



El Ornitorrinco Tachado. Revista de Artes Visuales

ISSN: 2448-6930

ISSN: 2448-6949

revista\_ornitorrinco@uaemex.mx

Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México

México

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El Ornitorrinco Tachado. Revista de Artes Visuales, núm. 10, 2019, Noviembre-, pp. 103-113

Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México

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# Ensayo visual

MARCEL DUCHAMP: LA ESCRITURA EN REVERSA

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

## LA IDEA DE LA CONSTRUCCIÓN

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

Caja de 1914.

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

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

3 Una de las reproducciones de este trabajo fue realizada por el crítico Ulf Linde y se encuentra en el Moderna Musset en Suecia: <https://sis.modernamuseet.se/en/view/objects/asitem/artistsoo4065/10/primaryMaker-asc?t:state:flow=88b01717-54c1-4a67-9f05-37edo52d3cea>

4 Esta obra se encuentra en el Museo de Arte Moderno de Nueva York y puede verse en este enlace:  
<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79600>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

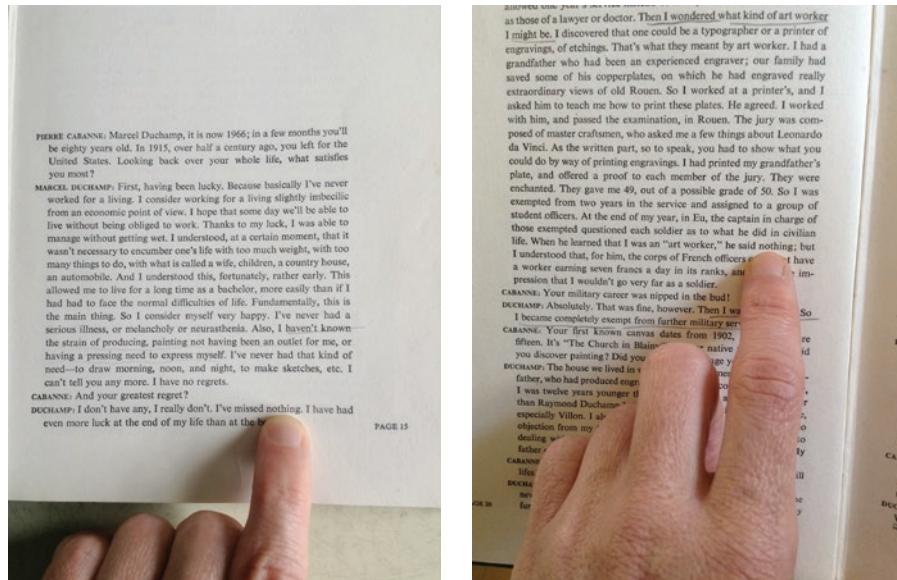
Había pensando que este artículo se llamaría *Marcel Duchamp: La escritura en reversa*. Llegado el momento de cierre de esta publicación, me doy cuenta que he escrito algo diferente. Al no tener otro título a la mano, dejo al lector la invitación de revisar las obras citadas y de incluir también *El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

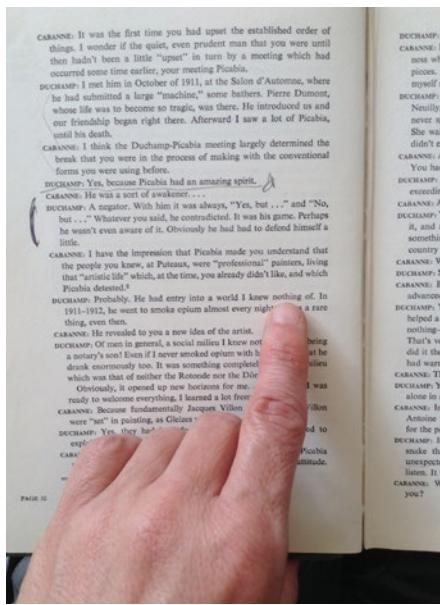
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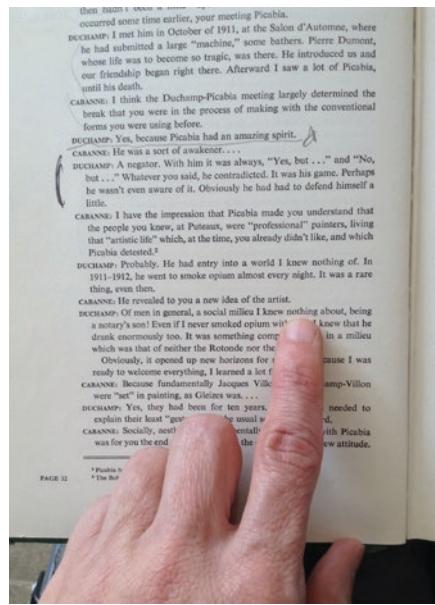
RESEARCHING NOTHING

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

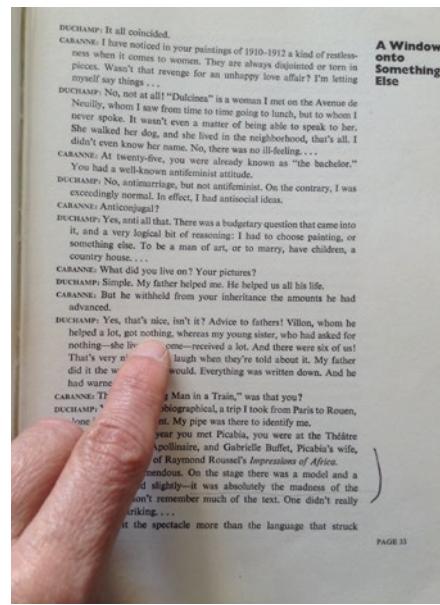




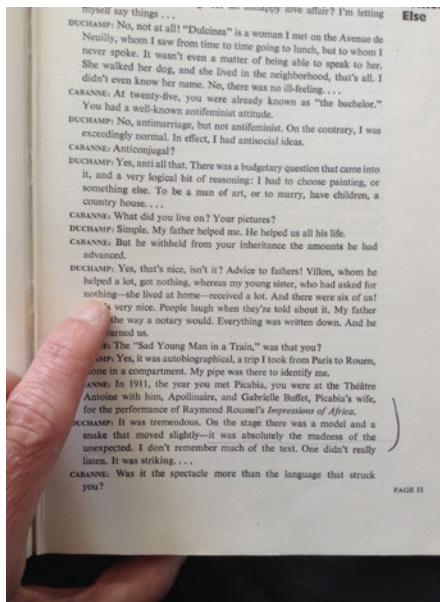
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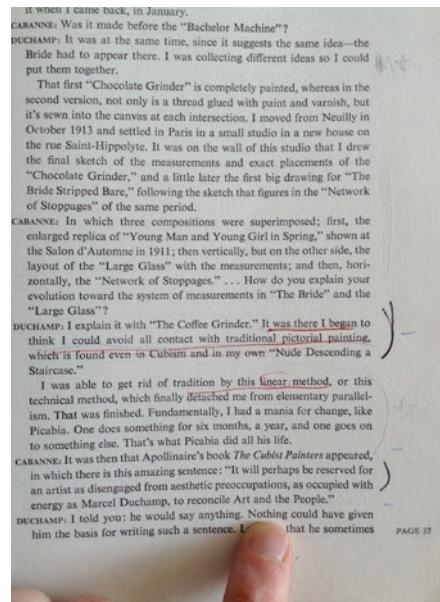
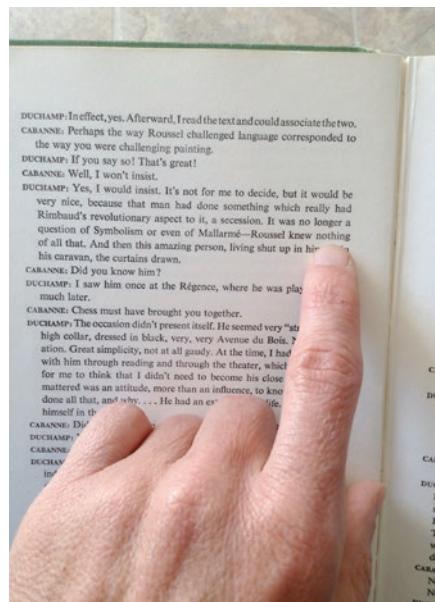
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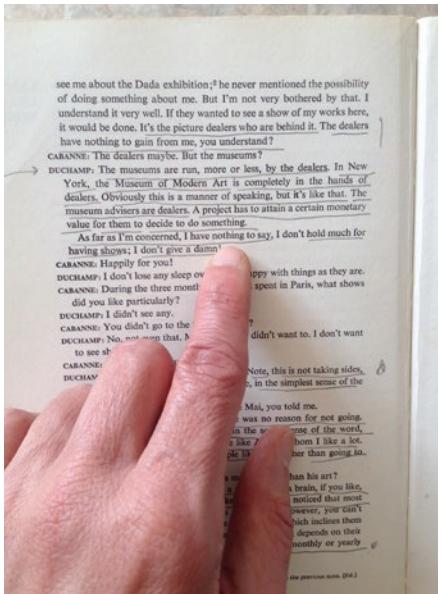
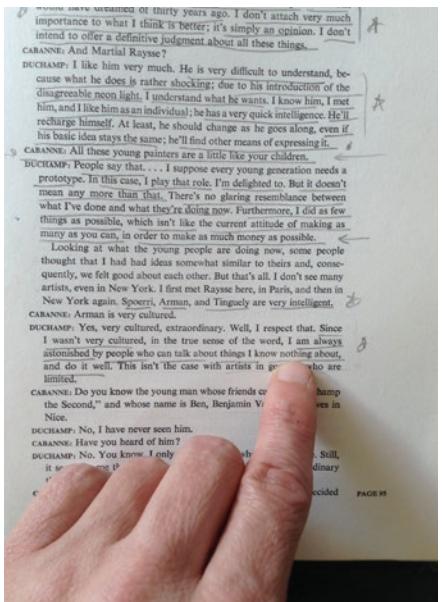
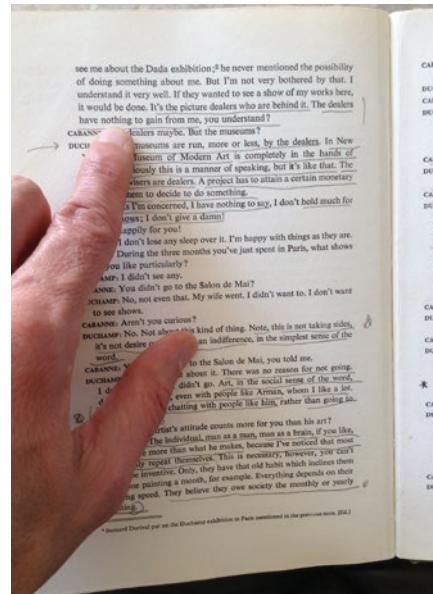
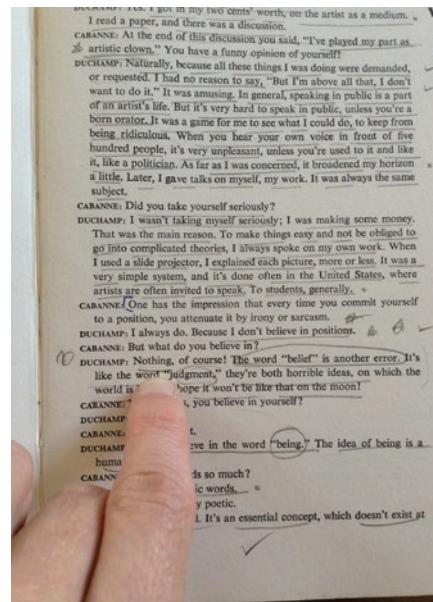
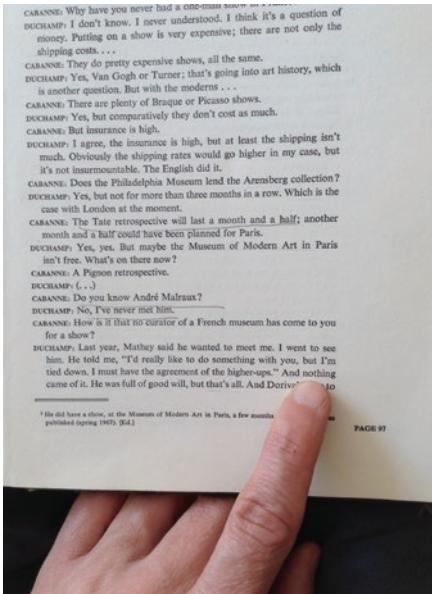
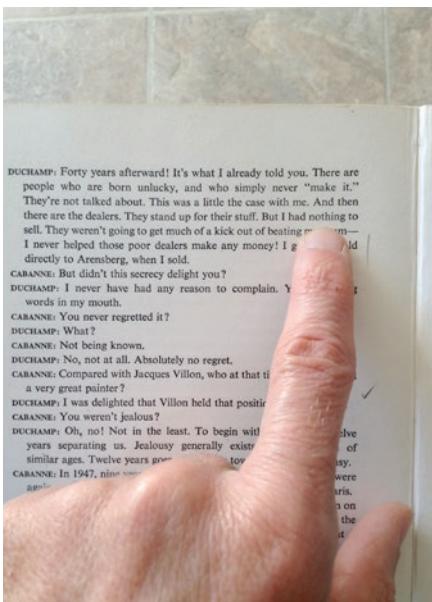
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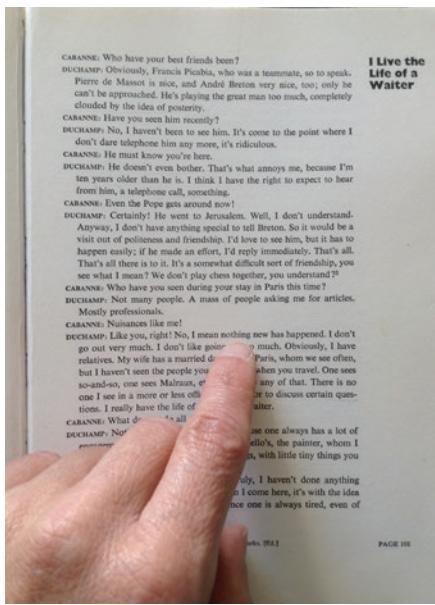
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<sup>1</sup> He did have a show, at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, a few months published (spring 1947). [Ed.]



I Live the Life of a Waiter

CARANNE: Who have your best friends been?  
DUCHAMP: Obviously, Francis Picabia, who was a teammate, so to speak. Pierre de Massot is nice, and André Breton very nice, too; only he can't be reached. He's playing the great man too much, completely clouded by the idea of posterity.

CARANNE: Have you seen him recently?

DUCHAMP: No, I haven't been to see him. It's come to the point where I don't dare telephone him any more, it's ridiculous.

CARANNE: He must know you're here.

DUCHAMP: He doesn't even bother. That's what annoys me, because I'm ten years older than he is. I think I have the right to expect to hear from him a telephone call, something.

CARANNE: Even the Pope gets around now!

DUCHAMP: Certainly! He went to Jerusalem. Well, I don't understand.

Anyway, I don't have anything special to tell Breton. So it would be a visit out of politeness and friendship. I'd love to see him, but it has to happen easily; if he made an effort, I'd reply immediately. That's all. That's all there is to it. It's a somewhat difficult sort of friendship, you see what I mean?

CARANNE: Who have you seen during your stay in Paris this time?

DUCHAMP: Not many people. A mass of people asking me for articles. Mostly professionals.

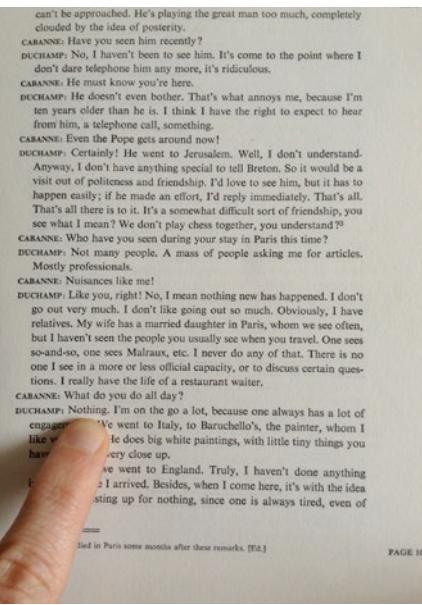
CARANNE: Nuisances like me!

DUCHAMP: Like you, right? No, I mean nothing new has happened. I don't go out very much. I don't like going out so much. Obviously, I have relatives. My wife has a married daughter in Paris, whom we see often, but I haven't seen the people you usually see when you travel. One sees so-and-so, one sees Malraux, etc. I never do any of that. There is no one I see in a more or less official capacity, or to discuss certain questions. I really have the life of a restaurant waiter.

CARANNE: What do you do all day?

DUCHAMP: Nothing. I'm on the go a lot, because one always has a lot of engagements. I went to Italy, to Baruchello's, the painter, whom I like very much. He does big white paintings, with little tiny things you have very close up.

We went to England. Truly, I haven't done anything since I arrived. Besides, when I come here, it's with the idea of setting up for nothing, since one is always tired, even of



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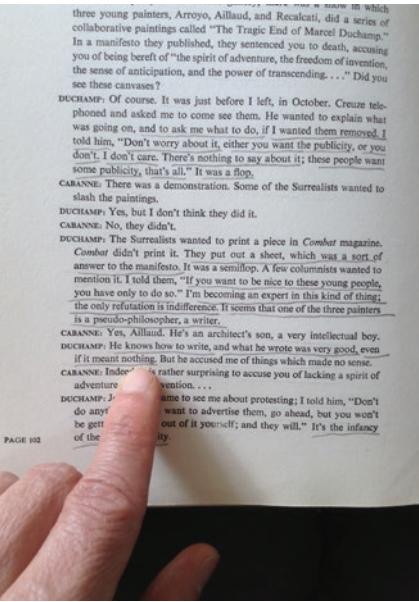
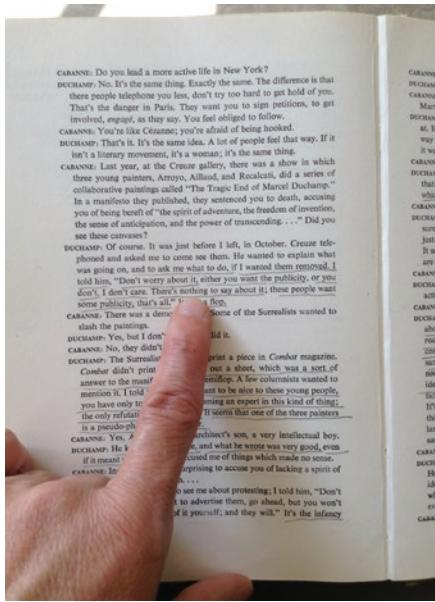
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After Italy, we went to England. Truly, I haven't done anything important since I arrived. Besides, when I come here, it's with the idea of resting. Resting up for nothing, since one is always tired, even of existing.

\* André Breton died in Paris on [Editor's note]

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CARANNE: Do you lead a more active life in New York?

DUCHAMP: No. It's the same thing. Exactly the same. The difference is that there people telephone you less, don't try too hard to get hold of you.

That's the danger in Paris. They want you to sign petitions, to get involved, engaged, as they say. You feel compelled to do so, to move,

CARANNE: You're like Cézanne, who's afraid of being hooked.

DUCHAMP: That's it. It's the same idea. A lot of people feel that way. If it isn't a literary movement, it's a woman; it's people thing.

CARANNE: Last year, at the Creuse gallery, there was a show in which

three young painters, Arroyo, Alliaud, and Recalcati, did a series of collaborative paintings called "The Tragic End of Marcel Duchamp."

In a manifesto they published, they sentenced him to death, accusing you of being bereft of "the spirit of adventure, the freedom of invention, the sense of anticipation, and the power of transcending..." Did you see these canvases?

DUCHAMP: Of course. It was just before I left, in October. Creuze telephoned and asked me to come see them. He wanted to explain what was going on, and I said, "Yes, I'll go." I waited them removed, I told him, "Don't worry about it, either you want the publicity, or you don't. I don't care. There's nothing to say about it; these people want some publicity, that's all." It was a flop.

CARANNE: There was a demonstration. Some of the Surrealists wanted to slash the paintings.

DUCHAMP: Yes, but I don't

CARANNE: No, they didn't

DUCHAMP: The Surrealists print a piece in *Combat* magazine, *Combat* didn't print

out a book, which was a sort of answer to the manifesto. A few surrealists wanted to mention it. I told them, "If you want to be nice to these young people, you have only to do so." I'm becoming an expert in this kind of thing; the only refutation is indifference.

CARANNE: Yes, Alliaud. He's an architect's son, a very intellectual boy,

DUCHAMP: He knows how to write, and what he wrote was very good, even if it meant nothing. But he accused me of things which made no sense.

CARANNE: Indeed, it's rather surprising to accuse you of lacking a spirit of adventure, a sense of invention...

DUCHAMP: Just the same to see me about protesting; I told him, "Don't do any!"

CARANNE: He didn't want to advertise them, go ahead, but you won't be getting out of it yourself; and they will." It's the infancy

of a pseudo-philosopher, a writer.

CARANNE: Yes, he's a pseudo-philosopher's son, a very intellectual boy, and what he wrote was very good, even if it meant nothing. He accused me of things which made no sense,

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CARANNE: He didn't want to advertise them, go ahead, but you won't be getting out of it yourself; and they will." It's the infancy

of a pseudo-philosopher, a writer.

CARANNE: He's a pseudo-philosopher's son, a very intellectual boy,

DUCHAMP: He knows how to write, and what he wrote was very good, even if it meant nothing. But he accused me of things which made no sense,

CARANNE: Indeed, it's rather surprising to accuse you of lacking a spirit of adventure, a sense of invention...

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CARANNE: The last painting in the series depicted your burial...

DUCHAMP: It was very pretty.

CARANNE: Your pallbearers were Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg, Maril Rayne, Andy Warhol, Restany, and Arman.

DUCHAMP: Dressed as American Marines! I swear it was amusing to look at. It was awful as painting, but that doesn't matter; it had to be that way for them to want to prove something; it was horribly painted, but it was very clear. It was a hell of a job.

CARANNE: What do you think of young people nowadays?

DUCHAMP: They're fine, because they're active. Even if it's against me; that doesn't matter. They think enormously. But nothing comes of it, which doesn't come out of the past.

CARANNE: From tradition.

DUCHAMP: Yes. That's what's irritating; they can't seem to do anything that people like. They think enormously, but nothing comes of it, which doesn't come out of the past.

CARANNE: What do you think of young people nowadays?

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CARANNE: What do you think of the burials?

DUCHAMP: I like them very much; it's a new activity; it's fine.

CARANNE: Are you interested in politics?

DUCHAMP: No, not at all. Let's not talk about it. I don't understand anything at all.

CARANNE: It's exactly the same that men justify the war.

DUCHAMP: Exactly. His wife did.

CARANNE: His wife did.

DUCHAMP: It was very pretty.  
CARANNE: Your pallbearers were Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg, Martial Raysse, Andy Warhol, Restany, and Arman.

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CARANNE: What do you think of young people nowadays?

DUCHAMP: They're fine, because they're active. Even if it's against me; that doesn't matter. They think enormously. But nothing comes of it which isn't old, out of the past.

CARANNE: From tradition.

DUCHAMP: Yes. That's what's irritating; they can't get away from it. I'm sure that when people like Seurat started to do something, they really just copied the past right out. Even the Fauves, even the Cubists did it. It seems that today, more than at any other time in this century, there are strong ties with the past. It lacks audacity, originality. . . .

CARANNE: What do you think of the beatniks?

DUCHAMP: I like them very much; it's a new form of young people's activity; it's fine.

CARANNE: Are you interested in politics?

DUCHAMP: No, not at all. Let's not talk about it. I don't know anything about it, I don't understand anything about politics, and I say it's really a stupid activity, which leads to nothing. Whether it leads to communism, to monarchy, to a democratic republic, it's exactly the same thing, as far as I'm concerned. I'm not going to tell me that men need politics in order to live in society. There is no way justifies the less, this is what politician's style is something extraordinary! politician's style is sometimes legal papers; the United States use the same language. I don't go for it.

CARANNE: Did you know John F. Kennedy?

DUCHAMP: No, not personally. He was very nice, a remarkable man. When he was president, he had something to do, and anything, and it will be done.

CARANNE: de Gaulle?

of artists. His wife did, but goes a little beyond the man has something to do, an anything, and it will be done.

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**Walter**

CARANNE: Do you read a lot?

DUCHAMP: No. Not at all. There are things I never read, which I never will read. Like Proust; in the end I never read him. When I was twenty, Proust was thought to be more important than Rimbaud and others. Obviously, times have changed and different things are current; still, one doesn't feel obliged to read him.

CARANNE: And among the contemporary novelists?

DUCHAMP: I don't know their work. Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor, I don't know their work. I don't know anything about the current novelists, the new novelists, *la nouvelle vague*. I once tried vaguely to read one, but I didn't understand it, so I gave up at any judgment.

CARANNE: What interests you in literature?

DUCHAMP: Always the same things that I've liked. Mallarmé very much, because in a sense he's simpler than Rimbaud. He's probably a bit too simple for those who understand him well. His Impressionism is contemporary with Seurat's. Since I still don't completely understand him, I find him very pleasurable to read for sound, as poetry that you hear. It isn't simply the structure of his poems or the depth of his thought that attracts me. Even Rimbaud must be fundamentally an Impressionist . . .

CARANNE: You're leaving for two months in Cadaqués, Spain. What are you going to do there?

DUCHAMP: Nothing. I have a very pretty, very nice terrace. I made an awning, it's out of wood, because there's wind down there. I'll make a chair app.; I don't know if it's lasted this winter; I'll make a chair and let you know!

CARANNE: Is your last ready-made?

DUCHAMP: It's ready-made, it's handmade!

CARANNE: Your life at Cadaqués different from your life in Paris or stay in the shade. It's marvelous. Everyone else, however, is in the sun to get tan; I hate it.

At the beginning of our conversation, you said that the word probably came from Sanskrit and meant "to make." Aside from a awning, haven't you ever felt like using your hands, to "make" something?

DUCHAMP: Oh, yes. Yes. I'm very handy. I often repair objects. I'm not at all afraid, like people who don't know how to fix an electrical outlet. I learned the rudiments of these things; unfortunately I don't know everything about it, nor am I very exact or very precise. When I see certain friends of mine doing the same things, I really admire them.

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**I Live the Life of a Waiter**

But I get along all right. It's fun to do things by hand. I'm on guard, because there's the great danger of the "hand," which comes back, since I'm not doing works of art, it's fine.

CARANNE: You never want to pick up a brush or a pencil?

DUCHAMP: No, especially not a brush. But I could. If I had an idea pop into my head, like the "Glass," I'd do it for sure.

CARANNE: If someone offered you a hundred thousand dollars to do a painting?

DUCHAMP: Oh, no! Nothing doing! During a talk in London, I answered questions for two . . . I was asked, "If you were offered a hundred thousand dollars, would you accept?"

I told the after seeing thousand

This simply to explain my attitude. It would be like offering me a hundred thousand dollars to do some orders, like the sugar cage which Katherine Dreier's mother had to have something by me. I told her she had to have something that I could do whatever I wanted that too. She sold it to her sister, and her it to Arenberg, still for the same price.

If it were the same request now, would you accept? friendship, and they let me do what I wanted to do.

ME: Can't do a painting, or a drawing, or a sculpture, I have to think for two or three months, something which would have some meaning, an object which would have some meaning. That's the only thing that would guide me, in my sense, before I started. So if I agreed to do it with reservations.

in God? all. Don't ask that! For me, the question doesn't exist. Why talk about such a Utopia?