armory Show of 1913, made no submission to the Independents. But two days before the official opening on April 10, an object titled *Fountain* was delivered to the Grand Central Palace, together with an envelope bearing the membership and entry fee of one Richard Mutt from Philadelphia. Duchamp, in the company of Arensberg and Joseph Stella, had purchased this object (see fig. 1)

¹⁵ See Foreword to the *Catalogue*, 11.

¹⁶ *Catalogue*, 11-12; de Duve, *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, 190-91.

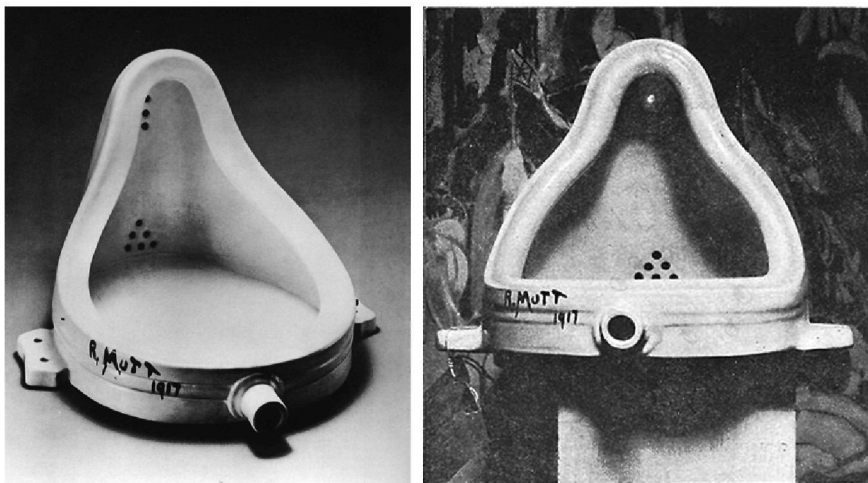


Fig. 1 (left): Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain* (1963); third version selected by Ulf Linde after lost original of 1917. Signed by Duchamp. Fig. 2 (right): Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, ready-made 1917 (lost). Original 1917 photograph by Alfred Stieglitz, silver gelatin print, 9 5/16 x 7 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.

a few days earlier from the showroom of J. L. Mott Iron Works, a manufacturer of bathroom fixtures, at 118 Fifth Avenue. It was a “flat-back Bedfordshire” model porcelain urinal. “Duchamp”, Calvin Tomkins tells us, “had taken it back to his studio, turned it upside down and painted on the rim at the lower left, in large black letters, the name R. MUTT and the date, 1917”.¹⁷

The reaction to this entry was electric: Bellows found the urinal obscene and refused to exhibit it; Arensberg praised its “lovely form”, but to no avail. At the zero hour before the opening, the ten-member board of directors met and voted by a small margin to turn down Richard Mutt’s submission. When Glackens, the president, declared that it was “by no definition, a work of art”, Duchamp and Arensberg immediately resigned from the board in protest. *Fountain* disappeared from the premises: no one could say for sure what happened to it. But a week later, it turned up in Stieglitz’s 291 Gallery, and soon, at Duchamp’s request, the great photographer made the urinal immortal by photographing it in front of a painting by Mardsen Hartley entitled *The Warriors*, setting its smooth curve against the similar ogival shape in the painting so that it resembled a sculpture in a niche: it was soon dubbed, by Duchamp’s acquaintance, the Madonna or Buddha of the Bathroom (fig. 2).¹⁸

¹⁷ Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 181.

¹⁸ See Camfield, *Marcel/Duchamp/Fountain*, 136; de Duve, *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, 144. Hartley’s painting is in the Regent Collection, Minneapolis.



Fig. 3 (left): Louis Elshemius, *Rose Marie Calling (Supplication)*, 1916. Oil on board, 61"x40" (collection Roy F. Neuberger). Fig. 4 (center): Dorothy Rice, *The Claire Twins*. Reproduced in the *New York Sun* of 15 April 1917 (Photo Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University). Fig. 5 (right): Constantin Brancusi, *Princesse Bonaparte*, polished bronze, (Arensberg collection, Philadelphia Museum).

But why did Duchamp want Stieglitz to give his urinal this aesthetic dimension? It was a move in keeping with a related one: on the opening night of the exhibition, Duchamp declared that the two best paintings in the show were Louis Elshemius's *Rose Marie Calling*, also known as *Supplication* (fig. 3) and Dorothy Rice's *The Claire Twins* (fig. 4). This judgment, cited the next day in *The New York Sun* by the art critic Henry McBride, was as widely quoted as it was wonderfully absurd. Elshemius was a painter influenced by the Hudson River School, who was largely scorned by the New York art world for his kitschy eroticism as well as his extravagant self-promotion: in a series of pamphlets, he claimed to be an unrecognized genius – "painter, poet, musician, inventor, linguist, mystic, educator, prophet, etc."¹⁹ As de Duve puts it, "Everybody gossiped about him, nobody took him seriously, no gallery was showing him"²⁰ Indeed, the large-breasted, arm-waving, histrionically posed nude in a pastel landscape of *Supplication*, reproduced on the final page of the exhibition catalogue, belongs, not to the world of charming, delicate, and elegant portraits that dominated the Independents' galleries, but rather to the parodic world of the moustached Mona Lisa of *L.H.O.O.Q.* or, even more uncannily, to the sphere of *Etant Donnés*.²¹

But the case of *The Claire Twins* is even more intriguing. The painting (now lost; we know it only through the black-and-white reproduction in the *New York Sun* for April 15, 1917) is a poorly painted double portrait of

¹⁹ de Duve, *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, 197.

²⁰ de Duve, *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, 201.

²¹ On Duchamp's complex attitude toward Elshemius, see de Duve, *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, 202-18.

the enormously overweight and grotesque female twins who evidently performed in a sideshow for the Barnum & Bailey circus.²² Absurdly decked out in fancy dress, with inappropriately girlish headbands and flowers in their hair, the two women have vapid expressions. One holds a doll in her awkwardly painted hand. The relation of figure to dark ground is handled with little skill. Indeed, this unpleasant painting bears little resemblance to the countless “pretty” portraits in the exhibition – portraits of young girls in flouncy dresses and charming matrons silhouetted against fireplaces and windows.

In his review of the Independents for the *New York Sun*, Henry McBride remarks that, after seeing one too many “soporifically correct pictures of the sort that are usually rejected even by the academy”, he was delighted to “stumble upon that stupendous production by Miss Dorothy Rice, *The Claire Twins*”:²³

“Everybody laughs when they see those twins. Even the Baron de Meyer laughed. Marius de Zayas of the Modern Gallery seemed positively glued to the floor in front of them.

“You’ll be having that down in your gallery next”, I bantered him.

“I should be only too proud”, he returned. “I can’t believe a woman did that. It’s strong”.

“She asks but \$5,000 for it”, said Mr. Montross, examining the little white card beside the picture.

And McBride adds, “In regard to the ‘Claire Twins’ there will be many to agree with Mr. Duchamp in spite of the price mark, but no one that I have heard of yet agrees with him in regard to ‘Supplication’ except Mr. Eilshemius”.²⁴

What was it about *The Claire Twins* that made everyone laugh? To begin with, Duchamp’s selection and high price tag are patently absurd, given the amateur status of the painter. The information about Dorothy Rice (1892-1960) is scanty, but we know the following.²⁵ The daughter of a

²² See Catherine McNickle Chastain, “Louis Eilshemius’s ‘Svengali-like Stare’: Memsemism and the Artist’s Figurative Paintings”, in: *19th Century Art World-Wide: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture*, 5, 2006, 2, <<http://19thc-artworldwide.org/>>.

²³ The only reproduction of this painting I have been able to find accompanies Henry McBride’s article for the *New York Sun* (see note 24). In the collection of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, the photograph is reproduced in de Duve, *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, 203.

²⁴ Henry McBride, “Opening of the Independents”, in: *The New York Sun*, 15 April 1917; reprinted in McBride, *The Flow of Art: Essays in Criticism*, New Haven 1975, 124-25.

²⁵ Based on the following sources: Gary Comenas, “Timeline for 1910”, <<http://www.warholstars.org/abstractexpressionism/timeline/abstractexpressionism10.html>>; Bennard B. Perlman, *Robert Henry: His Life and Art*, New York 1991, 90; Eileen F. Lebow, *Before Amelia: Women Pilots in the Early Days of Aviation*, New York 2002, 258-59.

wealthy New York financier, she had studied briefly with Robert Henri and is listed as having contributed "interest, time and money" to the organization of the Exhibition of Independent Artists in 1910. Briefly married to the well-known artist Waldo Peirce, a great friend of Hemingway's, she dabbled in art, novel writing, and then aviation: in 1916 she was one of the first women to receive a pilot's license. Divorcing Peirce in 1917, she married a banker and sportsman named Hal Sims and took her place in Society.

In singling out *The Claire Twins*, Duchamp may well have been playing one of his elaborate spoofs. Did Dorothy Rice actually paint this now lost picture and submit it? Her name does not appear in the list of addresses at the end of the Independents catalogue, and, given the absurdly high price tag, it is just possible that Dorothy Rice was no more than a cover for Duchamp, the *Claire Twins*, whether strictly speaking Rice's or Duchamp's own creation, providing perfect grist for the mill of le *Marchand du Sel* or Rose Sélavy. Like Eilshemius's *Supplication*, in any case, Duchamp's chosen painting looks ahead to the grotesquerie of *Etant Donnés*.

But what is especially remarkable is the relationship of *The Claire Twins* to its neighbors in the show. Although the exhibition opened three days after the US finally declared war on Germany on April 7, the 2,000+ paintings almost uniformly opted for the prettiness and charm that had characterized Impressionism – the late watered-down Impressionism of portraits in the vein of Manet, Degas, and Renoir, primarily of elegant ladies or sweet young girls as well as a few lovely nudes. The other major genre is landscape painting, again in the Realist or Impressionist style; there are also some Symbolist and Expressionist paintings. Oddly, in view of the fact that the Great War was now in its fourth year, there were few paintings on the subject, and even these (for example, Henri Reuter Dahl's *London in Wartime*), represented the picturesque city rather than anything that might be upsetting or uncomfortable. Even Francisco Pausas's *Victims of War* recalls a Madonna and Child rather than the technology of air bombardment or trench warfare.

All in all, there was little in this blockbuster exhibition that didn't satisfy the aesthetic norms of, say, a Robert Henri, whose popular *The Art Spirit* of 1923 (recently reissued in an 85th anniversary edition) contains nuggets like the following:

There are moments in our lives, there are moments in a day, when we seem to see beyond the usual. Such are the moments of our greatest happiness. Such are the moments of our greatest wisdom. If one could but recall his vision by some sort of sign. It was in this hope that the arts were invented. Sign-posts on the way to what may be. Sign-posts toward greater knowledge.

The effect of brilliancy is to be obtained principally from the oppositions of cool colors with warm colors, and the opposition of grave colors with bright colors. If all the colors are bright there is no brightness.

Whatever you feel or think your exact state at the exact moment of your brush touching the canvas is in some way registered in that stroke.

It is harder to see than it is to express. The whole value of art rests in the artist's ability to see well into what is before him.

Art cannot be separated from life. It is the expression of the greatest need of which life is capable, and we value art not because of the skilled product, but because of its revelation of a life's experience.

Paint what you feel. Paint what you see. Paint what is real to you.

Five minutes' consideration of the model is more important than hours of haphazard work.

To paint is to know how to put nothing on canvas, and have it look like something when you stand back.²⁶

Paint what you feel. Paint what you see. Shortly after the opening of the 1917 Exhibition, the first issue of a small magazine called *The Blind Man* came out. Issue 1 was the Independents Number; the cover boasted a caricature by Alfred Frueh representing a blind man guided through a painting exhibition by his dog. The public, it was implied not very subtly, is blind to "advanced" art. As for the critics, they are deemed to be even worse: in her article for *The Blind Man*, Mina Loy remarked sarcastically, "Only artists and serious critics can look at a grayish stickiness on smooth canvas".²⁷

The second issue (6 May, 1917), which came out immediately after the exhibition had closed, was more pointed. The cover featured Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder*, and above the title *The Blind Man* are the letters P. B. T., identifying the supposedly anonymous editors as (Henri) Pierre (Roché), Beatrice (Wood) and Totor, the nickname Roché had given to Duchamp.²⁸ Inside the issue, there appears an unsigned editorial "THE RICHARD MUTT CASE", side by side with the reproduction of *Fountain* as photographed by Stieglitz, and almost certainly written by Duchamp himself:

THE RICHARD MUTT CASE

They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit.

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

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

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

²⁶ Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit*, New York 2007[1923], *passim*.

²⁷ See de Duve, *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, 195-96.

²⁸ See de Duve, *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, 195.

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

As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.²⁹

"*He CHOSE it*", chose, moreover, an absolutely "ordinary" object: it is this declaration that has prompted avant-garde theorists from Bürger to the present to declare that Duchamp's was not a negation "of a certain form of art ('a style') but an assault on the very institution of art in bourgeois capitalist society".³⁰ The avant-garde, by this reckoning, is distinct from modernism, with its insistence on the *autonomy* of the artwork, for the avant-garde breaks down the "great divide" between art and life and hence between High and Low, elite and popular.

Or does it? Here we have to reconsider what *choice* really means in art. Suppose we try to assess Duchamp's state of mind on the eve of the 1917 Exhibition of the Independents – an exhibition he had, after all, helped to organize. Of the 2125 works shown, none was especially risqué. Even Brancusi's brilliant entry, an abstract, suggestively phallic ovoid sculpture ironically called *Princesse Bonaparte* (fig. 5) did not ruffle many feathers; unlike *Fountain*, after all, Brancusi's *Princess*, made of polished bronze, sat on a handsome pedestal like a "real" sculpture; an earlier marble version dating from 1909 had already been shown in Paris.³¹

Fountain by R. Mutt, so elegantly photographed by Stieglitz (see fig. 2), must, then, be understood as being in dialogue with the "approved" artworks of its time. Indeed, the Independents catalogue boasts three other fountains: Helen Farnsworth Mears's *Fountain of Joy* (fig. 6), Elizabeth Pendleton's *Drinking Fountain for Birds* (fig. 7), and Frederick K. Detweiler's *Miraculous Fountain in Brittany* (fig. 8). This last image is a painting of an actual fountain in front of a country church – a traditional image of the fountain of life, its water gushing from a phallic column into the "female" basin below. Farnsworth's and Pendleton's are more fanciful images, the former displaying a Cupid with a horn and arm raised, summoning the animals (leaping bunnies with big ears), depicted running around the shal-

²⁹ *The Blind Man*, 2 (May 1917), 4-5. The text is reproduced in Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 185. On the question of authorship of this editorial, signed P. B. T., the reference to plumbing in the last line slyly invokes Duchamp's first pronouncement when he arrived in the US, frequently cited by the press at the time.

³⁰ Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 52.

³¹ See Radu Varia, *Brancusi*, New York 1986, 182-86.



Fig. 6 (left): Helen Farnsworth Mears, *Fountain of Joy*. Fig. 7 (center): Elizabeth Pendleton, *Drinking Fountain for Birds*. Fig. 8 (right): Fredrik K. Dettwiller, *Miraculous Fountain, Brittany*. (All three from 1917 *Catalogue*)

low circular bowl of the fountain, placed on a stone slab. Pendleton's recalls Art Nouveau: her drinking fountain for birds has an elegant column with acanthus leaves and other décor and is topped by twin pelicans; a stork stands below, presumably waiting its turn to drink from the fountain.

Why were these three entries deemed "works of art" whereas Duchamp's *Fountain* could not be exhibited? Obviously because they were *handmade objects* – objects that displayed *craft* – a decorative flair that strove to make each fountain a unique piece of sculpture. Yet the irony is that it is Duchamp's *Fountain* that is unique, even visually. Traditional upright urinals, as Jack Spector reminds us in his witty essay "Duchamp's Gendered Plumbing",³² were designed to receive and remove a standing man's urination, his *jet d'eau* ("fountain"); in contrast the female's downward stream. Indeed, it has been argued that Duchamp's *Fountain* had an exclusionary significance for Frenchmen: its awkwardness for women embodies an implicit sexism. But Duchamp seems to have anticipated this critique in turning his urinal upside down, making it a female shape. Even the frontal hole (truncated penis? protruding vagina?) is equivocal. Indeed, the piece's androgyny recalls Brancusi's *Princesse* (see fig. 5) with its comparable male/female ambiguity.

Fountain, in other words, was carefully chosen, altered, signed, and named so as to call into question, not anything as general – and in a sense, clichéd – as the "capitalist art market" or the museum institution but to create a witty and subtle dialogue with those "art" objects of the time to which it bore a family resemblance. A similar dialectic involves a painting reproduced early in the catalogue, Henrik Hillbom's *The Making of an American* (fig. 9). As it happens, this particular painting is currently advertised on E-BAY on a site called Fantasia Antiques. Depicted on the web-

³² Jack Spector, "Duchamp's Gendered Plumbing: A Family Business", in *Tout-Fait: The Marcel Duchamp Journal of Studies Online* (2008), <www.toutfait.com/online_journal/>

site in color, *The Making of an American* carries a price of \$5,000 and is described as follows:

This wonderful oil on canvas painting is ca 1910 and was painted during the first world war. It shows a standing liberty figure, a man, a woman, baby, child, eagle and cornucopia and much more. Note the patriotic influence of Impressionist Childe Hassam [also in the Independents Exhibition], one of Hillbom's compatriots at The Old Lyme Colony who also painted in the patriotic Impressionist style.

This painting measures 30"H x 24"W. The colors are marvelous. It has been brought back to its original vibrancy by Page Conservation in Washington DC, restores for the National Gallery of Art. [...] It is a real treasure.³³

And the copy goes on to tell us about Henrik Hillbom (1863-1948), who was born in Sweden and studied in Paris with Benjamin Constant and Jules Lefebvre. Hillbom "was a member of the Old Lyme Colony School of Artists, gaining its name due to the large number of painters then living in Old Lyme, Connecticut, which became the first major art colony in America to encourage Impressionism. Old Lyme was accessible to its New York City-based painters by excellent rail service".

Duchamp would have relished that delicious description, especially the dating of this "World War I" painting in 1910! One cannot help wondering if he had seen it by 1915 when he made his first American ready-made (fig. 10) – a snow shovel, with a flat, galvanized iron blade and a wooden handle, which he bought in a hardware store on Columbus Ave. As Calvin Tomkins notes:

There were thousands just like it in hardware stores all over America, stacked up in advance of the winter storms, or, as Duchamp would say in the title that he inscribed on the metal reinforcing plate across the business end, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*. Why did he choose this particular item? He [...] had never seen a snow shovel before, he explained some years later – *they did not make such things in France* [...]. Duchamp, after taking it home and signing it "[from] Marcel Duchamp 1915" (to show that it was not 'by' but simply 'from' the artist), tied a wire to the handle and hung it from the ceiling"³⁴

Describing his newest readymade, wittily called *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, in a letter to his sister Suzanne, Duchamp remarked, "Don't try too hard to understand it in the Romantic or Impressionistic or Cubist sense – that has nothing to do with it".³⁵

But of course it does have a great deal to do with it – as complex parody. The picture of the famed Liberty figure – a secular goddess – silhouetted against the American flag, proffering a huge shovel to the eager

³³ <<http://www.fantasia-antiques.com/Fantasia/hillbom.html/>>

³⁴ Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 157-58, my italics.

³⁵ Cited in Tomkins, *Duchamp*, 157.

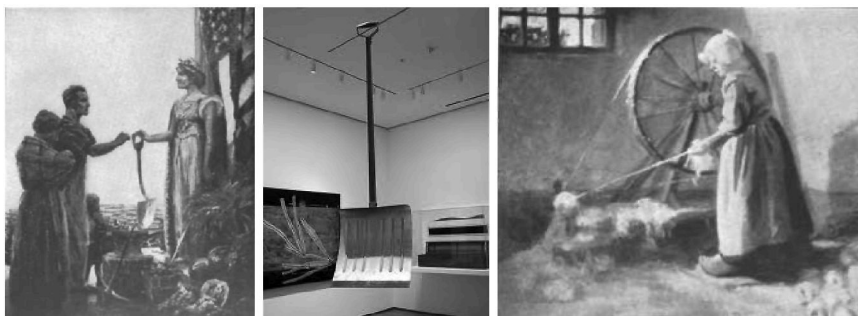


Fig. 9 (left): Henrik Hillbom, *The Making of an American*, ca. 1910. Oil painting, 30"x24", Fantasia Antiques Co. Fig. 10 (center): Marcel Duchamp, *In Advance of a Broken Arm*, 1915. Wood and galvanized-iron snow shovel, 52" high. Here the version shown in 1964 exhibition. Fig. 11 (right): May Audubon Post, *The Spinner* (from 1917 *Catalogue*)

man, who is flanked on one side by a young boy, no doubt his son, and on the other by his wife, holding a baby in her shawl, is the quintessential patriotic image of the welcoming of immigrants to the American soil, where a cornucopia of fruits and vegetables (lower right) greets the new worker-to-be. And the title immediately brings to mind Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*, written in Paris between 1906-08. In this context, Duchamp's *In Advance* can be construed as his own "Making of an American": the snow shovel, rendered useless, providing his own line of work as a new arrival in the US. Romanticism – Impressionism – more specifically Patriotic Impressionism as it's called on the Fantasia Antique site – the very core of the Independents' Exhibition – was thus turned inside out.

The Chairman of the Hanging Committee, in any case, had his work cut out for him. Such paintings as May Audubon Post's nostalgic *The Spinner* (fig. 11) must have made Marcel long to be photographed giving his own bicycle wheel a spin (fig. 12). For what world were the Independents' organizers, contributors, and viewers living in? April 1917: Duchamp, who had long ago rejected one-to-one mimesis and a photographic realism that might have given the audience images of trench warfare and mangled corpses, knew that at the least art must recognize the technology of the present. Ergo, it was not Christine Lumsdon's *Theodora*, with her long raven tresses that featured at the Independents but an ordinary steel comb [1916]. "Classify combs", a Duchamp note of 1915 reads, "by the number of their teeth".³⁶

³⁶ Sanouillet, *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, 71.



Fig. 12: Marcel Duchamp, *Bicycle Wheel*, 1913 (1964 Replica). 50 1/2 in. high.

It is not a pretty thought, nor is the steel dog comb in any way attractive. Like Duchamp's chosen favorites – Eilshemius's *Supplication* and Rice's *The Claire Twins* – those grotesque counterparts of the lovely ladies and idyllic landscapes that filled the 1917 exhibition – the readymades usher in a new era. The enemy is neither New York capitalist culture (which Duchamp loved!) nor the authority of the museum: on the contrary, Duchamp wanted very much to have his work on display: no one was more delighted than he when, in 1951, the Philadelphia Museum agreed to purchase the entire Arensberg Collection (including the bulk of Duchamp's own work), and to allow the artist to plan the precise layout of his individual pieces.³⁷ Once again, it seems, Duchamp was to become the Chairman of the Hanging Committee.

From Curator to Creator

"The choice of readymades", Duchamp famously told Pierre Cabanne in the late 1960s, "is always based on visual indifference and at the same time, on the total absence of good or bad taste".³⁸ Before we conclude, as have many critics, that Duchamp is herewith rejecting *art* as autonomous category, let us read further. Here is a passage in the preceding interview:

I shy away from the word "creation". In the ordinary, social meaning of the word – well, it's very nice but, fundamentally, I don't believe in the creative function of the artist. He's a man like any other. It's his job to do certain things, but the businessman does certain things also, you understand? On the other hand, the word "art" interests me very much. If it comes from Sanskrit, as I've heard, it signifies "making". Now everyone makes something, and those who make things on a canvas, with a frame, they're called artists. Formerly, they were called craftsmen, a term I prefer. We're all craftsmen, in civilian or military or artistic life.³⁹

The distinction that needs to be drawn, Duchamp suggests, is that between *art* and *craft* – the techniques many people can be *trained* to master without making anything that really matters. In a mass society like ours, where "those who make things on a canvas, with a frame" are classified as "artists", the observer must approach the art scene with a certain irony. The "artists" who exhibited at the Independents had been brought up on the late Impressionism of the turn of the century; their landscapes, bearing titles like *June Morning, Kinderhook Creek* (Frank M. Moore) or *The Japanese Bridge* (Alice Worthington Ball) were nothing if not pleasing. The skill of

³⁷ See *Correspondence*, 199 and further.

³⁸ Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 48.

³⁹ Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 16.

these paintings is evident: no doubt, the majority of their creators had been to art school and learned their *métier*. Occasionally, one of these paintings turns up in an auction catalogue, but the large majority have simply vanished.

Is such painting all that different from the largely anonymous craft we associate with needlepoint or jewelry design or pottery? "I tried", Duchamp tells Cabanne, "to find something which would not recall what had happened before. I have had an obsession about not using the same things".⁴⁰ Thus, in his "delay in glass" (*The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even*), Duchamp worked to "rehabilitate" point perspective, to "mix story, anecdote (in the good sense of the word), with visual representation, while giving less importance to the visual element, than one generally gives in painting".⁴¹ The aim was to produce works that could not be "looked at' in the aesthetic sense of the word". And Duchamp explains:

Since Courbet, it's been believed that painting is addressed to the retinal. That was everyone's error. The retinal shudder! Before, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral. [...] our whole century is completely retinal, except for the Surrealists, who tried to go outside it somewhat. And still, they didn't go so far! [...] down deep [André Breton is] still really interested in painting in the retinal sense. It's absolutely ridiculous. It has to change.⁴²

It Must Change: this was the understanding of early avant-garde practice. Duchamp did *not* reject "art"; what he rejected was what he labeled *retinal* art – the art of the 19th century as he had witnessed it especially in the Paris of his youth, the art of sensuous surface and visual pleasure. For the 20th century, Duchamp sensed, something different was needed – something more intellectual that might engage the mass culture of the moment, with its advertising, its sophisticated technology, its merchandise and machinery. The US entry into the Great War made such intervention more urgent. By August 1918, Duchamp would be on his way to Buenos Aires, where he tried to escape the war only to learn, soon after arrival, that his beloved brother Raymond had been killed in action. Given these circumstances, Heinrich Hillbom's sentimental and idealized image of American immigrant life must have struck Duchamp as absurdly irrelevant. *The Making of an American?* Perhaps the presentation of the shovel itself, wittily captioned *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, was more consonant with the conditions of modern life.

Perhaps the clearest statement Duchamp made about the meaning of the readymade is found in a little-known interview with the art historian

⁴⁰ Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 38.

⁴¹ Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 38-39.

⁴² Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 43.

and Yale curator George Heard Hamilton, recorded in 1959 as part of a BBC series called “Art, Anti-Art”:

G.H.H. – *Is there any way in which we can think of a readymade as a work of art?*

M.D. – That is the very difficult point because art first has to be defined. [...] We have tried, everybody has tried, and every century there is a new definition of art. I mean that there is not one essential that is good for all centuries. So if we accept the idea that trying not to define art is a legitimate conception, then the readymade can be seen as a sort of irony, or an attempt at showing the futility of trying to define art, because here it is, a thing that I call art. I didn’t even make it myself, as we know art means to make, hand make, to make by hand. It’s a hand-made product of man, and there instead of making, I take it ready-made, even though it was made in a factory. But it is not made by hand, so it is a form of denying the possibility of defining art.

You don’t define electricity; you see electricity as a result, but you can’t define it. [...] You can’t say what it is but you know what it does. You see, that is the same thing with art: you know what art does but you don’t know what it is. It is a sort of inner current in man, or something which you don’t have to define. [...]

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

It has a conceptual value if you want but, it takes away all technical jargon.

G.H.H. – *The irony, of course, is very much part of the world of the First War.*

M.D. – Yes, it was a very important form of introducing humor in a very serious world at that time.⁴³

Not message but value – and conceptual value at that, setting the object in question “from everything else in the world”. Visual indifference is not, for Duchamp, equivalent to aesthetic indifference. On the contrary, art is an “inner current in man”, defined not by what it *is* but what it *does*. Here is the foundation of the Conceptualism to come. In Duchamp’s case, conceptualism went hand in hand with intertextuality – specifically, the ironic dialogue with the artworks of Duchamp’s own moment. Against the late Impressionist, proto-Cubist, Expressionist, and even abstract forms created by the artists of the day – for example, Mrs. A. Roosevelt’s “abstract” sculpture *Tennis Player*, featured on the first page of the 1917 exhibition catalogue the readymade “was a very important form of introducing humor in a very serious world”.

And so *Fountain* by R. Mutt. Far from being an “ordinary” object, it was a conceptually brilliant production. The upside-down urinal with its equivocal female form becomes the receptacle for the male. The name *Mutt* plays on the comic strip *Mutt and Jeff*; Richard in French is slang for

⁴³ George Heard Hamilton, “Marcel Duchamp Speaks”, original (1959) reproduced in *Etant donné: Marcel Duchamp*, 4 (2002), 108-13, here 111. See also <www.marcel-duchamp.com>.

moneybags. Richard Mutt: a rich guy, with a special androgynous urinal.⁴⁴ A work not made but *chosen* and then "assisted" with a title and date. Photographed by Stieglitz, it emerges as the Buddha of the Bathroom, a beautiful artwork. And thus it is depicted in *The Blind Man* – the magazine for those who don't "see" so much as "think". "Can one", to return to Duchamp's question, "make works that are not 'works of art'?" Yes, and *Fountain*, refused admission to a set of galleries containing 2125 "works of 'art,'" has become the object now celebrated as one of the signal works of modern art.

Was it, as so many critics have argued, a triumph for the demotic vis-à-vis elitist or "high" art? Did Duchamp's ostensible repudiation of the aesthetic help to break down what Huyssen calls the "great divide" between High and Low? The J. L. Mott urinal was certainly "low" – an ordinary thing of everyday life, as were Duchamp's shovel and comb, his coat hanger and bottle rack. But the role of *art*, from Duchamp's perspective, was not to "reach out" to such things and grant them equal time in the interest of fairness and diversity, as is now commonly thought, but to *transform* them. The actual intention in choosing and selecting, in setting aside the chosen object from the hardware store "from everything else in the world" was nothing if not aesthetic, the paradox being that the "aesthetic", no longer conflated with the "beautiful", could once again suggest that other pole--the sublime.

It is one of the delicious ironies of art history. And it provides us with important lessons. Today, so the current orthodoxy would have it, everything is subject to all but instant commodification and reification: invent a new form and it quickly becomes grist for the art market and the museum mill. The same holds true, though to a lesser degree given the absence of real capital involved, for poetry. Wasn't it the fate of the Beats to be appropriated by blue jean ads, for Sylvia Plath's lyric to become no more than a one-liner in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall*?

Or is it possible that the avant-garde of the postwar years was elsewhere? Think of John Cage. Kyle Gann's 2010 study of Cage's 4'33" describes the process whereby this notorious mid-century piano composition – a piece of music that doesn't contain a single musical note – has gradually come to be understood as the major work it is.⁴⁵ Long considered mere joke or provocation, 4'33" is now frequently "played": indeed, at this writing, it has become a popular item for experimental films, providing as it does such astonishing possibilities for performance and inter-

⁴⁴ I discuss the actual formal and conceptual elements of *Fountain* in *Twenty-First Century Modernism*, and compare Camfield, *Marcel/Duchamp/Fountain*, and de Duve, *The Definitely Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, *passim*.

⁴⁵ Kyle Gann, *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage's 4'33"*, New Haven 2010.

pretation.⁴⁶ Like Duchamp, who was one of his idols, Cage was assumed to make no distinction between “art” and “life”, but as the decades have passed, we have come to see that, in Cage’s words, “One does not then make just any experiment, but one does what must be done. One does something else”.⁴⁷

Too often the question “Can one make works which are not works of ‘art?’” is equated with, say, Joseph Beuys’s famous insistence that anyone can be an artist. But Duchamp made no such argument; on the contrary, his view was that art was so important it couldn’t always be left to those called “artists”. Yet to make that point in the century of world wars, irony was more effective than pronunciamiento, humor more effective than the language of perpetual crisis.

Questioned by Pierre Cabanne about the motive of *The Large Glass*, Duchamp remarked that “perspective was very important. The ‘Large Glass’ constitutes a rehabilitation of perspective, which had then been completely ignored and disparaged. For me perspective became absolutely scientific. [...] It’s a mathematical, scientific perspective based on calculations [...] and dimensions”.⁴⁸ Here Duchamp was surely taking a little poke at his friend Apollinaire, who as spokesman for “The New Spirit” in the France of the World War I years, had dismissed perspective as totally passé. Certainly, the Cubists had made this case. When a particular aesthetic notion becomes a piety, Duchamp implies, it is time, in Cage’s words, to do something else. Indeed, perhaps it is time to remember that the pleasure we take in the productions of *art*, now as in the past, is the pleasure of what Duchamp, recapturing the 1911 performance of Raymond Roussel’s *L’Impressions d’Afrique*, called “the madness of the unexpected”?

⁴⁶ See, for example, “Cage Against the Machine: 4’33””. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPXP9wdV4aE&feature=player_embedded>

⁴⁷ John Cage, *Silence*, Middletown CT 1962, 68.

⁴⁸ Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, 38.

Instrument of Inspiration: High/Low Illusions in British Experimental Music and After

Alexis Paterson

In theory we believed in integration and being gregarious, in practice we were isolationists and parochialists; in theory we rejected the musical establishment, in practice we asked for its support [...] in theory we wished to be “an instrument of inspiration”, in practice we appeared to many as “a pessimistic symptom of a system in decay”; in theory we wished to build an open society, in practice we had created a closed fraternity; in theory we regarded people as a source of inspiration and in practice we were suspicious of our audiences. And so on. We willed one thing and caused its opposite: the anarchist’s dilemma!¹

In the Summer of 1981, John Tilbury – a key figure in the British Experimental scene and an early member of Cornelius Cardew’s Scratch Orchestra – published an article that outlined the factors he believed had contributed the ensemble’s decline. This “crisis” is summed up most clearly in the paragraph quoted above: the Scratch Orchestra remained embedded in those same institutional roles it sought to challenge. Tilbury concludes that: “disenchantment began when it finally dawned on me that this music bore precious little relation to the real world”.² What Tilbury’s article reflects is an ongoing concern in “classical” music (and musicological) circles with the public accessibility and consumption of the contemporary music that can be discernibly linked to a Western classical tradition.

While the British Experimentalists (of which Tilbury is generally seen as a representative) often positioned themselves as in some way reactionary to the mainstream European avant-garde, many commentators have since noted that their audiences were often drawn from the same spheres as other modernist musics. This contradiction becomes a central focus of Tilbury’s 1981 misgivings, yet he concludes that “the artist will necessarily

¹ John Tilbury, “The Experimental Years: A View From the Left”, in: *Contact*, 22, 1981, 16-21; here quoted from online version, para 5 of 30. <http://www.users.waitrose.com/~chobbs/tilbury_left.html>

² Tilbury, “The Experimental Years”, para. 28 of 30.

integrate the experience and voice the consciousness of that group whose experience in general resembles his own".³ In other words, despite the Experimentalist's desire to challenge the avant-garde, this was a challenge from the "inside": mounted by classically trained musicians thoroughly versed in the avant-garde they professed to be undermining.

However, at one point in the article, Tilbury turns his attention to the music of La Monte Young and Terry Riley, arguing that Riley in particular, had "managed to bridge the gap between the experimentalists and the pop world".⁴ This perception of minimalism as the great leveller between classical and popular music is one that has persisted for half a century, and one that will be challenged in this essay: from the early works of Young and Riley to the ad-friendly palate of Michael Nyman and the "postminimal punk" of Steve Martland, one can point to assumptions about the "other" of mass culture which are misleadingly general.

The origins of this championing of minimalism as an antidote to modernist exclusivity can be traced to its development at the same time as an emerging postmodern consciousness. The supposed crossing of the high/low divide in cultural spheres has become a central preoccupation of postmodern discourse: specifically, an engagement with the sociocultural implications of a modernist opposition between mass (or popular) culture and elitist (or institutionalised) artworks. However, this "crossing" is also closely linked with the notion of "crossover" between formerly distinct groups. For example, in music, between jazz and Western art traditions (Swingle Singers, Mark-Anthony Turnage); between folk music or ethnically-specific musics and popular culture (Gogol Bordello, Beirut) and in other arts between traditional techniques and the instantaneity of media image (the poetry of Adrian Henri or the subversive art-as-advertisement of Jenny Holzer).

While no strict definition of what might qualify a type of music or artwork as crossover seems to have entered this region of discourse, it seems that the assimilation of techniques, ideas and objects outside a given region of cultural practice – the use of which challenge a perceived "division" – is the element common to all of the examples above. Therefore, it is perhaps the common identification of "rock" elements in minimalism (a tonal centre, repetition, strong basslines and often amplified, band-like ensembles) that has led it to be so commonly associated with this idea of bridging the high/low divide. Fredric Jameson argues that it is the fact of *incorporation* (rather than quotation) of references from mass or other cultures that serves to remove older evaluative frameworks that

³ Tilbury, "The Experimental Years", para. 10 of 30.

⁴ Tilbury, "The Experimental Years", para. 4 of 30.

made use of cultural division, since the presence of such references in a context that lacks the violence of the modernist parody makes such comparative assessments meaningless.⁵ There have, however, been challenges to this observation (and to the idea that the incorporation of other musics serves to remove barriers to accessing what was formerly perceived as an elitist artform) on a number of levels.

Firstly, critics argue that high culture is still recognisably such, but that the elevated, “high” art status can now be identified within all genres and cultural sectors. This being the case, they reject the idea that the elitism of the modernist era is effectively challenged. In addition, many commentators point to the institutional focus that had formerly placed an emphasis on Western art music, suggesting it is the hierarchy *between* genres that has received the greatest transformation, rather than the hierarchy *within*. For example, although popular music discourse has become a subject in its own right within musicology, Headlam points out that influential popular music theorist, Andrew Goodwin “even goes so far as to distinguish between ‘pop music’ and ‘rock music’ by defining pop as a manufactured product by a faceless conglomerate and rock as an authentic and original creation from a defined author/performer”.⁶ The opposition to mass consumption that is articulated so strongly in (for example) Adorno’s writing, is in fact manifested in altered forms within a supposedly plural postmodernism: the broadening of academic scope merely indicates a more inclusive field of reference. Some also argue (Hans Bertens is one example⁷) that many theorists, particularly those whose work has a basis in modernist discourse, have inherited a dislike of mass culture that predisposes them to negative emphasis on such challenges to the divide, perhaps leading to exaggerated claims regarding the breakdown of traditional divisions.

Among these exaggerated claims, one might turn to the typical musicological profiling of two successful “postminimal”⁸ composers who have found commercial success beyond the normal “classical” routes: Steve Martland and Michael Nyman. While the music of these two composers is

⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London 1991, 64.

⁶ Dave Headlam, “Does the Song Remain the Same? Questions of Authorship and Identification in the Music of Led Zeppelin”, in: *Concert Music, Rock and Jazz since 1945: Essays and Analytical Studies*, Elizabeth West Marvin & Richard Hermann (eds.), New York 1995, 313–64 (321).

⁷ See Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*, London 1995.

⁸ The debate surrounding the application of this term is too complex to be given proper attention in this article. In this context, it will be used simply to mean ‘repetitive music that goes beyond the element of rigorous simplicity found in early minimal works’. For my full evaluation of minimal categorisation, see Alexis Paterson, *The Minimal Kaleidoscope: Exploring Minimal Music Through the Lens of Postmodernity* (Cardiff, unpublished PhD thesis, 2010).

quite different in terms of aural surface (Nyman retains the triadic, constantly moving surfaces typified in the minimalism of Philip Glass, while Martland's brash, electrified ensembles are more reminiscent of Louis Andriessen's hard repetition), they share some common traits. Both incorporate past historical models and devices (for example, Purcellian Passacaglia or ground bass) with a postminimal soundworld, both formed their own, composer-led ensembles (comprising a mixture of classical and "rock" instruments), and both had their early work championed by those in the "mainstream" (for Michael Nyman, a long-standing film soundtrack collaboration with director Peter Greenaway, and for Martland the first recordings of his music on Tony Wilson's Factory record label). Typically, both composers' success at the hands of "mainstream" mechanisms (films and "popular" record labels) are taken as an example of how minimalism has broken down the high/low divide and entered into popular culture. Or have they?

The perceived breakdown of the high/low divide is often associated with a popularisation of "high" art. However, the origins of this concept are much more concerned with the mutual assimilation of ideas and blurring of distinctions between genres (Jameson points to the architectural practice of echoing existing parts of local cultural and social fabric in new buildings) than with the direct appeal of any particular area to the mass market. Precisely for this reason, some commentators avoid the populist perspective in describing this phenomenon, fearing that the incorporation of aspects of popular culture will be mistaken for *popularity* (here Jameson uses the example of folk music as a genre that incorporates traditional and local elements while not being subjected to the branding and mass-marketing that would be associated with "popular" music).⁹ While the pluralism of the market guarantees (to an extent) that certain products will become popular within certain demographics, the popular perspective is problematic in that there will always be groups who contest any claims of dominance over the tastes of a "public" of which they consider themselves to be a part. In the cases of Nyman and Martland, one must question the "popularity" (from a mass cultural perspective) of either Greenaway's films or the Factory label. Notorious certainly, iconic

⁹ However, it should be noted that, had Jameson been writing from a current British perspective, it would not be true to say that folk is not branded and mass-marketed in the same way as "popular" music. Indeed, events such as the BBC folk awards; the success of artists such as Jim Moray, Kate Rusby, or Cara Dillon, and the popularity of festivals such as Larmer Tree or Wychwood, points to a mainstream, profitable "face" of folk that serves what Jameson might describe as a populist simulacra. In the UK at least, the D.I.Y Punk movement might be a more fitting demonstration of Jameson's argument.

perhaps,¹⁰ but both Greenaway and Wilson might fall into that same category of “authentic”, “high” art in their respective cultural arenas that Headlam identifies in Goodwin’s writing.

The adoption of “plurality” by many theorists to refer not only to the pluralism described above, but also to indicate the current flexibility of traditionally rigid boundaries between different aspects of the cultural sphere, is precisely the blurring of a distinction between *popularisation* and *plurality* that so often leads to the focus on minimalism as a form of music which bridges the high/low divide. Yet this focus leads us to question precisely how “popular” minimalism (and composers such as Martland or Nyman) have really become. Minimalism is often discussed in reference to its relationship with popular music, highlighting the migration of various performers between two traditionally distinct areas of musical practical (John Cale, for example, moved from La Monte Young’s Theatre of Eternal Music to The Velvet Underground; Joby Talbot composes what might be described as “postminimal” works, but also performs with The Divine Comedy). Yet crediting minimalism with blurring the distinction between “high” and “low” art forms perpetuates a notion of value based on relative complexity: challenging music will serve an elite audience; that which is simpler or more immediate will deliver for the masses. Any view of minimalism that equates its simplicity of elements with a popular following is not, in fact, blurring these traditional distinctions, but reinforcing them.

Once again, the question of minimalism’s popularity is riddled with contradictions: while composers such as Martland are relatively unknown despite their association with a “popular” record label, Steve Reich’s *Music for Eighteen Musicians* (without any similar associations) “was named ‘one of the 10 best pop albums of 1978’”¹¹. Even before its commercial release, *Music for Eighteen Musicians* had been greeted with considerable acclaim, receiving a standing ovation at its premiere on 24 April 1976,¹² just as *Drumming* had five years earlier. The predominantly tonal sound world of works like *Drumming* may be regarded as one of the principal contributors to minimalism’s popularity, and the connections that are made between

¹⁰ Of course, even the use of the word “iconic” or the way in which it is applied, is a product of very specific social contexts and their associate arbiters of taste.

¹¹ Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves: American Minimal Music as Cultural Practice*, Berkeley & Los Angeles 2005, 26. Fink’s punctuation in itself speaks volumes about how remarkable a success musicologists consider such achievements.

¹² See Tom Johnson, “Steve Reich and 18 Other Musicians”, in: *The Voice of New Music: New York City 1972-1982. A Collection of Articles Originally Published in The Village Voice*, Eindhoven 1989, 224-26 (first publ. “Steve Reich’s ‘Music for 18 Musicians’”, *Village Voice*, 10 May 1976).

popular music and minimalism.¹³ However, for those who stood to gain from minimalism's success (notably the record companies and publishers that promoted this new music), rhetoric that actively distanced minimalism from recent avant-garde trends and hinted at realignment with traditional harmony was advantageous. MacDonald, for example, highlights the exclusivity of minimalism's avant-garde roots when he notes that "the recent success story of minimalism is all the more remarkable for the fact that less than a decade ago it was the exclusive preserve of the cerebral avant-garde and confined to audiences of dozens in New York lofts".¹⁴

This latter point – that early minimalism did not enjoy the degree of success that has subsequently made it so ubiquitous – is an important one. Indeed, Philip Glass presents a good example of a composer whose Minimalist concerns have altered greatly during the course of his career in a way that has "popularised" his output, but at the same time moved away from strictly minimal concerns. Robert Schwarz argues that as Glass' success has increased, the composer has focused his attention on the maintenance of a certain palette to meet the expectations of his mass audience: "a large and devoted public that expects a familiar style and is not disappointed when it gets it".¹⁵ That the level of Glass' success can be attributed to a certain consistency of style – a predictability that recalls the rhetoric surrounding the "maufactured" and "production-line" characteristics of commercial pop – reminds us that Glass' popularity has not increased because he incorporated elements of popular music, but because (through a combination of good marketing and prolific output) his style is familiar, widely recognised, and easily replicated: Glass has crossed a divide from a "cult" or "exclusive" following, to mass appeal. Yet this is not the same thing as a "crossover" of stylistic divisions – a point regularly overlooked by musicologists keen to distance the uniformity (many would say blandness) of Glass' later works from a still evolution-based model of musical history.

Yet the crossover "myth" persists. The commercial success of minimalism suggests an ability to engage with the wider public that is not

¹³ This return to tonality might be more accurately described as a rejection of dissonance, or a favouring of a tonal centre, since the suggestion that Minimalism functions according to the established conventions of Western tonal practice is clearly undermined by common slurs such as "going-nowhere music".

¹⁴ MacDonald, *The People's Music*, London 2003, 174.

¹⁵ K. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists*, London 1996, 166. Keith Potter has pointed to the re-"packaging" of Glass' back catalogue, suggesting that the trilogy of operas begun by *Einstein on the Beach* was "probably commercially conceived as well as retrospective" (Keith Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, Cambridge 2000, 324). Potter is referring to the way in which *Einstein* was originally billed as "music theatre" before the later opera commissions were received.