

# Ensayo visual

## MARCEL DUCHAMP: LA ESCRITURA EN REVERSA

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ALEJANDRO TAMAYO  
York University, Canada  
laimagendelmundo@yahoo.ca

Es inmensamente mayor todo lo que se ha escrito, y sigue escribiéndose, sobre Marcel Duchamp, —este texto incluido, que aquello que él mismo escribió o publicó—. Aunque la escritura, y los ejercicios de exploración con el lenguaje, fueron llevados a cabo durante toda su vida, esta práctica fue en su mayoría esporádica, “no-lineal”, y siempre inacabada. Su escritura estuvo compuesta, más que todo, de relámpagos, de flechazos de inspiración, que buscaron ser plasmados, o “detenidos”, en los soportes ofrecidos por el lenguaje, y en los recursos que encontraba disponibles a su mano: reversos de tarjetas, hojas sueltas, o trozos de papel recortados.

Muy pronto se dio cuenta del valor de estos escritos, realizando él mismo una primera “publicación” en 1914, en lo que se conoce ahora como la *Caja de 1914*. La caja, porque en realidad lo era —Duchamp seleccionó para ello una caja de negativos Kodak—, incluyó 16 notas escritas a mano, fotografiadas y

montadas en cartón blanco, y un dibujo titulado *avoir l'apprenti dans le soleil* —tener el aprendiz en el sol—. <sup>1</sup> Este trabajo con- tuvo desde entonces elementos clave de lo que sería posterior- mente el desarrollo de su obra y ofreció pistas de la manera como la escritura y su obra plástica estuvieron mutuamente influenciadas. <sup>2</sup>

Podríamos decir que su relación con el lenguaje fue am- bivalente, considerándolo al mismo tiempo como una fuente inagotable de inspiración, y “[...] como uno de los grandes errores de la humanidad” (Lazzarato, 2014: 24). Su fascinación, indica Octavio Paz, fue de orden intelectual, ya que el lenguaje es “[...] el instrumento más perfecto para producir significados y, asimismo, para destruirlos” (Paz, 2008: 19).

Y es que Marcel Duchamp no entendió los signos del len- guaje a la manera como lo hizo Saussure, como una oposición entre significados y significantes, sino que para él “los signos no representan nada”, y por tanto pueden ser usados para orientar la mente de una manera diferente (Lazzarato, 2014: 25). Pero para que esta liberación sea posible, y nuevas posibilidades sean creadas, es necesario crear un estado de “vacío”, de “total anestesia”, que permita romper con el hábito de las palabras.



Esto es sólo posible si los significados que el lenguaje produce son suspendidos; “[...] significados que, como el buen o el mal gusto, no son más que hábitos cristalizados por la repetición” (Lazzarato, 2014: 24).

Los ejercicios que realizó a nivel del lenguaje estuvieron se- guidos, o precedidos, por un proceso de experimentación en el plano de la materia y de los objetos del mundo físico, dando cuenta de una mutua relación entre sus exploraciones formales con la “materia” y los significados del lenguaje y el desarrollo de su obra plástica. Dado que “[...] la tiranía de la representación concierne no solo al lenguaje, sino también al arte” (Lazzarato, 2014: 25), fue de ambas “tiránías” de las cuales buscó liberarse.

Entre sus influencias figuraron no solo Raymond Russel y Alfred Jarry, sino también Jules Laforgue —más que todo los títulos de sus obras que su poesía— y Stéphane Mallarmé —Rimbaud y Lautremont eran ya muy viejos para su gusto— (Paz, 2008:18-19).

1 Este trabajo, al igual que *El Gran Vidrio* y *Étant donnés*, su última obra, se encuentran en el Museo de Filadelfia. Puede consultarse en este enlace: <https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/86183.html?mulR=73974304%7C8>

2 Los escritos incluidos en la Caja de 1914, al igual que sus publica- ciones posteriores —la Caja Verde, la Caja Blanca, y otros textos más— fueron recopilados en francés por primera vez en 1958 por Michel Sanouillet en *Marchand du sel, écrits de Marcel Duchamp*. Una versión ampliada apareció en inglés llamada *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, publicada por Oxford University Press en 1973, e incluye su charla “El Acto Creativo” dada en Hous- ton, Texas en abril de 1957.

## LA IDEA DE LA CONSTRUCCIÓN

—Si un hilo (recto) de un metro de largo se deja caer desde la altura de un metro sobre un plano horizontal deformándose como le plazca, crea una nueva forma de la unidad de medida—  
— 3 ejemplos obtenidos en más o menos condiciones similares: considerados en sus relaciones mutuas constituyen una reconstrucción aproximada de la unidad de medida  
Los 3 detenedores estándar son el metro disminuido.

Caja de 1914.

La *Caja de 1914* contiene esta nota, la cual da cuenta de lo que al parecer fueron las instrucciones seguidas para la realización de 3 *stoppages étalon* —3 detenedores estándar— un año antes. Este trabajo fue clave ya que le abrió la posibilidad de escapar a los métodos tradicionales de expresión asociados durante mucho tiempo con el arte. Como se indicaría en una entrevista realizada en 1961 por Katherine Kuh, “[...] los 3 *stoppages étalon* fueron para mí el primer gesto para liberarme del pasado” (Kuh, 1960: 81).

Las deformaciones adquiridas por cada uno de los hilos a partir de este experimento fueron traducidas a tres plantillas de madera,<sup>3</sup> y fueron empleadas para generar la pintura *Network of Stoppages* —“Red de detenedores”— (1914), la cual presenta cada una de estas tres líneas repetida tres veces.<sup>4</sup>

- 3 Una de las reproducciones de este trabajo fue realizada por el crítico Ulf Linde y se encuentra en el Moderna Musset en Suecia: <https://sis.modernamuseet.se/en/view/objects/asitem/artists/004065/10/primaryMaker-asc?t:state:flow=88b01717-54c1-4a67-9f05-37edo52d3cea>
- 4 Esta obra se encuentra en el Museo de Arte Moderno de Nueva York y puede verse en este enlace: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79600>

Posteriormente estas líneas serán incorporadas en perspectiva en *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* —“La novia desnudada por sus Solteros, aún”— (1915-1923), obra conocida también como *Le Grand Verre* —“El Gran Vidrio”—, donde van a adquirir un nuevo significado. En este “nuevo ambiente” se convertirían en los Tubos Capilares que conectan a los nueve Solteros.

Como indicó también en la entrevista, los juegos de palabras fueron para él una fuente de inspiración, no solo por los sonidos generados, sino también por los significados inesperados que se producen al poner en relación palabras dispares: “Si se introduce una palabra familiar en un ambiente extraño, se obtiene algo comparable a la distorsión en la pintura, algo sorprendente y nuevo” (Kuh, 1960: 89). Esto fue lo sucedido con los 3 *stoppages étalon*, o “azar enlatado”, como también los llamó, los cuales adquirieron nuevos significados cada vez que fueron usados en un nuevo contexto, afectando al mismo tiempo el ambiente al cual ingresaban.

Doce años después de que El Gran Vidrio fuera dejado “definitivamente inacabado”, Duchamp publica una colección de 94 documentos que incluyeron notas, dibujos y cálculos llamados también *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires même*, esta vez sin la coma presente en el título de la obra del mismo nombre. Este “doble” creado con la materia de las palabras es indispensable, pero no suficiente, como indica Octavio Paz, para “interpretar” el Gran Vidrio (Paz, 2008: 31). Las notas incluidas en la Caja Verde, como también se le conoce, son incluidas de manera libre permitiendo crear nuevas conexiones y significados entre ellas. La potencialidad de significar del lenguaje es abierta y no dada como algo fijo o *a priori*. “(Q)uise hacer un libro, o más bien, un catálogo, que explicase cada detalle de mi cuadro”, indicó en una entrevista en 1964 (Paz, 2008: 31).

Una de las notas incluidas en esta caja va a mencionar de nuevo los “3 detenedores estándar”, vinculándoles esta vez

con un ejercicio a nivel de lenguaje, esto es, a la creación de un nuevo alfabeto a partir de nuevos signos que hacen referencia solamente a significados abstractos —que no tienen una referencia concreta—. Un experimento maravilloso y puramente conceptual con el cual podemos inferir fue escrito “El Gran Vidrio” —el resultado: “una pintura hilarante”—:

Tomar un diccionario Larousse y copiar todas las llamadas palabras “abstractas”, por ejemplo, todas aquellas que no tienen una referencia concreta.

Componer un signo esquemático para designar cada una de estas palabras (estos signos pueden ser creados con los detenedores estándar). Estos signos deben ser pensados como las letras del nuevo alfabeto. [...] Es muy probable que este alfabeto sea solo adecuado para la descripción de esta pintura (Duchamp, 1973: 31).

A su muerte en 1968 Marcel Duchamp dejó un paquete conteniendo notas escritas a mano y recolectadas durante más de 50 años. Fue de estas notas de donde seleccionó aquellas incluidas en la Caja Verde. Con el objetivo de completar y hacer público sus escritos, 289 nuevas notas fueron recopiladas y publicadas por Paul Matisse con la autorización de su madre Teeny Duchamp en 1980. Estas notas fueron encontradas separadas en cuatro grupos o camisas, e incluyeron notas relacionadas con “El Gran Vidrio”, con su concepto del “infra-leve”, sobre proyectos varios y un cuarto grupo llamado Juegos de palabras (Duchamp, 1999).

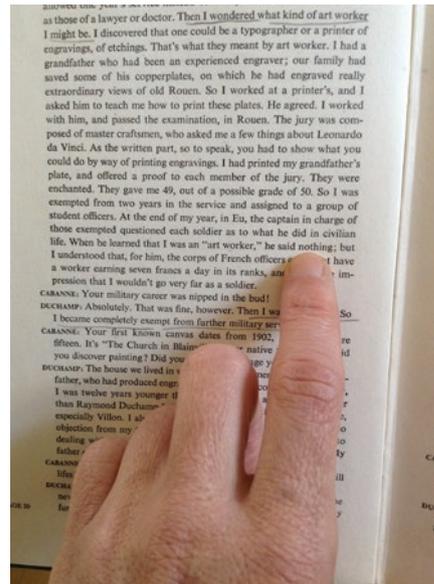
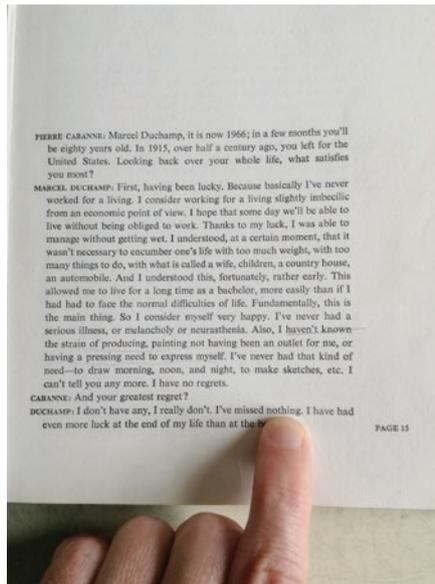
Había pensando que este artículo se llamaría *Marcel Duchamp: La escritura en reversa*. Llegado el momento de cierre de esta publicación, me doy cuenta que he escrito algo diferente. Al no tener otro título a la mano, dejo al lector la invitación de revisar las obras citadas y de incluir también *El Acto Creativo*, charla dada por Duchamp en 1957, que intuyo contiene las pistas faltantes que completan este título. Si al final alguien se anima a escribir el texto que yo no hice. Este escrito puede convertirse simplemente en su prefacio.

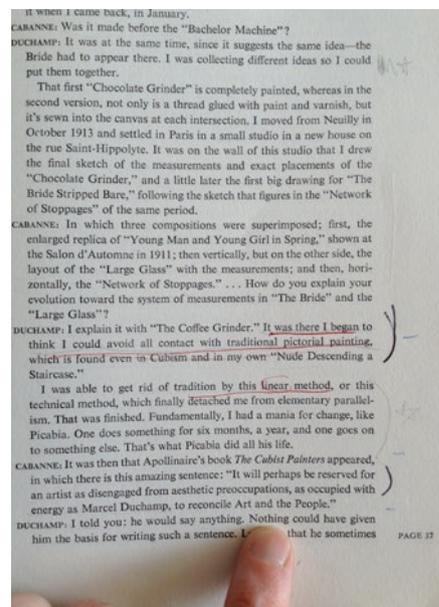
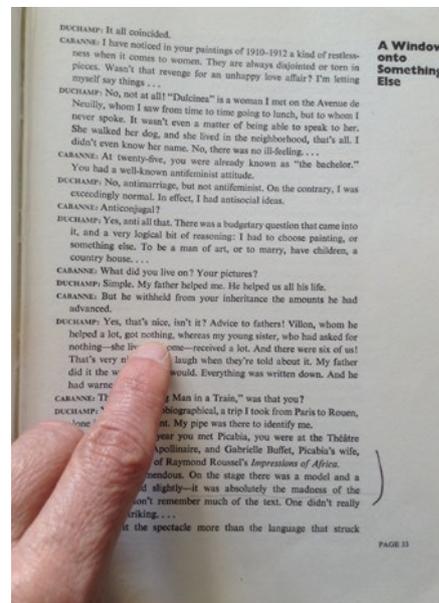
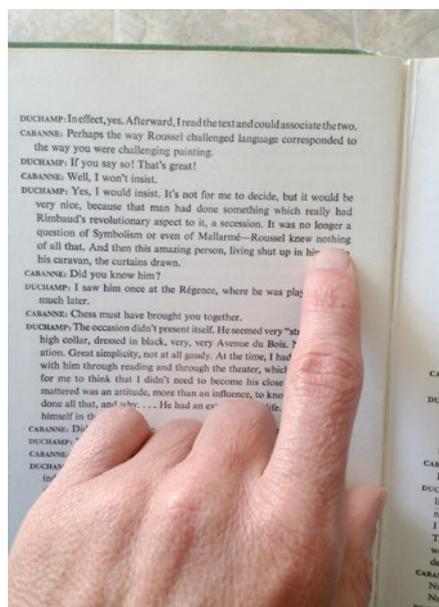
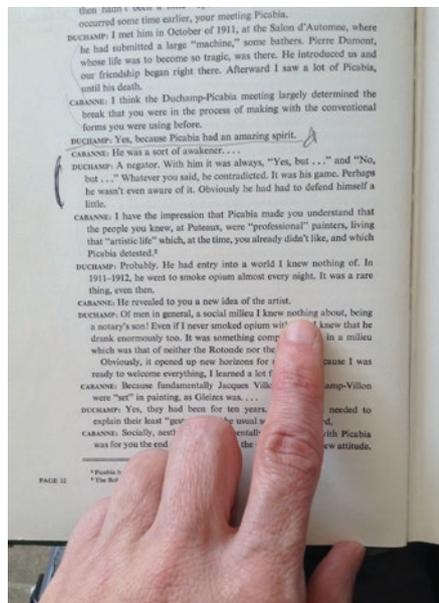
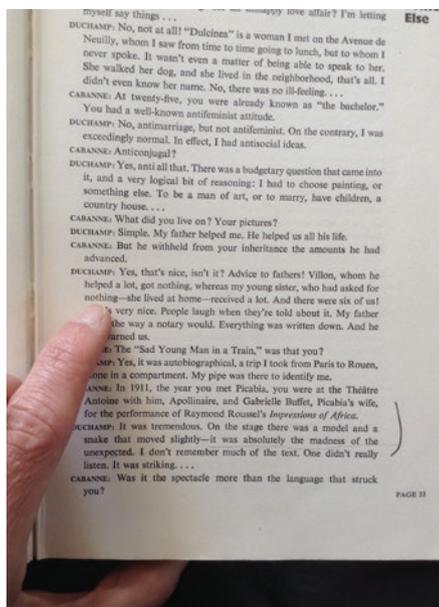
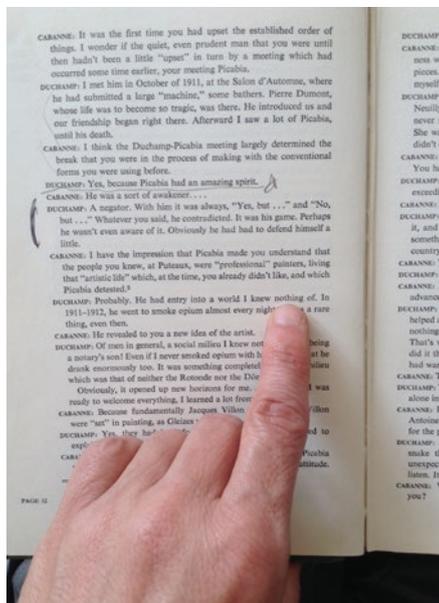
## REFERENCIAS

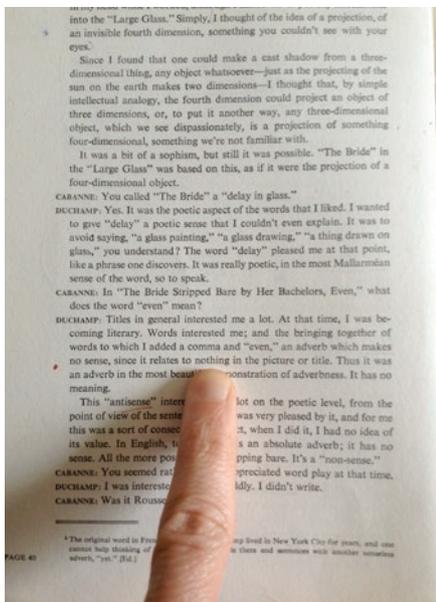
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## RESEARCHING NOTHING

Este proyecto, consiste en la selección de todas las veces en las cuales Marcel Duchamp respondió, o incluyó, la palabra *nothing* —nada— en su famosa entrevista con Pierre Cabanne en 1966, pocos días antes de cumplir 80 años y dos años antes de su muerte. El trabajo está realizado como un ejercicio de lectura e investigación y a la vez como ejercicio de apropiación de la página escrita a través del registro fotográfico. Los cortes permiten un acercamiento al texto de manera fragmentaria, rompiendo la linealidad de la narrativa y sugiriendo nuevas interpretaciones. Marcel Duchamp emplea 36 veces la palabra *nothing* en la entrevista. El libro de donde tomo las imágenes es *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, de Pierr Cabanne. New York: The Viking Press, la edición es de 1971.







into the "Large Glass." Simply, I thought of the idea of a projection, of an invisible fourth dimension, something you couldn't see with your eyes.

Since I found that one could make a cast shadow from a three-dimensional thing, any object whatsoever—just as the projecting of the sun on the earth makes two dimensions—I thought that, by simple intellectual analogy, the fourth dimension could project an object of three dimensions, or, to put it another way, any three-dimensional object, which we see dispartially, is a projection of something four-dimensional, something we're not familiar with.

It was a bit of a sophism, but still it was possible. "The Bride" in the "Large Glass" was based on this, as if it were the projection of a four-dimensional object.

CABANNE: You called "The Bride" a "delay in glass."

DUCHAMP: Yes. It was the poetic aspect of the words that I liked. I wanted to give "delay" a poetic sense that I couldn't even explain. It was to avoid saying, "a glass painting," "a glass drawing," "a thing drawn on glass," you understand? The word "delay" pleased me at that point, like a phrase one discovers. It was really poetic, in the most Mallarméan sense of the word, so to speak.

CABANNE: In "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even," what does the word "even" mean?

DUCHAMP: This in general interested me a lot. At that time, I was becoming literary. Words interested me, and the bringing together of words to which I added a comma and "even," an adverb which makes no sense, since it relates to nothing in the picture or title. Thus it was an adverb in the most beautiful constellation of adverbness. It has no meaning.

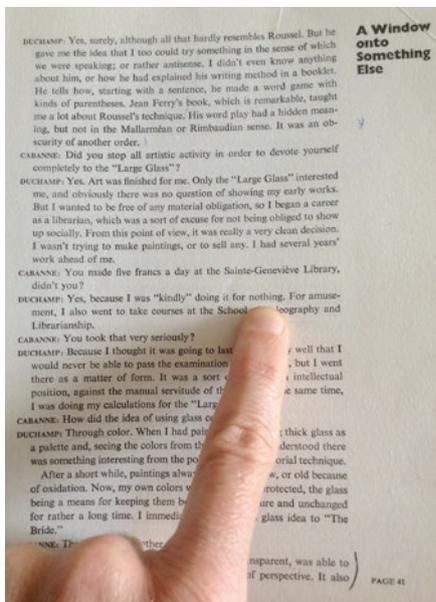
This "antiscenic" interest is a lot on the poetic level, from the point of view of the sense. It was a sort of conceit of its value. In English, it has a sense. All the more poetic.

CABANNE: You seemed rather interested in the word "delay."

DUCHAMP: I was interested in the word play at that time.

CABANNE: Was it Roussea...

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**A Window onto Something Else**

DUCHAMP: Yes, surely, although all that hardly resembles Roussea... But he gave me the idea that I too could try something in the sense of which we were speaking, or rather antiscenic. I didn't even know anything about him, or how he had explained his writing method in a booklet. He tells how, starting with a sentence, he made a word game with kinds of parentheses. Jean Ferry's book, which is remarkable, taught me a lot about Roussea's technique. His word play had a hidden meaning, but not in the Mallarméan or Rimbaudian sense. It was an obscurity of another order.

CABANNE: Did you stop all artistic activity in order to devote yourself completely to the "Large Glass"?

DUCHAMP: Yes. Art was finished for me. Only the "Large Glass" interested me, and obviously there was no question of showing my early works. But I wanted to be free of any material obligation, so I began a career as a librarian, which was a sort of excuse for not being obliged to show up socially. From this point of view, it was really a very clean decision. I wasn't trying to make paintings, or to sell any. I had several years' work ahead of me.

CABANNE: You made five francs a day at the Sainte-Geneviève Library, didn't you?

DUCHAMP: Yes, because I was "kindly" doing it for nothing. For amusement, I also went to take courses at the School of Geography and Librarianship.

CABANNE: You took that very seriously?

DUCHAMP: Because I thought it was going to last, and well that I would never be able to pass the examination, but I went there as a matter of form. It was a sort of intellectual position, against the manual servitude of the same time, I was doing my calculations for the "Large Glass."

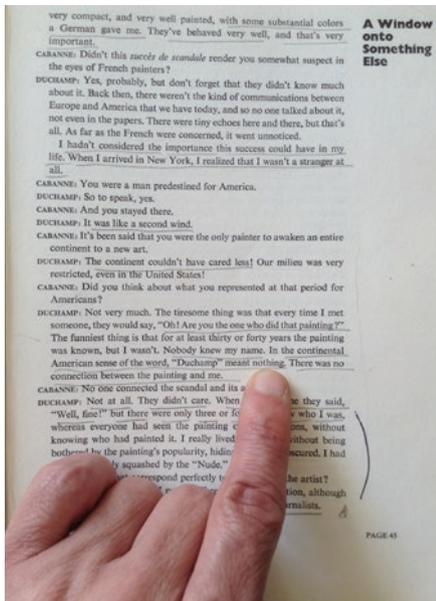
CABANNE: How did the idea of using glass come to you?

DUCHAMP: Through color. When I had put a thick glass as a palette and, seeing the colors from the other side, I understood there was something interesting from the point of view of a certain technique. After a short while, paintings always on glass, or old because of oxidation. Now, my own colors were protected, the glass being a means for keeping them bright and unchanged for rather a long time. I immediately had the glass idea to "The Bride."

CABANNE: The "Bride" was able to be seen from the reverse side, wasn't it?

DUCHAMP: Yes, but it was not from the perspective. It also...

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very compact, and very well painted, with some substantial colors. A German gave me. They've behaved very well, and that's very important.

CABANNE: Didn't this *surcote de scandale* render you somewhat suspect in the eyes of French painters?

DUCHAMP: Yes, probably, but don't forget that they didn't know much about it. Back then, there weren't the kind of communications between Europe and America that we have today, and so no one talked about it, not even in the papers. There were tiny echoes here and there, but that's all. As far as the French were concerned, it went unnoticed.

I hadn't considered the importance this success could have in my life. When I arrived in New York, I realized that I wasn't a stranger at all.

CABANNE: You were a man predestined for America.

DUCHAMP: So to speak, yes.

CABANNE: And you stayed there.

DUCHAMP: It was like a second wind.

CABANNE: It's been said that you were the only painter to awaken an entire continent to a new art.

DUCHAMP: The continent couldn't have cared less! Our milieu was very restricted, even in the United States!

CABANNE: Did you think about what you represented at that period for Americans?

DUCHAMP: Not very much. The tiresome thing was that every time I met someone, they would say, "Did you see the one who did that painting?"

The funniest thing is that for at least thirty or forty years the painting was known, but I wasn't. Nobody knew my name. In the continental American sense of the word, "Duchamp" meant nothing. There was no connection between the painting and me.

CABANNE: No one connected the scandal and its author.

DUCHAMP: Not at all. They didn't care. When they said, "Well, fine!" but there were only three or four people who had seen the painting, whereas everyone had seen the painting.

DUCHAMP: I was really interested in the painting's popularity, hidden behind the painting's popularity, hidden behind the painting's popularity.

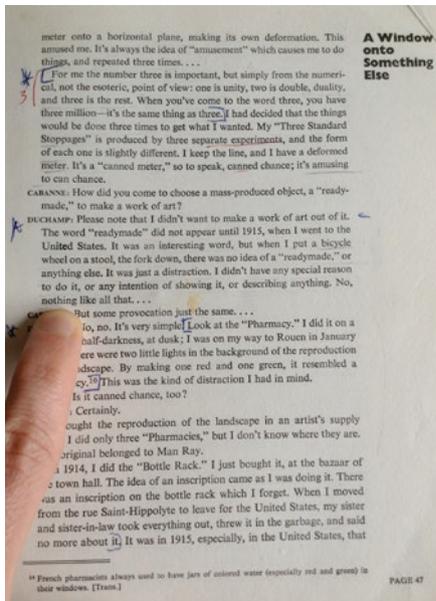
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meter onto a horizontal plane, making its own deformation. This amused me. It's always the idea of "amusement" which causes me to do things, and repeated three times. ...

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

CABANNE: How did you come to choose a mass-produced object, a "ready-made," to make a work of art?

DUCHAMP: Please note that I didn't want to make a work of art out of it. The word "ready-made" did not appear until 1915, when I went to the United States. It was an interesting word, but when I put a bicycle wheel on a stool, the fork down, there was no idea of a "ready-made," or anything else. It was just a distraction. I didn't have any special reason to do it, or any intention of showing it, or describing anything. No, nothing like all that. ...

But some provocation just the same. ...

no, it's very simple. Look at the "Pharmacy," I did it on a half-darkness, at dusk; I was on my way to Rouen in January ere were two little lights in the background of the reproduction discolor. By making one red and one green, it resembled a pharmacy. This was the kind of distraction I had in mind.

Is it canned chance, too?

Certainly.

I thought the reproduction of the landscape in an artist's supply original belonged to Man Ray.

In 1914, I did the "Bottle Rack." I just bought it, at the bazaar of town hall. The idea of an inscription came as I was doing it. There was an inscription on the bottle rack which I forget. When I moved from the rue Saint-Hippolyte to leave for the United States, my sister and sister-in-law took everything out, threw it in the garbage, and said no more about it. It was in 1915, especially, in the United States, that

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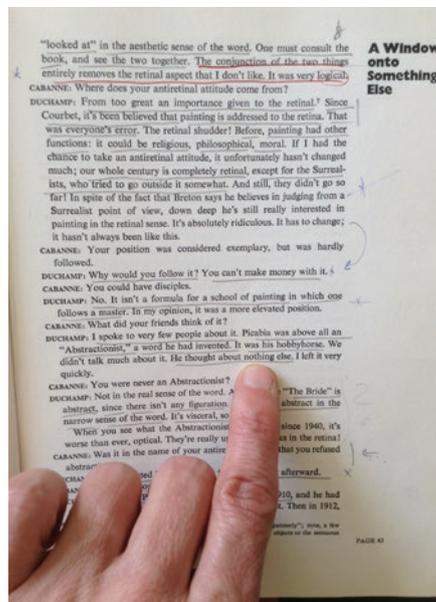
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**A Window onto Something Else**

"looked at" in the aesthetic sense of the word. One must consult the book, and see the two together. The conjunction of the two things entirely removes the retinal aspect that I don't like. It was very logical.

CABANNE: Where does your antiretinal attitude come from?

DUCHAMP: From too great an importance given to the retina? Since Courbet, it's been believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was Courbet's error. The retina slides! Before, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral. If I had the choice to take an antiretinal attitude, it unfortunately hasn't changed much; or whole century is completely retinal, except for the Surrealists, who tried to go outside it somewhat. And still, they didn't go so far! In spite of the fact that Bacon says he believes in judging from a Surrealist point of view, down deep he's still really interested in painting in the retinal sense. It's absolutely ridiculous. It has to change; it hasn't always been like this.

CABANNE: Your position was considered exemplary, but was hardly followed.

DUCHAMP: Why would you follow it? You can't make money with it.

CABANNE: You could have disciples.

DUCHAMP: No. It isn't a formula for a school of painting in which one follows a master. In my opinion, it was a more elevated position.

CABANNE: What did your friends think of it?

DUCHAMP: I spoke to very few people about it. Picabia was above all an "Abstractionist," a word he had invented. It was his hobbyhorse. We didn't talk much about it. He thought about nothing else. I left it very quickly.

CABANNE: You were never an Abstractionist?

DUCHAMP: Not in the real sense of the word. "The Bride" is abstract, since there isn't any figuration.

When you see what the Abstractionist does since 1940, it's as if the retina is in the retinal that you refused afterward.

CABANNE: Was it in the name of your antiretinal attitude that you refused afterward?

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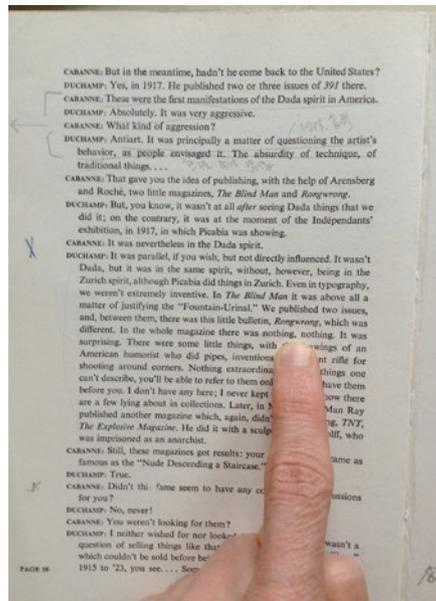
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CABANNE: The painting's popularity, hidden behind the painting's popularity, hidden behind the painting's popularity.

\*The original word in French was "délai," which means "delay." I had to find a word in English that would have the same meaning. I found "delay" in the dictionary. I had to find a word in English that would have the same meaning. I found "delay" in the dictionary.



CABANNE: But in the meantime, hadn't he come back to the United States?

DUCHAMP: Yes, in 1917. He published two or three issues of *SPJ* there. CABANNE: These were the first manifestations of the Dada spirit in America.

DUCHAMP: Absolutely. It was very aggressive.

CABANNE: What kind of aggression?

DUCHAMP: Anti-art. It was principally a matter of questioning the artist's behavior, as people envisaged it. The absurdity of technique, of traditional things. ...

CABANNE: That gave you the idea of publishing, with the help of Aronberg and Roché, two little magazines, *The Blind Man* and *Rongwrong*?

DUCHAMP: But, you know, it wasn't all after seeing Dada things that we did it; on the contrary, it was at the moment of the Independents' exhibition, in 1917, in which Picabia was showing.

CABANNE: It was nevertheless in the Dada spirit.

DUCHAMP: It was parallel, if you wish, but not directly influenced. It wasn't Dada, but it was in the same spirit, without, however, being in the Zurich spirit, although Picabia did things in Zurich. Even in typography, we weren't extremely inventive. In *The Blind Man* it was above all a matter of justifying the "Fontaine-Urinal." We published two issues, and between them, there was this little battle, *Rongwrong*, which was different. In the whole magazine there was nothing, nothing. It was surprising. There were some little things, with wings of an American humorist who did pipes, inventions shooting around corners. Nothing extraordinary. I can't describe, you'll be able to refer to them on the internet before you. I don't have any here; I never kept a few lying about in collections. Later, in 1920, I published another magazine which, again, didn't have any wings. *The Explosive Magazine*. He did it with a sculptor who was impressed as an anarchist.

CABANNE: Still, these magazines got results: your name became famous as the "Nude Descending a Staircase."

DUCHAMP: True.

CABANNE: Didn't the name seem to have any effect for you?

DUCHAMP: No, never!

CABANNE: You weren't looking for them?

DUCHAMP: I neither wished for nor looked for them. I was just a question of setting things like that, which couldn't be sold before me.

CABANNE: In 1915 to '23, you see. ...

DUCHAMP: Yes, but it was not from the perspective. It also...

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