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Analysis at the Limits

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13 Impossible! Bergson after Duchamp after Caillois

Sarah Kolb

WITH HIS PHILOSOPHY of intuition, Henri Bergson has been recognised as one of the most influential figures in the history of historical avant-gardism.[1] Nevertheless, art historians have not yet focused in depth on his particular importance for one the most famous artists of the twentieth century, whose epoch-making *oeuvre* is to be understood in direct contradistinction to the paradigms of classical avant-gardism: Marcel Duchamp. And yet, a comparative analysis of their works is anything but far-fetched.[2] After all, when Duchamp came to Paris in 1904, planning to start a career as an artist, the phenomenon of Bergsonism was just about to reach its peak, and particularly to become one of the most relevant sources for the contemporary art trends of Fauvism, cubism and Futurism. Since Duchamp came into contact with all these trends in the course of his first 'attempts of swimming' up to 1912,[3] it is obvious that he was conscious of Bergson's philosophy and its impact. But while leading avant-garde artists such as Henri Matisse, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger related to Bergson's philosophy in order to reinforce their artistic principles,[4] Duchamp finally decided to take another fork[5] and to break with any kind of dogmatism or unambiguity, be it artistic, scientific or metaphysical. However, the deeply novel conception of art that Duchamp developed as a result of this weighty decision is to be seen, as will be argued in the following, in immediate relation to Bergson's dichotomic conceptualisation of life and death, intuition and intellect, memory and matter, perception and action, precision and indifference, creativity and dogmatism, or *durée* and *tout fait*.

Staircase and Passage

As Duchamp turned his back on the contemporary art scene in order to push on with that highly independent-minded kind of 'avant-gardism' which Clement Greenberg would finally address as an unsurpassable role model for 'advanced-advanced art',[6] his crucial point of departure was his notorious *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, completed in January 1912. At that point, he was in close contact with the so-called Puteaux Cubists, a group of artists and writers (not least including his two elder brothers, Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp-Villon), whose concept of multiple perspectives was characterised not only by a number of rigid formal criteria, but also by an intellectual approach which would eventually turn out to be quite inspiring for Duchamp. Still, when he wanted to show his latest painting in the Puteaux Cubists' exhibition at the Salon des Indépendants in March 1912, Gleizes and Metzinger, the two heads of the group, resolutely rejected his *Nude*, objecting not only to its literary title, but also to the fact that it suggested a human figure in motion instead of the traditional pose.[7] However, it was clear from the start that his painting would pose a challenge to the orthodox cubists. After all, whereas his colleagues referred to Bergson's intuitionist concept of qualitative multiplicity with their multiple perspectives, Duchamp had deliberately decided to bring in an intellectual perspective by adopting the

Marcel Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, 1912, oil on canvas, 147 x 89.2 cm. Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art – The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Object Number 1950-134-59. Image copyright Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Estate of Marcel Duchamp

method of chronophotography and adding a literary title to his latest painting. Of course, it was out of the question for him to meet the Puteaux Cubists halfway by changing the title or contributing another work according to their obliging suggestion.[8] Instead, he affirmed his attempt to represent, with his multiple temporal perspectives, nothing like a coherent figure in terms of a qualitative synthesis, but in fact an analytical 'abstraction of movement'.[9] Thus his *Nude* can be understood in the strict sense of Bergson's critique of 'cinematographic thinking' as escapist, of which more later.

On the occasion of his radical disagreement with the Puteaux Cubists, Duchamp decided to distance himself from the Parisian art scene and to take a time-out in Munich during the summer of 1912.[10] This spontaneous retreat would prove to be more than productive, even seminal. Skipping back and forth between his modest studio and the Neue Pinakothek, and purposely relying on his own eclectic vision as well as on the sterling achievements of art history, Duchamp made several sketches and two oil paintings, which show an entirely new quality. Thus Duchamp's Munich period demarcates not only the conclusion of his career as a painter or avant-gardist in the traditional sense, but also the starting point of a long history of gimmickries, experiments and objections with which he was to revolutionise art history.

Right from the start, Duchamp's Munich work was entirely devoted to the very subject which would henceforth be central to his multifaceted *oeuvre*: the so-called 'Bride', first mentioned in a sketch titled *Mechanism of Chastity / Mechanical Chastity (First Study for: The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors)*. And yet, as this Bride is invariably linked to the counterpart of a number of 'Bachelors' according to Duchamp's basic idea, it can be regarded as a 'subject' only in the ambivalent sense of an object of desire, agreement or dispute. This is what primarily becomes apparent with Duchamp's first Munich painting titled *The Passage from*

Marcel Duchamp, *The Passage from Virgin to Bride*, 1912, oil on canvas, 59.4 × 54 cm. Courtesy Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, 2016. Image copyright the Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence

Virgin to Bride. Whereas with his *Nude Descending a Staircase* Duchamp intended to represent an 'abstraction of movement' by an accumulation of static positions or terms, with *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* he aimed at transcending this chronological perspective while turning towards a completely different kind of movement in the broader sense of qualitative progress and becoming.

Indeed, with regard to *Passage* there is no point in trying to distinguish discrete positions or moments or to locate the two supposed subjects of the painting, 'Virgin' and 'Bride'. On the contrary, any attempt to stabilise the two figures would actually interfere with the crucial point of the painting. As Jonathan Crary aptly remarks, 'words like *virgin* and *bride* denote discrete, whole, and delimited entities, while *passage* describes something open, in process, and dynamic' in terms of 'a becoming that has no subject':

> Instead, within a framed and limited space, we have an active field of potentially infinite relationships, of floating elements, which resist being inserted into a structural logic. It is a 'field of freeplay,' where oppositions are not contradictions and where any form is free of any necessary relation to any other.[11]

Similarly, Robert Lebel, in his pioneering monograph on Duchamp, infers that *Passage* does not figure the Bride's 'loss of virginity', but rather the 'transformation of one form into another', pointing to Duchamp's interest in 'problems of psyche and the organic'.[12]

Whereas Crary and Lebel refer to Nietzsche and Freud in order to point to Duchamp's new-found primacy of becoming, they notably neglect the crucial role, much more obvious, assigned to Bergson's popular philosophy of evolution.[13] Significantly, in his literal bestseller *Creative Evolution*, first published in 1907 and awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1927, Bergson exemplified his radical critique of 'cinematographic thinking' by alluding to the problem that thought is necessarily based on a principle of discrimination. According to Bergson, concepts like 'child' or 'man' are 'mere views of the mind, *possible stops* [. . .] along the continuity of a progress'; 'if language were here molded on reality', Bergson argues, 'we should not say "The child becomes the man," but "There is becoming from the child to the man."'[14] In the first proposition, he explains, 'becomes' is nothing but a verb of indeterminate meaning, comparable to the uniform movement of a film, whose function is to superpose successive pictures in order to imitate real movement. But when we say 'There is becoming from the child to the man' (just as Duchamp stresses *The* Passage *from Virgin to Bride* – my emphasis), then 'becoming' comes to the front as a 'subject', referring to the reality of movement itself, and no longer to its cinematographic imitation.[15]

By analogy with Bergson's metaphor of cinematographic thinking, one is drawn to the conclusion that Duchamp's *Nude* does not figure an imitation, but in fact a cinematographic 'abstraction of movement'. At the same time, it seems that with his painting *Passage*, he made his first major step beyond the illusionary concept of a clearly defined subject as such. There is, therefore, every indication that in a next logical step, with his second Munich painting titled *Bride*, Duchamp definitely abandoned the specious concept of before and after, while all the more implying a concrete becoming and rite of passage, this time touching the outmoded idea of a former virgin and later wife. Thus, with Bergson it seems natural to argue that Duchamp's focus turned away from subjections and towards becoming once and for all. Consistently, with a sole exception, *Bride* was supposed to be Duchamp's last painting in the traditional sense.

Painting of Precision, Beauty of Indifference and Infrathin

Duchamp's next major project, which he took up as early as 1912 in order to implement it after he had arrived in New York in 1915 and to declare it 'definitively unfinished' in 1923,[16] was a deeply conceptual mixed-media work titled *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, also known as the *Large Glass*. Although this large-scale work is basically structured like a traditional painting, it opens an entirely new perspective due the fact that it lacks opacity in favour of a principle of transparency. Yet, in his corresponding notes, Duchamp designates this work as a 'painting', which he defines not merely as a 'picture on glass', but rather as 'a "delay in glass" as you would say a "poem in prose" or a "spittoon in silver".'[17] Pointing to Duchamp's conviction that, at the end of the day, 'the spectator makes the picture', Dalia Judovitz remarks that Duchamp introduces this notion of delay 'in terms of a deferral, a passage that postpones the pictorial becoming of painting', while, by using the medium of glass, he 'denies one of the signatory marks of painting, that of figure/ground relations'.[18]

To set a basis for this pictorial becoming, against the background of its transparency, the *Large Glass* is structured in three sections: the lower 'Bachelor's domain', featuring a complex mechanism organised in central perspective; the upper 'Bride's domain', dedicated to an organic-mechanical entity reflecting the concept or reality of the fourth dimension; and, last but not least, a central 'Horizon' or 'Bride's dress', ambivalently separating and linking those two domains.[19]

This threefold structure is more than illuminating with regard to Duchamp's decision to move on from subjections and towards becoming, for the master plan of the *Large Glass* casts a light on Duchamp's deeply novel concept of the image as such. In striking parallel to the theory of perception which Bergson put forth in his book

Matter and Memory in 1896,[20] the Bachelors symbolise the changing viewpoints of any individual entity, intentional subject or arbitrary spectator; the Bride allegorises a quasi-objective or universal 'intuition of duration', that is a mode of 'pure perception'; and the central Horizon or Bride's dress represents the semi-permeable medium of the intermediary image.

Moreover, the three sections of the *Glass* can in no way be understood statically or independently of each other. Actually, the contrary is the case. In compliance with Bergson's notions of intellect, intuition and imagination, Duchamp insists on the fact that they are specifically intertwined, emerging one way or another only in the context of ever-changing backgrounds and different possible approaches.

However, the new perspective of these different possible approaches does not only affect the meaning of the *Large Glass*, but Duchamp's attitude towards art in general. With his dichotomic methodical vocabulary, summarised in his formula 'painting of precision, and beauty of indifference',[21] Duchamp referred not only to his time-consuming work on the *Glass* as well as to a number of other elaborate works, but also to his diametrical concept of the 'ready-made', which, as Linda Dalrymple Henderson has pointed out, directly traces back to Bergson's popular essay on *Laughter*.[22] As a matter of fact, whereas Bergson refers to a stumbling man as an exemplary object of ridicule right at the outset of his argument,[23] in 1917, Duchamp seizes on the very same kind of situational humour, as Bert Jansen remarks, with a wall coat rack nailed to the floor of his studio and titled *Trébuchet (Trap)*, which literally means 'stumbling block'.[24]

To get an idea of Duchamp's manifold approaches to art, one might also invoke his Mona Lisa with retouched moustache and beard as well as the 'hot ass' connoted in its title *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919); his self-staging alias *Rrose Sélavy* (1921), in terms of a photo-montaged female alter ego who would finally function as author of several of his prospective works; a number of 'boxes' containing meticulous reproductions of his notes and miniatures of his works (1914–66); his quasi-metaphysical concept of 'infrathin' (*inframince*), first made public within the framework of a special issue of the art magazine *View* (1945);[25] his acephalous mannequin with a water tap on its leg, titled *Lazy Hardware* and dressing a shop window of a New York bookstore (1945); or, last but not least, his truly unsettling assemblage *Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas* (1946–66), conspicuously appearing as an homage not only to the Statue of Liberty, but also to Gustave Courbet's scandalous painting *The Origin of the World*, while seeming to subtly hint with his title at Bergson's pivotal concept of duration first unrolled in his *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*.[26]

In sum, it seems fair to say that with his methodical pluralism, Duchamp espouses that paradoxical 'method of intuition' which Bergson defined in terms of an approximation to the variability and fleetingness of reality in his famous *Introduction to Metaphysics* of 1903:

Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage . . .* (*Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas . . .*) (inside view), 1946–66, bricks, velvet, wood, parchment over an armature of lead, steel, brass, synthetic putties and adhesives, aluminium sheet, welded steel-wire screen and wood; Peg-Board, hair, oil paint, plastic, steel binder clips, plastic clothespins, twigs, leaves, glass, plywood, brass piano hinge, nails, screws, cotton, collotype prints, acrylic varnish, chalk, graphite, paper, cardboard, tape, pen ink, electric light fixtures, gas lamp (Bec Auer type), foam rubber, cork, electric motor, cookie tin and linoleum. Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art – Gift of the Cassandra Foundation. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Object Number 1969-41-1. Image copyright Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ Estate of Marcel Duchamp

> No image can replace the intuition of duration, but many diverse images, borrowed from very different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized. [. . .] By providing that, in spite of their differences of aspect, they all require from the mind the same kind of attention, [. . .] we shall gradually accustom consciousness to a particular and clearly-defined disposition – that precisely which it must adopt in order to appear to itself as it really is, without any veil.[27]

In terms of this 'clearly-defined disposition', which shall bring consciousness 'to appear to itself as it really is, without any veil', namely by the medium of images not only 'as dissimilar as possible', but also 'borrowed from very different orders of things', for obvious reasons one is tempted to think not only of Duchamp's ready-mades, but also of his chosen one, the Bride. Whereas the concept of the ready-made, as Thomas Zaunschirm has pointed out, is not least connected to the idea of free choice in the face of a pre-made object of desire, a 'ready maid',[28] the Bride with her highly dissimilar appearances just seems to shout for a counterpart in order to appear 'without any veil'. In view of his abstract painting, his enigmatical notes, his female alter ego, his alienated Mona Lisa, his acephalous mannequin or his seedy peepshow, for Duchamp

it is not merely beauty, but rather 'beauty of indifference' that lies in the eye of the beholder. Exemplarily, the correlation of Duchamp's method of 'precision painting' with this 'beauty of indifference' emerging from images 'as dissimilar as possible' and 'borrowed from very different orders of things' becomes plausible in view of the *Large Glass*. As Octavio Paz makes clear, the Bride with its manifold apparatuses and aspects, as opposed to the Bachelors, is characterised by a principle of transformation:

> The Bride is a 'wasp' who secretes by osmosis the essence (gasoline) of love. The wasp draws the necessary doses from her liquid tank. The tank is an 'oscillating bathtub' that provides for the Bride's hygiene, or, as Duchamp says somewhat cruelly, for her diet. In the *Given*, ideas become images, and the irony disappears: the tank is turned into the lake, and the 'wasp-motor' into the naked girl, creature of the waters. But the best example of these changes – from the liquid state to the gaseous or vice versa, equivalent to mutations of gender – is the Milky Way of the *Large Glass*, manifestation of the Bride in the moment when, as she is being stripped, she reaches the fullness of delight. The Milky Way is a cloud, a gaseous form that has been and will again be water. The cloud is desire before its crystallization; it is not the body but its ghost, the *idée fixe* that has ceased to be an idea and is not yet perceptible reality. Our erotic imagination ceaselessly produces clouds, phantoms. The cloud is the veil that reveals more than it hides, the place where forms are dissipated and born anew. It is the metamorphosis, and for this reason, in the *Large Glass*, it is the manifestation of the threefold joy of the Bride as she is stripped bare: ultrarapid instantaneous communication between the machine state and that of the Milky Way.[29]

In the light of her hazy appearance, the Bride seems to be predestined to be associated with Bergson's postulate of the hidden nature of duration, virtually emerging by 'intuition', or, to put it with Duchamp, by 'precision painting, and beauty of indifference', combined with an aspiration of 'infrathin'. Thus one can infer that Duchamp's methodic approach goes with those three basic rules that are fundamental to Bergson's method of intuition according to Gilles Deleuze. Rule one, 'the stating and creating of problems', could be defined as the aim of 'precision painting'; rule two, 'the discovery of genuine differences in kind', as a result of 'infrathin'; and rule three, 'the apprehension of real time', as a contingent manifestation of 'beauty of indifference'.[30]

What if Creation Precedes Theory?

What can we learn if we look at Duchamp's art through Bergsonian glasses, with a view to highlighting potential correspondences or interferences between their works? Does it make sense to speak of an immediate influence of, or reference to, Bergson's

philosophy in terms of Duchamp's highly eclectic *oeuvre*? Is it not more likely that Duchamp's recourse to Bergson is but one of myriads of reference points essentially characterising his work?

Yes and no. On the one hand, it obviously does not make sense to argue that Duchamp's *oeuvre* would not be conceivable beyond the scope of Bergson's philosophy, but, on the other hand, it would be just as disproportionate to reduce Bergson's impact to only one random factor among many. After all, Bergson's philosophy can be viewed not merely as a *paradigmatic manifestation of* that particular zeitgeist of which Duchamp, once that he had emancipated himself from the paradigms of historical avant-gardism, would manage to stay ahead. Rather, Bergson's philosophy can be viewed as an ideal-typical *instrument to transcend* that zeitgeist, which actually proved to be less open-minded than it appeared to be. Note that Bergson, in an interview given in 1911, vehemently objected to the Puteaux Cubists' claim to theoretically reinforce their artistic work by saying: 'For the arts I would prefer genius, and you?'[31]

In view of Bergson's conservative attitude towards art, which is beyond debate,[32] one can proceed on the assumption that he would most certainly have objected to Duchamp's experimental approach as well. But at the same time, in retrospect it seems quite likely that he would still have had to concede one significant advantage to it. With regard to Duchamp's work, it would eventually be far too simplistic to argue 'that theory precedes creation', for, on closer inspection, rather the reverse is true. Even though Duchamp was intent on referring to theories, he would always make a point of doing so playfully, which is arbitrarily. Whether Duchamp, subtly hinting towards the iron/ironical laws of anarchism, defined himself as an 'an-artist' or as a 'respirator', as a chess player, a player on words, or as *Rrose Sélavy*, his art basically defies stringent definition and is in no way overly intellectual, but rather hedonistic and lambent and as such literally drawn from life.

Hence it is scarcely by mere coincidence that simultaneously with Duchamp's late success within the contexts of minimalism, pop art, Fluxus, happenings and conceptual art, neo-Bergsonism emerged as a new field of critical reflection, featuring an entirely new generation of images. In other words, if poststructuralist and postmodernist philosophies are characterised by an emphasis on the notions of processuality, discontinuity, heterogeneity, subtlety and self-organisation, which obviously trace back to Bergson, this focus can equally be observed in the fine arts from the 1960s onwards in terms of minimalist, conceptual, performative or seemingly trivial practices coevally tracing back to Duchamp. Thus one can safely say that Bergson's and Duchamp's works have a similar direction of impact, namely in terms of a primacy of immanence that can dawn on the recipient at best by means of perpetual re-enactment, or, to put it another way, of deliberate speculation.

Duchamp explicitly referred to this kind of approach in a lecture given in 1957 by pointing to a fundamental difference between what an artist intends to realise and what he or she actually does realise. Thus defining the artist as 'a mediumistic being' whose decisions in the creative act 'rest with pure intuition', Duchamp revealingly invoked a so-called 'art coefficient' being immanent in each work of art, and proving to be the decisive factor for its life and afterlife.[33]

From this perspective, when it comes to the specific 'art coefficient' contained in Duchamp's work, it may well be that he never intended to realise a kind of art which could potentially be described within Bergsonian terms. But what he did realise with his disparate *oeuvre* is not only an ideal-typical point of origin for ever-changing interpretations and future trends featuring a primacy of becoming, but also a new, surprisingly positive image of the ready-made, which is peculiarly apt to cast a new light on Bergson's philosophy.

Whereas Bergson devalued the ready-made to revalue the singularity of intuition, it was left to Duchamp to revalue 'The Idea of Fabrication', first mentioned in his *Box of 1914*, in terms of a primacy of concept to which realisation is only subsidiary. In practice, this idea refers to *3 Standard Stoppages, an experiment on 'canned chance' which Duchamp put into practice in 1913 by dropping three straight horizontal threads, each one metre long, from a height of one metre onto a horizontal plane in order to create 'a new image of the unit of length', 'casting a pataphysical doubt on the concept of a straight line as being the shortest route from one point to another'.*[34] Accordingly, it seems natural that Duchamp came up with the idea of using chance as 'a means of depersonalising all decisions pertaining to form', as Herbert Molderings remarks with reference to a range of experimental strategies that he developed in the context of his magnum opus:

> In the hypothetical world of the *Large Glass*, it is chance that determines measure and form; it determines the geometry of the happenings in the domain of the *bride* and in the *bachelor machine*. Its presence is threefold and operates on three different levels: point, line and surface. 'Wind – for the draft pistons / Skill – for the holes / Weight – for the standard stops / to be developed,' Duchamp writes in one of his notes in the *Green Box*.[35]

Likewise, it was also left to Duchamp to revalue manufactured goods themselves by defining them as art with his ready-mades, for which he offered some precise conditions of production shortly after he arrived in New York in 1915. In one of his notes of that time, published in the *Green Box* of 1934, Duchamp remarkably considered the possibility to create a ready-made in terms of a 'rendezvous', that is by 'planning for a moment to come (on such a day, such a date, such a minute), "to

inscribe a readymade'", which 'can later be looked for (with all delays).'[36] In fact, as he made a number of ready-mades according to this variant idea of fabrication, Duchamp even went to the lengths of inscribing an apparently meaningless text, an abstract piece of prose, on four postcards, which he arranged into a work addressed to his patrons Walter and Louise Arensberg and titled *Rendezvous of Sunday, February 6, 1916.*[37]

Duchamp's ready-mades can thus be understood in terms of a rendezvous with the unforeseen of duration by means of an intentional recourse to the very 'immediate data of consciousness' that Bergson had invoked in terms of an apprehension of real time or duration (*durée*). By implication, Duchamp's concept of the ready-made seems to refer not least to that controversial method of 'intuition', which Bergson had defined in terms of a foundation of his philosophy in his famous Bologna lecture of 1911:

> What is this intuition? If the philosopher has not been able to give the formula for it, we certainly are not able to do so. But what we shall manage to recapture and to hold is a certain intermediary image between the simplicity of the concrete intuition and the complexity of the abstractions which translate it, a receding and vanishing image, which haunts, unperceived perhaps, the mind of the philosopher, which follows him like his shadow through the ins and outs of his thought and which, if it is not the intuition itself, approaches it much more closely than the conceptual expression, of necessity symbolical, to which the intuition must have recourse in order to furnish 'explanation'. [. . .] What first of all characterizes this image is the power of *negation* it possesses. [. . .] It seems to me that intuition often behaves in speculative matters like the demon of Socrates in practical life; it is at least in this form that it begins, in this form also that it continues to give the most clear-cut manifestations: it forbids. Faced with currently accepted ideas, theses which seemed evident, affirmations which had up to that time passed as scientific, it whispers into the philosopher's ear the word: *Impossible!*[38]

Impossible! That is what Duchamp's inner demon might have whispered as well when he made up his mind to refrain from that unquestioned glorification of Bergson's philosophy, in other words from that questionable Bergsonism which was the order of the day in avant-garde circles in 1912. And if so, that might be one of the reasons that in a countermovement, in one of his cryptic notes of 1913, he projected a:

> Possible | *The figuration of a possible.* | (not as the opposite of impossible | nor as related to probable | nor as subordinated to likely) | The *possible* is only | a physical 'caustic' {vitriol type} | burning up all aesthetics or callistics.[39]

As he conceived the physical 'caustic' of his art in terms of a 'Possible without the slightest grain of ethics of *aesthetics* and of metaphysics', as another note dating back to 1913 reveals, Duchamp also considered it necessary to raise the question: 'The physical Possible? yes, but which physical Possible. rather hypophysical',[40] while adding in another note: 'The possible is | an infrathin [. . .] implying | the becoming – the passage from | one to the other takes place | in the infrathin. | allegory on "forgetting"'.[41] Against this background, it makes sense that he conceived '*The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*: to separate the *ready-made, wholesale* from the *ready found*', not least stressing that 'The separation is an operation.'[42]

Unsurprisingly, when Denis de Rougement – who had presented his book *Talk of the Devil* in a New York window display designed by Duchamp in 1943 – asked him 'What is genius?' in 1945, Duchamp would answer with one of his puns, pointing not only to the mentioned 'impossibility of iron' (*impossibilité de fer*) as contrasted with his predilection for irony, but also to the resonating impossibility of making (*impossibilité de faire*) as against the possibility of letting things happen.[43] Thus one can hypothesise that Duchamp related to Bergson's method of intuition like he chose a number of ready-mades, which is in terms of an open-ended rendezvous with a *ready-found* philosophy serving as an ideal point of departure for his subversive *oeuvre*.

Diagonal Science and Philosophy of Art

Against the background of this open-ended involvement, it is clear that an interconnection between Bergson's and Duchamp's works is to be seen not so much in the sense of an assertive recourse as in the sense of an oblique reference. Hence, Duchamp's approach can be described by analogy with that theory of 'diagonal science' which the French philosopher and writer Roger Caillois finally outlined in 1959 after implicitly pursuing it in his own work since he had turned his back on surrealism and its glorification of the irrational in the mid-1930s.[44] 'When it comes to rigorous investigation', Caillois writes in 1970 with reference to his transdisciplinary approach, 'genius almost always involves borrowing a proven method or fruitful hypothesis and using it in a field where no one had previously imagined that it could be applied.'[45] Whereas he approves that the 'evolution of science partly lies in the progress of its own classifications', Caillois points out that the fundamental 'problem is that specialization encourages scientists to penetrate ever more deeply in the same direction, making it harder for them to discover, observe, or imagine revolutionary perspectives.'[46] In favour of these new perspectives, implying the possibility to perceive or suspect 'the coherent picture that would give unity and meaning to the whole',[47] Caillois thus makes the case for his concept of 'diagonal sciences':

> These sciences bridge the older disciplines and force them to engage in dialogue. They seek to make out the single legislation uniting scattered and seemingly unrelated phenomena. Slicing obliquely through our common world, they decipher latent complicities and reveal neglected correlations. They wish for and seek to further a form of knowledge that would first involve the workings of a bold imagination and be followed, then, by strict controls, all the more necessary insofar as such audacity tries to establish ever riskier transversal paths. Such a network of shortcuts seems ever more indispensable today among the many, isolated outposts spread out along the periphery, without internal lines of communication – which is the site of fruitful research.[48]

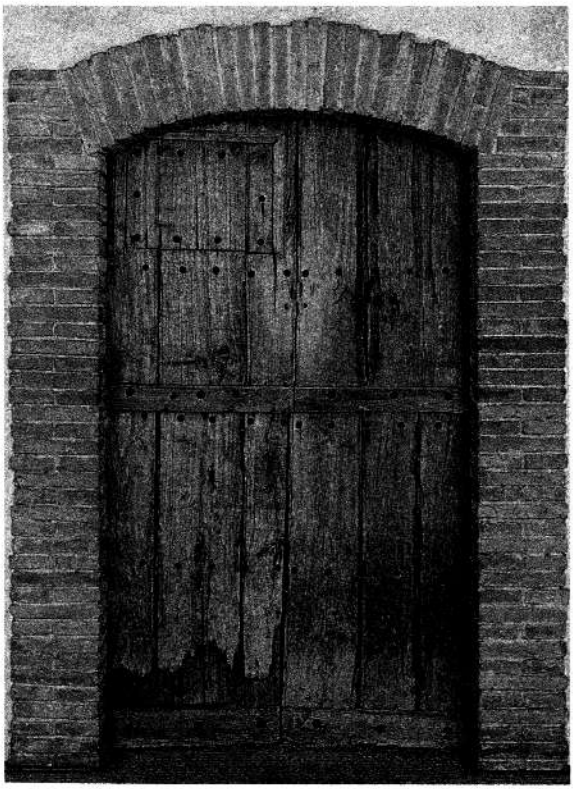
Now that the present essay suggests establishing a transversal dialogue between Bergson's philosophy of intuition and the physical 'caustic' of Duchamp's art, it is of peculiar interest that Caillois's attempt to promote a kind of knowledge that would go along with 'the workings of a bold imagination' was not least inspired by his perception of their antagonistic positions. Already in 1938, in one of his early diagonal essays, Caillois referred to that specific 'myth-making faculty' (*fonction fabulatrice*) which Bergson had introduced in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* in 1932.[49] Stating that mythical representation functions like '*a quasi-hallucinatory image*' able to 'provoke, in the absence of instinct, the behavior that instinct itself would have triggered,'[50] he associates it with a faculty to reveal some of the neglected correlations to which he would later refer in terms of his diagonal approach. And still in 1970, as he united 'texts as diverse as one could imagine' just as if 'a demon had pushed him' in his anthology *Cases d'un échiquier* [Spaces on a Chessboard],[51] Caillois referred to Duchamp as one of the great 'liberators of imagination', pointing to his highly specialised book on chess, *L'opposition et les cases conjuguées sont réconciliées* [Opposition and Sister Squares Are Reconciled], which had fascinated him since its publication in 1932 as he considered that it could 'provide a key to the entire activity of the author.'[52] Moreover, Caillois's interest in Duchamp is emphatically reflected in an essay on 'Figurative and Non Figurative "Painting" in Nature and Art', which he published alongside of his first plea for 'diagonal sciences' in 1959.[53] After opening his argument with reference to the wings of a butterfly, suggesting that their chatoyant surfaces seem to represent something like the 'ready-made work' of a painter,[54] Caillois draws upon a range of nineteenth-century Chinese artists, who, 'instead of painting, contented themselves with slicing slabs of marble, framing them, titling them, signing them and presenting them as such to the public, as if it were a matter of veritable paintings', in order to come to the conclusion which just seems obvious from a present-day perspective:

> Duchamp's audacity signifies that the essential lies in the responsibility taken by the artist by putting his signature on any object which he has or has not made, but

> which he masterfully makes his own as he uncovers it as an oeuvre able to provoke, exactly like a master's painting, the artistic emotion.[55]

Likewise, Caillois's own scientific research was motivated by a fundamental bias against the abstract language of philosophy in favour of a downright interest in 'every eyewink of reality and imagination' (not to cite Bergson's with his 'immediate data of consciousness'), which he would particularly recognise in everyday objects or phenomena like insects, stones, dreams, myths, the images of a poetic language or the bold activities of heart and mind.[56] Thus it is arguable that with his heterogeneous *oeuvre*, Caillois drew back, just like Duchamp did and as Bergson would put it, to 'many diverse images', belonging to 'very different orders of things', which might coincide in order to 'direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized.'[57]

Beyond the horizon of traditional art historical practice and its prevailing haptophobia with more experimental, subjectivist or historicist methods, what we have already begun to learn from Duchamp could be further established with Bergson and Caillois. An advanced philosophy of art would thus be one that combines the potentialities of intuition and a bold imagination with the need for precision and strict controls.[58] Finally, in the light of that 'logic of the imaginary' which Caillois brought onto the scene with his diagonal sciences,[59] art and its attendant histories and theories are no longer about substantive messages, but



Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage . . .* (*Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas . . .*) (outside view), 1946–66, wooden door, iron nails, bricks and stucco. Courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art – Gift of the Cassandra Foundation. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Object Number. 1969-41-1. Image copyright Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Estate of Marcel Duchamp

rather about questioning their contingent effects and affects upon a particular environment or beholder. By means of a transversal approach, an advanced philosophy of art might thus have to deal with unstoppable transformations of dominant structures of knowledge, outpacing self-referential interpretations in favour of a blooming field of reciprocal actions and attractions, which can be cultivated by anyone willing to join the game. In view of that promising perspective, which can be derived from the philosophies of Bergson, Duchamp and Caillois, finally it might be most productive not to let oneself get carried away with their *élan vital* or waterfall flow, but to take an independent stand against the impressiveness of their illuminating gaze.

Notes

1. Cf. François Azouvi, *La gloire de Bergson. Essai sur le magistère philosophique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), pp. 218–34; Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); *Bergson and the Art of Immanence: Painting, Photography, Film*, ed. John Mullarkey and Charlotte de Mille (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013); Mary Ann Gillies, *Henri Bergson and British Modernism* (Montreal and Buffalo: McGill Queen's University Press, 1996); Hilary L. Fink, *Bergson and Russian Modernism, 1900–1930* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999); Francesca Talpo, 'Der Futurismus und Henri Bergsons Philosophie der Intuition', in *Der Lärm der Straße. Italienischer Futurismus 1909–1918*, ed. Norbert Nobis (Hanover and Milan: Sprengel Museum Hannover, 2001), pp. 59–71; et al.
2. A detailed analysis of this correlation is included in my doctoral dissertation near conclusion with the working title: *Bildtopologie. Spielräume des Imaginären nach Henri Bergson und Marcel Duchamp.*
3. See Pierre Cabanne, *Gespräche mit Marcel Duchamp* (Cologne: Galerie Der Spiegel, 1972), p. 31.
4. Cf. Henri Matisse, 'Notes d'un Peintre', *La Grande Revue*, II, 24 (25 December 1908): 731–45; Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'Manifeste du Futurisme', *Le Figaro*, 51 (20 February 1909): 1; Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, *Du 'Cubisme'* (Paris: Figuière, 1912).
5. One of Duchamp's notes to the *Large Glass* is titled 'The Fork' (1915), cf. Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 2000), p. 629.
6. See Clement Greenberg, 'Counter-Avant-Garde' [1971], in *Marcel Duchamp in Perspective*, ed. Joseph Masheck (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), pp. 122–33 (pp. 123–4): 'The Futurists discovered avant-gardeness, but it was left to Duchamp to create what I call avant-gard*ism*. In a few short years after 1912 he laid down the precedents for everything that advanced-advanced art has done in the fifty-odd years since.

[...] With avant-gardism, the shocking, scandalizing, startling, the mystifying and confounding, became embraced as ends in themselves and no longer regretted as initial side-effects of artistic newness that would wear off with familiarity.'

7. Cf. Calvin Tomkins, *Marcel Duchamp. Eine Biographie* (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1999), pp. 98–101.
8. Incidentally, his *Nude* would anyway become one of the most conspicuous works of contemporary art as soon as it provoked a public scandal at the New York Armory Show in 1913.
9. *Marcel Duchamp: Interviews und Statements*, ed. Serge Stauffer (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 1992), p. 18.
10. Cf. *Marcel Duchamp in München 1912*, ed. Helmut Friedel, Thomas Girst, Matthias Mühling and Felicia Rappe (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012); Rudolf Herz, *Marcel Duchamp. Le Mystère de Munich* (Munich: Moser Verlag, 2012).
11. Jonathan Crary, 'Marcel Duchamp's *The Passage from Virgin to Bride*', *Arts Magazine*, 51 (January 1977): 96–9 (pp. 98–9).
12. Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (Cologne: DuMont, 1972), pp. 28–9.
13. In 1958, in an interview with Laurence S. Gold, Duchamp stated: 'I agree that in so far as they recognize the primacy of change in life I am influenced by Bergson and Nietzsche. Change and life are synonymous. We must realize this and accept it. Change is what makes life interesting. There is no progress, change is all we know.' Quoted in *Marcel Duchamp: Interviews und Statements*, p. 67 [trans. author].
14. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005), p. 257.
15. Cf. Ibid. pp. 257–8.
16. Cf. *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry de Duve (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1991).
17. *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Elmer Peterson and Michel Sanouillet (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 26.
18. Dalia Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp: Art in Transit* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998), p. 60.
19. For a detailed analysis of the structure of the *Large Glass*, see Jean Suquet, *Miroir de la Mariée* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974), *LE GRAND VERRE: Visite guide* (Paris: L'Échoppe, 1992); Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, pp. 141–6 et al.
20. Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire. Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1896) / *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and William Scott Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1990).
21. *Marcel Duchamp. Die Schriften. Band 1: Zu Lebzeiten veröffentlichte Texte*, ed. Serge Stauffer (Zurich: Regenbogen-Verlag, 1981), p. 95.
22. Henri Bergson, *Le Rire. Essai sur la signification du comique* (Paris: Alcan, 1900) / *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred

Rothwell (New York: Macmillan, 1911). See: Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 63. Incidentally, Henderson also refers to cubist theory in this context: 'Indeed, Duchamp's detached, mechanical practice and his name for it, Readymade, place these works directly in opposition to Bergsonian Cubist theory and painting.' Henderson, *Duchamp in Context*, p. 63.

23. See Bergson, *Laughter*, p. 8.
24. See Bert Jansen, 'Marcel Duchamp: De schoonheid van indifferentie', *Jong Holland*, 21, 2 (2005): 10–18.
25. *View: The Modern Magazine*, Marcel Duchamp Number, series V, no. 1 (March 1945). Cf. also Duchamp's ephemeral notes on infrathin in: Marcel Duchamp, *Notes*, ed. Paul Matisse (Paris: Flammarion, 1999), pp. 19–47.
26. Henri Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris: Alcan, 1889) / *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. Frank Lubecki Pogson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1910).
27. Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Thomas Ernest Hulme (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), pp. 27–8. First publication: 'Introduction à la métaphysique', *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* (29 January 1903): 1–36.
28. Cf. Thomas Zaunschirm, *Bereites Mädchen Ready-made* (Klagenfurt: Ritter, 1983).
29. Octavio Paz, *Marcel Duchamp: Appearance Stripped Bare*, trans. Donald Gardner and Rachel Phillips (New York: Arcade, 1990), p. 112.
30. Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (New York: Zone Books, 1990), p. 14.
31. Maurice Verne, 'Un jour de pluie chez M. Bergson', interview with Henri Bergson, *L'Intransigeant*, 11456 (26 November 1911): 1, quoted in: Mark Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*, p. 3.
32. In 1913 Bergson stated: 'Je déclare que je ne saurais approuver les formes révolutionnaires dans l'art.' See Villanova, 'Celui qui ignore les cubistes', *L'Éclair* (29 June 1913), quoted in Azouvi, *La gloire de Bergson*, pp. 226–7.
33. See Marcel Duchamp, 'The Creative Act', lecture given by Duchamp within the scope of a convention of the American Federation of Arts in Houston, Texas in April 1957, in *Art News*, 56, 4 (Summer 1957): 28–9.
34. Marcel Duchamp quoted in *MARCEL DUCHAMP*, ed. Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (New York: Prestel, 1989), pp. 273–4. In a note that he added to his *Box of 1914*, Duchamp states: '*The Idea of Fabrication*: If a straight horizontal thread one meter long falls from a height of one meter straight onto a horizontal plane twisting *as it pleases* and creates a new image of the unit of length. / 3 patterns obtained in more or less similar conditions: *considered in their relation to one another* they are an *approximate reconstruction* of the measure of length. / The *3 standard stoppages* are the meter diminished.' Quoted in Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, p. 595.

35. Herbert Molderings, *Duchamp and the Aesthetics of Chance: Art As Experiment*, trans. John V. Brogden (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), ebook.
36. Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp du signe. Écrits*, ed. Michel Sanouillet (Paris: Flammarion, 2005), p. 49.
37. *Rendez-vous du Dimanche 6 Février 1916 (à 1h ¾ après midi)* not least reveals some striking correspondences with the theme of the *Large Glass*, see Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, pp. 190–4.
38. Henri Bergson, 'Philosophical Intuition', in Bergson, *Key Writings*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey (New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 233–47 (pp. 234–5).
39. Duchamp, *Duchamp du signe*, p. 104 [trans. author].
40. Ibid. p. 51.
41. Ibid. p. 21.
42. Ibid. p. 41.
43. See *Marcel Duchamp: Interviews und Statements*, p. 32.
44. As for Caillois's dissociation of surrealism, see: Roger Caillois, 'Letter to André Breton' [1934], in *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader*, ed. Claudine Frank (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 84–6; Claudine Frank, 'Introduction to "Letter to André Breton" and "Literature in Crisis"', in *The Edge of Surrealism*, pp. 82–4; and Roger Caillois, *Procès intellectuel de l'art* (Marseille: Les Cahiers du Sud, 1935). Caillois's concept of 'diagonal sciences' traces back to an article that he published under the title 'Après six ans d'un combat douteux', *Diogène*, 25 (April–June 1959) and which he incorporated into *Méduse et Cie* under the title 'Sciences diagonales' in 1960. See Roger Caillois, 'Nouveau plaidoyer pour les sciences diagonales', in *Cases d'un échiquier* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), pp. 53–9 (p. 53, note 1).
45. Caillois, 'A New Plea for Diagonal Science', in *The Edge of Surrealism*, pp. 343–7 (p. 344).
46. Ibid. pp. 344–5.
47. Ibid. p. 344.
48. Ibid. p. 347.
49. Caillois, 'The Function of Myth', in *The Edge of Surrealism*, pp. 113–23 (p. 115). First published under the title 'La fonction du mythe', in *Le mythe et l'homme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), pp. 13–32. Cf. Henri Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (Paris: Alcan, 1932).
50. Caillois, 'The Function of Myth', p. 117.
51. See Roger Caillois, 'Préface', in *Cases d'un échiquier*, pp. 7–11 (p. 8): 'En hommage un peu ironique à cette dispersion fondamentale, je réunis ici les textes les plus divers qui se puissent concevoir: un démon, tant je crains qu'ils ne jurent ensemble, me pousse à le mettre à l'épreuve et à vérifier qu'ils s'accordent.'
52. Roger Caillois, 'L'Imagination rigoureuse' [1968], in *Cases d'un échiquier*, pp. 34–46

(pp. 43–4). Cf. Marcel Duchamp and Vitali Halberstadt, *L'opposition et les cases conjuguées sont réconciliées* (Paris and Brussels: Éditions de l'Échiquier, 1932).

53. Roger Caillois, 'Natura Pictrix. Notes sur la "peinture" figurative et non figurative dans la nature et dans l'art', in *Oeuvres*, pp. 501–8; first published in *Cahiers du Musée de poche*, 1 (March 1959); republished in *Méduse et Cie*. As for Caillois's first plea for 'digaonal sciences', cf. above, note 44.

54. See Caillois, 'Natura Pictrix', p. 501: 'Que l'aile des papillons soit ou non ce qui ressemble le plus à un tableau, il faut avouer que l'historie de la peinture ne révèle aucune préférence spéciale des peintres pour ces surfaces chatoyantes, où leur travail paraît tout fait. [. . .] Je constate cette abstention sans la commenter. Je soupçonne seulement qu'elle vient du fait que l'aile est déjà perçue comme tableau, de sorte que la peindre serait moins représenter la nature que dédoubler une œuvre.'

55. Ibid. p. 506 [trans. author].

56. See Roger Caillois, 'Préface', in *Cases d'un échiquier*, p. 7: 'Le langage philosophique me rebute. [. . .] Au cours de discussions abstraites, il m'arrive, comme on dit, de regarder une mouche voler, ce qui n'est le signe d'un esprit ni tendu ni entendu. Au fait, j'ai été justement intéressé par les mouches qui volent (au moins par les scarabées et les papillons), par les cailloux, les images de la poésie, les rêves, les mythes, les démarches hasardeuses du cœur ou de l'esprit, en un mot par tout clignement d'œil du réel et de l'imaginaire.'

57. Cf. above, note 27.

58. Cf. Henri Bergson, 'Introduction (première partie)', in *La pensée et le mouvant. Essais et conférences* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), pp. 1–23 (p. 1): 'Ce qui a le plus manqué à la philosophie, c'est la précision. Les systèmes philosophiques ne sont pas taillés à la mesure de la réalité où nous vivons. Ils sont trop larges pour elle. Examinez tel d'entre eux, convenablement choisi: vous verrez qu'il s'appliquerait aussi bien à un monde où il n'y aurait pas de plantes ni d'animaux, rien que des hommes; où les hommes se passeraient de boire et de manger; où ils ne dormiraient, ne rêveraient ni ne divagueraient; où ils naîtraient décrépits pour finir nourrissons; où l'énergie remonterait la pente de la dégradation; où tout irait à rebours et se tiendrait à l'envers. C'est qu'un vrai système est un ensemble de conceptions si abstraites, et par conséquent si vastes, qu'on y ferait tenir tout le possible, et même de l'impossible, à côté du réel.'

59. Cf. Roger Caillois, *La Pieuvre: Essai sur la logique de l'imaginaire* (Paris: La Table ronde, 1973).