

Painting at the Time of its Fall // The Invention of the Readymade

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Nicholas Lee, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own.
Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

This thesis provides an historical and theoretical account of Marcel Duchamp's position in the canon of avant-garde French painting. It argues that Duchamp's work responds to the epistemological conditions of its time, that Duchamp - unable to fully escape the trappings of the lyrical mode to which he is heir - makes work through an idiomatic language which is also a language that can be said to name the world, to participate in knowledge of it. As an inevitable by-product of this line of argument, it also proposes that painting, as a visual form (language), can no longer fulfil this task. The study therefore offers an account of the decline of European easel painting seen through the lens of the decline of traditional metaphysics as identified by Nietzsche, Adorno and Broch. The readymade is seen to occupy a unique place within this specifically European development.

The study begins with an examination of the implications of the *fin de siècle* problem of language and of lyricism as expressed by Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Letter of Lord Chandos* (1902). It then turns to Hermann Broch's interpretation of this work and his subsequent arguments concerning the relation of aesthetics and ethics. The thesis proceeds by analysing works by Manet, Cézanne, Picasso and Braque before moving onto an exploration of Duchamp's work, with particular attention paid to the 'invention' of the readymade as a response to the same set of problems faced by other visual artists of the time (and tradition). It proposes that the history of avant-garde French painting be seen more broadly as a history of lyricism (in its aesthetic and ethical function) and that Duchamp's work, far from operating outside of that tradition, exists within it and employs linguistic forms that are appropriate to both the epistemological and material conditions of his time.

The study enacts the writing *in* of Duchamp from the perspective of the French tradition from which he emerged and not through the filter of the American 'avant-gardes' and speculative sexual-psychoanalytical models that followed.

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Philosophy and art converge in their truth content: The progressive self-unfolding truth of the artwork is none other than the truth of the philosophical concept. With good reason, idealism historically – in Schelling – derived its one concept of truth from art. The closed yet internally dynamic totality of idealist systems was read out of artworks.¹

(Theodor W. Adorno, 1969)

I ask you to review and scrutinize whatever is natural – all the actions and desires of the purely natural man: you will find nothing but frightfulness. Everything beautiful and noble is the result of reason and calculation. Crime, of which the human animal has learned the taste in his mother's womb, is natural by origin. Virtue, on the other hand, is artificial, super-natural, since at all times and in all places gods and prophets have been needed to teach it to animalised humanity, man being powerless to discover it by himself. Evil happens without effort, naturally, fatally; Good is always the product of some art.²

(Charles Baudelaire, 1863)

This world needs photography, but has almost no need for painting.³

(Jean-François Lyotard, 1988)

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¹ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), 130.

² Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans.

² Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 2003), 32.

³ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (The Polity Press: Cambridge, 1991), 119.

Introduction

This thesis examines Marcel Duchamp's (1887-1968) abandonment of painting in the context of his position in the history of the French modernist avant-garde.

It seeks to make the case for the understanding of this rejection through an examination of the historical forces and epistemological shifts which undermine the traditional relation of the painted image to the world. In this way the study makes an epistemological argument for the identity of the readymade as a work of art and at the same time for the inability of the painted image to 'picture' the world and in so doing reflect human understanding of it.

In order to make this case the thesis relies primarily on the concept of the lyrical function of the work of art as a theoretical framework through which the relation of visual art to metaphysics can be examined. The concept is traced in the work of Theodor W. Adorno, Hermann Broch and derived primarily from Friedrich Nietzsche in the *Birth of Tragedy* (1872). The concept of 'lyrical painting' is also a theoretical trend running through the 19th Century (and early 20th Century) understanding of French painting as is demonstrated in my chapters on Manet, Cézanne and cubism. It informs the way in which artists and critics understand the role and purpose of the work of art within a more general structure of knowledge of the world. In this context, the work of art is seen, at its zenith, as a framing of the relation between humanity and nature, as a manifestation of the putative unity between these two realms – the site of the abatement of their difference. The lyric function of the work of art is also understood as a profoundly ethical effect

in which the dissolution of the individual ego leads to a sense of universality, of 'oneness' with all other beings. Adorno accordingly, in "Lyric Poetry and Society" (1954/57) describes lyrical expression, in its ideal form, as 'the voice of men between whom the barriers have fallen.'⁴ As suggested above, this concept derives from a principle of unity which is articulated by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

The images of the *lyrist* are nothing but *his very self* and, as it were, only different projections of himself, so he, as the moving center of this world, may say "I": of course, this self is not the same as that of the waking, empirically real man, but the only truly existent and eternal self resting at the basis of things, through whose images the lyric genius sees this very basis.⁵

In this work Nietzsche explicitly relates this process to the 'Dionysian,' in its opposition to the 'Apollonian' realm of science and logic.

Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man.⁶

Through the Dionysian we are supposedly made aware of 'the fundamental knowledge of the oneness of everything existent, the conception of individuation as the primal cause of evil, and of art as the joyous hope that the spell of individuation may be broken in augury of a restored oneness.'⁷ And this presentation of metaphysical 'truth' is to be understood as a preserve of lyricism:

The sphere of poetry does not lie outside the world as a fantastic impossibility spawned by a poet's brain: it desires to be just the opposite, the unvarnished expression of the truth, and must precisely for that reason discard the mendacious finery of that alleged reality of the man of culture.⁸

⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, "Lyric Poetry and Society". *Telos* no. 20 (1974), 71.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 50.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

For Nietzsche, then, the knowledge acquired through the Apollonian realm of rationality, science and reason is opposed to that which is provided by art:

Science, spurred by its powerful illusion, speeds irresistibly towards its limits where its optimism, concealed in the essence of logic, suffers shipwreck. For the periphery of the circle of science has an infinite number of points; and while there is no telling how this circle could ever be surveyed completely, noble and gifted men nevertheless reach, e'er half their time and inevitably, such boundary points on the periphery from which one gazes into what defies illumination. When they see to their horror how logic coils up at these boundaries and finally bites its own tail – suddenly the new form of insight breaks through, *tragic insight* which, merely to be endured needs art as a protection and remedy.⁹

Here a faith in art is expressed which counts upon the metaphysical imprint of ‘primordial unity’ within the work of art. In this context the lyrical work of art expresses knowledge of the world which cannot be attained, let alone expressed by the positivistic sciences. Nietzsche also implies that the work of art exists in order to assuage the terror of logic turned against itself, to counteract the (specifically Nietzschean) nihilism that results from this process. For Nietzsche, as for Adorno and Broch subsequently, the lyric function of the work of art is metaphysical.

At its height, a true work of art – for all three thinkers – becomes totality, is the form by which unity can be achieved. That this unity is a metaphysical absolute is testament to the perseverance of metaphysical speculation in the face of each author’s declaration of metaphysical decline.

For Georges Bataille, writing in *On Nietzsche* (1945), Nietzsche’s work tussles with one basic problem – the problem of the whole human being: ‘fundamentally, an entire human being is simply a being in whom transcendence has been abolished.’¹⁰ A being for whom metaphysics has indeed become satisfactorily obsolete – a state of affairs attainable by none of the artists or thinkers here discussed.

⁹ Ibid., 97.

¹⁰ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. Bruce Boon (London: The Athlone Press, 1992), xxix.

It is helpful to note that Bataille sees Nietzsche's writing within the context of the work of art that aspires to unity, to a totality of knowledge: 'not a word of Nietzsche's work can be understood without *experiencing* that dazzling dissolution into totality, without living it out. Beyond that, this philosophy is just a maze of contradictions.'¹¹ It is in this reflection on Nietzsche's writing that Bataille reveals one of the conditions of perception and understanding that will be fundamental to this study. The affect of the lyric mode, its resonance, the very sensation and act of perception that warrants its metaphysical import must be *experienced* by the viewer/reader of the works here discussed. Indeed without the supposedly unique quality of this experience then nothing this study says will make any sense to the reader. All of its points of reference will slip out of intellectual reach, its concepts will seem to have no substance, the names it uses, the signs employed, will seem to have no referent. By their very nature, the referents can only be inner experiences.

It may be helpful, therefore, to those for whom this variety of experience is not only rarefied, but perhaps entirely unknown, to consider that Sigmund Freud, whilst confessing that he knew absolutely nothing of it, termed this variety of feeling 'oceanic' – 'a sense of eternity, a feeling of something limitless... a feeling of being indissolubly bound up with and belonging to the whole of the world outside oneself.'¹² In short, Freud is describing something akin to the feeling of unity produced by the lyrical work of art (the Dionysian in Nietzsche). This lyric function is simply a way by which a particular epistemology makes knowledge out of an eccentric and esoteric – but fundamentally human - sensation. For Nietzsche the Dionysian is a channel through which vital human energies can be discharged.

¹¹ Ibid., xxxii.

¹² Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 2.

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This concept of the lyric is carried through Adorno's thought but is suspended and effaced in his late work. In *Negative Dialectics* (1966) Adorno adopts an approach that refutes the claim of lyric poetry to knowledge,¹³ not through its specific ineffectuality, but as a result of what he describes as the 'fall of metaphysics'¹⁴ to the decline of the sovereignty of transcendental (and therefore immutable) values.

Metaphysics has merged with culture. The aureole of culture, the principle that the mind is absolute, was the same which tirelessly violated what it was pretending to express. After Auschwitz there is no word tinged from on high, not even a theological one, that has any right unless it underwent a transformation. The judgment passed on the ideas long before, by Nietzsche, was carried out on the victims, reiterating the challenge of the traditional words and the test whether God would permit this without intervening in his wrath.¹⁵

Here Adorno is making a direct link between the insights of Nietzsche and the implications of his reflections for action in the world. In a sense, Adorno is suggesting that historical events have borne out the Nietzschean diagnosis. (Broch is in accordance here also, as the quotation below - note 19 - will shortly demonstrate.)

Here we must note, however, that as Nietzsche's thought develops from *The Birth of Tragedy* his conception of art alters. Whilst he continues to acknowledge the metaphysical function of the work of art, the epistemological context in which this is viewed differs profoundly:

Art makes the thinker's heart heavy – How strong the metaphysical need is, and how hard nature makes it to bid it a final farewell, can be seen from the fact that even when the free spirit has divested himself of everything metaphysical the highest efforts of art can

¹³ See also See Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society" in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press), 1997, 17-34, for Adorno's initial interdiction on lyricism. This is discussed in more detail on page 104.

¹⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 408.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 367.

easily set the metaphysical strings, which have long been silent or indeed snapped apart, vibrating in sympathy... If he becomes aware of being in this condition he feels a profound stab in the heart and sighs for the man who will lead him back to his lost love, whether she be called religion or metaphysics. It is in such moments that his intellectual probity is put to the test.¹⁶

Indeed, Nietzsche's later position articulates something of the effacement of the metaphysical function of art that Adorno and Broch will go on to read in entirely negative or pessimistic terms and with regard to the cruelty¹⁷ of the twentieth century. For Nietzsche, the collapse of the old metaphysical 'virtues' is to be welcomed as they served to valorize the 'religious and philosophical errors of mankind.' –

The Beyond in art – It is not without profound sorrow that one admits to oneself that in their highest flights the artists of all ages have raised to heavenly transfiguration precisely those conceptions which we now recognize as false: they are the glorifiers of the religious and philosophical errors of mankind, and they could not have been so without believing in the absolute truth of these errors... that species of art can never flourish again which... presupposes not only cosmic but also a metaphysical significance in the objects of art. A moving tale will one day be told how there once existed such an art, such an artist's faith.¹⁸

It is important to note that for both Adorno and Broch, the Nietzschean diagnosis of the arts and the sciences contribute to the epistemological conditions in which the catastrophes of the 20th century are made possible; little of the Nietzschean positivity, his new 'metaphysical' framework remains. Rather, for Adorno and Broch, the relativity of values, the preponderance of scientific disciplines, the decline of traditional metaphysics opens the world to a new and cataclysmic mythologisation. Broch makes clear this pessimism in his analysis of the implications of the innovations of Cézanne and the impressionists:

New Symbols, new languages are generated by a new breed of men, and such a breed had announced itself in that new art of the nineteenth century. The revolution of spiritual expression, ostensibly restricted to art alone, and hence ostensibly harmless, was an initial symptom of a world-shaking whose end we cannot perceive even today [Broch is writing in the late 1940s], and the artists of the time, full of artistic self-

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 82.

¹⁷ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 46

¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 102.

discipline, were heralds of anarchic dissoluteness, forebears of the new breed of men. The twentieth century was to become that of the darkest anarchy, the darkest atavism, the darkest cruelty.¹⁹

What occurs in the realm of ideas descends to earth – or rather, the distinction between the two realms can no longer be upheld, and hence, for Adorno, metaphysics merges with culture.

This study, therefore, intends to illustrate how this merging can be traced through French avant-garde painting and with regard to the concept of the lyric, which served both the metaphysical function, and by extension the transcendent value-based ethicality of the work of art. These concepts are explored in more detail as the study proceeds, principally with reference to Broch.

Indeed, Broch's position can be seen to develop in a similar way to Adorno's. Broch moves from a position of faith in the ethical function of the lyric work of art to scepticism towards this position after the Second World War. His two novels, *the Sleepwalkers* (1932) and *The Death of Virgil* (1945) register this transition. *The Death of Virgil* ultimately questions Broch's belief in 'art as a form of knowledge.'²⁰ – a principle he derives from Nietzsche's understanding of the opposition of the Apollonian and Dionysian, and which is related, in no small part to what Nietzsche describes as 'tragic insight.'²¹

Despite this development in his thinking, Broch never entirely revoked some faith in the redemptive potential of the work of art, nor of its claim to a metaphysical unity unavailable to science and mathematics. For Broch the work of art always achieves a representation of the reality of its time, and is therefore an appeal to knowledge, even to a totality we might describe as 'truth':

¹⁹ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 46.

²⁰ Michael P. Steinberg in Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 6.

²¹ See note 9 above.

Art is... enjoined to practice metaphysics: without a concern for reality, there is no genuine art! For only the producer of reality, namely art, and only art, can and may raise this concern with the aid of its primal symbols, which in turn become accessible to it only... when the metaphysical concern is addressed.²²

It is in this and the Nietzsche quotation above²³ that we find evidence of the cross-pollination of art and metaphysics that supports the argument that the decline of painting and the decline of metaphysics are related.

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Because of his relative obscurity, it is important to outline why Broch's thought is significant for this discussion. His specific contribution to this study is in his assessment of *fin-de-siècle* Europe and the ethical function of the lyric work of art during this period – in short in his pessimism. Broch's development of Nietzschean concepts in the context of what he understands to be an ethical art is significant for my reading of Manet and Cézanne. The 'value vacuum' to which Broch refers derives from Nietzsche and refers to a (religious) unity in absentia, in essence to the proof requirement of science turned upon itself, to logic chasing its tail – to the impossibility of a unity provided by scientific knowledge alone.²⁴

Broch seized on the solitude of Nietzsche, separated him from his contemporaries, and found in his own thought a philosophy of values that could serve as a foundation for his own. He knew very well that, within the boundaries of the Nietzschean tradition, to talk of values as autonomous entities rather than as components of a single, universally ascribed ethic was to admit an impoverished state of spirit and ethics, since the existence of many values and value systems implies a pluralistic system of ethics within a given culture or society. A culture that operates under a universally ascribed ethic needs no recourse to the subordinate discourse of values – group values or individual values – within it... For Nietzsche, as for Broch, the

²² Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 41.

²³ See note 18.

²⁴ Again, see note 9 above.

dissolution of values (as components of a universal ethic) and that of art go hand in hand.²⁵

Broch's 'value vacuum' does not describe a condition of the world in which there are no values, but a condition of the world in which there is no unity of value. It is a caesura amidst a relativistic plurality, a break in a line. The value vacuum is not used to describe a vacuous unity – nothingness - but rather a firmament in which there is the possibility of black holes. Indeed, in which there *are* such voids. It is a concept used imagistically within a meta-historical perspective. Broch offers this further explanation of how the 'value vacuum' should be understood:

The value vacuum of the world presented an extraordinary situation. In Germany it had adopted forms more visible than anywhere else, since intellectual production was reduced almost completely to the fields of science and music, yet that does not imply that it was not visible elsewhere. The cruelty, for example, that emerged with the increasing intensity in impressionist and postimpressionist painting can be taken as a symptom of vacuum. For even if every value vacuum is primarily a break in the flow of tradition, an empty spot in that "patchwork process" by which epoch styles are generated, each in the womb of the preceding style – though they develop in mutual dependence and influence through the revolutionary rejection of this "mother style" – this is still, so to speak, only the technical view, the "historico-mechanical" view of the problem; in truth a particularly ethical phenomenon stands behind it. In the nineteenth century the dwindling of the old European systems of belief had begun, and with the collapse of this central value, the splintering of the comprehensive religious value system gave rise to autonomous individual systems (of which *l'art pour l'art* was one). In other words, the universality governing ethical attitudes began to disintegrate, and the desires they had until now ethically subdued began to be unleashed. Here, however, the circle closes: every value vacuum is an incitement to revolution, but for the fulfilment of revolutions the unleashing of desires is indispensable.²⁶

For Broch it is the vacuum which allows the cruelty of the irrational to emerge, initially through the symbolic languages of the arts, and subsequently through historical events. As he suggests in the quotation above, the fracturing of a unified religious value system is seen as the cause of this cruelty, is seen as a result of the revolutionary forces – desires – required to formulate alternative values. This can also be understood as relating to the 'metaphysical need' described by

²⁵ Michael P. Steinberg in Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 11.

²⁶ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 58.

Nietzsche.²⁷ The cruelty to which Broch refers is that which he sees manifested in the art of the nineteenth century – it is cruelty sublimated in accordance with the rational faith in European society and bourgeois civility.

The bourgeois practices his cruelty, whether consciously or – more frequently – unconsciously, directly on his fellow man, especially when the latter is of a more feeble economic capacity; the artist’s cruelty, on the other hand, although no less unconscious, is sublimated in his work.²⁸

For Broch this process was associated with the transformation of the formerly qualitative world into universally commensurable ‘matter.’ This is something that he perceives in the painting of Cézanne and which is discussed at greater length in Chapter 2. Michael P. Steinberg in his introduction to *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and his Time* offers the following summary of Broch’s position:

Cézanne... was the master of the “objectless image.” His portraits, unlike those of Van Gogh, are almost inhuman; he “loves the object insofar as he desecrates and abolishes it,” Broch writes. Cézanne thus creates *nature morte* out of *nature vivante*, yet at the same time grants nature a new, strictly “painterly” life... For Cézanne, the object had become meaningless altogether. In the end, therefore, through a radical confrontation with [his] medium, [Cézanne] continued the nineteenth-century process of neutralising the object. All content was the same; everything was “paintable.”²⁹

For Broch, there is nothing but irrationality in the drive to make all things commensurate within the bounds of a given symbolic language, a given epistemology. This, for him, is an element of the cruelty described above. It denies the unique and differentiated quality of all things when seen alongside one another. Cézanne, then, obviates these qualities in the service of an aesthetic totality. His work (and for Broch, Van Gogh’s also) therefore pictures – at the level of form – the latent but gestating irrationality of the age. The metaphysical decline described by Adorno can be framed with regard to this formulation. If traditional metaphysics would seek qualitatively

²⁷ See note 16, above.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁹ Michael P. Steinberg in Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 16.

differentiated transcendental value in the world and by extension the work of art, then Cézanne's painting enacts the slump of metaphysics into mere 'culture' through the totality of his formal procedures, through his urbane yet 'irrational, immediate vision of the world.'³⁰

It should be noted that Nietzsche, Adorno and Broch all maintain the conviction that their diagnoses of the nineteenth (and for Adorno and Broch, also the twentieth) century are bastions of rational insight amidst a sea of the irrational (Broch), the regressive and degenerate (Nietzsche), the barbaric (Adorno).

In essence what is true for both Adorno and Broch is Nietzsche's diagnosis of European values. They do not agree with Nietzsche - or with each other - on how this state of affairs should be overcome. But such an 'overcoming' is not the focus of this work.

Indeed, this thesis ultimately advocates no overall value-position with regard to the lyric or the decline of metaphysics. Rather the changes in the visual language of French avant-garde painting are explored with regard to this putative process. The philosophical account is offered as one way in which we might understand the transformation of visual form.

In this way, the thesis moves from the position articulated by Baudelaire in the second of the epigraphs to this work to that described by Lyotard (in the third), not through the perspective of its argument, but through an account of the work being discussed. To put it simply, we map the transformations from an historical world given voice by Manet, Cézanne, Baudelaire, to one given voice by Duchamp, Adorno, Lyotard. Nietzsche, whilst forming something of the fabric adjoining these two worlds, will not be referred to extensively in the body of the text. Rather, his influence is contextual: Nietzsche's thought presents both an articulation of the lyrical aspirations

³⁰ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 45.

of the nineteenth century and his awareness of the subsequent epistemological conditions (his ‘clairvoyance’) which undermine these aspirations. It is his work, however, in its diagnosis of the age, that speaks of the problems to which Duchamp may be seen to respond in his artistic output.

This study therefore attempts to describe the relation of metaphysics and painting at the time of their fall – not to necessarily state that one causes the other, but that there are congruences and that the case of one illustrates the case of the other. Parallel lines can be traced. Painting can be seen as a mirror to metaphysics; the metaphysical account is a candle that can be held up to painting. The method attempts to demonstrate how what is positivistically, empirically, unverifiable in both painting and philosophy can be given heightened veracity in the light of the other. It is a process of illuminating painting with philosophy and illuminating philosophy with painting. Ultimately, the study stands on this methodology and this methodology alone. If one reads the study from the perspective of early Wittgenstein or early Ayer,³¹ then the conclusion that this work says nothing but nonsense is unavoidable. However, the work certainly *shows* its argument through the concepts and works of art synthesized in its development. If the reader remains unconvinced then at least, in a negative sense, the study might serve to rule out an option, or demonstrate an alternative path, or to testify, incompletely, to the fall of which it can be seen as an account.

The study is not a pessimistic work. It does not seek to judge the present by the terms of the past; nor does it lament the fall of painting in the context here described. The redemption of a putative unity is not desired, nor argued for. The work, although temporally linear in its construction (history), is fundamentally a constellation which should come into view gradually, and in ebbs and flows.

³¹ See specifically pages 33-45 in *Language, Truth and Logic*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936/67) for Ayer’s refutation of metaphysics.

The work is in no way a treatise on ethics; nor does it contain a programme describing how human beings should or should not relate to one another. Where ethics are considered they are done so with regard to how the thinkers here discussed envisage the ethical function of the work of art. In the context of this study this function, as we will see, is indivisible from the lyric function of the work and is therefore implicated in the fall of painting and metaphysics articulated herein.

Here the following model of Western metaphysics is operative: the power of the concept to 'reduce' the other to the same as not only a principle of knowledge, but also of ethicality.³² This is the very metaphysics which declines in the nineteenth century. Thus we see the concomitant decline of the ethical and aesthetic application of the principle: there can be no 'new' classicism, no new totality unless imposed and artificial.

All concepts are seen – as much as is possible - in the context of the epistemology in which they exist. The study adheres to no absolutes and does not argue for the existence of any eternal or immutable truths or values. The lyric function of the work is seen as the product of a particular strain of European thought and is therefore based upon a relative epistemological position. The decline of the lyric function is seen more broadly as an aspect of the changing cultural identity of the work of art.

All of the art here discussed provides an image of its age, the 'picture of reality of its time.'³³ This is never in doubt. What is at stake is the existence of a particular 'value' ascribed to the work of art and the relation of this value to knowledge. It is a question of what is *possible* (what it is possible to know) within a given epistemological framework – is it possible to produce a lyrical

³² Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 1999), 60.

³³ Michael P. Steinberg in Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 35.

painting; is it possible that a urinal can be a work of art? What, then, is at stake is the alignment of concepts and objects, of actions and their values – in short, unity; or its absence.

In this way, aesthetics is here conceived of as the concept by which the unique ‘interiority’ of the work of art might be known, might be approximated in discourse. Adorno provides the model:

Artworks are alive in that they speak in a fashion that is denied to natural objects and the subjects who make them. They speak by virtue of the communication of everything particular in them. Thus they come into contrast with the arbitrariness of what simply exists. Yet it is precisely as artifacts, as products of social labor, that they also communicate with the empirical experience that they reject and from which they draw their content. Art negates the categorical determinations stamped on the empirical world and yet harbors what is empirically existing in its own substance. If art opposes the empirical through the element of form – and the mediation of form and content is not to be grasped without their differentiation – the mediation is to be sought in the recognition of aesthetic form as sedimented content.³⁴

It is this conceptualization of aesthetics that allows us to consider the readymade within the tradition of French-painting of which it must be seen as a part, from which it springs, in which it is generated. The readymade is a response to the tradition, and its form demonstrates the uniqueness, the newness of its voice, speaking out from within the tradition, not calling in from outside of it.

Similarly, the concept of the ethicality of the work of art – its lyrical function – conceptualizes a way by which the work of art might reveal something of the ‘interiority’ of the human subject. That this ‘interiority’ of the subject has a universal character forms the basis of the arguments (made by Nietzsche, Broch, Adorno) for the redemptive force of lyric expression: it speaks of a putative unity known only through this mode. It expresses a potential for knowledge attainable by no other means. It is, we may decide, an archaic principle.

³⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), 5.

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The study proceeds in the following structure:

Chapter 1 describes how the historical and epistemological conditions of mid-nineteenth century bourgeois culture and inchoate industrial modernity can be seen as registered in the painting of Édouard Manet. Hermann Broch's *Hugo von Hoffmansthal and His Time* (written between 1947-50) provides a framework by which the relation of the work of art to knowledge might be generated. It is argued that Manet's work pictorializes the growing disorder threatening the traditional cultural forms of Europe and that in so doing his work achieves something of the lyrical function of the work of art: it offers up the unvarnished truth of the age through a dismembering of inherited forms. It announces the impotency of these forms, this being a constituent part of this 'truth.'

Chapter 2 compares Manet's work to that of Paul Cézanne, arguing that Cézanne attempts the reassertion of the lyrical function of the work of art through a totalized formal aesthetic. Here the pictorialized world is required to conform to an aestheticized unity which, beyond merely aesthetic concerns is false. Cézanne is seen as giving rise to a trend in painting which attempts the reunification of the painted image and the world it seeks to represent in spite of the fact that the world, and our knowledge of it, increasingly resist such picturing. My reading of Cézanne (and subsequently of cubism) is Nietzschean in that it succumbs to the 'suspicion that the decisive value of an action lies precisely in what is *unintentional* in it, while everything about it that is

intentional, everything about it that can be seen, known, “conscious,” still belongs to its surface and skin – which, like every skin, betrays something but *conceals* even more.’³⁵

Chapter 3 discusses how Cézanne’s innovations are developed by cubist artists into a shared language of abstraction, one which, in accordance with T.J Clark’s analysis, attempts at the totalized description of the world in congruence with the classical model. Cubist artists understand the abstracted image as the equivalent to the ‘fragmented’ modern world. This, I contend, is an errant assertion of the lyric principle through a form which can no longer sustain it. Rather, cubism is already subsumed by more general cultural and economic forces which serve to commodify the ‘metaphysical’ component of the work. Painting, I argue, can no longer serve a lyrical function in this context. In addition, the lyrical function of the work of art itself is called into question. It is in this chapter most clearly that we see painting at the time of its fall.

Chapter 4 considers the factors that contribute to Marcel Duchamp’s rejection of painting, taking into account the gradual nature of this process; his paintings prior to 1913; contemporary correspondence and his subsequent accounts of his work. It is argued that Duchamp rejects painting precisely because of its inability to describe the world, to resist the market, and to fulfill the lyrical function of the work of art. The readymade, it is argued, employs a verbal/visual language appropriate to the ‘picturing’ of the age (an age which increasingly resists pictorialisation) and opens, albeit briefly, the fissures in (visual) culture through which the traces of the lyrical function of the work of art might be sensed, expressed, despite the atavism of the concept. Here a paradox is upheld: the readymade, in searching for a language appropriate to the lyrical subject (voice) in modernity, articulates both the perseverance and the shattering of this subject. In this way the fall of metaphysics is seen as concomitant to the fall of the lyrical (metaphysical) function of painting.

³⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 44.

The central question this study addresses, from an art-historical perspective, is why Marcel Duchamp abandons painting, and what the readymade achieves in its place. I hope to demonstrate a possible way of understanding this twinned move of abandonment and generation, by illustrating why, in Duchamp's words, there remains no *reason* to paint; by suggesting why, in Lyotard's words, the world has almost no need for painting.

Manet

When you talked about painting, you always talked about Manet; painting didn't exist without Manet.³⁶

In order to understand Duchamp's move from painting to the readymade, to situate his actions within an historical context, and to illustrate the issues pertinent to them, we need to go back to the problems raised by the language of painting from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. In this and the following chapter I concern myself with the critiques of painterly representation that are posed by Édouard Manet (1832-1883) and Paul Cézanne (1839-1906) – which constitute a critical problem and tradition that Duchamp, as a young “vanguard” painter in the 1900s necessarily inherits - and then deal with the critique of painterly representation that evolved within cubism. This constitutes a mode of practice and thought in which Duchamp is first of all imbricated and against which he might, eventually, be seen to pose himself, with his challenge to “retinal” painting. This analysis is designed to provide a historical grounding for my examination of Duchamp's work, establishing a critical apparatus for subsequent analyses of the readymade and associated projects such as *The Large Glass*. I demonstrate first how the historical conditions of nineteenth-century industrial modernity are reflected in Manet's art, and how his aesthetic project allows for the representation of, and comment on, these more general social phenomena.

My analysis of these issues and correspondences is informed by, and reacts to a number of texts that concern themselves with the problem of ethics and language within modernism. The first of these is Hermann Broch's *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time: The European Imagination*,

³⁶ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 93.

1860-1920 (written between 1947-1950). Not only does this book elucidate Broch's understanding of the complex three part relation of language, ethics, and his theory of history within the context of an aesthetic project (Hofmannsthal's) that poses one of the earliest and most explicit challenges to the adequacy of representation; it also neatly circumscribes a historical period "bookended" by Manet and Duchamp. Broch provides, therefore, a theoretical model that strikes a fine balance between aesthetic, ethical, and historical concerns. As historical and further theoretical grounding, I am indebted to Richard Sheppard's account of the 'coming-into-being' of the modern condition in his *Modernism–Dada–Postmodernism* (2000). Sheppard's understanding of the differing conceptions of the relation of the human subject to language expressed by nineteenth and twentieth-century art will be of particular importance. In addition, Sheppard's work dovetails, to some extent, with Broch's, in his analysis of the significance of Hofmannsthal's *A Letter* (1902). Both writers find, in Hofmannsthal's problem of poetic language, a parallel account of the problem of knowledge affecting late nineteenth-century European society.

Broch describes the crisis he perceives within nineteenth-century European society thus:

The nineteenth century...which at its close was suddenly becoming aware of the value vacuum into which it had strayed, attempted to dominate that vacuum by inadequate and well-nigh ridiculous means. With a definite sense – at times even a knowledge – that every value system rests on a universally valid symbolic language, with which it is in fact identical, so that in a value vacuum (which is always silent) there can be no communication of language or values between one man and the next, came the intention to overcome this Babylonian condition by putting the cart before the horse and artificially contriving a symbolic language invested with universal validity.³⁷

Sheppard situates this problem with specific regard to the modernist work of art:

... the modernist understanding of the relationship between human beings and reality is radically different from that of mainstream nineteenth-century thinkers and writers. By and large, thinkers and writers working according to the principles of classical modernity posited, or at least sought to posit, some kind of symbiosis or correspondence between the structure of the material world, the structure of the human logos, and, if they were believers, between those two dimensions and the

³⁷ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 152.

divine Logos. Correspondingly, whilst classical aesthetics posited some kind of consonance or correspondence between the world of phenomena and a transcendental realm of beauty and truth, some kind of isomorphism between the assumed unity of the work of art, the unity of the human subject and the “Sinn-Totalität eines von Gott geschaffenen Kosmos” [the meaningful totality of a divinely created cosmos], the modernist work of art is afflicted by a greater or lesser sense of dislocation of the material, the human, the metaphysical.³⁸

What Sheppard provides so lucidly here is a diagnosis of both the problem of the nineteenth-century artist – broadly the transition from dependence upon stable classical forms to a growing sense of uncertainty concerning the validity of these forms – and one of the enduring epistemes of the modernist artist, wherein uncertainty and instability can become, paradoxically, determinate factors.

And with specific reference to painting, Sheppard discerns an aesthetic analogue to the general epistemological – and subsequently, by extension ontological – crisis which grips nineteenth-century Europe. Modernist artists are the immediate inheritors of this crisis:

Modernist painters, faced with...strange, disturbing, and even terrible metaworlds, found themselves forced, if they were to communicate their vision, to give up the fixed point of perspective that they had inherited from the Renaissance and that implied some sort of harmony between the divine Logos, a geometrically ordered universe, and the transcendental activities of the human logos.³⁹

In this instance, Sheppard specifically addresses the rejection of linear perspective by modernist artists, although this is only one aspect of a much broader disavowal and rejection of the forms inherited from the classically ordered world and one that we do not encounter until we reach first Cézanne’s work and then the cubism of Picasso and Braque. Nineteenth-century artists such as Manet began this process by eschewing other components of the classical aesthetic system, namely: the rejection of established conventions concerning finish, modelling, chiaroscuro, consonance (synchronicity) of image and title, composition, and intelligibility of pose and of gesture. The abandonment of linear perspective is undoubtedly the most drastic and most

³⁸ Richard Sheppard, *Modernism – Dada – Postmodernism* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 59.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

obvious step in this process: it wrenches the subject out of its established position and repudiates all claims an image might have to replicate vision in any objective or universal sense. But the other, perhaps more minor abandonments by nineteenth-century painters should be considered of comparable importance, together with the ways in which painting adheres to tradition, even as it radically reformulates its rhetorical forms. (Both Picasso and Manet are, after all, self-conscious exemplars of painterly tradition even in their most extreme challenges to the language of painting.)⁴⁰ It is in order to both illustrate and justify this point that I have chosen Manet as my first and precedential example, attending particularly to one of the paintings he submitted to the Salon of 1865 – *Olympia* (1863) [Figure 1]. Manet’s work, as I demonstrate, enacts several rejections or confusions of the classical system of representation that have specific relevance, ultimately, to the work of Marcel Duchamp.

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Returning then, to the concerns articulated by Broch, we can begin to see how Manet’s work relates to the wider issue of the displacement of societal values. The ‘value-vacuum’ to which Broch refers arises ‘at the point where one religious value centre is dissolved to make room for the next’ and wherein ‘dehumanisation inevitably occurs’.⁴¹ Broch therefore associates the nineteenth century’s crisis of value with the rational secularisation of Europe, and in this regard builds his thought upon Nietzsche’s diagnosis of the age. The values to which he refers, are, we can reasonably well infer, the values of a general ethical humanism, grounded in the Christian tradition of western Europe, which need little further elaboration at this particular juncture. Suffice to say, the values of the nineteenth-century, for Broch, can be used as a concrete example

⁴⁰ For a discussion of this see, inter alia: Michael Fried, *Manet’s Modernism* and, for Picasso, Elizabeth Cowling and Jennifer Mundy, *On Classic Ground* (London: Tate Publishing, 1990).

⁴¹ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 182.

of what human values should not be, and that the dehumanisation to which he refers arises from a lack of substantive values which define and orient humanity. Broch then traces a line in ethical terms from the 'value-vacuum' of the nineteenth-century to fascism's attempt to reinstate mythological value systems via grand-narrative: a call to irrational order based upon this lack.

I demonstrate, now, how Manet makes apparent the dislocation of value in the world at an epistemic, and – in accordance with Broch's reading - an ethical level, through his unique approach to aesthetic ordering, and through his treatment of the form/content divide. Initially this discussion is informed by Broch, who sees in Manet an artist who forced the bourgeois individual to see 'what he was and yet did not want to be'.⁴² It was to Manet that Broch ascribed revelatory power, and a critical vision so penetratingly truthful that it possessed prophetic force, that is, the singular ability to manifest formally, aesthetically, what was unfolding far more broadly at a meta-ethical level. And it is upon this ability that Broch's conception of the ethical 'development' (and in a sense he means progress) of humanity is reliant. In his own words: 'it is not on the mythological maturity of the world that this [development] depends – that is the Nazi aesthetic – but on the turning away from the decorative mission of artistic endeavour and on the emphasis upon its ethical duty'.⁴³

Through this formulation we can begin to see how Manet's work addresses the social problems of the nineteenth-century (which would develop, for Broch, into the seemingly inevitable ethical disasters of the fully-fledged industrial modernity of the twentieth century) working from the proposition that aesthetic structures have at most a reciprocal and at least a mimetic relation to ethical values. With this model, it becomes possible to analyse the artistic output of an era, a generation, an individual, to explain something of the nature of this relation within a specific historical or social context. In this respect I am arguing for a resolutely anti-formalist approach to

⁴² Ibid., 44.

⁴³ Ibid., 51.

art criticism, but only in order that formal qualities be understood for their communicative potential within a specific context, and not be afforded a primacy which monumentalises the work of art, and to an extent also mystifies it.

With this approach in mind, I suggest that the modernist focus on formal ‘purity’ can be understood as a response to the problem of the divorce of traditional formal structures from clearly identifiable meaningful content. In consequence, the question of form and content to which this study is addressed can be posed straightforwardly as a question of ‘what’ and ‘how’: what is represented and how is this representation achieved? There was a time when such questions could not be meaningfully asked, since the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ were assumed to be identical, unless the work signalled itself as allegory. But these were precisely the questions critics began to ask of Manet, whose work showed early signs of a significant divorce between form and content, and whose contemporaries construed this apparently inchoate severance as mere unintelligibility. (A corresponding critical bewilderment, over a different sort of severance, would later greet Cézanne). Beyond the myopia of many of his peers, however, Manet was able to represent pictorially the incoherence that was subtly creeping into the structuring value systems of nineteenth-century European and (specifically) French bourgeois society. With Manet, the questions of ‘how’ and ‘what’ could not be simply answered, because the answer was no longer simple, the question no longer straightforward. *L’art pour l’art* was so designated because it seemed no longer to situate an affirmative representation directly within society – it seemed no longer to serve a broadly sociological aim, nor a conventionally bourgeois moral purpose. This phenomenon is the origin of the modernist avant-garde in its immediate and purest form, before the dictates of fashion and, ultimately, of counter-bourgeois provocation (the desire to *épater les bourgeois*) conspired to confuse its purpose.

However, in attempting to illustrate lucidly the divorce of (what we might now refer to as) the signifier from the signified⁴⁴ (manifested at the level of the form/content divide) at work at the time, l'art pour l'art was in fact an art for society par excellence, in that it, misunderstood as it was, represented most clearly the transformative forces at work below the exquisitely ordered façade of European bourgeois society. Languages that once formed concrete and synonymous bonds with the order of the world (of which painting was one) began to lose their grip on the reality of social conditions and of subjective identity.

A dual motion, without precise origin, specifically manifests itself in Manet's work: this is the movement in the language of painting away from inherited neo-classical norms on the one hand, and the resistance of the world to knowledge through these forms on the other (hence Michael Fried's recognition of 'the resistance Manet's paintings of the 1860s offered to what were then the available modes of intelligibility'⁴⁵). Indeed, Fried argues that Manet 'deliberately courted unintelligibility on the plane of subject matter and internal disparity on that of mise-en-scène'⁴⁶ in order to utilise such transgressions for their communicative force.

It cannot be said which of these two motions precedes the other, as they are barely separable, and are made known only through the manifestation of one (the resistance of the world to knowledge) through the demonstration of the other (the movement of painting away from neo-classical norms). But this is exactly the space in which the questions of 'how' and 'what' arise, and in which they cannot be definitively answered. Instead we are left with a presentation of the problem that is at once a confusion of the ethical structuring of society and the problem of

⁴⁴ This refers both to the signified immanent objects of the world and to abstract ideas. Although for ease of communication Saussurean terms are employed here, Saussure's work does not form a significant part of my argument as there is no indication that any of the artists and thinkers discussed engaged in any meaningful way with his work. Indeed, the first posthumous collection of his work in French, *Cours de linguistique générale*, was not published until 1916 – three years after what I consider to be the pivotal moment in Duchamp's development of the readymade and there is little evidence that either Adorno or Broch were familiar with Saussure's theories, or that his thought influenced their own.

⁴⁵ Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 399.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 405.

communicating that confusion through a language which performs this very disordering of the world, and as such is unreadable. In this case, and to a bemused public, art is seen to fall back narcissistically into itself, and in a wholly appropriate sign of the times, l'art pour l'art is both born and wrongly named.

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Manet's work did, over time, reveal itself to contain prophetic insight, and Manet therefore demonstrates that he was registering the transformations taking place within the meta-levels of European society and the micro-level of the individual European subject. Although as an adumbration of what was to come, Manet's painting served little purpose, and presumably exerted little earthly effect; as an illustration and a monadic concentration of the forces of its production, it can act - albeit retroactively - in a revelatory manner. It is the 'resonance' (in the sense proposed by Thierry de Duve)⁴⁷ of the work in our current time that lets us trace backwards to the point when the note was initially struck and - at least from our historical vantage point - at which it sounded most clearly.

Let us consider, then, this contemporary account of Manet's work given by the pseudonymous Théophile Thoré:

His present vice is a sort of pantheism that doesn't value a head more than a slipper; that sometimes accords even more importance to a bouquet of flowers than to the physiognomy of a woman, as for example in his famous painting of the Black Cat [*Olympia*]; that paints nearly uniformly furniture, carpets, books, clothing, flesh, and accents of the face, as for example in his portrait of Émile Zola, exhibited in the present Salon [of 1868].⁴⁸

Here we see the association of Manet's work with the dissolution of values, with a 'pantheism', which defies the core principles at work in French painting at the time. Indeed, Manet is

⁴⁷ See Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

⁴⁸ Théophile Thoré cited in Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 284.

criticized precisely for not aligning the value of the represented object with its assigned and prescribed representative form/value. He is understood to misuse the language of painting, a misuse that occurs through the perversion of the established model of the form/content relation. This eventuality is construed as a 'vice', perhaps as a result of the heretical nature of his pantheism. Thoré's pejorative rhetoric is as revealing as Manet's painting itself, and indicates precisely how Manet's transgressions are to be understood: 'vice'; 'pantheism'; 'value'; 'importance'. Indeed, Georges Bataille declares that Manet's 'painting profaned everything it had been taught to believe in'.⁴⁹ Manet, we could suggest, is an exemplary artist-apostate.

As dialectic, Manet's work and its critical response synthesize an impression of the aesthetic/ethical concerns of the time and present clearly the way in which Manet's work is not only offensive (even heretical!), but also prophetic. Thoré is, of course, correct in his observations: Manet does commit these transgressions, but instead of creating disorder and promoting disunity (broadly offending the standards of bourgeois taste) he is representing the incipient disorder and disunity which, at a much deeper level than that of the painted surface – and as Nietzsche will demonstrate with his work of the 1880s - is gripping Europe. This was not, however, perceived immediately by many of Manet's contemporaries, and his work remained to a great extent inexplicable – so much so that even a sympathetic critic such as Théophile Gautier suggested that 'the jury [of the Salon of 1865] ought to have asked Manet to provide a statement of his aesthetic to be printed in the Salon livret, because simply looking at his paintings left one in the dark'.⁵⁰ Furthermore, we are made aware, reading the contemporary critiques of his work, of Manet's challenge to the established relation of form to content – a relation that, as it is upheld in its classical form, is stable, knowable, and rational. Manet's gesture, his establishing of the form/content divide as the battleground of pictorial modernist art is proleptic and decisive. It is this caesura, this opening which must be consistently repaired, that forms the site of the first

⁴⁹ Georges Bataille, *Manet*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse and James Emmons (New York: Skira, 1955), 60.

⁵⁰ Théophile Gautier cited in Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 576.

murmurings of the avant-garde project. It is here where the ethical and the aesthetic are first seen to contradict one another, here where each becomes aware of the other as a separate entity, as an essentially asynchronous, autonomous value structure, here where their false unity is first made apparent, knowable. It is in accordance with this false unity that Nietzsche, Adorno and Broch will - each in their own way – reject or renounce the putative lyric unity, the genuine aestheticized totality of the work of art.

Manet's gesture, however, can only be understood through the work of art's relation to the audience to which it is addressed. (This relation will subsequently be acknowledged and actively explored by Duchamp). The divide Manet suggests, the slippage he expresses in his work, can only be known through the work's presence in a world that is not yet fully aware of the incipient conditions adumbrated in Manet's painting. Simply, Manet's voice can only be heard within a dialectic, or as one side of a dialogue. The response to his work demonstrates how the work itself can only express meaning once considered with regard to a public from which it significantly differs, or to whom it poses open-ended questions. The work poses these questions in the form of an affront to the dominant values of a society that does not yet know the vacuity, or sense the atrophying, of these values. Manet therefore foreshadows the disunity of European industrial modernity and the decay of the values upon which its society was built. He pictorialises, even renders picturesque, the disunity, the decay, and compresses it into an aesthetic caesura in the relatively stable environment of nineteenth century bourgeois society.

Now let us turn to the paintings Manet submitted to the Salon of 1865, in search of evidence for my claims. In the first instance we should notice that Manet presented to the jury one sacred and one profane image (though both were considered to be profane), and that the response to *Olympia* [Figure 1] and *Jésus insulté par les soldats* [Figure 5] in 1865 was 'negative, even violent, to the extent that the government was forced to post a gendarme to protect Olympia from angry

viewers'.⁵¹ Fried gives us an idea of just what was at stake not only for Manet, but also for the viewing public: Manet's affront to bourgeois civility was such that it was seen to threaten the very values upon which civilisation was built. His work was understood to have a subversive (rather than self-evidently representational) power, to the extent that it inspired violence against it. Here we might recall Broch's stipulation that the underlying motivation for this violent response was the clarity with which Manet reflected European civilisation back to his audience. The disunity, the incomprehensibility, and ultimately the horror of Manet's work (as it was received at the time) are to be understood as the representation of the true nature of these disruptive forces at work within the world. And again, if we consider the subject matter of his submissions, we are presented with a representation of the world generated by the juxtaposition of two images: Manet demonstrates their contradictory co-existence. By providing a sacred and a profane image, Manet not only highlights the presence of both in the world, but also the manner in which they can be found to reside beside each other, without resolution and also, alarmingly, without contradiction.

Jésus insulté par les soldats should also, I suggest, be considered as a meta-title when seen alongside *Olympia*. Not only are we shown Christ insulted by the soldiers, but also how he is mocked by the presence of Olympia. The gulf opened between the subject of the two images is apparently dialectical but remains unresolved. Manet is not portraying one to valorise the other, but rather offers both in a state of 'supreme indifference, effortless and stinging'.⁵² We are presented, in a sense, with the bland co-existence of Christ's suffering (and implicated within this is the entirety of Christian morality⁵³) and unabashed female nudity (implicated in this are the conventions and

⁵¹ Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 308.

⁵² Georges Baraille, *Manet*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse and James Emmons (New York: Skira, 1955), 82.

⁵³ I suggest that with *Jésus insulté par les soldats* Manet undermines the requirement of pity as a foundational emotional response in Christian morality. Nearly two decades before Nietzsche articulates his critique of Christian morality, Manet presents his audience with an image that cannot be said to provoke the required emotional response for Christian moral feeling to be substantiated. I would suggest that there is little about this image that provokes an emotional response analogous to that desired by the text external to it and of which it is an 'illumination'. Here Christian morality is already subject to erosion by skepticism and it is the image which *shows* this doubt. Here we are presented with a religious image that does not seem to have faith in its religiosity.

codes of nineteenth-century bourgeois taste and culture). The two images cannot engage with one another beyond a formalised blankness, the apparent apathy with which they are rendered, and with which their subjects gaze out into the world. The irreconcilability of the images declares itself. The values of the emerging world, and the values upon which the world has been built, are no longer compatible, will not be reconciled.

This is an incipient example of Broch's 'value-vacuum', which forms the basis of his analysis of the nineteenth-century. It is in the disarray of values that the vacuum emerges, and it is this disarray that Manet illustrates. In both images we know, empirically speaking, what we are looking at (in one instance, Christ suffering, in another a nude - after Titian - reclining) but within this, we have the disorienting development that, through the means of representation, we do not know what either image means, in a specific sense, to us, the singular viewer, or more generally with regard to external social structures, in the context of the institutions of European civilisation and hegemony. But in this way - and this is vital to this particular reading of Manet - the bourgeoisie are shown themselves as they really are, and the world as it really is...or they are given a far-sighted vision of what it is becoming. I suggest that it is this last interpretation that holds: Manet articulates a process at work within European society, and arrests it in the form of a 'profane' image (or set of images) - images whose 'grave dignity resides in their very meaninglessness, brilliantly, masterfully accentuated by an art that turns their frivolity into the byways of profundity.'⁵⁴

I suggest, however, that Manet can only articulate this profound vision, with relation to real social and subjective conditions - with regard to what Broch diagnoses as a 'value vacuum,' or what for Nietzsche is a state of degeneration - through his use of indifference as an expressive mode, as an attitude realised in his treatment of both form and content. Furthermore, I would

⁵⁴ Georges Bataille, *Manet*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse and James Emmons (New York: Skira, 1955), 96.

argue that this indifference - employed, as much as anything else, as an artistic technique - is an appropriate attitude, a relevant artistic stance, in the address and representation of a condition characterised by a proliferation and therefore a degeneration of values: 'it often happens that indifference is revealed as a vital force, or the vehicle of a force, otherwise held in check, which finds an outlet through indifference'.⁵⁵ By mirroring the latent epistemological disunity of the age at the level of the painted image, Manet's work achieves, in Broch's formulation, 'the turning away from the decorative mission of artistic endeavour' and the renewed focus on its 'ethical duty'.⁵⁶ For Broch, Manet paints knowledge of the world – he provides, using Nietzsche's terminology, *tragic insight*: a knowledge which comes into view only at the borders of logic, where no other epistemological form - in and of itself - can claim legitimacy. This is the last metaphysical bastion of the work of art, where, with a single voice it speaks of the world and of itself within the world and in opposition to all logically self-legitimizing disciplines. It is this particular understanding of the 'ethical' in the work of art that Broch derives from the early Nietzsche.

Turning to *Olympia*, we can discern further ways in which Manet represents the undercutting and fracturing of the – for Nietzsche and subsequently Broch - formerly unified European value structure at work within his time. This painting, generally considered now to be his masterpiece, is ascribed such status because of the complex relations it concretises. It is at once the image most invested with Manet's 'pantheism' - his indifferent treatment of subject matter at the formal, painterly level – and simultaneously the image which most clearly enacts the distancing (to use Saussure's terminology) of sign from signifier. The image appears as a monadic concentration of the problem of the degeneration of the values of its time, and of the social forces at work contemporaneous with its creation. This reading is, in accordance with Adorno's theory of aesthetics, what gives the work of art its unique insight:

⁵⁵ Ibid., 82.

⁵⁶ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 52.

That artworks as windowless monads “represent” what they themselves are not can scarcely be understood except in that their own dynamic, their immanent historicity as a dialectic of nature and its domination, not only is of the same essence as the dialectic external to them but resembles it without imitating it. [...] Art’s double character as both autonomous and *fait social* is incessantly reproduced on the level of its autonomy. It is by virtue of this relation to the empirical that artworks recuperate, neutralized, what once was literally and directly experienced in life and what was expelled by spirit. Artworks participate in enlightenment because they do not lie: they do not feign the literalness of what speaks out of them. They are real as answers to the puzzle posed to them. Their own tension is binding in relation to the tension external to them.⁵⁷

Here Adorno upholds the concept that art and truth share a privileged relationship – and certainly whilst our discussion continues to value such a concept, and has faith in both art and truth, then Adorno’s model is extremely helpful. I suggest that this ability to tell the truth – although epistemologically determined and therefore always relative – is one of the vital motivating factors of the outrage that Manet’s *Olympia* provoked. This is certainly Broch’s understanding of the impact of the work. The painting, quite simply, stripped the bourgeois of his mask, it showed him ‘what he was and yet did not want to be’.⁵⁸

Initially, then, let us consider the title of the image. Olympia was a figure from the boundaries of Greek history and mythology, she allegedly cavorted with the Gods and led an army against Eurydice the 3rd of Macedon, was the mother of Alexander the Great, was supposedly a member of a Dionysian orgiastic snake-worshipping cult, and was executed in 316 B.C. for atrocities committed whilst she held power in Macedonia. She is also, of course, in Manet’s incarnation, a ‘transposition of a Renaissance Venus,’⁵⁹ and a direct reference to Titian’s *Venus d’Urbino* (1538). She is, therefore, simultaneously associated with the classical goddess of love, and with a powerful mythico-historical figure of dubious character. Of course, she is in actuality neither of these things, but a suspension of their terms. Manet cites Titian, but through an act of subversion, as much of reverence, adulation or mimicry. What perhaps would have been most pertinent,

⁵⁷ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), 5.

⁵⁸ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 44

⁵⁹ Georges Bataille, *Manet*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse and James Emmons (New York: Skira, 1955), 121.

however, to the public and critics of Manet's day, was the association of the name Olympia with prostitution. As T.J Clark explains, 'Olympia was a pseudonym favoured by prostitutes: it figures in the classic list of names drawn up in 1836 by the trade's first great investigator, Parent-Duchâlet'.⁶⁰ He goes on to suggest that:

For readers in 1865 the name Olympia probably also conjured up, as Gautier put it in his *Salon*, "the memory of that great Roman courtesan on whom the Renaissance doted", by whom he meant La Dona Olympia, villainous heroine of a popular novel by Etienne Delécluze; sister-in-law, mistress, and manipulator of Pope Innocent X; prisoner and harlot, so avid for gold that after Innocent died she refused even to pay for his coffin."⁶¹

What would have been relatively clear to contemporary viewers, then, was the conflation of a classical goddess of love and a modern prostitute, enacted in a painting which declares its relation both to the forms and ideas of the past, and to those of the present. The ideal, as posited by the art-historical reference collides with the base immediacy of the present, and their contradictory existence is articulated. Manet demonstrates how the renaissance ideal form of romantic love, even of carnality, has descended into the immanent form of the prostitute, whose body enters into a system of exchange based upon the equation of human experience to quantitative measure. Here the work of art signals not only the nature of prostitution itself, but the way in which the conditions of the exchange between prostitute and 'client' can be seen to infiltrate all aspects of human experience. The equation of experience to ideal and qualitative value systems (an equation to which Western painting traditionally attested) is replaced by a base quantitative equivalence, or - in this particular instance, and in terms of representation - an eloquent confusion in paint, a triumphant disorder.

The figure represented in *Olympia*, is consequently neither a classical Venus nor a prostitute. She is a woman depicted in contemporary surroundings, whose precise identity is confused by the reference to classical figures. The painting therefore takes on the uncertainty of the photograph,

⁶⁰ T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 86.

⁶¹ Ibid.

appealing more to the incompleteness of memory than structured narrative. What should be fixed becomes fugitive. The sitter is, of course, Victorine Meurent, one of Manet's preferred models⁶² – a professional model, at that. However, this 'true' identity of the sitter is confounded, despite her importance to Manet (primarily as muse), through the filter of several levels of semantic disruption. She is, at once, (and simultaneously not at all...) the zenith – the ideal, if you will - of womanhood in the eyes of all the gazing, bourgeois males in Manet's audience, but also, undeniably, a prostitute – ostensibly the basest 'form' of European womanhood. However, I stress that these incompatibilities are both present and suspended in the image. Manet treats them with indifference, so that all that remains in place of these proposed yet suspended categorisations is the gaze of Victorine Meurent (herself), unreadable, lacking in all feeling - compassionate or confrontational - yet somehow still penetrating. *Olympia* presents the male viewer with the impotence of his own gaze, with his inability to read, to know what he is looking at. In spite of all this confusion, the naked figure persists, remains, maintaining a definitive distance between the viewer and the painting which prevents any sort of 'absorptive closure,'⁶³ any possibility of a stable or unified perspective with regard to it.

This feeling is exacerbated, I suggest, by Manet's use of photographic effects. As Fried explains:

...more important than Manet's use of specific photographic images or, in *Olympia*, his adaptation of various conventions of pornographic or near-pornographic photography is what Farwell and others have seen as his deliberate exploitation in a number of paintings of the 1860s of certain broadly photographic effects, above all, first, the contemporary photograph's emphasis on abrupt contrasts between areas of light and shadow with a consequent suppression of half-tones and interior modeling, and second, the impression the carte de visite inescapably conveyed that the sitter knowingly posed for the photographer.⁶⁴

Built into the gradually increasing and disorienting levels of signification at work within *Olympia*, we have a "photographic" effect – namely the awareness that the sitter is actively engaged in the

⁶² Meurent appears most notably in *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1862-63) again as the nude whose gaze confronts the viewer.

⁶³ Michael Fried, *Manet's Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 399.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 325.

production of their image, that they are conscious of its creation, its function. This too, prevents the absorption in the image that contemporary viewers had come to expect. The represented subject in *Olympia* gives the impression that she is just as aware of you, the viewer, as you are of her - and that she is wholly indifferent to your presence, to her nudity. So the image not only becomes unreadable in general rhetorical terms, but gives the impression that actually, and quite against your will, it is reading you, or - to turn again to Broch - that it is showing the viewer what he is, revealing him to be that which he does not want to be.

Olympia is also, I would argue, not a painting that can (nor needs to) fulfil a conventional pornographic function within the context of bourgeois masculinity. Photography rapidly makes pornographic painting obsolete. Manet, I suggest, mobilises a pseudo-pornographic aesthetic in order to bring it into collision with other aesthetic codes within the painted image. Victorine Meurent's nudity is not explicitly nor absolutely eroticised, since it defies any comprehensive codification, any definitive categorisation that might situate the painting within the realm of reified human desire. Whilst the painting undoubtedly situates the viewer in the position of the gazing male, it also turns that gaze, blankly, and stripped wholly bare, back upon itself. The adoption of pornographic codes – the flat lighting, the full-frontal nudity, the indeterminate and banal *mise-en-scène* - allows this reflection, whilst the image itself remains indifferently aloft, distanced from both the erotic and intellectual concerns of its subject matter. The viewer is required, however, to consider that he *may* be looking at a pornographic image, but doing so in full view of his fellow bourgeois, and against the return gaze of the 'pornographic' subject. The only possible response to such a position, for the nineteenth-century bourgeois, is outrage.

Indeed, the image cannot serve any purpose for nineteenth-century society because it cannot be assimilated beneath a categorical function: it isn't absorptive art, it isn't pornography, it isn't photography, it isn't beautiful, it isn't intelligible. As I have stressed before, it cannot definitively

be any of these things because it suspends them, renounces and resists their judgment, their codification. *Olympia's* only function is - as I suggested earlier through Adorno's aesthetic theory, but reiterate here in the words of Thierry de Duve - a 'truth-function'.⁶⁵ It declares a state of being, reveals the historical conditions through which it emerges, and in this capacity presents a horrifying reflection of its age: 'her [Meurent/Olympia's] real nudity (not merely that of her body) is the silence that emanates from her, like that from a sunken ship. All we have is the "sacred horror" of her presence – presence whose sheer simplicity is tantamount to absence'.⁶⁶ In a peculiar sense, this combination of Manet, as artist, and Meurent as model has produced a definitive image of its time – a revelatory representation to which neither of them can lay claim, and the virtue of which lies in the complex interrelations it expresses and of which it is composed.

It is valuable to suggest, at this point, the nature of some other components of these relations, and the social phenomena to which they refer. Firstly, we can see how the presence of the black servant indicates the global hierarchical structure of race and power of which the European fancies himself the head. The image in this way presents the legacy of European colonial expansion, and to the twenty-first century viewer, demonstrates the ultimate instability of this venture, the failure of the project of European enlightenment to render the world unto the realm of rational mankind. The small black cat [Figure 3], loosely rendered at Meurent's feet, should also be considered as a destabilising device. "La chatte" was slang, in Manet's time, for female genitalia, and *Olympia* employs this pun. The play between slang and symbol, a kind of misogynist's wink, again sits uneasily within the tableau. The cat is quite incongruous, and cannot be said to function as an effective morceau (to employ the critical terminology of the time). It is, undoubtedly, a motif borrowed from Titian (who has a sleeping dog at Venus's feet) filtered through Achille Devéria (whose reclining nude, according to Fried, influenced Manet, and who retains the dog), but one that Manet has deliberately altered for his own purposes.

⁶⁵ Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 4.

⁶⁶ Georges Bataille, *Manet*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse and James Emmons (New York: Skira, 1955), 67.

Bewilderingly, Manet, amongst the simmering indifference of his painting, saw fit to include this visual pun, the purpose of which, we may infer, is to demonstrate further how imprecise language's hold of the world is – to further destabilise the image by exposing it to another semantic displacement. Indeed, we might speculate that la chatte is actually a visual substitute (signalled at the level of a verbal/visual transposition) for Meurent's own genitalia - practically the only part of her anatomy hidden from view, and covered, somehow innocuously, by her left hand. It is as if Manet, in his desire to expose everything, whether to disruption, subtle ridicule, or literalness, could not exercise any restraint in the act of representation. Somehow, la chatte found its way into his painting, through the intersection of semantic modes and the imprecise interrelation of signifiers, through an appeal to absurdity.

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In addition to the more general thematic analysis above, an in depth exploration of the formal techniques employed in *Olympia* also serves to illustrate how the image plays with the conventions of its time, both asserting and subverting them. Such an analysis also demonstrates the way in which Manet achieves an unconventional unity of form and content in accordance with the precedent established by academic and religious painting, but in the service of an articulation of epistemic disarray and the fragmentation of unified value systems. Despite the apparent unreadability of Manet's painting, it does not, for example, entirely dispense with the sort of ordered qualitative differentiation which allowed a decisive and at times definitive reading of academic and religious painting. *Olympia* displays varied painterly techniques and approaches, but presents them in a way that contemporary critics considered as a drastic misalignment. In the words of T.J. Clark:

There was something about *Olympia* which eluded their [contemporary critics'] normal frame of reference, and writers were almost fond of admitting they had no

words for what they saw. *Olympia* was “informe,” “inconceivable,” “inqualifiable,” “indéchiffrable”; the picture “ne s’explique pas.”⁶⁷

Such bewilderment is evoked by *Olympia* owing to the manner by which the conventional and expected relation of form and content is subverted within the image, as are the relations which govern the cogent integration of epistemological and aesthetic models. Manet does not reject the preordained meaningful relation of form and content outright – he does not embrace procedures of contingency – but it is refigured in such a way as to make painting speak differently; to raise a dissenting voice through increasingly idiomatic forms. And this is one of the ways in which Manet can be said to illustrate the essential disruption of value at work within his age (as attested by Nietzsche and subsequently reformulated by Broch), and to anticipate the problem of aesthetic form articulated by Hofmannsthal.

The analysis of *Olympia* which follows, will reveal the methods by which Manet effects this illustration, the way in which he makes the painting both speak of its time and adumbrate the future.

In the first instance, then, we can observe how Manet (despite Thoré’s protestations to the contrary) maintains the distinction, subsequently revoked by Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters between the technique used to model fabric and figure. The flowing and undulating nature of fabric is rendered with broad, free strokes, with clear evidence of blocking-in and under-painting; flesh is painted with layers of more meticulously applied paint, which lend Meurent’s figure the quality of porcelain. This is a differential approach not unique to *Olympia*, and can be seen in evidence in other of Manet’s paintings, notably in his portrait of Eva Gonzalez (1870). Here a differentiation observable in life is manifested in the painterly form, and whilst Manet’s approach may not be considered strictly ‘academic’ he maintains the essence of this

⁶⁷ T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 97.

relation. As we will come to see, this is one of the features of painting rejected first by Cézanne, and then subsequently by many 'high modernist' painters.

In addition, however, Meurent's figure is outlined – a device which contravenes inherited painterly conventions and serves to strictly differentiate the figure from the background. Whilst the application of paint in the background and figure is varied, this outline serves to mark the border between one region of the work and the next. This, it seems, is a device employed in order to signal Meurent's position in space, and to provide a literal border between the darkness of the background and the luminosity of her flesh. Manet also resorts to outline in order to situate Meurent on the white sheets. Here the line is stark and appears to be essential in delineating and emphasizing the human form. As a result of this, and through the smooth layered rendering of flesh, Meurent's figure emerges from the image. She is presented, quite unequivocally, as the main *visual* subject of the painting, and this, at an immediate aesthetic level, conveys the painterly coherence employed by Manet. Despite the subtle subversion of academic technique, the painting still employs, through *qualitative formal differentiation*, relatively stable hierarchical procedures. The painterly technique, despite its inchoate inconsistencies, maintains a sensible, if increasingly idiomatic, relation to the established language of painterly expression.

This hierarchical relation, with the human figure afforded an enigmatic yet somehow perverse primacy, is not, however, extended consistently throughout Meurent's figure, much less the work in its entirety. We can see, through subsequent analysis, how, at a formal level, Manet resists any claim to absolute determinacy throughout the image. Any order presented within *Olympia* is simultaneously undermined, not through a dialectical procedure which may result in a subsequent aesthetic/epistemological synthesis, but through the seemingly paradoxical upholding of contrary values.

There is, for instance, an almost total absence of chiaroscuro modelling applied to the nude. Instead she appears as a luminous space within the image, demarcated by outline, yet painted in accordance with Manet's general treatment of flesh. In order to realize the human form in space, but without recourse to chiaroscuro, the outline is used to mark the borders of the body. This is most evident in the dark line which separates Meurent's left arm from her stomach and breast. The position of the arm behind the body is made clear through this technique and in light of the fact that the tone and colouring of body and arm are practically identical. In accordance with this rejection of chiaroscuro, the light source illuminating the scene is imprecise; shadows, where present, are inconsistent, and are used less to imply a general imagistic coherence, more to simply suggest the presence of imprecisely related objects situated in a space which itself seems to conform to the ineluctable flatness of the canvas. Despite Manet's strategic use/misuse of the codes of aesthetic ordering, an overriding and universal principle by which *all* the features and subjects of the image may be hierarchised is not in evidence. The cat, therefore, casts a shadow as if it were lit from the left (of the image as we look at it), as does the locket around Meurent's wrist; whereas her left hand appears to be modelled as if lit frontally, or marginally from the right. No other features of the image give any real indication of light source, and thus chiaroscuro cannot be relied upon to reveal the hierarchical or discernibly coded arrangement of particulars. The image is not comprehensively ordered, we can conclude, according to the principles of illumination and depth within pictorial space.

The only true example of foreshortening, however, can be found in the rendering of Meurent's left hand [Figure 4]. Here chiaroscuro principles are employed and the hand is seen to emerge (and simultaneously recede) in space. This one moment of traditional modelling actually serves the purpose of suggesting the existence of the figure in depth through the painting as a whole, and it is this feature, combined with a general rejection of modelling elsewhere which both suggests how the image adheres to and deviates from formal conventions.

The hand is rendered precisely, but is without nails (and therefore, strictly speaking, is anatomically inaccurate). It is the hand, however, as a definitive symbol of humanity, which here demands the most sophisticated formal procedure, and which alone suggests the illusory depth of the image. Beyond this instance of chiaroscuro and foreshortening, the image is essentially flat – an interrelation of planes generated through blocks of colour. Apart from the single modelled hand, the human figure appears as a ‘shape’ of colour amongst others. Such an approach to human representation will, as we shall see, later be adopted by the mature Cézanne as a general aesthetic principle. Here, however, it exists as a form of representation alongside others. We move from the blank, flat outlined flesh of Meurent’s arm and torso, to the immediately recognizable form of the human hand – outlined but also conventionally, historically rendered. The highest achievements of Western painting are here presented alongside the painterly disarray into which they are destined to slide. In a motion twinned to this, Manet also demonstrates how the human form itself (and within this any ontological essence still ascribed to humanity) slips from a position of pseudo-divine reverence to one of blankness and nullification (here we may recall Manet’s Christ of *Jésus insulté par les soldats*). Whilst Meurent is undeniably a human being, Manet paints her humanity as if it were in question, as if it were merely a formal proposition, subject to refutation. As Clark has it, ‘*Olympia* makes hay with our assumptions as spectators, and may lead us to doubt the existence on canvas of three dimensions, the female body, and other minds’.⁶⁸

Similarly, if we consider Meurent’s face [Figure 2], we can further see how Manet deviates from representational conventions and the epistemological value-positions they imply. Here the face is painted with less ‘precision’ than the hand, and the brushwork anticipates a more gestural Impressionistic approach. Features are again suggested through line over modelling, but with

⁶⁸ T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 80.

softer tones preferred to the stark line which delineates the body. Meurent's eyes are simply rendered with tones drawn from her hair and the background. Pupils are in evidence, but iris colour is merely suggested in only the left eye. This should be compared to Manet's treatment of Meurent's face in *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863), where he uses a broader range of tones to imply depth. He describes her features more definitively through colouration and modelling and through the convention of a fixed light source. Here Meurent's face is more in keeping with the pictorial conventions of portraiture. Her face, as another definitive symbol of her humanity, is afforded concentrated painterly attention, and as such, commands the attention of the viewer in spite of (and alongside) her nudity. In short, there is *more* painting – a greater range of technique employed on Meurent's face in *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, than in *Olympia*. The qualitative formal differentiation which signals the importance of subject matter, and the meaningful relation of particulars within an image, is destabilized within *Olympia*. Formal differentiation is clearly apparent, but not in accordance with established and integrated codes of meaning and pictorial order. Needless to say, the implication of disrupting such order extends beyond the borders of the image itself, into the very fabric of knowledge by, and in which the image is both created and interpreted. Meurent's face here becomes less like a painted face as such, more like fabric, or blank flesh, or plaster (and it is here that we may feel that Thoré's words⁶⁹ ring most true). In this respect the rejection of definitive qualitative differentiation is itself an expressive act, and one that declares, through formal relations, that the detranscendentalised human subject becomes akin to the manufactured objects of a mundane social order.

Further to this, and with regard to Meurent's infamously indifferent expression T.J. Clark writes:

This is not a look which is generalised or abstract or evidently "feminine". It appears to be blatant and particular, but it is also unreadable, perhaps deliberately so. It is candid but guarded, poised between address and resistance – so precisely, so deliberately, that it comes to be read as a production of the depicted person herself; there is an inevitable conflation of the qualities of precision and contrivance in the

⁶⁹ See page 31 – footnote 48.

way the image is painted and those qualities as belonging to the fictive subject; it is *her* look, her action upon us, her composition of her herself.⁷⁰

Manet presents us with perhaps the first image in Modern European history of the human subject as indecipherable particular - as a blank body which in no way proposes the existence of other minds, of a general or universal 'humanity' beyond the singular incarnation (Manet, therefore, differs notably from Goya, in whose work such an ideal is framed against its pictorial and abhorrent absence. Here again we see that with Manet a dialectical procedure is not in evidence.). It is not that human beings are here subjected entirely to a sceptical conundrum - we do not fall back, endlessly into our doubt in the existence of others; rather here the problem itself somehow dissolves in the face of an overbearing materiality which, through its indifference to the question, smothers the desire to see beyond what is immanent and as such valuable only through mundane exchange. Doubt in others no longer presents a problem to be resolved because there appears nothing at stake to doubt. For the preoccupations of modern Europe, in the pursuit of its mundane material aims, one's corporal existence is sufficient - nothing *real* or ideal beyond it is required.⁷¹

Beyond the figure of Meurent herself, further aesthetic inconsistencies are evident in *Olympia*, and in highlighting some of these, we can see how Manet explores the competing claims for ordered/disordered formal differentiation throughout his painting. The un-readability ascribed to the work by contemporary critics can be understood as a result of the inconsistency of order within the image, the co-existence of signs which cannot be decisively meaningfully arranged.

⁷⁰ T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 133.

⁷¹ For an indication of Nietzsche's account of the impact of 'industriousness' on the inclination to religiosity see section 58 of *Beyond Good and Evil*. This brief quotation offers at least the essence of his diagnosis, if precious little of his particular understanding of the phenomenon: 'our modern, noisy, time-consuming industriousness, proud of itself, stupidly proud, educates and prepares people, more than anything else does, precisely for "unbelief."' See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 69.

The servant's hand is, therefore, extremely loosely rendered - in direct contrast to the attention paid to Meurent's hand - using colours which are drawn from the background. The imprecision evident in the painting of the servant has the effect of making her fade into the background of the image, with which she shares colouration and painterly technique. Again, this human being suggests very little of humanity and this in spite of the historical conditions that would have deprived an African servant of such an attribute. Human beings in this painting have humanity as a supplement to their materiality – a supplement which seems to be strategically denied them.

The textural centre of the painting (and, according to Thoré's contemporary reading, perplexingly, it's most important feature) can be said to be the bouquet of flowers which the servant holds – an offering to which 'Olympia' seems markedly indifferent. Here the painting is closest to impasto, and forms the greatest protrusion from the canvas. Manet was inclined to paint flowers in this way, as can be seen in his late floral still lifes, but here the effect is disconcerting: the flowers demand attention because of their treatment in paint, yet the rationale for such attention is uncertain. No one else seems to be interested in the flowers, yet Manet was, and we, following his lead, are asked to consider them, to question the formal procedure by which they are represented. The attention which we might expect to be lavished upon the human face, is here directed towards the banal offering of flowers. Indeed, the flowers more than anything else signify 'Olympia's' situation within a process of seemingly meaningless – and certainly undecipherable - exchange. What we cannot accept as meaningless, however, is the considered application of paint by the painter. The language of painting, despite that which is being depicted, still has the power to speak, even if that ability is itself, and through this expression, becoming increasingly weak. It is as if the expressive force of painting, its own compelling formal immanence, founders and through this foundering fails to be tethered to a meaning beyond itself and of equivalent import. In *Olympia* we see the incipient transformation

of European easel painting into a symbol without signification – a circuit of transient and imprecise signs, an hermetic aesthetic realm.

And it is here that Manet's relation to the later analyses of Broch and Hofmannsthal should reveal itself. The imprecision with which the language of painting lays claim to knowledge of the world in *Olympia* can be seen as analogous to the failure of lyricism described by Hofmannsthal, and occurring within the context of what Broch describes as a value-vacuum. Rather than developing a totalising aesthetic model with which to reassert a coherent pictorial and epistemological unity (a mimicry of the truth effect of the fully integrated classical model which we later see employed by Cézanne⁷²), Manet used the existing and still integrated painterly tools of his time to articulate, albeit through an increasingly atrophying language (vocabulary), the conditions of his age:

[Manet] seems to have put his stress deliberately on the physical substance of his materials, and the way they only half obey his efforts to make them stand for things in the world. It is this which was subsequently held to be the essence of *Olympia*, and the basis of its claim to be modern in artistic terms.⁷³

The image therefore signals the beginning of the end of the era in which painting coherently contributes to and partakes of a unified (European) concept of human knowledge of the world. *Olympia* itself becomes a symbol for the hollowness of signs – a paradoxical symbol of its own failed signification. It is a sign of the un-fixedness of symbols, and as such occupies an uncertain and interstitial space of meaning. This is, of course, the essence of the modern work of art, and specifically of the Modernist painting: it stands for itself within the world, as a hermetic realm in which particular internal reflection is privileged over general representation, and as a response to the failure of artistic languages to *know* or describe the conceptual unity the world. What *Olympia* shows us, however, and before abstraction was enlisted in an attempt to revive and reorder painting – to reassert its primacy – is that our knowledge is not certain. And that the only

⁷² And which I discuss at greater length in the following chapter.

⁷³ T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 138.

way to make such a statement truthfully, is through a language of uncertainty. The veracity of this, Manet's initial statement, took many years to come to fruition, yet history has shown his observations to be correct. Painting cannot know the world, because the world has eschewed the ideal (Nietzsche would say 'primal') unity to which painting can be made to attest. Or rather, the particular conflation of immanent and ideal specific to painterly expression has no equivalent extrinsic value within the increasingly secular and rationalised world. The pictorial ideal possesses no referent.

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It is only necessary to hint then, at the rather more imponderable features of the work – the single slipper which has fallen from Meurent's right foot, the locket she wears on her right arm which supposedly contains a lock of Manet's baby hair, the benign gaze of the servant, whose look recalls that of the nonchalant Christ of *Jésus insulté par les soldats*. These unfathomably indeterminate facets of the image exist alongside the more obvious formal traits which I have explored above, and for which Manet has become known: his abandonment of chiaroscuro, his suppression of half-tones, his lapses in linear perspective, his inconsistency of finish. All these choices are tantamount, as I hope to have shown, to a confusion (but never a wholesale rejection) of the classical system of representation to which he was (as one of France's foremost painters) supposed to adhere. As Bataille puts it, it is as though - and with regard to the established and inherited conventional forms of representation – 'everything in *Olympia* glides towards indifference to beauty'.⁷⁴ Manet effects 'the silencing of rhetorical forms'.⁷⁵ But it was at the level of both form and content that Manet employed disruptive devices to effect the dual motion to which I earlier referred, the movement in the language of painting away from inherited

⁷⁴ Georges Bataille, *Manet*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse and James Emmons (New York: Skira, 1955), 74.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

(neo-)classical norms on the one hand, and the resistance of the world to knowledge through these forms on the other.

In closing this formal analysis of Manet's work I want to suggest how this dual movement is also enacted at the level of naming: the title *Olympia* becomes imagistic, analogical, conditional - it is 'bogus'.⁷⁶ It does not name the image, and we cannot call the image by its name – or rather, the name and the image have such diffuse and contradictory possible meanings (as discussed above) that they are asynchronous, dissonant. They have no essential relation to one another, just as each has no essential being of its own. A space is opened between title and image, between two linguistic forms that had been previously used in consonance, and in concordance with the shared logic of the other, within a unified scheme of epistemology and ontology. Manet demonstrates the fracturing of these correspondences and their attendant meaning. And - in order to signal the way in which this study will proceed - it is here that I see Duchamp as Manet's immediate successor. It is Duchamp who explores fully the semantic implications of Manet's work, Duchamp who responds most fully to the conditions of modernity of which Manet's work is the first and most alarming announcement.

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I would now like to return to, and expand upon, the theoretical issues pertinent to this study. Richard Sheppard again illuminates the issues at stake in this discussion, summarising how certain works of modernist art have dealt with, or responded to (at an aesthetic level) the failure of rational structures and the project of the enlightenment as it grows into industrial modernity:

...a rationally constructed system – the imperial project of conquering the Dark Continent in the name of Enlightenment values, a machine for executing convicts,

⁷⁶ T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 86.

the military-industrial complex, mechanised warfare, the technological megalopolis, a food production process, and the legal machinery of the state – has turned or is in danger of turning into an elemental, irrational system that is running out of control, treating people as though they were animals or reducing them to dead primal matter, and threatening to destroy both its creators and itself in the process.⁷⁷

Manet prefigures these failures of rational systems: he presents the failure of the rational system of classical representation (and, accordingly, its norms and conventions) as analogous to the fracturing of epistemic unity that is taking place within European society. In this way, however, Manet still represents the world and expresses an understanding of it. What seems ‘unreadable’ or ‘unintelligible’ to Manet’s audience is, precisely, the ‘irrationality’ of a language which no longer holds with reality – the irrationality of a language which no longer appears to communicate. This, of course, is the great suspension of terms which Manet affects: his work does not cease to communicate; ultimately it speaks all the more clearly, and with a greater veracity than the rationalised classical languages can hope to. His work courts the ‘irrational’ so that it might reveal the failures of rational order from the standpoint of the autonomous individual as originator of its own language, one that has, nevertheless, a grounding in the general reality of social conditions.

This gesture by Manet is, of course, profoundly rational, and engages directly with a rationality seen to be veering disastrously off-course. The inability of these prophetic moves to illustrate and correct this misdirection further demonstrates the increasing impotence of rationality to right itself, to redeem the unforeseen conditions and consequences it inaugurates. I would argue that it is precisely because these consequences are unforeseen that rationality does not have the tools to assimilate them:

Enlightenment is as totalitarian as any system. Its untruth does not consist in what its romantic enemies have always reproached it for: analytical method, return to elements, siddolution through reflective thought; but instead in the fact that for enlightenment the process is always decided from the start. When in mathematical

⁷⁷ Richard Sheppard, *Modernism – Dada - Postmodernism* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 15.

procedure the unknown becomes the unknown quantity of an equation, this marks it as the well-known even before any value is inserted.⁷⁸

In accordance with Adorno and Horkheimer's thinking, the rational system cannot know and therefore dominate that which lies beyond its grasp. The rise of the irrational, of disorder and chaos within rational systems posits the dialectic that rationality sought to overcome within itself. In the parlance of psychoanalysis, this rise of the repressed which, unforeseen as it is, cannot be assimilated within the existing rational structure without recourse to mythic narrative (again following Freud's example) which in turn galvanises into the self-mythologising fascist impulse. Rational attempts to know the irrational within humanity lead, it seems, to a process of dehumanisation. The other cannot be assimilated as the same.

It is instructive, at this juncture, to return to Broch's reflections on Manet:

Why the furor at the Salon of 1865 over Manet's... Olympia? Why this unsuiteness to enjoyment? The answer is relatively simple: the social descriptions of naturalism had shown the bourgeois what he was doing and the base deeds he had committed, whereas the art pour l'art of impressionism showed him what he was and yet did not want to be. For not in its themes but in its mode of representation,⁷⁹ this art – even if it may once again appeal to later generations – proclaims that the unconditional cruelty of the epoch is making itself ready and is already present.⁸⁰

If we follow Broch, not only did Manet show the bourgeois what he was becoming – and therein what he most wanted not to be – he also showed him that his stable, yet increasingly hypocritical world was beginning to crumble. We must assume that Manet had a very limited historical agency, could not 'direct' history as a politician, monarch, or policy-maker might; that he was, rather, one of the first to recognise the signs and forces that would combine to steer the future course of Europe – to acknowledge and to present the hypocrisy (and more broadly the crisis of

⁷⁸ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1973), 24.

⁷⁹ Here Broch is in accordance with T.J. Clark. See p150 - footnote 211 - for further discussion of Clark's particular understanding of the importance of form in the representation of a particular historical moment.

⁸⁰ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 44.

knowledge) observed, retrospectively, by Broch. Manet's presentation takes the form of an altered representation of not only the world in general, but of the art of painting specifically. Painting becomes an analogy for the world - or rather, it has always served that purpose in that it presents, or aspires to present an *image-ideal* of the world: a painting always takes the form of a mise-en-abyme within the world itself.

My intended meaning of the term image-ideal here relates to this concept of the function of the painting as mise-en-abyme in the sense given by André Gides. Here the image-ideal occurs both as an aesthetic 'mirror' within a social, historical context and also as the reflection of an ideal structuring of the world (here an immanent and transcendental 'structuring' are both implied). In this way the reflection is understood to be reciprocal. The image-ideal is, therefore, not simply an ideal image of the world, but is rather a term through which we might understand the way an image manifests structural forms which are essentially external to it. It is a means by which the image's relation to social, historical and ethical concerns might be formulated. It is also a tool for the stipulation of the ideal within the immanent, marking a point of conjunction between these two realms. In this respect the image-ideal is also that which seeks to be fully realised in the world, something that the world can be built in the image of. In this way, it opens up a two-way channel of representation between the work of art and the world. An image-ideal seeks to be reciprocally represented, or realised in the world. Here the sense of aesthetic 'unity' produced by a work of art can engender the lyric effect, can extend beyond the work in an appeal to the totality of the world beyond it.

However, the image-ideal can also work in a critical sense, and through the function of the painting as mise-en-abyme. Seen in this light, the image-ideal works in a dialectical sense with the world: it announces its difference, and in so doing reveals the nature of its criticism of the world with regard to the ideal component of the image. The image-ideal is, simply, a formulation of the

way in which art can - at most - influence the actions of individuals in the world, and - at least - demonstrate (by means of opposition) the ways in which the world is lacking and requiring of betterment. The image ideal is also, then, the concept through which the fluid relation between ethics and aesthetics can be arrested, isolated and examined.

With Manet the painting as image-ideal declares its difference from the value system (the system of order, the organisational structure) of the world of which it is a part. This process is the immanent manifestation of the feeling of an individual who finds himself out of place in the world, or who finds, to be more precise, the ordering and expressive systems of the world to be incorrect, misaligned, or at worst, to be altogether false. Such an individual becomes, in Adorno's terms, aware of the falsity of their consciousness.⁸¹ How, then, does one express the falsity of one's consciousness, through the systems which produce this falsity? This of course, is one of the central questions posed by Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944/1947), and one of the questions that is addressed here, albeit in a different fashion. At this point, however, I would suggest that it is Manet's idiomatic expression that allows him to communicate through a generally 'false' set of linguistic terms. It is idiom that can, perhaps paradoxically, aspire and appeal to a total truth: 'the complete presentation of false consciousness is what names it and is itself truth content.'⁸²

I suggest that Manet's perception of the disordering of the world – the gradual rupturing not only (in 'high modernist'/or Saussurian terms) of signifier from signified, but also in more fundamental teleological terms, the severance of intention from outcome, of the unintended and unforeseen developments of the project of enlightenment - makes itself perceivable to others through his paintings. In Richard Sheppard's terms, Manet gives painted form to the 'profound

⁸¹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), 171.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 130.

doubts [that] arise as to whether man has the capacity to dominate the historical process'.⁸³ In this way Manet can be seen to make his own perception, perhaps his own intuition, communicable. However, significantly, at this stage in his career - and in his historical context - his work, his communication, remains substantially unreadable. But this illegibility is actually essential to the substance of Manet's communication. Whilst the 'form' of his work is readily perceptible (and by this I mean that he still recognisably paints figures and social situations even if he has abandoned certain painterly conventions), and even if it broadly offends the sensibilities of the Salon, his content (the content of his communication, his meaning, if you will) remains elided by this immediate sense of outrage. The penetrative truth masquerades as the unsettlingly 'new'.

This process can also be seen as essential to Thierry de Duve's conception of the avant-garde:⁸⁴ this is the inaugural stage of the modernist avant-garde. Manet was no flash in the pan, no mere sensation. If anything, he was prophetic, at least in terms of the fate of painting within European culture. What Manet sensed with regard to the course and conventions of his society was made real through the act of painting, which in turn revealed the role of painting in this changing world. Manet's work in this respect actually preserved the relation between painting and society that many of his more conventional contemporaries severed, as the subsequent writing of art history has demonstrated. Manet's art of disorder, of incongruity, of contradiction and uncertainty spoke, ultimately, most articulately of the disorder and contradiction that was gradually taking hold of Europe (and which can be understood to culminate, in a general historical sense - and certainly with regard to Broch's pessimistic account⁸⁵ - with the First World War). Manet offers one of the earliest glimpses of the failure of the Enlightenment project and of

⁸³ Richard Sheppard, *Modernism – Dada - Postmodernism* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 9.

⁸⁴ Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 29.

⁸⁵ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 16.

the power of rationality to form an effective alternative to the moral imperatives and absolute ethical goals of Christian Europe. He paints a godless world in which the standard conventions of European society are also shown to fail or degenerate. His abandonment of the conventional (and seemingly absolute) values and structures of high European art is an accurate adumbration of the incipient breakdown of the structures and values of European society. He marks this period of transition, this period of decline, if you will, and in this respect his paintings become part of a coherent historical continuity. They function, for this study, as an image-ideal - in the context of a social reality, a historical moment, *Olympia* occurs as a mise-en-abyme.

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At this point, and in order to inform my subsequent discussion of Duchamp's work, I comment briefly on von Hofmannsthal's *A Letter*, as a work explicitly addressing the same issues and rhetorical problems I have explored in relation to Manet. Hofmannsthal will provide a bridge to the more radical moves of Duchamp. Sheppard writes:

[Chandos] may be incapable of knowing reality for what it is, let alone put his intuitions into words, but now at least he can try to suspend judgment, listen to what is not himself and, most important, listen to himself listening to what is not himself.⁸⁶

From this we can understand that Chandos is clearly at a developmental stage succeeding that which I have ascribed to Manet. The tools of literary expression have become wholly insufficient for reaching the inherited aims of classical art. But this is, teleologically, simply a further step down the road upon which Manet started, wherein the process of severance and devaluation takes its toll on the very composition of the modern subject, so that the identity of the artist himself is exposed to the disorientating effect of the dissolution of fixed values. The sincerity with which

⁸⁶ Richard Sheppard, *Modernism – Dada - Postmodernism* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 98.

Manet declared he painted⁸⁷ becomes more and more difficult to achieve, as the world, language and the subject reveal their difference to each other, their lack of synchronicity. It therefore becomes increasingly difficult to represent anything stable within a context of formal stability. This will be the state of affairs which Duchamp inherits – a state in which the very identity of the painter is in question, as is the social function of the artist. For Duchamp the lyric mode itself is in jeopardy, its putative unity increasingly hard to account for.

Broch relates the condition thus: ‘in his [Chandos’s] struggle with the problem of symbols he was abruptly faced with the possibility of an inability to identify, which carried within itself the denial of poetic creation’.⁸⁸ He continues: ‘a compromise was reached: the non-lyric production could be continued; the poetic injunction was limited to lyric poetry’⁸⁹. Under the conditions of industrial modernity, the lyric function, the human capacity for lyricism is denied. Implicit within this is the failure of the particular model of rational humanity of which lyricism is one of the clearest expressions. The possibility of the lyric subject (as ideal secular subject) has been denied - the extreme isolation of the lyric subject, at once the reality the lyric seeks to overcome and simultaneously what defines it as such and motivates its creation, cannot be transformed into the transcendental communion of subjects that such an action promises. In Nietzsche’s phraseology, ‘primal unity’ is repudiated. The lyric can no longer be seen to propel a ‘restricted and restricting social condition beyond itself to a more humane one’.⁹⁰ Again this signals nothing more than the failure of the rational project of the Enlightenment to provide the ethical foundations for the betterment of the world. This is marked by the failure to implement the lyrical image-ideal of the human subject, of humanity, broadly, through the tools of rationality, and with exclusive recourse to humanity’s rationalised moral sense.

⁸⁷ Michael Fried, *Manet’s Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 23.

⁸⁸ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 124.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, “Lyric Poetry and Society”. *Telos* no. 20 (1974), 61.

Adorno argues that the lyric serves to universalise the isolation of the secular subject, to orientate poetic language around the expression of the poeticised (and at once idealised) human subject, whose experience (and frequently whose suffering) becomes the node around which a moral consensus can be formed. In this way the individual, posited at the centre of his or her own rational, moral universe becomes the point of origin for community, becomes the originator of communion, with the sole ethical goal of minimising the suffering of others through the employment of poetic language to communicate the now unique and isolated experience of the singular subject. In this way the lyric can be seen as providing – and this is something that Nietzsche, after his initial enthusiasm, will take great issue with – ‘metaphysical comfort’.⁹¹ Essentially, the rationale is this: if the force of lyric enunciation concentrates itself ‘in the individual, completely saturating him with substance and experience garnered from its own loneliness, then precisely this speech becomes the voice of men between whom the barriers have fallen’.⁹² Accordingly, rational thought seeks to overcome the essential unknowability of other subjects – a problem of rationality which arises with the recession of God’s presence in the world.

Broch, through his account of Hofmannsthal’s turn away from lyric poetry, gives an understanding of the lyric closer to that offered by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*, but one that still bears a striking resemblance to Adorno’s thought:

[Hofmannsthal] appeals to moments of poetic ecstasy, to those moments he describes as “exaltation,” since it is in them that, with one blow, through the extinguishing of the ego, the entirety of being is known, or rather, newly recognised in a wondrous, long-known familiarity, as if in total recall of a previous experience, in a total recollection whose origin... manifests itself unambiguously as a metaphysical pre-existence of man. It is the stage at which man is endowed with the complete identification of the ego with the non-ego (which confronts him as the world), the stage at which he has irrevocably and for all time received the divine gift of harmony of thing and concept and world – in short, the foundation of all world intuition, all knowledge, all language.⁹³

⁹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 59.

⁹² Theodor W. Adorno, “Lyric Poetry and Society”. *Telos* no. 20 (1974), 71.

⁹³ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 119.

Here the principle of fundamental – primal – unity is kept intact through metaphysical propositions alone. The only way by which the moment of poetic ecstasy, of Dionysian unity (in Nietzsche's formulation) can be assimilated into thought is through an appeal to metaphysical speculation, to the absolute, to the immutable, the pre-existent. But the degeneration of the concepts by which such speculation can be substantiated causes, in Broch's account, Hofmannsthal to renounce his lyric ambitions. Indeed, Broch generalises the condition which produces this renunciation:

Man is defeated by the aggression of things... and the required and now unachievable radical identification with objects, this act of most perfected love, is replaced by the defeat of love, by life impotence itself and its disgust.

Rather than a putative primal unity, Hofmannsthal's Chandos is thrown into an uncanny and complete isolation. He is made aware of his inability to identify. He experiences the inversion of poetic ecstasy:

A state of utmost inadequacy and for that very reason utmost disgust – disgust with things because they are unattainable; disgust with the word, which because of all its inconsistencies no longer reaches its object; disgust with one's own being, which has lost both knowledge and consequently all self-fulfilment.

We can reflect then, that the project of enlightenment runs along parallel epistemological tracks: knowledge of the world is achieved through positivistic and poetic means. Artistic expression is valorised as the highest human achievement, and therefore the source of the image-ideal by which human life might be reformed, through which our moral sense might rationally progress.⁹⁴ It can be argued that many of Modernism's aesthetic projects (Zurich Dada chief amongst these) are responses to the failure of the rationalisation of the arts to thwart the subjective traumas of industrial modernity. Again the aesthetic and ethical/social processes are essentially parallel: as the

⁹⁴ Here it is instructive to recall the Baudelaire quotation that opens this study: 'Evil happens without effort, naturally, fatally; Good is always the product of some art'. This quotation offers an insight into the faith in lyrical expression, in the redemptive power of art that was commonplace in the nineteenth century and which – in accordance with altering epistemological and social models – gradually declines.

project of the enlightened, rationally ordered European society atrophies, so too does the ability of the art of this project to truly reflect and communicate the state of the human subject.

What I hope to have shown by this brief tangential analysis is the way in which Duchamp's condition differs from that of Manet. Manet, in his time and irrespective of his transgressive treatment of his material, could conform to a generally accepted social construction of the role and the identity of the artist. The disruption and disorientation within European society had not yet found its way affectively into the identity of the individual subject to the extent that previously acceptable definitions of social functions were brought into question. Simply, Manet could produce work within a lyric mode which still ostensibly existed, and which was still generally recognised. Manet's identity as a 'painter' (and all its attendant meaning) was not in doubt. Duchamp, in contrast, enters into a world in which artistic identity is as susceptible to instability and displacement as the painted image was for Manet. The gap Manet observed and exploited with regard to title and image is now seen to be opening with regard to 'artist' and the subject who inhabits the role.

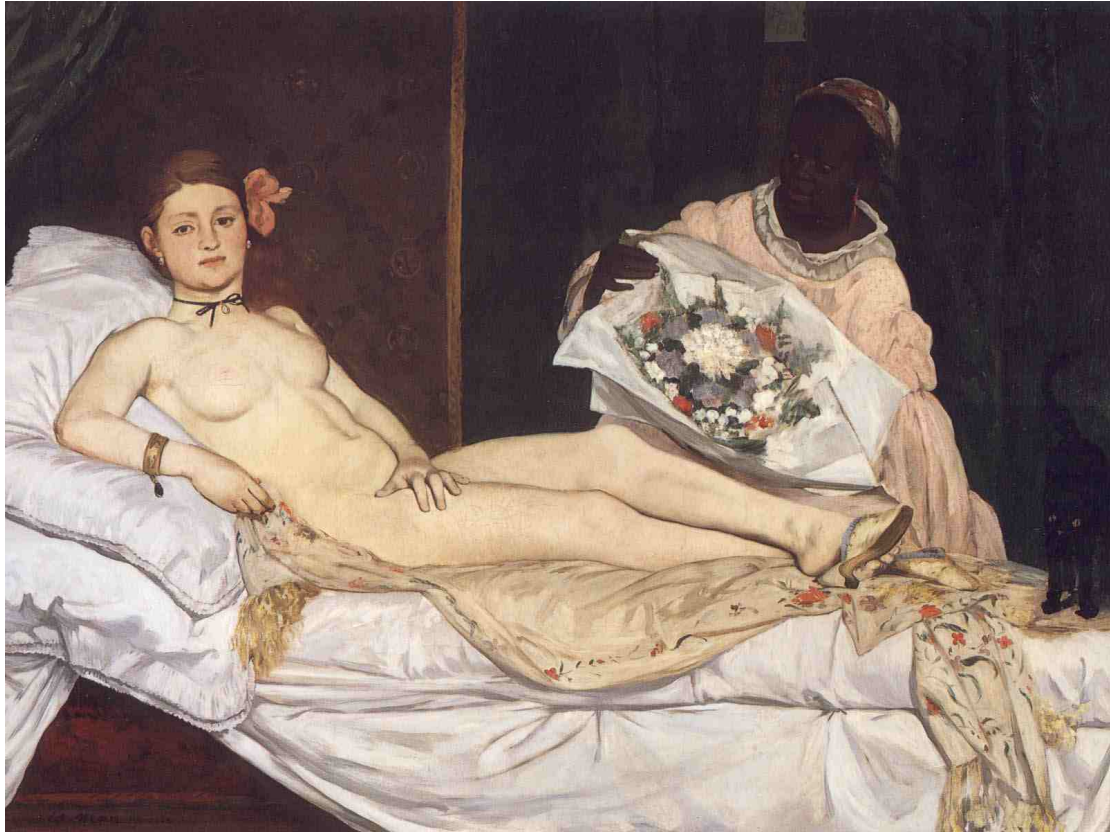
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Let me now briefly summarise my argument thus far, and suggest how the subsequent analysis of Cézanne, cubism, and ultimately Duchamp will proceed. The modernist shift to the focus on aesthetic form can be seen primarily as a move which serves ethical goals; one that announces a dissatisfaction with the forms of the past exactly for their emerging hypocrisy, their failure to speak clearly and on behalf of the subject. It is an attempt, at the level of the idiosyncratic artist, to reveal at once the problems of the world (albeit through the filter of the individual human psyche) as he or she perceives them, and to implement a 'new' image-ideal to which the world,

re-ordered, might conform. In this way every work of art is a call to order, of sorts, in that, structured and refined, it represents an ordering which is at once beautiful and earthly. The drastic reordering of aesthetic form represents an attempt to reinvest the work of art with its capacity for knowledge, its ability to know the world, to speak of its unity. That this in itself is becoming an increasingly improbable and atavistic proposition will be the subject of the following chapters on Cézanne and Cubism.

The study therefore proceeds by exploring how Paul Cézanne responds to the issues addressed by Manet, and frames his work with regard to the theoretical concerns expressed above. A distinct teleology is being designed, which plots the development of both the aesthetic and epistemological issues to which this study pertains, through the artists and works of art in question.



[Figure 1] Édouard Manet, *Olympia* (1863). Oil on canvas, 130 x 190 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



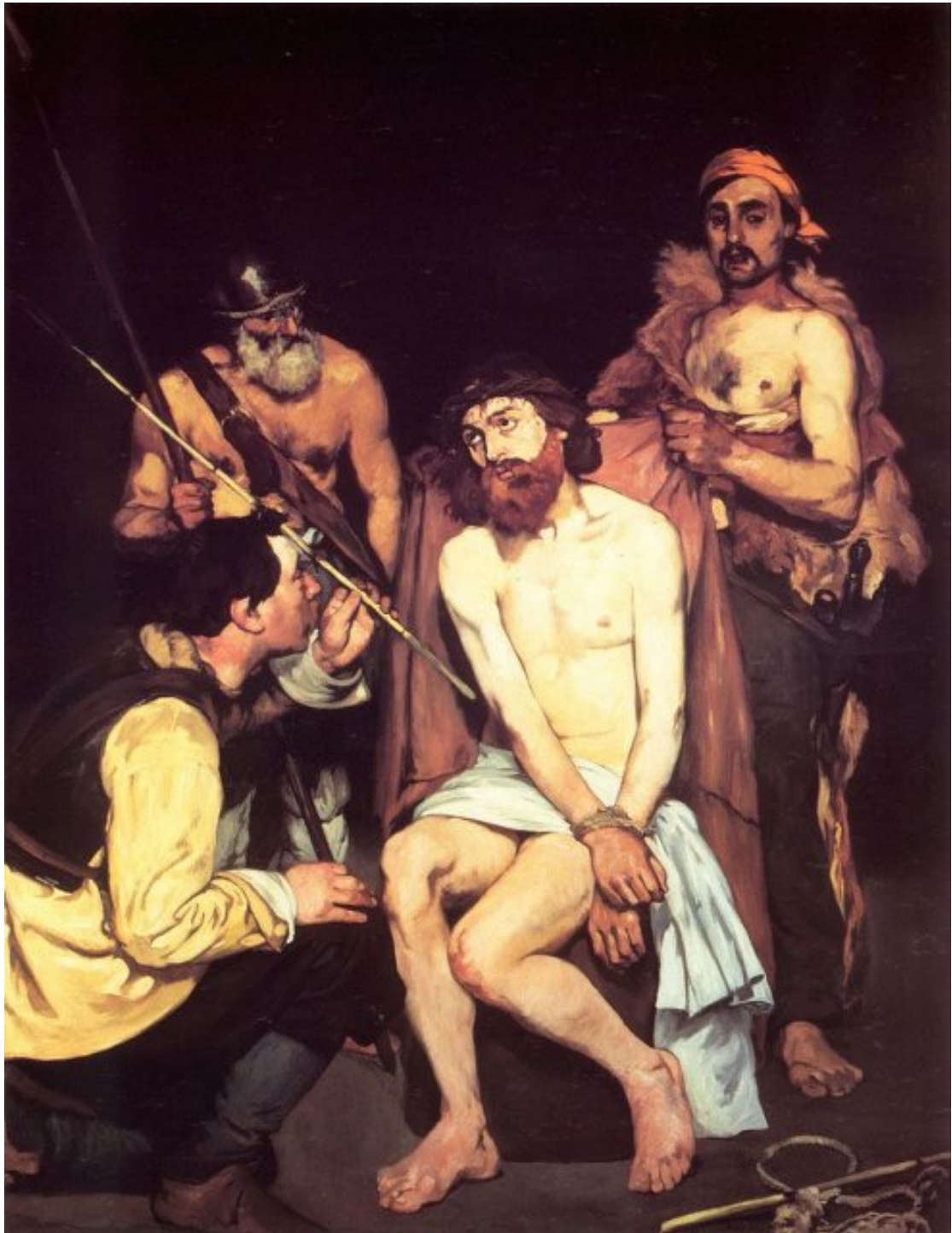
Details: face [Figure 2]



Cat [Figure 3]



Hand [Figure 4]



[Figure 5] Édouard Manet, *Jésus insulté par les soldats* (1865). Oil on canvas, 191.5 x 148 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago.

Cézanne

No, not Cézanne.⁹⁵

Under what circumstances will an expression of a particular temperament result in an art of universal import? When does the subjective truth of the individual's impression or sensation become an objective truth known to all?⁹⁶

In these two questions, Richard Schiff highlights one of the most pressing concerns for the modernist work of art, and suggests - although perhaps obliquely - the way in which personal expressive idiom becomes the modernist artist's primary tool.

In addition, Schiff also articulates one of the central concerns of this study: the problem of the unification of a subjective aesthetic with a set of general ethical values – a unification which thus provides the work of art with a renewed sense of its traditional social function. It should be reiterated at this juncture, that my proposed response to the modernist struggle to reinvest aesthetic form with ethical value is that it is impossible to effect such a unification, owing to the particular secular-rational-capitalist epistemic conditions of modernity. I therefore regard Schiff's questions as unanswerable in the modern age. Or rather, we can only, when pushed, answer them negatively: the subjective truth of the individual never becomes an objective truth known to all, because, according to the episteme of our time, objective, universal human values do not, or

⁹⁵ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 22

⁹⁶ Richard Schiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 36.

rather cannot exist. This is the state of affairs that causes the incipient redundancy of the lyric mode as attested by Nietzsche, Adorno and Broch.

The answer to the questions, when considered with regard to the French artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is somewhat different, however. Generally, in their minds, art's appeal to a universal truth, or set of universal values, was a given – an inheritance from Christian and academic painting which persevered even after universal modes of representation had been interrogated and largely abandoned by any artist seeking to represent - or by some means unearth - the 'truth'.

This chapter explores, then, the way in which the art of the emerging aesthetic avant-gardes (and with specific reference to Paul Cézanne) strove, through formal innovation, to preserve art's ritual, ethical, and in some cases, transcendental function, even as the foundations for such a set of beliefs within the existing conditions of knowledge were becoming increasingly insecure. It is during this period of drastic formal experimentation, which occurs alongside the upholding of painting's traditional social purpose, that we see the beginnings of the exhaustion of painting that leads eventually to the relative impotence of the art-form itself (marked, at least by the terms of this study, by Duchamp's abandonment of it).

I hope, then, to demonstrate the veracity of these claims through the study here, of certain works by Paul Cézanne, and more generally, through the examination of his work understood as a riposte to the formal conventions of the past. Cézanne scholarship tends to promote the view that his work represents the striving of an individual to achieve a moment or means of self-expression which would, in accordance with the lyric mode to which he undeniably aspired, achieve 'the synthesis of subject and object.'⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Richard Schiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 28.

Alex Danchev, editor and translator of the most recent collection of Cézanne's letters (2013), writes this of his subject:

He was and is a revelator. It was entirely characteristic of him to write to Émile Bernard that he owed him the truth in painting, and that he would tell it to him; or to Charles Camoin that he would speak to him about painting more truly than *anyone*, and that *in art* he had nothing to hide. Painting was truth-telling or it was nothing.⁹⁸

Cézanne's now infamous declaration to Émile Bernard: 'I owe you the truth in painting and I shall tell it to you'⁹⁹ has been grammatically deconstructed and reconstructed by Jacques Derrida¹⁰⁰ in the first section of *The Truth in Painting* (1987). Derrida demonstrates the uncertainty of the phraseology, the imprecise and fugitive manner by which truth may or may not be 'owed,' how it will be 'told,' whether in paint or words. What is not at stake in Cézanne's statement, however, is that painting and truth enter into some sort of mutually interactive relationship. Perhaps the truth 'in' painting is the secret of its untruth, and Cézanne owes this to Bernard. From the evidence of Cézanne's correspondence and Bernard's own attitude to painting, this reading is not likely. Rather, the more probable intended meaning is that painting contains a truth and Cézanne intends to communicate it. Bernard, for his part, recounts that 'according to Cézanne, what a painter needs above all is a personal *optique*, obtained only through persistent contact with a vision of the universe.'¹⁰¹ He also stresses the connection between painting, nature and self-knowledge:

The artist will arrive at self-knowledge and the perfection of his art not through patience... but through love that gives insight and the desire to analyse in greater depth and to improve. He must extract from nature an image which will be, properly speaking, his own; and only through analysis, if he has the strength to press it to the end, will he make himself known ultimately, unambiguously, abstractly.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Alex Danchev, *The Letters of Paul Cézanne*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 39.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 356.

¹⁰⁰ See Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) pp.1-13.

¹⁰¹ Émile Bernard in *Conversations with Cézanne*, ed. Michael Doran (Los Angeles: University of Los Angeles Press, 2001), 37.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 37.

Here we find the familiar unification of self, world and knowledge particular to lyric expression.¹⁰³ Cézanne's personal supplement to this formula is logical analysis - rigorous, pseudo-scientific process: 'fathom what you have in front of you, and make every effort to express yourself as logically as possible.'¹⁰⁴

It is important, therefore, to consider Cézanne's work with regard to the value system which underpins it, and which guides, to some extent, its formal composition. Despite Cézanne's rejection of academic theory, painting is a theoretical art-form, one which, for centuries, had been grounded in generally unchallenged theoretical propositions pertaining both to the structure of representation and the nature of reality.

Cézanne's project must be seen, therefore, with regard to the purpose served by conventional academic painting, and within this, the function performed by standardised 'readable' linguistic form. Such forms were designed and employed in order that they pertain and lay claim to the structure of the world and an *a priori* set of values which give meaning to human existence. They were standardised in such a fashion as to be universally understood, appealing most broadly to the perceptive faculties of the human mind, discharging their value through this closed linguistic universality – an aesthetic unity. What is vital in this formulation, is that the representational (linguistic) form be highly accessible, and through this accessibility, provide the broad basis for its claims. A universal form of seeing (although rigorously and precisely constructed in the service of universality) would equate to a universal system of knowledge, and thus unity would become apparent.

¹⁰³ Cézanne was an avid reader of Baudelaire, whose ideas no doubt influenced his own conception of his painting. He was said to know *Les fleurs du mal* by heart. See Alex Danchev, *The Letters of Paul Cézanne*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 36. Further tangential evidence for Cézanne's drive to 'lyrical' expression is to be found in his youthful letters to Émile Zola, which are laden with poetry and often dubious verse.

¹⁰⁴ Cézanne in a letter to Émile Bernard, 26 May 1904 in Alex Danchev, *The Letters of Paul Cézanne*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 339.

Cézanne's challenge to this system is more forceful than Manet's, and can be understood as a vehement assertion of 'new' aesthetic values in the place of outmoded conventional form. A problem arises, as I see it, when traditional ethical values are upheld alongside the denigration of traditional form, within the context of an episteme where neither can be effectively supported, nor prove their reality. Cézanne's work, to my eyes, inhabits this contradiction, and cannot resolve it. Manet voices a problem to which Cézanne performs a positive response – a response which can only ever be partially successful. There is an inherent inconsistency in the execution of his work, its existence in modern Europe: he employs drastically de-hierarchised, un-coded pictorial form in the service of an archaic principle of unity. He attempts to reassert the ethical purpose of painting whilst denying the universality of its form, the aspect which was, historically, vital to painting's ability to communicate ethical values within a broader system of knowledge. Cézanne resorts, in service of his aims, to the lyrical mode which, despite its idealist claims, fails to effectively serve an ethical function. The ideal ethical secular subject, as promised by the lyric self (the self at one with nature, and, through artistic expression, with all other selves) remains as fallible as the postulate of a God as the origin of all value in a universe becoming increasingly schematised and delineated by the (also increasingly fallible) positivistic sciences.

As a result of these propositions, I would suggest that Cézanne's move be considered as an inversion of Manet's: whereas Manet, to a greater extent, expressed a general epistemic disorder at the level of subject matter through the established formal codes of his time (although it must be conceded that part of this general disorder was made apparent through the contravention of inherited academic forms, conventions); Cézanne renders conventional subject matter through a disruptive, idiomatic formal procedure which coheres, eventually, into a relatively stable – if markedly idiosyncratic – system of representation. The confusions and contradictions of Manet's work – so pertinent to the actual epistemic conditions of his time – are apparent only as negative motivating factors in Cézanne's work, which seeks to assert, through the positive statement of

idiomatic formal procedures, the enduring relation of painting to natural and external truth values, and which, as a result of this programme, matures into a bold, if misguided aesthetic statement aspiring to metaphysical unity. It is this edifice (Cézanne's work taken as a whole, his life-work understood as a grand aesthetic/ethical project) which forms the model to which nearly all subsequent modernist painting will subscribe, and to which Duchamp, in accordance with the insights learned from Manet, will provide the most devastating riposte.

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Initially, let us examine the ways in which Cézanne rejected traditional painterly form, and strove to design his own idiomatic language of expression. Following from the disruptions of form seen in Manet's painting of the 1860s, and in a loosely tandem trajectory with Impressionism, Cézanne's work rejects the structuring principles of academic painting in the service of a more immediate response to 'reality'. Richard Schiff provides this lucid summation of the Impressionist project:

The truth which the impressionist sought could be found in any act of perception that had (or seemed to have) the idiosyncratic character associated with a personal, spontaneous "impression". Nevertheless, the impression, as an image or an object of vision, was not the end of impressionist art, but the means to that end, the means to an *experience* through which the true could be apprehended in an act of seeing.¹⁰⁵

Although Cézanne never fully identified himself with the Impressionists, his work – as Schiff has demonstrated – fulfils many of the criteria to which Impressionist art was seen to aspire. There is, in both instances, a shared focus on the vision of the individual – of the unique perception of the artist as route to knowledge of objective truths – coupled with an idiomatic painterly style which, to some extent, was specific to and analogous with the artist's unique perceptive capacity. The objectivised, formalised gesture (the 'signature' in paint) is understood as the incarnation of the artist as self, and in accordance with the privileged relation the artist has to truth: 'paint became a

¹⁰⁵ Richard Schiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 13.

medium for the transcription (one might even say the representation) of [the artist's] own gestures – these gestures become, to a large extent, the very subject of the work'.¹⁰⁶

The position of the work of art with regard to metaphysical truth is thus two-fold, as Schiff describes:

In French art criticism of the nineteenth century, the word “verité”, truth, had a double sense. On the one hand, it referred to a fidelity or truth to nature, and on the other hand to the artist's own temperament or emotions. In its second sense, the word would often be used in conjunction with “naïveté” or “sincérité.”... impressionist art was often seen to be related to both kinds of truth.¹⁰⁷

The secular European artist is then understood to inhabit a mediumistic position between two universalisable truths: on the one hand, the objective truth of nature, its majesty, and on the other hand, the general truth of a shared human subjectivity (made manifest through the artist as paradigmatic subject). The social role of the artist is then as communicator not only of the universal value of nature, but the universal value of the human subject also. Such a synthesis is achieved through the work of art as a simultaneous representation: it stands as the unification of the human self and nature, yet marks the point at which both can be known through their separation.

A commonly held view of the time, here expressed by Théophile Thoré, is as follows: ‘Poetry is not nature, but the feeling that nature inspires in the artist. It is nature reflected in the human mind’.¹⁰⁸ Undoubtedly painted art, at its zenith, was considered to operate within this Romantic mode and in accordance with a postulate of Idealist metaphysics: that there exists an ‘immanent tendency in nature to the development of consciousness and the awareness of universal truth’.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Richard R. Brettell, *Impression: Painting Quickly in France, 1860-1890*, (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 33.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Schiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 21.

¹⁰⁸ Théophile Thoré cited in *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰⁹ J.W. Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason*, (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 206.

An uneasy tension is maintained, however, between fidelity to nature and fidelity to self, as both concepts become increasingly destabilised throughout the nineteenth-century. The universal value of nature, traditionally communicated through standardised structured means of representation had to be coupled with an increasingly idiomatic expression on behalf of the painter, in the service of the communication of his unique subjectivity. Such an alliance is dubious at best; and at worst, outright contradictory.

The painter whose art aspired to truth was obliged, it seems, to reject a universal model of representation for a personal, idiomatic one, yet was required to use this model to express a universal natural truth. Such a feat is only achievable if the concept of nature is made subordinate to the concept of self, and is made communicable only through the iteration of the unique subjective existence of the artist as medium. The key to this communication is idiomatic expression: the announcement of difference from generality (standardised sameness) at a formal level combined with the paradoxical appeal to such a generality at an ideal level. The underlying principle of the lyric self is herein maintained; yet it is required to function alongside the new requirement for idiomatic formal procedure as the basis for legitimating a claim to subjective truth. In France this second-wave and increasingly anarchic Romanticism had been bolstered in the 1860s by Baudelaire, who claimed that ‘pure art... is the creation of an evocative magic, containing at once the object and the subject, the world external to the artist and the artist himself.’¹¹⁰ There remains, however, no real basis for a language of expression which can lay simultaneous claim to self and nature (as attested by Hofmannsthal). As such, the intended communion of the lyric mode is severely compromised, despite remaining one of the primary social functions of the nineteenth-century work of art.

¹¹⁰ Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 2003), 205.

The shift of focus from general and standardised expression to more idiomatic modes of communication is not immediately seen to present problems in terms of the ethical function of the work of painted art. Artists and critics assume that the move to more diverse and disruptive linguistic forms has little real implication for the universality for which the work of art had always been understood to stand. The greatest paintings are still seen to create ‘a social bond not otherwise fully manifest’,¹¹¹ to bring ‘forth emotions latent in others of the artist’s time, emotions which characterise human life in the “real” world, and with which others of all times might conceivably sympathise’.¹¹²

Art is, therefore, and in accordance with its historical function, ascribed an inter-subjective and idealistic role: it works as a mediator between subjects, and between immanent reality and transcendental values. It appeals, in short, to a universal idea of nature and a universal idea of humanity, but through a proliferation of increasingly confused and disruptive linguistic modes. Within the context of the nineteenth-century’s intensifying focus on the individual this is not necessarily seen as a problem:

...artistic creation expresses the individual subject (either artist or model – or their interaction); art is the experience and realisation of subjectivity; art is experience; art *is* subjectivity. This, at least, is implied in the discourse of many nineteenth-century artists and critics; usually, they do not approach the problem of subjectivity with the aim of annexing or rebuilding existing philosophical structures, but wish simply to affirm the inherent individuality and originality of a work of art or of any human expression.¹¹³

It is one of the main aims of this study to demonstrate how the reluctance or inability of painters and critics to fully address the epistemological structures which underpin not only their work but its function in a social context, led to a dependence upon atavistic value systems in order to maintain a sense of purpose for visual art within the context of what Broch has described as a value-vacuum.

¹¹¹ Richard Schiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 41

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 40.

It is my intention then, in the analysis of Cézanne's painting which follows, to illustrate how his work is foremost in the embodiment of the peculiar contradictions which afflict painting during the late nineteenth-century: namely the proliferation of 'new' and idiomatic forms of expression in the service of increasingly outmoded systems of value.

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It is my aim, through an assessment of Cézanne's need to define his own formal idiom, and to declare his opposition to the forms of the past, to more fully understand the nature of painting's transformation within Modernity, to view it with regard to Duchamp's eventual abandonment of the medium. I will build my argument upon the insights of those who have produced dedicated studies of Cézanne's work – specifically, Richard Schiff (historical/cultural context), Roger Fry (transcendental import) and Erle Loran (compositional technique).

Cézanne's most striking innovations are his abandonment of chiaroscuro and his rejection of linear perspective. Both of these developments can be understood to find their origins in Manet's transgressions as described in the preceding chapter. These structuring principles are most pertinent to this discussion, as they relate, in the case of chiaroscuro, to a system by which an image is hierarchised, through which subject matter is ordered and meaning attributed; and in the case of linear perspective to a system of spatial organisation which not only provided a stable framework upon which representation could occur, but, through its replication of vision, offered a linguistic model with universal application. The significance of the interrelatedness of these systems is thus: they were essentially reciprocal structures employed to discharge, through visual representation, underlying social value systems. They were constituent and complimentary

aspects of knowledge. In this sense aesthetics worked in the service of ethics, and ethics depended upon aesthetic structures to legitimate, to make *real*, its ideal value claims. With this in mind, Cézanne's work will be considered with regard to the external values for which it could be said to stand, and the relation of formal procedures to such values.

Let us turn again to Schiff for an assessment of Cézanne's attitude to chiaroscuro:

Cezanne... declared conventional chiaroscuro unacceptable for two reasons: first, because it seemed unlike the colouristic effects actually observed in nature; and second, because it was recognised as an academic artifice, a product of doctrine rather than personal experience.¹¹⁴

Here we can see the twinned concerns of Impressionism rising to the fore once more. Cézanne sees fit to reject the pictorial conventions of the past because they seem to him to be inapposite to his own conception and experience of nature. He appears to take issue with the 'artifice' of academic methods, and seek truth through an altogether reformed method of representation. It is clear, then, that Cézanne recognises the increasing invalidity of the aesthetic values of academic painting, and its lessening hold on what he considers to be the *true* features of reality, the essence of nature. In accordance with this belief his method employs what he describes as 'logical'¹¹⁵ analysis – a concentrated painterly attention to his subject which actively renounces the recognisable 'surface reality' of academic painting and instead seeks out 'spirit'. To Émile Bernard, in 1905, he wrote: 'Let us go out to study beautiful nature, let us try to capture its spirit, let us seek to express ourselves according to our individual temperaments.'¹¹⁶ Here we see quite plainly the convergence of the concept of the 'truth-telling' idiomatic artistic subjectivity with that of the *knowability* of the essence of nature. The unification of these concepts occurs in the painted image, through painting's enacting of the lyric function of the work of art. The artistic ego is simultaneously – paradoxically - asserted and dissolved.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 200.

¹¹⁵ See note 104, above.

¹¹⁶ Cézanne in a letter to Émile Bernard, (no exact date) 1905, in Alex Danchev, *The Letters of Paul Cézanne*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 353.

Almost inevitably, and as a response to the highly developed structure of academic painting, Cézanne resorts to the approach of a primitive, or naïve artist. It must be remembered, however, that this response is as much an affectation as the system he disavows. The truth he seeks to represent through his new formal procedures is not, as he surely believed, a universal value, but rather a relative one.¹¹⁷

Nevertheless, the primitive in Cézanne is also seen, with regard to the history of Western painting, as the undeniably new. Roger Fry:

... we find every person and every object presented to the eye in the simplest, most primitive fashion; instead of searching for diagonal perspective vistas, movements which cross and intertwine, he accepts planes parallel to the picture-surface, and attains to the depth of his pictorial space by other and quite original methods.¹¹⁸

For Cézanne, a return to the truth of nature equates, in formal terms, to a return to a more primitive means of representation filtered through the inherited conditions of European easel painting. In this move we sense the atavism to which Cézanne's innovation paradoxically adheres.

This further quotation from Fry demonstrates how Cézanne's work inhabits the peculiar contradictory space between primitivism and the height of modern abstraction:

There is... a total disregard of those convincing details of texture, those small specific characteristics which our everyday vision seizes on at once for the purposes of life... the actual objects presented to the artist's vision are first deprived of all those specific characters by which we apprehend their concrete existence – they are reduced to pure elements of space and volume. In this abstract world these elements are perfectly coordinated and organized by the artist's sensual intelligence; they attain logical consistency. These abstractions are then brought back into the concrete world of real things, not by giving them back their specific peculiarities, but by expressing them in their incessantly varying and shifting texture. They retain their abstract intelligibility, their amenity to the human mind, and regain that reality of actual things which is absent from all abstractions.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Nietzsche's conception of nihilism, from an 1887 fragment, is instructive here: '*Radical Nihilism* is the conviction of an absolute untenability of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognises; plus the realisation that we lack the least right to posit a beyond or an in-itself of things that might be "divine" or morality incarnate.' In short, 'the highest values devalue themselves.' See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), book 1, p. 9.

¹¹⁸ Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 25.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

The processes of abstraction by which Cézanne achieves his representations of nature are here understood to be fundamental to his presentation of natural truth. Fry here also attributes to Cézanne's art the character of classical art: the twinned presentation of the immanent and the transcendental – the object and the ideal. Through a series of drastic formal innovations Cézanne is understood to have preserved the inherent features of Western art – those things which provided painting with a social function and an ethical force. According to Fry, Cézanne creates an art which fulfils classical goals in the modern world – an arrangement in which Fry sees no contradiction. If Cézanne perceives an analogue between the increasingly invalid values of Western aesthetics, he no doubt relates this to a more broad problem of knowledge. His response to such a crisis is to reinstate traditional metaphysical values through a reformed aesthetic designed purposefully to reintegrate with the values of the past. Cézanne attempts to maintain the link between art and metaphysics despite the failure of the latter as a means to knowledge of the world, of other subjects.

And in this vein, Fry's appeals to transcendental signification are insistent. He sees Cézanne's work as pertaining to 'a world of spiritual values incommensurate but parallel with the actual world'¹²⁰ - a dualism vital to Fry's reading of Cézanne's work. He maintains, as did Cézanne,¹²¹ that the work of art exists as a relative point of contact between the essentially immutable and absolute realms of transcendental value on the one hand and immanent reality on the other. These two categories, for Cézanne and subsequently for Fry, are never in question. It is my contention that they are in fact disastrously undermined, not only by the emerging dependence on formal idiom, but also by the more general conditions of human knowledge (as articulated, contemporarily to Cézanne, by Nietzsche). The cultural force that allows the proliferation of idiomatic form and the confusion of principles of communication is the very same movement

¹²⁰ Ibid., 66.

¹²¹ Primarily in his letters to Émile Bernard. For example, see Alex Danchev, *The Letters of Paul Cézanne*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2013), 339, 353.

that throws into question any claim to absolute knowledge of reality, any absolute claim to fixed meaning or value. Cézanne's work exists, therefore, as a positive response to a set of negative developments, within this inchoate epistemic confusion.

With this in mind we should understand Cézanne's formal experimentation as the drive towards a new unity which is not necessarily outside of the tradition of Western art. Indeed, it is Erle Loran's project to establish Cézanne's place in this lineage, to assert the coherence and consistency of his work within such a historical trajectory:

I believe it is erroneous to think that Cezanne's structure is fundamentally different from that of the Renaissance painters... It is only the surfaces and the quality of the colours and lines that are different; structurally and fundamentally, Cezanne fits perfectly into the great traditions of Western painting.¹²²

Cézanne's rejection of the formal conventions of the past is never a rejection of the traditional function of art, nor of the role of the artist. We should see, therefore, his rejection of chiaroscuro as the rejection of a particular aesthetic value system which no longer pertains to the experience of reality, or which can no longer be understood as analogous to the real world. It is not only the structure of the representational image which is questioned, but the structure of the world itself. Beyond this awareness of the growing falsity of aesthetic models, Cézanne strives to unearth an existential truth which might overcome the uncertainty of his age:

[Cézanne] gave himself up entirely to this desperate search for the reality hidden beneath the veil of appearance, this reality which he had to draw forth and render apparent. And it is precisely this which gives to all his utterances in form their tremendous, almost prophetic, significance.¹²³

Fry, as a disciple of Cézanne, subscribes fully to the understanding of reality his work seeks to promote. And within this we see how Cézanne emerges as an artist/mystic. His work, in its aspiration to lyricism, to a renewed ethical application, depends upon the mystical and unknowable bridge between appearance and reality, between one subject and another. It cannot

¹²² Erle Loran, *Cézanne's Composition*, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1946), 25.

¹²³ Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 36.

be understood to serve its ideal function without this mediumistic value, and a faith in the work of art as a transcendental signifier. But as I have stated before, and following Richard Sheppard, the effectiveness of lyrical expression is reliant upon the unity of word and language within a coherent system of knowledge, and ultimately upon the faith that the world is knowable through human linguistic form.

Importantly we must remember that the model of the artist promoted by Cézanne is the model generally adopted by the Modernist artists who follow him. Cézanne's blend of formal innovation, of disregard for general conventions coupled with faith in the socially redemptive function of art is the paradigm for the utopian modernism of the early twentieth century. Art is not only understood to provide the means for effective critical analysis, but is also endowed with the power to discharge social values, to build the world in its ideal image. It is according to these criteria that modernist art must be regarded as a slow-burning failure, its aims having never been realised. Modernist painting never found a way of translating its ideals into immanent reality.

The bridge between the transcendent and the manifest could not be repaired.¹²⁴

I would suggest, then, that Cézanne's aesthetic consistency is hermetic and does not return to the world in the form of ethical and knowledge values.¹²⁵ The perfection of Cézanne's image-ideal as

¹²⁴ Robert Pippin summarises Nietzsche's interpretation of modernity as follows: 'Nietzsche stresses... the continuity between Enlightenment thought and the prior tradition, but he often notes that modernity is most distinctive in its smug *confidence*, its ambition to complete the ancient "will to truth" and the identification of the truth with "good in itself". It is this modernist insistence on a successful resolution of Platonic and Christian "incompleteness" that makes the failure of such an attempt ("nihilism") more prominent and more significant. Modernity's dream of enlightenment is so extreme, and according to Nietzsche, fails so utterly, that it helps reveal this dreamlike illusion in all post-Platonic thought and it allows us a distinct opportunity to understand that failure.' See Robert B. Pippin, *Idealism and Modernism* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 334.

¹²⁵ Indeed, Broch understands Cézanne's work in the context of what he considers to be an ethical project – the aim of achieving knowledge of the world (see Michael P. Steinberg in *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, p.16). However, whereas Cézanne conceives of a unity of artistic subjectivity and the 'spirit' of nature within his work, Broch understands his painting as an expression of the 'cruelty' of his age. Both appeal to a conception of knowledge provided by the work of art, but the nature of this insight differs profoundly. For Broch, the work speaks of the 'value-vacuum', for Cézanne, and then by extension, Roger Fry, the paintings instantiate historical values with a clear continuity into the present moment. In Fry's

perceived by Fry does not, to my eyes, correspond to the state of knowledge of the wider world. The objects sublimated by Cézanne remain just that – transcendental signifiers which can find no sufficient grounding for their transcendental value in their immanence, their reality. Cézanne’s mysticism of the natural world, or in more ideal terms, of nature, remains a purely aesthetic proposition – one which ‘reality’ no longer deigns to support.

I propose, therefore, that Cézanne structures the representation of his objects/subjects according to a *totalised aesthetic field* of his own design. Within this field objects are brought into an arrangement determined by purely aesthetic and formal relations. This is the totalising effect of Cézanne’s painting upon his chosen subjects: they enter into a hermetic world of aesthetic relations demarcated by the borders of the picture frame. The quotidian objects and natural scenes depicted by Cézanne are sublimated into a world of pure transcendental signification. Cézanne’s paintings therefore become the immanent and transcendental realisation of themselves. They are self-fulfilling and self-sufficient. An apple in Cézanne appeals neither to an apple in particular, nor to the ideal form of ‘apple’, but exists according to the aesthetic terms of the idiomatic representation. An apple is not pictorially named in Cézanne, but is given a pure aesthetic identity – an existence in paint grounded by no clear established relation to reality. Cézanne’s proposition that his work seeks and somehow communicates the ‘spirit’ of nature is built upon a metaphysics which is being undercut – rather than reinforcing the speculative relation of the image to the world, it articulates a cutting of this bond. Cézanne’s inherent proposition is thus: in order to speak more clearly of nature, the work must look less like the world and more like a form of ‘primal’ symbolism - this is the irrationality that Broch perceives in Cézanne’s art.¹²⁶

understanding the work is ‘ethical’ through its discharging of positive enlightenment value; in Broch’s the work is ‘ethical’ in its revelation of the negative forces of the age.

¹²⁶ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 44-46.

I therefore disagree with Fry's assertion¹²⁷ that Cézanne's abstractions return to the real world in the form of knowledge that he describes. To my eyes, Cézanne's is a total visual language which fails to describe the conditions of experiential reality beyond the singular vision of the artist. His painting is aesthetic without epistemological grounding. His is a language which cannot accurately describe the human values to which the world is now subjected. He cannot name objects, nor can he name others through a language which *knows* them. I suggest that rather than knowing the world, his work declares that it does not know the world, making a negative epistemological statement instead of the desired positive one.¹²⁸

Cézanne valorises the particular through a formal procedure which sets its own terms with regard to the ascription of value. The particular, once subjected to the idiomatic aesthetic code of the artist becomes its own transcendental signified within its painted immanence. 'Value' is trapped within the painted image and in accordance with a subjective aesthetic vision.¹²⁹ Cézanne's total aesthetic sublimates, therefore, its objects through the subjective filter of the artist's visual code, and through the paradoxical persistence of the represented object as a material figure in paint. In this way immanence and transcendence are reconciled within an entirely aesthetic sphere, and without any necessary regard for the fate of the relation of transcendental values to material existence beyond the limits of the painted image.

Once Cézanne's objects have been affected by this process they cannot be 'returned' to reality as such, and enter into a system of aesthetic signification through which value is ascribed through aesthetic means alone, and in Cézanne's case in accordance with his totalised aesthetic field which

¹²⁷ See page 77, note 119.

¹²⁸ Here the Nietzschean element of the argument constructed in this chapter (and outlined in my introduction) is most clearly revealed. I am suggesting that – in this context - what is most significant in Cézanne's work is what is unintentional within it.

¹²⁹ Walter Benjamin would situate this development as the motivation for bourgeois connoisseurship as the foremost mode of appreciation of the arts (see Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings Volume 3, 1935-1938*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Howard Eiland and others, eds Howard Eiland and Michaels W. Jennings, (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press, Harvard University, 2002), 9.

fails at a formal level to qualitatively differentiate between objects. The fallacy here is that this singular and hermetic aesthetic system aspires to pass as a universal linguistic form, or as a language that may communicate with universal import, may speak of the unity of world and sign.

This aesthetic absolute (the final conformity of all things to an unvaried and uniform pictorial surface¹³⁰) is falsely equated with an epistemological absolute. Rather, the only values which remain are those that have been transformed by the idiomatic aesthetic system: colour modelling replaces chiaroscuro, plane relations replace linear and aerial perspective, predetermined directional strokes replace modulated brushwork according to subject matter. Cézanne's primitivism provides the reductive aesthetic totality that can be seen to answer the confusions articulated in Manet's work. It provides what is intended to be a positive response through a reconfigured and greatly simplified aesthetic structure but which, through its simplicity, its positivity, actually denies the conditions to which Manet's work is testament. There is no synthesis, only assertion of the artistic will.

In its avoidance of the value based technical modulations of academic painting, Cézanne's work proceeds towards an absolute aesthetic in which value is negated through his totalising formal procedures. In attempting to make a positive aesthetic statement which cannot be supported by epistemological and ethical conditions Cézanne not only invalidates his own lyrical and truth-seeking aspirations, but in historical terms demonstrates the veracity of the values against which his work is seen to be braced, opposed. What I understand as Cézanne's failure is simultaneously the verification of the world which Manet paints and which Duchamp will eventually decide can no longer be painted.

¹³⁰ I suggest to the reader that a distinction should here be drawn between Cézanne's totalised aesthetic and the qualitative formal difference identified in my analysis of Manet's *Olympia*.

Now let us explore these assertions with examples of Cézanne's work, and through a comparison with Manet's technique.

Initially, we shall consider Cézanne's *Nature morte avec un Cupidon de plâtre* [Figure 6] (1894).

In this image we can see evidence of one of Cézanne's most favoured techniques, and perhaps one that he learned from Manet [although it should be noted that Manet, having employed this technique in *Olympia* uses it only intermittently, and has effectively abandoned it by the time he paints *Un bar aux Folies Bergère* (1882)]: the use of blue or black outlines to mark the point where forms meet one another. This can be understood as one of the ways in which the problem of situating objects in space is solved once chiaroscuro and linear perspective are renounced.

Quite simply, the line marks not the edge of one mass, or the start of another, but the caesura between them. It, being present, marks what is not there. It is a line which denotes its own absence, but which, by being present, affirms the coexistence of other forms. It is this appearance of the present gesture which denotes absence, or more plainly, of a gesture which has no real world referent, which marks the passage to abstraction and to the totality of the aesthetic field. The coherence of Cézanne's style, in this instance depends, upon the presence, in paint, of what is absent in nature.

We can clearly see that Cézanne has boldly outlined the bowl at the front left of *Nature morte avec un Cupidon de plâtre* along with several of the fruits, and the plaster cast itself. At times the modelling of the figure and the use of shaded areas of the background give the impression that the plaster cast has been conventionally modelled in order to situate it in the pictorial space. On closer inspection we can see that almost every edge of the figure ends with an outline. Manet most obviously resorts to outline in *Olympia*, where certain passages of the nude are defined by thin dark lines. These lines are apparent mostly where modelling and chiaroscuro are at their minimum, such as the point where Meurent's legs meet and, as discussed in chapter 1, where the

line of her stomach needs to be differentiated from her left arm. Manet's use of outline in this instance is in order to retain a pictorial integrity despite the rejection of academic conventions. Where he has employed other image-forming techniques, he does not require outline. The servant figure is not, for instance, distinguished from the background with recourse to outline.

In *Nature morte avec un Cupidon de plâtre* Cézanne relies upon outline to define the limits of objects in space, and uses colour modulation within a skewed perspective of plane intersections. In order to maintain the coherence of the painted image Cézanne depends upon painterly techniques which, through their distance from academic conventions and from traditional representations of reality, produce the effect of a totalised aesthetic field. The relations established within this field are defined by the requirement to provide a positive statement in opposition both to the conventions of the past and to the emerging conditions of high modernity.

In addition to this, brushstrokes (aside from those brush strokes which form the outlines) are generally uniform with little variation according to qualitative difference in subject matter or object. This technique provides the objects within the image with a feeling of immense mass – a mass greatly in excess of their 'real' existence. Texturally, table top, fruit, fabric are all subjected to the same painterly procedure. Line and colour are used to differentiate between objects and their 'qualities' – here a fruit is spherical and green/red, cloth is blue and described with curved and straight lines offset by areas of shadow. The table is a swell of greyish blues and appears as a large flat plane whose edges are marked by the outlines of other shapes/planes. The plaster cast is clearly outlined and is actually more conventionally modelled in white/blue/grey. Each aspect of the painting is therefore given a pictorial identity through demarcation by outline and differentiation according to imaginative use of colour. Every object has its own colour, but painterly technique remains essentially the same, as does viscosity of paint and evidence of brushwork.

If we consider Cézanne's landscape painting we see further evidence of his propensity for a closed and reductive aesthetic field. *Le lac d'Annecy* [Figure 7] of 1896 is composed of clear lines which mark the intersection of planes, and presents a vision of the world which clearly bridges Impressionist and what would be come to be known as Cubist aesthetic sensibilities. Here the landscape is modelled mainly through colour variation without concern for the representation of depth. As before, perspective is replaced by colour modulation and idiosyncratic attribution of colour to objects seems to operate within the closed field of the painted image. Aside from the bold dark lines which are frequently painted in a single stroke, brushwork is uniform as is paint thickness and texture. Some strokes appear 'directed', others looser and harder to define. Again, colour modulation within outlined areas of pictorial space becomes the only real tool for qualitative differentiation within the work.

Les grandes arbres au Jas de Bouffan [Figure 8] (1883) also demonstrates the self-imposed limitations of Cézanne's method. In this image the brushstrokes, almost without exception are diagonal/vertical. His technique is here reminiscent of Seurat's pointillism but seemingly without the theoretical underpinning of the effect of juxtaposed colour on the human eye. The implementation of a total painterly method in this image seems without rationale, other than the announcement of difference from established formal procedures. Here the impression is of looking at the landscape through rain, the brushstrokes suggesting the downward motion of falling droplets. There is no suggestion that this technique is used specifically to produce this sensation, nor to represent actual rain, and Cézanne employs it on other landscapes of this period such as *Paysage avec peupliers* (1885-7). The technique produces a sense of vibrancy, even vibration within the work, and as a result the image, in the announcement of its difference from the forms of the past, discharges a certain energy, expresses a feeling of motion and newness. The implementation of this technique is, however, tied to the expression of these sensations, and is

limited by them. The painterly approach absolutises the image and overwhelms any qualitative difference or variation that might be contained or represented within it. *Les grandes arbres au Jas de Bouffan* approximates the colours of nature; uses simple tonal and shade modulation through abutting brushstrokes to give the impression of depth within the foliage of the trees; and provides further example of Cézanne's reliance on outline to define form in the lines employed to delineate the tree trunks. In this image colour differentiation is not Impressionistic, and the total aesthetic field is created almost exclusively by the application of a singular approach to brushwork.

Perhaps the aspect of Cézanne's painting which most obviously reveals his hermetic aestheticism is his representation of human beings. His series of *Les joueurs de carte* paintings are some of the finest examples to explore.

The second version of the two-figure *Les joueurs de carte* [Figure 9] (1892-96) demonstrates once more Cézanne's general adoption of short brushstrokes. In this image there is, however, subtler modulation in colour than is seen in *Nature morte avec un Cupidon de plâtre*, and a greater reliance on modulation within large planes/areas of colour which serve to differentiate characters, objects, background. Where edges of objects meet, Cézanne resorts to more stable lines than the looser strokes which comprise the large areas of colour, once more betraying his propensity for outline. Another technique employed here to imply depth and spatial relations is the use of extreme areas of darkness/shade to outline the form of lighter areas. This procedure is used where simple outline is rejected and can be seen in use on the breast and back of the left-hand figure (where the darkness of the back wall is qualitatively the same as the darkness behind the figures' right arm) and to offset the cards from the background.

The image has a monumental stillness generated by the tendency of Cézanne's technique to produce the sense of excessive mass. The human beings are rendered no differently than the table, than clothing, than background features. The image is hypostatized by technique. The human beings are frozen, disfigured, bulbous, inhuman. Little compassion for the human subjects can be found in the qualitative difference of painterly technique, and the colour modulation and rendering of face flesh is most similar to Cézanne's approach to the representation of fruit. Whilst this image shows greater subtlety and sensitivity to subject matter than much of Cézanne's work, there is still little evidence of such consideration at the level of painterly technique. Cézanne's mature technique develops into the totalising aesthetic field to which I have consistently referred and the quality of subjects/objects, defined by external epistemological and ethical conditions/values, is lost through the conformity of all things to the painter's absolute aesthetical propositions. Cézanne's visual language names only the world he creates, and it is a world without consideration for nuanced difference – a world defined by the singularity of a subjective vision which aspires to universality, and can only achieve its aims through idiomatic absolutism.

Turning to the four-figure *Les joueurs de carte* [Figure 10] (1890-92) we can see greater formal differentiation between objects/subjects. There is a more nuanced approach to the representation of objects and textures. Clothing is formed of broad dark fold lines and areas of light colour, as can be seen clearly in the blue coat of the figure on the far right. Here Cézanne is closest to academic method, and the draped cloth hanging at the top right of the picture frame even recalls traditional formal treatments of fabric. The table and the back wall are rendered in similar fashion, and in a similar colour. The larger area of the wall is signified as such by larger brushstrokes and a slightly looser handling of the paint. Despite the subtle increase of variation in application of paint, colouration remains the primary means by which Cézanne differentiates between the various components of the image.

Faces are, in keeping with Cézanne's approach to human flesh, rendered according to the techniques rehearsed on fruit, and are, as a result, vague and inhuman, appealing more to an imprecise archetypal human form over any intention to represent individual human subjects. None of the human beings in this painting appear to have eyes, and as such it is impossible to think that Cézanne at any point aspires to 'likeness' of any sort. This reinforces the idea that humanity, as it is portrayed here, is dull, heavy, lifeless, and that human beings conform to vague anatomical conventions and little else. By rendering human flesh as he would that of an apple or a pear Cézanne brings humanity and the non-sentient objects of the world together on the same aesthetic (and I would argue, by extension, ethical) plane. We can, according to Cézanne, no longer qualitatively differentiate between a human face and an apple. And, in a peculiar extension of this principle, Cézanne rids human faces of their eyes also. In the place where eyes should be we find nebulous shadowy voids which recall the dark strokes employed to mark the intersection of planes and masses, and which signify, through their presence, that which is undeniably absent.

This tendency in Cézanne is further illustrated by *Le fumeur* [Figure 11], also painted between 1890 and 1892. In this mid-length portrait we are presented with the frontal image of a man, probably a peasant, smoking a small white pipe. Here the absence of eyes is most striking, most unnerving. The traditional aim of the portrait is undeniably compromised by Cézanne's treatment of his subject: this image proffers no sense of 'likeness', yields no access through identification with the figure portrayed. The man is merely archetypal, unrecognisable and unknowable beyond a simple list of general features: moustache, nose, lifeless eyes, pipe. There is nothing either in the represented figure itself nor the means by which the figure is represented which can be said to reflect the individuality, the specific humanity of the sitter. Indeed, the titles of the images so far discussed reveal Cézanne's approach to his human subjects: the card players, the smoker [and we can include in this list *Le paysan* [*The Peasant*] (1890-92), *Vieille femme avec un rosaire* [*An Old Woman with a Rosary*] (1895-96), *Les Grandes Baigneuses* [*The Large Bathers*]

(1894-95)] are simply broad categorisations under which unspecific human entities can be gathered without specific identity. They are general descriptive titles which have the effect, as does Cézanne's totalising aesthetic field, of discouraging qualitative differentiation and requiring the conformity of all things upon a singular aesthetic plane.

The removal of eyes from the human face can be said to be another feature of this totalising aesthetic project. It is a means by which, at the level of painterly technique, human beings are undifferentiated from the objects of the world, and a means by which - perhaps inadvertently - Cézanne denies the individual interiority of his human subjects. *Le fumeur* is an inhuman portrayal of something that looks more like a wax mannequin than it does a living human being. If indeed the eyes are the window to the soul, then Cézanne has bricked them up, perhaps in inadvertent recognition of the fate of the soul in European modernity.

The face of the smoker is rendered, as I suggest above, in accordance with the techniques used to model fruit, and colour is used not to approximate the tones of skin, but with regard to Cézanne's overarching programme of employing colour modulation as a replacement for chiaroscuro and linear perspective. This has the effect of moving the representation of the sitter further away from human likeness and into an increasingly abstract and hermetic visual realm. The application of paint on the face tends towards impasto, but as is common with Cézanne, viscosity of paint, and as a result the textural surface of the work remain essentially uniform.

Cloth is here rendered with the short stabbing and blocky strokes we see in the landscapes, but with the aim, in this instance, of producing large abutting planes of colour. It should be noted that this technique has the effect of producing vibration and a sense of motion in the landscapes, but here contributes to an uncanny and contradictory impression of plastic monumentality and deathly stillness. Cézanne approaches the extreme flatness of later abstract painting in his

representation of the bottle to the left of the sitter. Here there is almost no modelling whatsoever, no sense of depth in space, rather an outline which extends into the body of the shape it defines. Such an understanding of this object's presence in this painting may offer a way of seeing the role that outline played in the passage from academic painterly method to the abstraction of high modernism. And so, in addition to Loran's observation that...

the extraordinary influence... Cézanne has had on abstract art is markedly bound up with his abandonment of scientific perspective. Cézanne eliminated destructively converging lines, as well as lines that would seem to expand out of the picture plane or beyond the confines of the picture format.¹³¹

... we may say that Cézanne's use of outline to establish spatial relations as a result of his rejection of linear perspective paved the way for artists who chose to represent objects as little more than outlined shapes or flat blocks of colour. The step is a simple one, as the bottle in *Le fumeur* illustrates.

What is most significant about this painting for the current discussion is, however, as follows: almost nothing can be said of the subject/sitter using the visual information provided by the painter. Rather, we are left in a position whereby it is possible only to discuss the form of the painting itself, and in so doing reflect not on the represented subject, but on the nature of the painter. Such a development is vital to the changing face of visual art, however, and provides evidence of the way in which painting alters in accordance with the shifting epistemological conditions of the time. In Cézanne the humanity of others is reduced to a set of hypostatized aesthetic propositions/relations which serve (in what may be considered a paradoxical manner) to assert the humanity of the artist as subject. The self, as expressed through the work of visual art, becomes the central principle within aesthetic and ethical concerns, systems, and structures. The atomised modern subject develops, therefore, into the idiomatic producer of meaning, of value. It

¹³¹ Erle Loran, *Cézanne's Composition*, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1946), 8.

is both liberated from the cultural hegemony of social ties, and exiled from coherent value-consensual communities.¹³²

In response to Fry's claim that 'Cézanne had, properly speaking, no method. He improvised all the time, and always with rather desperate courage'¹³³ I suggest that Cézanne, as I have demonstrated, did indeed have a very clear method, and a coherent aesthetic programme. Where his desperation is most apparent, however, as is his errancy, is in his struggle to reinforce his aesthetic method with epistemological import. Such a task, for Cézanne, at his historical moment, seems, at worst outright implausible, and at best, unrealisable. Painting, it seems, can no longer shoulder the weight of universal values, can no longer be made to attest to unity.

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In order to place these analyses of Cézanne's work with regard to the theoretical position established in the first chapter, I will proceed with a comparative analysis of Manet's *Un bar aux Folies-Bergères* [Figure 12]. Painted in 1882, this work is Manet's last great large-scale painting before his death in 1883, and provides us with a final insight into the complexity of his painting and the direction in which it was developing. It is also, temporally, the closest of Manet's paintings to the mature works of Cézanne discussed above.

¹³² Again Robert Pippin demonstrates Nietzsche's insight in this regard: 'Stimulated by the secularism of modern social life and the theoretical attitude of modern science and philosophy, the dawning awareness of the contingency of traditional religious, metaphysical, and moral ideas has begun to make such ideals unavailable as bases of social cohesion and order.' See Robert B. Pippin, *Idealism and Modernism* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 347.

¹³³ Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 33.

Firstly, it should be noted that the face [Figure 13] of the female figure in *Un bar aux Folies-Bergères* is painted differently to Victorine Meurent's in both *Olympia* and *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*. It goes without saying that the handling differs greatly from that of Cézanne. Here the skin of the female figure is softer, less luminous than in *Olympia*. Instead of possessing a porcelain prominence, the skin, in tactile terms, sits back from the woman's dress and lace frill, and is matched, in terms of softness and handling by her hair. Whilst greatly differing brushwork is apparent on hair and skin, Manet succeeds in achieving an overall impression of the softness of both despite and as a result of this varied handling. The achievement is one of delicate balance over assertive statement. Alternative techniques are used to qualitatively differentiate between the features of the represented figure and also to reflect the *actual* qualitative difference between hair and skin. Beyond these particulars, Manet succeeds in conveying a general sense of the softness, fragility and expressiveness of the human face as a result of the accretion of separate values and painterly approaches within the pictorial space of the face itself. As a result, human values external to the aesthetic presentation seem to persevere. We can identify with this figure - albeit imprecisely – owing to the representational techniques employed.

But this is not to say that the painting resorts exclusively to traditional techniques. Extreme lights and darks are avoided as is deep chiaroscuro modelling. Here the face is modelled with subtle transitions to mark the passage from chin to neck and to suggest the roundness of cheeks. The transition from skin of the face to lips is also gentle – no single mark as such can be identified as the point of separation from one to the other. In this respect, outlining is forgone entirely in the face, marking a significant departure from both the technique of *Olympia* and Cézanne. Skin tones are realistic and areas of shadow are, if anything, under-emphasised. The shadow to the right side of the figure's nose (as we look at her) is coloured from the same palette as the hair, which has the effect of tying the two painted areas, face and hair, together. The hardness, so apparent in the appearance of Meurent's face in *Olympia*, is gone here, replaced instead by an

overall softness, a textural recession into the picture plane. Whereas Meurent's eyes have a brash clarity in their representation – despite the ambiguity of her expression, there is a boldness in Manet's brushwork, a straightforward decisiveness of line using the colours drawn from background and hair – the eyes of the figure in *Un bar aux Folies-Bergères* are imprecise, rendered through less assertive strokes. They have, as a result of this handling of the paint, a luminous, 'watery' quality. They appeal, in short, to our understanding, our experience of *real* human eyes. This is in direct contrast to Cézanne's work, where eyes become negative spaces. What for Manet in both *Olympia* and *Un bar aux Folies-Bergères* are integral components of the representation of human beings within pictorial (and always for Manet, social) contexts, become, for Cézanne, extraneous to requirements. Between the two artists we can see that the relationship of the human figure to its painted representation, of the human to visual art, has changed. What in Manet's work becomes the opening of a field of ambiguous intelligibility, is, in Cézanne, the closure of the work to sensible identification. This shift can be phrased in another way: whereas Manet creates a three-way and ostensibly open-ended relation between painter, subject and viewer, Cézanne creates a relationship only between painter and viewer – a relationship maintained and mediated by the pictorial subject and idiomatic form of the painting, but without the fluidity that a genuine third term provides. Essentially Cézanne's work generates a relationship between two selves (painter and viewer) without the possibility of mediation through the presence of other human figures. 'Nature', as a concept would provide such a mediation for Cézanne, but nature, as I have suggested, becomes, through the work of idiomatic art, subordinate to the concept of self. This is the effect of Cézanne's totalising aesthetic field: all things are subordinated to the idiomatic aesthetic project of the singular subject. All things become absolutely subjectified without external mediation. And as such, Cézanne, by attempting to reassert the epistemic unity to which Manet's work announces the death-knell, represents, through his position as lyrical self, the very atomised disunity into which human beings are thrown. His attempted (and ultimately unsuccessful) lyricism is singular and absolute, manifested through a totalising aesthetic:

'primordial unity' limps behind a bludgeoning subjective aesthetic. The positive statement Cézanne's work represents, through its formulation of a new aesthetic practice, through the hope of a new art, can be understood only as the dying echo of the unity which European Christian and academic painting once provided, reinforced. The epistemic conditions in which Cézanne's art occurs cannot provide the basis upon which a universal aesthetic and conjunctive ethical proposition might exist.

The significant relations in Manet's work, however, are those of qualitative difference maintained without resolution. Manet's work maintains this suspension and irresolution of values, imperfectly, and in accordance with the ambiguity that any rejection of absolute values entails.

Un bar aux Folies-Bergères actually upholds, at a formal level, the principle of unresolved qualitative differentiation within the painted image. Differing formal procedures are used to represent different aspects of the composition. *Un bar aux Folies-Bergères*, as does *Olympia*, places a human figure within an array of conflicting and unresolved values manifested by varied painterly techniques. Manet's rejection of academic method is by no means as absolute as Cézanne's, and he upholds certain archaic values whilst presenting, in seemingly ambiguous fashion, contradictory values within the same pictorial frame. As I have stated before, where Cézanne provides a positive aesthetic assertion within a context of epistemic confusion, Manet articulates the confusion, gives it voice and therefore presence. Manet makes objective a state of knowledge. His work is a precise image-ideal in this respect, whereas Cézanne's offers a vision to which the world would be ideally made to conform: an appeal to an atavistic unity.

In formal terms, then, we can see how Manet has utilised a variety of painterly techniques in his execution of *Un bar aux Folies-Bergères*. As the analysis above has shown, the woman's face is rendered with soft, subtle brushwork and an avoidance of impasto and chiaroscuro. Even this

reading, however, cannot be total, as a bold, almost cumbersome downward brushstroke is used to form the line of her nose. This stroke stands out plainly from the rest and as a result of its incongruity, defies definitive explanation.

This type of brushwork is used more commonly on the glassware in the foreground of the painting. Here impasto strokes are used to describe highlights, and it is here also that high contrast between light and dark is employed. Similarly, the jar of flowers [Figure 14] in the foreground is rendered with bold white strokes, and the flowers themselves are modelled in accordance with the more expressive mode in which Manet painted his late flower still-lives. The free handling of paint here differs greatly from the brushwork used to describe the woman's skin and hair. A different technique is used again to give the marble bar an appropriate texture. The paint is not as thick as the white highlights on the glassware, but is more obviously layered, and built up on the canvas in a way in which the paint of the woman's face is not. This difference in application is most notably apparent in the transition from marble surface to the skin of the woman's hands as they rest upon it. In a similar vein to the textural surface of the marble, the gold tops of the bottles in the front left of the picture are built up in thick layers of paint and with loose brushstrokes.

Similarly, extremely free brushstrokes are used to form the locket around the woman's neck [Figure 13], and these serve to highlight the softer, less obvious brushwork which comprises her face and neck. In these areas where varied techniques are employed within close proximity and with regard to objects placed very clearly in spatial relation to each other, we see Manet's keen regard for qualitative differentiation articulated most clearly. It should be noted that the varied method that Manet employs extends even to objects/subjects of a similar type. If we look at the face of the male figure [Figure 15] at the far right of the painting we can see how differently it is rendered to the face of the central female figure. The male face is actually painted in a very

similar way to Cézanne's *Le fumeur*, but whereas Manet uses this method of representation to suggest a comparison between the face of the central figure and that of the marginal male one, Cézanne adopts this technique as his *modus operandi*. The dark voids which represent the eyes of the male figure contrast starkly with the lucid eyes of the female, and this is the very basis of Manet's procedure of qualitative differentiation at both a compositional and formal level. Although it must be stated that *Un bar aux Folies-Bergères* seems more inclined to the sort of archaic hierarchical organisation that is so notably absent from Cézanne's work.

Nevertheless, the sheer breadth of formal approaches on display dissuade the viewer from any definitive reading of the work. The crowd reflected in the mirror are composed of hatched, generally broad and free strokes, and the area approaches levels of formal abstraction uncommon at the time. The brushwork here is much closer to the expressionism of the early twentieth century, and displays a concern for the tactile nature of the medium over its capabilities in the service of realism. Yet this is contained within the broader context of the image as a whole, where it enters into a dialogue with other modes of representation. The oranges in the foreground are, for example, traditionally modelled, through shades of one colour and appropriately highlighted. The *meaning*, therefore, of a particular formal procedure is held in suspension alongside others, and is defined by its position within this relation without necessary recourse to an established hierarchical structure.

As with the coherence maintained by an internal hierarchy that reflects an external hierarchy, Manet represents the confusions and disunities of the wider world within his pictorial frame. Cézanne, by contrast, represents the world according to the imposed coherence of his totalising aesthetic field, and in so doing seeks to reorder the world through a visual language of his own design. Cézanne is the model of a subject (artist) attempting to structure the de-hierarchised, disordered world according to his own idiomatic aesthetic - and by extension ethical - lyric vision.

Such is the paradox of the de-hierarchised world where all would assert the universal significance of their own individuality in a world which no longer consents to universal values. This drive, understood as a false freedom of the spirit in Nietzsche's thought, is fostered by the errant 'need to secure mankind from contingency, to reassure him *by means of truth*.'¹³⁴ Such reassurance, such 'metaphysical comfort,' is, according to Nietzsche's diagnosis, unachievable in the realm of knowledge; it is reliant upon unsustainable concepts of transcendental value, of the very 'primordial unity'¹³⁵ that, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, is exalted.

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Let us consider, by way of summation, and before expanding the discussion to further include the insights of Broch and Hofmannsthal, this comment by Roger Fry. Here he is describing Cézanne's *La femme a la cafetière* (1890-1895):

It looks almost like a defiant renunciation of all those devices which painters had adopted ever since the High Renaissance to enrich their arabesque and increase the recession of the picture-space.¹³⁶

The fundamental question posed by Fry's reading of this painting is, for the current study, as follows: if Cézanne rejects these conventions, these values, and also their claim to the world (which, as we have established, is greatly diminished in late nineteenth-century France) then what values/conventions/claims does he assert in their place? And upon what basis of knowledge can he make these assertions *real*. This is where I feel his project lacks the ability to truly reflect the episteme of his time: Cézanne's response to the failure of classical form/value is to resort to a mythic nature and a mystical conception of the artistic self as a medium between natural reality and the world of human understanding. But such an arrangement relies upon the perseverance of

¹³⁴ Robert B. Pippin, *Idealism and Modernism* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 341.

¹³⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 37.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

concepts of nature and of unity which are themselves eroded by secular rationality. Cézanne's reverence in the face of nature is perfectly understandable, and in many respects noble, even ethical, but occurs simply as a riposte to a humanity which, in every aspect of modern life is asserting its dominance over nature, subordinating it as an ideal and in its immanence.

Cézanne's art occurs as a response to historical progress, a progress in which he acknowledges disastrously negative forces, and to which he reacts, building his riposte upon the loosening formal conventions of the present married to the degenerating values of the past. His art can be read specifically with regard to Broch's diagnosis of the problem of modernity, here reiterated:

The nineteenth century... which at its close was suddenly becoming aware of the value vacuum into which it had strayed, attempted to dominate that vacuum by inadequate and well-nigh ridiculous means. With a definite sense – at times even a knowledge – that every value system rests on a universally valid symbolic language, with which it is in fact identical, so that in a value vacuum (which is always silent) there can be no communication of language or values between one man and the next, came the intention to overcome this Babylonian condition by putting the cart before the horse and artificially contriving a symbolic language invested with universal validity.¹³⁷

Where Manet articulated the problem, without resolution, almost with indifference, Cézanne offers a positive solution, a reassertion of value through the forms of the present, but without full acknowledgement of the implications of the values of the present. Cézanne's art, which might, through its assertion of the lyrical self, bring order, beauty and knowledge to the world, cannot form the basis of a tradition, cannot supplant the pictorial conventions of the past because the ethical and epistemic values of the world no longer legitimate the understanding of spirit and unity that he attempts to build into his aesthetic system. Indeed, Broch sees the cruelty of the age sublimated in Cézanne's work, not the promise of a redeeming knowledge.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 152.

¹³⁸ Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*, trans. Michael P. Steinberg, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 44.

Cézanne ostensibly fulfils, however, the romantic ideal of the lyrical self: he provides a bridge between immanent reality and metaphysical speculation. He makes their relation *real* through formal expression. His art fails however, when we consider the instability of the relation between the material world and the realm of ideal value. It is the very practice of art as metaphysics which has been undermined: Manet's art is testament to this. What Cézanne stabilizes into an aesthetic system is the realization of a set of atavistic value relations. He builds the sturdiest of bridges, but between shifting sands.

Cézanne strives to assert values in the time of their degeneration. His perfect aesthetic world remains just that, as he remains a painter of conventional subjects, toiling in an untouched corner of France, unable to engage with the brutal vicissitudes of modern Paris, of the trajectory of European rationality. The paradox remains as such: the lyrical soul may well live within Cézanne, and perhaps within his art; yet it can find no home in the world that men have made.

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One of the propositions central to the effectiveness of lyrical expression in Cézanne's work is as follows: *'Technique would facilitate the passage from the personal to the universal'*.¹³⁹

Here I suggest that we can substitute 'language' for technique. The passage from the personal to the universal is reliant, therefore, on the effectiveness of communication. But here we encounter Hofmannsthal's problem: the language of human expression, communication, ceases to lay effective claim to the world. In order to effect the passage from personal to universal, a language

¹³⁹ Richard Schiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 42.

must exist which lays claim to both spheres. For Hofmannsthal there is no such language, and this is why, for Sheppard also, the lyric mode is made defunct.¹⁴⁰ All that remains is the idiomatic expression of the subject, whose aspiration towards unity (communion) is always met with failure. There remains nothing in the conditions of knowledge that would allow a language of universal expression, one that, in its totality, overarches all the disciplines, defies all categorisation.

Therefore Cézanne's work should be seen with regard to the failure of the lyric mode. It is Cézanne's idiom which declares his unique subjectivity, and his drive to universality; but also this which signals the failure of his work in its aspirations. The idiom, through its desire to communicate with truth, with the utmost sincerity, announces its incommunicability, demonstrates its ultimate un-knowableness, tied, as it is, to the now un-knowable nature of other subjects, other minds. It aspires to the condition of a universal truth which can no longer be substantiated in reality, or through philosophical discourse.

Cézanne's radical idiomatic expression (one that does away, formally, with many of the conventions of the past) cannot lay claim to the world in a general sense, nor to the experience of other subjects despite the surprising conventionality of his subject matter. Such a process requires a language built upon universal conventions and a general episteme which legitimates its claim to the world, to knowledge. It requires a language that is verified or legitimated universally; not just with regard to a singular subject. As stated above, this is the source of the failure of Cézanne's art with regard to the lyric mode – not so much that Cézanne's work itself fails in its intentions, rather the intended outcome no longer serves its intended function. Simply, the lyric mode, the unity to which it testifies, no longer exists.

¹⁴⁰ Richard Sheppard, *Modernism – Dada - Postmodernism* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 124.

And it is through this realisation that we begin to understand the implications of a post-religious epistemology, one dependent upon the inherited and institutionalised values of European Christianity for its codes, but one which, in the absence of general religious belief, must rely on the ability of subjects to make themselves known to one another. There is a shift from the meta-ethic of the Christian model, to the inter-subjectivity of secular ethics.

Personal moralities may exist, but absolute moral codes cannot be substantiated. Morality must, it seems, be constructed through other means, other systems. This, of course, is the farthest-reaching consequence of Nietzsche's late philosophy.

The intended function of lyricism, and through Cézanne, of the work of visual art also, cannot be successfully achieved once a universal basis for ethical values has been rejected. It is this development – this decline of the metaphysical value of the work of art - that in the introduction to this work was tracked in the thought of Nietzsche, Adorno and Broch, which forms the theoretical basis for the study. As a result, the following postulate has been shown to be false, or substantially unsupported by experience:

The impression... is the embryo of both bodies of one's knowledge, subjective knowledge of self and objective knowledge of the world; it exists prior to the realisation of the subject/object distinction. Once that distinction is made, the impression is defined as the interaction of a subject and an object. An art of the impression, the primordial experience, could therefore be seen as both subjective and objective.¹⁴¹

The existence of an *a priori* form which marks the intersection between subject and object, and which acts to unify and to situate human action meaningfully within the world can no longer be substantiated. Under such circumstances the 'interiority' of the work of art must be called into question:

Art acquires its specificity by separating itself from what it developed out of; its law of movement is its law of form. It exists only in relation to its other; it is the process that transpires with its other. Nietzsche's late insight, honed in opposition to traditional

¹⁴¹ Richard Schiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 19.

philosophy, that even what has become can be true, is axiomatic for a reoriented aesthetic. The traditional view, which he demolished, is to be turned on its head: Truth exists exclusively as that which has become.¹⁴²

It is, in accordance with this state of affairs that today Cézanne's work can be made to testify to the fall of lyricism, to the degeneration of the relation between art and metaphysics. All we are left with are the images in their stark immanence – all idealist postulates or supplements, all appeals to transcendental truths or concepts of primordial unity are to be renounced.

The problem for art, as manifested by the painting of nineteenth-century France, is the recession of effective and complimentary explanations of the conditions of immanent and transcendent existence. Without such clarity, the work of art cannot exert its ethical function, nor depend upon a general aesthetic framework. If European art has always been understood to contain a metaphysical component, then the invalidation of traditional metaphysics enacted by the positivistic disciplines, the natural sciences – and by Nietzsche! - signals the invalidation of a traditional aspect of the function of the work of art. This process, I suggest, appears first through the incomprehensibility of certain of Manet's paintings.

Art is left somewhat bereft once this aspect of its ethical and knowledge function cannot be verified, or is no longer supported by a broader episteme: 'Maurice Denis would... consider the final goal of art as a synthesis of object and subject... later Denis would praise Cézanne's art for a "reconciliation between the objective and the subjective"'.¹⁴³ But if this reconciliation is gradually proved, if not to be impossible, then to be ethically ineffective, then art loses any positive social purpose beyond its purely aesthetic or surface character. This is, of course, the state of knowledge described by Broch as a 'value-vacuum'.

¹⁴² Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), 3.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 28.

Adorno's injunction on the writing of lyric poetry¹⁴⁴ can be understood, therefore, with regard to the historical conditions that emerge from this vacuous state.¹⁴⁵ The lyric itself is not necessarily at stake, but rather the ideal ethical function of the lyric fails disastrously, both in the context of Broch's 'vacuum' and Adorno's 'total society'. The metaphysical import of the lyric suffers because of the fall of metaphysics¹⁴⁶ in the face of progressive human ethical failures. For Adorno these failures find their apotheosis in the Nazi concentration camps:

A new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen.¹⁴⁷

Adorno recognises that this imperative against the mechanised infliction of suffering and the bureaucratic implementation of murder is concerned simply with the prevention of physical or psychological pain and the prolongation of individual human life, but has no legitimisation outside the immanent realm. The recession of metaphysical values connected with human existence is understood as a contributory factor to the historical progress (for Adorno, regress) that makes Auschwitz possible, but also to the cultural movement that makes it impossible to

¹⁴⁴ This is the context in which Adorno first makes this declaration: 'The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation.' Poetry is 'barbaric' and 'impossible' – not banned as such, but divorced from its purposes, perhaps even its *being*. See Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society" in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press), 1997, 17-34. It remains to be seen whether I am able to escape the pitfalls of 'cultural criticism' outlined by Adorno. Whilst I advocate his diagnosis, I stress also its historical specificity – what was *true* for Adorno's age (or perhaps more precisely for Adorno) is problematized in our own age, in accordance with the altered conditions of 'truth.' In a sense, Adorno's truth may subsequently be dislodged despite the enduring legacy of the historic and material events to which he refers.

¹⁴⁵ Indeed, the 'total society' that Adorno describes can be understood as developing from and as a result of the 'vacuum' described by Broch. The totality to which Adorno refers is in negative terms, is the negative imprint of any putative positive unity.

¹⁴⁶ With regard to this 'fall', several philosophers of the early-mid twentieth century can be seen to be grappling with the same philosophical problem: the fall of metaphysics. Ayer and Wittgenstein find evidence for this state of affairs in their analysis of language, Adorno finds evidence in historical facts and social conditions. Either way, some sort of philosophical comfort is still sought in order to overcome this state of affairs. Knowledge and the world still require reconciliation.

¹⁴⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 365.

provide transcendental values against which the atrocities of the concentration camps might be weighed. The imperative to prevent Auschwitz – and here I am using Adorno’s term of reference for the Holocaust as I am following his assessment - from being repeated, in the face of its occurrence, can be maintained only through opposition to the immanence of suffering: ‘it is in the unvarnished materialist motive only that morality survives’.¹⁴⁸ And it is upon this that personal moralities must now be constructed. For Adorno, the occurrence of Auschwitz stands as ultimate proof of the recession or impotence of transcendental values employed in the service of ethics, and the prevention of atrocity:

After Auschwitz, our feelings resist any claim of the positivity of existence as sanctimonious, as wronging the victims; they balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims’ fate. And these feelings do have an objective side after events that make a mockery of the construction of immanence as endowed with a meaning radiated by an affirmatively posited transcendence.¹⁴⁹

Herein is the reasoning for the injunction on lyric expression. The values to which lyricism aspires can no longer be considered to exist, cannot be understood to serve an ethical purpose. The metaphysical basis for such propositions has degenerated - this is precisely the reason for our doubt in Cézanne’s lyricism. In Adorno’s thought, the consequences of the diagnoses of Nietzsche and Broch are played out. There remains, in the face of the actuality of human history, no metaphysical basis for human existence, for the intrinsic value of human life, for the pre-existence of ideals or values: ‘our metaphysical faculty is paralysed because actual events have shattered the basis on which speculative metaphysical thought could be reconciled with experience.’¹⁵⁰

Aesthetic schemes, formerly charged with transcendental value and, in social terms, ethical import, are stripped of these functions in the face of the impossibility of value structures which are inherently extrinsic to mundane human values, and in accordance with which human action

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 361.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 362.

could be morally oriented and meaning attributed. The extra-human values (in Cézanne's case we can count 'nature' in this category) implied in any lyrical model – the values by which the aesthetic component of a work can be given transcendental significance – and by which, through what may be considered an archaic theological paradox, human actions and mundane values are given meaning. There remain no ethical values beyond the proposed prevention of suffering as it can be known in its immanence. Adorno describes the situation thus:

We despair of what is, and our despair spreads to the transcendental ideas that used to call a halt to despair. That the finite world of infinite agony might be encompassed by a divine cosmic plan must impress anyone not engaged in the world's business as the kind of madness that goes so well with positive normalcy. The theological conception of the paradox, that last, starved-out bastion, is past rescuing...¹⁵¹

In a world stripped of divine hierarchies, an equal, rational humanity must be morally regulated by rational schemes. Art would assume the role of moral instruction, but cannot teach from any doctrine other than rationality, or according to the inevitable dialectic, through a cult of the irrational. Art would, ideally – as has been demonstrated through the early pro-lyrical and Dionysian thinking of Nietzsche, Adorno and Broch - in showing us the transcendental worth in others (and the unity of all things) prevent the infliction of suffering on others. For Broch it would provide unique knowledge in the service of ethicality. There is an essential reciprocity of feeling built into the ideal ethical function of art: to feel through the creation of another is to acknowledge that others feel as we do. The lyric can now, however, once Adorno's injunction is taken into consideration, only blankly appeal to a shattered transcendence. Lyricism itself becomes a sign without referent. As a form of expression – the basis of a language, even - that pointed not to the world, but 'beyond' and 'before' it, lyricism has no purpose, no legitimacy within the context of epistemologies dictated by logic and positivism, by - in Nietzsche's binary - the Apollonian.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 375.

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These theoretical reflections can now be brought to bear on the painted art here in question. I now conclude the discussion of Cézanne with a further comparison with the work of Manet, starting with this comment on Manet's *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) by Roger Fry:

This composition [*Le déjeuner sur l'herbe*], seen by [Cézanne] in all the fervour of his youthful revolutionary enthusiasm, exercised a profound influence on his art. The motive of the picture haunted him throughout his life and he never gave up the hope of realizing a great design conceived in a similar spirit. It is indeed an idea that constantly recurs in the history of art; that of contrasting, in a single composition, the brilliance of nude flesh and the beauties of landscape – it is the eternal dream of an earthly paradise.¹⁵²

Manet's painting is, however, quite obviously *not* an earthly paradise, and in fact ridicules the idea of such a thing. Manet's painting is, instead, a complication of human values situated within 'nature', which is itself acknowledged to be a human construct. The forces at work within Manet's painting are not those which could conspire to realize an earthly paradise. Rather, Manet's work is closer to an immanent critique. The truth Manet aspires to render in paint is not an eternal, natural nor divine universal value, but rather the modern 'truth' of the degeneration of such values. Manet's sincerity, therefore, is not so much related to an inherent natural or human metaphysical truth, but to the truth of a historical condition, a subjective perception. The eternal dream of an earthly paradise, dependent as it is on value systems extrinsic to mundane humanity, is revealed to be a fallible vision of an unrealizable paradigm within the context of a fully anthropocentric understanding of the world.

As a result any natural, divine or transcendental human value within Manet's work can be known only in its absence. What Manet figures through omission, Cézanne will go on to assert

¹⁵² Roger Fry, *Cézanne: A Study of His Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 8.

positively, and in accordance with a model to which Manet's work actually represents a definitive riposte, the closure of the field.

The disorienting, contradictory sophistications of Manet's work represent a very different understanding of the world to Cézanne's urbane 'primitivism'. This is not to say, however, that the 'nature' to which Cézanne's work is directed has receded entirely from the world, or was always a mythic construct, but rather that the cultural and social conditions of the late nineteenth-century present an environment in which such values are perhaps inadvertently, but nevertheless coherently undermined. There remain few foundations upon which to build the great natural edifice to which Cézanne's work aspires. Seen in this way, Manet's work strikes a balance between the expression of the subject as an idiomatic particular, and the broader socio-cultural reality of which he is made, and of which he forms a constituent part; whereas Cézanne strives to assert, through his art, an atavistic model of the social function of art and its relation to truth.

At surface level we may say that Cézanne's art appeals to universal and trans-historical values, whereas Manet's asserts the primacy of relative values and the play of signification such relativism entails. This is only half the story, however. What occurs beneath this pictorial level is actually an inversion of the equation laid out above:

Because Cézanne cannot, beyond the capacity of the painted surface – his chosen medium – appeal to any universal truth value which can be considered to partake of immanent reality, or persevere in epistemological terms, his work enters into the cultural/historical sphere as an element of the play of signification to which Manet's work testifies. Cézanne's work can only have a cultural identity as a relative value. The truth to which he aspires can now only ever be

understood as one truth amongst many, or perhaps more pessimistically, one falsehood among many.

This then poses a problem for our understanding of Manet's work with regard to this inversion. I am, quite obviously, suggesting that Manet's work does strive to express the 'total' truth of a social reality characterized by the proliferation of relative truths/falsehoods. The best resolution to this particular conundrum is, I believe, as follows: Manet's work upholds a sincere representation of contradiction, which is, of course, simultaneously false. But what remains irresolvable at the level of thought, can find some adequate resolution on the pictorial plane, and specifically with regard to the painted surface.

Manet succeeds in his representation because he can rely on the historical coherence of the painted image, building his expression through subtle subversions of its conventions whilst still maintaining, beyond all real doubt, recognizable, and most importantly, realistic images. Manet's work is not 'imaginative' – its power is in its reality, or rather in the representation of a reality shown to be tearing itself away from the forms, the values, the beliefs of the past. Manet paints confusion, the effect of confusion on the human subject. In very straightforward terms, he signals the inadequacy of tradition, of the values of the past in his present moment, and he represents this inadequacy as the simultaneous reiteration and irrevocable subversion/perversion of tradition. Hence his *Olympia*.

In summation, and to resort to another contradiction, Manet uses the historical stability of the painted image to announce the death of the stability of the painted image. It is akin to the performative requirement Shakespeare makes of his protagonists: 'I am Slain!' In Manet, painting announces its death, according to the terms by which, historically, it was given life.

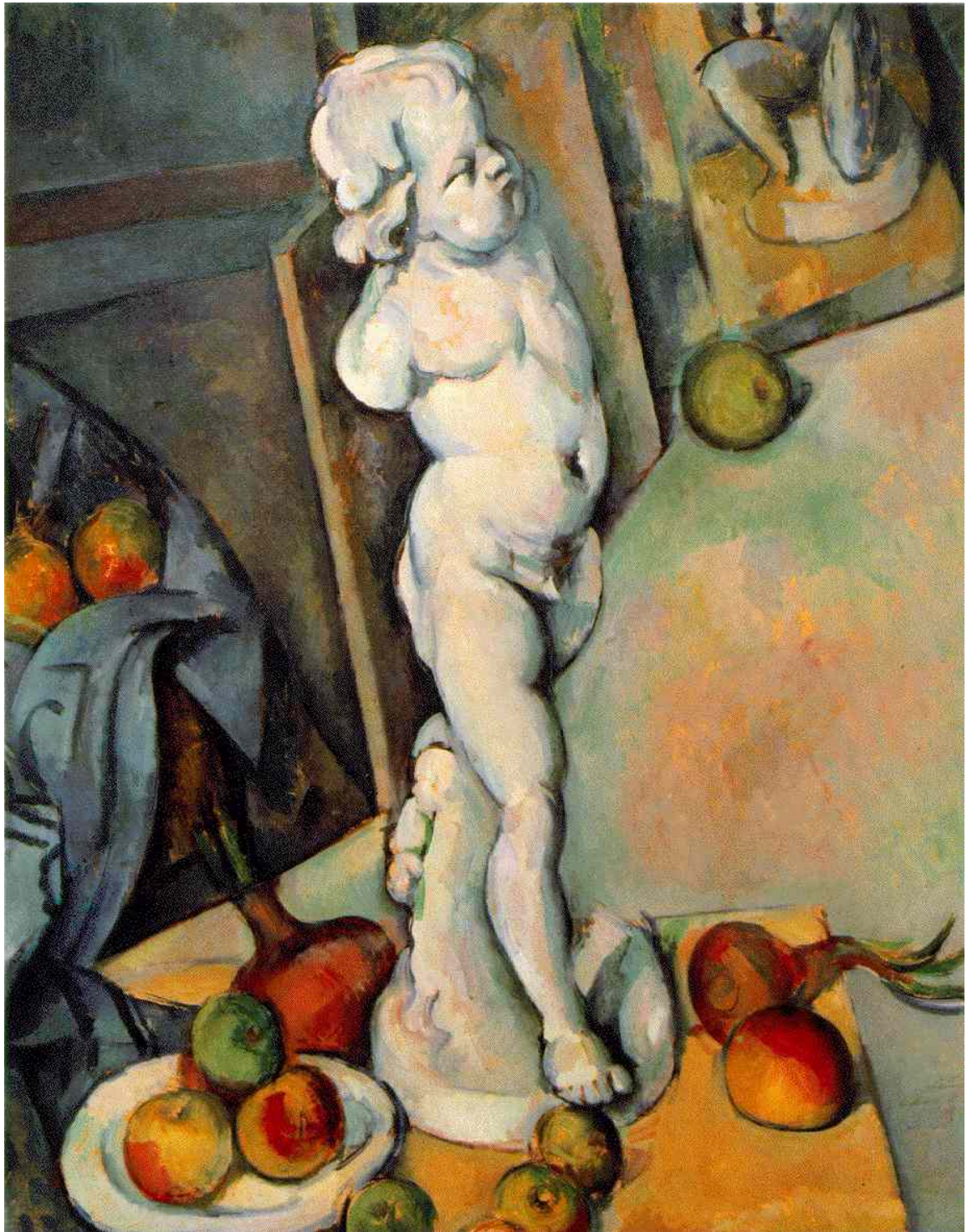
The art that follows is not some form of painterly life after death, but the blossoming of lyrical painting in the time of its impossibility; the age of painting striving to the condition of music; the age of painting deprived of its right to represent the world. Through this development painting loses its hold on reality, relinquishing any claim it once had to objectivity, and to a mirroring, critical or otherwise, of the world. It becomes the art of subjectivity, of the artist as self, of 'pure' expression.

In historical terms painting becomes divorced from its role of representing the world 'as it appears' and becomes concerned solely with its role of creating the world 'as it should be' through the idiomatic vision of the artist. The two separate functions of painting, the aesthetic and the ethical, which once worked in tandem through pictorial convention, are resolved entirely within the aesthetic.. No universal forms exist to communicate the ideal ethical values which the painter may intend to discharge in the world, and therefore these values cannot find their place in the world, cannot be made *real*. And in their surge to find an aesthetic language with genuine epistemological import – a language of knowledge - painters flee further and further from the conventions of representation, into visual languages in which abstract signs may be assigned idiosyncratic meaning, and an ideal hermetic, aesthetic realm created. These visual worlds are, however, increasingly removed from the reality of human perception, and from human experience.

Because painting no longer has the tools, the language, to represent the world, it cannot exert its influence within it. Painting can no longer 'speak' to the world, to knowledge, to values, because the epistemological models which ensured the necessary coherence for such a correspondence have crumbled through their inadequacy. Its failure in this regard can be seen in its recession as an art-form, its entrance into a state of profound undecideability, wherein the failure of its knowledge function eventually leads to the failure of its status as an effective form of art. Today,

the European (Christian) art *par excellence* has almost disappeared as a 'high' art practice. Once the ethical function of painting collapses, and after the medium's foray into manifold aesthetic relations, the aesthetic function of the work collapses also. There remains, for the artist, and as Duchamp attests, no *reason* to paint. Again I recall the Lyotard quotation with which this work opens: 'this world needs photography, but has almost no need for painting.'¹⁵³

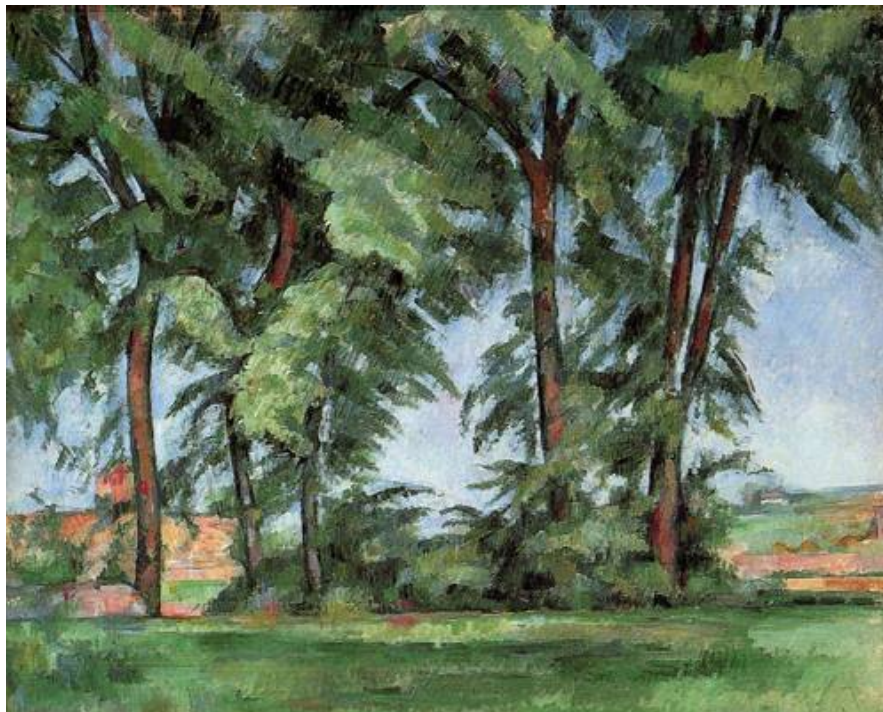
¹⁵³ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (The Polity Press: Cambridge, 1991), 119.



[Figure 6] Paul Cézanne, *Nature morte avec un Cupidon de plâtre* [*Still Life with Plaster Cast*] (c.1894). Oil on canvas, 70 x 57 cm. Courtauld Institute of Art, London.



[Figure 7] Paul Cézanne, *Lac d'Annecy* [*Lake Annecy*] (1896). Oil on canvas, 64 x 79 cm. National Gallery, London.



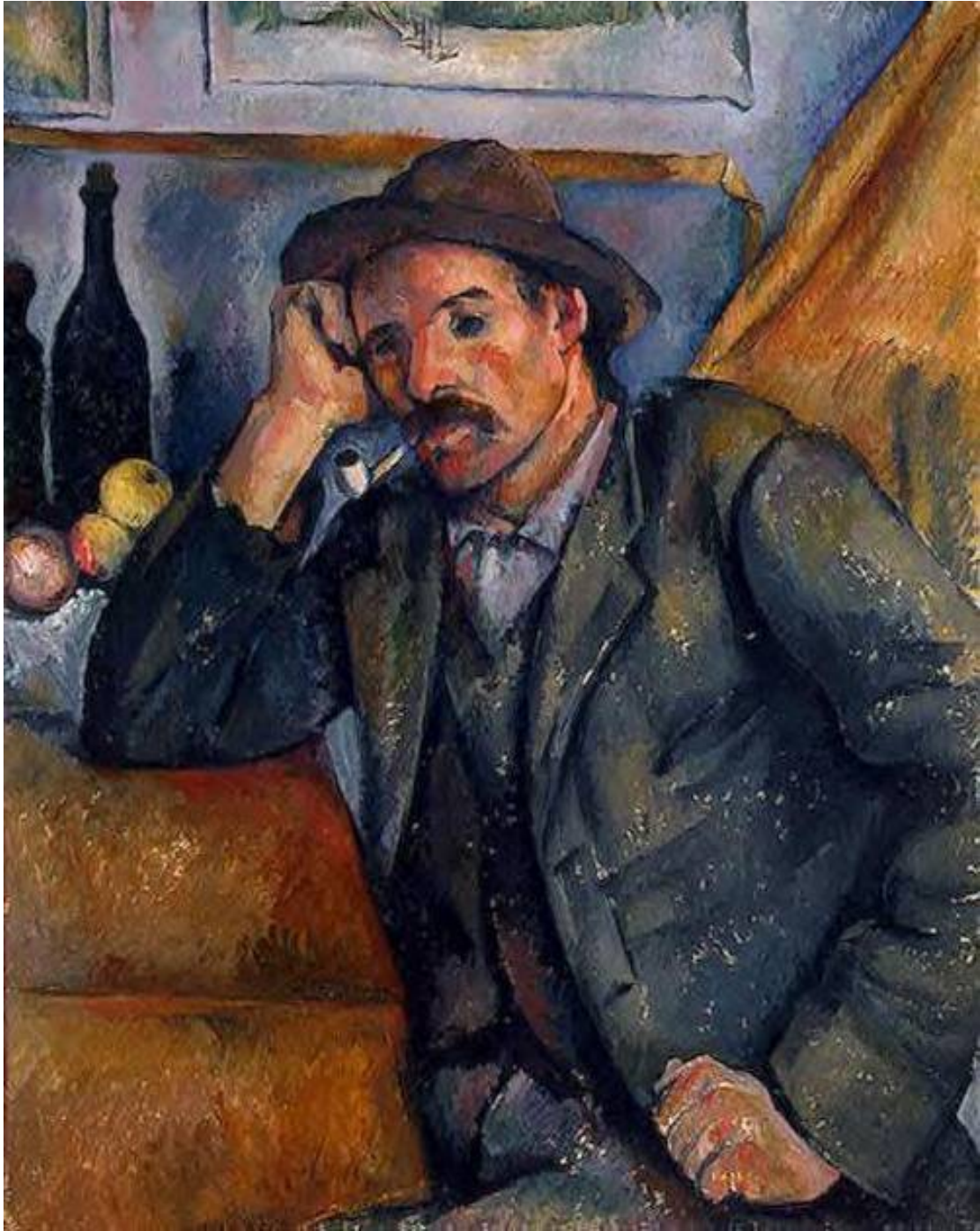
[Figure 8] Paul Cézanne, *Les grandes arbres au Jas de Bouffan* [*Tall Trees as the Jas de Bouffan*] (1885-1887). Oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm. Courtauld Institute of Art, London.



[Figure 9] Paul Cézanne, *Les joueurs de carte* [*The Card Players*] (1892-1893). Oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



[Figure 10] Paul Cézanne, *Les joueurs de carte* [*The Card Players*] (1892-1895). Oil on canvas, 60 x 73 cm. Courtauld Institute of Art, London.



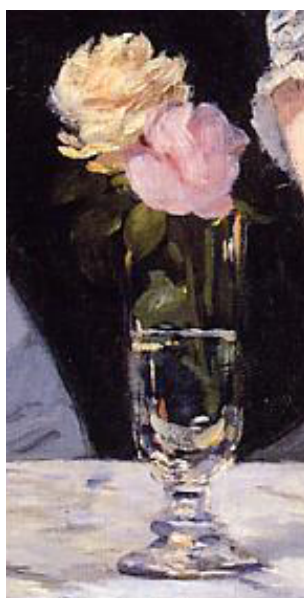
[Figure 11] Paul Cézanne, *Le fumeur* [*The Smoker*] (1890-92). Oil on canvas, 92.5 x 73.5 cm. Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.



[Figure 12] Édouard Manet, *Un bar aux Folies Bergère* [*Bar at the Folies Bergère*] (1882). Oil on canvas, 96 x 130 cm. Courtauld Institute of Art, London.



Details: face, necklace [Figure 13]



Vase [Figure 14]



Male face [Figure 15]

Cubism

Anyone who understands Cézanne has an inkling of cubism. From now on, we are justified in saying that there is between this school and the previous manifestations only a difference in intensity; and, to convince ourselves of that, we need only attentively envision the progress of that realism, which, departing from the superficial reality of Courbet, plunges with Cézanne into profound reality, shining brightly as it forces the unknowable to retreat.¹⁵⁴

No one in 1911 could ignore that both the duty of the third dimension and the ban on perspective had been posed by Cézanne. Neither Seurat nor Gauguin had succeeded as Cézanne had in placing the history of painting – and, consequently, the whole of the avant-garde in its function of ensuring historical continuity – in confrontation with this essential contradiction. And no one better than Cézanne “resolved” this contradiction in a way that was as significantly contradictory: this famous space, both hollow and bulging, that the brush stroke, “the coloured plane,” and the object engender around themselves. Cubism was an interpretation of Cézanne, an obligatory reworking of the pictorial problems invested by Cézanne’s painting with the force of law.¹⁵⁵

Cubism... is the moment when modernism focused on its means and its purposes with a special vengeance. The idiom that resulted became *the* idiom of visual art in the twentieth century: Picasso’s and Braque’s way of organising a picture was borrowed, adapted or fought against by almost all subsequent art, and very often as the still point of modernism – the set of works in which modernity found itself a style.¹⁵⁶

These quotations serve to demonstrate the connections between Cézanne’s art and that of the cubists. They concisely suggest the continuity between them – the ideas expressed here will be unpacked and developed in greater detail as this chapter progresses.

¹⁵⁴ Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, “Du Cubisme” in Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, (eds.) *A Cubism Reader*, (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 420.

¹⁵⁵ Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 23.

¹⁵⁶ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 175.

It is generally accepted¹⁵⁷ that cubism is a further working through of the questions posed by Cézanne's art – questions that his art simultaneously posed and sought to answer. Cubism is, however, at a productive distance from Cézanne. It is less invested in the question, more rational in its search for a solution. Cézanne posed questions related not only to the form that a painting took, but also to the position of art and the artist in society. His approach, as has been demonstrated, was markedly different to that of Manet, yet was engaged nevertheless with a tradition of painting with which Cézanne clearly identified himself. Cézanne's was an art of attempted reconciliation, both at the level of the picture plane and also with regard to the artist and society, the artist and nature. This is the essence of his desired unity, his 'epistemology of the singular and equivalent';¹⁵⁸ and of his aesthetic requirement that the world conform to the schema of his brushwork, to the completeness of his vision. Cézanne's art, however, cannot - as I have shown in the preceding chapter - be seen to achieve the unity to which it aspired beyond the aesthetics of the picture plane itself. His mature style represents an attitude to the world which can be translated into an aesthetic system and a disciplined practice. This is what allowed cubist painters and theorists to see in Cézanne the genesis of their own project, the paradox, as de Duve has it, of the collapse of classical form within the assumed continuation of historical tradition. Cézanne legitimates the practice of painting even if the system he proposes is inadequate. 'Cubists' – and here I am referring primarily to Picasso and Braque – acknowledge Cézanne's failure, but set about working upon the great hope his work declares: that painting can remain a valid form of lyrical expression. In Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger's rhetoric this equates to the pursuit of progress in realism (in accordance with the finest nineteenth-century models of such progress), the search not for superficial but 'profound reality'.¹⁵⁹ Indeed the spirit of nineteenth-century positivism, of empirical enlightenment that T.J. Clark perceives in Cézanne's project can be seen maturing in the work of the early cubists. It goes without saying that before 1912 - and

¹⁵⁷ As suggested by the quotations above from de Duve and Gleizes and Metzinger, and established in John Golding, *Cubism a History and an Analysis, 1907-1914* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959).

¹⁵⁸ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 166.

¹⁵⁹ Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, "Du Cubisme" in Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, (eds.) *A Cubism Reader*, (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 420.

certainly before the end of the First World War - a world wherein progress was not the ultimate aim of empirical and to a lesser extent metaphysical pursuits was virtually unimaginable.

Cubism set to work on this great aspiration through the work of two significant talents: Braque, the Cézanne ‘scholar,’ with his studious attention to detail, his reverence; and Picasso, the outrageous, prodigious talent – the painter with painting in his blood.¹⁶⁰ Yet what these two (and no less significantly, many others) sought to do was to settle upon a painterly language that was not wholly abstract, but which represented the world through a set of artifices equivalent, although not similar, to those employed by the classical system, and with a renewed relevance to the modern world. The new classicism, which can be seen as one of the hopes of cubism, would be thus achieved through the same means as the old classicism, through a totalising and unified aesthetic grounded in the epistemic conditions of the time. In such a system painting is assured a place of great and unrivalled importance. And it is primarily in this sense that I understand Clark’s declaration: ‘Cubism... is the moment when modernism focused on its means and its purposes with a special vengeance’.¹⁶¹ Cubism is the point at which painting as a tradition, as a discipline, must come to terms with its impoverishment, must renew itself or face redundancy. It is also marks the point where visual art splits subtly into two divergent paths – paths that will only become truly clear (in America) many years later – where visual artists must choose painting, or its alternatives. And at this moment, although the urge, the need for something else, something different may be evident, a clear alternative to painting has yet to reveal itself.

In this chapter, then, I explore how cubist painting attempts – taking Cézanne’s lead - to engage with the world, how it attempts to invest the project of representing the world with a sense of philosophical inquiry and therefore of epistemological relevance, accuracy. I wish to take one

¹⁶⁰ It should be noted that both Braque and Picasso’s fathers were painters, one of houses, the other of canvases.

¹⁶¹ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 175.

path, before retracing my steps and embarking decisively upon the other – that trodden by Marcel Duchamp.

However, I will not invest cubism with any specific philosophical force and I will also abstain from engaging in the debate which rages over the philosophical and theoretical ownership of cubist art. I do not suggest that it is overtly Kantian, Nietzschean, Bergsonian or Husserlean. It is possible to recognise visual elements and theoretical pronouncements that can be aligned with any of these schools of thought, but always to the exclusion of other, less assimilable elements, which contradict them. Cubism cannot be unproblematically associated with any philosophical figure or with any particular philosophy. Despite the apparent coherence of its mature style, cubism is in essence eclectic; or, is too troubled an art to find peace in a coherent philosophical paradigm. Cubism is, however, ‘philosophical’ inasmuch as it represents a struggle to know and to understand the world. The cubist method is philosophical - is interrogative in the style of philosophical analysis - yet the resultant works are not works of philosophy. They are works of visual art which cannot be understood entirely with regard to the tradition from which they emerge, and to which they form (one aspect of) its avant-garde. In the words of Edward Fry: ‘Cubism bears a reflexive, critical relationship to the classical tradition, it is art about art; but to the degree that it is also a critical examination of the epistemology and hermeneutics of that tradition, it is also art as unwritten philosophy’.¹⁶² I would suggest that the works are not only philosophical in this reflective capacity - with regard to the classical tradition and the vision of the world such a model implies - but that they are also required to examine the world anew, to seek out revised aesthetic models and thereby give form to the altered epistemological and material conditions. The disunity of coherent aesthetic forms and coherent theories of knowledge will become one of the greatest challenges faced by modernist painters. As Edward Fry further attests, the work of visual art can no longer fully encapsulate and envision an *idea*, and faced with the

¹⁶² Edward Fry, “Picasso, Cubism and Reflexivity” in *Art Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 4, ‘Revising Cubism’ (1988), 303.

impossibility of such a task, resorts to an internal reflection which is inevitably, however disfigured, a reflection of the external world also.

The Cubist treatment of space and time is directly but reflexively related to the classical tradition. In that tradition, all aspects of a subject are presented in such a way as to concentrate and unify the underlying idea, be it the depiction of a myth or allegory or of a pregnant moment that summarises past, present and future in a single pictorial image... The relation of old to new here is curious but revealing: instead of the pregnant moment chosen in classical art for the presentation of an idea, Cubism dethrones idea in favour of phenomenology and re-presents, in a highly self-conscious and intellectualized manner, the physical and mental processes subsumed within the idealism of classical representation.¹⁶³

But even here the influence of Husserl is overbearing; we find ourselves caught in one of the binary oppositions that seem to haunt the study of Cubism – idealism versus phenomenology. There are numerous others worth noting to illustrate the extent to which such dualistic thinking has shaped the historiography of the movement: Braque vs. Picasso; Puteaux vs. Montmartre; Salon vs. Gallery; Analytic vs. Synthetic; Bergson vs. Husserl; formalism vs. semiology; figuration vs. abstraction. The stylistic movement which most clearly defined the modernist project in the visual arts is not coherent despite its seemingly unified aesthetic. Nor could it be, such was the tradition it inherited. What cubism represents, however, is the effort of a group of artists to have their work coalesce into the basis for a new tradition, or for it to clearly mark a concrete step in the tradition of European easel painting of which they saw themselves as the most salient incarnation. What is important about cubism is not its perceived philosophical allegiances but the fact that it was forced to become philosophical – independently philosophical – at all. It is European art which, for seemingly the first time, is required to justify its existence with its own self-determined epistemological grounding. It is unprecedented in this respect: it is visual art untethered, art which must legitimate the nature of its representational form, must ground, in the stuff of the world, its image of *reality*. Cubism is art which has to theorise its reality. It is art which – looking all too much like art, and not enough like the world – must prove that it can still represent the world. Thus the philosophical justifications, thus the metaphysical flourishes. The

¹⁶³ Ibid., 298-299.

relative silence of Picasso and Braque in this regard eventually - and perhaps dubiously - compensated for by Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler need not be problematic. It was their dedication to an artistic tradition of which they believed they were a part, to their declared inheritance of 'High' European painting which not only produced the most compelling body of cubist work, but also inaugurated the ineluctable question of what this work could mean, both at the moment of its coming-into-being and in the light of its venerated precedents. In short, whether the cubists were aware of it or not, within cubism the history of European easel painting was at stake. Braque for one suggests that he had an inkling of the gravity of the predicament when he declared to Gelett Burgess in 1908, 'I want to express the absolute, not merely the factitious'.¹⁶⁴

But it is here that my account tilts away from the paintings themselves, into the newly formed realm of their justification. As the world appears to need painting less and less, as the traditional functions of the painted image are gradually met by other forms and simultaneously undermined by this process, painters are required to elucidate the theoretical underpinnings of their work. In essence, they are required to assert the relevance of a painting that has broken the bonds that tied it to the world of things and sensations and as a result has begun to resemble that world less and less. The theoretical model that had incorporated painting, had justified its presence and had structured its form, succumbs to a new and forceful episteme whose engine is fired by industry, by capital. Mature capitalism legitimates the presence of the painted image in the same way it affirms all things: through their market value. Cubism is both the art of the modern art market¹⁶⁵ and the art that must define its own epistemology. The following demand is placed upon cubist art: that it defines the proposed relation between its troubling aesthetic and its knowledge of the world. Such drastic and disruptive visual forms must be wedded to a purpose in thought, must be

¹⁶⁴ Georges Braque, "Personal Statement" (1908-09) in Edward Fry, *Cubism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 53

¹⁶⁵ David Cottington suggests that cubism was the 'first art grouping to be... divided between different market sectors' – gallery cubism for the obscurantist elite few, salon cubism for the more general public market of the Salon des Indépendents and the Salon d'Automne. See David Cottington, *Cubism and its Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 4.

seen to fulfil a social and theoretical function. It is in this arena then, that painting makes what I consider to be its epistemological ‘last stand’ (despite its several afterlives). No longer are the forms and functions of the painted image determined in advance. Manet’s insights can only be stated once – the framework through which he established his idiom is in a stage of collapse. Each artist, spurred as much by market pressures as ritualistic functions, must define his own painting according to its own terms. Painting’s ‘unreality’ becomes too obscure, and ultimately too terrifyingly meaningless to simply stand alone in the world. Abstraction requires clarification. What is at stake is no longer the meaning of the sign, as such, but rather the fate of a whole language – a language which ultimately can no longer articulately speak to nor of the world, but only stammer fitfully through the most intensely compelling idiomatic obscurity.

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In order to successfully analyse cubist painting with regard to the framework of this discussion, we must return to the question of language posed by Hofmannsthal and interpreted by Broch which helped established the focus of this inquiry.

Chandos’ dilemma is that of an inability to identify with the world - and by extension to know it – through the language of his time. Rather, ‘language itself had uncannily begun to assert and insert itself as his singular “object” of experience precisely by breaking up into so many linguistic bits’.¹⁶⁶ Through Broch’s reading, this predicament is expanded into a more detailed examination of the relation between a symbolic language and its underlying value structure. The injunction placed upon lyric expression – its apparent impossibility – is brought about by this inability to identify, to position oneself meaningfully and coherently within the world, and perhaps most importantly, to make oneself - and the world more generally - known to others. The question

¹⁶⁶ Eric L. Santner, *The Royal Remains* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 162.

hanging over cubism, then, is whether its obscure language can be said to take hold of the world in any meaningful way. It is a question of cubism's ability to know and to communicate, a question of its claim to unity, to – in Braque's words - the 'absolute'. This extends to the overall validity of cubism as a system or as a language; we must examine some of the claims made for it, interrogate its ambitions and its intentions.

The problem of cubism's language can, I suggest, be reduced to two key propositions – two incompatible alternatives. Not binaries as such, nor opposites, necessarily, but two irreconcilable points of view. On the one hand, we have the proposition that cubism represents, through the insights of Picasso and Braque, a new classicism and therefore a new unity, a new complete language of knowing and naming, that is in accordance with the epistemic conditions of modernity. This is a positive assertion in response to the problem of classical forms (in keeping with and derived from the equivalent set of positive aesthetic statements made by Cézanne) and one that, in 1910 or thereabouts, and with no knowledge of the events of the future, can be sensibly and legitimately posed. On the other hand we have the proposition that cubism is not an effective substitute for the classical model, that it does not attain the sort of coherent equivalences practiced by the classical model, and that its obscurity is not inchoate profundity, but obscurity plain and simple. The positive assertion on this side of the argument is that cubism creates a seemingly hermetically sealed aesthetic realm in which utopian potentialities are played out through the free-flow of unhinged signifiers. In this formulation cubist painting rejects conventional object-hood and materiality and instead generates an ideal pictorial realm which seeks to establish a *new* (or at very least unconventional) relationship to the world of things and sensations. In the words of T.J. Clark:

Cubism... does stand constantly in some kind of relation to a world we might recognize and traverse. But the point is the "some kind." The point is Cubism's annihilation of the world, its gaming with it, its proposal of other, outlandish orders of experience to put in the world's place. The problem for description is to build into the point-by-point detail... a sense of Cubism's deep, wild irredeemable obscurity, and of that being Cubism's first move, not final conclusion... The

problem is to lay and keep hold of Cubism's *ambition* for its obscurity, its seeming certainty about the mad language it used – its great totalizing will.¹⁶⁷

Here it is also apparent that however we conceive of the cubist project – to whomever we attribute such a cause – the fact of its 'great totalizing will' remains. The two options above are to some extent misleading, then, and can actually be dissolved into this one absolute – cubism's irredeemable gamble, its *all-in*. In either eventuality the dream of totality remains, and this totality is apparent within the picture frame, is given form in paint. It is undoubtedly the same totality for which Cézanne strove, the same dedicated formalist project that flies in the face of the world, that scoffs at photography and that strives to venerate and exalt the human spirit. It is an aesthetic sophistication that derives from and reflects a perceived mastery of the world, that tells us the world can be known through artistic endeavour, through lyrical expression. It is the equivalent of the totality of the classical model, and as with Cézanne, we find an inversion of Manet's model: startling, revolutionary form is employed in the service of atavistic ends.

The options above can be simplified to a single question, then, and one that runs from Manet, through Cézanne to cubism. Cubism develops the problems presented by Manet's qualitative differentiation, through Cézanne's totalizing aesthetic field into a language of representation upon which the fate of this lineage of painting can be seen to hang. Cubism cannot defer the questions posed by Manet's art, nor neglect a response to the painterly totality proposed by Cézanne. Cubism is, as Clark puts it, painting 'at the end of its tether'¹⁶⁸ – painting forced to confront these issues and resolve them somehow. A whole form of visual representation is quite abruptly at stake. Therefore the question is simply one of success – *does cubism succeed in providing an absolute aesthetic equivalent to the world; does it create a language by which the world can be known; do the innovations of Picasso and Braque coalesce into a new tradition, an equivalent classicism which is both the renewal of the represented world and the salvation of painting?*

¹⁶⁷ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 174.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 187.

If cubism does not or cannot achieve this aim, then the totality which it generates is purely aesthetic, and the second option presented above becomes the defining reality for cubist art. It becomes, in a purely aesthetic and therefore increasingly frivolous, ineffectual sense, an 'obligatory reworking of the pictorial problems invested by Cézanne's painting with the force of law'¹⁶⁹ – pure and rightfully named 'art for art's sake.'¹⁷⁰ What is at stake is the great claim that legitimates the cubist project specifically, and easel painting more generally – the claim that 'painting has taken hold of the world again. It has opened toward a new totality, one actually grasped and articulated... The grasp is there in the paint'.¹⁷¹

There is little doubt that the practitioners of cubism thought that they were achieving this aim. If they do little else, the meagre pronouncements from the time clarify this point. They confess both a deep faith in cubist painting's capacity to know and to articulate the world. Central to this faith is the persistence of the lyrical model of artistic expression. Here Kahnweiler in his 1920 text *The Way of Cubism* is describing Braque's painting of 1910/1911:¹⁷² 'here again, lyrical painting uncovered a new world of beauty – this time in posters, display windows and commercial signs which play so important a role in our visual impressions'.¹⁷³ It is clear, also, that Kahnweiler considers cubism a new language of painting, one with a unique and special significance. He goes on:

This new language has given painting an unprecedented freedom. It is no longer bound to the more or less verisimilar optic image which describes the object from a single viewpoint. It can, in order to give a thorough representation of the object's primary characteristics, depict them as stereometric drawing on the plane surface, or, through

¹⁶⁹ Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism* trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 23.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. my counter claim for Manet's art, p14.

¹⁷¹ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 219.

¹⁷² Kahnweiler makes reference to a painting of a guitar player from this period. It is likely that he is referring to *Homme à la guitar* of 1911.

¹⁷³ Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, "The Way of Cubism" (1920) in Edward Fry *Cubism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 157.

several representations of the same object, it can provide an analytical study of that object which the spectator then reassembles in his mind.¹⁷⁴

Here we can see the spectre of Kant implicit within Kahnweiler's thought and are shown the extent to which the art-dealer's conception of cubist art is influenced by German idealist principles. According to Kahnweiler's model, cubism functions progressively within a dialectical materialist's understanding of art history. In this passage we also see the extent to which cubism is constructed as the route to a reality beyond that of simple appearances – this being the theoretical justification for its outright rejection of classical forms. It is appropriate here to reiterate Braque's declaration of 1908: 'I want to express the absolute, not merely the factitious'.¹⁷⁵ Braque goes on to reveal his further faith in the lyrical mode and the role that the language of cubism plays in this: 'the subject is not the object; it is the new unity, the lyricism which stems entirely from the means employed'.¹⁷⁶ It is clear from this statement that cubism's language is required to function with regard to a lyrical model and therefore required to possess the sort of totality - the sort of all encompassing knowledge of world and self through the artistic ego - that befits it.¹⁷⁷ For cubism to achieve its aims, for it to fulfil the promise of Cézanne's project, it must reinvigorate the language of painting. It must put it in touch with epistemology once again. In this formulation modernism's project is not so much the reunion of art and life, but of art and knowledge. It is fitting now, therefore, to examine one of the most comprehensive contemporary theoretical justifications for the cubist method – Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger's *Du Cubisme*, a text

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 160.

¹⁷⁵ Georges Braque, "Personal Statement" (1908-09) in Edward Fry, *Cubism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 53.

¹⁷⁶ Georges Braque, "Thoughts on Painting" (1917) in in Edward Fry, *Cubism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 147.

¹⁷⁷ Ardengo Soffici, one of the few commentators to publish a contemporaneous account of Picasso and Braque's cubism ("Picasso e Braque" in *La Voce* 3 of August 24, 1911), and who, due to his friendship with Picasso was granted almost unique access to their paintings, describes analytic cubism as 'a mysterious mental creation deeply tempered by lyricism and poetry.' Picasso, he claims, 'inscribes a lyrically intuited truth' in his work. The language of commentary clearly demonstrates that the concept of lyrical truth was strongly associated with these early cubist works, and that art and metaphysical speculation are seemingly still firmly entwined. See William Rubin, *Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism*, (New York: MOMA, 1989), 43,44.

which, at its publication in 1912 was ‘by far the most ambitious statement of cubist principles to date’:¹⁷⁸

Of all the critical and theoretical writings on cubism, none had such influence as *Du Cubisme*. It was the first book devoted wholly to cubism, written by two artists most familiar to the public, and thus it immediately received attention in France and in advanced artistic circles throughout Europe.¹⁷⁹

David Cottington asserts in his commentary that ‘Gleizes and Metzinger sought from the outset to situate cubism within a pictorial tradition that, although explicitly modernist, was by then respectable – that of Courbet, Manet and Cézanne;’¹⁸⁰ that ‘what was at issue was the comprehensibility, and beyond this the legitimacy, of cubism’.¹⁸¹ *Du Cubisme* should be seen as a treatise on the epistemic grounding of cubism – a justification for the visual language which seeks to prove its representative force, hopes to tie the new and obscure symbolic order to clear epistemological principles. *Du Cubisme* is a text that proposes cubism’s relevance to the world, which strives to legitimate the nature of the image-ideal, the *mise-en-abyme* engendered by cubist painting. The implicit question addressed – and it is one that is justifiably levelled at cubism - is this: does cubism hold up a mirror to the world? And if so, why is this mirror so appallingly distorted?

Du Cubisme opens with the following disclaimer:

The word *cubism* is used here only to spare the reader any hesitation as to the object of this study, and we hasten to declare that the idea it evokes, that of volume, could not in and of itself define a movement leading toward the complete realization of Painting.¹⁸²

Here the ‘complete realization of Painting’, with its eschatological overtones, is left essentially undefined, although the concept becomes clearer as the text progresses. Realism plays a key part in this *realization*, and Gleizes and Metzinger are at pains to assert cubism’s grounding in reality.

¹⁷⁸ David Cottington, *Cubism and its Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 143.

¹⁷⁹ Edward Fry, *Cubism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 111.

¹⁸⁰ David Cottington, *Cubism in the Shadow of War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 159.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁸² Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, “Du Cubisme” (1912) in Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, (eds.) *A Cubism Reader*, (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 418.

It may not look like the world, they stress, but it does represent it. Manet is seen as the definitive forefather of this particular complication of the form/content relation, marking a ‘higher level’¹⁸³ than Courbet. Manet is seen as a ‘realist less because he represented everyday events than because he knew how to endow with a radiant reality the many possibilities enclosed within the most commonplace objects’.¹⁸⁴ I am sympathetic to this reading of Manet, to the extent that the use of qualitative differentiation in his work is a means by which reality is represented. The common principle here is that painting formulates thought visually – it provides a concrete visual realization of the order of the world, it maps it on to reality in the form of an image; it stabilizes processes, it arrests flux; it allows for contemplation of reality through its crystallization into unreality, into art. According to *Du Cubisme*, after Manet there is a ‘division’ in realist painting – a schism between the ‘superficial realism’ of the ‘nonsensical’ impressionists and the ‘profound realism’ of Cézanne.¹⁸⁵ It is clear then, that Gleizes and Metzinger attribute to Cézanne the sort of profound lyrical vision to which cubism aspires – the same profound lyrical vision that Cézanne fails to attain but which is the aim of his totalizing aesthetic field. It is at this point that the text betrays its allegiance to Cézanne’s goals, and also where it demonstrates that the cubist project is tied into the absolutism of his foundering aesthetic. (Shortly we will explore further examples of this in the early work of Picasso and Braque). Cubism, in this context, is understood to be the route to this ‘profound realism,’ is to be seen as the mainline to reality. Gleizes and Metzinger make the following statement: ‘at the risk of condemning all modern painting, we must regard cubism, which continues it, as legitimate. As a result, we must see it as the only conception of pictorial art currently possible. In other words, at the present time, cubism is painting itself’.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Ibid., 419.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 420.

It is important to note here that Gleizes and Metzinger are responding to the same set of problems and challenges to painting as Duchamp¹⁸⁷ – they just arrive at different solutions. In *Du Cubisme* we see reproduced almost verbatim, one of Duchamp’s most infamous pronouncements: ‘the art of the impressionists is inherently nonsensical... even more than in Courbet, *the retina predominated over the mind* [my emphasis]’.¹⁸⁸ Both Duchamp and the cubists are struggling to produce an art which is in touch both with reality and with thought – these would be the conditions of a profound realism: a synchronicity of world and knowledge manifested by the painted image. Whereas the cubists built their model on Cézanne’s work (which in my analysis proves misguided), Duchamp proposes, perhaps insincerely, a return to an art that pre-dates Courbet: ‘since Courbet, it has been believed that painting is addressed to the retina. That was everyone’s error. The retinal shudder! Before, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral’.¹⁸⁹

Gleizes and Metzinger, however, see Cézanne as the pivotal figure in the move away from academic painting and traditional painterly forms. They recognize the aesthetic absolutism in his work but perceive this feature as a positive assertion – a definitive step away from inherited forms invested with the lyric force of the artistic ego:

Cézanne was one of the greatest of those who shaped history... his work, a homogenous bloc, stirs before our eyes, contracts, stretches, dissolves, or lights up, and proves unimpeachably that painting is not - or is no longer – the art of imitating an object by means of lines and colours, but rather of giving a plastic consciousness to our instinct.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ We will go on to see how other of the concerns raised by *Du Cubisme* are in turn the concerns of Duchamp - ‘[Gleizes and Metzinger’s] book grew out of a series of long conversations between the authors, but it also reflects the consensus of group discussions at Puteaux that included the Duchamp brothers.’ See Edward Fry, *Cubism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 111.

¹⁸⁸ Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, “Du Cubisme” (1912) in Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, (eds.) *A Cubism Reader*, (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 419.

¹⁸⁹ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 43.

¹⁹⁰ Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, “Du Cubisme” (1912) in Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, (eds.) *A Cubism Reader*, (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 420.

This faith is clearly shared by Picasso and Braque and it deeply infuses the cubist project with meaning, with purpose and with historical credibility. But it also assumes that Cézanne's technique is correct and that his epistemology is impregnable. The cubist edifice is built upon the foundation of Cézanne's work without deep consideration of the (perhaps as yet unperceived) flaws within his technique and his ethical-aesthetic theory. Cubism's ultimate failing as a total system, or its failure to employ the discoveries of Cézanne in the service of a system of representation equivalent in symbolic significance to the classical model, can be traced back to the failure of Cézanne's work to achieve the expression of lyrical unity - the aesthetic declarations turn out to be hollow. But it is this that makes the first four or five years of cubism so intriguing - and the rest ultimately rather irrelevant. It is during this period that the limitations of Cézanne's propositions are being discovered. Hope and disappointment run side by side through the work of this period - faith is often tempered by failure. *Du Cubisme* is published towards the end of this moment of exploration and discovery and marks the point at which it was possible to attribute a general focus, a shared meaning to the project. It is the closest thing to a theoretical consensus derived from a more obvious aesthetic consensus. The document is useful in this regard as it can be understood as a declaration of the hope of cubist art, but also as the measure of the eventual failure of cubist artists to achieve their aims. Cézanne filled the void left by the decline of classicism - he aspired to a heuristic lyricism where the impressionists employed superficial hermeneutics; he engaged with art-history and the studious evolution of technique where Van Gogh and Gauguin burned brightly, perhaps illiterately (certainly naively), and all too briefly. It was Cézanne who, more than any other artist, represented for young cubist painters the values and the integrity of the classical system invested with the innovations, the new realities, of the modern world. Their adherence to his technique is thus understandable. Cézanne is the announcement of a structured hope that must be interpreted and explored. Yet it is his very perseverance with a degenerating value structure allied to unprecedented forms that ultimately lends his work a lumbering totality, a blunt inarticulacy, and an epistemological incoherence. The

profundity so venerated in his work by the cubists is unanchored, is unverifiable. It is simply one side of a coin, the other of which is a monstrous numbness – an aesthetic ponderousness which weighs dismally on the spirit: ‘no surface has ever been less animate than this one. No handling has ever been less a means of laying hold of (getting one’s hands on) a human world’.¹⁹¹

Cézanne’s work is never less than profound - it simply cannot salvage hope from disaster (it veers from hope to disaster). The unintentional by-product of his still, heavy world is a melancholic dread, a metaphysical ennui. Cubist art discovers this through its attempt to systematize Cézanne’s technique. It discovers a world stripped of metaphysical comfort. The logical conclusion of Cézanne’s work is an epistemological oblivion built upon a totalizing aesthetic. Its pictorial conclusion is cubism.

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The text of *Du Cubisme* synthesizes a variety of accepted academic and avant-gardist ideas in an attempt to prove the legitimacy and novelty of the cubist project. Thus we find the rephrasing of enlightenment principles intertwined with cubist technique:

... the cubists taught a new way of imagining light. // According to them, to illuminate is to reveal; to colour is to specify the mode of revelation. They call luminous what strikes the mind and dark what the mind is obliged to penetrate.¹⁹²

Later we encounter an expression of intense subjectivism, a retreat from the objective truth of the world and a declaration that sounds in equal parts Nietzschean, existential and eerily impressionistic:

There is nothing real outside us, there is nothing real but the coincidence of a sensation and of an individual mental direction. We would not dream of placing in

¹⁹¹ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 166.

¹⁹² Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, “Du Cubisme” (1912) in Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, (eds.) *A Cubism Reader*, (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 427.

doubt the existence of the objects that strike our senses; but we can reasonably only have certainty about the image they hatch in our minds.¹⁹³

The text develops this line of thought into an idea of absolute subjectivity which is informed by Cézanne's totalizing aesthetic and the drive to lyricism that his methodology embodies: 'we seek the essential, but we seek it in our personalities and not in a kind of eternity which mathematicians and philosophers laboriously develop'.¹⁹⁴ This is then democratized in a formulation that Duchamp will reiterate and rework some 45 years later: 'as many eyes as there are to contemplate an object, that is how many images of that object there are; as many minds to understand it, so many essential images'.¹⁹⁵ Duchamp's pronouncement on posterity comes in 1957, as he is addressing the American Federation of Arts and represents a further 'democratisation' of Gleizes and Metzinger's position:

The artist may shout from all the rooftops that he is a genius; he will have to wait for the verdict of the spectator in order that his declarations take a social value... All in all the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.¹⁹⁶

In *Du Cubisme*, however, we are presented with an absolute and universal subjectivist principle which is further complicated by the following declaration:

[As] a realist, [the cubist painter] will shape the real in the image of his mind, for there is only one truth, our own, when we impose it on everyone. And it is the faith in Beauty that provides him the necessary strength.¹⁹⁷

And so we see that for Gleizes and Metzinger realism in the service of the *realization* of painting is in fact an intense subjectivity, or the subjectification of 'objective' reality through artistic form.

Here the perseverance of the lyrical mode is most obvious, as is the debt to Cézanne. It is here

¹⁹³ Ibid., 429.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act" (1957) in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 138-140.

¹⁹⁷ Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, "Du Cubisme" (1912) in Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, (eds.) *A Cubism Reader* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 435.

most acutely we see that the subjective aesthetic model is required to map the fabric of reality, that under these conditions it is knowledge that is derived from aesthetics and not the other way round. *Du Cubisme* argues for the adoption of cubism not just as an art, but as an epistemology:

We have acknowledged that the ultimate end of painting is to touch the crowd, agreed, but it is not in the language of the crowd that painting must address the crowd; it is in its own language, in order to move, to dominate, to direct, not in order to be understood. So it is with religions and philosophies.¹⁹⁸

But the lyrical mode cannot be omitted from this task, and is in fact the *method* by which such influence is achieved – always in the service of the betterment of humanity:

It is by completing our inner selves that we purify humanity; it is by increasing our own riches that we enrich others; it is by setting aglow the nucleus of the star for our own intimate joy that we exalt the universe.¹⁹⁹ In short, cubism, which has been accused of being a system, condemns all systems... Let us conclude that there is a method in it, but let us not allow a method to be confused with a system.²⁰⁰

We may conclude that Gleizes and Metzinger are splitting hairs here, but there is some value to the distinction they propose. What is described above is undoubtedly a lyrical method. The ethical principle therein is precisely that rational drive that enlists the arts in the betterment of humanity,²⁰¹ is the enlightenment principle that claims human morality can be rationally guided, that lyrical expression as knowledge of self and others is the universal subjective equivalent to the positivistic sciences' project to know and understand the world. Art represents an ideal image of humanity - not according to a religious or classical model, but in accordance with the visions of individual artistic egos unified by a singular *method*. *Du Cubisme* condemns all systems because of their fallibility – its authors recognize only competing systems, none of which have any obvious

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 434.

¹⁹⁹ In this passage Gleizes and Metzinger's tone is reminiscent of Nietzsche's emphatic declarations in *The Birth of Tragedy*. For example, here Nietzsche is describing the 'Dionysian world-artist': [Man] is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art: in these paroxysms of intoxication the artistic power of all nature reveals itself to the highest gratification of the primordial unity.' See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 37.

²⁰⁰ Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, "Du Cubisme" (1912) in Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, (eds.) *A Cubism Reader* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 434.

²⁰¹ Here I direct the reader to the Baudelaire quotation with which this work begins, and which provides a lucid explanation of this concept: 'Evil happens without effort, naturally, fatally; Good is always the product of some art.' See Charles Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life," *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 2003), 32.

or objective supremacy (and herein declare their debt to Nietzsche). Yet their claims for cubist art bear all the hallmarks of an archaic epistemological system once designed for the progress of humanity but now destined for dereliction. A lack of faith in systems of knowledge must also manifest a lack of faith in the system of self-knowledge through artistic production. The lyric eye requires a language by which to know the world and by extension to make itself known to others. Such a language has decayed – this is the trigger of Hofmannsthal’s dilemma and in turn the justification for the decline of classicism – but *Du Cubisme* makes clear that cubism is attempting to generate a visual language that can renew the lyrical mode and thus the ethical function of the lyric. As I hope to demonstrate, cubism’s ultimate failure goes some way to demonstrating the truth of Hofmannsthal’s predicament.

But in a sense Gleizes and Metzinger are right: it should also be recognised that cubism never constitutes a visual system in the same way that classicism does. The significance of this is that cubism does not offer a substitute model for classical form, nor does it provide an equivalent set of rules for visual representation. To describe cubism as a system is not to attribute to it the grounded totality of the classical system – cubism rather structuralises certain responses to the classical model. It is never the analogue of a coherent system of thought, but rather a response to a problem both in thought and in representation. It is the attempt to reassert a pictorial model in the absence of the authority of the classical model. But in this respect cubism – if it were a system - could only ever be an aesthetic system, and an arbitrary one at that, only loosely and metaphorically tied to thought and to knowledge. (Thus the varied associations of cubism with Kant, Bergson, Husserl; and with Einstein). Therefore the adoption and development of certain traits from Cézanne into a structural paradigm can only be done at an exclusively aesthetic level. Cubism is built upon the first wave of rejections of classical aesthetics and as such is founded upon a prior aesthetic without clear epistemic validation. But here the visual form is developed into a ‘methodology’ which nevertheless aspires to some form of universality equivalent to the

classical model. Whereas Cézanne sought to reassert a romantically-inflected lyricism based upon the union of the subject and the 'spirit' of nature, cubism attempts a reinvigoration of the totality of the classical model through the development into 'law' of certain of Cézanne's innovations. The chief obstacle to the success of this procedure is that it has no coherent absolute principles and no equivalent grounding in knowledge. It is an aesthetic 'method' without epistemology, without ethics. And with the clear understanding that no aesthetic system can be sustained without its sympathetic (equivalent) resonance in the realm of knowledge (as my discussion of Broch in chapter 1 illustrates), cubist artists set about simultaneously explaining and legitimating their art – reinforcing an epistemological 'system' around it. We might then conclude that Gleizes and Metzinger are right in another sense too: if cubism is an aesthetic system without epistemology, without ethicality, then in reality it is nothing more than a method, a style.

A brief survey of certain work from the early years of cubism can demonstrate this. In early works by Picasso and Braque we can see evidence of techniques borrowed from Cézanne and Manet employed in an attempt to synthesise innovative painterly methodologies into a stable symbolic language, one that aspires to know the world and not simply to form part of the narrative of art-history. The following analyses also illustrate, however, how the innovations of Cézanne and Manet could not be synthesised into a coherent response to the breakdown of classical form. It is also appropriate here to put to use some of the hermeneutic scaffolds erected by the preceding analyses of Manet and Cézanne's work – a chance to put their means of inquiry, and the resultant findings, to the test.

In the early work of both Picasso and Braque their technique appears heavily influenced by Cézanne. In Braque's landscapes we see a uniformity of brushwork that is increasingly employed within a cubistic grid framework. *Le viaduc a l'Estaque* [Figure 16] of 1908 shows Cézanne's dominant influence on Braque at this time and demonstrates how Braque is coming to terms with the new representational forms and techniques Cézanne proposes. What begins as a process

of imitation – an apprenticeship to the deceased Cézanne through his work – develops into a synthesis of Cézannesque technique and the grid-like fragmented framework of Picasso’s nudes of 1907 and 1908 such as *Les demoiselles d’Avignon* and *Les trois femmes* [Figure 17]. The more extreme irregular grid-structure of *Les usines du Rio-Tinto à l’Estaque* [Figure 18] of 1910, for instance, demonstrates how Braque has not only assimilated certain principles evolving in Picasso’s work but has also developed what appear to be latent and inchoate tendencies in Cézanne’s also. The interlocking, imprecise forms and uniform, structured brushwork of Cézanne’s *Mont Sainte-Victoire*²⁰² (1904-06) [Figure 19] make obvious the connection between Cézanne and early cubism, providing an example of how his late technique had reached an unrivalled level of development - one that it would take the cubists several years to fully understand and integrate into their own work. In Braque’s painting of 1908 -1910 we see the gradual extrapolation of these tendencies into the fundamentals of a structural paradigm. In *Les usines du Rio Tinto à l’Estaque* it is as if the formal elements that constitute Cézanne’s image-making are used as the basis for an image in which the subject itself (here the roofs of factories) is secondary to the formal procedure employed. In this instance the aesthetic field is totalized through a combination of consistent and standardized brushwork and the employment of a framework which, while not mathematically precise, lends the image an overall structural coherence. Here the representational means overpower the representation as such.

In Braque’s *Grand Nu* [Figure 20] (1907-08) we see an attempt to synthesize Cézanne’s approach to modelling (the use of outline; uniform brushstrokes; suppressed chiaroscuro; the use of colour to differentiate form) and the increased fragmentation and ‘primitivism’ apparent in the Picasso nudes mentioned above. Braque’s nude clearly owes as much to Cézanne’s *Nature morte avec un Cupidon de plâtre* or his *Les grandes baigneuses* (1894-1905) as it does to Picasso’s *Les demoiselles d’Avignon*. This image is an important stepping-stone in the development of cubism as

²⁰² This is just one example – formally, the most relevant to this discussion - of the many studies of the mountain that Cézanne painted between 1882 and 1906.

at this stage Braque's figurative work shows little of the incipient grid-like patterning or overlapping 'collage-effect' discernable in his landscape paintings.

Similarly, Picasso's work of 1908 and 1909 is - in the main - informed by Cézanne. His *Nu* [Figure 21] of 1909, for example, demonstrates this quite clearly. Here the anatomy of a woman has been transformed into an interlinking structure of Cézannean volumes. Again there is strong use of outline, a general uniformity of brushwork and no clear light source upon which to base any coherent chiaroscuro modelling. Spatial differentials once provided by perspective are here accomplished through colouration and outline. In this image, however, there is the suggestion of a multiplication of perspectives – it is almost as if we see the sitter from the front and the side at the same moment – and this effect is reminiscent of T.J. Clark's reading of the 'Composite figure' in Cézanne's *Les grandes baigneuses* [*The Large Bathers*] (1904-05).²⁰³ What appears fleeting, ephemeral, mystifying in Cézanne begins to take on a systematic quality in Picasso's work.

Again, Picasso's *Pains et compotier aux fruits sur une table* [Figure 22] (1909) is an image that contains elements of the flattened cubist grid and of Cézannean modelling. We are aware that the objects we see on the table are presented in spatial depth, and that they possess a discrete volume and shape in space, but beyond this the image is broken into a series of fragmented planes or interlocking and irregular shapes. As before, however, the brushwork is essentially uniform despite the obvious looseness of handling on the table and lower section of the background – the image possesses a unified formal quality reminiscent of Cézanne. *La femme aux poires* [Figure 23] of 1909 presents a superficially more 'cubist' image, although on closer inspection, this proves not to be the case. A single point perspective is effectively maintained, we are presented with a

²⁰³ see T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea* pp. 153-160 for Clark's interpretation of this 'doubling'.

clear foreground and background, and although the image is more fragmented, more planar, it relies essentially on a Cézannean system of modelling and representation of spatial depth.

It is not until the paintings of 1910 that we see a significantly idiomatic development of the cubist aesthetic in both Picasso and Braque's work. As mentioned, Braque's *Les usines du Rio-Tinto à l'Estaque* demonstrates how the sense of depth and volume in space Cézanne achieves through unconventional means gives way to an altogether different structuring principle. Here an interrelation of planes make foreground and background converge and prevent the viewer from determinately positioning themselves in relation to what is represented. The flatness of the painted surface asserts itself under the conditions and the fully-fledged (if not yet entirely mature) cubist aesthetic. Picasso's *Le guitariste* [Figure 24] of 1910 also manifests these tendencies. The guitarist himself is almost unrecognizable through the structure of interlocking shapes and planes. The subdued palette no longer shows any of the differential techniques employed by Cézanne, but the strong use of outline, the uniform brushwork and 'primitive' modelling still bear his influence. In these images Picasso and Braque create a totalized aesthetic field as palpable as Cézanne's but in these two examples underwired by a cubistic grid, which, although irregular and seemingly capricious, lends the images an intoxicating visual *style* that we can be forgiven for interpreting as structural integrity.

Picasso's *Femme assise dans un fauteuil* [Figure 25] (1910) and Braque's *Le guéridon* [Figure 26] (1911) develop the cubistic method in terms of sophistication and fragmentation – the two seeming, at this point, to be wedded. The more significant the cubistic progress, the further from 'reality' the image strays. Here Braque is most abstract. His work radiates a benign structural intensity, and an architectural solidity. The work begins to stand alone, to define its own relations from within itself, paying little heed to the world beyond it. Within this, the later of the two images, we see musical notes – perhaps the representation of a score, perhaps (and I am

inclined to this reading) evidence of the process of unhinging cubism enacts with signification. Here the facets of the image interrelate with one another on the painted surface without clear ties to the 'real' world beyond them. The pictorial integrity of the image overrides any obvious claims the painting might make about the world in general. Braque's specific vision differs so greatly from our perception of the material world that no established and dependable ties can be used to maintain the relationship between image and world, between the sign and what it signifies.

In *Femme assise dans un fauteuil* this leap has not been made to quite the same extent. Picasso's penchant for painterly violence demands that the mutilation of the female figure here requires a certain attention to anatomical correctness. There seems no point enacting such violence on an indiscernible mass. The figure of the woman must be maintained in order for the feat to be accomplished. In this instance the background – ostensibly unfinished - is composed of large areas of colour whilst the figure in the foreground appears 'torn' and 'folded' in an act somehow prescient of Braque's *papier-collés* of 1912. The sitter here has no single form as such, but rather an interrelating diversity of minor forms each contributing to the effect of the disfigured whole. No facial features remain – even the simplified features of the masks have been jettisoned. Despite the unfinished appearance of the work, it maintains a striking aesthetic coherence, with the paint being applied in a consistent manner throughout the figure. The totality of the Cézannean aesthetic is influential here – the unity of the image evident in the adherence to consistent formal procedures and the unrelenting application of cubistic networks of fragmented shapes. In this image by Picasso, reality perseveres, but only, it seems, so we can be shown how forcefully the painter can manipulate and distort it.

In two works of 1914 we see further and definitive developments in cubist style. In Braque's *Homme a la guitar* [Figure 27] and Picasso's *Portrait de jeune fille* [Figure 28] we see the use of qualitative formal differentiation by both artists. In *Homme a la guitar* Braque employs a variety

of painterly techniques to create differing textures throughout the image. We see Cézannesque modelling and brushwork, pointillism and replica wood-finish, to name but a few; some sections of the canvas protrude, others are flat. There are some clearly recognizable objects such as the partial guitar and bow tie but these co-exist alongside such floating signifiers as the flipped and rotated bass clef (which would not be found on a guitar score at any rate). Fragmentation is also extreme with a multitude of overlaid planes and intersecting lines. This image therefore seems to encompass two competing tendencies – that to abstraction and contingency; and that to figuration and concrete signification. The painting at once stakes its claim to empirical reality and to a geometric fantasy of Cézannean plenitude. The eclecticism, if not bewildering, verges on incomprehensibility. The image, in its struggle with diversity and variety, emits a plethora of incoherent mutterings.

Similarly in Picasso's *Portrait de jeune fille* we see the same process in action. Here Picasso has jettisoned the muted palette employed in *Homme a la guitar* and has used a limited range of colour. Simply, the use of the green background lends the image a vibrancy not found in Braque's painting. Here again we find evidence of qualitative formal differentiation: Picasso uses pointillistic devices, limited Cézannean modelling, replica textures, even pastiche *papier-collés* elements such as the yellow 'balloon' painted as if it were pasted to the canvas. In this image there is very little left to indicate to the viewer what s/he is looking at. There are figurative elements, such as the left arm and the overall outline of the body of the sitter, but these are greatly distorted. The arm and hand are mainly recognizable because of their conventional colouration and the presence of an obvious sleeve; the four lines in the hand which separate the form into fingers do not represent the human hand in pictorial terms as much as mathematical ones. This painting stretches effectively to breaking point the ability of the viewer to recognise and process aspects of the image with regard to external signification. Its eclecticism is the means by which it achieves an aesthetic unity but this is at the expense of legibility.

The most significant development in these images is, however, the use of formal qualitative differentiation within the cubist framework where before a totalized aesthetic field was employed. Prior to these works Picasso and Braque maintained a Cézannesque approach to brushwork, to modelling, to overall pictorial unity which could be utilized across and throughout the developing cubist *fragmented framework*. This helped maintain the coherence of the image in the terms established by Cézanne and according to his model of aesthetic totality. Here we see a development in the work of Picasso and Braque much closer to the formal differentiation evident in Manet's *Un bar aux Folies Bergères* and *Olympia*. No doubt this change had been spurred by the *papier-collés* and their bringing together of disparate elements on the same picture plane, but the diversity we find in these works of 1914 cannot simply be said to be the painterly equivalent of collage. Such painterly practices have their precedent in Manet and, as I have shown, have significance beyond the borders of the picture frame.

In these works by Picasso and Braque, qualitative formal differentiation is an aesthetic tool, an attempt to invigorate cubist forms through experimentation. Its use within the cubist model has no real ethical or epistemological grounding, however. The differing facets of the image are brought to bear on each other and form part of the circulation of signs that occurs within these cubist images. They maintain the totality of their aesthetic field because of the self-enclosed nature of the images, because the visual language of cubism - even when attempting a synthesis of the insights of both Manet and Cézanne - can speak only ever partially and fitfully of the world. The technique, employed here, lends only a formal eclecticism, a further grammatical complication in an already obscure and symbolically obtuse language.

The inclusion of qualitative formal differentiation is a late development in cubism, and occurs perhaps when the movement or rather the *style* is already in decline. Picasso and Braque's images

are moving further and further from recognisability into abstraction and the use of formal differentiation can be seen simply as a step in this process. The unified technique employed before gives way to a painterly eclecticism without referent and without clear protocol. It is as if cubism is tearing itself up from within, just as classicism had done, and utilizing the same methodology – as if cubist painting befalls the exact same fate as academic painting in the nineteenth century; as if painting, irrespective of the nature of its manifestations, cannot again take hold of the world and speak of it; as if the art of Western Europe *par excellence* is slumping into incoherence, into obscurity.

Theoretical cubism is the epistemological representation of pictorial cubism – they are both fragmented frameworks, systems of faltering eclecticism. They are mutually engaged, but do not represent the world as it is, do not have mastery of a form (language) appropriate to such a task.

An effective synthesis of the two principles – of Manet's qualitative formal differentiation and Cézanne's totalized aesthetic field - could not be achieved. The aims of each are contradictory – the cubistic grid derived from Cézanne cannot support qualitative differentiation. On such a grid, where signification goes into free-flow, qualitative differentiation loses its representational effect. It merely contributes to the totalized aesthetic of the whole. It becomes an aesthetic contrivance. In cubism at its height, once it has assimilated the insights of Manet and Cézanne, ethics are required to be derivative of aesthetics. The ethical tools of Manet and even, in their diminution, those of Cézanne are employed in the creation of an image-ideal so removed from epistemology and from appearance that the image becomes a self-enclosed utopian proposition rather than a mirror to the world. Cubism does not illuminate but dreams of a better world – a world that can, paradoxically, only be figured through the most devastating of mutations and distortions.

Here mature cubism does not possess a language that solves Hofmannsthal's conundrum, which stakes a claim both to the world and the subjects who inhabit it. Cubism cannot provide a pictorial model that can be said to represent the world through a language equivalent to its epistemology. This was the great triumph of the classical model and here it cannot be equalled. Knowledge and image cannot be said to entwine and instead we are presented with a false unity, a fallacious totality based upon aesthetic rather than ethical propositions. The coherence of the mature cubist style is not replicated in the relation of the image to the world. The language of cubism does not achieve its lyrical goals because it cannot provide a recognisable image of the world – an image which places humanity in relation to the world. This is, of course, the function of epistemology – as a theory of knowledge but also of the role of human consciousness, human existence with regard to the world. Cubism cannot achieve the finely balanced act of mediation between the material and the immaterial required for a painting to stake its claim to lyrical expression – to knowledge. Rather through its retreat from the world it allows for a chasm to open between the material and the immaterial. We do not see the world how it is or how it should be; but rather how the painted image can reinvent the appearance of the world (can reinvent itself, reinvent representation) without paying heed to its reality.

The work of art becomes the originator of utopian value – as if the image, so saturated with the potentialities of the unreal could discharge its reforming energy (and this is a redemptive model that Dada and subsequently surrealism will adopt). It is as if aesthetic refiguring could be transformed into reconstituted ethical or epistemological values,²⁰⁴ as if the distorted *image* of the world could be the means by which our knowledge of it could be altered. Yet this image of the world is also a picturing of the world distorted by knowledge – a record of painting transformed by epistemology, transformed by secularism, by science and technology. It demonstrates the effect of modernity on painting more than anything else. Here painting strives to maintain its

²⁰⁴ As *Du Cubisme*, and in addition, the programmes of futurism, Dada, and surrealism demonstrate.

expressive, communicative, lyrical value in the face of the ever more real impossibility of such forms. What we are presented with then, is painting which strays further and further from the world in its attempt to get closer to it, to know it and to speak of it. This paradox is born with Cézanne but matures in cubism. The only way to understand the implications of such formal procedures is to trace their origins. Manet's work is most distressing and most communicative in its ability to balance the world against its unrepresentability through the painted image. Manet's formal procedures, his rejection of academic norms are the first real signs that the world cannot be recognizably pictorialized through the mediation of the human subject with recourse to a subjectively shared and objectively valid language of expression. Manet shows us, through his breakdown of a totalized aesthetic field (in this instance, classicism, academicism) into differentiated formal elements how unified systems of pictorialisation and knowledge are faltering. Through Manet's seeming indifference to this fact, an analogue between world and image is maintained. Here painting does not assert its primacy but maintains a lack of unity which is reflective of the world - painting shows what the world has become/is becoming precisely through the vacillating portrayal of its difference and sameness to the world, through its rejection of increasingly obsolete conventions. The bourgeois horror is subtle here. Manet's work frames a different paradox to Cézanne's: it begins to look both less and more like the world. Less like a bourgeois world of order and unity, more like a chaotic and ungoverned world of distortion and irregularity. The paradox is most acute in the form of the representation: Manet uses the tools of bourgeois order to express the disharmony. But the paradox can be disentangled – social disunity and epistemological unhinging within the context of an ordered tradition finds its formal analogue in paint. Here the language is most eloquent, most tragic.²⁰⁵ What is vital in this formulation, however, is the fine balance maintained between knowledge and image. Of paramount importance is the way by which knowledge is transformed into an image, the way in

²⁰⁵ The allusion to Nietzsche's 'tragic insight' should be registered here. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 98; and see also the introduction to this work for a further explanation of Nietzsche's understanding of the term.

which the image signifies knowledge. This balance is not maintained in cubism. Perhaps, in 1914 (where this account of cubism comes to an end), it is simply beyond painting's means - the language is no longer eloquent enough; or, perhaps, it is *too* eloquent and therefore insufficiently aporetic.

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Returning to *Du Cubisme* for a final time, we can discern an insight into the cubist rationale for the abandonment of academic forms – an abandonment already enacted by Cézanne, who declared ‘his horror of...the precise and automatic drawing taught at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.’²⁰⁶ In the following quotation we can see how the rejection of single point perspective and the hierarchisation of an image by chiaroscuro is related to cubism's new relativistic theoretical standpoint:

...it comes as a surprise to us that well-intentioned critics explain the remarkable difference between the forms attributed to nature and those of present day painting by the desire to represent things not as they appear but as they are. How are they? According to them, the object possesses an absolute, essential form, and it is in order to deliver it that we suppress traditional chiaroscuro and perspective. How simplistic! An object does not have an absolute form: it has as many as there are planes within the realm of signification.²⁰⁷

Here the fragmented image becomes an aesthetic analogue to the perceived epistemological conditions – the cubists are seeking to replicate Manet's achievement. The question, as ever, is why do cubist images look so different to the world? Here the justification is provided with recourse to a decentralism which (within the confines of the image) functions through a tautological relationship to perspective and chiaroscuro. There is no central ordering principle to the world, thus there is no central ordering principle to the image either – this is why a cubist

²⁰⁶ Cézanne made expressed this opinion to Jacques Félix Simon Schnerb and R.P. Rivière when they visited his studio in Aix-en-Provence in January of 1905. See *Conversations with Cézanne*, ed. Michael Doran (Los Angeles: University of Los Angeles Press, 2001), 84-90.

²⁰⁷ Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, “Du Cubisme” (1912) in Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, (eds.) *A Cubism Reader* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 429.

painting doesn't look like the world, but is still said to describe it. It does not, however, use a language through which the world can be recognized. It is in this way that cubism embodies the problem posed in Hofmannsthal's *A Letter*. Cubism paints a problem. It describes, visually, an epistemic problem - which has become, for painting, an aesthetic problem - and provides an aesthetic solution. It embodies both an epistemic dilemma and an attempted aesthetic reconciliation, a reconciliation that relies on the now incoherent unity of the lyric mode. The solution cubism proposes to the decline of absolute and centric principles relies upon the assumed totality of a lyrical language of expression. To reconcile the painted image and the world, a language is required which *knows* the world - a language dependent upon an absolute centrality, an epistemic sure-footedness. The visual idiom of cubism, I argue, cannot offer such assurances.

Cubist art attempts to reunite form and content by converting painting itself into this new relativist epistemology, or at very least it attempts to structure painting according to the structure of this epistemology. Aesthetically, however, this is tantamount to the realization of the totality to which Cézanne aspired. If cubism achieves this absolute - if it achieves a unity of world and image - then it is only a momentary symbiosis. A new 'classicism' is not founded, nor is the old tradition effectively reinvigorated. Rather, I would suggest, cubism is assimilated (as is all easel painting) into the market place, is co-opted by other more materialistic systems (capitalism, nationalism) - by the new epistemes - and thus its 'truth content' is made instrumental, is converted into an economic quantity, is reified. As much as cubist art seeks to represent the world and the psyches of those who inhabit it, it cannot escape the conditions of the increasingly de-transcendentalised world sufficiently to achieve its aim. Its theoretical - and lyrical - aspirations are thus thwarted.

Nothing within gallery cubism can prevent its bourgeois commodification through aesthetic fetishism in accordance with the 'monopolistic commercial policy pursued by Kahnweiler in his rue Vignon gallery, and his patronage of a small stable of artists'.²⁰⁸ At its most unnerving, electrifying, shattering it is also at its most irrelevant, grotesque, slothful. Consider Picasso's assorted decadent nude females; Braque's landscapes borrowed from Cézanne; the paintings of musical instruments; the still lifes. Cubism, now unable in any shape or form to resort to what once was known as realism turns Manet's formula on its head: cubism paints the old world with the tools of the new. It is nostalgic in its desire to reassert painting's dominance, to reinstate its relevance not within the confines of connoisseurship and elite artistic circles, but universally. Cubism (as did Cézanne) sought classical unity in a world that cannot sustain it. Absolutes fixed according to metaphysical postulates are increasingly incongruous in the context of the ordering principles of the twentieth century. Cubism is nostalgic, as are the painters who practice it. But justifiably so – the European art *par excellence* is in a stage of degeneration, and not because it has internally deteriorated or become debased, but because the world itself will no longer sustain it, will no longer support the lyricism to which, at its height, it aspires.

But the obviousness of painting's difference from the world, its new and unexpected alienation allows, through this marriage of disconnectedness and lyrical purpose, and within an idealised or reconfigured aesthetic realm, the hope of a utopian renewal. It is here most clearly that we can see an aesthetic structure seeking to generate an ethical system, the attempt to persevere and thus renew the redemptive and metaphysically comforting function of art. But this process, in cubism, requires a concomitant retreat from the world, from the world which increasingly denies the possibility of this reassurance.

The first condition is the surface. One no longer works between two imaginary levels that exceed the canvas. Now, the totalisation of the picture works through its

²⁰⁸ David Cottington, *Cubism in the Shadow of War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 163.

unverifiability, and the fact that the vision of the artist is not interrupted by observation. One cuts oneself off and one forgets.²⁰⁹

Therefore the severance of painting from inherited formal and epistemic structures is the source of its specifically modernist utopian potential. As the aesthetic values of painting and the values of the world - and, as much as anything else, the occurrences of the world - grow ever more disjunctive, the more that the hermetic aesthetic realm seems to be preferable to and ultimately unreflective of the ethicality and events of the world. In this way, the inability of inherited painterly forms to adequately represent the world (and any sense of its unity) presents both a problem for the structure of painting and the opportunity to derive new values from the unprecedented aesthetic forms brought into being as a result of this newly perceived lack, ineffectuality.

The failure of painting in its traditional form and with regard to its degenerating metaphysical import presents the opportunity not to represent the world through the painted image, but to build the world in the image of painting. The singular, idiosyncratically structured and subjectively envisioned work of art, severed as it is from general forms and dependable rhetoric, serves as the utopian source of new ethical values: beauty (as an end in itself) becomes the source of an ethical reconfiguring of the world. Such a development announces, for Broch, the failure of art in its ethical function and its decline into mere ornament. Painting is no longer an imaging of epistemology, but rather an imagistic fantasising of the world – a reshaping of the world within a subjectivised aesthetic framework.

In short – the language of painting no longer has the ability to name the world, but out of this ineffectuality, in this widening gap, a new form of pseudo-lyrical expression is found – one which verges, in its otherness, on unintelligibility. The world that can be made with this language is new, and hopeful, and beautiful. But it is also nostalgic, melancholic, imaginary. It is the lament

²⁰⁹ David Cottington, *Cubism and its Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 176.

of the ethical purpose of lyricism. It is a dream world that is sought to be made real. Precisely because the new language does not name the world, and does not name it in structured epistemic order, the world itself cannot be ordered in accordance with this lyrical dream image. It is an unrealisable image-ideal, whose failure is a failure of language, of taxonomy, of the perspicacity of rhetorical forms. The poetry of cubism is hermetic, is self-enclosed. It marks the failure of the painting as *mise-en-abyme*. And thus metaphysics and painting at the time of their fall partake of each other's inexorable degeneration and decline.

According to this analysis, cubism is to be regarded as a glorious failure – at once the 'creative conclusion of the classical tradition'²¹⁰ and the announcement of the redundancy of that tradition – and for the reasons given above, then under what conditions is a 'successful' visual art made possible? What would such an art look like? Are such valuations still possible? At this point in the analysis we have returned to the fork in the history of painting and this time we will follow Marcel Duchamp down his particular path, considering, as we do, T.J. Clark's conception of the truly historically representative work of art:

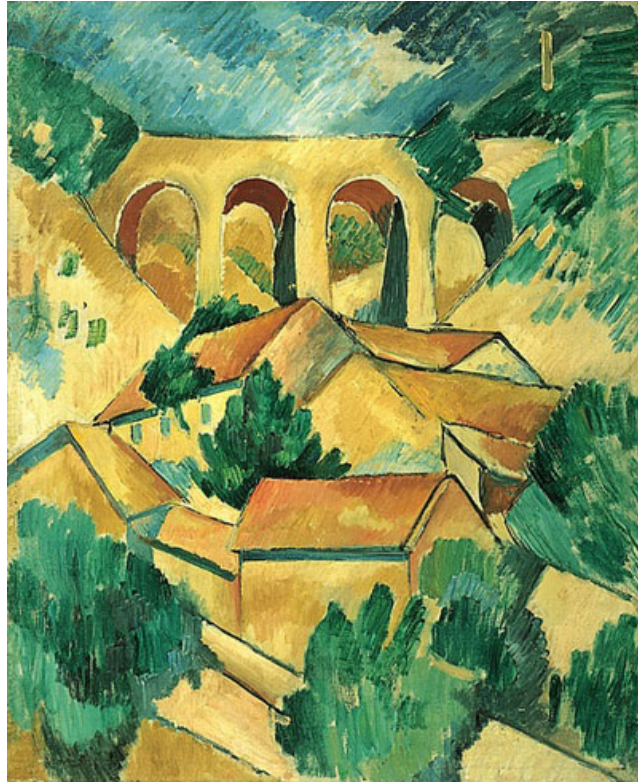
Certain works of art... show us what it is to "represent" at a particular historical moment – they show us the powers and limits of a practice of knowledge. That is hard to do. It involves the artist in feeling for structures of assumption and patterns of syntax that are (mercifully) deeply hidden, implicit, and embedded in our very use of signs; it is a matter of coming to understand, or at least to articulate, what our ways of world-making most obviously (but also most unrecognizably) amount to. I think that such work is done with real effectiveness – and maybe can only be done – at the level of form. It is the form of our statements, and the structure of our visualizations, that truly are our ways of world-making – at any rate the ways that hold us deepest in thrall. That means there is a necessary (though of course not sufficient) relation between the intensity and complexity of a work of art's formal ordering and its success in pursuing the questions: What is it we do, now, when we try to make an equivalent of the world? And what does the form that such equivalence now takes tell us about the constraints and possibilities built into our dealings with Nature and one another?²¹¹

In assenting to Clark's analysis I will argue that it is Duchamp's work which provides an art in accordance with his time – an art that employs a form in accordance with the epistemic

²¹⁰ Edward Fry, "Picasso, Cubism and Reflexivity" in *Art Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 'Revising Cubism' (1988), 302.

²¹¹ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea* (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 165.

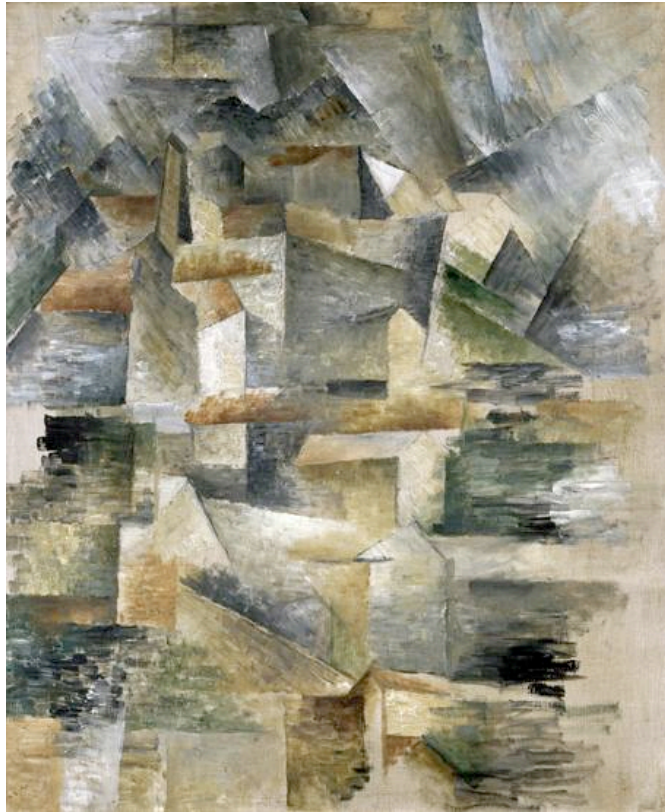
conditions of its time, that offers us a visual language by which the world can be known, represented.



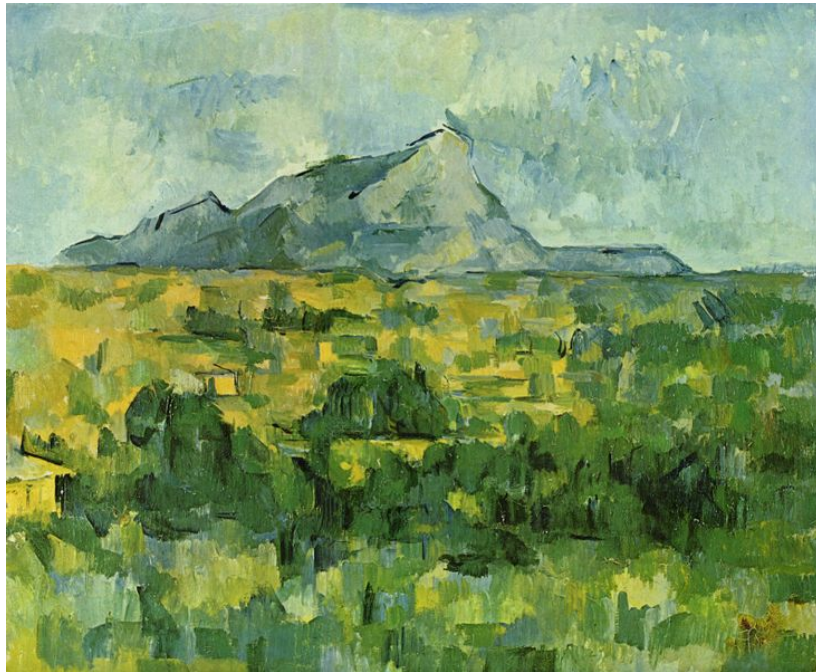
[Figure 16] Georges Braque, *Le viaduc à l'Estaque* [*The Viaduct at l'Estaque*] (1908). Oil on canvas, 72.5 x 59 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



[Figure 17] Pablo Picasso, *Les trois femmes* [*Three Women*] (1907-1908). Oil on canvas, 200x 178 cm. Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.



[Figure 18] Georges Braque, *Les usines du Rio-Tinto à l'Estaque* [*Rio-Tinto factories at l'Estaque*] (1910). Oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



[Figure 19] Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (1904-1906). Oil on Canvas, 66 x 81.5 cm. Private Collection, Switzerland.



[Figure 20] Georges Braque, *Grand nu [Large Nude]* (1907-1908). Oil on canvas, 140 x 100 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



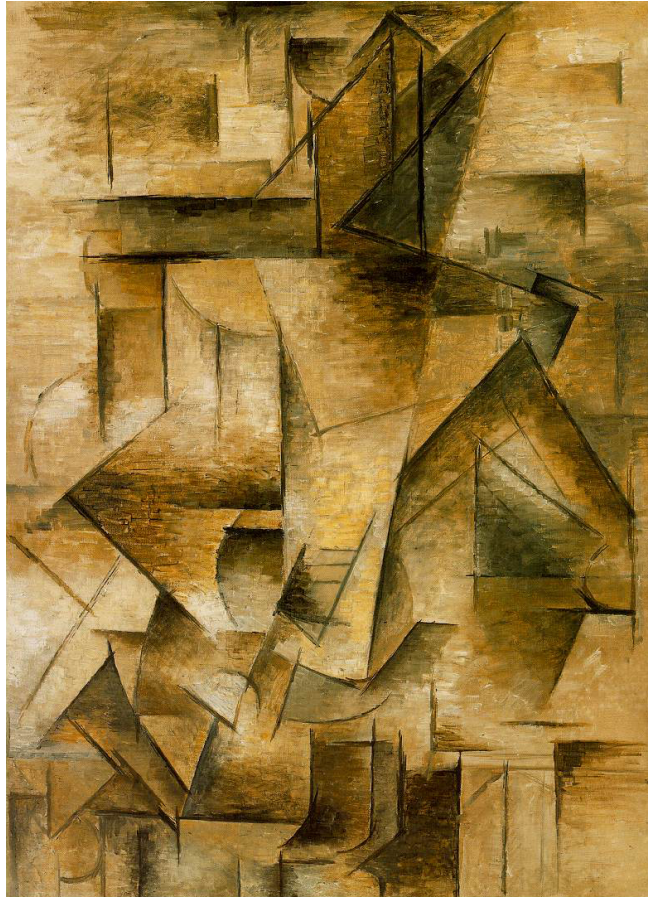
[Figure 21] Pablo Picasso, *Nu [Nude, or Nude Bathing]* (1909). Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm. Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.



[Figure 22] Pablo Picasso, *Pains et compotier aux fruits sur une table* [*Bread and Fruit Dish on a Table*] (1909). Oil on canvas, 164 x 132.5 cm. Kunstmuseum, Basel.



[Figure 23] Pablo Picasso, *La femme aux poires* [*Woman with Pears*] (1909). Oil on canvas, 92 x 71 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



[Figure 24] Pablo Picasso, *Le guitariste* [*The Guitarist*] (1911). Oil on canvas, 100 x 73 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



[Figure 25] Pablo Picasso, *Femme assise dans une fauteuil* [Woman Sitting in an Armchair] (1910). Oil on canvas, 100 x 73 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



[Figure 26] Georges Braque, *Le guéridon* [*The Pedestal Table*] (1911). Oil on canvas, 116.5 x 81.5 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



[Figure 27] Georges Braque, *l'Homme à la guitare* [*Man with a Guitar*] (1914). Oil and sawdust on canvas, 130 x 73 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



[Figure 28] Pablo Picasso, *Portrait de jeune fille* [*Portrait of a Young Girl*] (1914). Oil on canvas, 130 x 97 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Duchamp

There are not two histories of modern art, one that inscribes itself completely in the filiation of the father-Cézanne and that does not refuse to belong to the history of painting, and the other that inscribes itself completely in the denial of paternity by the bachelor-Duchamp and that believes that it is reinventing a completely new art in the denying of pictorial specificity. There is only a single history of modern art, and the task of historians is to capture it. They will not be able to do so by running to a peremptory judgment that eliminates one of the two currents to the benefit of the other, because they would then also be eliminating half of the facts that it is their duty to interpret. They are thus forced to be theorists and to produce an overall framework that accepts the two currents, shows their compatibility, allows within each of them singular value judgments, and restores the whole to the resonance of one and the same history.²¹²

The view that Marcel Duchamp took of the world and the way in which he translated that vision into words or into plastic signs appear at first to be radically new. His originality is such in all realms that one is tempted to see in his appearance at the turn of the century an accident of history, a break in continuity of the intellectual evolution of humanity – in a way, the birth of a “man born without a father.”

That would be a superficial analysis. Actually there is nothing of the “man from Mars” about Duchamp. He belongs firmly to his country and to his time in history. But instead of being perfectly integrated into a strongly determined sociocultural milieu that produced homogenous and evolutive art, he unites in his person several modes of expression which previously remained separate, in hermetically sealed compartments. This is the explanation for the disruptive character of his works and the general uneasiness they still provoke.²¹³

In a sense, what I propose to do is to seal the chasm that opens up between these two quotations, to reconcile them. This book is not simply a treatise on Duchamp. It is also a history of the decline of painting. (If nothing else, Duchamp’s near absence from what has preceded should demonstrate this fact.)

²¹² Thierry de Duve *Pictorial Nominalism*, trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 190.

²¹³ Michel Sanouillet, “Marcel Duchamp and the French Intellectual Tradition” in Anne d’Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (eds), *Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), 54.

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Duchamp was never an ideal candidate for the cubist team, for several reasons. In the first place, he was predisposed to approach the phenomenon of avant-gardism, whose perceived opportunities and promises were for his generation already starting to clarify and harden into obligations and orthodoxies, with a certain detachment.²¹⁴

Duchamp's work can only be seen fruitfully within the context of the stability he chose to undermine. We will do well to examine just how much of this stability remains, and not to overemphasise and indulge in the free-flow of signification that Duchamp enacts. Here the example of Manet is vitally important – the balance of order and disruption of that order is the only way to understand the way in which Manet's work relates to knowledge. The same is true of Duchamp. And so I intend to stay close to the work and to the explanations Duchamp has offered for it, to try not to lose the scent.

This study will not be, therefore, an examination of the speculative psychological conditions that spurred Duchamp to give up painting, but an analysis of that decision in the context of a tradition that is already struggling with the legitimacy of its language, the veracity of its images.

And so once again we must take a step back from the readymade, and listen to what Duchamp has to say of his work leading up to their 'invention'. On his early work as a painter, from the short film *Marcel Duchamp in His Own Words* (1968):

These two... are already from the palette of the Impressionists [here he is referring to *Landscape at Blainville* (1902) and *Man Seated by a Window* (1907)]. 1909 and 1910 were the years of my discovery of Cézanne [*La Partie d'Échecs / The Chess Game* (1910) and *Portrait of the Artist's Father* (1910) are seen]. And I was fortunate enough

²¹⁴ David Cottington, *Cubism and its Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 156.

to find in the Fauves, the wild beasts - Derrain, Matisse, Braque - a new outlet for my development [we see the *Bust Portrait of Chauvel, Paradise, Portrait of Dumouchel* (all of 1910) and *Le buisson / The Bush* (completed in 1911)]... And it was after these that I decided that no more obvious influences as I had before [sic]. I wanted to be at least living in my day, and my day was Cubism. 1910, 11, 12, Cubism was in its childhood and the approach was so different from the previous movements that I was very much attracted toward it. And I began being a cubist painter [we see *A propos de jeune soeur / Apropos of Little Sister* (October 1911), *Yvonne et Magdeleine Déchiquetées / Yvonne and Magdeleine Torn in Tatters* (September 1911), *Sonate / Sonata* (1911), *Dulcinée / Dulcinea* (1911)]... but really did not follow them.

You see, before 1850, 1860 painting was more or less an anecdotal thing, you just had the story that you painted on the canvas. But after that the Impressionists, the Fauves, the Cubists always had only in their mind not to tell a story but to give your retina something to consider and appreciate as art. So that was what I call retinal art because it concerns only what the retina receives: the colours and the forms without much of an anecdote. Well, I didn't like it, I never liked it.

I really was very much of a Cartesian²¹⁵ because I was very pleased by the so-called pleasure of using Cartesianism as a form of thinking – logic and very close mathematical thinking. So, from 1912 on I tried to do something else, to avoid to do something only appealing to the retina [we see *Les Joueurs d'Échecs / The Chess Players* (1911), *Portrait de joueurs d'Échecs / Portrait of Chess Players* (1911)].²¹⁶

We are given, then, Duchamp's account of his first ten years as a painter. Now this story cannot be seen as seamless and complete – it is obvious that the film has been edited and the narration carefully arranged. Nevertheless, the account Duchamp gives of his work is compelling and is fully represented by the paintings in question. This is also a history that he will repeat in essentially the same form to other interviewers (Jean-Marie Drot, Pierre Cabanne, Joan Bakewell, James Johnson Sweeney). Whether Duchamp knew at the time that his work was borrowing

²¹⁵ This section is taken from Duchamp's 1959 interview with Richard Hamilton where he declares that he is in fact a 'defrocked Cartesian' but that as much as he enjoyed thinking like a Cartesian he also enjoyed 'getting away from it', hence the Roussel-like inventions. As ever, Duchamp is in characteristically contradictory mood. See Marcel Duchamp in interview with Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, "Marcel Duchamp Speaks", broadcast by the BBC in the series "Art, Anti-Art," 1959, now available in MP3 format.

²¹⁶ Duchamp speaking in the short film *Marcel Duchamp in His Own Words* (1968), dir. Lewis Jacobs. In this passage I have used the titles of the paintings as given in the 1973 catalogue to the Duchamp retrospective at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. As much of Duchamp's work entered into American collections, there is no consistent system of titling throughout his oeuvre. Some early works, although painted in France are given only a title in English, whereas other works produced in New York have both a French and English title. Where both French and English titles are attributed to the paintings, I have used both. See Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (eds), *Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), 231-326. Arturo Schwarz in his *Complete Works* generally only provides English titles, although certain works are listed in French and English (such as *Trébuchet / Trap*) - presumably when a French pun is involved - and others only in French (such as *Rendez-vous de Dimanche 6 Février 1916...*). See Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 372-580.

from and subsequently disregarding the trends in modern art is hard to confirm, but with hindsight it is quite obvious. The calm rationality of the way in which the work alters in accordance with the narrative suggests that this is indeed the generally correct story of the work, and of Duchamp's various decisions to transform his painterly practice.

The lengthy quotation above also demonstrates that Duchamp had a good working knowledge of art history – a history of which he undoubtedly saw himself a part, and from which he apparently desired to escape. Although this is not entirely true. What we hear from Duchamp time and again in his account of his own work is his rejection of 'retinal art'²¹⁷ and of the clear delineation of the period in which this art came to fruition.²¹⁸ It should be seen as no mere coincidence that the age of 'retinal' art is also the age of fully-fledged industrial modernity, the age of rampant technological innovation, of seething metropolises, of the decadent bourgeoisie, of unchecked capitalist exploitation, of the death of God. In essence Duchamp is saying this: he does not like the art of modernity, he does not like modernist painting. And he does not like it because it divorces itself from the realm of ideas, of stories, of anecdote and allegory: 'For me Courbet had introduced the physical emphasis of the nineteenth century. I was interested in ideas – not merely in visual products'.²¹⁹ Indeed it is the materialism of the nineteenth century which manifests itself in the physicality of the painted image that Duchamp objects to. (It should be noted, however, that his disdain is never directed at Manet, who remains always beyond his condescension, but is never the object of prolonged exaltation: 'Manet. The great man that he was'.)²²⁰

²¹⁷ We should not forget that this distaste for 'retinal art' was something which originated, nominally, at least, within the Puteaux milieu: 'the art of the impressionists is inherently nonsensical... even more than in Courbet, the retina predominated over the mind.' Although they came to different aesthetic conclusions, Duchamp and his peers shared the same art historical concerns, and were reacting to the same imperatives. See Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, "Du Cubisme" (1912) in Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, (eds.) *A Cubism Reader*, (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 419; and pages 117-118 of this study.

²¹⁸ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), p43, for one such instance.

²¹⁹ Duchamp in Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 19.

²²⁰ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 22.

Paintings conform to the conditions of the secular market, they become visual *products*: novelty succeeds novelty within the marketplace. But this novelty is also an attempt to take hold of the world in paint, to bring the painted image once more to the height of its representative powers. Duchamp's strategy is not to attempt to take hold of the world in paint, by material means exclusively, but to attempt this 'taking hold of the world' in thought,²²¹ something for which a suitable and shared language is required.

Modernist painting perseveres with an idea of the painted image which is increasingly unsustainable, even when the principle of visual representation is invested with the idea of lyrical subjective expression transplanted from lyric poetry. Under these circumstances painting, as I have shown, transforms from 'apathetic' social critique in Manet to the assertion of painterly and subjective totality in Cézanne, to the attempted creation of a new 'classical' language in cubism. It is this sense of continuity and of the inherited validity of the cause of painting which is in question for Duchamp but which his peers and forebears unquestioningly assert. They have faith in painting transformed, painting as a modern art, as perhaps *the* art of modernity. But in this sense they have faith only in the signifier unhinged, in the sign without referent. This is the source of Duchamp's issue with 'retinal' art – it is merely a circulation of visual signs, unmediated, without meaning, yet self-sufficient and self-serving. Nevertheless, in late 1911 and early 1912, Duchamp still wants to paint, to paint well, and to paint the world around him, not as it is *seen*, but as it *is*. The pictorial project has not yet entirely died within him (and in truth never actually does).

²²¹ The oft-quoted remark that Duchamp made to Lawrence Steefel Jnr bears this out: he declares his desire 'to grasp things with the mind the way the penis is grasped by the vagina'. The eroticism of this phrase is difficult to overcome, but at the source of this startling image is the desire to know the world, to understand it. See Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 85.

But Duchamp's means of achieving this goal were far from in accordance with his time. Having completed his apprenticeship with modern painting, and in so doing realising that he does not approve of its methods or of its outlook, he decides that the only way to achieve his aim is to return to the model of art before Courbet, before 1850, before fully-fledged industrial modernity. Such a move, on the one hand is reactionary, regressive, and on the other, enlightened. Having explored the techniques of modernist painting, Duchamp decides that they are inappropriate for his ends. But this retrograde step is not designed to obliterate nor ignore the last 60 years of French painting, or to avoid the realities of his present moment. The journey back is conducted in order to examine the possibility of a different language, one that whilst being based on the ideological character of the art of the past does not import that character wholesale into the present. Duchamp's logic is clear: if we once had an art that pictorialized knowledge, then surely we can have it again. The only object in the way of this goal is the history of French painting that has continually and progressively distorted the inherited structures of image making in accordance with an internal formal logic of deconstruction – the picture of the negative dialectic. Just as tonal music exhausted its structures in the search for ever-more relevant and complex forms of representation, so painting collapses its own structures in the hope that somewhere, in the rubble, reality might reappear. Duchamp simply returns to a point before the deconstruction, and sets about generating an image from an older blueprint. He inaugurates another tradition which is also the same tradition. It is the internal 'other' of the French tradition, an art that holds a mirror up to art, and in turn through the resultant reflections and multiplications of meaning shows society its true face (what it has become). By proxy he attempts to re-align the epistemological conditions of an age with artistic form, and he does this by rejecting painting. Adorno and Horkheimer, in their summation of the task to redeem the project of the Enlightenment, offer a revealing parallel with Duchamp's own, albeit far less emphatic, personal

artistic project: ‘the task to be accomplished is not the conservation of the past, but the redemption of the hopes of the past.’²²²

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We do not know exactly what Duchamp means by ‘before Courbet’, or ‘before 1850.’ Potentially he could be referring to the whole history of Western easel painting. He does make clear, however, which particular qualities he admires in art ‘pre-Courbet’: ‘Before Courbet, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophical, moral . . . our whole century [here Duchamp is speaking in 1967] is completely retinal, except for the Surrealists, who tried to go outside it somewhat. And still, they didn't go very far!’²²³ And so for Duchamp retinal art is opposed to art that exhibits a connection to knowledge, to morality, to metaphysical speculation. Such a set of connections are no doubt what Duchamp desires for his own work and are what he has in mind when he declares to James Johnson Sweeney that ‘art is an outlet to regions which are not ruled by time and space.’²²⁴

Duchamp is damning of the painterly materialism of the Impressionists who ‘instead of interpreting through the pigment... gradually fell in love with the pigment, the paint itself. Their intentions were completely retinal and divorced from the classical use of paint as a means to an end.’²²⁵ By contrast, Duchamp declares his need to

get away from the physical act of painting. I was much more interested in recreating ideas in painting. For me the title was very important. I was interested in making

²²² Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1973), xv.

²²³ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 43.

²²⁴ “A Conversation with Marcel Duchamp” television interview conducted by James Johnson Sweeney, *NBC*, January 1965 in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 137.

²²⁵ Duchamp in Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 19-20.

painting serve my purposes, and in getting away from the physicality of painting... I considered painting as a means of expression, not at all as a complete aim for life... painting should not be retinal or visual; it should have to do with the gray matter of our understanding.²²⁶

One of the painters we know for certain that Duchamp greatly admired from the ‘pre-Courbet’ era, was Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553), an artist whose work he became familiar with during his visit to Germany in the summer of 1912. In the years since Thierry de Duve declared that ‘we know nothing of Duchamp’s activities in Munich,’²²⁷ certain details of his trip have come to light. Indeed, the 2012 exhibition of Duchamp’s Munich work at Munich’s Kunstbau gallery to mark the centenary of his stay in the city has revealed more than ever about this now seemingly mythologically significant period of the artist’s life. The exhibition, as well as shedding light on his stay, has helped to dispel some of the illusions gathered around this shadowy episode. In the words of Michael R. Taylor:

Duchamp spent his first ten days in Bavaria with Max Bergmann... who had a studio in the village of Haimhausen, about twenty kilometres north of Munich... We know very little about their time together in Haimhausen. Much more is known about the artist’s subsequent stay in Munich, where he rented a small furnished room in the heart of the Schwabing section of the city from August Gress, a young machine-operator of his own age. The room that Duchamp rented was on the second floor of a small boarding house at 65 Barerstraße, near the Alte Pinakothek. This location is important since the artist later recalled that he visited this world famous museum on a daily basis during his time in Munich. It was there that he discovered the work of the sixteenth-century German painter, Lucas Cranach the Elder, whose graceful, elongated nudes made a deep impression on the young artist: “I was painting and I went to the [Alte] Pinakothek in Munich every day. I love those Cranachs, I love them. Cranach, the old man. The tall nudes. [The] nature and substance of his nudes inspired me for the flesh colour [in the 1912 painting *Bride*].”²²⁸

It will become, as we will see, increasingly difficult to maintain elaborate and fanciful interpretations of Duchamp’s time in Munich in the face of accumulating historical evidence. This until now elusive period, rather than being the aporia in which there occurred an almost supernatural transformation, and in which Western painting was brought to its knees, was in

²²⁶ Ibid., 19.

²²⁷ Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 115.

²²⁸ Michael R. Taylor, “Visiting the Alte Pinakothek with Marcel Duchamp” in *Marcel Duchamp in Munich*, Exhibition Catalogue, eds Helmut Friedel, Thomas Girst, Matthias Mühling, and Felicia Rappe (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012), 55.

reality the occasion in which Duchamp produced some of his finest paintings and exposed himself to some of the great works of European art. His life-long love of Cranach was founded here, as was his intention to create an epic allegorical painting, the realisation of which would be the *Large Glass*, unveiled some 14 years later.²²⁹ The visit to Munich was not the end of painting for Duchamp; it was the beginning of its final act.

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Shortly we will examine the Munich paintings with regard to Cranach and other of the early Renaissance painters Duchamp would have encountered in the Alte Pinakothek. Now though, we must return to Duchamp's 'cubist days' and to the painting which was eventually to make his name, the *Nu Descendant un Escalier N°2 / Nude Descending a Staircase No.2* [Figure 29] of early 1912. The *Nude*, in a now pivotal moment in avant-garde folklore, was famously rejected by the 'Salon Cubists' of the Puteaux group for its flouting of the 'discipline' of Cubism guided, as it was, by the theoretical postulates of Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger. Duchamp recalls that

On the day before the opening [of the Salon] Gleizes asked my brothers to go and ask me at least to change the title because he thought, after conferring with Delaunay, Le Fauconnier, and Metzinger, that it was not Cubistic in their sense – that it was off the beam of Cubism too much for them not to do something about it... A nude never descends the stairs – a nude reclines, you know. Even their little revolutionary temple could not understand that a nude could be *descending* the stairs... So I said nothing. I said all right, all right, and I took a taxi to the show and took my painting and took it away. So it never was shown at the Indépendants of 1912, although it is in the catalog.²³⁰

Duchamp, unwilling to compromise his personal vision and with his self-expression at stake, simply withdrew his painting. He has said of the event, 'It was a real turning point in my life... I

²²⁹ It is in July of 1912 in Munich that Duchamp makes the first study called *The Bride Stripped Bare by the Bachelors (Mechanism of Modesty/Mechanical Modesty)*, see *Marcel Duchamp in Munich*, Exhibition Catalogue, eds Helmut Friedel, Thomas Girst, Matthias Mühling, and Felicia Rappe (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012), 118.

²³⁰ Duchamp in Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 16.

saw that I would never be much interested in groups after that'.²³¹ One of the significant objections to the image (besides its 'unfathomable' title) was its similarity to the Futurist aesthetic. There had been an exhibition of Futurist art at the Galerie Bernheim Jeune in Paris in January 1912 – the very time at which Duchamp was painting the *Nude* – and the Salon Cubists wanted to clearly differentiate themselves, both aesthetically and theoretically, from Marinetti and his fellow Futurists. Duchamp's work compromised this aim, his work exhibiting at this early stage the liminality that was to become one of its defining features. In an interview with Joan Bakewell for the BBC in 1968, Duchamp was to recall that

They [the Puteaux group and Salon Cubists] had already very soon in their production decided to write a book, at least Metzinger and Gleizes wrote a book on cubism [*Du Cubisme* of 1912, discussed in the preceding chapter]. It was a sort of theoretical exposé of what cubism should be, very early, a year or so after they had started painting. So when I came with my *Nude* they didn't see that it applied to their theory, that it was an illustration of their theory. And in fact it had more than cubism had – that is the idea of movement that the Futurists had at the same time. So they thought it was neither one, neither futurism nor cubism, and they condemned it.²³²

Here Duchamp is not entirely accurate in his recollection, although substantially his account is borne out by history. Gleizes and Metzinger did not publish *Du Cubisme* until October of 1912²³³ although Duchamp explains that they were formulating their ideas from the end of 1911 at the weekly meetings at Gleizes' house in Courbevoie, Paris.²³⁴ The ideas that would be expressed in *Du Cubisme* were undoubtedly those circulating amongst the Puteaux group and so Duchamp is correct in connecting the rejection of his painting to the treatise itself. No doubt it was the ever-hardening theoretical position of Cubism (galvanised momentarily in the form of the text of *Du Cubisme*) that lent Duchamp's work an air of unacceptability. In addition to this, Duchamp's *Nude* is not, I will argue, a cubist painting and therefore perhaps should not have been exhibited under the banner of Cubism at any rate. The theoretical posturing had at least

²³¹ Duchamp in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 83.

²³² Duchamp in an interview with Joan Bakewell for the BBC's *Late Show*, June 5th 1968.

²³³ Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, (eds.) *A Cubism Reader*, (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 435.

²³⁴ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 24.

delineated the cubist position and made it clear that Duchamp's project was not cubist in the increasingly strict sense of the word.

Duchamp offers the following explanation for the *Nude*:

I do not feel that there was any connection between the *Nude Descending a Staircase* and futurism. The futurists held their exhibition at the Galerie Bernheim Jeune in January 1912. I was painting the *Nude* at the same time. The oil sketch for it, however, had already been done in 1911. It is true that I knew Severini. But I was working quite by myself at the time – or rather with my brothers. And I was not a café frequenter. Chrono-photography was at the time in vogue. Studies of horses in movement and of fencers in different positions as in Muybridge's albums were well known to me. But my interest in painting the *Nude* was closer to the cubists' interest in decomposing forms than to the futurists' interest in movement, or even in Delaunay's *Simultaneist* suggestions of it. My aim was a static representation of movement – a static composition of indications of various positions taken by a form in movement – with no attempt to give cinema effects through painting.²³⁵

Duchamp gives no further indication of what he means by the cubist decomposition of forms. We must assume that he is referring to cubistic operations in perspective and the fragmentation of the object. But again Duchamp interprets this attitude to the object in his own idiosyncratic way. He 'felt justified', he informs us, 'in reducing a figure in movement to a line rather than to a skeleton. Reduce, reduce, reduce was my thought; - but at the same time my thought was turning inward, rather than toward externals'.²³⁶ For Duchamp the decomposition is a reduction – a shedding of flesh not through decay but owing to its excess. In the same way that 'some twenty different static positions'²³⁷ can be condensed onto a single canvas, the expressive and excessive materiality of painting can be stripped away. But this reduction is not a form of abstraction – Duchamp stresses this fact – it is more a purification, the refinement of a language to its basic forms, or to what could be considered its core signs, but which are, despite their precision, endless, manifold, indifferently universal: 'I came to feel an artist might use anything – a dot, a line, the most conventional or unconventional symbol – to say what he wanted to say... And in the *King and*

²³⁵ Marcel Duchamp, "The Great Trouble with Art in This Country" in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 124.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Duchamp in Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (eds), *Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), 256.

Queen (Surrounded by Swift Nudes, May 1912) painted shortly after the *Nude* there are no human forms or indications of anatomy. But in it one can see where the forms are placed; and for all this reduction I would never call it an “abstract” painting.²³⁸ It is clear, then, that Duchamp’s concerns were not those of the Salon cubists, or those of Picasso and Braque. The figureheads of the Salon cubists (specifically Gleizes, Duchamp was to recall²³⁹) recognised a wayward tendency in Duchamp, and he also openly declared that the inspiration for his work was decidedly un-cubist. He claims that by the time he had painted the *Nude*, his interests lay beyond the cubist sphere:

Movement... the publication of fencing or a horse galloping [here Duchamp is referring to the chronophotography of Étienne-Jules Marey] and so forth took me out of cubism if I may say. Attracted by the problem of motion in painting I made several sketches on that theme [we are shown *Encore à Cet Astre / Once More to this Star*, 1911]. That gave me the real idea for the *Nude Descending a Staircase*. It was a convergence in my mind of various interests.²⁴⁰

Indeed, Duchamp confesses to a ‘distrust of systematisation’, an inability to conform to established formulas.²⁴¹ ‘Cubism’, he tells us, ‘interested me for only a few months. At the end of 1912 I was already thinking of something else’.²⁴² And, as I have stated above, the *Nude Descending a Staircase No.2* is not, strictly speaking, a cubist painting, if we are to understand cubism not simply as a *style*, but as the struggle for the fate of French painting, for painterly representation in general. With cubism a language (or the reinvention of a language) is at stake. In Duchamp’s *Nude*, it is not. And there are clear indicators of this in the painting. The initial and fundamental difference we should note is that a cubist object is ideally seen from multiple spatial perspectives, each manifested by its representation in paint, by the artist’s flexible and fluid relation to the empirical world. In Duchamp’s *Nude*, a single ‘object’ is in multiple positions, at the same time, but seen from the same static point. The logic of the camera, and therefore of the

²³⁸ Marcel Duchamp, “The Great Trouble with Art in This Country” in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 124-125.

²³⁹ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 31.

²⁴⁰ Duchamp speaking in the short film *Marcel Duchamp in His Own Words* (1968), dir. Lewis Jacobs.

²⁴¹ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 26.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 27.

history of Western representation infiltrates Duchamp's image but is not subjected to the same strains and fragmentations apparent in cubism. There is no real effort or desire evidenced either in the *Nude* or the writings and recollections surrounding it to represent multiple perspectives of the same object, nor to enter into some sort of dialectical procedure to resolve the apparently contradictory flatness of the canvas with the illusion of three-dimensionality. Duchamp's work is rather a reconciliation of opposing states of being: the synthesis of stasis and motion. Although in actuality it is not a particularly effective synthesis, as stasis and motion are essentially resolved into stasis. The condition - the fixedness - of the canvas cannot be overcome. Similarly, Duchamp takes a characteristically nonchalant attitude to the classification of the *Nude*. He tells us that it is cubist in 'the brownish colouring of the painting... even though the treatment of the movement has some futuristic overtones'.²⁴³

Whereas a true cubistic image might represent multiple spaces in the time of a single visual impression, Duchamp's *Nude* represents the multiple 'times' of an object in the space of a single canvas. Here perhaps is the most appealing and least tenuous link to Einstein and the new geometries (although I do not wish to pursue such potential parallels at this time).²⁴⁴ Another key feature of this distinction is that Duchamp's concern is not one internal to painting, but is rather a theoretical problem which may or may not be successfully illustrated and even resolved by painting. Duchamp's tacit assumption here is that painting is still an illustrative and functional tool. It is a realm in which ideas can be expressed, can be given figurative reality. Whilst Duchamp's concerns are still undeniably pictorial, they differ from the more rigorously internalised preoccupations of cubism. Cubism tussles with itself – it tears the world apart at the same time as tearing its means of representation to shreds. The reconstruction of the means of representation in Cubism is a simultaneous reconstruction of the world *as* cubist. Cubism

²⁴³ Duchamp in Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (eds), *Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), 258.

²⁴⁴ See Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1998) for a thorough investigation of Duchamp's relation to the science and technology of his age.

purports to be a system of representation; Duchamp is concerned with representing *something beyond that system*. We should not be afraid of calling the adequacy of his language into question, but this, as we will see, is soon to undergo some drastic transformations. What we cannot ignore is that the representational means at painters' disposal are, whether cubistic or not, unequal to the task of representation. This, the essence of the internal problem of the language of painting, should not be forgotten.

In a sense, the *Nude* can be seen as little more than a painterly appropriation of Marey. This reading however, is complicated by the very fact of painting. Photography is a mechanical process; painting is a reflective medium.²⁴⁵ With the *Nude*, however, Duchamp is in the process of reducing the medium, reducing the language, not to a core of signifiers, but to a fragile and inconsistent iconography. He is not reworking the conventions of European painting from within, but returning to a point before the tradition could be so sure of its conventions. Linear perspective and chiaroscuro are not obviated, suppressed or transformed - they are simply not present. We are either transported to a point *before* such conventions had hardened to the dictates of a visual language or to a point *after* the dictates have lost their relation to reality, to a point where the language can no longer speak of or to the world.

If we were to go so far as to remove not only the formal conventions, but the *medium* itself from painting, then, in Duchamp's eyes, we are left with pure reflection, pure thought – a metaphysical pursuit, the ontology of European painting. This is the equivalent absolutist move to counter the Impressionists' love of the pigment, of paint itself.²⁴⁶ It would be a move to

²⁴⁵ Walter Benjamin describes the effect of early photography thus: 'what was inevitably felt to be inhuman – one might even say deadly – in daguerreotype was the (prolonged) looking into the camera, since the camera record sour likeness without returning our gaze.' See Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life* ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland et al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006), 204.

²⁴⁶ Duchamp in Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 16.

counter their rampant materialism, their 'cult devoted to the material on the canvas'²⁴⁷ that Duchamp sees continued and exaggerated in the work of the Cubists. If the means of representing ideas have become so debased, so divorced from ideas that they can no longer be made to serve them, then - Duchamp will reason - the material itself must be rejected. In order to put painting at the service of the mind,²⁴⁸ painting (in the specific terms of the development of the readymade) must be obliterated.

Yet it is also with the readymade, peculiarly, that Duchamp's work most closely approximates Cubist methodologies. In this instance the cubistic principle of multiple perspectives contained within the single pictorial frame (a painterly analogy, of course for the diverse and varied perspectives now tormenting or enthralling the modern subject and reordering the modern world) is transplanted to the conceptual realm. With the readymades, manufactured or found objects are subjected to a cubistic procedure: they are the focal point of multiple perspectives (theoretical, linguistic) which are essentially external to them, they are the object around which these perspectives converge and are confused. The pictorial frame is relinquished, the internal struggle for the soul of painting is renounced, but the still-life remains. Representation is shifted to the realm of ideas: the *image-ideal* is internalised.

Before dealing in any more detail with the readymades, let us further examine the *Nude* in accordance with the tools of formal analysis already established in this study:

Duchamp is quite right when he suggests that the palette for the *Nude* is taken from the cubists. But by this he surely means Picasso and Braque as opposed to the Puteaux group. The limited colour scheme of the *Nude* is indeed similar to Braque's *Le guéridon* and Picasso's *Le guitariste* both of 1911 and although Duchamp never visited Picasso's studio, he certainly went to Braque's

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 19.

in 1910 or 1911 and saw works from both artists at Kahnweiler's gallery in the rue Vignon, Paris.²⁴⁹ The colour scheme of Duchamp's *Nude* is also similar to that of Manet's *Olympia* – fleshtones, ochres and umbers predominate and again the figure of a luminous nude is clearly demarcated from a dingy and indistinct background. If Duchamp's work features within the cubist canon, then it also operates within the conventions of painterly treatments of the nude.

Although the figure may be hard to recognise as such, it is clearly differentiated from the background through use of colour and outline, techniques present in Manet and developed into a system of modelling by Cézanne. Here, however, it is not a single figure that is delineated in space, but many figures, overlaid. The complication here is also a reduction, a simplification. In order to present twenty figures in a single image, on the scale chosen by Duchamp, reduction to elements is required. But these figures are not overlaid, rather amalgamated. The teeming mass of the body suggests its own internal three-dimensionality but ultimately seems to conform to the flatness of the canvas, of the photograph. Here the mechanical process required not for the execution of the image as such, but for its inspiration, is contained within the rendering of the figure – it is a body subjected to mechanisation, painting made to conform to a photographic vision. Duchamp's interest in multiples, and in multiplication (of meaning, of works of art, of personas) is here evidenced in the compression of a profusion of positions into a single homogenous mass. It is less a static representation of movement than it is a singular pictorializing of multiple images. In this respect we can see *Dulcinea* (1911) - which Duchamp describes as 'a rather simplistic interpretation of cubism'²⁵⁰ - as a clear precursor to the *Nude*, an indicator of the direction of Duchamp's painting. There are fewer multiples and less 'reduction' of the figure to apparently abstract pictorial elements, but the propensity to these devices is obvious nevertheless.

²⁴⁹ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 25-26.

²⁵⁰ Duchamp speaking in *Jeu d'Échecs avec Marcel Duchamp* (1963), dir. Jean-Marie Drot.

It is as a result of this that Duchamp's 'cubist' paintings can never be said to be truly cubist. They do not concern themselves with perspectival (spatial) relations. Rather the *Nude* is concerned with the integration of temporal units into pictorial wholes, and as Duchamp has rightly said, it was the focus on movement that led him away from cubism. The *Nude* suggests time or duration to the viewer rather than an expanding or collapsing pictorial space. It is my conviction that Duchamp never actually produced a cubist painting (in the sense that cubism has a clear historical function - and to those artist who practice it, this constitutes an obligation), that none of his paintings realise the 'collapsing-in-on-itself' of pictorial space, nor the counteractive perspectives and modelling characteristic of the work of Picasso, Braque and also of Puteaux cubists such as Gleizes and Metzinger. In addition, Duchamp never exhibits any of the heaviness of Cézannean modelling and brushwork – a legacy which cubism proper adopts and develops. A true (early) cubist painting – such as Picasso's *Nu* of 1909 – demonstrates plainly these key features of cubism: the debt to Cézanne, the perceived need to build upon his technical achievements, and the more theoretical problem of pictorial space and the illusion of three-dimensionality. True cubism is painting lost deep within itself, painting which struggles with itself whilst losing sight of the world beyond it. Duchamp's painting never loses sight of what lies beyond painting, of the external world in which a painting is simply an image, a reflection. The material problems of painting, as they have been handed down to Picasso and Braque, are of little concern to Duchamp.

Therefore the fragmented frameworks of cubism are not evidenced in Duchamp's work. Indeed, his painterly approach seems wholly unengaged with the technical problems inherited from Manet and Cézanne. But as I have stated, that tradition, the tradition of 'retinal' art is something that Duchamp wants to distance himself from, even if – at this point in his life - he has not yet given voice to such a stance. So it is in the paintings themselves, rather than the readymades, that we can sense the first clear notes of Duchamp's dissent – a dissent that is acknowledged by his

fellow painters when they translate his idiomatic difference into justification for his rejection from the Salon des Indépendents of 1912.

If we look closely at Duchamp's technique we can see this difference in the paint. A reliable point of perspective is maintained throughout the *Nude* with the exception of the flight of stairs at the top right of the composition. These stairs seemingly leading down into the image have the effect of evoking the background of early renaissance paintings - such as those of Piero di Cosimo, for whom Duchamp declared a fondness²⁵¹ and in whose work aerial and linear perspective are in their infancy - rather than the multiple and fragmented perspectives of cubism. It is an irregular staircase rather than a staircase seen from conflicting perspectives. Indeed the failures of perspective, whether through deficiency or conscious effort are reminiscent of the inconsistencies of early renaissance art rather than the highly self-conscious and apparently historically determined deconstruction of perspective enacted by the cubists.

The staircase upon which the nude is descending is formed of a series of straight and curved lines moving diagonally down to the right of the painting. These stairs are flat: there is no attempt to suggest their recession into space, just as there is no real consistent attempt made to model the nude itself in space. Here the painting runs closest to both the photography from which it is derived and to the schematic aesthetic first evidenced in Duchamp's *Coffee Mill* [Figure 32] of late 1911/early 1912, a work to which he attaches a major significance: 'It was there I began to think I could avoid all contact with traditional pictorial painting, which is even found in Cubism and in my own "Nude Descending a Staircase."' ²⁵² But the *Nude* is also the presentation of an idea, is the realisation of a conceptual attempt to reconcile movement with the stasis of the painted image. In addition it is an attempt to present a photographic *effect* in painting. In this way it is a response to photographic imagery, to the mechanism of photography formulated

²⁵¹ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 71.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 37.

within the single painterly frame. But here already the tools of painting are somehow insufficient in the face of the world upon which they are required to comment. The *Nude* may well be an accomplished figuring of a complex problem, but it does not actually succeed in *saying* much, and what it does say is not particularly profound. It has the feel of a technical exercise, albeit a compelling one. Duchamp's subject, however is decidedly 'modern' – too much so for the cubists who reject his work from the Salon des Indépendants: nudes recline, they do not descend stairs in pseudo-photographic iterations.

The stable perspective (position) the viewer can adopt with regard to the image is an appropriate means by which the ideas explored can be presented. The picture frame here is very much the space of exegesis. It is more than just a schematic even though it depends upon schematisation as a form of presentation. Within the formalised conditions and confines of the image a variety of painterly gesturing is at work. We should note initially the way in which the furthestmost right iteration of the figure is the 'lightest', that as the nude approaches the 'present' (the moment in which the nude ceases to move, assuming, as we must, that her movement is in the past) she becomes more and more luminous, increasingly distinct from the background and from her past 'selves' or iterations. If historical or 'anecdotal' painting presents a pregnant moment in which narratives are played out in space and through pictorial devices such as chiaroscuro, then the *Nude* represents an elongated moment – an extension of time which is also a distortion and a fixing of what is mobile within that time. We do not see a figure as she moves through space in time, we see the time of that movement translated into painterly space. There is no figure, only the mark of her passing. Even when, at her lightest incarnation, she is supposedly still, she cannot be apprehended. In this way Duchamp's painting is the painting of an idea and not of a figure at all. The human being in this image can never be arrested, and has already been transformed first by photography and second by the painter's brush. Here Duchamp is describing the appeal of chess, although the description is equally appropriate to and is no doubt influenced by the *Nude*:

A game of chess is a visual and plastic thing, and if it isn't geometric in the static sense of the word, it is mechanical, since it moves; it's a drawing, it's a mechanical reality. The pieces aren't pretty in themselves, any more than is the form of the game, but what is pretty – if the word “pretty” can be used – is the movement. Well, it is mechanical, the way, for example, a Calder [the American sculptor Alexander Calder] is mechanical. In chess there are some extremely beautiful things in the domain of movement, but not in the visual domain. It's the imagining of the movement or of the gesture that makes the beauty, in this case. It's completely in one's gray matter.²⁵³

The transplanting of the site of beauty from the material imprint of the work of art to the immaterial site of the human mind is a gesture that is vital to understanding how Duchamp's work develops from the *Nude* onwards. Here in the *Nude* the burden is already upon the viewer of the work of art: 'I wanted to create a static image of movement: movement is an abstraction, a deduction articulated within the painting, without our knowing if a real person is or isn't descending an equally real staircase. Fundamentally movement is in the eye of the spectator, who incorporates it into the painting'.²⁵⁴ Increasingly 'Duchamp's work demands the onlooker's active participation'.²⁵⁵

The *Nude* then contains a hidden value, like a cypher. It is undoubtedly in this respect a sign for a concept: the material incarnation of an immaterial phenomenon or intellectual problem. The concept is not so much outside of the image as it is contained, plastically, within it. The work contains the movement of thought. The *Nude* – and this is something that Duchamp's work will continue to exhibit from this point onwards – embodies an *impossible internality*.²⁵⁶ It contains within itself (within its form on the canvas) a set of values that are immaterial, which do not have a material being but which can be said to exist nevertheless. This ontological twist differentiates

²⁵³ Ibid., 18-19.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 30.

²⁵⁵ Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 87.

²⁵⁶ The concept of an impossible internality is designed to indicate a metaphysical node of thought or sensation which, owing to the decline of metaphysical absolutes (and the attendant discipline of metaphysical speculation itself), cannot, strictly speaking be said to exist. It is a value unsupported by knowledge – epistemologically unverifiable; something that positivism cannot know and which can no longer be substantiated by archaic modes of thought either.

the image from the cubistic work of his peers, aligning him perhaps more with Kandinsky and certainly with Matisse, whom Duchamp greatly admired.²⁵⁷

The *Nude* does not assert its own materiality, nor its own vision as such, but asserts the ontological status of the *idea* which motivates (mobilises) it. This 'Being' of the idea can of course only be apprehended in the mind of the observer, who must 'activate' the painting with mental energy, or with some sort of cerebral 'gasoline'. This 'fairground ride' attitude to the work of art is common to Duchamp, deriving also from the experience of nineteenth-century fairs, optical devices and novelties (stereoscopes etc.). He offers this explanation for the nature of the bride in the *Large Glass*: '[it] took birth in my mind from the fairs, you know, country fairs where they have the wedding scene and you have big balls that you throw at the heads of the bride, of the bridegroom and the guests and then of course the bride would fall out when you touched the right place'.²⁵⁸ And by 'fall out' Duchamp means that the bride is disrobed. She is stripped bare, if you will.²⁵⁹

We can see this principle of 'activation' and its effect come to ultimate material fruition in *Étant Donnés*: 1. *La Chute d'Eau*, 2. *Le Gaz d'Éclairage* / *Given*: 1. *The Waterfall*, 2. *The Illuminating Gas* (1946-66) where the viewer is required to view the work of art according to explicitly pre-determined conditions. The work itself lives only briefly in the eyes of the single viewer and then disappears, prey to all manner of sceptical doubts. *Étant Donnés*, rather than being an anomaly (if such a thing can be said to exist in Duchamp's oeuvre) is the clear culmination of this line of his inquiry. The mechanisms of erotic encounter are also implicated in this formulation, and are

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 22-23.

²⁵⁸ Marcel Duchamp in interview with Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, "Marcel Duchamp Speaks", broadcast by the BBC in the series "Art, Anti-Art," 1959, now available in MP3 format.

²⁵⁹ Duchamp also suggests to Richard Hamilton – and he is embarrassed by the admission – that the stripping bare of the bride was also a reference to the stripping of Christ, a 'naughty' way of combining religion and eroticism. Here we can reflect on this in light of Manet's similarly blasé tone in *Jésus Insulté par les Soldats* (see Chapter 1). The comparison is made only in order to suggest a similarity of attitude, rather than any clear thematic ties. Ibid.

fitting: lovers are 'activated' by one another, the time of the encounter itself is finite; there is an onanistic slant to the position of the viewer who 'activates' and is 'activated' by the work of art. We should not overlook Duchamp's cunning description of the 'creative act'²⁶⁰ in light of his statement to Pierre Cabanne: 'I shy away from the word "creation." In the ordinary, social meaning of the word – well, it's very nice but, fundamentally, I don't believe in the creative function of the artist'.²⁶¹ Rather the creative act for Duchamp appears to take on the characteristics of the reciprocity of a sexual encounter, but through transplantation into the conceptual realm. *Étant Donnés* makes this parallel most explicit, however, aligning Duchamp's ideas about the intellectual inter-subjective component of the work with the peculiarly distorted conditions of a sexual encounter. The nude seems to have been the site upon which so many of the problems faced by visual language have been played out and here a parallel - beyond the obvious nudity - with Manet should not be overlooked: Manet's work demands the viewer to 'circulate' its signs, to examine material traces to uncover latent value systems. The technique of qualitative differentiation that I have discussed in Manet's work requires the viewer to actively decipher the structure or confusion of value and meaning that is the origin of the formal procedure.

With Manet, the formal characteristics of the work can be read with regard to an established painterly language, and the expression of the work can therefore make itself known almost entirely through the material forms which constitute the image. Manet's work requires the viewer to compare a broad impasto stroke on a necklace to the imperceptible brushwork used to model skin, to the irreverent marks used to render crowds or backgrounds. When reflected upon, such procedures actively create the mental conditions and produce the mental effects that Manet is aiming to represent. In this way the work of art strives to represent the world as it is, to take hold

²⁶⁰ Full text in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 138-140.

²⁶¹ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 16.

of it in paint. But even in this instance, the language of painting cannot articulate comprehensively. It becomes symbolic, obtuse, esoteric as it forces its language to breaking point in an attempt to give voice to the conditions it has been designated to communicate, express. Thus in Manet, the incomprehension of critics and the public can be understood as the manifestation of the intellectual work that his painting requires of its spectator: the true import of the work of art must be constituted in the mind of the viewer. If this mental task cannot be done then the work appears unreadable, disturbing, alien. What is operative in Manet finds fuller development in Duchamp. The link between the language of painting and its reconstitution in the mind is maintained, fraught with inconsistencies and dumbfounding silences.

Duchamp's brushwork, however, is uniform but unobtrusive: there is almost no trace of it, certainly no 'gestural' painting of the sort we see in Manet, nor of the obvious and self-conscious uniformity of Cézanne, nor of the equivalent forms of these techniques that we see being reworked and reformulated in cubism. On the contrary, Duchamp models with a uniform absence of expressive brushwork. No sections of the work reveal any obvious or seemingly intentional 'relief' and there are no outright traces of the artist's hand. It is as if Duchamp has done all he can to approximate the uninterrupted surface of the photograph. He describes passages of light to dark as if there were a clear light source, although there is none. This shading is used only to differentiate between forms or sections of the nude. The majority of this differentiation, however, is achieved by juxtaposing flat areas of plain colour frequently demarcated by black outline.

Along with the absence of any form of linear perspectival relations, there is a concomitant resistance to chiaroscuro. We should note that at the far right of the painting, halfway up, there is a banister with a sphere at its top. The sphere receives virtually no modelling whatsoever and is simply a circle of colour. It is, nevertheless, a strangely recognisable facet of an otherwise visually

challenging image. Certain aspects of the various iterations of the nude seem to protrude from one another, but there is no logic to this layering, which leads the viewer to conclude that the movement of the figure is not happening in space as such, but upon a flat surface (Duchamp concedes that this too is the case in *Dulcinea*).²⁶² Here perhaps we can suggest a valid similarity with cubism: the flatness of the canvas is indeed foregrounded and never obscured. But in this instance this seems less an internalised reflection on the history of painting than the mimicry of Marey's photographic effects. It is as if Duchamp has already accepted photography as the eschaton of Western painting, and this comment, in a 1922 letter to Alfred Stieglitz, even if somewhat hyperbolic, corroborates this reading: 'You know exactly what I think about photography/ I would like to see it make people despise painting until something else will make photography unbearable'.²⁶³ However, it would not be through mimicry that Duchamp paints 'photographically' but rather in the spirit of acceptance. The image is then both pre-modern and post-modern in its capitulation with the forces of modernity - its succumbing to them - and its nostalgia for a painting of ideas and a pictorialism uncontaminated by the insufficiencies of the visual language.

The *Nude* is a painting which declares its debt to photography, which owes its genesis to photography, to the photographic ordering of time and space, yet this must be understood as the conclusion of its own tradition, as the end game of its own Being. The readymade does not emerge, fully formed, but gestates in painting. It is not simply painting in the absence of painting, but painting *after* painting. The step down from the canvas is an abrupt one, and there can be no intermediate point, no half-measure. But in Duchamp's oeuvre, paintings and readymades coexist alongside one another, perhaps finding their shared climax in the *Large Glass* – a window with some painting on it, haunted by mystifying intangibles.

²⁶² Duchamp speaking in *Jeu d'Échecs avec Marcel Duchamp* (1963), dir. Jean-Marie Drot.

²⁶³ *The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk, trans. Jill Taylor (Ghent, Belgium: Ludion, 2000), 109.

The *Nude Descending a Staircase No.2* is, like Manet's *Olympia* before it, a controversial nude. In both instances the nude is controversial because it breaks with convention. With Manet, technique and presentation affront the viewer, the title intrigues and appals; with Duchamp, the title of the work offends, breaking both with the conventional pictorial context of the nude and with the cubists' traditional subject matter. The technique is dry, inexpressive. Here as in Manet's *Olympia*, a space is opened up between the work and the title – a space that dislodges the image from a clear context of meaning and establishes a play between sign and referent that must be entertained in the mind of the viewer. This conflation of word and image also finds its precedent in Duchamp's early work as a cartoonist, when he and his fellow artists were discussing Manet, whose 'name came up in every conversation on painting.'²⁶⁴ Manet was held in high esteem by these cartoonists. I would suggest that this is owing to his incisive ability to produce paintings which were also cutting social comments, which both partook of and derided their culture.

The *Nude Descending a Staircase No.2* does not look, of course, much like a nude at all. From the renaissance Venuses through Manet's *Olympia* to Duchamp's *Nude*, we have seen the nude female figure as an idealised form, subject to scandalous 'realism', and then made to disappear almost entirely through abstraction, reduction. In all of these instances the function of the nude alters slightly – social values orbit it, they shift and reform new constellations around it; the forms of the painted surface shift like tectonic plates. Any erotic value is stripped entirely from Duchamp's *Nude*. Or rather, if there is an eroticism inherent in the nude then it is disfigured by Duchamp. He performs this distortion continuously throughout his oeuvre, only offering the viewer any potential sense of conventional visual gratification with his late erotic studies.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 22.

²⁶⁵ One of the most intriguing of these studies is 'after' his old-enemy Courbet – *Details After Courbet* of March 1968 – and shows a reclining woman with an incongruous and watchful bird in the foreground. This, the continuation of the tradition of coupling the female nude with domestic animals, is most notoriously apparent with Manet's black cat, but here Duchamp is likely referencing Félix Vallotton, for whose work he always had a 'weakness'²⁶⁵; with whom he (rather erroneously) credits the invention of the cubist palette; and whose *La Femme au Perroquet* (1909-13) is exactly that: a reclining nude gazing straight

Duchamp's nude (descending the staircase), removed from any recognisable or traditional setting for the nude and reduced to a series of lines and overlapping shapes of colour, cannot be *seen* as such: 'there is no flesh, only a simplified anatomy, the up and down, the head, the arms and legs. It is a sort of distortion other than that of Cubism'.²⁶⁶ If it were not a nude, for instance, we could never know this from the visual information available, because the figure is unrecognisable. We only know that it is a nude because it is written at the bottom left hand corner of the image. Similarly, we only know it is female because Duchamp tells us as much. Yet this is vital to the overall impact of the painting. Duchamp would not change the title at the request of the Puteaux group because the identity of the figure as a nude (even though she cannot be recognised) is pivotal. This important aspect of the image cannot be seen in it, but must be read. That is why the image has its name inscribed upon it. Already the interrelation of text and image that Duchamp develops with the readymades and the *Large Glass* is apparent here. In a sense it is this interrelation that causes the objection to the image. It is the knowledge that the image is of a nude and that this nude is, of all things, descending a staircase which is at the root of the call for Duchamp to remove his work from the 1912 Salon des Indépendents. But this identity, the source of the objection lives not in the painting as recognisable pictorial material, through the

out of the painting with uneven lifeless eyes watched over by a parrot on its perch. What Duchamp probably recognised and was drawn to in Valletton, however, was his admiration of the renaissance painting of Holbein and Dürer - which found an equivalent in Duchamp's admiration of Cranach the Elder - and his subtle sense of humour, at once dark and pithy (see *Chaste Suzanne* of 1922).

But beyond this Valletton is indeed an intriguing painter in his response to Manet's *Olympia* and in the way he responds to the crisis of painterly language. *La Blanche et la Noire* of 1913 is clearly a reworking of *Olympia*, and has a nude white woman reclining and a black woman, seated at the edge of the bed, smoking a cigarette. The image is, in execution, alarmingly post-modern. It looks like the work of the post-photorealist painters who have attempted to rehabilitate perspective, and at times resembles the early work of Lucien Freud, without the subtle and unsettling distortions (although it should be noted that Valletton's *Femme Brun Assise de Face, avec Guitare* of 1913 anticipates precisely this aesthetic long before it is extrapolated in German Expressionism). It is interesting to note that Valletton's work was peculiarly ahead of its time in its own attempt to rehabilitate conventional spatial relations and figuration in the face of increasing abstraction. Valletton's modernity is, retrospectively, to be found in the treatment of his subjects, in a refreshingly 'modern' gaze rendered in conventional forms. His *La Chevelure Blonde* (1915) is the sort of image which routinely turns up every year at the BP Portrait Award, and represents the form that portrait painting for academic and institutional purposes will ineluctably take. This note aside, it is clear from Valletton's nudes that Manet's influence is still pronounced, the retrospective of his work at the Salon d'Automne in 1905 lingering long in the mind of Parisian painters.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

reading of a clear signifier, but outside of the painting in the mind of the viewer. The word 'nude' transforms the painting in that it suddenly thrusts the image through categorical shifts that the Puteaux cubists found incomprehensible or at very least incompatible with their programme. The visual category in which a nude exists is different to that in which a vase of flowers or a seated man exists. The cubist conservatism of subject matter (inherited from Cézanne) is here revealed.

It is, however, this transformation of the art object through the act of naming that will provide Duchamp with his most powerful tool in his subsequent search for a language of (self-)expression. It is the name of the nude that embodies both the transgressive act and the way out of the bind of painting, the historical determinacy into which avant-garde painting seemed to be locked: to paint itself to death, to cannibalise itself.

This process, I suggest, should be viewed in the context of the fall of metaphysics that Adorno refers to in his critique of culture and to which he assigns Auschwitz as the ultimate realisation. In the context of this discussion, Auschwitz is understood in Adorno's sense: as the negative culmination of a human project (the Enlightenment) that was meant to prohibit such ethical failures, to overcome the forces that would lead to such an eventuality.

The failure of culture to regulate itself, the failure of rational self-mastery, *culminates* in disaster – but this process is registered and manifested in cultural forms. The tendency for 'advanced' European painting to devour itself, to run itself aground, to exhaust its language, to relinquish its hold on knowledge, should be seen as clear sign of a cultural failure, of the transformation of progress into a negative and self-consuming force: painting turned against itself.

Adorno's diagnosis of culture post-Auschwitz, should, I assert, be extended to culture prior to Auschwitz. Immanent – as opposed to transcendental²⁶⁷ - ethical catastrophes have their causes in cultural forms, which reveal these incipient failures as structural failures. They are adumbrations, warning signs. The diagnosis is dismal, the prognosis leaves us little hope: 'whoever pleads for the maintenance of this radically culpable and shabby culture becomes its accomplice, while the man who says no to culture is directly furthering the barbarism which our culture showed itself to be'.²⁶⁸ This sentiment is expressed pre-Auschwitz with less outraged determinacy in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which the tone is certainly closer to that of warning:

There is no longer any available form of linguistic expression which has not tended towards accommodation to dominant currents of thought... even the best-intentioned reformer who uses an impoverished and debased language to recommend renewal, by his adoption of the insidious mode of categorisation and the bad philosophy it conceals, strengthens the very power of the established order he is trying to break.²⁶⁹

We cannot, of course, discredit the work of criticism entirely.²⁷⁰ Only the combination of the negative and positive forces of an age can provide an image of its totality, of its reality. And Marcel Duchamp offers an alternative: he sees the need to sidestep the disastrous determinacy of painting. This search for alternatives is fuelled by a deep sense of individuality, of difference combined with distrust of knowledge. As Duchamp explained to Pierre Cabanne, 'I always asked myself "why" a lot, and from that questioning came doubt, doubt of everything'.²⁷¹ It is this spirit that Duchamp equates with Dada and with nihilism:

Dada was an extreme protest against the physical side of painting. It was a metaphysical attitude. It was intimately and consciously involved with "literature." It was a sort of nihilism to which I am still very sympathetic. It was a way to get out of a

²⁶⁷ The decline of the lyric function of the work of art, for example, could be viewed as an ethical catastrophe taking place in the transcendental, rather than the immanent realm.

²⁶⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 367.

²⁶⁹ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1944 – English translation 1972), xii, xiv.

²⁷⁰ Adorno also does not abandon criticism for outright despair. His micrologies, as the operative agents of negative dialectics offer a possible critical methodology. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 408.

²⁷¹ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 18.

state of mind – to avoid being influenced by one’s immediate environment, or by the past: to get away from clichés – to get free.²⁷²

And indeed Dada was a mirror held up to the world: an art of irrationality, of nihilism in the face of a world inadvertently annihilating itself. Yet Dada always desired reconciliation, a post-Dada, where the world has been redeemed, repaired (Hugo Ball’s Dada and subsequent Christianity is an example of this tendency). It is a dissenting cry in this respect, but one that desires rehabilitation. It is a statement and not a practice. Duchamp’s art, by contrast, hopes for no rehabilitation, no return to order from disorder, to faith from disillusionment. It does not use nihilism in a dialectical fashion, nor address itself to the remedying of a culture gone awry. It uses nihilism – the devaluation of value, a Nietzschean state of knowledge – as a basis for production, as an epistemological reality in which works of art occur. Duchamp’s work, as deviant as it is, does not seek to return to the order of the old world. It is not nostalgic or concerned with redemption. It opens simply to an untold future. For better or worse it speaks of the world as it is and not as it was or even as it should be. Here we should recall Adorno’s articulation of Nietzsche’s insight, his indictment of idealist metaphysics: ‘truth exists exclusively as that which has become.’²⁷³

And so for Duchamp the period of ‘retinal’ art is the time of painting’s fall, its beautiful decline. It is the era of painting’s growing inability to know the world, to speak of it and for it. It is the time of painting’s slow divorce from knowledge, of knowledge’s flight from painterly representation. But in order to put painting at the service of the mind (and Duchamp means visual art, because prior to him there is nothing beyond painting) and in the light of the deficiency of the language of painting to cope with, to engage with knowledge, a new language is needed – a language which speaks of the world, which gives voice to its (dis)order.

²⁷² Marcel Duchamp, “The Great Trouble with Art in This Country” in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973),

²⁷³ Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), 3.

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Munich

Shortly before departing for Munich in June 1912, Duchamp saw Raymond Roussel's *Impressions d'Afrique* at the Théâtre Antoine in Paris with the Picabias and possibly Guillaume Apollinaire (his memory may be faulty where Apollinaire is concerned...).²⁷⁴ Duchamp subsequently recalls that in Roussel's work he 'really found the source of [his] new activity,'²⁷⁵ in Roussel's propensity for 'inventing the world in which things come out differently from the usual one.'²⁷⁶ Roussel's work coincided with Duchamp's concerns of this time, and presented a possible way out of the impasse of avant-garde painting, perhaps out of painting proper altogether: 'I felt that as a painter it was much better to be influenced by a writer than by another painter. And Roussel showed me the way.'²⁷⁷ Indeed, Duchamp credits *Impressions d'Afrique* with the inspiration for the bride in his *Large Glass*: 'Roussel wrote these completely fantastic descriptions of inventing new... beings whether made of metal or of flesh... the bride is sort of a mechanical bride, a concept of a bride.'²⁷⁸ But this feature in Roussel aligns with a tendency already apparent in the *Nude Descending a Staircase* – the combination of mechanical and organic forms unified under the (supposed) singularity of a name or concept. Here a multiplication of meaning occurs through the reconciliation of incompatibles under a linguistic sign. But this poetic device is at the heart of Duchamp's admiration for Roussel, in his ability to break with inherited forms, with the logical

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 90-91. Tompkins notes that whilst claiming to have attended Roussel's play with Apollinaire, in 'separate statements to three different interviewers' Duchamp contra-claims to have first met the poet/critic in October 1912.

²⁷⁵ Duchamp speaking in the short film *Marcel Duchamp in His Own Words* (1968), dir. Lewis Jacobs.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Duchamp in Calvin Tompkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 91.

²⁷⁸ Duchamp speaking in the short film *Marcel Duchamp in His Own Words* (1968), dir. Lewis Jacobs.

ordering of the world, and to give this break artistic form: '[he] had done something which really had Rimbaud's²⁷⁹ revolutionary aspect to it, a secession... what mattered what as an attitude, more than an influence, to know why he had done all that and why.'²⁸⁰

Here de Duve is right to suggest that Duchamp is interested in secession as a form of renewal in advanced art, but is wrong to suggest that he adopts this stance in Munich as a result of exposure to the German 'avant-garde.'²⁸¹ It derives from the principle as expressed in Rimbaud and given form (in Duchamp's eyes at least) by the work of Roussel. The bankrupt tradition is sidestepped, obviated. Duchamp resolves not be part of its nose-dive. It even becomes questionable whether Duchamp's 'abandonment' of painting is of the same order as Manet's abandonment of chiaroscuro and Cézanne's abandonment of linear perspective. Such devices were part of the internal struggle of painting – the manifestation of painting's own negative dialectic. Duchamp's move is made from the detached position of the outsider. He is heir to the tradition (who could have escaped it?) but is at no moment part of the inner circle. Quite apart from relegating 'the totality of the pictorial tradition to the museum'²⁸² he watched as that tradition exhausted itself.

When Duchamp departed for Munich, however, he was very much a painter, with his focus on solitude, on independence. His view is bleak: 'In 1912 it was a decision for being alone and not knowing where I was going. The artist should be alone... Everyone for himself, as in a shipwreck.'²⁸³ Whilst in Munich he produced a series of paintings and sketches. The first major work from this period is *Le Passage de la Vierge à la Mariée / The Passage from Virgin to Bride* [Figure 30] of July-August 1912.

²⁷⁹ We should not discount Rimbaud's influence on Duchamp – he abandoned poetry at the age of 19, dissatisfied with the forms of expression available to him.

²⁸⁰ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 34.

²⁸¹ See Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 105-107.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁸³ Duchamp in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 85.

The Passage is executed similarly to the *Nude*: it uses as its dominant pictorial devices areas of flat or irregularly shaded colour and outline to give form to the entirely abstracted figures it represents. I disagree that the work, as Calvin Tomkins asserts, is 'composed of interlocking cubist planes.'²⁸⁴ The work bears only a superficial resemblance to a cubist painting. It does not indicate forms altered by perspectival and spatial relations; but rather abstracted forms designed to give material presence to certain ideas pertaining to them. The work is hieratic rather than materialist. The viewer is very stably positioned and there is no suggestion of multiple perspectives, although the painting does give the viewer the impression of being inside the space of the image rather than external to it. The forms are essentially flat but depth is suggested, the several dark areas of the canvas seeming to indicate cavernous spaces where light does not reach. Having said this, there is no clear light source and no coherent realisation of such a thing in the shading and modelling.

The paint is applied evenly, thinly and modelling and shading are accomplished through subtle blending without obvious brushwork. There are some areas of exposed canvas, notably the dark brown section of the painting just below the midpoint the image on its far left side, and there is also frequent use of the 'dots' (perhaps to indicate movement, although they more closely resemble stitches) that Duchamp had discovered with the *Nude*. In *The Passage*, however, we find areas of 'amateurishly' applied white and off-white paint that sit somewhat uneasily amongst the colouring around them. They give the impression not so much of being integrated with the image as placed on top of it. This appears to be an element of Duchamp's adoption of a schematic or technical aesthetic, wherein aspects of the image do not contribute to the overall visual form as such, but indicate operations outside of it. Duchamp is attracted to the idea of the 'manual', or of the instructive text or image, their interrelation. This interest could easily stem

²⁸⁴ Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 99.

from his experience of Roussel as he recalls that the visual impact of *Impressions d'Afrique* was quite separate to his linguistic cognition of it: 'It was tremendous... it was absolutely the madness of the unexpected. I don't remember much of the text. One didn't really listen. It was striking... Afterward, I read the text and could associate the two'.²⁸⁵ We should also remember that ideally Duchamp wanted the *Large Glass* to be accompanied by a sort of manual, a Baedeker, which would provoke a synthesis of the theoretical elements and the visual impression of the work in the mind of the viewer.²⁸⁶ In another sense the glass itself would be the performance of the text, in the same way that the grinding of the coffee is the 'performance' of the schematic.

Pink flesh tones are used in conjunction with browner hues, and there is little of the continuity that would suggest anatomical forms. There appears to be no ordering principle to the chaotic arrangements of forms, none of the coherence that structures cubist images even at their most disrupted. We are looking at disorder, at a multitude of visual signifiers which provide no overall impression, which do not coalesce into a coherent visual representation. There is little qualitative formal differentiation – the disarray is achieved mainly through the impossible nature of the content twinned to the relatively lucid title, inscribed, as with the *Nude*, at the bottom left of the image. 'LE PASSAGE' is capitalised, obviously to emphasise that we are witnessing a transformation – another movement arrested on canvas, but 'unlike the physical motion represented in the *Nude Descending a Staircase*, the "passage" here indicates a change in metaphysical state.'²⁸⁷ And the reference to metaphysics should not be disregarded: Duchamp, when discussing his own personal philosophy, 'preferred the term "metaphysical".'²⁸⁸ and this

²⁸⁵ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 33-34.

²⁸⁶ See Duchamp's 1968 interview with Joan Bakewell for the BBC's *Late Show* for his explanation of this.

²⁸⁷ Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (eds), *Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), 263.

²⁸⁸ Jerrold Seigel, *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 151.

preference may well find its root in his sympathetic approach to Descartes²⁸⁹ whose conception was of metaphysics as the fundamental basis for all specialised knowledge and philosophical inquiry. For Duchamp, the deepest and most far-reaching questions, those that stretch to the very foundations of knowledge, are metaphysical ones.

As with the *Nude*, the title, inscribed on the image – a fixed part of its very physicality – forces the image through a series of categorical shifts. Here the name has the effect of stabilising the image. It calls its parts together and projects them through a semantic prism from which multiple meaning emanate.

The convention of inscribing directly onto the painted surface was operative in the early renaissance art Duchamp so much admired and he would no doubt have seen in the collection of Dutch, German, Flemish and Italian art at the Alte Pinakothek examples of such intersections of text and image. One of the most notable of these is Albrecht Dürer's *Selbstbildnis Im Pelzrock / Self-Portrait with Fur-trimmed Robe* of 1500. In this famous image we see Dürer, idealized, Christ-like, facing out of the canvas. To the right of his head an inscription in Latin reads: 'Thus I, Albrecht Dürer from Nuremberg, portrayed myself with characteristic colours in my 28th year.' To the right of his head, we see Dürer's monogram "A.D.", the D nestled within the A and the year 1500 above it. It is probable here that the A.D. stands both for "Albrecht Dürer" and "Anno Domini".²⁹⁰ In the first instance we have an inscription that ties the image to several things extrinsic to it (Dürer, Nuremberg, colour, the age of 28) and which are not necessarily apparent in the painting itself. In this way, the image is tethered to meaning external to it and its identity is secured within the context of verbal language. The A.D. is an early example of a

²⁸⁹ See Duchamp's 1959 interview with Richard Hamilton where he declares that he is in fact a 'defrocked Cartesian' but that as much as he enjoyed thinking like a Cartesian he also enjoyed 'getting away from it', hence his Roussel-like inventions. As ever, Duchamp is in characteristically contradictory mood. See Marcel Duchamp in interview with Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, "Marcel Duchamp Speaks", broadcast by the BBC in the series "Art, Anti-Art," 1959, now available in MP3 format.

²⁹⁰ Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 185.

verbal/visual pun which, rather than fixing meaning, suggests its multiplicity. It also heightens the Dürer/Christ parallelism on which the image plays.²⁹¹

Duchamp's inscription partakes of both these modes. It fixes the meaning of the image – it gives context to the abstract forms – and also multiplies meaning within this initial context. The title guides us to semantic regions but does not fix the image itself within them. Duchamp's name is also on his painting, and his signature is something that he will never relinquish, even when he has transformed into Rose Sélavy in 1921. Even if the art is obtuse, unreadable, stupefying, we are never asked to doubt the mind that lies behind it, and in which it originated.

Robert Lebel has suggested that the execution of Duchamp's Munich paintings appears to have been 'taken right from the old masters'²⁹² and in this judgment he appears substantively correct.

Thierry de Duve had speculated the following in response to Lebel's observation:

Maybe we have to understand that the Munich climate, less avant-gardist and less dogmatic than that of Paris, had something to do with this execution. More at ease in the milieu of these avant-gardes that did not deny their past but separated themselves from it in order to better claim it for themselves when they felt that it had lost its vitality, Duchamp was able without shame to give himself over to a new pictorial practice that was connected through the notion of craft to a tradition that he chose for himself. Whether or not this is the "explanation" for his sudden return to the techniques of the old masters, it was one of the conditions that authorised him and gave him his particular field of resonance.²⁹³

We can now say with some degree of certainty that Duchamp began using the techniques of the old masters because he was looking at their work every day in the Alte Pinakothek, and because the tendency was already apparent in his pre-Munich output. The particular nature of the Munich avant-garde seems to have concerned him little. Indeed, it is on French painting that he remarks whilst visiting Berlin in September of 1912: 'the Berlin Secession has finally allowed me

²⁹¹ See Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), for a vivid analysis of these parallels, of which the A.D. monogram is only a minor example.

²⁹² Robert Lebel, *Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 15.

²⁹³ Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 106.

to see how young French painting was looking abroad. There's a special room for Friez, Marquet, Valtat, Herbin and 4 for Picasso. I was really pleased to find Cubism here, it was so long since I'd seen any. And that certainly played a part in my having a soft spot for Berlin.²⁹⁴

It was doubtless in the Alte Pinakothek that Duchamp discovered his affinity for the work of Lucas Cranach, who, Duchamp has claimed, provided the direct inspiration for the colouring of *Mariée / Bride* [Figure 31] (of August 1912).²⁹⁵ Michael R. Taylor too, has drawn parallels²⁹⁶, and we can see, if we examine certain of Cranach's paintings, a similarity not only in colouring but in modelling also. *Klage Unter dem Kreuz / Lamentation Beneath the Cross* (1503) displays the vivid flesh tones Duchamp transplants into his own work, but also demonstrates the techniques of perspective and lighting at work during the early sixteenth-century. There is little chiaroscuro in the image, and it appears as though the light is entering the image predominantly from the left side. The figures represented are out in the open, however, and the lighting is generally flat. Light shadows are cast by the standing figures amongst the crosses. Christ's flesh is modelled without clear brushwork from light to dark, to suggest its volume, although there is little evidence of foreshortening apart from in the geometric form of the cross, extending outwards at the top right of the image. The modelling of flesh here suggests its roundness. The rendering is visceral whilst not employing any impasto in the technique. The forms of the body are vaguely distorted, exaggerated, given an artificial bulbousness in one instance, sharpness the next.

This approach to modelling and to painterly technique can be found in Duchamp's *Passage* and in *Bride*. A similar approach is already apparent in the *Nude*. Cranach's peculiar modulations in flesh can be appropriately translated to Duchamp's strange amalgamations of 'mechanical

²⁹⁴ *The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk (Ghent, Belgium: Ludion, 2000), 26.

²⁹⁵ Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 99-100.

²⁹⁶ See Michael R. Taylor, "Visiting the Alte Pinakothek with Marcel Duchamp" in *Marcel Duchamp in Munich*, Exhibition Catalogue, eds Helmut Friedel, Thomas Girst, Matthius Mühling, and Felicia Rappe (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012), 55-57.

elements and visceral forms'.²⁹⁷ He provides an excellent paradigm through his vaguely unsettling compositions and rendering of the human form. Additionally, both Cranach's and Dürer's 'hand of god' approach to painterly practice - whereby all traces of brushwork and material human intervention are intentionally avoided - is similar to Duchamp's technique in the execution of the *Nude Descending a Staircase*, *The Passage from Virgin to Bride*, and *Bride*. Increasingly the hand of the artist is being drawn away from Duchamp's work and not - as in the case of Dürer and Cranach - in emulation of divine creation; rather in the approximation of a mechanical or schematic form of representation and its attendant aesthetic.

This painterly approach is greatly removed from the gestural brushwork of the majority of his contemporaries, and is part of Duchamp's overarching desire to escape the conventions of his time. Here he looks back to the techniques of the early-renaissance masters, mimicking the obviation of subjectivity in their brushwork; but also adumbrating the 'dry' mechanical approach he is soon to adopt in his own work in an attempt to escape the dictates of taste and propriety. Indeed *Bride* demonstrates most clearly both of these tendencies, exhibiting a greater level of painterly refinement and a far more obvious borrowing of mechanical forms. Here the aspects of the image and its execution are more integrated and seemingly geared towards a unified pictorial end. In addition we start to see the repetition of certain forms that will find their apotheosis in the *Large Glass*. The bride is, of course, the bride we see in the *Large Glass* - a combination of 'mechanical elements and visceral forms' - and Duchamp had even intended 'to transfer the *Bride*'s painted warm hues to the *Large Glass* by means of direct photomechanical reproduction'²⁹⁸ although ultimately this proved unfeasible.

²⁹⁷ Duchamp, reusing Robert Lebel's phrase in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 99.

²⁹⁸ Thomas Girst, commentary on *Bride* in *Marcel Duchamp in Munich*, Exhibition Catalogue, eds Helmut Friedel, Thomas Girst, Matthius Mühling, and Felicia Rappe (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012), 130.

Bride presents the viewer with a peculiar interior space, in which the disquieting bride dwells, and commentators have noted how this space looks both like the interior of wax anatomical models²⁹⁹ and of the new internal combustion engines on display at the Deutsches Museum in Munich in 1912³⁰⁰ which were cross sectioned or partially exposed to allow the public to see the innards of the otherwise opaque machine. And indeed the *Bride* does display similarities to both of these: it looks like a mechanical form rendered in flesh, or some fleshy prosthetic. It is in this respect a reconciliation of incompatibles, it is a wedding of opposites (as all heterosexual weddings are).

Nevertheless, these incompatibles are brought together under the conceptual form of a 'bride' – a further twist which, as with *The Passage from Virgin to Bride* before it, both stabilises through the act of naming but simultaneously semantically disrupts the power of this name to lay claim to the image in light of its appearance, its apparent incongruity. Duchamp never revokes the art object as such. The ripple of disruption around any of Duchamp's mature works of art is only as a result of the clear fixedness of one aspect of them. In the paintings it is frequently the relative stability of a name that clashes with the contradictory elements of the image; in the case of the readymades it is the fixedness of the object itself which is disrupted through the act of naming – a process which could be understood as a simple reversal of the effect enacted by the name upon his paintings. Indeed, the scandal of the *Nude* is similarly the scandal of *Fountain* – it is a scandal of naming (a problem with language taking hold of the world), of the disruption of anticipated and conventional relations between objects and their names (although in the latter case Duchamp has reversed the terms and is actively courting disapproval). In the former, the fixedness of the 'nude',

²⁹⁹ See Herbert Molderings "The Discovery of the Mind's Eye, Marcel Duchamp in Munich 1912" in *Marcel Duchamp in Munich*, Exhibition Catalogue, eds Helmut Friedel, Thomas Girst, Matthius Mühling, and Felicia Rappe (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012), 11-35.

³⁰⁰ See Steffen Bogen, "Munich 1912. A Museum of Technology Writes Art History" in *Marcel Duchamp in Munich*, Exhibition Catalogue, eds Helmut Friedel, Thomas Girst, Matthius Mühling, and Felicia Rappe (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012), 69-82. One of the curatorial focuses of the 2012 exhibition of Duchamp's work at the Kunstbau in Munich was the desire to demonstrate how the museum culture of the city in 1912 had influenced Duchamp's work. Included in the exhibition was one of the cross-sectioned engines that would have been on display in the Deutsches Museum in 1912. When considered alongside facets of the imagery that Duchamp uses in his Munich paintings, the parallels are not only relevant, but insightful.

its categorical identity, is at stake; in the latter the category of the urinal, its empirical fixedness and functionality is in question. Duchamp's work in this way demonstrates and activates the growing possibility of a drastic rift between the world and the language that names it – a schism in which accepted and inherited valuations and meanings are at stake.

Michael R. Taylor acknowledges another influence that the art of the Alte Pinakothek had on Duchamp:

These Northern European artists shared an interest in allegorical and mythological subjects that imbued their work with the cerebral quality that Duchamp found so lacking in the work of his French colleagues, whose pursuit of purity and abstraction had led to a profound distrust of so-called “literary” painting. Cranach's engagement with the world of intellectual ideas resonated with Duchamp's stated aim of putting “painting once again at the service of the mind.”³⁰¹

As a result of these influences, Herbert Molderings suggests that ‘it was in Munich that [Duchamp] took the bold decision to do the same as the old masters and, once he was back in Paris, to paint a large-format allegorical work on love and eroticism’.³⁰² Whatever the precise sources of the Munich influences, we can be reasonably sure of their lasting effect on Duchamp's work. And it was *Bride* more than any painting prior to it that most fully compressed and realised these influences into a synthesised aesthetic. It is *Bride* that is the first form that will be carried forward to the *Large Glass*, the first clear indication of the direction Duchamp's work is going to take. Duchamp does not leave Munich having abandoned painting, he leaves with the grand plan for his ‘last’ painting – a painting which he intends to look more like a mechanical schematic or a renaissance allegory than a cubist or futurist composition. He leaves Munich with a sense of the new personal aesthetic with which he is going to realise his vision, his drive to self-expression – a language which is at once truthful and idiomatic, a poetic language of his own devising, which,

³⁰¹ Michael R. Taylor, “Visiting the Alte Pinakothek with Marcel Duchamp” in *Marcel Duchamp in Munich*, Exhibition Catalogue, eds Helmut Friedel, Thomas Girst, Matthius Mühling, and Felicia Rappe (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012), 56.

³⁰² Herbert Molderings “The Discovery of the Mind's Eye, Marcel Duchamp in Munich 1912” in *Marcel Duchamp in Munich*, Exhibition Catalogue, eds Helmut Friedel, Thomas Girst, Matthius Mühling, and Felicia Rappe (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012), 32.

while fulfilling the requirements of subjective expression, revels in its indifference to those pre-existing forms designated for such modes of communication. It is only on reflection, during his lecture and slide-show tour of American museums and universities (1963-64), that he reveals the significance of *Bride* as the end of one form of painting and the beginning of another:

Abandoning my association with Cubism and having exhausted my interest in kinetic painting, I found myself turning towards a form of expression completely divorced from straight realism.

This painting belongs to a series of studies, made for the large glass... [which] I began three years later in New York. Replacing the freehand by a very precise technique, I embarked on an adventure which was no more [a] tributary of already existing schools.

This is not the realistic interpretation of a bride but my concept of a bride expressed by the juxtaposition of mechanical elements and visceral forms.

My stay in Munich was the scene of my complete liberation, when I established the general plan of a large-size work which would occupy me for a long time on account of all sorts of new technical problems to be worked out.³⁰³

Duchamp returns to Paris not having rejected painting, but having rejected a particular *form* of painting: ‘I returned from Munich in 1912 and had to take decisions: whether to give up painting, the painting one might call pure or painting for painting’s sake, and to introduce very different elements totally alien to painting, this being, for me, the only way of getting out of a rut.’³⁰⁴ He has rejected, if you will, a tradition of painting, the French tradition to which he is heir. But this is not to say that he has then adopted the equivalent German tradition as his own. Certainly, he has borrowed from it, but he at no point aspires to mimic or continue it. Neither does he express any desire to found a counter-tradition (although he can subsequently be accused of/credited with such an achievement). He simply wants to be ‘free,’ to express himself according to his own thoughts and his own feelings, and not to be made to conform to the oppressive formal conditions of his day. The language of painting is stultifying and inexpressive, rehearsing the same tired clichés, grinding out the same old ideas, even if its appearance changes with each

³⁰³ Marcel Duchamp, “Apropos of Myself,” Slide Lecture delivered at the City Art Museum of St. Louis, Missouri, November 24, 1964, reprinted in Anne d’Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (eds), *Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), 263.

³⁰⁴ Duchamp in Herbert Molderings “The Discovery of the Mind’s Eye, Marcel Duchamp in Munich 1912” in *Marcel Duchamp in Munich*, Exhibition Catalogue, eds Helmut Friedel, Thomas Girst, Matthius Mühling, and Felicia Rappe (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012), 31. This quotation is taken from one of Duchamp’s statements in Jean-Marie Drot, *Jeu d’échecs avec Marcel Duchamp* [film], 1963.

successive generation. Duchamp apparently wants no part of this, but he does not want to cease to paint entirely and in actuality he does not.

He wishes to escape the cul-de-sac of what it *means* to be a painter, probably in the same way that he would wish, were he subjected to it, to escape the life of the doctor or notary or petty bureaucrat. Being a painter was not the 'being free' he had hoped for. It was to be beholden to an imploding tradition, to have your fate determined in advance. From the outset, Duchamp's desire to be an artist has an ontological bent: the artist should be free, and it is this desire to be free which motivates his artistic practice over a drive to artistic expression as such. But, Duchamp is to realise, freedom demands expression. And within the context of the increasingly academicised and commercialised Parisian avant-garde, that freedom of expression demands an increasingly complex and esoteric idiom.

Duchamp explains this aspect of his mind-set very clearly to Pierre Cabanne: 'I had to choose painting, or something else. To be a man of art, or to marry, have children, a country house.'³⁰⁵ With even greater clarity he declares that 'one is a painter because one wants so-called freedom; one doesn't want to go to the office every morning'.³⁰⁶ And so being a painter meant being an artist for Duchamp, and vice-versa: being an artist meant being a painter. But Duchamp soon discovers that being a painter does not mean that you are free, nor does it mean that you escape externally imposed duties, the expectation of obedience. Being a painter must therefore be disregarded to a greater extent, whilst 'being an artist' more generally is – for the time being – allowed to remain. But even this identity, ultimately, is brought into question by Duchamp's statements and his actions.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 33.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁰⁷ Here Duchamp's actions and his drive to freedom are reminiscent of Nietzsche's comments on his so-called 'free spirits': 'One lives no longer in the fetters of love and hatred, without yes, without no, near or far as one wishes, preferably slipping away, evading, fluttering off, gone again, again flying aloft; one is

Nevertheless, this ‘being an artist’ crosses over into being a professional gambler, an inventor, a salesman, an art broker, a dilettante, a dandy (‘as soon as a gentleman acts differently’, Duchamp informs us, ‘he becomes a dandy’³⁰⁸). Indeed the freedom from bourgeois conventions that Duchamp desires was also seemingly fulfilled by the figure of the flâneur, whose detachment from the crowd was a subsequent condition of his integration within it. Such a model is exemplified by Gérard de Nerval and explored by Walter Benjamin in his posthumously published study of Baudelaire.³⁰⁹ For Benjamin this freedom from the pursuits and causes of the bourgeoisie comes at the cost of the flâneur’s (and in Baudelaire’s case, the lyric poet’s) rejection of the class of which he is a product, a ‘type’. Here the spectre of Adorno’s thought looms again: even the critic of a bankrupt culture cannot help but reinforce the culture he claims to denigrate. And this diagnosis accords to the given linguistic forms of an age – an artist can only speak with the tools he is given, and those tools are integrated into a system of meaning, of organisation and instrumentation from which he cannot escape. Such would be the struggle of the radical or revolutionary lyric poet, who strives to find words to express the nature of his being *beyond* the prescriptions of his existence given by his age. In this way the lyric poet can be seen as a revolutionary against knowledge, against the contingent forms of his era.

Manet’s painting is again significant in this context: his art is turned against the bourgeoisie but in the form of a symbolic mirror held up to its face. Here a parallel with Oscar Wilde’s Dorian

spoiled, as everyone is who has at some time seen a tremendous number of things *beneath* him – and one becomes the opposite of those who concern themselves with things that have nothing to do with them. Indeed the free spirit henceforth has to do only with things – and how many things! – with which he is no longer *concerned*.’ The ‘free spirit’ forms an element of the positive aspect of Nietzsche’s philosophy, and therefore operates in the context of the negative assessment of his age, his deconstruction of value and valuation, of supposed *a priori* oppositions. Here again, in Duchamp’s rejection not only of external senses of duty and obligation and his overcoming of conventional valuations and value oppositions (such as, for example, his an-art, his transformation in Rose Sélavy, his conception of the infra-thin) he bears a striking resemblance to one of Nietzsche’s prophesied ‘free-spirits.’ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge University Press: 2005), 8.

³⁰⁸ Duchamp speaking in *Jeu d’Échecs avec Marcel Duchamp* (1963), dir. Jean-Marie Drot.

³⁰⁹ For the most recent collection of the majority of Benjamin’s writing on Baudelaire see Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life* ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland et al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006).

Gray is instructive. The principle is the same: ‘the nineteenth century dislike of Realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his face in the glass’.³¹⁰ Manet enacts the process described here in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (and subsequently fictionalised in its pages).

The rise (and fall) of the lyric voice within bourgeois culture is the mark of its failure. When lyricism is turned against society then it no longer serves the ideal ethical purpose through which society would see it channelled. It becomes the dissenting voice of the alienated subject, the soul disavowed. The lyricism of William Blake and subsequently of the Romantic poets served to warn of the dangers of industrialisation to the soul of man, and to the sanctity of nature. It operated within the binary of eternity and progress. The lyric voice of the nineteenth century is the expression of the soul overcome by this progress. The lyric voice of the twentieth century is the expression of the soul in the lived impossibility of its ontology – it is the voice of paradox, the expression of the impossible, of the ‘banished singularity of the subject’.³¹¹

Walter Benjamin explains his theory thus:

...the theory of *l'art pour l'art* assumed decisive importance around 1852, at a time when the bourgeoisie sought to wrest its “cause” from the hands of the writers and the poets. In the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx recollects this moment, when “the extra-parliamentary masses of the bourgeoisie,... through the brutal abuse of their own press,” called upon Napoleon III “to destroy their speaking and writing segment, their politicians and literati, so that they might confidently pursue their private affairs under the protection of a strong and untrammelled government.” At the end of this development, we find Mallarmé and the theory of *la poésie pure*. Here the poet has become so far removed from the cause of his own class that the problem of literature without an object becomes the centre of discussion. This discussion is clearly evident in Mallarmé’s poems, which revolve around *blanc, absence, silence, vide*. This, to be sure –particularly in Mallarmé – is the face of a coin whose obverse is by no means insignificant. It shows that the poet no longer supports any of the causes pursued by the class to which he belongs. To found a production process on such a basis of renunciation of all the manifest experiences of this class engenders specific and considerable difficulties – difficulties that make his poetry seem highly esoteric.³¹²

³¹⁰ Oscar Wilde, the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, (Lepizig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1908), 5.

³¹¹ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 1999), 14.

³¹² Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life* ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland et al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006), 132-133.

By the time Duchamp rejected the causes of the artistic milieu of Paris (and only, we might add, after they had rejected him...), that very milieu itself had become something of a class of citizen – a sub-category of the bourgeoisie – with its own requirements and agendas. Duchamp found himself revolting against the revolutionary collective, against the supposed ‘outsiders’, the cultural critics, the lyrical artists. The obligations of the avant-garde artist were, in Duchamp’s eyes, no different to the obligations of any other bourgeois sub-category. And as with Mallarmé before him, Duchamp’s work, through its rejection of the collective aims and experiences of his class of artists, ‘engenders specific and considerable difficulties’ - difficulties which do indeed make Duchamp’s work seem ‘highly esoteric’. Mallarmé is, of course, along with Rimbaud and Jules Laforgue, one of the few literary influences that Duchamp emphatically declares:³¹³ ‘Mallarme was a great figure. This is the direction in which art should turn: to an intellectual expression rather than an animal expression’.³¹⁴

The problem for Duchamp is what ground remains from which to declare one’s difference, from which to proclaim one’s dissatisfaction. The essence of poetic revolt remains – the spirit – but the available forms of expression have been marshalled by the institutionalised avant-garde, whose serialised aesthetic rebellions appeal more to collectors of fashionable art than do they self-consciously map the failures of a culture or its practices. Avant-gardism has been subsumed by the market and Duchamp outright rejects this commercialisation of artistic or critical expression. When, for example, Pierre Cabanne asserts ‘your position was considered exemplary, but was hardly followed’, Duchamp responds with ‘why would you follow it? You can’t make any money

³¹³ Cabanne asks Duchamp: ‘What interests you in literature?’ and he replies, ‘Always the same things I’ve liked. Mallarmé very much, because in a sense he’s simpler than Rimbaud. He’s probably a bit too simple for those who understand him well... Since I still don’t completely understand him I find him very pleasurable to read for sound, as poetry that you hear. It isn’t simply the structure of his poems or the depth of his thought that attract me.’ See Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 105.

³¹⁴ Marcel Duchamp, “The Great Trouble with Art in This Country” in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 126.

with it'.³¹⁵ This inability to commercialise his artistic activity is not simply accepted but actively sought by Duchamp.³¹⁶

The position that Duchamp resorts to – the theoretical standpoint from which he constructs his art – is deep, almost absolute scepticism. He tells us that he believes in 'nothing, of course.'³¹⁷

Everything is seen as a product of man, and therefore fallible, subject to human doubt. In Duchamp's art no values beyond contingent human values remain and here again his closeness to Nietzsche's diagnosis is clear. There are no higher powers to appeal to, no sources of meaning beyond those constructed in the human mind: 'I don't believe in the word "being." The idea of being is a human invention'.³¹⁸ Duchamp backs himself into a corner somewhat with this line of thought, a corner which reveals itself more fully in the following comment to William Seitz in 1963:

Words are the tools of "to be" – of expression. They are completely built on the fact that you "are", and in order to express it you have built a little alphabet and you make your words from it. It's a vicious circle. I mean it's completely idiotic. I mean language is a great enemy, in the first place. The language and thinking in words are the great enemies of man, if man exists. And even if he doesn't exist...³¹⁹

What is clear from this seemingly contradictory quotation is that every idea is undermined as soon as it occurs, is presented. Expressions of being are built on the presumption that one exists, yet they themselves are entirely dependent on the invented linguistic forms which are supplementary to one's existence, which therefore makes language the great enemy of man – if man exists at all – because language has the effect of asserting but simultaneously falsifying his

³¹⁵ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 43.

³¹⁶ The *Monte Carlo Bond* (1924) complicates this position somewhat, but not excessively. With the bond, the desire to make money through the work of art is writ-large: the art is, quite unapologetically, the desire to make money - there is no disguise, no transcendental import to the work. It is there to generate capital, plain and simple. If anything the *Monte Carlo Bond* is a money-making scheme barely disguised as art, just as Duchamp himself appears, barely disguised by the shaving foam with which he has curled his hair into two horns.

³¹⁷ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 89.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Duchamp speaking to William Seitz cited in Jerrold Seigel, *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 151.

existence. What Duchamp is saying here is that an ontological truth can never be reached. This (again, Nietzschean) position is a refuge of the (critical) spirit – it is the only point from which an assault can be launched on the values of a society which lays claims to a totality of knowledge in accordance with a particular yet partial system (secular techno-scientific capitalism): ‘language falsifies the world by imposing certain predetermined categories on our attempts to comprehend and describe it.’³²⁰ And in essence here Duchamp is not far from Adorno and Horkheimer’s diagnosis of modernity cited above.³²¹

Yet from this theoretical position Duchamp creates works of art even in the denial of them. His artistic production is the evidence of his negative bind, of the necessity to produce art (in accordance with an archaic principle of self-expression) within the context of its formal impossibility. He subjects the work of art to the absolute relativity of meaning which is the new ontological reality of the human subject. The forms that this expression takes must be outside the reach of the traditional tools of artistic production because they too are complicit with the more general falsification of value, the false-fixedness of meaning. What is required is a language which takes hold of the world as it is, that expresses the conditions of knowledge as they are, and not with regard to a dying tradition – a language as bereft of meaning, as disillusioned as the world itself, a ‘poetic’ language of valuelessness and banality.

This renunciation of the world is not, however, absolute – an absolute renunciation of being (suicide), is, according to Baudelaire, and subsequently Walter Benjamin, the ultimate act of nihilism, figured in Baudelaire’s formulation as the ultimate act of heroism in modernity:

‘Modernity must stand under the sign of suicide, an act which seals a heroic will that makes no

³²⁰ Jerrold Seigel, *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 151.

³²¹ ‘There is no longer any available form of linguistic expression which has not tended towards accommodation to dominant currents of thought.’ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1944 – English translation 1972), xiv. See page 191, note 269.

concessions to a mentality inimical to this will.³²² The alternative to modernity, we are told, is negation – either in the form of the negation of being, or through the negative dialectic. You either throw yourself from the train or join the struggle to stop it. But Duchamp’s attitude is demonstrably neither, and despite his generally nihilistic valuations, he nevertheless upholds a set of values – universal values, even – which make it possible for him to continue to produce works of art. These values are, on the one hand eroticism, ‘because it’s truly a rather widespread thing throughout the world, a thing that everyone understands’³²³; and on the other, poetics, or ‘poetic words...word games. Assonances, things like that, like the “delay” in the “Glass;” I like that very much. “Backward,” that means something’.³²⁴ Duchamp is here characteristically obtuse, eclectic, inconsistent, even.

He goes on to tell Pierre Cabanne that he does not believe in art, that it, like all things, was simply ‘invented’ – a point that he had in a sense proved with the ‘invention’ of the readymade: ‘Man invented art. It wouldn’t exist without him. All of man’s creations aren’t valuable. Art has no biological source. It’s addressed to taste’.³²⁵ Here Duchamp makes it clear that as all values are generated by man, then all value is subject to devaluation through the caprice of man, through logical procedures turned against themselves. Once again the parallel with Nietzsche’s diagnosis is clear. Yet, despite this, Duchamp maintains that: ‘art is the only form of activity in which man shows himself to be a true individual’.³²⁶ It is through self-expression that individuals make themselves known, but the languages and categories - the restrictive structures - through which this expression occurs are what Duchamp opposes. They are the things that he devalues through his practice.

³²² Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life* ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland et al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006), 104.

³²³ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 88.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 100.

³²⁶ Marcel Duchamp, *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 137.

Duchamp then takes issue with the categorical self-enclosure of 'art'. It serves no purpose other than its own - other than the one that the market has decreed for it - and 'taste' is the foremost incarnation of this imperative. In Walter Benjamin's formulation of the bourgeoisie, 'taste develops when commodity production clearly surpasses any other kind of production. The manufacture of products as commodities for a market ensures the conditions of their production - not only societal conditions, in the form of exploitation, but technological ones as well - will gradually vanish from the perceived world of the people'.³²⁷ The rule of taste is the veneer of civilisation over its barbarities. It is the product of the mature bourgeois society, the very society of which, in this account, Manet paints the first structural faults and which Duchamp, through his art, renounces. The readymade is, of course, designed to operate in a value vacuum, 'a total absence of good or bad taste... a complete anaesthesia'.³²⁸ It is an affront to taste and an exposure of its falsities.

Duchamp's rejection of culture and the categories of knowledge that pertain to it is consistent with his belief that all value and meaning originates with man and that consequently there are no values worth revering. The desire for meaning beyond the retinal impact of painting should be considered as a parallel line of thought to Duchamp's indictment of the audacity of mankind to lay claim to all aspects of existence: 'it is we who have given the name 'art' to religious things... We have created it in thinking about ourselves, about our own satisfaction. We created it for our sole and unique use; it's a little like masturbation. I don't believe in the essential aspect of art.'³²⁹

³²⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life* ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans Howard Eiland et al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006), 131.

³²⁸ Marcel Duchamp, "Apropos of 'Readymades'" in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 141.

³²⁹ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 100.

Here Duchamp is questioning the function of the work of art in its provision of ‘metaphysical comfort.’³³⁰

For Duchamp, art is a self-serving category of objects that maintain no *real*, genuine or legitimate relations to meaning, nor to the world, but only to the requirements of a particular culture (hence the metaphysical comfort function of lyricism) – a culture of which Duchamp nonchalantly disapproves. Beyond ‘art’ itself, however, a drive to self-expression remains, in the same way that, for Duchamp – and Baudelaire despite his pronouncements - suicide is not considered a particularly insightful expression of nothingness. Beyond all the falsities of a self-perpetuating culture, something intrinsic remains, which Duchamp has translated into eroticism, on the one hand and poetics on the other. What this formulation achieves is the casual, and rather unconvincing assertion of a biological necessity on the one hand, and a cerebral one on the other. Erotic is the universal co-efficient for Duchamp’s inane poesis. It is, he tells Richard Hamilton, ‘close to life in general, much closer than philosophy.’³³¹ By this means, Duchamp hopes to produce art that speaks to something beyond itself. In a sense he wishes to reintegrate art and society, even if society is simply seen as a collection of individuals, of artists (and in spite of his rejection of Apollinaire’s supposedly capricious remark that he might ‘reconcile Art and the People’³³² – the positivity inherent in Apollinaire’s statement should be considered anathema to the indifference that would today characterise such a reconciliation). But Duchamp’s eroticism is not in the service of erotic pleasure or stimulation, rather it is eroticism in the service of a general poetics of being that can, by its very nature, only resort to a cross-categorical nihilism as its mode of expression. Duchamp’s art is art in the service of nothing

³³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 59.

³³¹ Marcel Duchamp in interview with Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, “Marcel Duchamp Speaks”, broadcast by the BBC in the series “Art, Anti-Art,” 1959, now available in MP3 format.

³³² Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters*, trans. Peter Read (Forest Row, East Sussex: Artists . Bookworks, 2002), 77.

absolute and nothing in particular. It is art surviving in the afterthought of its own necessity. In Duchamp's own words: 'Art was a dream that became unnecessary.'³³³

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In Munich Duchamp hatched a plan for his future artistic production. He happened upon an idea not so much for a mode of production, but for a single work that could be realised through the disentanglement of a series of technical issues. The final result would be the definitive expression of that idea. In this way the *Large Glass* has been determined in advance: the idea is followed by the realisation, the realisation will be an expression of the idea. The *Large Glass* is an allegorical work with the universality of eroticism as its tether to signification – eroticism 'used as a tube of paint, so to speak, to inject into your productions.'³³⁴ It is the biological male/female binary which not only separates the two halves of the glass, but provides the work with a base legibility. This relationship is decided in advance and in accordance with this stability we are offered the keys to the representation: both the bride and the bachelors are named, and they both appear in the image. Here the poeticised linguistic content and the materiality of the image are brought to bear on one another. In the same way that the sexual binary is exploited, so to is the dualism of mind and materiality, of the immanent and the transcendent. It is this alliance of poetics and base materiality which will find its apotheosis in the readymade.

But it is not simply the effect of Munich on Duchamp that galvanises his will to create the work that will ultimately become the *Large Glass*. Munich is rather the place where a great variety of influences coalesce and, through their synthesis, make possible a new mode of expression. In the realm of art history, we have the French avant-garde tradition, from Courbet, through Manet and Cézanne, to Matisse, the fauves, cubists and futurists of Duchamp's own day; and the Germanic

³³³ Duchamp in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 408.

³³⁴ Marcel Duchamp in interview with Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, "Marcel Duchamp Speaks", broadcast by the BBC in the series "Art, Anti-Art," 1959, now available in MP3 format.

tradition: Cranach, Dürer, the symbolism of Böcklin. In the realm of literature we have Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Roussel, Jules Laforgue (for whose poems Duchamp produced a series of unpublished illustrations and who was also a significant influence on T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound). It is these literary and poetic influences that Duchamp has perhaps the greatest affection for. Writers, over painters, draw Duchamp's praise far more readily. As we well know, he was inclined to dismiss the last half-century of French painting with a single derisory phrase: 'retinal art.'

Duchamp was also influenced by the mathematical, scientific and technological developments of his day as Linda Dalrymple Henderson has demonstrated.³³⁵ It is also probable that he visited the Deutsches Museum whilst in Munich, and, as I stated in chapter 3, supposedly the 1912 Salon de Locomotion Aérienne where he remarked to Léger and Brancusi: 'Painting is finished. Who can do better than this propeller?'³³⁶ These eclectic forces combined with the personal shocks and jolts he experienced in 1912 seem to have provided him with the means with which to generate his idiomatic form of personal expression, and concomitantly to legitimate the absolute singularity of that expression – a self-legitimation that stands outside of the category of 'art' and of the predetermined role of the 'artist'.

Munich can be understood as the scene of Duchamp's 'complete liberation' owing to his total freedom and solitude. In Munich he had escaped the dictates of the Parisian avant-garde. He had, in a sense, escaped the crushing formalities of the tradition to which he was heir. And it was not so much a painterly act that achieved this than it was a physical relocation. Yet it will become apparent that Duchamp had not escaped entirely from the concerns of his fellow Parisians, from his generation of avant-garde painters and the problems their art faced.

³³⁵ See note 228.

³³⁶ Marcel Duchamp in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 137. Also see Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 595, for this statement in its original French form: "C'est fini la peinture. Qui fera mieux que cette hélice...".

Readymade

CABANNE: You're the first artist in history to have rejected the idea of painting, and therefore to have walked out of what's known as the imaginary museum...

DUCHAMP: Yes. Not only easel painting, but any kind of painting.

CABANNE: Space in two dimensions if you like.

DUCHAMP: I find that a very good solution for a period like ours, when one cannot continue to do oil painting, which, after four or five hundred years of existence, has no reason to go on eternally. Consequently, if you can find other methods for self-expression, you have to profit from them.³³⁷

In this exchange Duchamp offers an explanation of why he feels it necessary to give up 'painting for painting's sake'³³⁸ (which is, in his milieu, tantamount to giving up painting entirely). He states that *not* painting is a 'very good solution for a period like ours', but this is caught in the tautological framework of 'when one cannot continue to do oil painting'. For Duchamp, one cannot paint with oils in our era, and therefore he gives up painting. The exact reasons why he cannot paint are not elucidated (this study aims at such an explanation) but the decision is given an air of ineluctability. The justification is, however, historical: painting, after four or five centuries, has no *reason* to go on. Something has changed that makes painting redundant, even after half a millennia of consistent innovation and formal refinement. Duchamp believes that 'men are mortal, pictures too'³³⁹ and that therefore, painting as a general form might die in the

³³⁷ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 93.

³³⁸ Duchamp in Herbert Molderings "The Discovery of the Mind's Eye, Marcel Duchamp in Munich 1912" in *Marcel Duchamp in Munich*, Exhibition Catalogue, eds Helmut Friedel, Thomas Girst, Matthius Mühling, and Felicia Rappe (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012), 31; quotation taken initially from Duchamp in Jean-Marie Drot, *Jeu d'échecs avec Marcel Duchamp* [film], 1963.

³³⁹ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 93.

same way as its specific incarnations.³⁴⁰ What he means here is that paintings lose their vitality, their relevance; that as they persevere beyond their moment of coming-into-being they demonstrate their contingency, their ties to the knowledge of their own time and therefore their inappropriateness to subsequent epistemes. They remain whilst their historical moment has passed. This clearly suggests that for Duchamp the relationship between the work of art and its relation to society exists in the space of knowledge. A work of art is a response to the world at a moment in history, and its relevance should be understood as such. Duchamp even countenances a return of painting, should unforeseen historical conditions allow it: 'it's dead for the moment, and for a good fifty or a hundred years. Unless it comes back; one doesn't know why, but there's no reason for it.'³⁴¹ Here again is the key to Duchamp's practice: there is no longer any reason for painting. Cultural conditions have changed and in so doing have obviated the need for painting. They have eroded the foundations of knowledge that made easel painting the great European cultural edifice. The cultural conditions that once supported painting have altered, or receded entirely.

Duchamp reveals more of the nature of the irrelevance of painting to his age, however, when he frames the possible alternatives to it in the following way: 'if you can find other methods for self-expression, you have to profit from them'. Painting is bankrupt as a form of self-expression, presumably because the expression of the self must have, for Duchamp, an historical imperative. If self-expression in the broadest sense of the term is desired, then painting is still a perfectly valid cultural practice. Anyone can continue to paint as a form of self-expression in the same way that we can compose melodies at the piano, write sonnets, or sculpt. Painting has not disappeared as a practice, or as a form of self-expression, but as a medium for the conveyance of the historical

³⁴⁰ It is here also that Duchamp demonstrates his inclination towards the Nietzschean position that there are no extra-human values. Art therefore, is subject to the mortal condition of man and appeals only to falsified absolutes that occur contingently in historically determined epistemologies.

³⁴¹ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 93.

subjectivity of an era: indeed, to reiterate Lyotard, the world has ‘almost no need for painting.’³⁴²

Put in another way, painting loses its ability to channel genius, to be a medium for spirit; or this very channelling becomes irrelevant.

I suggest that the form of self-expression that Duchamp is referring to is lyricism. He aspires to the form of expression that speaks not just of a subject in an era, but of a subject through the historical conditions of its *own* era – a subject embroiled in the struggle for the cogency of its time, caught at the very frontier of knowledge, at the shifting intersection of language, the subject and the world. This has to be understood as the original function-position of the avant-garde, and the reason for its name, borrowed as it is from military theory. The avant-garde (the collectivity) would be pioneers at the forefront of knowledge, but no longer as an advance guard designed to strike out against alterity; rather a cultural force turned against culture, an arrow driven back into the body from which it was launched. The avant-garde serves both a critico-theoretical and practical function. This would be the source of its closeness to Marxism, and one of the reasons that T.J. Clark sees fit to equate Modernism with socialism. The avant-garde produces (dreams) possible futures through the cannibalizing of its host, of itself. It feeds on the reveries of a culture in the actuality of that culture’s demise. The avant-garde triumphs only in the decaying body of its host, as the fantasized aesthetic redemption of a culture in decline: it eats up the last of a culture it hopes to save.

‘Self-expression’ takes on the significance of poetic communication. Duchamp attempts to make himself (or something of himself) known through the viable forms of his age, in accordance with the epistemological conditions of his age – the conditions that make painting impossible as a form of lyric expression, of expression charged with both the supposedly eternal and transcendental element of humanity and the historically determined material conditions. These

³⁴² Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (The Polity Press: Cambridge, 1991), 119.

historical conditions materialize as the form of the work of art: a coalescence of the available material forms, the current traditions that order those forms and the attitude of the artist to societal convention. These separate conditions are of course merely tributaries of more general epistemes, that can be incompletely named as variously capitalist, secular, industrial, rational, relativist, European. The choice to reject painting is determined by a negative imperative: it is guided by painting's insufficiency and not by the symbolic plenitude of another medium.

For Duchamp, therefore, painting is primarily a form of self-expression with an historical significance. But this attitude towards painting is really only as old as the 'retinal' painting that Duchamp rejects. This is where Duchamp's theory (if we dare to even call it as much) becomes complicated, but not contradictory. This is the moment when we must separate the human subject from the artistic tradition. Duchamp inherits a principle of self-expression which is bound up with the idea of the modern human subject: a subject which must express itself, which ever increasingly must make itself known or face devaluation, degeneration. We can start to think of this as the basis of secular ethics. The burden of ethics is taken up by linguistic exchange in the decline of transcendental doctrines. Duchamp cannot elude the ethical conditions of his historical moment. They are, because of their intangibility, impossible to evade. They exist as an undercurrent to all societal institutions, they are built into the epistemologies that shape an era, and as such they are unavoidable.

Duchamp is drawn into the culturally and historically determined category of the professional artist, and as such, self-expression is his remit. Many of his strategies as an artist work to undermine and question this category and to alter the conditions through which self-expression might occur, but despite this, the subjective imperative remains: make yourself known. This imperative contains the echo of the increasingly unsustainable lyric paradox – that in absolute singularity we find universality: the absolute singularity of another, made known, universalizes

our own (known) absolute singularity. In the words of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 'alterity is contradictory to its essence. From precisely this paradox, Western onto-theology up to Hegel and beyond – one might well say, all our thought – has developed'.³⁴³ The ethicality of lyric is an eminently rational procedure and it conforms, no doubt, to a Hegelian reciprocation formula. But it requires, in the traditional sense, a refined aesthetic appreciation, a cultivated sensitivity to human frailty and human complexity. These are the very aspects of Bourgeois taste against which Duchamp can be seen to be revolting. If lyricism is to survive in any way through Duchamp's work, then it must do so without the gestural sentimentality of poetry or of the new painting, but it must also do so through an idiomatic language that is simultaneously a language of the time, that partakes in knowledge of the world, and in so doing can reveal the conditions of the human subject dwelling in it. In short, if it is to survive it must be 'de-humanised', or rather stripped of the false transcendental humanity that bourgeois sentimentality (subjectivity) lends it. What would remain, according to Lacoue-Labarthe, from this 'wreckage of poetry', would be the *singbarer Rest* (the term is Paul Celan's): a 'singable residue'.³⁴⁴

Duchamp feels required, it seems, to fulfill the obligation of the modern artist to 'express himself', but he rejects the concomitant obligation to bourgeois 'taste', to predetermined aesthetic standards (even if those standards are in perpetual, if onanistic, renewal). The readymade is the idea that most strikingly gave form to this marriage of adherence and renunciation and is the illustration of Duchamp's unwillingness to give up the (lyrical) cause of art, even if he declares to have abandoned the practice of it.

³⁴³ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 1999), 60.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23. Here we should note the connection of lyricism to song and to dance, something made clear by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* and attested to by Stefan George in his poem 'Nietzsche', which concludes: 'it should have sung, not spoken, this new soul.' See Walter Kaufmann, ed. *Twenty German Poets: A Bilingual Collection* (New York: The Modern Library, 1963).

It is in this way that we can map Duchamp's development with regard to certain characteristics of his precedents: he has the critical insight of Manet, the lyrical drive of Cézanne, Cubism's requirement to reinvigorate, or to discover anew the language of visual art (painting).

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* *

Having returned to Paris on the 10th of October 1912, Duchamp enrolled 'on a course on bibliography at the École des Chartes'³⁴⁵ and produced no new work until the following year. When he started working again, in Rouen and Neuilly, he had withdrawn from the Paris art-scene and was working in a decidedly un-painterly fashion on pieces such as *La Mariée Mise à Nu par ses Célibataires Même. Erratum Musical / The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even. Musical Erratum* (the unrealized musical accompaniment to the *Large Glass*), *Broyeuse de Chocolat / Chocolate Grinder No. 1*,³⁴⁶ and various other schematic studies for the *Large Glass* which at this stage was probably still conceived of as a large painting on canvas.³⁴⁷ He had jettisoned, however, all aspects of 'pure painting' from his work and instead employed a dry technical drawing designed to rid his work of 'taste', which enters the drawing 'subconsciously.'³⁴⁸ With mechanical drawing, Duchamp informs us, 'you are directed by the impersonality of the ruler.'³⁴⁹

³⁴⁵ *The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk (Ghent, Belgium: Ludion, 2000), 27.

³⁴⁶ It was with the *Chocolate Grinder*, Duchamp would tell Richard Hamilton in 1959, that he fully escaped Cubism. See Marcel Duchamp in interview with Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, "Marcel Duchamp Speaks", broadcast by the BBC in the series "Art, Anti-Art," 1959, now available in MP3 format.

³⁴⁷ Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 124.

³⁴⁸ Duchamp interviewed in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 127.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

What this development means, for the formal art critic, is that Duchamp's work yields few (if any) of the formal linguistic traits by which a painting is analysed and through which we can derive some elements of its intended meaning. This is one of the most challenging elements that Duchamp's work presents to art history and formal analysis: the critic's tools are blunted. One of the significant methods by which a painting is deciphered, and through which a painter could declare some sort of communicable intent or meaning, is abolished. Duchamp's work is then in a similar category to photography (which still upholds some aspiration to artistic expression) or simply to schematic drawing. The gesture of the artist, "*la patte*" in French, or the 'splash' as Duchamp describes it to Joan Bakewell,³⁵⁰ is removed, and with it all of its attendant signification. The trace of the artist's hand is gone; the subjective imprint is abandoned. Not only is the traditional means by which the artist announced himself through his work gone; so too is the means by which this subject can be apprehended by others. A great deal of the confusion prompted by Duchamp's work is due to this fact: the critical means to evaluate the work do not exist alongside the work. The 'language' - or even the logic - of the work, when compared to the language of painting and its critical analogues, appears incomprehensible simply because it resists interrogation, is purposefully opaque, 'inhuman,' mechanistic.

This strategy – a sort of side stepping of the key determinants of a tradition – is also applied to the content of Duchamp's work. The *Large Glass*, which is the definitive work to which nearly all of Duchamp's studies of 1913 pertain, is comprised of a series of irrational, ironic or pataphysical relations which amount to a dazzlingly unconventional allegorical whole. Even if it is based upon the allegorical paintings Duchamp saw in Munich, the *Large Glass* does not yield itself to equivalent analytical procedures, to similar strategies of decipherment. The *Large Glass* determines its own internal relations that cannot be directly allied to any phenomena external to it beyond the overall theme of heterosexual eroticism (something, as we have seen, that Duchamp

³⁵⁰ Duchamp in an interview with Joan Bakewell for the BBC's *Late Show*, June 5th 1968.

considers a 'universal') and perhaps its putative opposition of the immanent and the transcendent. It is purposefully esoteric and purposefully eccentric. The notes that accompany the glass only serve to reveal its internal relations and offer no insight into how the glass itself relates to the subjectivity of the artist specifically or the world beyond it more broadly. The reason for this is that the internal relations are themselves wholly self-serving, esoteric, circular and irrational. They are designed to resist any sort of assimilation into categories beyond that for which they are singularly designed. If we desired totality, the *Large Glass* presents it – fully formed and majestic, an irrational, useless totality of interrelated and self-serving components. In this sense it is a fallacy of totality – an erotico-aesthetic totality that declares itself as such. But it is still a subjective expression. In fact, its totality makes it all the more singular, all the more focused.

Perhaps now the scope and ambition of this study will be brought into greater perspective, and its methodologies given heightened pertinence. Throughout it has been essential to examine the work of Manet, Cézanne, Picasso and Braque with regard not to self-enclosed or transcendentalised formal categories, but through a process that relates the formal characteristics of the work of art to the social and cultural phenomena beyond it. The attempt here has been to build some sort of coherent and historically mapped framework whereby the formal characteristics of a work of art can be understood in relation to the epistemological conditions of an era. What we might call the 'ethical' component of the work of art is where this intersection of epistemology and aesthetic form occurs. By tracing this through several of Duchamp's antecedents we are in a position to examine his work not only with regard to the formal conditions of his forebears, but – more significantly - with regard to the theoretical conditions surrounding and represented within their work. We can, therefore, trace an *idea* of the work of art from Manet to Duchamp, through some of the dominant trends of the French tradition. We can additionally understand the work of art as an expression not only of the singular artistic

subject, but of social and epistemological conditions more broadly. Whilst the formal elements of a work of art can be seemingly changed in a moment, the cultural significance of the work of art – its relation to the conditions of knowledge – cannot be altered with such rapidity. As such, the theoretical aspect of the work of art that has been plotted from Manet should be seen as relevant to Duchamp: the formal qualitative differentiation of Manet and the totalized aesthetic field of Cézanne are gone, but their attendant principles linger. They remain as the theoretical tools for an examination of Duchamp’s seemingly impenetrable formal idiom.

The idea of the work of art and the role of the artist changes in accordance with the form of the work of art, but not in a plainly analogous way. As the idea of art has changed, so has its form – we can say this much, but definitively, little more. I hope to have shown, however, some of the ways in which these transformations can be mapped and understood. Such a methodology is also, I assert, essential to tackling the difficulties of Duchamp’s oeuvre. Our general point of inception with the *fin de siècle* problem of artistic form – a problem of language, ‘vocabulary’ - is intended to signify that while Duchamp is the key to this study and to the understanding it proposes, its overall theme is this problem and the social, cultural, epistemological conditions which precipitated it and of which it must be seen as a reflection.

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There is no consensus on the number of readymades Duchamp produced. This numerical problem derives from a more complex problem of categorization: there are no strict criteria for what is, and what is not a readymade.³⁵¹ Arturo Schwarz catalogues a total of thirty-six³⁵² of them,

³⁵¹ Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (October Books, The MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996), 388.

³⁵² Thierry de Duve notes that André Gervais claims there are around 50 readymades. [See *Ibid.*, note 16.] It is my feeling that Duchamp would have us understand significantly fewer objects than that as readymades, certainly in the sense that the readymade represents a line of artistic production parallel to that

in one form or another – rectified, assisted, imitated, semi, or ‘bred.’³⁵³ Contrary to this, however, Duchamp tells Joan Bakewell that there were only around 13 readymades produced over a period of 30 years.³⁵⁴ Here he is probably referring to the ‘core’ readymades of which there are 14 and which were all replicated in series of eight through the Galleria Schwarz, Milan in 1964.³⁵⁵ The bulk of the readymades (and all of the ‘core’ readymades) were made between 1913 and 1923. They are produced in a period of time roughly equivalent to that in which Duchamp is working on the *Large Glass* and before he tries his luck at being a professional gambler and chess player. He has said that the readymades were a way of producing work very rapidly to counteract the painstaking meticulousness he applied to the *Large Glass*:

The readymades... it was a deliberate activity [sic] by which I forgot all about my meticulousness. It was again a form of freeing myself from any form of programme... probably one day I woke up and said: why should I be so meticulous? Contradicting myself again. And I did by thinking of the readymade; I suppose that was the psychology of it. I don't know how it came about but I imagine it so now. Do you think that might explain it?³⁵⁶

In this excerpt from the 1959 interview with Richard Hamilton, it is not only apparent that the readymades were a project undertaken alongside the *Large Glass*, but that Duchamp seems to have only a vague sense of why he started producing them. He appears to come up with this explanation on the spot, in light of the fact that the *Large Glass* and the readymades share the same chronology. The question ‘do you think that might explain it?’ is posed with improbable earnestness. The origin of the readymades remains shrouded, but their existence is cumulatively elaborated upon through the 1960s. As we shall see, however, any attempt to get to the true

of the *Large Glass*. See Marcel Duchamp interviewed by Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, “Marcel Duchamp Speaks”, broadcast by the BBC in the series “Art, Anti-Art,” 1959, now available in MP3 format.

³⁵³ See Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 442-480.

³⁵⁴ Duchamp in an interview with Joan Bakewell for the BBC’s *Late Show*, June 5th 1968.

³⁵⁵ These were 1) *Bicycle Wheel*, 2) *Three Standard Stoppages*, 3) *Bottle Dryer*, 4) *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, 5) *Comb*, 6) *With Hidden Noise*, 7) *Travellers Folding Item*, 8) *Apolinère Enameled*, 9) *Fountain*, 10) *Trébuchet*, 11) *Hat Rack*, 12) *Paris Air*, 13) *Fresh Widow*, and 14) *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?*

³⁵⁶ Marcel Duchamp interviewed by Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, “Marcel Duchamp Speaks”, broadcast by the BBC in the series “Art, Anti-Art,” 1959, now available in MP3 format.

source of this conundrum is thwarted. The genesis of the readymade is a true blind spot in cognition.

Duchamp didn't use the name 'readymade' with relation to his art until 1915. And, strictly speaking, he didn't invent the name, but borrowed it from the American term for clothing 'straight-off-the-rack.' In the context of clothing the term denotes approximately the same meaning that Duchamp attributes to the 'readymade' in the context of visual art. That is, it describes an object which has not been made uniquely, to singular specification, but is rather mass-produced, in advance, with the view to a particular and essentially pre-determined outcome.³⁵⁷ But the name 'readymade' is subsequent to the idea that generates the object, or which causes the object to undergo all manner of semantic destabilizations. Even the name 'readymade' is not proper to the class of objects themselves, but is rather borrowed from elsewhere. It is a loose fit, an approximation. It does not clarify the process it names but acts in accordance with it, furthers it, becomes it.

In a letter sent from New York to his sister Suzanne dated January 16th 1916, Duchamp writes:

Now if you have been up to my place, you will have seen, in the studio, a bicycle wheel and a bottle rack. I bought this as a readymade sculpture. And I have a plan concerning this so-called bottle rack. Listen to this: here, in N.Y., I have bought various objects in the same taste and I try to treat them as "readymades." You know enough English to understand the meaning of "ready-made" that I give these objects. I sign them and I think of an inscription for them in English. I'll give you a few examples. I have, for example, a large snow shovel on which I have inscribed at the bottom: *In advance of the broken arm*, French translation: *En avance du bras cassé*. Don't tear your hair out trying to understand this in the Romantic or Impressionist or Cubist sense – it has nothing to do with that at all. Another "readymade" is called: *Emergency in favor of twice*, possible French translation: *Danger \Crise\ en faveur de 2 fois*. This long preamble just to say: take this bottle rack for yourself. I'm making it a "Readymade," remotely. You are to inscribe it at the bottom and on the inside of the bottom circle, in small letters painted with a brush in oil, silver white color, with an

³⁵⁷ According to the Merriam Webster dictionary the term 'readymade' originates as an adjective in the 15th century. This is a dubiously early appearance of the word. As a noun it is dated to 1882. The Webster 1913 Dictionary defines a readymade thus: **Read"y-made**, a. Made already, or beforehand, in anticipation of need; not made to order; as, ready-made clothing; ready-made jokes. Presumably this would have been the sense in which Duchamp knew and used the word. See The ARTFL Project, <http://machaut.uchicago.edu/websters>, accessed 7 September 2012.

inscription which I will give you herewith, and then sign it, in the same handwriting, as follows: [after] Marcel Duchamp.³⁵⁸

In this letter Duchamp does not clarify the meaning of the name ‘readymade.’ Rather he relies on his sister’s own pre-existing understanding of the word, one coloured by her knowledge of the term in another context. He leaves the act of interpretation up to her, simply suggesting that she not attempt to understand the readymade with regard to certain predetermined aesthetic categories (Romantic, Impressionist, Cubist).

Duchamp presents us with the following situation: there are some mass-produced objects that he has (mostly) bought and given a name to. This name is actually appropriate to the objects. In a sense it describes them: they *are* readymade objects; although they are not readymade works of art. This is the point at which an epistemic shift occurs and it is straightforward enough. The readymade object, appropriate to one context (consumer capitalism) is placed into another (‘high’ art) and the two worlds are found to be surprisingly mutually compatible... eventually. This process of displacement can only be achieved because epistemic conditions permit it. The readymade object can be placed into the context of visual art, even though such a move *should* not be possible. This registers a deep epistemological change which is manifested simply by an aesthetic one. It is not so much that Duchamp produces the readymade, but that it is possible to do so.

The name, then, offered up descriptively ‘after the event,’ borrowed from elsewhere, is both descriptive and metaphorical. It is an allegorical name, an ‘allegorical appearance,’ the readymade an ‘allegorical reproduction.’³⁵⁹ But all this really means for Duchamp is that it is many things without precisely being any of them. To suggest that the readymade has an allegorical relation to

³⁵⁸ *The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk, trans. Jill Taylor (Ghent, Belgium: Ludion, 2000), 44.

³⁵⁹ Marcel Duchamp, “The Green Box” in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 28.

knowledge and history is a Benjaminian strategy, not a Duchampian one. Whilst it can be extrapolated from Duchamp's method, it is not necessarily one of its aims.

The name 'readymade' enacts an initial disruption, then. But it only enacts this disruption if the object deemed a 'readymade' (noun) and not simply described as readymade (adjective) is conceived of as *first* being a work of art. In a sense it enacts the same disruption that would occur when the readymade finally made its way to the gallery,³⁶⁰ or *Fountain* to the 1917 Independents' show in New York (famously it was never exhibited after being suppressed by the hanging committee). By placing the readymade in a gallery (unlisted, 'unnamed,' as was the case in the first exhibition), or by submitting it to an Independents' show Duchamp is simply effecting an inversion of the act of naming: he declares the readymade object to be a work of art, *subsequently*, through this shift in context. In this instance the work is first readymade, subsequently a work of art: one could buy a snow shovel from the hardware store and go straight to the art gallery to hang it. Here art is 'after-the-event,' whilst remaining, at the same time, a pre-existing category into which certain objects are placed.³⁶¹ If the object is taken first to the studio (for argument's sake), and subsequently named as a 'readymade,' this naming works on the presupposition that this name is not descriptive but disruptive, which means that the object (which is readymade) is already other than itself – it is art first, 'readymade' second. By calling a readymade object a 'readymade' Duchamp is declaring the object's difference to itself. The readymade is other to itself and this is an aspect of its impossible internality. The ontology of the readymade is then

³⁶⁰ The first readymade to be exhibited was the 'pure' readymade, *Travelers Folding Item* (1916). It was shown at the Bourgeois Galleries, New York from 3-29 April, 1916 alongside another unidentified readymade, which, according to the dates of the show, could only have been either *In Advance of the Broken Arm* or *Comb*. Both were listed as 'sculptures' in the exhibition catalogue [see Tomkins p162]. The rectified-readymade, *Pharmacie* (1914), was shown at the Montross Gallery, New York, from 4-22 April 1916. It was displayed as part of a group show with Jean Crotti, Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger. The next time a readymade was displayed to the public was in 1930 in Paris at Louis Aragon's exhibition "La Peinture au défi," where a Duchamp authored copy of *L.H.O.O.Q.* was shown. From 1916 to 1930 all other readymades were either lost or entered private collections. See "The Works of Marcel Duchamp: a Catalog" in Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (eds), *Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), 231-326.

³⁶¹ Thierry de Duve has written extensively on this process, on the impact of the readymade *on* 'art.' See specifically, *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, October Books, 1998).

built on this irreconcilable twofold motion, an oxymoronic tautology-paradox: the readymade is both art before and after it is named, but only through these acts of naming and exhibiting. It is art *before* it is named; art *after* it is exhibited, but these processes are not separate, their relationship is what Duchamp will go on to describe as *infra-mince*:³⁶² ‘The infra-thin separation is working at its maximum when it distinguishes the same from the same, when it is an indifferent difference, or a differential identity’.³⁶³

By giving the readymades their own proper names, Duchamp makes them *more* like conventional works of art. He lends them a singular quality, whilst further displacing their meaning. He makes them more like his paintings. In inscribing the title (although the inscription is not always the title, as *Comb* of 1916 demonstrates) on the readymade he is employing a strategy of semantic disruption borrowed, as I have shown, from his canvases – a strategy which was intended to culminate in the *Large Glass*. In a letter to the writer and photographer Jean Suquet dated December 25th 1949, on the subject of the *Large Glass* Duchamp writes: ‘it should be accompanied by a “literary text”, as amorphous as possible, which never took shape. And the two elements, glass for the eyes, text for the ears and understanding, should compliment each other and above all prevent one or the other taking on an aesthetico-plastic or literary form.’³⁶⁴ In light of this admission, the readymades bearing inscriptions can be seen as minor works utilizing the strategies of the *Large Glass*, but which, because of their brevity, produce a heightened disorienting effect. Readymades not bearing inscriptions cannot be so effectively read in this light. What this does demonstrate, however, is that the inability of languages (verbal and visual) to legitimate each other was one of Duchamp’s primary concerns, and was something that he

³⁶² Duchamp’s gives several examples of ‘infra-mince,’ or ‘infra-slim,’ one of the most striking of which is as follows: ‘when the tobacco smoke also smells of the mouth which exhales it the two odours are married by infra-slim.’ See *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 194.

³⁶³ Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 160.

³⁶⁴ *The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk (Ghent, Belgium: Ludion, 2000), 284.

wanted his work not only to express, but to actively exhibit. He had no belief in the interchangeability of expressive forms: 'You cannot find any language to speak about painting. Painting is a language of its own. You cannot interpret one form of expression with another form of expression. To say the least, you will distort completely the original message, whatever you say about it.'³⁶⁵

An additional disorienting factor in Duchamp's letter to his sister is his reference to the bottle rack as a 'readymade sculpture.' This potentially problematizes the relationship between painting and the readymade. If readymades are sculptures (which they might be) then not only this, but a great many other works of commentary are invalidated. Duchamp, however, was a painter first, not a sculptor, and unless we propose to explain his output post-1913 as that of a sculptor, then we are justified in our attempts to make sense of the readymades in the context of French painting. What is significant about his reference to the bottle rack as a 'readymade sculpture' is that he is here using readymade as an adjective, as a modifier to 'sculpture.' Here the readymade as a category of objects is not apparent. Rather, this suggests that when Duchamp bought the bottle rack he did indeed consider it to be a work of art – a work of art, readymade; not a readymade. Here 'art' precedes the readymade and the subsequent act of naming functions as I have outlined above. Duchamp, as self-legitimizing artist-subject had already decided that the readymades were, *a priori*, works of art. In this regard he is the originator of his own values.

Duchamp explains to Suzanne how he wants the bottle rack, already a readymade sculpture (and therefore a work of art) to become a 'readymade.' Which, as we have seen, is an independent and differentiated category of objects within the more general category of 'work of art'.³⁶⁶ The process

³⁶⁵ Duchamp in Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 562. This statement is probably as much a veiled attack on Schwarz and his elaborate commentary as it is an expression of Duchamp's own position.

³⁶⁶ Of course at this stage, Duchamp is attempting to put into practice the affirmative action required by his negative pronouncement: 'can one make works which are not works of "art"?' A necessary precondition for the possibility of this is that art be both negated and affirmed at the same time, a process which is

of transformation from readymade sculpture to 'readymade' is to be enacted at distance, telegraphically. This principle underlying the action performed 'remotely' is the same as that which Duchamp describes in his short text *Deferment*.³⁶⁷ As the subject is preserved through 'telephonic' procedures in *Deferment*, here the work of art is created remotely, through the written word. The subjective enterprise is outsourced, but not compromised. The artistic self is scattered, delegated, contained in a 'forged' signature, authorized by the artist. These procedures of separation, of delegation and ultimately of duplication will be applied most notably again in *The Green Box* (1934), the *Boite en valise* (1935-1941), and the Schwarz edition replica readymades (1964). As we can see, however, these processes are significant at the inception of the readymade and are related to the cultural trends of mechanical reproduction and communication at a distance. Here, as with *Unhappy Readymade* of 1919, the readymade first takes the form of a 'message' before it can be transformed into the work of art proper. The readymade is thus information, sent and then transformed into an object. An object which happens to be a work of visual art. Here we might be forgiven for questioning Duchamp's claim that one language of expression cannot be interpreted by another; either this or he sees no problem with his message being scrambled.

Duchamp is then an artist who can make works of art 'remotely,' at a distance, but only *through* others, or through an act of communication with another. On the one hand this could be viewed as an act of artistic enslavement, on the other, a gesture to the inclusiveness of the work of art in the machine-age. At any rate, as we will see, the readymades frequently depend upon particular

effectively executed through the production and naming of the readymades. See "A l'Infinitif" in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 74.

³⁶⁷ The text is as follows: 'Deferment Against compulsory military service: a "deferment" of each limb, of the heart and the other anatomical parts; each soldier being already unable to put his uniform on again, his heart feeding *telephonically*, a deferred arm, etc.

Then, no more feeding; each "*deferee*" isolating himself. Finally a Regulation of regrets from one "*deferee*" to another.' See Marcel Duchamp, "The 1914 Box" in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 23.

inter-subjective relations for their significance: many of them occur within the context of communication, or of an offering.

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The readymades comprise a group of objects whose idiom is alienatingly obscure, yet they are frequently produced with the co-operation of others, or through an interaction with others. Some readymades are, for instance, gifts as well as works of art, and this is a trend apparent across Duchamp's oeuvre. For example, he gave *Young Man and Girl in Spring* (1911) and *Unhappy Readymade* (1919) to his sister Suzanne; *Baptême / Baptism* (1911) was a gift to Dr. Ferdinand Tribout (one of Duchamp's school friends); *Encore à cet Astre* (1911) was given to Frederic C. Torrey (a San Francisco Chinese antique shop owner);³⁶⁸ *Moulin à café* (1911) was given to Raymond Duchamp-Villon, painted to specification to decorate his kitchen; *Air de Paris* (1919) was a gift to Walter and Louise Arensberg; one of the two versions of *Feuille de Vigne Femelle / Female-Fig Leaf* (1950) was given to Man Ray as a farewell present; *Coin de Chasteté / Wedge of Chastity* (1954) was a gift from Duchamp to his wife Teeny;³⁶⁹ we could even see *Étant Donnés* as a posthumous gift to the Philadelphia Museum of Art - Duchamp certainly had no interest in making any personal financial gain from his last work.

Other works were made in conjunction with other people, at their request or with their co-operation: *Erratum Musical* (1913) was to be sung by Duchamp and his sisters Yvonne and Suzanne; Duchamp bought the snow shovel which would become *In Advance of the Broken Arm*

³⁶⁸ Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 46.

³⁶⁹ All examples given are provided by the catalogue of Duchamp's works in Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (eds), *Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), 231-326, and several are corroborated elsewhere by Duchamp in interview.

(1915) with fellow artist Jean Crotti;³⁷⁰ *A Bruit Secret / With Hidden Noise* (1916) famously required Walter Arensberg's contribution (he provided the 'hidden noise'); *Unhappy Readymade*, as well as being their wedding present, required Suzanne and Jean Crotti's participation; Duchamp painted *Tu m'* (1918) – 'his last oil on canvas'³⁷¹ – at Katherine Dreier's request; *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?* (1921) was produced at the behest of Katherine Dreier's sister Dorothea who, when shown the work, detested it;³⁷² Duchamp collaborated several times (primarily when he needed something photographed) with Man Ray on works such as *Elevage de Poussière / Dust Breeding* (1920), *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette / Beautiful Breath, Veil Water* (1921), *Obligations Pour la Roulette de Monte Carlo / Monte Carlo Bond* (1924) and *Anémic Cinéma* (1926). Despite Duchamp's protestations that he was resolutely individualist in his art,³⁷³ much of what he produced was dependent upon his relations with others. The work of art in these instances became a gesture, a communication, an inter-subjective sentiment.

One of the most significant insights of the 2012 exhibition of Duchamp's work at the Kunstbau in Munich was the discovery of a 'Bibloquet' [Figure 34] that he had given to his friend and fellow artist Max Bergmann on the 18th of April 1910.³⁷⁴ 'Bibloquet' is French game comprised of a wooden ball with a small hole cut out of it and a lathed rod on which one attempts to catch the ball after it has been thrown in the air. 'The sexual connotations of the toy are unmistakable,'³⁷⁵ and Duchamp presumably was emphasising this element when he gave it Bergmann, with whom he had explored nocturnal Paris during the latter's stay there in March and April of 1910.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁰ Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 156.

³⁷¹ Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (October Books, The MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996), 149.

³⁷² Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 63.

³⁷³ Duchamp in an interview with Joan Bakewell for the BBC's *Late Show*, June 5th 1968.

³⁷⁴ See *Marcel Duchamp in Munich*, Exhibition Catalogue, eds Helmut Friedel, Thomas Girst, Matthias Mühling, and Felicia Rappe (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2012), 110-113.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

What is more significant than this, however, is that this object adumbrates the gestures that Duchamp will make when he invents the readymade several years later. *Bibloquet* bears an inscription: 'Bibloquet / Souvenir of Paris / For my friend M. Bergmann / Duchamp spring 1910.'³⁷⁷ This object also bears many of the characteristics of the readymades proper, although it cannot be said to exist in the context of artistic production - it is a gift, plain and simple. Formally, however, it behaves very much like a readymade: it is a mass-produced object, it is inscribed, it is signed, it is a visual pun. But *Bibloquet* is in no way disorienting – it functions within the context of sentimental exchange between two subjects, and clearly expresses a message addressed from one to the other. It is a sentiment inscribed upon, but also in the form of, a readymade object - a suggestive and frustrating game.³⁷⁸

This, I propose, is a model for some, but not all, of the subsequent readymades. It helps us to understand why readymades look like they do, why they bear inscriptions, signatures and how they operate as a message carrier between subjects. We should not reduce all readymades to the *Bibloquet*, and it cannot be seen as the moment of genesis for the readymades; it does, however, bear the formal hallmarks of a readymade. It provides a window into the formulation of the readymade: it is the precedent for their form and in a sense for their content.

Air de Paris (1919), for instance, is a readymade that serves the 'gift-function' of *Bibloquet* alongside the added 'art-function' of the readymade. It exists both in the interpersonal 'intimate' realm and in the public world of visual art. *Female Fig-Leaf* (1950) serves a similar dual-function, existing effectively in two contexts as a precondition of its being – it is born of a dual ontology. *With Hidden Noise* (1916), as we will shortly see, highlights most acutely this trend in Duchamp's work, and represents probably the most profound meshing of the private and public,

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 112.

the specific and general inter-subjective gesture through its framing of the unknown 'quality' of other minds.

The readymade is not, then, a mute, alienated object. Perhaps it is not even, strictly speaking, esoteric. Instead it could simply be intimate – not a private language as such, but a secret, yet simultaneously universal one, to which we must be initiated. This is a significant difference but one that explains the difficulty of approaching a readymade in an alternative way to that based solely upon a strategy of formal disruption, or in the context of the aesthetic procedures of the avant-garde. The readymade, may not *look* like an intimate work of art, but frequently it is.

Although it does not manifest a gestural aesthetic, it is frequently a *gesture*. By stripping the work of art of its auratic and imperious qualities, it is surrendered to others, and not they to it. The readymade is never an object to be revered, because the reverential 'component' of a readymade is external to it. It points to other regions, gestures to inter-subjectivity over auratic objectivity, operates on a principle of telegraphy: it is communication that is always occurring, and always at a distance, an essential distance (that which exists between any two subjects) which is inviolate. The readymade cannot function in isolation, it does not exist unless in the context of a relationship, to which it attests, provokes, reworks, complicates. It does not exist unless it is looked at.³⁷⁹

With Hidden Noise [Figure 35] of 1916, manifests these tendencies. This 'assisted'³⁸⁰ or 'semi'³⁸¹ readymade is composed of two brass plates, bearing inscriptions, between which is sandwiched a ball of string. The assemblage is held together with four long screws, one at each corner of the

³⁷⁹ Duchamp tells Richard Hamilton that he believes that works of art do not exist unless someone is looking at them. See Marcel Duchamp interviewed by Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, "Marcel Duchamp Speaks", broadcast by the BBC in the series "Art, Anti-Art," 1959, now available in MP3 format.

³⁸⁰ Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (eds), *Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), 280.

³⁸¹ Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 461-462.

brass plates. Inside the ball of string is an object put there by Walter Arensberg. Duchamp gives the impression that he did not ask Arensberg to put the object inside the readymade,³⁸² but seems quite accepting of its presence and its anonymity: 'to this day I don't know what it is, nor I imagine, does anybody else'.³⁸³ The inscriptions, as Duchamp told Arturo Schwarz, were

... an exercise in comparative orthography (English-French). The periods must be replaced (with one exception: débarrassé[e]) by one of the two letters of the other two lines, but in the same vertical as the period – French and English are mixed and make no 'sense.' The three arrows indicate the continuity of the line from the lower plate to the other [upper] still without meaning.³⁸⁴

Duchamp has also described the inscriptions as 'three short sentences in which letters were occasionally missing like in a neon sign when one letter is not lit and makes the word unintelligible',³⁸⁵ although to Pierre Cabanne he insisted that 'they weren't incomprehensible at all; they were French and English words with letters missing... One can be amused putting them back together, it's very easy'.³⁸⁶

With Hidden Noise frames, then, the relationship of which the hidden object is the manifestation. The unknown quality - perceptible only through the noise it makes - is what lends the readymade its value. In other words, what is valuable about the readymade is unknown. This unknowable object which is the manifestation of an unknowable quality, establishes an allegorical relationship to the problem of the knowability other minds, to the assertion of their value.

With Hidden Noise is in this way the manifestation of a relation between Duchamp and Arensberg. It counts on the input of both individuals centred on the unknown quality of the

³⁸² In at least three separate accounts Duchamp states that Arensberg placed the object inside the ball of string without prompting. See Ibid.; Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (eds), *Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), 280; Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 54.

³⁸³ Duchamp in Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (eds), *Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), 280.

³⁸⁴ Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 462.

³⁸⁵ Duchamp in Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (eds), *Marcel Duchamp* (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1973), 280.

³⁸⁶ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 54.

object which validates the work. Duchamp's acceptance of this unknown quality as the site of value is a tacit acknowledgement of the value of another's mind - namely Arensberg's. This is effectively a faith in the existence of others (perhaps contrary to Duchamp's all-encompassing scepticism). It is an acceptance of the value of the minds of others in spite of the fact that these minds remain essentially unknown. What is framed here in the form of a readymade, will be transformed into a theoretical postulate by Duchamp's statement on the 'creative act'³⁸⁷ which is, to his eyes, an inter-subjective process rather than a singular work of 'spirit.'³⁸⁸ The work of art is secondary to the human subject, without which the work of art cannot be said to exist.³⁸⁹ This doubt is not extended to other minds, it is rather reinforced by an oppositional faith in the existence of other minds, perhaps suggesting that Duchamp maintains throughout a certain transcendentalised humanist impetus. Again we can turn to the idea that the viewer 'activates' a work of art, an activation which is the establishment of a relation between two minds. *With Hidden Noise* not only engages with this process externally, through its relation with the spectator, but also internally through its framing of the relation of Duchamp and Arensberg in the creation of the work, through its dependence on the inalienable quality of the unknown object and the imperceptibility of the mind behind it.

The inscriptions suggest, however, that despite the disorientations and imprecisions of language, something can be known, and meaning can be deciphered. As the quotations above demonstrate, Duchamp seems to oscillate between the incomprehensibility of this staging of a language game and its cognitive simplicity. The riddle can be untangled but we should not expect to find any great revelation at the end of it. Here knowledge is not at the end of a trail of language, not compressed within it nor created by it; it presents itself only in the form of the 'hidden noise.'

³⁸⁷ See "The Creative Act" in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 138-140.

³⁸⁸ Duchamp said to Jean Schuster in a 1957 interview for *le surréalisme, même, no. 2*, that 'the onlookers are the ones that make the picture.' See translation in Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 463/615.

³⁸⁹ See note 379, above.

The trail of language leads us down blind alleys, in the interstices between two languages (French and English) - two languages similar enough to announce both their sameness and their difference. But even bilingualism will not lead us to a definitive outcome. Language is a staging of meaning, a commentary around the essential and sensual unknown (the noise). The unknown value makes us aware of its presence (it makes a noise),³⁹⁰ but it cannot be described, attested to in language.

For Duchamp, this process is legitimate. His stated aim was to put painting at the service of the mind, and he does so through the readymade. He makes it clear what is at stake when we consider the human mind, the nature of our own interiority: our singular subjectivity (and perhaps our collective psychology) is best expressed through prefabricated objects and meaningless phrases. Duchamp is effectively saying that the creation of conventionally beautiful objects is fallacious, it is a betrayal of the mind, is pandering to mere bourgeois taste. Beauty, as Duchamp will say whilst describing chess, is ‘completely in one’s gray matter’³⁹¹ and I suggest that this is the attitude he adopted with regard to his art also. He did not banish beauty, he merely relocated it from material phenomena to the interior processes of human subjectivity. It is not subjective; it resides in subjectivity. This move, once integrated with the universalism of the “Creative Act” secures a place of value within each and every human mind, expresses no doubt in their existence. The mind becomes the site of beauty: thoughts are beautiful; thinking is beautiful. Duchamp’s art may have had the effect of changing the game of art from the naming of the ‘beautiful’ in particular to the naming of ‘art’ in general,³⁹² but this is not a process that his

³⁹⁰ It should be noted that by placing Duchamp’s works in a museum or gallery we are deprived of their interactive character. We cannot spin *Bicycle Wheel*, we cannot shake *With Hidden Noise*. In the case of the latter, our inability to discover even the noise of the unknown object, builds another layer of the unknown into the readymade: we must take Duchamp’s word for it until we are allowed to shake the object.

³⁹¹ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 19.

³⁹² Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (October Books, The MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996), 459.

work performs on itself. If anything he gives up saying ‘this is art’ – he never gives up saying ‘this is beautiful.’

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In the early 1960s Duchamp made a statement concerning the readymades. He was asked to explain them many years after their creation as they remained mostly un-exhibited until the resurgence of American interest in Duchamp after the Second World War. He explained to Joan Bakewell in 1968 that it was ‘only in the last twenty years that people have been interested in them’.³⁹³ The readymades therefore have a delayed effect. The decline of a European tradition (painting) that they register before the First World War is not acknowledged until after the Second, in America. In short, they are not recognised until historical events have demonstrated the decline and degeneration of European cultural traditions more generally. In his statement, Duchamp summarizes the readymade in the following way:

In 1913 I had the happy idea to fasten a bicycle wheel to a kitchen stool and watch it turn.

I few months later I bought a cheap reproduction of a winter evening landscape which I called “Pharmacy” after adding two small dots, one red and one yellow, in the horizon.

In New York in 1915 I bought at a hardware store a snow shovel on which I wrote “In Advance of Broken Arm.”

It was around that time that the word “readymade” came to mind to designate this form of manifestation.

A point which I want very much to establish is that the choice of these “readymades” was never dictated by esthetic delectation.

This choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste... in fact a complete anesthesia.

One important characteristic was the short sentence which I occasionally inscribed on the “readymade.”

That sentence instead of describing the object like a title was meant to carry the mind of the spectator towards other regions more verbal.³⁹⁴

³⁹³ Duchamp interviewed by Joan Bakewell for the BBC’s *Late Show*, June 5th 1968.

³⁹⁴ Marcel Duchamp, “Apropos of ‘Readymades’” in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 141.

This text was delivered as a talk at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, on the 19th of October, 1961. It must be seen therefore, to work retroactively on the readymades, which were, strictly speaking, produced between the years of 1913 and 1923. It cannot be understood as an entirely accurate summation of the purpose and characteristics of *all* the readymades. Rather, it must be understood as a text that *affects* the readymades from a distance, which rewrites them as much as it constitutes them. This text comes ‘after the event’ of the readymade, just as the name itself came ‘after the event’ of the first objects. Verbal accounts of the readymades are always made *a posteriori*, both by Duchamp and other commentators. Beyond the fact, as I have shown, that they must be seen as works of art, what occurs *a priori* of the readymade – that which constitutes its being – seems irredeemably lost. Framed another way, we might say that the ontology of the readymade is the very figuring of this loss, of this lack of meaning which requires a subsequent and continual linguistic investment. That many of the original readymades are in fact lost, does nothing to dissuade us from this reading. Nevertheless, from this potential absence of meaning, of an unaccountable nothingness, something springs: the readymade.

If we return to Duchamp’s letter to his sister Suzanne (see page 225), we should note that *all* of the works to which he refers are lost. To be precise, some of them were already lost at the time of writing (Suzanne had already disposed of the bottle rack and the bicycle wheel, straightforwardly assuming that they were junk and not works of art). The original *In Advance of the Broken Arm* is now lost, but no doubt Duchamp had it in his possession at the time he wrote the letter.³⁹⁵ The enigmatic readymade, for which we only have the inscription – no corresponding object has ever been located – ‘*Emergency in favor of twice*’ is the inversion of the *Bicycle Wheel*, which is a

³⁹⁵ It was still hanging in his studio in April of 1916, when Duchamp and Jean Crotti were interviewed for the New York paper, *The Evening World* and in which Crotti declares: ‘As an artist I consider that snow shovel to be the most beautiful object I have ever seen.’ See the *The Evening World*, April 4, 1916, held in the American Library of Congress, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030193/1916-04-04/ed-1/seq-3/>, Accessed 18th August 2012. Arturo Schwarz wrongfully attributes this quotation to Duchamp. It is a statement that would - had Duchamp made it - quite clearly have contradicted almost everything else he said or wrote about the readymade. See Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 456.

readymade without the name. This, the most, elusive of all readymades perhaps offers us the clearest indication of the chasm from which they emerged. It is a signifier for this absence only, a sign without referent. It is meaningless (valueless), yet it exists.

But it is only the most obvious of the many signs without referent that we find in Duchamp's letter to Suzanne. As I have stated, none of the objects described have survived – we only have replicas of *Bicycle Wheel*, *Bottle Dryer* and *In Advance of the Broken Arm*. These replicas point ineluctably back to their progenitor. They are purposeless, pointless without this absent figure of the original, upon which they depend for their form and their significance. But in this respect, we follow them down a blind alley. The originals are lost, and the replicas efface the auratic quality of these originals, whilst simultaneously valorizing them. In order to question the authority of the original, the replicas must employ that very authority as the basis for their existence. Duchamp tells us that the replica of a readymade delivers the same message as the original;³⁹⁶ but the importance of this *original message* (whatever that might be), remains. The message itself is also uniquely bound up in the form of the readymade: an inscription refers to a specific object and vice-versa. The significance of *Emergency in favor of twice* is that it does not engage in this play of originality. It *is* original. It is the archetype of all lost readymades and of all the readymades which are, by their very nature, lost.

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Duchamp's text "Apropos of 'Readymades,'" highlights the main features of the readymades:

- a) the choice of readymades is based on visual indifference and a rejection of 'aesthetic delectation'.
- b) The readymades are chosen with a total absence of good or bad taste.

³⁹⁶ Marcel Duchamp, "Apropos of 'Readymades'" in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 142.

- c) Some of the readymades have inscriptions and this carries ‘the mind of the spectator to other regions more verbal.’
- d) There is a basic antinomy between the readymade and art.
- e) The readymade is susceptible to devaluation by repetition (habit-forming, in Duchamp’s words). Their number is therefore artificially limited.
- f) Readymades are not unique, in the respect that the replica of a particular readymade is essentially as valuable (delivers the same message) as the original.

There are few readymades which conform to all these criteria and we must therefore see “Apropos of ‘Readymades’” as a retrospective effort to provide order (and to some extent meaning) to a class of objects which, whilst exhibiting similar characteristics, do not easily cohere. If anything they bear a ‘family-resemblance’ in the sense that Wittgenstein uses the term in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Duchamp, contradicting the urge to order, tells us that the readymades ‘don’t look like one another... there is a... strangeness from one to the other which shows there is no style there... and no taste and no liking and no disliking either’.³⁹⁷ Here he indicates that qualitative formal differentiation across the readymades as a category of objects is desirable in its resistance to any totalizing aesthetic, to the dictates of ‘taste’. In a note in the *Green Box* he provides a further possible methodology for creating readymades, through an arbitrary ‘rendezvous’ decided in advance.³⁹⁸ However, he later tells Pierre Cabanne ‘at that time I was preoccupied with the idea of doing a certain thing in advance, of declaring “at such and such an hour I’ll do this...” I never did it. I would have been embarrassed by it’.³⁹⁹

As I have shown, some readymades were designed with a recipient in mind, as a gift or as a saleable work, others do not bear inscriptions and it is questionable whether any of them can

³⁹⁷ Duchamp in an interview with Joan Bakewell for the BBC’s *Late Show*, June 5th 1968.

³⁹⁸ Marcel Duchamp, “The Green Box” in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 32.

³⁹⁹ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 49. It should be noted that *Comb* (1916) does feature an inscription with a date and time on it – part of the ‘information’ that Duchamp suggest should be recorded on a readymade discovered via a ‘rendezvous’ – but that *Comb* predates the text “Specifications for ‘Readymades’” [see *Ibid.*] which makes reference to *With Hidden Noise*, which was produced around two months after *Comb* in Easter of 1916.

operate within the realm of ‘visual indifference,’ as such a thing is impossible to measure; although Duchamp tells Joan Bakewell that he would look at an object for a length of time until he was convinced that it had no aesthetic effect on him, either positive or negative.⁴⁰⁰

One of the readymades that appears to fit many of the criteria outlined above, however, is *In Advance of the Broken Arm* [Figure 36], the inscribed snow-shovel of 1915:

In addition to being the first American readymade, the snow shovel brought to full, conscious fruition the readymade *idea* that had been hovering around in his [Duchamp’s] mind for two years. It was a mass-produced, machine-made object with no aesthetic qualities whatsoever, chosen on a basis of “visual indifference, and, at the same time, on the total absence of good or bad taste.”⁴⁰¹

Indeed, the snow shovel is a profoundly indifferent object and could quite easily have been chosen on (a) the basis of visual indifference; although we are led to believe that Duchamp bought the object with Jean Crotti,⁴⁰² who ‘as an artist’ considered it ‘the most beautiful object’⁴⁰³ he had ever seen. Similarly the object (b) seems not to conform to any conventional standards of good or bad taste. It is certainly a functional object that originates outside of such concerns. The snow shovel (c) bears an inscription and (d) expresses (as much as we accept that any readymade harbours this insurmountable difference) a basic antinomy to art.

I have shown, however, that despite this apparent antinomy, the readymade requires, ontologically, at its point of origination, its inclusion in the category of objects we call ‘art’ and which depend upon the ideas of self-expression and subjective singularity as a precondition of their coming into being. It is this categorization, or sub-categorization performed in advance which allows the name ‘readymade’ to function in its ironic/poetic mode and which changes the function of the name from its appropriate and logical descriptive designation. Without ‘art,’ without being an ‘artist,’ Duchamp is merely calling readymade objects ‘readymade.’

⁴⁰⁰ Duchamp in an interview with Joan Bakewell for the BBC’s *Late Show*, June 5th 1968.

⁴⁰¹ Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 157.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴⁰³ See note 370 above.

The readymade, as a concept, through its immanent manifestations is (e) susceptible to devaluation. Duchamp certainly restrained himself from excessive production, but this was in order to prevent the 'habit forming' nature of artistic production from entering into the readymade. The devaluation occurs because the readymade then becomes too much like conventional art, its difference is lessened. Nevertheless, a replica of *In Advance of the Broken Arm* was produced in 1945, and subsequently a limited edition of 8 signed reproductions were produced by the Galleria Schwarz in 1964. Playing, for a moment at least, the petty production-line capitalist, Duchamp demonstrated how reproduction of the art object could *generate* value, certainly in the monetary sense. With this act of duplication he also demonstrated that (f) a replica of a readymade delivers the same message as the original.

The propositions pertaining to the readymades are, in many instances dependent upon aesthetic value judgments which can only be made a singular subject. The criteria do not appeal to any sense of objective truth, nor do they strictly specify what a readymade actually is. Rather they present a series of possible worlds in which the statements may or may not be true of any readymade in question.

In this respect we could suggest that this subsequent definition of the readymades is not deductive. It does not attempt to describe the objects, to clearly align them with a series of linguistic concepts. Rather, the definition of the readymades forms a series of conceptual states which may or may not be equivalent to the materiality of any given readymade. Even in the case of *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, one of the 'purer' readymades, concept and object are not clearly and definitively linked. Rather the definitions offer a series of possible worlds in which the readymades signify or do not signify certain things. These possible worlds are actually in no way linked to the readymades themselves, they do not speak to their object-hood.

The origin of the readymade should be understood then, as the same as the origin of any other work of art: the product of inspiration. This reversion to transcendentalism only appears inappropriate because the readymade is a mass-produced object, and such mundane objects do not come into being through an act of inspiration, they come off a production line. Instead of transforming the moment of artistic inspiration into a 'beautiful' work of art which is in some way sensuously analogous to the inspired moment, Duchamp chooses an object which leads a dizzying trail back to the very site of inspiration itself – the gray matter. The readymade cannot be seen as the objectification of a set of coherent artistic concepts, their immanent analogue; rather it should be seen as the material other to its immaterial or ideal origin. The two are not equivalent, and that is a point the readymade makes quite clearly: the material world that humanity has made is quite different from metaphysical postulates of the 'absolute'. The ideal and the material cannot be seen to coincide, despite their simultaneity – there is no longer a receptacle for spirit. The readymade is testament to the loss of hope for this particular form of putative unity.

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To close this discussion of the readymade, we turn to its very first 'official' incarnation, which was not a readymade as such, but an assemblage: a bicycle wheel and front fork, turned upside down and mounted on a four-legged wooden stool. Duchamp created this object by combining its two 'readymade' parts – the front fork and the wooden stool – in Paris in 1913. We are given no clues as to where the bicycle wheel came from or if Duchamp had to dismantle a bike to get it. At any rate, the object which became retrospectively known as *Roue de bicyclette / Bicycle Wheel* [Figure 37], the first unofficial readymade, a readymade in advance of the idea, successfully made redundant both a bicycle and a stool.

Bicycle Wheel is composed of two mass-produced parts which can be combined at will. It can be easily replicated and in New York in 1916 Duchamp produced a replica, again for his studio, as the original was lost or had been forgotten in Paris. To Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp has said of the object, ‘when I put a bicycle wheel on a stool, the fork down, there was no idea of a “readymade,” 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’.⁴⁰⁴ To Arturo Schwarz, he said that

The *Bicycle Wheel* is my first readymade so much so that at first it wasn’t even called a readymade. It still had little to do with the idea of the readymade. Rather, it had more to do with the idea of chance. In a way, it was simply letting things go by themselves and having a sort of created atmosphere in a studio, an apartment where you live. Probably to help your ideas to come out of your head. To see that wheel turning was very soothing, very comforting, a sort of opening of avenues on other things than [the] material life of everyday. I liked the idea of having a bicycle wheel in my studio. I enjoyed looking at it, just as I enjoy looking at the flames dancing in a fireplace. It was like having a fireplace in my studio, the movement of the wheel reminded me of the movement of the flames.⁴⁰⁵

In this description, the *Bicycle Wheel* is many things without actually being any of them – it is an object that defies sensible understanding and apparently cannot be successfully described. In this respect the object is similar to Roussel’s fantastic machines taken from the context of literature or of drama and simply placed in the world. Any imaginative or conceptual function that the object possesses is obviously neutralized in the material world where it becomes an eccentricity, an anomaly. As we can see, one of the most significant features of the readymades is that they do not yield to conventional descriptive language. Duchamp has said that ‘the curious thing about the readymade is that I’ve never been able to arrive at a definition or explanation that fully satisfies me’.⁴⁰⁶ But he has also said that the readymade was a ‘form of denying the possibility of defining

⁴⁰⁴ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 47.

⁴⁰⁵ Duchamp interviewed in Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 442.

⁴⁰⁶ Marcel Duchamp interviewed in Katherine Kuh, *The Artist’s Voice: Talks with Seventeen Artists* (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1962), 90.

art,⁴⁰⁷ which rather defeats the object of aiming at a definition at any rate. In this regard the readymade is tautological: it repeats its own premise, it *is* its own premise, or is material evidence of its theoretical premise.

It is undoubtedly through some reverence for art that Duchamp creates the readymade: it is a form of denying the possibility of defining art, but never a denial of art, only of its stratagems and techniques. The readymade, at its core, is a statement of the intense subjectivity of art, of its personal and intimate character. It is art divorced from all instrumental ends, living for itself, within itself, caught in the tautology of its being, the spinning of the wheel. The problem the readymade poses is fundamentally a problem of form – but this has been the case since Courbet and Manet: ‘modernism, so everyone roughly agrees, was a kind of formalism.’⁴⁰⁸ It was through formal experimentation in the arts, T.J. Clark explains, that the promises of Modernity were put to the test and were seen ultimately to disintegrate in the very act of their realisation.⁴⁰⁹ The readymade upholds the artistic spirit, but of and for itself. There is no need to express anything as such, no need to sell anything either. There is seemingly no need for content or intentionality of expression at all.

Bicycle Wheel, then, is perhaps the object truest to the spirit of the readymade because it escapes even the category of the readymade itself. It is a thing in itself before it is named, before it is known and before it has purpose. Yet it still exists, it still has qualities that are uniquely its own. It is the basis of a language - an immaculate language - rather than something subject to a language. The impossibility of defining art is not a trans-historical gesture, but a culturally specific one. Art, unless defined by the dictates of the market, of fashion, of the avant-garde clique, has no definition: it cannot exist outside of the epistemology of the time. There can be no

⁴⁰⁷ Marcel Duchamp in interview with Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, “Marcel Duchamp Speaks”, broadcast by the BBC in the series “Art, Anti-Art,” 1959, now available in MP3 format.

⁴⁰⁸ T.J. Clark, “The Painting of Postmodern Life?” *Quaderns Portàtils* (Museum of Contemporary Art: Barcelona, 2009), 8. <http://www.macba.cat/en/quaderns-portatils-tj-clark>, accessed/downloaded 22 August 2012.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 9-11.

alternative to knowledge, yet knowledge is always incomplete, a partial totality. What lies beyond knowledge cannot, by definition, exist for human beings. Such things are subject to the paradox, as Lacoue-Labarthe describes it, of alterity:

As soon as other occurs, as such, there is the threat of an absolute alterity: absolute, which forbids or renders impossible all relation. The other, if it is indeed other, is immediately the wholly other. But at the same time, the other, even wholly other, is, insofar as it is other, unthinkable without relation to the same: as soon as other appears, detaching itself from the same, the same, in advance, has already recovered it and brought it back. It is impossible to think a total unbinding.⁴¹⁰

Here is where my reading of Modernism differs from T.J. Clark's – or rather supplements his interpretation. Whilst the work of modernist art functions as a testing ground for the dreams and promises of modernity - as a cultural 'laboratory' of sorts - it also suffers from the effects of modernity on the structures of knowledge. This is what requires my departure from the realm of painting and the importance of Duchamp and the readymade. Modernity strips painting of its ability to provide a critical mirror to society. The history of modernist painting is then the history of a critical faculty in a state of deterioration. But the key to this critical ability and to the decline of the art is the place of the human being, and of the human spirit within modernity. The critical voice is the outcry of the spirit against modernity, the destruction of the form of painting is the manifestation of the process to which the spirit is revolting. Modernist painting tries to be 'other' to culture, but it always finds itself the same – such is the bind of the episteme of which it is the 'picturing'.

Today, the readymade has usurped painting. This is because the readymade 'kills' art to let it live. Art, as a manifestation of spirit could only be preserved under new and altered conditions, in the nooks and crannies of an epistemology that has no explanation for it. We end up with art that cannot be explained, simply because to explain it would be to destroy it, to expose it directly, through patterns of order and linguistic tools, to the partial and mechanical knowledge of the

⁴¹⁰ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 1999), 60.

time. Perhaps the *Bicycle Wheel* is the only readymade that truly does what a readymade should do. It is lost, and never had a defined purpose, but was invested with something singularly human and subsequently indefinable. It is a banal outcry that cannot be assimilated. It is a work of art for which 'being-lost' is not an issue, the first work of art for which presence and immediacy are not prerequisites. It is a work of art that courts non-existence, although in saying as much I confound this courting, give it *being*. *Bicycle Wheel* can be seen as an expression *sous rature* – it is an artwork that sustains itself through its self-nullification, that acknowledges both its necessity and its inadequacy.

In the 1959 interview with George Heard Hamilton in which Duchamp declares that the readymade was a 'form of denying the possibility of defining art', he goes on, in a seldom quoted analogy to compare art to electricity: 'you don't define electricity you just see the results of electricity'.⁴¹¹ Indeed if there is any one image (even as imprecise as this) which should help define the readymade it is this one. The readymade is powered by 'art', which cannot be defined, but which produces effects: 'art has no place of its own. Indeed, there is nothing one can call art proper, properly itself'.⁴¹² The readymade is just one of these effects – a result. But if art, as Duchamp insists, is a dream that has become unnecessary, this must be understood in the sense that art perseveres in the face of its own enforced redundancy. Art has been made unnecessary through the same process that robbed painting of its power, of its (albeit short-lived) claim to the expression of the outcry of the human soul. The prelude to Duchamp's declaration is this:

I became a non-artist... not an anti-artist... The anti-artist is like an atheist – he believes negatively. I don't believe in art. Science is the important thing today. There are rockets to the moon, so naturally you go to the moon. You don't sit at home and dream about it. Art was a dream that became unnecessary.⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ Marcel Duchamp in interview with George Heard Hamilton, "Marcel Duchamp Speaks", broadcast by the BBC in the series "Art, Anti-Art," 1959, now available in MP3 format.

⁴¹² Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 1999), 60.

⁴¹³ Duchamp in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: a Biography*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 407-408. Sourced from "Art Was a Dream." *Newsweek*, 54, no. 19 (9 November 1959), 119-19. Interview with Duchamp, and review of *Marcel Duchamp*, by Robert Lebel.

Here it becomes clear that Duchamp, the artist, has altered his position in response to the effect of science and technology on art. He had attempted to incorporate the languages of science and of mathematics in the *Large Glass* and had succeeded in generating a nonsensical and irrational subjective science of wholly idiomatic relations. To use *real* science as such, would have produced science rather than art. In order to use science for art's ends, science had to be altered so that it stopped being science at all: 'it wasn't for love of science that I did this; on the contrary, it was rather in order to discredit it, mildly, lightly, unimportantly.'⁴¹⁴ The same process occurs with the readymades, which are simply readymade objects *altered* by art.

Duchamp demonstrates how art (and here I mean the lyrical function of art) is incompatible with the world, but also that it must remain, even in the light of its impossibility, not as a negative value against which the positivistic proofs of the world can be weighed, but as an indeterminate value, a dormant, latent or recessive value which cannot be negated but which seemingly serves no purpose. It must be something that exists on its own terms alone – something that cannot be tested, nor assimilated. This would be the last form of freedom afforded the subject: a sort of anonymity, a dwelling in the blind spot of knowledge - a state of absolute contingency, ineffable and mutable. This equates, ideally, to a valueless state and is brought to fruition only through the obscurity of a ruthlessly idiomatic expression.

George Heard Hamilton asks of Duchamp: 'Do you think anybody else could make one [a readymade]?' Duchamp replies: 'Yes everybody can, but as I don't attach any value – I mean commercial value or even artistic value - to it, hardly anyone would do it for the sake of doing it'.⁴¹⁵ The readymade is valueless, or rather, it devaluates itself. It is art in constant degeneration.

Here the *Bicycle Wheel* serves as a fine example: it was not determined in advance as a work of art,

⁴¹⁴ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 39.

⁴¹⁵ Marcel Duchamp in interview with Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, "Marcel Duchamp Speaks", broadcast by the BBC in the series "Art, Anti-Art," 1959, now available in MP3 format.

nor as any other category of objects for that matter: the closest thing it resembles is a fire, which it does not resemble at all, although it can be said to produce, for Duchamp at least, the same subjective impression as an open fire in a grate (if we visit the Pompidou Centre we are explicitly told not to rotate the wheel – which appears wedged in place at any rate - and so cannot even put Duchamp’s impression to the test). It is a tool for relaxation, for the production of ideas, for the creation of a personalised space. It is interior design as much as it is fine art, although all along it is eccentric, built upon redundancy – a stool you can’t sit on, a bike you can’t ride. It is frivolous. It embodies futility - a self-enclosed purpose which to all external functions is utterly valueless. It is the inversion of the use value of the objects, which become somehow epistemologically liberated by their futility, by their combined uselessness. In a 1955 letter to the art historian Guy Weelen, Duchamp states that *Bicycle Wheel* was created ‘as if in homage to the useless aspect of something generally used to other ends. In fact, it was a *readymade* “before the event”’.⁴¹⁶

This readymade exists without its name, both in the categorical and the proper sense. It is subject to none of Duchamp’s idiomatic acts of naming: it is not, at the moment of its coming into being, a readymade, nor does it bear a title which further serves to de-categorize it (and subsequently, as is the case with ‘named’ readymades, re-categorize it in the class of objects Duchamp declared ‘readymade’). It is, momentarily, the realisation of a pure visual language, the materialization of the impulse which will later, through all manner of acts of naming come to be *known* as the readymade. The *Bicycle Wheel* is an object which cannot be known, except retrospectively, in the light of the category of art objects we now know as the readymades. It has no *a priori* value, no metaphysical pre-existence. But for the brief period in which it existed as a pure visual value, it opened the door to the verbal-visual language of the fully-fledged readymade. It is the moment of inception, of conception. Conception and creation: we can understand

⁴¹⁶ *The Selected Correspondence of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Francis M. Naumann and Hector Obalk (Ghent, Belgium: Ludion, 2000), 346.

Duchamp's twin concerns - the erotic and the cerebral – as the basis of further epic, latent puns, Duchamp's meta-puns. They are one of the strands by which his work hangs on to materiality.

But the *Bicycle Wheel* is also modernity at its still-point. Here is a stool on which you cannot sit, a bike wheel that cannot go anywhere – a pure valueless quality, without a name, without significance: an object, but a nothingness, around which all the forces of modernity gather. Yet it is pleasing – the absurdity is pleasing, as (we are led to believe) was the sight of the wheel turning round and round. If we desire an image of modernism, then this should be it (and its originary moment, its *original*, is necessarily absent) – the moment at which a course of development, of progress, opened into a valueless extreme (a void). It is a no-man's land. It is the dying cry of metaphysics in the art of modernity, the legacy of which we still contend with today.

The year after *Bicycle Wheel* was made, war broke out and set in motion a series of events whose repercussions are similarly still being felt today. The morality of Western Europe would be proven to be fallacious, its epistemology of industrial progress would be shown to be the blueprint for a machine which fed on humanity, endlessly, as if by devouring sufficient numbers of men and women it would eventually obliterate the concept of humanity itself, or weaken it to breaking point. That this slaughter and disenfranchisement was overseen by human beings is the true nature of the failure in ethical terms. The return of the barbarism repressed by the project of European civilization might explain the disasters of the 'fully enlightened earth'⁴¹⁷ but it does so in terms that are disturbing, if not wholly unacceptable: humanity cannot be responsible for itself, nor even fully in control of its faculties. Indeed, in Nietzsche's terms, humanity achieves no self-mastery, cannot master the nature within itself. Incontrovertibly, the history of the twentieth century stands as testament to this reality. What better image, then, to capture this futility, this absurdity, this unforeseen negation, than a bicycle wheel attached to a stool - nameless, made for

⁴¹⁷ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1944 – English translation 1972), 3.

no good reason, achieving nothing, making redundant its component parts, produced simply on the whim of a man who calls himself (and then does not call himself) an 'artist'.

It is in this way that *Bicycle Wheel* can be seen as an *image-ideal*. It, in the simplest manner possible, through an assemblage of two components, presents an image of its time, through the language of its time, or by using the components of that language and speaking through the fissures and cracks within it. It presents an image of the historical moment of the (lyrical) subject: it is absurd, mute. It is not a pictorial reflection in the same way that the art of Manet or Cézanne was – the conventions of pictorialism are some amongst those things that modernity makes redundant – but is rather a materialization of the values of modernity at odds with themselves. In a sense it is the product of the values of modernity, the visual realization of the implications of the values of modernity. It is an aesthetic form of the ethics, the epistemology of the time.

Bicycle Wheel is, I argue, a successful image ideal, and is therefore the basis for a visual language appropriate to the time (to our time) because it, unlike cubism, and even unlike Dada, offers no reconciliatory dream, no hope of the redemption of the old world, nor the creation of a new one. It contains no eschaton, no theological murmur. *Bicycle Wheel*, calmly, gracefully, accepts the conditions of the age, accepts the futility of art in its inability to change those conditions. It accepts what modernist painting struggled so valiantly to refute: that art is futile in the face of the machine, that a gestural, meditative humanity gets devoured by the wheels of industry. This dandyish resignation, this impassive melancholy is what links Manet to Duchamp, what links the first clear notes of painting's recognition of and resistance to the conditions that would render it obsolete, to its final capitulation with the world around it. But in both Manet and Duchamp the lucid sensibility of the artist remains, and strikes out against whatever opposes it (science, technology, photography, avant-garde cliques) not so much in the service of art or aesthetics but

through a sheer act of human determination. If nothing else the struggles of modernism bring ‘humanity’ to the fore – they lay it bare and ask us to acknowledge it, to understand it if we can.

Despite the ‘inhuman’ appearance of *Bicycle Wheel*,⁴¹⁸ it does bring Duchamp’s humanness to the fore: it presents it as an absolute and singular value, as an absurdity, but one that is inalienable, unquestionable. It is the ludicrousness of lyric,⁴¹⁹ the absurdity of the human soul, the absurdity of the innate value of art. These things are absurd because they are now impossible. But absurdity itself is innately human – the ridiculous humour we might find in a machine set against itself. *Bicycle Wheel* presents both the positive statement of absurdity: that the soul is absurd in the secular machine age; and the negative: that the soul lives on despite this absurdity, despite its impossibility.⁴²⁰ It hovers between these poles, proof of both, testament to the paradox of the age, indifferent to either eventuality, to the valuelessness of the opposition.

Bicycle Wheel represents, therefore, the resistance to any sort of totality. But this resistance is not just of the order of the object, but also of the human subject. This must be seen as the remaining lyrical component of the work of art. In our resistance to an external totality we make clear our absolute subjective singularity. This amounts to the confrontation of one totality with another: the totality of a system of knowledge with the totality of the lyrical subject. But this is merely the same struggle that we bore witness to with Cézanne, who painted his soul into the world in order to oppose the gathering totality of modernity with his own subjective absolute. His totalized aesthetic field was nothing more than the implemented hope that the aesthetic riposte to industrialization and dehumanization could be made to swell into an ethical force that might overthrow the ‘inhuman’ march of modernity. The dream of modernist painting was twofold:

⁴¹⁸ Duchamp tells James Johnson Sweeney that ‘It was naturally, in trying to draw conclusions or consequence from the dehumanization of the work of art, that I came to the idea of the Ready-mades’. See “Regions which are not ruled by time and space...” in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 134.

⁴¹⁹ See note 154.

⁴²⁰ This formulation is thus as it cannot be positive for the soul to live on in the age of its absurdity. It must, therefore, be seen as a negative value, at least in this arrangement.

that it could continue to paint the truth; that it might remake the world from the meagre critical tools at its disposal. But it was caught in an impossible bind, called upon to show the world as it really is and also to create it as it should be. This is the struggle of cubism, the great conflict at the heart of its distortions: the need both to describe the end of a tradition and its values, and to inaugurate a new tradition - even a new classicism - using the increasingly impotent pictorial tools of the past.

Bicycle Wheel is an object of monadological singularity, the last bastion of the lyric self. It is banished from the world but speaks of it, and in its language. Only by renouncing its claim to the world can the work of art begin to speak of it again. Here the lyric subject must conform to the conditions of the time, must speak through the available forms, renouncing the outmoded sentimentalities of traditional lyric form. The human soul cannot be found in the *form* of language, through the traces or imprint of a being, rather it has been sublimated (or banished) almost entirely to the form and realm of information. Duchamp's artistic sensibility, whatever remains of his lyricism, is the *content* of *Bicycle Wheel*, but it cannot be found in the *form* of the work. My soul might be my own – I no doubt have my right to my own absolute subjective singularity – but to others it is information, or a pattern of information, just as the manifestation of Duchamp's artistic spirit, his lyric self, is the combination of a bicycle wheel and wooden stool, without a name. And this object, unlike an auratic work of art, can be reproduced, unproblematically. It is a unit of information in possession of a form to which it is uniquely bound. But this form is not unique. *Bicycle Wheel's* only stake against external totality is its uselessness, the uselessness of art in the reiteration of its statement, tied to the necessity of art to make it, again and again.

Owing to this, I suggest that we consider Duchamp's work the first genuine art of capitalism – the first artistic language that works completely from within the value structure of secular

capitalism, not in accordance with it, but through the totality of its epistemic conditions. His form of lyricism momentarily staves off accommodation to the market place: it cannot be reified as such, as it no longer inhabits the sentimental gestures of poetry and painting, but dwells in the detritus of capitalism, in redundant objects, deprived of any use and therefore exchange value.⁴²¹ The redundant human spirit finds its home in the redundant (obsolete) wares of capitalism. *Bicycle Wheel* is the inaugural object of this order, its purest manifestation.

Hofmannsthal's conundrum is solved, but at the expense of expressive gesture, of poetic language and form. In a sense Duchamp finds lyrical solace in the only way Chandos does – in the mundane insignificance of the features of everyday life, in a 'confluence of trivialities' which open onto the 'presence of the Infinite.'⁴²² Lyric *affect* dwells in the an-aesthetic, in the banality of Duchamp's contrivance: the ostensible coming together of art and life, wherein art is a 'human factor in anyone's life... to be an artist but not recognized as an artist'.⁴²³ As Adorno claims, 'metaphysics has merged with culture.'⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ This is not an idea that originates with Duchamp. As Walter Benjamin – who would extend the method in his *Arcades Project* – in his commentary of Baudelaire points out, 'the poets find the refuse of society on their streets and derive their heroic subject from this very refuse... "Everything that the big city has thrown away, everything it has lost, everything it has scorned, everything it has crushed underfoot he [the ragpicker] catalogues and collects" [these are Baudelaire's words]... This description is one extended metaphor for the poetic method, as Baudelaire practiced it. Ragpicker and poet: both are concerned with refuse, and both go about their solitary business while other citizens are sleeping. See Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life* ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland et al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006), 108.

⁴²² Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "A Letter" in *The Lord Chandos Letter and Other Writings* trans. Joel Rotenberg (New York Review Books: New York, 2005), 117.

⁴²³ Duchamp in an interview with Joan Bakewell for the BBC's *Late Show*, June 5th 1968.

⁴²⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 367.

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Readymade and Knowledge

Neutralised and ready-made, traditional culture has become worthless today.⁴²⁵

It remains for the relationship between the readymade and knowledge to be better explained. I have suggested how the general formal conditions of the readymade alongside the subjective presence (we may even venture so far as to say ‘intent’) behind or within the work are seen to relate to the broad cultural trends which define modernity – how the readymade engages with the epistemic conditions of its time. But this relationship now requires elaboration with regard to the claim that I make for the on-going relevance of Duchamp’s work in the face of a changing world (a world transitioning from modernity to postmodernity). *Bicycle Wheel* can be understood as the work which, in revealing the aesthetic face of modernity, wakes it from its utopian dreams. It is the inaugural moment of a language which is true to its time – the visual language of which the social and cultural forces of modernity are the architects. The struggle of the lyric artist to find a beautiful, gestural, sentimental language by which the subject’s experience of the world might be expressed (made known) is resolved in the form of a language which eschews beauty, sentimentality, even the ostensible urge to lyricism itself.

⁴²⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society” in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press), 1997, 34.

Subjectivity is now to be found in the remnants of bourgeois consumerism, or in the misfiring efforts of the dandy, the outcast, the marginal man. The dream of modernity – its project – to perfect the world by mechanizing, rationalizing it, was interrogated by artists who worked tirelessly in the traditions that this very mechanization and rationalization was devaluing. The results of the interrogation, whatever they may be, are consigned to the tail end of an aesthetic tradition. They offer little prospect for the understanding of the conditions of life that succeed them because they refer only to their dying world, to a bereft internality that once aspired to a manifest totality. The nostalgia of modernist art is the nostalgia for sentimentality, for art in the bosom of a unity which (even if it could never achieve it) aspired to a culture in which ‘humanity’ acted as a legitimating force – an incontrovertible value. As my readings of Nietzsche, Adorno and Broch have demonstrated, subjective expression, in aesthetic form (art, broadly), was once a legitimate source of knowledge. It was the basis of lyric knowledge, of that liminal and fleeting, yet penetrative and primal knowledge to which the bohemian or dandy is heir. Duchamp is in many respects the model of Baudelaire’s dandy⁴²⁶, with his ‘need to create for oneself a personal originality... a kind of cult of the self.’⁴²⁷ Dandyism, Baudelaire writes in 1863⁴²⁸ ‘is the last spark of heroism amid decadence... is a sunset; like the declining daystar, it is glorious, without heat and full of melancholy.’ He concludes with a summation of the figure of the dandy to which Duchamp provides a clear analogue:

The distinguishing characteristic of the dandy’s beauty consists above all in an air of coldness which comes from an unshakeable determination not to be moved; you might call it a latent fire which hints at itself, and which could, but chooses not to burst into flames.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁶ See Giovanna Zapperi “Marcel Duchamp’s Dandyism: the Dandy, the Flâneur and the Beginnings of Mass Culture in New York During the 1910s”, 2005. <http://www.artsetsocietes.org/a/a-zapperi.html>, accessed 1 September 2012.

⁴²⁷ Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 2003), 27.

⁴²⁸ The text of “The Painter of Modern Life” was written between November 1859 and February 1860 and published in installments in *Le Figaro* in late 1863 (Ibid., 301). The question of Baudelaire’s choice of Guys over Manet as the quintessential painter of modern life (see Ibid., xv) can perhaps be answered with this simple chronology: at the time of Baudelaire’s writing of *The Painter of Modern Life*, Manet had not produced his ‘great’ paintings of modernity.

⁴²⁹ Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 2003), 27.

The dandy is of course the figure of the poet unable to resort to lyricism, which would constitute this ‘bursting into flame.’ The dandy is then the suppression or inversion of the lyric poet, the negative from which the affirmative poet can no longer be developed.

It was not just painting and lyric poetry that modernity degenerated; it devalued itself too. It pursued a dream that turned out to be a nightmare. The two World Wars, which originate in the struggles of Europe magnified by the scope of its global influence (power), turned the dream of rationality inside out. Machines of war ruled over machines of utility, the negative expression eclipsed the positive. The forces of production were turned against each other in outright conflict. The human subject, which was already threatened by the anonymity and subjugation of the machine age, was at the mercy of the machinery of war in the same way that it had been ruled or ‘mechanized’ by the industrial process of manufacture. Marx in his mature materialist analyses demonstrates this.⁴³⁰ The ideological imprint of the sewing machine and the machine gun is ineradicable – production and destruction are executed with inhuman speed and at the expense of the human subject.

⁴³⁰ Marx makes numerous references to the effect of mechanization on the individual. For instance, in *Capital*, Vol. 1, Chapter 15, Section 3, “The Proximate Effects of Machinery on the Workman” he describes ‘the intellectual desolation artificially produced by converting immature human beings into mere machines for the fabrication of surplus-value’; that ‘the automaton, as capital, and because it is capital, is endowed, in the person of the capitalist, with intelligence and will; it is therefore animated by the longing to reduce to a minimum the resistance offered by that repellent yet elastic natural barrier, man.’; that ‘machinery sweeps away every moral and natural restriction on the length of the working-day’. In Section 4 “The Factory” he writes: ‘factory work exhausts the nervous system to the uttermost, it does away with the many-sided play of the muscles, and confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and intellectual activity’; and in the *Grundrisse*, Notebook VI (February 1858), “Fixed Capital and the Development of the Productive Forces of Society”: ‘it is the machine which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it; and it consumes coal, oil etc. (*matières instrumentales*), just as the worker consumes food, to keep up its perpetual motion. The worker's activity, reduced to a mere abstraction of activity, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery, and not the opposite. The science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself.’ For *Capital* see <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch15.htm#a61>; and for *Grundrisse* see <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch13.htm#p690>, both accessed 5 September 2012.

The events of the first half of the twentieth-century wound the project of the enlightenment, and the dream of modernity into a torturous knot. Adorno's negative dialectics, his interdiction on lyric poetry are the result of this history, of the impact of this history on idealism of any sort. The twentieth century had not so much willfully destroyed the lives of men (although it had done plenty of that too) as it had destroyed their ideals. Industrialization, mechanization, secularization (all three feeding into one another) had the combined effect of promoting and enforcing a profligate and totalizing materialism to which, ultimately, metaphysical speculation had no answer. This signals the absolute triumph of capitalism: after the desolation, because of its materialism and its inherent lack of ethical principle, it remained, bolstered, as a structure against which the disasters of empire and of nationalism had no power.

In a sense, the project of the ideology was complete: through its de-transcendentalising effect, through its focus exclusively on materialism (whose only possible sublimation is through profit) capitalism had stripped the world of idealist principles which could aspire to any sort of historical legitimacy.

Therefore the post-war reconstruction would not simply be a material procedure, it would occur also in the realm of human knowledge - a proposition which forms the hypothesis⁴³¹ of Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, the text to which I will now refer in order to help more clearly determine the way in which Duchamp's art can be said to partake of and contribute to knowledge. Although Lyotard refers primarily to scientific forms of knowledge, his interpretation has implications for other forms of knowledge also, and for epistemological conditions in general.

⁴³¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 3.

In accordance with Lyotard's thought, 'art' becomes a fragment of specialized knowledge, with an esoteric language all its own. Only a select few may know this language. Such an eventuality conforms with the post-industrial knowledge paradigm and therefore secures art as a discipline. A 'narrative' painting, or a painting which speaks a universal language, is not only historically irrelevant, it is linguistically fallacious. Such a language no longer speaks of the world - it cannot describe it. Artists in the 1950s and 60s looking for a fully formed esoteric language that still conformed to the requirements of artistic practice needed to look no further than Duchamp.

Similarly, the traditional critical function of the avant-garde is not required in the same way under the conditions of postmodern knowledge. The dual aspect of society in which we find the critical element accommodated as part of the whole (and therefore serving as a negative component in what is still an essentially affirmative dialectical function) is not an acceptable model for the greater fragmentation and specialization of postmodern knowledge.⁴³² Thus the productive (and therefore ultimately affirmative) function of the avant-garde, and of Marxist critique is negated. Capitalism as a totality essentially without narrative remains: a unity in which disparate and incompatible components and disciplines are maintained through a relationship of quantitative exchange. T.J. Clark corroborates this reading of the modern in light of the postmodern:

I think it is wrong to opt for either "negative" or "positive," or beautiful or ugly, as descriptions of modernism in characteristic mood. The point is that modernism is always on the lookout for the moment, or practice, to which both descriptions apply. Positive and negative, fullness and emptiness, totalization and fragmentation, sophistication and infantilism, euphoria and desperation, an assertion of infinite power and possibility or a mimicry of deep aimlessness and loss of bearings. For this, I think, is modernism's root proposal about its world: that the experience of modernity is precisely the experience of the *two* states, the two tonalities, at the same time. Modernism is that art which continually discovers coherence and intensity in tentativeness and schematism, or blankness lurking on the other side of sensuousness. And not on the other side, really – blankness as the form that sensuousness and controlled vivacity now actually take on.⁴³³

⁴³² See Ibid., 12-14 for Lyotard's full explanation.

⁴³³ T.J. Clark, "The Painting of Postmodern Life?", *Quaderns Portàtils* (Museum of Contemporary Art: Barcelona, 2009), 10-11. <http://www.macba.cat/en/quaderns-portatils-tj-clark>, accessed/downloaded 22 August 2012.

If we accept Lyotard's (seemingly paradoxical) formulation of the postmodern as the constant 'nascent state'⁴³⁴ of the modern, then we must understand modernism as a drive for a hardening of the modern into a valid totality that would, in a sense, be the transformation of this nascent state (which functions on the principle of agonistic duality, opposition) into a mature unity: a true and lasting modernity. In light of this, the (our) postmodern condition is then the endlessly reiterated state of 'nascent' being (knowledge) without the hope for unity, without the possibility of maturity. This is the legacy of Lyotard's paralogical model in the light of the de-legitimization of the grand-narratives. One nascent state must succeed the next, in each instance forcing knowledge to accumulate in a series of sideways steps which cause the redundancy of the previous knowledge 'generation' but ensure the overall growth of knowledge in general, and as tool of industry or capital.

Knowledge thus takes on the aspect of a family tree, with each generation rejecting the paradigms of the former (it adopts the model of the avant-garde but stripped of the critico-practical function it served within the context of a narrative of progress or a socio-cultural totality, an historical determinism). Unless this paralogical form of knowledge acquisition is framed within the superstructure of an overall purpose or direction of knowledge (in our world we might say this is capitalism, or even more flimsily, 'innovation' in the service of the 'knowledge economy') – a use value ideally unique to it – then we forgo an overall accretion of knowledge for an ever expanding, and ever contracting (in the sense that fractal geometries appear to grow ever larger as they get smaller, more precise) store of information which 'transcend[s] the capacity of [its] users'.⁴³⁵

The unrepresentable which Lyotard calls on the postmodern to present is then the moment of knowledge in its un-legitimized state, or knowledge subject only to its own legitimation. This is

⁴³⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 79.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

knowledge in its valueless singularity. In the work of art this sort of ‘knowledge procedure’ can take any form the artist likes, as even the conditions of the subject who expresses are as unconfirmed, un-legitimated as the channels through which the expression can take place. This act of self-legitimation – the only one proper to the world in which all paradigms and narratives are to be doubted – is that of which *Bicycle Wheel* is the first clear manifestation. *Bicycle Wheel* is not even legitimated by capitalism, as it still serves something of the critical function of the avant-garde, or manifests some of Walter Benjamin’s (via Baudelaire) revolutionary force found only in the detritus of modernity.

The melancholy of modernity was rooted in the impossibility of making the real world conform to the dream world, and can be found in the inability of each nascent dream state to mature into a clear reality. With regard to art this melancholy was located in the chasm between ethics and aesthetics. Postmodernity makes no attempt to reconcile the dream with reality. Rather it drives the two apart. But this can be seen as a function of capitalism rather than a specific feature of postmodernity. It is simply that postmodernity cannot be separated from the total blossoming of capitalism and vice versa. Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of the ‘culture industry’ is on the basis that mature capitalism thrives upon a dream world of ‘false consciousness’ which obscures and assuages the ‘true’ conditions of the workers’ exploitation. The current postmodern condition is one in which the division between true and false consciousness cannot be upheld. The work and leisure of the worker are simply assimilated within the totality of globalized capitalism. To maintain the Frankfurt School critique, despite its propriety, its acuity, is to live off the scraps of the past, to fight capitalism on the one hand with its thwarted internal other – an unsustainable ethical outcry of the Spirit; and on the other hand to fight for the cause of ‘truth,’ even if only at the level of self-consciousness, when such a thing cannot be said to exist.

Even Benjamin's process of retrospective redemption cannot be enacted on the past today. The dream of the truthful totality of the dialectical image – the moment of illumination offered by the forces of history revealing themselves in the correct constellation of elements – depends upon there being some ultimate *use* or purpose for such truth. Today there is none, unless it can be sold as enlightenment to disaffected consumers. Perhaps this assessment is too bleak, although the diagnosis of the critical models of the past is simply realistic. Only certain things can survive in a culture of eclecticism – spiritual unity is not one of them:

The objects and the thoughts which originate in scientific knowledge and the capitalist economy convey with them one of the rules which supports their possibility: the rule that there is no reality unless testified by a consensus between partners over a certain knowledge and certain commitments.

This rule is of no little consequence. It is the imprint left on the politics of the scientist and the trustee of capital by a kind of flight of reality out of the metaphysical, religious, and political certainties that the mind believed it held. This withdrawal is absolutely necessary to the emergence of science and capitalism... Modernity, in whatever age it appears, cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the "lack of reality" of reality, together with the invention of other realities.⁴³⁶

It should be noted, then, that Duchamp's work depends upon a consensus, on the one hand between artist and spectator, and on the other upon a historical consensus which Duchamp calls posterity. His work courts this arrangement.⁴³⁷ It is designed with these relations in mind, upon the pragmatics of communicative exchange. Duchamp's art is a sender (or Duchamp is the sender) and it/he anticipates a recipient whose consensus (at least in the form of address) is required to 'complete' the work of art. This process is only successful if we understand the work of art as a form of communication. It operates between two poles, between two minds (*Étant Donnés*, as a result of the unique way in which it must be viewed, makes this relationship abundantly clear).

⁴³⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 77.

⁴³⁷ See Marcel Duchamp, "The Creative Act" in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 138-140.

As I have suggested, the spectator ‘activates’ the work of art, they makes the request that it address them, sometimes simply by virtue of their presence. Duchamp corroborates this view when he tells Richard Hamilton that ‘a work of art exists only when the spectator has looked at it.’⁴³⁸ In such an arrangement the work of art and the spectator are equals in a framework of exchange. Lyotard is not, strictly speaking, correct when he assents that ‘we no longer converse with works of art, says Benjamin, or at least they no longer return our gaze when we look at them.’⁴³⁹ In the case of Duchamp at least, and under altered conditions to those which Benjamin was referring,⁴⁴⁰ these are exactly the things that the work of art requests of its viewer.

This ‘intermediary’ role is the state in which the work of art that does not dream (in the modernist sense) finds itself. With no hope or belief by which it can be aligned with a greater purpose, the work of art enters the cultural field as information, as information which may be elevated to the position of knowledge, but only if it is deemed suitable as such by ‘experts’ – and certainly not through an appeal to metaphysical absolutes. *Bicycle Wheel* demonstrates this process: it is a ‘work of art’ which was not designated as such by its creator, which was not even included in a sub-category of art objects (readymades) as it predated such a possible categorization; it was not exhibited, was twice lost and was only subsequently, owing to all manner of reinterpretations and reflections by experts, accepted into the tradition and historical stream of objects that we call visual art.

Bicycle Wheel was not only produced through a process of de-legitimation, it actively demonstrates that process as an historical object. But it is not an indifferent object as such, despite Duchamp’s protestations. It is a self-expression that enters into the new or emerging conditions of knowledge and represents them. In one sense *Bicycle Wheel* is a work of art ahead of

⁴³⁸ Marcel Duchamp in interview with Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, “Marcel Duchamp Speaks”, broadcast by the BBC in the series “Art, Anti-Art,” 1959, now available in MP3 format.

⁴³⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, “Contribution to an Idea of Postmodernity” trans. Mária Minich Brewer and Daniel Brewer, in *The Lyotard Reader* ed. Andrew Benjamin (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1989), 182.

⁴⁴⁰ Lyotard is referencing Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (Pimlico: London, 1999), 184; or *The Writer of Modern Life* ed. Michael W. Jennings, trans. Howard Eiland et al. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2006), 204.

its time, in another sense it is a work of its time. I would suggest that it in fact marks the intersection, the point where one structure of knowledge (one that dreams of a better reality) dissolves into the realization of the futility of those dreams, their aesthetic, ethical, material, political failure - with the tacit acknowledgment that the dreams themselves may have been faulty at any rate (this was certainly Nietzsche's view). The teleology of progress dissolves into tautology:⁴⁴¹ all that remains is all that remains - 'truth exists exclusively as that which has become.'⁴⁴² In this climate a bicycle wheel attached to a stool is a valid form of artistic expression, and in the light of the dreams of subjectivity to which it marks a waking, it stands also for lyricism. It *is* lyricism, because it is where the human subject now, irrefutably resides. It is not an expression analogous to the subject as such; it is rather a communication of this irrefutability. In a sense it is the manifestation of the subject's stubbornness not to decline within and alongside all those forms it once called its home. Painting is a dream of the past – a dream that became unnecessary – and the subject now finds its home - in the world of objects made esoteric by 'subjective' operations. The work of art and the subject are self-legitimizing. Perhaps they even serve to legitimate each other, but only with the consent of the spectator.

This process is a delving deep inside of lyricism, not its purposeful application. Lyric here serves to demonstrate only the self *itself*, to signify only the relationship between the work of art and the artist. It serves no metaphysical, meta-social or ethical function. It remains as a means by which the singular subject can make itself known, in the form of information, which contributes to knowledge. I *know* that Duchamp was the absolute and singular subjective being behind *Bicycle Wheel* and I know that through my observation of the work Duchamp and I, via this work, enter

⁴⁴¹ Duchamp gleefully recounts to Pierre Cabanne the story of a group of Viennese logicians who 'worked out a system wherein everything is... tautology, that is a repetition of premises.' He declares, 'everything is tautology, except black coffee because the senses are in control!' See Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 107. Duchamp is probably referring to the Vienna Circle of the 1920s and 30s whose work, influenced by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921), was anti-metaphysical, and sought a logical empiricist understanding of the world. Duchamp appears to have invented the anecdote about black coffee.

⁴⁴² Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002), 3.

into some form of social bond. But this is not transcendental; it is mundane. I ‘complete’ the work and my interpretation of it allows the work to continue to function as information, to exist in the realm of knowledge: ‘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.’⁴⁴³

The principle of qualitative formal differentiation – the process of unhinging signs and signifiers – in Manet’s work, becomes a theoretical tenet of Duchamp’s. The “Creative Act” universalizes what has become a principle of qualitative differentiation (without the previously dominant formal element) in the response of the spectator to the work of art. There is no right or wrong way to understand a work of art, rather there are an infinite number of possible qualitative (subjective) responses to it. This idea, we must not forget, originates in the pre-war Puteaux milieu, where it may or may not have been part of Duchamp’s contribution to the discussions. We must entertain the thought, of course, that it was simply one of the many new ideas circulating at that time, and that Duchamp’s appropriation of it does not indicate that it was his creation. We should therefore remind ourselves of the words of Gleizes and Metzinger, those cubist theoreticians of whom Duchamp was so disapproving: ‘as many eyes as there are to contemplate an object, that is how many images of that object there are; as many minds to understand it, so many essential images.’⁴⁴⁴ Duchamp’s work, whilst drastically different from his contemporaries, was at base addressing the very same set of changing social and cultural conditions.

Today the work of art is no longer a part of an historical and epistemic unity in the sense that it serves a unique purpose through which it demonstrates its own lines of historical development within the overall episteme (as was the case from Manet to Duchamp). Instead it exists in a line

⁴⁴³ Marcel Duchamp, “The Creative Act” in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 140.

⁴⁴⁴ Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, “Du Cubisme” (1912) in Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, (eds.) *A Cubism Reader*, (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 429.

of specialist goods within the context of a market system. These goods are valuable (and by this I primarily mean expensive) because they represent or manifest the artistic subjectivity, even if they cannot be said to express it through an *affecting* or affirmative sensuous procedure. They do not serve a metaphysical lyrical function, they serve an instrumental lyrical function.

Duchamp, by not consigning his work to the marketplace – by actively producing art that eschewed it – not only made work that represented the new conditions under which the art object would have to exist, but also applied this new form within the archaic lyrical role. *Bicycle Wheel* (and the readymades more generally) resist the ‘world of art’ whilst ensuring its survival: they resist it through a formal idiom which rejects the dictates of avant-gardism, effectively consigning them to the annals of history; but this very procedure counteractively courts or generates the artistic forms of the future. This move is, however, performed on the basis of the legitimacy of the lyric subject crying out against the oppressive climate of its age. In so doing, Duchamp inaugurates or courts the new age, despite himself.

There is, therefore, a conflict of form and content in Duchamp. Perhaps it is the last great aesthetic disunity of modernism. His work takes the form of the future, of the postmodern understood as the modern in its nascent state, whilst the content of his art – himself, his own ideas, plain and simple – derives from the lyrical model of the avant-garde artist: the artist hero, upon whose works a tradition may be founded. In this respect Duchamp truly is the artist/hero, but not so much for his revolutionary content as for his idiom: in creating a work of art constructed from ordinary objects, Duchamp struck a blow to the old world and its forms; he also presented the new world with its perfected form, with its visual language. Duchamp’s anti-market idiom has become *the* idiom of the vanguard visual arts, and as such has become marketable; but this idiom was tied, precisely and historically, to Duchamp’s subject. It is his lyric. But as Lyotard stresses, ‘each individual is referred to himself. And each of us knows that

our *self* does not amount to much.⁴⁴⁵ It is his lyric at the end of lyricism, in the new space (a space which the *form* of Duchamp's art makes clearly visible) of subjectivity as information objectified, offered to knowledge by the work of art, in *whatever* form it might take. The key here is idiom, and that an idiom may carry information, no matter how esoteric.

Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel*, I propose, functions on the basis of paralogy as opposed to innovation,⁴⁴⁶ a process which is borne out by the subsequent readymades:

the only invariable criterion with which today's work complies is whether or not some untried possibility of sensation or language is revealed in the work, something still without rules. Aesthetics becomes a paraesthetics, and commentary a paralogy, just as the work is a parapoetics. Being or beings only let themselves be tempted indirectly, seduced, like the gods.⁴⁴⁷

Duchamp's is the first work to engage with this new reality of being, of knowledge and of production. We might say that knowledge takes time to catch up with being, the work of art operating at a mid-point between the two. This mediacy between being and knowing would also be a function of its lyricism, or of what was once known as lyric.

The readymade is then a form of counter-reasoning to the avant-garde, and to painting, and the purpose of this counter-reasoning appears to be the legitimation of the self through the object. The use of mass-produced objects outside of any painterly context was - despite the proliferation of these objects and the subsequent 'postmodern' adoption of the idiom by numerous artists - wholly unprecedented and the basis for a singular and esoteric formal idiom. The form even went as far as to question the status of the work of art, to shake it to its core. *Bicycle Wheel* – the first art object not to be an art object – also prefigures the move to take art from the space of the gallery, something not currently attributed to Duchamp.

⁴⁴⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 15.

⁴⁴⁶ See *Ibid.*, 61 for the nature of Lyotard's distinction.

⁴⁴⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, "Contribution to an Idea of Postmodernity" trans. Mária Minich Brewer and Daniel Brewer, in *The Lyotard Reader* ed. Andrew Benjamin (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1989), 191.

Duchamp's paralogy – more precisely his parapoetics - represent the move from a language relevant to modern conditions to a language relevant to postmodern conditions – the decline or absence of the modernist drive for unity. This first parapoetic move determines the nature of all subsequent parapoetic moves. To offer an opposing language is to declare your difference, and to announce a novel way in which sameness can be construed. Through this endless differentiation, sameness is reiterated as that which allows us to understand, which allows the idiom to become communication, to enter the realm of information, of knowledge: 'obscurity originates in taking the encounter into consideration, and not in the demand for solitude.'⁴⁴⁸ The obscurity of a parapoetics is for the sake of an encounter, an encounter in which, through idiom, you are yourself, truly, singularly. It is on these terms alone that an encounter can take place.

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By the time Duchamp started naming his readymades, the transformation was complete: the conditions of the postmodern work of art were present, in accordance with an alternative system of knowledge to modernity. To be precise: it is the form of knowledge that remains once modernity has foundered, disappeared within itself, as an *all* that remains - those things which, once Europe woke from the dream of modernity were to be its new reality.

The lyricism that could still be practiced with the *Bicycle Wheel* had been all but exhausted by the time the readymades received their names. It is the act of naming which sends them through the processes of disruption that Duchamp's *Nude* was subject too, but in this instance the process is actively sought. The readymades are not named in accordance with their being, but in order to

⁴⁴⁸ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 1999), 57.

produce informational short-circuits. The name is a knowledge-process designed for disorientation and for the purpose of demonstrating that beyond the self-legitimization of the work of art, a) it has no meaning intrinsic to it; and b) there is potentially no meaning external to it either. It is a test of sorts: if the meaningless object can survive, then it does so only within an overall meaninglessness.

If we ask of the names of the readymades, ‘What does a proper name *mean to say*?’ (the question is Adorno’s via Lyotard)⁴⁴⁹ we discover that we have entered into the postmodern condition of knowledge. Readymades are not their names and vice-versa. There is no way of knowing what a readymade’s name *means to say*. The process of naming is designed to entirely subvert such an investigation. The readymade has sabotaged the moulds of the tools of negative dialectics even before they are cast.

The ‘named’ readymade defies micrology; *Bicycle Wheel*, as the first readymade before its name, the first readymade before the self-legitimated category comes into existence, does not. It *can* be examined precisely because it is not named. As soon as it is named, it is lost. It is its existence between the name of ‘art’ (which does not contain the subcategory of the readymade, but which does contain painting) and the name of the ‘readymade’ (which may or may not be contained under the overall category of ‘art’) which means that it can be seen in the transitional state between them. It reveals the forces which enter it and those which it emits. Perhaps this is tantamount to saying that *Bicycle Wheel* achieves, in a modern sense, and following Lyotard, the presentation of the unrepresentable.

⁴⁴⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, “Discussions, or Phrasing ‘After Auschwitz’” trans. George Van Den Abbeele, in *The Lyotard Reader* ed. Andrew Benjamin (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1989), 362.

Bicycle Wheel should be seen as the only *proper* response to the question: ‘can one make works that are not works of art?’⁴⁵⁰ Lyricism, in the proper sense, in the sense of *what it means to say*, is annulled after this. Its echo is heard, but its purpose cannot be served.

⁴⁵⁰ Marcel Duchamp, “A l’Infinitif” in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 74.

Conclusion

In this study I hope to have demonstrated that it is possible to explain the emergence of the readymade and the decline of European avant-garde painting in the context of the fall of absolute metaphysical values. Lyricism has been the primary lens through which these processes are illuminated – I hope to have illustrated how the lyrical mode and its degeneration offers a conceptual framework through which the changing aesthetic and epistemological forms can be registered, and brought to an illuminating convergence.

High modernist painting exists within the marketplace but does not represent it – it succumbs to the market, is entangled in its forces, panders to it. Paintings still strive to fulfil a ritualistic, a transcendental function, but can only find further representation, further epistemic grounding beyond their aesthetic qualities through their abstracted existence as monetary value. As ‘money is the root form of representation in bourgeois society’⁴⁵¹ this is the ultimate immaterial value to which all products of human endeavour must conform. Painting cannot escape this process, even through its appeal to lyricism – the perceived last transcendental bastion of rational ethicality – which is itself undermined by the gradual epistemic deterioration of all metaphysical principles. Paintings are required to represent the world, but are in turn represented by money. Without further value structures, ordering principles and epistemologies to represent or be represented by, painting is left in the following predicament: it must attempt to represent the world shaped by the value structure of capitalism and itself be represented (valued) by those structures also. This amounts to the absolute commodification of painting. It, like all goods, becomes free-floating in

⁴⁵¹ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 10.

a capitalist process of exchange and the ability of painting to adequately represent the world whilst standing somehow both within and outside of it is brought into question.

Duchamp's readymades, by contrast I argue, do not simply operate within the market – they effectively represent its effect at the same time, and this is as a result of their form. The readymade is to capitalism what linear perspective and chiaroscuro were to Christianity.

Duchamp makes art with the market's palette, preserving a direct analogue between the form of the work and the epistemology by which it exists. Formally, the readymade is an essentially unabstracted representation of the system of knowledge, of value external to it. It is a reflective *image-ideal* – it is a mirror of the world. As a work of art, the readymade is cryptic, alienating, useless. But this is precisely the point – the readymade illustrates art's position in capitalism. It is art stripped of virtually everything that would make it art, that would lead us to call it art – art with too much *reality*, not enough artifice. In 1913 Duchamp poses the question to himself: 'can one make works which are not works of "art"?'⁴⁵² But the readymade *is* art – art of a new order. It is an art which links form and epistemology not by asserting the transcendental value of the work of art, but by employing the materialist principles of secularism, capitalism. It is art that pays heed to the world around it and reflects it. Duchamp's disillusionment with painting as a representative force prompts him to ask the question.

But this matter is complicated by a third term – there is still a metaphysical echo. There may even still be a lyrical murmur. A third ideological principle interjects: that which motivates the image-ideal itself – the desire to reflect the world back to itself, to provide an image by which its manifold forces and motions might be known. This is where metaphysics perseveres not as a discipline nor even as a practice, but as a neglected human necessity. Amongst this all-devouring materialism, this abundant baseness, a higher faculty ineluctably remains. As Duchamp has it: the

⁴⁵² Marcel Duchamp, "A l'Infinitif" in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 74.

beauty is in the grey matter.⁴⁵³ He desires to ‘put painting once again at the service of the mind.’⁴⁵⁴

By suggesting that we understand Duchamp’s work as an art of capitalism (perhaps even *the* art of capitalism) I do not mean that his is an art which necessarily endorses capitalism, but an art which remains true, in form, to the epistemology in which it is created – an art which effectively figures the relation of the human subject to capitalism. In this respect Duchamp’s art gives thought appropriate form, gives it a material expression built upon and intrinsically tied to the episteme of the time. An art of capitalism is not then defined necessarily by what it is, but borrowing the more appropriate method from negative theology, defined by what it is not. It is not an art with a religious centre point; not an art that can refer, through a valid and accepted theoretical basis to the transcendental; not an art with a clear ethical underpinning; not an art of metaphysics. But neither is an art of capitalism an art that promotes capitalism as such, which espouses and aestheticises its values. Similarly it is not like socialist art, nor is it like religious art, nor ‘primitive’ art. It is art stripped of its ritualistic function because the only rituals proper to fully matured capitalism are production and consumption. But this is an old tried and tested argument that I am reluctant to re-hash here. I also do not wish to rail against capitalism in order to promote an opposing principle – socialism, as T. J. Clark suggests, is now a failed experiment.⁴⁵⁵ It never had the epistemological power, the ethical and at the same time metaphysical universality to overcome capitalism.

⁴⁵³ Duchamp in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, trans. Ron Padgett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: DaCapo Press, 1987), 19.

⁴⁵⁴ Marcel Duchamp in Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 19.

⁴⁵⁵ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 8.

Socialism⁴⁵⁶ - theoretically the antidote to capitalism - is guilty of the same dependence upon economic quantities, on monetary exchange, upon the ultimate commodification of human existence as the thesis to which it is the anti-thesis. Socialism still appeals to those of us who desire a 'fairer' world, a more equal world, but relies upon the same epistemological grounding as the great institution of iniquity to which it is the response - capitalism. Neither socialism nor capitalism can provide the basis for any residual human value beyond the material well-being of the worker, and this depends entirely upon the worker's relation to work and pay. Life is divided into parts by industrial systems which take on a religious ineluctability. Marx in essence states that it is wrong to treat human beings as if they were machines, yet a mechanical epistemology must remain. It is the known, yet all too readily obviated, inherent value of human life and human well-being upon which Marx bases his critique, but it is this very value which is increasingly unsubstantiated not only in his writings, but in social practice also. If reason itself fails, then there remains no *reason* to uphold the value of human existence. Industrialisation along both capitalist and socialist lines demonstrates this fact, as even a cursory glance at the history of the twentieth-century will show. Significantly, however, Marx finds the initial justification for his opposition to the capitalist financial system in Shakespeare and in Goethe – in short, in verse.⁴⁵⁷ Marxism is therefore partly fuelled by nostalgia. It is in the quoted passages from these writers (poets) that he finds the most powerful indictment of money, manifested in both the form and the content of the expression. They embody *another* system of value, one that is anathema to the economisation of human experience and endeavour characteristic of capitalist societies. Simply, artistic expression as the receptacle of *true* human value is opposed to money:

money, as the existing and active concept of value, confounds and confuses all things, it is the general *confounding and confusing* of all things – the world upside-down – the confounding and confusing of all natural and human qualities... it makes contradictions embrace.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁶ Here I am making a distinction between socialism as an economic system and Marxism as a theoretical economic critique.

⁴⁵⁷ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, "The Power of Money" trans. Martin Mulligan (1959), accessed 1 August 2012,

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/power.htm>.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

For Marx, money as the ‘alienated *ability of mankind*’ opposes lyricism as inalienable, incontrovertible human value. Yet it is here that Duchamp’s art can be said to be an art of capitalism, an art that employs capitalism’s epistemology: he turns detritus into art, he weds contradictions, illustrates the ‘fraternisation of impossibilities’⁴⁵⁹ and in so doing demonstrates how all things conform to the principles of capitalist exchange. Duchamp demonstrates how all values are exposed to the process of mediation and exchange practiced by fully matured capitalism. He ‘pictorialises’ this process, makes concrete this effect.

We can follow T.J Clark, then, when he states that ‘socialism occupied the real ground on which modernity could be described and opposed; but its occupation was already seen at the time (on the whole, rightly) to be compromised – complicit with what it claimed to hate’.⁴⁶⁰ We can follow him even to his equation of socialism with modernism. In this we might also find the reasons for the demise of both: ‘maybe it is true that there could and can be no modernism without the practical possibility of an end to capitalism existing, in whatever monstrous or pitiful form.’⁴⁶¹ The readymade expresses this complicity and also enacts a deep exposition of the underlying principles of capitalist society. What Marx, artistic modernism and even Freud all have in common is an ability to diagnose capitalist society, the capitalist subject, to lay them bare, to strip them to their essentials. Within the realm of visual art the readymade serves this capacity in an unrivalled fashion.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 9.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

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An(-)art⁴⁶² of capitalism - as much as the art of the church, or of the French bourgeoisie – represents the external structure of the world of which it is a part as its own internal structure. There is no rigorous and coherent counter-ideological ground from which to produce an art that would oppose or even effectively critique capitalism, such is its omnipotence. The same is true of the art of the church from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, and it is only with Manet that we see the first definitive signs that this universality is disintegrating, or succumbing to the overwhelming pressures of the relativized (and here read secularised, rationalised, positivised) world. (Manet is also, of course, the artist of the mature bourgeoisie, the society painter, the *enfant terrible* turned benignly against the society that both seeks and enables his genius.) The absolute authority of the religious model (which contained, beneath its umbrella, the inchoate capitalist and scientific models which would subsequently entirely overthrow it) is gradually transformed into the absolute authority of the capitalist, legislative model. The major ethical implication of this, in polemically simplified terms, is that the epistemological and universal basis for the human soul is lost. The soul is something that capitalism, in its enlightened materiality, cannot provide for. The immaterial realm of capitalism is not ethical, nor metaphysical. It is fiscal, mathematical. And these disciplines can tell us nothing of how to treat one another, or how to regard ourselves – they have no moral component.

To speak seriously of the soul today is absurd. It is absurd in the same way that to make historical paintings with linear perspective and chiaroscuro is absurd. It is absurd because capitalism

⁴⁶² Duchamp describes himself as an ‘anartist,’ meaning ‘no artist at all,’ yet nevertheless remains an artist all the same. See Marcel Duchamp interviewed by Richard Hamilton and George Heard Hamilton, “Marcel Duchamp Speaks”, broadcast by the BBC in the series “Art, Anti-Art,” 1959, now available in MP3 format; and note 441 below.

provides no language, no system of signification by which such a conception and such practices are valorised or validated. Ultimately it is absurd in the same way that T.J. Clark finds lyricism ludicrous as he moves towards his conclusion in *Farewell to an Idea*, revealing a deep nostalgia for an art whose higher purpose could be clearly determined and, more significantly, legitimately *felt* and therefore somehow known:

Now I think I understand what I have been defending all along. It seems that I cannot quite abandon the equation of Art with lyric. Or rather – to shift from an expression of personal preference to a proposal about art history – I do not believe that *modernism* can ever quite escape from such an equation. By “lyric” I mean the illusion in an artwork of a singular voice or viewpoint, uninterrupted, absolute, laying claim to a world of its own. I mean those metaphors of agency, mastery, and self-centredness that enforce our acceptance of the work as the expression of a single subject. This impulse is ineradicable, alas, however hard one strand of modernism may have worked, time after time, to undo or make fun of it. Lyric cannot be expunged by modernism, only repressed.

Which is not to say that I have no sympathy with the wish to do the expunging. For lyric in our time is deeply ludicrous.⁴⁶³

And supplemented to this should be Adorno’s conception of the lyric – his socialist and idealist reworking of the principle into an expression which is, as I have stated before, ‘the voice of men between whom the barriers have fallen.’⁴⁶⁴ The lyricism which Braque, Kahnweiler and Soffici describe, which is lurking behind Gleizes and Metzinger’s treatise on cubism is this very lyricism – the antidote to unfeeling secular rationality, the last bastion of systematic ethicality in the work of art. But as Clark demonstrates, it is a bastion destined to fall, supported as it is, by nothing more than faithful individuals, by nostalgic and sentimental painters and poets.

Modernist painters knew the market was their element... but by and large they could never escape the notion that art would absolve or transfigure its circumstances, and find a way back to totality. Call it the Body, the Peasant, the People, the Economy, the Unconscious, the Party, the Plan. Call it Art itself. Even those moments of modernism that seem to me to have understood the implications of the new symbolic order (or lack of it) most unblinkingly... are torn between exhilaration and despair at the prospect.⁴⁶⁵

But if any artist truly acknowledged this lack and acted upon it, it was Duchamp. He seemed to recognize it more than any other but did not *paint* what he saw: he did not paint the new

⁴⁶³ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 401.

⁴⁶⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, “Lyric Poetry and Society”. *Telos* no.20 (1974), 71.

⁴⁶⁵ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 11-12.

symbolic order, but traced the implications of this reformed order to the very object of representation itself. He made artwork of the new order using the language of the new order. And what we are left with is the appearance of disorder and a language of which none of us appears to be a native speaker. It is in this sense and this sense alone that Duchamp can be said to be maintaining the classical relation between art and epistemology, through a linguistic form that *does* contain signs that bear consistent relations to reality. The language of Duchamp's art is the language of the (anthropocentric) world. The structure of Duchamp's art is the structure of the world and the artist is left simply as the broker between the realm of art and that of reality. In essence no distinction remains, yet one is inscribed in objects, often by contingency but always through the agency of the artist, through his choice. The disenchanted world is the fully material world, the positivistic world, the world in its absolute immanence. Human consciousness cannot be said to operate on this ground, and human moral questions cannot be solved upon it alone. The transcendental, the immaterial aspect of human life, that which has found its expression in art and through the structures of art is now turned on the world itself. The readymade solves both the problem of the crisis of representational forms and that of the disenchantment of the world. It enchants the world by investing mundane objects with the transcendental quality of the work of art, and solves the problem of a suitable representational form for the new symbolic order by essentially dissolving it – 'there is no solution because there isn't any problem.'⁴⁶⁶ There is no form of art for the new symbolic order – the order is its own art, the objects it produces are its greatest creation because it neither advocates nor relies upon any value or value system beyond the borders of its own absolute mathematical (calculated) materialism. Yet art, in service of human consciousness, in the service of human society, must remain. And so it does, debased, fallen, flawed and beautiful only as an ideal – an ideal which it once fulfilled but to which it will always be beholden, even as a distant memory, or through prophetic anticipation. The beauty is in the grey matter because it can no longer be substantiated nor expressed materially.

⁴⁶⁶ Marcel Duchamp, *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 6.

Even Duchamp cannot entirely relinquish his dependence on the lyrical model, somehow reworked, democratised, made libertarian: 'I believe that art is the only form of activity in which man shows himself to be a true individual.'⁴⁶⁷ But in Duchamp the social element of the lyric is extended to the viewer of the work of art – we all lay claim to our own world through the work of art, by our completion of it through personal interpretation. This profound decentralising of knowledge and of the disavowal of the artistic lyric self is also a form of dandyish nonchalance, of detached indifference, of the valueless (not worthless) self, the *man without qualities*.

But arguably the best response to the capitalistic free flux of signs is indifference. It is the natural response – a response in keeping with the conditions of the system. Money is indifferent. But, as Marx describes, under capitalist conditions, money is also the ultimate creative force:

If I long for a particular dish or want to take the mail-coach because I am not strong enough to go by foot, money fetches me the dish and the mail-coach: that is, it converts my wishes from something in the realm of imagination, translates them from their meditated, imagined or desired existence into their *sensuous, actual* existence – from imagination to life, from imagined being into real being. In effecting this mediation, [money] is the *truly creative* power.⁴⁶⁸

And so art, emerging from the legacy of High Christianity – the Christianity which had, until the industrial revolution, been responsible for the highest *material* achievements of humankind (Cathedrals, Fortresses, Frescoes, Crusades) – loses the grounding which ensured the immaterial part of it lived through the work. It is this great profound immateriality that Cézanne bluntly reinstates in his work through sheer force of will – through a painting that bludgeons the world into a suffocating aesthetic submission. It is this immaterial quality which is also known as lyricism, and which is by no means unique to painting. Lyricism develops into the theoretical

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁶⁸ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, "The Power of Money" trans. Martin Mulligan (1959), accessed 1 August 2012, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/power.htm>.

basis for an ethical purpose any work of art might serve,⁴⁶⁹ but even this is based upon the enlightenment belief that through rationality alone, humanity can define and maintain moral conduct. In the twentieth century this belief is put continuously and disastrously to the test. Lyricism, then, as an increasingly rational and secular derivative of an emotive and purposefully moral effect of religious art, arrives at a crisis point in the twentieth century. (Paul Celan's poetry perhaps above all else demonstrates this fact. Whilst the drive to lyricism remains, it cannot, however, be directed to and therefore legitimated by a valid theoretical, ethical, even metaphysical structure. A lyrical silence reigns – lyricism in hiatus.)⁴⁷⁰

From within capitalism, lyricism, like all else, must become a commodity - must be reified – and as such, its transcendental import is drastically undermined if not altogether annulled. Lyricism, in lieu of any theoretical structure which attributes meaning to its effect, must be bought and sold like anything else. The lyric poet produces lyric poetry to meet a human need which is perhaps no different to the need to eat, to sleep, and which can be refused according to purely economic factors. This is a microcosmic example of the disenchantment of the world. Capitalism and the positivistic sciences do not provide an accurate theoretical analogue to the world – they do not describe it according to its *Being*; rather these theoretical frameworks provide the absolute epistemological model in which all things can be brought into seemingly safe, illuminated conformity. Capitalism creates a world in which qualities can be exchanged for that which they are not. It perverts Being. This is one of Marx's fundamental criticisms. And this partial attitude of knowledge of the world equates to a parallel partiality of knowledge of oneself and of others.

⁴⁶⁹ This reading again follows Adorno's understanding of lyric poetry as presented in "Lyric Poetry and Society". *Telos* no. 20 (1974), 56-71.

⁴⁷⁰ See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford University Press: Stanford, California, 1999) for an analysis of Celan's work and the possibility and potential purposes of lyric expression post-Auschwitz.

Picasso, the 'superstar' artist of the twentieth century, produced an art that was exalted by capitalism. His was an art which both fuelled and fulfilled capitalism, an art whose monetary value far exceeded any *real* or ritual value. Art has not always been useless, and has often been more than a simple status symbol, a signifier of wealth and standing. Picasso produced art that could be sold on account of its virtuosity, its novelty – its newness; yet its obscurity was its greatest asset. It was at once elite, obtuse, cliquy, and exclusively trendy. Kahnweiler ensured this.

Duchamp's art, by contrast, becomes, in the years following 1912, increasingly un-marketable. It begins to dispense with the fallacious aura so desired by wealthy investors, to shrug off the casual elitism and the righteous pretension. His was an art made from the material, the detritus of capitalism, from nuts and bolts and metal plates, from bicycle wheels, from cheap art prints. It was an art which, by upholding something extrinsic to the work itself, by upholding a value outside of the work incarnate avoided - for a time at least - the all-consuming market. Duchamp's art offered capitalism's detritus back to it, rebranded, recycled; but capitalism - or collectors, rather - were not especially enticed: 'threats to monetary value are threats to signification in general.'⁴⁷¹ What Duchamp presented then, what he entirely obscurely and outright paradoxically represented, was the value of which art may be said to be the worldly incarnation and which cannot be commodified as such. In this respect there is a certain analogical truth to be found in the urinal 'rebranded' and offered to the art market as an impossible, un-saleable commodity. By selecting and producing things that could not enter into the art market, Duchamp finds an immanent equivalent to the intangible and therefore unquantifiable transcendental or lyrical value of the work of art. But in a further twist of fate, this very intangible quality seems lost to the work precisely because of its blunt and inexpressive materiality. Duchamp's answer is of course this: the beauty is in the grey matter. If we want to see the value in Duchamp's art, we have to

⁴⁷¹ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 10.

look beyond it. Or rather, close our eyes to it – its value, its beauty cannot be beheld, but must be thought, or imagined. Here we are presented with the inverse of Marx’s formulation of the creative function of money: in this instance the material object leads, in a retrograde fashion, to the immaterial realm of thought, of imagination. The reification points to ‘other regions’⁴⁷² – a new thought is created for an object.⁴⁷³

Duchamp’s art does not foresee the end of capitalism, nor appear to wish it outright. If art would uphold that aspect of humanity which counters death, pain, necessity, temporality, then Duchamp’s art is the only true art of its time. It has descended to the earth, to the materiality of all things. Art has been invested with the absolute materiality of our ‘lived’ lives. Consider the deceptively simple comment Duchamp allegedly made at the 1912 Salon de Locomotion Aérienne: ‘Painting is finished. Who can do better than this propeller?’⁴⁷⁴ This statement does not reflect simply on a propeller and on painting, but rather on the underlying forces and vales that sustain painting and sustain industry, technology. To reiterate Adorno: ‘it is in the unvarnished materialist motive only that morality survives.’⁴⁷⁵ If transcendental value echoes through Duchamp’s work it does so without a clear material referent. His work eschews transcendental signifiers, eschews transcendence in general by reflecting the world around it. It is an image ideal – a material monad.

If Duchamp’s art is in the service of the mind then it achieves this through its engagement with the thought of its time, with the epistemology of its moment. The world no longer needs paintings. The readymade is art and the transcendence that art once symbolized is now only a matter of linguistic tricks, of the shifting of interrelating, codified systems of meaning which,

⁴⁷² Marcel Duchamp, “Apropos of Readymades” in *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 141.

⁴⁷³ Marcel Duchamp, “The Richard Mutt Case” in Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1969), 467.

⁴⁷⁴ Marcel Duchamp in Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), 137.

⁴⁷⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 365.

when rubbed against the grain, produce minute breakages, moments of hiatus in which the unknown becomes the site of an untraceable, un-locatable value; the site of contradiction or paradox in which we detect the now infinite possibilities of knowledge of the world; or (at the risk of adopting post-structuralist rhetoric) the site of madness. However, what Duchamp enacts in visual art are the questions that continental and particularly post-structuralist philosophy will go on to tussle with.⁴⁷⁶ They are questions that remain substantially unanswered.

This difficulty of categorization – the problem of the arbitrariness (and following T.J. Clark we could express this as the ultimate and total contingency of all things) of systems – is one of the fundamental issues raised by Duchamp's work. And his is an oeuvre which poses questions, raises issues. It is not an art of reassurance, and therefore of order; nor an art of disorder as such, but of provocation, of dissatisfaction. It is an art that has no answers. This is precisely why it remains 'unsurpassed,' why it cannot form part of a dialectic of progress which would consign it to the positive procession of human history - at least not yet. It *will* however, be surpassed and the questions it poses will become largely irrelevant. But for now, Duchamp's work remains one of the most lucid mirrors to our time. His work is the ruination of painting, or, more precisely, the ruins of painting. The great European, Christian edifice has crumbled. The language is dead, almost. And in its place we have a tangled array of barely translatable idioms that revolve around some supposed great 'ineffable.' As before, this unsayable and therefore unknowable (or perhaps simply inexpressible will suffice) quality which was once safeguarded by metaphysics - by all forms of 'transcendental' activity – is ushered to the borders of knowledge, to the fringes of enlightenment categorization and economic quantification. The Babelic overtones of this account do not go unrecognized; but the parallels are illustrative, if not entirely revelatory: in both instances a central, absolute principle is devolved into a myriad of relative components, each as

⁴⁷⁶ Similarly, in their own age, the linguistic strategies of the readymades can be seen as a possible non-sense to the logical sense of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) and also as potential examples of what can be *shown* but not *said* according to the scheme this work sets out.

much leading away from the centre as back to it. Such dispersion of course marks the ultimate collapse of the centric principle – classical unity has gone super-nova.

The collapse of the classical language of painting is therefore to be understood as a representation – paintings are *always* images of something - of the wider collapse of the epistemological structure to which the language of painting is itself a pictorial equivalent. This is where Duchamp's art, and specifically the readymade, enter the equation, and where the most pertinent question should be posed again: of what is the readymade a 'pictorial' equivalent? The readymade, I suggest, 'pictures' the world, it 'aestheticizes' our knowledge of it with a clarity that the art of Cézanne and of cubism could not achieve. The readymade's renunciation of formal unity, of aesthetic totality is the very feature which determines its ability to perform this 'picturing.' It rescinds the 'absolute' and in order to achieve this it renounces painting itself.

A further question, then, that the readymade poses is as follows: what are the values upon which its internal principles are based; how do we determine the value of a work of art that *looks* like a readymade does? The simple, endlessly reiterated, but to a great extent 'correct' answer to this question is this: we do not determine the value; or rather, we *alone* determine the value. Value, as it was once understood is now objectively indeterminate beyond a purely economic or sentimentally subjective framework.

Today visual artists make art according to a Duchampian model - albeit one filtered through other varied practitioners - but they do so in a mode first suggested by Duchamp.⁴⁷⁷ His art was

⁴⁷⁷ Thierry de Duve neatly summarizes the influence of the readymade thus: 'The case of the readymade was not difficult to spot. For more than thirty-five years [it is more like 60 now], what has been most significant in modern art has worked at the interpretation of the readymade's resonance, sometimes through compulsive repetition, sometimes through violent denial, but also sometimes through meaningful rethinking of it, and, in any case, always through a recognition (even if only an implicit one).

It is not possible to believe that all of this was nothing but an enormous blunder and still engage in art history. Nor can one continue to believe that a new culture could have sprung up there, fully constituted and fully armed, on a tabula rasa. Revolutions of all sorts have failed to keep their promises.

not modernist in the way that the art of his contemporaries was, nor was it commercial in accordance with the principles of the art market. He avoided these things and so did his art, because it was not addressed to them. Rather he concerned himself with the practice of making art in the face of its epistemological impossibility – a feeling which few artists felt then but one which has today become a material reality for many. What this amounts to is the impossibility of painting in its representative function. Painting stands for ‘art’. The history of European Christian art is painting, or is the story we write about painting – a story illuminated by the great works of art of the past. How do we write a urinal⁴⁷⁸ into such a narrative? This study hopes to have demonstrated the terms by which this ‘writing in’ can be achieved.

The model of art appropriate to fully mature capitalism is, I suggest, Duchamp’s an-art⁴⁷⁹ – an art stripped of its inheritance, of its signification; yet somehow remaining, and somehow still valuable. Art here is improbable, ridiculous. (It is blu-tack on walls and shit in cans and felt, fat and old Volkswagens and un-made beds and holes cut in buildings and flies being born and being killed - in all of these situations *art* is absent, but necessarily present.) It seems I have not managed to effectively sidestep the pitfalls, the rhetoric of continental philosophy. One reason for this is that such a process of thought is, to my mind, given form by Duchamp’s work. If cubism is art surviving as philosophy, then Duchamp’s work is philosophy surviving as art. And there is a difference. I hope at least to have demonstrated that.

In essence, what I am saying here is that Duchamp’s idiom has been adopted as the de facto mode of visual expression for ‘vanguard’ artists and this is testament to the extent to which his work ‘understands’ our world. If artists don’t make work that looks like his, they make work

The first theoretical task of the historian of contemporary art must be to restore the major interpretants of this history to their historical continuity.’ Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism*, trans. Dana Polan, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 188.

⁴⁷⁸ Here I am referring to Duchamp’s *Fountain*, submitted pseudonymously to the hanging committee of the Society of Independent Artists in New York in 1917.

⁴⁷⁹ See note 152, above.

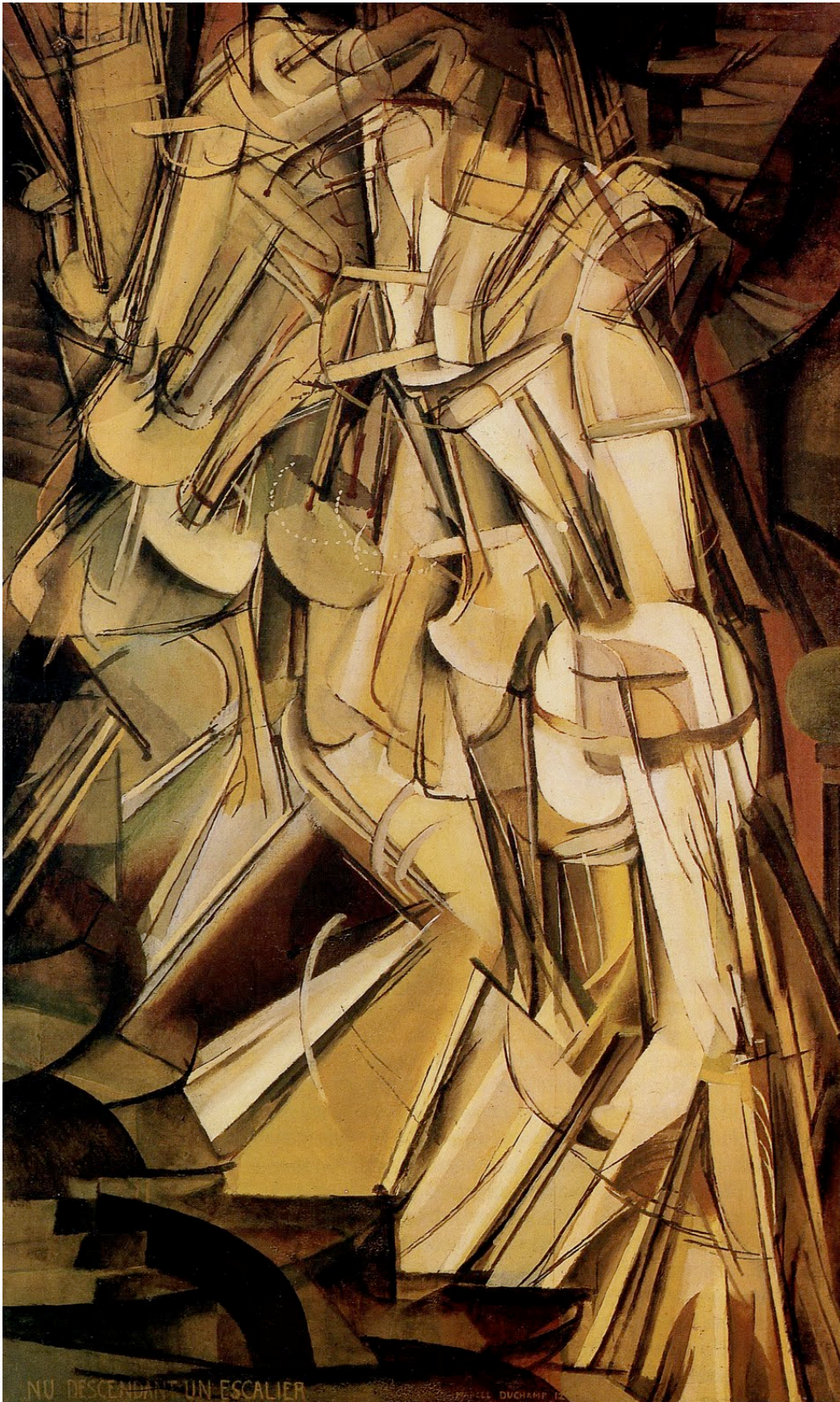
derived from his ideas concerning the nature of the work art. They work in a Duchampian mode - his idiom has become shared, and 'what, after all, is the ultimate test of a representational idiom...? It is the test of collectivity. That is to say, it is whether the idiom comes to be shared.'⁴⁸⁰

The cubist idiom did not survive the Second World War, and - it can be argued - was already dead by the end of the first. David Cottington, however, offers a less histrionic account of the demise of cubism, one that I am inclined to adopt as my own: 'Duchamp's departure [of Paris] for Munich [in June 1912] at once helped to set cubism as a movement in the past and to open it as a paradigm to the future.'⁴⁸¹ And Picasso, whilst justifying cubism's obscurity, gives inadvertent voice to the reason for its decline and for Duchamp's gradual, inexorable rise: 'art does not evolve by itself, the ideas of people change and with them their mode of expression.'⁴⁸² I acknowledge the deep irony of giving my penultimate word to Picasso. But within his claim resides a deeper irony: it is Picasso, as much through his work, as in this statement, who legitimates both Duchamp's rise and painting's concomitant fall.

⁴⁸⁰ T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, (London: Yale University Press, 1999), 223.

⁴⁸¹ David Cottington, *Cubism and its Histories*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 161.

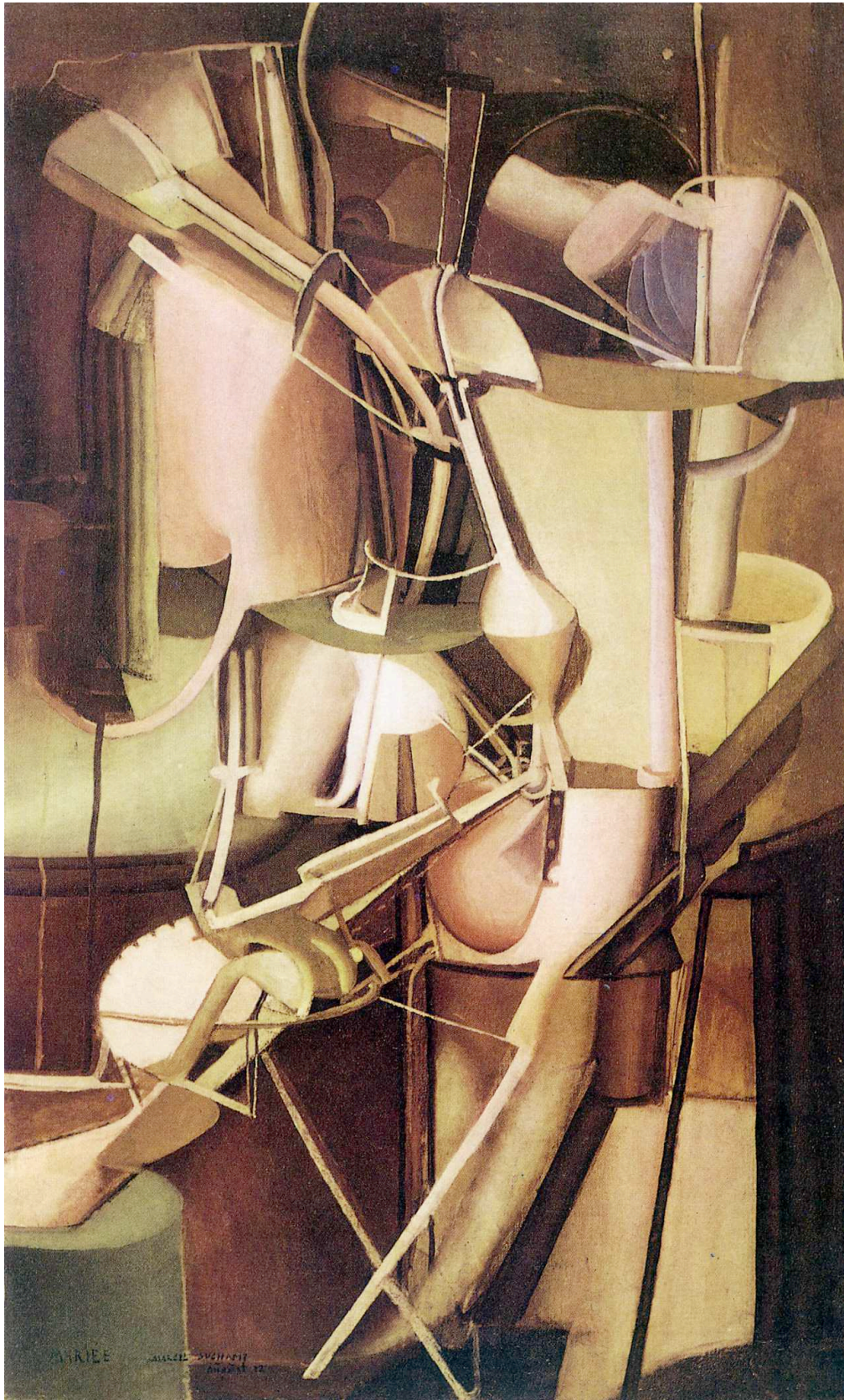
⁴⁸² Pablo Picasso, "Statement to Marius de Zayas" (1923) in Edward Fry, *Cubism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 166-67.



[Figure 29] Marcel Duchamp, *Nu descendant un escalier No.2* [*Nude Descending a Staircase No.2*] (1912). Oil on canvas, 146 x 89 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.



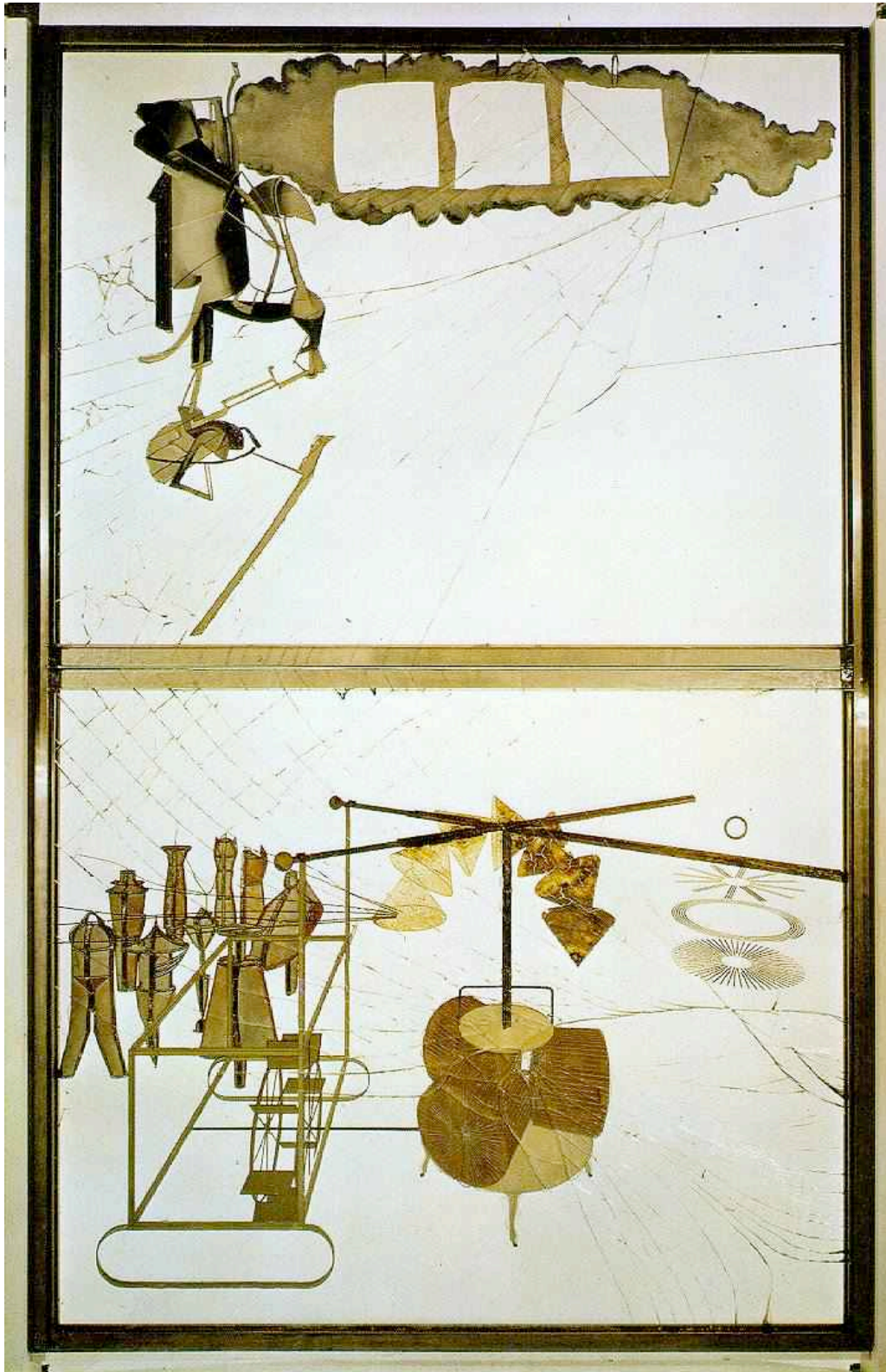
[Figure 30] Marcel Duchamp, *Le passage de la vierge à la mariée* [*The Passage from Virgin to Bride*] (1912). Oil on canvas, 40 x 25.7 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection .



[Figure 31] Marcel Duchamp, *Mariée [Bride]* (1912). Oil on canvas, 89.5 x 55 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.



[Figure 32] Marcel Duchamp, *Moulin à café* [*Coffee Mill*] (1911). Oil and pencil on board, 33 x 12.5 cm. Tate Modern, London.



[Figure 33] Marcel Duchamp, *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même / The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even [The Large Glass]* (1915-23) Oil, varnish, lead foil, lead wire and dust on glass panels (cracked), each mounted between two glass panels, with five glass strips, aluminium foil, and a wood and steel frame, 227.5 x 175.8 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art.



[Figure 34] Marcel Duchamp, *Bibloquet* (1910). Wooden ball (10.2 cm diameter) and stick (22.2 cm). Klaus-Peter Bergmann, courtesy Moeller Fine Art, Berlin.



[Figure 35] Marcel Duchamp, *A bruit secret* [*With Hidden Noise*] (1916). Assisted Ready-made: ball of twine between 2 brass plates, joined by 4 long screws, containing a small unknown object added by Walter Arensberg, 12.9 x 13 x 11.4 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection.



[Figure 36] Marcel Duchamp, *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1915). Original Lost; 2nd version obtained by Duchamp for Katherine S. Dreier, 1945; 3rd version Ulf Linde, Stockholm, 1963; 4th version [pictured] Galleria Schwarz, Milan, edition of 8 signed and numbered replicas, 1964. Readymade: wood and galvanised-iron snow shovel, height 121.3 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.



[Figure 37] Marcel Duchamp, *Roue de bicyclette* [*Bicycle Wheel*] (1913). Original lost, 2nd version: the artist, New York, 1916 (lost); 3rd version: Sidney Janis, New York, 1951; 4th version: Ulf Linde, Stockholm, 1961; 5th version: Richard Hamilton, London 1963; 6th version [pictured]: Galleria Schwarz, Milan edition of 8 signed and numbered replicas, 1964, 6/8. Bicycle wheel, 65 cm diameter mounted on painted wooden stool, 60 cm high. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Illustrations

Édouard Manet, *Olympia* (1863). Oil on Canvas, 130 x 190 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Édouard Manet, *Jésus insulté par les soldats* (1865). Oil on canvas, 191.5 x 148 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago.

Paul Cézanne, *Nature morte avec un Cupidon de plâtre* (c.1894). Oil on canvas, 70 x 57 cm. Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

Paul Cézanne, *Lac d'Annecy* (1896). Oil on canvas, 64 x 79 cm. National Gallery, London.

Paul Cézanne, *Les grandes arbres au Jas de Bouffan* (1885-1887). Oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm. Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

Paul Cézanne, *Les joueurs de carte* (1892-1893). Oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Paul Cézanne, *Les joueurs de carte* (1892-1895). Oil on canvas, 60 x 73 cm. Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

Paul Cézanne, *Le fumeur* (1890-92). Oil on canvas, 92.5 x 73.5 cm. Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

Édouard Manet, *Un bar aux Folies Bergère*, (1882). Oil on canvas, 96 x 130 cm. Courtauld Institute of Art, London.

Georges Braque, *Le viaduc à l'Estaque* (1908). Oil on canvas, 72.5 x 59 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Pablo Picasso, *Les trois femmes* (1907-1908). Oil on canvas, 200x 178 cm. Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

Georges Braque, *Les usines du Rio-Tinto à L'Estaque* (1910). Oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (1904-1906). Oil on Canvas, 66 x 81.5 cm. Private Collection, Switzerland.

Georges Braque, *Grand nu* (1907-1908). Oil on canvas, 140 x 100 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Pablo Picasso, *Nu* (1909). Oil on canvas, 100 x 81 cm. Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

Pablo Picasso, *Pains et compotier aux fruits sur une table* (1909). Oil on canvas, 164 x 132.5 cm. Kunstmuseum, Basel.

Pablo Picasso, *La femme aux poires* (1909). Oil on canvas, 92 x 71 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Pablo Picasso, *Le guitariste* (1911). Oil on canvas, 100 x 73 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Pablo Picasso, *Femme assise dans une fauteuil* (1910). Oil on canvas, 100 x 73 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Georges Braque, *Le guéridon* (1911). Oil on canvas, 116.5 x 81.5 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Georges Braque, *l'Homme à la guitare* (1914). Oil and sawdust on canvas, 130 x 73 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

Pablo Picasso, *Portrait de jeune fille* (1914). Oil on canvas, 130 x 97 cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris.

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