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BIO-WRITINGS

The Body and the Text in Marcel Duchamp and William Seward Burroughs

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Ex nuditate veritas

Alethurgic Gestures in the Age of Biopower, p. 5

Chapter 1

Marcel Duchamp

Desiring Liberty Between the *Visible* and *Lisible*, p. 33

Portrait of an Artist as a Chess Player, p. 37

I Chasing (Off) Art for Chess, p. 39

II Check Mate and Check made, a Matter of *Tempo*, p. 51

III Hermaphroditism, the *Infrathin* Lightness of Being, p. 67

Comment j'ai (d)écrit certains de mes Œuvres, p. 85

I Ma vie, mode d'emploi: une histoire de notes et hasard, p. 87

II Halfway between Sinner and Pyrrho, p. 96

III Behind closed doors, from Rose Selavy to *Roussel is the way*, p. 104

Chapter 2

William Burroughs

Dictatorship of the Images and Images of the Dictatorship, p. 117

Autobi(bli)ography of a Wolf, p. 121

I The Priest with the Golden Arm & His (Contr)Ad(d)ictions, , p. 123

II Family Dancing Routines, p. 138

Punching a Hole in the Big Lie, p. 163

I Degeneracy, Possession, Science and (In)Sanity, p. 165

II Rendezvous, histoire d'un baiser, p. 176

III Plat du jour, p. 186

Dossier 1, p. 195

The Large Glass: A Guided Tour by Jean Suquet

Dossier 2, p. 205

Iconology

Bibliography, p. 233

Introduction

Ex nuditate veritas

Alethurgic gestures
in the Age of Biopower

“We should learn all this from artists, and moreover be wiser than they. For this fine power of theirs usually ceases with them where art ceases and life begins; we, however, want to be the poets of our lives, and first of all in the smallest and most commonplace matters.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

“Je l'écoute faisant de l'infamie une gloire, de la cruauté un charme. Parfois il parle, en une façon de patois attendri, de la mort qui fait repentir, des malheureux qui existent certainement, des travaux pénibles, des départs qui déchirent les cœurs. Dans les bouges où nous nous enivrions, il pleurait en considérant ceux qui nous entouraient, bétail de la misère. Il relevait les ivrognes dans les rues noires. Il avait la pitié d'une mère méchante pour les petits enfants. Il s'en allait avec des gentilles de petite fille au catéchisme. Il feignait d'être éclairé sur tout, commerce, art, médecine.”

Arthur Rimbaud, *Une saison en enfer*

“We were as innocent and dangerous
as children racing cross a mine field.
Some never made it. Some drew the lot of more
treacherous fields. And some it seems turned out
all right and have lived to remember and salute the others.
An artist wears his work in place of wounds.”

Patti Smith, *To The Reader*

“Ἀποσκότησόν μου.”

(Stand out of my sun!)

Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*

“Pour moi le travail intellectuel est lié à ce que on pourrait appeler l'esthétique, ce qui signifie, se transformer soi-même. Cette transformation de soi par son propre savoir est, je pense, proche de l'expérience esthétique.”

Michel Foucault, *Le souci de soi*



Anonymous, *Alexander and Diogenes*, XVII century.

Throughout different epochs and cultures the body has been exhibited, celebrated, hidden and disavowed, and because of its symbolic charge it has always been the designed place in which the holders of power - in any of its declinations - concentrated their efforts to impose upon it all sorts of regulations and prohibitions. Because of this same symbolic value the body has also been used as a means of communication, of artistic expression or as a means to mark a sense of belonging or identity.

Starting from the second half of the XX century the body began to be used on the artistic scene as a last resource, as an instrument of opposition to the commodification established by an art system based on speculation and on the interrelations of the roles of the artist / the art dealer / the collector. From the early Sixties until the Seventies this extreme form of expression - an art made on, with or consisting of the human body - slowly and steadily penetrated under the skin of the artistic discourse and was soon labeled *Body-art*: its mise-en-scènes - exhibitions of the physicality where the subject gets the upper hand over the object, the gesture over the finished and defined oeuvre - were named performances and its protagonists were the Vienna Aktionists, Hermann Nitsch, Dennis Oppenheim, Gina Pane, Vito Acconci and Joseph Beuys.

Between the end of the Eighties and the beginning of the Nineties the body increasingly returned to occupy a central position in visual arts. Also as a consequence of a fast development of technologies, of an invasive turn of the individual dimension of life into show [Debord, 1972 and 1990], corporality came again to be a means of expression that a number of artists used to experiment and promote some new poetics that outstripped the ritualistic and the intimate typical of its predecessors. In the years when

the fall of the Berlin wall symbolically decreed the end of the Cold War - “[it was a] war fought more in the head and in the body than on the ground or in the air” [Derrida/Habermas, 2003, p.150] - and implicitly the reversal of its geopolitical setup - even though Derrida later stated that 9/11 is to be considered the real end of the Cold War [Derrida/Habermas, 2003, pp.153-154] - the artistic recourse to the body opened a breach in the wall of a representation of the individual and its consequent *subjectivization* that for more than forty years had socially, politically and culturally disciplined and shaped the very notion of the body and its use. In the shadow of socio-cultural affirmations and confutations over the Hegelian notion of “the end of history” [Fukuyama, 1989 and 1992; Derrida, 2006, pp-57-52], new esthetics related to the exploration and liberation of the body swiftly reached a dominant position in the variegated fields of artistic production.

Conceived as the reservoir of both psychic and physical energies yet to be discovered, as an indispensable tool for uncommon and hidden cognitive processes, as the place where the experimentation of new limits could still be possible [Deleuze-Guattari, 1987], physicality was to be the fulcrum of an end-of-millennium Body-art whose cartography was drawn by the performances and video-installations of artists such as Stelarc, Chris Cunningham, Orlan, Chris Burden, Davor Džalto, the Kingpins and Matthew Barney.

As a territory of control and social regulation, a crossroad of power and ideology, of esthetics and common morality [Foucault, 1997], the body acquired a completely radical centrality both in political and cultural terms in the poetics of these artists [Macrì, 1996]. Pierced by processes of non-identitarian redefinition and by an overturning of sexual and social roles, in their performances the body became a fantastic hybridization suspended between the organic and the inorganic; a sort of new reality under a perpetual process of construction, reconstruction and mutation designated to violate and the concept of the

sacred to the point that the idea of skin as inviolable boundary - as the membrane that separates inner from the outside world - was irreversibly cracked. In the time when plastic surgery allowed the mutation of sexual genders and the graft of artificial prosthesis in order to substitute some missing or defective parts with more or less sophisticated mechanisms, when genetic research could clone an organism, the performances of these artists explored the possibility of modifying the corporality according to principles that ranged over a variety of different needs, from necessity to pleasure. In the last resort, this end-of-millennium Body-art essentially reached the interbreeding of the physicality with technology, of the flesh with the machine.

It was out of a fascination for such suspended poetics of the body that my academic investigations started almost ten years ago. In the very beginning my purpose was to map out the esthetical coordinates that led to such forms of representation, to these new iconographies of the corporal, and since many of these artists explicitly based their works on the corpus of writings of several Modern authors, I tried to become acquainted with them as precursors and inspirers.

From this preliminary study I came to the plausible conclusion that in the XX century European and American literature it is possible to highlight a number of authors for whom physicality occupied an essential role in the production and organization of their work. It is possible to delineate the presence of a literary canon whose criteria are based on the relation existing between the artists' bodies and the body of their writings. As a matter of fact, in the case of several authors to precise experiences of the body corresponded a specific existential need, antecedent to an esthetic one, to subvert not only the morphology and the syntaxes of the text but also, tout court, language itself. We could draw a list of eclectic and radical artists such as Raymond Roussel, Antonin Artaud, Marcel Duchamp, Edward Estlin Cummings, Henri Michaux, William Seward

Burroughs, Samuel Beckett, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Leopoldo Maria Panero, and Carmelo Bene.

In order to frame on the page what the radical singularity of experiences inscribed on their flesh - a combination of sensations and thoughts (the latter to be considered, in the wake of the French materialist philosopher Pierre Jean Cabanis, *as secretions of the brain*¹) - more often than not such authors explored and then formulated new forms of expression destined to be seminal for many other writers and artists, including the ones that re-launched and wide-opened new horizons into what is now defined as Post-organic or Post-human Body-art.

It could of course be argued that not only in the XX century but all along the history of Western literature many authors certainly created innovative forms of narration or contributed to the evolution of styles and poetics in which corporal experiences had a prominent role.

Nevertheless, I believe that the artists I mentioned deliberately used their bodies like a Faustian laboratory, making of them almost a Hephaestus' forge through which the text and a truth were distilled. Moreover, they put the reader in front of a sort of constant dialogue between their bodies and the text. These operations in which the bodies become forms of cultural resistance against specific forms of coercions and control set up in the late-Modern political and economic structures of the society where these authors happened to live.

From such perspectives, I found inspiring what Patti Smith - the poetess and the chanteuse of the American vanguard culture between the end of the Sixties and the late Nineties of the XX century where many of the previously mentioned Body-artists rooted their formation - once wrote to seal her collected poems: "an artist wears his work in

¹ Cabanis' assumption was that " the brain in a manner digests impressions, and makes organically the secretion of thought" [Robertson, 2003, p. 120]

place of wounds” [Smith, 1994, p. 31]. Far from being the reiteration of a well known Romantic leitmotiv, such a statement rather suggests that at a certain degree of exploration the artistic practice is but a way that cuts into the living flesh: the artist’s inquiry is therefore a hazardous and perilous expedition into areas of knowledge yet to be found and shaped and in many ways such an operation recalls the mythological voyages of figures such as Prometheus or Orpheus [Detienne, 1989 pp. 101-132].

After all, it is not a coincidence that, together with Henry Miller, Patti Smith was the author who more than anyone else promoted along her career the life and work of Arthur Rimbaud into American literature, thus connecting her conception of the artist to the figure of the *adolescent Ardenais* whose brief but intense incursion into poetry had, as irremediably as fortuitously, changed the course of Western verse.

Without any doubts Rimbaud, with his existential experience and his work, offers himself as the first example in Modern literature archeology of the type of relation between the body and the text that my investigation wants to illustrate: not only because his relatively meager oeuvre was decisive for the authors I examined, but mainly because from the very beginning of his incursion into poetry - the *Letter of the Seer* - he clearly stated how his radically visionary theory of the verse depended on a specific physical predisposition meant to produce a “derangement of all the senses” so that “he will have to make his inventions smelt, touched and heard” [Rimbaud, 1994, p. 76]. And it is significant then that his last work *Une saison en enfer* (1873) - the poem in prose where together with the account of the genesis of his poetical method the poet recalled the passages and sceneries of his literary adventure [Bonney, 1973] - ends with the author’s statement “I went through women's Hell over there; - and I will be able now *to possess the truth within one body and one soul*” [Rimbaud, 1994, p. 149].

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Having already discussed between the end of the Seventies and the beginning of the Eighties the concept of *anatomo-power* or *bio-power* as “the emergence, in the field of political practices and economic observation, of the problems of birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration”, “an indispensable element in the development of capitalism” that produced “the explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” [Foucault, 1978, pp. 140-141], briefly before his death in 1984 - almost a testament - in the courses delivered at the Collège de France Michel Foucault developed the notion of *regime de vérité* as a viable way of resistance to late-modern power and its processes of subjectivization.

It is well-known how Foucault’s late analysis insisted on the fact that where relations of power exist, there are also forms of resistance and it is because of this dialectic of confrontation that power acquires its contingency. Therefore “the force of power is never independent from whatever represents an expression of truth”, and truth, in those lessons, is “everything that results unbearable in the moment when it comes off of the dimension of the discourse” [Foucault, 1997, pp. 85-88].

Though his works preponderantly focused on power rather than on resistance, in his very last year of his life Foucault delineated - in historical sequence - three different ways of struggle: the first against *domination*, that is opposition to monarchs or states of control; the second against *exploitation*, that is against economic power and its dynamics that alienate people from the product of their labor; the third against *subjection*, that is resistance to a peculiar declination of power that assigns diverse social characteristics and binds the populace into such identitarian models via modes of individualization [Foucault, 1983]. Even though he acknowledges that any form of resistance could imply all three

dimensions of the struggle, nonetheless Foucault also insists on the fact that one kind has the tendency to be dominant in any concrete situation.

Resistance against subjectivization is a transversal form of struggle which questions the status of the individual and is characteristic of late Modernity: “it asserts the right to be different and it underlines everything which makes the individuals truly individual. [...] It is not exactly a struggle for or against the individual, but rather against *the governance of the individualization*” [Foucault, 1983, pp. 211-212]. Starting from February 1984, Foucault shifted from an epistemological to a practical field: he abandoned the analysis of the discourse - that until then significantly characterized his works - to switch to practices of resistance which he named *formes aléthurgiques*, forms *to produce truth*, therefore forms *to tell the truth*. He basically formulated a distinction between what makes true knowledge possible and what conditions occur in the ethical transformation of the individual and his relation with himself and with the others in the moment when he pronounces the truth. Thus *truth* from being a substantive became an adjective, *true*: true life, *vraie vie*.

In order to proceed in this direction Foucault took into account some practicable models that he labeled *esthetical forms of existence* and that he developed from the examples of the main so-called “spiritual” regimes of antiquity - spirituality intended as the individual’s access to truth -: the agenda of his last course that year was focused on the role played by the concepts of Christian *alethurgy*, of Platonic ontology of the soul, of Stoic care of the self, of Socratic *parrhesia* and of Cynic *vrai dire*.

On the 29th of the same month, for almost one hour during his class, Foucault sketched out the terms of this vast programmatic investigation - which death forbade him to accomplish - pivoting on different styles of historically marginal ways of life that he named “militancy” and that he considered to be political modalities of resistance not

characterized by any particular doctrine but rather consisting in the pure use of the body, in a style of existence. Along this lesson devoted to the ontology of the *vrai dire/ vrai vie*, he insisted on a specific non-conventional aspect of Greek democracy which consisted in the courageous exercise of speaking the truth - *parrhesia* - in the moment of a public/political statement in the agora: the capacity, prior to the possibility, of boldly speaking the truth defined what makes democracy authentic and effective [Foucault, 2009]. Foucault wanted to demonstrate that the pursuit of a “better constitution” - the leitmotiv that obsessively recurred in the political philosophy of Ancient Greece - did not coincide with the theorization of an “ideal form” or an “optimal mechanism” of government but simply consisted in the possibility for the political actors to constitute themselves as ethical subjects.

Among the ancient forms of *parrhesia* that Foucault took into account, he had a preference for Cynicism. The coincidence between *vrai dire* and *vraie vie* that the cynic philosophers literally incarnated through their existential exempla and with their practice of rough frank speaking an uncomfortable truth at the risk of being derided or worse exiled, represented to Foucault the foremost and longest philosophic tradition in Western civilization.

Compared to other minor philosophical currents of antiquity such as Stoicism, Epicureism or Skepticism, the Cynic tradition is based on a poor corpus of writings which mainly consists in anecdotes, apocryphal yarns and sharp-tongued witticisms. If on one hand this is due to the fact that its doctrinal content is quite rough, and to the fact that, as it happened in the case of Socrates, the cynics largely neglected the practice of writing, on the other it is true that their philosophy mainly consisted in a precise existential conduct. Diogenes of Sinope’s extreme anti-conventionalism, nakedness and homelessness - “a homeless exile, to his country dead, a wanderer who begs his daily bread” [Diogenes

Laertius, 1925, p. 64] - were to Foucault the ultimate expressions of truth put to test by an existential style of reduced circumstances: they are evidence of “*what always last*”, of “*what absolutely resist*”, what remains of life once one is spoiled of his political and therefore social attributes: a life lived in its most naked acceptance [Foucault, 2009, p. 160]. In other words, all those attributes of the cynic philosophy were the evidence of an existential practice that- by disregarding luxury, laws and conventional customs of organized communities - deliberately switched from *βίος*, “*vita quam vivimus*”, to *ζωή*, “*vita qua vivimus*”: from the qualified life of the citizen to the existential life of the animal. This precept of privileging the *φύσις* to the *νόμος* lies at the bottom of the Cynic paradoxical hierarchy of beings according to which on the top are the divinities, at the bottom men, and half-way the animals. This is the reason why they built their existence on the model provided by a dog, the animal after which their epithet comes from. They reputed themselves as watch-dogs of morality.

To Foucault, both their salty and irreverent irony and their practice of “defacing the currency”, of “adulterating the coinage”² - a practice that must be interpreted in the sense of putting false coin out of circulation, to demystifying *in toto* the social values and to expose the falsity of most of conventional standards and beliefs and in order to call men back to a simple natural life [Höistad, 1949] - are but signs of “an individualism, a self-affirmation, an exasperation of a particular existence, the animal and the natural existence, in any case an existence affirmed via an extreme singularity that is still

² According to the ancient biographers, this was the reason why Diogenes was exiled from his home-town Sinope: “Eubulides in his book on Diogenes says that Diogenes himself did this and was forced to leave home along with his father. Moreover Diogenes himself actually confesses in his *Pordalus* that he adulterated the coinage. Some say that having been appointed to superintend the workmen he was persuaded by them, and that he went to Delphi or to the Delian oracle in his own city and inquired of Apollo whether he should do what he was urged to do. When the god gave him permission to alter the political currency, not understanding what this meant, he adulterated the state coinage, and when he was detected, according to some he was banished, while according to others he voluntarily quitted the city for fear of consequences. One version is that his father entrusted him with the money and that he debased it, in consequence of which the father was imprisoned and died, while the son fled, came to Delphi, and inquired, not whether he should falsify the coinage, but what he should do to gain the greatest reputation ; and that then it was that he received the oracle.” [Diogenes Laertius, 1925, p. 48]

traceable in the modern world as a form of radical reaction to the dislocation imposed by social structure and institutions.” [Foucault, 2009, p. 166].

According to Foucault, the cynic existential praxis as a scandalous and violent epiphany of truth persists in our modern society through the figure of the artist, through that specific particularity that the artist seeks and achieves through his work. Foucault seems to credit here what once William Blake wrote in reply to Sir Joshua Reynolds’ considerations on the work of art. We know that when Blake read one of Reynolds’ *Discourses* entitled “The General and the Particular in Painting”, he furiously hastened to write some marginalia where he stated what the artistic act should be, what the aim of an artist is be in the moment of creation: “To generalize is to be an idiot. To particularize is the alone distinction of merit. General knowledges are those knowledges that idiots possess. What is general nature? is there such a thing? what is general knowledge? Is there such a thing? Strictly speaking, all knowledge is particular. Distinct general form cannot exist. Distinctness is particular, not general” [Blake, 1997, p. 1022].

Furthermore, Foucault concludes that because his mission is that of “witnessing what art is in its truth” and because art is a way of “existential rupture, a way of true life”, therefore the life of the artist itself “must be a manifestation of art itself into its truth” [Foucault, 2009, p. 173]. As much as for the ancient cynics *transvaluation* was a practice that consisted in literally living the principles of truth, the life of the artist is the condition of his work of art, it is the authentication of the work of art.

In the wake of Foucault, because in modern society art - in all of its declinations - is the place where the eruption of the elementary - meant as “what absolutely resist” - happens and because it is the place of the *mise à nu* of existence, starting from the end of the XIX century it is possible to trace a tendency whose aim along the decades has been - and still is - to incorporate into conventional culture what is considered scandalous and

impure. Since *Colere* is the Latin verb that originated both the word culture/cultivate and colonize/colony [Derrida, 1998] and consequently culture has to be considered as a product of Power, in modernity art essentially acquires an anti-cultural function: its boldness consists in the barbaric true that it tries to affirm, to proclaim.

The dialectics introduced in the cultural discourse by the artistic vanguards since the beginning of the XX century - this incessant *mise en discussion*, refusal and rejection of every act performed by their predecessors which Viktor Šklovskij masterially crystallized in the image of a legacy that passes from grandfather to niece rather than from father to son [Šklovskij, 1959] - must be seen as a permanent and perpetual expression of the cynical practice.

Thus, the adulteration of the cultural currency performed by certain artists with their life and their work is not a direct position of immorality, it is more like morality itself put in the service of immorality: the model of cynical wisdom is to conceive probity, integrity, as a supreme form of dishonesty, and morals as a supreme form of profligacy, truth as the most effective form of lie. As Slavoy Zizek wrote, the modern practice of cynicism “represents the popular, plebeian rejection of the official culture by means of irony and sarcasm: the classical cynical procedure is to confront the pathetic phrases of the ruling official ideology - its solemn, grave tonality - with everyday banality and to hold them up to ridicule, thus exposing behind the sublime noblesse of the ideological phrases the egotistical interests, the violence, the brutal claims to power. This procedure, then, is more pragmatic than argumentative: it subverts the official proposition by confronting it with the situation of its enunciation; it proceeds *ad hominem* (for example when a politician preaches the duty of patriotic sacrifice, cynicism exposes the personal gain he is making from the sacrifice of others)” [Zizek, 1989, pp. 29-30].

In 1975, shortly before his assassination and while working on his novel *Petrolino*, left unfinished, Pasolini directed *Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom*, a movie that rereads Sade's notorious novel transposed in the last months of the Fascist regime. If on the one hand Pasolini's purpose was that of pragmatically denounce the authoritarian drift which planned and promoted the so called "Strategy of tension", on the other he meant to represent the reification and the commodification of the individual perpetuated by the sadistic dispositive which - in the director's opinion - is typical of any kind of power [Bertolucci, 2006].

The movie begins with a scene where the four wealthy male master libertines, four fascist *gerarchi* - each of them a representative of a different expression of power: the political, the juridical, the religious and the banking - strip bare the selected victims. According to Giorgio Agamben - who played the role of disciple Philip in Pasolini's *Gospel according to Saint Matthew* when he was a philosophy student in Rome - this denudation exemplifies the transition from *βίος* to *ζωή* [Agamben, 2009, pp. 83-128], a political paradigm which the Italian philosopher developed starting with *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998). Therefore it is significant that in *Salò* the only moment of resistance to perpetual practices of cruelty, that Pasolini represented after the Brechtian notion of estrangement, is given by a naked guard's gesture of dissent. Found in bed with the black servant, he silently rises his clenched left fist to claim his being a communist and is immediately executed. What shocks the viewer is not really the fact that the *gerarchi* shot the guard because he dared to copulate with a black lady-maid but rather that he deliberately provoked them - and therefore his own death - by gratuitously asserting his true belief.



Ezio Manni in *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma*, 1975.

The conjugation of the nakedness with a gesture of protest - this stubborn strategy of struggle that echoes what in music is named *ostinato*, a playground where repetitions cover the variation and the development - is but a cynic-like practice: it is a pure use of the body that relies upon the centrality of the gesture, its gestures. It was Pasolini's belief - as he put it in his last interview to Furio Colombo the very afternoon preceding the night when he was killed - that "by constantly hitting the same nail on the head one can possibly make a whole house fall down. [...] Most of all, it is history that gives us the best example. Contestation has always been an essential act. Saints, hermits and intellectuals, the few who have made history, are the ones who have said *no*. [...] To be meaningful, contestation must be large, major and total, *absurd* and not in a good sense. It cannot merely be on this or that point" [Pasolini, 1999, pp. 1723-1724].

Apropos of the gesture as something that "always lasts" and "absolutely resists", in *L'être et le Néant* Jean-Paul Sartre interpreted the libertine philosophy of the "Divin

Marquis” as a form of *incarnation*, as the attempt - however vain - to render the prey’s body disgraced, obscene: in fact the sadistic dispositive strives to have the victim’s anatomy assume positions which completely deprive it of its gestures and basically aims to expose the bare inactivity of the flesh.³

It is at this point that the coincidence of the cynical *vrai dire* and *vraie vie* manifests its radicalism, its “total” and “absolute contestation”, which is also “what remains of life once one is spoiled of his political and therefore social attributes”. If the birth of the anatomo-power, according to Giorgio Agamben, corresponds to the loss of the natural ability of the gesture - we live in an age “that has lost its gestures and for this reason is obsessed by them. For human beings who have lost every sense of naturalness, each single gesture becomes a destiny. And the more gestures lose their ease under the action of invisible powers, the more life becomes indecipherable” [Agamben, 2000, p. 53] - therefore the artist, which according to Foucault’s interpretation is but a modern cynic, voids the sadistic attempt to incarnate the body by putting up the praxis of his gestures, in other words his intimate truth.

From the moment when the artist decides to voluntarily bare himself as a modern Diogenes or from the moment he realizes that power stripped his individuality thus mutating his *βίος* into *ζωή*, the operation he sets is that of subtracting his flesh from any

³ “The sadist has reapprehended his body as a synthetic totality and center of action; he has resumed the perpetual flight from his own facticity. He experiences himself in the face of the Other as pure transcendence. He has a horror of troubled disturbance for *himself* and considers it a humiliating state; it is possible also that he simply can not realize it in himself. To the extent that he coldly persists, that he is at once a tenacity and a barrenness the sadist is impassioned. His goal, like that of desire, is to seize and to make use of the Other not only as the Other-as object but as a pure incarnated transcendence. But in sadism the emphasis is put on the instrumental appropriation of the incarnated-Other. The "moment" of sadism in sexuality is the one in which the incarnated For itself surpasses its own incarnation in order to appropriate the incarnation of the Other. Thus sadism is a refusal to be incarnated and a flight from all facticity and at the same time an effort to get hold of the Other's facticity. But as the sadist neither can nor will realize the Other's incarnation by means of his own incarnation, as due to this very fact he has no resource except to treat the Other as an instrumental-object, he seeks to utilize the Other's body as a tool to make the Other realize an incarnated existence. Sadism is an effort to incarnate the Other through violence, and this incarnation "by force" must be already the appropriation and utilization of the Other. Sadism like desire seeks to strip the Other of the acts which hide him. It seeks to reveal the flesh beneath the action.” [Sartre, 1943, p. 399]

coercion: as a response to a subjectivation, to a sadistic attempt of incarnation, he incarnates in the work of art his own body and together with it its truth. By doing so he more or less consciously adulterates or deforms the figures he received from the expressive and esthetical means he decides to use in order to transfer his flesh into a place where he can mould it and hence re-mould himself. On the whole, according to what Agamben once defined [Agamben, 2000, p.10-18] as forms of *minor biopolitic*, a counterpoint to that of the adversary by defying power where it is wielded - in the body, in the chosen means of expressions - the strategy is that of finding a *βίος* into the *ζωή*.

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Pasolini and Burroughs, Artaud and Bene, Duchamp and Beckett, Panero, Michaux and Roussel: a close look to both the biographical facts and the bibliographical *fortuna* of each of these artists will show how each of them incarnated the cynic praxis for which the the *vrai dire* coincides with the *vrai vivre* and within the perimeter of this operation nakedness followed as a coherent consequence. In each of these lives it is possible to trace a pattern which always involved denudation: Pasolini with his novel *Petrolio* wanted to provide the reader with the whole of his experiences together with a precise portrait of the post-WWII Italy, and in order to potentiate his literary project he wanted to include between the chapters some pictures of himself stark naked. The whole production of Duchamp is exclusively comprehensible in the light of a constant denudation that he first projected into reality through a corpus of poetical notes, then with the *Large Glass* and at the end with *Given*. Burroughs' literary career really started with *The Naked Lunch*, the novel through which he intended to offer to the reader a delirious portrait of the political madness that characterized the early Cold-War American society. For more

than thirty years Carmelo Bene bared the scene of the Italian theatre of all its traditional accoutrements: one by one he subtracted every element to the point he finally unveiled his own voice.

In a historical moment when late-modern capitalism and its industrial developments required the discipline of the anatomy and of the language that though that anatomy was spoken and written, in the wake of a Stirnerian individualism for each of these artists the corporal became the *conditio sine qua non* of his own work of art: the body had to be the battlefield of a resistance practice. Like modern Diogenes, each one bothered by his own Alexander, the extreme act of each and every of these radical writers was to get rid - sometimes with a mere shrug of their shoulders - of the shadow of the power that tried to subject him, so that the body and with it its own truth could be definitively exposed under the light of the sun.

In the face of the absurdity of the existent, of the brutal coercion set up by the reiteration of political and economical modalities of subjectivization, each of these artists performed his life according to the *cynical gesture* of speaking out one's own truth, a scandalous practice which on a certain level implied also the risk of death, as it happened in the case of Pasolini. Since to a certain degree they all intended life as a consequence of gestures - one should consider the case of Marcel Duchamp - the centrality of the practical dimension of their life was more often than not highlighted in their work: if Burroughs used to repeat over and over in his interviews that a "writer is *someone who writes*", Duchamp used to remind the viewer that "art is making". Because of this praxis, in all these writers the work of art seems to be but the precipitate of an existential reaction, a trace of a struggle that happened *somewhere* and *sometime* in reality: their writings are what is left *after*, they belong to the aftermath and therefore they acquire an untimely aura. In many ways their works result as the precipitate of an action that was

carried out *elsewhere*, as an account of a number of *counter-gestures* performed to engrave the anatomy of reality.

In the process of individualization that through his own parhessia each of these artists tried to achieve, constantly occurred a practice of “defacing the currency” of power that went hand in hand with a corresponding and necessary practice of defacing the discourse through which this very same power imposes his order, the machinery of its control. In the works of these artists it is always possible to track down a phase when to a relative ordinary practice of writing followed the attempt to subvert the morphology and syntax of the mainstream discourse and furthermore the act of forging “a language foreign to the language” [Deleuze, 1986, p. 140] - a language that estranged itself from the language of power - to take a revenge on the prearranged *significant*, to carve on the page the contours of an unbearable naked truth that required the transmutation of their body into their writing.

Once more Foucault’s works has been functional to corroborate the hypothesis I formulated in regard of the relation between biography facts and bibliographic products in the authors I have previously listed. It is well-know that from the very beginning of his investigations, Foucault’s critical ontology rested upon an archeological and therefore genealogical approach to the human sciences that starting with *L’Ordre du discours* - the lesson that inaugurated his courses at the College de France in 1970 - focused on the regulation of the discursive event. In this lesson Foucault raised the issues concerning both the relation between language and control and the limits of the language subjected to control and provided evidence of the fact that the presumed *logophilia* of our Modern rational culture belies an intrinsic *logophobia* which is so sacred to the discourse it tries to neutralize.

As to the strategies used to neutralize, Foucault states that “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its power and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality” [Foucault, 1984, pp. 119-120]: the discourse operates through a system of norms that rules out all that is forbidden and it is disciplined in terms of “subject”, what can be spoken of, of “ritual”, where and how one may speak, and the “privileged or exclusive right to speak of certain subjects”, who may speak.

Since the very beginning of the Greek written tradition the term λόγος - in opposition to έπος - implied the use of the word in its most rational organization thus sanctioning an astringent norm of the discourse that if on the one hand aims to produce sense, on the other results to be a means of power to build speaking subjects: “It seems to me that beneath this apparent veneration of the discourse a certain fear is hidden. It is just as if prohibitions, thresholds and limits have been set up in order to master, at least partially, the great proliferation of the discourse in order to remove from its richness its most dangerous part and to organize its disorder according to figures that avoid what is most uncontrollable in it. [...] Surely in our society exists a sort of rage against these events, against all that in the discourse could be discontinuous, violent, chaotic and dangerous” [Foucault, 1984, p. 125].

Foucault’s radical *logo-archy* reaches one of its extremes when he asserts that all languages are “inherently violent, because language can never adequately respect reality” [Kelly, 1999, p. 24] and it is because of [from] this specific allegation that I see the possibility of applying his theories to the work of Duchamp and Burroughs, who made of verbal proliferation their own linguistic strategy to the end of avoiding the narrow limits of discursive logic. If the former explicitly expressed his skepticism of verbal

communication and developed a poetical economy of language, Burroughs - after Alfred Korzybski's *Science and Sanity* - always maintained a conflicting approach to the written word that would lead him to experiment a number of practices such as the cut-ups and the fold-ins.

In Modern literature the struggle of many of the authors I took into account was to merge the materiality in action of their gestures into the corpus of their writings. In order to achieve an event with their discourse, many of these artists organized their writing according to a strategy that in the case of Duchamp and Burroughs contemplated the proliferation, the mixture of distant expressive codes and the introduction of chance, along with what is considered scandalous, untimely and impure.

From this perspective three literary essays have been seminal to my research: Carla Benedetti's *Pasolini contro Calvino: per una letteratura impura* (1998) and Evelyne Grossman's *Artaud/Joyce le corps et le texte* (1996) and *La défiguration - Artaud, Beckett, Michaux* (2004). Especially the notion of *de-figuration* has been extremely inspiring, since it deciphers and describes a "force of creation that subverts the stratified forms of the sense and the meaning in order to reanimate them", the "movement that destabilizes the figure [...] an indefatigable way of questioning the forms of truth". Like an alchemical *solve et coagula* "the de-figuration that animates the forms is an erotic movement: it endlessly questions the conventional figures of the Other, it infinitely reinvents them". [Grossman, 2004, pp. 7-9].

The initial aim of my doctoral investigation was to deal with three authors, each belonging to a different artistic field, whom I considered exemplary: Duchamp (homo pictor), Burroughs (homo scriptor) and Bene (homo loquens). The relatively restricted time allowed by the Bergamo side of the co-tutelle persuaded me to concentrate on the first two authors, leaving aside Bene for a later publication.

In the light of Anne-Marie Christin's *L'image écrite* (1999) and in particular of Octavio Paz's *Aparencia desnuda* (1994) I considered the French author first and foremost as a poet. Thus I proceeded both in the case of Duchamp and in the case of Burroughs to provide a biographical account that was to show how a certain experience of the authors' bodies and consequent existential choices followed a precise organization of the work of art. In the case of Duchamp I highlighted his passion for the chess game and for a corpus of notes upon which the artist created the epic of the Bride. In the case of Burroughs I paid special attention to his controversial drug-addiction and to the *word-horde* and more in particular to *The Naked Lunch*, the novel that was assembled after those chaotic pages where for the first time a number of experimental strategies had been adopted. I also took into account the meeting that the two authors once had, which was to be of fundamental importance at least to Burroughs.

More than the strictly literary questions that both Duchamp's and Burroughs' writings evoke, I chose to proceed with a *counterpoint* between their biographies and their writings, quoting a number of episodes and anecdotal circumstances that might have seemed superficial at first sight but that, scattered and casual as they seemed to be, eventually turned out to be strongly and consistently connected to their artistic efforts and theories.

From such a perspective I valued the biographical criteria that Marcel Schwob discusses in his famous introduction to the *Vies Imaginaires* ⁴ and also the academic

⁴ « La science historique nous laisse dans l'incertitude sur les individus. Elle ne nous révèle que les points par où ils furent attachés aux actions générales. Elle nous dit que Napoléon était souffrant le jour de Waterloo, qu'il faut attribuer l'excessive activité intellectuelle de Newton à la continence absolue de son tempérament, qu'Alexandre était ivre lorsqu'il tua Klitos et que la fistule de Louis XIV put être la cause de certaines de ses résolutions. Pascal raisonne sur le nez de Cléopâtre, s'il eût été plus court, ou sur un grain de sable dans l'urètre de Cromwell. Tous ces faits individuels n'ont de valeur que parce qu'ils ont modifié les événements ou qu'ils auraient pu en dévier la série. Ce sont des causes réelles ou possibles. [...] L'art est à l'opposé des idées générales, ne décrit que l'individuel, ne désire que l'unique. Il ne classe pas ; il décline. [...] Les histoires restent muettes sur ces choses. Dans la rude collection de matériaux que fournissent les témoignages, il n'y a pas beaucoup de brisures singulières et inimitables. [...] L'art du biographe consiste justement dans le choix. Il n'a pas à se préoccuper d'être vrai ; il doit créer dans un

works that Roger Shattuck devoted to artists and writers of the XX century, there included some I have mentioned in my previous list. Since Schwob's theory of the biography opposes history's emphasis on momentous events versus the singular traits, eccentricities and idiosyncrasies of the famous and the insignificant alike, and since the artist's aim – according to Schwob – must be that of eschewing approaches that foreground resemblance choosing instead to highlight “any seemingly irrelevant quality that nonetheless results unique” [Schwob, 2001, p. 8], I therefore decided to take into account also the memories and descriptions of specific moments in the life of Duchamp and Burroughs from some personalities I happened to meet who had been friends of these authors. It is the case of George Whitman (the owner of the Shakespeare and Company bookshop in Paris), Barry Miles (Burroughs' biographer), Paul D. Miller and Jean-Jacques Lebel (a good friend of both Duchamp and Burroughs who is also the person who actually introduced one to the other).

In the following chapters I tried to provide the evidence of the affinities that characterized the life and works of the French artist and the American novelist: they both seem to have adopted similar strategies to overcome the coercions of their time and places, which inflicted censure on their works. Above all, they both tried to release their art from the conventional standards of the cultural industry through the invention of verbal strategies and machineries that created a form of dehumanization: “a new form, not human nor divine, that we hope won't be as worst as the two previous ones have been” [Deleuze, 1986, p. 141].

chaos de traits humains. Leibnitz dit que pour faire le monde, Dieu a choisi le meilleur parmi les possibles. Le biographe, comme une divinité inférieure, sait choisir parmi les possibles humains, celui qui est unique. Il ne doit pas plus se tromper sur l'art que Dieu ne s'est trompé sur la bonté. Il est nécessaire que leur instinct à tous deux soit infaillible. De patients démiurges ont assemblé pour le biographe des idées, des mouvements de physionomie, des événements. » [Schwob, 2001, pp. 5-13]

Chapter 1

Marcel Duchamp
desiring liberty
between *visible* and *lisible*

Marcelo
mar de cielo
cielo de campo
maricel y campocel
invisible
mente de vidrio
vidrio demente
aparece desaparece
tejida de miradas
destejida en deseos
desvestida desvanecida
la Novia
Dulcinea inoxidable
cascada polifásica
molino de refranes
aspa de reflejos
la Novia
tu creatura y tu creadora
tú la miras del otro lado del vidrio
del otro lado del tiempo
Marcelo
eras la mirada
eros tu mirada
lámpara encendida en pleno día

Octavio Paz, *Marcel Duchamp*



Portrait of the Artist as a Chess Player

I

Chasing (Off) Art for Chess

« Ma main devint mon ennemi. Je voulais me débarrasser de la palette. »
M. Duchamp

« J'ai horreur de tous les métiers. Maîtres et ouvriers, tous paysans, ignobles.
La main à plume vaut la main à charrue. - Quel siècle à mains ! -
Je n'aurai jamais ma main. »
A. Rimbaud

Borrowing diction from the biographical and critical notes written by Marcel Duchamp for artists included in the catalogue of the *Société Anonyme Inc.*, Roger Shattuck— blending tonalities of truth and fable into an almost schowbesque *vie imaginaire* – sketches the following portrait of the author of the *Large Glass*:

A tournament chess player and intermittent artist, Marcel Duchamp was born in France in 1887 and died a United States citizen in 1968. He was at home in both countries and divided this time between them. At the New York Armory Show of 1913, his *Nude descending a staircase* delighted and offended the press, provoked a scandal that made him famous in absentia at the edge of twenty-six, and drew him to the United States in 1915. After several exciting years in New York City, he departed and devoted most of his time to chess until about 1954. A number of young artists and curators in several countries then rediscovered Duchamp and his work. He had returned to New York in 1942 and during his last decade there, between 1958 and 1968, he once again became famous and influential.

With the strong personality of a pioneer, he navigated his own way around Cubist and Futurist creeds and away from theories of abstraction during the heroic period of 1912-1913. An able cartoonist, he also concerned himself with physics and mathematics. From an early age, Duchamp addressed himself to two questions: can one produce mental works not reliant on primarily retinal effects? It is possible to produce works that are not works of art? His series of manufactured objects – chosen, signed, exhibited and named “readymades” – and his *The Large Glass (The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, even, 1915-1923*, accompanied by extensive published notes and drawings), display a restless, playful intelligence that sometimes sought a refined aesthetic state. Duchamp demonstrated that new forms of art could be invented after the domination of Impressionism. An aloof person, he

nevertheless enjoyed the loyalty and affection of many friends. [Shattuck; 2000, pp. 244-245]

Mostly all the salient records of Duchamp's paradigm are reported in these few lines, giving the reader exhaustive coordinates to orient himself in the cartography traced by this philosophical artist with his intermittent but incisive excursion into XX century art. After a decade-long traverse at full gallop of the different artistic *-isms* that marked the early decades of European scene - anyway throwing off any of those labels with a shrug of high refined taste for irony, ambiguity and mystery -, from the age of twenty-six he dedicated himself to postulate an art at *service of mind*, as he enunciate it in a later long interview with Pierre Cabanne in his early sixties. By carrying out this resolution for a *non-retinal* art, for more than fifty years Duchamp "devoted his career to saying a prolonged, ritualized goodbye to painting – ostensibly to play chess." [Shattuck, 2003, p. 288]. In actual fact, among all the conversions he passed through, in a thirst of freedom marked by a long series of contradictions, abandons and renunciations, the most significant one – yet the most stigmatized by Breton in the *Deuxième manifeste du Surréalisme* - remains that of the artist professionally playing chess. When in the early Twenties a rumor circulated through the art worlds of Paris and New York that Duchamp had decided to stop making art in order to devote his life to playing chess, the artist made no effort to refute this claim, and had indeed entered into regular tournament play. Therefore, it seems perchance predictive that Duchamp's brother Gaston, better known in the art world as Jacques Villon - as he changed his name after the medieval poet Francois Villon - taught thirteen years old Marcel both painting and chess in the same year.

On a par with Raymond Roussel, who had to be one of the most important literary references in his work, it was in this activity Duchamp had to discover and formulate the esthetic criteria whose inquires had hitherto disseminated anarchy in his creative

production, constantly challenging conventional thought regarding the artistic process and the art market. It is true that a fascination with chess has been meticulously documented by several of the early critics and historians, such as Schwarz, Lebel and Clair, so that most of the principal studies of Duchamp's career make reference to his lifelong involvement with the game, from his early drawings and paintings – such as *The Chess Game*, 1910, *Portrait of Chess Players*, 1911 and 1912, *The King and the Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*, 1912 – to his pursuit of the French Chess Championship. Nevertheless, despite the profusion of literature concerning Duchamp's several chess-related activities, critics have, for the most part, neglected to regard chess and its history as a potential resource for imagery in Duchamp's work, as Paul Humble notes:

Comparatively little has been written about Duchamp's chess as a form of artistic activity, how it relates to his other artistic interests, and what it reveals about his attitude to art in general. A few writers have commented on these matters, but their views tend to be underdeveloped and are often highly speculative. Roger Cardinal summed it up when he remarked that “nobody has entirely assessed the significance of chess in Duchamp's career”. [Humble; 1998, p.41]

One of the reasons could be that, as much as for his art, when attempting to address the nature of chess in the life of Marcel Duchamp we are met with many contradictions. As a matter of fact, we should be wary of theories that claim to unlock the system or pattern behind Duchamp's work. Even from within chess world, in an attempt to reflect upon his art, debates over Duchamp's approach to the game also give the impression of having failed to bridge the theoretical distance that separates the board from the artist's hand.

Francis Neumann, catalyst for most of Duchamp's chess-related studies, warns that any effort to formulate Duchamp would be an entirely futile endeavor and suggests that Duchamp gave his response to those attempting to unlock the mystery when he claimed “there is no solution, because there is no problem.”[Roché; 1998, p. 224]

In understanding the nature, role and significance of Duchampian chess, we need to see beyond the problem/solution dilemma and operate at a different cognitive level involving multiplicity and complexity. From this perspective, his recent *Marcel Duchamp, the Art of Chess* co-written by Bradley Bailey results the most exhaustive effort in exploring how Duchamp's activities as a chess player affected his art.

While Neumann's study tries to prove that the chronology of Duchamp's life could run parallel to the different phases of a chess game – from opening, to middle game, to endgame –, disclosing how many events that the artist craftily and deviously orchestrated resemble the unfolding pattern of a game, one that, insofar as the game of art is concerned, continues to be played, Bailey's essay demonstrates that Duchamp's identity as a chess player is so thoroughly interfused with his work as an artist that the two activities are aesthetically and conceptually inseparable, a sort of interrelation especially evident in Duchamp's 1915-1923 master work, the *Large Glass*.

Moreover, Bailey ventures to guess that the very same morphology of chess board components returns over Duchamp's production, not only where explicitly intended in the titles or the subjects as in the early works, but also subtly in later pieces such as the 1917 discovered readymade *Trébuchet* – a coat rack nailed to the floor of his New York studio – also called *Trap* (which in chess jargon means a pawn placed so as to take an adversary's piece), or the 1914 *Nine Malic Molds*⁵ – also known as the *Eros's Matrix*, a

⁵ The first drawing representing the molds as they would appear in the *Glass*, titled *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries No. 1* of 1913, shows the eight molds - the same number of the pawns in the chess game - individually numbered and drawn in perspective. A key on the left of the sketch identifies the uniforms, which are, from one to eight: a priest, a department-store delivery boy, a gendarme, a cuirassier, a policeman, an undertaker, a flunkey, and a busboy. Six months later, the number of molds became nine with the addition of the stationmaster. "In an interview with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp explained the transition from eight to nine molds: "At first I thought of eight and I thought, that's not a multiple of three. It didn't go with my idea of threes. I added one, which made nine". While the exterior of the mold approximates the respective uniform it represents, the actual depiction of the costume is invisible to the eye. As Duchamp explained, "you can't see the actual form of the Policeman or the Bellboy or the Undertaker because each one of these precise forms of uniforms is inside its particular mold". The designation "Malic" has been interpreted as meaning *mâle*, or "male-ish," rather than masculine and as a pun on the word *phallic*." [Neumann, Bailey; 2009, p. 117]

prototype of the *Cemetery of Uniforms and Liveries*, later incorporated in the far left area of the lower half of the *Large Glass* – whose male-professions stereotypes –caricatures derives, Bailey claims, to a specific segment of the history of chess, the evolution and symbolism of the individual chess pieces.

According to H. J. Murray, England's leading chess historian, there is a number of popular sermons composed astride the Twelfth and Thirteenth century commonly known as the “chess moralities”, like the *Morality of Innocent* or the *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium*, also known as *Solatium ludi scacchorum* ⁶. These orations were intended “to give instruction to all ranks of men by means of instances drawn from

⁶Introduced in Spain during the VIII century by Moorish conquerors, chess rapidly developed through Europe between 800 and 1100 AD. The first writings referring to *ludus scachorum* are commonly considered the Catalan *Testament du Comte d'Urgell*, and the Bavarian *Ruodlieb*. The first treaties on chess appeared under the reign of king Alphonse X the Wise who wrote himself the famous *Libro de Axedrez, Dados y Tablas*. Even if appearing along the same period, Moralities mark a difference from these treaties by introducing for the first time a allegorical and ethical prospective to chess game. “The “Innocent Morality” (“The Morality of Innocent”), is a literary work with a chess theme, dating to the 12th or 13th century. The earliest version is in Latin, but it can be found in the literature of almost every European country from the 13th century on. It is the earliest example of the morality on a chess theme that we have, but modern critics feel that it was probably used in sermons and homilies for some time before it was written down. Once on paper, it was pirated by every cleric in need of a catchy sermon or poet in need of an improving theme. According to Murray, the two most likely authors of the idea of a chess morality are Pope Innocent III and a man named John of Waleys (or Johannes Gallensis, or John Wales). Innocent (c1160–1216), the pope who had to deal with England’s Henry III and his son John, was a prolific sermon-writer. While Innocent got his name attached to this work for posterity, Murray prefers to credit John of Wales, a Franciscan who taught at Oxford and at Paris between 1260 and 1280. According to Murray, internal evidence shows that the writer was anticlerical (which the Franciscans were, almost by definition), knew 13th-century British law, and - most importantly - played chess according to the English rules. This original Latin version dates to the middle of the 13th century in England. About a hundred years later, with the growth of literature in languages other than Latin, there is a French edition. German and Dutch versions appear at the beginning of the 15th century, followed by (roughly in chronological order) Swedish, English, Scotch, Italian, Catalan, Czech, Castilian, Icelandic, and Estonian. Incorporated into the *Gesta Romanorum*, our Morality was carried forward into modern times. Murray gives particulars concerning several variations he was able to consult personally.

Probably the best-known to us is William Caxton’s edition. Under the title *The Game and Play of Chesse*, this was the second book printed in English, in 1474. (The first, of course, was the Bible.) Caxton’s is a fairly close translation from the Latin by way of the French, with one interesting exception. Instead of lumping all the “common men” together, he assigns each of the eight pawns on each side to a vocational group. Social historians find this a fascinating indicator of how the English working class came to identify itself in smaller groups. Jacobus de Cessolis was a Dominican from Lombardy, who lived in the second half of the 13th century. “His” edition of the Morality — *Liber de moribus hominum et officiis nobilium* — circulated widely in the 14th and 15th centuries in Latin and in local translations. The main difference between Cessolis and Wales is the issue of “permissible games”. Besides local variations in the rules of chess, there existed two recognized versions of the game. One developed into the one we know, but the other was played with dice and was largely a game of chance. On this difference a world of sermons were written. There are many period references to chess being forbidden to the clergy, and usually what was meant was the dice - read gambling - version.” [Johanna le Mercer, *Chess, from sermons to romance*, 1998]

Biblical, ancient and modern history" using "the chessmen as typical of the various classes of men." [Murray, 1913, p. 34]

For their strong similarity, in his iconographical analysis Bayle emphasizes how Duchamp modeled his *Malic Molds* after these allegorical chessmen - specifically the pawns - in the *moralities*, which in all probability he encountered through a number of sources [B. Bailey, 2000]. Most likely he could have come upon both *moralities* and Murray's writings during the 1912/1914 period, when, thanks to his friend Francis Picabia's help and intercession he was employed as librarian for the Parisian Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève.⁷

Alongside these intuitions of the chess player *forma mentis* influencing different iconological and morphological aspects of Duchamp opus, it could be interesting to interpret certain *topoi* of his life and his work, in particular *denudation* - one of the most significant *Leitmotive* recurring in his production from the 1911 *Dulcinea* passing by the *Large Glass* to 1968 posthumous *Given* - in the light of R. Fine's 1967 *The Psychology of the Chess Player* - a title we know belonged to Duchamp's library [M. Décimo, 2002, p. 342].

A renowned psychoanalyst and one of the greatest world chess player the first half of the XX century, Rueben Fine - who at the age of eight began tournament-level chess at the famous New York City Marshall Chess Club in the very same years Duchamp did - researches in his book the secret motivations which led differently talented men to dedicating the chess game an immoderate mental and practical space.

⁷ The evidence to support this theory is that both 1913 J. Murrays *A History of chess* and a 1504 edition of Jacques de Cessoles *Le Jeu des eschez moralisé* appeared in the St Geneviève catalogue, along with a 1534 Cassoles Italian edition, *Opera nuova nella quale se insegna il regimento e costumi delli homini e delle donne di qualunque grado, stato, e condition essersi voglia: composta per Giacobbo da Cesole sopra il giuoco delli scacchi, intitulata Costumi delli huomini, e ufficii delli nobeli* and 1892 Conrad von Ammenhausen *Das Schachzabelbuch Kunrats von Ammenhausen, nebst den Schachbüchern des Jakob v. Cessole und des Jakob Mennel, herausgegeben von Ferdinand Vetter*. While we know Duchamp spoke no Italian, we also know he was fluent in German.

Even if Fine never mentions the French artist in these pages, a section he dedicates to psychosis in chess players matches with certain peculiar aspects of Duchamp personality and art. Fine states that “chess is a contest between two men in which there is considerable ego-involvement” that “in some way certainly touches upon the conflicts surrounding aggression, homosexuality, masturbation and narcissism, which become particularly prominent in the anal-phallic phases of development” [Fine, 1956, p. 56].

He also outlines how players could be divided into two categories, the *heroes* and *anti-heroes*. While players of the first group use the game to satisfy their omnipotence fantasies and show through the years a different grade of regression, the anti-heroes consider chess as one of the many modalities to challenge their own intellectual ability, demonstrating to be able to achieve remarkable results in other activities, as Duchamp certainly proved with his polymorphic production.

Furthermore, Fine analyses the peculiar cases of exhibitionism among world history chess masters, interpreting this symptom in view of the profuse phallic symbolism of the game, that he essentially associates on the board with the figure of the King:

The King is indispensable, all-important, irreplaceable, yet weak and requiring protection. These qualities lead to the over-determination of its symbolic meaning. First of all, it stands for the boy's penis in the phallic stage, and hence re-arouses the castration anxiety characteristic of that period. Second, it describes certain essential characteristics of a self-image, and hence would appeal to those men who have a picture of themselves as indispensable, all-important and irreplaceable. In this way it affords an additional opportunity for the player to work out conflicts centering around narcissism. [Fine, 1956, p. 61]

Exhibitionism, particularly in form of body denudation, is subsequently explained as the incapability for further tolerating the taboo of physical contact and therefore an impulsive attempt to break off the isolation by showing the *real* penis instead of the *symbolic* one on the board:

In chess, thought replaces action. As contrasted with other sports such as boxing, there is no physical contact whatsoever. As the players become more expert, the taboo on touching becomes even stronger. In master chess the rule of “touchmove” is observed. If a player touches a piece he must move it. [Fine, 1956, p. 63]

Discovered in his childhood and constantly practiced during all of his migrations, chess was always present in form of pastime in Duchamp’s early years. Latent in these formative years, the maniacal passion for this game had clamorously exploded at the age of thirty-one as strongest mental necessity, as he confessed to his would-be *mecenate* Arensberg in several 1919 letters from Buenos Aires, where he moved in 1918 to avoid the draft when the US entered into the First World War:

I am absolutely ready to become a chess maniac...Anyone around me takes the shape of a knight or a queen and the outside world only interests me in its configurations of loser and winner positions...” and “my attention is so completely absorbed by chess...I play night and day and nothing in the world interests me more than finding the right move...I like painting less and less.[R. Kuenzli, F. Naumann; 1990, pp. 218-219].

And few months later he also wrote in another correspondence:

It’s been a long time that I’ve been wanting to write you. But I haven’t been able to find the time: my attention is so completely absorbed by chess. I play night and day and nothing in the world interests me more than finding the right move...I like painting less and less.[Duchamp in an unpublished letter to Carrie, Ettie and Florene Stettheimer, May the 3rd, 1919]

In 1964, when asked if he found any symbolism in chess playing, Duchamp bluntly answered:

It does tend to act a bit like a drug. Drugs are not symbolic but the addiction is similar. If you start playing chess when you are young, you’ll grow old and die playing chess. It’s a passion that you’ll take to the grave. And that no doubt makes you waste a fantastic amount of time. That happened to me and

probably helped me do what I wanted: paint at little as possible and not repeat my paintings. It works out well. Chess fills your time when you do not paint! [Drot, 1964]

Also related with Duchamp addiction to chess, it is worthy to report here the anecdote concerning the artist first marriage in 1927 with Lydie Sarrazin-Levassor, the daughter of a wealthy automobile producer, to be considered, according to Man Ray, an almost Dadaist joke schemed by Francis Picabia. On their honey moon:

Duchamp spent most of the one week they lived together studying chess problems, and his bride, in desperate retaliation, got up one night when he was asleep and glued the chess pieces to the board. They were divorced three months later. [Man Ray quoted in Calvin Tompkins, 1998, p. 53]

In the years when Duchamp accomplished his *Large Glass*, inaugurates his feminine alter-ego Rrose Selavy - immortalized on a picture by Man Ray, with whom he played a chess game for the famed scene of Renè Clair 1924 *Entr'acte* - he also achieves a series of successes in chess championships in the United States first, then in France.

Taken for granted this *anartiste* belonged to the category of Fine's chess *anti-heroes*, we regard at the relation of Duchamp with this game as a reversed form of sublimation, there to maintain fundamentally the Freudian optimistic and positive prospective of this term. The chess activity produced in Duchamp the same pathologies of professional players, though he is able to remove those from the board into his creation through a process of *transfert*. A process that generated a triangulation, using a number dear to Duchamp, of reversed sublimations where the main terms of Fine's analysis of psychoses are designated in the case of the French artist to be translated within the safe perimeter of artistic formulations and creations, thus allowing him to maintain with the chess game an inferior psychological involvement.

By assuming this, on a first level, we infer that, once translated into his art - via culturally and sanctioned, yet unconventional means - Duchamp's narcissism, aggressiveness and destructive fantasies both sublimated in creative competition with his brothers and put forward its libidinal and sexual aspects, a personal pursuit of pleasure that explains how this process strengthened, on a certain level, the shocking and erotic aspects of his art : "un tableau qui ne choque pas ne vaut pas la peine"⁸ the artist used to repeat in his later interviews.

Fine writes that chess is "more often than not taught to the boy by his father, or a father-substitute, and thus becomes a means of working out the son-father rivalry" [Fine,1959, p. 57]: in Duchamp case this competition becomes a sibling rivalry, a contention critics often remark in his biography:

The most vivid failure remained family-related, when we see his ambition of becoming an artist thwarted by his own brothers, more talented than he. Jacques Villon was a good, sensitive painter and, more than that, an extraordinary engraver. Duchamp-Villon was a wonderful sculptor who, if he hadn't been killed in the war, would have become one of the greatest artists of the century. Marcel, the youngest, was a menial, underpaid artist. How could he make a name for himself when his name was already taken? Duchamp would have been the prototype of the last born who, in order to dig his ecological niche, had the only alternative of radically upsetting the values advocated by his environment. [J. Clair, 1975, p. 19]

On a second level, again, under the lens of Fine's definition of narcissistic pathology in chess players, it's interesting to remark how the *Large Glass* - for the onanistic machinery of the *Bride* and *Bachelors* apparatus⁹ - closes in a certain way the thematic of masturbation in Duchamp's production, started with the 1910 *Portrait of Dr. R. Dumouchel* – an almost self portrait where the art critic commonly links autoeroticism to

⁸ "A painting that does not shock is not worth to be painted." [Rochè, 1998, p. 224]

⁹ About the dynamical mechanism of Duchamp's opus magnum Janis Mink wrote: "The Large Glass has been called a love machine, but it is actually a machine of suffering. Its upper and lower realms are separated from each other forever by a horizon designated as the "bride's clothes". The bachelors remain below, left only with the possibility of churning, agonized masturbation. [Mink, 2000, p.43]

the left hand posture of the model - and returning in his work circularly like the movement of the 1913/1914 series of *Chocolate Grinders*.

Assuming the Freudian dual *theory of the instincts or passions*, we distinguish in Duchamp's art the same development of libido in two stages: in first place the autoeroticism, as previously described, then a form of secondary narcissism consisting in a collapse of the libido over the ego, which in Duchamp occurred in the fabrication of his feminine alter-egos such as the *Rose Selavy* or the *Bride Stripped Bare*. In this second process of sublimation, Duchamp substitutes the symbolical figure of the king, "that stands for the boy's penis in the phallic stage" [Fine, 1959, p. 63] and touches on "certain essential characteristics of a self-image" [Fine, 1959, p. 73], with the one of the queen, the virgin that along 1912 he transformed in bride and designated to become then the ctonian and faceless figure of *Given*:

Sexuality was for Duchamp a primary, a core element - that existential legitimacy all progressive artists were looking for at the beginning of the twentieth century. Lawrence Steefel, the art historian with whom Duchamp was perhaps most frank, was once told by the artist, "I want to grasp things with the mind the way the penis is grasped by the vagina." Steefel has written: "Seeking to distance himself from his own fantasies, Duchamp sought a means of converting pathos into pleasure and emotion into thought. His mechanism of conversion was a strange one, but essentially it consisted of inventing a 'displacement game' that would project conflicts and distill excitements into surrogate objects and constructs without which his mental equilibrium might not have been sustained." And Duchamp once said to Steefel, "I did not really love the machine. It was better to do it to machines than to people, or doing it to me." [Mink, 2000, p. 84]

To continue to develop this hypothesis and thus concluding the triangulation of this analysis, strictly connected with this narcissist tendency in Duchamp's works is the third and last reversed sublimation process, concerning the nude and most precisely the phenomenon of denudation, which more than any other artist of his generation Duchamp investigated and represented, hence substantiating Apollinaire's foreseeing assertion

“Duchamp is the only painter of the modern canon to be interested in *nude*.” [G. Apollinaire, 1980, p. 34]

Aside for the relevant place that nude occupies in Western history of art - for which we could regard to the female nude not as a subject but as a *form*, whose manner and style in which it is represented or neglected are indicative of the dominant idea of art and its role in society at a particular moment in history through a very particular idealizing moral frame - and more precisely in last century production,¹⁰ from the angle of Fine's *Psychology of Chess Player* we also formulate an interpretation to the thematic of the Duchampian undressing related to the chess and specifically to exhibitionism. Once again this has been transported from the board into his artworks, ending up to invest those feminine projections of his personality who he stripped off to the spectator eye through the years:

Not the least paradoxical aspect of Duchamp's art is its strange, even appalling, combination of extraordinary intimacy - the sense of having been fabricated out of the very essence of its author's inward and outward being - with an icy distance and objectivity. Normal curiosity about extraordinary lives - the desire to peer behind the male curtain to see the wizard who has been engineering the display - is compounded in this case by the sense that the work conceals/reveals a daunting mystery. [S. Nodelman, 2000, p. 90]

¹⁰ On this topic we recommend the reader: S. R. Suleiman, *The female body in Western culture*, Harvard University Press, 1986; A. Mahon, *Erotic & art*, Oxford University Press, 2007; E. Cooper, *The sexual perspective*, Routledge & Kegan, 1986; K. Clark, *The nude: a study of ideal art*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1956. For a most precise study on feminine nude in men imaginary, see also John Berger's *On regarding*.

II

Check Mate and Check made, a Matter of *Tempo*

“ He speaks like silence without ideals or violence,
he knows there's no success like failure and that
failure's no success at all.”
Bob Dylan

“Tattica, strategia, abnegazione, forza!”
G. L. Ferretti

Along with *The Psychology of the Chess Player*, two other titles by Reuben Fine stand out in the *Livres d'échecs* section of Duchamp's library. Among the over six hundred books appearing in the collection of Alexina “Teen” Sattler – who married Duchamp in 1954 and was as avid a chess player as her husband – those concerning the board game seem to be the only ones the artist embellished with his marginal annotations, under marks and abandoned/unfinished observations.

Going over these volumes – where we could find authors such as Max Euwe, José Raúl Capablanca or Aron Nimzovich – can help to chart a course of the masters that influenced Duchamp's chess strategies and technique, thus bestowing upon the critic a different perspective both on his art and increasing involvement with the game, showing the reciprocal influence of the one activity on the other and how over the decades an evident translation of one into the other occurred, so that the 29-year-old artist, who in few months transformed from a Cezanian to a Cubist manner his *Portrait of Chess Players*, could laconically state at the age of sixty-five: “From my close contact with artists and

chess players I have come to the personal conclusion that while all artists are not chess players, all chess players are artists.”¹¹

If Tristan Tzara once played chess in a smoky Zurich café in 1916, as Codrescu's novels poetically remind us, Duchamp himself played – and lost – with Capablanca in 1921 and in 1923 won against the twenty-year-old George Koltanowski, famous for his chess exhibitions, future world title of blindfolded chess and the knight's tour. In 1924 he also competed with Max Euwe and in 1933 he was one of the four members of the French team at the Folkestone Chess Olympiad, together with the World champion Alexander Alekhine.

But among the different encounters the *anartiste* had with members of the chess world, probably the most remarkable remains that with the author of *Impressions d'Afrique*, whose theatre adaptation, seen in 1912 along with Apollinaire and the Picabias in the Parisian *Théâtre Antoine*, greatly stimulated the multifarious genesis of the *Large Glass*:

Duchamp recalled that it was in 1932 when he saw for the first time the author Raymond Roussel, who was playing chess at a nearby table at the Café Régence, the famous rendezvous of Paris chess players. [Schwarz, 1969, p. 64]

Duchamp – who frequently passed along the Roussel's tree-lined Parisian manor park on the Avenue Foch on his way home to Neuilly but was never brave enough to enter and express his admiration to the author of *Locus Solus*¹² – met his most bizarre and putative dandy master only by chance, shortly before he committed suicide in the renowned *Hotel*

¹¹ Duchamp in an address at the Banquet of New York State Chess Association, August 1952.

¹² “Duchamp recognized Roussel but did not talk to him, for he did not want to expose himself to a rebuff.” [Robert Label, 1985, p. 106]

delle Palme in Palermo, the circumstances of which still remain surrounded by an aura of mystery.¹³

By a singular twist of fate, both Roussel and Duchamp, who together with a devotion to homonyms shared an addictive passion for chess, published a respective homage to end-game situations in the same year they met by accident. Roussel – whose “secession” from literature, in his last months before he committed suicide, corresponds in a way to Duchamp’s challenge to, and final abandonment of painting – contributes to the literature of this game with *Le mat du fou et du chevalier*, first appearing in the November 1932 issue of *Echiquier*, then incorporated in the 1935 posthumous *Comment j’ai écrit certains de mes livres*. In collaboration with Vitaly Halberstadt, Duchamp wrote *L’opposition et les cases conjuguées sont reconciliées*,¹⁴ his major, yet *pathaphisic* bequest to chess theory, and also a tribute to Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking-Glass*.¹⁵

¹³ See Leonardo Sciascia, *Atti relative alla morte di Raymond Roussel*, Palermo, Sellerio, 1971.

¹⁴ This work is concerned with that very special point of the endgame in chess when all the pieces have been lost, only the kings and a few pawns remain on the board. And this special 'lone-pawns' situation is treated only from the even more particular situation in which the pawns have been blocked and only the Kings can play. Even though they make use of conclusions already established by Abbe Durand, Drtina, Bianchette, etc., Duchamp and Halberstadt are the first to have noticed the synchronization of the moves of the black King and the white King. This synchronization is analyzed at length and forms the basis of their system. In order to win, a white King cannot move indiscriminately without regard for the color of the square on which he finds himself. Using the terminology of the authors of the book, he must choose a 'heterodox opposition' with respect to the color of the square occupied by the black King. This 'heterodox opposition,' which represents the real contribution of Duchamp and Halberstadt to the theory of chess, would demand a technical explanation too lengthy to be given here. At any rate, for clarity I would add that the game of chess does contain the idea of 'opposition,' and that Duchamp and Halberstadt have renamed it 'orthodox opposition' in order to distinguish it from the 'heterodox opposition' that they have discovered. This 'orthodox opposition' is something that all chess players know about, and it is far from being a mystery. It is a sure means of winning in certain situations. In fact, 'heterodox opposition' is no more than an amplification of opposition. It is simply applied to a longer number of squares, and it adopts various forms that are missing in the rigid 'orthodox opposition.

“There comes a time toward the end of the game when there is almost nothing left on the board, and when the outcome depends on the fact that the king can or cannot occupy a certain square opposite to, and at a given distance from, the opposite king. Only sometimes the king has a choice between two moves and may act in such a way as to suggest he has completely lost interest in winning the game. Then the other king, if he too is a true sovereign, can give the appearance of being even less interested, and so on. Thus the two monarchs can waltz carelessly one by one across the board as though they were not at all engaged in mortal combat. However, there are rules governing each step they take and the slightest mistake is instantly fatal. There are the rules that Duchamp brought to light all to amplify this haughty junket of the kings.” Henry-Pierre Rochè, *Ecrit sur l’art*, André Dimanche Editeur, 1998, p. 220

¹⁵ “On songe au problème d’échecs que Lewis Carroll a pose en tête de *De l’autre cote du miroir*. » Robert Lebel, op. cit., p. 105

Most probably a stylistic attempt to correspond with the author of *Alice in Wonderland*, Duchamp formulated this work as "linguistic study"¹⁶, built around the notion of opposition, for which he adopted a form of language derived from a number of paradigms, especially from literature and philosophy, to explain the scientific and mathematical foundations of his chess theories, so that where the discussions couch geometrical situations, we find for example *translation* for displacement or *charnière* for axis of rotation.

To this end, it appears appropriate to remark how also Saussure, whose theories of language Françoise Le Peven firstly associated both with Duchamp's verbal and his intertextual systems in order to formulate a precise interpretation of the relation among Duchampian works and titles, also used the model of chess to introduce his oppositional theories of language. Saussure explains that:

It is only through words opposing one another that meaning is created: a given term has no value except through difference and through its opposition to the other terms in the language. [Saussure, 1995, p.107]

Furthermore he adopts the metaphor of chess for language by saying:

Just as the game of chess is entirely in the combination of the different chess pieces, language is characterized as a system based entirely on the opposition of its concrete units. [Saussure, 1995, p. 284]

The endgame is fundamentally a stage of opposition, where the only pieces that remain are the two Kings and some pawns. Opposition is defined during the end game when symmetry is presented by the position of the Kings and pawns. The aspect of the end game that Duchamp and Halberstadt were concerned about was when a symmetry or a formal structure arises and each player is struggling to maintain equilibrium for survival.

¹⁶ Hubert Damisch, *The Duchamp Defense*, 1979, quoted in R. Kuenzli e F.M. Naumann, *Op. Cit.*, p. 40.

For there is security in symmetry during such situations, because a player is able to restrict or control the moves available to the opponent. At the same time, due to the symmetry, a player may be forced into making a move that will cause his own defeat, otherwise known as a Trap or *Trebuchet*, again, the title of his 1917 readymade.

Not only a resonance, Beckett's *Endgame* is a friendly homage¹⁷ to Duchamp's chess pamphlet, whose theoretical subtlety had markedly impressed him. "There is no *chance* in *Endgame*, everything is based on analogy and repetition" [Blair, 1979, p. 421] Beckett wrote in a 1959 letter: he conceived his play as a chess game where each movement or action depended reciprocally on the previous movement or action. With this in mind, we might briefly consider the representation of time by these three authors from the perspective of their machination of verbal *dispositives*, from this common attitude they developed in emptying words, words that suddenly interrupt the attrition of verbal repetition to progressively wear out, forming a collage of fragments temporally subtracted from disaggregation:

The extreme edge of their work is the *punctum* of their reflection on time. *Endgame* is not only a title of one of Beckett pieces that from chess draws on the situation for a philosophical game on time and chance, but also a chess situation Marcel Duchamp analyzes in his four-handed *L'opposition et les cases conjuguées sont réconciliées*...The artist investigation on chess stalling corresponds to his interest for hamper, to the machinery paralysis, to the exchange interrupted or blocked before reaching culmination...The paralysis produced by the stall is also a way to perpetrate the presence and suspend the entropy implicitly present in the temporal process of the chess game: Duchamp elaborates ironically a suspension of the game (hence death) through infinitively postponing the stasis in the game. [Valeriani, 2004, p.162]

¹⁷ By tracing a vivid account of Duchamp's and Beckett's friendship, David Shank in *The Immortal Game* writes "The two were not evenly matched. Duchamp was one of the best players in France, and no doubt swept Beckett off the board in most of their encounters. But still they enjoyed each other's company, and continued to play. The two came together again in the summer of 1940, converging on the Atlantic coastal town of Arcachon, southwest of Bordeaux, as they fled the Nazi onslaught. All summer they played lengthy chess games together in a seafront cafe. While their conversations were not recorded, we can imagine that they discussed their mutual interest in chess's dialectic between total freedom and complete constriction, between choice and futility...[Beckett] once remarked that the ideal chess game for him would end with the pieces back in their starting positions." [Shank, 2007, p. 139]. See also Housez, 2006, p. 370-381

The *Zugzwang*¹⁸ situation, for the intrinsic relevance of increasing or consuming *tempo*, in terms of gaining or losing a move during the game, comes to evoke the problematic nature of time and timing in Duchamp's work.

In the first place, it is here opportune to give importance to the fact that Duchamp's growing attraction to chess conflicted with the time in which the theory and practice of the game were undergoing a radical change, similar to the situation he was facing in the pictorial world with the advent of the different avant-gardes and most precisely Dadaism, the *purge salvatrice*. Dada's anarchist and corrosive spirit was first introduced in the United States by Duchamp and Francis Picabia in the early Twenties with the publication of the New York based magazines *391*, *Blind Man* and *Rongwrong*, cofounded with Beatrice Wood and Henry Pierre Roché. In these very same years in the chess world Wilhelm Steinitz's scientific-position play based on technique and routine had to be displaced by Capablanca's and Nimzovich's artistic and inventive game play. The former for his independent ideas and highly personal style, the latter considered the Trotsky of chess, both could be considered the Dadaists of the chess world for the radical change they brought to the game:

A feeling that everything was now known and understood seemed to come over the leading masters, damping their fighting spirit and blurring and standardizing their playing style" until "the Neo-Romantic demonstrated over and over again that all these rules can be broken with impunity and even with advantage, in appropriate circumstances. [Euwe, 1968, p. 112-115]

Arturo Schwarz wrote that Duchamp's love for chess remained ardent until the end of his life, although he recognized after attending the Italian Championship in 1968, a few months before his death, that the game "had become a science now, it is no longer art"

¹⁸ German term in international use to indicate in chess a particular kind of end game, a block position in which only certain moves and in a limited number are possible. A particular, yet extreme, case of zugzwang is the *trébuchet*, after which Duchamp named one of his readymades, also called a full-point mutual zugzwang because a full point (win versus loss) is at stake.

[Schwarz, 1969, p. 68], pointing out, with a faint note of regret, how both the chess world and the art world, since the end of World War II, had been invested with an identical trend at the expense of a *quid novi* that reduced the former to an art market and the latter to a sterile improvement of principles that were already known.

Yet, in regard to the scientification of chess and commercialization of art, it is interesting to ponder on the importance of chance, considered by the artist as a fundamental element of his creation both in the board game and in art creation. Duchamp's interest in chance increased simultaneously with his involvement with the board game, from the 1913 *Erratum Musical* ¹⁹ to the 1914 *Three Standard Stoppages* - an example of form taken by chance, later returning redeployed in the accidental crevices of the *Large Glass* -, to the 1968 *Reunion*,²⁰ performed in collaboration with John Cage and his wife Teeny.

As much as his manipulation of the language, through puns and *calembours*, had led Duchamp to chess playing, thus his *semi-mathematical* investigations on the board and for the *Large Glass* took him soon to the gambling game – translating, of course, these two passions into the latter. Duchamp attempted to force roulette to become a game of chess, when in 1925 in Monte Carlo he started experimenting with the gambling system that was to prompt him to issue the *Monte Carlo Bond*. Schwarz notes that:

¹⁹ During a New Year's visit in Rouen in 1913, he composed this vocal piece with his two sisters, Yvonne and Magdeleine, both musicians. They randomly picked up twenty-five notes from a hat ranging from F below middle C up to high F. The notes then were recorded in the score according to the sequence of the drawing. The three vocal parts of *Erratum Musical* are marked in sequence as "Yvonne," "Magdeleine" and "Marcel." (Duchamp replaced the highest notes with the lower ones in order to make the piece singable for a male voice.) The words that accompanied the music were from a dictionary's definition of "*imprimer*" - *Faire une empreinte; marquer des traits; une figure sur une surface; imprimer un sceau sur cire* (To make an imprint; mark with lines; a figure on a surface; impress a seal in wax).

²⁰ "It happened in Toronto, at the *Sights sound systems* festival, when Cage had invited Duchamp and Teeny to be with him on the stage. All they had to do was play chess as usual, but the chessboard was wired and each move activated or cut off the sound coming live from several musicians. They played until the room emptied. Without a word said, Cage had managed to turn the chess game into a working performance. And the performance was a musical piece. In pataphysical terms, Cage had provided an imaginary solution to a nonexistent problem: whether life was superior to art. Playing chess that night extended life into art – or vice versa. All it took was plugging in their brains to a set of instruments, converting nerve signals into sounds. Eyes became ears, moves music.. It happened to be their endgame." [Lontringer, 1998, p. 55]

When I asked Duchamp that I did not fully grasp the relationship between chess and gambling, because the former involves the mind while the latter involves chance, he replied ‘In both cases there is a fight between two human beings. And by introducing more chance into chess and reducing the chance factor in gambling, the two activities could meet somehow. But chess is increasingly becoming a science in which is difficult to find place for chance..’.[Schwarz, 1969, p. 84]

Ironically but not surprisingly, both of Duchamp’s contributions to games theory shared a futile and ineffective nature. With regard to his *L’opposition et les cases conjuguées sont reconciliées*, Duchamp spoke of a purely intellectual study with no real practical application, for the situations being presented rarely came about. He sarcastically commented in his late years:

The end of the game in which it works would interest no chess player. That’s the funny part. There are only three or four people in the world who have tried to do the same research...Even the chess champions don’t read the book, since the problem it poses really only comes once in a lifetime. They’re end-game problems of possible games so rare as to be nearly Utopian. [Cabanne,1967, pp. 77-78]

On the other hand, the *Monte Carlo Bound*, a “collaboration” between Duchamp and his feminine alter-ego Rose Selavy, was once more a machine - a specific kind whose elaborate monotonous activity and the repetitive spinning of roulette discs inevitably recalls the optical pulse of the artist’s rotary reliefs and the droning machinery of the *Large Glass* - conceived as a martingale that would allow him to win ‘slowly but surely’ over the Monte Carlo bank, thus making roulette behave like a chess game. Nevertheless, even if this new way of painting, “sketching on chance”,²¹ was elaborated to guarantee the investors the 20% interest redeemable in three years, Duchamp had to admit:

²¹ Duchamp in a letter to Picabia, April the 17th 1924.

Only if one preserves long enough one can *hope* to win an amount equal to the wages of a clerk who works in his office as many hours as a gambler does in a casino. [Joselit, 1997, p. 110]

It is clear how the use of time in Duchamp transfigures into and reveals a noticeable indifference, if not a reluctance, to pursue a utilitarian side in his activities: a lifelong attitude that appears to be another point of contact between his game activities and art creation. In both cases, the result of his engagement either with games or art would have no social goal and yield no financial return. He constantly refused to use his increasing fame as an artist for financial reward or social prestige. When he arrived in New York in 1915 - already famous for the scandal of *Nude descending a Staircase* whose exhibition at the Armory Show of 1913 had shocked even Eleanor Roosevelt – he could have dictated whatever terms he chose to an eager and receptive audience; instead he limited himself to earning what was strictly necessary to keep him going by giving French lessons. Once more Henry Pierre Roché's *Écrits sur l'art* are enlightening:

At that time (Twenties) Marcel in New York was considered, together with Sarah Bernhardt and Napoleon, the most know French person. He could have chosen among millionaire young lovers. He did not. He rather played chess and gave French lessons for two dollars an hour, and anyway as a teacher he was very demanded. He was incompressible, divergent to all kind of costumes and habits, nevertheless he reached out everyone's heart. [Roché, 1998, p. 212]

The pursuit of monetary and social rewards would have meant to him the loss of what he cherished the most, his freedom. In the Thirties, right after having declared the *Large Glass* “definitively unfinished” he declined an extraordinary contract of 10000 dollars offered to him by the prestigious Knoedler Gallery with these words: “ It would force me to repeat myself. I will not even envisage this possibility. I value my independence too much.” [Schwarz, 1969, p. 72]

His friend Salvador Dali, notoriously known for his pecuniary obsession, flew into a covetous rage when informed of Duchamp's refusal, and still recalled the episode to his *entourage* briefly before dying.²² This priceless independence that for Duchamp coincided with freedom, certainly appeared to him as a natural right which he restlessly put out of question with tacit consent.

When, in 1925, the year both his parents died, in parallel to chess playing and artistic activity, Duchamp intermittently started dedicating himself to art business and speculation, employing a consistent part of his parents' heritage acquiring art works,²³ he had a precise intention in mind. Calling himself an anti-capitalist, his hilarious paradox of battling against the capitalistic society through its own means secretly hid a deeper need: that of demystifying the works of art in the very moment when our time started investing masterpieces with a supreme monetary value. The art pieces he started selling became to his eyes readymades he did not even have to bother signing, making even more extreme the statement he made once for his sculpture *Fountain*: "It doesn't matter if R. Mutt manufactured them or not, he chose them!". [Lebel, 1985, p. 107]

Taking a step back, *Les obligations pour la roulette de Monte Carlo* was also a way for Duchamp to testify to both the speculative conflation and forgery of the artistic and the economic. They were immediately valued not for their financial interest but as an

²² See C. Thurlow, 2002, p.225-226

²³ Duchamp, however, was highly implicated in the mechanisms and institutions he critiqued in word and object. To begin with, he was extremely well connected in the art world. During the course of his life, Duchamp became friends with bourgeois art collectors like Jean Doucet, Katherine Dreier, and Walter and Lydia Arensberg; with would-be art dealers like Sidney Janis, Julien Levy and Arturo Schwarz; and with museum officials like Alfred Barr, Walter Hopps (Pasadena Museum of Art) and Fiske Kimball (Philadelphia Museum of Art). From the mid 1920s to the 1940s, Duchamp made a partial living from trading art.

"In 1926 he helped out his friend Francis Picabia by buying eighty of his works directly from the artist. After framing them and making a catalogue (with an entry by Rose Sélavy) Duchamp sold the works at one of Hotel Drouot's auctions in Paris. Afterwards Duchamp and one of his best friends Henri-Pierre Roché bought twenty-nine sculptures by Brancusi from the estate of John Quinn, a rich American collector of modern art and early buyer of Brancusi's work. They were encouraged to do so by Brancusi himself who was afraid that the sculptures would not be able to maintain their value if dumped on the market in such a large quantity. After this transaction, Duchamp organized a Brancusi exhibition at the Brummer gallery in New York, where some of the works were sold. Over the fifteen years to follow, he sold the rest of his share piece by piece." [Tomkins, 1998, p. 285]

artistic investment. When Jane Heap, editor of the *American Little Review*, received a copy of the *Monte Carlo Bond* from Duchamp, she advertised it as follows:

If anyone is in the business of buying art curiosity as an investment, here is the chance to invest in the perfect masterpiece. Marcel's signature alone is worth much more than 500 francs asked for the share. Marcel has given up painting entirely and has devoted most of his time to chess in the last few years. [The Little Review, New York, Fall-Winter 1925, quoted in Schwarz, 1969 p. 85]

Another example of Duchamp's excursions into the financial is the 1919 *Tzanck check* – read also “thank check” –, a minutely hand drawn and written check, slightly larger than life-size and made out to compensate his Parisian dentist, Dr. Daniel Tzanck. Once again a shockingly everyday object sealed with the artist's signature, this check, even if drawn on *The Teeth's Loan and Trust Company, Consolidated, 2 Wall Street* in the amount of \$115, was clearly fraudulent.

Duchamp - who eventually bought back the *aided* readymade from his dentist for a price greater than that for which it was made out - plays again with both the geometrical notions of sizes and measure, as he did previously with 1914 *Three Standard Stoppages*, and with the concept of authorship. But this time dilating the defiance in terms of the question of man versus machine, or better, man imitating machine: whereas his other readymades questioned the value of artistic craftsmanship in a capitalist society, the *Tzanck Check* traveled the opposite direction by importing this value into the world of finance.

Rather than questioning artistic worth, these financial readymades address the general question of how value comes into being. Taking Duchamp's general critique of value one step further by not only questioning the distinction between art and non-art, but also exposing the congruency between the art world and the economy, these financial documents make artworks equivalent to monetary tokens, conflating the categories of

culture and finance in one object. With the explicit intention of eliminating the institutionalization of art, Duchamp wanted to criticize an art world where the signature certifies both artistic and economic value, where the authority of the artist and the authenticity of the work are seemingly all that counts:

When Duchamp signs mass-produced objects...and sends them to art exhibits, he negates the category of individual creation. The signature, whose very purpose it is to mark what is individual in the work, that it owes its existence to this particular artist, is inscribed on an arbitrarily chosen mass product, because all claims to individual creativity are to be mocked. Duchamp's provocation not only unmask 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. [Bürger, 1974, pp. 51-52]

Before proceeding forward, it must not be forgotten that the importance of the signature as the distinction mark of readymades is certainly to be ascribed to the importance that such practice has in the notarial deeds thus revealing a deeper layer of interpretation which leads straight to Duchamp's familial milieu: indeed the artist's father was a notary and, according to many biographers, until the age of sixteen Marcel's vocation was to follow the father career.

From a more general perspective, Duchamp's incursion into the financial domain must be valued as one of the most radical criticism ever produced in the artistic milieu of that commodification process that invested the European Modern civilization. As Giorgio Agamben pointed that out when taking into account a close lecture of Baudelaire's reports on the 1855 Exposition Universelle, it was on this occasion that the poet's eye first witnessed "an increasing orientation of the public attention from works of art to merchandising". From this point of view, Duchamp so-called *financial artworks* could be seen as an artistic declination of Baudelaire's aesthetical resolution for an art for art's sake: an absolute form where

The process of fetishization came to a point where it nullified the merchandising reality itself. A merchandising where the exchange and the use values reciprocally abolish one into the other, so that the only value left consists in the inutility of the product itself. It all comes to a final point where the product use, the art-craft, has no tangibility and therefore is no longer merchandising. [Agamben, 1985, pp.81-82]

Furthermore, in terms of political economy, intended as the immense transmutation of every sort of value such as work, knowledge, social and cultural and natural relations, into mere economical value of exchange, it is also possible to approach Duchamp's readymades as sumptuous irreverence and a parody also of the art market mechanism of auction sale, even in the light of the acceptance that Jean Baudrillard gave for this particular economical process, the *aristocratic parity*:

At the crucial moment of the auction sale, money comes to be denied as exchanging divisible and transubstantiated value for the expenditure procedure that makes it a rather indivisible and lavish value. It becomes an homologue of the unique and indivisible object which is the painting intended as a sign. Between money that became lavish matter because of the loss of economical exchange value and the painting that became a prestigious sign by losing its symbolic value, what happens is no longer an equivalence but rather an aristocratic parity. [Baudrillard, 1972, pp. 134-135]

Duchamp's financial quartet - here including the 1923 *Wanted/\$2000 Reward* and 1965 *Cheque Bruno* - specified and generalized his artistic venture on the whole, but rather than addressing all institutions of the art world, they deal with the art market specifically. Highly critical of art's marriage to commerce in the modern art world, when asked why he had stopped painting, Duchamp replied:

I don't want to copy myself, like all the others. Do you think they enjoy painting the same thing fifty or a hundred times? Not at all, they no longer make pictures; they make checks. [Naumann, 1999. p. 192.]

And to one of his American patrons, Katherine Dreier, he complained that economic success corrupted artists, while art lovers would only be able to value a work once it had a high price.

This manner of adulterating the value of his work and of the art investment by provoking the contradiction of market principles of profit and accumulation in an open defiance of money as a medium for economic exchange, recalls very closely George Bataille's theory of *expenditure*, which the other famed librarian derived from reading Marcel Mauss's *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*.

Indeed, given his condemnation of the art market, it is hardly surprising that rather than getting involved in commercial transactions, Duchamp gave away the major part of his oeuvre. It is worth recalling here that the artist rarely sold his few works, mostly preferring to trade or offer them to his friends or donate to museums, as he did with the 1968 *Given*, secretly assembled by the artist for twenty years, only to be posthumously donated to the Museum of Modern Art of Philadelphia. Also, purchasers are said rarely to have left his studio without a gift and when the art collector and couturier Jean Doucet financed the production costs of Duchamp's second optical machine, the 1925 *Rotary Demisphere*, the artist gave him the machine in return, insisting that the transaction was an exchange and not a payment. Furthermore, Duchamp, ostensibly to avoid involvement in the art world, urged his main patron Walter Arensberg not to lend his works to others, and frequently denied requests to have his art exhibited: "All exhibitions make me ill" [Tomkins, 1998, p.285], he wrote to Doucet and in a letter to Alfred Stieglitz claimed that "the feeling of the market here is so disgusting. Painters and paintings go up and down like Wall Street Stock." [Tomkins, 1998, p. 291]

Homo ludens rather than *homo faber*, Duchamp's inclination for recreational waste of time, loss of energy and convenience in terms of production, espouses the criteria of

Bataillian *depense*, thus throwing a double perspective on his works that enlarges both the perimeters of eroticism and the sacred. After ascertaining that any general judgment of social activity implies the principle that all individual effort, in order to be valid, must be reducible to the fundamental necessities of production and conservation, Bataille introduces his resistance theory by affirming that :

Human activity is not entirely reducible to processes of production and conservation: [...] games, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality), all these represent activities which, at least in primitive circumstances, have no end beyond themselves. Now it is necessary to reserve the use of the word *expenditure* for the designation of these unproductive forms, and not for the designation of all the modes of consumption that serve as a means to the end of production. [...] Even though it is always possible to set the various forms of expenditure in opposition to each other, they constitute a group characterized by the fact that in each case the accent is placed on a *loss* that must be as great as possible in order for that activity to take on its true meaning [...] in other words, an unconditional *expenditure*, no matter how contrary it might be to the economic rational principle of balanced accounts (since expenditure regularly compensated for by acquisition). [Bataille, 1984, pp. 120-121]

By “spending” his readymades - once again, objects he chose and signed thus displacing them from the ordinary - and by putting them in circulation, Duchamp sets into motion an alternate interpretation of value based on notions of expenditure. Value, be it artistic or monetary, is generated through exchange: it is neither essential to nor coextensive of actual objects. Duchamp’s works break down the notion of artistic standards through speculation, the reproduction abolishes the notion of artistic production through expenditure, through a gesture that mimics economy only to abolish the concept of abstract worth. From the enormous expenditure of time he dedicated to the chess game to the *perverse* and *deflected from genital* eroticism of his impossible machineries, his

excursions in XX century art instituted an unclassifiable value that depends not on an original but instead on the playful subversion of the notion of artistic creativity.

Seen in this light, the financial documents take Duchamp's ordinary readymades one step further: while these last works had defied Marxian notions of value by indicating that objects can have value without embodying labor, the financial readymades obscured the source of this value in the signature and institutional setting of the work, indicating by contrast that exchange, both inside and outside of the economic realm, may be closer to the source of value and of our desire to own a good, because desire, in other words, is at the same time satisfied and generated by exchange.

Rather than signifying the commensurability of art on the market - commensurate, for instance, to the services of a dentist -, these financial documents highlight the social and cultural subtexts of exchange. They emphasize the fact that both money and art work are dependent on trust, since both need a social setting in order to function. Just as the paper money and checks we use in everyday transactions are fiduciary and do not embody any value themselves, Duchamp's checks destroy any illusions we may still have had about the intrinsic value of art: its value is based on a discursive context which initiates the production of belief. As Dalia Judovitz wrote:

Rather than viewing Duchamp's commercial activity as a betrayal of both his artistic detachment and putative disinterest in financial value, his fascination for the speculative value of art can be better understood in intellectual terms. It is a fascination with how artistic and monetary value is generated arbitrarily through social exchange. Duchamp's interest in the speculative character of money does not translate itself into the subservience of his own artistic work to monetary considerations. Instead, it expresses the recognition that value, be it artistic or financial, is embedded in a circuit of symbolic exchange. [Judovitz, 1995, p. 167.]

III

Hermaphroditism, the *Infrathin* Lightness of Being

“La pittura è cosa mentale”

Leonardo

“My landscapes begin where da Vinci’s end”

M. Duchamp

“La parola collega la traccia visibile alla cosa invisibile, alla cosa assente, alla cosa desiderata o temuta, come un fragile ponte di fortuna gettato sul vuoto..L’ esempio più significativo d’una battaglia con la lingua per catturare qualcosa che ancora sfugge all’espressione è Leonardo da Vinci..”

I. Calvino

In 1910, publishing *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, Freud inaugurated the cycle of “pathographies”, the attempt to understand the life and works of a celebrated cultural figure through the investigation of his or her crucial psychological conflicts. Describing his work as the “most beautiful thing he ever wrote” in a letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé, the father of psychoanalysis, like many of his fellows, firmly held to the belief that psychoanalysis could contribute significantly to the illumination of a wide range of issues behind the therapeutic, in both the humanities and the social sciences. In such later works as *Totem and Taboo*, *The Future of an Illusion* and *Civilization and its Discontent* he addressed such questions as the nature of religious belief and the origins of human society and culture from both anthropological and psychological standpoints.

As a creative person and a master of prose, Freud - who in 1930 was awarded the Goethe Prize by the City of Frankfurt for the literary quality of his voluminous writings on the workings of the human mind – was fascinated by creative process, sought in a number of writings to explain it, and was eager to show the value of his method in the

case of Leonardo, the Renaissance man, both as a prototype of the universal genius and a creator of some of the most beautiful, familiar and yet mysterious paintings of all time.

Although in Freud's days, as indeed in ours, biographical data on Leonardo were relatively sparse, it was known that he was born in 1452, the product of a *liaison* between the notary Ser Piero da Vinci and a peasant girl whom we know only as Caterina. In the same year Ser Piero married one Donna Albiera: how long Leonardo remained with his natural mother is unclear, but by 1457 tax records prove that he was then living with his father and stepmother in Florence. It was widely believed that Leonardo was homosexual, at least in inclination if not in actual practice. At the age of twenty-four he was indicted, along with three others, for sodomy: the case was never proven and, ultimately, the indictment was dropped. These facts, along with Leonardo's birth outside of wedlock and the lifelong pattern of inconsistency in his commitment to his craft, strongly suggested to Freud that significant psychological conflicts underlay the artist's behavior and contributed to the unique character of his works.

What principally engaged Freud's interest in Leonardo was the artist's description in his *Codex Atlanticus* of a very early childhood memory with particular dramatic and colorful content:

It seems that I was always destined to be so deeply concerned with vultures , for I recall as one of my very earliest memories that while I was in my cradle a vulture came down to me, and opened my mouth with its tail, and struck me many times with its tail against my lips. [Freud, 1984, p. 19]

It is acknowledged that Freud's mistake in translating the word *nibio* with "vulture" rather than "kite" seems to have originated from some of the German translations he used, primarily the 1900 Merezhovsky essay dedicated to Leonardo, *The Resurrection of Gods*, which, as may be seen from the marked copy in Freud's library, was the source of the

better part of his information about Leonardo and in which he probably came across the story of the artist's childhood for the first time.

Apart from the fact that it has no consequent relevance on the Egyptian discussion - in which Freud links the image of the bird to the mythological hermaphroditic divinity *Mout* to eventually correlate both to Leonardo's mother - as Bryan Farrell notes in his 1984 introduction to Freud's essay:

The hieroglyph for Egyptian word for "mother" (mut) quite certainly represents a vulture and not a kite. In fact, Gardiner in his authoritative *Egyptian Grammar* identifies the creature as "Gyps fulvus", the griffon vulture. [Freud, 1984, p.6]

Hence this proves that the main body of the Freudian exegesis of Leonardo's libido presents us with a larger number of no less important side-themes: a more general discussion on the nature and working of the mind of a creative artist, an outline of the genesis of one particular type of homosexuality, and – of special interest to the history of psychoanalytic theory – the first full emergence of the concept of narcissism.

Apart from the thematic relevance and the evolution of both latent androgyny and narcissism in the French artist's chess and art engagement, as we have previously discussed, several of Duchamp's critics have detected further parallels with the life and work of Leonardo. Indeed, Freud's observation that

Leonardo da Vinci was admired by his contemporaries as one of the greatest men of the Italian Renaissance, still even then appeared as mysterious to them as he now appears to us [...] an all-round genius *whose forms can be divined but never deeply fathomed*, he exerted the most decisive influence on his time as an artist and it remained to us to recognize his greatness as a naturalist which was united in him with the artist:[...]the investigations in him never quite left the artist [Freud, 1984, p.9]

could perfectly match with the author of the *Large Glass*, if we would only replace *Italian Renaissance* with *Modern art*. As for *naturalist*, intended as scientist, we know that Duchamp maintained a lifelong interest in kinetics, algebra and optics and that more than any other eminent artist of his century he understood and researched non-Euclidean geometry and the mathematics of higher dimensionality in the different realms of his work.

Among Duchamp's many scientific ventures stands the development of the illusionistic *Rotoreliefs*, those spinning circular geometric patterns which phenomena he investigated simultaneously with the Italian optical scientific team that discovered and named this optical circumstance "the stereo-kinetic effect" in 1924. Indeed the history of art is filled with artists whose discoveries and research were labeled or advocated as *objets d'art* and whose scientific usefulness was not discovered until many years, often centuries, later. However, no other artist, as Duchamp did, ever cloaked so deceptively his intentions as a tactic to subvert conventional interpretation.

The most famous image of Leonardo in Modern art is certainly Duchamp's impromptu drawing of a supposed moustache and a Mephistophelean beard on a tourist reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* that he titled after the initials he wrote beneath, *L.H.O.O.Q.*: a pun on the French for when these letters are read aloud they say "Elle a chaud au cul", in English: "She has a hot arse". This Dadaist obscene assault on the very idea of an artwork as an object to be revered, rather than being an attack on Leonardo himself, could be seen as a reply to Freud, as Duchamp stated that it revealed a truth about his noted foregoer. However, it is fair to remember that baroness Dupin, better known in literature as George Sand, largely anticipated both Freud's and Duchamp's

interpretation of the *Gioconda* androgyny when she wrote about perceiving in this notorious portrait the feminine alter-ego of Leonardo.²⁴

Discussing the acquisition of the maternal image in pre-pubertal stage, Jung indirectly confirms Freud's assertions on Leonardo's androgynous representation of his mother as translated in the *Mona Lisa* by enunciating how the anthropomorphic mark could impress itself on the infantile imaginary through the archetype of the androgynous mother, perfect in her divine hermaphroditism.²⁵ If it is true that such an interpretation could overstep into misogyny, as Jung warns, it also contemplates, in terms of a spasmodic self-realization impulse, the figure of the boy *bearer of light*, thus corroborating another of Freud's intuitions according to which Leonardo identifies himself with the consoler and redeemer Christ child in the *Virgin of the Rocks*.

Not well known until the mid-nineteenth century, when artists of the emerging Symbolist movement began to appreciate it and associate it with their ideas about feminine mystique - as exquisitely substantiated by Walter Pater in his 1873 *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* - the *Gioconda*'s prestige over the mass public certainly increased because of Freud's 1910 essay, but most of all due to the clamorous 1911 theft at the hands of the Italian patriot Vincenzo Peruggia, who believed that Leonardo's last painting should return to Italy to be displayed in an Italian museum. What might relate this circumstance to Duchamp's libel of the *Mona Lisa* is the fact that his close friend Guillaume Apollinaire, who had once called for the Louvre to be "burnt down," came under suspicion and was eventually arrested and put in jail. Apollinaire tried to implicate

²⁴ See G. Sand, *Souvenirs et impressions littéraires*, Dentu, Paris, 1862, p. 207

²⁵ See Carl Gustav Jung, *Structure and dynamic of psyche*, London: Routledge & Kegan, 1960.

his friend Pablo Picasso, who was also brought in for questioning, but both were later exonerated.²⁶

With the 1919 *L.H.O.O.Q.* readymade Duchamp inaugurates his excursions into sex changes, later followed by the introduction in his works of the feminine alter-egos *Rose Selavy* and *Belle Heleine* whom he increasingly used to sign and advertise his art craft. To return once more to the financial document *Monte Carlo Bound*, Juan Antonio Ramirez wrote:

The most striking visual element of the raffle tickets printed by Duchamp is his own effigy, resembling a faun (achieved with shaving soap), against the background of a roulette wheel. This is one way of giving a human story-line to a mechanism, a means of bestowing sexuality on it; here again is the satyr-bachelor trapped in his masturbatory circularity, hoping to acquire the longed for winnings after each of the croupier's 'manipulations'. This was admitted by A. Schwarz, who quoted Freud: 'A passion for gambling is equivalent to the ancient compulsion to masturbate.' But perhaps there is something more, an allegory of the artist and his chance reward. [Ramírez,1993. P. 278]

Duchamp's shape in Man Ray's portrait has also been seen as strongly evocative of one of the principal attributes of classical antiquity's messenger god *Mercury*, suggestively pertinent to Duchamp's financial document. Renowned for his speedy effectiveness, resourcefulness, and shrewdness, Mercury was the Roman god of trade, profit, merchants, travelers, and shepherds, as well as patron to artists, impostors, and all dishonest folk. Even his name resonates with these associations, deriving from the Latin root for merchandise, *a mercibus*. Indeed, these are all attributes intensely associated with Duchamp's conduct, which may be summarized in his anagram: *marchand du sel*, salt merchant. In both Ancient Greek and Roman iconography, Mercury is generally shown beardless, almost feminine so that Duchamp's use of foam for creating a beard exalts this

²⁶ Jonathat Jones also wrote that "According to Picasso, the scandal cost Apollinaire his life: desperate to repair his reputation, he enlisted in the French army during the First World War and was mortally wounded" See "Was Da Vinci the first surrealist?" in *The Guardian*, 3 August 1999.

ambiguity, for it simultaneously indicates the absence of a beard after shaving and the appearance of a false beard in place of a real one. By mirroring the *Mona Lisa* disfiguration, Duchamp's Mercurial image not only bears an iconographic resemblance to the ancient god but also conceptually ties in with the hermaphroditic acceptation which this ancient divinity of word incorporates, in the mythological and also alchemical tradition, which we know, as Arturo Schwarz's and Robert Label's critical works proved, was not unfamiliar to Duchamp.

Also concerning *L.H.O.O.Q.*, it appears interesting to consider Duchamp's attack on both the painting's aura and its cult value in the history of art at the light of Benjamin's observation on the danger faced by works of art in the Industrial age:

That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of a work of art [...] the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. [Benjamin, 1969, p. 221]

By affirming that the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from being embedded in the fabric of tradition, Benjamin assumes that the cult value of art is defined by contextual integration of art in tradition. By using a commercial print of a masterpiece, Duchamp does remove it in fact from the painterly tradition, since the plurality of the reproduction challenges the uniqueness and originality of the work. However, this gesture merely reiterates the manner in which works of art are removed from their original location in order to be amassed under the institutional authority of the museums: the decontextualization that takes place through the reproduction of works of art is but the extension of the decontextualization that the museum performs on works of art as it makes them readily accessible for viewing by the mass public.

Like Leonardo, known for his maddening tendency to leave his work unfinished - when it came to finishing the work, most of the time he just farmed it out to assistants or simply stopped - and for his propensity of shifting his attention from artistic to scientific and mechanical interests, Duchamp's abandonments, renunciations and failures still stand in the history of art as milestones along the perimeter of modernity. And like Duchamp, Leonardo did not become the modern world's favorite artist because he was perfect, but because he was perceived as imperfect, troubled and tormented: this was why Freud devoted the first ever attempt at a psychoanalytic biography to him and this also was why the Surrealists loved him. Both artists still surprise posterity for the little painting they did; both bluff the spectator for the fact that most of their attempts were absolutely useless; both seem to have seen no distinction between art and life.

We may be tempted to state that Duchamp spent his entire career deliberately repeating Leonardo's *failure*: he started as a painter but stopped painting and instead chose objects to nominate as "art", then he gave up art and claimed he was a chess player and researcher.

Duchamp's science shares the same ambiguous relationship with modern technology as Leonardo's drawings with the early scientific revolution and, like many of Leonardo's creations - for instance, the 1506 fresco *The Battle of Anghiari* -, Duchamp's artworks are ruins. It is well known that when he became famous in the Sixties, his early readymades had to be reconstructed because they had vanished or were destroyed. His art was a self-consciously futile game, like Leonardo's picture puzzle *codices* and the notebooks that reveal a deliberate mixture of verbal and visual information, Duchamp also fabricated boxes that include sketches, notes and word associations.

Also, returning to Freud's study, the most remarkable aspect was not only the explicit discussion of Leonardo's sexuality, but the fact that the creator of psychoanalysis

considered the most celebrated artist in history for his failures and renunciations. As for Duchamp's nihilism and renunciations, also in Leonardo there really is evidence of a sense of futility and pessimism, as evidenced in his *codices* by the obsessive repetition of the phrase: "Was anything accomplished?" or "Was anything achieved?".

After having labeled *aristocratic* Duchamp's failures and abandons, Jean Clair wrote:

Duchamp also, in a sense, was a "failure." The feeling of failure - the idea of being a loser, a pariah, an outcast, a *Sonderling* or whatever leads a person to finding out at the age of fifteen or sixteen that they're not in the "in" crowd - was most vivid. There was the social failure of being a notary's son, an offspring of small-town bourgeoisie in a province that was already looked down upon on the eve of the First World War. There was the professional failure of his entrance examinations to the *École des Beaux-arts* in 1905, which drove back the spirits of the young artist. There was the failure of the *Salon des Indépendants* in 1912, when his work was refused. So many wounds to narcissism. It was therefore by the love of irony and the daily practice of failing that he responded with his creative powerlessness." [Clair, 1975, p.11]

And furthermore:

Duchamp's refusal never to let himself be seduced by the security of normal life and his scorn for the respectability and honors which accompanied this life were therefore sincere and very similar to the anarchic despair experienced by political explorers...Anarchists, Dadaists, Surrealists and other dynamos of society: Duchamp was decidedly not of this group. Rather, his camp was that of the deserters. His departure for New York, at the beginning of the war, then Buenos Aires, resembles Descartes' departure for Amsterdam. To a cauldron of reflection, of daydreaming, far from the masses. Polite but reserved: he wasn't there for anyone. [Clair, 1975, p.12]

Leonardo's and Duchamp's common interest in research, not only meant as an effort to rethink the relationship between art and science, but also to emphasize intellectual rather than visual experience explains why both artists were more concerned with formulating their ideas than with producing finished paintings, more excited by investigation rather than execution. Such considerations have been explored in the critical interlocation of Theodore Reff's 1977 *Duchamp and Leonardo: L.H.O.O.Q.-Alikes* and

Jean Clair's 1979 *Duchamp, Léonard et la tradition maniériste*, particularly regarding the shared conviction that in both artists "art is primarily the record of an intellectual process rather than a visual experience". [Reff, 1977, p. 85]

Duchamp's explicit rejection of painting as a pure visual medium whose purpose is to incite "visual euphoria" must be taken, as other pronouncements, *cum grano salis*, since his objections to painting are strategic rather than oppositional: they are less a statement of denial of the significance of the pictorial tradition than an effort to rethink the legacy of painting in conceptual terms. In 1960, delivering the lecture *Should the Artist Go to College?*, at Hofstra University in Hempstead, Duchamp stated:

Bête comme un peintre. This French proverb comes from the times of Murger's *Bohemian Life*, written around the 1880, and it is still in use as a wisecrack during in everyday conversation. Why should the artist be considered less intelligent than Mr Everyone? Could it be because his activity is essentially manual and does not have an immediate relation with the intellect? [M. Duchamp, 1989, p. 137]

In a later interview he clarifies his position by affirming his interest in the innovation of an "ideatic" interpretation of visual painting:

In France there is an old saying, 'stupid like a painter'. The painter was considered stupid, but the poet and the writer very intelligent. I wanted to be intelligent. I had to have the idea of inventing...In my visual period there is a little of that stupidity of the painter, All my work in the period before the *Nude* was visual painting. Then I come to the idea. I thought the ideatic formulation a way to get away from influences. [Roberts, 1969, pp. 63-64]

The *ideatic* came to Duchamp after the refusal of the *Nude* at the *Salon des Indépendants* in 1912, as a reaction to Metzinger's and Gleizes's Cubism *out-out* and as a strategy to escape the dictatorship of the retinal:

Since the advent of Impressionism visual production stopped at the retina. Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Abstraction, it's always a matter of retinal

painting. Their physical preoccupation: the reactions of colors, etc., put the reaction of the gray matter in the background. [Cabanne, 1967, p. 141]

Regarding chess as both an art and a game, it provided Duchamp with the metaphorical model for his life and work. The readymades and the *Large Glass* are the final outcome of Duchamp's intention to get away from the physical aspect of painting in order to put it at the service of the mind. He stated this briefly and very clearly: "This is the direction in which art should turn: to intellectual expression" and also declared that "painting should not be only retinal or visual: it should also have to do with the *gray matter* of our understanding", as it used to be for centuries before the advent of Impressionism.

The board game is for Duchamp the best example of this free and disinterested form of mental art: "there is a mental end implied when you look at the formation of pieces on the board. The transformation of the visual aspect to the gray matter is what always happens in chess and what should happen in art." And again: "It's imagining the movement or the gesture that makes the beauty, in this case. It is completely in one's grey matter." The precision play involved in chess is an aspect of the beauty of precision that Duchamp advocated for art and in this respect chess may also provided the affirmative answer to his question "Can one make works which are not works of 'art'?"

On Duchamp's primary valorization of the beauty of the chess game, Edward Lasker once recalled that the French artist "would always take risks in order to play a beautiful game rather than be cautious and brutal to win" [Schwarz,1969, p.78]. The beauty Duchamp found in chess was the movement of the pieces within his mind. This is testament to what Duchamp said to Jean-Marie Drot:

Mechanics in the sense that the pieces move, interact, destroy each other, they're in constant motion and that's what attracts me. Chess figures placed in a passive position have no visual or aesthetic appeal. It's the possible

movements that can be played from that position that makes it more or less beautiful. [Drot, 1964]

And further

Actually when you play a game of chess it is like designing something or constructing a mechanism of some kind by which you win or lose. The competitive side of it has no importance, but the thing itself is very, very plastic and it is probably what attracted me to the game.[Drot, 1964]

Indeed in another interview Duchamp said that the "expression" of chess and the "competitive" nature made it too incongruent with art, and thus no art form at all. However, for Duchamp, it was not important to understand chess as a fight, or "sport" but through artistic qualities. This he explicitly stated during a BBC radio interview, claiming that the "competitive aspect was of no importance"[Schwarz, 1969, p. 93]:

Of course, one intriguing aspect of the game that does imply artistic connotations is the actual geometric patterns and variations of the actual set up of the pieces and in the combinative, tactical, strategical, and positional sense. It's a sad expression though - somewhat like religious art - it is not very gay. [Schwarz, 1969, p. 94]

The way chess is able to evoke the abstract and intellectual movement of objects upon a new space or reality is certainly the attitude that Duchamp wanted the spectator to have for the *Large Glass* apparent static machinery as for certain inert readymades such as *In Advance for a Broken Arm* or *Why not sneeze, Rrose Selavy?*. Since the 1912 *Salon des Indépendants*, Duchamp's fascination with transition, change, movement and distance became manifest, and like many artists of the time, he was intrigued by the concept of depicting the so-called "Fourth dimension" in art, a theory vulgarized in those years by the *Comoedia* director Gaston de Pawlowski in several issues of the illustrious Parisian magazine and later on collected in the 1923 novel *Voyage au pays de la quatrième*

dimension. The first and only time Duchamp refers to Pawlowski is in the already cited interview with Cabanne:

Anyway, it was then that I decided to read the articles of a certain Pawlowski, who explained the measures, lines, curves etc...All these notions occupied my thoughts at the time I was working, even if I never really used such calculations for the *Large Glass*. Simply, I was thinking about the idea of a projection, of an invisible Fourth dimension since it is impossible to see it with the eyes. As I thought that one could represent the shadow of a three dimensions of any given object – like the sun projection on earth draws two dimensions – due to a similar intellectual analogy, I considered that the fourth dimension could cast a three dimension object. In other words, any three dimensions object is the projection of a four dimensions object that we do not know. [Cabanne, 1967, p. 194]

Jean Clair's 1975 essay *Marcel Duchamp ou le Grand Fictif* still remains the most complete attempt to interpret the artist's *opus magnum* at the light of Pawlowski's novel. And his intuitions are later regained by Ulf Linde who advances that the readymades are objects of subtle demonstration conceived to lead the spectator into multidimensional universes through the projection of their shadows or movement that must be set in motion intellectually:

The *Bicycle Wheel*, far from being a banal object found in a bicycle shop and mounted on a stool, is in reality an ingenious optical machine which allows the principle of "demultiplication" to be realized by "elementary parallelism" which, from the painting of *Moulin à café*, in 1911, occupied the mind of Duchamp: "It schematically gives shape to the principle of cubism: if one turns the wheel, one creates a multiplicity of n dimensions - the spokes become innumerable - a unit of $n + 1$ dimensions." Likewise was he going to prove the astonishing complexity of *Why not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?* with the presence, under the marble cubes, of porcelain cups...Let's consider, finally, that in the surrealist exposition of objects at the Charles Ratton gallery in 1936, the ready-made by Duchamp, the *Bottle Dryer* and the birdcage of *Why not Sneeze*, for example, were enthroned under the same light and to the side of some mathematical objects in string and brass from the Poincaré Institute which served to visualize the fourth dimension. Such near posturing, yet again, in favor of a complex ready-made conceptual machine destined to make visible the multidimensional continuum, rather than an ordinary object supposedly "elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the simple choice of the artist." [Clair, 1975, p. 26]

Indeed, the delight for abstract and intellectual movement that the chess game provided to Duchamp and that he invokes for the spectator to comprehend his works was outlined by the artist himself when he stated at the 1957 Convention of the American Federation of Arts in Houston:

The creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act. [M. Duchamp, 1989, p. 159]

therefore Duchamp paradoxically accomplished Apollinaire's oracle:

His technique can produce works of a strength so far undreamed of. It may even play a social role. Perhaps it will be the task of an artist as detached from aesthetic preoccupations, and as intent on the energetic as Marcel Duchamp, to reconcile art and people. [Apollinaire, 1980, p. 35]

This chess-derived inclination for abstraction and intellectualization is the attitude that we could imagine also led Duchamp to mostly formulate ideas rather than produce finished paintings, as the discrepancy between his annotations and his art works could indicate.

From such a perspective, this might be a significant difference between Duchamp and Leonardo: according to Vasari, Leonardo's dispersive nature and inclination in appointing different works in the same time, together with the experimentation of always new techniques, prevented him from concluding the many projects he worked on. In fact, if Duchamp's intellectual mindset prevented him from repeating himself in chess strategy or art practice, it also led his speculations to echelon where the artist left them abstracted in their theoretical form, not ultimate on the matter, thus evidencing the already evident fracture between thought and expression. By empathizing the primacy of the former over the latter, Duchamp attitude seems to espouse another Italian artist's supposition: it is the

case of Pasolini's *Decameron*, where interpreting Giotto, the director claims "Why shall one realize a work of art, when already dreaming about it is marvelous?"

Among the many of Duchamp's abandons that constellate Modern art, his *definitively unfinished* masterpiece, *The Large Glass*, stands as the most significant one: the spectator, who already must participate in the creation of the painting - having to interpret and set into motion its erotic machinery therefore becoming a sort of "erotonaute" -, will not find on the transparent surface of the masterpiece some of the elements the author conceived but never ended up incorporating. It is the case of the omitted *Juggler of Gravity* and the *Boxing Match* whose function makes the bachelors odyssey even more a hazard-ridden course.

The recurring influence of chess strategies on Duchamp's work has already been discussed. It seems possible here to assert, along with Neumann's intuitions, that Duchamp also organized his life as a chess game, so that chronologically his life could actually run parallel to the different phases of a chess game - from opening, to middle game, to endgame -, thus disclosing how many events that the artist craftily and deviously orchestrated resemble the unfolding pattern of a game, one that, insofar as the game of art is concerned, continues to be played, even after his death.

Duchamp's checkmate of Modern art and of any critical formulation or exegesis of his work thus appears closely related to the almost utopian circumstance he described in the four-handed *L'Opposition et les cases conjuguées sont reconciliées*: he placed himself in art history by ironically elaborating a suspension of the game - hence art, hence death - through infinitively postponing a stasis and consequently negating an all-embracing comprehension of his life, of his contradictory and subversive actions.

Thus, rather than being failures, his abandons and renunciations must be considered as passages that guaranteed his work a way out of the consumerism of the art market -

which he insistently and ironically denounced – and of the dead-ended dialectical evolution of Modern art. A specific kind of dialectic that Duchamp observed in his early years of apprenticeship when he passed through the different avant-gardes, and that he perceived as perishing, as Sklovskij pointed out for Modern literature, in a sort of mechanism for which artistic heritage does not pass from father to son but rather from uncle to niece.

From this angle Duchamp's life and art paraphrase some of Lewis Carroll's logical principia; like Carroll's *Alice* - another would-be feminine alter-ego Duchamp surely would have impersonated - he seems to have acknowledged the *Garden of Flowers* rule of the game as the Queen cries it out:

Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place, if you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that! [Carroll, 2003, p.271]

A strategist of life and of the mind, Duchamp had prepared his defences step by step during his life, as if his existence was a chess game, as if there was no other way to relate himself to art but as a challenge, as if he had reached a mental stratum that made increasingly difficult or even impossible to solve his enigma. His friend Jeanne Raynal declared once:

I admire him greatly because, in a way, he gave up life while still alive. He is very much alive, as everyone knows. But he can observe the impact of his work while he is alive but as if he were dead. [Drot, 1964]

Certainly the practice of contradiction played a fundamental role in Duchamp's strategy, first of all providing him with a tactic to avoid repeating himself as an artist. But even from a more general perspective this way of contradicting, that at the very end opposes the practice of art to the playing of chess, also conciliates them if seen from

another angle, in this case through what Duchamp called *Infra-thin*. The notion corroborates one of the artist's favorite mottos, "there is no solution because there is no problem": through *Infra-thin* we could rephrase Duchamp and claim "there is no conciliation because there is no opposition".

In 1945 Duchamp was asked to illustrate the special edition of the American magazine *View*: for the front cover he conceived a bottle of Bordeaux drained of wine but filled with smoke trailing across the page - remarkably reminiscent of the Milky Way, thus echoing the upper side of the *Large Glass* – while on the back cover he inserted a message built of collaged letters, that reveals Duchamp's notion of infra-thin, a neologism of his that, he stated, could not be defined, but only illustrated:

WHEN
THE TABACCO SMOKE
SMELLS ALSO
OF THE MOUTH
THAT EXHALES IT THE TWO ODOURS
ARE MARRIED
INFRATHIN.

The smell of smoke and the mouth are distinct and separate entities, though through the act of smoking, the two odors are combined forming a 'new thought.' Thus through infra-thin, art and chess are married in the life and work of Duchamp.

"The comparison between the chronological order of my paintings and a game of chess is absolutely right" Duchamp admitted once "but when will I administer checkmate - or will I be mated?" [Jones, 1994, p. 120]. It seems like *Given* is the final checkmate the *anartiste* administrated to retinal art: from a note he wrote in 1912, we know that he had the scenario of *Given* in mind even before the *Large Glass* was begun. Therefore, we know he started his chess game with art for more than fifty years earlier, from the very moment he declined the brushes and oil paintings odor to ask himself: can one produce

mental works not reliant on primarily retinal effects? Is it possible to produce works that are not works of art?

Duchamp was perhaps the only artist who realized that in his century art had left the canvas, and he pushed this epiphany to the point where his art left the canvas to become life. And by leaving the canvas his art became his own life.

Comment j'ai (d)écrit certains de mes Œuvres

I

Ma vie, mode d'emploi: une histoire de notes et hasard

"Le machines les plus compliquées sont faites par les mots."
Jacques Lacan

"El azar solo es una forma en la cual se manifiesta un diseño
que nos sobrepasa."
Octavio Paz

After the summer of 1912 the form of Marcel Duchamp's expression radically changed: painting pictures was replaced by constructing, in both two and three dimensions, closely followed by the appropriation, manipulation, modification and augmentation of preformed materials, for which the resort to writings to accompany those new works became fundamental. The following pages attempt to inquire into the literary origins and the sources of such a practice.

It is well known that Duchamp's work is not exactly what stands before the eyes but rather the impulse that such signs offer to the viewer's mind. For this reason one of the aspects that astounds the most in his productions is the use of verbal language to accompany his creations. Such a practice coyly began with the 1911 painting *Jeune homme triste dans un train*, at that stage of the artist's life where he was still trying to accomplish the Cubist paradigms of the Puteaux circle (otherwise known as the *Section d'Or*, which, among the various artists, included Raymond and Jacques Duchamp, Albert Gleizes, Jean Metzinger and Robert Delaunay) and that had to come to an end because of the 1912 *Salon des Indépendants* lamentable episode, when he was asked by his own two brothers to retire the *Nude descending a Staircase N° 2*, since it was considered too related to the Futurist idea of movement. Until then Duchamp conventionally employed

words to title those paintings that eventually he would have labeled as “retinal”, thus fitting himself into a pluri-centenarian practice for which the author of a work of art verbally illustrates his pictorial representation to the viewer.

From 1913 onwards, back from a journey to Munich, Duchamp adopted a different use for his titles: gradually, from simple captions, within few years they increasingly became more intricate and longer texts to a point where, while he was still alive, certain critics such as Octavio Paz and Robert Label began considering him not exclusively an *artiste* but also, because of his thoughtful notes and for his artful wordplay, a poet and a philosopher. It is true, indeed, that starting from the readymade put into practice, begun in 1913, to the posthumous *Given* (1946-1966), Duchamp is an artist to be read more than being viewed.

More than any other painter of his time, a close look at his writings is essential to cross the threshold of his world, to “strip bared the appearance” of his oeuvre - to use an expression of Paz – as much as to value how words accompanied and accomplished the organization of his life - Duchamp’s main art work, as previously illustrated - and, last but not least, to differentiate the literary and artistic sources that as a “painter” he based his production on.

To begin, Duchamp’s mixture of visual and verbal languages finds its origin within his familial background and more precisely in the relation with the maternal figure, Lucie Nicolle Duchamp, who also had artistic inclinations and skills that nevertheless had to be neglected in order to raise her six children. While such a circumstance could also explain why the artist always refused to deal with social duties and institutions that in his opinion would have taken away from him that freedom he always prized the most, Judith Housez’s recent biography reports a precious feature of Duchamp’s family milieu which

displaces some of the previous interpretations on the genesis of the artist's attitude on writing:

The relationship with his mother must have been very peculiar: at the time Marcel was born she was already semi-deaf. On this matter Duchamp once said: "among two beings that love each other, language is not the deepest form of communication...this is the reason why I love painting: it's an affection that one addresses to one other through a pure eye exchange". [Housez, 2006, p. 23]

It is most probably in regard of this love between his mother and her children which basically occurred mostly through silent glances that Duchamp, at the age of fifteen, started painting, already wanting to question in this way the primacy and rationality of verbal language in terms of communication; and even more importantly, it is because of the fact that every member of the family was obliged to verbally communicate with her through fast-written notes on paper and chalkboards, that - as Housez seems to suggest - the artist first considered and increasingly opted to accompany his works with numerous notes meant to explained their meaning.

To continue, wanting to find the origins of this singular mixture of expressive codes, one must also consider another circumstance that undoubtedly played a part in Duchamp's resolution for the use of notes applied to his works: in his early Parisian years, while attending the *Académie Julien*, to make a living he took over from his brother Raymond the post of cartoonist for a couple of humorist magazines, *Le Rire* and *Le Courrier Français*. It was during this period that he drew and sold sketches where for the first time he melted his ribald humor with a fine and elegant stroke thus creating his first visual and verbal puns.

Such play with words and symbols would eventually engage his imagination for the rest of his life. Duchamp pushed such a practice to a point where the difference between

painting and writing - both basically intended as analogue forms of optic perception - was abolished: rather than being a constant passage from one communicative system to the other, this process must be perceived as a whole, as the instauration of a new semiologic code for which the verbal representation of each and every of Duchamp's visual oeuvre reached the highest seminal force in terms of intellectual contents.

Apart from a few texts and aphorisms that the artist produced for the purpose of magazines collaborations, speeches for conferences and letters to friends, Duchamp's *corpus scriptorum* is mainly composed of notes for his works that he put down on different kinds of paper supports, such as sheets and notebook pages but also bills, visiting cards and paper napkins that occasionally happened to be in the artist's hand in the moment of inspiration. "Trasformateur destiné à utiliser les petites énergies gaspillées" as Breton wrote in the celebrated *Anthologie de l'humor noir*, Duchamp along the years applied the same practice of restrained output to both his writing and to the production of readymades: as for these elected and de-contextualized objects, the number of puns and wordplays he created was limited to a certain amount per year. Thrifty with actions and words, never before has such a slender corpus of art crafts produced so many important intellectual consequences and dividends.

It is a matter of fact that the increasing use of verbal language in Duchamp coincides with the aesthetical resolution for a non-retinal art, in the moment where the pursuit of a non-visual but intellectual horizon of expression had to reach an innovative way of representation: if on one hand a singular title matches with each and every of the readymades - those so called non-retinal works which the artist began producing in 1913 - on the other along nine years - from 1915 to 1923, when Duchamp dedicated himself to the composition of the unfinished *Large Glass* - the artist collected numerous notes intended to help him and eventually the viewer to understand the machinery of his *opus*

magnum, in which many of his previous works happen to be assembled together thus resulting in a unique verbal and visual composition.

Drawing with words and writing with images was Duchamp's way to access and guarantee to his works that status of ambiguous representation where symbolization was raised to the highest level possible. In this regard, one must then consider that the entire conception of the *Large Glass* - initiated while Duchamp was working as a librarian, from 1913 to 1915 - rather than being a progression of sketches and drawings, just happened through words, through poetical and semi-scientific notes that the author accumulated before starting to pour them on the glass support.

Wanting here to reverse the common interpretation, it could be said that in reality the *corpus* of notes is the main masterpiece and that the *Large Glass* itself is rather to be considered as a gloss to these texts. It was only in 1926 that Duchamp began to organize the publication of the integrity of these notes, the same year when the *Large Glass* got broken during the transportation by truck from Katherine Dreier's mansion in Connecticut to an exhibition in Brooklyn. Despite the fact that both the upper and lower slabs of the *Large Glass* were full of cracks, Duchamp did not lose heart but on the contrary he laconically said:

I feel affection for those fractures because they do not seem at all like broken glass. They do have a shape, a symmetric architecture. Or even better, I can see they have a curious purpose which I am not responsible for at all. A sort of given purpose that I respect and I find irresistible. [Statement made by the artist to J. Sweeney, quoted in Judovitz, 1995, p. 207]

He was convinced of the fact that, as if chance had accomplished his "definitively unfinished" oeuvre - the artist ascribed the accidental circumstance to "the destiny of things" -, these cracks incorporated in the glass the shapes of the *Three Standard Stoppages* which more than thirteen years before, in 1913, inaugurated the cycle of

readymades and whose outlines he collected one year after in another work, the *Network of Stoppages*. If until then Duchamp's creation proceeded in two different directions - one the readymades produced in a certain amount per year, the other the *Large Glass* assemblage, each of them characterized by a specific linguistic register - it is after this incident, when one readymade happened within the glass, that the two separate ways of creation fused with one another, as a veridiction: as if the precise organization of his actions through his works had finally provoked the uncovering of what he called "canned chance", a definition he used to label some of his readymades that depended on chance yet paradoxically attempted to fix or standardize it. From this angle, the *Network of Stoppages* could be seen in fact as a foreseeing representation of a moment to come and which actually happened: taking from granted Schwarz's interpretation of the 1911 *Young Man and Girl in Spring* as the poetic prologue to what the *Large Glass* would later develop and given that Duchamp traced the stoppages' silhouettes in a replica of this 1911 painting, the artist would have found through this accidental circumstance a crucial validation of *his own chance* together with a confirmation to the body of theories which until then he had been formulating and demonstrating with his works. This could also be the reason why he basically stopped making art to silently dedicate himself to chess for almost the rest of his life.

As if the glass fractures had suggested or better allowed him to accomplish the work before giving up art, he then decided to publish the verbal side of his masterpiece so that in 1934 he produced a 300 copies limited edition of the *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, otherwise known as the *Green Box*, a case where the artist recollected in facsimile the notes that preceded and accompanied the execution of the *Large Glass*. And yet, even if he published 178 notes during his lifetime, over 100 more notes relating to the

Glass were discovered and published following his death. It is appropriate to quote what Calvin Tomkins wrote:

Duchamp had always maintained that his *Glass* was not just something to be looked at but "an accumulation of ideas," in which verbal elements were at least as important as visual ones, perhaps even more so. [...] As Duchamp would say in a 1959 interview, he had "tried in that big *Glass* to find a completely personal and new means of expression; the final product was to be a wedding of mental and visual reactions; in other words, the ideas in the *Glass* were more important than the actual visual realization." Since the ideas were contained (more or less) in the notes, their long-delayed publication would become a new chapter in the continuing saga of his unfinished, shattered, but far from defunct masterpiece. [Tomkins, 1996, p. 296]

Like certain writers of his time - such as Raymond Roussel for the *Impressions d'Afrique* and as Joyce for *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* - who significantly contributed to the XX century literary discourse by empowering it through a perpetual infraction of internal rules and parody of models, throughout his life Duchamp performed a constant writing and rewriting of the same book whereof the *Large Glass* and *The Green Box* and *Given* constitutes the chapters, or in his words "the passage from one appearance to another". The combination of the three must be considered as a long poem made by a process of continuous *abduction* and *reconstruction* which aimed not just to represent the "Pawlowskian instauration of fourth dimension physics" in the words of Jean Clair, neither was it merely "a mechanistic, cynical interpretation of the phenomenon of love" according to Breton, nor a "Compendium of the adventures of the Spirit" as Schwarz pretended, nor "a history of Western eroticism" as Paz called it, but an attempt to achieve one of the uppermost conceptual paradigm ever written since Mallarme's *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard*.

Undoubtedly, no other artist after the author of *Divagations* ever inquired into the significance and the metaphysical implication of *chance* in the XX century both literature

and art as Duchamp did. Mallarmé's last and major work is formal composition that through a typographic complexity aims at appointing the dense convolution of reality and its proliferating meanings: given that the material world is but a desperate chaos of *significations* ruled by chance, nevertheless Mallarmé assumes that human authorship could still be asserted within it, by creating constellations of forms, one of which is the form of chance itself, the constantly changing hazard of inspiration.

The profound influence on Duchamp of Mallarmé's play with chance was attested by the artist himself in many interviews he delivered in the last years of his life and is further proved by the singular fact that in 1990 among Arensberg's legacy to the Bacon-Claremont Library in California was found a handwritten copy of *A Throw of Dice will never abolish Chance* handwritten by Duchamp himself ²⁷: if he had already this poem printed in several French and English editions both in his New York and Paris apartment, why would he have copied it by hand? What would this hand-tracing out have meant to him?

The centrality of Mallarmé's visual *opus magnum* in Duchamp's work should also be considered in light of the fact that, from the *Three Standards Stoppages* to the *Stoppages Network*, from *Rendez-vous du Dimanche* to *Erratum Musical* until the *Large Glass* cracks, the taxonomy of chance has been an internal procedure with a precise function in the artist's productions. Rather than just a mechanical or automatic exercise as it was for some Dadaists and Surrealist authors, Duchamp's commitment to chance questioning assumed a more profound and articulated connotation which still remains the artist's most impenetrable mystery but which in any case have significantly inspire young generations of artist to come, such as William S. Burroughs and John Cage. In his sparkling survey of

²⁷ Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, "New Notes of Duchamp and Arensberg", in *Marcel Duchamp's Silent Guard*, 1994, University of California, Santa Barbara 1994, p. 171

Duchamp's work, Tomkins commented on the important theme of chance, referring to the often-quoted statement by the artist:

The whole idea of chance, which was later to become the indispensable tool of a number of artists who saw it as a means to make their work conform more closely to the conditions of life, interested Duchamp in a unique way. He believes that chance is the expression of the subconscious personality. "Your chance is not the same as my chance," he has explained, "just as your throw of the dice will rarely be the same as mine." [Tomkins, 1968, p. 33.]

II

Halfway between Sirner and Pyrrho

“In my experience, there are two kinds of artists:
those who by working within society can't do without getting integrated with it
and those who are like snipers, free of duties hence of obstacles of any kind.”
Marcel Duchamp

“So the spirit must create for itself its spirit world, and is not spirit until it creates it.”
Max Stirner underlined by Marcel Duchamp

“Ich hab' meine Sach' auf nichts gestellt, juchhe!”
Johann Wolfgang Goethe

“Oh Pyrrho! How and where dost thou find the way of liberate yourself
from the servitude of opinions?”
Timon of Phlius

Before proceeding in venturing into the literary sources of Duchamp's works, it appears fundamental to point out how the work of two philosophers, whose thoughts appear to be fundamental to comprehend the artist's radical moral and political conception of the world - that is to say his *art of living*. It is the case of Pyrrho and Max Stirner. More often than not deserted by Duchamp's early critics - who at most reported their names - it was only very recently that those two philosophers started to appear in the works of certain reviewers and biographers such as, in chronological order, Marc Décimo, Bernard Marcadé and Judith Housez.

Author of many essays on Duchamp and “Régent du Collège de Pathaphysique”, in 2002 Décimo published *La bibliothèque de Marcel Duchamp, peut-être*, a volume that listed and commented on all the books belonging to the artist's libraries in New York and Paris, thus providing a indispensable list of authors that allows Duchamp's own work to be bridged with the work of several poets and philosophers as well as the works of certain renowned chess-players and artists. One could find here confirmation of the fact that

Duchamp never developed a passion for reading, as he often stated to his interviewers (i.e. to Pierre Cabanne and Georges Charbonnier), since most of the books are intact or, in the extreme cases, even uncut (it is most probably the case of books given or sent as presents by several authors). In the words of Décimo:

As for the marginal annotations, underlining, frugal notes begun and abandoned among the pages, we could only find very few in the books concerning the chess game and on Ortega y Gasset essay *The Dehumanization of Art*. We are tempted to believe that maybe Duchamp left few traces on this book while he was preparing his speech for Huston conference in 1957, which would have been eventually collected under the title *The Creative Process*. The bookmarks and annotation are extremely rare among the other books. [Décimo, 2002, p. 10]

Therefore it is astonishing to find out that among those volumes, Stirners's masterpiece appears to be one of the most read. In fact, again according to Dècimo,

While someone would find interesting certain underscored paragraphs of Max Euwe's book on chess strategies, someone else might be disturbed by the noted paragraphs of Max Stirner's *Ego and Its Own* in the 1960 Pauvert edition. Did Duchamp verify in there what he had been thinking along his life? What he was thinking? Did he find in there the conceptualized form of what he had been illustrating up to then? [Décimo, 2002, p. 11]

If Décimo assumes that Duchamp only read the book in his late years starting from the 1960 Reclaire's translation of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum*, it is thanks to Housez's biography that we now knows that Stirner had to be an assiduous philosophical frequentation throughout Duchamp's life and career. In fact, it was right before Duchamp moved to Munich for six months between 1912 and 1913, right after the *Salon des Indépendants* episode when he started to "completely rescue from his personal past"²⁸ and

²⁸ Cabanne, 1967, p. 51-52

inaugurated his lifelong “anti-artistic attitude”, that Picabia recommended him to read this book, in the 1900 *La Revue Blanche* edition.²⁹

Housez says that

Duchamp read one of the two books that ever since he would have kept by his nightstand, *Ego and Its Own*. In the very same way he had been inflamed few weeks before by Nietzsche’s reading, by night, in his small furnished room in Munich, Marcel discovered the work of this other philosopher who affirmed the individual as the sovereign instance and the refusal of all those social imperatives which addressed against that independency of the single one facing the community. [Housez, 2006, p. 114]

Marcadé also reports that in 1960, when Serge Stauffer gave Duchamp as a present a copy of Henri Avron’s *Aux sources de l’Existentialisme* edited in 1954, the artist told him:

“*Ego and its own* has been recently republished in France and I bought one copy. I’ve been reading Stirner for years. He his a great man but unfortunately almost unknown in Germany. Even Stirner wrote about something different than anarchy, yet he had been confused with this doctrine and ridiculed because of it.” [Marcadé, 2007, p. 456]

The founding text of individual anarchism and notoriously considered “the most revolutionary book ever written”³⁰, central in the formation of Marxism as it also had to be crucial in Carl Schmitt’s education³¹, *Ego and its own* exerted a great influence on Nietzsche’s thinking; Roberto Calasso even claimed that the author of *Also sprach Zarathustra* may have deliberately plagiarized Stirner.³²

²⁹ *Ad vocem* by Jean-Jacques Lebel

³⁰ See James Huneker, *Egoists, a book of Superman*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909, p. 350

³¹ See Carl Schmitt, *Ex captivitate salus*, Milano, Adelphi, 1987, pp. 80-82

³² See Roberto Calasso’s “Accompagnamento alla lettura di Stirner” in Max Stirner, *L’unico e la sua proprietà*, Milano, Adelphi, 1979, pp. 409-410

According to Décimo, the pages that Duchamp marked and noted in his 1960 edition³³ - and that so far are the only records that could be assumed therefore the most relevant ones in terms of Duchamp's life-long inspiration and his retrospective personal account of achievements in his later years - were those belonging to the first part of the *Ego and Its Own*. It is in this section that Stirner constructs an extensive and unorthodox genealogy of the modern, not exclusively in the mundane sense of tracing a linear progression through modes of experience, but also - from a Foucault-like prospective - of trying to perturb and thus radically criticize modernity by indicating how it failed to escape from the very principle that it claims to have outgrown: the religious modes of thought.

If Stirner's invitation to a radical individualism certainly predisposed Duchamp's resolution that "I should only count on myself...to be one and alone"³⁴ after the rejection of his *Nude* in 1912 - thus participating in the new aesthetical formulations that led to the readymades and furthermore to the *Large Glass* and *Given* - and basically substantiated the genesis of his "antisocial ideas"³⁵, the guiding principles of the *Ego and Its Own* are recognizable in the incessant attempts Duchamp made at ferociously ridiculing science with its technological derivations, altogether intended as a modern form of religion.

Certainly Jarry's *Doctor Faustroll* provided Duchamp with an ironic outlook on science: the pataphysic as an instrument of prodigiously well-suited production of a certain level of bewilderment. And Russell's *Locus Solus* offered a human-machine analogy that indeed must be seen as a parody of the machine intended as the most representative expression of human faith in scientific achievements. But it is also true that rather than only "stain the laws of physics" Duchamp's resolutions touched on a certainly deeper and more extreme level of criticism, not even explicable in the light of the Dadaist precepts he helped to introduce to the American artistic and literary scene, but that

³³ See Décimo, 2002, p.149.

³⁴ Cabanne, 1967, p. 52

³⁵ Ibidem, p. 56

definitively makes sense in the light of the corrosive pages of *Ego and Its Own*. A proof of such pondered but violent radicalism, so close to Stirner's prose, is offered by what Duchamp said in a private conversation with De Rougemont, the day the US forces dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima:

Science works in the very same way mythology does. Its rules and its matter are nothing but pure myths and they have no more and no less reality of the consequences any game has. [...] as for the atomic bomb, they combined everything so that it could happen!...It all depends on what our desires are. By getting together against the free and inventive individuals, the idiots create and solidify what they after would call reality, the 'material world' as they call it and as we suffer it! It is the very same world that science then observe and decrees scientific laws out of. The so-called demonstrations of scientific rules are not but consequences of these convictions. Those are all tautologies! [De Rougemont, 1966, p. 47]

From such a perspective, Duchamp's works must also be seen not only as a call to criticism only pertinent to the art system rules of the game, but more precisely as a mapping of the protracted relativizing incursion into science that started with the *Three Standard Stoppages* then continued with the lost *Unhappy Readymade* – a geometry book opened face up, suspended in midair in a outdoor porch and literally exposed to the elements – and that concluded with the impossible physics and chemical laws of the *Large Glass* together with the postulation of the *Infra-thin* category.

As a natural consequence of such a radical and heroic *egoism*, Duchamp developed a form of *skepticism* - "heavily afflicted by skepticism" wrote Breton in the *Second Manifesto of Surrealism* - that found its philosophical roots in the life and works of Pyrrho. Octavio Paz is the first and only of Duchamp's critics who mentioned the influence of the ancient Greek philosopher in his 1966 essay *Marcel Duchamp, the Appearance Stripped Bare*:

Duchamp's radical skepticism, as every form of radical skepticism, is that of an open kind and that lead him to the acceptance of everything that is unknown, as it happened with the *Large Glass* cracks. In fact it was during his reflection period in Sainte-Geneviève that he started to be interested in Pyrrho. [Paz, 1987, p.37]

Coming from ancient Greek *skeptikos* which means "inquirer", as a critical philosophical attitude, skepticism questioned the reliability of knowledge claims made by philosophers as well as scientists and artists.

As a modern skeptic, Duchamp engaged in inquiring into supposed human achievements in different fields of his time knowledge, to see if any true comprehension was or could be gained out of them. In the first place, it is curious to detect how Duchamp based his skepticism on the one of Pyrrho of Elis - the philosopher who first organized and developed those inquiries into a systematic set of arguments and left no writings but the model of the skeptical way of life - rather than on Montaigne's or Descartes' doctrines, which would have been closer to him in terms of chronological and cultural affinities and references.

Indeed, while we ignore how long Pyrrho's precepts and way of life could have influenced Duchamp's own art and life - since no book concerning either skepticism or its philosophers was found among the artist's volumes and since he never mentioned Pyrrho as one of his sources - it is a matter of fact that many of Duchamp's resolutions and works acquire a deeper significance and importance from the prospective of the skeptic philosophical background.

It would be sufficient to quote some of Pyrrho's principles, as reported by his disciples, to immediately realize how Duchamp imported these *precepta* into his artistic resolutions:

Pyrrho considered that nothing is naturally beautiful or ugly, but only according to our conventions and mores. [Sextus Empiricus, 1990, p. 71]

Pyrrho claimed that men act according to mores so that he could affirm that everything could be seen differently according to the prospective from where we see and perceive it. [Sextus Empiricus, 1990, p. 92]

Pyrrho, who firstly was a painter, became then a philosopher whose aim was to eliminate the reality of all things being. [Caizzi-Declava, 1981, p. 84]

We are told that he [Pyrrho] used to study poetry in all of its manifestations, and he certainly wouldn't have done so if he wasn't convinced of its utility. [Conche, 1973, p. 23]

Nausiphan stated that one must assume Pyrrho's attitude hence to have individual thoughts and contents.[Caizzi-Declava, 1981, p. 91]

Pyrrho's fellows were called the zetetics, for the constant pursuit of happiness; the skeptics, as they always searched but never could find. They could only theorize by spreading around *indifference*, as their master taught to do. [Conche, 1973, p. 44]

Most probably it was Pyrrho's resolution to abandon his career of painter at the age of twenty-six - exactly the same age Duchamp was when he also quit painting and first happened to read about the Greek philosopher! - that initially fascinated the young artist. Then it must have been Pyrrho's heroic indifference and apathy towards phenomena and external objects that would have encourage Duchamp's closer reading.

According to Pyrrho's disciple Timon and to Sextus Empiricus, there are three stages of the skeptic philosopher doctrine. The first is to assume that the mutually contradictory nature of things reveals that all we know are phenomena that cannot be classified as either true or false, as we don't know things in themselves beyond them. It is from this notion that Pyrrho developed the stratagem of *isosthenia*, the balancing of opposing arguments or evidence against each other so that they cancel each other out. It is worth to recall here how one of Duchamp's aims with the *Large Glass* was the representation of a fourth dimensional perspective on things we could only perceive in three dimensions, which is to say the nature of things beyond their ordinary appearance. And, concerning the

isosthenia dialectical principles, it is also appropriate to call to mind Duchamp's 1932 *Opposition and Sister Squares are Reconciled* chess essay together with the 1927 *Door, rue Larrey* readymade, a door that serving two doorways defies the *aut-aut* Aristotelian logic and that goes with the author's famous statement "there is no solution, because there is no problem".

The second stage is the suspension of any qualitative judgment, otherwise known as *epoké*: we must neither accept nor reject these things, since all we know of them are our own sensations. It is through the *epoké* that we acknowledge our *akatalepsia*, our lack of comprehension which lead to *aphasia*, or silence concerning them. Each of Duchamp's readymades must be considered as an example of *epoké*, since the artist aimed to express with and through them an "indifferent beauty", we already mentioned the central place that silence as a practice had in his life.

The third and last of the stages is the *ataraxia*, the tranquility of mind as a result of the combination of *isosthenia*, *epoké*, *akatalepsia* and *aphasia*. *Ataraxia*, which etimologically means "absence of agitation", could be considered Duchamp's most characteristic attitude: throughout his life the acceptance of his artistic failures – as previously illustrated - together with the calm he preserved before the many disasters that history made him witness were the two traits that could better compose a portrait of the French artist's personality.

III

Behind closed doors, from Rrose Selavy to *Roussel is the way*

“Ah! Que ne suis-je un simple clerc à Paris, montagne Sainte Geneviève
ou fleurit en ce moment une école de néo-alexandrins !
Un simple petit bibliothécaire dans cette brillante cours des Valois ”
Jules Laforgue

“Les poètes sont des hommes qui refusent d'utiliser le langage.”
Jean-Paul Sartre

“I like words in a poetic sense. Puns for me are like rhymes.”
Marcel Duchamp

In order to explain Duchamp's peculiar way of writing, critics often expatiate on his literary formation and sources. Duchamp himself always pretended to have dedicated very little time to reading - “I have never been a literary person, I only read few books”³⁶ - and when asked if he had ever experienced the desire to be artistically and literary cultured, he answered “Maybe, but it was a very mediocre desire. I would have wanted to work, but deep down I'm enormously lazy”³⁷.

In terms of literary references, it appears once more crucial to consider his fourteen months experience as a librarian in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, which occurred as a consequence of his decision to abandon painting as a public and professional occupation and to continue being an artist for only his own sake:

I wanted to release myself from any material need and I started my career of librarian as a social justification. It was a radical decision. I was not looking forward to make any more paintings nor to sell them. I had then begun to conceive an oeuvre which I knew would have taken many years to come, *The Bride Stripped Bared by Her Bachelors, Even*. [Poulle, 1997, p.43]

³⁶ Cabanne, 1967, p 48

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 93

“That was still the time when cultivated young men and artists hoped to find a career opportunity within some Parisian libraries” remarked Marie-Clotilde Hubert³⁸ and “that was also the time” - Duchamp stated in an interview to James Johnson – “when I first realized that, as a painter, I should have been influenced by a poet or an author rather than by another painter.”³⁹

As it happened for Pyrrho, we could assume that while attending some training classes at the *L'École Nationale des Chartes* and while indexing volumes on the shelves, having free access to any kind of book in the catalogue Duchamp read and studied many authors whose list of names most probably we will never know but whose influence in his art and poetry can nevertheless be guessed at. It was the artist's decision to distil as little information as possible about his work and life, a precise *labor limae* to shape what Roché claimed to be his major work: his own use of time or in other words his life. And in such an operation, secrecy - also to be intended in the modality of a heroic silence - certainly was one of the strategies he valued the most in the organization of self representation to the public. Nonetheless, in his last years, during the course of interviews, Duchamp began to list the names of certain authors that in one way or another influenced his work.

On a scientific side, we know that Gaston de Pawlowski's 1912 *Voyage au Pays de la Quatrième Dimension* together with Poincaré's essays on non-Euclidean geometries participated in the theorization and conception of the *Large Glass*. On the literary side, we do know that Laforgue's *Moralités Légendaires* were the inspiration source of a dozen illustrations that unfortunately got lost as well as the poem *Encore à Cet Astre* which provided the main idea for the two versions of *Nude descending a Staircase*. In the case

³⁸ Poulle, 1997, p. 40

³⁹ Quoted in Schwarz, 1969, p. 98

of this painting, it is also worth recalling that Paz proposed Mallarmé's *Pour un Tombeau d'Anatole* as a possible poetic reference.⁴⁰

Even if Duchamp considered Verlaine and Rimbaud to be still too impressionistic and in a way overvalued by the contemporaries, he still claimed to owe the conception of readymades also to the fourth section of the Rimbaudian *Youth*:

You are still at the temptation of Anthony. The antics of curtailed zeal, the tics of puerile pride, weakening, and terror. But you will set yourself to this work: all the harmonic and architectural possibilities will stir round your perch. Perfect unforeseen beings will offer themselves to your experiments. Around you will gather dreamily the curiosity of ancient multitudes and idle wealth. Your memory and your senses will be simply the fodder for your creative impulse. As for the world, when you emerge, what will have become of it? Nothing, in any case, of its present seeming. [Rimbaud, 1994, p. 187]

To James Johnson he once declared that

My ideal library would contain all the works of Brisset, maybe Lautréamont and Mallarmé. Mallarmé was a great poet. This is the direction art should take: toward an intellectual rather than animal way of expression.” [Quoted in Schwarz, 1969, p. 98]

If on one hand Duchamp's interest in Mallarmé's poetry was due to the author's play with chance - as previously mentioned -, on the other hand the artist certainly was fascinated by the constant process of denaturation of words that poet applied to his hermetic verses, that overflowing of the common semantic in which words began to acquire a significance outside the ordinary logic. This is the reason why, being extremely pessimistic in regard to effective reliability and effectiveness of verbal communication, Duchamp essentially developed a passion for those French authors who at his time were mostly marginal, not because they openly disdained the conventional status of the poet and, in general, of the artist, nor because their lifestyle had been very different from that

⁴⁰ Paz, 1987, p 53

of their contemporaries but essentially for the reason that they defied the structures of society through a repertory of variegated and original means.

It is the case of Alfred Jarry, whose puns and even more *Pataphysic* theorization as an alternate hypothesis for the workings of the universe that assigns an important role to *l'accident* certainly were taken into account by Duchamp for his “canned chance” readymades. As well known, Jarry’s *Doctor Faustroll* has an almost obsessive fascination with standards of measure. He always took in his pocket a “centimeter, a genuine brass reproduction of the traditional standard,” and he also owned a regulation fork which could “precisely establish” a period “in terms of mean seconds”: all these are practices meant to parody traditional Western science, which Jarry anarchically wanted destabilized. Furthermore, one should not forget that when arguing about science, Faustroll pointed the finger at the “common assent” being nothing more than “a quite miraculous and incomprehensible prejudice.”

Duchamp certainly shared such attitudes: the *Stoppages* in which the artist alleged to have “confined my future” inaugurated his mock-scientific purpose “to create a new image of the unit of length” and to gain a case of “canned chance”: the procedure of their manufacture, “a thread one meter long falling straight from a height of one meter on to a horizontal plane twisting as it pleases”, evokes Faustroll’s pataphysical law for which “when a string of copper is dropped, it floats down as slowly as if a viscous liquid occupied the space.”

Nonetheless, even more distinctly than for Jarry’s *Doctor Faustroll*, for Duchamp the question was not to determine some new methods of experimentation, but rather a serious testing of a specific process that the artist would eventually define in terms of *Infrathin* or *Inframince*, the category which identifies the “imperceptible difference between two seemingly identical items” but that “can be defined only by giving examples of it.”

Therefore it is explained why in Duchamp everything, or almost everything, played itself out in the margin of the vagueness separating the *sign* from the *signified*, joined by a bond that is as precise but as tenuous as possible thanks to the implementation of any number of purely conventional procedures of symbolization. For this reason, in the course of this resolutely asocial operation, the absurd was thus promoted to a sort of rational dignity and became the sole measure of Duchamp's and the viewer's freedom.

Because of the implicit character of uncertainty separating the *sign* from the *significance* and because of the absurd logic developed in their writings, Duchamp also was fascinated by Jean Pierre Brisset and Raymond Roussel:

Brisset and Roussel were the two men in those years [1912-15] whom I admired for their delirium of imagination. Brisset's work was a philological analysis of language, an analysis worked out by an incredible network of puns. He was a sort of Douanier Rousseau of philology. But Brisset was one of the real people who lived and will be forgotten. Roussel was another great of mine in the early days. The reason I admired him was because he produced something I had never seen. That is the only thing that brings admiration from my innermost being - something completely independent, nothing to do with the great names or influence of the time. [Duchamp, 1973, p.126]

Jean-Pierre Brisset (1837-1919) wrote and published all his life without a break, driven by an involuntary compulsion to demonstrate by puns and other figures of speech that mankind descends from frogs. He chose - if one can talk of choice when the boundaries of the conscious and the unconscious are so vague - to impose certain rules upon his writing which remained constant throughout the greater part of his oeuvre.

The main rule was to exploit to the limit the resources of homophony and paronomasia, thus creating a mode later described as "holorhyme verse". For example, *les dents, la bouche* sounds the same to the ear as *laides en la bouche* or *lait dans la bouche*. Brisset's originality was to suppose that these confluences of words and meanings were deeply

significant rather than fortuitous, as if words could play games among themselves. Brisset applied himself not only to listing all the homophonies and near homophonies he could find, but also to commenting upon them. While working backwards, thus he pretended he had to discover the trails that ran between apparently separate words and then the stories that motivate them. Thus, by a technique of glossing which he called *vraisemblablalisation* (likelyhoodwinking), *épouvantable* (dreadful) could be made to yield *époux vend table* (husband sells table). These substitutions, which modern readers might be inclined to associate with some pathology, recall the well known etymological theory, named *Cratylism* after Plato's dialogue, according to which words clearly represent both their own origins and the meanings of the things to which they refer. In the same vein, according to Brisset, words can be seen to represent the origins of mankind which he actually believed came from frogs.

Brisset's "anamorphological" linguism is responsible for the fact that Duchamp shifted his focus from something that exists and occurs in the physical world to the way we impose form and meaning on experience and the things around us. And it is after Brisset that Duchamp - who in the same years started to anagrammatically refer to himself as "le marchand du sel" - *the merchant of salt* - started to rely on ubiquitous puns, in the constant effort to transgress the grammatical norms to eliminate in his works the retinal in favor of the intellectual pleasure: it is in fact through games of wit and verbal licenses set in motion by the titles which the artist gave to mere objects, that words enter into a derisive relationship with the object they are supposed to represent and identify, thus inaugurating what could be called the artist's verbal sculptures, the readymades. Duchamp once stated in 1961:

For me, words are not merely a means of communication. You know, puns have always been considered a low form of wit, but I find them a source of stimulation both because of their actual sound and because of the unexpected

meanings attached to the interrelationships of disparate words. For me, this is an infinite field of joy - and it's always right at hand. Sometimes four or five different levels of meaning come through. [Naumann, 1989, p. 6]

That Duchamp sought to build up imageries able to embody such intangible but conceptually accurate interrelationships helps define the nature - and the uniqueness - of the project he was about to embark on. By using a set of personal symbols to illustrate a tale - that of the bride and her bachelors - about intellectual associations would have distinguished the *Large Glass* from any other work of the time: none would have resembled it visually, neither cubist nor futurist representations that deconstructed objects and scenes into parts or aspects, to reconstruct them in new ways, not even abstract works in the strict sense, made out of pure elements of color and shape.

No other modern masterpiece ever has required to be accompanied by written notes illuminating - and not to the extent that a viewer might need - the significance and rapport between its various parts, as the three *Boîtes* the artist issued in the subsequent years. He acted on the conviction he reported only in the last years of his life, that an artist “might bring into play anything in order to express what he wanted to say”⁴¹, in the attempt to express thoughts formed in his mind by way of a personal code of made-up symbols.

Duchamp's resolution in taking this direction for his art occurred while he was in Munich, in the light of a circumstance that happened a couple of months before he departed from Paris when he was first introduced to the work and the bizarre figure of Raymond Roussel: together with Francis and Gaby Picabia and Apollinaire in May of 1912 he attended an adaptation of the novel *Impressions d'Afrique* at *théâtre Antoine*. At that time Roussel was rather unknown and quite obscure outside his native France - as he still is, unfortunately - but the presentation of his play that year marked the inauguration

⁴¹ Cabanne, 1967, p. 168

of the curious marriage between him and first the Dadaist movement followed by Surrealist avant-garde. Two distinct visions arose among the spectators who attended Roussel's plays: to some he was just an eccentric, maybe even foolish literary aspirant who nevertheless could subject the public to his senseless follies as he was rich enough to pay to put them on stage; others believed he was an original and independent genius whose unrestrained imagination unlocked totally new spaces of inventiveness, in André Breton's words "the greatest hypnotizer of our days."

Duchamp was instantly and impressively drawn to what he later called Roussel's delirium of imagination and in 1946 went so far as to assert that

It was Apollinaire that first introduced me to the work of Roussel. It was pure poetry. He considered himself a philologist, a philosopher and a metaphysic, but he was and stays a great poet. It was fundamentally Roussel who was responsible for my glass, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. From his *Impressions d'Afrique* I got the general approach. I immediately understood that I could use Roussel as a source of inspiration. Roussel showed me the way. [Statement made by the artist to J. J. Sweeney, quoted in Judovitz, 1995, p. 148]

Many of Roussel's detractors suspected that some hidden machinery of meanings lay behind the unique objects and events staged in *Impressions d'Afrique*. Some guessed at the secrets prowling behind those bizarre visions, but Roussel's explanation of the puzzle only emerged after his death, in a book written a few years before, *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* (1935). It is in these pages that the author clarified that his literary work was structured by a highly elaborate set of word plays and verbal games that he named his "own procedure". Eventually the method reached several forms, but the easiest began with two words or short phrases, close in resonance and spelling but far in sense, such as *billard* , a pool table, and *pillard* , a buccaneer. Roussel put up two sentences, identical except for the fact that the replacement of the second word for the first altered

the sense of the entire text and of all of its parts. *Les lettres du blanc sur les bandes du vieux billard* which means *the white letters, written with chalk, aside the old pool table* comes to a different meaning by placing in the sentence *pillard* instead of *billard*: *the missives of a European, about the old buccaneer's hordes*. Roussel's early story *Parmi les noirs*, "Among the Black People", started with the first and ended with the second of these sentences; in the middle he developed a narration the only intent of which was to interlace threads in order to make it possible to pass from a situation described at the beginning to one where the second could be spoken. Starting with this novella, by enriching the narration of new elements through his singular procedure, Roussel arrived at *Impressions d'Afrique*. Most probably Roussel was not the first to assert this internal generation of the literary text, but "he was the first to do it categorically"⁴², to turn language into a kind of machine capable of cranking out the unheard of objects and images.

Many aspects of Roussel's work caught Duchamp's attention: in the first place, the passion that the writer used in describing his impossible machines, from which the artist certainly derived the human-machine analogy that he applied in the configuration of the bride and the bachelors in the *Large Glass*; then the primacy of imagination through the precise mechanical use of verbal language, "donner l'initiative aux mots" as a possibility and guarantee of acceding a dimension of pure thought. In fact, in Roussel as in Duchamp verbal language reaches an overt density capable of creating a parallel universe where non-representation leads, where words generate the possibility of expressing fantasies and obsessions through the creation of abstract, inhuman – thus non retinal and un-animal – and intellectual symbols. Both the writer and the painter, by unveiling and then draining the passive rule of verbal language, came to a point where they detachedly unlocked the

⁴² Todorov, 1981, p. 81.

intimate relation that tie a word to an object, and by doing so they basically reversed this situation when they proceeded – one must think again of the readymade procedure – in taking for granted that objects exist to give words the possibility of concretizing and not the other way around. It is worth to recall that Duchamp created most of his readymades and assembled the *Large Glass* before having the chance of reading Roussel's *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres*, so that it is possible to assert that he was able to deduce, understand and perform the same linguistic procedure on his own.

From such perspective, the precision they both employed in generating gratuitous mechanical images - basically through an elaborate verbal delirium - is nothing but a refusal to serve a humanity enslaved to the machines against whom they instead raised a world made of useless and un-functional machines generated by the imagination. The void generated by the defeat of verbal language and imagination in the attempt of reaching such a dimension is what might be called, in psychoanalytical terms, the domain of desire therefore, from such a perspective, the “mechanomorphosis” they both applied to describe love and sexual desires matches the Lacanian conceptualization of the Freudian *Thing*, that *empty space* around which our representations turn, a sort of *absolute* situated over the register of the common verbal language and for this reason unspeakable.

If according to Jacques Lacan the *Thing* is “that inaccessible place where we project our images of emptiness” a domain that “when we place an object into its perimeter, this object gains new and curious properties”, then Duchamp's process of sublimation of objects accompanied by captions - the readymades - must be perceived also as a colonization of the space of the *Thing*⁴³. And it is at this stage of the creative process that Darian Leader assumes that “rather than making this space of emptiness more obscure or

⁴³ Lacan, 1986, p. 178

hidden, such an operation evokes it”⁴⁴ which is to say that through these artistic and artificial constructions emerges a zone of bareness, an even more absolute lack which cannot be fitted by our visual imagination abilities and for which only death could be a representation of. From such a point of view both Roussel’s and Duchamp’s oeuvre could be identified as similar models of “tanatographies”, intended both as a venturing at the most extreme limit where what can be represented oscillates toward what cannot be represented and as a procedure to introduce the contingency of death by accurately shaping their works and actions according to its perspective.

Taking this for granted, we can state that in the very same way Roussel organized his publications, including his posthumous title, Duchamp also used the same modality for his works so that it is possible to apply to his case - the *Large Glass*, the *Green Box* and *Given* - what Michel Foucault wrote in his 1963 study *Raymond Roussel*, a volume that we know did not appear in artist’s libraries:

The work is given to us divided just before the end...the basic geometry of this revelation reverses the triangle of time. By a complete revolution, the near becomes distant, as if only in the outer windings of the labyrinth Roussel [or Duchamp] could play the guide. He leaves off just as the path approaches the center where he himself stands, holding all the threads at their point of entanglement or their greatest simplicity. At the moment of his death, in a gesture both cautious and illuminating he holds up to his work a mirror possessed of a bizarre magic: it pushes the central figure into the background where the lines are blurred, placing the point of revelation at the farthest distance, while bringing forward, as if for extreme myopia, whatever is farthest in the moment of utterance. Yet as the subject approaches, the mirror deepens in secrecy. The secret is the darker still: the solemn finality of its form and the care with which it was withheld throughout the body of his work, only to be given up at the moment of his death, transforms what is revealed into an enigma. [Foucault, 2004, pp. 38-39]

Raymond Roussel was Foucault’s first and only book-length literary essay and a work he defined as “something very personal”. Foucault - who the previous year already dedicated an article both to Jean-Pierre Brisset and to Louis Wolfson and was about to

⁴⁴ Leader, 2003, p. 63

publish *The Birth of the Clinic* - stumbled on one of Roussel's work in Paris in 1959 in a Left Bank bookstore, and was immediately fascinated by his exclusion of human subjectivity and his literary marginality. The philosopher's interest in this sort of writing strongly subordinated to formal rules and the impersonal structures of language, corresponded in a way to his further declaration that an author "writes in order to have no face", to lose any prefixed identity in the succession of masks he assumes in his books since, as he wrote not long before his death, "the main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning" [Foucault, 1988, p. 9]. Because he overtly linked such a loss of self in language with the extreme limit and eradication of subjectivity - which is to say death - his analysis of Roussel's works gives a central place to his vague and hazy death: the author of *Locus Solus* was found dead on a mattress laying on the floor of his hotel room in Palermo and facing a locked door - always before kept open - which he might have been trying to open to save himself, or which he might have locked to keep himself from being saved. For Foucault, the situation of this death corresponds to the key Roussel offers in *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* to his writings.

From one locked door to another, Duchamp's posthumous *Given* is a hyper-realistic representation of an as complex as ambiguous vision the artist more or less clandestinely and silently collected and organized along his career: a revelation supposed to undo secret but that nonetheless remains locked by the heavy Spanish door and that could only be seen through two small holes in wood. Just as we could not know whether they wanted to use these keys to those doors to allow us to enter or to keep us out, therefore we cannot know whether these literary and artistic keys are meant to open up or close off the meaning of their works. And indeed it is their death that prevents us from resolving either question.

Chapter 2

William Burroughs Dictatorship of the Images and Images of the Dictatorship

The method must be purest meat
and no symbolic dressing,
actual visions & actual prisons
as seen then and now.

Prisons and visions presented
with rare descriptions
corresponding exactly to those
of Alcatraz and Rose.

A naked lunch is natural to us,
we eat reality sandwiches.
But allegories are so much lettuce.
Don't hide the madness!

Allen Ginsberg, *On Burroughs' Work*, 1954.



Autobi(bli)ography of a Wolf

I

The priest with the golden arm & his (contr)ad(d)ictions

“Puisque le monde prend un cours délirant,
nous devons prendre sur lui un point de vue délirant.
Il vaut mieux périr par les extrêmes que par les extrémités.”
J. Baudrillard

“J'admirais le forçat intraitable sur qui se referme toujours le baigne;
je visitais les auberges et les garnis qu'il aurait sacrés
par son séjour ; je voyais *avec son idée*...”
A. Rimbaud

“Southern trees bear strange fruit...
for the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
for the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,
here is a strange and bitter crop.”
A. Meerpol

Boy Scout. A student of American literature, anthropology and medicine. A robber of drunkards on Big Apple trains. Bartender. Private detective. Bug exterminator. Lowlife. Farmer. Jungle explorer. Journalist. Traveler. Stateless and cosmopolitan pariah. *Queer*. Drug-dealer. Gun lover, a passion that led him to accidentally shoot his second wife Joan Vollmer while playing a drunken game of "William Tell"⁴⁵. Junkie and ex-

⁴⁵ Burroughs' controversial uxoricide stays as a crucial and no turning back moment both in literary and biographical terms, as we will illustrate throughout this chapter. So far, the most detailed and significant account of the murder remains, in my opinion, James Grauerholz's 2002 essay *The Death of Joan Vollmer Burroughs: What Really Happened?*, worthy of quotation here just to provide some basic facts: "Joan Vollmer was an unconventional and adventurous young lady who met Burroughs in New York in 1944 and became his lover early the next year, at about the same time that he first took morphine and began to develop the first of a lifelong series of narcotics addictions—an underworld career that he later chronicled in *Junkie*, written during 1950–52. Although Burroughs was well aware that he was homosexual, his relationship with Vollmer began with an eerie, almost-telepathic mental intimacy, and was encouraged by their friends, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. [...] In a Mexico City apartment, on the evening of September 6, 1951, the 37-year-old William Burroughs fatally shot his ten-years-younger American wife in the forehead with a .38-caliber automatic pistol, while aiming at a drinking glass balanced on top of her head. This tragedy caused great immediate shock and dismay for the protagonists' families and friends, and it grew exponentially in notoriety through the next four decades as the killer's career as a writer was established by a series of influential books." [Grauerholz, 2002, p. 4] Grauerholz was Burroughs' assistant

junkie. Alcoholic and ex-alcoholic. Writer. Presumed pornographer. Literary essayist. Theoretician of the postmodernist American novel. Doctrinaire of the *Electronic revolution*. Visual artist. Spoken word performer. Actor. Iconoclast. Ecce William Seward Burroughs, the author who appears to rightfully enter the restricted perimeter of literary mythology, embodying like no other American writer the Rimbaudian practice of the *Seer*, of the incursion into the *unknown* through a “long, boundless and systematized *disorganization of all the senses*” [Rimbaud, 1994, p.76], a lifelong journey at the edge of the skin that took him to decree on various occasions that

There is only one thing a writer can write about: *what is in front of his senses at the moment of writing*...I am a recording instrument...I do not presume to impose a “story” “plot” “continuity”...Insofar as I succeed in the direct recording of certain areas of the psychic process I may have a limited function...I am not an entertainer. [Burroughs, 2005, p. 184]

Often discarded by most of his contemporary writers - Truman Capote called him “a scribbler armed with scissors” [Capote, 2007, p.451] and Mario Vargas Llosa only credited his two early novels claiming that his other “experimental, psychedelic stories have always bored me, so much so that I don't think I've ever been able to finish one” [Vargas Llosa, 2003, p. 12] - and the mainstream criticism on the basis of his intricate prose, his controversial homosexuality - especially in regard of the homoerotic and sadomasochistic routines displayed throughout his novels - and of his drug use and abuse, Burroughs' writings has remained quite marginal, mainly in academic circles. Nonetheless he is considered one of the most politically trenchant, culturally influential, and innovative artists of the second half of the XX century.

and business manager for almost thirty years and after the author's death in 1997 he became his bibliographer and literary estate executor.

Throughout the course of four decades he exerted an invisible but present influence over the vanguard literature and artistic underground scene, being in 1957 when he first submitted some extracts of the so-called *Word Hoard* - the chaotic manuscript he wrote during his early Tangier years (1953-1958) and which sections the author progressively incorporated into *Naked Lunch* (1959) and the *Nova Trilogy* (1961-1964) - to the *Black Mountain Review* directed by Robert Creeley - a former scholar of the homonymous college that lunched a significant number of artists who during the Sixties led the American avant-garde - and to *The Chicago Review* directed by Irving Rosenthal. The two magazine published his texts the year after and for the first time Burroughs abandoned the sobriquet *William Lee*, which he adopted until then, and begun using his real name.

Even if frequently associated with the Beats' epic and its "interrupted renaissance" - Seymour Krim considered him the "spiritual father" and "the guru" of the movement [Krim, 1960, p.64] - and even if legitimately falling within the first wave of the *angel-headed hipsters* group that starting from the late Forties *significantly* shook the foundations of the American cultural and politic establishment, the remarkable distance between Burroughs' literary production and the poetical typecasts of authors such as Allen Ginsberg or Lawrence Ferlinghetti could be measured by his cynical sarcasm and by the disturbing and difficult material that assaults any reader's approach.

Indeed on more than one occasion he distanced himself from the movement:

I don't associate myself with the Beats at all, and never have, either with their objectives or their literary style. I have some close friends among the Beat movement: Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso are all close personal friends of many years standing, but we are not doing at all the same thing, either in writing or in outlook. You couldn't really find four writers who are more different, more distinctive. I don't associate myself with them, it is simply a matter of juxtaposition rather than any actual association of literary styles or overall objective [Odier, 1974, p. 43].

Also, both his social background and existential adventure are directly antithetic to the paradigmatic parables of such legendary figures as Neal Cassidy or Jack Kerouac: Burroughs' milieu was not the one of the early Cold War petty bourgeois menaced by anonymity or by the Industrialization leveling off, as it had to be in the case of Gregory Corso or Herbert Huncke and other members of the movement, whose privation, state of uncertainty and social mobility marked their cultural background and therefore their individual revolution. On the contrary

Burroughs hailed from the Anglo-Saxon Protestant, patrician ruling class. This was the class of entrepreneurs that believed they were destined to rule the American show – the privileged super-rich that produced Astors, Carnegies, Morgans, Rockefellers, Gettys, Fords, and the Burroughs family. All of them were bankers, creators of industries, inventors, or self-made capitalists who were destined to become the invisible, all-powerful hands shaking events and moving policies behind American business, industry and politics, leaving the rest of the populace behind awed and invidious of their power and complexity. [Harris and Macfadyen, 2009, p.101]

High-born, he did not belong to the “torturable classes”, to that world of mass society outcasts, of hoodlums, junkies, alcoholics, rejected war veterans, stud-poker dealers and bums that composed the variegated underground and unofficial humanity fermenting within the Post WWII American society which he first knew by such lectures as Jack Black's *You Can't Win* (1946) or Nelson Algren's *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1949) and which would later become on the fulcrum of his frequentations and the preferred universe around which his narrations gravitated. From such a sociological perspective, the main difference between him and the other Beats resides exactly in the absolutely conscious and subjective nature of this choice he made by electing this humankind as protagonist of his novels: it was not the reflex consequence of historical,

social and cultural condition, or better conditioning; it was an out-and-out qualitative jump, a deliberately irrational opposition to the codified and amorphous rationalism of his upper-class origin.

Also, by displacing into his novels a psychotic allure of control, a masochistic bliss of being enchained by addiction, sexuality and narrative, Burroughs' Post-WWII American landscapes - both physical and psychological - gave his narration a distinctly European taste, hence allowing to incorporate his literary enquiries along with the ones of authors such as Jonathan Swift and Laurence Sterne as well as Luis Ferdinand Celine and Antonin Artaud. Rather than patterning his image on the one of the Great American novelist on par with Hemingway or Scott Fitzgerald, Burroughs' oeuvre looks to Genet's chic criminality or Kafka's dry humor, to Sade's grotesque and cruel wisdom or to Dostoevsky's existential dread and certainly his routines recall the Dadaist insurrectionary vaudevilles.

As a matter of fact it is not a coincidence that Burroughs main contribution to the early Beat authors certainly was not the fact that he introduced them to marginalized and drug-consumers of New York, but rather the initiation to the many European authors, there including those previously mentioned. And afterwards it is significant that Burroughs cited Eliot's *The Waste Land* as the first noteworthy cut-up, thus inscribing his poetics and also acknowledging his debt to such writers who as well came to understand and testimony their own culture via exile, from a banished or out cast perspective. It should not be surprising then that Burroughs' self-imposed solitude in Tangier would only be interrupted by the visits of another celebrated self-exiled writer, Paul Bowles, the author of the *Delicate Prey*. As Caveney puts it

It is this sense of being an exile in his own reality, even a tourist in his own body, that gives Burroughs's work is distinctly European flavor. Whilst Ginsberg's songs of himself echoed the epic poetry of Walt Whitman and

Kerouac's road romanticism resurrected the spirit of Huckleberry Finn, Burroughs' ancestors hail from the old world rather than the new. He has frequently acknowledged his debt to Conrad and both his novels and interviews are liberally peppered with Shakespearean allusion. Also, it is now common critical currency to place Burroughs' novels in the tradition of Swiftian satire. [Caveney, 1998, pp. 22-23]

Nevertheless, if we take for granted Kerouac's definitions⁴⁶ of the term *beat*, which aside from the allusion and consequent stylistic connotation to *Bebop* jazz music also implies the paradoxical connotations of *beaten down/upbeat* and *beatific*, we are tempted to state that Burroughs resumed and incarnated this oxymoron, so that those two extremes could be taken as the elliptical foci of his life experience. Indeed this figure of speech by which a locution produces an incongruous and seemingly self-contradictory effect - otherwise known as *synechiosis* - must be regarded as the concealed movement through which Burroughs' living and writing progresses and in a way it evokes the whitmanian verses of *Song to Myself* "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes.)" [Whitman 1990, p.78].

In regard to the ability to *contain multitudes*, ever since his childhood, when at the age of eight he wrote his first story *Autobiography of a Wolf*, Burroughs demonstrated a pronounced tendency of obsessively personifying different characters: he obstinately refused the parental advice to change the title to "biography", insisting it was an "autobiography". Such an attitude was to be completely developed in *Naked Lunch*: it is starting with this novel that the "inhabitability" of the body and its consequent fragmentation of the self unity became one of Burroughs' most recurrent topics in his narratives. What is normally called "identity" - intended as sameness that makes an entity

⁴⁶ See John Clellon Holmes "This Is The Beat Generation", *The New York Times Magazine*, November 16, 1952 and also Jack Kerouac "Aftermath: The Philosophy of the Beat Generation", *Esquire Magazine* 3/58, March 1958.

definable and recognizable - in Burroughs' narrative is a matter of property rights, an affair of ventriloquism,

Everything is potentially up for reassignment or sale [...] In a compulsive gambling session described in *Naked Lunch* a young man loses his youth to an old one; lawyers sell not their skills but their luck to the hapless clients they defend. Most things in Burroughsland function as addictive substances, and the "self" can be simply the last drug the person in question has ingested. Or it may be a random object, someone else's discard, an article left in a hotel drawer." [Douglas, 1998, p. XIX]

Not to be considered in psychiatric terms as schizophrenic – even though the author was diagnosed as such by four different psychoanalysts he went into treatment with between 1939 and 1946 and since then he was extremely interested in schizophrenic writing and art⁴⁷ - Burroughs' theorization of possession by psychic forces and mechanisms of coercion extraneous to the individual will and awareness became the foundation for his personal literary mythology based on the acknowledgment that *word is a virus*, that verbal language is a millenarian symbiotic occupant of the human body: such a theorization results in one of the most original poetic contributions he provided to the literary discourse ever since he originally illustrated it in the celebrated chapter "Operation Rewrite" of *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962-1967), the second novel of the *Nova Trilogy*:

⁴⁷ "In connection with schizophrenic writing, I've done a great deal of exploration in the direction of schizophrenic art, much of which is not very distinguished. Not most of that was done by people who had inclination towards painting, who might have been painters. So what I was interested in was writers who had the concept of schizophrenia. I knew one who was a poet; he was a great admirer of T.S. Eliot and his work was very much like Eliot's. you could say that it is imitative of Eliot but you could also say it is the opposite. That little trick that Eliot has, that stylistic trick, is noticeable in schizophrenic poetry, but unfortunately I don't have any of this poetry available. I just remember few phrases like "Doctorhood is being made with me" or titles like *At swim two birds*, the same stylistic tricks that are found in Eliot and in the early poems of MacLeish." [Burroughs, 1986, p. 157]

The 'Other Half' is the word. The 'Other Half' is an organism. Word is an organism. The presence of the 'Other Half' is a separate organism attached to your nervous system on an air line of words can now be demonstrated experimentally. One of the most common 'hallucinations' of subject during sense withdrawal is the feeling of another body sprawled through the subject's body at an angle...yes quite an angle it is the 'Other Half' worked quite some years on a symbiotic basis. From symbiosis to parasitism is a short step. The word is now a virus. The flu virus may have once been a healthy lung cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the central nervous system. Modern man has lost the option of silence. Try halting sub-vocal speech. Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that forces you to talk. That organism is the word. [Burroughs, 1967, p. 159]

If on one hand we assume Burroughs's definition of schizophrenic as that, almost self-apologetically, of “ a guy who just found out what's going on” - and he was more often than not right in his apparently delirious social and political analysis and foresights - on the other hand John Vernon, by dedicating an entire section of his 1973 *The Garden and the Map: Schizophrenia in Twentieth-century Literature and Culture* to the *Nova Trilogy*, tries to forge for the American author a positive interpretation of a presumed schizophrenia transferred into his texts as a practicable form of cultural resistance and also as a model to strengthen the potentiality of writing outside the narrow limits of the conventional naturalistic novel. Even if Vernon conducts his analysis in a way that closely recalls a certain approach and use of Burroughs' writing which Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze did one year before in the 1972 *Anti-Œdipus*, nonetheless his essay lacks for the philosophical and economical background of the one written by the two French *maîtres à penser* and he presents rather an almost psychoanalytic overview of Burroughs' early novels thus ending up providing, in our opinion, a reductive analytical approach.

In fact Vernon's reading is mainly channeled by the overriding principal of "either-or principle" with which he identifies Burroughs' style and that takes him to categorize each of the body images as a potentiate of the polarities of the author's hierarchical and binary thought. According to Vernon, in Burroughs' prose the body is always divided into internal and external, upper - "consciousness and mental structure" - and lower - "sexual energies and anal violence"⁴⁸ - a dichotomy whose divisions are cited as proof of the author's schizophrenic vision. From such a dualistic perspective, Vernon's interpretation of the celebrated "Talking Asshole" tale included in *Naked Lunch* - the story of a carnie man who taught his asshole to talk and, far from being able to maintain his mastery of a teacher over pupil, he ends up being totally submitted by his anus who warns him "It's you who will shut up in the end!" [Burroughs, 2005, p.111] - is but the result of the triumph of one of the two poles, since the body turns on and devours itself. Considering the fact that, having being a pupil of Alfred Korzybski - the father of the General semantics and progenitor of the Neuro-linguistic programming "meta-model" - one of Burroughs' declared intentions of his writing was to exceed the cogent Aristotelian logic therefore to deny the notion of identity and of *tertium non datur*, as a consequence Vernon's "either-or" and "dualistic" approach to the American novelist ends up being quite constrictive. It would be a mistake to simply trim down Burroughs' schizophrenic writing to psychoanalytical terms and for this reason - as we will later discuss - we do find Guattari and Deleuze's "schizoanalytical" analysis concerning Burroughs' novels and speculations far more significant and appropriated, especially in regards of their effort "to separate folly from insanity" [Deleuze-Guattari, 1977, p. 35] and to produce new maps of subjectivity. Far from irresponsibly and romantically valorizing schizophrenia, far from confusing the revolutionary with the schizophrenic and making

⁴⁸ Vernon, 1973, pp. 188-190.

an apology of such a disturb - these were the early critiques to their schizoanalytical theories - Guattari stated that their attempt was rather “to simply highlight the problema in the very same way Burroughs did about drugs: is it possible to capture the power of drugs without consuming drugs? Without becoming an addict? We assume it should work in the same way with schizophrenia” [Guattari, 2004, p. 25]. Burroughs’ puzzled texts are not a consequence of a presumed schizophrenia, a sublimation of the disease into the page, but rather a consequence of the author’s heavy addiction to drugs: from the moment Burroughs credited an equivalence between addiction and control - it occurred for the first time with *Naked Lunch*⁴⁹ - his novels expressively aimed to achieve a systematized bewildered writing capable “to wise up the marks”, to disintoxicate from any kind of “algebra of need”, to instruct the readers in the art of the deprogramming the so called “control machine” which for him was synonymous with the Western psyche and civilization, from the moment it became a “conspiracy against its members” [Douglas, 1998, p. XXVI].

Furthermore, by taking a step back again to Whitman’s verse of *Song to Myself* , Burroughs’ tendency to *contradict himself* must be seen as the peculiar aspect which distinguished his life and also his death. Author of some of the most intricate and disturbing prose ever written but always dressed in a three-piece suit, capable of the most distinguished aplomb and never averse to trade on his patrician roots in a tight spot, an opiate addicted for more than twenty-year but opposite to both heavy drugs consumption and drug war hysteria, a homosexual but twice married and father of a son, *enfant gate* of one of the most prestigious WASP families, Burroughs’ ultimate act of a lifelong obstinate dissent and contradiction certainly had to be his own death. He lucidly kept on writing and delivering lectures until a few weeks before his demise caused by a heart

⁴⁹ See the final section of the novel, *Letter from a Master Addicted to Dangerous Drugs*.

attack, which occurred on August 4th 1997, at the venerable age of eighty-three, just four months after his once-lover and lifetime writing companion Allen Ginsberg.

He could have died from a drug overdose or from privations, stabbed by a lover or been lost in an unexplored South American jungle: ironically his death had to be for the umpteenth time a persiflage to the most reactionary and orthodox section of the American society. The one he once belonged to.

Like many revolutionary artists - “revolutionaries are always disaffected members of the ruling class” he used to say [Burroughs, 1984] - his literary value was only recognized in the autumn of his life. Thank to Ginsberg’s laconic nomination which stated

Burroughs is original genius, prose-poet with an extraordinary ear for assonances and speech style; naked eye for hypnotic detail; penetrating mind and innovator of forms, ideas, moods and cultural symbols; master-influence of several generations of poets and theater-music performers. He improves with age as do his books” [Morgan, 1988, p. 8]

he received an award from the *American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters* in 1983 - along with other co-opted controversial writers like Henry Miller and Norman Mailer - and on the same year in France - where his works reached a certain reputation thanks to the work of intellectuals such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze - he was given the title of *Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*.

Graham Caveney pointed out this umpteenth contradiction when he wrote:

Of course the ultimate paradox of the Burroughs’ mystique is that the most unsaintly of writers has found himself canonized. His induction into the *American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters* was an occasion replete with ironies. The marginalized and mainstream converged with the mutual unease; the linguistic terrorist whose intent was to Rub Out The World had finally had it bestowed upon him. An yet this is no return of the prodigal son, nor any simple appropriation by a conspiratorial establishment. Burroughs very much still walks alone, his iconic signature transcribed with an iconoclastic flourish. [Caveney, 1998, p. 122]

Certainly Burroughs was far from being interested in any of these august awards: he remarked “Twenty years ago they were saying I belong in jail. Now they are saying I belong to their club. I didn’t listen to them then, I don’t listen to them now” [Morgan, 1988, p. 9]. In any case this paradox could be explained in light of the fact that since the publication of *Naked Lunch*, as a well-known drug addict who was often held up by interminable and humiliating searches at airports check-ins, his attitude about such honors and awards was evident in his words: “listen I want all the medals on my chest I can get...gets you respects from customs agents” [Morgan, 1988, p. 577].

Burroughs played many cameo roles for such directors as Derek Jarman, Gus Van Sant and David Cronenberg thus becoming an icon of the American underground scene, “a pot-pourri of extremely variegated people tied together by different levels of misinterpretation” [Burroughs 1971, p. 11]. Starting from the mid-Sixties, it became fashionable within the rock circus and circles - rock and roll as a musical expression derived from blues should also be considered, in the author’s opinion as one of the modern manifestation of the Dionysian in the mass society - to be accompanied by him and this is also the reason why he began to deliver readings at rock concerts and why he was interviewed by major record magazines and also he contributed to independent publications with precious essays. Having been already adopted as the illegitimate father of the Beats, Burroughs then had punks and cyberpunks claiming him as their grandfather and his life and manners were to fascinate several generations of artists of every sort. Brian Johnson, Anthony Burgess, Bob Dylan, David Bowie, Lou Reed, Iggy Pop, Mick Jagger, J. G. Ballard, Susan Sontag, Andy Warhol, Jean Michel Basquiat, Patti Smith, Laurie Anderson, Lydia Lunch, Jim Carroll, Kurt Cobain and Tom Waits: they were all hosted to the *Bunker*, the rear apartment on 222 Bowery⁵⁰ in New York where Burroughs

resided between the late Seventies end early Eighties, or in Lawrence, Kansas, where he lived from 1982 until his death.

He became the honorary father of the NY New Wave scene having to delight his young aficionados with precious pamphlets and poems such as the dystrophic *Thanksgiving prayer*, included in *Tornado Alley* and which he eventually performed for Gus Van Sant's camera:

"To John Dillinger⁵¹ and hope he is still alive.
Thanksgiving Day November 28 1986"

⁵⁰ "Back in New York in late November, Burroughs moved to an apartment in John Giono's building, a converted Y.M.C.A., at 222 Bowery which had been bought by the furniture store next door, whose owner rented space to artists. The small basketball gym had once been Mark Rothko's studio Burroughs had a large but windowless concrete space. In the bathroom stood two high white porcelain urinals. The light of day never reached his apartment, which became known as the bunker, but he didn't mind, he liked the privacy and the quiet and the safety – there were three locked door between himself and the street...Burroughs had the Bunker painted white, floors and ceilings, and the walls, which he hung with paintings of Bryon Gysin, so it didn't look gloomy. An added advantage, he liked to say, were the heavy psychic traces of countless naked boys. But the best part of the deal was the rent: \$250 a month." [T. Morgan, 1988, p. 490]

Also concerning the illustrious residents of 222 Bowery: "In 1940, Leger fled the German occupation of France and took a studio for a year or two at 222 Bowery. His obituary in *The Times* in 1955 said that during his stay he found 14th Street "the most beautiful thoroughfare in New York City"...Mr. Giorno said that in the early 1960's, he attended parties with artists and poets at 222 Bowery. "You'd take a few drugs and stay a few days," he said. When he returned from Morocco in 1966 he took a loft in the building; the next year he founded "Dial-A-Poem," with a different poem each day. It attracted more than a million calls, he said, before he discontinued it later that year. Mr. Giorno has since published books of poetry, including *Gasping at Emptiness* and *You've Got to Burn to Shine*." [Grey, 2000]

⁵¹ It should not surprise that Burroughs dedicated such a vitriolic poem to the legendary outlaw who many historians claim to be co-responsible of the creation of the Federal Bureau of Investigations. Regarded as one of America's most conniving bandits, John Dillinger would become a national icon in an era where criminals were rarely taken alive. "Throughout the Great Depression, Dillinger robbed banks that many felt were robbing people of their lives. Through the media, Dillinger would no longer be one of the most deadly criminals in the Midwest, but would be a folk hero who was the Robin Hood of America. Born in Indianapolis, Indiana in the early 1900s meant that the day of cowboys and Native American Indians was nearly over. However, the era of a new type of American criminal was just beginning. By the age of 16, Dillinger had quit school, fallen in love, and stolen a car out of anger. As a result, in order to avoid prosecution, he joined the US Navy and soon deserted his crew. By the age of 20, he had already been arrested for assault and robbery. He pled guilty to the charges and spent ten years in prison, mostly in solitary confinement due to his brash attitude towards other prisoners and guards. John Dillinger's time in prison didn't actually rehabilitate him, but instead, taught him better ways of planning, gathering trustworthy men, and following through with bank robberies. The day he left prison, he had already planned his plights, gathered names of fellow bandits, and had a whole new perspective about robbery. Because he was let go out into society during the Great Depression, he would not have found proper employment, so he quickly went back to doing what he did best – wreaking havoc on society and its institutions. With a frustrated American public rooting him on, he became a hero in the national press. This infuriated J. E. Hoover's FBI and other law enforcement officers who attempted to capture him. And, while he was captured more than once, he would escape thanks to the loyalty of his men. In one instance, Dillinger managed to escape with a carved, wooden gun. With enough money to live, Dillinger attempted to hide out in Chicago. When his whereabouts were discovered, the now infamous Anna Sage, who became the "Lady

Thanks for the wild turkey and the passenger pigeons, destined to be shat out
through wholesome American guts.

Thanks for a continent to despoil and poison.

Thanks for Indians to provide a modicum of challenge and danger.

Thanks for vast herds of bison to kill and skin leaving the carcasses to rot.

Thanks for bounties on wolves and coyotes.

Thanks for the American dream, to vulgarize and to falsify until the bare lies
shine through.

Thanks for the KKK, for nigger-killing lawmen, feeling their notches.
for decent church-going women, with their mean, pinched, bitter, evil faces.

Thanks for "Kill a Queer for Christ" stickers.

Thanks for laboratory AIDS.

Thanks for Prohibition and the war against drugs.

Thanks for a country where nobody's allowed to mind their own business.

Thanks for a nation of finks. Yes, thanks for all the memories - all right let's
see your arms! You always were a headache and you always were a bore.

Thanks for the last and greatest betrayal of the last and greatest of human
dreams.

[W.S. Burroughs, 1989, p. 23]

Burroughs never stopped encouraging his young readers and listeners to “never be afraid of the surrounding world”, of “its machineries of control, their police intended in any possible form it might have, there included the police of the mind” [Burroughs, 1996, p. 61] and kept on formulating apocalyptic but impressively precise overviews and warning on the dynamics of political coercions and abuses such as the one performed for Gus Van Sant’s *Drugstore cowboy*, where he played the lifelong heroin addicted priest Tom Murphy:

Narcotics have been systematically scapegoated and demonized. The idea that anyone can use drugs and escape a horrible fate is an anathema to these idiots. I predict that in the near future right wingers will use drug hysteria as a pretext to set up an international police apparatus. [Van Sant, 1989]

in Red”, told federal agents of their plans to attend the theater. After the show, Dillinger was gunned down and killed. Some researchers and biographers believe, however, that it was all a ploy to trick agents into thinking Dillinger was dead, when in fact, he went on to live the life of a wealthy man.” [Matera, 2005, pp. V-VII]

Until the end of his days in the atmosphere of silence of the house in Lawrence - where most of his attention, on par with another noted lover of cats Louis Ferdinand Celine, the author he admired the most, was focused to his cats, to whom he paid homage by publishing *The Cat Inside* in 1986 - he lucidly maintained his purposes as a writer, corroborating what he once declared in 1965 interview:

I do definitely mean what I say to be taken literally, yes to make people aware of the true criminality of our times, to wise up the marks. All of my work is directed against those who are bent, through stupidity or design, on blowing up the planet or rending it uninhabitable. Like the advertising people we talked about, I am concerned with the precise manipulation of word and image to create an action, not to go out and buy a Coca-Cola, but to create an alteration in the reader's consciousness. [Knickerbocker, 1965]

II

Family dancing routines

“*Je* est un autre.”
A. Rimbaud

All that we see or seem
is but a dream within a dream.”
E. A. Poe

“Ce visage encore de fille qui cherche fixement au miroir
le secret de son être et le signes invisibles de sa maturité
à venir – contemplation insoutenable quand se fige
sur le tain la face effrayant d’un inconnu .”
L. R. Des Forêts

The origin of Burroughs’ life-long *logomachies* - a tribulation that from the late Fifties constantly invested his literary production - could be better comprehended in light of the extraordinarily intense life story of the writer. By investigating certain of Burroughs’ existential circumstances from the perspective of the perpetual contradiction that indeed he has incarnated, it is possible to unlock the reasons underlying his radical engagement with writing and the revolutionary commitment that such a practice implied in terms of literary and social content and, last but not least, to disclose Burroughs’ so-called iconological *enigma* that was recently risen up in regard of both the author’s image and imagination: it is an enigma that seems to emerge every time one attempts to produce any significant approach to his text through his life and vice versa.

For this reason it is worth to start this inquiry on Burroughs’ problematic commixture of biographic and bibliographic self-representation by taking into account the issue of the author’s enigmatic *identity* and its implicit fascination precisely as it was recently developed by Oliver Harris, who refuted the limits of a “junk paradigm” to set a new

standard in Burroughs' criticism by studying his development as a writer starting from a close study of his epistolary in relation to his manuscripts.

Once assumed that even within the Beats group Burroughs' identity was that of a shadowy figure, because even if celebrated in two milestone publications of the Beat movement - such as the 1956 *Howl* and 1957 *On the road* - yet he remained a strong invisible presence, out of this paradox Harris forges for Burroughs' image a different approach: by underlining how according to critics this image could bear a resemblance to a "text without an accessible and material author", "to a signifier without a signified" and by taking up the myth of transparency that *el hombre invisible* - this epithet was given to Burroughs by the Kasbah habitants of Tangier - has promoted, Harris solves the author's enigma by conceiving it as an *empty secret*, again a contradiction. He writes:

From Barry Miles allusion to his "strong though invisible presence", to Geoff Ward's general characterization of a "suppression of presence so ghostly as to become its own powerful identity", Burroughs is typically recognized as "a formidable absence". What then does it mean for Graham Caveney to claim that "there is nothing hidden in Burroughs' image, no secret to be decoded", or for Timothy Murphy to say that since "he hides nothing, he has no secrets that can be revealed"? [...] They approach Burroughs as another Andy Warhol, the great American icon of blank ambiguity. "Warhol" writes Steven Shaviro "is mysterious and charismatic not because he is good at keeping his inner life secret, but because he has no secret life." [...] Might we say of Burroughs what Hal Foster says of Warhol, that "the fascination is that one is never certain about this subject 'behind': is anybody home, inside the automaton?" [Harris, 2003, p. 46]

And rather than assuming this Burroughs/Warhol parallel lives as a no way out investigation, Harris proverbially cuts the Gordian knot by suggesting that

The alternative is a situation that combines a certain philosophical integrity with a radical short circuit of any grounding whatsoever. When an interviewer asked, "How do you see the relationship between your public image – there is a William S. Burroughs archetype – your body of work, and yourself, the actual man?" to his total consternation, Burroughs replied: "There is no actual man". When he says that all his "books are one book", we should recognize

how this makes art into “consciousness” and biography into “legend”, as Skerl puts it, at the cost of taking Burroughs out of history all together. [...] However difficult it may be to give the Burroughs oeuvre its chronology, to disentangle and reconstruct the histories of writing and reception, it is impossible to make a rigorous reading of his text without knowing how they relate one to another. Burroughs mythic identity must not be “considered another of his texts”, except insofar as this one also has its material origins and effect and has helped mystify the production histories and original circumstances of his other texts. [...] When an interviewer asked Burroughs “Do you have a lot of secrets?”, the significant answer was not in the first phrase but in the second “No writer has any secrets. It’s all in his work”. The secret of the work - the crime that is “the creation of a book” - is intimate with the secret in it: the material genesis of the text’s production is tied to its specific form and to the material effects of its consumption, which is why the possibility of an “accurate biographical account” matters. [Harris, 2003, pp. 24-27]

Therefore, once ascertained how is possible to utter for Burroughs the reality of a specific dialectic according to which to a biographical cause corresponds a bibliographical effect and how within this configuration of the self the author’s rerouting any perspective on his life plays a discontinuous but preeminent role, I will proceed to highlight the material origins of the author’s literary event.

The *Inspector Lee* alias *Uncle Bill* alias *Old Bull Lee* alias William Burroughs was born in St Louis, Missouri on February 5th 1914, the year that Europe would be thrown into its most savage and bloody conflict to date, the First World War: symbolically an historical clot where we could inscribe Modernity both as the decollation of the civilized world and as the culmination of its mercenary logic, an epochal knot that determined the beginning of the so-called “American century” as well as America’s loss of innocence together with the contradictions of its benefits. Ever since his adolescence and more than any other American author of his generation, Burroughs walked on and witnessed the wasteland of Modern disasters: his personal history seems inextricably intertwined with some of the most important and ominous events of the Modern era. Young Burroughs attended the Los Alamos Boy-Scout School in New Mexico, later commandeered during

the WWII as the ultra-secret home for the “Manhattan Project”. He was a medical student in Vienna when the Nazis took over Austria and he married Ilse Klepper, a German Jewish refugee, to provide her and her son with American citizenship in order to save them from persecution. He was in Mexico City during the years Alèman inaugurated the rampant political corruption and crony capitalism that until the present day seems to shape the relationship between politics and business. He was in Algiers when the War of Independence began and he witnessed the French Army repression over the civil population. He was in the United States during the McCarthy’s *witch hunting* and, after several years of self imposed exiled, he was back in his homeland during Nixon’s then Regan’s and Bush Senior’s presidencies, altogether to be considered - in the words of Noam Chomsky and Mark Zepezauer- as the Cold War shaped years when the American domestic and international policy reached its highest escalations in terms of offences to American constitutional rights and in terms of worldwide dirty wars, false-flags and covert operations scandals.

Burroughs’ legacy merged together two typical American lineages, the entrepreneurial Yankee inventor and the Christ-haunted Southern preacher, that had fiercely fought each other during the Civil War. His father Mortimer Burroughs was a strong man both decent and distant whose figure - according to the author - was characterized by a sense of emotional absence, a product of the white-collared Midwest, a class whose public sociability was matched by its more personal unavailability. He was the son of the inventor William Seward Burroughs Senior, founder of the *Burroughs Corporation*. The company began as the *Burroughs Adding Machine Company* in 1905, producing the world’s first practical adding machines, which had been perfected by Burroughs’ grandfather a decade before. The company succeeded Burroughs’ own *American Arithmometer Company* when the *Burroughs Adding Machine Company*

became the world's largest manufacturer of such devices, and in the Fifties and the Sixties it branched out into the manufacture of computer systems for business and office uses. It was then renamed the *Burroughs Corporation* in 1953 and it became the harbinger of the alliance between technology and corporate wealth that made possible the monstrously beefed-up industry of the Cold War years, but at that point the writer's family had already lost all the shares and rights because of some not too shrewd operations during the Wall Street Crash of 1929. On this affair Burroughs once told Barry Miles:

The point is we were not rich, and this circumstance alone would have excluded us from any elitist circles. With 200,000\$ in the bank we were not accepted by old families with ten, twenty, fifty millions..When the WASP elite got together for dinners and lunches and drinks nobody wanted those ratty Burroughses about. [Miles, 1993, p.54]

A conspicuous amount of what was left of this fortune must have been burnt into the author's veins during a multi-year addiction to heroin, Codeine and *Eukodol*: in fact starting from the age of twenty-two

His parents, upon his graduation, had decided to give him a monthly allowance of \$200 out of their savings and earnings from Cobblestone Gardens, a tidy sum in those days. It was enough to keep him going, and indeed it guaranteed his survival for the next twenty-five years, arriving with welcome regularity. The allowance was a ticket to freedom; it allowed him to live where he wanted to and to forgo employment [Morgan, 1988, p.65]

This allowance lasted until Burroughs reached the status of notorious celebrity and consequent financial independence with the publication in America of *Naked lunch* in 1962. It goes without saying that many puns have been made throughout the decades in relation to Burroughs' addiction and his grandfather's company name. Nevertheless, the author recalled in different interviews that far from being the only black sheep of the

dynasty, the only family member to have contracted a dependency, also several of his ancestors cultivated habits - even if more socially tolerated - or darkened the family's reputation because of notorious circumstances they got involved with. His homonymous grandfather William Burroughs Senior was an alcoholic, an addiction that he bizarrely combined with a hate for failure, which "in puritanical Darwinian fashion he equated to evil" [Morgan, 1988, p. 17]: for more than four decades such a record, on par of the proverbial sword of Damocles, remarked the author's own failures. If on one hand his grandfather was an alcoholic, on the other Ivy Lee, the author's maternal uncle, was a master image-maker, a pioneer of public relations who used his powers of persuasion to work as an extremely questionable turn-of-the century spin doctor. Ivy Lee started his career by working as publicity manager to the Rockefellers and especially for John Rockefeller Jr. whose image he helped to improve after the Ludlow Massacre in 1914, when in a dispute between miners and management ten women and eleven children were shot by the Colorado state militia. In the mid-Thirties, uncle Ivy was Hitler's public relations man in the United States and he was the chargé d'affaires during the propaganda campaign the Nazi regime conducted in Washington, an achievement the Congressman Robert LeFollotte labeled as "a monument of shame" and that, via the writings of Upton Sinclair and John Dos Passos, cost the author's uncle the notorious label of "Poison Ivy". Certainly Burroughs' suspicion of language in all its uses and forms - there where art and advertising, high finance and writing melt in a very obscure combination - and its implications with forces of control against which he fought with his entire corpus of writings was originated from this familial circumstance. Eventually the author traveled to Vienna and certified what the Nazi regime his uncle promoted - through a specific manipulation of words and images - was up to. For Burroughs - as for other celebrated writers like Genet and Artaud - Hitler was to become a seminal figure: he never forgot

that everything he had done was legal. This is the reason why in the Forties, when for a while the author made a living out of dealing drugs and as a thief, he recalled that he never felt guilty: in his opinion the life of petty crime was way less compromising than “the life of constant state of pretense and dissimulation required by any job that contributed to the status quo.”[Burroughs quoted in Morgan, 1988, p. 149]

Like a character from one of Sade’s dialogues, in a world contorted by crime and self-justification - where in a number of areas their interests run parallel - where gangsters write the law, and Burroughs was sure they did, not only in the Third Reich but also in most of the Post-WWII West, “ethics become fugitives, sanity is branded madness and the artist’s only option is total resistance: this planet is a penal colony and nobody is allowed to leave [...] kill the guards and walk” [Burroughs, 1983, p. 71].

On the other side, Burroughs’ mother, Laura Lee was a lady of reserve and nineteenth-century refinements who attended to the niceties of Victorian tradition. She was a typical southern beauty “with thick chestnut hair” and “a perfect oval face” [Morgan, 1988, p. 24], from whom the author inherited his characteristic long-boned thin figure. Proud and poised, Laura was the daughter of the Calvinist preacher James Wideman Lee, characterized by Burroughs as a “circuit-riding Methodist minister” [Caveney, 1988, p. 25], who, like thousands of the clan of the most common family name, claimed descent from Civil War General Robert E. Lee. Burroughs always teased about this pretended affiliation and used to sardonically comment “there’s no Lee family in the South that wouldn’t call for the same kinship, they are pretty inclined to incest down there..”[Burroughs quoted by Denti, 2005, p. 42].

Although in the author’s family displays of affection were often considered embarrassing, especially in the case of Mortimer Burroughs, the author was his mother’s favorite, “Laura was crazy about Billy and didn’t love her other son Mort” [Morgan,

1988, p. 29] and he returned this special attention by adopting her family name when he published his first novel *Junky* in 1954, similar to Luis-Ferdinand Destouches who also took up his mother's family name Celine to issue his novels.

It is significant then that for his second novel *Queer* - written between 1951 and 1953 but only published in 1985 due to its explicit homosexual contents - Burroughs leaves the first-person narrative form previously used in his early short stories and in his first novel to adopt a third-person form through which he firstly introduces to the readers his alter-ego William Lee, who would eventually become Inspector Lee of the *Nova trilogy*.

Burroughs started writing *Queer* in 1951 when the trial for uxoricide was prepared, in a moment when his wife Joan Wollmer's killing still oscillated between her being suicidal or acting out of the nihilistic bravado of an alcoholic and Burroughs being homicidal and using the *William Tell* game as a cover for murder. According to what Eric Mottram wrote in his 1978 essay *Algebra of need*, Lee's chaotic routines - as the author's matronymic might prove - display the theme of control as a pathology related to the maternal ego. In other words, the control issue that later was to invest his whole production germinates from the presence/absence of the maternal figure in *Queer*.

Far from containing no female characters and no reflections on women's roles and functions, *Queer* begins by twice invoking the stereotypical figure of maternal power and also makes numerous significant references and dry-humor jokes concerning Southern controlling wives. Given all these various attacks on maternal figures, one would think that Lee has something to hide which consequentially points out the main obvious omission in the novel: a direct reference to Lee's own mother. But considering that *Queer* was also written in the moment when *Junky* was first published, then it is significant to draw attention to the anomalous incestuous scene of a nostalgic reverie concerning the protagonist mother included in the author's first novel:

One morning in April, I woke up a little sick. I lay there looking at shadows on the white plaster ceiling. I remembered a long time ago when I lay in bed beside my mother, watching lights from the street move across the ceiling and down the walls. I felt the sharp nostalgia of train whistles, piano music down a city street, burning leaves. A mild degree of junk sickness always brought me the magic of childhood. "It never fails," I thought. "Just like a shot. I wonder if all junkies score for this wonderful stuff." [Burroughs, 2003, p. 126]

Differently from what Eric Mottram asserted, Harris has very recently proved that this scene was actually cut off from *Queer* to be added to *Junky*, and by doing this Burroughs "made his story of homosexual desire starting by literally cutting off the mother's body" [Harris, 2003, p. 116]. Therefore it is crucial to notice that by taking away the protagonist's reverie of maternal union, the author removed the unequivocal etiological origin of his own and Lee's homosexuality which as a consequence would have extensively shaped the ground for a familiar developmental narration. Why would Burroughs ever do so?

Shifting from Freud to Lacan, Harris claims Burroughs proceeded in cutting off the *primal cut* itself, "the separation of the mother-child dyad, the original loss that is also the point of individuation and entry into the symbolic order". In fact,

The magic of the childhood is therefore represented by elegiac image, melancholic motifs that recur, verbatim and as variations upon a theme, across the whole Burroughs oeuvre as traces of a lost world of the Real. But this magic moment of pre-symbolic bliss remains fundamentally ambiguous - as traumatic as sublime, as horrific as wondrous -, because of the eternal conflict between the drives towards merger and independence. [Harris, 2003, p.117]

As a consequence, such images of the celebrated maternal reveries of "music down a windy street" or the "the piano music down a city street" - these tunes of the Early jazz age, such as Hoagy Carmichael's songs, Burroughs' true musical era made of sheet music, of piano rolls and phonographs, of vaudeville theatres, nightclubs and radio

broadcasts - once cut to be pasted from one novel to the other, transfigure the magic into a pure menace.

As a matter of fact, it is in *Queer* that we could track down the very beginning of the author's misogyny and also it is in these pages that he closely related it to the idea of control since for the first time in this novel he seminally integrates the individual psychology with global politics in a unified structure destined to completely blossom in *Naked Lunch*. Burroughs' misogyny is one of the most thorny topics for both biographers and critics to a point where it is more often than not ignored. Between the early Sixties and the end of the Seventies, every time that during interviews he was asked his opinion on women he use to reiterate the same statement:

In the words of one of the greatest misogynist, plain Mr Jones in Joseph Conrad's *Victory* "Women are the perfect curse". I think they were the basic mistake and the whole dualistic universe evolved from this error. [Odier, 1974, p. 116].

In the end Burroughs' misogyny was a way to smother his own contemptible femininity: born in the odium of the secret, covered up part of himself which was womanly and sentimental, misogyny was his form of self-loathing. It is in fact very hard to guess that such a masculine and very deeply reserved man was capable of turning into a passive and maudlin lover.⁵² He did believe that women were useless and parasitic creatures, a blight on the planet, and that man must learn to clone himself and become independent from them. But having changed his provocative statements in his late years, as he declared to a reviewer "I have often said that it is not women per se, but the dualism of the male-female equation that I consider a mistake" [Sante, 1984, p.232], we should assume that his misogyny had rather a tactical nature, since he auspicated for a "liberated woman" [Snate, 1984, p. 233] and it is on this basis that during the Eighties an alliance

⁵² See Miles, 1992, pp.37-44.

between Burroughs and the Post-feminist theory of artists such as Diamanda Galas and Andrea Juno took place.

In fact rather than his personal feelings about women, what is really significant in Burroughs' work is the vitriolic criticism of the role assigned to women and to which women are confined in the conventional mode of procreation and family structure. From this angle his misogyny takes some surprisingly ironic and deeper turns. The author sees the matriarchal figure as the primary obstruction to innovative modes of reproduction, because the domination of such a procreation model and child rearing is not only the central support of a repressive family structure but also the basilar function for the nation state. At each level - from sexual reproduction to family relations, to national boundaries - power and its coercions are established by the dominance of a single group which represses the others.

Burroughs recognizes this power structure in the ideology of the American South and in the dominant position of women within this culture:

This whole worship of women that flourished in the Old South and in the frontier days when there weren't many is still basic in American life; and the whole Southern worship of women and white supremacy is still the policy of America. It's a matriarchal, white supremacist country. They lost the Civil War, but their policy still dominate America. [Odier, 1974, p.122]

For these reasons some of Burroughs' most vicious and ferocious early satires aims against this reactionary mentality - one of the most representative example is certainly the kafkaesque routine of the "Country clerk" in *Naked Lunch* ⁵³ - a mentality stuck and locked into patterns of binary opposition and hierarchy. In Burroughs' opinion, the goal of such reactionary thinking is stasis, the permanent perpetuation of established moral and political institutions at the expense of the evolutionary energies which spring from

⁵³ See Burroughs, 2005, pp.141-148.

desires, especially sexual ones. From this angle the figure of the mother - including his own mother - as defined by conventional notions of sexual difference and family structure, is but a necessary instrument in a larger system of patriarchal power which seeks to dominate the individual from his earliest moments of life. By using the strategy of taking over the weapons of the enemy, the author seems to escape the tyranny of the mother by appropriating her maternal and reproductive power for himself. Therefore many of the aggression against the woman figure in Burroughs' fiction could be understood as a part of this strategy of assimilation: to take the place of the mother the author must first displace her, which is also what exactly occurs with the *Junky/Queer* chapter removing. And continuing in this line of thought, it is worth here to recall what Roland Barthes defined for *grain of the voice*, "the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue" [Barthes, 1994, p. 1437] and *logocentrism*, "the symbolic domain of the father figure", which modality consisted in privileging the former over the latter. Robin Lydenberg wrote that

Barthes associates the pre-Oedipal mother of the bodily realm with certain "pulsional incidents", a throbbing eroticism of textual pleasure that may well seem as excessive, as forbidden and abject as anything in Burroughs' sexual Garden of Delights. Defying all taboo and property, Barthes asserts rather obscenely that the writer is playing always with the mother tongue, playing with the mother body. Barthes's pursuit of bliss acknowledges no forbidden territory and charts an intimate course through the body of language itself. [Lydenberg, 1997, p. 159]

Burroughs relation with the maternal language and therefore with the maternal body, as one could imagine, belongs to the realm of eroticism but it is strongly connoted with violence and destruction, as the revision of Hamlet⁵⁴ in *Naked Lunch*, where the mother vagina is displaced to her slashed throat. This practice of amputation - previously

⁵⁴ See Burroughs, 2005, pp. 39-40.

performed with the displacement of the chapter from one novel to another - aims in the Hamlet routine to avoid the tyranny of one orifice via the creation of some other holes which will restore and guarantee a new and free circulation. Such a hallucinatory practice is then reiterated in *The Soft Machine* where the author reinterprets Melville's *Billy Budd*, introducing in the routine the imaginary scene in which Billy's mother - an assonance to the author's own mother - inexplicably takes over his body in the moment of his execution:

"Gentlemen," says Captain Verre "I cannot find words to castigate this foul and unnatural act whereby a boy's mother takes over his body and infiltrate her horrible old substance right onto a decent boat and with bare tits hanging out, unfurls the nastiest colors of the spectroscope." A hard-faced matron bandages the cunt of Radiant Jade - "You see, dearie, the shock when your neck breaks has like an awful effect—You're already dead of course or at least unconscious or at least stunned – but – uh - well - you see - It's a medical fact - All your female insides is subject to spurt out your cunt the way it turned the last doctor to stone and we sold the results to Paraguay as a state of Bolivar." - "I have come to ascertain death not perform a hysterectomy," snapped the old auntie croaker munching a soggy crumpet with his grey teeth - A hanged man plummets through the ceiling of Lord Rivington's smart mews flat - Rivington rings the Home Secretary: "I'd like to report a leak"- "Everything is leaking - Can't stem it - Sauve qui peut" snaps the Home Secretary and flees the country disguised as an eccentric Lesbian abolitionist. [Burroughs, 1961, pp. 170-171]

Just like the Hamlet routine in *Naked Lunch*, the *word horde* which in the first two novels - according to Lydenberg - was representative of the oppressive mother is here "a liberated and liberating tide which overflows all boundaries and releases from domination...through his writing Burroughs becomes, in a sense, his own mother" [Lydenberg, 1997, p. 171].

We could assert that Burroughs' fictional matricide and real uxoricide are a result of the modalities to pave the way out of his private matriarchal domination and, tout court, a

way out of the patriarchal control in any of its public declinations, such as family, society, national institutions and corporations: they are all together responsible, from his point of view, of the repression of subjective and subversive energies which spring from desires, especially sexual ones. This takes us back to *Queer*, the novel he wrote while the trial for the killing of his wife Joan was underway and where for the first time he dealt with his homosexuality. Burroughs never regarded as himself as anything but homosexual and always thought that his irregular sexual relationship with Joan was a temporary solution when the boys he favored were unavailable: even if she adored him, he admitted to a friend that the marriage was a sort of “impasse, not amenable to any solution.” We already said that Burroughs never made a woman central to his fiction: the starring roles were instead for cruelly updated and obviously homosexual versions of the classic male hero, for tricksters, gunmen, pirates, and wild boys. Although he never considered himself a militant homosexual writer, exactly like Jean Genet Burroughs saw homosexuality - as opposed to effeminacy and “fagottry” for which he had no mercy - as inherently subversive of the *status quo*: in his opinion if women were born apologists, queer men were rebels and outlaws. Nonetheless, he knew very well that rules are defined by their exceptions: he sincerely adored Joan, her brilliantly unconventional mind, her elusive delicacy and for this reason he never fully recovered from her death.

If on one hand *Queer* is the novel where the author unveiled his homosexual desires to a point that Aaron A. Wyn - the owner of *Ace Books* who already published *Junky* - refused to issue it for its explicit contents, on the other, by intentionally removing a chapter from a book to another, again it is also the novel where for the first time Burroughs experiments with the practice of the assemblage as a resistance strategy to evade control, to subtract himself and consequentially the reader from what he would latter theorize as the *algebra of need*. Such a practice eventually led him to adopt and

improve writing techniques such as the *cut up* and the *fold in*, whose utility and intents the author would meticulously distill in his interviews and essays on creative writing which he edited in the early Eighties. Still on the theme of control related to global politics, in other words the author's will to unmask the delirious and devastating mechanisms of oppressing power structures and intents, *Queer* represent the first record of Burroughs' paranoiac disquisitions on control inducted strategies in a novel. Lee's speculations on mass thought control and brainwashing, that would consequentially take the author and his narrative alter-ego to the quest for the *yagè* - the psychoactive drug employed by Amerindians for divinatory and healing purposes - actually are historically alert: there really was a Cold War *yagè* race to use this substance as a mean to reach mental enslavement. Ian Mac Fadyen's research provide a precise historical contest:

In both 1951 and 1953, there was a widespread media coverage of the confession given by captured US pilots about the American use of germ warfare, and one source date this precisely as "beginning on February 21, 1952 - just days before Burroughs began *Queer*. These POW confessions were read in turn as evidence of communist "brainwashing" or what an early historian of mental seduction and thought control, Joost Meerloo, termed "menticide". Indeed Meerloo's study provides near contemporary evidence for how *Queer* plays out a fantasy of conversion narratives and mental control drawn from contemporary cold war phobias. But also confirm how in Burroughs' novel "totalitarianism and psychosis" go together, because the schizophrenic's "weird fantasies become more real" than the real world." Indeed *yagè* search was joined in the same years Burroughs ventured into the jungle. [Harris and Mac Fadyen, 2009, p. 246]

If with the Bible on one side and the spirit of Capitalism on the other, Burroughs' ancestry might be the therapist's dream because in his novels his contempt with for the platitudes of organized religion indeed coupled with a maniacal mistrust of order thus suggesting a career spent striking back against his heritage, a sort of Oedipal struggle removed at one generation, one could rightly affirm that in his case a birthright might not

be necessarily a birthmark as Burroughs' project is clearly to ascribe to deeper motivations rather than a simple familial squabble. It is true, but nonetheless I firmly believe that it is worth to investigate the modality of Burroughs literary strategies within the familial entourage and its circumstances, because if it is true that such analysis does not exhaust the whole of Burroughs' unique revolutionary theories on language concerning both literature and politics, anyway it provides a momentous outlook on the accidents that caused such resolutions in his writing.

Therefore, by taking a step back to Burroughs' domestic environment and more particularly to mother-related , now I want to focus on another two aspects of the mother influence on the writer that I consider essential in the development of the author's poetic. The first one is that whereas his father Mortimer's touchstone was containment, Laura Lee veered much more towards neurosis. In the descriptions Burroughs gave of his mother, her almost maniacal abhorrence of bodily functions is evident, a substantial trait of her personality which the author's son, William Burroughs Junior, also alluded to in his autobiographical novel: "My grandmother was Laura Lee Burroughs, aristocratic, proud, possessed of great strength and a great disgust for all things pertaining to body functions" [Burroughs Junior, 1973, p 48].

Laura Lee's bodily repulsion - if we take for granted Harris' analytical line for transfiguration of the maternal habits and attitudes - is most certainly the source of the author's repulsion/fascination with the visceral, for all those abject fluids and secretions that blur the characters' identity and physically undermine any individual autonomy and the control of the body in his fiction. The transfigurations of bodily functions first started with *Naked Lunch* where the most representative example is certainly the *Lique-factionist* process

Liquefaction involves protein cleavage and reduction to liquid which is absorbed into someone else's protoplasmic being. Hassan, a notorious liquefactionist, is probably the beneficiary in this case. [Burroughs 2005, p.123]

It will be immediately clear that the Liquefaction Party is, except for one man, entirely composed of dupes, it not being clear until the final absorption who is whose dupe.... The Liquefactionists are much given to every form of perversion, especially sadomasochistic practices.... [Burroughs, 2005, p. 136]

they contaminated entire pages of *The Soft Machine*

"Jelly," the doctor said, liquid gurgles through his hardened purple gums. His tongue was split and the two sections curled over each other as he talked: "Life jelly. It sticks and grows on you like Johnny." Little papules of tissue were embedded in the doctor's hands. The doctor pulled a scalpel out of Johnny's ear and trimmed the papules into an ash tray where they stirred slowly exuding a green juice... [Burroughs, 1961, p 19]

and of *Nova Express*

Lee woke with the green breathing rhythm-Gills slow stirring other cigarette smoke in other gills adjusted to the host by color storms-It is in pairs known as The Other Half sweet and rotten they move in and out and talk in spinal fluid exchanging genital sewage on slow purple gills of half sleep-Addicts of The Orgasm Drug-Flesh juice in festering spines of terminal sewage-Run down of Spain and 42nd St. to the fish city of marble flesh grafts-Diseased beggars with cruel idiot smiles eating erogenous holes inject The Green Drug-Sting insect spasms-It is a warning-We can do not-Doesn't change-Even the sky stale and rotten dissolving... [Burroughs, 1964, p.108]

Burroughs' exploration and exposition in a semi-scientific and semi-medical delirious prose of the human body's vulnerability via its most unrestrained or displeasing functions imply different meanings but in all circumstances they stand as an implicit and explicit consequence of control-related inductions, could it be drug-addiction, power-addiction or any other kind of internal and external intoxication that enslave the individual. If on one hand they represent some verbal hallucinations of specific control practices over the individual, on the other they remains as the author's most extreme attempt in discrediting

the idea of a presumed control over our own body and in the same time over ourselves, our presumed identity.

From such a perspective Burroughs' literary and philosophical odyssey - by displacing the words control over the body and by unveiling the bodily limits through a precise technique of word manipulation - bridges Antonin Artaud's own metaphysical and eschatological tribulations. Up to our days no comparative study of the two authors has been produced, even if numerous affinities tie up their works; aside for the biographical similarities - for example they both undertake a quest for a ritual drug in some remote areas of Latin America that in their opinion would released them from *possession* and *word intoxication* (Burroughs went searching for the yagé on the Bolivian-Colombian board while Artaud visited the Mexican tribe Tarahumara to discover their peyote ritual) - they shared similar theories (Burroughs's own mythology concerning the "theological" statute of words closely evokes Artaud's last years *theomachia*) and consequent literary strategies (Burroughs' cut ups recall Artaud's *glossolalias*) which sufficiently justify the urge of a critical study.

The aspect that here I want to focus on is how Burroughs' reiterated statement of the body as a biological structure that "manly acquires the status of a prison of the self, for it enslaves us to its appetites and inflicts upon us with involuntary desires" [Burroughs, 1986, p. 78] matches with Artaud's conceptions of the body as an inadequate sheath, a flesh dwelling which limits "take the self as an hostage". As Artaud clearly put it in his last work *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* (1947), the radio play that was censored for more than forty years and that was originally spilled over into America counter-culture in 1958 thanks to Burroughs and Ginsberg who mailed to Judith Malina, Julian Beck and Amiri Baraka some copies of a tape belonging to Jean Jacques Lebel⁵⁵:

⁵⁵ *Ad vocem* by Jean Jacques Lebel

We must make up our minds to trip him bare in order to scrape off that animalcule that itches him mortally,

god

and with god

his organs

for you can tie me up if you wish,

but there is nothing more useless than an organ.

when you will have made him a body without organs,

then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions

and restored him to his true freedom.

[Artaud, 1973, p. 570-571]

In Burroughs words, Artaud was “the only surrealist to have undertaken until the end of his life the extreme consequences of language subversion” [Burroughs, 2000, p. 367]. Because so far Burroughs was the first and only American writer concerned with the relation existing between the body and language and the correlated implication that such a conception implies, I want highlight here how both the French author and the American novelist shared very close preoccupations on language: they both considered it as a reductive or better incomplete tool which they both forced to its extreme limits, to a point where their own journeys at the end of the word join together there where both of them adopted hieroglyphic as a form for an ultimate representation. Indeed, while Artaud, by recognizing the tyranny of language and therefore the written text within the Western theatre tradition, formulated in the celebrated essays of *Le Théâtre et son double* the terms for a representation that would introduce anarchy on the stage by reducing the role of the written and spoken text in order to promote a rigorous hieroglyphic organization of the theatre space⁵⁶, similarly Burroughs’ logomachies came to a point where, on the basis

⁵⁶ Artaud’s admiration for Oriental theater and in particular for Balinese dance inspired the celebrated pages of *The Theater and Its Double* where he distilled the manifesto for the *Theater of Cruelty*. How his theorization implied a hieroglyphic form of representation could be gathered by the following passages of his essay: “It is plain that these signs constitute true hieroglyphs, in which man, to the extent that he contributes to their formation, is only a form like the rest, yet to which, because of his double nature, he adds a singular prestige.[...] This language which evokes in the mind images of an intense natural (or spiritual) poetry provides a good idea of what a poetry in space independent of spoken language could mean

of a critical pursue about the ultimate meaning of word-languages and consequently their presumed inadequacy in terms of communication, by compiling the *Book of breathing* (1980), he invented a new language-form based on the idea of abandoning phonograms in favour of a pure logographic language made of hieroglyphics.

The other aspect of Burroughs' mother personality that deeply influenced his work, probably the most enigmatic and complex one, was her interest in magic and her being a versatile clairvoyant. According to the author, Laura Lee was psychic: she used to have feels about people and apparently she was always true. Taking into account what the author once told to Victor Bockris, Morgan wrote:

Burroughs' father would be about to get involved in some business deal and she would say "No, no, he's crook, I can tell" and she would be right. Once Burroughs brother Mortimer was out late at night and his mother dreamt that he came to her with his face covered with blood and said "mother, we had an incident". In fact that night his brother had been in a car accident and his face had been covered with blood. [Morgan, 1988, p. 25]

This singular domestic circumstance would later encourage Burroughs's proneness to believe in magic and animism as the two main categories of the world we inhabit - as we will see in the next section - and also in dreams intended as a figurative system to trace out into his recounting and routines, as a source of plots and characters for his novels:

For me dreams are extremely useful professionally. I get most of my sets from dreams. Occasionally I find a book or paper in a dream and read the whole chapter or short story...wake up, make few notes, sit down at the typewriter the next day and copy from a dream book. [Burroughs, 1986, p.97]

and

in the theater.[...] This spectacle offers us a marvelous complex of pure stage images, for the comprehension of which a whole new language seems to have been invented: the actors with their costumes constitute veritable living, moving hieroglyphs. And these three-dimensional hieroglyphs are in turn brocaded with a certain number of gestures-mysterious signs which correspond to some unknown, fabulous, and obscure reality which we here in the Occident have completely repressed. There is something that has this character of a magic operation in this intense liberation of signs, restrained at first and then suddenly thrown into the air. [Artaud, 1953, pp. 51-62]

Roughly half of my characters come to me in dreams, Daddy Long Legs, for instance. Once, in a clinic, I had a dream in which I saw a man in this rundown clinic and his name in the dream was Daddy Long Legs. Many characters have come to me like that in dream, and then I'll elaborate from there. I always write down all my dreams. That's why I got that notebook beside the bed there. [Knickerbocker, 1965, p. 96]

Such a resolution rises an issue concerning the relation between the American novelist and the theories of the father of psychoanalysis. Along his life Burroughs maintained an extremely skeptical attitude over Freud's psychoanalytic theories. From 1939, back in New York from his first journey in Europe, he went into analysis for almost four years. He recalled that as an useless experience and he was convinced of the fact that Freud's approach on psyche failed for it merely reduced the different levels of mental illness to pure conflicts between what he called the advantages of civilization and the unconscious, intended as a destructive or at least, a repository of irrational and atavistic urges: in other words the writer questioned the rational presupposing a consciously agreed-upon social contract to suppress the irrational that the Freudian systematization implied. Burroughs considered Freud's theory too much of a compromise with the materialistic needs of capitalistic civilization - which is also the basis of Guattari and Deleuze's recourse to Burroughs for their "anti-Œdipic" or better "an-œdipic" theories - and, even more important, as a former medicine scholar, he considered the whole idea of psychoanalysis based on rather metaphysical than biological fundamentals: "Ego, Super-Ego and Id, floating about in a vacuum without any reference to the human nervous system, strike me as highly dubious metaphysical concept" [Burroughs, 1986, p. 91].

Almost a platonic reminiscence, Burroughs' conviction was that an artist transcribes from his unconscious and when asked about his tendency in bypassing the consciousness apparatus in his narrations, he stated:

I am quite deliberately addressing myself to the whole area of what we call dreams. Precisely what is a dream? A certain juxtaposition of word and image. I've recently done a lot of experiments with scrapbooks. I'll read in a newspaper something that reminds me of or has relation to something I have written. I'll cut out the picture or article and paste it in a scrapbook beside the words from my book. Or I'll be walking down the street and I'll suddenly see a scene from my book and I'll photograph it and put it in a scrapbook. [...] I've found that when preparing a page, I'll almost invariably dream that night something relating to this juxtaposition of word and image. In other words, I've been interested in precisely how word and image get around on very, very complex association lines. [Knickerbocker, 1965, p. 93]

In his Parisian years (1957-1961) the interest in all those uncovered and marginal unconscious activities that in his opinion the Freud's apparatus of theories did not explore became one of Burroughs' major interest: Aside for the phenomenon of telepathy which occurred to him in more than one occasion while he was in analysis – "I recall that when I was in analysis with Doctor Ferden, a number of telepathic exchanges turned up. [...] Freud, while admitting the occurrence of telepathy, thought of it as an atavistic and undesirable vestige going back to protoplasmic antiquity. It did not occur to him that this faculty could be useful or that it is used every day by ordinary people. [...] It is to be remembered that unconscious was much more unconscious in Freud's days than in ours" [Burroughs, 1986, p. 92] - many of the experiments he conducted in the so-called *Beat Hotel* - a run-down hotel at 9 Rue Gît-le-Cœur in the Latin Quarter that along the Fifties many broken American travelers used as a temporary residence while living in Paris - aimed precisely to investigate these complex association lines. It was then that together with Brion Gysin - an English artist Burroughs met in Tangier in 1955 - he tweaked what they named the *Dreamachine*, to be consider the first exploit of the novelist into the art world.

Originally the idea of this instrument, that novelist used quite a lot while he was writing the *Nova trilogy*, was a combination of a vision Brion Gysin had in 1958,

I had a transcendental storm of color visions today in the bus going to Marseilles. We ran through a long avenue of trees and I closed my eyes against the setting sun. An overwhelming flood of intensely bright colors exploded behind my eyelids: a multidimensional kaleidoscope whirling out through space. I was swept out of time. I was out in a world of infinite number. The vision stopped abruptly as we left the trees. Was that a vision? What happened to me? [Geiger, 2005, p. 228]

and the theories of neurologist Gray Walter's *The Living Brain* (1953), a book Burroughs was reading at the time concerning the physiological functions of the brain and in particular the functioning of brainwaves :

In a telephone system the meaning of a message received depends on the sender; in a sensory system the meaning depends on the receiver. When nerve impulses travel from a sense organ, it is their destination on the cortex which determines, in the first place, that character of the sensation, not the sense organ from which they come. If, when you get a number on the telephone, you give a message, the message remains the same, even if you give it to a wrong number. The result of such an error in the brain is very different. [Gray, 1953, p. 44]

A classical collusion between art and a science, the *Dreamachine* was conceived by Gysin and Burroughs and perfected by Ian Sommerville, a young brilliant scholar of Mathematics and Physics at the Corpus Christi College in Cambridge who Burroughs met in George Whitman's "Shakespeare and Company", the celebrated bookshop on the left bank of the Seine and few blocks away from the *Beat Hotel* where at the end of the Fifties some of the early Beat authors used to meet and to consult books for their writing. Technically the machine was a cylinder made of thick paper with holes in it and in its middle set a light bulb. It was attached to a record-player turntable set to spin at 78 RPM and the viewers were asked to sit in front of the cylinder and close their eyes. The light would have shone through the holes in the spinning cylinder and flickered on the eyelids

at a frequency of about 20 Hz which is similar to the frequency of Alpha brain waves. In an article written in the late 1961, Sommerville stated:

Our ancestors saw the creatures of the constellations in the apparently unorganised distribution of the stars. It has been shown experimentally through the viewing of random white dots on a screen that man tends to find patterns and picture where objectively there is none: his mental process shapes what it sees. External resonators, such as flicker, tune in with our internal rhythms and lead to their extension. The Dreamachine began as a simple means to investigate phenomena whose description excited our imaginations - our faculty of image-making which flicker was said to stimulate. Maximum effect is achieved with a light of at least 100 watts when flicker plays over closed lids bright as close as possible to the cylinder revolving at 78 rpm. This may not produce everybody's exact alpha rhythm but the effects can be astonishing. They continue to develop over a long period of time. More elaborate machines can be obtained. Brion Gysin added an interior cylinder cover with the type of painting which he had developed from his first "natural flicker" experience, and with eyes open the pattern became externalized, seemed to catch fire, and lick up from inside the whirling cylinder. In the bigger machines of his design whole moving pictures are produced and seem to be in flux in three dimensions on a brilliant screen directly in front of the eyes. Elaborate geometric construction of incredible intricacy build up from bright mosaic into living fireballs like the mandalas of eastern mysticism surprised in their act of growth. [Sommerville, 1962, pp. 25-26]

The principle of the flicker light on human mind was studied and investigated thought the centuries and from such a perspective Burroughs' and Gysin's experiments with dreamachine were just the latest example of a long series: it was widely believed that a precise use of such practice could lead to divination - the writer and the artist were quite aware of that - and indeed Caterina de' Medici had Nostradamus sitting on a top of a tower where his finger spread would flicker them over his closed eyes and interpret his vision in a way which influenced her to regard political power as instruction from a higher power.

Burroughs' studies on red, blue, white, green and red colors - the colors that Rimbaud assigned to the five vowels in his celebrated poem and that Patti Smith completed by adding the yellow to Y in her novel *The Coral Sea* - in *The Soft Machine*, basically the

discovery of a universe where the alphabet was made of colors, were inspired by the use of the Dreamachine: he considered the dreamlike potentialities of this instrument so important and subversive that in one letter to Ginsberg he once commented:

Of course life is literally a dream, or rather the projection of a dream... the whole existing system can be dreamed away if we can get enough people dreaming on the Gysin level. There is nothing that can stop the power of a real dream. I mean this literally. [Burroughs, 1994, p. 398]

And he actually did. Burroughs was making the point that has been central to mysticism throughout the centuries: it is through the malleability of dreams - also intended as desires - that a change of route could be produced. And it is the artist's duty to do so because they are "the real architects of change, and not political legislators who implement change after the fact" [Burroughs, 1986, p. 178].

Punching a Hole in the Big Lie

I

Degeneracy, possession, science, and (in)sanity

God might forgive your sins
but your nervous system won't.
Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity*

Cognoscere est coire cum suo cognobili
Francesco Patrizzi, *Discussiones peripateticae*

I have made big decision
I'm goin' to try to nullify my life
'Cause when the blood begins to flow
When it shoots up the dropper's neck
When I'm closing in on death
Lou Reed, *Heroin*

The map is not the territory!
William Burroughs, *The Book of Breathing*

Between 1961 and 1963 Foucault devoted two major [main] works - *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* and *Naissance de la Clinique, une archéologie du regard medical* - to the conditions beyond the constitution of a scientific subject in modern society. He basically investigated the phenomenon that in modern society progressively led to a simplification of all those oppositions - good/bad, legal/illegal, allowed/forbidden, etc... - that altogether used to be constitutive for every society. He focused on this simplification that mainly reduced all those oppositions to the single one of the normal/pathological and he ascribed this codification of all the former ones into the latter to an invisible but powerful turnaround that he assumed to be implicit in our modern culture: the one that opposes rationality to folly. In other words, the folly/rationality opposition works as a reversal that translates all the previous positions of our culture into the superior and monotone one of normal/pathological.

In an interview given to Paolo Caruso in the late Sixties, when asked about Western society's re-discovery of drugs as a phenomenon that hardly matches his analysis, Foucault stated:

The introduction of drugs in our society indeed produces quite a divergent operation. Through this practice we try to restore the autonomy of the ancient opposition rationality/folly. The aim is basically to take the pathological out of the folly and to reclaim it as a cultural and not pathological opposition. But rather than considering such an operation as the possibility to increase the horizons of our sensibility, rather than being the "irruption" of certain Eastern culture and thought into our Western civilization, what happens is exactly the contrary. Apparently in the last 150 years - let's say starting with Schopenhauer - we seem to absorb some aspects of Eastern philosophies and cultures. Instead, what really happened is that the rest of the world has been westernized, and because of it we are relatively more permeable, for example, to Indus philosophy, to African art, to Japanese painting, Arabic mystic... And indeed all those forms of art and philosophy happen to realize what they are because of those ideological structures that the Western civilization projects on them. As a consequence the use of drugs - in my opinion - is not a way of the Western individual to assimilate the otherness, the Eastern culture at all. As far as I know, drugs in Eastern cultures are functional to eradicate the foolish idea of being an individual, of the fact that there is an existing world. In other words, drugs work in those cultures as a way to nullify the concept of individuality. On the contrary, in our days the use that Western people do of drugs is very individualistic. Because what happens is that we try to find within ourselves a possibility for the folly: it is not a matter of dissipating the folly of normality to reach a true reality but rather recover through the rationality of the world a certain individual folly which we involuntarily hold. [Foucault, 1969, pp. 97-100]

In 1959, when *The Naked Lunch* was published in the olive green Traveler Companion collection of Maurice Girodias' "Olympia Press", Burroughs included the celebrated chapter written during a journey in Venice in 1956, the *Letter from a Master Addict to Dangerous Drugs* which he previously edited the same year on the *British Journal of Addiction*. In these pages - where Burroughs made a display of his medical erudition achieved during the Vienna period - he listed all the drugs that until then he had more or less occasionally, more or less frequently used, there including their effects and

consequent withdrawals. Until then the novelist stated that he experimented twenty-four different kind of drugs.

Burroughs' first experience with drugs dates back to 1927 when he was thirteen years old: while playing with a chemistry set he badly burned his right hand. Taken to the doctor, he was given an "adult dose" of morphine. When he later recalled the episode he wrote that it made a deep impression on him: "As a boy I was much plagued by nightmares. I remember the nurse telling me that opium gives you sweet dreams and I resolved that I would smoke opium when I grew up". [Burroughs, 2000, p. 512]. Few years later, when he read Jack Black's biography of a wandering opium smoker, *You Can't Win*, he decided that he would be a writer one day "because writers were rich and famous, they lounged around Singapore or Rangoon smoking opium in a yellow pongee silk suit, they sniffed cocaine in Mayfair and they penetrated forbidden swamps with a faithful native boy and lived in the native quarter of Tangier smoking hashish and languidly caressing pet gazelle" [Burroughs, 1986, p. 2]. As a teenager, Burroughs already knew he preferred Black's compassionate stranger universe and natural democracy of the equally suffering to the enforced, institutionalized hypocrisy of the high-class America he belong to. To have this world "before his eyes and not only in his heart" - to quote Pasolini - in 1939, back from Europe, Burroughs settled down in Chicago where "his romanticized life amid the criminal element" began: there he finally made contact with the milieu of Black's novel to which he had been so attracted:

He lived in Mrs. Murphy rooming house on the North Side, a rundown neighborhood favored by petty thieves, failed gamblers and short-chance artists. He liked the company and would go gambling with them. He had been rejected by the members of his own class in Harvard and in the military, but here he found unquestioning acceptance [Miles, 1993, p. 33]

Few years later, in 1943, he moved to New York where he rented an apartment in the Village. There Burroughs - who had already made trips to the Big Apple during his Harvard years and was introduced to the homosexual underground scene made of cabaret bars, illegal porno-movie theaters and dives - continued to associate with shadowy thieves and young veterans and hustlers hanging around Time Square. In those days, it was a picturesque and sleazy spot,

the place where the underworld met the elite, where those who had no cash encountered those who had a little or a lot. It was here that people who could afford \$60 seats in Broadway shows faced the young and the poor coming for the video arcades and budget double features. Time Square was a crossroads of class and race. It was one of the only places where it could happen in New York. [Benderson, 1997, p. 49]

There the author's homosexuality certainly played as a socializing factor within this variegated human universe as much as it manifested a rebellion to his origins because

Homosexuals can't make babies with each other and non production of a family automatically sets one outside the mainstream, in his erotic activity the homosexual was likely to encounter other outcasts...because of its non-breeding status and its association with marginality, homosexuality was the ideal position from which to challenge the conventional structures of society. It could have served as a starting point for new-oriented counterculture mentality [Benderson, 1997, p. 52]

After few months in New York, thanks to Lucien Carr, a friend from St. Louis, Burroughs met Kerouac and Ginsberg who at the time were students at Columbia University and also ran into Herbert Huncke, an ex-convict junky and hustler who belonged to the community of homos, dips, paperhangers and pimps gravitating around Time Square and who soon introduced him to morphine. In the same spirit of general inquiry that back to the Los Alamos school days took him once to ingest chloral hydrate,

he wanted “to see what it was like”. It certainly seemed to him the thing to do as far as being a criminal was concerned and indeed using junk made him part of the group of petty criminals he used to spend his time with back in those days: it was a sort of rite of passage and starting from that first “Syrette” he inaugurated both the addiction and that spirit of the self-mutilating scientist which would have characterized both the existential and literary inquires for the rest of his life.

Later on in *Junky*, the hard-boiled novel where he recollected his early experience with morphine, Burroughs remarked that one reason he drifted into a criminal and drug-addicted life was that drug consumption provided him the close-to-the-margin familiarity with urgent situations his comfy milieu had forestalled: his goal was not to undertake slumming expeditions among his social inferiors but to use his wittiness and his intellect to write his way out of his condition: as he wrote later

Back to those days I was liquidated by my WASP milieu, therefore I turned myself into criminality where, by the way, I have never achieved the status of a proper thief and I never made a life out of robberies: the only time I tried to steal money from a drunkard on the D line the guy woke up and started a fight with me. I got so scared that I decided then to give up. But at least I had the impression of owning an identity [Burroughs, 1986, p. 34].

Therefore, Foucault’s analysis of drug consumption in Western societies, in particular psychedelic drugs, fits some of the major figures of the Beat movement, like Ginsberg or Kerouac, who indeed through their poems and novels encouraged in a very naïf way the use of certain drugs to break through the strict conformist boundaries of the McCarthy’s and Nixon’s era America: the result that was involuntarily produced matches Foucault’s outlook because in the end the whole phenomenon only stopped at the stage of an individualistic folly.

But in the case of Burroughs drugs worked differently: his experimentations followed two different patterns: if on the one hand drug-consumption offered a way to de-figure his

identity and guaranteed the possibility of escaping a socially imposed representation of the self, on the other it provided also an instrument to achieve a kind of knowledge that could exceed tout-court the narrow limits of rationality imposed by the Western societies. First of all he mainly used heavy drugs and rather than being an attempt to dissolve his identity it was used to produce for himself or reach a new identity, a sort of constant rerouting that - as seen in the previous section - marked his existential and literary adventure. As the stated in the Introduction to *Queer*,

An addict has little regard for his image. He wears the dirtiest, shabbiest clothes and feels no need to call attention to himself. During my period of addiction in Tangiers, I was known as “El Hombre Invisible”, The Invisible Man. This disintegration of the self-image often results in an indiscriminate image hunger. Billie Holiday knew she was off junk when she stopped watching TV. In my first novel, *Junky*, the protagonist Lee comes across as integrated and self-contained, sure of himself and where he is going. In *Queer* he is disintegrated, desperately in need of contact, completely unsure of himself and of his purpose [Burroughs, 1985, pp. XI-XII].

The moment he started experimenting with psychedelic drugs - the yagé he went looking for into the Bolivian jungle - he always maintained a very methodical overview on the effects these substances produced, as if following Rimbaud’s poetical coordinates of a “long, boundless and systematized disorganization of all the senses” he ended up incarnating Thomas de Quincy’s scientific masochism:

I, who have taken happiness in conducting my experiments on this subject with a sort of galvanic battery and have, for the general benefit of the world, inoculated myself with the benefit of 800 drops of laudanum a day (just for the same reason that a French surgeon inoculated himself lately with cancer, an English one twenty years ago with plague and a third, I know not the of what nation, with hydrophobia). [Quincy, 2010, p. 22]

Rather than being an *egoistic* practice, drugs provided Burroughs with a way of dissipate the folly of reality through the opposition of a folly produced as a

consequence of a precise use of narcotics. From this perspective the American novelist seems to follow step by step Rimbaud's poetical manifesto:

All forms of love, suffering, and folly. He searches himself. *He exhausts all poisons in himself and keeps only their quintessence.* Unspeakable torture where he needs all his faith, all his super-human strength, where he becomes among all men the great patient, the great criminal, the one accursed--and the supreme Scholar!--Because he reaches the Unknown! Since he cultivated his soul, rich already, more than any man! He reaches the unknown, and when, bewildered, he ends by losing the intelligence of his visions, he has seen them [Rimbaud, 1994, pp. 74-75].

Drugs offered to Burroughs a tool to access forms of knowledge that exceed the concept of rationality in favour of cognitive paradigms that in our civilization branch down to that time where no distinction was possible between mythology and philosophy: that moment of Greek history when [still] the distinction between Epos – the word in its poetical value - and Logos - the word in its rational value - was not yet defined. In *La nascita della filosofia*, Giorgio Colli investigated this peculiar moment of the archaic Greek philosophy and, taking his points of departure from confuting Nietzsche's distinction between Apollo and Dionysus, he claims that in both these paradigms wisdom is but a product of an inducted folly. [Colli, 1975, pp. 13-20]. The nexus between wisdom and empoisoning, and more precisely the fact that wisdom is but a product of a folly inducted by a process of empoisoning, was recently picked up by Roberto Calasso who, in his critical works dedicated to the deconstruction of Greek mythology, in his essay *La follia che viene dalle Ninfe* also connects the notion of folly with the one of possession:

In the Greek world, possession was the primary form of knowledge and it existed long before these philosophers who inaugurated a rational research into the domain of wisdom. [...] The whole of the Homeric psychology - the psychology of both Gods and men - is traversed by a constant possession. First of all possession is the recognition of the fact that our mental life is hunted by forces that surpass it and that are hardly controllable. As human

beings we constantly have to deal with these forces, they are responsible of our transformations. [...] The mind is an open place, it is subject to invasions and incursions that, from time to time, could be either provoked or suffered. Each of these invasions is a sign of metamorphosis and every metamorphosis is but a means to acquire wisdom. [Calasso, 2005, pp. 27-28].

In Burroughs drugs functioned as a means to provoke such possession: along his life they always worked as a way to evoke these states of mind that would provoke and therefore guarantee a possession of the body whose metamorphosis he transcribed into the text. And to do this he had to subject the practice of writing to a constant process of metamorphosis that ended up in affecting the syntactic and morphologic figures that until then subjected the text and more precisely the ones of the naturalistic novel.

In Burroughs' works possession - like drugs- has an ambivalent significance. If on the one hand it is the condition that guarantees the possibility of being released from identity and control through the deliberate incorporation of substances therefore forces other of the self, on the other it represents the extreme declination of a process of control perpetuated over the individual.

Burroughs was the first writer who through his texts denounced the risk of the inhabitability of the body that the excess of rationalization typical of our modern culture has produced. Hence, the whole corpus of his experimental works - inaugurated with *The Naked Lunch* and concluded with the *Nova Trilogy* - echoes Pierre Klossowski's philosophical exegesis of the Greek and Roman mythologies, especially the assumption that

The soul is always possessed by some good or evil force. Souls are not ill because they are possessed: they are ill in the moment they are no longer able to be possessed. The illness of the modern world resides in the fact that souls are no longer *habitable* and in the fact that they suffer because of it [Klossowski, 1984, p. 65].

Only in his late years Burroughs reformulated his theories on possession and pointed out its equivalence with control, with that “dark passenger” that clearly manifested itself in the moment of his wife’s accidental death: from that moment on, the act of writing became a practice to exorcise this possession and at the same time to eradicate the virus of control. At the beginning of the Eighties - thanks to the philanthropist and manuscript collector Robert Jackson - Burroughs’ 1952 unfinished manuscript of *Queer* became available for publication. It was then that Burroughs forced himself to reread his early writings and therefore to remember the feelings and events of those dark years. He wrote an "Introduction" to the 1985 edition of *Queer* in which he tried to confront Joan's death directly and in which he refers to a cut-up message created by his friend and collaborator Brion Gysin around 1958:

I remember a cut-up I made in Paris years later: "Raw pealed winds of hate and mischance blew the shot". And for years I thought this referred to blowing a shot of junk. [...] Brion Gysin pointed out the actual meaning: the shot that killed Joan. He said to me: "For ugly spirit shot Joan because ...". A bit of mediumistic message that was not completed—or was it? It doesn't need to be completed, if you read it: "Ugly spirit shot Joan *to be cause*"—that is, to maintain a hateful parasitic occupation. [...]

I had bought a Scout knife in Quito. [...] It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, a few days after I came back to Mexico City, and I decided to have the knife sharpened. The knife-sharpener had a little whistle and a fixed route, and as I walked down the street towards his cart, a feeling of loss and sadness that had weighed on me all day so [much that] I could hardly breathe intensified to such an extent that I found tears streaming down my face. "What on earth is wrong with me?" I wondered [...]

I am forced to the appalling conclusion that I would never have become a writer but for Joan's death, and to a realization of the extent to which this event has motivated and formulated my writing. I live with the constant threat of possession, a constant need to escape from possession, from Control. So the death of Joan brought me in contact with the invader, the Ugly Spirit, and maneuvered me into a lifelong struggle, in which I have had no choice except to write my way out. [Burroughs, 1985, pp. XIV-XV]

In Burroughs' life Joan's death prefigures the moment of no return. After this accident the author decided to quit writing at once, and when eight years later, compelled by Kerouac who made him face the fact that he could not abdicate his task in the "Shakespeare squadron", he retraced his own steps, it was to do battle with this practice, to start those logomachies that he would carry on for almost twenty years.

One of the first act of this dispute *on* and *with* words was to put into practice the teachings of Alfred Korzybski, the author of a book he much admired, *Science and Sanity* (1933). Korzybski was a Polish nobleman who had grown up on an estate near Warsaw but had come to the United States in the 1915. A "post-IWW Utopian", he hoped that the wreckage of Europe would be the dawn of a new age. In the wake of Plato's *Republic*, he foresaw a government headed by a biologist, an engineer, a mathematician and a sociologist to develop human engineering. He was convinced of the fact that human nature could be made to change, since man was the only creature with the ability to improve.

When Burroughs went to Chicago in 1939 to study Egyptology at the University of Chicago and also attended five of Korzybski's lectures. He was drawn to his theory of General Semantics which showed the errors of either/or Aristotelian thinking:

In living, many issues are not so sharp, and therefore a system which posits the general sharpness of 'either-or', and so objectifies 'kind', is unduly limited; it must be revised and made more flexible in terms of 'degree'. This requires a physico-mathematical 'way of thinking' which a non-aristotelian system supplies. [...] under the all-pervading aristotelianism in daily life, asymmetrical relations, and thus structure and order, have been impossible, and so we have been linguistically prevented from supplying the potentially 'rational' being with the means for rationality. This has resulted in a semi-human so-called 'civilization', based on our copying animals in our nervous process, which, by necessity, involves us in arrested development or

regression, and, in general, disturbances of some sort [Korzybski, 1949, pp. 62-63].

Either/or thinking created a gap between reality and the words used. In 1938, for instance, when Korzybski founded the Institute of General Semantics in Chicago, “the words were *peace in our time* and *democratic appeasement*, but the facts were war and dictatorships.” [Burroughs, 1986, p. 121]. To demonstrate the gap between words and reality, Korzybski “banged on a table and said ‘whatever this is, this is not a *table*!’ “ Emotions such as love, hate and hunger – he used to explain – occurred on a nonverbal level so that what we called them had nothing to do with what they really are” [Burroughs, 1986, p. 123].

As words are inadequate to describe certain silent human processes, Korzybski proposed the idea of thinking in pictures, which Burroughs would later adopt in the *Book of Breathing*. In the wake of *Science and Sanity*, starting with *The Naked Lunch* Burroughs highlighted the dissymmetry between the written word and the object, the gap between the word and the thinnest mind processes. Devoting himself to the discrepancy that always occurs between the map and the territory, Burroughs linked his works to the visual art of Joseph Kosuth.

I

Rendezvous, histoire d'un baiser

“Depuis l'éternité, croyez-le bien, Madame,
l'Archet qui sur nos nerfs pince ses tristes gammes
appelait pour ce jour nos atomes charmés.”

J. Laforgue, *Sieste éternelle*

“Change nos lots, crible les fléaux, à commencer par le temps...”

A. Rimbaud, *À une raison*

“Navigare necesse est. Vivere non necesse.”

Motto of the Hanseatic League

Along four decades, the author of *The Naked Lunch* became convinced of a correspondence between art and writing, which represents one of the highest points of his reflection on language. In more than one occasion Burroughs pointed out how the writer's practice was strictly connected with the painter's, thus narrowly bridging the two activities to a point where they coincide in one nature. In several interviews and essays he argued how “writing was fifty years behind painting”, an evidence corroborated by the fruitful relationship he intermittently entertained for almost thirty years with Brion Gysin, the American poet and painter who back in the mid-Thirties shortly belonged to the Surrealistic movement. In detecting this gap, he stated that the reason of this delay is that while

the painter can touch and handle his medium, the writer cannot. The writer doesn't know what the words are. He deals only with abstractions from the source point of words. The painter's ability to touch and handle his medium led to montage technique sixty years ago. [Odier, 1974, p. 12]

It was Burroughs's opinion that, within the figurative arts, at the turn of the XX century the representational position was knocked out by photography. Therefore painting had to take a "new look" through a series of strategies among which montage was one of the most significant and efficient, for it improved the potentialities of the medium by disclosing horizons until then unimaginable to the brush.

According to Burroughs, the montage techniques had the advantage of being

Actually much closer to the fact of perception than representational painting. Take a walk down a city street and put what you have just seen down on the canvas. You have seen half a person cut in two by a car, bits and pieces of street signs and advertisings, reflections from shop windows - a montage of fragments. [Burroughs, 1986, p. 61]

Indeed one of the most considerable contributions Burroughs brought into narrative would be the translation of some figurative art techniques into writing, hence opening wide new potentialities for the modern novel. From such a perspective his work could be associated to the compositions of Jasper Johns or Robert Rauschenberg, whose *combine paintings* and sculptures made them the first artists to mirror and to criticize the Post-WWII American mass-consumption society - thus forerunning Pop-Art and more precisely Warhol's silkscreen paintings. Rauschenberg's claim of acting in the "gap between art and life" converges with the very same expressive program Burroughs launched.

If the modalities of both artists have often been labeled as Neo-Dada the former's for the role of the viewer in creating art's meaning, the latter's for questioning the distinction between art objects and everyday objects - certainly it would not seem inappropriate to highlight the importance Marcel Duchamp's work had on Burroughs.

As a matter of fact, to the detriment of several epithets that invidious colleagues palmed off him by erasing words, by disconnecting the syntactic circuit and by learning

“*how to breathe silently*”, Burroughs came to a point where he abandoned the plane geometry of fiction in favor of a space geometry, thus letting his prose “pass[ing] through spheres, cubes and hexagons, subsequently to pulverize them”, the so called *Dust words*, “so that the human being, *this animal who knots the time*, could finally understand to have entered the Space era” [Burroughs quoted in Lemaire, 1984, p. 20] or the *fourth dimension* , like Duchamp’s *Large Glass* in the silent rooms of the MoMA in Philadelphia.

Portents of a symmetry in this direction are evident in the way both Duchamp and Burroughs radically defied their own medium of expression through a strategy that reveals several points of intersection. If starting from 1911 Duchamp challenged the word of art by questioning if it was possible “to produce works that are not works of art” in order to avoid the blind alley of merely *retinical* representation, in a very similar way Burroughs turned writing upon itself in order to overcome the worn out form of the naturalistic American novel.

Duchamp’s inquiry took him to Poincaré’s and Pawlowski’s disquisitions on the so-called *fourth dimension*, which he almost literally followed by formulating and realizing the *Large Glass*. And once he accomplished it, for almost forty years Duchamp secretly played the score of *inverse canon* that led him to the assemblage of *Given*, a three-dimensional representation of the same subject, the *Bride stripped bare*, which he obtained by plagiarizing and depredating some of the XIX century French masters, such as Ingres, Cranach, Courbet and Rodin.

In the words of Jean Clair

The *Large Glass*, which for many years had been his attempt to attain this “materialism,” to portray this “*abstract, invisible object*,” is the appearance in a three-dimensional world of a nude young woman belonging to the four-dimensional realm. *Étant Donnés*, with the weighty signification of a geometry problem, seems ironically to lead us to the solid ground of

visible reality. The Bride is certainly there, surrounded by mechanisms now made visible. Finally, the appearance of what, in the *Glass*, remained hidden: the waterfall and the illuminating gas. She, herself, remains, with a sudden and strange reversal in appearance, *something like the finger of a glove turned inside-out*...In the *Glass*, she appears disemboweled, a mass of indistinct organs, an inside without an outside. On the other hand, in *Étant Donnés*, she appears as an exterior without an interior, an empty carcass, a hollow mold, a shell, an illusion. [Clair, 1975, pp. 162-163]

Similarly, if until the mid-Fifties Burroughs adopted a naturalistic form (*Junky*, 1954 and *Queer*, 1955), starting with *The Naked Lunch* in 1959 he traced a new mapping that would free this medium of the old dogmatic forms such as the Aristotelian unity of space, action and time, upgrading it to a four-dimensional perspective. Without being acquainted with it, Burroughs deliberately followed Minkowski's Non-Euclidian spacetime theory – according to which “space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve an independent reality” [Minkowski, 1912, p. 75]. Burroughs stretched the notion of space to a point where the concept of time totally invades the narration and by doing so time comes to a moment when it disappears to introduce an *independent* and *suspended* dimension⁵⁷. This new

⁵⁷ In a move that appears to invert the Bergsonian notion that we should reject space in favour of time, Burroughs wants to escape from time. But the inversion is only apparent. Bergson's object of critique is spatialised time, geometrically laid out as a line composed of discrete points. In a sense, Burroughs extends this rejection, by expanding upon the ways in which this conception of linear time is produced through the operations of language and expanding upon the subjective effects of linear time. Where Bergson sought a non-spatial conception of time as duration, however, Burroughs rejects the idea of time entirely and turns his attention to a rethinking of space, not in terms of geometry, but as outer-space: the final frontier. As Chris Land puts it: “If it is the word-image lines that lock us into identity and tie us to the ground, then cutting these lines can let us escape the bounds of the Earth and move into space. It is this drive to escape a logic of identity, control and limitation that led to Burroughs' oft-quoted catch phrase “This is the space age and we are all here to go”. But Burroughs' conceptions of space travel are about as far from NASA as you can get and he railed against current attempts at space travel for trying to take the Earth into space. Indeed, at times when he is discussing space travel Burroughs seems to be talking about a more abstract conception of space that is only explored metaphorically as outer-space in those of his novels that owe the most to the genre of science-fiction. As Burroughs put it himself he was primarily “a cosmonaut of inner space”. Setting himself quite obviously against the American space program Burroughs makes several indications that his concept of space is wider than the literal ‘outer space’ of interstellar exploration and included all attempts to free oneself from past conditioning. At the same time however, Burroughs plays with science fictional tropes in his writing from this period, leading some critics to accuse him of a crass post-humanism that itself perpetuates a Cartesian mind-body dualism in its drive to escape the ‘meat’ of corporeality. If we ignore this apparent similarity of imagery however it is clear that Burroughs' concerns are far from those of the post-humanists. Indeed, in his conception of inner-space he is closer to Buddhism. Unlike the Buddhists

dimension is “a place where old mythologies result inadequate” to explore and decipher such a new frontier of reality and a New Mythology “that is possible in the space age where we will again have heroes and villains with respect to intentions toward this planet. The future of the novel is not in time but in the space.”[Burroughs, 1986, p. 171]

The French artist and the American writer actually happened to meet, few months before Burroughs’s chaotic manuscript was assembled and given to Olympia Press to be published in the distinctive olive-green wrappers of their Traveler’s Companion series, under the title *The Naked Lunch*. Different accounts of the circumstance exist. The artist and writer Jean Jacques Lebel, the son of the renowned art critic and Duchamp’s close friend Robert Lebel, was the proposer of the encounter and recollected that

Duchamp came to Paris and my father said, “we’ll have a party for him, American style, invite some friends.” So we invited Duchamp, Man Ray and their wives, all the surviving Dadaists, Max Ernst and his wife, Breton and his wife, Peret and his wife. All the people who were still fantastically alive. So my father said “Of course you will come?” I said “I would like to bring some American friends.”...Of course it was William [Burroughs] and Gregory [Corso] and Allen [Ginsberg]...Because I was dying for an occasion to get them together, because my obsession all my life has been to put all the people I love together. To put together these people who did not know each other and to create a sort of hybrid mix is creating next cultures it’s actually making a dynamite event. So I knew it was important to put those two generations together...We walked, about fifty people were there, everybody’s standing. I started introducing people, and Duchamp, and Man Ray and Peret were there...And I made the introductions and of course nobody had ever heard of Allen Ginsberg, or Gregory Corso or William Burroughs because their books hadn’t been translated, hadn’t been translated yet. So it was “How do you do?” but it wasn’t “I’m glad to meet you”, because they didn’t know who they were. So of course what they do is all get piss drunk. And at the end, when people started going away, I see them going up to Duchamp. Gregory holding hands up with Allen. Duchamp was sitting in a chair speaking to people. The first thing goddamn Allen does, he gets down on his knees and starts kissing Duchamp’s knees. Thinking he was doing something Surrealistic. And Duchamp was so embarrassed!...But the most embarrassing thing was yet to come. Gregory had found a pair of scissors, ad he cuts Duchamp’s tie. It’s such a corny, childish thing. Knowing Gregory and Allen it’s lovely, it’s

however, Burroughs is less patient and more technologically oriented, seeking a quick, technical fix to the problems of identity and language.[Land, 2005, pp. 462-463]

trying to be humble, it's trying to say "We're children, we admire you!". It was a loving thing. My father comes up to me and says, "Hah, your friends, huh? Where did you pick up those *clochards*?" He didn't say it but his eyes said it...Here were geniuses on both side, you know? It was very stupid to be upset because actually Duchamp loved the guys and Man Ray loved the guys. Every time I'd see them they'd say "Where are your American beatniks? I love those beatniks. They are completely drunk but they are childish, they are wonderful, I'm sure they are great poets." In fact Duchamp spoke excellent English, but they were too drunk to speak. How can you speak to a drunkard who's falling off on the floor everywhere? [Miles, 2003, pp. 125-126]

Ted Morgan, formal biographer of Ginsberg and Burroughs, reported that

With the Dadaist as their audience, the beats were at their impish best. Gregory found a pair of scissors and cut Duchamp's tie in half. They kissed Duchamp and they made him kiss Burroughs, which he reluctantly did as a joke. The more they drunk the wilder and crazier they acted, ending up crawling around the floor grabbing and kissing Duchamp's pant legs. [Morgan, 2006, p. 273]

And elsewhere

Thus on June 15, 1958, they were invited to a party in honor of two of the great old Surrealists, Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp. Allen loved their surrealist objects. Duchamp's birdcage filled up with sugar cube was, he thought, a riddle to free the mind. In any case, Allen got drunk and began to crawl on all four in pursuit of Duchamp, feeling him up the pants leg and begging his blessing and calling him *cher maître* Duchamp smiled and chuckled and kept saying, "I am only human". Allen asked Duchamp to kiss Burroughs, in a symbolic passing of the mantle from the great French Surrealist to his contemporary American successor, and Duchamp gamely went along with it, and pressed his lips to Burroughs' brow. [Morgan, 1988, pp. 290-291]

Burroughs recalled the episode by tracing a vivid portrait of Duchamp as

an old, distinguished-looking gentleman, distinguished to his fingerprints; he behaved as someone who was certainly used to the same bravados and experiences. [Burroughs, 2000, p. 571]

And Ginsberg, recalling that night said:

Most probably [Duchamp] did not know who Burroughs was, but we told him he was our friend and master. I addressed to him and said “*Cher maître, this is another cher Maître*” [Ginsberg and Orlovsky, 1980, p. 175]

Through the generalization of plagiarism and the depersonalization of the writer, within the perimeters of what could be called *literature*, Burroughs put into a concrete form Isidore Ducasse’s prophecy for which “Poetry must be done by everyone. Not by one.” [Lautréamont, 1978, p. 279] as much as in figurative arts Duchamp fulfilled with his *readymades* and *The Large Glass* Apollinaire’s words who, facing the *Nude descending a staircase* exhibited at the 1911 Salon d’Automne, recognized the disparate and fluctuating nature of the artist’s output and predicted that he would have “reconciled art and people” [Apollinaire, 1980, p. 35]. If Duchamp’s purpose was to break the rules of taste, Burroughs’s was to escape the tyranny of words “thus breaking down the symbolic chains of State books” [Burroughs quoted by Lemaire, 1984, p. 19]: in order to attain their goals, both masters of Postmodernism operated with almost identical techniques which mostly led to the same results.

Starting from 1959, few weeks after *The Naked Lunch* was finally published, together with Brion Gysin, Burroughs initiated the early experimentation with the *cut-up* and *fold-in*, two methods that Duchamp also practiced along his whole production, as proved by his 1913 *Erratum Musical* or the 1967 series of *Selected details* after Cranach, Rodin, Ingres and Courbet. prove. It is also worth recalling that a primary incursion into the domain of randomness occurred for the assemblage of *The Naked Lunch*: the order of the 25 sections that compose the controversial novel respected the casual organization of its material that week after week was typewritten out of the *word-horde*, the ulcerated and musty colossal manuscript Burroughs wrote during his addicted years in Tangiers.

If Tristan Tzara is to be considered the originator of the cut-up, Duchamp is to be considered the inventor of the *fold-in* technique, as the 1916 readymade *Rendez-vous* proves: the artist took four postcards and taped them together to constitute a rectangular grid, then he typewrote a text that has no beginning nor end, typing the maximum number of letters across each card and cutting the words on the edge irrespective of the hyphenation dashes. Although the double space typed lines sometimes match, there is no continuity from one card to the next.

What follows is Burroughs' instruction for fold-in:

In writing this chapter I have used what I call "the fold in" method that is I place a page of one text folded down the middle on a page of another text (my own or someone else's). The composite text is read across half from one text and half from the other. The resulting material is edited, re-arranged, and deleted as in any other form of composition. This chapter contains fold ins with the work of Rimbaud, T.S. Eliot, Paul Bowles, James Joyce, Michael Portman, Peter Weber, Fabrizio Mondadori, Jacques Stern, Evgeny Yevtushenko, some newspaper articles and of course my own work. The method is simple. Here is one way to do it. Take a page. Like this page. Now cut down the middle. You have four sections: 1 2 3 4 . . . one two three four. Now rearrange the sections placing section four with section one and section two with section three. And you have a new page. Sometimes it says much the same thing. Sometimes something quite different-cutting up political speeches is an interesting exercise-in any case you will find that it says something and something quite definite. Take any poet or writer you fancy. Here, say, or poems you have read over many times. The words have lost meaning and life through years of repetition. Now take the poem and type out selected passages. Fill a page with excerpts. Now cut the page. You have a new poem. As many poems as you like. As many Shakespeare Rim baud poems as you like. Tristan Tzara said: "Poetry is for everyone." And Andre Breton called him a cop and expelled him from the movement. Say it again: "Poetry is for everyone." Poetry is a place and it is free to all cut up Rimbaud and you are in Rimbaud's place. [Burroughs and Gysin, 1978, p. 33]

If in Burroughs' case a certain use of *cut up* and *fold in* strategies introduced into writing the randomness and the time factor, since it made explicit a simple sensory process that was going on all the time anyway, also with his postcards-set Duchamp aimed at an implicit exercise in time that he explicated by bearing a stamp on each card

verso and the address of his patrons Arensberg with the complete title *Rendezvous de Dimanche 7 Février 1916 (à lh. ¾ après midi)*. As a matter of fact, by skimming the leaves of *The Green Box* (1934) - where Duchamp gathered together some annotations disclosing the creative mental process during the conception and execution of *The Large Glass* and certain readymades, and which results as an essential counterpart to the material work it describes verbally - one could find a note attributable to the 1916 postcards set that declares:

Specifications for *Readymades* - By planning for a moment to come (on such a day, such a date, such a minute), "to inscribe a readymade" - The readymade can later be looked for. - (with all kinds of delays). The important thing then is just this matter of timing, this snapshot effect, like a speech delivered on no matter what occasion but at such an hour. It is a kind of rendezvous. - Naturally inscribe that date, hour, minute, on the readymade as information. Also the serial characteristic of the readymade. [Duchamp, 1975, p. 32]

Even since the first experimentations, those montage techniques applied to narrative writing were to reinforce Burroughs' theory on writing for which even in our days this device preserves its initial propitiatory purpose, a speculation that most probably he developed on the basis of his studies in anthropology and in particular on Mayan codes and Egyptian hieroglyphics. Being "the written word an image" [Burroughs, 1986, p. 47], thus mutually conferring to the very first pictorial manifestations, such as cave art, a linguistic value, he could declare that "I recognize writing as a magical operation" [Burroughs, 1986, p. 47] and

what we call "art" - painting, sculpture, writing, dance, music, is magical in origin. That is, it was originally employed for ceremonial purposes to produce very definite effects. In the world of magic nothing happens unless someone wants it to happen, will is to happen, and there are certain magical formulae to channel and direct will. The artist is trying to make something happen in the mind of the viewer or reader. [Burroughs, 1986, p. 60]

Such a formulation, that in a way links the author of *The Naked Lunch* to the speculations Antonin Artaud developed in his late writings, led Burroughs to the conclusion that “when you experiment with cut-ups over a period of time, some of the cut and rearranged text seem to refer to future events.” [Burroughs, 1986, p. 52] Indeed

as he got deeper into cut-ups, he came to believe that his accidental combinations of words were prophetic subliminal announcements, coming to him from a collective, extratemporal consciousness. In other words, through the cut-ups he had become a medium for the disclosure of events about to happen. This was another breakthrough, since the guiding principle was “once upon a time”. But Burroughs’ cut up principle was “once in the future time” [Morgan, 1988, p. 322]

Although the French artist and the American novelist only met once, although none of Burroughs’ novels appears among the books of Duchamp, although Burroughs never explicitly mentioned Duchamp in any of his writings except for the letter to Ginsberg which was previously quoted, their aesthetics and purposes often coincided. From Paris to New York and from New York to Paris, from the verbal machines they invented or adopted to dehumanize their oeuvres, they both aimed to achieve with their texts what is most unbearable and inaccessible in writing: silence.

II

Plat du jour

“America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel.”
Allen Ginsberg, *America*

“Every man has inside himself a parasitic being
who is acting not at all to his advantage.”
Burroughs quoted by Ted Morgan, *Literary Outlaw*

“Il n'est pas de parole sans réponse,
même si elle ne rencontre que le silence.”
Jacques Lacan, *Écrits I*

According to what he states in the introduction, Burroughs never completely grasped the meaning of the title that Kerouac suggested to him until he recovered from his fifteen years of addiction: the naked lunch is “the frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of the fork.” [Burroughs, 2005, p. 13]. It is a “funny but not fun”⁵⁸ portrait of a world torn apart by the Cold War perversely destructive logic, a vision - according to Norman Mailer - of “how mankind would act if man was totally divorced from eternity”⁵⁹ [Burroughs, 2005, p. XXII]. It is also a description - according to Foucault - of that transition that in our Western world led from the disciplinary societies to the society of control, a term the French philosopher borrowed from Burroughs. [Deleuze, 1990, p. 241]. This picaresque novel, written in the wake of *Lazzarillo de Tormes* and *Voyage au*

⁵⁸ Barry Miles, *ad vocem*.

⁵⁹ This is an excerpt from Norman Mailer's deposition at Boston Superior Court before Judge J. Hudson in favor of Burroughs' *The Naked Lunch* which in 1966 risked to be banned for the alleged obscenity of its contents.

bout de la nuit ⁶⁰, displays a collection of sinister characters and comical/demonical situations that would surely suit the notion of *carnavalesque* as developed by Julia Kristeva [1969, pp. 143-173] after Bakhtin. Moreover, it is the gateway to Burroughs' disquisition over the nature of verbal language that will reach an organic theorization in the mid-Sixties. *The Naked Lunch* is the novel where for the first time Burroughs relates the symptoms of drugs abuse to possession, the machinery of control to the action of a virus, thus associating the coercion of power to the one produced by addiction:

Junk is the mold of monopoly and possession. The addict stands by while his junk legs carry him straight in on the junk beam to relapse. Junk is quantitative and accurately measurable. The more junk you use the less you have and the more you have the more you use. [...] Junk is the ideal product . . . the ultimate merchandise. No sales talk necessary. The client will crawl through a sewer and beg to buy. . . . The junk merchant does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to his product. He does not improve and simplify his merchandise. He degrades and simplifies the client. He pays his staff in junk. [...] Junk yields a basic formula of "evil" virus: *The Algebra of Need*. The face of "evil" is always the face of total need. A dope fiend is a man in total need of dope. Beyond a certain frequency need knows absolutely no limit or control [Burroughs, 2005, pp. 231-232].

The whole of Burroughs' mythology is set off and performed in every page of his novels, in each moment of connection between reader and text. His writings try to release us from our present condition, his theories are a set of postulations that take him to write and that make writing possible. According to Burroughs language is exactly a virus:

My general theory has been that the Word is literally a virus, and that it has not been recognized as such because it has achieved a state of relatively stable symbiosis with its human host; that is to say, the Word Virus (the Other Half) has established itself so firmly as an accepted part of the human organism that it can now sneer at gangster viruses like smallpox and turn them in to the

⁶⁰ A lot of circumstances and the language colloquial language that Burroughs used for *The Naked Lunch* closely recall Celine's major novel. It is very possible that the Lee's escape into the tube, in the first pages is an homage to the *Journey at the end of the night* opening.

Pasteur Institute. But the Word clearly bears the single identifying feature of virus: it is an organism with no internal function other than to replicate itself. [Burroughs, 1986, p. 47]

From the beginning of the Sixties until the end of the Eighties, in his novels, interviews and essays Burroughs developed this notion of word-virus both as a linguistic theory and as an assumption about the idea of subjectivity. His main argument was that language is a corporal disease which has developed a spongy and symbiotic correlation with the human body and as a matter of fact this verbal contagion is essential to what we now define as *man*.

The multifaceted connection among words, images and subjectivity operates on a number of different registers. On the one hand, Burroughs focuses on our daily sub-vocalizations, the inner monologues that grant us with a narrative sense of the individual dimension, that personal stability which we elaborate in terms of *ourselves*, on the other he explains how such sub-vocalizations altogether invade us from the *outside* - hence the conclusion that they are the consequence of a viral infection - to shape our *inside*, the *I*. The external nature of these monologues operates in two distinct ways: more often than not they are composed by fragments and snapshots collected from everyday conversations, newspapers, novels and TV and as an alternative they could be produced as a response to an outside authoritarian influence, as, for example, when a student is called before the teacher or a citizen before the institutions: in both these cases the individual constantly apologizes and provides explanations round and round, thus practicing the potential encounter with *control* [Burroughs, 1989, p. 121].

Because these inner monologues shape our inner nature and structure, Burroughs' linguistic theory deliberately draws from the Buddhist tradition, thus insinuating that this interior sub-vocalization participates in the construction of the linear sense of self-identity

and “permanence” that we usually name as *I*. From such a perspective Burroughs’ linguistic theorization also draws from Nietzsche’s evaluation of Descartes’ “grammatical prejudice”, in other words the need to conceive a subject for the proclamation of an ontological truth [Nietzsche, 1988, pp. 112-133].

In fact for the German philosopher the *I* subject is but a consequence of language and of the structures of grammar, but the main difference between Nietzsche and Burroughs is that the latter developed this concept in a more pessimistic and materialistic way since he conceives the word as a parasite that infects [the] mankind. Burroughs’s mythology begins in mock-Christian fashion, with the primal word preceding the proliferation of human language. In its original unity, like an alpha and an omega, the word occurs at both the beginning and the end of history, since “the end is the beginning born knowing” [Burroughs, 1967, p. 10]. The author does not take history as a matter of faith but he accepts it only as an antagonist because “history is fiction” [Burroughs, 1964, p. 13], “what we call history is the history of the word...in the beginning of that history was the word.”[Burroughs, 1967, p. 50].

According to Burroughs’ mythology the primary/terminal word is as unknown as unspoken. It is antithetical to any language circumlocution and, being almost bodiless and silent beyond the limits of human perception, it exists only at two extremes of history: “you were not there for *the beginning*...you will not be there for *the end* ...your knowledge of what is going on can only be superficial and relative” [Burroughs, 2005, p. 220]. Our ambivalent and terminal existence cannot enclose the whole of time and for this reason we do ignore history’s ultimate form as well as the circumstances underlying the immediate moment: therefore we are unable to freely act in the present.

History intended as a perambulation of languages is bound by a tautological word excluding all possibilities of discourse so that the theatre of human action is nothing more

than an endless talk. Desperate to feed on the escalating energies of language, the word began to split in two segments, as poly-embryo or mitosis in the cell-cycle: forgetting their sources, the two halves of the word started to interact in endless combinations of language: “The Word is divided into units which be all in one piece and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order tied up back and forth, in and out fore and aft like an un-arresting sex arrangement.” [Burroughs, 2005, p. 229]

When the primary word divided in time split, its interactions at once achieved the destiny of matter thus becoming flesh so that human bodies are accumulated residue of speech. “Your bodies I have written” (Burroughs, 1994, p. 139) “These colour-less sheets are what flesh is made from -becomes flesh when it has colour and writing – that is Word and Image write the message that is you on colourless sheets determinate all flesh” [Burroughs, 1964, p. 134]

Language is an illusory dialectic which masks our essential and intolerable double nature. It proliferates in endless reproduction of male and female bodies for flesh is the speech of time “The human organism is literally consisting of two halves from the beginning word and all human sex is this unsanitary arrangement whereby two entities attempt to occupy the same three-dimensional coordinate points” [Burroughs, 1967, p. 52]. Like all human history, sex is a form of warfare, a series of outrageous violations which occur over and over again. History consequently proceeds in time through the sexual warfare of mutually dependent antagonisms. Once become flesh, the word is permuted in double, warring and dialectical forms. Conversing and intersecting, these forms now create history, which is the history of one word and its doubled fleshly variations.

By building his linguistic mythology on the Bible, Burroughs again looks back to Nietzsche, whose very well known statement that “God is dead” announces the death of

man. Made in God's image, Man takes his place at the top of the pyramid of creation once God has been killed. From this angle, humanism is but the replica of an Oedipal patricide and this is why Deleuze and Guattari quoted Nietzsche's *Anti-Christ* in the title of their masterpiece *Anti-Oedipus*: it is not sufficient to exceed God: the next step must be *Man*, and Burroughs' dehumanizing verbal machineries - such as the cut-ups and the fold-ins - are meant to work and proceed in this direction.

Another central aspect of Burroughs' mythology is the superiority of the written over the spoken word upon which it is purportedly based and, as a matter of fact, it is the stability of the written word that allows people to 'bind-time'. Thanks to this concept of linear, "spatialized" time laid out by narratives and writing, men are able to function in ways that other animals actually are not:

Korzybski has pointed out this human distinction and described man as 'the time-binding animal'. He can make information available over any length of time to other men through writing. Animals talk. They don't write. Now a wise old rat may know a lot about traps and poison but he cannot write an article on *Death Traps in Your Warehouse* for the *Reader's Digest* translated into 17 rat languages with tactics for ganging up on dogs and ferrets and taking care of wise guys who stuff steel wool up our holes. If he could rats might well take over the earth with all its food stocks human and otherwise. [Burroughs, 2000, pp. 76-77]

From this angle, Burroughs' linguistic theories on language resemble those of Deleuze and Guattari who distinguish language proper from the communication structures of bees. For example bees are able to exchange quite complex information about the position of sources of pollen through complex dance patterns but only on the condition that they have seen the pollen source directly. Human communication, on the other hand, is basically indirect. Similar to a virus, our communications happen by exposure to one already infected rather than to a straight source of information. As Deleuze and Guattari put it:

Language is not content to go from a first party to a second party, from one who has seen to one who has not, but necessarily goes from a second party to a third party, neither of whom has seen. It is in this sense that language is the transmission of the word as an order-word, not the communication of a sign as information. [Deleuze/Guattari, 1987, p. 156]

As a consequence, the subject that perceives never perceives outside of the verbal communication through all of its association blocks, there including the situation ascribed to it as an *I* via linguistic ordering:

I is an order-word. A schizophrenic said: "I heard voices say: *he is conscious of life*." In this sense, there is indeed a schizophrenic cogito, but it is a cogito that makes self-consciousness the incorporeal transformation of an order-word, or a result of indirect discourse. My direct discourse is still the free indirect discourse running through me, coming from other worlds or other planets. [Deleuze/Guattari, 1987, p. 92]

The definite symptom of infection with the word-virus is the compulsive and unstoppable urge to sub-vocalize: "The fact that it is impossible to stop inner monologue implies that there is an alien force at work in language" [Burroughs, 2000, p. 449].

It is because of this explicitly "un-human" monologue, which paradoxically generates an "hyper-human" sense of identity and self-continuity, that the construction of linear time is scattered and through which identity is guaranteed.

As a consequence of the fact that the word and its discourses cannot be divided from power and its multifaceted means of subjectification, Burroughs - in the wake of his drug addiction - puts the question of coercion as the basis of his linguistic mythology. Via its inner sub-vocalization, the word forges both the individual and his identity, hence the subject turns out to be an personality that the American author evaluates according to Korzybski's concept of the *is* of identity. When it is possible to state that one *is*, a practice of objectification is occurring and - according to Burroughs - it certainly covers up a

submission to power: due to the *is* of identity language achieves indispensable, permanent, individual, quantifiable and controllable identities.

In the formulation of his theories over the nature and the implications of language, Burroughs also developed a number of strategies which aimed at counterpointing the word-virus and therefore its implicit control over the individual. Progressively as well as paradoxically his writing aimed to a representation and to a subversion of the verbal communication that attempt to reverse the language against itself, to break the block of verbal associations through the introduction of chance into his novels.

The last stage of the author logomachies was also his final paradox. Through the writing practices that Burroughs formulated in order to reach the “new frontier of space”, he devoted himself to a non-verbal form of communication developed in symbols and later in hieroglyphs which were meant to produce “violent epiphanies of truth” and to neutralize the inner sub-vocalization in favour of silence, “the most desirable state of being” [Burroughs, 1964, p. 105]. Far from being a device of nullification, silence is but a *tam phisice quam ethice* result of the subject’s emancipation from the world virus:

I don’t think of silence as being a device of terror at all. In fact, quite the contrary. Silence is only frightening to people who are compulsively verbalizing [Burroughs, 1989, p. 37].

The space revolution has little to do with the NASA projects and mission and concerns more what Carl Schmitt wrote in *Land und Meer*:

This extension of the domain of space could be very deep and astounding and it could imply not only the transformation of measures and parameters, the mutation of the external horizon of the human, but also the alteration of the notion of space itself. Then we could name this phenomenon as a space revolution. [Schmitt, 2002, pp. 58-59]

To enter the space era and to leave behind the conditioning generated by verbal reactions and constructions, one must learn to breathe in silence and learn to read the silent writing:

To travel in space you must leave the old verbal garbage behind: God talk, country talk, mother talk, love talk, party talk. You must learn to exist with no religion no country no allies. You must learn to live alone in silence. Anyone who prays in space is not there. [Burroughs, 1986, p. 138]

Therefore, it is necessary to travel, it is not necessary to live.

Dossier N.1

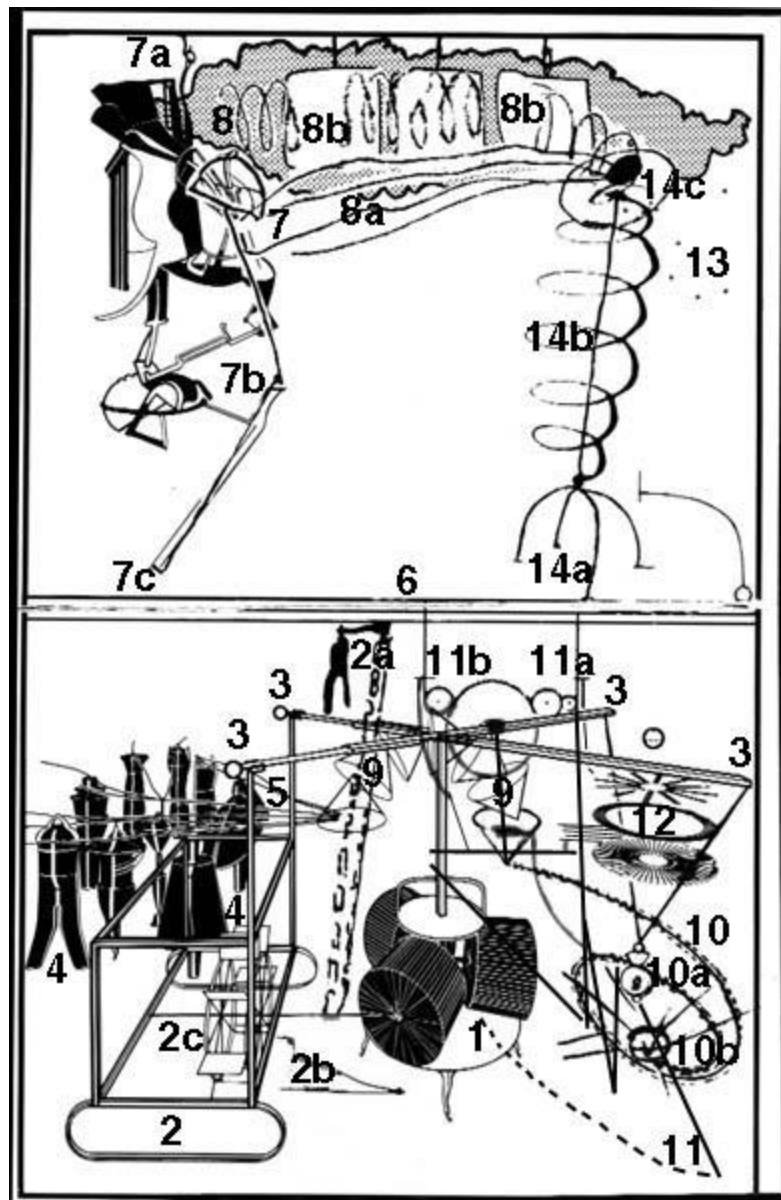
THE LARGE GLASS: A Guided Tour

by Jean Suquet

translated by Julia Kotliansky with Sarah S. Kilborne

Marcel Duchamp's Scheme for *The Large Glass*

- 1 - Chocolate grinder.
- 2 - Slide.
- 2A -Driving hook and chain of revolution
- 2B -Underground pedal.
- 2C -Water mill.
- 3 - Large scissors.
- 4 - Bachelors.
- 5 - Capillary tubes.
- 6 - Horizon — Bride's clothing.
- 7 - Bride, head or eyes.
- 7A -Suspension ring of the "Hanged" female.
- 7B -Wasp.
- 7C -Weather vane.
- 8 - Milky way flesh color.
- 8A -Meteorological extension.
- 8B -Roundtrip of the top inscription letters.
- 9 - Sieves.
- 10 -Planes of flow.
- 10A-Mobile of splash.
- 10B-Crashes — splashes.
- 11 -Cannon (?)
- 11A and
- 11B-Rams of the boxing match.
- 12 -Oculist charts.
- 13 -Shots.
- 14A-"Tripod" of the juggler-handler-tender of gravity.
- 14B-Spring of the juggler-handler-tender of gravity.
- 14C-Platform and black ball of the tender of gravity.



Being the one who punctuated the *Mona Lisa* with a mustache, who exhibited a urinal in a salon, Marcel Duchamp dashed off salubrious mockeries from time to time, to amuse the "gallery" of artviewers, as if to put them on a false scent. Meanwhile, every day, almost entirely in secret, he was working on his "grand oeuvre," which is today at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. *The Large Glass*, as much a window opening up a perspective as far as the eye can see, is formed by two vertical glass plates, one on top of the other, in a frame that is 1.76m wide x 2.72m high. On these glass plates, without offending the main part of their transparency, Marcel Duchamp outlined, using lead wire, austere mechanical figures that are meanly stopped or, one could say, imprisoned in ice. He sketched them, perfected them, arranged them in schemes; he suggested their possible movements in notes, by pen, by pencil; he scribbled them on pieces of paper in Paris between 1912 and 1915. He patiently and obsessively crystallized them in New York from 1915 until 1923, before he abandoned the piece in a *definitively unfinished* state. (The italics are Marcel Duchamp's.) In 1933 he was told that the "oeuvre" on which he had spent thousands of hours of work had been accidentally broken into a thousand

pieces. As if words themselves would escape from the lips of those breaks, he immediately undertook to publish his first and formative rough drafts of *The Large Glass* before even considering mending the disaster, which he would finally address in 1936. With the fervor of a water diviner and the carefulness of a monk copying a sacred text, he made a facsimile of each manuscript (he used the same paper, he tore outlines in the same way) and then gathered the jumbled up notes which made up ninety-three loose sheets in a luxurious box of green velvet, producing three hundred copies of this box in the autumn of 1934. A flight of leaps from the very first moment. On the cover of this marvelous *Green Box* is a constellation of dots in capital letters for us to decode into a sentence locked to its own equivocation: *LA MARIÉE MISE À NU PAR SES CÉLIBATAIRES MÊME* [The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even]. No need for the author's name. Its sonority sparkles in the title: *MARIée*, *CÉLibataires*. It's similar to looking for *or* in *oreille*. Marcel Duchamp delivered his notes in the sumptuous disorder of a puzzle, as if he had wanted everyone to start the game over and to braid his own path through the nerve tissue of the breaks. He wished pure reign for the legend – provided that one would read it through the grid of *The Large Glass* – without giving away in silence any of its *given* data. In order to begin, the reader should better add a swig of fun to the mechanical scheme described in these pages. With the same playfulness, he will have to make thousands of words sing which echo; he will have to find the sources of this "oeuvre" in the most vivacious, the most breathtaking, the most insatiable desire which haunts every mortal; and in every articulation of this meager trace he will have to follow the thread of this or that imaginary escape – for example, of the elusive fourth dimension - time - which a painter can only make sense of by revealing the imprints of its passing. That is why none of the *rouages* [cogs], none of the *roueries* [cunning] should be left in the shadows. The gears speak if they can be matched with precision, according to the number of their teeth. And their forbidding machinery, their jubilant machinations, start up as soon as *mots* [words] provide them with a *moteur* [motor].

In the bottom half, in the very middle, the *chocolate grinder* (1) is turning; turning as it has been and as it will continue to do, in a circle, in order to come back under the mere whip of repetition of the *adage of spontaneity: the bachelor grinds his chocolate himself*. We won't dwell on its dubious color or its essence of childhood. This triple millstone propelled by a proverb, in spite of its size, in spite of its central positioning, is useless except for the fact that it puts one on guard against the razzle-dazzle of the appearances. Next to it, a *slide* (2) goes back and forth over repeating *litanies*. It jerks and rattles and opens and closes, oh, barely half way through the *large scissors* (3) which do not cut but whose large X, on top of the bachelor's world, sharpens the poignant question of an unknown. A bit further back from the infernal train of these grating scraps of mockery, nine red fellows stand frozen at attention. They are the *bachelors* (4). They do not move, but the name that they wear slips and slides. This masquerade of uniforms, as hollow as if strictly dressed up, was baptized by Duchamp in the beginning as *eros matrix* and then, at the end, *cemetery*. Matrix and cemetery in one and the same place! A great gap must be overcome to be able to link at once the entrance and the exit. A subtle mobility, a quasi-spiritual fluidity must fill these moulds of males reduced to their clothes. As a matter of fact, the bachelors are full of spirit – inflated with *illuminating gas*. "Gas" comes from the Germanic "geist" meaning "spirit." Moreover, in 1912, gas wasn't yet reduced to its culinary usage. It blew life into lamps, but before it met its match, "*l'hydrogène clarteux*" [glimmering hydrogen] remained invisible. The painter can only show the demijohns which contain it, the pipes and *tubes* (5) which canalize it, or he can perceive out of its

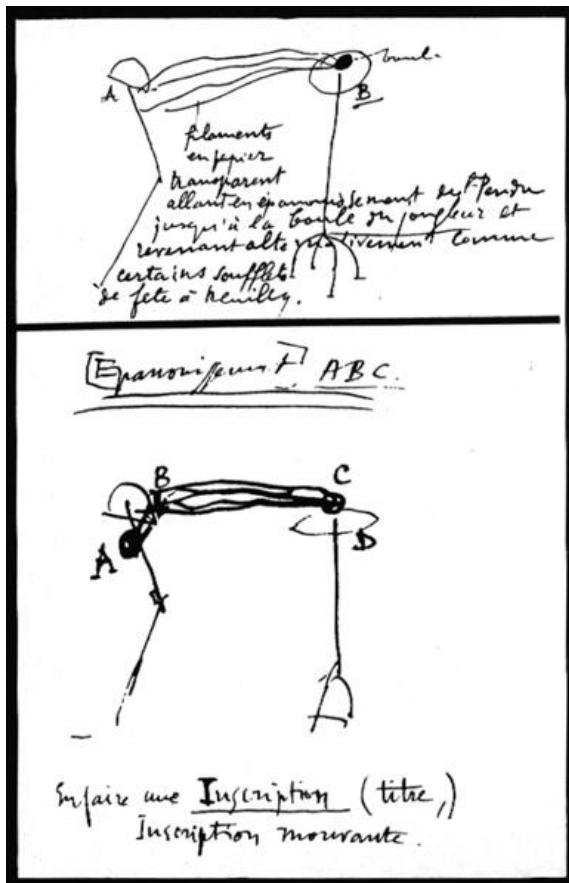
flow only the plumbing nailed to the walls. Meanwhile inside, spirit flows, time flies, gas leaks...

Let us, then, flow along together. This brother in wandering, let's accompany him on his *voyage* - in spite of the fact that he does not spare guiding traces. He does not say anything about the direction of the *route* [path], he hardly indicates the movement of the *roue* [wheel]. Thus, relying a lot on chance, dressed in personal rags, heavy with our own past, motivated by the very improbable prospect of enjoying the end of an *instantaneous rest*, let's enter the impersonal duration of *The Large Glass*. But before stepping over the threshold, let's pause while standing in front of it. At eye level (at least in the original frame) the fracture between the bottom and the top follows naturally the *horizon line* (6). Below, on the ground, the bachelors. On top, the *Bride* (7). What?! This skeletal puppet balancing at the zenith of the cemetery is actually the promised *female*? Could it be the spectre of Jocasta, the hanging mother of blinded Oedipus? Could death and love have crossed their blades for the sake of the large scissors of the unknown? What does this formless form mean? Is it a fossil? Is it a trace of an inspiration, like the impression of a bird's talons on snow or sand? Can we imagine it from here below? Duchamp has only half-opened the keyhole of the vanishing point: he has designated the horizon as the *Bride's clothing*. An admirably just allegory! We know the duplicity of this imaginary line which is, after all, only an infirmity of the eye. Where sight is lost, there we see it being drawn. When we go towards it, it moves away accordingly. And the bachelors, who are rushing *pleins gaz* [flat out] to strip the Bride bare, keep before them in their own *regard* [gaze] the veil which they are rousing and agitating and which they are dying to unfasten. However, before they can actually unfasten the folds of perspective which blind them...

The Bride has undone her clothing which falls down onto the horizon and covers the world around. She is *nue* [nude], *nuages* [clouds], *nébuleuse* [nebula]. *Milky way flesh color* (8) writes Duchamp with one stroke of the pen, one flap of the wing. C'est la vie! The Bride has a *life-center*. Her heart beats. The *throbbing jerk* of her *pulse*, palpitating like the convulsive abdomen of a *wasps* (a winged hymen), generates an *air draft*, a *blow*, a *wind* which sends out, to fray at the four points of the quadrant, an *oriflamme* [banner] of entrails and brains. On fire with infinity, the Bride escapes from her intimacies, she evaporates from appearance into transparency, she breaks out of the limits of her skin, escapes all outline, challenges all representation. Nubile, the maiden pours her heart out like a nebula. *Nue* [nude], she wants to be *une* [one] with the universe. She lets herself be captivated by the *meteorological extension* (8A), ripped out by the *tempests*, embellished by *fair weathers* (time takes the colors of weather), which merge her smoothly into the weave of the sky as *une flamme consistante* [a solid flame]. A *langue de feu* [tongue of fire], sublimated into what is fatal about it: *le langage* [language]. The current of air going up through the Bride's porous flesh is charged with *lettres* [letters]. The blowing, rising her up, is her vivid voice. The flesh is made word. Even though, in her first outburst, the *blossoming* of the Bride was going to turn the top of *The Large Glass* into a *vitrail* [stained-glass window] of entrails sparkling with fine copper, platinum and *golden dust*, the rise of pleasure transmuted gold into words, the *dew* of the lips into volatile ink. *Blossoming: to make an Inscription of it* (8B). The writing, which drags its ink, crackles. It blazes, it self-erases, it rises again, it flows back, it ploughs the Milky way flesh color from one end to the other. Breathtaking, always on the alert, letters deliver the *commandments, orders, authorizations* of the Bride to the bachelors. Times have really

changed. Instead of a hefty fellow spitting out thunder, a woman reigns in the sky. She dictates law.

On the bottom, the gas is still far from the end of its hardships. From pipes into funnels, from *sieves* (9) into churns, from obscurity into narrowness, being compressed, stretched out, cut, re-cut, frozen, and finally liquefied as a floorcloth, spirit goes through all the states of matter. *La pesanteur* [gravity] humiliates it, and *la pesante heure* [weighty time] overwhelms it with even worse hitches. But that's in vain. Gas never gives up its *determination to rise*. Its most twisted avatar, the least conclusive of its laborious *progress*, fails to even slightly alter the dream which is going to *emancipate it from gravity*. And when on the bottom of the *planes of flow* (10) the blood-bursting gas drips its miserable puddle on the ground, it is always capable of exploding desire. Three or four of its drops regale the breach of the *cannon* (11) pointed towards the vanishing point. The artist/artillery man spits out a *bille de combat* [combat marble]. The bachelors, with Gallic pride, support the sky above their heads with the help of two *béliers* [battering rams](11A, 11B) standing straight, risen to the surface of the horizon and flirting with its alluring underclothing. The *bille* [marble] releases the *béliers* [battering rams]. The sky falls. At least it intends to fall. For, with each shot, at the same time as the gas breaks up the supporters, whose parts are iron but whose joints are fragile, it infuses them with its dearest *childhood memories*: a resurgence of *ascensional magnetization*. The fallen rams raise their heads. And all starts over. *It wasn't exactly what I wanted*, concluded Duchamp. Thus, after five years of obstinate, mysterious work, distillations, incantations, decantations, backwards returns, fresh advances – of knights, bishops, queens and kings – the reverse of *The Large Glass* is silvered. In this mirror, using a scalpel on line after line to the point of scratching out the eyes, no second chances possible, he engraves three ready-made *oculist charts* (12) which had been borrowed from an optician's shop window and placed in perspective. By the end of its apprenticeships, the gas understands what destiny its name implies. Being illuminating, it must illuminate - starting with making itself clear. Under the shock of one last fall, of a shattering weight (10A) thrown into the puddle by the intervention of the scissors, it leaps out in *éclaboussures* [splashes] (10B) - whose sublimation maintains only *éclat* [brilliance]. The gas sets its own body on fire. It declares its flame. On the springboard of the oculist mirrors, which peel off its last dregs and correct the arrow of its ultimate rise, it spouts into the sky in a burst of rays. The soaring is described by Duchamp in a flight of alliterations: *éblouissement de l'éclaboussure* [dazzling of the splash]. The late illuminating gas fades into the core of its own light. It discovers there the origin of its own *interior lighting*. And it metamorphoses for the last time. Even though they are ablaze, these are *not the drops themselves* which *pass over the horizon* and *find their opening towards the infinite* in the constellation of the nine *shots* (13); *but their image* does. Which is the exact physiological definition of the gaze. When a ray of grains of light riddles the retina, the light doesn't go beyond and find its way through the gray matter thickness; but its image at the nerve level does, as a bunch of electrical impulses, of chemistries and chimeras. So, the energies at work in *The Large Glass* tend to unite. On the top, a flood of words. On the bottom, a flux of light. At the end of the voyage, the gas is transmuted into a dazzling gaze, the Bride, into effervescent writing. And the stripping bare, according to Duchamp's wish, can therefore be read as a *poem*. Which rhymes the *épanouissement* [blossoming] of the Bride with the *éblouissement* [dazzling] of the bachelors. We'll turn this already rich rhyme into gold by extracting from it this last word: *OUI* [yes].



"You don't say!" burst out laughing the supporters of *NON* [no]. Between the horizon and the Milky way there's a transparent immensity, in which Duchamp had not drawn any signs, neither a cloud nor the cast shadow of a dash. There are only solitudes. It's having never looked at the sky on a beautiful night. The Milky way marries the roundness of the vault of night and bows until it touches the horizon. No need for a giant to give shape to this pure effect of perspective. It's enough to have a being whose forms have no longer in relation to their destination a mensurability, for example the letters of the alphabet, upper and lower cases, which forward and deliver the same message. In fact, a troubadour enters into the scene and will reveal himself as the Bride's letter-weight, the lady's spokesman: the juggler of the center of gravity (14). He DANCES on the horizon line. He flexes, he straightens himself up, from one foot to the other, at the mercy of the cannon shots, according to the wish of the splashes. His body, sharpened into a spring, twists like an

endless screw between the bottom and the top. At his head, he erects a round *platform* in which a *black ball* rolls. That's the clot of darkness he juggles with. He dances, he translates the jerks of the machine through twirling the ball which concentrates the *waves of unbalance* of the bachelors' commotion. The ball vacillates, zigzags, dangerously brushes against the edges, but it does not fall. For the Bride sends it *orders of new balance* by licking it with a flame tongue, by flicking it with touching letters which *contrecarrent* [thwart] its *écarts* [swerves]. Five times, in drawings and model, Duchamp represented this *deus ex machina* in the shape of a *guéridon* [pedestal table], of a *table tournante* [swivel table]. A streamer on its *three legs* (sometimes four, or two), it is the Oracle of the *married-divinity*. One knock, two knocks, three knocks – like all gods, it doesn't exist. *The Large Glass* cleared it away into transparency. The fundamental dodge making diabolic the empty space, the miraculous blank around which the puzzle has been reconstituted. So that, for all the onlookers who had not read, or misread, the directions for use, it does not work, it cannot work. These infidels don't hear the screeching of the grain of salt crunched by the gears, they forget to deduce the god from these signs, from these marks. In the title, for example, he curves a comma's tail, sliding it in between the plural *célibataires* [bachelors] and the singular *même* [even], *virgule* [comma], there is no dead language except Latin which admits its real name: *virga*. Oh yes! He's the one in the salons today whom everybody calls Mister Phallus. The one who shines in his own absence, who acts all the better since he is not there. *To the sounds of the stripping bare*, this dancer changes his name as if it were a mask. With one last stroke of the pen, Duchamp instituted the appellation: *Tender of gravity*. The doctor of the law *de la chute des graves* [of the collapse of the graves] who unites the One in the sky with us on the ground. The volatile physician who heals the grave horizontal cut, who turns into a song

the cry, indicated by Duchamp in the first draft of his *preface*: *Given that, if I suppose I'm suffering a lot*. And what kind of remedy, what drug or alcohol is carried by the *guéridon* that is the Bride's bed-side table? It's enough to address it sharply and to enjoy one of the puns Duchamp had been so fond of: *guéris donc!* [so heal!]. And *si tu es gai, ris donc!* [if you're cheerful, then laugh!]. To heal gravity is to laugh. With the dot on the "i" shaped like a black ball. By spelling the letters of the Bride, the trismegistus juggler-handler-tender of gravity undresses this well-balanced virtue labeled by Duchamp: *irony of affirmation*. He personalizes OUI from top to toe. A OUI, whose letters anybody can make dance to their liking:



*Comment le Seigneur de gravité
traduit oui en Yes*

How the Tender of Gravity translates 'Oui' into 'Yes'

Dossier N. 2

Note

The following images are displayed according to the order in which the works and the personages are mentioned in the dissertation.



The Chess Game, 1910.



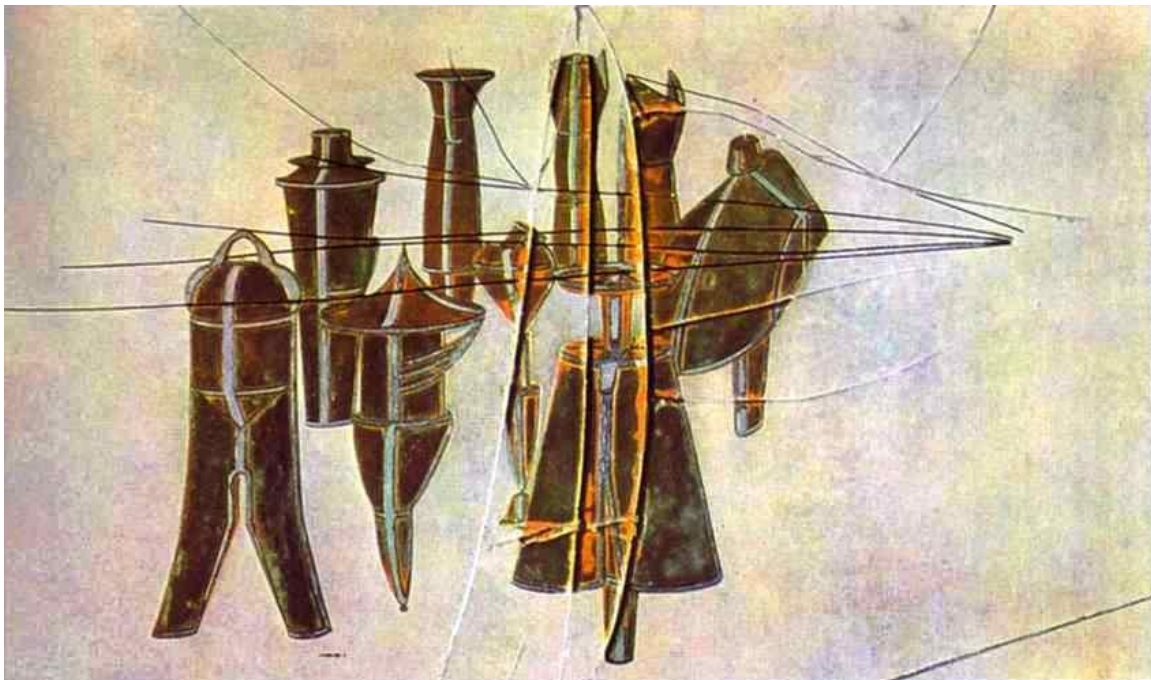
Portrait of Chess Players, 1911.



The King and the Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes, 1912.



Trap, 1917.



Nine Malic Moulds, 1914.



Dulcinea, 1911.



Rose Sélavy, photo taken by Man Ray , 1921.



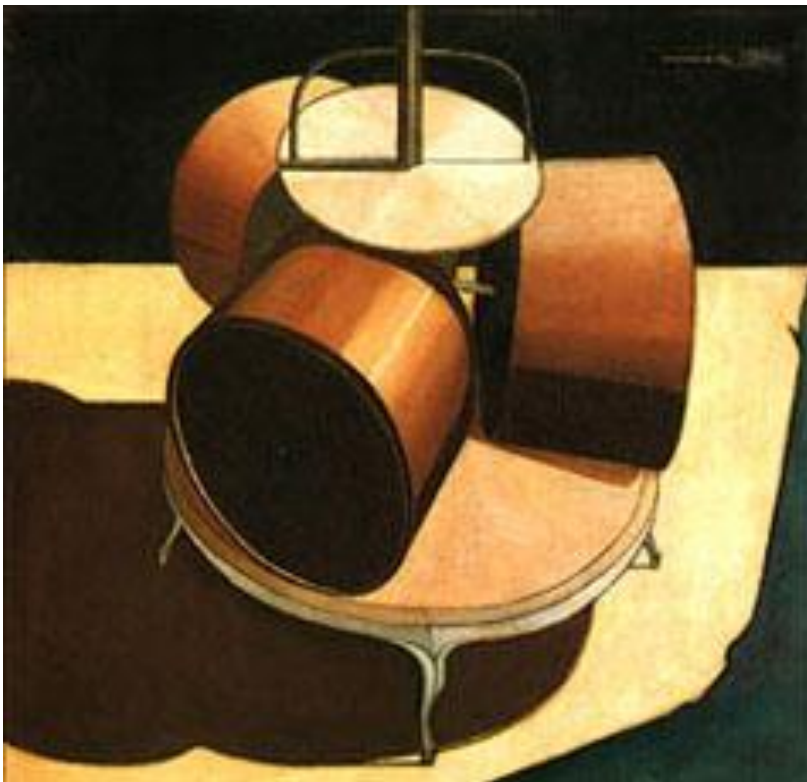
Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray playing chess in René Clair's *Entr'Acte*, 1924.



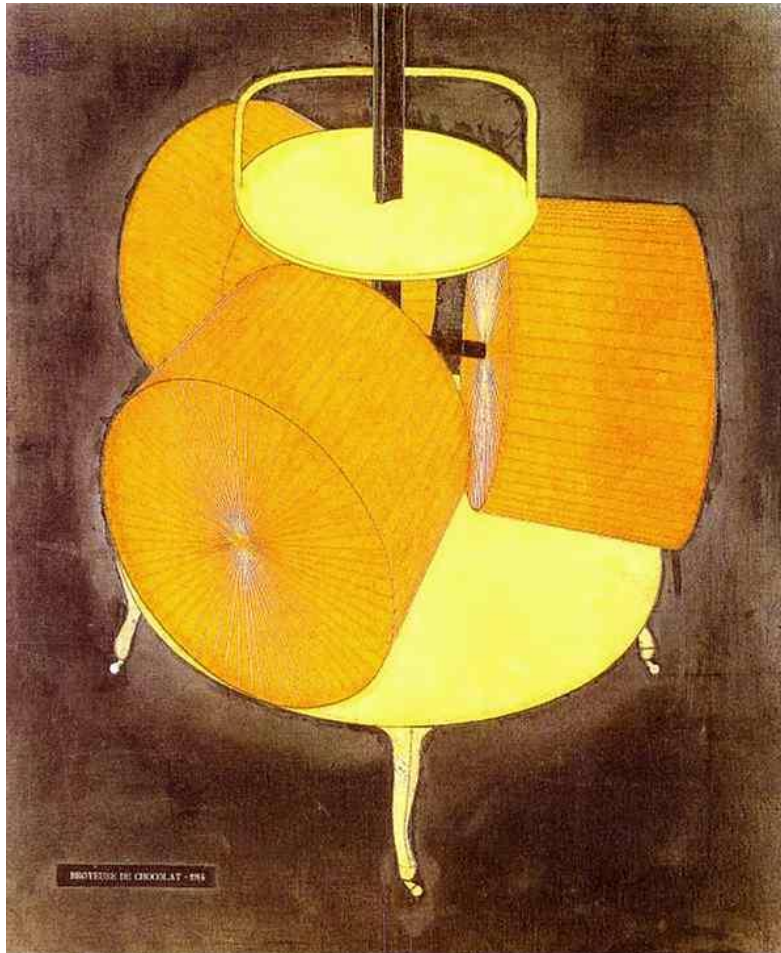
Portrait of Dr. R. Dumouchel, 1910.



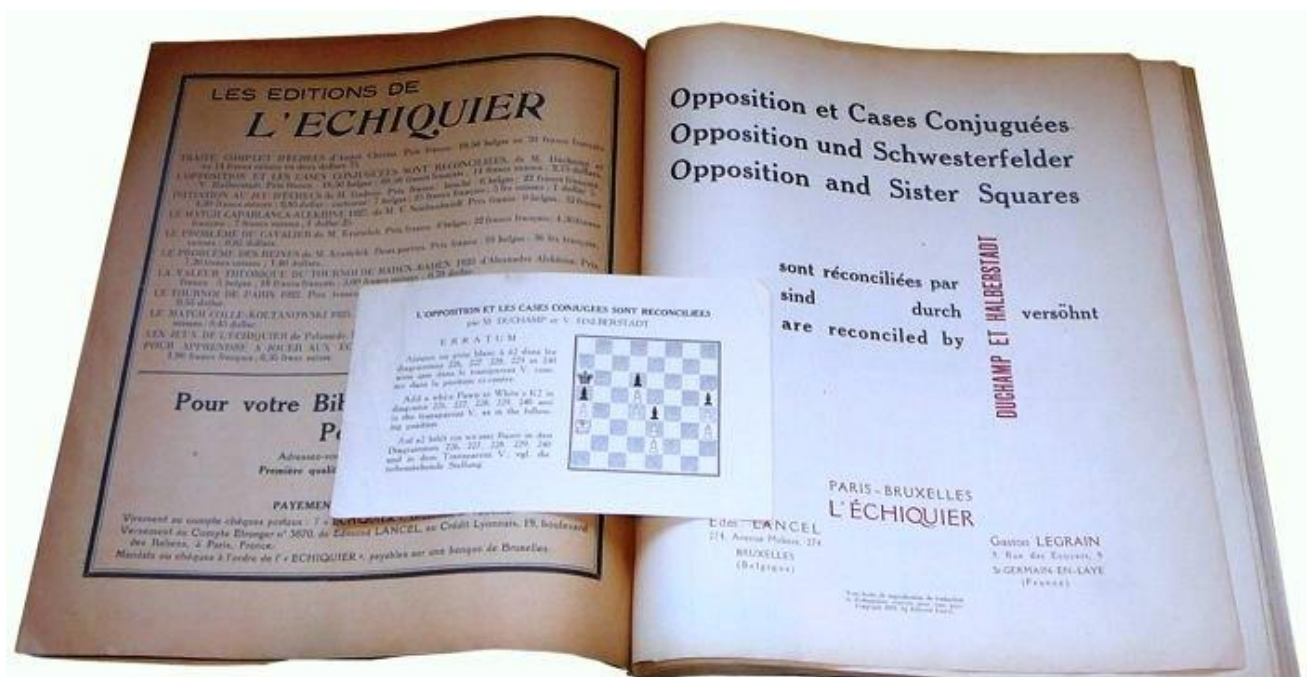
Nude descending a Staircase N. 2, 1912.



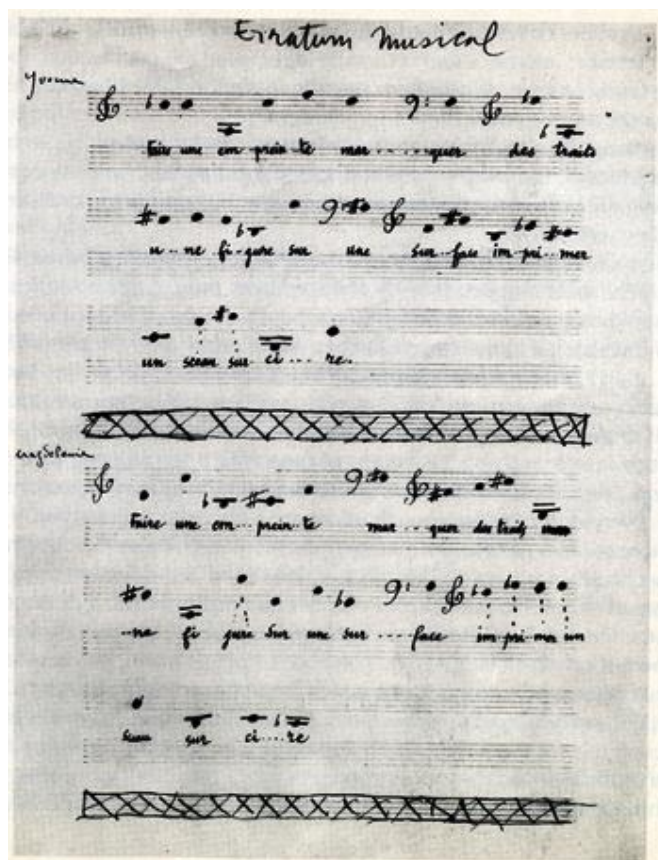
Chocolate Grinder N. 1, 1913.



Chocolate Grinder N.2, 1914.



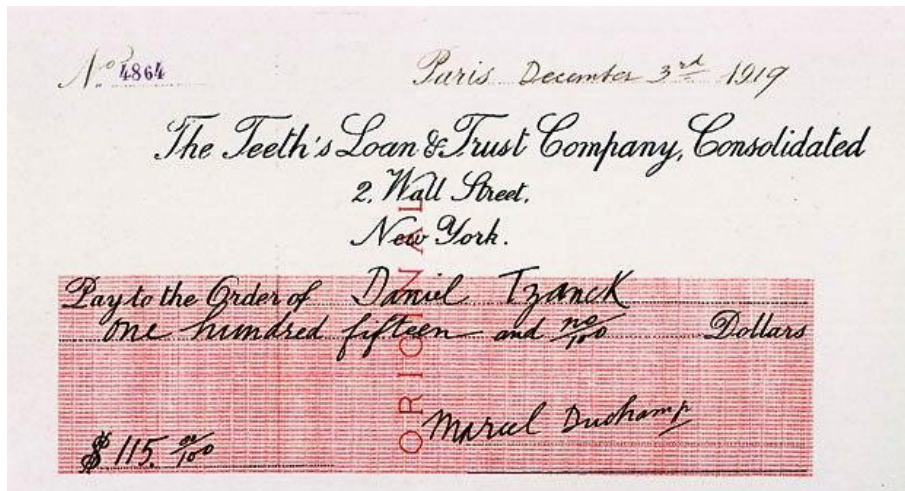
Vitaly Halberstadt and Marcel Duchamp, *L'opposition et les cases conjuguées sont reconciliées*, 1932.



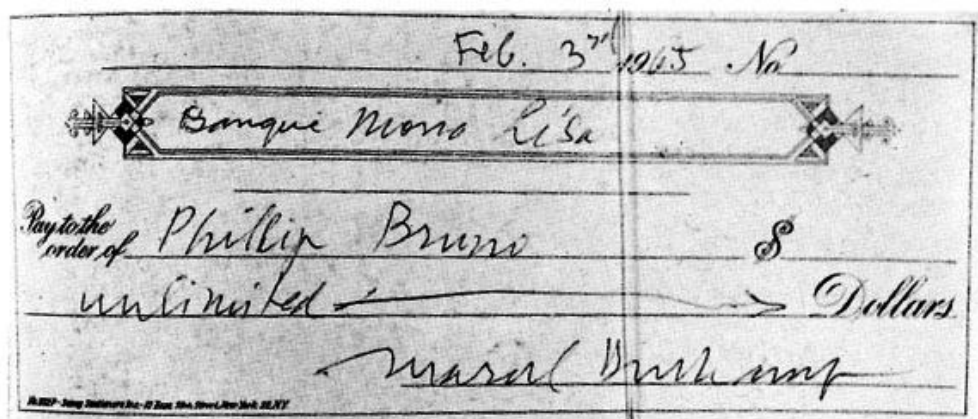
Erratum Musical, 1913.



Teeney and Marcel Duchamp with John Cage during the performance *Reunion*, 1968.



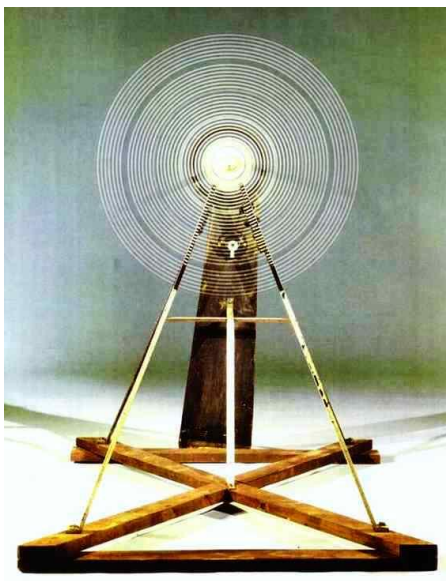
Tzanck Check, 1919.



Cheque Bruno, 1965.



Monte Carlo Bond, 1925.



Rotary demisphere, 1925.

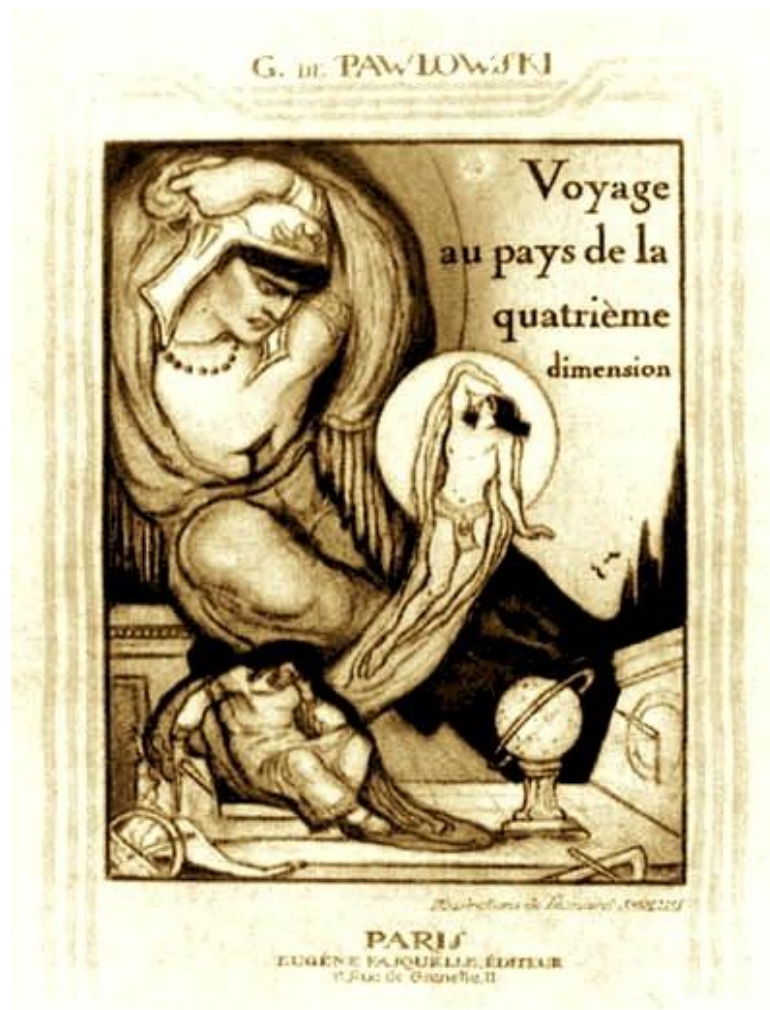




L.H.O.O.Q, 1919.



.Fountain,1919.



Gaston Pawlowski's *Voyage au pays de la quatrième dimension*, 1923.



In Advance for a Broken Arm, 1915.



Bicycle Wheel, 1913.



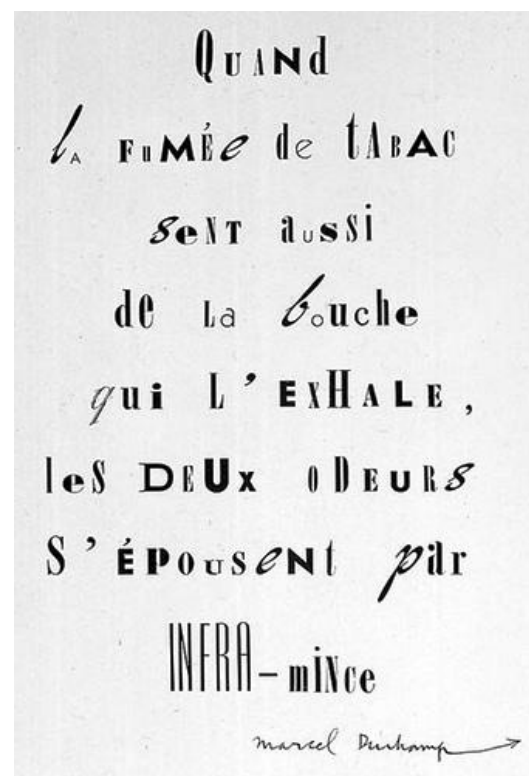
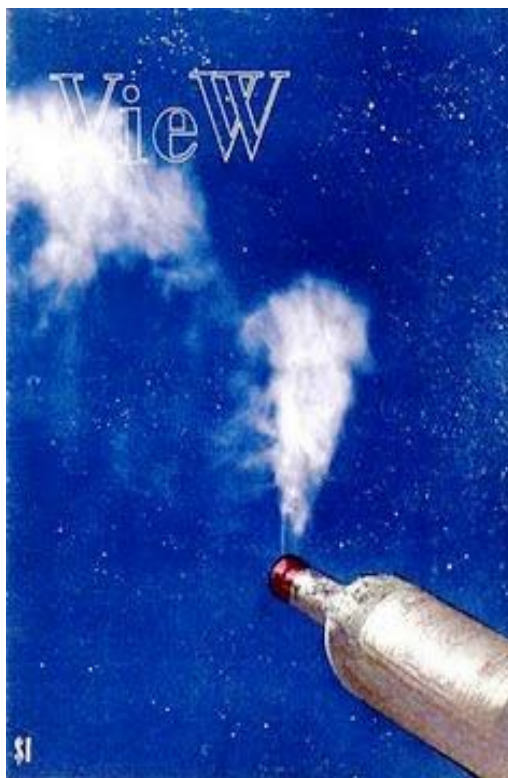
Coffee Mill, 1911.



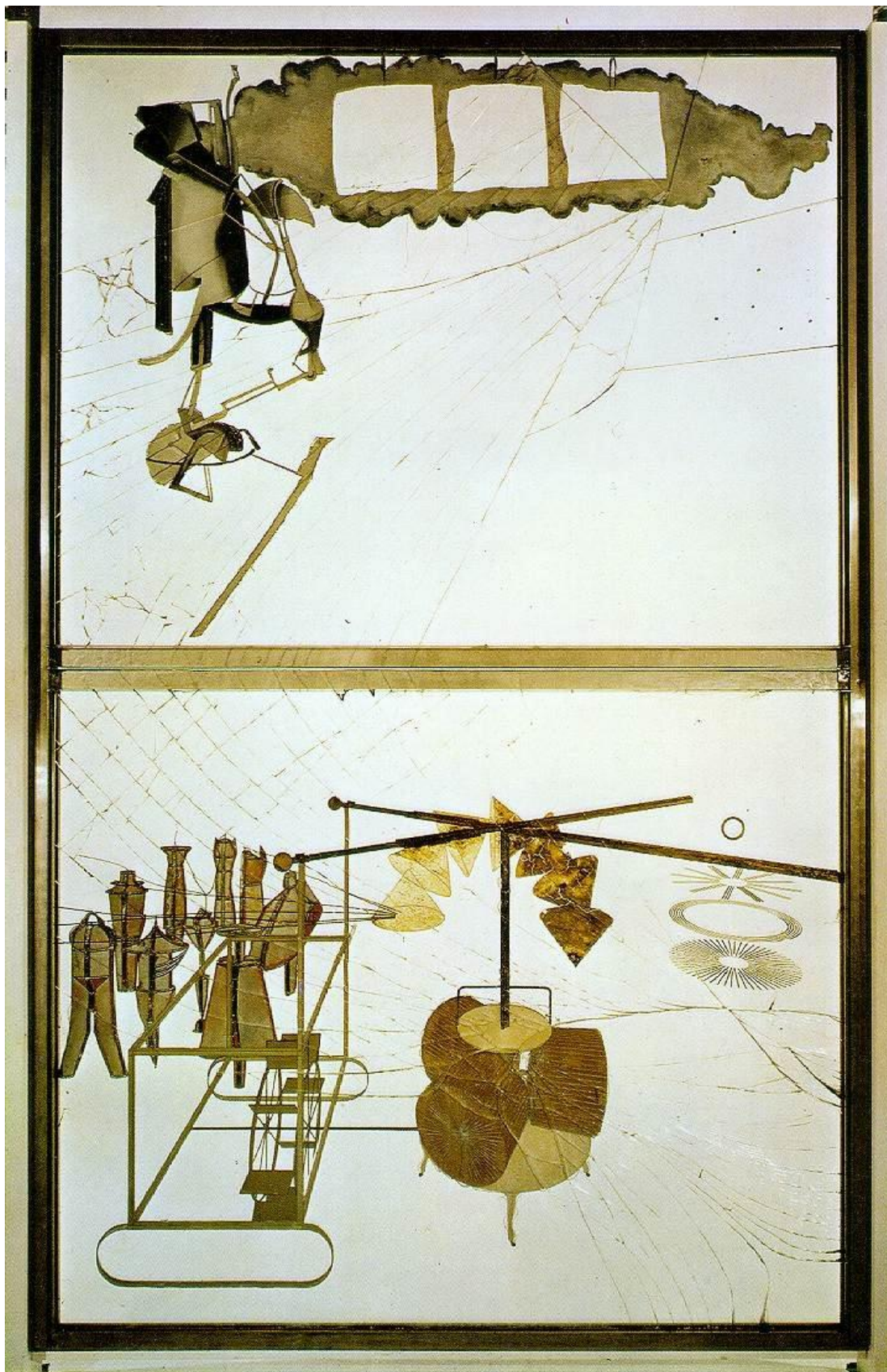
Bottle Rank or Bottle Dryer, 1914.



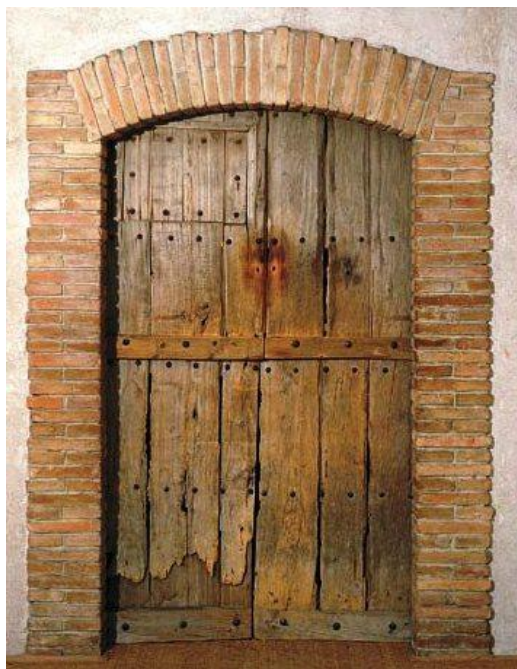
Why not sneeze, Rose Sélavy? 1924.



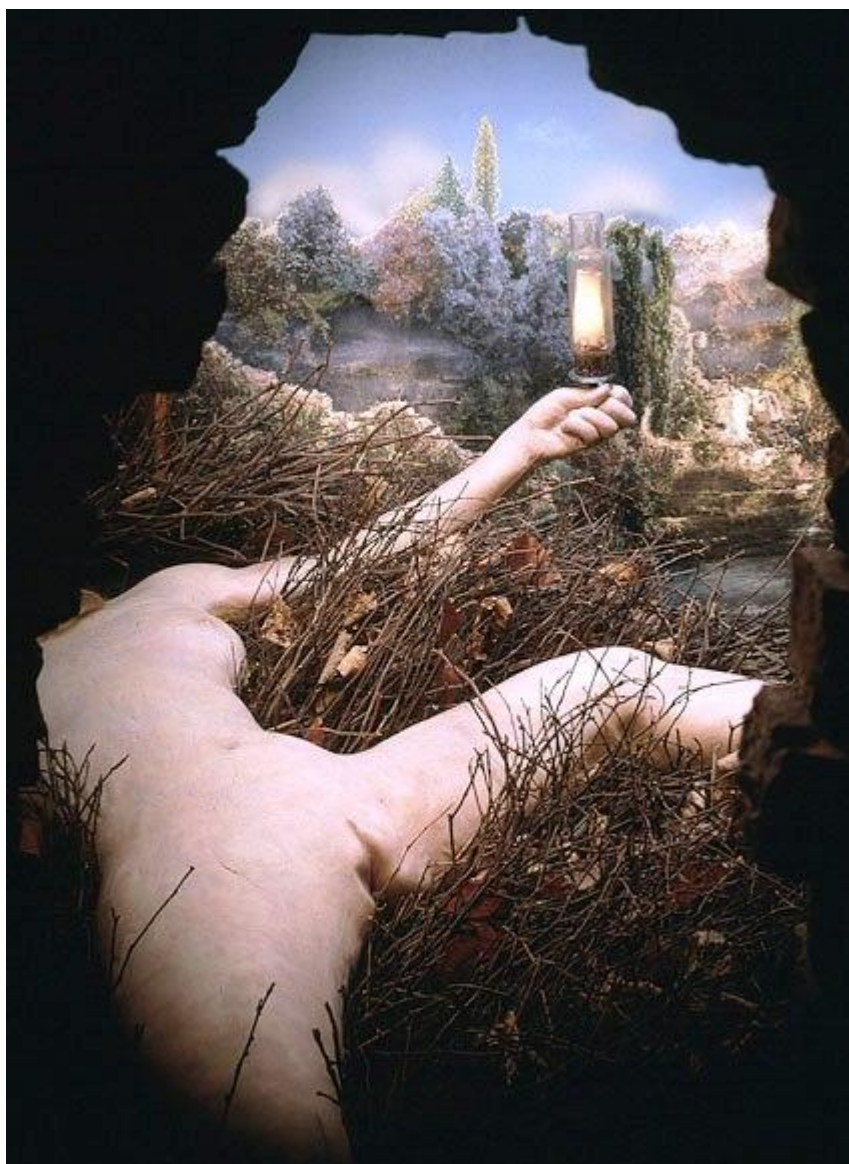
Duchamp's *View Magazine* cover, March 1945. The issue included the artist's notion of *Infra-mince*.



The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even also known as the Large Glass, 1915-1923.



Given, 1912 (or 1948)-1968.

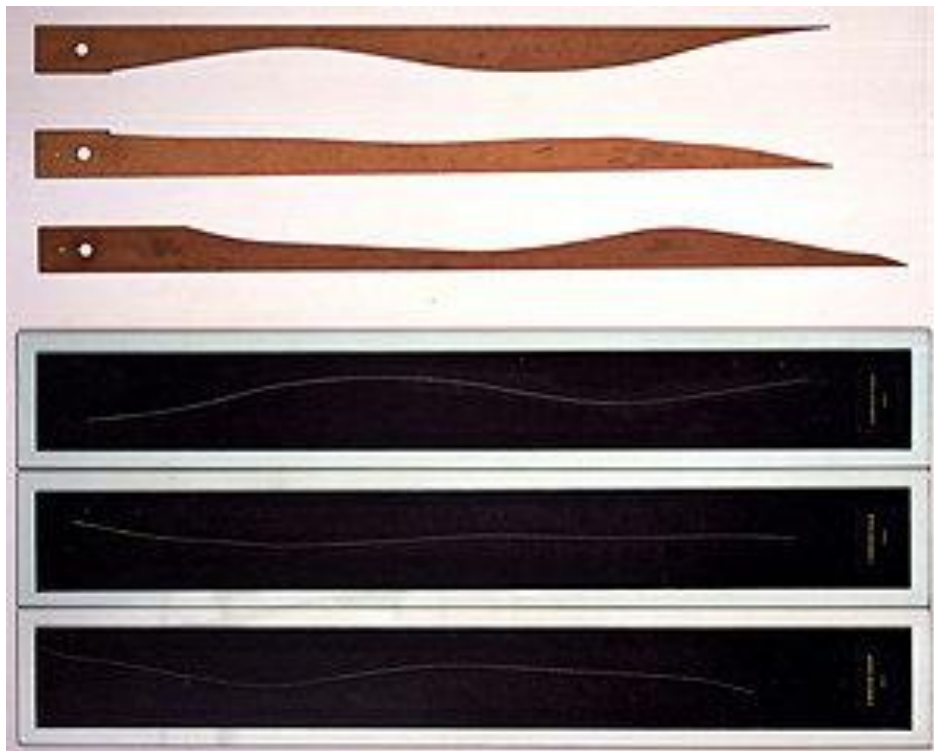




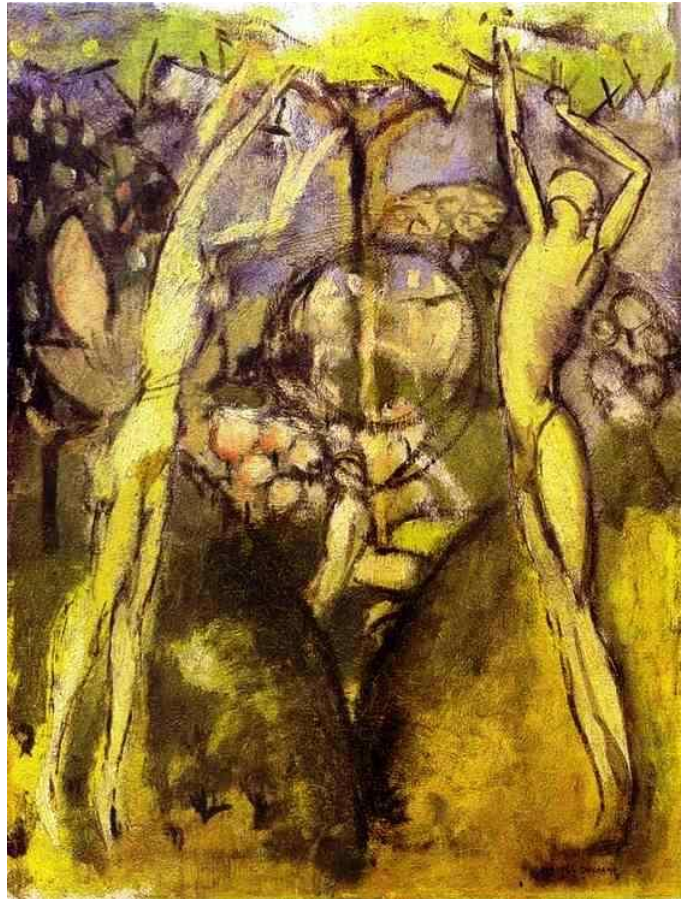
Jeune homme triste en train, 1911.



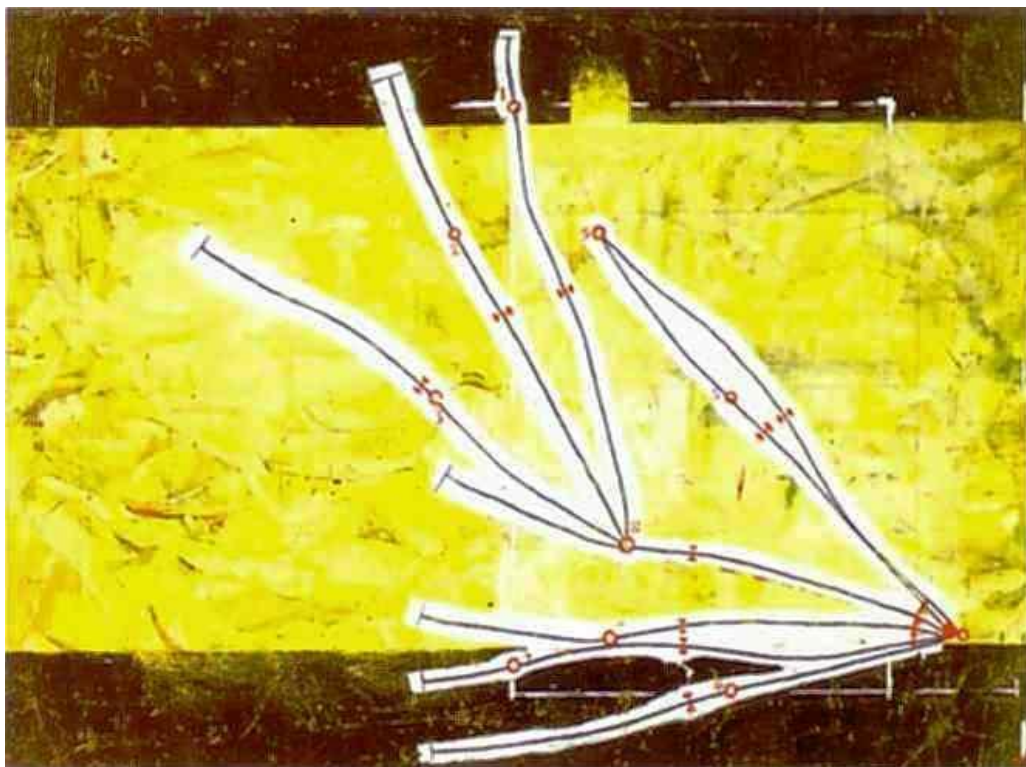
Dimanches, sketch for *Le Rire*, 1909.



Three Standard Stoppages, 1913.



Young Man and Girl in Spring, 1911.



Network of Stoppages, 1914.



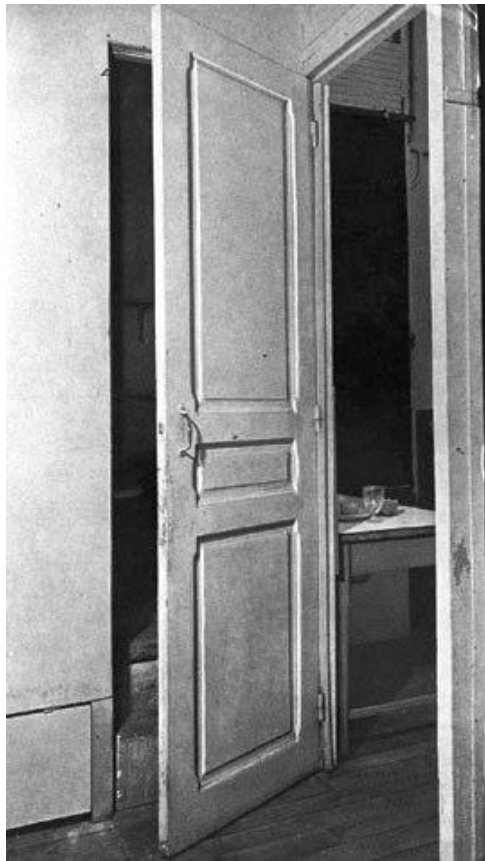
La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même also known as The Green Box, 1934.



Unhappy readymade, 1919.



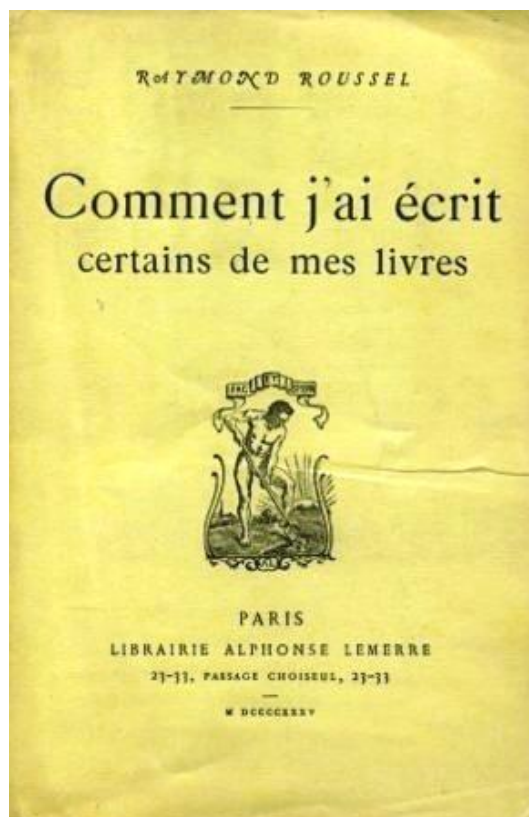
Rendez vous du Dimanche 6 Février 1916, 1916



Door, Rue Larrey, 1927.



Raymond Roussel at the age of 19.



Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres, the 1935 first edition shortly published after the author's death

Heir's Pistol Kills His Wife; He Denies Playing Wm. Tell

Mexico City, Sept. 7 (AP)—William Seward Burroughs, 37, first admitted, then denied today that he was playing William Tell when his gun killed his pretty, young wife during a drinking party last night.

Police said that Burroughs, a grandson of the author of the "Thin Red Line" series, first told them that, wanting to appear as a characteristically, a "playful" man, he had fired a shot at his wife's head and neck, but he admitted that he had fired a shot at her in the forehead.

After talking with a local newspaper, Burroughs, who is a wealthy cotton planter for 10 years, then changed his story to a "playful" shot at his wife's head and neck, but he admitted that he had fired a shot at her in the forehead.

Burroughs is 37.

Mrs. Burroughs, 27, the former Juanita de la Cruz, was shot dead.

The shooting occurred during a party at a restaurant in the heart of downtown Mexico City, where he was only slightly more present.

Burroughs said that he had shot at his wife's head and neck, but he admitted that he had fired a shot at her in the forehead.

No argument, he says.

"It was purely accidental," he said. "I was just sitting there and my gun went off. I was a little bit nervous, but I was not drunk."

He said there had been no argument at the time of the shooting.

"The party was quiet," he said. "We had a few drinks, but nothing is very heavy."

Burroughs and his wife had been married for two years. He said he was a wealthy cotton planter, and he was a member of the University of Mexico. He explained his long absence from his home by saying that he was working for himself.

Wife From Chicago.
He said he was born in St. Louis and that his wife was from Chicago, N. Y. They have two children, William Burroughs Jr., 5, and



William Seward Burroughs in Mexico City prison.



The Mrs. Joan Burroughs killed at party.

John Adams, 3, who he said was his wife's daughter by a previous marriage. The couple had been married five years.

The two attended parties at the home of the Burroughs family in Mexico City.

Burroughs who also had been married before, Burroughs' first wife, a former actress, died in 1948.

Underneath a group of trees at a party. He is a graduate of Harvard University and worked for two weeks in 1948 as a reporter for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

The married couple had the reputation of a party when he was the first killing machine married before, Burroughs' first wife, a former actress, died in 1948.



Article on Joan Vollmer's death, 7th September 1952/Burroughs in Bolivia, surrounded by Yagé vine, 1953.



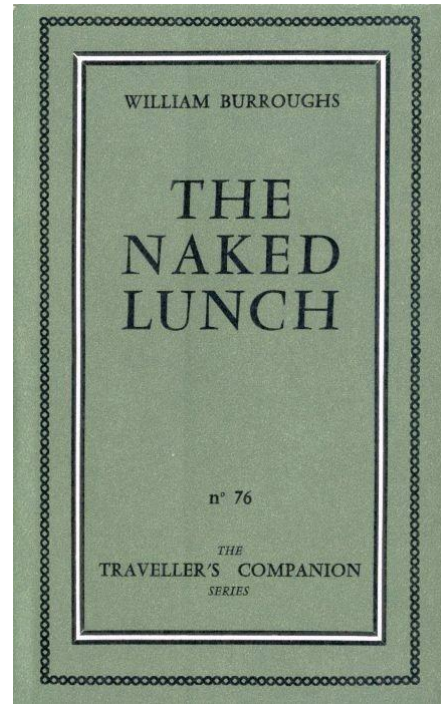
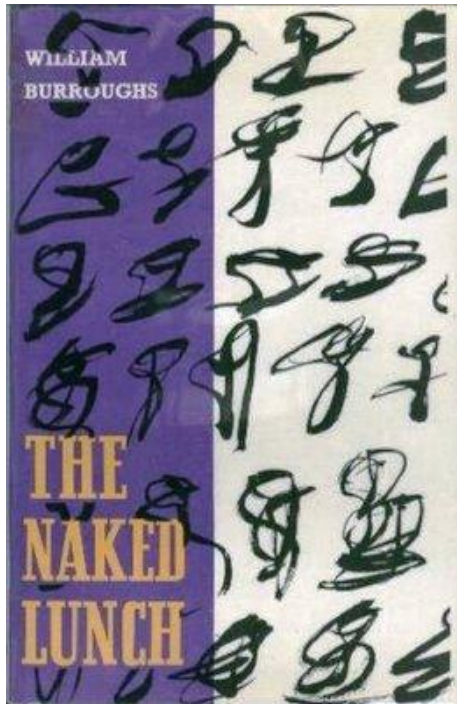
Peter Orlovsky, William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Alan Ansen, Gregory Corso, Ian Sommerville, and Paul Bowles in Villa Muniria garden, Tangier Maroc July 1961.



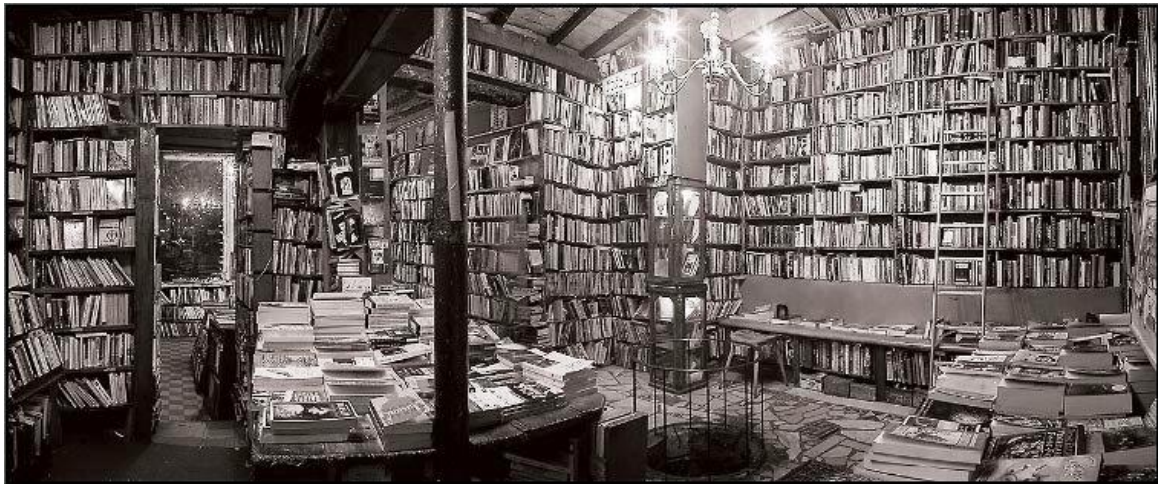
Burroughs heading to the Beat Hotel, Paris 1959.



Brion Gysin and William Burroughs experimenting with the *Dreamachine* in London, 1972.



Naked Lunch, Olympia Press, 1959.



George Whitman's "Shakespeare and Company" bookshop, where Burroughs used to borrow both poetry and medical books that he would have use for *Naked Lunch*.

WARNING WARNING WARNING WARNING WARNING WARNING WARNING WARNING WARNING
 OTHER MEMBERS AND OTHER RIPPED COMMITTEE ACTS OF LITERATURE AND SIMILAR
 OBSCENITIES ON FALL-OUT SHELTER WALLS WILL BE PROSECUTED AND, IF FOUND
 GUILTY, WILL BE SENTENCED TO PLASTIC BAG DISPOSAL DUTY IN THE CHILDREN'S
 DOMESTICS FOR THE REMAINDER OF THEIR LIVES. NOTE: SENTENCES WILL BE
 OF THREE WEEKS' DURATION IN THE CASES OF USUALLY LONG LIVED CRIMINALS.

[illegible]

to be read every which way

to William Burroughs

A black and white collage titled "IN THE ENERGY OF A HURRICANE!". The collage is composed of several rectangular and irregular photographic fragments held together by a dark, hand-drawn grid of lines. The fragments include: a top-left image of a damaged building with an "Esso" sign; a central image of a flooded area with debris and a small boat; a bottom-left image of two palm trees; a right-side image of a staircase; and a small image of a boat in the bottom right. The text "IN THE ENERGY OF A HURRICANE!" is printed in a bold, sans-serif font across the bottom center of the collage. The number "69" is handwritten in the bottom right corner.



Birmingham County Judge, Jack

Here's just about the only place you can see him. He's been in the county for nearly thirty years. He's a judge, and you know what that means. He's a judge.



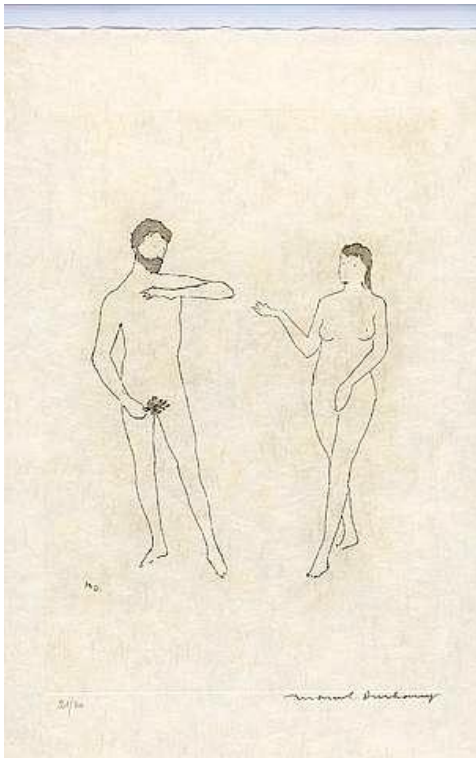
BIRMINGHAM COUNTY JUDGE

Here's just about the only place you can see him. He's been in the county for nearly thirty years. He's a judge, and you know what that means. He's a judge.

THE BIRMINGHAM COUNTY JUDGE

Here's just about the only place you can see him. He's been in the county for nearly thirty years. He's a judge, and you know what that means. He's a judge.

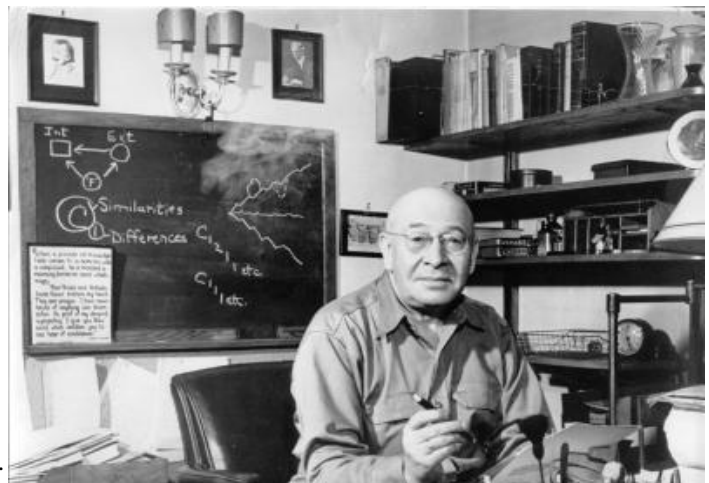
Burroughs's so called *word horde*, the chaotic manuscript compiled during the author's Tangiers and Parisian years, after which *Naked Lunch* and *The Nova Trilogy* were assembled. In these pages samples of cut-ups and fold-ins are visible.



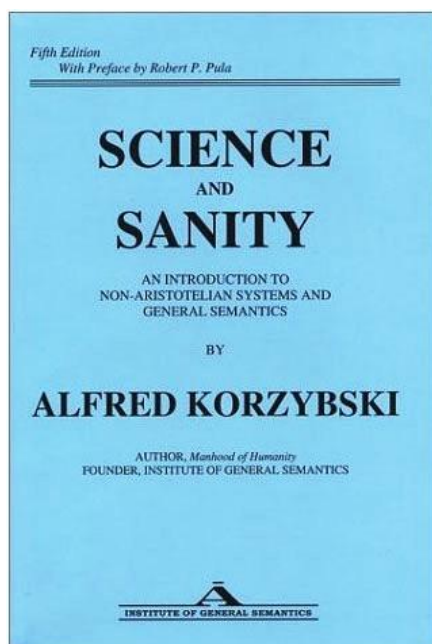
Duchamp's *Selected Details* (1967-1968) after Ingres, Cranach, Courbet and Rodin.



Herbert Huncke photographed by Allen Ginsberg, 1949



Alfred Korzybski in Chicago, 1954.



Korzybski's *Science and Sanity* Fifth Edition, 1995.



Joseph Kosuth, *Chair (One and Three)*, 1965.



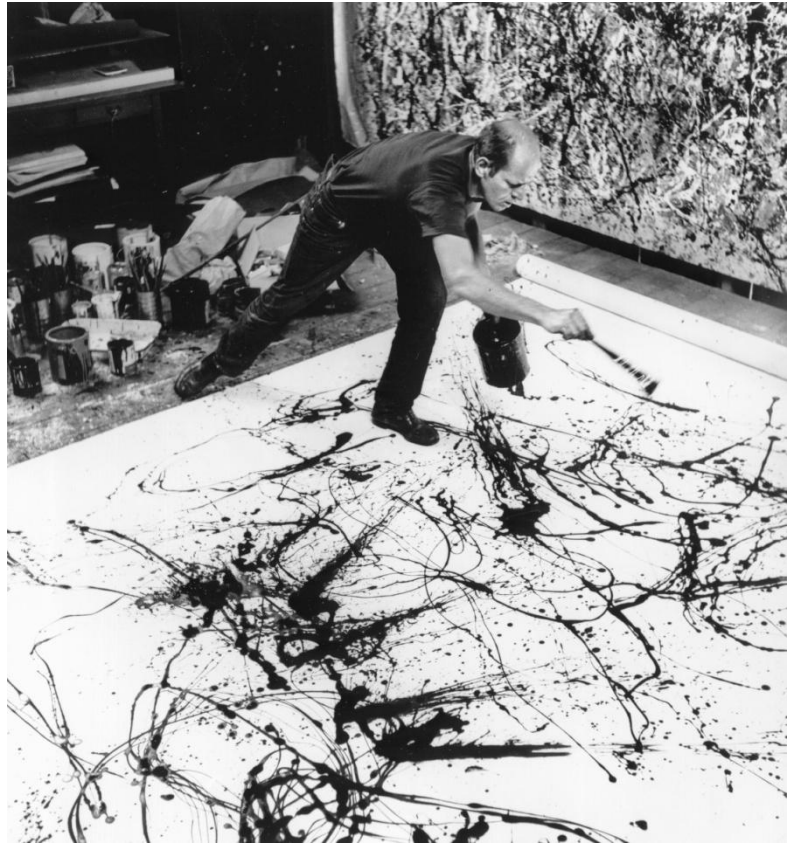
Joseph Kosuth, *Clock (One and Five)*, 1965.



Burroughs, *Untitled*, 1988.



Burroughs' shot-painting - painting made by shooting to some painting cans placed nearby the canvas - characterized the author's incursion into visual arts. René Richard, the famous *Art Forum* critic, claimed Burroughs's art belonged – together with Jackson Pollock and Jean Michel Basquiat, to the American Abstract expressionism.



Jackson Pollock in his atelier, 1950.



Jean Michel Basquiat, 1984.

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