Figure 1

Wortgebilde durch Spiel und Kombinatorik:
Or, Why Duchamp Loved Words
R. C. Kenedy

Due to the needs of a peculiar historical moment, Marcel Duchamp has become the legendary originator of the present; perhaps not the whole of it, but the best part of what passes for experimentation. Nothing can diminish his stature in this respect. His work has survived to supply the stimuli sought by a later generation of rebels when the more acceptable means of opposition were found to be either ineffective or exhausted. In this context it is largely irrelevant whether there is still room for protest by battling against the arts or for trying to undo societies by whatever faith they may have in their creative impulse. Bertold Brecht, for one, sought alternative traditions instead of destruction and he was a no less practised revolutionary than the artist Joseph Beuys; it could also be argued that Brecht was more urgently motivated than Beuys and that his ethical fervor pushed him towards sympathies with the morality play as a logical result of commitment. In the circumstances it seems strange that Duchamp's fame has reached its apogee through the influence which he exerts. Strange and possibly unjust as well, because Duchamp's work is antitraditional, and it is certainly not inspired by pragmatic considerations or by ethical imperatives.

No man can be utterly exonerated from responsibility for the meaning read into his work, and it is certainly true that in Duchamp's case his posthumous

legacy must be considered as an essential part of his contribution. His heritage is an ineluctable part of his myth, but the confusion which comes about when causes and effects are intermingled is far from helpful, and accurate historiography does demand that one should make an attempt to separate the initial evidence from the interpretations derived from it. Nor is it difficult to envisage such a clearcut distinction. It is simple to return to rudiments and to use them illustratively. The basic facts reveal fundamental requirements, and their purposes may not coincide with the demands made upon them by successive moments of exegesis. Accretions of an involuntary kind intervene between the observer and the observation when the so-called insight records an event in the past which acquires new meanings by being dragged into the alien coordinates of a different moment. These additional connotations often obscure the objective substance of an objective statement. It is, in fact, very strange why movements cannot do without these retroactive judgments (reappraisals?) and with alleged discoveries which happen to have little or no connection with the original facts. Their use in a subsequent context and their unplanned exploitation seem a matter of fortuitous accident often enough. The prophetic qualities which we attribute to the resurrected instance are too frequently aspects of seeking approval for ventures of dubious

validity, and the arguments are often addressed to the self rather than to the public at large. The public at large has no interest in the professional's soul-searching quibbles. Nevertheless, in Duchamp's case, there may well be grounds for trying to locate the machinery of his dominating impact in his own contribution. The connections are direct, even if most of them have paradoxical, ironical, and wilfully unforeseen implications. There are, in fact, good reasons to suppose that too much effort has been spent on the campaign to display the propaganda values of the direct connections which do exist. However, apologies of this kind are at the expense of serious investigations which must stress the component forces of paradox and irony; it is equally impossible to explore these without a confrontation with the uncorrupted evidence. Mercifully and at long last the documentation is almost complete. We have the record of Richard Hamilton's Almost Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp, partly superseded by Anne d'Harnoncourt's and Kynaston McShine's Marcel Duchamp.

It is extraordinarily useful to have the second publication for it presents a symposium of conflicting studies and tributes by a large number of hands. Hamilton's exemplary study-catalogue of the oeuvre can only be faulted for what happens to be its outstanding merit; it is too authoritative and it imbues its subject

with an aura that conveys unchallenged and unquestionable conclusions. This happens to be a disservice in Duchamp's case because his triumph rests on the controversial nature of his bequest, and the vitality of it is lost to a very great extent if it is deprived of the more or less calculated mysteries which cling to his deliberately constructed riddles. This is not to say that every one of Duchamp's gesturally conceived compositions was primarily intended to present a conundrum, but it can be safely asserted that the preponderant majority of them do, in fact, wear the enigma's uniform. It is part of their deliberate strategem to vaunt the artificial contrivances of the puzzle.

It is certainly no accident that Arturo Schwarz finds it possible to compile a magnificently entertaining and scholarly study of some length which lists the alchemical parallels supposedly built into The Large Glass (1915-1923, Figure 1) while Hamilton asserts with impunity that "Ulf Linde first observed that the drawing bears a resemblance to an illustration in a treatise by Solidonius—an insight which proliferated into the fashionable notion that alchemy provides a key to the iconography of the Glass. Ingenious and amusing as the later cross-referencing with esoteric texts and images may be, it must be said that Duchamp gave this no credence." All of this occurs within the covers of the same publication.[2] Nor is this

an isolated example of disagreement. Duchamp's art caters to diametrically opposed interpretations, and it becomes uninteresting if it is divested of controversy. Almost every later opus has evoked similar patterns of dispute, although a great many of them may not be fitted into a simple scheme of positive assertion and negative disclaimer. Fortunately, however, The Large Glass occupies a central position in Duchamp's career, and therefore it is doubly auspicious that it provokes this symbolically direct opposition of mutually exclusive readings. The unresolved doubts are working components of the oeuvre, and they maintain the potency of it. The deliberately introduced uncertainty is the motive

energy of Duchamp's rhetorically constructed works, and it is certainly not in vain to dissect the component elements of this structural ambiguity if we are to have valid conclusions. The anti-aesthetic inspiration of Duchamp's activity is too well documented to need repetition. Hence the terms of another discipline must be substituted for the traditional artist's aesthetic preoccupations when one begins to look for unities in Duchamp's oeuvre. In his case it can be safely asserted that he elected to replace conventions with the formal framework of rhetorical principles. His memorable works are declarations, and they adhere to the principle of declamatory statements. In their own right they are exclamation marks disguised under pretexts of seeming variety.

His works appear on a stage-like platform,[3] to recite a monologue allotted to them by the artist. It is worth stressing the point that almost every one of Duchamp's compositions is given a speaking part in addition to the costume-like conception of its substance. There is an initial ambiguity. Both the found and the made object are pushed into a dramatically conceived context which ignores their original identity; but it does not simply overlook self-evident discrepancies. Bicycle Wheel (1913) and Fountain (a urinal, 1917)[4] reproduce the operatic primadonna's predicament when they perform a part written for them; they represent without surrendering their own initial identity. The measure of their triumph depends to a very large extent on their capacity to excel in a dramatic performance: the performance of what is their anti-aesthetic assignment. In this sense, and in this sense only, Duchamp's role may be compared with the playwright's. He has created character-like concepts, and it was not his duty to substantiate the springs of their eloquence (some actors are, after all, better than others). Nevertheless, he could put words within their reach much like any other author who writes words for a character, and he was thus in a position to present conceptually complete dramatic propositions. His success combines the coordinated result of three interrelated factors. First, the object is subdivided between being itself and not itself. Second, the dichotomy speaks in the fashion of an actor (who is an independent being as well as a part). Third, Duchamp's written messages on the object complement and reunite the disparate ingredients in terms of the three categorical dramatic unities of a half-forgotten tradition. For example, there is Snow Shovel (1915) which says "In advance of the broken arm" or Comb (1916) which satirizes a latter-day Hamlet: "3 ou 4 gouttes de hauteur n'ont rien a faire avec la sauvagerie." Characteristically the speeches grow in complexity as Duchamp begins to master the comic possibilities of his medium.

Obviously, Duchamp did not reach this terminal phase without a long history of experimentation. A responsiveness to the calling of an innate bent produced

the stance, but no account of it can be meaningful unless it is clearly intended to demonstrate why the verbal commitment is an essential component in Duchamp's make-up. Only a much longer study could prove the hypothesis of this essay, and a great deal of these preliminaries must be taken on trust. However, it may not be necessary to trace the course of Duchamp's dualizing thought throughout the entire oeuvre. It may be taken for granted that the quasi-schizophrenic separation is present in the latent ambiguities of the earlier work without examining every stage of it. A phenomenological enquiry can be circumvented by a quasi-philological approach to the iconographical problems of the fine arts. It is self-evident that the fine arts are involved in attempting to specify their own semantics once one is ready to admit that recognition is implicated in any encounter between the artist's work and his public (which happens to take place around the art object). Communication of a kind does

occur and the artist's intent is declared in a work in order to be transmitted. The processes of interchange are ineluctably quasi-linguistic. In this light it is irrelevant whether the aesthetic content is narrative, descriptive, or simply auto-indicative. Duchamp's use of the icon's own semantics is very special, and in any discussion of his oeuvre the act of examining the basic ideas admitted by iconic communication is no less revealing than the cataloguer's running commentary on the individual product's peculiarities. Something unprecedented happened at the beginning of this century, and Duchamp's part in it conformed to the historical pattern for a very long while.

After Cézanne, exact correspondences between visual observations and their pictorial record were replaced by the graphic signals of pictorial programs. The simplest way to talk about the original naturalistic correspondences invokes the concept of translation. No translation is possible without a grammar of one kind or another. There is no pictorial or sculptural realism which does not accept the basic ingredients of a visual grammar, and every realist design transmits its messages which can be reformulated in structurally meaningful words. Needless to say, the translation is bound to show a contemptuous lack of regard for aesthetic values. However, for the time being aesthetic values are not

at issue in this argument. The grammar of the statement is the gist, without which no pictorial thesis could be formulated, without which pictorial argument would be impossible, without which no pictorial belief could be stated. It is of paramount importance that the image arranges its constituent forces in accordance with the rules of its own grammar. Perspective, color, and graphic forms are only the rudimentary manifestations of these rules and others may supplant

them in different cultures or in changed cultural climates. The Persian miniature employs a set of formulae which seems, at first sight, incompatible with the structural principles of the High Renaissance, but it is no less successful in presenting a communicatively valid record of a communicable statement: a story, to put it succinctly.

In Cézanne's wake the twentieth-century revolutions moved along a

path which advocated a progressively reductive use of visual language. It is possible to maintain that the ideals of a purer painterliness inspired the attitude and that they justified it. From the linguist's point of view, a metaphorical one in this case, it would seem that working components of the imagist's grammatical machinery were abandoned either for the sake of giving greater emphasis to the remaining apparatus or for the sake of superimposing an artificial system

on the left-overs. The Cubists, for instance, removed not only complete optic perspectives; they did away with curvatures and their associative correspondences as well. Their action was by no means negative. They admitted and exploited non-referential rhythmic quantities which replaced loss with a measurable gain, although the newly acquired impulse came from a different discipline. Musical concepts and, in their wake, quasi-musical structures combined with the

remaining set of pictorial technology to create an artificially renewed context for pictorial communication. Kandinsky's obsessive search for analogies between aural and visual harmonies was a logical extension of advancing along predetermined lines that have never been intended to quarrel with the notion of a grand, symbolic, all-embracing syntactic superstructure. A magnificent semantic hypothesis haunts every creative impulse, because only an

unconscious assumption of this kind can bridge the gap between the statement the artist makes and his audience receives. Certain basic formal relations cannot be denied. Structural coordination conveys informatively potent signals.

It would certainly be possible to study these structural details of communication in elaborate detail, but for the purposes of this essay it is sufficient to establish the relevance of a few basic concepts. Languages burst into meaning in two ways. Both the syntactic rules of the statement and the metasyntactic apparatus of (for example) metaphor and allegory are capable of conveying semantic values. In this sense rhythmic and chromatic echoes are quite obviously metasyntactic features of communication.[7] It is more convenient to regard these surface phenomena as the physical and the metaphysical properties of a given medium. Imagery conveys physical and metaphysical properties, and they correspond with the verbal statement's verifiable patterns exactly enough to be of practical use. It is not essential to dwell on metaphysical constituents; there is very little room for tnem in Duchamp's oeuvre in the conventional sense. Symbolic or quasi-symbolic modes did not appeal to his imagination; nor, indeed, are there many examples of the indirect mode in his oeuvre: no allegory, no metaphor, no allusive use of a medium.[8]

There remains the physical side of the problem, and a similar division is evident in every syntactic sign. In every coherent statement syntactic signs occupy a structurally allotted situation in order to fix meaning. Meaning is derived from the combined forces of verbal or quasi-verbal content and "activation," and "activation" is achieved by the structural forces indicated by context.

Two extremes characterize the attitudes one can assume towards these concepts. In Saussure's view the two extremes are governed by common principles manifested by the terms "lexical" and "arbitrary," on the one hand and "grammar" and "relative motivation" on the other. "The two extremes are like poles between which the whole system moves, two opposing currents which share the movement of language: the tendency to use the lexicological instrument (the unmotivated sign) and the preference given to the grammatical instrument (structural rules)."[9, 10] Throughout the history of the fine arts in Western Europe the attitude of "relative motivation" takes precedence over "arbitrary" decisions. There are very good grounds for this hierarchy during settled periods since creation takes place within given modes whenever traditions provide for a firm framework. This observation remains generally true even during periods of unrest. The grammatical stance is evident in Cubism no less than Abstract Expressionism. The syntactic machinery of an expressionist tendency is highly reductive. In the case of Constructivism, however, we have a total experiment which attempts to engineer the pictorial equivalent of a new language like Esperanto. In both instances the notion of interrelated quantities predominates without obstruction from externally conceived forces.

Looked at with Saussure's principles in mind, the Constructivist attitude is of special interest; for the declared aim of every constructivist trend is a new notation which is significantly indebted to the ancient magical script of geometry and mathematics. It is certainly no accident that the great Russian Constructivists attempted to base the vocables of their iconography on Pythagoresque principles just when modern theories of syntax have begun to succeed in evolving mathematical formulae which represent the formal dynamics of significant language. Tentative interpretations are beginning to disentangle the workings of the superstructural and symbolic processes which unite the communicative processes of human groups. These recent theories tend to suggest that the apparent gulf which separates these seemingly separate disciplinary processes is merely a haircrack. The Constructivist's goal is a script of universal validity, accessible

to the masses and embracing the distinct functions of painting, architecture, and sculpture. Inevitably their program employs a sign-language which expresses the communicative code of a foregone conclusion.

That is not to say that exceptions cannot be found to show examples of an "arbitrary" stance. Every mannerist inclination is, to a certain extent, tainted with arbitrary solutions. For example, Arcimboldo's paintings from the sixteenth century demonstrate how far this tendency could go during periods of seemingly settled tradition. Arcimboldo created portraits in which the image was created out of carefully juxtaposed objects such as fruits and vegetables. As his work suggests, the arbitrary is superimposed on a framework of accepted references in mannerist objects, and it performs the role of a highly esoteric metaphor in them, a metaphor which happens to be deliberately meaningless in many cases. Nevertheless, this arbitrary (metaphorical) discrepancy specifies the precise circumstances of a shock. It specifies it in spite of, or because of, the inbuilt semantic incompatibilities of an arbitrary opposition. The raw material of the shock has a relative motivation once again, as in Arcimboldo.

Duchamp's characteristic contribution explores the extreme case exclusively. Indeed, it is so uncompromising in its "reactionary radicalism" that his use of every verbal value is emphatically lexicological. There was to be no meaning in his oeuvre over which he did not exercise control. The abstract sentence was his ideal, and nothing could deter him from reaching its self-designated precincts, ones within which individual meanings were exposed to the symbolic equivalent of genocide. The mass murder of significance was obviously designed to indicate the absolute power the artist exercised over subordinate subject matter. In the artist's case these harsh realities do, of course, undergo some modification, for the accidents exposed to his whims submit only to gesturally motivated vanities, and they tend to be without lethal consequences.[11]

The arbitrary and the lexical aspects of Duchamp's program require further clarification. The distinction between the Found Object and the Readymade is best fitted to illustrate the syntactic distinction between the two attitudes implied by this antithesis. Picasso's Bicycle Saddle, which represents a bull's skull, is an ideal instance of the grammatical meaning through which the found object establishes points of contact with a communal reservoir of knowledge and recognition. Duchamp's Fresh Widow (1920, Figure 3) on the other hand, presents a categorical denial of relative motivation in accordance with the Readymade's auto-mythopoetic principles. It is a miniature "French window"

in a painted wood frame with eight panes of glass covered in black leather. The title of this work perpetrates a very weak pun, but the undergraduate humor of it is rescued by the first appearance of the artist's alterego in the pseudonymous signature. This compensates for the low dig in the ribs with the pen-name's double-entendre.[12] Pun is heaped upon pun at the verbal instigation of a representatively meaningless object and every indicative connection stresses only

the dictionary's fortuitous coordinates, the alphabetically determined correspondences which relate incompatibles in order to cancel out the emotive, the logical, the narrative, and the intuitive clues that prompt recognition. Only the vocabulary's quantities survive, and their survival is subordinated to the signification of the lexicographer's meta-empiric game with imaginary figures (merely figures of speech, as often as not).[13]

Every phenomenal representation of the disconnected instance serves this type of lexicalism in Duchamp's oeuvre. The objects serve an illustrative purpose, and in this context it is neither here nor there that they portray the analytical presence of the artist instead of specifying cognitively valid and satisfactory realities. Duchamp's aesthetics invoke the arbitrary in order to claim that it is the artist's right to define art and in order to deny the communally determined
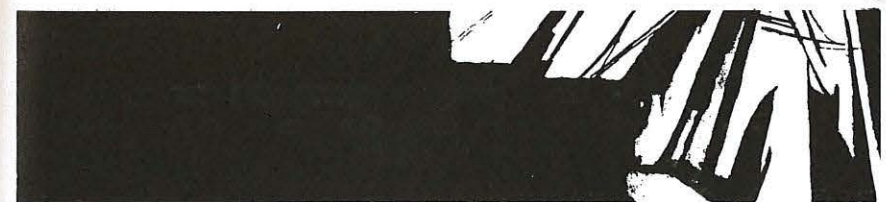
factors of judgment. One does not have to be a Marxist to entertain gnawing questions of doubt faced with this proposition. Art shares the predicament of every productive occupation and cannot do without

a need for art. This need must come from the communal area of the market place, however specialized the merchandise may be. The ethics of interchange stipulate recognizable terms for transactions between

partners in a contract. The contract between the artist and his audience may well be unwritten, but its reality, even if it is a changing reality, cannot be dismissed for all that. Duchamp represented anti-aesthetics

consciously enough, but the distinction between conservative aesthetics and his own brand of anti-aesthetics is admirably designed to fit into the unifying coordinates of Saussure's oppositive scheme.[14]

Max Bill was probably the first to understand the linguistic nature of Duchamp's oeuvre: "A verbal imagery inspired by games and the theory of combinations"[15] (Or, maybe "coined"—a more exact translation than "inspired"). Bill does not follow up the truth of his axiomatic observation with an enquiry which could clarify the nature of such an imagery, although his use of the word "Kombinatorik" emphasizes his

awareness of the fact that Duchamp represents quasi-mathematical, schematic abstractions and that realities are rigorously excluded from this oeuvre. The realities excluded embrace, of course, every verifiable

constituent of the universe, color-shape-form-and-force included. With these remarks in mind it is striking to observe that the major pictorial example of Duchamp's maturity depicts its icons on glass. The Large

Glass provides a transparent stage for its cast, and this ensures for it the independence of dialogue that takes place in an equivocal environment, one through which and within which unpredictable, uncontrolled forces
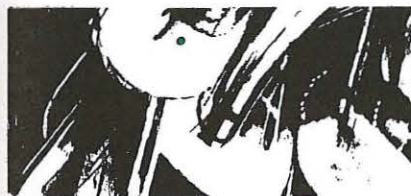
operate without let or hindrance. Imagery on glass operates like words in the objective environment. Duchamp fixed the absurdity of verbal coincidences, and the French window's fortuitous echo of Fresh Widowhood typifies his objectivation of callous accidents. He abhorred the poetic force of metaphor. There is no example in his work of, say, Bats in the the Belfry or The Grapevine, which could have supplied him with similar puns, puns whose content might have seemed no less concrete in a literal translation. However, the secondary and emblematic potency of a proverbial phrase was certainly not to his liking. It would have admitted the shades of poetic allusion, and connections of any kind would have adduced the otherness of a reality which his work forswore. E.M. Forster's motto "Only connect" was replaced by its opposite in his contribution, "Make sure there are no connections."

Unfortunately, Richard Hamilton's very comprehensive notes in the Tate Gallery catalogue were not meant to probe intellectual implications. They were designed to evidence the rather academic presence of aesthetic values in works meant to deny them.[16] He has tried to discover in Duchamp's Readymades "a hallowed aspect that welds them into a vision of implausible unity," and the sacred requirements of Hamilton's ideals kept him from recognizing

a unity which was neither implausible, nor indeed related to the faculty of vision.

Thus, the task to demonstrate the verbal nature of Duchamp's highly mixed techniques was left in abeyance until it was attacked, at long last, by David Antin. Antin's essay "Duchamp and Language" [18] is a masterpiece of its kind and it is likely to remain one of the cardinal texts of modern criticism. It documents a legitimate conception of language which shows very welcome signs that it was compiled after Wittgenstein's and Rudolf Carnap's findings have gained a degree of currency. It illustrates the application of linguistic principles to the practical problems of everyday psychology. With premises such as these he sets out to apply the theoretical concepts to Duchamp's puns. He dissects and demonstrates their features after the fashion of the anatomy lesson. At this point he stops short. Indeed, Antin's study is in many ways the equivalent of a doctoral thesis on a new disease. He lists symptoms without relating his account of them to a general, quasi-biological context. His observations are beautifully accurage; "I would say that what Duchamp does as an artist is to create a series of kinetic art works in which a language field defines the action of something that's put in the middle.... Why do I say 'linguistic significance'? Because there is no other kind of significance....Duchamp manipulates language structure, and he manipulates it mechanically...; he intended to create a kind of syntactical unit that has no clearly anticipated semantic consequences."

Antin achieves in a brilliant series of diagnostic insights what criticism has significantly failed to provide, but his revelations survey the surface, and this obscures his interest in the precise questions of the historian. He has no use for parallels and oppositions. Nor can he be blamed for the omission; for the new in Duchamp is new, and Antin sets out to specify its particular characteristics. Inebriated with the discovery of unknown facts, he enumerates accurate observations which display the precision of the gem's facets. His approach is disciplined

by principles of description, and these imply the need to forgo value judgments. Every note of approval or disapproval is consequently absent from this account. While science must remain tied to the so-called rock of impartiality, history cannot be recorded without references to the stage upon which it is enacted, and its boards evoke their own ethical principles. [20]

Bill's and Antin's observations must, therefore, be transposed into a contextual framework. [21] The fact that Duchamp's contribution is based on a special use of language would be of no practical interest if artists refused to admit that art is a special kind of language. [22] Only the generally assumed validity of this axiom gives the remark a degree of truth. It follows from this hypothesis that the language-like nature of the arts has

kept them alive over the centuries. Every aspiring painter and sculptor conforms to a visual syntax when confronted by the problems of practice. Michelangelo was schooled to acquire a fluency in a traditional script, and so were nearly all his predecessors and successors. The practice of art requires structurally designed processes of learning because they are intended to reveal means of communication which must take place within the fixed

coordinates of conscious or unconscious instruction. There is always a model and its didactic nature survives in every valid experiment. [23] The aspiring painter learns his craft from a conceptual ideal much as a child learns to speak from the adults around him, although there is a difference of some significance. The child is an uncritical subject of the environment that teaches him the rudiments of speech. No artist is uncritical. Even the student

approaches his task in the academies critically. It could be maintained that mature art cannot help reviewing the evidence of the model before it. The artist is a mature being, and his analytical preoccupations may be measured on a scale which embraces the entire spectrum of attitudes between wholesale acceptance and censoriousness. Duchamp represented the latter extreme uncompromisingly, but in every other respect he remained typical.

The artist brings a schizophrenic duality to the task of enlarging the sphere of his profession. He is an adult who exposes himself to the discipline of the nursery whenever he attempts to acquire new knowledge which fits into a traditional scheme and whenever he has the means of superimposing the poet's arbitrary schemes on a pre-existent outline. He can come up with personal rhythmic specifications and harmonies in order to obscure the hidden content or the latent traditions in his own work; and, of course, he is free to indulge in discourse. It is not surprising that childishness is a temptation when the nursery's ways of advancement are consciously reenacted. The superficially infantile graphics of a Mirò or a Dubuffet are ineluctably connected with memories of learning and relearning. (Duchamp's iconoclasm is also not wholly unrelated to the spirit of juvenilia....) In Noam Chomsky's terms "the structure of particular languages may very well be largely determined by factors over which the individual has no conscious control and concerning which society may have little choice or freedom." [24] The artist's control over them is also strictly limited. It cannot go beyond the limits of a James Joyce without exposing itself to incomprehensibility.

With such considerations in mind, the interest this study shows in structural features will seem self-explanatory. The contention that language is the concept that embraces the arts seems to be axiomatic. It follows from this premise that personal predilections are revealed by preferences for certain kinds of syntactic features. In a pictorial script characteristics of this sort are much more sharply polarized than in speech which is easily corrupted by unconsciously employed allegory, metaphor, or loose colloquialism. Iconographies tend to represent the deliberate phenomena of diction. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that oppositions reveal basic cultural sympathies. Subsequent analytical parallels establish a scale of values. Values of this type are emotively charged, but within their own passionately determined coordinates they are exact.

They are not meant to settle the question of hierarchies; they enable one to take sides. From a practical point of view, the horizon's earthy and lateral distinction between left and right does seem to be more exciting than the vertical's absurd calibration, for the measures of height and depth are arbitrary in isolation. It is just possible that the technical information of linguistics may turn out to provide the best tools for fixing the situations of this plane opposition. It so happens that nothing could be further removed from Antin's point of departure than such a method-based approach

and the coincidence of his conclusions with the present enquiry's seem all the more striking. [25]

There is an additional reason for invoking the spectre of language-learning. There is a need for stressing the communal resources of the artist's language, and it is best served by adducing evidence to show that the artificiality of art reflects a model which is imprinted in the unconscious structures of the social group or grouping. The machinery of making statements can only be explained with the help of this supra-individual concept. "On the basis of the best information

now available, it seems reasonable to suppose that a child cannot help constructing a particular sort of transformational grammar to account for the data presented to him, any more than he can control his perception of solid objects or his attention to line and angle. Thus it may well be that the general features of language structure reflect not so much the course of one's experience, but the general character of one's capacity to acquire knowledge." [27] The emphatic allusion in Chomsky's remarks to solid objects, line, and angle help to underline

the obvious, that recent findings do not distinguish between art-perception

and language-learning. On the other hand, matters remain in a state of suspension even

justification for expressing a degree of dislike. Duchamp's mature work, with its

in such a much-simplified arrangement. Language carries forms as well as content, and the

insistence on ignoring meaningful content, does in fact belong to the province of

As for conclusions, only one axiomatic inference can be asserted with a

degree of reasonable confidence. It is a symbolically potent fact

that expression seeks a transformational grammar. It is the task of art to transform.

as Duchamp's posits an egotistical sublime which must perforce lead to the

absurd. Knowledge is acquired and disseminated through points of contact,

confrontation, and conflict. The absence of such points fosters an autonomy

"arbitrary" stance towards forms does not go beyond implying authoritarian inclinations.

such formalist experimentation; hence the grounds for dwelling on classificatory

If it replaces grammar with lexical principles, it implies the negation of

which proposes the authoritarian values of mere self-esteem—

the person's cult of the personality whose radicalism is wholly reactionary.

It certainly does not implicate the message's content in totalitarian ideologies.

principles. Certainties are scarce in deliberately meaningless statements.

one's capacity to acquire correlative knowledge. The arbitrary autism of a work such