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2



MARCEL DUCHAMP

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LITERATURE AND ARTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

DUCHAMP, DADA COMPOSER and his Vast Influence on Post-World War II Avant-garde Music

Leigh Landy

In the early years of the twentieth century, two cities were known to be musical centers for new developments: Paris (Debussy, Stravinsky) and Vienna. When Schönberg moved to Berlin in the early 1920's, the latter center shifted its base. Zürich, the home of the *Cabaret Voltaire*, was never a musical center of much importance and therefore the link Dada and music is one that has been often ignored. Another reason for ignoring this combination stems from the fact that Tristan Tzara did not mention music once in his Dada manifestos, nor did any one composer ever really earn the title of Dada composer. In this article, a few introductory words will summarize Dada musical activities including those of the composers (or the lack thereof) most associated with Dada, Edgard Varèse and Erik Satie. Then the complete musical works of Marcel Duchamp will be presented. Finally several vectors will be sent from Duchamp's discoveries to later post-World War II musical developments. It will be shown that Dada finally penetrated the most abstract of all arts long after its death.

Dada's Music in Zürich and Berlin

Inspecting documents which include lists of programmes of Dada soirées, one sees that relatively little accent was given to composed – as opposed to an occasional improvised - music. In Zürich Hans Heussen presented 'antitunes', and equally unknown composers H. Samuel Sulzberger and Suzanne Perrottet are named. Surprisingly a couple of the young Schönberg's works were played there as well. If ever there was an undadaist personality, it was he! The musicologist/composer H.H. Stuckenschmidt was active in Berlin along with Jefin Golyscheff who produced 'anti-symphonies' (also known as 'circular musical guillotines'). For all it's worth, one of the lesser known members of the French group Les Six, Georges Auric, claimed to be the official liaison between his group and Dada. Little is known as to what this led to (Op de Coul:33). These names only appear sporadically in the consulted sources. The dadaist painter-poet Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes writes that he was the only composer at Voltaire as noone else was interested. He adds that Tzara was not really interested in music (he did contact Stravinsky once, though, for one of the Dada periodicals) and that André Breton detested the art. Therefore Ribemont-Dessaignes taught himself some rudimentaries of music and made some quasi-random studies hoping (in vain) to achieve within the Dada soirées that which Stravinsky experienced at his famous Sacre du Printemps première where more than a few tomatos were thrown.1

Before turning to Varèse and Satie, one Dada development should not be

neglected, namely that of sound poetry. Although the Dada poets were perhaps the very first to make phonetic poetry (Marinetti had been at it already for a syears), the sound texts of Hausmann and of course the various texts leading to the 'tour de force' *Sonate in Urlauten* (1922-1932) of Schwitters are of relevance the to their extremely musical character. The influence of these poets on post war for sound poets as well as composers of so-called music for extended vocal techniques is not to be underestimated.²

Dada and Music: in casu Satie and Varèse

To come quickly to the point, it is my opinion that neither composer was of fundamental interest to the Dada movement, nor did either profit from Dada to a great extent. Nevertheless, scholarship often has made other claims.³

- Varèse met Picabia in his early New York years and a friendship arose leading to Varèse's modest contributions to the Dada periodical 391 (No. 5, 1917) and to this signing one Dada treatise. Varèse claimed in 391 that the futurists (led by Russolo and his renowned Intonarumori machine instruments) failed in modernizing music by the simple replacement of notes with noises. Varèse dreamt of being able to profit by making music of organized sounds, which according to him projected much further in music's liberation. Nevertheless, this call to liberation was based on a very strict notion of the musical work, which is in sharp contrast to Dada ideology. In fact, Varèse was known to have disclaimed any affiliation with Dada shortly after the Picabia years. His 391 participation was, according to his wife, Louise, a simple sign of friendship, not of solidarity – Varèse later regretted having signed the treatise (Varèse:132).

– Satie is somewhat more complicated. He made several pieces which were Dada-oriented: *Vexations* (ca. 1893), *Parade* (1917), *Relâche/Entr' acte* (1924), and above all, *Musique d' ameublement* (1920). Some of the early Satie pieces from the turn of the century already demonstrated nihilistic tendencies. Anyone who has viewed his piano scores of this time knows the almost surrealist texts written within the score which have nothing to do with that which is played. Of course Satie forbids the player from announcing these texts to his public.

Vexations is a piece which consists of 52 beats of music to be repeated 840 times – performances tend to last about 18 hours. Whom he was provocating with this music is uncertain – the piece was destined to remain unplayed until Cage and Fluxus artists found the work to be an act of heroism. Minimal music composers write miniatures in comparison.

The period 1905-1908 was important for Satie as he entered the Paris Schola Cantorum (a Parisian conservatory) and studied traditional harmony and counterpoint in mid-career with the likes of d'Indy and Roussel. This training nearly ruined his creativity. Still, a few experimental pieces were written after this time, some of which are often associated with Dada.

The ballet, *Parade*, is one such example written in collaboration with Cocteau, Picasso and Massin. It is, despite its date, more surrealistic than dadaist in nature with its use of guns and typewriters as members of the symphonic ensemble.

The most dadaist tale to be told of Satie's collaborative ballet made with Picabia, Relâche, concerns its première in Paris. Due to 'circumstances' the première performance could not be held as scheduled, the large public that came to see the ballet was immediately disappointed – and shocked – when they saw the sign at the front door of the theatre, which read, Relâche (postponed). Its intermission film, Entr' acte, made together with René Clair and Picabia and (rarely) accompanied by a piano score made by Satie also known as Circus, stars its three makers and is often described as both dadaist and surrealist in nature. Nevertheless, the music, which is most often not played, is more for amusement and accentuation than Dada accompaniment.

Finally, *Musique d' ameublement* (Furniture Music) might be considered a pure work of dadaism. This work, orchestrated by Milhaud, was originally made to be performed (and not heard!) during concert intermissions. Later the idea was expanded into something which compares dangerously to what we know today as muzak or background music.

We urgently beg you not to attach any importance to it and to act during the intermission as if the music did not exist. [Furniture music] hopes to contribute to life the way a casual conversation does, or a picture in the gallery, or a chair in which one is not seated... We want to establish a music designed to satisfy 'useful' needs. Art has no part in such needs. Furniture music creates a vibration; it has no other goal; it fills the same role as light and heat – as *comfort* in every form (Nyman:31).

In a letter to Picasso, Satie described this music further as 'to be seen with the ears' (René Block in Catalogue 1980:9). It is most likely that only in this last work that either composer entered pure Dada territory.

The Complete Musical Works of the Composer, Marcel Duchamp

As little descriptive information has been given on the subject of Dada above, little attention will be given here to Duchamp, the plastic artist; it is assumed that the reader is acquainted with both. What is most likely less well-know is Duchamp's work as composer. His complete works consist of two compositions (of the same title!) and a very brief description for a sound sculpture all dated 1912/1913. Erratum Musical and the Musical Sculpture can be found in the famous collection of texts belonging to The Green Box and corresponding to his great masterwork, La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même. The work, La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même. Erratum Musical, can only be found in manuscript form (collections of Teeny Duchamp and John Cage).

To begin with the least important, his *Musical Sculpture* is one of his many fragmented ideas to be found in *The Bride's Veil* section of *The Green Box* and reads: 'Sounds lasting and leaving from different places and forming a sounding sculpture that lasts' (Sanouillet:31). Suffice it to say that sound sculptures rose to prominence as an autonomous medium in the 1960's. This concept was most likely never realized by Duchamp.

The *Errata Musicaux* both employ the technique of chance operations (randomness) similar to that of Tristan Tzara in his random poetry. The first and less shocking work (ill. 1) consists of having three people pull notes out of a hat and place them in order on music paper. Each note is sung slowly – the singers follow the same tempo. The text for these random harmonies is the dictionary definition of the verb, to print (*imprimer*): 'Faire une empreinte marquer des traits une figure sur une surface imprimer un sceau sur cire' (To make an imprint mark with lines a figure on a surface impress a seal on wax). The original version was sung by Duchamp along with his two sisters, Yvonne and Magdelaine. As no attention is paid to the singer's register (high or low), many notes turn up outside of the singer's potential. Attended performances and the only found recording all show that this piece allows for 'approximative' interpretation. The text is one of his many tongue twisters. It lasts about one minute.

Fitting well into Duchamp's remark, 'Anything is art, if the artist says it is' (Lippard 1971:139), his La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même. Erratum Musical is a work in which the performer is given a great deal of space for interpretation. As the manuscript was unavailable, the instructions given below have been drawn from recording notes from three separate sources and conversations with performers who have realized this work. This work bears the same name as Duchamp's Large Glass. It proposes an elaborate compositional process utilizing chance operations to create a new musical alphabet. The score is a description of the compositional process and tells how to realize it. Duchamp states that the composition may be performed on a player piano (a version is known made by Duchamp, himself), mechanical organ or any other new instruments for which the virtuoso intermediary is suppressed. The chosen instrument(s) can also be new and thus unidentifiable, yet resemble known instruments or, inversely, can be known instruments played in such a way that they can not be easily recognized. Once an instrument (or instruments) have been chosen, the compositional process may begin. The process requires the following: a large funnel, five open-connected (toy) train wagons, without locomotive, and numbered balls. There must be one numbered ball for each potential sound (timbre and/or pitch) the chosen instrument(s) is capable of producing (e.g., 88 pitches of the piano means that there must be 88 balls used).

Each one of the five wagons represents a predetermined time period, (chosen by the performer: not all periods have to be alike). The balls are all placed into a funnel and fall at random into the wagons (or next to them) which are pulled under the

funnel. Once the funnel is empty, and all the wagons have passed under, the balls are removed from each wagon in relation to the assigned time period of that wagon. Therefore numerous balls in the wagon = less proportioned space between notes within the time period than in the case of few balls. Duchamp assumes that each note per period will have the same length, but does not demand this. Dynamics are left to chance in each performance. The completion of the process yields one period with five sections. The process may be repeated if additional periods are desired up to any total time length. Duchamp adds ironically in the manuscript of his version for player piano that the piece is 'Unfinishable; for a designated musical instrument... (yields) a very useless performance in any case'.

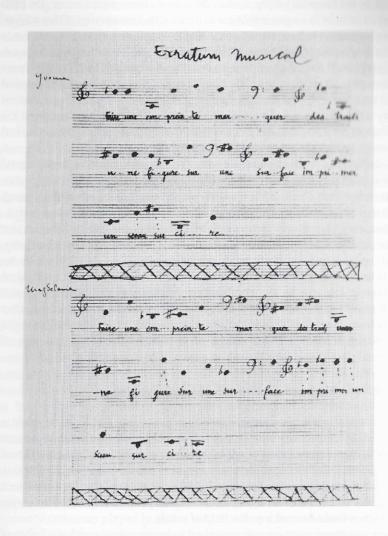
This challenging random piece allowing for research into new instrumental sounds has been performed more often than the vocal trio work of the same year. Versions, other than Duchamp's own for player piano, are known for a small chamber ensemble, utilizing computer generated sounds, using only glass percussive instruments, using rotary motors which lightly touch the strings of the interior of the piano and using home made instruments. These versions know no simularity. The Dada spirit is reached in this work as the local decisions are all made by the falling balls (the ones that miss the wagons are not played) and as musical expectation is lost due to the combination of the antivirtuosic instrumental approach as well as the lack of any form of development. The *Errata* works never really made an explosion, despite their true avant-garde character. Nevertheless they might be seen as a major source of inspriation for a huge amount of experimental post-World War II work as now will be discussed.

The True Dada Music, or Duchamp's Musical Heritage

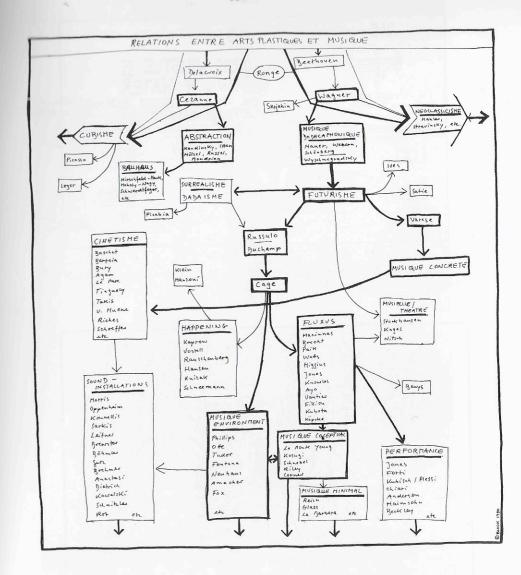
The international gallery owner and art historian, René Block, once made a network (ill. 2) representing how he saw influential growth patterns between art and music in this century as part of a catalogue for the show Für Augen und Ohren (the French version of the same show was called Écouter par les yeux). Although an entire article could be written concerning differences of opinion between Block and the author of this text, this figure can be used as point de départ in discussing how and when Dada entered into the field of music.

– There is without question only one place to begin, namely with the father of experimental music, John Cage. Cage was a long time friend of Duchamp's. He wrote more than one hommage to Duchamp and even included him as participant in a piece which allows the moves of a chess game to determine the sounds heard. He was also the most important figure in the realization of Dada ideas musically. A brief survey of Cage's techniques and philosophical views of new music will be presented as proof.

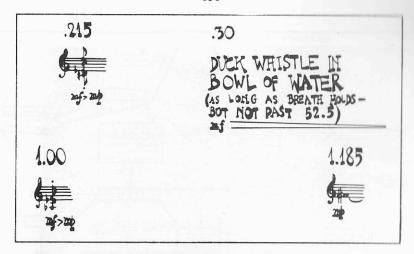
Early in the 1950's, Cage started introducing randomness into his compositions. In the beginning he speaks of the use of chance operations in determining musical



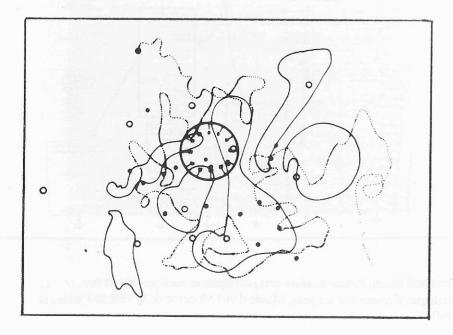
1) Marcel Duchamp, Excerpt from the score to his own version of *Erratum Musical*, 1913.



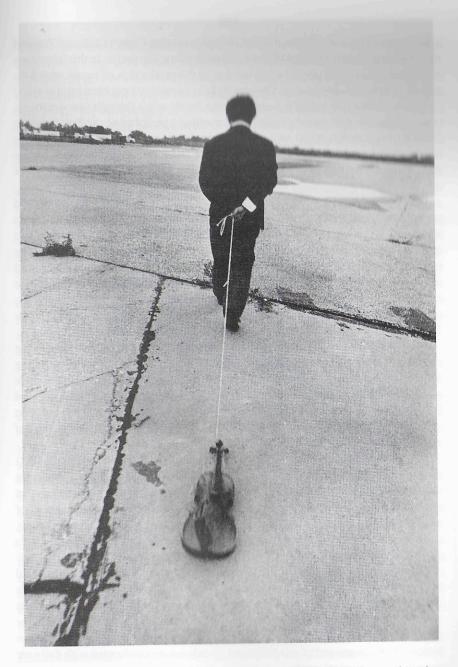
2) René Block, Relations entre arts plastiques et musique, exhibition catalogue, Écouter par les yeux. Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris, 1980.



3) John Cage, A close-up fragment from the score *Water Music* (Peters, NY 1952).



4) John Cage, *Cartridge Music*, superimposition using page 6 (Peters, NY 1960).



5) Nam June Paik performing *Violin with String (Violin to be dragged on the street)*, 1961-1975, 12th Annual New York Avant-garde Festival, Sept. 27, 1975. Photo: Peter Moore.

items notated on a score. Later, this field broadens during Cage's studies of Zen and Taoist theories to what he calls the use of indeterminacy in music. In this latter case the ego of the artist is intentionally cut out of the production of music which he considers to be too ego-centric. The possibilities of randomness entering a music at corpus: in determining what is notated, in the freedom left through new notations, in instrument choices, in the choice of order within a performance and so on, make Tzara's poetry and the Duchamp pieces seem simple exercises of pulling various rabbits out of a top hat. Granted the concept of indeterminacy goes much further than any Dada concept of chance, it is nevertheless founded in the experiments of the 1910's.

From the mid-1950's onward Cage fought for the liberation of all sounds and performance spaces. 'Each sound must be considered as essentially different from and independent of every other sound...I attempt to let sounds be themselves in a space of time...Separation in space is spoken of as facilitating independent action on the part of each performer's (Nyman:24). This freeing of all sounds (and silences!), realizing Varèse's dream, manifests itself in several ways. In the extremely controversial piece, 4'33 (1952), Cage calls for a pianist to open the cover of his instrument and to tacet (i.e., not play) for 4'33 or any other duration. The sounds that are heard in this silence form the performance.

Williams Mix (also from 1952), is a collage – another Dada genre – employing city sounds, country sounds, electronic sounds, newly produced sounds including the literature of music, wind produced sounds including songs, and small sounds requiring amplification to be heard with the others. A comparison to the potential Duchamp materials seems obvious. His Water Music of the same year reminds one of the Dada soirées, as he calls for a pianist to play a duck whistle into a bowl of water (ill. 3).

A combination of all of the above techniques can be found in Cage's 1960 composition *Cartridge Music* (ill. 4). Its score consists of transparent sheets on which are printed different shapes; these sheets are overlaid and readings taken that are 'usefull' in performance since they 'enable one to go about the business of making sounds'. Cage speaks of an example when, as part of his program of action, one player changes a volume control, lowering it to zero so that another performer's action to be made through the amplifier is rendered inaudible (Nyman:76).

Cage has once said, 'Music is all around us, if only we had ears. There would be no use of concert halls. If man could only learn to enjoy the sounds which envelope him...'. To illustrate this Cage sometimes takes his listeners to the most unusual places for concerts; furthermore in the case of his *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951) for 12 radios and 24 players (one per station and one per volume button) the huge amount of pre-packaged sounds we are confronted with daily are presented as a musical work.

Cage's *Theater Piece* of 1960 is the first of many experimental mixed-media pieces written by dozens of composers from that moment on. This work was one

of the main sources of inspiration leading both to the Fluxus as well as Happenings movements. Cage is of course considered as the father of both. As the lines of demarcation between the arts become less defined by Cage (as was also the case with Duchamp) and the use of musical spaces become redefined (where Duchamp once wrote that the spectator of art is more important than the artist in terms of art reception, Cage often has referred to the space as being one of the primary determinants of a piece's content), Cage in a sense profits by the main goals of the then highly aged dadaists.

The dadaists spent a good deal of time nihilizing the definition of the art work and destroying any sense of the function of art with their various treatises. Cage, too, redefined a work of art when he extracts any form of ego in his compositions, or, as in the case of his little-known so-called *Symphony*, he allows the listener to choose four locations randomly in Manhatten, four times of day and four lengths for his four movement work. The listeners create their own personal score. If they revisit the piece on a following day, it will sound completely different.

As for the function of music: if Cage assumes that sound is constantly available, one might conclude that for Cage the performance of a piece is no different than listening to any sounds anywhere at any time of day. Satie called for a *Musique d'ameublement*, Cage for a *Musique partout*.

Fluxus, Happenings and above all Nam June Paik

Where Cage can be seen to be the inheritor, Paik may be seen as the true executor of Dada in music. This is perhaps surprising to most readers due to the fact Nam June Paik is primarily known today as an experimental video artist. In fact the young Paik studied at conservatories in Seoul and in Cologne and has been involved in music during his entire career. After an early period from 1947-1953, Paik entered experimentalism with a composition entitled *Hommage à John Cage*. In 1964 his music became highly influenced by the cellist Charlotte Moorman who has performed in a great number of *TV-Cello* pieces (including the famous topless version which created a world-wide stir). His work includes what he calls 'antimusic' or 'action music' which is known to have called for throwing beans at the ceiling and into the audience, hiding his face behind a roll of paper which he unrolled endlessly slowly in a breathless silence – sniffing, pushing the paper into his eyes over and over again until it became wet with his tears; and so on. Paik is known to have slipped his 15" lasting *Simple* into a performance of other of his pieces so that this tape collage work isn't heard (Nyman in Hanhardt: 79-80).

He once said that he wanted to 'complement Dada with music' and particularly admired those Dada artists for whom 'humor was not an aim but a result' (ibid.: 82). In answer to a question whether he and the other Fluxus artistst considered themselves to be Neodadaists, he replied: 'Ich glaube, ich bin deshalb ein Künstler, weil ich abnormale Verhältnisse liebe. Künstler machen – im Gegensatz zur

Gesellschaft – das Abnormalste. Denken Sie an Duchamp, an Schwitters' (Catalogue 1977;51). In his 1963 'Exposition of Music-Electronic Television' in Wuppertal, one could speak of the largest collection of musical ready-mades until that time. He called it a situation wherein 'the sounds sit, the audience plays of attacks them' (Handhardt: 87).

It is no surprise that at one point in the 1960's Paik took his music outside with this *Moving Theater No. 1* (1962), where an unsuspecting audience comes across moving sounds unexpectedly in the street. He speaks of a 'surprise a priori' because almost all of the audience is uninvited, having no idea what it is, why it is, who is the composer, etc. (id. 89). He even wrote pieces for no audience, only a printed program (conceptual music?). Being of Oriental background, Zen is also of influence to Paik. It is left open to the reader as to whether Paik's work dated 1961-1975, *Violin with String* ('violin to be dragged on the street') is the acme of Dada music, Zen music or both (ill. 5). It is performed here at the Avant-Garde Festival at a small airport in New York City.

Paik, even more than Cage, employs the mass media as inspiration, an inevitable step for a video artist one would assume. He speaks of an *'Umwelt der vorproduzierten Geräusche'* (Catalogue 1977:30) which is used as source material for his work. There even exist Paiks works which carry the characteristic of the consumer society, 'Do It Yourself'.

Fluxus artists profited by Cage's and Paik's experiments in breaking down all art boundaries in their works. An example of their radicalism can be found in George Brecht's *Symphony No. 1* (1963) which reads: 'Through a hole', nothing more and nothing less. As many of the Happenings artists were trained musicians, dadaist sound ideas poures into their work in the 1960's.

Returning to Block's network a few closing Dada-inspired musicians should be mentioned. The film and theatrical composer of Dada is without question Mauricio Kagel whose work stemming from the 60's and early 70's combined Dada nihilism with German alienation (*Verfremdung*). Makers of sound installations are Duchamp influenced be it only for the 1912 sketch included in *The Green Box*. Music environment artists such as Max Neuhaus exploit new technology to expand upon Dada pioneering ideas. His concert in a swimming pool (dry listeners above water hear nothing, under water listeners hear sounds based on their position) and his *Listen* series, including 'concerts' in places like the main printing press room of the *New York Times* or in the 4th sub-basement of The Niagara Falls Electricity Plant at which Neuhaus shouts, 'Listen!' and nothing else is done for a period of time, are examples of a broadening in scope in music-making and are dadaist in the sense of the use of new found objects and spaces.

A perfect example of ready-made music is the composition, *Presque rien no. 1* by Luc Ferrari (DGG records: 2543004), a late 1960's work consisting of a recording made one morning on a Yugoslavian beach. The lovely combination of sounds of insects, children, water, wind, traffic and singing fishermen constitutes the collage of sounds in this unedited work.

It seems correct to conclude that other than the 1913 Duchamp works and a slight Dadaist leaning of Satie, the true birth of Dada in music had to wait until the early 1950's at which point it grew quickly in amount and in breadth. In the 1980's there is a totally different sort of growth in new music, that of diversification and assimilation of available information. Apart from the world-wide Neoromanticism in all arts, music is still experiencing mild Dada-like experiments, be it that they are new easily molded into new forms in combination with other, non-Dadaist elements. In other words, Dada has departed and thus is here to stay.

Notes

- 1 Ribemont-Dessaignes decided at one point that his works were not of great value (a very un-dadaist judgement) and discarded his complete works.
- 2 Perhaps it is worthwhile mentioning here the famous Schwitters/van Doesburg Holland Dada soirées with musical accompaniment by Petra (Nelly) van Doesburg. See Op de Coul.
- 3 Arnaud writes that Satie was 'a fish in water' with the dadaists. Vivier writes that Varèse was 'the only musician of the Dada epoque'.
- 4 Duchamp was also known for his anti-Stravinsky jeu de mots, 'Il faut dire: la crasse du tympan, et non le sacre du printemps.' (Rrose Sélavy in Le coeur à barbe in Catalogue 1981: 227)
- 5 Cage citations usually know no unique source. He is a great story-teller and loves to quote himself.

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RÉFLEXIONS CRITIQUES/CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

Thierry de Duve: *Pikturaler Nominalismus. Marcel Duchamp. Die Malerei und die Moderne*. Aus dem Französischen von Urs-Beat Frei. Verlag Silke Schreiber, Berlin 1987, 268 S. (Die Originalausgabe erschien 1984 bei Les Editions de Minuit, Paris.)

Peter Gorsen

Der Autor, Professor für Kunstgeschichte und Kunsttheorie an der Universität von Ottawa, hat die angeschwollene Duchamp-Exegetik um eine weitere gewichtige Dechiffrierarbeit vermehrt. Gleich zu Beginn am belasteten 'Verhältnis der Psychoanalyse zur Kunst' anknüpfend, das den Ausgangspunt einer Fülle von Hypothesen bildet, wird gefragt, 'welchem der beiden Bereiche steht das Recht zu, den anderen zu interpretieren? Soll man, wie Freud selbst, 'Leonardo nach Freud' interpretieren oder umgekehrt, wie es Lyotard noch gemacht hat, 'Freud nach Cézanne'? Thierry de Duve hält diese Fragestellung für eine Sackgasse. Er selbst strebt weder eine angewandte Psychoanalyse noch eine psychoanalytische Ästhetik an, sondern trägt der Tatsache Rechnung, daß an keinem modernen Künstler und keinem Kunsttheoretiker der Moderne das Vorhandensein psychoanalytischer Grundtexte und Interpretationen (wie der 'Traumdeutung' Freuds) spurlos vorübergegangen ist, sondern diese in das Denken, Phantasieren, Rekonstruieren von post-freudischen Künstlern, Ästhetikern und Historikern (häufig unthematisiert und rein instrumentell) ebenso aufgenommen sind, wie Stoffe der Kunstgeschichte und Mythologie in die Argumentation Freuds. Von dieser epistemologischen Gemeinsamkeit sei auszugehen, wenn man einem Diskurs und einer Konfrontation der Freudschen Theorie mit der ihr 'zeitgenössischen Kunst' immer noch mit gemischten Gefühlen gegenübersteht. Die Verdächtigungen auf beiden Seiten müssen aufhören. Der Autor will freilich keine Fortsetzung des interdisziplinären Dilettantismus in der psychoanalytischen Kunstinterpretation, noch aber ermuntert er Künstler und Kunsthistoriker, sich einer ihnen fremden Interpretationsmethode zu bemächtigen oder wie meist in surrealistischer Kunst (respektive bei Dali und Ernst) eine Illustration der freudschen Doktrin vorzunehmen. Nicht das suspekte Verwischen der Grenzen zwischen Kunst(geschichte) und Psychoanalyse sei der Sinn seiner Untersuchung, sondern die Rekonstruktion zweier parallel verlaufender 'Geschichtlichkeiten', die ab einem bestimmten historischen Augenblick um die Jahrhundertwende jede für sich und auf ihre autonome Weise ein subjektives (nicht expliziertes, unbewußtes) Verhältnis zwischen Kunst und Psychoanalyse eingegangen sind. Es gehe darum, 'zwei scheinbar unvergleichbare Geschichtlichkeiten miteinander in Beziehung zu setzen: einerseits die Kunstgeschichte', die mit ihren Schlüsselwerken den