

# VISUEL ARKIVERING

## 13

### Another Use of Art

VA#13 deals with the artistic research of Thierry Geoffroy/COOLONEL, with historical elements central in the reception of modern art like embarrassment and deception, and, finally, with some differences between the results of art making and revolutionary destitution.

Visual Archiving #13 is in English

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KUNSTAKADEMIET, CHARLOTTENBORG  
KGS. NYTORV 1, KØBENHAVN

<b>VISUEL ARKIVERING 09</b>	<b>VISUEL ARKIVERING 10</b>	<b>VISUEL ARKIVERING 11</b>	<b>VISUEL ARKIVERING 12</b>
<p><b>Sakræt Arbejdsplads</b> Billedmateriale, arbejdssange, noter og formidlingsstof</p> <p>Udgivet i forbindelse med Billedkunstskolernes udstilling Afgang 2016, Charlottenborg Konsthall fra den 2. juli til den 7. august 2016</p> <p>KUNSTAKADEMENET, CHARLOTTENBORG KLS. MYSTERY L. KØBENHAVN</p>	<p><b>Release of the Seminar "Images and Research"</b></p> <p>Interviews from the Seminar about Visual Anthropology at Moesgaard Museum, Aarhus, November 17th and 18th, 2014. Organized by the Project "Camera as Cultural Critique" at the Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University, and the late Department of Art Theory and Communication at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts – Schools of Visual Art.</p> <p>The Seminar was presented in VISUEL Arkivering 09, November 2014</p> <p>KUNSTAKADEMENET, CHARLOTTENBORG KLS. MYSTERY L. KØBENHAVN</p>	<p><b>Silvia Federici</b></p> <p>On reproduction, intergenerational solidarity and the dancing body</p> <p>KUNSTAKADEMENET, CHARLOTTENBORG KLS. MYSTERY L. KØBENHAVN</p>	<p><b>VA#12 is dedicated to the philosophical work of Mario Perniola</b></p> <p>Mario Perniola died January 9th in Rome. In November 2015 we visited Colloquium on the occasion of his death at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Schools of Visual Art. Some of them is published here for the first time.</p> <p>VISUEL Arkiving #12 = Digital</p> <p>KUNSTAKADEMENET, CHARLOTTENBORG KLS. MYSTERY L. KØBENHAVN</p>
<b>VISUEL ARKIVERING 05</b>	<b>VISUEL ARKIVERING 06</b>	<b>VISUEL ARKIVERING 07</b>	<b>VISUEL ARKIVERING 08</b>
<p><b>Grænse gengen</b></p> <p>Udgivet i forbindelse med Rundgang 2014 af Billedkunstskolernes Afdeling for teori og formidling, Billedkunstskolernes udstilling finder sted 20.2. juni 2014.</p> <p>KUNSTAKADEMENET, CHARLOTTENBORG KLS. MYSTERY L. KØBENHAVN</p>	<p><b>Images and Research</b></p> <p>A Seminar in English about Visual Anthropology at Moesgaard Museum, Moesgård, Højbjerg, near Aarhus. November 17th and 18th, 2014. Monday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Tuesday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.</p> <p>Organized by the Project "Camera as Cultural Critique" at the Department of Anthropology, Aarhus University, and the late Department of Art Theory and Communication at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts – Schools of Visual Art</p> <p>ADMISSION FREE AND OPEN TO REGISTRATION NEEDED</p> <p>KUNSTAKADEMENET, CHARLOTTENBORG KLS. MYSTERY L. KØBENHAVN</p>	<p><b>Homo Sacer afsluttet og genåbnet.</b></p> <p>Livets instrumentalisering: offringsmulighed og offringsmulighed. Zoë, det reducerbare liv, er politisk i overvejelsen om et mentale forstand, mens dies ikke løbende har været det over et hundrede år. Det er dog zoë's transmogrifikation, at hører sig som erfaringer.</p> <p>Sympathie, livsonråder og litterære erfaringer.</p> <p>Tilbage i "Homo Sacer, kendi&amp;ly" på Moesgård. I Seren Mass' anledning af den danske oversættelse af Homo Sacer // Information, samt med et efterord fra Alain Renauts den "supreme meeting" hos Lyotard.</p> <p>KUNSTAKADEMENET, CHARLOTTENBORG KLS. MYSTERY L. KØBENHAVN</p>	<p><b>Destin og sprøjt.</b></p> <p>Stridighed mellem formantene.</p> <p>Diskussionerne mellem Julian Copeau, Eric Mottram og Jean-Luc Nancy om de politiske og sproglige former.</p> <p>Med Alain Renauts videnes vedvarende på den sidste vige weekend på Place de la République.</p> <p>Tilbage i "Homo Sacer, kendi&amp;ly" på Moesgård. I Seren Mass' anledning af den danske oversættelse af Homo Sacer // Information, samt med et efterord fra Alain Renauts den "supreme meeting" hos Lyotard.</p> <p>KUNSTAKADEMENET, CHARLOTTENBORG KLS. MYSTERY L. KØBENHAVN</p>
<b>VISUEL ARKIVERING 01</b>	<b>VISUEL ARKIVERING 02</b>	<b>VISUEL ARKIVERING 03</b>	<b>VISUEL ARKIVERING 04</b>
<p><b>Synspunkter og parametre</b></p> <p>Udgivet i forbindelse med Rundgang 2012 af Billedkunstskolernes Afdeling for teori og formidling, Billedkunstskolernes udstilling finder sted 22.24. juni 2012.</p> <p>KUNSTAKADEMENET, CHARLOTTENBORG KLS. MYSTERY L. KØBENHAVN</p>	<p><b>Dasha Waks</b></p> <p>Notes from Kibera</p> <p>An informal settlement on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya January 10th – February 26th 2010</p> <p>KUNSTAKADEMENET, CHARLOTTENBORG KLS. MYSTERY L. KØBENHAVN</p>	<p><b>Balkan Banana and Other Stories</b></p> <p>Narrated by some iconic portraits, from the exhibition, Parades, Balkan Banana and Metamorphoses, October 2013.</p> <p>Exhibition model et Rundgang 2013, June 21st – 23rd, Schools of Visual Art, Dep. of Art Theory and Communication, finder sted 21.23. juni 2013.</p> <p>KUNSTAKADEMENET, CHARLOTTENBORG KLS. MYSTERY L. KØBENHAVN</p>	<p><b>Til stranden</b></p> <p>Udgivet i forbindelse med Rundgang 2013 af Billedkunstskolernes Afdeling for teori og formidling, Billedkunstskolernes udstilling finder sted 21.23. juni 2013.</p> <p>KUNSTAKADEMENET, CHARLOTTENBORG KLS. MYSTERY L. KØBENHAVN</p>

## PRETEXT

*As part of the organizing team behind the seminar "Images and Research", I wanted to open up the field of visual anthropology and include examples from the body of work produced by the artist Thierry Geoffroy/COONEL, which goes beyond traditional ways of using photography, as visual expressions connecting to the field of anthropology. I also wanted to address some of Thierry Geoffroy/COONEL's avant-garde methods for turning photography into a tool for participation and intervention. I think that the transformation of the subject matter and the expansion of artistic scope in the work of Thierry Geoffroy/COONEL is pertinent to the discussion of several methodological problems in artistic research.*

*T. M.*



*La lorgnette du voyeur*, Goa, India, 1988 — “Kulturministeriets Fotografiske Bogpris 1995”, Published by Rhodos, Supported by The Danish Ministry of Culture.



*La ronde des femmes*, Goa, India, 1988 — “Kulturministeriets Fotografiske Bogpris 1995”, Published by Rhodos, Supported by The Danish Ministry of Culture.



*masse 1*, India, 1988 — “Kulturministeriets Fotografiske Bogpris 1995”, Published by Rhodos, Supported by The Danish Ministry of Culture.



*masse 2*, India, 1988 — “Kulturministeriets Fotografiske Bogpris 1995”, Published by Rhodos, Supported by The Danish Ministry of Culture.



*Le serpent des palissades*, Barcelona, 1987 — “Kulturministeriets Fotografiske Bogpris 1995”, Published by Rhodos, Supported by The Danish Ministry of Culture. Part of the BRANDS- Museum of Photography collection, in Odense Denmark.

## Beyond *Photographie d'auteur*

An artist's way of using photography and engaging in the fields of anthropology and sociology

Tijana Mišković

Thierry Geoffroy/COLONEL (b. 1961) started his art career as a photographer, but around the end of the 80s he stopped using the camera in a conventional *photographie d'auteur* manner. He did not want to be an *auteur* - the single artist controlling all aspects of the creative process and overall elements of production and following only his/her own individual styles.

When Thierry Geoffroy/COLONEL stopped seeing a printed photograph as an isolated final artwork, he introduced a line of new conceptual understanding of photography as a medium and as a social tool for observation, recording and analysis.

This shift in image-making practices expanded his approach to photography to also include aspects such as the organisation and circulation of photographs (connected to representation and distribution), the act of photographing (connected to staging and space), and sharing photographs (connected to contextualisation and community building).

We could therefore argue that Thierry Geoffroy/COLONEL has continued being a photographer, even though he has stopped taking pictures in a traditional manner. With his new ways of using photography, he was now engaging with other fields such as anthropology and sociology. His understanding of photography as a medium for artistic investigation and expression, is, in my opinion, contributing greatly to our understanding of the potential of contemporary art within a sociological and anthropological framework.

In the following text, through several examples of artworks and projects, I will illustrate three of the artist's different methods which I consider relevant for the context of visual anthropology.

**Artistic use of private amateur photography** —— To dive into photo albums, private collections and archives owned by others was a natural solution to the artist's decision not to produce new images himself. Projects such as "Territorial Landscape" and "Tourists in Thailand" illustrate well the artistic rethinking of classification, arrangement, authorship and presentation: all questions which can also be found in sociological and anthropological investigations.

"Territorial Landscape", from 1999, was an art project aiming to actualize archives and re-contextualize images from private photo albums belonging to immigrants (including refugees) with different cultural backgrounds, living in Denmark. The artist displayed two personal snapshots of immigrants, from the time when they were living in their home countries, next to two more recent photos of the same immigrants, when living in Denmark. The immigrants chose the photos they wished to include, and then the artist made a second choice, based on a conceptual and visual format: four pictures placed together in a cross line.

When presented together, the images from before and after a person started a new life in Denmark opened up comparative observations about the life the immigrants had before they became immigrants. Pictures became small windows into different cultural universes, and led to some revelations, such as the fact that many immigrants had better living standards and conditions for well-being in their home countries. The diversity of the content underlined clearly that immigrants are not one homogeneous group in society, but individuals with very diverse cultural backgrounds and personalities.

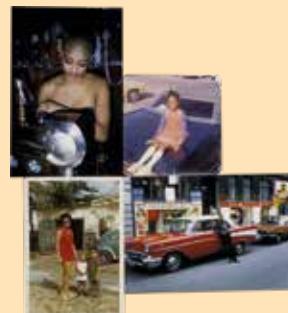
The choices and the combination of images also visualized the hopes, dreams and expectations that immigrants had when they left their previous lives behind and stepped into a new reality in Denmark. The changes and transformations they were hoping for were illustrated in a simple before-after display.

The fact that most of the immigrants had brought very few pictures with them from their home countries (often without the negatives) made each of the photographs a very precious object, with both

Bo Sunchat, born in Thailand in 1973, hairdresser and cook, came to Denmark in 1994. Part of *Territorial Landscape*, 1999.\*



Fabiana, born in St Kitts (Caribbean) in 1970, bartender, came to Denmark in 1992. Part of *Territorial Landscape*, 1999.\*



Sammy Byssung Hafi, born in Iraq in 1961, datalog, came to Denmark in 1991. Part of *Territorial Landscape*, 1999.\*



Installation view of *Territorial Landscape* at Traneudstilling Gentofte Hovedbibliotek, Denmark, exhibition *Mixed Culture*, 1999.



\*Exhibited at Nikolaj Kunsthall, Denmark in 1999; Traneudstilling Gentofte Hovedbibliotek, Denmark in 1999; Stadtische Galerie, Ravensburg, Germany in 2004.

sentimental and personal value as well as historical significance. (One of the contributors, who was an Iraqi refugee, fled the country and came to Denmark with only three photographs from Iraq.) “These photographs carry life” as the artist would express it when explaining their significance, which is exactly what makes this art project different from others that might seem similar, such as those produced for cultural purposes related to integration, as with those often seen in public spaces, libraries and culture houses.

During the project the participating immigrants gave their original photographs to the artist as a gift: a gesture which underlines the closeness and mutual understanding in the meeting between the artist and the participants. In this regard, it is also important to mention that the artist himself is an immigrant in Denmark, which gives him a predisposition to engage with the subject matter. There is, thus, a moment of recognition, creating an intimacy between the artist and the subject matter, seldom seen in conventional analytical research methods. Unconstrained by the requirement for objectivity, the artist can enter the private sphere of the group of people he wishes to learn more about. Without such boundaries, honest exchange, or even friendship, can develop on an individual level.

Another project which involved exchange, and where photographs were treated as visual data or documents for research, was done nine years earlier, in Bangkok.

**“Tourist in Thailand”** was a project from 1990, in which the artist studied tourism in Thailand through private amateur photography. He sat in front of 1-hour development photo service shops, where tourists used to come to have their vacation photos developed, stopping customers on their way out and asking to buy some of their photos.

As with the sociological approach, the artist was carrying out sampling, by choosing three different places in Bangkok to collect photos (all photo service shops, but each with a different client profile). He also asked the tourists to write a short bio-like text (their age, profession, and information about their time spent in Thailand) which was added to the image. In order to create diversity in his analyses, he used participants of different ages, professions (including a singer, teacher, surgeon, architect,

The artist Thierry Geoffroy/COLONEL collecting tourist photos in front of 1-hour development photo service shop in Thailand, Bangkok, 1990.



Yves Rouillon, 39 years old, French, Architect, a lot of architectural projects in Thailand. Part of *Tourist in Thailand*, 1990.



Max Anderson, 24 years old, English, diploma in geography, travelling for 18 months. Part of *Tourist in Thailand*, 1990.



Roger Creton, 38 years old, French, production agent, travelling in Thailand for 17 days on a group travel with his wife. Part of *Tourist in Thailand*, 1990.





Laurent Collin, 23 years old, American, singer and musician, travelling for one year. Part of *Tourist in Thailand*, 1990.



Avi Azar, Israelien, Aikido teacher, shopping in Thailand. Part of *Tourist in Thailand*, 1990.



Kevin Johnes, 30 years old, sailor in American Navy, on a week's leave in Thailand. Part of *Tourist in Thailand*, 1990.



*Exhibitionister* (Exhibitionists), Review of the exhibition *Tourist in Thailand* by Thierry Geoffroy/COONEL in the Danish newspaper Weekendavisen. (by Jan Kornum Larsen, Exhibitionist, Weekend avisen, 22/6/90 (R)).

electronic engineer, publicist, salesman, fashion model, tourist guide, computer engineer, soldier, nurse, bookkeeper, war photographer, waiter, and secretary, as well as some pensioners and students) and nationalities (English, French, Israeli, German, Swedish, etc). This brief information about where and when the material was acquired could be compared to a record in anthropological research, but instead of the text being merely an additional research note, the artist included it within the artwork itself.

The classification in both of the artworks mentioned above was constructed of several layers of filtration: the tourists had already made an editorial choice when deciding what to take pictures of, the immigrants chose which photographs they wanted to give to the artist, and only then did the artist make the final selection. The completed artworks were a photo series which, rather than creating an additional narration, showed an artistic (and sociological) interpretation of the subject matter, camera angles, and other technical and aesthetic solutions used in amateur photography.

When treating private images like data and using them in different new contexts, questions of ownership are inevitable. For example, some of the private tourist photos from the series "Tourist in Thailand", by becoming part of the artwork, also ended up in several newspapers, in connection with reviews of the exhibition. The circulation and transformation of private images is quite a complex process, especially when it comes to ethics. Some artists have turned it into their primary artistic preoccupation.

Christian Boltanski has, for example, been creating a number of artistic translations between private images from photo albums, archives, and newspapers. As part of his artistic praxis he changes their form, scale and context - sometimes moving them from the private archive to semi-public venues such as exhibitions in museums with regulated entrance, and then to free public space on the streets. Especially at a time when it is almost impossible to detach private photography from its usage in public social media, the internet in general, mobile phones etc. it is highly relevant to examine the ethical borders between the private and the public sphere. When do private images become public, and what role does an artist play in this image circulation and re-contextualisation? Thierry Geoffroy's artworks do not give a clear answer to this question, but based on the artist's

manifesto regarding exhibitionism (which I will come back to later in the text) we can perceive that he is genuinely interested in stimulating openness and mutual sharing, in order to go beyond the surface of prejudices and other protection mechanisms which are preventing us from connecting and uniting around common goals.

The photographs in Thierry Geoffroy's art projects are not scientific evidence, in the sense of direct information provision, but rather tools used partly for aesthetic investigation and partly for social interaction. Nevertheless, each of the above-mentioned art projects indirectly reveals information which could be calculated and organized in a systematic or statistical way for analytical purposes. For the artist, this additional layer of the mediation process would normally happen either when the public is interpreting the artworks, or when the art project is a specially designed collaboration with colleagues from scientific or academic fields. At the moment (2018), for example, the artist is unfolding a five-year exhibition at IKM - Oslo Museums about prejudice. The artwork exhibited is a growing sculptural art installation in the intercultural museum, with an interactive element allowing visitors to include their personal opinions about prejudices, through images and statements. By the end of the exhibition period, the ongoing expansion of the artwork will reach 50,000 evidence-like registrations of opinions about prejudice within a specific period in Oslo's history. Just as with documents, the artwork can then be turned into a useful archive for further study and analysis.

By trying to capture the view of the tourist and the immigrant, the artist essentially wishes to observe and understand a general construction of society. Both groups are also relevant for the field of visual anthropology. Even though the aspect of freedom is very different for a tourist moving from place to place for pleasure and for an immigrant, who does not have a place to return to, both groups represent the position of "the other" within society. They are both constructed social groups, governed by certain predefined conventions. These conventions, in fact, tell us just as much about the culture they originate from as the one they are visiting or living in now.

To focus his investigation on tourists and immigrants is also a natural choice for Thierry Geoffroy/COLONEL, since he has been travelling as a tourist around the world for many years after leaving his home country, France, and before settling in Denmark. (He even referred



Installation view of the artwork *The anatomy of prejudice* based on the art format Extracteur in a 5 year exhibition at IKM - Oslo Museums.

to himself as a *professional tourist* in several art projects, such as films developed for Danish television.) After settling in Copenhagen, his role changed from being a tourist to becoming an immigrant. Anthropologists, who travel to and stay in different countries as part of their work, have also to ask themselves about their different levels of personal attachment to the cultures they are studying. Often, when professional engagement overlaps with the personal, the "lens" for registering one's surroundings changes.

**The act of photographing as a *déclencheur* for social interaction** —— Turning away from *photographie d'auteur*, Thierry Geoffroy/COLONEL began steering his artistic focus towards the act of photographing, rather than the photograph itself. This shift has opened up the potential for a more performative understanding of photography and its sociological contextualization.

I chose two examples of artworks that illustrate how photographing as an act can be used to stage situations that can serve as a ramp and an impetus for social research.

**“Self-measurement of Danishness”** from 2000 is an art project where Thierry Geoffroy/COLONEL stopped passers-by in Copenhagen to ask them to assess, as a percentage, how much they feel Danish. After a filmed interview, their answers were written on pieces of paper and they each had their portrait taken in a street photo booth, holding up the percentage statement in front of them.

There is a scientific absurdity, of course, in the artistic measurement of Danishness, which might remind us of Marcel Duchamp’s “3 stoppages étalon” from 1913, in which he experiments with the measurement of chance in a poetic interpretation of the length of the meter stoppage. When it is asked by an artist, the question about Danishness automatically becomes poetic, and since it is about feelings rather than a scientific calculation of Danishness, the answers can be considered abstractly emotional, not data-like information. Nevertheless, the result does tell us about the characteristics of Danish society and the cultural tendencies at a specific moment in history; the self-understanding of people living in Denmark and their feeling of belonging to the country, nation or culture. As such, the artistic project, consisting of a street photo booth series of polaroid photographs, might be translatable to statistic and scientific materials for further analyses.

The project “I want to look like a Danish. I want to look like you” was produced around a temporary photo studio in Kongens Have - a “royal park” in Copenhagen. People were stopped in public space, as in the previous example, and for a moment taken out of their daily routines. Thierry Geoffroy/COLONEL told people that he wanted

*Self-measurement of Danishness*, photo series in frames, 2000, exhibited in Asbæk Gallery, 2007, part of HEART - Museum of Contemporary Art collection.



*Self-measurement of Danishness*, photo series in frames, 2000, exhibited in Asbæk Gallery, 2007, part of HEART - Museum of Contemporary Art collection.



Making of *Self-measurement of Danishness*, stills from the “The Immigrant”, produced for the national Danish television channel DR2, 2000.





Making of *I want to look like danish, I want to look like you*. Stills from the film *Capitain* produced for the national Danish television channel DR2 in 1999.

to look like a Dane, and that he needed to borrow their clothes in order to take a picture of himself as a Danish person, following their instructions. The juxtaposition of being a Dane and looking like one was communicated in a humorous manner, while people were stepping into a game-like situation, including elements such as an improvised dressing room (costumes) and the photo studio (stage), making the situation seem like a role-play in an improvised small-scale street theatre. In the end, the artist asked them to take a picture of him. Conceptually, the project refers both to photo studio traditions in visual anthropology and also to the Situationists'

*détournement* methods of disturbing the habits of public everyday life with surprising critical interventions.

Through this process of dressing up the artist, taking pictures of him and instructing him how to pose to look like them, the participants reflect on the question of Danishness, and also about the superficial nature of the concept. This time, instead of using a percentage figure to indicate their Danishness, they do it visually. With a *clin d'oeil* to August Sander's study of German society, Thierry Geoffroy reverses the roles of photographer and the motif, by giving the subject matter the possibility of influencing the final artwork. The artist is not telling us how a Danish person looks: the Danish citizens do so themselves.

Even though Thierry Geoffroy/COLONEL's spontaneously created photography settings might be staged, they are still able to provoke real engagement. His art projects are demonstrating that, when separated from their daily routines for a moment and taken by surprise, people tend to play along, open up, and share their honest, immediate responses to a given topic or situation.

When the participants are asked to evaluate subject matter related to themselves, from their subjective point of view, the artist calls it self-measurement. When presented collectively as one artwork, these individual subjective statements have the potential of becoming a more objective document. In the exhibition situation, the fragmented registrations interconnect visually and conceptually in such a way that they function simultaneously as both signifier and signified. This illustrates the results of the research process, and also the research process itself, just as a document provides facts and is itself a fact. What might seem a tautological relationship is actually the very premise of photography as a documentary tool for recording a virtual image, processing it and re-actualising it into a new image.

Technically, the staged photography actions often involve other photographic devices and approaches to "shooting", thus introducing new aesthetics. In the example of "Self-measurement of Danishness", instead of shooting the pictures himself, the artist is using the street photo booth machine. In "I want to look like a Danish. I want to look like you" he staged an improvised photo studio where passers-by "shot" the image with the artist's camera. In both cases, the visual characteristics of the final artworks were directly influenced by

technical decisions. The process and the aesthetics were in these artworks intertwined in such a way that the content was reflected in the form, and vice versa.

Thematically, both projects trigger questions about Danishness - a term which, in the years after, became a hot topic within discussions about integration and immigration policy in Denmark. In 2000, the artist further developed this terminological approach to Danish culture through words. He bought, for example, the internet domain [www.danskhed.dk](http://www.danskhed.dk). The act of buying the domain was an artwork in itself, conceptually questioning the idea of ownership. Can a foreign artist actually "own" Danishness? Ironically, since 2013, the artwork has itself been owned by a Danish museum, HEART - Museum of Contemporary Art.

#### Photography as tool for creating communities – Facebook before Facebook

— In 1989, Thierry Geoffroy/COONEL published a manifesto on moving exhibitions which included an element about social interaction and the creation of communities around artistic interventions in public or semi-public places. One of the categories in the manifesto was based on the "exhibitionistic" use of photography. For example, in order to take part in some of the social events, participants had to carry, visibly, a picture of themselves. The picture would be attached to their clothes. Wearing one's own picture visibly in a public sphere is connected to the concept of self-image and the need to define oneself through the gaze of others.

Aware of the social impact photography has in the public sphere in relation to a certain culture, a social group or a generation, Thierry Geoffroy/COONEL was, in his exhibitionist art projects, using photography to build social community strategies, similar to Facebook, but before the invention of Facebook. Even the terminology, including words like "friends", "statement-posts", "limited access", "password" and "wall" were already, in the late 80s, part of Thierry Geoffroy/COONEL's artistic vocabulary and manifesto.

Several exhibition projects showed that photography could be used to create communities of "friends" based on the sharing of private photos. For example, when the art project "Tourists in Thailand" was exhibited in Denmark, in order to see the exhibited tourist photos



Documentation photos of the entrance in the exhibition *What about Tourism?* in 1990, where the public, in order to see the exhibition about tourism, including a collection of private amateur photos, were asked to contribute self-critically to the theme by bringing their own private photos as a "password" for entering the exhibition.

the public had to bring their own private photos as a "password" for entering the exhibition place. The idea was to create self-criticism among the audience, as well as solidarity and common ground for mutual sharing. To agree on exhibiting one's own private photos in order to see other people's private photos is similar to the privacy policy on Facebook and other social media platforms, where only those who have a profile can see another user's profile.



The “wall” in the exhibition place, where the public put their private images and statements on display, 1990. Later, in 2011, the project was exhibited in Sprengel Museum as part of “I created facebook”, reflecting on photography as communication and exhibitionism and shown in the exhibition PHOTOGRAPHY CALLING! curated by Inka Schube.



Examples of contributions from different moving exhibitions. The so called “Moving exhibition de type exhibitioniste” was part of a MANIFESTE MOVING EXHIBITION, published in 1989 in the art magazine KATALOG - Museum BRANDTS in Odense, Denmark (translated from French by Niels Olaf Gudme).



Participants in “Moving exhibition” carrying images and text on their back.

As an artist and photographer who understands the potential of photography as a social tool, Thierry Geoffroy/COLONEL creates artworks based on an interest in investigating and discovering new ways of creating encounters between people. We could say that people are as much his artistic media as photography, and that his field of work is therefore just as much photographic as it is anthropological or sociological.

The circulation of the photos and text illustrated how statements can become mobile and contextualized, based on the place and the time they appear. This brings to mind “sharing” on Facebook, where image and text content can be moved from one context to another, through just one click.

**Conclusion** —— With this text, together with the presentation held during the seminar, I hope to underline that artists, just like anthropologists, do fieldwork, create and make use of archives and statistics, question people, and document and communicate their investigations. They do it in a more visual way, and often with a conceptual approach that goes beyond expected categories. Exactly for this reason, I believe that visual anthropologists can benefit from artists’ working methods. One essential characteristic of artistic praxis that differs from other professions could be the ability to work with subject matter without clearly predefining a goal for the final result. Reflecting on the process while it takes place means that the artwork is taking shape within its own process of creation. An artist does not have to follow the specific analytical methods outlined by a particular profession, or might combine several of these in order to discover unusual results. Even very personal, poetic and intuitive approaches to the analyses of a subject matter are welcome in the artistic way of working. And finally, the use of the image in an artistic praxis is connected to aesthetics in a much more complex manner than in most other professions. An image would, for an artist, not only be used for research. It would not only document or communicate a result of the research. For an artist, an image would be considered something in itself: an artwork, understood as the complete oeuvre - a synthesis of the motivation, the process, the methods, the form, and even life itself. Rather than a neutral document or evidence, the artwork is bona fides, reflecting the artist’s true motivations.

# Readymade and Fake

## The Richard Mutt Case Reitinerated

Jan Bäcklund

**The Readymade** —— When the American painter Douglas Gorsline bought a bottle dryer in 1964, he did as Robert Rauschenberg and Daniel Spoerri had done before, and wrote to Marcel Duchamp to hear if he might sign it for him. Duchamp answered: “In Milan I have just made a contract with Schwarz, authorizing him to make an edition of all my few readymades, including the *porte bouteille*. I have therefore pledged myself not to sign anymore readymades to protect this edition. But signature or no signature, your find has the same ‘metaphysical’ value as any other ready-made, [it] even has the advantage to have no commercial value.”<sup>1</sup> Even though this probably was not what Gorsline wanted to hear, the question for us must nevertheless be: what does this “metaphysical value” Duchamp is referring to consist of?

The most fascinating fact about *Fountain*, is the almost total absence of any critical reception from May 5th 1917 until it slowly started to reappear after the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> It is often

said – starting with Camfield in 1991 – that Stieglitz’s photograph was first reproduced in an article by Harriet and Sidney Janis in the Duchamp issue of *View* 1945,<sup>3</sup> but it had already been reproduced and discussed by Georges Hugnet in 1932 with the caption “« FONTAINE », PAR R. MUTT (MARCEL DUCHAMP), EXPOSÉE AU PREMIER SALON DES INDÉPENDANTS A NEW-YORK, 1917 (PHOTO STEIGLITZ).”<sup>4</sup> Four years after the appearance of the Duchamp issue of *View*, Sidney Janis asked Duchamp if he could buy a urinal for his Duchamp exhibition the next year, which he could, and he installed it, not 90 degrees tipped as in the Stieglitz photograph, but correctly, albeit rather close to the floor, “so that little boys could use it,” as Duchamp later commented on the installation. Three years later, at the exhibition “Dada, 1916–1923,” Sidney Janis conceived of an even more extravagant installation when he hung the item above a door

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langue française à Washington Square University a donné sa démission de membre du comité des Indépendants” and in number 8 (Zürich, February 1919), also on the back cover, one reads “Marcel Duchamp parti à Buenos-Ayres [sic] pour y organiser un service hygiénique de Pissotières. — (Rady-Made) [sic].”

3 Harriet and Sidney Janis, “Marcel Duchamp Anti-Artist,” in *View*, 5, 1 (1945): 18–19, 21–24 and 53–54. I have never seen this issue myself, but the text was reprinted, though without any illustrations, the same year in London in the journal *Horizon. A Review of Literature and Art* (October 1945): 257–268. “Moreover, *Fountain* was rarely mentioned in the 1920s and 1930s, and, to my knowledge, was not even reproduced again until the Duchamp issue of *View* in 1945—28 years after the Independents controversy!” William Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*: Aesthetic Object, Icon, or Anti-Art?,” in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry De Duve, 154–5 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

4 Georges Hugnet, “L’Esprit Dada dans la Peinture. I. – Zurich & New York,” in *Cahiers d’art*, 1–2 (1932): 62. As the caption suggests, from somewhere Hugnet had got the novel idea that it actually was exhibited for a short period of time: “Pour éprouver l’impartialité du jury des Indépendants, Duchamp, qui en faisait partie, avait envoyé sous un nom d’emprunt, cet urinoir, symbole pour lui de son dégoût de l’art et de son admiration spontanée pour les choses toutes faites (Ready Made) et parce que le jury retourna, au bout de quelques heures d’exposition, cet envoi, Duchamp donna sa démission.” (64).

1 Francis M. Naumann, *The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Gent: Ludion Press, 1999), 245.

2 “Regrettably, Picabia’s letters at the time contain no reference to *Fountain* [...] After May 1917, no references to *Fountain* have been found in the letters or records of anyone associated with the lively debate during April and early May that year – not even in the records of Arensberg, who supposedly purchased it.” William Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s ‘Fountain’. Its History and Aesthetics in the Context of 1917,” in *Marcel Duchamp*, eds. Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann, 85–86 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989). That Picabia, at least to a certain extent, was informed about the affair is clear from two rarely quoted notes in his journal 391. On the back cover of number 5 (New York, July 1917), under the heading “Marcel Duchamp” it reads: “Professeur de

frame with a mistletoe suspended from it, in line with how it was placed in one of Duchamp's studio photographs also reproduced in *View* magazine.<sup>5</sup>

From 1959 on, starting with Robert Lebel's monograph, the Stieglitz photograph starts to be reproduced on a regular basis. In 1963, I believe without asking Duchamp for permission, Ulf Linde bought a used urinal from a restaurant in Stockholm for the Duchamp exhibition at Galerie Burén in 1963, placed it in accordance with the Stieglitz photograph, but applied a printed signature on it. This urinal was exhibited in Milan the following year, and Duchamp not only confirmed the replica with his (and R. Mutt's) signature, but also paid tribute to the design by introducing the four flush holes from the Stockholm replica, not in the Stieglitz photograph, into the design of his and Arturo Schwarz's edition from 1964, effectively making it to an "object-collage". This is not an insignificant fact, as it demonstrates a certain reversal of the causal chain: making the Linde version as legitimate as the Stieglitz photograph for the new 'projection' and at the same time probably a hint from Duchamp: do we really see, when we look at art, or are we just another blind man filing past the labels?

If the happy finds of Sidney Janis at a Parisian flea market and Ulf Linde at a restaurant is in accordance with the idea of an 'unassisted readymade', playing such a decisive role in art theory, Schwarz's and Duchamp's edition is, on the contrary, from the beginning to the end, a product of perfectly traditional handicraft, and not even a replica, as the product differs considerably from the original urinal photographed by Stieglitz.

On December 1, 2004, the BBC and henceforth the international press, could proclaim *Fountain* one of the most influential art works of the century, according to a poll conducted among some 500 important actors in the art world. This is not in itself surprising, as any bibliometrical study would have yielded the same result, but it has not, however, dramatically altered the economical value of the edition of 1964, which would sell for something well off 1 million dollars today, still only a fraction of what one would expect for "the most influential piece of the 20th century". That is, of course, because "the most influential piece of the 20th century" is not a piece of porcelain signed by Marcel Duchamp, but because the "unassisted readymade" is the most influential concept of modern art.

The Schwarz edition is just a projection of this concept, but the most significant exploration of this idea was made the very same year by Andy Warhol with his exhibition of seven types of commercial cardboard boxes at the Stable Gallery. The production method of Warhol's box sculptures are strikingly similar to the one employed by Duchamp and Schwarz. Warhol's sculptures are not on cardboard, but on plywood, the motif is not printed, but silkscreened, is only reproduced on the five visible sides, and the objects are serially produced by craft in a small production studio (The Factory).

Even though not readymades at all, they nevertheless effectively evoke this distinctive 'readymade feeling', a certain conceptual evasiveness, but, at the same time, a precise aura of commodity, seriality, indifference, and banality. In my opinion, it is not only logical, but rather inevitable, that this piece – or rather: the *production method* of this piece – recently became, as it is usually phrased: "a disturbing case" of art forgery. It started when Pontus Hultén, then director for Moderna Museet in Stockholm, staged the first Warhol retrospective in Europe in 1968. Instead of shipping the original boxes to Stockholm, Warhol agreed that replica boxes were *not produced*, but *bought ready-made* from the Brillo factory. Thus, 500 offset-printed cardboard boxes, printed on all six sides, were exhibited in Stockholm. As with virtually every exhibited readymade in the history of art, these cardboard boxes was discarded after the exhibition, except for two copies, which were stored in Moderna Museet's archive as 'exhibition props'.

When Hultén organized the traveling exhibition *Territoire de l'Art*, in 1990, it included some 100 silkscreen wooden Brillo boxes, said to have been part of the Stockholm exhibition of 1968.<sup>6</sup> From the mid 1990s on, some of these boxes begun to appear on the art market, with a certificate from the Andy Warhol Authentication Board that these boxes were produced under Andy Warhol's supervision for the Stockholm exhibition in 1968 (as Brillo Box Stockholm Type), catching higher and higher prices, until, in 2007, it turned out that all these boxes were in fact produced by art students in Malmö in 1990.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> George Frei and Neil Prinz, *The Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné*. Vol. 2: Paintings and Sculpture 1964–1969, 78 (New York: Phaidon Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> The whole affair was exposed by three reporters Leo Lagercrantz, Micke Ölander, and Christian Holmén, from the Swedish evening paper

5 Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain," (1991): 156, figs. 4.2, 4.17–18.

The Hultén fakes were perfectly produced replicas of Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes, with the very same feeling of commodity, seriality, and banality, but were, technically and economically speaking, modern fakes. The true readymades of 1968 were, as Duchamp's original readymades from the beginning of the century, discarded as rubbish. This, I believe, is no coincidence, but intrinsically linked with the very concept of the readymade.<sup>8</sup>

Warhol's exhibition at Eleanor Ward's Stable Gallery in 1964 was undoubtedly his breakthrough as the most important post-war artist, but, later that year, and before he moved on to Leo Castelli Gallery, he participated in a now largely forgotten group exhibition organized by Ben Berillo, the *American Supermarket Exhibition*. Like most artists at the exhibition, Warhol participated with different types of works, some boxes, some silkscreens, and, intriguingly, signed Campbell's soup cans which, "to lend *authenticity* to the environment"<sup>9</sup> were sold for \$6 a piece (incidentally, the very same price which R. Mutt would pay for his piece). These signed soup cans were not exactly conceived of as "an ordinary object, elevated to the status of art, by the mere choosing of the artist,"<sup>10</sup> the very definition

*Expressen*, in a series of at least 16 articles running from the 30th May through to November 2007, and subsequently, but surprisingly *sotto voce*, to the world press.

8 As a curiosity, but again – I believe – not entirely coincidental, the first large buyer of these boxes from Pontus Hultén was Ronny Van de Velde, being the dominant dealer of Duchampiana today, who, in 1994, bought 40 boxes for \$240,000. The second buyer, Brian Balfour of Archeus gallery – today most known as the dealer of this century's most notorious forger Eric Hebborn – bought a lot of 22 boxes for £500,000 in 2004. Clemens Bomsdorf & Melanie Gerlis, "Authentication board says famous museum director 'falsified' their history," *The Art Newspaper*, 217 (October 2010): 1 and 4.

9 According to the press release. See Frei and Prinz, *The Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné*. Vol. 2, A56, my emphasis.

10 Neither this formulation, nor the label 'unassisted readymade,' stems from Duchamp himself; the first being André Breton's in his and Paul Éluard's *Dictionnaire Abrégé du Surrealisme*, 23 (Paris: Galerie des beaux-arts, 1938), the second was coined by Arturo Schwarz for cataloging and taxonomical purposes. Combined, they came to define the point of departure for Joseph Kosuth's "conceptual art."

of an "unassisted readymade," but were, nevertheless, still probably the first exhibited 'unassisted readymade' in the history of art since Duchamp's *Fountain*.<sup>11</sup>

The work? No known copy of such a signed soup can exist. It has never been on the market, nor has it been exhibited since. It is not included in the *catalogue raisonné* and it is entirely absent from the Warhol literature. The unassisted readymade, the very legacy of Duchamp, which Warhol had revitalized in a Pop Art context, does not exist.<sup>12</sup>

Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, to whom *Fountain* has recently been attributed, did collect objects, but no attempt seems to have been made to exhibit them, rather they seem to have functioned primarily within the same logic as her production of cloths, haircuts and other accessoires, to be fused into her performative or living practices of which only written, and maybe orally, transmitted recollections still exist.<sup>13</sup> Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven is perhaps the most prominent figure excelling in this dadaistic practice, which until recently didn't receive much attention, because it was not suitable

11 The exhibition of a bottle dryer (Man Ray's) at Galerie Charles Raton in 1936 was rather conceived of in the context of the surrealists' anthropological *objet trouvé*, which can't be separated from the context in which it is installed, similar to Duchamp's staging of surrealist exhibitions of the time.

12 One owner of a signed soup can, which wasn't bought at the *American Supermarket* exhibition, though, was told by Christie's that what he had was basically an *autograph*, but not an actual work of art. Kitty Eisele, "Warhol-Signed Soup Can: Art or Memento?", *NPR*, 9 (May 2006) <<http://www.npr.org/2006/05/09/5391527/warhol-signed-soup-can-art-or-memento>> (accessed 27 January 2014).

13 Julian Spalding, "How Duchamp stole the Urinal," *Scottish Review of Books* (November 4, 2014) and Julian Spalding and Glyn Thompson, "Did Marcel Duchamp steal Elsa's urinal?" *The Art Newspaper*, 262 (3 November 2014). The attribution stems ultimately from the authority on The Baroness, Irene Gammel, *Baroness Elsa. Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity. A Cultural Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), who didn't insist on it, but suggested the possibility on the basis of the strong iconographic link with her work, together with the facts that Elsa lived in Philadelphia at the time and Duchamp's letter to his sister.

for reproduction, and, if anything has characterized the reception of twentieth century art, it is that it has primarily been seen through reproductions.

It carried with it the same inherent invisibility and non-reproducibility as most dadaistic events. Another case in point would be Sophie Taeuber-Arp's puppet performances or Arthur Cravan's lecture in connection with the opening of The Indeps. Naturally, as von Freytag-Loringhoven's practice wasn't primarily directed toward any finalized art work, the objects have more the character of 'performance props.' The practice was first and foremost *allographic*, as Nelson Goodman once famously phrased it,<sup>14</sup> that is, either you would experience the work when it was performed, or you, or someone else, would have to re-enact it, in any appropriate or less appropriate form. Unlike any allographic work, with every *autographic* work follows a specific property, like a dark shadow: namely that it might-have-been-faked.<sup>15</sup>

The recent attribution of the autographic readymade sculpture, *Fountain*, to "Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven" expresses the same claim of authenticity as the signature "R. Mutt" or Hugnet's first published attribution of it to "Marcel Duchamp", notwithstanding the fact that the Baroness's as well as Duchamp's dealings with ready-mades typically bear the mark of indifference and being the arbitrary means for a specific end. For them, an "unassisted readymade" was always a performative act, and thus in every aspect an allographic work. But as the rising interest in collecting minimal, conceptual, and performance art has shown, any remnant, relic, and any document of an allographic work can be made autographic. But in so doing, it will be as a fake. My take is that Duchamp knew all this, but rather than producing a forgery of a work, any *specific* work, "The Richard Mutt Exhibition" is rather an experimental setting of the possibility of forging art as such, that is *generically*.

**The Richard Mutt Case Revisited** —— As Thierry De Duve noted many years ago, the most conspicuous feature of the photograph published

in *The Blind Man* no. 2 is its multiple inscriptions. It is signed five times. Two signings above the photograph: "Fountain by R. Mutt" and "Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz", one inscription below the photograph: "The Exhibit Refused by the Independents", and the two signatures in the photograph: "R. Mutt" written on the urinal and the conspicuously obtrusive entry card, written in Duchamp's hand, from which we can deduce the full name of the artist, the title and an address, which, according to Camfield, reads: "110 W. 88th Street", the address of Louise Norton.<sup>16</sup> I believe it can be proved that these five inscriptions were all added to produce a document forgery, a fake that happened not to turn out as any specific fake of, for instance, "an Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven", "an R. Mutt", or "a Michelangelo", but rather turned out to be a *generic fake*, that is a forged *concept of art*, somewhat in line with De Duve's reasoning around the generic and the specific in his *Kant after Duchamp*.<sup>17</sup>

To do so, I will itinerate through these five colophones with the ambition of showing that the entry card was never a *missive* attached to a submitted object, that the object was never *signed*, that the object was not *rejected*, that the image published was not a *photograph* by Alfred Stieglitz, and that the image published is not a *representation* of a work, and in so doing, presenting a coherent, non-contradictory, and simplistic interpretation of the events during April 1917, in such a way that any alternative interpretation will have to carry the burden of proof.

First, the entry card. Why would Stieglitz photograph an art object – as a "Buddha" or a "Madonna" – with its delivery card hanging so deliberately accidental and at the same time so carelessly precise? This is not how any professional photographer – except for the FBI – and definitely not Stieglitz, would have photographed any art work. It is as if it wants to prove the case that it was this very object that was delivered at the Grand Central Palace. It is furthermore cut in such a way that it can be read, but inadvertently, as if accidentally giving the observer a privileged glimpse of the evidence. The inclusion of the identification card in the photographic image can only be because we could otherwise be in doubt whether it was this very object that was delivered or not. As *Fountain* was not included in

<sup>14</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art. An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc, 1968).

<sup>15</sup> Michael Wreen, "Is, Madam? Nay, It Seems!", in *The Forger's Art. Forgery and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Denis Dutton, 188–224 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain," (1991): 140.

<sup>17</sup> Thierry De Duve, *Kant after Duchamp*, 145–198 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).



Detail of the "R. Mutt" signature. Silver-gelatin print, collection Jacqueline Matisse Monnier.

the first catalogue, it means that the object had not been registered before the deadline of March 28, and thus the artist would not have received any identification card, not by mail at least. Nor is it included in the supplement catalogue, printed after Duchamp's resignation from the hanging committee. Duchamp, on the other hand, could

of course acquire any number of blank identification cards (if there were such a thing), being chairman of the hanging committee at the time, and he could of course easily produce such a card of his own fancy if a statement should be made, which the photograph indeed suggests.

Secondly, the signature "R. Mutt" is certainly not written on the object, but on a photographic print or a negative. This becomes obvious when one compares the signature with the signatures on Sidney Janis's, Ulf Linde's, and Arturo Schwarz's replicas. On all of them we see that the writing follows the form of the object. In Stieglitz's photograph this is not the case, nor does the perspective of the letters correspond to the perspective of the object. Equally apparent is the discrepancy in scale between the letters and the object. The scale of the letters does, however, correspond perfectly to what we would expect from an inscription on a print or on a negative, that is, on a small flat surface. It is worth noting here that Stieglitz never mentions the signature or the name "R., or Richard, Mutt". The first documented mention of this name is Beatrice Wood's Saturday April 7 entry in her diary, "Discussion on 'Richard Mutt's' exhibition".<sup>18</sup> And she wrote "exhibition", not "rejection" or "voting", or some other word connoting any kind of controversy, as she narrates in her later, *much* later, recollections of the events. The second mention is in Duchamp's famous and oft-quoted letter to his sister Suzanne, dated Wednesday April 11, the day after the opening.<sup>19</sup> The third mention occurs in Charles Demuth's undated letter to the art reporter of *The New York Sun*, Henry McBride: "P.S. If you wish any more information please phone, Marcel Duchamp, 4225 Columbus, or, Richard Mutte [sic], 9255 Schuyler."<sup>20</sup> A misspelling that indicates that not even one of the initiated had himself seen the name in writing. On Saturday April 14, an anonymous article, "His Art Too Crude for Independents"

<sup>18</sup> Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain," (1989): 69.

<sup>19</sup> "A friend of mine, using a masculine pseudonym, Richard Mutt, sent a urinal in porcelain as a piece of sculpture." Francis M. Naumann, ed., "Affectueusement, Marcel: Ten Letters from Marcel Duchamp to Suzanne Duchamp and Jean Crotti," in *Archives of American Art*, 22, 4 (1982): 8. As with any document stemming from Duchamp, everything, including any dating, should be regarded with utmost caution.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Demuth to Henry McBride [c. April 10–14, 1917]. Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain," (1989): 72.

appeared in *The New York Herald*, probably instigated by Charles Demuth in the same way as he tried to persuade Henry McBride to write something for *The New York Sun*, now probably orally, as the reporter got the name “J. C. Mutt of Philadelphia.”<sup>21</sup> That is, every reference to a “Mutt” stems from the small group of conspirators around Duchamp. No other person seems to be aware of the name of this non-artist, not even Stieglitz, who supposedly photographed it, with its provocative signature and its hanging delivery card. Carl Van Vechten, in his letter to Stein, and who apparently saw the object at 291,<sup>22</sup> did, like Stieglitz, get the title – *Fountain* – right, but refers to its author as “R. J. Mutt”, suggesting that he did not see the signature, neither on the object, nor on “the wonderful photographs”, but instead had read the newspapers.<sup>23</sup>

Thirdly, the inscription below, “The exhibit refused by the Independents”, places the object in an artistic logic, which – as we all know – was of paramount importance for Duchamp. When his *Nude Descending a Staircase* was refused by the *Indépendants* in Paris during the spring 1912, to become the main attraction of Armory Show the year after, it was a duplication of the modality of the avant-garde since the rejection of Courbet at the World Exhibition in 1855 and the rejection of Manet’s *Déjeuner sur l’herbe* in 1863. And, as Thierry De Duve has demonstrated convincingly in beautifully algebraic fashion, this is the very logic the *Fountain* reproduces: for to be a *succès de scandale*, it has first to be rejected, for then to be exhibited in a new exhibition of the *refusées*.<sup>24</sup> Duchamp himself elaborated this theme in the aforementioned letter to his sister, saying that he wanted to make an “exhibition of the rejects from the Independents but that would have been a pleonasm and the urinal would be lonely”.<sup>25</sup> This inscription, together with the publication of “The Richard Mutt Case”

in the second issue of *The Blind Man* constitutes this exhibition of the rejects. This means that, already before anything had commenced, Duchamp knew that the urinal had to be refused. If not, the whole thing, including staging the fanzine *The Blind Man*, and even the very forming of a Society of Independent Artists, would be meaningless. No chances could be taken. No contingencies could be trusted. For to get the chance to print the crucial statement “The exhibit refused by the Independents”, it was obviously *imperative* that it had to be refused (and not sold or stolen or cracked or hidden for instance) – by the *independents* (and not by the general audience, or the press, or any group of established/conservative American artists). Much more than ‘unassisted’ or ‘mere choosing’, this logic is clearly formulated when Duchamp is asked specifically about the readymade by Francis Roberts: “[...] So that is the explanation, but when I did it, it was not at all intended to have an explanation. The iconoclastic part of it was much more important. Well, the Impressionists were iconoclasts for the Romantics and the Fauves were the same and again Cubism against Fauvism. So when I came along, my little idea, my iconoclastic gesture, was ready-made.”<sup>26</sup>

Now, within three days, about 2,500 works were delivered, of which the majority were of very low quality, and some pieces in a similar vein as the *Fountain*, for instance Raymond Duchamp-Villon’s piece, “a cheap electric bell, together with some length of wire, glued to a piece of common wall board.”<sup>27</sup> As we know, there was no jury, and this principle was heavily emphasized in the contemporary press as mirroring American political democracy, for which the United States had declared war against Germany April 4 that year. If Duchamp, or his “female friend”, truly had delivered this urinal, the chances that it could have failed to be rejected, were very large indeed, bordering the unavoidable. This means that Duchamp had to produce a rejection, without running the risk of an actual submission of the object, and this – I believe – explains the conflicting accounts of the events at Grand Central Palace. We all know of the incompatible narratives of what is supposed to have happened with

21 “His Art Too Crude for Independents,” *The New York Herald*, April 14, 1917, 6. Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain,” (1989): 68.

22 Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain,” (1989): 75.

23 Carl Van Vechten, *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, 1913–1914*, ed. Edward Burns, 59 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

24 Thierry De Duve, “Given, the Richard Mutt Case,” in *The Definitively Unfinished Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Thierry De Duve, 187–230 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

25 Naumann, ed., “Affectueusement, Marcel,” 8.

26 Francis Roberts, “I Propose to Strain the Laws of Physics,” in *Art News*, 67, 4 (1968): 47.

27 Rockwell Kent, *It’s Me O Lord. The Autobiography of Rockwell Kent* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1955). Quoted from Mann, *Marcel Duchamp: 1917*, 35–36.

this piece of hardware, so there is no need to recount them all here, just to remind us, as it seems to be forgotten: they are *few* and they are *late*, all of them, including Beatrice Wood's earliest manuscript drafts (but not her diary entries), are written years after the republication of the Stieglitz photograph and thus highly susceptible of muddling their accounts, with this purported historical document as their only source. It is the document (the Stieglitz photograph) that is the cause of the narratives; it is the forged documents that have produced the event (the Richard Mutt case), not the other way round. The 'event' has not precipitated any documents because it did not happen, exactly in the same way a forger instigates an event through a forged document, which purports to be issued from an author, time, or place it is not.

The earliest (published) account of how it was rejected came in 1955,<sup>28</sup> when Rockwell Kent published a rather undramatic narrative in his autobiography, that a urinal was submitted as a piece of sculpture but was promptly rejected by the "happy discovery of the technicality that the *entry card did not identify* the urinal's creator [...]." <sup>29</sup> Nothing about how the object disappeared. The year after, in 1956, Rudi Blech published a highly fictionalized account, which he probably had from Duchamp himself, of how Arensberg bought it and carried it out as "a marble Aphrodite" flanked by Duchamp and Man Ray.<sup>30</sup> This narrative is repeated by Duchamp in the interview with Pierre Cabanne, as customary, without the slightest attempt to cover up the obvious contradictions and outright lies. In 1957, Ira Glackens, the daughter of William Glackens, published her father's account of how the conflict was solved by his dropping of the *objet d'art* on the floor.<sup>31</sup>

But there is one relation from the time, which in itself reveals a lot more than the other, later published accounts. I am thinking about Katherine S. Dreier's letter to Duchamp of April 13, trying to talk him out of resigning from the board of directors of the Society of Independent Artists, which is worth quoting at some length:

Rumors of your resignation had reached me prior to your letter of April eleventh. As a director of the Society of Independent Artists, I must use my influence to see whether you cannot reconsider your resignation [...] As I was saying to Arensberg, I felt it was of much more vital importance to have you connected with our Society than to have the piece of plumbing which was surreptitiously stolen, remain. When I voted "No," I voted on the question of originality – I did not see anything pertaining to originality in it; that does not mean that if my attention had been drawn to what was original by those who could see it, that I could not also have seen it. To me, no other question came up: it was simply a question of whether a person has a right to buy a readymade object and show it with their name attached at an exhibition? Arensberg tells me that that was in accord with you[r] "Readymades," and I told him that was a new thought to me as the only "readymades" I saw were groups which were extremely original in their handling. I did not know that you had conceived of single objects. I felt that it was most unfortunate that a meeting was not called and the matter discussed and passed upon by the Board of Directors; but I do feel that you have sufficient supporters with you to make it a very decided question whether it is right for you to withdraw. I hope, therefore, that you will seriously reconsider it, so that at our next directors' meeting I may have the right to bring forth the refusal of the acceptance of your resignation.<sup>32</sup>

28 Henri-Pierre Roché, "Souvenirs sur Marcel Duchamp," *Nouvelle Revue Française*. Paris, 1, 6 (June 1953), 1133–1136, reprinted in Robert Lebel, *Sur Marcel Duchamp*, 79–87 (Paris - London: Trianon Press, 1959), does not specify how it was rejected.

29 Mann, *Marcel Duchamp*: 1917, 35–36 (my emphasis).

30 Rudi Blech, *Modern Art USA*, 79 (New York: A. Knopf, 1956). This is also the narrative repeated by Beatrice Woods in a series of highly fictionalized writings and rewritings starting in 1949, but published in 1977 and 1985. See William A. Camfield, *Marcel Duchamp: Fountain*, 25 ff. (Houston: The Menil Collection & Houston Fine Art Press, 1989).

31 Ira Glackens, *William Glackens and the Ashcan Group*, 188 (New York:

Grosset & Dunlop, 1957).

32 Letter from Katherine S. Dreier to Marcel Duchamp, *Archives of the Société Anonyme*, April 13, 1917, quoted from Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain," (1989): 73 supplemented with Jennifer R. Gross, "Believe Me, Faithfully Yours," in *The Société Anonyme. Modernism for America*, ed. Jennifer R. Gross, 123, 125 (New Haven: Yale University Press in Association with The Yale University Art Gallery, 2006).

This letter displays every mark of credibility in that the writer is honestly bewildered by the schemes surrounding her and to none of which she subscribes. When, for instance, Dreier writes that she voted “no”, it is clear that a vote did indeed take place sometime between April 6 and 9.<sup>33</sup> Even if Dreier seems to have a rather vague idea of the characteristics of this “piece of plumbing”, she demonstrates a surprisingly clear idea about this novel concept of an ‘unassisted readymade’, which she did not recognize in Duchamp’s practice. Someone has thus briefed her, not necessarily with details about the physical characteristics of the object, but definitively giving her an outline of the concept of “an ordinary object, pronounced art by the mere choosing of the artist.” This *someone* is obviously not to be found among the purported enemies of *Fountain*, but probably Arensberg, in his turn acting as an intermediary for Duchamp. But the most telling part of her letter to Duchamp is her unparalleled assertion that the piece was “surreptitiously stolen.”

Stolen? Who could have told Dreier that the object was stolen? And yes, the question is rhetorical: given that the object was soon to “reappear” at 291, the only feasible explanation is that Duchamp and his conspirators didn’t want to present the work, because it couldn’t be presented, given the unacceptable probability of an actual admission. Hence, taking the short time-span between the vote (April 6–9) and the opening of the exhibition into consideration, it becomes obvious that the object was already “stolen” at the time of the vote. Dreier voted on an object she never saw, and the letter does indeed make it clear that she hadn’t seen the piece in question. It is also evident from her letter to Duchamp that *no meeting* was called upon, as otherwise reported in the newspapers at the time, all of which, as we know today, were constantly fed by Duchamp & Co.’s interest – albeit rather unsuccessful – in making this rejection a public matter.<sup>34</sup> How did this

“voting” come about when there was no meeting and no object? How, and before what, did the other board members vote? Did someone give the other members a phone call, or meet with them individually or in small scattered groups during the hectic hanging of the enormous exhibition, described the matter, and asked for a vote without having to present the piece in question? For me, this – or a similar – scenario is definitively the most plausible. Still, with no meeting, there could be no fair calculation of votes (on an issue the Board had no authority), and any result of such a ‘vote’ would inevitably be rigged. Whatever the details, the conclusion must be that *Fountain* was never visible at Grand Central Palace during the time up to the opening of the exhibition, because it was never submitted.

This, at least, has the strength of explaining the otherwise inexplicable transition of the object from Grand Central Palace to Stieglitz’s gallery 291,<sup>35</sup> because it didn’t arrive from Grand Central Palace, but from Duchamp’s studio, or another suitable place, including any Mott Works retailer in New York City.

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want to express to you my profound admiration in the way you handled so important a matter as you did at the last meeting when it was at your suggestion that I made the motion, seconded by Mr. Covert, that we invite Marcel Duchamp to lecture one afternoon in our free lecture hall on his ‘Readymades’ and have Richard Mutt bring the discarded object and explain the theory of art and why it had a legitimate place in an Art Exhibit.” See Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain,” (1989): 73–4.

35 Who could we imagine being the person, arriving at the busy exhibition venue, shortly before, during or shortly after the opening, presenting himself or herself as Richard Mutt, or rather his agent, claiming the object, not registered, but stolen, smashed, hidden, sold and/or disappeared, back? Arensberg? No, then it would be at Philadelphia Museum of Art by now. Louise Norton, Beatrice Wood, Charles Demuth, John Covert, Henri-Pierre Roché or Duchamp? Definitively not, as any such a transition would have been noted and left traces in contemporary sources, and especially in Wood’s diary notes. “The recovery of *Fountain*,” Camfield speculates, “could have occurred as early as April 12 or 13, in as much as Beatrice Wood recorded in her diary for April 13: ‘See Stieglitz about ‘Fountain.’’ Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain,” (1989): 74. The point here is that speculations of the like are in vain: there was no submission, and thus no theft, transaction, vandalism or hiding away of any bathroom fixture.

33 According to Dieter Daniels, but without any reference, this vote took place on Saturday April 7, two days before the opening. Dieter Daniels, *Duchamp und die anderen. Der Modellfall einer künstlerischen Wirkungsgeschichte in der Moderne*, 178 (Cologne: DuMont). According to *New York Herald*, probably with Duchamp & Co. as sources, “a battle” took place until few hours before the opening in April 9. Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain,” (1989): 71. “His Art Too Crude for Independents,” *The New York Herald*, April 14, 1917, 6.

34 The first meeting of the Board of Directors after the events was in late April, after which Dreier writes to William Glackens (April 26, 1917): “I

But still, this fourth signature, “Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz” seems indisputable,<sup>36</sup> as Stieglitz confirms in letters to Georgia O’Keeffe and Henry McBride respectively that he had taken at least one picture of the *Fountain*. Yet, we really do not know what Stieglitz has photographed. Only three prints exist today, and all of them have resurfaced from Duchamp’s estate. The largest copy appeared in 1989 from the collection Jacqueline Matisse Monnier, a silver-gelatin print,  $9\frac{1}{4} \times 7$  in.<sup>37</sup> The second copy, slightly cropped at the bottom,  $7\frac{5}{16} \times 7$  in. (Philadelphia, Museum of Art, Arensberg Coll.) is the one reproduced in *The Blind Man*.<sup>38</sup> The third print, brutally cropped just above the signature, and thus only showing the soft form of the upper half, was discovered by Camfield in the late 1980s in The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, silver-gelatin print,  $4\frac{1}{4} \times 7$  in. “It is not known when, why, or by whom this photo was cropped”, Camfield writes, but the cropping clearly enhances the reference to a seated Buddha form.”<sup>39</sup>

No print and no negative are recorded in the Stieglitz estate.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the curator of photography at the Philadel-

phia Museum of Art, Martha Chahroudi, concludes that “it is on photographic stock consistent with the period but not really consistent with Stieglitz’ photographs.”<sup>41</sup> This fact, combined with the circumstance that the only surviving material evidence of this photograph stems from Duchamp, ought to cause some red lights to blink.

Van Vechten speaks about “some wonderful photographs” (*in plural*), which “look like anything from a Madonna to a Buddha”,<sup>42</sup> a characterization he evidently has from Stieglitz himself: “The ‘Urinal’ photograph is really quite a wonder – Everyone who has seen it thinks it is beautiful – And it’s true – it is. You’d like it. It has an oriental look about it – a cross between a Buddha and a Veiled Woman – And the Hartley background is great.”<sup>43</sup> Stieglitz is referring here to its formal qualities, the fine lines, and the play with shadows. Never does Stieglitz mention the aesthetically ugly elements: the blotted signature, the trashily attached entry card, or the compositionally disarranged wooden pedestal, which dominates the lower part of the photograph. I certainly have a hard time believing that Stieglitz saw what we see today, and the missing negatives and prints could indeed suggest that Stieglitz had photographed a urinal, *any* urinal; and what we are observing is a graphic work, produced with a similar or identical technique as the one applied by Duchamp in his “photo-graphic” works of his studio at 33 W. 67th St., New York.<sup>44</sup> It is not unlikely that the photographed urinal appearing on two of these “photo-graphic” works of Duchamp’s studio are inserted from another of Stieglitz’s

36 “Stieglitz’s letters and his photograph of Fountain are crucial documents – confirming the existence of Fountain [...].” William Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain,” (1989): 76.

37 First published by Ecke Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp: The Portable Museum. The Making of the Boîte-en-valise De ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy*, 205 (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989). See also Naumann, *Marcel Duchamp*, 73, ill. 3.16; Mann, *Marcel Duchamp: 1917*, 95, fig. 9.

38 See Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain,” (1991): 143, ill. 4.1. Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain,” (1989): 65, fig. 1.

39 Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain,” (1989): 79, fig. 7. “It is the same Stieglitz photograph but cropped so that a Madonna- or Buddha-like form is made more emphatic by elimination of the base.” Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain,” (1991): 142, ill. 4.5.

40 William Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain,” (1989): 84. “Curiously, just as Duchamp did not bother to save the original *Fountain*, Stieglitz did not save a print of this photograph, suggesting that he neither fully appreciated the significance that history would bestow on this event.” Sarah Greenough, *Alfred Stieglitz. The Key Set. The Alfred Stieglitz Collection of Photographs*, Volume One 1886–1922, XXXIII (Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, Washington & Harry N. Abrams, Inc Publishers, 2002).

41 Camfield, “Marcel Duchamp’s Fountain,” (1989): 92, n50.

42 Van Vechten, *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten, 1913–1914*: 59.

43 Stieglitz to O’Keeffe, April 23, 1917 (postmark), Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe Archive, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Quoted from Francis M. Naumann, *The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost. Essays on the Art, Life and Legacy of Marcel Duchamp*, 91 (New York, Readymade Press, 2012).

44 Duchamp’s photographic manipulations are well-documented, see for instance, Mark B. Pohlad, “Dodging History: Marcel Duchamp’s Photographic Manipulations,” *Photoresearcher* 8 (2005), pp. 23–26 and Bonk, *Marcel Duchamp*: p. 149 et passim.

photographs at 291, now without the conspicuously attached entry card.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, I do have my doubts if Stieglitz ever saw the photograph reproduced in *The Blind Man*. No reaction of his has come down to us, and the efficacy of the distribution of the presumably very limited number of copies would suggest that it didn't provoke reactions from anyone else either, probably explaining the remarkable lack of documents concerning *The Fountain* before the Second World War. Stieglitz died in July 1946, after suffering a serious heart attack in 1938, effectively disconnecting him from the art world, and he probably never saw any republication of *The Blind Man* photograph and hence never had the opportunity to answer our questions.

Finally, the signature above the photograph, "Fountain by R. Mutt", implies that this is a photograph representing a work, an object. The many attempts to identify this object have all failed. No urinal of the *Fountain* type seems to have existed, the closest being Trenton & Co.'s "Flatback 'Bedfordshire' Urinal with Lip."<sup>46</sup> Judging from the xylographed (?) image in the Trenton catalog, this type seems on the other hand identical with the urinal hanging in Duchamp's 33 W. 67th St. New York studio. Rhonda Roland Shearer has, in my opinion, convincingly argued that *The Blind Man* picture is made up from several photographs taken from different angles, as, by the way, are all photographs of Duchamp's early readymades. The argument is first and foremost visual, and to test it, one has to make the effort of comparing a urinal (any urinal) with the image in *The Blind Man*. Without noting it, Elaine Sturtevant came to illustrate this in her remaking of Duchamp's *Fountain* in 1974. Sturtevant approached her task – like a forger – setting herself in the artist's mind, and meticulously – very much like Duchamp – reproduced the method used by the copied work. As Sturtevant thought the *Fountain* was a bought object, she bought the closest possible and photographed it from the very same

angle as the lower part of the photograph. The distortion compared to the *Blind Man* image of the upper part is obvious. This is because the upper part of the *Blind Man* image is photographed from a slightly elevated angle; the lower part is photographed from the same height, but slightly off-center to the left.<sup>47</sup>

Incidentally, the heavily cropped version of the photograph is cropped precisely at the bottom, from where the incoherence of 'an upper' and 'a lower' part originates, separating the soft form of the porcelain rim on the upper part with the piece of plumbing with signature and entry card placed on a plinth at the lower. A compositional structure rather reminiscent of the domains of the 'Bride' and the 'Bachelors' in *The Large Glass*. The visual character of this heavily cropped photograph does indeed correspond with Stieglitz's description of the *Fountain* as "a veiled Madonna or Buddha". From a casual view it seems as if the Hartley painting continues on the lower part of the *Blind Man* image and the two larger photographs, but this is not really the case. Even though it is hard to see what is going on in Hartley's painting in the lower left part of the large photographic print, we would, comparing it with the painting itself, expect something else.<sup>48</sup>

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47     Taking a closer view at its depiction, we find that some manipulation must have taken place either on the object or more likely on the photograph. The upper part of the object shows a [longitudinal] frontal view, while the lower part is seen slightly in profile. Once this is discovered it seems quite obvious and we ask ourselves how we could not have noticed a grave "mistake" like this before. Three photographs are the only evidence we have of the urinal's existence, because the original object has been 'lost,' Anja Mohn, "The Artist as a Social Critique," *tout-fait*, Perpetual 2005. <<http://toutfait.com/the-artist-as-a-social-critique/>> (accessed January 25, 2018). My parenthesis.

48     To perform these comparisons, I would recommend having a good reproduction of Marsden Hartley's *The Warriors*, for instance, Pepe Karmel, "Marcel Duchamp, 1917," in *Modern Art and America. Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*, ed. Sarah Greenough, 227 (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, Washington - Bulfinch Press, 2000), of the large photograph, for instance in the above mentioned, Karmel, "Marcel Duchamp, 1917": 226 or in other recent monographs or exhibition catalogs of Duchamp, and, finally, a projection sketch like the one Camfield produced in 1987 (Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain," (1989): 77) before oneself.

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45     With the urinal in front-view in Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain," (1991): 138, ill. 4.2. With the urinal in back-view in Camfield, "Marcel Duchamp's Fountain," (1989): 71, fig. 3.

46     Rhonda Roland Shearer, "Why the Hatrack is and/or is not Readymade. With Interactive Software, Animations, and Videos for Readers to Explore," in *tout-fait* 1, 3 (2000), 8. <<http://toutfait.com/why-the-hatrack-is-andor-is-not-readymade-with-interactive-software-animations-and-videos-for-readers-to-explore/>> (accessed january 25 2018).

The parts of the painting under the handle and ‘behind’ the entry card do not really correspond with what we would expect from the painting. We would expect to see the front left leg and underside of the belly of the horse, as well as the top contour of the cloud in front of the left leg, instead we get a glimpse of a slightly bended form, flanked to the right by a similar, but shorter, stumped form, maybe resembling the horseman’s saddle and the horseman’s leg. But these should be hidden behind the handle if we were looking at a continuous painting.

Also, on the photographed object, we see anomalies in the critical area corresponding to the lower edge of the hard-cropped photograph. On this cropped copy, we see a sharp bend in the contour of the urinal towards the bottom left of the image. This sharp bend is not to be seen in the large print. Instead there is a strange line running up from the handle towards the point where a much softer bend is seen, and the line ascends above this bend, where it should be visible in the heavily cropped copy, but is not. Under the urinal, to the right of the handle, we see a sharp corner, which resembles a wooden panel supporting the urinal, but this wooden support is in a perspective totally inconsistent with the urinal.

But we do not necessarily have to fall back on tedious measuring and 3-dimensional modelling, the evidence is given by the conspirators themselves. In the same spread of *The Blind Man*, where we see the photograph on the left and the “Richard Mutt Case” article on the right, the statement of the image is contradicted by the statement of the text: “Without discussion this article disappeared and was never exhibited.” Not only is the “without discussion” qualification remarkable, but more revealing is it that the determiner (“this”), together with the image, contradict each other. Either the photograph is taken before its “disappearance”, which is impossible, since the session at 291 took place *after* the alleged “rejection”, or it did not disappear. The statement, with its pointing index finger (“this”) is a contradiction in terms. How could it have disappeared when photographed and reproduced now, *after* its disappearance? On the other hand, the correct phrasing: “This article never existed, and is, without discussion, exhibited in effigie,” gives us instead a precise characterization of forgery, which, I believe, is the performance giving *Fountain* its current status as the most important work of the 20th century.

**The Generic Fake** —— All this confusion – I believe – is because we have inherited André Breton’s definition of the readymade, as “an object elevated to the status of art by the mere choosing of the artist”. Judging from Duchamp’s early readymades, the objects themselves had no importance whatsoever. They were mere *apparatus* for the projection of immaterial images, cast shadows, and as such, means for an end. When they had fulfilled their purpose, they were discarded as rubbish. This applies for *Fountain* as well. The readymade, seen from this perspective – and, as we see from the case of Richard Mutt – is rather a genre of painting in an expanded field.

The readymade objects are never ‘autographic’ works, but mere *props*, that is stagings, methods, or means to *project* an image, probably analogous to how a four-dimensional space is projected onto a three-dimensional space. In attributing the readymade status as a work of art, André Breton, Arturo Schwarz, Joseph Kosuth, and almost the entire art world, has transformed an essentially allographic practice (performance) into an autographic work. The consequence has been that any such ‘autographic readymade’ has proven to be either absent and invisible, as is the case with the bottle dryer, the Brillo factory boxes exhibited in Stockholm, the signed Campbell’s soup cans, or virtually any other “unassisted readymade”, and can only be made visible or reappear in an act of reproduction or replication. Thus, any production of readymade, as *an attributable physical object*, is – *with necessity* – the production of a fake. It will always have the same degree of authenticity as the signing of a wall painting in a New York restaurant “as a readymade”.<sup>49</sup> Even though the action is authentic, in the same sense as Ben Berillo wanted to “lend authenticity” to his exhibition, the relation between the object and the signature, will always, *per definition*, be a forged relation. The metaphysical value of any apparatus, any “tube of paint”, is exactly – as Duchamp wrote to Gorsline – its impossibility as a commodity or collectible. If it is collected or signed, it would be as a fake, hence “the advantage to have no commercial value”. This – I believe – is the lesson to be learned by the Richard Mutt case.

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<sup>49</sup> Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, vol. II, 645, no. 341 (New York: Delano Greenidge Editions, 1997).

# Revolution solves art's political problem.

Reflections on the open and the dangerous.

Carsten Juhl

"Wir suchen den lieben Gott im Detail und schlagen ihn mit Hilfe unserer Ignoranz, wo wir ihn finden."

[We're looking for dear God in the details, and seeking to knock him out with the help of our ignorance, wherever we may find him.]

/ Max Adolf Warburg to his father, Aby Warburg, 1926.

We cannot, in advance, assign a higher priority to details than we can to theory. Nor can we claim that, when grappling with questions where there are no cogent analytical categories to resort to, we have to choose between description of detail and a theoretically facilitated synthesis. The considerations that follow are specifically aimed at redressing the "ignorance" that Warburg junior mentioned in his birthday greeting to his father.

Revolution and art do not belong to any of the analytical categories by means of which we can place a specific revolution or a specific work of art as confirmation of the particular category's tenability. Tenable in relation to what, for that matter? Nevertheless, revolution is valid within politics in the sense of power struggle, and artwork possesses a validity within culture in the sense of taste. Both can change the ways in which, respectively, power and taste become organized and exercised before the revolution or the artwork arrived.

But it is true enough that "Is this supposed to be art?" is something that anybody can ask of any work. And the answer will either issue from above "downward", that the work in question has been judged suitable for exhibition by a quality-certified censor committee or by

this or that quality-ensured head of a gallery, or it will be that the artist in question has been educated as a visual artist at a prestigious art school, or has completed an apprenticeship under another highly esteemed artist's, i.e. a "master's", guidance. Alongside an authoritarian reply like the foregoing one, there is the intrinsic answer issuing from the work itself and "outward": this is the conceptual or technical description, which takes the work's plastic dimensions into account – the composition of the motif in the stone block or on the picture, the presentation of the work, the exploration of intention and gesture, etc. However, any discussion of concept and execution already requires that the parties to the discussion are in agreement on a definition of art, i.e. that they have established a convention around a sensible line of inquiry that takes the place of the missing category.

There is also the spiritualistic or religious interpretation, which moves its way from the heavens or from the spirit and "downward", that is to say, which follows the mechanics of revelation; this is, however, a question of whether or not revelation is already a category, since, by definition, it is true and essential and therefore un-derived, un-simulated, etc. but instead simply reveals, enacting something that was previously absent or unclear. Whatever might grow forth or might obtain greater clarity by such means does not need to appear as the effect of an uncovering; it can be altogether industrious and probing, for example, a critical re-inscribing of art into metaphysics but with a "low" philosophical ambition (à la Mondrian), or can be heaven-defying and avant-garde, like an apologetic inscribing of art into metaphysics, which is religiously or spiritually inclined and hence "high" (à la Malevich).

Whereas metaphysics ensures a possibility of drawing near to certain problems surrounding creation and annihilation that bear on art, inasmuch as metaphysics constitutes the field where boundaries and boundaries' closing or opening can be discussed, it is the family, private property and the state that are utterly unconducive for any investigation into the question of art, which has to do with the work's plastic genesis. The three aforementioned categories, which have constituted the anthropological bearing elements in the establishment of power and sovereignty, to wit, *inheritance law*, *territorial control* and *the monopoly on violence*, form obviously strong categories in the institutionalization of the political as society, but they are utterly beyond investigations of aesthetic and ethical character, on which an understanding of art must build.

The problem will, therefore, always be that “social” or “political” art must be defined without inheritance law, territorial control and the monopoly on violence. For these three strong categories constitute, in turn, the foundations for, respectively, the accumulation of wealth, the nation and oppression, that is to say, for the ethically reprehensible consequences of the three aforementioned strong categories. Any art that aspires to address the social or the political must either affirm or disavow, must either praise or attack wealth, the nation and subjugation. And this is not an operation that bears on art’s plastic genesis, but rather one which, on the contrary, calls for an instrumentalisation, for an import from outside and “inward”, in order to direct attention to something that is not intrinsic to art, but rather constitutes its surroundings, context or – more relevant – problems of connotation.

As the reader will have understood, then, a spiritual as much as a political dimension are foreign bodies in relation to *the open* in art, to the work’s plastic genesis. And the two aforementioned dimensions’ categorial impact immediately raises the question of whether art can derive any joy from having to address the alienating effects of the adoration of the spirit or political propaganda, or whether these can be avoided. It is here that revolution comes to the rescue.

For a revolution to succeed, it has to be comprised of a chain of beneficial and independent details. Here, much like in art, lies revolution’s problem of autonomy: for in neither art nor in revolution can the ends *justify* the means, the detail. This would amount to spiritualizing revolution’s validity in relation to power, as though revolutionary acts were more inspired than other actions. And from art-generating actions we know that the successful work is based on exploration and trying things out, on technical mastery and ideas, not on spirit or religion.

The revolution’s details, however, are not always beyond reproach, for hasty decisions made in the heat of battle can contain errors. Military tribunals held on the barricade will, for example, often be sources of errors stemming from incomplete information, which can be blamed on informing. Informing grows less important as the numbers taking part increase. But when, say, 10% of the population are revolutionary and another 10% of the population are counterrevolutionary, while the rest are waiting to see what happens, the revolution will be hard-pressed. This is the situation in Egypt,

in Tunisia and in Syria today. The revolutions here have not spilled into revolutionary politics; on the contrary, politics are entirely in the hands of the counterrevolution, no matter whether it’s the army, the mosque, terrorist groups, intelligence services or a political mafia that happen to be dominating the political game. For they are in the state, whether we are talking about a democratic or dictatorial monopoly of violence, while, for now, revolution waits outside.

Revolutionary politics calls, then, for a shift: from the barricade to the reins of power, from the struggle to taking control of the state. And even though the revolution’s program is utterly impartial, and only abolitions can be expedited, namely of money, of the nation and the state, initiating this process, which serves to dissolve the money economy, passport controls and the police, demands that the revolution *moves into* the strong categories mentioned above. Revolution must be conversant in inheritance law, must know about territorial control and the monopoly of violence in order to set about dissolving them. The transition from revolution as event to revolution as politics involves a transition from the open in the revolutionary situation to an opening of the political and economic order that has prevailed since the abolition of slavery: an order that is based on the generalization of wage labour to all genders, all nations and peoples, all ages, all areas. This was the money economy’s triumph and, as we know, it has come to be called the “free market”.

Both revolution and art stand outside the “free market”. They can both be adjusted to become state-bearing or commercial, but, in their origins, they are without price and monetary forms: they are incalculable.

This is because they both belong to *the open* in an absolute sense. And they do so together. Art says something about creation that revolution aspires to force through. The creative impulse, becoming, is namely always open at its inception, and moves its way from a more or less clear idea about a plausible ideal for the idea’s realization toward a projection of the time and place for the presentation of its realization. The category of *realization* is difficult, but it is presumably the place *and* the conception, in which and by which passage is envisioned: the passage from *the open* in creation to *the opening up* of the order where the work is going to be placed and has to be able to connote, i.e. where it must carry some of the problematics of its making over into the prevailing order. Into the institutional situation. Into the established world.

Revolution and art can and must help each other in these passages. All “good” art is revolutionary art because it rethinks or re-tests this passage. It cannot be propaganda, but might very well ask whether art can come into being with propaganda in mind. This means to say that art can sustain a tension between scepticism and commitment while accepting, at the same time, a political instrumentalisation of its “statements”. What is crucial in this connection is the maintenance of the plastic process’s own inner necessity. For it is this necessity that ensures the open in the process of becoming and thereby also in the interpretation and experience of the work in question.

“Good” revolutions leave the exploration of the open to art. They do not expect that propaganda will enter into art, only that art will not be alien to anything, not even to questions involving the abolition of money, of passports and of the police force. Both revolution and art have to be ready and willing, which is to say, prepared to move from the open in struggle and creation to the opening up of the prevailing order.

This also constitutes, however, the dangerous point for both of them.

There are, accordingly, dangers that are connected with art. And it is danger that ties revolution to art, much in the way that the open tied art to revolution.

Translated by Dan A. Marmorstein from “Detaljer og teorier, kunst og kategorier, revolution og beredskab. Betragtninger over det åbne og det farefulde”, in: *Afgang 2013*, the Exit catalogue of the Schools of Visual Art, The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen, (May 25<sup>th</sup> to August 11<sup>th</sup>) 2013. The English version has some minor corrections made by the author. There is also a Swedish translation by Hannah Ohlén Järvinen in the magazine *Kris och Kritik* # 9/10, Umeå, June 2017; published with the title “Politisk kunstteori del III” [A Political Theory of Art, Part III]. – Originally also published in Oslo, in the Norwegian edition of the monthly journal *Le Monde diplomatique*, July 8<sup>th</sup> 2013.

## POSTSCRIPT

Tijana Mišković is a curator and visual artist presenting and discussing art work worldwide. She is fluent in Danish, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish and English and understands French and Italian very well. Mišković is, without any doubt, the most skilled interpreter of marginal, dissident or reparatory aesthetical praxis operating in Scandinavia today. Her work on Thierry Geoffroy / COLONEL was presented at the Moesgaard seminar in November 2014, cf. *Visuel Arkivering #06* and #10. She has recently published the book *The Emergency Will Replace the Contemporary* in English with Gallery Ultracontemporaine, about the tent works of Thierry Geoffroy / COLONEL.

Jan Bäcklund is a Swedish writer, art theorist and visual artist based in Copenhagen. His interpretation of the work done by Marcel Duchamp in preparing and constructing his readymades has been discussed over the last ten years in Scandinavia every time Duchamp is evoked. The research behind his contribution here was first presented at the international conference of art theory in Bruxelles, October 2012, organized by Duchamp scholar and former rector of the Academy of Bruxelles, Marc Partouche.<sup>1</sup> —— Bäcklund is a prolific writer and I shall only mention two titles from among his texts, both pertinent to the research presented here: “On the Paradox of the Copy in Visual Art,” in Reinold Schmücke & Darren Hick, edd., *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Copying*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016. And his crucial text presenting the anti-Hegelian hypothesis that the discovery of contemporaneity in visual art has constituted a turning point, a *Wende*, towards an integration of the historical dimension of art making: “Produktion af fortid” [Production of Past], Kasper Hesselbjerg, Signe Kjølner, Signe Frederiksen & David Hilmer Rex, eds., *Afgangskatalog 2013*, Det kgl. danske Kunsthakademie, Billedkunstskolerne, Charlottenborg, pp. 33-39.

My own contribution to this issue of *Visuel Arkivering* is from the same, very important catalogue: *Afgang 2013*, the Exit catalogue of the Schools of Visual Art, The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen, (May 25 to August 11) 2013, pp. 87-94, but without a translation of the “coda” about artistic research, I published there.

Carsten Juhl, May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

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<sup>1</sup> Back in 2010, the Schools of Visual Art at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen published the *Emergency Room Dictionary* of Thierry Geoffroy / Colonel together with Revolver Publishing in Berlin. Jan Bäcklund had been involved in the making of this important vademecum for artists: “It is the artist that take care of the society. Not the opposite”. *Emergency Room Dictionary* p.80.

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Visuel Arkivering, Issue 13: "Another Use of Art". Published by Billedkunstskolernes forlag, Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Schools of Visual Art

Edited by James Day and Carsten Juhl

Layout: Rasmus Eckardt

Print: Sangill Grafisk

Printed in Denmark 2018

ISBN 978-87-7945-103-2

Visuel Arkivering can be bought in Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Kgs. Nytorv 1, 1050 Kbh. K.,  
in Møllegades boghandel, Møllegade 8A, 2200 Kbh. N, and in Antipyrine Boghandel, Kunsthall Aarhus,  
J. M. Mørks Gade 13, 8000 Aarhus.

KUNSTAKADEMIET, CHARLOTTENBORG  
KGS. NYTORV 1, KØBENHAVN

DKK 30 / €4